

Analysing the history of human relations movement



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This assignment will analyse the human relations movement from when and how it was formed to its importance in management structure today. It will include relevant information about classical and scientific management providing an example of an organisation today. It will conclude with whether classical and scientific management has been eradicated by the human relations movement.

To begin with the human relations movement focuses on the environment and conditions in which employees are expected to work; the attitude and behaviour within the workplace; the social relations between employees and managers and how satisfied the employee is in the workplace. All these factors can be motivators for employees to improve their job performance.

The human relations movement according to Mullins (2002, p903) can be defined as

“ A management approach based on the consideration of and attention to the social factors at work and the behaviour of employees within an organisation and the satisfaction of individuals needs through groups at work”.

Elton Mayo was the founder of the human relations movement which occurred during the 1920s and 1930s. The idea for the human relations movement came from conducting a series of experiments which became known famously as the Hawthorne studies, this was created as a result of these experiments and their findings.

As a Harvard professor, Elton Mayo was employed by the Hawthorne plant of the American Western Electric Company in Chicago because of the low productivity of workers which took place between 1927 and 1932. There were four stages to the Hawthorne experiments; the illumination experiments, the relay assembly test room, the interviewing programme and the bank wiring observation room. During the illumination experiment stage lighting was used as a factor to analyse the productivity of the staff. The employees were arranged into two groups one of which was a control group and the other an experimental group. The control group had the same amount of lighting throughout whereas the experimental group had lighting constantly changing. In both groups productivity increased even when lighting conditions became poor. As the results were inconclusive other experiments were arranged on factors other than the changes in working conditions. The relay assembly test room was the next stage in which six women workers were assessed. Here they changed working hours, lunch times and rests. Their observer was also using a friendly approach, listening to the employees and their complaints. The production increased again and this is when Mayo recognised that it was the fact that they were given attention and noticed by management that the productivity increased. A crucial part in the Hawthorne experiments was the interviewing programme which assessed how the workers felt towards their supervisors. They used a non-directive approach and interviewers would listen in a friendly non-judgemental manner. This found out more about the employees feelings and attitudes with more specific information about the management, supervision, company, working relations and even the workers lives and views. These results showed that relationships with people have an effect on the workers

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attitudes which in turn affects the productivity. The bank wiring observation room was another experiment that took place, where fourteen men were chosen to work in an observation room with working conditions that changed slightly over six months or more. The group began to form their own organisation and rules with their own informal social relations.

“ Mayo’s conclusion was that the changes had been made in consultation with the employees, and that this factor had been the determining influence on productivity, together with the fact that the employees had a good working relationship with their supervisors.” (Sutherland & Canwell, 2004, p202-203)

An example of an organisation that uses the human relations movement today is Google. They avoid bureaucracy with their employees and allow them to use their own initiative. The managers work with the employees to create ideas which they find relevant and work on projects which they think are of importance. They employ people who want to succeed and therefore will work to the best of their ability to make Google a success allowing them the choice to make their own changes in order to feel more motivated. The employees look forward to the social aspects of the job and sharing ideas, they also get the benefit of good quality food and services such as massages.

The human relations movement conflicted with Frederick Winslow Taylor’s scientific management theory since Mayo believed that there must be other ways to motivate workers other than strict working procedures, financial incentives and scientifically timed tasks. There was a breakthrough in

scientific management in 1911 within the peak of the industrial revolution when Taylor published 'The Principles of scientific management' which described the four principles of Taylor's theory. These were that jobs should be broken down into different parts; workers should be trained and scientifically selected; management should co-operate with employees to make sure the method is reinforced and there should be equal division of work between both managers and employees.

"The principle object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer (the development of every branch of the business to its highest state of excellence), coupled with the maximum prosperity for each employee" (Taylor, as quoted in Boddy & Paton, 1998, p48)

The main reason for scientific management was to introduce a sense of control and order within the working environment. Productivity took longer because parts were being produced individually. This also meant that unskilled workers had the ability to do jobs when trained correctly by managers. Taylor believed that employees were lazy and the only way to motivate them was through financial incentives. This theory was followed by three more theorists; Frank and Lillian Gilbreth along with Henry Gantt. This is still alive today and is used as a management structure in some industries. An example of where scientific management is used today is in call centres. The employees are regularly checked up on by their supervisors in order to motivate them to give a good standard of service. They record and listen to their employees conversations in order to keep them under control. The

employees are also given a basic wage and commission on every sale they make; they get bonuses for meeting daily or weekly targets.

Classical management is another earlier theory that was developed by Henri Fayol who was known as 'the father of modern management'. Fayol, (as quoted in G. A. Cole, 1996, P12) defined management as to "forecast and plan, to organise, to command, to coordinate and to control". His theory consisted of 14 principles which were division of work so that employees knew their duties, authority and responsibility to give clear and reasonable instructions; discipline to show authority and be firm with employees when necessary; unity of command so that employees know their job; unity of direction so companies have an understandable strategy; subordination so that the employees put their job responsibilities first; remuneration so that employees get paid a fair wage; centralisation so that the organisation has a main control area; scalar chain meaning employees know their job positions; order so that the company is organised; equity to provide equal opportunities; stability of personnel to provide employees with job security; initiative so that employees don't constantly need to be told what to do by management and esprit de corps where employees work as a team to show company spirit. An example of where classical management is used today is Costco, a wholesale warehouse chain selling merchandise at lower prices for purchase by businesses. The CEO Jim Sinegal works on the retail floor with the employees, running the business and paying employees 50 percent more than competitors; contributing even more for health benefits. The businesses earnings grow at a faster pace than its top competitors showing that classical management is still effective.

Even though the human relations movement is the management structure most common in today's industries it has not eradicated classical and scientific management as there are some world famous companies which use them today and have become successful in doing so.