

Formal Communication: Meaning, Characteristics, Advantages Limitations and Types

Formal communication refers to interchange of information officially. The flow of communication is controlled and is a deliberate effort. This makes it possible for the information to reach the desired place without any hindrance, at a little cost and in a proper way. This is also known as 'Through Proper Channel Communication.'

Characteristics

(1) Written and Oral:

Formal communication can both be written and oral. Daily works are handled through oral communication, while the policy matters require written communication.

) Formal Relations:

This communication is adopted among those employees where formal relations have been established by the organisation. The sender and the receiver have some sort of organisational relations.

(3) Prescribed Path:

The communication has to pass through a definite channel while moving from one person to another. For example, to convey the feelings of a worker to the manager, the foreman's help has to be sought.

(4) Organisational Message:

This channel is concerned with the authorised organisational messages only and the personal messages are out of its jurisdiction.

(5) Deliberate Effort:

This channel of communication is not established automatically but effort has to be made for its creation. It is decided keeping in view the objectives of the organisation.

Advantages

The formal communication has the following advantages:

(1) Maintenance of Authority of the Officers:

Formal communication maintains constant relations among the superiors and the subordinates as a result of whom the dignity of the line superiors is maintained.

Consequently, it is convenient to control the subordinates and fix their responsibility which is absolutely needed for effective and successful control.

(2) Clear and Effective Communication:

In formal communication, there is a direct contact among the managers and the subordinates. Both understand the capability, habits, feelings, etc. of one another. Managers know as to when and under which conditions their subordinates need information. In this way, this communication is capable of making available timely information. Hence, it is clear and effective.

(3) Orderly Flow of Information:

The information has to pass through a definite route from one person to another. Hence, the flow of information is systematic.

(4) Easy Knowledge of Source of Information:

In this type of communication, the source of each information can be easily located.

Limitations

Following are the disadvantages or limitations of the formal communication:

(1) Overload of Work:

In a modern business organisation much information, many messages and other things have to be communicated. Under formal communication, they are routed through a definite channel and this consumes much of the time of the superiors and thus some other important works are left unattended.

(2) Distortion of Information:

This method can be a hindrance in the flow of information. Sometimes the distance between the sender and the receiver is so big that the information has to pass through many hands and by the time it reaches the receiver it is distorted. Thus it fails to serve its purpose.

(3) Indifferent Officers:

The officers do not pay much attention to the suggestions and complaints of the subordinates. In such a case a subordinate may come lose his faith in the effectiveness of communication.

Types of Formal Communication

Formal communication is of two types:

(1) Vertical Communication:

(i) Downward Communication

(ii) Upward Communication

(2) Horizontal Communication. All these types have been clarified in the following diagram:

(Downward Communication) (Horizontal Communication) (Upward Communication)

(1) Vertical Communication

Vertical communication is of the following two types:

(i) Downward Communication:

The communication by top hierarchy with their subordinates is called downward communication. This communication includes orders, rules, information, policies, instructions, etc. The chief advantage of the downward communication is that the subordinates get useful timely information which helps them in their work performance,

(ii) Upward Communication:

This is quite the reverse of the downward communication. This flows from the subordinates to the superiors. The subject-matter of this communication includes suggestions, reactions, reports, complaints, etc. This sort of communication helps the superiors in taking decisions.

(2) Horizontal Communication

Horizontal communication takes place when two individuals of the same level exchange information. Horizontal communication is used by the same level officers to solve the problems of similar nature and profit by the experience of other people. The subject-matter of horizontal communication includes information, requests, suggestions, mutual problems and coordination-related information.

Formal Communication Network

The way in which formal communication is done, is known as formal communication network. Formal communication can be done in different ways-it may be vertical

communication or horizontal communication. The different forms of formal communication network have been shown in the following diagram:

(1) Chain Communication:

Chain communication refers to the communication between a superior and a subordinate. All the people in an organisation from top to bottom are linked with the help of a scalar chain as has been shown in diagram (1). A is placed at the highest rank, B is a subordinate of A, C is the subordinate of B, D is the subordinate of C and E is the subordinate of D.

(2) Wheel Communication:

In this form of communication, all the subordinates of a superior talk to one another through his medium. The superior works as a hub of a wheel. In the diagram (2), A is the superior and B, C, D and E are the subordinates. All the four subordinates communicate through the medium of A.

(3) Circular Communication:

This communication takes place among the members of a group. Every member of a group can communicate with the nearest two members. In the diagram (3), A can have communication with B and E. Similarly, B can have communication with A and C. The same applies to all the members of the group. In this case the communication moves at a slow speed.

(4) Free Flow Communication:

This form of communication also takes place among the different members of the group. Its special feature is that every member of the group can talk to all the other people in the group.

This has been clarified in diagram (4). A can talk directly to B, C, D, E. In the same way B can talk directly to A, C, D, and E. The same applies to all the members of the group. In this case, the communication moves at a rapid pace.

(5) Inverted 'V' Communication:

In this form of communication, a subordinate is permitted to communicate with the boss of his boss. In this form of communication the messages move at a rapid speed, in the diagram (5), C and D are the subordinate of B who, in turn, is a subordinate of A. Here C and D can talk directly to A who happens to be the boss of B.

