

## Neo-classical Human Relation Theory

### Elton Mayo's Human Relations Approach to Management

#### **Subject Matter of Elton Mayo's Human Relations Approach:**

According to Human Relations Approach, management is the Study of behaviour of people at work.

This approach had its origin in a series of experiments conducted by Professor Elton Mayo and his associates at the Harvard School of Business at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne Works, near Chicago.

These studies brought out for the first time the important relationships between social factors and productivity. Before it, productivity of the employees was considered to be a function only of physical conditions of work and money wages paid to them. For the first time it was realised that productivity depended largely upon the satisfaction of the employees in work situations.

Following the Hawthorne Experiments, a great deal of work has been carried on by behavioural scientists belonging to a variety of disciplines including Psychology, Sociology, Philosophy and Anthropology in studying the behaviour of people at work.

Those who subscribe to the Human Relations School of Thought are of the view that the effectiveness of any organisation depends on the quality of relationships among the people working in the organisation.

So, according to them, the managers must concern themselves with an analysis of organisational behaviour, that is, interaction of people with the organisation. The basic assumption of this school still remains that the goals of the organisation are achieved through and with the people.

Apart from the study of formal organisation and techniques used by such organisations, this school studies the psychological processes in the organisations, informal organisations, conflict, change, motivation and relationships, and the various techniques of achieving organisational development by improving the relationships among the various groups of people constituting the organisation and its internal environment.

Thus, it may be said that this school concentrates on people and their behaviour within the formal and informal organisations.

#### **Features of Elton Mayo's Human Relations Approach:**

##### **The main features of the Human Relations Approach to management are the following:**

- (a) Since management is getting things done through and with people, a manager must have a basic understanding of human behaviour in all respects—particularly in the context of work groups and organisations.
- (b) The managers must study the inter-personal relations among the people at work.
- (c) Larger production and higher motivation can be achieved only through good human relation.
- (d) The study of management must draw the concepts and principles of various behavioural sciences like Psychology and Sociology.

### **Contribution of Elton Mayo to Management Thought:**

George Elton Mayo (1880-1949) was a professor at the Harvard Business School. He published the books —‘Human Problems of an Industrial Civilisation’ (1933),

‘Social problems of an Industrial Civilisation’ (1945), ‘Training for Human Relations’ (1949) etc. He conducted the famous ‘Hawthorne Experiments’ at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company in the USA during 1927-32 with his associates.

**These experiments are described below:**

#### **1. Illumination Experiments:**

From these experiments, it was revealed that productivity could be increased not only by improving the working environment, but also through informal social relations among the members of the working group.

#### **2. Relay Assembly Test Room Experiment:**

In this experiment a small homogeneous working group was constituted. Several new elements were introduced in the work environment such as—shorter working hours, proper rest periods, improved physical conditions, friendly supervision, free social interaction among the group members, and so on.

During the period of the experiment, productivity and morale increased. Productivity and morale were maintained even if the improvements in the working conditions were withdrawn. The researchers concluded that socio-psychological factors such as the feelings of being important, recognition, participation, informal work group, non-directive supervision etc. held the key for higher productivity.

#### **3. Mass Interviewing Programme:**

A large number of workers were interviewed to know their perceptions and orientation on the working life. The results again confirmed the importance of informal relation, social and psychological needs and their impact on the behaviour of the workers.

#### **4. Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment:**

A group of 14 workers was observed with regard to their work behaviour. The observation revealed the informal production norms set by the workers and the existence of informal relations in the group.

**The conclusions of the Hawthorne Experiments are pointed out below:**

- (i) A factory is not only a techno-economic unit but a psycho-social organisation also.
- (ii) The workers spontaneously form small informal groups. The norms and values of such groups have significant influence on the behaviour and performance of the workers.
- (iii) Physical conditions of work have some influence on the workers' morale and productivity. But their inter-personal relations, attitude of the supervisors and other social and psychological factors have a far greater influence.

- (iv) Usually, the workers act or react not as individuals but as the members of a group.
- (v) The workers are not mere economic men motivated by money alone. They respond to the total work situation including recognition, participation etc.
- (vi) The informal leaders play an important role in setting and enforcing group norms.
- (vii) The managers must understand and recognise the inter-personal and group relations on the job.

Elton Mayo is known as the 'Father of Human Relations Movement'. The Hawthorne Experiments provided a landmark in the evolution of management thought. Many organisations initiated the measures to improve relations with the workers. The managers were supposed to assume a new role and to develop new concepts of authority, motivation and leadership.

However, the Hawthorne Experiments were criticised for lack of scientific analysis and research. It was alleged that the researchers had certain pre-conceived perceptions and orientations. The experiments were too narrow and small to provide generalisation.

The findings of Hawthorne Experiments are, however, accepted even today. Mayo's work was a turning point in the development of management thought. His work challenged the basic postulates of the classical approach. His studies revealed the over-whelming significance of human and social factors in industry. He is rightly called the 'Founder of the Human Relations Approach' to management.