

**Motivation Theories: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, McClelland's Learned Needs Theory and  
Skinner's Reward/Reinforcement Theory**

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## **Motivation Theories: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, McClelland's Learned Needs Theory and Skinner's Reward/Reinforcement Theory**

This paper seeks to discuss three motivational theories that have explained and increased our understanding of motivation. Further, I will present the various similarities and unique differences that each of these theories posed to solve and how the result has greatly affected our contemporary work setting.

The beauty of learning is in its application. The concluding part of this paper will cover which of these theories I'll personally use in keeping employees motivated in a workplace.

### **Maslow's Hierarchy Theory of Needs**

Maslow's hierarchy theory of needs is considered as the most well-known and popular model on needs (Laegaard, 2006). The model classified human needs into five hierarchical levels which includes: self-actualization needs, esteem needs, social needs, safety needs and physiological needs. According to Maslow, the needs of a given level must be satisfied before the next level becomes interesting. In other words, human needs are in progression. Once a particular need is attained, the desire for the next level according to Maslow is triggered.

Before the employees can be motivated to come up with better performance, the employees current level in Maslow hierarchy model first needs to be identified as this will help predict what the next level is. This is because only unsatisfied needs can function as motivation (Laegaard, 2006).

The Maslow model helps us to understand that human needs vary at different phases in the life of an individual. At some point, primary needs such as water, food, shelter etc serve as the dominant factors while at some other time the need to be respected, command attention, independence play a significant role in the individual. Although the Maslow model is said it can predict employee behavior to a minor extent, its greatest significance is in the area of recognizing and identification of human needs (Laegaard, 2006).

### **McClelland Learned Needs Theory**

Unlike Maslow and C.Alderfer models that are either progressive or regressive, McClelland model focuses on the needs/motives that have significant influence on productivity and efficiency in working life (Laegaard, 2006). McClelland categorized these needs into achievement need, power need and affiliation need.

Achievement talks about the need to achieve high performance. It is perceived that the more challenging a task someone takes, the more confident he/she becomes in handling similar or more challenging or complex ones. Although some situations may demand training employees; empowering them with the skills needed. Power on the other hand is the need to take responsibility, the willingness to make a difference among other influencing roles. People with low affiliation usually do not have problems working longer periods alone.

This model depends on the cultural needs of the place or community and as such may not function in conditions that the needs of the people differ from the ones identified in McClelland's model.

The McClelland model suggests to us that it is possible for employees to change through training. So, occasionally, corporate or individual training could be conducted for various employees to boost their productivity on the job.

### **Skinner's Reinforcement Theory**

Skinner's reinforcement theory revolves around rewarding good performance and sanctioning or punishing poor performance. Behaviour may be random and influenced by experiments, but there's a tendency that behaviour which is rewarded will be repeated - and that behaviour, which is punished will be avoided (Laegaard, 2006).

In most organizations where a pay bonus is a motivator, Skinner's model will perform very well owing to the fact that better performance will always attract a pay bonus whereas failure on assigned tasks

will attract a deduction. One demerit of this model could be mounting so much pressure on employees to deliver even when they're stressed out. This in turn will have a negative side effect on their delivery as time goes on.

### **Comparison on Human Motivation**

The three needs theories all have their advantages and disadvantages. The Maslow model helps us in recognizing and identifying human needs which is very important in getting employees motivated. On the other hand, McClelland's model focuses on management as a starting point in empowering employees through training in achieving set goals and objectives. Both Maslow and McClelland models are confronted with a use case scenario where the culture of a community differs from the one proposed in both models. Skinner's reinforcement model may be short lived. Employees who constantly get punished may end up being frustrated on the job and probably decide to take up another job in another company.

### **Conclusion**

As much as Maslow's model is said to predict human behavior to a minor extent, it appeals to me as the theory that best applies to my personal and developmental journey. Since human needs differ, this implies that what may serve as a motivation to one employee may not work the same for another. And since Maslow suggests gathering information about employees from personal interaction, employee appraisal period; I see it doing well in keeping employees motivated by using the identified motivators as tools or triggers to get the best out of them.

### References

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