

# Managing communication - informal communication channels

Case duration (Min): **45-60**  
Principles of Management (PoM)  
Organizational Behaviour (OB)  
**Managing communication**  
**Communication and decision making**

**Worldwide**

## Case summary:

Informal (personal) communications are discussed and evaluated in terms of gossip, both at the organisational and team levels.

### Learning objectives:

Distinguish between formal and informal communication channels.

Evaluate informal communication channels.

Explain the difference between formal and informal organisational communications and the importance of each for organisation management.

Appreciate the role of personal communication channels in enhancing organisational communication.

### Case problem:

Should, and if so, how might organisations seek to manage informal communication channels?

First, if you are taking a taught management course then consult with your tutor and ensure that the case has not been scheduled into a teaching class or tutorial. If it has not:

1. Play/ read the media associated with the case. You may need to access the Internet and enter a URL to locate any video clips.
2. Attempt the Case study questions.

Consider attempting the case study as a group exercise; you could form a study group with fellow students.

3. Check the suggested answers - remember these are suggestions only and there are often many possible answers.

Discuss questions and answers with other students.

4. If you feel your answer(s) were weak then consider reading the relevant suggested readings again (also see the case study suggested references).

Title/ Media type	URL/ Media description
The Dangers of Office Gossip:	<a href="http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=9c29946b08aeba7bc841f0a5b4cf520159aaf5&amp;rf=bm">http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=9c29946b08aeba7bc841f0a5b4cf520159aaf5&amp;rf=bm</a>
<b>Film</b>	Workplace gossip isn't a harmless pastime. It creates silos and toxic relationships amongst people who need to trust each other, says executive coach Beth Weissenberger of the Handel Group.
Stopping Office Gossip:	<a href="http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=52e29cc2701fb4c22b3e4d7aed10dfab26b598a9&amp;rf=bm">http://feedroom.businessweek.com/?fr_story=52e29cc2701fb4c22b3e4d7aed10dfab26b598a9&amp;rf=bm</a>
<b>Film</b>	Weissenberger talks about the results achieved by one team after tackling, head-on, the issue of workplace gossip.

**NOTES:**

## Case study questions...

Action		Pre/During/After class
<b>1</b>	<b>WHAT ARE INFORMAL (PERSONAL) COMMUNICATION CHANNELS?</b> What are informal (personal) communication channels?	During
<b>2</b>	<b>HOW DO INFORMAL COMMUNICATIONS WORK (PROCESS)?</b> How do informal communications work (process)?	During
<b>3</b>	<b>EVALUATING INFORMAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS:</b> With reference to the film clip, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of informal communication channels for the organisation.	During
<b>4</b>	<b>MANAGING THE GRAPEVINE AND COMMUNICATIONS GENERALLY:</b> Studies have suggested that approximately 80% of Grapevine communication concerns business-related topics rather than personal gossip and that the majority of these communications are accurate. However, some of the communication is not accurate and not relevant to the organisation-rumours may be untrue, malicious and harmful. With reference to the film clip, discuss factors associated with the management of workplace informal communications – what is their function and purpose, why are they used, should they be discouraged?	During

# Answers...

## COMMUNICATION

A sharing of meaning through the transmission of information

## COMMUNICATION CLIMATE

the prevailing organizational atmosphere in which ideas and information are exchanged; an open climate promotes collaborative working, which is discouraged by a closed communication climate.

## FEEDBACK (IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION)

the processes through which the transmitter of a message detects whether and how that message has been received and decoded.

## FORMAL COMMUNICATION.

Formal communication involves presenting information in a structured and consistent manner. Such information is normally created for a specific purpose, making it likely to be more comprehensive, accurate and relevant than information transmitted using information communication. An example of formal communication is an accounting statement. See Informal communication.

## Question/ Answer

### 1 WHAT ARE INFORMAL (PERSONAL) COMMUNICATION CHANNELS?

What are informal (personal) communication channels?

An organisation's informal communication channel (Grapevine) is the transmission of messages from employee to employee outside formal communication channels (not officially sanctioned by the organisation). Information often flows freely and quickly through the organisation and coexists with formal channels. The Grapevine links employees in all directions.

### 2 HOW DO INFORMAL COMMUNICATIONS WORK (PROCESS)?

How do informal communications work (process)?

Two types of Grapevine (communication network) may be distinguished. A 'gossip chain' exists when individuals are highly connected and share information with many other managers and workers; a 'cluster chain' exists when people simply tell a few of their friends.

### 3 EVALUATING INFORMAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS:

With reference to the film clip, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of informal communication channels for the organisation.

Students should recognise that the desirability of the informal channel (from the perspective of the organization) depends upon the type of information being carried: company-relevant information or gossip. The former is generally desirable whilst the latter is not.

On the one hand they are accused of promoting gossip, rumours and speculation that may be unreliable and inaccurate, leading to dissatisfaction, wasted time and possibly poor quality decision-making.

On the other hand, studies have shown such channels to convey accurate information face to face (enabling feedback and therefore understanding) in a timely manner; furthermore, people have the opportunity to corroborate information by talking with others.

### 4 MANAGING THE GRAPEVINE AND COMMUNICATIONS GENERALLY:

Studies have suggested that approximately 80% of Grapevine communication concerns business-related topics rather than personal gossip and that the majority of these communications are accurate. However, some of the communication is not accurate and not relevant to the organisation-rumours may be untrue, malicious and harmful. With reference to the film clip, discuss factors associated with the management of workplace informal communications – what is their function and purpose, why are they used, should they be discouraged?

In order to better manage communications, particularly the Grapevine, management must understand the purpose, function, motivation and the reasons behind its use. There are a number of MOTIVATORS behind the use of the Grapevine: curiosity-to determine what is going on within an organisation and how it might affect people and rumour spreading-the purpose of the Grapevine is to satisfy curiosity in the absence of formal communications and explanations from management (the typical content of Grapevine messages includes information about change). The Grapevine may be used to fill any vacuum in formal communications, make use of rumour in order to flush out the truth and be an attempt by employees to make sense of their workplace. Employers are generally advised to embrace the Grapevine as part of an overall communication strategy, complementing their formal channels and as a means to receive upward or horizontal communications. Such channels can be used to determine what employees are thinking and feeling.

### **INFORMAL COMMUNICATION.**

This describes information that is transmitted by informal means, such as casual conversations between members of staff. The information transmitted in this way is often less structured and less detailed than information transmitted by formal communication. In addition, the information may be inconsistent or may contain inaccuracies. Furthermore, the information may also include a subjective element, such as personal opinions. See Formal communication.

### **CONFLICT**

Conflict is present where there is an incompatibility of goals arising from opposing behaviours at the individual, group or organisational level. Particularly, conflict is behaviour intended to obstruct the achievement of some other person's goals.

### **CONFLICT**

This frequently arises when the differences between two or more groups or individuals become apparent.

## **Case study references**

Cole, G A. and Kelly, P P. (2011) 'Management Theory and Practice', Ed. 7. Cengage EMEA.

Daft, R L. (2009) 'New Era of Management', Ed. 9. South-Western, Div of Thomson Learning; International ed edition.

Williams, C. (2007) 'MGMT', South-Western College Pub.