

12. Problems or Barriers to Effective Communication

Filtering: Refers to the manipulation of information by the sender so as to obtain a favorable opinion from the receiver. Example, an employee updating his superior about projects in which there is significant progress but not informing him about the projects that are lagging behind. The process of filtering information takes place at each level of the organization and may sometimes affect the quantity as well as the quality of information that reaches the top management. The amount of information that gets filtered increases with the number of vertical levels in the organizational hierarchy. Filtering may lead to problems in the long term as only pleasant information is allowed to pass up to the top management and thus they may not know about a problem till it assumes serious proportions.

Selective perception: A person perceives information on the basis of his needs, values, experience, and background. His personal interests and expectations influence the way he decodes information.

Defensiveness: People intentionally attempt to block communication when they feel that the other person is threatening their self-image and prestige. They react in a defensive manner by making sarcastic comments, by passing judgments on others, or by questioning the motives of the other party.

Language: Words convey different meanings to different people. Age, education and cultural background are the major factors that influence the use of language by people and the meanings they associate with words.

Barriers to communication can be further classified as

- Human/personal
- Semantic and
- Technical barriers.

Barriers to communication

Human/personal	Semantic	Technical
Personal emotions Biases Perceptual variations Competencies Sensual abilities Mental faculties	Word interpretations Gesture decodings Language translations Sign and symbols Cue meanings	Space or geographical distance Mechanical failures Physical obstructions Technological malfunctions Concrete obstacles Time lags

Human limitations also act as a hindrance to effective communication. Instead of listening in a rational and objective manner to what is being said, one occasionally becomes emotionally involved. Judgments are imposed in place of rational fact appraisal. Consequently the receiver hears only what he expects to hear.

Removal of communication barriers: Some guidelines

- i. Identify and analyze the barriers: find out the possible barriers in the way of effective communication and then try to remove these. To make the communication clear, make use of the listeners' language and avoid faulty translations.
- ii. Top management must be convinced of the need of communication: a good communication is good human relations, and good communication is good business.
- iii. Emphasis upon the written statement of policies: this is the best means of letting everyone know how an organization feels about communication. It sets the tone for the type of communication that everyone throughout the organization should have. It sets the basis for the procedures and practices, which will be used to implement policy.
- iv. Recognize that communication is a two way process: it is necessary to know whether communication has been properly received and perceived. This can be

done by encouraging action, responses, asking questions, removing confusion and explaining clearly the meaning of the message sent.

- v. Consistency and coherence are essential for successful communication: Orders should be consistent with the objectives of the organization and in line with other activities.
- vi. Overcome disadvantages of the distance barriers: whenever possible use the physical devices like telephone and the intercom and see that people understand ie. the sender should see to that the information is not distorted, misinterpreted or stopped by those who are responsible for passing it on to others.
- vii. Communication is a continuous process: it cannot be compartmentalized or reduced to one or more communication programs, because the goal of communication is complete understanding. Communication should be constant, habitual and automatic.
- viii. Empathetic speaking and hearing are essential for effective communication. Therefore, the speaker should know his audience and be sensitive to their needs and feelings when he speaks and listens; otherwise he may short circuit important communication networks.
- ix. Optimum timing is important in communication. The best time for communicating important messages is when they are competing the least with other situations affecting the listeners. Messages are most likely to be considered and attended to when they provide a solution to a problem affecting the receiver.
- x. The use of feedback improves the communication process and reduces the chance of major disparities between the information or idea received and the one intended.
- xi. Reception of messages may be helpful in conveying the intended thoughts. Often a single transmission of an idea may not be received or decoded properly. A second or third message may assist the receiver in his understanding and use of the concept. Repetition can be done by using various media and different formats.
- xii. Messages should be timed so that they are received when they are needed and are not misconstrued as a result of other thoughts on the receiver's mind.