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**EXPLORATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS: GOSSIPING AS A  
MEDIUM OF ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION**

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**Abstract**

Communicating thoughts and information through the mean of gossiping has long been recognised as one of the threats to organisational safety due to its nature of not having reliable sources, which can spark argument and doubt. Even though the sources are still questionable, the disposition of gossip to be employed as an informal communication in the workplace setting indicates that it is still highly regarded as one of the strategies in distributing information. The study aims to classify the significant factors, which will support the fitness of a group of modified items, specifically the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS). This study has involved 187 school teachers in Kelantan. The response gathered were then analysed in the exploratory factor analysis procedure. Positive Job-related Gossip, Negative Non-job-related Gossip, Negative-job-related Gossip and Positive Non-job-related Gossip are the factors generated from the procedure. The study has come to the conclusion that the four-factors derived could assist in measuring the engagement of gossip amongst teachers in the local setting. The study also proposes that other local and Asian respondents could utilise the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) as an antecedent towards other variables.

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## 1. Introduction

The presence of gossip in organisational-based communication has long triggered the affection of those who are craving for instant information. Gossip can be defined as "an evaluative social talk about persons, usually not present, arising in the context of social networks" (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007, p. 25). Other than that, workplace gossip is also best regarded as having informal chats especially during break times which involve the topic ranging from changes of policy, job position, customers' feedback and many more (Lee et al., 2016). Even though the sources are still questionable, the tendency of gossip to be implemented as an informal communication indicates that it is still highly regarded as one of the mechanisms in disseminating information (Miharaini Md Ghani et al., 2015). With the widespread use of modern-day technology, gossip can also be the source of cyberbullying. Hence convenient accessibility within a rendered environment could also prompt people to exhibit aggressive behaviours such as communicating insult and malicious information through virtual interaction (Shahidatul Maslina et al., 2020). Such practice is almost accustomed with gossip engagement whereby the affected victims would feel rejected as the attackers were targeting their personal reputation, causing harm to the victim's physical and psychological well-being (Lee et al., 2016).

## 2. Problem Statement

One of the threats of excessive gossiping practice is workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is a form of an act involving repeated physical and verbal behaviour which is harmful and occurs among employees in organisations (Hassan & Al Bir, 2014). Previous study has indicated that gossip, as a form of workplace bullying in Malaysia has affected 82.2% of employees in several organisations (Hassan & Al Bir, 2014). Consequently, gossip dissemination is a very cheap way of manipulating peoples' perception towards each other, thus affecting the relationship as well as the rate of organisational performance among employees (McAndrew, 2014). Such unethical behaviour, which is also known as workplace deviant, would prompt harm towards the faith and trust of employees and employers as well as employees and the clients (Pathak, 2014). Gossiping is also consistent with other deviant working behaviour such as fraud, theft, aggressive behaviour, corruption and sexual harassment (Pathak, 2014). As mentioned by Lee et al. (2016), such negative behaviour like verbal attacks were found to be affecting the performance of kindergarten's teacher in Taiwan. By spreading negative gossip at the workplace, the affected victim was feeling rejected as the attackers were targeting personal reputation, causing harm to the victim's physical and psychological well-being (Lee et al., 2016). Gossip engagement is also implied as one of the communication betrayal facets which involve gossiping, misunderstanding and criticising a teacher in front of other colleagues to develop a common interest among other teaching colleagues (Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016).

## 3. Research Questions

- What are the significant factors that could support the fitness of a group of modified Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS)?

- What are the items that best represent the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) in the local setting?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Gossip engagement is also implied as one of the communication betrayal facets which involve gossiping, misunderstanding and criticising a teacher in front of other colleagues to develop a common interest among other teaching colleagues (Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016). This study is aiming to classify the significant factors, which will support the fitness of a group of modified items, specifically the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS).

#### **5. Research Methods**

##### **5.1. Pre-test**

In this study, the items employed were adapted from the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) which has re-conceptualised two dimensions of workplace gossip; JRG (Job-related gossip and NJG (Non-job-related gossip) (Chang et al., 2015). The initial scale was comprising of the Workplace Gossip Scale with 20 initial items. The pre-test can be described as the stage involving content validity, which is obtained through the input given by the experts in the field of study (Zainudin Awang, 2012). The input received from the expert reviewers of the language, education, statistics, and communication fields were used to achieve face and content validity by modifying the items or statement that will be used during the pilot study. This step is essential to ensure the appropriateness of the set of items towards the contemporary setting of this research (Zainudin Awang, 2012). The fitness of the scale must also comply with the concept of variables that the researcher intended to study (Chua, 2016). Language experts were also consulted to achieve confirmation over the back to back translation made to the items.

##### **5.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

This study has been involving teachers in Kelantan with a total number of 187 respondents (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). The respondents were carefully selected from the population of teachers by employing the random sampling method through a listing acquired from the states' department of education (*Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri*) (Jabatan Pendidikan Negeri Kelantan, 2019; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). Prior to conducting exploratory factor analysis (EFA), 100 or a larger number of respondents is believed to be equivalent to the desirable size of sample adequacy (Hair et al., 2010; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). Preceding to the questionnaire distribution, the precision of the items that will be utilised in the study were ensured by giving a brief instruction to the respondents involved.

##### **5.3. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)**

The utilised scale, which is known as Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS), was adapted from the original scale established by Kuo et al. (2015). In assessing the fitness of the scale to the existing setting of this research, 20 items, which represent two factors, were initially employed prior to the analysis using

SPSS version 21 (Zainudin Awang, 2012). Principal axis factoring and varimax rotation were employed in the exploratory factor analysis technique to classify the factors from the initial items of Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) (Chang et al., 2015). This procedure is essential in determining the best factors that will signify the fitness of the developed items (Tan et al., 2016; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) test was employed to determine the internal consistency and reliability of the scale. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was employed to determine the fundamental factors of gossip engagement among teachers in the local setting (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). This procedure is also important to guarantee that the constructs are in consistence with the comprehension of the researcher (Awang et al., 2015; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019).

Other than that, Zainudin Awang (2012) also suggests that exploratory factor analysis (EFA) could assist in determining the appropriateness of the items in the present study (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). There are four major steps suggested by George and Mallery (2001) and Tan et al. (2016) in the EFA procedure. This includes “correlation matrix computation, extraction of necessary factors to represent the data, factor rotation through varimax rotation, and Kaiser normalisation, and the number of factors determination; assigning a label to the interpreted factors. A visual inspection that was carried out by examining the correlation matrix has indicated a substantial number of correlations exceeding .30 in the output. The anti-image correlation matrix has pointed out the satisfactory level of .50 for the measure of sampling adequacy” (Hair et al., 2010, p. 102; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2020, p. 3491; 2019, p. 257). After the rotation’s procedure were performed, four factors representing the construct of Gossip Engagement were developed (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). As the minimum prerequisite is set to be at .50, the KMO of Sampling Adequacy in table 01 which sits at .929 is considered as an acceptable value (Coakes & Steed, 2003; Tan et al., 2016; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2020; 2019). This indicates that there is a respectable correlation between the items (Hair et al., 2010; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). After the PCA procedure was performed, The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is also substantial and the result has verified that the adapted Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) were finally acceptable for factor analysis (Tan et al., 2016; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2020; 2019). This is because the standards of Eigenvalue >1 (Spicer, 2005), loading score .50 for each item (Hair et al., 2010), and obtaining more than three items in a single factor (Suhr, 2009) have been met by the researcher (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019).

**Table 1.** KMO and Bartlett’s test

KMO measure of sampling adequacy		.929
Bartlett's test of sphericity	approx. chi-square	6588.620
	df	253
	sig.	.000

## 6. Findings

Based on the EFA analysis, a total of a four-factor solution comprising of Positive Job-related Gossip, Negative Job-related Gossip, Negative Non-job-related Gossip and Positive Non-job-related Gossip were formed (Chang et al., 2015). The procedure performed has also managed to identify the

substantial 23 items which best represent the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) involving teachers in Malaysia. The passable value has exceeded the minimum requirement of 60% by indicating the total variance of 87.71% (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019; Zainudin Awang et al., 2015). Table 02 indicates the total variance explained by the 4 factors generated from the EFA analysis.

**Table 2.** Total variance explained

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	12.436	54.070	54.070
2	4.761	20.701	74.771
3	1.854	8.060	82.831
4	1.122	4.880	87.710

Four items that did not achieve the standards of Eigenvalue  $>1$  (Spicer, 2005), loading score  $.50$  for each item (Hair et al., 2010), and not gaining at least three items in a single factor (Suhr, 2009) were removed (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2020; 2019). In defining the elimination of unimportant items, certain standards of factor loadings and cross-loadings have to be complied (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019; Worthington & Whittaker, 2006). Nevertheless, the researchers' preference has always been the guidelines for determining the loadings and cross-loadings suitable for maintaining and deleting items (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In determining the items that need to be removed, a standard of cross-loadings, which is not less than  $.15$ , was highlighted by Worthington and Whittaker (2006). Therefore, the researcher has determined that a guideline of choosing the adequate cross-loadings for items which are grouped in 2 factors and above in accordance to the standards mentioned by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) should not less than  $.20$  whereby researcher's predilection in choosing the suitable cross-loadings is also acceptable in eradicating superfluous items (Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). The Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value for factor one is  $.976$ , factor two;  $.981$ , factor three;  $.964$ , and factor four;  $.910$ . The total Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value from the items remained is  $.961$ . Many researchers has set a guideline of obtaining more than  $.70$  in assessing the reliability of the entire scale (Hair et al., 2010; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019; Zainudin Awang et al., 2015). Hence, all the items listed in the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) are believed to have met the satisfactory standards as the items are all listed as consistent and reliable. There are seven items listed under the first factor identified as Positive Job-related Gossip. The items listed under factor one is item 4, 2, 3, 6, 1, 5 and 7. These items have substantial high loadings which are  $.935$ ,  $.930$ ,  $.923$ ,  $.910$ ,  $.893$ ,  $.884$  and  $.836$ . Furthermore, factor one has also recorded  $.976$  as its alpha value (Tan et al., 2016; Wan Yusoff Wan Shaharuddin et al., 2019). Factor one describes the positive form of workplace gossip which circulates on the colleagues' credibility, diligence, dedication, interpersonal skills, job performance, experience and demonstration of ethical behaviours. The gist of these items indicates the common behaviour of talking about the positive attributes of a specific colleague at work. Positive gossip, specifically the ones involving job-related topic, can be valued professionally, increase performance as well as help gain recognition from the organisation involved (Chang et al., 2015).

Seven items, namely item 12, 10, 11, 9, 13, 14 and 8 were grouped under factor two. The items also uphold substantial loadings which are  $.906$ ,  $.903$ ,  $.891$ ,  $.876$ ,  $.871$ ,  $.844$  and  $.830$ . Factor two, which

is identified as Negative Job-related Gossip, can also be described as gossiping about negative attributes of any particular colleague. The alpha value of this factor is .981. The items in factor two can help to imply the gist of negative gossip by incorporating topics such as poor job knowledge, poor work engagement. Item 21, 27, 20, 19 and 23 were found to be grouped into factor three, which also indicates the alpha value .964. The loadings of these items are .859, .849, .826, .826 and .814. Factor three can be classified as Negative Non-job-related Gossip. The items in this factor can help to represent the topics that are non-job-related and would be more personal.

Gossip engagement is also implied as one of the communication betrayal facets which involve gossiping, misunderstanding and criticising a teacher in front of other colleagues to develop a common interest among other teaching colleagues (Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016). The negative form of gossip usually involves the topic of norm violations which can further evolve into tarnishing reputations (Brady et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2015). The last factor extracted can be defined as Positive Non-job-related Gossip. Item 17, 16, 18, and 15 were derived from factor four, along with the loadings of .787, .762, .758 and .688. The alpha value for factor four is .910, respectively. Factor four explains mainly on the positive form of gossip, which is more personal and does not involve any work-related matters. Gossiping about personal matters involve talking about colleagues' new friendship, recent sorrowful events, illness or car accident, new love relationship and recent joyful life events (Chang et al., 2015; Kuo et al., 2015). Consequently, the higher-quality employment relationship can be highlighted based on the shared emotional proximity and feelings of happiness with the social setting and workplace relationships (Chang et al., 2015). Besides that, workplace gossip is also best regarded as having informal chats especially during break times and involve the topic ranging from changes of policy, job position, customers' feedback and so on (Lee et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the bond created from the gossip is surprisingly effective in enhancing interpersonal interaction and promoting physical social networking (Lee et al., 2016). This is because interpersonal communication is assembled based on the comforts of those who interconnect whereby building communication is essential in determining how one speaker can make another speaker to be interested in participating (Triwardhani & Chaerowati, 2019). Table 03 and Table 04 demonstrates the factor loading of the items in the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) along with the Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) after the PCA with varimax rotation procedure:

**Table 3.** Factor loading of the items in the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS)

No.	Factor	$\alpha$	Items	Loadings
4	<b>Factor 1</b> Positive Job-related Gossip	.976	Colleague's credibility in job role.	.935
2			Colleague's diligence to work.	.930
3			Colleague's dedication to work.	.923
6			Colleague's good interpersonal skills.	.910
1			Colleague's excellent job performance.	.893

5			Colleague's job experience.	.884
7			Colleague's demonstration of ethical behaviours at work	.836
12			Colleague's poor job knowledge.	.906
10			Colleague's poor work engagement.	.903
11			Colleague's inexperience.	.891
9	<b>Factor 2</b>	.981	Colleague's carelessness.	.876
13	Negative Job-related Gossip		Colleague's poor interpersonal skills.	.871
14			Colleague's poor workplace ethics.	.844
8			Colleague's poor job performance.	.830

**Table 4.** Factor loading of the items in the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS)

No.	Factor	$\alpha$	Items	Loadings
21			Colleague's poor interaction with children.	.859
27			Colleague's poor relationship with family.	.849
20	<b>Factor 3</b>	.964	Colleague's betrayal of their partners.	.826
19	Negative Non-job-related Gossip		Colleague's lying to their partners.	.826
23			Colleague's marital problems.	.814
17			Colleague's new friendship.	.787
16			Colleague's recent sorrowful life events; such as illness or car accident.	.762
18	<b>Factor 4</b>	.910	Colleague's new love relationship.	.758
15	Positive Non-job-related Gossip		Colleague's recent joyful life events; such as purchasing a house or a car.	.688

## 7. Conclusion

In the study of communication, organisational life and gossip phenomenon are merely inseparable, and any chances of not engaging in gossip are inevitable (Michelson & Mouly, 2004). The results of future studies would help the prospect or current employers to determine the right person for the right job. In order to maximise performance in any organisation, employees need to be placed in the correct

department. Thus, future studies can help to formulate an assessment of personality and grapevine tendency prior to hiring an employee. Therefore, it is hoped that the extension of this topic will be taken into further consideration by researchers, academics, as well as policymakers. The study also proposes that other local and Asian respondents could utilise the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) as an antecedent towards other variables.

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