

Workplace Motivation:
Libraries and Information Professionals
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Libraries are changing and so are librarians. The antiquated concept of a silent library filled to the brim with dusty volumes, guarded by a stern librarian is being replaced. Today's libraries are filled with electronic resources and constantly changing technology. Librarians are now information professionals. They are responsible, not only for their original duties as custodians of books and paper records, but also for keeping pace with technology and its demands. Information professionals provide a variety of services within the library environment including: user services, technical services and administrative services. The skillsets needed to fulfill these responsibilities are both wide and varied. The purpose of this paper is to examine the theories of motivation to better understand what drives these individuals to both take on these unique challenges and what keeps them motivated in these ever-changing environments.

What is Motivation?

The definitions for motivation can vary depending on the source. Merriam-Webster defines motivation as "the act or process of giving someone a reason for doing something; the process of motivating someone" ("motivation", n.d.). Maehr and Meyer (1997) prefer to substitute the term "personal investment" for motivation in their article on motivation and schooling. They also make the observation that motivation is "a word that is a part of the popular culture as few other psychological concepts are" (p. 372). In his paper "Motivation: New Directions for Theory, Research, and Practice", Terence Mitchell (1982) describes his definition of motivation. He explains a nonacademic description, a text book definition and a technical social-science definition and from these he has derived his own. He describes motivation as "those psychological processes that cause the arousal, direction and persistence of

voluntary action that are goal directed” (p. 81). Mitchell goes on to identify four common characteristics of motivation. Motivation is typically an individual phenomenon. It is intentional and multifaceted. Finally, the goal of motivational theories is to predict behavior (p. 81).

Motivational Theory

While there are a wide variety of motivational theories, they generally fall into two categories: intrinsic and extrinsic. When a person is intrinsically motivated they act for their personal satisfaction rather than in relation to external consequences. This can mean that people may be very motivated for certain activities and not at all for others. Intrinsic motivation is both personal and task specific (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 56). Extrinsic motivation is the opposite of intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation refers to a task or activity that is completed to receive a desired outcome or incentive (p. 60). Examples of extrinsic motivators would be promotion or a pay increase in the workplace or grades for a student.

Understanding what motivates people is not a simple topic with quick and easy solutions. Many theories exist surrounding employee motivation. The earliest theories regarding motivation looked at the needs of the individual. This paper will take a closer look at two of those needs based theories: Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory. Another set of research examined a more process-based approach to motivation with theories such as Expectancy Theory and Equity Theory. It is important to remember there is no one correct approach to motivation for everyone or even for one person all the time.

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

In “A Theory of Human Motivation”, Maslow (1943) described man as “a perpetually wanting animal” (p. 395). His theory is based upon the premise that there five sets of goals that he refers to as basic needs. He named these needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-

actualization. Maslow considered these goals to be hierarchical, stating “the most prepotent goal will monopolize consciousness and will tend of itself to organize the recruitment of the various capacities of the organism. The less prepotent needs are minimized, even forgotten or denied” (p. 394).

The lowest and most base level of his hierarchy are the physiological needs. This refers to food, water and other basic biological needs. His theory suggests that if a person is truly hungry then they can only seek to satisfy that need and fulfill that physical hunger. Other goals and interests will not matter until that hunger is satisfied (p. 373). After that need is met then higher level needs can be considered.

The next level in Maslow’s hierarchy is safety. The need for safety can include having a home and personal security as well the financial security of a stable job (p. 376). The love need is the third tier of the hierarchy after both the physiological need and the safety need have been met. This refers to our social need to bond with other people. We all have a desire to form connections with others and to be loved. Maslow states:

the whole cycle already described will repeat itself with this new center. Now the person will feel keenly, as never before, the absence of friends, or a sweetheart, or a wife, or children. He will hunger for affectionate relations with people in general, namely for a place in his group, and he will strive with great intensity to achieve his goal. He will want to attain such a place more than anything else in the world and may even forget that once, when he was hungry, he sneered at love. (p. 381)

Maslow is indicating that the needs already met have been minimized and forgotten in favor of the current need. Love is now the most important. The need for love could be met on a variety of levels. Friendships or family relationships could satisfy this need. It could also come from

romantic relationships. After satisfying the need for love on some level there is the need for esteem. This is the need to feel respected and appreciated. If this need is satisfied it leads to feelings of self-confidence and strength. But left unfulfilled it leads to discouragement and feelings of helplessness.

The highest level of Maslow's hierarchy is self-actualization. This notion refers to a person achieving their full potential. He writes "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to ultimately be happy. What a man *can* be, he *must* be" (p. 382). The form that this will take could vary wildly from person to person. It is also contingent upon the satisfaction of all the lower level needs in order to reach self-actualization.

In their article "Maslow Reconsidered: A Review of Research on the Need Hierarchy Theory", Wahba and Bridwell (1976) note that despite the lack of critical evidence to support it Maslow's theory is one of the most popular and influential in management literature (p. 212). Their review attempts to evaluate the available research and assess Maslow's theory. They ended with as many questions as answers and the determination that Maslow's theory is almost "nontestable" (p. 235).

Herzberg's Two Factor Theory

The Two Factor Theory, developed by Frederick Herzberg, is also known as Motivation-Hygiene Theory and Dual-Factor Theory. It approaches the issue of motivation somewhat differently. The subjects of Herzberg's study were asked to consider a time when they were especially happy and satisfied in their jobs. Additional questions were then asked about the reasons for these feelings and if these feelings had affected performance. The same subjects were then asked about a time when they felt especially dissatisfied in their jobs, the events that led up to those feelings, and the performance results of those feelings (House & Wigdor, 1967, p.

369). From those interactions Herzberg developed several concepts. First, that job satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposites but two totally separate things. In keeping with that idea, he theorized the opposite of job satisfaction is the lack of job satisfaction and the opposite of job dissatisfaction is the lack of job dissatisfaction. Job satisfaction is influenced by a variety of factors related to job content that include: achievement, recognition, increased responsibility and advancement. While job dissatisfaction is more aligned to work environment factors such as: company policies, supervision, work conditions and salary. The satisfiers are referred to as motivators while the dissatisfiers called are hygiene factors (Herzberg, 1965, p. 395). In short, based on Herzberg's theory it is possible to work in an environment that is pleasant and free from negative hygiene factors but remain unmotivated because it is also free from motivators.

Herzberg's theory has encountered criticism on a variety of levels: methodology, faulty research and inconsistent evidence. Primarily his critics suggest that it is the nature of people to take personal credit for things when they go well but to place blame on external factors when things go poorly or they experience failure. There is also criticism of the lack of a base measurement of overall satisfaction. It is suggested that there is no way to know the contributions of the hygiene factors or motivators if there is no base measurement. (House & Wigdor, 1967, p. 373).

Expectancy Theory

Expectancy Theory, pioneered by Victor Vroom, is considered a process theory. Vroom's theory explains that people behave as they do because they believe their actions will lead to a specific outcome, hence a process. There are three primary components to this theory: expectancy, instrumentality and valence. It is sometimes called VIE Theory, with the letters referring to these three components (Isaac, Zerbe & Pitt, 2001, p. 214). Expectancy Theory

suggests that when all three of components are present an individual would feel motivated. The first component, expectancy, refers to the belief that if a person puts forth a high level of effort they can be successful. The second component, instrumentality, is about the belief that performance is related to a positive outcome or reward. Finally, valence in this theory refers to how much this outcome or reward is valued by the individual. In short, if a person feels as if they work hard they can achieve success, they have a high expectancy. Next, if success is achieved the individual will receive a reward like a pay increase or other incentive related to that success, then instrumentality is high. If that incentive is valuable enough to be worth the additional effort, then valence is positive but if the incentive does not seem desirable then the valence would be negative. This state of motivation can be represented in an equation: $M = E \times I \times V$ (p. 215).

The previously discussed theories, despite their considerable contributions to operational and management theory, have been the subject of a great deal of criticism. Unlike these Vroom's theory is generally well accepted and supported. In their evaluation of research on Expectancy Theory, Heneman and Schwab (1972) noted that "expectancy theory differs in several promising respects from much previous theorizing about the determinants of employee performance (p. 7). They also note there is the need for considerable additional research regarding the theory and its components (p. 8).

Equity Theory

The final theory reviewed in this paper will be Equity Theory, developed by J. Stacy Adams in the 1960s. As a motivational model Equity Theory examines how people aim for fairness in social exchanges, like between coworkers. A perception of inequity can become a motivational force. This perception of equity or inequity is based on a series on inputs and outcomes (Banks,

Patel, & Moola, 2012, p. 2). Examples of inputs would be knowledge, experience, dedication, seniority or skill. Some examples of outcomes would be salary, job security, recognition, or additional responsibility. In the article “Perceptions of Inequality in the Workplace: Exploring the Link with Unauthorized Absenteeism ” the authors state “The ratio of inputs to outcomes become a process of social comparison in which each employee compares his or her inputs and outcomes to those of another employee” (Banks et al., p. 2). When inputs and outcomes are equivalent an employee will be likely to see a situation as equitable. If there is an inequality in this ratio between two employees, then there will likely be a feeling of tension. The employee may believe they are receiving fewer outcomes for their efforts than their colleague. Once there is perception of inequity people react in a variety of ways to restore balance. In some cases, the individual might alter their perceptions of their own work. For example, they might lessen their perceived value of their work or contributions to account for the different in outcome. In other cases, they might actually lessen their inputs to be more in line with the outcomes they received. The employee might try to get their competition to increase their inputs to make the situation fair. The employee might even seek to leave the organization to get away from an inequitable situation (Banks et al., p. 2).

Equity theory has received some criticism based on the notion that it is too simplistic in its model and lacks a true real-world applicability. In their article “Equity Theory: The Recent Literature, Methodological Considerations and New Directions ”, (1979) Carrell and Dittrich criticize the support for Equity Theory on a variety of levels. They question the laboratory only support for the “equity norm” concept. They also suggest that while there has been support research for underpayment equity scenarios, there is very little support for overpayment

scenarios (p. 204). They suggest that initial studies have been too laboratory based with a great deal of potential for field study (p. 208).

Motivation in Organizational Behavior

After examining the definition of motivation and several popular motivation theories it is now important to consider why motivation matters. Motivation is essential for employees to achieve their full potential. According to Kimberly Schaufenbuel in her whitepaper “Motivation on the Brain – Applying the Neuroscience of Motivation in the Workplace” (2015), it is beneficial for employers as well. Schaufenbuel indicates that motivated employees improve productivity, competitive advantage and are more highly engaged. She also indicates they are better problem solvers, more creative and more focused (p. 3).

Schaufenbuel notes four basic human drives that impact motivation. They are the drives to: acquire, defend, bond and learn. She suggests that these drives can be utilized by managers to understand employee behavior and develop practices that will suit each of these drives. For example, the drive to acquire would be linked to compensation and salary whereas the need to bond would be related to the organizational culture (p. 7). There are a wide variety of ways to make employees feel valued. The most obvious are salary or other monetary compensation but there are many others. Health benefits, pension plans, maternity/paternity leave, flexible schedules and even the smaller things like free parking or a free gym membership can increase job satisfaction (Rogers, 2017).

Motivation in the Library

Today’s libraries are complex organisms providing access to information, promoting literacy, and acting as a community hub. Satisfied, motivated information professionals are the key to determining exactly how well that organism functions. In 1973 Susanne Patterson Wahba

conducted a study of job satisfaction and motivation among librarians. Her goal was to find sources of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction and also to learn more about the correlation of motivation to satisfaction. Her study examined two hundred and two librarians at twenty-three academic libraries. They were surveyed anonymously on areas that included work, supervision, pay, promotions and coworkers. The results of her study determined that librarians found the highest degree of satisfaction with the work and the lowest levels of satisfaction with pay and promotions (p. 273). In regards to the relationship between motivation and job satisfaction, Wahba's finding indicated that satisfaction with work, supervision and promotion all seem to influence motivation. However, other aspects of the job such as pay and relationships with coworkers did not seem to have the same impact. She notes "this highlights the importance of the intrinsic aspects of librarianship; that is, of the satisfaction with the work itself. Obviously if librarianship as a job were to become more satisfying it would lead to higher motivation of librarians" (p. 276).

Twenty-seven years later Green, Chivers and Mynott (2000) are still addressing some of the challenges noted by Wahba. Many libraries are working with few financial resources. There are limited opportunities for promotions or salary increases. Green et al. (2000) suggests these financial limitations make library managers essential in keeping employees motivated through other methods. Good communication is one method that is key to engender trust and build a feeling of respect. Providing praise and recognition for accomplishments that is not pay based is both motivating and rewarding. The Green et al. (2000) notes that motivation is a "continual process that needs renewing and re-energizing" (p. 385).

In an innovative approach to motivation, the Director of Library Services at College of Western Idaho encourages her staff to play games together on the job (Leeder 2014). Every day

around 3:00 pm, during the quiet times of year, the staff will gather together for a game break (p. 620). It could be a card game or a board game but the rule is that it must be in the spirit of collaboration rather than competition. Leeder notes that some might consider this a silly waste of time rather than legitimate team-building activity. But she firmly disagrees. Her staff has been growing as a steady rate for several years with each additional employee enhancing and embracing their unique workplace culture. She credits their ability to play and have fun together as a key component to building strong communication (p. 621). While she strongly encourages the benefits of play, Leeder closes with a reminder that you cannot make people play, nor can you force play into a culture instantly. It might take time to be embraced in every environment (p. 627). This is a healthy reminder for all forms for motivation. It cannot be forced.

Conclusion

Libraries come in many different shapes and sizes. They fulfill a variety of functions and serve vast array of user groups. Information professional are just as diverse in the services they provide and the skills they bring to their roles. This paper has examined several motivational theories that might be used to predict behavior and applications of motivation in the library environment. But one important thing to remember is that each library is different. Every information professional is their own person. Motivation, despite all the theories, is not one size fits all. All information professionals will not respond to the same form of motivation. As a manager, it might take a combination of methods or several tries to determine the right balance. But it is worth the effort. Motivated individuals create a strong team and a great place to work.

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