Subject: Management

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Paper: 07, Business Communication

Module: 05, Barriers of Communication

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| Items	Description of Module
Subject Name	Management
Paper Name	Business Communication
Module Title	Barriers of Communication
Module Id	Module no.-5
Pre- Requisites	Meaning, Process & Principles of Communication.
Objectives	To understand the barriers of effective communication
Keywords	Communication barriers, Semantic barriers, Poor retention,**P**sychological barriers

1. Learning Outcome:

After completing this module the students will be able to:

- Understand the concepts of communication barriers.
- Identify the barriers to communication.
- Explain how barriers can be overcome.

2. Introduction

Communication is the process of exchanging the messages, ideas, information, etc. from one person to another person through some channel. Communication is effective only if the receiver understand the message in the same sense as it is sent by the sender. If any kind of obstacles disturbs any step of the communication process, the message will not transmit to the receiver in the same way as sender want to send. Suchkinds of obstacles are called barriers of communication.Due to such barriers, managers in an organization face various problems because communication becomes ineffective as information loses its originality. So the manager must find out such barriers and take effective steps to remove them.

Barriers to communicationcan distort the qualityof the information and purpose of the message being conveyed bythe sender which may result in ineffectiveness of the flow of communication or an outcome that is unacceptable. There are various kinds of barriers that affect the communication process in the organization. All the work in the organization is initiated through communication. So it is essential for managers to locate such barriers and remove them timely.
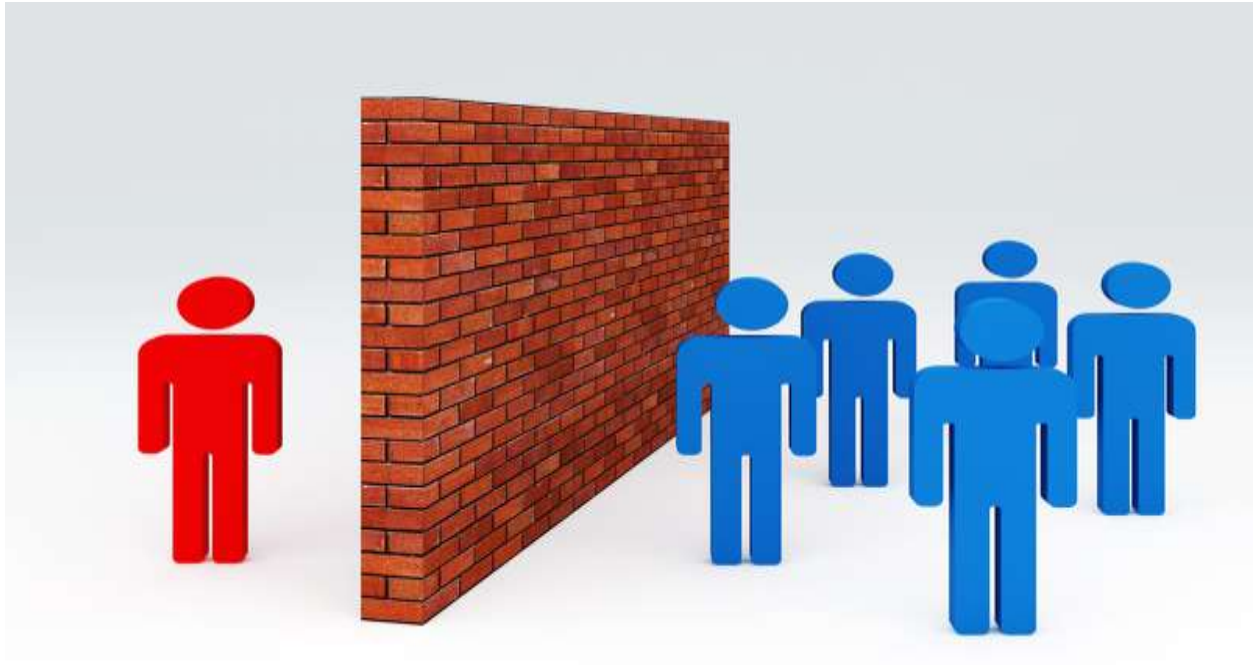
3.Meaning ofCommunication Barriers

Communication barriers are the obstacles and problems involved in effective exchange of ideas or thoughts which retard the information being properly perceived by the receiver. In other words, communication barriers are the factors which affect the effective exchange of ideas from the sender to the receiver and disturb the flow of communication in the organization.

As we can see in the picture the sender of the message transfers a message with the expectation that the receiver will receive the message, interpret it and act accordingly. But sometimes message is not always decoded by the receiver in the same way as the sender encoded it. Some factors and difficulties distort the flow of the message, its interpretation and understanding. Such factors and difficulties as depicted as noise in the picture are known as barriers of communication. Noise here does not only means unwanted sound but also all the factors which hamper or distort effective flow of communication.
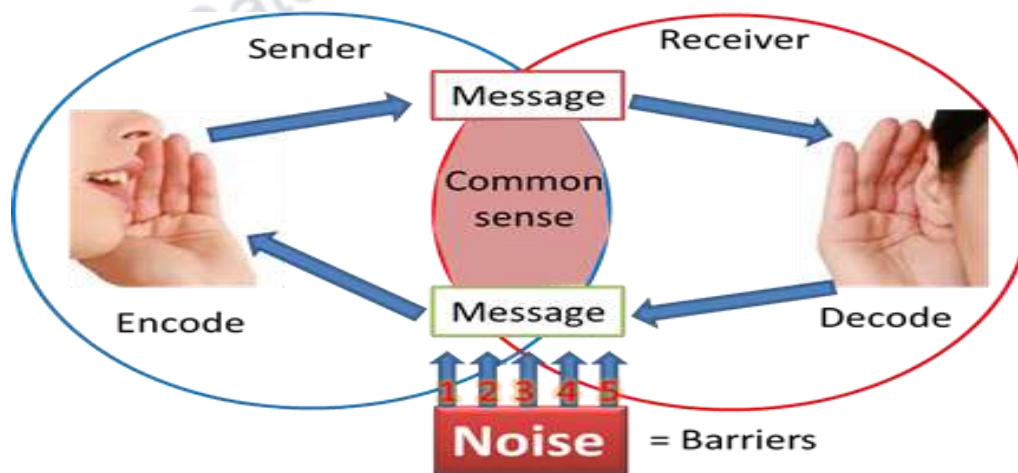
4. Types of CommunicationBarriers

The sender of the message sends the message with an expectation that receiver will receive the message in the same manner as it is sent. But sometimes the receiver receives the message in a different manner. This modification, filtration and misrepresentation of communication may cause misinterpretation. Therefore, it is necessary for manager to locate the barriers and take corrective action to remove these. There are various kinds of barriers which restrict the effective flow of messages from sender to receiver which are stated below-
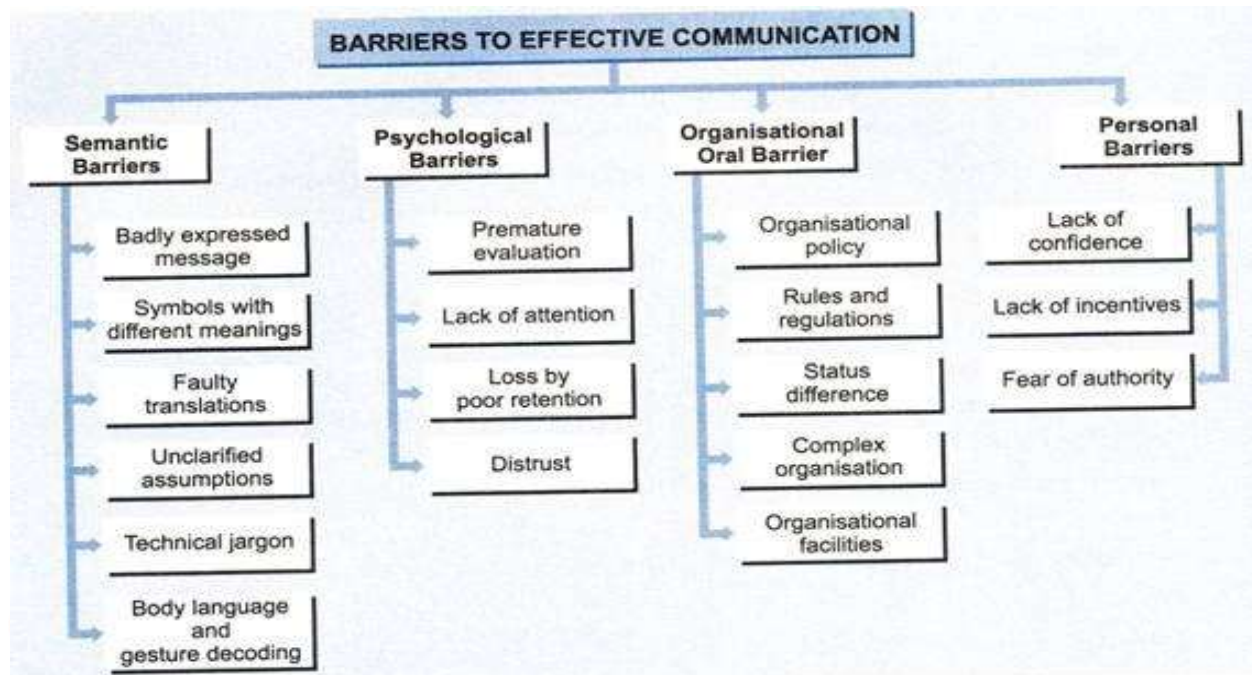
4.1. Semantic Barriers

When the sender convertsideas and thoughts in the form that will be understood by receiver through the use of words, signs, figures etc, there is a possibilitythat the same words and symbols have different meanings and different people interpret them differently. These words, signs, and figures used in the communication are interpreted by the receiver as per his knowledge and understanding which creates doubtful situations. There is always a possibility of misinterpretation of the intention of the sender of the message or understanding its wrong meaning. This happens because the information is not sent in simple and clear language.

The main causes of semantic problem can be-

4.1.1Badly Expressed Message:

In communication, there is always a possibility of wrong interpretation of messages due to wrong choice of words, the omission of needed words, frequent repetitions of words and

wrongconstruction of the sentence.If the sender usesa wrong word or arranges the words in a sentence in the wrong sequence, then meaning of the whole message will change completely. This can be called linguistic problem which is the most important barrier in communication.

Generally language related communicational barriers arise due to –

- Lack of common language including words, symbols and signs.
- Poor vocabulary
- Poor grammar
- Improper use of punctuations

4.1.2 Symbolsor, Words with Different Meanings:

In English dictionaries, a word can have same pronunciation but different spellings and meanings such as Price, Prize, Principle, Principal, Write, right, etc.In many cases a word can have the same spelling but can have different meanings in different sentences such as right, value, etc. There is always a chance that the receiver may perceive the meaning of the word not intended by the sender. If the receiver interpret the meaning as not intended, the communication will become meaningless.

For example –

- In English, the word 'right' can have different meanings in the following sentences-
  (a) One should fight for one's right.
      (Here Right means what is due to a person, or what is a genuine or lawful demand)

  (b) A manager will be successful only when he takes the right decision at the right time.
      (Here right means what is correct.)

- Some words have the same pronunciation but have different meaning-
  (a) As per the Principal this is not the correct way of doing it.
      (Here Principal is the head of the institution.)

  (b) As per the principle this is not the correct way of doing it.
      (Here Principle means a fundamental truth or a rule which has to be or is usually followed)

4.1.3 Faulty Translation:

In an organization, a lot of information has to be transmitted from one point to another. Transmission is done as per the knowledge and understanding of the people involved who act as receiver at one point and sender at another. Many times the information has to be translated from one language to another for easy understanding of the receivers.

For example office orders received from top management to be communicated to shop floor employees. In this process of translation and modification of the message, asper theunderstanding capabilities of the receivers, the meaning of the message too may be modified and wrong message may be transferred to the receiver. So, faulty translation can prove a barrier in effective communication.

4.1.4 Un-Clarified Assumptions:

In an organization, when a sender sendsa message he may assume that the receiver knows the back ground information relevant to the message and it is enough to inform the receiver about the main subject matter. In reality the receiver may not be knowing the background information and so will not be able to interpret the message as intended.Consequently the implementation of the message will not be as desired by the sender of the message.

For example – Manager maysend a memo to the subordinate, "You may proceed with further action as decided in the last meeting of the committee."

Here the manager assumes that the receiver, that is his subordinate knows all about the decision taken in the last meeting which might be a week back. In reality the subordinate may be knowing the decision taken in the meeting held twenty days back as for him that might be the last meeting because he was on leave during the last week. In such a scenario the interpretation and action on the part of the receiver will be faulty.

4.1.5 Technical Jargon:

Mostly, it has been observed that employees working in an organization are affiliated with some specialized groups such as biologists,industrial engineers, production development executives, quality controllers, information technology professionals,managers etc. Such specialized groups use their technical jargon which if used in communication with the people not belonging to that group may not be understood by them. Hence there will be communication gap and the message will not result in the desired action. So,technical jargon can be a barrier in communication. Therefore whenever a message has to be sent, the sender should ensure whether the receiver will be able to understand the technical jargon or not. If not then the language should be suitably modified to fall within the understanding level of the receiver.
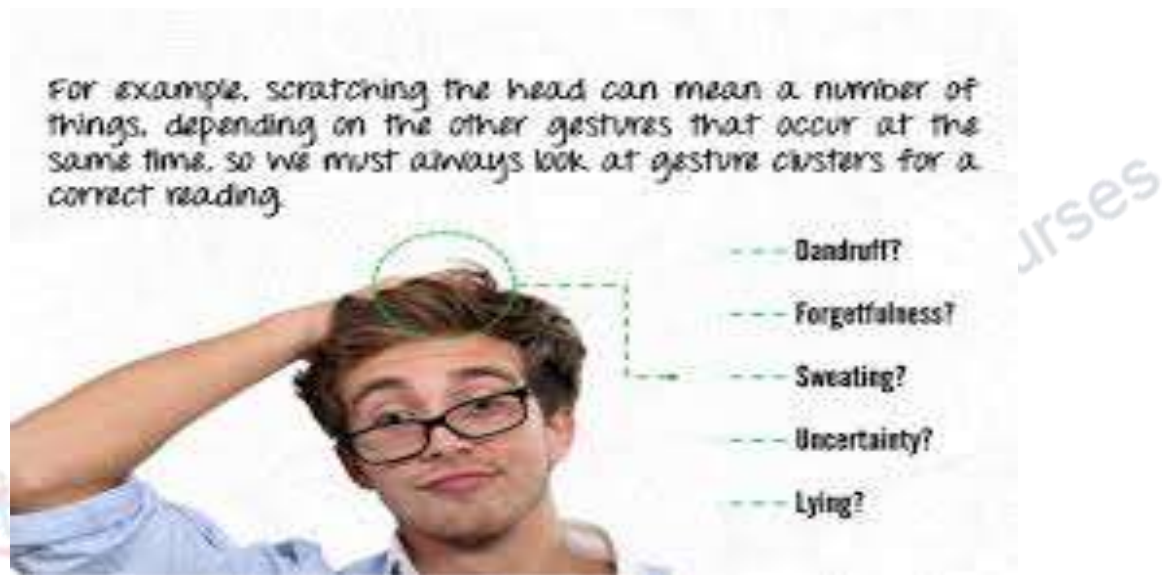
For Example:

4.1.6 Body Language and Gesture Decoding:

When some information is transmitted through body language and gestures, there is always a possibility of misinterpretation of the information by the receiver. If the gesture of the sender does not match with the verbal message, then the receiver may get confused and misinterpret the message.

For example-   If someone answer to a question by moving his neck it does not indicate clearly whether its meaning is 'Yes' or 'No'.If a manager is scolding an employee for negligence but there is a smile on his face then the worker will get confused and will not be able to grasp the severity of the situation.

For example, scratching the head can mean a number of things, depending on the other gestures that occur at the same time, so we must always look at gesture clusters for a correct reading.

- - - Dandruff?
- - - Forgetfulness?
- - - Sweating?
- - - Uncertainty?
- - - Lying?

4.2 Psychological Barriers

In order to make communication effective, it is essential to study about the psychological conditions of both sender and receiver as well. A person's attitude, perception, beliefs and value systems plays an important role in encoding and decoding of messages . This applies to messages within the organization or messages encoded for or decoded by external stakeholders like suppliers, financiers, customers etc. Also if any of the party whether it is sender or receiver is emotionally or psychologically imbalanced, it can considerably affect the smooth process of communication. The various emotions in an individual like anger, scorn, obsession, grief etc can also hamper the smooth flow of communication and distort the encoding or decoding of the messages. The various kinds of psychological barriers in the communication process can be stated as follows-

4. 2. 1 Premature Evaluation:

During communication in the organization, sometimes the receiver interprets the meaning of message before listening to the complete message. Such kind of interpretation can lead to faulty understanding and can create hindrance in the process of effective communication. On the other hand, sometimes personal opinion of receiver about sender creates obstacles in the communication process. Receiver concludes things without any logical thinking. So, this creates a barrier of effective communication.

For Example : A senior manager in a company may cut short the suggestion of a young executive in a meeting just because the managers prematurely evaluates the executive to be have less knowledge, so not worth listening to as the executive is very young and casually dressed.

4. 2. 2 Lack of Attention:

Sometimes the receiver is busy with some other task or his mind is pre occupiedwith some other thought due to which he does not listen to the message with complete attention. Consequently the message is not received as intended by the sender. Hence, this may be a psychological barrier in effective communication. Some extreme emotions of human beings such as anger, hatred or elation also distract the attention of the receivers creating a barrier in effective flow of communication.

For example-

When a worker is giving a suggestion regarding method of increasing productivity, the manager is preoccupied by his thoughts relating to the unpleasant conversation he had with his boss regarding below average performance of his unit. So he does not pay attention to what the worker is saying and asks him to leave. In such a situation the worker will feel that the manager is not open to ideas from juniors so may not share any suggestion with the manager in future.

4. 2. 3Loss by Transmission and Poor Retention:

The quality of the messageis decreased when it passes through many people. The actual form of the message is changed with each transmission from one person to another person. This is due to the filtration and loss of information. It happens, especially in case of oral communication due to carelessness of human beings and lack of their ability to retain the complete information for a long time.

For Example:

A client may communicate orally, to the sales executive, the product specifications for the supply of a product.Due to carelessness of receiver or lack of his ability to retain the complete information for a long time, he conveys incorrect specification to the production branch because of which wrong product is supplied to the client, which may lead to damaging the relationship with the client.

 Hence, we see loss of information during transmission and poor retention by the receiver becomesa hindrance in effective exchange of information.

4. 2. 4.Distrust:

The communication process will be successful only when both the sender and receiver have trust in each other. If there is no mutual trust, the communication process will not be effective because the receiver will not decode and interpret the message as it was intended by the receiver. If they don't have mutual understanding, then they will not understand each other's point of view which could be a barrier in communication process.

For Example:

This barrier may be very prominent in case of individuals having different world views, or belonging to different cultural backgrounds or when two different groups of employees have to work together in the situation of a merger or acquisition of companies.

4.3 Organizational Barriers

The effectiveness of communication is also highly affected by various elements inherent in the organization.Organizational factors such as organizational policies, rules & regulations, authority structures etc. may also put a hindrance in the communication process.

Following are the organizational barriers:

4.3.1 Organizational Policies:

Organizational policies are the guidelines under which all the decisions will be taken in the organization. For example, the organization may have the policy that formal communication will only be through written formin the organization which will follow a prescribe path for the flow of communication.

For Example:

There might be a message which can be communicated instantly, directly to the person concerned, orally to ensure faster action but due to organizational policythe message will be transmitted in a written form through a longer and more time consuming path, with a possibility of modification of the original message.

As a result the intended message may be lost in the process and work may done differently or delayed unnecessarily.

4.3.2 Rules and Regulations:

Rules and regulations are the strict plans of the organization which must be followed by each person in the organization. Sometimes the rules and regulation of the organization regarding communication may become a hindrance in effective flow of communication. The rules concerned with communication may be regarding the subject matter or following a particular medium.

For Example:

There may be a rule in the organization that only if there is a negative comment in the appraisal of an employee, it will be communicated to that employee, that too through written communication so that the employee can improve herself for future appraisal. Hence because of this rule the employee who receives appreciation or positive comments in her appraisal will not come to know about it. This not a very desirable situation as receiving praise motivates people and organization because of this rule, loses on this opportunity to motivate its employees. Also feedback on the appraisal is always more effective through oral communication especially if the objective is not only to judge but to improve the performance as well.

4.3.3 Status:

All the employees in the organization are divided into different level as per their authority and responsibility relationship. The formal hierarchy of the level of employees may become an obstacle in effective communication, especiallywhen the flow of communication is fromthe bottom level to top level. Secondly, sometimes the top level employees don't have credibility in the information supplied by lower level employees.

For example- If a message is sent by a foreman to the manager about the conduct of an executive there may be an insecurity in the mind of the manager that the information may have errors. But if the similar message is sent by a senior executive to the manager then the manager will be more ready to believe the information. Hence the status of an employee may also put a barrier in the flow of effective communication.

4.3.4 Complexity in Organizational Structure:

In an organization, the complexity of organizational structure is determined on the basis of a number of management levels. Higher the number of levels, greater will be the complexity in the organizational structure and effectiveness of the communication depend upon the organization structure. If the organizational structure is more complex than the quality of the message will be

distorted because the information loses its originality with each transfer of information from one level to another level.

A complex structure may **look like the following** on paper-
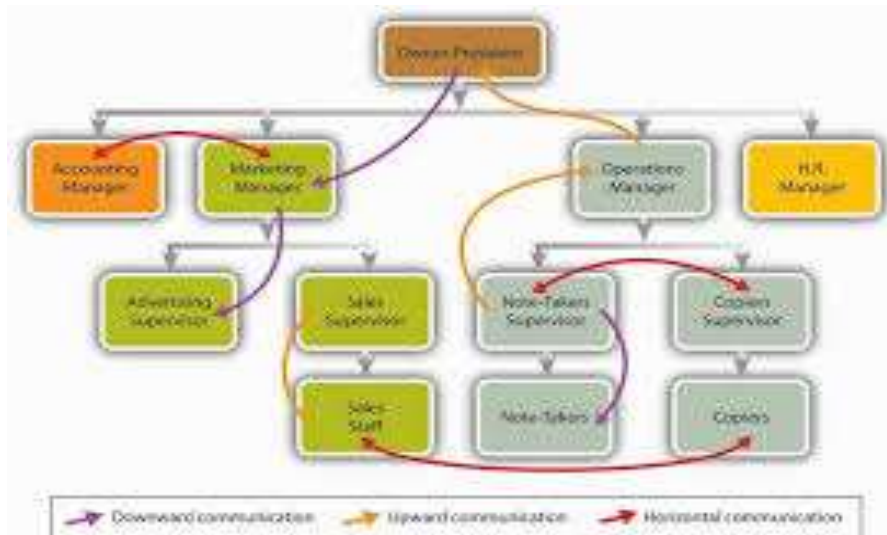
But actually may **feel like the following** for the senders and receivers-

4.3.5 Organisational Facilities:

The availability of organizational facility also affects the effective flow of communication in the organization. The organizational facilitiesinclude telephone,fax, internet connection,task force, stationary, translator, complaint box, etc. If these are available in sufficient quantity in the organization, then there will be effective and smooth flow of information. But if these are not available in sufficient quantity then the communication will be delayed and become ineffective. So that organizational facility may also become a barrier in communication process.

4.4 Personal Barriers

There are also various kinds of barriers which are directly concerned with the receiver and sender of communication. Such kind of barriers are called personal barriers which will affect the effective flow of communication.

The explanation of these barriers is as follows:

4.4.1 Fear of Challenge to the Authority:

Often in organizations the senior people discourage upward communication due to the insecurity that if the subordinates are given a chance to speak their minds or allowed to give suggestions then the weaknesses of senior managers will be revealed in the eyes of their colleagues or superiors. Sometimes employees at higher levels also suppress upward communication for the fear that their authority might be challenged and they will lose control over their subordinates. Such kind of insecurities can become an obstacle in the communication process.

4.4.2 Lack of Confidence in Subordinates:

Higher level employees may lack faith in the capability of their subordinates so may not pay attention to their suggestions or information provided by them. Hence, they deliberately avoid the opinions, and suggestions of their subordinates. As a result, morale of employees is decreased, which may become the barrier in effective flow of communication.

4.4.3Unwillingness to Communicate:

Sometimes subordinates avoid communicating with higher level employees as they may fear that the information which they share especially the negative one may not be liked by their superiors as it might reflect on their managerial skills. Even if there is communication regarding such issues the information is modified and molded to suit the inclination of the superiors. Also when the senior managers don't invite suggestions from heir juniors, the juniors may be wary of offering suggestions for fear of being rebuffed. Hence, such issues become a barrier in communication which might be harmful for the organization in the long run.

5. Strategies to overcome the communication barriers

Communication barriers are like a brick wall which if not broken timely will result in negatively effecting every function of the organization, be Human Resource Management, Sales and Marketing, Operations, Research and Development , Public Relations or maintaining goodwill of the organization among all its stake holders. So a way has to be found through wall..

Since communication is the life blood of an organization it is very important that efforts are made at the organizational as well as individual level to overcome the communication barriers. So efforts at individual level and interventions at organizational level are required to identify the barriers hindering the communication flow with in and outside the organization, so that proper action can be taken to address the problems related to effectiveness of communication. Although it is not possible to eliminate all the barriers, effort should be made to minimize them to extent possible in the interest of the organization.

The following guidelines are offered in this regard:

5.1. Well defined organizational policy: Organizations should have well defined, clear and widely circulated communication policies related to the dos and don'ts of the communication within the organization as well as communication with external stake holders. Such policies will minimizemisunderstanding and promote effective flow of communication.

For Example: It should be clearly mentioned in the relevant section of the HR policy that who will provide the appraisal feedback to the employees at various levels of the organization. Or it should be a part of the sales manual that what information should be given about the company to the prospective client in sales presentation by an executive.

5.2 Asking for feedback: In order to make communication effective, managers should actively seek feedback from subordinates about their communication messages. Feedback reduces the probability of confusion and discrepancy between the messages send and received.

For Example: After summing up the decisions taken at the end of the meeting of a team or committee, the convener or the chairperson of the committee may ask the members one by one to share with others what are the tasks that they have agreed to undertake within a particular deadline.

5.3 Restructuring: To facilitate an enabling communication environment, effort should be made to simplify the complex organization structure through reorganization activities.

For Example:Reorganization may involve reducing authority layers and establishing clear authority and responsibility relationship or adopting open door communication policy by superiors with respect to their subordinates or starting the use of technology like internet to deliver the messages through emails for faster dissemination of information.

5.4 Employee Training & Development: To make the employees efficient communicators, organizations can arrange various training and development programs for them.

For Example: When new employees joins the organization they should be given orientation seminars with respect to company mission, goals, policies, rules and regulations, procedures, etc. this can greatly enhance their future communication effectivenessin the organization as well as with respect to the external stakeholders. The employees can also be provided training on computers and other electronic means of communication.

5.5Developing informal relationship: Informal relationship can play a vital role in promoting communication. Hence an effort should be made to encourage informal communication along with the formal communication

For Example: Along with sending a circular to all the members of the department inviting suggestions for a solution to a particular problem, the manager should also reach out to the people and talk to them personally for gaining insights from them. This will ensure the return communication from the members, speed up the communication, help build informal relationship and motivate employees.

5.6Choosing appropriate media: Effectiveness of communication largely depends on the suitability of media. So, the media should be selected considering some factors such as the importance of the message, communication environment, knowledge of the receiver etc.

For Example: If the message is urgent and requires immediate action oral communication over telephone is the most suitable medium to communicate. Or if the brand and product information has to be given to the rural people then wall paintings in bright colors may be the best medium of communication.

5.7Reducing information overload: Communication system becomes defective if more information flows at a time than is necessary. To resolve this problem, only necessary information should be conveyed.

For Example: Information Overload can be reduced by decentralizing routine decision making so that communication channels can be shortened to make the communication faster and effective.

5.8Communication audit: To improve communication in the organization it is advisable to conduct communication audit at regular intervals. Communication audit means examining and evaluating communication networks, functions and effectiveness.

For Example: A detailed communication audit in an organization may lead the top management to realize that formal communication channels are designed in such a manner that only downward communication is possible in the organization which is hampering recognition of young talent. So after communication audit top management may initiate the process of building communication networks which facilitate upward communication for better growth of the company.

So we have understood the ways through which the communication barriers can be minimized. Such efforts have to be continuous and the management should be fully committed to work on these measures. Now let us summarize what we have learnt in this module…

6. Summary

As we have discussed in the preceding sections, communication is consideredas the life blood of organization, it is the way through which the details of the goals, objectives, strategies, orders and policy of organization are explained to the employees of the organization and by the way of communication the organization comes to acquire the information about their rivals, the opportunities offered by the markets and threats to the organization.So communication effectiveness is a must for organization. But sometimes the message does not gets decoded by receivers in original form as it is encoded by senders because of some kind of barriers. These barriers are called communication barriers. These barriers can be Semantic, Psychological, Organizational or Personal.The barriers to communicationmust be identified as early as possible by the people concerned so that appropriate steps can be taken to remove these barriers so that, information can be communicated effectively in the organization as well as outside the organization..