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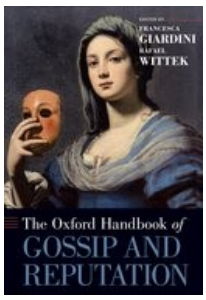

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CHAPTER

22 Antecedents and Consequences of Gossip in Work Groups

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Abstract

This chapter provides an overview of the antecedents and consequences of gossip in work groups. First, the chapter reviews the different motives for gossip in work groups (i.e., bonding, entertainment, emotional venting, information exchange, maintenance of group norms/social order, and interpersonal aggression) and links each motive to psychological theory. Second, the chapter reviews the different types of influence that gossip can have on various indicators of group effectiveness. Reflecting on the motives underlying gossip in work groups, as well as on its outcomes, it argues that future research should start integrating the diverse insights provided by earlier research on both gossip motives and outcomes, and it provides a number of suggestions for doing so.

Keywords: gossip, work groups, teams, motives, task performance, inclusion, viability

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Introduction

GROUPS are a breeding ground for gossip, and organizational work groups are no exception. Working in groups affords various benefits to group members, but it also poses serious challenges that may prompt group members to provide evaluative information about other group members who are not present—that is, to engage in gossip. In this chapter, we examine the relationship between gossip and work group functioning. In particular, we illuminate (1) how group dynamics give rise to gossip and (2) how gossip influences work group functioning. We use the terms "work group" and "team" interchangeably to refer to interdependent collections of individuals who share responsibility for specific organizational outcomes (Sundstrom, De Meuse, & Futrell, 1990).

Organizations increasingly structure work around teams (Garvey, 2002; Ilgen, 1999). From the perspective of the organization, group-based organizational structures are generally believed to facilitate adaptability, information exchange, learning, and control (e.g., Hollenbeck, Beersma, & Schouten, 2012; Hackman & Oldham, 1976). That is, groups tend to have more skills and have access to more knowledge than single individuals, and by pooling these skills and this knowledge, teamwork can provide performance gains that exceed the mere sum of individual members' performance (Hertel, 2011). In addition, the possibility of sharing ideas within the group is often believed to enhance creativity (Levine & Moreland, 1990), and this could in turn help organizations to come up with innovative solutions and as such adapt to a changing environment. Finally, working in teams reduces the cost of managerial control, as employees organized in
p. 418 teams are accountable to each other rather than to someone ↳ higher up in the organizational hierarchy (Crowley, Payne, & Kennedy, 2014). From the perspective of the individual worker, group work also offers several advantages. Through increased contact with co-workers, team-based structures enable higher levels of social-emotional and informational exchange, and these can benefit individual employees by facilitating interpersonal bonding, learning from one another, and the possibility to have a good time at work.

In spite of these advantages for organizations and individual workers, working in teams also has its difficulties. First, working with others in an interdependent setting makes social comparison salient (Beersma, Homan, Van Kleef, & De Dreu, 2013), and whereas comparing oneself to others may benefit self-assessment and self-verification (i.e. by enabling people to be known and understood by others according to their beliefs and feelings about themselves; Swann, 1983), individuals whose self-esteem is threatened by such comparisons may seek self-enhancement by for example downplaying others (Heatherton & Vohs, 2000).

Second, team-based work inherently means having to resolve tensions between cooperation and competition. Whereas in some situations, individual and collective interests are perfectly aligned, in many situations they are not, and in such social dilemma situations employees may be tempted to strive for their own rather than organizational goals (Beersma, Conlon, & Hollenbeck, 2007; Messick & Brewer 1983; Van Lange, Joireman, Parks, & Van Dijk, 2013). In order to achieve effective team performance, adaptability and organizational learning, it is essential that team members overcome the temptation to pursue their own goals and instead, cooperate with each other toward achieving the goals of the team (Beersma, Hollenbeck, Humphrey, Moon, Conlon, & Ilgen, 2003). An important question is therefore how to promote cooperation between individuals in the interest of the team.

In light of our previous discussion of the advantages and difficulties of group work, gossip within work groups is an interesting phenomenon. In line with Foster (2004), we define gossip as evaluative talk about an absent third party. Although it is difficult to give exact estimates about the prevalence of gossip, most authors who have studied work team gossip agree that it occurs frequently (e.g., Dunbar, 2004; Foster, 2004).

Gossip has been claimed to serve a number of different functions in groups, and many studies allude to the possible importance of gossip in affecting team cooperation and effectiveness. Interestingly, however, different lines of research lead to very different conclusions about what causes group members to gossip, and about the effects of gossip for work groups. On the one hand, several motives for, and effects of, gossip have been argued for that can be seen as furthering individual group members' as well as collective goals, such as bonding with group members (Rosnow, 2001), entertainment (Rosnow & Fine, 1976), venting emotions (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, & Ellwardt, 2012; Waddington & Fletcher, 2005), information exchange (Dunbar, 2004), and maintaining social order (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012; Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014). On the other hand, gossip has been argued to be used by group members with the intention to aggress against others. Specifically, the motive to aggress against others can be seen as fueled by individual group members' self-interest ↳ exclusively. As such,
p. 419
gossip has been argued to "divide groups, disrupt group harmonies, and destroy loyalties" (Ribeiro & Blakely, 1995, p. 45), and has been related to workplace bullying (see Einarsen, 2002, see also Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996) and destructive power struggles (Wittek & Wielers, 1998). Thus, the overarching picture that emerges from research and theorizing on work group gossip points to the multiple possible functions and effects of gossip, and it remains unclear whether (or when) the effects of gossip for groups are primarily positive or negative.

Clarifying this picture warrants a proper overview of the field. To provide this overview, this chapter aims to answer two questions. The first question is: "What motivates work group members to engage in gossip?" Motivation represents the reasons for people's actions, desires, and needs, and we define gossip motives as the psychological reasons that prompt a person to engage in gossip (cf. Maehr & Mayer, 1997). Interestingly, many motives for gossip that have been discussed in the literature fit with the goals and advantages for group work discussed earlier, whereas others can be argued to be a response to the difficulties of group work. We will summarize the literature on the different motives for gossip that apply in a work group context, linking each of the motives to psychological goals that are relevant in a group-work setting. The second question we aim to answer is: "How does gossip in work groups affect group effectiveness?" Besides the many different reasons or motives that work group members may have for engaging in gossip, studies have examined different outcomes of gossip. In this chapter, we structure empirical findings in relation to three different operationalizations of group effectiveness (cf. Barrick, Stewart, Neubert, & Mount, 1998; Kozlowski & llgen, 2007): *task performance*, or the extent to which a group meets its task goals; *team member inclusion*, or the extent to which the team offers its members a sense of belonging and authenticity (Jansen, Otten, Van der Zee, & Jans, 2014); and *team viability*, or the extent to which teams are capable of functioning over time (Hackman, 1987).

We will structure our literature review by focusing on group members' motives to gossip first. After this, we review the consequences of gossip for team effectiveness (task performance, inclusion, and viability). After each of these two parts of the chapter, we reflect on our review and suggest avenues for future research.

What Motivates Work Group Members to Engage in Gossip?

We structure this section by introducing six motives for gossip in work groups that have been discussed in the literature (i.e., bonding, seeking entertainment, emotional venting, information exchange, maintenance of group norms, and interpersonal aggression). We link each of the motives to relevant psychological theories and provide an overview of a number of representative studies pertaining to each motive. Not all of
p. 420
the studies we review here were conducted in the context of work groups. Rather, some of ↳ them were conducted in a lab setting or in a non-work group context (such as a group or friends or a sorority). We chose to include these studies nevertheless because we believe their findings are relevant to motives for, and consequences of, gossip in work groups, and we discuss this where applicable.

Bonding

The need to form and maintain strong and stable interpersonal relationships, or, in short, the *need to belong*, has been argued to be a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Our brains seem to be "hard-wired" to seek connections with other individuals, and frustration of the need to belong (for instance by social exclusion from a valued group) results in activation of the same brain regions that are activated in case of physical pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). As people spend much of their time working, the workplace is not exempt of the need to belong. Work engagement—defined as the extent to which employees are involved with, committed to, and enthusiastic and passionate about their work (Attridge, 2009)—depends in large part on the extent to which one feels to be a member of a larger collective. Furthermore, Lips-Wiersema & Wright (2012) demonstrated that experiencing "unity with others" is an important determinant of experiencing work as meaningful. Therefore one's work team is a natural source of belongingness at work.

Many authors discuss how gossip could serve as a bonding mechanism (see, e.g., Dunbar 2004; Grosser et al., 2012, p. 56). The idea that gossiping could foster interpersonal bonds fits with social psychological research, which has since long demonstrated that both mutual friendship relations, but also mutual friendships (i.e. being the enemy of one's enemy) can foster closeness (e.g., Aronson & Cope, 1968). As such, gossiping about others can be a way to promote closeness with team members. Indeed, Grosser et al. (2010) found that both positive and negative gossip were related to more expressive friendship ties at work. Wittek & Wielers (1998) found that the percentage of coalition triads (in which two parties have a good relationship amongst themselves and both have a bad relationship with a third party) consistently predicts gossip behavior across various organizational settings, potentially pointing to the bonding motive as a reason to engage in gossip. Finally, in a qualitative study that examined the communicative practice of gossip among virtual employees, Blithe (2014) found that building relationships is one of the motives virtual employees report for engaging in gossip.

Seeking Entertainment

Closely related to, yet different from the motivation to bond is the motivation to rewind and entertain oneself. Such motivation could easily emerge if job demands and job resources are not in balance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), resulting in employees experiencing either task overload (and in extreme cases burn-out
p. 421 symptoms), or, in contrast, ↳ a lack of challenge (and in extreme cases bore-out symptoms (Werder & Rothlin, 2007). In both situations, gossiping could be a way to temporarily detach from work and engage in a pleasurable experience with someone else.

Several authors indeed describe the motive to seek entertainment as a reason for gossip. For instance, Ben Ze'ev (1994) and Gilmore (1978) describe the pleasure individuals and groups derive from gossip activities (see also Melwani, 2012). Likewise, Roy (1958) provides a case description of a team seeking distraction and relief of boring, monotonous tasks by engaging in gossip. Furthermore, in a study aimed at distinguishing gossip from social curiosity, Hartung & Renner (2013) found that people predominantly conceptualize conversations about absent others as gossip when they serve the purpose of pleasure and amusement. Interestingly, Lyons & Hughes (2015) found that narcissism and psychopathy were correlated with social enjoyment as a motive for gossip, suggesting that people who score high on these traits hesitate less to engage in gossip when this is personally enjoyable to them than people who score low on these traits.

Emotional Venting

Work can be emotionally taxing at times. Especially work that requires one to regulate one's emotions in relation to clients or customers (i.e., "emotional labor") can deplete employees' resources (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1989; Russell Hochschild, 1979). Moreover, working in groups is a notable source of emotions, and these emotions are clearly not all positive (Van Kleef & Fischer, 2016). Gossip has been argued to serve as a "pressure valve" for workers who experience negative emotions in the course of their jobs. For instance, Peters, Kashima, & Clark (2009) demonstrated that stories about others are more likely to be shared when they arouse emotions with an unspecified audience (see also the chapter on gossip and emotions by Martinescu, Janssen & Nijstad, this volume). A study by Waddington (2005), which combines diary analysis and in-depth interviews, demonstrates that among a group of nurses, gossip was used to express a range of emotions. Altuntas, Altun, & Akyil (2014), who also studied gossip among nurses, but in the context of four Turkish hospitals, found that anger, stress, and anxiety are related to gossip, and that approximately one third of the nurses in the sample indicated feeling a reduction in stress levels after having engaged in gossip. Among virtual workers as well, emotional venting was reported as an important reason to engage in gossip (Blithe, 2014).

Information Exchange

Working with others is frequently characterized by uncertainty and ambiguity, and in order to make sense of their social surroundings, people often rely on others' judgments and opinions. The theory of informational social influence speaks to the importance of social influence as a source of information; we
p. 422 tend to see others as an important source ↳ of information about our environment (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010; Cialdini, 2001; Sherif, 1935). This perspective fits with Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs' (2004) view on gossip as an extension of observational learning: by gossiping, senders can convey important information to the receiver about culture and society. As such, gossip conveys information about cultural and societal rules. Another underlying reason for why gossip can be motivated by information exchange is that information about others is needed for team members to make social comparisons. According to Festinger (1954) there is a drive within individuals to gain accurate self-evaluations. In order to be able to make these evaluations, they compare their own opinions and abilities to others. Because team members' opinions and abilities may be difficult to access directly at times, gossip can be motivated by deriving such information in order to allow for social comparison.

A study by Baxter, Dun, & Sahlstein (2001) demonstrated that gossip helps people to learn the rules of interaction in a group. That positive as well as negative gossip is conducive to this goal can be derived from the findings of Levin & Arluke (1985), who found that 30 percent of oral gossip was positive in valence. Altuntas, Altun, & Akyil (2014), in a survey on gossip among nurses in four Turkish hospitals, found that one of the purposes the nurses reported for gossip is obtaining work related information that cannot be obtained via formal ways. Likewise, Blithe (2014) found that exchanging gossip is seen by virtual workers as educating themselves regarding the politics of their organization and therefore as exchanging necessary work-related information. The need to gather information is also seen as a central element that facilitates cultural learning by Hartung & Renner (2013), but they distinguish this "social curiosity" from gossip, arguing that the need to gather social information and the need to disseminate social information "might represent the two sides of the cultural learning coin" (page 8).

Further demonstration of the importance of information exchange for gossip comes from a study by McAndrew & Milenkovic (2002), which showed that people were most interested in gossip if the gossip concerned information about others of the same age and gender. This points to the possibility that gossip is most useful as a source of information if it considers others that are comparable to oneself.

Maintenance of Group Norms/Social Order

The motive for gossip that has perhaps drawn most research attention is the motive to maintain social order, or group norms. Some authors have argued that gossiping possibly operates as a mechanism to discourage people from deviating from group norms by taking a free ride (i.e., not investing effort in collective goals while still benefiting from others' investments) or otherwise failing to live up to these norms, and thus protects groups against those who violate group norms (Dunbar, 2004; Giardini & Wittek, this volume; Gluckman, 1963; Keltner, Van Kleef, Chen, & Kraus, 2008).

But what empirical evidence is there that supports these claims? Beersma & Van Kleef (2012) demonstrated that under circumstances where protecting one's group against norm violations becomes more important
p. 423 (that is, when one can gossip with an ingroup ↳ member rather than with an outsider, and when the gossip concerns a norm violation rather than harmless behavior), participants' tendencies to gossip increased, and this was related to the motive to protect the group against norm violators. Further support for the influence of the group protection motive on the tendency to gossip comes from a study by Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner (2012, Study 2), in which they demonstrated that individuals possessing more prosocial orientations were the most motivated to engage in gossip when they observed a norm violation, even at a personal cost, and that these individuals exhibited the greatest reduction in negative affect as a result. In contrast to this, Lyons & Hughes (2015) found that secondary psychopathy, a form of psychopathy characterized by high levels of anxiety and more receptivity to environmental stressors than can be found in individuals with primary psychopathy, was positively correlated to the group protection motive for gossip. This suggests that group protection can be motivated by pro-self, as well as by prosocial motives.

Interpersonal Aggression

The motive we describe last is the motive that has "earned" gossip its negative reputation: the motivation to enhance one's own reputation at the cost of others. There are several accounts in the literature that point to this motive for gossip. Under "information exchange," we discussed the findings by McAndrew & Milenkovic (2002), which showed that interest in gossip was highest when it concerned others of the same age and gender. These findings could point to the possibility that people are especially motivated to gossip when the information thus achieved gives them some advantage over others, especially because McAndrew & Milenkovic (2002) also found that their respondents were especially motivated to gossip when the gossip contained damaging, negative information about non-allies or positive information about allies. Richardson & Green (1997) also describe gossip as motivated by the willingness to indirectly aggress against others, and Crothers, Lipinski, & Minutolo (2009) point to gossip as an element of workplace bullying, especially among women. McAndrew (2014) argues that women are more likely to use gossip in an aggressive, competitive manner than men in order to damage the reputation and networking ability of potential rivals. Furthermore, Jeuken, Beersma, Ten Velden, & Dijkstra (2015) found, in a laboratory experiment, that interpersonal aggression as a motivation for gossip can be triggered by either one's internal motivation (i.e., a pro-self-motivation) or by features of the situation (i.e., a target demonstrating uncooperative behavior), and that power determines the influence of these two driving forces. Specifically, individuals with high power were most likely to be motivated to aggress through gossip when they had a pro-self rather than a prosocial motivation, whereas individuals with low power responded more to the behavior of the gossip target than to their own inclinations. As such, they were more likely to aggress through gossip when the gossip target behaved uncooperatively rather than cooperatively.

Possibly also pointing to the aggression motive for gossip, Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers (2012) found that
p. 424 among employees in a child care center, negative gossip about managers ↳ increased when employees had low-trust, non-friendly relationships, and infrequent contact with the managers.

How Does Gossip in Work Groups Affect Group Effectiveness?

In the previous section of this chapter, we reviewed research that suggests that gossip can be motivated by many different psychological needs (bonding, seeking entertainment, emotional venting, information exchange, maintenance of group norms, and interpersonal aggression). We now turn to research on the outcomes that gossip entails for work groups. We structure the current section by reviewing theoretical accounts and research findings regarding the effects of gossip on task performance, inclusion, and team viability.

Task Performance

Most studies directed at examining the effects of gossip on task performance have operationalized task performance as cooperation or conformity with the group's goals. Already in 1963, Gluckman proposed that the threat alone that one may be gossiped about by group members is enough to keep group members from behaving in a self-serving manner at the expense of the group. As such, gossip should foster cooperation. Research findings are generally in line with this perspective. Piazza & Bering (2008) demonstrated that the threat of gossip motivated prosocial allocations of scarce resources. Likewise, Beersma & Van Kleef (2011) found that study participants invested more personal resources in a collective goal when they believed their fellow team members scored high on the tendency to gossip than when they believed their group members were unlikely to engage in gossip. Milinski, Semmann, & Krambeck (2002), Feinberg et al. (2012), and Wu, Balliet, & Van Lange (2016a) also demonstrated that gossip fosters cooperation. Finally, research by Wu, Balliet, and Van Lange ((2016b) provides evidence that gossip may be more effective and efficient than direct punishment to promote and maintain cooperation.

Inclusion

Compared to the generally favorable consequences of gossip for cooperation, the picture regarding the effects of gossip on inclusion looks a lot bleaker. Interestingly, whereas the possibility of exchanging reputational information can enhance team members' cooperation with team goals, it can at the same time reduce feelings of inclusion in the team.

p. 425 What starts with gossip could eventually lead to exclusion from the group, something that is very negative for group members and that they thus want to avoid (Williams, Cheung, & Choi, 2000). Whereas the risk of being excluded may inhibit group members' tendency to behave in a self-serving manner (Baumeister et al., 2004; Dunbar, 2004), feeling a lack of inclusion in the team is related to reduced commitment to the team and this may in turn lead to deteriorated team performance in the long run (Jansen et al., 2014).

Studies paint a similarly mixed picture regarding the relationship between *engaging* in gossip and being accepted and included as a group member. Bosson, Johnson, Niederhoffer, & Swann (2006) demonstrated that sharing of negative (rather than positive) information about others increased interpersonal liking. Jaeger, Skelder, & Rosnow (1998) found that sorority members who engaged in "moderate" amounts of gossip had more friends than "low" or "high" gossipers. Farley (2011) also found that high-frequency negative gossipers were rated as less likeable than low-frequency gossipers and positive gossipers, perhaps suggesting that the relationship between gossip and belongingness is curvilinear.

In summary, the effects of gossip on group inclusion seem to be a lot less favorable than the effects on cooperative task performance. Both those who are the targets of gossip, or fear the risk of becoming targets, as well as those who engage in gossip risk suffering from being excluded from the group.

Team Viability

Very few studies have examined the effects of gossip over time, which makes it difficult to provide a firm conclusion regarding the effects of gossip on team viability (i.e., the extent to which teams are capable of functioning over time). However, the few studies that have examined longitudinal effects seem to converge on the conclusion that, in contrast to the positive effects on team member cooperation, gossip mostly relates negatively to viability. Wittek & Wielers' (1998) findings speak to the flourishing of gossip in contexts where people build coalitions that include some, but exclude others. The emergence of such dynamics within groups poses a threat to group viability. Georganta, Panagopoulou, & Montgomery (2014) found that negative gossip in a hospital was positively related to burnout and negatively correlated with job engagement and patient safety. Likewise, Kuo, Chang, Quinton, Lu, & Lee (2015) found that gossip was related to employee cynicism (a negative attitude toward their organization, Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998). In the long run, these effects are likely to endanger group viability. Likewise, Wu, Kwan, Wu, & Ma (2015) found that negative gossip about employees was negatively related to proactive behavior, i.e., self-initiated and future-oriented actions aimed to change and improve the situation (Parker, Williams, & Turner, 2006) by these employees as rated by their supervisors two months later. Moreover, the relationship between gossip and proactive behavior was mediated by emotional exhaustion. In contrast to
p. 426 the studies we reviewed earlier, which showed positive effects of gossip on ↳ cooperation, these findings show that in the long run, gossip may deteriorate group viability by damaging psychological well-being.

Reflections on Findings and Suggestions for Future Research

Gossip Motives

Our review on gossip motives shows that gossip can be motivated by many different psychological needs (bonding, seeking entertainment, emotional venting, information exchange, maintenance of group norms, and interpersonal aggression). Several issues emerge from our review that merit further attention.

One important issue is that in a given situation, and therefore, in a given study, it can be difficult to pinpoint the exact motive that caused an individual to engage in gossip. As a case in point, Dijkstra, Beersma, & Van Leeuwen (2014 demonstrated that police officers reported to be more inclined to engage in negative gossip and less inclined to engage in positive gossip when their supervisor demonstrated unfair conflict management behavior. Motives for gossip were not measured in this study, and interestingly, gossip in this case could be motivated by multiple motives, including bonding, emotional venting, interpersonal aggression against the supervisor, and maintaining social order. As such, we do not know whether gossip in a specific situation such as this is driven by one motive or by multiple motives simultaneously, and if the latter is true, whether some motives are more likely to link to one another than others.

Our review shows that regarding motives to gossip, studies can be divided into three types: (1) studies that do not discuss gossip motives, but in which motives can be inferred (see e.g., Grosser et al., 2010; Wittek & Wielers, 1998); (2) studies or theoretical accounts that specifically include motivation in their theoretical analysis of gossip but do not explicitly measure motives for gossip (see e.g., Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011, Feinberg et al. 2012; McAndrew, 2014); and (3) studies that explicitly assessed gossip motives, for instance by having respondents fill in the "Motives to Gossip" questionnaire (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012) or by alternative empirical assessments of underlying motives (see e.g., Hartung and Renner, 2013; Altunas et al., 2014; Lyons & Hughes, 2015; and Jeuken et al., 2015. Although we applaud the recent increase in studies that explicitly measure motives for gossip, we notice that even the studies that did explicitly measure gossip motives often focused on one specific motive, or on a subset of motives at most, ignoring the other motives identified in our review. In order for the field of gossip research to be able to answer the question of why

group members gossip, it would be worthwhile for researchers to start taking a more comprehensive approach to assessing gossip motives by measuring multiple motives. This would enable conclusions regarding the situations that activate certain motives, about the co-occurrence or mutual exclusion of motives, and about the relative predictive value of the various motives for actual gossip behavior.

p. 427 The relative predictive value of the various motives for actual gossip behavior is also important in light of the overarching focus of this book on gossip and reputation. Our review shows that whereas some research on motives for gossip in work groups specifically focused on reputational effects as a mediating, explanatory mechanism (i.e., the motivations to exchange information, maintain group norms, and to aggress interpersonally are each based on the possibility that gossip offers to exchange reputational information), other research on gossip (that examines it as a source for bonding, entertainment, or emotional venting) does not at all link gossip to reputation, but instead links gossip to other basic psychological drivers that are not related to reputation. The field of gossip research will only be able to answer questions about the motives that drive gossip in work groups if these motives are assessed explicitly and simultaneously. In the absence of such specific assessments, in a given situation, the centrality of reputational information in work group gossip may be a first clue regarding its motivational drivers. In other words, if gossip conversations in work groups contain a lot of reputational information about targets, this may be an indication that those engaging in these conversations are motivated by information exchange, maintenance of social norms, or interpersonal aggression). If, on the other hand, gossip conversations contain information that is peripheral to targets' reputation, this could indicate that gossipers are motivated by, for example, bonding, entertainment, or emotional venting. Indeed, research by Beersma and Van Kleef (2011) indicates that the tendency to gossip about a work group member's reputation-relevant behavior (i.e., free-riding behavior) or reputation-irrelevant behavior is related to different motives for gossip.

Finally, our overview points to the intriguing possibility that gossip could become more likely under circumstances where specific motives are not "fulfilled" at work. Reviewing the different motives, this leads to propositions about when gossip would be especially likely to occur. When the social structure at work provides few opportunities to bond, people could revert to gossip because of its role in interpersonal bonding. Workplaces in which work is particularly boring would also become a fertile breeding ground for gossip because of its role in enabling entertainment. Likewise, when organizations allow no structured possibilities to "blow off steam," gossiping could fill this gap. Teams that allow for little direct means to engage in social comparison would also be likely to be characterized by high levels of gossip. Furthermore, when failure to adhere to the norms of the group (for instance free-riding) is not punished by official means, gossip is likely to flourish and to be condoned (Van Kleef, Wanders, Stamkou, & Homan, 2015). And finally, high levels of intra-team competition could foster gossip because of the options it allows to aggress against rivaling team members. How design and cultural features of organizations stimulate gossip by increasing or decreasing gossip motives, and as a result, actual gossip behavior, is an interesting area for future research.

Gossip Outcomes

Our review on gossip outcomes shows that gossip is related to different types of outcomes for work groups,
p. 428 as we discussed its relationships with task performance, inclusion, ↳ and, team viability. Reflecting on the findings brings to light a number of issues, and suggests a number of related areas for future research.

First, critically examining findings related to effects of gossip on task performance shows that the operationalization of performance that is typically used in these studies is very narrow. Team members are asked to contribute to their team, and the only aspect of their contribution that is assessed is the level of cooperation/conformity to collective norms, often assessed through investments study participants make in

economic games (such as the dictator game or trust game, see for instance Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg et al., 2012; Wu et al., 2016a, b). Whereas cooperation is an important aspect of task performance in many real-life teams, and as such, these studies yield important insights in the gossip-team performance relationship, there is of course more to team performance than investing personal resources into a collective goal. Group performance can, for example, also be assessed as the quality, accuracy, or creativity of the team output, or as the efficiency with which a team invests its resources. Up to date, studies have not examined the extent to which these other performance criteria are affected by gossip processes. This is especially striking because previous studies have shown that trade-offs between these outcomes exist; fostering one often comes at the expense of other outcomes (Beersma et al., 2003; Beersma & De Dreu, 2005). The field of gossip research could gain from broadening the perspective on group performance by studying the consequences of gossip for these various outcome variables, and by examining possible trade-offs between them. For example, whereas gossip can on the one hand foster cooperation and norm-adherence in teams, it could at the same time reduce the originality of team member input, as when there is a high threat of being gossiped about, team members may want to keep a low profile in the group.

Second, besides moving toward a broader perspective on what constitutes task performance, gossip research would also benefit from looking beyond task performance when examining the effects of gossip in work teams. We noted two possible areas of interest in this chapter, team inclusion and viability. Although few studies have addressed these areas, our review showed that studies that did focus on these types of outcomes tend to point to the negative role that gossip may play in work teams (i.e., reducing feelings of inclusion and team viability). This highlights once again the importance of research that examines effects of gossip on multiple team effectiveness indicators simultaneously. Studies that do so are much needed to shed light on the trade-offs involved in effects of gossip; whereas gossip in teams may foster some aspects of teamwork, it may deteriorate others, and in order to design useful interventions for managing gossip in the workplace, practitioners need to have insight in these trade-offs.

Integrating Gossip Motives and Outcomes

Reflecting on the two parts of our review pertaining to the antecedents and consequences of gossip, respectively, we note a discrepancy regarding levels of analysis between research on gossip motives on the one hand, and gossip effects on the other hand. Whereas studies about gossip motives tend to focus on the individual (group ↳ member) as the unit of analysis, studies about the latter (at least theoretically) center on the group as the unit of analysis. Given that our review demonstrated that gossip can be motivated by very different psychological motives, and that it can also have a diverse array of effects on work groups, an important question is whether these two aspects of gossip, its individual drivers and its group-level effects, relate to one another in any way. Does what motivated the gossip in a group matter for group-level effects? Does gossip that was instigated because group members want to bond or entertain themselves have different effects than gossip motivated by the maintenance of social norms or by aggression? In order to answer such questions, studies should examine how individual-level motives for gossip combine to result in group-level gossip behavior, and how group-level gossip behavior affects individual outcomes (such as feelings of inclusion in the team). In general, integrating units of analysis in theoretical accounts of gossip motives and effects is an important challenge for future research on gossip in work groups.

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Another interesting issue is that although our overview does not allow us to systematically identify possible moderators of the gossip-team effectiveness relationship, several variables could be argued to play a moderating role. Gossip valence (whether gossip has a positive or a negative content), for instance, could be argued to moderate the relationship between gossip prevalence and team-level outcomes. Likewise, the legitimacy of gossip is also an interesting moderating variable to study. That is, cues that point to gossip being either justified or unjustified could moderate gossip's relationship with team performance, inclusion,

and viability. Systematic study of these moderator variables could help further demarcate when and why gossip is functional or dysfunctional for work groups.

Finally, and related to the previous issues regarding levels of analysis and moderating variables, our overview of gossip motives and effects suggest that the antecedents and consequences of gossip in work groups have thus far been largely examined within separate lines of inquiry. A synthesis between our analysis of gossip motives and gossip effects would lead to the proposition that gossip effects could, in part, be moderated by motives underlying gossip. For instance, gossip motivated by maintenance of group norms could be argued to have different effects at the group level than gossip motivated by interpersonal aggression, or motivated by entertainment. This can be argued to only be the case, however, if gossip recipients are able to accurately distinguish between different motives. Research examining the path from individual motives to group level outcomes could help clarify how gossip instigated by one group member is understood by others (or what motive it is being attributed to), and whether and how these attributions in turn influence how gossip affects task performance, inclusion, and viability.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the chapter, we argued that groups are a breeding ground for gossip, and organizational teams are no exception. We provided an overview of the different motives for gossip in work groups, linking
p. 430 each motive to psychological theory. We also ↳ provided an overview of the different types of influence gossip has been shown to have on various indicators of group effectiveness. Reflecting on both the motives underlying gossip in work groups as well as on its outcomes, we conclude that there is a lot of research evidence to back up our opening statement. The next step for research on gossip in groups, we feel, should be to start integrating the diverse insights provided here. Suggestions we provided for such integration are for example to simultaneously examine different motives to gossip within studies, to examine organizational context as a moderator of gossip motives, to integrate levels of analysis, and, perhaps most importantly, to examine how individual-level motives to gossip affect team-level outcomes. We hope these suggestions will stimulate gossip researchers to further increase our understanding of this phenomenon that is so prevalent and important for work groups.

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