

# **The Chicken *and* the Egg: How Maslow's Theory Can Contribute to Career Planning**

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***How can career services professionals link the abstract ideas of values and mission to concrete opportunities in the economy? Building on the work of Abraham Maslow, examine the concept of career choices from the angles of motivation and needs.***

This scenario may sound familiar to career services practitioners: Three years ago, Elaine started college on a hockey scholarship. She has always been interested in science and majored in biology. Today, she is looking for a job as a high school science teacher and field hockey coach. Her twin brother, Evan, loves music; he is an accomplished guitarist and is attending college on a music scholarship. He is uncertain about his career options and is thinking about taking some business classes.

These scenarios highlight themes well known to career services professionals and recruiters: the wide range of students' interests and diverse paths that connect students with their place in the job market. Many individuals start with their aspirations or inspirations, with personal goals or "visions."

The categories American psychologist Abraham Maslow proposed in his hierarchy of needs (a theory of psychological health based on fulfilling essential human needs) can relate to a greater understanding of the job seeker's needs. This approach can shed light on industries and occupations in terms of services provided to others. Adding that framework to the career choice discussion can be useful to professionals in both career services and recruiting. This approach can contribute another dimension to understanding the roles played by recruiters and their organizations.

## **Career Exploration Methods**

Career services and human resources professionals already know about employment-related information, including data published by private organizations and by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, such as the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*. Students unsure of their career direction could start with Richard Bolles' "What Color Is Your Parachute? A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers." This book emphasizes understanding one's self through reflecting on the knowledge and skills that one wishes to use, desired location and work environment, individuals who one wants as colleagues and/or customers, and one's overall goals.<sup>1</sup> These components become part of a "Flower Diagram," which offers a way to consider fields that would relate well to these personal aspects.<sup>2</sup>

As Bolles points out, technology, including social media, provides a way to link a number of these personal preferences with jobs. The Occupational Information Network, or O\*NET database, contains information on hundreds of occupations and allows individuals to find ones that tie in with their interests and job preferences. A major feature of the database is its interconnections with Holland's RIASEC categories of interests related to occupations (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional).<sup>3</sup>

## **Career Exploration and Maslow's Needs**

However, individuals are still left with the question of how to start the decision-making process and how to choose among the various possibilities. Bolles discusses mission and purpose in the context of nine issues, including serving the mind, the body, the eyes and other senses, and the spirit.<sup>4</sup> Another approach that touches on many of the same concerns is Maslow's concept of the hierarchy of needs.

Maslow's theory focuses on a set of fundamental individual needs: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization.<sup>5</sup> Physiological needs, such as being hungry, are "the most prepotent."<sup>6</sup> If people are deprived of basic nourishment, finding this will be their top priority and will overshadow their other needs. Maslow compares safety with children's desire to be in a secure and reliable environment, in which they will not be hurt

physically or emotionally.<sup>7</sup> For adults, this could be a secure job, savings, and insurance (medical, dental, unemployment, disability, old age).<sup>8</sup> Maslow also suggests that religion, philosophy, and science relate to safety, in providing a framework to the way we approach the world.<sup>9</sup>

Love encompasses affection and being connected to others in a mutual relationship; this involves having friends or family and "affectionate relations with people in general."<sup>10</sup> The need for esteem involves having a favorable idea of one's self and a positive view from others. This attribute may include several dimensions, evidenced through factors such as accomplishments, independence, and respect from others.<sup>11</sup> Finally, self-actualization relates to being "everything that one is capable of becoming."<sup>12</sup>

Maslow's theory maintains that as the basic necessities are more and more satisfied, higher-level needs come into play. This is a gradual and multi-track process—that there would not be complete satisfaction of one need, then, another, but ongoing fulfillment and development.<sup>13</sup> Also, one behavior that is manifested by a person may relate to all of the individual's needs.<sup>14</sup> Maslow defined some further motivators, including the desires to know and to understand, and aesthetic needs, which may connect with the other needs.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 1: Average Annual Spending, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2012**

	Total	Percent
Average for "all consumer units"	\$51,442	100.0%
Food	6,599	12.8
Food at home	3,921	7.6
Food away from home	2,678	5.2
Housing	16,887	32.8
Apparel and services	1,736	3.4
Transportation	8,998	17.5
Healthcare	3,556	6.9
Entertainment	2,605	5.1
Cash contributions	1,913	3.7
Personal insurance and pensions	5,591	10.9
All other spending	3,557	6.9

*Note: Data are for "consumer units," with an average number of 2.5 persons per unit. "All other" includes personal care products and services, reading, education, tobacco/smoking, alcoholic beverages, and miscellaneous items.*

*Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Consumer Expenditure Survey, 2012, News Release, September 10, 2013. Percentages calculated by author.*

Dennis O'Connor and Leodones Yballe have explored Maslow's ideas and address ways in which the concepts can be helpful to students.<sup>16</sup> They say it is important to consider what Maslow presented in his writings (instead of others' interpretation of his work) and using the insights that his theory provides for an understanding of "values, meaning, and leadership."<sup>17</sup>

O'Connor and Yballe discuss how Maslow's work evolved with regard to understanding motivation and self-actualization, and they present a road map exercise to use with students. Students are asked to brainstorm in small groups and develop a list of needs, which are subsequently written on the board by the instructor, who subtly arranges them according to Maslow's framework. This is later identified as such, with a discussion of each level, and the nature of motivation and its impact on performance.<sup>18</sup>

Another element of O'Connor and Yballe's approach is to focus on the concept of self-actualization through a discussion of values and of specific steps, such as Maslow's tip on consciously making choices that will lead to

personal growth, not only for one's self but for others.<sup>19</sup> They also connect the elements of self-actualization to leadership and the organization, with consideration of the importance of promoting quality and integrity.<sup>20</sup> They see Maslow's model as one that enables instructors and students to consider more deeply values and self-understanding in the journey through a course and in life.<sup>21</sup> These insights are transferable to the career services and recruitment processes.

## Maslow's Framework Applied to Markets and Industries

In addition, Maslow's ideas can be applied in a market-oriented context. In "The Economist Guide to Management Ideas," Tim Hindle connects a number of industries to the various types of needs identified by Maslow. Food manufacturers help to fulfill physiological needs, the insurance industry addresses safety needs, and telecommunications relates to social needs.<sup>22</sup> Hindle also discusses how one activity or industry, such as hospitality, can fulfill multiple needs, including physiological, social, and self-actualization.<sup>23</sup>

Is it possible to quantify the importance of these classifications? Consumer spending, while not necessarily synonymous with priorities, gives one perspective. Figure 1 presents data from the *Consumer Expenditure Survey*, compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). The data are for consumer units, which are similar to households, averaging 2.5 persons per unit in 2012. The average yearly expenditure by these consumer units in 2012 was \$51,442. The importance of fulfilling basic needs is evident, as expenditures on food and housing account for close to half of total annual spending.

**Figure 2: Management Occupations—Needs Addressed**

	Type of need addressed for others				
	Physiological	Safety	Love	Esteem	Self-actualization
Administrative services managers	*	*	*	*	*
Advertising, promotions, and marketing managers	*	*	*	*	*
Architectural and engineering managers		X		X	
Compensation and benefits managers		X		X	
Computer and information systems managers	*	*	*	*	*
Construction managers		X		X	
Elementary, middle, and high school principals		X	X	X	X
Farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers	X	X			
Financial managers	*	*	*	*	*
Food service managers	X	X	X	X	
Human resources managers	*	*	*	*	*
Industrial production managers	*	*	*	*	
Legislators		*			*
Lodging managers		X	X	X	X
Medical and health services managers		X			X
Natural sciences managers	X	X			
Postsecondary education administrators		X	X	X	X
Preschool and childcare center directors		X	X	X	X
Property, real estate, and community association managers		X		X	
Public relations managers and specialists	*	*	*	*	*
Sales managers	*	*	*	*	*
Social and community service managers	*	*	*	*	*
Top executives	*	*	*	*	*
Training and development managers	*	*	*	*	*

Source: Occupational classifications are from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2012-13 Edition*. Needs are from A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-396.

X denotes matching a need. \*denotes that matching needs involves the nature of the industry.

The data used were extracted from a list with much greater detail; still, the key categories in Figure 1 give some measure of the relative share of consumer outlays and a number of insights. Entertainment, for example, represents a notable percentage and outpaces the share represented by the apparel category. What might this say about human needs? In terms of the relative value of entertainment and socializing with others, more detailed BLS data (not shown in the figure) reveal that average outlays for "fees and admissions" (\$614) is 77 percent more than average spending for footwear (\$347).

Government spending gives another perspective based on areas not covered by personal expenditures. According to data on outlays published by the Internal Revenue Service, the breakdown (as of fiscal year 2011) for the U.S. federal government is (with total spending of \$3.6 trillion):

- Social Security, Medicare, and other retirement (37 percent),
- Social programs (includes outlays such as for Medicaid and food stamps, health research, and programs, 23 percent),
- National defense, veterans, and foreign affairs (24 percent),
- Physical, human, and community development (includes outlays such as for agriculture and for education, 8 percent),
- Net interest on the debt (6 percent),
- Law enforcement and general government (2 percent).<sup>24</sup>

These "macro" level categories also relate to Maslow's framework, most vividly in terms of addressing safety and physiological concerns. While not providing a one-to-one correspondence with Maslow's categories, consumer and government spending data help make what might be construed as abstract ideas more concrete: There are ways to see the impact of these human needs in quantitative terms.<sup>25</sup>

Along these lines, consider other market and industry links more specifically related to career choices. Figure 2 illustrates occupational connections, with a list of management-related job titles opposite Maslow's major needs. The goal is to show how individuals' and organizations' missions or values—as reflected in fulfilling the needs of others—may be linked with careers. These categories are based on content analysis of the BLS descriptions of the occupations. This illustration shows possible connections among missions and occupations or industries and how these might be approached systematically.

In Figure 2, an X indicates that an occupation relates to a need. An asterisk (\*) shows where an occupation might relate to a need, depending on the nature of the industry. For example, someone interested in a management career that helps serve the physiological needs of others could consider categories designated by an X, such as farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural managers or food service managers.

Some occupations may satisfy several needs. Food service managers would help satisfy consumers' needs for healthy nourishment (physiological and safety), and could also provide an appealing social environment (related to love and esteem). A human resources manager's work could involve any of the five categories of needs depending on the nature of the industry.

The needs addressed by major industry categories, such as manufacturing or finance, are shown in Figure 3. Grocery stores would address physiological and safety needs, while wholesale trade is a broad field in which the nature of the product would determine the relevant needs served.

Information on occupations beyond the managerial ones shown in Figure 2 was collected. For example, a speech-language pathologist helps with a physiological problem, which also impacts one's ability to obtain employment, enjoy the company of others, gain esteem, and actualize one's capacities. Consequently, an X would be indicated in all categories. A budget analyst may help with any of these categories, depending on the industry involved. In this case, an \* would be shown for all categories, because the industry would be the determining factor.

Another issue is the nature of the underlying demand for a career. Students interested in working in management consulting should consider the type of activity for which the consulting is needed. This would relate to the economic concept of derived demand, as Paul A. Samuelson writes, "The firm's demand for labor is derived indirectly from the consumer demand for its final product."<sup>26</sup> In this case, consulting is a factor of production, for which the demand is "derived ultimately from consumers' desires and demands for final goods," just as Samuelson points out as being true for the other inputs used at many levels in the production process.

### **Maslow's Framework and Student Expectations**

What can the framework of needs add to dealing with the real-life concerns of students? The O\*NET system and its links to the RIASEC framework already provide an opportunity to connect job seekers with fields that reflect their personal interests. Maslow's approach can contribute an additional element of focus on the market environment.

There are two dimensions to consider. First, the functions of the organization are dependent on the individual tasks of employees. From an organizational perspective, the work of W. Edwards Deming emphasizes the importance of understanding and responding to customer needs. In this framework, all elements of production are interrelated. Each person relies on others to provide the various components and activities required for customer satisfaction, and all individuals also know why their contributions are essential to this goal.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, identifying the needs filled by the industry in which the organization operates is key.

In addition, individuals want to relate to their organizations. The importance of matching employees' personal visions with the organizational vision is emphasized at the philosophical level in Kerry Bernes and Kris Magnusson's "Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development."<sup>28</sup> In the context of personal mission, Bolles also cites the value of considering the employer's mission.<sup>29</sup>

**Figure 3: Industries—Needs Addressed**

Industry	Type of need addressed for others				
	Physiological	Safety	Love	Esteem	Self-actualization
<b>Natural resources, construction and utilities</b>					
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	X				
Construction	X	X			
Mining	X	X			
Utilities	X	X			
<b>Manufacturing</b>					
Aerospace product and parts manufacturing				X	X
Chemical manufacturing, except drugs		-	-	-	-
Computer and electronic product manufacturing		-	-	-	-
Food manufacturing	X	X			
Machinery manufacturing	-	-	-	-	-
Motor vehicle and parts manufacturing		X		X	
Pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing	X	X			
Printing	-	-	-	-	-
Steel manufacturing		-	-	-	
Textile, textile product, and apparel manufacturing		-	-	-	
<b>Trade</b>					
Automobile dealers		X	X	X	
Clothing, accessory, and general merchandise stores		X	X	X	
Grocery stores	X	X			
Wholesale trade	-	-	-	-	
<b>Transportation/Warehousing</b>					
Air transportation		X		X	X
Truck transportation and warehousing	-	-	-	-	
<b>Information</b>					
Broadcasting		X	X	X	X
Motion picture and video industries		X	X	X	X
Publishing, except software		-	-	-	-
Software publishers		-	-	-	-
Telecommunications		-	-	-	-
<b>Financial activities</b>					
Banking		X		X	
Insurance		X			
Securities, commodities, and other investments		X		X	
<b>Professional and business services</b>					
Advertising and public relations services	-	-	-	-	-
Computer systems design and related services	-	-	-	-	-
Employment services	-	-	-	-	-
Management, scientific, and technical consulting services	-	-	-	-	-
Scientific research and development services	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Education, health, and social services</b>					
Child day care services		X	X		X
Educational services		X	X	X	X
Healthcare		X			X
Social assistance, except child day care	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Leisure and hospitality</b>					
Arts, entertainment, and recreation			X	X	X
Food services and drinking places	X		X	X	
Hotels and other accommodations	X		X	X	X
<b>Government and advocacy, grant making, and civic organizations</b>					
Advocacy, grant making, and civic organizations	X	X	X	X	X
Federal government	X	X	X	X	X
State and local government, except education and health	X	X	X	X	X

Source: Industry classifications are those from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009, *Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Edition* (the Guide is no longer published; for industry data including additional categories, see [www.bls.gov/emp/ep\\_table\\_109.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_109.htm)). Needs are from A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50 (1943): 370-396.

X denotes matching a need. - denotes that matching needs involves the nature of the project, product, or clientele.

From the job applicant's perspective, awareness of needs can help those who already have career direction to develop their job marketing approaches. Aspiring managers could consider whether they would like to work in a financial setting, in which they could serve safety (i.e., security needs), or for a religious organization, where self-actualization of members might be the focus. In ascertaining their own preferences, job seekers may then be able to better articulate their commitment to potential employers in their chosen fields.

As analyzed by David B. Montgomery and Catherine A. Ramus,<sup>30</sup> M.B.A.s seek a number of key elements when choosing a job, such as intellectual challenge and the reputation of the organization with respect to its social and corporate ethical responsibilities (ethical products, services and practices) and its treatment of personnel,<sup>31</sup> along with financial remuneration, location, and other factors. Maslow's framework provides a dimension of professional values for the job search. Also, a needs-oriented approach can encourage individuals to evaluate fields they may not have considered, but that relate well to their goals.

Conceptually, considering others' needs also ties in with analyzing motivational theories. As discussed by Bugenhagen and Barbuto,<sup>32</sup> five sources of work motivation include intrinsic process, instrumental, self-concept external, self-concept internal, and goal internalization.<sup>33</sup> Unlike the preceding motivators, which connect to a type of self-interest, goal internalization is based on a person's conviction of the value of the cause, as manifested in what an organization is trying to accomplish.<sup>34</sup>

### **Maslow's Framework as a Career Exploration Tool**

How do these ideas about motivation relate to students, who are often thinking about securing a high-paying job? If this is the main motivation, how is addressing the needs of others relevant to the job quest?

As Maslow indicates, there may not be total satisfaction of one need after another.<sup>35</sup> Maslow's approach can be a way of understanding the role of organizations and industries in the market and can help job seekers present themselves effectively to that market. Given two candidates with similar engineering expertise, whom would you rather hire to work for a power utility: someone who has given little thought to the organization's end users, or someone who is concerned about the reliability of the energy supplied to customers who are depending on electricity to keep their families comfortable and their offices and stores operating?

Returning to the opening story of the undecided student, one strategy would be to ask him to reflect on the different industries or occupations he might be considering and ask what needs he believes they might fulfill for other individuals. This would not be a replacement for the valuable insights from the O\*NET links to RIASEC and the resulting career possibilities, but an additional talking point. The information in the figures is not meant to be definitive but for use as a background for discussion. The goal is to amplify the reflection process in the context of understanding more about the fields individuals might have in mind, which could also enable more effective marketing of themselves to employers in those fields.

Similarly, recruiters can connect the mission of the organization to the human needs it serves, and to the personal needs of the applicant.

Career development is a complex, ongoing process—Maslow's framework can add another link to motivational and economic factors.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>R.N. Bolles. *What Color Is Your Parachute? A practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*. Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, Crown Publishing, Random House, 2013, pp.56-57.
- <sup>2</sup>Bolles, pp. 138-139.
- <sup>3</sup>M. Mariani. "O\*NET update," *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, 45 (3), 2001, pp. 26-27; O\*NET Resource Center (2013). About O\*NET. [http://www.onetcenter.org/content.html/1.B.1?d=1#cm\\_1.B.1](http://www.onetcenter.org/content.html/1.B.1?d=1#cm_1.B.1)
- <sup>4</sup>Bolles, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>5</sup>A. H. Maslow. "A theory of human motivation." *Psychological Review*, 50, 1943, pp. 370-396.
- <sup>6</sup>Maslow, p. 373.
- <sup>7</sup>Maslow, pp. 377-378.
- <sup>8</sup>Maslow, p. 379.
- <sup>9</sup>Maslow, p. 379.
- <sup>10</sup>Maslow, p. 381.
- <sup>11</sup>Maslow, pp. 381-382.
- <sup>12</sup>Maslow, p. 382.
- <sup>13</sup>Maslow, pp. 388-389.
- <sup>14</sup>Maslow, p. 390.
- <sup>15</sup>A. H. Maslow. *Motivation and Personality* (Second edition). New York: Harper & Row, 1970, pp. 48-51.
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- <sup>17</sup>O'Connor and Yballe, p. 741.
- <sup>18</sup>O'Connor and Yballe, pp. 744-745.
- <sup>19</sup>O'Connor and Yballe, pp. 747-748.
- <sup>20</sup>O'Connor and Yballe, pp. 749-750.
- <sup>21</sup>O'Connor and Yballe, p. 754.
- <sup>22</sup>T. Hindle. *The Economist Guide to Management Ideas*. London: Profile Books Ltd., 2003, pp. 115-116.
- <sup>23</sup>Hindle, p. 116.
- <sup>24</sup>U.S. Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service. 2013. 1040 Instructions 2012, p. 104.
- <sup>25</sup>Richard B. McKenzie and Gordon Tullock discuss ways in which Maslow's framework compares and contrasts with economic theories of behavior. Consideration is given to the price and quantity relationships illustrated by the demand curve and with budgetary and cost issues and how these relate to the satisfaction of needs. R.B. McKenzie and G. Tullock. *The new world of economics* (Sixth edition). Heidelberg: Springer, 2012, pp. 43-49.
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- <sup>31</sup>Montgomery and Ramus, p. 23.
- <sup>32</sup>M. J. Bugenhagen and J.E. Barbuto, Jr. "Testing the developmental nature of work motivation using Kegan's constructive development theory." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 19 (1), 2012, doi:10.1177/1548051811404896, pp. 35-45.
- <sup>33</sup>Bugenhagen and Barbuto, pp. 36-37.
- <sup>34</sup>Bugenhagen and Barbuto, p. 37.
- <sup>35</sup>Maslow, 1943, pp. 388-389.
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