Review of article from Shafritz & Ott by Victor Montemurro

Giving and receiving orders is a human resource issue that should not be taken lightly since consequences of not understanding the impact of an order on an employee's work and attitude could be ineffective management if not also ruinous organizational behavior. In the essay "The Giving of Orders" published in 1926, Mary Parker Follett argues that both the employer and the employee should study the situation and discover the law of the situation. Both employer and employee should obey the law of the situation. Employers should avoid acting as if the employee is "under" the employer. The attitude of the employee, previous behavior, the education and training, the circumstances and environment of the work situation need to be carefully considered before so-called "orders" are given. Orders should be depersonalized. Rather than delivering orders from on high, employers would do better to have face-to-face conversation that looks at the situation, and then both employer and employee should agree to "take their orders from the situation."

Follett asserts that no one likes to be bossed; one feels a lack of self-respect, becomes defensive, and acts angry or sullen. The wrong mindset is created in the employee and the result is likely to be the wrong behavior. Follett says that, "One person should not give orders to another person, (Follett's italics), but instead managers should concentrate on "how to devise methods by which we can best discover (again Follett's italics) the order integral to a particular situation. The manager's authority should be an exercise of the "authority of the situation." The manager must create in himself the proper mindset and attitude; this work
must be done in advance of the situations that will arise necessitating orders. Managers must consider, within themselves, the "attitude required for cooperative study and decision."

Follett discusses other aspects of human behavior that influence the giving of orders. Because people have a wish to direct their own lives, they usually resent the order itself. People feel a fundamental need to self-assert. No one likes to be under the will of another. Even the issue of pride in one's work can be optimized, according to Follett, not by orders that may conflict with one's expertise or sense of self-worth, but by "joint study of the situation." Proper regard is given to the worker who takes pride by allowing shared decision-making and input rather than ordering. Allowing the worker to participate in the process of work increases the responsibility that the worker will feel for the situation. Managers must unify the work order to the responsibility of the situation by allowing the order to serve as a symbol of an agreed upon course of action. Follett recognizes that work situations are evolving and must be understood as such so that orders may keep up with the changing circumstances of work.

Managers must develop a "conscious attitude toward experience," always aware that the changing work situation, environment, level of training and expertise, requires an awareness of the change that the "developing situation makes in ourselves." Managers must know that the "situation does not change without changing us." Though writing seventy-five years ago, Follett calls upon managers to develop what Howard Gardner calls intrapersonal intelligence and interpersonal intelligence when "giving orders."