Maslow's Theory and its Application to Librarianship

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Explain 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 diversified 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 an 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 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 predominant. 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 at least 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 perception 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 introducing 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 practically 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 developing and underdeveloped societies.

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

Owing to its ease of understanding and intuitive 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 caution 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 incentives and rewards or noneconomic like various dimensions of job and conducive work environment. Certain motivating factors work on the job whereas others work off the job. Normally 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 disappointment, prevention from attaining purpose and it is accompanied by severe discomfiture. Most common way in which individuals react to frustration is by compensation, rationalisation, 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 predominant 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, feedback etc. For example, we can incorporate an element of recognition, responsibility and task identity by allowing worker to claim the author-ship 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.

REFERENCES


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.
About the Author

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.  

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