**15.341 – Session 2 Reflection  
James Paine**

Early on during these readings I realized that this was the first time that I had actually *read* Maslow’s “A theory of human motivation” and McGregor’s “The human side of enterprise.” This is despite being very aware of the key artifacts of both papers, namely the hierarchy of needs and the ‘Theory X’ vs ‘Theory Y’ management styles, respectively. My research interests falls within the fields of System Dynamics and Behavioral Operations Management, which broadly defined can be considered their study of human behavior and its impact on operating systems and processes. Towards that end, the concepts of both Maslow’s and McGregor’s work have been viewed as fundamental and featured prominently in my previous studies.

Maslow’s work is a great starting point for later conversations in both psychology and other behaviorally-motivated fields that motivation is not simply focused on a base need to satiate or survive. Specifically, his distinction and emphasis on the importance of gratification versus deprivation, and how that relates to different levels of his hierarchy, I believe is an essential (and perhaps underappreciated) feature of the paper. It reminds me in part of the distinction of promotion versus prevention mechanisms in Higgins and Crowe’s later work, wherein the difference in motivation and resulting behavior between satiation of a base need is distinguished from that which comes from aspiring towards a higher goal. This in turn different structural needs when modeling each of these motivations. My large insight is that this may map nicely to existing concepts in System Dynamics compartmental modeling. Gap closure is modeled in compartmental models and controls theory as a balancing, or negative, loop. This maps to the promotion goals in regulatory theory and perhaps to the higher level needs in Maslow. I would be curious to try making an explicit System Dynamics control model of different types of motivational goals using the concepts form these papers.

I also greatly appreciated that Maslow pointed out that there may be many more determinates of behavior than just needs and desires. While there may exist a hierarchy of internal wants, this does not necessarily translate to observable behavior. This raises a question about research in general that I would love to explore in this class, namely how to elucidate the internal wants of people versus their observable behavior, The primary tenant of System Dynamics is that *Structure Generates Behavior* and we are very dependent on the observations of behavior to intuit structure. Maslow’s emphasis on the need to satiate higher level drives flows nicely into McGregor’s work, and both works were referenced in tandem with a commentary by Iva M. Wilson I found and enjoyed. McGregor builds on Maslow nicely, creating a ‘systems thinking’ approach to work design in his description of ‘Theory Y’ managers, presented in contrast to more process and outcome-oriented ‘Theory X’ management.

However, I do not feel that the assumptions of Theory X versus Theory Y management are necessarily at odds. Often, a process *must* be highly specified and controlled (consider the manufacture of a pharmaceutical or pacemaker) to avoid harm. But, even in these environments, I believe it possible to have a Theory Y mindset, allowing employees to control their working environment, while still controlling the actual process outputs. This is another topic I would love to explore more in the class discussion this week, but I would point towards more recent work in job design as a starting point. In general I would love to see a middle ground of Theory X and Theory Y, or rather a more clear description of when either may be the best managerial framework.

While less directly related to my other work in System Dynamics and Behavioral Operations Management, the study by Festinger and Carlsmith appealed to me because it contained an actual empirically grounded experiment, versus the general observations of Maslow and McGregor. My key takeaway is that we must pay for our dissonance, either directly via real compensation or internal rationalization. While I appreciated the study, it also raises some concerns with similar psychology papers, namely around the use of deception to get behavioral insights. One of the primary tenants of behavioral economic studies is to eschew deception whenever possible, to avoid the expectation of deception in future experiments. While the authors here address that a bit with their final screening of 11 of their 71 trials, I would be curious about how to test the same theory without the use of deception.