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### Thoughts on the History of Management Thought

My favorite part of the history of management thought is the Hawthorne experiments by Elton Mayo at the Western Electric Company. I think it's interesting how the studies originally took a very scientific approach, and ended up with a very behavioral (i.e., almost non-scientific) conclusion. It is perhaps even more "scientific" than the observational studies in Taylor's experiments in scientific management, which did not seem to have as clearly-defined of a research process with clear hypothesis testing.

To briefly summarize the event, the Western Electric Company was attempting to improve the productivity of their workers by making changes to the workers' environments and initiating incentives for the workers. The first stage was as described in class: a group of assembly-line workers were separated from the rest of the group, and experiments were performed on various aspects of their work benches such as lighting and rest pauses. However, no matter what changes were performed, it seemed that productivity would always go up. This experiment continued for five years, during which time production had increased from 2,400 to 3,000 relays per day (a 25% increase).

The important thing to note was that this group of workers was consulted before each change, and they had the ability to voice their opinions and sometimes reject suggestions. The company creatively intuited that perhaps the wholehearted participation and cooperation of the whole group, due to the company recognizing the importance of individuals in this group and this social group as a whole in critical decisions about work conditions, will improve worker productivity. This is the famed Hawthorne Effect.

The second part of the experiment adds to the hypothesis that the social norms of a group should be respected. In this experiment, a second group of fourteen workers that performed wiring and

soldering was experimented on in a similar way, but the performance change was the opposite. The conclusion is that due to the wiring team's previously hardwired group norms, such as sticking to an informal production rate cap and ostracizing those who did not follow it. Clearly, this norm would be violated if the production was to go up, and so the group may have felt averse to the experiments. As a result, they were not as cooperative in the experiment, and the results showed.

Two things about the Hawthorne Effect are interesting to take note of. Firstly (and the textbook makes clear point of this), it is important that the company not only listen to individuals, but the social groups formed within a corporation. Secondly, it was only after this experiment that people got a concrete understanding that there is a complex relationship between human factors and productivity, and that productivity is much more than purely mechanical efficiency, as Taylor was studying.

Personally, I also find experimenting with my own workstation for productivity very fun as well: if I have the ability to personalize my work environment rather than being confined to a default work setup, then I generally feel happier and more productive. For example, at my last workplace, even though most people at the company that I was working at use Windows, they had the option to use Linux, which I feel more comfortable with; giving that option of personalization, and also having people listen to my issue with the particular software product on Linux, empowered me to work harder to solve those issues. Similarly, I like being able to personalize my work environment as well, such as using an ergonomic keyboard and keyboard layout; being able to choose computer components for my PC; programming language and editor environment; pen and notebook; monitor resolution, count, and orientation; etc. In the past, I felt that this was a matter of pure efficiency, but I think that there is a mini-Hawthorne Effect here: when I feel that I have the power to change my own work environment, even if not directly or mechanically more efficient, it will improve my motivation to do work.