

1.9 Noise in Communication

Aim

- To understand the ingredients of effective communication and the concept of noise/distortion

Procedure

- Draw a line A at one end of the field and another line B at a distance of about 60 ft.
- Divide the participants into groups.
- Ask each group to send you one representative with a paper and pen.
- Make the representatives stand at line B and the groups at line A.
- Give each group leader an envelope containing a message (See examples of messages below) which they will have to communicate to their representative groups with their hands behind their backs.
- Give them the signal to begin communicating.
- The result will be hilarious as each group will scream and shout over and above the others to make themselves heard.
- After about 3 minutes of this attempt allow the group to release their hands and encourage them to communicate in whatever way they can without crossing the line.
- Group members will immediately try various ways to communicate - through signs, actions, role play, some may write out the message on paper arrows, etc...
- This exercise is not competitive. However only the teacher need know this. The urge to compete will automatically arise. For instance, it will be noticed that not only will the groups try their best to make their messages heard over and above the others; they will scream and shout in order to dissuade others from hearing their own messages. This spirit of unhealthy competition must be taken note of by the teacher.

Some sample messages:

He who forgives ends the quarrel

Greed led the monkey to fall on it's back

A child or youth who does not listen to an elder's advice gets his or her leg broken

The child considers his father's guest only a slave

Labour has sure reward

Body is easily satisfied but not the heart

You can be a star but one day, you will encounter your death

Tasty soup (meal) draws seats (people) to itself.

Finally ask the group the following questions:

- As senders were you able to get the messages across? Why?
- As receivers how did you feel as you attempted to pick up the message of your team?
- What was the one factor that blocked your ability to send or receive the message?
- What were the various attempts you made to communicate the messages?
- Did it occur to the groups that messages could be communicated to their representatives if only each group communicated at a time while the others remained silent? How would this be done? Why was this option not chosen?

Input

In the exercise above we can notice three things:

- There are various ways to communicate through words and actions. This is an excellent example of how in society each one who is communicating is trying to target a particular person/group/audience. Parents want children to obey, teachers want students to listen, friends want to grab the attention of their peers, pop songs aim to be the most popular, advertisements persuade people to buy, etc. All communicators, especially mass communicators, are screaming for attention.

Materials Required

- An open playground so that the participants can scream and shout



- b) The high degree of NOISE blocks the communication process and seriously hinders communication.
- c) It did not occur to the groups that they could plan their 'air time' because they presumed that they were competing with each other for a prize. This was a wrong presumption based on the notion that whenever people are divided into teams or groups they must compete. (This in itself is a fine example of how the bias of our past experiences influences our behaviour). Nowhere was it mentioned that this was to be a competition. None of the leaders thought of interacting with each other to help get their messages across. We fail to see that the best ways to communicate is to communicate in unity, in collaboration and in a disciplined manner - not through groupism, unhealthy competition and noise.

What is noise?

Whatever impedes the message of the sender from being fully understood by the receiver is called noise. Noise interferes with communication and might negatively affect the intended message. External distractions such as loud music, a big-screen TV, or car traffic may interfere with receiving the oral message. Internal distractions such as personal worries, daydreaming, or physical illness may also cause interference. Effective communicators work hard to reduce interference. Sometimes interference results in lost sales, accidents, or confused messages. Noise can be of different types:

1. Mechanical or technical noise - caused by the quality of media used. Example: I cannot hear the person at the other end of the mobile telephone because there is no network there or I may not get a good reception of the TV broadcast since my TV aerial needs repair.
2. Physical Noise - Caused by actual disturbances in the environment. Example: The sound of a cricket can be heard at night when everything is silent. Physical distractions are usually easier to prevent in a speaking or listening situation because the surroundings can often be controlled or changed.
3. Psychological Noise - Caused by conditions that affect our thinking and feeling. These are more popularly called biases. Example: In the exercise above all the groups were biased into thinking that they were to outdo each other in sending their messages. This bias has entered as a result of the previous experiences of each participant who is conditioned to think that working in teams automatically means working to compete as for example during tournaments, competitions and games.
4. Emotional Distractions - they can prevent the receiver of the message from concentrating on and giving full attention to the communication. They may include thinking about a personal matter or allowing an emotion such as anger to influence how you interpret a message.
5. Contextual noise - caused by a poor knowledge or interpretation of the context in which a message is communicated. Example: In the African context, spitting beneath one's clothing is a sign of blessing our ancestors. In European and American cultures, this may be considered weird and disgusting.

Review

1. All communicators, especially mass communicators, are screaming for attention.
2. The best way to communicate is to communicate in unity, in collaboration and in a disciplined manner.
3. Noise is whatever impedes the message of the sender from being fully understood by the receiver.
4. Noise is of different types: Mechanical or Technical noise, Physical noise, Psychological noise, Emotional disturbances and Contextual noise.

Reflection

1. 'If you can't beat them, join them' is a famous saying. How would it apply in the case of collaboration between communicators? Would this collaboration actually be applicable in Africa's media today?

Relevant Skills

Using the information you have acquired, give suggestions to your school or college administration on how they can manage/control all the noise that bombards students, e.g. TV, radio, friends, etc to be able to communicate better with them.

Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini, 2000.

References

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 Terrell Galvin. Communication Works. Illinois: National Textbook Company, 2001.
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