Analysis of mcgregor, alderfer and murray’s motivation theories and their applicability in the military

Grigor Grigorov
Vasil Levski National Military University, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria
E-mail address: gbgrigorov@nvu.bg

Abstract: The article discusses some of the content motivational theories, examining their applicability in military organisation. The purpose of the report is to analyse the theories of McGregor, Alderfer and Murray rather than indicate the best approach for motivation. The results of the analysis will contribute to a clearer understanding of military motivation and provide guidance that commanders and chiefs could use to enhance their own motivational style.

Keywords: MOTIVATION, THEORIES, MILITARY.

1. Introduction

In scientific literature, there is a large number of theories of motivation which reflect the views of their authors. Each of them aims to explain why people behave in a certain way, but nevertheless, none of them provides a generally accepted explanation of human behaviour due to the complexity of human nature. Our goal is to look at some of the most popular content theories, rather than point out the best approach to motivation, by refracting them through the prism of military organisation. This would contribute to a clearer understanding of military motivation and provide guidance that commanders and chiefs will be able to use to improve their own motivational style.

Different classifications of theories of motivation can be found in literature depending on the author’s point of view. The most popular of them is developed by L. Mullins [1], who divides theories into two basic groups: content and process. Content theories are aimed at determining what in the individual or environment stimulates and maintains a certain behaviour. This behaviour is seen as a result of the influence of external environment, which encourages certain actions. This group of theories explains what specific things motivate people.

On the other hand, process theories try to explain and describe the essence of motivation as a process. The process of stimulating, directing, maintaining and finally stopping certain behaviour. Process theories first attempt to describe the underlying changing needs to explain choice, effort, and persistence.

The authors of content theories consider motivation in terms of its content characteristics. Hence, the name of this group of theories. It is assumed that from a content point of view, motivation is associated with the mechanism of action of human needs.

In this report, we will examine the content motivational theories of McGregor, Alderfer, and Murray through the prism of their applicability in military organisation.

2. Content theories of motivation of McGregor, Alderfer and Murray

2.1. McGregor’s theory of X and Y

Douglas McGregor is a representative of content motivational theories. He was influenced by the ideas of humanistic psychology and the theory of human needs of his predecessor Maslow. Based on them, McGregor developed and presented his theory X and Y for the first time in 1957 in his article The Human Side of Enterprise [2], and later expanded and published it as a book with the same title in 1960. [2] In it, he examines the shortcomings of the then-traditional concept of management, presenting its characteristics and calling it Theory X.

Theory X is based on the assumptions that people are by nature lazy, unambitious and frivolous. They do not like to take responsibility and prefer to be guided. In addition, they are self-centred and indifferent to organisational needs. They usually resist change by being gullible and willing to be manipulated. Therefore, they must be persuaded, rewarded, punished, controlled and their activities must be directed by managers. [2] For their part, managers are responsible for providing money, materials, equipment, directing staff with the intention of achieving economic goals. Without the active intervention of management, employees would be passive and not sharing organisational goals. Therefore, managers need to manage, motivate and control employees in order to change their behaviour in a direction that meets organisational needs.

After describing the characteristics of Theory X, McGregor presents his arguments refuting its adequacy to the changed organisational environment. Like Maslow, he believes that when a person satisfies his lower-level needs, they are no longer able to motivate him. Once managers have met physiological needs as well as protection and security needs, motivation shifts to social and selfish needs. However, if the job does not provide opportunities to satisfy them, then employees will experience deprivation that will affect their behaviour. Under such conditions, if managers continue to focus their attention on physiological needs, their efforts will be ineffective. [2]

When people cannot meet their higher-level needs, they tend to fill the vacuum of their lack with more money. They will demand more money, making it more important than ever to buy material goods and services that provide limited satisfaction of frustrated needs. And although money has only a limited ability to meet many higher-level needs, if it is the only means available, it can become a centre of interest.

McGregor’s theory consistently argues for the effectiveness of the ‘hard and soft approach’ and the carrot-and-stick approach, arguing that once a person reaches an adequate level of subsistence, he is motivated primarily by higher needs. But the leader could not provide a person with respect, self-respect or self-realisation. The leader can only create conditions that encourage and facilitate their occurrence or prevent and prohibit their occurrence. Therefore, the author is of the opinion that the philosophy of management through guidance and control, regardless of its nature (hard or soft), is inadequate to motivate the needs of a higher order, and this requires the use of a new approach that he calls Theory Y.

Theory Y is based on the assumptions that people are by nature active, self-managing, and sharing organisational needs as a result of working in an organisation. They are motivated, seeking development, ready to take responsibility and pursue organisational goals. These attitudes are not a consequence of managerial pressure, but a result of the opportunity provided by management for employees themselves to recognise and develop their own abilities. [2] The managers’ main responsibility is to provide such conditions and way of working that employees achieve maximum performance of their own goals while directing their efforts to achieve organisational ones. In other words, managers need to ensure maximum integration of personal to organisational goals.
McGregor offers some guidelines for implementing Theory Y. Among them is the granting of a certain freedom of action and delegation of powers, which stimulates taking responsibility. Another way to enrich the work, making it more challenging and interesting and providing opportunities to meet social and selfish needs. In addition, providing opportunities for participation and consultation in decision-making would help to develop employees' creative thinking and their involvement in organisational goals.

McGregor's Theory X and Y makes a significant contribution to understanding how leaders need to think and act in order to motivate their employees. For this reason, Theory Y remains largely relevant today, even in the military. Many examples of high financial results can be found in civil practice, but the same cannot be said for satisfied employees. In military circles, the situation is no different. In the search for people to fill the vacancies in the army and to keep those who want to leave it, the leaders at the Ministry of Defence are looking for the right formula for motivating servicemen. An attempt to do this is to improve the financial situation of the military by increasing salaries. However, it seems to be insufficient to attract new staff and retain mostly young people. The situation of the military by increasing salaries. However, it seems to be insufficient to attract new staff and retain mostly young people. As McGregor shares, after satisfying the lower needs, it becomes necessary to satisfy the higher ones. That is, it is necessary to pay attention to the enrichment of the work itself. To look for options to provoke creative thinking by providing some freedom of action, delegation of responsibilities and integration of staff to organisational goals, not in a violent way but in a way that provokes the individual to do it voluntarily. This could be achieved by examining the needs and abilities of the particular military, and subsequently set him such tasks that best fit his individual profile and bring him satisfaction with their implementation.

2.2. Alderfer's E.R.G. theory

Another well-known content theory was developed by Alderfer under the name E. R. G. (Existence, Relatedness, Growth). Unlike Maslow, but in a similar way to McClelland, Alderfer divides needs into three groups [3]:

E. – existence needs: these include all material and physiological needs, such as food, water, air, clothing, safety, physical love and affection. They cover the first two levels in Maslow's hierarchy.

R. – relatedness needs: these cover social communication, respect from others, and relationships with family, friends, colleagues and employers. It means being respected and feeling secure as part of a group or family. These are the needs of the third and part of the fourth level of Maslow.

G. – growth needs: these include self-esteem and self-actualisation. They encourage a person to have a creative and productive behaviour, to search for the ideal self. They correspond to the rest of Maslow's fourth and fifth levels.

Alderfer is aware of the differences in the needs of individual people and therefore gives a different degree of specificity for each group, which decreases in ascending order. Thus, the needs of existence are the most specific and the easiest to identify. The needs for connectivity are less specific than those for existence and depend on the relationships between people. Finally, growth needs are the least specific, as their specific goals depend on the uniqueness of each person.

It should be noted that the author of the theory places three fundamental relationships between the different categories in his theory.

Satisfaction – progress. This is the connection showing the transition to higher-level needs based on satisfied needs. According to Maslow, the progress of satisfaction plays an important role, and people move up the hierarchy of needs as a result of satisfying lower-level needs. According to Alderfer’s theory of E.R.G., this is not mandatory. Moving upwards from commitment to the pursuit of growth does not presuppose the satisfaction of the individual's needs for existence.

Frustration – regression. If the need for a higher level remains unmet, one can return to lower-level needs that seem easier to satisfy. This connection suggests that the already satisfied need can become active again when the higher-level need is not met. Thus, if one falls in one's attempts to satisfy growth, the need for commitment may reappear as a key motivator.

Satisfaction – strengthening. This connection shows the active strengthening of the satisfied needs at the current level. This happens when there is a failure to meet the needs at a higher level. Then the already satisfied need can maintain the satisfaction or actively strengthen the needs of a lower level.

Although the theory of E.R.G. considers needs like Maslow's theory, there are differences between them in many respects. In Alderfer’s theory, it is not required to meet the needs of a lower level in order to move to a higher level. Another difference between the theories is that if a relatively larger need is not met, the desire to satisfy a less significant one will increase (i.e., dissatisfaction with meeting high-order needs can lead a person to regress to more specific ones). The theory of E.R.G. allows the order of needs to differ from person to person. For example, a starving artist may place the needs of growth above those of existence.

In the process of work, managers need to recognise simultaneously the emerging needs of their subordinates. According to Alderfer's theory, focusing on satisfying only one need at a time will not motivate people. In addition, the frustration-regression relationship affects workplace motivation. For example, if employees are not given opportunities for growth, they can return to the needs of commitment and socialise more with colleagues. This example justifies managers trying to identify the needs of their subordinates in a timely manner in order to take steps to meet unmet/frustrated needs until the employee is able to pursue growth again.

Financial incentives can satisfy the need for growth and recognition from others. In this theory, it can be clearly seen that financial incentives can be used indirectly to meet other human needs through their perceived value and effect on other people. Providing financial incentives alone is not a guarantee that the remaining needs of employees will be met, and if this happens, according to the theory of E.R.G., employees will not be motivated.

Aldfer’s theory is easy to understand and apply primarily because of its simplicity. In the context of a military organisational unit, it could be useful for commanders and chiefs in terms of better recognizing and understanding the needs of their subordinates, and in particular those of growth. In the new concept for the development of servicemen, the development from the lowest to the highest level in the military career is theoretically possible. Although in practice this is difficult to achieve, even with the increasing length of military service, the opportunities for development in the military remain relatively large compared to those in other civilian professions. For this reason, military leaders need to help meet the need for growth. In case of impossibility to satisfy it, it is necessary to provide compensation for the failed need by strengthening the importance of the last one satisfied, with empathy and connection to the team, until a new opportunity appears to realise the higher need. Besides, progress needs to be fairly stimulated, not simply supported arbitrarily or by lobbyists. The unjust progress of some servicemen, aided by their superiors and commanders, plays the role of an exceptional demotivator for others. This necessitates the elaboration and implementation of clear rules for career development.
2.3. Henry Murray's system of needs

At the heart of his theory, Henry Murray [4] puts the understanding that man is motivated by a system of diverse needs. He believes that human development is accompanied by a change in his needs, through which he shows and realises himself. The difference between the theories of Murray and Maslow is that Murray does not rank needs in a hierarchical order, and according to him they number twenty, individually or in combination predetermining human behaviour. The classification of needs according to Murray is as follows:

- Achievement – overcoming difficulties on the way to success;
- Humiliation – power over someone else in a manipulative or other way;
- Bonding – establishing significant social connections to connect with someone as a result of the desire to be loved;
- Aggression – physical and mental harm to someone;
- Counteraction – protection of someone's honour and the feeling of pride in it;
- Respect – willingness to follow someone and a sense of pride in it;
- Defence – defence of one's own personality by apologizing and giving explanations;
- Domination – leadership of others, control over them;
- Show – attracting other people's attention to yourself;
- Challenge – causing an activity or situation that poses danger to others or to the person himself;
- Autonomy – protection of one's own personality and one's own field of expression;
- Avoidance – an attempt to avoid a funny or confusing situation;
- Order – the need to be accurate, neat, precise;
- Growing – helping someone in need, taking constant care of someone;
- Game – relaxation, joking;
- Refusal – underestimation, exclusion of someone from an activity;
- Sensuality – desire for satisfaction;
- Sex – desire for erotic and sexual relationship;
- Support – help for others, support;
- Understanding – protection of connections, abstract ideas, concepts. [4]

Murray's system is a successful attempt to cover extremely comprehensively all the needs that elicit a purposeful human effort. According to Murray, every need consists of two components – direction and strength.

Direction represents what the need is directed to and can be an object, action, individual, etc.

The power of need is the energy that a person puts into satisfying that need. This power is determined by the specific meaning and significance of the need for the individual.

The author believes that only the most important needs of a person can motivate him and make him act so that they are satisfied.

Murray's theory does not specify an algorithm for how to satisfy a need, but it puts human needs into separate groups, which gives a starting point for further research.

In military terms, Murray's theory is of interest and is applicable in terms of changing needs as a result of human development. Studying the changing needs as well as their diversity is important for any commander. Having information about the range of abilities of his subordinates, he could use them as an effective incentive to dictate certain behaviour that will contribute to the implementation of organisational goals. Military leaders need to continually identify the key needs of their subordinates and help meet them. Moreover, they need to influence the strength and direction of the specific needs related to organisational goals, helping to meet them, thereby seeking to obtain a loyal performance of duties by their subordinates.

3. Conclusion

The considered content theories of motivation reflect the views of their authors, contributing to a more complete and comprehensive understanding of human motivation. Each of them has similarities with the others, but also its own characteristics.

McGregor's Theory X and Y emphasises the higher needs and the encouraging and facilitating role of managers their employees to recognise and develop their own abilities. This can be achieved by giving some leeway, delegating powers, enriching work and involving subordinates in the decision-making process.

Alderfer’s theory of E.R.G. considers needs in three groups, but it does not require one to satisfy the needs of a lower level in order to move to a higher one, while allowing the order of needs to differ from person to person. The author places three fundamental interrelations between the different categories in his theory, thus allowing a two-way vertical movement of the individual's needs. From a military point of view, it directs commanders to focus on the needs of subordinates, especially those of growth, in order to motivate them in the performance of their duties.

Murray's theory classifies needs without arranging them in a hierarchical order. An important point in it is that human development is accompanied by a change in individual needs. This requires military leaders to constantly identify, guide, and meet the changing palette of needs of their subordinates, integrating them with organisational goals.

4. References