

Soft Skills
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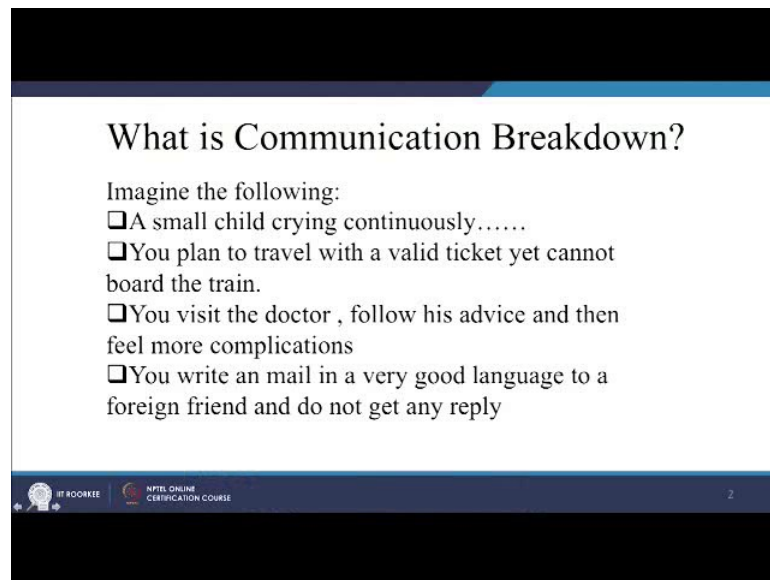
Lecture – 21
Communication Breakdown Part I

Good morning, welcome back. You have been listening to a series of lectures on Soft Skills. And in the previous lecture we talked about organizational communication, but then you all know that we do not communicate only in organization and only with an organizational purpose, we also communicate at homes, we communicate with friends, with relatives, with seniors and juniors at the work places. And the nature of these communication varies from one context to another at times. Because of certain reasons we are not able to communicate properly or effectively.

Now, in this lecture we are going to talk about communication breakdown, but before letting you know what we mean by breakdown. Let me tell you a very small story which is from a famous essayist, A G Gardener's 'On Saying Please'. The incident is that a passenger enters the lift and says "top", the lift man demands—"top please". The passenger once again says 'top.' At this the lift man throws the passenger out of the lift. Now this is very small, this is actually and when it was enquired it was found that the lift man wanted some sort of courtesy from the passenger whereas, the passenger denied to respond to the courtesies and when the entire case was examined this was actually a case of communication breakdown.

Now, the question is when you are communicating with the person, you do not know the nature as well as the expectation of the other party. When this lift man was asked why he did so, it was found that the lift man was not treated properly in his house. Now, this was actually a sort of reaction. So, when people communicate, all of us have some preoccupied ideas, but when we communicate sometimes we do not leave those preoccupied ideas and we communicate and in such a moment of communication, we do not communicate exactly what we want. You will come across many such instances.

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What is Communication Breakdown?

Imagine the following:

- ☐ A small child crying continuously.....
- ☐ You plan to travel with a valid ticket yet cannot board the train.
- ☐ You visit the doctor , follow his advice and then feel more complications
- ☐ You write an mail in a very good language to a foreign friend and do not get any reply

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Let me ask you to imagine the following situations. Imagine a small child crying continuously and when the child cries because crying is also sort of communication the child actually wants to say something. The mother comes and simply provides her the bottle of milk and the child is yet crying, the mother comes again and finds everything is fine, but the child cries continuously.

It is later found that the child was feeling quite uneasy because the bed on which the child was sleeping was wet. Now the question is---- the mother could not understand in the very first instance what was the reason for the child's crying and hence she could not find out the solution. Later, when she saw that the bed was wet and she changed, the child stopped crying. So, this is a case of communication breakdown or communication barrier. There is another case you can also imagine you are going to travel to Bangalore for an interview. You have booked your tickets well in advance and the date for your travel is 25th and the time is night.

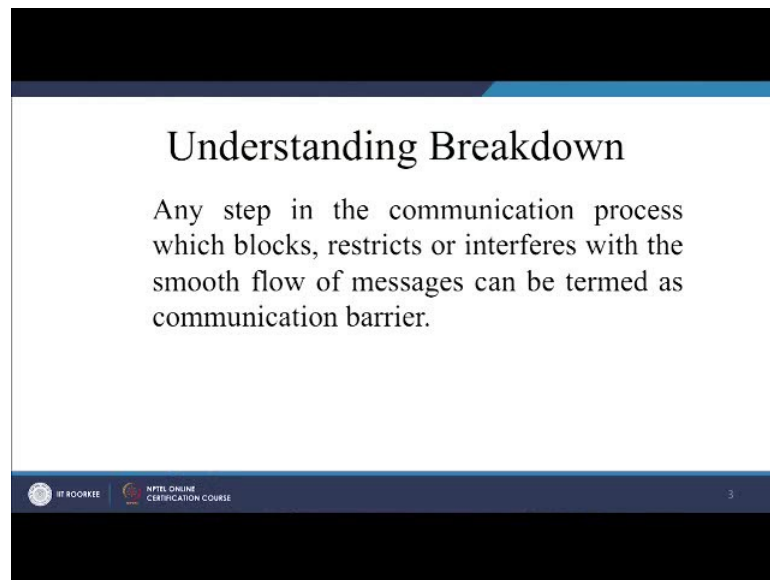
So, very carefully you have packed everything and you go to the station you also board the train, but then you find that somebody else is occupying your seat. On enquiry he says that the seat is his and he shows you a ticket also. Now when you look at the ticket you are dumbfounded. The T.T.E comes and on an enquiry he says---- 'your train departed only last night'. It is later that you realize that your train for which the ticket you had bought, the departure time was 12:30 and in railways the dates change after 12.

This is again a sort of breakdown or barrier either because you did not know or you perhaps is slept.

Same is the case when you visit a doctor and the doctor prescribes some medicine and then you stop taking that medicine very seriously and yet you feel that the problem still persists. Actually, what the doctor had done is--- the doctor had written a word like SOS while prescribing a particular tablet and the doctor was under the impression that you will understand the meaning of this SOS perhaps you ignored. Because the meaning of SOS is, it is actually to be taken when required when the pain persists for a long time, but you skip the fact and that is why the communication breakdown. Likewise, you write an electronic mail in a very beautiful language to one of your foreign friends and the reply does not come. You later realize that either your letter was too long or your email was too short.

So, you come across different ways of communication breakdown which we also call communication barrier. Now what is this communication barrier?

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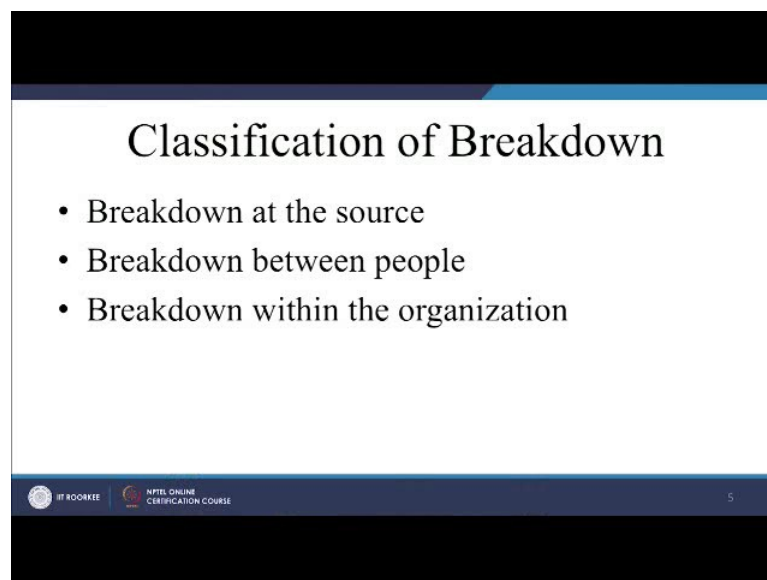
If you look at this situation you will find that communication barrier is when you start a communication process some way or the other there is something that either blocks, restricts or interferes with the smooth flow of message and since the message does not go smooth, since the most message does not achieve its required purpose, it ends in a breakdown. That is why when you come across a communication breakdown, you really feel very embarrassed, but then here in these two lectures, I am going to discuss how you should be quite careful when communicating so that the communication crisis does not happen.

Now, how to do that? You have to understand why things go wrong what was actually the reason behind these communication breakdown or barrier and then what could be the solution. You know once you realize the problem you know you do not succeed just in one interview, but you will feel in course of time that when you start making a sort of review of what the questions were asked and how you responded you will come to a realization that this could have been answered in a different way. And you utilize that in another interview and in this process, you learn and you also become successful.

Same is true of communication barriers also. You create a communication barrier, but when you realize you perhaps try to improve it and you become successful. So, while you are going to identify like what cause this barrier you can also find about various alternatives or solution and depending upon the situation, you have to apply the best solution and then see feedback and you will find that you have been successful.

Now, dear friends, this communication barrier cannot be confined only to one situation. In life situations change new and new situations, new and new circumstances emerge every now and then and that is why you have to understand that how this breakdown or barrier can be classified.

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This barrier can either be at the source, now you know well because we have already discussed that communication is actually a process of sharing information between the two where there is a sender there is a receiver. So, on majority of occasions there is a problem or there is a breakdown at the source, you are a sender you are the source.

How you manipulate the information, how you create the communication that totally depends upon you. So, some way or the other there may be some lapse in the way you form the message you create the message. There can also be breakdown between people I mean you do not communicate alone, but you communicate alone also because communication as we have discussed can be intrapersonal when you are communicating to yourself. It can be interpersonal when you are communicating either with some two people, three people, and with groups of people. And there also can be communication breakdown in the organization because ultimately because as we have said earlier all of you belong to organizations and you will have to communicate in the organization.

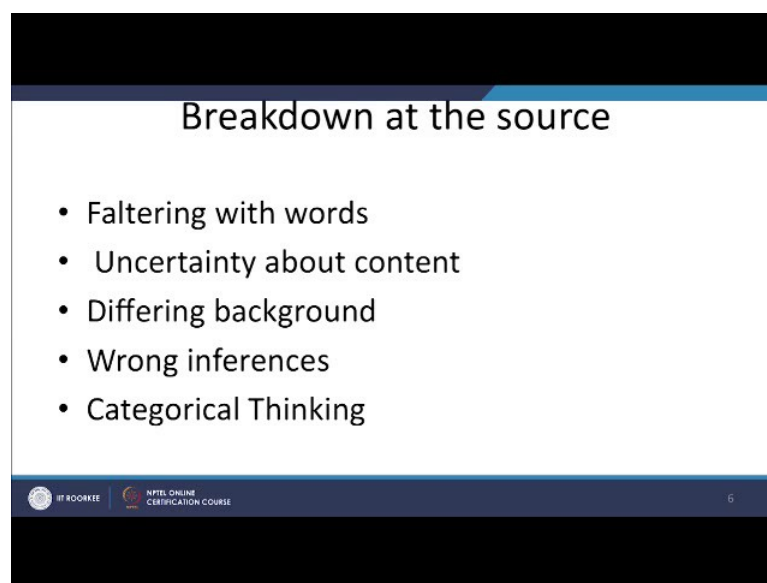
So, these three types of communication barrier---- how do they arise and how best we can guard them or if it has already happened how we can overcome them and try to warn ourselves or to make ourselves guard against such barriers we shall discuss.

Now, what is this breakdown at the source? So, when we say breakdown at the source, we mean breakdown with the sender. I mean you as a sender, you create a message and when you create a message, you create a message either in a spoken form, you create a message in the written form, nowadays you have lots of channels available at your disposal and that is why when you are creating the message and you create the message depending upon the situation or the circumstance. So, initially what happens? You start faltering with words.

Say for example, you have to write a letter or an application for leave. Now it is very difficult you know because of the profligacy of these channels of information many of the youngsters they still find it difficult as how to write a leave application. Because in a way, these communication technologies have threatened our language and have blocked at times we have a system where we fill in the leave now and you come to know. But if you have to write, but then this is not one example there are many such examples where you need to write, where you need to speak, where you need to express, where you need to share, where you need to communicate, where you need to belong and for all this you need some sort of communication strategy.

So, when you are communicating and you know sometimes you may come across the very difficult situation and in this difficult situation when you are going to write a message what happens is----- you start thinking for words, you start faltering for words as to what word should be more suitable. Then on many occasions you are not certain about the content. If you understand why you are going to write this message, why you are going to make this call, why you are going to address a particular group then depending upon the need what you do is you are going to decide the content. So, on many occasions you are not confident of the content.

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The slide is titled "Breakdown at the source" and lists five factors in a bulleted format:

- Faltering with words
- Uncertainty about content
- Differing background
- Wrong inferences
- Categorical Thinking

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And then there can be different backgrounds all of us we come from different backgrounds, since we have brought up in different circumstances, in different ambiances about tastes, habits as we have been discussing since the beginning, we tend to develop a sort of background in which we are brought up, but then what we do is-- we actually our background it affects our communication.

Say for example, if I talk about a literary piece today and if I say oh yes Mister X if you read that book you will find this. So, you will find after sometime, this person will start showing his disinterest in you and the reason is because he has not read that book or he never intends to read that book. So, this is the case of differing background. You know all communication will have a sort of homophily. I mean common frame of reference. That is why two computer engineers they will talk very smoothly, two doctors they will talk very smoothly, two lawyers--- they will talk very smoothly, because they are a common reference. Sometimes when on a particular subject both the parties are interested they will have a better communication and on many occasions, you have wrong inferences, wrong inferences. These wrong inferences what are these you will find you remember that famous know illusion that sometimes when you are walking and if it is just the start of the evening even a small rope can appear to be a snake. So, this is one example of inference. Initially, this is not a snake, this is only a rope, but you suddenly come to the conclusion that it is a snake. So, every individual makes his or her inferences according to his own psyche.

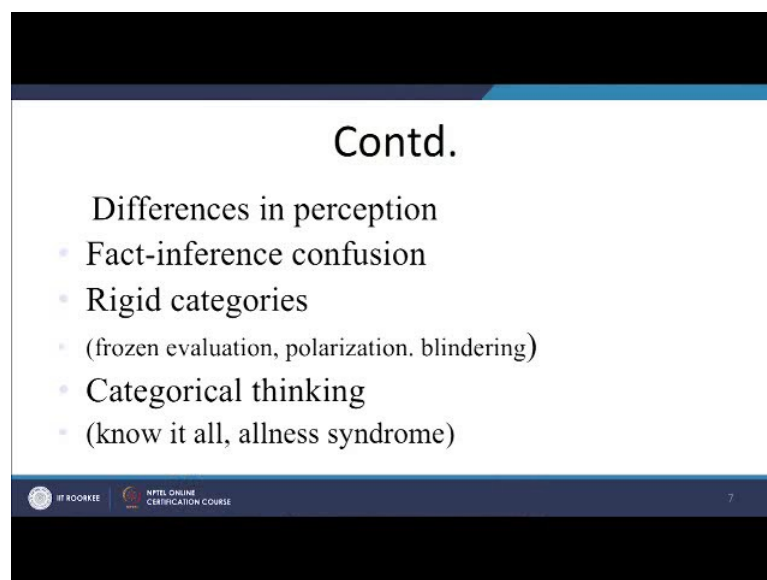
And then there can be differences in perception. You know all people in this world, they are having different perceptions. They do not respond to the same situation the way you expect them. Everyone's perception is his own and you will also come across, even you will also feel yourself that you come across some people who are of rigid categories.

Now, what are these rigid categories? Now these rigid categories are: say for example, when one day you are invited to a talk and this talk is on nanotechnology and you are a student of nanotechnology. You have done so many papers on nanotechnology and then you start believing oh will there be something new nanotechnology. No, you have learnt a lot on nanotechnology. Everything in that area you know and then you decide not to go there and even if you go there, you actually create such a situation you either whisper to your friend oh what he is saying is of no significance I know more than this. Now this is actually a syndrome where you feel you know everything. No. Moreover, you feel that there can be no further innovation, there can be no further knowledge in this regard that you really required.

So, and at times you have a sort of frozen evaluation also. You sometimes believe no if sometime one day you miss the train and the next day when you go you actually go 10 minutes or say sometimes 15 minutes earlier to the station in the hope that maybe you will miss the train again. So, you never know that situations change, things change and this time the train itself is delayed. So, this is a sort of frozen evaluation and on many occasions you start blundering you feel that the situation will happen time in again.

Dear friends! Change is the law of nature every now and then things change and people also have to change.

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Contd.

- Differences in perception
 - Fact-inference confusion
 - Rigid categories
 - (frozen evaluation, polarization, blinding)
 - Categorical thinking
 - (know it all, allness syndrome)

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So, that is why when you are communicating see to it that when you become very rigid you cannot communicate too much. Then, comes categorical thinking. You will often come across people as I said you know who will say all the people in this organization they are against me, all I say or do is taken negatively all source of information which are being flowing they are flowing only from computer language, they have not given any importance to written communication.

Now this appears when you start feeling that you are a person of categorical thinking, you suffer from a sort of allness syndrome. Every now and then, you know ,every now and then when you will talk, these words will appear---- all, every, fine every now and then. So, you ensure you actually announce to the outside world that you know everything and that is why you are not able to communicate and this. And when you do that and when you communicate in such a situation this will result in a sort of communication breakdown.

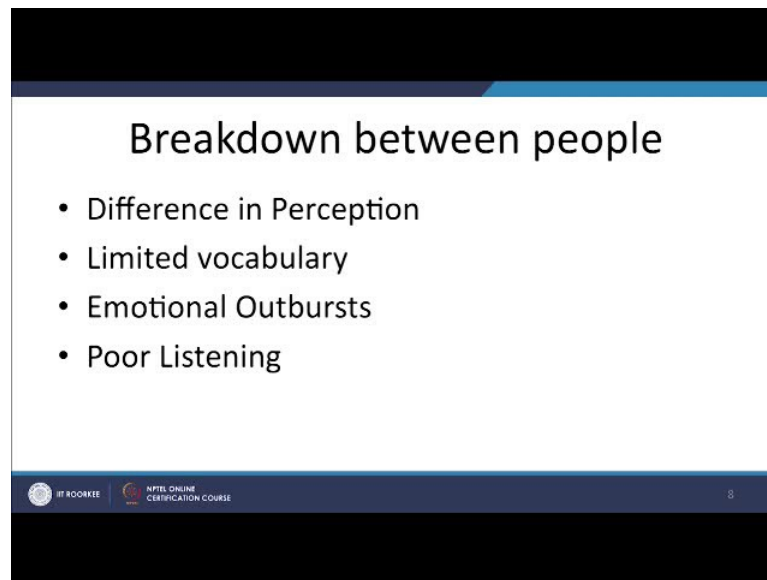
Now, we are talking about breakdown between people which we also can call interpersonal communication. Now this interpersonal communication, it actually happens not in your everyday life, but you will you will find in organizations also. So, in such a situation what happens is you have a difference sort of perception and this perception of reality your perception of reality will be totally different from others perception of reality. You know people have different sorts of perception about looking at or viewing at things. At times you have a limited vocabulary, no, sometimes what you do is since you have a limited vocabulary and you do not understand that one word may have so many meanings.

If you rely only upon say if you rely only upon one word and you rely upon only one meaning, it will become very difficult. You know, there are situations when you have to tied over when you have to overcome when you have to come out of that and if you believe only in one word if you have a very limited vocabulary you cannot have a proper communication. So, there can be a breakdown between people you know when you say let us take a word like fast you know you use the word fast now this word fast can be used differently by different people.

Say for example, if I say--- you are very fast. Now, I have left something here when I say you are very fast. Maybe the other person may say--- fast regarding my speed, fast regarding my dealing, fast regarding or does it have some other meaning because you know words can be used idiomatically at times and in particular a context when a particular word is used, it may be taken in differently or maybe interpreted differently by different people.

And then there can also be breakdown because of emotional outbursts every now and then, we are not in a proper mood.

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The slide features a dark blue header and footer. The main content area is white with a blue horizontal bar at the top. The title 'Breakdown between people' is centered in a large, bold, black font. Below the title, there is a bulleted list of four items. The footer contains two logos on the left and the number '8' on the right.

Breakdown between people

- Difference in Perception
- Limited vocabulary
- Emotional Outbursts
- Poor Listening

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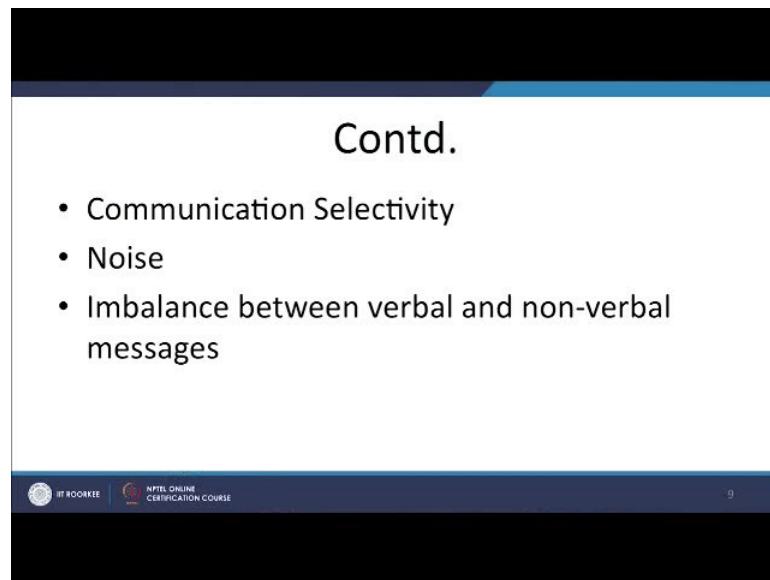
We are full of emotions sometimes that is why we often say if you are emotionally surcharged either you know excessive of anger, excessive of love, excessive of sentiments. So, in such situation, when you communicate sometimes you are excessively tired. So, if you are communicating you do not have a control over words. You do not, you know you perhaps ignore some other facts also about how the use of particular word will be reacted to by the receiver and then during such emotional outbursts you are not able to communicate effectively and whatever you communicate.

Say for example, a modern day professional which surrounded by all sorts of gadgets. He is working on his laptop at the same time a phone call comes and he starts attending that phone call. And at the same time some other pieces of information come with a support system from some other division. And if you are concentrating on a particular piece of work, you will find that this will become incomplete.

For example, you forget or you tend to forget or you tend to skip over some of the words which could have been used there. And, then poor listening. In a previous lecture we talked about how people listen and why listening is very important. You know if you are on majority of occasions people do not listen, but remember when you are communicating with a purpose listening becomes very important there are different factors which impede listening. Now sometimes maybe in outside disturbances sometimes because you are working in a room where you know many people often say I can hear everything that people in the adjacent room says. Now in such a situation what happens you are listening and the way you were listening sometimes you are lost in your own thoughts will you be able to listen properly, you will not.

So, because of poor listening also you communicate in a way that ends in a communication breakdown. And there is another way which is called communication selectivity. Every person listens to as we have said earlier listens to the piece of information which actually interests him say for example, and what he does is--- he ignores the other party.

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Say you are appearing at an interview and while a question is put, before understanding the entire question you picked up one of the phrases or the clauses which you know and you start responding you will find to your great shock that you have answered quite negatively. So, this actually creates a sort of communication barrier or communication breakdown. Every person has a sort of communication selectivity, we use the word, you actually take out things which you understand is of interest to you, you forget about the other parts and that is how you create a sort of communication barrier.

Next is noise, do you really feel that noise is a sort of disturbance? But I believe noise is a sort of communication. You know, but then noise can also help you give a lot of excuses say when you are talking over telephone and you try not to supply the best piece of information and you try to make a sort of pretension what you say I am not able to hear your voice clearly, I am not able to concentrate on because there is a lot of noise, I am at a place where I am surrounded by a crowd and there is a lot of cacophony.

But remember when you are communicating, this noise also can be a deterrent, it can also stop the proper communication, it can also help in giving confused sounds that you utter or sometimes if you are writing, it will also not help you concentrate. And then another important factor which helps or which destroys communication is the lack of proper balance between verbal and nonverbal messages. You speak a word, you speak a sentence, you are giving a direction, but at the same time the language that is there on your face or the way you react to maybe different.

So, a careful communicator has to see either if you are a leader or say if you are in the role of a decision maker you have to understand that communication is very comprehensive, it is very subjective and you have to look at both the verbal and the nonverbal. You say something in words, but the way it is said that has a lot to mean. So, please try to understand and moreover it will vary as we have discussed in our lecture on culture and communication that it varies from one culture to another you know we have discussed how when during a communication, you become silent it can be understood differently by different people even while you are you know there is an example that in Kenya the son-in-law and the mother-in-law do not face each other when they communicate.

Now, this may be understood in a different manner in our cultures because we believe that when you communicate in many countries you know even for an assignment, even for initiating a dialogue between two countries are the women they are not sent. But then there may be other voices from some organizations that it is a sort of discrimination because you know the entire world, as I said, the other day the entire world is global and there are diversity of cultures.

So, when you are communicating you also have to be aware of these cultural considerations. Then we come to the perception as I said your perception and my perception of two things will be totally different. So, we should not always believe that everyone's perception will be the same as ours. Here it is very pertinent to emphasize on how important is language. Language is a code. You know language is a code. So, when you are using a language you are actually transferring your thoughts.

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Perception

- Perception of reality
 - selective perception
- Language –an arbitrary code

“The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

- Mark Twain



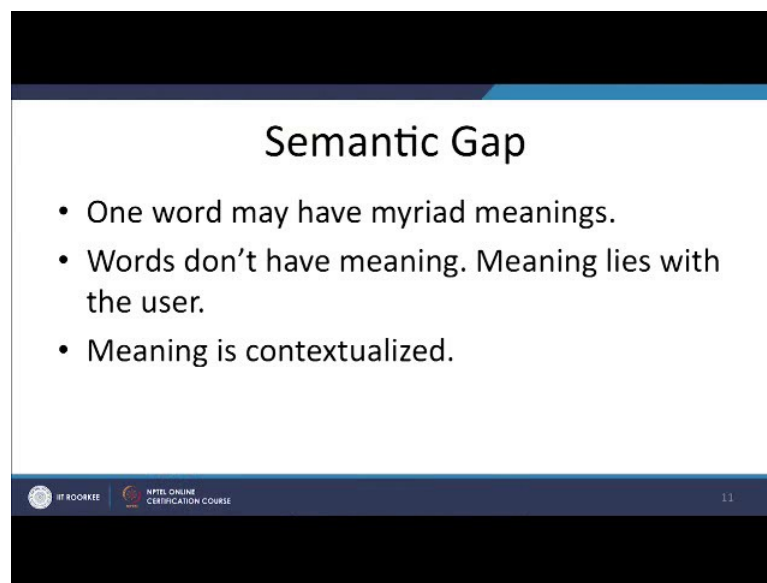
We have said and we will repeatedly say that when you are using a particular word you actually try to situate a particular meaning in it, but then how it will be reacted to it depends entirely upon the receiver. Here it is of paramount importance as to what Mark Twin says, 'the difference between the right word and almost right word is the difference between lightening and a lightening bug'. Of course, the difference is too less, but you know this difference may create a lot of confusion when you are communicating, that is why when you communicate with a doctor as I said in the beginning the way he uses a language like SOS, unless you understand. Since you do not understand and the doctor was under the impression that you understood it, but you kept on taking the tablets as you took other tablets and this created a lot of problem. So, that may be the case also.

Say for example, when you are communicating with a person of different background and you say--- 'May I request you to put in a word to your friend so that when I go for my passport I may not have a difficulty. And your friend says---, No, no I will tell him. And you know while discussing your case he will be very loyal.

Now, you start wondering as to what loyal what does it mean and then you perhaps realize that he could have said instead of loyal, he could have used the term he will be very kind, you will very considerate and not loyal. So, the question is when you are using a word or when you expect other party to communicate you actually expect that this should be communicated in such a manner that words convey the real meaning of the intended message and that is possible only when the receiver also enjoys. That is why the importance of background is very important.

Moreover, you will also find that on many occasions you come across a barrier which arises because of a semantic gap. When I say semantic gap what we mean is a sort of language gap, linguistic gap. Now at times many people even you know as a youngster when you write something you think that you should use some such words so that you can be appreciated for your mastery of words. But then you perhaps ignore the fact that this letter or this electronic mail or this message when it reaches the other party how he or she will react to. So, there may be a semantic gap and moreover one word that you are using in one context may be understood differently.

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Semantic Gap

- One word may have myriad meanings.
- Words don't have meaning. Meaning lies with the user.
- Meaning is contextualized.

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Say, for example, if you know let us take the example of how the word side walk sidewalk which is used by people in the U.S--- they use sidewalk whereas, others may use it as pavement and in India we may say it is just a platform. So, this is how they interpret and because all of us use words according to our own knowledge according to our own experience, according to our own background, but then this may not be true when it comes to be understood by other people. Similarly, when we say or when the Britishers say **table a motion**. the meaning is to act on, but the US people they understand to postpone. This is actually the way we use words. Dear friends! while we are communicating we actually see that our basic intention has to be understood by the receiver.

And that is why we say it has to be a cordial cooperation between the sender and the receiver. But sometimes we ignore are the background of the other people sometimes we ignore the knowledge of the other people and we create a communication that is bound to be very destructive. And remember when you are communicating you actually want to sometimes you want to speak what you think proper, but that may be improper also.

Likewise, when I am communicating with you, I think that you might be understanding everything and that is why I can speak at my liberty. But then that can at times be troublesome. Hence, the time has come not to burden your minds too much and end of this lecture by saying that communication is a sort of consideration, it is a sort of negotiation between the two people and if any skip, if any you know, if any channel, if any thought, if any word has not been spoken carefully---- that may result in a sort of miscommunication.

And communication means to unite, not to divide, communication means to make or bring people closer, not to make them distance hence since I want you to be very close I will not communicate further in this lecture. Rather, in the next lecture when we will be talking we shall see how more and more information, loading up more and more information can also end in a sort of breakdown.

Thank you very much.