

The Connotation of Informal Communication and its Application in Long Distance Vocational Education

Qiong Xu^{1, a} and Xiaoping Li^{2, b}

^{1, 2}School of Continuing Education and Long Distance Education, Beijing Institute of Technology, Beijing, 100081

^axuqiongmm@sina.com, ^blxpmx@x263.net

Keywords: Formal Communication; Informal Communication; Network Environment; Vocational Education

Abstract. Informal communication has been suppressed and marginalized ever since H.Mchzel and Mikhailov emphasized the importance of paper publications and formal communication. However, informal communication is everywhere in long distance vocational education. It plays an important role in people's study, work and everyday-life. Informal communication is always essential or even significant in terms of improving formal communication.

Vocational education is imperative to the demand for talents in China's transition from manpower resources country to a talent resources country. Under the condition of limited education investment, it is the best choice to cultivate large quantities of talents by developing long distance vocational education. Communication usually includes both formal communication and informal education. Formal communication comes after books and plays an important role. However, informal communication has been existed ever since the beginning of human beans. Spoken language, gesture and expression are used to express informal communication, but the concept of informal communication has not been formed for a long time.

1.The Connotation of Informal Communication

H.Mcnzel, an American sociologist, divided the communication for information into formal communication and informal communication based on the difference of the carrier for the information in 1985. As views vary, no unanimous conclusion can be drawn when it comes to the connotation of informal communication. Main viewpoints for the connotation of both formal communication and informal communication are as follows.

Mentioned above, according to H.Mcnzel, information communication based on scientific literature is formal process, otherwise, it is informal process, often be carried out by scientists and experts themselves^[1].

Mikhailov, an educator of the former Soviet Union, holds that informal communication, also called direct communication process, is the free communication of scientific information among members of society or informal organizations. Basically, the processes been done by the scientists and experts are informal category of the scientific communication. Science conferences, as another important form of scientific information communication, become the most important way for informal communication (including private correspondence, visit study, summer class discussion, reprint of thesis and so on)^[2].

Deli Chen thinks that formal information communication usually appears in the form of paper forms and work description, which describes the relationship between organization members of different hierarchy in detail. Just the opposite, the forms of informal communication are quite free. The mechanism for formal communication means that materials of all parts of organization are collected, processed and distributed in traditional ways. Informal communication includes interpersonal communication in conferences and conversations, directly observation and informal reports. Conversations, listening and debates in conferences, exhibitions, or even calls are all the main forms of informal innovative network, that is, main content of informal communication^[3].

Tianjun Wu holds that information communication without intelligence officers in and literature as carriers is formal information communication process; those with intelligence officers in but without literature as carriers are also informal information communication processes.

The scholars above all explain the connotations of informal information communication from their viewpoints. To sum up, informal information communication is the directly delivery of information between the information source and the information user, such as panel discussion, newspapers, exhibitions, demonstrations, visits, correspondences and so on, which has obvious individuality^[4].

Using the existing theories, we define the formal communication and informal communication as: indirect communication with scientific literature as carriers is formal information communication, otherwise, informal information communication. Although communication carriers are significant factors in the categorization, it is not the determinant. Different from the carriers as criterion, we categorize them by whether professional literature organizational management is needed or not.

2.Main Advantages of Informal Communication

Informal communication has always been marginalized since great importance is attached to paper publications and formal communication. However, informal communication is everywhere in long distance vocational education. It plays an important role in people's everyday-life, work and study. Informal communication is always essential or even significant in terms of improving formal communication. Nowadays, the important role that informal communication plays in communication is widely acknowledged. To include, the main advantages of informal communication are as following:

Informal communication is much more diverse than formal communication. Formal communication, which is generally inside of the organization system, delivers and communicates information according to the principles of the organization. Thus, the amount of information in formal communication is limited. While, informal communication can reflect the communicators' thoughts, attitudes and motivations truly because of its flexible communicating ways. Not only the content of informal communication is diverse, but also the ways, environment, place and time are all flexible for informal communication. A lot of information that won't deliver through formal communication can be obtained through informal communication since the diversity and freedom of informal communication.

Informal communication is much faster on the access to information. Without the cumbersome procedures, the access to information in informal communication is much faster, easier and more straightforward than formal communication. Thus, the information get through has less redundant information than that get through formal communication. Informal communication is much flexible and faster than formal communication. In many cases, information obtained from informal communication get more attention from the communicators. While the information obtained from formal communication tends to be programmatic.

The communicators in informal communication are more proactive. The informal communication not only meets the demand of the communicators, but also covers the shortage of formal communication. Common sentiment is the bond of the communicators in the informal organization, where the communicators' emotion is closely related, trusting and relying on each other. As a result, the informal communication is much more cohesive than formal communication. On the base of voluntary association, communicators in informal communication tend to agree with each other on some problems. So, they have a strong sense of belonging in the organization. Information can be delivered much faster in informal communication since the communicators are intimate and reflect similarly on information. On the contrary, formal communication is institutional and top-down processing.

Compared with formal communication, informal communication can offer more tacit knowledge. According to Polanyi, an English philosopher, tacit knowledge is the knowledge we obtain during the process of doing something, and it only can be got an idea but cannot be explained; explicit knowledge is the knowledge that can be encoded and formulated by written words, diagrams,

mathematical formulae and so on. Tacit knowledge often represents our background knowledge, including individual way of thinking, habits, beliefs, views and mental structure and so on. We can rarely aware of the presence of tacit knowledge. However, it is the foundation of our world views and success. As programmatic knowledge, tacit knowledge is action oriented. One can get it through his/her personal experience, intuition and insight, and do not need the help of others. Tacit knowledge is difficult to spread because of its unstructured attribute. Therefore, its communication cost is high, and spreading area is less. Formal communication use encoded knowledge and scientific literature as carriers, while tacit knowledge cannot be encoded, so it cannot use literature as carrier. That's also why tacit knowledge is mainly gained through the interaction of communicators in informal communication.

Informal communication usually uses informal organizations as platform. Informal organizations are formed on the need of emotion and motivation of the communicators. Communicators communicate through their common work, study and everyday life in the organizational system. Information communication in informal organizations is often based on interpersonal emotional need, say spontaneous human communication. Thus, it is more general, self-consciousness, randomness, selective, and so on. On the contrary, formal organization is more professional, having its own specific organizational goal, formal organization structure and system as guarantee. So the interpersonal relationship in formal organization is institutional. Compared with informal communication, formal information communication is professional, systematic, stipulation and so on.

3.Informal Communication in Long Distance Vocational Education

Information carrier plays great importance role in traditional information communication. Along with the development of information technology, the information carriers are more and more diversified, so the traditional standard classification of information carrier is no longer able to cover all kinds of carriers. When it comes to the new carrier, say, network, the difference of formal communication and informal communication has become blurred because the net work is their common carrier. There are electronic periodicals, electronic newspapers and other forms of carriers for formal communication on the network, and, there are also BBS, blog, weibo, etc, for informal communication.

Using network platform in long distance vocational education contributes a lot. On one hand, it can improve the informational level of education and strengthen practical application of teaching environment and process by building up project libraries and case libraries. On the other hand, its properties in communication can also improve the communication between students, so that practical knowledge can be better learned in vocational education and the problems of resources imbalance in vocational education can also be better resolved. Taking advantage of the formal communication, and at the mean time, overcoming the disadvantages of formal communication, for example, less area, high cost and so on, informal communication in long distance vocational education can make full use of the network in vocational education.

3.1 Advantages of informal communication in long distance vocational education

Compared with traditional way of study and communication, informal communication for long distance vocational study has got more advantages in practice:

The Organization Forms of Informal Communication Are Much More Flexible In Vocational Education

The traditional invisible organization in education has disadvantages due to the limited time and place, for example, loose structure, limited unified time, uneasy maintained collective learning achievement and so on. However, network has greatly improved those disadvantages by its strong power of across time and space. The invisible organization in long distance vocational education has extended greatly in the way of communication, content, group portfolios and so on. Learners are no longer limited by the time and place of communication, they can give their opinions or communicate with their classmates and teachers through online learning platform, email, BBS, Blog,

Wiki, Weibo, etc, at any time and any place. Besides, it is more convenient to preserve the network communication information, which benefits the preservation and inheritance of learning achievement in the invisible organization.

Informal communication is much more convenient and faster in long distance vocational education

Taking advantage of the network, long distance education offers a convenient way of information communication. Without the limit of country, region and time, informal communication in long distance vocational education has got great advantage in communicating speed. No matter who the communicator is and where he /she is, he/she can communicate much more efficient and faster. The cross-discipline and cross-region collaborative learning groups will widely emerge under the condition of network in the future.

The cost of informal communication is much lower in long distance vocational education

Informal communication in long distance vocational education can keep the learners off trips, and can take place and anywhere as long as there is a computer terminal or even telephone terminal. Sending emails and instant information are much more convenient. Learners can learn from and communicate with each other if their computer terminal has installed related video software.

Informal communication is a useful addition to formal study in long distance vocational education

Formal study in long distance vocational education is based on courses, study tasks, seminars and so on. However, informal communication is organized, controlled and in charged by learners themselves. Generally speaking, they go straight to the theme, without a lot of background knowledge and unit content. Besides, informal communication can delivery large amount of tacit knowledge that formal communication cannot. The tacit knowledge help a lot in improving learners' knowledge and technique acquisition.

3.2 Disadvantages of informal communication in long distance vocational education

(1) Network information is lack of seriousness. Since the learners in informal communication in long distance vocational education change in time, they cannot learn deeply and heritage easily. The information is lack of seriousness since all learners are anonymous. Thus making it possible that part of the information is useless for study, or even junk information, despite of the large amount of the total information. Open topics in network communication are also against systematic study, making the reliability of study be questioned. This leads to the poorer quality of informal communication in long distance vocational education. So, supervision and evaluation in network communication are of great importance.

(2) Information storage problems in network communication. Information in long distance vocational education is stored at the network platform and can be well preserved for looking up anytime. But the network security is a big hidden danger. Loss of information caused by the hacker's attack will influence the further learning, which is also a key factor influencing informal communication in long distance vocational education.

References:

- [1] Jieqin Jin.Study of theory and model of informal information communication under the environment of the network [D]. the 2005 Nanjing Agricultural University master's degree thesis.
- [2] Deli Cheng. Informal communication mechanism and innovative capacities of industrial clusters [J]. Journal of China University of Mining & Technology(Social Sciences),2007(3)
- [3] Wu Tianjun,Song Cuiqin.The function of intelligence officer in informal information communication process [J]. Journal of information science, 1992 (4)
- [4] Yue Quan; the new change of [J] information exchange in the network environment; information science, 2000(4)
- [5] Hao Venus; under the network environment on the information communication mode in [J]; information science, 2003(1)