

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

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The factors which obstruct the effectiveness of communication are known as Communication Barriers. These barriers cause a mismatch between understanding of the message by the sender and the receiver. These barriers can occur at any stage of the communication process.

1. Mechanical Barriers: A communication is a two-way process, distance between the sender and the receiver of the message is an important barrier to communication. Noise and environmental factors also block communication.

2. Personal Barriers: Personal factors like difference in judgment, social values, inferiority complex, bias, attitude, pressure of time, inability to communicate, etc. widen the psychological distance between the communicator and the communicate. Credibility gap i.e., inconsistency between what one says and what one does, also, acts as a barrier to communication.

3. Semantic or Language Barriers: Semantic is the science of meaning. The same words and symbols carry different meanings to different people. Difficulties in communication arise when the sender and the receiver of the message use words or symbols in different senses. The meaning intended by the sender may be quite different from the meaning followed by the receiver. People interpret the message in terms of their own behavior and experience. Sometimes, the language used by the sender may not at all be followed by the receiver.

4. Status Barriers (Superior-Subordinate Relationship): Status or position in the hierarchy of an organization is one of the fundamental barriers that obstructs free flow of information. A superior may give only selected information to his subordinates so as to maintain status differences. Subordinates, usually, tend to convey only those things which the superiors

would appreciate. This creates distortion in upward communication. Such selective communication is also known as filtering. Sometimes, —the superior feels that he cannot fully admit to his subordinates those problems, conditions or results which may adversely affect his ability and judgment. To do so would undermine his position as a superior being in the formal organization.¶ This causes distortion in downward communication. A subordinate may also feel reluctant to report his shortcomings or may not seek clarification on instructions which are subject to different interpretations for fear of loss of prestige in the eyes of the superior.

5. Organizational Structure Barriers: Effective communication largely depends upon sound organizational structure. If the structure is complex involving several layers of management, the breakdown or distortion in the communication wall arises. It is an established fact that every layer cuts off a bit of information. In the words of W.C. Bennis, —Communication gets distorted particularly as it goes up the hierarchy. Moreover, information traveling through formal structure introduces rigidity and causes delay because of long lines of communication. Similarly, lack of instructions for further conveying information to the subordinates and heavy pressure of work at certain levels of authority also act as barriers to effective communication.

6. Barriers Due to Inadequate Attention: Inadequate attention to the message makes communication less effective and the message is likely to be misunderstood. Inattention may arise because of over business of the communication or because of the message being contrary to his expectations and beliefs. The simple failure to read notices, minutes and reports is also a common feature.

Whatever be the reason, communication remains only a one-way process and there is no understanding of the message, if the receiver pays little attention to the message. In the words of Joseph Doohar. —"Listening is the most neglected skill of communication". —"Half listening is like racing your engine with the gears in neutral. You use gasoline, but you get nowhere".

7. Premature Evaluation: Some people have the tendency to form a judgment before listening to the entire message. This is known as premature evaluation. As discussed in the previous point, —half-listening is like racing your engine with the gears in neutral. You use gasoline but you get nowhere." Premature evaluation distorts understanding and acts as a barrier to effective communication.

8. Emotional Attitude: Barriers may also arise due to emotional attitude because when emotions are strong, it is difficult to know the frame of mind of another person or group. Emotional attitudes of both, the communicator as well as the communication, obstruct free flow of transmission and understanding of messages.

9. Resistance to Change: It is a general tendency of human beings to stick to old and customary patterns of life. They may resist change to maintain the status quo. Thus, when new ideas are being communicated to introduce a change, it is likely to be overlooked or even opposed. This resistance to change creates an important obstacle to effective communication.

10. Barriers Due to Lack of Mutual Trust: Communication means sharing of ideas in common. —When we communicate, we are trying to establish a commonness.‖ Thus, one will freely transfer information and understanding with another only when there is mutual trust between the two. When there is a lack of mutual trust between the communicator and the communicant, the message is not followed. Credibility gaps, i.e., inconsistency in saying and doing, also causes lack of mutual trust which acts as a basic obstacle to effective communication.

11. Other Barriers: There may be many other barriers, such as unclarified assumptions, lack of ability to communicate, mirage of too much knowledge of closed minds, communication overload, shortage of time, etc., which cause distortion or obstruction in the free flow of communication and thus make it ineffective. Failure to retain or store information for future use becomes a barrier to communication when the information is needed in future.

- **The use of jargon.** Over-complicated, unfamiliar and/or technical terms.
- **taboos.** Some people may find it difficult to express their emotions and some topics may be completely 'off-limits' or taboo. Taboo or difficult topics may include, but are not limited to, politics, religion, disabilities (mental and physical), sexuality and sex, racism and any opinion that may be seen as unpopular.
- **Physical barriers to non-verbal communication.** Not being able to see the non-verbal cues, gestures, posture and general body language can make communication less effective. Phone calls, text messages and other communication methods that rely on technology are often less effective than face-to-face communication.

- **Expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping.** People often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions.
- **Cultural differences.** The norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do the way in which emotions are expressed. For example, the concept of personal space varies between cultures and between different social settings.
 - ❖ Lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance to the receiver.
 - ❖ Differences in perception and viewpoint.
 - ❖ Physical disabilities such as hearing problems or speech difficulties.
 - ❖ Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents

The Seven Cs of Communication help overcome barriers:

1. Consideration: consideration states that every message should be prepared keeping in mind the person who will be the receiver of the message. Receiver's interest should be kept in mind while drafting the message.

2. Clarity: Clarity is the most important characteristic of communication especially in case of oral Communication/Presentation. Clarity in words, language of expression is very important to ensure proper presentation of ideas, message one wants to communicate during conversation.

3. Completeness: Complete message is very important to communicate the main idea or information behind the message. Oral presentations should be as far as possible planned on restructured and all the information related to the message should be properly communicated.

4. Conciseness: Conciseness is the essential requirement of oral communication. Concise message saves time on expense for both sender and receiver concise means brief, short on informative message which is able to explain the idea of message with minimum words. Words in message should not be repetitive in nature & only relevant information should be communicated in message.

5. Correctness: In oral communication grammatical errors should be avoided. Right level of language should be used both in formal & informal communication. Use of accurate words and spellings should be considered.

6. Concreteness: it means specific, definite or valid use of information than vague or general. Concrete facts or figures should be used to make the receivers know exactly what is required or desired. Concrete language on information helps in interpreting the message in the same way as communicating intent to communicate the message.

7. Courtesy: A proper decorum of speaking should be maintained while making oral communication/ presentation. One should say things with force of assertiveness without being rude. Polite or humble language shall be used which should not be insulting, against the religious, social or personal values of the listener. Discriminatory language based, on gender, race, age, color, caste, creed, religion etc should be avoided

Elements of Communication

There are four major elements in the communication process.

- 1. Source:** The source wishing to say something
- 2. The Message:** The message or what the source wishes to say
- 3. The Channel:** The channel or the medium which carries the message to its destination and
- 4. The Receiver:** Who is the target of the message

No society or community can survive without communication. In fact, without communication, every person becomes an island. Human beings form a society or community with the help of communication.

Communication occurs when person A communicates message B through channel C to person D with effect E.

Some authors describe communication as S-R for the stimulus—response process, or the interaction between a source and receiver, thus S and R standing for two referents each. Stimulus is anything that sets our sensory organs into motion and sends messages to the mind.

PROCESS OF COMMUNICATION

- **Sender:** Someone who is sending the message to someone else. For example, in an ad the brand being advertised is 'Pantaloons'. Naturally, the maker of this brand is the sender of the advertising message.
- **Encoding:** When we address someone, we use language, visuals, body gestures, etc. to communicate. All these are called symbols. The process of putting our thoughts into symbolic forms is called encoding. In the following Ad, you see a face full of wrinkles. Then you read the headlines which simply say: —"Wrinkle free." This process of communication is called encoding.
- **Message:** The symbols themselves constitute the message. Hence, the visuals, headlines, body copy, tag line, brand name, logo, etc., are all parts of the message. If you have already heard the name of 'Pantaloons', then the message being given to you is that they are dealing with a known company.
- **Media:** The channels used for sending the message across to the receiver (customer) is called medium (or media; note that media is also singular). This Ad has appeared in the print media (just for the sake of knowledge, TV is an audio-visual medium, radio is an audio medium, etc. You will learn more about media in the second year). An individual member of the medium is called a vehicle. Here, India Today is the vehicle. A vehicle is the carrier of the message.
- **Decoding:** Once we receive the message, we start interpreting it. For example, when you look at the wrinkled face shown in the Ad, you realize how bad it looks. The implication is that your clothes will also look as bad if they were not wrinkle free. Likewise, there are visuals of a shirt and a pair of trousers. These immediately give you the message that the Ad is perhaps for readymade clothes. At the bottom, the message given is that the brand is available at various cities and Pantaloon Shoppes.
- **Receiver:** A receiver is one who reads/listens and hears the message of the communicator. For example, any reader of India Today who is likely to see this Ad, is the receiver of the message. It may be noted, however, that the communicator (in our example, the manufacturer of Pantaloons) is not interested in just any receiver (i.e. any

reader of India Today) but only those who would be interested in using his product. Thus, if I never wear trousers, then the company will not be interested in me.

- **Response:** After having read the ad, I will react to the message. My reaction (alternatively known as response) could be objective (if I accept what the sender of the message is saying) or negative (If I don't accept the message). For example, the body copy in the Ad says: —Pantaloons presents T 2000"I may get impressed by the fact that the range has T 2000 choices available! But I may also reject the claims made in the body copy in case I find them unbelievable.
- **Feedback:** Every communicator waits to know whether the message (a) has reached the target audience or not, and (b) whether it has been accepted or not. In other words, one waits for feedback from the audience. The most desirable form of feedback from the marketer's point of view, of course, would be the purchase of the product by the customers. Thus, after this Ad is released in the media, if the sale of such trousers goes up significantly, the feedback is said to be positive. Similarly, if the company conducts surveys and questions about the intention to buy; and customers say that they will buy the brand, again, the feedback is positive.