

CHAPTER 5

NETWORKS/CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION

Learning Objectives

After reading this chapter, you'll be able to:

- ★ know about the different channels of communication,
- ★ know how different channels function,
- ★ learn the importance of each channel.

5.1 Introduction

Communication is the process of sharing of information. It moves from one person to the other. It travels along a prescribed path. This path is called network or channel. In this chapter, we shall know about the different networks and channels, and how they affect the communication.

5.2 Channel

Network is a system of intersecting lines and channel is the path through which a message travels. They play a major role in the transmission of a message. There are various channels of communication in an organization. They represent various contacts or linking points which exist between different individuals or departments. They can be divided into the following categories:

5.2.1 Formal Network/Channel of Communication

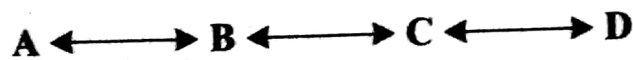
Formal communication flows along a prescribed network which is known as 'formal channel

of communication'. The path of communication is determined and controlled by the managers or people occupying similar position in the organisation. It links to the different positions of the organisation. Every organization has this channel, based on clearly defined rights, duties and responsibilities of the employees. The members of the organization, desirous to communicate with one another, follow this network.

5.2.1.1 Formal Network Model

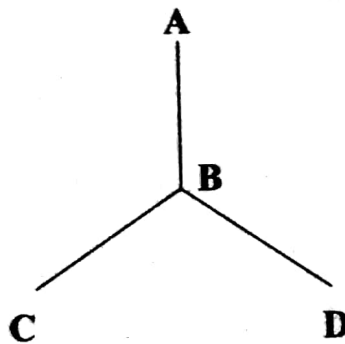
There are different ways to communicate with other employee(s). They can be divided into the following categories:

(a) Chain Network



In this network, message passes from one designation to the other until it reaches to the final destination. It is a process of step-by-step transmission. The message passes through intermediaries. The message generally moves in vertical direction. For example, if Principal is to convey a message to some teacher, s/he may communicate the message through the Head of that department to whom the person belongs to.

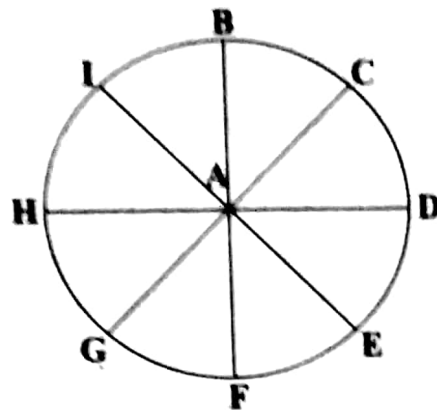
(b) Y Network



In this network, the person at the fork of 'Y' is the central person. S/he communicates with three persons. For instance, the supervisor communicates with workers as well as managers.

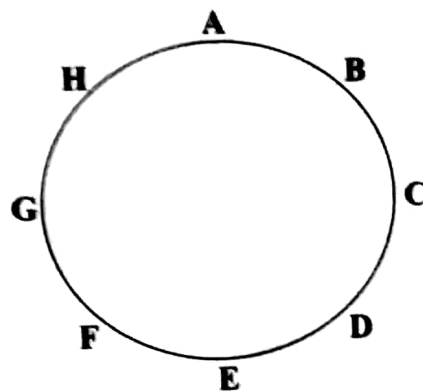
(c) Wheel Network

In this network, the senior or superior member remains at the centre and controls all the communication. All other members remain around him/her. Individual members communicate with the central member separately.

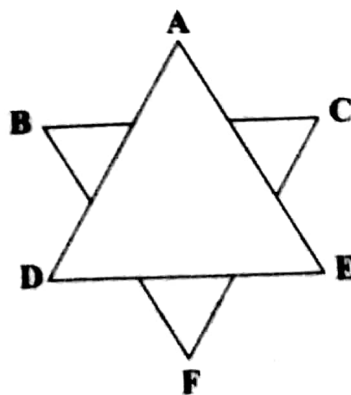


(d) Circle Network

In this network, there is no central member. Every member communicates with the member(s) next to her/him. Each member can communicate with two members only.



(e) Star Network



In this network, every member has freedom to communicate with other member, regardless of rank or status. It connects all the employees of the organization.

5.3 Informal Network/ Channel

The network or channel of informal communication is known as grapevine. It represents the unofficial channel of communication which is created and controlled by people themselves rather than the authority. It is a means of passing on information unofficially. It is informal system of communication. The network is based on friendship, shared personal or career interests. The communication is free from all kinds of formalities. It is a spontaneous flow of information which can or cannot be correct. Information does not flow in a particular direction.

Rumours keep on floating in every organisation. Sometimes they carry useful information. Many employees rely on grapevine as it is their main source of information about the organization. Every organization has this network which supplements the official channels. Information follows no set lines or definite rules but spread very fast and in any direction, like a vine of grapes, that's why it is called grapevine. Actually, the term "grapevine" was originally coined during the civil war in USA because the telegraph lines used by Army intelligence were strung through trees and the wires often resembled grapevines.

5.3.1 Features of Grapevine

Grapevine has following features:

- Information flows in every possible direction throughout the organization.
- Information travels at a rapid rate. Once the message enters grapevine, it reaches almost instantaneously to any point in the organization.
- Grapevine generally occurs orally.
- Grapevine is selective with regard to the person who receives the information.
- Grapevine is based on people rather than task.
- Grapevine extends beyond the formal hierarchy system of an organisation. Anyone can pass on or receive information at any time.
- It does not follow a fixed pattern.
- It is controlled by the people themselves rather than the authority.

5.3.2 Advantages of Grapevine

Grapevine has following advantages:

- It is a fast means of communication and can bypass any individual without restraint. Message reaches instantaneously within no time.
- It can carry useful information quickly throughout the organization.
- Passive employee(s) can get information what is going on within the organization.

- It supplements to formal channel of communication.
- It gives employees a channel to express their anxieties and opinions without any fear.
- Authority can use grapevine to know employees' reaction(s) towards some decision before its official announcement.
- It is inexpensive.
- It is helpful to build teamwork and motivate people.
- It helps in building social relations.

5.3.3 Disadvantages

Grapevine has following disadvantages:

- The message has no authenticity. Information can or cannot be true.
- It can harm the reputation of a person or organization.
- It can create misunderstanding and lead to conflict.
- It can affect employees' morale adversely.

5.3.4 Grapevine Chains

Grapevine carries information from an individual or group to other individual or group. Grapevine can disseminate information in the following ways:

(a) Single Strand Chain

In this network, the information travels from one person to the other person, regardless of rank or status, who transmits it to the next. The process of communication is very much linear. The movement can be vertical as well as horizontal.

(b) Gossip Chain

In this network, an individual transmits the information to a number of persons directly at the same time. S/he serves as a source of information. The persons transmit the information to the other persons. In this way, the information keeps on moving from one person to the other(s).

(c) Probability Chain

In this network, an individual acts as primary source of a message. S/he randomly selects people to communicate the message. These secondary people then randomly pick other people to pass on the message. Receiver is not pre-decided by the sender. Selection is purely based on communicator's discretion.

(d) Cluster Chain

In this network, the source of a message selects a number of persons to communicate the message. The secondary persons then pass on the message to a pre-selected group of persons. The difference between probability chain and cluster chain is that receivers are not pre-selected in probability chain but they are pre-selected in cluster chain.

Questions

1. Define formal network model of communication.
2. What is the role of grapevine in organisational communication?
3. What is the role of rumours in grapevine?