

REVISITING MASLOW'S HIERARCHY: THE RECOGNITION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF GREATNESS IN OTHERS

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Abstract

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a broadly accepted framework in psychology that offers valuable insights into human motivation. The initial five-tier model has been applied across numerous spheres of influence. Later revisions incorporated self-transcendence and emphasised the importance of contributing beyond individual fulfilment. This study criticises and expands on Maslow's framework by suggesting an additional dimension, namely the recognition and acknowledgment of greatness in others. This is followed by a conceptual exploration of two distinct perspectives within this anticipated dimension, while drawing from the self-determination theory and social motivation research. The first perspective interprets recognition as a fundamental segment of self-transcendence, which aligns with Maslow's highest level of need. It suggests that recognising others' greatness mirrors the individual's shift from personal fulfilment to a focus on the collective good. The second perspective suggests that recognition constitutes a distinct motivational need and is situated between esteem and self-actualisation. There is therefore a perceived link between self-accomplishments and the broader altruistic motives. This dual perspective stresses the psychological and social gains of recognising others, and similarly links it to intrinsic motivation, interpersonal relationships as well as workplace engagement. By including this dimension, the framework evolves to deliberate contemporary perceptions of human fulfilment and underscoring the significance of social validation and community well-being. This proposed addition enriches both individual and collective experiences and positions the concept of recognition as a fundamental psychological and social need in modern civilisation.

Keywords: Maslow's hierarchy, motivation, recognition, self-transcendence, social validation.

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1. Introduction

Maslow's hierarchy of needs [1] has been a cornerstone in psychology. Over decades, it has been regarded as key to advancing our insight into human motivation and self-fulfilment and is similarly used to cognise human motivation and behaviour. It proposes five levels of needs, arranged in a hierarchy, namely physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging needs, esteem needs, and self-actualisation as the fifth tier. It's noted that the deficiency needs are focused on what individuals lack, and the growth needs has a focus on what individuals would need to grow [2].

Then, later framework revisions presented the concept of self-transcendence, which theorises that fulfilment arose from our connection with others and contributions beyond personal gain [3]. These revisions extended the framework to incorporate cognitive and aesthetic needs [4] as well as transcendence needs [5] and posited contemplating causes beyond oneself, such as altruism, spiritual enlightenment, and the yearning to help others achieve self-actualisation. In Alderfer's theory [6], the aforesaid five levels are then summarised into three categories, namely existence-, relatedness-, and growth- needs. However, as social values and work dynamics advance, there is room for the further refinement of Maslow's extended hierarchy [7].

Then, the self-expansion model, proposed by Arthur and Elaine Aron in 1986, considers that individuals seek to develop their self-concept through close relationships by including others' resources, perspectives and identities into their own. This framework may well suggest that recognising and appreciating others contributes to one's personal growth and fulfilment, resonating with

the idea of integrating recognition into motivational hierarchies [8]. While the theory supports the notion of integrating the recognition of others into existing motivational frameworks, the specific positioning of this recognition as a distinct need between esteem and self-actualisation is less explicitly addressed in existing literature. This conceptualisation therefore offers an unique positioning for this need within Maslow's hierarchy and potentially bridges the gap between self-oriented achievements and broader motivations.

Consequently, this article suggests an further tier to the hierarchy, the recognition and acknowledgement of greatness in others. This proposal is founded in the concept that personal fulfilment occurs from the contribution to the well-being of others. Likewise, acknowledging others positively affects individual motivation and well-being, therefore aligning with a psychological need. Whether recognition is from academic achievements, leadership abilities or personal attributes, its impact reaches further than just the individual. Recognition can hence be contemplated as a form of self-transcendence where personal fulfilment is enriched through contributing to the success and well-being of those around us.

This principle is reiterated in the transformational leadership theory, that stresses the significance of working towards an environment where our individual contributions are valued and recognised [9]. Accordingly, integrating the recognition of others into Maslow's hierarchy introduces a vital social dimension to motivation, and as argued by the authors of [10], *"human resources motivation is primordial in all sectors of activity"*.

The aim of this research was to expand on Maslow's framework by suggesting an additional dimension, namely the recognition and acknowledgment of greatness in others, and also to present a conceptual exploration of current models drawing from the self-determination theory and social motivation research.

2. Materials and Methods

This article assumes a conceptual and theoretical approach to propose an expansion of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The methodology involved a conceptual literature review, drawing on motivational theories. This includes in particular Maslow's expanded hierarchy, self-determination theory, and the job demands-resources model. These and other frameworks were explored to assess how the recognition of greatness in others may be integrated into existing motivational orders. By critically engaging with these frameworks, the study identifies an emerging conceptual space that centres the interpersonal and prosocial aspects of motivation, which are argued as areas that have been underrepresented in traditional models.

It is within this context that two conceptual perspectives are proposed to position the recognition of greatness in others within Maslow's motivational hierarchy.

Therefore, a dual conceptual approach guided this inquiry:

- a) Recognition, perceived as an representation of self-transcendence, bringing this perspective into line with Maslow's highest level of need.
- b) Recognition, perceived as a distinct motivational need, that is placed between esteem and cognitive needs.

The conceptual development was informed by existing academic criticisms of Maslow's work, including its methodological limitations and socio-cultural prohibitions. Theoretical reasoning was then employed to support the inclusion of recognition as a vital element of modern motivation theory.

2. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed a dual perspective in conceptualising the idea of recognising the greatness of others within Maslow's hierarchy.

3. 1. A Dual Perspective

In the context of self-transcendence, the later phase Maslow has frequently been discussed in literature. According to Maslow, beyond self-actualisation, self-transcendence is when individuals transcend their own sense of fulfilment and connect with a higher purpose by acting philanthropically and putting the welfare of others first [7]. From this angle, acknowledging the greatness of

others could be interpreted as a manifestation of transcending oneself. At this level, the person aims to make a constructive contribution to society, not for their own benefit but for the benefit of others, which naturally connects self-transcendence with appreciating the accomplishments of others.

By placing the recognition of others as a distinct motivational need in Maslow's hierarchy between self-actualisation and esteem requirements, it further builds upon this particular hypothesis. Although not quite as abstract or self-directed as self-actualisation, the acknowledgement of others proposes motivation that transcends self-esteem. This creative placement offers a middle ground where people seek external validation of others to improve their interpersonal relationships, feeling of purpose, and sense of identity.

This second perspective therefore introduces an important distinction: recognition as a unique, intermediate need that is both relational and motivational. While some of the foundational works on self-expansion [8] hint at this type of connection and personal growth through relationships, the explicit and novel placement of this need between esteem and self-actualisation has not been addressed directly in the literature. This expansion of Maslow's framework provides a new layer to understanding how recognition and acknowledgement of others plays a crucial role in motivating individuals, not just for self-improvement but for recognising and valuing others' contributions.

3. 2. Perspective 1: Self-transcendence through recognition

Perspective 1 grounds the idea that recognition could be a form of altruistic behaviour, tied to Maslow's self-transcendence. This section supports the idea that recognising others fits into the higher levels of Maslow's hierarchy. Recognition could therefore be viewed as part of the self-transcendence level in Maslow's extended hierarchy (**Fig. 1**). This viewpoint suggests that self-transcendence, which is the final level in Maslow's extended hierarchy, contains the recognition of greatness in others. Then, the *"self-determination theory maintains that an understanding of human motivation requires a consideration of innate psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness"* [11]. Consequently, it can be hypothesised that psychological well-being and an individual's basic drive are developed through interpersonal validation, such as acknowledging the accomplishments of others.

Distinguishing self-transcendence as part of Maslow's hierarchy has significant importance for research and theory in that it offers *"(a) a more comprehensive understanding of worldviews regarding the meaning of life; (b) broader understanding of the motivational roots of altruism, social progress, and wisdom; (c) a deeper understanding of religious violence; (d) integration of the psychology of religion and spirituality into the mainstream of psychology; and (e) a more multiculturally integrated approach to psychological theory"* [12].

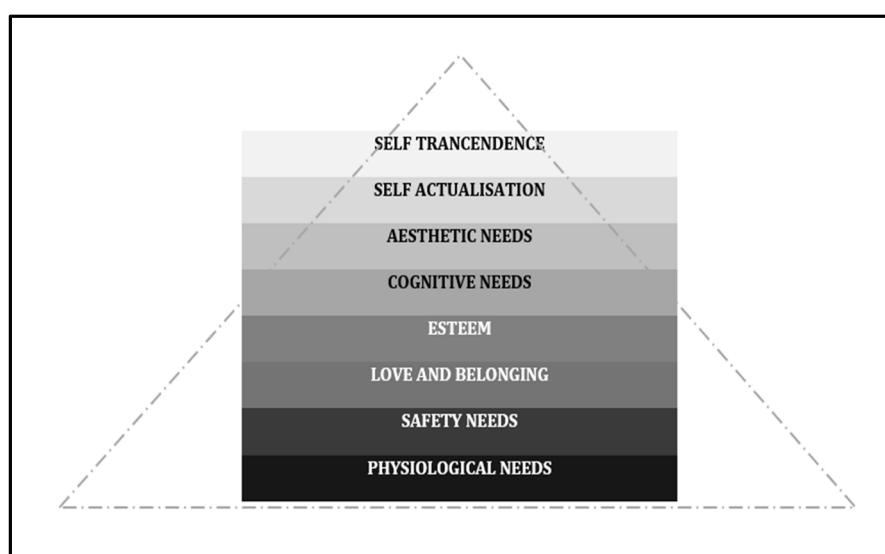


Fig. 1. Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs as adapted from the authors of [7, 12]

3. 3. Perspective 2: Recognition as a distinct layer

Perspective 2 (distinct need between esteem and cognitive needs) builds on the foundation, laid by self-transcendence, but takes it further by suggesting that recognition has its own space in the hierarchy, as it specifically involves external acknowledgment of others, which serves as a motivational force for personal and collective development (**Fig. 2**). The second layer of the perspective is about valuing and appreciating others, which promotes stronger social ties and respect for one another, in contrast to the need for esteem that still places emphasis on recognition.

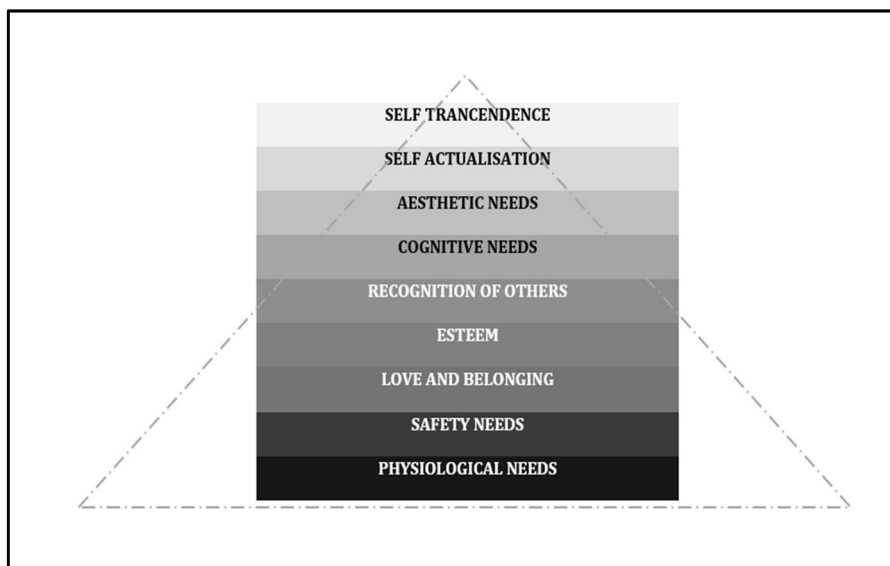


Fig. 2. Proposed expansion to Maslow's hierarchy incorporating recognition

In the proposed expansion of Maslow's extended hierarchy of needs, the added element of recognition now acts as a bridge. After establishing one's own esteem, an individual begins to look outward, acknowledging and valuing the achievements and qualities of others. Cognitive needs then follow, as the individual seeks to understand, learn, and integrate these social experiences into broader intellectual and aesthetic pursuits.

3. 4. Theoretical Underpinnings

Looking towards the historical and philosophical foundation of recognition, Maslow's hierarchy of needs surfaced in the post-World War II context. This was a period, marked by existential uncertainty, rapid industrialisation, and a growing interest in human potential. As part of the humanistic psychology movement, Maslow's theory functioned as a retort to the constraints of psychoanalysis and behaviourism, which he viewed as too deterministic and reductionist [1, 13]. His framework established a more optimistic idea of the human nature, which was centred around growth, meaning, and the pursuit of self-actualisation. It was only in his later work that he extended his framework to include self-transcendence, which reflected a shift toward the more relational dimension of human motivation.

The concept of recognising others' value, conversely, is far from new. Philosophical traditions across numerous cultures have long underscored the value of relational existence. For instance, Aristotle's idea of *eudaimonia* described human thriving not only as personal excellence but as ethical living in relation to others [14]. Similarly, native and collectivist worldviews understand identity as inherently social. The African philosophy of *ubuntu*, which is well captured in the phrase 'I am because we are', expresses a philosophical relationship between self and community [15, 16]. These perspectives underscore recognition as a deeply embedded human need, rooted in shared humanity, and not just as a superficial social act.

This historical and philosophical grounding positions recognition as a universal psychological imperative – one that rise above temporal, cultural, and disciplinary confines. In an increas-

ingly individualistic and technologically mediated society, returning to these foundational ideas of mutual affirmation and relational value becomes both relevant and necessary [17, 18].

The aforementioned historical and theoretical grounding helps to position recognition as a deeply rooted human need, one that spans cultures, time periods, and schools of thought. Building on this concept of recognition as a core human need, research further reinforces the idea that our well-being is deeply tied to how we relate to it and uplift others. Research by the authors of 19 suggests that social relationships and benevolence are vital for psychological health. Their findings further reveal that the senses of “*autonomy, competence, and relatedness are increased when people can give, and they explain a large part of the well-being benefits of pro-social giving*” [19].

It could therefore be claimed that if we recognise the capabilities and successes of others, it will contribute to the cultivation of positive relationships and the advancement of our well-being. This consequently supports the hypothesis that personal advancement is parallel to the recognition of others.

It is similarly important to consider the critique by the author of [20], who pointed out that the most noteworthy shortcoming of Maslow’s theory involves his methodology, when Maslow formulated the characteristics of self-actualised individuals through employing a qualitative method, namely biographical analysis.

During his research, Maslow studied the biographies and works of 18 individuals that he personally acknowledged as being self-actualised, and then, from this foundation, he established a list of qualities that he mainly generalised to humanity. It could, hence, be argued that the biographical analysis as a methodology is deemed biased as it was founded on the estimation of the researcher [20]. Moreover, Maslow’s biographical exploration engaged a subjective sample of self-actualised individuals, including friends and colleagues, but notably limited to well-educated male historical figures (including Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, William James and Beethoven).

Several authors understand Maslow’s self-actualised needs as markedly self-centred, underscoring only the needs of individuals in “*contemporary democratic societies, and primarily men in these societies, without considering the influence of culture and socio-economic context, and therefore not encompassing universal human needs*” [21, 22].

Finally, as also found by the authors of [23] on the job demands-resources model, it is evident that social support and recognition are key resources that contribute to employee motivation and engagement, especially in high-demand settings.

Limitations of the study. This study is conceptual in nature and lacks the practical validation of quantitative or qualitative research. The inclusion of a construct, such as “recognition of others”, is fundamentally interpretive and may differ extensively across cultural, psychological or philosophical contexts.

Recommendations for further research. Future studies could empirically test the hypothesis that recognition of others is a core motivational need. Then, a longitudinal study could assess if including the recognition of others as a motivational need predicts long-term well-being, workplace engagement and societal cohesion.

4. Conclusions

As human motivation continues to evolve in an increasingly interconnected world, so must our understanding of fulfilment. Adding the layer of recognition of others’ greatness to Maslow’s hierarchy reflects a shift towards a more collaborative and socially connected form of motivation. Either in workplaces, academic institutions or broader society, this addition could enrich both individual lives and the communities, in which we live and work. Whether conceptualised as an enhancement of self-transcendence or as a separate, distinct layer, this concept underscores the critical role of social recognition in fostering personal fulfilment and community well-being.

Recognising others positively influences individual motivation and well-being, thus positioning itself as a psychological need. This indicates that such recognition behaviours augment individual well-being and foster collective harmony and satisfaction. Recognition within social or organisational settings significantly improves overall well-being and fosters a sense of community support. Consequently, acknowledging others aligns with the need for relatedness and intrinsic

social validation, which supports an enriched understanding of Maslow's hierarchy that includes recognising others as an essential human need.

This article's dual perspective i.e. recognition as part of self-transcendence and recognition as a distinct need are presented and proposed as an expansion to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. By linking recognition to Maslow's self-transcendence stage, a theoretical foundation is provided for why recognition of others could be considered a higher-order need. It similarly shows that recognising others fits well into Maslow's later conceptualisation of self-transcendence, which focuses on the well-being of others.

By valuing the achievements and qualities of others, we contribute to a more interconnected and empathetic society, ultimately enriching our shared human experience and contributing towards a more collaborative future. Adding this layer to Maslow's hierarchy provides a modernised view that emphasises the interpersonal dimension of human motivation. These are elements, deemed foundational to well-being in both personal and professional settings.

Conflict of interest

It is declared that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this paper, as well as the published research results, including the financial aspects of conducting the research, obtaining and using its results, as well as any non-financial personal relationships.

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Data availability

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Use of artificial intelligence

The authors confirm that they did not use artificial intelligence technologies when creating the current work.

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