

# Barriers to Effective Communication and How to Overcome Them

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## Introduction:

Communication is a complex process wherein information is shared between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, and behavior expressing feelings, ideas, views, opinions, etc. People communicate to satisfy needs. The main purpose of communication is to help people feel good about themselves and about their friends, groups, and organizations. For the communication to succeed there must be a transmission of thoughts, ideas and feelings from one mind to another. Effective communication is an essential component of organizational success whether it is at the interpersonal or intergroup or organizational or even external level.

Although all of us have been communicating with others since our infancy, the process of transmitting information from an individual (or a group) to another is a very complex process with many sources of potential error. According to an estimate, people in organizations typically spend over 75% of their time in an interpersonal situation; thus it is no surprise to find that at the root of a large number of organizational problems is poor communication. This poor (or ineffective or unsuccessful or failed) communication is caused by a large number of barriers. We will however be discussing them under three broad categories.

## Barriers to Communication:

1. Physical
2. Semantic
3. Socio-psychological

## 1. Physical barriers:

Physical barriers refer to a large number of physical factors ranging from noise and bodily movements to ill health of either or both the participants, confusion and discomfort. Even the slightest of the undesirable sound such as that arising out of dragging a table or sneezing or banging of the door or the window panes or creaking of the door or the fan etc. can pose a distraction especially to the listener leading to loss of certain information. Similarly, when one or both of the persons in the field of communication is/are not well or when there is any kind of discomfort on either part communication becomes ineffective. Sometimes, some sort of confusion also arises which leads to the communication being not successful. Thus, in oral communication, other barriers such as faulty seating arrangements, distance between the sender and the receiver, fatigue etc. result in miscommunication. In case of written communication, on the other hand, illegible writing, bad photocopies etc. lead to miscommunication.

## 2. Semantic Barriers:

Secondly, barriers pertaining to language vary from spoken words to graphics, charts etc. The audience fails to get the intended meaning if the words or expressions used are too complicated or uncommon. The choice of words or language in which a sender encodes a message will influence the quality of communication. Because language is a symbolic representation of a phenomenon, room for interpretation and distortion of the meaning exists. Similar is the case with

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graphics, charts, maps, diagrams and such other things. When the teacher uses very difficult or weird words such as bizarre, eerie etc. the students may not comprehend them. Semantic barriers occur when the sender and the receiver assign different meanings to the same words. The word *vent*, for example, may mean either an opening, a hole or to express.

### **3. Socio-psychological barriers:**

There is one more barrier to effective communication: socio-psychological which comes out of attitudes, emotions, status, source of communication, inattentiveness, poor retention, unsolicited communication, etc. People attend to stimuli in the environment in very different ways. We have shortcuts that we use to organize data. Invariably, these shortcuts introduce some biases into communication. Some of these shortcuts include stereotyping, projection, and self-fulfilling prophecies. Of these, however, stereotyping is more common. Similarly, our perception or preconceived notions on certain things also affect our understanding. Communication fails if there are hasty judgments, refusal to listen to a problem, distraction, acceptance of words literally, fear of criticism, day dreaming, impatience, interruptions, preconceived notions, switching off, etc.

#### **Means to overcome barriers:**

There are, however, many feasible ways to overcome these barriers so as to make our communication effective and successful. Some of the more acceptable and easily practicable ways and means of overcoming these barriers are suggested below:

#### **1. I. Means to overcome physical barriers:**

As far as the physical barriers are concerned, they can be overcome by following some small yet effective steps such as making appropriate seating arrangements in the classroom or the lecture hall. The seating arrangement has to be such that all the

audience face the speaker in order to have eye contact. Secondly, the audibility and visibility in the hall should be ensured. Moreover, the visual and aural distractions should be minimised. It is also necessary that the environmental comfort is provided to achieve optimum effect.

#### **2. I. Means to overcome semantic barriers:**

Similarly, in order to tackle linguistic barriers use of simple language is a very useful method. Ideas and information can also be effectively disseminated by using graphic symbols, charts, audio-visual resources, etc. The speaker also should prepare handouts and recommend books for better communication. Taking feedback as frequently as possible is another useful means of overcoming linguistic barrier.

#### **3. I. Means to overcome socio-psychological barriers:**

Socio-psychological barriers are difficult to tame. Calling attention and motivating listeners, however, go a long way. Feedback also helps overcome psychological barriers to a large extent. The listeners expect some kind of assistance and sympathy which are very useful for the success of the communication. Judicious use of audio-visual media helps bridge the communication gap.

#### **Conclusion:**

Language is a powerful vehicle of communication. Sometimes, however, owing to a number of factors successful or effective communications do not take place. Some of the more prominent factors leading to breakdown or failure in communication are: physical, semantic and socio-psychological barriers. Of course there are also equally effective means through which these barriers can be overcome, thus resulting in effective communication. To cite Francis T Bergin, communication, in order to succeed must be *correct, clear, complete, concise, concrete, candid* and *courteous*.

