

Interpersonal Needs

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn about theories of interpersonal needs and how they relate to communication. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

We communicate with others in order to meet basic needs, and our meetings, interactions, and relationships help us meet those needs. We may also recognize that not all our needs are met by any one person, job, experience, or context; instead, we diversify our communication interactions in order to meet our needs.

At first, you may be skeptical of the idea that we communicate to meet our basic needs, but let's consider two theories on the subject and see how well they predict, describe, and anticipate our tendency to interact.

[Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs](#) may be familiar to you. We need the resources listed in level one (e.g., air, food, and water) to survive. If we have met those basic needs, we move to level two: safety. We want to make sure we are safe and that our access to air, food, and water is secure. A job may represent this level of safety at its most basic level. Regardless of how much satisfaction you may receive from a job well done, a paycheck ultimately represents meeting basic needs for many.

Still, for others, sacrifice is part of the job.

➔ **EXAMPLE** "First responders" and others who work in public safety often place themselves at risk for the benefit of those they serve.

If we feel safe and secure, we are more likely to seek the companionship of others. Humans tend to form groups naturally, and if basic needs are met, love and belonging occur in level three.

IN CONTEXT

Perhaps you've been new at work and didn't understand the first thing about what was really going on. It's not that you weren't well-trained and didn't receive a solid education, but rather that the business or organization is made up of groups and communities that communicate and interact in distinct and divergent ways. You may have known how to do something, but not how it was done at your new place of work. Colleagues may have viewed you as a stranger or "newbie" and may have even declined to help you. Conflict may have been part of your experience, but if you were lucky, a mentor or coworker took the first step and helped you find your way.

As you used your **self and social awareness skill**, you came to know what was what and who was who, and you learned how to negotiate the landscape and avoid landmines. Your self-esteem (level four) improved as you perceived a sense of belonging, but you still may have lacked the courage to speak up.

Self-actualization (level five) refers to how people come to perceive a sense of control or empowerment over their context and environment. Where they look back and see that they once felt at the mercy of others, particularly when they were new, they can now influence and direct aspects of the work environment that were once unavailable.

IN CONTEXT

Over time, you may have learned your job tasks and the strategies for succeeding in your organization. Perhaps you even came to be known as a reliable coworker, one who did go the extra mile, one who did assist the "newbies" around the office. If one of them came to you with a problem, you would know how to handle it. You are now looked up to by others, and by yourself within the role, due to your ability to make a difference.

Beyond self-actualization, Maslow recognizes our innate need to know (level six) that drives us to grow and learn, explore our environment, or engage in new experiences. We come to appreciate a sense of self that extends beyond our immediate experiences, beyond the function, and into the community and the representational. We can take in beauty for its own sake, and value aesthetics (level seven) that we previously ignored or had little time to consider.

This theory of interpersonal needs is individualistic, and many cultures are not centered on the individual, but it does serve to start our discussion about interpersonal needs. What do we need? Why do we communicate? The answers to both questions are often related.

2. Schutz' Theory of Needs

William Schutz offers an alternate version of interpersonal needs. Like Maslow, he considers the universal aspects of our needs, but he outlines how they operate within a range or continuum for each person.

According to Schutz, the need for affection, or appreciation, is basic to all humans. We all need to be recognized and feel like we belong, but may have differing levels of expectations to meet that need. Humans also have a need for control, or the ability to influence people and events; however, that need may vary by the context, environment, and sense of security. Finally, Schutz echoes Maslow in his assertion that belonging is a basic interpersonal need, but notes that it exists within a range or continuum, where some need more and others less.

Schutz describes these three interpersonal needs of affection, control, and belonging as interdependent and variable.

➔ **EXAMPLE** In one context, an individual may have a high need for control, while in others they may not perceive the same level of motivation or compulsion to meet that need.

Both Maslow and Schutz offer us two related versions of interpersonal needs that begin to address the central question, "Why communicate?" We communicate with each other to meet our needs, regardless of

how we define those needs.

From the time you are a newborn infant crying for food, or the time you are a toddler learning to say "please" when requesting a cup of milk, to the time you are an adult learning the rituals of the job interview and the conference room, you learn to communicate in order to gain a sense of self within the group or community, meeting your basic needs as you grow and learn.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that we meet our needs through communication. Two psychological theories have provided popular ways of thinking about needs: Abraham **Maslow's hierarchy of needs** and William **Schutz's theory of needs**. Both offer a framework for understanding why we communicate and how communication fulfills our interpersonal needs.

Best of luck in your learning!

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