

Workplace Grapevine: Its Impact on Work Relations and Performance*

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Abstract:

This article explores the dynamics of workplace grapevine as performed and practiced by the administrative personnel of the University of the Philippines Diliman. The findings reveal that grapevine is a powerful channel of informal communication used to perpetuate organizational values, exert power, control and influence in the workplace. Relationships either flourish or weaken which inevitably affect work relations and performance. Indeed grapevine is a natural phenomenon in organizations with far and wide ranging effects to both the workers and the workplace. To obtain valid and reliable information, a triangulation of data source and research method was done. Focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and diaries of administrative personnel from various units of the University were utilized.

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Introduction

Communication is an integral part of organizational life. It binds and holds organizations together. It is a major factor in the achievement of purpose and functions of organizations. According to Chester Barnard, it translates purpose into concrete actions (in Acuña, et al., 1999). It moves people to think and act accordingly.

In organizations, the exchange of information is continuous and collective in nature. Both management and rank and file spend a great deal of time communicating. There are deadlines to beat, tasks to be accomplished, targets to be met, issues to be resolved, etc. All these activities involve a series of communication processes by way of giving instructions, follow-ups, clarifying things and all the necessary steps to be taken to make everyone in the organization productive. When communication is successful, the desired and expected output of personnel is achieved.

People in the workplace communicate not just purely work-related matters. They communicate practically anything under the sun for various and mundane reasons. This may be due to a recent news on high-profile political figures embroiled in a case of graft and corruption, showbiz news, television programs, or simply a conversation between two colleagues bonded by common interests and problems. The flow of communication is therefore continuous as no one can stop a person from engaging in trivial talks in organizations no matter how rigid the rules are against it. As this activity is repeated every single day in the workplace, employees form a web of informal communication network in the process. As a result, informal communication becomes inevitable and part of organizational reality.

This informal communication network of employees in organizations is what constitutes and characterizes grapevine. Informal communication is a dominant activity in organizations. It is indispensable as it is part of the day to day routine of employees, either as passive or active participants. This natural tendency of humans to engage in grapevine makes it a rich source of organizational information. The comforts offered by the workplace coupled with trust and confidence among colleagues, provide employees with the chance and venue to freely express anything without worrying about being reprimanded or ostracized.

As the 'vine' slithers in the organization, all kinds of information are picked up and messages become subject to distortions from the different participants of grapevine. Like a vine, information gets

entwined in various places making it hard to locate the origin or source of the message. The message can emanate from two officemates conversing casually, overheard by a colleague who happens to pass on the information to another officemate. The process is repeated until such time that the private conversation between two unsuspecting employees blew out of proportion in the workplace with the twists and turns to the original information made by the grapevine transmitters.

The informal communication channel is not only a rich source of information or an outlet for employees to voice out their sentiments but also a means to build relationships essential to organizational effectiveness. It is a crucial element for the success of any organization. Knowing the importance of informal communication gives us a clearer and much better picture of why people behave the way they do in organizations. Otherwise, to undermine the process of communication in an organization will lead it to its failure.

Cognizant of the value of informal communication and the role it plays in organizations, this study investigated the workplace grapevine dynamics of administrative personnel of the University of the Philippines in Diliman. This is an interesting and vital subject of study considering people's inherent desire to communicate as well as the life informal communication brings to organizations.

Background and Rationale of the Study

Grapevine is the informal communication network of people in organizations. It is the major form of informal communication in workplaces. It cannot be seen but it has a life of its own. It is difficult to stop as well as pinpoint the source of information because communication runs in all directions and at all levels of the organization. Grapevine helps people make sense of what is going on and it satisfies their curiosity. According to Crampton, et al. (1998) grapevine activity is heightened when issues are perceived to be important, situations are ambiguous, personnel feel threatened, insecure, under stress, when there is pending change, and when employees feel that information is lacking.

In the grapevine, employees are more open in voicing out their opinions, more willing to speak out their thoughts, feelings, and perception of things happening in the workplace. This gives work satisfaction to employees and it affects their morale as their needs to speak and to be heard of are met.

Grapevine can be perceived as trivial, but as people interact, people are able to maintain personal relationships, which are important in a workplace setting because it contributes to the fulfillment of employees need for belonging. If employees are satisfied with their relationships in the workplace, there would be lesser opportunities for conflict and greater chances of organizational productivity. Since organizations undergo a series of changes in the course of their organizational life, grapevine will always exist and is definitely a force to reckon with.

The role played by people in organizations cannot be overemphasized. Ideas from employees contribute to an overall better workplace functioning. Respecting their ideas, suggestions and opinions in the formulation of policies and in decision-making will definitely gain support and foster active participation from employees. They put into action policies made, decisions arrived at, and deliver various and complex tasks involved in order to achieve organizational objectives. Major decision-makers therefore must be sensitive to the needs and behavior of key workers so that they can modify measures and tie it to the functions of their organization.

In the University, faculty members, research, extension and professional staff (REPS), and administrative personnel come from different regional affiliations, religious orientations, educational backgrounds, social and economic status, to name a few. The conversation that takes place in their everyday life as workers of the University is therefore just as diverse as the speakers themselves. Of the three types of workers in the UPD, the administrative personnel outnumber faculty members and REPS. According to a document prepared by the UP Diliman Human Resources Development Office, the UPD has a total workforce of 3,585, with 1,506 faculty members, 470 REPS and 1,609 administrative personnel as of April 2009.

Considering the size of the administrative personnel in the UPD, their role in the attainment of the mission and vision of the University cannot be disregarded. It is clear that they are in a unique position to either cripple or ensure the smooth day-to-day operations of the University. With this in mind, together with the informal communication that takes place every single working day in the UPD, this study looked into the impact of workplace grapevine on work relations and performance of administrative personnel of UPD.

To strengthen validity and reliability of data gathered, three focus group discussions were conducted. The participants were a mixture of administrative officers, administrative assistants, human resource

management officers, clerks, data entry machine operators, student records evaluators/officers, director, etc. who have been employed with the University for at least four years to more than forty years.

The use of diaries by administrative personnel from various units of the University was also utilized in the study. The diarists hold positions where there is high human traffic in their respective work stations. They were either secretaries or administrative officers. To make the notes authentic, full and accurate, diarists recorded all conversations confidential or not, trivial or significant that took place on an agreed period of time. However, names were changed to protect the identity of the FGD participants, the diarists, as well as the people and names of offices mentioned in the diaries.

Lastly, for a broader understanding of workplace grapevine and to give the results of the study a more solid foundation, two sets of key informant interviews were conducted. The researcher interviewed Prof. Felipe Landa Jocano, a holder of Ph.D. in Anthropology, former Dean of the Philippine Center for Advanced Studies and Prof. Jose C. Gatchalian, former Dean of the School of Labor and Industrial Relations with a Ph.D. in Communication. With their expertise, experience and education, both informants are considered highly knowledgeable on the subject at hand.

The Origin and Nature of Grapevine

One aspect of informal communication is grapevine. Johns (1992) defined grapevine as the informal communication network that exists in any organization. It is the informal vehicle through which messages flow throughout the organization (Lussier, 2005). Davis (in Heckmann and Huneryager, 1960) described grapevine as the communication system of the informal organization in business where anyone can become active participants given the proper situation and motivation. As opposed to rumor, grapevine information is most of the time correct and more a product of the situation than of the person. Heckmann and Huneryager (1960, pp. 262-263) described grapevine as something that:

..... exists in every company as a system of informal communication. This type of communication is a result of the natural desire of people to communicate with each other and arises from the social interaction of individuals. It is multidimensional in nature and is as flexible, dynamic, and varied as are the people who communicate along its paths. As a system of communication, it is limited in

direction and degree only to the extent that limits are self-imposed by members of an organization. As such, it contrasts sharply with formal communication system because it frequently ignores or trespasses upon formally delegated lines of authority and responsibility.....

The term grapevine has its roots during the Civil War days in the United States. Vinelike telegraph wires were loosely hung from tree to tree across battlefields by army intelligence. Messages that came from these lines were often garbled and confusing that resulted to inaccurate communication. Because of this, any rumor was said to have come from the grapevine (Mishra, in <http://www.analytictech.com/mb119/grapevine-article.html>).

Carey (1994) portrayed grapevine as the informal network system which has real news, rumors and gossips. According to him, it surfaces spontaneously; arises out of the situation and supplements the formal network. For Mishra, grapevine is unstructured and can easily be disrupted (in <http://www.analytictech.com/mb119/grapevine-article.html>). But it cannot be completely controlled by management because it moves through in every direction of the organization. This characteristic of grapevine was also supported by Devito (2003) who believed that grapevine does not follow any formal lines of communication. It has a life of its own and it grows as the size of the organization increases. He explained that messages can be transmitted in a number of ways through the following communication networks:

- a) *the circle. It has no leader; all members of the circle have equal authority and power to influence the group. Each member may communicate with the two members on either side;*
- b) *the all-channel or star pattern. Like a circle, all members have the same authority and power to influence the group. However, each member may communicate with any other member, thus, allowing for greatest member participation;*
- c) *the wheel. It has a clear leader who solely sends and receives information from all members. All messages must go through the leader if one wishes to interact with another member;*
- d) *the Y pattern. It is less centralized than the wheel but more centralized than the circle or the all-channel. Here, the leader is the third person from the bottom and the second person from the bottom plays a secondary leadership role since they can communicate with more people than the others. The remaining three members can communicate with only one other person; and*
- e) *the chain. This is similar to the circle but the members on the ends may communicate with only one person each. There is centrality*

and the middle position has more leadership possibilities than any of the other positions (p. 29).

Another marked characteristic of grapevine is the speed with which it functions. It reaches many people in a short time. This probably is the best feature of grapevine as formal communication is understandably much slower because it comes in the form of memos, reports, newsletters, etc. (Karathanos & Auriemmo, in http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/55174910_2.html).

Davis (in Huseman, et al., 1973) believed that grapevine cannot be stopped. It arises not because of the person but because of the situation. The insufficient amount of information available causes false rumors to arise. The case study done by Nelson (1981) yielded the same result. According to her, the major reason why people rely on grapevine is due to absence of sufficient and timely information. Davis (in Heckmann and Huneryager, 1960) further explained that people become active participants in grapevine during periods of excitement and insecurity, when their friends and associates are involved; and when there is lack of information about a situation, whenever people have a personal interest in a situation and when they have information that is more recent. Hodgetts (1987) further stated that grapevine usually carries information that deals with matters that are of current interest to the personnel. This could be an accident in the factory, introduction of new procedures, etc.

Miriam Defensor-Santiago (in Nastor, 1980) said that a major topic of conversation in organizations is office intrigues. According to her, it is the great national indoor sport second only to sex. She explained that office intrigues come about as a result of idleness which is prevalent in government employees because they are not too busy with work. She succinctly described the type of employees who spread office intrigues:

The purveyors of office intrigue are usually those employees who have had a long and satisfactory career in the service. Because of dishonesty, incompetence, or laziness they have positioned themselves into a rut from which they see no hope of salvation or advancement. Even more, they know that it is only a matter of time before they get dismissed or retired because of their inefficiency and sterility. Hence, they harbor envy and jealousy in their hearts. If they cannot succeed, no one else should. Woe to the new employee who appears honest, competent, and diligent, for they will vent their spleen on him. If he is honest, he has no 'pakikisama'; if he is competent, he is an ambitious eager beaver; and if he is diligent, he is showing up the other employees. In other words, he is rocking the boat. (p. 58)

Rosita Casipit (in Nastor, 1980) had similar observations on government employees. She said that these employees enjoy gossiping and explained that:

this type of activity is found in most government offices where envy, greed, jealousy, selfishness thrive among some government workers. Having nothing to do they dissect the life of the person they wish to destroy with their malicious talks like morticians dissecting a corpse, doing it thru the phone, thru letters or thru their own evil acts. These are women who without moving from their seats, know all the latest gossip in the camp. (p. 61)

Indeed communication is the instrument through which organizations come into reality. It joins culture, people and organizations as each component influences the others. Through the informal communication process, culture and employee characteristics are transferred or reflected in the organization. When people communicate, they normally share a common language, follow certain norms, practices or rituals and so in the process create a common understanding or meaning of things. As communication progresses in the organization, work relations and performance are definitely affected.

Impact of Grapevine on Employee Relations

Communication satisfaction is related to overall job satisfaction (Gould, 1982); informal communication is useful when obtaining, maintaining and expanding power in organizations (Theunissen, 1998); gossip builds allies and coalitions which are necessary in organizations to accomplish tasks (Evans, 2000); and it can serve as a tool for sharing culture in the organization by way of office grapevine or through formal meetings (Levin and Arluke, 1987). In the workplace, it can guide behavior as one is informed of the different personalities of colleagues. A newcomer is warned early on whom to avoid, who can be trusted, or simply who should not be given a loan (Rosnow, 1977).

The following account of Alice, an FGD participant, conveys one positive impact of grapevine because it reinforces bonding and employees become closer. It also fosters bonding between superiors and subordinates. According to her,

Depende iyon sa boss mo. Nagkakaroon kayo ng bonding kasi. Siyempre ang mga concerns mo masasabi mo sa kanya. [It all depends on your boss. You can express your concerns to him/her because you have bonded already.]

Anne Cruz Camit (1999) studied the perceived effects of casual conversation on communication climate in the Bureau of Internal Revenue Region VII. She found out that the more casual conversation occurs in the organization, the more supportive the communication climate is. According to her study, casual conversation affects the communication climate because it strengthens the formal organizational relationship or communication by means of forming deeper personal relationships. So employees are able to form trust, sincerity and relationships with other people.

Indeed informal channels of communication cannot be avoided and may even enhance task efficiency (Bormann, 1990). It is more effective than formal channels of communication (Bulaong, 1988; De Leon, 1989); because there are less chances for misunderstanding of messages as interactions between personnel and management and among members of each group are direct and immediate (De Leon, 1989).

Grapevine is also a venue to show concern to others which strengthens relationships of administrative personnel as this journal of one diarist shows.

Leo: Ano ba ito masakit na naman ang balakang ko (hawak ang balakang). [What is this, my hips are aching again (touching his hips)].

Cita: Ano ba iniinom mong gamot para diyan? [What medicine are you taking for that?]

Leo: Sambong lang, inilalaga tapos iniinom ko. Kaya lang siguro gawa na ng kabataan. Hahaha! Bumabata na kasi tayo di na makayuko. [Sambong only, I boil it and drink. Maybe this is because I am getting younger. Hahaha! It's because we are getting younger we can no longer bend down.]

Cita: Oo nga mahirap na ang bumabata ehe tumatanda, dami ng nararamdaman. Ako nga marami ng dinaanang mga operation. [Yes that's true it's really difficult when you're getting younger, I mean, older, you feel a lot of pain. Like me, I underwent a lot of operations already.]

In grapevine “pakikialam” or minding the business of others has been the rule of the game. Since administrative personnel talk about the personal lives of others, “pakikialam” is naturally carried out. Dr. Jocano explained that “pakikialam” is part of Filipino culture, otherwise, you are considered a good for nothing person. Andres and Ilada-Andres (1986) believed that to be branded as “walang paki” is the worst thing that can be said to a Filipino. They defined “walang paki” as “a person who does not share or cannot relate or get along with others.”

David Weinberger emphasized the value of small talk in relationship building. According to him, small talk is part of the ‘social grooming’ necessary to build and maintain social bonds. Through this, people are able to reveal contextual information which they wouldn’t share otherwise specially in a formal meeting. Without small talk, teams fragment and become inefficient (in <http://www.headshift.com/archives/002116.cfm>).

A group of faculty and researchers from Victoria University of Wellington identified various functions of small talk in the workplace. First, “small talk serves discourse functions within workplace communication like marking the boundaries of interactions in meetings or topics within a meeting”. Second, it serves to “soften directives to make it easier for a worker to challenge a more powerful co-worker”. Third, it “serves social functions like constructing, maintaining and reinforcing interpersonal relations” between and among workers. It helps “oil the wheels of workplace communication” and “helps to start and end conversations”. Hence, good relationships are maintained in the workplace (in www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/research/lwp/resources/short-pubs.aspx).

Filipinos engage in grapevine as a way of showing “pakikisama” and “pakikipag-kapwa”. It maintains smooth interpersonal relationships that are highly valued by Filipinos. In fact, there are several ways in which Filipinos interact. These can be through “pakikitungo”, “pakikisalamuha”, “pakikilahok”, “pakikibagay”, “pakikisama”, “pakikipagpalagayang-loob”, “pakikisangkot”, and “pakikiisa” (Enriquez and Santiago, 1989). These different ways of interacting also form part of the activity when one engages in grapevine. This means that grapevine participants go through these different ways of interaction in informal communication. In this diary entry, Tintin offers food to her boss as a sign of “pakikisama” or getting along with.

- Tintin: Ma'am andito na po ang biko pinadala ni VC Rosario. Hmm ang sarap ng amoy. Mukhang masarap yata yan ha. [Ma'am the rice cake sent by VC Rosario is already here. Hmm it smells delicious. It looks delicious.]*
- Ma'am Fe: Oo nga masarap yan. [Yes it's really delicious.]*
- Tintin: Ma'am gusto niyong tikman. (joking) [Ma'am do you want to taste?]*
- Ma'am Fe: (smiling) Sige nga di pa nga ako nag-umagahan. [Yes, please, I haven't eaten breakfast yet.]*

Grapevine also makes the atmosphere in the workplace light and happy as Ofel testifies:

Ako, yung nakikita kong advantage sa paggi-grapevine na yan, siyempre, nakakabuo rin talaga ng masayang grupo yan eh. Kagaya sa amin, masaya yung buong araw namin..... [What I see as an advantage in grapevine is that it is able to create a cheerful group. Like in our unit, we are happy the whole day.....]

Levin and Arluke (1987) considered gossip as an important source of entertainment and relaxation which are necessary to relieve the pressure as well as overcome boredom in the workplace. As officemates interact, gossips help explain why people behave the way they do in organizations. Why this employee is unhappy, can't perform well at work, etc. Gossips can help newly hired employees adjust to the environment by giving vital information on the different personalities in the workplace. With grapevine, administrative personnel of the University are able to rally friends to side with them whenever conflict or misunderstanding arises. It is a means for getting support, as Ofel explained:

Oo. At saka makakakuha ka ng kakampi. Oh lalo na yan tinitira ka ganyan, at least masasabi mo sa iba "Bakit ganon? Bakit ganon?" at malalaman din nung tao kung ano yung mali nya. [Yes. Also you can get someone to side with you. Especially when you are being targeted, at least you can tell others, "Why is it like that?" and the person will realize what his/her mistakes are.]

Gossip functions to inform, to influence, to entertain (Rosnow and Georgoudi, 1985); it has a social purpose because it satisfies a person's preconditioned needs, wishes, and expectations (Rosnow, 1977); it can guide a person on how best to live his/her life and it meets the need of other-directed people to be socially acceptable (Levin and Arluke, 1987);

it is a way to be updated on what's happening around because of the many things one picks from the grapevine (Lugue in Nastor, 1980).

In the case of UPD administrative personnel, they are able to know the real attitude and character of a colleague from the bits and pieces of information picked from the grapevine. It is a means of knowing a person better as this story of Ofel proves:

Bago ako sa office non, one week pa lang. Siguro mga pangatlong araw tumawag na sakin yung AO ko, yung AO ko don sa una kong opisina, "Merong feedback dito sa amin na ganyan ka raw diyan." Sabi ko, "Po? Paano po nangyari yun?" "Eh kasi telebabad ka raw ganyan ganyan." "Paano po nangyari yun eh...?" "Text ka raw ng text." "Eh kaaalis ko lang diyan eh. Sino po yung tumatawag?" Tapos sabi, yung isa ko raw kaopisina tumatawag doon. Tapos sabi ko ganyan ba talaga yung officemate nyo, tatlong araw pa lang ako dito ah. Syempre alam kong hindi totoo yun kaya umiyak ako. Tapos sabi nung isa kong officemate, huwag ka ng umiyak ganyan talaga yan, nung bago rin ako dito ginanyan din ako niyan. Tumawag din sya doon sa dati kong opisina. [I was still new, just a week in the office that time. I think it was on the third day my AO in my former office called me, "There is feedback here saying that you are like this in your office." I said, "What? How did it happen?" "They said you are always on the phone, like this and that." "How did it happen...?" "You are always texting." "I just left the office there. Who called?" Then I was told that one of my officemates was calling there. Then I said is that really the character of your officemate, I've been here for three days only. Of course I know that it wasn't true so I cried. Then one of my officemates told me not to cry because he/she is really like that. She said that, "I was also treated that way when I was new here. He/She also called my former office."]

Tapos sabi pa nung officemate ko, "Actually dalawa kaming bago non ginanon niya kami pareho, hindi nakayanan nung isa kaya nagresign. Ako umiyak nga ako pero hindi ko pinakita sa kanya. Kaya wag mo ipakita sa kanya na umiiyak ka dahil matutuwa yang mga yan, gawain talaga nila yan." Naisip ko loko pala talaga yun eh, ginagawa niya pala talaga yun sa lahat ng bago. Kaya simula non, dalawang taon na ko, hindi ko siya friend. [Then my officemate added that, "Actually there were two of us who were new that time who was treated similarly. The other one was not able to take it so he/she resigned. I cried but I did not show it to him/her. So do not let him/her them see that you are crying because he/she will really be happy." I thought he/she is really wicked, so he/she does that to all new employees. So since then, I've been in that office for two years already, he/she is not my friend until now.]

The destructive nature of gossip was described by advice columnist Ann Landers who said that gossip is, “the faceless demon that breaks hearts and ruins careers” (in Levin and Arluke, 1987, p. 4). In a poem, Landers continued to describe gossip as something that “maim without killing”, with “helpless victims” who cannot be protected because gossip “has no name and no face”. Similar to grapevine, it can also be a venue to attack someone in the workplace leaving the victim defenseless.

Hence, the ugly face of grapevine inevitably surfaces in work settings. While grapevine can relieve stress, it can also be a source of stress as relationships are strained. This discussion in one of the FGD sessions showcases how grapevine can lead to stress.

Linda: Oo. Meron kasi minsan noh? Sa office siya, affected na affected siya kaya ayon, naghighblood siya. [Yes, there are cases sometimes. In the office, she was so affected so her blood pressure went up.]

Raizel Ako ganoon. [I was like that.]

Ara: Oo di ba naghighblood ka kaya sinugod ka pa sa Infirmary. [Yes, you had high blood pressure so you were brought to the Infirmary.]

Eve: Kasi affected na affected siya eh. [Because you were so affected.]

Raizel: Baka magcollapse ka kasi sobra eh. [You might collapse because it was too much.]

Rowan (1979) stated that grapevine can also provide management with employee feedback on almost everything. On the side of employees, it is a good source of entertainment and it affords employees to translate company orders in their own language, disseminate information on job performance and employment opportunities. Hence, it makes employees get closer to each other. It also supplements the void filled by lack of openness, candor, and visibility of top management (Goldhaber, 1990); it supplements the formal organization in getting things done and provides managers with feedback (Hodgetts, 1987); it gives employees a sense of belonging and helps satisfy a natural desire to know what is really going on (Mishra, in <http://www.analytictech.com/mb119/grapevine-article.html>).

Stirling (1956) identified both positive and negative functions of gossip. According to her, gossips provide information, serve as a form of recreation, make groups cohesive, and reflect public opinion among others. However, gossips can also be destructive as they can cause conflict

in groups; and also because it is based on one's interest (Firth, 1956). Luge (in Nastor, 1980) posited that gossip or rumor is a way to advance one's social status; it is the ugly side of news; and persons who engage in it destroy the reputation of others for their advantage. Dr. Gatchalian recalled how grapevine can cause conflict in the workplace. He narrated that:

.....I remember, may cold war yung dalawang secretary. Talagang hindi nag-uusap. And that had been going on for years. Talagang matindi ang tampuhan nila..... [.....I remember there was cold war between the two secretaries. They really did not talk to each other. That had been going on for years. Their conflict was really intense.....]

In addition, grapevine can disrupt the once smooth work relations in the workplace as the following account shows:

Alice: Kasi dati kami, dun sa sinasabi ko, ok yung relationship namin eh tapos lately nag-isnaban na kami, kanya-kanya na kami. Dati kasi nung nandoon kami, noong tatlo kami, "Ay, akin na, ako na magrereceive kasi busy siya". Ngayon nung nangyari nga yung akala niya siya pinag-uusapan kapag may dumating na, "Ay hindi, nandon siya puntahan mo". [Before our relationship was okay, but lately we no longer talk to each other. When the three of us were still okay, when somebody comes over to the office, we would receive the document on her behalf, if she is busy. But when she began to entertain the thought that we were talking about her, when somebody comes over to the office, we no longer do it for her.]

Based on her study of the employees in the Occupational Safety and Health Center, Recto (1996) concluded that negative rumor outweigh positive ones. It affects an individual, his/her working relations with others, and is one of the many factors for the decrease in efficiency and productivity of the entire organization.

Again, Alice, an FGD participant, illustrates how the smooth flow of work can be disrupted by bad work relations in the office.

Alice: Oo. Kasi minsan kapag may dumarating na para sa kanya, kami na nagrereceive. Pero kapag sa amin na ayaw niyang ireceive. O kaya kapag nireceive naman niya ang sasabihin, "Ay, ewan ko sa kanila, sila ang nasa harapan". Tapos kapag hinanap mo na yung file, nakita mo na, makikita mo na lang, na siya pala yung nagreceive. [Yes. Because sometimes when someone comes over to her, we are the ones who receive the document. But if it is for us, she doesn't want to receive it. Or if she is the one who receives, she would say, "I don't know about them, they are the ones in front". When you look for the file, you will just find out that she was the one who received it.]

Administrative personnel become aloof or distant with one another as friendships are damaged. The discussion in this FGD session shows that communication lines had been burned of what was once a close friendship.

Rhoslyn: Minsan nakakasira ng career at friendship. Pwedeng minsan may away. Tapos napapalayo yung pinakaconcerned doon sa kaopisina at pwedeng magkaaway dahil sa tsismis. [Sometimes it destroys career and friendship. Sometimes there is conflict. Then the person most concerned distances him/herself to officemates and they can quarrel because of rumor.]

Alice: Kumbaga dati na wala naman kayong away dito, dahil lang sa tsismis nagkaroon kayo ng conflict. [In other words, before there was no quarrel, because of rumor conflict arose.]

Fanny: O kaya nagkailangan kayo. [Or you will be aloof with each other.]

Administrative personnel would find ways to avoid communicating to the person he/she is mad at. In this account of Raizel, an FGD participant, it is clear that good relationships are a big part in accomplishing tasks, even simple tasks. She explained that:

Malalaman mo na magkaaway kasi halimbawa pag kasagot ng telepono, halimbawa sa iyo tinawag, "Hoy ano, sagutin mo yung tawag". Yun ay pag walang kasama, pero pag may kasama sila, halimbawa ibibigay lang, "Oy ano, Richard tawagin mo nga si ano". Samantalang magkasunod lang naman sila. Mga ganon. Kahit sa trabaho minsan nagkakaroon pa ng mga problema kasi parang hindi niya maibigay yung voucher dun sa iba. Di ba? Pinapadaan pa sa iba. [You will know if they are not in good terms because when someone calls over the phone, the person will either just give the

phone to the concerned person or he/she will ask someone to call that person even if they are just seated beside each other. Even at work sometimes problems arise because the person does not want to give the voucher to the other. Right? It will be coursed through other people.]

The once good relationship between the boss and the subordinate can also be negatively affected because of grapevine. Here, Bella recounts from her experience how it happened to her and how work relations had been destroyed as well:

Binigyan niya ako ng ano. Sabagay, hindi naman concerning sa trabaho ko. Nung wala siya, nag-asign siya ng mga tao para noon sa December sa aming party. Naitoka niya sa akin yung pagbunot ng mga raffle-raffle. So wala siya, meron siyang inasign, so gumawa kami ng rule ganyan. Wala namang sinabi na hindi kasama ang students so since December is para sa lahat, we included the students, faculty, reps and admin. E di bago ko pina-aapprove, draft draft ako dun sa inasign niya. Eh nung last minute, nagtanong ako, "Sir, ok na ba ito?" "Ok na." Then dumating na siya nung araw na iyon. And may nakapagsumbong sa kanya na isang admin daw na, "Sir, bakit ganoon sinama ang students?" Eh hindi namin alam na hindi kasali ang students sa party. Tapos kung ano-ano na sinabi. Sabi namin, "Sir, hindi naman namin sinama iyong students don sa raffle. Pero kapag inano ninyo, mapapahiya naman kami sa students at faculty." Tapos yun na, hanggang ngayon, hindi na ako tumatanggap ng hindi ko trabaho. Basta iyong trabaho ko wala siyang maipipintas sa akin. Basta gagawin ko lang trabaho ko. [He gave me an assignment that does not concern my work anyway. When he left, he assigned people for the December party. I was assigned on the raffle. Since he was out, he gave assignments, so we made rules. It was not communicated to us that students are not included so since it was December, it is for everyone, we included the students, faculty, reps and admin. Before I had it approved I made drafts to the person he assigned. In the last minute, I asked, "Sir, is this okay already?" "It's okay already." Then he arrived on that day. Someone told him from admin who said that, "Sir why are the students included?" We did not know that the students are not included in the party. Then he said many things. We said, "Sir the students are not included in the raffle. But if you insist, we would be put to shame in the face of students and faculty." And that's it, until now, I no longer accept work that is not included in my official duties and responsibilities. For as long as I do my work, he cannot say something bad about me. I will just do my work.]

Dr. Gatchalian explained that what makes grapevine more active is when work relations are not good. The information that flows are those that are negative in nature against someone. However, if the work relations are all right, people in the workplace are open and they are comfortable with each other, even when there are big things that are happening in the workplace people will just keep quite about it.

As a consequence, grapevine can cause administrative personnel to lose self-confidence which in turn resulted to poor work relations as the following discussion shows.

Linda: Kasi nawala ang tiwala niya sa sarili because of grapevine. [He/She lost self-confidence because of grapevine.]

Sarah: Yeah yeah.

Linda: Naging rebelde, lahat inaaway, talagang mahirap. Kasi talaga nanggaling siya sa ibang opisina. [The person became rebellious, everyone became an enemy, it's difficult, because he/she comes from another office.]

Administrative personnel of UPD engage in grapevine for a number of reasons. The accounts above are classic examples how grapevine can positively and negatively affect work relations.

Impact of Grapevine on Work Performance

Bavelas and Barrett (1960) explained that an organization is an elaborate system for gathering, evaluating, recombining and disseminating information. Its effectiveness closely rests on the quality and availability of the information in the system and how effective it handles information.

As administrative personnel go through the daily grind of office work, engaging in grapevine relieves them of the monotony work brings. It also facilitates work in the office as tasks are accomplished faster and easier. Ofel explained that:

Isa pa, may mga pagkakataon na hindi mo na kailangan pang sumulat ng pormal kapag halimbawa may hinaing ka tungkol sa ginawa ng isang faculty. Naivo-voice out mo ang mga problema mo halimbawa, ang isang faculty na 'yan masama ang ugali. So ang nangyayari, bumabait naman iyong faculty na pasaway. So feedback siya. Nakakafacilitate din siya. Halimbawa, may reklamo ang estudyante at alam naming may problema iyong faculty

concerned, kami na ang nag-iexplain sa mga estudyante na hindi na kailangan pang umakyat sa taas. [Another thing, there are times when you no longer need to write a formal letter like for example you have complaints on what the faculty did. You are able to voice out your problems for example, that faculty has a bad attitude. So what happens, that faculty becomes kind. So it's a feedback. It also facilitates. For example, there is a complaint from a student and we know that the faculty concerned has a problem, we already explain to the students so it doesn't have to be brought up to the superiors.]

Grapevine can be a source of work motivation. Information from this source motivates and inspires administrative personnel to work harder as this story from a diary entry shows:

Nagpapa-sign si Mang Noy ng dividend form ng Credit Union. May nagsabi daw kasi sa kanya na magbibigay ang Credit Union ng dividend. Masaya ang staff pag may dividend kasi pandagdag din sa gastusin ang makukuhang dividend. [Mang Noy had the dividend form for Credit Union signed. Someone allegedly told him that Credit Union will release the dividend. The staff are happy whenever their dividend is given because it can add to their budget.]

Grapevine as a source of information is useful in making decisions. Dr. Gatchalian mentioned that superiors can harness grapevine as a venue for trial balloon particularly when coming out with new policies that entail far-reaching changes. Ara explains that:

Pero kasi minsan yung, napakanormal talaga nung grapevine, at the same time yung tsismis, makakatulong yan sa iyo to decide eh. Kasi malalaman mo yung konsepto ng nakararami kung halimbawa lalo na sa pagdedesiyon sa isang bagay sa isang opisina. Makikita mo yung consensus ng lahat kung how they see things eh, so bago mo iimplement ang isang bagay, masasala mo siya or at the same time, malilead ka niya how to decide dahil nakuha mo yung pangkalahatang konsepto nila. So at the same time, yung grapevine, nakakatulong to decide sa part ng management kasi nakakafilter ka ng information e. [Grapevine is really normal. At the same time, rumors help you to decide. Because for example you will know the idea of others regarding decisions on matters in the office. You will see the consensus of everyone, how they see things, so before implementing anything, you can filter or at the same time you can be guided on how to decide because you got their overall idea. So at the same time, grapevine can help on the part of management to decide because you can filter information.]

Effective communication is indeed essential for efficient problem solving and to make work efficient. According to Wickesberg (1973), when there is trust and openness, the right facts, attitudes and feelings help accomplish the tasks at hand. He further explained that there is a wide range of individual contacts in organizations. As such, as people interact, informal relationships are formed that contribute to task accomplishment.

Kraut, et al. (1990) investigated informal communication in different research & development organizations. They argue that:

informal communication, generally mediated by physical proximity, is crucial for coordination to occur. Informal communication is frequent in R & D organizations, it aids organizational members in learning about each other and their work, it supports both production work and the social relations that underlie it, and it provides a critical facility that collaborators rely on to start joint work, maintain it, and drive it to conclusion. Without informal communication, many collaborations would undoubtedly not occur and others would break up before becoming successful (in <http://.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/user/kraut/www/RKraut.site.files/articles/kraut90- InformalCommInOrgs.pdf>).

Grapevine also allows people to behave according to the situation as it serves as a warning to employees. According to Linda during the FGD:

..... Kapag merong may assignment kunwari doon sa opisina. Pinag-uusapan pa lang ng director, wala pang finality yung decision. Paglabas na paglabas pa lang ng mga directors, malalaman na agad ng concerned person na siya pala. So magkakaroon agad siya ng move sa sarili nya na 'may gagawin akong sulat' kahit wala pa sa kanya yung memorandum. [.....When there is assignment like in the office. It is still being discussed by the directors, there is no finality yet to the decision. As soon as the directors come out, the concerned person will get the information that it's all about him/her. So he/she will make a move already like preparing a letter even if the memorandum is not yet with him/her.]

Sarah, another FGD participant, agrees that grapevine information serves as a warning and gives employees an idea on what will happen. Grapevine in other words lessens the fear of most people which is the fear of the unknown, particularly the future.

- Sarah: Well I think yung informal na ano na communication, I think it gives you leeway, it gives you some advance information on what's happening. So medyo may ano ka na, ano, hint ka na kung anong mangyayari. Parang you're thinking of a way na para don. [Well I think informal communication gives you leeway, it gives you some advance information on what's happening. So somehow you already have a hint on what will happen. So you're thinking of a way for that.]*
- Facilitator: Ahh.... parang may warning ka na? [Like you are already warned?]*
- Sarah: Oo. Ganoon. And true or not, you do something about it. You act about it. [Yes. That's it.]*

Grapevine can serve as a check and balance on employee's behavior, attitude and performance.

- Deyik: Ang mga usap-usapan kasi wala kang magagawa diyan. Siguro dapat tingnan natin, kung may sinasabi ang kapwa mo na hindi maganda, tanungin mo rin sarili mo kung bakit kaya. Kasi ang grapevine naman kasi pwedeng ano yan e, corrective, preventive ganun. [You cannot do something about grapevine. Maybe, what should be looked into, if someone says bad things about you that is not good, you should also ask yourself why. Because grapevine can be corrective, preventive like that.]*

Nuevo (in Nastor, 1980) found out that the reasons why people engage in gossiping or rumor mongering is because it helps people find out if they are being talked about, the veracity of a certain rumor, what others are doing, and what is acceptable or not by society. Since gossips let us know the life of others, people who engage in it try to compare themselves with the subject of conversation in one way or the other. When they feel that they are better off than the subject, their feelings of respectability and self-worth are enhanced (Levin and Arluke, 1987). In a similar fashion, Suls (1977) viewed gossip as ready and available information needed when comparing one's self with another. Taking the cue from Festinger's Theory of Social Comparison, he explained that humans have a tendency to compare themselves with others. So that information picked from gossips is very useful in evaluating one's self against another "in an indirect and painless fashion".

The type of information received from grapevine can also be a cause for loss of work motivation. This story shared by Ofel proves how information from the grapevine can cause employees to lose motivation

to work harder. She narrated that employees would not put in extra effort to their work in terms of time rendered.

Ang nakikita kong sa official, halimbawa sa benefits, kapag sinabi na may darating tapos wala pa sa ATM makikita mo sa tao nadisappoint. Meron akong kakilala na 5:01, "Uwi na nga ako nagpapakahirap ako dito eh tapos hindi naman nagbibigay. Nakakatamad." [What I see for example in the benefits, when someone says that there is an expected monetary incentive but then it is not yet in the ATM you'll see that the person is disappointed. I know of someone who left office when it was 5:01, "I will just go home, I work hard here but then they do not give. I feel lazy."]

This diary entry supports the observation previously made by Ofel.

Pagkatapos ng umpukan ay balik kwarto uli ako sagot ng phone at trabaho uli. Di nagtagal ay pumasok si Niyoy, nagtatanong kung may bonus na sa ATM. Niyaya niya si RJ at nag-check sila sa LandBank. Bumalik silang bigo at lulugo-lugo. Wala pa daw bonus sa ATM. [After the group gathered together I went to my room to answer phone calls and work. Soon after, Niyoy went inside asking if the bonus is already in the ATM. He invited RJ to check at Landbank. They came back depressed and disappointed. The bonus was not yet in the ATM.]

One indicator of loss of motivation in workers is absenteeism. Information coming from the grapevine can lead to absenteeism. This means that not only is the immediate unit affected by a worker's frequent absences but the overall productivity of workers in the University is likewise reduced. In a day's work, there are outputs expected of an employee. If this is multiplied with the number of administrative personnel who are absent, there is definitely a huge amount of work left undone. Ara explained:

So example yung pinag-uusapan, mamaya makikita mo, mahihiya na yan. Ayaw ng pumasok. Mamaya hindi na makapagperform. Kaya minsan dapat kailangan ng alagaan at kausapin. Kung hindi, sa case na yan, hindi na yan makaka-perform. Tsaka minsan umiiyak, so parang kami, madadala ka sa kwento. Parang maki- carried away kami, maaawa kami. [So for example, you saw the person being talked about, that person will be ashamed already. He/she does not want to go to office. Later on he/she can no longer perform. So sometimes this person should be taken cared of and talked with. Otherwise in

that case, he/she can no longer perform. Also sometimes he/she cries, so we get carried away with the story, we sympathize.]

The following statement of Ofel reflects her “face-saving” value as a defense mechanism against nasty talks in the office.

Ang nakikita ko naman sa personal depende naman sa tsismis. Kasi kung malala naman yung tsismis na ginawa sa iyo ng mga officemates mo ay siguro mas maganda kung di ka na pumasok. Pwedeng mahiya ka na, galit ka na, or palaaway ka na. Tapos masama na tingin mo sa mga officemates mo. Yun ang pwede. [What I see on the personal level depends on the rumor. Because if the rumor about you by your officemates is very damaging, maybe it's better for you to be absent. You can be ashamed, angry, or you become troublesome. Then you despise your officemates already.]

Dr. Gatchalian explained that people become affected psychologically with grapevine when the topic is about him/herself. This story is a classic example. It shows that an employee knowing that he/she was a constant subject in grapevine caused his/her resignation.

Facilitator: May nangyari na ba sa inyo na dahil alam niyang siya ang laging pinag-uusapan, naging pala-absent siya o nagresign? [Has it ever happened to you where an employee became habitually absent or resigned because he/she knows that he/she is always the topic in grapevine?]

Weng: Meron sa aming ganun, nung umpisa, nag-absent absent, hanggang sa nagresign na nga siya. [It happened in our office. At first, the employee was just absent for days until he/she finally resigned.]

Grapevine can also be a venue to put pressure to University Administration particularly when issues important to employee welfare arise, as Mel explained.

.....Ang isang disadvantage naman nun, kapag nagkakat ng mga bali-balita, halimbawa, sasabihin na, “Uy, may ibibigay daw si GMA”, kahit wala naman, it puts so much pressure to administration. So hindi rin maganda. [One disadvantage is that when someone spreads an information, for example, “Hey, GMA will give something”, even if there is none, it puts so much pressure to administration. So it's not good.]

Kimmel (2004) explained that organizational rumors occur because they satisfy various needs and functions. These include: a) to know; b) to convince; c) to boast; d) to get even; e) to feel relief; f) to entertain; g) to receive job performance feedback; and h) to learn about employment opportunities. Crampton, et al., (1998) also summarized the common factors that influence grapevine activity. People resort to grapevine depending on: a) the intensity and importance of the information to the employees; b) the degree of ambiguity and lack of clarity of the communication to employees; c) when there is presence of threat or insecurity in the organizational environment; and d) when there is lack of trust among employees toward formal communications. Whatever impacts grapevine has to administrative employees and to the University, it is essential that this be harnessed so that it can be used as an instrument to yield more positive outcome to both the employees and the University.

Summary and Conclusion

The effects of grapevine are both beneficial and destructive to administrative personnel and to the University as a whole. It can facilitate work but it can also disrupt the smooth flow of work in the University. It can foster closer work relations but at the same time grapevine can also tear them down. It can inspire administrative staff in their workplace as the atmosphere becomes light and happy but then again it can cause an employee to be absent or worst to resign from work. It is also an outlet for personnel to vent problems personal or otherwise but it can also be used for character assassination and betrayal. Suggestions, advices and other expressions of concerns can be picked from grapevine but it can also be a venue to advance one's interests. Of course grapevine can relieve stress as one is able to express inner feelings with officemates. However, it can also be a source of stress, specifically if one becomes the subject of nasty rumors.

The above findings also reveal that grapevine is a very powerful agent of control, domination and influence in the workplace. Grapevine is a formidable channel of communication for exerting influence on ideas, behavior and values in the University. It can be used by administrative personnel to wield control and influence over decisions made not only by colleagues but on a larger scale by the University Administration. As such, grapevine in effect can command compliance to all organizational

members and at the same time can be used as a form of resistance. In short, power play is manifested in workplace grapevine.

Grapevine influences many things in the organization. These influences pervade the various aspects of work-life of organizational members since the exchange of information in grapevine is fast, spontaneous and continuous. As part of the day to day affairs of administrative employees, grapevine has the power to control their organizational lives. Decisions made by the UPD Administration can very well in large part be influenced by information coming from the grapevine. In terms of function, it is a potent force in commanding compliance and in exhibiting resistance to change. Grapevine therefore gives life to the power play or politics in the University.

Recommendations

Grapevine is intrinsic in organizations. It is part of the socialization process of the workers. It both has positive and negative consequences and far and wide implications. Given the inherent features of grapevine, administrative personnel and the whole University would however benefit from it if grapevine can be harnessed to create, maintain and perpetuate positive values in the workplace.

The University should build and maintain a culture where communication is open. One way to do this is to implement in units what Peterson and McCabe (1994, in French, 1998) call the 'open door policy' where staff have direct access to their immediate superior so that problems and issues can be ironed out. Another is to have regular meetings where everyone is welcome to join so that problems no matter how small can be resolved immediately. Here, it is imperative that the human resource department play an active role in establishing this culture of communication efficiency and decency in the University.

When introducing change, grapevine can be a barometer for knowing what the sentiments of the employees are on the expected change. Superiors can float the idea to the employees because definitely comments, suggestions and recommendations would surely come about in grapevine. These remarks of employees can be taken into consideration by a superior before finally implementing the change. This way, superiors can expect more cooperation from employees and ultimately a better, productive workplace in the University.

Life in organizations is not easy. There are a lot of issues to deal with, problems to face, and challenges to overcome. For workers, grapevine makes life easier but it definitely can make one's life miserable. On the part of the University administration, one sure way to combat the negative effects of grapevine is to give timely and accurate information. People in organizations try to make sense of their environment. In the absence of timely and accurate information, different information come about as they try to interpret things happening in the workplace.

Also, it is worth mentioning, that University officials should at all times exercise more caution particularly when discussing sensitive matters. To both employees and University officials, it is always prudent to be discerning on any information received.

As a whole, there is really no single approach and strategy that can fully combat the destructive effects of grapevine in organizations. Instead of crushing it, the University should utilize its power for a better, harmonious, efficient and productive work environment.

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