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## **Management Theory: X, Y, Z and Maslow**

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In 1943, Abraham Maslow proposed a simple psychological theory on human needs as they relate to motivation and the order in which they progress. First, a person is motivated by physiological needs: air, food, water, sleep and comfort. Progressing from there comes safety (personal, financial, health), then love and friendship (belonging), then esteem (respect), and finally self-actualization. These needs are determinate and specifically ordered, so one cannot be met before the one preceding it (i.e., you cannot be motivated to seek love and friendship if you are thirsty and starving).

In management, X, Y and Z are theories of human motivation relating to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and how human behavior and motivation are factors in productivity. They describe how management style is influenced by the perception that managers hold of their employees. Pioneers in the development of these theories include Douglas McGregor for X and Y and Dr. William Ouchi and W. J. Reddin for Z.

Very basically, theory X subscribes to the position that employees dislike and try to avoid work, so management needs to control, motivate and closely supervise the workforce. Theory Y maintains the outlook that under conducive conditions employees are self-motivated, enjoy work and will seek opportunities to excel. Therefore, theory Y managers establish a climate of trust with the workforce, involving employees in decision-making, allowing them to exercise their talents and seek out further responsibilities. Theory Z derives from theory Y, promoting employee loyalty, concern and security, both in and out of work.

Generally, organizations adopt one of these primary theories as their management approach to human capital. However, this ignores the tenets of Maslow's hierarchy of needs for which they are modeled. When you apply a specific management theory to a culture – as so many companies end up doing – whether cognitively or incidentally, you are attempting to find people who respond to a set value on a spectrum of motivational needs. Adopting a specific style of management on the presumption that everyone operates from the same psychological caliber of needs is a recipe for frustration and turnover.

Am I saying that it is management's responsibility to adopt different managerial approaches towards individuals based on what their motivating psychological need is?

Precisely. In some ways, we automatically do this without thinking. We finance a person's ability to meet the first few basic needs on Maslow's hierarchy. Employees get hired to produce a certain amount of needed work at a business and in return (hopefully) get enough money to secure nourishment, lodging and a varying amount of safety. Usually, the higher the salary, the easier it is for someone to progress up this hierarchy to secure the needs of belonging and esteem, and so

on, because they are able to secure more resources, assistance and stability. But all motivational needs cannot be met with money alone.

The truth is that leaders develop unique relationships with those that work for them. All relationships lie on a variable spectrum. Theory X is a spectrum. Theory Y is a spectrum. Theory Z is a spectrum. Because a person's behaviors are a spectrum and their motivational needs are a spectrum. So while you would be hard-pressed to find a self-actualized starving person, you would also be hard-pressed to find anyone with complete satisfaction in any single category of motivational need.

To put it another way, I am more or less secure on any given day with my physical needs, so I am more or less concerned for my safety, which leaves me more or less able to function well in my relationships, which makes me more or less feel good about myself, which makes me more or less able to consider what my life is about or where I am going. Therefore, I am going to respond more or less effectively to any one management style. But I will have a better time at it if the management style is flexible enough and/or tailored towards my variable state of motivational needs...more or less.

I realize that this analysis is not without complexity or controversy. It would be simple if we could just boil it all down to a specific theory, put on our favorite managerial helmet, and watch the revolving door of human capital spin until we get the right people to fit our workplace culture. But dumbing down our perceptions of the complexity of human relationships is inefficient and wasteful. You can have a general framework for culture in an organization. But effective management will also establish individual relationships, establish individual expectation, and establish individual parameters. In essence, manage the spectrum of motivation.

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