Hierarchy of Needs – A Vedantic Perspective

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Abstract

Motivating employees remains the most difficult task for all managers. Getting things done through others requires a great deal of motivation so that people do the task in a committed and enthusiastic manner. Researches on motivational aspects are carried in large numbers because underneath it lies the knowledge of why people do things they do? One of the earliest notable contributions in this area is that of Abraham Maslow. He postulated the theory of "Hierarchy of Needs" in explaining the human behaviour. This theory was later challenged by some other behaviourists on the account of insufficient data and concept of hierarchy but it is still one of the key concepts in motivation taught to all managers. Motivation like other phenomenon associated with management was present since time immemorial. Nobody can survive without doing anything and nothing is done without motivation. India is considered one of the richest countries in culture, traditions and ethos and has one of the oldest histories of unbroken culture. Our ancient texts provide a rare glimpse of the life, traditions and values of our ancestors. These texts are rich in philosophical teachings, many of which form the basis of modern day management principles. India has its own theories on motivation and at times its in consonance with Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This article tries to collect some evidences of these theories from our ancient texts and their relevance to the modern management.

Introduction

India is one of the very few countries having the longest history of unbroken continuity of culture, traditions and ethos. Management was and is not something new to the Indians. Ancient India was one of the leading countries in the world in trade. Indian ancient texts have many things to contribute in different areas of management like motivation, leadership, communication, decision-making, development of an appropriate work culture etc. A lot of things have been said in this area and many research works are being carried out nowadays to explore the wisdom in our ancient texts and find their relevance and applicability in the current situation. This paper tries to lay the foundation of our modern day motivational theories on some of the strotas and teachings in our ancient texts.

Rationale

Any research is for the achievement of certain objectives. This research also has some very valid reasons. Some of these are:

1. **Inadequate contribution of Indian people in the development of Western Management** – It is quiet evident from the management principles taught to a management graduate that Indian people contributed little in the development of these principles and theories. India has been a pioneer in the ancient times on almost all subjects from religion to philosophy, from literature to mathematics. In the same analogy, we can say that Indian people must have developed some form of management to control such great empires.

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2. Universality of Management Principles –
One of the assumptions commonly held by people is that management principles are universally applicable everywhere. This indirectly applies, that if ancient Indian people developed some management theory then it should be applicable even in Western countries.

3. Specific application of Management Practices – Although management principles are universal but the management practices based on these principles have to be tailor-made according to the culture of the organization and the country. Since, western and Indian culture are very different therefore even if we study the western approach yet when we have to apply that in the Indian context we have to change the practices to suit the local needs. This necessitates one to understand the Indian approach also in order to be effective.

4. Management is an interdisciplinary subject – Another reason for undertaking this research is the fact that management is an interdisciplinary subject. It draws its various principles from various disciplines. Some of the contributing disciplines are philosophy, anthropology, sociology, law, engineering, mathematics etc. Even if we assume that there was little knowledge in the Indian texts about management as a separate discipline, even then the vast knowledge we possess in related areas like philosophy, sociology and other disciplines is undoubtedly very informative.

5. Normative in Nature – Management as a discipline is an applied one. It is a commonly held view that management is taught to managers to take decisions. These decisions have better chances of success as they are based on certain reasoning and logic. Management as a discipline is consciously trying to help the managers understand what is correct and what should be done. Almost the entire emphasis of Indian approach can be summed up as a normative science. At almost every place in the Indian texts, one will find words of wisdom, which tells human beings the way to behave in a given situation. Hence, this similarity in the approaches of western and Indian approach makes the researcher believe that there will be so many

principles in the Indian approach, which will be very useful even in this modern business world.

6. Increased Acceptance and confidence of Indian Managers – A management approach if taught through examples of ones own culture has better chances of understanding and acceptance by the student. It also increases the self-confidence of Indian people if they discover that the various approaches taught to us in our religious texts have a great application in the business world and also in our day-to-day life.

This study is meant for managers and is targeted towards practicing managers, management students and academia for fine-tuning the managerial practices in Indian organizations. It is equally targeted towards general masses because management principles are used in our daily life also.

Research Methodology

Research methodology is the description of the way in which the research has been conducted by the researcher. The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English lays down the meaning of research as " a careful investigation or inquiry specially through search for new facts in any branch of knowledge".

Type of Research

1. **Descriptive or Analytical** - Descriptive research includes surveys and fact-finding enquiries of different kinds. The major purpose of descriptive research is description of the state of affairs, as it exists at present. In analytical research, on the other hand, the researcher has to use facts or information already available, and analyze these to make a critical evaluation of the material. In this research, no description of the state of affairs is made, as it exists. Rather, the researcher has used the theories already available in the western approach and compared these with those discovered by him in the Indian approach. An analysis is conducted to find out which approach is the better one and which one is more comprehensive. Hence, this is an analytical research.

2. **Applied or Fundamental** - Research can either

be applied or fundamental research. Applied research aims at finding a solution for an immediate problem facing the society or an industrial/business organization, whereas fundamental research is mainly concerned with generalizations and with the formulation of a theory. This study tries to formulate a theory for managing the Indian people. From this point of view, it looks like a fundamental research. But management principles have a wide applicability and in this way this research also has the objective that it should be utilized and used for managing people in India. Therefore, it is an applied research from this point of view.

Research Approach

Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior. Research in such a situation is a function of researcher's insights and impressions. Such an approach to research generates results either in non-quantitative form or in the form, which are not subjected to rigorous quantitative analysis. In this research qualitative approach to research is adapted.

Conceptual Framework

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow is known for establishing the theory of "hierarchy of needs". He stated that human beings are motivated by unsatisfied needs. He further claimed that certain lower needs should be satisfied before higher needs can be satisfied. Maslow studied exemplary people such as Albert Einstein, Jane Adams, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Frederick Douglas rather than mentally ill or neurotic people. This was a radical departure from two of the chief schools of psychology of his day: Freud and B.F. Skinner. Freud saw little difference between the motivations of humans and animals. We are supposedly rational beings; however, we do not act that way. Such pessimism, Maslow believed, was the result of Freud's study of mentally ill people. He opined that the study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy in his book 'Motivation and Personality'. Skinner, on the other hand, studied how pigeons and white rats learn. His motivational models were based on simple rewards

such as food, water, sex and avoidance of pain. According to Skinner if one said, "sit" to one's dog and gave the dog a treat when it sits, and-after several repetitions—the dog will sit when given such a command. Maslow thought that psychologists should instead study the playfulness, affection, etc., of animals. He also believed that Skinner discounted things that make humans different from each other. Instead, Skinner relied on statistical descriptions of people.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs was an alternative to the depressing determinism of Freud and Skinner. He felt that people are basically trustworthy, self-protecting, and self-governing. Humans tend toward growth and love. Although there is a continuous cycle of human wars, murder, deceit, etc., he believed that violence is not what human nature is meant to be like. Violence and other evils occur when human needs are thwarted. In other words, people who are deprived of lower needs such as safety may defend themselves by violent means. He did not believe that humans are violent because they enjoy violence. Or that they lie, cheat, and steal because they enjoy doing it.

According to Maslow, there are general type of needs (physiological, safety, love, and esteem) that must be satisfied before a person can act unselfishly. He called these needs "deficiency needs." As long as we are motivated to satisfy these cravings, we are moving towards growth, towards self-actualization. Satisfying needs is healthy; blocking gratification makes us sick or evil.

Maslow also emphasized that needs are prepotent. A prepotent need is one that has the greatest influence over our actions. Everyone has a prepotent need, but that need will vary among individuals. A teenager may have a need to feel that a group accepts him/her. A heroin addict will need to satisfy his/her cravings for heroin to function normally in society, and will not worry about acceptance by other people. According to Maslow, when the deficiency needs are met higher needs emerge, which dominate the organism. And when these in turn are satisfied, again new (and still higher) needs emerge, and so on. As one desire is satisfied, another takes its place.

esteem, which results from competence or mastery of a task. Second, there's the attention and recognition that comes from others. This is similar to the belongingness level, however, wanting admiration has to do with the need for power. People, who have all of their lower needs satisfied, often use luxuries because by doing so it raises their level of esteem.

"Whose reputation is destroyed gets destroyed".

This shloka tells that a person who loses respect gets destroyed. Here, loss of esteem is compared to death itself.

"Who has honour, only he is living".

This shloka clearly indicates that death should be preferred over dishonour.

"Respect is the abundant wealth of great people".

For great people, respect is the most important of all their possessions. Therefore, these people can forego other things but not their esteem.

"A disgraced person and straw have the same destiny".

A person without respect is compared to a straw. It tells that a person without dignity is worthless.

"Honour satisfies a person and not food".

This shloka has even more relevance in Maslow's hierarchy as it signifies that esteem comes at a higher level than food or physiological needs. It is an indication that a person with satisfied physiological needs will still crave for respect and it is one of the assumptions of Maslow.

Self-Actualization

The need for self-actualization is "the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming." People who have everything can maximize their potential. They can seek knowledge, peace, aesthetic experiences, self-fulfillment and oneness with God, etc. It is usually well off people who take up environmental causes, join the Peace Corps, go off to a monastery, etc.

Indian approach of management has a clear opinion of the concept of self-actualisation. The highest thing one can achieve in his life is the realization of 'Brahman' or 'Atman' as a part of Brahman. Once this realization is made, no other thing remains to be achieved. The person enjoys perfect bliss free from any need and becomes desire less after this realization. Since, he no longer has any desires so he no longer remains in the purview of Maslow's hierarchy. A story from our ancient texts will reveal the greatest thing in a very simple manner.

Narada, a seeker after truth, once asked the great sage Sanatkumara of the Vedic days about the real path towards knowledge of the supreme. Before undertaking to enlighten the questioner on the subject Sanatkumara desired to know how much Narada had already learnt. When asked to state that, Narada unfolded a long list of the texts over which he had acquired mastery which included the four Vedas, grammar, philosophy, mathematics, the epics and the puranas etc. then followed between the two the conversation given below:-

Sanatkumarā: "you are right in thinking so. Narada". What all you have mentioned is a series of mere names and nothing else."

Narada: "Then Sir, which is it that is greater than mere words and names?"

Sanatkumara: "Speech is greater than words, because without speech, there would be no words, or for that matter, not even any Vedas, nor truth nor religion."

Narada: "Could you mention anything that is greater than this power of speech, Sir?"
Sanatkumara: "Yes, Mind is greater than speech, because, without the thinking of the mind, there could be neither speech nor words."

Narada: "Anything greater than the mind, Sir?"
Sanatkumara: "The will is greater than the mind, because it is the will that makes mind think."

Narada: "Is there anything that is greater than the will venerable, Sir?"

Sanatkumara: "Yes, there is a thing called consciousness which is greater than will. Unless one

is 'conscious' of a thing, one cannot make one's will start moving by making the mind think."

Narada: "Anything greater than consciousness, Sir?"

Sanatkumara: "Meditation is greater than consciousness because it is meditation alone that makes things stand firm and steady."

Narada: "Kindly tell me, Sir, if there is anything greater than meditation."

Sanatkumara: "Power of understanding being a sine quo non for proper meditation, that is greater than meditation. If we cannot correctly understatand and discriminate between good and bad, truth and untruth, and the like pair of opposites, how can we meditate?"

Narada: "If there is still a greater thing than this power of understanding, please let me know what it is."

Sanatkumara: "Physical power is certainly greater than all these, because there is nothing like manly valour when it comes to a question of inspiring awe into others. One strong and physically powerful person is greater than a multitude of imbeciles, though latter may all be highly learned."

Narada: "Is there anything, Sir, which surpasses even physical power?"

Sanatkumara: "Yes. Food is greater than physical power. This should be obvious to you from the fact that a man starved for a few days will start losing his physical energy and power and may eventually even die. Such a famished person, given food again, will get all his former physical power restored."
Narada: Surely, Sir there is something, which is greater than even food. What is it?"
Sanatkumara: " Water is greater than food, because without it there will be no food."

Narada: "Anything greater than water, Sir?"

Sanatkumara: " Heat is greater than water. It

is heat that makes the waters of the earth get converted into vapour and form clouds which give rain to the universe."

Narada: " Kindly tell me, Sir, if there is anything greater than heat."

Sanatkumara: " The ether or akasha is greater than heat. It is in ether that we find the sun, the moon and the stars and it is again in ether that sound waves transverse."

Narada: "I wonder, Sir, whether there is anything which is greater than even this ether. If there is any such, do kindly tell me about it."

This last question of Narada brought the sage's teaching to its climax. Starting with the statement that the Atman or the Supreme Spirit is greater than everything else he expounded about this ultimate reality in the following words:-

"It is the joy of doing a thing that makes a man do it. That joy is unlimited. That limitless infinity is the atman. It is all pervading. He, who realizes the Atman, enjoys perfect bliss or happiness. This realization can come only to a mind, which is pure. This purity of mind results from pure food. Truth can be contemplated upon only by a pure mind."

The above teaching of Sanatkumara to Narada is called 'para vidya' or realization of the Eternal spirit, which confers on the person knowing it deathlessness and everlasting joy.

Hence, we can say that the ultimate happiness is achieved after one attains the realization of atman and it is the highest state of self-actualization a person can achieve.

Condusions

Indian approach talks about more or less the same things, which is opined by Maslow. However, the Indian approach is older than its western counterpart. The earliest schools of western management can be traced back to the second half of eighteenth century. The following table gives the indication of the evolution of the various schools of thought of western approach

Western Management Schools		Approximate Period of Evolution
1.	Scientific Management	1792 - 1972
2.	Administrative Management	1841 – 1957
3.	Behavioural School	1771 – 1964

Hence, it is quiet clear from the above table that the origin of western management thoughts is somewhere in the second half of eighteenth century. In comparison to that the evolution of scriptures of Indian society are much older. A look at the time ascertained of various scriptures will give an indication to this fact.

Indian Approach of Management		Approximate time ascertained
1.	Rigveda	2000 B.C.
2.	Samaveda	1500-900 B.C.
3.	Yajurveda	1500-900 B.C.
4.	Atharvaveda	1000 B.C.
5.	Upanishads	1000-300 B.C.
6.	Kautilya ka Arthashastra	400-300 B.C.

This draws the comparison between the Western and Indian approach to management in terms of age. We can easily see that even one of the youngest works among the Indian approach, Kautilya's Arthashastra was also written somewhere between 400-300 BC. Even if we compare the western management with Kautilya we find that the Indian approach is at least, 2000 years older than the western approach. If we take Vedas as the reference point, then the Indian approach is older than the western approach by at least 3500 years. We should also keep in mind that in Vedic era, the knowledge was imparted to the students only orally. So, it can safely be assumed that hundreds and thousands of years would have passed before this knowledge was written. Indian sages are of the opinion that the sacred knowledge in these scriptures was given by God himself to the seers. Even if these factors are not accounted for, there is little doubt that the Indian approach is much older than its western counterpart.

Secondly, Maslow and other western motivational approaches have not been able to explain self-actualization very clearly whereas Indian texts abound in its explanation. The ultimate objective of every human being is described as the attainment of "Moksha" which is akin to self-actualization.

Thirdly, the most important thing is that Indian motivational approach also talks about what should be once motivation.

"The worst kind of people desire money, middle type of people desire money and esteem both whereas the best type of people desire only esteem because it is the most important wealth".

Hence, we can say that the normative nature of Indian motivational approach advises people to go for higher order needs.

In a nutshell, it can be ascertained with humble accuracy that like the Maslow's approach, Indian management although not based on quantitative analysis has almost the same postulates as his. At places, the Indian approach goes beyond the Malsow's Hierarchy and is able to explain phenomenon much better. Indian motivational approach of "Nishkama Karma" which resounds everywhere in Indian philosophy is one such concept in which people are motivated even without any desires.

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