

PHILOSOPHICAL AND MANAGERIAL VALUES OF MARY PARKER FOLLETT'S CONTRIBUTION

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ABSTRACT:In contrast with many of her contemporaries, Mary Parker Follett offered a different view, an innovative one, of business management and administration, providing relevant messages for today management problems. Her approach was more philosophical and idealistic, focused on the integration of the individual and the organization. Obviously the complexity of her ideas and interdisciplinary approach, made a contribution extremely difficult to understand and follow in order to achieve a harmonious life organization. The purpose of this paper is to see Follett's contribution to today's managerial context. In our article, are investigated her main ideas expressed in her work and how they can be connected with current concepts. This article concludes that, rather than to believe naively that we are reinventing now management practices, it may be better to recognize the historical roots of many modern ideas, and admit that we are still striving to improve them.

KEYWORDS:*management philosophy, integrative unity, power with, low of situation.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Chronologically, Mary Parker Follett belonged to the scientific management era, but philosophically and intellectually she was a member of the social relations ideology. She had a foot in each world and served as a link between the two eras by generalizing Taylor's concepts and anticipating many conclusions of the Hawthorne research.

At the beginning she was a political philosopher. As political philosopher, following the group principle, she concluded that a person's "true self is the group self" and that "man can have no rights apart from society or independent of society or against society" [1]. In opposing the notion that the purpose of government is to protect individual rights, she proposed a new concept of democracy: "Democracy then is a great spiritual force evolving itself from men, utilizing each, completing his incompleteness by weaving together all in the many – membered community life which is the true theophany ("Teophany is the visible manifestation of God") [1]. Mary Parker Follett is a fascinating example of a person who transferred disciplines from political science to management studies and was able through the insights of the former to illuminate the later. In order to understand her contribution to the development of organization coordination must be examine her philosophical predilections. She was an ardent admirer of Johann Fichte, the German philosopher considered one of the father of nationalism. Fichte is often perceived as a figure whose philosophy forms a bridge between the ideas of Kant and those of the German idealist Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Recently, philosophers and scholars have begun to appreciate Fichte as an important philosopher in his own right due to his original insights into the nature of self-consciousness or self-awareness. He exposed the idea that freedom of the individual had to be subordinated to the group. The group principle gave the idea that people could live and work as a single unit, not separately and independently.

Follett was both, the political philosopher and business/management philosopher. Although writing in a different day and age, her ideas are rich with foresight. She advocated cooperation and better horizontal relationships in organizations, taught respect for the experience and knowledge of workers, warned against the dangers of too much hierarchy, and called for visionary leadership. These ideas remain at the forefront of progressive management today and remind us that Follett was a true 21st – century thinker, even if the current environment is more dynamic and uncertain than the early of 1900s. "The greatest need of today is a keen,

analytical, objective study of human relations. We preach “compromise” as the apex of the ethical life, we laud the “balance of power” as our political and international faith, we give our substance and ourselves to establish an “equilibrium” of nations”[2]

Marry Parker Follett provides relevant principles and messages ...contributing to the development, welfare and culture of modern society. Using phrases as “togetherness”, “group thinking” and the “collective will”, she sought a new society which would be based upon a group principle and not upon individualism. This idea did not implied to destroy the individual, but was based upon her premise that only through the group could the individual find his “true self”.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

For a deeper analysis of Mary Parker Follett’s administrative and psychological contribution, we have used a qualitative research method, analysing her representative biography. In this endeavour we took into consideration main moments of her life, her experiences and human relations with different members from society [3], her main writings, scientific papers and lectures. In accordance we analysed publications like: Creative Experience (1930), Dynamic Administration. The Collected Papers of Mary Parker Follett (1940) and The New State: Group Organization, the Solution of Popular Government (1998/1918). Also we have reviewed the literature regarding her influences and criticisms, transferred concepts and adopted theories. Due to her visionary ideas, the complexity of which she had addressed issues, discussed and presented in her writings, Mary P. Follett has received an increasing interest from the followers in many research areas. Her interdisciplinary character, of philosopher, political scientist, social ideologist and writer, determined a wide spread of her messages in: organization theory, education, philosophy, public administration. Based on a citation analysis of her work, Fry and Thomas [10] observed that the Follett’s contributions, outside the areas of psychology and interdisciplinary social sciences, have been the most cited in area of organization theory. Due to the fact that many topics presented by Follett became more relevant at the present, we focus in our study on 3 main topical issues for modern management:

- Leaders and leadership;
- Empowerment and authority as coordination philosophy;
- Integrative unity.

In her book, Creative Experience, she developed the idea of the interrelatedness of all psychological phenomena involved in human relations. Through her eyes, power, leadership and authority became dynamic concepts, not heavy tools which only burdened administrators.

3. VISION ABOUT THE LEADER’S ACTIVITY

To be effective Follett felt that leadership must not be autocratic. In her vision the leader is a person who can explain that his/her orders resulted from the situation. The manager must not think solely of what effect he or she will have on the group, but also what influence the group will have on him, her. Agreeing with Fayol and Sheldon, she stressed the role of education and the fact that leaders were not born only, but could be made through understanding group dynamics and human behaviour. What is important in this context according to Follett is the interaction between people, because this could create spiritual values. The primary leadership task was defining the purpose of the organization; the leader should “... make his co-workers see that it is not his purpose which is to be achieved, but a common purpose, born of desires and the activities of the group. The best leader has not followers, but men and women working with him” [7].

Follett applied this constructive approach which reveals a deep understanding of the importance of leaders and managers’ activity:

“we are loyal to the soul of our work. To that which is both in our work and which transcends our work. This seems to me the highest romance as it is the deepest religion, namely, that by being loyal to our work we are loyal to that which transcends our work” [7].

Mary P. Follett reported herself to the new society based on the group principle, instead of individualism. This modern approach has roots in the puritan ideology. This served as a catalyst in developing the modern civilization and represented the fundament of capitalism. As a group from Protestant Church, Puritan philosophy strengthened the Christianity attitude toward work activity, work is necessary not only for surviving but also to share the fortune and good luck of faith with those which are in suffering. In accordance with this ideology, which implied also a simplification of the religious ceremonies, faith is not a doctrine,

“faith cannot even be identified or located without good works. Doing one’s work requires the transforming quality of faith. To work at a calling is to be a person of faith and to work diligently at a calling is to be a person of great faith” [5].

Mary Parker Follett was concerned about the meaning of the activity and inhumanity of what she called the mechanical age. In this way she referred on one hand to the scientific management principles, which brought the idea of calculability, measurability and efficiency as a result of engineering transferred to human life in organization. So, for the first time, she drew attention that management or leadership activity doesn’t mean just to control and measure the results, but also to understand the human nature, with emotions, desires and motives. A single action stemmed from many motives and she accepted that profit, personal motives and desire for innovation were also present with the desire for service. She hoped that service would become the dominant motive in management.

“We all want the richness of life in terms of our deepest desire. We can purify and elevate our desires, we can add to them, but there is no individual or social progress in curtailment of desires” [7].

She seems to make a straight distinction between two types of desires, one connected with immediate utility and another one, at a superior level, which give a meaning of life and have to prevail. Mele [11] considered that Follett’s concept - richness of life - can be understood as being personal improvement, resulting from ethical behaviour. Also, considered Follett’s approach an Aristotelian one, in which human excellence is a crucial reference for good behaviour. Likewise in the Aristotelian philosophy, where true and elevate goal guiding people to achieve well-being and happiness, in her vision “only when the spirit of art rises from the roots ... will it redeem our civilization” [2].

She stressed the idea of evolving purposes when factors and situations are changed and due to human relations evolution. “Activity, she said, does more than embody purpose, it evolves purpose.”

4. A NEW ATTITUDE REGARDING AUTHORITY

One of the Follett forward-looking ideas for the organization psychology was the replacement of the current principle of “power over” people with the new one of “power with”. Also she considered necessary to replace coercion and consent with co-action. Follett pointed out that when the uses of physical force pass beyond a certain point, energies are lessen and self respect is lost: thus, no community could stand long unless it was founded upon the consent governed.

“The moral right to power which has not been psychologically developed is an empty ethics; it is an ethics, alas, which we have to combat daily in politics and industry” [2].

Follett thought that “final authority” was an illusion based on a false premise of power. So, she concluded that the central problem of social relations is power and authority. In her philosophy authority results from a function rather than a position and power was the ability to influence others, to achieve objectives and bring changes. Follett identify that authority accrued the situation, not the person or his, her position.

Likewise “final responsibility”, was an illusion. She explained how responsibility should be reinterpreted: at the individual level a person should be responsible for his/her work, not to someone. At the departmental level the responsibility of work should be shared jointly by all

those who contributed to it. Finally, the head of organization also has cumulative responsibility for interweaving interdepartmentally.

Follett is a fine psychologist of human behaviour. She affirms that no one likes to receive orders from a boss. People feel a fundamental need to self-assert, so no one likes to be under the will of another. This implies lack of self-respect, frustration and determined wrong behaviour for employees. The roles of boss and subordinate have created barriers in recognizing the commonality of interests. That's why Follett proposed to depersonalize orders and to shift obedience to the "law of the situation".

"One person should not give orders to another person, but instead managers should concentrate on how to devise methods by which we can best discover the order integral to a particular situation. The manager's authority should be an exercise of the "authority of the situation." [7].

The issuing of order from one person to another will often give possibility to raise a conflict. The conflict may be a direct between the two parties or it may be a Freudian conflict within the self of one or both parties. Both of each party will find expression in a partial or reluctant execution of an order. In the essay "The Giving of Orders" published in 1926, Mary Parker Follett argues that both manager and employee should study the situation and discover the "law of the situation". This law holds that when both, managers and employees, see the logic of a situation and try to gain a total understanding of all factors being on that situation, the conflict must dissolve in the face of the facts. The law of the situation will obviously work imperfectly, so long as the facts are not available. Through finding the law of the situation, Follett has felt as an important contribution made to the psychology of corporation and ultimately scientific management. Situations can be changed by orders, the implementation of orders and the dynamics of any situation itself.

Most situations were too complex for the top management of organization in order to function effectively; therefore controls were being gathered in many points in the organization. So, she summed up her idea of organizational control as a self-adjusting process under four principles:

- a) Co-ordination is best achieved when the people responsible for making a decision are in direct contact;
- b) Co-ordination during the early stages of planning and project implementation is essential;
- c) Co-ordination should address all the factors in a situation;
- d) Co-ordination must be worked at continuously.

5. INTEGRATIVE UNITY

Mary P. Follett realized that the basic problem of any organization, business or otherwise, was the harmonizing and coordinating group efforts to achieve most efficient the goals. The research for integrative unity, for commonality of will, and for human cooperation earned Mary Follett an international reputation as a political philosopher, also as a business/management philosopher. Relying heavily upon Gestalt psychology, which held that every psychological situation has a specific character apart from the "absolute" nature of the component parts, that is, the "whole" is a configuration greater than the sum of the parts, she felt that through group experiences, individuals could reach a greater release of their own creative powers [1]. She defined the notion of integrative unity in order to understand the connection between different approaches. Integration involved finding a solution which satisfied both sides, without compromise and domination. A very simple illustration of this theory was presented by Mary Parker: "...A Dairymen's Co-operative League almost went to pieces last year on the question of precedence in unloading cans at a creamery platform. The men who came down the hill (the creamery was on a down grade) thought they should have precedence; the men who came up the hill though they should unload first.

The thinking of both sides in the controversy was thus confined within the walls of these two possibilities, and this prevented their even trying to find a way of settling the dispute which would avoid these alternatives. The solution was obviously to change the position of the platform so that both up-hillers and down-hillers could unload at the same time. But this solution was not found until they had asked the advice of a more or less professional integrator. When, however, it was pointed out to them, they were quite ready to accept it.” [7]. Once the content of the conflict has been identified, Follett considered that it must be broken into its constituent parts. The goal of group effort was an integrative unity which transcended the parts. In essence, she began to answer the questions of group conflict which she failed to examine in *The New State: group Organization the Solution of popular Government*.

She hypothesized that any conflict of interests could be resolved in any one of four ways:

- “(1) voluntary submission of one side;
- (2) struggle and the victory of one side over the other;
- (3) compromise; or
- (4) integration”.

Both one and two were clearly unacceptable because they involved the use of force or power to dominate. Compromise was likewise futile because it postponed the issue and because the “truth does not lie “between” the two sides” [1]. This implied from managers to analyse the psychological implications of the demands, put forward by each side to see which must be specifically met and which was merely symbolic of a desire and could be satisfied in another way, to the mutual argument of both parties.

In conclusion, Follett argued that managers have to understand how different sides contribute to a new perspective, mutually fair and identify the commonalities between the approaches. She defined integrative unity as the process through which individuals integrate their common interest by focusing on their interdependence, as well as their joint responsibilities. She also argued that sometimes this integration is not possible, due to the nature of situation or to the specific period of time, but is important to be open minded and not afraid of differences. Integration involves creativity, innovation and a way of thinking beyond the limits.

It is very important that she acted as a promoter of the tolerance concept, which becomes a key element for today modern society. Today, we define tolerance as an open and understanding attitude towards the differences between people and respect others for what they are. Some sociologists believe that the idea of orientation to the concept of tolerance today came after losing the central idea, one truth and one common way of life for all of us [9]. In general, globalization’s emphasising has underlined diversity and freedom values in shaping people's lives.

Within this context of justice and fairness, Follett suggested that managers and employees should mutually construct their perceptions of justice and understand the nature of justice. She also has identified the substantial obstacles to achieving integration as being the perceptive powers and sheer inventiveness of the individual. Language, leadership and management theory can be misused and fade path of integration.

Follett emphasized that integrative unity would lead to a better understanding of the needs, perspectives and responsibilities of others. The benefits resulted for all three sides: employees, managers and organization.

The benefits associated with fostering integrative unity are noted in the following quote:

„We find, however, that when there is some feeling in a plant, more or less developed, that the business is a working unit, we find then that the workman is more careful of material, that he saves time in lost motions, in talking over annoyances, that he helps the new hand by explaining things to him, that he helps the fellow working at his side by calling attention to the end of a roll on the machine, etc. This is the Golden Rule taken behaviouristically” [2].

The novelty brought by integrative unity is that it suggests that managers are extremely important to define fairness together with employees. Mary P. Follett believes that it is not enough if managers understand the perceptions of employees and then decide on how to repair the violations of fairness. Thus, she deemed it appropriate to develop within the organization mechanisms, respectively she had tried to instrument the concept, one-on-one meetings, workshops, feedback sessions, through which managers and employees can jointly develop definitions of fairness and equity.

In summary, through the concept of integrative unity, Follett offers a possibility for generating the spirit of cooperation. Thus, she puts forward another innovative idea of participation of workers in organization management. Mary P. Follett was convinced that workers inevitably took part in management when they made their own decisions how to execute the orders [9].

6. CONCLUSIONS

Peter Drucker called Mary P. Follett “the prophet of management” and considered her one of the most insightful of the early management scholars. She believed in managing for increased yield and that increased yield could be achieved through better understanding among employees. Follett was a true management philosopher, a pioneer who preached the use of conflict to create understanding. Follett was closer to reality about society, people and management than were the theorists and practitioners from her time [4]. Follett's philosophy of management is understood from her innovative ideas of empowerment, cross-functional teamwork, horizontal communication, adaptive behaviour, and the role of conflict in organizations in the development of entrepreneurial spirit.

It is very important to say that, Mary P. Follett had referred to carefully analyse all factors that might influence a given situation. Like Fayol, she argued that principles and management techniques must be applied differently in each situation in accordance with its unique requirements – referring to this as the law of the situation. But in time this general concept came to be known as the “contingency theory”[6].

She believed that making every employee an owner in the business would create feelings of collective responsibility. Today we address the same issues under such labels as “employee ownership”, “profit sharing” and “gain – sharing plans”. Follett believed that business problems involve a wide variety of factors that must be considered in relationship to one another. Today we talk about “systems” when describing the same phenomenon. As we see, her ideas anticipated the systems viewpoint of management. One recent reviewer of her work has argued that its overall significance, “rivals the long – standing influence of such giants as Taylor and Fayol”[13].

She gave us a theory of human interaction that shows how the same factors that cause change also provide the means for solving the problems presented by change, a theory that tells us that the possibilities for the healthy resolution of conflict is part of the natural process of human intercourse [3].

Follett believed that business were services and that private profits should always be considered vis – a – vis the public good. Today we pursue the same issues under the labels of “managerial ethics”, “business ethics” and “corporate social responsibility”. In order to get employees to work harder she felt that managers had to recognize the motivating desires of the individual. Accordingly, Follett urged managers to motivate performance rather than simply to demand it.

She also argued that managers could use super ordinate goals – goals workers in all areas of an organization could hold in common – to reduce conflict and increase coordination between units Follett's contributions were valuable and still hold true today, but were given little credit by scholars in her time.

Cooperation, a spirit of unity, and coordination of effort were seen by Follett as the keys to both productivity and a democratic way of life. Follett became convinced that the greatest potential for individual performance existed when an individual functioned in a group. She believed that organization should “nourish” the employee to improve performance and that managers should coordinate this productivity

Follett placed great importance on achieving what she called “integrative unity”, whereby the organization would operate as a functional whole, with the various interrelated parts working together effectively to achieve organizational goals. Yet she saw the process of working together as a dynamic process because environmental factors would necessitate change.

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