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WHISPERS IN THE WORKPLACE: HOW ORGANIZATIONAL GOSSIP AFFECTS THE OPPORTUNITY AND PREVALENCE OF WORKPLACE FRIENDSHIPS?

İŞYERİNDEKİ FISILTILAR: ÖRGÜTSEL DEDİKODU İŞYERİNDE ARKADAŞLIK KURMA FIRSATINI VE YAYGINLIĞINI NASIL ETKİLER?

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Abstract

This research focuses on the negative effects of organizational gossip within the scope of social exchange theory. The aim of the study is to determine how job-related and non-job-related gossip behaviors of administrative staff at universities affect the opportunity and prevalence of workplace friendship. To achieve this goal, a study was conducted using data obtained from 300 administrative staff working at Karabuk University through a questionnaire. Hypotheses in line with the study's purpose were tested using path analysis within the scope of structural equation modeling. It has been found that both job-related and non-job-related gossip behaviors have a negative effect on workplace friendship. However, while job-related gossip behavior has a strong effect on the opportunity for friendship, non-job-related gossip has a stronger effect on the prevalence of friendship.

Keywords: Organizational gossip, workplace friendship, friendship opportunity, friendship prevalence

JEL Classification: D23, L20, M10

Öz

Bu araştırma, sosyal mübadele teorisi kapsamında örgütsel dedikodunun olumsuz etkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırmanın amacı, üniversitelerde idari personel olarak görev yapan çalışanların işle ilgili ve iş dışı dedikodu davranışlarının arkadaşlık kurma fırsatını ve arkadaşlık geliştirme derecesini ne

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şekilde etkilediğini belirleyebilmektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda, Karabük Üniversitesi'nde görev yapmakta olan 300 idari personelden anket yoluyla elde edilen verilerle bir araştırma gerçekleştirilmiştir. Çalışmanın amacına uygun olarak oluşturulan hipotezler, yapısal eşitlik modellemesi kapsamında yol analizi yardımı ile test edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucunda hem işle ilgili hem de iş dışı dedikodu davranışlarının işyeri arkadaşlığı üzerinde olumsuz etkiye neden olduğu belirlenmiştir. Bununla birlikte işle ilgili dedikodu davranışının arkadaşlık kurma fırsatı üzerinde güçlü bir etkisi varken, iş dışı dedikodunun ise arkadaşlık geliştirme derecesi üzerinde etkisi daha güçlüdür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Örgütsel dedikodu, işyeri arkadaşlığı, arkadaşlık kurma fırsatı, arkadaşlık derecesi

JEL Sınıflandırılması: D23, L20, M10

1. Introduction

Gossip, which has been prevalent in all cultures for centuries, emerged as a result of people's socialization and cooperation. Individuals strive to meet their economic, social, and personal needs by establishing a harmonious relationship with their environment, often through joining various groups or organizations. While some of these needs can be met individually, others require a group participation. Gossip is an inevitable phenomenon in both personal and professional settings (Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012, p. 522; Grosser, Kidwell, & Labianca, 2012, p. 53). Although gossip can have positive effects, this study focuses on the negative aspects of organizational gossip.

Organizational gossip refers to the sharing of information, rumors or opinions about individuals or groups within a workplace (Kurland & Pelled, 2000, p. 249; Michelson & Mouly, 2000, p. 339). Such gossip can often have negative effects on workplace friendships, leading to strained relationships and decreased productivity (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000, p. 175; Grosser et al., 2012, p. 55). Organizational gossip can waste employees' time, damage both individual and organizational reputations, decrease morale, and foster negative attitudes and beliefs by spreading false information. Negative gossip can have irreparable consequences for individuals, groups, and organizations, leading to a loss of trust among employees and a tarnishing of ethical values such as honesty and transparency. The negative consequences of gossip can also lead to conflicts, decreased motivation and morale, and decreased productivity and performance. As a result, organizational gossip can damage the corporate image, reputation, and identity of an organization (Ellwardt, Labianca, & Wittek, 2012, pp. 193-194).

In recent years, research has increasingly focused on the effects of organizational gossip on workplace dynamics, including its impact on interpersonal relationships (Kuo, Chang, Quinton, Lu, & Lee, 2015; Martinescu, Jansen, & Beersma, 2021; Wu, Kwan, Wu, & Ma, 2018). The negative effects of gossip on relationships are particularly important to consider, given the significant role that workplace friendships play in employees' job satisfaction and overall well-being (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012, p. 197). Friendship is a critical aspect of social relationships in the workplace, providing emotional support, socialization, and even career benefits. Workplace friendships can provide employees with emotional support, help them navigate workplace challenges, and increase their sense of belonging and commitment to their organization (Michelson, van Iterson, & Waddington, 2010, p. 373; Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000, p. 629).

Despite the potential negative consequences of organizational gossip on workplace friendship, little research has been conducted on this specific topic. Existing studies have categorized the effects of organizational gossip as either positive or negative (Caglar, Ugurlu, & Gunes, 2013; Cicek & Soylemez, 2020; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007; Ellwardt, Wittek, et al., 2012; Grosser et al., 2012; Kuo et al., 2015; Kurland & Pelled, 2000), and in some cases, these effects are further classified as planned or unplanned (Michelson et al., 2010). In addition, gossip can be a significant informal communication issue and problem within academic organizations. Nonetheless, research on gossip within academic organizations is relatively scarce in the literature.

Given this research gap, the present study aims to investigate the direct impact of organizational gossip on workplace friendships. To this end, a survey was conducted among administrative staff at Karabuk University. The findings were analyzed and interpreted in the relevant sections of the study. Overall, this study contributes to the literature on organizational gossip by examining its effects on workplace friendships, which has been an underexplored area. By shedding light on this aspect of organizational gossip, the findings of this study have important implications for managers and practitioners seeking to enhance workplace relationships and communication. Moreover, by better understanding the role of gossip in the development of workplace friendships, organizations can develop targeted interventions to manage gossip effectively and promote positive social connections among employees.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Organizational Gossip

Since the dawn of humanity, people have been in constant interaction with their environment. Communication has been and continues to be the primary tool for such interaction. In general, communication refers to the transmission of feelings, thoughts, or knowledge to others through various means (Littlejohn & Foss, 2017, p. 4). Communication occurs at the individual, group, and organizational levels. Organizational communication, in particular, is a comprehensive and complex process that facilitates the continuous exchange of information and ideas, as well as the establishment of necessary relationships between departments, both within and between organizations and their external environment. The goal of organizational communication is to ensure institutional functioning and to achieve organizational objectives (Miller, 2015, pp. 11-12)

Organizational communication occurs through both formal and informal communication channels. Formal communication channels are established within predetermined boundaries and are structured according to specific rules, and they involve authorized persons who communicate with the organization's internal and external environment (Michelson et al., 2010, p. 376; Robbins, Coulter, & Decenzo, 2020, p. 461). Informal communication channels, on the other hand, emerge as a result of interpersonal relationships and are not subject to any formal structuring. Informal communication is a spontaneous form of communication that occurs through personal and social relationships among organizational members (Shockley-Zalabak, 2014, p. 47). While informal

communication networks may not be as structured as formal communication channels, they still support the formal communication system. However, the informal communication system is often geared towards individual goals rather than organizational goals. Gossip, which is considered to be the oldest known form of informal communication, is the most well-known form of such communication (Miller, 2015, p. 53; Shockley-Zalabak, 2014, p. 123). Gossip is a phenomenon that involves talking about someone in their absence or transmitting information without evidence of its accuracy (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007, p. 20; Dunbar, 2004, p. 100; Foster, 2004, p. 80). Negative conversations, such as chattering and bad mouthing, are often associated with gossip, which can lead to the emergence of organizational gossip within workplaces (Ellwardt, Labianca, et al., 2012, p. 193; Kurland & Pelled, 2000, p. 249)

The concept of organizational gossip was first introduced in 1993 and refers to informal conversations between colleagues in a workplace about other colleagues (Arabaci, Sunkur, & Simsek, 2012, p. 175; Ayaz, 2021, p. 262; Kurland & Pelled, 2000, p. 249). Gossip has been used as a communication tool in primitive societies to establish justice and is characterized by its speed, spontaneity, and ability to make those who engage in it happy. It involves the transmission of value-laden information about individuals in a social environment, including internal news between primary groups in a small community, and is often associated with bickering or condemnation (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007, p. 25). Gossipers are typically divided into two categories: active gossipers and passive gossipers. Active gossipers are those who initiate gossip, while passive gossipers are those who only listen to gossip without actively spreading it. Active gossipers are especially essential for gossip to spread to the desired level (Princehouse, 2017, p. 20; Rosenbaum & Subrin, 1963, pp. 822-823).

Gossip typically originates from second or third-party sources and is often of uncertain origin, making it difficult to verify. The main motivation behind gossip is driven by the need for ego satisfaction and the desire to attain status and prestige (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010, p. 178). Based on this, the key characteristics of gossip can be summarized into three main categories. Firstly, the source and direction of gossip are uncertain, which makes it challenging to base information on concrete grounds. Secondly, gossip is typically rooted in the common interests of the organization, including its related issues. Finally, gossip is prevalent when there is a lack of reliable information (Grosser et al., 2012, pp. 58-59; Wu et al., 2018, p. 802). One of the most negative aspects of gossip is its longevity. Even if proven false, gossip can still spread and become exaggerated over (Ellwardt, Wittek, et al., 2012, p. 544).

Gossip is often practiced in organizations for various reasons. Firstly, individuals use it as a means to gather information about others without the need to conduct interviews. Secondly, gossip facilitates the establishment of social networks by connecting individuals to each other (Grosser et al., 2012, p. 53). Thirdly, social network structures and exchanges can be achieved by breaking ties that create competition and bonding. Negative gossip enables this process. Fourth, gossip is driven by the desire to increase social status, power, and prestige within the group. Finally, gossip can provide informative insights on what one should do to gain and maintain a place in social networks (Arabaci et al., 2012, p. 176).

2.2. Workplace Friendship

As social beings, humans have an innate desire for social interaction, communication, and companionship. This need is reflected in the significance of friendship as a crucial social requirement that impacts various aspects of individuals' lives (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Friendship is a social entity that arises from shared attitudes and behaviors or newly formed ones through communication groups. It plays a critical role in different life stages, such as childhood play friendships, education, marriage, military service, and workplace friendships (Sias, Heath, Perry, Silva, & Fix, 2004, p. 322).

Workplace friendship is a relationship of mutual trust, common values, and interests between individuals who work in the same workplace but are not involved in romantic relationships (Sias & Cahill, 1998, p. 275; Zarankin & Kunkel, 2019, p. 157). It is formed by individuals who come together with common purposes to perform similar or different jobs within the same organization, and who become closer to each other as a result of their individual efforts and interests (Bicer & Buyukyilmaz, 2019, p. 518). Although workplace friendship arises in the workplace, it is a product of emotional and intellectual integrity between individuals (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002, p. 219; Huang, 2016, p. 569).

There are various definitions of workplace friendship in the literature. According to Berman et al. (2002, p. 218) workplace friendship refers to "a relationship that exists between two or more employees, characterized by mutual trust, intimacy, and mutual concern for one another's welfare". Pillemer and Rothbard (2018, p. 637) define workplace friendship as "a voluntary reciprocal relationship between two people that is characterized by mutual positive regard, mutual social and emotional support, and mutual engagement in shared activities and experiences occurring within the context of work". Another definition of workplace friendship is provided by Nielsen et al. (2000, p. 629), who state that it involves "feelings of mutual trust, shared values and interests, and supportive interactions that extend beyond work-related matters". Buyukyilmaz and Bicer (2018, p. 30), describe it as workplace friendship refers to "non-exclusive relationships characterized by mutual trust, commitment, mutual appreciation, and shared interests or values". Sias, Gallagher, Kopaneva, and Pedersen (2011, p. 240) view workplace friendship as "a social connection between individuals in a workplace that transcends the formal roles and responsibilities of the workplace". Finally, Morrison and Cooper-Thomas (2017, p. 125) define workplace friendship as "an interpersonal relationship characterized by mutual liking, trust, respect, and commonalities in attitudes, values, and behaviors between two or more employees in a work context".

Voluntariness is the most important characteristic distinguishing workplace friendships from other relationships. Workplace friendships are formed in accordance with employees' own wishes and are not imposed on individuals. Therefore, the voluntary nature of this friendship distinguishes it from other relationships formed within the framework of peer-colleague or subordinate-superior relationships in the workplace (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018, p. 637; Sias et al., 2004, p. 322).

Organizations are social environments where employees interact with each other. As such, workplaces should be seen as more than just places of work, but also as venues where employees can develop and strengthen their social connections (Sias et al., 2011, p. 241). When employees develop friendships in a workplace, it fosters a positive and productive work environment that can facilitate the achievement of performance goals and overall happiness. The satisfaction levels of workplace friends depend on the quality of relationships that they establish with each other. Moreover, such friendships can enhance people's social lives and improve their living standards (Nielsen et al., 2000, p. 629). Therefore, it is crucial for employees working in the same workplace to exhibit behaviors and attitudes that facilitate the realization of personal and organizational goals.

However, in some cases, the workplace environment may not be as desirable. Employees may engage in gossip and spread negative thoughts about their colleagues in order to conceal their own failures, inadequacies, and aspirations. This behavior wastes valuable time and energy, ultimately leading to a decline in organizational performance and strained relationships between employees. While negative attitudes and behaviors towards colleagues may be tolerated to a certain extent, exceeding ethical boundaries in the workplace can lead to unforeseen conflicts between employees and have negative consequences for organizational performance in the future (Ucok, 2019, pp. 6-7).

2.3. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Although the relationship between organizational gossip behavior and workplace friendship has not been extensively researched empirically, it has been studied in various fields such as business, psychology, and sociology. Organizational gossip is a common behavior among many employees, and it often has a detrimental impact on organizational performance (Grosser et al., 2010, p. 179). In contrast, workplace friendship refers to the social relationships that employees establish with each other in the workplace. These friendships can positively influence employees' job satisfaction, job involvement and contribute to creating a harmonious work environment (Bicer & Buyukyilmaz, 2017, p. 200; Nielsen et al., 2000, p. 629)

Research suggests that organizational gossip behaviors can have a negative impact on workplace friendship (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000; Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012; Grosser et al., 2012). However, the negative effect of organizational gossip on workplace friendship can be explained by social exchange theory, which suggests that positive social exchanges require norms of reciprocity and trust (Blau, 1964). Organizational gossip violates these norms and can harm the reputation and emotional well-being of individuals, leading to a breakdown of positive social exchanges and a decrease in workplace friendship.

Social exchange theory is a framework that explains how social interactions involve the exchange of resources between individuals, where the resources can be tangible (e.g., money, goods, services) or intangible (e.g., emotions, information, support). The theory suggests that people engage in social exchanges with the expectation of receiving benefits from others, and when these benefits are not reciprocated, individuals may experience a negative emotional reaction (Blau, 1964; Emerson, 1976; Erdogan & Liden, 2002; Homans, 1958).

In the context of workplace friendship, social exchange theory suggests that individuals engage in positive social exchanges with their colleagues, such as providing emotional support, sharing information, or offering help, with the expectation of receiving similar benefits in return (Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018, p. 636). However, organizational gossip can have a negative effect on these social exchanges and, therefore, on workplace friendship (Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012, p. 624). Organizational gossip refers to the spread of information about individuals or events in the workplace that is not based on verified facts and can be negative or harmful (Grosser et al., 2012, p. 53; Martinescu et al., 2021, p. 467). When employees engage in gossip, they may use it as a way to gain social status or to form alliances with others (Martinescu, Janssen, & Nijstad, 2019, p. 90). However, the spread of negative and false information can harm the reputation of the individuals involved and can lead to negative emotional reactions, such as embarrassment, anger, or resentment (Rosnow, 2001, pp. 204-205).

According to social exchange theory, the negative effects of organizational gossip on workplace friendship occur because gossip violates the norms of reciprocity and trust that underlie positive social exchanges. When individuals engage in gossip, they may not provide any tangible or intangible benefits to the person they are talking about, and they may even harm their reputation or relationships with others. As a result, the person who is the target of gossip may feel that their social exchanges with their colleagues are no longer equitable, leading to a decrease in trust and a withdrawal from social interactions.

In terms of organizational dynamics, it is widely acknowledged that gossip can create problems that can harm relationships between colleagues and negatively impact group productivity (Michelson et al., 2010, p. 375). This is due to the fact that gossip not only damages the reputation of the person being talked about and wastes the time of the gossiping party, but it can also have a negative effect on workplace friendships, which have become increasingly important due to the disruption they cause in communication between individuals. Based on these explanations, the study put forward the following hypotheses.

H_1: *Employees' job-related gossip behavior negatively affects the friendship opportunity.*

H_2: *Employees' job-related gossip behavior negatively affects the friendship prevalence.*

H_3: *Employees' non-job-related gossip behavior negatively affects the friendship opportunity.*

H_4: *Employees' non-job-related gossip behavior negatively affects the friendship prevalence.*

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The population of this study consists of the administrative staff working at Karabuk University, Turkey. As of November-December 2022, the Personnel Department confirmed that there was a total of 942 administrative staff employed at Karabuk University. However, due to factors such as response rate,

willingness to participate, time constraints, and cost limitations, a sampling method was employed from the population. Therefore, a convenience sampling method was utilized, and a questionnaire was distributed to 390 employees. Out of the 390 distributed questionnaires, 300 employees responded, resulting in a response rate of 77%. As a result, the data collected from these 300 respondents were analyzed. The distribution of the 300 administrative staff who participated in the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Participants

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	109	36.3
	Male	191	63.7
Marital Status	Married	191	63.7
	Single	109	36.3
Age	40 and under	185	61.7
	41-50	77	25.7
	51 and over	38	12.7
Education	High school or below	95	31.7
	Undergraduate degree	142	47,3
	Graduate degree	63	21.0
Organizational Tenure	Less than 10 years	97	32.3
	11-20 years	135	45.0
	21 years and over	68	22.7
TOTAL		**300**	**100**

A total of 300 administrative staff participated in the study. Out of the total participants, 36.3% were female while the rest, 63.7%, were male. Among both genders, 63.7% were married while 36.3% were single. A majority of the staff, specifically 61.7%, were aged 40 years or younger, while 25.7% were between the age range of 41 to 50 years, and 12.7% were 51 years or older. It is observed that the majority of administrative staff participating in the research hold an undergraduate degree (47.3%). Conversely, the proportion of individuals with a high school education or lower is 31.7%, while those with a graduate degree comprise 21% of the sample. With regards to organizational tenure, 32.3% of personnel have 10 or fewer years of service, 45% have 11-20 years of service, and 22.7% have 21 or more years of service.

3.2. Data Collection Process and Measures

The data utilized in this analysis were obtained through an online survey technique within the scope of a quantitative research design. The questionnaire form consists of two parts. The first part comprises questions that determine the demographic characteristics of the participants, such as gender, age, marital status, education, and organizational tenure. Demographic data were collected to gain a comprehensive understanding of study participants. The second part includes 20 statements designed to determine the gossip behavior of the administrative staff participating in the research,

and 12 statements to determine the perception of workplace friendship. The questionnaire form uses a five-point Likert scale for the evaluation of the statements, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement.

The approval of the ethics committee for the application of the questionnaire form was obtained with the decision of the Karabuk University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, which was dated 18.01.2023 and numbered 2023/01-9.

The scale developed by Kuo et al. (2015) was utilized to assess the degree of organizational gossip behavior among participants. The scale comprises 20 statements and two dimensions, with ten statements designed to evaluate job-related gossip behavior and the remaining ten statements intended to evaluate non-job-related behavior. The Turkish version of the organizational gossip scale was adapted from a study conducted by Santas, Akbolat, and Saglam (2019) and employed in this study. Sample statements from the scale include "I comment on colleagues' poor job performance", "I comment on colleagues' inexperience and poor job knowledge", "I comment on colleagues' poor interaction with children", and "I comment on colleagues' poor relationship with family". According to Kuo et al. (2015), job-related gossip exhibited a reliability value of 0.970, while non-job-related gossip had a value of 0.890. Meanwhile, Santas et al. (2019) study revealed that job-related gossip had a reliability value of 0.870, and non-job-related gossip had a value of 0.844. These findings suggest that the scale developed by Kuo et al. (2015) which was later adapted by Santas et al. (2019), can effectively measure organizational gossip behavior with strong internal consistency for both job-related and non-job-related gossip dimensions. Overall, the results of these studies indicate that the scale is a dependable tool for evaluating gossip behavior among participants in organizational settings.

The scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) was used to determine the degree of participants' perceptions of workplace friendships. The scale has 12 statements and consists of two dimensions. Six statements aim to assess the friendship opportunity, while the remaining six statements aim to determine the degree of friendship prevalence. The Turkish version of the workplace friendship scale was adapted from a study conducted by Buyukyilmaz and Bicer (2018) and utilized in this research. Sample statements from the scale include "I have the opportunity to get to know my coworkers", "I have the opportunity to develop close friendships at my workplace", "I have formed strong friendships at work" and "I can confide in people at work". Nielsen et al. (2000) reported reliability values of 0.840 for the friendship opportunity and 0.850 for the friendship prevalence. Meanwhile, Buyukyilmaz and Bicer (2018) obtained reliability values of 0.715 for the friendship opportunity and 0.749 for the friendship prevalence. Overall, the workplace friendship scale was deemed an appropriate tool for measuring participants' perceptions of workplace friendships. Its utilization, along with the reliability values obtained, adds credibility to the results of the study.

3.3. Data Analyses Method

Initially, the study underwent validity and reliability assessments for the scales, followed by tests to verify the hypotheses. To assess the construct validity of the scales, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted, which included all variables contained in the scales. Discriminant and convergent validity tests were also performed as part of the validity analysis. Reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values for each scale. The hypotheses were tested through path analysis within the framework of structural equation modeling.

4. Results

Initially, the study focused on assessing the reliability and validity of the measurement instruments used in the research. Next, the study examined descriptive statistics and correlations among variables. Finally, the research hypotheses were tested by conducting appropriate statistical analyses.

4.1. Validity and Reliability Tests

Initially, the study evaluated the validity of the measurement scales by using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the differences between the study variables (Table 2). The results of the CFA demonstrated that all standardized estimates exceeded the threshold value of 0.50, ranging between 0.650 and 0.901. The minimum t-value (CR) for the measurement variables was 10.021 (p<0.01). Additionally, the goodness-of-fit indices of the model were evaluated and the chi-square goodness of fit ($\chi2/df$) was 1.867, the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) was 0.860, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was 0.054, the normed fit index (NFI) was 0.901, the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) was 0.946, and the comparative fit index (CFI) was 0.951. These indices indicated that the study achieved an acceptable level of measurement quality and construct validity for all five constructs used in the study (Byrne, 2016, pp. 90-102; Kline, 2016, pp. 265-280; Whittaker & Schumacker, 2022, pp. 136-141).

Table 2: Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Scales/Items	Standardized Estimates	Standard Errors	t-values (CR)	AVE	CR	α
Job-Related Gossip				0.690	0.957	0.955
(JOB_GOS1)	0.820*	-	-			
(JOB_GOS2)	0.858*	0.058	18.630			
(JOB_GOS3)	0.810*	0.063	16.853			
(JOB_GOS4)	0.859*	0.062	18.348			
(JOB_GOS5)	0.850*	0.061	18.135			
(JOB_GOS6)	0.724*	0.063	14.483			
(JOB_GOS7)	0.801*	0.063	16.738			
(JOB_GOS8)	0.852*	0.060	18.424			
(JOB_GOS9)	0.821*	0.060	17.289			
(JOB_GOS10)	0.901*	0.058	19.802			

Non-Job-Related Gossip				0.545	0.923	0.923
(NON_JOB_GOS1)	0.653*	-	-			
(NON_JOB_GOS2)	0.691*	0.088	12.128			
(NON_JOB_GOS3)	0.771*	0.095	11.545			
(NON_JOB_GOS4)	0.817*	0.095	12.069			
(NON_JOB_GOS5)	0.783*	0.102	11.701			
(NON_JOB_GOS6)	0.746*	0.095	11.238			
(NON_JOB_GOS7)	0.724*	0.093	10.936			
(NON_JOB_GOS8)	0.792*	0.097	11.764			
(NON_JOB_GOS9)	0.735*	0.097	11.116			
(NON_JOB_GOS10)	0.650*	0.094	10.021			
Friendship Opportunity				0.610	0.903	0.903
(FRI_OPP1)	0.780*	-	-			
(FRI_OPP2)	0.804*	0.065	14.929			
(FRI_OPP3)	0.862*	0.072	15.888			
(FRI_OPP4)	0.720*	0.072	12.681			
(FRI_OPP5)	0.835*	0.047	22.913			
(FRI_OPP6)	0.666*	0.070	11.923			
Friendship Prevalence				0.731	0.942	0.941
(FRI_PRE1)	0.848*	-	-			
(FRI_PRE2)	0,.88*	0.051	20.387			
(FRI_PRE3)	0.877*	0.051	19.935			
(FRI_PRE4)	0.881*	0.051	20.096			
(FRI_PRE5)	0.818*	0.058	16.286			
(FRI_PRE6)	0.815*	0.055	17.583			
Goodness-of-Fit Indices	**χ2/df**	**GFI**	**RMSEA**	**NFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**
	1.867	0.860	0.054	0.901	0.946	0.951

Note: *p<0.01; N=300; AVE= average variance extracted; CR=composite reliability; α=Cronbach's alfa

The research examined the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales, which indicate the degree to which the scale items relate to the scale itself. To assess this, the study employed the Fornell and Larcker (1981) method and calculated composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) (refer to Table 2).

To establish convergent validity, a scale's AVE value should be above 0.50 and its CR value above 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981, pp. 45-46; Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019, p. 663). The study found AVE values of 0.690 for job-related gossip, 0.545 for non-job-related gossip, 0.610 for friendship opportunity, and 0.731 for friendship prevalence, respectively. Additionally, the CR values were 0.957 for job-related gossip, 0.923 for non-job-related gossip, 0.903 for friendship opportunity, and 0.942 for friendship prevalence, respectively. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the scales possess convergent validity.

Regarding divergent validity, the square root of a scale's AVE value should be greater than the correlation of that scale with other scales (Fornell & Larcker, 1981, pp. 45-46; Hair et al., 2019, p.

663). Table 3 displays the square root values of AVE and correlation values, revealing that the scales satisfy the divergent validity condition.

Reliability analyses were conducted after the validity analyses for the scales. The purpose of the reliability analyses was to determine the internal consistency of the scales, for which Cronbach alpha (α) reliability value and composite reliability value were calculated. The researchers stipulated that for a scale to be considered reliable, both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability value should be above 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, p. 265).

Table 2 presents the analysis findings, which show that the Cronbach's alpha values for job-related gossip, non-job-related gossip, friendship opportunity, and friendship prevalence were 0.955, 0.923, 0.903, and 0.941, respectively. The corresponding composite reliability values were 0.957, 0.923, 0.903, and 0.942, respectively. As both Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values were found to be above 0.70, it was concluded that all scales were reliable.

4.2. Correlations and Descriptives

Prior to hypotheses testing, the mean, standard deviation and correlation values of the variables used in the study were analyzed. (Table 3).

Tablo 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Job-Related Gossip	2.520	0.977	0.831[a]			
2. Non-Job-Related Gossip	2.438	0.848	0.649	0.738[a]		
3. Friendship Opportunity	3.544	0.962	-0.629	-0.731	0.781[a]	
4. Friendship Prevalence	3.773	1.093	-0.644	-0.551	0.450	0.855[a]

Note: a=Square root of AVE

Upon examining the mean values of the variables, it was ascertained that the participants displayed a moderate level of engagement in both job-related gossip behavior (Mean=2.520) and non-job-related gossip behavior (Mean=2.438). In contrast, the participants' perception of the opportunity for friendship (Mean=3.544) and the prevalence of friendship (Mean=3.773) were found to be significantly higher.

Subsequently, the correlations between the variables were subjected to rigorous analysis, revealing that all variables displayed meaningful relationships with each other. Notably, a negative correlation was observed between organizational gossip behaviors and the perception of workplace friendship. However, the correlation values, which were all below 0.90, indicated the absence of any multicollinearity issue (Kline, 2016, p. 71).

4.3. Hypotheses Testing

The present study investigates the impact of job-related and non-job-related gossip behaviors on workplace friendships. It is hypothesized that an increase in gossip behaviors would have a negative effect on both the opportunity and prevalence of workplace friendships. Path analysis, utilizing structural equation modeling, was employed to test the proposed hypotheses (Figure 1).
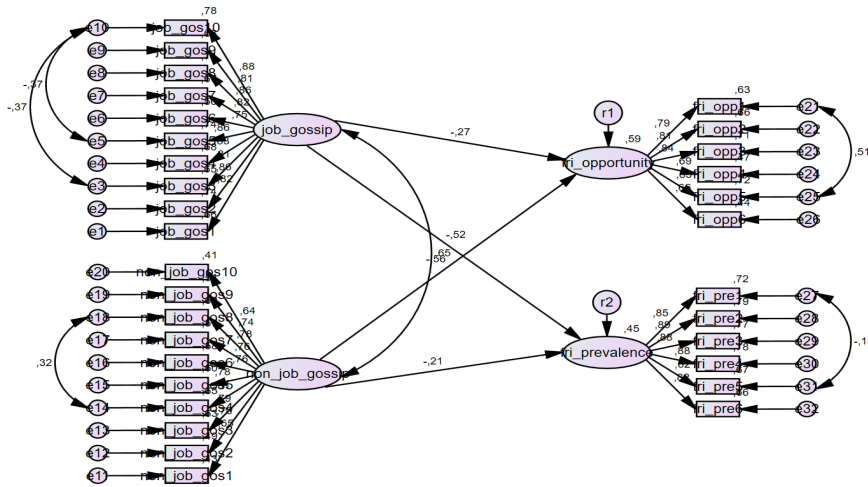

Figure 1: Structural Model of Path Analysis

Goodness-of-fit indices were used to assess the validity of the path analysis model (Table 4). Based on the results of the path analysis, the obtained goodness of fit values exceed the acceptable fit conditions, as indicated by a χ2/sd value of 1.998, a GFI value of 0.850, an RMSEA value of 0.045, an NFI value of 0.897, a TLI value of 0.937, and a CFI value of 0.943 (Byrne, 2016, pp. 90-102; Kline, 2016, pp. 265-280; Whittaker & Schumacker, 2022, pp. 136-141).

Table 4: Results of Path Analysis

	Hypotheses			Standardized Estimates	Standard Errors	t-values	Hypotheses Results
H1:	Job-Related Gossip	→	Friendship Opportunity	-0.273*	0.064	-4.381	ACCEPTED
H2:	Job-Related Gossip	→	Friendship Prevalence	-0.519*	0.082	-7.439	ACCEPTED
H3:	Non-Job-Related Gossip	→	Friendship Opportunity	-0.559*	0.094	-7.184	ACCEPTED
H4:	Non-Job-Related Gossip	→	Friendship Prevalence	-0.207*	0.095	-3.145	ACCEPTED
	Goodness-of-Fit Indices						
	χ2/df	**GFI**		**RMSEA**	**NFI**	**TLI**	**CFI**
	1,998	0,850		0,045	0,897	0,937	0,943

*Note: *p<0.01; N=300*

These findings suggest that the relationships within the model are significant. The path analysis results reveal that the friendship opportunity explained by 58.7% of the variance (R^2=0. 587), while the friendship prevalence is explained by 45.2% of the variance (R^2=0.452). These findings demonstrate that the model is a good fit and that the variables included in the analysis are important predictors of the outcome variables.

The present study investigates the impact of job-related and non-job-related gossip behaviors exhibited by administrative staff on workplace friendship. The first two hypotheses examine the relationship between job-related gossip behavior and friendship. The results of the analyses reveal that job-related gossip behavior has a significant and negative effect on both the friendship opportunity (H1: β = − 0.273, p < 0.01) and the friendship prevalence (H2: β = − 0.519, p < 0.01). Notably, the negative effect of job-related gossip behavior on the friendship opportunity is more pronounced. Therefore, hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported by the data.

The third and fourth hypotheses of the study examine the relationship between non-job-related gossip behavior and friendship. The path analysis results show that non-job-related gossip behavior has a significant and negative effect on both the friendship opportunity (H3: β = − 0.559, p < 0.01) and the friendship prevalence (H4: β = − 0.207, p < 0.01). Moreover, the negative effect of non-job-related gossip behavior on the friendship prevalence is stronger. Based on these findings, hypotheses H3 and H4 are also supported.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study examines the negative effects of job-related and non-job-related gossip behaviors on workplace friendships among administrative staff at universities. The aim of the study is to determine how such gossip behaviors affect the opportunity and prevalence of friendships. Data were obtained from a questionnaire distributed to 300 administrative staff members working at Karabuk University.

The research findings indicate that organizational gossip behavior can be a significant factor that negatively affects workplace friendships. Specifically, the study shows that gossiping about the work of administrative staff reduces the opportunity to establish workplace friendships and negatively affects the degree of existing friendships. Negative talk about factors such as a colleague's job performance, job-related roles, work ethic, experience, or shortcomings reduces the opportunity to develop friendships at work and negatively affects the quality of existing friendships. Additionally, job-related gossip has a stronger effect on the friendship prevalence compared to friendship opportunity.

Moreover, the results suggest that gossip about non-job-related factors is also a factor that reduces the friendship opportunity and the friendship prevalence. Negative talk about non-job-related factors such as colleagues' marriages or family life disrupts the work environment and reduces the quality of workplace relationships. However, the study found that non-job-related gossip has a stronger negative impact on friendship opportunity compared to the friendship prevalence.

While the findings may not be applicable to all sectors or employees, they suggest that negative gossip in the workplace can have harmful effects on employees. These results are consistent with previous studies (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000; Ellwardt, Steglich, et al., 2012; Grosser et al., 2012). Therefore, it can be concluded that both job-related and non-job-related gossip behaviors of employees are crucial predictors of workplace friendships.

The findings demonstrate that when employees encounter negative outcomes, they are likely to respond with negative attitudes and behaviors. This supports the social exchange perspective. According to social exchange theory, individuals engage in social interactions with the expectation of receiving some sort of reward or benefit in return (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). In the context of workplace friendships, individuals may form friendships with their coworkers because they expect to receive social support, companionship, and other benefits. However, the spread of gossip can damage these social exchanges by eroding trust, reducing the willingness of individuals to disclose personal information, and creating a hostile environment that undermines the potential for positive social interactions.

The study has certain limitations, and various suggestions can be proposed in this regard. Firstly, the sample size of the study is limited to administrative staff. Carrying out research with diverse samples may result in different findings and enhance the research outcomes. Hence, it would be beneficial to conduct similar studies on employees with diverse qualifications. Additionally, a comparative analysis of state and foundation universities in similar studies on administrative staff would be advantageous in comprehending the correlation between gossip behavior and workplace friendship.

Secondly, the study only investigates the impact of employees' gossip behaviors on their friendship relationships in the workplace. Future research can explore the relationships between gossip behavior and other employee attitudes and behaviors by focusing on various individual and organizational outcomes. Furthermore, linking the social exchange relationship with employee behaviors can contribute to a better understanding of the consequences of the exchange relationship. Constructing models within the ambit of other variables believed to mediate or moderate this relationship would also shed light on the outcomes of the relationship between gossip behaviors and workplace friendship with more clarity.

Thirdly, while the study did not include specific hypotheses related to demographic variables, future research endeavors could delve deeper into these considerations. By examining the influence of demographic factors such as gender and seniority, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between social dynamics and demographic factors.

In conclusion, the results of this study suggest that organizational gossip behavior may be an important factor that negatively affects workplace friendships. The study suggests that both job-related and non-job-related gossip behavior can have detrimental effects on workplace friendships. Specifically, the negative impact of gossip behavior on the opportunity for friendship is more severe in the case of job-related gossip, while the negative impact on the prevalence of friendship is more pronounced in the case of non-job-related gossip.

These findings highlight the importance of promoting positive communication and discouraging gossip behavior in the workplace. Furthermore, the research findings emphasize the importance of maintaining positive workplace relationships and avoiding negative gossip behavior that could affect such relationships. It is recommended that organizations develop policies and training programs to help employees recognize and address negative gossip behavior in the workplace. The findings emphasize the importance of avoiding gossip behaviors and maintaining a positive work environment to promote healthy workplace relationships.

This study contributes to an area that has received more attention in recent years but has not yet yielded clear findings. However, although this study supports the idea that gossip can be detrimental to good relations between employees, further research is needed.

Author Contribution

CONTRUBUTION RATE	EXPLANATION	CONTRIBUTORS
Idea or Notion	Form the research idea or hypothesis	Ozan BÜYÜKYILMAZ İskender KOYUNCU
Literature Review	Review the literature required for the study	İskender KOYUNCU
Research Design	Designing method, scale, and pattern for the study	Ozan BÜYÜKYILMAZ İskender KOYUNCU
Data Collecting and Processing	Collecting, organizing, and reporting data	Ozan BÜYÜKYILMAZ İskender KOYUNCU
Discussion and Interpretation	Taking responsibility in evaluating and finalizing the findings	Ozan BÜYÜKYILMAZ

Conflict of Interest

Financial Support

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