

SOCI 425

Industrial Sociology I

Session Four: The Hawthorne Studies and the
Appearance of Sociology in Industry Part II

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Session Overview

□ Overview

- The Sociological Approach to the study of Industry could be traced to the Hawthorne Studies. This session focuses on the third Experiment that constituted the Hawthorne Studies and their relevance to the understanding of the Sociological Approach to the study of Industry.
- **Objective:** At the end of the lecture, the student will be able to
- Describe the Bank wiring Observation Room Experiment;
- Explain how these Experiments brought out human factors in industry;
- Understand the contribution of the Hawthorne studies to the study of industrial behavior;
- Identify the criticisms against the Hawthorne studies

Session Outline

The key topics to be covered in this session are as follows:

- Topic One: The Bank wiring Observation Room Experiment
- Topic Two: Results of the Bank wiring Observation Room Experiment
- Topic Three: Contribution of the Hawthorne Studies to the Understanding of Human Behaviour
- Topic Four: Criticisms against the Hawthorne Studies

Topic One: Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment (BWOR)

- By the end of the RATR, it has been discovered that social/informal groups formed within the workplace;
- Were capable of exerting considerable influence over the behaviour of their individual members and over their output;
- Observers had noted that in certain departments, output had been restricted by the workers in complete disregard of all financial incentives;

Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment (BWOR) Cont.

- And this was due to group pressure or group influence on the individual worker;
- This means that within workplace settings, groups are capable of influencing their individual members and restricting their outputs;
- Mayo decided to investigate one of the departments known as the Bank Wiring in order to discover the possibility of restriction of output by workers within the department.

Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

❑ Objectives of the Experiment

- For Mayo, productivity was the most convenient index of well-being and therefore developed the hypothesis that;
- “the working group as a whole actually determined the output of individual workers by reference to a standard or the group’s conception of a fair day’s work”;
- The hypothesis then led to the final experiment known as the “Bank Wiring Observation Room” which was set up to study the behaviour of groups;
- To examine how informal or social groups within the work place can restrict productivity and influence their members.

Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

□ Operatives

- There were fourteen (14) men employed in Bank Wiring which involves attaching wires to switches for certain parts of telephone equipment;
- Nine (9) men attached the wires, three (3) soldered it and the remaining two (2) were inspectors;
- The investigation was carried out by two (2) men – an observer and an interviewer;
- The observer was in the wiring room with instructions to be friendly with everybody but give no orders.

Topic Two: Results of Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

□ Results of the Experiment

- The results showed that these men had developed spontaneously into a team with natural leaders who had risen to the top with the action consent of the group;
- Towards the financial incentive of the company, the attitude of the group was one of complete indifference;
- Although the incentive plan of the company provided that the more work an employee did, the more money he received;

Results of Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

- The workers had their own ideas about what a fair day's work was;
- Obviously, the values and customs of the group were more important to the individuals than any cash benefit;
- Informal organization existed which had its own social norms contrary to that of management;
- These men were on group piecework where the more they turned out the more they earned;

Results of Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

- In such a situation one might have expected that they would have been interested in maintaining total output;
- As the faster workers would have put pressure on the slower workers to improve their efficiency, but this was not the case;
- There existed an unofficial code of behaviour which exerted a powerful influence over the group members and operating within this group;
- The restriction or control of output was enforced through a set of rules and regulations namely:

Results of Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

- You should not produce too much work or above the amount they had set themselves, if you do you are a “**Rate-buster**” or a “**Slave**”;
- You should not turn out too little work than what we have set, if you do you are a “**Chiseller**”;
- You should not tell a supervisor anything that would react to the detriment of an associate, if you do you are a “**Squealer**”;
- You should not attempt to maintain a social distance or act officious even if you are an inspector i.e. you should not behave as one.

Results of Bank Wiring Observation Room Experiment Cont.

- Those who broke the above informal rules were punished by ridicule or ostracised, some were even hit on the shoulder;
- For instance, those who completed their work earlier than the group's accepted time were called "4.30 special";
- The experimenters, probing the informal group life of industrial workers, made their greatest discoveries that;
- The wage incentives were weaker than the sentiment concerned with social recognition and group security.

Topic Three: Contribution of the Hawthorne Studies to the Understanding of Human Behavior in Organizations

- That work organization is basically a social system and not just a techno-economic system;
- As a result, the social factors at work place are very important in understanding the behaviour of the worker;
- These social factors include a feeling of being important, recognition, participation among others which cannot be ignored in productivity;

Contribution of the Hawthorne Studies to the Understanding of Human Behavior in Organizations

Cont.

- Participation becomes an important instrument in human relations within every business organization;
- Work is a group activity and that the individual worker cannot be treated in isolation but must be seen as a member of a group;
- That improving human relations resulted in increased productivity as today there is scarcely any industry without some sort of human relations training program for its supervisors and workers;

Contribution of the Hawthorne Studies to the Understanding of Human Behavior in Organizations

Cont.

- The need for recognition, security and a sense of belonging is more important in determining workers morale;
- And productivity than the physical conditions under which they work;
- In other words monetary incentives are less important to the individual than the need to belong to a group.

Contribution of the Hawthorne Studies to the Understanding of Human Behavior in Organizations

Cont.

- Informal or unofficial groups within the workplace exercise strong social control over the work habits and attitudes of the individual worker;
- In other words, informal groups play an important role in any business organization;
- The employee can be motivated by social and psychological factors because his behaviour is also influenced by the feelings, emotions and attitudes of others;

Contribution of the Hawthorne Studies to the Understanding of Human Behavior in Organizations

Cont.

- Hence economic incentives are not the only way to motivate people;
- Employees feel more important when they are allowed to participate in decision making and goal setting;
- In order to achieve participation, effective two-way communication network is essential.

Topic Four: Criticisms of the Hawthorne Studies

- The researchers concerned themselves only with consensus and neglected conflict of interest between management/workers;
- The findings on informal groups were nothing new since earlier studies by Charles Cooley had already found the existence of informal group;
- The above was however refuted by the fact that no sociological study had found the existence of informal group within industrial organizations as the one by the Hawthorne studies.

Criticisms of the Hawthorne Studies

Cont.

- The study was management bias; i.e. it only focused on workers and neglected the role of management;
- The study was too empirical as it ignored the importance of theory; Miller and Form (1954) states, it is useless to collect any data unless they can be related within some frame of reference;
- That is mere facts without a theoretical background are valueless;

Conclusions

- The Hawthorne studies brought out the fact that productivity of the employee is not function of only physical conditions of work and monetary wages paid to them;
- Productivity of employee depends heavily upon the satisfaction of the employee's in the **work situation**;
- Elton Mayo's idea was that logical factors such as high wages were less important than emotional factors in determining productivity of workers.

Conclusions Cont.

- Furthermore, of all the human factors influencing employee behaviour, the most powerful were those emanating from workers participation in social groups.
- Mayo concluded that work arrangements in addition to meeting the objectives of production;
- Must at the same time satisfy the employee's subjective requirement of social satisfaction of his work place.

Reading List

- Refer to students to relevant text/chapter or reading materials you will make available on Sakai
- Miller and Form (1964). **Industrial Sociology: The Sociology of Work Organization**. New York: Harper and Row Publishers. (Pages 110-135)
- Parker, R. S et al (2005). **The Sociology of Industry**. Sixth Edition. London: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group. (Pages 155-238)
- Mayo, G.E. (1945). **The Social Problems of Industrial Civilization**. Harvard University Press.

Activity/Assignment

- How has the findings of the Hawthorne Experiment helped in the understanding of Organizational Behavior.