DEFINING KEY ELEMENTS THAT SHAPE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN A MASLOW HIERARCHY IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This study focused on employee engagement as a research in the industry using qualitative methods. The purpose of this paper was to define the factors that affect employee engagement, as tested within the framework of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (MHN). Key elements for measuring employee engagement were defined based on MHN. The priority of this study is to determine which factors and to what degree contribute to employee engagement in Maslow's five levels. Data was interpreted with MAXQDA 22 for thematic content analysis. As a result of this study, a strong relationship was determined between employee engagement and the key elements of MHN. The factors of employee engagement are explained as 9 codes (key elements) and defined in the relevant step of the pyramid. There is a lack of applied studies in the literature on employee engagement, making this study original in that respect. In the analysis, a significant relationship was found between self-actualization and 9 key elements. These elements are Expectations, Materials, Recognition, Care, Development, Quality, Team, Progress, and Learn & Grow. The last step is to achieve self-actualization, all these elements must work together. As a result, this study concludes that MHN can offer valuable insights regarding employee engagement.

MASLOW HİYERARŞİSİ PERSPEKTİFİNDE ÇALIŞAN BAĞLILIĞINI BELİRLEYEN ANA UNSURLARIN TANIMLANMASI

Öz

Bu çalışma, sektörde nitel yöntemler kullanılarak yapılan bir araştırma olarak çalışan bağlılığına odaklanmıştır. Buna bağlı olarak bu makalenin amacı, çalışan bağlılığını etkileyen faktörleri Maslow'un ihtiyaçlar hiyerarşisi çerçevesinde test ederek tanımlamaktır. Çalışan bağlılığını ölçmeye yönelik temel unsurlar MHN'ye göre tanımlanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın önceliği Maslow'un beş düzeyinde çalışan bağlılığına hangi faktörlerin ve ne ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunun belirlenmesidir. Veriler tematik içerik analizi için MAXQDA 22 ile yorumlanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonucunda çalışan bağlılığı ile MHN'nin arasında güçlü bir ilişki olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Çalışan bağlılığını etkileyen faktörler 9 kod (temel unsur) olarak açıklanmış ve piramidin ilgili adımında tanımlanmıştır. Literatürde çalışan bağlılığı konusunda uygulamalı çalışmaların eksikliği bu çalışmayı özgün kılmaktadır. Analizde kendini gerçekleştirme ile 9 temel unsur arasında anlamlı bir ilişki bulunmuştur. Bu unsurlar; Beklentiler, Malzemeler, Tanınma, İlgi, Gelişim, Kalite, Ekip, İlerleme ve Öğrenme & Büyüme'dir. Son basamak olan kendini gerçekleştirmeyi başarmak için tüm bu unsurların birlikte çalışması gerekmektedir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışmanın bulguları MHN'nin çalışan bağlılığı konusunda değerli bilgiler sunabileceğini iddia etmektedir.

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1. Introduction

In the rapidly evolving and fiercely competitive automotive industry, where technological advancements and consumer demands constantly reshape the market, the importance of employee engagement cannot be overstated in maintaining organizational success. Engaged employees not only contribute to the efficiency of manufacturing processes but also play a pivotal role in shaping the industry's response to evolving challenges. The automotive industry, characterized by its intricate supply chains, rigorous production schedules, and constant demands for innovation, places unique demands on its employees. Beyond traditional productivity and efficiency metrics, employee engagement in the automotive industry drives creativity and problem-solving and fosters resilience in the face of change (Saks, 2006: 601; Guo, 2021: 15).

Constantly changing the field of organizational psychology, the success of a workplace depends on how engaged its employees are. Understanding the complex factors that influence employee commitment is becoming more and more important. As companies face the challenges of modern-day work environments, understanding what motivates people to invest their talents, effort, and enthusiasm has become increasingly complex. MHN, which was initially developed to explain the hierarchy of human needs, offers a useful structure for analyzing the fundamental factors that drive employee engagement. (Saks and Gruman, 2014: 157). Enhancing employee motivation is crucial for unlocking untapped potential and fostering a thriving workplace culture that prioritizes creativity, resilience, and commitment in a dynamic environment. MHN suggests that influential factors are a key factor driving employee engagement, which goes beyond conventional performance metrics and plays a crucial role in fostering innovation, collaboration, and organizational commitment. The automotive industry is a complex field that requires a combination of human skills and technological expertise to achieve success. To understand what motivates employees in this industry, it is critical to examine the foundational elements that drive them. MHN provides a significant psychological theory that offers a framework for understanding the influential factors that shape the workforce in the automotive sector. MHN, a layered structure that incorporates basic needs, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization, provides a lens to decode the complex interplay between individual needs and organizational dynamics in the automotive industry. (Stum, 2001: 5; Jerome, 2013: 40; Soelistya and Mashud, 2016: 48).

This study explains into how MHN manifests within the automotive industry, shedding light on the specific factors that influence employee engagement, satisfaction, and overall well-being. Against the backdrop of rapidly evolving industries and remote work becoming more prevalent, traditional employee motivation models demand reassessment. This article bridges the gap between classical psychological theories and contemporary organizational realities, researching to unravel the intricate interplay between Maslow's fundamental human needs and the ever-shifting dynamics of modern work environments. The originality of this research presents a comprehensive review of motivational factors influencing employee engagement levels. This paper explored the various dynamics that shape and define employee engagement, using MHN as a framework. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to define the factors that affect employee engagement, as tested within the framework of Maslow's pyramid. In this context, the layers of complexity within the framework of MHN were researched to define and understand the factors that intricately weave the tapestry of employee engagement.

2. Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Maslow created a theory in the form of a pyramid with five levels. The first level is the physiological level, which includes the basic needs for human survival such as food, water, and shelter. Once these needs are met, an individual will move to the second level and seek safety, including freedom from anxiety and stress, as defined by him. After achieving safety, the individual will move to the third level, which involves the need for belongingness, friendship, and love, and is unique to each individual. Once the need for belongingness is met, the fourth level of esteem comes into play where the individual seeks to feel competent, confident, and self-assured. Finally,

the individual can pursue self-actualization when they have met the needs of the previous four levels. It's important to note that each person has different needs, and what is sufficient for one may not be adequate for another (Benson and Dundis, 2003: 317).

Employee engagement is a crucial factor in organizational culture and employee effectiveness. Employee engagement mention to the level of psychological, intellectual, and motivational commitment that employees have toward their work and organization. It involves a deep connection to the company's goals, values, and mission, and goes beyond mere job satisfaction. Employees who are engaged willingly contribute to the success of the organization and are enthusiastic about their work (Little and Little, 2006: 112; Imandin et al., 2014: 521; Kanwar and Sharma, 2014: 72). In today's rapidly envolving and technology-driven automotive industry, employee engagement is more critical than ever for organizational success. Employee engagement is a critical concept that involves motivation, commitment, and a sense of belonging. It is not just a mere metric for organizational well-being, but a strategic imperative for navigating the complexities of the automotive landscape. From production to research and development, the level of engagement among employees directly impacts productivity, product quality, and the industry's ability to respond to market demands (Wu et al., 2017: 220).

Employee engagement is a significant aspect of organizational performance, and it can be effectively understood within the framework of MHN. MHN provides a conceptual foundation for comprehending the significance of fulfilling basic human needs and contextualizing employee engagement (Shuck et al., 2011: 310). This is particularly relevant as employee engagement is defined as the commitment and emotional attachment of employees towards the organization (Alias et al., 2022: 1735). MHN provides a framework to understand the fundamental needs of humans, and fulfilling these needs has a crucial impact on employees' professional performance. This model can be used to address the decline in employee engagement, which can negatively affect workplace culture, employee retention, and performance. The theoretical framework suggests a correlation between employee engagement, satisfaction, and productivity, emphasizing their interconnection. Engaged employees are a valuable source of competitive advantage, emphasizing the strategic importance of employee engagement within organizations (Dhanda, 2015: 80; Ştefan et al., 2020: 135).

Academic discussions on employee engagement often involve the examination of factors influencing engagement, the measurement of engagement levels, and the impact of engagement on organizational outcomes such as productivity, innovation, and employee retention. Several studies have investigated the determinants and impact of employee engagement on organizational results.

Wahba and Bridwell (1973) both explore the concept of employee engagement within the framework of MHN. The researchers evaluate the empirical research on Maslow's theory, suggesting that the hierarchy may not be as rigid as originally proposed. **Benson and Dundis (2003)** claimed that MHN is a valuable framework for understanding and motivating healthcare employees' engagement, particularly in the face of industry changes and the increasing role of technology in training. **Harvard (2010)** further expands on the ideas, updating Maslow's model to include cultural considerations and the influence of employee knowledge, and emphasizes the importance of self-actualization and enlightened management policy in achieving employee engagement**. Shuck et al. (2011)** investigated employee engagement through connection, workplace, and occasions, all in line with MHN. They identify relationship development, workplace climate, and learning opportunities as key factors in employee engagement, aligning with Maslow's emphasis on social needs and self-actualization. **Jerome (2013)** both underscored the relevance of MHN in organizational culture, human resource management, and employee engagement, despite the challenges in its application. These studies collectively highlight the need for healthcare organizations to consider and address the diverse needs of their employees to enhance performance. **Upadhyaya (2015)** emphasizes the importance of the theory in organizational

loyalty, personnel management, and employee engagement, suggesting that it can be a valuable tool in achieving organizational goals. **Casey and Sieber (2016)** suggests that involving employees in sustainability and corporate social responsibility can enhance their perception of job meaning and increase engagement. This is supported by **Riyanto et al. (2021),** who found that motivation positively influences employee performance, with employee engagement mediating this relationship. **Afolabi et al. (2018)** assume that the effectiveness of motivational strategies in organizations was also influenced by factors affecting employee engagement. **Robijn et al. (2020)** and **Schaufeli (2021)** engaging leadership, which fosters work engagement through basic needs satisfaction, has been shown to positively impact individual and team performance. **Guo (2021)** conducted a comprehensive review of motivational factors affecting employee engagement.

Evaluating previous studies that have been done to discover the literature for relevant studies that engage within the framework of Maslow's hierarchy. Most researchers focus on quantitative research rather than qualitative research. Above all, the scarcity of qualitative research in the literature describes a gap in this field. This paper was explored to understand the various factors that shape and define employee engagement, using MHN as a framework.

3. Materials and Methods

Disclosing the aim of this research was to define the elements that affect employee engagement, as tested within the framework of Maslow's pyramid. This research applied Maslow's pyramid to address employee engagement challenges in the speedily changing automotive industry. In this study, key elements for measuring employee engagement was defined based on MHN. Maslow created a motivational pyramid divided into five levels. The premise is that employee engagement factors are the response to Maslow's levels such as basic needs, management support, teamwork, growth, and self-actualization.

In this qualitative study, the researcher collected documents, conducted semi-structured interviews, and recorded observations at a multinational manufacturing corporation. Post-data collection, MAXQDA 22 for thematic content analysis has been used to evaluate employee engagement.

The study measured employee engagement through 20 questions to comprehensively assess the key elements of Maslow's pyramid. The questions were arranged based on the existing literature to measure the possibility of employee engagement implementation. Open-ended questions related to this research have been asked of 12 employees in the production industry in Aksaray. While open-ended questions were used to allow the researcher from seeing all dimensions of the bigger picture while collecting the data, each participant was interviewed at separate times, at a determined place. Purposive sampling was used in this study to focus on a specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2013: 231; Mertens, 2014: 38), where the sample of the study was one group, namely 12 employees from the industry in Aksaray. The face-to-face interview was conducted to elicit a specific response from the employees. Table 1 provides information on the employees' departments, experience, and MHN information levels.

Table 1: **Participants Features**

No	Department	Experience(years)	Maslow information levels
1	Project Management	12	Moderate
2	Controlling	9	Well-intensive
3	Human Resources	20	Moderate
4	Production Planning	16	Little
5	Logistic	12	Moderate
6	Quality Management	14	Moderate
7	Information Technologies	10	Moderate
8	Public Relationship	11	Little
9	Maintenance	19	Well-intensive
10	Production	7	Little

Table 1 (Continued): **Participants Features**

No	Department	Experience(years)	Maslow information levels
11	Dyeing	7	Well-intensive
12	Sales & Marketing	9	Moderate

Table 1 illustrates how much the employees cooperate with other departments on a three-step scale of little, basic, and moderate. According to data collected from 12 employees across various departments, the estimate is that about 50 percent of employees' relationships are moderate, 25 percent of employees' relationships are well-intensive, and 25% of employees have little cooperation with other departments. The qualitative approach involves analyzing unstructured data in the form of text (Schuelke-Leech et al., 2017: 464). This study involved analyzing qualitative data collected from employee interviews through coding and classification. The MAXQDA 22 program was used to code the data since it is a highly advanced and efficient program for qualitative data analysis. After coding was interpreted the findings and identified factors that proved to be the most effective. For the qualitative data analysis, the researcher employed inductive content analysis. The findings were then used to develop a paper on the participants' ethical compliance to spread awareness. To ensure the research's reliability, this formula was used. (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 64):

$$\text{Code Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}} \times 100 \tag{1}$$

The percentage of reliability for this study was calculated as 86%

$$\text{Code Reliability} = \frac{290}{290 + 49} \times 100 = 86\%$$

4. Results and Discussion

Open coding was employed during the qualitative study coding phase. The codes briefly described influential factors added to accepted knowledge, which were then grouped based on their equality and proximity and became related (Cohen et al., 2011: 238). The data was exported after predicting the frequency to produce results utilizing MAXQDA.

Upon analyzing the factors that impact employee engagement, the themes were grouped under the main theme of MHN through thematic content analysis.

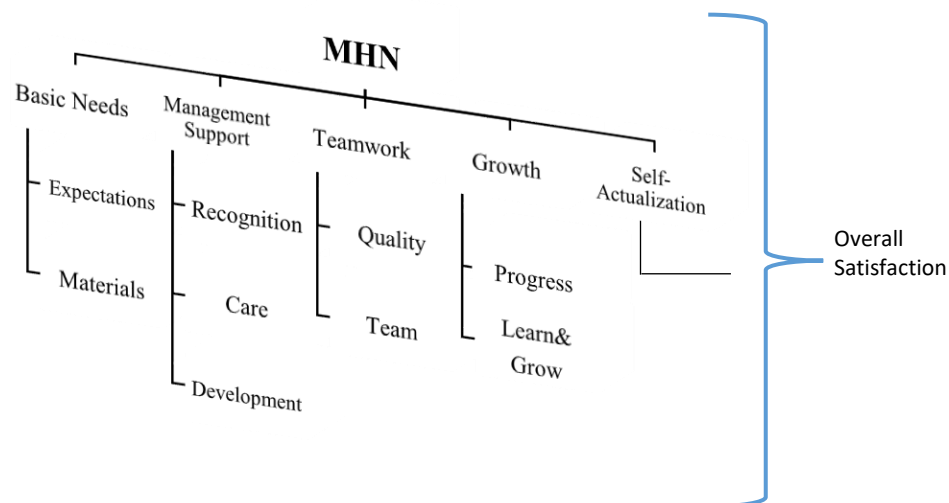Figure 1: **Content Analysis (MAXQDA-codes-sub-codes)**

Figure 1 illustrates the content analysis results of the MHN concept, examined in five separate sections. Post-data collection, MAXQDA 22 for thematic content analysis has been used to evaluate employee engagement. There was a significant correlation between employee engagement and the 9 key elements, according to the data analyzed. Expectations, Materials, Recognition, Care, Development, Quality, Team, Progress, and Learn & Grow of these codes. Figure 2 shows a Maslow pyramid based on content analysis.

Figure2: **Maslow Pyramid Based on Content Analysis**
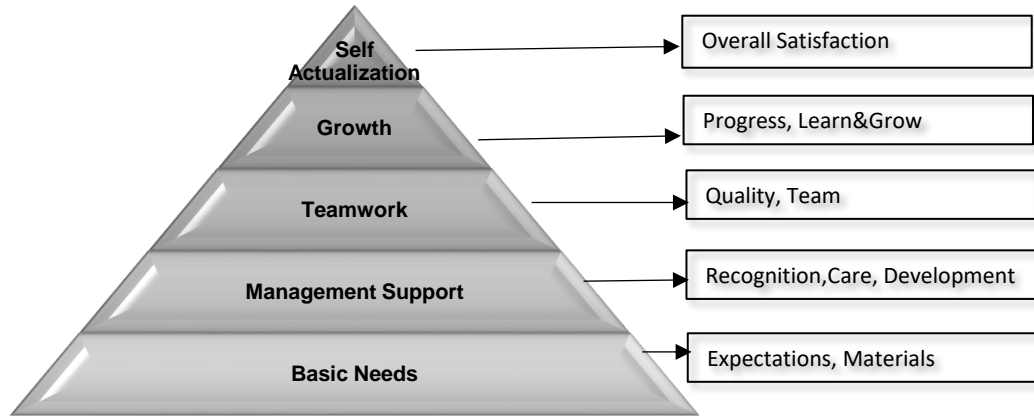
As figure 2, the 9 codes must work together to achieve self-actualization. To achieve employee engagement, one must ensure overall satisfaction. The frequency indicates how frequently the sub-indicators were asserted per code. Findings on the 9 key elements of employee engagement are as follows:

4.1. Basic Needs

The data analysis reveals two influential factors that evoke the concept of employee engagement concerning basic needs.

Table 2: **Key Elements Suggesting in 'Basic Needs'**

No	Key element	Sub-key element	Frequency	Percentage
1	**Expectations**		**32**	**52.5**
1.1		Top priority	9	14.8
1.2		Team priority	6	9.8
1.3		Best communication	9	14.8
1.4		Clearness	8	13.1
2	**Materials**		**29**	**47.5**
2.1		Sufficient knowledge	8	13.1
2.2		Productivty	5	8.2
2.3		Essentials	2	3.3
2.4		Equipments	7	11.5
2.5		Enough people	7	11.5
	Total		**61**	**100**

Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage distributions of key elements triggered by basic needs consciousness. The key element of expectations had the highest level (52.5%) and was often mentioned by participants. Employees need clear expectations to guide them towards their goals and help them meet the desired outcomes of their role.

4.2. Management Support

The analysis indicates three key elements that influence management support for employee engagement.

Table 3: **Key Elements Suggesting in 'Management Support'**

No	Key element	Sub-key element	Frequency	Percentage
1	**Recognition**		**24**	**35.3**
1.1		Potential for success	7	10.3
1.2		Biggest praise	9	13.2
1.3		Colleagues communication	8	11.8
2	**Care**		**15**	**22.1**
2.1		Contributions	5	7.4
2.2		Customer's visit	3	4.4
2.3		Purchase desicion	7	10.3
3	**Development**		**29**	**42.6**
3.1		Challenged at work	6	8.8
3.2		Challenging experiences	6	8.8
3.3		Relationships	9	13.2
3.4		Partnerships	8	11.8
	Total		**68**	**100**

Table 3 illustrates the distribution of key elements triggered by management support. The most frequently mentioned element of development was the key element, accounting for 42.6% of mentions by participants. The relationship between employees and managers is crucial in any workplace. The interaction between them should help employees identify their professional strengths and potential for growth. A positive relationship with their manager can often be linked to their personal success and professional achievements.

4.3. Teamwork

The analysis has identified two essential factors that impact teamwork for employee engagement.

Table 4: **Key Elements Suggesting in 'Teamwork'**

No	Key element	Sub-key element	Frequency	Percentage
1	**Quality**		**24**	**51.1**
1.1		Better duty	8	17.0
1.2		Good teamwork	9	19.1
1.3		Quality of work	7	14.9
2	**Team**		**23**	**48.9**
2.1		Trustworthy team member	8	17.0
2.2		Positive workplace	8	17.0
2.3		Engagement	7	14.9
	Total		**47**	**100**

Table 4 shows the distribution of key elements triggered by teamwork. The most frequently mentioned quality element was the key element, accounting for 51.1% of participant mentions. Highly quality employees understand the importance of identifying with their team rather than just being assigned to it. When everyone on the team is contributing equally towards achieving the team's goals, it fosters a sense of engagement and collaboration. Conversely, when one employee takes advantage of their teammates by not putting in enough effort, it can lead to resentment and a lack of teamwork.

4.4. Growth

The analysis of the data indicates that two influential factors are responsible for evoking the concept of employee engagement concerning growth.

Table 5 illustrates the distribution of key elements triggered by teamwork. The key element was the most frequently mentioned progress element, accounting for 55.6% of participant mentions.

Table 5: **Key Elements Suggesting in 'Growth'**

No	Key element	Sub-key element	Frequency	Percentage
1	**Progress**		**20**	**55.6**
1.1		Learn new ideas	5	13.9
1.2		Apply ideas	7	19.4
1.3		Collaborate	8	22.2
2	**Learn&Grow**		**16**	**44.4**
2.1		Acquiring new knowledge	6	16.7
2.2		Job better	6	16.7
2.3		New things	4	11.1
	Total		**36**	**100**

Regularly checking in on employees' progress can have a positive impact on productivity and employee engagement as Table 5. When managers show an interest in their team members' progress, it can increase their belief that they are being fairly compensated and can improve job satisfaction, leading to higher employee retention rates.

4.5. Self-Actualization

In the analysis of employee engagement, a significant relationship was found between self-actualization and 9 key elements. These elements are Expectations, Materials, Recognition, Care, Development, Quality, Team, Progress, and Learn & Grow. To achieve self-actualization, all these elements must work together. Collectively, they contribute to creating an environment where employee engagement can thrive and reach its highest level of functioning.

Overall satisfaction provided with Self-Actualization are intertwined concepts that play a crucial role in shaping employees' experiences and organizational outcomes. When organizations prioritize self-actualization by providing opportunities for growth, autonomy, and meaningful work, they create a culture of employee engagement. This culture benefits both employees and the organization as a whole.

5. Conclusions

This study explained how MHN manifests within the automotive industry, shedding light on the factors influencing employee engagement, satisfaction, and overall well-being. This article connects classical psychological theories to modern organizational dynamics, exploring the interplay between Maslow's human needs and today's work environments. The originality of this research presents a comprehensive review of motivational factors influencing employee engagement levels. So, this paper aimed to identify the factors that impact employee engagement, as studied within the context of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The research delved into the layers of complexity within Maslow's framework to define and understand the factors that intricately contribute to employee engagement. Key elements at each level of Maslow's pyramid were tested for their impact on employee engagement, and the most effective ones were identified through analysis. Expectations (52.5%) emerged as a crucial factor, constituting the foundation upon which employees build their professional identities and aspirations. Having clear expectations provides employees with direction, purpose, and guidance, which helps them achieve desired outcomes. When employees understand what is expected of them, they are better equipped to align their actions with organizational objectives, thus facilitating their journey toward self-actualization. Similarly, the element of Development (42.6%) plays a pivotal role in empowering employees to realize their potential. By investing in employees' growth and providing opportunities for learning and skill development, organizations demonstrate their commitment to fostering self-actualization. A supportive relationship between employees and managers further enhances this process, as managers play a crucial role in facilitating employees' professional development and helping them unlock their latent talents. Teamwork, characterized by the Quality (51.1%) of collaboration and mutual support, also contributes significantly to employees' self-actualization. When employees feel valued and respected within their teams, they are more likely to experience

a sense of belonging and fulfillment. Collaboration fosters synergy, allowing individuals to leverage their collective strengths towards shared goals, thereby enhancing their overall satisfaction and engagement. Furthermore, Progress (55.6%) emerged as a key driver of self-actualization, reflecting employees' desire for continuous improvement and achievement. Regular feedback and acknowledgment of progress reinforce employees' sense of competence and contribution, motivating them to strive for excellence and reach new heights in their professional endeavors.

In conclusion, findings underscore the importance of fostering an organizational culture that prioritizes holistic employee engagement. By addressing the key elements identified in the analysis and creating an environment conducive to self-actualization, organizations can cultivate a highly engaged workforce that is motivated, fulfilled, and committed to driving organizational success.

This study's findings were appropriate with the related literature (Guo, 2021; Riyanto et al 2021; Afolabi et al, 2018 ...etc.). Because of its originality, this qualitative research is an assist to the sector and other papers. Therefore, the results of the research can foster increased awareness of employee engagement in industry management. As a result, this study concludes that Maslow's hierarchy of needs can offer valuable insights regarding employee engagement.

Future work can be suggested for quantitative research in which this research is other studies. Concerning the limitations of the research, due to the practical impossibilities of data collection from the company, purposive sampling methods were used. Besides, it was researched within one company only, one industry, and 12 managers'.

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