

# Needs of Employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall in China

- Lao Xiaoqin
- Anong Wisessuwan
- Chalong Tubsree

**Abstract.** *This study explores the levels of needs of employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and compares the difference of needs that motivated employees of different genders, ages and years of work experience. A quantitative approach is applied to answer the research questions proposed for this study. This study uses a questionnaire to collect data. The sample of 66 employees was randomly selected from the population of 78 employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall. Using descriptive statistics, the ranking of the five need levels for employees, in order of importance, was self-actualization need, social need, esteem need, physiological need and safety need. From the comparisons of employees' needs classified by gender, age and years of work experience, there were no significant differences.*

**Key words:** Employee motivation/needs

## Introduction

In order for an organization to meet its obligations to shareholders, employees and society, its top management must develop a relationship between the organization and employees that will fulfill the continually changing needs of both parties. At a minimum the organization expects employees to perform reliably the tasks assigned to them and at the standards set for them, and to follow the rules that have been established to govern the workplace. Management often expects: that employees take more initiative, supervise themselves, continually learn new skills and be responsive to business needs. At a minimum, employees expect their organization to provide fair pay, safe working conditions and fair treatment. Like management, employees often expect more, depending on the strength of their needs for security, status, involvement, challenge, power and responsibility. For organizations to address these expectations, an understanding of employees' needs is required (Beer, Spector, Lawrence, Mills & Walton, 1984).

Understanding employees' needs is an essential component of a successful business practice. No matter how appealing are the products and services a company is providing, how efficient are a company's business and marketing strategies, and what size budget a company has to operate, low morale in employees could be a major problem for companies that aim to make a profit in the marketplace.

Human resources are now seen as the primary source of a company's competitive advantage. Therefore, the way people are treated increasingly determines whether an organization will prosper or even survive (Lawler, 2003). To ensure that employees are treated fairly, organizations are acknowledging that they need to establish an equitable balance between employee contributions to the organization and the organization's contribution to the employees. Establishing this balance must begin with understanding employees' needs first.

Every individual has needs; some are innate, others are acquired. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (1943) goes beyond this to explain that each level of need contains various things that he grouped together because they are conceptually related. Maslow's hierarchy of needs can serve as

a reliable guide when it comes to providing employees with things they need and expect from an employer.

Maslow's work is certainly a major work in employee motivation but there have been many more recent studies which should also be discussed in any paper on motivation.

Employee motivation theories attempt to create models to understand what motivates people to push their performance at work. One of the famous motivation theories is Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

This hierarchy suggests that people are motivated to fulfill basic needs before moving on to the growth need. Maslow believed that these needs are similar to instincts and play a major role in motivating behavior.

Parry and Doan (1994) stated that "a theory of motivation must include the study of ultimate human needs and goals appropriate to humanity's full range of being." Thus, the researcher did this survey based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. Even so, Maslow's theory still has sufficient reasons to evaluate today's China. Firstly, they ignored a fact that cultures are developing persistently, which means Chinese employee motivation is also changing over time. Garcia (2008) mentioned what cannot be neglected is that the final aim of socialism is to achieve common prosperity. As a consequence, to achieve self-actualization is an essential premise for achieving the final aim of socialism, which is in accordance with Maslow's theory directly, even though China is a collectivism country. Furthermore, Maslow said that people have motivation to achieve high levels of needs when they have achieved the basic needs. Alsa (2008) found that Chinese employee focus more on material satisfaction, which can be anticipated that they are now gradually close to the level of self-actualization. In conclusion, although Maslow's theory has been considered outdated and although China is a collectivist country instead of individualist country, the theory also can evaluate employee motivation in contemporary Chinese business in most respects. Effective employee motivation can increase employees' productivity and loyalty. The loss of talented employees may be very detrimental to the company's future success. Outstanding employees may leave an organization because they become dissatisfied, underpaid or unmotivated.

## Statement of the problem

The study was conducted at Nanning Admiral City Mall. Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory may not be applicable as perceived by this company's employees because many employees seem to act on their own perception of reality. The culture and the high insecurity in the country may highly affect the hierarchy of needs among employees. There is concern that needs may tend to reoccur and motivation will deviate from Maslow's hierarchical order. There is a need to investigate these assertions to find out if the employees would perceive their needs as being in Maslow's hierarchical order.

## Research Questions

1. What are the levels of needs of employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs?
2. Are there any differences in the levels of needs of employees according to gender, age and years of work experience at Nanning Admiral City Mall?

## Research Objectives

This research was intended to achieve the following objectives:

1. To explore the levels of needs of employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

2. To compare the employees' needs classified by gender, age and years of work experience at Nanning Admiral City Mall.

## Significance of the study

The results of the study can provide useful information for human resource development and emphasize the importance of employee motivation. The research can help the company manager to know and understand the employees' needs, so that they can promote a healthy work environment. It also makes a company care about employees and help them to motivate their employees.

## Literature Review

### Nanning Admiral City Mall

According to the *Official website of Nanning Admiral City Mall*, (2008), the information about Nanning Admiral City Mall is as follows:

"Nanning Admiral City Mall is the Sino-Malaysia joint venture business and prosperous shopping center with modern and fashion trends. There are dozens of feature stores, antique shops and time-honored brands. Admiral City Mall offers to the shoppers, a comprehensive and dynamic shopping experience."

Admiral City Mall is located in Nanning City, Guangxi province. It is one of the famous shopping centers in Nanning. Nanning Admiral City Mall covers about 4 hundred thousand square meters and a total of about 450 million U.S. dollars of investment which surrounding a perfect matching of a large municipality and five-star hotels, a beautiful natural landscape, convenient transportation and which is located downtown. Admiral City Mall has currently over 100 shops and about 30 restaurants. A variety of brands, mostly international, are offered here to meet more sophisticated needs. Admiral City Mall has become an integrated shopping plaza with a set of international products, fashion, entertainment, and food stores. Combined with the characteristics of the commercial district, it is creative, innovative, and fashionable, with the over-the-top psychological service management concept which meets people's all-round life needs.

There are 78 employees in Admiral City Mall. The company is divided into seven departments. There is a human resource department, a financial department, a marketing customer service department, a property management department, an operation department and an information department.

The research focused on the study at Nanning Admiral City Mall, which is a Sino-Malaysia joint venture business. Because Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory has not been used in Nanning Admiral City Mall. It is believed that satisfying employees' need can enhance the productivity at this company. So the researcher was interested to investigate whether Maslow's motivation theory would work in a Chinese enterprise as well as it works in the western society.

In conclusion, given the importance of employee motivation, research into the needs of employees is very important, and is the basis of this study.

### Need and Motivation

For the purpose of clarity, the relevant concepts are defined in the sections that follow: First, a "need" is defined, according to Briggs, Gustafson and Tillman (1991, p. 21), as "a need is expressed when an individual takes action to remove the discrepancy between what he or she wants and has". Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory goes beyond this to explain that each level of need contains various things that he grouped together because they are conceptually related. For this study, need is defined as a psychological feature that motivates a person to action toward a goal. The fundamental approach to motivation is to consider human behavior as stimulated by the way to satisfy needs.

Secondly, “motivation” is defined. Many authors have defined the concept of motivation. Kreitner (1995) defined motivation as the psychological process that gives behavior purpose and direction; Buford, Bedeian and Linder (1995) defined it as “a predisposition to behave in a purposive manner to achieve specific, unmet needs”. Schacter, Gilbert and Wegner (2010, p. 325) also stated that “motivation is a psychological feature that arouses an organism to act towards a desired goal and elicits, controls, and sustains certain goal-directed behaviors. It can be considered a driving force; a psychological one that compels or reinforces an action toward a desired goal”. For this study, motivation is defined as the force that drives individuals to accomplish personal and organizational goals. The driving force is produced by a state of tension, which exists as a result of an unfulfilled need.

Hertel (2003, p. 3) said that “motivation is getting more important every day since the competition in the workplace is increasing on a daily basis as well as the unemployment rate”. Management has to find an effective way to motivate not only themselves, but their employees. Lauby (2005, p. 1) also stated that “different needs motivate different people”. It’s important for managers to figure out what motivates each employee. The perfect way to motivate an employee is to understand his individual needs first, and then satisfy those needs.

Motivation has become increasingly important for organizations and companies of all sizes that want to reach the organizational objectives in a competitive marketplace. Top performers of an organization consistently provide high-quality work, maintain a high level of productivity and overcome obstacles or challenges. Helping all employees maintain a high level of motivation can help keep employees committed to working hard and contributing as much value as possible to the organization. In order to reach a high level of motivation, managers need to satisfy their needs first.

### **Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory**

To create valid and suitable measures for needs, it is essential to derive a clear definition for each concept. Thus, each of the needs is operationally defined to develop a clear understanding of what is to be measured with each scale. In turn, the definitions are used to enable scale development for empirical testing.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a theory in psychology, proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper *A Theory of Human Motivation*. Maslow (1943) stated that people are motivated to achieve certain needs. When one need is fulfilled a person seeks to fulfill the next one, and so on. If the most basic need is not met, then Maslow’s theory proposes that none of the needs higher up in the hierarchy can be met. Once these needs have been reasonably satisfied, one may be able to reach the highest level called self-actualization.

Some writers have criticized Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory because they thought it was created using ideas that are based only in Western culture, but the data in this study, which were obtained from an Eastern culture. However, Maslow (1943, p. 389) suggested that there was “unity behind the superficial differences in specific desires from one culture to another” and that “it is the common experience of anthropologists that people, even in different societies, are much more alike than we would think.” Also, as Maslow further noted, the classification of the needs helps in understanding human nature: “The claim is made only that it is relatively more ultimate, more universal, more basic, than the superficial conscious desires from culture to culture, and makes a somewhat closer approach to common human characteristic” (p. 390).

In discussions of the application and limitations of his hierarchy, Maslow took pains to emphasize that his theory is a schema. Needs could be partially fulfilled at lower and higher levels. Inversions or reordering of needs for particular individuals at particular turning points is also possible. So, Maslow’s theory is a framework for understanding and action rather than a rigid prescription governing all human activity. Thus, the researcher did this survey based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory.

In conclusion, although Maslow's theory has been considered outdated and although China is a collectivist country instead of an individualist country, the theory also can evaluate employee motivation in contemporary Chinese business in most respects.

### **Research Related to Employee's Need**

#### **1. Research about employees' needs and employee performance**

Stella (2008) used the Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, McGregor's X-Y and Herzberg's two factor theory in her research. She did research on employee motivation and performance in the Kitgum District Local Government. She also said that for adequate work motivation leaders and managers need to understand the active needs that create individual employee motivation.

In order to be able to provide physiological motivation an organization should ensure that it provides, for example, sufficient lunch breaks and offers salaries that enable the workers to be able to meet basic needs. (Physiological need.)

Safety needs can be provided through the creation of a conducive environment which is safe, provision of job security and a feeling that workers are safe from any threat.

Social needs require an organization to create a feeling of acceptance, belonging, and the spirit of communal living by encouraging team spirit among the employees.

Esteem motivators are provided through the recognition given to workers' achievements, attaching value to their view, assigning important projects to hard-working employees and provision of status to make them feel valued and appreciated by the organization.

In order to enable an employee to achieve the need of self actualization, it requires the provision of challenging tasks, important work assignments which help to stimulate motivation, creativity, and progress in accordance to long term organizational goals.

The research used a questionnaire to get data from the sample, surveyed the current situation of employee motivation, focused analyses on influencing factors, and then proposed improvement strategies.

The research findings (Stella, 2008) showed that money is an important incentive to encourage good performance, but they perceived the salaries as not adequate. Both females and males found the working conditions and physical environment effective to encourage good performance. Females did not find the job security at the district to be adequate while their male counterparts found the job security to be adequate. The working relations at the organization are found to be fair. The researcher recognized that motivation is necessary to encourage good performance.

#### **2. Research about factors that affect employees' needs**

Employee motivation, at times, can be an elusive quest for companies and managers due to the multiplicity of incentives that can influence employees to do their best work. The fundamental approach to motivation is to consider an employee as stimulated by the urge to satisfy their needs.

Berkson, Martin, Smith & Worley (2012) did research on employee motivation and its most influential factors. The study was conducted by issuing a questionnaire to all employees working at the company headquarters in Reno. The research analyzed and presented four criteria: communication in the workplace, income of employees, long-term incentives and non-financial incentives.

According to the study, 48.33% of the employees believed that improvements could be made to the communication within the company. Employees at the company wanted better communication with their immediate managers and the company as a whole. They wanted to know how they are doing, what to improve on, and what they are good at. Many believed the quality of communication at the company was insufficient, thus it is very rational to believe that an increase in communication quality would lead to an increase in overall employee motivation.

The findings showed that competitive wages were a strong motivational factor, especially for the lower-income demographics of the company. They were less pleased with management and the



company, which may have led to their comparatively low motivation levels. They desired a higher income but were often forced to settle for non-financial incentives when their wishes were not granted.

### **3. Researcher about demographic factors' influence on levels of needs of employees**

Using demographic factors as independent variables in research, population and sample or subjects can generate confidence, validity and reliability of the evidence of the results. Additionally, it can suggest the strength and limitations of research procedures, it may as well constitute extraneous variables that affect results.

Human beings are motivated by satisfying their different kinds of needs. Needs depend on many factors and vary by the person, situation, organization, nature of work, education background, work experience and position of work, etc. When considering employees needs, demographic variables should be considered to thoroughly understand the possible factors that lead to different need levels. According to some researchers, it is seen that demographic variables that influence levels of needs of employees include gender, age, level of education and work experience, etc.

In terms of relationships between gender and levels of needs of employee, previous studies by Ajang (2007) and Kovach (1987) reported that gender did not have a significant impact on levels of needs. Ajang's survey was carried out among students at Umeo Business School who are assumed to be future employees. Ajang (2007) pointed out that the responses of men and women showed no significant differences between genders. Both men and women ranked four of five needs at the same level. For example, men and women gave importance to safety and self-actualization. And Kovach (1987) did his research at organizations in the U.S. industrial sector. He also found no significant differences between men and women, but reported that women placed self-actualization in first place, while men put it in second place.

Other studies have reported conflicting results. A study done by Hofstede (2001) in Australia found that males are more concerned about safety and esteem needs. Besides, Bigoness (1998) investigated the job attribute preferences of male and female MBA candidates. Participants were drawn from 27 different MBA programs in the United States. He found that males usually emphasize safety while females emphasize self-actualization. Also, a study done in Tennessee by Wiley (1997) noted that females placed greater importance on esteem need.

A study done by Ajang (2007) indicated that there were no significant differences among age groups concerning levels of needs. He divided the sample into four groups: 20 years or under, 21-25, 26-30, 31 and above. He emphasized that younger employees gave high scores for safety. He explained that this could be due to the fact that the age group 20 and below are still new in the labour market and still have a huge appetite for material things like cars. The older workers (age group 31 and above) are more responsible and prefer a secure working environment.

Ojha and Pramanick (2009) did the research about effects of age on intensity and priority of life needs. A large group of 1800 subjects of urban areas of Bhagalpur equally divided into six age groups, who were employed in or retired from government services and educational institutions. They also gave statistically significant evidence of age differences in motivation for all needs. The two higher priorities given to physiological and social needs by the younger group and older group indicate that both these needs were more important than esteem and self-actualization. The middle age group felt that esteem is more important for them, and social and self-actualization needs which were ranked third and fourth were less important. However, the study found that physiological needs are important for all age groups as it received either first or second rank by all. Esteem need received first rank by the middle age group.

According to relevant literature, income is related to the level of reported happiness (Easterlin, 2001). A study done in Oxford by Layard (2005) found a positive correlation between income and reported happiness. But this is opposed by Frey & Stutzer (2002, p. 15). The incorporation of Maslow's theory, however, can provide an important additional insight, if we make the reasonable assumption that basic needs are best satisfied by income.

Years of work experience is another variable that may affect levels of needs. Many years of working experience brings about communication skills, improve personal relationships with others and resolution of conflicts and stress. However, Brauchle (2004) did the survey on relationships between selected demographic variables and employee work ethics. His data were derived from the supervisors of information and non-information employees of six randomly selected manufacturing industries in the central Illinois area. Brauchle found no relationship between years of work experience and need.

Job position is another variable that has been studied besides gender, age, income, education background and work experience. Job position in the current study plays a vital role in emotional intelligence. Brauchle (2004) found that there is difference between different positions in an organization in levels of needs. This indicates that job position has a significant impact on levels of needs.

Based on the discussion in the paragraphs above, the researcher decided to select gender, age, and years of work experience as demographic variables in this study.

According to Corey (1996, p. 139), features such as “a person’s age and gender may have an important influence on who they are, how they are treated by others, their behavior and their relations with others. The employee’s needs change with age.” Therefore, some studies use age as a demographic variable in their research. Gender is used to differentiate needs between men and women due to the fact that men and women have different needs from a job. The gender variable has long been applied in connection with needs and motivation research (Kotler & Keller, 2009, p. 257).

The researcher selected variables according to the situation with the company. For instance, the incomes of employees fall within a small range; the education background of most of employees is a bachelor’s degree. The company has just one top manager, six middle managers and the rest are normal employees. Therefore, income, education background and job position were not chosen as demographic variables in this study.

## Research Methodology

A survey research design was used in this study. “In its broadest sense, ‘survey research’ is the collection of quantified data from a population for purposes of description or to identify covariation between variables that may point to causal relationships or predictive patterns of influence” (Sapsford, 2007, p. 2).

### Population and Sample

The population of this study was all employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall with a total of 78 persons. The sample of this study was 66 employees who were randomly selected from the 78 employees

A sample is a part of the population from which it was drawn. As Fowler (2009) stated, survey research is based on sampling, which involves getting information from only some members of the population. If information is obtained from the whole population, it is not a sample, but a census.

There are several ways to choose a sample size. The researcher determined the sample size using Krejcie & Morgan’s table (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

### Instrument

In this study, the researcher used a questionnaire containing 20 items, each rated on a scale from 1 to 5, for investigating the levels of employee needs at Nanning Admiral City Mall. The thematic foundation of this research study rests on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory. To this end, questions in the questionnaire were developed by the researcher through a review of related literature and research.

The questionnaire used in this study consisted of two parts: part one was demographic data including three items: gender, age and years of work experience. The second part consisted of the 20 closed-end questions. All the items for each need level were developed from Maslow's theory of need satisfaction, which was examined for conceptual validation, yielding 4 items for each of the needs. The questions that asked for the physiological, safety, social, esteem and self-actualization needs referred to satisfaction of the need, and responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

### **1. Physiological need**

Although there are many physiological needs, some are classic in terms of their underlying prepotency. Thus, satisfaction with the physiological needs was measured by 4 items that included items specifically mentioned by Maslow. That is, the need for rest, food and housing. The items asked about the amount or quality of these. A sample item was "My company allocates break time for meals and snacks for me."

### **2. Safety need**

The safety need is defined in this study as the desires for security and stability; to feel safe from job; safe conditions and clear work procedures to reduce stress and anxiety. These were all included in the 4 items created to assess satisfaction of the safety needs. A sample item was "I feel secure with my job."

### **3. Social need**

This measure focused on receiving love, support and acceptance. Thus, the items created included co-workers, family and leaders. Satisfaction of the social needs was also measured with a 4-item scale. A sample item was "I have a good relationship with co-workers."

### **4. Esteem need**

Esteem need of this study emphasized the influence on individual emotion from a leader's unfairness; to regard with respect from leader; the self job satisfaction and the opportunity to achieve job promotion. A sample item was "My manager always treats me with respect."

### **5. Self-actualization need**

The items created for this study were based on Maslow's central concepts. Maslow (1943, p. 382) described that self-fulfillment, doing what one wants and gratifying one's own desire. These concepts were included as items for this construct. Self-actualization was measured with 4 items that assessed the extent to which it was achieved. A sample item was "I want to be best at my job."

During the process of constructing questionnaire items, the researcher consulted the principal and co-advisor for the wording and content validity of the questionnaire. The face and content validity of the questionnaire were ascertained by three experts from Burapha University. Afterwards, the researcher revised the questionnaire according to the suggestion from the three experts. When an opportunity arose to gather data in China for better understanding of items and more reliable results, translation of the scales was then undertaken by the researcher.

The researcher translated the original English items into Chinese, then Assist. Prof. Li Xiaoying at Guangxi University of foreign languages translated the Chinese version back into English. The back-translation was then examined by a bilingual expert.

The back-translation was deemed virtually identical to the original English version.

Questionnaires were distributed to 30 employees of the MIXC mall in Nanning between 1st Dec. 2013 and 15th Dec. 2013 for its reliability. The validity of questionnaires obtained from pre-application was measured and its Cronbach's alpha was calculated as 0.92 (See Appendix D). This means that in the survey's evaluation, internal complication is acceptable and validity is high. After this reliability analysis, research studies started.



## Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher sent an email to the manager of the human resource management department at Nanning Admiral City Mall for the permission to collect data. The manager notified all employees that they would be asked to participate in the study.

At last, the questionnaires were distributed to the employees and the completed questionnaires were sent back to the researcher. The response rate was 100 percent from the employees.

All data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviations, were used to summarize the data. Frequencies and standard deviations were computed for responses to research questions. For each research question, individual item response means and standard deviations were computed, as well as composite mean and standard deviations for each research question corresponding to each of the five levels of Maslow's needs hierarchy. The difference in levels of needs according to age, gender and years of work experience was also analyzed. The data analysis was done through t-tests for comparing the gender and age variables. *F*-test was used for comparing the years of work experience variable.

## Research Results

This chapter is composed of sections which address the research questions. The demographic characteristics of the samples were classified into groups. The respondents' demographic information was as follows:

Table 1 Demographic data

		<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Male	20	30.30
	Female	46	69.70
Age	20-35 years old	49	74.20
	36-50 years old	17	25.80
	1-2 years	25	37.90
Years of work experience	2-4 years	14	21.20
	over 4 years	27	40.90
Total		66	

Table 1 shows the demographic groupings of employees in Nanning Admiral City Mall. It also lists the sample size for each group.

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation of five levels needs for employee motivation

Need level	<i>(n = 66)</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Rank	Level
Physiological need	3.30	0.74	4	Medium
Safety need	2.88	0.76	5	Medium
Social need	3.75	0.61	2	High
Esteem need	3.44	0.72	3	Medium
Self-actualization need	3.84	0.52	1	High

Table 2 shows the ranking of the five need levels from employees, from most to least important, were self-actualization need, social need, esteem need, physiological need and safety need. The self-actualization need held the highest mean score ( $M = 3.84$ ) with the level of agreement as high. The safety need held the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.88$ ) and the level of agreement was medium.

Table 3 Comparison of five need levels between male and female employees

Need level	Male ( $n = 20$ )		Female ( $n = 46$ )	
	$M$	$M$	$t$	$p$
Physiological need	3.33	3.29	0.16	0.88
Safety need	2.97	2.84	0.67	0.50
Social need	3.66	3.78	-0.73	0.47
Esteem need	3.35	3.48	-0.69	0.49
Self- actualization need	3.94	3.79	1.04	0.30

Table 3 shows that there were no significant differences in the five need levels between male and female employees.

For male employees the first three ranks were self-actualization need ( $M = 3.94$ ), social need ( $M = 3.66$ ) and esteem need ( $M = 3.35$ ).

For female employees the first three ranks were also self-actualization need ( $M = 3.79$ ), social need ( $M = 3.78$ ) and esteem need ( $M = 3.48$ ).

Table 4 Comparison of five need levels among employees with different ages

Need level	20-35 years old	36-50 years old	$t$	$p$
	( $n = 49$ )	( $n = 17$ )		
	$M$	$M$		
Physiological need	3.26	3.44	0.99	0.38
Safety need	2.81	3.09	1.32	0.19
Social need	3.74	3.75	0.03	0.98
Esteem need	3.38	3.63	1.27	0.21
Self- actualization need	3.80	3.94	0.96	0.34

Table 4 shows that there were no significant differences in the five need levels among different age groups.

For 20 – 35 year-old employees the first three ranks were self-actualization need ( $M = 3.80$ ), social need ( $M = 3.74$ ) and esteem need ( $M = 3.38$ ).

For 36 - 50 year-old employees the first three ranks were self-actualization need ( $M = 3.94$ ), social need ( $M = 3.75$ ) and esteem need ( $M = 3.63$ ).

Table 5 Comparison of five need levels among employees with different years of work experience

Need level	1-2 years of work experience ( <i>n</i> = 25)	2-4 years of work experience ( <i>n</i> = 14)	over 4 years of work experience ( <i>n</i> = 27)	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>M</i>		
Physiological need	3.22	3.52	3.27	0.76	0.47
Safety need	2.80	3.00	2.88	0.31	0.74
Social need	3.74	3.82	3.71	0.14	0.87
Esteem need	3.47	3.39	3.44	0.05	0.95
Self-actualization need	3.82	3.77	3.89	0.27	0.77

Table 5 shows that there were no significant differences in the five need levels among employees with different years of work experience.

For employees with 1 – 2 years of work experience, the first three ranks were self-actualization need ( $M = 3.82$ ), social need ( $M = 3.74$ ) and esteem need ( $M = 3.47$ ).

For employees with 2 years – 4 years of work experience, the first three ranks were social need ( $M = 3.82$ ), self-actualization need ( $M = 3.77$ ) and physiological need ( $M = 3.52$ ).

For employees with over 4 years of work experience, the first three ranks were self-actualization need ( $M = 3.89$ ), social need ( $M = 3.71$ ) and esteem need ( $M = 3.44$ ).

## Discussion

### 1. The need levels of employees at Nanning Admiral City Mall

The results of this study can only be inferred to employees in Nanning Admiral City Mall. Some of the results from this study support Maslow's theory. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs are in the order of priority from first to fifth. In this research, the ranking was self-actualization needs, social needs, esteem needs, physiological needs and safety needs. This study showed that self-actualization needs were considered most important by the employees. This indicated that the greatest motivator for them was self-actualization, which supports Maslow's theory. In essence, most employees want to develop more of their potential. Alsa (2008) also indicated that self-actualization need becomes more and more important in a growing market. There is more need to provide employees with a challenge and the opportunity to reach their full career potential.

Results of the data analyses in this study indicated that there was more importance given by employees to social ( $M=3.75$ ) and esteem ( $M=3.44$ ) needs than physiological ( $M=3.30$ ) and safety ( $M=2.88$ ) needs, which supports Robbins & Judges' presumption. Most people have a need for a high evaluation of themselves that is firmly based in reality, recognition, and respect from others.

For esteem, this is related to concepts of "face", that is, how positively a person is regarded in society, which is an important aspect of life in Chinese culture (Ho, 1976). Since esteem is of such great value in Chinese society and self-actualization is the epitome of personal achievement, it is understandable that self-actualization and esteem needs could predict basic needs.

The hierarchy of needs' theory as propounded by Maslow may not be applicable as perceived by Nanning Admiral City Mall employees because many employees seem to act on their perception of reality. The culture and the high insecurity in the country may highly affect the hierarchy of needs among employees.

In conclusion, according to findings of the data analysis in this study, employees attached more importance to their higher needs than basic needs. According to results of this research and the above reasons it can be suggested that Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is not supported. Physiological and safety needs, which are the basic needs in Maslow's hierarchy, are ranked first and second; in this research they were ranked fourth and fifth. In this study, the self-actualization need is the first priority.

## 2. Comparison of the levels of employee's needs

From the results of the study, it is confirmed that an employee, whether male or female, whether young or old, whether with short or long working experience do not fall under Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

From the comparison of five need levels between males and females, it was found that there was no significant difference in responses. According to some researchers, females and males are characterized by more similarities than differences. A study done by Pearson & Chatterjee (2002), examining the experience of China, came to the conclusion that despite divergences, gender uniformity in needs of men and women dominated. Males and females are not similar in all needs, but in most. Whatever the reasons, that the females in this study placed greater value on social and esteem needs than males. Females at this stage are more conscious about status and recognition. Males responded similarly but to a lesser extent.

From the comparisons of five need levels between different ages, it was found that there was no significant difference in responses. The ranking of the five levels was similar between younger and older employees. However certain other items between the different age groups were ranked differently. Good wages was given higher importance by the younger employees. One possible explanation could be the fact that the younger employees are still new in the labour market and still have a huge appetite for material goods like cars, while the older employees are already of a responsible age and prefer a secure working environment.

From the comparison of five need levels between different years of work experience, it was found that there were no significant differences in responses.

Based on comparisons of different years of work experience, it appears that the esteem need was more important to the group with 1-2 years of work experience than other groups. From the esteem need analysis, it was shown that the first rank of the group with 1-2 years of experience was "My manager always treats me with respect." This might occur because those with 1-2 years of work experience want to be recognized by their new managers so that it increases their promotion chances in the new company. The social need was more important to the group with 2 years - 4 years of work experience than other groups. The employees in this group had a strong feeling of teamwork in the company and could fulfill both job and family responsibilities. The group with over 4 years of work experience placed the highest scores to self-actualization need. They have the desire for self-fulfillment and to be the best in the company, also willingness to undertake challenging work.

## Recommendations for Implementation

Based on the review, the following are recommendations for owners of organizations similar to the one in this study:

1. Provide opportunities for advanced studies to employees. In this study, the employees held the highest level of agreement on self-actualization need. The researcher suggests providing regular training and professional development seminars and opportunities for career growth in the organization to satisfy employees' self-actualization needs.

2. Keep a positive interpersonal relationship. In this study, it was found that the social need also held high scores among the five need levels. Keeping a positive relationship with co-workers and supervisor was important to employees. The researcher suggests that building communication boards can improve communication.

## Recommendation for further study

1. This study found that the employees showed the lowest levels of importance for the safety need, while they reported the highest levels for the self-actualization need. Therefore, further research should focus on the importance of self-actualization need and investigate the methods to satisfy it.
2. To go further with research the researcher also suggests investigating the levels of needs of employees and how it affects employee retention. Exploring how to satisfy employee's need in order to keep them in the company is very significant and important.
3. This study had some drawbacks. Firstly, the sample size may have been too low. Secondly, it was limited to one company, and might lack evidence or information. Thirdly, Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory was an old theory, the researcher suggested the further research should focus on others newer theory. Finally, the researcher applied quantitative methods to explore problems. For the further research, the researcher suggests using qualitative method to get more details from interviews.

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มหาวิทยาลัยบูรพา  
Burapha University