

# Hawthorne contribution to organisational management business essay



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Management and its practices have been in existence for a very long period of time and is not an unknown subject to human nature. Kings used management to rule over territories were they had to occupy as their kingdom and govern it in the best means possible. Success or failure of such kingdoms might be the result of good or bad management. Organisational behaviour can be termed as “ the field of study concerned with the actions of people at work in an organisation” (Robins, 2006)

The term “ Hawthorne” is a term used within several behavioural management theories and is originally derived from the western electric company’s large factory complex named Hawthorne works.

Starting in 1905 and operating until 1983, Hawthorne works had 45, 000 employees and it produced a wide variety of consumer products, including telephone equipment, refrigerators and electric fans. As a result, Hawthorne works is well-known for its enormous output of telephone equipment and most importantly for its industrial experiments and studies carried out.

Between 1924 and 1932, a series of experiments were carried out on the employees at the facility. The original purpose was to study the effect of lighting on workers’ productivity.

The first illumination was conducted in three departments where illumination level in each department was increased at stated intervals. Puzzling results were obtained, production increased, though it did not correspond with the change in lighting level. The second illumination study utilized a test group and control group, where the test group had an increase in illumination and the control group at constant level. Results concluded that not only

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production increased in both groups but nearly at an identical rate. Another third illumination study used the same procedure but instead illumination was reduced. Still, efficiency in production of both groups increased until the lighting in the test group became so poor that the workers complained. From these studies conclusions were brought forward that employee output was not related to lighting conditions and that too many variables were not controlled hence findings could have been biased.

Such behavioural results initiated an interest within Harvard university professors Elton Mayo, Fritz Roethlisberger and William J. Dickson. Using a study group other experiments were conducted to examine what effect of monotony and fatigue on productivity and how to control those using variables such as rest breaks, work hours and incentives.

At normal conditions the work week was of 48 hours, including Saturdays, with no rest pauses. On the first experiment workers were put on piece-work salary where they were paid on each part they produced, as a result the output increased. On the second experiment the workers were given 2 rest pauses of 5 minutes each for 5 weeks and again output went up. The third experiment further increased the pauses to 10 min and the output went up sharply. For the fourth experiments a 6, 5 min breaks were given and output fell slightly as the workers complained that the work rhythm was broken. On the fifth experiments conditions for experiment three were repeated but this time a free hot meal was given by the company and output went up again. At the sixth experiment, workers were dismissed at 4. 30p. m. Instead of 5. 00p. m an output increase was recorded.

The seventh experiment had the same results as experiments six even though the workers were dismissed at 4. 00 p. m. on the eighth and final experiment, all improvements were taken away and workers returned to their original working conditions. Surprisingly, results concluded that output was the highest ever recorded!

Another experiment was conducted by Mayo at the bank wiring room. The work involved a group of workers carrying out tasks such as wiring, soldering and inspection, which were all overseen by a single observer. At the first few days workers would not work freely as an outsider was present, but with time normal behaviour resumed which included talking, fighting and helping out each other. It was also noted that some employees tend to change their way of carrying out their task within time to time, in order to reduce task monotony.

Upon concluding such experiments Mayo commented that the obtained high productivity results may be affected due to the fact that workers have “ the feeling of being studied” which led him to further investigation. In fact to his amusement, Mayo discovered that the general upward production trend is independent of any changes in work conditions and that response to productivity is non-linear. From the bank wiring room, Mayo also stated that workers will scale back productivity to suit group norm and that organisations are social systems in which human interaction play a critical role. Being in a team, unlike on the normal factory floor, the selected workers together with their observer formed a social atmosphere which increased freedom and attitude towards work reducing the monotony of the task. (Mayo, 1927-1933)

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His study now contradicted Taylor's theory that of high productivity is a result of longer working hours and using a single established procedure given by their managers.

Through Hawthorne experiments Mayo discovered the fundamental concept which seems obvious in today's behavioural management theories. “

Workplaces are social environments and within them, people are motivated by much more than economic self-interest” (Human Relations Contributors, 2012) hence, the following theories were applied:

The first theory is based on psychological contract where an unwritten understanding between the worker and employer of what is expected from them exists.

Second theory states that a worker's motivation can be enhanced by applying an interest in them as Mayo did through his experiments.

Team work is the third theory, where worker's motivation could be increased through it as it allows people to form strong working relationships and increases trust between the workers. Work groups are created formally by the employer but also occur informally as characters are attracted to each other.

The fourth theory concerns the social aspect of work which workers are motivated through it, as demonstrated by the test group socialising during work and the subsequent increase in motivation.

Recognition of workers also induces motivation, security and a sense of belonging which is said to be the fifth theory.

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Sixth and final theory is the communication between workers and management. This influences workers morale and productivity. Motivation is enhanced through a good working relationship with management. (Elton Mayo: Hawthorne Experiments)

A new milestone in organisational behaviour was set and Mayo and his team found a way to improve productivity by creating a healthy team spirit environment between workers and supervisors labelling it as The Hawthorne Effect. Such theory has been broadened and the term Hawthorne Effect nowadays has several definitions. By time, the Hawthorne theory evolved within the management and organisation sector. Having illumination as the basis of the Hawthorne effect, “ People will be more productive when appreciated” (Hawthorne Effect, 2012).

The Hawthorne effect is a physiological phenomenon that produces an improvement in human behaviour or performance as a result of increased attention of superiors and colleagues. As a combined effort, the effect can enhance results by creating sense of teamwork and a common purpose. As in many ways the Hawthorne effect is interpreted, it generates new ideas concerning importance of work groups and leadership, communication, motivation and job design, which brought forward emphasis on personnel management and human relations. (Mullins, 2007)

Although the Hawthorne effect tends to be an ideal contributor to organisational management, it contains a few flaws which such a study is criticized upon. Having the experiments being conducted in controlled environments, lack of validity may exist as the workers knew they were

observed hence produced better performances. The human aspect in the Hawthorne experiments was given too much importance were it alone cannot improve production as other factors are a must. Group decision making might also evolve in a flaw as on occasions individual decision making is vital as it might be the way to prevent failures within a system. Another flaw contributes to the freedom given to the workers by the Hawthorne effect. The important constructive role of supervisors may be lost with excess informality within the groups and in fact such a flaw may result in lowering the performance and productivity. (Akrani, 2011)

The Hawthorne experiments marked a significant step forward in human behaviour and are regarded as one of the most important social science investigations and said to be the foundations of relations approach to management and the development of organisational behaviour. Managers are to be aware of the criticism evolved through years on such a study before adopting it. In my opinion, the Hawthorne effect is a validated theory and could be applied within the organisation, though care is to be taken and a limit is to be set. The use of team groups is acceptable as it creates a caring factor between workers and competitively amongst other teams. Supervisors are to keep their role and limit socialising with staff on the shop floor to always keep their role and hence standards are always kept to the maximum. Team meeting are to be held which allows the worker to give out his opinion and feel important by contributing his ideas to the organisation.

Whichever management structure an organisation is to adopt, regular reviews are to be carried out in order to keep a stable output and good standard in quality. Such a strategy will ensure continuous evolution of the <https://assignbuster.com/hawthorne-contribution-to-organisational-management-business-essay/>

organisational management and a successful organisation producing maximum efficiency in its produce.