

Elton mayo: biography, key works and theories essay sample

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Elton George Mayo stands out as one of the prominent personalities in the management discourse. He was born on the 26th day of December 1880 in Adelaide, Australia to the family of George Gibbes Mayo and Henrietta Mary Donaldson. He joined collegiate School of St. Peter in Adelaide, and attempted to enroll as a medical student. When his efforts to secure this chance failed, he went to England and indulged in writing. Upon his return to Australia, Mayo joined the University of Adelaide where he pursued philosophy. Graduating in 1912, he was given an appointment at the University of Queensland where he was a pioneer lecturer of philosophy and education. Mayo also taught economics, psychology, metaphysics, and ethics in addition to practicing management consulting (Lucas). After he resigned in 1923, Mayo transferred to the University of Pennsylvania where he studied the value of work breaks on worker productivity in a number of textile firms (Dingley, 1997, p. 31). It is here that he delved into organizational sociology and psychology, a combination which baffled many.

Major worksIt was not until 1926 that Mayo was introduced to sociological studies. Since then, he embarked on applying sociological to other management studies of the time. Thus, he became a pioneering researcher in the sociology of management in the infamous Hawthorne studies conducted between 1927 and 1932 which applied statistical methods in an effort to demonstrate the relevance of considering human factors in the workplace alongside physical factors, for instance, the environment and ergonomics (Gillespie, 2003, p. 45). Basically, these studies were aimed at examining strategies of improving productivity by initiating various changes,

for instance lighting conditions. When these studies were completed, Mayo derived a number of hypotheses.

These included the articulation that individual workers must be seen as members of a group but not treated in isolation; that group affiliation supersedes monetary incentives and favorable working conditions; that informal groups formed at the workplace strongly influence the behavior of those workers in a group; and that the management must understand and tend to the social needs of employees, rather than working against them (Mayo, 1930, p. 326). Through these studies, Mayo demonstrated that productivity is dependent on motivation and morale. Another insight provided by these studies is the Hawthorne effect, which highlighted that the productivity of workers would tend to increase on discovering that they are being observed or studied (Gillespie, 2003, p. 72). This revelation was a major breakthrough in management.

His publication, *The social problems of an industrialized civilization* appeared in 1933, and espoused on the importance of using psychological insights in solving human-related conflicts at the workplace (Dingley, 1997, p. 93).

Notably, the Hawthorne studies were instrumental in building his reputation as an outstanding character in the application of sociological knowledge to the theories of management. By using statistics as an analytical tool rather than a deliberate attempt to advance the science of statistics itself, Mayo was able to realize this objective (Lucas). After the Second World War came to an end, Mayo retreated to England and continued to lecture. He succumbed to a stroke on September 7, 1949. Long gone are his days, but

his contributions in management discourse and other academic arenas remain quite significant to date.

The social, political, intellectual and economic factors which influenced Elton MayoTo a large extent, Mayos ideas and theoretical conceptualizations were influenced by the social, political, intellectual and economic climate that prevailed during the time. Worthwhile to mention is the fact that he lived in era characterized by social and political unrest precipitated by the two world wars (Mayo, 1984, p. 144). During the First World War, mayo was involved in clinical treatment of well-shocked troops. Through this experience, he gained insights through observations and treatment of individuals. This became the basis of his general approach to the investigation of issues related to contemporary industrial society (Mayo, 1945. p. 116).

Mayo also identified with the progressive politics of early 29th century, and he was thus able to understand the plight of workers, who were often oppressed. Similarly, the processes of industrialization and urbanization elicited deep concerns. Particularly, his observation of the high level of political conflict as well as industrial strife in Australia led him to derive a relationship between war neurosis and the psychological causes of industrial upheavals (Wood 83). To this end therefore, he argued that workers motivation was largely dependent on the social function of work. In his opinion, the solution to such industrial unrest was to not to be found in radical politics, but in sociological inquiry and industrial management (Riegly, 1995, p. 1-2).

The intellectual climate that prevailed at the time also contributed to the growth of his ideas. Intellectual inquiry and exploration was tolerated. When he was appointed to investigate high labor turnover at a textile firm as an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania, Mayo did a commendable job, which saw him appointed as an associate professor at the Harvard School of Business Administration (Mayo, 1923, p. 419). Here, he was actively involved in inquiries aimed at ascertaining the relationships between social and personal factors and work output (Mayo, 1933, p. 24). The outcomes of this research were a major breakthrough in contemporary social inquiry. In 1926, Lawrence Henderson Mayo was introduced to Parietos sociological theory (Lucas). From then onwards, he was able to apply sociological theories in management-related research, which culminated in the Hawthorne studies. Furthermore, the evolution of disciplines such as sociology, economics, political science and anthropology in the 20th century also influenced his worldview.

The relevance of the theories to managers today More than 50 years after his death, Mayos ideas have not been rendered redundant. his observations of employees productivity under varying conditions provided deeper insights as to the real source of motivation for workers. Rather than the commonly held notion that employees are motivated by environmental factors and monetary incentives, his experiments highlighted that that social or relational factors, for instance companionship and attention are more important (Smith, 2004, p. 491). Despite the tidings of these studies, some managers in contemporary enterprises still remain oblivious of this fact. Ironically,

virtually every manager concurs that employee motivation encourages greater output, and thus higher returns on investment. It is commonplace to find a scenario where management improves the working conditions at the workplace and avails promotional opportunities, but fails to capture implicit issues like paying attention to the worries and woes of the employee fraternity, for instance, remaining ignorant of the potential sources of distress and possible solutions (Mayo, 1947, p. 124). Thus, embracing Mayos ideas could go a long way in improving productivity.

Unlike other scholars like Fayol who emphasized stability of management, Mayo stressed the importance of social stability within the workforce (Wood, 2004, p. 152). According to him, spontaneous cooperation and the fostering of cohesion among the employee fraternity was crucial in the realization of organizational success. Put in other words, Mayo underscored the significance of goal congruence, where the aspirations of the employees are harmonized with the organizations goals and objectives (Smith, 1998, p. 221). Additionally, he advocated for the establishment of proper communication channels at all levels: amongst employees themselves, between the workforce and the management as well as amongst the management staff themselves. Although management in contemporary setting must exercise authority, organizational success can not be attained unless the management listens to the workforce, and envisions taking the organization to the next level. In the same vein, contemporary management must embrace this great idea.

Conclusion The ongoing discussion reveals the numerous contributions that Elton Mayo made to the management discourse. Through the Hawthorne experiments, he managed to prove that management involvement with employees was fundamental in solving unrest and problems at the workforce. He was able to provide sound evidence of the significance of human relations in the workplace, and this enriched the existing conceptualizations on management. Though his ideas were not fully conclusive and were indeed criticized, Mayo's studies inspired many theorists to create their own organizational theories. Considering his theories of management and employee productivity hypotheses, Elton Mayo qualifies to be regarded as the brainchild of human relations.

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