McClelland’s Theory of Needs

David McClelland’s research indicates that individuals are motivated based on three needs:

- **Need for achievement (N_Ach):** The drive to excel, to achieve in relation to a set of standards, to strive to succeed.
- **Need for power (N_Power):** The need to make others behave in a way that they would not have behaved otherwise.
- **Need for affiliation (N_Aff):** The desire for friendly and close interpersonal relationships.

Unlike Maslow, McClelland did not differentiate between any certain transition among the needs. He indicates that some people have higher levels of one need than others.

People who have **high achievement needs** are different from others in the following ways:

1. They seek personal responsibility for finding solutions to problems. This means they take the initiative to find results, sometimes even when it isn’t their problem!
2. They need rapid feedback on their performance. They are usually very frustrated by not receiving feedback, and the quicker the better!
3. They are not gamblers, but instead set appropriately challenging goals. High achievers like to control their own success; they don’t like to “win the lottery” or anything by chance!
4. They want to stretch themselves, so they set goals that are challenging but ones that they perceive they have at least a 50% chance of attaining.

People who have a **high need for power** are not power-mongers! Instead, they understand the use of power and that it enables people to get things done and make a difference in a positive way. (See my Power lecture for more information on this phenomenon!) Keep in mind that power is not a negative construct! It is necessary to use these processes to make change and to make a difference! People who have a healthy need for power have the following characteristics:

1. They like to be “in charge.” Part of this is because they know their own strengths and weaknesses and know they can trust their own judgment.

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and skills. They are often uncertain about the abilities of others, so they want to be in charge!

2. Since they know they can be effective, they strive for influence over others.

3. High power people enjoy competition and status-oriented positions.

4. They do enjoy prestige and sometimes this gets in the way of their effectiveness on the actual job.

McClelland found that people who have a high need for affiliation have the following characteristics:

1. They enjoy being with people and being accepted and liked by the people around them.
2. They prefer cooperation over competition.
3. They strive to make and keep relationships with a high amount of trust and mutual understanding.

Manager's Use of McClelland's Research:

The Ah-Ha here is again tied to matching the individual to the position he/she is holding within the company. Whenever possible, evaluate the individual’s needs for achievement, power, and affiliation and see how it stacks up with the job requirements.

- A person with a high need for affiliation may hate being a computer programmer because it requires so much time alone in the cubicle writing code.
- Someone with a high need for power will be frustrated and will likely frustrate his/her co-workers if put in a position at the bottom of the ladder with no opportunity to advance.
- Employees who have a high need to achieve will often be satisfied with their work any time they have an opportunity to feel a part of something that they perceive to be meaningful and worthwhile.

Keep in mind that even though this is a goal, it is not likely that every person in every company will be able to completely satisfy his/her needs while on the job. This is often the explanation for people who act out their needs at home when they are not met on the job.