
Does Age impact Need Priorities?—Maslowian Perspective in an Industrial set-up

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Abstract

Warren Buffet couldn't have expressed it better, when he said that "I do know that when I am 60, I should be attempting to achieve different personal goals than those which had priority at age 20". This simplistic statement belies the significance of age and need priorities. Many industries in India, especially, the Public Sector Enterprise have an issue with the motivational level of its ageing employees besides other issues like knowledge management and transfer, etc. 'To what extent, the age of an employee affects his need priorities' would be a pertinent question to be answered in revisiting motivational strategies of an employee group. Thus, authors have delved into the issue and tried to find answers through empirical study. It is found that all the five needs in Maslow's need hierarchy have a reducing trend in while proceeding from a lower age group (21-30 years) to higher age group (51-60 years). The path and scale of reduction and the speed of dwindling of needs may be different for different needs. In this study, various other interesting and pertinent results have been found. In all age-groups except in the age group 31-40 years, Safety need is the dominant need of the highest number of employees. In the age group 31-40 years, belongingness need is the dominant need. It is also found that self-actualization need is the dominant need amongst the highest percentage of employees (27%) in youngest age group of 21-30 years. Self-actualization need is the lowest in the age group 31-40 years. This, in a way establishes that the younger generation of employees wants more meaningful and satisfying jobs and wishes to contribute to a higher purpose rather than just making money and going about their jobs mechanically. Isn't this a sign of a global and modern India!

Keywords : Maslow, need priorities, age, trend

Introduction

Maslow's Need Hierarchy theory has been the cynosure of most of discussions in the field of motivation studies. It has been analyzed, criticized, modified and even, to an extent, brutalized by academicians and management practitioners. However, till to this day, it remains relevant in parts as practicing managers use this theory for explaining employee motivation. Besides, the theory is intuitively logical and easy to understand. The famous quote from the biography

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of billionaire business man lends supports to the theory *"I do know that when I am 60, I should be attempting to achieve different personal goals than those which had priority at age 20."* (Warren Buffett).

Maslow propagated that all human beings are driven by their needs and such needs have been categorized as Physiological, Safety needs, Social, Esteem and Self actualization needs. He called self-actualization a growth need while all the rest as deficiency needs. For Maslow, the level of self-actualization reflects the fact that human beings are not simply biological machines. As people mature, they become more aware of self and are increasingly driven by a sense of personal meaning and purpose. Self actualizing people deliberately seek some other kind of experiences which Maslow termed as **peak experiences**. These experiences are profound, life-altering moments of love, understanding, happiness and bliss. They are moments in which one feels radically more whole, more completely alive and more aware of truth, beauty, goodness, etc. Since, self actualization need is inner-driven for an individual and is innately personal in nature, hence, in an Industrial set-ups it is more pragmatic and easier to address the deficiency needs of employees.

For Maslow, each level in need hierarchy must be substantially satisfied before the next is activated. When a need is satisfied, the next higher need becomes predominant. This tenet brings out two basic presumptions i.e. (a) that an individual is driven or motivated to work towards fulfillment of his dominant needs and (b) that the individual moves from lower order to higher order needs. While the individual works for higher order needs, the lower order needs remain present but subsided. Let's now take this tenet towards Industrial set-up wherein an employee has to perform the work assigned to him whether his dominant needs is being satisfied or not. However, he shall be motivated to work enthusiastically and with higher level of precision and responsibility if he feels that the completion of his job would partially fulfill his dominant needs. However, the management of an organization can initiate and infuse appropriate motivational strategies only when the need priorities of employees are known and trend of the change in priorities is established.

An old-aged father feels estranged and craves for a phone call from his children even though he has

reached fairly great height in his career. This means his need for belongingness is now dominant although he has fulfilled his esteem needs in his working career. Thus, the issue arises as to whether during a lifespan, a person goes up in the needs ladder i.e. from lower order to higher order needs or can any of the lower order needs relapse in between. Thereafter, the second issue arises as to whether age can be a determinant variable for individual need priorities, i.e., whether, two employees one of 25 years of age and another of 50 years of age drawing same salary and holding similar position in organizational hierarchy will have the same need priority or not. The main focus of the paper is to explore two above issues.

Aims and Objectives of this Paper

This research study aims at

1. Finding out whether age is a significant factor in determining the need priority of an individual.
2. Relating findings of the study to industrial set-up in India and provide suggestions for using need priorities as a tool for designing motivation strategies.

Review of Literature

Robert A Poston in his explorative article "An Exercise in Personal Exploration on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" says that 'When looking at Maslow's hierarchy pyramid, an important concept to remember is that anyone at anytime can regress back to any point within the hierarchy structure that Maslow addresses. How does this impact human behavior? Looking back at the basic of physiological needs are, for example, people's need to feel good. It does not matter if a person is employed as a janitor or a top-notch cardiac surgeon if he or she is diagnosed with a disease that impacts them physically, he or she is likely to regress back towards satisfying any physiological needs that may come about. The affected individual's attitude towards the prognosis of this disease will likely contribute towards a shift in his or her priorities. Emotionally, feelings of love and belonging may have an impact in the sense that they may want to ensure that their loved ones are safe when they pass away. Although Poston's point is that any need may come at any point of time due to unforeseen special

circumstances. He, in his article recognizes the importance of culture of a place. Yet, he doesn't comment upon the crucial factors determining needs and whether or not the age is a factor in determining the dominant need.

Maslow himself says that while moving up the pyramid, one must have safety needs met, then one must feel love towards and from his friends and family. After this, one must receive self-validation and a feeling of self-worth from one's self. Lastly, a state of self-actualization and creative work is possible. However, if any of the levels of the pyramid goes unfulfilled at any time, the subject must return to that level. In other words, self-actualization isn't a permanent state but rather a continuous battle. The primary idea to retain from this model is that human motivation is complex, and while working towards the primary goal of self-actualization, their particular needs and pursuits might change dramatically. However, Maslow does not relate his observation with the age of his subjects.

Hardeo Ojha and Meena Pramanick studied the effect of age difference on intensity and priority of life needs viz., physiological, security, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization on a group of 1800 subjects equally divided into six age groups viz., early young (21-30 yrs), late young (31-40 yrs), early middle (41-50 yrs), late middle (51-60 yrs), early old (61-70 yrs) and late old (71-80 yrs). The results give statistically significant evidence of age differences in motivation for all needs but only limited support to Maslow's hierarchy as a developmental sequence. The two higher priorities given to physiological and belongingness needs by the younger and older subjects indicate that for both these needs are more important than esteem and self-actualization needs. The middle aged subjects feel that esteem is more important for them and belongingness and self-actualization which have been given third and fourth priorities are less important. However, we find that physical needs are important for all age groups as it has received either first or second preference by all. The esteem need has received first preference by the middle aged but the third preference by other age groups. Security need which is second in order of priority according to Maslow (1970) has received fourth priority by the older subjects and the last priority by the younger and middle aged subjects.

Research Problems and Hypothesis

Even upon extensive review of literature on the subject, very few studies could be found wherein, empirically, on the nature of relationship between the age and need priorities of employees in industries could be established. The study by Ojha and Pramanick pertains to the whole life of persons. The results further need to be re-checked and revalidated in industrial work environment.

Keeping in view the above research problems and gaps the following hypothesis was proposed:

'H0: That there is no relationship between need priorities and the age group of the employees. The hypothesis has been tested through established statistical methods and based on the results recommendations are made for application.

Research Methodology and Strategy

The 'Hierarchy of needs-Personal Needs Survey Instrument' sourced from the internet (<http://www.accel-team.com/>) was administered for finding out need priorities of employees. Besides, data pertaining to various demographic variables like years of experience, gender, age, job classification, job type, etc, were also captured. Data were collected from the employees of one major Public Sector and one major Private Sector enterprise i.e. NTPC Ltd and HEG Ltd, respectively. Approximately 400 questionnaires were distributed and 369 correct and proper responses have been received. Out of these 369 responses, 100 are from HEG Ltd., and 269 from NTPC Ltd. Data were collected during the period of January, 2011 to May, 2012 and were analyzed through SAS software. Following tests were carried out for testing the hypotheses:

Normality Test: Before doing Analysis of Variances ANOVA, normality test was accomplished to assess the likelihood that data came from a normal distribution.

Analysis of Variances (ANOVA): This test was carried out to understand which factors such as sector, age, sex, etc., and their interactions have significant effect on corresponding scores for statistical comparisons.

Correlation Analysis: Correlation analysis was applied to understand which factors from the leaders has direct effect and could be correlated to the employee's score. The results of this test is particularly important to explain whether the gender of leaders along with various factors can have direct effect on employee' motivation or output.

from this method are similar with correlation analysis except data came from nonparametric variables.

Stepwise and Backward Linear Regression Analyses: These tests were carried out to discover if Training, Teamwork and other dependent variables have impact on satisfaction or can predict Satisfaction scores by other variables that are mentioned.

Correspondence analysis: This technique accomplished on questions 85 to 92. Results obtained

Data Presentation, Analysis and Findings Data Presentation

Table 1 : Age-wise Needs of Employees

Age Group	Total No. of Person	Physiological	Safety	Belongingness	Est-eem	Self-Actualization	Total
21-30	100	0	35	23	15	27	100
31-40	127	0	35	52	23	17	127
41-50	83	0	32	13	19	19	83
51-60	58	0	21	9	13	15	58
Total	368	0	123	97	70	78	368

Need Priorities of Employees Aged 21-30 years

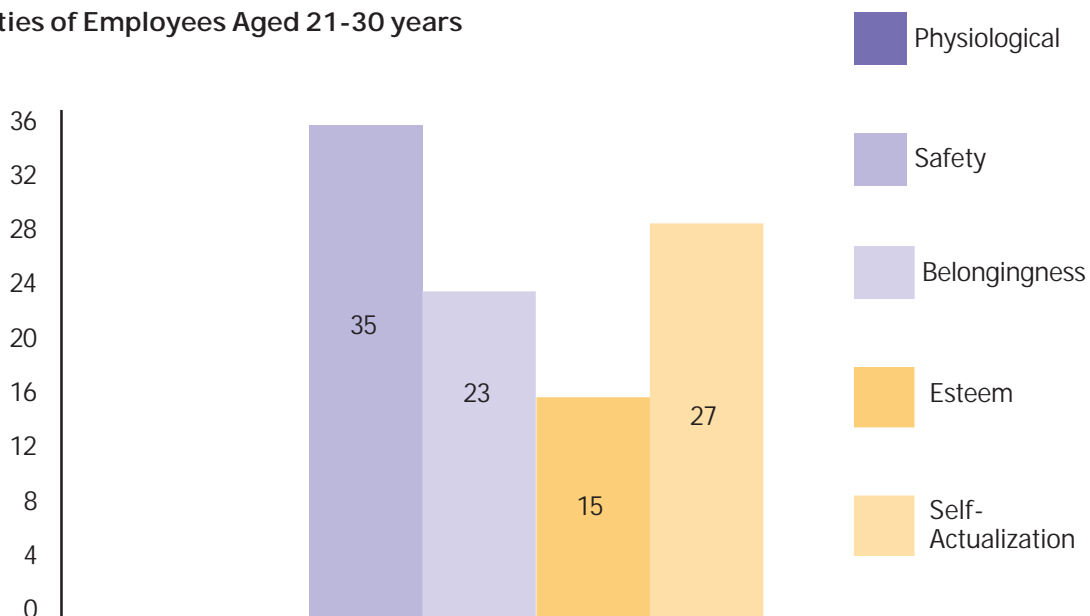


Fig.1 : Need priorities of Employees aged 21-30 years

Need Priorities of Employees Aged 31-40 years

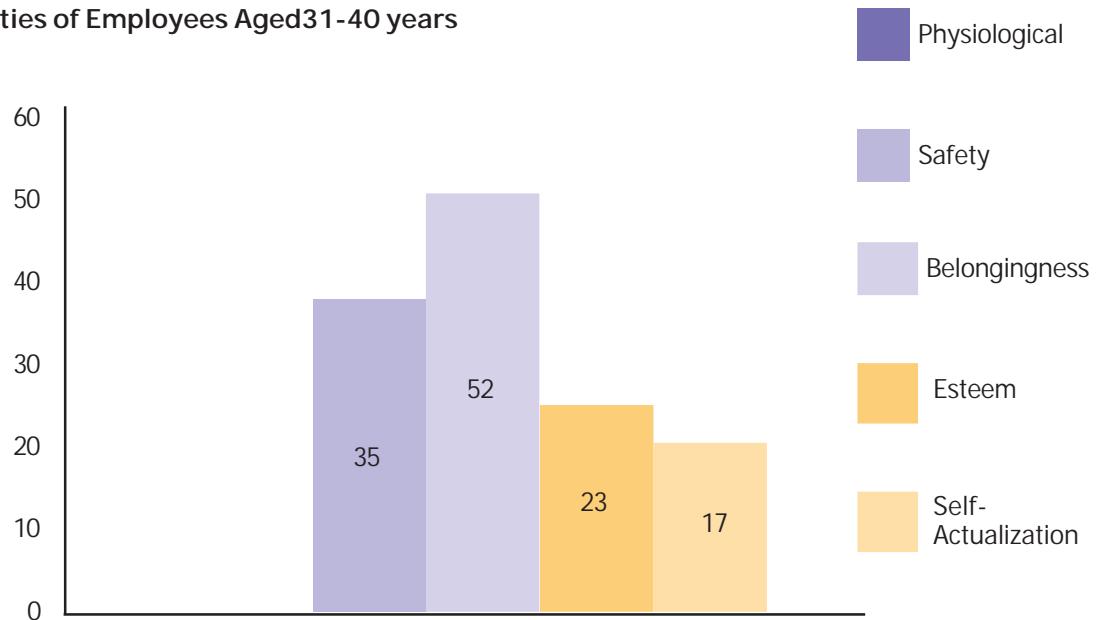


Fig.2 : Need priorities of Employees aged 31-40 years

From the above graph, it is clear that the in the age group of 31-40 years, the highest number of employees have Belongingness as their dominant need while the second highest number of employees have safety needs

Need Priorities of Employees Aged 41-50 years

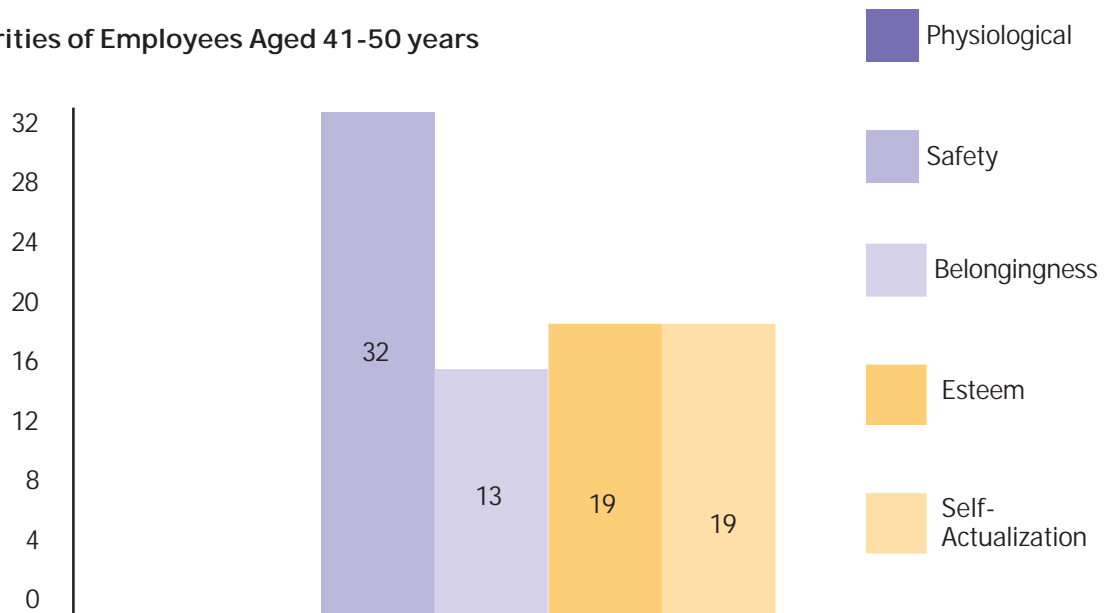


Fig. 3 : Need priorities of Employees aged 41-50 years

From the above graph, it is clear that in the age group of 41-50 years the highest number of employees have dominant safety need followed by esteem and self-actualization need in equal numbers. Thus, it can be seen that in the age group of 21-30 years, safety was the dominant need, while in the age group 31-40 years belongingness is the dominant need and once again the safety appears as the dominant need in the age group 41-50 years.

Need Priorities of Employees Aged 51-60 years

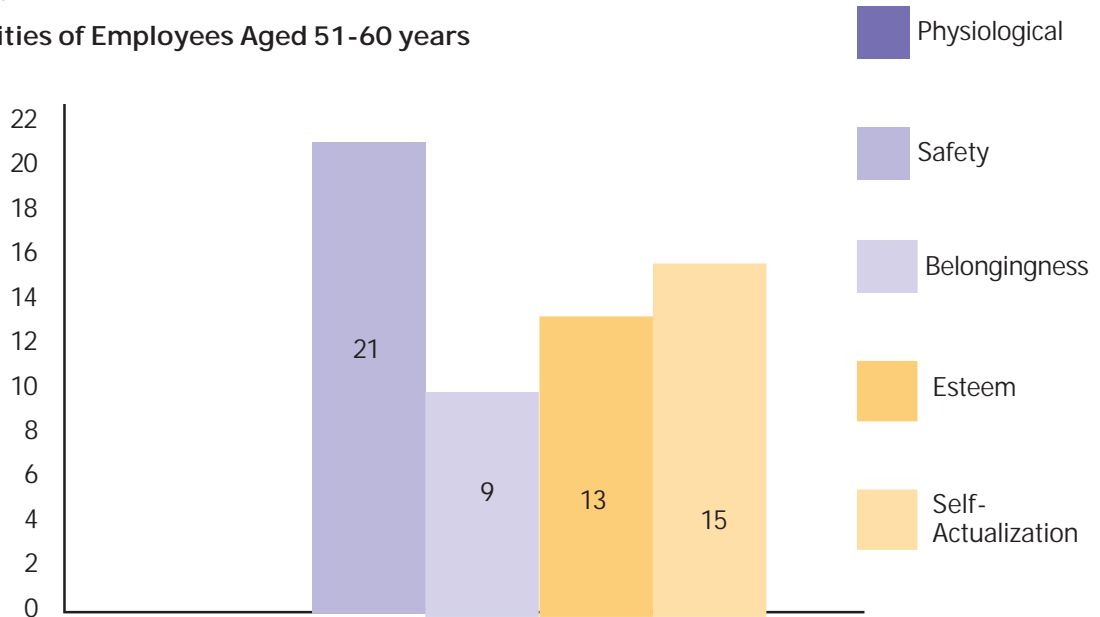


Fig. 4 : Need priorities of Employees aged 51-60 years

From the above graph, it is clear that in the age group of 51-60 years, the highest number of employees have belongingness as their dominant need while the second highest number of employees have self actualization need.

Need Priorities of Employees (Total)

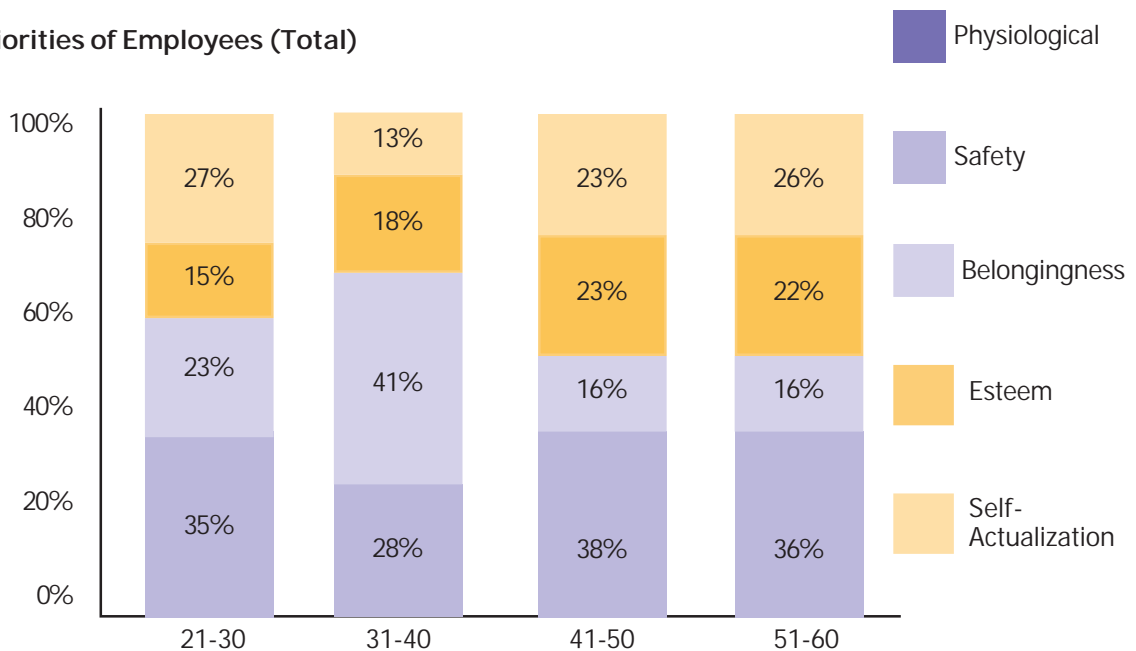


Fig. 5 : Need priorities of Employees in various age groups

A need-wise ranking has been formed on the basis of above discussions which further clarifies the need priorities in various age-groups. The rankings are presented in the form of a table as below:

Table 2 : Age-wise Needs Ranking

Need/Age Group	Safety	Belongingness	Esteem	Self-Actualization
21-30 years	1	3	4	2
31-40 years	2	1	3	4
41-50 years	1	3	2	2
51-60 years	1	4	3	2

It is observed that the safety is a dominant need for most of the employees despite their age group. Thereafter, second highest number of employees dominant self-actualization need as their dominant need.

the employees', data analysis has been done by using SAS software and adopting appropriate statistical tools. For convenience purpose employees' age groups have been categorized as follows:

6.2 Data Analysis

In order to test the hypothesis 'that there is no correlation between need priorities and age group of

- Category A—21-30 years
- Category B—31-40 years
- Category C—41-50 years
- Category D—51-60 years

Table 3: Correlation between Need Priorities of employees and age of employees.

Contingency Table

	Belongingness	Esteem	Safety	Self_actu alization	Sum
A	23	15	36	27	101
B	52	23	34	17	126
C	13	19	32	18	82
D	9	13	21	16	59
Sum	97	70	123	78	368

Contributions to the Total Chi-Square Statistic

	Belong ingness	Esteem	Safety	Self_act ualization	Sum
A	0.4929	0.9234	0.1489	1.4609	3.0261
B	10.6284	0.0390	1.5633	3.5278	15.7587
C	3.4331	0.7421	0.7695	0.0221	4.9667
D	2.7601	0.2814	0.0831	0.9765	4.1011
Sum	17.3145	1.9860	2.5648	5.9874	27.8526

The hypothesis that there is no relationship between need priorities and the age group of the employees is rejected. Since the sum of contribution (**27.85**) when a < 0.05 is higher than that of Chi Square Table (9.49), therefore the result of the test is significant. Thus we can say the hypothesis is rejected and there is correlation between the two parameters, i.e. need priorities and age group. In the above Contingency Table-3, frequency of variables is shown. Amongst 'A' category employees, aged 21-30 years, 'C' category aged 41-50 years and 'D' category employees aged 51-60 years, frequency of safety is the highest, while in 'B' category employees aged 31-40 years belongingness need is the highest.

Major observations : Conclusion and recommendations

The answer whether age impacts need priorities of employees is affirmative. Further observations and conclusions are as under:

In all age-groups except in the age group 31-40 years, Safety need is the dominant need of the highest number of employees. In the age group 31-40 years, belongingness need is the dominant need.

Contrary to the general belief, the self-actualization need is the dominant need amongst the highest percentage of employees (27%) in youngest age group of 21-30 years. Self-actualization need is the lowest in the age group 31-40 years. This shows that the young employees want more out their job. They wish to contribute to a higher purpose rather than just making money. Probably, this can be fathomed as one of the signs of a changing India !

Esteem as well as Safety needs are dominant needs in highest percentage of employees in the age group of 41-50 years. This need is the lowest in the age group 21-30 years.

Belongingness need is the lowest amongst the age groups 41-50 years and 51-60 years. This need is the dominant need of highest number of employees in 31-40 years age group.

All the needs may exist in parallel, however, one of the needs can be a dominant need at one point of time. It can also be safely said that the pyramid of hierarchy does not proceed in the order as propounded by Maslow.

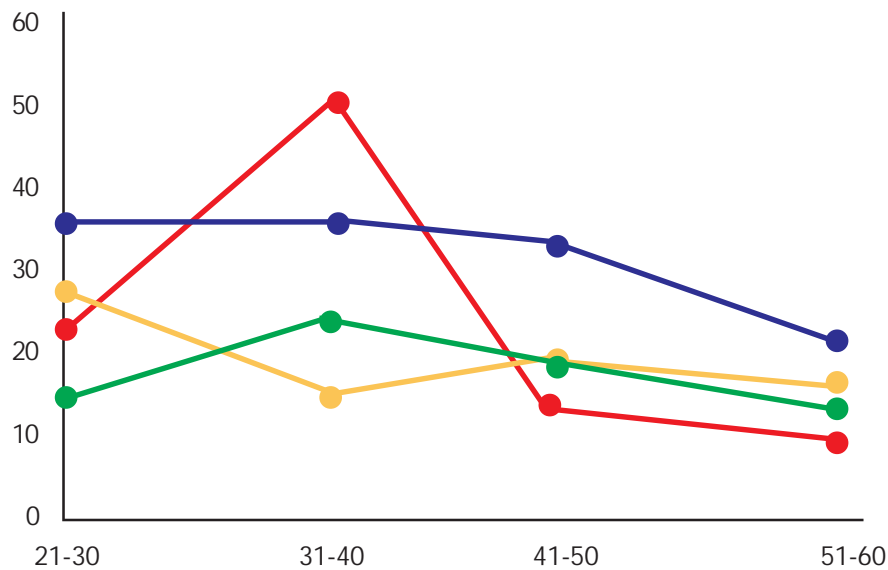


Fig.6 : Need priorities

One definite statement can be made from the above graph and discussions that all the needs have a reducing trend while we proceed from a lower age group (21-30 years) to higher age group (51-60 years). The path, and the scale of reduction and speed of dwindling of needs may be different for different age groups. Hence, it can be concluded that it is much more difficult to motivate the older group of employees at workplace than the younger group of employees for a simple reason that needs of the older group (51-60 years) is much lower than that of other age groups in general. The younger group may consider the workplace and job as means to fulfill his needs while the older group may not. As such intervention by Management for meeting the deficiency needs may not be viewed by the older group of employees as fulfilling. The older employee, say at an age of 55 years, may not be further interested in career growth. As such Management has to enrich the jobs in a manner which would make older group of employees interested and they view such measures as satisfying the higher level of their needs.

Recommendations:

Based on the above the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. That organizations should maintain need inventory status and should collect the need priorities of employees or let's christen it as 'Need Priority Inventory'. Data should be collected once in every ten years so that the change in needs could be re-checked.
2. That rewards, compensation and motivational strategies may be decided after taking into account the age and need priorities of employees.
3. That the younger employees may be involved in decision making process so that their self-actualization need be fulfilled.
4. That in the age group of 41-50 years of age, higher level of autonomy in jobs should be given so that their esteem needs are fulfilled partially.

Limitations and Further Scope of study :

The above study has some limitations and they raise further scopes for studies. Cultural nuances may play a major role in shaping up the dominant need of an employee and the same hasn't been addressed in this research paper. It is, hence, suggested that studies may be conducted while taking into account the national culture as a determinant factor of need priorities. Further, it is suggested that the need priorities of employees can be studied alongwith leadership styles of the managers. Impact of various leadership styles on employees with different need priorities could be studied. Also, studies of correlation of need priorities and impact on work motivation is suggested to be undertaken.

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