

8.25: McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory

Learning Objectives

- Describe how employees might be motivated using McClelland's acquired needs theory



Psychologist **David McClelland's acquired-needs theory** splits the needs of employees into three categories rather than the two we discussed in Herzberg's theory. These three categories are **achievement**, **affiliation**, and **power**.

Employees who are strongly *achievement-motivated* are driven by the desire for mastery. They prefer working on tasks of moderate difficulty in which outcomes are the result of their effort rather than luck. They value receiving feedback on their work.

Employees who are strongly *affiliation-motivated* are driven by the desire to create and maintain social relationships. They enjoy belonging to a group and want to feel loved and accepted. They may not make effective managers because they may worry too much about how others will feel about them.

Employees who are strongly *power-motivated* are driven by the desire to influence, teach, or encourage others. They enjoy work and place a high value on discipline. However, they may take a zero-sum approach to group work—for one person to win, or succeed, another must lose, or fail. If channeled appropriately, though, this can positively support group goals and help others in the group feel competent.

The acquired-needs theory doesn't claim that people can be neatly categorized into one of three types. Rather, it asserts that all people are motivated by all of these needs in varying degrees and proportions. An individual's balance of these needs forms a kind of profile that can be useful in creating a tailored motivational paradigm for her. It is important to note that needs do not necessarily correlate with competencies; it is possible for an employee to be strongly affiliation-motivated, for example, but still be successful in a situation in which her affiliation needs are not met.

McClelland proposes that those in top management positions generally have a high need for power and a low need for affiliation. He also believes that although individuals with a need for achievement can make good managers, they are not generally suited to being in top management positions.

Practice Question

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/14434>

Contributors and Attributions

CC licensed content, Original

- Revision and adaptation. **Authored by:** Linda Williams and Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)
- Practice Question. **Authored by:** Nina Burokas. **Provided by:** Lumen Learning. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

CC licensed content, Shared previously

- Boundless Management. **Provided by:** Boundless. **Located at:** <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-management/>. **License:** [CC BY-SA: Attribution-ShareAlike](#)
- Chess Player Props. **Authored by:** John Ragai. **Provided by:** Flickr. **Located at:** <https://www.flickr.com/photos/johnragai/48691729708/>. **License:** [CC BY: Attribution](#)

8.25: McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory is shared under a [not declared](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by LibreTexts.

- 23.8: McClelland's Acquired Needs Theory has no license indicated.