Upward Communication

When information flows from subordinates to superiors, it is called upward communication. The purpose of upward communication is to provide information to the managers from subordinates. Through this communication, subordinates convey their opinions, suggestions, complaints etc. to their superiors. The lower-level employees initiate upward communication and the message ultimately reaches to the upper-level management.

According to Ricky W. Griffin, “Upward communication consists of messages from subordinates to superiors.”

In the opinion of Weihrich and Koontz, “Upward communication travels from subordinates to superiors and continue up the organizational hierarchy.”

Boone, Kurtz and Block said, “Communication that flows form a supervisee to a supervisor, is known as upward communication.”

According to L. C. Bovee and Others, “Upward communication is the flow of information from lower to higher levels in the organization.”

Bartol and Martin defined, “When the vertical flow of communication is form a lower level to one or higher levels in the organization, it is known as upward communication.”

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that the communication where information flows form subordinates to superiors is known as upward communication. Upward communication conveys information related to periodic updates, requests for data, clarification of directives and requests for additional financial support.
Media or ways of upward communication

The subordinates can communicate their problems, attitudes, complaints and suggestion to their superiors through various ways. That means, there are a number ways or means or methods of upward communication. The important media of upward communication are mentioned in the followed table:

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1. **Written media of upward communication**: The popular written media of upward communication are discussed below:
   - **Report**: Report is one of the most important a widely used media of upward communication. Subordinates prepare reports periodically or regularly on various routine issues. They also prepare special report when need arises. Reports are then submitted to the higher authority for supplying necessary information.
   - **Memo**: Memo is the short form of memorandum. A memo is a short piece of writings generally used to exchange information amongst the people within the organization. Superiors usually send information to their subordinates through memo. However, subordinates can also write memos to convey essential information to their superiors for making decisions.
   - **Suggestion and complaint boxes**: Some organizations install suggestion and complaint boxes at some convenient places in the office or factory through suggestion box, management invites the employees to submit their suggestions for improving the efficiency of organizational operations. On the other hand, complaint box is placed to submit any complaint of the employees regarding any aspect of their employment.
   - **Direct letters**: Subordinates can write letters directly to their superiors at their superiors at their own initiation or they may be asked by their superiors write about any directed matter.
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Questionnaire: Sometimes managers encourage upward communication by asking questions to their subordinates. For this purpose, they distribute questionnaires to the employees. Through questionnaires, management can know the attitudes, feelings and complaints of the employees.

2. **Oral media of upward communication:** The oral media of upward communication are as follow:
   - **Grievance procedure:** Grievance is the employee dissatisfaction over any aspect of their employment. Grievance procedure provides the employees with a formal channel of appeal to their superiors. In modern organizations, there is well-established procedure for handing employee grievances that acts as a mode of upward communication.
   - **Joint setting of objectives:** In participative organizations, superiors and subordinates sit together for setting objectives. In this case, the superiors seek information and suggestions from the bottom-level managers and employees.
   - **Employer-employee meeting:** Meeting between employer and employees is a very useful medium of upward communication. In the meeting, the superior can raise problems and seek information, guidelines or suggestions from the subordinates.

3. **Other Media:** In addition to written and oral media, superiors can encourage upward communication through the following symbolic medium.
   - **Open-door-policy:** Open-door-policy of management inspires the employees to feel that the manager’s doors are always open to them. Whenever they want they can enter into the manager’s room and talk everything to the superiors without any fear or hesitation.

These are the commonly used media of upward communication. However, all the media are not suitable for every message. Selection of a particular medium in a particular situation depends on the nature and importance of the message.

**Downward communication**

Downward communication is that communication in which information flows from superior to subordinates. Through downward communication, managers communicate organizational goals, policies, procedures, orders, instructions, decisions etc. to their subordinates.

*Newstrom and Davis* defined, “Downward communication in an organization is the flow of information from higher to lower levels of authority.”

According to *Ricky W. Griffin*, “Downward communication occurs when information flows down the hierarchy form superiors to subordinates.”
L. E. Boone, Kurtz and Block said, “A message that flows form a supervisor to a supervisee is known as downward communication.”

According to Himstreet and Baty, “Downward communication is that form superior to subordinate—from boss to employee and from policy makers to operating personnel.”

In conclusion, we can say downward communication occurs when messages flow form upper level of lower levels by following the organizational hierarchy. The objective of downward communication is to carry organizational objectives, plans, policies and procedures form higher level to lower levels of the organization.

**Methods of downward communication**

Both written and oral methods are used in transmitting messages of downward communication. Actually, section of media depends on the nature, urgency and importance of the message to be communicated. The followings are the frequently used media or methods of downward communication.

1. **Oral Media or Method**: Downward communication is mainly done by means of oral media or method. Usually, the supervisors give instructions to their subordinates through face-to-face and telephonic conversation. Beside this, managers also exchange relevant information to their subordinates through meetings, conferences, lectures etc.

2. **Written Media or Method**: Organization of any size and nature sends important information to its employees in written forms through letters, circulars, manuals, bulletins, posters annual reports etc. generally, letters and memos communicate important organizational directives; circulars, manuals and bulletins communicate policies and procedures and annual report communicates organizational activities and performance at the end of the year.
3. **Other Media or Method**: In addition to oral and written media or method, audio, visual and audio-visual media are also used in downward communication. Radio, television, poster, signal, symbol, graphs etc. some of the commonly used instruments that convey messages to the subordinates.

- **Differences between Upward and Downward Communication**

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<tr>
<th>BASIC COMPONENTS</th>
<th>DOWNWARD COMMUNICATION</th>
<th>UPWARD COMMUNICATION</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Direction:</strong></td>
<td>It flows from superior to subordinate or from top to bottom.</td>
<td>It flows from subordinate to superior or from bottom to top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speed:</strong></td>
<td>It is very swift or consumes less time and is empowered by the authority.</td>
<td>It is slow or time consuming as it has to pass through many levels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose:</strong></td>
<td>It is to give orders for implementing instructions and executing responsibilities.</td>
<td>It is to provide feedback and give suggestions about how a task has been executed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature:</strong></td>
<td>It is authoritative and directive in nature.</td>
<td>It is informative and appellative in nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examples:</strong></td>
<td>It includes orders, circulars, notices, etc.</td>
<td>It includes reports, proposals, suggestions, grievances, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Horizontal or lateral communication**

Horizontal communication is the communication where information flows among the similar or same level statuses of people in the organizational structure. Horizontal communication is a communication among people at the parallel or same level, position, rank or statues people of the organization. Horizontal communication is the communication that flows laterally within the organization, involves persons at the same level of the organization. Horizontal communication normally involves coordinating information and allows people with the same or similar rank in an organization to cooperate or collaborate. Some definitions of horizontal communication are as follows:

**Ricky W. Griffin**, “Horizontal communication involves colleagues and peers at the same level of the organization.”
According to William A. Conboy, “Horizontal communication is the exchanges between and among agencies and personnel on the same level of the organizational chart.”

According to Bovee and others, “Horizontal communication is the flow of information across departmental boundaries, either laterally or diagonally.”

According to Ivancevich and others, “Horizontal communication occurs when the communicator and the receiver are at the same level in the organization.”

**Benefits**

1. It develops mutual trust and confidence amongst employees of same level which help in maintaining or promote understanding between similar position holders of different departments.

2. If employees at similar position communicate to each other for a given task it will create or develop the feeling of co-ordination among various departments.

**Problems**

1. Sometimes it creates rivalry among employees of various departments.

2. Proximity shows the liking and disliking of an employee who is near by another in respect of space. Like in any organization HR department and Marketing department are near to each other then Manufacturing department. So proximity exists between HR and Marketing department and they favour each other as compared to Manufacturing department.

3. Biasing shows the liking and disliking of an employee due to religion, caste, family background, personality etc.

**Methods of horizontal communication**

**Face-to-face discussion:** When individual communicate directly to another. Face-to-face communication minimises the problem of misinterpretation and quick feedback makes the communication more effectively.
**Telephonic conversation:** When the employees are busy with their work or they are sited far from each other then telephonic conversation become more relevant against face to face conversation. It saves time but sometimes congestion or disturbance and any other obstacles create delay and distort the message.

**Periodical meeting:** Periodical meeting means meeting between employees on weekly, monthly, quarterly, annually basis where all the members are assembled and discuss on pre-determined issues. **Memorandum:** Memorandum is a written form of communication which transmits between different departments in the same organisation. It is also called inter office letter.

**Consensus:**

When a number of people irrespective of their status, sit down and confer with one another to arrive at a decision acceptable to all, it is called consensus. The format of these communications is predetermined and can not be altered.

**Formal communication**

When an organization communication occurs by following the prescribed or official or predetermined rules, policy and regulation of the organization is called formal communication. Formal communication is governed by the established chain of command. Internal information exchanged form one to another following the conventional rules. But this type of communication system may be used for both internal and external purposes. Some important definitional communications are as follows:

**According to Bartoal and Martin**, “Formal communication refers to vertical and horizontal communication that flows path specified by the official hierarchical organizational structure and related task requirements.”

**According to Bovee and his associates**, “Formal communication is the flow of information that is dictated by the organization’s official structure.”

So, formal communication is the process of exchanging information between two or more person by following the prescribed or official rules, procedures, systems, formalities and chain of command in the organizational structure.

**Grapevine or informal communication**

Informal communication system is the opposite system of formal communication. In this system the communication is made without following any predetermined rules of policy. Informal communication plays a vital role to operate the organization’s activities. When the employees cannot understand the subject matter of the communication, they can discuss with their authority anywhere about the matter as like in the dining table or in the play ground or in the club.
According to Bartol and Martin, Informal communication is the takes place without regard to hierarchical or task requirements.”

According to Bovee and his associates, “Informal communication is the flow of information without regard for the formal organizational structure, hierarchical or reporting relationship.”

So, grapevine or informal communication is the process of spontaneous exchange of information between two or more people at different status without following any prescribed or official rules, formalities and chain of command in the organizational structure.

❖ Characteristics of grapevine or informal communication

The important features or characteristics of grapevine or informal communication are as follows:

1. **Un-official channel of communication**: Since an informal communication network does not follow any rules or formalities. So, it is an unofficial channel of communication.
2. **Not controlled by management**: The grapevine is not controlled by management. The grapevine is mainly controlled by the employees themselves. As employees control the grapevine information, sometimes the information may be accurate and sometimes the information may be inaccurate.
3. **Less reliable information**: Most employees perceive and believe that the grapevine contains more reliable information than the information received from upper management. What employees may or may not realize is that many times the grapevine contains false information.
4. **Flexibility**: Informal communication is more flexible than formal communication because it is free from all type of formalities.
5. **Oral way of communication**: Informal communication technique more uses oral way of communication rather than written communication.
6. **Rapid communication**: Informal communication transmits very fast. Especially miss-inflation or rumor spread rapidly to others is the organization.
7. **Distortion of meaning**: Something the meaning and the subject matter of the information is distorted in this system.
8. **Influential**: Informal communication is very much influential type of communication is distorted in this system.
9. **Free form accountability**: The exchange of message in informal communication is free from accountability to the authority or top executives of the organization.
10. **Spontaneous**: Informal communication is the process of spontaneous exchange of information between two or more people at different status within the organizational structure.
11. **Multidirectional**: Informal communication is multidirectional in nature. The grapevine may be largely available to simply serve the interests of the people it involves. Many times, employees use the grapevine to begin rumors that serve their own interests, with little regard to the people they affect.
12. **Others**:

   - Incomplete messages,
   - penetration capacity,
   - no record.
Pattern or ways of grapevine or informal communication

Grapevine is an informal channel of business communication. The management can use grapevine to supplement the formal channels of communication. The patterns, types or kinds of grapevine may divide into different ways. Keith Divide grapevine into four categories-single strand, gossip, probability and cluster chain which are as follow:

- Single strand
- Gossip
- Probability
- Cluster

**Single strand or straight chain:** Single strand network is an information network where one person will tell a message to another person and he will communicate it to another one person. The third person also will tell the same message to another one person.

![Single strand network](image)

**Gossip or star chain:** Here all the persons in the communication network talk one another informally. In this network someone stays in the center of the system. He is the main or pivotal person.

![Gossip network](image)
Probability chain: Probability network is an informational network where each of the individual randomly tells others the same message. The source of information for each of the person hearing the message is different.

Cluster chain: Cluster network is an informational network where someone first tells the message to the selected individuals and those selected individuals pass the same information to other selected individuals and the process continue in the same way. Most of the informal communication follows this chain. Here the pivotal or the center person passes the information to the other persons who pass the information to the other selected persons.
“Informal communication spreads rumor, untrue and distorted information.”

Explain.

Since informal communication follows no rule, direction or formality, it can quickly transmit any message in various directions. The information which the grapevine or informal communication circulates is generally ill-informed, rumor and often untrue. Let us see how this happen:

1. **Absence of set rules**: Since informal communication networks follow no set rules, so they convey any kind of message to anybody in the network without any fear.
2. **Fabrication or untruth**: Some people prefer to fabricate facts and events. They enjoy fiving a false account of events.
3. **Cheap admiration**: Some people prefer to spread rumor and distorted messages to get cheap praise.
4. **Complexity of message**: Informal communication also spreads rumor if the message is transmitted through complex and unfamiliar channels.
5. **Lack of understanding**: When the employees fail to understand the real meaning of the messages, they interpret it in their own way.
6. **Inattention**: If the receiver hear any message without full concentration of mind or the absence of mind or the absence of attention, such situation may develop. They spread false information unconsciously.
7. **Tendency to resist of changes**: Sometimes the employees do not like changes in their present working conditions and procedure. If any changes occur, they resist and spread rumor, untrue and false news to prevent the coming changes.
8. **Conflict**: Conflict between sender and receiver is also responsible for communicating untrue information through informal channels.
9. **No control**: As there is no standard mechanism to control informal networks, rumors may spread and spread very quickly at any time at any place and the organization nothing to do.

**Difference between formal and informal communication**

Formal communication is the process of exchanging information by following the prescribed or official rules, procedures, systems, formalities, chain of command etc. in the organizational structure.

On the other hand, informal communication is the process of spontaneous exchange of information among various people of different status in the organizational structure. The difference between formal and informal communication are as follows:
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<tr>
<th>Basis</th>
<th>Formal communication</th>
<th>Informal communication</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Nature</strong></td>
<td>Authoritarian in nature</td>
<td>Democratic and friendly in nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Official recognition</strong></td>
<td>Since it follows official rules, it has official recognition.</td>
<td>It is not officially recognized channel of communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Secrecy</strong></td>
<td>Official secrecy is maintained in formal communication system.</td>
<td>It is occurred by open discussion, so official secrecy is not maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Delegation of authority</strong></td>
<td>It facilitates delegation of authority.</td>
<td>It has no roles in delegating authority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Rumor</strong></td>
<td>No scope of creating and spreading rumor.</td>
<td>Greater scope of creating and spreading rumor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Distortion</strong></td>
<td>No chance of distortion of message.</td>
<td>Here message are distorted frequently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. Discipline</strong></td>
<td>It helps to maintain discipline in the organization.</td>
<td>It may create indiscipline in the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8. Cost</strong></td>
<td>It is expensive and requires more cost.</td>
<td>It is less expensive and requires no or low cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9. Time</strong></td>
<td>It is time consuming.</td>
<td>It is less time consuming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10. Relationship</strong></td>
<td>Little scope to build up labor management relationship.</td>
<td>Higher scope to build up labor management relationship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11. Flexibility</strong></td>
<td>Not or less flexible.</td>
<td>Highly flexible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>12. Permanent documents</strong></td>
<td>Formal communication is done by written documents and it documents an official record.</td>
<td>Generally, informal communication is occurred verbally and it has no document.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>13. Information flow</strong></td>
<td>Information can flow only upward and downward direction.</td>
<td>Information can flows freely to all direction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14. Obligation</strong></td>
<td>It is obligatory to follow every employee.</td>
<td>It is not obligatory to follow.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>