

Maslow's Theory of Motivation -

Hierarchy of Needs

In 1943, Dr. Abraham Maslow 's article "A Theory of Human Motivation " appeared in

Psychological Review, which were further expanded upon in his book: Toward a

Psychology of Being In this article, Abraham H. Maslow attempted to formulate a

needs-based framework of human motivation and based upon his clinical experiences

with people, rather than as did the prior psychology theories of his day from authors

such as Freud and B.F. Skinner, which were largely theoretical or based upon animal

behavior. From this theory of motivation, modern leaders and executive managers

find means of motivation for the purposes of employee and workforce

management. Abraham Maslow's book Motivation and Personality (1954), formally

introduced the Hierarchy of Needs.

The basis of Maslow's motivation theory is that human beings are motivated by

unsatisfied needs, and that certain lower factors need to be satisfied before higher

needs can be satisfied. According to Maslow, there are general types of needs

(physiological, survival, safety, love, and esteem) that must be satisfied before a

person can act unselfishly. He called these needs "deficiency needs." As long as we

are motivated to satisfy these cravings, we are moving towards growth, toward self-

actualization. Satisfying needs is healthy, while preventing gratification makes us sick

or act evilly.

As a result, for adequate workplace motivation, it is important that leadership

understands the active needs active for individual employee motivation. In this

manner, Maslow's model indicates that fundamental, lower-order needs like safety

and physiological requirements have to be satisfied in order to pursue higher-

level motivators along the lines of self-fulfillment. As depicted in the

following hierarchical diagram, sometimes called 'Maslow's Needs Pyramid' or

'Maslow's Needs Triangle', after a need is satisfied it stops acting as a motivator and

the next need one rank higher starts to motivate.

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Self-Actualization

Esteem Needs

Social Needs

Safety Needs

Physiological Needs

Self-Actualization

Self-actualization is the summit of Maslow's motivation theory. It is about the quest

of reaching one's full potential as a person. Unlike lower level needs, this need is

never fully satisfied; as one grows psychologically there are always new opportunities

to continue to grow.

Self-actualized people tend to have motivators such as:

Truth

Justice

Wisdom

Meaning

Self-actualized persons have frequent occurrences of peak experiences, which are

energized moments of profound happiness and harmony. According to Maslow, only

a small percentage of the population reaches the level of self-actualization.

Esteem Needs

After a person feels that they "belong", the urge to attain a degree of importance

emerges. Esteem needs can be categorized as external motivators and internal

motivators.

Internally motivating esteem needs are those such as self-esteem, accomplishment,

and self respect. External esteem needs are those such as reputation and recognition.

Some examples of esteem needs are:

Recognition (external motivator)

Attention (external motivator)

Social Status (external motivator)

Accomplishment (internal motivator)

Self-respect (internal motivator)

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Maslow later improved his model to add a layer in between self-actualization

and esteem needs: the need for aesthetics and knowledge.

Social Needs

Once a person has met the lower level physiological and safety needs, higher

level motivators awaken. The first level of higher level needs are social needs. Social

needs are those related to interaction with others and may include:

Friendship

Belonging to a group

Giving and receiving love

Safety Needs

Once physiological needs are met, one's attention turns to safety and security in order

to be free from the threat of physical and emotional harm. Such needs might be

fulfilled by:

Living in a safe area

Medical insurance

Job security

Financial reserves

According to the Maslow hierarchy, if a person feels threatened, needs further up the

pyramid will not receive attention until that need has been resolved.

Physiological Needs

Physiological needs are those required to sustain life, such as:

Air

Water

Food

Sleep

According to this theory, if these fundamental needs are not satisfied then one will

surely be motivated to satisfy them. Higher needs such as social needs and esteem are

not recognized until one satisfies the needs basic to existence.

Applying Maslow's Needs Hierarchy - Business Management

Implications

If Maslow's theory is true, there are some very important leadership implications

to enhance workplace motivation. There are staff motivation opportunities by

motivating each employee through their style of management, compensation plans,

role definition, and company activities.

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Physiological Motivation: Provide ample breaks for lunch and recuperation and pay salaries

that allow workers to buy life's essentials.

Safety Needs: Provide a working environment which is safe, relative job security, and

freedom from threats.

Social Needs: Generate a feeling of acceptance, belonging, and community by reinforcing

team dynamics.

Esteem Motivators: Recognize achievements, assign important projects, and provide status to

make employees feel valued and appreciated.

Self-Actualization: Offer challenging and meaningful work assignments which enable

innovation, creativity, and progress according to long-term goals.

Remember, everyone is not motivated by same needs. At various points in their lives

and careers, various employees will be motivated by completely different needs. It

is imperative that you recognize each employee's needs currently being pursued. In

order to motivate their employees, leadership must be understand the current level of

needs at which the employee finds themselves, and leverage needs for workplace

motivation.

Maslow's Theory - Limitations and Criticism

Though Maslow's hierarchy makes sense intuitively, little evidence supports its strict

hierarchy. Actually, recent research challenges the order that the needs are imposed

by Maslow's pyramid. As an example, in some cultures, social needs are placed more

fundamentally than any others. Further, Maslow's hierarchy fails to explain the

"starving artist" scenario, in which the aesthetic neglects their physical needs to

pursuit of aesthetic or spiritual goals. Additionally, little evidence suggests that people

satisfy exclusively one motivating need at a time, other than situations where needs

conflict.

While scientific support fails to reinforce Maslow's hierarchy, his thery is

very popular, being the introductory motivation theory for many students and

managers, worldwide. To handle a number of the issues of present in the Needs

Hierarchy, Clayton Alderfer devised the ERG theory, a consistent needs-based model

that aligns more accurately with scientific research.

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