

PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AND VITALITY PHENOMENON OF A. MASLOW'S THEORY OF NEEDS

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Abstract

60 years after the Maslow theory on individual motivation issues discussions continue on whether the author's hierarchy of needs theory is a suitable model for research work and practice. Our article clearly presents a positive response. Such an attitude to Professor A. Maslow's theory was formed in 2002-2007 when research was carried out where 1260 respondents participated. In this article recommendations on the most efficient ways of using the above mentioned theory in a work environment are put forward.

Key words: employee motivation, hierarchy of needs, the idea of sufficiency of needs satisfaction.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management

1. Introduction

If we were to analyze the dominating opinions about the theory of the hierarchy of needs of American psychology professor A. Maslow in the scientific and teaching material published in Lithuanian and the teaching methodological literature we would easily find a critical tone:

- this theory was not successful in proving the needs hierarchy and taking the individual differences of people into consideration [8];
- the research results do not fully coincide with the basic statements made by A. Maslow's theoretical statements [9];
- this theory is not prevailing and universal [6].

Unfortunately it is difficult to dispute with the expressed critical comments because the necessary explanations are not always presented and sometimes are based on the soviet way of thinking of „working better“, the number of respondents participating in the selection is also questionable and others.

2. A. Maslow's Theory of Needs

It can be said that such critical remarks on A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory have come to Lithuania from firstly the material published in Western countries. As an example the Dutch professor's G. Hofstede's position who thought that A. Maslow's created needs hierarchy cannot be considered a universal motivation explanation [2]. An analogous position is supported by D. Newstrom and K. Davis who state that many provisions of the hierarchy of needs theory do not have any practical application [7].

On the other hand the voice of those who support A. Maslow's theory is becoming stronger. One of the reasons behind this is A. Maslow's friend and the author of more than 80 different books (about A. Maslow's post Freudian psychology [11]), Englishman C. Wilson who said that „*A. Maslow's time has not come yet. He belongs to the future and we will be convinced of that in the 21st century*“ [4]. Recently the number of published translations into other languages and Lithuanian enables us to get acquainted with the authentic ideas of the author.

We have to admit that there are no teaching methodological means or text book for general and personnel management theoretical basics where A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs has

not been mentioned. Also the majority of the mentioned authors admit that A. Maslow's created theory of hierarchy of needs is popular among managers working practically and has become the most well known theory of the employed on motivation. So what are the critical remarks on the hierarchy of needs based on? Different authors when criticizing it have noticed that:

- different people's individual needs hierarchically often are distributed *in an other way* than presented by the author;
- when special living conditions appear the mechanism of regrouping is *unclear*;
- the behaviour of different people from different countries is conditioned by *different* traditions and cultural experience which has an influence on an individuals' activity motives and hierarchical needs.

Table 1: Needs hierarchy according to A. Maslow's needs theory

Needs satisfied not at work	Levels of needs	Needs satisfied at work
Desired education, freedom of religion, favourite activities personal development and others	Self-realization	Possibility to study, to be promoted, develop, express creativity and pride in one's work, the right to make important decisions and others
Recognition by family, friends community etc.	Respect (self-respect) and status	Participate in professional development programs, try to achieve recognition, higher status, desired responsibility and others
Family, friends, participating in different organizations community activities and others	Social (belonging)	Being a member of a work group (team, good working relations, possibilities to communicate with organizational partners, clients, colleagues, managers, subordinate and others
A safe political and societal situation (no war, no violence, no epidemics, a stable legal society), safe environment, own housing facilities, and others.	Security	Actions of a manager are predictable, (desired, democratic) a guaranteed working place, social guarantees, insurance, economic encouragement and additional privileges, financial support
Air , water, food, shelter, sleep, sex, clothes and others	Physiological	Normal working conditions, tidy equipment, basic remuneration, individual bonuses, annual holidays and others.

On the basis of the presented criticism on A. Maslow's used research method the negating position appeared¹. Also the analysis of literary sources enables us to notice the fact that according to many authors A. Maslow's theory presumes that with the appearance of new i.e. higher level needs it is necessary for the lower level needs to have to been *fully* satisfied. Some authors point out that it has been scientifically proved [7].

We will try to elucidate the fact whether the criticism on the theory of the hierarchy of needs is substantiated methodologically when speaking about *employees' motivation*. When criticizing A. Maslow for the fact that different individuals' needs hierarchically are situated otherwise than presented in the theory of needs, no attention is paid to the fact that the entirety of needs according to A. Maslow can be grouped into those which can be satisfied during work and those which can be satisfied during leisure time. In the first table concrete examples of the

¹It can be agreed that A.Maslow himself indirectly created conditions negating the research method acknowledging that“there is not much scientific literature on the need to belong...” [4]

hierarchy of needs are presented in view of the possibility to satisfy needs during working time and beyond its limits.

First of all the space is distributed into groups (working time and leisure time) in A. Maslow's pyramid of needs which helps to explain the fact how under different circumstances in life a person attempting to satisfy his/her needs evaluates himself/herself and his/her motives of motivation in different environments. For example an employee may be concerned about good equipment however this does mean he/she will take an interest in clothing; an employee may try to achieve a wide range of labour social guarantees but be indifferent to the events on the level of social life etc. The need for security according to A. Maslow „is regarded as an active and dominating focus subject only at exceptional times: war, disease, disaster, a wave of crime, at stretches of time when society is disorganized, neurosis, brain damage, the collapse of the government, when unfavourable conditions continue for too long“ [4]. The manager hoping to successfully motivate his/her employees of course firstly has to be concerned about the motives of his/her employees that make a direct influence on the needs which have to be satisfied during working time. On the other hand if motivation specialists do not pay attention to an individual's possible different behaviour in an every day environment there may be reasons for A. Maslow's, as a representative of psychology, criticism of his suggested pyramid of needs.

Differently from the statements made by some other employee motivation specialists saying that higher level needs appear when lower level needs have been absolutely satisfied, in A. Maslow's needs theory an important position is occupied by the idea of the *sufficiency of needs satisfaction*. The results of different research show that a person never fully feels the satisfaction of his/her needs because no matter what a person has reached he/she wants more money, security, friends, respect etc. The following conclusion can be made that the appearance of new needs on higher levels of hierarchy occurs not because of absolute but due to the *sufficient satisfaction of present needs*. In 1954 this is what the author wrote :“ It is true that a person lives on bread only there where there is no bread...but if his/her physiological needs are *comparatively well satisfied* a new group of needs appear which we could include into the category of security needs“ [4]. Analogically the author explains the reasons when social needs begin to dominate. Basically supporting such an idea M. H. Mescon together with his colleagues support such an idea in his book „Management“ commenting this situation as follows: „a person's behaviour motivation process through needs is infinite“ [5]. A. Maslow, acknowledging such facts agreed that *normal individuals' needs are at the same time satisfied or unsatisfied and the levels of hierarchy needs presented in the pyramid are not discreet steps* [4]. Keeping to the provision that higher level needs are determined by the sufficient satisfaction of lower needs A. Maslow agreed that *a person's behaviour is mostly motivated by the most important at a given time i.e. the dominating needs*. Let us imagine that the reorganization of the management structure is going on and the consequences are usually redundancies. Therefore it is expected that self – realization, respect and even the importance of social needs decline and the essential one becomes the need for security. There have been cases when a person's life changes so much that the only condition of surviving and also the only need coincides with a person's physiological nature. M. Mescon presents a much discussed fact about absolutely normal people who in 1975 survived the air crash in the Andes and fighting for their lives had to consume their fellow passengers who had died in the accident [5].

The given examples also show that there are no two similar people. Did A. Maslow while creating his needs theory, evaluate such human behaviour features? Undoubtedly this was known to him because in one discussion he pointed out “Up to now we spoke about the fact that the levels of hierarchy of needs have a fixed order however this hierarchy is not so “strong” as previously it had been thought it was. It is true that for the majority of people with whom we worked with their main needs were distributed nearly in the same order as we had pointed out.

However there were some exceptions. There are some people to whom self-respect is more important than love.” [4].

J. Stoner and his colleagues in the book “Management” while supporting A. Maslow’s needs theory, indicate that there are people who want to satisfy their main needs only through work (people of lower social status, not fully literate etc) others are attracted by the possibility of being recognized and being able to realize themselves [10]. The latter consciously sacrifice security needs (pilots, astronauts, divers, climbers, acrobats performing complicated tricks etc.) and have to realize their special personal objectives in selecting a job which is dangerous to their lives. For a majority of these people self-realization is a reflection of special motivation (competence and the aim to be different).

Finally A. Maslow notices that on the level of physiological and security needs people are more similar. However on the level of respect and especially self-realization the difference is more immense. Therefore evaluating employees’ higher level needs managers have to take into consideration that the following needs:

- are expressed in an abstract way compared to the original needs;
- are strictly determined by the individual’s experience;
- are of different intensity;
- most often influence one another therefore are difficult to distinguish and identify.

All the above discussed examples enable us to make a conclusion that Professor Maslow’s suggested hierarchy of needs conceptually does not disagree with a person’s individual distribution of needs, their hierarchy and tendencies of change can be investigated (this will be discussed later, when speaking about the author’s research results). The given examples also very clearly illustrate the importance to the manager intending to motivate fairly, to know more about the person’s individual needs.

As we have mentioned A. Maslow’s theory of needs was criticized for insufficient evaluation of different nationalities cultural traditions influence on the motivation processes. The author himself could answer this question. “This basic needs classification has tried to cover the relative content of motives of an individual from a specific togetherness which is beyond different superficial differences in concrete cultures.” Undoubtedly a specific culture will be different from the conscious content of motives of an individual coming from another society” [4]. Perhaps it would be possible to agree with the resounding criticism when speaking about people’s motivation in the wide sense of the word, firstly on the psychological aspect², however when analyzing it according to the work aspect it is impossible to say that these differences are so important and do not fit in with A. Maslow’s suggested theoretical frames on the whole. Also it would be impossible to find different cultures in the 21st century with very purified cultural features (here I have in mind folklore). It has been noticed that in the work environment the development process of different cultures is more dynamic and reflects the globalization tendencies. Therefore we can absolutely support the idea which A. Maslow mentioned a few decades ago that the basic needs are more general than superficial desires and behaviour.”(as above).

The presented theoretical survey of A. Maslow shows that there are specialists who are criticizing and there are specialists supporting the author. Despite the criticism of different specialists according to J. Stoner and his colleagues, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs concept has had more attention from managers than any motivation theory [10], because it presents a sufficiently beneficial description of the motivation process.

² This is what A. Maslow wrote “I do not state that this classification is complete or universal for all cultures. I am only saying that compared to it is *much more* complete, *much more* universal, *much more* fundamental than the superficial conscious desires and it takes into account more seriously the general qualities of people [4].

Our performed research in 2002 among higher schools' different study forms and levels (universities, colleges) students, employees of two organizations and the unemployed, where up till now 1261 individuals have participated obviously showed that the majority of managers from Lithuanian organizations have a reason to seriously take an interest in A. Maslow's created hierarchy of needs theory. The number of questioned respondents makes up more than 80 per cent of all the students taking management and personnel management. Respondents had to present in the form of a test their opinion about 20 work situations –remuneration, working conditions, the importance of equipment being used, to describe the efforts of the manager.

According to the survey it was determined that for respondents the evaluation scale from “I absolutely agree” to the scale “I absolutely disagree” could express their opinion on the mentioned situations. The assessment of the survey results was carried out in a 100 point system, some of the responses which were received:

- from 0 to 30 inclusively expresses a weak need;
- 31 – 60 inclusively expresses an average need;
- more than 60 to 80 inclusively reveals the respondent's strongly expressed needs;
- more than 80 points show the very strong needs of the respondent.

Below in the first diagram the results of the ongoing survey actually confirm the theory of the individual's needs hierarchy expressed by A. Maslow 60 years ago. As it had been anticipated there were no two similar answers because different individuals' priorities of needs and their strength differs only because of the reason that influence is made to each one personally by the combination of different motives. The purpose of such a research is to determine the general phenomena, their tendencies and to understand what recommendations can be presented to employers on the issue of motivation.

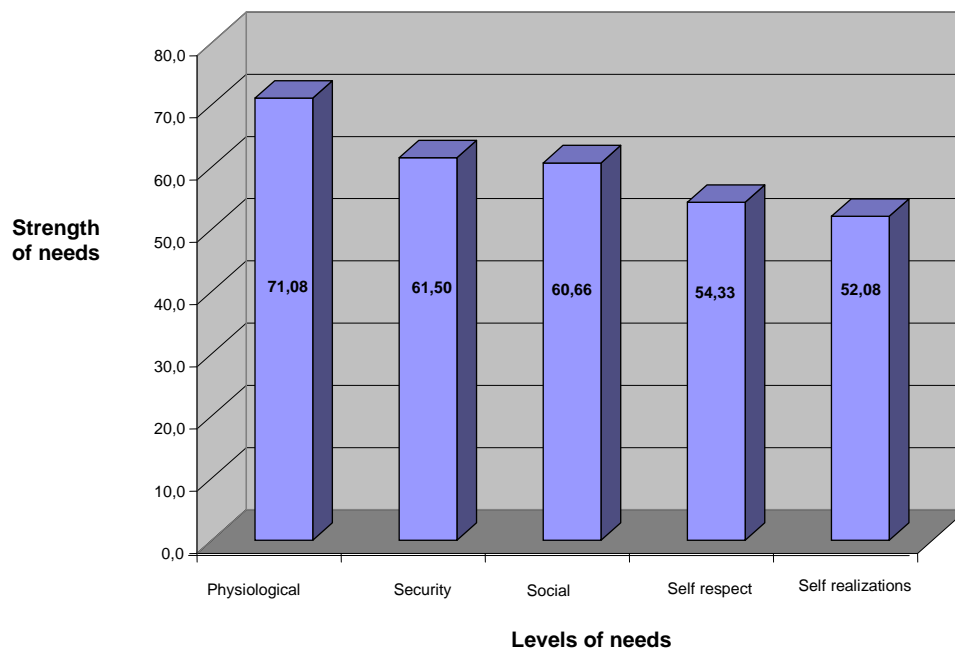


Diagram 1: Strength of respondents' needs according to A. Maslow's hierarchy of needs (% from 100 points)

According to the survey it was determined that respondents find that ensuring of physiological needs is the most important -71.08 points which actually reflects the contemporary economical situation in Lithuania. All the other levels of needs are distributed in the order as A. Maslow presented. The results of the survey revealed that the correct understanding of an individual's needs has to be directed by the presumption of partial satisfaction and all those questioned also have different levels of needs and only their levels of strength differ. When grouping respondents according to some indications it is possible to elucidate the characteristic needs of a group. For example, discussing the research results according to the respondents' study forms it has been noticed that from the received results full time bachelor students (this is 19 – 22 years old in their research 53 percent college students and 20 per cent university students from all those interviewed) can be distinguished by a particular needs structure and Labour Exchange students³. In Diagram 2 the results of these respondent groups are presented.

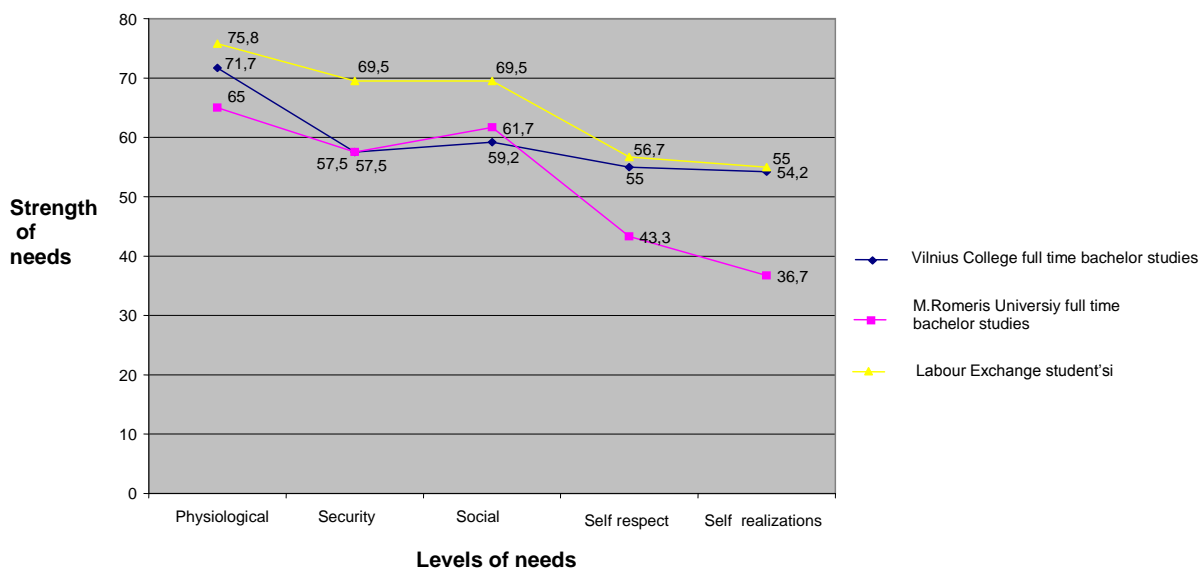


Diagram 2: M. Romeris University and Vilnius College full time bachelor student's and Labour Exchange student's strength of needs (%-from 100 points)

As can be seen the students from the Labour Exchange among which there are individuals who had previously completed higher studies, there are efforts to escape from a dangerous living environment, however the environment itself has put a mark: „a person lives on bread only where there is no bread“ (A. Maslow). The students of the Labour Exchange evaluated their level of strength of physiological needs with highest points -75.8. Assessing the answers of full time student respondents according to the strength of physiological needs it can be seen that for university students they are less important than for college students (65,0 or 71,7 points). Since the absolute majority of full time student respondents live with their parents and are supported by them the received answers can be correlated with the different social and economic situation of their families. However evaluating the responses according to safety needs the mentioned circumstances unite them because according to the students' assertions when living with parents all consider these needs are less important and compared with social needs are not of first priority. The research reveals one more important circumstance showing the differences between

³ The registered unemployed and the "future"unemployed made up the Labour Exchange student group

university and non university students. Non university studies from the beginning are directed towards practice and continue for 3 years. However in universities the study period is 4 years and their purpose is – training to use general scientific knowledge. The objective differences in studies are conditioned by the fact that college students start to express motives of respect and self realization (55.0 or 54.2 points – for college students, 41.7 and 36.7 points – for university students⁴) at a much earlier stage. With a change in the living environment, it is understandable that among those surveyed respondents the motives conditioning such results will hardly remain in the future. The presented research results very obviously confirm the conclusion made by A. Maslow that „*a person's behaviour is motivated mostly by the most important needs at that moment i.e. the dominating needs.*“

With the aim of elucidating the reliability of the received answers Vilnius College had comparatively very good (9 and 10 points) and satisfactory (5 – 6 points) of those mastering Management and Personnel Management subjects of full time students results (Diagram 3) We can see that those studying on a weak level have conditionally stronger physiological needs (there are certain reasons for this) however their other needs are more weakly expressed. The essential differences are expressed on the level of needs of respect and self respect where the researched groups make up only 68,6 and 62,2 per cent of the best level of students⁵.

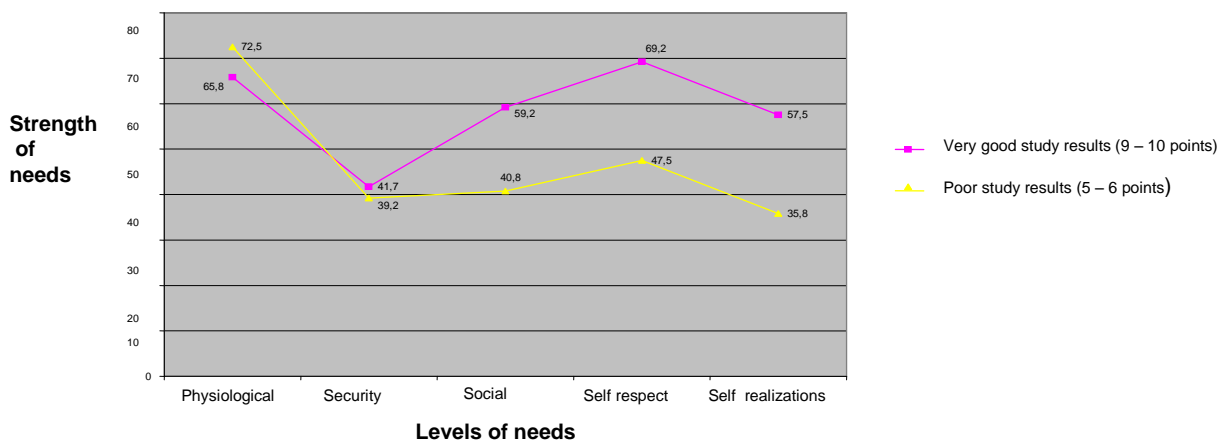


Diagram 3: Vilnius College full time student's strength of needs according to A. Maslow's needs theory, considering study results (% from 100 points)

Currently continuing the survey the final data do not change. The presented results obviously confirm A. Maslow's theory that the biggest individual differences are expressed on the level of respect and self respect.

A. Maslow's basic phenomenon theory of the hierarchy of needs: the model of the hierarchy of needs foresees that every employee has different needs which he/she hopes to satisfy. The employee firstly is motivated by needs which are the most important for him/her at the moment. The sufficient satisfying of some needs means that new ones appear in their place – mostly needs of a higher level.

⁴ According to us, in this case we can speak about the surveyed university respondents' "delayed needs" because the motives of self-respect and self-realization levels as we will see later can be different.

⁵ It is no secret that some of those studying at a higher school try to achieve not only knowledge, to develop their abilities but to gain a very down to earth object- a diploma. According to this aspect the low respect and self realization levels of strength of needs among those students whose results are poor can be explained.

3. Conclusions

The application of A. Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs under current conditions in Lithuania could help managers of organizations:

- to determine subordinate employees' (all the staff, a few subdivisions, a separate subdivision or a part of it) the strength of different groups of needs and their hierarchy;
- to create a general program of motivation to encourage employees;
- to coordinate a subordinate motivation process according to a general program with means satisfying the needs of each individual.

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