



# Spontaneity Is the Spice of Management: Elton Mayo's Hunt for Cooperation

# 23

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## Contents

Mayo's "Findings" .....	548
The Vital Center Does Not Hold .....	550
The Great Depression .....	551
The Good War .....	553
An Inchoate Movement .....	556
Elton Mayo: The Manager as Therapist .....	558
Conclusion .....	560
Cross-References .....	562
References .....	562

## Abstract

This chapter covers the career of Elton Mayo and the impact of the Hawthorne studies upon the field of management. The first section of the chapter discusses Mayo's contribution to the management literature. This section argues that Mayo's best elements – his empathy and charisma – have not survived, but he leads a great legacy, as a scholar, for his influence in the field. The second section of the chapter covers the role of the Great Depression and World War II on Mayo's work. The third section compares Mayo's work to his major competitors – Whiting Williams and Henry S. Dennison. The final section compares Taylor to Mayo, arguing that they were complements rather than competitors.

## Keywords

Mayo · Hawthorne and Human Relations

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The Hawthorne studies, a series of experiments carried out at Western Electric's large assembly and manufacturing plant in Illinois between 1925 and 1932, have an iconic status in management literature. Yet our understanding of what happened remains shrouded in controversy. Although the studies extended over many years, only one part is typically remembered – a study of female assemblers taken off the shop floor and exposed to a variety of experiences that supposedly demonstrated the importance of intrinsic, socially-based rewards in work performance. Revolutionary in its conclusions, which shifted attention away from monetary rewards, the work of Elton Mayo and the Hawthorne studies loom large over management research.

Perhaps no study has created as much controversy and praise as Hawthorne. There is a long list of books and articles published that have attempted to unearth the mysteries of Hawthorne. Only Frederick Winslow Taylor has attracted as much attention. What is more notable is that there is little consensus among scholars regarding the study. I (Muldoon 2012) view the studies as a positive step in management thought. While Kyle Bruce (2006) views them as a step backward, H. M. Parsons (1974) and Alex Carey (1967) view the studies as worthless and wasteful. George Homans (1984) and Talcott Parsons (1940) believed that they were important in the development of theory. Some scholars have praised the studies' originality; other scholars have attacked its lack of originality. Management, psychology, and sociology each have a different perspective on the studies. The original criticisms of Mayo's work were overwhelmingly sociological in nature, suggesting that different disciplines have different standards and values. Which was also happened, even with individual researchers, perspectives change over time. For example, in 1947, Daniel Bell (Bell 1947) believed that the studies were a step toward fascism with a docile worker; in 1973 (Bell 1973) he argued that Mayo had a prime insight that the majority of socializing occurs at work.

When Hawthorne is attacked, Mayo faces a greater brunt of the criticism. Henry A. Landsberger (1958) defended the Hawthorne studies by suggesting that Mayo's work was illegitimate compared with the scientific rigor of *Management and the Worker*. This statement is like saying *Hamlet* is a good play except for the lead character. Mayo's arguments and influences clearly affect the works associated with the study. Other scholars have attacked the uncredentialed and unlettered Mayo. Still more scholars, including Kyle Bruce, Chris Nyland (2011), and Michael Rose (1975), have argued that the Hawthorne studies were a form of fascism. Other scholars, such as Morris Viteles, Peter Drucker, and the left-wing political activist Stuart Chase, have praised Mayo's ideas as a defense against fascism. Some of his critics, such as Reinhard Bendix, (1956) have noted Mayo's contributions to management ideology. His defenders, such as Homans (1984), Chase (1946), Drucker (1946), have noted Mayo's shortcomings as both as scholar and a man.

Mayo's reputation has been comparatively low since his death. In life, Mayo was praised as a social scientist in league with Thorstein Veblen and John Dewey (Smith 1998). Now, Mayo is, by a growing number, seen to be a mountebank who took management down an unneeded path. In 1977, Mayo was ranked fourth among all management thinkers (Wren and Hay 1977). In 2010, he was ranked 11th, a precipitous slide (Heames and Breland 2010). Despite the Hawthorne studies

connection to launching organizational behavior as a distinct field of study, the studies are also ranked comparatively low. Even with the, now proven, importance of attitudes and relationships, scholars still attack Mayo's work and the findings of the study. Little research has traced the actual influence of the studies to understand its great influence on the fields of sociology, psychology, and management. In fact, the old suggestion that human relations replaced an undemocratic and inhumane scientific management has come under attack.

There is a tremendous amount of research attempting to unearth what happened at Hawthorne – such an approach is chimerical. Scholars often bring their own baggage when researching Hawthorne (present author included). Edwin Locke and Gary Latham (1984) argue that the increase in production is due to goal-setting. Peach and Wren (1991) argue that monetary incentives matter the most. H. M. Parsons (1974) argues for the role of behavioral management. Some scholars have researched the data, others the context of the plant, still others have written about the various figures in the study, some scholars have conducted oral histories. The stream of these studies has shed light on the fact that we do not know what happened. Wren and Bedeian (2018) conclude that it is impossible to know what happened at Hawthorne. The net result of these varying views is that scholars have devoted too much attention to what happened at the plant. A tremendous amount of hand wringing would have been avoided if scholars paid closer attention to the arguments by Homans (1949a), Roethlisberger (1977), Sonnenfeld (1985), and even Mayo (1945), who stated that the studies proved nothing. Their importance was to develop new approaches in examining management thought.

Scholars have begun to research the context of the studies but ignore the wider academic, social, and political context of which the studies occur. I do not claim any final statement about Hawthorne. I merely write to explain several important issues related to the Hawthorne studies. Firstly, I make a point that a combination of the Great Depression, World War II, and its aftermath played a key role in making the Hawthorne experiments the dominate study in Human Relations. Secondly, I seek to explain why the studies dominated literature, in comparison to other contenders, such as Whiting Williams and Henry Dennison. Thirdly, I would like to note the complex relationship between Taylorism and Mayoism. My contention here was less that Mayoism contradicted Taylorism, but instead addressed certain limitations that Scientific Management suffered from, as well as building on its developments. Hopefully, each objective will shed light on what the Hawthorne studies meant for management and their continuing importance to the field.

The combination of these points is the following: Mayo stressed noneconomic incentives at a time when both workers and managers believed that the Great Depression was now a permanent feature of industrial life. The second point was that the Great Depression ended welfare capitalism, creating a new approach in industrial relationships. The third point is that while Mayo was successful in spreading the word to business leaders in the 1930s, the academic spread of human relations was limited by the fact that there were few academic jobs and journals to maintain the research. In addition, competing frameworks had some of the same baggage as did the Hawthorne studies, but lacked the academic support led

by Mayo's associates. Finally, we make an important note about the relationship between Mayoism and Taylorism noting the complementary relationship between both ideas.

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## Mayo's "Findings"

Elton Mayo left a complex legacy (Gillespie 1991; Trahair 1984). For the historian, he left some slim, underdeveloped books. He did not leave a theory. Nor did he research or conceive the Hawthorne studies. The Hawthorne studies did not prove anything. Both William Foote Whyte (1956) and George Homans (1949a) argued that Mayo's findings were only the genesis of research. Others had a similar view, like Kornhauser (1934), who argued that Mayo's (1933) book provides more questions than answers. Park (1934) and Powell (1957) suggest that the work was more exploratory and the purpose of the work was to develop new approaches. Rogers (1946) argues that the work's major focus on groups was a contribution, but was more developmental than a final statement. The best of Elton Mayo was his charm, wit, and empathy – he had, what *Fortune* (1956) called, a high voltage personality. Time eroded these strengths – few, if any, people alive today had any major dealings with Mayo. What is left is his turgid prose in his short, underdeveloped books and the recorded memories of his disciples. Figures, such as Taylor (scientific management), Fayol (the fourteen principles of management), Chester Barnard (zone of indifference), and Herbert Simon (bounded rationality), each left a defined concept. What did Mayo leave? It is not as clear.

Compounding the problem was that Mayo distorted and even lied about his background, failing to correct people who believed he had a medical degree. Mayo did not address his critics, was imprecise in writing, failed to acknowledge the work of others, and appeared conservative in his politics. Scholars, including Ellen O'Connor (1999a, b), Bruce and Nyland (2011), and Richard Gillespie (1991) have all argued that the Hawthorne studies were less science and more advocacy. Scholars have challenged Mayo's arguments over his opinions on unions, the originality of his ideas, and the roles of groups, attitudes, and social motivations in the workplace (Muldoon 2017). His most persistent and ablest critic, Bruce, pointed out that Mayo was more concerned with providing businessmen with the ammunition to fight off unions and coddling favors with the Rockefellers than true science.

Mayo's accomplishment was as a codifier as well as an advocate. Mostly, what Mayo did was to focus on what scholars knew (that social relationships motivate) and to direct that knowledge in discovering how, where, and when social relationships matter. He also advocated for the need for industrial research to understand cooperation. With the chaos of the postwar years reigning, people began to hear his ideas and sought more complete understandings of work. He did not launch a theory, but launched a school of scholars who would refine his work. Whyte notes one of the first textbooks in industrial relations was Burleigh Gardner and Moore's (1945) book *Human Relations in History*, where the primary focus was on the Hawthorne studies. Stone (1952), Bell (1947), Moore (1947), Whyte (1956), Homans (1949a), Chase

(1946), Powell (1957), Drucker (1946), Parsons (1940), Hart (1943), Parsons and Barber (1948), and others have suggested the primary propulsion to study social relationships within the organization came from Mayo's monomaniac, obsessive appeals to do so. These men were contemporaries, students, critics, and competitors of Mayo, but were experts in their own fields at the time. Some, such as Wilbert Moore and Bell, decried Mayo's influence, but they understood that it was nevertheless vast.

Therefore, Mayo's contribution was to place focus squarely on researching worker relationships. Most of the research that commenced in analyzing worker relationships had roots in Mayo, either copying his methods or trying to improve them. Some scholars criticized the political implications, but scholars on the left sought to use some of the Mayo's methods to recreate the Hawthorne studies under a different context. Mayo also demonstrated that pay was only one element in terms of work motivation. Perhaps, he went too far to suggest that pay was not that important, but he suggested that social and intrinsic elements could be important as well. Mayo created a general structure where Whyte and other scholars would discover that workers do not necessarily care about pay in absolute terms; they care deeply about it in relative terms (Muldoon 2012). Subsequent work on both equity theory and justice would demonstrate this issue more clearly to the point where Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) have suggested that justice is where social and economics influences dovetail. Scholars also discovered that piece-rate systems could lead to other problems within the work group as collaboration diminishes. Furthermore, in knowledge-based jobs, the primary emphasis on collaboration and overly strenuous competition can diminish information exchange. In fact, different types of pay systems can cause major problems within plants.

C.W. M. Hart (1943, 1949) pointed out that one of the major implications of the study was that people are not consistent in their thoughts about work. Hart went further, arguing that the combination of social sciences that Hawthorne represented could push towards more practical and interesting research. The studies of Hawthorne indicate that the total situation at work – mind, body, social system, talents, motivations, and desires – plays a key role in performance. Today we would suggest that person-job and person-organization fit are extremely important. The Hawthorne studies were key indicators of these. One can also see elements of situation – personality interactions within the workers. Namely, situations can influence behaviors or tap into negative feelings. Mayo did not use personality theory, but instead used the work of Janet and Freud to illustrate the issues of frustration and alienation in modern work life.

Mayo is a founding father of human resource development. Much like Robert Owen, Mayo was concerned with the worker's total situation, viewing them as more of a total person, and less like raw material. Both men sought managerial interventions to make workers better: Owen through education and Mayo through socialization. Owen and Mayo saw better management had a social impact. As Drucker (1946) noted, one of the principle problems with traditional management was that it viewed people as raw materials, while Mayo saw them as people. Homans could similarly claim that industrial sociology owed its seminal understandings of human-work interaction to

Mayo, whose work changed the nature of management research by shifting the emphasis to work groups and away from technology or task. Homans (1949a, b) points out that Mayo viewed the Hawthorne studies as a potential first step towards laying the basis of organizational behavior.

Mayo's principle idea was that trust existed in primitive society due to rituals, ceremonies, and other social arrangements and provided the necessary underpinnings for cooperation in work-based activities. The shift to modern society destroyed these arrangements. Yet despite the shift, Mayo understood that behavior was not wholly rational, but often driven by sentiments. Accordingly, the way to understand people was to address "the whole situation," meaning that we should examine both intrinsic and extrinsic elements at work. Roethlisberger noted that in every group, workers form their own rituals and routines that ensure cooperation within the group.

Drucker noted that it was Elton Mayo and his group that made the primary contribution to management thought as he contributed the principles and methods of industrial research. Mayo provided a rudimentary conceptual scheme, as well as vocabulary, with his discussions of sentiments, understanding of nonlogical thinking, and the role of social factors. Later work would, sometimes by his students and protégés, refine and expand Mayo's general scheme. The most notable contribution was a rebuffing of economic determinism, which had been the major intellectual explanation for behaviors since the time of Marx. By deemphasizing economic motivations and stressing other human elements, such as social relationships, Mayo made a notable contribution. Such an approach would have been a popular undertaking in both political science and history at the time. The inability of the Great Depression to crush American capitalism indicated that economic factors alone could not predict behavior (Brinton 1948; Drucker 1946).

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## The Vital Center Does Not Hold

"The world over, we are greatly in need of an administrative elite who can assess and handle the concrete difficulties of human collaboration," Elton Mayo wrote in 1933. In 1945, he argued that society had failed to develop means of collaboration. Based on the destruction from the wars, Mayo had a pessimistic view of the future of humanity. His critics, such as Daniel Bell and others, also looked to the future with a fearful eye. The argument laid forth in this section is that Elton Mayo worked in a period of social and political upheaval when people sought means to promote cooperation; the failure of other management and political solutions provided an opening for human relations. Mayo grimly noted that churches, social groups, and families no longer held sway. He argued for the development and training of a new elite to handle society's issues and others agreed. The changes to industrial life brought on by the Great Depression and World War II aided Mayo in selling his view (Brinkley 1998). This process is discussed in this chapter.

## The Great Depression

The Great Depression was the major economic event of the twentieth century (Kennedy 1999). Its impact on management has not received major study. Likewise, scholars have provided scant commentary of the importance of World War II on management thought. This is not to say that scholars have not addressed either issue, but have not adequately provided enough of a context for both events. In other fields, such as psychology and sociology, there have been studies to document the role the war played in shaping those fields. Likewise, we have documentation of how the war dramatically changed and shaped modern liberalism. Some scholars, such as Albert G. Mills (Foster et al. 2014; Williams and Mills 2017) and others, have begun to fill in the gap. For the purposes of this chapter, to understand the importance of both events would reveal the intellectual importance of the Hawthorne studies.

The Great Depression is the most researched economic event in history. Despite various attempts by the Roosevelt administration, it seemed that the economic conditions were not going to improve. Comments from academics, politicians, and common people support this point. Lizabeth Cohen (1990) wrote:

During the 1930s American industrial workers sought to overcome the miseries and frustrations that long had plagued their lives neither through anticapitalist and extra-governmental revolutionary uprisings nor through perpetuation of the status quo of welfare capitalism but rather through their growing investment in two institutions they felt would make capitalism more moral and fair – an activist welfare state concerned with equalizing wealth and privilege and a national union movement of factory workers committed to keeping a check on self-interested employers. (pp. 365)

She does not suggest that workers believed that a growth period could occur, therefore increasing the financial pie. They wanted capitalism to be fairer in distributing the benefits, a very different perspective than Taylorism, which assumed a growing bounty (Cohen 1990; Kennedy 1999; Leuchtenburg 1995; Hamby 2004). Amity Shales (2007) gets this point right; the American people believed that the economy was permanently broken. Mostly Americans took the Great Depression as one would a major natural disaster – it simply happened.

If this were true, it would explain the crucial point regarding the Hawthorne studies – namely, if wages could no longer be paid, if economic incentives were limited, how do we motivate workers? Taylorism assumed a consistently growing economy. In fact, its defenders, then and now, have pointed out the explicit purpose of creating plenty. However, it appeared that the era of the growing economy had ended. If so, what other elements could blend society together? The common response was government intervention. In fact, many intellectuals looked toward fascist Italy or Soviet Russia as a potential guide. Others looked toward the government to create stability. The initial New Deal response was to eliminate competition between labor and capital through the National Recovery Act, which set wages, production, and working conditions. This model was based on the War Industries Board from World War I (Kennedy 1999).

John Hassard (2012) has suggested that the Hawthorne studies were unneeded, citing the presence of welfare-capitalism at the Hawthorne plant. Hassard argued:

The Hawthorne plant, which officially opened in 1907, soon developed a reputation within American industry as a champion of ‘welfare capitalism’ or the practice of businesses providing welfare-like services to employees. Under welfare capitalism, companies would typically offer workers higher pay and superior non-monetary compensation (such as health care, housing, and pensions, plus possibly social clubs, sports facilities, and in-house training) than available from other firms in the industry.

Richard Gillespie (1991) has agreed, arguing that the Hawthorne track team, formed in 1927, was the very flower of welfare capitalism, predating Mayo’s work. The purpose of welfare capitalism, as Lizbeth Cohen (pg. 161) has proposed, was that “the enlightened corporation, not the labor union or the state, would spearhead the creation of a more benign industrial society.” However, Cohen also noted, welfare capitalism died in the Great Depression, since companies (even a monopoly like the phone company) did not have the funds for it anymore.

Based on these two issues, we could draw a number of important conclusions. Mayo would have liked some aspects of welfare capitalism; it caused interaction between workers and management. People work to consumption is the old saw. However, what could make workers work, when incentives do not exist and consumption is impossible? Welfare capitalism all but died by 1933 when Mayo was arguing for attempts to discover spontaneity at work, and was dead in 1945, when he argued for more efforts to understand cooperation.

Rather than seeking government involvement, Mayo sought another benefit to this approach – it would provide laborers with a greater sense of connection to society, which would eliminate radical tendencies. Mayo’s work frequently cited and sought inspiration from the work of anthropologists Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. In fact, when he tutored his great student George Homans (1984), most of his classes were interested in anthropological work on primitive societies, which Mayo believed had the clues to offer guidance in how to promote a better society. Mayo did not come up with a solution, noting in 1945 that modern sociology and psychology failed to provide a response. He merely noted that the Hawthorne research could lead to an explanation. His suggestion was that the use of rituals could be a solution, which received some confirmation with Roy’s Banana Time (Roy 1959) article that indicated that “times and themes” can create a sense of unity. Mayo, during the 1930s, tried to sell his ideas to a wide array of business leaders. He did receive funding – but mostly his ideas were too under developed to be really applied.

Mayo’s suggestions found intellectual conformation. Crane Brinton (1948) argued that what Mayo and his colleagues had done was to demonstrate that when economic conditions are clearly measurable, people still want to feel the sense of sharing, satisfaction of the ego, and emotional satisfaction. Brinton also notes, when referring to industrializing England, that economic values do not necessarily correspond to upheaval. Kornhauser (1934) and Elliott (1934) viewed Mayo’s work as an attempt to develop answers to the widespread social disorganization, presumably



caused by the war. Parsons (1940) motivation of economic activities argued that the institutionalization of self-interest had been one of the distinguishing characteristics of modern life. Yet, modern management techniques were needed. Parks praised the interdisciplinary work of the studies as a means of addressing various contemporary social issues.

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## The Good War

Mills and coauthors have demonstrated that the Hawthorne studies did not receive notice in the textbooks until after World War II. My own work (Muldoon 2012, 2017) has found that many of the articles, especially criticisms, did not occur until after 1946, with Bell's article in *Commentary* serving as a jumping point for criticism. The largest explanation for this occurrence was that the economic hardship of the depression limited the spread of the Hawthorne studies' message (Blum 1976, O'Neill 1993; Kennedy 1999). Sociology, psychology, and economics each faced hardships. There were few journals launched, few jobs, and fewer books. World War II also limited the degree to which books could be published owing to restrictions on the usage of paper. Therefore, it was not until after World War II and its aftermath that the Hawthorne studies received their due from scholars. Part of this reason was that, as *Fortune* (1946) magazine noted, Mayo's ideas and the research he inspired were just beginning to bear fruit.

The other significance of World War II to the Hawthorne studies has to do with the labor market. The war had dramatically changed the relationship between labor and capital. Labor's prewar desires had been nationalized by the War Labor Board. Unions had provided a guarantee not to strike. Unemployment had been all but eliminated. Wages did not rise, but neither did prices, due to price controls. Consumption was limited due to the war. People had money but consumer goods were rare. Instead, companies provided healthcare and other benefits to attract workers. Therefore, there was little economic reason for workers to strike. There were little social reasons as well. There was a strong sense of patriotism. Workers were encouraged to believe that they had a part to play in the war. People who were able to work and chose not to were considered slackers. Even the most radical elements of the American society supported the war. In fact, as Eric Foner has noted, World War II was the only war in history that did not have a major protest movement. Labor unions had moved to a position of accommodation with capital under the aegis of the New Deal broker state. The spirit of Gompers had won over unions, forsaking anything similar to the Industrial Workers of the World. Accordingly, labor unions agreed not to strike (Blum 1976; Kennedy 1999; O'Neill 1993).

Yet in both the war and its aftermath, a wide variety of union confrontations with management and the government were seen despite organized labor's promise not to strike that were unprecedented in the United States. Mining leader, John L. Lewis, continued striking during the war. Future President Harry S. Truman, a friend of labor, wanted Lewis shot for treason, claiming that the only reason why this did not occur was that President Franklin Roosevelt lacked guts (Kennedy 1999). For his

part, Roosevelt felt that Lewis was the most dangerous man in the country. In addition, *Stars and Stripes*, the Army's official newspaper, attacked labor leaders who struck during the war. Although labor leaders were able to gain some concessions, the loss in reputation, confidence, and political support was, in the words of historian David Kennedy, "immeasurable" (Kennedy 1999: 643). Unions seemed unable to control labor. In 1944, there were 4956 labor stoppages alone. In 1945, there were 4750, and in 1946, there were 4985. These were shocking to the nation (Blum 1976; Kennedy 1999; O'Neill 1993). There was industrial upheaval in Europe and Great Britain as well.

These strikes occurred despite the fact that they were often illegal, wildcat strikes not endorsed by unions. These strikes had issues beyond simple pay; they were often the result of racial difficulties as well as issues with various managers. These wildcat strikes were, in essence, spontaneous actions done by labor against the approval and agreement of either the union or the government. James R. Zetka (1992) has noted that the close collaboration of working together actually provided workers with sufficient trust with other workers that encouraged strikes. Workers also violated the contracts that unions signed with management. The Mayo group noted that humanistic management prevented the wildcat strikes. Jerome Scott and George Homans researched a wildcat strike in Detroit, finding that the actions of one manager, who had developed a sense of trust with workers, prevented the wildcat strike. Scott and Homans, argued for the need for cooperation, the need to study human skills, having discussions with labor about issues, are perhaps the clearest statements on Mayoism. In essence, social interaction with management to encourage trust between workers and management was Mayo's major suggestion.

Mostly, Mayoism was a modification to the notion of rationalization, in that there would always be spontaneous actions since behavior had nonlogical antecedents. The notion was to develop better social skills to replace bureaucratic responses. The flowering of social sciences during the war could provide administrators with the tools needed to manage society. The use of collective bargaining – although still important – was viewed as a necessary but insufficient condition to ensure peace. The idea that workers can have spontaneous behaviors – beyond that of the work contract – meant that there was a need for new techniques to promote cooperation.

A series of articles published after the war hailed the development of new social sciences in aiding cooperation. In addition, several new human relations programs were founded after the war and many of them had connections to Mayo. D. N. Chester (1946) notes that Mayo attempted to address the major concerns of industrial life. The impact of the war could be seen in Kimball's review, where he noted the need to examine the development of social skills. In an article on the war and its relationship with sociology, Parsons and Barber (1948) noted that universities turned to other social issues, including education, race relations, public opinion, crime, alienation, social work, and anthropology with the purpose of promoting cooperation and integration.

One of the major new approaches was industrial sociology. The most notable success was the establishment of a department at the University of Chicago, with W. Lloyd Warner and Burleigh Gardner as key figures. Both Warner and Gardner

had a connection with the Hawthorne studies and Elton Mayo. They took up Mayo's criticism that the university needed to be the focal point of research and training for the administrator. Bladden (1948), who was a critic of Mayo, found himself a director of an industrial relations department a year after the war. Many social scientists were produced by the war providing a supply, while the problems of peace providing the demand (Kimball 1946; Parsons and Barber 1948).

Accordingly, Mayo's work saw acknowledgment in the press in a major way. *Fortune* (1946) magazine was one of the first to recognize the merit of Mayo's work. The unsigned article, as was the practice at the time, noted several important facets of the work. Firstly, *Fortune* noted that Mayo discovered one of the primary elements of behavior in the Hawthorne studies that social factors helped determine production. People did not wish to produce too much, which itself was an element of the peasant work culture that Taylor had only partially exorcised. Secondly, *Fortune* magazine argued that Mayo's ideas were a challenge to the notions held by both Adam Smith and Karl Marx that economics was the principle driver of behavior. *Fortune* magazine also noted that Mayo's ideas went beyond collective bargaining, attempting to seek spontaneous cooperation between various groups within society. In terms of Mayo's attitudes towards unions, *Fortune* found several interesting aspects. Union leader Clinton Golden felt that the work of the Hawthorne studies, especially its emphasis on the informal group, was a step in explaining how unions came to be. Golden went further by noting that unionization merely made these informal arrangements more permanent. Golden also pointed out that some of the social aspects that workers desired could not be explained with collective bargaining. As anyone who has worked a tedious job would understand, social relationships can make the job far more rewarding.

Drucker also pointed out that one of the principle attentions has been on the divide between labor and capital. For the system to work, there must be a reduction in conflict. Drucker asked why did conflict occur? Drucker notes that the principle conflict between labor and management is objective work conditions not someone's villainy. Few people bought into the image of the fat-cat owner or the lazy worker (Drucker 1946). Locke (1982) once noted that the principle contention between management and labor was over monetary wages. Yet, Drucker demonstrated that wage rates are rarely the cause of the problem – the problem is the overwhelming lack of trust that occurs between labor and management. This distrust is the primary driver of labor contention. Drucker notes that managerial unfairness, as well as arbitrary work elements, is the primary causes of dissatisfaction.

Drucker argued that collective bargaining does not substitute for trust. Since contracts are incomplete and enforcement mechanisms are costly, management often attempts to challenge the union on even the most benign matters (Drucker 1946; Locke 1982). Drucker also pointed out that there would be nothing as potentially dangerous as splitting up workers and separating them socially, arguing that workers seek acceptance and validation from their peers. He noted that two different plants – one in Dayton, where workers could compete and socialize with one another, and another at Indianapolis, where workers could not, had a distinct difference in production. Dayton was more productive (Drucker 1946).

## An Inchoate Movement

The anti-Hawthorne movement had a high level of reliability, but it is unclear whether other scholars could form a legitimate alternative to the Hawthorne research. The reason is that the Hawthorne studies were a research study that had elements in sociology, political science, anthropology, management, and economics. Each of these fields has different research ends and means, funding, and different levels of legitimacy. The 1930s saw the development and hope that there would be an integrated social science. Robert Lynd, Mayo, and others were calling for science to develop more applied solutions. Talcott Parsons and George Homans would take this a step further by developing theories that explained a wide variety of human behaviors through the lens of sociology, psychology, and economics. C.W.M. Hart (1943) and others praised the Hawthorne studies for attempting to bend the boundaries between fields (Muldoon 2012; Muldoon 2017).

Yet this new science did not emerge. The fields had too many different assumptions and ends. For example, scholars criticize Mayo's work for attempting to improve production and morale. Yet, both of those ends are completely legitimate variables in management and psychology. It would be difficult to publish a paper in organizational behavior that did not have performance, or some variable similar to morale, as a criterion of research. This difference placed an impossible divide between critics and the Mayo group. Mayo's sociological critics talked past the Human Relations writers; Mayo and Roethlisberger did not respond; Homans talked past the critics. There was little conceptual overlap of work-related phenomena research. Psychologists ignored unions; economists placed emphasis on unions; sociology both ignored and placed emphasis on unions. The best reason why would be to follow the money. Sociology received money from unions, and psychology and management from business (Muldoon 2017).

My contention is that the major contenders for the father of human relations, Whiting Williams and Henry S. Denison, would also fail some, if not all, of the criticisms labeled on the Hawthorne studies. I found that there are generally about six major criticisms of the Hawthorne studies listed in the literature between 1936 and 1958. Contrary to Landsberger, the majority of the criticisms came from sociology and reflected the ongoing debates within the sociology literature. I also state that Bell's famous criticism was the focal point of launching the anti-Hawthorne movement. In this section, I would like to dwell on Williams and Denison as competitors to Hawthorne.

Whiting Williams was an early sociologist who conducted research on workplace behaviors during the 1910s and 1920s. He discovered many of the same "findings" that the Hawthorne studies did. Williams found that workers were motivated by feelings, worth (even managers), social relationships, social comparison based on pay, and the need for social interactions on the part of the worker. He also noted that workers sought union membership due to ineffective and arbitrary management. He discovered most of what would become Human Relations. Henry S. Denison, an executive and member of the Taylor Society, made similar findings, by stressing nonfinancial rewards, job enlargement, and social interactions, noting their role in

increasing production. Wren and Bedeian note that one of the reasons why Human Relations commences with Hawthorne was that the Hawthorne studies had more of a scientific element (Bruce 2015; Wren 1987).

Yet the work of Williams and Denison would flunk several of the same criticisms leveled at the Hawthorne studies. For instance, sociology scholars would have had issue with the fact that job performance and cooperation were still dominant themes in the work of Williams and Dennison. Performance and cooperation would have been regarded not as objective criteria, but desired outcomes. In addition, scholars would have attacked Williams and Dennison (the same way as the Hawthorne studies) as observations collected at random, rather than a systematic study or experiment. Some radical scholars, such as C. Wright Mills and Daniel Bell, would have attacked Denison and Williams since they both supported maintaining, while reforming current structures of power, rather than overthrowing them. In addition, radical scholars would have challenged the idea that Dennison and Williams, men of privilege, would have really understood workers – a criticism that was placed on the Mayo group. Williams's type of research, undercover, was increasingly losing its influence over the field to survey and experiment.

Finally, the 1940s saw the emergence of theory within the field of sociology as a means to gain respect and legitimacy. Accordingly, several papers at the 1946 meeting of the American Sociological Society addressed the need for theory as well as scholars publishing work on how to theorize. This approach was hegemonic within the field, touching on the most prestigious schools in sociology, Harvard and Columbia. Theory, it is important to note, is hypotheses deduced from a set of propositions that are logically true called covering laws (Homans 1984).

This is different than theorizing based on observation. This was a stunning turn for the field, which up to the 1930s, had been devoted to practical research on social issues. Moore, one the drivers of theory, stated plainly that Mayo "is ignorant of the role of theory in social research" and that he instead "advocates amassing observations, apparently at random." Moore argued that this approach caused the misnaming of variables and confused hypotheses. I believe that both Williams and Denison flunk this test as well. I see little theory in Williams, as noted at the time; he provided interesting insight but with little explanation. Denison was considered, as Bruce notes, a theorist but one who was practical in orientation that developed observations inductively. As I note in my work on Homans and Fayol, this approach would have been considered illegitimate in the logical positivist 1940s and 1950s.

There is nothing new under the sun. Henri Fayol described the Hawthorne findings before Williams and Denison. St. Benedict predated Fayol. Roethlisberger suggested that Mayo was an update of the Gospel of St. Luke. Hawthorne, despite its problems, was perceived to have better methods, as well as stimulating scholars to research boundaries. It is not just knowledge, but also the methods we use to discover knowledge. The reason for multiple discoveries is often that a researcher made a fatal flaw, such as when Copernicus developed the heliocentric model. Galileo and Kepler were the ones who made it work.

Alternatively, Denison and Williams did not leave behind a generation of scholars to replicate and refine the original work. Alternatively, they worked, when their

research was not in vogue. As I have noted, the Hawthorne studies combined better methods, explanations, and inspirations than the work that followed. Hilda Weiss Parker (1958) could claim that, until Mayo's work, there was little systematic and experimental research conducted in relationships at work. Williams work was reviewed, but scholars had some issues with the methods and insights. I have found not a single review of Denison's work in JSTOR. However, Mayo's work directly inspired subsequent research. My 2012 article has a long list of studies that were inspired by Mayo and this is merely a sample.

Mayo's work was disseminated at a time when scholars were attempting to move past bureaucracy to develop means of trust. The other reason why the Hawthorne studies became the dominate field was the human and social capital that Mayo reproduced. He legitimized the business school at Harvard, launched the careers of the two most cited sociologists of the 1960s (Parsons and Homans), and launched work centers at Chicago and Cornell. Elton Mayo inspired the political scientist Harold Laswell. Even Mayo's arch critic, Daniel Bell, noted that the emergence of industrial research at the university was because of Mayo. Put simply, Mayo inspired a generation of scholars to refute, expand, or explain his findings, or develop theory based on his findings. Mostly, the Hawthorne studies were the most significant contribution in that it forced the study of workplace behaviors as a distinct field separate from the worker and community (Trahair 1984).

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## **Elton Mayo: The Manager as Therapist**

Scholars have placed Mayo and Taylor as a match pair fighting over the nature of industrial life. These two men are in opposition to each other because Burleigh Gardner and Stuart Chase sought to separate the work of both men. In addition, as Bruce noted, the Taylor society held less than promising views of the Hawthorne studies. Depending on your perspective, it is the scientifically valid Taylor versus the unscientific Mayo or the inhuman Taylor versus the humanist Mayo. Other scholars, such as Edwin Locke (1982), J. Boddewyn (1961), and Daniel Wren (2005), have noted that Taylor preceded Mayo. We should see the Hawthorne studies as both an attempt at an applied social science and answering the limitations of scientific management. Mayo and Taylor should not be viewed as competitors rather as complements. Along with Stephen Waring (1994), I view modern organizational behavior to have elements of both Mayo and Taylor.

Lyndall Urwick (1937, 1943, 1944) attempted to combine both viewpoints into a new management theory. Mayo addressed the Taylor society; Roethlisberger praised Taylor. Powell (1957) sees Taylor as the genesis of the human relations movement, noting that Mayo considers issues of social organization, but that Taylor also had a simplistic understanding of social and psychological issues. It should be noted that this was the case, as we will discuss later. Powell also noted that Williams produced some of the most important work; he developed shrewd insights about plant life. Yet, Powell also notes that it was Mayo who built on the work of Powell in expanding the role of worker social behavior at work. Time magazine noted:

The seeds of this change were sewn by two great pioneers whose names are scarcely known – Frederick Winslow Taylor, a one-time day laborer, and Elton Mayo, an Australian immigrant turned Harvard sociologist. Their work did not seem related but it was. Taylor, who died in 1915, was the father of scientific management; he increased industrial production by rationalizing it. Mayo, who died in 1949, was the father of industrial human relations; he increased production by humanizing it.

Bendix and Fisher (1949) noted that in the future we should see them as “not unrelated.” Wren and Bedeian have argued that they should be seen as complements.

William Hawley Cooper (1962) delivered the most sustained analysis of the relationship between Hawthorne and Taylor. He argued that they both focused on different aspects of the job. Taylor was, according to Cooper, (pg. 23) a form-perceiving manager,

aware of his surroundings in terms of shape, structure, and orderly arrangement. His perceptions are analogous to those of a builder who takes a disorderly mass of raw material and converts it into a recognized useful order, or to a scientist who looks at the seeming chaos in nature and either defines or creates an orderly pattern, or to an artist who sets down on canvas an arrangement of patterns that he hopes are meaningful.

Mayo viewing tasks and procedures as a process-receiving manager might as one who views life as transitory and lacking set form.

Mostly, to use contemporary terms, Taylor was concerned with economic exchange, where the terms of the exchange are discussed beforehand, where everyone has distinct roles and remuneration is known beforehand. Taylor sought to increase trust through scientifically determining both work and pay conditions. Yet, Taylor ignores that a great amount of meaning is determined through social interaction and that not all aspects of work could be broken down. Mayo's recognition was that in an earlier, preindustrial society, people clearly understood their obligations because roles were socialized through rituals, which in turn allowed for trust and spontaneous cooperation to ensue. Mayo recognized that the new order, one based primarily on economic benefit, had washed away this old society, creating a new society where acquisition was the primary obligation, ignoring other social issues. This created a lack of trust and cooperation. Mayo was more concerned with what makes spontaneous cooperation possible. Social outings, encouraged by management, are not, by definition, spontaneous.

The notion of cooperation is one of the principle driving factors behind the development of both scientific management and the advent of the human relations movement. William H. Knowles (1952) argues that the term “cooperation” is one dependent on the field. For example, economics focuses on the ability of the market to ensure cooperation between various partners who use prices to coordinate between buyer and supplier. Yet, anticipating transaction cost economics, Knowles's perspective breaks down in the face of larger collectives. After all, most transactions are nonmarket. The price mechanism often sets a bare minimum of cooperation, namely, what a worker could do without losing his job. From the manager's perspective, the maximum amount of effort sought would increase the speed of

production without facilitating a strike. Compounding this problem is the issues raised by Karl Marx, who pointed out the paradox – that capitalism’s growth was based on the growth of cooperation. Cooperation would be based on division of labor, which would require the need for a directing authority and that this directing authority would extract as much production on an increasingly dependent workforce. Therefore, a new system of coordination was needed to aid in exchange. Marx’s solution was dictatorship of the proletariat and control means of production. Taylor sought to use science and financial incentives to solve the problem; Mayo sought to use social ties.

As Wagner-Tsukamoto (2007) noted, Taylorism was mostly concerned with the ability of managers to handle issues of opportunism on the part of workers. Taylor saw the solution to opportunism as both science and incentive, ignoring the fact that a great many parts of work are, as Mayo noted, spontaneous. In a system that is rationalized, where every arrangement is determined by job design and job performance is quantified, there is little in the way of actual trust and discretion. Thus, there is very little need for actual management, since everything is determined by function. Taylorism was incomplete because it could not understand that trust can be a solution to work problems. Many organizations have shifted away from the hierarchical model of performance to a model based on social exchange relationships. The reason is that, once again, we have recognized that there are certain behaviors that could not be preprogrammed. A usual job description contains some, but not all, of the tasks required by the company, as companies often use the open phrase “as determined by the supervisor.” How could management ensure completion of those tasks, especially for behaviors that are informal and unrewarded (Organ et al. 2006).

Mayo understood that group interactions were a common part of the job. He was correct that groups could allow soldiering. The difference was that Mayo understood that financial incentives were not the basis of cooperation, because the manager/scientists could not conceive of every element at work. Nor could government structures and rules ensure compliance. Human relations seemed to become more popular in the years after World War II as a means of dealing with wildcat strikes, of which there were many, despite the “no strike” promises offered by management. Mayo was also correct that no amount of money could eliminate the need for social interactions. Although he overstated his case greatly, even his greatest critic, Daniel Bell, recognized the majority of social relationships come from work. Certain studies performed during the 1950s, such as Roy’s Banana Time, confirm this general idea. Mayo’s belief was that modern social scientists should create rituals as a means of ensuring cooperation. To summarize, Mayo added the social element to Taylorism, creating a system of both formal and informal inducements to create trust and effort.

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## Conclusion

Elton Mayo left a great record. Even Bell, his most notable critic, both in his 1947 article and his later work, recognized that Mayo had developed a new approach in recognizing the importance of studying workplace behaviors, as well as the



importance of the manager to society. Again, this is not to say that Mayo was original. I find myself in agreement with Drucker that Mayo was a true scholar in that he was a codifier and an originator. I wrote (Muldoon 2012):

Hawthorne's second contribution was that it provided researchers with a more focused analysis of workers' interactions within the organization, such as the social interaction between workers and supervisors. Contemporaries understood that the work of the Hawthorne researchers was not only more rigorous than the work of Williams, but also provided new paths and understandings for future research. Whether the contribution was providing the concept of the man in the middle or exploring the dynamics of social influence on production (Whyte 1956), scholars noted that the Hawthorne studies provided a new and significant break from the work of Williams and other contemporaries. Summed up this idea when he conceded that the original and pioneering effort of industrial sociology was *What's on the Worker's Mind*. He also noted, however, that Mayo's group made the most influential contribution because it focused attention squarely on the internal organization so that it became the dominant concern of industrial sociology. The general conclusion from both Mayo and Williams was that workers' motivation was a combination of both monetary and non-monetary benefits. (Parsons 1940; Rogers 1946)

It was not that Mayo was original, nor did he develop a theory, nor did found a school – his disciples had rigorous arguments between them. He did not produce an applied solution to the labor question nor did he endorse any propose solutions. In fact, he argued that there were no known solutions. What Mayo did was to demonstrate the complexity of modern work life and the need to take the attitudes, feelings, and other motivations of workers seriously. He codified the other findings of the 1920s.

Modern organizational behavior bares his imprint directly. Due to Mayo's efforts, we demonstrated that work motivation has intrinsic and social elements in addition to monetary benefits. We have demonstrated that job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and morale are important outcomes to job performance and that managers should pay attention to them. We know that work stress and injury is related to relationships and attitudes, as well as working conditions. There is vast literature on the need for managers to develop relationships with workers that create spontaneous behaviors and cooperation. We also have demonstrated, through transaction cost economics, that not every work condition can be known beforehand nor can we effectively monitor workers. This rich legacy was due to the Hawthorne studies and Elton Mayo. Mayo may not have been a deep and rigorous thinker, but he understood the big picture of the modern world better than anyone, including Taylor (Whyte 1987).

The failures of welfare capitalism and pure unionism to produce a cooperative society have been noted during Mayo's time. In fact, the importance of supervisor/subordinate relationships within the organization is intensified in the current business environment due to the presence of reorganization, downsizing, and layoffs. All of which limit the social rewards and potential satisfaction individuals derive from the organization, making it necessary for these individuals to seek satisfaction elsewhere. Supervisor/subordinate dyads enable both parties to gain satisfaction, thus encouraging them to exchange resources that aid the organization.

Consequently, supervisors are encouraged to create quality relationships with their subordinates as a means of ensuring the proper functioning of the organization (Cappelli et al. 1997; Organ 1988; Rousseau 1998).

If Mayo did not matter, why do we spend so much time looking at measures related to job satisfaction and commitment? If spontaneous behaviors and relationships beyond economic exchange were not important, why is there vast literature on social exchange? Mayo's contemporary and historical critics fail to answer those questions. The profession owes them a great deal however, since they force us to examine why Mayo emerged and the intellectual context of the research. Part of the problem, as Landsberger suggested, should be placed directly on the shoulders of Mayo. Mayo did not have the ability to define his interests precisely and was too ambitious in his endeavors. Had he simply suggested that he was looking at spontaneous behaviors, in conjunction with programmed behaviors, he would have made his contributions more clear. In addition, had he engaged the scholarship literature or his critics, his contribution would have been more obvious. This combination means that Mayo's legacy contains unneeded complexity. Like Taylor, Mayo suffered a lack of empathy or understanding with his critics – repeating his mantra “let the heathen rage.” His unwillingness to engage meant that Mayo only produced more heathens (Smith 1998).

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## Cross-References

- ▶ [Organizational Psychology and the Rise of Human Resource Management](#)
- ▶ [Taylor Made Management](#)

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