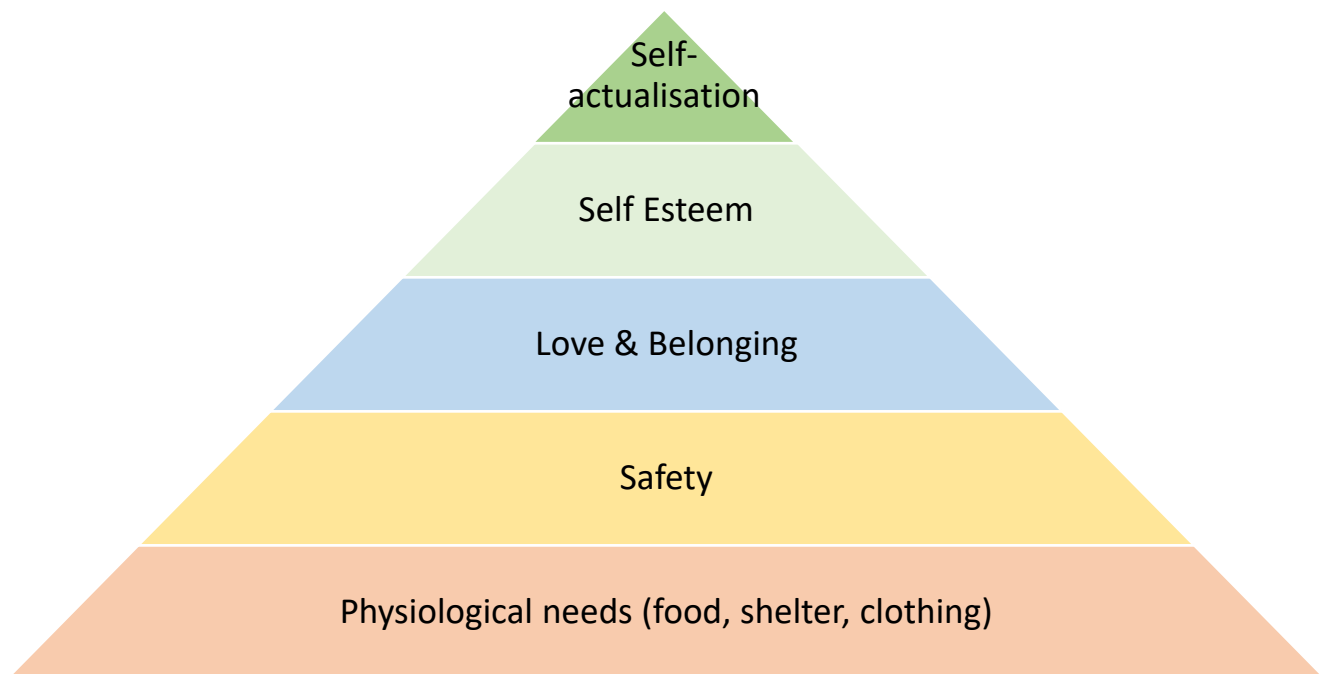


How is learning important to us?

by Dr. Jesvir Kaur Mahil

We have been learning from the day of our birth; how to breathe, attract attention and get fed. This type of learning, related to survival needs, can be explained using the hierarchy of needs proposed by Maslow (1970) suggesting that we are motivated to fulfil our primary, secondary and tertiary needs in a logical, and perhaps linear order as illustrated in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970)



However, our motivations for undertaking MBA or Doctoral courses when we are already established in our careers and have full-time jobs, are probably much more complex, contextual, and nuanced than Maslow's hierarchy of needs implies.

How can we explain our motivations for undertaking highly demanding Masters' level courses when we already have secure jobs, and the increased home and family responsibilities that usually come with our maturity in age?

When our course is funded by the society we live in, we have an obligation to consider our motivation from a social perspective.

The desire for increased social prosperity, greater productivity and a broader level of citizenship may be some of the motivating drivers that lead us to voluntarily take on a demanding journey of learning.

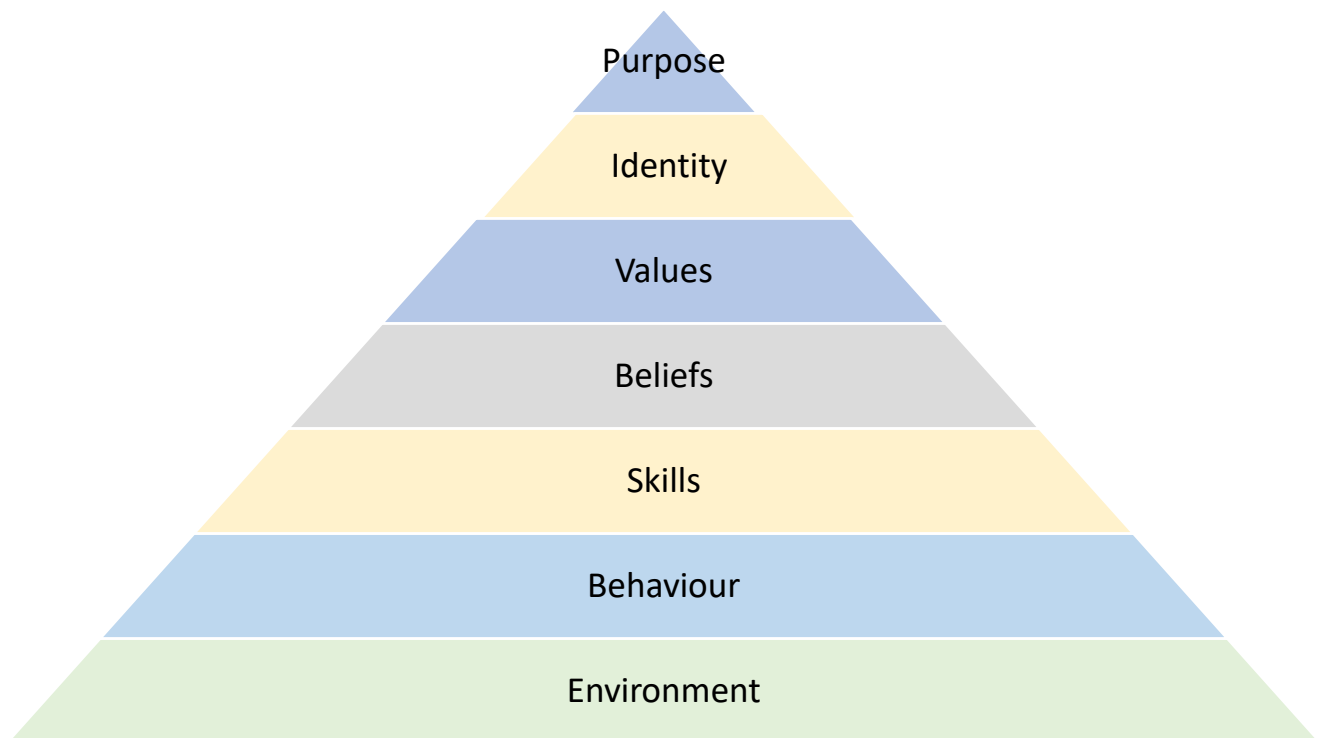
In contrast to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Figure 1 above) I would argue that Masters' level students who already have their basic survival and self-esteem needs met, are motivated by the desire to lead, influence and choose their own position in society. Education can provide a wider range of options and the freedom to choose where we work, who we work with and above all *why* we work. The desire for self-actualisation that Maslow refers to, may be accompanied by a desire for emancipation.

Rarely have I seen Masters' or Doctoral level students remain in the same jobs as before they completed their course, without feeling that they have outgrown their previous role. Indeed, I would question the efficacy of their learning journey if they have not become much more visibly confident, courageous to take risks and creative in generating new opportunities for themselves, as a direct consequence of their recent education. They have more choices even though they may prefer to hold on to the comfort of security.

Our motivation to raise our profile by doing a Masters level course may be seen through the lens of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2002). As an example, being the first in our family to be classified as a Professional rather than Labourer means that the inherited socio-cultural capital provided through affluent networks, prestigious formal education and privileged geographical locations, may not be readily available to us, creating a disadvantage in progression and promotion opportunities. Therefore, our motivational drivers to complete Masters and Doctoral level courses may be underpinned by a strategic effort to bridge the seemingly unsurmountable gap between opportunities available to us in theory and the success we attain in practice. Completion of Masters' and Doctoral courses provides us with visible, tangible, and credible feathers in our caps (socio-cultural capital), enabling us to occupy spaces that may otherwise have been beyond our reach: the role of chair at the decision-making board table; influence in policy making; recognition for our philanthropic work, contributing to making our world a happier place for all.

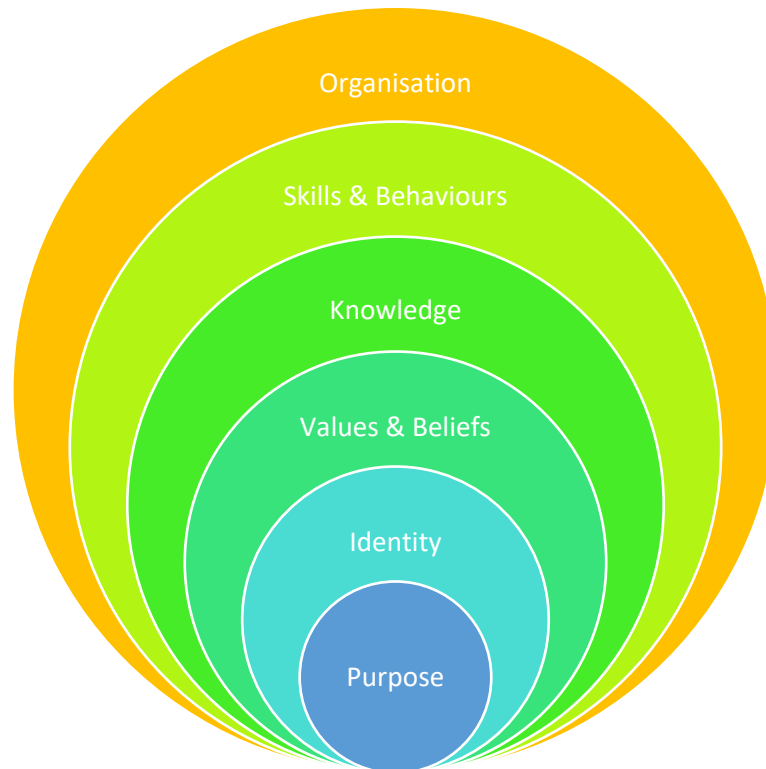
Yet another way of analysing our motivations for learning, at Higher Education levels, is through the lens of Dilts (1996) who created an alternative to Maslow's hierarchy of needs as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Dilts (1996) Logical Levels of Change



Dilts' neuro-logical levels provides a comprehensive tool for understanding our motivations to learn which include our purpose, identity, values, beliefs, existing skills and the environment in which we find ourselves. At lower levels of education, the purpose for learning may simply be to become employable and to find a job whereas at higher levels of learning, the purpose may be to have a wider range of choice and options. At Masters and Doctoral levels, our purpose may be to transform culture so that there is a greater degree of social justice or prosperity. Integral to our purpose for learning is our identity. If we identify as being a teacher, our purpose for learning will be quite different compared with someone who identifies as being a manager. Our core values and ingrained beliefs will also shape our learning. Moreover, we cannot separate our identity from the contextual environment in which we are located as there is an inter-connectedness between our internal and external environments that determines what we learn, how we learn and for what desired outcome.

Figure 3: Adaptation of Dilts' Logical Levels to highlight drivers that motivate work-based learning (Mahil 2021)



Each one of us has a unique identity although there are patterns of behaviour which Jung and Read (1968) explained as universal, hereditary archetypes, which unconsciously influence our behaviour. If our chosen identity is a Hero, we will behave differently compared with if our chosen identity is a Conformist or a Ruler.

Preparation for a meaningful journey of learning requires critical reflection on the core drivers of our learning: Purpose, Identity and Values

What is our purpose in learning? Is it to gain more security, recognition and confidence within our organisation? Is the main focus of our learning to grow, make a contribution to society and to lead transformational change?

What is your motivation for doing a Masters' level course based on your purpose, identity and values? Do the models of Maslow (Fig 1) Dilts (Fig 2) or Mahil (Fig 3) serve to clarify your motivations for learning?

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