

Formal and Informal Communication Net Work: A Study with references to Local Governments in Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Local Governments are the grassroots governance institutions for translating the effects of globalization into opportunities by building a strong space and it is imperative for them not to miss any opportunities. They will be forced to miss opportunities when they fail to understand that the success depends less on formally reporting structure by which the formal communication is transmitted. But an informal communication by any means making the formally designed structure is in fructuous. Revealing the hidden connections that drive how work gets done in Local Governments are of utmost importance in the ever widening network of communication which are provided by the present order of globalization.

1. Introduction

Local Governments are the grassroots governance institutions for translating the effects of globalization into opportunities by building a strong space and it is imperative for them not to miss any opportunities. They will be forced to miss opportunities when they fail to understand that the success depends less on formally reporting structure by which the formal communication is transmitted. But an informal communication by any means making the formally designed structure is in fructuous. Revealing the hidden connections that drive how work gets done in Local Governments are of utmost importance in the ever widening network of communication which are provided by the present order of globalization. Grassroots communication networks in Local Governance consists of interaction of key players of different communication nodes viz., Local Governments, Grama Sabhas, Oorukkuttams, Ward Sabah's, District Planning Committees, District Planning Offices, Working Groups, Transferred Institutions, District Treasury Offices, Police Stations, Collectorates, Higher tier governments, Educational institutions, various missions like Kudumbashree, Non-Governmental Organizations, Social Activists and to a considerable extent, some informal communication nodes. The interaction to a particular node very largely depend upon the purpose for which advice or information is required to avail.

2. Literature Review

Jafri and Singh,(2006)¹ pointed out that Gram Sabha is the important forum of participation to assist in planning and implementation through voluntary contribution and by scrutinizing and questioning the decisions of the panchayat,. The participation of marginalized communities and women in gram sabha meetings has often reported to be small and these groups do not wield much influence.

Girish Kimar (2006)², stated that undoubtedly, by making the periodic elections compulsory, the continuity of PRIs has been ensured. However, the panchayats are still groping with the fundamental problems pertaining to the three Fs: functions,

functionaries and funds. He recommended, the local government system should be more accountable, responsive and transparent.

Chandana Shetye (2007)³ points out that, the 74th amendment to the Constitution was promulgated in 1994 in Maharashtra through state conformity legislation and also codified specific norms for the selection of non-governmental organizations. But, state government or the elected representatives do not take initiative to implement this amendment, which was applied only after judicial intervention. Public bodies are not keen on decentralization of power and introducing transparency, accountability and responsiveness in civic administration.

John, J (2008)⁴ identified that; there is a mismatch between activity mapping and corresponding funding in various budget heads of union territories. Own source of revenue needs to be mobilized by strengthening tax assessment. Proper programmes should be introduced to create awareness about the significance of gramasabha among the public.

Palanithurai, G (2008)⁵ points out that, the lowest units of governance and administration have to be rationalized from the perspective of management. These units have to be made accountable to them first and then accountable to their officer next in the hierarchy. Thus downward accountability has to be ensured. Activities at local level are carried out by different personnel and the implications are to be assessed periodically.

Rasmi Sharma (2009)⁶ attempted to capture the complex and fascinating dynamic of grassroots democracy in India, and to delineate, in the context of this dynamic, critical policy steps. Panchayats present an intriguing picture of institutions embedded in the larger social and governance structure, but also capable of generating a new dynamic which has the potential for impacting the macro structure.

Suresh Kumar . M⁷ in his study on Grass roots Leadership – A Study on Local Governments in Kerala pointed out that

there are four important factors in Grassroots Leadership, namely: subordinate dexterity, superior efficiency, peer dominance and benevolent voluntarism. He also examined whether there exists significant difference in grass roots leadership potential, within and different tiers of Local Governments in Kerala and concluded that there exists significant difference within different strata of Local Governments.

Sudhish.G⁸, in his work on An Evaluation on the Implementation of Peoples Plan in Kerala examined the problems in the implantation of peoples plan in Kerala highlighted that there is an urgent necessity towards the improvement in the present practice of service delivery for ensuring environment justice in tune with social justice and there is a need for strengthening Gram Sabha to reflect the local feeling in Panchayath Raj Institutions, the importance of Gram Sabha, its formation, formation of working groups, proper training for project preparation and arrangement of institutional finance.

Biju.A.V⁹ in his study on Certain Predictive Motivation Potential: A Study on Selected Local Self Government's in Kerala concluded that challenging complexities, flexi local environment and growth potential governance system named as Exigent Bendy stimulus (57 per cent) and Recognition capabilities and Monitory incentives are termed as Flex Stimulus (43 per cent).

3. Statement of the Problem

Being governance institutions at grassroots Local Governments are expected to deliver quality services to the citizens and the decision making process has become more important than ever before particularly for Governments viz., Grama Panchayat, Municipalities and Corporations, who have to cater to the needs of their daily life. The parties involved in the process of implementation sometimes ignore this fact and consider their own interest or interest of certain vested groups. But what is lacking today is sufficient communication to attain the vision or set targets is lacking. The overall aim of grass root level planning is better governance, better delivery of service to the people and for attainment of local economic development. The implementation of the programmes are carried out by leaders of political parties, rural people and bureaucrats whose are not understanding the objectives of the government either because of not conceiving properly or because of barriers which prevent them to understand it properly. The empirical evidences compelled the researcher to arrive at a hypothesis that it is not the formally designed reporting structure *per se* upon which individual success and team success of Local Government is dependent but more on how the network interacts informally and the number of nodes known to and used in the system. As is seen from the earlier studies that no such studies are made in this area to know the impact of communication in local governments of Kerala and hence the present study.

4. Objectives of the Study

1. To look into formal and informal communication network in the local Governments

2. To examined the actors and their relations which are pertinent in determining the success of Local Governments

5. Data Source and Methodology

Method of Study: The method of research is Empirical which tests the feasibility of solution using empirical evidence and is based on the opinion survey method.

Secondary Data : Secondary data will be collected from the Official publications of the Government of Kerala, State Planning Board, magazines, Journals and Newspapers. Also the data will be collected from the websites.

Primary Data : Primary data has been collected from the respondents based on using multi stage random sampling techniques.

Sampling Technique: The study considered a 'Multi-stage Stratified Random Sampling' for selecting the grassroots functionaries of local governments of lower most strata, viz., Village (grama) Panchayat, Municipality and Corporation.

The Universe: The grassroots functionaries of Local Governments at lowest tier i.e., Grama Panchayat, Grassroots functionaries in Gram Panchayat consist of Elected Executives, Appointed Official and Nominated / Delegated Activists. The size of population from 999 Grama Panchayats works out to be 18,371.

The Sample: Out of the population respondents of 18371, nearly 10.88 per cent respondents i.e., 2000 were selected for study. The sampling technique adopted for selection of sample is shown below:

Selection of Sample Districts: There are 1057 grassroots Local Governments in Kerala comprising of 999 Grama Panchayats spread over in different proportions in different districts. For selecting the districts, firstly the state is divided into two broad categories based on its geographical conditions. They are: (i) Two Hill Tract districts consisting of Idukki and Wayanad; and (ii) Twelve other districts consisting of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Alappuzha, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, Palakkad, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Kannur and Kasaragod. From among the hill tract districts, one district – Wayanad is selected at random. The other 12 districts were categorised under three regions viz., (i) Southern region, the erstwhile princely state of Travancore, (ii) Central region, the Cochin and (iii) Northern region, the Malabar. One district each from all these regions were selected at random, i.e., Thiruvananthapuram from Travancore, Ernakulam from Cochin and Kozhikode from Malabar regions are selected as sample districts for the study. Thus, out of the 14 districts 4 (28.6 per cent) are selected.

6. Selection of Local Governments

Rural Local Governments: From the selected four districts of Kerala, 25 Grama Panchayats each were selected at random for a representation of 100 Grama Panchayats to form a 10 per cent sample of the population of 999 Grama Panchayats in Kerala.

Selection of Respondents: The functionaries of local governments are grouped under three viz., Elected Executives (President and the Chairmen of all the three Standing Committees), Appointed Officials and Nominated / Delegated Activists (Chairmen of all the 12 Working Groups) who are in the top, middle and bottom levels in the administrative hierarchy. The identified respondents for the study differ for different kinds of Local Governments and different levels of executives. There are 389 such Panchayats in the State. Thus, a total of 18 (4+2+12) respondents are selected from each of the selected Grama Panchayat in addition to 38 Nominated / Delegated Activist from Tribal Sub-Plan Working Group, where ever applicable. Out of the population of 18371 ((999 X 18) + 389), a total of 2000 ((100 X 18) + 29) respondents (10.88 per cent) are selected from the Grama Panchayats for study.

Tools for data collections : Primary Data will be collected by using an Interview Schedule specifically developed for the purpose and is finalized after conducting the pilot survey.

Tools used for Analysis of Data: For analyzing the collected data social net work analysis is used

7. Data analysis and interpretation

The analysis is made through Social Network Analysis which draw the boundaries around a population wherein it focus on relations among actors. The conventional communication data focuses only on the various actors and their attributes in a communication network and the total communication net work as it gives vital answers on who reports to whom. The social network analysis can extend the boundaries by replicating populations i.e., instead of one Neighborhood Groups Two or Three can be taken into account or testing of hypothesis by comparing population. The present study attempts to identify the nature of communication both through the formally organized structures of Grama Panchayat , Municipality and Corporations.

Personal Profile variables

1. **Gender Composition:** On an average, 1174 (59 per cent) are male and 826 (41 per cent) are female respondents.

2. **Age Composition:** The average age of the entire sample respondents is 47 years.

3. **Academic Qualifications:** In it , 523 respondents (26 per cent) have Graduation; 1024 (51 per cent) have Secondary and 273 respondents (14 per cent) have below secondary educational qualifications .

4. **Work Experience:** In this case 357 (18 per cent) had no previous experience, 1018 (51 per cent) had experience in the same line and 625 (31 per cent) had previous experience in different line.

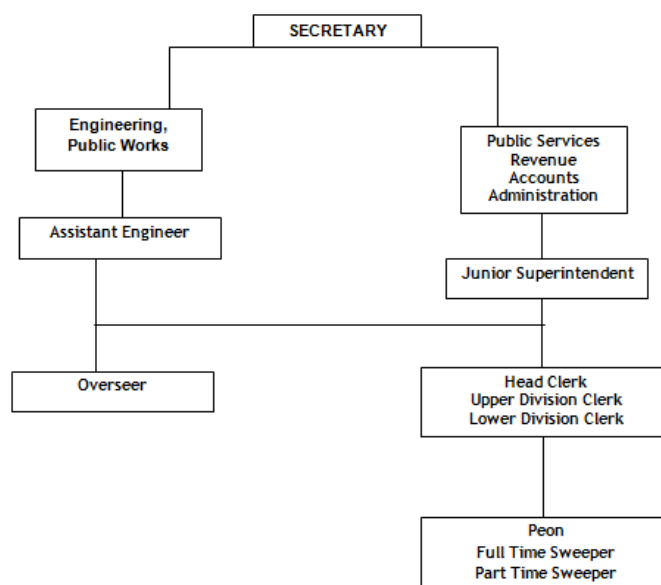
5. **Training:** Here, 1571 (79 per cent) respondents had attended training programmes of KILA.

6. **Areas of Training attended:** Majority of elected executives and appointed officials had received training in the area of decentralised planning and majority of nominated activists received training in Gender development.

Grama Panchayat : Organisation Structure

In Grama Panchayats the Secretary is the chief executive officer and is placed as the top most node of communication network which passes through Engineering, Public Works Department and Public Services, Revenue, Accounts and Administration wing. In the Engineering, Public Works Wings, there is Assistant Engineer under whom there is Overseer doing executing the work. Similarly in Establishment Wing there is Junior Superintendent under whom there are UD Clerks , LD Clerks , Full time and Part time Sweepers . The organization structure of Gram Panchayat at Grassroots level is shown in Figure 1.1.

Figure. 1.1
Organization Structure of Gram Panchayat



Nodes of Communication in Grama Panchayat

The different nodes of communication in different structures of Gram, Municipalities and Corporations are described as under:

The major functions in which the communication net work has a direct impact in a Gram Panchayat are Planning, Implementing, and Review (Social Audit) in which enormous functionaries are directly interacting formally and informally. Grama Sabha, Working groups, Development Committees, Implementing Offices, District Planning Committee, Community Based Organizations and Informal Groups are the major role players of the day today activities . The Community Based Organisations and Informal Groups are having maximum linkages that is they are interacting with all the three kinds of functions like Planning ,Implementing and Review and hence considered to be the major players. Grama Sabha, working Groups, Development Committees and Implementing Offices have roles with respect to any of the two functions only i.e., Grama Sabha is having role in Planning and Review (Social Audit), Working Groups have role in Planning and Implementing, Development Committees have role in Planning and Implementing and Implementing Offices have role in Planning and Implementing . District Planning Committee have role only in Planning Function .

An analysis is made on how various functionaries via., Elected leaders and appointed officials interact each other with these role players to see whether it is the formal structure or the informal structure or both which actually lead to effective communication or communication effectiveness.

The functions in general of the major role players such as Secretary, Junior Superintendent, Head clerk, UDC, LDC and Overseer are given below:

1. **Secretary** : The major functions of the secretary makes him the hub of the entire communication network and is responsible for providing support for functioning of various committees and ensuring implementation of the decisions of the Panchayat committee, standing committees etc. As an implementing officer of the Panchayat he is responsible for all functions and activities of the Panchayat, adhering to the relevant statute, orders, procedures and systems including matters related to function and implementation of development plans /projects, realization of income dues, as well as finance and accounts functions. He has to exercise authority as registrar of birth and death registration and in general he has to oversee the functioning of various institutions of the Panchayat.
2. **Junior Superintendent/Head Clerk**: He is the hub of day to day activities of the Panchayat and as such he has to provide appropriate support to the Secretary and supervision of activities of the ministerial staff. He has to exercise the delegated authorities of executive officer and also to oversee /provide support for audit activities
3. **Clerical staff (UDC and LDC)**: The role of clerical staff in the communication net work of the Panchayat cannot be undermined by virtue of the unique position they enjoys in dealing with the citizens directly. They have to carry out various activities in the Panchayat both within the office and outside in field level ensuring compliance of the

related provisions in the statutes /orders as well as the prescribed norms.

4. **Overseer**: The public works occupies the major chunk of the projects undertaken by any Grama Panchayat. In this, the role of overseer is of much vibrant as he has to carry out activities related to public works and field inspection to settle the related public grievances.

Social Network Analysis in Grama Panchayat has been worked out with a sum of Twelve (12) different communication nodes occupied by both elected representatives and appointed officials. In this network there are Five (5) elected representative holding the position of Panchayat President and Chairmen of four Standing committees and there are Seven (7) appointed officials working at different levels of key functions such as Panchayat Secretary, Junior Superintendent, Head clerk, UDC, LDC and Overseer and Peon.

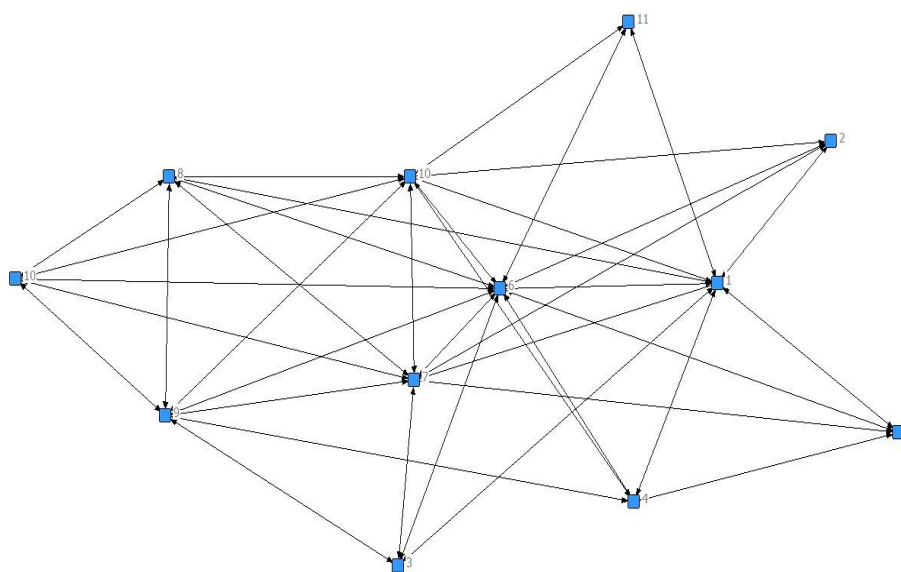
The code used for indicating various nodes in the network diagram in respect of Gram Panchayat is :

President	1
SC1	2
SC2	3
SC3	4
SC4	5
Secretary	6
Junior Superintendent	7
Head clerk	8
UDC	9
LDC	10
Overseer	11
Peon	12

The Network diagram of the select functionaries and standing committees in Grama Panchayat is shown in Fig. 1.2.

Fig 1.2

Network diagram of the select functionaries and standing committees in Grama Panchayat



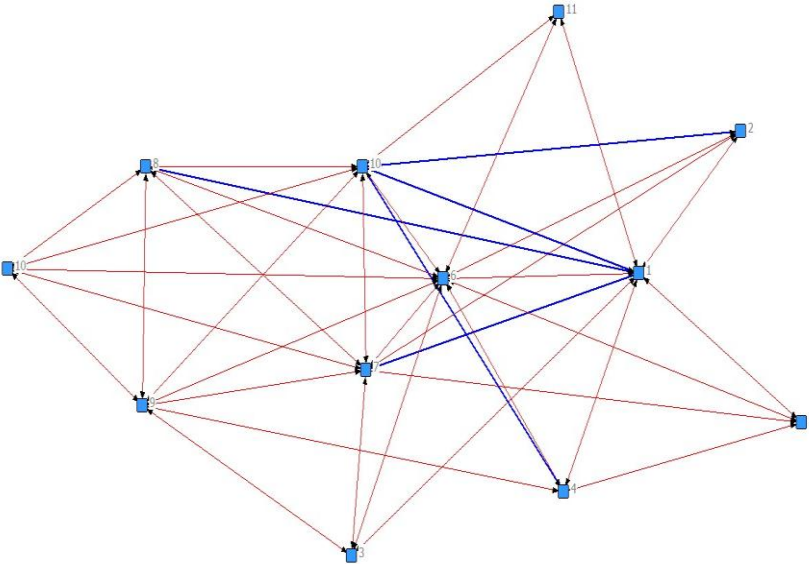
The figure 12 indicate that superintendent has maximum number of nodes directly reporting to him followed by the municipal secretary with least nodes directly reporting to the standing committee (7).

Reciprocity of Nodes in the Communication Network of Grama Panchayat

On an analysis as to the reciprocity of various nodes of communication network in the Grama Panchayat, it is found

that there are only very few nodes without having reciprocal relationship which is seen in fig.1.3.

Fig 13
Network Diagram of Select Functionaries and Standing Committee in Panchayat



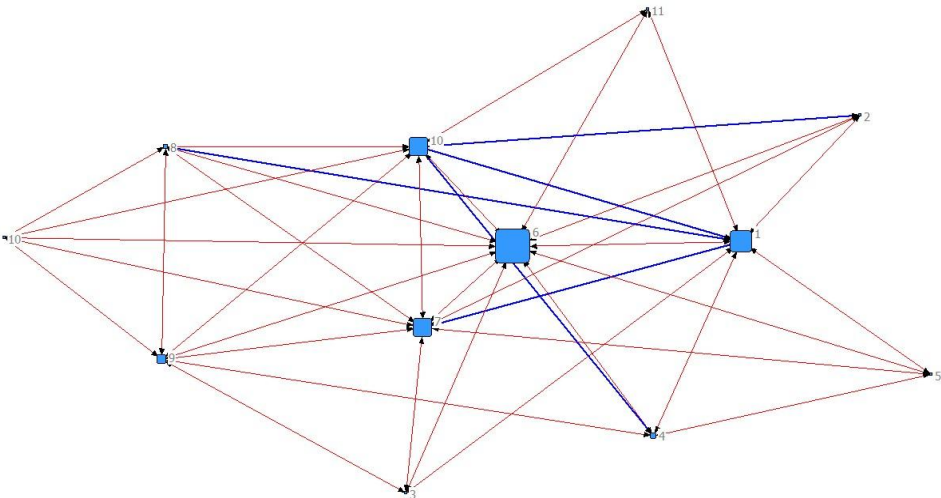
In figure 1.3 red arrows indicate those nodes having reciprocal relations and blue arrows indicate non-reciprocal relationships. The figure 1.3 indicate that the majority of interactions by different nodes in the communication network of Grama Panchayat are that of reciprocal. The blue arrows in the network shows non reciprocal interactions and red arrows denotes the reciprocal interactions. All interactions in the network with different nodes except those between Panchayat President, Standing committee(1), Standing committee(3),

Standing committee(4), Junior Superintendent, Head clerk and Overseer are reciprocal in character.

Betweenness of Nodes in the Communication Network in Grama Panchayat

The analysis on betweenness of various nodes of communication network in the Grama Panchayat, it is found that there are only very few nodes without having reciprocal relationship which is seen in fig.1.4.

Fig. 1.4.
Node Size in Network Diagram of Select Functionaries and Standing Committee in Municipality based on Betweenness



The size of node representing the Gram Panchayat Secretary is very high followed by that of Superintendent as is noticed from Fig . 1.5

The betweenness measures of different nodes are shown in Table 1.5

Table 1.5
Betweenness Measures

	1	2
	Betweenness	N Betweenness
6	23.867	21.697
7	11.583	10.530
1	9.833	8.939
10	6.783	6.167
9	5.083	4.621
4	1.367	1.242
8	0.700	0.636
5	0.667	0.606
3	0.617	0.561
11	0.333	0.303
2	0.167	0.152
12	0.000	0.000

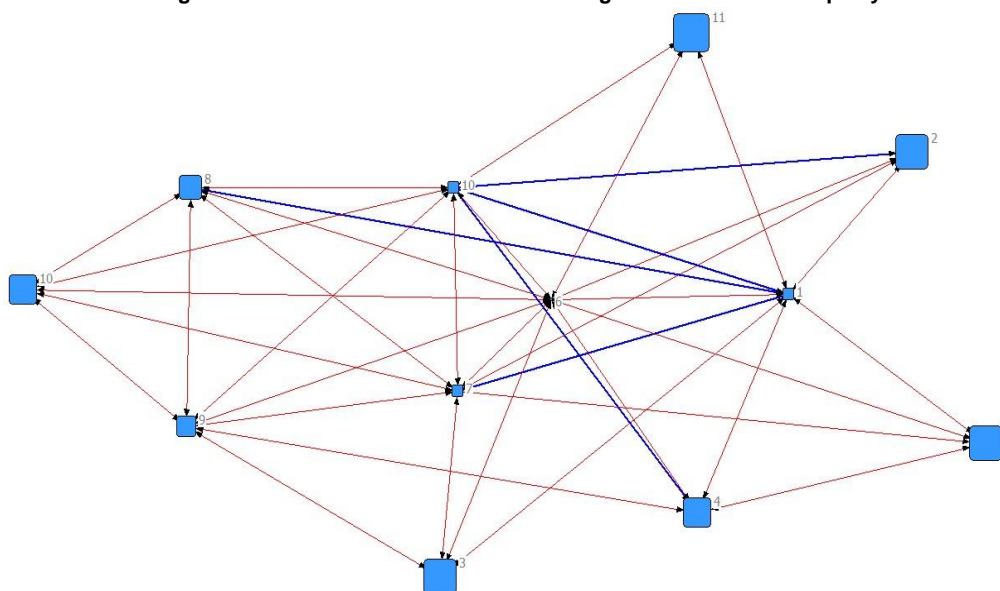
Source: Analysis of Primary Data using computer Software programme

Closeness of Nodes in the Communication Network in Grama Panchayat

On an analysis as to the closeness of nodes in the communication network in the Grama Panchayat reveals that low farness or high closeness is for the Secretary followed by

the Superintendent. The fig. 1.5. shows the network diagram with node size on the basis of closeness. It is seen that the size of node representing the secretary is very small followed by that of the Superintendent.

Fig. 1.5
Node Size in Network Diagram of Select Functionaries and Standing Committee in Municipality Based on Closeness



8. Conclusions

The Social Network Analysis made on the functionaries and elected representatives of Local Governments viz., Grama indicates a common trend that the grassroots communication is not being channelised through the formally designed structure of the respective Organization Chart. In all the cases, the Secretaries viz., Panchayat Secretary is having the highest centrality indicators in respect of betweenness, closeness and degree centrality. The second position goes to the node Superintendents and Peons of these Local Governments. This is the clear indication of the fact that when it comes to the grassroots communication, it is not the formal organization structure that matters but the informal organization structure.

9. Suggestions

The style of communication is not up to the mark in local self governments which is a contributing factor tending towards informal channels and there should be a sound policy for local governments to style-set the communication networks.

While designing the training programmes of different functionaries due importance should be given to the functionaries at various nodes of communication network in the lines of centrality, betweenness, closeness, degree and other network analysis rather than considering the position in which they are fitted in the formally designed structures because the channel of communication network is entirely different from that of formally structured channel in existence in Grama Panchayat as is seen from the Social Network Analysis of various functionaries and elected representatives.

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