# Needs

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## NEEDS

The term “need” describes a recurrent concern for a certain type of outcome resulting from individuals’ interactions with their environments. Examples of biological needs are hunger, thirst, sex, or avoidance of bodily harm; examples of psychological needs include social contact, dominance, and curiosity. The common denominator of most biological and psychological needs is that the successful attainment of a need-specific outcome (e.g., food, water, orgasm, interpersonal closeness, high rank, new rewards) is pleasurable and satisfying. Anticipation of the pleasurable end state provides motivational needs with *energy* and *direction*. For instance, hungry individuals invest effort and energy into the procurement of food, but not into the attainment of dominance or social contact. Needs also influence learning and memory by facilitating the retention of behaviors that are instrumental in need satisfaction and the recall of contexts that are associated with need satisfaction or frustration.

Research on individual differences in psychological needs (often called *motives*) has focused on the needs for achievement (n Achievement), power (n Power), and affiliation (n Affiliation). These needs are also labeled *implicit motives*, because they operate outside of a person’s conscious awareness and are assessed indirectly, through empirically derived scoring systems that are used to analyze stories individuals write in response to picture cues. The validity of picture-story measures of implicit motives has been documented by studies relating them to a large array of phenomena, ranging from psychophysiological responses, to measures of mental and physical health, and to societal and historic phenomena. Importantly, implicit motives predict career trajectories, entrepreneurial activities, and managerial success. Moreover, implicit motives do not

correlate with measures of explicit or self-attributed needs assessed per questionnaire. Implicit and explicit motives are activated by different types of cues, predict different types of behavior, and interact in shaping individuals' adjustment and well-being.

**The Power Motive**

The implicit power motive represents a recurring need to have impact on others or the world at large. Findings from longitudinal studies show that power-motivated individuals have more successful careers, as reflected in higher occupational levels attained. In large companies, they are also more likely than other individuals to rise to higher management levels, particularly if they have a strong prosocial power motive. There are two reasons for power-motivated individuals' greater career success: First, a successful career provides prestige and social visibility and therefore satisfies power-motivated individuals' need to have an impact on others. Second, to the extent that the work itself gives power-motivated individuals frequent opportunities to influence and direct others' work, it can provide an outlet on a daily basis for the need to have impact on others and thus promote frequent need satisfaction. Research also shows that power-motivated individuals excel at influencing and leading others. They are particularly adept at using behavioral strategies that project intelligence and competence. As a consequence, they have an easy time persuading others and rallying them to their cause. Research on US presidents has shown that presidents whose inauguration speeches were particularly saturated with n Power were also judged by historians as being the most effective at leading the country.

Depending on the individual's socialization and learning history, n Power can be expressed in prosocial, controlled ways by helping, leading, or teaching others or in

antisocial, uncontrolled ways by coercing, controlling, or aggressing against others. Research suggests that career and management success are frequently associated with controlled forms of power motivation (also called inhibited or socialized power motivation), which enables individuals to be socially successful by taking the long-term consequences of their behavior into account. In contrast, individuals characterized by uncontrolled power motivation are more likely to express their need for impact in impulsive acts, exploitative behavior, and alcohol abuse. Not surprisingly, individuals with this variant of power motivation are less likely to have successful careers or to be promoted to higher management positions.

**The Achievement Motive**

Individuals with a strong implicit achievement motive derive pleasure from doing well or improving on a task. In contrast to power-motivated individuals, who feel comfortable delegating work to others, they want to have complete control of the task and master it on their terms; extrinsic demands for good performance or external interference with the way they want to complete the task can be powerful disincentives for achievement-motivated individuals. Achievement-motivated individuals achieve optimal task performance by setting medium-difficulty, challenging goals and seeking frequent feedback on how well they are doing en route to goal attainment.

The implicit achievement motive is a predictor of several aspects of career success: on average, achievement-motivated individuals earn more, they make more realistic occupational choices, and they tend to be more satisfied with their job than individuals low in achievement. In large companies, achievement-motivated individuals are also more likely to rise to higher management levels, as long as they do not need to

manage large numbers of people and can still make contributions on their own. In contrast to power-motivated individuals, however, they rarely make it to the top management positions, and if they do, they tend not to do well in these positions, because they no longer have direct control over the tasks and goals to be accomplished but have to delegate the actual execution of plans and tasks to others.

Implicit achievement motivation has also been linked to innovation. A strong achievement motive predisposes individuals to constantly seek new, better, and more efficient ways of achieving their goals. As a consequence, the achievement motive has been linked to increases in the U.S. patent index, to the adoption of innovative agricultural practices by farmers in developing countries, and more generally to greater curiosity. High levels of achievement motivation make individuals more interested in and capable of doing well in business, because this line of endeavor requires that one take moderate risks, have personal control over process and outcome, and find new and innovative ways of making and marketing products. It also provides the achievement-motivated person with constant feedback as costs and profits increase or decrease. For achievement-motivated individuals, money is important only to the extent that it reflects how well they are doing in a particular line of business.

**The Affiliation Motive**

People with a strong implicit affiliation motive derive satisfaction from establishing, maintaining, or restoring close, friendly relationships with others. As a consequence, they are more likely to cooperate with and help others and less likely to enjoy competing with, confronting or directing others than individuals low in affiliation motivation. Affiliation-motivated people are also characterized by good interpersonal

skills. In laboratory experiments and naturalistic studies, the affiliation motive has been found to predict good task performance and positive social interactions when affiliation incentives were present (e.g., a warm and friendly instructor or manager), but not when such incentives were absent. Affiliation-motivated individuals tend to have less success than others when they head small companies, and high-affiliation individuals are also less likely than low-affiliation individuals to be promoted to higher management levels in large companies, primarily because they tend to shrink away from conflict and hard decisions regarding personnel. They do tend to excel in integrative management positions, though, because such positions allow them to use their interpersonal skills to resolve conflicts and facilitate cooperation within and between groups.

One reason why affiliation-motivated individuals do not show much evidence of career and managerial success may be that the n Affiliation measure has a strong fear-of-rejection component. In other words, affiliation-motivated individuals are particularly motivated to avoid rejection and try to belong to a group without necessarily aiming at building truly deep and meaningful relationships with others. Researchers have therefore developed a picture-story measure of n Intimacy, which, despite some overlap with n Affiliation, captures a positive, hopeful component of the need for close social contact. Although little research on the effects of n Intimacy on career success exists, some studies suggest that intimacy-motivated individuals have overall better social adjustment and mental health than individuals low in intimacy motivation.

### Differences Between Implicit and Self-Attributed Needs

A large body of research suggests that picture-story measures of implicit needs and questionnaire measures of individuals' self-attributed needs and goals do not

substantially correlate. This means that, for instance, a person can be endowed with a strong implicit power motive without possessing a strong conscious need to dominate, influence, or control others. Likewise, a person can be low in implicit power motivation but endorse many items related to the pursuit of power and dominance on a questionnaire. Of course, the absence of a substantial correlation also means that some people can be high and some can be low in both types of measures.

Whereas implicit motives are hypothesized to be based on affective preferences, that is, on the capacity to experience the consummation of a motive-specific incentive as rewarding and pleasurable, explicit motives are linked to the goals and expectations that are normative for a particular group (e.g., family, peers, society) and that thus focus the individual's decisions and behaviors on what the group deems important and desirable. Explicit motives guide voluntary goal setting and thus can either channel the expression of implicit motives into certain contexts and behaviors or even override motivational impulses, which increases both the flexibility and the stability of behavior. Thus, a crucial difference between implicit and explicit motives is that the former *motivate* and the latter *channel* and *regulate* goal-directed behavior.

Implicit and explicit motives also differ in the types of incentive cues they respond to. Implicit motives respond to task-intrinsic (or activity) incentives, that is, to the pleasure of working on a challenging task in the case of implicit achievement motivation or the pleasure of having friendly conversations with others in the case of implicit affiliation motivation. Explicit motives, in contrast, respond to social-extrinsic incentives, that is, to salient external demands and social norms. For instance, individuals' self-attributed need for achievement becomes can become activated by an

experimenter's explicit instructions to do well on a task and individuals' self-attributed need for affiliation can become a salient guide for behavior if cued by specific demands to be friendly and socialize with others. Some research also suggests that implicit motives are more likely to respond to nonverbal incentive cues than to verbal-symbolic stimuli.

Finally, implicit and explicit motives influence different types of behavior. Implicit motives are particularly likely to show an effect on *non-declarative* or *operant* measures of motivation (i.e., measures that tap into individuals' know-how in operating on their environment), whereas explicit motives and goals have a stronger influence on *declarative* measures of motivation (i.e., measures that assess individuals' self-related "knowing that", or their attitudes, judgments, choices, and decisions). For instance, individuals' implicit need for achievement has been shown to predict their performance on a speed-based achievement task (a non-declarative criterion) but not their decision to continue on the task (a declarative criterion). Conversely, individuals' self-attributed need for achievement has been found to predict the decision to continue on the achievement task, but not their performance on the task itself.

**Interactions between Implicit and Self-Attributed Needs**

There is growing evidence that despite their statistical independence, implicit and explicit needs interact in shaping individuals' well-being and life outcomes. For instance it has been found that individuals whose explicit goal pursuits in a particular motivational domain (e.g., power) are supported by a strong underlying implicit motive disposition experience more motivational well-being upon realizing their goals than individuals whose goals are mismatched with their implicit needs. Both research and theory also suggest that the pursuit of explicit goals becomes effortful and demanding for

individuals' capacity to self-regulate if the goals are not supported by strong implicit needs. Thus, for instance, a person who is committed to the goal of becoming a manager and directing the activities of others, but whose implicit need for power is low, will experience the pursuit and realization of this goal as more difficult and challenging than a person who wants to become a manager *and* has a strong implicit power motive. Because research on the interactions between implicit and explicit needs has just started to gain momentum, it is currently unclear to what extent people are also objectively less successful at realizing explicit goals that are misaligned with their implicit needs and are more likely to suffer from impaired social adjustment and mental health problems. However, it has been demonstrated that individuals can maximize the fit of their explicit goals and their implicit needs if they explore a potential goal experientially (e.g., by vividly fantasizing about the pursuit and attainment of the goal) before deciding on whether to adopt the goal. This suggests that although people often consciously desire outcomes for whose attainment they do not have the necessary implicit motivational resources, they can increase the degree to which their goal choices match their implicit needs through careful exploration of the incentives and disincentives associated with the pursuit of a given goal.

Suggested additional readings

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