

Communication May Fail Due to Some Barriers



Management

KEYWORDS:

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Recognizing barriers to effective communication is a first step in improving communication style. Do you recognize these barriers from your own personal and professional experience?

Encoding Barriers. The process of selecting and organizing symbols to represent a message requires skill and knowledge. Obstacles listed below can interfere with an effective message.

Lack of Sensitivity to Receiver. A breakdown in communication may result when a message is not adapted to its receiver. Recognizing the receiver's needs, status, knowledge of the subject, and language skills assists the sender in preparing a successful message. If a customer is angry, for example, an effective response may be just to listen to the person vent for awhile.

Lack of Basic Communication Skills. The receiver is less likely to understand the message if the sender has trouble choosing the precise words needed and arranging those words in a grammatically-correct sentence.

Insufficient Knowledge of the Subject. If the sender lacks specific information about something, the receiver will likely receive an unclear or mixed message. Have you shopped for an item such as a computer, and experienced how some salespeople can explain complicated terms and ideas in a simple way? Others cannot.

Information Overload. If you receive a message with too much information, you may tend to put up a barrier because the amount of information is coming so fast that you may have difficulty comfortably interpreting that information. If you are selling an item with twenty-five terrific features, pick two or three important features to emphasize instead of overwhelming your receiver (ho-hum) with an information avalanche.

Emotional Interference. An emotional individual may not be able to communicate well. If someone is angry, hostile, resentful, joyful, or fearful, that person may be too preoccupied with emotions to receive the intended message. If you don't like someone, for example, you may have trouble "hearing" them.

Transmitting Barriers: Things that get in the way of message transmission are sometimes called "noise." Communication may be difficult because of noise and some of these problems:

Physical Distractions. A bad cellular phone line or a noisy restaurant can destroy communication. If an E-mail message or letter is not formatted properly, or if it contains grammatical and spelling errors, the receiver may not be able to concentrate on the message because the physical appearance of the letter or E-mail is sloppy and unprofessional.

Conflicting Messages. Messages that cause a conflict in perception for the receiver may result in incomplete communication. For example, if a person constantly uses jargon or slang to communicate with someone from another country who has never heard such expressions, mixed messages are sure to result. Another example of conflicting messages might be if a supervisor requests a report immediately without giving the report writer enough time to gather the proper information. Does the report

writer emphasize speed in writing the report, or accuracy in gathering the data?

3. Channel Barriers. If the sender chooses an inappropriate channel of communication, communication may cease. Detailed instructions presented over the telephone, for example, may be frustrating for both communicators. If you are on a computer technical support help line discussing a problem, it would be helpful for you to be sitting in front of a computer, as opposed to taking notes from the support staff and then returning to your computer station.

Long Communication Chain. The longer the communication chain, the greater the chance for error. If a message is passed through too many receivers, the message often becomes distorted. If a person starts a message at one end of a communication chain of ten people, for example, the message that eventually returns is usually liberally altered.

Decoding Barriers. The communication cycle may break down at the receiving end for some of these reasons:

Lack of Interest. If a message reaches a reader who is not interested in the message, the reader may read the message hurriedly or listen to the message carelessly. Miscommunication may result in both cases.

Lack of Knowledge. If a receiver is unable to understand a message filled with technical information, communication will break down. Unless a computer user knows something about the Windows environment, for example, the user may have difficulty organizing files if given technical instructions.

Lack of Communication Skills. Those who have weak reading and listening skills make ineffective receivers. On the other hand, those who have a good professional vocabulary and who concentrate on listening, have less trouble hearing and interpreting good communication. Many people tune out who is talking and mentally rehearse what they are going to say in return. We'll see some techniques for improving listening skills in Chapter 2.

Emotional Distractions. If emotions interfere with the creation and transmission of a message, they can also disrupt reception. If you receive a report from your supervisor regarding proposed changes in work procedures and you do not particularly like your supervisor, you may have trouble even reading the report objectively. You may read, not objectively, but to find fault. You may misinterpret words and read negative impressions between the lines. Consequently, you are likely to misunderstand part or all of the report.

Physical Distractions. If a receiver of a communication works in an area with bright lights, glare on computer screens, loud noises, excessively hot or cold work spaces, or physical ailments, that receiver will probably experience communication breakdowns on a regular basis.

RESPONDING BARRIERS— The communication cycle may be broken if feedback is unsuccessful.

NO PROVISION FOR FEEDBACK. Since communication is a two-way process, the sender must search for a means of getting a response from the receiver. If a team leader does not permit any interruptions nor questions while discussing projects, he may find that team members may not completely understand what they are to do. Face-to-face oral communication is considered the best type of communication since feedback can be both verbal and nonverbal. When two communicators are separated, care must be taken to ask for meaningful feedback.

INADEQUATE FEEDBACK. Delayed or judgmental feedback can interfere with good communication. If your supervisor gives you instructions in long, compound-complex sentences without giving you a chance to speak, you may pretend to understand the instructions just so you can leave the stress of the conversation. Because you may have not fully understood the intended instructions, your performance may suffer.