

Student Name

Professor Name

Course

Date

Communication Barriers

Communication is a crucial activity in which any practitioner is almost inevitably involved today. Regardless of the type of profession one practices, he or she will have to face the need to communicate with colleagues, clients, managers, or all of these types of audiences. Effective communication involves presenting a point of view or certain information in a way that shapes in the receiver an optimal understanding of what the deliverer wants to express (Austin and Pinkleton 9). However, the process of communicating effectively may be challenging for some individuals and groups because many factors need to be considered, and messages should be designed according to various considerations of what may distort a message that is to be delivered. Therefore, any individual or group involved in communicating should consider barriers to the effectiveness of communication in order to try to address and overcome them. Major types of communication barriers include noise, personal communication barriers, poor listening, and corporate communication complications.

Noise

The process of communicating can be schematically presented as a series of elements. There is the communicating entity and the receiving entity; the former performs encoding, i.e. shaping a certain message into a form that can be delivered to the latter: it can be an email, a report, or sentences expressed verbally. The receiving entity performs decoding, i.e. translating the message into a particular

meaning and, possibly, a course of action. Between the two entities, there is a certain channel, i.e. a medium of communication. In all of these elements, flaws and failures can be found that are able to distort the meaning of a message. In addition, it should be recognized that the signal, i.e. the encoded message, coexists in this system with so-called noise, i.e. factors that can distort the message while it is traveling through the channel (Galloway et al. 80). Therefore, there are environmental factors that are not part of the communication process per se but can affect it.

What can be seen as noise in the everyday process of communicating — whether it is informal personal communication or formal business communication, such as public relations — is the existing context in which a message will be decoded upon traveling through a communication channel. The communicating entity should ensure that the context in which something is said or written is well-understood, i.e. certain background knowledge is needed on the subject. By conducting research, the results of which may not be explicitly evident in a message but can shape the right context, a party that communicates ensures that the effect of noise is minimized.

Personal Communication Barriers

In contrast to the theoretical vision of communications described above, personal communication is a specific and practical process. Particular barriers that exist in this area include differences in cultural background, lack of willingness to communicate effectively, and communication stoppers. If two people put different meanings in the same word or concept due to those people's different backgrounds, their communication can be hindered; this is an example of cultural differences. To overcome them, the process of communication should be perceived as the process

of learning (Volet and Ang 21) in addition to being perceived as the process of informing or convincing. This approach should be employed in personal communication to address the issue of the lack of willingness to communicate effectively. If the result of communicating is important to a person, the process should be approached seriously and with thorough considerations of how one's interlocutor's vision and perspective can be different from one's own.

In addition, there are so-called communication stoppers, i.e. practices carried out in personal communication that hinder the effectiveness of it. Examples include being offensive or insulting, being sarcastic, ignoring, blaming, stereotyping, lecturing, and commanding ("Communication Stoppers"). For instance, when one tries to advise something to his or her interlocutor obtrusively (lecturing), the interlocutor may find it inappropriate and become reluctant to communicate further. The same effect can be caused if one is trying to order somebody to do something instead of suggesting solutions and respecting the decision making of the other participant of the communication process. These stoppers should be recognized and avoided in personal communication. A way to do so is reflecting not only on available relevant literature but also on one's experiences of communication failures and their causes: they are likely to boil down to a certain type of communication stoppers.

Poor Listening

Not to take away from the importance of communication barriers described above, failures to communicate effectively may be not only due to the communicating side but also due to the side that receives messages. Communicating effectively means trying to deliver messages in a precise and intelligible manner as well as trying to decipher messages delivered by others correctly. For this, certain listening skills should be mastered; despite being called

“listening skills,” in a broader sense, they may apply to reading or watching, too.

From the perspective of education, Roberts and Gous claim that “poor listening skills may be a contributing factor in the high dropout and failure rate of...learners” (68).

As it was mentioned above, the whole process of communication should be perceived as the process of learning (see Personal Communication Barriers), which is why this vision is relevant not only to education but also to communications among peers or to formal communication.

To improve listening skills, one should employ particular strategies, such as active listening. Tyagi writes that “[i]n active listening, the listener is genuinely interested in understanding what the other person is thinking, feeling, wanting or what the message means” (3). This genuine interest should be adopted as part of the effort aimed at overcoming communication barriers. To ensure that listening is active, one may try to repeat the words of one’s interlocutor back to him or her or to paraphrase them and ensure that what the other person is trying to say is understood correctly. In writing (e.g. correspondence), it is also helpful to sum up the other party’s points and have the other party either confirm or disconfirm the correctness of a certain understanding of its messages.

Corporate Communication Complications

Corporate communication may appear as an area that is altogether different from personal communication; however, same principles may apply to both. A major complication of corporate communications is that it is not one person communicating but an entire organization or a part of it, i.e. more interests may be involved, and it might be harder to take into consideration all the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of communication. However, this can be an advantage, too: not every person is a communication expert, and learning effective communication skills can

take a large amount of time, while organizations are more likely to hire professionals to address their communication needs. To accomplish this, organizations should recognize the necessity to have professional communication practitioners who will carry out public relations and other types of external communication.

However, organizations communicate not only externally but also internally. It is important to ensure that all the employees of an organization understand its strategies; besides, effective communication is a way to improve motivation. In the context of communication barriers, it was found by Welch that many employees find the format of internal communication inappropriate or irritating. Therefore, the “persuasive writing and rhetorical messaging skills” (Welch 263) are often counterproductive because they make employees reluctant to commit to the strategies communicated to them in this format. This shows that, in internal corporate communication (and in external as well), a crucial consideration is the audience and its potential perception not only of messages but also of the format of messages and the way of their delivery.

Conclusion

Communicating effectively, i.e. delivering messages in a way that enables them to be properly understood, is a concern of both the communicating party and the receiving party. In addition, possible distortions on the way (noise) should be considered. To achieve this, the context of communication should be addressed, which is done by studying the background of the addressed context. In personal communication, the one who communicates should take into account the cultural background of the interlocutor or correspondent and avoid communication stoppers, while the other party should commit to active listening. In corporate communication,

the tone of communicating should be adjusted to the audience. Following these principles will ensure that possible communication barriers can be overcome.

Works Cited

- Austin, Erica Weintraub, and Bruce E. Pinkleton. *Strategic Public Relations Management: Planning and Managing Effective Communication Campaigns*. 3rd ed., Routledge, 2015.
- "Communication Stoppers." *Communicating Skillfully*, 2007, aventalearning.com/content168staging/2007LifeSkills/unit5/html/section_2_page_16.html. Accessed 24 Aug. 2017.
- Galloway, Alexander R., et al. *Excommunication: Three Inquiries in Media and Mediation*. University of Chicago Press, 2013.
- Roberts, Jennifer J., and Ignatius G. P. Gous. "ODEL—Open and Distance Education and Listening: The need for Metacognitive Listening Strategies." *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, vol. 4, no. 3, 2014, pp. 63-70.
- Tyagi, Babita. "Listening: An important Skill and Its Various Aspects." *The Criterion: An International Journal in English*, vol. 2, no. 12, 2013, pp. 1-8.
- Volet, Simone E., and Grace Ang. "Culturally Mixed Groups on International Campuses: An Opportunity for Inter-Cultural Learning." *Higher Education Research & Development*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2012, pp. 21-37.
- Welch, Mary. "Appropriateness and Acceptability: Employee Perspectives of Internal Communication." *Public Relations Review*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2012, pp. 246-254.