

SRV MATTERS -5

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

How might we begin to discern people's needs?

As you know, SRV is very clear about the need to get to know people well, understand as much of their life experiences as is relevant, and thus to work out what their needs are likely to be.

Why is discerning needs essential? Two reasons of several come to mind. Firstly, doing so is integral to people getting the good things of life – and it is this that the application of SRV excels in. Secondly, no matter what helping role we are in, if we truly care, we would aim for excellence in using SRV to serve people.

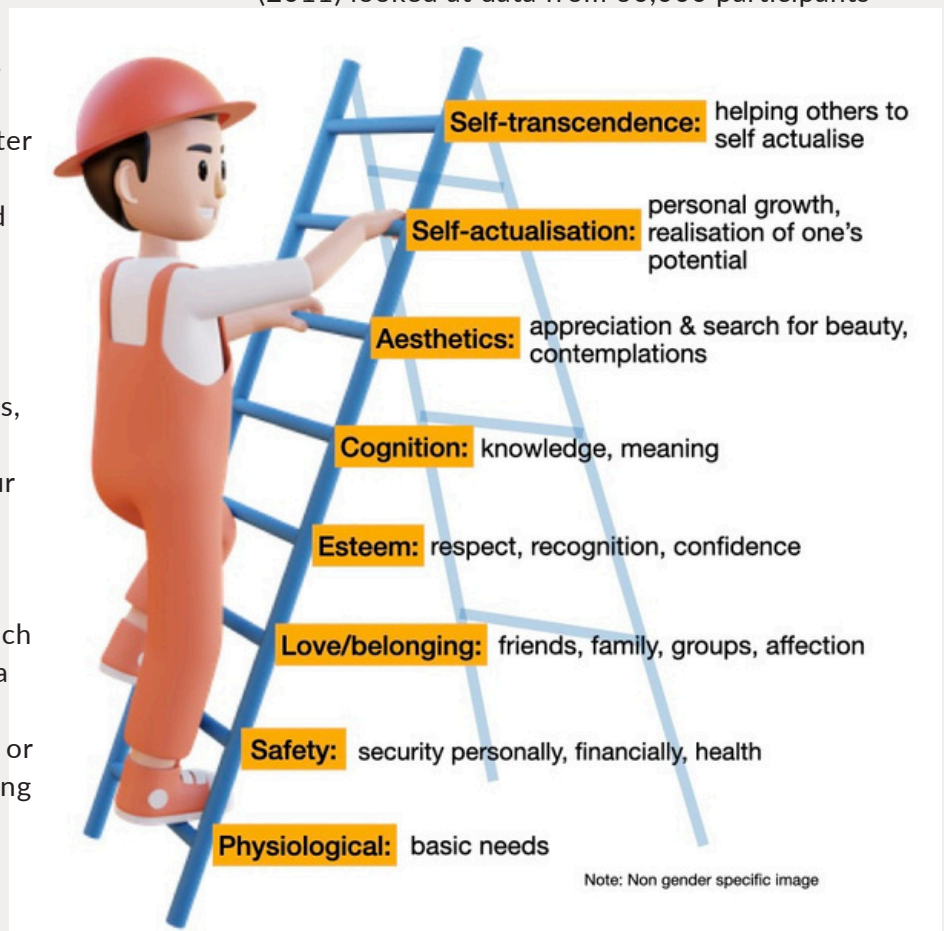
However, as Wolf has said, 'To discern need accurately is notoriously difficult'. Wolf spoke to one tool to help better understand people's needs in his 11-day event in 1999; and that is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This work of Maslow started out as five levels but quickly (within two years) Maslow a) went to eight levels, and b) broke the model into four deficiency needs and four growth needs.

Maslow at no point presented his theory as the well-known pyramid with which we are all familiar but rather a list of domains. He did not suggest these needs as levels or stages you reach before moving on to the next. Instead he believed that people move within the hierarchy and that we are

often motivated by multiple needs simultaneously.

Unfortunately, the common interpretation of a strict hierarchy held sway for many years. We see this sort of phenomenon with elements of Wolfensberger's work; it is so very easy to see how Wolf's ideas are often bastardised.

You might recall that a recent edition of SRV Matters focussed on Universals. The needs described in Maslow's theory appear to be universal. Criticism exists about this question of universals and the applicability of universals to cultures other than that of Maslow's US American culture. Researchers Tay and Diener (2011) looked at data from 60,000 participants



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Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (cont.)

in 123 countries. They concluded that Maslow's theory is largely correct and the needs identified in the original hierarchy of needs are still relevant and universal today.

It has been suggested that the hierarchy should not be a pyramid.

Rather, it would be **more helpful to present it as a ladder**. When climbing a ladder, imagine your feet and hands on up to four different rungs, each representing a different level. It suggests that our needs are flexible, interconnected, that we can be pursuing more than one at a time, and that we move between them based on our current situation and needs.

And, of course, the order of importance at any one time is ordered by both culture and the context or situation one is in. For example, experiencing a significant health condition can make it difficult to fulfill your most basic needs let alone higher order needs. Such difficulty makes it harder for people to maintain their social connections, which can then affect other areas of life that affect mental wellbeing. Loneliness, isolation, and lack of support can further complicate a person's needs.

How then might we use this listing of need domains in serving people well? The answer lies in identifying them in the first place, where the question is: what needs should be met in order to thrive (not 'what needs should be met in order to exist?').

SOME ADDITIONAL DETAIL

1. **Physiological needs:** Food, warmth, shelter, sex, water, and other body needs. If one's basic biological needs are not met,

then there's likely to be issues with bodily wellbeing.

2. **Safety needs:** These needs have to do with the human yearning for a safe (but not too safe) environment, and even a predictable, orderly environment. This need, if not satisfied, can lead to ill health and feelings of insecurity (as opposed to feelings of autonomy or being in control) and lead to high conscientiousness or need for discipline and orderliness.

3. **Belonging needs:** This involves emotionally-based relationships in general, such as friendship, sexual intimacy and having a supportive and communicative family. Without such close relationships, feelings of 'otherness' and isolation can occur.

4. **Self-esteem needs:** All humans have a need to be respected, to have self-respect, and to respect others. Being engaged in relationships and in activities can give the person a sense of contribution, to feel accepted and self-valued. The absence of self esteem can lead to feelings of inferiority and show in one's behaviour.

5. **Cognitive needs:** This is the expression of the natural human need to learn, explore, discover and create. A lack of ongoing learning and stimulation can lead to low development, loss of skills and a feeling of emptiness.

6. **Aesthetic needs:** Humans appreciate beauty in their surroundings, whether it be in their home, nature, art, music etc.

7. **Self-actualization needs:** Self-actualization is the need of humans to be the best they can be. This is relevant to human's creative, intellectual, and social potential.

8. **Self-transcendence needs:** Spiritual Needs, when fulfilled, can lead to being able to look beyond oneself and be concerned for others.

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