LESSON 2   OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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2. **OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

After having introduced you to the concept of Communication and the Communication Process in the previous lesson, we will now move ahead and learn about the possible barriers to effective Communication and the techniques which can be adopted to overcome them. We will also learn about the different types of Communication Flow in an Organisation.

### 2.0 Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will acquire a basic understanding of:

- The various barriers to effective Communication
- The basic techniques which can be used to overcome these barriers.
- A broad understanding of the different types of Communication flow in an organisation.

### 2.1 Introduction

We have already learnt in the previous lesson that transfer of information from the sender to the receiver, with the information being understood by the receiver, is known as communication.

In this lesson we will try to understand the problems which are likely to be encountered in a communication process and discuss how these can be overcome. We will learn about:

- Barriers to effective communication
- How to overcome the barriers to effective communication.
- Communication flow in an organisation (vertical, horizontal and diagonal).
- Official and semi-official communication.

### 2.2 Barriers to Effective Communication

There are many barriers which can come up at any stage of the communication process. Let us now discuss some of the more common barriers
or obstructions to effective communication. If these barriers are overcome, message is likely to be clearly understood. The main barriers to effective communication that we will discuss are:

- Filtering
- Psychological factors
- Defensiveness
- Language
- Lack of planning

2.2.1 Filtering

Filtering refers to the sender manipulating information so that it will be seen more favourably by the receiver. In this he/she sends only partial information concealing the slightly unpleasant bit of the information.

Advertising commonly makes use of this technique. You may have noticed that several advertisements promise exciting deals. The unpleasant clauses are always filtered or kept in fine-print, so that you do not understand them.

2.2.2 Psychological factors

The receiver in the communication process interprets the message based on his psychological makeup — his likes, dislikes, experiences, background and other personal characteristics. This factor should always be kept in mind while making communication.

2.2.3 Defensiveness

When the receiver interprets the sender’s message as a threat, they often respond in ways that prevent effective communication. For example, when there is an upward communication in an organization, the subordinates due to fear or hesitation may not clearly express their thoughts or give the right feedback.

2.2.4 Language

Language should be carefully chosen as it can lead to misunderstandings or distortions in the communication process. We must remember that words mean different things to different people. Meanings of words also change from culture to culture. All these factors should be kept in mind while communicating.

For example, in a tribal village, the tribal people used to consume water from a lake nearby. The government realized that in due course the water of that lake had become unsafe to drink. So the govt. put a board outside the lake “UNSAFE WATER, DO NOT CONSUME”. Yet the tribal people continued to use the water. WHY?

It was because the board was printed in English…a language not known to the tribal people. Hence the communication was not effective due to language barrier.
2.2.5 Lack of planning

Lack of Planning is one of the important reasons of poor communication or failure of communication. Communication is a complex process. To be a good communicator, a person has to:

- Formulate his idea clearly.
- Understand the capabilities of the receiver.
- Anticipate how his message can be misinterpreted and correct it in advance accordingly.
- Use simple, concise and precise language.

All this requires skill and good planning, which can be developed with practice.

Self-check Questions

1. What are the different types of barriers which can cause defective or deficient Communication?

2.3 Overcoming Barriers

The following tips should be kept in mind for effective communication:

- The Planning for communication should be done properly. One must know what is to be communicated, to whom it is to be communicated and how it is to be communicated.
- The sender should have a clear understanding of the receiver’s environment and should be able to visualize how the message will be understood by the receiver.
- The message should be clear, concise and brief. Span of human attention is very short. Long, complicated sentences confuse people.
- The tone of voice, the choice of language, the manner in which communication is made, should be appropriate for the occasion.
- Facial expressions, body language, gestures etc., should be in harmony with the message.
- To ascertain whether we have communicated the message clearly, it sometimes helps to repeat the important part of the message and sometimes also to ask the receiver to repeat what he has understood.
• In written communication, the sender should ensure that the grammar and punctuation are appropriate. Also the language of the message should be drafted in a way that it is understood in the same manner by both the sender and the receiver. For example “Bear eats, shoots and leaves” does not imply the same as “Bear eats shoots and leaves” due to the punctuation error in the first sentence.

Having discussed the various barriers to effective communication and how to overcome them, let us now briefly understand how communication flows in an organisation.

2.4 Communication Flow in an Organization

Flow of communication in an organisation can be vertical, horizontal, and diagonal.

2.4.1 Vertical Communication

Vertical communication occurs between hierarchically positioned persons and can involve both downward and upward communication flows. Downward communication is more common than upward communication.

• *Downward communication*: In Downward communication the flow of communication is from top to bottom (superior to subordinate). This type of communication includes instructions, speeches, meetings and telephonic conversations, memoranda, letters, policy statements etc. In your case downward communication would be communication from your mentor, facilitator or teachers, to you.

• *Upward communication*: Upward communication travels from subordinates to superiors and continues up the organizational hierarchy. Upward communication is usually found in participative and democratic organizational environments. For example, feedbacks are taken from subordinates about their superiors. In your case it would be communication from your end upward to your facilitator, teacher or mentor.

For a textile designer it is very essential to be participative in both upward and downward communication. He / she should have good relations with his / her supervisors as well as subordinates, so as to maintain effective communication.

2.4.2 Lateral communication

Lateral communication involves communication among persons who are at the same level in the organization. They could be in the same or different departments. For example, people from various departments, holding similar positions in Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, communicating with each other. In your case it would mean communication among yourselves or with other students of, say the Office Management course.

2.4.3 Diagonal communication
This type of communication includes communication between persons at different levels of different departments, within the same or different organizations. They do not normally have direct reporting relationship.

While talking of the various patterns of communication in an organisation, it would be relevant to briefly introduce you to Official and semi-official communication.

Self-check Questions

2. Enumerate the different types of communication flows in an organisation.

2.5 Official and Semi-official Communication

2.5.1 Official communication

In any organisation like an office, institution, business house or factory, the flow of communication follows a set format. It is based upon certain guidelines and principles and is formal and organized. Communication can be written or oral.

For example, letters, reports, fax, circulars, news letters, etc. are forms of written official communication, whereas telephonic conversations and meetings fall in the category of oral official communication.

2.5.2 Semi-official Communication

In any organization, along with formal communication, usually semi-formal and informal communication also takes place. This includes discussion(s) amongst employees regarding their work, their bosses and colleagues. This forms part of semi-formal or informal communication.

Assignments

2.6.1 Class assignments

i) Have a group discussion in class to identify what are the major barriers to effective communication in a family environment.

ii) What suggestions do you have to remedy these? Discuss and formulate a set of recommendations for improving communication between various members of a family.

2.6.2 Home Assignments

i) You are required to make a presentation before your mentors and facilitators giving your ideas on the courses that you are doing in the first semester. Write down your thoughts in about twenty lines which effectively and precisely convey your point of view.
2.7 **Summing Up**

Let us summarize what we have covered in today’s class:

- Barriers to communication
- How to overcome the barriers
- Communication flow in an organization -
  - Vertical
  - Horizontal
  - Diagonal
  - Official and Semi-official communication

2.8 **Possible answers to Self-check Questions**

1. The main Barriers to effective Communication are:
   - Filtering
   - Psychological factors
   - Defensiveness
   - Language
   - Lack of planning

2. Flow of Communication in an Organisation can be:
   - Vertical Communication
     - Downward
     - Upward
   - Lateral Communication
   - Diagonal communication

2.9 **Terminal Questions**

1. Which of the barriers to effective communication is deliberately used by advertising companies? Give one example

2. Which factors are important in effective communication?


2.10 References and Suggested Further Readings


2.11 Glossary

1. Overcome To get the better of, to conquer
2. Barriers Obstacles
3. Effective Having power to produce a specified effect
4. Encounter Meet
5. Filtering Separating - generally for purification
6. Defensiveness Act of defense
7. Partial Not total or complete
8. Formulate To state or express in a clear or definite form
9. Anticipate Foreseeing
10. Concise Brief, clear, expressed in few words
11. Precise Very accurate, definite
12. Punctuation The art of dividing by using comma, semicolon etc.
13. Formal According to established mode