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Title Exploring the Architecture of Informal Communication Channels in Organizations – Origin, Life And Impact

ABSTRACT

Given that communication in business organisations is a determinant of effectiveness, it is important to understand its nature and types. The Informal Communication Channels (ICCs) are field in Organizational Communication that has not been fully explored fully in the Indian context; especially in the context of IT industry in India. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To develop an understanding of the nature and extent of Informal Communication Channels in organizations and their prevalence.
- ii. To study the impact that these Informal Communication Channels have on employee morale and organizational culture
- iii. To study the steps taken by Senior Managers to address issues emanating from Informal Channels of Communication
- iv. To study the differences in the nature of Informal Channels of Communication, their impact and coping mechanisms in Indian and MNC IT companies.
- v. To examine the role of HR personnel in this context.

For the purpose of this research, Grapevine, Gossip and Rumors are three terms constituting ICCs that have been used interchangeably. The most representative forms of research methodology are quantitative and qualitative research. While each has its own advantages and disadvantages, it has been seen that research in social sciences has not limited itself to any one approach.

The present study under takes a mixed method approach. There has been a focus on conducting quantitative research through a questionnaire, and that has been supported

by detailed qualitative research in terms of interview discussions with a sub set of respondents. The same has been discussed in detailed in the subsequent sections.

The study comprised a set of organizations that are (i) Two IT Indian companies (ii) Two IT MNCs.

Three tools were used - a questionnaire had been generated to conduct a survey through which the researcher reached out to respondents in four target organizations to study the ICCs. Out of the total 217 respondents, about 57.0% respondents are male and 43.0% are female which is a very healthy ratio. The average age of respondents was 28.3 years; while the average work experience was 5.4 years, the time spent in current organization was 3 years. Thus the respondents are seasoned, mature professionals with largely a stable set of experiences in their organizations. This adds tremendous value to their feedback and buoyed the present researcher's confidence in the study.

Further an interview guide has been conducted as the second stage on ten individuals from each organization (N = 40). Thirdly, a case study was developed by horizontally extending the items of the interview guide, probing deeper and re-visiting the issues presented by the respondents to develop an indepth understanding.

The main conclusions are that ICCs are a universal phenomenon across all respondents and interestingly, there are no specific differences between Domestic & MNCs. This aspect is extremely relevant to HR and HR professionals, since ICCs cannot be curbed, ignored or "wished away". Thus, HR (and the management) needs to identify ways of 'managing' and 'tapping into' ICCs. In this context, proactive and Consistent Communication is a key.

Some of the key recommendations that emanated from the study are that HR is at forefront of all employee related Communication. Building Trust and Culture are predicated on Consistent and Transparent Communication which is generally top/down. It is important to articulate a set of values and keep reinforcing them. Hence, HR is to deal with breakdown of traditional boundaries of employee vis a vis management. Thus, it is important to Create and implement policies and practices that encourage multifarious channels of communications with employees