# Mayo - Human Relations

## Introduction

Following on from Taylor's research into work-study, Mayo initially set out to investigate the impact of rest breaks on workers' productivity. His most famous experiments centred on the workforce at the Hawthorne Plant of the Western Electric Company in Chicago, where Mayo studied the effects of varying working conditions (such as heating, lighting and the length of the working day) on the productivity of small groups or teams of workers. Every change that was introduced was discussed in detail with the workers beforehand, and each change led to increases in productivity. Most surprisingly, however, the biggest increases occurred when working conditions were changed back to their original levels.

## The Theory

The key conclusions of Mayo's theory are:

- The importance of teamwork – work is seen as a group activity and the 'team spirit' created by close cooperation between individual workers can motivate them to work harder. Workers may group together informally, producing their own rules or 'norms' that can have an important influence on behaviour

- The importance of managers showing an interest in the workforce – communicating with workers and recognising their contributions can help to boost morale and lead to increases in productivity – known as the Hawthorne Effect

- Physical conditions and financial rewards are less important within the work place than social factors such as teamwork and effective communications

## Examples

**Autonomous work groups, quality circles and kaizen groups** where the focus is on teamwork and involving workers in decision-making.
**Human resources managers and departments that focus on employee welfare.**

## Criticisms

Mayo's experiments have been criticised for not being scientific – only small groups of workers were used and subsequent experiments failed to confirm his results.
Workers may not share management's interests in increasing productivity and may expect more than recognition for doing so.

## Question

Do you like working on your own or as part of a team? Why do you think this is?