

24.3: Reading- The Hawthorne Studies

Results of the Hawthorne Studies

The Hawthorne studies were conducted on workers at the Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company by Elton Mayo and Fritz Roethlisberger in the 1920s. The Hawthorne studies were part of a refocus on managerial strategy incorporating the socio-psychological aspects of human behavior in organizations.

The following video from the AT&T archives contains interviews with individuals who participated in these studies. It provides additional insight into the way the studies were conducted and how they changed employers' views on worker motivation.



The studies originally looked into whether workers were more responsive and worked more efficiently under certain environmental conditions, such as improved lighting. The results were surprising: Mayo and Roethlisberger found that workers were more responsive to social factors—such as the people they worked with on a team and the amount of interest their manager had in their work—than the factors (lighting, etc.) the researchers had gone in to inspect.

The Hawthorne studies discovered that workers were highly responsive to additional attention from their managers and the feeling that their managers actually cared about, and were interested in, their work. The studies also found that although financial motives are important, social issues are equally important factors in worker productivity.

There were a number of other experiments conducted in the Hawthorne studies, including one in which two women were chosen as test subjects and were then asked to choose four other workers to join the test group. Together, the women worked assembling telephone relays in a separate room over the course of five years (1927–1932). Their output was measured during this time—at first, in secret. It started two weeks before moving the women to an experiment room and continued throughout the study. In the experiment room, they had a supervisor who discussed changes with them and, at times, used the women's suggestions. The researchers then spent five years measuring how different variables impacted both the group's and the individuals' productivity. Some of the variables included giving two five-minute breaks (after a discussion with the group on the best length of time), and then changing to two 10-minute breaks (not the preference of the group).

Intangible Motivators

Changing a variable usually increased productivity, even if the variable was just a change back to the original condition. Researchers concluded that the employees worked harder because they thought they were being monitored individually. Researchers hypothesized that choosing one's own coworkers, working as a group, being treated as special (as evidenced by working in a separate room), and having a sympathetic supervisor were the real reasons for the productivity increase.

The Hawthorne studies showed that people's work performance is dependent on social issues and job satisfaction, and that monetary incentives and good working conditions are generally less important in improving employee productivity than meeting

individuals' need and desire to belong to a group and be included in decision making and work.

Check Your Understanding

Answer the question(s) below to see how well you understand the topics covered in this section. This short quiz does **not** count toward your grade in the class, and you can retake it an unlimited number of times.

Use this quiz to check your understanding and decide whether to (1) study the previous section further or (2) move on to the next section.

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.com/assessments/204>

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