

# “The Enduring Impact of Great Ideas”

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## **CHAPTER 3**

# **GENERAL ISSUES IN MANAGEMENT**

### **The Enduring Impact of Great Ideas**

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#### **Abstract**

The ultimate measure of an idea is its resilience and enduring influence. In this paper, we examine the concepts of Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, and Frederick Herzberg and the impact of their ideas on subsequent models of motivation, leadership and organizational design. We review the major contributions these authors have made and discuss the impact they continue to have on the practice of management. Specifically we show the connection between the ideas of Maslow, McGregor and Herzberg on the development of job design, empowerment and the evolution of transformational leadership. An integrative model is presented that shows the connections between the original ideas of Maslow, McGregor, and Herzberg and subsequent management thinkers.

#### **Introduction**

Attracting, keeping and motivating high-performers are becoming increasingly important in contemporary organizations. The creation of work environments that provide a sense of challenge and meaningfulness for employees has become a priority. In fact, creating such a work environment may very well be the strategic imperative of the new millennium. This perspective has been recently articulated by Whetten and Cameron (1998) who concluded that “good people management” is more important than all other factors in predicting profitability.

Over the last twenty years a burgeoning market of popular business books has emerged to address these concerns. This genre began with *In Search of Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, 1982) and *The One-Minute Manager* (Blanchard & Johnson, 1983). The most recent best-selling addition to the list is Jim Collins' (2001) *Good to Great*. The plethora of books is supplemented by journals aimed at the management practitioner. In fact, the Harvard Business Review recently began a practice of listing the most influential articles published in their journal during the previous year. The articles on the HBR list cover topics on gaining employee commitment, attracting and retaining top-performers, organizational structure, and leadership.

While these readings may have had some immediate impact, the real measure of an idea is its resilience and enduring influence. In this paper, we review several ideas that we believe meet this standard. Specifically, we review the concepts of Abraham Maslow, Douglas McGregor, and Frederick Herzberg and discuss the impact of their concepts on subsequent models of motivation and leadership.

#### **Abraham Maslow: A Theory of Human Motivation**

Arguably the most famous of management theorists, Abraham Maslow casts a long shadow over the field of organizational behavior and the practice of management. In his classic article, “A Theory of Human Motivation” (Maslow, 1943), he presented a “prepotent hierarchy” in which at least five sets of needs compose the framework. The fundamental need classifications are: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. Each of these needs operates at all times, although one deficient set dominates the individual at any one time and circumstance. These needs tend to manifest themselves in the order of their prepotency. We seek essential satisfaction of the then prominent need by resolving basic, unconscious goals. The hierarchical nature of this framework suggests that higher, unsatisfied needs usually appear after the satisfaction of those on

the lower level. Thus for Maslow, need gratification is as important as deprivation in motivation. At the base, the satisfaction of physiological needs “permits the emergence of other more social goals.” In fact, satisfied needs are no longer motivators and for all practical purposes can be viewed as nonexistent unless re-opened due to subsequent deprivation.

Maslow’s model has a wide appeal because of its conceptual clarity and simplicity. Despite this appeal the model has been criticized for several reasons (cf, Szilagyi & Wallace, 1990; George & Jones, 2002). First, there is concern over the content of the hierarchy. Some research suggests that there is no evidence for the five-need hierarchy, while others collapse the hierarchy into two clusters, where both biological and safety groupings encompass what is deemed to be lower level needs, and a global set that includes the higher order needs. Maslow was not locked into only five needs. He considered the full range of cognitive needs. He did, however, view self-actualization as the ultimate need. For those who reach this highest level, it involves being what you are most capable of being: “a person becomes what he is most capable of becoming. What a man can be, he must be” (Maslow, 1943, p. 370).

A second criticism of Maslow’s theory is that the needs of individuals should be viewed as dynamic rather than static. The needs of individuals vary constantly as a function of the situations in which individuals are involved. Third, more than one level of need may be operating at any given time. Finally, the theory states that an essentially satisfied need is not a motivator. This may be valid in a general sense, but needs are never fully or permanently satisfied. Because needs are perceived and reflect psychological or physiological deficiencies they must be continually and repeatedly satisfied. If multiple needs are operating simultaneously, then it is not realistic to expect the needs to be satisfied in a hierarchical order. This criticism may reflect the negligence of textbook writers who have failed to recognize Maslow’s discussion of the fact that individuals may flow back and forth along the hierarchy as time and circumstances impact the satisfaction or deprivation of needs.

Despite these criticisms, Maslow’s model continues to have an impact. It is still included in management and organizational behavior texts. His theory continues to generate a common sense appeal to practicing managers. Indeed, a recent publication stated that the application of need driven behavior remains the foundation for most behavioral studies today (Anonymous, 2003). Maslow’s theory guides managers to recognize individual differences among employees and thus provides a foundation for understanding human behavior.

### **Douglas McGregor: The Human Side of Enterprise**

Maslow’s views of human motivation impacted the work of Douglas McGregor who believed that people worked hard to achieve deeply felt needs. According to McGregor (cited in Heil, Bennis, & Stephens, 2000),

*“All human behavior is directed toward the satisfaction of needs. From birth to death, the individual is engaged in a constant attempt to satisfy his varied, complex, and sometimes conflicting needs. Any given behavior is a resolution of forces arising in part within him and in part in the environmental situation.”*

McGregor proposed that managers use their authority in a positive manner to create an environment that would augment employees’ natural desire to satisfy their needs. In order to create such an environment, managers should examine their core assumptions about human nature to see how these cognitions impacted their managerial behaviors. For McGregor, managers are only able to change how they lead by first changing their thinking.

In his book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, McGregor (1960) identified two sets of assumptions held by managers. The conventional view, labeled Theory X, stated that employees inherently dislike work and, whenever possible, will attempt to avoid it. Since employees dislike work, they must be coerced, controlled, or threatened with punishment to achieve goals. Furthermore, these employees will shirk responsibility and seek formal direction whenever possible. Most workers place security above all other factors associated with work and will display little ambition.

In contrast to the then (and now?) conventional view of the manager's role, McGregor introduced a "new theory of management," labeled Theory Y. According to this view, employees can view work being as natural as rest or play. People will exercise self-direction and self-control if they are committed to their objectives. The average person can learn to accept, and even seek, responsibility. The ability to make innovative decisions is widely dispersed throughout the population and is not necessarily the sole province of those in management positions.

McGregor's "new theory" is based on the higher needs of Maslow's framework. In this approach the job of management is to "create opportunities, release potential, remove obstacles, encourage growth, and provide guidance." McGregor identified several "innovative ideas" that were "entirely consistent with Theory Y." These included decentralization and delegation to create flatter organizations of truly empowered employees. He advocated job enlargement that encouraged acceptance of responsibility which would provide intrinsic motivation. McGregor prescribed a participative and consultative approach to management that would unleash the creative potential of employees throughout the organization. He also advocated a participatory approach to goal-setting in which the employee accepted responsibility in the performance planning and appraisal process. These "new ideas" have found contemporary expression in a wide variety of motivational and leadership strategies including job enrichment, goal-setting, and transformational leadership.

Douglas McGregor was a distinct prophet in our field. He envisioned a management future where employees could perform because they wanted to. When managers in McGregor's day asked "Why don't employees work as hard as I do?" McGregor's answer would have been "Why would they?" What needs are being fulfilled if an individual is being told what to do, how to do it, and when prescribed results are required? This pillar in organizational behavior opened our minds to motivated workers who perform because they want to. They are turned on by a work position that taps their unmet, higher needs. Their supervisor is supportive and explains why certain work activities are happening. This manager's mind opens to new ideas about the workplace and under appropriate conditions a tremendous amount of creative human energy can be unleashed throughout organizations. Agreeing with Maslow, the key to motivated behavior is activating driven, unsatisfied higher order needs.

Parenthetically, it is sad to discover that many managers espouse McGregor's thinking, yet treat workers in a manner that is consistent with Theory X. This disguised reversal to earlier times is usually maintained with performance management programs where a check mark on a specified work activities chart indicates compliance with higher-level managers' expectations. The employee is described as a subordinate (check the Latin derivation of this pejorative word to understand its compliance source) instead of being elevated as a team member, colleague, or associate. This wolf in sheep's clothing approach to managing people does a huge disservice to both Maslow's and McGregor's far-reaching management concepts.

### **Frederick Herzberg: One More Time...How Do You Motivate Employees?**

Frederick Herzberg (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman 1959; 1974) simplified Maslow's need hierarchy into two distinct dimensions: hygiene factors and motivators. The hygiene factors consisted of a set of extrinsic job conditions that included job security, wages, benefits, working conditions, company policies, quality of technical supervision, and the quality of interpersonal relations in the work place. According to Herzberg these factors were associated with dissatisfaction. If they were not acceptable, employees would be dissatisfied. Yet if they were present in the workplace they did not lead to motivation or satisfaction, but only to a state of no dissatisfaction. The hygiene factors parallel the lower-level needs of Maslow's hierarchy: physiological, safety, and social needs.

In contrast to these, Herzberg identified a set of intrinsic job conditions that were associated with motivation. These factors were labeled motivators and included achievement, recognition, personal growth, responsibility, personal development, and career advancement. These factors correspond to most of the higher-level needs on Maslow's hierarchy. If and only if, these fac-

tors were present would employees be satisfied and motivated. The absence of these factors resulted in a state of no satisfaction.

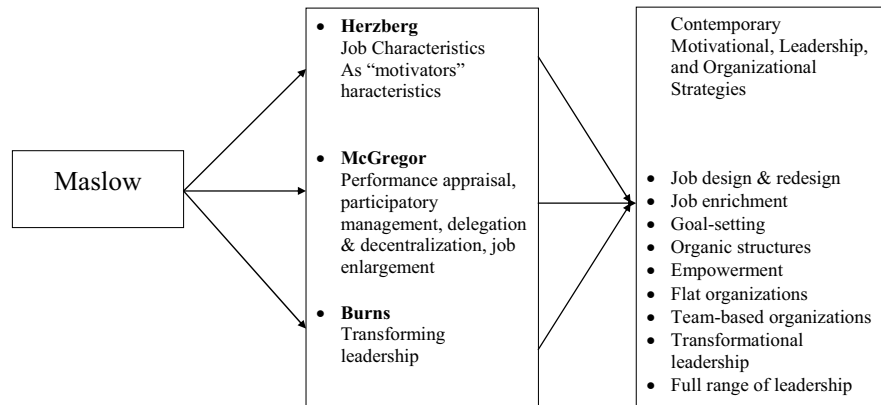


Fig. 1. Maslow's Legacy: The Enduring Impact of Great Ideas

### Job Enrichment and the Job Characteristics Model

Herzberg's ideas of intrinsic motivators that existed inside the job itself led to the development of job design as a motivational strategy. Perhaps the most representative model of this approach was created by Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980). They developed a model of task design that identified five core job dimensions: task variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Jobs that have these dimensions are said to be enriched and have a high motivating potential (Oldham, Hackman, & Pearce, 1976). According to their model, the presence of these core dimensions produces three critical psychological states: a sense of meaningfulness in the work, a sense of responsibility for the work, and knowledge of the results of one's work (KOR). These critical psychological states in turn produce a variety of positive individual and organizational outcomes. Among these are high internal motivation, high quality of work performance, high satisfaction with the work, and low levels of absenteeism and turnover. Thus, the impact of the core job dimensions on these outcomes is mediated by the critical psychological states.

An important element of Hackman and Oldham's original model that is often overlooked in contemporary textbooks is the moderating role of individual growth need strength and satisfaction with the general working conditions. According to Hackman and Oldham's model, the relationship between the core job dimensions and the critical psychological states, and the relationship between the critical psychological states and the outcomes are both moderated by two additional variables: satisfaction with the general working conditions and the individual employee's growth need strength. This element suggests that essential satisfaction of Herzberg's hygiene factors is a necessary prerequisite to the potentially motivating impact of job enrichment efforts. Thus, jobs that have been enriched through redesign efforts will only produce the critical psychological states and favorable outcomes if the general working conditions are favorable and the employee has a high level of growth need strength.

Using the Hackman and Oldham (1976, 1980) job characteristics model, Griffin (1991) examined the relationships between task design and job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and performance in a longitudinal field experiment. In his study, Griffin combined five task characteristics (task variety, identity, significance, autonomy, and feedback) into an overall motivating potential score, or MPS. The relationship between MPS and the criterion was examined four times over a forty-eight month period. At each point, the MPS was significantly and positively related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment. In the third and fourth periods, MPS also had a significant and positive relationship with performance. It is important to note that Griffin (1991) found these significant relationships without examining the moderating impact of the employee's growth need strength and contextual satisfaction on the relationship between MPS and the crite-

tion. These results suggest that the relationship between task characteristics, as measured by MPS, and a variety of criterion variables is more direct than previously discussed. Thus, enriched jobs are positively related to a wide variety of positive outcomes, including employee job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and performance.

## Goal-Setting

Maslow's need theory and McGregor's Theory Y provide the foundation for goal-setting, which is perhaps the most powerful of all motivational models (Locke & Latham, 1990). Fore-shadowed by Maslow (1943) who observed that individuals tend to create goals that will satisfy their unmet needs, the impact of goal setting on employee performance has been documented on a wide variety of tasks in both laboratory and field settings (Locke & Latham, 1990; Mento, Steel, & Karren, 1987). The robustness of the relationship prompted Mento et al. (1987, p. 74) to conclude that "if there is ever to be a viable candidate from the organizational sciences for elevation to the lofty status of a scientific law of nature, then the relationships between goal difficulty, specificity/difficulty, and task performance are most worthy of serious consideration. Certainly, if nothing else, the evidence from numerous studies indicates that these variables behave lawfully." The "lawful" nature of the impact of goal setting has been described as the high performance cycle (Locke & Latham, 1990). The process begins with a high level of challenge in the form of specific, difficult goals. When employees are committed to these goals, receive adequate feedback, possess high self-efficacy and suitable task strategies, high performance will result. If high performance leads to desired intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, employees will experience high levels of satisfaction. High job satisfaction is, in turn, strongly related to commitment, and consequently high intentions to remain in an organization. Employees who are satisfied and committed are then ready to accept additional challenges. Thus, the cycle repeats itself. The high performance cycle may lead to performance beyond expectations, extra-role behaviors, and commitment to the organization.

## Empowerment

Perhaps the most popular motivational strategy to emerge over the past twenty years is empowerment. For many managers this technique was simply delegating authority or engaging in a more participative decision-making and leadership style. These interpretations rang hollow and have been heavily criticized (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Spreitzer and Quinn, 2001). When practicing in this way employees experience a bogus empowerment (Ciulla, 1998) that promises employees the freedom and resources to act on their judgments, but fails to deliver. Spreitzer and Quinn identify five reasons for the failure of most attempts to embrace empowerment: ambivalence, bureaucratic cultures, conflicts within the organization, personal time constraints, and a fundamental misunderstanding of how empowerment is achieved.

In contrast to these failed approaches, Conger and Kanungo (1988) define empowerment as a process of enhancing feelings of self-efficacy. This is done by identifying and removing the conditions that foster powerlessness and through formal organizational practices and informal techniques of providing efficacy information. This process is echoed in the work of Spreitzer and Quinn (2001) who claim that genuine empowerment requires a change in the mindset of authority to figures. This shift requires the creation of leaders who have the courage to give up control and trust empowered people to do the right thing. The result is employees who experience the four psychological dimensions at work. First, empowered employees will experience meaning. Meaning refers to having a personal connection to work. As such this is similar to the significance dimension of the job characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). The second dimension is self-determination which refers to having freedom and discretion. This dimension parallels the characteristic of autonomy in the job characteristics model. The third dimension is competence which refers to an individual's confidence about their abilities. This dimension is consistent with Conger and Kanungo's view of empowerment as increasing self-efficacy. The final dimension is impact which refers to the experience of making a difference. This parallels the sense of meaning-

fulness that results from the variety, identity, and significance dimensions of the job characteristics model.

The elements of authentic empowerment developed by Conger and Kanungo (1988) and Spreitzer and Quinn (2001) are rooted in the Theory Y assumptions advocated by McGregor. These elements are also in alignment with Herzberg's suggestions for motivating employees. The result of these practices will lead to satisfaction of the higher order needs identified by Maslow.

## Transformational Leadership

The work of Maslow also impacted Pulitzer prize-winning historian and political scientist James McGregor Burns' thinking on leadership. Recently Burns (2003) discussed the impact of Maslow's approach to motivation regarding the development of transforming leadership:

*"Few other motivational theories matched Maslow's in boldness and intellectual creativity. His theory had the virtues of clarity, economy, and flexibility, without sacrifice of comprehensiveness. Like the behaviorists, Maslow began with survival wants, yet he saw the higher wants as more than the mere compounding of the lower-order motivations. People were qualitatively transformed as they proceeded up the hierarchy of wants, and this motivation for continual betterment was at the heart of Maslow's idea of human nature. Unlike the Freudians, Maslow was above all an optimist. Not only did he describe ultimate human potential in the most generous terms of self-actualization, he held that people were powerfully motivated to achieve that potential. A theorist of leadership found in Maslow's ideas an account of progressive change grounded squarely in the motivations of leaders and followers alike" (pp. 148-149, italics in the original).*

According to Burns (2003), Maslow's model had a striking appeal because of the potential link between Maslow's drive for self-actualization and the motivation for leadership. Burns saw that the creativity, capacity for growth and learning, flexibility and openness that characterized self-actualization were near to the characteristics of leadership. Burns did, however, make a crucial distinction between self-actualizing individuals and leadership self-actualization. While self-actualizing individuals were self-contained and autonomous, "leadership self-actualization is pursued through a process of mutual actualization with others" in a commitment to a purpose that transcends the individual (Burns, 2003, p. 143).

For Burns (1978) power and leadership are relationships that must be analyzed in a context of human motives and physical constraints. For Burns, power is a process "in which power holders, possessing certain motives and goals, have the capacity to secure changes in the behavior of a respondent." This power relationship consisted of three elements: the motives and resources of power holders, the motives and resources of power recipients, and the relationship among all three.

Building on this definition of power, Burns drew a sharp distinction between leaders and power wielders. Power wielders use the resources of their power bases that are relevant to the attainment of their own purposes. In contrast, Burns defines leadership as a process that takes place in the context of a relationship between leaders and followers. Through this process leaders induce followers to achieve goals that represent the values, motivations, wants, needs, aspirations and expectations, of both leaders and followers. Thus, leadership is viewed as a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship. As such, leadership, unlike naked power wielding, is thus inseparable from followers' needs and goals. According to Burns, "power wielders may treat people as things, but leaders may not. All leaders are actual or potential power holders, but not all power holders are leaders." This understanding of power is consistent with McGregor's Theory Y assumptions about people.

According to Burns, leadership can take two fundamentally different forms: transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things. This type of leadership is based on a contractual ethic that emphasizes contingent rewards. While a leadership act may take place, it is not necessarily one that builds leader and follower together in a mutual and continuing pursuit of a higher purpose. In contrast to transactional leadership, Burns presents transforming leadership. According to Burns transformational leadership occurs when leaders and followers interact with each other in

such a way that they raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. It becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and thus has a transforming effect on both. Thus, transformational leadership is rooted in a covenant relationship, rather than a contractual one. Thus, transforming leadership creates a relationship between the leader and the follower that is characterized by reciprocity of influence and mutual vulnerability.

Burns' concept of transforming leadership has been operationalized as transformational leadership in the work of Bass and his associates (e.g. Bass, 1985; Avolio, 1999). Transformational leadership is distinguished from transactional leadership behavior in several ways. Transactional leadership emphasizes the transactions or exchanges that take place between leaders and their followers. These exchanges are based on the leader's identification of performance requirements and clarification of the conditions and rewards that are available for meeting those requirements. Transformational leaders do more with their followers than simply develop conditional exchanges and agreements. Although transformational leaders may exhibit transactional behaviors (Wofford, Goodwin, & Whittington, 1998), their leadership style also includes one or more of the following behaviors: ascribed charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Avolio, 1999). Through these behaviors an environment is created that allows employees to do more than initially expected. When this occurs, the employees report higher levels of satisfaction and commitment to their organization (Bass, 1997; Avolio, 1999; Whittington, 2003).

### **The Present Challenge**

Facing the reality found in many organizations today, where downsizing has severed employee relationships, and where today's managers are focused on immediate financial results, individuals are regularly denied the motivational forces found in the Maslow-McGregor-Herzberg triad. The current economic conditions, parlayed into hygienic environments, are sucking away the positive motivational contributions that our pillar authors have described. Sound theory remains sound, however.

Despite current economic conditions, attracting, keeping and motivating high-performers are increasingly important in contemporary organizations. The creation of work environments that provide a sense of challenge and meaningfulness for employees has become the strategic imperative of the new millennium. This perspective has been recently articulated by Whetten and Cameron (1998) who concluded that "good people management" is more important than all other factors in predicting profitability. It is interesting to note that this strategic imperative was foreshadowed in the works of Maslow and McGregor.

In support of this perspective, Pfeffer (1998) sees people as the only remaining source of sustainable competitive advantage. He advocates the creation of new organizations that emphasize seven characteristics: employment security, selective hiring of new personnel, self-managed teams and decentralized decision making as the basic principles of organizational design, comparatively high compensation that is contingent upon organizational performance, extensive training, reduced status distinctions and barriers, and extensive sharing of financial and performance information throughout the organization. These practices certainly reflect the Theory Y perspectives advocated by McGregor.

The development and implementation of Pfeffer's keys to organizational effectiveness requires a "new" mindset. According to Lawler (2000) a new form of managing and organizing must be created that addresses three vital issues: how will individuals know what to do, how will they be trained and developed, and what will motivate them to do it? To address this need, Lawler advocates a "new logic" organization built around six principles. First, effective organization can be the ultimate competitive advantage. This principle suggests that management systems, processes, and structures are the foundation that must be laid to create a competitive advantage that allows the organization to perform in ways that competitors cannot.

Second, employee involvement is the most effective source of control. Involvement creates intrinsic controls because the employees have a sense of ownership and the employees focus



their energy and creativity on the improvement of organizational processes. Third, when employees are involved in their work it is possible for all employees to add significant value to the organization. The fourth principle is that lateral processes are the keys to achieving organizational effectiveness.

The fifth principle states that team-based work designs are necessary and that the various organizational subsystems, such as reward and performance evaluations, must be aligned to support this structure. Lawler suggests that this team-based approach to organizing should be centered on products and customers rather than the traditional functions of the organization.

Finally, Lawler calls for transformational leadership that impacts the organization's effectiveness by setting direction, defining the agenda, adjusting strategy to address the changing business environment, and serving as a role model for leaders throughout the organization.

While the practices suggested by Pfeffer (1998) and Lawler (2000) are labeled as "new", they actually reflect the higher-order needs of Maslow and are based on the Theory Y perspective advocated by McGregor.

The legacy of Abraham Maslow can be seen directly in the works of Douglas McGregor and Frederick Herzberg. The impact of their ideas extends into the motivational models of job enrichment, goal-setting, empowerment, and the transformational model of leadership that has dominated recent research and practice. In many ways, the "new thinking" suggested by contemporary management scholars is really an extension of the work of Maslow and his disciples. Thus the road to building high-commitment organizations requires the solid foundation laid by Maslow, McGregor, and Herzberg.

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