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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### THE THEORIES OF HUMAN NEEDS AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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#### ABSTRACT

This study reviews four of the human needs theories as they relate to the commitment of employees in institutions of higher learning. Many factors account for why employees leave their jobs. This study tries to look at how factors such as stress and organizational climate influence organizational commitment. It begins by discussing the various components of the Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as they affect the commitment of employees. It continues to discuss ERG theory, Herzberg's Two-factor Theory, and finally, McClelland's Acquired-needs Theory. It is seen in that a factor such as stress has both positive and negative relationships with employee commitment. Stress could serve as a catalyst for growth; however, it could also lead to lack of commitment depending on the type of stress and nature of work. On organizational commitment, it is concluded that positive environment or climate increases employee commitment and vice versa.

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## INTRODUCTION

Abraham Maslow is considered as one of the most notable psychologists of the twentieth century. Maslow's theory is based on a simple principle: Human beings have needs that are orderly ranked (Maslow, 1943). There are some needs that are basic to all human beings, and in their absence nothing else matters. As humans satisfy these basic needs, they start looking to satisfy higher order needs. In other words, once a lower level need is satisfied, it no longer serves as a motivator. This principle works perfectly in the workplace. Employee motivation is keen to employee performance. When the needs of employees are not met, they feel very reluctant to perform their tasks. The most basic of Maslow's Needs are physiological needs. Physiological needs refer to the need for food, water, and other biological needs. Employers should always put systems in place to ensure that their employees have these basic needs. This means regular interactions with employees about their wellbeing is very important. Managers need to pay attention to them because when these basic needs are lacking, the search for them may overpower all other urges. When employees are hungry or their families have no food, they will hardly concentrate on anything but look for means to meet that need. Once physiological needs are satisfied, people tend to become concerned about safety needs.

Are they free from the threat of danger, pain, or an uncertain future? On the next level up, social needs refer to the need to bond with other human beings, be loved, and form lasting attachments with others. The satisfaction of social needs makes esteem needs more salient. Esteem need refers to the desire to be respected by one's peers, feel important, and be appreciated. Finally, at the highest level of the hierarchy, the need for self-actualization refers to "becoming all you are capable of becoming." This need manifests itself by the desire to acquire new skills, take on new challenges, and behave in a way that will lead to the attainment of one's life goals (Maslow, 1943). Providing incentives like personal development training, study leave and promotions will make employees loyal and will give their very best for the betterment of their organization. Even though there is not strong research support, Maslow's Theory has obvious applications in corporate settings. Understanding what employees need gives managers clues to understanding them. The hierarchy is an orderly way of thinking about the different needs employees may have at any period of time and explains different reactions they may have to similar treatment. An employee who is trying to satisfy esteem needs would surely feel thankful when management praises him or her for an accomplishment. This might not be case for an employee who is trying to meet social needs. Such an employee may resent being praised by supervisors in front of peers if the praise sets the individual apart from his or her colleagues. The question is, "How can an organization satisfy the needs of its employees?" In the long term, physiological needs may be met by paycheck, but in reality, salary may not fill in the void of

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needs such as safety and esteem as well. The provision of incentives like health insurance and company-sponsored retirement plans, as well as offering job security will help meet safety needs. Employers and managers could meet the social needs of their employees by providing a friendly working environment with good collaboration and proper communication channels. Social needs could also be met by setting up clear promotion and career path for employees; recognizing employees' accomplishments, and conferring job titles that communicate to the employees that they have achieved high status within the organization. These tools will automatically boost their esteem and increase their sense of belonging. By making the effort to satisfy the different needs of each employee, organizations may realize a highly motivated workforce.

Zameer, Alireza, Nisar, and Amir (2014) confirm that there are several key elements which can enhance the commitment of employees towards an organization. The factors included salaries and wages, job security, promotion, and bonus. These factors make employees exert high levels of efforts and devote their full energies to accomplish given tasks when they feel that such efforts will be given rewards by the management. In a recent study, Ahmad, Bibi, and Majid (2017) investigated various issues of teachers' motivation in the public sector of Higher Educational Institutions in Pakistan. The findings of the research showed that although compensation packages and financial incentives are important factors for employees in the competitive market environment of the higher education sector, some other factors like job design, working environment, performance management system, and training and development are also significant.

**ERG (Existence, Relatedness, Growth) Theory:** ERG theory, developed by Clayton Alderfer, is a variation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Alderfer proposed that basic human needs may be grouped under three categories: existence, relatedness, and growth. The author explains Existence as a need which corresponds to Maslow's physiological and safety needs. Relatedness is the same as Maslow's social needs, and Growth as explained by Alderfer refers to Maslow's esteem and self-actualization need (Alderfer, 1969). Unlike Maslow's Needs Theory, ERG theory does not rank human needs in any particular hierarchy. It states that more than one human need may exist at a given time. The theory suggests that individuals who are putting in efforts to meet one need may have other needs as well. For example, an employee who is failing to reach career goals and growth may end up spending more time with co-workers chatting. The implication of this theory is that employees are driven by multiple needs at any given time therefore the needs must be recognized by management so as to understand employee behavior and properly motivate them. This is to say that organizations should focus on meeting multiple needs of their employees at the same time to keep them motivated most of the time.

**The Two-Factor Theory:** Frederick Herzberg answered the question of motivation by asking individuals what satisfies and dissatisfies them with their jobs. After this, he came to the conclusion that an aspect of a work environment that satisfies employees is very different from an aspect that dissatisfies them (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959; Herzberg, 1965). Herzberg called these factors that cause employee dissatisfaction as "hygiene" factors.

Hygiene factors include supervision, working conditions, company policies, safety, salary, and job security. In contrast, according to Herzberg's research, motivators are the conditions that really motivate employees to give their very best. These factors are inherent to the job, and they include achievement, recognition, interesting work, and increased responsibilities (Cummings & Elsalmi, 1968; House & Wigdor, 1967). This theory can be a great tool to employers as it points out that improving the environment is a great way for motivating employees. However, the theory encourages employers not only focus on hygiene factors, they should also provide employees opportunities to perform challenging work, greater responsibilities, advancement opportunities, and a job in which those who work under them will feel accomplished.

**Acquired-Needs Theory:** In David McClelland's Acquired-needs Theory, people have three types of needs. These needs are the need for achievement, the need for affiliation, and the need for power. According to McClelland, all people possess a blend of these needs, and the greatest needs influence employee behavior. McClelland made use of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) to assess people's dominant needs (Spangler, 1992). In this method, the researcher presented the participants with pictures, asked them to observe it and write a story about it. The assumption is that the stories that will be written based on the photos will portray what motivates the participants (Mueller, 2010). For instance if the story a participant creates in relation to the picture contains elements like making plans to be with friends or family, the participant may have a high need for affiliation.

In management, when there is a high need for affiliation, it could be disadvantageous as these employees who have a need for affiliation tend to be overly concerned about how they are perceived by others and may find it difficult to give employees critical feedback or discipline poor performers. This could create a bad working environment and cause high performers to leave the organization (Spreier, 2006). The Acquired-Needs has important implications for the motivation of employees. Employers and managers need to well understand the main needs of their employees to be able to motivate them. Employees who have a high need for achievement respond to goals; those who have power needs would try to rule over their colleagues. Employees with affiliation needs would usually seek the approval of their colleagues and supervisors. Lastly, employees who have a high drive for achievement usually experience difficulties with management as they tend to think that the common pitfalls of management may affect their effectiveness.

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