

Grapevine communication assignment

[Business](#), [Management](#)



The objective of this report is to research and evaluate the importance of the grapevine in internal business communications and to provide recommendations of how organizations can effectively manage a healthy grapevine within their organization. In order to do this, it is necessary to highlight the background and structure of the grapevine, and also its positive and negative impact on organizations.

An experiment will demonstrate how quickly information can spread among people, and how easily it can become distorted. The Grapevine originated during the American Civil War, it is now a world-wide method of informal communication in business and in society in general. A typical grapevine structure consists of various different chains using different types of transmission forms communicated through different types of participants. We have researched many of the advantages and disadvantages, and the impact they have on management and employees.

The most important advantage of the grapevine is the greater possibility for information to reach more people; it can also be a good indicator for the health, morale, trends and productivity in an organisation. The most important disadvantage is inaccuracy of information, which in turn may lead to conflict and damaged reputations within organisations. From the conclusions of this report we found that a grapevine is a very powerful means of communication and will always be present in any organisation, it is also a part of society in general. There are various benefits and problems which arise from this method of communication.

It is one of the most rapid ways to disseminate information. If misused or not carefully monitored it can prove to be damaging to individuals and organisations. Based on the conclusions our recommendations are that everybody whether you are an employee or a manager should have responsibility not to exploit the information passed along the grapevine. It is important within an organisation for managers to know when to intervene and when to step back and to allow it to run its course. Managers need to know how to solve issues arising from problems caused by the grapevine.

It is essential in a well-functioning organisation that employees comply with the recognised behavioural principles. In order to prevent conflict and encourage healthy communications it is vital that managers do not restrict the natural flow of information, and employees should not falsify or embellish the truth. Terms of Reference This report was commissioned by Elizabeth Downes, Business Communications lecturer in the Institute of Technology, Tallaght. It was commissioned as part of a Continuous Assessment for that module within the Higher Certificate of Business Accounting.

It accounts for 40% of the final marks and provides an analysis of the importance of the grapevine in internal business communications.

Introduction For the purpose of this assignment we will be researching and evaluating the importance of the grapevine in internal business communications. In order to do this effectively we will first need to define the grapevine, discover how it originated, describe its structure, and discuss the advantages & disadvantages. We will also interpret the results of an

experiment which has been performed to assess the accuracy of the grapevine.

On completion of this information we will then be in a position to conclude whether or not the grapevine is in fact important in internal business communications in the present day, and also we will put forward our recommendations on how to manage it. There are many conflicting opinions regarding whether the grapevine is a valuable tool for rapid transmission of information, or simply an annoyance causing untrue rumours to circulate. Business-unit boundaries exist precisely because they create efficient structures for executing strategy.

The solutions, we think, lies not in reorganisation but in informal communication through the social networks that exist throughout the company. (Kleinbaum & Tushman 2008) It's concerning because the grapevine, although a rapid carrier of " news", is generally unreliable as a source as information is passed on from person to person. (Bradfield 2006) The grapevine dates back to the American civil war, so it is not a newcomer to the business world, however over more recent years it has become a more prevailing means of communication in the workplace.

This topic will be researched from a variety of different means including the internet, books, journals, newspapers, lecture notes and E-journals accessed from the library. Our own personal experience of the grapevine will also be a very vital part of the research. We would like to acknowledge the help & advice given by the college librarians, our lecturer Elizabeth, our families and friends. Grapevine in Business 1 Internal Business Communications Internal

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communication is essential to every organisation in order to ensure the smooth running of the business.

Effective communication is directly linked with an organisation's productivity. The role of the communication is to state what the company expects from its employees, and provide employees with a definite specific direction that they can work towards. (More business. com 2007) 1 Objectives The main aim of internal business communication is to pass information down the chain of command. For example the managing director passes information to the general manager, who in turn passes this information on to other employees. This communication may consist of changes to company policy, redundancies, changes in opening hours etc.

Managers also rely on upward communication from employees to provide feedback, suggestions and ideas. 2 Formal versus Informal There are two main types of communication, formal and informal. Formal communication generally follows the formal organisation structure and uses methods authorised by management. A typical example of formal communication is managers informing staff about missions and policies. Informal communication on the other hand is mainly composed of the grapevine. Indicators that the grapevine is active are employees whispering and laughter in the canteen for example. Definition There are many definitions of the grapevine, small talk, gossip, rumours, and the informal communications network within an organisation. A popular American gossip columnist defines the grapevine as: news running ahead of itself in a red satin dress – it is a rumour about to become true. (Smith, The New York Post) Whatever

definition you use, informal communication is a faster way of communicating in a business compared with formal communication. There are many elements to a successful grapevine as well as it having its fair share of advantages and disadvantages. History The term grapevine originated during the American Civil War. As the battle fronts frequently moved, telegraph wires were loosely strung between trees resembling grapevines. Due to the reckless ways that the lines were strung between the trees, messages were often distorted leading to confusing and inaccurate messages. (godubai. com). Structure of a Grapevine 1 Elements There are a number of prerequisites for the psychological nature, which contribute to the appearance and flow of the grapevine among people. Rumour is an effective instrument of conducting informational war.

Rumours are the easily attainable method of satisfying the informational needs of human kind and this explains their vitality and receptivity. The reasons which facilitate the appearance and spread of rumours, relate to the following psychological factors: • the limitation of the operational memory of a human • the conjecture of fragments of the absent information These factors facilitate the distortion of information in the transfer “ from the mouths to the mouths”: 2 Informational Chains The psychological basis for the form of rumours is the distortion of information from the oral transfer of one person to another.

Then the longer “ the chain”, the greater the number of people who participate in the transfer of information that is not reinforced by reliable data, or do not have official information sources, the more significantly this

information is distorted. Four different chains/structures according to Keith Davis are: 1 The Single Strand Chain This is the easiest hypothesis to follow, Ann tells Brian, who tells Clara, who tells Davie and so on. Each employee passes the information to another. The last person in the single strand chain can discover the information is unrecognizable from the original.

Most error happens in this chain. 2 The Gossip Chain In that case Ann tells every employee with whom she is in contact. 3 The Probability Chain In this situation Ann makes casual contact with, for example, Fred and Clara and passes on the information. Fred and Clara then randomly speak to other employees in accordance with laws of probability. Some of the members of staff hear the information and some don't. Those employees who take in the information might be a very talkative and sociable type of individual. 4 The Cluster Chain

The basis for this type of chain is selection. In the organisation the employee feels more comfortable with someone or some group of employees whom he/she is in contact with, or maybe works with. For example, Ann tells Brian and Fred. Brian and Fred may tell two or three other employees with whom they have close contact. 3 The Transmission Forms of Rumours The following two characteristics explain the basis of the forms of rumours: informational and expressive. An informational characteristic determines the degree of the authenticity.

In accordance with the informational characteristic the rumours are subdivided into four basic types: • absolutely uncertain rumours • rumours with elements of likelihood • rumours with elements of improbability •

trustworthy rumours with elements of unlikelihood. An expressive characteristic is the general type of emotional reaction, for example desire, fear or hostility. This reaction is to be expected depending on how the rumour is perceived by people.

- 1 Pipe Dreams or Wish Fulfilment These state the desires and hopes of people who spread rumours and they help o stimulate the creativity of others. Sometimes this expresses the employee's wish for the changes needed in the working environment. These improvements sometimes increase efficiency in certain departments within the organisation. Even though the tone is optimistic they still characterise concerns of a member of staff.
- 2 The Bogie Rumour In this situation, the employee will verbally communicate to show their fear to other members of staff. The rumour will come from the person in terms of fear and anxieties. This type of rumour can be damaging, for example a rumour about an employee's dismissal.

In such a case an official denial from management is required.

- 3 Wedge Drivers This is a very aggressive rumour, which contributes disorder into the interpersonal relations of people, which disrupt friendly social connections and organisational- structural formations by suspiciousness and mutual distrust, by hostility and by hatred for the individual persons or the groups of people.
- 4 Home-Stretchers This is a preventive rumour. This rumour happens when the employee is expecting a notice for a long time. It can be a little thing or point that could lead to the rumour.

4 Types of Participants

There are different types of participants in the grapevine, which are classified into three different categories.

- 1 Bridger's or Key Communicators

Bridger's or key communicators obtain and bypass information to other employees. They are primarily responsible for the progress of the grapevine.

“ Key Communicator” is an individual who is responsible for initiation of rumours. 2 Baggers or Dead-enders Baggers receive rumours but do not pass them along to other employees. They have another name: “ dead-enders. ” Sometimes they can pass information to other “ dead-enders”. 3

Beaners or Isolates

Beaners, or isolates, do not receive or pass information. They stay outside the rumour. Advantages & Disadvantages There are many arguments for and against the grapevine in business. For the purpose of this report we will discuss some of the most common ones and classify them under different headings, mainly their impact on management, and their impact on employees. 1 Advantages Now-a-days, the grapevine is viewed more as an advantage to an organisation than a disadvantage. It is a good indicator for health, morale, trends and productivity in an organisation. 1 General

Advantages

As information on the grapevine travels far faster than information through formal communication means, there is a greater possibility for information to reach more people. 2 Impact on Management If you are a new manager or group leader in an organisation, the grapevine can be a great means of finding out information about the staff working under you, such as employees likes, dislikes, their area of expertise, what can management do to better motivate their workforce. Managers who harness the energy of the

grapevine can utilise information to better meet the needs and goals of the organisation.

Managers can put new ideas out to the workforce through informal communication and receive feedback on the matter before sending out the official formal communication. 3 Impact on Employees We may not all know it, but having a little gossip on our tea breaks can help ease stress and anxiety in the workplace. This can help improve organisational efficiency as it fulfils a social function and gives employees a sense of belonging. The grapevine can be used to evaluate potential problems that may become true, through formal communication means. 2 Disadvantages

The grapevine is part of the modern business world and has long been considered a necessary evil. There are many disadvantages associated with the grapevine. 1 General Disadvantages People are generally wary of embracing the information spread through the grapevine because of its poor reputation. Information that passes along the grapevine is undocumented and thus is in a prime position to be altered and misinterpreted as it flows. Errors are very often dramatic and mistakes and misinformation tend to be more memorable than accurate information. Critical details are eliminated constantly in a process known as levelling.

The dramatic details are hyped up to make the information more exciting, boring details are omitted; other details are sometimes adjusted to correspond with the bias of the person passing on the communication. 2 Impact on Management Information can get twisted and misinterpreted by employees as it moves along the grapevine, and end up meaning exactly the

opposite of what management had intended. Employees tend to believe what they have heard in informal conversations before they believe what they have heard in formal communication methods directly from management. Crampton 1998). Communication that has become distorted can result in an erosion of trust and morale between management and staff. Lost productivity may result from wasted time spent gossiping about co-employees and may even disrupt the efficient working of the company. Staff turnover and absenteeism may be prevalent as employees leave the company due to an unhealthy work atmosphere. 3 Impact on Employees The grapevine consists of mainly gossip which could lead to conflict, insult, and damaged reputations which in turn could end friendships in an organisation.

It is easy to see how one friendship ending could gain momentum as employees begin to take sides and this leads to divisions between different groups. Case Studies A perfect example of how a myth or rumour can be so drastically changed as it moves from one person to the next is the children's game " Chinese Whisper". This involves a line or circle of people, where the first person initiates the game by telling a basic short story by whispering quickly in to the ear of the person next to them.

In turn that person then whispers their interpretation of what they have heard into the ear of the next person in the line or circle. This continues to the last person who says out loud what they have heard. This final version of the story is usually a very much distorted version of the original. We conducted an experiment to demonstrate how this works: 1 Introduction There are many beliefs about the grapevine and an abundance of research,

but to see from first hand how it works we must conduct an experiment which will be an interesting and educational experience. Background We developed this experiment to illustrate the ease in which a rumour can be generated by using the “grapevine” method. We used the local pub as the starting point from which to initiate the experiment. 3 Method 1. To demonstrate the effect of the grapevine we decided on a story that we would tell our initial “subjects”; three acquaintances present in the pub. 2. We told the three people in the pub that we were thinking of emigrating to Australia soon and needed to sell a car quickly, hence the price tag being half of the market value.

We gave a description of the car, the colour, type, mileage, the year manufactured, engine type (petrol), and the price. We gave a contact phone number and mentioned if they knew of someone who would be interested to pass on this number. 3. We waited to hear back.... 4. When we were contacted by individuals over the phone (not those initially told), we asked them where they had heard we were selling the car. 5. We found out who these individuals had heard the information from and how, if at all, they knew the initial people we had told. 4 Results Four out of the five people that contacted us were not a direct friend of the initial individuals. • The colour of the car had changed from navy to blue, black and even red! • We were asked by one individual “why are you moving to America?” • One person thought we were giving the car away for free while another said she was quoted half of the price that we asked for! • Two people thought we were selling a diesel engine car. • Two people thought the car was manufactured in a different year. • One person thought we were let go from a job and had

no choice but to emigrate to find work. Conclusion We demonstrated that the grapevine could be used very efficiently to relay information. People that we didn't even know or had never met had actually contacted us through the recommendation of a friend or even a " friend of a friend". Some people quoted different prices showing how stories can be changed, with information being added on. Although this was a harmless experiment with no chance of detrimental consequences, the " grapevine" is non selective, and can be used to carry information that can be harmful or damaging as well as useful and innocent.

The conclusion that was drawn from this experiment is that this form of communication is rapid but can be often to a degree inaccurate. A diagram can be found at the end of the report to illustrate the flow of information from the source to the tertiary contacts, (appendix A). Conclusions The grapevine is such a huge and widespread part of every day life that even tales once told as mere stories have become integrated in to society as if they are reality. All businesses have a grapevine, but not all of them use it effectively.

Although it's a speedy method of communication in the workplace and reaches every corner of the company long before the formal methods, it can often be distorted on its journey. If we were to believe every story like this without any evidence what hope have we in the workplace when innocently meeting a colleague at the water cooler and being confronted with a shocking revelation about a fellow employee of the company. Whether it is a piece of trivial gossip about a fellow colleague or something more serious,

for example, involving the future plans of the company, the reaction is always the same.

People have an overwhelming urge to tell other people what they have just heard and perhaps add a little bit from their own imagination to make it more interesting. A grapevine will always be present in an organisation the main point is that we have to learn how to manage it in everyday business life. While it has well known negative aspects, such as inaccurate information and damaging consequences it is also important to focus on its positive aspects. The grapevine is essential to every business in order to encourage staff bonding, relieve stress and tension.

From a management perspective it is an unofficial means that managers can use to send out information to employees, to gain feedback and to informally evaluate their work performance. Recommendations Based on the above conclusions, we suggest the following recommendations as possible areas for improvement. For the purpose of this report we will suggest recommendations from two different perspectives, from an employee's and a managerial point of view. Managerial: If management has purposely leaked information into the workforce, it is their responsibility to monitor the progress of this rumour and clarify any misunderstandings.

If the source of the rumours is not management and the rumour does not adversely affect the organisations goals, or any one individual, we recommend that the manager should not overly monitor the progress and only intervene when necessary. It may be necessary for management to intervene if the rumour contradicts with the company's code of ethics. This

would involve complying with the company disciplinary procedures.

Employee: We recommend that employee's should respect the company code of ethics and fellow employees. They should not fabricate untrue rumours, and should not overly embellish falsified information through the grapevine.

It is in the employee's own interest not to create an unpleasant working environment. We also recommend that they should keep in mind the legal consequences of slanderous remarks and unfounded accusations. On a positive note the grapevine is important for the social networking of the employees in the organisation to give them a sense of belonging. For this reason we recommend a healthy level of interaction and communication between employees. References Newspapers: Cottee, P. (2004) ' I heard it on the grapevine...', The Irish Times, 29 September 2004 Journals: Kleinbaum, A. M. , & Tushman, M. L. 2008) ' Managing Corporate Social Networks', Harvard Business Review, [Online], 86: 7/8, Available from: <http://0-search.ebscohost.com/millennium/it-tallaght.ie> [accessed 21 October 2008]. Websites: Bradfield, J. (2006) Grapevine is undermining internal communications, [Online], Available from: <http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/18/9073.html> [accessed 1 November 2008]. Crampton, S. (1998) The Informal Communication Network, [Online], Available from: <http://www.allbusiness.com/management/735210-1.html>. [accessed 14 October 2008]. Crawford, R. (2008) Burke Museum, [Online], Available from: <http://www.washington.edu/burkemuseum/spidermyth/myths/whileyousleep.html>, [accessed 1 November 2008]. Emery, D. (2008) Urban Legends, [Online], Available from: <https://assignbuster.com/grapevine-communication-assignment/>

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Education. Appendices Appendix A The Power of the Grapevine: Source:
Walsh, Susanne, M. , Ploss, Olesja, V. , Boughton, Catherine, J. , and Skehan,
Juanita, J. , (2008). Primary: Three Acquaintances Secondary: Four Secondary
Contacts Tertiary: Final Contacts ————— Tertiary Contact Z Tertiary
Contact X Secondary Contact 4 Tertiary Contact Y Tertiary Contact W
Tertiary Contact V Secondary Contact 3 Secondary Contact 2 Secondary
Contact 1 Primary Contact C Primary Contact B Primary Contact A “ Source”