

Dr. Jyoti Verma

Yashwantrao

## CHAPTER

# 4

# Communication Breakdown

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

AFTER COMPLETION OF THE CHAPTER, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO :

- ☐ Explain the various Semantic barriers to communication
- ☐ Explain the various Physical barriers to communication
- ☐ Explain the various Organisational barriers to communication
- ☐ Explain the various Psychological barriers to communication
- ☐ Explain the gateways in communication

### □ INTRODUCTION

Communication is complete and perfect when the receiver understands the message in the same sense and spirit as the communicator intends to convey. Here, idea and information reached to and responded by receiver remain unaltered and undistorted. But practically it has been noticed that such perfect and complete communication does not take place because of certain obstacles or other factors known as communication barriers or breakdowns. These barriers make the communication incomplete, unforceful and ineffective.

Proper identification of these barriers (breakdown) is as important and imperative as diagnosis of ailment for its remedy. Most of the behavioural problems in organisation stem from improper communication of business executives, who are to discharge their functions effectively and to ensure smooth running of the enterprise. They have to overcome these barriers through their right understanding and effective actions.

There are a lot of causes of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of the message communicated. As the process of communication involves sender, channels and receiver, the problem of communication usually lies with either one or more of them. There may be certain flaws in encoding and decoding the message, the channels used may be defective or faulty. For discussion sake, these barriers (breakdown) may be categorised into the following groups :—

(A) Semantic barriers

(B) Physical barriers



- (C) Organisational barriers
- (D) Psychological barriers

### ☐ (A) SEMANTIC BARRIERS

Semantic barriers are concerned with problems and obstructions in the process of encoding and decoding the message into words or other impressions. The use of different languages, different interpretations of different words and symbols, poor vocabulary and poor grammatical knowledge are some of the semantic barriers.

### ☐ (1) Different Languages

Employees at organization have no common language. This is obvious barrier when Employees at organization have no common ideas and feelings. This problem is more acute in there is no common vehicle to convey ideas and feelings. Even competent translators fail to culturally diversified organisations and multinationals.

Even competent translators fail to convey the exact meaning of different words of different languages.

As company's operations expand and extend to different countries, this language barrier widens.

**(2) Different Context for Words and Symbols**

*"The meanings of words are not in the words; they are in us," Hayakawa (authors of Language in Thought and Action) profoundly remarks. Words and symbols used have several meanings depending upon the context in which they are used e.g.*

(a) Give me water to drink (Here water means glass of water)

(b) The water dispute of Punjab and Haryana (Here water means water of river)

Unless the context of words and symbols used is known, the receiver may misinterpret them because of his preconceived ideas. Misunderstandings are rules, rather than exceptions, because of different presumptions and perceptions.

### ☐ (3) Poor Vocabulary

Poor vocabulary hinders the communicator to convey written or verbal message in right sense. The communicator should know the clear and precise meaning of the used words and their appropriate replacement, if needed. If the inappropriate and inadequate words are used, they will fail to clear the idea to be communicated.

### ☐ (B) PHYSICAL BARRIERS

Some of the Physical barriers are as follows :—

#### **(1) Noise**

Any disturbance or interference that reduces the clarity and effectiveness of communication is called noise. It may be physical or psychological, written or visual. Noise distracts the persons communicating and acts as barrier to communication. Loud noise of speaker playing outside or noise due to machines, affects listening process of persons communicating (Physical noise). Mental trouble and turmoil affect the receiver's listening and understanding the message. Similarly inattentiveness and indifference of the listener make communication ineffective (Psychological noise). Bad handwriting and incorrect typing irritates the reader not to speak of understanding the contents (written noise). The late arrival of employee results in distraction of superior's attention (visual noise).



## (2) Improper time

Improper timing of communication also hinders the process of communication, e.g., an order at closing hour to execute an urgent work, may cause resentment in the employee who has to catch train for going back to his home. Message requiring action in distant future may be forgotten. A phone call at midnight, interrupting sleep, further irritates the receiver, if message is not urgent.

## (3) Distance

The distance between sender and receiver acts as a barrier in the communication process as the sender has to speak loudly to convey the message, similarly in import-export transactions because of distances of miles, communication may be ineffective if proper use of fax, telephone is not made.

## (4) Inadequate or overloaded information

Inadequate information falls short to convey the message and overloaded information distracts the reader's attention and dilutes the theme of message. It is imperative that information should be adequate, neither less than desired, nor more than wanted. If this is not so, it fails to serve the purpose of communication.

## ☐ (C) ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS

### (1) Organizational Rules and Regulations

Organizational Rules and regulations, prescribing the different sub-matter along formal communication may restrict the flow of messages and act as hindrance in the communication process. Sometimes it happens that important messages are omitted or manipulated. Observance of rigid rules and regulations relating to communication, causes delay of message and discouragement to employees in conveying their creative and innovative ideas. On the other hand, where such rules and regulations are flexible and communication is free, employees feel encouraged and motivated to come up with new ideas and opinions.

### (2) Non conducting of Staff Meetings

To overcome the above barrier, certain organizations conduct staff meetings to know the grievances and suggestions of employees. In organizations where such meetings and conferences are missing, free flow of communication is interrupted and the communication gap between persons being ruled and the ruling, widens.

### (3) Wrong choice of channel *Suggesting / hearing*

There are many mediums and channels of communication available, like face to face, oral communication, telephonic, E-mail and audio visual. Each channel is not ideal and perfect in every situation. If persuasion is to be made by sales manager, face to face communication is more suitable than talking on phone.

Written communication is required in case of formal relations. But in communicating with illiterate people, this channel fails. Illiterate people are to be communicated orally and with support of pictures.

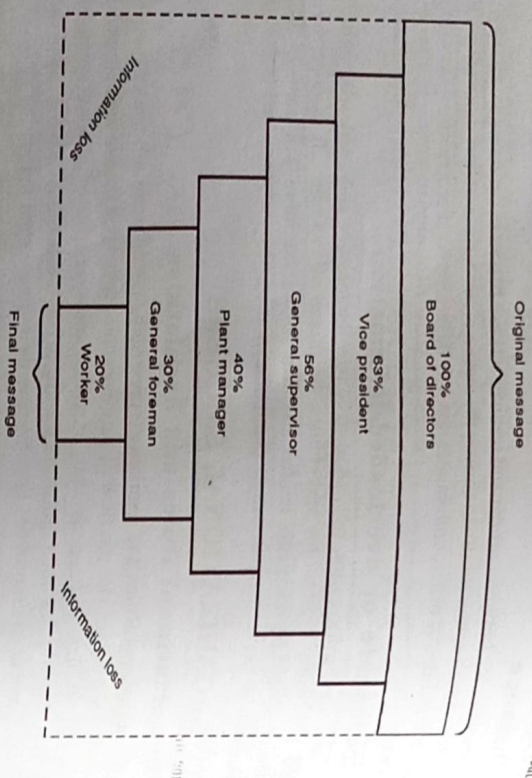
### (4) Hierarchical Relationship

Hierarchical, formal boss-subordinate relationship in organisation structure also restricts the free flow of communication specially in upward direction. The greater the difference

*February*



in hierarchical position, the greater is the communication gap between employees and executives. The employees are expected to contact executives through their immediate bosses. In such types of cases it has been noticed that upward communication is intentionally distorted and designed either with exaggerations or understatements, sometimes with false and fabricated stories, to suit the purpose of middle level bosses. This leads to distrust and disappointment among employees and disruption of the congenial communication environment.



## □ (D) PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

Psychological barriers arise from motives, emotions, social values, different perceptions etc. These create a psychological distance, cause misunderstanding among people at work and hinder the communication process.

### (1) Selective Perceptions

Our sensory receptors have their own limitations. As a result we perceive not the whole spectrum, but a few selective symbols based upon our needs, motives, experience, background, etc. As already explained we do not see the reality, as it is; but interpret what we see and call it reality.

Because of our selective perceptions, we can not communicate the whole. And because of different perceptions, neutral words conveying certain positive message convey the opposite meaning as they reach the receiver. It results into misunderstandings and misinterpretations and makes communication ineffective.

### (2) Premature Evaluation

It is human tendency that we try to evaluate quickly. We do not listen or read the whole, but try to infer from certain part of the message. The moment we try to evaluate, we stop further message visible to our sensory receptors. As a result, effective communication

## Communication Breakdown

does not take place because of premature evaluation. This barrier can be overcome by emphatic listening or suspending judgement for the time being.

### (3) Different comprehension of reality

Reality is not absolute concept, it is relative to different persons. Each person has unique sensory receptors and mental filters. As a result our abstractions, inferences and evaluations are different. *Abstraction* is the process of focusing attention on specific details and ignoring others. Due to abstracting we fail to comprehend the situation as a whole and even fail to understand other person's point of view as we think ourselves right. In addition to different abstractions our *inferences*, things beyond verifiable and confirmed facts, are different. For example, one person told the other that he would leave by specific train; the other person infers his arrival at the station at the right time of train. It may prove to be correct or wrong. In the same manner, we infer beyond facts. If our inferences are different, communication gap will be there.

### (4) Attitude of Superiors

The general attitude of the superiors about communication, affects the flow of communication. If the superiors are afraid of delegating authority and lack confidence in themselves as well as in their subordinates, they will obviously try to conceal, colour or filter the information. They intentionally do so to twist the situation to their favour or to mask their weaknesses.

### (5) Attitude of Subordinates

The negative attitude of subordinates also affects the communication flow. Their inferiority complexes, unwillingness to share information and fear of action are the obvious barrier to communication. Under such situations, organizational communication becomes ineffective.

### (6) Poor listening

Poor listening is one of the psychological barriers in the effective communication. Most of the people just hear, do not listen attentively. If they listen, they listen selectively: taking the 'desired part' and ignoring the 'undesired part' of the message. They do not listen to what the other is saying, but what they *want* to listen. This poor listening retards the communication flow and prevents understanding of the real meanings.

### (7) Egotism

Egotism is diametrically opposed to transmission of understanding—the most vital aspect of communication. The self-centered persons think that their own ideas are more important and others are wrong. Such people are very bad listeners. They keep their minds closed and alienate from the people with whom they work. If a person wants other people to understand him he has to understand them. Such level of understanding diminishes with egotism and as a result the communication process is hindered.

### (8) Emotions

Positive emotions such as love, affection and compassion smoothen the flow of communication whereas negative emotions such as hatred, anger, anxiety obstruct the communication process. Excited, nervous, frightened and perplexed individuals cannot think



rationally and consequently transmit their negativity to others. They cannot receive the message as it is. Therefore, effective communication requires a soothed heart and a silent mind.

## ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.

An effective communication is most essential for the organisation. Whatsoever the form—letters, memorandums, reports—it may take, whatsoever the media, it may use, it has to be made effective by following certain scientific principles. These principles are not exclusive, but illustrative as more can be added to them. According to Francis J. Bergin, communication should be :

1. Candid
2. Clear
3. Complete
4. Concise
5. Concrete
6. Correct
7. Courteous

More points can be added to these 7 Cs of communication. For our discussion, we will divide the principles of communication into two broad parts :

(A) 7 Cs of communication

(B) Other Principles of communication

### (A) 7CS OF COMMUNICATION

#### (1) Candid

The message, to be communicated, should be candid (straight forward, frank), it should not be indirect, multivocal or untrue. Gay Hendricks and Kate Ludeman profoundly remark, "If you make sure you're telling the truth, you won't ever have to worry about people listening to you. When people do not listen, it is usually because the speaker's got something else, he or she is communicating besides the truth."

To make communication effective, it is most imperative that the message should be frank and straight forward. There should not be beating about the bush or conveying something that hinders the truth. It will lead to prejudices and doubts about the sincerity of the communicator.

#### (2) Clear

The message, to be communicated, whether oral or written, should be clear. For this, not only clarity of expression is must, but also clarity of thought. It is the first and foremost requirement. Clear message always stems from clear minds and clear hearts. Since the message to be communicated is first produced in the mind of the sender, it is imperative that sender's mind should have clear thought about the objectives of communication, their effect on the receiver and the channels to be used.

The clearly thought-out message should be presented with clear expressions to avoid ambiguities and confusion. The transmitter should be very careful about the meanings and organization of the words and symbols used in communication.

To make the expressions clear and free from multi interpretations and inferences, the sender of the message should consider the following points :

(a) Clarity in expression is brought through use of precise and concrete words. For example notice the following sentences :

Imprecise : After studying the market reports and other relevant data of different markets, we can infer that the share market is lucrative for investment.

Precise : After studying the market, we recommend that investing in shares is profitable.

(b) As far as possible, use simple and short words than pompous and heavy words :

*Pompous*

*Simple*

terminate	end
fascination	attraction
utilise	use
procure	get
deem	think
interrogate	question

(c) Use words which are familiar to the audience and are appropriate for the situation.

*Familiar*

*Preferential*

home	domicile
after	subsequent
deeply	profoundly
for example	e.g.

(d) Construction of effective sentences and paragraphs is at the core of clarity. For this : go home.

(i) prefer use of short sentences than long ones.

(ii) insert no more than one main idea into a sentence.

(iii) arrange words and clauses in such a way that the main idea occurs easily in a sentence and less important in subordinate (or dependent) clause.

(e) Headings, tabulations, graphs, line charts, pie charts, coloured capital letters or italic letters should be used in a creative way to improve the visual impact of the message.

(f) Use technical terms and business jargons while communicating to the professionals. But while communicating with ordinary reader or listener, it should be avoided. For example :

Technical : The company earned 20% rate of return on equity.

Ordinary : The company earned 20% rate of return on owners' money.

#### (3) Complete

Completeness is necessary for effective communication. Incomplete message breeds misunderstanding and misinterpretations. It leads to further queries resulting into wastage of time and resources, and irritates the receiver. Therefore, every aspect and relevant detail should be incorporated in logical sequence. Moreover completeness contributes to the clarity of the message.

To make the message complete, following guidelines should be kept in mind :

(a) Provide all necessary information that the reader needs for thorough and accurate understanding. For this, check whether the message provides answer to the five W-questions—who, what, when, where, why—and any other essential, such as how. For example, while circulating the notice of conference, specify when the conference will be held, where it will be held, why it is being conducted, what are the matters to be discussed, who are going to address and how many members are expected to reach there.

(b) Answer all stated and implied questions which may arise in the mind of reader. For example, while drafting letter offering sale of goods, first anticipate customer's possible



questions regarding price, quality, quantity, usage, etc. and then draft the letter in such a way that it answers all these questions.

- (c) Give some extra information in the relevant context.

#### (4) Concise

To retain the attention as well as to save the time of the reader, it is essential that the message should be concise. Conciseness means conveying the message in fewest possible words without sacrificing its completeness and clarity. It contributes to make the important ideas stand out, on the other hand, aimless and unnecessary details distract the reader's attention and consequently reduce the effectiveness of communication. Concise messages appear more interesting to the reader and show respect for recipients by not letting their personal as well as professional life bored with unnecessary information. Therefore, communicated message should clarify the meaning in fewest possible words, include only relevant facts, avoid needless repetition of the same ideas and words and appear in organized form. For this :

- (a) Use single word substitutes instead of phrases without changing the meanings of the message.

##### Long phrases

at the present time  
due to the fact that  
despite the fact that  
will you kindly  
keeping in view

##### Single words

now  
because  
although  
please  
considering

- (b) Omit tripe and wordy expressions.

##### Wordy Expression

I beg to state that I am going  
Allow me to say how useful  
your suggestions were.

##### Concise

I am going  
Your suggestions were  
very useful.

- (c) Use single and simple word instead of using two words, conveying the same idea.

##### Two words

9 a.m. in the morning  
viable alternative  
In my personal opinion  
period of one month

##### Simple

9 a.m.  
alternative  
In my opinion  
one month.

- (d) Eliminate unnecessary prepositional phrases.

##### Wordy

Wish to suggest  
order for goods

##### Concise

Suggest  
order goods

- (e) Include only relevant material related to the main purpose of the message.

- (f) Avoid lengthy introductions and unnecessary explanations. Also omit the information already known to the receiver.

#### (5) Concrete

The communicated statement should not be vague, rather, it should be concrete and specific. Concrete expressions create specific visual images in the mind of the receiver which vague or generalised statements cannot. For example, consider the following statement :

- (i) The price of washing machine is very high  
(ii) The price of automatic washing machine is Rs. 23,000.

The first statement is vague and general. To say that the price is very high, conveys different, meaning to different people depending upon their economic background and perceptions. The second statement specifying "automatic machine" and "Rs. 23,000" is concrete and specific in expression as it presents definite facts.

While writing business letter, memo, advertisement copy, report, etc. always give concrete facts instead of making generalised statements. Concrete language reduces the chances of misinterpretation by the receiver and increases the likelihood that message will be understood in the way the sender intends. "Moreover, concrete messages are more richly textured than general or vague messages; then they tend to be more vivid, dynamic and interesting". Murphy, Hildesbrandt and Thomas rightly remark.

Therefore,

- (a) Use specific facts and figures.  
(b) Avoid using words that lead to uncertainty and confusion :  
early low many large quick soon slightly least  
very big a few small about slow most easy

- (c) Use active voice than passive voice.

##### Passive

The goods were received by us. We received the goods.  
The conflict among workers was resolved by Top management resolved the conflict among top management. workers.

##### Active

#### (6) Correct

The message to be communicated should be correct in spelling, grammar, format, contents, statistical information, etc. Incorrect and inaccurate statements mislead the reader, lower his confidence in the communicator and tarnish the image of the organization. These may sometimes lead the management to erroneous and disastrous decisions. Therefore it is imperative that the sender should verify the correctness of the information before presenting it to the receiver.

To make the message correct,

- (a) Ensure that facts and figures are accurate and verify statistical data, totals, etc.  
(b) Check whether grammar, punctuation and spelling are proper or not.  
(c) Use the right level of language. That language may be formal or informal. A formal writing is often associated with scholarly writing : doctoral dissertations, scholarly articles, legal documents, top level government agreements, and other materials where formality in style is demanded. Informal writing is more characteristic of business writing. Here the sender uses words that are short, well-known, and conventional.



**(7) Courteous**

Congenial and healthy communication environment is essential to ensure the effectiveness of communication. Courtesy, in the message as well as manners, plays dominating role in this regard. While communicating, it is necessary that we should be considerate, compassionate and friendly. We should avoid becoming sarcastic, impatient and irritated by being aware of ourselves. If it is necessary to criticise, we must be tactful in approach, so that our communication generates more light than heat. While communicating:

- (a) First, be in right frame of mind. Ensure that you are not perturbed or irritated, but are calm and quiet.
- (b) Use polite and respectful tone. Courtesy is not merely politing with mechanical insertions of "please" and "thank you" rather it is sincere concern and respect for the other person.
- (c) Always 'thank' the other person for his generosity and favour.
- (d) Do not forget to use the word 'please' for requesting something.
- (e) Ensure that the other person's self-respect is not hurt.

**(B) OTHER PRINCIPLES OF COMMUNICATION**

In addition to the above 7Cs of communication the following points deserve attention for making communication effective.

**(1) Create Synergetic Environment**

Misunderstandings are rules rather than exceptions because of unhealthy and uncongenial organizational environment. The neutral words attempting to convey positive message convey negative message because people possess different perceptions. We notice defensive behaviour of employees because of lack of co-operation and trust among them in the organization. Communication cannot be effective under such circumstances.

The first and foremost requirement is to create synergetic environment. Synergy means whole is greater than its parts. Under synergetic environment, cooperation breeds co-operation and trust breeds trust at accelerating rate. For this top management should initiate and ensure trust and cooperation among employees at lower level. They will respond with trust and cooperation sooner or later. When organization is operating at high degree of cooperation and trust among employees, communication will be automatically effective.

**(2) Two way Communication**

Effective communication is never one way traffic rather two way channelisation. The organization should ensure two way communication, with sound feedback system to overcome the communication gaps because of distortions, filtering, colouring, etc.

**(3) Strengthen Communication Flow**

The organizational policy should simplify, streamline and strengthen the flow of communication—both upward and downward—through proper organizational structure, proper decentralisation and delegation of authorities. In addition to this, adequate and timely dissemination of information should be there, both through formal as well as informal networks. Frequent meetings, conferences and social gatherings should be organized from time to time to ensure easy access of information to employees.

**(4) Proper Medias**

Proper medias of communication should be followed. Any media is not ideal for every situation. Illiterate workers should be instructed through oral and visual communication. In case of formal relations, written communication should be followed. And for negotiation, persuasion, brainstorming, etc. face-to-face oral communication is the best way.

**(5) Encourage open Communication**

Lack of transparency and denial of information, breeds rumours in the organization and consequently harms the organisational environment. To avoid this, management should make open-door policy and Manage By Walking Around (MBWA)

In open-door policy, employees are encouraged to approach immediate and higher superiors with any matter that concerns the organization and people at organization. This overcomes the organizational gap among executives and employees. Executives should follow this policy not only in letter but also in spirit so that not only their doors are open physically but also psychologically and employees can communicate without hesitation.

Executives should not restrict their operations by sitting in their offices but walk out through the door to make contacts with a large number of employees.

**(6) Appropriate Language**

Appropriate words, pictures, symbols should be used to make the message simple and easily comprehensible to concerned employees. As far as possible technical and equivocal words should be avoided and message should be supported by proper diagram.

**(7) Effective Listening**

In oral communication effective listening is vital. It is not only the sender's responsibility to make his message clear, complete and concrete; but also of the receiver to understand the message in proper sense through effective listening. Listening should be made effective by keeping the mind free from prejudices and presumptions, paying attention to the spoken words and feeling the emotions of the speaker.

**Review Of Chapter**

Communication is complete when the message is conveyed in the same sense and spirit that sender intends to convey. But it does not happen because of some barriers which are classified as semantic, physical, organisational and psychological. *Semantic barriers* are concerned with problems and obstructions in the process of encoding and decoding the message. These include different language, different context of different words and poor vocabulary. *Physical barriers* include noise, in proper time, distance and improper load of information. The *organisational barriers* include rigid organisational rules, wrong choice of channel, too formal organisational relationship. *Psychological barriers* include selective perceptions, premature evaluation, wrong attitude of superiors and subordinates, egotism, negative emotions, etc.

Effective communication is essential for the survival and success of the organization. To make communication effective it is essential to make it candid clear, complete, concise, concrete, correct and courteous. In addition to assessing these 7Cs of communication, management should.