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In Favor of Leader/less Management: Follettian Perspective of Co-leadership

Ana Martins and Isabel Martins

Introduction

In this chapter, we argue for the leader/less management position which we consider to be in harmony with the Follettian perspective of co-leadership leader/less management. According to this perspective, leadership is inherent in and shared by the group and not in one specific single individual all the time. This chapter further demonstrates the importance of re-humanizing leadership and identity which is embodied in

A. Martins (✉)

Graduate School of Business and Leadership, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Durban, South Africa

e-mail: martinsa@ukzn.ac.za

I. Martins

School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Durban, South Africa

relationships, context and made possible through groups and organizational culture. This chapter is organized in the following sections. First, we argue why we do not agree with the *leaderful* management position, neither the favorable nor less favorable lenses. Then, we argue why we agree with the co-leadership *leaderless* management position, and herein we introduce our vision of an organization wherein a Follettian perspective of co-leadership *leaderless* management prevails.

Why We Do Not Support *Leaderful* Management

In this first part, we argue the lens of the undesirable and inauspicious *leaderful* management perspective. This *leaderful* management is based on the dominant and militant principle combined with a relentless pursuit for surplus value. The great majority of inauspicious *leaderful* management is anchored on surplus-based management, which is considered autocratic, domineering, bellicose, and forceful (Follett [1949]1987). Moreover, unfavorable *leaderful* management tends to focus on hierarchical and autocratic structures and processes prevalent in the command-and-control environment, as Nielsen (see Chapter 2 in this volume) has previously explained.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the focus moved from managing to leading wherein leadership became an obsession (Alvesson and Spicer 2011) as leadership tended to concentrate on the individualistic paradigm and emphasized the leader and personality, based on the Scientific Management perspective. Studies on leadership further evidenced power instead of the essence of leadership itself. The roles of both managers and leaders have always portrayed a specific and important part in organizations and in society at large (Mintzberg 1973). These roles have also been the theme of research over many decades. However, this points to the undesirable *leaderful* management which encapsulates a single leader and which we are not in favor of. Moreover, a mindset based on rank that highlights the command-and-control thinking stifles the humane aspects of individuals as well as their intelligence. This mindset has arisen from the Scientific Management perspective wherein

the leader takes on the autocratic and a military rank-based mindset. Furthermore, this mindset, evident in the undesirable *leaderful* management, is disheartening and intimidating because it restrains individuals from naturally wanting to participate.

Rank-based mental models, prevalent in undesirable *leaderful* management and advocated by the self-interest of leaders, uphold wicked, and malevolent contexts. As a consequence of the critique of rank, order, hierarchy, and power, as postulated by the anarchists, even in those situations where undesirable *leaderful* management is considered democratic and the leader appears to adopt a transformational leadership style, the leader possesses a command-and-control attitude because the leader considers individual employees as being a cog in the wheel of the organization. This type of organization alludes to the context of a machine, as Morgan (1986) substantiates. This context gives rise to the undesirable and inauspicious *leaderful* management perspective which can be as detrimental as the unfavorable *leaderless* management perspective. Moreover, this machine metaphor has relegated the individual to the lowest possible state of being in the organization wherein all communication has broken down and the individual no longer has a sense of belonging to the organization. We are not in favor of the “hierarchization” of power, which is exercised by autocratic and dictatorial leaders, prevalent in undesirable *leaderful* management. In this context, creativity and innovation are stifled and this could impede the process of organizational learning, which can eventually result in the decline and possible stagnation of the particular organization.

Many contemporary organizations have become rife with undesirable *leaderful* management wherein leaders are characterized as being immoral greedy and lack humility because they are ruthless; their quest for profit and power is strengthened by their demeaning nature and by exploiting employees in their organization. This undesirable *leaderful* management perspective is directly associated with the production of surplus.

In summary, in this section we have essentially argued why we are against the *leaderful* management perspective, which is destructive, ruthless, exploitative, and usurps power of rank due to being focused on a single leadership figure. Therefore, the entire *leaderful* management

perspective needs to be rethought in order for any positive and effective outcomes to be achieved and to harness the sustainability of an organization.

Why We Are in Favor of Leader/less Management

This section entails two parts; first we put forward the Follettian co-leadership leader/less management perspective which we consider as the favorable lens and which we espouse. Then, we argue the less inauspicious aspects of leader/less management.

Favorable Co-leader/less Management

In this part, we argue in favor of the desirable co-leader/less management position which we embrace. We regard this perspective to be designated as the Follettian co-leader/less management wherein the concept of being is the essential component.

Leader/less management (Kotow 2019) may have benefits in so far as it focuses on peer instead of being based on rank, as Nielsen (Chapter 2 in this volume) has previously explained. This favorable leader/less management position is regarded as the absence of single persons who take on the role of a leader. Thus, “effective management is a participatory, inclusive and non-hierarchical process—not a command and control, direction giving process” (Nelson 2017, p. 183). Indeed, organizations that are peer-based encourage the humane aspect of individuals by calling upon their heart and their intelligence. In these organizations which depict the less inauspicious leader/less management approach, the shift in mindset may be endorsed because the common good is harnessed as opposed to the individual self-interest. Moreover, flat structures (Nielsen 2004) tend to be focused on instead of hierarchical structures because the latter are traditional and pyramid in nature with power and control being top down (Green 2007), as opposed to the flat structures which have participatory decision-making processes.

Furthermore, we draw inspiration from the pancake metaphor that Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) and Coop (2013) propose, to describe those organizations that have flatter structures. This flat structure seemingly alludes to a horizontal metaphor which highlights the disintegration of the traditional and pyramid-shaped organization by giving rise to a fundamentally different kind of structure, which, at first glance appears to be leaderless and takes on an organizational structure that is considered flat in nature. Additionally, the fewer levels of management the organization has, the more conducive the environment is toward creating more flexible, creative and innovative individuals (Burns and Stalker 1961). This scenario may be favorable to the less inauspicious leaderless management.

In line with the Follettian co-leaderless management perspective, it is important to contextualize the notion and essence of being and its meaning. Our current globalized world, as we know it, seems to have fallen apart because the values of humanity, justice, and temperance have been overlooked in the quest for surplus value. The onset of the coronavirus disease which became known as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic led to a compulsory change of how organizations operate, and this triggered the need for introspection. This urgency prompts a fresh opportunity for individuals and organizations to go back to the essence of being, the *raison d'être*. We draw upon Phenomenology in order to elucidate what is the meaning of being, and that meaning is circumstantial, endless, perceived as all-embracing and comprehensive (Merleau-Ponty [1945]1995). Being aware that we are alive is our first perception of what is the meaning of being human and, specifically contextualizing this meaning, and specifically in this context, what it means to be a co-leader. In perceiving our path in life, and our quest in attempting to understand why we are alive, we do so through introspection and language (Heidegger 2003). This inquiry, which Heidegger refers to as Dasein, where “Da” means “there” and “Sein” means “to be” or “being there.” In this journey to comprehend the true meaning of being—the essence of co-leadership, it is necessary to substantiate and embody Dasein which is enabled through “...being ahead of oneself...” (Ricoeur 2006, p. 347). Additionally, in the exploration to understand being, we need to be aware of time in order to contextualize situations,

as Follett posits. Moreover, we can draw a connection with the Follettian principles inherent in the “meaning of a situation” (Monin and Bathurst 2008, p. 450) which is understood as being linked to the elusive nature of both time and the situation itself. We can further draw a nexus with co-leaderless management which concentrates on social interchange by espousing the co-leadership characteristics.

The notion of temporality further provides the context for “being” which is thus linked to time (Heidegger 2003). In an attempt to apply the metaphor of the clock to describe the Follettian principle of co-leaderless management and linking this principle to the notion of time, it “is unusual in that it keeps time both for the individual’s and the collective’s authentic use of self and their engagement in and modelling of intention and purpose, creativity, experiential, and adaptive learning in relationship to their internal other and with others outside themselves” (Nelson 2017, p. 182). The notion of authentic human beings, considered the subject, arise from these social bonds. In this regard, the Follettian pragmatism provides a path to understand organizations and considers this activity as being reasonable.

The essence of Dasein resides in authentic and inauthentic existence (Heidegger 2003) which further corroborates the need for introspection. However, over the decades, this social context, based on the humanistic and holistic schools of thought, has unfortunately been neglected and even relegated to the wayside. What is more, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have further eradicated the humane side of organizations and work. Additionally, the co-leaderless management perspective, which is based on the Follettian principles of leadership, focuses on individualism and “plurivocality” (Monin and Bathurst 2008, p. 448). The group is composed of individuals who have attained self-actualization following a common purpose where there is no leadership arising from one single individual. Every situation is always in a process of becoming, just as we, humans, are also in a process of becoming. Heidegger (2003) termed this as “Being-in-the-world” which is considered as authentic existence. While inauthentic existence is portrayed when an individual is fulfilling a lifestyle which is pre-defined by the forces of society. This inauthentic existence supports the common existence which precludes and blurs the oneness.

Care and concern, therefore, are the ontological constructs associated with being and Dasein and embody the authentic existence. Indeed, the Follettian perspective of co-leader/less management and the notion of re-humanizing leadership, address the aspect of bringing “concern and care” (Follett 1924) back into “being-in-the-world” into organizations as well, by bringing authenticity of existence into the meaning of temporality. Therefore, the authentic existence gains meaning when individuals are aware of their distinctive human beingness. This is fully envisaged in the Follettian co-leadership leader/less management perspective. In accordance with this Follettian perspective, in an organization where everyone is actively involved, then the notion of a single individual as a leader becomes superfluous. This is very much in tune with the notion of group-based or shared leadership. This is possible when the organization develops four key elements, namely “collectiveness, concurrency, collaboration, compassion” (Raelin 2011, p. 16). These four elements are also considered as being anchors that facilitate the re-humanizing of the organization. In this context, the collective consciousness can be directed toward achieving the greater good of organizations and humanity at large. This a break away from the “hunt” for surplus value and is in line with the Follettian principle of leadership.

The Follettian perspective of co-leadership leader/less management focuses on that authority which is based on knowledge and not on power of position. In the same vein, Foucault was “against scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects” (Foucault 2003, p. 10), in spite of regarding knowledge as power. Foucault was also against authority based on position. This is further corroborated by Crossan et al. (2017) who created a leader-character framework which denotes a shift from the initial Scientific Management paradigm and now includes eleven virtues. These virtues entail the prudence dimension at the core of personality which can be regarded as diametrically opposed to the Scientific Management personality framework. This virtues framework is based on core and essential qualities that were first theorized by Plato (2021), then further developed by Aristotle (Barnes 1984), as well as the Chinese Confucian philosophy (Provis 2017), including the values of courage, justice, humanity, temperance, and transcendence.

These are the values that fortify the Follettian perspective of co-leaderless management, which we argue in favor of.

The Follettian principle of co-leadership leaderless management is described as group-based and as the rebel against the pursuit for surplus value. Furthermore, this Follettian perspective focuses on reciprocal relationships in groups enhancing “circular response” (Follett 1924, p. 53) giving rise to the notion of “power-with” (Follett 1941, p. 101) as opposed to power over. It is “power-with” that builds on integration because Follett attributed enormous importance on collaboration, shared purpose, commitment, and intent. Additionally, Follett was of the opinion that long-term sustainability engages individuals toward reaching the common good and taking into account the community. This type of Follettian co-leadership leaderless management ensures that the integration of the wishes and needs of individuals, the community as well as organizations, takes place. For this reason, the main focus of the Follettian perspective is therefore, to ensure businesses are part of the broader community.

This Follettian perspective enables a balance to be achieved in the exploration—exploitation of co-leadership leaderless behaviors, namely open (explorative and creative) and closed (exploitative and routine) behaviors (March 1991). In this regard, Burns and Stalker (1961) theorize a blend of mechanistic and organic structures. These evoke the Follettian perspective of collaborative leadership that entails human capital with expertise, social capital that is collaborative in nature, and organizational capital that is natural, green, and innovative. Furthermore, in open (exploration) and closed (exploitation) co-leadership leaderless behaviors, harmonization, and co-ordination may occur because innovation is fostered through the exploitation and exploration of learning that individuals and groups engage in; this can lead to improved organizational performance. This Follettian co-leadership leaderless management perspective promotes an auspicious learning culture which is nurtured through transformational co-leadership leaderless behavior—as predicated by Nemanich and Vera (2009). Therefore, innovation arises because it is highly dependent on co-leadership behaviors, as O’Reilly and Tushman (2013) further substantiate. We are in favor of

leaderless management based on the Follettian co-leadership principles of collaboration and integration.

Additionally, in those organizations that enhance the Follettian co-leadership leaderless management, these organizations do not demonstrate bureaucratic, hierarchical, and controlling processes. Furthermore, the abilities and qualities of co-leaderless management are very much akin to those evident in distributed leadership, namely, to foster dialogue, adaptability, openness, and a culture that is in favor of innovation. These characteristics evoke the Follettian principles of co-leadership leaderless management, that we advocate. In horizontal structures wherein power is driven by the community and learning is collaborative, no single individual is leader, but shared leadership is more relational and not individualistic (Endres and Weibler 2020). Moreover, this is analogous to what Proudhon termed “mutualism” (Edwards 1969). This is what we argue for in this chapter.

The Follettian view of integration also encapsulates cohesive yet divergent opinions which contemporary organizations have unfortunately, moved away from (Follett 1924). However, organizations with co-leadership characterized by the Follettian co-leaderless management perspective display this humane aspect. This Follettian view of co-leadership leaderless management emphasizes motivation, well-being, tasks, goals, and the performance of both the organization and its members (Bass 1990; DeRue et al. 2011; Skogstad et al. 2014; Yukl 2002).

We argue that a leadership management perspective in an organization should not simply achieve the needs of a particular individual but instead but should aim for the betterment of the organization. In essence, this transformation means re-focusing on the Follettian perspective of co-leadership leaderless management and not on leaders as individuals. According to the Follettian perspective, leadership is inherent in the group and not in one specific single individual, as we have stated above. Reinforcing this perspective urges individuals in contemporary organizations to participate in collaborative activities with other individuals.

Inauspicious Leaderless Management

In this part, we argue the inauspicious and less favorable leaderless management lens by indicating that it can be based on the anarchists' dissociation of the western growth philosophy and its direct link with the hunt for surplus value (see also Hertel and Sparre, Chapter 9 in this volume). In organizations wherein leaderless management prevails (Hansen 2016), the perception of this leaderless management is analogous to the viewpoint espoused by the anarchists. Bakunin (Dolgoff 1972; Purkis and Bowen 2004) is a critic of organizational hierarchy because he concurs that the capitalistic production and its exploitative nature have dehumanizing corollaries. The production of surplus value is further critiqued by Kropotkin (Shatz 1995). There is insufficient empirical proof thus far about the effectiveness of leaderless management perspective in organizations. Here, we draw inspiration from the double metaphor referring to the starfish and the spider, as Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) and Coop (2013) put forward, in order to distinguish between the progressive leaderless peer-to-peer management model and the traditional top-down model. Brafman and Beckstrom (2006) further posit that the spider metaphor alludes to an organization where the head is centralized. This type of organization is hierarchical and top down in nature, where knowledge and power are concentrated at the top and the organization relies on a specific space in which to be located. If a unit is separated, this may affect the basic functioning of the organization. In contrast, the starfish metaphor alludes to a network organization without a head or some form of control; it is decentralized and fluid wherein power is diffused throughout and does not rely on a fixed space in which to function. If one arm of the starfish is removed, another arm is grown. Additionally, in so-called starfish leaderless management, individuals unlearn the cultural information which enables the creation of new ideas which enthruse the group.

Moran (2015, p. 505) posits that in an organization which entails a leaderless management approach, this leadership can be considered inefficient because it tends not to base decisions on facts or data ("data-less leadership"); naïve leadership behavior reveals an individual who is easily confused and is afraid of employees ("simply distracted leadership") and

relies on others to make decisions; leaderless management can also be evident in the so-called ostrich leadership approach which arises when problems are avoided in the hope that the issue gets resolved alone; and in the approach termed as “What would you do leadership?”—this leaderless management approach demonstrates that the leaderless management avoids making decisions because this type of individual neither knows how to manage nor wants to make the incorrect decision. The abovementioned type of leaderless management approaches, as Moran (2015) further posits, reveal that there is an inquiry with other fellow employees to ascertain what they would do if they were in the leading position. The effect of the abovementioned leaderless management styles on the organization has also been considered as a shortcoming because this type may give rise to feelings of perplexity, disorientation, as well as mistrust, skepticism, over-reliance on analysis and eventual organizational inertia. This scenario of leaderless management can also be considered as detrimental to the well-being of the organization. In the leaderless management scenario as Moran (2015) further describes, a blame culture surfaces, one in which the lack of morale predominates among individuals and the overall organizational climate is characterized by stagnation because individuals become averse to learning.

In summary, we are in favor of that specific co-leaderless management which is based on constructive, transformational co-leadership behaviors inherent in the Follettian co-leadership management perspective.

Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, we argued against the leaderful management perspective that is based on dominant and militant principles and their relentless pursuit for surplus value in undesirable leaderful management. We argued in favor of that leaderless management perspective that is based on the Follettian co-leadership leaderless management approach—wherein lies our definition of co-leaderless management. We have put forth our definition of leaderless management which is based on the anarchists’ dissociation of the western growth philosophy and its hunt for surplus

value. In this regard, co-leaderless management should consider what is the essence of being. It is apparent that organizations require to re-humanize their principles and foster an environment imbued with humanity, virtuous, and values-based principles inherent in the Follettian co-leaderless management perspective. The latter perspective entails principles which fortify a culture wherein all individuals are valued and respected. Creativity and innovation are fostered leading to the longevity of organizations. Furthermore, humanity is placed at the core and is considered the very essence for re-humanizing co-leadership in order to set organizations in this Follettian co-leadership leaderless management direction, which we endorse.

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