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Human Resources

Work Group Discussion
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Session Objective: Review applicable research done in the past, being done currently and needed by the industry that is directed to improving utilization of human resources in Distribution Center Operations.

For the "past," the only definitive work identified was the Hawthorne Studies. It was also noted that there was a large body of "wisdom literature" or statements by individuals without research documentation.

The "current" picture was also dismal. One National Restaurant Association study of the impact of rotating jobs to cut down boredom was mentioned. There was no knowledge of results or applications.

The failure in the past to direct research to the person as well as technology (the "System" and the equipment) led to citing some controlling industry attitudes:

1. The principles of work simplification have been known for many years but they are still ignored.

2. Working with people is difficult and frustrating and therefore avoided. Industry seeks motivation pills like money or money or money or money.

3. Distributors operate on the edge of extinction continuously. It is this short term survival concern that obscures benefits of long range research.

The discussion of research needs for the future covered eight primary areas:

1. The impact of basic orientation of new employees on employee turnover. This refers to entry level unskilled labor. A simple program cut employee turnover 50 percent in one company but a controlled study is needed to prove cause and effect.

2. Effects of supplying the basic people "information" needs, i.e., the goals of the company, the purpose of their own job and their performance standards.

3. What really motivates the warehouse labor force? Is it money or recognition or working conditions or some sense of accomplishment, or something else entirely.

4. Study the people in the warehouse separately from and prior to analyzing the technology. How do the people affect the technology?

5. Study the Japanese QC (Quality Control) system applied to our different cultural background. Examine the groupism or family concept of Japanese business applied in this country.

6. Compile a list of ideas that didn't work, such as incentive plans, with enough data to evaluate the idea in another situation and possibly prevent another failure. For example, the buddy system for orienting new employees has a high frequency of teaching the wrong attitudes.

7. Study the effect of self development programs on warehouse labor.

8. Study the results of worker committees or worker projects when they are given a free hand. An example cited was giving the two worst offending fork truck drivers the job of correcting fork truck inflicted product damage. They designed a training program, made a training film at their own expense and developed an effective program.

The discussion concluded with an industrial engineering success story in designing systems for workers. Step one was to provide and police a clean, safe and pleasant place to work. Supervision was directed to functions not to people. People were told where they stood at all times and bad apples were eliminated. Work rules were enforced. This approach is credited with generating a 40 percent productivity improvement in three years.