Barriers to Effective Communication

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Abstract

Communication is a very common concept in everyday life and takes place in every setting, organization, area or a place, no work or operation or function is carried out without effective means of communication. Within the process of communication, it is apparent that barriers and obstacles do occur, which can be avoidable and which cannot be avoidable; therefore an individual should inculcate all the required skills, attitudes and traits amongst himself so that he can effectively overcome all the barriers to communication. In this research manuscript, there have been various crucial areas, kinds of barriers to effective communication, barriers to effective communication within an organization and procedures for overcoming them, psychological barriers to effective communication, content barriers to effective communication and overcoming communication barriers. The main emphasis has been laid upon the barriers that arise within an organizational structure and the problems that arise due to occurrence of these barriers. This research manuscript makes provision of pertinent information about the communication barriers and what kinds of procedures should be adopted in order to overcome them.

Keywords: Barriers, Effective Communication, Organization, Content, Information, Factors

Introduction

Communication is stated to be one of the most crucial systems, which is essential to develop in all areas. It does not matter how good the communication system is, how well formed and well developed it is, barriers do occur within the

communication systems, whether it is an organization, communication between the family members, social network, institution and so forth. Barriers that take place within the communication systems are very unfortunate and unwanted, every individual wants that his functioning should be implemented in a smooth manner without the occurrence of barriers, for instance, when a person is discussing a vital issue with somebody, or two friends are having a friendly conversation and a door bell rings or somebody enters then in most cases, it is displeasing. There are number of reasons due to which these barriers take place, most of the barriers carry a reason, for instance, if some important task is going on and a door bell rings and somebody enters immediately, this might have occurred due to a particular reason and there are also numerous factors which can be physical barriers, such as faults that take place in the telephonic system, internet not working or any barriers which are random (Usman, n.d.).

Kinds of Barriers to Effective Communication

There are barriers to communication which are of different kinds and possess various kinds of characteristics: (Communication Theory, n.d.).

I <u>Environmental and Physical Barriers</u> – Under the environmental and physical barriers, there have been classification of barriers as follows:

a) Time – This is the barrier which is concerned with developing quicker and speedy channels of communication. For example, when communicating with somebody, if the process is time consuming such as mailing letters then it is a barrier, any kind of communication whether, it is done in a formal or an informal manner, if it is highly time consuming then it proves to be a barrier and for efficient working, individuals need to develop a faster means of communication such as electronic mail instead of sending letters by post.

b) Space – It is vital to eliminate the unwanted distance within the communication system, if the condition requires it, for example, it can occur in telephonic communication. If two persons need to discuss an important matter and one of them is in India, whereas other one is in the United States of America, then telephonic conversation may not prove to be very effective, then they can send each other details through the system of email.

c) Place – The area, the environment where the communication is taking place should be clear and not over-crowded. Noise pollution can be a barrier to effective communication, this is obvious, where there is noise, there a person cannot efficiently communicate, therefore places and areas with lesser people, proper ventilation is required for effective communication.

d) Medium – The medium via which the process of communication is taking place should be effective and appropriate. Communication takes place in various forms; it is oral, written, audio, video, formal, informal, the medium used for the purpose of communicating should be accurate, precise and understandable.

II <u>Semantic Barriers</u> – When communicating with the other persons, no matter what kind of communication means is utilized, whether it is formal or informal, it is vital to make use of appropriate words, vocabulary and language; all kinds of communication should reflect decency. Language and vocabulary that is used in communication should be understandable to the persons; if a person speaks only English and a word is used in Spanish then he may or may not understand the word, for instance, if a person speaks only English, then it could be a possibility that he might have studied other languages such as Spanish or French. Two or more persons when they are communicating with each other should use a common language, so that everyone can understand it well.

III <u>Cultural Barriers</u> – Communication also takes place between people belonging to different nationalities, religions, castes, creeds, races, ethnicities etc. in other words, when two persons are communicating with each other, there may be differences in their cultural backgrounds. It is vital to overcome all the barriers that might occur within the course of communication. It is crucial to make people aware of ones own culture with whom they are communicating. In the form of communication, it is vital to form an understanding and acceptance of another person's culture.

IV <u>Psychological Barriers</u> – In the process of communication, it is vital to understand each other's mindset and mental capacity; this applies in every case whether it is a professor giving a lecture or a conversation between the employer and an employee. If someone is communicating with the other individual or a group of individuals with an attitude of disinterest or unwillingness then the process of communication will not be effective. In this case, it would have believed to be that attitude of the communicators is inappropriate for the purpose of making the process of communication effectual. It is therefore considered crucial to overcome the psychological barriers.

V <u>Perception of Reality</u> – When communicating, it is important to understand various perceptions of a situation or of an issue or a problem. There are different levels of perceptions that are involved when communicating about a particular topic, condition, problem, issue, situation, dilemma, stress or a concept. Lacking understanding about different levels of perceptions may prove to be a barrier. In order to implement effective communication, it is vital to gain the 'perception of reality' which means information about facts, knowledge, figures, actuality and what is true. While communicating, it is important to be open, flexible and transparent.

Barriers to Effective Communication within an Organization and Procedures for overcoming them

Communication is known to be the key factor for the success of any organization, within any kind of an organizational structure, individuals have to work in collaboration, they need to conduct meetings, discuss with each other various issues regarding their functions and activities; on the other hand, if they develop amongst themselves strained relations and hard terms then they will not be able to work effectively and incur profitability, productivity and goodwill within the organization. In concerning communication, there are some barriers that every organization deals with; individuals are of the viewpoint that the process of communication is very simple and straightforward, which is true but, what makes the process complicated, difficult and tedious, the answer to this is barriers. Barriers are the ones that make the process of communication difficult. Within an organization, the common barriers that are part of the communication are: (Zaineb, 2010).

a) Perceptual Barriers – These are the barriers which arise due to differences of opinion between two people, differences of the viewpoints does prove to be a major barrier, therefore these differences do generate a requirement for effective communication; any kind of disagreement between two persons is not healthy for the functioning of the organization.

b) Emotional Barriers – At times it happens that people do not develop interest in communicating with their fellow employees due to the feelings of fear, mistrust, anger or annoyance, that may arise within their minds and these are stated to be emotional barriers.

c) Language Barriers – Language is the means which is said to be the most effective means of communication with others. The language provides

understanding of the content that an individual is willing to express or communicate with the others. When two persons or groups of people are involved in communicating with each other and if a common language is used that is understandable to all individuals then their objectives will be fulfilled and the process of communication will be made effective. Within an organization, it is vital to develop a common language in order to communicate appropriately. For example, when international students come to study in India, they are not familiar with the national language, hence English is considered to be the common language that is understood by all and utilized for the purpose of communication.

d) Cultural Barriers – Within an organization, individuals belonging to different nationalities, regions, cultures, religions, castes, creed and different status groups are employed together. These people at times do familiarize themselves with other people's cultures and backgrounds, whereas other times they are even unaware. A cultural barrier occurs when people of different cultures are unable to communicate with each other efficiently and this inability may be due diverse factors such as different backgrounds, languages, customs, viewpoints, ideas, notions and so forth.

e) Physical Barriers – Within an organizational structure, it is vital to have team spirit and individuals should work in coordination with each other and be cooperative towards each other. Formal and informal means of communication occurs within an organization. One of the crucial factors is proximity within an organizational structure. There is a system of hierarchy and those individuals who are placed at the higher levels of the hierarchy have closed doors, offices and cabins and are physically placed at the distance; their subordinates are in this way unable to communicate with them and this is a physical barrier to effective communications.

One of the ways to improve the process of communication with an organization and to remove the barriers to effective organizational communication is by forming a positive attitude within the workplace. It is vital to be considerate, respectful and polite with ones colleagues, superiors and subordinates in order to create an integrated working environment. Barriers prove to be highly unproductive and will not lead to goodwill of the organization. It is up to the individuals to possess this responsibility of overcoming the barriers, working in coordination with the co-workers, efficiently supervising and managing the subordinates and maintaining trustworthy relations with ones employers and superiors.

Psychological Barriers to Effective Communication

Communication is stated to be an ongoing continuous process. Everyone is continuously communicating with the people around them, such as their family members, friends, helpers, neighbors, relatives, workplace members, and when a person goes out for shopping then too with the shopkeepers and other people communication takes place. Communication is also referred to as a skill that is pertinent in ones daily life and an individual is required to be competent in this skill by him self or via means of observing others (Skills you need, 2011). Psychological barriers to effective communication have been classified into:

a) Marital Barriers – When an individual is married, then also communication is considered to be one of the most important factors in a relationship. Between spouses there are psychological barriers to communication that might develop; the reasons may be due to irrelevant information, fear, insecurity or misunderstandings; these reasons are not always correct but when a marital barrier occurs then it is a possibility that these reasons might be the cause. For example, partners within the course

of time may feel that they are not happy with each other and the ultimate outcome is divorce or separation; when the partners have decided that they are going to get separated or divorced then there is lack of communication between them. These factors are indicated as psychological barriers between the partners.

b) Academic Culture – In academic institutions such as a university; there are different departments, each department has a chairperson, professors, students and other staff members. Communicating in an effective manner is extremely crucial within the university or in any other academic institution. For example, a professor teaches a topic and some students within the class may have differing viewpoints so that does not mean that the professor will not instruct or communicate with those students. Within the university, there are different cultures, subcultures, nationalities, traditions, norms, values etc; in one classroom, it is a possibility that out of so many students, there may be few Sikhs, Muslims, Christians or Hindus, they all have to develop mutual ties and communicate effectively with each other which is essential in acquiring academic learning. A psychological barrier that might arise in the case of an academic institution are some students may face difficulties in some programs, they may find some concepts hard to understand, these are considered to be psychological barriers because they are unable to understand from a different perspective through a logical viewpoint.

c) Communication Flow – In accordance with the communication flow theory, individuals can communicate only up to a certain extent; the reason for this is that the knowledge they possess is limited. Directly this means that people who are smart have good communication skills as compared to people who are not very knowledgeable; this also depends upon the nature

of the person, for instance, individuals who are isolated, who do not have a large social network and who do not inculcate themselves into communication with others should not be hold responsible, the reason being that they possess inadequate information that is required for effective communication. It is the individual himself who decides whether he/she possesses efficient communication skills.

Content Barriers to Effective Communication

Content barriers are stated to be the factors that cause hindrances, distractions, disturbances or obstacles during the course of the communication

process; barriers that occur during the course of the communication process tend to distort, block, alter or misrepresent the information that is being exchanged between the sender and the receiver. No matter what place or area it is, whether it is a workplace, home, recreation park, shopping complex etc. barriers tend to take place within the course of communication everywhere. What is important is the identification of those barriers and adoption of measures in order to overcome them. Content barriers have been identified into the following categories: (Smith, 2015).

a) Non-assertive Behavior – It is a barrier during the course of communication, the reason being that this kind of behavior on the part of somebody breaks down the communication between the people; this kind of behavior develops unwillingness to communicate with indecisive people.

b) Anger or Frustration – It is a barrier, the reason being that when an individual is angry or frustrated than no one shows interest in communicating with people with this kind of an attitude; the reason for unwillingness to communicate with angry and frustrated people is that in

these kinds of approaches people tend to communicate in an inappropriate manner.

c) Personal Bias – When a person is personally biased to one person rather than the other, then there is breakdown of communication between people; for instance, sometimes teachers tend to get biased for one student in class rather then the other, when students feel that a teacher is biased towards a particular student, then they tend to develop some kind of negativity and there is break down of communication between them.

d) Team Diversity – As it has been understood, within the organizational settings, educational institutions and other places, individuals are from diverse backgrounds, they have different religions, castes, cultures, traditions, norms, beliefs, customs, ethnicity and sometimes they even speak different languages; hence, all these factors are stated to be barriers within the course of effective communication.

e) Lack of Confidence – When two or more individuals are involved in communication with each other, it is vital that they are confident and possess the required ability to communicate; when an individual lacks the confidence, ability to communicate well or get involved in an oral conversation or written with another, then it is a barrier in the course of effective communication. Feelings of nervousness, anxiety, apprehension prove to be barriers within the course of effective communication.

f) Inappropriate Priorities – Priority means the state or quality of being earlier in time or occurrence; when a certain priority arises which is inappropriate then it is a barrier to effective communication. For example, if a manager has a meeting or a group discussion with his subordinates and all of a sudden a family emergency comes up and he is required to hurry to his house and is

unable to go for the meeting, then a family emergency is said to be an inappropriate priority during the course of his work.

g) Organizational Structure – In some cases, an organizational structure is formulated in a complicated manner which proves to be a barrier to effective communication, the structure should be simple and not complex; for instance, if the structure is large and there is lot of space, employees may not even see each other and may not be able to communicate with each other effectively, therefore, it is vital that within the organizational structure, the employees should be well familiar with each other.

h) Distractions and Interruptions – While communicating, there are number of distractions that occur for instance, in telephonic conversations, disturbances in the line, when internet is not working, some kind of noise in the background, people doing their work and ringing of the door bell, people having a meeting and somebody entering the room without notifying etc.

i) Tunnel Vision – Tunnel vision means unable to depict accuracy at the 100% level; when one is not accurate and precise about the situation, case, concept or a circumstance about which communication is taking place, this is also a barrier to effective communication.

j) Rank Differences – When there are differences in the rank of individuals within an organizational setting, then it is a barrier to effective communication; people who are subordinates, in other words they are low in rank do not tend to communicate effectively with people of the higher rank; they may have a feeling of disparity or would feel discriminated against. Not only within the organizational structure but also economically backward sections of the society do not communicate in an effective manner with upper class, wealthy individuals; therefore, rank differences prove to be barriers to effective communication.

k) Task Preoccupation – In this case, for example, an individual has to go for a very important formal meeting with a client and when he is about to leave another client enters in order to resolve some issues, then it becomes his job duty that he should attend to the issues of that client before leaving for the meeting; in this case, a client coming up instantly without informing proves to be a barrier to effective communication.

Overcoming Communication Barriers

1. Eliminating Differences in Perception – Within the organization when individuals are recruited, their performance, qualifications, skills, abilities, knowledge, attitude should be taken into consideration; there should be proper training and development programs, employee selection procedures and individuals should possess effective communication skills especially regarding the English language, they should be fluent in English, in speaking as well as in writing.

2. Use of Simple Language – While communicating no matter what language, the use of words should be understandable, clear and simple; usage of complicated words might make an individual perplexed and such words should be avoided.

3. Reduction and Elimination of Noise Levels – Noise is the most common barrier which occurs everywhere, for instance, when family members are communicating at home, constant noise comes from busy neighborhoods, or at the workplace too while working on the computers, people may get engaged in informal conversations, hence that leads to emergence of noise levels. It is necessary to identify the sources of noise and then formulating measures in order to eliminate those sources.

4. Active Listening – The receiver should listen to the speaker with awareness and in a considerate manner; he/she should respond by asking

questions, the speaker should always be aware of the fact that the listener understands everything that he is saying and this overcomes the barrier to effective communication.

5. Emotional State – During communication, the speaker is required to make effective use of body language and not depict ones emotional state; for example, if the speaker is upset due to some reason than he should not portray his distress in his speech, the listeners might misinterpret the information if it is delivered by a speaker in a distressed mood.

6. Simple Organizational Structure – The hierarchical levels within the organization should be optimum in number; the operations and functions implemented within the organization, the leadership skills, span of control, authority, rules, policies should be organized appropriately and put into operation in an effective manner.

7. Avoid Information Overload – Employers as well as the employees should not overload themselves with work; they should manage their work for the day accordingly, extended working hours should be avoided and employees should also take out time during their working hours to listen to the subordinates and workers grievances; they should practice effective time management skills.

8. Provide Constructive Feedback – While making provision of feedback to the employees and subordinates, negativity should be avoided and feedback should always be delivered in a constructive manner; negative feedback is stated to be a barrier to effective communication. The content of the feedback can be negative, if the superior feels that there have been some misinterpretations, but it should be communicated in a constructive manner with a positive attitude.

9. Proper Media Selection – The medium of communication should be proper; if it is a simple message or just a minor notice, it can be delivered either through a face to face conversation or through a telephone; information which is complicated and lengthy should be delivered in a written manner for example, through letters, notices, newspapers or electronic mail, therefore proper media selection also leads to effective communication.

10Flexibility in Meeting the Targets – Employees when they are employed within an organization, should work towards accomplishing the desired goals and objectives, they should not be put under pressure to complete a particular assignment within a particular time period, in other words, they should be allowed sufficient time, especially when the task is extensive; in accomplishing the organization's goals and objectives, it is essential to have effective means of communication and flexibility should be allowed in meeting of the targets.

Discussion and Summary

In the concluding part of this manuscript, it is vital to highlight that effective communication is very essential not only for the development and

progress of the organizational structure, educational institution, academic learning or in implementation of ones daily routine tasks but also for the individual as a whole. There are number of barriers that do come within the course of communication, these are environmental and physical barriers, semantic barriers, cultural barriers, psychological barriers and perception of reality. Within an organizational structure, many barriers arise and there have been formulation of certain measures and procedures for overcoming them, these are perceptual

barriers, emotional barriers, language barriers, cultural barriers and physical barriers; the most effective and successful means of overcoming barriers of effective organizational communication is by forming an optimistic approach within the workplace and it is regarded as mandatory to develop politeness, good manners and respect within ones approaches and attitude. Psychological barriers to effective communication can be marital barriers, academic culture and communication flow. Content barriers to effective communication are non-assertive behavior, anger or frustration, personal bias, team diversity, lack of confidence, inappropriate priorities, organizational structure, distractions and interruptions, tunnel vision, rank differences and task preoccupation. In the final part of the manuscript, steps have been identified to overcome the communication barriers, these are, eliminating differences in perception, use of simple language, reduction and elimination of noise levels, active listening, emotional state, simple organizational structure, avoid information overload, provide constructive feedback, proper media selection and flexibility in meeting the targets.

It is essential to overcome the barriers by identifying the causes that give rise to them, some of the barriers are avoidable whereas some are unavoidable and an individual is not left with any option but to face the barriers. Keeping the technology updated, developing within oneself effective speaking and listening skills, being respectful, being fluent in English language, not speaking to each other while working on an important assignment, developing effective leadership, stress management, anger management, time management skills and so forth, these are some of the ways that lead to avoidance of barriers; some of the barriers are unavoidable such as inappropriate priorities, when these kinds of barriers come up then the individual should develop within himself the confidence and aptitude to deal with such kinds of barriers. Implementation of solutions to remove those

barriers leads to effective communication as well as efficiency in achieving the desired goals and objectives. Finally, it can be stated that barriers do come up within the course of communication, but in order to effectively communicate, individuals should possess efficient speaking and listening skills, they should make sure that the listeners are understanding their viewpoints and concepts, they should make use of simple language, whether it is an oral or a written communication, be courteous and polite so that individuals do not misinterpret any kind of communication, possess efficient knowledge of the concepts and ideas that they are communicating and there should be no personal bias or discrimination between people of different religions, cultures, race, ethnicities, creed and socio-economic backgrounds.

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