CHAPTER IV
ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ITS IMPACT
ON COMMUNICATION PROCESS AND BEHAVIOUR

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SYNOPSIS

* Introduction

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* Influence of recipients' place and position in the routing of communication

* Methods of routing communication
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* Emergence of informal channel of communication

* Emergence of collateral organisational structure

* Modification of formal channel by the bottom level organisation.

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Introduction: An organisation represents the structured behavioural relationship of individuals who interact among themselves in a work environment. It is a structure of
roles which the individuals play in the performance of the corporate activity. The role of individuals are tied together with the lines of communication, which is usually represented through an organisational chart. It explains the position and description of the personnel employed by the enterprise. An organisational structure through an organisation chart also represents the flow of ideas and information between the members stationed at different work stations in the organisation.

These work stations are the sub-units of different functions of an enterprise. They are further departmentalised and divisionalised on basic principles like product, function, geographical location etc., in a hierarchial form. Information flows among them in certain established formal pattern so as to assist managers in their decision-making function at various levels of an organisation.

The organisation chart explains the routes through which the journey of communication takes place from the point of origin to destination. The objective of an organisational structure represented through an organisation chart is to exhibit the network of communication system in an organisation. It ensures the smooth flow of communication throughout the length and breadth of an organisation, which in turn decides the quality of communication for
effective managerial decisions. But, in practice, it is not so, as expected by the organisational designers. There are many frictional points in the structure of many organisations which are analysed hereunder.

Departments - the friction points in the network of organisational (structural) Communication System: It is an obvious fact that when a larger number of personnel are put together by corporations necessarily they have to divide the work into different functions, departments, divisions etc., till they reach a stage, when further division is not possible. Such fragmentation of the 'whole' organisation reduces the 'organisational citizens' into smaller groups. It restricts them from getting the 'total picture' of the organisations to which they belong. Nor, they are able to have the complete knowledge about their organisations. It encourages them to develop 'micro-level' group loyalties also. It reduces the opportunities of such small groups from even merging into the culture of the corporations. It results in widening the gulf between those who are at the helm of affairs deciding the destiny of enterprises by formulating the corporate and functional objectives, policies, procedures etc., and those who are directed to implement them. The 'micro-level' group loyalties encourage rivalries and hostilities among groups, ultimately disrupting the whole networks of communication system and crumbling the organisational structure too.
When there are too many layers and departments in the hierarchy of organisations, it results in the increased volume of communication and information explosion. Each divisional unit in the organisational structure becomes a friction point. Whatever be the directional flow of communication each friction point contributes to handling of increased volume of communication either by filtering or adding to the content of the subject matter. They have to take time as prescribed in the communication planning and network system in handling information which passes through them. Therefore these units or divisions in the organisational structure add to the problems of communication by increasing the volumes of communication. They in turn affect the quality of communication and consequently there is delay in taking effective decisions.

But, departmentation and divisionalisation are necessary evils which are inevitable in any organisation. The reason is that when organisations grow and multiply, it is but necessary that the functions are divided and authority is delegated for taking quick decisions. Even though there is decentralisation of authority there is need for effective co-ordination between departments and functions vertically and horizontally through a rational network of communication system so that the former would be successful.
Influence of recipients' place and position in the routing of communication: In an organisational environment as soon as all the functions are identified and suitable personnel are put in them, the question arises as to how the communication is to be routed in the organisational hierarchy. This is to be decided by considering the place and position of the recipients in the organisation. Sometimes a message may have to be sent to one person at a particular box irrespective of the level of management or position to which he belongs or to many at the same time, level or different levels of the organisation simultaneously.

In that case, the communicator should see that all the communicatees receive the message at one and the same time. Else, it may lead to grumbling and jealousy as well as egoistic feeling in the minds of those recipients who receive the information first. This may be interpreted to favouritism also. Hardwick and Landyut have rightly stated that "to prevent unfriendly individuals from receiving information earlier than others and protect himself against charges of showing favouritism, the administrator may find it necessary to despatch his communication so that it will be received simultaneously by all intended recipients."¹

Methods of routing communication: Depending upon the organisational structure in general and communication policies and procedures established by top management in particular,
the information can be routed in the following manner:

(a) Direct: When an enterprise is small with very limited number of personnel and restricted activities, much of the communication is rather direct between the members of the organisation. Moreover, there is no organisational structure in the strictest sense, even though there prevails authority and responsibility relationship between some members, who are entrusted with the authority of taking decisions and those who are to implement the decisions taken by the former. In these circumstances communication between them takes place mostly directly.

When the organisation grows and expands and more number of people are added to the enterprise, some systems and procedures are established to streamline the flow of communication in the organisation so as to see that there is no breakdown nor failure of communication affecting managerial decisions. This is achieved by delegation of authority by top management to the executives at different levels or divisions in the organisational hierarchy. They send and receive communication to and from all directions of the organisation. Depending upon the authority, sometimes they take decisions and end up the subject at their end. If it is beyond their authority, after modifying the message to suit the next higher level, — either by filtration or addition — it is forwarded upward in the hierarchy.
However, what is said above is the usual procedure as prescribed in the network of communication system in an organisation. But, not infrequently, the sender of the communication may send the communication directly to the recipient. Usually, it takes place between the top management or any higher level management and any individual in the operational level in the first line.

This is better presented in a chart form with an example, as given below:

**Chart I**

- General Manager
- Middle level Manager (Production)
- First line Manager (Production)
- Operator

At times depending upon the urgency of the job the staff of the General Manager establishes direct contact to the first line management, mostly the operators. Suppose some repair job is to be attended to in the General Manager's office. The General Manager tells it to his personal assistant. In his turn he rings up to the first line manager/supervisor. At times when the personal
assistant is in a position to know the exact person who is to be contacted, he conveys the message directly to him and see that the job is done. Else, the first line manager/supervisor is informed and he sees that the job is attended to.

On the surface, it appears that the whole communication behaviour of the P.A to G.M, to the first line manager or supervisor or the operator appears to be informal one. But, in reality, it is more based on a formal authority of a higher order which, makes the recipients act without any reservations. The recipients are not dare enough to say that the communication should be routed through their heads of departments. This kind of instruction from higher authorities to lower level operators may often take place in respect of personal(non-official) activities also. It is mostly down-ward and the structural hierarchial line is not having any place in such communication behaviour.

One of the greatest problems of direct method of routing of communication is that it gives use to procedural conflicts, operational system conflicts etc. If it is routed through the departmental heads, all the routine procedures and systems would be attended to in the usual course. On the other hand when a job is attended to
without his knowledge, the normal procedures and systems are likely to be overlooked and they are not likely to be followed strictly by the operators when they attend to any job directly by themselves on the pretext that they would hurt the top 'hot line' executives.

Similarly, when such direct communication takes place on non-official activities also, the top-executives indirectly give room for a crack in the relationship between the operators and their immediate superiors, whom the former (the operators) are likely to overlook little by little; and ultimately demoralising the group behaviour in that division. Though this problem is conspicuous in most of the organisation (the details of which could not be statistically established), no management has taken any positive step to arrest this method. It seems that the roots of informal communication has found its place in this way.

One of the causes for this kind of 'direct communication behaviour on the part of top-executives is that they act purely on 'impulse' which emerge out of their position and authority. They could not foresee the consequences of their behaviour. They are only concerned with the problems of their own, which they see as more personal. Their subordinates also, by attending to them 'personally' wish to be in good looks with their bosses.
This problem of 'direct communication' can be solved easily by routing the communication to the respective departmental executives in the first line management according to regular channel. Where the organisations are sufficiently larger one, a separate facilities engineering department may be created to attend to routine maintenance of facilities in the organisation. Where it is permitted as well as necessary the same department may attend to non-official (personal) odd functions of the top executives as and when they are communicated to do so.

(b) Hierarchial Channel: The second choice for routing the information is through the established hierarchial channel, as represented in the organisation chart. An organisational hierarchy aims at assisting the managers at different levels to take decisions at least possible time without any hinderance. But, in practice, channalising communication through the various levels in the hierarchy, result in delay in taking decisions. Moreover, the subordinates tend to communicate to their superiors only those matters which may please them. Kenneth Boulding has found that "in a hierarchy there is an inescapable tendency towards pleasing the superior and hence conforming his ideas... Hierarchy corrupts communication. The information gathering apparatus always tends to confirm the existing apparatus of the top decision-makers no
matter what it is,² of course, in modified format at different times.

The transmission of communication in the hierarchial channel is also influenced by the nature of authority—centralised or decentralised—in the organisation. This is also subject to the type of span of management i.e., narrow span or wider span. If the organisation is having narrow span and has centralised decision making, the information has to travel through many levels in the hierarchy—each level acting as a gate valve to adjust the content of communication. It affects the free and quick movement of communication to the decision making centre. On the other hand, when the organisation is having wider span since the number of intermediate levels are negligibly small, there is quick transmission of communication to the central decision-making point.

Where an organisation is having decentralisation—i.e., diffusion of authority to take decisions as much in the lower level as possible, or at any level the management deem it necessary, the distance that a communication has to travel in the hierarchy is rather limited to the decision making point. However, the top management is making post-mortem only on the decisions taken already. P.F. Drucker has stated that "in any large scale organisation
decentralisation is a must; it is the condition for the conversion of bigness from a social liability into a social asset ... with respect to communication and decision-making federal organisation is the only satisfactory design, principle we possess.\(^3\) But Dearden has found that information technology has been of little help in controlling decentralised companies.\(^4\) The reason is probably, according to Nolan Richard L., related to the finding that decentralisation is a source of inconsistency in data, resulting from problems of synchronising the updating and reporting cycles for units of decentralised company.\(^5\)

Whether an organisation is centralised or decentralised or having narrow or wider span of management, it is evident that the hierarchy has a direct influence on the quantity as well as quality of communication. In either case, there are systems and procedures in the network of the communication system, which is necessarily a formal one. Merely sticking on the authority ladder and chain of command even in cases of vital and emergent issues may result in heavy cost to the enterprises. In those circumstances, it is necessary that there is a multi-connected network of communication system which would reduce the distance and time in taking decisions.
(c) Indirection: This is an unique channel when the authority is approached not directly but indirectly. This is mostly upward - horizontal and that too when critical decisions are to be taken favourably towards a person or department in the organisation. In other words, it is more or less like recommendations made by one person to another regarding certain obligations. In this case a third person emerges between the communicator and the communicatee. Usually a peer level executive (in a related function) who is very close to the decision making authority comes up in the 'indirection' function of communication.

This may be illustrated through a small caselet given hereunder:

Suppose, A the plant manager wishes to get some sanctions from his chief Mr. B, the works manager. Mr. A is aware that his direct request may be turned down by the latter. But, Mr. A is sure that if it is presented through a person who is close to Mr. B it will have some effect. In that case he puts the facts to Mr. C the Research and Development Manager, who is having equal authority to that of Mr. B and who is having very close personal relationship with him (Mr. B). Mr. C discusses the problem of Mr. A and sees that a positive decision is taken in favour of Mr. A.
This is not a general practice that is acceptable to any scientific method of routing of communication in an organisational hierarchy. Yet, it takes place, at times, in very peculiar situations.

Emergence of Informal Channel of Communication: Routing of information through the above three methods often proves to be ineffective causing much delay in taking decisions. In practice, a sizeable quantity of communications in an organisation are taking place through informal method which are not planned nor foreseen by the management. Informal channel of communication simply takes place as employees and workers do their jobs. Mostly it is of face-to-face one. It is also called emergent system of communication. The activities which take place under informal channel are ad-hoc and spontaneous and of inter-personal nature.

The adhocism and spontaneity in informal channel usually arise in times of crisis situations associated with stress and uncertainty. In these circumstances individuals, in organisations, irrespective of their position collaborate themselves in overcoming such crisis situations. In this case, routing of information by following established formal structure in the hierarchy may cause much delay in taking any crucial decisions. Hence an informal channel comes up spontaneously.
Further, there are occasions when the flow of information was not smooth and that the receiving end finds it difficult or impossible to transmit the information in time for effective action. Gerald Albaum has pointed out that "information failures were the result of

(a) barriers inherent in the formal structure through which the transfer of information typically occurs, and

(b) inadequacy of interaction patterns between potential receivers and transmitters of information."

In practice, informal channel of communication supplements the established structured formal channel when the latter is not able to deliver the goods. It often softens even the inter-departmental relationship in solving the delicate problems.

Sometimes staff in different departments may furnish information to some departmental heads without being asked by them. Nevertheless they may be of use for them in one way or other depending upon their knowledge in using them. It is true, they add to the volume of communication. But, it is to be emphasised that unsolicited informal flow of information to executives is indeed a necessary evil which cannot be eliminated totally. Perhaps, it is better, through a scientific
0 & M analysis, it can be converted into a formal one. It is also suggested that the department which receive such unsolicited information and find that they cannot use it, they can forward it to those departments who are directly connected with such information. Analysing this kind of communication situation, Albert Wickfeburg has found that, "companies have not provided structures or channels to perform the information function in such a way that unsolicited information not necessarily pertinent to the receiving unit can be recognised and passed on to the proper unit in the organisation."  

Emergence of Collateral Organisation Structure: At the time of designing the structures of organisations the organisational designers expect that communication would flow through the formal structural networks only. But, in practice, it is absolutely impossible to be so. Dale Zand has felt that "Managers can expect structure to loosen at all levels, encouraging interaction to aid the flow of (information) knowledge."  

From the loosened organisational structures as stated above, a collateral organisational system emerges so as to supplement the existing formal organisational system.
It is a parallel one in the existing structure. It helps flow of information in all directions in a quick and easy way, of course, within the framework of formal organisation. It is the outcome of the spontaneous interaction between managers and subordinates when the former permit the latter to use a parallel line of communication in order to get things done. This is an inevitable one. A logical and rational outlook from the managers would help maintain a healthy communication network in the organisation. This is similar to informal communication system. The only difference is that in the case of collateral organisational communication network the authority is given to the concerned staff to travel in the parallel organisation. On the other hand, in the informal structure it arises out of the natural human interaction only.

Modification of formal channel by the bottom level organisation: It is not infrequently that the personnel in the lower levels modify the formal channels of communication in an organisational hierarchy. Managements also in such organisations might not have foreseen such modifications of channels of communication. Therefore, through such unexpected and unscheduled modifications, an irregular channel also starts functioning. It is neither formal nor informal. It is mostly upward.
The modified channel takes place when the bottom-up communicator finds it difficult to reach the communicatee in the next higher tier of the hierarchy through the usual channel. Therefore he taps another source in that higher tier through which he transmits the subject matter to the communicatee and thus holds his attention and gets the feedback if necessary. The salient feature of such a combined channel of communication is that the recipient usually reacts quickly to the uncharted modified channel.

This is better illustrated through the following caselet.

The following is the organisation chart of the manufacturing department of XYZ Limited, Bombay, Manufacturing PVC pipes.

CHART II

Manufacturing Manager

Deputy Manufacturing Manager

Work Manager ↔ Materials Manager ↔ Plant Manager ↔ Maintenance Manager
It is the policy of the organisation that the sanctions to the Materials Manager will be made when his demands are endorsed either by the Works Manager or the Plant Manager (but preferably by the Works Manager).

The staff of Materials Manager's department will approach the No. 2 in the Works Manager's department who is authorised to act on behalf of the Works Manager and get their demands sanctioned when the Works Manager by himself may be reluctant to endorse the demands of Materials Management department. Similarly when the Materials Manager's staff find that the Works Manager or his authorised No. 2 may not accept their demands, they will approach the Plant Manager and persuade him to make endorsement for their demands.

In this way they modify the usual procedures in order to see that their work is done. The sanctioning authorities also do not take pains to see if the procedures are routed according to the charted channel in the hierarchy. It is to be recognised that when the managers who are to grant sanctions are confronted with voluminous letters and reports, it is rather very difficult to them to verify the procedural matters.
The hierarchial structure in the organisations coupled with the problems of routing of information give rise to voluminous communication and information explosion. They affect the effectiveness of communication in the first instance, and quality of decisions at the end. They are discussed in the following chapter.

REFERENCES


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