

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

http://www.tutorialspoint.com/management_concepts/communication_channels.htm Copyright © tutorialspoint.com

Introduction

In an organization, information flows forward, backwards and sideways. This information flow is referred to as communication. Communication channels refer to the way this information flows within the organization and with other organizations.

In this web known as communication, a manager becomes a link. Decisions and directions flow upwards or downwards or sideways depending on the position of the manager in the communication web.

For example, reports from lower level manager will flow upwards. A good manager has to inspire, steer and organize his employees efficiently, and for all this, the tools in his possession are spoken and written words.

For the flow of information and for a manager to handle his employees, it is important for an effectual communication channel to be in place.

The Working of a Communication Channel

Through a medium of communication, be it face-to-face conversations or an inter-department memo, information is transmitted from a manager to a subordinate or vice versa.

An important element of the communication process is the feedback mechanism between the management and employees.

In this mechanism, employees inform managers that they have understood the task at hand while managers provide employees with comments and directions on employee's work.

Importance of a Communication Channel

A breakdown in the communication channel leads to an inefficient flow of information. Employees are unaware of what the company expects of them. They are uninformed of what is going on in the company.

This will cause them to become suspicious of motives and any changes in the company. Also without effective communication, employees become department minded rather than company minded, and this affects their decision making and productivity in the workplace.

Eventually, this harms the overall organizational objectives as well. Hence, in order for an organization to be run effectively, a good manager should be able to communicate to his/her employees what is expected of them, make sure they are fully aware of company policies and any upcoming changes.

Therefore, an effective communication channel should be implemented by managers to optimize worker productivity to ensure the smooth running of the organization.

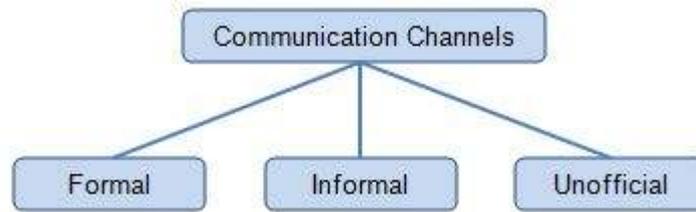
Types of Communication Channels

The number of communication channels available to a manager has increased over the last 20 odd years. Video conferencing, mobile technology, electronic bulletin boards and fax machines are some of the new possibilities.

As organizations grow in size, managers cannot rely on face-to-face communication alone to get their message across.

A challenge the managers face today is to determine what type of communication channel should they opt for in order to carryout effective communication.

In order to make a manager's task easier, the types of communication channels are grouped into three main groups: formal, informal and unofficial.



Formal Communication Channels

- A formal communication channel transmits information such as the goals, policies and procedures of an organization. Messages in this type of communication channel follow a chain of command. This means information flows from a manager to his subordinates and they in turn pass on the information to the next level of staff.
- An example of a formal communication channel is a company's newsletter, which gives employees as well as the clients a clear idea of a company's goals and vision. It also includes the transfer of information with regard to memoranda, reports, directions, and scheduled meetings in the chain of command.
- A business plan, customer satisfaction survey, annual reports, employer's manual, review meetings are all formal communication channels.

Informal Communication Channels

- Within a formal working environment, there always exists an informal communication network. The strict hierarchical web of communication cannot function efficiently on its own and hence there exists a communication channel outside of this web. While this type of communication channel may disrupt the chain of command, a good manager needs to find the fine balance between the formal and informal communication channel.
- An example of an informal communication channel is lunchtime at the organization's cafeteria/canteen. Here, in a relaxed atmosphere, discussions among employees are encouraged. Also managers walking around, adopting a hands-on approach to handling employee queries is an example of an informal communication channel.
- Quality circles, team work, different training programs are outside of the chain of command and so, fall under the category of informal communication channels.

Unofficial Communication Channels

- Good managers will recognize the fact that sometimes communication that takes place within an organization is interpersonal. While minutes of a meeting may be a topic of discussion among employees, sports, politics and TV shows also share the floor.
- The unofficial communication channel in an organization is the organization's 'grapevine.' It is through the grapevine that rumors circulate. Also those engaging in 'grapevine' discussions often form groups, which translate into friendships outside of the organization. While the grapevine may have positive implications, more often than not information circulating in the grapevine is exaggerated and may cause unnecessary alarm to employees. A good manager should be privy to information circulating in this unofficial communication channel and should take positive measures to prevent the flow of false information.
- An example of an unofficial communication channel is social gatherings among employees.

Conclusion

In any organization, three types of communication channels exist: formal, informal and unofficial.

While the ideal communication web is a formal structure in which informal communication can take place, unofficial communication channels also exist in an organization.

Through these various channels, it is important for a manager to get his/her ideas across and then listen, absorb, glean and further communicate to employees.

