

# **Elton Mayo's Theory of Human Relation**

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## **Introduction:**

Everyone has unique needs and expectations. Every successful workplace culture embraces multiple perspectives, accommodates various expectations and fulfills the unique needs of employees. This management approach was first seen in the Human Relations Theory. Read on to see how this management approach changed the world of work.

To understand the human relations approach, we must first understand the context it emerged. The human relations movement emerged as a response to some of the limitations of scientific management theory. According to scientific management, there was a logic to actions and knowledge that boosted workplace motivation. In other words, efficiency was a result of operational, legal and administrative improvements.

At the time, Taylorism—scientific management advocated by Frederick W. Taylor—was the prevailing theory, which viewed workers as machines. It suggested that the best way for people (factory workers) to become efficient is to receive proper training and necessary tools. The human relations approach addressed these gaps by taking into consideration the social factors. It acknowledged that people's perceptions, attitudes and expectations play a critical role in their workplace performance.

Elton Mayo, an Australian psychologist from Harvard University, developed the Human Relations Theory. He conducted a series of experiments, which are now known as Hawthorne Studies or Hawthorne Experiments. He concluded that people have unique preferences and can't be treated as machines. Here are some of the key takeaways of the Elton Mayo Human Relations Theory:

- Humans are complex and different factors influence their behavior
- Group dynamics (team relations) influence job performance and output
- Managers should understand that employees have unique needs and one size doesn't fit all; communication is essential between managers and employees
- People aren't solely motivated by compensation; finding meaning in their work is important as well
- Employees are more open to change when given the opportunity to participate

Therefore, the Elton Mayo Theory suggested that the workplace is a social system where multiple factors influence an employee's performance. Most times, it's psychological and organizations need to pay attention to these aspects for bringing about change.

## **DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY**

There are several characteristics that are common to the Human Relations Theory. Let's look at them in detail:

### **1- COORDINATING PROCESS**

Efforts are made to eliminate miscommunication so that people can establish trustworthy relationships and achieve organizational targets through greater efficiency. Emotional unity and coordination are instrumental in pursuing and achieving common objectives.

### **2- JOB SATISFACTION**

In addition to economic needs, employers need to focus on social and psychological needs and expectations as well. There should be some non-monetary incentives as they not only boost employee morale but also increase employee retention. Such incentives further enhance productivity and efficiency.

### **3- HUMAN ASPECT**

As we've already established, the Human Relations Theory was developed as a response to the scientific approach, moving toward the human aspect of management. It suggests that humane treatment is crucial for successful management. This means that employers should prioritize employee well-being within and beyond the workplace.

These characteristics of the human relations approach to management also suggest that employees should be happy and find meaning in the work they do. When employers identify and address basic needs, an individual's willingness to work improves. This further improves productivity, contributing to business growth and profitability. Let's see how people can benefit from the human relations approach.

### **THE NEED FOR HUMAN RELATIONS SKILLS**

The Elton Mayo Human Relations Theory showed that relationships are highly influential for human productivity. Employers and managers need to have a vast array of skills to effectively carry a human relations-focused workplace culture. Let's look at the different skills needed for successful human relations:

#### **1- COMMUNICATION**

At the core of the human relations approach to management lies strong communication skills. It ensures that everyone in the organization is on the same page. It encompasses all forms of communication—verbal, non-verbal and written. Whether it's the eye contact you maintain with your audience during meetings or the emails you send, effective communication skills are a great way to convey your message and connect with others. Managers and team leaders should especially focus on sharpening these skills as it helps them drive teamwork and collaboration.

#### **2- CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

It's no secret that employees come from multiple walks of life. This further leads to diverse personality types, outlooks and goals all working together. There may be times

when you don't agree with someone's perspectives and you have every right to respectfully disagree. This is why conflict resolution skills are important as they help people address and resolve issues in a civil manner. However, people need to keep an open mind and must allow for individual perspectives to be voiced. You must work towards a solution that everyone feels comfortable with and maintain harmony in the process.

### **3- ORGANIZATION**

One of the most important skills in the human relations approach, organization impacts all areas of work. Whether it's your workflow or physical workspace, staying organized has several benefits. It helps you prioritize your work and manage your time better. It's a key element in creating an efficient workflow. This further allows you to meet your deadlines and be productive. Organization is an important quality for team leaders as it allows them to juggle multiple priorities and complete tasks in an organized process.

By employing these skills, managers and team leaders can implement human relations management practices with greater efficiency.

### **PUTTING THE HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY INTO ACTION**

While the Elton Mayo Theory received recognition and credit for bringing several fundamental aspects of management to the forefront, it faced several criticisms. Theorists argued that it was another way to maximize business output. Nevertheless, it did emphasize the power of positive treatment of employees. If you want to put the Human Relations Theory into practice, consider these strategies:

#### **1- PROVIDE CONTEXT**

Employees are often unable to see the bigger picture. As a result, it's difficult for them to find meaning in their work. This can negatively impact employee morale and increase the risk of them quitting their jobs. Communicate the organizational mission, vision and objectives to remind employees of their contribution. Help them extract a sense of fulfillment from their tasks.

## **2- COLLECT FEEDBACK**

Communication is a two-way street. If you want to strengthen relationships, collaboration and efficiency, you need to hear others out as well. You can actively solicit employee feedback through surveys or one-on-one meetings. More importantly, you need to act on the feedback or insights you gathered. This helps establish trust as employees feel heard.

## **3- IDENTIFY UNIQUE NEEDS**

One of the core tenets of the Human Relations Theory is that every individual is unique. One size doesn't fit all, which is why you need to understand individual perspectives and preferences. Understanding their motivation and work styles can help you tailor your management style. Say, for example, someone is a strong team player; help them collaborate with others on projects. In short, play to employee strengths for greater efficiency.

## **4- OFFER PRAISE AND RECOGNITION**

While monetary benefits act as strong motivators, they alone don't suffice. You need to make your employees feel valued as well. Recognize or celebrate their hard work whenever possible. Effective recognition is honest and authentic, so make sure that you talk about individual achievements. The act of appreciation can be as simple as a congratulatory email or as big as a celebratory lunch.

## **5- MAKE ROOM FOR BONDING**

We often interact and engage with coworkers because we're required to. However, interpersonal relationships need not necessarily be transactional. You can explore other topics of conversation that aren't limited to 'shop talk'. For example, you can ask someone about their day or their hobbies. Connecting on a more personal level can help you bond better and establish lasting relationships. However, it's important not to cross any boundaries and only talk about things your team is comfortable with.

## **CONCLUSION**

Although the Elton Mayo theory was groundbreaking at the time, it's impossible to imagine a workplace without considering social aspects in the modern world. As a manager, if you want to improve workplace performance and prioritize your team's needs and expectations, Harappa's Managing Teamwork course is the solution! This team management course will not only help you collaborate with different team members but also handle conflicts with empathy, maturity and sensitivity. You'll master the art of giving and receiving feedback and foster a team culture that helps everyone maximize their potential.

## **References:**

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