

# Barriers to human communication

-Jubayer Ibn Kamal

Communication is the key factor in the success of any organization. When it comes to effective communication, there are certain barriers that every organization faces. People often feel that communication is as easy and simple as it sounds. No doubt, but what makes it complex, difficult, and frustrating are the barriers that come its way. Some of these barriers are mentioned below. Barriers to successful communication include message overload (When a person receives too many messages at the same time,) and message complexity

The use of jargon.

Emotional Barriers and Taboos

Lack of attention, interest, distractions, or irrelevance to the receiver

Differences in perception and viewpoint

Physical disabilities such as hearing problems or speech difficulties

Physical barriers to non-verbal communication

Language differences and the difficulty in understanding unfamiliar accents

Expectations and prejudices which may lead to false assumptions or stereotyping.

## **Physical barriers:**

Physical Barriers are often due to the nature of the environment. Thus, for example, the natural barrier exists, if staff are located in different buildings or on different sites. Likewise, poor or outdated equipment, particularly the failure of management to introduce new technology, may also cause problems. Staff shortages are another factor that frequently causes communication difficulties for an organization. Whilst distractions like background noise, poor lighting or an environment that is too hot or cold can all affect people's morale and concentration, which in turn interfere with effective communication.

## **System design:**

System Design faults refer to problems with the structures or systems in place in an organization. Examples might include an organizational structure that is unclear and therefore makes it confusing to know whom to communicate with. Other examples could be inefficient or inappropriate information systems, a lack of supervision or training, and a lack of clarity in roles and responsibilities which can lead to staff being uncertain about what is expected of them.

## **Attitudinal barriers:**

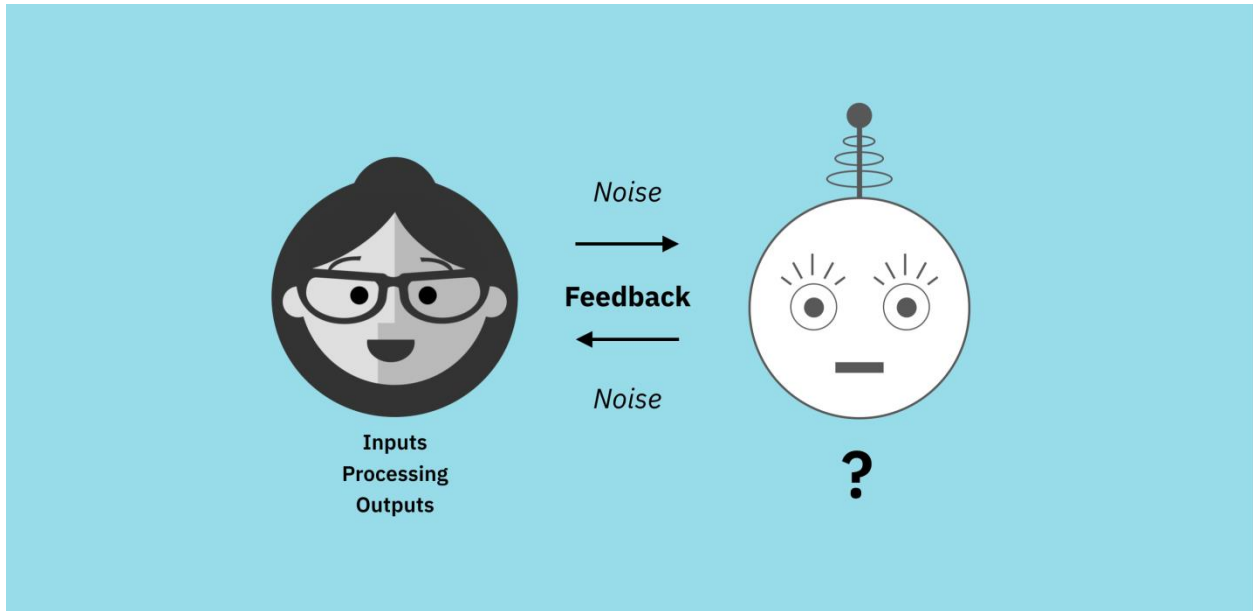
Attitudinal Barriers come about as a result of problems with staff in an organization. These may be brought about, for example, by such factors as poor management, lack of consultation with employees, personality conflicts which can result in people delaying or refusing to communicate, the personal attitudes of individual employees which may be due to lack of motivation or dissatisfaction at work, brought about by insufficient training to enable them to carry out particular tasks, or just resistance to change due to entrenched attitudes and ideas.

## **Ambiguity of Words/Phrases:**

Words sounding the same but having different meanings can convey a different meaning altogether. Hence the communicator must ensure that the receiver receives the same meaning. It would be better if such words can be avoided by using alternatives.

## **Individual linguistic ability;**

is also important. The use of difficult or inappropriate words in communication can prevent people from understanding the message. Poorly explained or misunderstood messages can also confuse. We can all think of situations where we have listened to something explained that we just could not grasp.



## Physiological barriers:

may result from individuals' discomfort, caused, for example, by ill health, poor eyesight, or hearing difficulties.

## Presentation of information:

is also important to aid understanding. Simply put, the communicator must consider the audience before making the presentation itself, and in cases where it is not possible, the presenter can at least try to simplify his/her vocabulary so that the majority can understand. In any communication model, noise is interference with the decoding of messages sent over a channel by an encoder. There are many examples of noise:

## Environmental Noise:

Noise that physically disrupts communication, such as standing next to loud speakers at a party, or the noise from a construction site next to a classroom making it difficult to hear the professor.



# Barriers to Effective Communication

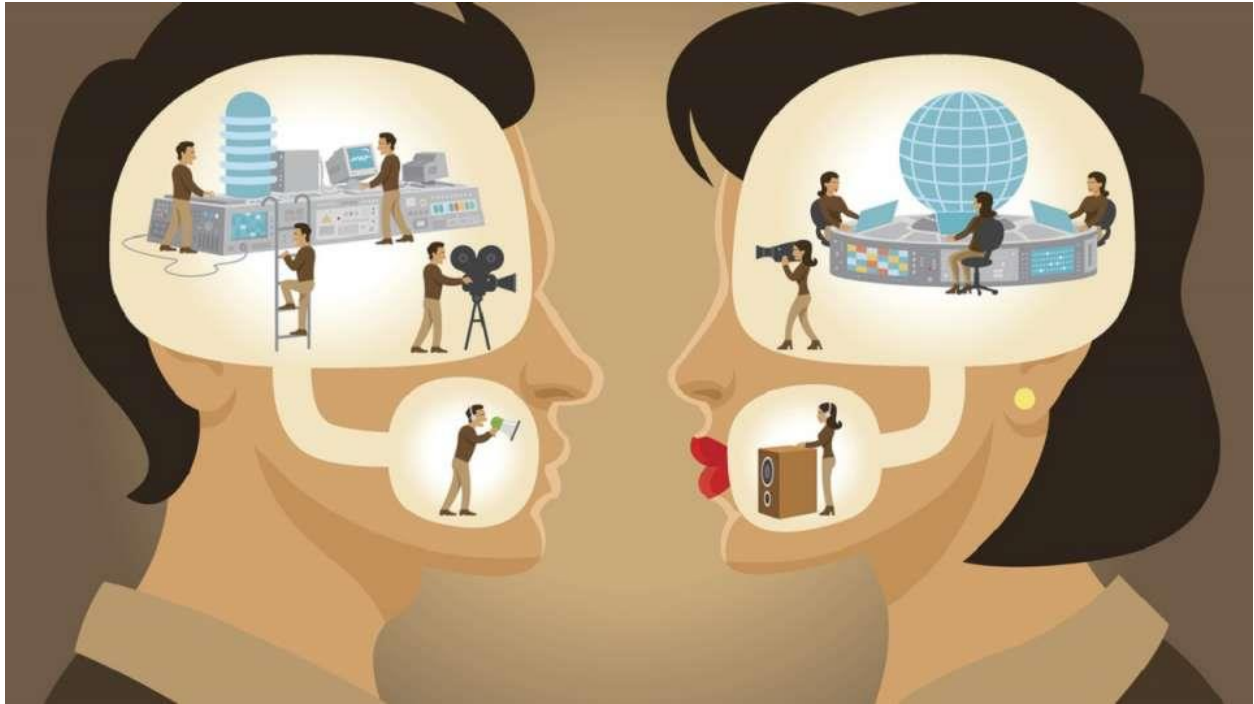
## Key Differences

### **Physiological-Impairment Noise:**

Physical maladies that prevent effective communication, such as actual deafness or blindness prevent messages from being received as they were intended.

### **Cultural differences:**

The norms of social interaction vary greatly in different cultures, as do how emotions are expressed. For example, the concept of personal space varies between cultures and between different social settings. See our page on [Intercultural Awareness](#) for more information.



Overcoming Way out of Various Barriers to Effective Communication

## **Listening:**

Listening is not just hearing the words said but a lot more. Words have context, which needs to be taken in. Words are said with feeling and meaning, with gestures and mannerisms, all of which need to be taken into account. In communication body language is very important, if not all-important. We do not just communicate with our words but with our whole body. Any listener (and speaker) who does not take this into account does so at their peril. Listening well is one of the best things we can do to overcome barriers in communication. Listening is giving our full attention to the other person. It helps to be enjoying the interchange. It helps to try to get the most out of the interplay.

So what is it that keeps people from listening and being present in a conversation? Here are some possible causes:

- **Rehearsing what to say next:** When we're too busy and too focused on preparing our response to what the other person is saying, we aren't fully present to what's being said at precisely that moment.
- **Being overemotional:** Allowing defensiveness, fear, anger, love, disgust, or resentment to take control. Emotions are going to show up all the time, it's only when they overwhelm us that they become barriers to effective communication.

- **Wearing a Mask:** Pretending to be someone we are not. We go through life putting on masks to suit the needs of the moment. If we need to please someone, we put on our people pleaser mask. When we pretend that we are happy with everything other people are doing, we don't express anything that may be seen as "not nice". When we don't express ourselves freely, we fail to communicate.

- **Having an agenda:** When we have a hidden agenda it's unlikely we'll be able to stay focused on what the other person is saying. Most likely we'll be too busy thinking of how to convince them about something – or of ways to ask them for something, to be listening to what they're saying.

We may argue that most people have an agenda, and we'd be right about that. One of the main reasons we communicate is to get something we want, either through control, manipulation, or just influence.

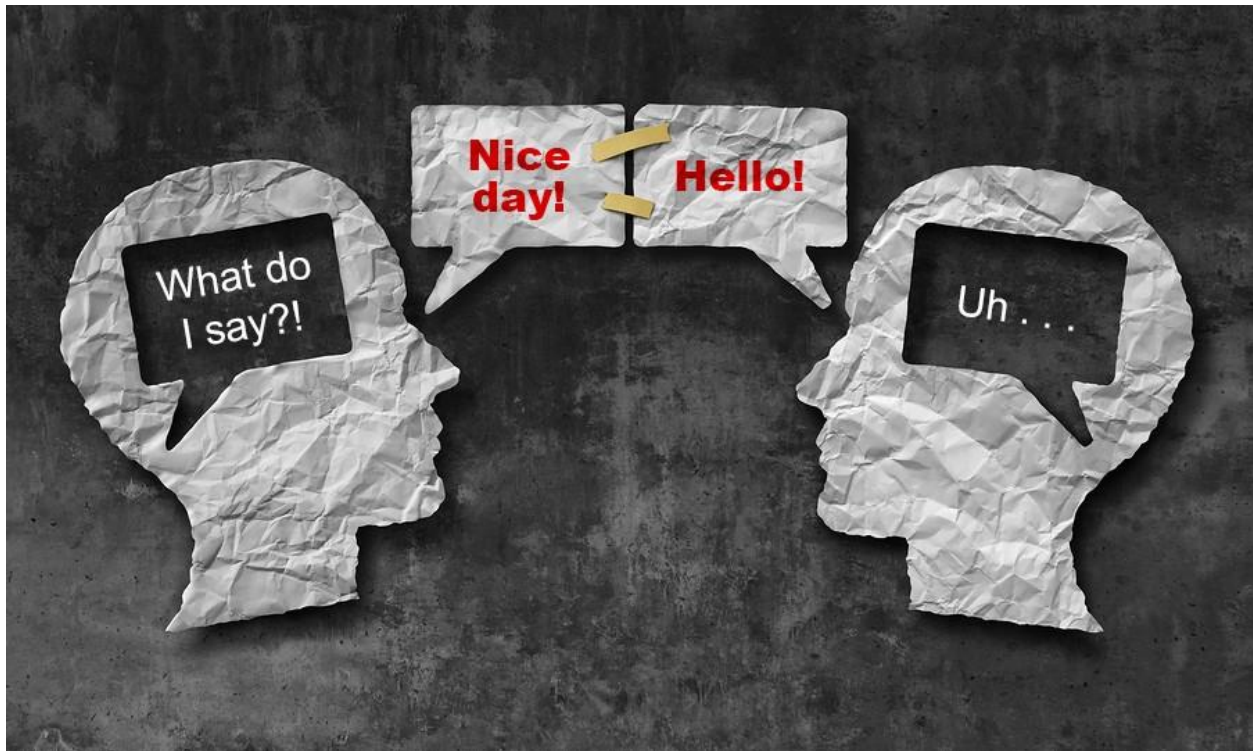
Having an agenda becomes a problem when we become too focused on fulfilling it; when we remain too attached to getting our way.



- **Prejudging and Filtering:** This consists of using our frame of reference to process any information we get. Our frame of reference consists of ideas, conclusions, experiences, preconceptions, values, and beliefs that we have about life.

As an example, we disregard what someone is telling us because we dislike a trait about the person. We dismiss their input beforehand. In short, we close the doors.

Another example, is we reject or ignore someone's ideas because their values are different than ours. Now this is a very serious behavior pattern and if not addressed immediately, can lead to complete failure of communication.



## Accent and Trust Factor:

This is universal and applicable to all of us. Americans think Asians have an accent and Asians think Americans and Europeans have one. There is no right and wrong, we all have our way of expressing the global language, 'English'. And most of the time our tone is influenced by either the local dialect or our family language. When I came to Singapore this is the first thing I faced, I carry an Indian accent and my friends shared it with me. At the same time, I used to feel that Singaporeans carry a unique accent as well. Some call it Singlish, now the question was that should I try to adapt the local accent to dissolve well or do something about the way I speak to be understood? As a Facilitator, getting understood well is a very critical part of our job. So I was advised by a colleague to slow down my rate of speech. And this is something, which works for sure, and brings a lot of credibility as well.

Another important thing that comes with getting understood is Trust. I still remember in my earlier programs in Singapore, sometimes clients used to give me a very Alien look. Which is a clear indicator of not being understood or finding my accent too thick. Another good instant I can recall is while conducting an activity called 'Trolley' where we need to pick balls scattered around in a field walking on wooden skies as a team. I had major difficulty in getting my message across while the activity was ongoing. Then later my co-facilitator pointed out that when people are tired, it becomes more difficult to get a fast pace accent. So being slow is the best bet, while at the same time, we need to watch out for modulation to

keep things exciting. But since I am using the trick of saying it slowly, life gets much easier and we get instant trust and acknowledgment from clients and colleagues.



### **Watch your Volume:**

Volume and pitch are like Fire in Communication. While the right amount can cook the food, too much of it can burn the village. As I come from a family of Human Loudspeakers, saying is loud is pretty natural to us. This only comes in handy when while doing a workshop the amplifier breaks down. But most of the time a loud voice is taken offensively by others. This is one area I work on constantly. Another interesting input I received from one of my co-facilitators is that if your pitch and volume are high, you may need to put some extra effort to command authority. This is sometimes needed in our profession, to get things done in a particular manner. While getting too loud may rob the authority, too low and slow can also portray you as not interested and low in energy. So, striking the right balance is the key to good communication.

### **Say it right:**

Clarity of thoughts is essential for almost all kinds of communication, be it written, visual, or verbal. This brings respect and credibility to the speaker. As it is said, "Say it once and say it right" because as we repeat our sentences it's interpreted that we are not sure of what we are saying. Another important factor from a facilitation perspective is the use of 'filler words' like 'a', 'umm', 'well', 'you know', etc. While using them sometimes is acceptable, too many of



these words make you look nervous and unclear in your thoughts. It may sound funny but rehearsing and simulating the real Workshop is a good idea for beginners. As these issues go away with more field time in Facilitation.

As we can see that communication barriers can take on many forms. Some we just need to be aware of to avoid them, others are things we need to steer more carefully around. Getting our communications right does take effort and a will to succeed. To get our message across may be the aim, with politeness, respect, and civility our means, and clarity and meaning our tools, and words our vehicle. As we overcome each one of these barriers to effective communication, we'll be able to enjoy closer and more authentic relationships with others in our life. We'll connect with people in ways we hadn't anticipated. But more importantly, we'll feel at ease in practically any situation, confident that we'll be able to handle it.

**END**

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