

- I Interpreting (not reading anything into the message being sent)
- E Evaluating (not immediately passing judgement on the message being sent)
- R Responding (replying to the sender, letting him or her know you are paying attention)

COMMUNICATION NETWORKS

While the downward, upward, lateral, diagonal and external flows are general, there are specific flows which exist within these broad categories. In upward communication, for example, an employee who wishes to communicate with the production manager may be required to do so through the foreman who is the immediate superior. These specific flows within the broad categories are called communication networks. A communication network may be understood, therefore, as the pattern of communication that flows among various positions in an organisation. Networks may also emerge spontaneously in the course of interpersonal interaction. Whatever their use is, communication networks are a fact of organisational life. Particularly, networks created by organisations are useful inasmuch as they protect higher level managers from being swamped with unwanted information.³⁰ They enhance co-ordination, and reinforce authority structure. Furthermore, communication networks in groups can be important in determining who gets what information and how satisfied the members are with their functions or places in the groups.³¹

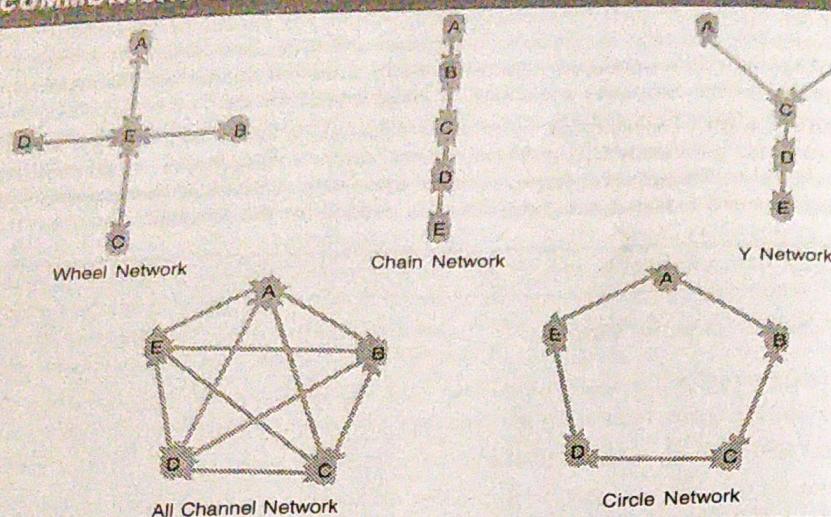
Most studies of communication networks have taken place in groups created in a laboratory setting. As a result, the research conclusions have limited application because of their artificial settings and small groups involved.

Though based on studies conducted in laboratories, communication networks can be extended to organisations. For simplicity's sake, let us assume that there are only five persons in an organisation, viz., A, B, C, D and E. The *wheel net* in Fig. 19.4 represents four workers, and a supervisor who is placed in the midst of the workers. Workers have no interaction among themselves. All communication must pass among themselves and pass through the supervisor.

Key Term: *Diagonal Communication:* This refers to the communication between boss of one department and employees of another department.

**FIGURE 19.4
COMMUNICATION NETWORKS**

Types



Wheel is, therefore, a highly centralised network. The same is true of 'Y'. In a chain, communication can move up or down, but not laterally. The chain has all the appearances of an organisational chain of command — first reporting to the second, second to the third and so on. The circle network allows each member to converse with the person on his or her left or right and no farther. In all channel net, every member has easy access to every other member in the group.

The relevant question now is which network is better than the other? The answer is difficult because each network has its own advantages and limitations, as shown in Table 19.2. Thus, among all the nets, chain scores high on all the factors. Then comes "Y", followed by all channel and others.

**TABLE 19.2
PERFORMANCE OF NETWORKS**

Factors	Wheel	'Y'	Chain	Circle	All channels
Speed	Fast	Moderate	Fast	Slow	Fast
Accuracy	Good	High	Good	Poor	Moderate
Emergence of leadership	Very pronounced	Moderate	Marked	None	None
Satisfaction	Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	High

(Source: Adapted from Bavelas and Barrett, "An Experienced Approach to Organisational Communication", Personnel, March 1951).

COMMUNICATION ROLES

The specific functions an individual serves in an organisation's communication network shall constitute his or her *communication role*. Four such roles have been identified:³² gatekeeper, liaison, isolate, and cosmopolite.

Key Term: *Gatekeeper:* Gatekeeper is the person who passes information to others or controls it.

Chapter Nineteen • Communication

Gatekeepers: A gatekeeper is an individual who passes information to others or controls messages. Common examples of gatekeepers are secretaries and assistants to executives. A gatekeeper who has the ability to control the information or time its release actually controls the final decision. Generally, executives depend on gatekeepers who wield influence at higher levels in organisations.

Liaisons: An individual who serves as a communication link between groups, but is not a member of either group, is a liaison. This person serves as a bridge between groups that need to exchange messages. Organisations that use liaisons to link departments are relatively more effective than firms that do not.

Isolates: An isolate is someone who has very little or no conflict with other members of the organisation. Certain jobs, such as night guard and messenger, are characterised by the absence of contacts with other organisational members. Yet some people whose jobs offer more opportunities for contact may still remain uninformed. They may consciously choose not to socialise with co-workers or participate in grapevines. Feelings of isolation tend to be associated with such social isolation.

Cosmopolites: A cosmopolite is a person whose communication network frequently extends into the organisation's external environment. Cosmopolites are more interested in national rather than local affairs and tend to have stronger professional affiliations. They are also likely to change jobs more frequently than other employees. Like liaisons, cosmopolites can serve a gatekeeping function in that the firm's contact with and information from the outside world needs to be passed through them.



communication-related problems from arising. The audit can take many forms and may include observations, questionnaires, interviews, and analyses of written documents. Each audit should be followed by a formal report defining the current condition of communications, explaining whether organisational goals are being achieved.³²



INFORMAL COMMUNICATION

The discussion till now has been on formal communication. There is also informal communication, popularly known as grapevine. Grapevine exists outside formal communication channels in organisations and is carried out either in face-to-face interaction or over the phone. The informal communication may be task related (e.g., short-cutting long chains of command) or social related (e.g., exchanging personal information, gossip, and rumours).³³

The word grapevine originated during the Civil War in America, during which period telegraph lines were strung loosely from tree-to-tree in vine-like fashion. Messages sent over this haphazard system often became garbled, and any false information or rumour that came along was therefore ironically said to come from the grapevine.

The following characteristics of the grapevine are worth noting:

1. Grapevines are found in every organisation and they are virtually impossible to eliminate. It is only natural for employees to discuss matters of mutual concern, and even the closest monitoring of their conversations will not prevent them from occurring.
2. Information usually travels more rapidly through the grapevine than through official communication channels.
3. The grapevine is a more spontaneous form of expression and hence intrinsically more gratifying and credible than formal communication.
4. In situations, where official censorship and filtering occur, grapevine information is more informative.
5. On non-controversial topics related to the organisation, most of the information communicated through the grapevine (about 75 per cent) is accurate. Emotionally charged information however, is more likely to be distorted.
6. The number of people who serve as actual links in the grapevine is generally small (estimated to be less than 10 per cent of the group).³⁵

Three types of grapevine have been identified: chain system, cluster system, and gossip systems.³⁶ (See Fig. 19.5). Some grapevines operate as a single-strand, chain system in which one member tells another, who in turn tells another, and so on. But such grapevines are uncommon. Most organisational grapevines operate as a cluster system in which a few individuals inform a cluster, or set of other people. A third type of grapevine, the gossip system, occurs when a single member non-selectively communicates with everyone he or she meets. Most organisational grapevines are cluster systems, with occasional 'gossip' adding to the rate of spread.

Grapevines are inevitable in organisations. They play positive as well as negative roles. On the positive side are listed several benefits that occur to the management because of grapevines. Grapevine is an effective tool for developing corporate identity, building teamwork, and motivating people. It supplements formal communication channels to make the total communication system more effective.

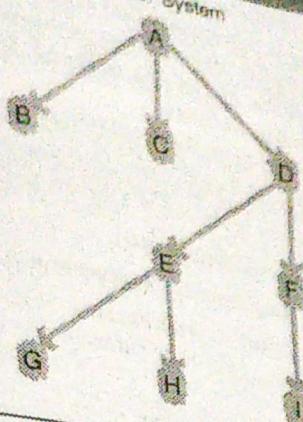
In a sense, the degree of grapevine activity is a measure of a firm's spirit and vitality. If employees are so disinterested in their work that they do not engage in pep talk, they are obviously maladjusted. If

Key Term: *Grapevine*: An organisation's informal channels of communication, based mainly on friendship or acquaintance.

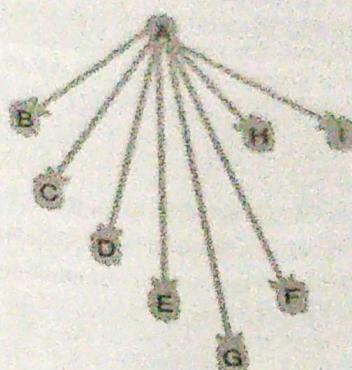
Chain System



Cluster System



Group System



(Source: Robert P. Vecchio, *op. cit.*, p. 554).

they are so indifferent about their associates that they even eschew chattering about who will get promotion, who brought in the big contract or which young executive is dating whose secretary, they are patently abnormal. A lively grapevine reflects the deep psychological need of people to talk about their jobs and their company as a central life of interest. Without it the company would literally be sick.

What should not be missed is the most positive contribution grapevine makes to the organisation's communication system — it is the speed of spreading the message. The speed of grapevines can be attributed to the fact that the messages are oral rather than written. Moreover, people enjoy passing on timely information because it makes them appear in touch and well informed and there is social value attached to bringing surprising news to others.

Grapevine has been criticised too. It tends to be accurate when the information is non-controversial. With controversial information, the grapevine can be erroneous, it is also said that the speed with which the grapevine spreads information makes it difficult to check false rumours.³⁷

Rumour: As was pointed out above, 75 per cent of grapevine information is accurate. The remaining 25 per cent which is inaccurate, constitutes rumour. Rumour, therefore, is the injudicious and untrue information that is communicated without factual evidence to back it up.

Rumour itself is of four types: pipe dreams, bogie rumours, wedge drivers, and home stretchers. **Pipe dreams** represent people's wishes. The person spreading the word has positive wishes but gets disappointed when the wish does not realise. **Bogie rumours** are based on people's fears and worries. Such rumours are likely to arise under conditions in which people are uneasy about things, for example, when budgets are exceptionally tight. **Wedge drivers** arise when people intentionally say malicious things about someone with the intent of damaging his or her reputation. **Home stretchers** are rumours designed to reduce the degree of ambiguity in a situation by telling a story about something before it happens.

Rumour is generally perceived to be dangerous because of its potential to fish in troubled waters. But not always. Rumours serve at least four purposes: to structure and reduce anxiety; to make sense of limited or fragmented information; to serve as a vehicle to organise group members, and possibly admit outsiders into coalitions; and to signal a sender's status or power that he or she is the only person possessing the information.³⁸



Communication in organisations can take a variety of forms but the most popular media are (a) written communication, (b) oral communication, and (c) non-verbal communication.

Written communication: Written communication is more common in organisations. Reports, notes, letters, memos, and organisational handbooks are the most common forms of written communication. Managers prefer written communication because it provides a record of what has been transmitted and it can be reread if first reading was not clear.

The problems with written communication are: (i) many managers are not good in drafting, they prefer verbal medium; (ii) superiors often refuse to read written reports of any substantial length preferring to be briefed verbally about the contents; and (iii) some written communications, such as job descriptions and policy manuals, are continually in need of updating, a task that is highly time consuming.³⁹

Oral Communication: Face-to-face verbal orders, telephone discussions, speeches and discussions at meetings are forms of oral communication. Most managers prefer oral

communications because it is faster and provides for immediate feedback. Face-to-face communication is more popular form of oral communication.

Face-to-face communication is not always possible. In dealing with large groups the manager is often forced to choose a more appropriate form of communication, such as speech. Even with a small group and informal talk with limited discussion afterwards may be the best the manager can do. Each step away from one-on-one communication reduces the degree of interaction and, therefore, the extent of information exchanged.

SELF-CHECK

1. Which of the following statements reflects the nature of communication more clearly?
 - (a) Talking to others
 - (b) Making use of information technology to transmit messages
 - (c) Process of exchanging information and understanding between people
 - (d) Always fails.
2. (i) Employees of British Telecom create _____ by encouraging ongoing communication.
(ii) _____ represent clarity of thought, correct word usage, correct spelling, and the like.
(iii) The main phases in inter-personal communication process are:

