

## A Critical Evaluation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory: Enduring Relevance and Contemporary Challenges

Dr: Majde Ali Ayalawwad

Corresponding author: Dr: Majde Ali Ayalawwad - E-mail:  
majdeawwad983@yahoo.com

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, originally presented in his 1943 paper entitled "A Theory of Human Motivation," remains one of the most recognized and influential theories in psychology and management. Essentially, Maslow's (1943) theory suggests that human motivation is guided through a hierarchical progression of innate needs, from basic physiological needs to the top category, beyond physiological, called self-actualization. The goal of this study is to critically review Maslow's research and support, providing insight into the key concepts of his theory, where his theory has grown historically, how it is still relevant more than 75 years after initially published, and some of the key criticisms and empirical research that has challenged it.

**Methods:** This review investigates the historical and contemporary literature related to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. That body of literature includes Maslow's writings, interpretations, and elaborations made by others, studies testing the theory, critiques from multiple psychological second and cross-cultural perspectives (including critiques related to and uses from very recent literature from 2015-present), and critical analyses of the status of motivation science modern-day as a whole. The review evaluates relevant aspects of the theory's conceptual strengths and shortfalls, its use in applied settings such as management and education, and its standing as a motivational theory in contemporary motivational science.

**Results:** The study describes five fundamental levels of Maslow's hierarchy: Physiological needs (e.g., food, water, shelter), Safety needs (e.g., safety, security, stability, and order), Love and Belongingness needs (e.g., affection, relationships, group membership), Esteem needs (e.g., self-respect, achievement and recognition), and Self-Actualization needs (e.g., desire to become more self-aware, realizing personal potential, self-fulfillment, peak experiences). Some limitations of the theory are presented including absences in the rigid hierarchy of needs, it is virtually impossible to empirically

test self-actualization, and potential cultural biases. Contemporary interpretations of Maslow's theory often eliminate hierarchical layers (level 1 through level 5) and suggest a more complex and overlapping intersectionality of needs.

**Conclusion:** The research indicates that even though Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has faced considerable empirical and theoretical objections, it continues to provide an important framework for understanding human motivation and will continue to influence multiple disciplines. Its strength is its holistic consideration of human needs and the importance of growth and self-actualization. The limitations of Maslow's theory, particularly its hierarchical and universalist assumptions, highlight the need for a more context-driven and nuanced application of his insights to our contemporary understanding of motivation. In the future, researchers should continue to explore the interrelated nature of human needs in diverse contexts of culture and situation.

### 1. Concept of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory, first proposed in his influential 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation," which he further elaborated in the book "Motivation and Personality" (Maslow, 1954), is one of the first significant contributions to humanistic psychology. The theory provides an understanding of human motivation through consideration of the hierarchical nature of innate human needs. Maslow argued that an individual is motivated to satisfy an ordered series of needs in a sequential manner such that more basic needs are, to some degree, satisfied before higher order needs can motivate behavior (Taormina & Gao, 2013; Qutishat, 2025).

The pyramid shape of the hierarchy, although not an original metaphor in Maslow's writing, immediately indicates the hierarchical range of needs, which has become symbolic of his contributions to psychology. At the heart of Maslow's theory is a shift from earlier motivation theories based on biological drives (e.g. Freudian psychoanalysis) or conditioned behavior (e.g. behaviorism) toward a more positive view of human nature and human motivation based on an innate drive for growth, self-improvement, and for self-actualization (i.e., to become the fullest version of oneself (Tay & Diener, 2011)). " He described human beings as "wanting animals;" as we satisfy one need, another would take its place, moving our behavior in an ongoing search for satisfaction. The theory is not only descriptive of needs, but it also suggests the possibility of reaching the state of self-actualization as the ultimate goal of human development, where the individuals exhibit creativity, problem solving, a direct acceptance of facts as they are, and altruism (Maslow, 1970).

Maslow's paradigm provided a more holistic and positive way of understanding human motivation, not just that individuals are responding to deficiencies (the need to

eat) or simply external rewards (receiving pay); people are also motivated tripartite by personal growth and meaning. Maslow identified "deficiency needs" or D-needs, (these arise out of an absence of something, e.g. hunger, thirst, lack of happiness, lack of safety, etc.) and when a D-need is not satisfied, it motivates behavior until satisfied ("a deficiency induces need/motivation"). He also identified "growth needs" or "being needs" (B-needs), which refer to what the individual wants for themselves, to grow and realize their potential (Taormina & Gao, 2013).

Satisfaction of D-needs reduces tension whereas satisfaction of B-needs leads to further growth and further wants for more. This distinction was crucial in highlighting the potential for continuous human development beyond mere survival and security. The intuitive appeal and comprehensiveness of the hierarchy have led to its widespread application and discussion in various fields beyond psychology, including management, education, marketing, and social work, despite ongoing debates about its empirical validity and universality (Maslow, 1982, p. 236).

## 2. The Five Levels of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

The most well-known aspect of Maslow's theory is the five stage model of human needs in order of prepotency. In a hierarchy of needs like Maslow's, prepotency means that lower order needs are, by definition, more basic and must be reasonably satisfied before the higher order of needs will dominate intention and behavior (Maslow, 1970, 293).

- **Physiological Needs** (The base of the hierarchy): This need is the most basic and prepotent. It is basic to the survival of human beings. Once this need is not satisfied, it will control the motivation and behavior of the individual and, relative to the other needs, essentially eliminate them. Examples: Air, food, water, shelter, warmth, sleep, homeostasis (the body's effort to maintain a set point which is stable). Organizational Implications: For employees, this might mean minimum acceptable wages to allow for the acquisition of basic needs; where required, comfortable working conditions (e.g., temperature, lighting); and rest breaks. When these are not met, incentives are unlikely to motivate (Allen et al. 2019).
- **Safety and Security Needs:** When our physiological needs are mostly satisfied, our needs for safety and security are next. Safety and security needs are about the desire for a predictable, orderly, and stable environment, free of physical and emotional harm. Examples of safety and security needs: Personal security, financial security (such as a job or a large savings account), health and well being, protection from accidents and illness, law and order, stability, and freedom from fear. Organizational Implications: This can include job security; safe workplace conditions; health insurance or retirement benefits; having rules and procedures to follow; and fair and

just treatment from management. If there is no safety, it creates anxiety and stress for workers which reduces performance (McLeod, 2020).

- **Love and Belongingness Needs (Social Needs):** Once safety needs and physiological needs are mostly satisfied, the need for love, affection, and belongingness emerges. Humans are social beings and have a basic desire for interpersonal relationships, group membership and attachment. Examples; Affection, friendship, intimacy, family, romantic relationships, group membership (work team, social club, or community), and acceptance and attachment within a group. Organizational Implications; These needs are met in the workplace through the establishment of positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors, cooperation with a team, social activities with work colleagues, and working within an organizational culture that supports workers in feeling valued and accepted as part of a team. Contrastingly, isolation from co-workers or members of an organization or the team dynamic may lead to alienation and a lowered drive (Fowler, 2014 ; Qutishat, 2025).
- **Esteem Needs:** With the lower three levels of need being satisfied, esteem needs can become significant motivators. Esteem needs encompass the need for self-respect, self-esteem, and esteem by others. Maslow further divided esteem needs into two categories: (a) the need for strength, achievement, adequacy, confidence in the presence of the world, independence and freedom (internal esteem). (b) the need for reputation or prestige (which can be defined as respect or esteem from other people), status, fame and glory, recognition, attention, importance, dignity, or appreciation (external esteem). Examples: achievement, mastery, competence, independence, self-confidence, recognition from others, status, respect, and appreciation. Organizational Implications: These needs can be satisfied by job titles, promotions, recognition programs, challenging assignments which allow for skills development and achievement, positive feedback, and increased responsibility. Unsatisfied esteem needs can result in feelings of inferiority, weakness, and helplessness (Allen et al. 2019).
- **Self-Actualization Needs (The Apex of the Hierarchy):** At the apex of the hierarchy, we find the need for self-actualization. According to Maslow (1970) this describes the need to "become everything that one is capable of becoming" – to become self-fulfilled, to realize one's full potential, and to seek personal growth and peak experiences. Because this need is unique to the individual (i.e. each individual's potential to be fulfilled depends on the individual itself), ways of self-actualization will also differ. Examples: Creativity, problem solving, spontaneity, acceptance of facts, absence of prejudice, a high appreciation of life, pursuit of knowledge and truth, personal growth, a reason for being or cause greater than oneself. Self-Actualized People (by Maslow): is realistic, accepts themselves, is spontaneous, problem-centered, autonomous, has continued freshness of appreciation, peak experiences, Gemeinschaftsgefühl, profound relationships with a few people, democratic character

structure, distinguishes between means and ends, philosophical sense of humor, creativity, and resistance to enculturation. Implications for organizations: In order to pursue self-actualization, organizations must find ways to offer employees creativity, challenging work that has meaning, autonomy, personal development, and ultimately realize the individual's goals align with the organizational mission. It is commonly regarded as the most difficult need for organizations to help employees achieve consistently (Link, 2018).

Later in his career, Maslow suggested that there could exist needs prohibiting self-actualization, like "transcendence needs" (requiring you to help/enable others to obtain their self-actualization) or cognitive and aesthetic needs but the five-tiered hierarchy model is the most commonly used version of his theory (Maslow, 1970; Koltko-Rivera, 2006). He also pointed out that the hierarchy is not always fixed and that certain needs may overlap and/or their sequence may differ for some individuals or cases (Al Maamari, 2025).

### **3. Strengths and Enduring Influence of Maslow's Theory**

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory has an undeniable effect on people in various fields of study, and some of the aspects of Maslow's theory contribute to its legacy and continued use (Allen et al. 2019; Qutishat, 2025). For example:

- **Intuitive and Simple:** Maslow's hierarchy has an intuitive appeal and a simplicity that resonates with people's developmental experiences of prioritizing needs. It is the simplicity that gives the hierarchy widespread audiences and a useful construct beyond just academic psychology (Karadencheva, 2025).
- **Holistic and Humanistic View:** As Maslow's theory took shape it was a much-needed pragmatic alternative to reductionist, deterministic ontologies of motivation (e.g. behaviorism and psychoanalysis). Here Maslow aligned his theory with optimistic and holistic views of human beings. Maslow discussed the innate desire that human beings have to grow, better and transform their ideas about themselves into actual self, and eventually, the pursuit for psychological needs such as self-actualization and self-transcendence. It took this view of human's potential as a foundation of the humanistic psychology movement.
- **Concentrate on Higher-Level Needs:** Maslow's inclusion of esteem and self-actualization redirected interest to the psychic well-being, personal development, and search for meaning as motivating forces. These are important for considerations beyond basic physiological drives or extrinsic rewards.
- **Practical Applications in Many Fields: Management and Organizational Behavior:** The theory has been used extensively to better understand employee motivation, to develop employee reward systems, and to create workplace environments that

address a larger scope of employee need. It has been instrumental in influencing approaches to job design, leadership styles, and development in organizations (e.g. McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y were significantly a product of Maslow's hierarchy). Education: Educators have also used the hierarchy to understand the needs of students and to create an educational environment that stimulates cognitive development, as well as emotional and social development. If a student has serious needs for safety or social belongingness, learning will be a low priority concern. Marketing and Consumer Behavior: Marketers have used the hierarchy to understand consumer motivations to inform and enhance the design of products, services, and advertising messages that would speak to individual levels of needs. Healthcare/Social Work: Practitioners in healthcare and social work use the framework to assess, and respond to the complex needs of patients/clients. Basis to support future research: While not always empirically supported in its strict hierarchical form, Maslow's theory has stimulated a vast amount of research on human needs, motivation, and well-being. It has served as a springboard for other need-based theories, such as Alderfer's ERG (Existence, Relatedness, Growth) theory, which proposed a more flexible, less rigid hierarchy (Sowmya & Anokha, 2025).

- **Focus on Growth and Self-Actualization:** The notion of self-actualization as a construct may be problematic and hard if not impossible to measure, but it is argued that the theory has made a substantial contribution in communicating that human beings are motivated to become who they are capable of becoming: to make a meaningful life (as with positive psychology and personal development) and that this notion of self-actualization has resonated profoundly.
- **Cross-Culturally (with caution):** In addition to some of the criticisms of cultural bias, at the least, the theory has generated cross-cultural studies based on researching the universality of human needs as well as their order of needs and has helped to explore how culture may affect how needs are expressed and prioritized (Hofstede, 1984). In summary, the argument presented here is that Maslow's theory was innovative in its scope and shifted the lens of motivational psychology from deficit-focused and negative perspectives to an inclusive and positively oriented understanding of humanity. In its primary premises and simplicity, Maslow's theory leaves a legacy of a simple yet elegant approach to think about what drives human behavior and what people need to flourish (Miri, 2016)

#### **4. Criticisms and Limitations of Maslow's Theory**

While Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been highly influential, it has also faced significant criticism and has not always been robustly supported by empirical research.



These criticisms address various aspects of the theory's conceptualization and applicability (Koltko-Rivera, 2006).

- **Lack of Strong Empirical Support for the Hierarchy:** One of the most significant criticisms is the difficulty in empirically validating the strict hierarchical progression of needs as proposed by Maslow. Research studies attempting to test the hierarchy have often yielded mixed or contradictory results (Wahba & Bridwell, 1976; Tay & Diener, 2011). There is limited evidence to suggest that individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before higher-level needs become operative or that needs are satisfied in a fixed, universal order. People often pursue multiple needs simultaneously, and the order of importance can vary significantly (Abu Bakar ET AL., 2025).

- **Rigidity of the Hierarchical Structure:** Critics contend that the hierarchy is overly rigid and does not sufficiently account for the individual differences, situational factors, or cultural differences. For example, individuals in certain cultures may prioritize social needs over individualistic self-actualization, or individuals may actually pursue higher level needs (e.g., artistic expression, spiritual pursuits) in the absence of meeting lower-order physiological or safety needs (e.g., "starving artist"). Maslow noted that the order of the hierarchy was not as rigid as is often depicted and that there could be exceptions, but the popular view misses these subtleties.

- **Difficulty in Defining and Measuring Self-Actualization:** The concept of self-actualization, while appealing, is inherently vague and difficult to define operationally and measure empirically. Maslow's own methodology for identifying self-actualized individuals (biographical analysis of a small, subjectively chosen sample) has been criticized for its lack of scientific rigor and potential for researcher bias. This makes it challenging to test the highest level of the hierarchy and its role as a universal motivator.

- **Cultural Bias (Ethnocentrism):** The theory has been criticized for reflecting an individualistic, Western cultural perspective, particularly the emphasis on self-actualization as the pinnacle of human development. In more collectivistic cultures, needs related to community, interdependence, and social harmony might take precedence or be integrated differently with individual aspirations (Hofstede, 1984; Nevis, 1983). The universality of the needs themselves might be accepted, but their relative importance and the means of satisfying them can vary significantly across cultures.

- **Methodological Weaknesses in Original Research:** Maslow's initial research relied heavily on clinical observations and biographical analyses of a small and unrepresentative sample of individuals he deemed to be self-actualized (e.g., Abraham Lincoln, Albert Einstein, Eleanor Roosevelt). This qualitative and subjective approach

lacks the generalizability and empirical testability expected in contemporary scientific psychology.

- **Oversimplification of Human Motivation:** While providing a useful framework, some argue that the theory oversimplifies the complex and dynamic nature of human motivation. Motivation is likely influenced by a wider array of interacting factors, including cognitive processes, learning experiences, personality traits, and immediate situational cues, which are not fully accounted for in a simple hierarchical model.
- **Assumption of Need Satisfaction Leading to Motivation Cessation:** The theory implies that once a need is satisfied, it ceases to be a motivator. However, this may not always be true, particularly for higher-level needs like esteem or self-actualization, where satisfaction can sometimes lead to an even stronger desire for more growth and achievement.
- **Lack of Predictive Power for Specific Behaviors:** While the theory provides a general framework for understanding needs, it is less effective in predicting specific behaviors in particular situations. The same need can manifest in many different behaviors, and the same behavior can be driven by multiple needs.

Despite these criticisms, it is important to note that Maslow's intention was often to provide a broad framework for understanding human potential rather than a rigid, empirically testable scientific model in the positivist sense. Many contemporary psychologists acknowledge the value of his contributions in highlighting the importance of human growth and higher-order needs, even if the specific hierarchical structure is debated. Later need theories, such as Alderfer's ERG theory, attempted to address some of these limitations by proposing a more flexible and less strictly ordered set of needs (Lu et al., 2023).

## 5. Contemporary Relevance and Modern Interpretations

Despite the valid criticisms leveled against its original formulation, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory continues to hold a degree of relevance and influence in contemporary thought, albeit often with significant modifications and reinterpretations. Its enduring appeal lies in its intuitive framework and its focus on a holistic spectrum of human motivations, from basic survival to self-fulfillment.

- **Evolutionary Psychology Perspectives:** Some evolutionary psychologists today have reinterpreted Maslow's hierarchy of needs through an evolutionary lens. They have suggested that the needs actually reflect various adaptive challenges humans have faced throughout evolutionary history (Kenrick, Griskevicius, Neuberg, & Schaller, 2010). Kenrick et al. (2010) also presented a revised pyramid of needs that focused on evolutionarily relevant motives—immediate physiological needs, self-protection,



affiliation, status/esteem, mate acquisition, mate retention, and parenting. Kenrick et al. showed, in their updated model, that later developing motives do not necessarily replace earlier developing motives. Instead, in less industrialized environments, individuals may prioritize later developing motives based on their current developmental stage and environmental cues. Based on this framework, self-actualization is less a distinct need and instead a manifestation of an evolving need (e.g., status, mate acquisition, or parenting) that has been pursued effectively and creatively.

- **Dynamic and Overlapping Needs (Beyond Strict Hierarchy):** Contemporary understanding often moves away from the strict, sequential hierarchy. Instead, needs are seen as more dynamic, overlapping, and capable of coexisting. Individuals may be motivated by multiple needs simultaneously, and the salience of different needs can fluctuate based on individual differences, life stage, cultural context, and immediate circumstances (Tay & Diener, 2011). For example, someone might pursue creative endeavors (related to self-actualization) even while struggling with financial security (safety needs).

- **Continued Application in Applied Fields (with Nuance):** Management and Leadership: While the theory is not considered to be prescriptive, it still informs conversations around employee well being, motivation, and designing environments of work to support various human needs. Leaders should acknowledge that finance is not the only motivation for employees who have needs for promotion, recognition, and meaningful work. Education: The idea that basic needs (safety, belonging) need to be addressed in students for learning to be maximized is one which can continue to have an impact on creating educational environments that support students. Marketing / Consumer Psychology: The understanding of basic human need is still relevant in commercial product development and marketing strategies, regardless of whether the strict hierarchy is an effective indicator of specific consumer decisions.

- **Influence on Positive Psychology:** Maslow's emphasis on human strengths, growth, and self-actualization was a precursor to and continues to influence the field of positive psychology, which focuses on studying human flourishing, well-being, and the conditions that enable individuals and communities to thrive (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

- **Cross-Cultural Re-evaluation:** Research continues to look at ways in which cultural values have been taken into account in defining, ranking, and expressing needs. While physiological and safety needs may be fairly ubiquitous, the expression and prioritization of social, esteem, and self-actualization needs can differ greatly from culture to culture (Vauclair et al., 2014). This highlights the need for a culturally sensitive application of theories of need.

- **Integration with Other Motivational Theories:** Maslow's conceptual framework can be related to many other motivational frameworks, particularly Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) which also focuses on intrinsic motivation with basic psychological needs being autonomy, competence and relatedness. Once again, we find similar concepts in Maslow's higher-level needs. Even though Maslow's original five-stage model was not supported by empiricism, based on the prescriptive, tenable argument that it was possible to implement a universal and predictive theory of motivation from a strictly hierarchical perspective, it is a developed notion, and a useful notion, and while there may not be absolute or precise hierarchy of human needs, there remains a motivation to grow. The contemporary work of motivational theorist is seldom connected solidly to Maslow, and it is common to see human needs referenced relative to more complex, dynamic feedback system opposed to a fixed "ladder" of human needs. Nevertheless, to be pumped about Maslow's work is to create a more humanistic and holistic view and appreciation of being a more developed human being.

## 6. Empirical Evidence and Research Findings

Empirical validation of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs has been the subject of extensive debate and research since its introduction. While the intuitive appeal of the theory is robust, direct scientific evidence to support its basic principles - especially the strict hierarchical progression and the universal existence of five distinct levels - has proven to be scant and often contradictory (e.g., Tay & Diener, 2011).

- **Early Studies and Methodological Challenges:** Early attempts to test the hierarchy often faced significant methodological challenges, including difficulties in operationalizing and measuring the different need categories, particularly abstract concepts like "self-actualization." Many studies relied on correlational designs, which could identify relationships between need satisfaction and other variables (e.g., job satisfaction, well-being) but could not definitively establish the causal, hierarchical progression Maslow proposed. The use of self-report questionnaires to measure need satisfaction also presented limitations, including potential social desirability bias and subjective interpretations of need fulfillment.

- **Review by Wahba and Bridwell (1976):** A widely cited and influential review by Mahmoud Wahba and Lawrence Bridwell (1976) examined the existing empirical research on Maslow's theory. Their comprehensive analysis concluded that there was "little clear or consistent support for Maslow's need hierarchy theory." They found scant evidence for the ranking of needs as proposed by Maslow, limited support for the deprivation/dominance proposition (i.e., that an unsatisfied need dominates behavior), and even less support for the gratification/activation proposition (i.e., that satisfaction of one need activates the next higher need). While they acknowledged the

existence of various needs, the specific hierarchical structure and the dynamic processes described by Maslow were not consistently borne out by the data they reviewed.

- **Cross-Cultural Studies:** Cross-cultural research has provided mixed findings. While some studies suggest that certain basic human needs (e.g., physiological, safety) might be relatively universal, the importance, ordering, and manifestation of higher-level needs (e.g., esteem, self-actualization, belongingness) appear to vary significantly across different cultural contexts (Hofstede, 1984; Nevis, 1983). For instance, in collectivistic cultures, needs for belongingness and group harmony might be prioritized over individualistic self-actualization goals, challenging the universality of Maslow's proposed apex.

- **More Recent Global Studies (e.g., Tay & Diener, 2011):** In a large scale study by Tay and Diener (2011), which used data from the Gallup World Poll in 123 countries, they took a more nuanced view. Their discernments were favourable towards the fulfilment of many of the various needs of humans, akin to those posited by Maslow (e.g., practical, social, esteem, competence, freedom), as being important for well-being globally. However, they importantly showed that whilst need fulfilment was related to subjective well-being overall; the strict ordering of needs was not supported. Instead, people reported having positive well-being when they satisfied what Maslow regarded as 'higher-level' needs, even if they were not fully satisfying their 'lower-level' basic needs. The different needs appeared to independently contribute to well-being and people would pursue them simultaneously. This study suggests that whilst the types of needs seen by Maslow are significant in all cultures, the hierarchical and sequential notion of his theory is questionable.

- **Support for a Two-Tier Structure (Deficiency vs. Growth):** Some research has provided more support for a simpler, two-tier distinction between deficiency needs (physiological, safety, belongingness, and lower esteem) and growth needs (higher esteem and self-actualization), rather than the full five-level hierarchy. However, even this is not universally accepted.

- **Qualitative and Humanistic Support:** Although empirical evidence exists for a strict hierarchy, it is weak. Many humanistic psychologists and qualitative researchers acknowledge the importance of Maslow's theory, arguing that its worth lies in its depth of description and focus on human potential and subjective experience that is hard to articulate fully or measure through a rigidly empirical process. They argue that Maslow's description of healthy people, and how these healthy people's needs drive their behavior, are to be valued. In conclusion, there is substantial consensus in the empirical literature that although the existence of human needs (physiological, safety, social, esteem, and growth related) is universally acknowledged as a matter of importance within the human experience and wellbeing across cultures, Maslow's strictly ordered

and universally pre-potent hierarchy of needs lacks strong and consistent empirical support. Many contemporary researchers also favor models that are more dynamic so that the needs can exist simultaneously and acknowledge that the salience and expression is contingent on cultural and individual factors will be central to the expression of needs.

## 7. Alternative and Complementary Theories of Motivation

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, while foundational, is not the only theory attempting to explain human motivation. Several other theories have emerged, some building upon Maslow's ideas and others offering distinct perspectives. Understanding these alternatives provides a richer context for evaluating Maslow's contributions. (Tay& Diener, 2011).

- **Alderfer's ERG Theory (Existence, Relatedness, Growth):** Clayton Alderfer (1969, 1972) offered the ERG theory as a modification and simplification of Maslow's hierarchy. Alderfer combined five of Maslow's needs into three needs: Existence Needs: This is Maslow's physiological needs (material well-being) and safety needs. Relatedness Needs: This is Maslow's love/belongingness and esteem needs (external) which are interpersonal relationships. Growth Needs: This is Maslow's esteem needs (internal) and self-actualization needs (personal development). Major Differences from Maslow: More flexible or less rigid hierarchy: the ERG theory suggests needs can be satisfied in any order, and even all at the same time. Frustration-Regression Principle: if we are unable to satisfy - or actually frustrated by - the unsatisfied higher-order needs - we may regress to relating to - maybe satisfy the lower-order ones more. For example, if we were blocked in potential growth, an employee may focus more on their social relationship with their coworkers or monetary rewards (there is nothing more than); So, this is different than Maslow's was - that a satisfied need is not more of a motivator. Basically, ERG theory is more empirically testable, more flexible and more than just the original hierarchy.

- **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (Motivator-Hygiene Theory):** Frederick Herzberg (1959) proposed a two-factor theory of job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. According to Herzberg, job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction are created by two separate sets of factors. The first, Hygiene Factors (Extrinsic), are factors whose absence causes dissatisfaction, but whose presence do not necessarily cause strong motivation or satisfaction with their job (e.g., company policy, supervision, working conditions, salary, job security, interpersonal relations). Hygiene factors eliminate dissatisfaction. The second, Motivators (Intrinsic), are factors that improve job satisfaction and motivation when they are present (e.g., achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement, growth). Motivators create satisfaction. Herzberg, in advocating for motivation through motivators, says that managers must concern themselves with

hygiene factors to reduce dissatisfaction for employees. But to actually motivate employees, managers would need to focus on job enrichment with motivators instead. Using Maslow's words, Herzberg would challenge and suggest contrary to Maslow's concept of motivation that any continued unsatisfied need can serve as a motivator.

- **McClelland's Theory of Needs (Acquired Needs Theory):** David McClelland (1961) built on three learned/\_\_\_ needs: Need for Achievement (nAch): this is the desire to be competent, or to achieve in reference to some standard (e.g., to strive to be successful); Need for Power (nPow): the need to make the other person to do something they would not otherwise do; the desire to influence, impact, and control someone else (this can be personal power, or institutional/social power); and Need for Affiliation (nAff): this is the need to friendly and personal relationships with other people. McClelland maintained that all of these needs are learned from one's culture and experiences in life, and that all people differ in the strength of each need. This view directly opposes Maslow's needs that are universal and innate.

- **Self-Determination Theory (SDT):** Self Determination Theory (SDT) was founded by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000) and is a major modern theory on motivation related to intrinsic motivation and psychological well-being. It proposes three universal, innate psychological needs: - Autonomy: The need to feel in control of one's own behaviors and goals; - Competence: The need to feel effective and capable in one's interactions with the environment; - Relatedness: The need to feel connected to others, to care for and be cared for by others. SDT proposes that when these needs are met, people experience more intrinsic motivation, more engagement, and more psychological health. It is clear that the SDT needs relate to Maslow's higher needs (belongingness, esteem, and some of self-actualization). SDT provides a more dynamic, empirically-rich framework for investigating intrinsic motivation. These alternative theories, among others (such as Expectancy Theory, Equity Theory, and Goal-Setting Theory), provide disparate lenses to understand the complex nature of human motivation. Although these theories may differ in details, many appear to be aligned with Maslow's acknowledgement of both basic and higher-order needs and aspirations in humans.

## 8. Conclusion

Even though more than 70 years have passed since Abraham Maslow first described his Hierarchy of Needs theory, it continues to be a remarkably influential and highly debated construct in disciplines of psychology, management, and other fields. In this study, I have offered a critical review of the theory, analyzing the theoretical constructs of Maslow's original theorizing, its lingering intuitive appeal, the significant contribution it has made to humanistic theory, and the numerous empirical and theoretical challenges it unabashedly has endured over the decades. The five layer hierarchy (physiological, safety needs, love/belongingness, esteem, self-actualization



needs) offered a "whole" view of human motivation, introducing a new perspective on the field of human needs, while placing it beyond purely mechanistic and need-deficiency views and with an emphasis on human growth, potential, and higher order pursuits.

The lasting impact of Maslow's theory has been in our way of understanding human needs and dreams. It has shaped the ways we approaches to manager employee motivation, philosophies of education aimed at holistic development of the student, and postulated notions of practice for therapeutic improvement in a person's life. Its simplicity and breadth have made the model easy to access and frequently consulted, for applying to various multi-faceted motivators of human behavior. Although, this review has demonstrated, the model's central tenet has not supported empirical observation of a true, universal and forced sequential basis of existence. Concerns over the methodology of its original construction, culture biases, and the nature the definition, operationalization and measurement of the peaking level of "self-actualization", while the inconsistencies across domain settings are valid and considerably recorded.

Modern interpretations and additional studies, such as Alderfer's ERG model and Tay and Diener's global studies, have more dynamic, blended, and context-sensitive ideas of unique human needs rather than a specific hierarchy of needs. While Maslow's pyramid may not take precise shape, it is still true that humans are moved by an array of needs ranging from survival to psychological fulfillment. In conclusion, perhaps we should think of Maslow's hierarchy of needs less as a specific, empirically absolute scientific law and more as a robust heuristic or philosophical schema, certainly with important insights into the human experience in particular.

Maslow's main contribution is as a hopeful and aspirational picture of human nature, and, as well, its insistence to recognize the full range of human needs to motivate and create more supportive and enhancing growth environments in all facets of living. Future research needs to continue to develop a broader understanding of the diverse and dynamic interaction of human needs, acknowledging varied types which are cultural, contextual, and individual and build on the gains, albeit imperfect record, that Maslow has designated.

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