

Motivational Theories and Their Relevance in Military Motivation

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Abstract

Motivation is an important aspect that determines human behaviour and various studies have been carried out to establish the determinants of human behaviour and its motivational aspects. Military profession offers a different set of working conditions where the magnitude of challenges is well above those found in commercial and other business organisations. The aspects of motivation are peculiar to the military profession and Military motivation is in a league of its own. Militaries across the world face physical and psychological challenges at work that most other people don't. Being armed with the right set of motivational techniques is critical for rising to the demands of such challenges and ensuring the best performance from the soldiers.

This study aims to review the different motivational theories and determine their relevance in the context of military motivation. Four of the primary motivation theories in practice today have been reviewed for this purpose. These motivational theories include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Herzberg's Motivation-Maintenance Theory, McClelland's Theory of Need Motivation and McGregor's Theory X/ Theory Y. These theories show how employees can be motivated to achieve tasks set upon them in the workplace.

The relevance of these theories to Military motivation is analysed. Given the peculiarities of the working conditions of the military and the challenges faced therein, these motivational theories can be suitably adapted to modify the functional aspects of military and institute suitable changes in the leadership styles and working mechanisms to improve motivation and enhance task achievement. It has been found that all these motivational theories are still relevant in military environment and can be factored in effectively in the Armed forces.

Keywords: Motivation, Motivational theories, Military Motivation, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Herzberg's Two Factors Theory of Motivation, McClelland's Theory of Need Motivation, McGregor's X and Y Theory of Motivation, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Determinants of Motivation

INTRODUCTION

Everyone needs motivation to perform, otherwise we might never do anything and just remain idle. Varying degrees of motivation propel us through life. Military motivation, however, is in a league of its own. Militaries across all branches of service face physical and psychological challenges at work that most people don't. Being armed with the right set of motivational techniques is critical for rising to the occasion of such challenges and making the best of them.¹ Military Motivation is synonymous with leadership. The success of a leader can depend solely on his ability to motivate others. The effective functioning of the forces, especially the attainment of war time goals, is critically dependent upon the motivation of its members. Miracles on battlefield were performed, not by numerical superiority of manpower weapons or equipment, but by well-motivated armies.

¹ Military Motivation: Special Challenges and Techniques | Better Help accessed on 23 Apr 23, 1630 hrs

MOTIVATION

The word “Motivation” was derived from the Latin word *movere* (meaning ‘to move’). Motivation is that self-propelling force within a man, which keeps prompting him to improve his performance and behaviour. It is his will and keenness to achieve not what he is supposed to achieve, but what he sets for himself to achieve².

Motivation is the force, either internal or external, to a person that arouses enthusiasm and resistance to pursue a certain course of action. According to Baron et al. (2008)- “Although motivation is a broad and complex concept, organizational scientists have agreed on its basic characteristics. Drawing from various social sciences, we define motivation as the set of processes that arouse, direct, and maintain human behaviour toward attaining some goal³.

Motivation has been defined as the process whereby goal-directed activities are initiated and sustained⁴. Although others exist, this definition highlights four key concepts: *motivation is a process; it is focused on a goal; and it deals with both the initiation and the continuation of activity directed at achieving that goal.*

Motivation is a physiological response and a feeling of willingness. It is an incentive or a stimulus that drives you to act. Motivation refers to the drive and effort to satisfy a want or goal. The motivation process begins with needs or deficiencies. These needs vary in intensity and over time among different individuals. In response to these needs, the individual searches for ways to satisfy it. From the manager's viewpoint, the objective is to motivate people to behave in ways that are in the organisation's best interests. Thus, motivation is important because of its significance as a determinant of performance and because of its intangible character. If the managers know about factors that create motivation, they can induce employees to work harder, faster, more efficiently and with greater enthusiasm by tailoring job assignments as per needs of the employees.

INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC DETERMINANTS OF MOTIVATION

In order to understand the basic motivational process, it is useful to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is the motivation that results from an individual's need to be competent and self-determining. Intrinsically motivated tasks are those that are interesting and enjoyable to perform, irrespective of external rewards. Extrinsic motivators are those external stimuli that induce a person to perform with the desire for gratification. Intrinsic motivation is always better as it deals with performance at a higher plane⁵.

² Motivation, OB Compendium Vol II,” College of Defence Management, Secunderabad, 2022, P 14

³ <https://www.businessmanagementideas.com/management/theories-of-management/Theories of Motivation in Management/18448> accessed on 27 Apr 23 at 1945 h

⁴ Motivation to learn: an overview of contemporary theories by David A Cook & Anthony R Artino Jr⁴.

⁵ An Empirical Study of Motivation in The Indian Air Force Jagdeep Singh* Journal of Defence Studies, Vol 3. No 4. October 2009 page 131

WHAT IS MILITARY MOTIVATION?

As for military motivation, it's the force that makes military men to keep trying when the challenges seem overwhelming or nearly impossible. It's what keeps them engaged for as long as they 're needed. Military motivation comes into play when they have a mission to accomplish, duty nights, or are standing watch on very little sleep. Military motivation is special because, more often than not, lives, freedoms, and security are at stake.

The Defence Services have unique conditions like risky nature of job, difficult and hazardous working conditions, frequent job rotation & periodic transfers. It is an accepted fact that in the current global security scenario, armed forces the world over have to be ready always to launch into combat at a moment's notice. A case in point is the recent Pulwama attacks. The defence forces have to ready to launch a suitable riposte if so desired by the political leadership of the country. The defence personnel guard the country's borders and airspace, patrol the high seas, fight wars, fight with terrorists, assist in peacekeeping forces and in calamities. They serve the country with selfless devotion, dignity and honour, often paying with their own lives in their line of duty⁶.

Motivation is a key factor in enabling conventional armies to win conflicts. On numerous occasions, quantitatively inferior armies have been able to gain the upper hand because of their fighting spirit, aggressiveness, and relatively buoyant high morale. No matter how much energy is put into training the soldier, the outcome will constantly be low combat performance, if he is not adequately motivated. This means that individual actions, human imperfections, performance thresholds, and differing personalities will still influence and determine a conflict's outcome. Therefore, an understanding of motivation and application of effective leadership merits special importance in Defence Services.

UNIQUE MILITARY MOTIVATION CHALLENGES

Often military personnel may have to do that job in harsh, unfamiliar environments, or in small spaces, with lots of gear, usually under extremely stressful and urgent situations. Facing the unknown is a commonplace in the military, but there are some known ways to prepare themselves for their job in the service. They 're *always* on duty, as long as they are part of the military. If they 're out on a mission or even if they are on peace time break, their military duties are never far away. They have to conduct themselves according to military rules and customs or face the consequences of non-adherence from their superiors. As a military, there is a constant need for them to adapt. They'll be faced with new job tasks, unfamiliar environments, new team, new living quarters, new missions, and new supervisors continually and they have to adapt and survive, and perform.

Some military jobs pose extreme Physical Challenges and demand exceptional physical strength and endurance. The intense mental challenges you might face can be as difficult to overcome as the physical ones. The urgency of the mission comes with dangers, critical timelines, and strict confidentiality and brings about unbearable mental stress on the soldiers. This increases their need for motivation even more.

⁶ ibid page 132

Military men need to have a flexible mindset, but they'll also need a steady source of motivation on which they can rely on in any situation. The only motivation that meets this requirement is *intrinsic motivation*. They have to find reasons within themselves for dealing with all of these major adjustments. A report titled, *Intrinsic Motivation in the Military: Models and Strategic Importance*⁷ states that the potential benefits of intrinsic task motivation and self-management include, at the individual level, flexibility, adaptation, responsiveness, innovation, learning, and satisfaction. These, in turn, are expected to lead to enhanced retention and readiness, at individual and unit levels.

Why do they fight? Two prime sources for combat motivation that emerged in a study carried out in the US army to understand soldier's motivations to fight in Iraq are – *unit cohesion and the pride of being part of a professional army*. Today's American soldiers trust each other, they trust their leaders, they trust the Army, and they also understand the moral dimensions of war. Notions of freedom, democracy, and liberty were voiced by soldiers as key factors in combat motivation⁸. The findings of this study are equally applicable for Indian Armed forces too, as India too is a democracy and these values have traditionally held more influence in Indian military.

The interaction between our physical and socio-cultural environment shapes our potentialities. Needs and desires prompt behaviour to achieve the desired objectives with both internal and external inputs. The interaction of these elements in the motivation process is shown in Fig 1.

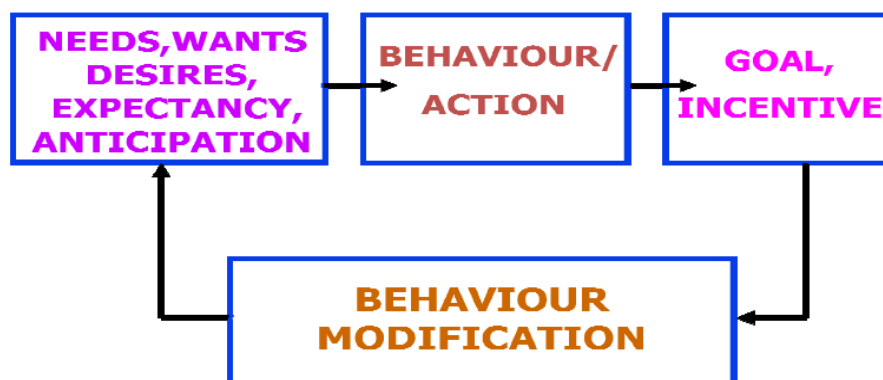


Fig 1. Process of Motivation

To understand the theoretical construct of the motivational aspects of the armed forces, a few important theories are dealt in brief in the succeeding paragraphs.

All human motivation theories are broadly classified into three categories as follows: -

- Theories based on human needs (theories by Maslow, Herzberg and McClelland).
- Theories based on human nature (theories by McGregor, Urwick and Argyris); and

⁷ Intrinsic Motivation in the Military: Models and Strategic Importance by Kenneth Thomas and Erik Jansen

⁸ Leonard Wong, Thomas A. Kolditz, Raymond A. Millen, Terrence M. Potter, Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War Study by Strategic Studies Institute USA, 2003. Page 23

- Theories based on the expectancy of human beings (theories by Vroom and Porter and Lawler). In this paper, I would restrict my study to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory, Herzberg's Motivation-Maintenance Theory, McClelland's Theory of Need Motivation and McGregor's Theory X/ Theory Y and examine their relevance to Military Motivation.

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

The best-known theory of motivation is probably Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory. He proposed that people are motivated by a predictable five-step hierarchy of needs. According to Maslow, most individuals are not consciously aware of these needs; yet we all supposedly proceed up the hierarchy of needs, one level at a time⁹. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory is based on the premise that man has needs which motivate him when they are unsatisfied, which can be arranged in a hierarchy of importance. The hierarchy of needs can be diagrammatically represented as shown in Fig 2.

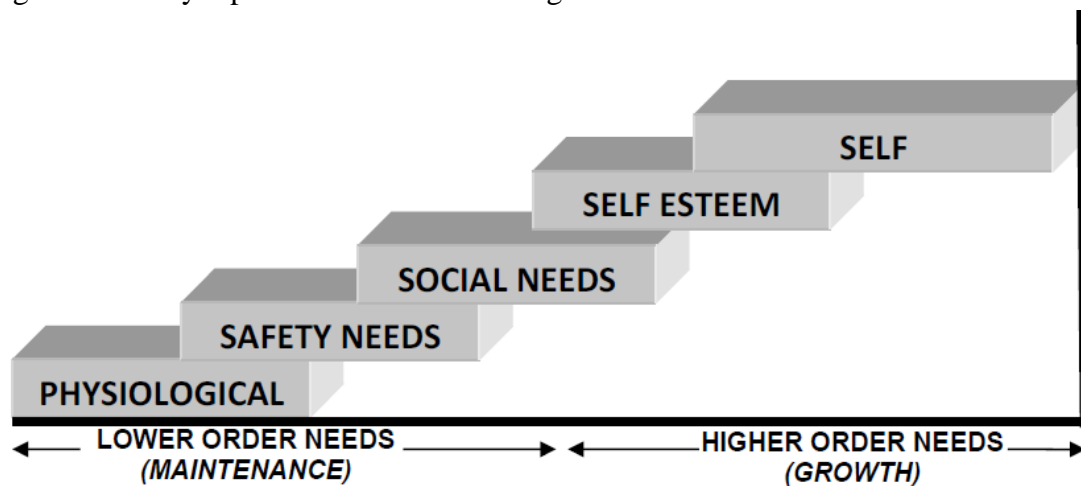


Fig 2. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Propositions of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

- Man is a wanting being – Maslow says that man is a wanting animal, and his needs are never fully satisfied. He always wants and wants more. But what he wants, depends upon what he already has.
- A hierarchy of needs – Human needs differ in importance and can, therefore, be arranged in a series of levels—a hierarchy or pyramid. Some needs are more important than others.
- Emergence of needs – An individual's needs at a particular level on the hierarchy emerge only when the lower-level needs are reasonably well-satisfied.
- Progression of needs – Maslow says that once a person has moved from a lower level of needs to a higher level, the lower-level needs assume a less important role.
- Deprivation and domination – Needs do not have to be 100 percent satisfied, before higher needs emerge. They only have to be satisfied enough, "satisfied". According to Maslow, only needs that have not been satisfied, exert any considerable force on what a man does.

⁹ <https://www.businessmanagementideas.com/management/theories-of-management/Theories of Motivation in Management/18448> accessed on 30 Apr 23 at 1130 h

- Gratification and activation – Maslow says that only unsatisfied needs generate motivating behaviour. A satisfied need is not a motivator of behaviour. Once a certain need is satisfied, it ceases to be a motivating factor.
- Physiological needs are the highest priority – These are the needs that must be satisfied on a priority basis because they are essential to maintain life. These are more finite than the higher-level needs (ego, esteem or social needs).
- Self-fulfilment/ Self-actualization need can never be achieved and is very difficult to satisfy. These are the individual's needs for realizing one's own potentialities, for self- fulfillment, for self-development.

MASLOW'S FIVE CLASSES OF NEEDS

- **Physiological Needs.** At the bottom of the hierarchy are needs based on physical drives. These include the needs for food, water, sleep, and sex. Fulfillment of these lowest-level needs enables the man to survive.
- **Safety Needs.** Once the physiological needs are reasonably satisfied, safety needs, which consist of physical safety needs against fire, accident, murder, criminal assault or any other danger and emotional safety needs for security against fear, tensions, frustrations, favoritism, unemployment, etc., become important.
- **Social or Love Needs.** These needs relate to social processes, relationships or belongingness. When persons physiological and safety needs are satisfied, social needs become important motivators of behaviour.
- **Esteem Needs / Ego needs.** These are of two types- (a) self- esteem needs include self-respect, self-confidence, achievement, competence, independence and freedom and feeling of personal worth, and (b) esteem for others refers to need for status, power, prestige, recognition, awards etc. These needs can be satisfied through promotions, praise, job positions etc.
- **Self-Actualization Needs.** These are the highest level of Maslow's hierarchy involves self-realization needs and reflect our desires to realize our full potential. It is related to self-concept and gives self-fulfillment. It requires continuous self-development.

After describing these five classes, Maslow separated these five needs into higher and lower levels. Physiological and safety needs were described as lower-order needs, and social, esteem, and self-actualization needs were called as higher-order needs. This difference was made to emphasize that the higher-order needs are satisfied internally, whereas lower-order needs are mainly satisfied externally.

Maslow says that a higher-order need arises only when a lower-level need is completely satisfied. Only unsatisfied needs motivate behaviour. A man gets motivation only when he is deprived of or threatened with deprivation of some need. A satisfied need ceases to be a motivator.

In the final analysis, it can be said that Maslow's need theory is not a perfect answer in work motivation. Yet the theory, as Fred Luthans has observed, "Does make a significant contribution in terms of making management aware of the diverse needs of humans at work. The number and names of the levels are not important nor is the hierarchical concept. What is

important is the fact that humans in the workplace have diverse motives.” Thus, a manager can motivate people by satisfying their needs¹⁰.

Application of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs to Military Motivation

Maslow had assumed that unless the lower order physiological and security needs are met, the higher order needs like belonging, esteem, and self-actualisation, which really contribute to Organisational effectiveness, would fail to motivate an individual. As far as the militaries are concerned, the relative importance of these needs and their interplay *changes* during peace and war/ hostilities. During war/hostilities, there is a requirement for higher order needs of Esteem and Self actualisation, to play an important role in motivating individuals to undertake challenging tasks. This interplay of needs at the time of joining, during peace and war is as shown in figure 3.

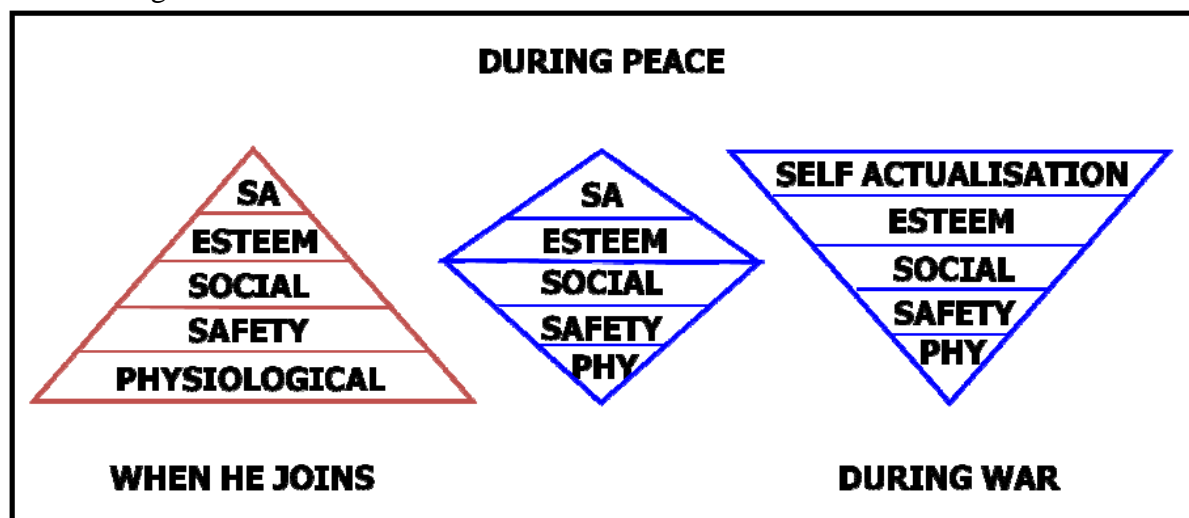


Fig 3. Motivation needs of a Soldier

McClelland’s Theory of Need Motivation¹¹

McClelland’s need theory believes that needs are learnt or acquired by the kinds of events, people experienced in their environment and culture. He found that people, who acquire a particular need, behave differently from those who have not acquired the need .

The three needs as identified by McClelland are as follows: -

Need for Achievement “n Ach”

Need for achievement is a behaviour directed towards competition with a standard of excellence. McClelland found that people with a high need for achievement perform better than those with a moderate or low need for achievement and noted regional/national differences in achievement motivation¹².

¹⁰ <https://www.businessmanagementideas.com/management/theories-of-management/Theories of Motivation in Management/18448> accessed on 30 Apr 23 at 1130 h

¹¹ <https://www.businessmanagementideas.com/management/theories-of-management/Theories of Motivation in Management/18448> accessed on 30 Apr 23 at 1730 h

¹² Motivation, OB Compendium Vol II, Op cit, P34

McClelland identified the following three characteristics of high-need achievers:

- High-need achievers have a strong desire to assume personal responsibility for performing a task or finding a solution to a problem.
- High-need achievers tend to set moderately difficult goals and take calculated risks.
- High-need achievers have a strong desire for performance feedback.

Need for Power “n Pow”

The need for power is concerned with making an impact on others, the desire to influence others, the urge to change people and the desire to make a difference in life. People with a high need for power are people who like to be in control of people and events. People who have a high need for power are characterized by the following: -

- A desire to influence and direct somebody else.
- A desire to exercise control over others.
- A concern for maintaining leader-follower relations.

Need for Affiliation “n Aff”

The need for affiliation is defined as a desire to establish and maintain friendly and warm relations with other people. The need for affiliation, in many ways, is similar to Maslow’s social needs.

The people with high need for affiliation have the following characteristics:-

- They have a strong desire for acceptance and approval from others.
- They tend to conform to the wishes of those people whose friendship and companionship they value.
- They value the feelings of others.

Relevance of McClelland theory of Need Affiliation to Military Motivation Achievement need is that need which motivates a commander to push for performance, ensure greater effectiveness of functioning and a high performance. However, *a leader with a high degree of Achievement need, will be a poor team leader*. Affiliation need assists the commander in assessing the degree of pressure he can exercise on his men for achieving the organizational objective. An overdose of this desire may result in a high concern for people, instead of task performance. High need power can manifest itself as use of power for personal aggrandisement and authoritative manner of functioning. Subordinates working with them have a feeling that they are being used not for the benefit of the organisation, but for the advancement of career prospects of the commander.

Herzberg’s Two Factors Theory of Motivation¹³

Frederick Herzberg classified people’s needs into Motivators and Hygiene factors, each influencing human behaviour in a different way as shown in Fig 4. *Motivators* are linked to the content of the job and result in intrinsic motivation. *Hygiene or Maintenance factors* are related to the context of their jobs and the work environment.

- **Hygiene Factors** – that can de-motivate if they are not present – such as supervision, interpersonal relations, physical working conditions, and salary. Hygiene factors affect the level of dissatisfaction, but are rarely quoted as creators of job satisfaction.

¹³ Motivation, OB Compendium Vol II, Op cit, P38

- **Motivation Factors** – that will motivate if they are present – such as achievement, advancement, recognition, and responsibility. Dissatisfaction isn't normally blamed on motivation factors, but they are cited as the cause of job satisfaction.

So, once the Hygiene factors are satisfied, providing more of them won't generate much more motivation, but lack of the motivation factors won't by themselves demotivate. There are clear relationships to Maslow here, but Herzberg's ideas really shaped modern thinking about reward and recognition in major companies. Employees' satisfaction and dissatisfaction stem from different sources. Dissatisfaction results from the absence of what Herzberg calls hygiene factors like – salary, relationship with others, etc. Satisfaction results from the presence of motivating factors like – opportunities, etc. The supervisor has control of many of the motivating factors, including recognition, responsibility, advancement, and personal growth.

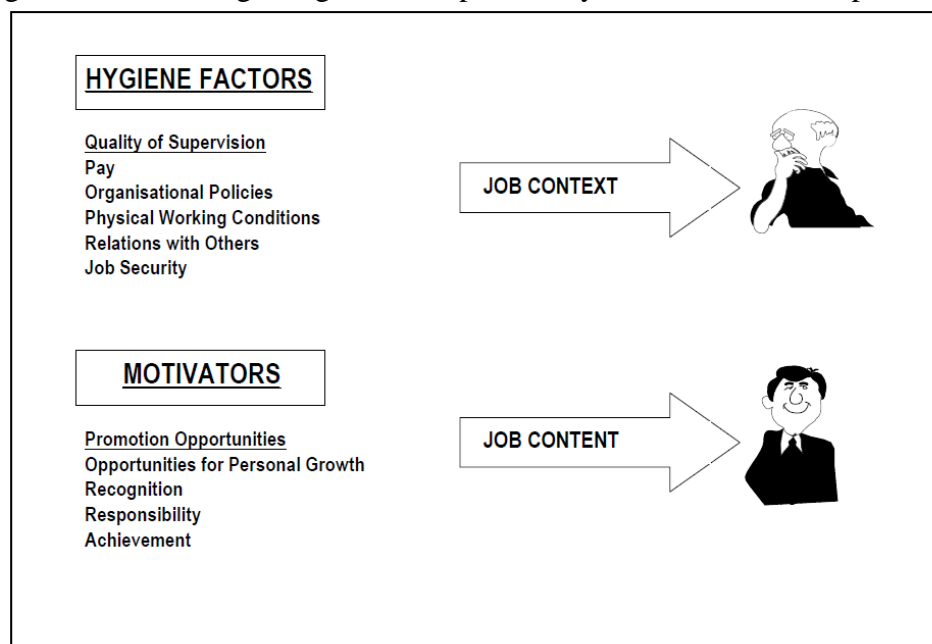


Fig 4. Herzberg's Two Factors Theory of Motivation

Herzberg's Two Factors Theory and its Relevance to Military Motivation *Motivators* are linked to the content of the job and result in intrinsic motivation. *Hygiene or Maintenance factors* are related to the context of their jobs and the work environment. Therefore, when the content of defence services jobs is improved in terms of making them more challenging, the intrinsic desire of our men to do well is aroused and they produce better results. But when attention to contextual factors like working conditions, status and interpersonal relations is paid, the existing levels of motivation can be prevented from going down.

McGregor's X and Y Theory of Motivation

Douglas McGregor formulated two distinct views of human being based on participation of workers. The first theory is basically negative, labelled Theory X and the other theory is basically positive, labelled Theory Y.

Theory X is the traditional view of direction and control, is based on the following assumptions: -

- People are by nature indolent. That is, they like to work as little as possible.
- People lack ambition, dislike responsibility, and prefer to be directed by others.
- People are inherently self-centered and indifferent to organizational needs and goals.
- People are generally gullible and not very sharp and bright.
- As a result, most people have to be coerced, controlled, and threatened if they are to put in enough effort to achieve the Organisational goals.
- In fact, the average person prefers to be directed, avoids responsibility, isn't ambitious and simply seeks security.

Theory Y is based on the integration of individual and organisational goals and assumes the following: -

- The physical and mental effort of work is as natural as play or rest, so the average person doesn't inherently dislike work.
- We are capable of self-direction and self-control, so those factors don't necessarily have to come from elsewhere.
- Our commitment to an objective is a function of the rewards for its achievement.
- The average person learns not only to accept, but to seek responsibility.
- Most people have a capacity for imagination, ingenuity, and creativity.
- The intellectual potential of most people is underused in modern industrial life.
- People are not by nature, passive or resistant to organizational goals.
- They want to assume responsibility.
- They want their organization to succeed.
- People are capable of directing their own behaviour.
- They have a need for achievement.

Relevance of McGregor's two factor theory to Military Motivation. What McGregor tried to highlight through his theory X and theory Y, is to outline the extremes within which the organizational man is usually seen to behave. The fact remains that no organizational man would actually belong either to theory X or theory Y. In reality, he/she shares the traits of both. What actually happens is that man swings from one set of properties to the other with changes in his mood and motives in changing environment. The military personnel would need to operate more in theory Y as it only the self-motivation that can lead them to face the major challenges that the profession of military duties would impose on them. There are some areas of military functioning wherein the Theory X behaviour of the individuals would be detrimental to the efficiency of the services and would have to be corrected.

The leadership models that would be required, is also determined by which theory of motivation is in operation. Theory X emphasises scalar chain system and centralisation of authority in the organisation while theory Y emphasises decentralisation and greater participation in the decision-making process. Theory X emphasises autocratic leadership; theory Y emphasises democratic and supportive leadership styles. Theory Y is not a soft option.

In fact, it can take as much management effort as Theory X, but the effects of a Theory Y approach will last longer.

CONCLUSION

Economic affluence and changing social structure are bringing about a major change in human attitudes. As material achievement takes priority, over ethical and value constructs, there is a change in human attitudes towards life. As human attitude changes, his approach to work and relationships changes. The twenty first century is seeing a major shift in the way human beings and nations interact with each other. The way nation's fight each other, is undergoing a change, and nature and dimensions of human conflict is undergoing a major transformation. The wars are becoming more impersonal and technologically intense. As a result, the human value construct and approach to destruction and loss of human lives, is undergoing an upheaval.

All the human motivational theories discussed in the paper are relevant even in modern times. While the human motivation continues to be driven by his needs, his nature and his expectations, the application of these theories in practice need to be upgraded. As a nation attains adequate economic growth, the contribution of the basic needs in motivating a person would reduce. The changing human values and ethical construct will result in a shift in the impact of various motivational elements. The military motivation methodologies have to keep in tune with the modern times and military leaders need to apply them in an innovative and practical manner. This becomes important due to the fact that the military services are most dependent on motivational aspects of their constituents to deliver their Organisational commitments.

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