

WHY THINGS GO WRONG
OR
THE PETER PRINCIPLE
REVISITED

Author : Dr Laurence J. Peter

A presentation by

- Sushant Kumar
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About Dr. Laurence J Peter

(September 16, 1919 - January 12, 1990)

- American Psychologist
- Teacher
- Consultant
- Experience of working in prisons and children
- Authored Peter principle with Raymond Hull in 1968



How did the principle originate ?

- The Peter Principle was first introduced in an article written by Dr. Laurence J. Peter in the January 1967 issue of Esquire magazine
- It struck a chord among American office-dwellers
- With the help of writer Raymond Hull
 - ▣ wrote the book, **“The Peter Principle: Why Things Always Go Wrong”**

Peter Principle

- In a Hierarchy Every Employee Tends to Rise to His Level of Incompetence
 - Uncovers a real flaw in hierarchies
 - Companies prefer to promote within the hierarchy
 - Person is eventually promoted to his level of incompetence

But Why ?

- System encourages people to rise to level of incompetence
- If you are competent, you'll be promoted
- But when you can't do well, you'll stay

- Effects
 - ▣ Bungling your job
 - ▣ Frustrating your coworkers
 - ▣ Eroding effectiveness of organization

Corollaries of Peter Principle

A deduction or inference that follows a main proposition

Corollaries of Peter principle lead us to more consequences

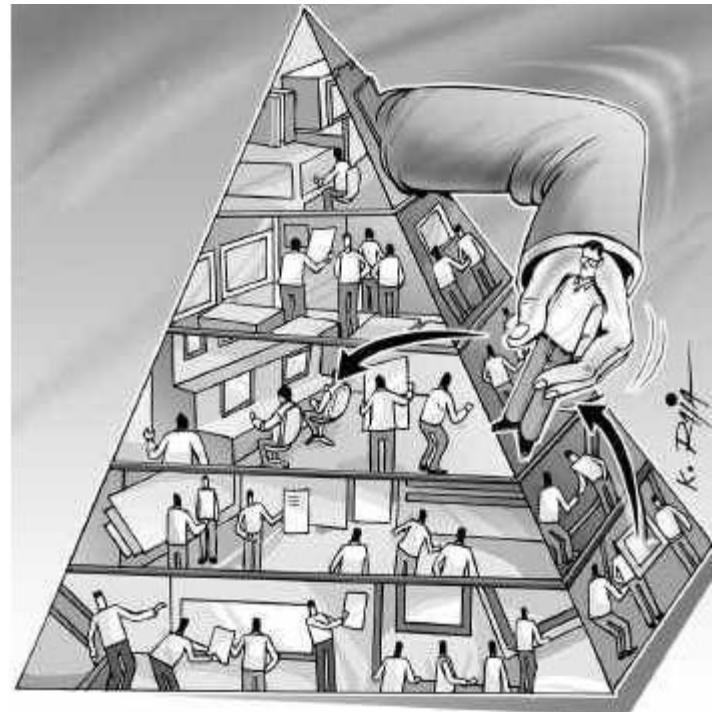
Useful Work

- All useful work is done by those who have not yet reached their level of incompetence



Hierarchy

- Accomplishment is inversely proportional to its height



Trivial tasks

- There is tendency for the person in the most powerful hierarchical position to spend all his or her time performing trivial tasks

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“Watson, you idiot, I said ‘enforce referential integrity’, not ‘regimental integrity!’”

Super (Competence & Incompetence)

- Either super-incompetence or super-competence may be offensive to the establishment

A super-competent case

- Mrs. Abel
- Taught first grade in elementary school
- Parents wanted their children to be in Mrs. Abel's class
- Ate lunch in classroom with her pupils

But...

Mrs. Abel *cntd...*

- She did not attend any staff meeting (except first one)
- Refused to upgrade her qualifications
- Did not take in-service courses

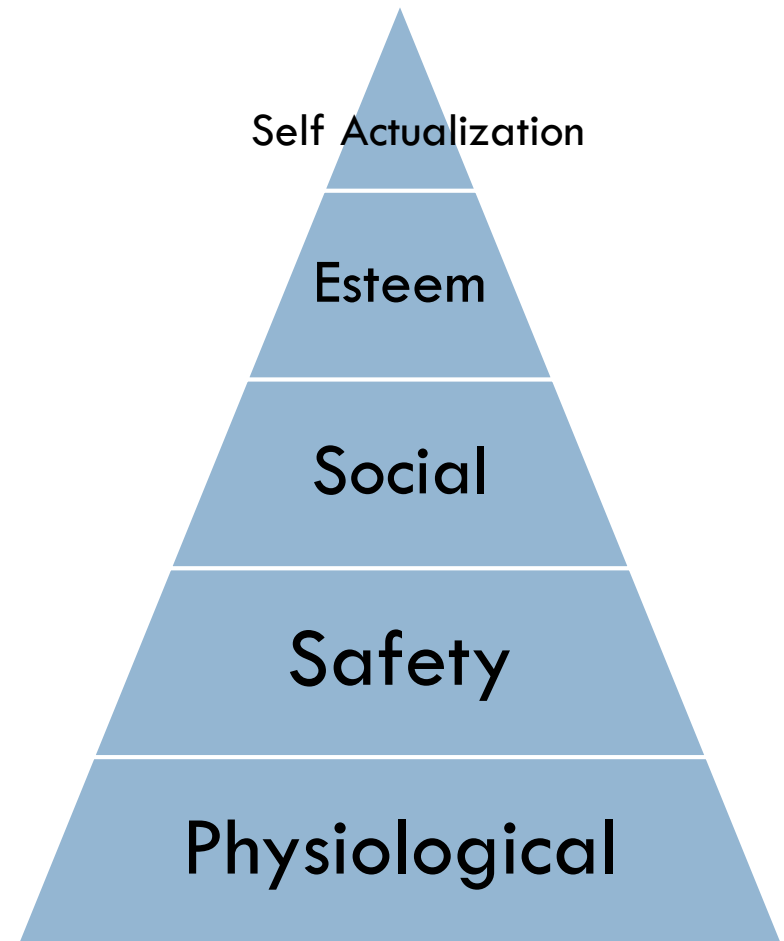
- She said...
 - ▣ *I don't want a promotion. I don't want to be an administrator.*
 - ▣ *I like working with children.*

Mrs. Abel *cntd...*

- Got low marks for
 - ▣ Attitude & Cooperation
 - ▣ Professional advancement
- She had reached her level of competence

Up, Up and Oops!

- Why do humans climb to their level of incompetence ?
 - ▣ Abraham Maslow
 - ▣ Proposes human nature as an explanation for struggle upward
 - Social needs – One's positions relative to others
 - Ego needs – Recognition, Prestige



Success – The trappings



Impressing others has become such a preoccupation that the image and trappings of success are more valued than success itself


Management insights

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**"Congratulations on your promotion, Bob,
but I should tell you that no one has lasted
over a month at the
Department of What Could Possibly Go Wrong."**


- 
- Ability to identify genuine levels and requirements of job performance and attributes
 - People may then be placed in jobs that they can do and for which they are best suited
 - Self check is most important
 - Identify boundary of competence
 - Hierarchy kills competence and competent individuals


Types of Incompetence


- Professional
- Physical
- Mental
- Social
- Emotional
- Ethical



Communication insight

- 
- The style and method used by the author is in itself a lesson on effective communication.
 - Presented a boring subject like hierarchy not as a serious scientific work
 - Presented in a light, amusing and witty way.
 - Gives us relief from what might otherwise be relentless "preaching".

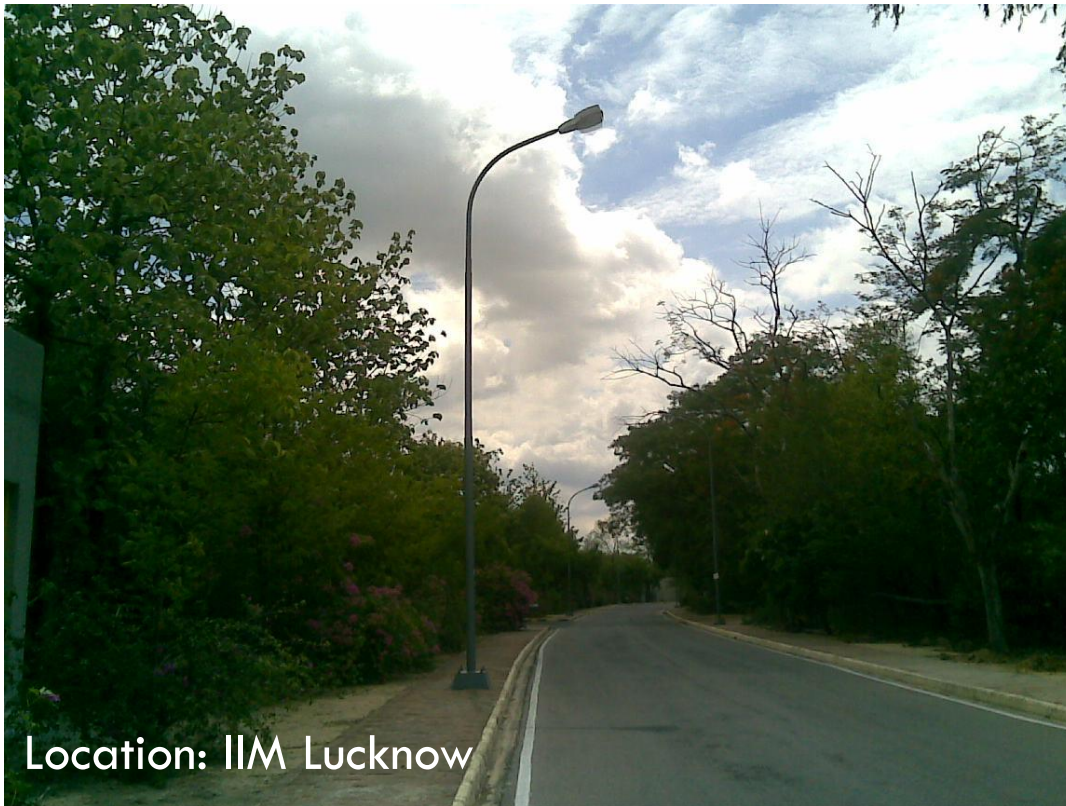
- 
- Satire is a form of writing in which the message is serious and the method is humor.
 - Benefits of employing satire:
 - ▣ It's nonviolent and artistic way of criticizing.

- 
- Author objects to the form of language that mystifies rather than clarifies.
 - Favors language that expresses
 - coherent ideas
 - Relevant information
 - understandable instructions.

In the end...

- Success is a journey, not a destination

- Ben SweetLand



Location: IIM Lucknow