

Communication Breakdown at Flight Foods Ltd

An Analysis of Communication Barriers in Food Manufacturing Operations

Group Presentation – Communication in Business Contexts

Presented by: ozmen Kuntay

Student number-2516437

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[Student 1] – Environmental Noise | [Student 2] – Language & Body Language

[Student 3] – Age & Generational | [Student 4] – Cultural Barriers

[Student 5] – Emotional Barriers

Presentation Overview

1. Company Background & The Core Problem
2. Barrier 1: Environmental Noise (Shannon-Weaver Model)
3. Barrier 2: Language, Communication & Body Language (Berlo's SMCR Model)
4. Barrier 3: Age & Generational Differences (Schramm's Interactive Model)
5. Barrier 4: Cultural Standards & Practices (Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions)
6. Barrier 5: Emotional Barriers (Goleman's Emotional Intelligence)
7. Strategic Solutions & Recommendations
8. Conclusion & Q&A

Company Background & Problem Statement

Flight Foods Ltd: The Profile

- Company: Flight Foods Ltd
- Size: Medium enterprise (40 employees)
- Industry: Ready meal manufacture for airlines
- Objective: Increase market share
- Reality: Losing business due to quality failures

Under-cooked food served to passengers

Poor packaging compromising freshness

Meat found in vegetarian meals

Declining airline confidence & contracts

The Factory Floor Reality

"A Day in the Life at Flight Foods"

Physical Environment

- Large, spacious factory
- Good lighting & ventilation
- BUT: Packed with old, noisy machines
- Constant clanking and banging
- Signs plastered on walls as primary communication

The Workforce

- 40 employees
- Ages 16–60 (wide generational span)
- Mainly immigrants from 5 distinct cultural groups
- Limited English proficiency
- "Speak their own language with a few English words"

Management

- Gary—Floor Manager
- Englishman from London's East End
- Self-taught hygiene trainer
- Management provides no formal training
- Overwhelmed, under-supported, exhausted

Barrier 1: Environmental Noise

Presented by: [StudentName 1] | Theoretical Framework: Shannon-Weaver Model (1949)

Evidence from Case Study

- Old, noisy machines creating constant "clanking and banging"
- Gary "running around" trying to explain tasks amid the noise
- Signs on walls as a substitute for verbal communication
- Gary's personal state: exhausted (4 hours sleep), rushed, distracted

Shannon-Weaver Model Application

- Information Source → Gary's instructions / Hygiene rules
- Transmitter → Gary's voice / Wall signs
- Channel → Verbal (shouted over machines) / Visual (signs)
- Noise → Machine noise, fatigue, time pressure
- Receiver → Multi-cultural, non-native English speakers
- Destination → Correct food handling behavior

Overcoming Environmental Noise

1. Engineering Controls

Service or replace old noisy machinery | Install noise-dampening barriers | Create designated quiet zones for briefings

2. Channel Redundancy

Don't rely solely on verbal instructions | Use visual demonstrations, pictograms, color-coded systems | Implement digital displays with safety messages

3. Structured Communication Times

Hold pre-shift briefings BEFORE machines run at full volume | Schedule regular communication breaks away from factory floor

4. Personal Noise Management

Provide noise-canceling headsets for supervisors | Ensure Gary is not scheduling himself into exhaustion | His 4-hour sleep increases psychological noise

5. Signage Upgrade

Replace text-heavy signs with universal visual symbols | Use multilingual pictograms (not just English text) | ISO-standard safety symbols

Barrier 2: Language, Communication & Body Language

Presented by: [StudentName 2] | Theoretical Framework: Berlo's SMCR Model (1960)

Evidence from Case Study

- Staff "speak their own language with a few English words thrown in"
- Gary's East London accent and colloquialisms may not translate
- Gary "screamed: 'Idiots!'" — aggressive, counter-productive language
- Wall signs only in English
- No formal language or hygiene training provided

Berlo's SMCR Model Application

- S (Source): Gary has hygiene knowledge but lacks cross-cultural communication training
- M (Message): English-only; treatment is shouting and signs; code is verbal/text
- C (Channel): Over-reliance on hearing (shouting over noise) and seeing (English text)
- R (Receiver): Limited English, diverse cultures, no hygiene knowledge baseline

Overcoming Language & Body Language Barriers

Solutions for Gary & Management

1. Multilingual Communication Strategy

Translate all signage into 5 primary languages | Hire bilingual team leaders/communication champions | Use translation apps for real-time clarification

2. Visual & Demonstrative Communication

Replace text signs with picture-based instructions (ISO safety symbols) | Use video demonstrations of hygiene procedures | Implement "show, don't tell" training methods

3. Body Language Awareness

Train Gary in non-verbal communication: open posture, appropriate eye contact | Avoid aggressive body language (pointing, towering over staff, screaming) | Recognize that body language meanings vary across cultures

4. Structured Language Support

Offer English classes for staff during paid time | Provide Gary with basic phrase cards in staff languages | Create a visual hygiene checklist using photographs, not words

5. Feedback Loops

Ask staff to demonstrate back what they understood (closed-loop communication) | Use the "teach-back" method to confirm comprehension

Barrier 3: Age & Generational Differences

Presented by: [StudentName3] | Theoretical Framework: Schramm's Interactive Model (1954)

Evidence from Case Study

- Workforce ranges from 16 to 60 years old
- "The older ones seem to understand, but the problem seems to be with the younger ones"
- "It doesn't matter what I tell them, they seem to do something else"
- Gary (middle-aged) uses traditional top-down management style

Schramm's Model: Field of Experience

- Communication only works when sender and receiver share overlapping 'field of experience'
- Gary + Older workers: More overlap (hierarchical, verbal, experiential)
- Gary + Younger workers: Minimal overlap (digital, collaborative, needs context)
- Gary interprets behavior as defiance; younger workers experience disengagement

Overcoming Age & Generational Barriers

Solutions for Gary & Management

1. Adaptive Communication Styles

Train Gary to vary his approach: direct instruction for some, collaborative explanation for others | Explain the WHY behind rules, not just the WHAT (especially for younger workers)

2. Multi-Modal Training Delivery

Combine verbal briefings (older workers) with digital/video content (younger workers) | Use peer-to-peer mentoring: pair older experienced workers with younger ones

3. Reverse Mentoring

Allow younger workers to teach digital or modern techniques to older colleagues | This builds mutual respect and bridges the experience gap

4. Generational Inclusion in Problem-Solving

Form mixed-age quality circles to discuss food safety improvements | Younger workers may suggest tech solutions; older workers offer operational wisdom

5. Avoid Stereotyping

Challenge Gary's assumption that "younger ones don't understand" | Implement comprehension testing for ALL ages to identify actual gaps vs. perceived gaps

Barrier 4: Cultural Standards & Practices

Presented by: [StudentName 4] | Theoretical Framework: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions

Evidence from Case Study

- Staff are mainly immigrants from 5 distinct cultural groups
- No cultural orientation or food hygiene training before starting
- Gary is monocultural with no cross-cultural training
- Different cultural attitudes toward: hair covering, hand washing, meat handling
- Management expects immediate productivity over proper onboarding

Hofstede's Dimensions Applied

→ Power Distance: High = staff won't question Gary even if confused; Low = younger workers may challenge

methods

→ Uncertainty Avoidance: Some cultures have strict food rules; others are relaxed. Without standardization, confusion reigns.

→ Individualism vs. Collectivism: Collectivist cultures prioritize group harmony; mistakes go unreported

→ Long-term vs. Short-term: Management's short-term focus (start immediately) vs. long-term training investment

Overcoming Cultural Barriers

Solutions for Gary & Management

1. Culturally Responsive Onboarding

Mandatory pre-start food hygiene training (not 'learn on the job') | Explain WHY UK standards exist (legal, airline contracts, safety) | Acknowledge cultural differences respectfully while establishing non-negotiable standards

2. Cultural Liaisons / Champions

Identify respected figures from each cultural group as team leaders or translators | Create culturally diverse safety committees

3. Standardized Visual Protocols

Remove reliance on cultural assumptions | Use photographic SOPs showing the EXACT required method | Color-coded zones: RED=meat, GREEN=veg, BLUE = packaging

4. Respect for Dietary & Religious Practices

Strict separation of meat and vegetarian production lines | Assign staff to lines consistent with their dietary/religious preferences where possible (builds ownership) | Directly addresses the 'meat in vegetarian meals' complaint

5. Cross-Cultural Competency Training for Gary

Train Gary in basic cultural awareness: communication styles, attitudes to authority, concepts of time and cleanliness | Move from 'they don't understand' to 'how can I communicate so they understand?'

Barrier 5: Emotional Barriers

Presented by: [StudentName5] | Theoretical Framework: Goleman's Emotional Intelligence (1995)

Definition: Psychological states—stress, anger, fatigue, frustration, defensiveness—that prevent effective

Evidence from Case Study

- Gary stayed up until 2 AM, woke at 6 AM = 4 hours of sleep
- "Feeling a bit tired" (understatement)
- Rushed, anxious, dirty uniform, car wouldn't start
- Arrived to find chicken left out → 'I pulled at my hair and screamed: Idiots!'
- Staff described as 'not a bad lot really, but they just don't seem to understand' (frustration, resignation)

Goleman's EI Components

- Self-Awareness: LOW — Gary doesn't recognize his exhaustion as a problem
- Self-Regulation: LOW — screams at staff, pulls hair, uses insults
- Motivation: Misdirected — wants to do best, but burnout is winning
- Empathy: LOW — sees staff as 'idiots,' not confused, untrained employees
- Social Skills: LOW — relies on shouting and signs rather than dialogue

Overcoming Emotional Barriers

Solutions for Gary & Management

1. Self-Care & Stress Management for Gary

Management must ensure realistic workloads and shift patterns | Gary needs adequate sleep (his 4-hour night is a safety hazard) | Provide supervisors support/counseling resources

2. Emotional Intelligence Training

Teach Gary to recognize his emotional triggers | Practice the 'pause' technique: stop, breathe, respond calmly | Replace 'You idiots!' with 'Let's look at what happened and how we fix it'

3. Positive Reinforcement Culture

Shift from blame to praise: acknowledge correct behavior publicly | Create a 'near-miss' reporting system without punishment (encourage transparency) | Celebrate hygiene compliance milestones as a team

4. Psychological Safety

Staff must feel safe to ask questions without fear of screaming or humiliation | Gary should adopt a coaching mindset: 'What don't you understand? How can I explain better?' | Remove the stigma of 'not knowing'

5. Management Accountability

The emotional barrier is NOT just Gary's fault — management created conditions (no training, no support, immediate start expectation) | Management must model emotional intelligence from the top down

Integrated Solutions: A Strategic Framework

Presented by: Group Leader

The 5-Barrier Solution Matrix

Environmental Noise	Noiseassessments,signage upgrade, quiet briefing zones	Machinery replacement, acoustic engineering
Language / Body Language	Multilingual pictogram signs, bilingual champions	Comprehensive language training, digital SOPs
Age / Generational	Mixed-age mentoring pairs, varied training formats	Generational inclusion committees, adaptive leadership training
Cultural	Cultural orientation, color-coded production zones	Cross-cultural competency certification, diverse leadership pipeline
Emotional	Gary's EI coaching, positive reinforcement introduction	Organizational wellness program, supervisor mental health support

Recommendations for Management

"Beyond Gary: Systemic Change"

1. Invest in Pre-Employment Training

No more 'start working right away' | Mandatory food hygiene + communication + cultural orientation BEFORE floor work

2. Resource the Floor Properly

Replace or maintain noisy, outdated equipment | Provide adequate clean uniforms | Ensure supervisory coverage (Gary needs support, not sole responsibility)

3. Hire for Communication & Diversity

Recruit bilingual supervisors or team leads from the 5 cultural groups | Value communication skills as highly as technical skills

4. Measure & Monitor

Track complaint rates, hygiene audit scores, staff comprehension tests | Conduct regular communication climate surveys

5. Lead by Example

Management's 'start immediately' mentality mirrors the very shortcuts causing food safety failures | Quality communication = Quality food = Market share growth

Conclusion

Presented by: Group Leader

What We Have Demonstrated Today:

- ✓ Flight Foods' problems are NOT merely operational — they are communication failures at five distinct levels
- ✓ Environmental noise degrades the channel (Shannon-Weaver)
- ✓ Language barriers create encoding/decoding mismatches (Berlo's SMCR)
- ✓ Generational gaps prevent shared fields of experience (Schramm)
- ✓ Cultural differences clash with standardized hygiene expectations (Hofstede)
- ✓ Emotional dysregulation destroys psychological safety (Goleman)

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