

Theories of motivation compared and contrasted



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Motivation is one of the most heavily researched areas within modern psychology. Dawson 1986(cited in Thomas & McHugh, 2009, p. 307) states that motivation “ refers to the mainspring of behaviours; it explains why individuals expend a degree of effort towards achieving particular goals”. Throughout the years, many psychologists have looked at motivation and created an array of theories to try and explain what motivation is and what in fact motivates us as individuals. Looking further into these theories, the majority of theories can come under two headings; content theories and process theories. These headings state what the focus of the theory will in fact be. The focus of content theories is that everybody has the same set of needs; this is why they display certain behaviours. Contrastingly, Process theories look at the individuals cognitive processes. This essay will compare and contrast two of the most influential theories of motivation to date; Abraham Maslow’s ‘ hierarchy of needs’ and Fredrick Herzberg’s ‘ two factor theory’. This essay will then use these theories to explain how a team leader might use these to motivate their team members.

Abraham Maslow outlined one of the most significant theories of motivation; the ‘ Hierarchy of needs’. This hierarchy included five needs that determine most of our behaviour. This theory states that an individual must fulfil certain basic needs within their lives before they can ‘ climb’ the hierarchy and look to fulfil more advanced needs. These needs start from physiological needs; basic needs for food and shelter and culminate with self-actualisation needs; the more advanced needs to develop our potential. (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005). Maslow stated that we do have an innate desire to automatically

ascend the hierarchy once a lower order need is fulfilled. (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007).

Looking at how team leaders can use this theory to motivate workers, the psychological needs of the individual need to be looked at. This is where each individual starts within the hierarchy. The very nature of holding down a job fulfils our primal needs of survival. By offering an individual a job and in turn a salary or wage, it allows them to fulfil these basic needs by providing themselves and others they are responsible for with food, shelter and warmth. (Wilson, 2003). By completing this team leaders have effectively motivated their workers and they are fulfilling this need and individuals need to be motivated by this need before they can move onto the second rung of the hierarchy; security needs.

Looking further into Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there are many other ways in which a team leader could effectively utilise this theory to motivate their team. For example, after individuals have achieved physiological needs, they will look for security needs. (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005). Team leaders can look at these security needs and look at what tactics they can employ to ensure that the individual is motivated by these needs. One thing they could do is by creating a safe environment. Working environments have become safer over the years thanks to a variety of different factors including legislation. If a team leader deploys initiatives that help the individual feel they are safe at work, their safety needs will be met and this will be an effective motivator.

Even though Maslow's work has been highly influential in the area of motivation, it can be criticised on many counts. Firstly, it is not backed by a huge amount of empirical research, which is needed for a theory to gain validity. Furthermore, his theory can be criticised for population validity, his theory is based on American, white, middle class individuals, even though his theory was proposed as a universal theory. So this can't be generalised to the wider population. (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007). Contrastingly, Herzberg's theory does try and offer some evidence to back up its claims. Initially, his theory could have been criticised for population validity, as he only interviewed 203 Pittsburgh accountants and engineers. Wanting to prove his theory was universal and to eliminate these criticisms, Herzberg went on to draw samples from a further 1, 685 participants who ranged in profession. (Wilson, 2003). Keen to further reduce these criticisms and show that his theory was in fact universal, he undertook research in many other countries, including: Hungary, Italy, Israel, Japan & South Africa. (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007).

The other theory this essay will look at is Fredrick Herzberg's 'two factor theory'. Just like Maslow's theory, Herzberg's two factor theory, it has had a profound effect on organisations over the years. In comparison to Maslow's theory, one similarity that can be stated is that they both place motivation on a scale. Maslow places his theory on a hierarchal scale, whereas similarly, Herzberg uses two factors; motivators and hygenes as the scales upon which motivation is looked at.

Herzberg developed a 'two factor theory'. This broke down two lists of factors that affect an individual at work. These were 'motivators' and '

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hygiene'. Motivators were placed under this heading as they seemed to offer some satisfaction to the worker and as the title suggests they were in fact motivating. (Fincham & Rhodes, 2005). Contrastingly, Herzberg stated that 'hygiene' factors were merely to prevent job dissatisfaction and not actually there to motivate and individual (Doyle, 2003). Motivators included factors such as; achievement, recognition and also responsibility. Moreover, 'hygiene' factors include factors such as; salary, work conditions and relationships with colleagues. (Wilson, 2003).

Looking at how a team leader could use this theory to motivate their workers, the list of motivators could help them to design initiatives that catered for these needs. For example, they could offer employees more responsibility. Responsibility is one of the 'motivators' that offers individuals job satisfaction. If a team leader recognises this, they can utilise this and motivate workers to work more effectively. So, for example, they could offer individuals more responsibility within a certain area of their job, individuals will feel satisfied by this and in turn be motivated. One way in which team leaders could do this is by job enrichment. Job enrichment was utilised effectively by experiments in the 1960's and 70's. American mobile company AT & T showed the effectiveness of this by employing job enrichment. In turn, they found a '27% reduction in the termination rate and a production cost saving of \$558, 000' (Wilson, 2003).

Another way, in which a team leader could use this theory to motivate their team members, is to ensure that hygiene factors are present within the working environment. Hygiene factors are those that have the potential to cause dissatisfaction. They do not motivate the individual; they are just

required so that the individual can be motivated by the motivators. During his research Herzberg found that company policy and administration; which are hygiene factors, was at least partly to blame for 31% of reported dissatisfaction' (Wilson, 2003). This shows how significant hygiene factors are within an organisation. A team leader could use this theory, by ensuring that all the hygiene factors are in place for a member. For example, salary, work environment and company policies. If a team member enforces all of these factors, an employee will be able to feel satisfied and then will be able to get motivated by the motivators that are also linked to Herzberg's theory.

Comparing the two theories, it can be said that there are differences between Maslow's and Herzberg's theories. Maslow started that there was a hierarchy to follow, and for an individual to 'climb' up the hierarchy, they must first complete the lower order needs. The needs won't be effective motivators until they are completed. If an individual doesn't complete a level, they can't progress to their ultimate goal; self-actualisation. Maslow stated that very few people actually reach self-actualisation. (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007). Contrastingly, Herzberg theory does not focus on this.

There is no stage to complete in his theory. Hygenes and motivators are not placed in a structure where one needs to be achieved before another. This highlights the fact that the two theories have a different structure and how they place emphasis on different things. Maslow's theory seems a rigid structure, whereas, Herzberg's doesn't have any order in which factors are completed which indicates flexibility, to an extent.

Further comparing the two theories, one similarity can be found between the two. Herzberg's 'Motivators' can be seen as the top two factors of the

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hierarchy of needs and also the 'hygenes' can be seen as the other 3 factors of the hierarchy of needs. This can be seen to correspond to each other and Herzberg's work was influenced by Maslow and this is clearly evident within his theory. (Montana & Charnov, 2008). Furthermore, another similarity that can be found between the two theories is that they both have specific criteria that an individual must fulfil to be motivated. With Maslow, this is a 'hierarchy' of needs, whereas with Herzberg it is a list of two factors.

Maslow's hierarchy includes; physiological needs, safety needs, belonging needs, esteem needs and finally self-actualisation. (Preziosi, 2008). Herzberg theory also has a specific criteria relating to motivation. The basis of the theory is two factors; hygenes and motivators. Specific hygenes and motivators include salary and responsibility. What can be seen in these theories that there is a lot of emphasis on higher order needs. Self-actualisation is seen as one of the most important things to achieve and Maslow argued that it is one of the ultimate goals. (Huczynski & Buchanan 2007).

When looking at these theories another similarity is clearly apparent; they have both been criticised and the validity of both of these theories has been questioned many times. For example, both theories don't extensively look at motivation and look at the differences between males and females. Research into these areas has shown that males and females are motivated differently and not in the same way as in which these theories propose. For example Betz 1984, (cited in Fiona M Wilson, 2003, p 113) study shows that homemakers are much likely to focus on the lower levels in comparison to working women. This shows how even within females, the way in which

needs motivate are different, so there is definitely a difference between males and females. Research regarding Herzberg's theory shows that males and females differ when it comes to what they are concerned with at work. Donnell & Hall 1980 (cited in Fiona M Wilson, 2003, p 116) found that females focused on opportunities for growth, autonomy and challenge. Whereas, males looked at work environment and pay. This research shows how there is a clear difference between males and females in regards to motivational factors and how any theory must always be taken with caution. However, it needs to be noted that both of these theories have been highly significant within psychology and have stood the test of time.

In conclusion, when looking at these theories there are clear similarities and differences. These have been discussed in detail throughout the essay. One of the most significant similarities is that both have clear criteria of what motivates individuals. However, it is also important to consider the differences. With reference to the differences, one that stands out is the fact that the theories differ in the way they describe how an individual progresses and achieves these needs. Maslow states that an individual must progress through the hierarchy, whereas Herzberg just states that there are two factors of motivators and can be achieved at any time, with no need for completing other needs. In addition to this, the essay also looked at how a team leader would use these theories to motivate their team members. For example, a team leader could use Maslow's theory by looking at a certain need that they could fulfil e. g. security needs. In addition to this, a team leader could use Herzberg's theory by deploying tactics that use 'motivators', which in turn will offer job satisfaction and motivate their team

members. Maslow & Herzberg's theories have both provided valuable insights into motivation and will always have certain significance in organisational psychology.