Business communications and presentation skills – 2

Human behaviour
Human behaviour: motives and needs

“It is harder to understand the behavior of human beings than to understand that of atoms.”

Albert Einstein

The Purpose of this Chapter

If we want to understand human behavior, we must know the reasons why people act the way they do. This is the study of human motivation. Most of our conscious behavior is motivated in one way or another, because we rarely do anything without having some purpose in mind.

When a person acts in order to achieve some purpose, we say that his behavior is goal-oriented, or that he is motivated. But human motivation is a complicated matter. People are not always aware of the motives for their own behavior — let alone that of others. Any particular motive may lead to many different ways of behaving. For instance, most farmers would like to have abundant harvests — that is a common motive. Some farmers will use fertilizers to raise their yields,
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others will offer prayers and sacrifices to achieve the same end, and
still others will do nothing and hope for the best.

Similarly, people may be acting the same way, but for very differ-
ent motives. Suppose we see three women going down to the river.
One of them goes there because she has clothes to wash, another is
perhaps just getting out of the way of her drunken husband, and the
third wants to hear the latest news from her friends and she can do that
best down by the river. To help us bring some order and coherence
into the vast variety of human motives psychologists have developed
theories of motivation.

A Theory of Motivation
There is, as yet, no single theory of motivation that can satisfactorily
explain all human behavior. However, one of the most widely applicable
and generally accepted theories was set forth by Abraham H. Maslow
Edition, 1970). The following is a brief summary of the theory, with
some slight modifications and additions to make it more useful to the
practicing extension worker.

A motive for behavior may be anything that a person wants to have,
to feel or to become. Rather than attempting to enumerate and classify
the almost limitless number of motives people may have, Maslow sug-
gests that we look at human needs, because people's wants can usually
be traced back to one or another of their basic needs, either as living
organisms, as persons, or as members of society.

There are five groups of basic human needs, and there is a hierarchical
order among them. That is to say, they are found at five different levels,
each level becoming felt as a want only when those at the lower levels
have been satisfied.

Survival Needs
At the most basic level are the so-called "physiological" needs,
namely all those things which a human body needs to survive as a
living organism. Included in this group are the need for food, drink,
shelter, sleep, air to breathe, etc. As long as any of these needs remains
unsatisfied, a person will not worry about other needs. Clearly, they
are the most basic. But once the survival needs have been relatively well
met, the next level of needs emerges and becomes felt. They are the
safety or security needs.

Security Needs
When we have sufficient food, drink and the other necessities of life,
our primary concern becomes self-protection. Normally, a person will
avoid situations and places where he is likely to get hurt. He will fre-
frequently also take steps to secure his future from a possible lack of the
basic necessities. We build houses, store food, buy insurance policies —
in short, we respond to a need for physical security. That is how this
group of needs is expressed in our daily life. Only when the more basic
needs for survival are not satisfied do we willingly take risks or endanger
ourselves to supply them.

Affiliation Needs
Once the needs for survival and security are sufficiently met so that
they no longer bother us, we become aware of what Maslow calls affilia-
tion and belongingness needs. These also could be considered security
needs, but in the sense of emotional rather than physical security. We
need to feel accepted by the people around us for our emotional
stability. To be rejected, isolated or ignored by society is commonly
felt as a form of deprivation. We therefore act in ways that make other
people like us and accept us. However, says Maslow, these needs are
already at the third level in the hierarchy, and we feel them only when
we do not have to worry about our physical survival and security.
Unlike the first two groups of needs, which are of a biological nature, affiliation needs are clearly social. No one can satisfy these needs by himself: he needs a social group to which he can belong and which accepts him. The same is true also for the needs at the next level, the fourth, which Maslow calls recognition or esteem needs.

**Recognition Needs**

Our self-esteem and self-respect depend very much on how others evaluate us. A person will usually not be satisfied when he is merely accepted by others, he wants to be respected for what he is worth. If we are appreciated and admired we feel self-confident and capable. On the other hand, if others look down upon us, not only do we tend to feel hurt and insulted, but we also begin to think of ourselves as inferior, weak and incompetent. But again, if a person is not even accepted by his social group, he is unlikely to worry about these matters. In other words, recognition needs stand at a higher level in the hierarchy than the three other groups of needs, and we feel them only when our more basic needs are satisfied.

**Self-Actualization Needs**

There is still a higher need level, which we begin to feel when the other four levels of needs have been met. Maslow calls it the need for self-actualization. A healthy, normal person needs to use the potential which he feels is in him, or else he will feel thwarted and discontented. As Maslow puts it, "What a man can be he must be." It is common to see this need expressed among artists and other creative people, but it is in fact universal. Even a child who has mastered a new skill will feel this need for self-actualization. We all know what children do when they have just learnt to write their names: they scribble it all over the place. This is the need for self-actualization in action. It is the same with most of us: we need to do what we think we can do well.

Unfortunately, for many people in the world survival needs and security needs are only barely satisfied, hunger and physical danger being only just around the corner. In such circumstances no normal person will worry about self-actualization, or about esteem and affiliation, for that matter. But give the people enough to eat, shelter and physical security, and the higher levels of needs are bound to appear.

**Frustration**

So much for the basic elements in Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs. There remains an additional concept that must be discussed before we can apply this theory to the practical problems of exten-

![Figure 3.2 The Frustration Threshold](image-url)

- **Person "A"**
  - Felt Need
  - High Threshold
  - Low Threshold
  - Latent Need
  - A little deprivation causes frustration

- **Person "B"**
  - Felt Need
  - Low Threshold
  - Latent Need
  - Able to stand much deprivation without frustration
The levels of our frustration thresholds depend on our life experience. In general, regular and sufficient satisfaction of our needs tends to raise the frustration threshold, while experiences of deprivation and want tend to lower them. In other words, people learn to feel frustrated and to cope with it just as they learn other things in life.

Conclusions
We are now in a position to draw some practical conclusions from this discussion. In extension work, an understanding of people’s motivation can help us in at least two kinds of situations: when we want to help people, and when we want them to change their behavior.

To help people overcome some of their problems, we must first understand why they are behaving the way they do at present. Their actions may appear entirely irrational or even foolish to us, but they can turn out to be wise and prudent once they are understood in light of the felt needs. A systematic analysis of the situation with the aid of motivation theory can uncover those felt needs and enable us to help such people in those matters where they really need help.

When an extension worker wants to persuade people to change their behavior, to try something new, it is not enough that he himself is convinced that the new way is better, more efficient or more productive. He must also consider how that new idea looks when seen through the eyes of those whom he is trying to persuade. Can it be expected to answer one of their felt needs, or is it perceived as irrelevant? It could even be that the idea is understood (correctly or not) as a potential threat to the present levels of satisfactions. In such a case it would be futile to extol the advantages and virtues of the new idea. Serious mistakes have been made due to glib assumptions about people’s motives and needs. A systematic analysis of the situation can prevent many such mistakes, and a professional extension worker must know enough about motivation in order to avoid them.

And what about the extension worker’s motives? They can be as varied as anyone else’s. He may need the security of a permanent job, or the affiliation that goes along with meeting many people, or the recognition and esteem that he may get from people whom he has helped with sound advice. He may even need self-actualization, and satisfy that need in the knowledge that he is successful in an important job. Most of us in extension work get a little of all of these at one time or another. The important thing in trying to gain some satisfaction from your work is to remain realistic and thus avoid the frustrations that inevitably accompany unreasonable expectations.