The Impact of Positive Workplace Gossip on Employees' Job Satisfaction: A Study Based on the Confucian Humanistic Management

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Abstract. Based on the Confucian philosophy of humanistic management, a relationship model between positive workplace gossip and employees' job satisfaction is constructed through a questionnaire survey of 205 Chinese corporate employees. Meanwhile, psychological capital and organizational identity are introduced as mediating variables to analyze the impact of positive workplace gossip on the satisfaction of the gossiped employees and the formation mechanism. The results show that: positive workplace gossip has a significant positive impact on employees' job satisfaction. ②Psychological capital has significant mediating effects on the relationship between positive workplace gossip and job satisfaction. ③Organizational identity has significant mediating effects on the relationship between positive workplace gossip and job satisfaction..

Keywords: positive workplace gossip; job satisfaction; psychological capital; organisational identity; humanistic management.

1. Introduction

Gossip is the behaviour of communicating and discussing content related to others among individuals in society, which is widespread in social life [1]. Workplace gossip, an expression used to describe the casual information shared at work regarding non-present third parties, is another common sort of gossip [2]. Workplace gossip is an extremely common and very important behaviour for employees to share and communicate with each other in the company [3, 4]. Research shows that over 95% of employees participate in workplace gossip [5], and gossip accounts for about 65% of employees' work talk time [6, 7, 8]. At present, most studies classify workplace gossip into positive gossip and negative gossip based on its valence [9, 10, 11]. Currently, a wide range of studies have examined the effects of unfavorable rumors on workers, and the majority of these studies have shown how bad rumors affect workers' job satisfaction, productivity, and excitement as well as their creativity and pleasure at work [12, 13, 14, 15]. Scholars, however, have not given much thought to the examination of good workplace gossip and its effects on workers [16]. Positive and bad talk, according to some academics, have quite different effects [17]. Although the effects of good workplace gossip on participants' job satisfaction have been confirmed by certain researchers in the past [18], the impact of gossip itself is still unknown and requires immediate investigation. Thus, the goal of this study is to investigate if encouraging gossip at work might enhance the job satisfaction of those who hear gossip.

According to earlier studies, positive workplace gossip has been shown to boost employees' organizational identity by enhancing their perception of job security, which is one way that it influences job satisfaction [7, 19]. In addition, some studies have confirmed that job insecurity only partially explain the influence on job satisfaction in the theoretical perspective and background of the West [18], which indicates that different mediators may exist when examining it from other theoretical perspectives, but no studies have yet explored other mediators. Especially when analyzing the behaviour of individuals within firms in the Chinese economic environment, the influence of culture cannot be ignored [20]. Until today, the traditional culture of Confucianism still plays a crucial role in the social progress of the country and the management of businesses [21, 22]. Previous studies have combined psychological capital with traditional Chinese cultural perspectives, concluding that positive psychological qualities can positively influence an individual's subjective well-being [23].

Some scholars have also confirmed that teachers with higher psychological capital have higher job satisfaction [24]. Whether positive workplace gossip can be used as a tool to create a harmonious atmosphere in the workplace, help employees gain organizational recognition and enhance their psychological capital has not yet been verified.

In summary, based on the Confucian cultural background, this study explores the influence mechanism of workplace positive gossip on job satisfaction from the perspective of humanistic management thinking and specifically analyses the mechanism of gossip to enhance employee job satisfaction, to make a strong addition to the academic research in the field of workplace gossip, and in particular to fill in the "black box" of the field of research on workplace positive gossip. Using the best parts of traditional culture, especially Confucian culture, as an entry point, it provides theoretical references for modern enterprises to create a harmonious and positive atmosphere and enhance employee satisfaction.
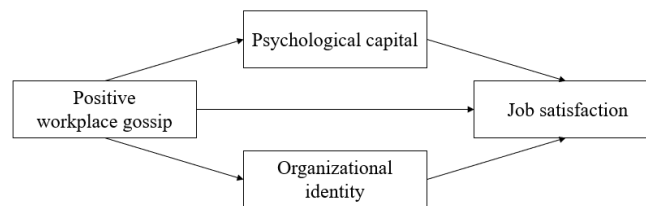

Fig. 1 Theoretical model

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

2.1 Research on the philosophy of humanistic management

As the essence of our traditional culture, Confucianism has prevailed in China for thousands of years [25]. Humanistic management is the most distinctive feature of Confucian management theory. The core of humanistic management is to place people at the centre, respect human nature, adapt to human nature, shape human nature and improve human nature in the process of management [26]. The most notable features of the humanistic management philosophy are manifested in the way of "benevolence and love", the concept of "the people are the most important", and the principle of "harmony is the most important" [27].

"Benevolence" emphasizes the subjective status of human beings, which is expressed in the management as caring and respecting workers. Mencius first combined the concept of benevolence with the practice of management, and put forward "benevolent government" [28]. "The people are the most important" emphasizes the value of the human being. Confucius believed that "people can develop the way, not the way" [29], that is, people have the subjective initiative of thinking and analysis, so all management behaviours of an enterprise should focus on the employees and positively affirm the value of the employees. "Harmony is the most important" emphasizes the core value of harmony in management, which is put forward by Confucius [30], emphasizing the importance of harmonious organization.

The 21st century is the era of humanistic management. The competitiveness of enterprises is highly correlated with the satisfaction of employees [31]. Some researchers think that one of the reasons why some private enterprises in China do not attach importance to employees' satisfaction is that they do not set up the concept of humanistic management and do not realize the importance of humanistic management [32, 33]. On the contrary, some scholars investigated Wen's food group which formulated the humanistic management rule, and through collecting questionnaires, found that the scores of various satisfaction indicators of the employees were either good or excellent [34]. Up to now, scholars have been calling on all enterprises to establish a humanistic management corporate culture [35]. Therefore, the humanistic management concept is of great necessity to explain the employees' job satisfaction and is also of great significance to study the behaviours among employees

in an enterprise and provide suggestions for the enterprise management practice based on the people-oriented concept.

2.2 Positive workplace gossip and job satisfaction

Positive workplace gossip means telling coworkers good things about a third party who isn't there and praising an individual on a personal level in an appropriate situation [36]. Positive gossip at work refer to those that acknowledge and commend a worker's skills, disposition, and productivity. Additional empirical research supports the notion that positive workplace gossip improves employees' attitudes and behaviors, including their ability to succeed at work [37]. However, the effect of positive gossip at work on workers' job satisfaction has not been thoroughly investigated in empirical research. Employees' responses to their working environments are reflected in their job satisfaction, which is a subjective measure of how happy they are with their jobs [38]. The Chinese-style management under the Confucian culture follows the human-oriented logic, emphasizes the people-centred view of people's livelihood and humanism, and advocates "the nature of heaven and earth is precious". As individuals who participate in the operation management and value creation activities of the enterprise, their job satisfaction is very important. Some researchers use the theory of social information processing, which explains that employees will identify gossip in the workplace and gossip that is beneficial to them will make employees feel happy through people making corresponding responses to social information judgments [18, 39].

Similarly, Confucian culture emphasizes the harmonious relationship between man and society, and man's behaviours are greatly influenced by the social environment. Firstly, positive workplace gossip performs an essential part in the overall atmosphere of the organization. Acknowledgment and appreciation for an employee's work ethic, disposition, and productivity can foster strong interpersonal bonds among coworkers [40], which in turn can improve the way that employees view the company and themselves. Secondly, positive gossip among employees creates a positive and harmonious working atmosphere, which is in line with the characteristics of Chinese management based on Confucianism [41]. The friendly and harmonious working atmosphere enables employees to feel concern, tolerance and love [42]. Therefore, when employees find that workplace colleagues spread positive gossip, their subjective reaction to the work environment will be more positive, so their behaviour with higher job satisfaction will occur [43]. Therefore, this paper proposes:

H1: Positive workplace gossip has a significant positive impact on employees' job satisfaction.

2.3 The mediating role of psychological capital

The foundational psychological component of a person's overall initiative is known as psychological capital [44], which is composed of optimistic, resilient, and positive psychological components like self-efficacy [45]. When the content of workplace gossip is positive, the affirmation and praise from colleagues will stimulate positive emotions, provide support and encouragement, and create a harmonious working environment, so that the gossiped people will be more motivated, more confident, and more resilient to work [46]. The JD-R model of the association between research work and pleasure incorporates psychological capital in order to examine the function of psychological capital [47]. According to research, people with strong psychological capital typically have nice things to say about their workplaces, which has a beneficial impact on their job satisfaction [48]. At the same time, studies have demonstrated that psychological capital positively affects employees' job performance and organizational behaviour [49].

From the perspective of Confucian culture, Confucian culture also advocates positive psychological qualities, such as optimism, kindness and benevolence. Previous studies combined with the perspective of traditional culture in China found that positive psychological quality is related to subjective well-being prediction [50]. Some academics blend psychological capital with traditional Chinese culture, using Confucian culture as a stand-in for traditional Chinese culture and drawing beneficial psychological traits from it. From a fresh angle, they investigate the connection between positive psychological traits and subjective well-being and discover that good psychological qualities

raise an individual's degree of subjective well-being [23]. The so-called "harmony is the most important thing". Positive gossip in the workplace is an act of appreciation and affirmation [40]. It can create a harmonious coexistence between employees and an atmosphere of friendship and goodwill among all people. It can help the employees who are gossiped to establish confidence in their future work, feel motivated, let the employees feel the joy and happiness of their work, and let the employees have a higher sense of happiness. However, higher psychological capital workers have more stable psychological moods, are more able to fit in with the company culture, engage in more cordial interactions with coworkers, and are simpler to incorporate within the company [51]. At the same time, higher job happiness is beneficial to enable employees to have higher job satisfaction. Therefore, this paper proposes:

H2a: Positive workplace gossip has a significant positive impact on employees' psychological capital.

H2b: Psychological capital has a significant positive impact on employees' job satisfaction.

H3c: Psychological capital mediates the impact of positive workplace gossip on employees' job satisfaction.

2.4 The mediating role of organizational identification

Organisational identity is when members of an organisation agree more strongly with the organization, the organisation and its members are an important part of each other [52]. Existing research indicates that negative gossip diminishes employees' organizational identification [7]. On the contrary, positive gossip spreads positive information, so that more people in the organization will approve or approve the workability or attitude of the employee being gossiped about. When the organization reaches a consensus on the employee's excellence, the employee being gossiped will feel a stronger sense of organizational integration and identity. Research has confirmed the fact that negative workplace gossip affects employees' job satisfaction by reducing organizational identity. Negative gossip reduces employees' identification with the organisation and creates discontent [53].

Confucian culture emphasizes moral concepts as "benevolence, righteousness, courtesy and faith", which play a key role in shaping social identity. Confucian culture holds that individuals should actively integrate into society and regard themselves as members of the organization. Humanistic management emphasizes the importance of individuals to the organization and affirms the value of people [27]. Individuals can achieve self-worth by gaining social recognition and support. When individuals feel that they have achieved self-worth within the organization, their sense of identity will increase. First of all, positive gossip, as an act of spreading positive comments on employees, can make the employees feel respected and appreciated by their coworkers [40], obtain a sense of belonging to the organization, and promote the harmony of interpersonal relationship. Therefore, positive gossip in the workplace enhances employees' organizational identification. Prior research has demonstrated the significance of organizational identity in relation to worker job satisfaction [54]. Workers that feel a strong sense of belonging to the company will be more satisfied with their jobs and will see their work status favorably. Therefore, this paper proposes:

H3a: Positive workplace gossip has a significant positive impact on employees' organizational identity.

H3b: Organizational identity has a significant positive impact on employees' job satisfaction.

H3c: Organizational identity mediates the impact of positive workplace gossip on employees' job satisfaction.

3. Research Method

3.1 Sample selection and data sources

From October to November 2023, this study collected data through online questionnaires. It is mainly carried out on the professional data platform, Credamo(credamo.com). The sample data collected on this platform have been recognized by authoritative conferences and journals at home

and abroad. All the respondents in this study have carried out strict registration and identity audits in the platform sample database. The respondents will receive varying amounts of remuneration after completing the questionnaire survey and after the researchers' audit.

For the sample structure, 70.20% of the valid samples are women, 73.20% of them are aged 26-45, and 68.30% of them have bachelor's degrees. The occupations of the sample varied, with 58% employed in private enterprises, 19.50% in state-owned enterprises, 8.80% as students, 7.80% in public institutions, 3.40% in foreign-funded enterprises and 2.40% as civil servants.

3.2 Measuring tools

All the measuring instruments used in this research are foreign mature scales, which have been verified by authoritative international management or psychological research to have high reliability and validity. Unless otherwise specified, the scales used in this study were all evaluated using the Likert 7-point scale (1= very different meaning, 7= very agreed).

Positive workplace gossip is measured by the scale developed by Brady et al. [2]. The scale includes 4 questions, such as "colleagues approve of my work ability".

Psychological capital is measured by the scale developed by Luthans et al. [55] and translated by Li Chaoping. The scale includes 4 questions, such as "I am always optimistic at work".

The organizational identity scale is measured by Smidts et al. [56] is used to measure the staff's degree of organizational identity. The scale contains 4 questions, such as "I have a profound sense of belonging to the company".

Job satisfaction is measured by the scale developed by Cammann et al. [57] and revised by Liu Cong [58]. The scale contains 3 questions, such as "Overall I am pleased with my current job".

4. Results

4.1 Common method bias

Since the data in this study are filled in by the employees themselves, there may be a problem of common method deviation. This study uses the Harman single-factor method for backtesting. The results show that there are four principal components, the interpretation rate of population variance is 73.889%, and the interpretation rate of the variance of the first factor separated without rotation is 40.64%, which is lower than the judgment standard of 50%, which indicates preliminarily that there is no serious common method bias in this study [59].

4.2 Reliability and validity test

The reliability of the questionnaire is evaluated using the Cronbach'α coefficient. The Cronbach'α values for all latent variables are greater than 0.8, indicating that the reliability of the scales is sufficient for empirical research. According to the research of Kline et al. [60], a confirmatory factor analysis measurement model is constructed. $\chi^2 = 107.939$，$df = 84$，$\chi^2/df = 1.285$，$CFI = 0.986$，$TLI = 0.982$，$GFI = 0.934$，$RMSEA = 0.037$， so the model has good adaptability. The standardized factor loadings of all items are all greater than 0.6, z values are significant at the level of $p < 0.001$， indicating that the reliability of each item is high. Convergent validity and discriminant validity are used to test the validity of the scale. The combined reliability of the four latent variables ranges from 0.820 to 0.903, all above the critical value of 0.7; The average variance extraction values range from 0.603 to 0.700, both of which are greater than the critical value of 0.5, thus passing the convergence validity test.

4.3 Correlation analysis

Table 1 presents descriptive statistical results for each variable, showing the mean, standard deviation and correlation coefficients between the variables. The results show that positive workplace gossip has a significant positive correlation with employees' psychological capital and organizational

identity($r = 0.377, \ p < 0.01$; $\ r = 0.294, \ \ p < 0.01$), the psychological capital of the employees is significantly positively correlated with the job satisfaction of the employees($r = 0.525, \ p < 0.01$), and the organizational identity of the employees is significantly positively correlated with the job satisfaction of the employees($r = 0.465, \ p < 0.01$), which provides initial support for the assumptions of this study H2b and H3b. In addition, positive workplace gossip and employee job satisfaction are significantly positively correlated ($r = 0.413, \ p < 0.01$), which provides initial support for hypothesis H1.

Independent sample T-test results show that there is no significant difference in job satisfaction between male and female employees($t = -0.782, \ p = 0.263$). Univariate ANOVA test shows that there is no significant difference in job satisfaction among different age groups($F = 1.771$, $p = 0.136$). There is no significant difference in job satisfaction among employees with different educational backgrounds $F = 0.313, \ p = 0.869$). There is no significant difference in job satisfaction among different occupational types($F = 1.074, \ p = 0.376$).

Table 1 Correlation coefficient

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Positive workplace gossip	4.74	1.17	1							
2. Psychological capital	5.10	1.38	0.38**	1						
3. Organizational identification	4.43	1.17	0.29**	0.37**	1					
4. Job satisfaction	4.85	1.28	0.41**	0.53**	0.47**	1				
5. Gender	1.70	0.46	0.04	0.11	-0.08	0.06	1			
6. Age	2.24	0.93	-0.06	0.06	0.04	0.03	-0.11	1		
7. Education background	4.12	0.65	-0.03	-0.02	-0.07	0.02	0.04	-0.06	1	
8. occupation type	3.92	1.54	-0.09	-0.07	-0.02	-0.02	-0.01	0.19**	-0.07	1

4.4 Hypothesis test

The study tests the hypothetical model using the Amos26.0 algorithm, which has 5,000 bootstrap replicates and a 95% confidence interval [61]. Demographic variables are not included in the analysis as they are not correlated with job satisfaction. The fitness test of the constructed structural equation model shows that $\chi^2 = 120.876, df = 85, \ p < 0.01, \ \chi^2/df = 1.422, \ CFI = 0.979, \ TLI = 0.974, \ RMSEA = 0.045$, and the model data fit well[61].

Direct effect test: the maximum likelihood method is used to test the hypothesis of the model. The results of the direct effect test are shown in Table 2. The results show that positive gossip in the workplace has a significant positive impact on the job satisfaction of the employees being gossiped about ($\beta = 0.234, \ t = 2.870$), assuming Hypothesis H1 is valid. Positive gossip in the workplace significantly positively affects tpsychologicalcapital$\beta = 0.431, t = 5.524$) and organizational identity($\beta = 0.329, \ t = 4.026$), assuming that H2a and H3a are both valid. The psychological capital($\beta = 0.381, \ t = 4.985$) and organizational identity($\beta = 0.338, \ t = 4.452$) have significant positive impact on their job satisfaction, assuming both H2b and H3b are both valid.

Table 2 Direct Effect Test

Hypothesis	X→Y	Standard deviation	t	β	Conclusion
H1	Positive workplace gossip → Job satisfaction	0.097	2.870	0.234	valid
H2a	Positive workplace gossip → Psychological capital	0.111	5.524	0.431	valid
H3a	Positive workplace gossip → Organizational identity	0.084	4.026	0.329	valid
H2b	Psychological capital → Job satisfaction	0.063	4.985	0.381	valid
H3b	Organizational identity → Job satisfaction	0.088	4.452	0.338	valid

Mediating effect test： the Bootstrap method is used to test whether there is a mediating effect between the psychological capital and organizational identity of the employees being gossiped about in the impact of positive gossip on their job satisfaction in the workplace. The results show that positive workplace gossip has a significant mediating effect on job satisfaction through psychological capital($\beta = 0.142$), with a confidence interval of(0.084,0.192) and a mediating effect ratio of 31.636%. Positive workplace gossip has a significant mediating effect on job satisfaction through organizational identity($\beta = 0.089$), with a confidence interval of(0.038,0.136) and a mediating effect ratio of 19.739%. Therefore, both H2c and H3c are assumed to be true.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conclusion

Beginning from the background of Confucian traditional culture and based on the ideological basis of humanistic management, this paper constructs a model of the impact mechanism of positive gossip in the workplace on the job satisfaction of the employees being gossiped, with psychological capital and organizational identity as the intermediary mechanism. The results show that positive gossip behaviour in the workplace helps improve the job satisfaction of the gossiped employees. At the same time, positive gossip behaviour in the workplace helps to improve the psychological capital of the employees being gossiped, about and further improves their job satisfaction. Positive gossip in the workplace is also beneficial to improving the job satisfaction of gossiped employees by improving their organizational identity.

5.2 Theoretical Contribution

Firstly, this study effectively expands the conclusion on positive gossip behaviour in the workplace. Previous studies on workplace gossip mostly focused on negative workplace gossip. The impact of negative gossip has attracted more scholars' attention. However, only a small number of studies focus on positive gossip behaviour in the workplace, and the impact of positive gossip on employee behaviour has not been fully explored. This study innovatively transfers the research object from gossip participants to gossip recipients, while considering the occurrence of other influencing mechanisms. In addition, many scholars have previously studied the factors that affect employees' job satisfaction and found that both psychological capital and organizational identity can affect employees' job satisfaction [62], but no study has yet combined the two with positive workplace gossip. Therefore, for the first time, this study brings psychological capital and organizational identity into the structure of positive gossip and gossip employees' job satisfaction, enriches the research content of positive gossip, discovers and confirms the mediating role of the two variables, and reveals a new mechanism that affects job satisfaction.

Secondly, this study further explores the application of Confucian culture in the fields of human resource management. In recent years, corporate governance, social responsibility, human resources management and differentiation are the four important topics discussed by Confucian culture in the field of economic management [64]. Among them, the research on job satisfaction in human resources

management focuses on the leadership style and has not paid attention to the relationship between employees' behaviours and their satisfaction. In this study, for the first time, Confucianism is used to explain the influence of gossip behaviours among employees on employee satisfaction. This research deeply analyzes the influence of Confucian culture, especially the thought of humanistic management on Chinese-style modern human resources management supplements the previous research on analyzing employee satisfaction from the perspective of Confucian culture, enriches the content of organizational behaviour research using Confucian culture, and expands the research direction of explaining employee job satisfaction through Confucian culture.

5.3 Pratical applications

Firstly, the conclusion of this paper has enlightenment for organization management. Enterprises can adopt appropriate strategies to play a positive role in workplace gossip when managing the organization. First, because the dissemination of positive gossip is beneficial, enterprises can commend outstanding employees recognized by colleagues, advocate and encourage more communication among employees, learn advanced work models, and encourage and improve each other to create an environment for the generation and dissemination of positive workplace gossip. Second, contrary to the behaviour of advocating positive gossip, corporate executives should pay attention to the working atmosphere among employees on time, and stop and clarify the phenomena and signs of negative gossip within the company on time to create a harmonious and friendly working environment.

Second, businesses can boost the beneficial effects of gossip at work and employees' psychological capital and organizational identity to raise job satisfaction. For example, firstly, enterprises can increase the frequency of group building activities and commendation meetings, so that employees can feel a sense of belonging to the organization or a sense of value realization within the organization, and generate happiness at work. Secondly, when recruiting new employees, the enterprise can evaluate the fit between employees' personal values and organizational values through interviews or written examinations.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Trends

Although this study ensures academic standardization and rigour and has a positive role in promoting the theoretical application and management practice, there are still the following limitations to be improved in future research.

First, there may be some uncontrolled variables in this study. Workers could be exposed to a variety of work situations at once, including company culture and leadership styles. Therefore, future research can control the factors related to the working environment to eliminate the uncertainty of the uncertain factors.

Second, the study's findings indicate that the influence of good workplace rumors on job satisfaction can only be partially explained by psychological capital and organizational identification. Therefore, there may be other mediating factors or regulating mechanisms. Therefore, it is necessary to further explore more mediating variables and explore more mechanisms in future research. Variables that may have research value include job requirements, job resources and organizational support.

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