

3 BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

There are many barriers to communication and these may occur at any stage in the communication process. Barriers may lead to your message becoming distorted and you therefore risk wasting both time and/or money by causing confusion and misunderstanding. Effective communication involves overcoming these barriers and conveying a clear and concise message.

Common barriers to effective communication

The message, you want to transfer, can skew the *use of jargon, over-complicated, unfamiliar and/or technical terms*. There are *emotional barriers and taboos*. Some people may find it difficult to express their emotions and some topics may be completely 'off-limits' or taboo. Other barriers to communication may constitute *lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance* to the receiver. Naturally differences in perceptions and opinions exist in the human population, which can cause problems in interpersonal communication. Physical disabilities such as *hearing problems or speech difficulties* can be very serious barriers to communication. Some *physical barriers complicate or even make it impossible to non-verbal communication*. Not being able to see the non-verbal cues, gestures, posture and general body language make communication less effective or impossible. These handicapped people have problem with language differences and they have the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents.

Other possible barriers could be *expectations and prejudices* which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping. People often hear what they expect to hear rather than what is actually said and jump to incorrect conclusions. *Cultural differences* contribute to these manners. The norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do the way in which emotions are expressed. For example, the concept of personal space varies between cultures and between different social settings. A skilled communicator must be aware of these barriers and try to reduce their impact by continually checking understanding and by offering appropriate feedback.

A categorisation of barriers to communication

When studying the barriers to communication we get to their categorization. The above-mentioned barriers can be divided into the following groups:

- *Language Barriers*
- *Psychological Barriers*
- *Physical Barriers*

- *Systematic Barriers*
- *Attitudinal Barriers*

Language Barriers

Language and linguistic ability may act as a barrier to communication. However, even when communicating in the same language, the terminology used in a message may act as a barrier if it is not fully understood by the receiver(s). For example, a message that includes a lot of specialist jargon and abbreviations will not be understood by a receiver who is not familiar with the terminology used. Regional colloquialisms and expressions may be misinterpreted or even considered offensive.

Psychological Barriers

The psychological state of the communicators will influence how the message is sent, received and perceived. For example, if someone is stressed they may be preoccupied by personal concerns and not as receptive to the message as if they were not stressed. Stress management is an important personal skill that affects our interpersonal relationships. Anger is another example of a psychological barrier to communication, when we are angry it is easy to say things that we may later regret and also to misinterpret what others are saying. More generally people with low self-esteem may be less assertive and therefore may not feel comfortable communicating - they may feel shy about saying how they really feel or read negative sub-texts into messages they hear.

Physiological Barriers

Physiological barriers may result from the receiver's physical state. For example, a receiver with reduced hearing may not grasp to entirety of a spoken conversation especially if there is significant background noise.

Physical Barriers

An example of a physical barrier to communication is geographic distance between the sender and receiver(s). Communication is generally easier over shorter distances as more communication channels are available and less technology is required. Although modern technology often serves to reduce the impact of physical barriers, the advantages and disadvantages of each communication channel should be understood so that an appropriate channel can be used to overcome the physical barriers.

Systematic Barriers

Systematic barriers to communication may exist in structures and organisations where there are inefficient or inappropriate information systems and communication channels, or where there is a lack of understanding of the roles and responsibilities for communication. In such organisations, individuals may be unclear of their role in the communication process and therefore not know what is expected of them.

Attitudinal Barriers

Attitudinal barriers are behaviours or perceptions that prevent people from communicating effectively. Attitudinal barriers to communication may result from personality conflicts, poor management, resistance to change or a lack of motivation. Effective receivers of messages should attempt to overcome their own attitudinal barriers to facilitate effective communication.

Book about barriers to communication

Authors Kevin Hogan and Ron Stubbs who have a lot of experience with communication have written book “Can’t get through 8 barriers to communication” which contains advice on effective communication. Kevin Hogan is an expert in communications and in his book passes on readers the key findings related to the topic of body language, influence, persuasion method of offering goods and sometimes humorous presentation as in the following example: *"The ability to say something funny requires a high level of intelligence. If you memorize a thousand jokes, that doesn't make you a person with a sense of humor. Sense of humor is more subtle. A good sense of humor is about timing, the ability to say the funny thing at the right time and to the right people. Telling a sexist joke in a room full of women will probably not score many points with the audience. Humor is largely an interpersonal activity that requires a high level of emotional, social and also mating intelligence."*

Eight Barriers to Communication

K. Hogan has found that there are eight basic mistakes causing loss of attention and respect towards other actors of communication - 8 barriers to communication:

- It is difficult shortly to define barriers to effective communication
- K. Hogan has discovered that there are 8 general ways that people lose the attention and respect of others when communicating - 8 barriers to communication:
 - Failure to make a great first (and second) impression
 - Flubbing (bungleing) the story
 - Not listening
 - Arguing with the intent to harm

- Criticism
- Hostility and contempt
- Ignoring body language
- Ignoring the cycle of communication

Important Facets of Communication

There are several facets of communication, many of which people never consider. Here are the most important:

- You, your beliefs, your intentions, your verbal skills, your empathy.
- The other person, his/her beliefs, intentions, verbal skills, and empathy.
- The physical environment (church, hospital, school, office, family).
- The physical appearance of each communicator.
- The nonverbal communication of each communicator.
- The degree to which two people like each other.
- Gender differences in perception and communication.