

Informal Communication: Meaning, Characteristics, Advantages and Limitations

Informal communication refers to interchange of TOOLKIT-5 information unofficially. This communication is based on informal relations (like friendship, membership of the same club, the same place of birth, etc.) and, therefore, is free from all the organisational formalities.

The exchange of informal messages usually takes place on the occasion of community meals, social occasions, parties, etc. On such occasions, the superiors gather such information from their subordinates as may be difficult to get through formal communication. Such communication includes comments, suggestions, etc.

Under this, communication takes place through gesticulation, moving of head, smiling and by remaining quiet. For example, a superior wants to complain against his subordinate to his higher officer and at the same time he is afraid of giving it in writing. This can be conveyed to the higher officer through informal communication, say during the course of a conversation.

Informal communication is also called grapevine communication because there is no definite channel of communication. Under it some information passes through many individuals and covers a long distance making its origin obscure. This is exactly like a grapevine where it is difficult to find the beginning and the end.

Characteristics

Informal or grapevine communication has the following characteristics:

(1) Formation through Social Relations:

This communication is born out of social relations who mean that it is beyond the restrictions of the organisation. No superior-subordinate relationship figures therein. A more sociable superior can gather much information through this channel.

(2) Two types of Information:

Through this communication, information about the work and the individual can be collected.

(3) Uncertain Path:

Since it is beyond the restrictions of the organisation, it follows no definite channel. Like a grapevine, it moves in a zigzag manner.

(4) Possibility of Rumour and Distortion:

Responsibility for the true or false nature of communication does not lie on any individual and, therefore, not much attention is paid to its meaning while communicating. Consequently, the rumours keep floating.

(5) Quick Relay:

Informal communication makes news spread like wildfire. Not only this, people start adding something of their own which sometimes changes the real meaning of the communication.

Advantages

The informal channel of communication has the following advantages:

(1) Fast and Effective Communication:

Under this communication, the messages move fast and their effect is equally great on the people.

(2) Free Environment:

Informal communication is done in a free environment. Free environment means that there is no pressure of any office-big or small. The reactions of the employees can easily be collected.

(3) Better Human Relations:

Informal communication saves the employees from tension. Freedom from tension helps the establishment of better human relations. This also affects the formal communication.

(4) Easy Solution of the Difficult Problems:

There are many problems which cannot be solved with the help of formal communication. There is more freedom in informal communication which helps the solution of difficult problems.

(5) Satisfying the Social Needs of the Workers:

Everybody wants good relations with the high officers at the place of his work. Such relations give satisfaction to the employees and they feel proud. But this can be possible only with the help of the informal communication.

Limitations

The defects or limitations of the informal communication are as under:

(1) Unsystematic Communication:

This communication is absolutely unsystematic and it is not necessary that information reaches the person concerned.

(2) Unreliable Information:

Most of the information received through this communication is undependable and no important decision can be taken on its basis.