



A pearl contribution in support of 'inspiring women leaders... dare we?'

"THE UNDIVIDED ONE"ⁱ

Mary Parker Follett

Written by Johnathan Wilson

"Yourself is actually the whole of mankind" David Bohm, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, 1980

Preface – Mary Follett in her own words

She once wrote, "The individual is not a unit, but a centre of forces (both centripetal and centrifugal) and consequently society is not a collection of units, but a complex of radiating and converging, crossing and re-crossing energies. Society is a dynamic process rather than a crowd or a collection of already developed individuals."ⁱⁱ

On another occasion, "The leader releases energy, unites energies, and all with the object of not only carrying out a purpose, but creating further and larger purposes. I mean purposes which will include more of those fundamental values for which most of us agree we are really living."ⁱⁱⁱ

And on business, "[Business men] may be making useful products; in addition to that they may be helping individuals in their employ to further development; but even beyond all these things, by helping to solve the problems of organization, they are helping to solve the problems of human relations, and that is certainly the greatest task man has been given on this planet."^{iv}



Introduction

Leo Melamed calls her the first known management consultant in the USA. Peter Drucker described her as "the Prophet of Management"^v.

She wrote about communities, democracy, freedom, leadership, and power. It was only in her last years that she wrote about business; although it is for this she is best remembered. Her writing broke new ground about social psychology, group relations, systems thinking and complexity theory. Her two main books were *The New State (1918)* and *Creative Experience (1924)*. A third book, *Dynamic Administration (1941)*, was assembled after her death in 1933 from notes of her lectures to managers.

Joan Tonn's comprehensive biography in 2003 "*Mary P. Follett: Creating Democracy, Transforming Management*"^{vi} and Pauline Graham's 1995 celebration of her writings, "*Mary Parker Follett – Prophet of Management*" have inspired this piece. I will try to summarise Mary Follett's most important ideas and show how her life, her approach to thinking and her style of writing and her ideas are interwoven, and why those ideas are still so important for society and business in the early 21st Century.



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Her Life

Mary Follett, who never married, was born into a prosperous Quaker family in Boston in 1868. Her maternal grandfather was one of Boston's wealthier patricians. Her father, Charles Follett, was a machinist in a factory and served in the Civil War. He does not appear to have made a success of much of his life, drinking excessively and leaving his family. After he did return, Mary gained a sister, who lived only four months, whereupon her father left home again. In 1875, when Mary was seven years old, her father signed the temperance pledge and prospered at home thereafter. She spoke very little about her early childhood, but it seems she had few friends. Despite his drinking problems and absences, she always spoke very well of her father, but spoke less kindly of her mother, who seems to have suffered debilitating depressions.

She seems to have decided to secure her own future by excelling in her education. She found it difficult to trust people or to form intimate relationships. Her family took in three lodgers to earn some money, even though this was not socially desirable in their society. When she was eight years old, her brother was born. A year later, her maternal grandmother died and her grandfather invited the family to join him, his son and engaged daughter in his big house. They had to manage the household and look after grandfather. Meanwhile her, now sober, father rose in the community through the Temperance League. Joan Tonn's biography of Mary Follett suggests that as a child she felt very lonely and sought social acceptance by her service, her hard work and academic achievement.

When she was only eleven years old, she was accepted into Thayer, a new leading school that normally did not accept children below thirteen and rarely accepted girls. In her final year there, she scored 99%. At Thayer, Mary was blessed by some remarkable teachers, including Anna Thomson, who probably inspired her thinking about democracy and leadership. She also became intrigued by psychology. At fourteen, she wrote about 'expectant attention', which she described as, *"an unconscious state in which the mind becomes possessed with the idea that certain sights, sounds and feelings are to be experienced, so that various sensations which have no place in the world of fact will, by the all powerful agency of the mind, be created."*

Just two years later, both Mary Follett's grandfather and father died within seven weeks. She had to leave school and take over her father's role and much of her mother's role too, as her mother appears to have submitted to an incapacitating depression that continued the rest of her life. This meant Mary having to take care of her younger brother, George. Fortunately, a new home-schooling project for women had just launched, which she joined. It was here that she developed her passion for history and 'political economy'. She spent three successful years developing her education and running the household, till at twenty she enrolled at the Harvard Annex for women (Radcliffe College). In those days fewer than 2% of women went to University. She was described there as "a quiet and studious girl and a deep student".

A year later her mentor, Anna Thomson, took her to Cambridge, England, where she wrote her graduation thesis on the Speaker of the House of Representatives, which became her first book. "Oh, it isn't good enough; I did so want to do something good for my America." Despite her anxiety, her thesis/book was and is still regarded as one of the defining and influential texts about the US democracy of the time. She visited Europe several times and lived in London for some years in later life.

In 1900 she moved into her friend, Isobel Briggs', house, in Vermont. They would live together for the next thirty years till Isobel's death. Isobel Briggs was a Yorkshire woman, a head



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teacher, twenty years older than Mary. About the same age as Mary's mother, she was very unlike her. She was active with a very lively mind and a strong social orientation.

A small inheritance enabled Mary to undertake active voluntary work, such as founding and leading neighbourhood community centres in Boston and serving on many committees. She was socially connected to some of the richest and most influential families in Massachusetts. She built and maintained her network to the great benefit of US society and later business in the US and UK. In later years she became involved in the League of Nations, often visiting Geneva.

Follett's early life shaped her thinking about society, service, democracy and integration. She had seen her father leave his family to serve in the Civil War. She had felt the joy of his return, the joy of gaining and pain of losing a baby sister, then losing her father again to alcohol. She had felt the pressure to serve the lodgers in her house and then her grandfather. She had felt the joy again of her father's presence and felt the family thrive after his temperance pledge. Then she felt the grief of losing him and her grandfather within a few weeks. These traumatic events in her early life made her feel the pain of disintegration and separation and the great value of integration. From these events she also gained her strong feelings about the importance of service.

The Historical Context

America

Mary Follett's America was itself facing huge challenges of integration. The US Civil War had happened in her lifetime (it nearly took her father completely from her). It had been a terrible experience of national disintegration, threatening the very concept of democracy. Its echoes still rumbled across America. This had happened to a land that its settlers regarded as The New Eden, where true democracy would be reborn.

At the same time, waves of immigrants were arriving along the Eastern Seaboard. They arrived in hope, but then often found themselves in a violent world of exploitation by ruthless business men and women, by union bosses and by party politicians. Frequently unable to speak the language of their new country, many immigrants found it desperately hard to integrate. Lacking the ability to communicate fluently, they were often not taken seriously, nor treated with respect by the settled Americans. In his seminal book on Scientific Management that shaped management thinking throughout the 20th Century, FW Taylor uses a manual worker's Dutch accent as a way of 'demonstrating' his stupidity and inferiority.^{vii}

Work and Business

The growth of industry and transport in the 19th and 20th Centuries led to the idea of corporations as separate from the people, frequently in geographically different locations. This led to divisions between 'life' and 'work'. People left their homes to work for a corporation instead of working in their community for themselves. It created the idea of remote workers working for remote owners. Firms hire managers who then hire those workers. Remote investors publicly own those firms (individually or in common funds) and pay people to manage their investments. Ironically, these investors are often the employed people investing through pensions funds and savings schemes.



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Frederick Taylor launched what he called Scientific Management in 1911, based on the idea of clear separation between workers and managers and the use of standardisation, repetition and strict obedience to pre-ordained management instruction to minimise the use of people and time. As people's time became more expensive, the drive to use fewer people increased. This was the context in which Mary Follett was trying so hard to integrate people and communities. She noted that the power of corporations itself depends on the ability of men to "interknit themselves into such genuine relations that a new 'real' personality is evolved". She said, "One of the first things to be done to make business management more scientific is to apply scientific methods to those problems of management which involve human relations."^{viii}

Follett said that, "There is no wall between my private life and my public life."^{ix} Deborah Bassett describes Follett's integration of her scholarship with her public activities as "the reciprocal relationship of scholarship and public work that distinguishes Follett as a public scholar rather than a simply a public worker."^x

Mary Follett died in Boston in December 1933.

Her Writing Style

Mary Follett wrote a cultured American English that today can sometimes seem unwieldy, but her writing is full of little gems of homely insight and humour. On one occasion, trying to explain the difference between the beneficial integration that retains difference and the destructive absorption that annihilates it, she quotes an old nursery rhyme,

"Algy met a bear
The bear was bulgy
The bulge was Algy."^{xi}

She was frustrated that the very structure of language sometimes obscures insight, and this becomes most apparent when she discusses 'circular response'. Systems Thinking only really captured public imagination decades later when people used diagrams and pictures to convey their ideas, but she did not have that capability in the 1920s.

Follett uses metaphors of weaving throughout her writing and draws homely metaphors from ideas such as knitting (e.g. "knitting the child back again into worthy relations") to illustrate her thinking. She is trying to convey how everything is connected inextricably with everything else, as systems thinkers acknowledge today. Her language is characterised by words to do with connection and interdependency, such as "interacting", "interweaving", "interpermeating", "interknit", interrelatings and "interminglings". She was not shy of making a word up to express her exact meaning!

Her Ideas

Mary Follett's ideas came from her life experience, and gradually integrated with each other to become her worldview. She conscientiously wrote her ideas down, tested and explored them thoroughly. She also integrated and reintegrated them constantly. Her books show her ideas evolving and recombining again and again in fresh ways. Some ideas she described as fundamental and essential. They were: integration, circular behaviour, the laws of association, the law of the situation and the four rules of co-ordination.



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Integration

Integration and “circular behaviour” are at the root of all Mary Follett’s ideas. She believed that integrating was the core skill; that the measure of a leader is how much difference they can integrate. She said [The leader] must be ever ready to gather up the many threads [of the group] into one strand of united behaviour.”^{xii} She felt that integrating difference generates a particular kind of sustainable power – and requires practice and skill.

Successful, sustained integration leads to integrity. Integrity literally means one-ness or wholeness. At the time of her early writing, Einstein’s work was not in the public domain, but her concept of complete integration fits with his observation “ $E = MC^2$ ”, which may be recast as “ $M = E/C^2$ ”, or, expressed in words, that all Matter is simply a huge amount of integrated Energy. So the idea of integrity applies to matter, to the whole person and to the whole of democratic society.

Circular Behaviour (Systems Thinking)

Mary Follett’s ‘Circular Behaviour’ or ‘Circular Response’, which she also calls ‘reciprocal interplay’, is the essence of systems thinking. Follett’s ideas of reciprocal interplay are built on psychological concepts expounded by William James and Edwin Holt. She was also influenced much by Freud and by the Gestalt school in Germany. She says that ‘interpenetrating is the fundamental law of existence.”^{xiii} This holistic systems approach forms the basis of her thinking about people and about communities. One of her earliest public observations was, “The central lesson of life is that social power is increased in proportion as the individual sinks himself in the body he serves.”^{xiv} and later, “The deepest truth of life is that the inter-relating by which the [One and the Many] are at the same time a-making is constant”^{xv}.

She takes a consilience^{xvi} approach, a view that all things are different manifestations of the same basic idea. She says that the individual is “not a unit, but a centre of forces (both centripetal and centrifugal) and consequently society is not a collection of units, but a complex of radiating and converging, crossing and re-crossing energies. Society is a dynamic process, rather than a crowd or a collection of ready-made individuals”^{xvii}. By this she means that all life and all society is a constant, unceasing process of endless, self-organising interacting.

She says “The task of creation, from electrons up, is putting oneself in relation”.^{xviii} She also says that it is impossible to describe this process in the conventional language of subject and object, because these are just “moments in the process”. Later she says “Functional relating is the continuing process of self-creating coherence...a process that will create a unity that will lead to further unities – a self-creating progression.”^{xix}

Dafna Elyon summarises Follett’s perspective as “dynamic and holistic”.^{xx} What we see developing in her writing is the idea of fractals of dynamic systems; from organs to people to communities to societies to a global order. She said, “The organism is the continuing activity of self-organising, self-maintaining.”^{xxi} People are systems of self-organising and self-maintaining organs and psyches that are functioning through constant, continuous, inseparable ‘circular responses’. People interact with each other and “through circular response we are creating each other all the time.”^{xxii} She said, “The self is always in flux, weaving itself out of its



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relations.”^{xxiii} All these systems are fractal in that they are self-similar and they exist at different levels of magnitude.

This central idea of everything being included as part of this dynamic system prompts Follett to develop her concept of the ‘total situation’. The point of the ‘total situation’ is that one should only work with the whole of a situation and that it is not possible to disentangle its component elements and just analyse them to understand what is happening or what to do, because the act of analysing takes time and itself changes the situation. She anticipates Schrodinger^{xxiv} and Heisenberg^{xxv}, adding her own observation that in the real world, there isn’t time anyway to separate, measure and reassemble things before deciding and acting. We have to maintain our overall awareness of the whole situation and integrate our thinking and our actions with it. She recognised the impossibility of true objectivity. She said, “Objectivity alone is not reality.”^{xxvi} But this does not mean that one should not seek and study facts, rather that they must be seen as just part of the total situation, which also includes context, perceptions, feelings and judgements. “Life is the true revealer. I can never understand the whole by reason, only when the heartbeat of the whole throbs through me as the pulse of my being.”^{xxvii}

The Laws of Association

From her understanding of circular behaviour or ‘reciprocal interplay’ she conceived her ‘laws of association’.^{xxviii} She felt that when people associate in groups and make the most of their differences by integrating them, they are most free and powerful. She felt that the “central problem of society” is power^{xxix} and that our task is not to learn where to place power, but how to develop it. She said that the ‘power-over’ of conquest or domination is not sustainable; that only ‘power-with’ and ‘power-through’ sustain and these are developed best by integrating difference. She said, “We may wish to abolish conflict, but we cannot get rid of diversity. We must have life as it is and understand that diversity is its most essential feature. Fear of difference is dread of life itself.”^{xxx}

She spent much of her life understanding how people act together in groups and explaining her view of the ‘laws of association’. She said, “Three fundamental principles must guide the study of social situations:

1. that my response is not to a rigid, static environment, but to a changing environment
2. to an environment which is changing because of the activity between it and me
3. that function may be continuously modified by itself...that response is always to a relating, that things which are varying must be compared with things which are varying.”

Later she observed that, “In every situation, our own activity is part of the cause of our activity. We respond to stimuli we have helped to make” (Social Ethics Seminary 20 Dec 1926, quoted in Joan Tonn’s biography).

She said, “The most fundamental idea we get from studying group action is that integrating is the true law of association.” She went on, “The social process may be conceived as either the opposing and battle of desires with the victory of one over the other, or as the confronting and integrating of desires.” She said that every social process comprises, interacting, unifying and emerging in one simultaneous process. She thought, “all human intercourse should be the evocation by each from the other of new forms undreamed of before, and all that is not evocation should be eschewed. Release, evocation – evocation by release, release by



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evocation – this is the fundamental law of the universe.”^{xxx}. She later combines these ideas this idea by augmenting her three principles that guide study of social interaction to “Four fundamental principles of human relations: evoking, interacting, integrating and emerging.” Lecture on the Psychology of Control, quoted in Joan Tonn’s autobiography p437).

These laws of association underpin her beliefs about community, society and democracy. She felt that the activity of co-creating is the “core of democracy, the essence of citizenship.”

Her holistic views meant that she did not see any contradiction or even any gap between the individual and the society that they live in. She felt that no-one loses any of their individuality or freedom by integrating fully with others. She hoped that the “fallacy of self-and-others” would fade away and be replaced by her idea of “only self-in-and-through-others, only others with others so firmly rooted in the self and so fruitfully growing that sundering is impossible.” She said it was important to see that society is a social construct far beyond physical dimensions. “The social bond, being a psychic relation, cannot be expressed either in biological terms or in any physical force. Our psychical self-unitings knit infinitely more closely and in a wholly different way. Freed from the limitations of time and space, minds can blend, yet in each blending preserve each its own identity. Furthermore, in society every individual may be a complete expression of the whole in a way impossible for the parts of a physical organism.”^{xxxii}

The Law of the Situation

Like ‘Circular Response’ and the ‘Laws of Association’, Follett’s ‘Law of the Situation’ is the basis of her thinking about society, leadership and control. She saw the law of the situation as the “the discovery and formulation of modes of unifying” (Community is a Process, Philosophical Review, 1919). The law of the situation states that it is better that the agreed, objective facts of the situation determine the requirements for action than that anyone, even a leader, imposes their personal opinion. She does not mean that agreeing the facts means that the necessary actions are agreed. That requires conscientious and deliberate integration of the different views and inferences about the agreed facts. “We seek facts not to do away with difference, but to do away with muddle...what accurate information does is to clear the ground for genuine difference and then makes possible [though not inevitable] agreement.”

Community

Communities were the centre of Mary Follett’s attention. There are many kinds of community, from the geographic to the virtual, from social to business. A recurrent question is “What is this community for?” Mary Follett felt that the neighbourhood community is the basis of all democratic society and that its common purpose is always to create power by, for, with and through the individual. She said that it does this best progressively when the members of the community engage and interact.

She felt that the purpose of a community is to create power; “creative power is evolved through the activity of group life”^{xxxiii} But the power of the group depends on democracy and ‘democracy depends on the creative power of every man’^{xxxiv} She saw how the law of the situation could increase power. She said, “If both sides obey the law of the situation, no person has power over another...Respect for facts, scientific methods, is the first step in this



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method of seeking the law of the situation...Facts by reducing the area of irreconcilable controversy reduce power-over."^{xxxv} She believed that integrating differences without losing them increases both personal and community power. Jim Collins and Jerry Porras echo Follett in 'Built to Last' when they write of "The 'Power of the And' over the 'Tyranny of the Or'" .^{xxxvi}

Mary Follett felt that activity in a community "always does more than embody purpose, it evolves purpose. Activity creates experience and experience leads to will and purpose"^{xxxvii}. This implies that a healthy integrated community will create its own purpose through the democratic interaction of its members. If members try to impose their will on others, the result will be disintegration and loss of power. By integration she means different wishes uniting into a working whole, not being "absorbed, melted or fused"^{xxxviii}.

In systems thinking terms, the scale of a community is significant. A community clearly exists and is manifestly composed of distinct and different people, who themselves comprise intertwined physical and psychological entities, that are obviously, but less visibly, the composite of their bodies and minds, of organs, hormones and muscles and of perceptions, thoughts, beliefs and emotions. These are all interacting constantly and mostly invisibly, unconsciously. Each person may be interacting in several communities at the same time, connecting them and creating interactions between them to the point that the communities may become a super-community, society or nation state. It is at the level of community that the human idea of togetherness, of the systemic nature of life is most obvious. The community is a kind of fractal mid-point that has the greatest meaning to us as human observers, somewhere between the infinitesimal atomic systems of which we are made and the total situation of which we are all inevitably a part and with which we need to mindfully integrate.

Democracy

Democracy was Mary Follett's lifelong interest and the lack, or abuse of it was a constant and very great frustration to her. "We must be weaving all the time the web of democracy"^{xxxix}

She believed that America completely misunderstood democracy and she offered a much better way – real democracy. She argued that, "Democracy is a process, not a gift"^{xl}.

She did not believe that democracy was about voting, as such. She said, "Democracy is not brute numbers. It is a genuine union of true individuals."^{xli} She felt so strongly about democracy because she felt that the founders of America, the New World, had wanted to be a real democracy, a truly fresh start, and she hoped it would live up to its founding ideals. She did not get motivated about votes for women as such, feeling it was not the core issue. She said, "The vote will not make women free. Freedom is always a thing to be attained and we must remember that freedom is not a static condition."^{xlii} She also said, "No question in history will seem more astonishing than "Should woman be given a place in politics? Woman is in politics. No power under the sun could put her out."^{xliii}

Today, despite Mary Follett, we still hold on to our faith in representative democracy, meaning merely having a vote to choose between competing political parties who represents us, It is better than totalitarian centralised alternatives, but nowhere near true democracy. When we see occasional examples of the kind of true democracy that she was exhorting us to follow, they always inspire, even if they rarely endure. Unfortunately, people soon tend to take such democracy for granted and start to delegate their powers to representatives as they tire of active, constant engagement. They then choose those representatives by the number of votes



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because it seems easier and quicker, but that leads to the corrosion of the real democracy that we need, that Follett espoused and we still need so much today.

She said real democracy is about getting involved and discussing issues, identifying differences, valuing them and integrating them to a truly democratic inclusive unity. She said, "Democracy is not a goal, it is the path, not at attainment, but a process. It is the more abundant life. It is the attitude of man towards his fellow-man. When once we grasp this and begin to live democracy, only then shall we have democracy."^{xliv}

Freedom

Mary Follett defined freedom as "the identifying of the individual will with the whole will, the supreme activity of life"^{xlv} and went on that freedom is the "harmonious, unimpeded working of the law of one's own nature"^{xlvi} She felt that the idea of the 'free man' as someone without any constraints simply made no sense. She said that freedom cannot be quantitatively measured by the absence of constraints, but is the power of being able to choose and control things through integrating with others. She saw no contradiction between individual freedom and being part of a community, because from a systemic perspective she saw no difference between the individual and the community of which they were a part. She saw that it is part of humanity to associate with other people, so freedom cannot mean the anarchy of being able to ignore others, but rather "a man is ideally free only so far as he is inter-permeated by every other human being."^{xlvii}

She extends this thinking when she asks her readers to consider the "fallacy in the old idea of obedience, that obedience is necessarily passive." She continues, "There is an active principle in obedience... There is, as a rule, a very elaborate and complex process going on. ... Consent interweaves with all the other factors in the process... Obedience and self-expression, or even self-direction are reciprocally involved. Organised group activity should aim to incorporate and express the desires, the experience, the ideals of the individual members of the group: also to raise the ideals, broaden the experience, deepen the desires of the individual members of the group...Leadership increases freedom as it heightens individuality."^{xlviii}

Power

Power interested Mary Follett greatly. She noticed that people think power is something to have over other people and that this kind of power is inherently unsustainable. She said it is better to "develop the concept of power-with, a jointly developed power, a co-active, not a coercive power."^{xlix} As she said, "You have rights over a slave, you have rights with a servant." She said in *Creative Experience*, pxii "Our task is not to learn where to place power, it is how to develop power...Genuine power can only be grown, it will slip from every arbitrary hand that grasps it; for genuine power is not coercive control, but coactive control. Coercive power is the curse of the universe; coactive power, the enrichment and advancement of every human soul." For Mary Follett, power means the ability to control and power-with therefore means co-control, which means understanding the laws of association and the circular responses in the total situation. She said, "If both sides obey the law of the situation, no person has power over another....respect for facts, for scientific methods, is the first step in this method of seeking the law of the situation."^l And further, "(1) control is coming to mean fact control,



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rather than man-control; (2) central control is coming to mean the correlation of many controls rather than a superimposed control."^{li}

Leadership

Mary Follett's ideas on human associating and integrating difference through the 'law of the situation' led her to think about leadership both in a social and, later, in a business and management context. She believed that communities need leaders to help people to integrate with each other and to integrate their different wants and needs. She saw that one of the core skills of a leader is systems thinking. She says that the role of the leader is to help their communities to integrate as much difference as possible. She said that the "leader guides the group and is guided by the group, is always a part of the group"^{lii}.

She said that 'the leader must understand the situation, must see it as a whole, must see the inter-relation of all the parts...[and] the evolving situation."^{liii} The leader is "the one who knows how to relate the different wills in a group so that they will have driving force." Leaders "create a group power rather than express their personal power"^{liv} and "The best leader knows how to make his followers feel power themselves."^{lv} Jim Collins describes this as 'Level 5 Leadership' – a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. He says that "Level 5 leaders are incredibly ambitious – but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves."^{lvi}

Mary Follett said that the skilful leader "does not rely on personal force; he controls his group not by dominating it, but by expressing it"^{lvii} and "He is not the best [community group leader] who imposes the most progressive ideas on his district – he is the best who guides the people of his district to express and develop the best in themselves."^{lviii}

Peter Drucker gives an example of such a leader when he tells how Alfred Sloan helped him to research his book "the Concept of the Corporation" about General Motors, even though he personally disagreed that GM should have him (or anyone) write it. He wrote, "Sloan rarely made a decision by counting noses or taking a vote. He made it by creating understanding." Drucker also describes how Sloan invited difference on occasion by refusing to immediately go along with a unanimous Board decision, "I take it you gentlemen are all in favour? Then I move that we defer action for a month to give ourselves the chance to think." And a month later the proposal was either scuttled or drastically revised."^{lix}

She said, "The great leader is he who so relates all the complex outer forces and all the complex inner forces that they work together effectively."^{lx} and, "When leadership rises to genius, it has the power of transforming experience into power. And that is what experience is for - to be made into power."^{lxi}

Business

Although she is remembered most for her writing about business and management, Follett only wrote and spoke about business management in depth in the last nine years of her life. By then, she was frequently ill and unable to work for long, but this has proved to be her most influential writing. Her interest in management came from her long-standing views about democracy, power and leadership. She once said, "I am working at business management because while I care for the ideal, it is only because I want to bring it into our everyday lives"^{lxii}



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She felt that "It is among businessmen that I find the greatest vitality of thinking today, and I like to do my thinking where it most alive. Moreover, I find the thinking of businessmen today in line with the deepest and best thinking we have ever had. The most profound philosophers have always given us unifying as the fundamental principle of life and now businessmen are finding it is the way to run a successful business. Here the ideal and the practical have joined hands."^{lxiii} She sees business as the practical application of the universal principles that she has identified and been working on all her life.

Melissa Schilling argues that Follett "created the origins of the concept of stakeholder theory as an integrative framework in business." She says, "Follett argues explicitly that the administrator is the integrator of the interests of all parties concerned. This is the main tenet, if not the definition of stakeholder theory."^{lxiv} Schilling points out that Follett believes that following these principles is not only the right thing to do, but will bring the greatest success for the firm. This is directly contrary to FW Taylor's view that "Each shop (business) exists first, last and for all time for the purpose of paying dividends to its owners."^{lxv}

She applied her thinking about the law of the situation and its relevance to conflict resolution and the integration of difference to management thinking and business leadership. She was most interested in how the law of the situation could help with the control, co-ordination and the giving of orders.

She saw that business created the opportunity for and demanded the very best leadership. She said a leader should lead by the force of example. "If those led obey the law of the situation, they must realise that he is doing the same. If they are to follow the invisible leader, the common purpose, so must he.... In every way he must show that he is doing what he urges in others"^{lxvi}

When Follett described "the attempt to find the law of the situation as the essence of scientific management", she may have been subtly criticising and certainly putting distance between herself and FW Taylor, for whom 'Scientific Management' was more a brand that he had created than a discipline. Their different conceptions would create a huge gulf throughout the 20th Century. Taylor's top-down, fundamentally divisive approach would lead to great material wealth, but it also created anomie, depression and feelings throughout society of loss, disintegration and alienation. Follett's different scientific approach that included 'human factors' would be forgotten for decades before showing one way back to the reintegration of people, business and community. She said, "One of scientific management's largest contributions is that it tends to depersonalise orders... With scientific management, the manager is as much under orders as the workers, for both obey the law of the situation. We cannot have any sound relations with each other as long as we take them out of that setting which gives them their meaning and value."^{lxvii}

In 1911 Taylor had said, "In the past, man has been first. In the future the System will be first."^{lxviii}, but Follett believed that man is the system and so the system must be human, while Taylor believed in the system as a machine requiring man's subordination and his obedience to management's orders. While Follett believed that there is great value in exploring difference and that integrating differences leads to greater power, Taylor believed that there was only "one best way"; that it was management's job to find it and apply it and the workers' job to do what they were told. He said in 1907, "Our scheme does not ask any initiative in a man. We do not care for his initiative." Most strikingly, Taylor said, "The potential of functional



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foremanship (Scientific Management) will not have been realised until almost all the machines are run by men who are of smaller calibre and attainments, and who are therefore cheaper than those required under the old system."

Principles of Organisation

When she applied her experience and thought about integration and the law of the situation to how to organise a business enterprise or project, Mary Follett said, "The four fundamental principles of organisation are:

4. Co-ordination by direct contact of the responsible people concerned.
5. Co-ordination in the early stages
6. Co-ordination as the reciprocal relating of all the factors in a situation
7. Co-ordination as a continuing process."lxix

She meant that the people actually doing the work must be directly engaged with the planning and coordination of the work from the very beginning and that it was not enough to make a plan and give it to others to execute; the execution of the plan requires constant and careful ongoing co-ordination. She made a clear difference between coordination and coercion. Her concept was that coordination should not be centralised, but that it should be collective.

Most Western management through the last century instead followed Taylor's views, separating planning from executing, creating strategy departments to plan in central isolation using out of date facts, then passing those plans to others to implement.

Her third principle, reciprocal relating, is the essence of co-ordination and refers back to all her previous thinking about the law of the situation and 'functional relating'. She used the word 'reciprocal' in a double sense. She means first reciprocity, so that one person's action leads to an action in return and she secondly means reciprocal is the mathematical sense of what is needed to make something complete or integral. She said, "*Functional relating is the continuing process of self-creating coherence.* Most of my philosophy is contained in that sentence."^{lxx}

Conclusion

Over a few hundred pages in four books, Mary Follett progressively develops and integrates her thinking about humankind, community and society, freedom, leadership and business. In a lecture near the end of her life, she said, "The fundamental law of the universe is the increase of life, the development of human powers and either you keep yourself in obedience to that law, or for you the universe breaks around you and is shattered."^{lxxi}

David Lemak says, "Her extensive grounding in philosophy makes it extremely difficult to understand and apply her insights to achieve a harmonious organizational life. Yet, in her integrative mind, she viewed philosophy as directly related to action and reality."^{lxxii}

Mary Follett integrated the pain and losses of her early life and her remarkable intelligence with her hope and determination to perceive, grasp and describe the most profound blend of common sense and idealism. She both captures the sense of her time and at the same time transcends any particular era. Her writing resonates with universal, eternal relevance. That



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fulfilled her own definition of genius, "to transform experience into power, for this is what experience is for, to be made into power."^{lxix}

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The Mary Parker Follett Network <http://mpfollett.ning.com/>

Mary Parker Follett – Greatest Consultant of All Time? http://cbae.nmsu.edu/~dboje/teaching/503/follett_links.html

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ⁱ "I am always and forever the undivided one, mounting from height to height, always mounting, always the whole of me mounting." A poem she quoted in The New State 1919, Ch XXXII,

ⁱⁱ The New State, 1919 Ch X

ⁱⁱⁱ Dynamic Administration, 1941, Leader and Expert

^{iv} Dynamic Administration, 1941, Leader and Expert

^v Pauline Graham "Mary Parker Follett – Prophet of Management", 1995, Beard Press

^{vi} Joan C Tonn, "Mary P. Follett: Creating Democracy, Transforming Management", 2003, Yale University Press.

^{vii} Frederick Winslow Taylor, The Principles of Scientific Management, 1911, (Dover Edition 1998) p20 "Tell me whether you are a high priced man or not" "Vell – did I got \$1.85 for loading dot pig iron on dot car tomorrow?" Taylor says later, "This seems to be rather tough talk. With a man of the mentally sluggish type like Schmidt it is appropriate."

^{viii} Dynamic Administration p125

^{ix} The New State, 1919, Ch X11

^x REFERENCE to be added

^{xi} New State XXXII

^{xii} The New State Ch XXV

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- xlviii Dynamic Administration, p 275
- xliv Dynamic Administration p100
- l Dynamic Administration p105
- li Dynamic Administration p295



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- liii Dynamic Administration p169
- liv Dynamic Administration p282
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- lvii The New State Ch XXV
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