

The Psychology Underpinning the Traits ‘Great’ Organisations Share

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Introduction

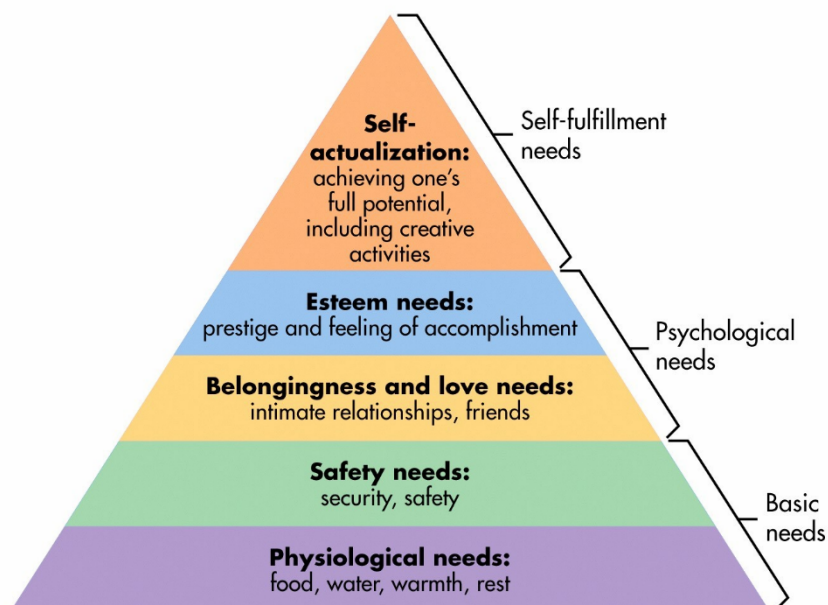
Individuals need to feel that they are doing something worthwhile, otherwise they may feel they ‘must’ do it rather than ‘want’ to do it. Everything an individual does and how well they do it, relies heavily on motivation. It is one of the key driving forces behind human behaviour and can derive from a variety of sources.

There are two kinds of motivation.

- **Intrinsic motivation** is the internal desire to do something for a sense of fulfilment, curiosity, satisfaction and/or self-image.
- **Extrinsic motivation** which is the drive to do something for a reward, compensation or to please others.

Organisations need to develop a positive and successful working environment, to be at the top of their game. Motivation is the key essence that all organisations require to drive employee behaviours, that will facilitate organisational success.

But how can organisations ensure their employees are motivated? Abraham Maslow (1943) suggested that there are five essential needs that motivates people and created the motivational theory “The Hierarchy of Needs”.



Maslow, in his original theory suggests that the lower needs must be satisfied before a person can achieve their potential and self-actualisation. However, Psychologists now theorise motivation as diversified behaviours, whereby needs can operate on many levels simultaneously. A person may be motivated by higher self-fulfilment needs at the same time as the lower level basic of needs (Tay and Diener, 2011).

Method

After conducting an extensive desk research into the traits that ‘great’ organisations share, findings uncovered seven traits that were thriving and consistent within ‘great organisations’ (Simple Usability, 2022).

The key traits comprised of:

- **Trust**
- **Effective communication**
- **Leaders who inspire**
- **A sense of community**
- **Culture, values, and purpose**
- **Investment in people**
- **A focus on health and wellbeing**

This paper will use an adopted version of Maslow’s theory to explain how the model can be used in today’s organisations, regarding employee motivational needs. It will discuss the psychological underpinnings of the ‘Traits ‘Great’ Organisations Share’, and in addition, endeavour to provide a deeper understanding into the different sources of motivation and the human behaviours this will encourage.

Employee Motivational Needs (adapted from Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, 1943)

- **1st Tier - Physiological – Basic Needs** – referring to a comfortable workspace, regular salary, adequate technology, knowledge, and reliable resources to do the job

- **2nd Tier - Safety - Basic Needs** – referring to job security, sick pay, formal contract, safe working environment and organisational security
- **3rd Tier - Belongingness and love – Psychological Needs** – referring to team collaboration, effective communications, positive workplace relationships, trust, and psychological safety
- **4th Tier - Self-esteem - Psychological Needs** – pride in the work, organisational identity, individual development, respect for others, confidence in own capabilities and a sense of purpose
- **5th Tier - Self-actualisation – Self-fulfilment Needs** – empowerment, ownership in the role, striving to reach true potential, mentoring, and fully engaged in the organisation

Traits ‘Great’ Organisations Share - The Psychological Underpinning and Behavioural Impact

Trait 1: The Psychology Underpinning Trust - (psychological needs - the 3rd tier on Maslow’s Model)

In psychology trust is viewed as an emotional brain state, and not just an expectation of behaviour. It is a key element of human relationships and a basis for social interaction.

Organisations who operate within a low-trust environment, will suffer with a lack of employee motivation and enthusiasm in their role. Employees are less likely to speak up and are more likely to adopt a ‘just get on with it’ attitude, there will be a lack of interest to support teamwork activities which, eventually will weaken organisational morale and create a toxic working environment. If this occurs, employees will then start to question if their basic needs on the Maslow’s model are being met, ultimately resulting in a low output and high turnover of staff (McLeod, 2018).

It is, therefore, critical that organisations do everything they can, to establish and support the growth of a positive and trusting working environment.

Enabling all employees in building positive relationships, fostering honest communications, and inspiring the exchange of ideas and sharing of information. This will support the psychological needs of employees and create a strong sense of trust enabling the growth of a robust working culture. Workplaces high in trust will also benefit from less staff turnover, positive working relationships, increased output and are less prone to negative groupthink.

Research suggests that trust is a multidimensional construct and interpersonal trust between organisational members is based on 4 elements (Ahteela and Vanhala, 2018).

- The employee's disposition
- Desirable features in others
- Distinguishing between vertical and horizontal trust
- Situational parameters

What do these 4 elements of trust represent?

1 - The employee's disposition

This refers to the intrinsic tendency of individual employees, to trust or distrust others within the workplace. And can be linked to the psychological contract theory that represents the mutual beliefs, expectations and informal obligations between employee and employer. This is not something that can be achieved as a quick fix and will take some time to build up. However, having several approaches in place will nurture the psychological contract and maintain a positive trusting relationship (Teguh Setiawan Wibowo, 2022).

The approaches can include, having organisational transparency with clear policies outlining the organisation's expectations and the values and standards to work by. The employee needs to know where they stand and where their responsibilities sit, this can be achieved by having an individual job specification, detailed project plans and reasonable timelines to carry out the work along with regular feedback and discussions.

2 - Desirable features in others

This refers to the trust in competency, altruism, and reliability of organisational members. This could be anyone within the organisation from the most junior employee to the most senior. Employees want to be able to have confidence and trust in the ability of their co-workers and leaders, especially, if they are working on a project together, everyone will need to do their bit.

If there is a sense that not all co-workers are consistent and reliable, this can cause elements of distrust and tensions within the workplace, which if not addressed straight away, may develop into miscommunications, lower productivity, lack of commitment and may also present itself into negative verbal and/or physical conflict (Lencioni, 2012) and is detrimental to the overall success of the organisation.

There are various approaches that can be taken to enhance this element of trust and can consist of team building days, peer mentoring, cohesive team workshops, social events, inclusion and diversity courses and cultural awareness training.

3 - Distinguishing between vertical and horizontal trust

This refers to the characteristics of the employee's trust in their superiors and the employees trust in their co-workers. It is possible that the employee has trust for their fellow co-workers but may lack trust in their superiors, or trust could lie with the superiors but not in the co-workers. It is important to understand exactly where there is a lack of trust to ensure the correct approaches and solutions are employed (Jongsma and Bredenoord, 2018).

Data gathering methods will be able to highlight any gaps in trust either horizontally or vertically. This could include various qualitative and quantitative approaches and may consist of surveys, observational studies, focus group and individual interviews, these will assist in understanding the best solutions and approaches to employ to enhance trust in this area.

4 - Situational parameters

This refers to psychological safety and having the trust in the working environment. It allows employees to feel confident that they do not need to fear

admitting mistakes or speaking up if they feel something is not right or they don't understand something.

Instilling a psychological safe environment will encourage employees to be more motivated to share ideas and provide solutions without the worry of the idea not working and in turn, being reprimanded for it. Psychological safety will enable any mistakes that have been made to become learning opportunities and enable positive communications and the sharing of ideas amongst employees, cultivating a fully collaborative working culture (Edmondson., 2018).

Guaranteeing that all employees understand the importance of psychological safety, and what it entails, encouraging each individual to look out for it within the workplace and to be aware of situations where there is a lack of it. Empowering them to talk to the right people to highlight areas that will need to be improved. It will also help them to adapt their own behaviours and attitude to ensure the things they do and say is providing a psychological safe environment for those around them.

Trait 2: The Psychology Underpinning Effective communication - (psychological needs and the 3rd tier on Maslow's Model)

Effective communication, both written and verbal relies on the internal communications from within the organisation and the communication skills of all its members, it is the building blocks for any organisation to succeed.

Having superior staff demonstrate effective communication and foster an 'open door' attitude, will encourage employees to feel that they can approach their superiors irrespective of the reason why, and will strengthen organisational relationships, providing the employee with a perception of having a voice and feeling valued. In turn it will boost employee morale and organisational identity.

For effective organisational communication to happen, it is important that full transparency is provided and that employees hear the 'good' and the 'bad' of

what is happening within the business. This will increase respect and trust amongst employees, which in turn, will enable employees to feel respected and appreciated within the organisation.

This can also be enhanced by various types of effective communications development, such as online training sessions, webinars, team workshops and independent study.

Trait 3: The Psychology Underpinning Leaders Who Inspire and Care - (psychological needs and the 3rd & 4th tier on Maslow's Model)

There are various leadership theories and styles of leadership. Leadership training and development sessions tend to direct the participant to a specific type of leadership style and propose that the participant adopt it as their own style.

However, what happens if that leadership style does not align with the participants own personality and values? Humans are often very good at recognising when someone is not being totally genuine or they are doing something that does not quite fit and will quickly realise the persona is fake, this will negatively impact the organisation and result in employees mistrusting and disrespecting their leader, making it very hard to build any form of positive relationships.

Leaders need to be true to themselves, they need to believe in their own principles and attitude. If they want to achieve positive impacts in their role they must 'be real' regardless of situation. Leaders with this authenticity will establish positive influences within the workplace and build positive relationships with their employees. This leadership style is recognised as Authentic Leadership (Lorenzo, 2022).

Everything the authentic leader does or says is built on authenticity, trust, and their own set values that they have to guide all that they do. They will not try to

be someone they are not; this will allow them to build authentic relationships as well as inspire others to be the same. They will recognise team members' personalities, strengths, weaknesses, and motivations. They will encourage everyone to set goals and will fully support their progress and development to achieve those goals (Levy, Naehrig, Sullivan and Chin, 2022).

Authentic leaders are considerate of their employees and will make every effort to support, develop and empower them, allowing them to reach their personal development goals alongside the goals of the organisation. They genuinely care about others and see all people as equals regardless of job role. They will help to build and encourage a positive working culture that is based on honesty, integrity, development, and inclusion in an environment where all employees feel like they belong.

If the organisation is dedicated to developing its leaders through having various leadership programmes in place, will ensure that all leaders are consistent in their approach and will gain further knowledge and understanding of how to be an effective leader. Helping leaders to understand their people will also support positive relationships. This could be achieved by incorporating team workshops, personality profiling in the workplace, setting team values and having honest conversations.

Trait 4: The Psychology Underpinning a Sense of Community (psychological needs and the 3rd tier on Maslow's Model)

The McMillan and Chavis theory suggests that there are 4 aspects to the theory of 'Sense of Community':

- Membership
- Influence
- Integration and fulfilment of needs
- Shared emotional connection

Membership is the first aspect. This refers to, how an employee psychologically identifies as being a member of a team and/or the organisation. This will rely

heavily on all the other factors mentioned in the other sections of this paper, combining to create a sense of membership within the wider organisation, but also amongst members within their own team.

The second aspect is Influence. Members of the team/organisation support the needs and opinions of other members and will encourage them to share ideas, information, and their experience, creating a fully cohesive culture. This may comprise of all members of the organisation, from the senior levels to the most junior roles. However, for this to happen members must feel psychologically safe in their environment before these collaborations will take place.

The third aspect is the Integration and fulfilment of needs. This is referring to the members of the group aligning and having shared values and standards. Working towards the same goals in a unified approach, each member being positively recognised for their contribution along the way and the trusting in other members abilities to collectively achieve successful results.

Shared emotional connection is the fourth aspect. Organisations need their employees to love where they work and the job, they do in order to retain talent and increase productivity levels. However, this is not always the case, some organisations find it difficult to achieve this and will look at increasing salaries, providing bonuses, or signing their employees up to perk apps and other engagement tools. Although these methods can be seen to assist with retention and provide some incentive, that they do not last in the long term.

Research suggests that employees prefer having an emotional connection to the organisation/ team. Having a perception that the work they do makes a difference and adds value to the organisation, provides them with a sense of achievement, a feeling of pride in their work. When employees feel supported and valued by their leaders and co-workers it provides intrinsic motivation to want to do well and fully engage in the workplace. It helps to build deeper work relationships and provides a sense of 'working for a great company', this can also be associated to 'Organisational Identity' (Whetten, 2006) and a sense of pride to work in the organisation.

Trait 5: The Psychology Underpinning Investment in people -

(psychological & self-fulfilment needs and the 4th & 5th tier on Maslow's Model)

People are the key foundations to a thriving and growing organisation, if the foundations are supported and cared for the organisation will continue to thrive and develop. However, if they are overlooked and/or disregarded then the foundations will eventually start to crumble and become detached resulting in organisational breakdown.

Including the usual organisational benefits, perks and income, there are other ways in which organisations can invest in their employees that can also include employee development and employee empowerment.

Employee development

Research suggests that employees who do not feel they are developing in their career goals are more likely to leave the organisation (IBM, 2014). This can be very costly to the organisation in the long run, with extra costs to advertising, interviewing, assessing and recruitment, but also the added cost of onboarding and training up a new recruit.

People are intrinsically motivated by self-development, learning new things that will enable them to achieve their goals. Research suggests that employees with high levels of perceived investment in employee development also demonstrated high levels of intrinsic motivation and a sense of organisational identity (Kuvaas and Dysvik, 2009).

Investing in employee's development will not only develop their skills and knowledge but will motivate them to be more effective and productive in their role. Organisations who are committed to investing in the development of their people are creating a positive organisational culture that provide a sense of confidence, loyalty, and self-achievement, all of which are a value add for both, employee, and organisation.

Employee development can come in various forms of media and at different levels of learning. Such as, self-directed study, training courses, accredited educational courses, workshops, mentoring and coaching.

Having individual employee development plans in place will assist team leaders in acknowledging the next steps of learning and development requirements for each member of their team informing the best approach to take. It will also allow discussions to take place regarding developmental needs and individual goals to learn providing a sense of being valued.

Employee empowerment

Employees need to feel that they are fully trusted to be motivated to do their work. They need to believe that the organisation values their contributions. Leaders who empower their teams with autonomy and the flexibility to control how, when and where they will do the work, will see a rise in employee motivation that will encourage high levels of output from their employees (Lambert, 2017). Employees who feel empowered will be inclined to have high respect for their leader and will tend to go above and beyond to demonstrate their abilities.

YBS Behaviours – We Reach for Better – We Make It Happen

Both these YBS behaviours, align well with this trait.

We Reach for Better, encourages employees to take control of the personal learning, as well as experimenting and learning from failures, to be curious and not afraid to step out from their comfort zone. Leaders are to support and act as a coach to positively challenge their people to be the best they can.

We Make it Happen, promotes employees to take ownership and make decisions, to move fast and with drive and a purpose, to achieve objectives and think of solutions to overcome any issues that may get in the way of success. Leaders are encouraged to provide employee flexibility and remove any barriers that may hinder their achievements.

Trait 6: The Psychology Underpinning Health and wellbeing - (basic & psychological needs - The 2nd & 3rd tier on Maslow's Model)

Employee health and wellbeing is the responsibility of the organisation to ensure employees are working to their full potential to keep the organisation operating and continue to provide successful results. Health and wellbeing refers to mental, physical, emotional, social, and financial wellbeing of the employee, and are the elements that can either individually or collectively impact a person's wellbeing. Over the last few years, psychological issues have been emerging as the main cause of low productivity and absenteeism amongst employees. Stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout are some of the primary mental health issues that are reported by employees (Hallam, Peeters, Gupta and Bilsborough, 2022). Which has led to a rise in organisations taking steps to promote mental health awareness and provide various support and training packages to deliver more understanding into various preventative techniques and methods.

The Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) (Suff, 2021) have identified several inter-related domains that influence positive health and wellbeing. Organisations that have these domains in place will encourage a happy working environment where employees can flourish and reach their full potential.

- **Health** – includes physical health, physical safety, and mental health
- **Good Work** – includes working environment, good line management, work-life balance, autonomy, change management, pay and reward
- **Values/Principles** – includes leadership, ethical standards, inclusion, and diversity
- **Collective/Social** – employee voice, positive relationships
- **Personal Growth** – career development, lifelong learning, creativity, and an open and collaborative culture
- **Good lifestyle choices** – physical activity, healthy eating
- **Financial Wellbeing** – fair pay and benefits policies, retirement planning, employee financial support

Trait 7: The Psychology Underpinning Culture, Values, and Purpose (All 5 Needs on Maslow's Model)

Organisational culture characterises the principal attitude of the organisation, where underlying values and objectives are expressed. This will usually be expressed through the mission statement or vision statement and will normally convey robust messages about the purpose and values of the organisation and acts as a guide for all activities and expected behaviours (Burke, Borucki & Kaufman, 2002).

Edgar Schein's (2010) Organisational Culture Model suggests that organisations are made up of formal and informal factors. Formal factors refer to the visible part of organisations and include the structures, policies, objectives, results, and employees. These are the things that are easy to see and measure. The informal factors are the things that are not so easy to see or measure, however, these are the aspects that will make up most of the organisation and will be the key influences in organisational success or failure. Informal factors consist of culture, values, attitudes, and behaviour.

So, how do organisations ensure that their informal factors are working well to achieve overall success? Organisations need to have a full understanding of their current culture, what's working well and what isn't. They will need to have honest discussions with employees to get an overall feeling of what the working experience is like on a daily basis.

Organisational values need to resonate and represent something to employees to provide motivation. This psychological need will encourage a sense of purpose to the employee's role and the contributions they make.

Building a positive and effective organisational culture also involves heavy investment into the wellbeing and happiness of their employees and will include the elements previously discussed within this paper:

- A sense of trust
- Organisational transparency and integrity
- Psychological safety
- Effective communications and positive workplace relationships
- Authentic leadership

- Organisational identity and a sense of belonging
- Feeling valued and empowered
- people development/ training/coaching
- Employee health & wellbeing

Conclusion

The aim of this section was to explore the psychology underpinning the seven traits that great organisations share, and how these traits aligned with the Maslow's Motivational Model (The hierarchy of needs). In understanding the impact of these traits, as well as the workplace behaviours and attitudes they promote, will support Organisations to inspire and motivate their people to want to strive to be the best, it will increase employee engagement and performance, it will boost talent acquisition and promote employee wellbeing. Unsurprisingly, all these behaviours will assist in building up the organisation and the services they provide to not just be 'good' but to be considered as 'Great':

So, what next?

Further research looking at the seven traits and how these are being implemented into the organisation would be beneficial to understand at what level these traits are already in place and how they can be further improved ensuring all departments and employees are equally adapting them into their working practices. This data will provide a clearer overview of how the seven traits are being enculturated and organisational behaviours are currently creating used and will draw out any gaps, strengths and/or weaknesses that may need to be revised.

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