

1.10 Barriers to communication

Communication is the answer to the success of any organization and if there are barriers to its effectiveness, there will be frustration to the concerned parties. Communication barriers can arise at every stage of the communication process that is from the sender, the message, the channel, the receiver, the feedback and the context.

"A barrier to communication is something that keeps meanings from meeting. Meaning barriers exist between all people, making communication much more difficult than most people seem to realize. It is false to assume that if one can talk he can communicate."

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"Because so much of our education misleads people into thinking that communication is easier than it is, they become discouraged and give up when they run into difficulty. Because they do not understand the nature of the problem, they do not know what to do. The wonder is not that communicating is as difficult as it is, but that it occurs as much as it does." - Reuel Howe, theologian and educator

Barriers to successful communication include message overload, when a person receives too many messages at the same time, and message complexity (Patrick J. and Charon, B. H, 2008). Some barriers to communication are discussed here under:-

Physical barriers - Physical barriers are often due to the nature of the environment. Example poor or outdated equipment, distractions, noise, poor lighting etc

System design: System design faults refer to problems with the structures or systems in place in an organization.

Semantic barriers - semantic refers to meaning of language used. Often the same word is interpreted by different people in different ways according to their mental attitude and understanding. Poorly explained or misunderstood messages can result in confusion (J. Scott Armstrong, 1980).

- i. **Physiological barriers** - may result from individual's personal discomfort, ill health, poor eye sight, hearing difficulties etc.
- ii. **Socio-psychological barrier** – Certain attitudes can also make communication difficult. For instance, great anger or sadness may cause someone to lose focus on the present moment. Disorders such as Autism may also severely hamper effective communication (Berko, M.R, 2010). Other barriers based on social psychological barriers are according to Saleemi (1997):-

- a. Attitude an opinion– if an information agrees with our opinion and attitude, we tend to receive it favorably but if it ends to run contrary to our accepted beliefs, we don't react favorably.
- b. Emotion – emotional state of mind affect communication. If the sender is excited or nervous his thinking will be blurred and he will not be able to organize his message properly.
- c. Closed mind – it's a person with deeply ingrained prejudices and is not prepared to reconsider his opinions

- d. Status conscious – are common in organization and subordinates are afraid of communicating upward any unpleasant information. Superiors also think that consulting their juniors would be compromising their dignity.
- e. The source of communication – if the receiver is suspicious about a prejudice against the source of communication there is likely to be a barrier to communication.
- f. Inattentiveness – people often become inattentive while receiving a message in particular, if the message contains a new idea.
- g. Faulty transmission – translator can never be perfect.
- h. Poor retention – studies shows that employees retain only about 50% of the information communicated to them. If the information is communicated through 3-4 stages, very little reaches the destination. Poor retention may lead to imperfect responses which may further hamper the communication process.

- iii. **Presentation of information** – it is important to aid understanding. The communicator should consider the audience before making the presentation by simplifying their vocabulary so that the majority may understand.
- iv. **Environmental barrier** - Noise that physically disrupts communication, such as standing next to loud speakers at a party, pulling and moving of seats in a lecture room, working in a factory etc
- v. **Physiological-Impairment barrier** - Physical maladies that prevent effective communication, such as deafness or blindness.
- vi. **Syntactical barrier** - Mistakes in grammar can disrupt communication, such subject verb agreement, abrupt change in tense etc
- vii. **Organizational barriers** - Poorly structured communication can prevent the receiver from accurate interpretation.
- viii. **Cultural barrier:** Stereotypical assumptions can cause misunderstandings, such as unintentionally offending a Kikuyu person by calling him a thief.

- ix. **Noise** - is any occurrence that inhibits effective communication; it can occur at any point in the process. Noise is the causative factor for the message being mis-communicated or misunderstood due to the problem either in the medium chosen or encoding or decoding or in some stages of the process.