

Gossiping at work really is bad for your career

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Gossiping in the workplace can have serious negative impacts on your career, according to new research by Durham University Business School and NEOMA Business School.

Not only are gossipers frowned upon by other work colleagues, they also become socially excluded in the company, and can experience negative career-related impacts as a consequence of their storytelling. Interestingly, the study also found that gender had an impact on how gossipers were perceived, with women having a much more negative view of workplace gossipers than men.

The research was conducted by Dr Maria Kakarika, Associate Professor of Organisational Behaviour and Leadership at Durham University Business School, alongside Dr Shiva Taghavi and Dr Helena González-Gómez, Associate Professors of Organisational Behaviour at NEOMA Business School.

The researchers wanted to examine colleagues' responses to workplace gossip, and how they judged the gossipier afterwards, understanding whether or not gossiping had implications for the gossipier's career or social standing.

In order to do so, the researchers conducted three separate studies. In the first experiment, almost 200 participants were presented with a workplace scenario in which a colleague was either gossiping or not. Afterwards, participants completed a survey based on the scenario, which explored their views on the gossipier in terms of their morality.

In the second study, the researchers manipulated the gender of the gossipier and conducted the same experiment with 500 participants - again with a survey at the end. This was to identify if gender had an impact on colleagues' views of gossipiers. They also measured the behavioral reactions of participants towards the gossipier.

In the final study, the researchers surveyed over 200 participants from various organizations on past gossiping incidents that had happened in their own workplaces. Participants were asked to describe the incident and share their thoughts on the gossipier. They also indicated their behavior towards the gossipier, allowing the researchers to identify any consequences as a result of the gossip.

The studies revealed that workers typically held negative views of gossipiers in the workplace, with many respondents socially excluding the gossipiers from groups due to their actions – through methods such as removing them from social media groups, sharing less information with them and even refraining from speaking to them at all.

Most concerningly, the studies revealed that gossiping had damaging implications for career progression. Participants were much more likely to give low ratings about their gossiping peers' performance, recommend bonus reductions or even impede their potential promotions.

"Gossiping is pretty commonplace in all workplaces. Whether it's a small comment about someone's work, or something more personal and less work-related, we've all engaged in it either through

gossiping ourselves or hearing someone gossip.” says Dr Kakarika. “But it is highly likely that gossiping can be reduced in the workplace if people were aware that it says much about the gossiper too rather than only about the person they are gossiping about. This workplace gossiping can have real negative impacts on their career progression”.

Though difficult to police employee gossip, the researchers say that organisations should actively inform employees of the potential negative effects of doing so in the workplace. If employees become more aware of the potential negative implications to their career, it is likely workplace gossiping will be reduced in organisations.

If you would be interested in receiving the full research paper, or speaking to the researchers, please contact Peter Remon at BlueSky Education – peter@bluesky-pr.com +44 (0) 77 235 228 30.