

The teachings are nothing but common sense

.....**J.Krishnamurti**

It is not bigotry to be certain we are right; but it is bigotry to be unable to imagine how we might possibly have gone wrong

.....**G.K.Chesterston**

The minority is sometimes right; the majority always wrong**George Bernard Shaw**



Administration:

- The process or activity of running a business. Organization etc. The people responsible for this, regarded collectively.
- Performance of executive duties.

(Webster dictionary)

Administration. The word carries with it a ring of authority, aloofness; an antiseptic flavour. Starting with word is therefore a poor start. Let us try a different starting point.

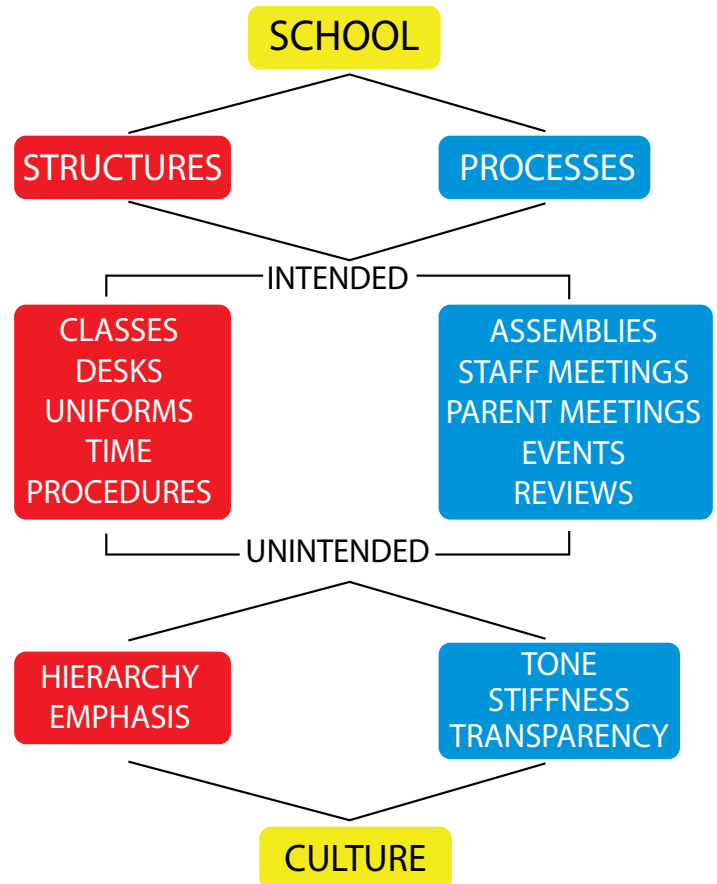
Schools have structures and processes. Some are intended; the product of thinking by the governing body or staff of a school. Others grow out of nowhere – they are perhaps not planned-but they are real and tangible.

It may be possible to say that administration is 'attention to the intended and the unintended' structures and processes. Particularly in schools, thanks to the terms such as 'Headmaster' or 'Principal', the term administration suggests that one person is in 'control'. Nothing could be less true. If administration could also connote 'culture' of a school, the way things are done, then it becomes abundantly clear why it never is in the hands of just one person.

We are now living in times that are seeing tremendous outward change. Cities are being reshaped. Work places are being transformed and mobility is easy. 'Life long learning' as a metaphor and a reality is here. Access to information on the internet, reaching across the globe with email and video conferencing is giving a new meaning to the words 'knowledge' and 'understanding'. Rather than demonstrate erudition we are being asked to show our ability to learn and reorient and collaborate. Rather than move with the security of established practices we are challenged to move away

from old ground without the security that this is necessarily an improvement.

Our times are wrenching human beings from earlier known securities, even as new insecurities surface with painful regularity – terror, war, natural calamities. There is an upheaval happening in society. Tomorrow promises change and reorientation at each step. Flexible working hours, learning anywhere and anytime are two important features that are of immense significance to schools. The structural edifices of classrooms and timetables are under question and being rearranged by these possibilities. Thus no school



management can be blind to these shaping forces of our times.

A culture of consultation is unavoidable. No one person can say that he has the best idea or the best solution. Questions of openness, prejudice, collaboration, shared intentions are unavoidable. In the shared journeys of educating students, clarification of intentions will be needed many times. Patience will be required to meet new views, difficult views and outrageous, exciting views. Our conditioning will be challenged.

New ideas will increase levels of individual discomfort while holding out some promises. There will always be three broad issues -

Institutions would need a culture of support and appreciation for human failings.

All the little decisions, conscious and unconscious make up the fabric of a school, its texture. No school's culture, however well worked, will carry a machine finish. The feel is that of a handwoven fabric since human beings and their decisions are involved. People never function with machine like precision. This is the beauty and this is the problem too. During the unplanned pressures that the teacher feels in a large number of situations and in the planned efforts, a school reveals its soul. It is in these times that people grow aware of the underpinnings of values, the certainties and the fears that guide an institution.

Simultaneously, new ideas would have to be welcomed and implementation dips will need to be endured.

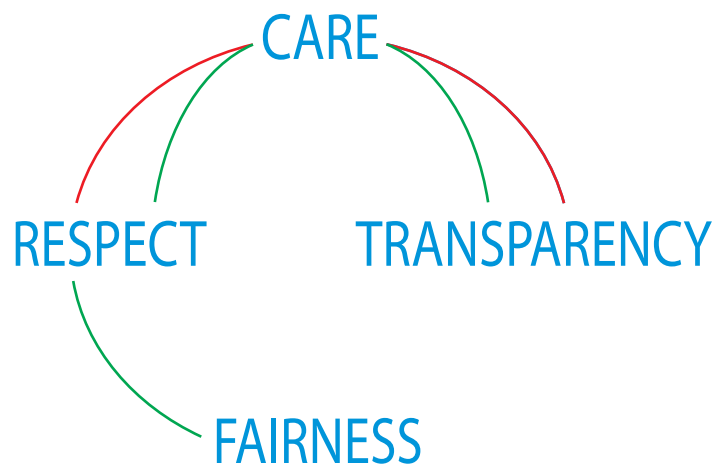
Good cheer and staying away from blame in our communications will be vitally important.

Authority, as traditionally defined, has lost its momentum and efficacy and is recognized today as a sign of backwardness. Following a leader or boss without conviction is a sign of a weak intellect. Questioning, as equals, has gained energy. Just as the World War II gave strength to women's emancipation in a big way, the computer industry has ushered in the age of irreverent questioning in the traditional temples of success, the organization. The successful organizations are not the sweat shops, reeking of exploitation, or cracking the feudal or colonial whips to subjugate their workers; but those that proudly wear transparency and equality as shining

principles of respectful human interaction and transaction. The authoritarian principles are well established and well known. The egalitarian principles are also well established but less known. Schools as crucibles of learning need to be ahead of their times and anticipate the future and strongly embody these principles. Before one moves further we must recognize that **egalitarian functioning still feels strange in most places.** Our individual personal histories and mankind's history makes it difficult to trust it fully. Nevertheless, it is the only way ahead.

In attempting to speak about school administration, the best place to begin may be common sense. It seems obvious that any administration must be constructed on a foundation of **respect, fairness and transparency.** All three may be put under the umbrella of **care.**

It is to be remembered that lack of fairness in an institution weakens the fabric irreversibly. And fairness is to be seen by all, and felt in the air.



The processes of a school are not different from those of other groups/ organizations. All institutions face, more or less, the same or similar situations. The difference is in the way they meet them. Working together is inevitable in shared spaces, such as institutions and organizations. Schools are no exceptions.

"There must be unstinted co-operation among all the teachers in a school of the right kind. The whole staff should meet often, to talk over the various problems of the school; and when they have agreed upon a certain course of action, there should obviously be no difficulty in carrying out what has been decided. If some decision taken by the majority does not meet with the approval of

a particular teacher, it can be discussed again at the next meeting of the faculty.

No teacher should be afraid of the headmaster or feel intimidated by the older teachers. Happy agreement is possible only when there is a feeling of absolute equality among all. It is essential that this feeling of equality prevail in the right kind of school, for there can be real co-operation only when the sense of superiority and its opposite are non-existent. If there is mutual trust, any difficulty or misunderstanding will not just be brushed aside, but will be faced, and confidence restored."

J. Krishnamurti,
Education and the significance of life."

This one statement, assimilated into an individual's consciousness, and an institution's consciousness, could radically affect the culture. Unfortunately we usually approach this statement with apprehension, trepidation, uncertainty and disbelief. Some corollaries and elaborations of this statement can be stated - most may appear self evident –

When different individuals work together there will be different perceptions and ideas. While these need not become barriers to a healthy working together, most often they do. Institutional movement and capacity to move ahead depends on the strength of processes for handling differing perceptions.

For a participative culture in any institution, it is important that differing views are welcomed and stated. Paradoxically, good decision making requires individuals who can put aside views.

Thinking, discussing, questioning are important attributes of a healthy culture and all must experience this as a fact at all

Decisions....

There is no decision or position without some advantages & some disadvantages. Whenever a decision is being made, it is important to remember that we are choosing some disadvantages.

It is greatly helpful at all levels to ask before finally making a decision, if this is a good idea, or an idea whose time has come.

levels. Without watchfulness, barriers develop.

Close and affiliative behavior, particularly among decision makers, while it may yield short term results, weakens the institutional fabric in the long run. All too often there are barriers in institutions - some are included, others excluded. Some are 'in' and others 'not in'.

Encouragement in a culture is usually sustained through rewards and punishments. Listening carefully to everyone seriously and respectfully is the only real alternative.

Some impersonal and widely distributed norms and principles help spread the intended culture. Some articulation is unavoidable and can be avoided only at risk to institutional health. However, the danger of articulation is that words become clichés, in the absence of sustaining processes. And empty clichés make hollow institutions.

While liking the notions of plurality and diversity most institutions, at the core, are extremely rigid and hierarchic. This manifests itself in how decision making is carried out.

Growing institutions may need to pick up or discover different 'tools' from time to time. Institutions often find themselves embroiled in the question 'Is the adoption of new tools a 'betrayal' of institutional History?'

Without adequate processes for 'gracing' one's history it is difficult to 'wholesomely' move ahead.

Leadership.

- Intelligently, skilfully, wholesomely navigating that which is given,
- Finding and taking the next step.

If an institution does not concern itself with developing leadership, it begins to stagnate or lose distinctness. It is likely to be swamped by the 'dominant' culture of the time. Distinctness, in a culture, is always under assault from the dominant Culture. And the key in processes of sustenance, regeneration and handing over. **Leadership building is actually an effort at sustaining a valuable culture, not merely survival into the future.**

Some new ideas gain currency in times such as now, rapid change is a vital need for these times.

In 1995, Asha, a young, new colleague, was most alarmed at a certain decision that was being taken. After 3 rounds of meetings, the school staff had decided that it would conduct a series of meetings with the senior-most students of the school. She voiced her objections saying, "I think things are quite ok and there is no reason for such a series of meetings." The principal could not move ahead without either dismissing her view – which would also imply that "you are new, young and your view is therefore uninformed" or "while we can listen to you we cannot take you seriously." This was an institutional crisis.

My colleagues and I looked hard at the fundamentals. We told Asha, "Thank you for speaking your mind. This is valuable to us as it means that there is space for people to actually voice what they feel. It may be uncomfortable for us to hear this but that is not your problem. Second, please hold your reservations they are valuable. No one is going to try and convince you to change your mind. Third, how shall we move ahead? We have been holding discussions about holding a series of meetings with senior students. You have an objection and think it is a bad idea.

Can we consider holding one meeting and then reviewing the decision? Surely others would pick up your misgivings if they are evident." Asha agreed and we were together in the decision. After the first meeting she said, "All my misgivings have vanished. Let us go ahead."

Is it possible for colleagues to say to each other the following:

- a. I will not try to convince you.
- b. Let us listen to each other carefully.
- c. As we discuss and listen, we can come to what is the right thing to do together.

Further I ask, is it possible for teachers to say the same to students?

How dissent is located in an institution is crucial. Space for dissent is vital and cannot be denied. The new technologies, particularly the internet, are making traditional intolerance for the other view, almost impossible. If dissent is not permitted or discouraged, it will find expression through other mediums, and the internet can reach any corner of the world. Each organization and institution experiences some struggles in this area. The culture of an organization, its

A senior colleague Kamala was once asked, as part of an in-house survey, if she had space to voice her opinions at school & if her views counted or were taken into account. She replied, "I have always been able to voice my views. When a decision is taken and it is against my view, I still feel I have contributed to the decision."

humanness, its strength and character, are most defined, by the space and processes for engaging with dissent in its fold. Agreement, on all but the most trivial matters, is not easily found. Recognition of this fact and the manner in which colleagues, friends, teachers and students navigate this terrain is critical. Krishnamurti's teachings clearly move away from 'convincing' another, 'coercion' or use of 'authority'. The space defined by him 'collaboration, not around an idea' is truly a transformational challenge, not just for the individual but for the institution as well.

Organizations need to evolve into an understanding of some crucial points. Krishnamurti indicates that:

Views are not important, fact is. Decisions are made, not through authority, but 'thinking together' and there is a collaboration, that is not around an idea. It may interesting to ask if such a position is tenable in the 'day to day' running of a school or any organization. The 'day to day' metaphor assumes that there is an urgency in the matters to be decided, a hurry, a 'cannot wait'. Is this so?

Decisions are made at all levels. If something resembles what was done earlier, we don't call it a 'decision'. However it is one – it is the decision to 'continue' as before.

Most decisions are made through the need for fairness and consistency. In fact most institutional problems relate to not doing in letter and spirit what was done yesterday. Doing the same thing as yesterday, mechanically. Not recognizing the need for a fresh approach.

A fair and true invitation to express followed by a careful hearing is a vital, and yet often elusive, feature of human communication. It is not surprising that the shared space of institutions and organizations most vitally lives these questions.

The premise defines all else. The orchestra needs a conductor and the military a commander. Even in groups that

practise democracy it seems extremely difficult to move away from 'dominant' or 'overriding' influences. Can schools and modern institutions conceive of vibrant alternatives? Can the

working space in institutions, schools carry a deeper quality of intelligence, and not a tussle for power and influence, obvious or subtle?

G.Gautama worked as Principal, The School KFI (1991-2009) and guided important educational, administrative and institutional transitions. Now as Director of The Chennai Education Centre KFI, he is responsible for The School, an Outreach program that has contributed significantly to the State Schools in Tamilnadu and Pathashaala, a new KFI residential school. He may be contacted at gautama2004@gmail.com.

Editor's Note:

This article was originally published in Volume 10 of The Journal of Krishnamurti Schools. The Editor thanks the KFI for permission to reprint the same.

