Different channels of communication are: 1. Formal channel of communication 2. Informal Channel of Communication / Grapevine!

Communication can also be classified according to the degree of ceremony or formality it has.

Thus we can divide communication into two broad categories:

1. Formal channel of communication:

A formal channel of communication is the means of communication normally controlled by people in positions of authority in an organisation. Hence, it has also been referred to as an organization's 'main line of operational communication'.

All the reports, records and other forms that supply working information to various parts of an organisation are included in the formal channel of communication. These channels of communication do not function automatically. A good business organisation will ensure that these are carefully planned and designed to its needs.

Advantages:

(i) Effective:

Formal channels are considered the more effective of channels of communication. With organizations constantly growing in size, formal channels help to bridge the gap in the communication process. It is a readily available means to reach through to every corner of an organisation, which would otherwise be difficult.

(ii) Prevent bogging:

In formal channels, the rules are well laid. For example, a worker communicates with the supervisor, the supervisor with the manager, and so on. Thus, only necessary information gets filtered and sent to the top. It prevents the top-level management from getting bogged down with the irrelevant nitty-gritty (the practical details) of information and leaves it free for bigger decisions and overall management.

(iii) Better monitoring:

An organisation can design formal channels to suit its specific needs. This can help monitor organizational activities. It can ensure that problems are solved without too much delay.

(iv) Good atmosphere:

Good formal channels of communication reflect professionalism. They help consolidate the organisation. They also keep the managerial personnel in control.

Disadvantages:

(i) Deter free flow of information:

Formal channels deter a free flow of information. Formality demands that the information flow take a specific route only. This inhibits the natural flow of information.

(ii) Time-consuming:

Formal channels of communication often lead to delays. The information may not directly reach the person for whom it is meant. It will often have to take a circuitous formal route where the intervening links may be meaningless. As a result, formal channels of communication can become time-consuming.

(iii) Affects decision-making:

Filtering and monitoring of information at lower levels is a double- edged sword. While it has its advantages, it may also prevent vital information from reaching the top management. This may change the perspective while making decisions.

Types of Formal Channels of Communication

Consistent with organization's formal structure, there are two major networks or channels by which communication flow, they include:

Vertical communication and Horizontal communication

Vertical Communication

Vertical communication is the flow of information both up and down the chain of command. It involves an exchange of messages between two or more levels in the organizational hierarchy. There are two categories of vertical communication:

Downward communication and Upward communication.

 Downward communication

In any organizational hierarchy, when vertical communication flows from a higher level to one or more lower levels it is called downward communication.

Downward communication may be in the form of staff meeting, company policy statement, company newsletters, informational memos, face-to-face contact and speeches.

Most downward communication involves information in any of the five categories:

Job instruction or specific jobs

Relations between tasks

Goals/objectives

Directions, decisions

Procedures and practices to be adopted

Performance feedback

Encouragement/appreciations

<u>Upward communication</u>

In any organization, when the vertical communication flow is from a lower level to higher levels in the organization it is called upward communication.

Upward communication consists of messages sent up the lines from subordinates to managers. It provides feedback for upper management regarding policies and practices, which allows for wider participation in decision-making.

Most upward communication consists in the following topical points:

Progress reports or information.

Problem resolutions.

New developments

Suggestions for improvements

Complaints/problems

Appeal (Requests)

Exit interviews

<u>Horizontal communication</u>

Horizontal (or lateral) communication occurs in an organization between employees at the same hierarchical level.

Horizontal communication, also called crosswise communication, appears to be more prevalent across the lower levels of the organization, where it tends to focus on problem-solving, information sharing and conflict resolution.

Horizontal communication is used to improve understanding, and coordinate efforts for achieving organization objectives.

Downward and upward communications are the primary forms of communication used in most traditional, vertically oriented organizations. However, in today's dynamics of organization, horizontal communication is prevalent, with people continuously sharing information across departments and levels.

2. Informal Channel of Communication / Grapevine:

The informal channel of communication is often discouraged or looked down upon in an "organization, and is not officially sanctioned. It is popularly referred to as grapevine. This is because it runs in all directions irrespective of the formal structure.

The origin of the term grapevine can be traced to the way the botanical vine grew over telegraph wires, making telegraphic messages go in unintended directions. In business life, grapevine owes its existence to man's gossipy nature.

Humans tend to speak loosely or lightly with their associates wherever they may be. Time to time they feel the need to get freed from the necessity to stick to logic or truth.

As people go about their work, they have casual conversation with their friends in the office. These conversations deal with both personal and business matters. This results in the generation of a rumour mill, which is a **grapevine.**

Grapevine is classified into four categories:

Single strand: Each one tells another.

Group or gossip chain: One tells all persons in his/her group.

Probability chain: Each randomly tells a number of people.

Cluster chain: Some tell selected others.

Grapevine satisfies the social needs of members, leads to more relaxed human relations (partly through the release of fantasy), serves to fill the possible gaps in the formal communication and links even those people who do not fall in the official chain of command.

Other characteristics of grapevine are:

(i) It is more people-oriented then issue-oriented.

(ii) May not be totally authentic and dependable.

(iii) Grapevine transmission flows in all directions in an organisation.

(iv) Grapevine information travels very fast.

(v) Its responsibility cannot be fixed.

Factors leading to grapevine:

A rumour mill becomes active when the following factors exist in an organisation:

(i) A lack of sense of direction, especially in times of crisis. The more the uncertainty, the greater the rumour mongering.

(ii) The formation of favoured groups of employees by the management. This breeds insecurity among other employees leading to rumours.

(iii) A lack of self-confidence amongst employees leads to the formation of groups. These groups often run rumour mills.

Advantages:

Speed:

Speed is the most remarkable characteristic of this channel of communication. It is possible to transmit information remarkably fast since there are no formal barriers and no stopping. A rumour, thus, may spread like a wildfire.

(ii) Feedback:

The feedback through this channel is much faster than a formal channel of communication. The channel is like the pulse of an organisation. The reaction to the decisions, policies, directives and directions often reach managers faster through this channel than through the formal one.

(iii) Parallel function:

The informal channel does not have official sanction, but is an inevitable parallel to the formal channel. It works as a supplementary channel of communication in an organisation. Good managers have been known to use the informal channel to their benefit for transmitting information otherwise unfit for formal channels

(iv) Support system:

A grapevine is an informal support system developed by employees within an organisation. It brings them closer and gives them immense satisfaction.

Disadvantages:

(i) Less credible:

A grapevine is less credible than a formal channel of communication. It cannot be taken seriously as it involves only the word of mouth. It is, therefore, likely to be contradicted.

(ii) Selective information:

Informal channels usually fail to carry the complete information. As a result, the receiver does not get the essence of the whole message. Mischief mongers or vested interests may use the channel for transmitting selective information.

(iii) Creates trouble:

A grapevine can foster trouble within an organisation as there is no control over the information sent, received, its portrayal and perceptions. Information gets distorted. A grapevine can be synonymous with the spreading of false or wild stories.

(iv) Leakage:

Information may get leaked at the wrong time. The term 'open secret' in an organisation can often is attributed to such leaks.

Effective use of informal channels of communication:

(i) The higher authorities should ensure that employees are well informed of the working of the organisation. This will reduce the tendency for distortion.

(ii) Activities that update knowledge should be frequent. This will prevent the generation of rumours.

(iii) The higher authorities should not indulge in favouritism.

(iv) A manager should conduct regular meetings with the employees.

(v) The manager should make efforts to identify popular employees who can serve as leaders for other employees.

(vi) As far as possible, employees should be involved in the decision-making process.

(vii) Managers should not indulge in loose talk.

(viii) A manager should be a good listener,

(ix) A manager should try to get regular reviews about his style of work.