

GOSSIPING AT ADMINISTRATIVE LEVEL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY IN THE SCOPE OF A LOCAL GOVERNMENT

FOFOCAS EM NÍVEL ADMINISTRATIVO: UM ESTUDO QUALITATIVO NO ÂMBITO DE UM GOVERNO LOCAL

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Abstract

Given the limited literature on the intentional utilize of gossip by managers in local government organizations, this study explores whether gossip functions as a managerial instrument in these settings. Using an exploratory phenomenological research design, interviews were conducted with 20 managers from Kartepe Municipality (in Kocaeli, Turkey) to gather data for analysis. MAXQDA was employed to assist in the thematic analysis of interview transcripts. The analysis of the collected data reveals that managers do, in fact, utilize gossip for organizational and managerial purposes. Rather than solely attempting to suppress gossip, certain managers appear to engage with it intentionally, employing it as a strategic instrument to further their organizational or personal objectives. However, in some cases, even if administrators do not intentionally create or spread gossip, they may still benefit from it in one way or another. These results underscore the complex role of informal communication in organizational management and suggest that gossip may be strategically employed to shape managerial decisions and relationships.

Keywords: Gossip. Informal Communication. Local Government. Managerial Instrument. Phenomenological Analysis.

Resumo

Considerando a escassez de literatura sobre o uso intencional de fofocas por gestores em organizações governamentais locais, este estudo explora se a fofoca funciona como um instrumento gerencial nesses contextos. Utilizando uma abordagem fenomenológica exploratória, foram realizadas entrevistas com 20 gestores do Município de Kartepe (em Kocaeli, Turquia) para coletar dados para análise. O software MAXQDA foi empregado para auxiliar na análise temática das transcrições das entrevistas. A análise dos dados coletados revela que os gestores, de fato, utilizam a fofoca para fins organizacionais e gerenciais. Em vez de simplesmente tentar suprimir a fofoca, alguns gestores parecem interagir com ela intencionalmente, empregando-a como um instrumento estratégico para alcançar seus objetivos organizacionais ou pessoais. Contudo, em alguns casos, mesmo que os administradores não criem ou espalhem fofocas intencionalmente, eles ainda podem se beneficiar delas de uma forma ou de outra. Esses resultados ressaltam o papel complexo da comunicação informal na gestão organizacional e sugerem que a fofoca pode ser estrategicamente empregada para moldar decisões e relacionamentos gerenciais.

Palavras-chave: Fofoca. Comunicação Informal. Governo Local. Instrumento Gerencial. Análise Fenomenológica.



1 INTRODUCTION

Communication is not merely an action conducted in a planned manner, either verbally or in writing, by individuals within an organization. Rather, communication is a social process that reveals interconnected social networks and encompasses continuous fluctuations in organizational contexts (Fa, 2018, p.12). From this perspective, communication is one of the primary arguments that help in understanding the dynamics within organizations (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). As beings capable of communication and organization, humans complete themselves through communicative connections and various group memberships (Mumby, 2013). Formal communication is regarded as a linear and systematic process occurring between two individuals, whereas informal communication encompasses a holistic network of connections that are non-linear and shaped by reciprocal values, including meanings and interpretations (Alvesson, 1996).

Gossip and rumors, which are categorized as informal communication channels, emerge in situations where communication between employees and managers is disrupted, incomplete, or when access to information is lacking. Gossip is, at its core, the utilize of informal communication channels by individuals for socialization when formal communication channels fail to provide solutions (Michelson & Mouly, 2000). When transitioning from formal to informal communication, the resulting communication gaps are filled by gossip and rumors (Grosser et al., 2012, p.57). According to Emler (1994, p.127), gossip accounts for approximately two-thirds of daily conversations. The most significant characteristic of gossip is its social aspect, which makes it a socially binding form within the organization (Grosser et al., 2010, p.187). The impact of gossip within an organization is related to its structure (Noon & Delbridge, 1993, p.23). However, due to its tendency to obstruct formal communication channels within organizations, gossip is often perceived negatively by managers. Furthermore, the general perception of gossip as negative remarks about others contributes to the adoption of a negative attitude toward it. Despite these challenges, gossip encompasses many positive attributes, such as the construction of organizational identity, interpersonal socialization, the adoption of organizational norms and rules, and the understanding of internal dynamics (Fan et al., 2020: p.7) Ignoring gossip may initially seem like a sound strategy; however, as it constitutes a form of informal communication based on information, it can lead to significantly risky situations (Van Iterson & Clegg, 2008).

Gambetta (1994, p. 201) emphasized that, compared to other communicative practices, gossip fulfils a broader range of functions within organizations and may even operate as a managerial instrument—contrary to its common reputation as mere idle chatter. Cruz et al. (2021) argue that studies on gossip contain many contradictions and simplistic recommendations for managers. The most important reason for this is that researchers perceive gossip differently. Since there is not even a unified definition of gossip, theoretical studies on gossip are differentiating rather than integrating (Kniffin & Wilson, 2005).

Although informal communication has been studied by organizational scientists (Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974; Waddington, 2005), management scholars have not shown systematic interest in the topic of gossip (Noon & Delbridge, 1993), nor has it received sufficient attention from organizational scientists (Waddington, 2012). A review of past studies reveals that gossip has been examined in relation to various topics in recent years: A general analysis of gossip (Farley et al., 2010; Wu et al., 2018), the interaction of gossip between subordinates and superiors (Chang & Kuo, 2021), the distinction between gossip and rumor (Difonzo & Bordia, 2007), the gossip triad (Michelson et al., 2010), the relationship between gossip and organizational development (McAndrew et al., 2007), and the nature of gossip (Grosser et al., 2012) are prominent studies on gossip. Studies about gossip in relation to management have mostly focused on the relationship between managers' gossip-related actions (Kniffin & Wilson, 2010), the relationship between positive gossip and teamwork and performance (Sommerfeld et al., 2008; Meyer & Allen, 1991), the relationship between manager gossip and employee cynicism, embarrassment, and stress (Kuo et al., 2015; Cole & Dalton, 2009; Foster, 2004), and the relationship between manager gossip and confidentiality (Dunbar, 2004). Gossip is not only a poorly understood topic from an organizational behavior perspective, but its role in management processes has yet to be fully explored. In this regard, Ferrari (2015) suggests that despite the negative connotations of gossip across all cultures, the widespread nature of gossip itself presents a paradox, and therefore, it is a subject that warrants investigation. In light of this, the following research question is addressed in this study: “Do managers intentionally generate gossip and utilize it as a managerial instrument? If so, why, and how?” To answer these questions, a qualitative phenomenological analysis was conducted with managers from a municipality Kartepe Municipality (in Kocaeli Turkey). The analytical results of this study were systematized and validated through the

MAXQDA. The analysis of the collected data revealed that managers engage in gossip—either intentionally or unintentionally—for managerial purposes, highlighting its functional role in organizational life.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gossip, often dismissed as trivial or idle chatter, lacks a universally accepted definition but is typically described as “evaluative talk about a person who is not present” (Eder & Enke, 1991). In organizational settings, it is understood as informal communication that spreads within the workplace, often without the subject’s knowledge, and is usually perceived as a negative social phenomenon. Despite its negative connotation, gossip is a pervasive and integral form of communication in organizations (Dunbar et al., 1997), influencing workplace dynamics, group behavior, and communication processes. While it is often seen as inconsequential or harmful, emerging research challenges this view, suggesting that gossip can serve valuable functions within organizations, including as an instrument for managers to influence employee behavior, reinforce organizational norms, and maintain control over group dynamics (Waddington, 2012).

Gossip can be framed from two theoretical perspectives: the functional perspective and the knowledge-based perspective. From the functional perspective, gossip serves as a mechanism for social control, functioning as an early warning system against potential threats or organizational changes (Dunbar, 2004). It can also act as a means of stress relief for employees or a strategy for survival within hierarchical or bureaucratic organizations (Gabriel, 1991). This perspective highlights how gossip, even in its most informal and seemingly trivial form, can provide valuable information that helps employees navigate the organizational environment. On the other hand, the knowledge-based perspective emphasizes how gossip facilitates the flow of information, sometimes filling gaps where formal communication is lacking. According to Paine (1967), gossip allows managers to gather informal yet useful insights about employee sentiments, organizational issues, or emerging problems.

While gossip may often be dismissed as unreliable or unverified, its value to managers lies in its ability to provide early, albeit informal, intelligence about the organizational climate. Mintzberg (1989) suggests that gossip, though not always

accurate, can be an important source of early information for managers, who may utilize it to gauge employee morale, identify potential conflicts, or track organizational changes. This informal information is crucial for managers, especially when formal channels of communication fail or when there is a lack of transparency within the organization. Dunbar (2004) further argues that gossip allows managers to shape perceptions, influence employee behaviors, and even promote individuals they wish to highlight for advancement. By engaging in gossip strategically, managers can motivate employees, reinforce organizational norms, and create alliances within the workplace (Gulati et al., 2000).

However, using gossip as a managerial instrument comes with its challenges. Negative gossip may be undermining managerial authority and damage reputations, especially when it spreads misinformation or fosters distrust. Research indicates that gossip can contribute to organizational cynicism, erode loyalty, and cultivate a toxic work environment (Foster, 2004; Kuo et al., 2015). As a result, many managers attempt to mitigate gossip or control its flow. The main challenge lies in differentiating between functional and destructive gossip and managing both in ways that benefit the organization (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Michelson & Mouly, 2000). To this end, effective management of gossip involves fostering a workplace culture that encourages transparency and open communication. Studies indicate that organizations with positive gossip cultures report higher levels of job satisfaction, as gossip in these settings often serves to reinforce organizational values and promote social cohesion (Bakker et al., 2011). Managers can shape this process by creating opportunities for open dialogue, addressing concerns proactively, and ensuring that employees feel heard and valued. This can reduce the negative effects of gossip while harnessing its potential as an instrument for organizational cohesion (Grosser et al., 2012).

From a strategic standpoint, gossip can also be utilized by managers to build alliances or influence key organizational stakeholders. Kniffin and Wilson (2010) point out that gossip is often utilized to navigate power struggles within organizations, where employees may utilize it to strengthen their positions or challenge managerial authority. This can be a form of resistance to management, but it also highlights the extent to which gossip can play a role in organizational power dynamics. Therefore, managers must understand the underlying social networks within their organizations and leverage gossip

strategically to reinforce positive behaviors, align employees with organizational pursuits, and address any underlying tensions before they escalate (Ellwardt, 2011).

In conclusion, while managers cannot fully eliminate gossip, they can play an active role in managing it. By shaping the flow of information, intervening when necessary, and fostering a culture of trust and transparency, managers can reduce the harmful effects of gossip while enabling its potential to serve as a instrument for social control and organizational development (Liff & Wikström, 2021). As Mills (2010) suggests, gossip should not be seen solely as a disruptive force but as a social process that can be strategically developed and managed for organizational benefit. When managed effectively, gossip can foster social cohesion, improve communication, and even enhance employee performance, making it a valuable instrument in the managerial instrument (Michelson & Mouly, 2000).

3 METHODOLOGY

This study aims to provide exploratory and explanatory insights into the relationship between management and gossip within a local government organization in Kocaeli, Turkey. To achieve this, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was adopted. In phenomenological research, the primary objective is to uncover the meanings, essences, perceptions, and thoughts associated with individuals' lived experiences (Patton, 2002; Ruona, 2005). Marshall and Rossman (2006, p. 104) emphasize that phenomenology enables the understanding of lived experiences through interpretive methods that contribute to the development of a worldview. Based on these insights, phenomenology was chosen as an appropriate method to examine how gossip functions as an informal management instrument within local government organizations. Following ethics committee approval and the informed consent of participants, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 senior managers at Kartepe Municipality. The qualitative data collected through these interviews were systematically coded and analyzed using MAXQDA to identify thematic patterns and enhance analytical rigor. The software's coding and visualization tools facilitated the organization and accessibility of the data, allowing for contextual interpretation of managerial perspectives. The findings were later presented through thematically structured visual outputs to clearly illustrate the key patterns emerging from the interviews.

3.1 Research context

The study examines how gossip operates informally as a managerial tool in the context of local government administration. To this end, a sample of 20 managers from Kartepe Municipality, located in Kocaeli, Turkey, was selected using a convenience sampling method. Kartepe District Municipality, located within the borders of Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, was established in 2008 by merging 11 previously existing town municipalities. Kartepe District has a population of approximately 100,000 people spread across an area of 269 km², resulting in a population density of 304 people per km². Around 9% of the population, or 7,000 people, reside in the region's villages, while the remainder live in the neighborhoods throughout the district. In total, there are 33 neighborhoods within the district. The annual budget allocated by Kartepe Municipality to serve this population is approximately 43 million dollars.

Since its establishment, Kartepe District has rapidly attracted migration and is characterized by a predominance of sectors in both tourism and industry. Kartepe Municipality, like almost every municipality in Turkey, also includes various units such as human resources and training, cultural affairs, law enforcement, social services, and youth and sports management, alongside technical units like planning and urban development, building control, public works, and cleaning services. The municipality comprises a total of 30 managers, including 1 mayor, 4 deputy mayors, and 25 department heads.

As mentioned earlier, the sample was selected from the managers of Kartepe municipality using a convenience sampling method. Studies on organizational behavior within local government organizations are relatively scarce, making research in this area highly valuable for both academic literature and practical applications. With this in mind, this study was designed and conducted to explore whether gossip is utilized as a managerial instrument within a local government organization. If so, the study also investigates the reasons behind its utilize and the methods employed.

3.2 Sample set

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted using a phenomenological qualitative approach, employing semi-structured questions and a purposefully limited

sample size. According to Creswell (2013), data collection in phenomenological research is typically carried out through in-depth interviews, often supported by semi-structured questioning techniques (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Regarding sample size, Polkinghorne (1989) suggests a range of 5 to 25 participants, while Haase (1987) recommends selecting between 6 and 10 participants for phenomenological studies.

As mentioned in the previous section, there are a total of 30 senior managers at Kartepe Municipality. Considering the interpretive phenomenological characteristics, a balanced and homogenized sample size of 20 individuals has been selected. This number represents 66% of the total managers, indicating a fair representation in terms of sample adequacy. However, there are only 3 female managers among the participants. This reflects the level of importance placed on women's representation within municipal management, as only 5 out of the 30 managers (16.6%) are female.

In the below given Table 1, information about the participants is presented by anonymizing their names and giving them an interviewer code in accordance with ethical rules.

Table 1

Information About Interviews

Interviewee	Gender	Age	Education	Duration
BY1	M	57	Graduate	17
BY2	M	56	Middle-School	23
IK	M	41	Master Degree	26
T	M	45	Graduate	34
SY	M	56	Vocational School	36
HI	F	51	Graduate	28
RD	F	53	Graduate	17
PJ	F	33	Graduate	13
MA	M	54	Graduate	23
YA	M	59	Graduate	39
BM	M	58	Graduate	43
MS	M	55	Graduate	47
EI	M	37	Graduate	27
ZA	M	54	Graduate	16
GS	M	46	Graduate	23
FE	M	46	University	32
AF	M	56	Graduate	29
IM	M	39	Graduate	24
PB	M	40	Graduate	27
YK	M	39	Graduate	23

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The purpose of the study was communicated to all participants, and face-to-face interviews were conducted following ethics committee approval and the participants' informed consent. The interview questions were developed in accordance with Patton's (2002, p. 353) guidelines, emphasizing open-ended, neutral, and clearly worded items. The primary aim of these questions was to explore the presence of gossip within Kartepe Municipality and to determine whether managers utilize gossip as a managerial instrument—if so, to understand their underlying motivations and methods of utilize. The interview protocol consisted of eight questions, structured to move from general to more specific topics. Examples of these questions include: *“Is there gossip in the workplace?”* *“Have you ever been the subject of gossip?”* *“Do you engage in gossip?”* and *“Do you take sides in gossip?”* The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using MAXQDA to support a systematic coding process.

Before the main study, a pilot study was conducted with two participants to assess whether the research questions effectively measured what we intended and whether the questions were understood correctly by the participants. The interviews were conducted by two of the authors between March and June 2024.

After data collection, the study transitioned to the data analysis phase using interpretive phenomenology. The primary aim of interpretive phenomenology is to uncover individuals' perceptions and experiences (Giorgi, 1997). According to the interpretive phenomenological approach, there should be a dynamic relationship between data and theories, similar to the relationships between categories and themes (Glaser, 2012). The coding process commenced immediately after each interview. The researchers sequentially engaged in theme development, categorization, and coding. First-order coding, or open coding, was performed by highlighting the participants' statements, followed by axial coding, which involved categorizing the codes and selective coding for theme development (Charmaz, 2006). In line with interpretive phenomenology, the study compared theoretical relationships with the literature to understand whether managers benefit from gossip in their management practices and to reveal their experiences and perceptions (Glaser, 2005). After all these processes were completed, the findings of the study were interpreted and evaluated.

4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The presence of gossip in municipality

This study investigates the role of gossip as a managerial instrument within local government organizations. The findings of the study reveal that gossip is a widespread and ordinary part of daily life within the municipality. Most participants acknowledged the presence of gossip in the workplace and described it as an inevitable phenomenon in any organizational setting. Some managers did not view gossip solely as a harmful or malicious behavior, but rather as an informal yet effective form of communication that reflects the social fabric of the organization.

Table 2

The Presence of Gossip

Yes		No		I don't know	
n	%	n	%	n	%
20	100	0	0	0	0

It is understandable that gossip is prevalent in organizations like municipalities, which are closely connected to the public and exhibit high levels of social interaction. Gossip constitutes approximately %65 of people's conversational time and is a ubiquitous activity (Dunbar, 2004). As Waddington (2012) states, gossip is at the very center of society and its human and social relationships. Moreover, one of the most significant characteristics of gossip is its resilience. Regardless of how advanced civilization becomes, gossip will continue to manifest in various forms. For instance, recent studies on gossip have focused on the characteristics of social media and mobile phone communication (Foster, 2004). Emler (1994) also asserts that gossip accounts for approximately two-thirds of daily conversations, indicating its significant prevalence. Therefore, it should be stated that gossip can always occur to a greater or lesser extent wherever there are people.

4.2 Utilization of gossip by managers

Before analyzing the managers' encounters with gossip deeply, it was important to determine whether they utilized gossip. This is because if they do not utilize gossip in their managerial processes, it would not align with the aims of this study. Therefore, establishing this first should be considered a prerequisite for conducting more in-depth analyses in line with our aims.

4.2.1 Managers' tendencies to utilize gossip

The responses presented in Table 3 aim to determine whether managers utilize gossip in the managerial processes. Accordingly, 80% of participant managers (n= 16) reported that they do benefit from gossip, while 20% (n= 4) tell that they do not.

Table 3

Managers Utilize of Gossip

Yes		No	
n	%	n	%
16	80	4	20

Indeed, a significant portion of the participants stated that they benefit from gossip as a means of acquiring information. According to them, the information underlying gossip is often highly confidential and, as such, contains important details. In fact, obtaining this information through alternative means appears to be exceedingly difficult. Critical organizational information is often shared through gossip, which can provide significant benefits for organizations by, for example, helping to prevent potential crises before they occur. One of the most experienced managers in the municipality, BY1, provided the following assessment on the topic:

“Gossip can provide us with clear information about the situation of managers, deputy mayors, and even the mayor. If managers obtain this information reliably and it is verified, it can be beneficial from a managerial perspective.” (BY1)

One of our participants, TI, also pointed this out and emphasized that gossip can play an important role in managerial processes:

“During times of crisis, gossip becomes indispensable for the municipality. For example, our vehicles break down, but we cannot afford repairs due to our inability to pay the local tradespeople. The tradespeople are discussing this situation outside, which leads to a loss of trust both in the public and among our colleagues. In fact, our staff even delays their work due to fears of not receiving their salaries. I reported this situation to the mayor. We were able to cover part of the tradespeople's debt, which temporarily postponed the crisis.” (TI)

As some participants have indicated, rather than suppressing gossip, understanding the underlying reasons for it, and addressing potential crises revealed by the information it generates would provide a much more rational solution for managers. In doing so, managers can exert greater control within the organization, which would contribute to reducing malicious gossip (Wittek & Wielers, 1998). Managers, at the same time, may utilize gossip mechanisms to gather necessary information for making timely decisions, as well as to influence and gain support from other managers and employees within the organization. Furthermore, gossip and other informal communication mechanisms may be utilized as a means to instinctively protect themselves from individuals who appear socially active and risky within the organization (Beersma & van Kleef, 2011). In the end, when utilized rationally, gossip can be one of the most effective diagnostic instruments for managers. From this perspective, gossip functions as an early warning system that can help detect organizational conflicts and mutual distrust among employees (Grosser et al., 2012).

On the other hand, managers who assert that gossip is not a reliable source of information, and therefore do not benefit from it due to their lack of trust in the source, make up 20% (n= 4) of the participants. One such manager, ZA, made the following comment:

“Utilizing gossip is not a logical stance. It is not reliable information. Why should I benefit from something that may be incorrect? There's no need for me to chase after its accuracy and waste my energy in that area.” (ZA)

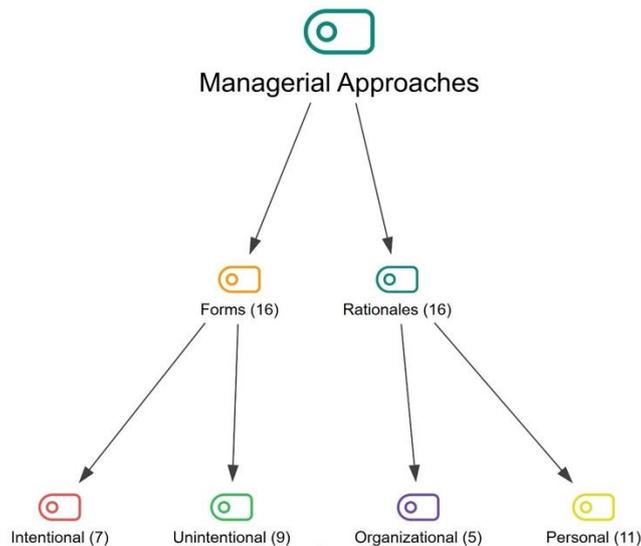
Itersen and Clegg (2008: 1130), in this context, argue that good management should strive to minimize gossip through legal measures such as contracts. Since it is impossible to eliminate gossip entirely, without preventive measures, it could become a threat to the organization. Therefore, it should be noted that some managers may

recognize it as rational to avoid gossip and may take action to either prevent gossip or refrain from chasing it. Moreover, managers with political acumen should be aware of the threats posed by gossip and, instead of reacting hastily, develop communication strategies with strategic adjustment to deliver their messages effectively (Van Iterson & Clegg, 2008: 1134). Unfortunately, it should be noted that the number of managers who can act in this way is also limited, at least being around a quarter compared to others.

Although one in four participants gave a contrasting response, it is clear that the tendency of managers to benefit from gossip is quite high, leading to the conclusion that local government managers gain significant advantages from gossip.

4.2.2 Managerial approaches to gossip utilization

Since the methodological focus of the study is to analyze managers who utilize gossip as a managerial instrument, the four participants who stated that they did not benefit from gossip were excluded from the sample at this stage. The subsequent interview questions specifically targeted how and why gossip is utilized; therefore, including these individuals would have been methodologically inconsistent with the aims of the study. Nonetheless, their initial responses provided valuable insights for confirming the presence of gossip within the organization and assessing its potential role in managerial approaches. It is important to note that this exclusion did not have any meaningful impact on the overall validity or integrity of the findings. As previously mentioned, the following analyses were conducted based on data collected from 16 participants.

Figure 1*Managerial Approaches to Gossip Utilization*

As illustrated in Figure 1, which was generated through creative coding, the analysis of participant data revealed how managers utilize gossip and the underlying reasons for its utilize. Sixteen participants reported that they incorporated gossip into their managerial practices. The ways in which gossip was employed varied and were categorized as either intentional or unintentional. Similarly, the rationales provided by managers were grouped under two main themes: safeguarding organizational interests and pursuing personal objectives. Although managerial experience and individual perspectives differed, the findings—consistent with the aim of the study—suggest that some managers actively and strategically utilize gossip as a component of their informal management practices.

The findings derived from the data collected from these 16 participants are significant in shedding light on the "why" and "how" of managers utilize of gossip. However, before presenting and discussing our main findings in this regard, it is necessary to address another related yet surprising finding. Accordingly, some of the interviewees stated that gossip is quite natural and ordinary for public organizations and somehow serves organizational pursuits. In fact, it can be inferred from the following comment that he also aimed to legitimize gossip in some way:

“The primary objective of managers here is to ensure the continuity of operations. Ultimately, we are a public institution. Gossip inevitably occurs here. However, it is up to managers to turn this into something positive. For example, I engage in

gossip with entirely positive intentions to encourage my subordinates to work.”
(GS)

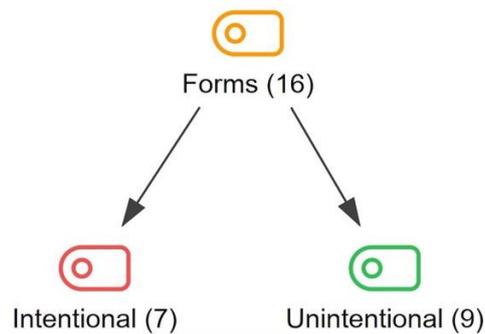
Another participant, BY2, who is an experienced manager in the municipality, made the following statement, again referring to the banality and benefit of gossip:

“Given that gossip exists here, if you are on the listening side, it is naturally expected that you will also produce gossip. After all, you are the manager. This means you must be solution-oriented. Even if the gossip is malicious, I do incorporate different, even nonexistent, interpretations for the sake of finding a solution. However, let's refer to this as a benevolent lie rather than a malicious one.” (BY2)

It is widely acknowledged that gossip is a common feature of organizational life. (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994). Therefore, it may seem natural to describe gossip as a part of organizational life, yet when it comes to the utilize of gossip by managers, it may take on different roles. According to existing studies, our study is the first to show that managers exhibit two distinct behavioral patterns in their utilize of gossip—intentional and unintentional—not just in critical situations, but also in general management processes. This suggests that managers intentionally generate and/or utilize gossip, whether positive or negative. However, it is important to note here a few studies in the literature indicating that managers may tend to gossip under different but critical conditions: Accordingly, managers are likely to produce gossip during times of organizational change (Mills et al., 2010: 216) or when socialization is necessary (Dunbar, 2004: 112). In conclusion, we have gathered substantial evidence that gossip, in one form or another, is both common and widespread within organizations.

4.2.2.1 Forms of gossip utilization by managers

At this point, it is essential to address our second set of research questions. Accordingly, the findings regarding why and how managers utilize gossip as a managerial instrument are presented below. Analysis of the collected data from 16 participants, in this direction, revealed that some managers (n=9) benefited from gossip unintentionally, meaning they were influenced by gossip produced by others without actively participating in its creation. In contrast, another group of managers (n= 7) intentionally utilized gossip as a managerial instrument, using it as a management instrument.

Figure 2*Forms of Gossip Utilization by Managers*

According to the creative coding map presented in Figure 2, 7 out of 16 participants intentionally utilize gossip, while 9 participants engage in gossip unintentionally. The intentional utilize of gossip entails managers perceiving it as a strategic instrument for achieving both their personal objectives within the organization and the maximization of organizational interests. In contrast, unintentional engagement with gossip occurs during informal, spontaneous conversations that often serve social or relational purposes rather than any intentional managerial objective.

One key observation is that managers utilize gossip both by intentionally producing it and benefiting from it, as well as by unintentionally benefiting from it, at similar rates. This, in a way, legitimizes gossip. Perhaps managers prefer to utilize gossip as an instrument for information-sharing rather than eliminating it, as suggested in the literature (e.g., Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Michelson & Mouly, 2000). While this may seem justifiable, the intentional utilize of gossip by managers raises ethical questions that merit further examination.

4.2.2.1.1 Unintentional utilization

In our findings on the utilize of gossip by managers for managerial purposes, we first address unintentional utilization. As mentioned earlier, unintentional utilize refers to the behavioral pattern of managers who do not intentionally generate gossip but still derive some benefit from it. While these managers may utilize gossip for managerial purposes, they are not directly involved in its production. Thus, they utilize gossip spontaneously, but unlike those who intentionally produce and circulate gossip for a specific purpose, they do not aim to benefit from it in this way. Compared to the latter

group, managers who benefit from gossip unintentionally may appear more innocent. However, this does not negate the fact that they still utilize gossip for their managerial purposes.

The most critical aspect of the unintentional utilize of gossip is that gossip is readily available (i.e., circulating) within the organization. In other words, managers do not participate in the production or dissemination of gossip, but they may still encounter it. As a result, they may choose to benefit from gossip produced and disseminated by others. Furthermore, this implies that without gossip, it is impossible to utilize it for managerial purposes or derive any benefit from it. In other words, only if gossip is produced, circulated, and transmitted to managers (without their intention) can they benefit from it; if these conditions are not met, it becomes impossible for them to gain any benefit.

One of our interviewees made the following comment in this regard:

“Gossip cannot be completely prevented. While I do not personally condone gossip in alignment with my own values, I am frequently exposed to it. The utilize of gossip for managerial purposes, however, varies depending on the specific circumstances. For instance, one of our employees recently remarked about his manager, “My manager is so uneducated, what is he doing in our department? He doesn't even know the rules of official correspondence.” The individual who shared this comment holds a negative opinion of his manager and personally dislikes him. However, after hearing this, I spoke with this manager and provided him with a correspondence lesson. This example illustrates the potential managerial benefits of gossip. But note that I was not involved in the production, dissemination, or any other aspect of gossip. I'm simply stating that by taking advantage of it once it came to me, I solved a problem.” (YA)

As evidenced in the findings, the manager does not intentionally produce or spread gossip. However, he is exposed to it. Subsequently, the manager takes initiative based on the gossip he receives, leading to improvements that prevent what could otherwise become an administrative crisis. This illustrates one of the core findings of our study: Managers do not intentionally create gossip, as it contradicts their values; rather, they become aware of it and take action by initiating administrative changes that lead to improvements. Dunbar (2004), in this meaning, argues that gossip allows managers to shape perceptions, influence employee behaviour, and even promote people they want to promote. Therefore, managers may utilize gossip for a variety of purposes without generating it themselves.

Consistent with this observation, Gulati et al. (2000) also argue that managers may strategically intervene both inside and outside the organization through gossip. Thus, managers actually gain an opportunity for managerial intervention by relying on gossip. In the same context, a second interviewee gave the following striking example:

“I never gossip. God forbid! But no matter how much I try to prevent it, I can’t stop gossip from spreading. When I can’t prevent it, the gossip inevitably reaches me. These gossip may be simple, or they may concern the management. If the gossip relates to my management, I take measures to address it, such as engaging employees in dialogue, relocating them, or sending them on leave for a few days. However, if the issue is beyond my control, I report it to the vice president, who is my superior in the hierarchy.” (HI)

Managers may not approve of gossip in principle, but they may still utilize it in some way to facilitate managerial actions, make decisions, and implement them. This is never a intentional behaviour. Rather, it reflects the manager's acceptance of gossip and taking action. Since it is impossible to eliminate gossip entirely, without preventive measures, it could become a threat to the organization (Van Iterson & Clegg, 2008: 1130). Therefore, even if managers are not directly involved in gossip, they may still seek to benefit from it in some way.

4.2.1.1.2 Intentional utilization

It is a critical issue that managers intentionally create and utilize gossip, as it is unacceptable for them to rely on a morally questionable instrument like gossip for managerial purposes. Accepting this practice implies that 'the ends justify the means,' which is ethically problematic. However, despite this concern, nearly one-third of the managers we interviewed indicated that they could intentionally create and utilize gossip. There are some weak signals in the literature on this subject. For example, (Hiatt, 2011, p.55) suggests that although gossip may seem like undesirable behavior, it is inherently intentional. To better understand this, it is important to examine the situation through a few examples. One such example comes from a municipal manager we interviewed, who stated the following:

"In a political institution like the municipality, crises are constant, though most of them are based on gossip. As a result, gossip and crises feed into each other. It is

also in my interest for crises to occur. There are many different factions among the administrators in the municipality, and in fact, we sometimes create crises intentionally. The first step in this process is communication, that is, gossip. When a crisis arises, the top managers are often unable to resolve it. Their inability to solve the issue creates another crisis, which forces them to consult me. In this way, I am able to prove my value within the municipality." (TI)

As observed, the manager not only engages in gossip but also creates crises to serve his own interests. In this context, gossip and crises feed one another, with new gossip emerging from the crisis and vice versa. While it is difficult to understand and ethically problematic for a manager to utilize organizational resources for personal gain, the fact that this behavior is not acceptable does not negate its occurrence or potential for recurrence. In fact, managers with political acumen are aware of the threats posed by gossip. Instead of reacting hastily, they develop communication strategies that involve indirect communication strategies to convey their messages effectively (Van Iterson & Clegg, 2008: 1134).

Another municipal manager we interviewed addressed this issue as follows:

"If gossip arise about you or individuals you are affiliated with, you can defend them by generating and circulating counter-gossip. Conversely, you can undermine an employee whose performance you disapprove of, or a manager you view as a rival, by creating and spreading gossip about them." (FI)

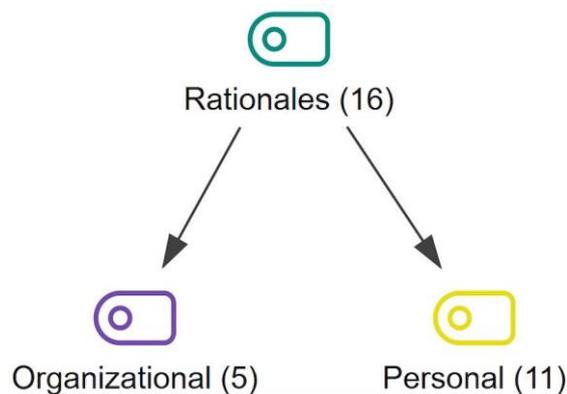
A further illustration of intentional gossip utilization is presented here. Managers may intentionally generate and spread gossip as a defensive strategy. Beyond the moral implications of such actions, it is also noteworthy that gossip may be instrumentalized (Tebbutt & Marchington, 1997; Tucker, 1993), turning into an instrument against competitors or others in certain scenarios. Similarly, Kniffin and Wilson (2010) also point out that gossip is often utilized to navigate power struggles within organizations. Although the scenarios and their objectives may vary, it is clear that managers utilize gossip as a managerial instrument. This finding thus offers a valuable contribution to both scholarly inquiry and managerial practice by revealing the strategic utility of gossip within organizational contexts.

4.2.2.2 Rationales behind gossip utilization by managers

The final research question of our study addresses the rationales behind managers' utilization of gossip. In this section, we present the findings from our investigation into "*why managers working in municipalities utilize gossip*", along with a discussion of these findings in relation to the existing literature. Notably, the rationales for utilizing gossip are not categorized according to whether it is employed intentionally or unintentionally. This decision is based on our analysis, which indicates that the rationales for using gossip do not significantly differ depending on how it is utilized. Furthermore, it was observed that the rationales for utilizing gossip were consistent or shared among the 16 managers who participated in our study sample. Although Liff and Wikström (2021, p.16-17) argue that the purpose of managers' gossip is to minimize uncertainty and correct missing or incorrect information, and Van Iterson et., (2011) contends that managers' gossip serves to ensure moral responsibility within the group(s) and harmonize the common interests of the groups, our study reveals the potential to classify the reasons why managers gossip into two distinct categories. Overall, managers tend to utilize gossip for two primary rationales: to safeguard organizational interests and personal interests, Gossip, whether utilized for organizational or personal purposes, can ultimately become a strategic means (Ellwardt, 2011, p.526; Gulati et al., 2000).

Figure 3

Rationales Behind Gossip Utilization by Managers



Secondly, the analysis focused on the justifications provided by managers for their utilization of gossip. According to Figure 3, 5 participants indicated that they utilize gossip to safeguard organizational interests, while 11 participants stated that they engage

in it in pursuit of personal interest. Prioritizing organizational learning and sustainability is a distinctive characteristic of experienced managers who regard the utilization of gossip as a means to serve organizational benefit, with no self-serving intent." Prioritizing organizational learning and sustainability is a distinctive characteristic of experienced managers who regard the utilization of gossip as a means to serve organizational benefit, as a means to serve organizational benefit, with no self-serving intent. On the other hand, when managers utilize gossip to promote themselves or to undermine individuals or groups they perceive as rivals, this reflects the utilization of gossip for personal objectives. Such behaviour also indicates that gossip is utilized strategically. The subsequent section provides a detailed exposition of these two rationale categories. T

4.2.2.2.1 Safeguarding organizational interest

Some of the managers we interviewed stated that they utilized gossip to advance organizational interests, while others employed it to protect their personal objectives, either aligned with or separate from organizational s. Therefore, they described gossip as a defensive strategy especially under uncertainties (Sandler,1988). As an extension of this description, some interviewees emphasized that gossip could be utilized not only as a defensive instrument but also as an offensive one. Liff & Wikström (2021, p.16) also suggest that gossip can have devastating and destructive consequences. Therefore, it can be argued that gossip is utilized by strategic instrument, implemented in one way or another, to serve the organization. However, its unethical nature is a separate issue. The following section presents a detailed account of how the interviewees responded to these insights:

“I do not believe that gossip is ethically right, but it is something that cannot be ignored. Gossip can provide significant benefits in safeguarding the interests of the municipality. For instance, there was a supplier from whom we purchased technological devices such as computers, cameras, and printers. We were acquiring products through tenders, but they also offered services for more complex tasks, such as camera installation, at a very high price. This information was shared with me by a colleague. I communicated the situation to the mayor, and as a result, we immediately terminated the supplier's contract. This was not my intention to gossip, but we did a very useful job for the municipality.” (BM)

It appears that the damage caused by a stakeholder, who was reported to have harmed the organization, was prevented through gossip. Although in a different context, Grosser et al. (2012) state that gossip functions as an early warning system. This enables them to respond more quickly and take action (Michelson & Mouly, 2000). Therefore, through gossip, managers can learn about potential threats to the organization, take precautions, and protect organizational interests.

Another interviewee described gossip as a defensive and even offensive strategy, saying:

“Gossip functions as both a defensive and offensive mechanism, and this extends to management as well.” (FI)

The tendency to utilize gossip for organizational purposes is prevalent among managers. Some researchers also state that it is important to manage gossip in line with organizational interests (e.g. Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Michelson & Mouly, 2000). The utilize of gossip for organizational purposes arises from the understanding that if gossip encountered by managers is not addressed, it can cause further damage to the organization. This may be considered a provocative statement, but managers often utilize gossip as a means to protect the organization.

4.2.2.2.2 Pursuit of personal objectives

The interview data suggest that there are instances where personal interests are also protected through gossip. Moreover, asserting that gossip is utilized for personal objectives appears to be a particularly complex issue. Utilizing gossip to protect personal interests in a public setting, such as an organization, is often considered normatively inappropriate, given its potential to undermine organizational cohesion and integrity. One interviewed manager mentioned that he resorted to gossip in order to protect his personal interests, stating:

“The purpose of the gossip is for our group to know what is going on in the municipality and to take precautions and manage the process accordingly. At the very beginning, I said that even religion forbids it, but what can I do if the other group tries to wear me down?” (SY)

One interviewee stated that he was able to influence the mayor through gossip and that this way they got along better:

“The gossip we engage in among friends doesn’t only affect those directly involved. When I said that it’s impossible not to be affected by gossip, this is what I meant. Even the person who claims to be unaffected is impacted. The mayor is also affected. I would even argue that we have become closer because of this. Sometimes, we meet once a month to exchange information. Of course, what the managers think about him is important.” (IM)

In this case, for instance, the manager utilize gossip to get closer to the mayor and regularly shares the information he gathers with him. This allows the manager to cultivate a more personal and intimate relationship with the mayor. Similarly, Goff & Goff (1988) also argue that managers often resort to gossip about their subordinates, other employees, and even other managers in order to gain power and control within the organization. Therefore, we can conclude that the manager prioritizes achieving his personal objectives through gossip. Thus, we have determined that gossip is also utilized for personal purposes. Although it can be argued that this constitutes a complex and unethical behavioral pattern, considering the strong motivation people have to protect themselves and their possessions, it becomes more understandable that gossip is utilized for personal gain (Foster, 2004).

5 CONCLUSION

Gossip, which occupies a central position in communication, has been extensively studied by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists, both in its positive and negative forms. However, research on gossip within the field of management science is still emerging. Particularly, the impact of gossip on managerial processes among managers remains an unexplored area.

The findings from the current study indicate that managers in local government organizations make extensive utilize of gossip, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Sometimes, gossip comes to them ready to utilize, while at other times, they intentionally create it for their own purposes. Additionally, they continue to utilize gossip not only for organizational purposes but also for personal purposes, including self-interest. While these results are intriguing, the fact that the study was conducted in only one local

government organization raises concerns about generalizability. Future studies involving multiple organizations may help clarify this issue. In conclusion, it is evident that managers are influenced by gossip and leverage it as a managerial instrument. Nevertheless, they require constant communication to safeguard against the negative aspects of gossip.

5.1 Practical implications

Recognizing gossip as a potential managerial instrument may aid in developing more nuanced communication strategies that acknowledge the informal dimensions of organizational life. However, managers must remain cautious not to idealize or overestimate the strategic utility of gossip, as its misuse can foster mistrust, fuel misinformation, and exacerbate internal divisions. Those who are aware of both the risks and the limited opportunities associated with gossip may be better equipped to navigate internal dynamics, monitor employee sentiments, and pre-empt conflicts. Therefore, training and awareness programs that emphasize the dual nature of gossip—its potential for harm as well as its strategic use—may contribute to more ethically grounded and cohesive managerial practices..

5.2 Theoretical implications

This study advances the theoretical understanding of informal organizational communication by conceptualizing gossip not merely as a peripheral or disruptive behaviour, but as a functional managerial instrument. By distinguishing between intentional and unintentional gossip utilization, it introduces a novel typology that highlights the variability in managerial agency and strategic intent. Furthermore, the identification of dual rationales—organizational and personal—extends existing models by demonstrating how gossip operates at the intersection of collective goals and individual agendas. These insights call for a reassessment of gossip's role in administrative theory, emphasizing its entanglement with decision-making processes, power dynamics, and managerial communication.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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