



## TRACING BACK THE SIGNS OF COMPLEXITY THINKING IN MANAGEMENT: MARY PARKER FOLLETT RE-VISITED

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### ABSTRACT

The modernist stream of thought had immensely influenced the theories of organizational management in the early twentieth century. Equilibrium-oriented and universally valid reductionist approaches viewed organizations as machines that could be broken down into pieces, hence, behavior of the whole could be understood from the knowledge of its parts. Mary Parker Follett, owing to her valuable contribution ahead of her time, emerges as a prominent figure in the history of management thought and organizational studies. Most of what is written and discussed today in the field of organization studies and management such as power, authority, group dynamics, leadership, coordination and governance have been derived from Mary Parker Follett's corpus. She had built the bridge between complexity thinking and management almost four decades before the introduction of nonlinear dynamics to scientific research. Although the actual terminology of nonlinear dynamics was not employed in her postulations Mary Parker Follett's works provide profound insights for the field of management under the prevailing global circumstances where the impact of repeated attempts to design the 'whole' seems to have been neutralized since it is barely enough to predict the outcomes of the upward-causality from the knowledge of the parts. A thorough analysis of her writings reveals that she had accurately anticipated the problems associated with the contemporary organizational settings as well as incorporating nonlinear dynamics into management thinking. This conceptual paper intends to draw inspiration from Mary Parker Follett's works with special emphasis on the links between her conceptions and complexity thinking in the field of management.

### JEL Classification

M10, M19

Rereading Mary Parker Follett is like entering a zone of calm in a sea of chaos. Her work reminds us that even in our fast-paced world – in which 18 months can constitute a high-tech product life cycle and “15 minutes” a person's assigned allotment of fame – there are truths about human behaviour that stand the test of time. They persist despite superficial changes, like the deep and still ocean beneath the waves of management fad and fashion.

Rosebeth Moss Kanter (1995)

## **1.INTRODUCTION**

Organizations are supposed to constantly build new capabilities in order to be able sense and respond to the shifting needs of their target markets in a hyper-competitive global environment where any attempt to comprehend the nature of the emergent phenomena turns out to be futile. Managers of twenty-first century are incapable to surmount the number of variables involved and keep track of the interactions between them. This situation evokes the infamous butterfly effect, which implies that a butterfly fluttering its wings in South America can cause a tornado in Far East. This metaphor refers to how small perturbations in the initial condition of a system might trigger unexpectedly major changes afterwards. Over the last two decades, there has been a significant surge in the number of studies in management field regarding the applicability of complexity principles to organizational settings. This is plausible given the current level of interconnectedness and interdependence in an integrated global economy. The high volatility of global markets entails coping with the dynamics of continuous change. The 'machine metaphor' seems to have already fallen short given the prevailing conditions of global business climate. It is the very reason why observations penned by Mary Parker Follett eight decades ago worth to mention and ponder. Her postulations were flourished under the heavy ideological climate of modernism and she anticipated way ahead of her time approximately four decades before the inception of vigorous scientific research in nonlinear dynamics. This paper intends to cast light on the conceptual linkages between Follett's ideas and the assumptions of complexity science based on her writings inductively supportive of the operation of nonlinear dynamics within social world (Mendenhall et.al., 2000). She had employed terms such as 'self-organizing', 'interaction', 'diversity', 'evolution', 'novelty', 'experience', which are not only associated with complexity science, also acknowledged as the building blocks of innovation in organizations. Her ideas on centrality of relationships, constructive conflict, power, authority, control, leadership and co-ordination will guide managers along their struggles to transform organizations into ecologies of innovation. In order to be able to grasp the insight of her contribution and demonstrate how the assumptions of the complexity thinking and her conceptions intertwine with one another, the next section intends to deal with the assumptions of the modernist stream of thought by which early theories of management were significantly influenced. The third section of the paper draws a general framework of complexity thinking through introducing nonlinear dynamics at play in a complex system. The fourth section reveals how Mary Parker Follett's postulations overlap the contemporary efforts to incorporate nonlinear dynamics into organizational studies although she did not employ the actual terminology.

## **2.HAUNTED BY THE GHOST OF MODERNISM: MECHANISTIC VIEW OF ORGANIZATIONS**

The modernist paradigm was predicated on scientific principles developed by Newton, LaPlace and Descartes derived from the assumption that the natural state of a system had to be reaching and sustaining an equilibrium so that the future states of a given system and the behavior of the whole could be predicted (Dooley, 1997). Complex social phenomena were viewed as being composed of variables that manifested linearity in their relationships leading to a definition of organizational experiences from reductionist,

deterministic, and equilibrium-oriented perspectives (Dooley, 1997; Mendenhall et.al., 2000; Marion, 1999). Modernity had launched a new world of meaning in which society valued rationality encouraging the implementation of efficiency oriented methods to accomplish organizational goals (Lune, 2010). Wagner (2012) provides a definition of modernity as 'the belief in the freedom of human being – natural and inalienable, as many philosophers presumed – and in the human capacity to reason combined with the intelligibility of the word, that is, amenability to human reason.'

The reflections of modernist assumptions were conspicuous in the early theories of management and organizations. McAuley et.al (2007) describes the three key aspects of modernism: the modernist ontology, the modernist epistemology and the modernist technologies. Modernists believed that the world was ordered and there were underlying systems to be unveiled. Any system could be ordered and rationally structured. This called for scientifically designed work processes to ensure ordered and systematic structures. The best way to ensure rationality was to rely on calculation of relevant empirical data and measurement of the variables to attain solid facts. The efficiency of outputs and performance of employees were constantly measured and management's timely intervention was deemed necessary when discrepancy occurred between calculable predictions and the actual outcome. Thus, there should be a management elite equipped with techniques that enabled them to process information and to exercise rational control over the members of the organization. The distinction between management and workers assumed that the former would take all the major decisions concerning the methods of production, while the latter would more or less passively conform to management's authority and accept their role in the overall production process (Sheldrake, 2003). Modernist organization theories regarded actions as sequenced and actors behave mechanistically in their endeavor to accomplish rationally declared ends to fulfill organizational goals (Pettigrew, 1990). The tendency to hold reductionism, determinism and equilibrium as core principles was prevalent in organizational and managerial studies – indeed, all social science was influenced by this paradigm (Dooley, 1997). Wagner (2012) portrays how the principles suggested by modernist stream of thought influenced the development of theories in social sciences as follows:

These principles were seen as universal, on the one hand, because they contained normative claims to which, one presumed, every human being would subscribe and, on the other, because they were deemed to permit the creation of functionally superior arrangements for major aspects of human social life, most importantly maybe the satisfaction of human needs in market-driven, industrial production and the rational government of collective matters through law-based and hierarchically organized administration. Furthermore, they were seen as globalizing in their application because of the interpretative and practical power of normativity and functionality.

Mechanistic approaches had their own limitations in spite of their relative success on certain aspects of organizational operations (Morgan, 2006). First, a mechanistic way of managing may render the organization incapable to adapt the changing circumstances in its environment. Second, a mindless and unquestioning organizational structure may arise, which stifles innovation driven managerial endeavors. Third, when the interests of those working in the company do not overlap the goals the organization was designed to achieve pernicious effects will be inevitable. Lune (2010), deriving from the Marx's

economic critique, mentions that 'if our identities and efforts are kept separate from any sort of goal or value to be found in the work then we are alienated from our labor'. The rise of systems thinking and cybernetics depicted the limitations of the ingrained methods trying to understand the whole through analysis of its parts. Cybernetics and general systems theory emerged after World War II in favor of replacing reductionism with an appreciation for modeling interactions instead of simplifying them away (Anderson, 1999). General Systems Theory (GST) was developed during 1950s by Viennese theoretical biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy based on the idea that physical systems were considered as closed systems, which was irrelevant to living systems, as such were open systems (Merali & Allen, 2011). According to GST when systems confront disturbances, the cells in the organisms (the subsystems in an organization) go through a series of change in order to adjust to the new circumstances, thereby, maintain the system as a whole (McAuley et.al., 2007). Cybernetics concentrated on mechanisms for control and co-ordination and gave rise to management theories for organizational design and conceptualized feedback loops between system components as regulating mechanisms for the system's performance (Merali & Allen, 2011).

However, GST and cybernetics, both, addressed deterministic dynamical systems, systems where a set of equations determine how a system moves through its space from time  $t$  to time  $t + 1$  (Anderson, 1999). In the second half of the twentieth century, Herbert Simon's conceptualization of bounded rationality and Henry Mintzberg's concept of emergent strategy were conceded as milestones seeking perspicacious insights into dynamics of interaction within the organization and between the organization and its environment (Merali & Allen, 2011). Interconnectedness happened to be the key component impelling markets in unforeseen directions. When all organizational actors are interconnected with one another, in case feedback loops dampen out change decay might occur or if changes keep reverberating throughout the system, then, chaos ensues (Anderson, 1999). Hernes (2014) suggests that the frameworks commonly used in organization studies are not capable of capturing the actual complexity confronted by the managers, rather 'they confine complexity by locating it within organizational boundaries, as if managers were like Weberian officials trapped down in an administrative bunker, grappling more or less competently with neatly parceled chunks of complexity.'

### 3. TRANSCENDING BEYOND TIME AND SPACE

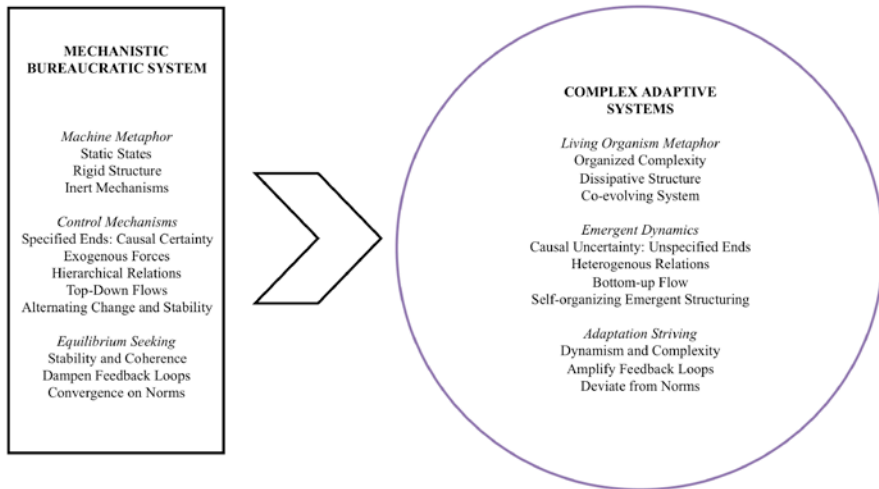
... we presently find ourselves in a time of 'interregnum' – when the old ways of doing things no longer work, the old learned or inherited modes of life are no longer suitable for the current *conditio humana*, but when the new ways of tackling the challenges and new modes of life better suited to the new conditions have not as yet been invented, put in place and set in operation.

The above quotation from Bauman's (2000/2012:vii) pioneering work 'Liquid Times' depicts the zeitgeist of the times we are living in. The fluidity metaphor is usually employed to go beyond the limits of unity, coherence and solids. Bauman (2000/2012) uses 'liquids' - one variety of fluids - and 'solids' with reference to their relationship between space and time. Behaviour exhibited by solids is a result of the type of bonding that holds the atoms and their structural arrangements together, so here 'bonding' is a term that signifies the stability of solids. Fluids, on the other hand, do not keep to any

shape for long and are always prone to change it, so it is the flow of time that counts more than the space they occupy. Bauman (2000/2012) considers fluidity or liquidity as relevant metaphors in order to be able to grasp the essence of the present. Embracing this metaphor entails to perceive what really exists is not things but things in the making. Such shift from being to becoming is an important contribution of process philosophy to an epistemology of fluids (Styhre, 2007).

Complexity is a reflection of fluid epistemology and concentrates on the dynamic behaviour of complexly interacting interdependent and adaptive agents (Uhl-Bien et.al., 2007). Complex systems consist of myriads of agents who interact with each other in unpredictable ways; they are sensitive to changes in initial conditions; they develop adaptive behavior to the changes in the environment; they oscillate between stability and instability; and are characterized by emergent order (Plowman et.al., 2007). Complexity arises when agents with different perspective and information interact with each other in a mode of mutual influence causing the emergence of unanticipated novel outcomes (Goldstein et.al., 2010). Technological advancements and the process of globalization is constantly reshaping competitive landscape, exposing organizations to complexity (Hitt, 1998). We are going through an era of unprecedented global turmoil where seemingly improbable, the unanticipated, and the downright catastrophic appear to occur with alarming regularity (Chia, 2012). States and societies have become enmeshed in networks of interaction fostering magnitude and intensity of the global flows (Held & McGrew, 2003). The extent of the network of interactions could be observed in the financial crisis in Thailand in 1997, which first appeared as an isolated banking and currency crisis in an emerging market country and soon generated global financial distress with severe effects on markets (Keohane & Nye Jr., 2003). Events in any part of the world can have consequences for developments in every other part of the world, as a matter of fact, the Internet and other technologies have collapsed time and space (Rosenau, 2003). Merali & Allen (2011) suggest that under the prevailing conditions of global business climate, any attempts to design an organization to ensure structural stability is nothing more than an intellectual construction with limited capability to encompass all interactions between the agents (system components) given the constraints imposed by the modeller's bounded rationality. Embracing nonlinearity in organizational studies calls for adopting a new mindset; a one that supersedes what has been imposed by machine metaphor (Figure 1). In complex (adaptive) systems, the focus is no longer on discrete components, events or systems, instead, interactions and networks that connect individual agents appear as the indispensable quality of such systems (Hazy et.al., 2007). Chia's (2012:115) argument puts special emphasis on the need for incorporation of complexity into our way of thinking:

A complex, perpetually changeable, and inextricably interconnected world, however, calls for complex, processual thinking: thinking that is concretely grounded in the intimacy and immediacy of pure lived experience; thinking that acknowledges the reality of spontaneous, self-generated social orders, entities, and institutions; thinking that accepts and embraces the inherent messiness, contradictions, and ambiguities of reality and thinking that overflows our familiar categories of thought.

**Figure 1. Key Assumptions of Mechanistic Systems and Complex Systems**

**Source:** Hazy et.al., (2007)

Hence, organizations could be referred to as networks of social interaction in which members of the organization are supposed to extract new meanings and solutions via bottom-up structuration, moving the system to a more desirable level of competitiveness. In nonlinear dynamic systems the causal relationships between independent and dependent variables are replaced by symbiotic relationships where interdependent co-evolution is the main driver of the emergence of innovative adaptive organizational practices (Goldstein et.al. 2010). Due to the richness of information flow between the agents, order is emergent, organic and unpredictable (Uhl-Bien et.al, 2007). Diversity within organizations triggers evolution that eventually results in coming-into-being of superior level processes enabling adaptability. Evolution seems plausible when dynamics of interaction are fluid and diversity, tension and conflict are embedded in the thematic patterning of communicative interaction (Stacey, 2001).

#### **4. IDEAS AHEAD OF THEIR TIME: THE FIRST ENCOUNTER OF MANAGEMENT THINKING WITH NONLINEARITY**

While the early theories of management took the individual as the key focus of analysis and worked outwards, Follett's approach to the understanding of management was recognizably different in nature from the dominant stream of thought. Unlike the conventional scientific managers who based their ideas on the analysis of tasks via breaking them down into their constituent parts and artificially reconstructing them, she began with accepting the complexity of social situations and focused on the working group and the need to integrate individual and group efforts within the productive whole (Sheldrake, 2003). She placed relationships in the centre of her conceptualizations. Follett argued that the fundamental organizational challenge is the ability to build and maintain dynamic and harmonious human relationships. Her key concepts such as 'coordination', 'constructive conflict', 'integration' and 'power with' are all centred on human

relationships and they are all concerned with ways of promoting a creative dynamic in those relationships that is based on consensus (Child, 2013). A clear evidence of her position against the mechanistic view of management imposed by modernism could be observed: 'the idea of mastering environment is unfortunate because we have carried it over into social relations; it becomes our duty to conquer all external circumstances, nature and other men too' (Follett, 1924/2013: 119). Follett highlighted the need to shy away from static expressions with an attempt to discern the difference between 'being' and 'becoming' and argued that "Integrated organism is unfortunate, for the organism is the continuing activity of self-organizing, self-maintaining. We must be careful of the "eds" because they lead to "wholes", the wrong kind of wholes, the influence of the whole on the parts" (Follett, 1924/2013:58). The logic of Gestalt movement in psychology devised in Germany by Max Wertheimer and his associates Wolfgang Köhler and Kurt Koffka as an objection to the artificiality of the structuralists' study of consciousness (Tonn, 2003) reverberated in Follett's ideas about the role behaviour business organizations. The basis of Follett's thinking was the 'whole man' and, specifically, relations between the 'whole men' within the groups (Wren & Bedeian, 2009). She clung on to the assumption that whole is greater or different than the sum of its parts, which renders the reductionist way of dealing with social phenomena irrelevant. Follett (1924/2013: 105-106) wrote:

This "total situation" is often looked at as a total *picture*; it is thought that you can get all the factors if you examine the picture in sufficient detail. But a total situation is never a total picture; it is a total activity in which the activity of individuals and activity of environment constantly interweave. What the social worker tries to do is to bring about the *kind* of interweaving from which it follows that further responses from individual, will mean a *progressive* experience.

For Follett, behaviour was the manifestation of innumerable complex interactions between an individual agent and the surrounding environment, thus, emerged out of intra and extra organic stimulation because the behavioural function was continuously being modified by itself (Mendenhall et.al., 2000). She argued that every social process had three aspects, which were 'the interacting', 'the unifying' and 'the emerging' and pointed out that '... our consideration of the interacting has shown us that the interacting and unifying are one. Shall we now therefore consider the emerging? We have already done that. Because the emerging is also part of the same process' (Follett, 1940/2013: 198). Her emphasis on interaction and emergence as complementary processes of effective conduct in organizations is reflected in complexity thinking, which adopts that a complex system is composed of interdependent, interacting subsystems and information about the functioning of the system is distributed throughout the networks of connection (Goldstein et.al., 2010). Her perspective regarding the interweaving of the agents with each other as well as the interweaving of each agent and the entire organizational system, clearly defied the decontextualized ideal of the Newtonian paradigm as could be seen in the following statement: "I have been saying that the whole is determined not only by its constituents, but by their relation to one another. I now say that the whole is also determined by the relation of whole and parts. Nowhere do we see this at work than in business administration" (Follett, 1940/2013:195).

In a complex system there is a vast amount of interacting agents each governed by some rule or force, which relates their behaviour in a given time period contingently to the

states of the other parts, thus, as individual agents respond to their own specific local contexts in parallel with other agents (parts), qualitatively distinct new patterns can arise as a consequence of upward causality (Maguire, et.al., 2011). According to Lichtenstein (2014) emergence is a totally different category from transformation and change and explains, "At the root of this difference is the fact that every case of organizational change and transformation involves the modification of existing elements, an alteration of design structures or internal processes or activity routines in the organization." Follett's (1924/2013:62) description of 'circular response' taps into the very essence of nonlinear dynamics and the role of emergence in an organizational setting:

Through circular response we are creating each other all the time...The most fundamental thought about all this is that reaction is always reaction to a relating ... In human relations, as I have said, this is obvious: I never react to you but to you-plus-me; or to be more accurate, it is I-plus you reacting to you-plus-me. "I" can never influence "you" because you have already influenced me; that is, in the very process of meeting, by the very process of meeting, we both become something different. It begins even before we meet, in the anticipation of meeting.

Accurately speaking the matter cannot be expressed even by the phrase used above, I-plus-you meeting you-plus-me. It is I plus the-interweaving-between-you-and-me meeting you plus the-interweaving-between-you-and-me, etc., etc. If we were doing it mathematically we should work it out to the  $n$ th power."

Goldstein, et. al. (2010) calls this phenomena as 'interaction resonance', which signifies a richness of information flow that is generated and maintained through interactions over time. Follett's conception of circular response stressed the importance of the dynamic aspect of relationships and foreshadowed the concept of 'structuration', which Giddens (1984) later developed (Child, 2013). Follett held that the reality of organizational behaviour was in the interaction between subject (independent variable) and object (dependent variable), in the activity between them; she viewed the relationship between subject and object to be reciprocal and interdependent in nature, each being the function of another (Mendenhall et.al., 2000). Follett further explained the circular response in the following way: 'My response is not to a crystallized product of the past, static for the moment being; while I am behaving the environment is changing because the environment is changing because of my behaving, and my behaviour is a response to the new situation which I, in part, have created.' (Follett, 1924, quoted in Child, 2013:79). For Follett, relationships within social settings were continuous and integrative and the process of circular response is an evolving one – a continuous dynamic process (Child, 2013). Interaction and adaptation are prominent dynamics of complex systems and causal relationships between agents are described as symbiotic relationships referring to co-evolution. When two agents interact (in an organizational setting) their unique information and perspective generates difference, which eventually leads to unexpected novel outcomes (Goldstein, et.al., 2010). Ergo, countless and continuous interaction leads to the emergence of meaningful phenomena when there is diversity in the systems. The greater the diversity in a given system the higher the potential these differences can be amplified into emergent innovations (Goldstein, et.al., 2010).

In Follett's system of thought, difference was articulated as an indispensable feature of social systems because merging of differences in nature brought about new creation, and



that new creations then merged with other differing creations to produce new creations. (Mendenhall et.al., 2000). According to Gray (2012), in a healthy system both genes and ideas need to cross-pollinate so that creative ideas emerge when different ideas and concepts interact. Diversity is the source of adaptability, especially, at the micro-levels of individual differences and group level heterogeneity (Goldstein et.al., 2010). Follett (1940/2013) proposed that diversity paved the way to the emergence of novel solutions and emphasized that 'Instead of shutting out what is different, we should welcome it because it is different and through its difference will make a richer content of life. The ignoring of differences is the most fatal mistake in politics or industry or international life: every difference that is swept up into a bigger conception feeds and enriches society; every difference, which is ignored, feeds on society and eventually corrupts it'. Diversity enables conflict, which she regarded as vital for "progressive integration and with the emphasis placed upon novelty in the moment of synthesis, the critical moment of evolution" (Follett, 1924/2013:118). Diversity involves tension and conflict.

Emergence of creative experience, for Follett, required active participation in events or activities always in an effort to create something new (Tonn, 2003). Follett's insight was to recognize that the conflict was not necessarily pathological and a manifestation of failure, rather it was the appearance of difference (Child, 1995). It was the only way for making interaction resonance possible, which signifies a richness of information flow that is generated and maintained through interactions over time (Goldstein et.al., 2010). Follett, 1924/2013 stressed the importance of emergence of new ways of doing business and proposed that 'The confronting of diverse desires, the thereby revealing of 'values', the consequent revaluation of values, a uniting of desires which we welcome above all because it means that the next diversity will emerge on a higher social level – this is progress'. She underscored that unity (not uniformity) was our aim, and this could only be attained through the integration of differences and pointed out the "as long as we think of difference as that which divides us, we shall dislike it; when we think of it as that which unites us, we shall cherish it" (Follett, 1918). Therefore utilization of conflict as a means of integration of what is desirable in various viewpoints not only would serve to attract attention to where it was urgently required, but the integration of previously differing views could provide a valuable organizational dynamic (Child, 2013). Follett, extended her view to include competitors as she defined them as "...our opponents are our co-creators, for they have something to give which we have not" (Follett, 1924/2013:174). The way Follett identified competitors is quite similar to the one suggested by Adam M. Brandenburger and Barry J. Nalebuff in their seminal work 'Co-opetition' in which they attempted to reconceptualised competitors as complementors with whom the organizations create value in a cooperative process.

Follett's approach to leadership is also congruent with that of postulated by complexity leadership studies. Complexity thinking posits that leadership is not a linear event, however, it is embedded in a complex interplay of numerous interacting forces and in the network of relations (Uhl-Bien, et.al., 2007). Follett deprecated the idea of defining leadership as a function of personal traits and noted that 'the chief mistake in thinking of leadership as resting wholly on personality lies probably in the fact that the executive

leaders is not a leader of men only but of something we are learning to call the total situation ... includes facts, present and potential, aims and purposes of members of the organization' (Follett, 1949/2013:51). Within the framework of complexity leadership theory leaders are reconfigured as enablers, who control only to the degree that they build structures for inhibiting or redirecting ideas that are not aligned with organizational mission or impair organizational abilities. Thus, both leaders and followers, which are intertwined with each other, are responsible for the total situation and avert any potential threat to its proper functioning. Leaders and followers in an organization '...are both following the invisible leader – the common purpose.' (Follett, 1949/2013:55). Complexity approach in leadership studies posits that leadership is a continuous process and engenders an organizational ecology in which qualitatively distinct phenomena emerge as an outcome of interaction among the constituent agents. Follett (1949/2013:52) held that 'the leader is one who can organize the experience of the group ... when leadership rises to genius it has the power of transforming experience into power... He must see the evolving situation, the developing situation. His wisdom, his judgment, is used, not on a situation that is stationery, but one that is changing all the time'. Complexity thinking, as one of the prominent fluid epistemologies, refers to the shift from being to becoming, from existence to in-the-making (Styhre, 2007), similar to that of liquidity employed by Bauman (2000/2012). Follett (1924/2013:53) pronounced that 'In business we are always passing from one significant moment to another significant moment, and the leader's task is pre-eminently to understand the moment of passing. The leader sees one situation melting into another and has learned the mastery of that moment.' The leader should be able to grasp the essence of the flow in time and space and have the awareness that the whole is an evolving product of evolution. As mentioned above, novelty emerges as a synthesis that occurs at the critical moment of evolution. This is clearly beyond mere running a system with complicated dynamics but entails taking system plasticity for granted. Hence, 'the leader must understand the situation, must see it as a whole, must see the inter-relation of all the parts' Follett (1949/2013:52). Complexity leadership approaches asserts a leadership style that fosters interaction, interdependency and injects adaptive tension as well as acting as a catalyst to manage the entanglement between bureaucratic and emergent function of the organization.

## **5.CONCLUSION**

Mary Parker Follett's defied ingrained approaches that had taken stationery condition for granted and made assertive arguments regarding socio-organizational issues. Given the proclivity of studies in the field of management that mainly demarcates organizational and managerial matters within the framework of determinism Follett's principles opened up new avenues on the way to unveil the nature of nonlinear dynamics in organizational settings. Without rejecting the need for utilizing quantitative means in organizational decision-making processes she had put special emphasis on the aforementioned 'things-in-the-making' (fluidity) and had drawn our attention to the fallacy of getting obsessed with the so called cause-and-effect because 'there is no result of the process but only a moment in the process... On the social level, cause and effect are ways of describing certain moments in the situation when we look at those moments apart from the total process' (Follett 1924/2013:60-61). In an era of 'big data' the amount of data generated

have become colossal as companies capture trillions of bytes of information about their customers, suppliers, and operations, and millions of networked sensors are being embedded in the physical world in devices such as mobile phones and automobiles, sensing, creating, and communicating data (Manyika, et.al., 2011). Hence, there is a strong need to become a data-savvy organization, which is capable of extracting meaning from the relevant and reliable data collected to achieve organizational ends. Knowledge emerges as individuals and social settings interact to create meaning (Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2011). Follett's conception of 'circular response' reveals that the appropriate context to be employed for analyzing data is determined in the continuous interaction between the members of the organization. In complex systems 'the agents in the system recognize the meaning of a given exchange, and adjust their own behavior as their response to that meaning within the system. As they do so the system changes: it is not the same system as it was before' (Lichtenstein and Plowman, 2009). Incorporation of complexity thinking into management facilitates our understanding of Follett's propositions about everlasting issues in management. More insight is yet to come as we delve into her oeuvre.

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