MASLOW'S NEED HIERARCHY THEORY

Chapter 3

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This chapter attempts to review the Maslow's Need Hierarchy Theory of Motivation. Since the study aims at analyzing the relevance and applicability of this theory to non-managerial employees of public sector and private sector undertakings, a detailed discussion is important and imperative. This chapter is devoted for giving a detailed explanation on the theory of Need Hierarchy of Maslow.

As stated in the previous chapter, Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory is considered to be the first and foremost content theory of motivation, which was developed in 1935.

Abraham H Maslow of Brandies University fashioned a dynamic and realistic explanation of human Behaviour. The underlying concept of motivation is some driving force within individuals by which they attempt to achieve some
goals in order to satisfy some need or expectation in life. Maslow clearly understood this factor and he felt that motivation must reflect this nature.

3.1 NEEDS

The concept of need is especially important for a greater understanding of one's own behaviour and that of others with whom and through whom one works. "Needs" reflect an internal state that makes certain outcomes appear attractive.

An unsatisfied need create tensions. Tensions motivate action and action can result in the accomplishment of a goal and relief of the tension.

Maslow pointed out that needs are ever changing. People change their goals and redirect their activities in response to changing needs. Of major importance was his pointing out that unsatisfied need serve as 'magnets', which attract efforts to satisfy those needs. After a particular need is satisfied, it is 'de-magnetised' and after a particular need is de-magnetised, it is no longer serve as effective motivator.

Maslow hypothesized that within every human being there exists a hierarchy of five needs.

These needs are:

1. Physiological - includes hunger, thirst, shelter, sex and other bodily needs.
2. Safety - includes security and protection from physical and emotional harm.

3. Social - includes affection, belongingness, acceptance and friendship.

4. Esteem - includes internal esteem factors such as self-respect, autonomy and achievement and external esteem factors such as status, recognition and attention.

5. Self-actualization - is represented by the drive to become what one is capable of becoming; includes growth, achieving one's potential, self-fulfillment etc.

Need levels 1 and 2 are typically called lower order needs and levels 3, 4 and 5 are called higher order needs. The differentiation between the two levels was made on the premise that the higher order needs are satisfied internally to the person, whereas lower order needs are predominantly satisfied externally.

Needs are the “initiating and sustaining forces of behaviour”. They have a direct influence on an individual since they determine in part one’s thoughts and actions. A person’s needs, working in conjunction with emotions and other psychological functions, act as the motives that dictate actions or behaviour. Any individual’s behaviour is aimed at satisfying some set of needs at a given point of time. The wants-objectives-behaviour chain indicates that any approach to understanding motivation should begin with a treatment of human wants or needs.
The Need Hierarchy Theory states that human behaviour is influenced by a set of needs. The needs are arranged in a hierarchy of 'prepotency' meaning that, as a person fulfills a lower need, the next higher need becomes important in directing the person's behaviour.

The major postulates of the Need Hierarchy Theory formulated by Maslow are:

- Needs can be classified into five groups and arranged in a hierarchy.
- When one need is satisfied, another need emerges to be satisfied.
- When a need is satisfied, it is no longer a motivator of behaviour. Even though there is a school of thought which say that fulfilled need motivate employees, in reality it is only unfulfilled needs that motivate human behaviour.
- Until the basic physiological needs are met, higher order needs won’t motivate behaviour. Maslow explains that “a person who is lacking food, safety, love and esteem probably would hunger for food more strongly than anything else”.

The need with the greatest strength at a particular moment leads to activity. Satisfied needs decrease in strength and normally do not motivate individuals to seek goals to satisfy them.

Physiological needs take precedence over other needs when thwarted. Consequently, the person lacking everything in life would probably be motivated
by physiological needs. For a starving person, higher level needs become temporarily non-existent or are pushed into the background; a person who is deprived of food, safety, companionship and esteem will probably want food more strongly than everything else. All the abilities of a starving person may be directed toward hunger satisfaction. Conscious and unconscious acts become directed by hunger motivations - a hungry person thinks of food, wants food, dreams about food and has fantasies about food as a drowning person thinks of air.

As Maslow aptly put it⁵ - “It is quite true that man lives by bread alone - where there is no bread. But what happens to man’s desires when there is plenty of bread and when his belly is chronically filled?” Maslow’s answer is that at once other higher level needs emerge to demand satisfaction, and the process continues “from belly to brains”, through the satisfaction of needs at each level. This continued emergence of new needs is what is meant by a hierarchy of needs.

Although this motivation theory is popularly known as Need Hierarchy Theory, Maslow himself calls it as ‘holistic - dynamic’ theory because it fuses the points of view of different schools of psychological thought and it conforms to known clinical, observational and experimental facts. Maslow identified a hierarchy of five levels of needs, arranged in the order in which a person seeks to gratify them. This hierarchy is shown in Figure. 3-1
Figure 3.1
MASLOW’S NEED HIERARCHY

3.1.(i) **Physiological Needs**

Physiological needs are the biological needs required to preserve human life. These needs include need for food, clothing and shelter.

All these basic needs are recurring needs. These needs are essential to the very existence. They are powerful determiners of behaviour. The Physiological needs become all powerful, the longer they go without satisfaction. The strength of these needs is obvious because of their capability to divert our attention from whatever we are doing until we relieve that need.

The satisfaction of physiological needs is usually associated in our society with money. Money is used as a means to be used to satisfy other motives. Thus it is what money can buy, not money itself, that satisfies one’s physiological needs. Today in organizations such needs must be viewed more broadly. A large number of organizations are now providing workers with child care facilities, subsidised lunch programmes, housing facilities etc.

According to Maslow’s Theory, once these basic needs are satisfied, they no longer motivate and will be motivated only by the next higher level of needs.
3.1.(ii) **Safety or Security needs:**

Safety needs refer to a person’s desire for security or protection. Once the physiological needs become relatively well gratified, the second level needs begin to manifest themselves and dominate human behaviour. These include:

a) Protection from physiological danger (Fire, accident etc)

b) Economic security (fringe benefits, health, insurance, pension programme etc.)

c) Desire to achieve some control over uncertainties of life.

An example of transition from physiological to safety needs as motivators is the way demands of labour unions have changed. In earlier years the unions demanded greater pay (for gratification of physiological need). Recent negotiations emphasis accident prevention through safety measures, job security, and other fringe benefits. Security needs may serve as motivators, if they are not reasonably satisfied. Generally organizations tend to over-emphasize the security needs by providing elaborate safety arrangements, fringe benefits, health care - accident insurance plans etc., in an attempt to motivate employees.
3.1.(iii) Social or Belongingness Needs:

The next rung in Maslow's hierarchy of needs is occupied by the social or belongingness needs. The social or belongingness needs are a reflection of the fact that people are social beings, needing the company or companionship of others. In a search for companionship and belongingness, the individual might behave in ways that are more socially acceptable to others. This level of needs marks the departure from essentially economic goals to a quest for mental health. Since man is a social being, he wants to belong, to associate, to gain acceptance from associates, to give and receive friendship and affection. Belongingness and love needs focus on the social aspects of work as well as non-work situations.

Organizations meet these social needs by providing opportunities for social interactions such as coffee breaks, organized sports or other recreational opportunities. Social needs provide meaning to work life. Satisfied social needs are apparent in a work situation when an individual becomes so much a part of the group he is working with that he sees the group's effort as his own.

3.1.(iv) Esteem or Ego Needs:

Needs diminish in their ability to affect what a person does as those needs become satisfied. With their satisfaction, a new class of needs comes into
prominence, displacing the former needs. Thus as the social needs become relatively satisfied, the new need of esteem emerges as a motivator.

Ego needs are the needs for self-esteem and the respect of others. It reflects the wish (while being accepted by others) to be set apart by being recognized as some one special. This might come about as a result of some achievement of which one is proud and for which recognition is sought.

This need can be separated into two parts\(^7\) - internal and external recognition. Internal recognition is the self-respect one has and seeks. External recognition is public acclaim or esteem arising out of recognition and appreciation of the individual or his deeds. Esteem needs represent the higher order needs of human beings. The needs for power, achievement and status, greater responsibility, competence, skills etc., are part of this level. Satisfaction of esteem needs produces feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy, of being useful and necessary in the world. An important feature of these needs is that these needs are only partly satiable. Unlike lower order needs, these needs are rarely satisfied.

3.1.(v) **Self-Actualisation Needs:**

The highest and the last class of needs on the hierarchy is self-actualization. It is also the weakest because all other needs on the hierarchy must
be rather well satisfied in order for this class of needs to emerge. Self-actualization needs go beyond the esteem needs in a significant fashion.

Maslow defines it as “the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything one is capable of becoming”8.

Esteem needs reflect the need to be differentiated from peers by virtue of accomplishments and achievements. Self-actualization needs point to the constant striving to realize one’s full potential - whatever it is. Here one should realize his own potentialities for continued self-development. Self-actualization is the desire to become all that one is capable of becoming. It is a growth need, where sky is the only limit. It reflects the individual’s desires to grow and develop to their fullest potential. Individuals often want the opportunity to be creative on the job. To satisfy the self-actualizing needs of such individuals, organizations should provide growth and career opportunities, provide training and development programmes, encourage creativity and achievement.

These needs are entirely an individual choice; the individual sets and attain his own goals to his own levels of satisfaction.

Esteem may come from doing something better than others; the self-actualized person may not be satisfied simply by the gratification of esteem needs, knowing that he can do still better. Rather than merely doing better than others do, this person must be as good as he is capable of being. Let us take an example of
certain athletes. Some exert only enough effort to win; with poor competition, they loaf along. Others, however, constantly strive to break the national record. Once the record is broken, they try constantly to set a new one.

For self-actualization needs, a fundamental shift in orientation takes place. In belongingness needs, the individual measures satisfaction with acceptance by others. In esteem needs, one is differentiated from peers by higher accomplishments and consequent recognition. In self-actualization, one is measured against the personal ideal of the greatest potential that individual is capable of fulfilling. These needs are psychological in nature and are substantially infinite and do not end in satisfaction in the usual sense.

A much more lucid picture illustrated in the figure 3.2 gives how the need satisfaction theory works on individuals.
Figure 3.2
THE PROCESS OF NEED GRATIFICATION

Seek satisfaction of Self-actualisation Needs

Concentrate on fulfilling Esteem Needs

Seek satisfaction of esteem needs

Concentrate on fulfilling Social Needs

Seek satisfaction of social needs

Concentrate on fulfilling Safety or Security Needs

Seek satisfaction of security needs

Concentrate on fulfilling Physiological Needs

Maslow contented that people will remain at one level until all their needs at that level are satisfied. For example, as long as a person is hungry or thirsty, the physiological needs dominate. Once they have been satisfied, the needs in the safety category become important. When safety needs have been largely gratified, new and higher level needs arise, and so on.

The hierarchy of needs model is dynamic. It presents motivation as a constantly changing force, expressing itself through the constant striving for fulfillment of new and higher level of needs. Instead of resting on their laurels, when one goal is reached or a need is satisfied, individuals typically redirect their efforts and capabilities toward the attainment of still higher goals.

3.2 An Evaluation of the Theory:

The Maslow Theory of Motivation has many limitations and it has been difficult to verify with research.

Although Maslow published his theory years ago, it was not until the mid 60’s that his ideas began to be questioned with empirical research. The body of critics is growing and we must be content to summarize some of the major limitations. In the first, factor analysis techniques have been used to determine if Maslow’s classification schemes of needs is correct and if there is indeed a hierarchy of needs. The results of these tests have failed to support Maslow’s
classification schemes for human needs, and these tests have failed to support the idea of a hierarchy of needs. Maslow’s need categories appear to overlap but are not distinct and separate. Further, there is evidence for lower and higher order needs, but even these categories cannot be ascertained for sure. Second, as one need is satisfied does another rise to dominate as Maslow concluded? Stated another way the strength of a given need should diminish after gratification of the next higher order need should increase in strength (prepotency). The evidence from various studies does not support Maslow in this regard.9

Unfortunately, research does not generally validate the theory10. Maslow provided no empirical substantiation to the Need Hierarchy. One researcher11 reviewed the evidence and concluded that, "although of great societal popularity, need hierarchy as a theory continues to receive little empirical support."

As listed by Maslow, needs cannot be classified into neat water-tight compartments, a neat five step hierarchy. Experts like V.S.P. Rao and P.S. Narayana12 have expressed the same opinion in the following words:

"The different levels are interdependent and overlapping. The boundaries between the levels are hazy. Again, the statement, ‘if one need is satisfied, then another emerges’ may create a false impression, because needs do not have to be cent percent satisfied before higher needs dominate and activate. It
is better to measure in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction of needs as one go up in the hierarchy of prepotency”.

The need classification scheme is somewhat artificial and arbitrary. Further, there is no evidence that once a need has been gratified, its strength diminishes. It is also doubtful that whether gratification of one need automatically activates the next higher need in the hierarchy. The various levels in the hierarchy imply that lower level needs must be gratified before a concern for higher level needs develop. But in real life situations, it can be seen that human behaviour is probably a compromise of various needs acting on us simultaneously. The same need will not lead to the same response in all individuals. The degree of gratification differs from person to person depending upon the intensity of their various need requirements and up on different situations.

In spite of its limitations, the need hierarchy model presents some sound ideas for helping managers motivate their employees. Maslow’s need hierarchy has often been uncritically accepted by writers of management and by practitioners. Although the research studies clearly point out that Maslow is not the final answer in work motivation, the need hierarchy set by Maslow provides a conceptual framework for management awareness of the diverse needs of employees at work.
Maslow did not intend that his need hierarchy be directly applied to work motivation. In fact, he did not delve into the motivating aspects of human beings in organizations until about twenty years after he originally propounded his theory. Despite this lack of intend on Maslow’s part, others such as Douglas McGregor, in his widely read book, ‘The Human side of Enterprise’, popularised the Maslow Theory in management literature.

This theory has received wide recognition, particularly among practicing managers. This popularity stems primarily from its simplicity and logic. The Need Hierarchy Theory has had a tremendous impact on the modern management approach to motivation.

Maslow’s approach is preferred because of its general scope, directness, simplicity and practicability and it is this theory that forms the basic framework of human motivation.

This model theory is to be viewed as a general theoretical statement having its application in all developing countries, especially a country like India. This model is useful because of its rich and comprehensive view of needs. This motivation theory has much relevance and applicability for understanding about the need satisfaction of employees in a country like India where employees are still searching for higher order needs.
Because of the complexities involved in this theory, an attempt has been made to study the relevance and the application among the non-managerial employees of public sector and private sector based on Maslow model.
Reference


7. Ibid., p.227.


