

Communication Networks

Network Functions

- Organizations have their origins in communication networks. The functions of communication networks include:
 - Providing the means for coordinating the activities of individuals, relationships, groups and other subunits within the organization.
 - Providing mechanisms for directing the activities of the organization as a whole.
 - Facilitating the exchange of information within the organization, and
 - Ensuring the flow of information between the organization and the external environment in which it exists

Networksize

- One important differentiating characteristic of organization **is the size**. An increase in the number of individuals in a social unit dramatically increases the number of reciprocal communication linkages that are possible and necessary to connect the persons involved. This is a problem of major proportion within large organizations.
- In small groups, people can generally talk to whom they wish, about what they wish.

Internal Networks: Message flows within organizations

- **Downward Message Flows** formalized the lines of information that flow within organizations correspond closely with the lines of authority. The most familiar pattern of formalized information flow is from management to employees. Messages flow downward from persons in positions of relatively greater authority to others in the organization who report to them directly or through others. Messages transmitted downward generally serve one or more of the **following functions**:
 - 1) Specifying a task to be performed
 - 2) Providing instructions about how to perform a task
 - 3) Providing information about the reason for a particular task that needs to be performed
 - 4) Providing information about organizational policies or practices
 - 5) Providing information about an employee's performance and /or
 - 6) Providing information about the organization and its mission.

Upward Message Flows

It is channeled from subordinates to superiors. Upward communication has several functions, including :

- 1) Providing input for decision making
- 2) Advising about subordinates' information needs
- 3) Providing information regarding subordinates
- 4) Providing a potentially constructive outlet
- 5) Allowing superiors to assess the effects of previous downward communication and,
- 6) Helping subordinates cope with problems and facilitating their involvement

Horizontal Networks

- Horizontal communication networks refers to the connection between individuals at the same level of authority within an organizational group, department, or division. Functions of horizontal information include:
 - 1) Coordinating planning and execution of tasks
 - 2) Providing for collective problem solving
 - 3) Facilitating common understanding
 - 4) Resolving differences and
 - 5) Developing supportive and productive work relationships

Informal Networks

- Other informal or emergent networks inevitably develop among individuals and subunits in any group or organization. These informal networks serve to link individuals to one another in much the same way as do formal networks. Informal link-ages come into being primarily because of the personal and social needs of the members.
- Informal communication networks correspond closely in structure to the formal systems. For instance, a supervisor and his or her subordinate may regularly have lunch together and discuss personal and professional matters.
- Informal networks:
 - 1) Are generally face-to-face
 - 2) Are less constrained by organizational and political restraints
 - 3) Move messages rapidly
 - 4) tend to be more the result of the situation than the people or their roles
 - 5) Tend to develop more often within organizational workgroups, departments , or divisions than between them and
 - 6) Generally transmit information that is accurate, though often somewhat incomplete, leading to misinterpretation.

External Networks: Relating to other organizations and publics

- **Inflow: Research and surveillance.** All groups depend on various constituencies, stakeholders, or publics in the larger environment for their survival. External networks connect and respond appropriately to environmental change, threat opportunity or challenge. Organizations receive information necessary to identify and respond appropriately to environmental change, threat, opportunity or challenge.
- **Outflow:** Advertising, Marketing, and Public Relations refer to activities that involve the transmission of messages into the environment with the aim of informing and systematically influencing these publics.



Mediated Communication Networks

Therefore, in most enterprises, mediated communication is essential. The traditions of the mail and telephone are now supplemented by fax, teleconferences, on-line computer systems, electronic mail e.t.c.

[visit aminotes.com](http://aminotes.com) for more...

Organizational Communication Networks in Action

- In actuality, the functioning of communication networks is exceptionally complex, often unpredictable, sometimes uncontrollable, and frequently chaotic. The message a manager or a subordinate thinks he or she is sending in a memo or through face-to-face conversation is often quite different than the message others receive. Distance generally increases the likelihood of message loss, distortion and the likelihood of distrust and suspicion.
- It has been said that:
 - If communication can fail, it will
 - If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be understood in just the way that does the most harm
 - There is always somebody who knows better than you what you meant by your message
 - The more communication there is the more difficult it is for communication to succeed.

Organizational Culture

- An organizational culture, is the sum of its symbols, events, traditions, standardized verbal and nonverbal behavior patterns, “folk tales”, rules, and rituals that give the organization its character or “personality”.
-

Origins of Organizational Cultures

- Symbols are one important element of the culture of many organizations. Trademarks, buildings, office furnishings, and uniforms are examples of symbols that are often a visible facet of an organization's culture.
- Space is another important organizational symbol. In many organizations, rules are developed for use in allocating space to employees, such that the location, and décor of an employee's office or workspace reflect his or her position.
- Events like "the annual picnic", "the senior prom", "the annual Christmas party", or "the management retreat" also contribute to and reflect an organization's culture.
- The language used to talk about an organization is also a reflection of, and at the same time an influence on, its culture. One framework distinguishes between corporations based upon whether their cultures are like academies, clubs, fortresses, or baseball teams, based on the language used by its employees.

- Organizational “folk tales” or “stories” are another important facet of an organization’s culture. Most organizations have a collection of “ favorite” stories about notorious past and present personnel, organization achievements of failures, and memorable moments in the life of the organization.

Functions of Organizational Cultures

- Organizational cultures serve many important communication functions for those who create and participate in them, including:
 - Providing people within these units with a sense of individual and collective identity
 - Contributing to the establishment of structure and control
 - Aiding with the socialization of members to the customs and traditions of the organization, and
 - Fostering cohesiveness among members of the organization

Assimilation, Socialization, and Innovation in organizations

- Becoming a member of an organization requires an initiation into the culture through processes referred to as socialization and assimilation. The formal communication networks play a role in this process, but informal networks are even more to “learning the ropes”. Stability within organizations is fostered when members of the unit carry cultural traditions forward with them in time. Innovation and change call for departures from tradition. Cultural continuity and cultural innovation are equally necessary to the survival and prosperity of organizations over time.

Organizational Climate

- An organization's climate is the atmosphere or tone members of the organization experience as they go about their daily routines. In very general terms, we can talk about climates being 'positive" or "negative". Positive –supportive-climates have been described as having the following characteristics:
 - Supportiveness of superior-subordinate communication
 - Perceived quality and accuracy of downward communication
 - Perceived openness of the superior-subordinate relationship
 - Opportunities and degree of influence of upward communication and
 - Perceived reliability of information from subordinates and coworkers.

- Generally speaking, a positive climate and high levels of satisfaction will be reflected in the positive treatment of clients and consumers, as well as colleagues. Organizational climates, whether “positive” or “negative”, are self-perpetuating.

Implications and Applications: Organizations and their Publics

- Organizations have multiple constituents, or publics. In many respects, an Organizations' most important constituents are internal. Each staff member, work group, or division has contribution to make to the organization as a whole. Organizations also have a number of external publics-customers and suppliers. Organizational quality can be evaluated based on: a) technical quality b) administrative quality and c) relationship quality.
- "Insider" assessments of the quality of a college for example are generally based on an evaluation of administration, research, teaching, and service, using quality for granted, or are unable to assess it.
- The image of an organization with its external publics is influenced by mediated communication and by face-to-face contact with representatives of the organization. From this perspective, every contact between an employee and a "constituent" is an encounter that either contributes to or detracts from the perception and the reality of organizational quality. Interactions between representatives of an organization and its external publics are critical communication links that are vital to the continued viability of any organization.

Organizational Control

- **Management Functions**

Organizational systems need a mechanism for planning, decision making, financial oversight, monitoring the activities of the organization, coordinating activities of its component parts, evaluating the organization's functioning in comparison with other organizations and the environment and so on. These are typically termed management functions. Management functions may be very centralized, or authority can be diffused in varying degrees among members of the organization, providing for what is termed participatory management.

- **Human Nature and Organizational Communication**
- Traditionally scholars have identified three main schools of thought regarding human nature. Each of the three suggests a set of principles and assumptions about how individuals behave in organizations, and each has its own implications regarding the function management and communication should serve.
- **The scientific Management School**
- In this view, humans in organizations are seen as being motivated primarily by a desire for money and material rewards. A clear and specific organizational structure, job specialization, fair rewards, defined rules, and distinct lines of responsibility and authority are regarded as basic. The purpose of communication is to provide information to employees that will clarify the tasks they are to perform and to reward them monetarily, according to their accomplishments.

- **The Human Relations School**

- In this school of thought, communication is seen as a means to facilitate social interaction and participation in organizational decision making. Achieving this objective is regarded as the primarily function of management.

-

- **The Systems School**

- Human behavior in organizations is seen as being shaped by the organization- its goals, roles, rules, culture, climate, networks, and so on. Communication is viewed as the process through which organizations emerge and evolve and the basis upon which individuals, relationships, groups, and organizations relate to their surroundings and to one another. Communication also serves in decision making and control of the system as a whole in its efforts in its efforts to adapt to its environment. In this perspective, management functions emphasize the need for effective communication and information systems to facilitate interaction, coordination and adaptability.

Organization and Organizational Communication: Definitions

- **The Organization**

An organization may be defined as a group of individuals organized for the achievement of specific goals. What is important is that these individuals operate within a defined structure. Each person's role and position within the hierarchy is clearly defined. Others are more loosely structured: roles may be interchanged, and hierarchical status may be unclear and relatively unimportant. The goal of most organizations is to make money, but a variety of subordinate goals must be achieved if this ultimate goal is to be reached. Goals of both the organization as a whole and the individual workers are achieved largely through the formal and informal communication that takes place within the organization.

The Communications

- Organizational communication refers to the messages sent and received within the organization's formal and informal groups. As the organization becomes larger and more complex, so do the communications. In a three-person organization communication is relatively simple, but in an organization of thousands it becomes a highly complex and often specialized function.
- Rogers and Rogers have identified four crucial communication roles:
 - The gatekeeper is the person who controls the messages that get into the system or that get to any one member of the organization.
 - The liaison is the person who connects two subgroups within the organization but does not belong to either.
 - The opinion leader is the one to whom others look for guidance and direction. This is the person who influences others.
 - The cosmopolite is the one who communicates often with many individuals from various subgroups throughout the organization.

Formal and Informal Communications

- Organizational communication may be both formal and informal. The formal communications are those sanctioned by the organization itself and are organizationally oriented. The informal communications are socially sanctioned, they are oriented not to the organization itself, but to the individual members.

Approaches To Organizations

- **The Scientific Approach**

This approach holds that scientific methods should be applied to organizations to increase productivity. Scientifically controlled studies will enable management as the science in order to identify the ways and means for increasing productivity and ultimately profit. Communication is viewed as the giving of orders and the explaining of procedures and operations. Only the formal structure of the organization and the formal communication system are recognized.

- **The Human Relations Approach**

The human relations' approach developed as reaction against the exclusive concern with physical and the exclusion of psychological and social factors in measuring organizational success. One of the principal assumptions of the human relations' approach is that increases in worker satisfaction lead to increases in productivity; a happy worker is a productive worker. Management's function therefore is to keep the workers happy. The major problem was that the approach was based on an invalid assumption—namely that satisfaction and productivity were positively related. They were in some cases, but certainly not in all.

The systems Approach

- The systems approach combines the best elements of the scientific and human relations' approaches. It views an organization as a system in which all parts interact and in which each part influences every other part. The organization is to be viewed as an open system; open to new information, responsive to the environment, dynamic and ever changing. A closed system in contrast is closed to new information, unresponsive to the environment, and static or unchanging. Communication is what keeps the system vital and alive. If a system is to survive and if its parts are to be coordinated and its activities synchronized, communication is essential.

- **The Cultural Approach**

A contemporary approach to organizations holds that a corporation should be viewed as a society or a culture. Much as a social group or culture will have various norms or rules of behaviors, roles, heroes, and values, for example, so does an organization. In this approach, then an organization is studied to identify the type of culture it is and its specific norms or values. The aim of such an analysis is to enable us to understand better the ways the organization functions and the ways in which it influences and is influenced by the members (workers) of that organizational culture. The corporation is here viewed as a social group or culture, organized around a similar set of values and goals with workers who have a kind of citizenship in the corporation. Communication in this approach in fact defines and constructs the organization, its structures, and its functions.

- Excellent companies do the following:
 - They have a bias for action
 - They stay close to the customer
 - They encourage leaders who are autonomous and entrepreneurial
 - They achieve productivity through people
 - They encourage hands-on management
 - They stick to what they know
 - They have simple organizational structures and are lean at the top
 - They are decentralized (loose) and centralized (tight)

Communication Networks

- By a network, we mean the channels through which messages pass from one person to another. These networks may be viewed from two perspectives: First, small groups left to their own resources will develop communication patterns resembling these several network structures. Second, these networks may also be viewed as formalized structures established by an organization for communication within the company.

The Network Structures

- **The wheel:** The wheel is characterized by the centralized position of a clear leader, who is the only one who can send messages to all members and the only one who can receive messages from all members.
- **The Y:** The y pattern is somewhat less centralized than the wheel, but more centralized than some of the other patterns.
- **The Circle:** The circle has no leader; here there is total equality. Each member of the circle has exactly the same authority or power to influence the group.
- **The Chain:** The chain is similar to the circle except that the end members may communicate with only one person each.
- **The All-Channel:** The all-channel or star pattern is like the circle in that all members are equal and all have exactly the same amount of power to influence others, except that each member in this pattern may communicate with any other member. This pattern allows for the greatest member participation. Communication through these networks occurs often but not always face-to-face. Messages may be written in informal memos or in formal letters and reports.

[visit aminotes.com for more...](http://aminotes.com)

Communication flow in organizations

It is useful to discuss communication in organizations in terms of the direction in which it flows. There are upward downward communication where (also called vertical) lateral and serial communication where (also called horizontal).

- **Upward Communication**

- Upward communication refers to messages sent from the lower of the hierarchy to the upper levels for example, line workers to manager. Problems with upward communication is extremely difficult to handle. One problem is that messages traveling up the ladder are often messages higher-ups want to hear.

- **Downward Communication**

- Downward communication refers to messages sent from the higher levels of the hierarchy to the lower levels, for example, messages sent by managers to workers. Perhaps the most obvious example of downward communication is the giving of orders. Problems with downward communication are that management and labor often speaks different languages, and a lot of managers simply do not know how to make their messages understandable to workers.

- **Lateral Communication**

- Lateral communication refers to messages sent by equals to equals—manager to manager or worker to worker. One obvious problem with lateral communication is the specialized languages that divisions of an organization may develop. Such languages are often unintelligible. Another problem is the tendency of workers in a specialized organization to view their area as the one crucial to the health and success of the company.

- **Serial Communication**

- Serial communication refers to messages sent along a chain of people. Problems with serial communication have to do with leveling, sharpening and assimilation. In leveling the number of details is reduced. At the same time that details become omitted in leveling, other details become crystalized and heightened in a process called sharpening. Assimilation at the end refers to the tendency of our own attitudes, prejudices, needs and values.

The Grapevine

- Grapevine messages is a type of serial communication but having some additional properties that merit its separate consideration and do not follow such formal lines. Often it is difficult to discover the source of the original message, which is why it is so difficult to ascertain the truth or falsity of grapevine information. The grapevine, according to organizational theorist Keith Davis seems most likely to be used when a) there is great upheaval or change within the organization b) the information is new and no one likes to spread old and well-known information 3) face-to-face communication is physically easy. Keith Davis observes and advocates that “a lively grapevine reflects the deep psychological need of people to talk about their jobs and their company as a central life interest. Without it, the company would literally be sick”.

- **Information Overload**

- In nowadays, with the explosion of technology, information overload is becoming one of our greatest problems. Information is being generated at such a rapid rate that it is becoming extremely difficult to keep up with all that is relevant to one's job. Invariably, each person must select certain information to attend to and other information to omit. Another major cause of overload is that many organizational managers disseminate information as a substitute for doing something about a problem or issue.