



# AUSTRALIAN PRINCIPALS CENTRE

## Monograph Number 2

Australian Principals Centre Ltd  
ACN: 071 008 216  
The University of Melbourne  
Hawthorn Campus  
Level 2, 442 Auburn Road  
Hawthorn Victoria 3122  
Australia

Ph: (03) 9810 3306  
Fax: (03) 9810 3137  
Email: apc@apcentre.edu.au  
Web site: www.apcentre.edu.au

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Editor:  
Keith Redman

CEO, APC:  
Nick Thornton



**PROFESSOR PAUL BEGLEY** is Head of the Center for the Study of Values and Leadership at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Toronto. Professor Begley is also Co-Director of the Center for the Study of Leadership and Ethics of the University Council of Educational Administration.

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## VALUES IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP — DO THEY REALLY MATTER? by Paul Begley

### INTRODUCTION

There are four great lies:

- 1 *This hurts me more than it hurts you*
- 2 *The cheque is in the mail*
- 3 *Of course I'll still respect you in the morning*
- 4 *I'm here from OISE to bring you the all the answers you've been looking for*

There are no panaceas. No-one can bring you solutions on a plate. What can I contribute, though, as you find your ways through the themes and issues addressed in this paper? As an ex-principal from an elementary school I can both share perspectives and offer a range of insights built up over more than 15 years working in teacher education, specifically in the field of values in leadership. I can outline general principles, using examples drawn from the experience and classroom practice of school leaders around the world.

Try an activity that was developed with Gary O'Mahony at the APC. Look at the list of values in Figure 1 (right). Choose one as a personal value with which you identify more than any other. Choose one professional value from the same list.

On leadership courses, I ask participants to put the two selections on their name tag, and compare their selections with those around them. The variation of response is remarkable, sparking animated discussion about the selections and their implications. This list is by no means comprehensive or immutable; often people add to the list other values of their own.

Looking at values is a way of building our understanding about ourselves and our leadership. This understanding is by no means simple: values and leadership are about paradoxes and tensions. In leadership this expresses itself, for example, in the tensions between managerial and leadership styles of behaviour, and in conflicting demands. For example, at one time or another, a Principal

**Figure 1:  
Thirty-five Values  
to Live By and Die For**

- Character
- Commitment
- Compassion
- Courage
- Empathy
- Fairness
- Faith
- Freedom
- Friendship
- Gentleness
- Happiness
- Helping Others
- Honesty
- Humour
- Kindness
- Knowledge
- Love
- Loyalty
- Perseverance
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Self Discipline
- Service
- Sharing
- Sincerity
- Solidarity
- Supportive
- Teamwork
- Thoughtfulness
- Tolerance
- Truth
- Understanding
- Unselfishness
- Willingness
- Work

(List devised by Gary O'Mahony, APC.)

might be faced with some of the paradoxes shown in Figure 2, overleaf.

Sound familiar? You could provide a longer list from your own immediate experience.

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**Figure 2: Examples of paradoxes, where values are involved**

Do what you are told to do!	Don't wait to be told what to do!
Mistakes are expected!	Do it right!
Problems are unavoidable!	Avoid problems!
Be proud to be the best!	We aren't good enough!
The leader is in control!	The leader does not control!
Be tender, care for individuals!	Be tough, care for the organisation!
People don't work for rewards!	Reward people!
Plans must always be revised!	Plan carefully!
If you keep changing, you will never get it right!	Keep changing!
Co-ordination is impossible with so many variables!	Improve co-ordination!
Educational outcomes are hard to measure!	Measure them!
Allocate resources equally!	Distribute resources where they are most needed!

(From Deal T & Peterson K (1994) *The Leadership Paradox*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco)

Faced with such paradoxes day by day, Principals tend to respond either in **managerial** or **leadership** terms.

Managerial responses tend to be in terms of procedures, orders, administrative and curriculum documents, or operational considerations; leadership responses tend to be characterised by acting to meet urgent needs, or factors not covered by policy — their emphasis is humane rather than finance-driven.

The role of the Principal evolves continuously. It is not the same as it was five years ago, in Australia or anywhere else. Demands and priorities change, as do the sources for the dynamics of change. In addition to the 'formal' changes required of us by our employers, we may be affected by social trends, for example responding to a perceived loss of trust in school Principals among members of the community. This has been the case in Canada and has led to an increasing emphasis on the evaluation of teacher performance.

We may also respond to changing patterns in educational literature. Educational theorists, academics and commentators after all are constantly trying to develop their ideas in response to the work that they are doing; they respond on a continuous basis to perceived successes or failures in the innovations with which they are associated. A glance at the writings of people like Fullan and Hargreaves over the last ten years illustrates how their focus has changed as a result of retroactive studies. Such change is influential in the broader educational community.

Currently there is much debate, but no consensus about rethinking the purposes of

education. We can draw an analogy with the tragedy of conflicts in countries like Yugoslavia, to see how the imposition of decentralised decision making, without understanding of local contexts, can lead to strife.

What are we seeking to achieve in education? One objective where we should be able to claim consensus would be in administrative excellence. Even so, this is a complex area. Simultaneously we are trying to achieve technical sophistication and to maintain sensitivity to the values orientations of those around us ... and ourselves. You have to know yourself before you can understand others. What we are aiming for is a sense of synergy when the two approaches are cultivated.

Cultures and values vary. How do we know what we are conveying to others through our words and actions? How do we know what they are 'reading' into, and understanding about, our values? How do we know what each other's motivational bases are? As leaders we need to work consciously to build and support our own and others' improved understanding of these areas. As Willower commented, the extent of our understanding will affect the way that we act and make choices as leaders and administrators:

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*Because a significant portion of the practice in educational administration requires rejecting some courses of action in favour of a preferred one, values are generally acknowledged to be central to the field.*

Willower, 1992, p 369



*Simultaneously we are trying to achieve technical sophistication and to maintain sensitivity to the values orientations of those around us ... and ourselves. You have to know yourself before you can understand others.*

This is about knowing some values theory and applying it in practice — as a grounded approach. Hodgkinson refers to it as having a ‘*conception of the desirable*’, which influences our selection of actions and/or responses as individuals or groups.

How do Principals respond when they encounter a decision making situation? We need to take care with generalisations, but observation shows that men tend to look for quick action while women tend to deliberate more; a Principal’s style of action tends to be somewhat prescribed if s/he is in an accountability environment; Principals generally act in what they think is the best interests of the children; they tend to act according to priorities in their district; in some cases they will act according to the precepts established by major educational writers; in other cases they may consult their teachers.

In 85 to 90 per cent of cases they will act on the basis of either anticipated consequences or consensus. Both are rational processes. Both will allow them to justify the consequences in an accountability environment. As time goes by, a comfort level develops and they may explore a third process — one where they are more concerned with self interest or personal preferences. Although not often seen as part of the accountability environment, this is always a factor, in whatever situation we find ourselves. Sometimes we may ‘dress it up’ as something more socially acceptable, but it is there nonetheless.

Experienced teachers tend to be consensus based but may verge towards the self interest/ personal preferences model in certain circum-

stances, for example when resisting change that is wanted by the system or the Principal.

How can we encourage people to understand more consciously, and perhaps change, the way that they choose to act? One strategy might be to bring them together to talk about what they like about school and about the tasks that they perform. The aim would be to draw the conversation away from non-rational personal models of response and towards a debate framed in terms of a more professional domain. If this sounds like some of the School Improvement strategies of the 80s, they have never gone away. We continue to use them because they work.

The fourth approach, then, relates to values, ethics and principles. You might argue that these are not rational either, but they are often practical, with practical outcomes. Ethics may be considered as ‘collective social values’.

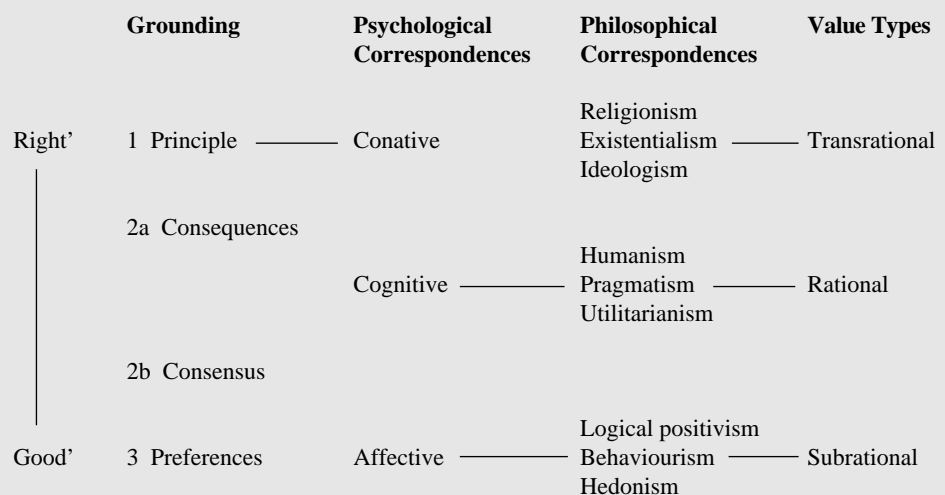
Principals use ethics under particular circumstances, for example where there is ambiguity, uncertainty, urgency, no possibility of consensus, unpredictable consequences, or a need to explain the unexplainable. On occasions, it should be said, they may exhibit ‘Hide-in-an-Ethic’ syndrome’ — using ethics as a fortress or castle if they cannot justify their actions on a rational basis. There is, after all, no resolution necessary with a value or ethic. You can’t win an ethical debate with rational argument.

Let’s now look at the four types of motivational base. Hodgkinson (1978) characterised them as shown in Figure 3, below. Let’s also look at a diagrammatic representation of a values syntax (see Figure 4, overleaf).



*There is, after all, no resolution necessary with a value or ethic. You can't win an ethical debate with rational argument.*

**Figure 3: Analytical Model of the Value Concept**

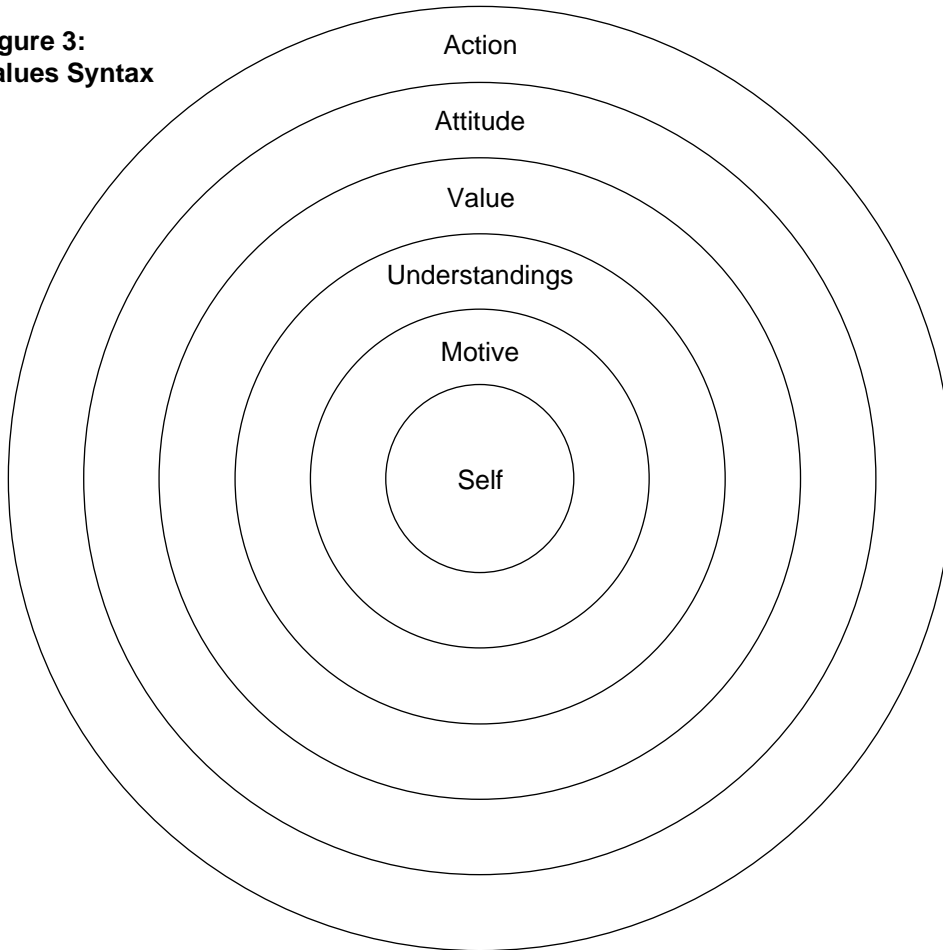


(Hodgkinson’s Administrative Values, 1978)

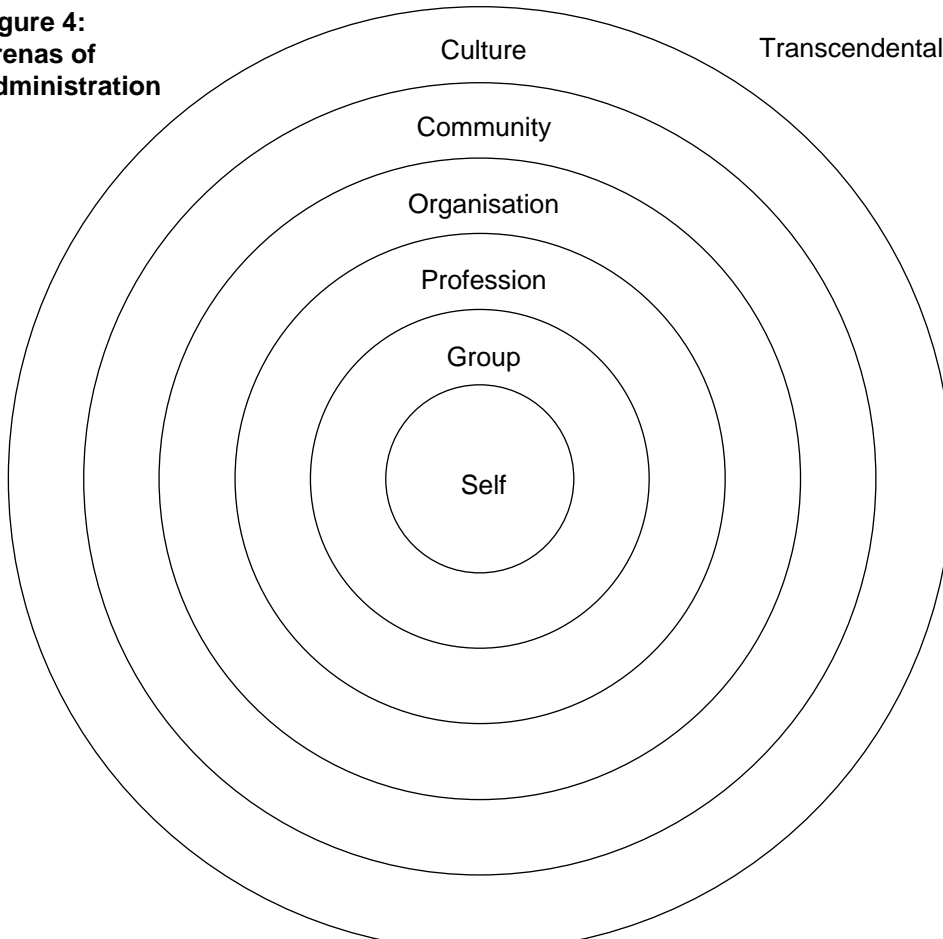
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**Figure 3:  
Values Syntax**



**Figure 4:  
Arenas of  
Administration**



*If you don't understand  
the context, in the  
environmental realm,  
transfer probably  
will not work.  
How can you expect  
people to learn,  
if you don't  
take into account  
what is going on  
around them?*



*We cannot afford to be blind-sided in our management by ignoring something that is an important dimension for some of our staff or school community.*

We might value something like ‘honesty’ for every one of the motivational bases. On the other hand, it is the type of knowledge we have that determines how we interpret things into action, although we may have different motives. For example, two Principals — one more experienced than the other — might get the same curriculum document to implement. They both have the same motive, but the less experienced one might write to staff asking them to read and respond to the document by Friday; the more experienced one would realise that time will be required for the staff to take the document on board, and act accordingly.

As Principals, we need to look at why we respond in particular ways — having more understanding will change the way we do things. Consider the arenas of administration, in Figure 5, opposite.

An organisational perspective has tended to dominate literature in the leadership field. The individual tends to get lost. That is one reason for including ‘transcendental’ in the arenas we need to take into account. We personally may not subscribe to transcendental values, but some people in our environment undoubtedly do.

We cannot afford to be blind-sided in our management by ignoring something that is an important dimension for some of our staff or school community.

The arenas in Figure 5 (opposite) are the sources of values. Value conflicts are the result of incompatibility between arenas, for example organisational values may clash with personal or group values. When making decisions, we should consider which arenas are in play and how we are responding.

We also need to know when values are used in an argument to raise the stakes, for example where a supervisor retreats into saying “*Research says .....*”, or where in a last resort, resisting change, a teacher says “*I just don’t believe in that*” — whether or not this partially disguises a case of self interest speaking.

*Value conflicts are the result of incompatibility between arenas, for example organisational values may clash with personal or group values. When making decisions, we should consider which arenas are in play and how we are responding.*



## WHY STUDY VALUES?

Building on what’s been said so far, let’s summarise some of the reasons why we should study values. They include the following:

- Leadership and administration are essentially decision making; preferred alternatives are selected and others are rejected.
- There has been an over-emphasis in administrative theory, research and training on the technical aspects of leadership and the empirically verifiable, as well as a neglect of the more moral aspects.
- Educational leaders work in environments where value conflicts are common: between post-modern world and modernist institutions; in terms of racial, ethnic and religious diversity; and where there is a lack of consensus on the purposes of education.
- Values articulated by a group or an individual may be different from the values to which they are actually committed.
- In an increasingly pluralistic or global society, administrators must understand their own motivations, biases and actions.
- Administrators must be able to interpret the actions of others. In particular, they must recognise the sources and causes of value conflicts.
- In mediating values conflicts, administrators must be able to distinguish among personal, professional, organisational and social values.

We need to be able to distinguish between our values, and our motivations for calling upon them. This sort of reflective practice is a ‘habit of mind’. It is an essential skill to think things out and you get better at doing it with practice. To create a culture in an organisation, however, where this type of analysis is accepted as routine, takes time ... and a commitment on the part of all involved.

This will not be easy for all Principals. Many are just surviving, and time seems short for the amount of things that need to be done. In addition, increasing one’s understanding does not necessarily make things easier.

Different Principals approach this in different ways. Some set aside time for reflection, but this

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may manifest itself in different ways — what may appear to others as shuffling papers for half an hour may be seen by the Principal as a sacrosanct time for thinking things over without interruption. It has less to do with what you're doing than it has to do with what's going on in the person's head. (On the other hand the shuffling of papers may be more of an escape from pressures, based on self interest! It may be more or less than it seems.)

The arenas are going to impose on you, whether you like it or not. The important thing from the Principal's point of view is to be aware of his/her own motivational basis ... and to concentrate on understanding rather than making judgements on those of others.

In practice, we can rarely act in a purely existentialist way. We have limited choice because of pressures from other arenas. Indeed Hodgkinson, one of the leaders in this field, in his later writings has become increasingly concerned with the issue of how much choice we really have.

Certainly we all suffer from hardening of attitudes' over time, and as a general rule we do tend to operate most of the time in the overtly rational domain of 'Consequences'.

As an aside on this, there has been an interesting change in Canada that may translate to other locations. There has been a shift in the patterns of those who opt for leadership roles. In a context where there is an aging teacher population, it is no longer the teachers with 15 years experience who are applying for promotion but rather those who are younger, with perhaps 5 years experience. This has implications for leadership training in a variety of areas, not least in the field of values clarification and reflective practice, especially as that relates to working with a cohort of experienced and older staff.

## Establishing Frameworks

How do 'good' Principals operate? There has been a lot of research in this area, but some of the results point up the dangers of skewed results emerging from correlational data. For example, there might be a high correlation with 'wearing a tie' but in reality that would have little to do with quality of operation. Getting back to asking "Why?", and using a values basis for analysis of how Principals act, perhaps offers a practical way to explore this area.

Although there is considerable consensus and overlap in some regards, what is seen as good

practice varies considerably from place to place, context to context. Consider, for example, the differences that we found from answers to questions about key dimensions in practice, that we put to school leaders in Western Australia, Ontario and the Northwest Territories in Canada (Figure 6, opposite).

These varying responses were based around discussion of a profile developed in Ontario. This came out of a brainstorming process, and discussion that took more than a year. It proved unexpectedly and extremely popular when published as *School Leadership in Canada* by Paul Begley and Associates, Hillsdale, Ontario. Originally published in 1993 and reprinted six times, the booklet is now in its second edition. A third edition is in preparation, including changes that take account of shifts in roles over time.

When I have used the booklet at my home university in Ontario, or with Principals in Australia, Hong Kong, Russia, Sweden or other locations, I ask them to assess their own styles of action in terms of suggested indicators.

An example from the booklet, relating to managerial behaviour, is shown in Figure 7, overleaf. The example shows, for each subset outlined previously, indicators of progress through four stages that lead from a basic level of competence towards 'ideal practice'. The column for the fifth stage in this analysis is left blank, for participants to fill in.

There are similar multi-level checklists of indicators, on the continuum leading from a general competence towards 'ideal practice', for each of the other dimensions — the Principal as Program Leader and Learning Facilitator; as School Community Facilitator; as Visionary; and as Problem Solver.

This framework is about more than mere definitions. It is about conceptualising the nature and stages of growth, based on values identified by numbers of educators in a range of different environments. It was produced by practitioners, not academics, and draws on a wealth of practical experience. The process has been found very useful by some Principals working with their deputies in their own schools. Its value in sharing skills such as time management has been particularly complimented.

The material was originally developed for on-line professional development purposes and lends itself both to self analysis and to comparison and discussion of results with peers. The idea is then to use the self and peer analysis to help develop a one-year personal professional development



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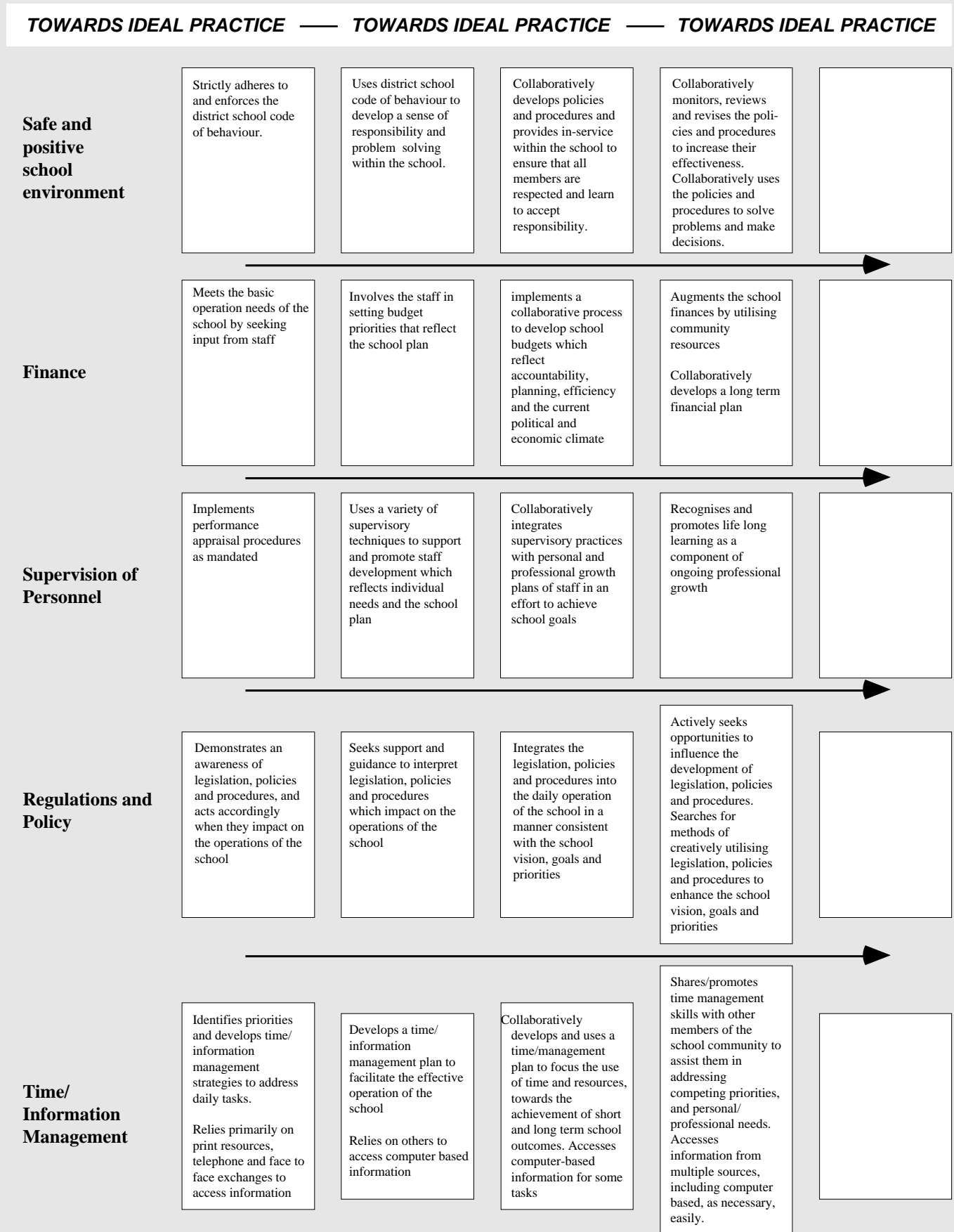
**Figure 6: Comparing the key dimensions of Principal practice from three profiles: Western Australia, Ontario and the Northwest Territories**

<b>KEY DIMENSIONS OF PRINCIPALS' PRACTICE</b>		
<b>Western Australia</b>	<b>Ontario</b>	<b>Northwest Territories</b>
<p><b>1 Self</b></p> <p>Vision Problem solver Effective communicator Change agent Monitor</p>	<p><b>1 Visionary</b></p> <p>Vision development Vision derived goals Communicator of the vision Change agent Culture</p>	<p><b>1 Advocacy</b></p> <p>Community values Empowerment Community education plan Student and staff support</p>
<p><b>2 Processes — Instructional</b></p> <p>Goal setter Curriculum leader Program evaluator Expectation holder</p>	<p><b>2 Instructional leader</b></p> <p>Learning environment Goals: sources and uses Leadership strategies Implementation Program &amp; staff evaluation</p>	<p><b>2 Instructional leadership</b></p> <p>Planning Development &amp; implementation Evaluation</p>
<p><b>Processes — Pastoral/cultural</b></p> <p>Cultural leader Acknowledger of student achievement Acknowledger of school community achievement Community facilitator</p>	<p><b>3 School-community facilitator</b></p> <p>Goal setting Inter-agency liaison Culture management Communication Entrepreneurial skills</p>	<p><b>3 School culture management</b></p> <p>School environment Decision making Language &amp; culture promotion</p>
<p><b>Processes — Management/Administrative</b></p> <p>Staff developer Human resource manager Communicator Time manager</p>	<p><b>4 Manager</b></p> <p>Student conduct Budget Supervision of personnel Regulations &amp; policy Time management</p>	<p><b>4 Organisational management</b></p> <p>Finances Facilities Human resources Policies &amp; procedures Time management</p>
<p><b>3 Outcomes</b></p> <p>Instructional Pastoral/cultural Management/administrative</p>	<p><b>5 Problem solver</b></p> <p>Problem interpretation Goals &amp; values Solution processes</p>	

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**Figure 7: (extract from *School Leadership in Canada*, 2nd edition, 2000). The Principal as Manager ...**  
 ... selects and employs available resources and actions to ensure the effective and efficient management of the school community.





plan for each participant in the activity. This involves:

- Doing the process
- Identifying areas to be targeted for growth
- Setting priorities
- Defining stages to be achieved by the end of the year
- Determining how and when you will evaluate it.

## Analysing case studies

Another activity I use on leadership courses involves analysing case studies, auditing them in terms of the four types of motivational base: Principle, Consequences, Consensus and Preferences. Participants read the nine case studies (three representing each of the managerial, instructional leadership and school-community-culture facilitation areas), select one from each area, then treat them as problem solving exercises. They audit the case studies themselves and then discuss their interpretations with a peer. This is a valuable process; it provides opportunities for exchange, affirmation, challenge, the enhancement of perceptions, and the development of skills, understanding and interpretation.

Having discussed their audit the participants code their responses so that an overall count can be made of interpretations from the whole group. By using a simple standardised coding system (Value 1, Value 2a, Value 2b, Value 3), applied to the same set of case studies, I am also able to build the results into a comparative study of responses from groups in a number of different countries where I work. Over time what is effectively part of an international action research project will be a valuable source to inform the planning of professional development for educational leaders.

By completing this exercise the participants are also able to explore issues relating to attitudes, which people often use as predictors or indicators of underlying values. For example, a young person might make offensive comments in a family conversation, about what he thinks of women. Challenged over his comments by an outraged parent, he might respond by saying "What's the matter? I didn't do anything". In one sense that may be true, but the parent is able to use the expressed attitude as an indicator of underlying values. Attitudes can in fact be defined as values, which are learned in one context and are applied in, or intrude upon, another

With attitudes, we need to dig to uncover the deeper values. We need a multitude of examples and we need to be honest with ourselves. For example, on a regular basis, one Principal used to go up on to the school roof to retrieve footballs. However, his real reason was that this was his one way to escape the pressures of the office and the schoolground. Up there, he was solitary and on a clear day ... he could see forever! What is happening here is that a personal preference is being dressed up as something more rational, and more socially acceptable.

Take another case. Since Mum is busy, a father takes his two sons to the department store to buy new sports shoes for his two sons. There are two styles from the same top brand, one last year's model at \$60 and one this year's model for \$120. The father wants to buy the older models; the boys want this year's. Both are applying relatively rational approaches. The sons are operating on the basis of peer pressure and consensus. The father is looking rather at issues of consequences, such as cost savings.

Undeniably, all parties are also operating partly on the basis of personal preference. (In this case, by the way, the outcomes are probably twofold — the father will end up buying the expensive shoes and Mum will never let him go shopping with the boys again!)

## From case studies to practice

The problem for Principals is that all too often they are asked to resolve transrational conflicts, where there may well be no 'right' or 'wrong' resolution satisfactory to all. Furthermore they are accountable for the decisions they make.

One might think that the choices would be more straightforward for Principals and teachers where values are an explicit and emphasised element in their working environment. In the Catholic and independent sectors, for example, the acceptance of particular values and/or beliefs is often an expectation or condition of getting a job. In practice, however, there will still be conflicts where Principals and teachers may be doing things for a range of reasons, or on different levels. It will still be necessary to distinguish between personal, professional and religious and/or ethical orientations in particular situations.

In the case of getting a job in an independent school, for example, a teacher might act in a particular way to ensure that s/he gains employment, but that action might be according to personal preference at one level and on the basis of consequences at another



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As a professional, you are generally expected to behave in terms of consequences or consensus (only two of the four motivational bases). This relates to your accountability. Of course, people have the capacity to react in other ways, but in most professional contexts they will prefer to defer a decision where possible until things settle down enough for them to make the decision on an overtly rational basis.

A range of other factors may influence the style of response. Take the example of the case studies mentioned earlier. When you compare the reactions of Principals in different countries there are some interesting differences. Consider the responses from Russian Principals. For them, consensus as we understand the term was a difficult concept to understand. They were used to an imposed 'consensus'. This was particularly true for the older Principals, who were uncomfortable about trying to negotiate consensus. They also disapproved greatly of younger Principals, who allowed their personal preferences to show.

The Swedes, whose territory is close to the Russians, are spending large amounts on professional development for Russian school leaders — at least partially an investment in a hoped-for development of attitudes and values over time for a whole new generation.

## WHAT TO DO FROM HERE?

At a more local level, as Principal in your own school, the key is to establish reflection on values, orientations, motivations and implications, as part of routine practice — your own and that of your staff. The aim is ongoing enhancement of understanding and decision making, leading to generally positive outcomes across the range of school operations. As Principal, you are in position both to provide a model, facilitate the process, and establish and resource a framework where that can occur.

Nobody says this is going to be easy. It will be particularly difficult dealing with conflicts that occur because of incompatibility of values in the arenas. We can't ignore the arenas; if we do they'll creep up and bite us anyway, whatever the local circumstances or culture of the school. As Principal, however, you can look at that culture strategically — as a source of tools for leadership. You can use the artefacts of schools to tap into the culture and to work on its development — using the past as the key to the future.

The school leader must listen for the deeper dreams and hopes the school community holds for the future. Every school is a repository of unconscious sentiments and expectations that carry the code of the collective dream — the high ground to which they aspire. This represents emerging energy which the Principal can tap, and a deep belief system to which he or she can appeal when articulating what the school might become.

Deal, TE & Peterson, KD (1990) *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, US Department of Education, Washington DC, p 18.

While doing this you should also be aware of the potential dangers, such as being seen as manipulative. It is important to be up front about what you're doing.

## Where to start?

You might start with small group work, asking the staff questions and encouraging discussion about the founding of the school, its traditions, building, current realities and future dreams. Often it's best to ask each of them to write down their own answers, then discuss them with a colleague before coming back to a full discussion. What we are talking about here is leading towards a dream that you and your staff will construct, from the raw material that's there already. It would be naive to think that you could just parachute somebody in from outside with a ready packaged vision.

This asking and answering of questions is a worthwhile conversation — effectively it might be the first step towards a values audit, working with the staff. That is not to say that it always works out as you might hope or predict. Take an extreme example — what would you do if the current school culture emerged as so toxic that you couldn't use the discussion as a foundation? What if you came up with the wrong sort of information? Too many negatives?

One response might be to say that now is not the time to be doing this work. Another might be to say all the more reason to act now, and work for an improvement. If things look that bad, one strategy would be to generate a set of urgency to get people moving along the way. In either case, more focused groundwork would be needed.

One thing to remember here is not to expect everything to happen at once. In any organisational change, the last thing to change is the culture — a lot of processes come first, before you get there. Find a few good things to build on. Use a few of the ideas talked about in this



*The school leader must listen for the deeper dreams and hopes the school community holds for the future.*



*Tradition may well provide a sound base for future development, providing it is not calcified. Nostalgia, on the other hand is a comfort place, with no reference to realities or hard data.*

paper, rather than trying to do it all at once. Use a few specific, targeted questions. Watch out in the staff responses for what is called ‘ritual rationality’, where there is an apparent value displayed, but there may also be something else going on behind that surface appearance.

As an aside, when considering the past of the school, remember and allow for the difference between tradition and nostalgia. Tradition may well provide a sound base for future development, providing it is not calcified. Nostalgia, on the other hand is a comfort place, with no reference to realities or hard data. It is important to work out with the staff what is worth holding on to as a historical base from which to work.

### Dealing with conflict

It may be that you will encounter what seems an insurmountable conflict. Some critics have suggested that there is actually a degree of inevitability about conflict, and that given the transrational nature of Value 1 (Principle and Ethics) and the subrational nature of Value 3 (Personal Preferences/Self Interest) there is really only room for manoeuvre and debate where people stay within the rational framework set by Values 2a (Consequences) and 2b (Consensus). Perhaps. If the person you are working with retreats from the more rational values bases, try looking for ‘neutral ground’.

One effective strategy is to try getting them to describe what they see as a critical incident from their own experience. As they write about it they will be thinking to themselves continually ‘How did I feel about that?’ — emotion is involved at all times, to some degree, and tends to blur the edges around Value 2 rational responses. However, such an exercise, followed by discussion, could well draw out greater understanding for both parties about the values being espoused.

Monitor progress continuously. When it comes to implementation, people who have tended towards exhibiting Value 3 will again often go back/ or retreat into self interest again, but they, and you, will be in a position to be aware of that and to tackle it.

There is one proviso here: in describing critical incidents, people often risk significantly in what they talk about; what they reveal about themselves. This is an approach to use with care and with respect for the individual and his/her confidentiality. The need for some debriefing should be anticipated and provided.

### Dealing with variations of values

Kevin Roach, a Catholic Principal, has carried out some interesting research with Queensland Principals. He has been keen to explore the area of values conflict in practical situations — as they occur in any of the arenas, relating to personal, group, professional or community contexts. He has considered the issue of ‘variations’ of values, where they may not appear to be compatible, yet that does not necessarily mean that there is any apparent conflict.

Following an interest in ‘ethical dilemmas’ — where there is no apparent right or wrong solution, or where two parties might each lay claim to ‘rightness’ from their own perspective — Roach has used hypotheticals with groups, leading into discussion of ‘real’ situations. His findings suggest that the Principals in his sample used four key strategies to respond to ethical dilemmas:

#### 1 Avoidance

This is a relatively logical response to administrative problems in an accountability situation. And ‘accountability’ can also be different from ‘denial’.

#### 2 Suspending morality

There could be an occasion when a decision by the Principal would be seen either as against the interests of one student or against the interests of the other students. In such a case, the Principal might be inclined to ‘act by the book’. This is a complex area — we all play roles in society, and we suppress some elements according to circumstance; in another situation, the Principal might suspend his/her personal interest in favour of following the ‘party line’. It all depends on the relative strength of the particular value, the particular context and the Principal’s perception.

#### 3 Creative insubordination

In this case the Principal might find a way of subverting the rules, in response to some perceived higher value.

#### 4 Personal morality

Taking a moral stand, Roach says, is the least used of the four strategies.

There are two general points to add here. First, falling back on principles will to some large extent depend on the seriousness of the situation.

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In times of chaos, people often resort to principles or ethics., whereas in more settled times they don't seem to have to do that so much. Second, we have a saying in America that should be remembered by all school leaders in their decision making: "If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging!".

## Ethical dilemmas — some questions to ask

If you are working in this area of ethical dilemmas with your staff, what are some of the issues you might explore and where might you look for some discussion questions? There are examples all around us, but the following suggestions might prove useful:

1 Finding a way to resolve a dilemma lies in determining how to decide **what is 'preferred'** — for example, in a conflict between industrial relations and desired outcomes — as well as where the judgement point lies on what is manageable. If there is a dilemma, for example, over staffing and allocation of staff to particular duties, somebody or somebodies will not be happy, whatever you do.

How often do Principals have to make decisions that come down to maximising the school and whole staff benefits rather than opting to emphasise the effect on some individual(s) — even though this may alienate the particular member of staff for an indefinite period?

Welcome to real life!

2 **Ritual rationality** is something that we see quite often, most likely when there's a kneejerk reaction to a dilemma — more of a 'quick fix', as if the complex dilemma was a simple 'either/or' problem — in which case people will seek a justification. Governments provide numerous examples of this approach.

3 **Post modernist vs modernist conflicts** present interesting dilemmas. For example some Catholic Principals find conflict in their dealings with practising and non-practising parents who choose to send their children to Catholic schools. Often parents who are 'involved' in a whole range of parish activities resent those who do not participate and/or who have no such sense of commitment.

The 'involved' parents often feel that they have more right to a say in what happens in the school. Another example might be in the area of dress codes, where parents can be poles apart in opinion, with those disparate opinions firmly based in philosophical standpoints.

4 There are all kinds of **smokescreens** that people use to hide motives. For example, staff in a school may say that they are collegial and friendly. This may be a strong element in the image they want to generate. In fact, although pleasant and genial, they may have no common work ethic and may not support each other. In practice, they may have a masked preference for minimal effort, which the smokescreen disguises.

5 In a pluralistic society, can we assume that there are **core values**? Leaving aside cultural differences, what are the core values if the parents push for the 3 Rs while the school is responsible for the broader education of the whole child?

6 **Giving reasons for the actions of others** can leave the Principal as the meat in the sandwich, for example defending a teacher criticised by a member of the school community.

7 **Distinguishing between personal and professional arenas** can be very difficult. It can also be difficult to determine the degree of precedence at any one time.

This might involve dealing with the social or religious views of a subgroup, or perhaps with a single person who at different times presents him/herself with a multitude of 'hats' — "Excuse me, I'm here with my union hat ... Now let me switch to my parent hat/personal hat/PD Co-ordinator's hat" — perhaps several times in the same day.

Raise any of these areas with your staff and the examples from their own experience will take the discussion from there.

The key, as with all the suggestions I'm making, is to make a first step. Activities that have a high 'fun' factor get people interacting and discussing things. They smoke out of the bushes even those who endeavour to stay out of the conversation.



*... we have a saying in North America that should be remembered by all school leaders in their decision making: "If you find yourself in a hole, stop digging!".*

## MYTHS, PATHOLOGIES AND BEGUILLEMENTS

As administrators, it is crucial that we develop our understanding of people's values and the effects those values have on their actions. A number of obstacles stand in the way.

### 1 Values consistency

There is a myth of values consistency, within individuals, organisations and society. Don't expect or assume consistency; it may well not be there, whatever the appearances may be. If something does not match our core values, more often than not we'll be prepared to put up with it. We will only state our disagreement if asked ... or if pushed ... or perhaps not at all. Even then the degree of honesty may vary according to the context.

### 2 Cultural Isomorphs

Gabrielle Lekomski, at The University of Melbourne, talks about Cultural Isomorphs. What she is referring to is a subtle, but potentially valuable factor. This is where things may have the same name, or use the same words, or look the same, but be or mean different things. They are actually built out of different components.

For example, 'democracy' is a term used throughout the world, but in practice it means very different things in different places. Similarly 'free speech' may mean different things, and have different connotations and consequences, in different cultures or under different regimes. 'Democratic decision making' or a 'flat hierarchy' may mean two different things in two different schools.

### 3 Age and similar factors

Be aware of factors such as age, career stage and other similar "toothaches". Hodgkinson, the top North American philosopher in the administration area, commented that "It is difficult to be a philosopher when you have a toothache". Transfer that analogy to the school environment. Are the teacher's basic needs being met; if not, how well can they be expected to do their jobs? Put bluntly, if morale in a school stinks, what will the quality of the education be?

With the increasing age of the workforce in education, there are changes in emphasis in how

teachers see, and act upon, their values. They may, for example, become more oriented towards relationships in their jobs, rather than being predominantly task oriented; more inclined towards a quiet life rather than possible confrontation.

Similarly with regard to career stage, at the beginning of their careers teachers are starting to frame their professional values (which may be easy or difficult to deal with, according to the circumstances), while after 5 to seven years their values have stabilised and they may well be looking for an administrative or supervisory role. In both cases, this will affect how they act. Such factors obviously need to be taken into account by the school leadership.

### 4 Ritual rationality

Ritual rationality was mentioned earlier, but is worth re-emphasising. This is about making a decision and dressing it up in a way that will be more acceptable to other individuals or groups — especially those with whom you work, the organisation and/or the broader community. In politics they call it 'spin doctoring'.

It might be about someone buying in computer equipment with an overt purpose of raising the school's technological profile and taking teaching and learning in that area to the leading edge, but it might also be about that person having a high degree of self interest in using the equipment. By contrast, the staff in that school might prefer to see the funds expended on new water fountains for the junior school and the spin put on the purchase will greatly affect their reaction to the decision.

In fact, of course, the two values ascribed to the purchaser of the equipment are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is possible to be both a visionary and self indulgent. It is also possible that the use of supposedly rational arguments to support questionable actions has led to something of a backlash against a purely rational approach, and sympathy for new approaches based around ideas about emotional intelligence.

### 5 Thick and thin values

Ken Strike talks about 'thick' and 'thin' values. Thick values, he says, create communities. Thin values promote inclusion. There is a difference.

For example, in the USA some high schools are achieving relatively poorly. To some large



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extent this may be because of the emphasis placed on inclusion rather than community.

The fundamental 'thin' value is that everybody must be included, but this means everything else, other values included, needs to be watered down to achieve that aim. In addition, there is relatively limited commitment to the school.

By contrast, the Catholic schools have 'thick' values, with a strong sense of community, but some children are excluded. Somehow, in US high school education as a whole, we need to find a point of balance in between the two extremes — emphasising values that support us in creating a community but including all people.

If the values we live by are too 'thin', we will not build a community and we will not achieve the quality of outcomes to which we aspire as educational leaders. In my own institution, OISE in Canada, the dominant value espoused is one of 'equity'. In practice, I believe, this is too 'thin' a value to build the community and achieve the standards we would like to have. It is not enough to achieve the degree of collaborative endeavour among the staff that would be necessary to do so.

For us in Canada, as for all educational leaders who seek excellence of outcomes from their schools, the key issue is how to change habits of mind in order to make that happen. I hope this paper has helped to explain the importance of values in that process, and that it has provided some strategies for you to try along the way.

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## LIST OF SUGGESTED READINGS



... for all educational leaders who seek excellence of outcomes from their schools, the key issue is how to change habits of mind in order to make that happen

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*How do we know what we are conveying to others through our words and actions?*

*How do we know what they are 'reading' into, and understanding about, our values?*

*How do we know what each other's motivational bases are?*

*As leaders we need to work consciously to build and support our own and others' improved understanding of these areas.*

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