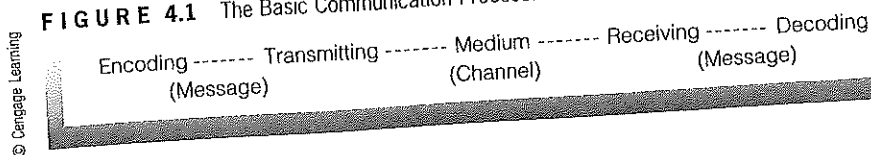


FIGURE 4.1 The Basic Communication Process.

judgment on the part of the sender and receiver (Littlejohn and Foss, 2005). Figure 4.1 shows the basic dyad interaction.

Nine Barriers to Communication

Although this process seems straightforward and reliable, we all know from personal experience that simple messages between two individuals are often not communicated effectively. The communication process is frequently unreliable for a number of reasons. Senders may not formulate their meaning properly in symbols that can be transmitted to the receiver. Stated simply, one must say what one intends to say. Assuming the sender has encoded and transmitted the message to the receiver with some accuracy, a series of communication barriers may intervene to block the communication or alter the meaning of the message. These include the following:

1. Preconceived ideas
2. Denial of contrary information
3. Use of personalized meanings
4. Lack of motivation or interest
5. Noncredibility of the source
6. Lack of communication skills
7. Poor organizational climate
8. Use of complex channels
9. Communication gap

Preconceived ideas:

Receiver hears what he or she wants to hear.

Preconceived Ideas "People hear what they want to hear" best describes the phenomenon of **preconceived ideas**. If we have a preconceived idea about the information transmitted to us, we tend to receive and understand the message as that idea. Because conflict and mistrust between inmates and corrections officers are often based upon the stereotypical views each group holds toward the other (Kagehiro and Werner, 1981), it is not uncommon for corrections officers to encode their views inaccurately. A similar impediment to communication may exist between community police officers and residents of low-income communities (Carlson, 2005; Schneider, 1999).

Denial of Contrary Information Messages that conflict with information we have already accepted as valid are often denied or rejected. After assessing the message, we may reject information about the stock market based on prior information. This is a prudent or rational communication decision. However,

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the message may conflict with our personal beliefs or values, in which case we reject it or deny its validity without any deliberation or thought. This **denial of contrary information** process, known as cognitive dissonance in the psychology literature, is the kind of denial of information that creates a communication barrier. Denial is also a common problem faced in rehabilitating offenders. Social-skills training, of which communication is a significant part, is considered therapeutic for young adult and juvenile offenders. Henderson and Hollin (1983) suggest improvement of such skills, including communication skills, will improve offenders' ability to overcome denial and adjust to their environments. Moreover, the denial of contrary information is a major impediment to interpersonal communication and communication competence (Sypher and Zorn 1986).

Use of Personalized Meanings The words chosen by the sender and his or her use of **personalized meanings** may have a different meaning for the message receiver. Professional jargon or legal terminology may have little, no, or a different meaning to those outside the profession or legal system. Words and sentences that convey images of pleasure for one party may convey contrary images for another. A young person may refer to an experience with enthusiasm and say it was "really bad," meaning it was very good. Guilt is based on fact in the criminal justice system, but in psychiatry it depends on the state of one's conscience. Cultural differences between ethnic and gender groups may also affect personalized meanings (Madera 2011).

Lack of Motivation or Interest Motivation in communicating and interest in the message must exist for both the sender and receiver, at least to some reasonable extent, if a message is to be communicated effectively and to avoid **lack of motivation or interest**. Memo writing in organizations is a standard method of communication. However, if memoranda become excessive, personnel may lose interest in spending time reading them. If such a situation exists, a motivated communicator may supplement memos with a fresh or unique medium to get the attention of receivers.

Noncredibility of the Source The sender of a message may not be believable for a number of reasons. **Noncredibility of the source** is present when individuals have given out inaccurate information in the past. Individuals who have a history of providing reliable information are considered highly credible senders of messages and get the attention of prospective receivers. Individuals with relatively greater status in an organization have more credibility than those with little or no status.

Lack of Communication Skills Poor or a **lack of communication skills** can be attributed to an individual's lack of proper training, educational level, experience, and cognitive capacity, as well as personality traits. Practitioners in the field of criminal justice must master the art of receiving, collecting, recording, and disseminating information. This can be accomplished

Denial of contrary information: Rejecting a message that conflicts with our personal beliefs.

Use of personalized meanings: The words chosen by the sender may have a different meaning for the message receiver.

Lack of motivation or interest: Interest in the message or motivation to receive the message must be present to create a successful communication process.

Noncredibility of the source: A sender who is not believable.

Lack of communication skills: Lacking the ability to encode or decode messages, such as poor speaking, listening, or writing skills.

through formal education, academy training, and experience throughout the practitioner's career. A "streetwise" education also is important for developing a full range of communication skills. It is necessary to understand street language and even be fluent in it to achieve maximum delivery of services to clients and the public.

In our changing society, with its influx of legal and illegal immigrants, language barriers often exist between members of a community and governmental agencies. South Florida, Arizona, and California are examples of areas where English is not the first language for many members of society and is not spoken well by many. Also, the rise of diversity in our nation has dramatically increased the numbers of women and minority members of criminal justice agencies. The slight differences in language presentation and levels of sensitivity between ethnic and gender groups can also affect communication skills and become communication barriers on their own (Madera, 2011).

Poor Organizational Climate An organization that promotes openness and trust among its members encourages active communication. Typically, organizations that decentralize decision making include subordinates in higher-order policy decisions and foster risk taking in their members. These strategies will foster a favorable communication climate. Highly formal organizations may discourage all but formal and approved communications among their members, which can result in a **poor organizational climate**. An insistence on formality often promotes an active, informal grapevine that often creates a suitable climate for gossip. Here again, the complexity of verbal and nonverbal communication across ethnic and gender lines can affect the receptiveness of communications and hence the climate.

Use of Complex Channels The more gates through which communication must pass—the **use of complex channels**—makes it more likely that the message will pass slowly and be altered. The highly complex channels of communication characteristic of large, complex organizations make communicating inefficient and ineffective. Such organizations tend to create red tape and usually become rigid because important information cannot be transmitted readily from clients or to policymakers.

Communication Gap These barriers to communication can create a **communication gap**: the difference between the message the sender intended to communicate and what the receiver understands the message to be. The existence of a communication gap between individuals in an organization becomes an organizational problem that impedes effective management and operations.

COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

As the discussion of barriers to communication illustrates, simple messages between individuals can be inadvertently filtered or even lost. Moreover, when the individual is a sender or receiver within an organization, additional factors—

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Poor organizational climate: An organization or social system that discourages or impedes communication.

Use of complex channels: The more gates a message passes through, the more complex the channels.

Communication gap: The difference between the message the sender intended to communicate and what the receiver understands the message to be.