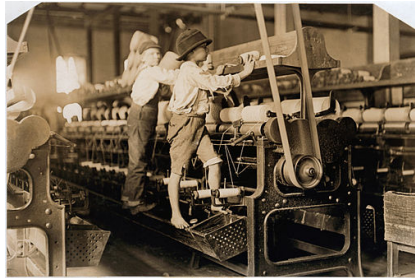


9.1: Why It Matters- Human Resource Management

Why explain the role of human resource management in planning, recruiting, and managing a workforce?



It's the early 1900s and you are twelve years old, living in an American city where industrialization has begun to boom. On Monday morning at 5 a.m., you line up with the rest of your family to begin your long workday at a textile factory. If it isn't terribly busy you will end your day around 8:00 p.m. You visit with your parents and siblings during your fifteen-minute lunch break. The factory where you work is not heated, has no ventilation system, and the windows can't be opened to let out the exhaust fumes from machinery. Since you are small, your responsibility is to climb in between the machinery and dislodge pieces of material that get caught in the gears and belts—while the machines are still running. You have to be especially careful because the only light in the factory is the sunlight that comes through the dirty windows. If you are not killed or maimed by the equipment, chances are good that your life will be cut short by the toxic fumes you inhale while in the factory. Every member of your family works there, including your four-year-old sister. Your father, the most highly skilled worker in the family, makes about ten cents per hour, your mother makes about half that since she's a woman, and you, as a child, make even less. Fortunately you don't have to worry about doing homework, because you don't attend school, and you'll learn to read and write only if your parents teach you on Sunday—the one day of the week when you don't go to work.

Similar grim working conditions continued for decades in America until labor unions formed and activists began to lobby for worker protections. It's hard, today, to imagine what those conditions really must have been like. We have always worked in conditions regulated for health and safety. We aren't forced to work for pennies per day. Understanding how far we have come in terms of employee rights and protections is an important context for thinking about human resource management. As you work through this section, try to keep this historical perspective in mind.

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