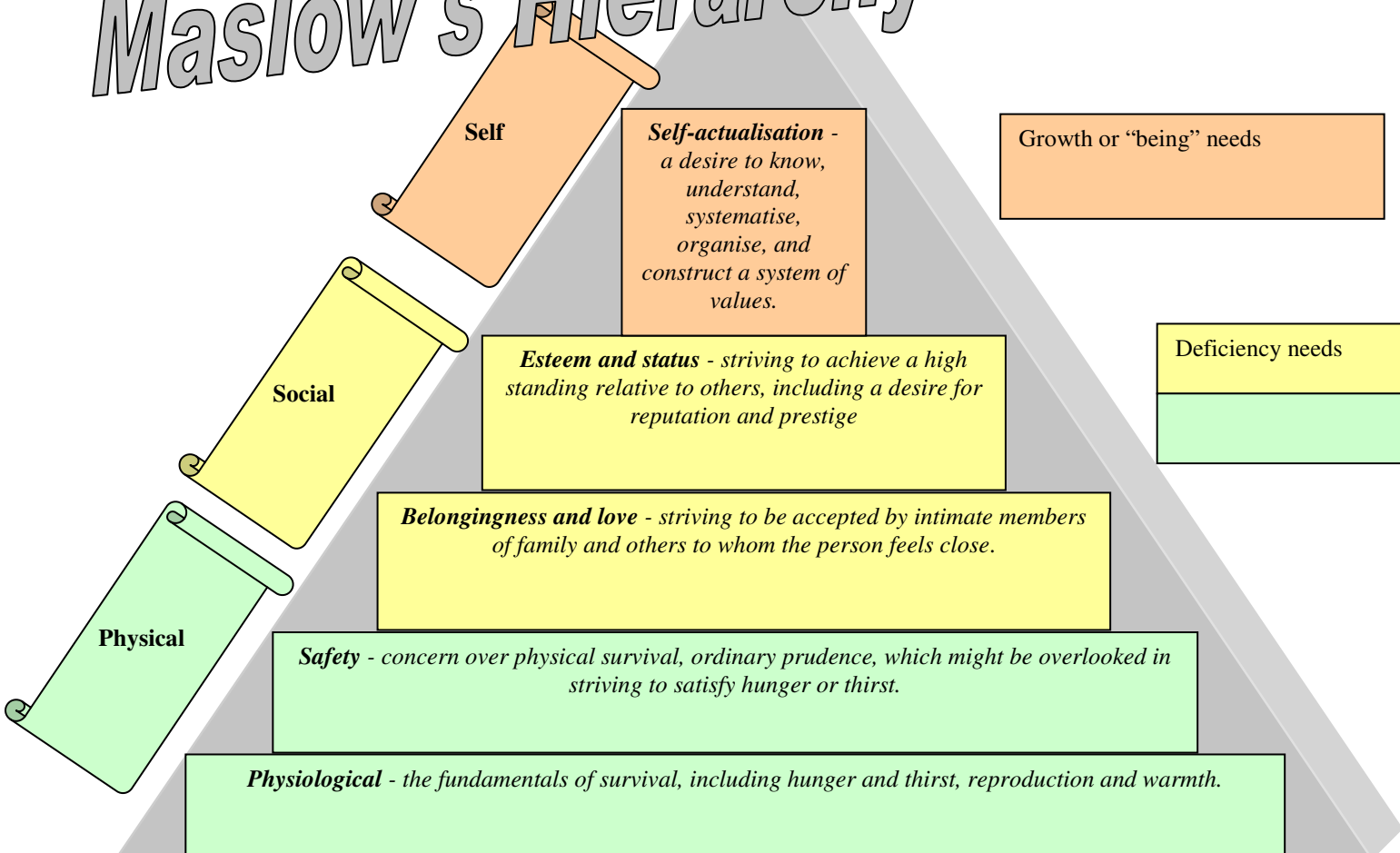


Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Alderfer's ERG Theory

Abraham H. Maslow believed that there was a "hierarchy of needs" which needed to be satisfied in sequence, and that until the first order of needs had been satisfied, there would be no interest in the subsequent orders.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



He suggested that the first need dominates a person's behaviour until it is satisfied, and then the second, and so on. A learner would not be interested in learning, need 5, until needs 3 or 4, 'belonging' and being 'esteemed by others' had been satisfied. Nor indeed, would they be interested in learning until they were warm, and replete.

A light, airy, warm, comfortable "safe" learning environment, adequate 'comfort breaks' and realistic timings can help to facilitate these conditions. An awareness of, and proactive approach to, group dynamics will also help to satisfy (or at least not de-satisfy) some of the affiliation and esteem needs.

Clayton Alderfer - ERG Theory

An attempt to simplify Maslow's needs theory was put forward by psychologist Clayton Alderfer with his ERG theory. Both theories see needs as the motivating force behind behaviour. People are motivated to do things by different needs, of which Alderfer identified three:

- 📖 **Existence Needs** - those which give us physical well-being
- 📖 **Relatedness Needs** - the need for social relationships
- 📖 **Growth Needs** - the need for personal growth and development.

Besides establishing only three, instead of Maslow's original five needs, the second difference between Maslow and Alderfer is that Alderfer considered that people could move around the hierarchy meeting their needs. People do not start at the bottom and work their way up. People might be meeting their relatedness or social needs whilst tired or hungry. They might meet their need for personal growth by studying alone, even though they feel lonely.

Alderfer also argued that people could go backwards in meeting needs. If people are frustrated in meeting their higher order needs - no recognition of their work, feeling unvalued, they may start meeting lower order needs even though these are already satisfied. People may eat too much, drink too much, concentrate on making money, etc. to compensate themselves for not achieving the higher order needs.

In a learning environment, recognition of learner achievement and positive feedback helps to satisfy Maslow's need for recognition and need for self-actualisation, and Alderfer's need for personal growth.

Learning itself helps to satisfy Maslow's need for self-actualisation and Alderfer's need for personal growth.

Social contact, maybe experienced during the learning process, helps to satisfy Maslow's social need and Alderfer's relationship need.

Thus, in order to optimise learning according to the above theories and principles, the learning environment and experience should be such that both the learners' physical and psychological needs are met.

Source: J. K. Williams 29 November 2003



Leading learning and skills