

Delayed Response

Point of This Assignment: To recognize that when someone experiences something new, unexpected and/or shocking, for which they have no prior experience or frame of reference, there will likely be a delayed response to the experience. A delayed response can take anywhere from a few seconds to several years depending on the situation and person.

EXPLANATION: What is Happening

During the actual event. The shock, mental and emotional/psychological responses may not occur in any specific order. For example, some people may react with emotion first, and mental second, where others may respond with mental first and emotional second. The varied responses could be due to any combination of training, personality, life experience and/or circumstances. What is happening can likely be explained through any combination of the following processes. An example of this “Delayed Response” was how people responded to the 9/11/2001 terror attacks. The possibility of such horrible attacks was something that Americans, at that time, could not anticipate and therefore left most people – especially those in the middle of it – shocked, wondering what happened, and how to respond.

1. Shock:

Something unexpected happens for which the person is not prepared. These situations are often unexpected, so the person may experience various levels of surprise, shock and/or trauma. This shock can incapacitate the person momentarily or longer.

2. Information Gathering and Processing:

The person will take information in through their five senses and their intuition. Their process can be best explained through any combination of the following theories:

1. **Cognitive (mental):** The person needs time to take information in and make sense of it, and process, what just happened. This can take anywhere from a few seconds to months. There are several reasons why, and the following learning theories can explain why this process can take so long.
 - a. **Multiple Learning Styles*** This theory states that different people have different preferences regarding how they take in and process new information, and will consequently learn better when they are allowed to function in their primary styles. The most common application of this is three sensory learning styles*: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (hands-on).
 - b. **Brain-based Learning***: This theory states that effective learning requires three parts of the brain to work simultaneously: Reptilian (instinctual/physical), Limbic (emotional), and Neocortex (thinking). Therefore, if a person is cold, sick, tired, or hungry, their brain will not be able to process abstract thinking activities easily. Also, to truly understand something, a person needs to process information mentally, emotionally, and experientially. For example, a person may have been told, or even seen, that divorce is extremely painful, but until he or she actually experiences a divorce for themselves, they will not be able to fully understand and internalize the

significance of that pain. So, in order to receive, understand, apply, and internalize higher-order critical thinking, a person needs to have their physical needs met, have personal experience, and to be able to integrate their emotions as well.

- c. **Bloom's Taxonomy*** This theory states that there are different levels of critical thinking (Remember, Understand, Apply, Analyze, Evaluate and Create) and that the higher the level of thinking, the harder the activity is to do. Once they take information in, they must then understand it. However even when they understand what happened, that does not mean they will know what to do about it (Apply).
 - d. **Paradigm Shift*** A paradigm shift occurs when an individual experiences a 'triggering event' that forces them to reevaluate what they assumed was reality and reprocess old memories and experiences from a new perspective.
 - e. **Transition Theory*** This theory states that a transition is defined as: Endings, Neutral Zone, New Beginnings. A shocking and unexpected event could potentially trigger a transition where an individual must face the fact that their old world no longer exists, let go of it, then decide how to find a new world.
 - f. **Happenstance***: Unplanned events – chance occurrences – more often determine life and career choices than all the careful planning we do.
2. **Emotional/Psychological:** At some point, the individual will likely have some kind of emotional response to the situation. Depending on the situation, person, their experience and training, their reaction could include any combination of the following responses:
- a. **Fight, Flight, Freeze** – Is a survival response to feelings of threat, such as potentially being attacked by a predator. When faced with such a threat, the first response is to try to fight back, to run away to safety, or to just freeze due to a feeling of being overwhelmed and perceived inability to address the situation.
 - b. **Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*** - This theory reveals that humans have different kinds of needs that must be met in order:
 - 1) **Physiological** (*Air, water, food, clothing, shelter, rest, and health*)
 - 2) **Safety** (*Protection against danger, loss of life, property, and freedom*)
 - 3) **Social** (*Acceptance by others, belonging to groups, friendship and love*)
 - 4) **Ego** (*Self-esteem, self-confidence, and respect of others*)
 - 5) **Self Actualization** (*Achieving meaning and purpose for your life*)

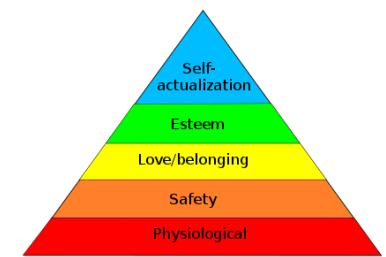


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

According to this theory, an individual whose unexpected situation is of a higher-order need, such as “belonging,” “self-esteem,” or “self-actualization”, may be inclined to avoid dealing with the situation because it threatens their lower-order needs of survival. For example, domestic violence victims may hesitate to leave their abusers if they are financially dependent upon their abuser for food, shelter and clothing.

- c. **Stress*** – Severe and/or prolonged stress can limit a person’s ability to function mentally, emotionally, and physically in a given situation.

- d. **Boundaries*** Because the situation is new and unexpected, the individual may not know what is the cause. Therefore, some people may struggle with identifying who is responsible for the situation, who should respond, whether or not they have a right to choose not to accept the situation, and/or if they have a right to have specific emotional responses to the situation. For example, an individual who experiences a form of abuse or manipulation for the first time may not recognize it as such, and therefore may not register that they do not have to accept the inappropriate behavior.
 - e. **Denial:** Some, but not all, people may struggle with denial as a way to cope with this unexpected event in their lives. Denial is a coping tool when the situation is too emotionally overwhelming. It helps the individual control what information they receive so they can process it at a pace that is within their ability to cope. Denial is often associated with shock, and grief. An example of denial could include someone who realizes that they hear gun shots nearby and responds by saying “This can’t be happening,” and pauses before taking action.
 - f. **Trauma:** Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. While these feelings are normal, some people have difficulty moving on with their lives. (American Psychological Association, 2019)
3. **Evaluate Available Options:** Once the person has made sense of their situation and had an opportunity to respond to their emotional reaction, they will likely be able to consider their options and potential courses of action.
 4. **Response = Action:** As the person registers the situation, there could be a delay in responding – especially if they have never experienced a similar situation or been trained to know how to respond. The person is using this time to figure the best response to the given situation. They may be reviewing their prior knowledge and problem-solving tools for a suitable solution. Or if time permits, they may take the time to learn more about the situation and potential options before responding. Examples of being trained to respond include California children being taught to “Stop, Drop, and Cover” when they experience an earthquake. Earthquakes are often so stressful because they usually come when they are least expected. However, since earthquakes are common in California, most Californians have learned how to respond. They may delay for a second to realize why everything suddenly starts shaking, but then look for the nearest cover. Yet at the same time, many non-native Californians can potentially become traumatized when they experience their first unexpected earthquake because they are unfamiliar, unexpected, and unprepared to respond.
 5. **Reflection:** After the situation is under control and any potential danger has subsided, individuals may spend time evaluating how they handled the situation and whether or not they should have handled things differently. Responses can vary greatly from regret over options not taken or consequences, or a desire to prevent similar traumas from happening again, etc.

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*For more information on these topics, visit: <http://www.dreams-goals.com/resources/> for links to handouts, workshops, PowerPoint files, and/or videos.

Coping Skills:

What can you do when you experience a delayed response? How can minimize the effect?

Following are a few suggestions.

1. **Gain knowledge:** If time permits, learn whatever you can about the subject, your potential options, and your response. For some people, having an increased understanding of the situation will provide helpful validation, give them a sense of control over the situation, and potentially helpful information that allows them to know how to proceed.
2. **Find a mentor:** If possible, find a mentor who has some knowledge on the subject or who has experienced a similar situation before. Their insight can potentially offer validation, potential help, and potential options for how to proceed.
3. **Seek appropriate professional help:** Sometimes it may be wise to seek the help of a professional, such as a mental health counselor, career counselor, financial advisor, or lawyer, etc. (depending on the circumstances) for dealing with the situation. These people should be properly trained for dealing with your situation, its consequences, and should be able to help you make as smooth of a transition as possible. “Help: Asking, Giving, and Receiving” indicates that the secret to effective helping is to get the “right help, from the right person, at the right time.” <http://www.dreams-goals.com/resources/workshops/wkshp-help/>
4. **Develop good stress reduction techniques:** Because delayed responses often trigger stress and trauma, it is important to develop good stress-reduction techniques. The ‘Stress’ document mentioned above offers suggestions for dealing with stress.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Think of a time in your life where you experienced a ‘Delayed Response’ to a specific situation.

Describe the situation:

What was your first response? Was it shock, mental or emotional (as described above)?

What was your second response? Was it shock, mental or emotional (as described above)?

How long did it take you to make sense of what happened (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, etc.)?

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How did you reflect on the experience (talk to people, write, take time of solitude, pray/meditate, seek professional help, second guess your decisions, etc.)?

How and when did you ultimately decide to respond to the situation? How long did it take to decide (seconds, minutes, hours, days, months, etc.)?

If you had an opportunity to do the situation over, what could you have done differently if you could?

What lessons can you learn from that situation?

Current situation: Are you currently experiencing a “Delayed Response” to a current situation?

If yes, review the tips provided under the topic above “Coping Skills” and identify three things you can do to help you deal with your current situation.

Test your understanding:

What is the main point of this assignment?

Why were you expected to do this exercise?

What type of person would need to do this exercise?

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How well do you fit the profile of the person for whom this assignment was created?

Reflection: *(Write down your response after completing this assignment.)*

References

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