



Research on the Incentive Issues and Countermeasures for Civil Servants Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

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Abstract

In the process of advancing diverse national affairs, thousands of grassroots civil servants play a crucial and indispensable role as dedicated servants of the state and the people, significantly contributing to the development of the country's undertakings. They are not only crucial to the construction of the national cadre team but also in line with the talent development strategy. However, a thorough analysis of China's civil servant incentive mechanism through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory uncovers numerous persistent problems within the system. In recognition of these challenges, it is proposed, under the guidance of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, to explore and provide referential experience for the construction and improvement of China's civil servant incentive mechanism. Therefore, dissecting the current incentive mechanism and actively seeking effective improvement measures under the guidance of this theory has emerged as an urgent and significantly important issue that requires immediate attention and resolution.

Keywords

Civil servants; Maslow's hierarchy of needs; Civil servant motivation mechanism

1. Introduction

Maslow's theory of human motivation, published in 1943, divides human needs into five levels: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs (Zhao, 2020). In the modern process of growing the civil service, there have been many problems, such as a one-dimensional motivation concept, an unreasonable salary mechanism, an unscientific evaluation mechanism, an imperfect training mechanism, an unstandardized promotion mechanism, etc. The urgent problem is to further promote the institutionalization and perfection of the civil service motivation mechanism. This paper aims to contribute to the construction of the civil service with the guidance of Maslow's theory of human motivation.

2. Issues in Civil Servant Incentives

2.1 Simplification of Incentive Concepts

At present, China's civil servant incentive system primarily encompasses compensation, promotion, assessment, and supervision. The incentive design demonstrates a strong orientation towards economic rationalism. Taking the "rational economic man" as the dominant concept in incentive design (Yan, 2024), it is believed that civil servants' behavioral motivations stem from their astute calculations of their self-interests. Therefore, their behaviors can be

stimulated through methods such as compensation, benefits, power, accountability, and discipline. It is undeniable that a civil servant incentive system that takes human "self-interest" as a constraint can largely mobilize the work enthusiasm of grassroots civil servants. However, in recent years, as the incentive system oriented towards economic rationalism has become increasingly refined and innovative, due to information asymmetry and the multiplicity of value goals in the public sector, the costs of incentives such as supervision and assessment have continued to rise. The increase in incentive costs and the decrease in marginal incentive effectiveness have not resulted in substantial improvements in incentive outcomes (Zhang, 2014). Conversely, we must also address phenomena of moral and behavioral misconduct, such as corruption and dereliction of duty among some civil servants, through disciplinary mechanisms like anti-corruption campaigns.

2.2 Unreasonable Compensation Mechanism

A reasonable compensation structure is one of the most crucial settings in the incentive mechanism. If civil servants' work efforts are not commensurate with their returns, it will dampen their enthusiasm and initiative.

In the compensation mechanism, social insurance and benefits constitute an important part of the nonmaterial rewards for grassroots civil servants, providing them with necessary life security. Their salaries, as their primary source of income, directly originate from direct allocations from the finance of service-oriented governments. Such settings are usually reasonable and align with their job requirements and the social market price level, playing the most direct incentive role for civil servants. However, the current compensation system has many unreasonable issues in practical operation, mainly manifested in the following two aspects:

Firstly, there is unfairness in salary design, with significant regional differences. In China's civil servant system, salaries are determined based on administrative levels, which can easily create feelings of unfairness among grassroots civil servants (Zhang, 2019). At the same time, imbalances within service-oriented government agencies lead to large income disparities among civil servants of the same level in different departments and regions, triggering feelings of imbalance among them. Secondly, the design of the salary structure is not reasonable enough, and the incentive effect of compensation is clearly insufficient. Currently, China's civil servant compensation system adopts a wage system that combines positions and levels. However, in this structure, position-based salaries account for a high proportion, while basic salaries account for a small proportion. Moreover, the current incentive system emphasizes external incentives over internal incentives and direct incentives over indirect incentives, to some extent exacerbating the emergence of the "official-oriented" phenomenon.

2.3 Unscientific Assessment Mechanism

Assessment is an important basis for the promotion of grassroots civil servants and a way for service-oriented governments to evaluate the recent performance of grassroots civil servants. Currently, there are many unscientific factors in China's performance assessment, mainly manifested in three aspects: low assessment frequency, unreasonable assessment basis, and insufficient application of results. According to surveys, 47.8% of grassroots civil servants' organizations conduct assessments annually, accounting for the largest proportion of all assessment forms. The performance assessment of grassroots civil servants is primarily based on annual assessments, with fewer monthly assessments and longer assessment cycles (Li et al., 2014). The long interval between two assessments leads to delays in examining and evaluating grassroots civil servants, which may cause them to become lax in their work. Additionally, there are fewer routine and random assessments for grassroots civil servants, and the assessment process lacks flexibility, failing to timely reflect their daily work status. In terms of assessment standards, others' evaluations account for a large proportion in civil servant performance assessments, and self-summaries also play a significant role. This results in the evaluation of civil servants being based on interpersonal relationships rather than outstanding performance in "morality, ability, diligence, performance, and integrity." Furthermore, civil servants also have many blind spots in their self-evaluations.

2.4 Imperfect Training Mechanism

The scientific nature of the training mechanism is related to the effectiveness of the training. Due to the continuous development of the times, training is the most effective means to enhance the abilities of grassroots civil servants. The imperfection of the training mechanism leads to ineffective improvements in civil servants and difficulty in achieving expected goals. For civil servants, personality is formed through long-term practice and is difficult to

change in a short time, while work skills can be rapidly improved through short-term training. China's training for grassroots civil servants primarily focuses on political literacy and moral education, with less training on practical work skills such as document writing and computer operation. This indicates that China's training for civil servants lacks practicality and is difficult to improve their abilities. Secondly, civil servant training lacks specificity, without conducting a needs analysis of civil servants. The training content is also not combined with the work performance and assessment results of grassroots civil servants, making civil servants passively accept training, reducing their enthusiasm, and making them prone to resist training. Finally, training tends to be a mere formality. Training institutions do not examine the learning effects of civil servants after training nor feedback on the training results to government departments. This results in both parties not knowing the effectiveness of the training, unable to identify its deficiencies. Ultimately, training is not taken seriously and becomes a mere formality.

3. Countermeasures to Improve Civil Servant Motivation

3.1 Promoting Dual Incentives

In the modern socialist market economy system, we must focus on both material and spiritual incentives. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, which includes physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization, physiological needs should be prioritized to achieve an effective combination of material and spiritual incentives. Firstly, considering current socio-economic conditions, the basic living needs of civil servants must be guaranteed. Secondly, it is necessary to continuously assist civil servants in establishing scientific and correct values at the spiritual level. This process involves activities such as communication, education, and training, where honorary titles are awarded to civil servants in a timely manner to ensure their work enthusiasm from an ideological perspective. Finally, demand analysis should be conducted during implementation to understand the different needs of various civil servants and achieve differentiated and targeted management.

3.2 Increasing the Proportion of Incentive Compensation

In Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, physiological and safety needs are considered the most basic human needs. Therefore, in the incentive mechanism for civil servants, beyond meeting their most basic material needs, the compensation structure must also be thoroughly considered. The current civil servant compensation system primarily consists of allowances, salaries, and benefits. However, there are no clear written regulations defining these three components, resulting in ambiguity and a lack of clarity.

To effectively incentivize civil servants, it is recommended to increase the proportion of incentive compensation within the civil servant compensation system. This will not only better meet the basic needs of civil servants but also stimulate their work enthusiasm and creativity, enhancing overall work efficiency. At the same time, clarifying the regulations of the compensation system ensures that civil servant compensation is closely linked to their contributions, creating a fair and transparent compensation environment. Specific measures include: (1) Optimizing the compensation structure based on the basic needs of civil servants. The proportion of salaries in the civil servant compensation system can be increased to approximately 60%, while allowances and benefits should account for about 40% of the total compensation system, with allowances comprising 30% of this. The levels of allowances and benefits should be set primarily based on local socio-economic development levels. In economically underdeveloped areas, additional compensation can be provided based on the uniqueness of the work environment. (2) Maintaining internal and external balance in civil servant compensation. The civil servant compensation system should ensure that income differences among staff across regions and departments are controlled within a certain range. Additionally, civil servant salaries should be consistent with domestic socio-economic development levels and maintain a certain relationship with the average levels of employees in enterprise units to meet the normal social living needs of civil servants (Zhao, 2023).

3.3 Improving Performance Appraisal

In refining the performance appraisal process, emphasis should be placed on improving appraisal indicators, optimizing appraisal methods, and strengthening the application of results, thereby achieving scientific performance appraisal. Performance appraisal is not only an assessment of employees' work performance in enterprises but also a high-level need for employees. Through target evaluations, employees feel a sense of participation in contributing to corporate

goals and a sense of organizational belonging that requires goal orientation and participation, satisfying their social and esteem needs.

When improving appraisal indicators, it is necessary to proceed from three aspects: setting performance appraisal indicators, selecting performance appraisal indicators, and evaluating performance indicators. When setting performance appraisal indicators, we should closely build around the service level of civil servants. Civil servants are on the front line, directly serving the broad masses of the people. Therefore, using service recipients' evaluations as a reference standard allows us to not only more accurately understand the work performance of grassroots civil servants but also ensures the fairness of performance appraisals (Lü, 2012). Secondly, when selecting performance appraisal indicators, we need to focus on diversification, not only evaluating civil servants' overall service levels and handling capabilities but also paying attention to their detailed performance at work. Through multiple aspects, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of civil servants' work capabilities, enabling them to achieve comprehensive development in terms of "morality, ability, diligence, performance, and integrity." Finally, in terms of evaluating performance indicators, by observing their behavioral performance at work, the appraisal indicators are quantified. At the same time, different weights are assigned based on the importance and influence of each indicator to ensure the fairness of the performance appraisal results.

3.4 Enhancing Training Effectiveness

Innovating the civil servant training mechanism can enrich the work content of grassroots civil servants, improve the pertinence of training, and create diversity. It also helps grassroots civil servants gain access to new knowledge, change their perceptions and thinking, elevate their cognitive levels, improve their work capabilities, and better meet employees' self-actualization needs. Practical and targeted training is an important aspect of innovating the mechanism (Zhang, 2013). To achieve practical and targeted training, it should be carried out from the following three aspects:

Firstly, training should be tailored to individual needs. We should conduct capability assessments on civil servants to more accurately understand their strengths and areas for improvement. These insights are achieved by conducting in-depth analyses of civil servants' appraisal results, thereby discovering their outstanding work performance and areas needing further improvement, and subsequently customizing different training content to ensure that the training content is closely linked to their actual needs. Secondly, conducting a needs analysis survey is a crucial step. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of civil servants' needs, we can adopt various communication methods such as face-to-face interviews or questionnaire surveys. Through these methods, we can collect civil servants' relevant needs for course content, ensuring that the training content aligns with their actual needs (Hao, 2024).

Secondly, training should focus on effectiveness. Firstly, the training content should closely relate to the daily work of civil servants, providing practical solutions to specific problems and challenges they encounter in practice, enabling them to quickly address shortcomings in their work and achieve leapfrog improvements in personal abilities, laying a solid foundation for competence in higher positions. Secondly, during the training process, vigilance against formalism is essential to ensure that the training content is authentic and practical, avoiding superficiality and formalism.

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