

BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

The ability to communicate is an important facet of human beings. However, it is not always possible for humans to communicate effectively without any flaw. There will be stumbling blocks between the sender and the receiver which may arise from various factors. These factors are barriers to communication.

In this paper, the presenter provides facts about the factors that make communication unsuccessful. Hence, the first task of this work is defining communication barriers and the importance of knowing them, and the second task is introducing the various forms of barriers to communication with their causes and solutions.

The presenter discusses two major levels of barriers to communication. Intrapersonal barrier to communication is the first level whose causes are wrong assumptions, varied perceptions, different backgrounds, wrong inferences, impervious categories, and categorical thinking. The second level is Interpersonal barriers which include causes such as limited vocabulary, incongruity of verbal and non verbal messages, emotional outburst, communication selectivity, cultural variations, poor listening skills, noise in the channel, inappropriate use of medium, and information overload.

It is the wish of the presenter to put the necessary ideas across without causing any misunderstanding in the minds of any reader of this paper. Therefore, it has been endeavored to elaborate the facts with the words and examples of the presenter after basing the skeleton of the work on the book entitled 'Technical Communication-principles and Practice' by Raman and Sharma (2004).

KEYWORDS: Barriers, Communication, Intrapersonal and Interpersonal

INTRODUCTION

What Does 'Barriers to Communication' Mean?

Communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another (Keyton, 2011). The word communication is derived from the Latin word, communis, which means common. The definition emphasize the fact that unless a common understanding results from the exchange of information, there is no communication

Raman and Sharma (2004) describe communication barriers as another dimension of noise, which hinder the proper flow of message and change the intended meaning. People get distracted because of the interference in the thought process. Distraction can be in any form.

What is the Purpose of Knowing Communication Barriers?

The elements in the communication process determine the quality of communication. A problem in any one of these elements can reduce communication effectiveness (Keyton, 2011). It is important to ask why it is required to know

barriers to communication. The first and foremost reason is to help communicators identify themselves with any of the barriers which they may think they are involved in, and support them with the mechanisms of getting rid of those barriers. In addition, it may give them prior knowledge about the barriers in case they have not yet encountered them. Knowing the cause will help us to solve the problem (Mishra, Sunita and Muralikrishna 2011).

Levels of Barriers

Based on message formation and delivery, we find communication barriers at two levels

- **Intrapersonal Barriers**
- **Interpersonal Barriers**

Intrapersonal Barriers, Causes and Solution

Although human beings birth follows the same biological steps, their attitudes, education experience, personality, etc are different. Even brothers and sisters are not similar in such respects. Because of these varying qualities, they may not understand a similar piece of information in the same manner. This leads us to the causes of communication barriers that come out of the individual himself/herself, which is what we call *Intrapersonal Barriers*. The following are the major causes of Intrapersonal Barriers along with their examples and solution (Mitra2006).

Wrong Assumptions, Differing Backgrounds

Communicators may have wrong assumptions about the ability, experience and background knowledge of the speaker or the listener. Due to this fact, they tend to deliver their message without considering individual differences in understanding the theme. The end result of their communication will be a failure if their message reaches in this manner. For instance, a teacher plans to deliver a lecture on certain topic to the students, while doing it practically he encounters certain problems which he has to deal immediately on the spot. This leads to distraction from the main topic, because of the distraction he might not be able to continue with the thoughts which he has carried. In another instance, If a politician goes to a certain village on election campaign. The ideology he/she supports is, say socialism. In the course of his campaign if he uses the theoretical viewpoints of socialism, it is likely that the villagers may fail to understand what it is about. It is at this point that we say the communicator has wrong assumption about the background knowledge of the audience.

Solution

It is important to always remember the existence of individual differences, and to adjust the topic of your talk to the audience background knowledge by putting yourself in their place.

Varied Perception

The same message will be interpreted in different ways, but none of the interpretations may be wrong for they convey meaning in various angles. Communicators, who do not have any idea about the presence of varied perception on the same subject, develop a barrier to their communication. For instance, a teacher goes to class to share his daily experience on roadways with his students. He reasons the major cause of road accident as the prevalence of careless drivers in the city, and leaves no room for students to add on the point. Students may raise issues like the increase in the number of cars, lack of awareness of pedestrians on how to use the road and so on. If the teacher understands his subject can be interpreted in various views, he may not cause this sort of barrier to his communication.

Solution

A topic can be interpreted in different angles, so broader understanding of it helps to avoid communication breakdown.

Wrong Inferences

Whenever we communicate, it is essential to have evidence about what we are saying. Otherwise, we commit a sort of barrier to communication called *wrong Inferences* by misleading people. This kind of communication barrier occurs when we begin our premise of reasoning without tangible evidence and conclude what we say is true. For example, one of the journalists once wrongly inferred that the death of the former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh was due to the bumping of the helicopter with a mountain, actual cause was that the chief died in a helicopter crash. If what we write or speak lacks evidence, we should put it in words like 'in my opinion'.

Solution

To avoid wrong inferences research well in advance about your subject, and state it with words such as 'evidence suggest'.

Impervious Categories

Impervious categories are observed in people who are not open-minded, who do not accept anything other than what they already judged or concluded. Technically, these people are called *misonoists*. When these people face ideas which do not match with their views, habits and attitudes, they tend to ignore, distort, and reject them. This sort of behavior is believed to affect the personal development of people in the fast growing world and make them lag behind the technology. For instance, People who are not willing to adapt themselves to the modern technology may act as a barrier in the development process of the organization.

Solution

To get rid of impervious categories, one should be open-minded and ready to accommodate new developments in life areas. In this case, the importance of adapting new techniques should be highlighted so that the employees get motivated to accept the new changes.

Categorical Thinking

'Categorical Thinking' is another form of intrapersonal communication barriers which deals with individuals who have 'know it all' attitude so that they use words such as always, none, all, every time, etc. This is likely to cause communication barrier for these people are not willing to entertain any different idea. Technically these people are called *pansophists*. For instance, somebody discusses a certain matter in a meeting, and one of the participants raises his hand to say something that the presiding persons of the meeting have never heard in the reasoning process. If they do not accept or entertain what he says, they are showing 'know it all' attitude.

Solution

Learning is a life- long process, and our horizon of knowledge is may be different, therefore, we should use words such as *in most situations* or *likely* or *it appears to me* in our expressions. If we don't have any idea about the subject raised, we would rather accept that we do not know.

Interpersonal Barriers

This is another level of communication barrier which arises from inappropriate exchange of words between the participants. According to Raman and Sharma (2004:28), the two general classifications of this barrier 'can be inefficiency in communication skills and negative aspect nurturing in the climate'. Below are the recurrent reasons for this kind of interpersonal barriers.

Limited Vocabulary

To understand what has been said or to convey our messages, the words we have determine a lot to be effective in our communication. For example, a person who stands before a considerable number of people in a meeting to deliver a speech can leave a good impression on his audience if he is able to say what he wants to say with careful choice of words or else he will suffer the consequence of his failure leaving a bad impression on his audience.

Solution

In order for us not to face shortage of words in expressing our ideas or getting other ideas, we should carry on reading word building books and get exposition to the language by interacting with native speakers.

Incongruity of Verbal and Non-Verbal Messages

Both verbal and non-verbal clues are expected to match each other during communication. If any mismatch happens between them, the desired communication outcome cannot be achieved. This barrier to communication may confuse the listener and results in making the message sent ineffective. For instance, in higher education institutions instructors are usually perceived as having suit clothing or with distinctive formal clothes. Once, in the first semester of our undergraduate studies, we waited for a course instructor who was late by some minutes. A young man in shirt appeared talking to another person. We never thought that that person was our instructor. However, when he requested us to go into the classroom we were shocked. This happened due to our expectation of an instructor which is caused by the mismatch between verbal and non-messages.

Solution

To avoid this sort of barrier, one should dress according to the occasion, wear neat and clean clothes, choose and appropriate hair style, wear clean and polished shoes.

Emotional Outburst

Average emotional involvement is normal and is believed to aid communication. But excessive emotional involvements such as anger, excitement, fear, etc are believed to obstruct the normal flow of communication. For instance, a famous actor in India once was arrested for allegedly committing a hit-and-run crime. He was very emotional with his words when he refuted it in custody, which gave a bad image to the judge.

Solution

Controlling emotion is vital in this state of barrier to communication. The best thing to do is to calm down.

Communication Selectivity

Being the receiver of a message delivered by a sender, if one is giving attention only to a certain part of it, he /she

is creating a barrier to communication called *communication selectivity*. This type of barrier usually happens when the receivers are interested only in some parts of the message as it has of use for them. Under such circumstances if the flow of communication is interrupted, it is the receiver who is responsible for the barrier occurred to the communication. For instance, if a professor tells his students the final exam will be designed from the power point he is using in the class than what he is dictating, students may not give attention to what he is talking. Rather they focus on what is written on the power point. Hence, this poses barrier to the communication taking place between the teacher and the student (Mitra 2006).

Solution

As a solution what we would like to recommend to all people is to give attention to all communication made targeting them.

Cultural Variations

In interpersonal communication, cultural variations could be the principal cause for the failure of effective communication. Especially in the contemporary world when the world is going to be a single village, it is required to understand the existence of cultural variation and think how to deal with those cultures if the dream of getting effective communication across various cultures is needed to come true. To create intercontinental ties through partnership, collaboration and affiliation, it is essential to know the culture, law, customs and norms of the host countries. This concept holds true not only in the area of business but also education.

Solution

To get an effective communication across different cultures, it needs to identify the possible cultural barriers of communication like body language, customs, norms, etc.

Poor Listening Skills

One of the main obstacles of effective communication is poor listening skill. It is very important to keep in mind that hearing and listening are two different things. Thus, the former is a passive exercise, while the latter needs concentration and accurate decoding of signals sent by the speaker. The problem of misunderstanding could be solved if people listen to the message with attention. Emotional disturbances, indifferences, aggressiveness and wondering attention are some of the distractions that can hamper listening. Being immersed in worries and thoughts can also make people not to actively listen. Hence, in such situation effective communication cannot take place. A student who is thinking about his parents' row being in the classroom cannot fully understand what the teacher has been teaching.

Solution

As listening is a skill, it is possible to develop it through time by trying to concentrate on a certain thing at a time. And the speakers need to be aware of listening-related barriers to communication to come up with problem –solving approach.

Noise in the Channel

Noise which could happen in the form of sound, visual, audio-visual, written, physical or psychological could greatly affect the transmission of message from the sender to the receiver. It can also hinder the flow of communication, and effective exchange of ideas could not be made. Similarly, the interests of the communicators will diminish which in

turn leads to ineffective communication. For example, in a blurred television program, it is very hard to fully comprehend the concepts of the program as the main idea could be delivered to the audiences through the pictures.

Solution

While we are sending a message across a certain medium, it would be advisable to prove that the channel is capable to transmit it to receivers without any distortion. It is also better to look for another way of sending the message if we understand the channel is not effective.

Use of Inappropriate Media

Words of mouth, telephone, facsimiles, e-mail, etc are the media we use in interpersonal communication. But we do not make use of them every time for any incident. There is a preference of one medium over the other.

Before getting the message across to the receiver/s, a sender should think about the following factors while choosing the medium.

- Time
- Cost
- Type of message
- Intended audience

While choosing the medium for our message, we need to consider the advantages, disadvantages and the possible barriers to communication. For instance, a student wants to know when class starts after a long break, and chooses telephone to ask the vice chancellor, however, due to designation gap the student may not get the desired response. The suitable medium for his query would be visiting the official website of the University.

Solution

Choosing the medium that best suits the message's urgency, content, and proving the effectiveness of the medium is very crucial to prevent the communication failure.

Information Overload

The availability of massive amount of information which a receiver hardly handles effectively is another major problem that appears as interpersonal barrier to communication. This is known as *information overload*. Overloaded information usually leads the receivers of the information to fatigue, disinterest, and boredom. In addition to this, very crucial pieces of information are jumbled with too many irrelevant details and go rejected by the receivers. Hence, the sender has to mainly focus on sending very vital information rather than sending extraneous details as the quality of the information pays more than the quantity. If not, messages which have to get attention could be passed unnoticed. To cite an example, in a classroom if a teacher comes up with overloaded information on his power point presentation, participants lose patience and control of what is going on the stage. They get bored and start daydreaming.

Solution

Selectively conveying what one would like to say is believed to overcome over-loading of information.

CONCLUSIONS

The presenter has endeavored to elaborate the major causes of barriers to communication along with their solutions. Of course, there will be others that will be grouped under intrapersonal and interpersonal barriers to communication, but with different terminologies. As the main focus of the work is to create awareness about the frequently observed impediments to successful communication, we hope any other barrier can fall under the aforementioned categories. We would like readers to consider the classification which is in your mind as part and parcel of these major levels of barriers to communication.

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