



REDEFINING MASLOW'S THEORY OF HIERARCHICAL NEEDS- A NEW PERSPECTIVE THROUGH SITUATIONIST LENS

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Abstract

This academic paper seeks to call attention to what in the present has been universally acclaimed and accepted by many as an intrinsically flawless and well-founded theory of Human Motivation i.e., the pyramid of Hierarchical needs propounded by the pioneer of Humanist school of thought-Abraham Maslow to explain the role of needs in urging people to make progress. It aims to highlight in detail the inherent flaws present in Maslow's Humanistic approach towards explaining the process of innate motivation in people and at the same time suggests an alternative block model vis a vis the hierarchical model addressing some of its structural shortcomings and elucidating in depth the important links between the different virtues that determine the essence of Human nature itself. It intends to describe and focus thoroughly on this theory from the situationist lens to reflect on just how it is intolerably over generalised and how certain subjective experiences can trigger a change in the course of one fulfilling some particular need thus strongly reinforcing this view that it's not plausible enough to place human needs and demands in some particular hierarchy or order of fulfilment.

Keywords- *Motivation, Human Needs, Hierarchy, Humanist, Block Model, Abraham Maslow, Psychology.*

Methods

While organizing this piece of work, extensive research was carried out through several peer reviewed journals and articles to obtain the desired evidence over which the content of this paper is based upon. Original works of Maslow and commentaries of other research scholars were identified and duly assessed for precise matter and quality. The references were further examined to trace down changes that were made and studies that have been performed since in order to further support this academic composition.

Introduction

Motivation since time immemorial has been realized and considered as one of the most crucial driving forces of a person's personality in developing new competencies, achieving creative skillset, improving work efficiency and most essentially fulfilling desired goals. The traditional constructs of Human motivation have undergone dramatic change over the course of time. Different cultures across the world have at distinct times cropped up with new ways to explain and enhance motivation in people by focusing on specific value-sets and aspects of personality. In relation to the proposed methods, albeit several research studies have been conducted with objectives of concretely defining those needs which stimulate motivation, no single person associated with this subject of the matrix of Human Psychology has come close to the legacy of the Humanist scholar- Abraham Maslow who famously suggested the revolutionary theory of Hierarchical needs of Human Motivation.

Maslow who is today popularly regarded as the pioneer of the Humanist school of thought attempted to enlarge the conception of the human personality by reaching into and focusing on the higher levels of human nature in addition to what the psychologists of the time had to say. He profoundly stressed on the



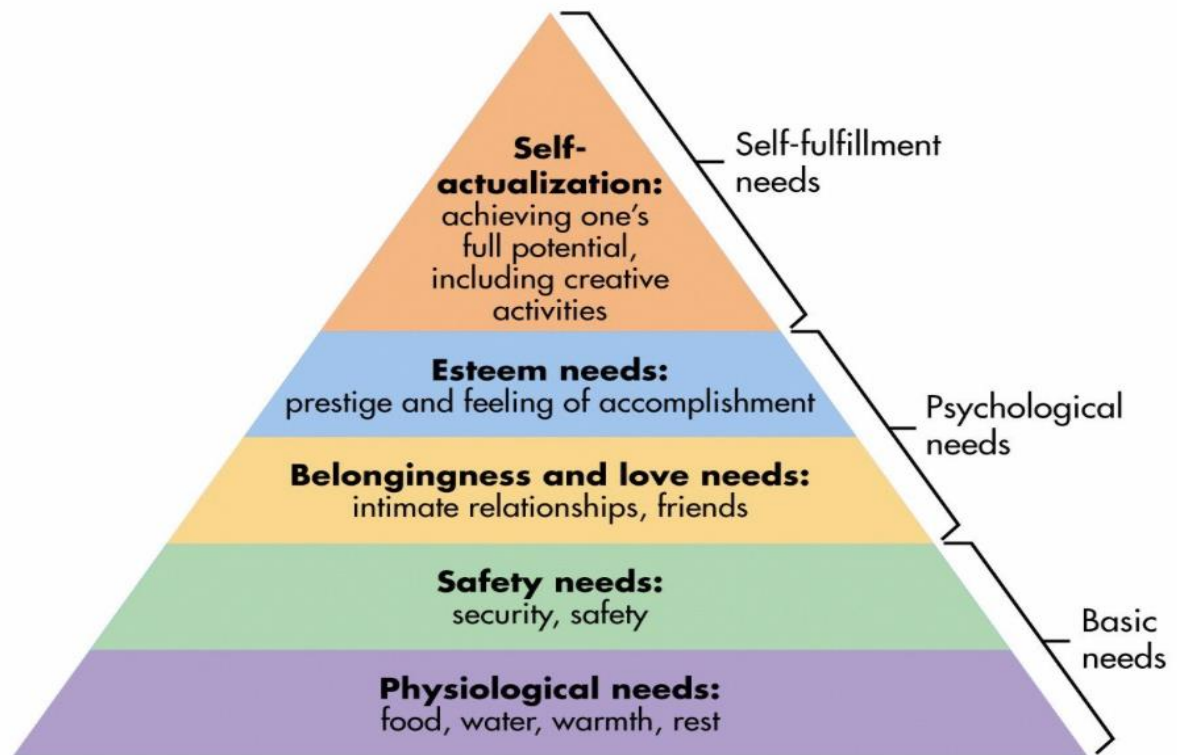
holistic essence of human nature in contradiction to the analytic-dissecting-atomistic approach of the behaviourists and Freudian psychoanalysts. Observing the human nature in distinct spheres of knowledge, he ultimately formulated this conception that Human Nature is inherently hopeful and encouraging thus forwarding a viewpoint which continues to massively influence the humanistic understanding of people as positive rational beings who possess a huge potential to make an impact.

Present View

With the passage of time, while many of his propositions have been formally declared as his personal projections rather than a reasoned-philosophical or verifiable scientific explanations, one theory in particular has enjoyed a completely different fate of unquestioned authority and authenticity in several sectors especially in the educational arena. The theory of hierarchical needs which today forms an inexplicable component of theories of developmental psychology is the one. Underpinning several research studies on human motivation, the theory in a concise manner puts forward the idea that all individuals move through a fundamental number of hierarchical motivations, in a unique order, based upon both physiological and psychological needs. Referred to generally in the form of a pyramid structure in the hierarchical order of importance the theory essentially highlights that it is the needs of a person which keep him/her motivated enough in order to achieve the expected goals.

The first stage in the hierarchy, and according to Maslow the most fundamental, accounts for basic human physiological needs such as food and water. All these requirements are necessary for subsistence. Moving on, when these needs are met, the second stage refers to both psychological and physical safety, such as security of body, family, property and morality. The next stage in gradual succession refers to love and belongingness and incorporates intimacy and friendships (Maslow 1943, 1954). Maslow refers to these three stages as deficiency needs, asserting that if these three areas are not met then the individual will experience negative physiological and psychological consequences. The theory suggests that if these fundamental needs are appropriately met then an individual can focus upon higher needs such as self-esteem and respect, eventually reaching a 'meta-motivated' state (Maslow, 1943). In this state the individual achieves self-actualization and can focus upon the development of the self by way of creativity, morality, acceptance and the loss of prejudicial perspectives and therefore achieving his maximum potential. (Maslow, 1954). The stages in this hierarchy of needs are not mutually exclusive and may overlap based upon which need dominates and motivates the individual at any one time dependent upon individual psychological and physical circumstances.

Rebelling against the traditional behaviorist assumption of human motives stemming from only a few primary needs of hunger and thirst via classical conditioning experiences, this theory which upon its inception argued the existence of multiple independent motivational systems drew considerable support from later research in neuroscience and evolutionary biology.



Limitations

While the theory inarguably enjoyed great appreciation for years in so closely elaborating the needs and motives around which human goals evolve, the modern integration of ideas from neuroscience, developmental biology and evolutionary psychology suggests that Maslow's proposition suffers from its own set of flaws and limitations:

1. A review of ten factor-analytic and three ranking studies testing Maslow's theory showed only partial support for the concept of need hierarchy. A large number of cross-sectional studies showed no clear evidence for Maslow's deprivation/domination proposition except with regard to self-actualization. Longitudinal studies testing Maslow's gratification/activation proposition showed no support, and the limited support received from cross-sectional studies is questionable due to numerous measurement problems.
2. In Maslow's theory, the ideas of cognitive and developmental priority were blurred together on the presumption that the two types of priorities move in synchrony with one another. But cognitive and developmental priorities do not, in fact, overlap perfectly. For example, physiological needs were placed at the bottom of the hierarchy and are therefore presumed to arise early in development. This certainly is true of needs such as hunger and thirst, but other physiological needs, such as the hormonally driven desire for sexual satisfaction, do not become active developmentally until adolescence. At the same time, sexual desire, as well as other physiological needs such as hunger, can be suppressed by social concerns (e.g., esteem) even when those physiological needs are salient.
3. Maslow's assumption of only one level of need operational at a point has been challenged and his view of human needs as static in nature has also been proven wrong. He conceived of 'higher needs' as personal strivings, unconnected from other people, and totally divorced from biological

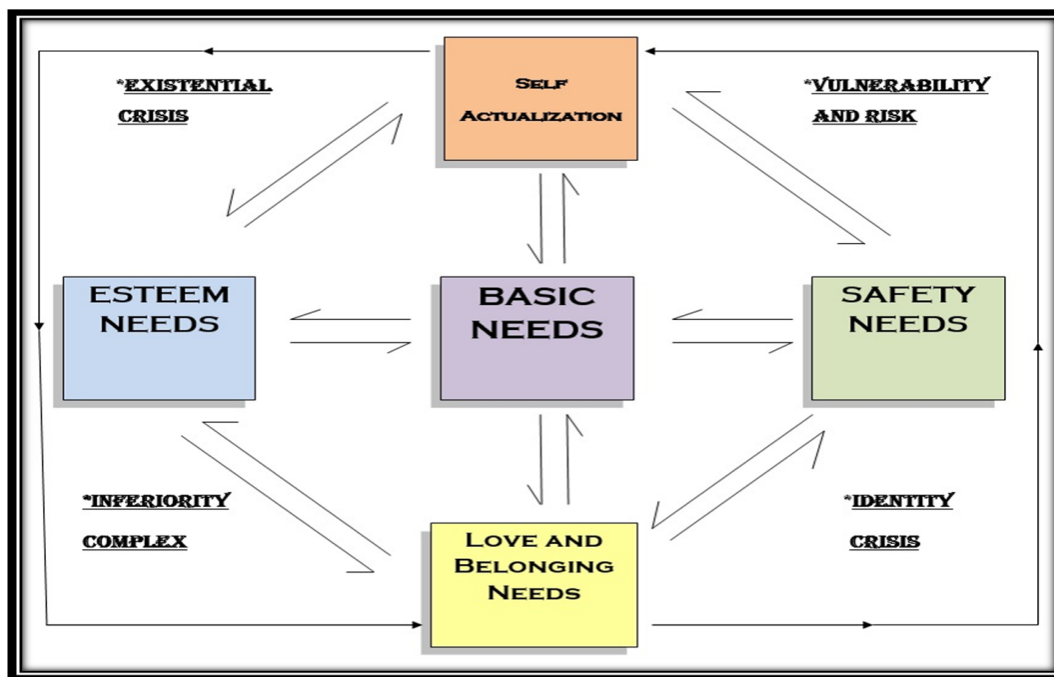


needs. Parental motivations were completely missing from his hierarchy concerning this discourse and while he indicated that a satisfied need is not a motivator, he failed to conceive that certain-individual needs are never fully or permanently satisfied.

Our View – The R.S Model

Building upon it, any individual as a rational agent would realize that while these needs are definitely not mutually exclusive, they are also not entirely hierarchical provided the connections between fundamental motives and immediate situational threats and opportunities which need to be highlighted. Rather than depicting the goals as systematically stacked on top of one another, we find it necessary to depict these human needs in such a form that would explicitly reflect the view that early developing motives are unlikely to be replaced by later and more sophisticated goals but instead continue to be essentially important throughout life, depending on individual differences and ecological cues.

Hence, maintaining it as the cornerstone of our analysis, we propose on revisiting the original work of Maslow and carving out a revised model to address and rectify in particular the structural shortcomings of Maslow’s hierarchical model in order to explain the updated approach towards the process of human motivation. A Block Model is mentioned and described as follows:



R-S Block Model of Human Needs

Note: All the terminologies following ‘*’ are explained comprehensively below

In the above stated model, besides expressing the principal 5 needs of Maslow’s original work, special emphasis has further been laid on the consequent forces that would take hold upon the unsuccessful maturation of a particular motive or appropriation of a specific need.

Beginning with the foundational necessity of basic requirements such as food and water (procreation was later incorporated in this as well), an unfulfillment of this stage at any distinct moment would



gradually push an individual towards subsistence crisis i.e., a state which threatens the survival prospects of an individual due to his inability to access essential food or water supplies. An example that could perfectly simulate this idea would be of a person lost in a desert or war-torn setting lacking means to attain basic nutrition and cater to his extreme thirst.

Progressing further onto the second pivotal stage of safety needs, an unsatisfaction in this peculiar case would result in incredible insecurity and vulnerability for an individual. A slight exposure to a potential risky situation in such a case would trigger extreme anxiety and uneasiness in the person that would inevitably result in irrelevant panicky reactions. Besides actual threat to life, fear which acts as a byproduct in such situations, makes an individual prone to several mental disorders such as phobia, post-traumatic stress disorder to name a few which gravely obscure the possibilities for an individual to suitably meet his/her other needs.

Continuing on this course, an individual might at any given point of time find himself/ herself falling prey to the clutches of the Identity Crisis upon the absolute failure to meet the crucially important needs of love and belonging. Originating as a vital component of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the term in this context might appear to some as having a cause quite distinct from the role confusion due to sudden sweeping changes as was proliferated by Erikson, its impact on the individual however in every possible sense remains the same i.e. confusion about one's social role, a sense of loss of continuity to one's personality, chronic distress, disorders etc. which can (not to mention how) gravely harm one's motivation to achieve his ulterior goals and thus fulfil his further needs. A clear and reasonable One can easily imagine of a situation wherein a traumatic event hits a person such that circumstances provide him with no emotional assistance from his family or relatives.

Moving onto the acknowledgement of the advanced Esteem needs of an individual which encompass a sense of self-confidence, social acceptance and respect from others; gratification in this sphere is of immense value in order to avert the crisis. Inferiority Complex which can be explained as an intense personal feeling of inadequacy surmounted by thoughts of shame, guilt, low self-esteem etc. which sets upon a man here deters the progress of the person in achieving and fulfilling his aspirations and goals.

Finally, with the successful accomplishment of all the previous needs, an individual as has been closely observed on different occasions, habitually finds himself at a pedestal where he is confronted upon by this uncertainty regarding what is authentic and genuine that makes the desire for life as meaningful as possible. At this juncture, the person realizes the unconscious need to debase the discontentment by attaining what Maslow originally referred to as the prime state of self-fulfillment. Self-actualization as the term has flourished over decades is interpreted as the full and complete realization of one's potential and of one's true self. It is when the individual intrinsically becomes growth motivated rather than deficiency motivated. Failure to do so in such a case often produces aversive ramifications most commonly of which is the Existential Crises. It is the frustration and distress that ensues and takes a toll over the person when one's will to meaning gets vicariously suppressed due to conformism or totalitarianism.

Conclusion

A simple glance at this revised model would raise an eyebrow regarding the interlinked form of relationship as has been portrayed in it. The primordial reason for such is to deliver a visual representation of how exactly dynamic human needs truly are and relate to each other in real life setting. Man being a subject of vastly unpredictable environment, actively operates in and often encounters



situations and circumstances which are intensely volatile and require refocusing of priority of all his needs in order to essentially survive (the fundamental will of one to live thus is central to all). Needless to say, this depiction of needs in blocks vis a vis the pyramid also affirms that needs can't simply be stacked over one another and be exclusive of each other thus subverting the earlier proposition that when a need is fairly well satisfied, the next prepotent ('higher') need emerges, in turn to dominate the conscious life and to serve as the center of organization of behavior while the less prepotent needs are forgotten or denied. Instead of overlapping or entirely replacing the lower needs by higher ones, this presentation illustrates that satiation of needs depends on subjective experiences of an individual.

For instance, as research suggests, high creative potential of an individual and his performances which on a general level provide self fulfilment, foster self-esteem and status (esteem needs) also act as catalysts for acquiring mates and earning money for subsistence (physiological need). Thus we see that in fact any human behavior can have multiple determinants.

Besides that, this representation also challenges the degree of fixity of Maslow's hierarchy that was earlier implied by drawing support from the mass evidence of people in whom self-esteem seems to be more important than love. This most common reversal is usually due to the development of the notion that the person who is most likely to be loved is a strong or powerful person, one who enjoys respect and who is self-confident or aggressive. Therefore, such people who lack love and seek it, may try hard to put on a front of aggressive, confident behavior. But essentially, they seek high self-esteem and their behavior acts more as a means-to-an-end than for its own sake.

Hence while sharp distinctions are no doubt crucial for clarity of thought and precision in experimentation, it is ought to be accepted that Human needs and Motivation constitute such a sphere where besides formulating an impression on general inspection, we must attempt to distinguish in a dynamic fashion, the overt behavior from its true underlying purpose in order to arrive at a valid conclusion.

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