

# David mcclelland's achievement motivation theory

[Psychology](#), [Motivation](#)



In his 1961 book 'The Achieving Society', David McClelland expounded on his acquired-needs theory. He proposed that an individual's specific needs are acquired over time and are shaped by one's life experiences. A person's motivation and effectiveness in certain job functions are influenced by these three needs.

The n-ach person is 'achievement motivated' and therefore seeks achievement, attainment of realistic but challenging goals, and advancement in the job. There is a strong need for feedback about achievement and progress, and a need for a sense of accomplishment. People with a high need for achievement seek to excel and thus tend to avoid both low-risk and high-risk situations. Achievers avoid low-risk situations because the easily attained success is not a genuine achievement. In high-risk projects, achievers see the outcome as one of chance rather than one's own effort. High n-ach individuals prefer work that has a moderate probability of success, ideally a 50% chance. They prefer either to work alone or with other high achievers.

The n-pow person is 'authority motivated'. This driver produces a need to be influential, effective and to make an impact. There is a strong need to lead and for their ideas to prevail. There is also motivation and need towards increasing personal status and prestige. A person's need for power (n-pow) can be one of two types – personal and institutional. Those who need personal power want to direct others, and this need often is perceived as undesirable. Persons who need institutional power (also known as social power) want to organize the efforts of others to further the goals of the

organization. Managers with a high need for institutional power tend to be more effective than those with a high need for personal power.

The n-affil person is 'affiliation motivated', and has a need for friendly relationships and is motivated towards interaction with other people. They need harmonious relationships with other people and need to feel accepted by other people. The affiliation driver produces motivation and need to be liked and held in popular regard. These people are team players. High n-affil individuals tend to conform to the norms of their work group. They prefer work that provides significant personal interaction. They perform well in customer service and client interaction situations. How to interpret the model McClelland stated that most people possess and exhibit a combination of these characteristics. Some people exhibit a strong bias to a particular motivational need, and this motivational or needs 'mix' consequently affects their behaviour and working/managing style.

McClelland's theory also allows for the shaping of a person's needs; training programs can be used to modify one's need profile. McClelland suggested that a strong n-affil 'affiliation-motivation' undermines a manager's objectivity, because of their need to be liked, and that this affects a manager's decision-making capability. A strong n-pow 'authority-motivation' will produce a determined work ethic and commitment to the organisation, and while n-pow people are attracted to the leadership role, they may not possess the required flexibility and people-centred skills.