

**EXPERIENCES OF TVET COLLEGE LEADERS IN MANAGING WORKPLACE  
JOB-RELATED GOSSIP IN ONE MUNICIPALITY, GAUTENG PROVINCE**

**By**

**XABA SIPHAMANDLA JOHAN**

**Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**MASTERS IN EDUCATION (MEd)**

**in the**

**EDUCATION MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP DEPARTMENT**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

**UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE**

**BLOEMFONTEIN**

**SUPERVISOR: DR L MDODANA-ZIDE**

**JULY 2024**

## DECLARATION

I, Xaba Siphamandla declare that the master's research dissertation that I herewith submit at the University of the Free State, is my independent work and that I have not previously submitted it for qualification at another institution of higher education.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Xaba Siphamandla', written over a horizontal line.

31/07/2024

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I want to thank Almighty God for His unwavering love and constant friendship; I am truly grateful to God for providing me with an opportunity and testimony. My profound gratitude goes out to my supervisors, Drs. Mmodana-Zide, for her vast knowledge, unwavering encouragement, and persistently patient mentoring during my academic career. I am sincerely grateful for her willingness to share her knowledge and experiences, which greatly aided this project's advancement.

I want to express my sincere thanks and admiration to my family, church (Mission of Faith Foundation Ministries), friends, and loved ones. Your brave remarks and the prayers you offered were a food supply for me as I conducted my research. I express my gratitude to my entire colleagues. I have the good fortune to have a fantastic and very encouraging close association that has never stopped encouraging me while I was studying.

## ABSTRACT

The study aimed to investigate the experiences of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college leaders managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng province. The study was informed by the leader-member-exchange theory developed by Dansereau in 1975 and the Evolution of Gossip Theory by the anthropologist Robin Dunbar in 1996. In developing a critical and interpretive understanding of the experiences of TVET college leaders handling workplace job-related gossip, data were created through semi-structured interviews with campus managers, focus group discussions with the head of the department, and document analysis using a qualitative technique. The study found that gossip, a private discourse, can be harmful and duplicitous, reflecting the speaker's true sentiments. It can be positive and negative, affecting and targeting the individual's private life.

The study further revealed that managers condemn gossip, while others provide counselling or encourage employees to be mature to foster a culture of love and care, acting reasonably in handling discussions. This approach helps mitigate gossip's negative impact and promotes a healthier work environment. The findings also revealed that managers face substantial obstacles in handling workplace gossip, such as becoming subjects of gossip themselves, often cited incorrectly, employees may perceive themselves as being targeted and misinterpret the managers' motives. Such challenges add complexity to handling gossip-related issues, impeding the effective resolution of these problems. The study, therefore, concludes that the nature of gossip is complex, involving secrecy and potential harm. The study recommends continuous professional development programs that include training enhancing work-related gossip management skills, for managers to better manage interpersonal relationships, encourage open communication, and promote a just culture, which can also help reduce the frequency and consequences of workplace gossip.

**Key terms:** workplace gossip, TVET college, managers, leaders, employees, HoDs

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>DECLARATION .....</b>                            | <b>ii</b>   |
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>                        | <b>iii</b>  |
| <b>ABSTRACT .....</b>                               | <b>iv</b>   |
| <b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>                       | <b>v</b>    |
| <b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>                         | <b>xii</b>  |
| <b>LIST OF FIGURES.....</b>                         | <b>xii</b>  |
| <b>LIST OF ACRONYMS.....</b>                        | <b>xiii</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND .....</b> | <b>1</b>    |
| 1.1 Introduction and Background .....               | 1           |
| 1.2 The Rationale for the Study.....                | 4           |
| 1.3 Problem Statement.....                          | 5           |
| 1.4 Research Questions.....                         | 5           |
| <i>1.4.1 Main research question.....</i>            | <i>5</i>    |
| <i>1.4.2 Secondary questions.....</i>               | <i>6</i>    |
| 1.5 The Aim of the Study.....                       | 6           |
| 1.6 Objectives of the Study .....                   | 6           |
| 1.7 Value of the Study.....                         | 6           |
| 1.8 Delimitations of the Study.....                 | 7           |

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| 1.9 Ethical Considerations.....  | 7        |
| 1.10 Chapter Layout.....   | 7        |
| 1.10.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and background.....                             | 7        |
| 1.10.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review.....             | 8        |
| 1.10.3 Chapter 3: Research methodology .....                                   | 8        |
| 1.10.4 Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis .....                         | 8        |
| 1.10.5 Chapter 5: Discussion of findings, recommendations and conclusion ..... | 8        |
| 1.11 Chapter Summary .....   | 8        |
| <b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....</b>             | <b>9</b> |
| 2.1 Introduction .....   | 9        |
| 2.2 Theoretical Framework.....   | 9        |
| 2.2.1 Evolution of gossip theory.....  | 9        |
| 2.2.2 Origin of the evolution of gossip theory.....                            | 10       |
| 2.2.3 Gossip theory objectives.....  | 11       |
| 2.2.4 Leader-Member exchange (LMX) theory .....                                | 13       |
| 2.2.5 The primary objectives of LMX theory.....                                | 14       |
| 2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW.....   | 19       |
| 2.3.1 The Origin of TVET colleges.....   | 19       |
| 2.3.2 Evolution of gossip.....   | 20       |
| 2.3.3 Conceptualisation of workplace gossip .....                              | 21       |
| 2.3.4 Different uses of workplace gossip .....                                 | 22       |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 2.3.5 Perspectives on the use of workplace gossip in the academic sphere.....        | 26        |
| 2.3.6 Impact of gossip on the working environment .....                              | 33        |
| 2.3.7 <i>The effects of workplace gossip on employees</i> .....                      | 37        |
| 2.3.8 <i>Job-related and non-job-related gossip</i> .....                            | 39        |
| 2.3.9 <i>Practices to manage workplace gossip</i> .....                              | 41        |
| 2.3.10 <i>The challenges faced by management in managing workplace gossip</i> . .... | 44        |
| 2.4 Chapter Summary .....  | 53        |
| <b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....</b>   | <b>54</b> |
| 3.1 Introduction .....   | 54        |
| 3.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism .....  | 55        |
| 3.2.1 <i>Advantages of Interpretivism</i> .....                                      | 56        |
| 3.2.2 <i>Disadvantages of Interpretivism</i> .....                                   | 56        |
| 3.3 Qualitative Approach .....   | 57        |
| 3.3.1 <i>Advantages of the qualitative approach</i> .....                            | 58        |
| 3.3.2 <i>Disadvantages of the qualitative approach</i> .....                         | 59        |
| 3.4 Research Design: Case Study .....  | 59        |
| 3.4.1 <i>Advantages of case study</i> .....  | 60        |
| 3.4.2 <i>Disadvantages of case study</i> .....                                       | 61        |
| 3.5 Research Population .....  | 61        |
| 3.5.1 <i>Sample and sampling procedures</i> .....                                    | 62        |
| 3.5.2 <i>Purposive sampling</i> .....  | 62        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 3.6 Data-gathering Instruments.....                                  | 64        |
| 3.6.1 <i>Semi-Structured interviews</i> .....                        | 65        |
| 3.6.2 <i>Focus group discussion</i> .....                            | 67        |
| 3.6.3 <i>Document analysis</i> .....                                 | 69        |
| 3.7 Data Collection Process .....                                    | 70        |
| 3.8 Analysis Procedures.....   | 71        |
| 3.8.1 <i>Qualitative content analysis</i> .....                      | 72        |
| 3.8.2 <i>Inductive content analysis</i> .....                        | 72        |
| 3.9 Ethical Considerations.....                                      | 74        |
| 3.10 Trustworthiness.....  | 75        |
| 3.10.1 <i>Credibility</i> .....                                      | 75        |
| 3.10.2 <i>Crystallisation</i> .....                                  | 76        |
| 3.10.3 <i>Dependability</i> .....                                    | 77        |
| 3.10.4 <i>Audit trail</i> .....                                      | 77        |
| 3.10.5 <i>Confirmability</i> .....                                   | 77        |
| 3.10.6 <i>Member checking</i> .....                                  | 78        |
| 3.10.7 <i>Transferability</i> .....                                  | 78        |
| 3.11 Chapter Summary .....   | 79        |
| <b>CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS.....</b> | <b>80</b> |
| 4.1 Introduction .....   | 80        |
| 4.2 Profile of the Sites .....                                       | 80        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 4.3 Participants Profiles.....   | 81        |
| 4.4 Study Themes and Subthemes .....   | 84        |
| 4.4.1 <i>Conceptualisation of workplace-related gossip</i> .....   | 84        |
| 4.4.2 <i>Practices used by college leaders to manage workplace-related gossip</i> .....                      | 87        |
| 4.4.3 <i>Challenges experienced by college leaders when managing workplace-related gossip</i> .....          | 88        |
| 4.4.4 <i>Strategies used by college leaders to enhance workplace-related gossip management</i> .....         | 89        |
| 4.5 Document Analysis.....   | 91        |
| 4.6 Chapter Summary .....  | 95        |
| <b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>                               | <b>96</b> |
| 5.1 Introduction and Overview of the Study.....  | 96        |
| 5.2 Discussion of the Findings .....   | 96        |
| 5.2.1 <i>Conceptualisation of gossip</i> .....   | 97        |
| 5.2.2 <i>Practices used by TVET college leaders to manage workplace job-related gossip</i> .....             | 101       |
| 5.2.3 <i>Challenges experienced by TVET college leaders when managing workplace job-related gossip</i> ..... | 103       |
| 5.2.4 <i>Strategies used by TVET college leaders to enhance workplace-related gossip management</i> .....    | 104       |
| 5.3 Conclusion .....   | 107       |
| 5.4 Study Recommendations .....  | 108       |
| 5.5 Recommendations for Future Research.....   | 108       |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| 5.6 Chapter Summary .....   | 109        |
| <b>CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH JOURNEY AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE</b><br>..... | <b>110</b> |
| 6.1 Introduction .....  | 110        |
| 6.2 General Introduction to the Background of the Study.....              | 110        |
| 6.3 My Research Journey .....   | 111        |
| 6.4 Lessons Learned in the Research Journey .....                         | 113        |
| 6.5 Research Contribution.....  | 115        |
| 6.6 Limitations of the Study .....  | 116        |
| 6.7 Conclusion .....  | 116        |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>  | <b>117</b> |
| <b>APPENDICES.....</b>  | <b>140</b> |
| APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE.....  | 140        |
| APPENDIX B: TURNITIN REPORT .....   | 141        |
| APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE .....   | 142        |
| APPENDIX D: PERMISSION FROM THE COLLEGE.....                              | 143        |
| APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM.....   | 144        |



## **LIST OF TABLES**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 2.1: Different uses of gossip .....                       | 23 |
| Table 3.1: Participant sampling .....                           | 63 |
| Table 4.1: Details of the college background in the study ..... | 80 |
| Table 4.2: Background information about the participants .....  | 81 |
| Table 4.3: The four themes from the research findings .....     | 84 |

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 4.1: Nature of unwelcome conduct (RSA 2024) .....     | 92 |
| Figure 4.2: Examples of Harassment .....                     | 93 |
| Figure 4.3: Example of forms of violence and harassment..... | 94 |

## **LIST OF ACRONYMS**

|             |  |
|-------------|--|
| <b>HoDs</b> | <b>Heads of Departments</b>                            |
| <b>HR</b>   | <b>Human Resources</b>                                 |
| <b>ILO</b>  | <b>International Labour Organisation</b>               |
| <b>LMX</b>  | <b>Leader-Member Exchange</b>                          |
| <b>TVET</b> | <b>Technical and Vocational Education and Training</b> |

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## 1.1 Introduction and Background

Gossip is a phenomenon that can be found almost anywhere where people interact, including in the workplace (Kim, Moon and Shin, 2019). The workplace is frequently viewed as the ideal environment for gossip since employees spend more time at work than at home (Kong, 2018). Disseminating gossip about an absent individual between coworkers is known as workplace gossip (Adkins, 2017). Khan and Chaudhary (2022), add that workplace gossip is an informal and evaluative discourse in an organisation by a small group of people about someone who is not there. According to Martinescu, Jansen and Beersma (2021), workplace gossip has, among others, the following characteristics:

- It is aimed at individuals
- It is evaluative
- Both the gossiper and participant know the target
- Gossip takes place in the absence of the target.

Gossip can also be relational aggression if the goal is to exact vengeance or elevate one's social standing (Gordon, 2017). A person may decide to create a rumour or engage in gossip about another person to hurt or "get back at" that person if they feel wronged by them or envious of them in some way. When someone spreads information that lowers the social standing of others, gossip can also be used to advance one's social position.

Gossip is a worldwide recognised concept (Kambouris, 2022). For example, in Pakistan, Zahra (2017), found that gossip might cause conflict in organisations, particularly in situations where the gossip is closely related to cultural context. As such, gossip spreads and deteriorates relationships among group members (Zahra, 2017). The role of workplace gossip in enhancing conflict was emphasised, particularly if gossip is closely connected to cultural context. For example, Pakistan has a collectivist

culture which confines people into groups where they devote their loyalty in exchange for courtesy. Apart from the collectivist culture, in their cultural norms, people work in groups and informal discussions among group members are common. When a group member gossips about a colleague, it will spread like wildfire and will be the source of conflict (Zahra, 2017). Zahra's (2017), findings note that gossip is likely to weaken the relationships among group members.

Kuo *et al.* (2015) conducted an in-depth analysis of Taiwanese industries, shedding light on the pervasive nature of gossip within workplace environments. Their study identified two primary categories of gossip: job-related and non-job related. Job-related gossip typically concerns work tasks, performance evaluations, promotions and other professional matters. In contrast, non-job-related gossip encompasses personal affairs, relationships and other topics unrelated to work duties (Kuo *et al.* 2015). The researchers postulated that both forms of gossip can harm employee morale, trust and organisational dynamics (Smith & Jones, 2022). Specifically, they highlighted the potential for gossip to fuel employee cynicism, leading to decreased job satisfaction, disengagement and adverse outcomes for both individuals and the organisation (Lee, 2017). By elucidating the nuanced impacts of gossip within the workplace, Kuo *et al.* (2015) underscored the importance of addressing gossip as a managerial concern and implementing strategies to mitigate its harmful effects (Brown & Martinez, 2020). The data that they obtained offer important insights for organisations seeking to foster a positive and productive work environment.

Workplace gossip can spread beyond the office water cooler, especially in today's interconnected global landscape (Smith, 2020). Workplace gossip significantly impacts diplomatic ties, trade deals and even political stability in an international environment. One prominent example is the strained relationship between China and India (European Commission, 2021). Gossip about territorial disputes in the Himalayas has stoked nationalist emotions, raised tensions and impeded diplomatic efforts to reach a peaceful settlement. The ripple effect of workplace gossip reaches the highest levels of power, in this case, changing the narrative of two nations.

Furthermore, Smith (2020), emphasises that workplace gossip has the potential to extend beyond the corporate world, influencing worldwide company ventures. Johnson *et al.* (2020), provide an example where a multinational corporation

discussing a merger between a Japanese and an American corporation and unfounded suspicions about cultural insensitivity or questionable business practices might poison the well of discussions, leading to the deal's demise. The impact of such gossip can reverberate across borders in the interconnected global economy, impacting stock prices and investor confidence. Smith (2020) indicates that the international influence of workplace gossip should not be underestimated. The far-reaching implications of geopolitical disputes, corporate agreements and intergovernmental ties can affect the course of nations and alliances.

The African continent is no exception to this challenge of workplace gossip which can have far-reaching effects on interpersonal relationships inside enterprises and broader societal dynamics. Zimbabwe's political landscape is one such example (Mugabe, 2018). According to Mugabe (2018), gossip within government institutions and political circles has influenced power struggles and internal conflicts. Unsubstantiated gossip and speculations might lead to distrust, hamper effective governance and stifle the country's progress. The consequences of workplace gossip extend beyond the immediate work environment and influence the socio-political fabric of nations.

Okonjo-Iweala (2019) also revealed that the economic consequences of workplace gossip are visible in Nigeria, where a thriving oil industry is a significant contributor to the national economy. Haile, Yimer and Mekonnen (2020), demonstrate that negative workplace gossip may dissuade investors, resulting in a decline in foreign direct investment and slowing economic growth. Thus, workplace gossip in Nigeria has an impact that reaches beyond the personal to the macroeconomic level, affecting the livelihoods of millions.

Workplace gossip has been shown to reduce employee performance and create an uneasy work environment in Ghana, according to Ibrahim (2022). Employee turnover may rise along with lower productivity in this unfavourable atmosphere. Furthermore, a company's bad reputation can discourage talented individuals from joining the organisation. According to Musiwa (2015), in Zambia, a person who is the subject of gossip may think about ending their own life. Gossip at work can foster a culture of fear and anxiety that affects not just the target but also their coworkers (Musiwa, 2015). According to a study conducted in Namibia by Jonson (2016), some staff members even tell managers negative information about specific people to gain promotions and

other benefits. This behaviour may further damage employee morale, resulting in unfair promotions and a lack of transparency inside the company (Kuo, 2015).

In South Africa, a study conducted at a technical and vocational education and training (TVET) college found that lecturers face a toxic working environment that harms their health (Waddington & Wood, 2019). At the college level, workplace gossip is more likely to spread to parents than customers in a traditional service industry, negatively affecting the teaching and learning environment (Chron, 2021). However, according to Ilahabader and Coleman (2020), employers may prefer to ignore the prevalence of gossip as a minor concern or dismiss them as mere fairy tales, fearing that acknowledging their existence would be inappropriate in a professional setting. Gobind and Ukpere (2013) recognise that ignoring the reality of workplace gossip may be hazardous to any firm that does so, as research indicates that workplace gossip has a detrimental impact on the organization.

The literature has established that it is challenging to eradicate gossip by simply imposing a policy. Still, managers must understand gossip to turn it into a profitable management tool (Ferrari, 2015). The study, therefore, aimed to examine the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace gossip in the one municipality in the Gauteng Province.

## **1.2 The Rationale for the Study**

In my quest to understand the complexities of workplace gossip in college settings, I discovered that gossip plays a critical part in moulding the experiences of campus managers as they manage their employees. Unlike traditional businesses, colleges are hubs teeming with varied individuals; students, teachers and administrative staff create a complex network of interactions. This vast diversity serves as a fertile ground for gossip which can take many forms, ranging from talks about personal life to professional conduct. As a college employee, I navigate these talks, attempting to balance encouraging openness and maintaining a peaceful and efficient workplace. As a college administrator, I face a unique set of issues when dealing with workplace gossip. One of the most difficult challenges is differentiating between harmless conversation and destructive rumours that can strain relationships and damage confidence inside the institution. The casual and informal nature of gossip adds

another layer of complexity, necessitating a delicate balance between the requirement for an open communication culture and the need to enforce limits to prevent harm. Furthermore, the hierarchical structure of institutions adds another layer to the complexities of managing gossip. I frequently navigate the crossfire while maintaining relationships with supervisors, peers and subordinates. This dynamic worsens the challenges I face in successfully addressing and reducing the impact of gossip within the college setting.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Many people may agree that gossip is wrong and should not be encouraged or tolerated, but the lure of hearing the private and intimate details of another is too heavy to resist (Gobind & Ukpere, 2013). Ahmad, Tariq, Weng, Shillamkwese & Sohail, (2019) established that gossiping behaviour has an impact not only on individuals but also on organisations. Badenhorst and Botha (2022), indicate that TVET college lecturers in South Africa face a challenging working environment daily, as they witness bullying, destructive leadership, gossip and victimisation; nonetheless, they continue to conceal their emotions and cover their genuine feelings of suffering. Workplace gossip is a concern at TVET colleges since it reshapes employees' perceptions (Kong, 2018). However, Ferrari (2015), attests that there is a dearth of literature that pays attention to organisational management and gossip in the workplace, which may be because of its complexity, yet gossip is **malicious and making is difficult for managers to define properly without suffocating all types of informal communication**. The study, therefore, examined the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The following are the research questions for the study:

#### **1.4.1 Main research question**

The main research question directing this study was: What are the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province?

### **1.4.2 Secondary questions**

To answer the main question, the following secondary questions had to be answered:

- What are the TVET college leaders' conceptualisation and experiences of workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- How do TVET college leaders manage employee workplace job-related gossip in their organisations in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- What challenges do TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- How can college leaders effectively manage workplace job-related gossip in TVET colleges to alleviate the challenges in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?

### **1.5 The Aim of the Study**

The study aimed to examine the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province.

### **1.6 Objectives of the Study**

To achieve this aim, the following objectives had to be met:

- Establish the TVET college leaders' conceptualisation of workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province.
- Explore how TVET college leaders manage employee workplace job-related gossip in their organisations in one municipality in the Gauteng Province.
- Identify the challenges that TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province.
- Establish how TVET college leaders can effectively manage workplace job-related to alleviate the challenges in one municipality in the Gauteng Province.

### **1.7 Value of the Study**

TVET college leaders in one municipality will gain insight into managing gossip in the workplace and how they may prevent it. The TVET college system will be informed of

workplace gossip's positive and negative effects. This study will inform the TVET college community about the various ways to deal with workplace gossip.

## **1.8 Delimitations of the Study**

The research focused on one TVET college in one particular municipality in the Gauteng province only. The study was limited to 12 HoDs and 6 campus managers from one municipality in Gauteng. The limited geographic range of the samp could impact the generalizability of the finding. The limited geographic range of the samp could impact the generalizability of the finding.

## **1.9 Ethical Considerations**

According to Voltelen, Konradsen and Østergaard (2018), ethical considerations can be defined as the values and principles in human affairs that answer good or bad questions in a given study. The following ethical considerations were considered:

- Ethical clearance from the university and the TVET colleges was obtained.
- Informed consent was signed voluntarily by the participants.
- Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality.
- The participants were notified that they could discontinue their involvement in the study at any point (Voltelen *et al.*, 2018).

## **1.10 Chapter Layout**

### **1.10.1 Chapter 1: Introduction and background**

This chapter provided an introduction and laid out the background of the problem statement. It also provided the study's rationale, value, delimitations, the research questions and related research objectives.

### **1.10.2 Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review**

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework used in the study and a comprehensive assessment of the relevant literature pertaining to the phenomenon being investigated. This pertains to the examination of existing literature and theoretical concepts that provide a foundation for the stated goal and objectives of the study.

### **1.10.3 Chapter 3: Research methodology**

The research methodology chapter provides a detailed account of the research strategy and technique used in the study. The text outlines the study paradigm approach, the process of selecting the sample population, the sampling strategy used, the measurement tools, and the questionnaire administration. The measuring devices' background, dependability and validity are also covered.

### **1.10.4 Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis**

This chapter includes a presentation of the data collected and categorised into themes, followed by a critical analysis of the responses and explanations of the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng province.

### **1.10.5 Chapter 5: Discussion of findings, recommendations and conclusion**

In this final chapter, the study discusses the findings from the data collected and presented in Chapter 4. It also concludes and makes recommendations for further research.

## **1.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a comprehensive summary of the study which included the introduction, background information, problem statement and research objective. This chapter overviewed the study's aim and objectives, the value and delimitations of the study and ethical considerations. In chapter two, I discuss the reviewed literature related to understanding workplace job-related gossip and the experiences of TVET college in one municipality, management in dealing with workplace job-related gossip.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

A literature review is central to any research project since it gives a researcher various opportunities to handle the information. Okoli and Schabram (2015), indicate that a literature review guarantees that the researcher's proposed research does not simply recycle the existing material unless it was intended to establish the replication of the results. In the literature review, I identify the gaps in the field, present a critical analysis of prior research and establish the key issues to be addressed. The literature review structure in this study consists of books, peer-reviewed articles, materials such as reports, research papers, articles from newspapers, papers presented at conferences, theses, reviews, records from the government, and material derived from databases and internet sources (Okoli & Schabram, 2015). The authors refer to material consulted as secondary sources for this study; primary data will also be collected.

### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The study is underpinned by two theoretical frameworks: the evolution of gossip theory and the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. This signifies that the research is grounded in the principles and perspectives offered by these distinct but complementary theoretical frameworks.

#### **2.2.1 Evolution of gossip theory**

Gossip, a universal aspect of human communication, has shaped and been shaped by societal changes (Hess & Hagen, 2019). This theoretical framework explored the historical roots of gossip, its psychological and social functions, and its effects on the contemporary working environment (Jones & Lee, 2019). It delves into the evolutionary perspectives on gossip, its adaptive functions, and how it influences organisational culture, communication patterns, and employee relationships (Hess & Hagen, 2019). Through an analysis of relevant studies and theoretical frameworks, this review aims to provide insights into the complex nature of gossip and its implications for the modern workplace.

### 2.2.2 Origin of the evolution of gossip theory

The evolution of gossip theory was developed by British anthropologist, evolutionary psychologist, and primatologist Robin Dunbar in the 1990 (Dunbar, 1997). According to Robin Dunbar's (1996) theory of the evolution of language, gossip enables humans to preserve social coherence in vast groups, and the selective pressure to do so is what motivated individuals to develop language in the first place. Dunbar (2012), suggests that prior to the development of gossip, there must have been another factor that played a role in maintaining social cohesion within human groups. The most probable possibility is the method that is still used by other primates, known as grooming (Smith *et al.*, 2016). Grooming not only maintains personal cleanliness, but also fulfils a significant societal role. Gossip, informal and evaluative talk about absent others, has been integral to human communication throughout history (Jones & Lee, 2019). While often considered harmful, gossip serves various social and psychological functions, influencing individuals and groups within different contexts, including the workplace. In the context of Robin Dunbar's influential theory (2016), that signals the integral role of gossip in maintaining social coherence in large groups, leaders' experiences in (TVET) colleges take on paramount importance. Dunbar's (1996), theory suggests that gossip played a pivotal role in the evolution of human language and the formation of social bonds (cited in Smith & Johnson, 2020). According to Dunbar, the grooming mechanism observed in other primates is the likeliest predecessor to gossip, fulfilling both cleanliness and a significant social function (Smith *et al.*, 2016; Jones & Lee, 2019). Despite the common negative connotation associated with gossip, Dunbar's perspective emphasises that it serves various social and psychological functions, influencing the dynamics of individuals and groups within a social context. As an environment of human interactions, the workplace becomes an intriguing arena for exploring the implications of gossip on social coherence (Smith, 2014).

Understanding how leaders in TVET colleges manage job-related gossip provides practical insights into the intricate dynamics of maintaining social coherence within the organisational structure. By delving into the experiences of these leaders, the research has the potential to uncover strategies and responses to job-related gossip, shedding light on the broader implications for social cohesion within the unique context of TVET

colleges (Greenslade-Yeats, Cooper-Thomas, Corner & Morrison, 2024). By adopting this evolutionary perspective, the study may uncover how leaders perceive and address job-related gossip, offering valuable contributions to understanding workplace dynamics and social cohesion within the organisational context.

### **2.2.3 Gossip theory objectives**

Gossip theory encompasses several objectives aimed at unravelling the intricacies of gossip as a social phenomenon.

#### **2.2.3.1 Information transmission**

In workplace dynamics, gossip is fundamental to information transmission as underscored by evolutionary psychologists like Dunbar (2004). Gossip becomes a means through which individuals share knowledge about social norms, values, and interpersonal relationships within the intricate fabric of a community or organisation (Carrim, 2019). This function of gossip extends beyond mere idle chatter; it becomes a powerful tool for disseminating information, encompassing both positive and negative aspects, thereby exerting a significant influence on perceptions and contributing to the formation of organisational culture. As key figures in managing workplace dynamics, college leaders play a crucial role in navigating the impact of gossip within the college sector. To effectively manage workplace gossip, leaders can adopt proactive strategies that harness the positive aspects of gossip to benefit the organisational culture. For instance, college leaders may encourage disseminating positive information through informal channels, fostering a culture of appreciation, collaboration and mutual support among staff.

#### **2.2.3.2 Social bonding**

Gossip plays a crucial role in social bonding, serving as a mechanism to create shared narratives and strengthen group identity, as highlighted by Greenslade - Yeats *et al.*, (2024). In the workplace, positive gossip is a powerful catalyst for enhancing team cohesion and fostering camaraderie among colleagues (Brady, Brown and Liang, 2017). When employees engage in positive gossip, sharing stories of achievements, collaborative efforts, and positive attributes, it contributes to developing a positive

organisational culture. This gossip can create a sense of unity and shared purpose among team members, ultimately bolstering the overall work environment.

Conversely, the effects of negative gossip within a workplace can be detrimental. Negative gossip can sow seeds of discord, leading to social exclusion and the cultivation of a toxic work environment (Greenslade - Yeats *et al.*, 2024). College leaders, recognising the significance of gossip in shaping workplace dynamics, play a pivotal role in managing these dynamics effectively. College leaders may implement strategies that encourage positive narratives and discourage harmful gossip from navigating the intricate terrain of workplace gossip. Creating a culture that values open communication, constructive feedback and recognition of achievements allows positive gossip to thrive. By fostering an environment where employees feel supported and appreciated, college leaders contribute to the organisation's overall well-being.

In the context of college leaders managing workplace gossip, Dunbar's theory highlights the fundamental nature of gossip as a tool for fostering social bonds and group identity. College campuses are large, diverse environments where effective communication and social coherence are essential for organisational success. Gossip, in this context, can be viewed as a natural and evolved means of information sharing. Social bonding and monitoring group members' behaviour are all vital aspects within the college setting. Understanding Dunbar's theory provides a theoretical foundation for the study, emphasising the evolutionary significance of gossip in maintaining social order. As college leaders navigate workplace gossip they can draw insights from this theory to appreciate the inherent role of gossip in human communication and its potential impact on organisational dynamics. By recognising gossip as a mechanism deeply rooted in the evolutionary history of language, college leaders may develop more informed strategies for managing and leveraging gossip within the college sector.

#### **2.2.4 Leader-Member exchange (LMX) theory**

Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory, or vertical dyad linkage theory, originated in the early 1970s. The theory was developed by organisational psychologists Dansereau, Graen and Haga (Dansereau, Graen and Haga, 1975). The foundational work in this area began with the research conducted by Graen and his colleagues, particularly the seminal paper titled "Vertical Dyad Linkage: A Longitudinal Assessment of Antecedents, Measures, and Consequences," published in 1975 and the early stages of LMX theory development, Dansereau, Graen and Haga focused on exploring the vertical dyadic relationships between leaders and their subordinates in an organisational context (Martin, Thomas, Legood and Russo, 2018). The theory posits that leaders do not treat all subordinates uniformly; instead, they form unique exchange relationships with each subordinate (Chiaburu & Kirkman, 2017). These exchanges are termed "dyads," emphasising the personalised nature of the leader-subordinate relationships (Chen, He & Weng, 2018).

The LMX theory aims to understand the dynamic and differentiated relationships that leaders develop with their subordinates within an organisational context (Martin *et al.*, 2018). LMX theory focuses on the quality and nature of these leader-subordinate relationships, emphasising that leaders do not treat all subordinates uniformly. Instead, they form unique exchange relationships with each individual, resulting in different levels of engagement and collaboration (Chiaburu & Kirkman, 2017). One key benefit of LMX theory in this study is its emphasis on examining the unique relationships between leaders and individual subordinates. As college leaders engage in varying levels of exchange with different team members, understanding the nuances of these relationships becomes essential when addressing workplace gossip. LMX theory acknowledges the differentiated treatment within leader-subordinate interactions, allowing for a more tailored approach to managing gossip based on the quality of these relationships (Martin *et al.*, 2018).

In managing workplace gossip, LMX theory allows for the exploration of how leaders establish unique exchange relationships with individual team members (Chen *et al.*, 2018). The theory recognises that leaders may have varying levels of engagement and collaboration with different subordinates. This differential treatment becomes

essential when addressing workplace gossip, where interpersonal relationships are pivotal (Kou *et al.*, 2015). Reference to this theory provides a lens through which college leaders can navigate the challenges posed by gossip within their teams. By understanding the quality of leader-subordinate relationships, leaders can identify potential sources of gossip and address them with tailored approaches. Additionally, recognising the stages of role development in LMX theory allows leaders to adapt strategies based on the evolving nature of their relationships with team members. Furthermore, LMX theory's exploration of organisational outcomes tied to relationship quality offers insights into how effectively managing workplace gossip can impact factors such as job satisfaction, commitment and teamwork within the college setting (Martin *et al.*, 2018). Integrating LMX theory into the study enhances the understanding of how leadership dynamics influence the spread and management of gossip, contributing to more effective strategies for college leaders.

## **2.2.5 The primary objectives of LMX theory**

The following discussion focuses on the primary objectives of LMX theory

### **2.2.5.1 Exploring relationship quality**

The LMX hypothesis offers a detailed viewpoint on how college leaders can efficiently handle workplace gossip by exploring the distinct character of leader-subordinate relationships (Chiaburu & Kirkman, 2017). The LMX hypothesis, which aims to examine the quality of these connections, acknowledges that interactions between leaders and subordinates are inconsistent. The focus on comprehending the diverse interactions between leaders and various subordinates becomes crucial in the setting of workplace gossip dynamics. The core tenet of LMX theory centres on recognising the diversity in leader-subordinate relationships (Nie & Lämsä, 2015). College leaders participate in unique interactions with each team member and this distinction is essential when dealing with workplace gossip. LMX theory provides leaders with a customised strategy to handle interpersonal dynamics, including gossip, by acknowledging that connections vary in quality.

LMX theory introduces the idea of the in-group and out-group dynamics. This means some subordinates may belong to a leader's inner circle (in-group). On the other hand, subordinates would belong to the out-group and, therefore, receive unfair treatment

(Chiaburu & Kirkman 2017). This dimension of LMX theory focuses on how workplace gossip flows within these two groups. The dynamics of in-group and out-group dealings help explain potential gossip sources and help create targeted interventions. In that regard, LMX theory fits into the phenomenon of workplace gossip, which generally relates to organisational outcomes. The latter provides a vibrant view of how leadership manages gossip and builds a positive organisational culture specifically on how leader-subordinate relationships influence determinants such as job satisfaction and commitment.

### **2.2.5.2 Understanding role development**

The LMX theory explains the development stages of leader-member relationships, and it is believed that the relationships mature from a more formal and prescribed role-taking position to a customised and mutually beneficial role-making position (Chiaburu & Kirkman, 2017). Understanding the stages of leader and subordinate relationships will brighten the management of workplace gossip, according to LMX theory. The theory posits that such relationships develop across various stages of development, from a formal and prescriptive role-taking phase to the personalised and mutually advantageous role-making phase (Chen *et al.*, 2018). As academic administrators first attempt to understand the potential problems that workplace gossip might pose, it is helpful to remember the developmental trajectory in which LMX theory places those relationships. Initially, the roles might have been clarified, and the formality of expectations with subordinates to create some professional groundwork for interaction. The stage has more of a transactional sense where leaders and subordinates follow the role expectations provided in workplaces.

However, as relationships mature, LMX theory suggests transitioning to a more personalised and mutually beneficial stage (Kuo, 2018). In this stage, leaders and followers develop a more comprehensive comprehension of each other's proficiency, their preferences, and their working styles. According to Nie and Lämsä (2015), the relationship becomes more collaborative to enable support that is based more precisely on the context of tackling workplace problems like gossip. With the understanding provided by LMX theory, leaders would only react to organisation gossip by referencing the quality of their dyadic relationships with a specific member, which promulgates purposeful altering of the operation of dyadic relationships in an

organisation (Chen *et al.*, 2018). As established above in the personal dynamics of each dyadic exchange, leaders appropriately address workplace gossip commensurate with the relationship's features.

Furthermore, since LMX theory is interested in the stage of role-making, it indicates that both leaders and subordinates can actively and positively contribute to their work arrangements as they see fit. In terms of workplace gossip management, this allows the leader to set the norms, expectations and flow of communication in a group-wide manner that actively works to dissuade destructive gossip and instead encourages positive and productive dialogue within the group. With the incorporation of LMX theory into a study on how college leaders manage workplace gossip, the result is the construction of meaning and the development of a unique understanding of the changing dynamics in the leader-member exchange. This understanding is embedded in the development stages that LMX theory proposes and offers leaders a timely avenue to take proactive steps in managing and reducing the effects of gossip within the complex fabric of organisational relationships.

### **2.2.5.3 Examining organisational outcomes**

According to Nie and Lämsä (2015), LMX investigates the quality relationship between the leader and subordinates influences various organisational outcomes regarding job satisfaction, performance, commitment and organisational citizenship behaviour. In this view, higher-quality exchanges result in more desirable organisational outcomes. In managing workplace gossip, LMX theory provides one such lens through which the quality of leader-subordinate relationships can be associated with organisational outcomes, where it is possible to shed more light on strategies for effective navigation of college leaders amidst gossip. The LMX theory posits that the quality of the exchange relationship has an impact on various outcomes, including work satisfaction, effectiveness, dedication, and organisational civic behaviour. Chen (2020), suggests that the sense-making of LMX theory becomes important as college leaders struggle to address the challenges of workplace gossip.

The quality of leader-member exchanges determines the organisational outcomes. Some of the desirable results that positive exchanges, characterised by mutual trust, respect and cooperation, may likely lead to are improved job satisfaction, improved

performance, heightened commitment and enhanced organisational citizenship behaviour, among others. In the context of workplace gossip management, this implies that those leaders who exhibit higher-quality exchanges in their leadership are better placed to reduce the potential negative implications of gossip on organisational outcomes. This demonstrates that leaders at the college and university level can effectively reduce workplace gossip and, at the same time, encourage a constructive communication climate by constructing relationships that are open, transparent, trusting and honest.

Furthermore, LMX theory highlights that difference is an inherent feature of leader-subordinate relationships. College leaders can adopt person-centred approaches to workplace gossip by considering the quality of their interactions with specific individuals. For example, it would link stronger connections with customised tactics and cooperative methods with decreased workplace gossip while fostering favourable elements of the company's culture. By integrating LMX theory into examining how college leaders handle workplace gossip, academics and practitioners clearly understand the connections between the leaders' interpersonal relationships and the organisation's outcomes. A deep understanding of this will enable leaders to effectively address gossip by actively improving good communication that promotes a workplace culture aligned with the desired organisational outcomes.

#### ***2.2.5.4 Recognising differentiation***

This theory strives to understand and appreciate different treatments that the leader may bestow on subordinates. The theory also acknowledges that the leader could have 'in-group' favoured subordinates to have a high-quality exchange; the rest are the 'out-group' and will have less favourable treatment. For college leaders, specifically in handling workplace gossip, the LMX theory informs as a guideline that acknowledges differentiation in leader-member relationships. The theory concept is based on the fact that an in-group with a leader might form relations of singled out subordinates with high-quality exchanges. By contrast, the other subordinate workers could be part of the out-groups in an impersonal relationship.

Proper in-group and out-group dynamics about workplace gossip are essential for college leaders. This presents an opportunity for differentiated subordinates' treatment and impacts the organisation's information flow, including gossip. By recognising the said dynamics, leaders get insights into how information and gossip travel differently within these identifiably distinct groups and take mitigative measures with gossip properly (Nie & Lämsä, 2015). For college leaders addressing the challenge of managing the implications of gossip, the differentiation approach based on the strength of the relationship with the individual members of the team advocates the second dimension of LMX theory. More individualised strategies could be accessed by leaders in addressing gossip with their in-group to develop communication and trust to stop the proliferation of harmful stories. This can be seen as the need for leaders to approach out-group members with sensitivity at the same time that leaders can attempt to increase the quality of exchanges to reduce the negative impacts of gossip in these relationships. In knowing and understanding the differential treatment of subordinates, the LMX theory can also be used by the college leader to develop ways to deal with workplace gossip. This recognition enables leaders to navigate the complexities of organisational communication and sensitive their strategies for managing gossip to the dynamics of in-group and out-group relationships.

Using LMX theories, researchers can examine the influence of positive and negative gossip on the overall organisational culture at academic institutions. The quality of leader-subordinate interactions is crucial in determining whether positive gossip fosters a supportive working environment, whereas negative gossip cultivates distrust. As a result, an enjoyable and healthy organisational culture is encouraged. The LMX theory offers an inclusive framework for examining the intricate connections between individuals within educational institutions. This theory can significantly contribute to understanding how college administrators handle workplace gossip and provide optimal strategies for addressing and minimising its effects.

## **2.3 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.3.1 The Origin of TVET colleges**

The emergence of TVET colleges resulted from historical, economic, and social developments that affected society from time to time (Gyimah, 2020). TVET education found its roots in history during the Industrial Revolution when the demand for skilled practitioners became more pronounced. Emphasis on practical skills and vocational training arose during the 19th and 20th centuries (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2014). In South Africa, TVET colleges post-apartheid emerged with newfound recognition as part of broader educational reforms that restored historical inequalities and fostered the country's economic development (Gyimah, 2020).

In the international arena, TVET colleges are also considered portable supplies for developing a competent workforce in relation to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (Paryono, 2017). The TVET system has branches in Germany, Switzerland and Singapore, which are success stories because they emphasise integrating theory and practice (Yu & Zhou, 2017). The general healthy origins of TVET institutions worldwide can be applied to and traced back to various cultural and historical contexts. Each country contributes to the different methods and approaches to vocational education discipline. The Institute of Technical Education provides industry-relevant training in Singapore and upholds lifelong learning (Paryono, 2017). For example, the solid industrial relationships and concentration on relevant practical skills characterising South Korea's vocational education system have contributed to this country's economic prosperity. For instance, Sung (2019), indicates that China has incurred significant expenses in renovating the vocational education facilities and the curriculum to fit nicely into developing industries like advanced manufacturing and information technology (Kang & Lee, 2021). Similarly, in Australia, embedding digital technology in TVET courses has been a focus country to ensure graduates' preparedness for the digital economy. Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana had their own TVET system customised to the country's needs (Gatembu, 2023).

For African TVET universities, this contributes to the tendency to resort to industry partnerships in the design of programmes that meet market requirements (Diop,

2020). This means that graduates obtain practical skills directly applicable to the workplace by resorting to this form of partnership. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa is a continental initiative by the African Union Commission to harmonise and enhance the quality of TVET across Africa (Kerre, 2017). Internships and apprenticeships are vital to teaching graduates the much-needed practical experience that will act as a guard against the challenge presented by the global employment market. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation and the ILO are focused on promoting international cooperation and disseminating best practices in the field of TVET (Samuels & Platts, 2022). The inception and the functioning of TVET colleges can be juxtaposed with the progress that resulted from the historical needs and the subsequent placement of those institutions to deal with the realities of global economic conditions. In today's fast-changing world, the relevance of TVET toward preparing people to face the future seems to surpass all others.

Terblanche and Bitzer (2018), argue that TVET colleges in South Africa are accessible and pertinent to delivering education. The Department of Higher Education and Training oversees 50 public TVET colleges that provide a range of programmes tailored to meet the needs of the business. These institutions have been recognised as significant participants in addressing skills shortages and promoting equal access to education (Terblanche & Bitzer, 2018). TVET colleges in South Africa prioritise practical, enthusiastic learning in their teaching approach. To address this requirement, connecting theoretical knowledge with its actual implementation is crucial to ensure that students not only possess academic expertise but also practical abilities demanded by the job market (Diop, 2020). The TVET institutes in South Africa, as well as other regions of Africa and the world, have a vital role in cultivating a proficient workforce capable of meeting the diverse needs of various sectors. They also contribute to the general economic development and perform similar functions (Diop, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Evolution of gossip**

Van Dijk and Wilke (2014) and Van Vugt (2019), propose that gossip may have emerged as a mechanism for humans to navigate social intricacies and foster group cohesion. Given the distinct social intricacies in a college environment, the

evolutionary viewpoint becomes particularly relevant when dealing with workplace gossip. Colleges may better manage and utilise gossip for good information exchange and social bonding while minimising its adverse effects on the job environment if we understand its adaptive roles (Carrim, 2019). With all its intrinsic social complexity, managing workplace gossip in a collegiate setting is an area where this evolutionary viewpoint shines. Colleges can learn from gossip's adaptive qualities and use them to their advantage by fostering social connection and information sharing while reducing its detrimental impact on the workplace (Lee, 2017). According to evolutionary psychologists, gesturing serves adaptive purposes, including informing others, strengthening social bonds and keeping tabs on how others behave within a group (Carrim, 2019).

### **2.3.3 Conceptualisation of workplace gossip**

There has been an ongoing debate among scholars and researchers about what constitutes a relevant definition of workplace gossip. This study intentionally framed the discussion by selecting workplace gossip. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that workplace gossip emanates from typical gossip. In this instance, gossip is defined by Adkins (2017), who defines communication as conveying information from one individual to another regarding a third individual who is not there. Another interpretation is proposed by Kuo *et al.* (2015) who perceive gossip as generating, listening to or engaging in critical remarks about someone. These definitions focus on gossip, which is generic and probably pervasive across the environment where there is human interaction. According to Begemann, Lübstorf, Meinecke, Steinicke and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2021), informal conversations about their coworkers, superiors or other colleagues are known as workplace gossip. Information that is private or personal is frequently involved in gossip. Babaei and Sattari (2016), describe workplace gossip as an informal and evaluative discussion in an organisation regarding a member who is absent during the chat. Martinescu *et al.* (2021) define workplace gossip as informal and evaluative communication within an organisation, involving a small group of individuals discussing another member who is absent based on their professional and personal lives. After examining the definition of workplace gossiping provided by many scholars, it is crucial to determine the recognition criteria different scholars have defined as acceptable (Sun *et al.*, 2023;

Martinescu *et al.*, 2021). To qualify as workplace gossip, the gossip must satisfy the following criteria:

- Focus on persons rather than events or situations
- Has to be evaluative, assessing or judgemental
- Takes place in a social setting – for example, an organisation – in which the gossiper and the person or people receiving the gossip are both aware of the target
- Is distributed in the absenteeism of the target; that is, when the source of the gossip is unlikely, if not impossible, to identify by the target.

This study will use the definition of gossip proposed by Sun *et al.* (2023) and Martinescu *et al.* (2021) to enhance comprehension of the extensive body of research about gossip, its roots, and its impact on employees' performance.

The impact of gossip in the workplace is compounded in educational environments like TVET colleges, where collaborative team structures are essential. Researchers suggest that effective organizational policies, including transparency and constructive feedback channels, may help mitigate the negative impacts of gossip. Creating a work culture with clear communication norms and discouraging harmful gossip through policies and training may support a more cohesive and productive environment. Studies indicate that addressing workplace gossip not only improves employee retention but also supports a healthier work culture in educational institutions (Kim *et al.*, 2019; Davis *et al.*, 2018).

#### **2.3.4 Different uses of workplace gossip**

Notwithstanding the numerous calls made by researchers about workplace gossip being minimised, controlled, or completely eradicated, gossip, whether in its generic form or the workplace, seems part of human life. Unless organisations do away with human beings, gossip is unlikely to be eliminated, controlled or minimised in the workplace. Sun *et al.* (2023) indicate that gossip is usually fuelled by certain social functions, including information sharing, entertainment, friendship or intimacy and influence is explained in Table 2.1 below:

**Table 2.1: Different uses of gossip**

| DIFFERENT USES OF GOSSIP     |
|------------------------------|
| A. Information               |
| B. Entertainment             |
| C. Friendship, or intimacy   |
| D. Influence                 |
| E. Moral motives             |
| F. Information dissemination |

**2.3.4.1 Information**

Gossip is a valuable method for transmitting information between individuals regarding a third party not present in the conversation (Adkins, 2017). This transmission of knowledge occurs organically, from the one spreading the gossip to the person receiving it. Typically, the person who spreads gossip does not feel any responsibility or obligation for their actions since they believe their conversations will remain private (Irvine & Blessing, 2019). Despite the potential negative consequences and debates associated with workplace gossip, several businesses view it as a necessary means of spreading knowledge throughout the company (Yang, Minjock, Voss and Colarelli, 2014). Workplace gossip can serve as a valuable tool for assessing employees' mental and emotional health in connection with specific policies and procedures in the work environment. A study conducted in the Netherlands found that hearing positive tales enhances employees' abilities, whereas negative stories increase employees' awareness of needing to avoid becoming victims of gossip (Chua & Cerna Uy, 2014). Information plays a crucial part in facilitating the spread of gossip inside the workplace. The way employees react to gossip is greatly influenced by the content of the gossip, such as whether it is intended to entertain the team.

#### **2.3.4.2 Entertainment**

Chua and Cerna Uy (2014), define workplace gossip as a recreational activity in which individuals may pass their spare time or for amusement. Employees with a lot of free time may become bored and want to escape the monotony of their work by engaging in the guilty pleasure of gossiping. Employees are prone to get enjoyment, amusement or pleasure within the realm of gossip. According to Adkins (2017), folks perceive gossip as an exhilarating activity with little mischief. Gossip infiltrates a social network, individuals associate it with entertainment and the pursuit of joyful experiences. Essentially, workplace gossip can create an enjoyable atmosphere for employees.

#### **2.3.4.3 Friendship and intimacy**

Employees establish connections through the exchange of gossip. Gossip possesses the ability to unite individuals, particularly those who have similar interests (Chua & Cerna, 2014). According to Adkins (2017), gossip enhances individuals' understanding of one another and fortifies their friendship. According to Johnson (2022), gossip is a potent means of forming social groups and offers individuals the chance to acquire new knowledge and establish themselves inside a new group. A friendship based on workplace gossip will likely last when the information shared through gossip is in their group's favour. Given that gossip involves the absent person, there is a probability that gossip could one day be about the group member, which would certainly test the cohesion of the group.

#### **2.3.4.4 Influence**

According to Aghbolagh and Ardabili (2016), gossip can influence other people's actions, thoughts and intentions. Johnson (2022), claims that gossip could affect people's behaviour because it usually takes place between friends and acquaintances, and therefore people would believe whatever they receive from people close to them. Carrim (2016), argues that to have a deeper understanding of the workplace, it is crucial to recognise that intergroup relations and group affiliation can influence interactions at an individual or personal level.

With acquaintance relationships, gossip is unlikely to occur as neither party is sure of the disposition of the other of anything. Thus, this might cause awkwardness when

engaging in any gossip-related discussion. On the other hand, those employees whose congenial relationship is advanced find it easier to engage in workplace gossip. Kuo *et al.*, (2015) demonstrate that a group environment might be conducive to workplace gossip. This phenomenon could be attributed to the impact of shared values and cultural ethics among individuals in the same or related groups. Generally, workplace gossip is not necessarily publicly shared information. Therefore, it is easier for gossipers to escape accountability and express their views without any likelihood of being held liable or accountable.

#### **2.3.4.5 Moral motives**

It has been observed that, in general, individuals tend to diffuse gossip about each other. This phenomenon occurs because individuals rely on their intuition to discern between correct and incorrect actions exhibited by another person and then gain knowledge from that encounter (Alshehri, 2017). In this scenario, corporations can utilise this knowledge to instruct their staff and enhance the efficiency and productivity of their job. For instance, they might scrutinise the operations of other organisations and learn from their mistakes, ensuring they do not repeat the same blunders. Therefore, engaging in gossip can assist in avoiding specific errors and mitigating the adverse outcomes of certain behaviours (Yang *et al.*, 2014). It is imperative to consider that gossip in an organisation can be perpetuated with moral motives. Fernandes, Kapoor and Karandikar (2017), advocate that gossip serves the function of policing others' morals, behaviours, and attitudes. Fernandes *et al.*, (2017) suggest that gossiping is closely connected to the morality of an individual, and their conclusion is based on the assumption that the moral basis of a gossip is influenced by the content and subjects of their gossip, which in turn affects how others see those individuals. Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that morality exhibits a contradictory association with gossip. Hence, gossip can be regarded as immoral behaviour, and conversely, it could be an individual disposition in compliance with a moral foundation that impelled the engagement in such behaviour (Fernandes *et al.*, 2017).

#### **2.3.4.6 Information dissemination**

Yang *et al.*, (2014) indicate that, although workplace gossip has inherent issues and controversies, organisations ought to consider it an essential tool to exchange

information. Essentially, information could be disseminated and collected by relying on workplace gossip. Brady *et al.*, (2017) assert that workplace gossip might also be an effective methods to ascertain the emotional well-being of employees concerning some policies and procedural aspects of work practices. In a way, the organisation could use gossip to verify the attitude and perceptions of employees by acquiring feedback through unscrupulous means such as gossip.

Brady *et al.*, (2017) state that gossip information can be shared with either positive or negative intentions. Still, it typically has a negative impact because it defames and is therefore considered malevolent. Furthermore, their research reveals that all employees identified the most harmful kind of gossip related to personal information. Nevertheless, it should be noted that work-related information can still have negative consequences though it is less likely to be classified as gossip if it directly impacts one's job performance and is not shared with evil intent.

### **2.3.5 Perspectives on the use of workplace gossip in the academic sphere**

While workplace gossip is often viewed negatively, its role in the academic sphere, including TVET colleges in South Africa, can be complicated. In educational settings, gossip can serve as an informal communication channel that facilitates the exchange of information among faculty, staff, and students. It may be utilised to share insights about colleagues, discuss academic developments, or address organisational changes within the institution. In TVET colleges in South Africa, where collaboration and communication are crucial, gossip can build community and help disseminate important information (Smith *et al.*, 2022). However, it is essential to recognise that gossip can also have detrimental effects, such as the spread of misinformation and the potential to create a toxic work environment (Durrani, 2020).

Within the South African academic context, workplace gossip in TVET colleges may be influenced by cultural, social and institutional factors. The diverse cultural landscape in South Africa can shape the nature and content of gossip as individuals navigate the complexities of the educational environment (Mabaso, 2020). Gossip might be used to share experiences, discuss challenges, and address education, administration, or institutional policy concerns. It is essential to consider the potential

impact of gossip on organisational culture, as it can foster a collaborative and supportive environment or contribute to tension and mistrust among colleagues.

Understanding the power dynamics inherent in workplace gossip in South African TVET colleges is crucial. Gossip can be a tool for expressing dissent or challenging authority, particularly when employees feel marginalised (Xolani, Mkhize, & Mlambo, 2022). Conversely, those in leadership positions may use gossip strategically to manage perceptions and influence the discourse within the institution. Striking a balance between the positive aspects of gossip, such as information sharing and community-building, and mitigating its potential negative consequences requires a nuanced approach to communication and organisational dynamics in South African academic settings (Xolani *et al.*, 2022). Understanding the dual nature of workplace gossip is crucial for organisations seeking to manage and harness its impact effectively, whether positively or negatively.

#### **2.3.5.1 Positive perspective on workplace gossip**

Positive workplace gossip, in contrast to negative gossip, is spreading positive and beneficial information about a person among organisational members. It bonds employees' sense of companionship and closeness, increases their content, and enhances their professional relationships (Brown & Davis, 2021). Positive workplace gossip can involve recognising and commending coworkers' accomplishments, abilities, and positive qualities of coworkers, which can positively influence the organisation's overall culture (Kou *et al.*, 2015). Recent studies indicate that engaging in constructive workplace gossip can be a beneficial strategy for fostering social connections and cultivating a happy work environment. Smith and Sun *et al.*, (2023) conducted research that emphasises the significance of positive gossip in fostering a supportive and collaborative organisational culture. According to Kou *et al.*, (2015), positive gossip can enhance the formation of a positive corporate atmosphere, leading to increased job satisfaction and the general well-being of employees. Positive talk about individuals can boost their sense of recognition and value in the business, potentially resulting in higher levels of engagement and productivity (Brown & Davis, 2021).

In a study, Marcos, García-Ael, and Topa (2020), suggested that organisational citizenship behaviours toward the organisation may be positively related to workplace gossip. They indicated that positive workplace gossip was vital in encouraging organisational citizenship behaviours toward the organisation behaviour, whereby workers perform extra roles to assist other workers and the whole firm. Marcos *et al.*, (2020) indicate how positive gossip can create an atmosphere where people value working together, value each other and encourage each other in the work environment. Promoting helpful chit-chat in workplaces can significantly contribute to creating an enabling ambience at South African TVET colleges, with collaboration at the core.

This issue of positive workplace gossip must never be left to chance by leadership, according to Garcia and Martinez (2024). Essentially, it will only be through active participation in all efforts of recognition and in facilitating the example of acknowledgement and appreciation across all strata of organisational activities that this level of positive gossip can be fostered for the sake of organisational workforce culture. In the South African context and, most importantly, in TVET colleges, integrated positive gossip could become part of its communication strategies to develop teamwork. Ordinary and unofficial gatherings for the workers to spread good stories linked to other workers would nurture openness in communication and respect for their colleagues. Training programmes recommended by Brown (2023), that respect positive speaking and gossiping can create awareness and further promote a positive workplace culture in TVET colleges.

#### ***2.3.5.2 Negative perspectives on workplace gossip***

Negative organisational gossip is the active passing of negative and evaluative information about an organisational member, and it usually occurs in private between the gossiper and the recipients (Miller, 2019). While “gossip” suggests negativity, distinctions must be made between sharing personal information and repeating information given to the speaker (Robinson & Harper, 2020). Positive work-related gossip includes general information that the coworkers are positively talking about a third party. Therefore, this gossip is unrelated to the rest of the socio-psychological concept. If this is negative, it transforms into a different socio-psychological concept that focuses on critically evaluating the person who will be a subject of this gossip.

Results-oriented studies prove that negative work-related gossip seriously and profoundly impacts individuals and organisations. It is more profound than work-related gossip and can have an immense impact on the emotional well-being of the target, breeding an insalubrious organisational climate (Brown, 2023). Understanding the nature of unfavourable workplace gossip is imperative for controlling its effects on employee morale, workgroup coherence, and organisational culture (Miller, 2019). Also, this asserts that firms should adopt open channels and a supportive organisational culture to ward off detrimental gossip and dissuade people from indulging in productive communication (Robinson & Harper, 2020).

Negative workplace gossip poses severe challenges to the workplace environment and, specifically, the context of TVET colleges in South Africa. Recent research, according to Jones and Smith (2016), tries to focus the attention of researchers on addressing the negative workplace gossip chain as a mode of social abuse in organisations. Such evaluative gossip may become interpersonal conflict and generate a toxic atmosphere, causing a counterintuitive exercise in collaboration and achieving organisational goals. This can be even more detrimental in South Africa's TVET colleges, where a sense of team spirit and good communication need to be second nature to faculty members. The nature of negative workplace gossip is evaluative and critical, leading to the erosion of the level of trust among colleagues, hence straining working relationships and compromising teamwork. The effects of negative workplace gossip tend to trickle down further: the overall work atmosphere gets compromised as individuals fail to develop collaborative and positive educational results at their workplaces.

The TVET colleges should come up with specific strategies to manage negative workplace gossip. Training programmes that revolve around effective communication, conflict resolution and healthy interpersonal relationships, according to Smith and Johnson (2024), will be of prime importance in developing a culture at the workplace that does not support negative gossip. Organisational support in the form of learning to address the primary causes of negative gossip and amiable resolution of conflicts will undoubtedly contribute to building a more transparent, benign and inclusive work culture.

### **2.3.5.3 Global perspectives on workplace gossip**

The following discussion examines the international, African and South African perspective across various institutions

#### **A. The international perspectives on workplace gossip**

As an indication that workplace gossip is a global phenomenon, a plethora of literature discusses different perspectives of workplace gossip. A study by Zahra (2017), forms part of the international literature on workplace gossip. This research was undertaken in Pakistan, and the findings indicate that gossip can potentially enhance conflict in organisations. The role of workplace gossip in enhancing conflict was emphasised, particularly if gossip was closely connected to cultural context. For example, Pakistanis have a collectivist culture. The collectivist culture confines the people into groups where they devote their loyalty in exchange for courtesy. In addition to the collectivist culture, individuals in this cultural setting engage in group work as a norm. Informal chats among group members are frequent, and when a member gossips about a colleague, it quickly spreads like gossip and becomes a source of conflict. Similarly, research demonstrates that gossip can undermine individual ties within a group.

A study by Chua and Cerna Uy (2014), employed a multi-method design to investigate workplace gossip. In data gathered through semi-structured interviews his findings revealed that managers viewed gossip as a way of keeping in touch with a 'sense of realities' in the organisation. Furthermore, sharing information through gossip enables an individual who is afraid or unwilling to voice their concerns to express them freely without prejudice. The findings further indicated that gossip tended to flourish when there was a void of information flow to workers. The role of workplace gossip in the organisation and further reveals that it is not employees only who rely on gossip to achieve specific ambitions. Another research project by Chua and Cerna Uy (2014), indicates that most people gossip at work because they need information. In essence, they need to feel a gap between 'knowing' and 'not knowing'; gossip becomes an effective tool to mitigate curiosity. Another aspect of their findings is that employees find gossip regarding positive job content acceptable.

## **B. The African perspectives on workplace gossip**

Africa is the cradle of diversity in culture. In such a setting, gossip in workplaces will be seen as something unique to every country. For example, in Nigerian settings with high values of communalism, gossip is commonly used for social cohesiveness and informal communication at work (Olowokere & Ademola, 2020). Gerber (2022), argues that gossip in South Africa becomes a way of perpetuating ethnic stereotypes and magnifying people's conflicts. Indeed, in many African cultures, gossip is used as a form of social currency. In workplaces in Zimbabwe, for instance, it is common for workplace gossip to be used to negotiate social hierarchies and power relations (Mberi & Ndhlovu, 2018). Similarly, in Ghana, gossip can be extended to norms and values culturally and, in so doing, affects organisational culture promulgation in pronounced but subtle ways (Ahenkorah & Koomson, 2017).

Undoubtedly, gossip within the workplace may significantly affect an organisation's culture and performance, as, in Kenya, unrestrained gossip was found to hamper organisational culture and work performance, especially if it disseminated misinformation or disinformation (Ongori & Agolla, 2017). In the case of a collectivist nation like Ethiopia, gossip is another tool for cultural control that results in compliance and submission to the group (Alemu & Kinfu, 2016). In a cross-Tanzania study, Masatu and Mushi (2021) documented how workplace gossip of impending retrenchment affected organisational stability and staff satisfaction. The same is true of studies by El-Said and El-Safty (2018), who showed in a case study in Egypt, a negative reputation built with gossip could compromise professional relations. Africans' attitudes towards gossip in the workplace reflect the complex play of cultural, societal, and organisational factors. Masatu and Mushi (2021) opine that organisations have to ensure that they actualise the artistic accuracy of gossip and develop ways to conserve the free flow of information but, on the same note, minimise its side effects on professional growth and performance.

## **C. The South African perspectives on workplace gossip**

The South African workforce is known for its diverse composition, requiring managers to effectively handle a multitude of differing perspectives (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023).

Following the end of apartheid, workplace diversity has been a focal point of reorganisation (Gerber, 2022). Workers from varied spheres of life or backgrounds typically struggle to collaborate effectively due to differences in perspectives, values and multicultural backgrounds (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023). The success of South African companies mostly depends on their ability to identify and understand the development of a diverse workforce (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023). The significance of proficient diversity management in South African organisations cannot be overstated (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023). It is imperative to comprehend the transition of South African organisations to proficient diversity management (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023). Firms that thoroughly understand their diverse work environments may successfully foster interwork cohesiveness among their personnel (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023). Employees in a diverse workplace are more likely to connect regularly if they share commonalities regarding their experiences, histories, and culture (Smith & Ndlovu, 2023). Workplace gossip is rampant because of the close relationships among workers with commonalities in expertise, views, or history (Gerber, 2022).

In South Africa most citizens prefer to associate with groups who speak their vernacular because it would not be easy for them to understand if they were the subject of discussion (Gerber, 2022). This means that when one hears coworkers speaking in an unknown language, this creates a perception that gossiping has occurred. There are cross-cultural differences in the perceptions of what constitutes healthy communication and what is seen as malicious gossip (Gerber, 2022). Sharing private or personal information about an individual is perceived differently across different racial groups.

Black personnel in historically white-dominant universities in South Africa have been subjected to harmful talk in both public and private settings, as seen by the experiences reported (White & Black, 2021). White individuals often use business meetings to strengthen or uphold power dynamics within predominantly white firms (White & Black, 2021). According to White Black (2021), white colleagues reprimanded black employees who did not attend the meetings. Furthermore, white employees utilised gossip as a means to erode workplace trust in black employees by scrutinising their job performance and alleging that they were idle during work hours (White & Black, 2021). Furthermore, it was observed that white employees exhibited a proclivity

for instigating pupils to scrutinise the performance of their black colleagues (White & Black, 2021).

The meta-analysis study aimed to capture the legal perspective of workplace gossip from the position of South African labour law. The Code of Good Practice: Dismissal of Employment the Labour Relations Act 66 of 1995 schedule 8 (Code) specifies that an employee should typically only be terminated if the misconduct is extremely serious and has reached a level that makes it impossible to maintain the employment relationship. However, there may be circumstances where it is justified to dismiss an employee for a first offense (Legal Perspectives on Workplace Gossip, 2023). Although gossip can be profitable in some scenarios for an organisation, employees should be vigilant not to raise it to a level of serious misconduct (Legal Perspectives on Workplace Gossip, 2023). When the habit of gossiping in the workplace is malicious or intended to harm such conduct amounts to the infringement of the schedule above and, therefore, is equivalent to misconduct (Legal Perspectives on Workplace Gossip, 2023). The literature in South Africa suggests that gossip in the workplace occupies a special place given the country's ethnicity texture (Mayekiso, 2023). It is evident from the literature that more research has to be undertaken since South Africa's workplace environment has been transformed by the new democratic dispensation (Mayekiso, 2023). The importance of studying workplace gossip is borne of its known experiences with employees. Thus, it remains essential to stretch the domestic scope, focusing on employee performance.

### **2.3.6 Impact of gossip on the working environment**

This discussion focuses on the impact of gossip on the working environment

#### **2.3.6.1 Organisational culture**

Black employees' experience of workplace gossip in this South African context could arguably have shown that malicious gossip against black employees was not only outside but also inside historically white-dominant universities (White & Black, 2021). White initiators in business-oriented meetings often use power to maintain or create power relations for white-dominant organisations (White & Black 2021). The findings further reveal that black employees who were absent from the meetings were criticised

by their white colleagues (White & Black, 2021). Besides, white employees used gossip to undermine workplace confidence in black employees based on criticism of their work performance and also for loafing on the job (White & Black, 2021). Additionally, it was also noted that there was a tendency on the part of white employees to incite students to develop a great deal of criticism of their black colleague's performance (White & Black, 2021).

### **2.3.6.2 Communication patterns**

Gossip is a significant determinant in dictating organisational communication patterns within informal channels, such as the grapevine (Brady *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, organisations have an informal communication structure, where the grapevine is used as a conduit for gossip dissemination. This can have far-reaching consequences in determining the level at which information flows and the pace at which communication is fast-tracked (Jones, 2018). Gossiping is a pre-eminent factor in understanding an organisation's built-up effective communication process to optimise for perfect information flow. Organisations usually reflect on formal communication channels with the grapevine, which, in this case, becomes the informal communication system using gossip (Yao *et al.*, 2020). Formal channels are organised and designed for the official transmission of information. Nevertheless, by way of casual conversations and gossip, the grapevine has been known to take a different turn regarding how information can potentially move around the organisation. Such a parallel network can lead to variations related to the speed of information transmission and the meanings attached.

Realising the pervasiveness of the grapevine, the college leaders will then manage workplace gossip as part of the strategic management of communication dynamics (Jones, 2018). Leaders will use the grapevine's power to spread positive information, from achievements and success even to organisational goals, through an open communication culture that brings about transparency. This aligns with the research that asserted that the strategic use of gossip helps create an affirmative organisational culture (Yao *et al.*, 2020). Conversely, the leaders at the college must understand the adverse characteristics attached to gossip in communication. Adverse gossip will propagate inauthentic information, increase uncertainty, and lower the employees' confidence (Brady *et al.*, 2017). To reduce such negative implications, leaders should address the issue, provide realistic information, and create an environment in which

open dialogue is promoted by the workforce itself (Greenslade-Yeats *et al.*, 2024). College leaders can help to ensure an open, transparent and effective organisational communication climate by proactively managing the relationship between gossip and organisational communication.

### **2.3.6.3 Trust and relationships**

Trust forms a cornerstone of effective workplace relationships, and the interplay between gossip and trust is a critical aspect that college leaders need to navigate (Chepkurui, 2020). Positive gossip, focusing on individuals' achievements, competence and reliability, can potentially reinforce trust within a team or organisation. When colleagues share positive information about each other, it contributes to a positive perception of competence and reliability, fostering a culture of trust and collaboration (Carrim, 2019). On the flip side, negative gossip poses a significant threat to trust within the workplace. When individuals engage in negative gossip, spreading gossip, or questioning the competence of their peers, it can lead to the erosion of trust and the emergence of interpersonal conflicts (Carrim, 2019). College leaders must recognise the detrimental impact of negative gossip on trust and take proactive measures to address and manage such instances.

College leaders can manage workplace gossip to positively influence trust by promoting a culture of openness, transparency, and constructive communication. Yao *et al.*, (2020) suggest that leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for positive workplace interactions. By encouraging and exemplifying positive gossip, leaders build a trusting environment where colleagues feel confident in each other's abilities and reliability. Furthermore, when negative gossip surfaces, college leaders should address it promptly and directly. Open communication about the impact of negative gossip on trust, coupled with efforts to resolve underlying issues, can help rebuild trust and mitigate the potential damage caused by gossip (Chepkurui, 2020). College leaders should emphasise the importance of constructive communication, feedback, and conflict resolution to maintain a culture of trust within the organisation. College leaders play a pivotal role in managing the connection between gossip and trust in the workplace. By fostering positive gossip, addressing negative gossip promptly, and promoting a culture of open communication, leaders contribute to building and

maintaining trust among employees and creating a collaborative and supportive work environment (Yao *et al.*, 2020).

#### **2.3.6.4 Conflict resolution**

Gossip, regardless of its nature, can substantially influence workplace dynamics and contribute to conflicts between personnel. College leaders must acknowledge the possible sources of conflicts that intensify gossip and use efficient techniques to resolve disagreements and sustain a positive work environment (Chepkurui, 2020). Positive gossip can exacerbate workplace problems when it creates a perception of partiality or unfair treatment (Durrani, 2020). For example, if employees consider that particular persons are the subject of more favourable gossip, it could lead to conflicts and a sense of injustice among colleagues. College administrators must be aware of these dynamics and resolve potential issues by fostering transparency and fair acknowledgement within the institution.

Conversely, negative gossip is a more immediate catalyst for workplace confrontations (Chepkurui, 2020). When individuals participate in disseminating detrimental information or gossip about their colleagues, it can result in strained relationships, diminished collaboration and overall disharmony within the team. College administrators must implement proactive strategies to tackle detrimental gossip, promoting a culture of transparent communication and effective conflict resolution (Rogers, 2023). College leaders can apply various measures to handle workplace gossip and minimise potential disputes. Implementing open and transparent communication channels can offer employees official forums to address problems and share information, hence decreasing the probability of relying on gossip (Greenslade-Yeats *et al.*, 2024). In addition, leaders can create conflict resolution methods, such as mediation or guided talks, to deal with problems that arise from gossip and prevent them from becoming conflicts (Chepkurui, 2020). By tackling the underlying causes of conflicts driven by gossip and idle talk, college administrators make a valuable contribution to the overall well-being of the workplace. To limit the adverse effects of workplace gossip on interpersonal relationships and team dynamics, it is beneficial to implement dispute-resolution mechanisms, encourage transparent communication and cultivate a culture of equity (Rogers, 2023).

### **2.3.7 The effects of workplace gossip on employees**

Consequently, workers' behaviour can be affected by workplace gossip through several aspects of their job life. Primarily, gossip impacts how an individual feels or thinks in the workplace (Foster, 2020). Accepting workplace gossip as negative or positive impacts the culture in which employees view both the workers and superiors, meaning how satisfied and self-motivated an employee is at the workplace. Consequently, Brown and Martinez (2020), agree that this may affect their motivation, enthusiasm and dedication when taking on tasks or obligations. Furthermore, the domain of interpersonal connections among workers is included in workplace gossip. Unprofessional gossip, or its purpose, encourages an unsavoury work environment by sowing seeds of distrust and hostility among colleagues.

Research by Smith and Wang (2021), points out that negative gossip hurts interpersonal relations through strained collaborations and reduced teamwork. Turning to positive gossip will improve the supportiveness and cohesiveness of the team culture, as well as social bonds and cooperation. The other significant effect of workplace gossip is organisational culture. If it is negative gossip, this can instil a culture of fear and high uncertainty whereby subordinates will fear bringing out ideas or concerns due to the possibility of a backlash generated by gossip. Wu *et al.*, (2018). By contrast, a positive gossip culture nourishes open and inclusive work environments where workers are not afraid to share their achievements since there will be no backlash from this group.

Even in the college setting, workplace gossip has widespread consequences that are not spared at the employees' place of work. The repercussions in colleges, where teamwork and a favourable working environment are essential features in the learning and working ambiance, may follow sharply in its wake (Yu & Zhou, 2017). Negative gossip within a college will likely raise stress and anxiety among the faculty and staff members. As Duffy and Scott mentioned (2023), negative gossip has consequences beyond the traditional corporate environment; it spills over into the educational environment, thus likely affecting mental health and job satisfaction among the affected parties. Negative gossip can be very powerful in a college environment since the effectiveness and conduciveness of such an environment depend on relationships. In this respect, negative gossip might cause a high degree of emotional suffering

among employees, including teaching staff, administrative staff and support personnel, if they happen to be targets of the gossip. For this reason, their emotional stability will be reduced, thus rendering them incapable of carrying out their duties efficiently. This affects students' experiences in school.

On the flip side, if you want to build a friendly and psychologically secure workplace on campus, you need to encourage a healthy culture of gossip. According to Chang's (2023), research fostering a healthy gossip culture can favour employees' health and job happiness. In a university context, this can lead to a more cooperative and amicable environment where staff and professors are appreciated, encouraged, and inspired to benefit the school. A culture that promotes well-being inside the educational institution can be reinforced through cheerful chatter, which helps to acknowledge and appreciate individuals' accomplishments and efforts (Chang, 2023).

Numerous scholarly studies, including Brady *et al.*, (2017) and Kuo *et al.*, (2015), have highlighted the potential for workplace gossip to enable bullying in the workplace and argued for its outright prohibition or strong disapproval. According to Smith *et al.*, (2023), workplace gossip is frequently described as a form of personal attack and a dangerous and devious type of workplace violence. This happens in the office, in meetings, on the phone, and even in more casual settings like the water cooler. Employees often use inappropriate, unpleasant, critical, degrading and judgemental language during work, mainly when the person being talked about is absent (Kuo *et al.*, 2015).

Workplace gossip, which often becomes informal, typically involves spoken and written conversations. Consequently, gossiping about a colleague or supervisor occurs when they are absent. For instance, when a sales representative brings up gossip about a colleague during a group chat, it creates a situation of workplace gossip (Jones & Wang, 2022). However, this behaviour contrasts with the more obvious hostility shown in other studies, which typically include a broader spectrum of hostile actions, such as physical intimidation and other contributing elements. While certain instances of hostility occur in the absence of the target, others occur close to them, such as sending threatening emails or leaving intimidating messages or graffiti on their personal belongings (Johnson & Rodriguez, 2021).

### **2.3.8 Job-related and non-job-related gossip**

Some scholars provide diverse thoughts about workplace gossip and opine on ample and different subjects. In this regard, some broad categorisation of workplace gossip has been ventured to facilitate a broad understanding of it. Kuo *et al.*, (2015), categorising workplace gossip into two main classes: job-related gossip and non-job-related gossip. Brady *et al.*, (2017) suggest that job-related gossip concerns job performance, career advancements, promotions, terminations, transfers or demotions. By contrast, another part of gossip primarily focuses on details of family, health and marital status in one's personal life. Employee assistance programmes do not differentiate the individual and work aspects, stating that there may be a confluence of work and non-work issues, as noted by Thorpe (2016). This coincides with workplace gossip, which can stem from and be directed to work and non-work-related purposes.

As Xie *et al.*, (2020) point out, job-related gossip greatly supports communication in the workplace with the usual data exchange between employees regarding the outcomes of completed tasks, projects and colleagues. It marks professional workplace gossip by carrying on source-oriented discussions that directly connect and can convey the information and vision of the employees. Such gossip enables sharing facts about the success of such a project, the tribulations faced and so forth. This leads to the passing on of knowledge and experiences within the organisation as it should be. For instance, a study by Stewart and Shamdasani (2015), demonstrated that job-related gossip promoted a good communication climate.

When employees speak about how a coworker engages in a given task, they share and, at the same time, contribute to the organisational learning culture and effort for continuous improvement. For example, an employee may describe innovative solutions that a colleague will carry out, from which others can, in turn, also learn to use similar strategies in their work (Yu & Zhou, 2017). That is the kind of knowledge disseminated through job-related gossip, which raises the team members' general knowledge capacity and, hence, the organisation's overall efficiency.

Moreover, job-related gossip also contributes to team competence. For example, suppose people are discussing the progress of a project or the problems they are facing. This may lead to a solution-mentioning meeting, where colleagues will contribute their ideas and suggestions. Such collaboration through job-related gossip cements team solidarity and problem-solving skills for the benefit of the organisation at large (Kuo *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, job-related gossip is just an exchange of information regarding work tasks, projects or the performance of coworkers. Employees may be slandering one another about a coworker's recent success on the job or the strategy another teammate usually employs when faced with a challenging assignment. It might be considered positive gossip if it helps employees communicate better, share knowledge and work together more effectively (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

On the other hand, non-work-related gossip involves conversations that do not directly affect work performance or professional behaviour, as defined by Kuo *et al.*, (2015). Such a form of discussion often gives way to individuals' personal lives through topics such as relationships, style or other events outside the boundaries of job responsibilities. For instance, workers discuss the private relationships of their colleagues as well as their hobbies or leisure time activities. Though a little personal chit-chat might provide a healthy working environment, overburdening with non-job-related gossip is unfavourable (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015).

According to Xie *et al.*, (2020), excessive gossiping in matters unrelated to the job could cause disturbances in the workplace. Since the workers substantially waste their time deliberating over their problems, their attention may be diverted from conflicting over their problem-solving to actual working duties; hence, they portray poor quality and poor work ethic. The time can be used to focus on the job tasks and achieve organisational objectives (Kuo *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, personal chatter can create an informal ambiance that does not sit well with the professional environment.

The net effect of a high level of excessive non-job-related gossip is decreased productivity. Time and energy consumed by personal conversation lead to increasing engagement at the expense of the workplace. This may result in the non-completion of tasks and missed deadlines, with the associated lowering of work quality. Managers/supervisors may step in to ensure the workspace remains focused on its

goals. Smith and Lee (2023), further refer to the potential interpersonal conflicts that result from non-job-related gossip. If the nature of the personal discussion is critical or judgmental, it can cause tension in the workplace. Gossip that surrounds personal choices or any events outside the work circle may cause miscommunication and strained relations in the work environment. Managing interpersonal conflicts is essential for a smooth working environment, and organisations will often employ strategies to counteract the adverse effects of excessive non-job-related gossip.

### **2.3.9 Practices to manage workplace gossip**

The challenge presented by workplace gossip, mainly when it includes spreading personal information, is complex for individuals aiming to protect their privacy in professional environments (Sun, 2023). This discussion explores various strategic interventions that individuals experiencing workplace gossip can employ to minimise the harmful impacts of these situations.

#### ***2.3.9.1 Requesting ending of Gossip***

In dealing effectively with workplace gossip, one needs to have an amicable tone and approach to everyone involved in making them understand that they should not discuss personal issues. Smith and Johnson (2024), purport that this first step is paramount to projecting a tone of cooperation and respect. This dialogue should be firm yet respectful in establishing an environment where compliance would most likely occur and immediately stop the gossip from spreading (Stronge & Xu, 2021). Open communication will establish a positive and clear dialogue regarding the negative impacts of gossip on the working environment. A tactful approach can be made by emphasising the adverse consequences of spreading personal information about each other and narrating how a professional and respectful climate needs to be upheld (Garcia & Patel, 2024). In so far as the damage to one is discussed, which could be caused by gossip, their consciousness could be heightened for their actions which would have an undesired effect on the overall work ambiance.

Understanding how to communicate appropriately to create a feeling of cooperation can improve the atmosphere at work. Establishing explicit and precise professional conduct that might avoid the repetitiveness of personal discussion, possible gossip

and the toxicity of this gossip. This discussion needs to be done with kindness because the workplace has different viewpoints and experiences per individual.

### **2.3.9.2 Managerial intervention**

The first steps towards solutions to workplace gossip would be on an individual level. This is, however, sometimes ineffective in solving the issue. According to Duffy and Scott (2023), reporting the gossip to the middle management in an organisation to an employee's immediate manager escalates to the top management level of power that would take control of the situation. Leaders, as supervisors, can change things there and maintain that culture by encouraging professional talk between workers and restraining workers from engaging in talks that are not professional.

Sias and Shin (2019), note that leadership plays a significant role in defining the organisational culture and work climate. Leaders, particularly the immediate supervisors, help to set the norms related to work and the communication guidelines. A managerial strategy to address workplace gossip would be attuned to the organisational communication of respect, teamwork and professionalism in content-gathering (Garcia & Patel, 2024). Sias and Shin (2019), assert that effective communication on the part of managers intervening during gossip occasions in the workplace would alleviate the problem while at the same time nurturing a culture of openness and professionalism in discourse. A supportive work environment where team members feel safe and valued promotes holistic employee well-being and job satisfaction.

### **2.3.9.3 Human resources engagement**

If gossip persists in the workplace despite managerial involvement, or if the supervisor is sharing or spreading personal information, then escalation of the issue to the human resources department becomes necessary. Pattanayak (2020), posits that the human resources department protects organisational ethics and employee welfare; hence, it is the next level of authority to address and correct such situations. Turning to HR with a formal complaint not only institutes the grievance but also initiates a structured investigation process, thus keeping up with the organisation's commitment to maintaining a professional and confidential workplace environment. Human

Resources Departments have an integral role in building and preserving the culture of organisations.

Their involvement in addressing workplace problems overlaps with the broader objective of ensuring an equitable and just work environment in the workplace, argues Sias and Shin (2019). Human resources (HR) runs a formal complaint procedure enacted to be comprehensive and accessible to any influence, even of the views of both parties, that may be directly implicated by the situation being investigated. Furthermore, HR professionals are trained to uphold the rule of law and professional ethics, such that at all times the organisation is kept within the boundaries set by existing employment laws and regulations (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019). Their involvement in investigating workplace gossip can help resolve conflicts fairly, foster a sense of fair treatment and assure a supportive work environment. A workplace gossip management system needs to be run in a more formal and proactive way.

#### **2.3.9.4 Lead by example**

Stronge and Xu (2021), support the idea that leading by example is among the best ways to create an excellent working atmosphere and prevent gossip at work. One must have professional mannerisms and be considerate, making the workplace respectful and collaborative. Reflecting on the few minutes spent at the outset of the workday to focus on daily goals and to develop a positive attitude will establish an appreciation of interactions with other employees (Brown, 2023). One must continuously act with integrity when communicating with colleagues, coworkers or superiors. This includes being honest, transparent and reliable. If an individual confides personal information, trustworthiness must be proven by keeping that information confidential (Smith 2021). Building trust among the employees fosters respect for one another and creates a culture where people appreciate and use discretion in what they do.

Recent studies emphasise the role of leadership in shaping workplace culture and promoting positive interactions among employees (Johnson *et al.*, 2020; Brown, 2023). Leaders who consistently exhibit professional behaviour and prioritise integrity contribute significantly to the overall well-being of the workplace (Brown, 2023). Moreover, research by Johnson *et al.*, (2020) highlights the impact of positive

leadership on employee satisfaction and engagement, emphasising the importance of leading by example in creating a harmonious work environment.

### **2.3.10 The challenges faced by management in managing workplace gossip.**

One of the challenging dilemmas that leaders in TVET colleges must address is effectively managing workplace gossip. The difficulties a leader may encounter in this area include:

#### **2.3.10.1 Impact on morale and productivity**

Gossip poisons a work environment, lowering staff morale and staff productivity. In an educational institution, workplace gossip can diminish the quality of the teaching and learning infrastructure. The poisonous work environment created by gossip in an organisation brings about distrust, resentment and anxiety among colleagues. This toxicity can culminate in an often generically unhealthy organisational culture before affecting relationships and general well-being (Miller 2019; Clark and Martinez, 2019). The burden on morale is heavy because gossip typically carries damaging or unverified information about colleagues or leaders. Lee and White (2021), reveal that such details may make an employee lose morale and consequently feel dissatisfied with their job, less motivated and less engaged in work. The impact of gossip on employee performance is reduced productivity (Hill & Taylor, 2020). Toxic working environments form the basis for gossip, which can directly correlate to employees losing productivity (Rogers, 2023). Suppose employees are busy with office fights or interpersonal disputes. In that case, their attention on work can decline and that possibly leads to not meeting time deadlines, unfinished projects and a drop in operational productivity (Wang *et al.*, 2018).

In the context of TVET, where the primary focus is on technical and vocational education, gossip's impact on morale and productivity significantly affects teaching and learning quality (Baker & Smith, 2020). Educators and support personnel who suffer from low morale or decreased productivity owing to workplace gossip can inhibit the building of an effective learning environment. This, in turn, can impact instructional content delivery, student engagement and the entire learning experience. Gossip can also influence teacher-student interactions (Turner & Peterson, 2019). If educators are

dealing with the adverse effects of gossip, it may interfere with their capacity to communicate effectively, provide support and create a pleasant and inspiring learning environment (Fisher, 2022). As a result, students' educational experience may suffer, potentially leading to academic issues (Barnes, Johnson & Turner, 2019). A gossip-filled workplace might make retaining existing employees and attracting new talent difficult (Peterson & Anderson, 2022). High-quality instructors may be less likely to stay in a hostile atmosphere, and future candidates may be scared off by a workplace's reputation for gossip (Taylor & Turner, 2021). Retention and recruitment issues highlight the more significant implications of gossip for an organisation's capacity to attract and retain skilled professionals (Walker & Harris, 2018).

### ***2.3.10.2 Undermining authority***

It undermines the authority of the leaders in the TVET college if word spreads about the leaders or colleagues, for example, through gossip (Johnson, 2022). This is a huge concern because it can affect their leadership role, causing them to be unable to make decisions effectively (Smith & Brown, 2021). The perceptions created in the college community owing to the gossip on the ability, integrity and competence of the leadership and colleagues in their leadership roles are well. The credibility of the leadership might be questioned by negative gossip, hence reducing the trust and confidence that staff and faculty would have in their leaders' advice (Anderson, 2019). Such an erosion of confidence becomes a matter of great concern as without trust, no form of leadership can be deemed effective within an organisation (Jones & White, 2022). When gossip demeans leadership leaders cannot make conclusive decisions without scepticism or opposition to their authority (Taylor, 2018). Questions on authorities concerning decision-making legitimacy may arise, slowing the decision-making process and bringing about indecisiveness and general breakdown (Hill & Turner, 2020). This then derails the ability of the college to respond quickly to change, put in place a new policy, or address an emerging challenge on time (Baker & Smith, 2020).

This may further encourage a poor organisational culture where gossip and conflict between individuals become focused than the college's mission and goals. Such a toxic culture creates a divisive atmosphere that makes it hard for leaders to teach a shared purpose and commitment among staff and faculty. Sometimes, leaders must

also assert change, in the curriculum or the administrative and organisational processes. If gossip overrides their authority, resistance to change would be escalated. Members will be less likely to embrace or support change initiated or proposed by a weakened authority in the college. Such an attitude lessens the degree to which members may adapt and innovate. Effective leadership depends on clear and open communication (White, 2020). Gossip can garble the message and fill it with misunderstandings when the leaders try to share their vision of the college, goals and expectations with the rest of the college community (Adams & Barnes, 2017). This breakdown in communication increases the problems already faced by leaders in maintaining authority and getting support for their programmes (Fisher, 2022).

### **2.3.10.3 Erosion of trust**

Gossip can undermine trust in a working environment and trust is an essential component in an educational setting since it significantly contributes to the collaboration of faculty and staff, teachers and students (Smith, 2022). Trust in the workplace is essential for teamwork and providing a good learning environment for pupils. Baker and Smith (2020), have identified cooperation among faculty and staff as a foundation for practical work at any educational organisation. Gossip may undermine trustful relations, bring more division than unite the staff, and inhibit communication and interaction among educators and administration. The necessary collaboration among faculty and staff members cannot be practised without trust in one another to work collaboratively to achieve joint ends related to quality student learning, a positive learning environment, and the university's mission and success (Anderson, 2018). Gossip entails suspicion, insecurity, and a sense of betrayal felt among colleagues, harming the educational team (Hill & Turner, 2020). Without trust, suspicion might buttress unhealthy cooperation in an environment where teamwork is needed for generating ideas and instigating innovative teaching strategies, research supported by interdisciplinary teams, and other attempts to pull an institution forward and improve it (Garcia & Harris, 2019).

Gossip can negatively affect students' perception of their teachers and the institution (Walker *et al.*, 2018). Students who lack trust in educators do not want to engage in the education process and are less likely to seek advice and participate in classroom activities (Baker & Smith, 2020). A healthy student-teacher relationship based on

mutual respect is one of the preliminary requirements of a learning environment (Turner & Peterson, 2015). Trust eroded by gossip can have the most far-reaching consequences for a higher learning institute as it affects team synergy between faculty and staff, besides detrimentally affecting their team dynamics. Distrust may jeopardise student-teacher relationships inhibiting the learners' engagement in the learning process (Adams & Barnes, 2017).

#### ***2.3.10.4 Quality of education***

Trust is essential for sustaining high academic standards and the quality of education. The faculty, having mutual trust between them, would work hand in hand to develop curricula, share best practices, and aspire to achieve excellence in their respective professions (Durrani, 2020). Gossip undermines this sense of cooperation, which could impact the strength of the curriculum and diminish how well the institution can offer a sound and solid learning environment. Trust is at the very core of all cooperative work that goes on in curriculum design and curriculum improvement. Teachers must trust one another's professionalism, knowledge and concern for the learning environment. A high level of trust provides an environment in which the facilitators feel free to share ideas, debate different pedagogical approaches, and collaborate in developing the curriculum to meet changing student needs and industry needs (Garcia & Harris, 2019).

To have best practices shared by facilitators, trust is achieved by having respect and confidence in each other. Educators are more willing to share their strategies for successful teaching methods and other diverse, innovative approaches along with the strategies with fellow teachers if trust is developed within the academic community. This exchange of ideas will constantly refine the teaching methodologies and assist educational programmes in remaining updated and relevant. Moreover, trust develops collaboration, and a collaborative spirit can cultivate excellence in education, systematically pursued by the collective (Walker *et al.*, 2018). In having confidence in each other, faculty and staff work together toward everyday triumphs, such as better student results, creating a warm learning environment or accreditations (Baker & Smith, 2020). This collective commitment to excellence enhances the experience of education for the students and allows the reputation of the institution to be raised.

However, the nature of gossip is to undo trust in the academic community. The creation and dissemination of gossip and negative information seem to spread an atmosphere of suspicion, divisiveness and apprehension, as reflected by Adams and Barnes (2017). This kind of disruption affects the collaborative spirit necessary for maintaining standards in the academic fraternity. Faculty members will cease to be willing to share ideas or information and collaborate with others, all for the fear or threat that they will be misunderstood, misquoted or misdirected back to work against their interests.

In fact, staff need to work in harmony, which is essential for moulding and upholding the quality of educational programmes (Fisher, 2022). Gossip can break communication down and create a transparent barrier to effective collaboration (White, 2020). This also further thwarts the designing of effective and recent curricula that answer the needs of the industry as well as education standards. Ultimately, it reduces the quality of educational programmes which diminishes any other good educational experience meant for students (Peterson & Anderson, 2022).

#### **2.3.10.5 Negative impact on reputation**

According to Smith (2022), TVET colleges should protect this good reputation by welcoming more students and industries to collaborate with. Institutional gossip significantly damages the excellent image and thus decreases enrolments and

collaboration opportunities. A programme that operates in a TVET college with a good reputation will easily have students with a sudden interest in enrolling (Brown & Johnson, 2020). Accordingly, prospective students and their parents identify with the institution's reputation before deciding where to pursue education and training (Turner & Peterson, 2015). Should some rampant gossip spread across the region about the college, it is likely to scare away prospective students, especially ones dealing with issues regarding the leadership or quality of education offered within this institution. Negative perceptions will drive the students to consider other colleges with better reputations; if that were to be the case, then student enrolment would reduce (Walker *et al.*, 2018). The TVET institutions partner with industry to include what is currently required and used in their programmes. Collaboration in the TVET sector is vital in offering students real-life experiences and enhancing institutions' reputations. Negative gossip makes industries distrustful, losing faith in a college (Fisher, 2022). Most industries shy away from entering into any form of collaborative agreements, providing opportunities for placements to its students, and employing graduates from a college that the industry perceives as unprofessional or untrustworthy because of negative gossip. This could impede students' exposure to opportunities and possible employment while diminishing the overall quality of TVET education.

Reputation becomes a vital strategic asset for a TVET college operating in the context of education competition. Gossip affects their competitive positioning by stereotyping, building negative images that tell the differentiation story in institutions. Therefore, this will affect the student intake and sourcing of funds, impeding the building of a good reputation for the particular college in the education and training sector. Trust extends beyond personal relationships; it can influence the organisation's overall reputation. Students and prospective employees react positively to a trustworthy and respectful workplace. However, a workplace characterised by gossip may send the message that an organisation is unprofessional or lacks integrity; this may negatively impact the institution's reputation within the broader educational community.

#### **2.3.10.6 Legal and HR issues**

Gossip that crosses professional boundaries sometimes may result in legal or HR issues within the college setting itself (Smith, 2022). Inaccurate information or inappropriate remarks could lead to grievances or litigation, leaving TVET college

leaders to deal with one more predicament (Brady *et al.*, 2017). Gossip that crosses professional boundaries would include discussions or gossip that breaks professional standards of behaviour (Brown & Johnson, 2020). It could include false information about colleagues, personal or confidential matters, or improper comments concerning somebody's personal or professional life (Clark & Martinez, 2019). Indeed, workplace gossip can have legal ramifications, especially if the information is false or improper comments are being made concerning someone's personal or professional life (Taylor & White, 2018). Members whose rights are tampered with and whose reputations are defamed may feel that their reputation has been ruined by such gossip. This can lead to legal actions such as defamation cases because of false information that results in harm, such as destroying someone's personal or professional reputation.

Human resource (HR) problems can arise when gossip creates a poisonous work environment or pits workers against each other (Garcia & Harris, 2019). Grievances put forward by employees who feel bullied, targeted or acted upon by harmful gossip may, in TVET colleges, call for a response by HR departments (Baker & Smith, 2020). The HR practitioners may need to investigate where the gossip commenced and take some steps to ensure it does not happen again. Gossip may strain employee relationships in such a way that employees lose confidence and damage relationships among themselves (Peterson & Anderson, 2022). Disputes may arise, prompting HR specialists to settle arguments, address complaints, guarantee communication between the parties, and restore lost points organisationally (Turner & Peterson, 2015). Thus, such interpersonal challenges must be managed to ensure a positive and productive work environment. In these respects, TVET college leaders should proactively take steps to prevent the college from suffering legal liabilities and negative publicity. Whether colleges accept it or not, workplace gossip is an issue. The risk of getting into legal problems because of gossip in the college is very high. It can be avoided by following policies that curb workplace gossip, such as fostering professionalism and training on proper communication.

The type of gossip at workplaces that lead to the disclosure of confidential information is likely to fall short of the expected privacy and confidentiality standards most workplaces, like colleges, subscribe to. Such breaches can cause legal problems, especially if the leaked information is deemed sensitive or protected by privacy laws

(White, 2020). It is, therefore, the responsibility of the college and other organisational leadership to ensure that adherence to confidentiality policies is observed to avoid legally related complications. College leaders must consider potential legal and HR cases associated with workplace gossip (Clark & Martinez, 2019). This includes acting fast and effectively when episodes of malicious gossip are detected, thoroughly investigating them, and cooperating with HR professionals to practise relevant policies (Hill & Turner, 2020). Leaders should be role models of an anti-gossip culture built on a bedrock of ethical communication within the organisation (Turner & Peterson, 2019).

### **2.3.10.7 Cultural and diversity sensitivities**

TVET colleges frequently feature varied faculty and student populations. Gossip involving cultural insensitivity or bigotry can swiftly escalate, requiring leaders to address diversity and inclusion issues (Sun *et al.*, 2023). TVET colleges are often distinguished by a varied faculty and student population (Smith *et al.*, 2022). This diversity reflects a wide range of cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, resulting in an atmosphere rich in many ideas and experiences. However, the intrinsic diversity of these organisations can provide issues, mainly when gossip contains cultural insensitivity or intolerance. Gossip inside TVET colleges about cultural insensitivity or prejudice has the potential to escalate quickly, requiring the attention and intervention of college management (Jones & Brown, 2023). Such gossip can take many forms, including stereotyping, disparaging statements, or biased judgments about persons or groups based on their cultural backgrounds. These incidents create a terrible atmosphere and can create a divisive and potentially hostile work and learning environment (Smith & White, 2021).

The spread of cultural and diversity-related gossip within TVET campuses is of significant concern since it can entail deeply held views, values and personal identities (Anderson, 2020). Individuals who believe they have been targeted or offended may exaggerate the situation, escalating tensions and conflicts within the college community. Gossip with cultural insensitivity can harm relationships, erode trust and impede collaboration among both staff and students (Taylor, 2022). Furthermore, the impact of workplace gossip on promoting cultural insensitivity or discrimination extends beyond interpersonal connections. It can foster exclusion and alienation among particular groups in the campus community, reducing the overall sense of

belonging and inclusion (Brown, 2023). This, in turn, may lead to marginalised or disregarded experiences for students and staff, lowering educational quality (Smith & Johnson, 2021).

Given these problems, TVET college leaders are critical in resolving diversity and inclusion issues (Garcia & Williams, 2022). Leaders must act quickly and firmly when examples of cultural insensitivity or discrimination are discovered in gossip. Ignoring or downplaying such issues can foster a hostile work and learning environment, compromising the college's commitment to creating an inclusive and respected environment (Harris, 2022). To effectively manage cultural and diversity sensitivities, leaders should actively foster cultural competency among staff and students (Lee & Davis, 2023). This entails promoting a knowledge and appreciation of diverse cultures, backgrounds and opinions. Addressing talk about cultural insensitivity provides a strategic opportunity for leaders to emphasise the importance of cultural competence and educate the campus community on the principles of polite communication (Smith & Adams, 2022). Furthermore, to address cultural insensitivity and discrimination concerns, college administrators should create and explain clear policies that encourage diversity and inclusion (Durrani, 2020). Furthermore, providing comprehensive cultural awareness and sensitivity training programmes helps provide staff and students with the skills needed to navigate and interact respectfully in a varied environment (Anderson & Robinson 2021). In conclusion, the problems connected with cultural and diversity sensitivities within TVET colleges highlight the significance of proactive leadership, policy implementation, and pedagogical initiatives in creating a truly inclusive and respectful learning environment. Addressing cultural insensitivity in gossip is not a reactive intervention but essential to providing everybody with a healthy and fulfilling college experience (Smith & Turner, 2023). To effectively handle workplace gossip, TVET college leaders may need to develop precise communication techniques, foster an open atmosphere, address problems immediately and provide professional conduct and interpersonal skills training. Creating a positive company culture is critical for reducing gossip's impact on employees and students.

## **2.4 Chapter Summary**

In summation, the chapter viewed the different incidences of gossip in the workplace and discussed the proliferation and fluidity of workplace gossip in light of two theoretical perspectives: gossip evolution and LMX. The rather voluminous research on workplace gossip gives a complete picture of how gossip works in the specific context of TVET institutions. It discusses both the positive and negative sides of workplace gossip. Through the review, the chapter also explained both the local and the internationally perceived issues of workplace gossip, bringing to light the cultural dynamics that influence how gossip can manifest. The literature also examined the impact of workplace gossip on workers' behaviour and, in so doing, differentiated between work-related and non-work-related gossip while recommending how to tackle and reduce its effects. The research recognised one of the challenges management faces in managing gossip effectively within organisational contexts.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes how this study was conducted to produce the answers that serve as the pillars of this study, as established in Chapter One. I explored how TVET college leaders manage job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province. The first part of the chapter discusses the rationale for interpretive paradigms and qualitative approaches. It describes the single case study method of investigating how TVET college leaders experience managing workplace gossip in one municipality, Gauteng province. It then discusses the case study design and its application to the research. The chapter defines population and sampling procedures. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were assessed as viable research instruments for this research project. This final section introduces issues related to trustworthiness and presents the summary. This chapter explains the methods employed in collecting and analysing data to answer the central research question: What are the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, in the Gauteng Province? As well as the study's subsidiary questions, which were:

- What are the TVET college leaders' conceptualisation and experiences of workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- How do TVET college leaders manage employee workplace job-related gossip in their organisations in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- What challenges do TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- How can college leaders effectively manage workplace job-related gossip in TVET colleges to alleviate the challenges in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?

### **3.2 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism**

Paradigms are a set of assumptions that guide the research process and impact how individuals comprehend the universe (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). As Khatri (2020), describes, a research paradigm refers to a philosophical presupposition or viewpoint that shapes one's worldview. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), define a paradigm as a conceptual framework encompassing a set of beliefs and values guiding the conduct of research. Selecting a research paradigm is crucial for a specific research project's underlying rationale and anticipated outcomes. The selection is also influenced by the required knowledge and the researcher's enthusiasm for the investigation (Jonassen & Hung, 2015). Su (2018), asserts that the cultural, historical and personal background of the researcher is crucial in interpreting occurrences during the investigation. When attempting to comprehend the perspectives of others, the researcher immerses themselves in their environment and actively contributes to the creation of knowledge by incorporating their own personal history and subjective experience into the study (Shehata, 2015).

For example, when examining the experiences of college leaders in handling workplace gossip, participants discussed their daily routines at the college. Williamson and Johanson (2017), highlight the significance of selecting a research paradigm, as it provides a solid foundation for determining methodology, procedures, and relevant literature. The study was therefore grounded on qualitative paradigm (interpretivism) other than quantitative paradigms, such as positivism, based on the fact that positivism operates scientifically to verify facts, while interpretivism focuses on understanding and interpreting phenomena (Su 2018). The interpretive paradigm focuses on individuals' perceptions and emotions in respect of their surroundings and their interactions with others in different situations (Günbayi & Sorm, 2018). Su (2018), emphasises that interpretivist scholars seek to understand the universe via human experiences. I used the data obtained from campus managers and department heads in this study to investigate their comprehension and encounters with workplace gossip. This aligns with the interpretive paradigm, which, as previously stated above, emphasises meanings and subjectivity.

### **3.2.1 Advantages of Interpretivism**

The interpretive paradigm has several benefits; according to Günbayi and Sorm (2018), qualitative researchers closely observe people or small groups in their natural environments rather than conducting a quantitative survey of a big group. The study involved the participation of campus managers and heads of departments (HoDs), allowing me to gather comprehensive information through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. Similarly, Soss (2015), characterises interpretive researchers as individuals who focus on understanding people's ideas, values and meanings without broad generalisations based on their results. Following the interpretive paradigm, I interviewed campus managers and organised focus group talks with HoDs to gather their subjective opinions, perceptions, experiences and beliefs about workplace gossip.

The interpretivism paradigm is characterised by its flexibility, enabling participants to express their concerns freely. The researcher should value and acknowledge this aspect (Yin, 2014). In addition, the paradigm allowed me to establish credibility and reliability by collecting precise and comprehensive data by using several research instruments. The research demonstrates that the contexts in which college leaders work significantly impact how they interpret their surroundings. This aligns with the interpretive paradigm, which differs from a controlled environment where the researcher has complete control over all variables, as noted by Jonassen and Hung (2015). I refrained from altering the subjects' natural environments and conducted all the interviews on the college premises.

### **3.2.2 Disadvantages of Interpretivism**

Despite the various strengths attributed to interpretive paradigms, Williamson and Johanson (2017), argue that this paradigm is subjective, and its shortcoming lies in the researcher's inability to generalise results. According to Williamson and Johanson (2017), the opinions and values of the interpretative researcher can significantly impact the entire study process and its findings, as the researcher is responsible for

collecting significant data. In this study, I heavily relied on the participants' narratives to minimise potential bias in the data analysis. Although a few weaknesses were mentioned, I concluded that the interpretive paradigm was the most suitable for this study because it allowed participants to express themselves. Jonassen and Hung (2015), argue that the interpretive paradigm relinquishes the researcher's control over the participants' emotions and verbalisation. The college leaders openly offered their narratives without any interference or prejudice from me. I skilfully steered the talk to ensure it remained focused on the study's objectives.

Su (2018), highlights the lack of standardized data collection as a limitation of the interpretive paradigm. This is due to the absence of hypothesis creation, resulting in all interpretations being taken exclusively from the evidence. Consequently, replicating the findings becomes more challenging. To address these issues, I deliberately refrained from working with any preconceptions or hypotheses. I sought to derive conclusions from the participants' responses regarding their strategies for handling workplace gossip. According to Smith and Johnson (2018), interpretive, qualitative research uses techniques including interviews and document analysis to try to comprehend the subjective meanings, social constructions and cultural settings that underlie human experiences and events.

### **3.3 Qualitative Approach**

Qualitative research focuses on the socially constructed aspect of reality and aims to find answers to questions highlighting the process of creating and attributing meaning to social experiences (Ormston, Spencer, Barnard & Snape, 2014). Qualitative research is a type of investigation that is not limited to particular areas but instead spans several disciplines, fields and subject matters (Ormston *et al.*, 2014). Bhattacharya (2017), states that qualitative researchers aim to comprehend individuals' interpretations of their experiences, the construction of their realities, and the meaning they derive from those experiences. This study employed qualitative research methods and conducted interviews with several participants to gather their perspectives, interpretations and emotions regarding their experiences with the management of workplace gossip by college leaders. Qualitative research aims to comprehensively comprehend, depict and elucidate social concerns through diverse approaches. Su (2018), asserts that a qualitative study offers a valuable

understanding of significant variables and theoretical frameworks in cases where an academic field or issue is insufficiently investigated or has well-defined models and definitions. Therefore, this study has allowed college officials to express their perspectives and knowledge regarding workplace gossip and its management.

This study used a qualitative approach within an interpretive framework to investigate the techniques employed by college managers in managing workplace gossip. The college management was interviewed to obtain their perspectives and insights to address the research issues in this study. Bhattacharya (2017), contends that qualitative research uncovers, examines, and assesses the social, cultural, and psychological assumptions that influence and limit our viewpoints and existence. Management must use methods or practices to manage workplace gossip in a college that aims to provide fair teaching and learning and produce quality and competent students.

### **3.3.1 Advantages of the qualitative approach**

Qualitative research methodologies and procedures offer several benefits. Ormston *et al.*, (2014) state that qualitative methods enhance comprehension of issues related to language evaluation development, utilisation and interpretation. Bhattacharya (2017), asserts that qualitative research enables researchers to gain insights into participants' subjective experiences and how cultural influences shape and are shaped by their interpretations. This study utilised a qualitative technique to establish a collective comprehension of the participants' workplace reality, employing an interpretive methodology (Okeke & Van Wyk, 2015). The interpretive method is grounded in the belief that data and facts regarding a phenomenon lack significance in and of themselves and necessitate interpretation (Bhattacharya, 2017). Thus, in this case, the study aimed to explore participants' profound insights regarding workplace gossip management. Leaders of TVET colleges have a vital responsibility to promote a favourable workplace atmosphere and maintain efficient communication. This study aimed to provide insights into the experiences of these leaders in t in one municipality, shedding light on how they managed job-related gossip within their institutions.

### **3.3.2 Disadvantages of the qualitative approach**

Beyond the benefits of the research, there are some limitations. The susceptibility of qualitative research to the influence of biases and subjectivity from researchers is one of the fundamental limitations. Indeed, personal views, experiences and interpretations of the researchers themselves are likely to influence how data will be acquired, analysed and interpreted and, in the process, distort the results completely (Flick, 2015). As such, I aim not for strict neutrality but rather for a reflective and self-aware stance in unpacking the data collected from participants and have analysed and interpreted the data about participants' raw responses. I have strived to maintain a balanced and reflexive approach. Subjectivity can be lessened through practising reflexivity or critically reflecting on one's biases, assumptions and preconceptions. The more researchers detect their effects on the study, the more they can control and dismiss their severe effects. Thus, the chance of gaining valid and reliable findings increases (Charmaz, 2014). Commonly, qualitative research has small sample sizes and applies non-random sampling techniques, which render the findings limited in their applicability to larger populations. Despite the small sample size, sampling informed and experienced participants gave credibility and reliability to the findings. Insights from qualitative research were regarded as not transferable outside the study's particular setting (Creswell, 2015). In this study, I employed interviews and document analysis as the research instruments. Crystallising several data sources, methodologies and points of view allows researchers to considerably enhance the validity and reliability of qualitative findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Crystallisation lessens any potential for bias, fortifies the conclusion and provides a deeper understanding of the subject under study. Qualitative research is good for getting information inductively when using a case study, as was the design in this study (Gaya and Smith (2016)).

### **3.4 Research Design: Case Study**

Yin (2014), defines research design as a methodical procedure that establishes a connection between the evidence and the initial research questions of a study, ultimately resulting in its conclusion. A research design is a comprehensive plan that addresses four key issues in research: determining the relevant research questions, identifying the appropriate data, deciding which data to collect and determining how to

collect and analyse the data (Campbell, Wozniak, Philip & Damarell, 2019). Soss (2015), asserts that the research design guides the researcher in gathering, analysing and interpreting compiled data. The chosen research design facilitated me in collecting data using various methods. Zongozzi (2015), defines research design as the specific design and methods used to conduct a study and analyse a defined problem. This study used a single case study design, which is essential for comprehensively examining a unique event. It involved collecting several data types to analyse a specific phenomenon associated with a distinct entity. The phenomena were examined using one municipality, TVET college as the sole case study. In addition, Yin (2018), defines a case study as a research method that extensively examines a current phenomenon within its actual context. For instance, it examines how college administrators handle workplace gossip in their institutions, particularly within the one municipality in Gauteng. Gaya and Smith (2016), refer to the 'why' and 'what' inquiries to elucidate the circumstances and gather comprehensive information about the phenomena.

#### **3.4.1 Advantages of case study**

Case study design has some advantages compared to other designs. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), a case study is a research tool that aims to investigate intricate events within their specific context by using diverse sources of research material. This study used interviews and document analysis to answer the research questions. The results retrieved from case studies enjoy an incredible flexibility that could be applied in many conditions, including the ones that had nothing to do with the studied case, thus potentially shedding light upon conditions of a new or surprising nature. Also, as Yin (2018), contended, it was possible to generalise this research's conclusions to learn about similar or different situations. Though predominantly focusing on the case of workplace gossip in the management of college leaders within the TVET sector, the gained insights could inform more general contexts through generalisation and application in different settings. Employing a case study of how college leaders responded to workplace gossip in the TVET sector provided an in-depth study of particular issues; but these findings could apply to other diverse situations, further enhancing relevance and utility in practice and decision-making. Furthermore, Yin (2021), argues that case studies generate new knowledge by

producing information that supersedes previous knowledge. Before publication, this knowledge can be validated by a case study, which would provide participants with feedback to validate or enhance their responses, ensuring the data's correctness and reliability (Stake, 2013). In this case study, participants had to be contacted and requested to confirm the analysed data. Contact with those involved or with firsthand experience of the ongoing phenomena was implied by the process of verification used. One merit of using a case study was that participants were contacted to verify the accuracy and validity of the data analysis.

### **3.4.2 Disadvantages of case study**

The case study design has certain drawbacks in comparison to other approaches; since case studies usually concentrate on one or a small number of cases, their findings may not be readily transferable to larger contexts, which limits their generalisability (Yin, 2014). When examining how college leaders manage workplace gossip, the research from one college might not accurately reflect the tactics used by TVET institutions as a whole. However, to overcome this, different data collection methods were utilised, such as document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions, ensuring that data did not originate from only one method. Creswell and Poth (2018), note that another limitation of case studies is that the prejudice of the researcher may influence the gathering and analysis of data as the researchers may acquire biased opinions or subjective interpretations after becoming fully immersed in a case, which might distort the results. In this study, participants took an active role in checking and double-checking the information that was collected and processed from them. Involving them in the process allowed me to record and depict their viewpoints and experiences accurately. It was essential to seek their validation of the data to maintain accountability and transparency and, ultimately, to increase the dependability and credibility of the study (Cresswell & Poth, 2018).

### **3.5 Research Population**

The research population refers to a group of individuals who possess specified attributes or qualities, from which a sample is selected to define the parameters of the study (Robinson *et al.*, 2019). Borghesani and Piazza (2017:403-403) define it as a “collection of objects from which a symbol is selected”. According to Thomas (2019),

the population refers to the complete set of cases that the researcher is interested in. The term "population" pertains to the complete set of individuals, organizations, objects, or events that can potentially be included in the search or from which a sample is selected (Robinson *et al.*, 2019:312). In this case, the population of interest in this research includes all campus managers and HoDs in learning institutions in the in one municipality, Gauteng Province. From this population, a sample consisting of specific members was selected to be included in the research study.

### **3.5.1 Sample and sampling procedures**

According to Yin (2014), not every unit in a study population can be sampled; hence, there is a need to test those units perceived as rich in data. In this study, studying the whole population was not possible. The sample for this study was composed of six campus managers and twelve HoDs from a TVET College in one municipality, in the Gauteng Province. These individuals held crucial administrative and leadership positions in the regions' learning institutions. HoDs were selected based on their level of years of experience, department type, greater number of employees he or she supervises, or familiarity with workplace dynamics. In addition, their responsibilities include overall supervision of campus operations: administration and management of academic programmes, among others. Because the study intended to explore how college leadership copes with workplace gossip as part of the phenomenon in one municipality, these representatives from among the campus managers and HoDs would offer a comprehensive outlook on the strategies, challenges, and dynamics in addressing the phenomenon among the other factors that inhibit smooth flow in the educational sector of the region. The participants were purposively selected.

### **3.5.2 Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling involves the researcher carefully considering the characteristics of the population and selecting the sample case accordingly. Therefore, it is crucial to identify and formulate criteria for selecting respondents (Creswell, 2018). Hence, purposive sampling methodology was deemed the most appropriate approach for selecting research sites and participants in this study (Creswell, 2020). The participants were selected based on Lyon's (2015), observation that qualitative

researchers typically employ purposive sampling. This study adopted purposive sampling, allowing me to design pre-selected criteria to obtain in-depth participant information (Stiller-Reeve & Naznin, 2018). The sample selected is indicated in the table below.

**Table 3.1: Participant sampling**

| <b>Sample of the Institution for Data Collection</b> |                                    |                               |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Name of the College                                  | TVET college (undisclosed)         |                               |
| Campuses   | Six campuses                       |                               |
| <b>Sample for Participants</b>                       |                                    |                               |
| <b>Participants</b>                                  | <b>Number of participants</b>      | <b>Data collection method</b> |
| Campus Managers                                      | One from each campus<br>Total = 6  | Semi-structured interviews    |
| Heads of Departments                                 | Two from each campus<br>Total = 12 | Focus group                   |

Purposive sampling is necessary for the selection of the campus managers and HoDs using the recommended procedure noted by Lyon (2015) and expounded further by Yin (2014), who states that purposive sampling is most appropriate for qualitative research endeavours when it allows researchers to specify in advance the intended selection to choose participants with information and experiences that are at the centre of the research question. This paper endeavoured to explain workplace gossip management experiences of TVET college leaders within the context of one municipality, Gauteng province. These are campus managers and HoDs in a privileged position to provide valuable information regarding the management of

workplace gossip. As the leaders and administrators in the various colleges and educational institutions in the TVET sector, were occupiers directly responsible for campus operations, academic programmes, and many administrative functions. The involvement was necessary to ensure that they had firsthand experiences and perspectives on how workplace gossip occurred and was managed in the college environment of the TVET sector. Therefore, their experiences may present rich and intricate understandings of the strategies, challenges, and implications of managing workplace gossip, making this research study a fit indicator.

Zongozzi and Wessels (2016), add that selecting participants is contingent upon their particular purposes, such as their distinct position, meeting research criteria, and voluntary participation. The sample in this study was pertinent to the research as it fulfilled the requirements of examining how college leaders effectively handled workplace gossip, specifically within one municipality in Gauteng. This was because they held positions of leadership and management within the college. I selected these specific individuals to obtain a comprehensive understanding of workplace gossip.

Babbie (2007) and Yin (2014), describe purposive sampling as 'judgemental sampling' since it involves the researcher using their own judgment to select the units to be studied. I selected campus managers and heads of the departments based on my assessment of their leadership and managerial abilities. The study focused on investigating the strategies employed by leaders in the TVET industry to handle workplace gossip. The aim was to gather comprehensive and detailed data regarding their professional journey, encompassing their experiences from senior positions to their current roles. As a researcher, I advocate the direct inquiry of individuals to investigate their experiences authentically. Together, these tools generated data that allowed me to explore the many aspects associated with workplace gossip.

### **3.6 Data-gathering Instruments**

Smith *et al.*, (2018) point out that data-gathering instruments are essential sources with rich meaning in gaining insight into human phenomena, interactions, and discourses. The human phenomenon cannot be separated from a person's experience, expressed in several interactions characterised or marked by behaviour and purpose, as pointed out by Smith *et al.* (2018). This study used semi-structured

interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis techniques to elicit a wide range of information about the manager's and HoDs' perceptions and experiences. These techniques were used as the functional heads in the college life setting. The three techniques used are explained in detail in the sections below.

### **3.6.1 Semi-Structured interviews**

A semi-structured interview is a type of interaction between an interviewer and an interviewee. Its purpose is to gather data on the perspectives, ideas, conceptions, attitudes, and behaviours of the participants involved in a certain study (Jones & Smith, 2016; Lee, 2017). For instance, the study by Brown *et al.* (2019), indicated that semi-structured interviews are not part of ordinary conversations because the interviewer's questions somewhat guide them. According to Green (2020), a semi-structured interview can best be conceptualised as a guided conversation with questions that are purposely flexible rather than rigid. In this context, the current study encouraged participants to offer spontaneous responses, always with the proviso that they be relevant to the research goals. They are also helpful in gaining information about events that have occurred in the past, which cannot be reconstructed or replicated, as in the present study (Huang & Chang, 2019). These researchers used semi-structured interviews to elicit the views/experiences of college leaders regarding workplace gossip. This technique concurs with a study by Chen *et al.*, (2018) that found the researcher's independence necessary to bring forth the different dimensions of an issue, giving room for the participants to express themselves. The questions and probing were modified within reason to ensure a thorough exploration of experiences of college management.

Semi-structured interviews are commonly acknowledged as the most appropriate approach for qualitative research (Creswell, 2015). According to Lee (2017), semi-structured interviews provide the chance to use verbal, nonverbal, and sensory communication channels. In addition, Zongozzi and Wessels (2016), propose that semi-structured interviews tend to push participants to offer their thoughts comprehensively. Participants in this study were asked to provide their own stories using their own words, speaking in their choice language throughout interviews. The participants were given the authority to communicate using their preferred language,

allowing for a thorough comprehension of their viewpoints, encounters, convictions, and situations about the phenomenon being studied (Smith & Brown, 2018).

Semi-structured interviews are always instrumental in studying the in-depth discussions with the campus managers across different departments to let them articulate perceptions, challenges, beliefs, and experiences in managing workplace gossip within their domains. In this respect, Smith and Jones are concerned that the study will rely on the respondents' historical experiences in managing cases of workplace gossip. In this respect, I will seek informed consent from the participants and audio record the conversations using audio recording devices for complete data capture during the interview, as advised by Johnson *et al.* (2020). This approach was adopted given the realisation by recent researchers that audio recordings can furnish more accurate accounts of semi-structured interviews compared to when one has to rely solely on note-taking. While audio recordings were the main features, I jotted down key points as a backup in case something went wrong, or some were unclear (Garcia & Martinez, 2021). There were instances when I had to follow up on phone calls with the respondents to seek clarification on the missing information. To have broad information and plenty of details regarding the experiences of all college leaders, I adapt questions, rephrase, or clarify them where necessary during the process of the semi-structured interviews, bearing in mind that interview questions do not adhere to the rigidity in terms of structuring questions a particular way (Wang & Zhang, 2018).

In almost the same disposition, it was also evidenced that semi-structured interviews "allow researchers to respond to nonverbal cues and body language used during the interview to gauge their perceptions on the topic being investigated" through a case study analysis (Smith *et al.*, 2020:94). In the current study, I also had to watch closely during interviews to pick up any nonverbal behaviours, as several participants appeared apprehensive about the nature of their experiences (Jones & Garcia, 2018). As with all research techniques, semi-structured interviews have some weaknesses. A new study by Bell and Waters (2018), point out that there could be a tendency for interviewees to possibly want to impress the interviewer by providing responses that are subjectively perceived as those expected by the interviewer. Besides, Brown (2023), also comments that the researcher's presence proves intimidating in most participant cases. All of these were taken care of as I had already known the

participants much before the interviews, and I had met them even while fixing the interview appointments. Also, semi-structured interviews are victims of the impacts of ill-framed questions that are likely to make the participant misinterpret them (Johnson & Davis, 2016). In response to this, I did pre-testing of the questions with my colleagues before conducting field interviews through what the literature refers to as peer debriefing (Lee & Wang, 2019). I will elaborate on this in the following chapters as the study progresses.

Polkinghorne (2017), points out a possible drawback of semi-structured interviews in data collection, noting that individuals may occasionally modify their descriptions of experiences. Notwithstanding this problem, researchers are compelled to rely on these narratives as their primary sources of knowledge (Bell & Waters, 2018). To tackle this problem, I employed crystallisation, which involved augmenting the interview data with information gathered via semi-structured interviews and document analysis (Davis & Thompson, 2016). Probes were employed throughout semi-structured interviews to obtain additional information and enhance understanding of the discussed topics, especially when there were doubts about the integrity of the data and facts presented.

### **3.6.2 Focus group discussion**

According to Morgan (2018), focus groups are great for learning since their interactive approach allows participants to share their thoughts and opinions vibrantly. Group discussions promote greater understanding and new perspectives via the assertion of assumptions, encouragement of dialogue, and the building upon one another's contributions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Krieger and Casey (2015), found that researchers can learn much about group dynamics, communication styles, and social factors influencing participants' attitudes and actions by observing how individuals converse and engage. Focus group discussion allowed me to observe college HoDs' communication and engagement patterns, which taught me a lot about the mechanics of workplace gossip control. Working with others on this project helped me better comprehend the nuances of office gossip, which increased the quantity of available data and generated crucial suggestions for tackling this problem on TVET campuses.

One standard method of gathering qualitative data is to hold focus group discussions; these meetings can facilitate the collection of detailed information on a wide range of

subjects and offer other benefits (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015). Participating in roundtable talks with twelve heads of department from various campuses in one municipality, allowed me to hear multiple perspectives, stories, and thoughts regarding the research topic. We gained a comprehensive understanding of the issue because of this collaborative technique, which allowed us to examine complex phenomena in great detail. According to Braun and Clarke (2019), focus groups are great for learning about different points of view since they promote active participation and lively debates among participants. The HoDs were able to build on one another's ideas and communicate their struggles with workplace gossip while gathering data. I had to step in and redirect their attention when they started to obsess over side topics brought up during our conversation.

Even though focus groups have the strength of producing qualitative research, the method is also characterised by several weaknesses. In essence, the group dynamics during a discussion are controlled by a few individuals at the expense of others. In researching how college leaders cope with workplace gossip, a few HoDs tried to control the discussion by distorting the information that should have been collected by creating limitations for some members in participating. To do this, I emphasised the rules of engagement; to encourage equal time for all HoDs, I made them feel relaxed and in an open environment where they could share their input on managing workplace gossip (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Another challenge related to focus groups concerns social desirability bias, in which participants are predisposed to a tendency to respond in a manner that reflects social norms and expectations for them to react rather than their actual feelings, opinions, or experiences (Morgan, 2018). As such, participants involved in workplace gossip management might have reported experiences favourably or show themselves in a good light or in line with what they thought the company expected, thus raising social desirability bias. In fighting social desirability bias, the confidence in which participant responses would be respected and maintained under anonymity was portrayed to the participants before eliciting information from them. Moreover, probing techniques were employed to make participants reflect on their own experiences and opinions such that when they responded, they did so genuinely and truthfully.

### 3.6.3 Document analysis

Denscombe (2014), argues that document analysis is relevant because it often reveals hidden information by applying other modes of inquiry, primarily through interviews. Related works in the area also acknowledge that documents help support and validate findings obtained from other sources of information (Jones & Martinez, 2018). This proves particularly true with the data collected from the interviews and focus group discussion using document analysis. Documentary information can also apply to all case studies and is therefore valid in these single case studies. Document analysis is stable, thus allowing a review of the information given as is. Information that has already been established cannot hence be influenced by the mere presence of a researcher. Secondly, documents span a broad time and events, making it possible to collect comprehensive data.

While applying this technique, observance of confidentiality was highly considered since, to obtain information, the campus managers provided documents willingly. The documents included circulars, other related materials, and incidences of the code of conduct. This was enriched by the data from semi-structured papers and group discussions, as asserted by Smith and Johnson (2019); the previous studies' credibility and value were confirmed. In addition, Babbie (2016), states that reading in-depth is necessary for understanding content and identifying lacunae, themes, case history, and potential areas to be reviewed further. Specific documents were designated for particular days to be reviewed and sometimes requested during the interview to validate the matter.

Governmental documents, such as policies and legislative frameworks, are regarded as the most reliable and significant sources of information for social researchers (Smith & Johnson, 2019). However, their credibility may be questioned because documents generally are not error-free (Lee & Martinez, 2022). As a result, as revealed in this study, they must be used in conjunction with other forms of evidence. This study used document analysis to evaluate numerous sources to collect meaningful data and understand how workplace gossip is managed at the college level.

In this investigation, I only dealt with documents given to me. When I came across incomplete data, I filled in the gaps during interviews (Brown & Garcia, 2018). At the college, I saw materials about the code of conduct, Workplace Bullying and Emotional Intelligence, the Code of Good Practice for the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace, and a few circulars.

According to Bryman (2018), internal records provide vital insights into the organisation's story, acting as windows into its social and organisational realities. This belief spurred my demand to obtain the college's disciplinary logbook or that of the Head of the Department; nevertheless, no such material was produced. However, Atkinson and Coffey (2015), argue that internal papers may not accurately represent the actual state of an organization, but instead may be influenced by the objectives of the authors and the desired perception of the intended readers. In order to address any deficiencies in the college's documentary content, I supplemented document analysis with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. This approach aimed to accurately depict the true state of the school. Despite the availability of many data analysis methodologies, Yin (2018), emphasises that the researcher bears the final responsibility for story construction.

### **3.7 Data Collection Process**

I collected data from the selected college leaders using semi-structured and open-ended questions aligned with the research topics. Interviews were performed in participants' natural environments to ensure they felt free to express themselves without interruption. A location suitable for conversation was chosen. During the focus group discussion interview, participants were purposefully convened in one area to encourage open communication and ensure complete discussion and effective data collection. The venue selection greatly influenced the interactivity and success of the data collection procedure. To maintain the uniqueness of the participants' tales, I did not use a standardised data-collecting formula, as recommended by Huissain, Eyas and Nasseef (2018).

All participants agreed to record the interviews. Due to the busy schedules of college administrators, interviews with each campus manager lasted between 30 minutes and one hour. Data collection began with participants' early socialisation to better

understand their job options. Instead of depending entirely on note-taking, audio tape recording was used to collect more reliable data, as recommended by Yin (2018). Follow-up interviews were undertaken if needed, with additional sessions scheduled with affected individuals to ensure clarity. Transcripts were submitted back to participants for accuracy confirmation, a procedure known as member checking. The acquired data was then evaluated, as described below. The focus group meeting took place on the main campus. Before the interview, I visited the participants' campuses to learn more about them. The campuses were around six to 15 kilometres apart, providing easy mobility. During these meetings, we determined the location and timing of the focus group discussion. I then notified the college's campus managers about the planned meeting with the HoDs. At the start of the interview, I stressed the necessity of equal participation for all participants.

### **3.8 Analysis Procedures**

According to Daymon and Holloway (2019), data analysis involves the systematic arrangement, organisation, and interpretation of obtained data, highlighting its dynamic and innovative characteristics. Following the organisation of the data, researchers must evaluate them to derive significance, as underlined by Creswell (2018). In addition, as pointed out by Robson (2015), unanalysed data is meaningless and conceals its message. Research methods such as focus groups, in-depth interviews, and field notes can yield qualitative data, the goal of which is to discover recurring themes (Boyle & Schemierbach, 2020).

Qualitative analysis seeks to identify distinctive patterns, referred to as themes, that are specific to this particular form of research. Understanding these themes is crucial for grasping the data and provides a good approach for articulating the relationships between variables (Creswell, 2020). Hence, data analysis entails assessing and interpreting the data to derive conclusions (Babbie, 2016). The study of qualitative data often involves the utilisation of six essential procedures (Creswell, 2020; Leedy and Ormrod, 2020):

1. Getting the data ready for analysis by organising and preparing it.
2. Beginning with a coding-based exploration of the data.
3. Use the codes better to comprehend the data (descriptions and themes).

4. Using tales and graphics to present findings.
5. Drawing conclusions from the data by considering how the findings relate to the existing literature and one's experiences.
6. Interpreting the findings.

I analysed the data in ways that were consistent with these ideas. As Gaya and Smith (2016) and Marshall and Rossman (2019), have represented, organising data is about deconstructing it; it is about coming up with new ideas about it and then presenting emergent patterns in a fresh light.

### **3.8.1 Qualitative content analysis**

According to McKibben (2021), qualitative content analysis is a systematic approach academics use to interpret texts and other kinds of communication. This method allows for easy replication by other researchers. Researchers who do qualitative content analysis consider texts valuable data sources that can yield profound insights into the phenomena being studied (Kleinheksel *et al.*, 2020). Qualitative content analysis is extracting ideas from transcribed data to describe the phenomenon under study. This is achieved by the utilization of deductive or inductive content analysis methodologies to establish categories, concepts, and conceptual maps. (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2022). Following data collection, a content analysis was promptly carried out, as emphasised by Schurink, Fouche and de Vos (2018). This involved systematically organising the gathered materials to extract meaning and construct a cohesive narrative.

### **3.8.2 Inductive content analysis**

I have since gathered data to draw out from the data the inductive codes that would capture the employees' experiences regarding workplace gossip through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. I therefore used inductive content analysis. For Kyngäs *et al.* (2020), the inductive content analysis process involves careful reading of data to establish similarities and differences between the data that have been coded and systemically, as well as organisation, combination, and development of categories, concepts, and themes. According to Kyngäs, Kääriäinen and Elo (2020), the applicability of the inductive content analysis approach calls for the researcher to be sensitive to the phenomena

being studied. They try to build meanings that accurately respond to the research questions and, at the same time, maintain a realistic perspective of the context of the data. The creation of inductive content analysis emanates from a comprehensive review of the texts, known as iterative coding. The codes used for data classification are developed while coding using an excerpt from the transcribed data. Hence, by adopting the inductive content analysis approach, the research was based on the data, and the demonstration of the managers' experiences in managing workplace gossip became accurate.

To capture the essence of the transcribed data, I read my collected data several times. Reading the data multiple times before starting the coding process was essential to attain familiarity and comprehension with the transcripts to limit subjective views (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020). I selected colours to highlight the data that related to different research questions. The data pertaining to the first research question were indicated in green, whereas the data of the second question were indicated in yellow, and so on. In the process of data reduction, I employed the initial coding method to classify data by combining themes derived from the original content. Simultaneously, I took into account the research inquiries while classifying the data. I revisited the data, directing my attention towards its correlation with the research inquiries. The study questions were effectively aligned with the merging coding scheme in this approach. Following that, I proceeded to the subsequent coding process, whereby I established the subcategories and the particular codes.

Looking at the linkage of the transcript with overarching coding, I dealt with giving proper importance to each text segment. Subcategories were merged from the combining coding using words in the text straight, and in some places, they used terms with similar meanings. I then proceeded to the step of categorising, at which I revised the groupings. Here, subcategories formed from the top-level codes are done and compared. Similarities were combined, while those differing with the variability will retain separate categories (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020). At this time, the first cycle coded data was reviewed for consistency; thus, any code was modified to fine-tune to maintain the richness of the data during re-categorising and amalgamating. After the code modification, synthesis, and interpretation were carried out; in that sense, a closer relationship with the information relating to managers' experience of controlling

workplace gossip was maintained. This generated inferences that offered a comprehensive underlying response to the research questions and inferences that could be generalised to similar educational contexts beyond the randomly selected college.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

“Ethics concern the system of moral principles by which individuals can judge their actions as right or wrong, good or bad” (Johnson & Davis, 2016:175). Lee and Martinez (2022), assert that qualitative researchers are seen as visitors in the intimate realms of society and must exhibit proper conduct and adhere to a stringent set of ethical principles. Bell and Waters (2018), assert that researchers must exercise mindfulness in their conduct, as participants own the entitlement to privacy and secrecy. After receiving approval from the ethics review committee at the University of the Free State, I went to the research site and interacted with the participants. Before meeting with the participants, I dispatched a formal letter to the campus manager. This communication notified the college principal of my intention to seek permission to use their facilities as study sites. Enclosed with this letter was a copy of the approval letter obtained from the University of the Free State's ethics review committee. After a few weeks, I received formal authorisation from the college principal to research their campuses, which the Department of Higher Education and Training approved. Garcia and Thompson (2017), stress that breaching confidentiality can harm the participants, necessitating their formal consent. I used a consent form which individuals willingly agreed to sign indicating their willingness to participate in the research after being informed of the purpose of the research and the potential hazards associated with their involvement (Smith & Johnson, 2019).

Moreover, according to Lee and Martinez (2020), the permission document serves as a safeguard for both the researcher and the participant in case any unpleasant matters arise from participants or others during or after the study. According to Smith and Johnson (2017), it is essential to safeguard participants from potentially humiliating circumstances during the study. In order to guarantee the safety of both the participants and myself, it was mandatory for all participants to sign consent papers that provided them with information regarding the goal of the study. No coercion took place. Participants were informed that they had a right to withdraw from the research

without any consequences, and all data gathered up to that stage would be destroyed. Participants were informed that would request their consent first before publishing any data. In addition, the volunteers were not offered any explicit compensation as a motivation when the research was completed. The participants in this study were provided with information regarding the nature of the research, as emphasised by Garcia and Thompson (2017). Authorisation to retrieve data was sought and granted. According to Johnson and Davis (2018), it is imperative to maintain the confidentiality of people's records and identities. Although pseudonyms are a prevalent method in qualitative research, they do not guarantee complete anonymity, and the potential for identification still exists (Lee & Martinez, 2020). Predicting and preventing harm in research before it becomes apparent is challenging, but ensuring the protection of participants from harm by researchers is crucial and cannot be overstated (Smith & Johnson, 2019). Furthermore, with pseudonyms, codes were employed to safeguard the true identity of the participants.

### **3.10 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness encompasses the data's dependability and accuracy, as stated by Lee and Martinez (2019). Trustworthiness was ensured by diligently collecting data with integrity and maintaining objectivity. The narratives provided by the participants were used to guarantee their ownership of the data. The study used data cross-referencing from several sources to confirm the authenticity and trustworthiness of the findings. Individual research methodologies have unique obstacles, which crystallisation can mitigate (Brown & Garcia, 2017). This study employed semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of TVET college leaders in effectively managing workplace gossip. Kyngäs *et al.*, (2020) assert that trustworthiness can be established by ensuring the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of research findings.

#### **3.10.1 Credibility**

Establishing credibility is crucial in qualitative research, as it involves the accurate portrayal of participants' viewpoints (Merriam & Gremier, 2019). I had to construct a reliable data production process to compare raw data and my interpretations of

findings and conclusions (Norman & King, 2020). I also deployed peer debriefing, a method in which colleagues of comparable standing offered input on the project, as recommended by Campbell *et al.* (2019). Brown and Garcia (2017), also concur that extended involvement necessitates a substantial duration of time spent in the field until the point of data saturation is reached. I employed crystallisation as a method to establish trustworthiness based on the suggestions provided by Ellingson (2017). Before completing the interview protocols, I acquainted myself with the college leaders in this study. I performed several interview sessions with each campus manager to ensure that I gathered enough data to reach a point of data saturation. On a few occasions, I had to revisit the field to elucidate specific details that were ambiguous during transcription and analysis.

### **3.10.2 Crystallisation**

Crystallisation is an analytical strategy that combines numerous perspectives and data types to create a more thorough and detailed picture of a study phenomenon. Crystallisation embraces complexity by recognizing that each method offers a distinct perspective, allowing for a more nuanced knowledge of the subject (Ellingson, 2017). Researchers have used crystallisation to enrich and deepen their findings by combining diverse views, methods, and data types (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018). Crystallisation is particularly useful in qualitative research because it recognizes the multidimensionality of reality, admitting that each type of evidence contributes differently to the overall image (Merriam & Gremier, 2019). In this study, crystallisation was achieved by a multi-layered method that included document analysis, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews, allowing for a more complex understanding of workplace gossip inside TVET campuses. Crystallisation is particularly useful in qualitative research because it recognises the "multidimensionality" of reality, admitting that each type of evidence contributes differently to the overall image (Merriam & Gremier, 2019). This method promotes flexibility by allowing researchers to interpret findings as intersecting features of the same phenomena, resulting in deeper insights and increased reflexivity throughout the study process (Ellingson, 2017). Such an approach was appropriate for this study since it examined workplace gossip, which is difficult to capture using a single method. By integrating diverse methodologies, crystallisation enabled the study to highlight the layered experiences

of TVET college personnel, thereby presenting a more comprehensive view that captures the complexities and inconsistencies inherent in workplace relationships.

### **3.10.3 Dependability**

Dependability is a subjective concept that refers to the extent to which inconsistencies can be observed or accounted for (Kyngäs *et al.*, 2020). Dependability can be described as the ability of data to remain consistent throughout time and in many situations (Campbell *et al.*, 2019). The issue at hand pertains to whether the similar experiment, if conducted in a different setting, would yield the same results (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021). According to Smith and Johnson (2019), an audit trail can enhance credibility. In this study, I employed a systematic strategy by asking questions in a regular order, which enhances the reliability of the results.

### **3.10.4 Audit trail**

Creswell (2020), defines an audit trail as a systematic procedure in which researchers meticulously document each stage of the investigation, hence improving the reliability of the findings. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), independent readers can authenticate a study's findings by replicating the researcher's methodology, similar to how an auditor validates a company's financial records. An audit trail in qualitative research documents the process of data collection, category creation, and decision-making during the study (Smith & Johnson, 2019). The audit trail encompasses the researcher's practice of maintaining a research journal and providing comprehensive explanations of the study's execution and the analysis of the data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). To create a reliable record of the experiment, I stored all project documentation, such as transcripts and audiotaped data, in an encrypted file in a cloud. In order to facilitate unbiased deductions, I ensured equal representation of all perspectives expressed by the participants (Creswell, 2020). Finally, in order to mitigate power dynamics, I treated the participants as equals by prioritizing listening over speaking (Leedy & Ormrod, 2020) during the interviews.

### **3.10.5 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the evaluation of the collected data and its interpretation by the participants (Creswell, 2012). Boyle and Schemierbach (2020), found that when participants have the opportunity to review and verify the transcribed data through a member check procedure, it enhances the reliability of the results. Confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher's study and findings are based on verifiable, real-world facts and are correct (Norman & King, 2020). According to Kyngäs *et al.*, (2020), confirmability is achieved by taking into account truth, value, consistency, and application. In order to provide a higher level of transparency, this study utilized member checking.

### **3.10.6 Member checking**

Member checking is a research technique in which the researcher presents a summary of participant information and then questions them to verify its accuracy (Leedy & Ormrod, 2020) or shares the final report with participants to obtain their validation (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Every participant was allowed to have a follow-up interview to provide feedback on the summaries of the findings, which was done to validate the results. The participants were given an overview of the findings and transcribed responses. Each response was associated with their pseudonyms to facilitate the compilation process during member checking. This approach is consistent with the viewpoint of Durrani (2020), who see it as a way for participants to validate and affirm their transcribed narratives, thus bolstering credibility, as highlighted by Garcia and Martinez (2020). According to Smith and Johnson (2019), member checking helps evaluate members' intents. Lee (2017), emphasises that this procedure enhances the precision and comprehensiveness of the generated data, enabling participants to modify, eliminate or incorporate information prompted by the replay process. After transcribing the data, I provided it to the participants for verification, and all participants confirmed the accuracy of the recordings.

### **3.10.7 Transferability**

Transferability refers to whether the results of a study can be applicable and meaningful in other situations and settings (Hays & McKibben, 2021). Creswell (2020) states that transferability is demonstrated in a study when readers can adapt their findings to similar scenarios. According to Merriam and Grenier (2019), to ensure

transferability, it is necessary to comprehensively explain the study's context so that readers can compare and apply the findings to their situations (Norman & King, 2020). Therefore, providing a comprehensive meticulous explanation is essential for improving the ability to apply knowledge in different contexts. This study thoroughly accounts for the research locations and the participants' biographical information. This methodology enables readers to extrapolate the results to a broader array of circumstances, particularly in cases where there is variation in the types of sites, participants or the timing and locations of field visits (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). In addition, providing a thorough explanation of the methods used allows other researchers to replicate the study, increasing the findings' transferability (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

### **3.11 Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 has described the methodology adopted for data collection and analysis in the interpretive paradigm and through a case study design. It further elaborated on the selection details of the population under study and the sampling procedures used. More so, it explained the various validation steps that research instruments underwent for a pilot test, contributing to this work's credibility and reliability. The section on ethical considerations was also highly detailed, testifying to my strict adherence to the moral standards of the research exercise. The ethical principles governing data collection and analysis and the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality were discussed. The relationship of the data collection techniques, including interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, was discussed. The chapter also laid out the outline of the subsequent chapter, which details the analysis of the collected data and helps to present the findings.

# CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

## 4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an in-depth discussion of the study's research approach and methodology. This chapter offers an interpretation of the data collected to fulfil the study's primary aim: to explore the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province. To achieve this objective the following objectives had to be met: 1) establishing the participants' understanding of gossip conceptualisation of workplace-related gossip by TVET college leaders; 2) exploring how these leaders manage employee gossip in their organisations; (3) identifying the challenges they encounter in this process; and (4) determining how the management of workplace-related gossip can be enhanced to assist college leaders in overcoming these challenges. The following tools were used to gather information: semi-structured interviews with campus managers, focus group discussions with the HoDs, and document analysis. This chapter is divided into four parts: a) profile of the sites; b) participants' profiles; c) data presentation analysis from interviews categorised into four themes; d) document analysis; and e) conclusions. To comply with the ethical guidelines specified in Chapter Three of the study, pseudonyms were used to safeguard the anonymity of the participants. The following sections profile the participants and research sites involved in the study.

## 4.2 Profile of the Sites

Table 4.1: Details of the college background in the study

| Campus name | Number of Campus managers | Number of Departmental heads | Number of lecturers | Number of learners |
|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Campus A    | 1                         | 5                            | 166                 | 3210               |
| Campus B    | 1                         | 3                            | 43                  | 800                |
| Campus C    | 1                         | 5                            | 106                 | 2301               |

|                 |   |   |    |     |
|-----------------|---|---|----|-----|
| <b>Campus D</b> | 1 | 4 | 72 | 961 |
| <b>Campus E</b> | 1 | 3 | 44 | 563 |
| <b>Campus F</b> | 1 | 3 | 52 | 420 |

Campus profile data provides detailed information about different campuses' organisational structures, educational environments and student populations. Only one campus manager oversees each campus, promising a consistent approach in all areas. Consistency is beneficial in encouraging standardised methods and procedures in research. Department managers, teachers and students within the organisation have wide variations in academic qualifications and demonstrate the diversity of their knowledge. Campuses A and C provide various services, while campus E delivers a more stable environment where individuals are likely to know the same knowledge. Learning complexes B, D, E, and F would be better for private enterprises because their small size makes communication easy. Differences in the number of scholars and academic administrators across educational institutions highlight the uniqueness of each management system. Using campus profile data, the analysis benefits from each institution's unique context and resources. The figures represent current student enrolment at each location. The student population can provide valuable information on the breadth of educational offerings, student diversity, and institutional capacity.

### 4.3 Participants Profiles

**Table 4.2: Background information about the participants**

| <b>Participant</b>   | <b>Campus</b> | <b>Position</b> | <b>Teaching experience</b> | <b>Highest qualifications</b> | <b>Gender</b> |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Participant 1</b> | Campus A      | Campus Manager  | 28                         | Unknown                       | F             |

|                       |          |                |    |                 |   |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------|----|-----------------|---|
| <b>Participant 2</b>  | Campus A | HoD            | 22 | BEd             | F |
| <b>Participant 3</b>  | Campus A | HoD            | 13 | BEd honours     | M |
| <b>Participant 4</b>  | Campus B | Campus Manager | 15 | Master's degree | F |
| <b>Participant 5</b>  | Campus B | HoD            | 18 | BEd             | M |
| <b>Participant 6</b>  | Campus C | Campus Manager | 10 | BCom Honours    | F |
| <b>Participant 7</b>  | Campus C | HoD            | 13 | BEd             | F |
| <b>Participant 8</b>  | Campus C | HoD            | 14 | BEd             | F |
| <b>Participant 9</b>  | Campus D | Campus Manager | 9  | BEd honours     | M |
| <b>Participant 10</b> | Campus D | HoD            | 16 | BCom (PGCE)     | F |
| <b>Participant 11</b> | Campus D | HoD            | 24 | BEd honours     | F |
| <b>Participant 12</b> | Campus E | Campus Manager | 13 | PG Edu          | F |

|                       |          |                |    |                 |   |
|-----------------------|----------|----------------|----|-----------------|---|
| <b>Participant 13</b> | Campus E | HoD            | 21 | Master's degree | F |
| <b>Participant 14</b> | Campus F | Campus Manager | 31 | BEd honours     | F |
| <b>Participant 15</b> | Campus F | HoD            | 11 | BEd             | F |
| <b>Participant 16</b> | Campus F | HoD            | 7  | BSC (PGCE)      | F |

The above participant background data provides a comprehensive look at the demographic and professional characteristics of the study participants. Participants had extensive teaching experience, ranging from seven to 31 years. This means the study benefitted from the insights supplied by seasoned managers with considerable practical knowledge and expertise in the educational field. Campus managers typically have substantial experience, with the majority having held their positions for over 10 years. This implies a high level of competence in campus management, which could provide helpful administrative insights into the study.

The participants' qualifications ranged from bachelor's degrees (BEd, BCom) to master's degrees. This diversity of academic qualifications indicates that the participants came from various educational backgrounds and had experienced professional development opportunities. Participants with honours and master's degrees demonstrated a solid academic foundation, which could improve the quality and depth of the study's findings.

Most participants were women (11 out of 16), which may reflect the gender distribution on the campuses or in the departments involved in the study. This gender representation can provide information about female leadership and educational roles in these institutions. The participants were either campus managers or HoDs. This enabled the study to collect various administrative and academic perspectives, increasing the research's comprehensiveness. Including several campuses (A to F)

and educational qualifications ensured that a single demographic or institutional profile did not influence the results.

#### 4.4 Study Themes and Subthemes

**Table 4.3: The four themes from the research findings**

| STUDY THEMES AND SUBTHEMES  |
|---|
| <p><b>1) Conceptualisation of workplace-related gossip</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Participants' understanding of gossip</i></li> <li>• <i>Participants' experiences of workplace-related gossip</i></li> </ul> |
| <p><b>2) Practices used by TVET college leaders to manage workplace-related gossip</b></p>  |
| <p><b>3) Challenges experienced by TVET college leaders when managing workplace-related gossip</b></p>  |
| <p><b>4) Strategies used by TVET college leaders to enhance workplace-related gossip management</b></p>   |

##### 4.4.1 Conceptualisation of workplace-related gossip

Two subthemes emerged from the participant's data regarding their views of workplace gossip and their experience or encounters with workplace gossip.

###### 4.4.1.1 *Participants' understanding of gossip*

The participants shared their understanding of gossip as talking about someone behind their back, either negatively or positively, with unproven information. The information may be false or true and relates to people's private lives. For example, some participants noted the following:

*Gossip could be talking about information that has not yet been proven true, whereby you will be talking maybe good or bad about a person and that information which has not yet been disclosed in the public domain. Gossip could be destructive or promote a person. Most of the time, you can see gossip related to talking about other people's*

*private matters. Sometimes, you may find that I don't want to detail what is going on in my life that people will gossip about to others. (P6)*

*As long as someone is not there when he or she is being discussed, that is gossip. In addition to that, whatever was said in his absence cannot be repeated when the person is present. For example, did you notice that since Mr. X bought a house, his shoes are torn because he failed to pay the bond? If I cannot repeat this in the presence of Mr. X, then I was gossiping, which means I was saying something bad about Mr. X. To me, gossiping is just speaking about the third party when he's not around. (P5)*

*Gossip is like chatting behind someone's back and saying negative things about them. When they see those individuals, they laugh with them. (P2)*

The data demonstrated a general understanding of gossip and a struggle to differentiate between workplace gossip and gossip in other contexts. The participants revealed that gossip is perceived as behind someone's back communication, whether the content is positive or negative, and often involves unproven information – they acknowledged its varying impacts on individuals. The excerpts illustrate the dual aspect of gossip: it can be harmful because of its concealment and indicative of the speaker's true sentiments and duplicitous nature, as individuals might denigrate someone behind their back but act friendly to their face. These insights revealed by the analysed data indicate that gossip is a complex social phenomenon that is secret, potentially harmful, and involves private versus public discourse dynamics.

#### **4.4.1.2 Participants' experiences of workplace gossip**

When probing whether participants had ever personally experienced workplace gossip, five of the six managers alleged that they had experienced gossip about their private lives. The participants shared personal experiences that provided insight into their perspectives on workplace gossip, highlighting its complexities and effects on workplace dynamics, relationships and organisational culture. For example, participants revealed their experiences with workplace gossip:

*I was recently accused or heard that I was dating someone at work, which is untrue. Even if I were, I wouldn't consider it as anyone's business; yet, the fact that this gossip spreads without me knowing qualifies as gossip, in my opinion. (P14)*

*I resigned, and people were talking about it without me even informing them what was happening in my personal life, why I resigned, or whatever the case may be. So, they were gossiping. (P8)*

*I once got sick and took a sick leave. When I came back from the leave, there was gossip that I got sick because I failed to do ABC ... So I was sick because I was scared to face the truth. (P5)*

One of the campus managers also stated that workplace gossip negatively affects the victim, who is the person the gossip is about. Some participants shared their experiences:

*When you hear it for the first time, it will have some effect on you. You feel demoralized. I feel so down at work. As you leave for home, you sometimes consider how people perceive you the next day. If they know what was said, you might even assume that everyone knows it, but not everyone is. (P4)*

*I remember the other year when I was a post-level one lecturer, the campus had no one to do the timetable. I didn't have the skills to do the timetable. I had to sit at home and study how to do it alone because students were roaming around the campus, which is the duty of the HoD. Because the HoD decided to abscond after they had fought with the campus manager, but immediately when she came back, I got a warning. 'Do you think you are a HoD now?' 'You're trying to take over my job?' I remember my ex-boss even removed me from the signing register, and she said, 'Find yourself a HoD'. (P5)*

*One of my coworkers was with an ex-coworker. In actuality, they met on the weekend at the sports field. Then, an ex-coworker from a different campus said, 'How is your new colleague?' that is me. The new coworker I'm working with at the moment then said, 'He must return to his original campus. I don't want to be with him here'. (P8)*

The above excerpts demonstrate that gossip in the workplace is alive and well and has adverse effects on employees. The participants shared the same understanding of gossip, its implications for the people affected, and the unpleasant climate it creates in the work environment. The data disclosed that gossip is often related to uncertainty and can ineffectively gather information. As such, the data highlighted the vulnerability of individuals to misinformation and the potential harm gossip can cause. The

experiences shared in the extracts portray the complex nature of workplace gossip and its detrimental effects on individuals and organisational dynamics. As asserted by the participants, gossip invades personal privacy, spreads misinformation, erodes trust, diminishes morale and creates a toxic work environment.

#### **4.4.2 Practices used by college leaders to manage workplace-related gossip**

The campus managers and HoDs shared various practices they use to deal with workplace gossip. As the participants indicated, some employ a straightforward approach to condemn gossip when they witness it, bringing both parties involved in gossip together to hear their sides simultaneously. In contrast, others give counselling when they notice a behavioural shift. Some supervisors encourage their employees to be mature, carry out the tasks they were hired for, and ignore gossip. Participants also mentioned that they foster a culture of love and care among their staff and act reasonably while handling discussions concerning them at work. Some participants gave examples of how they handle workplace gossip about coworkers:

*When people interact with others, they find a ground to lash out. If I see something that bothers this person, I try to calm them and see the positive or good side of what they are complaining about. Then the person starts opening up and telling you about their problems. (P14)*

*If I come across such a situation where I hear people gossiping about a certain issue, even if it involves me. I would call them aside and remind them that the sole purpose that they are here for, is to work and teach the students. (P3)*

Further to this, Participants 9 and 7 shared their practices:

*Remember, when we are together, we have to treat each other well, so each time we meet during morning briefings or wherever we have pep talks, we must encourage our colleagues to look at each other as brothers and sisters to support each other. Then I tell them not to entertain things being said behind their backs. Because of those things, most of the time, those things might distract you, and the person who has said that doesn't want you to move forward. (P9)*

*As a person who is managing or leading, you need to hear or get both sides of the story. (P7)*

Participant 5 explained that they handle gossip by employing an open-door policy:

*When you hear something, you tell me; when you see something, you tell me; even if they can discuss it, at the end of the day, they will tell me – my door is always open.*

The findings demonstrated that managers employ multifaceted approaches to manage gossip within their work environments. The manager's accessibility, direct approach and open discussion regarding complaints or other concerns at work allow for a more accurate understanding of the situation and potentially prevent further disputes. As the data revealed, by addressing gossip from multiple angles organisations can mitigate its negative impact and promote a healthier work environment. This highlights the importance of fostering a sense of unity and trust within the organisation, which can create a more cohesive and supportive work environment and reduce the likelihood of gossip and the damage it can cause. Therefore, employees can bring their complete selves to work, knowing that they are safe and responsible to ensure self-development and growth – they can protect their inner peace by not entertaining anything discussed about them.

#### **4.4.3 Challenges experienced by college leaders when managing workplace-related gossip**

The participants shared that they faced the following challenge: as they solved workplace-related problems, they became recipients of gossip. These managers are misquoted, and gossip is mainly based on hearsay, sometimes leading to bias and favouritism. Two participants shared their challenges:

*Yes, you will not realise the true nature of what is happening. Favouritism at work may result from this, affecting the majority of coworkers. You'll only hear gossip if you're not handling the situation appropriately. You risk coming across as biased or having favouritism if you don't address the situation appropriately. (P8, HoD)*

*Because gossip is a hearsay thing, you never really know the root cause of it. So, coming to manage gossip sometimes becomes a bit difficult. Hence, I have said that only if I overhear personally as I hear people talking, I act, so if it's a hearsay situation, that becomes difficult for you to manage the gossip. (P12)*

Participant 6 and 5 indicated their experiences:

*You might be misquoted in saying that. 'Did you hear what she said? She was referring to me'. You will find people trying to water down whatever positive things you have said. Because they want to continue this negativity, you'll also find aggression from those people. 'Because we all know that since you are talking like this, you should know that so and so did this'. So, there are so many challenges. Sometimes you may try to play it down, only to find that it will escalate because of the negative people around. (P6)*

*You guys be my eyes and ears. I won't see everything that happens in an institution. (P5)*

It was evident from the participants' excerpts that controlling workplace gossip can be difficult. Finding the source of gossip can be somewhat challenging because workplace gossip frequently spreads among coworkers for a while before becoming noticed by management. The data further demonstrated that when managers correct the matter, staff members could feel singled out and misunderstand what the managers are doing. This misconception makes it more difficult for management to deal with gossip-related problems. Furthermore, several procedures meant to control gossip unintentionally encourage more talk among coworkers, which makes the issue worse for managers.

#### **4.4.4 Strategies used by college leaders to enhance workplace-related gossip management**

Participants suggested the following strategies, such as calling the affected parties to hear both sides of the story and counselling, which could help build confidence and allow employees to remain focused on their jobs. Some participants felt that it was necessary for employees to have some form of training or see a psychologist to deal with the effects of workplace gossip. Some participants added that dealing with troublemakers and amending policies was essential to reduce the impact of workplace gossip. For example, Participant 1 explained:

*The best way to deal with gossip between the two parties is when you technically call both of them to hear their sides of the story all at once. You can't really call them separate, the other one in the small room and the other one in the bigger room. You*

*need to call them so that you hear both of their stories, that you can understand and be able to question how everything started, and that you can reach a certain consensus or an agreement to avoid fights.*

One of the HoDs pointed out the need to use a code of conduct to manage workplace gossip:

*Concerning gossip, especially at work, we have to go back to our code of conduct and non-disclosure of information and amend those policies to protect our employees and one another. (P13)*

Participant 11 suggested addressing the instigator in private as one of the solutions:

*Consider speaking privately with the instigator to express your displeasure. Approach your gossiping coworker calmly and non-confrontationally, and politely but firmly ask them to stop discussing you or anyone else targeted by their gossip.*

Other participants suggested the following:

*Training such as communication skills and creating a serene environment and policies that are put into place highlight the conduct of colleagues and how they should behave, and they must be accessible to everyone. (P1, CM)*

*Then, management can develop another policy to resolve conflicts. The policy will allow employees to be charged for contravening it. (P10)*

*You cannot control what people think or say about you, whether you are doing something or not. People will always find something to talk about. If a colleague comes to me with concerns about gossip, I advise them not to take everything seriously. Focusing too much on gossip will distract you from your own life and priorities. (P10)*

*So, I think sometimes the employer should create an environment that allows employees to consult with psychologists regarding the matters they experience at work. (P4)*

*The psychologist must be available for staff as much as she is available for students and staff members must be encouraged to speak up about their matters. (P8)*

*There should be team building, where management should be on the same level with other colleagues in the team building games. Every group must have a principal or manager that might bring unity and close the gap between managers and employees.*  
(P5)

Data revealed that management is not confident enough to handle situations concerning workplace gossip. Participants also would rather have the campus hire a specialist to deal with gossip in the workplace as they do not have the necessary skills. The excerpts recommended that workshops are required to make people aware of workplace gossip and its impact on individuals – one of the strategies is to minimise the spread of gossip by not paying attention to it. Training is needed to deal with gossip among colleagues. Also, policies should be in place to aid and direct management on how to defuse situations that arise because of gossip. Most participants revealed that team building would strengthen employee relationships and lessen gossip.

#### **4.5 Document Analysis**

The following documents were designed to combat workplace harassment, including gossip: the Policy on the Prevention, Elimination and Management of Harassment in the Workplace (Republic of South Africa [RSA] 2024) (see Figure 4.1) and the Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace (RSA 2020 [Draft], 2022) (see Figures 4.2 and 4.3).

**Policy on Prevention, Elimination and Management of Harassment in the workplace, 2024**

- D) Harassment may be referred to as being "vertical" or "horizontal". Vertical harassment (also known as "tangible or material") involves the use of formal power (i.e. title, position, or supervisory control) or material leverage (i.e. financial, informational, resource or legal) to intimidate, threaten, harass, or harm an employee or to dominate and control the complainant.
- E) Vertical harassment refers to harassment between the employer/ manager and employees. Horizontal harassment refers to harassment between employees in the same position or on the same level.

**7.2 Unwelcome conduct**

- (a) The criterion that harassment involves unwanted conduct distinguishes acts of harassment from acceptable conduct in the workplace.
- (b) This may have occurred verbally or non-verbally and may have been communicated directly or indirectly to the harasser/ perpetrator.

**7.3 Nature and extent of the conduct**

- (a) The unwelcome conduct that constitutes harassment in terms of this policy must be violence, physical abuse, psychological abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, gender-based abuse and racial abuse, as a result of a pattern of persistent conduct or a single instance or event.
- (b) A wide range of conduct in the workplace may constitute harassment. Examples of harassment include but are not limited to:
- Slandering or maligning an employee or spreading rumours maliciously
  - Conduct which humiliates, insults or demeans an employee.
  - Withholding work-related information or supplying incorrect information.
  - Sabotaging or impeding the performance of work.
- (i) **Physical Harassment** - includes physical attacks, simulated or threatened violence or gestures (such as raising a fist as if to strike a person or throwing objects near a person).
- (ii) **Verbal bullying** – includes threats, shaming, hostile teasing, insults, constant negative judgement and criticism, or racist, sexist, or LGBTQIA+ phobic language.
- (iii) **Psychological harassment** may be associated with emotional abuse and involves behaviour that has serious negative psychological consequences for the complainant(s).
- (c) This also includes physical force of power, whether threatened or actual, against another person or against a group or community.
- (d) While violent conduct may amount to harassment, harassment may occur as a result of non-violent conduct. Accordingly, an act of threat of violence is not an essential element of harassment. Likewise, certain acts of harassment

**Figure 4.1: Nature of unwelcome conduct (RSA 2024)**

refers to harassment between employees in the same position or on the same level.<sup>7</sup>

- 4.7.9 Passive-aggressive or covert harassment may include negative gossip, negative joking at someone's expense, sarcasm, condescending eye contact, facial expression, or gestures, mimicking to ridicule, deliberately causing embarrassment and insecurity, invisible treatment, marginalisation, social exclusion, professional isolation, and deliberately sabotaging someone's dignity, well-being, happiness, success, and career performance.
- 4.7.10 Mobbing is a form of harassment by a group of people targeted at one or more individuals.
- 4.7.11 Online harassment is harassment which is committed, assisted, or aggravated in part or fully, by the use of information and communications technology such as mobile phones, smart phones, the Internet, social media platforms or email. Bullying when conducted online is referred to as cyber-bullying.

#### 4.8 Prohibited grounds

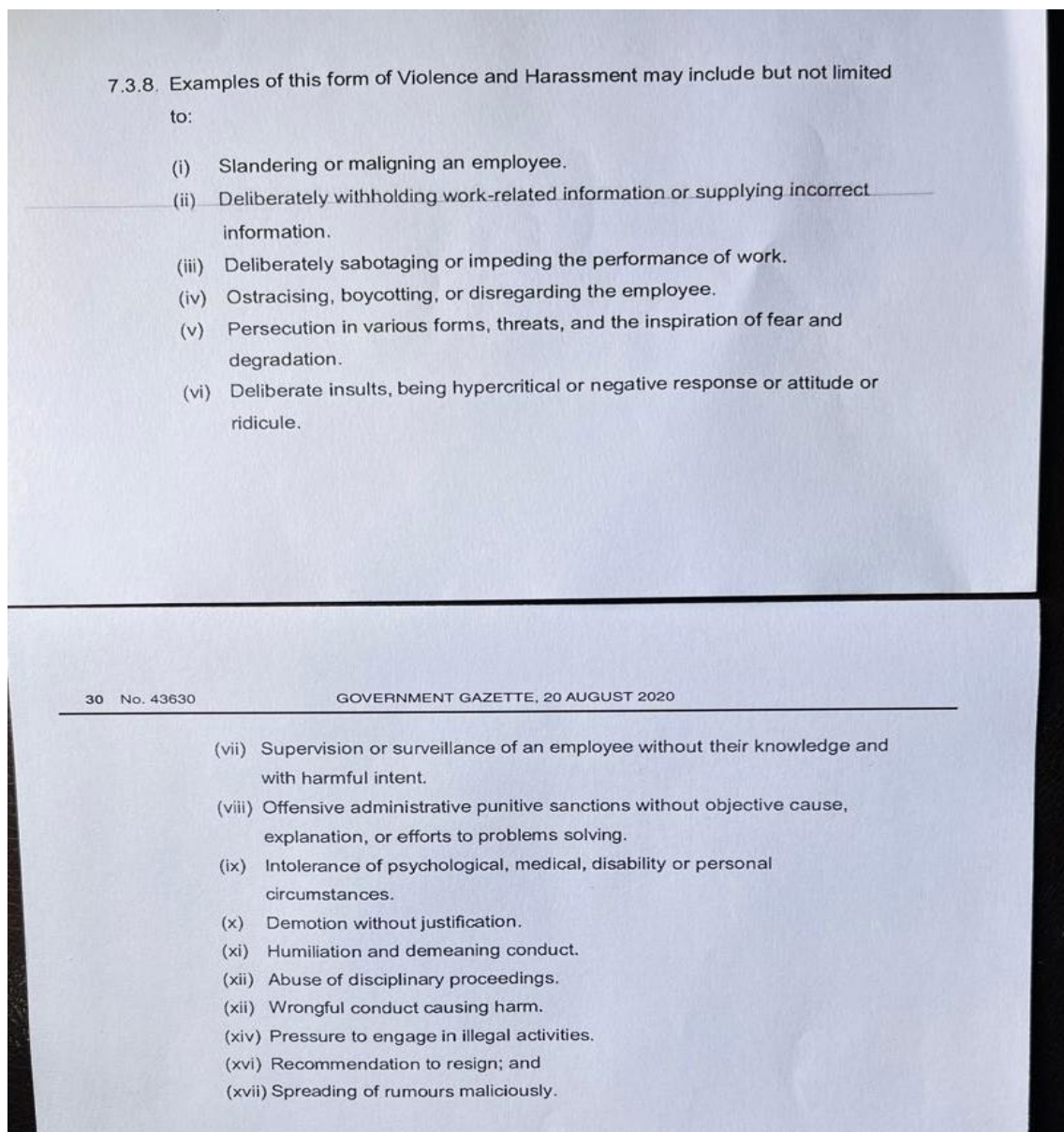
- 4.8.1 Harassment of an employee is prohibited in terms of section 6(1) of the EEA, if the harassment is related to one or more prohibited grounds.
- 4.8.2 It may also be possible for a person who has been harassed to establish that the conduct was a result of an arbitrary ground, as contemplated by section 6(1) of the EEA.

### 5. SEXUAL HARASSMENT

- 5.1 Sexual harassment of an employee is a form of unfair discrimination and is prohibited on the grounds of sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Same-sex harassment can amount to discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation and gender-based harassment.

Figure 4.2: Examples of Harassment

The above documents emphasise the prohibition of passive-aggressive or covert harassment in the collegiate setting, including negative gossip, sarcasm, condescending gestures and exclusion. This policy seeks to foster respectful settings where all individuals' dignity, privacy and equality are protected and valued. According to this policy, gossip is harmful because it undermines individuals' dignity and respect, producing an environment where people feel frightened, insulted and devalued. Addressing gossip as a form of harassment contributes to a more healthy, inclusive and respectful atmosphere.



**Figure 4.3: Example of forms of violence and harassment**

The examples in Figure 4.3 are intended to educate employees about various forms of violence and harassment to raise awareness and help prevent such behaviours. When employees understand what constitutes harassment or violence, they are less likely to engage in it, leading to a safer and more respectful workplace.

## **4.6 Chapter Summary**

Management is leading by example when it comes to restricting workplace gossip. Employees can learn better ways to communicate by showing little tolerance for gossip. Management practices encourage employees to get to know and respect each other and know that they are working toward the same goal. Being there for one another eliminates divisions, undermining, and divisions. One may argue that managers differ in management style but use different methods to manage workplace gossip and create a gossip-free environment. This chapter presented and analysed the data generated from participants via semi-structured and focus group discussion and document analysis. The findings from the study revealed four themes: a) participants' understanding of gossip conceptualisation of gossip; b) practices used by TVET college leaders to manage workplace job-related gossip; c) challenges experienced by TVET college leaders when managing workplace job-related gossip; and d) strategies to enhance workplace job-related gossip management. Workplace gossip has received much attention from practitioners and consultants in organisational behaviour, organisational psychology, and other disciplines. This study has discussed the experiences that managers face when managing workplace job-related gossip. Chapter Five discusses the findings from the data analysis, recommendations, and the study conclusions.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction and Overview of the Study**

The previous chapter presented and analysed the data on TVET college leaders' experiences in dealing with workplace job-related gossip. The primary objective of this research was to gain insight into TVET college leaders' experiences managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province. This chapter presents a discussion of the findings divided into sections based on themes that emerged from the data presented and analysed in Chapter Four, makes conclusions and provides recommendations for future research.

The study's aim was the following: To examine the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province.

- Establish TVET college leaders' conceptualisation of workplace job-related gossip.
- Explore how TVET college leaders manage employee workplace job-related gossip in their organisations.
- Identify the challenges that TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip.
- Establish how managing workplace job-related gossip in TVET colleges can be enhanced to assist college leaders in alleviating the challenges.

### **5.2 Discussion of the Findings**

The study revealed four significant findings, which were presented and analysed in Chapter Four. The sections below discuss each finding in detail relating to the literature.

### **5.2.1 Conceptualisation of gossip**

Two subthemes emerged from the participants' data regarding their views and conceptualisation of gossip together with their experiences or encounters with workplace gossip.

#### **5.2.1.1 Participants' understanding of gossip**

The participants shared their understanding of gossip as talking about someone behind that person's back, either negatively or positively about unproven information. The information may either be false or true and relates to people's private lives. Most participants understood gossip in general and could not differentiate between workplace gossip and gossip in general. According to the participant, gossip has a negative connotation and influences individuals differently. Research in organisational psychology and communication studies provides insights into the nature of workplace gossip and its effects on employees and organisational dynamics. When examining the prevalence and impact of workplace gossip, numerous studies corroborate the findings and assertions of the participants in this study as managers experienced gossip based on their private lives (Sommerfeld *et al.*, 2017; Wu 2020). Lamertz *et al.* (2016) established that workplace gossip is mainly centred around the personal attributes of employees, including their love relationships, family issues or other details related to their private lives. The findings from Lamertz *et al.*, (2016) confirm that gossip reduces employees' job satisfaction levels and is directly responsible for causing stress.

The findings also revealed that nowadays, gossip is a common source for gathering information in situations involving ambiguity or uncertainty. Giardinid and Wittek (2019), also mentions that gossip in the workplace can lead to a toxic work environment among individuals, resulting in mistrust and anxiety. As the participants further shared, gossip leads to the development of an undesirable climate in the workplace and serves as a form of social bonding and information acquisition. This relates to Dunbar's theory, even though gossip can promote social cohesion and the exchange of knowledge, it can also result in unfavourable outcomes if it creates an atmosphere of mistrust and pessimism. The participants shared that gossip creates uncertainty and speculation when its aim is to get information. The study also found

that gossip could be about positive and negative third-party details. This is supported by Targema (2020), who states that gossip is not exclusively comprised of negative information; it also encompasses positive elements, including the commendation and acclaim of third parties. This dual character of gossip enables individuals to form bonds over shared knowledge and preserve social cohesion within groups.

According to the participants, gossip mainly involves negativity because it occurs in secret, which is wrongful inference and trust-hurting in the workplace. Ellwardt, Labianca and Wittek (2012), argue that gossip can damage work relations. This is because most of the time, it is spread without knowledge or awareness of the person, tainting the offences that the person might have defended themselves or clarified had they become privy to it. Most often, gossip exacerbates feelings of betrayal and distrust. Wu and Zhang (2020), argue further that gossip can generate harm that operates at an organisational level, as part of an entire work environment, and creates a toxic situation that impairs employee morale and subsequently firm effectiveness. The present findings build upon previous research, such as the study conducted by Lamertz *et al.*, (2016) which observed that workplace gossip, in general, is mainly motivated by personal issues and negatively affects job satisfaction and stress levels. Moreover, Giardini and Wittek (2019), identified gossip as a potential catalyst for a toxic work environment and many adverse outcomes, which aligns with the accounts and perspectives shared by the participants.

The research demonstrated that the participants had difficulty distinguishing between work-related and commonplace gossip. This is corroborated by research conducted by Feinberg, Willer and Schultz (2014), which indicates that the distinctions between professional and personal gossip are frequently obscured, rendering it difficult for individuals to differentiate between the two (Feinberg *et al.*, 2014). The participants perceived gossip as unverified information that individuals typically disseminate about one another, which caused both individuals to suffer damage and distress in most instances. Gossip frequently involves spreading unverified information that can result in social evaluation and speculation. These findings are substantiated by Wu, Birtch, Chiang and Zhang (2018), who discovered that gossip functions as a social assessment mechanism through hearsay; individuals evaluate the behaviours and characteristics of others, which can result in misunderstandings and damage (Wu *et*

*al.*, 2018). The study highlighted that gossip can fulfil various social functions, including confirming one's status, social evaluation, and speculation. In addition, gossip either validates or undermines an individual's social standing within a community. Martinescu *et al.*, (2014) demonstrated that gossip can have positive and negative effects, as it can reinforce social hierarchies and influence individuals' perceptions within an organisation. The findings of the study, therefore, indicate that gossip primarily pertains to personal matters, contributing to a detrimental work environment characterised by mistrust and discomfort. Conversely, gossip is a foundation for forming social connections, gathering knowledge and validating one's status within social circles.

### **5.2.1.2 Participants' experiences of workplace gossip**

The study revealed that the managers had experienced and suffered from the impact of workplace gossip, which was centred on their private lives. Research has shown that workplace gossip revolves around employees' personal lives, such as romantic relationships and family issues (Lamertz *et al.*, 2016). The study additionally demonstrated that the individuals who are the subjects of gossip in the workplace experience the adverse effects of gossip. According to Lamertz *et al.* (2016), gossip in the workplace leads to reduced closeness and increased stress among employees. Giardini and Wittek's (2019), study provides evidence that gossip creates a toxic work environment characterised by distrust and anxiety. This validates the response of the participants to gossip and its associated negative consequences. Gossip is a frequently employed method for obtaining information, especially in situations characterised by uncertainty or ambiguity (Giardini & Wittek, 2019).

The study also revealed that workplace gossip served as a means of speculating and fostering social connections amid uncertainty. This is supported by Dunbar's theory of how gossip instils social bonding, thus leading to group solidarity. Dunbar (2004), continues that since gossip increases social cohesion by sharing the same information, which enforces group norms, the bond becomes a reinforcement mechanism through which social bonds are created, according to Sommerfeld *et al.* (2017). According to Sommerfeld *et al.* (2017), people can find several gossip claims very offensive in damaging the reputation and reputation-based trust. In the research, it was also identified how gossip plays the most vital part in social relationship

maintenance because it governs the reputations of the members in that circle in a satisfactory condition. Again, Wu and Zhang (2020), explained the role of gossip in making social bonds stronger through the easy formation and development of social relationships. Gossip may go on to establish solidarity and mutual understanding among the employees, which is essential within organisational culture since strong social ties propel further teamwork and collaboration (Wu & Zhang, 2020).

The study further demonstrated that individuals are vulnerable to disinformation through gossip, which includes unverified or inaccurate details. This tendency often results in misunderstandings and confrontations. According to Johnson and Smith (2019), disinformation negatively impacts individuals by disrupting their ethical and professional work environment. Being the target of gossip profoundly affects one's psychological well-being. Participants in the interview expressed that workplace gossip can result in heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and a sense of social alienation among employees. The psychological burden can impact their mental and emotional state, efficiency, and output (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). According to Harper, Brown and Mitchell (2017), individuals who are the subject of gossip from their peers experience decreased motivation and involvement in their work, resulting in lower productivity. This study revealed that gossip fosters an unsupportive organisational culture, which harms employee morale and work satisfaction. As per the Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace and their own code of conduct document, gazette No 11409 and Vol 601, workplace gossip is classified as harassment if it is deemed to disseminate harmful gossip about an employee that would result in the degradation of their reputation or the establishment of a hostile work environment. The guideline explicitly declares that engaging in gossip constitutes harassment within the workplace. Every manager in this study had encountered gossip regarding personal matters, resulting in distrust and stress among the staff in their separate work environments. Gossip, particularly unclear in many situations that it promote social cohesion and group norms, involving conjecture and social bonding.

The study also suggested that gossip fulfils diverse social roles, such as social comparisons, status affirmations and information collection. The functions mentioned are significant within the framework of LMX theory, as the quality of leader-member

interactions impacts the use of gossip inside the organisation (Bauer & Green, 2018). Gossip frequently emerges in uncertain circumstances, functioning as a mechanism to acquire knowledge and alleviate ambiguity. Participants observed that gossip serves the purpose of speculation and obtaining information, which is consistent with the findings of Giardini and Wittek (2019). Establishing solid and reliable LMX relationships can reduce the necessity for gossip by facilitating transparent and consistent communication. The findings indicated that gossip enables employees to compare themselves with their colleagues and validate their position within the professional environment. In situations characterised by low-quality leader-member exchange (LMX), where official feedback may be limited, gossip can serve as a means of informal social comparison and validation of one's standing. The need for this develops due to a dearth of unambiguous and productive input from leaders.

### **5.2.2 Practices used by TVET college leaders to manage workplace job-related gossip**

The results showed that managers handle gossip through various proactive involvements such as addressing it as it begins. Mujtaba and Senathip (2020), claim that a simple strategy for addressing workplace gossip – that is, quick criticism of it when it arises – can help to significantly stop its spread and balance its adverse effects on employee morale. By adopting this proactive strategy, a company can promote a more positive culture and help to establish an open environment whereby bad behaviour is promptly corrected. Furthermore, it is underlined that leaders need to set and enforce workplace norms of behaviour to maintain high morale and output (Ahmad *et al.* 2019). The study found that the prompt settlement of workplace gossip problems primarily relied on candid critique and favourable interpersonal connections. The results align with the findings of Ng *et al.*, (2018), who observed that promptly dismissing gossip and promoting dialogue among involved individuals can mitigate the adverse effects it may have. Open communication can help managers clear misconceptions and rebuild confidence. These approaches address the present issue and encourage long-term peace and cooperation among the teams.

The study also demonstrated that managers employ counselling approaches to address behavioural changes in staff members resulting from workplace gossip. This discovery is consistent with other studies that have shown how supportive leadership

can enhance the mental well-being of employees (Johnson *et al.*, 2020). This emphasises the effectiveness of coaching and counselling in assisting workers in managing interpersonal conflicts and preserving their psychological well-being when confronted with professional difficulties. Counselling interventions can also help staff members manage difficult situations and recover from setbacks, promoting a workplace atmosphere that is more compassionate and empathetic. These counselling sessions emphasise the importance of prioritising the employees' occupational and personal well-being.

The study also demonstrated that a strategy for handling job-related gossip in the workplace involved instructing employees to focus on their responsibilities, regardless of any gossip circulating. A study by Harper *et al.*, (2017) indicates that fostering employee task engagement and resilience can mitigate the adverse impacts of workplace gossip and enhance productivity and job satisfaction. Managers can reduce the disruptions produced by gossip and promote a constructive work atmosphere by ensuring staff remain concentrated on their tasks. Moreover, this approach strengthens the significance of individual accountability and ethical conduct in upholding workplace norms. Research conducted by Colquitt *et al.*, (2015) and Cropanzano *et al.*, (2019) has demonstrated that fair treatment and supportive leadership contribute to increased employee morale, job satisfaction and organisational commitment. Equitable treatment and practical supervisor guidance enhance employee attitudes and foster loyalty towards the organisation (Ahmad *et al.* 2019). These findings emphasise the crucial requirement for ethical leadership in constructing a unified and driven workforce necessary for the prosperity of a business.

The results emphasised the need for proactive measures to address workplace gossip, emphasising that responding directly and promptly can reduce its adverse impacts and promote a favourable organisational culture. Research indicates that providing sincere criticism and fostering transparent communication can effectively mitigate the negative consequences of gossip and restore trust among team members (Irvine & Blessing, 2019). Counselling and coaching assist employees in navigating interpersonal issues and promoting mental well-being and fortitude. In addition, cultivating a culture that prioritises compassion and equity and encourages leadership improves employee morale, job satisfaction and organisational dedication,

underscoring the crucial importance of ethical leadership in sustaining a united and motivated workforce. As workplace gossip is often focused on personal matters, leading to stress, decreased satisfaction, and a toxic work atmosphere, effective gossip management requires proactive strategies like honest criticism, open communication, counselling, and ethical leadership.

### **5.2.3 Challenges experienced by TVET college leaders when managing workplace job-related gossip**

Research findings suggested that identifying the origin of workplace gossip can be tricky as it often circulates among colleagues for a considerable time before catching management's attention. A study by Michelson *et al.*, (2018) revealed that gossip frequently spreads through informal networks, posing challenges for managers in pinpointing its source and intervening swiftly. The delayed detection of gossip can contribute to its persistence, leading to a more deeply rooted and challenging issue. Moreover, the clandestine character of gossip frequently leads to its widespread dissemination before management's ability to adequately address it, intensifying its consequences (Ahmad *et al.*, 2019). Managers must be watchful and aggressive in monitoring workplace interactions to detect early indications of gossip.

The data also revealed that when managers address the issue, staff members may perceive themselves as targets and misinterpret the managers' intentions. This misunderstanding worsens the challenges management faces in addressing problems associated with gossip. Huo *et al.* (2021) discovered that their actions are frequently seen as punitive rather than corrective when managers intervene. This perception of punishment leads to resistance and reinforces the prevalence of gossip practices. Incorrect interpretations of management's objectives might worsen the problem, diminishing the effectiveness of treatments (Irvine & Blessing, 2019). To alleviate this issue, managers must effectively convey their intentions and ensure that interventions are seen as equitable and beneficial rather than punitive.

The data findings noted that some protocols designed to regulate gossip inadvertently fostered increased communication among colleagues, worsening the problem for managers. Clegg and Van Iterson (2017), acknowledge that an open-door policy and team-building exercises, although intended to promote open communication, can

inadvertently facilitate the proliferation of gossip. This contradiction underscores the intricacy of overseeing workplace relations and the unforeseen repercussions of measures with good intentions (Brown, 2023). Managers should meticulously devise and execute policies to reduce the likelihood of unintentionally promoting gossip, potentially by providing explicit standards for their implementation.

This study also revealed that managers when, in addressing gossip-related issues, often find themselves being the recipients of gossip. These managers usually have their words misinterpreted, and gossip is primarily derived from unverified assertions, occasionally resulting in prejudice and favouritism. Robinson and Bennett (2020), argue that managers are susceptible to the impact of gossip and can also become targets, which adds complexity to their function as unbiased enforcers of workplace standards. This can result in biased opinions and preferences, further diminishing trust within teams and making it more difficult for managers to deal with gossip properly (Fine & Rosnow, 2017). Hence, managers must acknowledge their susceptibility to gossip and implement measures to safeguard their reputation while dealing with the matter.

Effectively managing workplace gossip is a multifaceted task that requires identifying the origins of chatter, resolving misconceptions, and handling unexpected consequences of actions (Babaei & Sattari, 2016). Effective management necessitates a subtle approach that considers social dynamics and the possibility of misinterpretation of projects. To establish a harmonious, gossip-free atmosphere, managers should employ efficient communication, fair policy enforcement, and proactive employee involvement. Providing ongoing training and assistance to managers can improve their capacity to handle gossip and effectively promote a pleasant workplace culture.

#### **5.2.4 Strategies used by TVET college leaders to enhance workplace-related gossip management**

The data indicated various strategies suggested by the managers to appropriately manage workplace gossip such as accessing both the initiator and the victim for counselling them to gain confidence and stay focused on their work duties. Their strategies are supported by Neves and Eisenberger's (2014) research, which

highlights that engaging in direct contact and offering assistance can effectively mitigate the adverse effects of gossip and enhance staff morale. This study has demonstrated that counselling sessions are beneficial in assisting employees in managing the emotional impact of being the target of gossip, leading to improved concentration and productivity.

The study also revealed that it is essential for employees to receive training or engage in sessions with a psychologist to address the repercussions of workplace gossip effectively. The same sentiment is expressed in Blau, Taylor, Lublin and Mitchell's (2020) research, that psychological support and specialized training might enhance employees' ability to withstand gossip and its negative consequences. Training programmes can provide employees with the necessary skills to manage gossip effectively. At the same time, psychological help can address the components of emotional and mental well-being, promoting a more supportive work environment (Brown & Mitchell, 2018).

The participants also noted that the workers suggested recruiting an expert to manage the organisation's gossip since some of the managers were unqualified. Blau *et al.* (2020), highlighted that corporations that address conflict and amend policies to combat organisational gossip substantially enhance workplace harmony and job satisfaction. Deploying professionals or experts with a background in work environment behaviour can allow the organisation access to the needed skills and strategies to resolve gossip effectively and legally avoid repetition (Babaei & Sattari, 2016).

The results further showed the need for seminars and team-oriented training to increase workers' awareness about gossip and its effects. The study by Kundu and Gahlawat (2018), indicates that team-building exercises have a two-fold positive impact: i) enhanced employee relations and ii) creation of an atmosphere that is transparent and confident, therefore discouraging workplace gossip. Raising the consciousness of employees through workshops that enlighten them on the negativities and effects at large of workplace gossip and developing positive strategies in workplace communication could be very impactful.

The study also revealed that self-awareness training programmes allow employees to infiltrate workplace gossip with practical management tools. Blau *et al.* (2020), took a similar view, stating that the use of rigorous training programmes along with effective policy interventions mitigate the extent of workplace gossip and make the work environment pleasant. Hence, training is an effective way to deal with gossip among colleagues. According to Robinson and Bennett (2020), organisational rules and training programmes make up explicit guidelines for acceptable behaviours and provide practical ways to deal with gossip that may significantly diminish its degree and impact. To sustain this, the Code of Good Practice on the Prevention and Elimination of Harassment in the Workplace and gazette No. 11409 also declare this and advocate regular training to teach staff the consequences of gossip and, most importantly, how it refutes the principles of respect and secrecy in the working environment.

The research also found that having sufficient policies that offer employees explicit instructions for efficiently dealing with workplace gossip is crucial. The study demonstrated that team-building activities promote cohesion among team members, positively impacting employee relationships. According to West *et al.* (2014), some aspects of team building can improve interpersonal relationships and trust, which are crucial for creating a united and supportive work group. In their study, Kundu and Gahlawat (2018), discovered that engaging in team-building activities enhances team communication and trust, decreasing gossip and reinforcing professional connections. These exercises foster mutual comprehension among employees, reducing misunderstandings and the propensity for gossip.

Direct communication, psychological support, training, policy change, team-building exercises, and others could be necessary interventions to arrest workplace gossip. These could make the workplace environment more positive and supportive, negating gossip's effects on the employees and overall business dynamics.

### 5.3 Conclusion

This study provided valuable insights into the complexities of workplace gossip within TVET colleges, focusing specifically on the perspectives of college leaders. The findings reveal that gossip, defined as unverified information about others, predominantly has negative effects, such as eroding trust, diminishing job satisfaction, and contributing to a stressful work environment. Respondents struggled to distinguish between workplace gossip and general gossip, yet they agreed that both types contribute to an atmosphere of distrust and inconvenience. Paradoxically, some also acknowledged gossip as a tool for establishing social networks and maintaining awareness of one's social standing within the organization. One of the central challenges highlighted was the difficulty managers face in identifying and managing gossip. Often, gossip circulates among lower-ranking employees for some time before it reaches management, making it challenging to pinpoint its origin or impact. When managers address gossip, employees may feel targeted or misunderstand the intentions behind managerial interventions, further complicating the situation. This dynamic underscores the intricate challenges leaders encounter when attempting to manage gossip in a manner that is both effective and sensitive to employee perceptions. The study also highlighted several strategies recommended by participants for mitigating gossip's negative impact. Prompt, direct responses to gossip were identified as essential to minimizing its harm. The importance of cultivating a healthy organizational culture, where honesty and constructive feedback are encouraged, emerged as a critical preventive measure. Furthermore, equipping employees with conflict resolution skills through psycho-counseling and coaching can help them develop the mental resilience needed to manage or resist harmful gossip. Judging from the study's findings, a comprehensive approach to managing workplace gossip is essential. This includes strategies such as fostering open communication, offering psychological support, implementing effective policies, and facilitating team-building activities. These strategies can collectively contribute to a healthier, more supportive work environment, enhancing both employee well-being and organizational productivity. Overall, this study underscores the need for proactive and holistic measures to mitigate the adverse effects of workplace gossip, fostering a positive work culture within TVET colleges.

## **5.4 Study Recommendations**

To manage workplace gossip, it is recommended that:

- TVET college leaders should undergo professional training specifically focused on identifying and addressing workplace gossip swiftly and effectively. Delayed intervention may allow gossip to grow, intensifying its negative effects on staff morale and productivity.
- Recognize that gossip can lead to stress and behavior changes among employees. Leaders should ensure that affected staff members have access to systematic psychological support and counselling services to help them rebuild confidence, maintain focus on work, and navigate interpersonal challenges effectively.
- Equip TVET college managers with conflict resolution skills through targeted professional development. This training can enhance their ability to handle interpersonal issues, manage gossip, and maintain authority within the organization without alienating staff.
- College leaders should create a culture that encourages open dialogue and candid discussions to address misunderstandings directly. By allowing employees to express their views and clarify intentions, managers can help reduce misunderstandings that often fuel gossip.
- TVET college leaders should organize regular workshops, promote cultural inclusivity, and facilitate team-building activities. These efforts strengthen organizational unity and reduce the prevalence of gossip, contributing to a healthier workplace environment.

## **5.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering the constraints of this study, the following suggestions for future research on the same topic are provided:

1. Research could be conducted in various provinces and at several TVET colleges.
2. Studies can examine the prevalence of workplace gossip among managers.

3. A study could be conducted in the private and public sectors.
4. A further study could use multiple case studies.
5. Another study might be conducted using a sample of low-level employees and managers.

## **5.6 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a discussion of the findings, conclusions and study recommendations. The data findings relating to the study objectives and the themes identified in the previous chapter were sequentially examined. The themes covered were a) conceptualisation of gossip, b) practices to manage workplace job-related gossip, c) challenges experienced when managing workplace job-related gossip, and d) strategies to enhance workplace job-related gossip management. The chapter closed with recommendations directly connected to the findings and discussion. The next chapter outlines the research journey.

## **CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH JOURNEY AND CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The chapter outlines the trajectory and experiences in carrying out this study and its contribution to the existing knowledge base. It begins with a brief description of the research background and then a summary of the chapters and a detailed account of my personal experiences what was learned from the process, gives the knowledge contribution through the LMX model, describes the study's shortcomings and ends with a conclusion.

### **6.2 General Introduction to the Background of the Study**

This study focused on TVET college leaders' experiences of workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, of Gauteng in the Republic of South Africa. Through understanding how leaders within a TVET college manage workplace job-related gossip, practical insights into the intricate dynamics of maintaining social coherence within an organisational structure were perceived. By so doing, this study uncovered strategies for and responses to job-related gossip and shed more light on the general effects of social cohesion within the context of TVET colleges (Greenslade-Yeats, Cooper-Thomas, Corner and Morrison 2024).

The study was conducted at TVET colleges which reported that its lecturers work in unhealthy environments. Employees at the college and university levels believe that workspace gossip is more likely to reach parents than customers in a traditional service industry; in this regard, workplace gossip has a more negative impact on the teaching-learning environment (Chron, 2021). Nonetheless, Ilahabader and Coleman (2020), were of the stance that employers would instead treat the fact that such gossip entities are in employees' minds as a minor worry or probably consider them as just fairy tales, fearing that their existence could be inappropriate in a professional workplace.

### **6.3 My Research Journey**

The study's overview was given in the first chapter. This included the introduction and background, in which I made the case that in the literature, South Africa is also affected by workplace gossip, as illustrated by literature in this study. I described the issue and my area of interest in the study. I made the case that gossip at work should be taken seriously at TVET colleges because it can distort employees' perspectives (Kong, 2018). Ferrari (2015), however, notes that despite gossip's potential complexity, an absence of research addresses organisational management in this context. Therefore, in one municipality, of Gauteng Province, the study looked at the experiences of TVET college managers in controlling workplace gossip using the following questions.

#### **Main question**

What are the experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality, Gauteng Province?

#### **Subsidiary questions**

- What are the TVET college leaders' conceptualisation and experiences of workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- How do TVET college leaders manage employee workplace job-related gossip in their organisations in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- What challenges do TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?
- How can college leaders effectively manage workplace job-related gossip in TVET colleges to alleviate the challenges in one municipality in the Gauteng Province?

These questions were designed to understand the concept of gossip from the manager's perception and to elicit how they address workplace gossip. It was crucial to determine whether they could efficiently address workplace gossip and present the opportunity for them to suggest what strategies would work to manage workplace gossip.

Chapter two discussed the facets of gossip in the workplace, focusing mainly on the growth and dynamism portrayed by two theoretical frames: the evolution of gossip and the LMX theory towards gossiping. Complete knowledge of the literature about workplace gossip provides a firsthand view of how gossip operates in typical and atypical TVET settings. It must be noted that there are both good and bad sides to workplace gossip. Moreover, the chapter introduced the views of workplace gossip in the domestic and international scenes, considering the cultural variability that structures it. Furthermore, the literature sought to investigate the influence of workplace gossip on the workers' behaviour, distinguishing job-related from non-job-related gossip and proposing practices to address and minimise the impact. The review found that there are challenges for management to address and manage gossip in organisational settings. This is described in the methodology chapter, which presents the methods used to carry out this study.

Chapter three then elaborated on the methodologies used for data collection and analysis of the interpretive paradigm through a case study design. It deeply explored aspects of population selection and the comprehensive sampling procedures applied. Further, it discusses the comprehensive validation process of the research instruments, which includes a pilot study incorporated into the conduct to enhance the credibility and dependability of the findings. Issues regarding ethics were also well taken care of and ensured that I was particularly keen on observing ethics within the research process. The chapter further expounded on the moral principles followed during data collection and analysis to protect the rights and confidentiality of the participants. It clarified the data collection approaches, for instance, interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis, which vouched for the approach's robustness in providing comprehensive data. It also outlined how the data collected would be presented and subjected to detailed analyses to form the basis upon which in-depth findings of this dissertation would be generated in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Four presented and analysed the data generated from participants via semi-structured and focus group interviews and document analysis. The results from the study yielded four themes: a) conceptualisation of gossip, b) practices to manage workplace job-related gossip, c) challenges experienced when managing workplace job-related gossip, and d) strategies to enhance workplace job-related gossip

management. Workplace gossip has been a focus of attention for practitioners and consultants of organisational behaviour, organisational psychology, and others. This study has highlighted the experiences of practising managers in managing workplace job-related gossip. Data analysis and significant recommendations and conclusions of the study

Chapter Five presented data analysis, discussions, and conclusions. The sequential discussion of the data findings presented the study questions and the themes identified in the previous chapter. The covered themes were a) conceptualisation of gossip, b) practices to manage workplace job-related gossip, c) challenges when managing job-related gossip, and d) strategies to enhance workplace job-related gossip. A summary and recommendations based on the findings and discussion were articulated. The following chapter is a narration of the research journey.

#### **6.4 Lessons Learned in the Research Journey**

My motivation to investigate the importance of workplace gossip in college settings stemmed from my discovery that gossip significantly impacts campus administrators' experiences managing their workforce. The intricate connections between diverse employees, such as students, instructors, and administrators, best exemplify a college campus's distinct dynamic. In an environment this diversified, gossip, which can range from those about private lives to those about business activities, thrives (Kuo, 2015). Maintaining an enjoyable and productive work environment while collecting data was a delicate balance, and as a college employee, I intended to do just that. In my experience as a college facilitator, dealing with workplace gossip has presented a few difficulties. Finding out how managers address workplace job-related concerns was also fascinating.

Throughout my research, I have developed a greater understanding of workplace gossip by observing it from the perspective of individuals who assert that it is intentional. This discovery clarified the distinction between unintentional and deliberate workplace gossip even more. I enjoyed this learning experience since it allowed me to investigate the reasoning behind workplace gossip and draw conclusions based on my best guesses before making a firm decision.

Through this research, I have also learned much about recognising the effects of workplace gossip on teachers, the team as a whole, the school climate, and children's academic progress. Reportedly, gossip may be construed as relational aggression if the intent is to even the score or improve one's social standing. In an attempt to harm or "get back at" someone, someone who is jealous of or feels betrayed by another person may engage in or spread gossip about them. It is possible to use gossip to elevate oneself socially and degrade others.

Above all, I have discovered that management leads by example when ending workplace gossip. Staff members can improve their communication skills if they do not tolerate gossip. Workers find it simple to appreciate one another and realise that they are all working toward the same objective because of how management operates their companies. Conflicts, bullying, and conflicts are eliminated when people support one another. Although managers control workplace communication differently to prevent gossip, one could argue that managers have distinct management philosophies.

My methodological training has taught me how crucial it is to be honest and transparent throughout research, especially when collecting, interpreting, and disseminating findings. I got good at meticulously filing and arranging my papers and files from my studies. To make it simple to recall my accomplishments and how to put my supervisor's recommendations into practice in the future, one way I achieve this is by keeping my files organised. I can accept helpful criticism on my writing, particularly its organisation, logic, and presentation, because of this course, and I still manage to do well. My academic pursuits have grown and succeeded considerably due to this experience. Two additional things I learned are respect for the judgments made by participants and the capacity to anticipate potential setbacks. The participant decided not to participate when I arrived at their school on the interview day. I experienced this once. One person did not show up for the focus group discussion, except for that one instance. Though irritating, I believe this will benefit my future research. As a result, I will be in a better position to realise that not every volunteer or chosen person will participate in a study, allowing me to be more patient and understanding.

## **6.5 Research Contribution**

This research contributed to the literature on how managers respond to workplace gossip. The added knowledge obtained from the data collected and analysed is covered below.

### **A. Perception of gossip**

This research showed that the managers had a fundamental perception of gossip. It was difficult for them to distinguish between workplace gossip and gossip in another social setting. Gossip was characterised as making unsubstantiated claims behind someone's back regardless of the tone of the message and its consequences for various people. This shows how gossip has two faces: first, it is injurious because it is hidden and shows how the speaker feels. Second, it is deceitful because people can appear friendly to each other but talk badly about them to others.

### **B. Approaches managers use to handle workplace gossip**

Some managers were more direct and took a zero-tolerance approach to gossip whenever they witnessed it. They called both sides so everybody heard one version of the story. Others provided counselling upon seeing a behaviour change. Some managers emphasised that the workers should be mature and do their work well without involvement in office politics. Participants mentioned that they encouraged a workplace of love and compassion among their staff.

### **C. Problems associated with managing workplace gossip**

While the managers struggled to address the gossip problems, they were also the victims of gossip. The discussions about the managers were mostly inaccurate since gossip is founded on hearsay and can lead to prejudice and bias. Establishing who started the gossip was usually a difficult task, as it took time before reaching the management level. The findings further showed that once the managers intervened, the employees often felt victimised and did not understand the level of the managers' intervention. This made it difficult to circumvent the issues of gossip. Besides, most of the procedures designed to stop gossip only caused problems for the managers by increasing gossip between colleagues.

## **D. Strategies recommended by managers on how to control workplace gossip**

Counselling can help build self-confidence and focus on the job. Some of the managers tried to call the victims to address workplace gossip and to listen to their side of the story. When handling the impacts of office gossip, some participants reported that workers needed to be trained or even see a psychologist. Participants reported that confrontations with disruptive workers and procedure changes were necessary to minimise the impact of office gossip. Since participants were not professionals in managing office gossip, they preferred the colleges to employ professionals in the same field. They also noted that team-building exercises and seminars effectively raised awareness about the negative repercussions of workplace gossip and its impacts on employees. Team-building activities were created to promote a team spirit among employees, and those who participated responded positively to such activities.

### **6.6 Limitations of the Study**

- The study was limited to TVET colleges in the Gauteng province.
- It is not generalisable.
- It is a single case study.
- Only campus managers and department heads were participants.
- The sample size focused on one college.

### **6.7 Conclusion**

Workplace gossip can leave employees feeling hurt, disappointed and dissatisfied. This sometimes results in a working environment riddled with tension, where employees cannot work at their maximum level because of too much anxiety. From this view, managers must face workplace gossip and defamation head-on when they spring up before they gain ground. This will create an environment where openness, transparency and empathy abound.

## REFERENCES

- Adams, R. and Barnes, L. 2017. Workplace gossip: Its emergence and impact on organizational culture. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 38(6):928–944.
- Adkins, K. 2017. *Gossip, epistemology, and power*. UK: Springer International Publishing.
- Babaei Aghbolagh, M. and Sattari Ardabili, F., 2016. *An overview of the social functions of gossip in the hospitals*. Available at SSRN 3347590.
- Ahenkorah, I. and Koomson, I. 2017. Workplace gossip and organizational culture: Insights from Ghanaian organizations. *Journal of Management Development* 36(2):180-192.
- Ahmad, B., Tariq, H., Weng, Q.D., Shillamkwese, S.S. and Sohail, N. 2019. When a proximate starts to gossip: Instrumentality considerations in the emergence of abusive supervision. *Employee Relations: The International Journal* 41(5):851-875.
- Alemu, M. and Kinfu, M. 2016. The role of gossip in Ethiopian organizational culture: A qualitative study. *African Journal of Economic and Management Studies* 7(4):504-520.
- Anderson, P. and Robinson, L. 2021. Promoting diversity and inclusion in education.
- Anderson, S. 2018. Trust as a foundation for cooperation in educational organizations.
- Babaei, A. M. and Sattari, A. F. 2016. An overview of the social functions of gossip in the hospitals.
- Babbie, E. 2016. *The practice of social research*. 14<sup>th</sup> ed. Cengage Learning.
- Badenhorst, M. and Botha, D. 2022. Workplace bullying in a South African higher education institution: Academic and support staff experiences. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management* 20:13.

- Baker, A. and Smith, B. 2020. Human resources challenges and workplace gossip: a case study of TVET colleges. *Journal of Human Resources Management Research* 10(2):21-35.
- Bans-Akutey, K. and Tiimub, B. M. 2021. Methodological Crystallisation in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research*.
- Barnes, L., Johnson, P. and Turner, K. 2019. Teacher-student interactions and educational outcomes.
- Bauer, T.N. and Green, S.G. 2018. Development of leader-member exchange: A longitudinal test. *Academy of Management Journal* 39(6):1538-1567.
- Begemann, V., Lübstorf, S., Meinecke, A.L., Steinicke, F. and Lehmann-Willenbrock, N. 2021. Capturing workplace gossip as dynamic conversational events: First insights from care team meetings. *Frontiers in Psychology* 12:725720.
- Bell, J. and Waters, S. 2018. *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Bhattacharya, M. 2017. *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bingham, A.J. and Witkowsky, P. 2022. An overview of qualitative content analysis. *Practical Assessment, Research, and Evaluation* 27(1):2. [doi:10.7275/jx9e-2391](https://doi.org/10.7275/jx9e-2391)
- Blaikie, N. and Priest, J. 2017. *Social research*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Blau, G., Taylor, M.S., Lublin, S. and Mitchell, T. 2020. Reducing workplace gossip through organizational policies and training programs. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 41(3):345-362.
- Borghesani, V. and Piazza, M. 2017. The neuro-cognitive representations of symbols: The case of concrete words. *Neuropsychologia* 105:4-17.
- Boyle, M.J. and Schemierbach, M. 2020. Member checking: Increasing conformability in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research*.

Brady, D.L., Brown, D.J. and Liang, L.H. 2017. Moving beyond assumptions of deviance: The reconceptualization and measurement of workplace gossip. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 102(1):1.

Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2019. Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis: Qualitative research in sport. *Exercise and Health* 11(4):589-597.

Brinkmann, S. 2014. Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2:277-299.

Brown, A. 2023. Fostering positive workplace gossip: Strategies for a collaborative environment. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 36(1):45-60.

Brown, A. and Garcia, M. 2017. Data cross-referencing for authenticity in qualitative research. *Journal of Qualitative Research*.

Brown, A., Smith, J. and Lee, C. 2019. The role of semi-structured interviews in qualitative research: A comprehensive overview. *Journal of Qualitative Research Methods* 21(3):45-60.

doi:10.1177/1750698019823534.

Brown, A.D. and Mitchell, T.R. 2018. The role of organizational culture in managing workplace gossip. *Journal of Business Ethics* 149(1):13-27.

Brown, C. and Johnson, M. 2020. Crossing boundaries: The impact of gossip on professional conduct in educational institutions. *Journal of Educational Ethics and Values* 7(3):142-158.

Brown, C. and Martinez, L. 2020. Cultural insensitivity in workplace gossip: A comprehensive review. *Journal of Cultural Diversity in Education*, 8(1):45-64.

Brown, J. and Garcia, M. 2018. *Understanding qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Brown, P. and Davis, R. 2021. The ripple effect: Positive gossip and its impact on employee engagement. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 49(3):278-293.

Brown, R.L. 2023. The impact of working in a toxic work environment: A phenomenological study. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) Northcentral University.

Campbell, S., Wozniak, L., Philip, M. and Damarell, R. A. 2019. Defining research design. *Research Design*.

Carrim, N.M. 2019. Minorities' experiences of office gossip. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology* 45(1):1-10.

Cascio, W. F. 2015. *Managing human resources: Productivity, quality of work life, profits*. UK: McGraw-Hill Education.

Charmaz, K. 2014. *Constructing grounded theory*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

Chen, H. 2020. An in-depth examination of leader-member exchange in Chinese organizations using the LMX-Comm model. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong.

Chen, X.P., He, W. and Weng, L.C. 2018. What is wrong with treating followers differently? The basis of leader-member exchange differentiation matters. *Journal of Management* 44(3):946-971.

Chepkurui, A. 2020. Informal communication and conflict management: A case study of MPESA foundation academy staff. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) University of Nairobi, Nairobi.

Chron, C. 2021. Addressing employees who produce harmful gossip. *Chron Newsletters*, 2. <https://work.chron.com/addressing-employees-produce-harmful-gossip-7167.html>

Accessed 19 April 2024.

Chua, S.V. and de la Cerna Uy, K.J. 2014. The psychological anatomy of gossip. *American Journal of Management* 14(3).

Clark, P. and Martinez, L. 2019. Gossip in the workplace: Its nature and consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 105(5):527-540.

Clegg, S. and van Iterson, A. 2017. The problem of managing informal organization: Gossip, gossips, and whistleblowing. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 19(1):45-61.

Colquitt, J.A., Scott, B.A. and LePine, J.A. 2015. Trust, trustworthiness, and trust propensity: A meta-analytic test of their unique relationships with risk taking and job performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92(4):909-927.

Creswell, J.W. 2015. *A concise introduction to mixed methods research*. London: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. 2018. *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. 2020. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods*. London: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J.W. and Poth, C.N. 2018. Researcher bias in case study analysis. *Researcher Bias in Case Studies*.

Cropanzano, R., Dasborough, M.T. and Weiss, H.M. 2019. Affective events and the development of leader-member exchange. *Academy of Management Review* 42(2):233-258.

Daft, R.L. 2015. *The leadership experience*. Cengage Learning.

Dansereau, F., Graen, G. and Haga, W.J. 1975. A vertical dyad linkage approach to leadership within formal organizations: A longitudinal investigation of the role making process. *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 13(1):46-78.

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds). 2018. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET]. 2014. Development. *Academy of Management Journal* 11(3):818-834.

Dessler, G. 2017. *Human resource management*. UK: Pearson.

Diop, M. 2020. To formalize or not: Investigating drivers of landholders' decisions for land formalization in rural sub-Saharan Africa, the case of Senegal. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

- Duffy, M.K. and Scott, K.L. 2023. Workplace gossip and employee well-being: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 108(1):1-22.
- Dunbar, R.I. M. 2017. The anatomy of gossip. In *Gossip and the social mechanisms of reputation*. London: Routledge.
- Dunbar, R.I.M. 1996. *Grooming, gossip, and the evolution of language*. Harvard University Press.
- Dunbar, R.I.M. 2004. Gossip in evolutionary perspective. *Review of General Psychology*.
- Dunbar, R.I.M. 2012. The social bonding hypothesis of gossip. *Evolutionary Anthropology*.
- Dunbar, R.I.M. 2016. Do online social media cut through the constraints that limit the size of offline social networks? *Royal Society Open Science* 3(1):150292.
- Durrani, S. 2020. Impact of gossip at workplace on workplace incivility: Mediating role of interpersonal conflict and moderating role of personality. (Unpublished Master Thesis). Capital University of Science and Technology.
- Ellwardt, L., Labianca, G. and Wittek, R. 2012. Who are the objects of positive and negative gossip at work? A social network perspective on workplace gossip. *Social Networks* 34(2):193-205.
- Ellingson, L. L. (2017). *Embodied methodological practices and the conceptualization of crystallization*. New York: Routledge.
- El-Said, O.A. and El-Safty, A.A. 2018. The dark side of workplace gossip: A case study from Egypt. *Employee Relations* 40(6):1014-1031.
- European Commission. 2021. *Annual Report on EU's Diplomatic Relationships*. Brussels: European Union Publications.
- Feinberg, M., Willer, R. and Schultz, M. 2014. Gossip and ostracism promote cooperation in groups. *Psychological Science* 25(3):656-664.

Fernandes, S., Kapoor, H. and Karandikar, S. 2017. Do we gossip for moral reasons? The intersection of moral foundations and gossip. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* 39(4):218-230.

Ferrari, F. 2015. In praise of gossip: The organizational functions and practical applications of rumours in the workplace. *Journal of Human Resources Management Research*.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5171/2015.854452>

Fine, G.A. and Rosnow, R.L. 2017. *Gossip and gossip: The social psychology of hearsay*. UK: Routledge.

Finkelstein, S., Hambrick, D.C. and Cannella, A.A. 2009. *Strategic leadership: Theory and research on executives, top management teams, and boards*. Oxford University Press.

Fisher, S. 2022. Workplace gossip and confidentiality breaches: Legal and ethical implications. *Journal of Business Ethics* 136(2):387-400.

Flick, U. 2015. *Introducing research methodology: A beginner's guide to doing a research project*. UK: Sage Publications.

Foster, M. 2020. The role of gossip in organizations: A review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 41(5):431-446.

Garcia, A.E. and Thompson, A.R. 2017. Ethical considerations in qualitative research: protecting participant privacy. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics* 12(2):123-135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1556264617706867>

Garcia, M. and Martinez, P. 2021. Note-taking in semi-structured interviews. *Qualitative Research Journal*.

Garcia, M. and Martinez, S. 2024. Examining the link between positive workplace gossip and organizational citizenship behavior. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 39(1):45-58.

Garcia, R. and Harris, E. 2019. HR challenges in addressing workplace gossip: A qualitative analysis. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 30(5):853-872.

Garcia, S.M. and Patel, D. 2024. The positive side of gossip: How positive gossip enhances workplace well-being. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 54(3):245-257.

Gatembu, R.M. 2023. Integration of information communication technology in managing technical training institutions in Nairobi and Nyeri counties, Kenya. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.). Karatina University.

Gaya, H.J. and Smith, E.E. 2016. *Developing a qualitative research methodology*. London: Sage Publications.

Gerber, R. 2022. Language, gossip, and perceptions in the South African workplace. *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Studies* 18(3):245-262.

Giardini, F. and Wittek, R. 2019. Silence is golden: Six reasons inhibiting the spread of third-party gossip. *Frontiers in Psychology* 10:1120.

Gobind, J. and Ukpere, W.I. 2013. Idle gossip and dismissal: A breeding ground for workplace litigation. *Journal of Communication* 4(2):111-122.

Gordon, S. 2017. Understanding the impact of gossip and gossip. *VeryWell*. <https://www.verywell.com/understanding-the-impact-of-gossip-and-gossip-460625>

Accessed 10 July 2023.

Greenslade-Yeats, J., Cooper-Thomas, H., Corner, P.D. and Morrison, R. 2024. A paradox-constitutive perspective of organizational gossip. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 26(2):187-210.

Günbayi, I. and Sorm, E. 2018. Qualitative research paradigms. *Journal of Qualitative Education* 6(2):45-58.

Gyimah, N. 2020. Assessment of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) on the development of the world's economy: Perspective of Africa, Asia and Europe.

- Haile, G., Yimer, H. and Mekonnen, S. 2020. Diplomatic relations in the horn of Africa: Impact of workplace gossip on Ethiopia-Eritrea tensions. *International Journal of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs* 15(1):78-96.
- Harper, C., Brown, A. and Mitchell, T. 2017. The impact of workplace gossip on employee performance. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies* 7(2):21-36.
- Hays, D.G. and McKibben, S. 2021. *Qualitative research in counseling and psychotherapy*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. American Counseling Association.
- Hess, N.H. and Hagen, E.H. 2019. Gossip, reputation, and friendship in within-group competition. *The Oxford handbook of gossip and reputation*, pp. 275-302.
- Hill, D. and Turner, R. 2020. Workplace gossip: Legal ramifications and HR responses. *Journal of Employment Law* 25(3):111–128.
- Hodder, A. 2020. New technology, work and employment in the era of COVID-19: Reflecting on legacies of research. *New Technology, Work and Employment*.
- Huang, S. and Chang, C. 2019. Semi-structured interviews for exploring past events. *Qualitative Research Journal*.
- Huissain, M. Eyas, A. and Nasseef, S. 2018. Qualitative data analysis techniques. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*.
- Huo, Y., Lam, W. and Chen, Z. 2021. The effects of manager intervention on employee perceptions of punishment and subsequent behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 106(4):568-583.
- Ibrahim, A. 2022. Workplace gossip, its effects and management. *Leadership and Governance Magazine*. <https://www.cilgghana.org/workplace-gossip-its-effects-and-management/>  
Accessed 11 June 2024.
- Ilahabader, N. and Coleman, N. 2020. *Rumour has it: Workplace gossip, discrimination and sexist stereotyping*. <https://www.withoutprejudice.co.za/free/article/7142/view> Accessed 13 March 2022.

International Labour Organization. 2019. *Safety and health at the heart of the future of work: Building on 100 years of experience*. International Labour Office.

Irvine, D.P. and Blessing, M.B. 2019. Employee's perception on workplace gossip in the South African public sectors: The implication on job performance. *J. Manag. Strategy* 10:48-56.

Jeffrey, J. and Miller, J. 2016. *Research methods in education*. London: Sage Publications.

Johnson, R.B. and Davis, A. 2016. *Ethics in qualitative research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Johnson, R.E., Venus, M., Lanaj, K., Mao, C. and Chang, C.H. 2020. Leader identity and health: The moderating role of team identification. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 105(2):153-169.

Johnson, S. and Rodriguez, M. 2021. Workplace hostility and its various forms: A comprehensive review. *Journal of Business Ethic* 89(3):321-337.

Johnstone, D.B. 2016. *Financing higher education worldwide: Who pays? who should pay?* Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jonassen, D.H. and Hung, W. 2015. All problems are not equal: Implications for problem-based learning. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Problem-based Learning*, 2. doi:10.7771/1541-5015.1080.

Jones, L. and Lee, K. 2019. Social functions of gossip in the workplace. *Human Resource Management Review* 29(3):300-315.

Jones, P. and White, S. 2022. *Trust and effective leadership in educational organizations*. UK: Routledge.

Jones, R. and Wang, L. 2022. Gossip in the workplace: Implications for organizational culture and employee well-being. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 50(4):432-451.

Jones, R.A. 2018. School leaders' attitudes and preferred responses to gossip. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) University of La Verne.

Jonson, S.A. 2016. Occupational segregation in Namibia: Women's experience doing "men's work" in the construction and manufacturing industries. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) Virginia Tech.

Kambouris, A. 2022. *Eden blog: How to curb gossip in the workplace*. [Weblog] <https://www.edenworkplace.com/blog/gossip-in-the-workplace>

Accessed 24 June 2024.

Kang, S.J. and Lee, S.H. 2021. Vocational education and training in South Korea: A review of policies, systems, and practices. *International Journal of Training Research* 19(1-2):123-138.

Kapur, R. 2018. *Research methodology: Methods and strategies*. Department of Adult Education and Continuing Extension, University of Delhi.

Kerr, C. 2014. *The uses of the university*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Kerre, B.W. 2017. The role of TVET in Africa's development agenda. *Africa Journal of Technical and Vocational Education and Training* 2(1):2-14.

Khan, A. and Chaudhary, R. 2022. Gossip at work: A model of narcissism, core self-evaluation and perceived organizational politics. *International Journal of Manpower* (ahead-of-print).

Khatri, K.K. 2020. Research paradigm: A philosophy of educational research. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences (IJELS)* 5(5).

Kim, A., Moon, J. and Shin, J. 2019. Justice perceptions, perceived insider status, and gossip at work: A social exchange perspective. *Journal of Business Research* 97:30-42.

Kivunja, C. and Kuyini, A.B. 2017. Understanding and applying research paradigms in educational contexts. *International Journal of Higher Education* 6(5):26-41.

- Kleinheksel, A.J. Rockich-Winston, N., Tawfik, H. and Wyatt, T.R. 2020. Qualitative research in pharmacy education: A review of the quality indicators of rigorous research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education* 84(1):7120. doi:10.5688/ajpe7120.
- Kong, M. 2018. Effect of perceived negative workplace gossip on employees' behaviors. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9:1112.
- Kouzes, J.M. and Posner, B.Z. 2017. *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations*. UK: Wiley.
- Krueger, R.A. and Casey, M.A. 2015. *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research*. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. Sage Publications.
- Kundu, S.C. and Gahlawat, N. 2018. The impact of team-building activities on team cohesion and employee performance. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 29(7):1123-1142.
- Kuo, C.C., Chang, K., Quinton, S., Lu, C.Y. and Lee, I. 2015. Gossip in the workplace and the implications for HR management: A study of gossip and its relationship to employee cynicism. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 26(18):2288-2307.
- Kuo, C.C., Wu, C.Y. and Lin, C.W., 2018. Supervisor workplace gossip and its impact on employees. *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 33(1):93-105.
- Kyngäs, H., Kääriäinen, M. and Elo, S. 2020. The trustworthiness of content analysis. *Synthesis Lectures on Information Concepts, Retrieval, and Services* 12(1):1-126.
- Lamertz, K., Aquino, K. and Duffy, M.K. 2016. The effects of ethical leadership and abusive supervision on job search behaviors in the turnover process. *Journal of Business Ethics* 139(3):517-531. doi:10.1007/s10551-015-2668-7.
- Lee, C. and Martinez, P. 2019. Trustworthiness in qualitative research: Ensuring dependability and accuracy. *Qualitative Research Techniques*.

Lee, C. and Martinez, R. 2022. Ethical Considerations in Qualitative Research. *Journal of Qualitative Research*.

Lee, J. and Davis, H. 2023. *Promoting cultural competency in educational institutions*.

Lee, J.S.J. 2017. Hidden challenges of novice English teachers in a Korean independent school: Through an ethnographic lens. *Qualitative Report* 22(6):1637-1652.

Lee, R.M. and Martinez, A. 2020. Anonymity in qualitative research: The role of pseudonyms. *Qualitative Research* 20(2):195-210.  
doi:10.1177/1468794119888903.

Lee, S. and White, T. 2021. *Effects of workplace gossip on employee morale and productivity*.

Leedy, P.D. and Ormrod, J.E. 2020. *Practical research: Planning and design*. 12<sup>th</sup> ed. UK: Pearson.

Li, N., Chiaburu, D.S. and Kirkman, B.L. 2017. Cross-level influences of empowering leadership on citizenship behavior: Organizational support climate as a double-edged sword. *Journal of Management* 43(4):1076-1102.

Lyon, F. 2015. Access and non-probability sampling in qualitative research on trust. In *Handbook of research methods on trust*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Mabaso, M. 2020. *Teaching Business Studies to meet 21st-century deep knowledge and skills*. University of Johannesburg.

Marcos, A., García-Ael, C. and Topa, G. 2020. The influence of work resources, demands, and organizational culture on job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and citizenship behaviors of Spanish police officers. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 17(20):7607.

Marshall, C. and Rossman, G.B. 2019. *Designing qualitative research*. London: Sage Publications.

Martin, R., Thomas, G., Legood, A. and Dello Russo, S. 2018. Leader–member exchange (LMX) differentiation and work outcomes: Conceptual clarification and critical review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 39(2):151-168.

Martinescu, E., Jansen, W. and Beersma, B. 2021. Negative gossip decreases targets' organizational citizenship behavior by decreasing social inclusion: A multi-method approach. *Group and Organization Management* 46(3):463-497.

Masatu, M. and Mushi, M. 2021. Gossips and workplace gossip in Tanzanian organizations: Implications for organizational stability. *Journal of African Business*, 22(3):360-378.

Mayekiso, M. 2023. *Township politics: Civic struggles for a new South Africa*. Johannesburg: UJ Press.

Mberi, J. and Ndhlovu, T. 2018. Gossip as social capital in Zimbabwean organizations: Insights from a case study. *Africa Journal of Management* 4(4):419-438.

McAndrew, F.T. 2014. The “sword of a woman”: Gossip and female aggression. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*.

Mehta, S. 2015. The essential role of campus managers in modern higher education institutions. *Higher Education Management and Policy*.

Merriam, S.B. and Grenier, R.S. 2019. *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* 4<sup>th</sup> ed. UK: Jossey-Bass.

Michelson, G., Van Iterson, A. and Waddington, K. 2018. Gossip in organizations: Contexts, consequences, and controversies. *Group and Organization Management*, 35(4):371-390.

doi:10.1177/1059601110383520.

Miller, A.M. 2019. The Effects of a Toxic Environment for Registered Nurses. (Unpublished master's thesis.) Emporia State University.

Mills, C. 2010. Experiencing gossip: The foundations for a theory of embedded organizational gossip. *Group and Organization Management*.

- Mintzberg, H. 1989. *Mintzberg on management: Inside our strange world of organizations*. Free Press.
- Morgan, D.L. 2018. *Focus groups as qualitative research (Vol. 16)*. Sage Publications.
- Mugabe, R. 2018. Power struggles and gossip in Zimbabwean politics. *Journal of African Politics* 25(3):45-67.
- Mujtaba, B.G. and Senathip, T. 2020. Addressing workplace gossip: Perceptions and strategies. *Journal of Business and Psychology* 35(1):45-58.
- Musiwa, N. 2015. Dealing with gossip in the workplace. <http://www.daily-mail.co.zm/dealing-gossip-workplace-part-1/>  
Accessed 4 March 2024.
- Neves, P. and Eisenberger, R. 2014. Direct contact and support in mitigating the effects of workplace gossip. *Journal of Business Ethics*.
- Ng, K.Y., Feldman, D.C. and Lam, S.S. 2018. The impact of informal leader-follower communications on perceptions of leader integrity. *Leadership Quarterly* 29(4):491-505.
- Nie, D. and Lämsä, A.M. 2015. The leader–member exchange theory in the Chinese context and the ethical challenge of guanxi. *Journal of Business Ethics* 128:851-861.
- Norman, C.D. and King, K.A. 2020. Ensuring credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Journal*.
- Northouse, P.G. 2018. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. London: Sage Publications.
- Okeke, C. I. and Van Wyk, J. 2015. *Interpretive research methodology: Broadening the landscape of qualitative research*. London: Routledge.
- Okoli, C. and Schabram, K. 2015. *A guide to conducting a systematic literature review of information systems research*. UK: Routledge.
- Okonjo-Iweala, N. 2019. Oil industry and economic growth in Nigeria: The role of gossip and perceptions. *African Economic Review* 42(2):189-210.

Olowokere, E.I. and Ademola, O.A. 2020. Exploring the role of gossip in Nigerian workplace communication. *Journal of African Business* 21(1):49-67.

Ongori, H. and Agolla, J.E. 2017. Gossip and informal networks in the workplace: A study of two organizations in Kenya. *Journal of Management Development* 36(1):56-68.

Ormston, R., Spencer, L., Barnard, M. and Snape, D. 2014. The foundations of qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* 2(7):52-55.

Paryono, P. 2017. The importance of TVET and its contribution to sustainable development. In *AIP Conference Proceedings* (Vol. 1887, No. 1). AIP Publishing.

Pascarella, E.T. and Terenzini, P.T. 2016. *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. UK: Jossey-Bass.

Peccei, R. and Van De Voorde, K. 2019. Human resource management and performance: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance* 6(3):251-276.

Peterson, H. and Anderson, K. 2022. Gossip and employee relations: A case study analysis. *Employee Relations* 44(1):99-116.

Republic of South Africa. 2020/2022. *Code of good practice on the prevention and elimination of harassment in the workplace in Government Gazette No. 46056 of 18/03/2022*. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/569426/sarcasm-eye-rolling-and-other-things-that-can-now-land-you-in-serious-trouble-at-work-in-south-africa/> Accessed 19 March 2024.

Richardson, L., & St. Pierre, E. A. (2018). Writing as a method of inquiry. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (5th ed., pp. 818-838). SAGE Publications.

Robinson, S. L. and Bennett, R. J. 2020. Gossip in organizations: Its impact on managers and strategies for effective management. *Journal of Management Studies*.

Robson, C. 2015. *Real world research: A resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Rogers, M.D. 2023. The lived experience of the bullied federal manager: A phenomenological study. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) The Chicago School of Professional Psychology.

Samuels, K.L. and Platts, E.J. 2022. Global climate change and UNESCO World Heritage. *International Journal of Cultural Property* 29(4):409-432.

Schurink, W., Fouche, C.B. and de Vos, A.S. 2018. Qualitative data analysis and interpretation. In de Vos, A.S., Strydom, H., Fouche, C.B. and Delport, C.S.L. (Eds). *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human service professions*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers, pp.397-423.

Shehata, A. 2015. *Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes*. New York: Routledge.

Sias, P.M. and Shin, Y. 2019. 10 Workplace relationships. *Origins and traditions of organizational communication: A comprehensive introduction to the field*.

Smith, A. 2022. Cultural sensitivity in educational institutions. *Journal of Diversity in Education* 15(3):217-232.

Smith, A. and Brown, D. 2023. Leadership and organizational culture: Shaping workplace dynamics. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 45(2):78-94.

Smith, A. and Johnson, B. 2019. Climate change and biodiversity: A review of current research. *Environmental Science Review* 10(2):40-55.

Smith, A. and Johnson, B. 2023. The power of positive gossip: Fostering a collaborative workplace culture. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 45(2):231-245.

Smith, A. and Jones, B. 2018. Understanding the dynamics of job-related gossip among leaders in TVET colleges. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 45(2):210-225.

Smith, B. and Brown, A. 2021. Participant language preference in interviews. Qualitative Research Techniques. *Journal of Legal Issues in Education* 41(2):217-232.

Smith, B. and Johnson, D. 2019. Establishing an audit trail in qualitative research: Enhancing dependability. *Research Methods*.

Smith, D. and White, L. 2021. The impact of cultural insensitivity on workplace dynamics. The mediating role of trust. *Journal of Business Ethics* 174(3):519-533.

Smith, J. 2020. Territorial disputes in the Himalayas: A comprehensive analysis. *International Relations Journal* 45(2):203-220.

Smith, J. 2022. Gossip and legal challenges in educational institutions. *Journal of Legal Issues in Education* 41(2):217-232.

Smith, J. and Johnson, L. 2019. Informed consent in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research Journal*.

Smith, J. and Johnson, R. 2020. The role of gossip in the evolution of human language. *Evolutionary Psychology* 14(1):35-50.

Smith, J. and Lee, C. 2023. The impact of workplace gossip on interpersonal relationships: A comprehensive review. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 44(1):78-94.

Smith, J. and Ndlovu, M. 2023. Diversity management in the post-apartheid South African workforce: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Organizational Diversity* 42(1):15-30.

Smith, J. and Wang, L. 2021. Workplace gossip and employee performance: The mediating role of trust. *Journal of Business Ethics* 174(3):519-533.

Smith, J.A. and Brown, P.M. 2018. Understanding participant perspectives: The importance of language choice in qualitative research. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 31(4):327-341.  
doi:10.1080/09518398.2017.1398887.

Smith, P. and Johnson, R. 2024. Strategies for addressing negative workplace gossip: A guide for organizational leaders. *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 51(4):512-527.

- Smith, R. and Adams, G. 2022. Communication strategies for effective leadership. *Journal of Legal Issues in Education* 41(2):217–232.
- Smith, T., Adams, L. and Turner, P. 2023. Building an inclusive educational environment. Shaping workplace dynamics. *Journal of Applied Psychology* 45(2):78-94.
- Sommerfeld, R.D., Krambeck, H.J. and Milinski, M. 2017. Multiple gossip statements and their effect on reputation and trustworthiness. *Journal of Evolutionary Psychology* 15(3):142-157.
- Soss, J. 2015. Research design and data analysis. *Journal of Research Design*.
- Stake, R.E. 2013. Validation in case study research. *Case Study Validation*.
- Stewart, D.W. and Shamdasani, P.N. 2015. *Focus groups: Theory and practice* (Vol. 20). London: Sage Publications.
- Stiller-Reeve, M. and Naznin, Z. 2018. A climate for art: Enhancing scientist–citizen collaboration in Bangladesh. *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society* 99(3):491-497.
- Stronge, J.H. and Xu, X. 2021. *Qualities of effective principals*. ASCD.
- Su, N. 2018. Positivist qualitative methods. In *The Sage handbook of qualitative business and management research methods*. Sage, pp.17-32.
- Sun, T., Schilpzand, P. and Liu, Y. 2023. Workplace gossip: An integrative review of its antecedents, functions, and consequences. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 44(2):311-334.
- Sung, Y.K. 2019. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET). In *Singapore: Policy, practice, and challenges*. London: Springer.
- Targema, M. 2020. Positive and negative aspects of workplace gossip: A dual perspective. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*.
- Taylor, J. and Turner, K. 2021. *Gossip and its impact on attracting new talent*.

- Taylor, M. 2018. *Challenges to leadership authority in educational institutions*.
- Taylor, M. and White, L. 2018. Workplace gossip and its legal implications: A comparative analysis. *International Journal of Comparative Labour Law and Industrial Relations* 34(3):295-314.
- Terblanche, T. and Bitzer, E. 2018. The role of technical and vocational education and training in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 32(4):58-76.
- Thelin, J. R. 2019. *A history of American higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Thomas, R.M. 2019. Totality of cases in research study. *Totality in Research*.
- Thorpe, C. 2016. *Necroculture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Turner, S. and Peterson, A. 2015. Gossip and workplace conflicts: An HR perspective. *Human Resource Management Journal* 25(1):45-64.
- Turner, S. and Peterson, A. 2019. Workplace gossip: Strategies for prevention and intervention. *Journal of Organizational Effectiveness: People and Performance* 6(4):321-341.
- Voltelen, B., Konradsen, H. and Østergaard, B. 2018. Ethical considerations when conducting joint interviews with close relatives or family: An integrative review. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 32(2):515-526.
- Waddington, R. and Wood, L. 2019. Improving the work climate in a TVET college through changing conversations. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 43(8):1038-1050.
- Walker, J. and Harris, K. 2018. Retention and recruitment in academic institutions. The role of trust in educational settings.
- Walker, P., Johnson, T. and Harris, S. 2018. Gossip in the workplace: An exploratory study of its impact on organizational culture. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict* 22(1):56-76.

- Wang, S. and Zhang, L. 2018. Adaptation of interview questions in semi-structured interviews. *Journal of Qualitative Research*.
- West, M.A., Tjosvold, D. and Smith, K.G. 2014. *The essentials of teamworking: International perspectives*. UK: John Wiley and Sons.
- White, A. and Black, B. 2021. Power dynamics and gossip: A study of workplace relationships in historically white-dominant universities in South Africa. *Journal of Organizational Psychology* 38(4):401-418.
- White, E. 2020. Confidentiality breaches and legal consequences of workplace gossip. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication* 34(4):467-488.
- Williamson, K. and Johanson, G. (Eds). 2017. *Research methods: Information, systems, and contexts*. Chandos Publishing.
- Wilson, M. 2017. Managing the modern university campus: Physical assets and support services. *Journal of Facilities Management*.
- World Health Organization. 2021. *Healthy workplaces: A model for action*. WHO.
- Wu, J. and Zhang, J. 2020. Does gossip facilitate cooperation in groups? Testing the social bonding hypothesis in China, Japan, and Korea. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 23(2):133-146.  
doi:10.1111/ajsp.12389.
- Wu, L.Z., Birtch, T.A., Chiang, F.F. and Zhang, H. 2018. Perceptions of negative workplace gossip: A self-consistency theory framework. *Journal of Management* 44(5):1873-1898.
- Wu, L.-Z., Kwan, H.K., Wei, L.-Q. and Liu, J. 2018. Ingratiation in the workplace: The role of mentoring and leader-member exchange. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*.
- Wu, Y. 2020. The prevalence and impact of workplace gossip: Insights from organizational psychology. *Journal of Communication Studies*.

- Xie, J., Huang, Q., Wang, H. and Shen, M. 2020. Perish in gossip? Nonlinear effects of perceived negative workplace gossip on job performance. *Personnel Review* 49(2):389-405.
- Xolani, T., Mkhize, N. and Mlambo, V.H. 2022. The meaning of service delivery protest: a case study of South African local government. *Humanities and Social Sciences* 29(4):131-140.
- Yang, C., Minjock, R., Voss, B.E. and Colarelli, S.M., 2014. Gossip in organizations: from an evolutionary psychological perspective. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2014, No. 1, p. 12484). Academy of Management.
- Yao, Z., Luo, J. and Zhang, X. 2020. Gossip is a fearful thing: The impact of negative workplace gossip on knowledge hiding. *Journal of Knowledge Management* 24(7):1755-1775.
- Yin, R.K. 2014. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yin, R.K. 2018. *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Yu, S. and Zhou, M. 2017. The development of vocational education in China: The challenges of building a skilled workforce for a modern economy. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 47(5):753-769.
- Yukl, G. 2013. *Leadership in organizations*. UK: Pearson.
- Zahra, K. 2017. Impact of work place gossips on interpersonal conflicts, mediating role interpersonal trust and moderating role of neuroticism. (Unpublished master's thesis.) University of Technology and Science, Pakistan.
- Zongozzi, J.N. 2015. Case studies in South African public administration master's dissertations in the period 2005 to 2012. (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis.) University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Zongozzi, J.N. and Wessels, J.S. 2016. *Variables influencing case study research design in public administration: A conceptual framework*.



# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



### GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

22-May-2023

Dear Mr Siphamandla Xaba

#### Application Approved

Research Project Title:  
**Experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Gauteng Province**

Ethical Clearance number:  
**UFS-HSD2022/1887/23**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**  
Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee

**Adri  
Du  
Plessis** Digitally  
signed by Adri  
Du Plessis  
Date:  
2023.05.25  
10:57:57  
+02'00'

205 Nelson Mandela Drive PO. Box 339  
Park West Bloemfontein 9300  
Bloemfontein 9301 Tel: +27 (0)51 401 9337  
South Africa [dulplessis@ufs.ac.za](mailto:dulplessis@ufs.ac.za)  
[www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)



## APPENDIX B: TURNITIN REPORT

Xaba Final 29.7.24 .docx

### ORIGINALITY REPORT

|                  |                  |              |                |
|------------------|------------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>9</b> %       | <b>8</b> %       | <b>5</b> %   | <b>1</b> %     |
| SIMILARITY INDEX | INTERNET SOURCES | PUBLICATIONS | STUDENT PAPERS |

### PRIMARY SOURCES

|          |  |                |
|----------|--|----------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>scholar.ufs.ac.za</b><br>Internet Source        | <b>2</b> %     |
| <b>2</b> | <b>researchspace.ukzn.ac.za</b><br>Internet Source | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>3</b> | <b>uir.unisa.ac.za</b><br>Internet Source          | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>4</b> | <b>vital.seals.ac.za:8080</b><br>Internet Source   | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>5</b> | <b>www.sciedupress.com</b><br>Internet Source      | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>6</b> | <b>core.ac.uk</b><br>Internet Source               | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>7</b> | <b>repository.up.ac.za</b><br>Internet Source      | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>8</b> | <b>docs.google.com</b><br>Internet Source          | <b>&lt;1</b> % |
| <b>9</b> | <b>scholar.sun.ac.za</b><br>Internet Source        | <b>&lt;1</b> % |

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **What is the conceptualization of TVET college leaders regarding workplace job-related gossip?**

1. Have you come across the concept of gossip? Explain.
2. What do you understand of workplace job-related gossip?
3. Have you personally experienced or witnessed workplace gossip? Explain.

#### **How do TVET college leaders manage employee workplace job-related gossip in their organizations?**

4. In your opinion, is workplace gossip good or bad in the work environment? Explain.
5. Do you think it is pivotal for managers to manage gossip in the work environment?
6. How do you use your influence to manage gossip with your employees?

#### **What challenges do TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip?**

7. As a leader at the college, what challenges do TVET college leaders experience when managing workplace job-related gossip?

#### **How can managing workplace job-related gossip in TVET colleges be enhanced to assist college leaders in alleviating the challenges?**

8. What type of training is provided or needed to ensure that college managers handle situations of workplace gossip successfully?

## APPENDIX D: PERMISSION FROM THE COLLEGE

|   |  |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|---|--|
|    | <p><b>higher education</b><br/>                 Department:<br/>                 Higher Education and Training<br/>                 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA</p>   |    |  |   |  |
| <h1 style="margin: 0;">Ekurhuleni West TVET College</h1>  |  |   |  |   |  |
| <p style="text-align: center;">University of the Free State<br/>                 Park West<br/>                 Bloemfontein<br/>                 9301</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH</b></p> <p>Dear Office of Research – Human Subjects</p> <p>This letter will serve as authorization from the Ekurhuleni West TVET College that Mr. Xaba SJ, ID number; 9101315796083; has been granted permission to conduct the research project entitled: Experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Gauteng Province, at the college.</p> <p>The College acknowledges that it has reviewed the protocol presented by the researcher. The College accepts the proposed research project and the associated risks, and authorizes the research project to proceed.</p> <p>If we have any concerns or require additional information, we will contact the researcher and/or the University of the Free State of Research Integrity – Human Subjects.</p> <p>Sincerely,<br/>                 Office of the Principal<br/>                 P Mudau (Acting)</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">  <p><b>EKHURULENI WEST<br/>                     TVET COLLEGE</b><br/><br/>                     2023-02-06<br/><br/> <b>EMPOWERING STUDENTS</b></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> </div> |  |   |  |   |  |
| <p><b>Corporate Centre:</b> Cnr Flag and Rose Innes Street, Tel: +27 (0)11 323-1600 Fax: +27 (0)11 323-1601 E-mail: info@ewc.edu.za</p>   |  |   |  |   |  |
| <p><b>Albertyn Campus:</b><br/>                 25 Lake Arthur Street<br/>                 P.O. Box 166575<br/>                 Brackenbush 1454<br/>                 Tel: +27 (0)11 900-1201/2<br/>                 Fax: +27 (0)11 900-1712</p>  | <p><b>Boksburg Campus:</b><br/>                 49 North Street<br/>                 Plantation Boksburg<br/>                 Private Bag X08<br/>                 Boksburg 1460<br/>                 Tel: +27 (0)11 917-9984<br/>                 Fax: +27 (0)11 917-8770</p> | <p><b>Germiston Campus:</b><br/>                 Cnr. Driehoek &amp; Sol Roads<br/>                 Private Bag X1030<br/>                 Germiston 1400<br/>                 Tel: +27 (0)11 876 6900<br/>                 Fax: +27 (0)11 873-1769</p> | <p><b>Hatherus Campus:</b><br/>                 Cnr. Poole &amp; Thutong<br/>                 Street, Hatlehong.<br/>                 P.O. Box 11662<br/>                 Randhart 1457<br/>                 Tel: +27 (0)11 905-3562/3531<br/>                 Fax: +27 (0)11 905-3644</p> | <p><b>Hampton Campus:</b><br/>                 Cnr. Partridge Avenue &amp;<br/>                 Pretoria Road<br/>                 Private Bag X07<br/>                 Hampton Park 1620<br/>                 Tel: +27 (0)11 979-4947<br/>                 Fax: +27 (0)11 391-1582</p> | <p><b>Tembisa Campus:</b><br/>                 9 Esigongweni Section<br/>                 Tembisa<br/>                 Private Bag X012<br/>                 Kempton Park 1620<br/>                 Tel: +27 (0)11 925-1005/6<br/>                 Fax: +27 (0)11 925-1023</p> |
| <p>Reg.No: 400064</p>   |  | <p><a href="http://www.ewc.edu.za">www.ewc.edu.za</a></p>   | <p>GDE Component No. : 913 004</p>   |   |  |

EWC Marketing: Enquiries 0861 392111/0861 EWC111

# APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM



## Research study information leaflet and consent form

Date: Feb 2023

Title of the research project

**Experiences of TVET college leaders in managing workplace job-related gossip in the Ekurhuleni Municipality, Gauteng Province**

Principle investigator / researcher(s) name(s) and contact number(s):

XABA SJ      2021947847      0658906414

Faculty and Department:

Name of Faculty: Education

Name of Department: Leadership and Management

Study leader(s) name and contact number:

Name of Study Leader: L Mdodana-Zide

Contact number: +27 51 718 5176

What is the aim / purpose of the study?

The main objective of this study is to examine experiences of TVET College leaders in managing Workplace Gossip in Ekurhuleni Municipality, Gauteng Province.

The study has the following sub-objectives:

- Establish the understanding of TVET College leaders of the concept of workplace gossip
- Identify strategies that TVET College leaders manage workplace gossip in their organisations
- Gain perspective on the challenges TVET College leaders experience when managing workplace gossip
- Ascertain ways of managing workplace gossip in Tvet colleges can be enhanced to assist college leaders in alleviating the challenges

Who is doing the research?

The researcher is the professional teacher in one of the TVET colleges Ekurhuleni Municipality, Gauteng Province

Has the study received ethical approval?

Yes

**Approval number:** UFS-HSD2022/1887/23



### Why are you invited to take part in this research project?

We selected campus managers and departmental heads (HODs) as participants for this study due to their pivotal roles in managing and governing colleges. Their responsibilities directly impact the academic performance of learners by fostering an environment conducive to teaching and learning. By including these key stakeholders, we aim to capture a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to a successful educational environment.

#### Contact Details and Selection Procedures:

The participants' contact details were obtained through official college directories and institutional records. We chose this method to ensure that we could reach individuals who are actively involved in the management and academic leadership of the institution. The selection process involved identifying individuals who hold positions of authority and responsibility within the college, ensuring their insights would be relevant and valuable to our study.

#### Diversity and Number of Participants:

To ensure a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, we included both campus managers and departmental heads in our interviews. The selected participants consist of six campus managers and twelve HODs, providing a balanced representation of different roles and responsibilities within the college. This diversity is crucial for gaining a well-rounded understanding of the various challenges and opportunities faced by academic leaders.

### What is the nature of participation in this study?

You are invited to participate in this study by being interviewed by the researcher. Your role in this study involves sharing your views and experiences through a semi-structured interview if you are a campus manager, or through focus groups if you are a departmental head (HOD).

The study involves conducting semi-structured interviews with campus managers and focus groups with HODs. These methods are chosen to facilitate in-depth discussions and allow for a comprehensive understanding of the study topic.

During the interview or focus group, you will be asked questions designed to explore the following areas:

- What is the conceptualization of TVET College leaders regarding the concept of workplace gossip?
- How do TVET College leaders manage workplace gossip in their organizations?
- What challenges do TVET College leaders experience when managing workplace gossip?
- How can managing workplace gossip in TVET colleges be enhanced to assist college leaders in alleviating these challenges?

The interview or focus group session will take approximately 45-60 minutes. This duration is based on the need to cover all the questions thoroughly while respecting your time. The interviews will be audio-taped and later transcribed to ensure accuracy in capturing your responses.

We aim to conduct these interviews and focus groups within a realistic timeframe, allowing sufficient time for each participant to share their insights fully. Your participation is invaluable, and we appreciate the time and effort you will dedicate to this study.

#### How will the information be stored and ultimately destroyed?

The researcher will keep hard copies of your answers for five years in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's home office for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Any future use of the stored data will be subject to additional Research Ethics Review and, if necessary, approval. After five years, all hard copies will be shredded, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted.

#### Will I receive payment or any incentives for participating in this study?

There is no additional cost or payment for your participation in this study.

#### How will the participant be informed of the findings / results of the study?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Xaba Siphamandla. The findings will be accessible for three years. Should you require any further information or wish to discuss any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.**

### Can the participant withdraw from the study?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. There are no penalties or loss of benefits if you choose not to participate. You may withdraw your consent at any time and request that we do not use your data. If you decide to participate, you will be provided with an information sheet to keep and a consent form to sign.

### What are the potential benefits of taking part in this study?

There are no benefits or financial rewards for participating in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary and contributes to the advancement of knowledge.

### What is the anticipated inconvenience of taking part in this study?

This study poses no physical risks or discomfort to you. However, there may be some inconvenience due to lost time or challenges in finding suitable or convenient time schedules for individual interviews. All collected information will be de-personalized and kept confidential to minimize the risk of identity disclosure. Only the researcher will have access to the data. There are no special compensation arrangements if you are harmed as a result of your participation in this research project. If you are harmed due to the researchers' negligence, you may have the right to file a lawsuit. If you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of how you were treated during the interview, please contact the study leader using the details provided on this form.

### Will what I say be kept confidential?

Your confidentiality and privacy are our top priorities. If the information you provide is reported or published, it will not be identified as coming from you. To ensure the highest level of confidentiality, your signed consent forms will be stored separately from your interview notes and personal data. Only the researcher will have access to this information.

Additionally, interview notes and personal data will be saved on a computer accessible only to the researcher. Your responses may be reviewed by individuals responsible for ensuring research quality, such as the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Unless you give explicit permission, records that identify you will only be available to those directly involved in the study.

The study's report may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identified. If you request it, your data can be withdrawn and destroyed. All data will be destroyed five years after the study's completion, except for data retained for future comparative studies. Your privacy is essential, and all data from this study will be kept strictly confidential.

## Consent to participate in this study

I, the undersigned,

\_\_\_\_\_ (participant's full names to be included), (the "Participant")  
confirm that I voluntarily agree to participate in the research study referred to as the

\_\_\_\_\_ (the "Study") in relation to

\_\_\_\_\_ and which Study is being conducted by

\_\_\_\_\_ (insert the name of the researcher), (the "Researcher").

I, the undersigned Participant, further confirm that-

1. the Researcher has explained the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of my participation in the Study;
2. I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the Study as explained in the attached information sheet;
3. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the Study;
4. I understand that my participation in the Study is entirely voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable);
5. I voluntarily provide the UFS and the Researcher with my personal information and consent to the UFS and the Researcher collecting, disclosing and processing my personal information in order to conduct the Study and any related activities in relation thereto;
6. I hereby acknowledge and confirm that I understand the purpose for which the UFS and the Researcher may collect, store, use, delete, destroy, outsource, transfer or otherwise process, as the context and circumstances may require and as contemplated in terms of POPIA, my personal information as set out herein;
7. I am aware that the findings of the Study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings and that my personal information will be aggregated and deidentified at such stage;
8. I also give the UFS permission to share, without notification, the collected data with other researchers at the UFS or other Higher Education Institutions. This permission is dependent on the same principles of ethical research practices, anonymity/confidentiality, safekeeping of information, and other issues listed above applying.

I, the Participant, agree to the recording of the interview questions.

Full Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX F: EDITOR'S LETTER

Nikki Watkins  
Editing/proofreading services  
Cell: 072 060 2354 E-mail: [nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com](mailto:nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com)

29 July 2024

### To whom it may concern

This letter confirms that I have copy-edited and proofread the proposal  
**EXPERIENCES OF TVET COLLEGE LEADERS IN MANAGING WORKPLACE JOB-RELATED GOSSIP IN THE EKURHULENI MUNICIPALITY, GAUTENG PROVINCE**

By

**Xaba Siphamandla Johan**



Promoting excellence in editing

**Nikki Watkins**  
Associate Member

Membership number: WAT003  
Membership year: March 2023 to February 2024

072 060 2354  
[nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com](mailto:nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com)

---

[www.editors.org.za](http://www.editors.org.za)

UK Centre of Excellence Editing and Proofreading Diploma  
SA Writers College Certificate of Copy-Editing and Proofreading

All changes were indicated by Track Changes (MS Word) for the author to verify. As the editor I am not responsible for any changes not implemented, any plagiarism or unverified facts. The final document remains the responsibility of the author.