

CHAPTER

2

Barriers to Communication

OBJECTIVES

You should study the chapter to know

- what communication barriers are and what causes them
- how to avoid communication failures caused by noise
- how to classify communication barriers

INTRODUCTION

Having studied the basic principles of technical communication in Chapter 1, we now move on to a very important factor related to communication. Imagine you are a junior executive who has just joined as a trainee in an automobile company. You go to meet your boss, to seek permission for visiting the automobile exhibition being held in Delhi. While you are talking, two of your colleagues also arrive to get your boss' signature on some bills. You fall silent while he signs the bills. After they leave, you resume talking but you find that your boss has not really grasped what you have said earlier. You later analyse this situation, and realize that your colleagues' intervention led to your boss' lack of concentration. As the sender, you had patiently tried to express your wish. But because of the interruption by your colleagues, the receiver, your boss, could not decode your message fully. Hence the communication process failed.

This discussion brings us to the introduction of the term 'barrier' in communication. 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. In the example given above, notice that the arrival of your colleagues was an event that prevented your boss from concentrating completely on what you were saying. So, we say that this incident was a barrier to the communication between you and your boss. All of us have come across such situations while communicating with parents, friends, or colleagues. Let us now learn how to avoid such communication failures and make our interactions more effective.

We all know that effective communication is the nerve of all the business activities in an organization. Even a slight break in the communication flow can lead to misunderstandings.

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tated 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.

There are numerous such barriers associated with communication. These need to be addressed in order to ensure that no gap occurs in the communication cycle. A common barrier is the wrong assumptions made about the person to whom the message is being sent and *sometimes about the message itself*. For example, if the sender of the message is talking about a technical proposal, he/she would be wrong if he/she makes assumptions about the receiver's level of technical knowledge. The problem can be resolved to a great extent if the sender of the message analyses his/her message thoroughly and anticipates the likely response before sending it.

If a particular communication fails to evoke the desired response, the following five steps can help solve the problem:

- ✓ Identify the problem
- ✓ Find the cause/barrier
- ✓ Work on alternative solutions
- ✓ Opt for the best solution
- ✓ Follow up rigorously

The first step—identifying the problem—is the most difficult. We first realize that there is a problem when we do not receive the desired feedback. To identify the problem correctly, it is mandatory that the feedback be analysed carefully. For example, you have asked your subordinate to write a bimonthly report, and until the next month, he has not done so. When you ask him about the delay, he replies that he was asked to produce the report bimonthly. The problem here is that to you the term *bimonthly* meant *twice in a month*, whereas to your subordinate it meant *once in two months*. Later, you look up the dictionary and find that *bimonthly* means *twice a month* as well as *once in two months*!

Having identified the problem, the next step is to find out what caused it. In this situation, we could say that it was the choice of words. The third step is to explore possible solutions. In this case, a way out would be to choose words that are more specific in their meaning, i.e., words that could mean only one thing—the intended meaning. After thinking through the alternatives, apply the best solution that not only solves the problem, but also does not create any new difficulties. Hence, instead of using the troublesome term *bimonthly*, either *twice a month* or *once a fortnight* could be used. After successfully completing all the four steps, the last step requires that we implement the best solution properly. Having once come across a particular communication barrier, there should be a conscious effort to never let it crop up again.

In this chapter, we will discuss the various types of communication barriers, and how they can be identified and overcome. Before going on to consider the different barriers to communication, however, let us first understand the related term 'noise'.

Noise

Any interference in the message sent and the message received leads to the production of 'noise' (see Figure 2.1).

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. If noise occurs because of technological factors, it is not too much of a problem as it can be removed by correcting the technological faults. However, if the noise is due to human error, the parties involved in the communication process need to take corrective measures.



FIGURE 2.1 Noise interferes in the correct transmission of messages

Noise is defined as any unplanned interference in the communication environment, which affects the transmission of the message.

manner, related to a (*baseless*) assumption of superiority. Other examples of semantic noise are ambiguous sentence structure, faulty grammar, misspellings, and incorrect punctuation.

Noise is defined as any unplanned interference in the communication environment, which affects the transmission of the message. Noise can be classified as *channel* and *semantic*. *Channel noise* is any interference in the mechanics of the medium used to send a message. Familiar examples of channel noise are distortion due to faulty background, noise in telephone lines, or too high a volume or pitch from loudspeakers. In written communication, illegible handwriting can

be termed as channel noise. Whereas channel noise develops externally, *semantic noise* 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. For 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



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. How often have you said, 'I meant to say this and not that'? Even with the best intentions, communication barriers crop up and our written and spoken messages are misunderstood. If we classify barriers according to the processes of message formation and delivery, we can identify three types:

- Intrapersonal
- Interpersonal
- Organizational

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. Let us explore all the common causes that lead to these intrapersonal barriers:

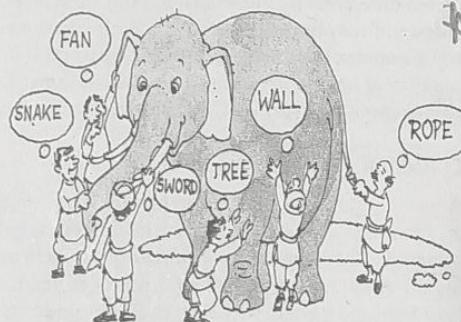
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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrong assumptions • Varied perceptions • Differing background | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrong inferences • Blocked categories • Categorical thinking |
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Wrong assumptions

Many barriers stem from 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. Here the



'Take this medicine only SOS.'



be able to appreciate his/her opponent's point of view. It is all a matter of perception. The best way to overcome this barrier is to step back and take a wider, unbiased perspective of the issue.

Differing backgrounds

No two persons have the same background. 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. Think of a class where the professor talks about his rock-climbing adventure. Students who have experienced rock climbing may be able to appreciate the professor's talk, while others who have never been into adventure sports may not find it interesting at all.

To enhance communication skills, it is necessary to know the background of the audience. This information can accordingly be used to construct your message.

The representative of a computer company would not make much sense to a group of doctors if in his/her presentation he/she goes into details about the hardware aspects of the computer that he/she plans to install in a hospital.

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. The language

doctor has made a wrong assumption about her patient's level of knowledge. Wrong assumptions are generally made because the sender or the receiver does not have adequate knowledge about the other's background or entertains certain false concepts, which are fixed in his/her mind. 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.

Varied perceptions

We all know the story of the six blind men and their description of an elephant. The elephant was perceived by each man as a fan, a rope, a wall, a sword, a snake, and a tree. None of the blind men were wrong, as the part of the elephant body touched by each man compared well with the various objects they named. This is how different individuals hold different viewpoints about the same situation.

Similarly, 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. You may perceive your friend's arguments as correct, and hence, may not



'... and if you clip a carabiner to each end of the sling, you have a quickdraw.'

Confusables

Common groups of words are sometimes confused or ignored by users.

- Ability is a skill that you have mastered through study or practice. Capacity refers to innate talent.
- If something affects you, it has an effect on you. To effect something, however, means to make

understood by the receiver should be used to avoid ambiguity and reduce multiple meanings.

The exact meaning of a word resides in the mind of the speaker; therefore, one ought to be cautious while using words. The multiple meanings of a word can astronomically increase the problem of communication barriers. A word can have several connotations (implied meanings) and definitions. The more a word is prone to multiple meanings, the greater are the chances of it being misunderstood. A conscientious speaker is careful to explain her message in context by rephrasing and repeating words that can be confusing.

something happen: 'The new management wanted to effect drastic changes, but the unions felt these would adversely affect workers.'

Refer to Chapter 16 for more on this.

Wrong inferences

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. Since there is a recession on, you draw an inference that they have been laid off. The fact is that they have been promoted and sent to another department. This is an example of *fact-inference confusion*. It has happened because you failed to distinguish between what actually exists and what you had assumed to exist.

Inferences are more dramatic than facts, and for this reason they can provide more scope for gossip and rumour to spread. When professionals analyse material, solve problems, and plan procedures, it is essential that inferences be supported by facts. Systems analysts, marketing specialists, advertisers, architects, engineers, designers, and others must work on various premises and draw inferences after collecting factual data. When presenting any inference in the course of your work, you could use qualifiers 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.

When Writing or Speaking

1. Think of your audience. How well do they understand the language? How much do they know about your logic?
2. Select your words with care, especially technical terms. Words must be suited to your audience's language skills.
3. If you have to use slightly difficult or unfamiliar words, try to explain these as part of your communication.
4. Do not fall into the trap, however, of oversimplifying your language; your audience could get put off if you use words that sound unprofessional or non-technical.
5. Feedback serves as an effective barometer to find out if the intended message has been put across. Ask the receiver to paraphrase the message and also ask questions on what was said.
6. Even if you have an extensive vocabulary, never use words merely to impress. Rather use them to express your ideas as simply and clearly as possible.

Communication and other technologies are advancing so rapidly today that many people find it difficult to quickly adapt themselves to these developments. Instead of taking advantage of these developments, which help expedite the communication process, such people tend to resist and criticize them. This is a result of having a closed mind. Such people are called *misanthropists*. They tend to ignore variations and differences, which leads to unreliable conclusions. Some people have certain prejudices so deeply embedded in their mind that these cannot be challenged.

Similarly, people who are very rigid in their opinions may face problems in communicating effectively. For example, one of your fellow students may think that only students of science are good in reasoning; another might be of the opinion that young executives are more efficient than older ones. Such people fall into blocked categories, because they may not be able to accept any deviation from their points of view.

Categorical thinking

People who feel that they 'know it all' are called *pansophists*. This type of thinking exists in 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 has 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.

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'. Label your opinions with phrases like, 'it appears to me' or 'the evidence indicates'. If your data is insufficient, it is better to admit that you are unaware of the rest of the information rather than being indirect. To sum up, good communicators should:

- Be non-judgemental
- Be empathetic
- Not assume anything
- Stick to the subject
- Listen, and above all, paraphrase
- Remember that generalizations do not always hold good in all situations

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:

- Inefficient communication skills
- Negative aspect nurturing in the climate

The second point refers to a situation when negative tendencies nurtured by some people affect others around them. This leads to a barrier as individuals start thinking only negative.

Interpersonal barriers creep in as a result of the limitations in the communication skills of the encoder or the decoder, or of both. In addition, they may also occur because of some disturbance in the channel or medium of communication. If two people are involved in communication, the traits that distinguish them as individuals can be the root cause of a communication problem.

In a business environment, we neither attempt to change these traits, nor can we do it; however, we can try and understand the role of differences among individuals that lead to communication breakdowns. The most common reasons for interpersonal barriers are:

- Limited vocabulary
- Incompatibility (clash) of verbal and non-verbal messages
- Emotional outburst
- Communication selectivity
- Cultural variations
- Poor listening skills
- 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. On the other hand, if you have a varied and substantial vocabulary, you can create a favourable impression on your listeners.

Merely having a wide vocabulary is of no use unless the communicator knows how to use it. In communication, the denotative (literal or primary) and connotative (implied or suggested) meanings of the words used should be absolutely clear to the receiver. 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. Thereafter, using a wide vocabulary regularly will also help to make its usage comfortable and natural. Chapter 16 discusses vocabulary development in detail.

Incompatibility of verbal and non-verbal messages

Imagine a situation where your CEO introduces the newly recruited middle-level manager to the 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, the expression on his face 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. Misinterpreted non-verbal



'Did whatever I said in the last half hour make any sense to you?'

The first impression about people is most often made on the basis of their physical appearance, which significantly affects the quality of communication.

people initially formed worn-out appearance.

Guidelines to improve your appearance:

- Dress according to the occasion.
- Wear neat and clean clothes.
- Choose an appropriate hairstyle.
- Wear clean and polished shoes.

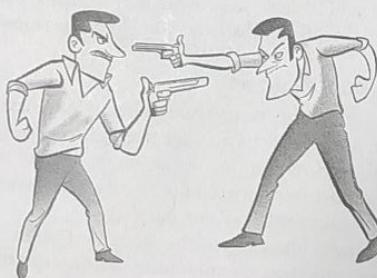
While interpretation of non-verbal cues requires keen observation, there are also pitfalls to guard against. For instance, there is great disparity in the use and interpretation of non-verbal messages across countries and cultures. For example, in Kenya, a mother-in-law and a son-in-law avoid eye contact. In fact they turn their backs to each other. In America, this would be a sign of disrespect.

In brief, your non-verbal cues should consistently match your verbal messages, adding to their effectiveness and enhancing your image as a competent and interesting communicator.

Emotional outburst

Imagine that you are the President of a well-established company. There are rumours floating amongst your employees that you have indulged in fraudulent activities. You are fully aware that these rumours are baseless. However, when you are asked to address the same employees, you are unable to put your point across, as you are flushed with anger. Despite the fact that you are a confident public speaker, your communication failed as you were overwhelmed by your emotions.

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. For example, extreme anger can create such an emotionally charged environment that a rational discussion becomes impossible. Likewise, prejudice, stereotyping, and



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boredom all hinder effective communication. Positive emotions such as, happiness and excitement, also interfere in communication, but to a much lesser extent than negative feelings.

Emotions are an integral part of our being, whether in business or in personal encounters. By sharpening self-awareness, intuition, and empathy, emotions can help in developing an environment that is highly conducive to good communication. Yet, situations often arise where people react negatively. Depending on their nature and the situation, this negative reaction may 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 reactions occur when the receiver of the message perceives some kind of threat. Both these responses have an extremely negative impact on the communication. Messages are misinterpreted, ignored, or overreacted to by people displaying such behaviour. Those who witness such behaviour are most likely to lower their opinion of such people.

It is important to maintain one's composure in all kinds of communication. Viewing issues from different perspectives helps develop objectivity and rational thinking, which in turn can eliminate many of the causes of hostility or defensiveness. When confronted with such negative behaviour, it is essential to avoid reacting. 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. In such a situation, the sender is not at fault. It is the receiver who breaks the flow of communication.

Take for example, a meeting held by the CEO of a company. She has called all her senior executives from various divisions—production, marketing, finance, human resource (HR), etc. During the meeting she discusses diverse topics. However, she may not be able to get the entire message across to each one of the participants, unless she gets their undivided attention. 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.

Communication selectivity may act as a barrier in written forms of communication as well. While reading any document, if you read only the parts you consider useful, you are posing this barrier.

Cultural variations

This is one of the predominant interpersonal factors contributing to communication failure. As businesses are crossing national boundaries to compete on a global scale, the outlook of the global and domestic workforce has changed drastically. European, Asian, and American firms have expanded their businesses worldwide to create international ties through partnership, collaborations, and affiliations. The management and employees of such 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.

This factor holds good in the area of education as well. You will prove to be a successful communicator abroad, during the course of your higher studies, if you take pains to understand

the culture of the educational campus in which you would be studying. 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

A common obstacle to communication is poor listening habits. 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. The various distractions that hinder listening can be emotional disturbances, indifference, aggression, and wandering attention.

Sometimes, an individual is so engrossed in his/her own thoughts and worries that he/she is unable to concentrate on listening. If a superior goes on shifting the papers on his/her desk while listening to his subordinate, without making eye contact with the latter, he/she pays divided attention to the speaker's message. This divided attention adversely affects the superior-subordinate relationship, besides distorting the communication. Chapter 4 discusses listening skills in detail.

Noise in the channel

As discussed earlier, noise interferes in the transmission of signals. 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. All these forms of noise communicate extraneous matter which may distract the receiver from the message, and even irritate him/her.

Technical or physical noise refers to the din 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. Disturbances in telephone lines, poorly designed acoustics of a room, dim typecripts, and illegible writing are some more examples of technical noise.

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.

In large organizations where the flow of information is downward, feedback is not guaranteed. Organizations with a flat structure usually tend to have an intricately-knit 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.

Most large companies are realizing that a rigid, hierarchical structure usually restricts the flow of communication. This is because there are numerous transfer points for communication to flow in these hierarchical systems, and each of these points has the potential to distort, delay, or lose the message. To obviate this, there should be direct contact between the sender and the receiver with minimum transfer stations. If the message is presented orally, this further reduces the dependence on transfer stations.

The main organizational barriers are as follows:

- Too many transfer stations
- Fear of superiors
- Negative tendencies
- Use of inappropriate media
- 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. Now, there are four people involved in this communication channel. Let us see how the message gets distorted as a result of the increased number of transfer stations:

Professor: X was supposed to meet me today regarding the submission of an assignment on Magnetic Theory. But I want X to meet me on Friday, as I am going out of station tomorrow.

You (to your friend Y): Ask X to meet the professor tomorrow, regarding the assignment, as the professor is going out of station today.

Your friend Y (to X): X, you have to meet the professor today as he will not be available tomorrow.

This is an example of how messages get distorted in huge organizations with several layers of communication channels. The message gets distorted at each level not only because of poor listening or lack of concentration, but also because of several other reasons. Some employees may filter out the parts of the message they consider unimportant. Whatever the reasons for filtering or distorting the message, having too many transfer stations is always an obstacle to effective communication and should be avoided. Transfer stations do serve a purpose, but having too many of them is counter-productive.

Fear of superiors

In rigidly structured organizations, fear or awe of superiors prevents subordinates from speaking frankly. An employee may not be pleased with the way his/her boss extracts work from him/her but is unable to put his/her point across because of fear of losing the boss's goodwill. 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 goodwill of a communicator.

To avoid speaking directly to their boss, some employees may shun all communication with their superiors. At the other extreme, they may present all the information they have. This is because they feel that they will be viewed in an unfavourable light by leaving out some vital information. In written communication, this results in bulky reports, where essential information is clubbed with unimportant details. Such unfocussed messages result in a lot of wasted time. 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, or solutions to come forth from their subordinates.

Negative tendencies

Many organizations create work groups. While some groups are formed according to the requirements of the task at hand, such as accomplishing a particular project, many other small groups are also formed for recreational, social, or community purposes. These groups may be formal

In organizations with many levels of communication, messages have a greater chance of being distorted. This occurs due to poor listening, lack of concentration, or a person's tendency to leave out part of the message.

or informal, and generally consist of people who share similar values, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, and behaviours. Nevertheless, on some occasions, a communication barrier can exist due to a conflict of ideas between the members and non-members of a group.

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. While deciding upon the medium, the following factors should be considered:

- Time
- Cost
- Type of message
- Intended audience

The telephone, for instance, would not be an ideal medium for conveying confidential information. Such messages are best conveyed in person or, if the receiver is located in another office, by private chat messenger. Printed letters, which provide permanence, are preferable for information which requires to be stored for future reference. 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. Under these circumstances, further communication is simply not possible. Very often, vital, relevant information gets mixed

up with too many irrelevant details, and is therefore ignored by the receiver. Thus, the quality of 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.

Bearing in mind all these possibilities and reasons for communication failure, one can take pre-emptive measures to avoid these barriers.





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.

SUMMARY

Communication fails because often the message sent is not always the message received. Various interruptions or barriers prevent the proper passage of information from sender to receiver. This failure can be attributed to various types of 'noise', which could exist either at the source, in the channel, or at the receiver.

If a speaker does not see the desired response from the audience, he/she must identify the problem, find the cause or barrier, work on alternative solutions, select the best solution, and follow up rigorously to ensure that this barrier does not come up again.

Barriers to communication are classified as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organizational. Intra-personal barriers occur because of individual

attributes, such as wrong assumptions, varied perceptions, differing backgrounds, wrong inferences, blocked categories, and categorical thinking. Interpersonal barriers occur due to inappropriate transactions of verbal and non-verbal messages between two or more people. The different barriers are limited vocabulary, incompatibility, or clash of verbal and non-verbal messages, emotional outburst, communication selectivity, cultural variations, poor listening skills, and noise in the channel.

Organizational barriers stem from organizational attributes such as too many transfer stations, fear of superiors, negative tendencies, use of inappropriate media, media, and information overload. Once we know the reasons for failure of communication, we should take pre-emptive measures to overcome it.

EXERCISES

1. Identify the communication barrier that describes each of the following situations:
 - (a) 'Every time I have a meeting with Mr Gupta, I end up disagreeing with him about a particular issue.'
 - (b) *Manager:* 'Reeta, where is the report that I asked you to submit on the financial matters of the company?'
Reeta: 'I do not remember you asking me to submit a report.'
 - (c) *Teacher:* 'Students, why have you not submitted the report within the fortnight?'
Students: 'But you asked us to submit it bimonthly!'
- (d) 'This room is horrible to work in. I am able to hear everyone around, and there is no scope for privacy.'
- (e) 'It is quite tedious to manually work on the students' records, but I fear using the computer as it might corrupt all our data.'
- (f) 'Why every time I get a meeting with John, I usually end up showing my disinterest with him about a particular topic?'
- (g) 'If you want some more information from me, ask only the specific questions and do not waste my precious time!'
2. Identify and explain a communication barrier which may hinder each of the process compo-