

Waddington, K. (2021). Gossip organization and work: A research overview. London: Routledge.

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This book offers a resource for researchers willing to embark on a journey of studying the role of gossip in organizations. As the author notes in the introduction, gossip is an idea whose time has come. Indeed gossip research has increased dramatically from its modest beginnings in the 1970s and is constantly gaining interest in both science and society at large. Throughout the book Kathryn encourages researchers to see gossip not only from the perspective of positivist quantitative science, aimed at testing various hypotheses regarding behavioural and interpersonal dimensions of gossip, but to take qualitative and arts-based approaches in studying gossip as a pathway to accessing organizational knowledge.

The author proposes that organizations and workplaces provide the content and context of gossip, which should be better regarded as a storytelling process that uncovers narratives of difference, discrimination and bias. As such, gossip is described as a process that communicates organizational knowledge. Through gossip participants may understand their context better and may even perceive early signs of organizational failure.

Kathryn advises researchers to take a reflective stance in the study of gossip and does so herself from the start of the book. The author admits to her aversion for positivist quantitative approaches, and in particular for the two-by-two design, because this sort of research is formulaic and restrictive, and dissecting gossip by testing hypotheses 'stifles scholarship' (p. 22). Furthermore, the author takes a position against narrow definitions of gossip as a process that occurs between individual senders, receivers, and targets, and prefers to think of gossip as 'language in action' (p. 22). Thus, according to this view, definitions of gossip should be flexible and include organizational myths, stories, rumor, small talk, chatting and urban legends that circulate in organizations, as well as talk about corporate events and actions, which are not reducible to the personalities of the actors.

Although as a more quantitatively oriented researcher of gossip my view on conceptual clarity and the usefulness of quantitative methods is different from the one outlined in this book, there is value in carefully considering the reflections made here. Particularly useful are the author's considerations in terms of advantages and limitations of different research approaches, and the advice to use a variety of methods and perspectives to understand a social phenomenon as complex as gossip in organizations. The field of gossip research has only to benefit from integrating insights derived from different methodological approaches. Although leveraging the advantages of different

approaches may be challenging, this is worthwhile in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the meaning of gossip in organizations. A challenge researchers may need to overcome is to transcend the school of thought in which they were trained and consider integrating research practices from a different paradigm. I believe Dyson's (2009) analogy on page 8 illustrates well this idea, which is central to the book:

"Some mathematicians are birds, flying high in the sky, surveying vistas out to the far horizon, and delighting in 'concepts that unify our thinking and bring together diverse problems from different parts of the landscape. Others are frogs, living in the mud and seeing only the flowers that grow nearby. The evolving scholarship of organizational gossip needs both frog's-eye and bird's-eye vantage points, which will involve working at the empirical intersections of qualitative and quantitative research."

Furthermore, Kathryn formulates valuable advice for researchers to reflect more deeply on the ethics of conducting gossip research, in terms of how their values, ideology, culture, or training may affect the research process. For example, how do the hierarchical relationships between researcher and participants influence the research process and the research output? How were participants selected, are all groups of interest represented in the sample? Is the researcher prioritising ethical protocols and checklists versus creating respectful and meaningful relationships with research participants?

In this short review I have highlighted some of the topics covered in this book, which ultimately sparks ideas for reflection and challenges the reader to take less established but potentially more creative approaches in studying gossip in organizations. I share Kathryn's hopefulness that these reflections will enable researchers to make innovative discoveries in the field.

About the reviewer

Dr Elena Martinescu is a postdoctoral research associate at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Her research is focused on understanding the role of gossip in work contexts as a process that helps exchange information and influences social bonds between group members.