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# ECONOMICS

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## IMPACTS OF INFORMAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING (WORKPLACE GOSSIP) ON ORGANISATIONAL TRUST

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**ABSTRACT.** The relationship between organisational trust and informal knowledge sharing is a rarely researched area. This is especially true in the case of workplace gossip, which acts as a channel of informal knowledge sharing. The aim of the research is to point out that although there is a strong positive relationship between organisational trust and knowledge sharing, the special form of informal knowledge transfer/sharing (workplace gossip), refuting earlier research findings, does not always produce a positive effect. In the first part of the two-phase quantitative research (it was done in 2019), trust and its conditions, tools and their place in the organisational hierarchy were identified through questionnaire surveys, and then the existence of informal knowledge transfer/sharing (workplace gossip) and its impact upon organisational trust were analysed. The hypotheses were tested on the basis of an own theoretical model using one and multi-variable statistical methods with the SPSS 25 and NVivo 12 content analysis software. The results show that while confidence building is supported by high quality real-world professional knowledge transfer/sharing, but workplace gossip, especially including fake information, has the opposite effect, which negatively influences organisational performance.

**Keywords:** information, informal knowledge transfer/sharing, quantitative research, trust, workplace gossip.

## Introduction

Researches on organisational trust date back to the '60s of the last century. Its significance has been demonstrated in a number of studies that focus on employee satisfaction, performance, teamwork, communication, the characteristics of ethical behaviour, organisation partner relationships, etc. (Tan & Lim, 2009; Paliszkievicz et al., 2014) In terms of results (Ellonen et al., 2008; Gilbert & Tang, 1998; Wech, 2002) it has been proven that – both at a micro and a macro level – it is a significant determinant of the functioning of relationships between organisations and has an impact on their economic performance (Fulmer & Gelfand,

2012). The results of international research on the topic were published in the last decades of the last century, mainly as a result of globalisation processes. Since then, it has been of great interest due to its interactions and relationships with several fields, and its identification as a company's success factor (Koohang & Paliszkievicz, 2013; Chenhall & Smith, 2003).

Researches on organisational trust have primarily approached critical questions theoretically such as how organisational level of trust and/or distrust is related to communication, the characteristics of organisational culture, leadership style, and other factors of company success (Rahman et al., 2015; Azman et al., 2013; Ayoko & Pekerti, 2016). The demonstration of relationships in numerical form rarely appears in literature, since hard-to-define parameters, factors are needed for quantifiable factors to become tangible. Because of distrust, we monitor our employees' activities more often than necessary, we do not dare to delegate tasks, rather suffer under the burden of exaggerated expectations, or make other colleagues repeatedly do the tasks. These phenomena appear daily in organisational operation and their economic consequences and spill-over effects are rarely taken into account. Because of its predominance in knowledge management systems, the issue of knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer, whose quality, level, depth, and impact upon organisational functioning belong to the category of hardly quantifiable factors, but whose significance due to its relationship with trust is indisputable, is increasingly in focus. Although this relationship is often found in earlier studies, it is primarily observed from the perspective of evaluating explicit knowledge sharing solutions. We have not found any research that specifically explores ways of informal knowledge sharing and their effects in relation to trust.

The present study is thus a kind of gap filling in the above topic. The relationship between organisational trust and knowledge transfer/sharing as a critical competitiveness factor will be examined from a specific perspective. Among the ways of knowledge transfer, the present study intends to examine a specific form, namely, the relationship between workplace gossip and trust. Workplace gossip is rarely in the focus of research, although its impact on organisational performance is clearly proven. The aim of this research is to demonstrate that an informal solution of knowledge sharing – as a key element of workplace trust, the realisation of which is key to organisational success –, namely, workplace gossip is counteracting this success. The research was conducted in two phases, in quantitative form, with random sampling, and in the form of questionnaire surveys. The formulation of research questions and objectives provided the basis for the elaboration of the hypotheses, whose proof confirmed our assumptions. Namely, the content of the definitions formulated by the respondents contained the necessary elements of organisational trust, which according to their own organisational experience are not or only slightly typical in the everyday practice of the examined organisations. The foundations and tools of trust building are built on one another, often overlapping, but on different levels of organisational hierarchy different solutions are dominant. Knowledge sharing/transfer is an important element of workplace trust, but in an informal way such as workplace gossip it can result in weakening trust and so cause a decline in organisational performance. This is especially true if the transmitted information/knowledge has not real content. The following chapters of the study establish a theoretical foundation for the relationships between organisational trust and workplace gossip, and then the results of practical research are presented through the verification of hypotheses. Finally, the conclusion summarises the most important new findings, the value added to science, and the limitations of research.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. On trust

Ralph Waldo Emerson in his study written in 1841 stated the following wisdom: “Trust men and they will be true to you; treat them greatly and they will show themselves great.” Emerson, R.W. (1841). In relation to organisations, he thought that relationships within an organisation could only be developed if people, their behaviour and qualities were carefully evaluated. In his studies, he pointed out that trust plays a key role in corporate efficiency and productive manufacturing (Holmes, 2010; Emerson, 2010; 2016).

Several fields of science deal with the issue of trust (psychology, sociology, economics, organisational psychology, leadership theory, etc.), and each of them formulates a definition from their own aspects. Although the definitions differ from one another in terms of their emphasis, basically, they summarise the essential qualities of trust based on similar principles, such as:

- Trust is faith in integrity, a characteristic and a leadership ability,
- Trust is belief in the intentions and behaviour of others,
- Trust is nothing else than relying on the integrity, sincerity and justice of others.

Other trust-related characteristics, such as integrity, character, ability, faith, reliability, sincerity and justice, are tough expectations in an organisation’s life, which are, in many cases, less experienced. Employees feel and wish to live in a climate of trust, the positive effects of trust-based organisational culture, but desires and reality are often far apart. Organisational trust can be approached from multiple directions. Two basic directions:

- “interorganisational trust”, that is, trust between organisations,
- “intraorganisational trust”, that is, trust within an organisation. This direction can be further broken down:
  - relationship between worker and worker, or relationships between workers and immediate supervisors,
  - relationships between employees and organisational leaders,
  - trust established between groups within an organisation (Bansal, 2016).

The latter approach is important for the present study, as the significance of trust between organisations has not been addressed in research. However, the distinction between relationships of trust within an organisation according to hierarchy is important because this research has paid special attention to it. Because organisational trust is primarily expressed at the level of trust between employees, the foundations that provide the conditions for building trust, according to Laschinger et al. (2001), are teamwork, the right leadership style, and the possibility of reaching objectives, employee satisfaction and commitment. Trust has a positive impact on the harmonious cooperation between employees, and helps coming up with new ideas.

In addition to leadership style, a number of other tools, such as knowledge transfer/sharing, the free flow of information also contribute significantly to trust building. Creating, nurturing and maintaining this culture require a lot of attention and energy. In this way, we can say that both trust building and the lack of trust require financial resources from organisations.

### 1.2. The culture of trust

What does a culture of trust mean? Employees do not have fears of making mistakes, no criticism, people are innovative. They are honest with one another and accept one another

as they are. There are no ulterior motives, social cohesion is present. Employees support one another, affection, patience and empathy prevail. Self-reliance is typical, and trust that work goes on even when there is no direct control and monitoring, people are reliable. They work for common goals, they are extrovert, and they are humble in their work, constantly striving for excellence (soul.com, 2018).

The relationship between the above highlighted two determining factors, managerial activity and knowledge sharing, and their impact on organisational performance have been studied by Lee et al. (Lee, et al., 2010) Their research focussed on the leader's knowledge-building role and its impact on knowledge sharing, as well as the consequences of trust between various levels of leadership in terms of leadership style and behaviour. Their research has shown that leadership behaviour, which lends trust, has a positive impact upon organisational knowledge sharing. Similar findings have been made in further research (Srivastava et al., 2006, Dirks, 1999; Kimmel et al., 1980; Renzl, 2008). According to their research, because knowledge sharing is not automatic within organisations, and leaders exert a powerful influence on knowledge sharing by exercising their knowledge-building role, they also create and support knowledge sharing among the members of the organisation (Srivastava et al., 2006). A direct and an indirect relationship with leadership style was investigated in relation to managerial trust and organisational knowledge sharing by Farrell et al. (2005) and they found a correlation. Lin (2007) examined the impact of trust between individuals upon collaboration, social relationships and knowledge sharing among employees, which also resulted in a correlation. Other factors listed below may – directly or indirectly – influence organisational knowledge sharing through leadership style, activity and behaviour.

- Knowledge characteristics, their appropriate expression and aggregation (Spender, 1996; Blackler, 1995; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995)
- Management characteristics, managerial activities, such as coordinating mechanisms, competition of organisational units, teams, managerial interventions to increase knowledge sharing (rewards and other incentives) (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002; Tsai, 2002)
- Environmental characteristics, including macro-level characteristics such as national culture (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) technology and organisational culture (Wasko & Faraj, 2005) and micro-level environmental characteristics such as interpersonal relationships, in which knowledge sharing manifests, e.g. strengths of common language, vision, interpersonal relationship between two parties (Hansen, 2002; Levin & Cross, 2004) There is a strong emphasis on the local characteristics of knowledge, which are shared through social networks (Brown & Duguid, 2002; Gherardi et al., 1998)
- Characteristics of individuals, who share their knowledge, attitudes (including personal trust as well) (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Levin & Cross, 2004; McEvily et al., 2003), motivation and gender (Bock et al., 2005; Miller & Karakowsky, 2005)

It is evident that in recent years, lots of researches and publications discussing their results have been produced in relation to the correlations between knowledge sharing/transfer and trust (Paliszkiewicz & Koohang, 2013; Paliszkiewicz, et al., 2014/b; Abrams et al., 2003; Sankowska, 2013; Six, 2007; Killingsworth et al., 2016) With no exception, all of them affirms that trust influences knowledge sharing, its quality and depth, so it can be closely linked to the building and operation of an organisational knowledge management (KM) system. Therefore, the present study does not aim at further propagating the evidence, but rather, on this basis, it seeks to confirm the impact of a specific knowledge transfer solution.

All of the above mentioned research studies deals with the characteristics of knowledge sharing, but in terms of applied methods, no detailed examinations have been carried out. This

shortcoming is filled by the present research, which focuses on a specific method of informal knowledge sharing among possible knowledge sharing solutions, namely, workplace gossip, and its impact upon the organisational trust. The next section will discuss the relevant theoretical foundations and research findings to date.

### ***1.3. Informal knowledge sharing – workplace gossip***

A prerequisite for successful organisational operation is that the necessary information/knowledge be available when, where and how it is needed. Thus, the feasibility of knowledge sharing is a critical issue in organisational operation (especially in knowledge management system building and operation). This can be done through formal channels in accordance with organisational regulations, internal correspondence, intranet, social/community interfaces, workflow, SharePoint, work meetings, reports, etc., which are mandatory in the operation of an organisation. The other option is to use informal channels to substitute malfunctioning formal channels, to fill the gaps, or to provide new platforms for sharing. Informal knowledge sharing can be implemented in various ways, the most popular of which is workplace gossip.

Gossip, despite being present in some form in everyone's life, is rarely the focus of research. If so, it is a preferred area for behavioural or communication professionals, psychologists or sociologists. Very few studies deal with the impact of gossip on organisational operation, and it is rarely mentioned as part of managerial activity that deserves attention. Establishing and maintaining appropriate communication channels in the workplace environment (as proven in previous research on trust) is of immense importance because they affect not only work and performance at work, but also the mood and behaviour of employees. Where communication via internal, official, formal channels is inadequate, the role of informal channels, which fill the gaps caused by the lack of formal ways, is much more appreciated. Through these informal channels, the spread of news and, of course, gossip, is faster.

Nobody questions the existence of gossip at work. Whether it is detrimental or conducive to employee relationships or workplace performance, in this case, in the phases of knowledge acquisition and transfer, is debatable. In terms of human communication, 90% of conversations is gossip. It means that even we are most likely to invent and/or listen to gossip. It is important to know that not only hallway whispers are considered to be gossip, but about 15% of workplace correspondence, where negative gossip occur 2.7 times more than positive ones (Szekfu & Szvetelszky, 2005).

The impact of gossip can be felt not only in connection with workplace problems but it can affect performance as a result of personal relationships. Open managerial communication and behavioural model can minimise the occurrence and spread of gossip, referring to its undesirable existence in the workplace. The question is, however, whether gossip should be prevented. As has been said above, gossip can have positive consequences, which is true to workplace conditions as well. It can encourage cooperation, put light on good workforce, and eliminate workplace abuse – according to research from Stanford University (Parker, 2014). It is true that gossip can easily be misused, but, according to studies, gossiping can have essential functions in the life of communities. There is more research on the power of gossip in terms of privacy, pro and con, but little research has been published on its consequences at the workplace. No research has been found to examine the correlation between trust and gossip in workplace environment, especially their impact on knowledge sharing. In the next chapter, the relationship between the factors will be theoretically explained.

#### ***1.4. Building and destroying workplace trust (the impact of gossip)***

The theoretical and practical researches on workplace trust have been presented above. In this section, the possible path of development of trust, and its possible degradation will be presented based on exploiting the potential of communication channels. Real content communication (regardless of its formal or informal mode) makes you committed, it is uplifting, open and honest. An important element of communication is the ability to listen actively. In doing so, you are able to learn, to create new perspectives, thus increasing understanding and, on the whole, trust. In the case when trust predominates, communication among employees is unhindered, collaboration, inclusion prevail. This results in meaningful and important work and its accompanying phenomena, such as affirmation, respect, recognition, etc. They further build trust, leading to more meaningful conversations, knowledge sharing, professional communication and continuous learning. Thus, trust is built along an unbroken spiral that supports organisational cooperation, communication (knowledge transfer), ensuring the continuity of organisational learning, and, at the same time, increasing performance.

Trust building is not always this smooth. Namely, in the case of malfunctioning communication channels (both formal and informal), the distance increases between employees, between management and subordinates, which automatically leads to the negative consequences of workplace gossip. Guessing, pointing fingers to others, and individualism predominate where problems and mistakes are in focus, criticism and an atmosphere of distrust emerge, which have the opposite effect on organisational learning and knowledge sharing than what has been demonstrated in the previous case. When this process is going on, indifference develops and colleagues and management do not care about one another, which increases distrust. However, tolerance for distrust on the part of colleagues within an organisation is not unlimited. This can have serious consequences organisational operation and economic performance.

The goal for all organisations is to build trust, using managerial support that can deliver ever-increasing performance through the sharing of real content information and knowledge. False information, the lack of knowledge transfer, distorted information and the lack of managerial support leads to a decline in organisational functioning.

The appreciation of the value of knowledge management systems in the operation of organisations emphasises the importance of knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing. In this context, both formal and informal methods play a prominent role, and workplace gossip as a means of informal knowledge sharing also plays a more emphasised role than before. This fact indicated the research into the role workplace gossip as an informal knowledge sharing tool and the impact of its occurrence on trust. The results of the research will be presented in the following chapters.

#### ***1.5. The logical course of research***

Figure 1 below illustrates the logical process that follows the steps of the research. After the theoretical review, the formulation of the research questions and hypotheses was the basis of the questionnaire. Prior to appearing on the electronic interface, a team of invited experts completed 20 questionnaires as a test. Based on their feedback, minor corrections were made which allowed the final version to be prepared. After determining the number of sample and selecting the respondents, the completed questionnaires were cleaned and evaluated. The analytical methods presented in the next chapter provided a basis for testing the hypotheses and formulating the final research results.

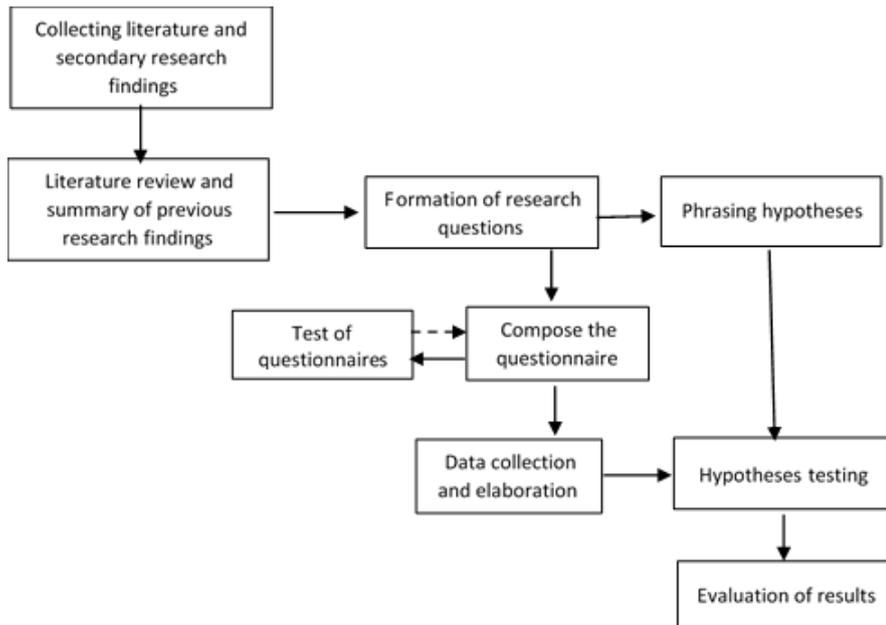


Figure 1. Logical process of research  
Source: *own construction*

### 1.6. Theoretical model of research

During the investigations, based on theoretical knowledge, the following research questions were formulated, which are related to the areas that determined the research and later the directions of analysis. The research questions are:

- What are the organisational characteristics on which trust between employees can be built?
- What tools can be used to build trust within an organisation?
- Is it possible to distinguish different trust characteristics at various levels of hierarchy?
- Of the tools, what role does a specific form of informal knowledge transfer/sharing (workplace gossip) play in building organisational trust?
- What are the organisational consequences of workplace gossip?

The objective based on the research questions is to prove the assumption that there is a strong correlation between organisational trust and workplace gossip, and while trust building is supported by quality knowledge sharing, the special form of informal knowledge sharing (workplace gossip) has the opposite effect.

The research questions and objectives provided a basis for the formulation of the hypotheses. In this spirit, the authors defined the following hypotheses. (See Figure 2.)

**H1:** Respondents are able to provide their own definitions of the characteristics of organisational trust, in which the criteria are in line with the characteristics necessary for organisational trust building that have been proven by previous researches.

**H2:** There is a significant difference between the expected characteristics of organisational trust and those experienced in practice.

**H3:** There is a correlation between the fundamentals of organisational trust and the tools needed to build and maintain organisational trust, often there is overlapping.

**H4:** The nature of trust is different at various levels of the hierarchy, due to different foundations.

**H5:** Different trust building tools are typical at and between different levels of the hierarchy.

**H6:** Knowledge transfer/sharing is an important tool for trust building, but a specific form of the informal solution (workplace gossip) has negative impact on organisational trust.

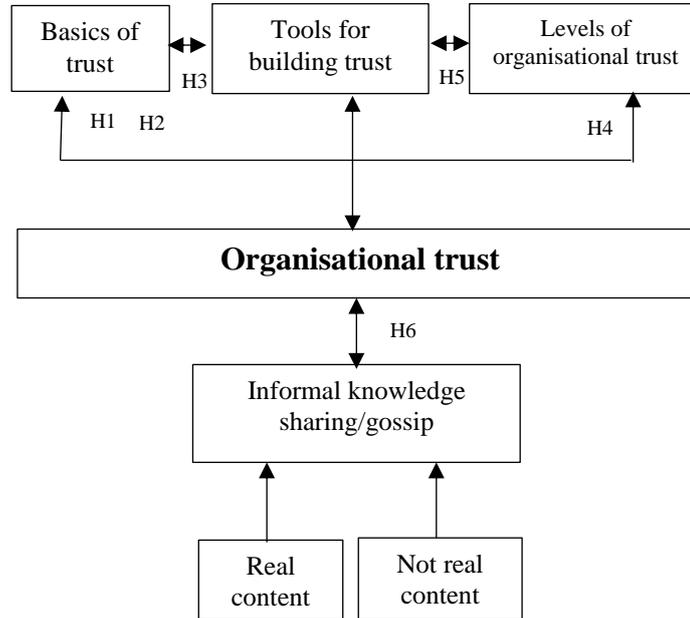


Figure 2. Logical model of research  
Source: own construction

## 2. Practical research

### 2.1. Sampling and methodology

In the past year, two closely related quantitative researches have been conducted to map the characteristics of organisational trust, in particular its impact on knowledge sharing and its organisational consequences. The first study analysed the economic influence of organisational trust, while the second one examined the impact of informal knowledge sharing (workplace gossip) on trust, highlighting its impact on organisational performance. During the quantitative research, the questionnaires were sent to the employees via the Internet, using a random sampling method. The purpose of the online survey via the Internet is to ask as many people as possible by the authors. In both cases, 2000 questionnaires were sent out, of which 466 were enrolled in the first phase and 745 in the second one. Respondents were workers who are working in different positions. The questionnaire was essentially based on metric and nominal variables, and most of the questions were close-ended. The open-ended questions served to gather the definitions (trust and gossip) of the respondents.

The structure of the question series is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of questionnaire

Research	Issue 1	Issue 2	Issue 3	Issue 4
Phase 1	Organisational specification  (Location of organisation, size, industry, ownership)	Knowledge characterisation within the organisation  (Knowledge and its use, the nature of knowledge management. Characteristics of knowledge management system building and operation based on the logic of Probst's model. Market value of organisational knowledge.)	Trust in organisational practice  (Expression of trust in the work environment. Characteristics of the trust system. Tools for building trust.)	Functioning and economic impact of trust culture  (Causes of trust and distrust within the organisation. Benefits of having trust. Measuring the consequences of trust and distrust.)
Phase 2	Organisational specification  (Location of organisation, size, industry. Gender, age, educational background, position, ownership. Assessing the importance of knowledge.)	Informal and formal knowledge and information sharing typical of work  (Formal modes Informal modes Sharing people Content of information/knowledge to be shared)	Transfer of real and false information and knowledge  (Cases where professional and non-professional information and knowledge are transferred)	Workplace gossip  (Definition of gossip. Content of workplace gossip. Professional and non-professional gossip. Impacts of gossip. Gossip evaluation)

Source: *own compilation*

The evaluation methods consisted of single and multivariable statistical procedures, frequency analyses, standard deviation and mean analyses, and cluster, factor and correlation analyses. In both studies all the questionnaires were evaluable. Data were analysed with SPSS 25 and NVivo 12 software.

## 2.2. Specifications of the sample

For the specifications of the sample of Phase 1 see Table 2.

Table 2. Specifications of the first sample

Characteristics	Frequency (N)
Organisational size	86 Micro-enterprise
	120 Small business
	106 Medium-sized business
	154 Large enterprise
Ownership structure	252 Wholly domestic
	79 Joint ventures
	135 Wholly foreign-owned
Branch of industry	74 Trade, services
	45 Financial activities
	43 Public administration
	30 Construction industry
	34 Transportation/Shipping
	etc.

Source: *own compilation*

For the specifications of the sample of Phase 2 see Table 3.

Table 3 Specifications of the second sample

Characteristics	Frequency (N)
Organisational size	186 Micro-enterprise
	178 Small business
	194 Medium-sized business
	187 Large enterprise
Ownership structure	449 Wholly domestic
	133 Joint ventures
	163 Wholly foreign-owned
Branch of industry	106 Trade
	90 Manufacturing
	69 Transportation/Shipping
	68 Financial activities
	etc.

Source: *own compilation*

Based on the logic of the model, trust is the central element, about which, in the first phase of the research, the aim was to define the concept, specify the fundamentals and tools of trust building, and identify the predominant characteristics at each organisational level.

### 3. Analysis and results

#### *Organisational trust building and emergence*

*Hypothesis 1: Respondents are able to provide their own definitions of the characteristics of organisational trust, in which the criteria are in line with the characteristics necessary for organisational trust building that have been proven by previous researches.*

Respondents had to define what trust meant in the organisation. Textual answer to the open-ended questions were analysed with NVivo 12 software. The authors constructed factors from the answers given by the respondents to the open-ended questions that investigated the fundamentals of trust. Figure 3 shows the seven variables, into which the responses of the

interviewees could be identified and classified. Features that are close to each other (based on characteristics) are in one group, made by the program. Thus, the basic factors of trust defined by the respondents were grouped into knowledge transfer, staff personality, proper communication, task assignment, knowledge, thinking in teamwork and democratic leadership. The authors grouped the items into clusters using the software. Figure 5 shows the specific factors in the clusters.

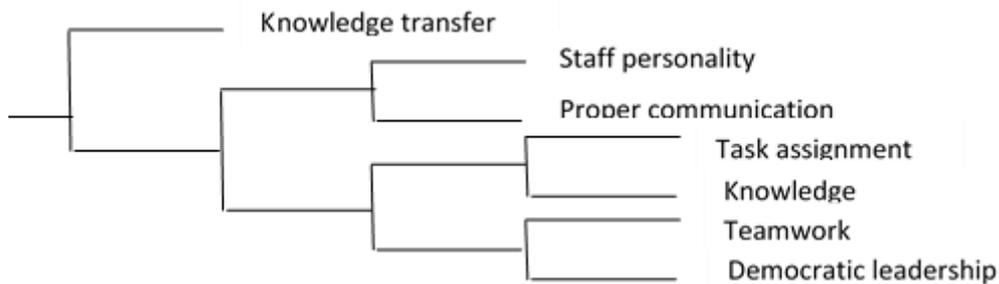


Figure 3. Clustering of the fundamentals of trust based on the definition of respondents  
Source: *own construction*

In the case of “knowledge transfer”, the answers indicated that there was no fear for knowledge among colleagues, everyone can freely and fully receive information from and give to colleagues. These knowledge transfer directions should to work not only in the case of employees at the same level (horizontally), but also vertically.

Regarding “Staff personality”, the respondents emphasised that not everybody is able or willing to build a trust-based environment or be an integral part of a culture of trust. The behaviour of those in this group can be detrimental not only to the trust characteristics of the micro environment, but to the broader culture of trust present within the organisation.

Respondents gave a wide range of answers to “Proper communication”, e.g. the Open Door Policy, avoidance of insults, free expression of opinions, joint problem solving, etc.

By “Task assignment” the respondents understood the issue of well-communicated, well-worded, well-structured task assignments and how they should be solved. In organisations that do not have a clearly defined scope of activities and responsibilities, employees are subject to constant monitoring (i.e. scrutiny) and reporting, and this makes them uncertain, and the permanent compulsion for conformity and the possibility of failure destroy trust.

The interpretation of “Knowledge” basically presupposes the existence of professional knowledge. At the same time, it also means that the goal of sincere detection of deficiencies is to correct them, and not to find those responsible, not pointing to each other within the organisation.

“Teamwork” means thinking and working together to achieve common goals. It also means that individual and team goals must point in the same direction, they must cooperate without being subordinated to each other. Otherwise, they can cause confusion in the organisation’s atmosphere of trust.

“Democratic leadership” has a major role to play in building and maintaining trust. Self-directed leadership, constant, suspicious control, one-way leadership that requires no feedback, can cause damages in the building of organisational trust.

In the questionnaire, the researchers made a definition in advance, and the respondents had to indicate how much they agreed with it. The definition: “A very high level of mutual understanding and affection, where there is no longer need for check the honesty, good will, values and deeds of the other party, but you know for sure that they think and do the best things possible. The full understanding of the other party.”

55% of the respondents agreed with the wording, 37% of them were more and less accepting and about 8% thought that this definition did not cover organisational trust. The variables with which the respondents described the characteristics of trust largely coincided with the trust characteristics defined by the authors (and in the related literature). Taken together, this means that the foundations of trust within an organisation: knowledge transfer, staff personality, proper communication, task assignment, knowledge, teamwork, democratic leadership. Based on this, the first hypothesis is acceptable, since the respondents produced their own definitions, in which the concepts are in line with the characteristics provided previously by the authors and in the literature.

*Hypothesis 2: There is a significant difference between the expected characteristics of organisational trust and those experienced in practice.*

After the definition being made, the respondents had to select from a set of pre-defined characteristics to express what they considered to be the foundation of trust, and which of these characteristics can be found in their organisation. (The features listed were based on the definitions.) The question sought to confirm the expectations set out in the definition. It was a point where respondents not only needed to define the meaning of trust but qualify organisational trust, what was an essential characteristic, and what respondents experienced every day in their organisation. Respondents had to choose from the variables listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Foundations of organisational trust

Basics of trust system	Basics of trust %	Basics of trust of a given organisation %	$\chi^2$
An open corporate hierarchy system	10,3	7,9	39,779
Flexible regulation of the organisation's employment structure	11,2	6	54,054
Flexible regulation of the organisation's activity structure	12	7,7	88,936
Free implementation of ideas	23,8	19,5	34,219
Free knowledge transfer	27,7	19,1	63,957
"Open Door Policy"	30	24,7	118,520
Seeking causes instead of those responsible	35,8	22,5	22,188
Multilateral information flow horizontally	36,3	28,1	99,299
Seeking solutions instead of retaliation	41	29,1	64,464
Multilateral information flow vertically	42,7	27,7	84,477
Undertaking and correct management of open conflicts	45,1	32,2	21,751
Exploring the causes of problems together	46,8	38	42,792
Will to compromise	51,3	39,7	52,133
Mutual assistance	54,7	47,4	47,724
Free expression of opinions	57,9	41	40,454
Open communication	60,7	40,3	37,874
Respect for colleagues	62,2	51,9	59,694
Teamwork	65,2	63,3	77,268

Source: *own compilation*

The results confirm that the definitions are in line with the most important expectation of respondents. According to the respondents, the five most important expectations for establishing trust are *teamwork, respect for colleagues, open communication, free expression*

*of opinions and mutual assistance.* Free flow of knowledge and information (horizontally and vertically) were classified as characteristics of medium importance.

After that, respondents had to indicate which characteristics were present in their organisations. The results are summarised in Table 4 Column 3. It can be seen that there is a significant difference between the expected and the actual trust characteristics (Chi-square results in Column 4, in all cases the differences were significant). For each variable, the frequency of actual incidences were much lower than would be expected according to the respondents.

In the light of the above investigations, the following conclusions can be drawn. Trust can essentially be based on the personality of the staff, proper communication, and thinking in teamwork, relying on the elements of knowledge/information sharing and democratic leadership. These attributes are essential for building appropriate trust within an organisation. Based on the above results, Hypothesis 2 can be considered as valid. In order for the trust to function in the long run, the tools necessary for building trust must be known and applied. The next step in the analysis aimed to explore these.

*H3: There is a correlation between the fundamentals of organisational trust and the tools needed to build and maintain organisational trust, often there is overlapping.*

Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale how effective the tool could be to build, strengthen and maintain trust within their organisation. One meant not at all typical, and five meant absolutely typical. Table 5 shows the means and standard deviations for each tool.

Table 5. Tools for trust building

<b>Tools</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
Emotional intelligence training	2,62	1,230
Development of a rating system	2,89	1,217
Individual work	2,97	1,106
Development of communication	3,39	1,119
Team building	3,48	1,192
Open discussion of problems	3,48	1,096
Resolving of conflicts	3,51	1,031
Knowledge sharing	3,64	0,994
Joint discussion between leaders and subordinates	3,69	1,010
Teamwork	3,85	1,013

Source: *own compilation*

According to the respondents, the most typical tools were teamwork, joint discussions, and knowledge sharing. (It can be seen that there is an overlap between the previously stated expectations, which form the basis of trust, and the tools needed to build and maintain it.) Individual work, a rating system and the development of emotional intelligence were the least necessary tools to be applied. It is true that the latter two had the highest standard deviation values, that is, the sample was very heterogeneous.

Based on the analysis presented above, Hypothesis 3 was confirmed. This means that the respondents were able to define the most important characteristics that provide the basis of organisational trust, and are also supported by the theoretically substantiated data. There is a significant difference between the expected and the experienced characteristics of trust. The tools needed to build trust are in line with the organisational characteristics that serve as the basis for trust building.

These tools and the foundations of trust building operate at different levels of the hierarchy and interact with one another. The fourth hypothesis is related to this. The proof of this can be found in the next section.

*Hypothesis 4: The nature of trust is different at various levels of the hierarchy, due to different foundations.*

In an optimal case, organisational trust works both horizontally and vertically. Respondents were asked to rate on a five-point scale whether there was trust between each level of the hierarchy. One meant not at all typical, and five meant absolutely typical. The levels examined were subordinate-subordinate, manager-subordinate and manager-manager relations.

Table 6. Levels of trust vertically and horizontally within organisations

Position level	Mean	Standard deviation
Between subordinate and subordinate (SU-SU)	3,88	0,859
Between subordinate and low-level manager (SU-LM)	3,66	0,895
Between subordinate and middle-level manager (SU-MM)	3,48	0,935
Between subordinate and senior manager (SU-SM)	3,19	1,148
Between low-level manager and low-level manager (LM-LM)	3,58	0,967
Between low-level manager and middle-level manager (LM-ML)	3,51	0,946
Between low-level manager and senior manager (LM-SM)	3,30	1,041
Between middle-level manager and middle-level manager (MM-MM)	3,60	0,992
Between middle-level manager and senior manager (MM-SM)	3,54	0,988
Between senior manager and senior manager (SM-SM)	3,68	1,057

Source: *own compilation*

Trust is most prevalent among subordinates, and least between subordinates and senior managers. Vertically very weak relationships exist, while horizontally they are relatively stronger. The direct manager-subordinate trust relationship is stronger than the one between an indirect manager and the subordinate. The correlation study confirmed that the more trust there is between each organisational level, the more typical is its positive impact upon the trust between other levels. See Table 7.

Grey squares indicate stronger than moderate correlations. Management plays a very important role in building trust. Senior managers can influence horizontal trust at managerial levels, while trust building between subordinates and managers strengthens trust between managers and managers. One-way ANOVA studies confirmed that the foundations of trust relationships at each level of the hierarchy are different from the general characteristics that provide the foundations of trust. They differ the least in open conflicts, but the difference is especially large in connection with free expression of opinions, compromise, responsibility and respect for colleagues. These characteristics differ the most at horizontal managerial levels. Accordingly, Hypothesis 4 was accepted.

Table 7. Effects of trust between given levels of the hierarchy on trust between other levels (p=0.01)

4.	SU-SU	SU-LM	SU-MM	SU-SM	LM-LM	LM-MM	LM-SM	MM-MM	MM-SM	SM-SM
SU-SU	1									
SU-LM	,574**	1								
SU-MM	,428**	,700**	1							
SU-SM	,317**	,482**	,694**	1						
LM-LM	,519**	,608**	,499**	,415**	1					
LM-MM	,459**	,642**	,653**	,490**	,753**	1				
LM-SM	,293**	,556**	,622**	,695**	,581**	,737**	1			
MM-MM	,459**	,532**	,500**	,386**	,751**	,715**	,582**	1		
MM-SM	,312**	,529**	,548**	,514**	,585**	,733**	,748**	,661**	1	
SM-SM	,381**	,433**	,422**	,443**	,558**	,622**	,586**	,628**	,695**	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

SU: Subordinate, LM: Low-level manager, MM: Middle-level manager, SM: Senior manager  
Source: *own compilation*

*Hypothesis 5: Different trust building tools are typical at and between different levels of the hierarchy.*

It was examined whether there is a relationship between the strength of trust between the different levels of the hierarchy and the tools that can be used to build it. There was a positive correlation between the variables. The better teamwork and knowledge sharing work within an organisation, the stronger the horizontal atmosphere of trust becomes. Trust between direct and indirect relationships can be strengthened through teamwork, joint discussions between management and subordinates, knowledge sharing and open discussion of problems. The correlations are summarised in Table 8, where values (marked in grey) with a correlation coefficient higher than 0.3 indicate a moderate relationship. There was no correlation for empty cells.

The nature of trust has different attributes at and between various levels of the hierarchy. It is especially strong in horizontal dimensions, while between vertical levels it is weaker and more difficult to build. At the same time, horizontal trust characteristics have positive impact on vertically built trust characteristics, and leaders, in particular, have an exemplary role in strengthening them. In view of the above, Hypothesis 5 can be considered to be proven.

The results obtained so far show that the significance of knowledge sharing is of paramount importance in all cases. It is important for all prerequisites (basics and tools of trust, hierarchy levels). Respondents considered that the transfer and free flow of information/knowledge is undoubtedly an effective tool for trust building. So, in the second phase of the research, (as in the model), the aim of the research was to examine the impact of knowledge transfer/sharing upon trust, and explore the ways the quality and form of knowledge transfer influence trust building. We assume that formal and informal knowledge/information transfer of everyday life has impact on organisational trust, especially depending on the reality content of the knowledge/information transferred. Based on this, the sixth hypothesis was examined.

Table 8. Possible tools for building trust between the levels of the hierarchy

	Teamwork	Individual work	Joint discussion between managers and subordinates	Knowledge sharing	Development of communication	Resolving of conflicts	Team building	Development of a rating system	Emotional intelligence training	Open discussion of problems
SU-SU	,375**		,304**	,377**	,185**	,244**	,247**			,242**
SU-LM	,420**	,108*	,315**	,414**	,188**	,272**	,282**	,157**	,168**	,359**
SU-M	,377**	,179**	,370**	,402**	,222**	,267**	,222**	,117*	,121**	,328**
SU-SM	,318**	,140**	,381**	,365**	,208**	,224**	,224**	,132**		,328**
LM-LM	,343**		,277**	,343**	,133**	,154**	,245**	,110*	,096*	,281**
LM-M	,386**	,129**	,355**	,423**	,222**	,243**	,300**	,175**	,194**	,339**
LM-SM	,340**	,140**	,328**	,350**	,154**	,184**	,248**	,159**		,290**
M-M	,320**	,109*	,287**	,327**	,154**	,162**	,219**	,133**		,286**
M-SM	,333**	,116*	,355**	,354**	,158**	,179**	,241**	,132**	,118*	,263**
SM-SM	,309**		,293**	,290**	,149**	,211**	,228**	,129**	,114*	,326**

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: own compilation

### ***The impact of knowledge transfer on trust***

*Hypothesis 6: Knowledge transfer/sharing is an important tool for trust building, but a specific form of the informal solution (workplace gossip) has negative impact on organisational trust.*

The hypothesis examines the effect of formal and informal knowledge transfer on trust, depending on the reality content of the transferred knowledge/information. The exchange of information/knowledge within an organisation mainly occurs in a formalised way, in a regulated form, but informal knowledge transfer is almost always present. Among the modes of its implementation, workplace gossip has been focussed on, examining its impact on organisational trust.

### *Modes of knowledge transfer/sharing*

The first step in the study was to explore how knowledge transfer/sharing takes place within organisations. The respondents were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-scale how typical the practice of formal or informal knowledge sharing was within their organisations. One meant not at all typical, and five meant absolutely typical. The analysis was performed by

linear regression. The means showed that formal (mean: 3.5) was slightly more typical than informal (3.34). The respondents share primarily professional information formally, where the value of R-square, that is, the explained proportion is about 23% (Table 9).

Research, including the theoretical model as well, deals essentially with the issue of informal knowledge transfer/sharing, so the presentation of results will primarily focus on that. In the case of informal sharing, it was examined whether the respondents share mainly professional or non-professional information. In both cases, the informal nature of transfer (professional or non-professional knowledge/information) explains the transfer of knowledge/information relatively poorly. This means that the respondents did not want to admit to the practice of informal transfer (the fact of gossiping), but with the help of follow-up questions, the truth revealed itself.

Other questions included whether the willingness to transfer depends on whether or not the information to be disclosed had any real content. According to the responses, in the case of professional knowledge/information transfer, only real content is transferred in a formal or informal way. However, in the case of private information, despite its false reality, it is transmitted through informal channels, and this has little effect on the fact of transfer and that the information has no real content ( $R^2: 0.20$ ). The above results are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9. Results of linear regression ( $p=0.05$ )

Dependent Parameter	Independent Parameter	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig.	B	$\beta$
Only professional knowledge	Formal mode	,226	,000	,459	,475
Not real content	Formal mode/Professional information	,001	,371	-,035	-,033
Real content	Formal mode/Professional information	,381	,000	,597	,617
Only professional knowledge	Informal mode	,076	,000	,269	,275
Private information	Informal mode	,014	,001	,118	,120
Not real content	Informal mode/Professional information	,029	,000	,190	,171
Real content	Informal mode/Professional information	,415	,000	,662	,644
Not real content	Informal mode/Private information	,204	,000	,473	,452
Real content	Informal mode/Private information	,471	,000	,720	,686

Source: *own compilation*

#### *Characteristics of workplace gossip and its impact on trust*

After exploring the informal mode of knowledge sharing, the research asked respondents through everyday expressions about the everyday practice of informal knowledge/information transfer (workplace gossip).

The question was whether the respondents used to gossip within the organisation. About 10% often like to share information in this way, and 30% occasionally does so. The question for the hypothesis was what kind of impact gossip had on organisational trust. Gossip containing real content, private information (35% believed this) caused confusion in the teamwork, according to 44% it was detrimental and disruptive to organisational trust, while 40% thought that it had no positive effect on intra-organisational communication either.

Respondents considered that gossip linked to real content professional information could cause disturbances within the organisational culture (according to 37%), in teamwork (according to 38%), in organisational trust (according to 39%), and in methods of knowledge sharing (according to 32%). See Diagram 1.

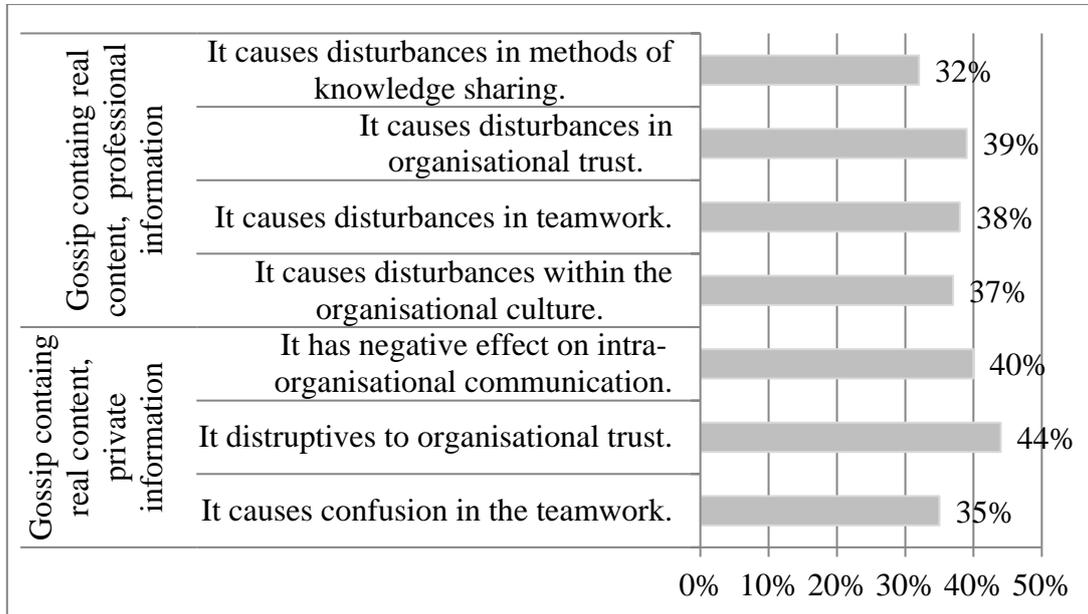


Diagram 1 The negative effects of gossip

Source: *own compilation*

According to the respondents, gossip that contains unreal content is even more detrimental. 50% believed that it has a negative impact on trust and knowledge sharing methods, and, according to 60%, on teamwork and intra-organisational communication. In the light of the above results, it can be concluded that this form of informal knowledge transfer/sharing tends to have a negative impact on trust, especially, if the information transferred does not contain or does not fully reflect reality. The question asked at the beginning of the study about the impact of workplace gossip on organisational trust building, and through it on functioning, can be answered. The relationship between trust and organisational performance has been proven in a number of previous studies, so it can be stated that informal knowledge/information sharing (workplace gossip) with false information adversely affects organisation trust, and, through it, organisational performance. Using well-chose indicators and parameters, the economic consequences can be quantified, which will be presented in a later study. Based on the above, the sixth hypothesis can be considered to be accepted.

### Discussion - Conclusion

According to the research results, organisational trust can primarily be based on teamwork, respect for colleagues, open communication, free expression of opinions and mutual assistance. The free flow of knowledge and information was then mentioned as an important factor for establishing trust. This means that the most important characteristics defined by the respondents, which form the basis of organisational trust, and are supported by the previously theoretically proven literature data, (Paliszkievicz & Koohang, 2013; Paliszkievicz, et al., 2014/b; Abrams et al., 2003; Sankowska, 2013; Six, 2007; Killingsworth et al., 2016; Bansal, 2016) can be summarised above. However, there was a significant difference between the

expected and experienced trust characteristics of the respondents' organisations. By its very nature, organisational trust is very heterogeneous, so the tools to build it partly come from the fundamentals, and partly require other organisational characteristics. According to the results, teamwork, joint discussions, knowledge sharing, resolving of conflicts and the open discussion of problems play the most appropriate roles as trust-building tools. The common elements speak for themselves, and, in this case, the importance of knowledge sharing increased. This means that it is important both in foundation, building and maintenance.

At the same time, at different levels of the organisational hierarchy, the nature of organisational trust is different both vertically and horizontally. In the case of employees at the same level and in direct manager-subordinate relationships, trust is more pronounced (this is true for both subordinate and managerial levels, although, moving upwards in the hierarchy, the tendency weakens). Trust is less perceptible in vertical relationships, especially in the case of subordinates and not direct managers. However, it has also been detected that the more trust works at a given level of the organisation and in the relationships between direct levels, the more typical it is to have a positive impact on trust at and between other levels.

The characteristics necessary for establishing trust are important in different ways at different hierarchical levels. The most striking difference is in the free expression of opinions, compromise, responsibility and respect for colleagues. It is interesting that the higher you move up the organisational ladder, the intimate characteristics are increasingly pushed into the background. This characterises the leadership behaviour and style, which can be identified with importance awareness, sense of superiority and autocratic elements.

Among the many tools of trust building, the impact of knowledge transfer was primarily examined, since its strong influential impact could be detected in the case of both the foundations and tools of trust. The reality content of information/knowledge transferred in informal and formal ways in the daily practice of organisations has a significant impact on organisational trust. That is, the trust-building nature of knowledge transfer is indisputable. Sharing professional information with real content either in a formal or an informal way strengthens the culture of trust, but if information with unreal content is transferred in an informal way, workplace gossip starts to spread, and it has an opposite effect on organisational trust, and, at the same time, on organisational functioning. Thus, summarising the results of the research, it can be stated that the confirmation of the hypotheses supported the preliminary assumption that the daily practice of quality knowledge sharing strengthens the impact of trust on organisational success, but workplace gossip as a typical mode of informal knowledge sharing weakens this effect.

The research also highlighted that, although formal information/knowledge sharing within organisational functioning is more typical, (thanks to Operational Regulations and Organisational Policies), than the informal mode, people very often gossip at work. Even if the results make you aware of the negative effects of such informal ways of information/knowledge sharing on the development of culture, trust relationships, organisational operation, performance and effectiveness. The results confirmed that workplace gossip can be really detrimental to the soft elements of the organisation, in the factors, the development and correction of which take plenty of time, and cause a loss to organisations. Despite its detrimental nature, many people do not find gossip morally reprehensible, and perhaps this is why, in 60% of the involved organisations, managers do not deal with the consequences of workplace gossip.

The new results of the research, which carry an added value to science, can be summarised below. (1) The authors examined the impact of trust on organisational functioning in a new context. (2) They have confirmed that there is a close relationship between the foundations of organisational trust and the tools necessary for building them, and often there are overlaps, but different tools are predominant at different levels of the organisational hierarchy. (3) It has been shown that trust between colleagues has a positive impact, it

strengthens the trust relations on other levels of the hierarchy. (4) It was confirmed that organisational knowledge sharing significantly influences trust building (meaning both foundations and tools), but knowledge transfer in an informal way does not have a positive effect in all cases. Informal knowledge sharing with unreal content (workplace gossip) is particularly critical and has a negative impact on trust and successful organisational operation. In summary, 11.8% of respondents have already felt the positive effects of gossip, 34.1% of them have felt the negative effects and 60% of respondents condemn workplace gossip.

Among the limitations of the research, the limited possibilities of sample collection must be noted. Partly because of the lack of willingness to respond, partly because of the lack of support, the sample is not representative, so the results cannot be generalised to all organisation. It was problematic that, in the case of questions related to trust, beyond a certain depth, no further investigations were allowed because there was no permission during the trials. Researchers faced similar managerial excuses and references to ethical principles in the case of workplace gossip. A limitation was that access to information of economic nature was not provided in the organisations, so that concrete quantified results regarding the negative impact of workplace gossip on the organisation could not be presented. The researchers are working to address these constraints and, hopefully, the next study will provide a more detailed picture of the effects being studied.

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