

7. BARRIERS OF COMMUNICATION

Communication plays a major role in developing a relationship. It can also affect the relationship among family members or management in any institute. More specifically, communication influences the effectiveness of instruction, performance evaluation, and the handling of discipline problems. Communication should be straightforward. What can make it complex, difficult, and frustrating are the barriers. Some barriers of communication are the following.

7.1. Physiological Barrier

Physiological barriers to communication are related with the limitations of the human body and the human mind (memory, attention, and perception). Physiological barriers may result from individuals' personal discomfort, caused by ill-health, poor eye sight, or hearing difficulties.

7.1.1. Poor Listening Skills

Listening to others is considered a difficult task. A typical speaker says about 125 words per minute. The typical listener can receive 400–600 words per minute. Thus, about three-fourth of listening time is free time. The free time often sidetracks the listener. The solution is to be an active rather than passive listener. A listener's premature frown, shaking of the head, or bored look can easily convince the other person/speaker that there is no reason to elaborate or try again to communicate his/her excellent idea.

7.1.2. Information Overload

Nurses are surrounded with a pool of information. It is essential to control the flow of the information, else the information is likely to be misinterpreted or forgotten or overlooked. As a result, communication may get distorted.

7.1.3. Inattention

At times, we just do not listen but only hear. For example, your boss is immersed in his/her very important paper work surrounded by so many files on the table and you are explaining him/her about an urgent office problem. In this situation, due to the inattention, the boss will not listen to you (he/she will only hear you); hence, he/she may not get what you are saying and it may lead to disappointment.

7.1.4. Emotions

The emotional state of a person at a particular point of time affects his/her communication with others as it has an impact on the body language (nonverbal communication). If the receiver feels that the sender is angry (emotional state), he/she can easily infer that the information being obtained will be very terrible. Emotional state causes some physiological changes in our body that may affect the

pronunciation, pressure of the speech, and tone of the voice of the sender as well as the perception, thinking process, and information interpretation of the receiver during verbal communication.

7.1.5. Poor Retention

Human memory cannot function beyond a limit. One cannot always retain all the facts/information about what is being told to him/her especially if he/she is not interested or not attentive. This leads to communication breakdown.

7.2. Physical and Environmental Distractions

Physical distractions are the physical things that get in the way of communication. Examples of such things include the telephone, an uncomfortable meeting place, and noise. These physical distractions are common in the hospital setting. If the telephone rings, the usual human tendency will be to answer it even if the caller is interrupting a very important or even delicate conversation. Distractions such as background noise, poor lighting, uncomfortable sitting, unhygienic room, or an environment that is too hot or cold can affect people's morale and concentration, which in turn interfere with effective communication.

7.3. Psychological Barrier

Psychological factors such as misperception, filtering, distrust, unhappy emotions, and people's state of mind can jeopardize the process of communication. We all tend to feel happier and more receptive to information when the sun shines. Similarly, if someone has personal problems such as worries and stress about a chronic illness, it may impinge his/her communication with others.

7.4. Social Barriers

Social barriers to communication include the social psychological phenomenon of conformity, a process in which the norms, values, and behaviors of an individual begin to follow those of the wider group. Social factors such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and marital status may act as a barrier to communication in certain situations.

7.5. Cultural Barriers

Culture shapes the way we think and behave. It can be seen as both shaping and being shaped by our established patterns of communication. Cultural barrier to communication often arises when individuals in one social group have developed different norms, values, or behaviors to individuals associated with another group. Cultural difference leads to difference in interest, knowledge, value, and tradition. Therefore, people of different cultures will experience these culture factors as a barrier to communicate with each other.

7.6. Semantic Barrier

Language, jargon, slang, etc., are some of the semantic barriers. Different languages across different regions represent a national barrier to communication, which is particularly important for migrating nurses. Use of jargon and slang also act as barrier to communication. For example, while delivering health education to a cardiac patient, if a cardiac nurse uses jargons such as "coronary artery disease," "anticoagulants," and "homocysteine and C-reactive proteins," the patient will listen attentively as he/she cannot understand these medical jargons. Therefore, she is required to use simple words "heart ki nadi ki bimari," "khoon patla karne ki dawai," and "certain chemicals in our body" so that the patient can understand what the nurse is supposed to communicate with him/her.

7.7. Linguistic Barriers

Individual linguistic ability may sometimes become a barrier to communication. The use of difficult or inappropriate words in communication can prevent the people from understanding the message. Poorly explained or misunderstood messages can also result in confusion. The linguistic differences between the people can also lead to communication breakdown. The same word may mean differently to different individuals. For example, consider a word "face."

- He is facing a problem
- What is the face value of this share bond?
- Your face is oval shape

"Face" means differently in different sentences. Communication breakdown occurs if there is wrong perception of the meaning of the message by the receiver.

7.8. Past Experience

If someone has awful experiences in the past related to some particular situation, then he/she will try to avoid communication in that situation. For example, a staff nurse who, while providing detailed information regarding the patient care at the time of routine clinical round to her boss, is always facing negative body language and discouraging words from her boss will ultimately limit her communication to the boss at that time.

7.9. Organizational Barriers

Unclear planning, structure, information overload, timing, technology, and status difference are the organizational factors that may act as barriers to communication.

7.9.1. Technological Failure

Message not delivered due to technical failure (e.g., receiver was not in mobile network area and the sender has not activated delivery report in message setting).

7.9.2. Time Pressures

Often, in organization the targets have to be achieved within a specified time period, the failure of which may have adverse consequences for the employee. In a haste to meet deadlines, usually an employee tries to shorten the formal channels of communication that can lead to confusion and misunderstanding among the various levels of supervisors, hence leading distorted communication. Therefore, sufficient time should be given for effective communication.

7.9.3. Complexity in Organizational Structure

Greater the hierarchy in an organization (i.e., the more the number of managerial levels), more are the chances of communication getting destroyed. Only the people at the top level can see the overall picture while the people at low level just have a knowledge about their own area and a little knowledge about other areas of the organization.

7.10. Barriers Related with the Message

7.10.1. Unclear Messages

Effective communication starts with a clear message. Unclear messages in terms of meaning, grammar, and words may act as a barrier to communication because the receiver may not be able to intercept the actual meaning of the message.

7.10.2. Stereotypes

Stereotypes are beliefs or generalizations about characteristics or qualities that are felt to be typical of a particular group (Funk & Wagnalls, 1966). Stereotyping is a barrier to communication because people with stereotype thoughts either will not read the message completely or will not read it at all because of their thinking that they already know everything ([Figure 1.9](#)).

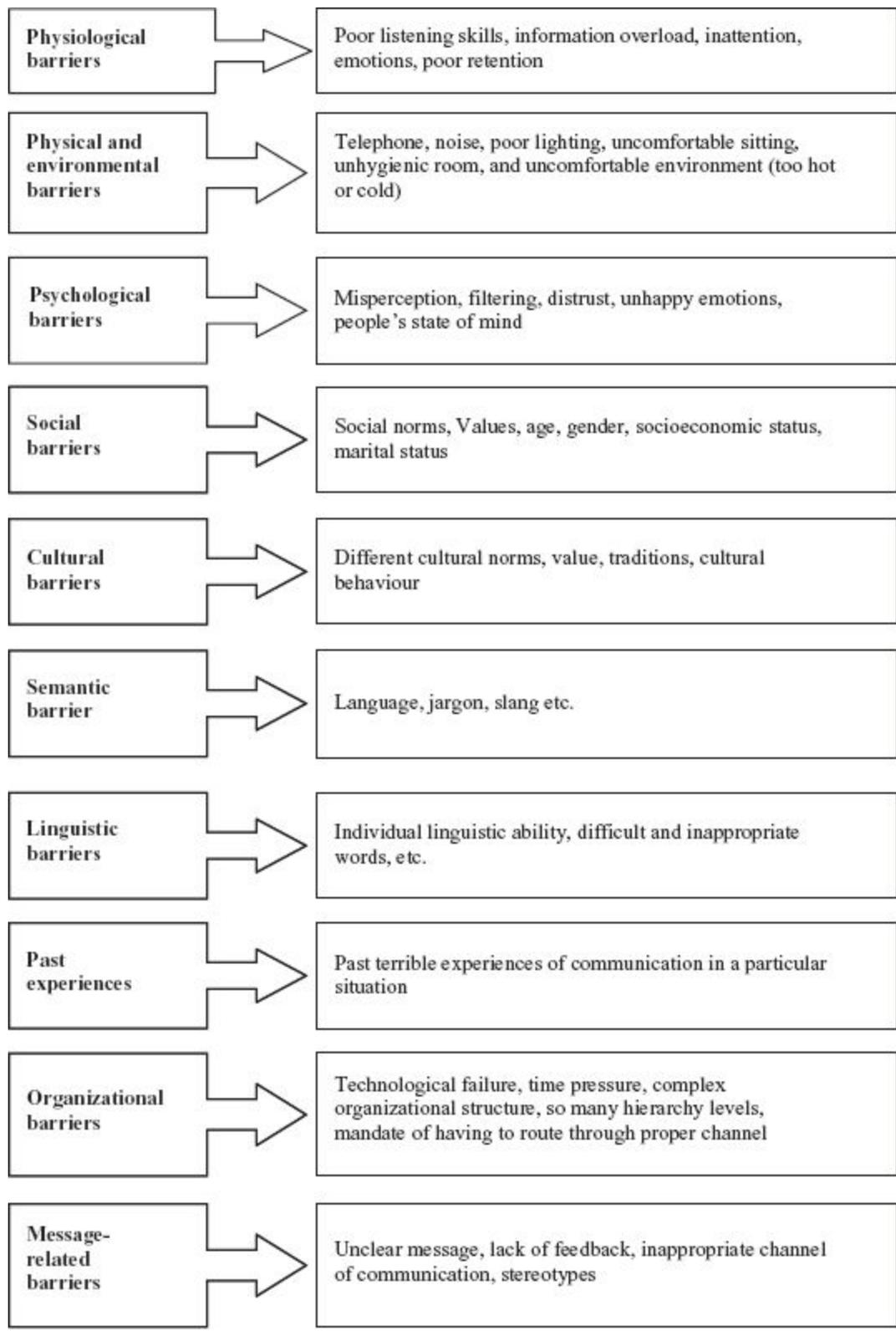


Figure 1.9 Barriers to Communication

7.10.3. Inappropriate Channel

Variation of channels helps the receiver understand the nature and importance of a message. While making a choice for a channel of communication, the sender needs to be sensitive to such things as the complexity of the message; consequences of a misunderstanding; knowledge, skills, and abilities of the receiver; and immediacy of action to be taken from the message.

7.10.4. Lack of Feedback

Feedback is the mirror of communication. Feedback mirrors what the sender has sent. Without feedback, communication cannot be considered complete. Both the sender and the receiver can play an active role in using feedback to make communication truly two-way.

7.11. Some Other Blocks to Communication

- Failure to listen: Communicator may or may not feel able to speak freely to the listener, if the listener is not listening carefully or not responding.
- Conflicting verbal and nonverbal messages.
- Failure to interpret with knowledge.
- Changing the subject: A quick way to stop conversation is to change the subject.
- Inappropriate comments and questions: Certain types of comments and questions should be avoided in most situations because they tend to impede effective communication, e.g., close-ended questions and using comments that give advice.