

3.2 BARRIERS

For a better understanding of barriers and filters which abort effective communication, let us consider his situation.

You are attending a friend's marriage reception. At the venue, there were hundreds of people talking to each other. The orchestra was playing a very popular movie song. All of a sudden you met a person, who happens to be your childhood friend. He was dressed in a very expensive suit. He recognized you animatedly in fluent English. After a while he gave you his address and explained, how to reach his place and invited you to dinner. But you could listen and understand only a little. Why???

You can give a few answers: 1. There was too much of noise. 2. I did not recognize the person. 3. He was speaking in fluent English, which I could not catch up with. 4. I was thinking and trying to remember him, so I did not grasp what he said. 5. I was distracted by his style and expensive clothing so on.

Good. You are right. All these are valid reasons for the failure of the communication between you two. Now you have realized that there are several obstacles which will stop you from communicating effectively. We call them Barriers and Filters. Let us find out the difference between barriers and filters.

3.3.1 Barriers

Barriers are the external obstacles or distractions which exist outside both the sender and receiver and prevent effective communication. Examples Noise, Language, Cross-talk, Distance, Mechanical failure, Jargon, Visual distraction etc.

1. Physical or environmental barriers:

a. Noise - The noise created by external factors like traffic, playing of loud music, trains and airplanes, or by crowds of people, affects our communication.

b. Time & distance - Time becomes a physical barrier when people have to communicate across different time zones in different countries. The physical distance between people who need to communicate can also cause problems because it does not allow oral or face-to-face communication.

c. Defects in communication system – Mechanical problems and defects in instruments of communication also create physical barriers, as in a faulty fax machine or typewriter. Similarly, a computer that hangs, or a dead telephone line can lead to non-transmission of messages. eg. No range in mobile, technical problem in mike or speakers.

d. Wrong selection of medium – The sender selects the medium which is not familiar to the receiver.

e. Physiological defects like stammering, hearing defects, mumbling while speaking etc.

2. Language or Semantic barriers:

Language is the main medium of communication and words are its tools. Language proves to be a barrier at different levels, such as semantic (meaning), syntactic (grammar), phonological (pronunciation, intonation, pitch etc.) and finally linguistic (across languages) Thus, language barriers can arise in different ways:

a. Jargon or unfamiliar terminology - There are some special terms or technical words used by people belonging to a certain group or field of work such as doctors, lawyers, computer software engineers or college students. They use words which are their own, specialised jargon which cannot be understood by anyone outside their group.

b. Difference in language – Unfamiliar language becomes a barrier when people do not know each other's language. This barrier can be overcome by using a common medium of communication, as in a classroom. Translation is also an important way of overcoming this barrier.

c. Words are of two kinds: extensional and intentional words. Extensional words are clear in their meaning and therefore do not create barriers – such as words like boy, chair, garden etc. Intentional words are words that describe and they can be understood differently by different people, according to the meaning that a person gives to the word. Thus good, bad, beautiful are intentional words, and a simple sentence like she is a good girl. can create confusion because the meaning of the word 'good' is unclear.

d. Sometimes, the same word is used in different contexts, giving rise to totally different meanings. A word like 'hard', for example can be used in different ways:

hard chair, hard-hearted, hard drink, having a hard time – all these use the same word but the meanings are different.

e. Barriers can be created when we come across words, which have the same sound when pronounced, but which mean very different things. Examples: words like fair and fare; bear and bare; council and counsel.

3. Psychological barriers: Psyche means mind. Psychological barriers are created in the mind. Communication is a mental activity and its aim is to create understanding. But the human mind is complex and not all communication can result in understanding. There are several kinds of psychological barriers which can come in the way of understanding.

(a) **Emotions:** Emotions are among the most common psychological barriers to communication. The emotion may be connected to the communication received or it may be present in the sender's or receiver's mind, even before the communication takes place. In both cases, it acts as a barrier. Emotions can be positive, like happiness and joy, or negative, like fear, anger, mistrust etc. Both positive and negative emotions act as barriers, if they are not kept in check.

(b) **Prejudice:** A prejudice is an opinion held by a person for which there is no rational basis or valid reason. It can be against something or someone, or in favour of it, but it becomes a barrier to a meaningful communication. Prejudices are based on ignorance and lack of information, e.g., prejudices about certain communities or groups of people.

(c) **Halo effect:** Sometimes our reactions to people are not balanced or objective; they are of an extreme nature. Either we like a person so much that we can find no shortcomings in her/him, or we dislike someone so much that we can see nothing good in her/him. In both cases, we commit errors of judgment and fail to understand the person.

(d) **Self-image or different perceptions:** Every person has in her/his mind a certain image of herself/himself. S/he thinks of herself/himself in a certain way. This is their perception of themselves, their self-image. One's self-image is the product of one's heredity, one's environment and one's experiences, and thus every person's selfimage is unique and different from the others. Self-image can create a barrier

because we accept communication which is compatible with our self-image. We avoid or reject communication, which goes against our perception of ourselves.

(e) **Closed Mind:** A closed mind is one which refuses to accept an idea or opinion on a subject, because it is different from his idea. Such persons form their opinion on a subject, and then refuse to listen to anyone who has something different to say about it. A closed mind may be the result of some past experience or just habit. It is very difficult to remove this psychological barrier.

(f) **Status:** Status refers to rank or position. It could be economic, social or professional status. In any organisation, hierarchy creates differences in rank, and this is a normal situation. Thus, status by itself does not cause barriers; but when a person becomes too conscious of his status, whether high or low, then status becomes a barrier. For instance, in a business organisation, a senior executive who is unduly conscious of his seniority will not communicate properly with his juniors, and will refrain from giving them the required information. Similarly, if a junior is acutely conscious of his junior status, he will avoid communicating with his seniors, even when it is necessary

(g) **Inattentiveness and Impatience:** Sometimes the receiver may not pay attention to the sender's message, or he may be too impatient to hear the message fully and properly. Such barriers are common in oral communication.