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# Gossip And Cynicism: A Case Study For A Healthcare Organization

Cem KAHYA  Evren YANAR 

Prof. Dr., Bayburt University, Faculty Of Economics And Administrative Sciences, Department Of Business, Bayburt, Turkey  
Bayburt University, Institute of Social Sciences, Graduate Student, Bayburt, Turkey

## ABSTRACT

This study focused on revealing the relationships and interactions between workplace gossip and employee cynicism. While workplace gossip is defined as informal conversations of at least two people about a third person who is not present, employee cynicism is; It refers to the negative attitude of employees towards their own organizations. Since both phenomena are thought to be effective on the performance of employees and therefore organizations, there is a need to conduct such a scientific research.

Our main purpose here is to reveal the role of the perception of gossip in the workplace on employee cynicism. For this purpose, a survey was conducted on a total of 324 academic and administrative personnel working in Erzurum Atatürk University Health Research and Application Center. As a result of the analyzes made on the data obtained from the participants, It was concluded that gossiping in the workplace was perceived negatively by the employees and this negative perception increased the cynicism levels of the employees.

**Key Words:** Workplace Gossip, Employee Cynicism, Healthcare Organization

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Individuals need to share with others some personal or non-personal information (economic, familial, spiritual, etc.) that they cannot find a solution on their own or that they feel the need to talk about. For this reason, they try to meet their needs by communicating with different people in different environments. Such organized formations can alleviate or completely disappear issues that cannot be solved alone in the light of different ideas (Guirdham, 1995). Such organized formations can reduce or completely eliminate problems that cannot be solved alone by making use of different ideas.

The actions of acting as a group enable the formation of organizational structures so that individuals can meet their personal or impersonal needs and achieve their goals jointly by exchanging ideas with different people (Solmaz, 2006).

In organizational structures, communication takes place either formally or informally. In formal communication, the superior-subordinate relationship is dominant and the communication takes place in writing through official channels. Informal communication occurs outside of official channels, such as gossip or rumor (Sarı, 2019). In this study, the concept of gossip, which is expressed as an informal communication tool, is discussed.

In every environment or workspace where people come together, gossip is an inevitable phenomenon (Gürbüz, 2019). Such environments allow gossip to emerge in an organized manner. Herskovits (1937) defined gossip as one's desire to impose one's own ideas and thoughts on a group. The phenomenon of organizational gossip, which points to the collective emergence of gossip in a way, has been defined as the gathering of people in order to perform the services or actions that need to be done within the organization. It can be said that the phenomenon of gossip, which exists at every stage of our lives as an accepted communication tool in all societies from the past to the present, is a communication tool that can affect individuals, groups and communities in a positive or negative way.

Organizational gossip is discussed in three dimensions within the scope of this study. The first dimension is the having information, which includes employees' knowledge of any situation and sharing it (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). The second dimension is the developing relationships that involve employees getting closer and socializing with each other through social interaction (Çalikuşu, et al. 2013). Finally the third dimension is the organizational harm, which includes the employees' harming organizational activities through gossip (Kieffer, 2013).

It can be said that gossip has both benefits and harms in terms of organizational functioning. While communication established through organizational gossip enables the development of interpersonal relations and the rapid delivery of information to other audiences (Şahan, 2017), on the contrary, It can also cause groupings and the destruction of friendships within the organization (Çalığıuşu et al, 2013). Therefore, this negative situation may result in the emergence of negative attitudes and behaviors in employees. One of them is thought to be employee cynicism, which is expressed in the literature as negative attitudes of employees towards their organizations. Previous studies have shown that there are multiple personal and organizational reasons underlying employees' cynical behaviors and negative emotions. It has been determined that reasons such as insecurity, jealousy, injustice, ignoring the person in the organization and workplace gossip cause the emergence of cynicism (Özler et al, 2010).

In this study, employee cynicism is discussed in three dimensions. The first dimension is cognitive cynicism, which represents employees' beliefs that the organization lacks integrity; The second dimension is affective cynicism, which includes the negative feelings that people feel towards the organization and the employees, and the third dimension is behavioral cynicism, which is expressed as the negative reactions of the employees against the managers and the organization (Dean et al, 1998).

Studies examining the relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism are limited in the literature. Therefore, starting from the above information, we purposed to explore the interaction between organizational gossip and organizational cynicism in this study.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1. Workplace Gossip and Employee Cynicism

Although the existence of an unavoidable gossip mechanism in the organization provides some administrative advantages, it is a situation that commonly disrupts the functioning and health of institutional mechanisms. Where there is a lack of information, gossip occurs,

Where there is a lack of information, gossip swarms, and unrelated images and assumptions fill the gaps in meaning created by secrets. Gossip transforms sloppy information into imaginary objects by categorizing it and makes it possible to talk about what is happening by associating it with known concepts (Akduru & Semerciöz, 2017). Therefore, as a result of misinformation and sharing, negative attitudes such as cynicism may develop in employees. Therefore, as a result of misinformation and sharing, negative attitudes such as cynicism may develop in employees.

*H1a= Having information has a significant and positive effect on cognitive cynicism.*

*H1b= Having information has a significant and positive effect on affective cynicism.*

*H1c= Having information has a significant and positive effect on behavioral cynicism.*

On the other hand, people feel better by discovering and discussing the faults and weaknesses of others through gossip (Michelson et al., 2010). This may result in the employees being gossiped about feeling bad, thus making the gossipers a target for them. As a result, there may be more conflicts among the employees, and in this way, the peace environment in the organization may be disturbed. In this context, it can be said that gossip in the organization may lead to the emergence of negative attitudes such as cynicism, rather than developing closer and sincere relations among employees.

*H2a= Developing relations has a significant and positive effect on cognitive cynicism.*

*H2b= Developing relations has a significant and positive effect on affective cynicism.*

*H2c= Developing relations has a significant and positive effect on behavioral cynicism.*

Gossip can benefit organizational and personal interests, as well as harm the organizational structure and employees (Dicle, 1974). Employees may spread harmful rumors in line with their personal interests. In such environments, it is difficult to identify the source of gossip and to intervene. For this reason, gossip can sometimes reach more dangerous and harmful dimensions than physical violence (Kieffer, 2013). This may also lead to negative attitudes such as cynicism in the injured employees.

*H3a= Organizational harm has a significant and positive effect on cognitive cynicism.*

*H3b= Organizational harm has a significant and positive effect on affective cynicism.*

*H3c= Organizational harm has a significant and positive effect on behavioral cynicism.*

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Population and Sample

The population of the research consists of 2300 academic and administrative personnel working at Atatürk University Health Research and Application Center located in the city center of Erzurum. The reason for applying the research in a health institution is that the number of personnel working in the institution is high and the working conditions cause gossip among the employees. The purpose in this study is to reveal the effects of gossip emerging in these environments on the cynicism levels of the employees. The number of participants who should be included in the research sample was determined as 320 by means of simple random sampling method. Considering this sample size, a total of 350 questionnaires were distributed and 331 questionnaires were returned. Accordingly, the return rate of the questionnaires is 94.5%. Since 7 of the 331 questionnaire forms were answered incompletely and incorrectly, they were excluded from the questionnaire and the total number of samples was determined as 324.

When the distribution of the participants according to their demographic characteristics is examined in table 1. According to the results of frequency analysis; 53.1% (n= 172) of the participants were men and 49.9% (n= 152) were women. The average age of the participants between the ages of 19 and 55 was 34.76 (SD= 7.59). 17.9% (n= 58) of the participants have high school, 19.1% (n= 62) associate degree, 29.9% (n= 97) undergraduate and 33.1% (n= 107) graduate degrees. Finally, the average tenure of the participants who worked between 1 and 7 years was 3.33 (SD= 1.57).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Sample

Variables	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	172	53.1
	Female	152	46.9
Age	< 30	98	30.4
	30 - 40	151	46.6
	40 <	75	23.0
Education	High School	58	17.9
	Associate degree	62	19.1
	Undergraduate	97	29.9
	Graduate	107	33.1
Tenure	< 6	120	37.1
	6 – 11	67	20.7
	11 <	137	42.2

#### 3.2. Measures

In this study, the Workplace Gossip scale, which was developed by Han and Dağlı (2018), was used to measure the participants' perceptions of organizational gossip. The scale consists of 23 items and three sub-dimensions in total: *having information*, *develeoping relations*, *organizational harm*). As sample items: “I get to know a lot of information about employees in the workplace through gossip”, “I make new friends in gossip environments at work” and “I lose my confidence in my colleagues who gossip at work”

In order to measure the employee cynicism perceptions of the participants, the Employee Cynicism Scale was used. This scale was developed by Brandes et al. (1999) and consisting of 13 items and 3 sub-dimensions (*Cognitive Cynicism*, *Affective Cynicism*, *Behavioral Cynicism*). As sample items: “I believe that my company's says one thing and does another”, “I see little similarity between what my organization says it will do and what it actually does” and “I complain about things happen at my organization to friends outside the organization”.

Both scales are rated with a 5-point Likert scale (1= Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree).

### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4. 1. Validity, Reliability and Normality

According to table 2, the construct validities of the workplace gossip and organizational cynicism scales have been provided and it has been concluded that both scales are reliable for this study.

Table 2. CFA and Cronbach's Alpha Results

Scales	CMIN/DF	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	Cronbach's Alpha
<i>Organizational Gossip</i>	2.00	.94	.94	.06	.09	.84
• <i>Having information</i>						.91
• <i>Developing Relations</i>						.91
• <i>Organizational Harm</i>						.82
<i>Organizational Cynicism</i>	2.45	.98	.98	.06	.04	.93
• <i>Cognitive Cynicsm</i>						.95
• <i>Affective Cynicsm</i>						.89
• <i>Behavioral Cynicsm</i>						.84

The skewness and kurtosis coefficients were calculated to determine whether the data obtained in the study had a normal distribution. Since Kurtosis and Skewness values are considered to be normal when they are between -1.5 and +1.5 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2013), it was determined that the data had a normal distribution according to the calculation findings.

#### 4.2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to determine the intercorrelations between research variables and the findings are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Means, standard deviations, coefficient alphas, and correlations among variables

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender	1.47	.50	1											
2. Age	34.76	7.59	-.270**	1										
3. Education	2.78	1.09	.058	-.180**	1									
4. Tenure	3.33	1.57	-.123*	.760**	-.260**	1								
5. Organizational Gossip	3.18	.53	.046	-.115*	.224**	-.081	1							
6. Having Information	3.30	.95	.058	-.101	.185**	-.027	.809**	1						
7. Developing Relations	2.14	.89	-.076	-.091	.162**	-.062	.593**	.446**	1					
8. Organizational Harm	3.73	.66	.086	-.035	.092	-.070	.534**	.115*	-.175**	1				
9. Organizational Cynicism	3.11	.89	.155**	-.216**	.159**	-.060	.510**	.496**	.270**	.216**	1			
10. Belief	3.36	.99	.162**	-.155**	.083	-.003	.388**	.397**	.167**	.174**	.888**	1		
11. Affect	2.79	1.11	.173**	-.154**	.124*	-.015	.400**	.375**	.195**	.197**	.865**	.656**	1	
12. Behavior	3.13	1.00	.054	-.260**	.219**	-.151**	.547**	.521**	.356**	.189**	.824**	.597**	.573**	1

\*\*p < .01, \*p < .05

It was determined that there is a significant and positive relationship between workplace gossip and employee cynicism, which are the main variables of the research ( $r = .510$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

When the relationships between the sub-dimensions are examined, there were significant and positive relationships between having information and cognitive cynicism ( $r = .397$ ,  $p < .01$ ), affective cynicism ( $r = .375$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and behavioral cynicism ( $r = .521$ ,  $p < .01$ ). There were significant and positive relationships between developing relationships and cognitive cynicism ( $r = .167$ ,  $p < .01$ ), affective cynicism ( $r = .195$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and behavioral cynicism ( $r = .356$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Finally, there were significant and positive relationships between organizational harm and cognitive cynicism ( $r = .174$ ,  $p < .01$ ), affective cynicism ( $r = .197$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and behavioral cynicism ( $r = .189$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

#### 4.3. Testing Hypotheses

Three multiple regression models were established to test the research hypotheses. Gender, age, education and tenure variables were added to these models as control variables. The findings obtained as a result of multiple regression analyzes are presented below:

Model 1 established for testing the H1 hypothesis is significant ( $R^2 = .221$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Having information ( $\beta = .338$ ;  $p < .001$ ) and organizational harm ( $\beta = .140$ ,  $p < .01$ ) dimensions were found to have significant and positive effects on cognitive cynicism. It was determined that the dimension of developing relations did not have a significant effect on cognitive cynicism ( $\beta = .037$ ;  $p > .05$ ). Based on these findings, hypotheses H1a and H3a were accepted, while hypothesis H2a was rejected.

Table 4. Results for testing multiple regression models

Variables	Cognitive Cynicism	Affective Cynicism	Behavioral Cynicism
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
1. Gender	.090	.108*	-.035
2. Age	-.264**	-.238**	-.278***
3. Education	.009	.048	.084
4. Tenure	.233**	.217**	.110
5. Having Information	.338***	.281***	.383***
6. Developing Relations	.037	.092	.180**
7. Organizational Harm	.140**	.174**	.169***
F	12.770	12.387	26.258
R <sup>2</sup>	.221***	.215***	.368***

\*\*\*p < .001 \*\*p < .01 \*p < .05

Model 2 established for testing the H2 hypothesis is significant ( $R^2 = .215$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Having information ( $\beta = .281$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and organizational harm ( $\beta = .174$ ;  $p < .01$ ) dimensions were found to have significant and positive effects on affective cynicism. On the other hand, the dimension of developing relations did not have a significant effect on

affective cynicism ( $\beta = .095$ ,  $p > .05$ ). According to these findings, the H1b and H3b hypotheses were accepted, while the H2b hypothesis was rejected.

The model 3 established for testing the H3 hypothesis is significant ( $R^2 = .368$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The dimensions of having information ( $\beta = .383$ ,  $p < .001$ ), developing relations ( $\beta = .180$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and organizational harm ( $\beta = .169$ ,  $p < .001$ ) were found significantly and positively effects on the behavioral cynicism dimension. effects were found. According to these findings, hypotheses H1c, H2c and H3c were accepted.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to reveal the relationships and interactions between the concepts of workplace gossip and employee cynicism. For this purpose, a survey study was conducted on 324 academic and administrative personnel working at Atatürk University Yakutiye Research Hospital. After the necessary analyzes were made on the data set obtained from the respondents, the following results were obtained:

Bivariate correlation analysis was performed to reveal the relationships between research variables and sub-dimensions. As a result of the analysis, a significant and positive relationship was determined between workplace gossip and employee cynicism in general. At the same time, it was seen that there were mutually significant and positive relations between the sub-dimensions of these variables.

As the main reason for carrying out such a study, multiple regression models were established to prove the proposed research hypotheses and multiple regression analyzes were performed on each dimension of employee cynicism. As a result of these analyzes, it was determined that all of the models established were significant.

Mostly positive interactions were discovered between sub-dimensions representing workplace gossip and employee cynicism. Accordingly, while there was a positive interaction between awareness and organizational harm and cognitive, affective and behavioral cynicism, there was a positive interaction between developing relations and behavioral cynicism. When a general evaluation is made according to these findings, it can be said that gossip creates a negative perception in organizations and this may cause negative attitudes in employees. At the same time, it should not be ignored that the word gossip creates a negative connotation in people's minds, which can lead to this result.

The purpose of gossip may not always be to do harm to the manager, colleague or organization. However, because people do not see gossiping as legitimate, they may have the belief and perception that gossip can cause negative consequences for the organization, even if the content of gossip is to obtain and share information or develop close relations with others. Based on this belief and perception, they may develop negative attitudes towards environments where they think gossip is made.

There are studies in the literature that support the results we reached in this study. Aboramadan et al. (2021), Doaei et al. (2021), Sevda (2021), Kuo et al. (2020), Kuo et al. (2015) and Kuo et al. (2013) concluded in their study that workplace gossip has a strong positive effect on employee cynicism, and as the perception of workplace gossip increases, it significantly increases the cynicism levels of employees.

Based on the results obtained in this study, if it is necessary to make suggestions for businesses and managers;

- ✓ An open and transparent communication channel should be established within the organization,
- ✓ Time intervals and environments where all employees can socialize with each other should be created,
- ✓ A two-way communication should be foreseen between the managers and their employees,
- ✓ The existence of organizational problems should be accepted, and timely solutions should be developed without ignoring even the smallest problem,
- ✓ Organizational responsibilities, authorities and tasks should be clearly defined and clearly explained to employees in a way that does not cause confusion among employees,
- ✓ Managers should first confirm the information they receive about their employees and avoid prejudice in this process,
- ✓ A free environment should be created where employees can openly express their ideas and suggestions about organizational issues and problems.

If the above suggestions are put into practice, the level of gossip in the organization will decrease, and accordingly, there may be a decrease in the negative attitudes of the employees towards the organization.

This study has some limitations. Although the results obtained are valid for the research sample, it is predicted that a general evaluation can be made with the emergence of similar results when compared with previous studies in the literature. It is thought that future researches on different sectors or occupational groups or employees with different

cultural characteristics will be very useful in terms of both examining the issues discussed in more detail and being a guide for businesses and managers.

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