

## **MARY PARKER FOLLET'S THEORY OF MANAGEMENT AND ITS EFFECT ON WORK BEHAVIOUR OF THE ORGANISATION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines Mary Parker Follet's Theory of Management and its effect on work behaviour of the organization. The Scientific Theory was criticized for reducing human beings as machines. This gave birth to the emergence of the Human Relations school of thought. This human relations school of thought placed emphasis on getting things done through people who have other needs from economic needs. Among the proponents of the human relations theory was Mary Parker Follet (1868-1933). This paper examined the Mary Parker Follet's Management Theory and its effect on Work Behaviour of the Organization.*

***Keywords: Mary Parker Follet, Human Relations, Theory, Work Behaviour, Organization***

### **INTRODUCTION**

Human Relations Theory is based on the premise of increase production and management efficiency through an understanding of people. The growth and popularity of this approach is attributed to Elton Mayo Hawthorne experiments which were conducted to determine the effects of better physical facilities, environment and increase in economic benefits as motivators increasing productivity. In effect, the emphasis shifted to Socio-psychological aspect of organization life as a factor contributing towards efficiency in organizational management and productivity.

Mary Parker Follet rejected the scientific management approach to management, emphasizing instead the importance of management-worker relations and the need to view management (leadership) more holistically. According to Gabo (2015) , Mary Parker Follet was an early management consultant and organizational theorist. She also wrote on creativity. She regarded management as an art not science. This sits at the heart of her thinking about management and her strong belief that the key task of management is to facilitate co-operation and the involvement of workers in the key task of decision making. Her contribution to modern day thinking on management and employer -employee relations is becoming more widely accepted.

Follet felt that no one could become a whole person except as a member of a group; human beings grow through the relationship with others in the organization. In fact, she called management the art of getting things done through people. She rejected Taylor's assertion that labour and management shared a common purpose as members of the same organization but believed that the artificial distraction between managers (order givers) and subordinates (order takers) obscured the natural partnership.

Mary Parker Follet was a great believer in the power of the group where individuals should combine their diverse talents into something bigger. Muller and Vaughan (2005) stresses that her work contrasted with the scientific management theory of Fredrick Taylor which stresses time and motion studies. Follet stresses the interaction of management and workers. She looked at management and leadership holistically, and identified a leader as someone who sees the whole rather than the particular. Mary Parker is considered as the mother of 'conflict resolution'

According to Mele and Rosanas (2008), Follet coined the words 'power-over' and 'power-with' to differentiate coercive power from participatory decision making, showing how 'power-with' can be greater than 'power-over'. Follet believed that rather than establishing a strict hierarchy and

delegating power to certain individuals over others, the organization should practice co-active power. Power with the team is better than powering over them. This way each member feels just as valued as the next. Group power should be valued over personal power. If this selfless mindset prevails, then all workers will feel they are on the same team rather than in competition.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Human Relations:** This can be referred to as the behaviour of a people in a group. The interactions of members of the group in terms of social activities, emotional, political and psychological aspects of human beings in a social, industrial or educational situations.

**Theory:** a theory according to Graham (2012) is a set of assumptions from which a large set of empirical laws can be described by purely logical and mathematical principles. Harris (2012) looked at a theory as a set of interrelated concepts, assumptions and generalizations that systematically describe and explain behaviour in organizations.

### **Biography of Mary Parker Follet**

Mary Parker Follet (1868-1933), known as the mother of modern management was born in Quincy, Massachusetts to a well-off Quaker family. Her early education was at the Thayer Academy, where she studied philosophy. Follet entered Radcliffe College in 1888, which was called Harvard Annex for Women at that time. There she studied economics, government, and philosophy and was influenced by Albert Bushnell Hart who specialized in historical fact and political analysis. According to Graham (2012), while at Radcliffe, Follet spent a year in England attending Newnham College in Cambridge. Her thesis *The Speaker of the House of Representatives* was published in 1896 and quickly gained recognition. In 1898, she graduated from Radcliffe. Her many years of education and her ensuing dedication to social work led to her developing of management theories that still resonate within the modern workplace (Blaise, 2015).

### **Follet's View of Management**

Follet came to management theory from an unusual angle. Not long after graduating, she became a social worker in one of Boston's poorer neighbourhoods. She noted the damaging effect that lack of community space had on the people around her and set about creating social and educational groups. This was the beginning of her research into group dynamics. Her central theory – that individuals and society shape each other equally came from her work in community centers, not the boardroom. Later, when she translated her theories to the workplace, she found the same dynamics applied; a group would be successful if allowed to define its own roles and work collaboratively.

Of all the Management theories working during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Mary Parker Follet shines out as the most recognizably modern. Her theories about employee engagement in the workplace continues to illuminate worker needs 100 years later

Mary Parker Follet defined Management as the act of getting things done through people (Clegg, Komberger, Pitsis, 2005). She drew people's attention to people-oriented method of management. Parker Follet's incredibly modern seeming approach has a simple central message: Employees will be more engaged, productive and happy if they are given autonomy within their roles, if they are treated as intelligent individuals and if they are allowed to work co-operatively.

Follet argued that a single leader model, with a typical 'boss' figure barking out orders, could never be truly successful in a complex organization. Allowing groups to use their own ideas and experiences not only harnesses a great intelligence resource, it also empowers employees by acknowledging their individual skills.

Instead of emphasizing industrial and mechanical components, Mary Parker Follet advanced for what she saw as the far more important human element, regarding people as the most valuable

commodity present within any business. She was one of the first theorists to actively write about and explore the role people had on effective management, and discuss the importance of learning to deal with and promote positive human relations as a fundamental aspect of the industrial sector.

Through her research and experience, Mary Parker Follet has drawn the conclusion that co-operation between all organizational levels is essential and the activities of those who work with each other should be coordinated. She developed the idea of coordination. She focused on the importance of collaboration between employees and teams. This encourages co-operation and build team spirit which is essential for a productive workplace.

### **PRINCIPLES OF MARY PARKER FOLLET THEORY OF MANAGEMENT**

Mary Parker Follet's theory of Management establishes people as the most important pieces of an organization above tasks or material goods. Therefore, Mary Parker's theory promotes group interactions and participatory leadership in organizations.

The main concern of Follet was to stimulate employee engagement in organizations through the proper use of the power of leaders. According to Mary Parker Follet, leaders should use power with people not over people, in order to promote better employee performance. She made the case that leaders should value group power over personal power.

Mary Parker Follet's Management theory was based on four principles.

- 1) Direct contact between leaders and workers
- 2) The notion that all members are equally important within the organization
- 3) The stimulation of the concept of teamwork
- 4) The constant coordination ensures the guiding principles of the organization never cease to apply.

### **CRITICISMS OF THE MARY PARKER FOLLET THEORY OF MANAGEMENT**

- 1) Some have criticized Follet for too much idealism in management. Her work suggests that everything is possible at the same time, e.g, collectivism can exist with individualism and freedom. However, Follet saw her idealism as reflecting possible world not ideal world.
- 2) Critics also note that her belief in the potential to integrate interests depends on a particular configuration of interests and objectives and means to achieve integrative solution may differ.
- 3) According to Rosebeth Moss Kanter, Follet's long term influence was not assured because she was neither academic nor a chief executive who could sustain the impact of her work through a base of student disciples or an exemplary organization.

### **SUMMARY**

The Mary Parker Follet's theory stimulates group interactions and moves away from the traditional idea of organization in which each group of employees must dedicate themselves to fulfilling their duty without being interested in the work of other groups within the organization.

### **CONCLUSION**

As a radical departure from the mechanist and dehumanizing scientific theory of management, the human relations approach or humanism sought to derecognize human beings as machines but Mary Parker Follet argued that managers should have a human face, this form of management posited that humans grew through their relationship with others in the organisation. Management depends on people; compromise and integration as means of conflict resolution and belief in the power of groups and the empowerment of every employee.

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