

The Max-Neef Model of Human-Scale Development

by BJ Diamond

Human-Scale Development is defined (by Manfred Max-Neef)¹ as "*focused and based on the satisfaction of fundamental human needs, on the generation of growing levels of self-reliance, and on the construction of organic articulations of people with nature and technology, of global processes with local activity, of the personal with the social, of planning with autonomy, and of civil society with the state.*" (Max-Neef et al, 1987:12)

Max-Neef makes an important distinction between needs and satisfiers. Human needs are few, finite and classifiable (and distinct from the conventional notion that "wants" are infinite and insatiable). And, they are constant through all human cultures and across historical time periods. What changes over time and between cultures is the way these needs are satisfied. It is important to understand human needs as a system, i.e. they are interrelated and interactive. According to Max-Neef, there is no hierarchy of needs (apart from the basic need for subsistence or survival), rather, simultaneity, complementarity and trade-offs are features of the process of needs satisfaction.

Max-Neef identifies nine fundamental human needs which are further defined by the categories of being, having, doing and interacting. From these dimensions, a matrix is developed which can be filled with examples of satisfiers for those needs.

Satisfying Human Needs (Max-Neef Model)

FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEEDS	Being (qualities)	Having (things)	Doing (actions)	Interacting* (settings)
SUBSISTENCE	physical and mental health	food, shelter work	feed, clothe, rest, work	living environment, social setting
PROTECTION	care, adaptability autonomy	social security, health systems, work	co-operate, plan, take care of, help	social environment, dwelling
AFFECTION	respect, sense of amor, generosity, sensuality	friendships, family, relationships with nature	share, take care of, make love, express emotions	privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness
UNDERSTANDING	critical capacity, curiosity, intuition	literature, teachers, policies educational	analyze, study, meditate investigate,	schools, families universities, communities,
PARTICIPATION	receptiveness, dedication, sense of humor	responsibilities, duties, work, rights	cooperate, dissent, express opinions	associations, parties, churches, neighborhoods
LEISURE	imagination, tranquility spontaneity	games, parties, peace of mind	day-dream, remember, relax, have fun	landscapes, intimate spaces, places to be alone
CREATION	imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity	abilities, skills, work, techniques	invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	spaces for expression, workshops, audiences
IDENTITY	sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency	language, religions, work, customs, values, norms	get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself	places one belongs to, everyday settings
FREEDOM	autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness	equal rights	dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness	anywhere

*The (English) label "*Interacting*" was selected to describe settings as in locations, times and space which promote various types of interpersonal relationships as there is no corresponding English word for *Estar* (Spanish) or *Finden* (German).²

Satisfiers have different characteristics: they can be destructive, pseudo-satisfiers, inhibiting, singular satisfiers, or synergistic satisfiers. Certain satisfiers may appear to satisfy a particular need while, at the same time, inhibit or destroy the possibility of satisfying other needs: e.g., commercial television, while satisfying the need for recreation or relaxation, may interfere with understanding, concentration, creativity and identity. Examples are everywhere.

Synergistic satisfiers, not only satisfy one particular need, but also lead to satisfaction in other areas: some examples are self-managed production; democratic community organizations; preventative medicine; meditation; educational games.

Max-Neef and his colleagues found that this methodology "*allows for the achievement of in-depth insight into the key problems that impede the actualization of fundamental human needs in the society, community or institution being studied*" (Max-Neef et al, 1987:40). This model also provides a useful approach that meets the requirements of small group, community-based processes that have the effect of allowing deep reflection about one's individual and community situation, leading to critical awareness and, possibly, action at the local economic level.

According to Holger Nauheimer, Change Facilitation s.r.o.³, this model can help transform an individual's resistance to change. "This resistance is, in fact, an expression that their needs are not being fulfilled, or that they believe that their principal concerns are not being taken in consideration. People always compare their personal costs and benefits in a change process; in most cases this is an unconscious process. They usually are not aware of what they want and what they fear. Understanding and acknowledging their purposes, concerns and needs is key to getting their commitment for collaboration."

Nauheimer encourages change leaders to draw out individuals. "Everyone has their own story. As a change leader you must not assume that the people you deal with have the same understanding of the change process; nor do they have the same needs."

He suggests using this matrix of needs and satisfiers as a basis for questionnaires, interviews, coaching sessions, team meetings, etc. "Treat every answer as a gift and start a dialogue about how a safety net can be built - and how the change program needs to be supplemented by other activities to provide for what people require."

Nauheimer lists 3 important lessons using the Max-Neef matrix as it relates to change processes:

- There is no substitute for individual ownership of change processes.
- If people feel that their leaders do not acknowledge their concerns, purposes and needs they will not support a change initiative. When people feel that their needs, purposes and concerns are acknowledged, they open up and collaborate.
- Personal perspectives on change are deeply rooted and emotionally-charged. No rational reasoning will ever conquer these emotions. Individuals must feel that their personal needs are satisfied, and that their fears (unconscious or conscious) are acknowledged and respected.

Dr. Gilbert Brenson-Lazan, with 40+ years of international experience as a social psychologist, consultant and mentor of facilitators and facilitations processes for those who facilitate, lead and manage processes of sustainable cultural transformation, often uses the Max-Neef model as a training tool. He will sometimes combine satisfiers into fewer columns (*Being* and *Doing*) since *Having* is very culturally-defined and *Interacting* per se, is a subset of *Doing*. Dr. Brenson-Lazan includes the *Interacting* column when the settings for such interaction are important for the development of the group or community being considered.

The GFSC Model (Crisis > Change > Choice) describes four stages of building personal and community resilience after a trauma. After survival and security needs are met, people work on meeting their needs for autonomy and for community. These broad concepts can be described in more detail using Max-Neef's matrix. Techniques can focus on helping people identify choices in thinking and acting, so that they can recognize and evaluate what will be effective (satisfiers) and not pseudo-satisfiers that could cause unintended consequences for meeting other needs.

Sources

- <http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/background/maxneef.htm>
- The Change Management Newsletter © Holger Nauheimer 2009
- HUMAN SCALE DEVELOPMENT: Conception, Application and Further Reflections
http://www.max-neef.cl/download/Max-neef_Human_Scale_development.pdf
- Amauta International, LLC, <http://www.amauta-international.com/AmautaENG.htm>

Endnotes

1 Manfred Max-Neef is a Chilean economist who has worked for many years with the problem of development in the Third World, articulating the inappropriateness of conventional models of development, that have led to increasing poverty, massive debt and ecological disaster for many Third World communities. He works for the Centre for Development Alternatives in Chile, an organisation dedicated to the reorientation of development which stimulates local needs. It researches new tools, strategies and evaluative techniques to support such development. Max-Neef and his colleagues have developed a taxonomy of human needs and a process by which communities can identify their "wealths" and "poverties" according to how these needs are satisfied.

2 Manfred A. Max-Neef et al, HUMAN SCALE DEVELOPMENT: Conception, Application and Further Reflections, published 1991 (in English) by The Apex Press, an imprint of the Council on International and Public Affairs, page 33.

3 The Change Management Newsletter © Holger Nauheimer, 2009