CHAPTER 4

THE HUMAN RELATIONS SCHOOL

1. Placing the human relations movement in its historical and political context
   1. Work conditions (ex. Ludlow massacre and Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire) led to unions and strikes.
   2. The need to improve work conditions let to reform initiatives as well as a widespread interest in alternative political systems.
   3. The need for increased production for WWI led to government pressure on business owners to provide workers with increased rights.
   4. The wealth disparity between rich and poor reached unprecedented levels.
   5. These conditions led to debates about democracy and its application to industrial contexts.
      1. Industrial democrats called for increased participation by workers and democracy in the workplace.
      2. Realist democrats believed that administrative elites should take the lead in industrial development because the masses could not be trusted to make objective decisions.
2. Elton Mayo and the Hawthorne Studies
   1. Elton Mayo was the principal architect of the human relations movement.
      1. Mayo argued that the workplace produced an extreme sense of alienation in the worker and thus, counseling could psychologically adjust worker to their work.
      2. Modern workplaces lacked cooperative systems and administrative elites should world to create conditions of social collaboration.
      3. The solutions to problems of the era, according to Mayo, were not in social and economic reform, but in the application of psychological principles.
   2. The Hawthorne Studies were conducted from 1924 to 1933 at the Western Electric Hawthorne plant in Cicero, Illinois in order to investigate the importance of a variety of physical, economic, and social variables in the workplace.
      1. *The illumination studies* (1924-1927) studied the effects of varying the lighting on production. The productivity of the workers increased no matter how the lighting varied.
      2. *The relay assembly test room studies* (1927-1933) placed a number of workers in a special test room and altered certain variables in the conditions. Researchers determined that much of the increase in productivity came not from those variables, but from the new system of “laissez-faire” supervision.
         1. *The Hawthorne effect* was the name given for the phenomenon in which workers respond to the personal attention paid to them.
      3. *The interview program* (1928-1931) worked as nondirective counseling and showed that workers seemed to appreciate being recognized as individuals by the company.
      4. *The bank wiring observation room study* (1931-1932) observed a group of workers to examine the natural development of informal group relations.
   3. Implications of the Hawthorne Studies
      1. Mayo argued that group cohesiveness could lead to a more productive workforce.
      2. HRM emphasized the positive, social aspects of informal communication.
      3. The discovery of the Hawthorne effect led to a new focus of organizational research: worker attitudes and worker satisfaction.
      4. The studies became an impetus for leadership research.
      5. The studies showed the importance of taking a systemic approach.
      6. The studies, especially the relay assembly test room study, were among the first to utilize naturalistic, qualitative methods.
      7. The studies seemed to provide a solution to the intense industrial conflict of the times.
   4. A critique of the Hawthorne Studies
      1. Reexamining the empirical data
         1. There were competing explanations but Mayo and his colleagues ruled these out in favor of “social factors.”
      2. Critiquing the ideology of the Hawthorne researchers
         1. Conflict was assigned a wholly negative role.
         2. Managers were assumed to be rational and workers were thought of as “sentimental.”
         3. The studies were gender biased and much of the Hawthorne effect may be attributable to gender dynamics.
3. Mary Parker Follett: Bridging theory and practice
   1. Follett was a pragmatist who saw groups and organizations (flat, nonhierarchical collectives) as the vehicle for change toward greater democracy in society.
      1. Follett used the notion of *circular response* to capture the ongoing, dynamic, and ever-changing character of the interactions amongst people and notes that the very act of communicating changes everyone involved.
      2. Follett distinguishes three different ways of dealing with conflict in organizational life:
         1. Domination – the interests of one person are asserted over those of another
         2. Compromise – both parties give up something
         3. Integration – creative engagement in order to find a solution in which neither side has to make a sacrifice
      3. Power, authority and giving of orders
         1. Follett distinguishes between two types of power: “power-over” in which managers assert their authority over workers, and “power-with” in which power is seen as coactive, not coercive.
         2. Her *law of the situation* refers to the idea that in exercising power or giving orders, one’s authority arises out of the needs of the situation.
   2. The strange case of the disappearing theorist
      1. Gender – As a woman, Follett’s ideas may not have been taken seriously
      2. Nature of Follett’s work – While most management thinkers of the time were associated with a single idea, Follett’s work was not easily classifiable and “too rich”
      3. Political implications – Follett’s work was associated with industrial democrats which did not fit with management thinking
4. Human resource management was an effort to motivate workers by recognizing their value to the organization and to legitimize work as relevant to the achievement of human potential.
   1. Douglas McGregor describes two sets management attitudes--Theory X and Theory Y--and argues that Theory Y has the best chance for organizations to reach their objectives.
      1. Theory X is McGregor’s label for the traditional philosophy of management control that assumes that people do not like to work and will avoid it, people must be coerced to achieve organizational goals, and people want to avoid responsibilities and so must be directed.
      2. He, instead, proposes Theory Y in order to realize the full potential of workers as human beings. Theory Y management assumers that work is as natural as play, people will exercise self-direction and self-control, commitment to objectives is based on rewards, people will accept responsibility, people are generally creative, and the intellectual potentialities of people can be more fully utilized.
   2. Rensis Likert’s Four Systems Approach classifies organizations into one of four systems, or leadership styles:
      1. Exploitative-authoritative – Similar to Theory X, motivation occurs through fear and threats, and decisions are concentrated with top management.
      2. Benevolent-authoritative – Motivation occurs through both rewards and threats, and decisions are made in top management with possible opportunity for comment at the lower level.
      3. Consultative – Motivation occurs through rewards, and there is some low-level participation in decisions.
      4. Participative – Motivation occurs through rewards, and decision making is distributed throughout the organization.
   3. Critiquing Human Resource Management
      1. HRM does not take different organizational contexts into account but treats them all as if they could all benefit from the same participative models.
      2. HRM often treats the employee as an object of knowledge that can be more precisely controlled.