Types of Barriers to Communication

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Everything you need about the types of barriers to communication. Communication barriers are the factors that obstruct the effectiveness of communication.

They result in mismatch between understanding of the message by the sender and the receiver. These barriers can occur at any stage of the communication process—sending, encoding, transmission, decoding or receiving.

The barriers to communication can be grouped under:- 1. External Barriers 2. Organisational Barriers 3. Personal Barriers.

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It may be further sub-divided into:- 1. Technical Barriers 2. Language Barriers 3. Psychological Barriers 3. Semantic Barriers 4. Emotional or Psychological Barriers 5. Barriers in Superiors 6. Barriers in Subordinates 7. Mechanical Barriers 8. Physical Barriers 9. Inter-Personal Barriers 10. Cross-Cultural Barriers.

Some of the technical barriers to communication are:- 1. Timing 2. Information Overload 3. Information Gaps 4. Cultural Differences 5. Faulty Planning 6. Focus 7. Distance 8. Red Tape.

Some the language barriers to communication are:- 1. Semantics 2. Poor Messages 3. Inconsistency in Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication 4. Individual Linguistic Ability.

Some of the psychological barriers to communication are the following:- 1. Filtering 2. Assumptions 3. Degree of Trust and Openness 4. Fear 5. Emotions 6. Perception 7. Noise 8. Poor Listening 9. Poor Retention 10. Resistance to Change 11. Closeness of Mind 12. Attitudinal Barriers.

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The semantic barriers to communication includes:- 1. Badly Expressed Message 2. Faulty Translations 3. Specialist’s Language 4. Words/Symbols with Different Meaning 5. Unclarified Assumptions 6. Technical Jargon 7. Body Language and Gesture Decoding.

Few emotional or psychological barriers to communication are:- 1. Premature Evaluation 2. Inattention 3. Undue Reliance on the Written Word 4. Distrust of Communicator 5. Failure to Communicate.

The organizational barriers to communication are:- 1. Organizational Policy 2. Organizational Rules and Regulations 3. Status Relationships 4. Complexity in Organization Structure 5. Organizational Facilities.

Personal barriers to communication are:- 1. Attitude of Superiors 2. Fear of Challenge to Authority 3. Insistence on Proper Channel 4. Lack of Confidence in Subordinates 5. Ignoring Communication 6. Lack of Awareness 7. Unwillingness to Communicate 8. Lack of Proper Incentive.

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Other barriers to communication are:- 1. Inadequate Policies, Rules and Procedures 2. Status Patterns 3. Lack of Attention 4. Quick Conclusion 5. Lack of Confidence over the Communicator 6. Improper State of Mind 7. Lack of Time 8. Technical Language.

Barriers to Communication in an Organisation

Types of Barriers to Communication – Technical, Language and Psychological Barriers

Communication barriers are the factors that obstruct the effectiveness of communication. They result in mismatch between understanding of the message by the sender and the receiver. These barriers can occur at any stage of the communication process—sending, encoding, transmission, decoding or receiving.

The sender may not be audible to the audience, he may not properly convert the message into signals, the choice of channel may be faulty (lengthy messages transmitted orally are likely to be forgotten by the receiver), receiver’s understanding of codes or symbols may be different from that of the sender or the receiver may not be in a mood to listen to the message. The point at which communication barriers occurs must be identified so that remedial action can be taken at the earliest.

The types of communication barriers are:

1. Technical Barriers:

Technical barriers refer to the physical, social and informational environment in which the message is transmitted.

Some of the important technical barriers are as follows:

i. Timing:

Timely transmission of information is important if senders want receivers to obey their instructions. Factories where work is done in shifts, workers leaving one shift must communicate with the workers joining the next shift. If workers of night shift report for duty after the workers of afternoon shift have left, important messages may be left out from being communicated, affecting the productivity.

ii. Information Overload:

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It refers to excessive transmission of information. Much more information than what the receiver can process is transmitted to him. The receiver cannot understand, analyze and act upon information overload beyond his mental capacity.

It results in various problems:

(a) Receivers may not act upon part of the information, which may be an important one.

(b) They may make errors in processing excessive information.

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(c) If they want to be accurate, they may delay the processing of information.

iii. Information Gaps:

Complete information is not transmitted from one level to the other. Part of the information is retained at some levels and the gap is filled by some unintended information. Messages conveyed are different from those received. Information gap is as bad as information overload.

iv. Cultural Differences:

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Cultural differences occur when managers work with people of different cultures. Culture represents a national barrier that is particularly important for organisations involved in overseas business. Culture refers to values, beliefs, norms, attitudes and perceptions of people of different nations (India, America, Japan etc.) or regions (different regions in India).

When managers deal with employees of different nations (in multinational co-operations), they should regard cultural values or beliefs; otherwise, they may not be able to convey what they really want to. For example, in India white is a colour of mourning while in western countries, it is black. Symbols, words, colours, gestures, language should be carefully selected when senders of information deal with people of different nations or regions.

v. Faulty Planning:

Communication must be planned. Choice of words, their organisation into sentences and paragraphs, selection of channel, mode and timing of presentation should be planned before transmitting the message. Presentation is important to help understanding. Presenting production, sales and profit figures verbally without using graphs, tables and charts is poor communication.

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vi. Focus:

Sometimes the focus is more on presentation than the product. Usually in advertisement campaigns, viewers lose sight of the product but remember the visuals, sound and light effects of the advertisement. The actual purpose of advertisement is defeated. There should be focus on the message, not the messenger.

vii. Distance:

Long distances between the senders and receivers can obstruct effective communication. If sender and receiver are separated by geographical distances, telecommunication is most often resorted to. Disturbance in telephone connection can result in miscommunication or incomplete communication.

viii. Physical Barriers:

These barriers occur due to the nature of environment. It is a natural barrier which exists if staff are located in different buildings or different sites.

Likewise, poor or outdated equipment, particularly the failure of management to introduce new technology may also cause problems. Staff shortage is another factor which frequently causes communication problems for the organisation.

Distractions like background noise, poor lighting, too hot or too cold environment can affect concentration and interfere with effective communication.

ix. System Design Faults:

It refers to problems with the structures or systems in the organisation. Unclear organization structure makes it confusing to know whom to communicate with. Staff will not know what is expected of them, if there is inefficient or inappropriate information system, lack of supervision or training, lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities.

x. Red Tape:

If messages pass through many people before reaching the recipient, it makes the process lengthy and the messages may change also. Actions can be delayed as a result of late transmission of the message.

2. Language Barriers:

Language barriers relate to use of words, jargons and language that are interpreted differently by senders and receivers. The same statement may carry different meanings for different people. This affects the process of effective communication.

Some of the common language barriers are as follows:

i. Semantics:

Semantics is the study of words and their meanings. Problems arising on account of transmission of meanings are semantic problems. Different words mean different things to different people. Around 500 words in English language have about 25 definitions each. It is natural, therefore, that they are interpreted differently.

If the word means the same to the sender and receiver, communication will be complete and effective, otherwise, communication breakdown is likely to occur. The word ‘profit’ for example, has different interpretations. It can mean pre-tax profits, fixed amount of profit, post-tax profits or a rate of return. Choice of words and their interpretation is, therefore, important to make communication effective.

ii. Poor Messages:

Clear ideas but wrongly chosen words and sentences are as bad as poor ideas. Wrong words and sentences can lead to misinterpretation of messages. Poorly explained or misunderstood messages can result in confusion. Words, sentences and paragraphs should be well connected to convey the right meaning.

iii. Inconsistency in Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication:

Though verbal communication is a powerful medium of communication, non-verbal or gestural communication is equally effective in conveying the right message. Not only should our language be clear, our facial expressions, gestures, body movements, appearance etc. must also correspond to the language. A manager who says ‘good morning’ to subordinates without eye contact will not be very popular amongst them.

iv. Individual Linguistic Ability:

Use of difficult or inappropriate words in communication can prevent people from understanding the message. The sender of information may use difficult words in his message which receivers cannot understand. This will result in wrong interpretation of the message. Saying ‘hostile instead of belligerent’ or ‘harmless instead of innocuous’ will result in better communication. The sender should use simple words and language which can be understood by the receiver.

3. Psychological Barriers:

Psychological barriers are the major source of communication breakdown. Psychological factors represent people’s state of mind. We all are receptive to information when we are happy. If, however, we have personal problems, this affects communication.

Some of the common psychological barriers are as follows:

i. Filtering:

Filtering means manipulating information in a way that only favourable information is sent to the receiver. In business organisations, when messages are transmitted vertically along the chain of command, some part of information normally gets lost on the way. In upward communication, subordinates tend to pass information likely to be followed by rewards. Information about their failures and non-achievements is not sent upwards. Filtering is a common barrier when organizational hierarchy has large number of levels.

ii. Assumptions:

Communication based on assumptions is bad communication. If workers presume that managers will pay them financial rewards if they work overtime, they are wrong unless there is clear indication by the management in this regard. Nothing should be stated as presumed while transmitting official information.

iii. Degree of Trust and Openness:

Worth of the message depends upon worth of the sender. A manager perceived by his subordinates as knowledgeable, trustworthy, sincere, concerned about welfare of others, fair in taking decisions and open minded, will be rated high by them. Employees will carry out his directions sincerely. If, however, they do not trust or have a biased opinion about the sender, they will ignore or misinterpret the message.

iv. Fear:

Communication in the environment of threat, fear, punishment and penalties is a barrier to effective communication. There should be positive motivation for receivers to carry out sender’s directions.

v. Emotions:

Emotions—feeling of love, threat, compassion, anger, jealousy, embarrassment, etc. largely affect senders and receiver’s encoding and decoding of the message. Emotions are important and communicators must understand them to avoid communication breakdowns. For instance, when the sender is happy, his encoding of message will be different from that when he is depressed.

Receiver’s emotions also affect understanding of his message. A message in angry mood is interpreted differently from that in happy mood. Calm and composed emotions help in effective communication. If the boss had controversy with his wife at home, he may lose temper on subordinates even if the subordinates are right. This will result in poor communication.

vi. Perception:

Perception is individuals’ feeling, knowledge and understanding of the subject-matter conveyed. People with different cultural, educational and emotional backgrounds understand the message differently. People tend to hear or see what they want to hear or see and, therefore, perceive the message in their own way. If sender’s perception is different from that of the receiver, it will make the message misleading and communication process ineffective. In perception distortions, meaning of the message lies in the perception of the receiver than the words.

vii. Noise:

Noise is the disturbing element that obstructs free flow of information. It is “interference that occurs in a signal and prevents you from hearing sounds properly.” Communication is generally not noise-free. Noise filters or screens out information during its transmission. Physical noise (disturbance in telephone line, sounds of machine, and loudspeakers in a nearby locality) and psychological noise (mental disturbance or unrest) make oral communication ineffective. It distracts sender’s and receiver’s concentration to communicate effectively.

Though noise cannot be eliminated, it should be minimized so that communication does not turn into miscommunication.

viii. Poor Listening:

Listening is different from hearing. We do not listen when we are preoccupied with other thoughts and engagements. When a speaker is speaking on the subject we are not interested in, we sit and hear but do not pay much attention to what he is saying. Much of what he says goes above our heads, that is, we do not listen. Unless we listen and not just hear, communication will not be effective.

ix. Poor Retention:

Human mind cannot retain all that is communicated to him orally. He tends to forget part of the information because of his limited retention capacity. It is, therefore, advisable to make the receiver repeat the message and also use more than one channel to communicate the same information. Sending reminders can overcome the problems of poor retention.

x. Resistance to Change:

Organisations operate in the changing, dynamic environment. When managers introduce change in people, technology or structure and announce it to organizational members, it may involve change in their social or emotional set up and, therefore, they may be resistant to change. Resistance to change generally results in miscommunication because people do not want to carry out the orders as directed by the sender.

xi. Closeness of Mind:

Some people are not open to new ideas, persuasion and suggestions. They prefer to work along pre-defined courses of action and are not willing to listen to others. On being offered suggestions, they may react negatively, “I know how to do my work. I’m experienced enough in this trade. Don’t give me suggestions.” Closeness of mind may reject useful and lucrative suggestions. It acts as a barrier to communication.

xii. Attitudinal Barriers:

These barriers arise because of problems with staff in the organisation. They may be the result of factors such as poor management, lack of consultation with employees, personality conflicts that can result in people delaying or refusing to communicate. The personal attitudes of individual employees may be due to lack of motivation or dissatisfaction at work, brought about by insufficient training to enable them to carry out particular tasks or just resistance to change due to entrenched attitudes and ideas.

Types of Barriers to Communication – External, Organizational and Personal Barriers

The various inadequacies that can be identified through communication evaluation are required to be analyzed in terms of various factors obstructions and barriers—that impede flow communication. Any managerial action in this regard can be effective only when it strikes at the very root of the factors that lie at the very root of the problem. From this viewpoint, identification of different factors is necessary.

There might be a number of such barriers impeding the flow of communication in the organization. These may be classified as – (i) external (ii) organizational, and (iii) personal factors. However, such a classification does not suggest that these are mutually exclusive. Rather, such a classification is helpful in understanding the nature of communication barriers.

1. External Barriers:

Barriers to communication may be either external to the parties involved or they might be internal to them. External barriers may affect communication in any context, whether organizational or otherwise.

Such external barriers may be in the following forms:

i. Semantic Barriers:

Semantic barriers are obstructions causes in the process of receiving or understanding of the message during the process on encoding and decoding ideas and words. These barriers arise from the linguistic capacity of the parties involved. Words are the principal communication instrument but a common difficulty with the words is that each word has several meanings.

For example, in English language, the word ’round’ has seventy-five meanings. The Oxford Dictionary records an average of twenty-eight separate meanings for each of the 500 most used words in the English language. Similar is the position in other languages. Thus, words sometimes fail to convey real meanings.

Moreover, they work as barriers in communication in the following manner:

(a) Badly Expressed Message:

Lack of clarity and precision in a message makes it badly expressed. Poorly chosen and empty words and phrases, careless omission, lack of coherence, bad organization of ideas, awkward sentence structure, inadequate vocabulary, platitudes, numbering repetition jargon, and failure to clarify implications are some common faults found in this case.

(b) Faulty Translations:

Every manager receives various types of communications from superiors, peers, subordinates and he must translate information destined for subordinates, peers and superiors into language suitable to each. Hence, the message has to be put into words appropriate to the framework in which the receiver operates, or it must be accompanied by an interpretation, which will be understood by the receiver.

This needs a high level of linguistic capacity. Approximate understanding of words and the consequent faulty translations lead to impaired efficiency and heavy costs.

(c) Unqualified Assumptions:

There are certain un-communicated assumptions, which underlie practically all messages. Though a message appears to be specific, it underlying assumptions may not be clear to the receiver.

(d) Specialist’s Language:

It is often found that technical personal and special groups tend to develop a special, peculiar and technical language of their own. This increases their isolation from others and builds a communication barrier. Whatever be the intention of this special language, it hinders their communication with persons not in their speciality, because of the receiver’s ignorance of that type of language.

ii. Emotional or Psychological Barriers:

Emotional or psychological factors are the prime barriers in interpersonal communication. The meaning ascribed to a message depends upon the emotional or psychological status of both the parties involved. In a communication, apart from the message, there is a meta-message, that is, what one gets out of a message when decoding.

Meta-message, the emotions of the receiver play a vital role and he may not be at a wavelength as that of the communicator. Keith Davis opines that these “exist in the people’s minds or because of their actions, such as being hard to contact or difficult to understand. These barriers to communication are just at effective as an actual physical wall. Often these human barriers are more like filter paper then a brick wall.

They let through some communications, but hold back others, thereby making communication inadequate….This ‘half-way’ communication gets ‘half-way’ results”.

Following are some emotional barriers:

(a) Premature Evaluation:

Rogers and Roethlisberger in 1952, first pointed out this barrier. Premature evaluation is the tendency of prematurely evaluating communications, rather than to keep an uncompromised position during the interchange. Such evaluation stops the transfer of information and begets in the sender a sense of futility.

This barrier can be remedied by ’empathy’, non-evaluative listening, where the communication is listened to in a non-committal and unprejudiced way, so that sagacious decision and action can follow.

(b) Inattention:

The preoccupied mind of a receiver and the resultant non-listening is one of the major chronic psychological barriers. It is a common phenomenon that people simply fail to react to bulletins, notices, minutes and reports.

(c) Loss by Transmission and Poor Retention:

When communication passes through various levels in the organization, successive transmissions of the same message are decreasingly accurate. It is said that in case of oral communications about 30 per cent of the information is lost in each transmission.

Even in case of written communication, loss of meaning might occur as far as the appended interpretation, if any, is concerned. Poor retention of the information is again a malady. It is shown that employees retain about 50 per cent of information only, whereas supervisors retain about 60 per cent of it.

(d) Undue Reliance on the Written Word:

Written word is no substitute for sound face-to-face relationships and that employees cannot be persuaded to accept companies’ viewpoint and policies through ‘slick’, easy to read, will-illustrated publications, unless there is a fair degree of mutual trust and confidence between the organization and its employees. Further, a written communication might fail to explain the purpose of order, procedure or directive.

Chester Barnard has laid down that a communication must appeal to the receiver as consonant with the organization’s purpose and with his own personal interest. Written communication often tells what is to be done, but not why it should be done, and it lacks the persuasive quality. Moreover, a written communication can be above the level of readership, and failure to ascertain the response to communication is also there. Hence, written media must be considered as supplementary to productive face-to-face relationships.

(e) Distrust of Communicator:

It arises out of ill-considered judgements or illogical decisions or frequent countermanding of the original communication by the communicator. Repeated experience of this kind gradually conditions the receiver to delay action or act unenthusiastically, hence making the communication unsuccessful, though apparently it is complete.

(f) Failure to Communicate:

It is quite accepted fact that managers often fail to transmit the needed messages. This might be because of laziness on the part of the communicator, or assuming that ‘everybody knows’, or procrastination or ‘hogging’ information or deliberately to embarrass.

2. Organizational Barriers:

An organization being a deliberate creation for the attainment of certain specified objectives, day- to-day happenings within it required being regulated in such a manner that they contribute to attain these objectives in the most efficient manner.

This is usually attempted through a variety of official measures such as designing the organizational arrangements for performance of various activities, prescribing of various policies, rules, regulations and procedures, laying down of norms of behaviour, instituting a reward-and-punishment system, etc. All the inner processes, including communication in different directions, are markedly affected by these prescriptions.

As such major organizational barriers may be as follows:

(i) Organizational Policy:

The general organizational policy regarding communication acts as an overall guideline to everyone in the organization regarding how he is normally expected to behave in this matter. The policy might be in the form of explicit declaration in writing, or as is very commonly the case, it has to be interpreted from the behaviour of organization members, particularly people at the top. If this policy is not supportive to the flow of communication in different directions, communication flow would not be smooth and adequate.

(ii) Organizational Rules and Regulations:

Organizational rules and regulations affect the flow of communication by prescribing the subject-matter to the communicated and also the channel through which these are to be communicated. The rules may restrict the flow of certain messages and may leave many important ones.

On the other hand, communication through proper channel in a specified way prescribed by these rules delays it and works against the willingness of persons to convey the message. This barrier is strongly operative in Indian public sector enterprises where observance of rules and regulations is more rigid.

(iii) Status Relationships:

The placing of people in superior subordinate capacity in the formal organization structure also blocks the flow of communication and more particularly in upward direction. Greater the difference between hierarchical positions in terms of their status, greater would be the possibility of communication breakdown.

(iv) Complexity in Organization Structure:

In an organization where there are a number of managerial levels, communication gets delayed, chances of communication getting distorted are more and the number of filtering points is more. This is more true in case of upward communication, because people generally do not like to pass up the adverse criticism either or themselves or of their superiors.

(v) Organizational Facilities:

Organizational facilities provided for smooth, adequate, clear and timely flow of communication may take a number of forms. If these are not properly emphasized generally people fail to make effective communication.

3. Personal Barriers:

While the organizational factors discussed above are, no doubt, important influences operating on communication, a host of factors internal to the two parties-senders and receiver-to this process also exert important influences on its operation, as communication is basically an inter­personal process. Here, for the sake of convenience in the analysis, these barriers have been analyzed separately and these are relevant in the case of downward and upward communication.

i. Barriers in Superiors:

The role of superiors in communication is very vital. Because of their hierarchical relationships with subordinates, they act as barriers in a number of ways discussed below-

(a) Attitude of Superiors:

The attitudes of superiors towards communication in general or in any particular direction affect the flow of messages in different directions. For example- if this attitude in unfavourable, there is a greater possibility that messages would not flow adequately from and/or to superiors.

(b) Fear of Challenge to Authority:

A person in the organization always tries to get a higher position and prestige to satisfy his needs. As such, managers in general try to withhold the information coming down the line or going up as frequent passing of information may disclose their weakness.

(c) Insistence on Proper Channel:

One of the basic features of superiors exercising of the authority is that they wish to remain in communication links and they do not like any type of bypassing in communication. Communication through bypassing may, sometimes, be necessary but superiors treat this as the waiting of their authority and blocks the flow of communication.

(d) Lack of Confidence in Subordinates:

Superiors generally perceive, correct or otherwise, that their subordinates are less competent and capable, they are not able to advise superiors or they may not have some information coming downwards.

(e) Ignoring Communication:

Sometimes superiors consciously and deliberately ignore the communication from their subordinates to maintain their importance. This works against the willingness of subordinates to communicate.

(f) Lack of Time:

Superiors feel, whether correct or otherwise, that they are overburdened with the work and they have time to talk to their subordinates.

(g) Lack of Awareness:

Sometimes, superiors may lack the awareness about the significance and usefulness of communication in different directions in general or of particular subject matter. In such a case, communication flow is blocked.

ii. Barriers in Subordinates:

Vertical communication in either direction can take place only when subordinates also actively participate in this process. There are various factors in the subordinates that adversely affect such active participation on their part.

Some factors, which have been traced in the case of superiors, are also applicable have such as attitude, time availability, awareness about the significance, etc., two factors are more important in the case of subordinates and these are responsible for blocking communication in upward direction.

(a) Unwillingness to Communicate:

Sometimes, subordinates do not communicate upwards certain information because they are not willing to do so. Thus, if a subordinate feels that he is likely to be adversely affected by a particular piece of information to his superior, he would not be willing to supply it. Information going up is utilized for control purposes and subordinates would not be willing to give any information to their superiors about any unfavourable happening and if its supplication is necessary they would modify the information in such a way so as to protect their own interest.

(b) Lack of Proper Incentive:

Lack of motivation to communicate also refrains subordinates to communicate upwards. The reward and punishment system of the organization is more responsible for this. Thus, if a novel suggestion by a subordinate does not evoke any attention from the organization, he would not convey it.

Types of Barriers to Communication – Physical, Personal, Status Relationships, Perfunctorily Attention, Semantic, Premature Evaluation and Other Reasons

Limitations or causes of breakdown of communication channels are called barriers to communication. Communication is not always as effective as it should be. Some people do not communicate because they do not attach any importance to communication. They are very secretive and do not believe in any type of exchange of information.

Barriers between people do not screen out all communication rather they operate like filter to permit some communications but hold back others, thereby, making communication inadequate and incomplete. Communication may be vague and badly expressed. They may suffer from lack of clarity or poor retention. Translation or Transmission of messages received may be wrong. Words may fail to communicate the intended meaning.

In oral communication about 30% of the message is lost with every successive communication. Non-listening of the communication is a chronic problem. Large number of communications does not receive the attention they deserve. Telling and listening to a selective group of people, i.e., filtering is an important problem in communication. Sometimes messages are not communicated because it is felt that everybody knows about it.

Communication is impeded by various types of barriers such as:

1. Physical Barriers:

Physical Barriers are environmental factors that present or reduce the sending and receiving of communication. They include distance destructive noises and similar other interferences.

2. Personal Barriers:

They arise from judgment, emotions and social value of people causing psychological distance between people similar to physical distance. People sometimes are guided by their attitudes and prejudices while interpreting words. Psychological distance may entirely prevent the communication to filter out or simply cause interruption.

3. Status Relationships:

In the formal organisation structure, superior subordinate relationship may cause obstacle to clear understanding. A manager may not communicate to his subordinates his weaknesses or the subordinates may communicate to their superiors only those things which they expect would be appreciated by the latter.

4. Perfunctorily Attention:

Busy people sometimes fail to understand clearly some of the incoming information from the subordinates which they had never expected. They pay maximum attention to those communications only which they would have expected to listen or which does not come in clash with their personal goals. Sometimes communication breakdown is caused by the credibility gap, i.e., the amount of difference between what one says and what one does.

5. Semantic Barriers:

Semantic barriers arise from the limitations of the symbolic system itself. The different words such as efficiency, productivity workers’ participation, employees’ welfare are differently understood by different people. Sometimes, a person distorts communication intentionally, but many a times, they understand it according to their own concepts, expectations and from of references.

Symbols usually have a variety of meanings and to choose one from them and to draw inferences is an essential part of communication. As inference can give wrong signals, awareness to them and their appraisal is necessary.

6. Premature Evaluation:

On several occasions, managers start evaluating the information before reaching proper understanding. Decision is taken before knowing the full facts. Such a premature evaluation tends to inhibit free flow of information and understanding and distorts communication.

7. Other Reasons:

Communication may also be distorted on account of a number of reasons. It may be unnecessarily delayed to miss a profitable business opportunity. Persons desiring to resist changes may causes distortion in those communications which seek to introduce new changes.

Lack of mutual trust and faith between two classes of people may lead to distorted understanding of the communication by the one at the cost of the other. Lack of time and pressure of work may also be barriers to free flow of information.

Types of Barriers to Communication – 8 Types of Barriers that Stand in the Way of Effective Communication

Communication barriers refer to the obstacles or problems that stand in the way of effective communication.

These communication barriers are generally of the following types:

Type # 1. Organisational Barrier:

If the organisational structure is complex, involving layers of supervision, long communication lines, the distance between the workers and the top management increases. Communication, therefore, often breaks down.

Type # 2. Status Barrier:

Status, which refers to the relative ranking of a person in an organisation, is a serious obstacle in organisational communication. Some individuals have higher status than others. Persons of higher status do not talk freely with those of lower status. Subordinates at lower levels do not feel free to talk to superiors. They pass on only what superiors would like to listen and hold back unpleasant facts. Selectivity thus becomes a rule in organisational communication giving rise to a strong communication barrier.

Type # 3. Semantic Barrier:

In the communication process, the receiver is expected to understand the message in the same way as the sender. Words and symbols used in communication process may mean differently to different persons. For example, profits may mean one thing to a manager and quite another to a worker. People understand the same message in different ways depending on their social and cultural backgrounds, education and experience.

Type # 4. Lack of Concentration:

When the receiver does not pay full attention to a message, because of being overburdened with other important issues, in such situations, the very purpose of the sender, in making a communication is defeated.

Type # 5. Perceptual Barrier:

Perception means the way one notices things. Many recipients have their own perceptions and interpret messages in their own ways of thinking and to their own advantages. Thus, perception leads to filtering of the message unconsciously.

Type # 6. Information Overload:

Managers are flooded with information’s from different sources. They may not always be able to regulate the flow of information. Effectiveness of communication will be reduced if managers allow themselves to be inundated with information. They may ignore or misinterpret some of the important messages. Time factor may also create communication problems. In the process of expanding matter, some people may get incomplete information.

Type # 7. Premature Evaluation:

Communication is hampered when the receiver makes judgement about the worth of the message prior to receiving the entire communication. Such judgement may be based on the past experience of the receiver. A manager may pay little attention to a memorandum from the union leader because “he is always up against something.”

Type # 8. Mechanical Barriers:

The flow of communication is also affected by mechanical barriers, inadequate provisions made for transmitting messages, poor organisational layout, defective communication network and media etc. under the communication system.

Types of Barriers to Communication – 15 Barriers as given below

There may be filtering or distortion of information while it is being communicated. If such a thing happens, the object of communication will not be achieved.

The barriers to communication or problems of communication are given below:

1. Noise:

There is a possibility of noise interruption while communicating information. The noise may be produced by the conversation of somebody-else nearly or by the machine operation and the like. In such circumstances, the communicator takes an extra effort to overcome the noise. The communicator must also use right vocabulary which is easily understood by the receiver.

2. Missing Information:

The communicator may miss some of the information. It may be caused due to giving undue emphasis to a few pieces of information. Sometimes, the communicator may fail to supply the required information if he communicates the information in a hurried manner.

3. Alteration of Information:

The information is altered if the communicator sends the information through a third party. The third party may twist or alter the information according to his convenience. It may be done intentionally or unintentionally. Normally, this is possible in the case of upward communication. The reason is that the third party wants to earn a good name from his superiors.

4. Overloading:

This barrier arises due to an increase in the number of messages to be sent. There is a need for the introduction of communication channel to reduce workload. If it is not done, the messages do not reach the correct persons or places in time. So, the manager should make a special arrangement to send the urgent and important messages.

5. Lack of Facility:

Sometimes, meetings and conferences are necessary to impart the information to the employees or else the communication will not be an effective one. If the management does not have any facility to conduct meetings and conferences, there will be no possibility of conveying the information to employees correctly.

6. Inadequate Policies, Rules and Procedures:

The management should adopt the communication policy which is adequate to meet all the present and future requirements of the organisation. The communication policy should be a flexible one. This is necessary to meet any contingency. The rule of ‘through proper channel’ may be relaxed if important messages are to be passed during emergency periods. If it is not done so, the information cannot be passed in time. It means that there is a delay of communication.

7. Status Patterns:

Problems may arise due to the status prevailing between the superiors and subordinates. Superiors have executive chair and table, phone connection and a separate room to indicate then status. But the subordinates have only chairs and tables. This differential treatment widens the communication gap between the superior and subordinates. The trend has however, changed, following the emergence of a strategic global communication network.

8. Lack of Attention:

The receiver does not pay any attention in grasping the information. This attitude of the receiver may be caused by the receiver’s immersion in his own thoughts, his difficulty in understanding the idioms and phrases or his having no belief in the information. Sometimes, the receiver may think that the information is not worth paying attention to.

9. Quick Conclusion:

The receiver comes to a conclusion without giving due weightage to the information. Besides, he has his own opinion and belief. So, the quick conclusion may not be a correct one.

10. Lack of Confidence over the Communicator:

The receiver may feel that the communicator is not able to effectively extend the information. Then, the receiver does not believe the information which he gets. This may defeat the very purpose of the communication ultimately.

11. Improper State of Mind:

At times, the receiver may not be in a sound state of mind to receive the information accurately. If he is mentally upset, it will definitely affect the free flow of information.

12. Lack of Time:

The opportunity to communicate is limited because of the lack of time the communicator, has at his disposal.

13. Badly Expressed Messages:

If there is no coherence of information and no clarity of information, then the receiver will not be in a position to understand the information correctly.

14. Technical Language:

There are large number of special languages as computer, system analysis, operation research and the like. Different types of vocabulary are used to communicate the message. A single word may have different meanings.

15. Poor Retention:

Generally, the employees retain only 50% of the information which they receive, so poor retention is also one of the barriers of communication.

Types of Barriers to Communication – That may Hinder Communication

Communication is said to be successful only when the message is received by the receiver in time and the latter understands the sense of the message in the way it is intended by the sender. But there are several hindrances or barriers that may hinder communication.

1. Mechanical Barriers:

Where the very mechanism through which communication passes fails, the message may not teach the intended person in the intended form and volume. Possible mechanical failures include poor sound quality, faulty telephone lines, system breakdown, poor printing quality, signal problems in radio or television in adverse weather conditions.

2. Physical Barriers:

Time, place, space, climate and noise may hinder the flow of communication.

i. Time:

Message not delivered in time becomes useless like rotten, fruits and vegetables. An organization that wants quick results may not give timely instructions to employees concerned to get the task done in time to achieve the given objectives. Time difference among the countries delays the timely communication.

ii. Space:

It represents the distance between the sender and the receiver. It may be one of the barriers to communication. It can act as a barrier in a cross culture or transnational oral communication situation. Overcrowding in elevators, jostling in office corridors, elbowing others in public transport system, etc., are all external factors affecting communication.

iii. Place:

The place where the sender or the speaker and the listener or the receiver exist, influences communication. The audience attention cannot be sustained in a hall which is poorly lit, ill ventilated and packed beyond its capacity. An uncomfortable chair, poor acoustics, poor lighting etc., are some of the irritants distracting the attention of the audience. Places near the vehicular traffic are prone to noise pollution. It also may distract the attention of the audience.

iv. Climate:

Talks, conversation, speech, interview etc., held in an uncongenial ambience may lead to misperception or wrong decisions.

v. Noise:

Noise distorts the message and acts as a barrier.

3. Psychological Barriers:

Individual or psycho-sociological barriers are the major bottlenecks in interpersonal communication. The meaning assigned to the message depends upon the emotional and psychological status of both the sender and the receiver in the process of communication.

i. Style – It means the manner in which a person communicates. There are a few barriers connected therewith-

a. Accent variation.

b. Avoiding idiomatic expressions.

c. Over dosage of humour.

d. Too much of brevity.

ii. Selective Perception – Some people who live in their self-created world take in only information they feel relevant. This attitude ends up in their getting incomplete and inappropriate information.

iii. Poor literacy – Poor literacy mars one’s understanding of certain messages.

iv. Roving mind – A wandering or roving mind cannot fully gather the inputs given to it. This results inattention or limited attention span. Sometimes visual or audio distractions too inhibit flow of attention of the listeners.

v. Frame of mind – Emotional state of a person can act as a barrier. When one is in the grip of emotion like anger, shock, fear, depression or cheerlessness, etc., one may not listen to reason.

vi. Brand loyalty – Where one is loyal to a particular brand, he may not be receptive to a rivals’ product. One may not even relish the praises or compliments heaped on the rival product.

vii. Prejudice – Racial, communal and religious prejudices blind a person from reasoning out the fact.

viii. Limited intellectual capacity – Limited intellectual backgrounds, limited reading and parochial interest cause one to be narrow-minded. People with closed minds do not appreciate suggestions for betterment.

ix. Status and power – There may be status and power relationship which may hinder the communication process and affect the communication effectiveness. For example, seniors listening to smart juniors.

x. Halo effect – Good impressions formed on earlier occasions i.e., halo effect, causes one to turn a blind to the negative information about the other person.

4. Semantic and Language Barriers:

This occurs when the speaker/writer means one thing and the listener/ reader takes it in a different meaning. For example, one person gives an advertisement for selling a bad dog which actually refers to attacking power of a dog to guard the house. But the reader may misunderstand it otherwise.

i. The meaning of words differs context-wise.

ii. Idiomatic words should not be taken in a literal sense.

iii. Opinions may be given as facts.

iv. Using abstract words send a wrong message.

v. Lack of proper language skills leads to wrong choice of words or words with associative values.

vi. Homonyms distort the meaning. For example, there and their, once and ones.

vii. Difference in accent mars delivery and understanding.

viii. Inadequate vocabulary is a handicap in communication.

ix. Symbols cause communication problem.

x. Poor composition of speech, harsh voice, lengthy paragraph, verbosity, etc., spoil communication effectiveness.

xi. Use of technical jargons creates confusion between the sender and the receiver.

xii. Sender sending unclarified messages leads the receiver to have his own assumptions.

xiii. Lack of clarity, precision, coherence and awkward sentences lead to creation of bad message.

5. Interpersonal Barriers:

Communication effectiveness depends on relationship between two people i.e., ‘sender’ and ‘receiver’. There are superior-subordinate barriers that affect the free flow of communication between the two.

i. Barriers Originating from Superior:

Superior not sharing enough time with subordinates for discussion and clarification.

a. Suppression of information.

b. Reluctance of superior to listen to subordinates.

c. Inadequate information.

d. Deliberate Misguidance.

ii. Barrier from Subordinate Angle:

a. Fear psychosis – Subordinates not seeking adequate clarification wherever necessary from superiors out of fear.

b. Filtered information – Subordinates sending filtered information to the higher ups for fear of being penalized.

c. Over/under reporting – Subordinates over/under reporting their performance.

d. In expression of difficulty – Subordinates not disclosing their practical difficulties for fear of being mistaken.

e. Withholding suggestions – Subordinates not making workable suggestions due to lack of incentives for such exercise.

f. Personal inadequacies of subordinates – Poor educational, background, communication skill, inferiority complex and lack of confidence of subordinates debilitate the communication process.

6. Cross-Cultural Barriers:

Culture is a shared set of values and attributes of a group. It is the sum total of ways of living built by a group which are transmitted from generation to generation. Culture differs in terms of language, values, norms of behaviour, concept of time and space, perception, basic personality, national character, etc. Words, colours and symbols cannot have different meanings to different cultures.

Examples:

i. Wearing white colour dress is inauspicious in some countries, while it is a wedding dress in some other countries.

ii. If a Japanese says ‘yes’ he means he is listening, while ‘yes’ in America means ‘I agree’.

iii. Punctuality is the norm in some countries, while it is a matter of convenience for some other nations.

Thus, communication can acquire different connotations and opposite meaning thanks to cross cultural barriers.

7. Organizational Barriers:

The climate and culture of an organization influences freedom, thrust and interaction pattern among its people. It may take time for employees in every organization to get used to climate variables. In this context, communication bottlenecks are inevitable.

i. Rules rigidity.

ii. Poor communication infrastructure.

iii. Organizational structure.

iv. Poor working relationship.

Types of Barriers to Communication – Semantic, Psychological, Organisational and Personal Barriers

Communication plays a key role to achieve organisational objectives thus it must be effective. Managers must ensure the systematic and efficient flow of communication in all directions. However, the breakdowns or barriers may filter part of information or carry incorrect meaning leading to misunderstandings. Therefore, a manager must identify the barriers and take measures to overcome them.

Communication Barriers can be categorized as follows:

1. Semantic Barriers:

Semantic barriers are concerned with problems and obstructions in the process of encoding and decoding of message into words or impressions. The same words of sentences may be understood or interpreted differently by different individuals causing confusions and misunderstanding. The main cause of semantic barriers may be lack of good communication skills.

The various reasons for different interpretations or meanings resulting in semantic barriers may be discussed as follows:

i. Badly Expressed Message:

Use of inadequate vocabulary, incorrect words, omission of important words etc. may distort the message. The badly expressed message fails to convey the intended meaning of the message.

ii. Words/Symbols with Different Meaning:

Some words may have multiple meanings. While communicating a message sender may use a word with specific meaning but if there are alternative meanings then the receiver may perceive the meaning in accordance to his/her understanding and ability. Different perceptions lead to ineffective communication.

iii. Faulty Translations:

The communication may be ineffective if the translation of the original message is done by a translator who may not be proficient with both the languages. The use of wrong words or incorrect understanding of the content may result in different meaning of the translated message.

For example – The owner’s message in English needs to be translated in Hindi so that workers can understand the message. Use of incorrect words by a translator will change the entire meaning of the message. The wrong use of words may translate a positive message into negative.

iv. Unclarified Assumptions:

Some communications are backed by assumptions, which may be interpreted differently by different individuals.

For example – The manager says, “take care of stock”. He may mean that storekeeper must maintain the stock levels but the storekeeper may understand that he is responsible for the goods in the store. As a result, he may not place order or inform manager when stock of goods finish.

v. Technical Jargon:

If people with specific expertise use technical words or jargons while explaining to unskilled workers or people from different field, the communication may transfer in parts due to lack of clarity in information. The receivers may not have sufficient knowledge to understand the meaning of technical words used.

For example – During an address to workers the production manager said, “Our department will follow Unity of Command and you all must believe in the concept of Espirit De Corps.” Of course this was a motivational statement but workers would understand the message only if they know the meaning of Unity of Command’ and ‘Espirit De Corps’.

vi. Body Language and Gesture Decoding:

If the body language or gestures of a manager do not match with the words used to communicate his/her instructions then the receiver may get confused and perceive the information wrongly.

For example – A manager using words of praise for his sales team with anger on his face will confuse the entire team.

2. Psychological Barriers:

The state of mind of information sender and receiver influences the intention of information. The emotional and psychological factors may act as barriers to effective communication. For example, an angry manager cannot listen to his/her subordinates problems or give rational opinion.

Some of the psychological barriers are:

i. Premature Evaluation:

Some people have the tendency to judge or evaluate the meaning of the message even before sender completes his/her message. The premature evaluations are mainly because of individuals being judgmental or are prejudiced against communication.

For example – Mr. Rohit has a pre-notion that his boss always finds faults with his presentation. During one of the presentations, his boss wanted to appreciate his hard work but before he could complete Rohit closed his presentation and left the room.

ii. Lack of Attention:

If receiver or sender is pre-occupied with thoughts or some work she/he may not concentrate or pay attention to the message being transferred. Lack of attention is one of the main reasons of misunderstandings among superiors and subordinates.

For example – Mr. Sahil, the finance manager was busy preparing his presentation for a meeting when his secretary Reena came and asked him to sanction salary advance as her child was very ill. Due to pre-occupation Sahil did not listen to her problem and rejected her request. This disappointed Reena and she decided to resign.

iii. Loss of Transmission and Poor Retention:

If communication passes through various levels or channels it may result in complete loss of transmission or transmission of inaccurate information. Transmission of inaccurate information in case of oral communication may be due to lack of attention or retention amongst people.

For example – Mohan told his secretary to inform all department heads about the meeting at 9.30 am in the morning. She informed three department heads at the scheduled time for meeting. On her way she met her friend and started talking to her and forgot to inform other department heads about the meeting.

iv. Distrust:

Distrust between the sender and receiver may act as a barrier in effective communication. If two people do not trust each other, they may either try to hide or withhold information or do not try to understand the message in original sense. In fact, they may be suspicious towards each other and try to find hidden meanings in the message.

3. Organisational Barriers:

The factors related to organisation structure, authority relationships, rules and regulations sometimes, act as barriers to effective communication.

Some of these barriers are:

i. Organisational Policy:

If the organisational policy does not support free flow of communication, it may hamper effectiveness of communications.

For example – Centralized organisations do not allow lower level management to participate in decision-making. This may restrict workforce to communicate freely.

ii. Rules and Regulations:

Rigid rules and regulations may act as a hurdle to communication. Communications through prescribed channels may result in delays in transmission of information and action.

iii. Status:

Status conscious managers may consider themselves as superior and maintain distance with their subordinates. Superiors may not be open to suggestions or ideas from their subordinates. This may affect relationships between superior and subordinate and restricts free flow of information.

iv. Complexity in Organization:

If the organisational structure of an organisation consists, number of managerial levels and large number of employees it may result in delays, distortions or filtering in transmission of information.

v. Organisational Facilities:

For effective and free flow of communication it is a must that, an organisation must have scheduled meetings to discuss organisational issues, suggestion box to invite suggestions from employees, social and cultural gatherings, transparent policies etc. Lack of well-established process of communication and facilities for free flow of information may create communication problems.

4. Personal Barriers:

The personal factors of both sender and receiver may influence effective communication.

Some of the personal barriers may be as follows:

i. Fear of challenge to authority – If a superior has a fear, that sharing of specific information with his/her subordinates may affect his/her authority adversely then he/she may withhold or suppress such information.

ii. Lack of confidence of superior on his subordinates – If superiors do not have confidence on the competence of their subordinates then they may not share important information or seek their suggestions.

iii. Unwillingness to communicate – Some subordinates may not be confident or willing to communicate with their superiors with a fear that they may be misunderstood and it may adversely affect their interest in the organisation.

iv. Lack of proper incentives – Subordinates may not give proper feedback, share market information or suggestions to their superiors if there is no financial or non-financial incentive for initiating positive communication.

For example – Rajvir, the head of sales team, takes suggestions from team members and use them to prepare his presentation. In his presentation, he does not recognize or appreciate his team members. This disappoints all the team members and they decide not to give any suggestions in future.