# Achievement Motivation and Grit

*by Sophia*

### ☰ WHAT'S COVERED

By the end of this session, you will be able to discuss theories of motivation and achievement, explain achievement motivation, and define achievement, motivation, and grit. We will cover this in the following topics:

# 1. Achievement

Achievement and motivation are two terms that are often linked. Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines **achievement** as a result gained by effort, while **motivation** is defined as incentive or drive. In 1938, psychologist Henry Murray coined the phrase **achievement motivation** and defined it as: a desire for significant accomplishment, for mastering skills ideas, for control, and for attaining a high standard. To better understand the concepts of motivation and achievement, several theories were developed.

Motivation and achievement are often separated into the two theoretical areas of process and content. Process theories explain how motivation occurs while content theories define what motivation is. Many cognitive theories are oriented towards thought processes and how the surrounding environment affects motives for achievement. Constructs such as mindset, self-concept, and perception of control are examined for their positive or negative impact in the taking of goal directive actions.

### 📄 TERMS TO KNOW

**Achievement**
A result gained by effort.

**Motivation**
An incentive or drive.

**Achievement Motivation**
A desire for significant accomplishment, for mastering skills ideas, for control, and for attaining a high standard.

# 2. Content Theories of Motivation and Achievement

## 2a. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

One of the most well-known theories of content motivation is **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**. Using a pyramid structure, Abraham Maslow explained his belief as to how dissatisfaction is the motivational factor that moves us in the direction of fulfillment. Needs are divided into the three broad categories of basic, psychological, and self-fulfillment.

*Basic needs* are biological and necessary for the sustenance of life. *Psychological* and *Self-fulfillment needs* are relationship/environmentally based and are required for well-being and emotional growth. As one progresses through the hierarchy, the needs become more complex reflecting an increased need for self-actualization and growth. Not everyone achieves the psychological or self-fulfillment needs.
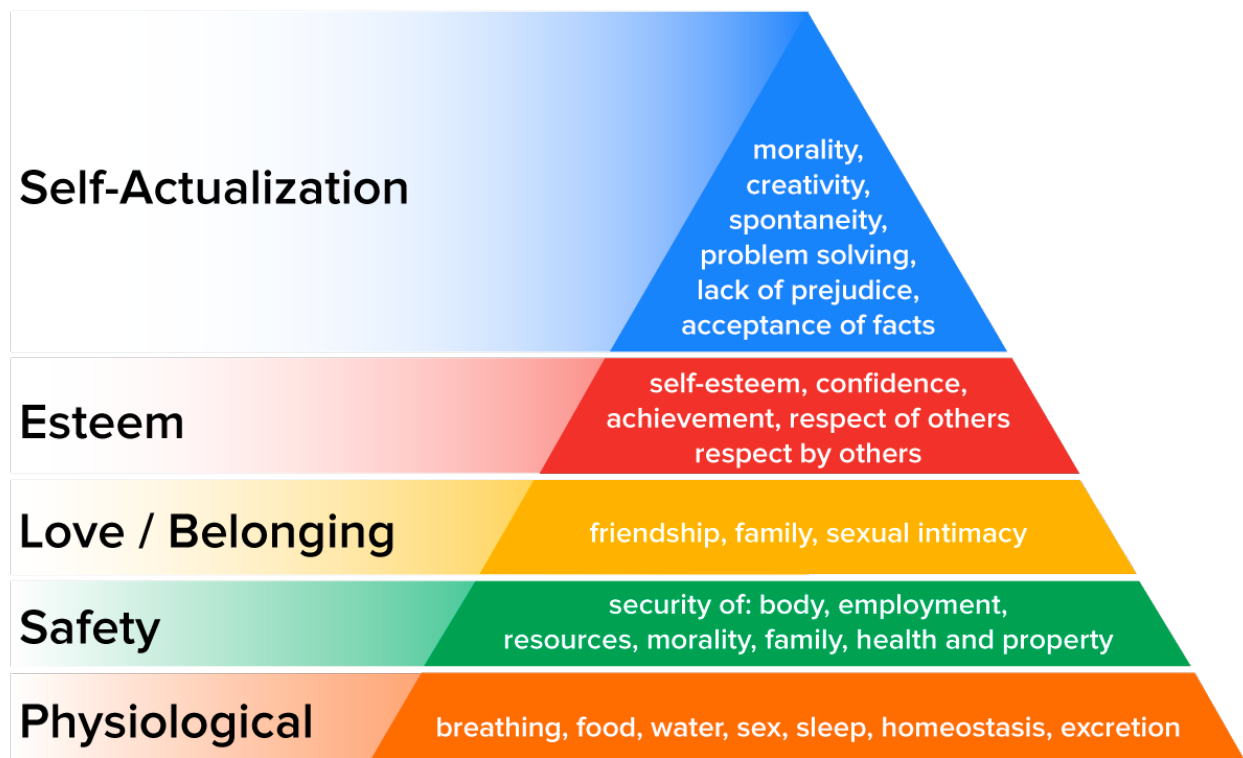


| Needs | | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Self-fulfillment Needs | Self-actualization | achieving one's full potential, including creative activities |
| Psychological Needs | Esteem Needs | prestige, feeling of accomplishment |
| | Belongingness and Love Needs | intimate relationships, friends |
| Basic Needs | Safety Needs | security, safety |
| | Physiological Needs | food, shelter, water, rest |

▶ WATCH

In this video, learn how Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory relates to the life journey of the former Air Force and Thunderbird pilot, Nicole Malachowski, as she struggled with her own physical and neurological medical conditions pushing her to self-actualization and how she has helped others by sharing her stories.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

> **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**
> A structure of goals based on the belief that dissatisfaction is the motivational factor that moves us in the direction of fulfillment.

## 2b. McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory

David McClelland was a psychologist who believed needs to be learned and expounded. As a result, he channeled his research away from satisfaction and categorized them into the areas of achievement, affiliation, and power. He viewed these needs as influenced by internal drivers or external factors. Achievement was seen as derived from a psychological need for competence. He defined **achievement** as striving for excellence against a standard of three sources of competition: the task itself, the competition with the self, and the competition against others. High needs for achievement can stem from a person's social environment/social influences (ex. familial influences) or could be developed over one's life due to a need for personal growth.

# 3. Process Theories of Motivation

### 3a. Reinforcement Theory

Reinforcement theory focuses on behavioral consequences as the main factor in motivation. Rooted in B.F. Skinner's **Operant Conditioning Theory**, positive reinforcements are viewed as the factors driving the potential for a repeat in the desired behavior (ex. praise, money, promotion, etc.). In this theory, positive and negative behaviors are separated into reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement provides only what is needed in exchange for displaying desired behavior while punishment seeks to end undesired behavior via imposing unwanted consequences.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

> **Operant Conditioning Theory**
> A theory in which positive and negative behaviors are separated into reinforcement and punishment, respectively.

### 3b. Locke's Goal Setting Theory

Within Edwin Locke's Goal Setting Theory, goals are seen as the causes of behavior. In setting effective goals he provided the following guidelines:

- Goals should be challenging and yet attainable. Motivation does not occur when goals are too easy, excessively difficult, or unrealistic.
- Goals should be measurable and specific. This can aid personal focus and the measurement of progress in reaching the goal.
- Integrate strategies (ex. feedback, bonuses). Avoid pressures that could lead to dishonesty in goal achievement.

- Provide support elements (ex. encouragement, moral support, resources).
- Quantify results via feedback.

---

# 4. Grit

Angela Duckworth defines **grit** as passion and perseverance for long-term goals. It is described as having an ultimate concern in which the desired goal organizes and gives meaning to all of your actions. It is considered the best predictor of success. Grit is often correlated with the characteristics of self-control and conscientiousness. According to Duckworth, grit is a mindset that develops over time. Individuals have control over how they view life's difficulties. As such, we can empower ourselves to find resolution in the midst of adversity.

Duckworth believes grit to require more than talent and skill. She has devised a formula:

TALENT x EFFORT = SKILL
SKILL x EFFORT = ACHIEVEMENT

In the absence of effort, even the most talented and skilled people will fail to achieve.

> 📄 **TERM TO KNOW**
>
> **Grit**
> Passion and perseverance for long-term goals.

> 📋 **SUMMARY**
>
> In this lesson you learned about how **achievement** motivation captures our drive to accomplish significant things.
>
> **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs** described an early understanding of how basic biological needs can be ordered from most important to least important. **McClelland's Achievement Motiviation Theory** moved beyond this idea by theorizing how achievements motivate us to strive for excellence and accomplish great things.
>
> **Reinforcement Theory** and **Locke's Goal Setting** Theory help describe how motivations work, as opposed to why they exist. Reinforcements are positive and negative rewards that provide feedback to shape our behaviors and habits. Goal setting, as its name implies, describes a more active planning process where we actively set goals that drive our behaviors. Finally, **grit** is an emerging idea that captures how passions we have can drive perseverance toward important long-term goals, even in the face of obstacles.
>
> Good luck in your learning!

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR**TERMS OF USE.**

## Video Transcription

What moves you, what motivates you to get up and go in the face of failure or even danger. In this video, we'll hear from America's first female Thunderbird pilot who struggled with the life changing illness. Illustrates how human motivations change depending on the needs in our life.

When you're at that lowest point and you're broken you become very, very focused on surviving.

Nicole Malachowski had been in the Air Force for 20 years. Her career was taking off when she was offered the job of a lifetime, as executive director in the White House.

I'm working for the First Lady of the United States, Mrs. Michelle Obama as well as Dr. Joe Biden. I actually have an office in the East Wing. Everything was going phenomenal.

Nicole was on the top of the world. In fact, she was also on top of something called Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, a theory that shows how motivations are prioritized. From fulfilling our most basic human needs like health, food, and shelter to higher motivations like a sense of belonging purpose and ultimately self actualization. But just when Nicole couldn't climb any higher, everything she had built began crumbling down.

I woke up one day and something just wasn't feeling right in my body. I literally couldn't move or walk. I was paralyzed and it was extraordinarily frightening.

For her to pull through, would take motivation. The same strength of will the power Nicole through all of her previous achievements.

I was starting to have a lot of symptoms that were to the doctors inexplainable. They impacted every single system in my body. I had a lot of neurological problems and then I started to lose my ability to speak fluently. And it was scary.

She was forced to forfeit her dream job and was medically retired from the Air Force. Nicole didn't know if she would ever fly again.

My entire career, all of the amazing things I've done. Working at the White House, fighter pilot, squadron commander, thundery was gone. I was in bed sleeping 22 hours a day. I went from the independent type A to someone who was completely dependent on other people for everything.

Desperate for answers. Nicole decided to take a new approach to solving this medical mystery.

We started digging through my medical records and it hit me one day turn those records around, read them from when you were healthy. And it starts to read like a story. And it goes back to the time I went to my doctor with what I now know to have been a tick bite in a rash.

I ended up with a specialist up in Boston, they drew so many vials of blood. And I'll never forget she said you're positive. I had neurological tick borne illness.

Tick borne pathogens that can include Lyme disease, can be fatal if not diagnosed. Nicole's condition

was severe and impacted her central nervous system.

I knew we were going to find an answer. We just had to keep trying. When you finally get the diagnosis, it's just overwhelming like relief.

With this diagnosis came a harrowing series of treatments for the sake of not only herself, but her family. Nicole was motivated to recover

For two years, I couldn't interact with my young children at all. I had people that needed me and depended on me. And I'll never forget the first time I went in the backyard and kicked a soccer ball with my kids. Here I was the person that used to fly fighter aircraft and I found joy in these little things.

Nicole's medical journey made a lasting impact, shaping her identity.

For me it's about resurgence. The fact of the matter is, my old self ceased to exist, but I had more that I needed to contribute.

Now as Nicole climbed back up Maslow's hierarchy, she was motivated once again to fulfill her need for self actualization. This time she found a new way to do that, helping others accomplish their goals.

When you share stories, you connect with people, it makes them realize that they're not alone. I think I'm impacting more people than I would have if I had stayed in the military. So at the end of the day, being broken as bad as I was by this medical journey has been the greatest gift I've ever been given. I am a better person now because of all the bad.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**
A structure of goals based on the belief that dissatisfaction is the motivational factor that moves us in the direction of fulfillment.

### 2b. McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory
David McClelland was a psychologist who believed needs to be learned and expounded. As a result, he channeled his research away from satisfaction and categorized them into the areas of achievement, affiliation, and power. He viewed these needs as influenced by internal drivers or external factors. Achievement was seen as derived from a psychological need for competence. He defined **achievement** as striving for excellence against a standard of three sources of competition: the task itself, the competition with the self, and the competition against others. High needs for achievement can stem from a person's social environment/social influences (ex. familial influences) or could be developed over one's life due to a need for personal growth.

# 3. Process Theories of Motivation

### 3a. Reinforcement Theory
Reinforcement theory focuses on behavioral consequences as the main factor in motivation. Rooted in B.F.

Skinner's **Operant Conditioning Theory**, positive reinforcements are viewed as the factors driving the potential for a repeat in the desired behavior (ex. praise, money, promotion, etc.). In this theory, positive and negative behaviors are separated into reinforcement and punishment. Reinforcement provides only what is needed in exchange for displaying desired behavior while punishment seeks to end undesired behavior via imposing unwanted consequences.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

> **Operant Conditioning Theory**
> A theory in which positive and negative behaviors are separated into reinforcement and punishment, respectively.

### 3b. Locke's Goal Setting Theory

Within Edwin Locke's Goal Setting Theory, goals are seen as the causes of behavior. In setting effective goals he provided the following guidelines:

- Goals should be challenging and yet attainable. Motivation does not occur when goals are too easy, excessively difficult, or unrealistic.
- Goals should be measurable and specific. This can aid personal focus and the measurement of progress in reaching the goal.
- Integrate strategies (ex. feedback, bonuses). Avoid pressures that could lead to dishonesty in goal achievement.
- Provide support elements (ex. encouragement, moral support, resources).
- Quantify results via feedback.

# 4. Grit

Angela Duckworth defines **grit** as passion and perseverance for long-term goals. It is described as having an ultimate concern in which the desired goal organizes and gives meaning to all of your actions. It is considered the best predictor of success. Grit is often correlated with the characteristics of self-control and conscientiousness. According to Duckworth, grit is a mindset that develops over time. Individuals have control over how they view life's difficulties. As such, we can empower ourselves to find resolution in the midst of adversity.

Duckworth believes grit to require more than talent and skill. She has devised a formula:

> TALENT x EFFORT = SKILL
> SKILL x EFFORT = ACHIEVEMENT

In the absence of effort, even the most talented and skilled people will fail to achieve.

📄 **TERM TO KNOW**

> **Grit**
> Passion and perseverance for long-term goals.

📋 **SUMMARY**

> In this lesson you learned about how achievement motivation captures our drive to accomplish significant things.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs described an early understanding of how basic biological needs can be ordered from most important to least important. McClelland moved beyond this idea by theorizing how achievements motivate us to strive for excellence and accomplish great things.

Reinforcement Theory and Locke's Goal Setting Theory help describe how motivations work, as opposed to why they exist. Reinforcements are positive and negative rewards that provide feedback to shape our behaviors and habits. Goal setting, as its name implies, describes a more active planning process where we actively set goals that drive our behaviors. Finally, grit is an emerging idea that captures how passions we have can drive perseverance toward important long-term goals, even in the face of obstacles.

Good luck in your learning!

## TERMS TO KNOW

**Achievement**
A result gained by effort.

**Achievement Motivation**
A desire for significant accomplishment, for mastering skills ideas, for control, and for attaining a high standard.

**Grit**
Passion and perseverance for long-term goals.

**Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs**
A structure of goals based on the belief that dissatisfaction is the motivational factor that moves us in the direction of fulfillment.

**Motivation**
An incentive or drive.

**Operant Conditioning Theory**
A theory in which positive and negative behaviors are separated into reinforcement and punishment, respectively.