

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

HUI10: English and Professional Communication

WHAT IS BARRIER?

- A barrier is defined as something that prevents or controls progress or movement. This definition implies that a barrier is something that comes in the way of the desired outcome.
- Communication is effective only if it creates the desired impact on the receiver.
- Often, managers get frustrated in their efforts, and end up saying that nobody in the organization understands them. Many employees fail to listen attentively during meetings, or send incomprehensible business letters. Such situations arise due to the presence of barriers in communication, which can take many forms such as inadequate communication skills.

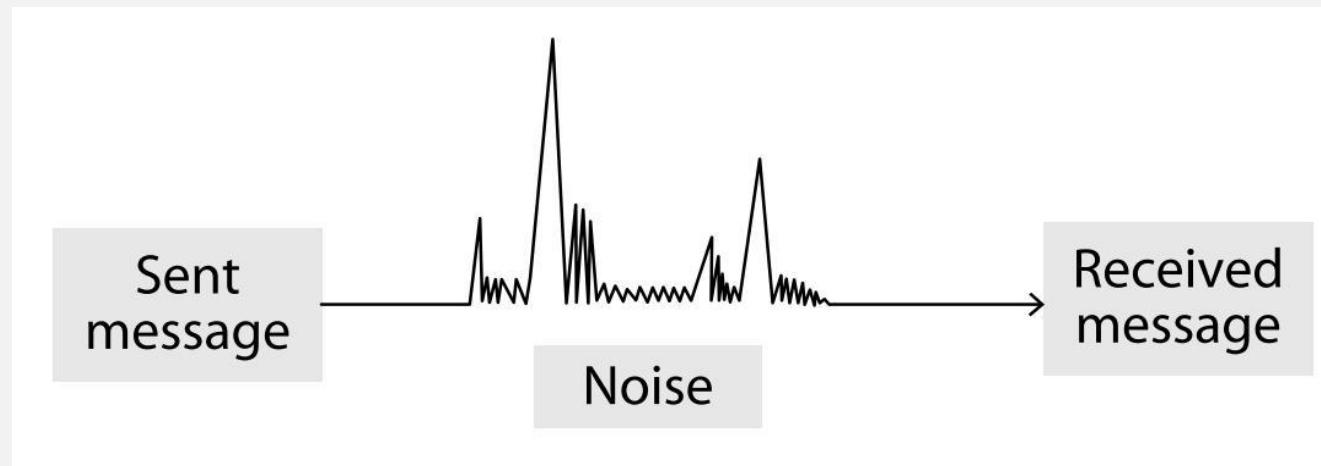
FIVE STEPS TO OVERCOME THE BARRIERS

1. Identify the problem
2. Find the cause/barrier
3. Work on alternative solutions
4. Opt for the best solution
5. Follow up rigorously

Example, you have asked your subordinate to write a bimonthly report, and until the next month, he has not done so.

NOISE

- Any interference in the message sent and the message received leads to the production of 'noise'. The term communication barrier, or that which inhibits or distorts the message, is an expansion of the concept of noise. Noise here does not mean sound, but a break or disturbance in the communication process.



CLASSIFICATION OF NOISE

1. **Channel noise**: It is any interference in the mechanics of the medium used to send a message.

Examples: Distortion due to faulty background, noise in telephone lines, or too high a volume or pitch from loudspeakers, illegible handwriting.

2. **Semantic noise**: It is generated internally, resulting from errors in the message itself. It may be because of the connotative (implied) meaning of a word that is interpreted differently by the sender and the receiver.

Example: The word 'condescend' may have been used in a positive manner, implying grace or dignity of manner, but the receiver might interpret it in a negative manner, related to a (baseless) assumption of superiority. Other examples of semantic noise are ambiguous sentence structure, faulty grammar, misspellings, and incorrect punctuation.

CLASSIFICATION OF BARRIERS

- A barrier acts like a sieve, allowing only a part of the message to filter through; as a result, the desired response is not achieved.
- To communicate smoothly and effectively in an organization, irrespective of your position, you need to know how barriers operate, why they cause misunderstandings, and how to minimize their negative impact.
- If we classify barriers according to the processes of message formation and delivery, we can identify three types:
 1. Intrapersonal
 2. Interpersonal
 3. Organizational

I. INTRAPERSONAL BARRIERS

- Individuals are unique because of differences in perceptions, experiences, education, culture, personality, etc.
- Each of us interprets the same information in different ways, as our thinking varies. These differences lead to certain inbuilt or intrapersonal barriers.
- The common causes that lead to these intrapersonal barriers:
 1. Wrong assumptions
 2. Varied perceptions
 3. Differing background
 4. Wrong inferences
 5. Blocked categories
 6. Categorical thinking

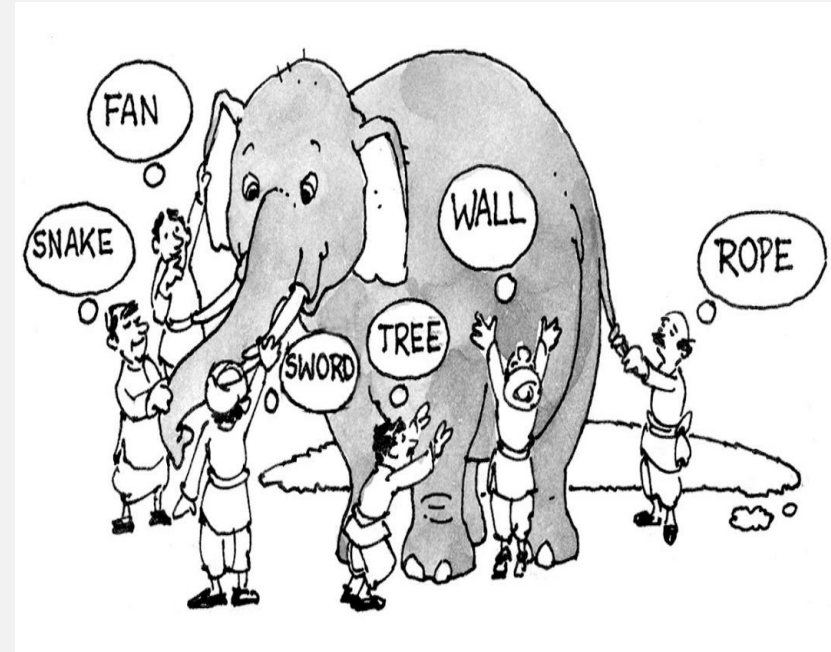
WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

- For example, when a doctor tells her patient that he has to take some medicine only 'SOS' (i.e., during an emergency), without knowing whether the patient understands the term 'SOS', she is creating a barrier in their communication.



VARIED PERCEPTIONS

- The story of the six blind men and their description of an elephant.
- Individuals in an organization also perceive the same situation in different ways. Let us take the case of disagreement between two individuals. If you are close to one of them, you are likely to be biased.
- The best way to overcome this barrier is to step back and take a wider, unbiased perspective of the issue.



DIFFERING BACKGROUNDS

- Backgrounds can be different due to different education, culture, language, environment, financial status, etc.
- Our background plays a significant role in how we interpret a message. At times, something not experienced earlier is difficult to interpret or appreciate.
- To enhance communication skills, it is necessary to know the background of the audience. This information can accordingly be used to construct the message. Empathy or identification with another person is the solution to this barrier.
- We must make an effort to understand what the listener can find difficult to comprehend in our message because of the difference between our background and that of the listener.



WRONG INFERENCES

- Example: Suppose you have returned from a business trip and you find that two of your colleagues are absent. They do not turn up for several days.
- When professionals analyse material, solve problems, and plan procedures, it is essential that inferences be supported by facts.
- When presenting any inference in the course of your work, you could use phrases such as 'evidence suggests' or 'in my opinion' to remind yourself and the receiver that this is not yet an established fact.

BLOCKED CATEGORIES

- In general, we react positively to information only if it is in consonance with our own views and attitudes. Conversely, when we receive information that does not conform to our personal views, habits, and attitudes, or appears unfavourable to us, we tend to react negatively or even disbelieve it.
- Rejection, distortion, and avoidance are three common, undesirable, and negative reactions to unfavourable information.
- People who are very rigid in their opinions may face problems in communicating effectively. For example, one of your fellow students might be of the opinion that young executives are more efficient than older ones.

CATEGORICAL THINKING

- People who feel that they ‘know it all’ are called pansophists. People who feel that they know everything about a particular subject, and therefore refuse to accept any further information on that topic.
- The clue to detecting this barrier in ourselves and in others is the use of words like all, always, everybody, everything, every time and their opposites like none, never, nobody, and nothing. If a message contains too many of these words, then there is a fair chance of the communication getting distorted. To avoid this barrier, substitute these words with phrases like ‘in most situations’ or ‘most likely’.

REMEDIES

- To sum up, good communicators should:
 1. Be non-judgemental
 2. Be empathetic
 3. Not assume anything
 4. Stick to the subject
 5. Listen, and above all, paraphrase
 6. Remember that generalizations do not always hold good in all situations

2. INTERPERSONAL BARRIERS

- Intrapersonal barriers stem from an individual's attitudes or habits, whereas interpersonal barriers occur due to the inappropriate transaction of words between two or more people.
- The two broad categories into which these barriers can be classified are:
 1. Inefficient communication skills
 2. Negative aspect nurturing in the climate
- The most common reasons for interpersonal barriers are:
 1. Limited vocabulary
 2. Incompatibility (clash) of verbal and non-verbal messages
 3. Emotional outburst
 4. Communication selectivity
 5. Cultural variations
 6. Poor listening skills
 7. Noise in the channel

LIMITED VOCABULARY

- Inadequate vocabulary can be a major hindrance in communication.
- At times, we find ourselves searching for the exact word or phrase that would be appropriate for what we are trying to express.
- For example, during a speech, if you are at a loss for words, your communication will be very ineffective, and you will leave a poor impression on the audience.
- If you have a varied and substantial vocabulary, you can create a favourable impression on your listeners. (reading and listening to native speakers)
- Merely having a wide vocabulary is of no use unless the communicator knows how to use it. (denotative and Connotative meanings)

INCOMPATIBILITY OF VERBAL AND NON-VERBAL MESSAGES

- Example: The expression on the person's face shows just the opposite of what they are saying.
- A communicator should acclimatize himself to the communication environment, think from the angle of the listener, and then communicate.
- The first impression about people is most often made on the basis of their physical appearance, which significantly affects the quality of communication.
- Generalization based on assumptions about physical appearance or dress, can also lead to severe communication barriers.
- Physical appearance often serves as one of the most important non-verbal cues. For instance, many people initially formed negative impressions of Einstein because of his worn-out appearance.
- Your non-verbal cues should consistently match your verbal messages.

EMOTIONAL OUTBURST

- In most cases, a moderate level of emotional involvement intensifies communication, making it more personal.
- However, excessive emotional involvement can be an obstacle in communication. (Positive & Negative emotions)
- For example, extreme anger can create such an emotionally charged environment that a rational discussion becomes impossible.
- It is important to maintain one's composure in all kinds of communication.
- The person displaying these emotions should be calmed down. They should preferably be taken to a quiet place to try and sort out the problem that caused their emotions to spin out of control.

COMMUNICATION SELECTIVITY

- When the receiver in a communication process pays attention only to a part of the message, he/ she is imposing a barrier known as communication selectivity. This happens because he/she is interested only in that part of the message which may be of use to him/her. (STTP)
- If the production manager and the marketing manager pay attention only to matters related to their respective areas, they may not be able to get the total perspective of what the CEO is conveying.
- While reading any document, if you read only the parts you consider useful, you are posing this barrier.

CULTURAL VARIATIONS

- The management and employees of multinational companies need to closely observe the laws, customs, and business practices of their host countries, while dealing with their multinational workforce.
- To compete successfully in such a business environment, one must overcome the communication inadequacy arising due to different languages and cultures.
- Success, whether as a student or as a professional, lies in knowing the business practices, social customs, and etiquette of the particular country one is dealing with.

POOR LISTENING SKILLS

- We should remember that listening and hearing are not the same.
- Hearing is a passive exercise while listening requires careful attention and accurate decoding of the signals received from the speaker.
- Misunderstandings and conflicts can be avoided if people listen to the message with attention.
- Sometimes, an individual is so engrossed in his/her own thoughts and worries that he/she is unable to concentrate on listening.

NOISE IN THE CHANNEL

- Noise is any unwanted signal that acts as a hindrance in the flow of communication.
- It is not necessarily limited to audio disturbances, but can also occur in visual, audio-visual, written, physical, or psychological forms.

3. 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 nurtures its own communication climate.
- 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 as follows:
 1. Too many transfer stations
 2. Fear of superiors
 3. Negative tendencies
 4. Use of inappropriate media.
 5. Information overload

TOO MANY TRANSFER STATIONS

- The more links there are in a communication chain, the greater are the chances of miscommunication.
- Imagine, for instance, that your professor asks you to convey a message to X. You, because of some inconvenience or sheer laziness, ask your friend Y to do this job.
- Some employees may filter out the parts of the message they consider unimportant.

FEAR OF SUPERIORS

- In rigidly structured organizations, fear of superiors prevents subordinates from speaking frankly.
- An open environment is conducive to increasing the confidence and goodwill of a communicator.
- By encouraging active participation from their subordinates, senior officers pave the way for more ideas, resources, or solutions to come forth from their subordinates.

NEGATIVE TENDENCIES

- For example, the student members of the sports club of an educational institution may be annoyed with non-members who oppose the club's demand for allocating more funds to purchase sports equipment.
- This type of opposition gives rise to insider–outsider equations, which in turn pave the way for negative tendencies in the organization.
- Once these negative tendencies develop, they create noise in interpersonal communication.

USE OF INAPPROPRIATE MEDIA

- Some of the common media used in organizations are graphs and charts, telephones, facsimile machines, boards, email, telephones, films and slides, computer presentations, teleconferencing, and videoconferencing.
- While choosing the medium for a particular occasion, the advantages, disadvantages, and potential barriers to communication must be considered.
- Printed letters, which provide permanence, are preferable for information which requires to be stored for future reference.
- While deciding upon the medium, the following factors should be considered:
 - Time • Cost • Type of message • Intended audience

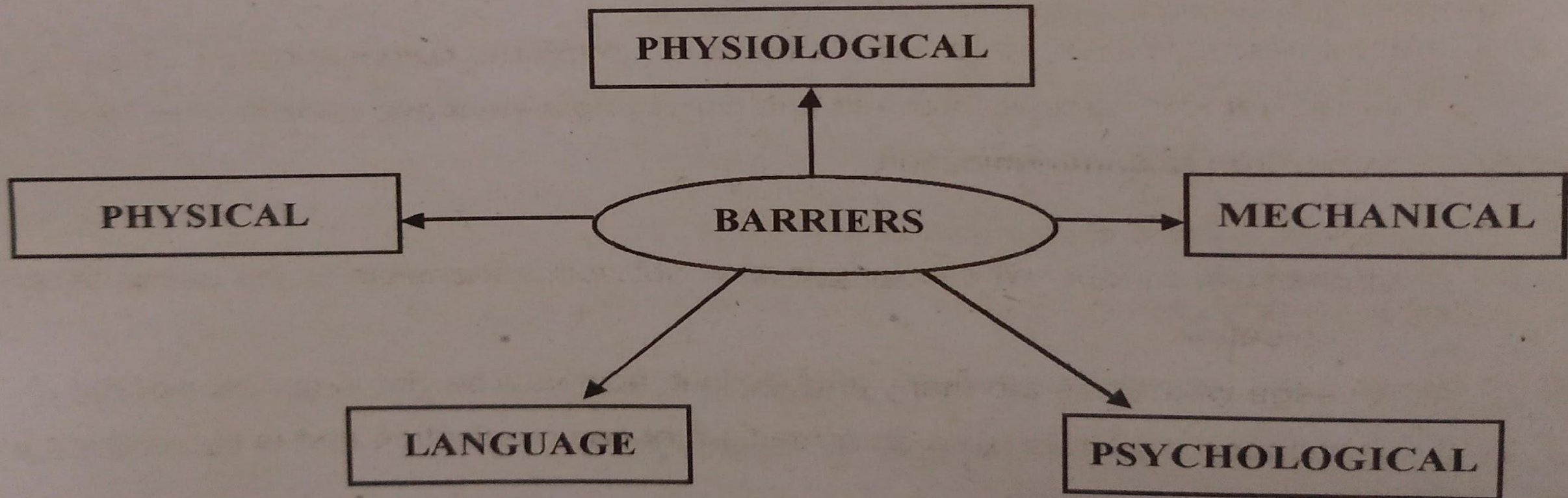
Usually, a mix of media is best for effective communication. For example, after booking an order online, a follow-up call can be made to verify whether the order has been placed.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

- One of the major problems faced by organizations today is the decrease in efficiency resulting from manual handling of huge amount of data. This is known as information overload.
- The usual results of information overload are fatigue, disinterest, and boredom.
- Very often, vital, relevant information gets mixed up with too many irrelevant details, and is therefore ignored by the receiver.
- 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.



BLOCK DIAGRAM



Tips for Effective Communication

Tips for Effective Communication



Constant practice and rigorous implementation of these ideas will help you become an excellent communicator.

- Always keep the receiver in mind.
- Create an open communication environment.
- Avoid having too many transfer stations.
- Do not communicate when you are emotionally disturbed.
- Be aware of diversity in culture, language, etc.
- Use appropriate non-verbal cues.
- Select the most suitable medium.
- Analyse the feedback.