

Hawthorne studies



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In the early century, human beings were considered to be a little more than attached to machines since the Industrial Revolution (Fountain, 2006, pg 45). The importances of the human relations were not considered a factor to contribute to an organisation growth. In 1924, Hawthorne Studies was first initiated by the Western Electrical Company and National Academy of Science to study on the "relation of quality and quantity of illumination to efficiency in industry" which is known as Illumination studies. Roethlisberger & Dickson, 2003, pg 14). From 1927-1933, a series of experiments were conducted once again at Western Electric Work and analyzed by Professor George Elton Mayo who is famous for Hawthorne Effects after the failure for the first studies. These experiments initially wanted to find out the environmental variables and then move to psychological aspects on the workers productivity in the organization. Still, Hawthorne studies may not seem as perfect as it is. Other philosophers have argued and criticized Hawthorne studies.

In this review, the major criticisms of Hawthorne studies will be discussed and also if it will be applicable to apply it in the Asian society. The Ideology Critics Through the entire study of Hawthorne, Mayo wanted to provide a friendly supervision approach and to allow the relation between workers and supervisors to come closer. Mayo justifications are to manipulate workers based on management's ends. In order to secure the workers' cooperative towards the supervisors, the authority of the supervisor must be based on the social skills in order to increase the productivity.

But, this method has been strongly criticized by Daniel Bell. In his writing of 'cow sociologists', he argued on Mayo's experiments for "psychologizing the

workers while ignoring the institutional and power of relationships of industry, and for seeing industrial relations as a problem of communication and leadership rather than accommodation of conflicting of interest" (Bell, 1947). Bell strongly disagrees with Mayo point of views which is to give in to the workers so as to get the workers to cooperate with them and increase the productivity.

Bell argued that with this implementation, this will eventually make the workers to " climb over the head" of the supervisors, hence will result the supervisor to lose their authority on them. The interviewing program is to undertake to explore workers' attitude. Instead of letting the union to take care of the welfare of the workers, Mayo set up this program to allow workers to confide in the interviewers on the problems that they are facing at work. However, they found out that majority of the people are complaining on their personal life experience.

Hence, resulted in the genuine conflict of interest between management and the workers that cannot be resolved by psychotherapy (Gale 2004). Then, majority of the problems that the workers encountered it could not be resolved and Hawthorne studies have failed to recognize other alternative accommodating industrial conflict like collective bargaining. The Methodology Critics The methodology critics that gathered aims directly at the Relay Assembly Test Room. One of the conclusions made by Carey was that there is no attempt to establish sample groups representatives of any larger population of the groups themselves (Carey, 1967, pg 416).

Mayo has only five subjects to be tested in the studies on the productivity in different conditions. The sample size of the subjects that participate in these experiments could not produce accurate statistic as it is way too small to make any conclusion on the Hawthorne studies. This could not represent the whole industries. Further to that, Mayo only brought women into the test. Men were not included initially. This has result gender biasness on the actual result. The workers have also been working on the same job scope so systematic that they are unable to learn more skills.

During one of the experiments on using wage incentives to boost up the total output, Carey has noted that the new incentive system did not increase the weekly output in the beginning. It was only after the dismissal of the two poorest performers and their replacement with two other girls that are highly motivated whose desire for money stemmed as they need money to support the family, it leads the output to increase significantly (Carey, 1967, pg 415). This will make the total output varies. In this context, the two girls will work extra hard just to earn more money during the Hawthorne studies as the incentives is now under individual based.

With the incentive based system, those workers who are the primary source of income for their families tend to work extra harder to earn more. Mayo has therefore concluded that incentive system is a factor that will affect the output but it is an unimportant factor. This is due to that Mayo has little understanding of the workers and their hidden motivation (Gantman, 2005, pg 59). Asian Workplace In countries in Southeast Asia (SEA), employers and government are viewing labour relations that will promote the workplace to

be more cooperative, flexibility, productivity and competitiveness with other countries.

This will be able to prevent the dispute that the employers and the workers will have and will allow them to work align with their goals towards the business organizations. With the advance in the technology, this will result less management by command and supervision. This will allow the technology to replace the human and at the same time will increase the productivity of the outputs. It will be more emphasized on cooperation, information sharing, communication and a more participative approach to manage people (Tallo, 2007, pg 237).

This allows the workers to be able to work off-site or work at home. Under the Hawthorne studies, there are no rules between workers and employers. They are more like friends than employers and workers relationship. Workers are also needed to work in a systematic approach in order to increase the productivity and with supervision. Due to the culture differential between SEA countries and westerns countries, to SEA countries are more conservative. The employers will still maintain a distance with the workers. If the Hawthorne studies, the employers will deem that the workers are disrespect to them.

In the Hawthorne studies, it does not have union to support the welfare of the workers in the organization. The interview is only a point of contact for the customer to make complains to the interviewers. However, it is not a point for them to make any collective bargaining (wage increments, bonuses) with the employers. In the modern society now, the educational

levels of the people are getting higher and higher. People are getting smarter. Hence, they know what they really want and the benefits that they are able to enjoy.

Under the studies of Hawthorne, the workers to be exact, does not have a say in their job scope or wages. In other words, using the Hawthorne studies, it will make the workers to seem that they are being manipulated by the employers since the interviewers are also themselves too. However, in the society nowadays, if the workers felt that they are being abuse, or being unfairly treated, union will step in to negotiate with the employers in order for them to maintain the reputation of the organizations. Further to that, studies have shown that majority of the organizations in the SEA countries are being unionized.

Hawthorne studies enable to help us to understand the factors that will lead to the productivity of the workers. Nevertheless, there are still alot of loop holes on the studies that enable other philosophers to argue and criticism on their view of the Hawthorne studies. Hawthorne studies mainly focus on the western side of the management practices. Until recently, the dominance of American management theory led to the belief that " one size fit all". this means that a good manager in America will be a good manager on other countries too.

However, this management practices will not be as efficient as before anymore. Different countries have different in values, attitude, behaviour and culture. It will not be easy for one to adapt to the management styles (Newman & Nollen, 2010). Word Count : 1349 Reference Bell Daniel, 1947,

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