HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY

(ELTON MAYO)

Elton Mayo is widely recognized as the father of human relations theory. He explained the role of human behaviour in production and also highlighted the importance of communication between the workers and the management.

Elton Mayo in his studies concentrated on fatigue, accidents, production levels, rest periods, working conditions, etc., of industrial workers in factories.

His two among many important researches were:-

I. Research in textile mill near Philadelphia,
II. Research in Western electricity company, Chicago (Hawthorne studies)

I. TEXTILE MILL, PHILADELPHIA

Textile mill near Philadelphia was a model organization with all facilities to workers, was well organised. The employers were highly enlightened and humane.

The labour personnel faced problem in the mule-spinning department of the mill.

Issues were:-

1) Had to hire 250% more workers than the actual requirement. So absenteeism among workers was the main issue.
2) Management also consulted efficiency engineers, several financial incentives were introduced, and number of schemes were launched, but they yielded no appreciable results.

Mayo was consulted to study the problem of multi-spinning Department of the mill.

Mayo’s observations:-

He studied the problems intensely from various angles i.e., physical, social and psychological.

1. He found that almost every piecer working in the mule-spinning department, suffered from foot trouble for which they had no immediate remedy. This trouble developed since every piecer had to walk up and down a long alley, a distance of 30 yards or more, on either side of which the machine head was operating for spinning frames with cotton thread.
2. A single worker had to care 10 to 14 such machines due to which he felt miserable attending to the job.
3. Also found that workers were afraid of the company president because he was a Colonel in the US Army in France both before and during the First World War. So, workers would never protest.

Mayo’s experiments:-

1. INTRODUCTION OF REST PERIODS: He introduced two rest periods of ten minutes each in the morning and again in the afternoon with every team of piecers.
Results:

- The rest period scheme eliminated the problem of physical fatigue.
- Production increased
- Morale improved
- Labour turnover almost came to an end.

2. *INTRODUCTION OF ‘EARN BONUS SCHEME’*: He also introduced ‘*Earn Bonus Scheme*’. Under this Scheme, if the workers were to produce more than a certain percentage, they would earn bonus.

These two Schemes made the workers happy. But very soon, these new schemes faced problem as the supervisors were not under these two schemes so they never liked the workers enjoying rest period. Therefore, they suggested that workers should ‘earn’ there rest periods. This New system was launched

Results:

- Within a week the production fell
- The workers became unhappy
- The old symptoms started reappearing.

So, the company president looked into the problem. He discussed with Mayo and his research team, and ordered that:-

The spinning department should be shut down for ten minutes, four times a day and that all hands from the supervisors down to the workers should enjoy the rest period.

Also, he gave the control of the rest period into the hands of workers.

Results:

- Old problem disappeared.
- Production increased
- The workers started earning bonus.

**CONCLUSIONS FROM TEXTILE MILL AT PHILADELPHIA**

i. Spinning produces postural fatigue and induces absenteeism and passivity

ii. Rest periods relieve postural fatigue, and end absenteeism and passivity.

iii. Rest periods are more effective when they are regular.

iv. The life of the worker outside the mill has improved as workers become more interested in their families and become more sober.

v. Prevailing problem in the mill was not the result of working conditions but the result of emotional response of the workers to the work performed.

vi. Monotony was not the problem but repetitive work done under conditions of isolation.

II. **HOWTHORNE STUDIES**
Mayo’s studies at the Western Electricity Company, Chicago is popularly known as Hawthorne Studies. It was a research programme of National Research Council of the National Academy of Science at the Hawthorne Plant of Western Electricity Company.

In the early 20th century, it was realized that –

- There was a clear-cut cause and effect relationship between the physical work, environment, the well-being and productivity of the worker.
- Also, there was a relationship between production and given condition of ventilation, temperature, lighting and other physical working conditions and wage incentives.
- It had been believed that – improper job design, fatigue and other conditions of work mainly block efficiency.

So to establish the relationship between man and the structure of formal organization, Hawthorne Studies conducted.

The studies were conducted in the following four phases.

A. Illumination Experiment (1924-27)
B. Relay Assembly Test Room Experiment (1927)
C. Mass Interviewing Programme (1928-31)
D. Bank Wiring Experiment (1931-32)

A. **ILLUMINATION EXPERIMENT (1924-27)**

It was done to determine the effect of different levels of illumination on workers’ productivity.

In this experiment, two group of female workers were located in separate rooms, each group performing the same task. The rooms were equally illuminated with stabilized room temperature, humidity, etc. Slowly the conditions of work were changed to mark change in production. After a period of one-and-a half year, it was concluded that – illumination doesn’t affect productivity of workers.

B. **RELAY ASSEMBLY TEST ROOM EXPERIMENT (1927)**

This experiment was conducted to observe the effects of various changes in working conditions on the workers’ output and morale.

C. **MASS INTERVIEWING PROGRAMME (1928-31)**

It was launched to explore the employees’ feelings (i.e., human attitudes and sentiments) by the worker’s social group (informal organization)

The workers were asked to express freely and frankly their likes and dislike on the programmes and policies of the management, working conditions, and behaviour of their boss with workers, etc.

After a few days there was a change in the attitude of the workers, however no reforms were introduced. That change was seen because of the following reasons:-

- The workers thought that the working conditions were changed because of their complaints.
- They also felt that the wages were better although the wage scale remained at the same level.
After interviewing 21,126 workers, and analysing their complaints, it was found that – there was no correlation between the nature of complaints and the facts.

It was concluded that – the experiment succeeded in identifying the following three aspects:-

1. Workers feel elated if they were allowed to express freely. They develop a feeling that the conditions in the environment were changed to the better although no such change took place.
2. Subordinates should be allowed to comment freely about their supervisor.
3. It is difficult to understand the real problems, personal feelings and sentiments of the workers derived from both an employee’s personal history and his social situations at work, without appreciating their feelings and sentiments.

D. BANK WIRING EXPERIMENT (1931-32)

This experiment was done to observe and analyse the group behaviour, workers performing a task in a natural setting.

For the experiment, a number of employees consisting of three groups of workmen whose work was inter-related were chosen. Their job was to solder, fix the terminals and finish the wiring. It was known as ‘The Bank Wiring Experiment’.

Wages were paid on the basis of a group incentive plan and each member got his share on the basis of the total output of the group.

It was found that workers had a fixed clear-cut standard of output, which was lower than management target, however they were capable of increasing their output.

It was also found that the group did not allow its members to increase or decrease the output. They were highly integrated with their social structure, and informal pressure was used to set right the erring members. The following code of conduct was maintained for group solidarity:

- One should not turn out too much work. If one does, he is a ‘rat buster’.
- One should not turn out too little work. If one does, he is a ‘chesler’.
- One should not tell a supervisor anything detrimental to an associate. If one does, he is a ‘squealer’.
- One should not attempt to maintain social distance or act officious. If one is an inspector, for example, he should not act like one.

Conclusions:-

Mayo and the researchers concluded that:-

I. The behaviour of the team had nothing to do with management of general economic conditions of the plant.
II. The workers viewed interference of extra department personnel as disturbance.
III. The workers considered supervisors as representative authority to discipline the workers.
IV. The logic of efficiency did not go well with the logic of sentiments.
V. One should not miss the human aspects of organization while emphasising technical and economic aspects.
VI. In addition to the technical skills, the management should handle human situations, motivate, lead and communicate with the workers.

VII. The concept of authority should be based on social skills in securing cooperation rather than expertise.

CONCLUSIONS FROM HAWTHORNE STUDIES BRIEFLY

a) The social and psychological factors at the workplace, not the physical conditions of the workplace determine the employees’ morale and output.

b) The organization is a social system.

c) Non-economic rewards and sanctions significantly affect the workers’ behaviour, morale and output.

d) Workers are not inert or isolated, unrelated individual; they are social animals.

e) Division of labour strictly on specialization is not necessarily the most efficient approach.

f) The workers have a tendency to form small groups (informal organizations). The production norms and behavioural patterns are set by such groups.

g) Leadership, style of supervision, communication and participation play a central role in workers’ behaviour, satisfaction and productivity.

Thus, the findings of Hawthorne studies revolutionised the organizational thought, and gave rise to a new theory called Human Relations Theory.

CRITICISMS OF MAYO’S HUMAN RELATION THEORY

I. This theory lacks scientific base.

II. This theory is not based on actual behaviour of workers as they were influenced by their feelings of importance, attention and publicity they received in the research setting. Workers react positively and give their best when they know that they are being observed.

III. It is anti-union and pro-management. Mayo underestimated the role of Unions in a free society as well as never tried to integrate unions into his thinking.

IV. This theory neglected the nature of work and instead focused on interpersonal relations.

V. It ignored the environmental factors of workers’ attitudes and behaviour.

VI. Evidence obtained from the experiments does not support any of the conclusions derived by Mayo and the researchers.

VII. It lacks economic dimension.

VIII. It does not consider effects of ‘conflicts’ and ‘tension’ on the workers.

IX. This theory give much attention to informal relations among workers and between workers and supervisors, but little to the formal relationships with informal ones.

RELEVANCE OF MAYO’S HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY

Even though its criticism it is regarded as a major development in administrative theory till date and you will find his techniques being used in all organisations like rewards and orders, parties and celebrations, group outings and appraisals to boost morale and motivation.