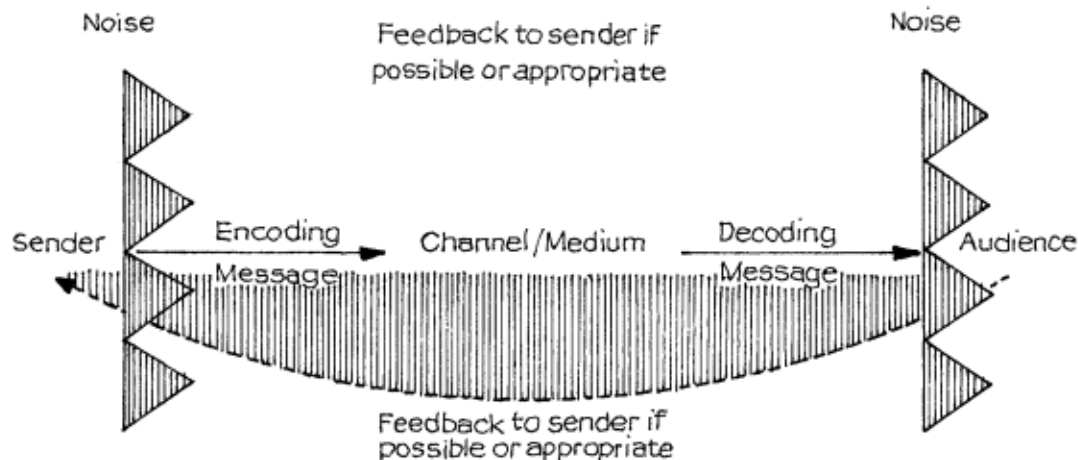


## THE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

For a communication to be effective it is dependent on the nature and quality of the information which is being sent to the recipient. It also relies on the interpretation placed on the communication by both sender and receiver. Because individuals differ so very much from each other it is helpful if, when we communicate, we understand the nature of those differences and modify our interpersonal behaviour to cope with them. However, this is not always possible if we have to communicate with a large and diverse audience which may differ in a number of ways, such as age, interests or culture, and we are unable to communicate with each of them on an individual basis.



There are a number of potential barriers which may result in an ineffective communication, which in turn may cause problems in the workplace. These include:

- Irritation • Misunderstanding • Mistakes • Conflict

Barriers to successful communication include:

### (a) Technical noise

For example, if a message is not received because of interference on a mobile telephone or because a fax machine is not working properly.

### (b) Physical noise

For example, if an office is too noisy because it lacks sound-proofing or a group is too large so they cannot hear what is being said in a presentation.

(c) Lack of interest or hostile attitude For example, if, during a sales presentation, an individual believes a product is not appropriate for his needs or feels strongly that his valuable time is being wasted, then the person's message will not get through what is essentially a very strong barrier.

(d) Poor listening skills For example, if a group of staff on a training course are not used to sitting down and concentrating on what is being said then their lack of listening skills might mean that the message is not successfully communicated.

(e) Information overload For example, during a meeting a manager might try to give his audience a long list of facts and figures in a short period of time; this would mean that most of his message would not be communicated successfully.

(f) Lack of understanding For example, if someone had a poor grasp of language and used incorrect words such as "economically variable" instead of "viable", or the person used technical jargon or abbreviations which were not understood by the audience.

(g) Psychological noise For example, if a person at an interview said that he was very interested in the job being described but started to yawn and gaze disinterestedly out of the window as the interviewer was speaking.

(h) Perceptual bias For example, if a person uses selective hearing and tunes out in order to avoid an unpleasant message or one that does not fit into his pre-existing attitudes and values. An employee listening to his line manager talk about the importance of team work and its benefits who was uncomfortable in the team he was currently working in would be likely to "block" the message.

(i) Poor timing For example, telephoning at lunch times and on Friday afternoons may make it difficult to get through because the person you need to contact is unavailable; or if you are talking to someone in an appraisal interview telling them how long-term planning in the firm might affect their role, they are unlikely to be listening if they know that the next topic concerns their annual pay rise!

### **Sample Case Study:**

Consider the communication barriers in the following situations. Review the suggested barriers set out at the end.

### **Example**

Sally Strict, the Office Manager in Telephone Ordering section, is nearing retirement and has very conservative ideas about the appearance of office staff and how they should behave. Ben Brown, the new Sales and Marketing Manager, has a reputation as a "whiz kid" and has overall responsibility for the Telephone Ordering section. As a result of some last-minute direct response advertising which he placed last week, he realized that the section would be facing a very busy period over the next few weeks. Consequently, he made arrangements for a number of temporary

staff to start the following Monday. Early Monday morning, whilst on his way to a meeting, he telephones Mrs Strict from his mobile telephone. "Sall — girl, guess what, I've organised some temps because .... (silence as he is in an area with poor reception) ... anyway can 7 chat long because the telephone batty needs recharging ... back in the office on Wednesday" Mrs Strict is very annoyed. Before the telephone call she had already been called to reception to look after three young women from the local temporary staff agency. The young women were all students looking forward to earning some money in their vacation. Two of them sat in their chairs yawning; the other one had very short cropped hair and a ring in her nose. She started to introduce herself but much to her surprise Mrs Strict said, *"I am very sorry but you must be mistaken. The Telephone Ordering section does not require temporary staff. If we did, I certainly would not want to work with you three."*

The communication barriers evident in this are as follows:

- **Technical noise** which means that Ben's message is interrupted and therefore incomplete.
- **Mrs Strict's hostile attitude** would mean that even if there had been no technical noise, it would have been difficult for Ben to communicate his message effectively.
- **Mrs Strict's perceptual bias** against the appearance of the three young temp staff would mean that, whatever they were to say or do, initially they would find it very difficult to communicate successfully as she is likely to be selective in the way she listens to what they say. Furthermore, they created psychological noise so that whatever positive message they wanted to communicate was contradicted by their appearance and body language.