

Thomas L. Quick

**UNDER
STANDING
PEOPLE
AT WORK**

*A Manager's
Guide to
the Behavioral
Sciences*

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*A Manager's Guide
to the
Behavioral Sciences*

by Thomas L. Quick

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About the Author

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Foreword

What we all once thought of as “authority” is undergoing significant changes in our society. We are moving away from authority based strictly on power and status to authority based on knowledge and ability. Today, teachers, parents, government officials, doctors, judges, and other authority figures are required to demonstrate competence in order to maintain their authority. Authority is granted by constituents to their leaders only so long as these leaders satisfy the needs and standards of the governed. This startling change applies equally to managerial authority.

Many of our concepts of managerial authority were derived from the Industrial Revolution and have been undergoing transformation ever since. Prior to that time, workers were closely associated with the product of their labors. Each person was accountable for the quantity and quality of his output. With the rise of the factory system and mass production, work became depersonalized. The management system developed in order to assure planning, execution, and control in achieving a predetermined result. The management system sharply reduced the worker's freedom and control over his work, substituting managerial

judgment for that of the individual. As organizations grew, the management system expanded into a codified hierarchy whose different levels were marked by significantly different rewards and social status. Management's right to manage was based on its ownership of the means of production and on the exercise of unimpeded authority. This authority was part of the overall authority system operative in the general society.

Authority of managers was unquestioned. They could be and frequently were demanding and exploitative, and they used their authority to punish workers with impunity.

During the late 1800s, the union movement started to take hold and to challenge the free exercise of managerial authority through collective action. In many countries, socially conscious legislators began to limit managerial control over health, safety, hours, and working conditions.

With mass production and the moving assembly line, new possibilities for efficiency were discovered by conducting studies to make work more efficient. While the industrial engineers recognized that worker motivation was a key ingredient for successful productivity, workers were antagonistic to the whole efficiency movement. Workers felt they were being treated little better than machines by being manipulated and threatened with loss of their jobs by an uncaring management.

It is important to remember that developments within offices and factories are interrelated with political, economic, social, and technological changes. The waves of immigration, the emergence of socialism, expanded educational attainment, and new communications and transportation technologies have all had dramatic impact on employee attitudes, needs, and expectations.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, pioneering work—known as “the Hawthorne studies”—was conducted by a small band of engineers and social scientists under the leadership of Elton Mayo. Previous studies of worker

alienation, suicide rates among workers, and breakdowns in communications between supervisors and workers had created an awareness that the industrial system was marked by underlying resentments and tensions.

The Hawthorne studies confirmed that workers were organized on an informal basis to impede the objectives of management. An anti-authoritarian system existed as a countervailing force to managerial authority.

The insights gained during these studies have changed the focus of management action over the past forty years. It became obvious that employee cooperation was the key to productivity and achievement of corporate objectives. Cooperation cannot be mandated—it must be earned.

For managers to *earn* cooperation requires that:

- They understand the needs, attitudes, expectations, and behavior of people at work—people as both individuals and members of groups.
- They utilize this knowledge to develop specific policies, practices, and programs that will motivate employees to participate in the achievement of managerial objectives.

Significant advances have taken place since Hawthorne to help managers not only understand employee attitudes and behavior, but also elicit the cooperation and involvement required in today's world of work.

One major change has been how managers perceive and use their authority. As you read the following chapters, you will note that managerial authority today is based primarily on competence rather than edict. The old style—domineering authority figures who rule by fear—is now seen to be less effective than gaining workers' willing cooperation.

Lewis Abrams
Publisher

Author's Preface

This book has been conceived and written for anyone who wants a clearer understanding of how research in the behavioral sciences is affecting and improving the quality of our working lives. Most people want to achieve objectives, their own as well as those of the organizations for which they work, in order ultimately to get more joy and satisfaction from their investment of time and energy on the job and in their relationships with others. Most of us want to know more about motivations—our own as well as other people's.

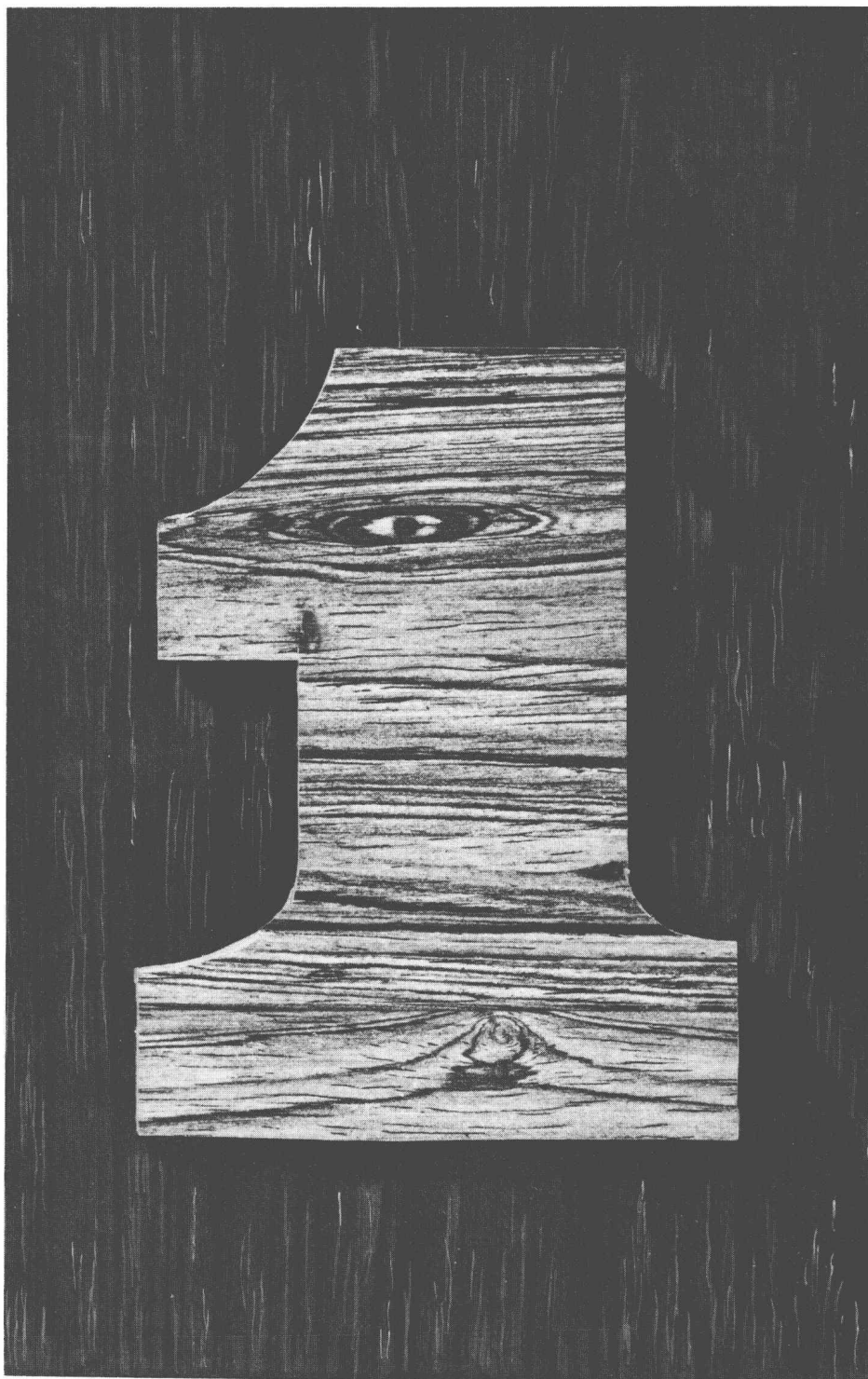
Much of the work of behavioral scientists today is devoted to studying these objectives and helping us be more effective in achieving them. Thousands and thousands of printed pages each year discuss theory and experimentation in these areas. So prodigious is the output that it is fashionable to talk about the *management-theory jungle* as if all of this effort were an impenetrable thicket in which one would easily lose all direction. But that is not accurate. There is a general direction in theory and practice. Scien-

tists have built upon others' thinking and experiments. The results are *not* masses of contradictions and sharply differing schools of thought; there *is* a certain unity to what the research and thinking have produced.

The purpose of this book is to identify the patterns of that research and to define its direction. These pages are for the manager who wants an overview—a manager being anyone responsible for planning, organizing, controlling, or monitoring the efforts of others to achieve organizational objectives—as well as for every individual who wants a glimpse of how his or her work life is being altered by the behavioral sciences.

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Work and Morale

The Hawthorne experiments were the first major intervention by behavioral scientists in industry. Management wanted to know what factors would contribute to higher productivity. And the Harvard University researchers wanted to study those factors. But the scientists, under Elton Mayo, were not prepared for what they uncovered at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company. (Nor did they grasp the significance of everything they did uncover, especially the importance of social relationships on the work scene.) In the beginning, their work was to try to establish some relationship between conditions of work and the incidence of fatigue and monotony among the employees. In broad terms, the experiments consisted of altering various factors involved in the work situation and measuring what effects, if any, these changes had on the workers involved.

The first experiment, which involved changing the lighting in three departments, was inconclusive. The intensity of

the lighting was varied—and production varied as well, but not always in relation to changes in the illumination.

Therefore a second experiment was set up. It involved test groups working under different illumination intensities, and a control group that had relatively constant intensity of light. Production increased in *both* test and control groups. Further research led to two conclusions: (1) The production variances were not directly related to the level of intensity of the lighting, and (2) there were apparently human factors involved that had to be studied.

The need for further study led to observations conducted over an extensive period of time. Because nothing was involved that would not be taken for granted today, the reader will be astonished to learn that these were experimental innovations at the time: Rest periods were introduced; the method of payment was changed; the workers were allowed to talk freely. In addition, rest periods and working hours were adjusted periodically. Output increased, and remained high.

The employees involved in the test were asked to give their reasons for the high production. They said that the contributing factors were the greater freedom, increased attention, decreased direct supervision, and the chance to set one's own pace. Another factor contributing to the high production rate could also have been the consequence of the employees' revised attitudes about their work: Absenteeism in the group dropped sharply.

Two other experiments were arranged to determine the role of wage incentives in increased production: These experiments took place in the second Relay Assembly Test Room and the Mica Splitting Test Room. But the relationship between more money and higher output was not easily and definitely established. Some increase in production could be assumed to follow from increased pay, but it was becoming increasingly clear to the experimenters that other

factors—such as supervision—were involved. Hawthorne demonstrated that employees sometimes rated as poor supervisors whom management regarded as effective. And the employees' view of supervision was probably the more important, since they were the producers. A mass interviewing program was designed to gather from employees data that would guide supervisors in doing a better job of leadership. (Today, it is almost routine for a consultant to begin work in an organization by gathering such data and making diagnostic studies.)

Another factor that could temporarily affect production was discovered: the so-called *Hawthorne Effect*. This phenomenon has to do with the attention given a work group. During the illumination experiment, production in the control group, where lighting was kept relatively constant, went up. Similarly, during the data-gathering, many of the employees interviewed enjoyed the mere fact of the interview and benefited from it in terms of morale. Subsequent researchers and consultants have had to take this phenomenon into account in determining how much *temporary* change in morale and productivity has taken place as a result of mere attention to employees—and how much substantial, permanent modification has occurred as a result of successful efforts to change conditions and relationships. The Hawthorne Effect is an important consideration in research, since it can clutter up a project with misleading results. Response to attention may make the researcher believe that some permanent change of behavior has occurred.

Informal Groups

Perhaps the most significant discovery of the Hawthorne team was the influence of the social or informal group upon

its members. Employees were not only economic creatures; they were social beings as well. How each felt about work and the company—especially the group with which he or she worked and the employee's position in the group—had much to do with the employee's relationships with others. The final experiment, in the Bank Wiring Observation Room, was concerned with this social or informal group. The male employees in this room had devised means of controlling production through ridicule, sarcasm, and "binging"—a blow to the upper arm. If you wanted to belong to the in group, you had to be careful not to turn out too much or too little work; you must not harm a fellow worker by saying anything bad about him to a supervisor.

Especially interesting is that Hawthorne management seemed totally ignorant of the existence of such groups, a factor that undoubtedly contributed to their maintenance and helped to increase their power.

Because of the research done by Elton Mayo and his team, we can assume that in every formal work group of any size there will be at least one informal group. There are groups formed along the lines of age, sex, experience, seniority, and specialization. There are clusters formed by employees who merely like to socialize with one another off the job. Whatever the organizing principle, these informal groups satisfy a social need in people by giving them a sense of belonging. The formal organization, on the other hand, is usually functional and exists—at least in principle—for the sake of efficiency of the total operation. Mere membership in a functional department does not automatically provide the opportunity for social satisfaction.

Writing many years after Hawthorne, Harvard's Fritz J. Roethlisberger, an associate of Mayo, suggested that most managements are uneasy about such groups. For one thing, the informal groups often reflect the personal values of the members. Consequently, management may fear a