

# History of management thought

[Business](#), [Management](#)



The history of management thought has come through so many discoveries and studies over the years. Many theorists have come up with various views by use of theories in the explanation of management history. This paper is a discussion on the history of management thought from one of the theorist, Elton Mayo. It will give a focus in the social, political, intellectual, and economic factors, which influenced the theorists in the development of his theories. It will also give a practical application on the relevance of Elton Mayo theories to managers of today especially on how they manage their organizations.

### Discussion

History of management having come through various perspectives in relation to the various theories, Elton Mayo, through Neo-classical theory of Management in a Human Relations approach during the year 1930 gave a view that has so far led to the construction of a manager as a leader. Mayo has secured the fame of being a leader through his several experiments, which has become one of the greatest turning points in the thinking of management (Wren & Daniel, 2004). He introduced the concept of human relations to management thought hence treating it as human relations approach to management. Being a sociologist, psychologist, and an organization theorist, Mayo was appointed a lecturer in the University of Queensland in 1911 where he taught logic, ethics, and psychology and later he took a post at the University of Pennsylvania in 1923. This enabled him to build up his knowledge in management related issues.

During the time he was in this institution, he got involved with the investigation, which acted as a path for Hawthorne experiment. During the Second World War, Mayo was also among the contributors to the supervisors training development whereby he had focused on the training within industry programs. This program was lately adopted in United States mostly in large organizations. Mayo also was writing about democracy, freedom, and social problems that many workers face in the industrialization of the society. This brought him to the position of an advisor to the British government where he was involved in solving problems dealing with the industries (Kyle & Chris, 2011). Because of all this experiences, he started to work on the Hawthorne experiment.

In the experiment, he took a team to western electric's Hawthorne plant where they evaluated psychological reactions, and attitude of workers to job situation. In undergoing this, they had made an attempt to carry out an investigation into the characteristics of work setting especially how the illumination level can affect the workers performance and fatigue. To do this, they measured the workers productivity at various illumination levels and they found out that productivity increases regardless of any illumination level (Jayanta, 2006). They named this effect as the Hawthorne effect, which states that the attitude of workers towards their managers is a factor affecting the level of workers performance. (Roth, 1998) Throughout this experiment, Mayo developed human relations theory of management hence he is rightly considered as the pioneer of this theory.

The role Mayo played in the development of this management thought is largely associated with his discovery of the social man and the need for social man in the work place. Before he got involve with any research, Lawrence. J. Henderson introduced him to Parieto's theory where he applied the theories of sociology he learnt during his management studies. His adaptability to the sociology theories allowed him to write a book with the title, Human Problems on Industrial Civilization. Mayo believed that when workers are treated with respect and their needs are met, they have a possibility to work well with the management.

Some of the major findings from this experiment were that their behavior as employees is under the influence of their mental attitude, and emotions including their prejudice. Mayo also concluded that if the workers are doing the work in a group, they tend to develop a common psychological bond, which unites them as a group in a form of the informal oorganization. According to him, he believed that an organization is not only a workplace, but also a place of social environment where employees interact and grow together. Therefore, human and social motivations play important role in increasing the productivity of the organization apart from a financial incentive. In addition, in his experiment Mayo identifies the fact if the workers are given a special attention by the management; they tend to have a high production irrespective of any changes in the working conditions of organization.

One of the important implications of this theory of management thought is that, managers have to understand that both their behavior and the workers

and the working setting are all considered to be the important factor in explanation of the workers level of work performance. As for managers, there is a necessity to understand the informal organization, its behavioral rules, system and norms emerging from this group when they are trying to manage or bring a change to a certain behavior in the organization (Gibson, 1999). This trickles down to understanding of organizational behavior as a whole. Therefore, as for manager, there is a need to strive for a foreign equilibrium between technical organization, and the human nature of the workers hence a manager should develop skills to handle both human relations and situations. These skills include diagnostic skills in understanding of human behavior, and interpersonal skills in dealing with counseling, motivation and perhaps in communication (Peterson, Fleet, 1994).

Mayo also stated that supervisors should undergo some training for receiving special skills in understanding the human nature of workers, and how to channel it to getting a higher productivity in the organization despite of the workers differences in terms of their characters. In this approach used by Mayo, corporation of employees, their team spirit and satisfaction are the core factors useful in increasing productivity of the organization. He has gone further to point out that social need of the workers and the role of the management in fulfilling such needs.