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DISSERTATION

WORKPLACE GOSSIP, COMMUNICATION OPENNESS, AND
ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION: ANALYSIS IN PORTUGUESE
ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

Gossip is a pervasive and multifaceted practice in organizations. While initial conceptualizations of workplace gossip emphasized its negative dimensions and negative consequences, there is currently a widespread recognition that it may also encompass positive dimensions and positive consequence. This dissertation aims to analyse the effects of positive and negative workplace gossip for the organizational communication climate – measured as communication openness- and for the bonds employees create with the organization – measured as organizational identification. For this, a questionnaire survey was used, which was available from the 15th of December 2023 to the 15th of January 2024. An initial analysis revealed significant differences in the sample groups. The results show that men perceive higher levels of negative workplace gossip than women, and that participants with lower education levels perceive lower levels of communication openness than those with higher education levels. In turn, participants with significant lower means of organizational identification are young (below 25), single, have been working in the organization for less than one year and do not hold a managerial position.

The relationships among the variables were analysed through structural equations modelling. The results indicate that positive workplace gossip is positively associated with organizational identification and communication openness. Conversely, negative workplace gossip is negatively associated with communication openness but not significantly associated with organizational identification. In turn, communication openness is positively associated with organizational identification, and also plays a mediating role between positive workplace gossip and organizational identification. Altogether, the model explains 12,4% of the variance for communication openness and 19,5% of the variance in organizational identification.

Keywords: Organizational Culture; Workplace Gossip; Organizational Identification; Communication Openness.

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RESUMO

A bisbilhotice é uma prática comum e multifacetada nas organizações. Enquanto as primeiras definições de bisbilhotice no local de trabalho enfatizavam as suas dimensões negativas e as suas consequências negativas, atualmente existe um reconhecimento generalizado de que pode também englobar dimensões positivas e consequências positivas. Esta dissertação tem como objetivo analisar os efeitos da bisbilhotice positiva e negativa no clima de comunicação organizacional - medido como abertura de comunicação - e nos laços que os funcionários estabelecem com a organização - medido como identificação organizacional. Para tal, foi utilizado um questionário de pesquisa, que esteve disponível de 15 de dezembro de 2023 a 15 de janeiro de 2024. Uma análise inicial revelou diferenças significativas nos grupos amostrais. Os resultados mostram que os homens percebem níveis mais elevados de bisbilhotice negativa no local de trabalho do que as mulheres e que os participantes com menor nível de educação percebem níveis mais baixos de abertura de comunicação do que aqueles com níveis de educação mais elevados. Por sua vez, os participantes com médias de identificação organizacional significativamente mais baixas são jovens (abaixo dos 25 anos), solteiros, têm menos de um ano de trabalho na organização e não ocupam cargos de gestão.

As relações entre as variáveis foram analisadas através de um modelo de equações estruturais. Os resultados indicam que a bisbilhotice positiva no local de trabalho está positivamente associada à identificação organizacional e à comunicação aberta. Por outro lado, a bisbilhotice negativa no local de trabalho está negativamente associada à comunicação aberta, mas não está significativamente associada à identificação organizacional. Por sua vez, a comunicação aberta está positivamente associada à identificação organizacional e desempenha também um papel mediador entre a bisbilhotice positiva no local de trabalho e a identificação organizacional. No total, o modelo explica 12,4% da variância da abertura de comunicação e 19,5% da variância na identificação organizacional.

Palavras-Chave: Cultura Organizacional; bisbilhotice no Local de Trabalho; Identificação Organizacional; Comunicação Aberta.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Workplace gossip, a pervasive phenomenon with approximately 90% of individuals engaging in such exchanges (Ellwardt et al., 2012), is a complex and influential practice within organizational settings, significantly impacting workplace dynamics (Dunbar, 2004).

Despite its prevalence, gossip is often overlooked as informal chatter, yet recent research underscores its pivotal role in shaping organizational identification and communication openness (Grosser et al., 2010).

Organizational identification, defined as an individual's sense of belonging and attachment to the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), is crucial for fostering employee commitment and engagement. Similarly, communication openness has emerged as a cornerstone for successful organizational communication (Schiller & Cui, 2010), facilitating collaboration and information sharing.

Recent studies have shed light on the multifaceted nature of workplace gossip, suggesting its potential to serve as a social adhesive within teams (Sun et al., 2023), while also highlighting its broader organizational implications, particularly in shaping communication climates (Brady et al., 2017). However, the intricate interplay between workplace gossip, communication openness, and organizational identification remains relatively unexplored in the literature.

Despite some evidence indicating the influence of workplace gossip on communication climates and employee identification, the specific mechanisms through which these variables interact, and impact organizational dynamics remain unclear. This gap in understanding hinders our ability to develop targeted interventions and strategies for fostering positive workplace environments.

Thus, the research problem at hand revolves around elucidating the complex relationship between workplace gossip, communication openness, and organizational identification. By investigating this interplay, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how these variables collectively shape the dynamics of modern workplaces, ultimately contributing to better leadership practices and organizational management.

Amidst today's global interdependence, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent a critical roadmap for addressing pressing global issues, guiding efforts towards a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable future for all. A Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) is a globally agreed upon set of targets designed to address pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges while fostering sustainable development and prosperity for all (United Nations, n.d.). Considering that both communication climate and organizational identification constitute antecedents of employee well-being (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Hameed et al., 2022), this research aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good health and well-being.

This analysis will be based on Social Exchange Theory and the Social Identity Theory. Social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) posits that, shared characteristics shape individuals' self-concept and self-esteem. Thus, operating as a tool for information sharing and norm reinforcement, gossip plays a pivotal role in contributing significantly to organizational identification (Dutton et al., 1994). Additionally, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) illustrates how a positive communication climate can foster stronger organizational identification, emphasizing how communication shape's identity within the organization and provides valuable insights into the dynamics influencing organizational effectiveness (Neill et al., 2020).

Social Exchange Theory (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005) suggests that social interactions involve reciprocity, forming the basis for various relationships. Gossip, when viewed through the lens of social exchange, becomes a valuable resource within informal communication networks (Mills, 2010).

Given the framework presented, this study aims to analyze, in the Portuguese organizational context, how employees perceive workplace gossip, communication openness and organizational identification.

The main objectives are therefore to:

- To analyze the levels of perception of workplace gossip, organization identification, and communication openness in a sample of workers in the Portuguese organizational context;
- To analyze whether there are significant differences in the variables under study in different groups of the sample (e.g., gender, age, level of education);

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- Analyze the relationships established between the perception of workplace gossip, organization identification and communication openness.

In line with these objectives, this dissertation is organized into four chapters. The first comprises this introduction, while the second focuses on the literature review, delving into the development of the concepts under study and the relationships established between them. Subsequently, the third chapter outlines the empirical study, encompassing an explanation of the methodology, sample characterization, the utilization of measurement instruments, and the analysis of results. Lastly, chapter four is devoted to delineating the contributions of the study, identifying limitations, and offering suggestions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a concise literature review analyzing the key concepts central to the development of this study, specifically the perception of workplace gossip, organizational identification, and communication openness. Subsequently, relevant studies will be presented to illustrate the established relationships between these concepts, thereby justifying the formulated hypotheses and the conceptual model developed.

2.1. Workplace Gossip

Gossip is a pervasive aspect of human communication (Dunbar, 2004) that can stem from across cultures and in a range of social institutions, spanning from traditional to contemporary environments (Besnier, 2019; Mills, 2010).

Recognizing its deep and multidimensional character, gossip has spawned a plethora of definitions and interpretations in the literature, as proposed by different academics and researchers (Dores Cruz et al., 2021). For instance, Dunbar (2004) defined gossip as an "informal and evaluative talk in an organization about another person who is not present" (Dores Cruz et al., 2021, p.14), while Kurland and Pelled (2000) have defined it as "the sharing of information about a third party in a manner that is evaluative, judgmental, or critical" (Kurland & Pelled, 2000, p.2).

Despite the momentum of the topic, until recently, the lack of a precise definition has hindered meaningful comparisons across studies due to a lack of a common theoretical foundation for consistent research methodologies (Dores Cruz et al., 2021).

According to Dores Cruz et al. (2021), two essential characteristics tend to enjoy broad consensus within the literature, providing a foundational framework for understanding workplace gossip. Namely, that gossip is communication between humans involving a sender, a receiver, and a target, and that the target is absent or unaware of the communicated content. This triadic structure underlines the social nature of gossip, emphasizing its role in interpersonal relationships within organizations.

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Nevertheless, studies reveal that some definitions include characteristics on which there is less agreement. Two characteristics are subject to varying interpretations within the literature: gossip valence and gossip formality (Dores Cruz et al., 2021).

Gossip valence, referring to whether the content is positive, negative, or neutral, holds significant implications. Positive gossip can bolster social bonds, reinforce group norms, or express dissent, while negative gossip might cultivate an atmosphere of distrust, diminish morale, and hamper workplace efficiency (Sun et al., 2023).

Studies have indicated that the valence of gossip significantly affects outcomes. Negative gossip consistently demonstrates negative impacts on individual, relational, and organizational outcomes (e.g., Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). Conversely, positive gossip tends to have a minimal effect on individual outcomes but yields a moderately positive impact on relational and organizational aspects (Wax et al., 2022).

Gossip formality refers to the level of structure and intentionality observed in workplace communication. This spectrum extends from casual, spontaneous exchanges to more structured, intentional communication strategies designed to fulfill specific organizational objectives (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Research by Kurland and Pelled (2000) suggests that the level of formality significantly influences how gossip is perceived and processed in professional settings. It is noteworthy that this variability is not inherently linked to the physical environment where the communication occurs but rather to the degree of structure and intentionality inherent in the communication itself (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Over time, the perception of workplace gossip has evolved. Although historically deemed unproductive or even deviant workplace behavior (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2009; Lipman, 2022; Vaidyanathan et al., 2016), an increasing body of evidence emphasizes that gossip serves multiple roles in organizations—some positive, some negative, and others that don't neatly fit into either category (Bai et al., 2019; Brady et al., 2017; Vaidyanathan et al., 2016).

Having said that, it has become critical to fully understand the implications of workplace gossip. According to research findings, gossip may have both positive and negative effects on people, groups, and organizations (Sun et al., 2023). Notably, it is shown that it has an influence on all people involved in the 'gossip triangle,' which

includes those who begin gossip (gossip senders), those who receive it (gossip receivers), and those who become its topic (Dores Cruz et al., 2021).

In the context of organizational life, workplace gossip is a multifaceted phenomenon with notable consequences (Wax et al., 2022). Specifically, it is essential to recognize that the impact of gossip whether for the organization or for the individuals can have both positive and negative consequences (Ellwardt et al., 2012).

As far as organizations are concerned, some negative consequence relates to the ability that gossip has in shaping communication potentially repressing open and effective communication, hindering decision-making and problem-solving (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Secondly, the grapevine effect leads to more influential but informal information dissemination, which may negatively affect organizational learning, power relations, and breed distrust (Sun et al., 2023). Furthermore, Gossip may erode trust among employees and between employees and management, fostering an atmosphere of suspicion and hostility (Brady et al., 2017; Mills, 2010).

Moreover, at work, gossip can significantly impact productivity and performance, reducing morale, increasing stress levels, and decreasing task engagement which can culminate in higher employee turnover (Feinberg et al., 2014; Foster, 2004). Finally, gossip can harm an organization's external reputation, potentially damaging its image and credibility in the marketplace (Foster, 2004).

On the other hand, workplace gossip can have positive effects, like improved performance, as it enables creativity, innovation, and information sharing, as well as easing the establishment of group norms and rules (Brady et al., 2017; Sun et al., 2023). Likewise, it can also help individuals build social connections and establish trust with others (Brady et al., 2017). Parallelly, gossip serves various social functions, such as social control, social support, social comparison, and providing valuable information for organizations. It helps manage social relationships and behavior regulation (Dores Cruz et al., 2021; Sun et al., 2023).

As far as individuals are concerned, gossip may have negative effects by eliciting self-conscious feelings, such as guilt or pride, influencing individuals' emotional experiences (Feinberg et al., 2014). Secondly, negative gossip can increase psychological discomfort

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and harm mental health, reduce job satisfaction, and negatively impact engagement and organizational commitment (Foster, 2004; Mills, 2010).

Conversely, individuals can sense that, gossip can have positive takeouts including its influence upon individual behavior, for instance organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and pro-social actions, or withdrawal (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Thus, workplace gossip can create a web of interpersonal relationships, impacting trust, camaraderie, and harmony among coworkers (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Mills, 2010).

2.2. Organizational Identification

Organizational identification and its underpinning concepts of organizational identity have long been recognized as foundational constructs in the field of organizational studies. These constructs play a vital role in understanding the dynamics of how individuals relate to the organizations they are a part of (Albert et al., 2000).

Central to this concept is how individuals perceive themselves within the organization, notably shaping their attitudes and behaviors (Ashforth et al., 2008). This perception of identity extends into organizational identification, where individuals become embedded in the organization's identities. The more these perceptions are shared and communicated, the stronger the organization's identity and the greater the potential for identification among its members (Albert & Whetten, 1985).

Ashforth and Mael (1989) define organizational identification as "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member" (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104).

Over time, the concept has evolved substantially, transitioning from a static, one-dimensional construct to a more dynamic and diverse viewpoint. Thus, recognizing the multifaceted nature of organizational identification (Pratt et al., 2006; Riketta, 2005). This contemporary perspective acknowledges cognitive and emotional aspects and its contextual variability based on different circumstances (Mazzola & Disselhorst, 2019).

Hence, it is evident that organizational identification is significantly associated with work-related attitudes and behaviors (Lee et al., 2015; Wilkins et al., 2018). For this

reason, analyzing the different consequences (positive and negative) at both the organizational and individual levels is fundamental to comprehend the different impacts of this variable (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

As far as organizations are concerned, strong organizational identification yields a higher sense of attachment and belonging among individuals, leading to increased commitment, and motivation (Mael & Ashforth, 1992; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Ultimately, greater organizational identification contributes to the development of a positive organizational culture (Dutton et al., 1994; Liu et al., 2011; Millward & Postmes, 2010; O'Reilly & Chatman, 1986). Furthermore, heightened organizational identification is linked to enhanced productivity and performance, along with lower turnover rates (Dutton et al., 1994).

However, along with the positive aspects, there are also potential negative organizational consequences. For instance, strong organizational identification can lead to resistance to change (Gregory et al., 2009), which may limit critical thinking, creativity, and innovation (Van Knippenberg, 2000). This resistance can impede an organization's adaptability and success (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Additionally, excessive identification may create conformity pressures and in-group favoritism, impacting teamwork and collaboration within the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

As far as the individual is concerned, strong organizational identification is linked to increased job satisfaction, well-being (Dutton et al., 1994; Van Knippenberg, 2000) and mental health (Rai, 2015). Thereby, leading to an increase in self-esteem and career advancements as they are positively related with organizational identification (Riketta, 2005; Van Knippenberg & Sleebos, 2006).

Moreover, studies show that there is a positive correlation between organizational identification and intent to stay in the organization. In which, higher organizational identification is associated with high intentions to stay in the organization (Riketta, 2005). The same correlation is also found for tenure, as the employees' length of time with the organization is positively correlated with organizational identification. Longer organizational tenure is associated with a stronger sense of identification with the organization (Riketta, 2005).

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Nevertheless, some adverse effects emerge as one becomes overly immersed with the organization fostering a potential for conformity and groupthink that may restrict individual creativity and critical thinking (Mael & Ashforth, 1989). Simultaneously, the pressure on individuals to align with organizational expectations, even when conflicting with their personal values or beliefs, can further compound the constraints on independent thought and innovative expression within the organizational context (Mael & Ashforth, 1989).

2.3. Communication Openness

Communication is a fundamental aspect of organizational life, so understanding the communication processes becomes essential for comprehending how organizations function (Redding, 1979). From the organizing process throughout the lifespan of the organization, communication forms the basis of organizations (Keyton, 2017), "Organizations cannot exist without communication" (Keyton, 2017, p. 11). Thus, studying organizational communication helps to shed light on the dynamics, processes, and implications of communication within organizations.

The early understanding of communication openness focused primarily on the exchange of messages and the ease of comprehension during interactions (Baird, 1973; Redding, 1972). However, the concept evolved significantly over time and, Rogers (1987) expanded this framework beyond basic exchange behaviors, presenting a comprehensive model that encompassed multiple dimensions.

Roger's framework adds more dimensions to the concept stating that "communication openness incorporates the message sending and message receiving behaviors of superiors, subordinates, and peers with regard to task, personal, and innovative topics" (Rogers, 1987, p. 54). This expanded definition illustrated a structured model comprising three key dimensions: the direction of communication, the manner of message exchange, and the range of topics discussed, including complaints, personal opinions, and suggestions, among (Rogers, 1987)

The evolution in the definition of communication openness reflects an expanded view influenced by factors such as cultural context and the advent of diverse communication mediums. Recent research emphasized the impact of cultural differences and diverse

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communication channels, such as face-to-face interactions and instant messaging, on communication openness in the workplace (Ayoko, 2007).

This more comprehensive view emphasizes how dynamic communication openness is, going beyond simple exchange behaviors to take technical and contextual factors into account and so influencing successful communication in organizational contexts (Schiller & Cui, 2010).

As far as the organization is concerned, communication openness encourages better interactions among coworkers, facilitating the sharing of opinions, information, and knowledge (Gordon & Hartman, 2009; More & Pascoe, 2008). Hence, openness can ensure a flow of vital information allowing for faster adjustment to changes and thereby leading to a more innovative and collaborative work environment (Shin & Zhou, 2007).

Additionally, for the organizations, communication openness may positively impact employee retention (Al-Omari et al., 2008). That is, when communication channels are open, employees are more likely to feel committed to the organization, leading to higher dedication, loyalty, and alignment with organizational goals (Gordon & Hartman, 2009). Altogether, communicating openly can result in greater employee satisfaction (Trombetta & Rogers, 1988) leading to increased productivity and better overall performance (Rogers, 1987).

Finally, communication openness is also pivotal to develop trust relationships in the workplace (Ayoko & Pekerti, 2008), by reducing uncertainty (Wilson & Malik, 1995) and positively impacting effective decision-making (Breen et al., 2005) which helps mitigating organizational crises (Rogers, 1987).

Conversely, openness could lead to an overwhelming amount of information, causing confusion and misinterpretation of information potentially leading to ineffective communication (Goldhaber et al., 1978; Rogers, 1987). Furthermore, excess communication openness without clear guidance or structure, decision-making processes might stall or become inefficient (Janis, 1972). Resulting, in a weakened sense of authority, making it difficult for leaders to carry out choices or manage teams successfully (Mintzberg, 1979).

As far as the individual is concerned, communication openness channels can contribute to alleviate stress levels among employees, as it reduces ambiguity and

uncertainty, resulting in a more relaxed and conducive work environment (Gordon & Hartman, 2009). Therefore, fostering a positive workplace culture (Gordon & Hartman, 2009; Trombetta & Rogers, 1988).

Additionally, communication openness can lead to a greater sense of involvement and satisfaction in one's job (Redding, 1972; Shin & Zhou, 2007). Furthermore, openness fosters trust among team members, leading to stronger interpersonal relationships (Edmondson & Lei, 2014) as well to enhance the sense of employee empowerment (Hancer & George, 2003).

On the other hand, communication openness may result in a continuous flow of information flow, which could potentially lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding of shared information, thus generating conflicts within communication networks (Gudykunst, 2005). Moreover, overload of information states might lead to resistance to change within organizations due to unclear communication (Kotter, 1995).

2.4. Conceptual Framework and Hypothesis

This section will present the hypotheses developed in the study, justified by the literature review. These hypotheses concern the relationships established between the perception of workplace gossip, organizational identification and communication openness and result in the conceptual model that will be used in the empirical study. Firstly, two theories applied to various relationships in the model developed will be presented.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979) explores how shared characteristics shape individuals' self-concept and self-esteem. This theory is relevant to workplace gossip, where it serves as a tool for information sharing, norm reinforcement, contributing to organizational identification. Gossip helps define roles, strengthen connections among similar group members, fostering a sense of belonging (Wax et al., 2022). A study conducted by Dutton et al. (1994), grounded in Social Identity Theory, illuminates the impact of workplace gossip on individuals' perceptions of their relationships and social identities. This research emphasizes the critical role of comprehending gossip processes in shaping organizational identity and influencing group dynamics in the workplace.

Additionally, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel et al., 1979), can also be effectively used to explain the relationship between communication climate and organizational identification. This theory asserts that when employees view organizational aspects as positive (e.g. an communication openness climate), they are more inclined to integrate organizational membership into their self-identity. Research carried out by Neill et al. (2020) used the Social Identity Theory as theoretical framework, illustrates how a positive communication climate fosters stronger organizational identification. Thus, Social Identity Theory is useful for understanding the relationship between workplace gossip and organizational identification, as well as the relationship between communication openness and organizational identification.

Social Exchange Theory, as proposed by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), posits that social interactions involve reciprocity, fostering mutual exchanges that underpin various relationships. In the context of workplace dynamics, engaging in gossip can be viewed as a form of social exchange, where individuals reciprocate information, treating it as a valuable resource within informal networks. The idea that information becomes a valuable resource within informal networks aligns with the theory's emphasis on reciprocity. This theory is particularly applicable to workplace gossip and communication openness, as reciprocity manifests through the give-and-take of information, shaping the dynamics of communication networks. By understanding gossip as a social exchange mechanism, we gain insights into how reciprocity influences the flow of information and communication dynamics in organizational settings(Mills, 2010). Thus, Social Exchange Theory is useful for understanding the relationship between Workplace Gossip and communication openness.

2.4.1. Workplace Gossip and Organizational Identification

Organizational identification refers to the sense of belonging and attachment that employees feel towards their organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). According to Kurland and Pelled (2000), gossip, contributes to this identification by fostering social interactions among employees. Positive gossip about the organization, its values, or successful colleagues can create pride and attachment. In essence, gossip plays a crucial

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role in shaping employees' sense of belonging and attachment to the organization, contributing to the transmission and reinforcement of organizational culture.

The study by Kurland and Pelled (2000) concludes that workplace gossip serves as a mechanism for members to negotiate and construct their collective identity, influencing how individuals perceive the organization and their roles, ultimately impacting the overall organizational identity.

Based on the study by (Wang et al., 2022), positive workplace gossip can increase employees' sense of organizational identity. As positive workplace gossip contains positive comments and evaluation, which can impact employees' positive self-esteem, and sense of belonging. Hence, gossip may contribute to a shared organizational culture and a sense of community among employees. The correlation analysis in (Wang et al., 2022) shows that positive workplace gossip is positively correlated with organizational identity. This indicates a significant positive relationship between positive workplace gossip and organizational identity.

According to Grosser et al. (2010), negative gossip is associated with lower organizational identification. Employees heavily involved in negative gossip are more likely to experience diminished organizational identification. This engagement in negative workplace gossip can adversely affect both organizational identification and performance, leading to lower ratings from supervisors. This underscores the broader impact of negative gossip on individual relationships, informal influence, and employees' overall sense of belonging within the organization.

In this sense, the following hypotheses are presented:

H1: workplace gossip is associated with organizational identification.

H1a: positive gossip is positively associated with organizational identification.

H1b: negative gossip is negatively associated with organizational identification.

2.4.2. Workplace Gossip and Communication Openness

Kurland and Pelled (2000) delve into the ways gossip functions as a form of communication influencing social interactions. The study concluded that workplace

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gossip can have both positive and negative effects on communication openness within an organization. On one hand, gossip can facilitate communication by providing a channel for sharing information, building relationships, and creating social bonds among employees. On the other hand, gossip can also hinder communication openness by spreading rumors, creating mistrust, and undermining formal communication channels (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Mills (2010) examined the role of gossip in organizational communication. The study challenges conventional perspectives on the connection between formal and informal communication, underscoring the conversational nature of gossip and its integration with other communication modalities. The study revealed a close association between the dynamics of gossip and the quality of relationships among those involved in gossip activities, emphasizing the importance of trust in fostering communication openness and enabling the sharing of personal information (Mills, 2010).

In this sense, the following hypotheses are presented:

H2: workplace gossip is associated with communication openness.

H2a: positive gossip is positively associated with communication openness.

H2b: negative gossip is negatively associated with communication openness.

2.4.3. Communication Openness and Organizational Identification

In a recent study by (Yue et al., 2021), the effects of internal communication on employees' organizational identification were examined. Notably, the research underscores the empirical impact of internal communication practices in fostering organizational identification. To explore these connections further, Yue et al. (2021) conducted a comprehensive correlation analysis, revealing a robust correlation between internal communication and organizational identification. This finding affirms the significant relationship and supports Yue et al. (2021) conclusion that internal communication plays a mediating role in the intricate relationship between communication practices and organizational identification.

Neill et al. (2020) studies the impact of an open and participative communication climate on employee organizational identification and their responses to change. The

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study examined how employee organizational identification and change-reactions are impacted by an environment of open and participatory communication. The study found that an open and participative communication climate acts as a catalyst for fostering employee identification with the organization, revealing a substantial association between communication climate and corporate identity (Neill et al., 2020). The research revealed a robust positive association between the communication climate in the organization and employees' identification with the organization. In essence, a positive communication climate fostered a sense of belonging and strong ties to the organization among employees (Neill et al., 2020).

Atouba et al. (2019) explored the relationship between participative and inclusive organizational communication practices and employees' identification with their organizations, particularly among IT workers. The findings reveal a positive correlation between organizational communication adequacy and organizational identification. Put simply, higher levels of organizational communication adequacy are associated with increased organizational identification. This correlation is emphasized when employees view inclusive communication practices favorably and when these practices positively impact their job experiences. The study emphasizes that employees who perceive their opinions as valued and receive sufficient information about their jobs and organization are more likely to identify with their workplace (Atouba et al., 2019).

In this sense, the following hypotheses are presented:

H3: communication openness is positively associated with organizational identification.

Considering that workplace gossip leads to communication openness and that communication openness leads to organizational identification, we will also verify whether communication openness plays a mediating role.

In short, considering the literature review presented and the hypothesis formulated, the following conceptual model is presented (Figure 1).

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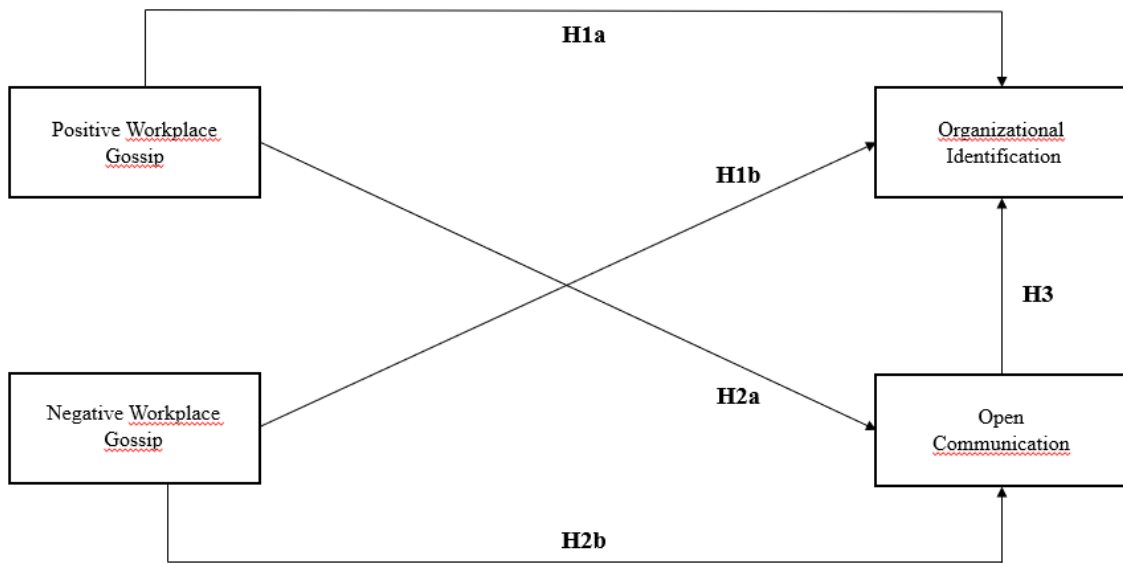
Figure 1 - Conceptual Model

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3. EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1. Method

Considering the established goals, this research employs a quantitative approach, relying on the gathering of numerical data to facilitate a statistical analysis of the correlations among the variables being investigated (Walliman, 2016). The quantitative methodology, rooted in positivism, maintains an objective stance by viewing social reality as an empirical fact (Walliman, 2016).

This research was based on the quantitative methodology, supported by hypothesis testing. Data was collected at a single point in time, from December 15th, 2023, until January 15th, 2024, by providing an online questionnaire developed in the QualtricsXM software and then shared with the master's student's network of personal and family contacts, and on social networks (LinkedIn, Instagram, and Facebook).

It should be noted that of the 310 responses collected, only 139 were considered and analyzed, corresponding to individuals who, at the time of data collection, were employed or have already had some experience in the job market. The data was processed using two software packages: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and SmartPLS. The tables supporting the statistical analysis can be found in Annex II.

3.1.1. Sample Description

The sample consisted of 139 valid responses. To ensure respondents did not feel identified, the sociodemographic questions in the last section of the questionnaire were made optional.

Table 1 shows how the sample is characterized. It can be seen that 91 respondents were female (65.5%), 81 were male (31.7%), and 2 considered themselves non-binary (1.4%). As far as age is concerned, the average age of the sample is 47, and the most representative age group is 18-25 years old with 61 respondents (43.9%), followed by 26 - 30 years old with 24 respondents (17.3%), then 41 to 50 years old with 23 responses (16.5%), the 51-60 age group with 15 respondents (10.8%), and the 31-40 age group with 12 respondents (8.6%), and finally the more than 60 years old with 2 respondents (0.01%).

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In terms of marital status, 92 individuals are single (66.2%) and 43 are not single (30.9%), including married (15.8%), divorced (5.8%), widow (1.4%), non-marital partnership (7.9%) and other (1.4%).

In terms of the level of education completed, 50 participants have a bachelor's degree (36%); 48 have a master's degree or have completed a postgraduate course (34.5%) and 3 respondents have completed a PhD (2.2%). However, qualifications equivalent to secondary education (12th grade) or lower account for 22.3% of the sample, of which 28 individuals have completed secondary education (20.1%) and 3 people (2.2%) have completed elementary education (9th grade).

For sector, 106 respondents said they worked in the private for-profit sector (76.3% and the), while 19 said they worked in the public sector (13.7%) and 9 in private non-profit sector (6.5%).

Regarding the nature of the contractual relationship with the organization where they carry out their main professional activity, 87 individuals are employees, of which 66 individuals have an open-ended employment contract (47.5%) and 21 individuals have a fixed-term employment contract (15.1%). There are 17 individuals in internship programs (12.2%) and 23 self-employed workers (10.9%).

In terms of seniority within the organization, 50 respondents (36%) reported a tenure of 1 to 5 years, while 43 participants had less than 1 year of experience. Additionally, 15 individuals (10.8%) had been with the organization for 6 to 10 years, another 15 individuals (10.8%) for over 20 years, 7 participants (5%) for 11 to 15 years, and 5 individuals (3.6%) for 16 to 20 years.

Regarding the hierarchical level occupied in the organization, 71 individuals are qualified professionals (51.1%); followed by 17 highly qualified professionals (12.2%); 14 supervisors/team managers (10.1%) and 13 middle managers (9.4%); 10 non-qualified professionals (7.2%) and 9 top managers (6.5%). It should be noted that 25.9% of the respondents exercise a management function/responsibility for other people (top manager, middle manager, and supervisor).

3.1.2. Measuring Instruments

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) consists of 38 questions and is divided into four sections, designed to collect different elements, 1) the perception of workplace gossip (positive and negative) in the organization, 2) perception of the organization identification, 3) perception of the communication openness in the organization, and, finally, 4) socio-demographic variables. For the purpose of this research, all scales were adapted to a 5-point Likert scale. For two of the scales, it was employed the Likert Scale, where 1 corresponds to "totally disagree" and 5 means "totally agree". For the remaining scale it was employed the Likert Scale, where 1 corresponds to "Never" and 5 to "Daily".

To verify the internal consistency of the scales, an analysis was carried out using the reliability analysis that was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha (α), which ranges from 0 to 1. Reliability is considered appropriate when $\alpha \geq 0.70$ (Field, 2005).

The first part of the questionnaire addresses the variable workplace gossip, utilizing Brady et al. (2017) Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS), which was translated into Portuguese by the author of this study. This scale is composed by 20 questions and comprises four dimensions: positive workplace gossip about a supervisor (PWGS) (items 1 to 5), and negative workplace gossip about a supervisor (NWGS) (items 6 to 10), positive workplace gossip about co-workers (PWGC) (items 11 to 15), and negative workplace gossip about co-workers (NWGC) (items 16 to 20).

For this study, the initial scale, which originally comprised four groups, was methodically reorganized into two overarching categories: positive gossip (PG) and negative gossip (NG). This consolidation aims to enhance clarity and streamline the analysis, allowing for a more focused examination of the nuanced dimensions of gossip within the research framework.

Conducting the reliability analysis (Table II) the high Cronbach's alpha values per dimension within each block signify strong reliability in the defined groupings. Hence, the dimension with the highest Cronbach Alfa value was positive workplace gossip (PG) (α=0,885), followed by Negative workplace gossip (NG) (α=0,861), Within the Workplace Gossip Scale, all items exhibit correlations higher than 0.2 with the scale.

The second section refers to the variable organizational identification. The Organizational Identification Scale from Mael & Ashforth (1992) was utilized, translated

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to Portuguese by (Noronha, 2013). For this research, it was only used the second section of this questionnaire – organizational identification which is composed of 6 questions. Within the reliability analysis (Table II), and since only one of the dimensions was employed, the total scale Cronbach Alpha was considered. Thus, this section shows a total scale Cronbach Alfa that exceeds the threshold of 0,7 meeting the criteria of interest (α=0,813). Within the Organization Identification Scale, all items exhibit correlations higher than 0.2 with the scale.

The third part of the questionnaire focuses on the variable of communication openness, using Burchfield (1997) Communication Openness Scale translated into Portuguese by the author of this study. For this research, it will be used only the first section of this questionnaire - communication openness which is composed by five questions. Within the reliability analysis (Table II), and since only one of the dimensions was employed, the total scale Cronbach Alpha was considered. Thus, this section shows a total scale Cronbach Alfa that exceeds the threshold of 0,7 meeting the criteria of interest (α=0,839). Within the Communication Openness Scale, all items exhibit correlations higher than 0.2 with the scale.

The last part of the questionnaire was reserved for questions characterizing the respondent and the organization where they carry out their main professional activity, namely: gender, age, nationality, marital status, level of education, tenure, sector of the organization, contractual relationship, hierarchical level, and position held.

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3.2. Results

This section presents the results of the study, in line with the objectives defined in the introduction. Firstly, the results relating to the mean and standard deviation of the scales in the total sample are presented, followed by the analysis of significant differences in subgroups of the sample and, finally, the analysis of structural equations. The tables mentioned can be consulted in Appendix II.

3.2.1. Mean and Standard Deviation in the Total Sample

After checking the reliability of the scales, the average of each variable in the total sample was calculated of each variable in the total sample. A 5-point Likert scale was used for all the variables in the study, so the theoretical midpoint is 3. The results can be analysed in Table II.

Firstly, three out of four variables in the study have a mean value in the total sample that is higher than the theoretical midpoint. Here, we can emphasize the mean value of the communication openness variable in the total sample (3.994). Followed by organizational identification variable with a mean value of 3.652.

It is worth noting that within workplace gossip only the positive gossip dimension presents a mean value in the total sample that is higher than the theoretical midpoint (3.352), while negative gossip presents mean value in the total sample that is lower than the theoretical midpoint (2.112).

3.2.2. Analysis of Significant Differences in Sample Subgroups

In order to answer the second objective defined in the first chapter, significant differences between subgroups of the sample were analysed using the ANOVA variance test and the student's t-test. The latter is used to compare the mean of two groups, so in this study it was used for the variables gender and marital status. For the other variables, an ANOVA variance test was used. ANOVA test was used for comparing two or more groups (Field, 2005).

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Differences between groups are considered significant when the significance value (p) is such that p≤0.05. Since there is 95% certainty that there are significant differences between subgroups of the sample (Field, 2005).

Firstly, in relation to the demographic variable gender (Table III) there are significant differences with the variable negative gossip ($p < 0.031$). Masculine respondents have higher means for negative gossip (2.209) compared to female respondents (1.993).

In terms of age (Table IV), notable differences exist in the organizational identification variable ($p < 0.037$). The highest averages are observed among individuals aged over 40 for organizational identification (3.892), followed by the 26 to 40 age group, showing averages of 3.718 organizational identification. Conversely, the lowest average is found in the 18 to 25 age group, recording (3.462) for organizational identification.

Examining marital status (Table V), the significant difference emerged in organizational identification ($p < 0.039$). Non-singles exhibited a higher average for organizational identification (3.837). In contrast, those with a single marital status showed a lower average organizational identification (3.565).

In terms of the education level (Table VI), there are significant differences with communication openness variable ($p < 0.030$). Individuals holding advanced degrees, such as master's or Ph.D., exhibit the highest average for communication openness (4.216). On the other hand, less advanced education level individuals, such as 12th grade, presented a lower average concerning communication openness (3.865).

Concerning tenure or time working in the organization (Table IX), there are significant differences with organizational identification variable ($p < 0.018$). Respondents with more than 6 years' and less than 20 years of experience have a higher average organizational identification (4.111). In contrast, those who have been working for less than 1 year have the lowest average organizational identification (3.516).

Finally, with respect to the hierarchy position (Table XI), there are significant differences with organizational identification ($p < 0.005$). Managerial roles exhibit a higher average for organizational identification (3.963) while non-managerial roles reveal a lower average for organizational identification (3.541).

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No significant differences were identified for the variable type of contract and sector of activity for the four variables under study.

3.2.3. Analysis of Relationships Among Variables

We chose Structural Equations Modelling (SEM) to test the hypothesis under study and conducted data analysis with PLS (Partial Least Squares). Items that presented poor reliability (loadings below .6) were excluded from the analyses. Table 1 shows the final items that will be used for each construct, as well as their means, standard deviations, and loadings.

3.2.3.1. Measurement Validity and Reliability

As far as reliability is concerned, all Cronbach alphas and all composite reliabilities for latent variables are above the acceptable internal consistency level of .7 (Hair Jr et al., 2017) (Table XII). The standardized loadings of indicators are all larger than .6 (Table XI), which also confirms indicator reliability (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

Subsequently, we analysed convergent and discriminant validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) by each latent variable exceeds the threshold of .5 (Table XII) indicating a high convergent validity and that the constructs are unidimensional(Hair Jr et al., 2017). To complement the analysis of convergent validity, we calculated bootstrap t-statistics of the indicators' standardized loadings (Hair Jr et al., 2017). They were significant at the 1 percent significance level (Table XI), suggesting a high convergent validity of the measurement model.

We checked for discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio (Henseler et al., 2015). As Table XIII shows, the upper bound of the 95 per cent confidence interval of HTMT is lower than the more conservative threshold of .85, thus we can conclude that there are no discriminant validity problems.

We also tested the possibility of common method bias since it may affect the study validity. For that, we used the full collinearity assessment approach of Kock (2015). All the variance inflation factor values (VIF) were lower than the 5.0 threshold, suggesting that the model is free from common method bias.

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3.2.3.2. Model Estimation Results

Having confirmed robust validity and reliability indices during the analysis of the measurement models, the subsequent phase involves scrutinizing the structural model to examine the relationships under study (Henseler et al., 2009).

Hence, the bootstrapping procedure was used to assess the significance of the path coefficients (Table X), however since some presented a t-value bellow 1.96 (p > .05), they were excluded from the final structural model (Figure 2). Those excluded that represented a non-significant relationship concerned negative gossip and organizational identification (H1b).

Then, Table 4 exhibits all significant direct effects in the model and the effect sizes after removing the non-significant relationships, verifying partially hypothesis H1 with H1a, hypothesis H2 with H2a and H2b, and H3.

To analyse effect sizes (Table XIV), Cohen (1988), defends that these are week for $f^2 = 0.02$, moderate for f^2=0.15 and strong for $f^2 = 0.35$. As follows, hypothesis H1a predicted a positive relationship between positive workplace gossip and organization identification, and this prediction was confirmed as positive gossip has a positive small effect on organizational identification (β =0.281; p<0.01; $f^2 = 0.091$) as proposed. Consistent with the predictions for hypothesis H2a, which anticipated a positive association between positive workplace gossip and communication openness, the research results supported this expected relationship, revealing a mild positive effect on communication openness (β = 0.289; p < 0.01; $f^2 = 0.095$). Following the prediction that foresaw a negative correlation between negative workplace gossip and communication openness, hypothesis H2b, was confirmed revealing that negative workplace gossip has a significant weak effect on communication openness (β = -0.223; p < 0.05; $f^2 = 0.056$). Ultimately, our anticipation of a positive association between communication openness and organizational identification, as hypothesized in H3, was confirmed through data analysis. The results revealed a significant, positive small effect of communication openness on organizational identification (β = 0.272; p < 0.01; $f^2 = 0.085$).

Beyond the hypothesis, it was also tested the significant indirect effects (table XV), where we examined the mediating role of communication openness as a mediator in the

relationship between positive gossip and organizational identification. The results revealed a statistically significant and modest mediation effect (β = 0.078; p < 0.018). This indicates that positive gossip exerts its influence on organizational identification through the intermediary mechanism of communication openness, emphasizing the noteworthy and statistically significant mediating role played by communication openness in this relational pathway.

Additionally, we analyzed the coefficient of determination (R^2) of the endogenous constructs in order to evaluate the explanatory power of the model (Hair Jr et al., 2017). The model explains 19.5% of variance for organization identification and 12.4% of variance for communication openness.

Lastly, we analyzed predictive relevance, for which we used blindfolding to calculate Stone-Geiser's R^2. All the values of Q^2 are above zero, thus we can consider that the model has predictive relevance (Hair Jr et al., 2017).

Figure 2 presents the final structural model:
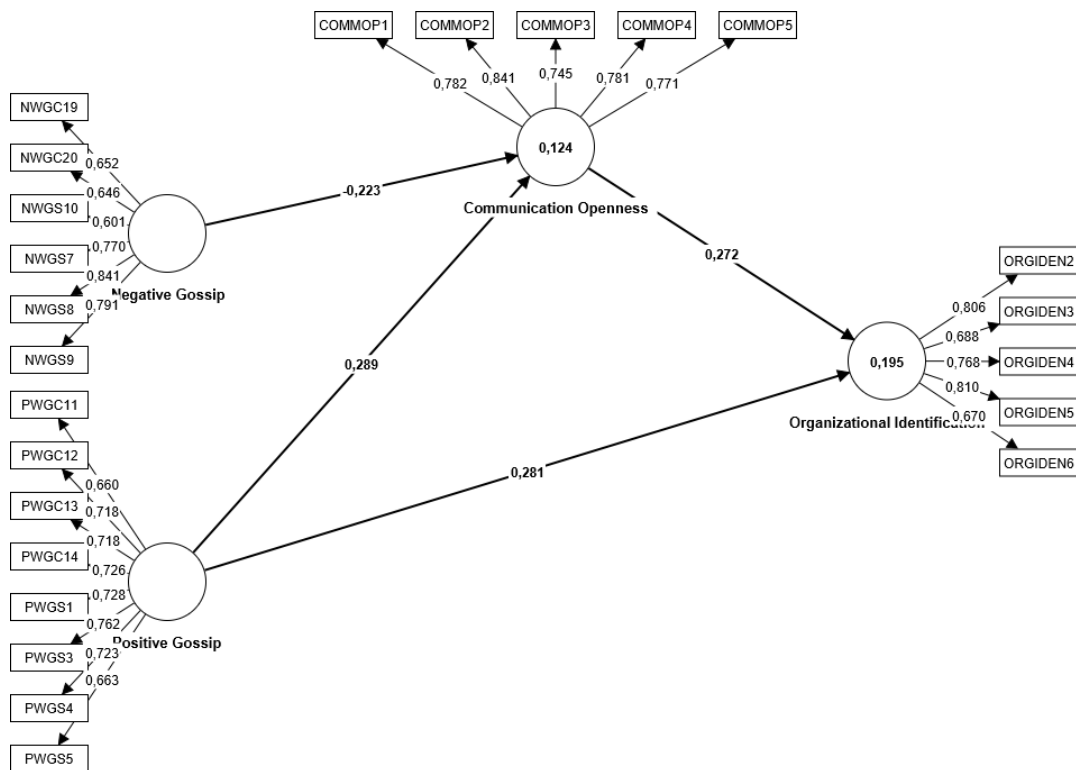
Figure 2 - Final Structural Model

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4. CONCLUSION

4.1. Summary of the Results

It was found that, in the Portuguese organizational context, individuals do not present problems in terms of the perception of the four variables. The perception of communication openness and organizational identification expressed the highest averages (3.994 and 3.652) respectively. Followed by the perception of positive workplace gossip (3.353) and the perception of negative gossip (2.112) values.

The second objective sought to analyze significant differences in subgroups of the sample. The results of the study show significant differences in terms of perception of negative workplace gossip in the subgroup gender. The results show that men exhibit higher perception of negative gossip than women. This discrepancy may stem from men's higher levels of competitiveness compared to women, leading them to be more vigilant towards negative information regarding their colleagues (Van de Vliert & Janssen, 2002). Men's inclination towards competition could render them more attuned to potentially threatening social dynamics within the workplace, thereby influencing their perception of gossip.

Regarding the perception of communication openness, the significant difference found corresponds to the subgroup level of education. Participants with a higher level of education (e.g., PhD) present higher levels of communication openness, when compared with participants that do not present such high levels of education (12th grade). This difference can be attributed to the advanced education group's acquisition of diverse communication tools, critical thinking skills, and a culture that values transparency. Higher education not only enriches individuals with a broader range of communication theories but also cultivates interpersonal skills and encourages collaborative dialogue. As a result, participants with higher education levels contribute to more open and transparent communication channels in the organizational context.

Regarding the perception of organizational identification, significant differences are revealed in the subgroups: age, marital status, tenure, and hierarchy position. Participants with higher age (e.g., individuals with more than 40 years old), that are not single (married, divorced, non-marital partnership and widow) with more years in the organization (e.g., more than 40 years) and with managerial roles exhibit higher

perception towards organization identification. For age, senior respondents (more than 40 years of age) exhibited a stronger organizational identification compared to younger counterparts (18 – 25 years of age). This suggests that as individuals age, indicating more time within the same organization, their sense of identification with the organization tends to increase. Similarly, in terms of tenure, those with extended organizational experience (more than 20 years), demonstrated a higher perception of organizational identification compared to those with less tenure (less than 1 year). This aligns with the notion that increased years in the organization foster a deeper familiarity with its culture and values, contributing to a stronger sense of organizational identity. Finally, concerning the hierarchy position, the results show that managerial roles (senior and middle management and team manager) consistently showed higher organizational identification compared to non-managerial roles (highly qualified, qualified, and unqualified professionals). This aligns with the observation that management positions, often associated with longer organizational tenures, are conductive to developing a higher identification with the organization.

It is worth to noting that there were no significant differences for the variables type of contract and sector of activity. As well as none of the variables expressed significant differences between groups for the perception of positive workplace gossip.

The third and final objective of the study was to analyze the relationship between the perception of positive gossip and negative gossip, organizational identification, and communication openness. Based on these relationships, it is important to assess whether the hypotheses defined have been confirmed.

Hypothesis 1a (H1a) that predicted a positive association between positive workplace gossip and organizational identification was confirmed, as shown in previous studies (e.g., Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Wang et al., 2022).

Hypothesis 2a (H2a) that predicted a positive association between positive workplace gossip and communication openness was confirmed, consistent with earlier findings (e.g., Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Mills, 2010). Regarding, hypothesis 2b (H2b) which predicted a negative association between negative workplace gossip and communication openness, this was confirmed, as previous investigations indicate (e.g., Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

Lastly, hypothesis 3 (H3) which predicted a positive association between communication openness and organizational identification was verified, as showed in prior research (e.g., Yue et al., 2021; Neill et al., 2020).

4.2. Contributions

Therefore, the present study contributes to a better understanding of the role that workplace gossip (positive and negative) can have in organizations, specifically in terms of organizational identification and communication openness. Moreover, it is presented a research model that explains 12.4% of communication openness and 19.5% of organizational identification, indicating that there is also an indirect relationship, in which communication openness can act as a moderator between positive gossip and organizational identification.

This study reinforces the need for human resources managers to consider actions that promote open communication channels to allow for a smoother assimilation process. Thus, to reinforce communication openness, we propose moments where informal communication is encouraged through events and occasions that allow employees to casually communicate (e.g., lunches or casual get-togethers).

Additionally, organizing regular social events, such as team-building outings and holiday parties, provides employees with opportunities to connect on a personal level. These activities contribute positively to the assimilation process and foster better identification with the organization.

To maximize organizational effectiveness and employee satisfaction, managers could implement targeted initiatives tailored to specific demographic groups identified in the study. For instance, recognizing the notable differences in organizational identification across age groups, managers could introduce age-differentiated training programs. These programs could include mentorship schemes pairing younger employees with seasoned professionals to foster knowledge transfer and cross-generational collaboration. Additionally, workshops focusing on career development tailored to the needs and aspirations of different age cohorts could enhance organizational identification and commitment.

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Moreover, for education level and tenure, interventions can be devised to capitalize on strengths and address potential disparities. For instance, recognizing the higher communication openness among individuals with advanced degrees, managers could establish knowledge-sharing platforms and forums to leverage the expertise of highly educated employees for organizational learning and innovation. Additionally, for employees with shorter tenure, onboarding programs focusing on integrating newcomers into the organizational culture and providing clear career pathways could enhance organizational identification and reduce turnover.

Finally, it is imperative to recognize the indispensable role played by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in guiding our collective efforts towards addressing the most pressing global challenges. As we navigate an increasingly interconnected world, these goals provide a comprehensive framework for fostering a more equitable, prosperous, and sustainable future for all. Rooted in a shared commitment to addressing social, economic, and environmental issues, the SDGs offer a roadmap towards a better world, one that prioritizes the well-being of both current and future generations (United Nations, n.d.).

Exploring organizational identification, and communication openness in the context of Portuguese organizations, our research, aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3 – Good Health and Well-Being as these variables constitute antecedents of employee well-being (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Hameed et al., 2022). Organizational identification, reflecting employees' sense of belonging and connection to their workplace, has been shown to positively influence various aspects of well-being, including job satisfaction (Dutton et al., 1994; Van Knippenberg, 2000), commitment (Mael & Ashforth, 1992), and mental health (Rai, 2015). Similarly, communication openness practices contribute to a supportive work environment by fostering transparency, trust, and collaboration (Edmondson & Lei, 2014), thereby enhancing employee morale (Hancer & George, 2003), and reducing stress levels (Gordon & Hartman, 2009).

4.3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The methodology utilized in the empirical study also exhibits certain limitations. Firstly, regarding the data collection, reliance on a convenience sample constrains the

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generalizability of findings. On the other hand, the sample size, since the sample was small considering the number of employees in the Portuguese context. Therefore, future research should aim to increase the number of respondents within the Portuguese context to enhance the generalization of findings. Alternatively, researchers may consider extending the study to incorporate an international perspective, enabling cross-cultural comparisons, and broadening the scope of research.

Additionally, the sample characteristics may also pose its limitations since it was made up mostly of women (65.5%), with ages between 18 and 25 (43.9%) that hold a bachelor's degree (26%), which might make it difficult to perceive significant differences in relation to other subgroups.

Another limitation of the study was the simultaneous collection of data for all variables studied impedes the establishment of a robust cause-and-effect relationship (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). Specifically, it remains uncertain whether communication openness precedes organizational identification or vice versa. Furthermore, the instrument used in the study was solely composed of self-report scales, potentially introducing bias into the results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In future studies, we suggest the use of objective measures to complement self-report scales. Utilizing mixed methodologies, such as incorporating both questionnaire surveys administered at different times and interviews, can enrich the information collected and enhance the robustness of the study's fundings.

Lastly, despite these limitations, it is important to acknowledge that the study contributes valuable data and insights relevant to the Portuguese organizational context. In today's organizational landscape, where employee well-being and a healthy workplace environment are paramount for success, it is crucial to examine how positive workplace gossip can positively impact both organizational identification and communication openness. Additionally, the positive association between communication openness and organizational identification underscores the importance of promoting these factors to foster healthier work environments. Conversely, understanding that negative gossip may negatively affect communication openness enables organizations to define strategies and closely monitor this relationship, thereby avoiding the jeopardy of a positive workplace environment.

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ANNEXES

Annex I – Instrument

This study is part of a Master's dissertation that I am doing at ISEG - Lisbon School of Economics & Management, University of Lisbon. I would like to thank you for your cooperation, which is essential for this work.

Aim of the study: The main aim of the study is to analyse perceptions of informal communication in the workplace.

Procedures: The questionnaire consists of several statements, for which you will have to indicate your agreement. At the end, you will be asked to answer some sociodemographic data, such as age and level of education.

Expected duration: Completing the questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes.

Confidentiality: The information you provide during this study will be treated confidentially. The study will not disclose any data that could identify the participant. There will be no questions that ask you to identify yourself, or any element that compromises your anonymity.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please note that you are free to opt out or stop participating at any time before submitting your answers.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty.

How to withdraw from the study: If you wish to withdraw from the study, simply click on the "Close" button in Qualtrics.

If you have any questions about the study or need to report a problem with it, please contact: Maria Louro mariaalouro@aln.iseg.ulisboa.pt

Part I – Workplace Gossip

The following statements refer to your perception of informal communication in the organization where you work. Please indicate how often each statement occurs, using the scale from Never (1) to Daily (5).

In the last month, how often ...

	1	2	3	4	5
Said something nice about your supervisor while talking to a work colleague.					
Complimented your supervisor's actions while talking to a work colleague.					

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Told a work colleague good things about your supervisor.					
Told a work colleague that you respect your supervisor.					
Defended your supervisor's actions while talking to a work colleague.					
Asked a work colleague if they have a negative impression of something that your supervisor has done.					
Questioned your supervisor's abilities while talking to a work colleague.					
Criticized your supervisor while talking to a work colleague.					
Vented to a work colleague about something that your supervisor has done.					
Told an unflattering story about your supervisor while talking to a work colleague.					
Complimented a co-worker's actions while talking to another work colleague.					
Told a work colleague good things about another co-worker.					
Defended a co-worker's actions while talking to another work colleague.					
Said something nice about a co-worker while talking to another work colleague.					
Told a work colleague that you respect another co-worker.					
Asked a work colleague if they have a negative impression of something that another co-worker has done.					
Questioned a co-worker's abilities while talking to another work colleague.					
Criticized a co-worker while talking to another work colleague					
Vented to a work colleague about something that another co-worker has done.					

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Told an unflattering story about a co-worker while talking to another work colleague.					

Part II – Organisational Identification

The following statements refer to your perception of the organization where you work. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement, using the scale from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5)

	1	2	3	4	5
When someone criticizes the organisation, it feels like a personal insult.					
I am very interested in what others think about the organisation.					
When I talk about this organisation, I usually say 'we' rather than 'they'.					
This organisation's successes are my successes.					
When someone praises this organisation, it feels like a personal compliment.					
If a story in the media criticized the organisation, I would feel embarrassed.					

Part III – Communication Openness

The following statements refer to your perception of the climate of openness in the organization where you work. Please indicate your level of agreement with each statement, using the scale from Strongly disagree (1) to Strongly agree (5).

	1	2	3	4	5
It is easy to talk openly to all members of my workgroup					
Communication in my group is very open.					
I find it enjoyable to talk to other members in my group.					

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When people speak to each other in my group, there is great deal of understanding.					
It is easy to ask for advice from members of my group.					

Part IV - Socio-demographic data

In this fourth part you will find questions relating to sociodemographic data. Indicate the option that best corresponds to your personal data.

Gender:

- Masculine
- Feminine
- Non-binary
- Other

Age:

- 18 – 25 years
- 26 – 30 years
- 31 – 40 years
- 41 – 50 years
- 51 – 60 years
- More than 60 years

Marital status:

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Widow
- Non marital partnership
- Other

Education:

- Elementary / primary education
- High school
- Higher education undergraduate
- Higher education master's or postgraduate degree
- Higher education PhD
- Other

Sector of activity:

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- Public sector
- For-profit private sector
- Private not-for-profit sector

Type of contract:

- Permanent employment contract (effective)
- Fixed-term employment contract (non-effective)
- Self-employed worker
- Intern
- Other

Tenure:

- Less than 1 year
- 1 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 - 15 years
- 16 – 20 years
- More than 20 years

Hierarchy position:

- Senior manager
- Middle management/ manager
- Supervisor / team manager
- Highly qualified professional
- Qualified professional
- Unqualified professional

Annex II – Statistical Analysis Tables

Table I - Sample Characterization

Question	Options	N	%
Gender:	Female	91	66,4%
	Male	44	31,7%
	Non-binary	2	1,4%
	Other	0	0%
Age:	18 to 25 years	61	43,9%
	26 to 30 years	24	17,3%
	31 to 40 years	12	8,6%
	41 to 50 years	23	16,5%
	51 to 60	15	10,8%
	>60 years	2	1,4%
Marital status	Single	92	66,2%
	Married	22	15.8%
	Divorced	8	5.8%

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	Widow	2	1.4%
	Non marital partnership	11	7.9%
	Other	2	1.4%
Education	Elementary school	3	2,2%
	Secondary school	28	20,1%
	Bachelor's degree	50	36%
	Master or postgraduate	48	34,5%
	PhD	3	2,2%
	Other	5	3,6%
Sector	Public sector	19	13,7%
	Private for-profit	106	76,3%
	Private non-profit	9	6,5%
Type of contract	Open-ended employment contract	66	47,5%
	Fixed-term employment contract	21	15,1%
	Internship programs	23	16,5%
	self-employed workers	17	12,2%
	Other	9	6,5%
Tenure	< 1 year	43	30,9%
	1 to 5 years	50	36%
	6 to 10 years	15	10,8%
	11 to 15 years	7	5%
	16 to 20 years	5	3,6%
	>20 years	15	10,8%
Hierarchy position	Top manager	9	6,5%
	Middle manager	13	9,4%
	Supervisor/team leader	14	10,1%
	Highly qualified professionals	17	12,2%
	Qualified professionals	71	51,1%
	Non-qualified professionals	10	7,2%

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table II - Descriptive Statistics and Total and Factor Reliability Analysis

		N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alfa
Workplace Gossip	Positive Gossip	139	3.352	0.719	0.886
	Negative Gossip	139	2.112	0.694	0.861
	Total	139	2.732	0.534	0.856
Organizational Identification		139	3.652	0.859	0.813
Communication Openness		139	3.994	0.836	0.839

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table III - T-Test: Gender Differences

		N	Mean	Z	Sig.
Negative Gossip	Feminine	91	2.209	1.876	0.031
	Masculine	44	1.993		

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Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table IV - ANOVA: Age Differences

		N	Mean	Z	Sig.
Organizational Identification	18 - 25	61	3.462		
	26 - 40	36	3.718	3.371	0.037
	>40	40	3.892		
	Total	137	3.655		

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table IV - T-Test: Marital Status Differences

		N	Mean	Z	Sig.
Organizational Identification	Single	92	3.565	-1.781	0.039
	Not single	45	3.837		

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table V - ANOVA: Education Level Differences

		N	Mean	Z	Sig.
Communication Openness	12th grade	31	3.865		
	Bachelor's degree	50	3.928		
	Master and PhD degree	51	4.216	3.065	0.030
	Other	5	3.240		
	Total	137	3.996		

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table VI - ANOVA: Tenure Differences

		N	Mean	Z	Sig.
Organizational Identification	< 1	43	3.516		
	1- 5 years	50	3.543		
	6-20 years	27	4.111	3.475	0.018
	>20 years	15	3.589		
	Total	135	3.653		

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

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Table VII – T-Test: Hierarchy Position Differences

		N	Mean	Z	Sig.
Organizational Identification	Managerial role	36	3.963	2.592	0.005
	Non-managerial role	98	3.541		

Source: Own elaboration (SPSS)

Table VIII - Mean, Standard Deviation and Standard Weights of Indicators

Construct	Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Factor Loading	Bootstrap (T-test)	P-value
Workplace Gossip Positive Gossip	PWGS1	3.201	1.012	0.728	10.448	0.000
	PWGS3	3.094	0.988	0.762	11.296	0.000
	PWGS4	3.158	1.095	0.723	14.317	0.000
	PWGS5	3.122	1.196	0.663	8.447	0.000
	PWGC11	3.669	0.970	0.660	0.660	0.000
	PWGC12	3.683	0.945	0.718	0.718	0.000
	PWGC13	3.662	0.870	0.718	0.718	0.000
	PWGC14	3.403	1.051	0.726	0.726	0.000
Workplace Gossip Negative Gossip	NWGS7	2.065	1.189	0.770	5.805	0.000
	NWGS8	2.050	1.075	0.841	6.049	0.000
	NWGS9	2.590	1.186	0.791	5.717	0.000
	NWGS10	1.734	0.993	0.601	3.435	0.001
	NWGC19	2.388	0.963	0.652	4.292	0.000
	NWGC20	1.863	0.946	0.646	4.086	0.000
Organizational Identification	ORGIDEN2	3.741	1.171	0.806	18.554	0.000
	ORGIDEN3	4.007	1.232	0.688	9.660	0.000
	ORGIDEN4	3.842	1.207	0.768	15.530	0.000
	ORGIDEN5	3.770	1.075	0.810	14.969	0.000
	ORGIDEN6	3.662	1.160	0.670	17.820	0.000
Communication Openness	COMMOP1	3.727	1.285	0.782	17.772	0.000
	COMMOP2	3.892	1.136	0.841	26.854	0.000
	COMMOP3	4.288	0.842	0.745	13.941	0.000
	COMMOP4	3.878	1.049	0.781	16.645	0.000
	COMMOP5	4.187	0.979	0.771	16.176	0.000

Source: Own elaboration (SmartSPLS)

Table IX - Reliability and Convergent Validity

Latent variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Workplace Gossip – Positive Gossip	0.863	0.892	0.508
Workplace Gossip – Negative Gossip	0.818	0.866	0.521

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Organizational Identification	0.805	0.865	0.564
Communication Openness	0.846	0.889	0.508

Source: Own elaboration (SmartSPLS)

Table X - Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio

	Positive Gossip	Negative Gossip	Organization Identification	Communication Openness
Positive Gossip				
Negative Gossip	0.250			
Organizational Identification	0.396	0.190		
Communication Openness	0.299	0.230	0.398	

Source: Own elaboration (SmartSPLS)

Table XI - Direct Effects - Significant Relationships

Hypothesis	Relationships	β	f^2	T-test	P-value
H1a	Positive Gossip -> Organizational Identification	0.281	0.091	3.686	0.000
H2a	Positive Gossip -> Communication Openness	0.289	0.095	3.539	0.000
H2b	Negative Gossip -> Communication Openness	-0.223	0.056	2.539	0.011
H3	Communication Openness -> Organizational Identification	0.272	0.085	3.999	0.000

Source: Own elaboration (SmartSPLS)

Table XII -Indirect Effects - Significant Relationships

	β	T-test	P-value
Positive Gossip -> Communication Openness -> Organizational Identification	0.078	2.362	0.018

Source: Own elaboration (SmartSPLS)

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