Maslow's Theory and its Application to Librarianship

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Explains the basis for Maslow's theory, enumerates Maslow's hierarchy of needs, describes implications of the theory and finally presents application of Maslow's theory to librarianship with suitable examples and illustrations.

0 Introduction

Human relations assume double importance in Librarianship as Library is a nonprofit, service-oriented organisation having a sensitive component "users" consisting of more diversed and complex group of individuals.

One of the best representations of much of today's thinking and research in human relations and motivation is the work of Dr Abraham H. Maslow, a psychologist of Brandeis University. Maslow says that man is motivated by his own needs as he sees them.

1 Basis of Maslow's theory

Maslow's theory is based upon following propositions :

1.1 Man is a perpetually wanting being. He always wants and he wants more in an unending process. At a particular point of time a particular need may be satisfied but not needs in general. When a strong need is satisfied, the strength of that need is either dissipated or reduced. However, another need immediately replaces it. Thus human condition is always one of demanding that a need be satisfied.

1.2 Although no need is ever fully satisfied, a substantially satisfied need no longer motivated behaviour. Human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs and not by those that have been gratified.
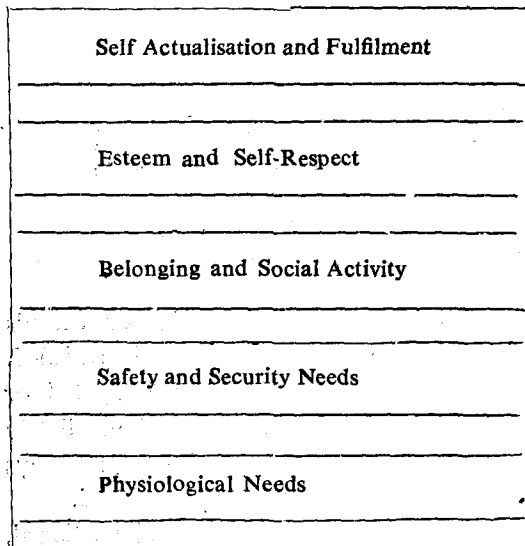
1.3 Man's needs can be arranged in a series of levels. As the more basic needs are met, the needs at the next higher level will demand satisfaction. In other words, thwarting a need at any level tends to make that level pre-eminent. Thus deprivation of need becomes as important a concept in motivation as gratification of it,

2   Maslow's theory

The Maslow's need hierarchy consists of the following five levels :

    Physiological needs
    Safety and security needs
    Belonging and social activity
    Esteem and self respect
    Self actualisation and fulfilment.

The essence of Maslow's need hierarchy is that these needs have a definite sequence of domination in an individual and the same is depicted in the adjacent figure. In other words

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│     Self Actualisation and Fulfilment    │
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│     Esteem and  Self-Respect             │
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│     Belonging and Social Activity        │
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│     Safety and Security Needs            │
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│     . Physiological Needs                │
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until such time as all the physiological needs are reasonably well satisfied, none of the other needs will be of sufficient strength to become a motivator of behaviour. Similarly, unless the safety and security needs are fairly met, the individual is less likely to be motivated by higher order needs.

2.1   *Physiological needs :* Common physiological needs are hunger, thirst, sleep, sex, etc. Each physiological need tends to be relatively independent of the other. Physiological needs

like sleeping and eating must be satisfied frequently. They are essentially finite.

2.2   *Safety and security needs :* Once physiological needs are fairly satisfied, the need for security and safety becomes predominent. They are the needs for self preservation and involve building up a reserve supply of necessities of life such as food, water, clothing and shelter. Safety need is one of the important needs in the hierarchy as it deals in terms of the working environment. Thus protection from physical and emotional harm, things related to job security, promotions, salary, etc. are of safety and security needs.

2.3   *Belonging and social activity :* These are social needs involving affection, affiliation, belongingness, acceptance, friendship, companionship, cooperation and other emotional considerations. They are work related because of the needs for acceptance by fellow workers, a friendly relationship with atleast a few individuals, and the opportunity to associate with and discuss problems with coworkers. The informal organisations arise because of these social needs and desires. Social needs are much more difficult to observe and to distinguish than other needs. It is almost impossible to measure them.

2.4   *Esteem and self respect :* These needs include seeking both self-esteem and the esteem of others. In addition it also includes internal esteem factors like self-confidence, self-respect, achievement, independence and autonomy and external esteem factors such as status, recognition and attention.

2.5   *Self actualisation and fulfilment :* These are needs related to self realisation involving need to realise one's own potential and drives to become what one is capable of becoming. As this includes growth, achieving one's potential

and self-fulfilment, it assumes a clear percep-
tion of one's potential and one's limits.

3 Implications of Maslow's hierarchy of needs

We have seen in the beginning that the
needs serve as the motives or stimuli of human
activity. Maslow's need hierarchy is basis for
motivational theories and all work related
studies in motivation. The concept is normally
applicable to any given situation. However
following are important implications of
Maslow's hierarchy of needs :

3.1 Manager has to be cautious in intro-
ducing change. Unless each individual can see
clearly how his changed behaviour will result in
satisfying his personal needs, he is not likely to
strive to change.

3.2 In times of economic plenty almost all
permanently employed workers have had their
lower order needs substantially met and hence
they are no longer strong motivators.

3.3 Manager has to strive hard to expand
the objectives of the individual employees to
achieve their higher order needs on the job
since lower order needs are usually met fairly.

3.4 Since needs have a definite sequence of
domination, it becomes necessary to find out
what needs are already met and what is the
currently predominant need before devicing
motivational methods.

3.5 Completely meeting a need is practi-
cally impossible. Normally only first three
needs are met to a degree of fairness.

3.6. Since higher order needs are built on
lower order needs, maintaining a minimum
satisfaction of lower order needs is essential to
motivate with higher order needs.

3.7 Higher order needs are more pressing
in high level professional and scientific

employees (i. e. they are related closely to
levels of performance) than low paid employees.

3.8 Higher order needs are more stronger
with members of affluent society than in deve-
loping and underdeveloped societies.

4 Maslow's hierarchy of needs as a model of motivation

Owing to its ease of understanding and in-
tuitive logic, Maslow's theory has received wide
acceptance as one of the models of motivation.
Nevertheless it has been criticised on several
grounds. Before we see how Maslow's theory
can be applied in librarianship, a word of cau-
tion about contingency nature of motivators.
What looks a motivator for one may not be a
motivator for another. There is no accurate
and predetermined set of motivators for all
time for a particular worker. Infact it depends
on situation, individual and organisation. Hence
an organisation should always consider the
entire environment, organisation culture and
objectives vis-a-vis needs of employees before
devicing motivational methods.

Motivators could be economic like incen-
tives and rewards or noneconomic like various
dimensions of job and conducive work environ-
ment. Certain motivating factors work on the
job whereas others work off the job. Normally
on the job motivators are stronger than off the
job motivators.

Lastly, we shall see what happens when a
need is not gratified. If a need is not fulfilled
usually it results in frustration. Frustration,
normally involves defeat, bafflement, a dis-
appointment, prevention from attaining purpose
and it is accompanied by severe discomfiture
Most common way in which individuals react
to frustration is by compensation, rationalisa-
tion, withdrawal or aggression.

5 Application of Maslow's theory to librarianship

Having discussed Maslow's hierarchy of needs we shall now try to see the practical applications of this theory in librarianship. The utility of these concepts in librarianship can be broadly grouped under :

Library personnel management

User Studies.

There is no dispute about the fact that all the applications of Maslow's theory to personnel management, human relations and behavioural studies of any other profession is equally applicable to the management of library personnel. The more vital applications of these concepts could be on user studies. The concept of human relations certainly throw light on understanding and motivating users and also on maintaining good user relations.

5.1 *Library personnel management* : In the real world situation, the above discussed theory tells us that the heart of the problem lies in recognising and satisfying the higher order motivational needs of employees. Hence library managers need to practice positive motivational methods to increase job satisfaction in employees in order to achieve desired goal. As the motivational needs (mostly of higher order) emerge from the nature of work, librarians, have to 'enrich' the content of each job in the library in addition to 'enlarging' it with due attention to job dimensions. It may be necessary to make changes in organisation structure of libraries. To make our discussion more concrete we shall see a practical illustration of redesigning a job. We have been hearing that works like accessioning of library documents, catalog card filing, shelf reading and arrangement, charging and discharging of library documents, part of compilation works,

etc. are monotonous, disinteresting and do not call for continuous intellectual involvement. The following steps are desirable to redesign such jobs and to motivate staff :

5.11 First and foremost is to find out the individual ability, skill and interest of employees together with level of predominent need.

5.12 Invite workers to participate in redesigning jobs, setting performance standards and evaluating performance.

5.13 Redesign the job and enrich it with the various dimensions of job like variety, autonomy, task identity, task significance, feed back etc. For example, we can incorporate an element of recognition, responsibility and task identity by allowing worker to claim the authorship of a compilation work done.

5.14 Even after redesigning, if the job is not free from monotonous nature, consider employing job rotation and/or work mix. It would be very much welcome and practical for each one of us in the library to file fifty catalog cards per day to relieve prolonged, monotonous, exclusive catalog card filing work of an assistant.

5.15 Set realistic performance standards, measures and appraisal procedures.

5.16 Try to fit in each person to redesigned job with or without rotation and/or work mix taking their needs and interest into consideration.

5.17 Appraisal, rewarding and other motivational methods could be employed at fixed interval or variable interval and it may be of fixed-ratio or variable ratio depending on the situation.

5.2 *User studies :* Lastly, we shall see how Maslow's theory is useful in reader requirement surveys, reader behaviour studies and maintaining good user relations. Under-

standing users is essential for planning library and its services. General need level of potential users determine the necessity and strength of the library. Generally, need for library services arises when lower order needs (physiological, safety and security needs) of the users are fairly satisfied. Normally, the more affluent the society is more stronger is the need for library services. As an illustration we have seen that the information needs of the workers at operators level is almost nil. Maslow's theory of need hierarchy is equally useful in understanding the behaviour and attitude of readers in the library. Also problems such as loss and mutilation of books could be better analysed in this frame work, those who are motivated by higher order needs have most conducive and encouraging attitude towards library staff, material and services. Maintaining good relations with the users is as important as user studies since good relations help in having concrete +ve as well as —ve feedback. This public relations activity of the library is basically built on human relations practice. The feedback of an user becomes highly relevant and useful when he feels that library staff have understood his needs, such an interaction with users can help building healthy user relations.

6 Conclusion

To conclude, fullfledged application of behavioural science theories including Maslow's theory to librarianship is yet to become reality. When applied systematically it is evident that a new dimension will be added to human relations aspect of librarianship and thus efficiency

and morale of libraries would be boosted considerably. Maslow's theory not only acts as a tool to design motivators but also provides a frame of reference for user studies.

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Corrigenda

IASLIC Bulletin,   Vol 26   No 2,   June 1981

P. 80   11th line read as :

...... rising prices ultimately led to the fall of Chimanbhai
Patel ministry in 1974.

P. 80   example under abstracting read as :

> WIND :
>> Cyclone :
>>> Andhra Pradesh—Relief : donations, Nov. 25, 10g

P. 80   Under abbreviations read as :

Discussions in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha are abbreviated
as L. S. and R. S.

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Dr. M. S. Sridhar is a post graduate in mathematics and business management and a doctorate in library and information science. He is in the profession for last 35 years. Since 1978 he is heading the Library and Documentation Division of ISRO Satellite Centre, Bangalore. Earlier he has worked in the libraries of National Aeronautical Laboratory (Bangalore), Indian Institute of Management (Bangalore) and University of Mysore. Dr. Sridhar has published four books ('User research: a review of information-behaviour studies in science and technology', 'Problems of collection development in special libraries', 'Information behaviour of scientists and engineers' and 'Use and user research with twenty case studies') and 74 research papers, written 19 course material for BLIS and MLIS, presented over 22 papers in conferences and seminars, and contributed 5 chapters to books. **E-mail:** sridharmirle@yahoo.com, mirlesridhar@gmail.com, sridhar@isac.gov.in ; **Phone:** 91-80-25084451; **Fax:** 91-80-25084475.