



# **BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATIONS-GREATEST HINDRANCES TO SMOOTH COMMUNICATIVE PROCESS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The history of communication is as old as man himself. We have seen that since times immemorial, man has been communicating in same form and the other. The advent of technology in this modern era has totally transformed the ways and manners of communication. But there are certain barriers which hinder the smooth process of communication. In this present paper I have mentioned the types of barriers that disrupt the effective communication.

### **Key words:-**

Barriers, communication, semantic, physical, noise, gender, time, organizational, socio – psychological, emotional, information, channel.

## **BARRIERS TO COMUNICATION**

**Introduction-** Effective communication is the key to achieving success in the professional field. Communication is said to be effective when the feedback of the message sent is the same as desired by the sender. But this is not always possible. Sometime the information conveyed is not

understood completely by the receiver. This is because of various factors which hinder the process of communication.

Planning, preparation and practice of communication will be incomplete and unsuccessful unless one identifies and understands the barrier to communication. These barriers are semantic, physical, sociological, psychological, interpersonal and organizational obstacles that interfere with the planning, organization, transmission, and understanding of the message. These factors interfere with the self-confidence, self-disclosure and self-consciousness of the senders and receivers. The barrier to communication can prove to be damaging to an organization if they are not removed on time. When the communication transmits the idea and it reaches in an unchanged and undistorted to the receiver and the receiver responds to it, the process is said to be perfect.

However, this process of 'perfect' communication can never exist due to number of factors which stand in its way as barrier. These barriers tend to distort the message and create friction among the organizational member; they also adversely affect the morale of the employees and relationship between team members. For the effective communication it is imperative that these barriers are removed.

### **SEMANTIC BARRIERS: - (language barriers)**

When communication is disrupted because of linguistic inabilities it is known as semantic barrier. Due to regional differences and differences in accent; we are not always able to comprehend the message conveyed by the sender. Different languages are spoken at different places. Therefore, pronunciation is not always understood clearly. In written communication too, there may be errors in spelling, vocabulary and sentence structure, leading to ineffective communication. Ambiguous words and ambiguous sentence constructions also adversely affect the process of communication.

The problems that occur in encoding and decoding process are called Semantic barriers. These may be words, pictures, actions and poor vocabulary. Words are said to have no meaning but they represent an associated arbitrary meaning. A word may have variety of meanings and the meaning attributed by the sender may not be same as that attributed by the receiver. Similarly, a word can have different meanings to different people at different occasions. Experts have found that people attribute 14,000 different meaning to 500 commonly used English words. Sometimes, the sender and the receiver may use different words to communicate the same meaning. There are many words in English such as light, cheap etc. that can be used with favorable as well as unfavorable connotations. Sometimes, the receiver wrongly perceives the intended meaning of the word in the message by the sender. Some of the following semantic barriers are:-

**1. Interpretation of words:** - communication is mostly carried on through words, whether spoken or written. However, words are capable of communicating a variety of meanings. It is quite possible that the receiver of the message does not assign the same meaning to a word as the transmitter had intended. This may lead to miscommunication. Murphy and Park in their book

“Effective Business Communication” mentioned that in an abridged dictionary the word ‘run’ has 71 meanings as a verb, another 35 as a noun, and 4 more as an adjective. If this word occurs in a message, the receiver is at liberty to interpret it in any of the 110 senses. However, if communication is to be perfect, he must assign to it the same meaning as existed in the sender’s mind when he used it.

It is only from the context that we can determine which meaning is to be assigned to a particular word. Because of different social, economic, cultural and educational backgrounds, people interpret even the context differently. The result is miscommunication. It is often found that technical, personal and special groups of people tend to develop their own short forms and abbreviations, isolating others and building communication barriers.

**2. Bypassed instructions:** - Bypassing occurs when people miss each other with their meanings. They used the same words but attribute different meaning to them. This problem creates differences between superior and subordinates and results in poor performance. The blame is often laid on personality, cultural and educational differences.

**3. Poor Vocabulary:** - Poor Vocabulary makes our message more difficult and less effective. It can affect both the sender and the receiver.

**4. Poor grammar and punctuation:** - A good vocabulary is useless unless the communicator acquires the knowledge of how to use it in a sentence. Those involved in written and oral communication must have good grammar skills because an understanding of grammatical structure provides an excellent basis for effective writing, speaking, listening and reading skills. If the communicator has poor knowledge of grammar, he will not be able to communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings correctly. The knowledge of punctuation is equally essential for effective communication as faulty and improper punctuation can change the intended meaning of the sentence. For example, an absent or a misplaced ‘comma’ could prove to be misleading to a reader.

**5. Round about or ambiguous style:** - **Words** lacking clarity and sentence constructions which do not convey a crystal clear meaning lead to a major semantic barrier in communication. Expression should be clear, lucid, precise and simple.

**6. Lack of common language:** - If the sender and the receiver speak in a different language, their ignorance of each other’s language or the lack of common language will be a barrier to communication between them. It is not possible for them to communicate with each other unless they know some common language, which is properly understood by both of them. A Hindi speaking boy and a Tamil speaking boy will not be able to communicate without knowledge of each other’s language. If both of them know a common language, say English, their knowledge of English words, phrases, clauses and sentence- structure should be adequate to express their thoughts and feelings.

**PHYSICAL BARRIERS:** - This occurs when communication is hindered due to physical disturbance. The distracting element found in the surrounding environment that does not allow proper communication.

**1. Environmental discomfort:** - **Ill** health, poor lighting, climatic disturbances and noise are some of the examples of physical barriers.

**2. Noise:** - Noise is one of the most common barriers of effective communication. Noise is any unpleasant sound that disturbs the smooth flow of information. As a result the message is not heard properly or completely. This creates confusion which does not allow effective communication. Some examples of noise are the sound of machines and the din from a stereo system. It interferes with the transmission of signal. It also refers to the unwanted signals of messages, which interfere and disturb the reception of the wanted signal, usually in the form of sounds. It can be in visual, audio-visual, written, physical or psychological forms. Technical or physical noise refers to loud noise of the machines or blaring noise of the stereo and such other noises, which make it difficult for a listener to understand the message. Visual noise can be experienced, for example, when a committee member arrives late at the meeting hall, all other committee members are distracted. Poor telephone connection is also an example of noise.

**3. Time:** - Time is also a great barrier. If employees do not communicate with their superiors for a long time, it may create a communication gap between them, which may affect their relationship. Time can act as a barrier to communication in some other ways also. A guest who arrives in the wee hours in morning may create embarrassment to the host. Time will not allow two communicators to talk to each other if they work in different shifts.

**4. Distance:** - **The** distance between the communicator and the receiver can be a strong barrier to communication if the technical devices of communication such as telephone, telefax and other devices are not available to limit them. Faulty sitting arrangement in offices or partition between the works benches are also the distance barriers.

**5. Age:** - The age, maturity, and educational background in which a person grows up determine what kind of person he is going to become. This will also largely determine the way one communicates. The generation gap results due to use of vocabulary and style of speeches and the values of life to which different generations stick or adhere. Considering the age and maturity, we tend to apply different standards of judgment to judge the statement of the speaker. In many organizations there is a communication between older and younger employees as their likes and dislikes, aptitudes and interests are different.

**6. Gender:** - **Man** and woman communicate with one another according to their gender. There is a great deal of gender gap between man and woman as man is assertive acquisitive, self-confident and aggressive. On the other hand, women are feminine submissive and less aggressive. Women also lack self-confident. But nowadays these notions are proving wrong. Women are working at

par with men and so they are becoming more self-confident and more self – reliant. Now this gender-gap is losing the ground, but still in Indian society it prevails in the backward regions.

## **SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN COMMUNICATION**

Psychological needs and feelings are the prime barriers of the organizational communication process where both the sender and the receiver could be affected. Some of the barriers are attitude, perception, inference, abstracting, closed-mindedness, distorting, filtering and editing, bad listening, emotions, resistance to change and cultural differences.

1. **Attitude and Values:** - Attitudes are pre-learned dispositions and can be favorable or unfavorable. They provide need satisfaction to the individuals. When the message is unfavorable to the receiver, he cannot be easily persuaded to accept it. The most agreeable information for anyone of us is the one that is favorable to our opinions, values, norms and attitudes. The message which is contrary to our views and beliefs is not easily acceptable to us even when it is factual and true. We promptly accept the government policy if it is favorable to our business, but we express our strong resentment towards it if it adversely affects our business. Sometimes, attitudes and values have emotional basis. Such attitudes are extremely difficult to change.
2. **Selective perception:** - The individual experiences and their interpretations are never identical because their perceptions are different. If two friends see a movie together, their interpretation of the events and the characters different selective perception of the same object or idea by two or more people.
3. **Inference:** - our everyday life is full of activities based on inference. When we get up, say at 7:00 or 8:00 am, we infer that our mother might have already started her housework. When we sit down at a table to write, we infer that the chair would support our weight and ink will flow from the pen. Thus, the statements which are based on the facts and go beyond the facts are inferences. We may have good reason to expect that our inference will be correct, but they may prove incorrect due to some unpredicted situation.
4. **Abstracting:** - We use language to communicate our experience and feelings, but not every detail can be communicated. There is also a tendency to focus our attention on only some of the details. While we prepare a business report on our observations of the various events in the market, we abstract the selected information and present only the information which is relevant. The observations will not be perfect. Hence, communication would also be imperfect because our experience of the event is also not complete.
5. **Close- mindedness:** - **It** is very difficult to communicate with a person who has deep-rooted prejudices. Such a person not prepared to receive any message on a subject about which he assumed to know everything. His mind is closed to new ideas, facts and suggestions. If an employee approaches his close- minded boss with some suggestions to improve the work of a business unit, the boss would retort by saying he knows better about what should be done for the betterment of the organization. Perhaps, he may further warn

the employee that he should never try to teach him (the boss) again. Thus, he completely rejects the information's and recommendations of the communicator even before he knows the real facts. The reasons behind his close-mindedness are his deep – rooted prejudices. When people feel threatened, they tend to react in ways that reduce their ability to a message mutual understanding. They start asking question in reply, make sarcastic remarks, start verbal attack, become over judgmental and question other's motives.

6. **Distortion, filtering and editing:** - When a message is transmitted through translations, interpretations, explanations and simplifications some part of it gets distorted or lost. The accuracy of the message is lost and the transmission becomes imperfect as the message goes through the filters of translations and simplifications. There is a manipulation of information by the sender so that it is seen as more favorable by the receiver because the sender wants some results of his own. It happens where there are more vertical levels and upwards communication gets distorted and filtered. Grapevine is also a reason for distortion. The message in grapevine receives fresh additions with every repetition until it gets worst. Thus often, the original information, especially orally communicated through formal and informal channel gets lost or distorted largely and very little of it is retained. Adopting written communication for important messages can reduce distortion and subsequent misunderstanding.

7. **Bad Listening:** - Bad listening is one of the major communication problems. Misunderstanding and conflicts can be reduced if people would listen to the message with enough attention. Most people do not listen very well due to various distractions, emotions, excitement, indifference, aggressiveness and wondering attention. One of the major reasons for bad listening is an individual's continual thinking about his own problems and worries. The poor listener always feels that the thought in his mind is more interesting than what the speaker is saying.

Bad listening can also be due to lot of worries affecting the listener for example; an employee may get engrossed in worrying about the sickness of his daughter rather than listening to the instructions given by his manager. Some listeners mentally argue with the speaker before comprehending the complete message. This usually leads to misunderstanding and conflict. Their impatience to express their thoughts and their lack of interest in the message contents are strong barriers to communications.

8. **Emotion: - Emotions** are our feelings about the world around us. Usually, positive emotions such as joy, love or affection do not interfere with communication; it is the negative emotion that creates barriers. An emotionally excited communicator is unable to organize his message properly. His excited or nervous state of mind does not allow him to think clearly. He expresses his blurred thoughts with gesticulations and keeps on repeating the same words. He does not understand that the message he wants to convey is ruled by uncontrolled emotion and is misdirected as the emotion makes him turn a blind eye to reason. Anyone who comes across such an irritated person becomes a victim of his

unfocused negative emotions. The perplexed, nervous and excited state of mind never allows smooth flow of communication.

9. **Resistance to change:** - If we receive a message which proposes a new idea, we tend to be inattentive to it. The new idea is rejected consciously or sometimes unconsciously if it conflicts with the beliefs, morals, values, attitudes and opinion of the receiver. The average adult human mind ignores any new idea, especially when there is insecurity and uncertainty about its outcome. The receiver feels comfortable in maintaining status quo and is insecure if the changes are introduced. Because of it's uncertainly, he hastily concludes in his mind that the proposal would not be successful. He even further feels that the proposal would make things worse for him. The new idea is considered as a drastic proposal which is not needed. Thus, the average human mind, which resists change, does not accept the new ideas from the communicator.
10. **Information overload:** - Whenever the information we have to work with exceeds our processing capacity, the result is an information overload. Let us take an example of a regular executive in a company in today's scenario. The executive may have to deal with the following communication on an average in a given day :-

Emails	15-20
Faxes	02-05
Phone calls	15-25
Reports (daily)	01-05
Instruction to Employee/subordinates	10-12
Meeting	01
Memos	05-06
Circulars	02-04
Notices	01-02
Employee grievance	01-02
Other communication Eg. (Pamphlet, Brochure)	10-15

This is an example of a normal day. If this was the end of the financial year, which ends on 31<sup>st</sup> march every year, this could multiply 3-5 folds. The result is that the communicator could select , ignore , pass or even forget information. Hence, there is loss of information and less effective communication.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS**

1. **Status:-** Status is a position or social rank of a person in a ground. It depends on the person's abilities, amount of pay, job skills, seniority, type of work assigned, age and occupation. Status reflects the degree of power, authority, importance and responsibility placed on an individual by other people in the society. The people at the lower level are usually afraid of communicating

unpleasant and unfavorable information to those highly placed managers. For example, the juniors may feel scared of entering into the well-furnished cabins of senior managers as they become conscious of their own social status. This status consciousness is harmful in upward communication. People fear that the unpleasant facts communicated to their superiors might have adverse effects on them if the information displeases the superiors. They are reluctant to communicate their problems, shortcomings, mistakes and other unfavorable information to the higher-ups because of their fear that their superiors might consider them incompetent and unworthy of doing their jobs. They do not show courage for offering suggestions and plans for improving the organization and its procedures for the fear of being called arrogant by their superiors. The high-ups too are strongly conscious of their status. In order to safeguard the dignity of their status, they avoid accepting suggestions from the subordinates and presume that their higher status stands for better knowledge and competence. These assumptions prove serious barriers to communication between the superiors and subordinates.

2. **One-way flow:-** Effective communication is a two- way process where the sender and the receiver both are free to exchange information and ideas. When there is no response from the listener or the listener is blocked, misunderstanding tends to arise.
3. **Structure of the organization:-** organization are multilayered based on the hierarchies, so that people of different experience levels roles, responsibilities are at different levels of authority. Large organizations have a number of layers of supervision and long communication lines resulting in distance between the workers and the top management. This proves to be a barrier as the organization is divided into departments, and free interdepartmental communication becomes difficult because of the organization structure, rules and bureaucratic system.
4. **Organization rules and regulations:-** Rules and regulations are made to improve performance by all those who are working in an organization. However, some rules and regulations cause unnecessary delays and loss of information. A piece of information is valuable if it is available on time; if it is delayed, then it loses its value and the resulting effect is that communication is impaired. This barrier is prominently present in government departments and even companies. However lately, the Indian



government has taken a number of initiatives to reduce red –tapism and bureaucratic delays.

5. **Long chain of command:-** Following a rigid hierarchical structure distort the message and affects communication. In a small organization where the information is conveyed directly to the concerned person, communication becomes effective. However in large organizations with a number of layers of communication channels, the information is distorted at each level because of poor listening, lack of concentration or being selective in the communication of messages.
6. **Negative attitude in the workplace:-** In an organization work groups are formed because of individual or cultural differences. These workgroup may be formal or informal. Thus, groupism leads to negative attitudes. Sometimes conflicts arising among the group also hinders communication, which hampers the growth of an organization.
7. **Improper channel of communication :-** A proper medium or channel of communication should be used to avoid communication gap. If there are disturbances in any communication medium, communication is hampered. Therefore, it is important to consider the urgency of the message, and its audience while choosing the right medium of communication.

## CONCLUSION- OVERCOMING BARRIERS

The success of organization is a combined effort. It is the responsibility of every small or big unit of the organization to overcome the barriers to effective communication. The following steps may be taken:-

- 1) Follow the principle of equality.
- 2) Create better understanding.
- 3) Make proper policies.
- 4) Problem should be solved quickly.
- 5) Arrange internal meetings.
- 6) Proper job facilities should be provided.
- 7) Fulfill the expectations.

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