

## **Technical Communication – Unit 1**

### **Assignment 6**

**Q.1 What is Communication Barrier?**

**Q.2 Explain various Intrapersonal barriers of communication?**

**Q.3 Explain various Interpersonal barriers of communication?**

**Q.4 Explain various Organizational barriers of communication?**

**Q.1 What is Communication Barrier?**

#### **Communication Barrier:**

Sender transmits a message with the expectation that the receiver will receive, understand and act on it. However, messages do not always reach to its intended receiver in a way the sender thinks. Some causes or factors impede the flow of message, its interpretation and understanding. Such factors or causes are known as **communication barriers**.

According to Dr. Suruj Kumar Debnath, “Barriers to communication mean obstacles to the process of communication.”

In the opinion of Louise E. Boone and Others, “Communication barriers are the problems that arise at every stage of the communication process and have the potential to create misunderstanding and confusion.

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

Communication barriers can be classified as follows:

- a) Intrapersonal Barriers
- b) Interpersonal Barriers
- c) Organizational Barriers

**Q.2 Explain various Intrapersonal barriers of communication?**

#### **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 per our thinking abilities. The causes that lead to intrapersonal barriers are:

1. Wrong assumptions (suppositions)
2. Varied perceptions (understanding differently)
3. Differing backgrounds
4. Wrong inferences (conclusions)
5. Impervious (inflexible) categories
6. Categorical ('know it all') thinking

### **1. Wrong assumptions:**

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 exercise will prevent making wrong assumptions about the receiver.

### **2. 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 differently by each man - as a fan by the man who touched the ear of elephant, as a rope who touched the tail, as a wall who touched the side body, as a sword who touched its tusk, as a snake who touched the trunk, and as a tree who touched its leg. 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.

### **3. 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.

To overcome this barrier one should know the background of his audience and use the information accordingly to deliver his message effectively.

### **4. 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.

### **5. Impervious (inflexible) categories:**

In general, we react positively to information only if it is in agreement with our own views and attitudes. Conversely, when we receive information that does not conform (match) to our personal views, habits and attitudes, or appears unfavourable to us; we tend to react negatively or even disbelieve. Rejection, distortion and avoidance are three common, undesirable and negative reactions to unfavourable 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 as **misoneists**.

### **6. 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 that the topic was discussed and a decision had already 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.

### **Q.3 Explain various Interpersonal barriers of communication?**

#### **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:

1. Limited vocabulary
2. Incongruity (mismatch) of verbal and nonverbal messages
3. Emotional outbursts
4. Communication selectivity
5. Cultural variations
6. Poor listening skills
7. Noise

#### **1. 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 efforts to

increase one's vocabulary by regularly reading a variety of books and listening to native speakers of the language.

## **2. Incongruity (mismatch) 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 environment, think from the 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.

## **3. 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.

It is important to maintain one's composure in all kinds of communications. Viewing issues from different perspectives helps develop objectivity and rational thinking, which in turn can eliminate many of the causes of hostility or defensiveness.

If you are confronted with such negative behaviour, it is essential that you do not retaliate. The person displaying these emotions should be calmed down. He should preferably be taken to a quiet place to try and sort out the problem that caused his emotions to spin out of control. Usually, in such exchanges, the volume of both the sender and receiver increases, with stress more on the volume than on the message. Therefore, it is important that the situation be checked at the outset, when the volume increases.

#### **4. 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.

#### **5. 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 potential for misunderstandings further increases.

Stella Ting-Toomey describes three ways in which culture interferes with effective cross-cultural understanding. First is what she calls "cognitive constraints." These are the frames of reference or world views that provide a backdrop that all new information is compared to or inserted into.

Second are "behaviour constraints." Each culture has its own rules about proper behaviour which affect verbal and nonverbal communication. Whether one looks the other person in the eye-or not; whether one says what one means clearly or talks around the issue; how close the people stand to each other when they are

talking--all of these and many more are rules of politeness which differ from culture to culture.

Ting-Toomey's third factor is "emotional constraints." Different cultures regulate the display of emotion differently. Some cultures get very emotional when they are debating an issue. They yell, they cry, they exhibit their anger, fear, frustration, and other feelings openly. Other cultures try to keep their emotions hidden, exhibiting or sharing only the "rational" or factual aspects of the situation.

All of these differences tend to lead to communication problems. If the people involved are not aware of the potential for such problems, they are even more likely to fall victim to them, although it takes more than awareness to overcome these problems and communicate effectively across cultures.

## **6. 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.

## **7. 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 attention. Disturbance in telephone lines is also an example of technical noise.

#### **Q.4 Explain various Organizational barriers of communication?**

##### **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:

1. Too many Transfer Stations
2. Fear of Superiors
3. Negative Tendencies
4. Use of Inappropriate media
5. Information overload

##### **1. 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.

##### **2. 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 be viewed in unfavourable light if they left out some vital information. In written communication, this results in bulky reports where essential information gets clubbed with unimportant details. Such unfocussed messages result in a lot of time waste. Such practices need to be eliminated by superiors to ensure that communication flows effectively in their organizations. Moreover, by encouraging active participation from their subordinates, senior officers pave the way for more ideas, resources and solutions to come forth from their juniors.

### **3. 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 for negative tendencies in an organization. Once these negative tendencies develop, they create barrier in inter-personal communication.

However, good managers can take advantage of these situations by considering these groups not as troublemakers, but as reinforcers of the organization's objectives and values. Experienced administrators can even make these groups organize orientation sessions for new recruits, thereby projecting the corporate's image.

### **4. 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 that there is no possible misunderstanding of the message.

## **5. 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 likely to benefit from the information. Major points should be highlighted, leaving out all irrelevant details. This kind of screening will be appreciated by all and can reduce the problem of information overload to a great extent.

We have observed that communication falls into two categories: either it is successful or it is not successful. Bearing in mind the possibilities and reasons for communication failure, we can take preventive measures to avoid these barriers.