

The Hawthorne studies and their implications



According to Huczynski and Buchanan, “ In the United States, during the 1920s and 1930s, the Hawthorne studies were to lead to the creation of the human relations movement and a highly influential school of academic and practical management thinking”. The Hawthorne studies revolutionised the way in which the management of an organization deals with its human resources and the relationship between the different levels of the human resource chain.

The Human Relations Movement originated in the United States of America and was the outcome of the Hawthorne Studies. The Movement and its basic theories were developed primarily by Elton Mayo. These experiments were conducted in the Western Electric Hawthorne Works in Chicago from the early 1920s to the 1930s. The Hawthorne Studies involved the examination and measurement of the affect of physical working conditions such as lighting, humidity, cleanliness, etc. and psychological factors such as managerial leadership, payment systems, working hours and respites between work on the output and productivity of the workers and on employee motivation.

The most significant discovery from the Hawthorne experiments was that workers were not so much impacted by physical working conditions and remunerations, or by changes thereof, than they were by the very fact that they were being observed. When workers became aware that they were being supervised, they felt that they were an imperative part of the organization. They felt the need to perform better. This raised employee morale and motivation and in turn increased employee productivity. Thus, the term “ Hawthorne Effect” was coined and used widely to denote the

improvement or modification of the behaviour of a subject under study due to the fact that it was being studied.

Subsequent studies that were conducted revealed that informal groups and informal social conventions within the organisation played an important role in determining the work habits and opinions of the workers along with the organisation and conduct of work.

Course of the Experiments

Changes in Lighting: The initial step in the experiments was the gauging of worker productivity against changes in the intensity of lighting conditions. Two groups were selected, lighting being changed for one, but kept constant for the other. However both groups were under the impression that lighting was changed. Mayo observed that output rose in both cases.

Relay Assembly: This was the most crucial aspect of the experiments. These were conducted mainly on a small group of six women to test their responses to certain changes, over a period of five years. First, Mayo attempted to find a correlation between fatigue and monotony and productivity. Changes were made in the work hours, break timings, lunch timings, piece works and physical conditions to assess the workers' responses to each. Next, a group was employed in assembling relays. The effect of changes was evaluated to see how these changes influenced the production and rate of relay assembly. Throughout the experiments an observer or supervisor was made to record the events and incidents, to direct the women and provide help and information where needed and to listen to their feedbacks and complaints.

The most startling observation that was made during these experiments was that the output reached the maximum point when all the incentives, breaks and piece works were taken away from the workers and they were returned to working 48 hour six day weeks. This defied the notion that physical, economic and material benefits affect productivity to the highest degree. Here social factors were at play. The women worked sincerely and to the best of their abilities as a result of being free from any type of coercion. The sense of importance they were endowed with urged them to improve performance. The women under investigation were given the liberty to choose their own techniques of putting the relay parts together. It was noticed that each of them followed different patterns and introduced innovative techniques to avoid monotony. The freedom of movement accorded to the women encouraged them to work responsibly, without inhibitions and incited them to execute tasks in an enhanced manner.

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with the workers to establish their attitude towards their work. It was uncovered that the relationships that existed between the workers and their supervisors and management were highly significant.

Bank Wiring Observation Room: A sample of 14 workers were taken from the production line and observed for six months. No changes in working conditions were implemented. It was noticed that workers developed their own procedures and methods to protect their interests. Production was constant, even after changes in compensation.

Counselling: Counselling sessions were held to discern the problems and complaints of workers towards their jobs.

Inferences

The results of the experiments led Mayo to draw the following conclusions:

Work is a group activity.

Workers should be considered a part of the group, but also as individuals.

The status of the worker within the group, the recognition of his work and a sense of belonging impacts his productivity more than working conditions or pay scales.

Workers are motivated by the attention and importance given to them by their supervisors. The relationship of the worker with his superiors and with the management was imperative to his performance and efficiency.

Social and emotional factors play a vital part in determining productivity of workers. The workplace is a social system and the workers are influenced by internal and external social demands.

Informal groups within an organisation have a strong bearing on the attitudes and behaviour of the workers.

Group cooperation needs to be planned and cultivated.

According to Wilson and Rosenfeld, George Elton Mayo stressed the following:

Natural groups, in which social aspects take precedence over functional organizational structures.

Upwards communication, by which communication is two way, from worker to chief executive, as well as vice versa.

Cohesive and good leadership is needed to communicate goals and to ensure effective and coherent decision making.

Thus, Elton Mayo looked at the organisation of work from a totally new perspective. He stressed on the social, rather than technical organisation of work. The inferences made by Elton Mayo led to the development of the Human Relations Movement. The implications of Mayo's perspectives on modern day organisations are immense. The propositions laid down by Mayo were radical and changed the way in which organisations view their workers and their productive capacities. Mayo's suggestions are the premise of human relations and their management in various organisations, even today.

Importance of Human Relations Movement for Today's Organisations

Mayo and his ideas have made organisations recognise the fact that apart from monetary and material rewards, social satisfaction and a sense of belonging is also important for the workers of the company. In order to guarantee that a worker will perform to the best of his ability, not only his economic but also emotional and social needs must be taken into account.

Companies integrate the propositions of Elton Mayo and the Human Relations Movement perspective into their human resource management techniques by recognising the workers' need for acknowledgement. As

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observed, workers tend to be more productive when they feel that they are an integral part of a group or the organisation and when their work is appreciated.

The management of modern day organisations involves these perspectives to motivate employees and boost their morale. When an employee senses that the organisation is taking an interest in him, he will be motivated to enhance the execution of his tasks.

Workers also perform better when there is internal stimulus, from within the working group rather than when there is pressure from management. Thus, the management must ensure that too much pressure or control is not placed on the worker. Instead group dynamics should be studied and control should be accorded to each group correspondingly.

The propositions, laid down by Mayo have also taught organisations the importance of relationships. By maintaining healthy and positive relations with the workers and strengthening the relations at each level of the organisation, the management can further augment employee motivation, satisfaction and productivity. Mistrust or animosity should not be allowed to develop between the workers and their superiors.

Communication is also an essential aspect of keeping a worker motivated. There ought to be adequate two-way communication between supervisors and workers. Instructions should be properly and unambiguously given to the employees. Further, employees' feedback should be given due recognition. Their problems, complaints and suggestions should be heard and taken into consideration.

Mayo's suggestions also help organisations comprehend the importance of teams in the workplace. Groups and their functioning play a crucial role in the operation of the organisations. The integration of group or team goals with the goals of the company can aid the latter in ensuring greater efficiency.

Freedom of movement should be conferred on the workers as it has been perceived that workers tend to do better when they have the independence to function according to their own methods and techniques.

Thus, the Hawthorne Studies and the Human Relations Movement, spearheaded by Elton Mayo have made remarkable contributions to the administration and management of the human resources of an organisation. Since then, there have been many developments in this field. Nonetheless, even modern day organisations choose to consider and implement Mayo's notions and perspectives when dealing with the organisation of work and management of workers.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_Relations_Movement