

## COMPLEX COMMUNICATION BARRIERS IN THE ORGANISATION IN A CRISIS CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** The role of communications and the communication process are currently changing in significant aspects. The globalizing society and business, the ongoing and unpredictable Covid-19 pandemic, the constant and chaotic economic trends; hybridity in the changes in the main social processes and many other factors have led to the exacerbation of some trends affecting the management processes.

Factors such as: human resources management; labour market pressures, equality and social justice and accountability; demographic factors; the increased need for decentralization; the role of social responsibility; social entrepreneurship; the role of information and smart technologies in management, crises, fake news and others, were presented in new aspects to business and public executives.

The different and extremely diverse means of communication, forms, values dimensions, context, information redundancy and overload, loss of trust, etc. complicate the process of interaction between the communicator and the recipient. The requirement to explore, update and overcome the causes that do not allow people to build effective communication or completely block it, takes lead. In the presence of communication barriers, the information is distorted, loses its original meaning or does not reach the recipient at all, which makes the whole process of data transmission meaningless.

The ideas presented in the work can be an appropriate basis for the development of programs for organizational change in the aspects concerning the communication processes in the modern environment and outlining new paradigms in overcoming the obstacles in the organizational communication.

**Keywords:** communication barriers, trends, management, human resources, Crisis

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication as a social behavior and attitude, the transmission and reception of information, regardless of type, is accompanied by implicit obstacles also known as barriers. This small detail, which may actually be significant, has a set of characteristics that need to be taken into consideration in the organization's communication. In this sense, the focus of attention should be pointed to the emerging modern communication barriers and how to overcome them. The ubiquitous presence of multiple means of communication is one of the essential features of modern societies (Vasilev, V., & Ognianski, D., 2020, p.91-93). This makes it a key tool for influencing the development of organizations and determines the need for research and effective use. The task of making a detailed study is not easy due to the fact that communication phenomena are in an open system and are dynamic.

The variety of means of communication, forms, value dimensions, context, information redundancy and overload, loss of trust, etc. complicate the process of interaction between the communicator and the recipient. At one of the first levels is the requirement to investigate, update and overcome the causes that do not allow people to build effective communication or completely block it. In the case of communication barriers, the information is distorted, loses its original meaning or does not reach the recipient at all, which makes the whole process of data transmission meaningless. Relevant barriers are defined rather as psychological phenomena that are interconnected and difficult to isolate and differentiate, but they represent the essence and basis of the communication process. This determines the need for their understanding, meaning and role, accurate interpretation in a particular organizational context.

### 2. ON COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Yes. The world is facing challenges of an unprecedented kind, intensity and management deficit in the direction of knowledge. The transition to an active home office environment, communications are becoming more mediocre, which, along with traditional communication skills, adds new requirements to management and employees in terms of interaction and communications, and therefore to the barriers. The transformation is taking place with the advent of digital communication and the "transfer of the office" to the home environment is not something new, but has been progressively developed alongside the Internet, e-mail, blogs, social networks and media, but the pandemic has imposed unprecedented speed on these processes and rapid transition to a "new way of working".

People recognize the need for communication and effective communication, but it hinders them in a number of ways. Many various barriers exist between the author of the message and the addressee and if they are not

overcome, the meaning of the message will be distorted or it will not reach its destination at all (Manolov, L. 2020, p. 42). From a management point of view, there are countless reasons why managers fail to communicate effectively or receive correct feedback. Here we need to account for the fact that “the role of human resource management, on the other hand, plays a central role in organizational development and organizational change. It is a bridge between management and staff in communicating to a positive organizational assessment and acceptance of changes of a managerial nature” (Gigauri, I., 2020, p. 26). The growing level of topics to be communicated in and through the organization, the commitment of leaders, their attitudes and behavior as part of the communication process, today become even more tangible and complex. The existence of an effective communication system in the organization does not guarantee effective communication between human resources, if there is no desire to learn about and overcome barriers to human relations in a professional environment.

A close look at these obstacles could help management to identify and overcome them on the way to effective communication with subordinates. In recent years, several groups of communication barriers related to the human relations of the participants in the communication process, the way of perception and interpretation, the levels of listening, the status peculiarities are considered in the scientific developments. Communication barriers to effective communication are numerous and specific to each organization. Good communication is a difficult process (Icheva, M. & Vasilev, V., 2021, p. 914).

By applying the interdisciplinary approach to summarizing knowledge and research in the field of human resources management and public relations, through the perspective of today's reality and organizational challenges, barriers can be summarized in the following three major groups and in particular with specific reflections:

**1. The power of the direct impact of the social context** as an external global communication barrier, direct circumstances beyond the control of the interlocutors. The context of communication is defined as the physical, psychological or socio-cultural conditions or circumstances to which the communication takes place. Even before the pandemic, workers were generally exposed to concerns about the replacement of human labour by automated computing power, the effects on people's skills and adaptability to these changes.

These insights are described in detail by Klaus Schwab in his book *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*, and in the same aspect it is concluded that the response of organizations is slower and shows "the discrepancy between the scale of the forthcoming changes and the relatively insignificant actions taken by companies to respond to the challenges" (Schwab; K., 2016, p.68) The global health crisis - the COVID pandemic and all resulting and multiplying crises.

And if a few years ago the external communication barriers included, for example, unfavourable conditions or meeting place and work environment, telephone communication malfunctions, time anomalies, socio-cultural differences, etc., today the situation is additionally burdened. Based on this crisis, the typical manifestation of people and their relationships in the work environment is stress. Survey with The Harris Poll (<https://b2b.talkspace.com/hubfs/employee-stress-check-2021.pdf>) in 2021, among 1015 full-time employees in the United States on the current situation of mental state and work shows that the stress of the pandemic directly affects the employees relationship with managers and strongly reflects on their overall work.

It can be pointed that 41% of employees are considering changing jobs to deal with stress. Employees circumvent company policies, such as changing teams or short-term vacations, in favour of leaving. Stressful events and insecurity continue to redefine the workplace, and many employees are extremely disappointed by the unfulfilled promises made by their employers over the past 18 months regarding their well-being. On the one hand, this has led to burnouts, which also leads to physical and mental health problems.

On the other hand, feelings of stress and burnout lead to a decrease in focus and productivity in the workplace, more mistakes and problems in interpersonal relationships and communication with colleagues and managers. The unpredictable nature of the COVID pandemic has a "direct impact" on managers and employees, generates daily uncertainty, encourages them to rethink their priorities and directly affects the communication between them and their principles of perception, retention and processing of information, whether it is related to information, training, persuasion or pleasure.

**2. Trust** - the core of any communication is the trust between partners and goodwill. Including in the organizational plan where the organization is obliged to continue and maintain its meaning. Trust is about our security and the feeling that the actions of "someone" will keep our interests intact, as this determines our identity, spirituality and our place in the world.

And although psychology distinguishes different models of functioning of trust in society from generally accepted rules such as moral norms, traditions and laws to the manifestation of "good attitude", without it the efficiency in communication is almost non-existent, which is the basis of knowledge transfer, cultural experience, socialization and development. According to data from Edelman Data & Intelligence (*The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer*) (<https://www.edelman.com/trust/2020-trust-barometer>), which has been conducting a global, multidisciplinary

survey and confidence analysis for 20 years, neither one of the four public institutions the survey measures - government, business, NGOs and the media – are being rewarded with trust.

According to the analysis, the reason for this paradox can be found in people's fears about the future and their role in it, which are a signal to awaken our institutions to adopt a new way to effectively build trust: balancing competence with ethical behavior. Distrust is driven by a growing sense of injustice in the system. It is perceived that the institutions increasingly serve the interests of a few above all.

Justice in economic systems raises fears for the future - of job loss, impending recession, lack of skills, automation and partnership in general. And although there are variations of trust, it is based on the degree to which a person is confident and willing to act on the basis of words, actions and decisions of another person (Vasilev, V., 2021, p.126). It is not a constant quantity and everyone needs it to a different degree. Accordingly, it moves from communication to the actual assessed action of the subject. As it grows, the relationship becomes more stable and vice versa, as it decreases, insecurity, doubts and dissatisfaction build up.

**3. Excessive "exaggeration and overestimation" of the possibilities of online communication for "real" relationships between people.** This is not about denying and / or underestimating the many benefits of online communications, especially in a situation where technology is the leading tool in remote work, but about looking "inside" the barriers it creates or as a consideration of modernity. through another prism. The automatic transfer of "real communication" to the online one loses from its effectiveness. Public and organizational communications are transmitted through various channels.

In the aspect of the online communication channels Sl. Angelova concludes that: "The efficiency of the channel also has value dimensions. They participate in the authority, the degree of prior trust, the readiness to use and the principled opportunity for effective public dialogue through this channel (Angelova, Sl., 2011, p.41). The communication-technological society is characterized by special and even its own value dimensions, which are a factor that affects the readiness of people to receive messages. Scott Lash (Lash, Sc., 2004; p.25) defines the online space as disinformation, because there is information overload, wrong and uncontrollable information.

In the information society, organic life forms change their essential characteristics, acquire the "form of networks" and are absorbed by the ubiquitous informatization. According to Lash, the information society is "mostly a communication order" because information is static, and communications are what determine its dynamics and global distribution determines them.

In the world of the Internet, we pay more attention to things that change same as technology, so we tend to overestimate their role, and underestimate things that play an important role but are constant, such as water or human relationships. The new generations are more open to technology, they try more things, but they are often inappropriate. Technologies are largely "fragile and volatile," as defined by Nasim Taleb (Taleb, N., 2019, pp. 417-419).

The professional approach requires a better identification and knowledge of communication barriers, but with careful consideration of their organizational specifics. To the previously listed external barriers, we will define a group of more segregated internal barriers, which are of a known type, but with additional content and stronger influence. Communication barriers are manifesting in the situational aspect as well as in terms of gender, age, profession, nationality, cultural specifics of the communicators, which actually multiplies many times the number of their variations. In practice, the results of these psychological barriers are always catastrophic. The problem is the inability of management and subordinates to communicate effectively (Vasilev, Stefanova & Angelova, 2017, pp. 111-113).

Organizational barriers can be classified into the following types:

**Propensity to prejudice.** It is very difficult to separate what we hear from the feelings we have for the person we are communicating with. Non-existent motives are often attributed to the source of the message. When we like someone it is more likely for us to accept his words, whether he is telling the truth or not, than to trust someone we don't like. To this category is added the first impression, which, however, can be negative in relation to the interlocutor.

Some external characteristics, for example, will cause hostility, which will affect the discussed topic. This can apply to both the manager and the employee. It also manifests itself in the form of prejudices on the part of managers towards employees in regards of their assessment of people at lower levels in the organization. At the same time, however, they demonstrate their approval or disapproval. In the event that the manager considers the subordinate incompetent to cope with a particular task, he could not effectively present the need for its implementation. Thus, such behavior is perceived by subordinates as negative.

**Doubts about the legitimacy of the source.** This, rather, refers to the hierarchical line and governing bodies with a certain power and connection, as well as an understanding of the degree of subordination and level. Especially in formal official information, the message can be questioned if the source is not "authoritatively" legitimized.

**The perception of the competence of the source** in the specific professional field. If a manager is not recognized by employees as an expert in the relevant field of activity, they will respectively question the information and / or knowledge provided to them or will not accept it at all (Gospodinov , Y., 2010, p.118).The manifestation can again be in the form of bottom-up communication.

**Differences in the professional status.** Employees with the same or similar status in the organization communicate much easier, and also more sincerely. While in communication with a manager, the employee may knowingly distort, conceal or manipulate information and present it in a light beneficial to the recipient. The determining factor can be considered fear or favouritism of the leader and only good news are communicated to them.

**Filtering** refers to the deliberate manipulation of information by its sender. This manipulation is performed in order to present the recipient with information in a light that is beneficial to the sender. For example, when the subordinate informs his superior only what he thinks he will like, he filters the information. Managers with high professionalism in all areas of management express superiority over subordinates, which hinders effective communication.

**Infallibility.** Nothing has a more negative effect on communication in the relationship leader - subordinate than a person who defines himself as infallible. This always leads to increased emotionality and inaccurate interpretation. As a rule, an effective manager must be careful not to fall into this trap of infallibility. This also raises situations such as the inability to establish contact with the manager, loss of courage to express ideas due to fear of encountering aggression and negative feelings of inferiority and failure.

**Misunderstanding the motives of the individual.** Among the numerous psychological barriers that prevent managers from communicating effectively with their subordinates is misunderstanding of the subordinates' motives. Very often, when the members of a group present the arguments "for" and "against" a management decision, the managers do not listen to them, they cannot establish their motives for resistance (Vasilev, V., 2021, p.124-125). When the motives are unclear, the leaders fail in their attempt to communicate with their subordinates. In cases where the managers knows exactly why their subordinates are telling them exactly that, communication will be more effective in terms of how, what, why, and for what needs it will be done. Caution is needed to avoid the "I know everything" syndrome.

**Interpretation based on mistrust and scepticism.** Sometimes managers do not correctly interpret the messages from the members of the structural unit because they do not believe in them. When their attitude expresses negativity, managers discourage subordinates to communicate effectively (Tepavicharova, M., & Boykova, L .; 2016; p.630). Scepticism can also manifest itself in the attitude of subordinates to management. In both cases, the communication is characterized by negative results, which in turn leads to conflicts. Trust to a leader and a person has a very high impact.

**Lack of understanding and concern.** For effective communication it is necessary for the manager to monitor the emotions, problems and needs that the employees have and experience. Lack of interest can cause serious communication problems. The show of genuine concern for their subordinates aims to avoid barriers to effective communication. The leaders who knows how to feel the moods and feelings of their subordinates will express their ideas in an understandable way. A person's emotional state at the time of receiving a communication message determines how it will be interpreted. The message received when a person is irritated or bereaved will rather be interpreted differently from cases where a person is satisfied. Explicit emotions, such as euphoria or depression, tend to impede effective communication and give way to rational and objective thinking in favour of emotional judgment. They apply to both managers and employees.

**Lack of effective listening skills.** It is important to know the levels of listening by hearing, activating attention, comprehension, response and memory, which are the first step to effective listening. From these features of the process arise differences in the ability to listen. They are related to distraction of the listener, distraction with other thoughts, lack of interest in the received information or negative reactions to the interlocutor. In another aspect, in order to avoid the barrier of "ineffective listening", the manager must listen to people when they express aloud their feelings, observations or disagreements related to the work. The ability to listen carefully and to perceive feedback directly from subordinates increases the communication skills of the manager.

**Lack of epistolary alignment skills.** Written communication to a large extend is considered as the formal communication. The lack of purposefulness, clarity of expression in writing, implies misunderstanding and misinterpretation of information.

**Information overload.** The ability of people to receive and process information is limited and if the "processing capacity" is exceeded, "information overload" occurs. In this situation, people consciously or subconsciously sift through, miss or simply forget some part of the information. Whatever the result of information overload, it is a loss of information and a reduction in the effectiveness of communication (Vasilev, V .; 2020; p. 231). The constant flow of electronic messages, telephone calls, information received from meetings and conferences, as well as the need for

training for changes or innovations accompanies the daily lives of managers, administration and experts and is the cause of increasing information overload.

Organizational barriers are also manifested in unclear planning, structure, time pressure, technology, which are also part of the factors that can act as barriers to communication.

### 3. CONCLUSION

One spends a lot of time at work, so a favourable climate in the team, relationships and communications is important. In essence, relationships arise in communications, and for an organization to exist and survive, it must be based on a solid foundation of effective relationships between managers and employees, employees and employees and groups. This helps people and groups to coordinate their activities in order to achieve their goals and is vital for the processes of professional socialization and adaptation, decision making, problem solving and change management, etc. The relationship between employees is influenced by many factors: gender, age, level of education and moral principles. Research shows that overcoming barriers is part of the prerequisites for a purposeful and effective communication process. We hope that the ideas presented in the current work will be an appropriate basis for the development of programs for organizational change in the aspects concerning the communication processes in the modern environment and outline new paradigms in overcoming the obstacles in the organizational communication.

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