An Analysis of the Motivational Effect on Employees of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in International Culture Circumstances

Zhang Dian

Abstract

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is one of the important motivation theories, has become a strategy used by managers to motivate employees. The project will explain the definition of motivation and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs from the perspective of organizational behavior and the strengths and weaknesses of the theory. Then it will consider how the theory is applied effectively in the USA and Northwest Europe and ineffectively in some developing and undeveloped countries with different economic backgrounds political systems and cultural preferences. The conclusion suggests that managers should choose motivation systems that fit in the local cultural backgrounds.

Key words: motivational effect; Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs; culture

1. Introduction

Motivation theories suggest that employees accomplish tasks because they have needs which drive behaviors. One of the most important motivational models is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which is used by some employers. It is necessary to know how the theory functions in business organizations and to what extent Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is applied effectively and ineffectively in business circumstances with different economic backgrounds political systems, and cultural preferences to motivate employees to achieve higher levels. The project will first explain the definition of motivation effect and comparison of different motivation theories, then it will give explanation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs from the perspective of organizational behavior and the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in business practice will be shown. Finally, several case studies will consider to what extent how Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is applied effectively in the USA and Northwest Europe while working in effectively in some developing and undeveloped countries. It will conclude that with different types of economic backgrounds political systems and cultural preferences varying from place to place, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is not an all-powerful tool to motivate employees in some environments. Therefore, managers should select appropriate motivation systems suitable for the unique culture when running their businesses.

1Jiangxi University of Finance and Economics, 330013, Nanchang, China; Jiangxi College of Foreign Studies, 330099, Nanchang, China
2 Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in an Organization to Motivate Employees

2.1 Definition of Motivational Effect and Comparison of Different Motivation Theories
Motivational effect is applied by numerous employers to encourage staffs to enhance productivity to achieve expected performance than usual. In this process, personal interests are met, in order to achieve the overall objective of a business organization. There are two types of motivation theories: one is content theory which includes Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs that focuses on what causes employees to devote time and energy to working, while the other is process theory which focuses on how someone becomes motivated. Though some factors suggested by motivation theories may not be precisely suitable for all societies, the basic frameworks exist to provide chances for understanding needs.

2.2 Explanation of Maslow's Theory from the Perspective of Organizational Behavior
Maslow, a famous American psychologist, established a theory called Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which was based on his clinical experience and some former conclusions which had been originated by other experts. He found that it was nearly one of the most important human motivation theories and described a shape like a pyramid which had strictly ordered five levels of needs, with the need for self-actualization at the top and the physical needs at the bottom. From the perspective of organizational behavior, physical needs are satisfied by the pay employees received, safety needs can be seen as having job security, and social needs are satisfied in the workplace by aspects such as communicating with each other or socializing after work. Furthermore, self-esteem can be achieved in the workplace through recognition or achievements, and finally, self-actualization occurs when employees develop new skills or take on new challenges. However, different economic backgrounds, political systems and cultural preferences influence the values of different rewards and affect motivational practices in business organizations. In addition, Maslow’s theory suggests that once the lower needs are fairly well satisfied, there will emerge the next higher level needs. Besides, Maslow also pointed out that the hierarchical order is the same for everyone and remains unchanged in whatever circumstances.

2.3 Analysis of the Strengths and Weaknesses of Maslow's Theory in Business Practice
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has its strengths. It reflects the regular pattern of human behavior to some extent. Human needs, individualism plus personal achievement serve as a foundation to explore the motivation behavior by Maslow, so the theory is somewhat beneficial for managers to motivate employees in a society which stresses personal benefit and individual achievement. To some extent, the Hierarchy of Needs theory has implications for managers to adopt more sufficient strategies to encourage employees to work actively and enthusiastically in some developed countries such as the USA and Northwestern Europe. However, the theory has its weaknesses. It concentrates on self-centralized orientation and
ignored societal condition, historical development and human's social practice. To be specific, the theory may not apply for some developing and undeveloped countries because of their particular conditions. Besides, it may not suitable for collectivist countries neither which require that employees should absolutely loyal to the organizations rather than seek for personal rewards as the prior goal in business companies.

3. The Applicability of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in International Business Environments
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is effective in developed places such as the USA and Northwestern Europe where put emphasis on individual achievement. By contrast, the theory may not be effectively applied in some developing and undeveloped countries with unique characteristics such as absolutely collectivism or extremely poverty.

3.1 How Maslow’s Theory Work in the USA & Northwest European
Since Maslow's theory is individualistically oriented, it has shown effectively in some developed countries. In the 1960s in the USA, a survey which used statistical ways such as interviews and questionnaires to collect information from employees working in large companies was taken by Hall and Nougaim. The results showed that original Maslow's model was sufficient and affected employees consistently. Indeed, Maslow’s theory significantly contributed in motivating employees to work in the USA according to the survey. Another successful example can be seen from some technological companies in the UK. The employers used awards to motivate employees such as extra hourly paid and promoted employees who can master challenges or accomplish important goals. The result showed that it strictly obeyed Maslow’s theory and obtained expected goals.

3.2 How Maslow’s Theory Work in Some Developing & Undeveloped Countries
With different economic backgrounds, political systems and cultural preferences varying from place to place; Maslow’s theory does not work effectively in some developing and undeveloped countries as well as collectivist countries to some extent. In a global environment, a certain culture’s values and characteristics may influence the motivation effect. In a collectivist culture, the fundamental need is belonging, self-esteem is meaningless, and self-actualization is maintained to reach the requirement of meeting the development demands of the society. According to Trompenaars, he used Japan as an example to show that Japanese and Chinese culture concentrate on the risk avoiding rather than risk taking and employees regard safety and security needs as the most important needs. In conclusion, Western motivation models such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs focuses on individualistic culture, so applying them to a collectivist culture may not effectively motivate employees. Religious and poverty factors also affect the importance and ordering of demands in business organizations when motivating employees. The president Qaddafi launched "cultural revolution"(the 1973 Libyan People's Revolution); he announced that all existing law was suspended. Shortly after
that, Libyan employees regarded social needs were more fulfilled than security needs. They treated the social needs as the basic needs in order the meet the demands of authority. On the contrary, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs states that social needs will not be focused on until security needs had been fulfilled. Since the Republic of Zimbabwe was one of the most undeveloped countries in the world which had an extremely high inflation rate and citizens had disappointing education norms, employees put higher importance on security and self-esteem needs but less on love and belonging needs such as relationship since the competition between employees was very cruel in Zimbabwe where resources were limited.

3.3 Implications for Managers

The meaning of work which employees find has value varies with culture, so it is very necessary for managers to judge whether the motivation systems they used fit in the local culture or not. There are some important differences such as collectivist or individualist in how culture influences the approaches to motivation. Therefore, managers need to select a suitable motivation system that enables them to understand the demands of employees and encourage employees effectively who work for managers to achieve organizational goals.

4 Conclusion

The project has shown to what extent does Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has motivational effect on employees in international culture circumstances. First, it looked at the definition of motivational effect and comparison of different motivation theories. Second, it examined Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs from the perspective of organizational behavior. Third, it analyzed of the strengths and weaknesses of Maslow's theory in business practice. Finally, the applicability of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in international business environments was given. With the economic backgrounds, political systems and cultural preferences varying from place to place and the inevitable limitations of Maslow’s theory to some extent, the hierarchical order is seldom the same for everyone or remains unchanged in whatever circumstances in practice. Since Maslow’s theory is connected with individualistic orientation, it is handled by managers to encourage their employees to work effectively in the US and Northeast Europe. By contrast, in some developing and undeveloped countries to some extent because an award an employee regards attractive in one background sometimes cannot be that effective to carry weight in another, such as collectivist, religious, poverty or in other complex circumstances. Consequently, managers need to choose an appropriate motivation system that enables them to understand the requirements of employees and encourage them consistently.

References