Mary Parker Follett: Theory of Management

Ideas on Administration and Organisation

Mary Parker Follett was the first lady pioneer in the field of administrative thought. She evolved the principle of human association and organisation specifically in terms of industry and convinced businessmen of practicability of these principles in dealing with current problems. Her important works are:

1. “The Speaker of the House of Representatives” (1896)
3. “The Creative Experience” (1924)
4. “Dynamic Government” (1941)

Her writings are replete with practical wisdom, deep flashes of intuition, departmentalised thinking and all pervading spirit of democratic dynamism. Follet’s philosophy and conception are moving around critical management and administrative themes like conflict, power, authority and responsibility, leadership, control, role of individual in group, participation, place of business in society, labour-management relation.

Follet’s Ideas of Administration

According to the Follet, administration as being essentially involved with reconciling individual as well as social groups. She did not make any distinction between private and public administration. She stressed on the efficacy of the group in human function. People in groups produce results in thoughts as well as in action. Individuals achieve their true expression in group relationships. Individual activities in the group setting are highly significant. Group process is given an important place in her administrative thought.

Follet’s Ideas of Organisation

She opines that an organisation is a social system, but not a cooperative social system. Hence, she stressed that the principal of any organisation is not only to determined their profit but also guide and control the conduct of employees in such way as to get them to do it to realise the organisational goals.

Follet’s Ideas of Conflict Management (Constructive Conflict)

As she said that organisation is a social system which is accompanied by human. Then there will a space of conflict and differences among human because it is a normal process. To Follet, conflict is neither good nor bad and has to be considered without passion or ethical prejudgemen. Conflict doesn’t mean warfare, but is only an appearance of difference-difference of opinions, of interests not between the employer and the employee but also between managers, between directors or wherever differences appears. She said conflict is very necessary because it is driving unit for the enrichment of all concerned.

To Follet, conflict as an moment of appearing and focusing of differences, may be sign of health and a prophecy of progress. She was the first one who raised the question i.e. how to make conflict work constructively.

She says that there were three ways of resolving a conflict: **Dominion, Compromise and Integration.**

1. **Dominion:** It means one side prevailing over the other. But there is no solution because the weaker side remains unsatisfied.
2. **Compromise:** In this method, each sides gives up a little of what it wants in order to settle the conflict. Conflict resolution through compromise also is no solution because neither side gets all of what it wants.
3. **Integration**: This is very effective and best way to breaking down the contentions of each side into their components and then bring them together again in the new arrangement. Conflict resolved through integration is constructive because each side gets what it wants and something new has been created that is beneficial to both sides. Therefore, integration is the most satisfactory way of conflict resolution. Thus, conflict should not be used to achieve victory or produce accommodation. It should be used to achieve the integration of interests in organisations. Its value depends on how it is put to use.

... some advantages when compared to compromise:

1. Compromise does not create but only deals with the existing, whereas Integration creates something new, leads to invention and to the emergence of new values.
2. Integration leads to the use of better techniques.
3. Integration saves time and resources.
4. Integration goes to the root of the problem and puts an end to the conflict permanently.

**Steps to Achieving Integration (Bases of Integration)**

Follett also discusses the ways of achieving integration:

(a) The first step towards achieving Integration is to bring differences into the open, instead of suppressing them. “We cannot hope to integrate our differences,” she asserts, “unless we know what they are.” Therefore, what is needed is to uncover, identify and understand the real issues involved in a conflict. This involves finding out the significant, rather than the dramatic features involved in a conflict or controversy.

(b) The second step is the breaking up of the whole, i.e., to consider the demands of both sides involved in the conflict and to break them into their constituent parts involves the examination of symbols, use of which are unavoidable in organizational work. Examination of symbols, in turn, involves a careful scrutinizing of the language used, to see what it really means. To Follett, all language used is symbolic, and therefore, one should be on one’s guard to know as to what is being symbolized. Integration not only involves breaking up of the whole but sometimes one has to do the opposite. It is important to articulate the whole demand, the real demand which is being obscured by miscellaneous minor claims or by ineffective presentation.

(c) Anticipation of conflict is the third step. Anticipation of conflict does not mean the avoidance of conflict but responding to it differently. To Follett, integration is like a game of chess. Anticipation of response is by itself not enough; there is need for preparation for response as well.

**Obstacles of Integration**

It is not easy to achieve integration in resolving a conflict because it requires a high level of intelligence, ability to perceive, discrimination and inventiveness. Besides, the other important obstacles to integration are given below:

1. The habit of most leadership to enjoy domination.
2. The tendency of people to theorise proposed activities rather taking them up as practical issues requiring quick solution.
3. Manager’s obsession with power
4. Lack of training
Follett gives special attention to the problem of power, control and authority. She reveals profound, penetrating and strikingly original insight in her analysis of power. She define power as “the ability to make things happen, to be casual agent, to initiate change”. Power is a capacity to produce intended effects. It is an instinctive urge inherent in all human beings. She makes a distinction between “power-over” and “power-with”. The former may tend to be ‘coercive-power’ while the latter is a jointly developed ‘co-active power’. Power-with is superior to power-over as it is a self-developing entity, which promotes participative decision-making.

According to her authority as vested power- the right to develop and exercise power. Authority in terms of status and the subordination of one another offends human dignity and may cause undesirable reaction and friction. Therefore, it cannot be the basis of organisation. To her authority stems from the task being performed and from the situation, and suggests that function is the true basis from which authority is chief executive should be replaced by authority of function in which each individual has the final authority within the allotted functions.

Control, like authority and responsibility, is an important aspect to achieve organisational-goals. Unlike classical thinker, She believes in fact-control rather than man-control and in correlated-control than super-imposed control. Therefore, Follet suggests that control mechanisms should be correlated at many places in the organisational structure. If organisations are to be well integrated, unified process as a unified organisation is self-regulating and self-directing, organism. In all such organisations, Follet feels, control tends to be self-control.

Follett’s principles of organisation

1. **Coordination as the ‘Reciprocal Relating’** of all factors in a situation – relating the factors in a situation.
2. **Coordination by direct contact** – direct communication between all responsible people involved, whatever their hierarchical or departmental positions.
3. **Coordination in the early stages** – involving all the people directly concerned, right from the initial stages of designing a project or forming a policy.
4. **Coordination as a continuing process** – keeping co-ordination going on a continuous basis, and recognising that there is no such thing as unity, but only the continuous process of unifying.

Follet’s ideas of leadership

Follet discusses at the length the process of leadership. She believes that the old ideas of leadership are changing because of the changes in the concept of human relations and development in management. According to her, a leader is not the president of the organisation or head of the department, but one “who can see all around a situation, who sees it as related to certain purposes and policies, who sees it evolving into the next situation, who understand how to pass from one situation to another”. Hence, she opines, leader is “the man who energise his group, who knows how to encourage initiative, how to draw from all what each has to give”.

She postulates three types of leadership:

1. Leadership of position
2. Leadership of personality
3. Leadership of function

According to her, the last one is more important. She conceptualised leadership as the ability “to create functional unity in the organisation through proper correlation of controls instead of personal power to command based on position”. In contemporary organisation, persons who posses expert knowledge lead others. Leader who posses the expert knowledge are found not just at the apex but throughout the organisation. Expert can give orders even to those of higher rank. For example- the dispatch clerk can give
orders to the superintendent and the stores clerk can tell the man in charge of purchasing when to act. Thus Follet called attention to emergence modern life of leadership by functions, along before the term “situational approache” came into use. According to Follet, leaders perform three important functions: coordination, definition of purpose, anticipation. A leader has also to organise experience of the group and transform it into power.

In the above discussion, Follet’s ideas of critical management and administrative themes like conflict, power, authority and responsibility, leadership, control, role of individual in group and participation convince everyone about the validity and the justification of the multi-dimensional focus of her universalistic approach. She accorded high importance to the problems of conflict in organisation that should constructive and also overcome through efficient leadership. Hence, this is only reason, she gives special attention to the usage of power, authority and control. So, she laid the foundations for the application of democratic concepts and practices to organisations. Better understanding of the present trends in administrative thought and practices requires a study of Follet’s ideas and work.

**Reference.**

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