

Exploring Leadership Engagement with Informal Communication Networks: A Study on the Organizational Grapevine

Neera Jain¹

¹Professor – Business Communication, Management Development Institute Gurgaon.

Email ID: njain@mdi.ac.in

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0507-6296>

Cite this paper as: Neera Jain, (2025) Exploring Leadership Engagement with Informal Communication Networks: A Study on the Organizational Grapevine. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 2 (3), 632-641.

<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p><i>Grapevine, Informal communication, Leadership, Organizational communication, Employee sentiment</i></p>	<p>ABSTRACT</p> <p>The purpose of this study is to explore the perception of leaders in organizations about grapevine communication and how they leverage it to enhance outcomes. Though the grapevine is considered at times to be unreliable or informal, it plays a key role in organizational dynamics. Through semi-structured interviews with 17 leaders from 5 sectors, this study identifies key themes for the functional and strategic use of informal communication networks within organizations. Findings show that leaders may leverage the grapevine as an intelligence tool to understand employee sentiment, capture early warning indicators, and collate direct feedback that may not arise through formal channels. Additionally, the study examines how leaders seed information through this informal network to reinforce organizational culture, assess employees' reactions to forthcoming changes, and influence narratives. The study also uncovers challenges emerging from digital communication. The leaders emphasize the importance of transparency to build trust while leveraging the grapevine. This paper contributes to a better understanding of the grapevine and suggests that leaders should engage actively with this informal communication network for organizational outcome. This study provides practical ways leaders may navigate complex modern communication and proposes future research areas in informal communication in today's digital age.</p>
--	---

1. INTRODUCTION

In organizations, informal communication (IC) facilitates information sharing, performance, and well-being (Watanabe et al., 2024). Informal communications are interactions between two or more individuals within an organization, wherein they interact in their capacity as friends or acquaintances, or help employees become familiar with each other (Koch and Denner, 2022). Literature shows that it plays a variety of roles such as communicating acceptable and unacceptable workplace behaviour and nurturing relationships among others (Fay and Kline, 2011; Holmes and Marra, 2004). By sharing the way thinking and working are done in the organization, employees help disperse information about the organizational culture (Fay, 2011). Such communications also disperse information beyond roles and structure in the organization and this increased information sharing enhances job satisfaction (Koch and Denner, 2022). Thus, IC contributes to the well-being of the employees (Viererbl et al., 2022). Employees with high levels of well-being help create a work environment that focuses on the happiness of the employees (Denner et al., 2025).

IC becomes difficult to study as these interactions occur in hallways, coffee breaks, and virtual spaces (Viererbl et al., 2022). From a functional point of view (Step and Finucane, 2002) the functions of IC are becoming increasingly relevant in research



(Matias and Cardoso, 2022). Even though it forms the majority of internal communication in an organization, IC has received limited scholarly attention (Hoffjann, 2024). Kraut et al. (1990) found coordination, problem-solving, social bonding, relationships, and information as the functions of IC. Rosnow (2001) posited influence, information, and entertainment as the functions of IC, whereas Fay (2011) stated that receiving and giving support were the main functions of IC. Beersma and van Kleef (2012) identified influencing negatively, informing, and maintaining groups norms as the main functions of IC. Lee and Barnes (2021) stated that employees use IC to form friendships. Koch and Denner (2022) postulated that coordination, integration, distraction, and anger venting were the major functions of IC.

Denner et al. (2025), identified 8 function types of IC. These are, 1) Information sharing - providing employees with information about personal updates, office gossip, social events in the near future, and details about other employees (Burke and Wise, 2003). Social networks such as WhatsApp facilitate such information sharing (Viererbl, 2022); 2) Coordination – understanding organizational goals, cooperation, delegation, and control (Jakubiec, 2019); 3) Entertainment and Distraction - especially when these communications include humour or gossip (Holmes and Marra, 2004). Such IC provides relief from stress and contributes to the well-being of the employee (Koch and Denner, 2022); 4) Emotional release – IC helps employees ‘blow off steam’ by vocalizing their frustrations and disappointments related to their boss, job, or co-workers (Fay, 2011), thereby contributing to inner balance (Foster, 2004); 5) Influencing organizational culture - IC enables collective formation of values and norms in an organization (Koch and Denner, 2022). New employees get information through IC about the appropriate behaviour (Burke and Wise, 2003); 6) Identification – IC facilitates the development of a sense of belonging and connection with their team and the organization. Such organizational identification is critical for remote workers who work in isolation (Fay, 2011); 7) Sense of belonging - It is normal for humans to seek social interaction and support. This creates a sense of belonging and leads to enhanced performance on the job (Zhao and Rosson, 2009); 8) Build professional relationships – IC enables employees to get insights about their co-workers in terms of their skills, personalities, and working styles (Zhao and Rosson, 2009). This enables collaborative efforts and knowledge sharing and leads to increased innovativeness and effectiveness (Chen and Krauskopf, 2013).

If an organization is viewed as a body, IC is the blood that courses through the various parts affecting the opinions, decisions, engagement, and effectiveness of the organization. Formal communication, such as emails, minutes of meetings, and newsletters transmit structured updates and information. The grapevine comprises spontaneous exchanges among employees which include emotional expressions and conjectures. The grapevine transcends hierarchies, functions, and locations and plays an important role in shaping perceptions, influencing morale, and spreading information. Failure to harness the grapevine may at times lead to distrust, confusion, and disengagement among employees. Therefore, how leadership interacts with this IC is both relevant as well as strategic.

The grapevine has been studied in literature mostly through the lens of organizational dysfunction. Multiple studies have associated it with gossip and rumours (Dores et al., 2021; Himmetoglu et al., 2019; Foster, 2004). However, how leaders leverage the functionality of the grapevine as an IC, remains inadequately explored but is an emerging and significant area of scholarship (Siddiqui et al, 2025). As the literature on this theme remains scant, it is this research gap that this study seeks to fill.

This study aims to explore how leaders in organizations use grapevine and seeks to unwrap the strategies and practices by which leaders leverage ICs for organizational benefit. By adopting a qualitative methodology, this research strives to capture the context-based ways in which leaders leverage the grapevine. This study uses the qualitative method, as such inquiry permits exploration of meaning-making and subjective experiences of leaders in the IC domain. This study aims to identify the holistic models of communication that integrate the formal structure as well as the informal web of influence to impact organizational outcomes.

In today’s uncertain times of rapid change, remote work, complex stakeholder expectations, and high volatility, the ability to manage informal communications is vital. Understanding how leaders respond and interact with this resource can contribute to organizational agility and employee well-being. The primary research question that guide this study is “How leaders in organizations leverage the grapevine?” Through semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, this study seeks to address this question and contribute to a richer understanding of the interplay between leadership and IC.

The following section reviews relevant literature on informal communication. This is followed by explanation of the methodology, data collection, and analysis. The section on findings presents key themes that emerge from the data, supported by illustrative quotes and interpretations. The discussion section explains the implications of the findings. Towards the end, the main contributions are summarized along with suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The grapevine is the unofficial information network in every organization (Mishra, 1990). Grapevine has been associated with certain advantages such as coping with stress (Crampton et al., 1998), improved understanding of issues which were not clear in formal discussions (Noon and Delbridge, 1993), propagate information for achieving tasks (Conrad and Poole, 1997), and developing interpersonal relationships (Duck, 1993). Habel et al. (2010) propagated the high potential for word- of-mouth publicity in virtual communities.

Rise of the Grapevine

Quite often, managers have a tendency to reveal only part of the long-term strategy to their teams to ensure their focus on short-term goals. Due to this incomplete information, a lack of trust is created in the minds of the employees (Reina and Reine, 2009). For additional information, they look towards the grapevine. Online grapevine is addictive and habituates employees to depend on it, in the absence of managerial control (Lieberman et al., 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand how leaders handle the grapevine in their workplace and how they engage with the flow of online grapevine. Other subtly different forms of IC are whisper network, gossip, and rumour. This study only gives a brief description of these below.

Whisper Network

To support each other from hazardous colleagues, people create whisper networks. Whisper is a metaphor for information shared about others who hold power, without their knowledge. In a whisper network, there is an implied expectation that the recipient of the information will keep the information to themselves and will share only with those whom they trust. Such networks are used to share information about known risks of sexual harassment (Johnson, 2023).

Gossip

Gossip is defined as “the exchange of personal information, whether negative or positive, in an evaluative way about absent third parties” (Foster, 2004, p. 83). 90% of the employees indulge in workplace gossip (Grosser et al., 2012). Literature suggests that gossiping about a person can have negative outcomes for the sender of such gossip, such as decreased self-esteem (Cole and Scrivener, 2013) and poor performance (Tian et al., 2019). Gossip may detract from or interfere with work (Lee and Barnes, 2021). Gossip has been shown to have negative linkages with perceptions of organizational justice and fairness (Naeem et al., 2020). Since the provided definition of gossip allows for the spread of positive as well as negative information, it may not exclusively have harmful intent or generate counter-productive effects.

Rumour

Rumour has often been treated as synonymous with gossip (Brady et al., 2017). However, in the work context, a key distinction is that rumours refer to an event or a claim that may or may not include people, whereas gossip is mostly about people (Dores Cruz et al., 2021).

Unlike workplace gossip, which occurs in small groups or between two persons, the grapevine denotes the spread of information across the organization (Grosser et al., 2012). The key characteristics of grapevine communication include informality, speed of dissemination, unpredictability of path and reach, and emotional influence on employees' perception and reaction. The benefits of the grapevine include rapid dissemination of information, especially where formal channels are slow; serves as an informal feedback loop, giving awareness about formally unvoiced concerns; and fostering relationships and enhancing morale. However, a lack of formal oversight can lead to the spread of rumours and misinformation, which may influence employee sentiments and create conflicts.

Social Exchange Theory

The interplay between grapevine and workplace relationships can be understood through the lens of social exchange theory (SET), as outlined by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005). This theory helps explain how interpersonal interactions, involving exchanges ranging from tangible elements to emotional ones such as support and friendship, shape relationships between colleagues (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008). These exchanges occur in both positive and negative forms: positive exchanges involve mutual benefits between participants, while negative exchanges consist of reciprocated harmful actions (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008). When viewed as a form of social exchange, grapevine serves multiple functions including information sharing, exerting influence, and establishing trust between individuals (Beersma et al., 2019). What makes grapevine complex is that it represents not only an exchange between the person sharing the information and the listener, but also constitutes an implicit exchange involving the absent subject or the context of the conversation. The ultimate effect of grapevine on outcomes largely depends on whether the content is positive or negative, as well as the specific role each person plays within this exchange dynamic.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how leaders in organizations engage with the grapevine. A qualitative approach is suitable as it allows an in-depth understanding of lived experiences and the context of the respondents, and enables nuanced insights that may not be captured in a quantitative analysis. This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm, that reality is socially constructed and dependent on the context.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide the relevant insights. The inclusion criteria required participants to 1) hold a leadership position in a medium to large-sized organization, 2) have a minimum of three years of leadership experience, and 3) have familiarity with informal communication within their organization. 17 leaders working in 5 different sectors, such as manufacturing, software development, banking, retail, and hospitality, were interviewed to

ensure a diversity of perspectives (see Table 1). Sampling continued till data saturation was reached and no new themes or significant insights emerged from additional interviews.

Table 1: Demographics

Age range (in years)	n	n%
Below 29	0	0.0
30 - 39 yrs	3	17.6
40 - 49 yrs	9	52.9
50 - 59 yrs	5	29.4
More than 60	0	0.0
Gender		
Male	12	70.6
Female	5	29.4
Education level		
Under-graduate	0	0.0
Graduate	3	17.6
Post-Graduate	14	82.4
Sector / Industry		
Manufacturing	3	17.6
Software Development	4	23.5
Banking	3	17.6
Retail	4	23.5
Hospitality	3	17.6

Data Collection

To collect data, semi-structured interviews were conducted, which permitted flexibility while ensuring that key topics were addressed. Sample questions included – “What, according to you, is the role that the grapevine plays in your organization?”; “What has your experience been while engaging with the organizational grapevine?”; “As a leader, how have you leveraged the grapevine to your advantage?”. The duration of the interviews ranged from 30 to 45 minutes and were conducted through the video conferencing platform (Google Meet) as the respondents were from different locations. To enable the leaders to speak freely, no recording of the audio or video was done. Participants were provided detailed information about the study’s purpose, methods, and confidentiality protocols. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. To ensure confidentiality, pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reported findings.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis which follows a six-step process as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The steps are – 1. Familiarization with the data, 2. Generating initial codes, 3. Searching for themes, 4. Review themes, 5. Naming themes, 6. Final report. The data was examined using the grounded theory approach (Charmaz et al., 2018). Notations were added to each line of the interview to identify patterns and ideas. Coding was performed manually, and recurring patterns, metaphors, and examples were grouped to form broader thematic categories. The analysis was iterative allowing themes to evolve as engagement with the data progressed. As categories emerged, constant comparison was done to further refine the interpretation of initial codes.

FINDINGS

Thematic analysis revealed four major themes that reflect how leaders in organizations engage with the grapevine (see Table 2). Each theme is supported by sub-themes and illustrative excerpts from the participants.

1. Informal Intelligence System

Most respondents perceived the grapevine as a tool for obtaining insights about the sentiments of employees. Leaders described it as an **early warning system** that helped them identify underlying issues that might not surface through formal communication channels.

"The grapevine lets me know what people are really thinking. Often, I hear about concerns before they escalate into real problems. It's like reading between the lines of the organization." (P4, Production Head, Manufacturing)

Leaders stressed that they viewed the grapevine as a source of informal intelligence that could give updates about employee engagement and satisfaction. Several participants noted that they could derive information about any discontent or confusion about changes in the organization or reactions to certain high impact decisions. Leaders also discussed how the grapevine helped them understand the **emotional tone** of the workplace. For instance, employees might not feel comfortable expressing dissatisfaction in a structured manner but may share their concerns with peers, which then came back to leaders through the grapevine.

"I am able to know more about how employees are feeling about the appraisals through the grapevine, than through official channels." (P16, General Manager, Hospitality)

In this manner, it served as a source of **feedback beyond the formal channels**.

"I get more honest feedback from what people say in the break room than what I read on our employee feedback forms. There's authenticity in the grapevine." (P9, HR Head, Hospitality)

2. Strategic Influence

Several leaders expressed that they intentionally shared information through informal influencers at the workplace to achieve **cultural reinforcement**.

"If we want to embed a cultural value—say, customer-first thinking—I'll share a story about an employee who went above and beyond. I know it will travel informally, and that's more powerful than an all-staff memo." (P2, COO, Retail)

Some leaders shared that they had used the grapevine to **shape employee narratives**. Rather than being seen as a manipulation, this was viewed as a way of amplifying positive messaging. For example, if positive information circulates on the grapevine about a leader's fairness, this might shape employee narratives toward viewing the organization as just and supportive.

"During a difficult quarter, I casually highlight customer success stories with different team members. It's fascinating how quickly those positive narratives spread and help maintain morale without seeming like forced positivity" (P10, Branch Manager, Banking)

Another strategic use involved **gauging reactions** to pilot ideas before announcing them formally.

"Sometimes I float an idea informally just to see how it lands. If there's too much resistance, I know we need to rethink or reframe it before going public." (P6, General Manager, Manufacturing)

This approach allowed leaders to refine strategies and messaging in advance, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation.

3. Navigating Risks

While participants acknowledged the utility of the grapevine, they also highlighted **risks** associated with its use. Many leaders had experienced the **consequences of misinformation** where the grapevine spread inaccurate or damaging information. This often occurred during periods of uncertainty, such as restructuring or leadership transitions.

"During the last merger, misinformation spread like wildfire—some employees thought we were shutting down. It created panic." (P1, VP, Banking)

These incidents highlighted the need for proactive communication. Some leaders addressed this by rapidly issuing clarifications. Several participants reflected on the ethical lines between seeding information and manipulation. While some admitted to selectively sharing information to steer opinions, they expressed caution about going too far.

"There's a fine line between using the grapevine and manipulating it. I'm very conscious about not misleading people just to achieve buy-in." (P11, Head-Marketing, Software Development)

This suggested that while leaders saw value in informal influence, they were also aware of its potential to erode **transparency and trust** if misused.

4. Evolve within Digitization

Digitization has transformed the nature of grapevine in organizations. Several leaders noted that grapevines had evolved with digitization and migrated to digital platforms, including Slack channels, WhatsApp groups, or Teams chats, especially in hybrid and work-from-home work environments. While this allowed for continued social interaction, it also made monitoring difficult.

"Before, I'd overhear conversations in the office kitchen. Now it's happening on private group chats or social media. It's harder to pick up the mood." (P7, Product Head, Software Development)

This digital transformation has led some leaders to adopt new strategies to engage with the **grapevine in virtual workspaces**, such as digital pulse surveys or informal check-ins via chat, to stay connected to employees. Digital platforms have also amplified the **speed and reach** of the grapevine. A single message or meme shared in a chat group can reach hundreds of employees in minutes. While this enhances communication, it also increases the risk of damage from viral misinformation.

"One sarcastic message can undermine a leadership initiative if it goes viral in internal channels. We have to be much more proactive now." (P14, Regional Manager, Retail)

Table 2: Emerging Themes and Sub-themes

Theme	Sub-theme	Freq.	Freq. %
1 Informal System	Intelligence		
	Early Warning System	8	11.6
	Feedback Beyond Formal Channels	10	14.5
	Emotional Tone of the Workplace	5	7.2
2 Strategic Influence	Cultural Reinforcement	7	10.1
	Testing Reactions	6	8.7
	Shaping Employee Narratives	4	5.8
3 Navigating Risks	Consequences of Misinformation	11	15.9
	Transparency and Trust	5	7.2
4 Evolve with Digitization	Grapevine in Virtual Workspaces	7	10.1
	Speed and Reach	6	8.7

The findings of this study demonstrate that leaders perceive grapevine communication not as a liability but as a **strategic asset**. Leaders use it to monitor the pulse of the organization; reinforce culture, test reactions, and influence narratives; address risks of misinformation; and evolve their strategies in the digital era.

4. DISCUSSION

This study explored how leaders in organizations engage with grapevine communication. The findings reveal that leaders do not act as bystanders to the grapevine as an inevitable part of the organization, but engage with to gather informal intelligence, re-inforce culture, and exert strategic influence. This discussion contextualizes these findings within existing literature, examines their implications for leadership, and outlines avenues for future research.

Our findings offer significant insights for those working in organizational management and communication fields. Grapevine serves essential functions, particularly in fostering belonging, connectedness, information sharing, and coordination among employees. These elements play a vital role in organizational effectiveness. First, information shared through casual channels supplements formal communication structures, enabling knowledge to flow beyond hierarchical constraints. Second, when colleagues develop positive interpersonal relationships, both structured and unstructured workflows tend to improve, enhancing communication efficiency and collaboration. Thirdly, the personal relationships and stress relief from these informal interactions benefits individual workers, boosting job satisfaction and better health outcomes, as supported by recent research (Denner et al., 2025; Begemann et al., 2024).

This study found that leaders utilize the grapevine to gauge employee sentiment. This aligns with Denner et al. (2025), who identified that informal communication serves critical functions such as facilitating information exchange and fostering a sense of belonging within organizations. By tapping into these informal networks, leaders can access feedback that may not surface through formal channels. Moreover, the grapevine acts as an early warning system, alerting leaders to potential issues

before they escalate. This proactive use of informal communication channels enables leaders to address concerns promptly, thereby enhancing organizational responsiveness.

Leaders in the study reported intentionally seeding information through informal networks to shape narratives and test reactions to potential initiatives. This strategic use of the grapevine reflects an understanding of its power to influence employee perceptions and behaviours. As noted by Fay (2011), informal communication among co-workers often includes personal disclosures and support-giving, which can significantly impact organizational culture and employee engagement. By leveraging the grapevine to disseminate positive stories or pilot new ideas, leaders can foster a participatory environment. This approach also allows for the refinement of strategies based on informal feedback, leading to better decision-making.

The grapevine presents challenges related to spreading misinformation. Leaders acknowledged the potential for the grapevine to spread rumours or inaccurate information, particularly during periods of organizational change. This highlights the need for leaders to monitor informal communication channels and intervene when necessary. The intentional use of the grapevine to influence perceptions raises questions about manipulation and trust. Leaders must balance the advantages of the grapevine with the need to maintain transparency and foster trust.

Digitization of the workplace has transformed this informal channel of communication. Leaders noted that the grapevine now extends into digital platforms such as instant messaging and social media, making it faster, more pervasive and harder to monitor. This shift necessitates new strategies for engaging with it. Digital grapevines can quickly amplify messages, both positive and negative, affecting employee morale. Leaders must therefore develop digital literacy and implement monitoring tools to effectively navigate this landscape. Additionally, fostering a culture of open communication can help mitigate the spread of misinformation in digital spaces.

Implications

Our research suggests several practical implications for cultivating effective workplace environments. Organizations would benefit from allocating resources to create dedicated social areas and implement flexible working arrangements that encourage spontaneous employee interactions. Understanding the significant role that grapevine plays in alleviating stress and supporting processes, employers should prioritize spaces and opportunities for casual socialization and relaxation, which may ultimately help reduce employee burnout and decrease turnover rates. Furthermore, acknowledging how critical informal exchanges are for knowledge dissemination and coordination efforts, organizational leaders should promote practices that enhance employee engagement, such as implementing technologies that facilitate casual communication. These approaches can foster a more committed and enthusiastic workforce, potentially enhancing both individual productivity and overall organizational outcomes. Leaders need to engage actively with the grapevine to receive insights and concerns, rather than dismissing it as mere gossip. Disseminating positive narratives and getting feedback for new ideas can improve cohesion and innovation. Leadership development programs should include training on the effective use of the grapevine within the organization.

5. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While the qualitative approach provides deep insights, it is not intended to be generalizable to all organizational contexts. Future research could employ quantitative methods to measure the impact of grapevine communication on organizational outcomes such as employee engagement, innovation, and performance. The sample size was relatively small and confined to senior level leaders in specific sectors. Future research could address these limitations through larger, mixed-method studies that explore the prevalence and impact of grapevine communication across different contexts, cultures, and organizational sizes.

Examining the use of informal communication in different sectors, such as healthcare, education, and the automobile sector, can reveal sector-specific dynamics and best practices. The study is also limited by its reliance on self-reported data, which may be subject to bias or selective recall. However, the diversity of sectors/industries and the rigor of the thematic analysis enhance the credibility and transferability of the findings. Further exploration of how digital platforms influence the grapevine's structure and function can inform strategies for managing informal communication in virtual environments. Since this study has a limitation of cross-sectional data collection, longitudinal studies can assess how the role of the grapevine evolves over a period, particularly in response to organizational changes such as mergers, crises, or restructuring.

By focusing on leadership practices concerning the grapevine, this study aims to contribute to a realistic portrayal of organizational communication. It invites scholars and practitioners to reconsider the value of informal channels not as distractions or liabilities, but as integral components of leadership effectiveness. This study highlights the multifaceted role of the grapevine in organizational life. Instead of being a peripheral aspect of communication, the grapevine serves as a vital channel for information, influence, and cultural reinforcement. Leaders who engage with informal communication channels like the grapevine can enhance organizational effectiveness, foster a positive culture, and manage the complex modern workplace. However, this engagement must be guided by ethical considerations and adapted to the evolving digital landscape. Future research can build on these findings to further elaborate on the dynamics of informal communication and its implications for leadership and organizational success.

6. CONCLUSION

This study explores the nuanced and often overlooked role of grapevine communication in organizational settings, with particular focus on how leaders engage with IC to enhance organizational outcomes. Through a qualitative methodology involving semi-structured interviews with leaders across various industries, the research identified critical themes that provide valuable insights into the intersection of leadership and informal communication.

The findings demonstrate that organizational leaders acknowledge the grapevine as a key component of the communication ecosystem, facilitating information flow, cultural reinforcement, and strategic influence. One of the most significant insights is the grapevine's role as an *early warning system*. Leaders use it to gain awareness of issues that may not surface through formal communication, such as employee surveys or structured meetings. Thus, the grapevine complements formal communication by providing grassroots-level data, enabling leaders to respond effectively to concerns.

In addition, the study illustrates how leaders can strategically influence the grapevine by seeding narratives that align with organizational values and objectives. This use of the grapevine to amplify positive cultural norms or test the waters for impending change initiatives reveals its potential as a subtle but powerful leadership tool. Leaders also acknowledged the need for authenticity and transparency to foster trust.

Furthermore, the research unravels the changing nature of informal communication in the context of digital transformation. The rise of hybrid and remote work has extended the grapevine into virtual spaces. This can create difficulties in managing misinformation. Leaders need to adapt to this changing landscape by cultivating digital awareness and implementing proactive strategies.

In conclusion, as the workplace continues to evolve, driven by technological change, globalization, and shifting employee expectations, the ability to lead through the grapevine will emerge as a key differentiator for effective leadership.

REFERENCES

- [1] Baird, J. E. (1977). The dynamics of organizational communication. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- [2] Banerjee, P., & Singh, S. (2015). Managers' perspectives on the effects of online grapevine communication: A qualitative inquiry. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(6), 765-779.
- [3] Beersma, B., & Van Kleef, G. A. (2012). Why people gossip: An empirical analysis of social motives, antecedents, and consequences. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42(11), 2640-2670.
- [4] Beersma, B., Van Kleef, G. A., & Dijkstra, M. T. (2019). Antecedents and consequences of gossip in work groups. *The Oxford handbook of gossip and reputation*, 417-434.
- [5] Begemann, V., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Stein, M. (2023). Peeling away the layers of workplace gossip: a framework, review, and future research agenda to study workplace gossip as a dynamic and complex behavior. *Merits*, 3(2), 297-317.
- [6] Begemann, V., Handke, L., & Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. (2024). Enabling and constraining factors of remote informal communication: a socio-technical systems perspective. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 29(5), zmae008.
- [7] Blithe, S.J. Creating the water cooler: Virtual workers' discursive practices of gossip. *Qual. Res. Rep. Commun.* 2014, 15, 59-65
- [8] Brady, D. L., Brown, D. J., & Liang, L. H. (2017). Moving beyond assumptions of deviance: The reconceptualization and measurement of workplace gossip. *Journal of applied Psychology*, 102(1), 1.
- [9] Burke, L. A., & Wise, J. M. (2003). The effective care, handling and pruning of the office grapevine. *Business Horizons*, 46(3), 71-76.
- [10] Chen, B., & Krauskopf, J. (2013). Integrated or disconnected? Examining formal and informal networks in a merged nonprofit organization. *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 23(3), 325-345.
- [11] Cole, J. M., & Scrivener, H. (2013). Short term effects of gossip behavior on self-esteem. *Current Psychology*, 32, 252-260.
- [12] Conrad, C., & Poole, M. S. (1997). Introduction: Communication and the disposable worker. *Communication Research*, 24(6), 581-592.
- [13] Crampton, S. M., Hodge, J. W., & Mishra, J. M. (1998). The informal communication network: Factors influencing grapevine activity. *Public Personnel Management*, 27(4), 569-584.
- [14] Denner, N., Koch, T., Viererbl, B., & Ernst, A. (2025). Feeling connected and informed through informal communication: A quantitative survey on the perceived functions of informal communication in organizations. *Journal of Communication Management*, 29(1), 71-93.
- [15] Dores Cruz, T. D., Nieper, A. S., Testori, M., Martinescu, E., & Beersma, B. (2021). An integrative definition

- and framework to study gossip. *Group & Organization Management*, 46(2), 252-285.
- [16] Duck, J. D. (1993). Managing change: The art of balancing. *Harvard business review*, 71(1993), 11.
 - [17] Fay, M. J. (2011). Informal communication of co-workers: A thematic analysis of messages. *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 6(3), 212-229.
 - [18] Fay, M. J., & Kline, S. L. (2011). Coworker relationships and informal communication in high-intensity telecommuting. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 39(2), 144-163.
 - [19] Foster, E. K. (2004). Research on gossip: Taxonomy, methods, and future directions. *Review of general psychology*, 8(2), 78-99.
 - [20] Grosser, T., Kidwell, V., & Labianca, G. J. (2012). Hearing it through the grapevine: Positive and negative workplace gossip. *Organizational Dynamics*, 41, 52-61.
 - [21] Habel, C., Veale, R., & Lu, V. N. (2010, February). I heard it through the grapevine! Exploring drivers of participation in virtual communities. In Paper presented.
 - [22] Himmetoğlu, B., Ayduğ, D., & Bayrak, C. (2019). Management of Gossip and Rumor as Informal Communication Tools in Educational Organizations. *Journal of Qualitative Research in Education*, 6(3).
 - [23] Hoffjann, O. (2024). Informality in strategic communication. Making the case for a forgotten concept. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 29(2), 206-220.
 - [24] Holmes, J., & Marra, M. (2004). Relational practice in the workplace: women's talk or gendered discourse?. *Language in society*, 33(3), 377-398.
 - [25] Jakubiec, M. (2019). The importance of internal communication for management of an organisation. *Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie/Politechnika Śląska*.
 - [26] Johnson, C. A. (2023). The purpose of whisper networks: a new lens for studying informal communication channels in organizations. *Frontiers in Communication*, 8, 1089335.
 - [27] Koch, T., & Denner, N. (2022). Informal communication in organizations: work time wasted at the water-cooler or crucial exchange among co-workers?. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 27(3), 494-508.
 - [28] Kraut, R. E., Fish, R. S., Root, R. W., & Chalfonte, B. L. (1990, February). Informal communication in organizations: Form, function, and technology. In *Human reactions to technology: Claremont symposium on applied social psychology* (Vol. 145, p. 199).
 - [29] Lee, S. H., & Barnes, C. M. (2021). An attributional process model of workplace gossip. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 106(2), 300.
 - [30] Liberman, B., Seidman, G., McKenna, K. Y., & Buffardi, L. E. (2011). Employee job attitudes and organizational characteristics as predictors of cyberloafing. *Computers in Human behavior*, 27(6), 2192-2199.
 - [31] Matias, A., & Cardoso, L. (2022). Formal and informal organizational communication: Frameworking its roles and purposes. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*.
 - [32] Mills, C. Experiencing gossip: The foundations for a theory of embedded organizational gossip. *Group Organ. Manag.* 2010, 35, 213-240.
 - [33] Mishra, J. (1990). Managing the grapevine. *Public Personnel Management*, 19(2), 213-228.
 - [34] Moreland, R.L. Are dyads really groups? *Small Group Res.* 2010, 41, 251-267.
 - [35] Naeem, M., Weng, Q., Ali, A., & Hameed, Z. (2020). An eye for an eye: does subordinates' negative workplace gossip lead to supervisor abuse?. *Personnel Review*, 49(1), 284-302.
 - [36] Noon, M., & Delbridge, R. (1993). News from behind my hand: Gossip in organizations. *Organization studies*, 14(1), 23-36.
 - [37] Reina, D. S., & Reine, M. L. (2009). Trust and betrayal in the workplace: Building effective relationships in your organization. *ReadHowYouWant.com*.
 - [38] Romero-Rodríguez, L. M., & Castillo-Abdul, B. (2024). Internal communication from a happiness management perspective: state-of-the-art and theoretical construction of a guide for its development. *BMC psychology*, 12(1), 1-23.
 - [39] Rosnow, R. L. (2001). Rumor and gossip in interpersonal interaction and beyond: A social exchange perspective.
 - [40] Siddiqui, M. B., Shaikh, M., Shah, E., & Qureshi, U. J. (2025). Inclusive Leadership and Emotional Intelligence: Strategies to Address Grapevine Communication in Private HEIs. *Research Journal of*

Psychology, 3(1), 198-210.

- [41] Step, M. M., & Finucane, M. O. (2002). Interpersonal communication motives in everyday interactions. *Communication Quarterly*, 50(1), 93-109.
- [42] Sun, T., Schilpzand, P., & Liu, Y. (2023). Workplace gossip: An integrative review of its antecedents, functions, and consequences. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 44(2), 311-334.
- [43] Tian, Q. T., Song, Y., Kwan, H. K., & Li, X. (2019). Workplace gossip and frontline employees' proactive Service Performance. *The Service Industries Journal*, 39(1), 25-42.
- [44] Trice, H. M., & Beyer, J. M. (1993). *The cultures of work organizations*. Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- [45] Viererbl, B., Denner, N., & Koch, T. (2022). "You don't meet anybody when walking from the living room to the kitchen": informal communication during remote work. *Journal of communication management*, 26(3), 331-348.
- [46] Watanabe, K., Umemura, H., Mori, I., Amemiya, S., & Yamamoto, Y. (2024). Transforming informal communication in the urgent shift to teleworking: a case study in Japan. *Frontiers in Communication*, 9, 1361426.
- [47] Zhao, D., & Rosson, M. B. (2009, May). How and why people Twitter: the role that micro-blogging plays in informal communication at work. In *Proceedings of the 2009 ACM International Conference on Supporting Group Work* (pp. 243-252).
- [48] Zong,B.; Martinescu, E.; Beersma, B.; Xu, S.; Zhang, L. How multi-source gossip affects targets' emotions and strategic behavioral responses. *J. Bus. Ethics*, 2023, advance online publication.

fffff