Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
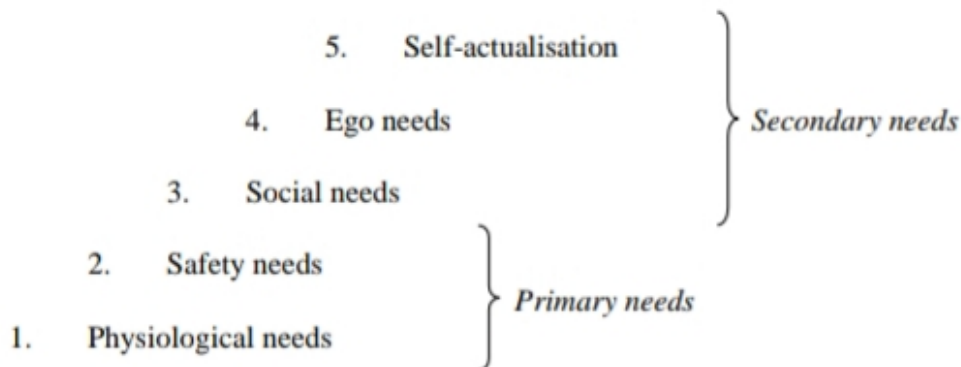
An American psychologist, **Abraham H Maslow**, is particularly associated with "needs" theory. In 1954 he published an expansion of the threefold classification of needs, which has found wide acceptance, to the point where the phrase "*hierarchy of needs*" is now commonly used without explanation.

Five Overlapping Needs

Maslow suggested that people are in a continuous state of motivation, and that the nature of that motivation is variable and complex. Further, people rarely reach a state of complete satisfaction, except for a short time. As one need is satisfied, another overlapping need assumes prominence and motivates further effort until satisfied – when yet another clamours, as it were, for satisfaction. Hence, we should think of a sequence or hierarchy of needs, rather than a simple list of human needs driving us on. Read the following from the base upwards:

5.　　Self-actualisation

4.　　Ego needs ⎫
3.　　Social needs ⎬ Secondary needs

2.　　Safety needs ⎫
1.　　Physiological needs ⎬ Primary needs

Figure 2.2: Hierarchy of Needs

Now let's look at each of these in turn, beginning with the most basic.

(a) Physiological needs

The obvious basic needs arise from a person's instinct to stay alive and reproduce his kind – for food, water, sleep, sex, etc. In all except the most primitive communities, these needs largely take an **intermediate** form of a need for money.

(b) Safety or security needs

These are a subdivision of the material needs mentioned above (i.e. food, warmth, shelter). Man needs protection from the physical environment – housing of some sort, clothing (for warmth or protection from the sun), defence against natural dangers (animals, insects, germs). In a developed country, security of employment is the intermediate need covering the basic ones.

(c) Social needs (the need to belong or affection needs)

These include the need to love and be loved, the need to give and receive affection, and a need for company and association with other people, extending to co-operation in joint effort. Is this not a powerful factor in the cohesion of work groups?

(d) Ego needs (the need for social status, esteem and self-respect)

People want to feel a certain pride in themselves – that their abilities are tested and proved adequate, that they are achieving something, and that they are useful as individuals. Complementary to this is a need for the respect of others, overlapping the need for belonging and affection. We want appreciation, a measure of acclamation, to be noticed among all the

others and, at least, some degree of prestige and status. We all wish to enjoy the feeling of our worth as persons among other persons.

(e) **Self-actualisation** (the need for personal status, self-realisation and accomplishment)

This need is placed at the top of the hierarchy by Maslow. The person fortunate enough to satisfy the first four needs is still driven on by an urge to accomplish the uttermost of which he feels himself to be capable – to "reach the top" and, once there, to achieve complete success. Maslow describes this need as:

> *"Man's desire for self-actualisation ...... to become everything that one is capable of becoming"*.

Significance of Maslow's Hierarchy

The critical feature of Maslow's analysis is the hierarchy, i.e. his suggestion that, as a need is satisfied, another assumes major importance in an individual's mind. This concept is now generally accepted.

The various needs are interdependent. The urges for accomplishment and growth emerge only when the most basic needs have been satisfied: *"Man is a perpetually-wanting animal"*, said Maslow.

When the fortunate few get to the ultimate need – self-fulfilment – it seems this is the hardest to satisfy, which means, also, that it can be a most powerful motivator.

The important elements in motivation to work are, therefore, unsatisfied or undersatisfied needs. To be effective, an incentive should be designed and presented in such a way that the person to whom it is offered will see it as a means of satisfying one or more of his needs, and so as his motive for working.

Empirical research carried out since Maslow developed his theory substantiates the existence of the various needs identified in the model. There is little evidence to date, however, that the needs function as a true hierarchy.

The model has excellent applications as an introduction to management thinking on motivation derived from human needs. It also has a place in training programmes for sales personnel, who have to understand the needs of the customer as a first stage in the selling process.