

# Cross cultural application of maslows hierarchy of needs commerce essay



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Studies have proposed that the effective use of human capital is likely the most important determinant of organisational performance (Adler, 1991 cited in Fey 2005). This has prompted organisations to seek for ways to motivate their employees to work to their full potential and to ensure optimal organisational performance. One of the most cited and discussed theories of motivation is Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of needs, which is same as with other popular motivation theories, Maslow's model was based on research carried out on individuals from the United States (Fatehi, 1996, Gibson 1994). While it is reasonable to assume that this theory can help managers in America, the question arises as to its applicability to international management. The aim of this essay is to address that question using America and China as case studies. This essay is structured into three parts, the first part of this essay would consist of an overview of the various theories of motivation, the second part would look at Hofstede's cultural dimensions of individualism and collectivism while the final part would analyse the applicability and implications of using Maslow's Theory of

Motivation within individualistic and collectivistic cultures (America and China respectively).

## **Motivation**

According to Bateman and Snell (2007) motivation refers to forces that energize, direct and sustain a person's efforts.

## **Theories of Motivation**

There are two groups under which motivation theories are classified namely: ' content theories and ' process' theories. Content theories, also known as the ' need theories' are concerned with the internal factors that motivate an individual. These theories suggest that individual needs keeps changing and that to motivate individuals, it is important to take into consideration these needs and fulfil them. Notable among the content theories is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Herzberg's Hygiene Theory and McClelland's Learned Need Theory. On the other side, the process theories of motivation are concerned with the how people initiate, direct and maintain their motivations. These theories see motivation as a rational cognitive process. Examples include Adams equity theory (1963), which assumes that people expect a balance to exist between their contributions and their outcomes. They compare their circumstances with other similar people and if there is any inequity (if it is to their disadvantage) they adapt their behaviour to lessen that inequity. Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) is also part of the process theories.

## **Maslow Hierarchy of Need Theory:**

Maslow's theory suggests that people will satisfy basic-level needs before adjusting behaviour to satisfy higher-level needs. Once a lower need is satisfied, it ceases to be a motivator and the individual progresses to the next need in hierarchical order.

Source: Maslows Hieracy of Needs; [www.learnmanagement2.com](http://www.learnmanagement2.com)

Such needs have been recognized by Maslow and in their hierarchical order, include physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem, and self-actualization. In Maslow's model, individuals at the outset desire to gratify physiological needs. Physiological needs are the fundamental human needs which are necessary to maintain life and consist of food, clothing and shelter. Other desires present slight motivation pending the satisfaction of these basic needs. As soon as physiological needs are satisfied, safety becomes the next need. Safety characterizes the need to be liberated of the fear of bodily harm, the want to experience freedom from lack of fundamental physiological needs and the desire for self-protection. Subsequently, the social need arises as the chief need to be satisfied. The social need represents striving for significant relationships with other people. Once the need for significant relationship is fulfilled, the individual begins to seek more personal recognition and desires esteem or recognition from other people. The satisfaction of this need produces feelings of self-confidence, prestige, power, and control. After satisfying the need for self-esteem, self-actualization becomes the principal need. Self-actualization represents the desire to take full advantage of one's abilities and be what one is able to be (Maslow, 1970, Hersey, 1996, Gambel and Cianci, 2003). <https://assignbuster.com/cross-cultural-application-of-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-commerce-essay-application-essay-samples/>

## **Cultural Dimensions**

Culture can be defined as " a system of values and norms that are shared among a group of people and that when taken together constitute a design for living" (Hill, 2009 p. 89). According to Hofstede (1984), there are five dimensions of culture namely: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism vs. Collectivism, Masculinity vs. Femininity.

Power distance relates to the way a society deals with the fact that people are unequal in intellectual and physical capabilities. The uncertainty avoidance dimension relates to the extent to which different cultures socialised their members to accepting uncertainty and ambiguous situations; According to Hofstede, members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures place a premium of job security, benefits and demonstrate a strong resistance to change while the opposite applies to members of cultures with low uncertainty avoidance. Individualism and Collectivism refers to relationship between the individual and his fellows. In individualistic cultures, bonds between individuals are loose and freedom an individual achievement are valued while in cultures where collectivism is emphasized, bonds are tight and individuals are supposed to look out for the interest of others before his own. Hofstede's masculinity versus femininity dimension refers to the distribution of roles between genders in a particular culture. (Hofstede, 1984, Hill, 2009).

## **Overview of Individualism and Collectivism**

Individualism

Amongst individualistic societies, Hofstede (1984) suggests that individuals desire and gain a high quality of life as a result of success achieved by his or her efforts alone. Achievement, self-actualization, and self-respect describe an individualistic society and furthermore typify self-esteem and self-actualization in Maslow's hierarchy of needs. One conserves self-respect and separates work and private life in an individualistic society. In the work organization, completing the job task will come before developing relationships.

### Collectivism

Hofstede (1980) suggests that collectivism can be described by a tight social framework where differences exist between in-groups and out-groups. Individuals expect to be cared for by their fellows, which can consist of relatives, clans, or organizations in exchange for absolute allegiance. Hofstede (1982) also points out that individual are born into a collective society. Consequently, Hofstede (1984) suggests that in a collectivist society, a high quality of life is defined more in terms of the family and close relatives than the individual. In terms of the work environment, individuals from collectivist cultures do not separate their private lives from their jobs, relationships take precedence over job tasks and importance is placed on the development of relationships as a requirement to work together effectively.

### American and Chinese Culture

To better understand the extent to which various factors motivates

individuals from different cultures, it important to look at their national  
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culture. The national culture of America and China shall be discussed briefly using Hofstede's (1984) model. Despite the short coming of this model, it is still widely used because it provides data on characteristics of culture based on a large number of respondents from variety of countries.

Dimension America China

Power Distance 40 80

Individualism 91 20

Uncertainty Avoidance 46 40

Masculinity 62 66

Source: Hofstede, G (1983), ' The Culture Relativity of Organisational Practices and Theories', Journal of International Business Studies, Vol. 14 (4) pp. 75-89

American Culture

Hofstede argues that, " the ordering of needs in Maslow's hierarchy represents a value choice Maslow's value choice. This choice was based on his mid-twentieth century U. S. middle class values" (1984, p. 396). Maslow's hierarchy was developed during an era when the American culture stressed individual achievement. The rapid growth of this country, which was facilitated by strong emphasis on education, lifestyle and career opportunities, influenced the formulation the needs demonstrated on Maslow's model (Gambel and Cianci, 2003). Hamden, Turner and

Trompenaar (1993) argue that the American culture places a lot of emphasis on making the individual self reliant as against being influenced by his or her external environment or others. Nevis (1983) also states that the American culture over the years has developed from assumptions that stress the independence of the individual. It can be confirmed from the research done the Maslow's Theory was based on individualism that was prevalent in the American society. The question therefore arises as to whether this theory can be applied to cultures that are high on the collectivism dimension.

### Chinese culture

Lit et al (2002) state that research on cultural studies identify family oriented collectivism as a key Chinese cultural characteristics. According to Triandis (1996), the Chinese are collectivist individuals. Similarly, Smith and Bond(1993) points out that a lot of research have discovered that the Chinese place a lot of emphasis and importance on family values and hierarchy. This characteristic is also noticed in the work environment; Chinese business practices are influenced by family-oriented collectivism and the structure of their organisations supports the collectivist nature (Nevis 1983, Li et al, 2000). These factors suggest that a Chinese hierarchy of needs would differ significantly from Maslow's original model.

The main issue concerning Maslow's Theory and its ability to apply to Chinese cultures is the aspects of self actualisation and the need for social belonging. Other needs such as physiological and safety needs are basic needs that are present in any culture, although it may not be sought after in the sequence proposed by Maslow. However, his hierarchy of needs places



the need for social belonging as being desired after physiological and safety needs are met. While self actualisation is the ultimate need. While these may be applicable in the American society, such cannot be said concerning the Chinese. Being a collectivist culture, one of the main focuses of individuals in such societies is to look out for the well being of their immediate family and relations. Such characteristics are acquired from young as the individuals watch the way their fellows interact. It is therefore not a need that they aspire to or desire but rather one that is already embedded in their environment. This need therefore, cannot be used as a motivator for individuals from collectivist cultures especially China.

Another problem with the application of this theory in collectivist cultures is the importance Maslow places of self actualisation. Self actualisation is seen as the chief desire of individuals. While this is possible in cultures that are highly individualistic, the same doesn't apply to collectivist cultures. As demonstrated in the literature on collectivist cultures, the aspect of self is not emphasized while communal thinking is promoted in place of individualistic behaviours. In cultures such as China, the need for Self-actualisation as proposed by Maslow may not exist at all.

The implication of this is especially important for managers who are working in cross cultural environment. When using Maslow's theory of motivation, it should be clear as to who such motivations are targeted to. Generalising this theory as being applicable to individuals from diverse cultures may not be in the best interest of management as they may not achieve their aim of motivating their employees to full potential. Although Maslow's Hierarchy of Need theory is an important contribution that can help managers in <https://assignbuster.com/cross-cultural-application-of-maslows-hierarchy-of-needs-commerce-essay-application-essay-samples/>

motivating their employees, it should be handled carefully when dealing with individuals from diverse backgrounds.