

Barriers to Communication

What is a Barrier ?

- ◆ Communication barrier means various disturbances in communication process which hamper (obstruct) the smooth flow of effective communication.



Classification Of Barriers

Intrapersonal Barriers

- ◆ Intrapersonal barriers stem from an individual's attitudes or habits. Individuals are unique because of their idiosyncracies (unique qualities). This is mainly because of differences in experience, education and thinking abilities. Each of us interprets the same information in different ways as our thinking varies. The causes that lead to intrapersonal barriers are...

Intrapersonal Barriers

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graph TD; A[Intrapersonal Barriers] --> B[Wrong assumptions]; A --> C[Varied perceptions]; A --> D[Differing backgrounds]; A --> E[Wrong inferences]; A --> F[Impervious Categories]; A --> G[Categorical Thinking]
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Wrong assumptions

Varied perceptions

Differing
backgrounds

Wrong inferences

Impervious
Categories

Categorical Thinking

Wrong assumptions (suppositions)

Many barriers stem from wrong assumptions. For example, when a doctor tells his patient that he has to take a medicine only as 'SOS', without knowing whether the patient understands the term or not, he is creating a barrier in his communication.

Here the doctor has made a wrong assumption about his patient's level of knowledge. Wrong assumptions generally occur when the sender and receiver do not have adequate knowledge about each other's background, or entertain certain false notions (ideas), which are fixed in their mind. In order to strengthen your

skills as a communicator try to put yourself in the shoes of the listener. This

Varied perceptions (understanding differently)

Different people have their different views.

We all know the story of six blind men of Burma, who visited an elephant and their description of the elephant on returning from the venture. The elephant is perceived by each man as a fan, a rope, a wall, a sword, a snake, and a tree. None of the blind men is wrong, as the part of the elephant body touched by each man was compared with various objects. This is how an individual perceives reality. Similarly, individuals in an organization also perceive situations in different ways. Let us take the case of an argument between two individuals. If you are close to one of them, you are likely to be biased. You may perceive your friend's arguments as correct, and hence, may not be able to appreciate his opponent's point of view. It is all a matter of perception. The best way to overcome this barrier is to take a wider view of the issue.

Differing backgrounds

No two persons have a similar background. People vary in terms of their education, culture, language, environment, age, financial status, etc. Our background plays a significant role in how we interpret a message. At times, something not experienced by you earlier will be difficult to interpret or appreciate. Think of a discussion where somebody talks about his mountaineering expedition experience. Those people who have had the experience of trekking may be able to appreciate the talk, but others who have not trekked before may not find it interesting at all.

Wrong inferences

To draw wrong conclusion about something without knowing the facts can also lead to communication barrier. For example, you have planned a trip with some of your friends, suddenly one of your friends could not make the trip, you draw the conclusion that he has not come due to studies, but the fact is that he had taken ill.

Impervious (inflexible) categories

own views and attitudes. Conversely, when we receive information that does not conform (match) to our personal views, habits and attitudes, or appears unfavorable to us; we tend to react negatively or even disbelieve.

Rejection, distortion and avoidance are three common, undesirable and negative reactions to unfavorable information.

People who are very rigid in their opinions and are not ready to accept any view which is different from their own, fall into impervious categories.

Such closed minded people face problem in communicating effectively and are known

Categorical thinking

People who feel that they 'know it all' are called pansophists. This type of thinking exists among people who feel that they know everything about a particular subject and therefore refuse to accept any further information on that topic. For example, in a General Body meeting of your organization, you are to be briefed about the annual budget. However, you do not pay attention because you feel you have already been briefed about it by your secretary the previous day. Later you propose that new vehicles have to be bought. Imagine your embarrassment when you realize you have been taken in the general body meeting. This type of thinking can pose a major barrier leading to a failure in communication. In such instances, the receivers refuse information because of their 'know-it-all' attitude.

Interpersonal Barriers

Interpersonal barriers creep in as a result of the limitations in the communication skills of the encoder or decoder, or both. In addition, they may also occur because of some disturbance in the channel. If two people are involved in communication, the traits that distinguish them as individuals can be the root cause of a communication problem. The most common reasons for interpersonal barriers are

Interpersonal Barriers

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graph TD; A[Interpersonal Barriers] --> B[Limited vocabulary]; A --> C[Incongruity of verbal and nonverbal messages]; A --> D[Emotional outbursts]; A --> E[Communication selectivity]; A --> F[Cultural variations]; A --> G[Poor listening skills]; A --> H[Noise];
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Limited vocabulary

Incongruity of verbal
and nonverbal
messages

Emotional outbursts

Communication
selectivity

Cultural variations

Poor listening skills

Noise

Limited vocabulary

Inadequate vocabulary can be a major hindrance in communication. At times your pen falters, or your tongue fumbles as you search for the exact word or phrase. In your communication, the meanings of your words should be absolutely clear to the receiver. During your speech if you are at a loss for words, your communication will be ineffective, and you will leave a poor impression on the audience. On the other hand, if you have a varied and substantial vocabulary, you can create an indelible impression on your listeners. Also remember that merely having a good vocabulary is of no use unless the communicator knows how to use it. Therefore, one should make constant

Incongruity of Verbal and Non-verbal Messages

Inappropriateness between verbal and non-verbal messages also causes barrier in communication. Imagine a situation where your CEO introduces a newly recruited middle-level manager to other employees. In a small speech, he conveys the message that he is very delighted to have the new manager appointed in his office. However, his face expression shows just the opposite of what he is saying. The stark difference between the verbal and non-verbal aspects of his communication leaves his listeners feeling confused and puzzled. A communicator should acclimatize himself to the communication angle of the listener, and then communicate.

It is important to remember that physical appearance can have a great impact on any kind of conversation. Guidelines to improve physical appearance are as follows:

- Dress according to the occasion
- Wear neat and clean clothes
- Choose an appropriate hairstyle
- Wear clean and polished shoes.

Emotional Outburst

Emotions are integral part of every human being. A moderate level of emotional involvement intensifies communication. However, excessive emotional involvement can be an obstacle in communication. For example, extreme anger can create such an emotionally charged environment that rational discussion is just not possible. Positive emotions like happiness and excitement also interfere in communication, but to a lesser extent than negative feelings.

Very often people react negatively. Depending on their nature and situation, this negative reaction may either be classified as hostile or defensive. Hostility can be considered as a move to counter-attack the threat, whereas defensiveness is resistance to it. Both occur in situations where the receiver of the message perceives some kind of threat. Both these responses have an extremely negative impact on the communication. Messages are either misinterpreted, ignored, or overreacted to by people displaying such behaviour. Those who witness such behaviour are most likely to lower their opinion about the sender of such messages.

Communication Selectivity

If you are the receiver in a communication process, and you pay attention only to a part of the message, you are imposing a barrier known as communication selectivity. You do this because you are interested only in that part of the message which may be of use to you. In such a situation, the sender is not at fault. It is the receiver who breaks the flow of communication.

Cultural Variations

Effective communication with people of different cultures is challenging. Communication failure may occur when sender and receiver belong to different cultures. The sender encodes a message with some meaning but the receiver who belongs to other culture, decodes some other meaning. Cultures provide people with different ways of thinking, seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they talk the "same" language. When the languages are different, and translation has to be used to communicate, the

Poor Listening Skills

A common obstacle to communication is poor listening skills. The various distractions that hinder listening can be emotional disturbances, indifference,

aggressiveness and wandering attention.

Sometimes, an individual is so occupied in his own thoughts and worries that he is unable to concentrate on listening. If a superior goes on shifting the

papers on his desk while listening to his subordinate, without making eye contact

with the latter, he pays divided attention to the speaker's message. This divided

attention adversely affects the superior – subordinate relationship, besides

distorting the communication

Noise

Noise interferes greatly in the transmission of signals. Noise is any unwanted signal which acts as a hindrance in the flow of communication.

It is not

necessarily limited to cacophony, but can also occur in visual, audio-visual, written

and physical forms. All these forms of noise communicate irrelevant matter which

may allay the receiver's interest in the message, even irritate him.

Technical or physical noise refers to the din (sound) of machines, the blare of music from a stereo system, or other such sounds which make the task of the

listener difficult. Human noise can be experienced when, for instance, employees

gather for a meeting and a member arrives late distracting everybody's

Organizational Barriers

Communication barriers are not only limited to an individual or two people but exist in entire organizations. Every organization, irrespective of its size, has its own communication techniques, and each develops its own communication network. Irrespective of size, all organizations have communication policies which describe the protocol to be followed. It is the structure and complexity of this protocol that usually causes communication barriers. The main organizational barriers are enumerated below

Organizational Barriers

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graph TD; A[Organizational Barriers] --> B[Too many Transfer Stations]; A --> C[Fear of Superiors]; A --> D[Negative Tendencies]; A --> E[Use of Inappropriate media]; A --> F[Information overload];
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Too many Transfer
Stations

Fear of Superiors

Negative Tendencies

Use of Inappropriate
media

Information overload

Too many Transfer Stations

The more links there are in a communication chain, the greater are the chances of communication failure. The message gets distorted at each link not only because of poor listening or lack of concentration, but also because of several other reasons.

Some employees may filter out a part of the message which they consider unimportant. Whatever the reasons for filtering or distorting the message, having too many transfer stations is always a deterrent to effective communication and should be avoided. Transfer stations do serve a purpose, but having too many of them proves counterproductive.

Fear of Superiors

In rigid structured organizations, fear of the superiors prevents subordinates from speaking frankly. An employee may not be pleased with the way his boss works but is unable to put his point across because of losing the good will of his boss. As a supervisor, it is essential to create an environment which enables people to speak freely. An open environment is conducive to increasing the confidence and good will of a communicator. To avoid speaking directly to their boss, some employees may either shun all communication with their superiors or, at the other extreme, present all the information that they have. This is because they feel that they would

Negative tendencies

Many organizations create work groups. While some groups are formed according to the demands of the task, such as accomplishing a particular project, many other small groups are also formed for recreational, social, or community purposes.

These groups may be formal or informal, and generally consist of people who share similar values, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and behaviour.

Nevertheless, on some occasions, it is possible to have communication barrier due to a conflict of ideas between members and non-members of a group. Such conflicts pave the way

Use of Inappropriate Media

Some of the common media used in organizations are graphs and charts, telephones, facsimile machines, boards, e-mail, telephones, films and slides, computer presentations, teleconferencing, and video conferencing. While choosing

the medium you should keep in mind the advantages, disadvantages and potential

barriers to communication before sending a message, you should consider the

following factors while choosing a medium:

- Time

- Cost

- Type of message

- Intended audience

Usually, a mix of media is best for effective communication. For example, a telephone call to book an order, followed by a confirmatory letter ensures

Information Overload

One of the major problems faced by organizations today is the availability of huge amounts of data which the receiver is unable to handle effectively. This is known as information overload.

The usual results of information overload are tiredness, disinterest, and boredom. Under these circumstances, further communication is simply not possible.

Very often, vital, relevant information gets mixed up with too many irrelevant details, and therefore goes ignored by the receiver. Thus, the quality of the information is much more important than the quantity.

To reduce information overload in an organization, screening of information is mandatory. Messages should be directed only to those people who are



Thank you!