

## **A Review of Individual Change and Motivation: A Case Study Based on AMC Breaking Bad TV Series**

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### **Abstract**

Breaking Bad is an American television series which was telecasted during the year 2008 to 2013. The drama was release by AMC and it was well popular among the fans around the world as the most controversial television drama series in the previous decade and also it received numerous awards and nominations. Mr. Walter White is a functional character and the central character of Breaking Bad. Initially, he was a school chemistry teacher and part time cashier in a car wash center. Later he became a crime lord and prominent drug dealer also known as Heisenberg. This paper is basically focused in reviewing the need theory of motivation and behavioral change theory of Lewin's plan change approach through critically analyzing the behavior of Mr. Walter White's character in Breaking Bad television series. Qualitative analysis techniques based on the character observation was the primary technique that was used to analysis the case and at the same time the results from the analysis are carefully plotted with the basic theory to get the conclusions. The study is very significant to anyone who is interest in learning the nature of need theory of motivation and behavioral change theory including Lewin's plan change model.

**Keywords:** AMC Braking Bad, Need Theory of Motivation, Behavioral Change Theory, Lewin's plan change approach

## INTRODUCTION

Human behavior is a very complex phenomenon. Through the history that complexity takes a major part of curiosity regarding the human life on earth. However, it's visible that the biological and psychological process makes humans as humans. At the same time those factors together creates the entire phenomenal human behavior. Under the above circumstance studying and predicting human behavior is an absolutely challenging. What factor/factors drive human behavior? What are the scientific approaches to study human behavior? Those questions are still debatable among the contemporary scientific community but anyhow there are some acceptable approaches and theories which can be used to getting understood about the human behavior in some extent. In this case motivational theories and behavioral change theories can be identified as very common as well as popular theories among the scientific community.

This paper is basically focused to study the nature of human motivation and behavioral change by using the literature of need theory of motivation and behavioral change theory with special reference to Lewin's plan change approach. At the same time the author has selected the character of Mr. Walter White of AMC Braking Bad TV series as an experimental behavioral model to explain the functionality of those mentioned theories. When focused to the functional character of Mr. Walter White initially he was a school chemistry teacher and due to personal financial problems he worked for car wash center as a part time cashier after the school hours. Later he became a crime lord and mysterious drug kingpin named "Heisenberg". The character itself has shown the behavioral transformation. At the same time it's emphasized the motivational process of individual human been.

Why the so-called motivational and behavioral changing theories are important? Consider about the business management point of view the human factor can be highly prioritized as a significant to the success of the business. Therefore the common argument would be the business managers those who are managing the business have to have an acceptable level of human skills. In this case theories of motivation as well as theories of behavioral change are providing a concrete foundation to sharp up their human skills. Bartol and Martin (1998) consider that the motivation a very powerful tool to reinforces human behavior and triggers the tendency to continue. At the same time Kalimullah (2010) suggested, a motivated employee has a goals aligned with those of the organization as well as directs that employees efforts in to that direction. Meanwhile Zammuto (1982) The goal model also defines the

organizational effectiveness referring to the extent to which an organization attains its predetermined primary objectives.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Based on the case study approach the main objectives of this paper can be outlined as follows. The first research objective would be to identify the steps of need theory of motivation, the second objective would be to identify the nature of individual's behavioral change and the third research objective would be to identify the relationship in between the phenomena of human motivation and the phenomena of individual's behavioral change. Further applying those findings to the real world human resource and business management problem solving also can be identified as another major objective of this study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

When focus to applied methodology in paper, as a whole the main approach can be identified as a qualitative approach. Under the qualitative methodology the author used the case study method to this research study and at the same time review of available literature as a secondary data through the published journals, text books and internet articles also can be identified as a part of the research methodology. In order to analysis the Braking Bad's main character, the author carefully plot the critical behavioral moments in the TV series and secondly build the relationship with the available theoretical literature and the above mentioned critical behavioral moments of that character.

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The major limitation of the study can be summarized as Mr. Walter White; the central character which used to the analysis was not a real life character. He was a hypothetical functional character.

The study itself focused to the key moments of the above mentioned character but the story as a whole it's included many more moments which are not considered during the analysis.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW – MOTIVATION**

That subject of the human motivation as a complex and well-studied field that has wider scope in a different areas of academic disciplines including psychology, education, political science, sociology and economics. Also human motivation is very subjective matter therefore it can be review in much different point of views according to the interest and the perception of the reviewers. Anyhow this section of this research paper is focusing to reviewing the phenomena of motivation through the available literature. There are two types of motivational theories are available as a literature first one is content theories of motivation and the second one is the process theories of motivation. The primary difference in between the content theories of motivation and the process theories of motivation is content theories are focused on the needs that all individuals share and the process theories are focus on the cognitive differences between individuals. Moreover in this paper the author used content theory of motivation to analyze the individual behavior of Mr. Walter White in the Braking Bad TV Series.

Denhardt et al. (2008) defined the term motivation as, “what causes people to behave as they do” (p.146).

Guay et al. (2010) motivation refers to “the reason underlying behavior” (p.712). As a summary Broussard and Garrison (2004) defined the term motivation in somewhat broad manner as “the attribute that moves us to do or not to do something” (p.106).

According to the observation of Deci et al. (1999) “intrinsic motivation energizes and sustains activities through the spontaneous satisfactions inherent in effective volitional action. It is manifest in behaviors such as play, exploration, and challenge seeking that people often do for external rewards” (p. 658).

Moreover Deci et al. (1999) mentioned that the Researchers are often contrast intrinsic motivation with extrinsic motivation, which is motivation governed by reinforcement contingencies and Traditionally, educators are consider intrinsic motivation to be more required and to result in better learning outcomes than the extrinsic motivation.

Lawler (1994) define the term motivation which reflects that motivation is goal directed. Denhardt et al. (2008) also expressed the term motivation as it outlines the achievement and

pursuit of goals. Pettinger (1996) mentioned the term motivation as motivation is environmental dependent. Campbell and Pritchard (1976) also define the same phenomena as being the set of psychological processes that cause the initiation, direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior.

Many scholars are believed that it's so difficult to provide a well-developed definition to motivation. Denhardt and Aristigueta (2008) provided four examples for that argument as the first Motivation is not directly observable, second the motivation is also same as satisfaction, third it's always conscious and the forth is directly controllable.

Denhardt et al. (2008) "Motivation is an internal state that causes people to behave in a particular way to accomplish particular goals and purposes. It is possible to observe the outward manifestations of motivation but not motivation itself" (P.147). Therefore it can be argue that the motivation is not direct observable.

Denhardt et al. (2008) also mention that "Put simply, satisfaction is past oriented, whereas motivation is future oriented" (p.147). Therefore it can be argued that the phenomenon of motivation is not the same as satisfaction.

Another argument about the motivation is that the motivation is not always consider as conscious. According to the Freud (1976) Focusing to the Sigmund Freud's theory of human behavior, its expressing this unconscious motivation as its significant part.

Denhardt et al. (2008) "Motivation is not something that people do to others. Motivation occurs within people's minds and hearts. Managers can influence the motivational process, but they cannot control it" (p.147). Therefore the motivation is not straightly controllable.

Pennock (1930) introduce the modern theories of motivation are began as a result of the Hawthorn experiment which was done by Elton Mayo at the Western Electric Company, Chicago.

Considering about the content theories of motivation Denhardt et al. (2008) mention that in 1941 the book title Management and morale was published by Fritz Roethlisberger outlining in detail the Hawthorn effect and in 1943 Abraham Maslow was published "A Theory of Human Motivation". Thereafter Maslow is considered as the father of needs based motivation

theory and at the same time his theory of motivation is one of the most widely cited work on motivation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW – INDIVIDUAL CHANGE

Change is the natural process. Nothing is remaining as a constant manner. Consider about behavioral change related to the human been self-efficiency theory, learning theory and behavioral analytic theory of change, Social learning and social cognitive theory, theory of reasoned action, theory of planned behavior Transtheoretical or stage of change model can be identified as a wildy used approaches to analyze change. In this paper the author only used Lewin's 3 step model to analyze the behavioral change of Mr. Walter White in Braking Bad TV series. Lewin can be considering as a pioneer in the study of planned change. Lewin (1951) define the changing process as a 3 step model including freezing, moving and refreezing. According to the Fig 1 Lewin's plan change approach can be illustrated as follows. Lewin (1947) also suggests that to manage the change processes, it must 'unfreeze' its current state into a neutral position. So that old behavior can be unlearned and at the same time new behavior can be successfully adopted. Then the change should be implemented by utilizing driving forces and minimizing resisting forces. Once change takes place, it will 'refreeze' into the new state as shown in the Figure 1.

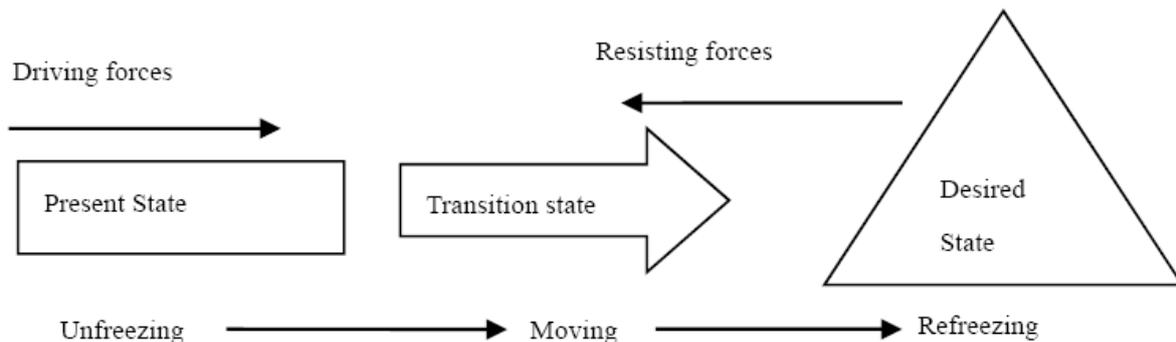


Figure 1: Lewin's Plan Change Approach Lewin (1951)

### **Brief Review of Walter Whit's Key Moments In Braking Bad TV Series**

Braking Bad (2008) Mr. Walter White was a genius chemist. He graduated from California University of Technology and founder member of Gray Matter Technologies (currently \$ 2.16 Billion Company). His research area was proton radiography and his contribution to the field help a team wins a noble prize in chemistry in 1985. He left the company after sell his shares for \$5000.00. At the age of 50 Mr. Walter White worked as a School Chemistry teacher with many personal financial difficulties. To overcome his financial difficulties, after school hours he worked as a part time cashier in the car wash center while washing cars occasionally due to lack of staff in the car wash center.

White (2008) explains his students to “Chemistry is, well technically, chemistry is the study of matter. But I prefer to see it as the study of change”.

Schrader (2008) “Um it's not the most we ever took. It's easy money, till we catch ya” at the Walters 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party after shows a meth lab bust by Drug Enforcement Administration unit which was led by Hank Schrader who was a brother-in-law of Walter White. This event was the turning point of Mr. White's life because this is the moment he got to know about another side far away from his scope of knowledge and exposure in terms of making quick money.

Braking Bad (2008) Mr. White a Chemistry teacher who is struggling with personal financial difficulties had received a very unfortunate message from the doctor regarding his terminal cancer diseases. After that Mr. White decided to join with Hank Schrader's meth lab bust operation. During the operation ironically Mr. White had met his past student name Jesse Pinkman who also known as Cap'n Cook. Mr. White met Jesse Pinkman and offered to cook Methamphetamine in a chemically sound method together as a quick money making business. Jesse was a student of Mr. White but he did not complete his school education successfully. They agreed to cook Methamphetamine together and sell it to the market. in this case Jesse has to play a major role as an assistant to production and look after the entire distribution.

Jesse was very curious about the sudden change of Mr. White. With the doubt about his perception Jesse ask why you are doing this at this age. White (2008) express his primary

intention regarding entering to the meth business as “I am Awake!” as an answer to the question from Jesse Pinkman.

White (2008) also express that his basic need is to collect approximately USD 7, 37,000.00 for his family after his death by cancer. He calculated all the future financial requirements of his family and decided to earn that money within very short period of time.

Braking Bad (2008 - 2013) Later beyond the primary need of collecting approximately USD 7,37,000.00 Mr. Walter White addicted to the meth cooking and at the same time he was try to remove each and every barrier and obstacles to his business more strategically. Walter was copy some behavioral actions in to his day to day life which were unique to every person he killed. He imitated Krazy-8, Gus Fring and Mike Ehrmantraut people who had been killed by Walter.

Walter (2012) beyond his basic financial requirement for his family surviving after his death, Mr. White expressed his motivation to capture the meth empire as “Jesse, you asked me once, If I was in the meth business or the money business. Neither. I’m in the Empire Business”.

Walter (2012) tries to introduce himself as iconic way to another drug dealing party “Now: say my name! [‘Heisenberg’, says the man] You’re goddam right!!”

As an answer to the question from Mrs. White “If I have to hear one more time that you did this for the family...” White (2013) responds “I did it for me. I liked it. I was good at it. and... I was really... I was alive”.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Analysis Based on The Need Theory of Motivation**

Available literature justified the basic idea of need theory of motivation. It can be figure out as follows. It’s starting with unsatisfied need and that psychological momentum leads to create some kind of tension. If an individual with unsatisfied need with tension, that individual will act to achieve or act to satisfy that unsatisfied need. This stage can be identified as an individual’s goal directed behavior. As a result of the previous stage the individual will be able to satisfy his or her unsatisfied need but after achieved that specific

need it will again lead to create another unsatisfied need. According to the need theory of motivation, this is happening like a cycle, jump to one need to another like a never-ending cycle.

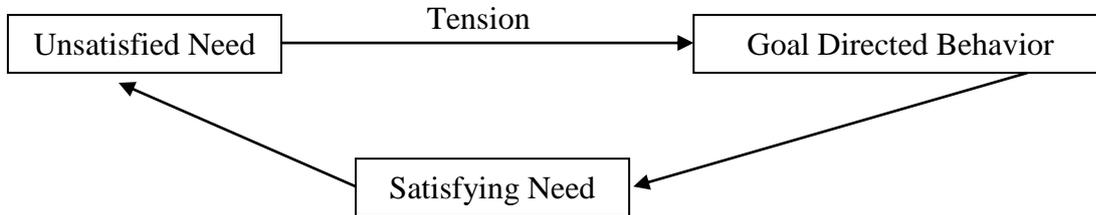


Figure 2: Need Theory of Motivation – Basic Stages. Source: Author developed

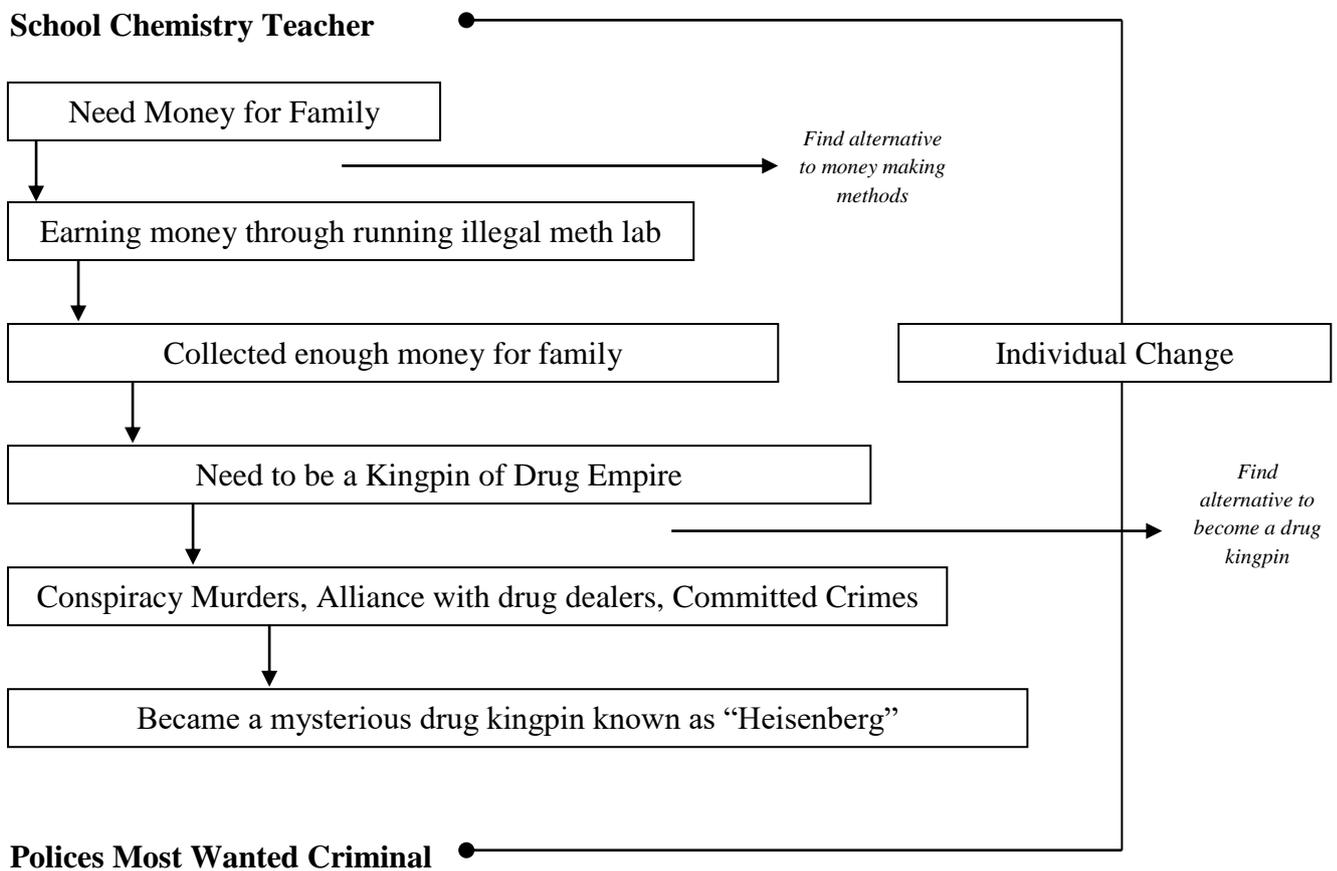


Figure 3: Need theory of Motivation and Mr. White’s key behavioral moments. Source: Author developed

According to the Figure 3 initially, to fulfill the family financial requirement Mr. White was start and ran an illegal meth lab with the partnership of Jesse Pinkman. In this moment family financial requirements can be identified as an unsatisfied need of Mr. Walter White, finding alternative ways to making easy money within very shorter period of time because of his

cancer diseases can be identified as a tension and also earning money via running an illegal math lab for the future family requirements can be identified as goal directed behavior. As a result of Mr. White's meth business he has been collected that required money amount within very shorter period of time. This incident can be identified as a fulfilled of unsatisfied need. At this stage the person should be a satisfy person in terms of that mentioned unsatisfied need.

According to the need theory of motivation once a person satisfied his unsatisfied need then again it can be create another unsatisfied need. In this case, need to be a kingpin of drug Business Empire can be identified as Mr. Walters's next unsatisfied need after fulfilled the financial requirement for his family. Finding alternative ways to become a drug kingpin was demonstrate as a tension in this scenario. At the same time Conspiracy Murders, Alliance with other market leading drug dealers and Committed Crimes which has been done by Mr. Walter White can be identified as a goal directed behavior to achieved and concur the drug empire. After all he became a well reputed drug mysterious kingpin named as "Heisenberg".

Through this motivational process it can be clearly identified that two identical as well as two separate personalities which cannot be compare to each and not behave as the same. At the beginning Mr. Walter White was a School Chemistry Teacher, but after the above process he became a Polices most wanted criminal.

### **Analysis Based on The Individual Changing Theories**

According to the Lewin's plan change approach for behavioral change its consist of main three stages including unfreezing stage, moving stage and refreezing stage. Unfreezing stage is representing the present state, moving stage is representing the transformation state and also refreezing stage is representing the desired state. If applied this theory in to the case of Mr. Walter White it can be identified Mr. Whites Unfreezing stage as well as the present state as a behavior / personality of school chemistry teacher, moving or transformation state as Mr. Whites need for motivation and refreezing state as a criminal personality name called "Heisenberg" the Fig 4 summarized the above argument in a pictorial way as follows.

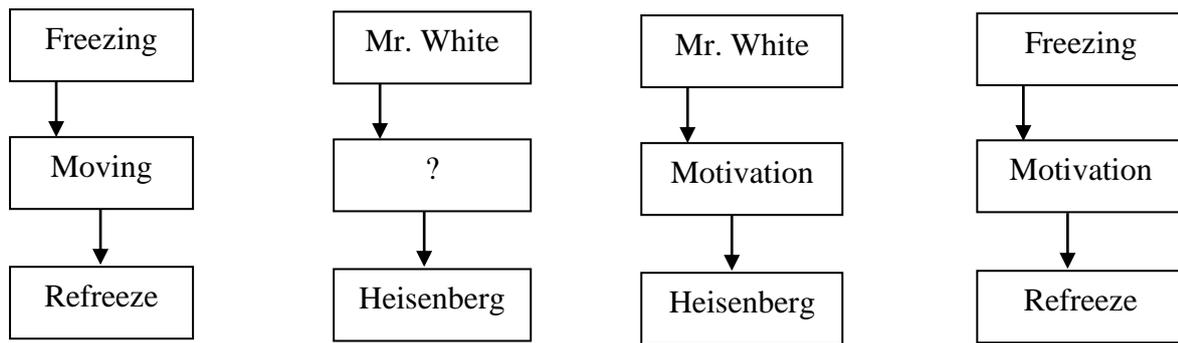


Figure 4: Lewin's Plan Change Approach and Behavioral Transformation of Mr. Walter White. Source: Author developed

Initially Mr. White's Character and the role was a typical Father, professionally a school teacher and a husband until he reached his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday. If applied this to the Lewin's Plan change approach this stage can be identified as a Freezing stage of his life. Then the role of Heisenberg as a most wanted criminal as well as the most controversial drug dealer also can be identified as a Refreeze stage of Mr. White's life. Based on the Lewin's plan change approach and according to the case it's provides many evidences that the motivation of Mr. White's was played as a moving factor in the transformation stage.

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The major finding of this case study was, when consider about the need theory of motivation and Lewin's plan change approach it is clearly demonstration a logical relationship in between those two theories. It means that when it come to the human behavior analysis, Moving stage or transformation stage of Lewin's plan change approach can be describe through the need theory of motivation. Therefore in the analysis of human behavior, it can be identified that the need theory of motivation as a sub component of the Lewin's plan change approach. Figure: 5 also summarized that relationship as follows.

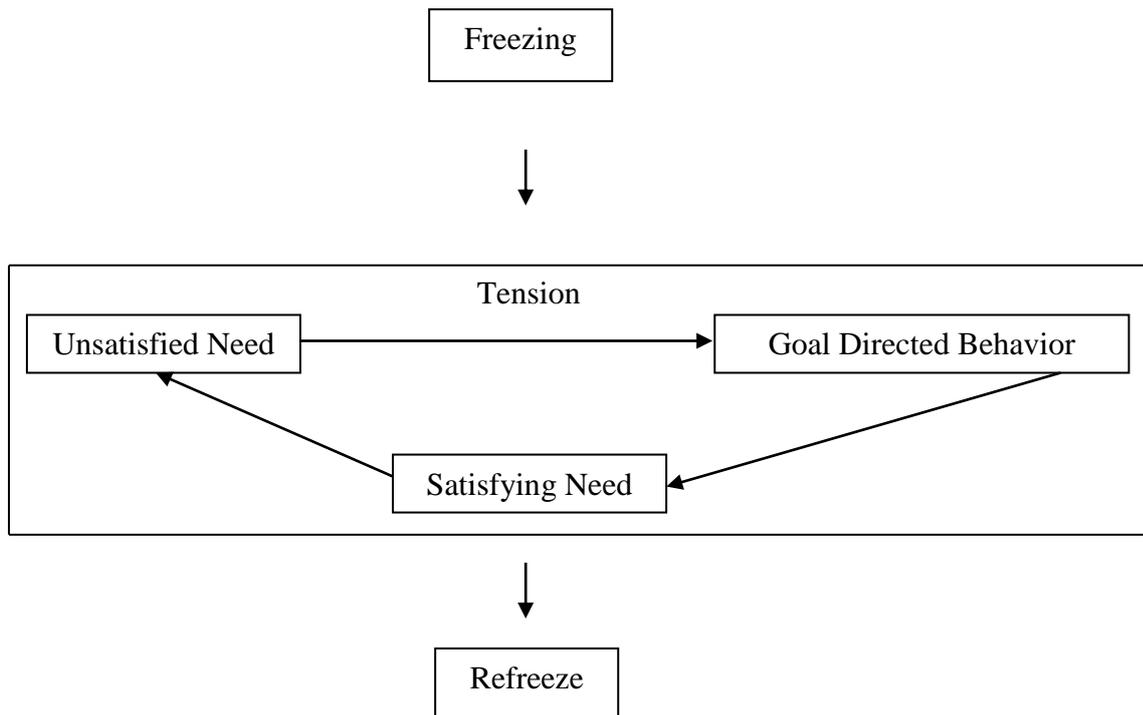


Figure. 5: Need theory of motivation as a part of Lewin's plan change approach. Source: Author developed

According to the major finding of this case study base analysis, it can be concluded that the need theory of motivation can be explain as a moving stage of Lewin's plan change approach. Therefore, the phenomena of motivation can be identified as a psychological factor for behavioral transformation. Moreover when it apply to the real life scenario it's possible to change human behavior through motivating people. Therefore organizations also can apply the same logic when it's came to the true requirement of behavioral transformation of its employees. In this case the study was very significant to anyone those who are interesting about the behavioral transformation related to the human resources.

Denhardt et al. (2008) "Motivation is not something that people do to others. Motivation occurs within people's minds and hearts. Managers can influence the motivational process, but they cannot control it" (p.147). Therefore getting proper understand about how the motivation is work as a psychological process will be a definite advantage to the human resource professionals including human resource managers, Trainers, consultants as well as the all type of managers. Dockel (2003) to be a successful business organization or a company it should have to adopt some new technology to lead the organization while

applying new employee motivated methods. Also Dockel (2013) express that, in order to move the organizations with such a rapid worldwide changes it should have management and management means time and human resource management. Therefore in the business management context studying those theories in a consistent manner is vital to the business success.

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