Innovation in scheming Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs

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Abstract: Almost all schemes that have been issued by scholars or researchers to present Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs include a pyramid (triangle) in which the physiological needs are in the base and the self-actualization needs are in the top of the triangle. Although this scheming is inspiring to some results, basic needs have more characteristics that are significant however, this scheming is not able to inspire. Based on elaborating Maslow’s theory and research’s findings, this study aims to disclose weaknesses and strengths of traditional scheme (triangle), and develop two innovated schemes of basic needs, which are more close to Maslow’s ideas and more inspiring to realize the actuality of this hierarchy.

Key words: Maslow; basic needs; innovative scheming; elaborating the theory

1. Introduction

Maslow is the founder of humanistic psychology—the third force in psychology. One of his most influential ideas is the theory of human motivation. Once the basic needs of human recognized, there is a powerful instrument to know why and how an action has occurred. However, how many sets of basic needs exist? In brief, it seems that although neither Maslow nor others have claimed that they have collected all of the human needs, Maslow at least had faith to seven sets of needs (Kenyon, 2004; Huitt, 2004). This notion is in oppose to majority of scholars who refer to five sets of needs classified in a pyramid. Recent researches (Koltko-Rivera, 2006) have claimed that Maslow has believed to another set need. They call it self-transcendence needs. These eight sets of basic needs should be arranged in a hierarchy (see Figure 1) of pre-potency. They are as follow (although there are different ideas in the situation of needs): (1) the psychological needs; (2) the safety needs; (3) the belongingness and love needs; (4) the esteem needs; (5) the needs for self-actualization; (6) the needs to know and to understand; (7) the aesthetic needs; and (8) the self-transcendence needs.

There are so many schemes issued by scholars or researchers to present this hierarchy of basic needs. Most of them have presented the levels of the needs in a pyramid (triangle) in which the physiological needs are in the base and the self-actualization needs are in the up of triangle. However, why they have chosen pyramid to present the basic needs? Based on searching the web, no source has claimed that “pyramid figure” was Maslow’s recommendation. No scheming has been seen in Maslow’s text as well.

Although the pyramid figure implies many aspects of basic needs, there are much more significant characteristics in describing needs and in “how the needs work”, that is, this scheming is not able to imply them.

Based on elaborating Maslow’s theory and research’s findings, this study aims to disclose weaknesses and strengths of tradition scheme (triangle) and develop two innovated schemes of basic needs which are more close to Maslow’s ideas and more inspiring to realize the actuality of this hierarchy.

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2. The arguments of Maslow hierarchy of basic needs

Using Google engine to search for the words “Maslow hierarchy” will result in 493 options which rarely are something except a plain triangle. Figure 1 is drawn from http://www.arrod.co.uk/images/maslow_hierarchy.gif, which contains all eight sets.

Pyramid is inspiring, for instance, (1) individual’s growth is from down to up; (2) degree of satisfaction is assumed as a line parallel to the base of triangle; and (3) as far as needs gratified, this line is pushed up and individual will meet the new needs (pre-potency of lower needs).

However, basic needs possess significant characteristics that this scheming is not able to inspire them. These characteristics as Maslow himself has described, are as follow:

(1) Maslow (1970) has stated that although his theoretical may “give the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100 percent before the next need emerges” (p. 53), it is not right. Instead, “normal society members are partially gratified in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs” (p. 53). Maslow (1970, p. 54) described these data (Table 1) for instance, for the average citizen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic needs</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physiological</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and belongingness</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esteem</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-actualization</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(2) “The emergence of a new need is not a sudden, but rather a slow degree from nothing” (Maslow, 1970, p. 54). For instance, he gave this data (Table 2).

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1 Almost all the evidences have been brought in this study is drawn from Maslow’s book entitled *Personality and Motivation*, (2nd ed., 1970). It is not a field research rather it is served to reveal some new points regarding his hierarchy and to assist realizing the concepts of basic needs and their relation through innovative scheming of hierarchy.
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Table 2  Emergency of basic needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic need</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: A is pre-potent to B.

(3) A satisfied need is not a motivator (Maslow, 1970, p. 57).

(4) The perfectly healthy, normal, fortunate man has no sex needs or hunger … or self-esteem, except in stray moments of quickly passing threat (Maslow, 1970, p. 52).

(5) People, who have been satisfied in their basic needs throughout their lives, particularly in their earlier years, seem to develop exceptional power to withstand present or future thwarting of these needs simply because they have strong healthy character structure as a result of basic satisfaction (Maslow, 1970, p. 53).

(6) The needs in any level and inter level are not completely isolable. Any of the needs serve as channels for all sorts of other needs as well (Maslow, 1970, p. 19).

(7) Getting aged is not essential to meet higher needs. A child of 3 years normally may meet even esteem needs. Maslow believed that to meet self-actualization even most intelligence people like Mozart, should wait until 4 year (Maslow, 1970).

(8) The person who thinks he/she is hungry may actually be seeking more for comfort. This specification is a result of integrity of human. It means that when an individual motivated, the whole of him motivated rather than a part of him (Maslow, 1970). This is a very important point that most often has been neglected.

With attention to above characteristics, following points will be emerged:

(1) Previous discussion shows that it is possible for a person to be beneath effect of many sets of motivators simultaneously. Pyramid scheme is not able to show this characteristic.

(2) The shape of needs may not be rigid, rather it is more flexible and affected with current lifestyle and experiences (Maslow, 1970), but as far as the age going up, the shape of needs become more and more solid. Thus, the quality of early living years is an important factor in shaping the individual hierarchy of a person. Therefore, if the satisfaction of basic needs is sufficient, then Maslow will describe individual as healthy and normal person.

(3) Every set of needs, itself forms a small inter hierarchy. That is, as far as growing up, a person not only meets new needs, but also meets high degrees of the current need. For instance, an infant needs simple foods, whereas a young child needs foods that are more complex. Sex as a physiological need will emerge after many years. As a result, it is possible to infer that some lower level sets of needs may consider as deficiency needs and some upper level sets may assign as growth needs. For example, about the needs to know and to understand, there are some levels like the need to explore environment as a mobile life, which seems to be deficiency need, whereas the need to organize or look for relation (Maslow, 1970, p. 50) in this set is clearly growth need.

(4) The integrated wholeness of the organism might be one of the foundations of Maslow’s motivation theory. The pyramid is unable to show this integrity and relation of sets in hierarchy.

All schemes have issued and are accessible, there was only one innovate scheme which was able to present more characteristics of basic needs in compare to traditional scheme. It is accessible from following URL: http://praxis.wynja.com/personality/needs.html.
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Although based on literacy and researches (e.g., Saeednia, 2009) the hierarchy of basic needs includes more than five sets, overall this section it will be mentioned to traditional 5 sets, because there is not agreement in their
existence and in their situation in hierarchy. This study offers following scheme (Figure 2) as an innovative one, which seems to be able to present some of above characteristics, in oppose to pyramid scheme, which was not able to do so.

This scheme is not rigid, but it is possible to extend up for individuals with poor and slow satisfaction, particularly if it had happened in first years of life. These people will meet higher needs too late and will not be motivated by several needs at the same time as the following scheme (Figure 3) presents. Therefore, theses people meet basic needs with less overlapping.

In contrast, the scheme will be compacted, for fortunate people who are satisfied fairly and early. These people seem to pass needs fast and motivate nearly all levels of needs simultaneously. They will soon lose the lower needs as motivators and will be purely motivated with higher needs as following scheme (Figure 4) presents.

Comparing these schemes with the characteristics that were mentioned above, it is evident to which extend this scheme satisfy and inspire them.

These schemes are closer to further characteristics of needs and present that emergence of needs is not a sudden but rather a slow degree from nothing. Obviously, it is not essential that a need satisfied 100 percent before the next emerge, rather when the lower need is salient the others emerge.

As the satisfaction level grows up (horizontal line), the acceleration of increasing a need for lower need (we can call this quantity “pre-potency”) is high, then after satisfying fairly (passing the line from diameter of oval), this acceleration decreases as the acceleration of next need now growing. It is possible to formulate it in mathematic language but might be unnecessary.

The last suggestion in scheming Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is very simple, while with maximum inspiration. It is like a piece of a flexible tube. Satisfaction would be considered as filling it with water.
horizontal line that shows the quantity of satisfaction may be considered as the surface of water (Figure 5).

This scheme is able to inspire either all of previous points or some new characteristics as follow:

1. Integrity of human and motivating the whole person instead of a part when affected with any needs;
2. “Any of the needs serve as channels for all sorts of other needs as well” (Maslow, 1970, p. 19);
3. Satisfaction level will never meet the null amount of needs since a determined amount of satisfied physiological needs is essential to survive;
4. A lack in lower needs will produce pressure to whole of organism to fill it up as an emergence as the scheme shows. Yet it is a quickly passing threat and all needs serve as channels to fill up the lacking need.

This scheme is able to present the effect of the quality of gratifying the emerging needs and characteristics of meeting them. For individual with poor and slow satisfaction particularly if it has happened in first years of life,
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this tube tends to get up (same as a tension). The needs, then will become more independent and the individual will get far from integrity (see Figure 6).

Rather, for fortunate people who are satisfied fairly and early, tube will tend to be relaxed and come close to horizon. Most of needs are emerged almost together (see Figure 7).

It is useful to compare all the characteristics that have been mentioned with this new scheme one by one, however it could be done by reader avoiding the repetition.

3. Conclusion

Because of the nature of the study, most of the conclusions were expressed during the argument. Following states would serve to complete the remained points.

Most of scholars present the Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs by a plain triangle which is not adequate to inspire all characteristics of basic needs. Besides, triangle is not Maslow’s suggestion. This study has elaborated Maslow’s theory of motivation. Based on this elaboration, a list of characteristics has been found for basic needs. Thereafter, it was tried to initiate some new suggestion to scheme hierarchy of basic needs.

Two new suggestions were innovated to scheme the hierarchy. Using these new schemes, it is easy and impressive to realize more about basic needs.

The contribution of this study is not just new scheming, even though it is important enough to proceed. The other contribution is elaboration of the very impressive characteristics of basic needs and their relation. Realizing Maslow’s theory without understanding these characteristics is never adequate.

References:

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