

## **Barriers to Communication:**

Many people think that communicating is easy. It is, after all, something we've done all our lives. There is some truth in this simplistic view. Communicating is straightforward. What makes it complex, difficult, and frustrating are the barriers we put / that come in the way. When communication doesn't happen, conflict often does.

There are Six Barriers to Communication:

1. Physical Barriers
2. Cultural Barriers
3. Interpersonal Barriers
4. Perceptual Barriers
5. Emotional Barriers
6. Language Barriers

## 1. Physical Barriers:

Physical barriers are the environmental and natural conditions that act as a barrier in communication in sending message from sender to receiver. Organizational environment or interior workspace design problems, technological problems and noise are the parts of physical barriers.

Physical barriers (in the workplace) include:

- Marked out territories, empires and fiefdoms into which strangers/others are not allowed
- Closed office doors, barrier screens, and separate areas for people of different status and designation.
- Large working areas or working in one unit that is physically separate from others

As one of the most important factors in building cohesive teams is proximity, being close to others aids communication because it helps people get to know one another.

Example: Mr. Rahim Qazi sits in the second floor of the building whereas his entire team sits in the third floor of the office and as a result his communication is limited to the entire team. This is an example of Physical barrier.

## 2. Cultural Barriers:

Cultural diversity makes communication difficult as the mindset of people of different cultures are different, the language, signs and symbols are also different. Different cultures have different meaning of words, behaviors and gestures. Culture also gives rise to prejudices, ethnocentrism, manners and opinions.

Example: Americans prefer to be called by their first name irrespective of their age and designation, whereas Indians (may) have some reservations for the same. This is a classic example of Cultural Barrier.

### 3. Interpersonal Barriers:

Interpersonal communication is the process by which people exchange information, feelings, and meaning through verbal and non-verbal messages: it is face-to-face communication. Poor self-esteem, social anxiety, and other issues can make it difficult for people to feel comfortable opening up to others, which hurts their ability to communicate feelings accurately to others as well as their ability to interpret others. You might experience these struggles in the following ways:

Lack of participation: It's impossible to communicate with someone who doesn't want to. People can appear unwilling to communicate when they don't speak up when they should, dodge direct questions, or use defensive body language.

Lack of open-mindedness: It's tough to communicate with someone who refuses to explore different points of view, opinions, or ideas about the world. We must be able to get along with people of different viewpoints to function even at a basic level with other people.

Example: Niharika is the part of the weekly sales meeting in her office but because of her unwillingness to participate in the meeting, she barely spoke and gave her inputs in the meeting. This is an example of Interpersonal barrier to communication.

#### 4. Perceptual Barriers:

Perceptual barriers are internal barriers to communication. If you go into a situation thinking that the person you are talking to isn't going to understand or be interested in what you have to say, you may end up subconsciously sabotaging your effort to make your point.

- **Perceptual Filters** - We all have our own preferences, values, attitudes, origins and life experiences that act as "filters" on our experiences of people, events and information. Seeing things through the lens of our own unique life experiences or "conditioning" may lead to assumptions, stereotyping and misunderstandings of others whose experiences differ from our own.
- **Triggers and Cues** - What we say is affected by how we say it (tone, volume) and by our nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial gestures. For example, you may perceive a situation differently if the person you are speaking with is smiling or frowning, has body odour and is standing too close or is not giving you direct eye contact.

Example: Rajveer has relocated to New Delhi for new job but as his past experiences in New Delhi were not good, he has stereotyped views on Delhi and natives of Delhi thereby limiting his social circle and interaction with the people around him. This is an example of perceptual barrier.

## 5. Emotional Barriers:

One of the chief barriers to open and free communications is emotional. The emotional barrier is comprised mainly of fear, mistrust and suspicion. The roots of our emotional mistrust of others lie in our childhood and infancy when we were taught to be careful about what we said to others.

*"Mind your P's and Q's."*

*"Don't speak until you're spoken to."*

*"Children should be seen and not heard."*

As a result, many people hold back from communicating their thoughts and feelings to others. They feel vulnerable. While some caution may be wise, excessive fear of what others might think stunts our development as effective communicators and our ability to form meaningful relationships.

Example: Riya has joined a new team in her where all the team members are elder to her. This makes Riya uncomfortable to disagree with anyone in her team as he is not able to put forth her views and make any submission in any meeting. This is an example of Emotional barrier to communication.

## 6. Language Barriers:

Our language may present barriers to others who are not familiar with our expressions, buzz-words and jargon. When we couch our communication in such language, it excludes others. Understanding this is key to developing good public speaking skills and report writing skills.

In a global marketplace, the greatest compliment we can pay another person is to talk to them in their own language.

Example: One of the more chilling memories of the Cold War was the threat by the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev who said to the Americans at the United Nations:

*"We will bury you!"*

This was taken to mean a threat of nuclear annihilation.

However, a more accurate reading of Khrushchev's words would have been:

*"We will overtake you!"*

By this, he meant economic superiority. It was not just the language used that was the problem.

The fear and suspicion that the West had of the Soviet Union led to the more alarmist and sinister interpretation.