

Breaking Down Barriers: Understanding and Overcoming Communication Challenges in Organizations

Moses C¹, Leah N²

Abstract

Communication is the process of transmitting information from one person to another. It is a means of making contact that may be between people, organizations or between places. A person or organization can communicate with another in a written, oral, visual or physical form (using body language). Communication is such a powerful tool of both marketing and administration that every business relies on it for their survival. In practice no organization can function without an efficient internal as well as external communication system.

However, a communication system is said to be efficient if all possible means are available all the time for a business to use and the information being transmitted is done so very rapidly and accurately. Efficient and effective communication is essential to a business for a number of reasons some such as manager to issue instructions to the staff on what should be done in order to make business to operation smoothly and efficiently. Additionally, the staffs are also able to pass their grievances or suggestions to management in an amicable way, if there is a well-established and reliable line of internal communication.

A firm contacts its customers, suppliers and other firms by telephone, telex, fax, or E-mail in order to check, confirm or establish the market prices and conditions. A firm can also discuss problems, complaints, queries and so on with either its supplies or customers or even other business World-wide communication system helps the firm to widen the extent of its overseas (foreign) market enabling foreign customers to be contacted speedily by telecommunication service, or air mail. Thus By networking, an organization can contact other business persons and share their problems, experiences, and successes. This way, one can obtain better prices, and find business opportunities one did not know about. On the other hand, an efficient communication system enables a firm to increase its efficiency and to complete favorably with other firms in the same business.

In an organization, communication is bound to suffer from setback if conditions contrary to the smooth functioning of the process emerge. They are referred to as barriers because they create impediment in the progress of the interaction. Asha Kaul (2013) in her book "effective Business communication" explains the barriers to effective communication in terms of Sender-oriented, Receiver-oriented, Organizational structural oriented and many more.

Sender-oriented barriers could be voluntary or involuntary. At any cost, efforts should be made on the part of the sender to identify and remove them. As the sender is the originator of communication, he should be extremely careful not to erect barriers, if his interaction gives rise to or indicates that there are barriers,

the communication comes to a grinding halt. Some of the barriers that are sender-oriented can be due to badly expressed message. Not being well versed in the topic under discussion can create problems of this nature. The sender may not be able to structure his ideas accurately and efficiently. What he wishes to say and what he finally imparts may not be the same. The discrepancy emerges as soon as the words are uttered. In fact, one of the important criteria at the time of initializing a piece of communication is ideas should be concrete and the message should be well structured. The receiver should not feel that the interaction is a waste of time. The moment this feeling crops up, the listener totally switches off and thus ceases the process of effective communication. Asha Kaul (2013).

The other example of sender oriented barrier can be Loss in transmission. This is a very minor issue but one that gains in magnitude when it leads to inability in transmitting the actual message. Once again, if the choice of the channel or medium is not right, the impact of the message is lost. This is mostly a physical noise. However, the responsibility lies with the sender, as he should ensure that all channels are free of noise before commencing communication.

Semantic problem is another example of the sender oriented barrier. This is the High and big sounding words definitely look and sound impressive. But if the receiver is not able to comprehend the impact of these words, or if they sound 'Greek' or 'Latin' to him, the entire exercise proves futile. This problem could arise in the interpretation of the words or overall meaning of the message. It is also related to the understanding of the intention behind a particular statement. For the receiver, e.g., the sanctity associated with the word 'white' might be violated when the receiver uses it in a careless fashion. The idiosyncrasies of the receiver should be well understood by the sender if he/she does not wish these barriers to crop up at the time of communication. The look on the face of the listener should be sufficient to warn the sender that he has overstepped his limits or he has been misunderstood (Association of business Executives).

The other example of sender oriented barrier is Over/Under-communication. The quantum of communication should be just right. Neither should there be excess information nor should it be too scanty. Excess information may confuse the receiver as he/she has to figure out the exact import of the message, and scanty information would make him grope for the actual intent of the message. The sender should as far as possible try to get the profile of the receiver so that at the time of communication he/she knows how much material is needed and how much can be done away with. Suppose he/she starts with some information that the receiver already possesses, the latter might lose interest as it is a mere repetition of what he already knows, so by the time he arrives at the core of the matter, he has already lost the attention of the receiver.

Prejudice is another sender oriented barrier. Starting any piece of communication with a bias or know-it-all attitude can prove to be quite detrimental to the growth of communication process. Though it is easier said than done, still, when communication commences, all sorts of prejudices should be done away with, and the mind should free of bias. This would enable the sender to formulate his/her message, keeping only the receiver and his needs in mind. Thoughts like "last time he did this...." Or "he belongs to his group..." can totally warp the formulation of the message. This barrier can also be extended to the receiver. If the respondent starts with prejudices in mind, he too would be unable to listen to the intent of

the message because the understanding of the message is going to be warped. The messages are going to be understood in relation to the prejudices that a receiver harbors against the sender.

The receiver too can be guilty of erecting barriers in the course of the interaction. Although his role in the initial phase is passive, the receiver becomes active when he/she starts assimilating and absorbing the informing. The receiver is equally to blame if the situation goes awry and communication comes to a stop, or there is miscommunication. Some of the barriers emanating from the side of the receiver can be due to Poor retention. Retention is extremely important during interaction. If the receiver has poor retention capability, he would probably get lost in the course of the proceeding. There would be no connection between what was said initially and what is being said now. He might counter statement instead of seeking clarifications that might lead to clamping in the part of the sender. If the decoder feels that his retention capacities are not good, a judicious strategy for him would be to jot down points. It does not portray him in a poor light. On the contrary, it shows how conscientious he is to get the message right.

The other one can be due to Inattentive listening. The mind has its own way of functioning. it is very difficult to exercise control over the changes of someone's mind. Listening is more an exercise in controlling the mind and exercising it to assimilate messages. The errors in listening arise primarily because the receiver is either not interested in what is being said, or has other things to concentrate on. The art of listening is an exercise in concentration. If this skill can be honed, barriers to communication would not be erected.

Tendency to evaluate is another barrier that arises from the receiver of information. Being judgmental and evaluative are both the starting points for miscommunication. Remember, the mind cannot perfume two activities at the same time. If it is evaluating, listening cannot take place. Evaluation should always be a sequel to the listening process. It cannot be done simultaneously with listening. The minute the sender opens his mouth, if the listener starts mentally pronouncing judgment concerning his style or content, he has actually missed out on a major part of what has been said. His responses naturally are then going to be incorrect or expose his misunderstanding.

Organizational structural oriented these are barriers that arises due to misinformation or lack of appropriate transparency available to the employees in an organization such as. Conflicting information. This comes about due to Dichotomy in the information that the receiver possesses and that which is being transmitted can create confusion and result in miscommunication. Conflict between the existing information and fresh one result in elimination of the latter unless and until the receiver is cautious and verifies with the sender the reliability and validity of the message. The sender should convince the receiver that whatever is now being said is correct and relevant to further proceedings.

The other example is due to Differing status and position. Position in the organizational hierarchy is no criterion to determine the strength of ideas and issues. Rejecting the proposal of a subordinate or harbouring a misconception that a junior cannot come up with a "eureka" concept is not right. In fact, many companies have started encouraging youngsters to come up with ideas/solutions to a particular problem. These ideas are then discussed among the senior managers and their validity is ascertained keeping the workings and the constraints of the company in mind. The basic purpose of this upward

traversing of ideas is that fresh and innovative mind can come up with unique solutions. If an individual has been working in a particular company for some years, it is natural that his mind gets conditioned in a particular manner. Challenging newcomers to innovate as a part of company policy takes care of ego problems that may arise if this is not the accepted norm (Asha K 2013).

Resistance to change and Refutations and arguments are the barriers that are related to the organizational structure. Fixed ideas, coupled with an unwillingness to change or discuss, hampers on the way people relate in an organisation and results in miscommunication. Novae concepts that require discussions before they can really materialize, if rebuked, fall flat. The onus lies directly on the receiver who is unreceptive and unwilling to change. People with dogmatic opinions and views prove to be very poor communicators and erect maximum number of barriers. On the other hand, Refutations and arguments are negative in nature. Trying to communicate with the sender on the premise that refutations and arguments can yield fruitful results would prove to be futile. Communication is a process in which the sender and the receiver are at same level. The minute refutations or arguments begin, there is a shift in balance between the two participants, after which the receiver moves to a conceived higher position and the sender remains at the same level. In case there are some contradictions that need to be resolved, discussion is the right way to approach. Listening to the views of the other, trying to understand or at least showing that there has been understanding, appreciating and, finally, positing own views should be the sequence to be followed. The strategy adopted should not make the sender feel small or slighted.

In conclusion, it can be stated that Ideas should be carefully formulated/though out before beginning any kind of communication. This can be done by test thinking by communicating with peers and colleagues. It is said that two minds are always better than one. Ideas, when discussed aloud with another person, necessarily take on a shape and form. Errors of logic, if any, get sorted out. In this process the concepts of other can also be collated and incorporated to make the communication richer and more fruitful. Create a climate of trust and confidence In order to win the trust and confidence of the receiver, the sender has to put in extra effort through which he is able to win the trust and confidence of the recipient. This is what we normally refer to as establishing sender credibility. If the receiver is convinced that the sender has his best said and try to heart, he would be willing to pay attention to all is being said and try to grasp the import of the message in the manner in which it is intended. Different occasions and different hours necessitate a change in the message. The sender has to be careful of the time when and the place where he makes his statement. As all communication is situation bound, a statement made at an incorrect moment, or a wrong place can stimulate an undesired response. The most prudent step is to measure the import of the message in relation to the situation and then impart it. Reinforce words with action. Whatever statements are made, should be reinforce by action on the part of the sender. The receiver should not fell that there are two codes at play, one for transmittal and the other for action. if there is harmony between the two, the decoder is mentally at peace, for his grasp is more accurate thorough. Communicate efficiently. The sender can only ascertain whether communication has been effective when he confirms with feedback. The receiver on his part is also wary as he knows that he would be requested for feedback. Soliciting and receiving feedback is the simplest and the surest way of removing any barriers that might crop up in the course of communication as a result of either over communication or a semantic problem.

REFERENCES

1. Association of Business executives (2014), Organizational Behaviour, Wimbledon, UK
2. Asha K (2013), effective Business Communication, PHI learning private limited, Delhi.
3. Derek L (2008), Success in commerce 4th ed. John murray ltd, london
4. Matimba B. (2016), Business in modern Environment, academic helpline, Lusaka, Zambia
5. Mullins J. L. (2005), management and organization behavior, 7th ed. Pitman inprint, Britain.
6. Wokorach J B (1998), Commerce a complete course 3rd ed. Salama publishers, mochudi, Botswana
7. Wokorach J B (2010), Commerce a complete course 5th ed. Salama publishers, mochudi, Botswana