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Neoliberalism in the North American University: Toward Integrating Divisions in Agent Orientation Via a Follettian Differentiated Relational Ontology

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Abstract

This paper uses observations from empirical articles and personal experiences of the authors to explore issues associated with the rise of neoliberalism and academic capitalism in the contemporary public university. It frames these issues as stemming from conflicting ontologies between academicians who adhere to the differentiated individual ontology and university administrators who favor the undifferentiated individual ontology. To overcome the disconnect, a differentiated relational ontology that adheres to principles of Mary Parker Follett and Alfred North Whitehead is proposed. The driving force behind this ontology can be highlighted through a communicated crisis, and a specific application of Follett's differentiated relational ontology is Ensemble Learning Theory (ELT). A potential limitation of this study is generalizability, because the focus is centered on North American public universities and anecdotes are used to characterize a broader educational problem. This evolution is pertinent to academicians and administrators because the ontological impasse experienced in North American public universities threatens their existence as institutions, and has a broader and potentially negative impact on the quality of educational focus and output.

Key Words

Neoliberalism, Ontology, Mary Parker Follett, Academic Capitalism, Public Universities

1 Introduction

Mary Parker Follett's differentiated relational ontology has renewed relevance in the radically changing climate of North American public universities. Her theories of education (Follett, 1970) emphasize that both faculty and university administration have an obligation to stimulate students intellectually for the betterment of society. Her simple message resonates in universities that have evolved into metaphysical and ontological nomads diverging from the original intent of higher education (Hartman, 2017). North America has both public and private universities with the principle difference being that public universities are predominately subsidized by government with the explicit goal of providing affordable education to the general populace (Sappey, 2005, Noble, 2012); whereas private universities do not necessarily have the same mission and may be less reliant upon public funding. Consequently, this paper will focus primarily on the struggle of North American public universities in the wake of neoliberalism.

The encroachment of a neoliberalized economy that elevates profit at the expense of the general populace (Jessop, 2017) is a major contributor in this public university metamorphosis. The works of Mary Parker Follett and Alfred North Whitehead underscore the need to reinvent or reinvigorate the basic tenets of the public university educational system (Whitehead, 1928, 1959; Follett, 1970) to respond to the challenge of neoliberalism. Mary Parker Follett avouches there is a law of the situation (Follett, 1919, 1941), or a singularity around which others can integrate or concreate (Whitehead, 2010). Through properties of relationality, points of agreement can be achieved and a common path forged (Follett, 1919; Whitehead, 2010; Pelly, 2016a, 2016b, 2017). Utilizing Follettian principles, public university education systems (faculty and administrators) may coalesce to determine best practices that resurrect an educational system revolving around the enhancement of societal economic and educational norms. In order to comprehend the applicability of Follettian and Whiteheadian principles, a basic understanding of the research question and evidentiary conventions are requisite. The overarching research question of this paper may be phrased as "what are the consequences of a university having two competing organizational ontologies, and what solutions can be proposed to resolve this ontological impasse?"

The divarication of orientations and future paths within the university appears beyond the ability to integrate without the introduction of an alternate ontology. Traditionally, university professors have been masters of their own domains, free to interpret their objective of educating students as they deemed appropriate, with the support of administration (Geuna, 1998). Whereas each department or sub-unit of the university had similar metaphysical goals, there was little intellectual overlap (Hartman, 2017); thus, they operated akin to the differentiated individual ontology (Stout, 2012) which advocates that departments function as a "universe of one" and academicians are free to interpret norms with respect to intellectual freedom.

Recent trends in academia have emphasized the importance of external funding for the university (Bullar, 2007; Newfeld, 2008). As a result, programs have been developed that diverge from research and education in the public university in favor of increasing university revenues (O'Hara, 2018). Although each profit-making division of the university is unique, this overarching directive utilizes fundraising prowess to determine hierarchical position (Brunila & Valero, 2018). This financially focused synergy is the embodiment of the undifferentiated individual ontology (Pelly, 2016b, 2017; Stout, 2012).

While there are many competing narratives in any organization, including public universities, these narratives of profit seeking neoliberal administrators (undifferentiated individual ontology) and education oriented academics (differentiated individual ontology) were chosen because they represent ideal types (Weiss, 1983). Neither university administrators nor faculty strictly adhere to the exact precepts of their respective ontologies but their use facilitates discussion of the contrasting viewpoints within public universities, and provides potential opportunities for integrating each perspective into the differentiated relational ontology. This overlap between ontologies supports the precept that narratives and counter narratives are rarely diametrically opposed (Lueg, 2018). Similarly, the university and competing ontologies epitomize the struggle within the university between reason and emotion (Brunila & Valero, 2018) or carnival and lent (Hjorth, 2005). Additional capacity for convergence exists between these competing ontologies because administration aspires to conquer the "emotion" of faculty; conversely, the faculty strives to resist the "reason" of administration (Brunila & Valero, 2018). Acknowledgement and recognition of opposite viewpoints generates overlap, thereby sowing the seeds for future integration (Pelly, 2017, Saunders, 2010). The *rencontré* between ontologies illustrates a case whereby Follettian process ontology, or differentiated relational ontology, is particularly germane. In the public university conflicting individualist ontologies exist concurrently, eroding its metaphysical fabric. As Whitehead (2010) states, if a given structure is unsuitable for further reformation, it will not survive. If this crisis is not resolved, the public university as we know it will cease to exist.

Since the Thatcher/Reagan years, funding for public universities has steadily declined, supplanted by a neoliberal agenda of reduced funding (Plant, 2010; Newfield, 2008), resulting in tuition increases. Neoliberalism is an economic doctrine that shifts education away from self-discovery to a focus on economic utility (Hartman, 2017). The university has metamorphosed into a commodity rather than a ‘public good’ concentric to an educated democracy (Saunders, 2010). As an example, an undergraduate degree from a public university in California may well exceed \$250,000, despite previously being a high quality, low cost option (Hartman, 2017). The policy response is academic capitalism (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997), which promulgates this identity crisis and the struggle for survival. It is crucial that a sustainable ontology be adapted in order to progress from current university practices. Although this trend towards neoliberalism is perhaps most visible within the North American public university system, it is occurring internationally as well. This article includes examples from Australia, the European Union, the Nordic countries, and Finland to highlight the rise of neoliberalism internationally.

Ontological destruction and regeneration is essential to realign and unify public university objectives that guarantee organizational success and focus on academic achievement. A communicated crisis can convey a need to eliminate past differences in the interest of working towards a joint resolution (Grint, 2005). This communicated exigency may lead to integration and highlight the need to embrace new metaphysical sources and accompanying ontological forms. What is crucial is a desire to revive the debate between the ontologies (Hartman, 2017), and encourage reflective practices (Bagelman & Bagelman, 2016). Follett’s differentiated relational ontology and its manifestation of Ensemble Learning Theory (Rosile, Boje, & Nez, 2015), which thrives on debate and views differences between parties as strengths, not weaknesses, may serve as the model for the public university.

This article explores academic policy, tuition and fees, the displacement of research faculty, and the intensification of a centralized top-down administrative order guided by politics and the neoliberal agenda. Although both researchers and administrators adhere to individualist ontologies, solutions proposing relationality should be explored. Therefore, this paper will proceed by exploring the consequences and rationale of having two competing organizational ontologies. After exploring this initial line of inquiry, potential solutions to this ontological impasse will be proposed.

2 Introduction to a Relational Process Ontology

One of the most succinct summaries of processual ideas can be found in Stout (2012). She identifies the differentiated relational ontology with all beings connected to a shared metaphysical source, but interpretation of this source enhances understanding of individuality (Pelly, 2017). Mary Parker Follett’s (1919) ideas are the embodiment of the relational process ontology and she resolved conflicts through integrative unity rather than by domination or forcing ‘compromises.’ She stressed that genuine democracy is not majority rule characterized by shallow voting; rather, it is composed of self-organizing and self-managing groups at the community level that serve as the backbone of a business or a university (Follett, 1918). Her ‘law of the situation’ is a jointly studied investigation by all participants and an agreement to co-inquire. This co-construction explores ways in which a situation emerges, changes, and progresses (Follett, 1919) and celebrates diversity by treating cultural differences as assets (Follett, 1941). Her message was to grow power-with, avoid power-over, and support endogenous empowerment by gaining capacity for power. Follett suggests the situation itself is the ‘invisible leader’ and through scientific co-study and joint-projects of inquiry, it is possible to create common purpose (Pelly, 2016a, 2017), which is the foundation of Ensemble Leadership (Rosile et al., 2015).

“Follett’s views are in concert with feminist approaches to the ethical resolution of conflict, which focus on dialectical communication between participants to reach an integrative solution that attends to the needs of all” (Monin & Bathurst, 2008: online). In contrast to representationalist and individualist ontologies commonly found in the public university, Follett advocated a weak ontology (Stout, 2012; Hjorth, 2013) steeped in relationality and devoid of dualism. Her ontology embodies the diversity of industrial democracy, which has no meaningful existence in individualism or in domination via power-over. “Give your difference, welcome my difference, unify all difference in the larger whole--such is the law of growth. The unifying of difference is the eternal process of life--the creative synthesis, the highest act of creation” (Follett, 1918, p. 0). O’Connor (2000), Stout and Staton (2014), among others have advanced the Hegelian dialectic grounding of Follett’s concepts.

Follett (1924) develops the law of the situation in its “total situation” (Follett, p. 52) and “as part of a total process” and “of the *continuous* process of self-renewal” (Follett, 1924, p. 53). The total situation is within the total environment and is defined as “that which is in such immediate relation to the individual that its forces

can be reckoned with both as cause of and effect of his activity, that is, that much of environment which comes within the appreciable range of circular behavior.” (Follett, 1924, p. 09). Circular or integrative behavior is considered “seminal for our future thinking, a conception which is surely destined to influence largely the social sciences” (Follett, 1924, p. xv).

Mary Parker Follett was influenced by Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy, and by her association with the ‘Cambridge Intellectuals’ (Stout & Staton, 2011, p. 72), which included North American pragmatist philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce and William James whose works are hitherto discussed in relation to systems theory and storytelling (Boje, 2014).

One of the most significant perplexities of a weak ontology is its encompassing inclusivity with an almost implied degree of ontological superiority. The weak ontology incorporates all that exists to show connectivity between points and serve as a common vector for integration or concrescence. Integration and concrescence represent choices around the convergence of one or more sets of values (Pelly, 2016a, 2017) in which individuals sense their ontology to understand reality. As depicted in Stout’s differentiated relational ontology, the embodiment of process theory and Follett’s process ontology (Stout and Staton, 2011; Stout, 2012), there is an assumption of a shared metaphysical source, albeit not a shared interpretation.

Plato circumscribes to the existence of multiple ontologies that can only be assumed and are not inherently correct or incorrect (Moravcsik, 1992; Plato, 2012). This difference in ontologies stems from the infinite number of metaphysical sources and their corresponding possible interpretations. Forms are perfect examples of the static and are devoid of relationality. Different integrations can occur from completely different groupings of forms and, thereby, different metaphysical sources. Follett (1941) briefly described that which transpires when integration is not possible – when the ontologies are metaphysically so divergent there is little or no relationality between the two. In its current form, the public university exemplifies a situation of ontological obliquity.

3 The Decline of the Public University

The golden age of the public university followed World War II and ended in the late 1970s, after which the dream of educating the working class majority to enter the middle class faltered. Following the Second World War, there was a consensus that a cohesive democratic society with a strong economy was impossible unless all social classes participated in mass education — teaching only upper class individuals was insufficient (Noble, 2012). As an extension of the New Deal Act, the G.I. Bill was passed in 1946 and provided veterans with many benefits - one of which was university tuition. As a result of the G.I. Bill and similar legislation, enrollment more than doubled by the 1970s in North American public universities, and the system became admired internationally for its high quality education and lack of student debt (Hartman, 2017). The public university promoted a virtuous cycle of accelerating new ideas, affluence, and culture in order to live more intelligently and harmoniously. The prevailing zeitgeist during the 1950s to 1970s was that a society required strong universities as a public good, implying access without incurring student debt. In fact, even proposing ideas similar to neoliberalism would have been considered unacceptable prior to the 1950s (Giroux, 2005). The public university promoted high quality competition in emerging fields of research, elevated by teaching large numbers of students, admitting the majority of those who applied, and improving their knowledge base upon entrance. It provided free and open access, deep personal development, and egalitarian inclusion in a diversified curriculum. The public university offered socioeconomic problem solving to society. Until the 1980s, public universities were set to inherit the earth in the postindustrial ‘new’ knowledge economy. However, in the 1980s, they faced a new set of challenges (Touraine, 1992).

In the 1950s and 1960s the new ‘organization man’ (Whyte, 2013) with an importance of majoritarian economics and the value of noneconomic forms of human development, (i.e., the egalitarian humanism common to Keynesian economic thought and policy and to women’s and civil rights movements) emerged, sowing the seeds for the culture wars (Hartman, 2017), which had consequences for North American public universities. First, the humanities fields lost confidence in the university mission they had once sponsored: to instill individual agency that encouraged self-governed human development (Häyrynen-Alestalo, & Peltola, 2006). As an embodiment of the differentiated individual ontology, the humanities faced an existential debate as to the ideal path for a humanities education in the United States. The policy of promoting diversity and inclusion during the culture wars splintered universities’ social and cultural capital to the point that it opened the door for a replacement orientation that valued economic utility over intrinsic worth: neoliberalism (Hartman, 2017).

Neoliberalism is a form of economic rationality that breaks down boundaries between economic, cultural, social, and political spheres, with extrinsic gain becoming paramount (Aronowitz, 2000; Apple, 2001). There are three principle components of neoliberalism: the benevolence of the free market, minimal state intervention in the economy, and the individual as a rational actor (Harvey, 2005; Turner, 2008). It is a doctrine designed to attack social values, democracy, and concentrate wealth into the hands of a select few (Giroux, 2005) by using business techniques in every domain of life (Bourdieu, 1998). Neoliberalism received its legitimacy during the severe stagflation of the 1970s in the United States, when policy makers encouraged voters to reject the socially-minded politics that lead to this disastrous period (O'Connor, 2003). During the 1980s and 1990s unemployment was reduced, and the country enjoyed a balanced budget, which was coupled with economic recovery (Dumeil & Levy, 2005). In light of this compelling evidence, neoliberalism was able to enter domains outside of economic policy. In the 1980s and 1990s the mission evolved to produce flexible, adaptable, innovative workers for the new market economy, but the vision of egalitarian development declined, and the democratizing mission was eclipsed by financial concerns of the 1990s and 2000s economic crises (Sappey, 2005, Noble, 2012). This included introducing further neoliberal reforms into public universities (Saunders, 2010). "Conservative elites who had been threatened by the postwar rise of the college-educated economic majority have put that majority back in its place" (Newfield, 2008, p.). This was accomplished by enacting a culture war on the public university that had previously enfranchised the mass middle class (Hartman, 2017). Newfield postulates the culture wars against the public university were designed to reduce the economic claims of their target group, the growing college-educated majority. "The culture wars discredited the cultural conditions of the political and economic ascent of these college-educated, middle-class workers" (Newfield, 2008, p.).

4 The Differentiated Individual Ontology

The public university, which initially focused on the public good, embodied the differentiated individual ontology (Stout, 2012). Stout defined the differentiated individual ontology as an immanent source of being devoid of hierarchy. Moreover, individuals exist in their natural state without organic bonds. A further stipulation of this ontology is a degree of opportunity (Pelly, 2016b) or ethical (Pelly, 2017) isolation; actors believe they are a "universe of one". In other words, actors are free to interpret their goals independently of others' input, ensuring a plurality of opinions.

This ontology is relevant to the public university prior to the 1980s due to the representation of the vast pluralism of societal and intellectual interests reflected in the overall university structure (Hartman, 2017). As society concretes on different metaphysical sources, each subsection forms a subunit unto itself. Similarly, the university enjoyed a plurality reflected in its diverse academic structure in pursuit of educating society in its entirety (O'Hara, 2018). Departments had differing connotations of the ideal approach to educating the masses, reflected in varying course content and political approaches. Irrespective of metaphysical bubble, the public university existed to enhance student educational outcomes.

The plurality of this fractious ontology was reified within each academic division by sparse intra-departmental academic coordination and a dearth of shared metaphysical commonalities with external entities, including the university administration and government. The public university slowly ceded to an alternate ontological form, the undifferentiated individual ontology, and its corresponding orientations of academic capitalism and neoliberalism.

4.1 Academic Capitalism

A side-effect of neoliberalism is academic capitalism, which occurs when universities perform "market and market-like activities" (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997, p. 1). The goal of the university is to secure external funding for "the influence of business ideals upon colleges and universities" (Bullar, 2007: vi, 1). Students are treated as customers, faculty are knowledge producers, and colleges are vendors of that knowledge in the university economy (Newsom, 2004; Slaughter et al., 2004). Student consumerism encourages 'mallification' as the university transitions to a hub of commerce (Shumar, 2008). "The process of commodification in the university (especially American universities) is beginning to reach new levels, dramatically transforming knowledge production, the knowledge itself, and the identities of those who produce that knowledge" (Shumar, 2008, p. 7). This process of commodification echoes Polyani (1944) who indicates that markets transform from economies born of social relations, to social relations being embedded in economies. Alternatively, commodification

reflects Marx and Engels' (2002) perception that values and professional ethics can be reduced to nothing more than a commodity with an exchange value.

Through mallification the university becomes a shopping mall, conducive to student and community consumers. "In the United States, the process of mallification goes back to the transformation of university bookstores in the 1980s" (Shumar, 2008, p. 1). A large public university in New Mexico has a bookstore which recently added a gift shop, and like many others, outsourced its operations to Barnes and Noble, with an incorporated Starbucks' cafe. This university is now planning a shopping mall adjacent to a reconstructed 27-hole golf course with additional plans for a hotel. "Like the commodities in the stores, students come to think of course work and research as another commodity form" (Shumar, 2008, p. 3). Moreover, the campus library, over the objections of faculty, included a café within its confines to attract more students (consumers) to its place of business. The case in New Mexico is not unique, but rather epitomizes a larger North American trend (Saunders, 2010)

Mallification shifts paradigms of education, teaching, learning, and research from the 'knowledge society' (i.e. the differentiated individual ontology) to the new 'knowledge economy' (i.e. undifferentiated individual ontology). In the knowledge society, education had a civic purpose of democratic enlightenment, but in the knowledge economy universities become integral to capitalism accumulation (Amaral et al., 2002). The university is commodified to compete in the global knowledge economy and attract corporate investment (Bok, 2009) at the expense of faculty and students. Academic capitalism and changes in the history of capitalism are entangled in a new form of socioeconomics, the university-as-corporation (Hartman, 2017). The business college is for sale, and a corporation or philanthropist with enough cash can engrave a name on one of the buildings or on one of its classrooms.

As capitalism faces repeated crises, the sale of space within the university, outsourcing of university services, capital fundraisers, and omnipresent commodification is entangled with the rise of neoliberal social and economic ideals. The neoliberalism doctrine for higher education influences career and student pathways, pedagogy provokes status conflicts, and assessment induces new forms of anxiety and performance (Brunila & Valero, 2018). Neoliberal socioeconomics has resulted in widespread poverty and inequality worldwide (Collins et al., 2008). The move to a market forces ideology, p.) legitimizes federal and state disinvestment in public education (Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997; Aronowitz, 2000); 2) outsourcing of education services (Saunders, 2010); 3) increasing tuition (O'Hara, 2018); 4) devalorizing tenure (Saunders, 2010); 5) substituting technology for human investment (O'Hara, 2018); 6) cutting labor costs by replacing tenured permanent workers with temporary appointments (Saunders, 2010); 7) administrators' mallifying the campus in order to attract higher rates of consumption; and, 8) increasing corporate partnerships for more business ventures in university (or corporate) research parks (Hartman, 2017).

Neoliberal economic ideology shapes the development of the contemporary public university, diverting it from a mission of civil knowledge society to a 'profit-making' role in a globalizing knowledge economy (Canaan & Shumar, 2008, p. 7). The repercussions of these policies justify decentering faculty and student governance from the administrative corporatization forms of command and control (O'Hara, 2018). The contemporary socioeconomic context of the public university and the macro sociopolitical context are subverting teaching, research, and service into a market economy (Olssen & Peters, 2005).

4.2 Consequences of Academic Capitalism

Public universities are viewed as a drain on resources, yet are encouraged to attract more students (Hartman, 2017). Over the past decades, they have aggressively marketed services to foreign students who pay the highest levels of tuition. Globally, public universities are radically changing, with academic capitalism superseding all other requirements. In lieu of new political and economic leadership to resolve social, cultural, and environmental issues, there has been a resurgence of neoliberalism, steering the public university in the direction of national-neoliberalism and away from the global neoliberalism of Thatcher-Reagan.

Christopher Newfield (2008, p.) noted that protesters at California's public universities rallied "that educational development should not be determined by the long series of economic crises that the state's leaders had managed to produce." The situation in New Mexico parallels that in California. There have been a steady series of economic crises for which state leaders have developed a taxation system dependent upon oil and gas revenues. As in California, this platitude is no longer concentric to university culture.

In academic capitalism tuition increases are designed to offset the decline in state funding, with the university considered a business focused on supporting alternative profit centers (Saunders, 2010). At a large public university in New Mexico, privatization, profit, and outsourcing are paramount, as illustrated by the

following examples. A new research center was constructed to facilitate technology transfer from student and faculty entrepreneurship into products the university can patent and or/sell to the private sector for cash. Athletic events have shifted from character and physical development to academic capitalism. The basketball arena is used for music and wrestling events, with revenues of approximately a million dollars per performance. The football team loses more games than it wins and cannot fill its home stadium, but is paid a million dollars for its practice games with Ohio State and Iowa State in sell-out away games.

In lieu of using the expertise of university faculty, a consulting firm was hired to facilitate reductions in expenditures and layoffs. Business Process Reengineering (BPR) embodies the undifferentiated individual ontology. It is contextless because it separates everyday experience from the top-down change approach, emphasizes control, and purports applicability to all organizations and experiences.

BPR shuns the participation of students, has token representation of faculty, and does not solicit input from students, faculty, or staff. It fails to tailor its abstractions (combining departments or entire colleges) to an exchange of information with the affected people. It is an ontology grounded in abstract conceptions of downsizing and reorganization, in principles and beliefs of neoliberal academic capitalism and the undifferentiated individual ontology. BPR makes a number of technological recommendations to reduce the number of faculty needed to operate and conduct classes. BPR's singular focus is to reduce operating costs in order to increase revenues.

Concurrently with the implementation of BPR, the state of New Mexico no longer invested or contributed to faculty and staff salaries, and reduced its support of student financial aid. However, it continues to divert income to buildings and landscaping. The University Foundation fundraises for scholarships, and encourages faculty to invest their individual funds.

At one large California public university, a dean was hired despite repeated terminations from previous institutions of higher learning. The principal reason for prior terminations stemmed from attempts to eliminate entire departments and terminate faculty based not on their teaching or research productivity, but their ability to attract donations and grants. A similar situation occurred at Temple University, where individuals who failed to attract funding were accused of left-leaning politics and faced ostracism and punishment (O'Hara, 2018). The justification for eliminating tenure at the California public university was to replace current faculty with those who could fundraise for the university. Upon arriving at this large public university, the new dean cut faculty pay, increased teaching loads, eliminated maintenance contracts for buildings, and reduced administrative and IT support for faculty. The coup de grace however, was hiring an administrator with no academic, practical, or university experience to design curriculum and dictate faculty research agendas. The rationale for such flagrant violation of academic freedom was to engage in total mobilization of university resources for fundraising. When this was brought to the attention of the university's president, he explained the cuts were necessary to augment administrator's salaries, including his own, to facilitate their retention and recruitment.

Both examples epitomize the undifferentiated individual ontology. Profit making under the guise of academic capitalism becomes the priority and other goals, such as learning, personal development, or student success become secondary, only to be discarded. The intellectual plurality of the differentiated individual ontology gradually recedes as academic capitalism grows (Hartman, 2017).

4.3 International Examples of Neoliberalism and Academic Capitalism

This crisis is not limited to U.S. public universities. Australian public universities have suffered decreased government funding, resulting in a client-oriented culture designed to shift the university away from its role as a social equalizer to one of an economic agent focused on Australian national competitiveness (Smyth, 1995). Their commodification process renders education a managerial and production tool whereby administrators serve as middlemen dictating the interactions between academicians and students (Knights et al., 1999). This commodification has resulted in education competing with other leisure activities (Usher et al., 2004). The academician is no longer the guardian of knowledge or the definer of theory, but rather another form of commoditized labor, much like a new petty bourgeoisie (Marx & Engels, 2002; Aronowitz, 2000). Akin to New Mexico, Australian faculty are increasingly pressured to conform to practices designed around "customer" (i.e. student) wants (Usher et al., 2004).

Likewise, European countries have succumbed to pressures of neoliberalism. The European Commission has launched two programs, the Research Framework Programs (RFPs) and the European Research Council. These programs offer financial rewards to Universities that provide research promoting political and economic development, and excellence in research, respectively (Hoenig, 2014). This trend of a supranational organization dictating research agendas is reminiscent of isomorphism among countries (Lueg,

2018). This attempt at institutional control has historical precedent – even Bologna University left the town for three years due to attempts at external control (Karran et al., 2017). This conformity has led to a marketization of competition in education, and has reduced academic freedom in favor of homogenizing organizational practices (Lueg, 2018) much like BPR. This focus upon excellence embodies the undifferentiated individual ontology (Pelly, 2017; Stout, 2012) in that it does not reflect the intellectual diversity of university departments, but rather focuses upon grant seeking behavior that rewards universities with a history of “excellence” and adequate administrative support for grant acquisition (Hoenig, 2018).

The tide of neoliberalism in Nordic countries has been particularly extreme. Nordic management education has a history of looking to other countries for inspiration when they created and revised their educational system (Engvall, 2004). Unfortunately, under the reforms in the Nordic model, education is shifting towards corporatization (Brunila & Valero, 2018). Part of the problem is that universities have become self-governed institutions that do not enjoy the support of the state, and their newfound autonomy means they are also responsible for ensuring financial stability to reach largely social goals (Karran et al., 2017). Nordic universities, like their American counterparts, are experiencing an Orwellian panopticon where professors are expected to produce research outcomes that focus on economic value – the result is a high stress environment where academicians are little more than inputs (Brunila & Valero, 2018). In Denmark there is a very draconian view of academic freedom. Professors have their research agendas mandated to support the university’s goal of economic survival (Karran et al., 2017). Sweden has also minimized research, manpower, facilities, and has a website dedicated to the country’s multiple violations of academic freedom (Karran et al., 2017).

Even a highly socialized country like Finland is not immune to the neoliberal commodification of higher education. In Finland, neoliberalism is undermining the principles of the welfare state, and managerialism and market conformity are expected in all public organizations, including universities (Häyrinen-Alestalo, & Peltola, 2006). Academicians have less governance in universities, and are experiencing an existential debate about university identity (Karran et al., 2017). Education and research are no longer viewed as priorities; moreover, universities are pushed to capitalize knowledge (Etzkowitz et al., 1998). Consequently, scientific disciplines are ranked according to their investment value. Unfortunately, humanities and social sciences are seen as less worthwhile (Häyrinen-Alestalo, & Peltola, 2006). As a result of the emphasis on commercial value, Finnish universities are unable to maintain autonomy (Jacob, 2003; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997).

Finnish government policy dictates that universities shift from servants of the welfare state to builders of the neoliberal one – i.e. universities function based upon market selection in lieu of communal needs. Like the rest of the Nordic countries, universities in Finland have become private corporations with a type of governance that focuses on managerialism (Karran et al., 2017), much like BPR. This is problematic because states, universities, and academic manpower are not easily evaluated based upon market exchanges. Typically, there is a large gap between academic and market interests, as witnessed when universities in Finland have attempted to commercialize their technology and collect surplus value. These conflicts are indicative of an identity crisis within Finnish universities similar to their U.S. counterparts.

5 The Undifferentiated Individual Ontology

The Undifferentiated Individual Ontology represents a worldview seemingly devoid of relationality with the differentiated individual ontology. Stout (2012) defines it as a state depicting humans as imperfect copies of a metaphysical source arranged in a hierarchal relationship akin to a modern bureaucratic organization. This is a rigorous top-down and representationalist hierarchical order. All elements of reality in the undifferentiated individual ontology are encouraged to emulate the opportunity (Pelly, 2016b) or ethical position (Pelly, 2017) of the overarching metaphysical source. Those that fail to achieve cohesion are eliminated as defects. Furthermore, individual elements are discouraged from interacting and instead use the metaphysical source for guidance in extraordinary and prosaic circumstances.

An example of the undifferentiated individual ontology is the military bureaucracy (Hackworth & England, 2003) where individuals are encouraged to follow orders in order to embody an abstract “ideal” behavior and control is embodied in rationality. Alternatively, rigorous forms of monotheism also illustrate the undifferentiated individual ontology (Stout, 2012), where individuals are encouraged to adhere to certain beliefs and those who do not are cast aside. Parallel examples of these behaviors can be identified in government organizations, (Pelly, 2016a) as well as in corporations such as General Electric (Slater, 2003).

In contrast to a plurality of metaphysical sources in the differentiated individual ontology, the undifferentiated individual ontology as applied to the public university has a solo, monolithic metaphysical

source: the pursuit of capitalistic profit. This ontology embodies the mentality associated with academic capitalism and neoliberalism as applied to the university. Universities cease to represent the plurality of society; instead, all support the mission to maximize profit. Less profitable departments of the university, such as academic centers, are in many ways perceived as defective in that they are unable to provide the “truest” reflection of profit and must be penalized (O’Hara, 2018). In contrast, those that generate more profit are rewarded with more resources.

6 The Consequences of this Ontological Conflict

As a result of this ontological conflict, the university may obtain new building constructions, but cannot expand faculty resources or guarantee reasonable tuition for the poor and working classes. Academic capitalism and return on investment for the new “plug-in workforce” (Newfield, 2008, p. 0) becomes the mission. The distinctive qualities of the public university are more difficult to ascertain. Additionally, faculty and graduates have less cultural and economic capital than in the industrial society prior to 1980. This can be attributed to the neoliberalism’s successful campaigns during the culture wars against the public university, creating conditions that forced repeated budget cuts in most states (Hartman, 2017), including New Mexico and California. Moreover, mass-middle-class development has been degenerated because a college-educated middle class is a threat to the “right” (Saunders, 2010). The appearance of a majority-educated population gave rise to the counter-reaction of a conservative offensive against the public university composed of the North American right with economic and social conservatives. In actuality, the culture war is a war on equality, principally focused on feminist, lesbian, gay, and minority studies in the public university currently incompatible with “market forces, democracy, political order, affirmative action, and economic efficiency” (Newfield, 2008, p. 2).

The contemporary public university rewards economic success through unenlightened business practices to promote racial inequality and block the multiracial college-educated population from entry into the middle class. Academic capitalism and the corporate university are a form of privatization, a way to withdraw public support from higher education, and opt for private funding through technology transfer by finding private funding sources to replace the shrinking state budgets for higher education (Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Noble, 2012).

Public universities are enduring continuing tuition hikes with catastrophic disinvestment by the state, resulting in a cost shift for public universities from society to students. As tuition increases, students assume more debt and enter an indentured status as the price of higher education in the public university supersedes the price of a home mortgage. With state funding cuts, rising tuition creates a feedback loop: legislative response to tuition increases budget reductions enacted during the next budget cycle. The defunding of the public university leads to poorer educational outcomes (longer time to graduate, less income potential); this in turn results in less public support, because students benefit less from their education.

What are the consequences of the university transforming into a business enterprise? Firstly, it requires more administrators to manage a university with multiple profit centers (Saunders, 2010). Secondly, faculty and students become a smaller part of the administrative concern (Hartman, 2017). Thirdly, faculty governance is no longer center stage, since the business model treats faculty as one of many profit centers, engaging in a deskilling labor process (O’Hara, 2018). An example of deskilling is investing less in faculty labor by substituting technology (digital measures of performance, centrally designed curriculum, distance learning software, etc.) (Noble, 2012). Fourthly, tenure is becoming less important in academic capitalism as more adjunct and short-term contract faculty are hired and provided fewer benefits (e.g. fewer healthcare benefits or none at all). Academic labor policies are changing, as the public university is displacing full-time research faculty positions and replacing them with less expensive adjunct and college faculty positions. “In the 1970s, 80 percent of college professors were full-time employees, according to the National Education Association. Today, part-time adjunct professors represent more than 50 percent of college faculty, says the American Association of University Professors” (Glenn, 2016, online). With faculty salaries tied to the market, there is a two-tiered employment system. The administration is following prevailing business methods, reducing labor costs, hiring consultants to install more commercialism, and purchasing more billboard and movie theater marketing ads. Faculty labor and student learning become less visible as the university expands the number of profit centers. Neither state legislatures nor the public can ascertain what professors and students are doing with respect to teaching and learning. The university is marketed for its sports, entertainment, golf, housing, grounds, and its new shopping mall (Saunders, 2010). Most importantly, tuition has increased, and students have to find new ways to pay for their education – they become autonomous consumers (Aronowitz, 2000; Rhoades & Slaughter, 1997)

In summary, the public university becomes a business model of administration. University-as-Corporation (the undifferentiated individual ontology) is the antithesis of University-as-Plurality (the differentiated individual ontology). The Corporate-Ontology and the Public University-Ontology are diametrically positioned. The Corporate-Model-University *processes* that were for education, teaching, and research are decentered and converted to profit centers. The *metaphysical source* shifts from faculty and student governance to the administrative order exercise of command and control, with reduced participative democracy. Under the undifferentiated individual ontology, a university is focused on financial recompense, which rules supreme over other modes of existence. This creates the question of whether enacting a different ontology will change the downward spiral of the public university, and can the public comprehend that the business model of educational labor process is eroding society?

The language and concepts of Business Process Reengineering at a large public university in New Mexico (as described above) is thin, impoverished, and reductionist. Our richness is relegated to currency, to spreadsheet calculation, and to virtual abstraction in the University-as-Corporation model. What is fundamentally real with respect to a public university is the caring democratic and participative community, which was once a concrete relational experience that has been displaced by the undifferentiated individual ontology. A caring community does not support pseudo-participation and a thinness of humanity.

6.1 *Whereto for the Public University*

This ontological conflict has resulted in an identity crisis for the public university, and challenges whether the goal of the public university is to educate the population or generate profit. To date, it appears the battle for education is a losing proposition, and the public university is becoming profit centric. However, if it were to entirely become a profit center it might lose its mission and cease to exist (Hartman, 2017).

It is apparent the conflicts between ontologies are not merely intellectual, but threaten the existence of higher public education. As Whitehead (2010) indicates, without ontological coherence, an organization's existence is threatened. While integration would be beneficial, how can it occur when different groups within the university congregate on fundamentally different metaphysical sources?

Although Follett did not directly address resolutions that occur during stages of ontological conflict, similar bodies of process theory have explored this very subject. Ontological conflicts are akin to a cosmology episode (Weick, 1993) that may threaten life, limb or eyesight (Johannisson & Olaison, 2007) or, if they are socially constructed they may be solved by participants (Grint, 2005). In the case of the public university, the message should be conveyed to both the academic faculty and profit-seeking administrators that the existence of the public university is threatened without serious intervention. This threat of existence, if communicated properly (especially via storytelling as illustrated in Follett (1941) or Pelly (2016a)) may encourage the conflicting structures of the university to dissipate in favor of new forms through an awakening of social capital (Johannisson & Olaison, 2007). Through the use of an effective narrative, perhaps a new technique can encourage a form of conresence that is unitary, relational, process oriented, and would honor the ideas of Mary Parker Follett.

6.2 *Proposed Follettian Interventions*

The current public university governance fails to harmonize ongoing differences. The proposed counter-strategy for higher education based upon a cohesive relational process ontology and corresponding narrative is called Ensemble Leadership Theory (ELT) (Rosile, Boje, & Nez, 2015). ELT finds harmony in differences, in diversity of voices and characters, and works through theatric performances of leadership in what Whitehead (2010) calls a process of becoming harmonized, or in Follett's terms, interweaving differences in a process of becoming "self-in-and-through-others" (Follett, 1918, p. 8, as cited in Stout & Staton, 2011, p. 83). A combination of ELT and Follett's differentiated relational ontology was successfully implemented in leadership (Mgt 388v), in consulting (Mgt448/Mgt548), and sustainability development (Mgt 375v/BA 550) courses currently taught at a large public university in New Mexico. Unfortunately, it was not enough to turn the tides on the neoliberal agenda at this university; however, it provides a seed for future reforms. As a story, ELT can awaken social capital as can a communicated emergency (Grint, 2005; Johannisson & Olaison, 2007) or a powerful narrative (Follett, 1941).

In a given situation, the co-creation of the ensemble does not deny individual differences. Rather, in an on-going process of ensemble-creation and working through conflicts, the communicative expressions of each individual interweaves into an ensemble, a "process of harmonizing differences" and "constructive conflict"

(Follett, 1995c, as cited in Stout & Staton, 2011, 283). A quelle of Ensemble Learning Theory is a communicated or narrative emergency (Grint, 2005; Johannisson & Olaison, 2007). By communicating the gravity of the public university's situation with adherents of the differentiated individual and undifferentiated individual ontologies, both parties can search for a new set of metaphysical sources and embrace the differentiated relational ontology. This emergency may be the seed for deliberate reflection (Bagelman & Bagelman, 2016) and an ensuring a necessary discussion to resolve this impasse. Ensemble Learning Theory can be the specific avenue for ontological shift.

ELT is a process of becoming that integrates differences in the everyday experience of conflict resolution. Leading by togetherness parallels Follett's differentiated relational ontology, as both utilize harmonizing for integrating differences into creative expression. ELT and Follettian differentiated relational ontology are alternatives to the dominant individualist strategies of public universities. The undifferentiated individual ontological hierarchy of university departments, representative governance of the faculty senate, and administrative command and control hierarchy cannot coexist with a differentiated relational ontology's self-organization and harmonizing processes of differences. The ontologies are irreconcilable, producing inherent discord in the same situation. The self-ordering, self-organizing of a differentiated relational ontology as well as Ensemble Leadership are about 'nexūs' (the plural of nexus) (Stout & Staton, 2011, p. 80).

Mary Parker Follett's (1918) ideas are relevant to the political problems of contemporary public universities. Follett brings many difficulties of the public university to light. In "The New State" Follett (1918) establishes a standpoint on the problems between (faculty) labor and (university administration) management, especially when the state provides the capital. Faculty labor power is gathered and exercised outside of the state government in ways that can influence state funding of public universities. It is the self-organization of faculty, students, and staff that can counter the state and negotiate democracy in the future. There are two issues:

1. The unique configuration of labor, management, and capital in public universities; and,
2. The ability of labor to organize pressure on the state as the holder of capital in this system.

Follett's democracy is the political dualism of liberty and equality. Its leaders are not bosses of political pluralism. The public university can enact creative citizenship. "The 'harmony' that comes from the domination of one man is not the kind we want" (Follett, p. 918, 26). The Board of Regents, Chancellor, Provost, and Deans should not harmonize cooperation by bribing, coercing, or bullying faculty, staff, and students into submission, as found in the undifferentiated individual ontology (Pelly, 2016b, 2017).

Follettian differentiated relational ontology has different theories and concepts for these two opposing public functions. For example, state funding and tuition and fees are negotiated by administrators. Research brings in outside actors in the private sector through grants and contracts for service. There is a negotiated give-and-take integrative process of interplay (as an alternative to domination and compromise) (Follett, 1918, p. 9). This is a reference to Hegelian dialectical development process, the "group spirit" in Follett's terms (Follett, p. 918, 30).

"The complex reciprocal action, the intricate interweaving of the members of the group, is the social process" (Follett, 1918, 33). Follett highlights differences in the collective process. Reciprocal adapting, the interknitting of differences, and its accumulated effect is the irresistible flow of life, our existence, and reaching a richer synthesis becomes a fresh difference leading to new unities in ever broadening fields of activity (Follett, 1918, p. 35). This is in part a Hegelian sense of dialectical development. Heterogeneity, not homogeneity in the social organization where difference welcomes difference in the large whole is its creative synthesis. "Difference in itself is not a vital force, but what accompanies it is - the unifying spirit" (Follett, p. 918, p. 1). "It is the spirit of democracy" (Follett, 1918, p. 43).

Follett focuses on human potential (human well being), co-active participation (participation leadership), self-organizing teams, and shared power in a system of organization adaptation to continuously shifting environments. Follett viewed organizational systems as communities of diverse individuals (and networks of self-managed teams) that need not have dominance. The innovative ideas of Follett, her focus in humanizing organizations, building human potential, developing participative leadership systems of co-action and power sharing need to be situated as an alternative to organizations facing ontological conflicts. In summary, a Follettian differentiated relational ontology can serve as a way to resist the individualist ontologies of the neoliberal university, its ontology of fear and anxiety, its surveillance, and power-over command and control.

7 Conclusion

The public university is currently at a crossroads with respect to its future path. Which road the university takes will ultimately determine not only its identity, but also the very fabric of its existence. Under the current ontological impasse, the public university may cease to exist. At first blush, it appears that the public university may be forced to choose between two individualist ontologies: the undifferentiated individual ontology and the differentiated individual ontology. The differentiated individual ontology, with its emphasis on ontological freedom with a simultaneous lack of coordination, appeared to favor academicians' desire for a plurality of leadership and academic freedom. The undifferentiated individual ontology focuses on control and adherence to the values of a metaphysical source.

Faculty follow a differentiated individual ontology. Their core beliefs stem from individual and a-relational conceptions of the university. They educate students and further their agendas in unique ways based upon their academic backgrounds and core competencies. This approach was effective during the golden age of the public university when funding was abundant. In the face of weaker finances, the public university searched for external support, and shifted to an undifferentiated individual ontology. This model treats the university as a modern bureaucracy and as a business. In lieu of functioning as a supplement to the ontology of the faculty, it has supplanted the interests of professors and students.

This ontological conflict endangers the existence of the university. Two conflicting ontologies cannot exist within the same organization, and may cause the organization to cease concrescence. In the face of this threat, a new ontology based upon Folletian and Whiteheadian ideals, the differentiated relational ontology, may preserve the university. The specific application of the differentiated relational ontology advocated in this work is ELT, which can be used to communicate this impending disaster through a robust narrative to harmonize differences and awaken social capital between actors in the university. Irrespective of whether the public university is able to implement ELT, it is imperative this ontological conflict be resolved.

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