Presenting Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: Scavenger hunt to the rescue

Abstract:

This 30-minute activity session aims at demonstrating how instructors can introduce Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in a fun and engaging way. The proposed activity is applicable for face-to-face classrooms and is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate courses. I believe that the ideas presented in this session could successfully be used in classes such as Organizational Behavior, HRM, Organizational Theory, Introduction to Management, or any class that teaches theories of motivation.

Keywords: Maslow Hierarchy of Needs, team, experiential learning

Activity/Exercise General Details:

This 30-minute activity session aims at demonstrating how instructors can introduce Maslow's hierarchy of needs in a fun and engaging way. The proposed activity is applicable for face-to-face classrooms and is suitable for both undergraduate and graduate courses. I believe that the ideas presented in this session could successfully be used in classes such as Organizational Behavior, HRM, Organizational Theory, Introduction to Management, or any class that teaches theories of motivation.

Introduction:

Every management textbook in organizational behavior has a chapter on motivation that covers Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow's theory is fundamental in illustrating how unsatisfied needs prompt effort and ultimately motivation in individuals. Despite its heavy presence in management textbooks, however, I have noticed students' skepticism, lack of engagement and understanding of its value when I introduce the concept.

Furthermore, the 21st century students, often called Millennials, and their learning needs are quite different from what I was personally accustomed to as a learner. According to Diana and James Oblinger (2005), the following characteristics have an impact on how Millennials approach learning:

- Millennials are digitally literate and do not remember life before computers.

- Millennials like to stay connected with peers and family.

- Millennials prefer responses and results that are timely or immediate.

- Millennials prefer learning that is relevant and experiential.

- Millennials are highly social and usually prefer to think and learn "out loud".

- Millennials seek out learning that includes active engagement and experience.

With these considerations in mind, I saw the need to introduce Maslow's hierarchy of needs in an engaging way that would allow students to interact with others, use technology and ultimately engage in the creation of knowledge. My scavenger hunt activity was born.

Learning Objectives:

The scavenger hunt activity was guided by a few objectives in mind.

Objective 1: To allow students to identify Maslow's theory needs at work or school settings.

Objective 2: To allow students to understand the theory better and the need for it in actual work settings.

Objective 3: To encourage students to communicate more effectively with others.

Objective 4: To allow students to become effective team members. This objective will also help students realize approaches to working with or managing persons different from themselves.

I also had three Goals in mind for this session:

Goal A: To provide participants with ideas how to accomplish the above goals.

Goal B: To allow participants, who would use the activity presented in the session, to actually experience what students in the classroom might, such as the challenges, the revelations, and the learning moments.

Goal C: To receive feedback as to how the class experience and application could be improved along with addressing questions that participants might have in relation to the presentation.

Exercise Overview:

Prior to coming to class, I print the instructions for the activity (see Appendix A). The activity is to be done in teams of 5-8 students per team, thus the number of copies to be printed depends on the class size.

Without any presentation on Maslow's theory, I present students with the instructions. Instructors could choose to lecture prior to engaging students with the activity, however, I found that "going blind", coupled with the plenary debrief, has a more memorable impact.

The activity's goal is two-fold – 1) as a team, collect pictures around College of Business that represent the satisfaction of specific needs (the list of needs is provided) and 2) create and email to the professor a power point presentation where these pictures are inserted and organized. Teams have 20 minutes for this step of the activity. The next steps involve downloading an showing the power point presentations to the class. Finally, the instructor engages the class in a plenary debrief session, where Maslow's theory is introduced as well as its applicability and relation to the activity (see Appendix A for a description of the debrief session).

Total running and debriefing time takes about 55 minutes:

- Students get into teams and read instructions: 5 minutes

- The activity begins – students take pictures, create power point presentations and email the latter to the instructor: 20 minutes

- Instructor downloads power point presentations: 2-5 minutes

- Instructor shows power point presentations to the class: 5 minutes

- Instructor introduces Maslow's hierarchy of needs and ties the theory to the activity: 20 minutes

Session Overview:

After a brief introduction, the bulk of this session will involve engaging participants in a demonstration and discussion of the activity. To get the feel of the experience from the student's perspective, participants will work through the activity individually.

The session will close with a dialogue regarding participants' thoughts, reactions, and questions. Conference participants will be encouraged to share their own experiences as well. This dialogue is important for many reasons. Specifically, participants will have the opportunity to leaf through the resources they can use in the classroom and digest the benefits and challenges of using the presented activity in their own classroom.

Session Description:

My presentation will be in the following format:

Introduction (purpose of session and set up)   2 minutes

Presentation and Session Activities:

Conference participants engage in the activity: when prompted, they suggest tools from each category of needs that satisfy needs at their college (Goals A and B)   10 minutes

Presentation of student work (Appendix B) (Goal A)   3 minutes

Dialogue:

Conference participants share their impressions of the activity (Goal C)   5 minutes

Conference participants suggest improvements/alternative use (Goal C)   5 minutes

Conference participants share their experiences with Maslow's theory presentation (Goal C)   5 minutes

Application to Conference theme:

The session is not to be considered as part of the Conference Theme Track.

Unique Contribution:

This presentation is unique and novel and have not been presented or considered for publication elsewhere.

References

Oblinger, D. & Oblinger, J. (2005). *Educating the Net Generation*. [eBook] EDUCAUSE.

Retrieved from https://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/pub7101.pdf

Appendix A: Activity Description

<u>Prior to running the activity</u>, instructors print the activity instructions along with the list below

Take a picture that demonstrates how College of Business (COB) provides tools for satisfying at least 2 factors listed in EACH group of the enclosed document. For example, for "thirst" in group 1, take a picture that satisfies your thirst in COB. Team members could be featured in the pictures. After you've taken ALL of your pictures, create a power point presentation that shows the factor and the pictured satisfaction tool (start with group 1 and finish with group 5 factors). Don't forget to include a cover slide with your team name (team members' names). Email your power point to your professor. You have 20 minutes.

Group	Factors
1	Thirst
	Food
	Sleep/Rest
	Oxygen
	Sex
	Body Needs
2	Security
	Safety
	Protection
	Comfort
	Economic Stability/Well-Being
	Acceptable
	Feeling of Belonging

3	Group Membership Love/Affection Group Participation
4	Recognition Prestige Confidence Leadership Competence Success
5	Doing things for the challenge Doing things for the accomplishment Intellectual curiosity Creativity Self-fulfillment of potential Becoming better

On the day of the activity presentation,

1. Instructor divides the class into **teams** (5-8 students per team) and gives each of the teams the **instructions** and the list of needs above.

2. Instructor starts the **timer** with 20 minutes on the clock. Students collect pictures, create and email power point presentations to the instructor.

3. After the time is up, the instructor **shows** all of the submitted power point **presentations** to the class. Optional: to make the environment more engaging and competitive, the instructor could offer bonus points for the best presentation, submitted within the allotted timeframe.

4. Instructor starts the plenary **debrief session**:

    A. Instructor opens the discussion with the question *What motivates people?* According to Abraham Maslow, it is the unsatisfied need that motivates people (if you have a need to satisfy, you will put the effort to do so, will do all the things necessary to satisfy the need, and will persist until you satisfy it - all these elements form the definition of motivation.

B. Further, according to Maslow, the needs people have exist in a very specific order –
the lower the need, the more powerful it is and the more it motivates.

a. Physiological needs. The most potent and basic human physical needs
including the need for food, water, sleep, and oxygen. In organizational settings, the
mechanisms that satisfy these needs include adequate heat, air, and base salary to ensure
survival (to buy food). As soon as we satisfy these needs, they cease to motivate us for
effort/action and only then we can feel and move up to the next level of needs. This is
known as the progression principle.

b. Safety needs. These are the needs for a safe and secure physical and emotional
environment, free from threats of violence. This level includes needs for health, body
security, housing and property. In organizational settings, the mechanisms that satisfy
these needs include provision of safe jobs, fringe benefits, and job security.

c. Belongingness needs. These needs include the desire to be accepted by one's
peers, to have friends, to be part of a group, and to be loved. In organizational settings,
the mechanisms that satisfy these needs include environments that foster good
relationships with co-workers, participation in a work group, and a positive relationship
with supervisors.

d. Esteem needs. Esteem needs relate to the desire for a positive self-image and
the need to receive attention, recognition, and appreciation from others. In organizational
settings, the mechanisms that satisfy these needs include environments that foster and
acknowledge recognition, increased responsibility, high status, and credit for
contributions to the organization.

e. Self-actualization needs. This is the highest need category and it represents the need for self-fulfillment—developing one's full potential, increasing one's competence, and becoming a better person. These needs can be met in an organizational setting by providing opportunities to grow, by encouraging creativity, and by providing training for challenging assignments and advancement. This category contains needs that never cease to motivate fulfillment (mastering a skill still motivates a person to continue developing and applying said skill).

C. Instructor ties the game into the discussion by highlighting that students found a number of tools and mechanisms around the school that satisfy all five groups of needs. Some of these tools, such as safety information, we often take for granted, yet they play a key role in our environments. Still, the question remains, *why do we need to have these tools to satisfy our needs, especially at the 1st four levels?* After probing for an answer, instructor reveals that managers want to provide people with tools to quickly and seamlessly satisfy their needs from the 1st four levels, because the ultimate goal is to get employees to feel unsatisfied needs at the final, 5th level. The reason - when satisfied, needs for levels 1-4 cease to motivate us; yet even if satisfied, needs from level 5 continue to force us to exert more effort and keep on. Managers want their employees to continuously strive for self-fulfillment, a drive that is internally ignited, rather than imposed.

D. The conversation wraps with a discussion of whether the progression principle is always at play. Students are encouraged to think of times when they actually had an unsatisfied lower level need, yet they were being motivated to satisfy an upper level need. For example, they might have felt hungry during their test-taking, yet they proceeded. The last question centers

around what happens when we violate the progression principle? What are the emotional and

performance implication of the violation of the progression principle?

Appendix B: Student Power Point Presentation Sample

GROUP 4: LEADERSHIP AND SUCCESS

GROUP 5: BECOMING BETTER