

RESEARCH ARTICLE



BARRIERS AND OBSTACLES OF TECHNO-LINGUAL COMMUNICATION

Dr. DHRUV SHANKAR

(Ex-Lecturer)

Department of Applied Science and Humanities, Krishna Institute of Technology & Naraina College of Engineering & Technology, Kanpur, U.P., India



ABSTRACT

Barriers and obstacles are the means which check the free flow of communication that may be general or technical. Indeed, they are the original tools of obstruction or impediment progressing ever with great strength and power in the opposite direction of the communicational flow running from one place to another. They are, categorically, originated by erroneous encoding, imperfect transmitting, faulty decoding, cultural variation, many transfer stations, fear of superiors and emotional, psychological and physical interventions. We may avoid of them if we are extremely cautious and careful about the message which is to be communicated, the medium through which the message travels and the real status or the background of the recipient. Life is a pool of problems controlling the lively flow at each and every step. Similarly, the process of communication is full of barriers and obstacles which may be compared to the thorns around a sweet and fragrant rose.

Keywords: Barriers, obstacles, communication, encoding, decoding, intrapersonal, interpersonal and organizational.

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Meaning and Definition of 'Barriers' and 'Obstacles': Life is a self-generated and voluntary flow of happenings running from pillar to post. But it does not glide smoothly as there are a number of problems which always try to check it. Similarly, the components that prevent the spontaneous stream of transmission from communicator to receiver are known as the barriers to communication. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines the term 'Barrier' as 'a thing that prevents or controls movement from one place to another' or 'a thing that makes communication or good relationships between people difficult or impossible'.¹ Thus, it is clear that the barriers are nothing but the sources of interruption which stop the volitional flow of something running from one

place to another. Besides, Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines the term 'obstacle' as 'a thing that stands in the way and obstructs progress'.² Consequently, we can state that there is no difference between 'barrier' and 'obstacle' as both of them refer to the same meaning.

Different Conceptions: Everyone attempts to impart what he or she longs to convey. But it is not always possible to communicate the same message, as it is intended for the receiver because there are many barriers or obstacles which are always ready to arrest the common flow of communication. Then, there is a difference between what is sent and what is received. In fact, the barriers are the natural sources which are generated automatically. Considering the natural facts of barriers, Rajhans

Gupta says, "The barriers of communication may be such as the poor form of the communicated matter; the presence of distorting 'noises' – internal and external (i.e., an unsuitable mood, anxiety, distraction etc., and physical, environmental disturbances – interruptions, failure of mike or voice, some noisy activity – e.g., a parking place – in the neighbourhood); very different perspectives and sympathies addressed to the same issue, and the absence of a language well known to all the people participating in a conversation."³

As communication is a complex process, it is desirable to take care of interference and barriers that may hamper the smooth flow of effective communication. Communication barriers are generally created by improper encoding, by passing, frame of reference, physical distractions, psychological and emotional interference or cultural differences.

Improper encoding refers to the selection of an inappropriate medium or linguistic form which leads to communication breakdown due to misunderstanding or confusion. The term 'bypassing' refers to misunderstanding resulting from missed meanings because of the use of abstract words and phrases on which both senders and receivers do not agree. Your weakness in viewing others within your frame of reference may also lead to confusion and misunderstanding. The moment you interpret others' point of view from your angle, you allow your preconceived notions and prejudices to start working for you. Physical distractions can easily disrupt communication because a person who is physically uncomfortable can neither be a good speaker nor a good listener. You should avoid any physical discomfort during communication. Any psychological or emotional turbulence or disturbance can also prove to be a barrier to effective communication because it leads to lack of interest and concentration. Feeling of sadness, fear, anger, anxiety or jubilation influence our reception and receptivity to others' ideas. Finally, cultural differences may create misunderstandings during intercultural communication because the sender and the receiver belong to different cultures and share different values. We should be sensitive to cultural

differences and take into account the values of our listeners/readers while communicating with them.⁴

Now, it is evident that there are many reasons by which barriers and obstacles are generated. However, most of the scholars' opinion is that communication process would be carried out successfully if both the sender and the receiver belong to the same physical, mental, social, psychological, cultural and technical background or status. Besides, the barriers and obstacles would definitely be generated in the process of communication if there are characteristic differences between two persons or parties. In this reference, Malti Agarwal's views are quite revealing:

No two individuals upon the earth are alike. We interpret the things according to our own perceptions, background and experiences. When we communicate with a particular set of people, it becomes necessary to know about the background, education and capacity of the perception of the audience i.e., the receiver so that the message can be properly decoded. If a computer company representative gives the details of his company product to one who knows nothing about computer, in such a case, all his explanations and deliberations fail into insignificance since the receiver cannot perceive anything. Likewise, if a doctor communicates the causes of cancer like fatal disease in strictly technical terms to a layman, the patient fails to understand. Doctor's wrong assumption about the patient's knowledge here creates a barrier to communication.⁵

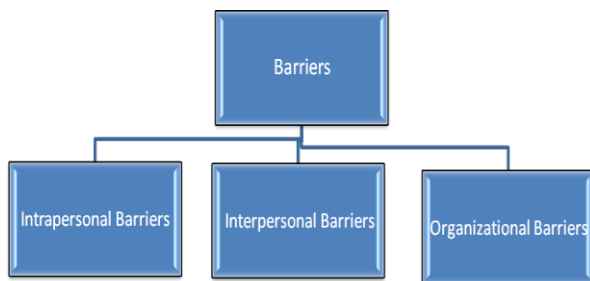
Undoubtedly, life is full of complexities. Some problems are always waiting to overpower us whenever we start for any physical, technical or social work. If we deeply consider about the barriers and obstacles of communication, we shall find that they are nothing but some kind of technolinguistic problems. These problems may be compared to the incongruities or discrepancies as Thomas N. Huckin and Leslie A. Olsen state: "A problem is some kind of incongruity, a discrepancy between what we expect or want to find and what we actually do find. It is a conflict between what should be and what is. Problems are not inherent in nature; they are a product of our expectations and desires."⁶

Thus, we can say that barriers and obstacles are the problems that are always striving to stand in the way of transmitting ideas effectively and peacefully from communicator to receiver. In addition, barriers and obstacles may be compared to 'noise' that leads a disturbance in the process of transferring ideas as Meenakshi Raman and Sangeeta Sharma's philosophy portrays:

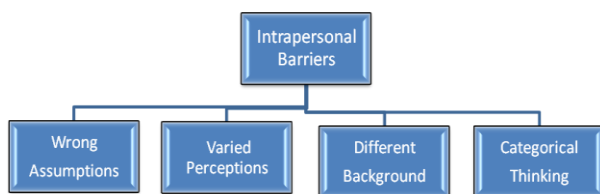
Any interference in the message sent and message received leads to the production of 'noise'. The term communication barrier, or that which inhibits or distorts the message, is an expansion of the concept of noise. Noise here does not mean cacophony, but a break in the communication process. If the noise occurs because of technological factors, it is a smaller problem as it can be removed by correcting the technological faults. However, if the noise is due to human error, the parties involved in the communication process need to take corrective measures.⁷

Classification of Barriers/Obstacles:

On the process of message formation and delivery the barriers or obstacles of communication may be classified at three levels:



Intrapersonal barriers: In this world, every human being is a unique creation of God and everyone thinks differently from the other as thinking varies person to person. The word 'intra' refers to 'inside' or 'within' or 'inner'. Hence, it can be inferred that the 'barriers' which are aroused due to inner struggle or disturbance of a person are known as intrapersonal barriers. The reasons that lead us to intrapersonal barriers are the following:



Wrong Assumption: Wrong Assumption can be one of the main barriers to communication. Wrong assumptions are generally made because the sender does not have the proper knowledge about the background of the receiver. A skilled communicator keeps these issues in mind to prevent them from becoming barriers.⁸ For example, if a patient goes to a doctor, and tells him about his sickness, the doctor examines his illness and suggests that he has to take some medicine with 'SOS'. Now, the problem arises if the patient does not know the meaning of the 'SOS'. This thing creates the barrier of wrong assumption.

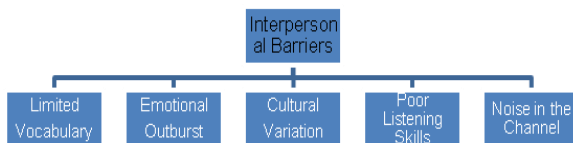
Varied Perceptions: There is a story of the six blind men who perceive an elephant in different ways. The first one who catches the ear of the elephant, says that the elephant is just like a fan. The second one takes the trunk in his hands, and says that the elephant is like a snake. The third one who perceives the tusk of the elephant, says that the elephant is similar to a sword. The fourth one grasps a leg and thinks that the elephant is akin to a tree. The fifth one touches the stomach of the elephant and states that the elephant is looking like a wall. The sixth one who seizes the tail, thinks that the elephant is just like a rope. It's nothing but a matter of perception. The best way to conquer this barrier is to have a wider outlook on the matter.

Different Backgrounds: If two persons are having dissimilar backgrounds, they would not be able to understand each other effectively. Suppose that a computer engineer comes to a doctor and starts to describe the hardware of the computer, the doctor would be unable to understand the engineer's ideas. The reason is that both the persons are having different backgrounds. Therefore, to improve communication skills, it is necessary to have the background knowledge of the audience.

Categorical Thinking: People who feel that they 'know it all' are called 'pansophists'. This type of thinking exists in people who feel that they know everything about a particular subject, and therefore refuse to accept any further information on that topic. For example, in a General Body meeting of your organization, you are to be briefed about the annual budget. However, you do not pay attention because you feel you have already been briefed

about it by your secretary the previous day. Later you propose that new vehicles have to be bought. Imagine your embarrassment when you realize that the topic was discussed and a decision had already been taken in the General Body meeting. This type of thinking can pose a major barrier, leading to a failure in communication. In such instances, the receivers refuse information because of their 'know-it-all' attitude.⁹

Interpersonal Barriers: The word 'inter' refers to 'coming or occurring between two things in time, place, order and character'. In fact, interpersonal barriers take place because of inappropriate transaction of words, limited vocabulary, poor listening skills, emotional outbursts, cultural variations and noise in the channel etc. when a communication process is going on between two persons or more. The most important factors of interpersonal barriers are the following:



Limited Vocabulary: If a person has inadequate vocabulary, he will have to face the barrier of limited vocabulary. Besides, it leaves a poor impression on the audience during the speech or presentation. Hence, everyone must try to improve his vocabulary power by studying a variety of books, newspapers and magazines.

Emotional Outburst: The display of intense emotions such as love, hate, anger, fear, jealousy and joy is likely to distort the message. It has, however, been found that positive emotions such as joy and love interfere less with the flow of communication than the negative emotions. When the receiver of a message feels threatened by a real or imagined danger, he becomes defensive or hostile. In such a situation he is likely to misinterpret, ignore, or overact to messages. Often the clue to this barrier is a significant change in vocal modulation. The voice may become sharp, crack or rise to a shout at the time of the emotional

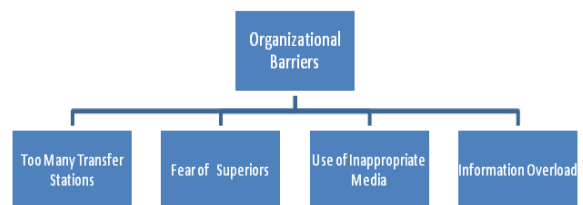
outburst. When this happens the receiver of the hostile message should remain calm, try to pacify the sender, and encourage him to talk coolly about his strong feelings.¹⁰

Cultural Variation: If the communicator and the audience belong to different cultures, the barrier of cultural variation would take place. To overcome this kind of barrier, it is necessary for both the communicator and the audience to have the knowledge of different cultures as industrial globalization is increasing very rapidly.

Poor Listening Skills: An ordinary obstacle in the process of transmission is the habit of poor listening. There is a difference between hearing and listening. Hearing is an inactive activity while listening requires attentive and thoughtful alertness to decipher the message communicated by the speaker. Misconception and misinterpretation may be diminished if the audience listen to the message with careful consideration. Wandering attention is the main reason for the habit of poor listening.

Noise in the Channel: Noise is an undesirable incitement which interferes the flow of communication. To a great extent, it is confined to cacophony, besides, it may take place in physical, psychological, written, visual and audio-visual shapes. Technical or material noise relates us to the uproar of machines, loud musical sound and human tumult which make the action of the listener hard and Herculean.

Organizational Barriers: The barriers which are generated in an organization through different resources are known as organizational barriers. Organizational barriers may be divided in the following way:



Too Many Transfer Stations: The process of having too many transfer stations twists and procrastinates the message. The processing of information by several hands before it reaches the destination emphatically causes loss of meaning and weakens the original message. To solve this

problem, some organizations have changed the communication network to allow direct access from bottom to the top and vice versa on the stairs of communication.

Fear of Superiors: Fear or fright of the superiors interrupts subordinates from speaking frankly and freely. A worker may not be pleased with the way his boss treats him, but he cannot resist him because of losing his boss's favour and grace. Therefore, in each and every organization, it is indispensable to originate an environment which empowers employees to speak freely. Consequently, we can conclude that an open environment is beneficial for both the boss and the bearer.

Use of Inappropriate Media: Most important components of the common media utilized in the organizations are graphs, charts, facsimile machines, boards, e-mails, telephones, films, slides, computer presentations, teleconferencing, and Video conferencing. An unsuitable medium may act as a barrier to communication. For example, an employee longs to express his repentance to his boss over his misbehaviour. In this case, the written document will be fruitless and face to face communication will be fruitful. Therefore, before choosing the medium one should keep in mind the advantages, disadvantages and possible barriers to communication.

Information Overload: One of the major problems faced by organizations today is the accessibility of the facts which the receiver is unable to cope with in an effective manner. This is known as information overload. It can be minimized in two ways. First, the information should be given only to those who may be benefitted from it. Secondly, the message should include only the main ideas, devoid of all useless details. Thus, these are the methods by which the problem of information overload can be solved.

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