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Justice perceptions, perceived insider status, and gossip at work: A social exchange perspective

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ABSTRACT

Gossip is a ubiquitous phenomenon found in organisational life but has been under-researched within organisational literature. Our study elaborates on the multidimensional nature of workplace gossip in terms of valence (i.e., positive and negative) and targets (i.e., supervisors and organisations). We derive perceived justice and insider status as an antecedent and boundary condition of workplace gossip from social exchange theory. Our analysis of data collected from 329 nurses largely supports our hypothesised relationships between organisation-initiated (i.e., procedural and distributive) justice and gossip about the organisation, as well as between supervisor-initiated (i.e., interpersonal and informational) justice and gossip about the supervisor. With the exception of distributive justice, our work indicates the moderating effects of perceived insider status on the positive linkages between justice perceptions and positive gossip behaviours. Our findings provide theoretical implications for the gossip patterns across gossip triggers and gossipers and offer practical guidelines for effectively managing workplace gossip.

1. Introduction

Workplace gossip is an essential behaviour among employees in organisations. Workplace gossip refers to “informal and evaluative (i.e., positive or negative) talk from one member of an organisation to one or more members of the same organisation about another member of the organisation who is not present to hear what is said” (Brady, Brown, & Liang, 2017: 3). As a prevailing phenomenon occurring in diverse social settings (Foster, 2004), gossip is a core component of everyday social life to the extent that it accounts for approximately 65% of individuals' daily conversation time (Dunbar, 2004; Emler, 1994). Likewise, in the workplace, gossip is an inherent social behaviour that almost every employee is involved in (Mills, 2010; Noon & Delbridge, 1993); over 90% of employees in U.S. and Western European organisations reported that they engaged in some form of gossip behaviour at work (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, Labianca, & Ellwardt, 2012).

Corresponding to the prevalence of workplace gossip, organisational researchers have gradually explored its implications for managing employees and workplace outcomes. For example, Noon and Delbridge (1993) proposed that workplace gossip may reinforce social bonds among gossip participants. Kurland and Pelled (2000) asserted that workplace gossip may influence the power of gossipers over other employees. In addition to these conceptual studies, a group of empirical

studies have revealed concrete consequences, including gossipers' results such as low supervisor-rated performance, high peer-perceived informal influence, and self-reported cynicism (Grosser, Lopez-Kidwell, & Labianca, 2010; Kuo, Chang, Quinton, Lu, & Lee, 2015), as well as gossip targets' outcomes such as high emotional exhaustion, low organisation-based self-esteem, and reduced prosocial behaviour at work (Wu, Birtch, Chiang, & Zhang, 2018; Wu, Kwan, Wu, & Ma, 2018). In general, existing evidence in the organisational literature suggests that workplace gossip elicits adverse psychological and behavioural changes in gossipers and victims, while it generically also entails functional aspects (Brady et al., 2017) for interpersonal relations and norms in social settings (Feinberg, Willer, Stellar, & Keltner, 2012).

Although these initial studies and findings have indicated that workplace gossip is prevalent and has a noticeable impact on workplace outcomes, research in this area is nascent and insufficient (Brady et al., 2017; Mills, 2010; Wu, Birtch, et al., 2018). To illustrate, first, prior research has mostly focused on ‘negative’ workplace gossip (e.g., Wu, Birtch, et al., 2018; Wu, Kwan, et al., 2018), and far fewer existing studies have distinguished and differentially examined negative and positive gossip (e.g., Brady et al., 2017) or measured overall gossip (e.g., Decoster, Camps, Stouten, Vandevyvere, & Tripp, 2013; Kuo et al., 2015). This is primarily due to the general negative connotations (Gluckman, 1963) and conventional negative views on workplace

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gossip in business literature (Michelson & Mouly, 2004). However, in terms of valence, employees participate not only in negative or malicious gossip about the undesirable sides of the gossip object but also in positive or non-malicious gossip to highlight the desirable sides of others in their absence (Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012; Tassiello, Lombardi, & Costabile, 2018). This organisational phenomenon warrants a more balanced scholarly approach to gossip, encompassing both positive and negative aspects. Second, prior research has typically examined workplace gossip about colleagues and/or supervisors (e.g., Brady et al., 2017; Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012), with whom gossip participants most frequently interact within their work unit boundaries (Grosser et al., 2010). However, workplace gossip research needs to consider more extended target groups, because employees also gossip about other organisational entities that do not necessarily reside within the gossipers' work groups (Tassiello et al., 2018). Finally, while past studies have highlighted gossip's noticeable and evidential consequences in the workplace, which illuminates the critical role of gossip in organisational settings, it is also important to investigate what gives rise to workplace gossip. This provides theoretical implications to extend our understanding of gossip as an organisational behaviour (Brady et al., 2017) and practical suggestions for effectively managing workplace gossip.

In an endeavour to fill these gaps, this research aims to identify some origins and individual variations of the internal states motivating employees to initiate positive and negative gossip about their organisations and supervisors, based on social exchange theory. First, given that workplace gossip is viewed as an individual behaviour (Brady et al., 2017) and a fundamental reaction to a contextual need and cue (Paine, 1967), this research delves into the contextual influences shaping the internal states of workplace gossipers. Specifically, in line with Kuo et al. (2015), we regard employees' supervisors and organisations as the immediate sources of their personal perceptions on the contextual conditions under which their workplace gossip flourishes. Second, synthesising social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), justice research (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013; Greenberg, 1993a), and a target similarity perspective (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007), we assert that gossip is proximal to, and a behavioural expression of, employees' evaluative outcomes pertaining to their pleasant or disappointing experiences with the organisation (i.e., distributive and procedural justice) and the supervisor (i.e., interpersonal and informational justice). Finally, we further explore how employees' generic attitudes towards the organisation, for instance, perceived insider status, influence their gossip behaviours resulting from perceived justice at the individual level. In addition to our theorisation, this research provides empirical evidence for the linkages between the full domain of justice perceptions and four types of workplace gossip depending on perceived insider status, by analysing a sample of 329 nurses working in four South Korean hospitals.

This research contributes to the existing literature on gossip and social exchange theory in several ways. Differentiated from previous studies focusing on the relational aspects among gossip participants (e.g., relational cohesion in Grosser et al., 2010 and trust between gossipers and recipients in Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012) in identifying the antecedents of workplace gossip, our study regards workplace gossip as an individual behaviour of people reacting to the treatment they receive (Brady et al., 2017). We then propose that gossipers' personal perceptions on the quality of their social interactions with employers and supervisors trigger target-specific gossip. Although overlooked in prior research (Foster, 2004; Jaeger, Skleder, Rind, & Rosnow, 1994), it is meaningful to examine how situational impacts stemming from various potential gossip sources lead to differential reactions of employees manifested by gossip. In addition, we elaborate on the multidimensional nature of workplace gossip in terms of valence and targets. While existing research has typically examined negative workplace gossip and its single target (e.g., colleagues, supervisors), our work simultaneously investigates positive and negative workplace

gossip about supervisors and organisations. Considering these two targets together is especially worthwhile to increase our understanding of how gossip differs according to the features (e.g., power, status) of the gossip objects (Brady et al., 2017). In addition, we identify the role of individual differences in delineating why employees engage in workplace gossip by regarding perceived insider status as a boundary condition for the justice-gossip linkages. Overall, our novel attempts underline the personal motives of gossipers shaped by how organisations and supervisors treat them, the gossip patterns depending on objects, and the individual differences of gossipers in the workplace.

Our study also contributes to existing social exchange research, which has suffered from a lack of sufficient theoretical and empirical precision (Cropanzano, Anthony, Daniels, & Hall, 2017). Following three components of social exchange theory, we regard justice perceptions, target-specific workplace gossip, and perceived insider status as an initiating action, a reciprocating response to the initiator, and a relationship with the initiator, respectively. Furthermore, our theoretical model matches the parties (i.e., organisations and supervisors) that are held accountable for justice perceptions to the objects of workplace gossip and connects perceived justice to increased positive gossip and decreased negative gossip. In so doing, our work complements existing social exchange studies that have called for stronger correspondence of variables from respective exchanging parties, in action and reaction, in designing empirical models by precisely matching action initiators and the targets of responses (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

2. Theoretical development and hypotheses

2.1. Gossip in organisations

The linguistic origin of gossip is 'godsib,' which refers to "the spiritual affinity of the baptised and their sponsors" (Noon & Delbridge, 1993: 24), or 'godsibb,' which refers to godparent (Grosser et al., 2010). Gossip has been defined diversely in many different disciplines (see Michelson, van Iterson, & Waddington, 2010). In organisational literature, workplace gossip has been defined as informal and evaluative (e.g., positive, negative) talk in which employees are involved to share value-laden information about another member of their organisation who is absent (Brady et al., 2017; Kurland & Pelled, 2000).¹ While some researchers (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; Michelson et al., 2010) have seen workplace gossip as a dynamic process encompassing an interaction among multiple individuals such as gossipers, listeners, and objects, others (Brady et al., 2017) have viewed it as an individual behaviour (i.e., a unidirectional communication) which is launched by one member who intends to validate information pertaining to others in the same organisation and thus does not necessarily require dyadic action. We draw on the individual behaviour view to examine what motivates an employee to gossip at work.

As an evaluative communication offering informal information about absent others, gossip needs to be investigated with an emphasis on the kinds of objects of interest. The content of the information that individuals obtain from gossip hinges on what the gossip object is, which will eventually influence the way they make sense of the object. Prior workplace gossip research has mostly examined employees' gossip

¹ Although conceptually overlapping to some extent and mutually generative (Grosser et al., 2012), differences between gossip and rumour have been pointed out by researchers. For example, Fine (1985: 223) stated, "rumour's foundation is a lack of evidence— without regard for topic; gossip specifies the topic— the moral doings of other humans— but ignores its factuality." In addition, DiFonzo et al. (1994: 52) noted that rumour refers to "speculations that arise to fill knowledge gaps or discrepancies" and gossip "is meant primarily to entertain or convey mores." Keeping these conceptual distinctions in mind, this research focuses on gossip, which denotes employees' informal, evaluative, and arousing conversations about whether the gossip target in their organisation is right or wrong.

about their direct supervisors or colleagues within their work group boundaries, because gossipers most frequently interact with those work group members (Grosser et al., 2010). However, gossipers share their evaluative talks about diverse absent third parties (Ayim, 1994; Foster, 2004; Grosser et al., 2010). As such, gossip objects are not limited to group peers who are physically proximate and encompass other organisational members beyond formal work unit boundaries that are diverse in terms of both horizontal and vertical distances (Tassiello et al., 2018). In fact, low-status employees tend to seek information about high-status employees, some of which may be confidential or off-the-record but critical for maintaining and enhancing their organisational status (Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012; McAndrew, Bell, & Garcia, 2007). Thus, employees tend to be keenly interested in information about the top management possessing organisation-wide decision-making authority or the organisation per se as a viable entity. In this regard, by focusing on supervisors and further organisations (i.e., top management) as the objects of workplace gossip, our investigation intends to promote an improved understanding of the target-specific issues (i.e., organisation- and supervisor-initiated justice perceptions) that cause workplace gossip.

Regarding the substance of gossip, researchers have increasingly agreed that both positive and negative gossip exists, each of which could be triggered by mutually different motives. The conventional management perspective has embodied gossip in a negative stance (Michelson et al., 2010) and recognised it as an antisocial behaviour (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). In this negative view, gossip is discouraged or prohibited (Emler, 1994), as it is likely to negatively influence organisations by decreasing workforce morale and productivity (DiFonzo, Bordia, & Rosnow, 1994). However, other research has shown that gossip is not always negatively oriented (Rosnow & Fine, 1976). For example, Elias and Scotson (1994) distinguished praise gossip from blame gossip. Similarly, other researchers (e.g., Baumeister, Zhang, & Vohs, 2004; Foster, 2004) have suggested that gossip can be related to positive and negative instances and that both forms of gossip can create value in organisations. Building on these scholarly discussions, we conceive that positive and negative gossip will enhance the positive and negative aspects of the objects, respectively, by functioning as mutually opposing reactions of the gossipers, influenced by different psychological motives in social exchange relationships.

Taken together, we examine four types of gossip at work: positive gossip behaviour towards supervisors, positive gossip behaviour towards organisations, negative gossip behaviour towards supervisors, and negative gossip behaviour towards organisations.

2.2. Four types of justice perceptions in organisations

We suggest that justice serves as an immediate perceptual determinant of workplace gossip. In organisational literature, justice refers to employees' fairness perceptions of the treatment they have received (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001), and it is acknowledged as “the very essence of individuals' relationship to employers” (Cropanzano et al., 2007: 34). Workplace gossip is known as a primary means of fulfilling the self-interests and personal needs of gossipers (Brady et al., 2017; Wu, Kwan, et al., 2018). As such, the justice with which most employees are concerned can be a significant motivator for workplace gossip. While a sizable number of studies have reported that justice is correlated with, and leads to, a variety of attitudes and behaviours at the individual level (Rupp, Shapiro, Folger, Skarlicki, & Shao, 2017; also see the meta-analytic reviews by Colquitt et al., 2001, 2013), much less has been reported about justice in relation to workplace gossip. There are a few exceptions, but they have merely conceived that gossip is performed to validate gossipers' opinions of fair treatment (Wert & Salovey, 2004) and reported simple correlations between justice and gossip (Brady et al., 2017). Taking into account the centrality of justice in predicting employees' organisational behaviours (Rupp et al., 2017) and the prevalence of gossip (Mills,

2010) in organisational life, it is imperative to systematically examine how employees' gossip behaviours depend on the full domain of parties held accountable for fair treatment.

Although some studies (e.g., Ghosh, Sekiguchi, & Gurunathan, 2017) have focused on the partial domain of sources from which employees perceive justice (DeConinck, 2010), we examine the full domain of justice information sources: distributive, procedural, interpersonal, and informational (e.g., Ambrose, Hess, & Ganesan, 2007; Colquitt, 2001; Loi, Yang, & Diefendorff, 2009). In existing justice literature, distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of outcomes allocated to an individual (e.g., equity, equality). Procedural justice refers to the perceived fairness of organisational procedures that decide the distribution of outcomes (e.g., consistency, ethicality). Interpersonal justice refers to the perceived fairness of interactions and interpersonal treatment in the process of implementing organisational procedures (e.g., respect, dignity). Informational justice refers to the perceived fairness of communication about organisational procedures and proper justifications for decisions (e.g., accuracy, quality). Considering all four types of justice is useful to better understand the effects of justice on employee outcomes in organisations (Colquitt et al., 2013; Johnson, Lanaj, & Barnes, 2014).

In addition, given that injustice perceptions are related to attributions of blame (Barclay, Skarlicki, & Pugh, 2005), it is necessary to understand how employees specifically react (i.e., gossip) towards a particular party held to account for fair/unfair treatment. As with organisational gossip, a multifoci approach is taken to classify the four types of justice perceptions into organisational and supervisory foci. Justice researchers have increasingly advocated the utility of specifying the sources of justice perceptions (Cropanzano, Byrne, Bobocel, & Rupp, 2001; Lavelle et al., 2007). Researchers (e.g., Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002) have indicated that the perception of an organisation's justice is distinguished from that of a supervisor's justice. Integrating dimensions and foci, justice researchers have directed distributive and procedural justice to organisations, and interpersonal and informational justice to supervisors (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011). Distributive and procedural justice are related to the fairness perception of organisational rules and procedures for decision-making on the outcomes that employees receive, whereas interpersonal and informational justice are related to how immediate supervisors treat employees interpersonally and share information with them (Ambrose, Seabright, & Schminke, 2002; Greenberg, 1993a; Loi et al., 2009; Masterson, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). Following this perspective, we specifically investigate whether employees' perceptions on how fairly they are treated by organisations and supervisors affect their gossip about organisations and supervisors.

Finally, as opposed to previous studies which have typically examined the effects of justice on either positive or negative outcomes (Cropanzano et al., 2017), our study links justice to positive and negative workplace gossip, in tandem. As noted earlier, gossip transmits a non-objective evaluation of the target. Justice perceptions emanate from employees' subjective evaluations of what they experience in organisations (Cropanzano & Greenberg, 1997; DeConinck, 2010). When employees are treated by their organisation or supervisor in a certain manner, they are prone to evaluate the fairness of the treatment and then confirm their evaluation outcomes with others. For example, as a sanctioning behaviour followed by a transgression (Ellwardt, Wittek, & Wielers, 2012), lower justice perceptions prompt the spread of negative gossip in organisations (Grosser et al., 2012). Since negative gossip is distinguished from positive gossip in terms of intent and content, both are inherently driven by different (i.e., unfair and fair) situations. In this vein, we strive to investigate how the two types (i.e., positive and negative) of employees' workplace gossip are differentially predicted by their experienced justice or injustice, which is conducive to the existing justice literature that typically neglects “the voices of injustice victims” (Shapiro, 2001: 235).

2.3. Linkages between justice perceptions, perceived insider status, and workplace gossip: A social exchange perspective

Social exchange theory has served as the dominant lens to understand the effects of justice perceptions on outcomes in organisations (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008) and can be invoked to determine why employees engage in workplace gossip (Michelson et al., 2010). As recent review work by Cropanzano et al. (2017) noted, the theory consists of at least three components, including (1) an initiating action begun by an organisational actor (e.g., a supervisor) towards a target individual (e.g., a subordinate), (2) a reciprocating response from the target individual, and (3) a relationship between the actor and the target. Blau (1964) first discussed the concept of social exchange, which represents “subjective, relationship-oriented interactions between employers and employees” (Lavelle et al., 2007: 845). According to this theory, positive social exchanges involve the norm of reciprocity, such that people have an obligation to benefit others who help them (Gouldner, 1960; Nedkovski, Guerci, De Battisti, & Siletti, 2017; Tekleab & Chiaburu, 2011). In our theoretical model, employees' perceived justice emanates from the initiating actions conducted by their organisations and supervisors, and, in turn, workplace gossip represents an immediate behavioural response from employees. In addition, perceived insider status captures employees' relatedness with their organisation and other organisational members. These three components are expected to conjointly reveal the circumstances in which employees are motivated to partake in positive or negative gossip as a reaction via the social exchange mechanism.

Although prior studies have already reported many findings for the behavioural consequences of target employees who perceive justice (Rupp et al., 2017), our investigation on workplace gossip as another behavioural response can add some value to the social exchange literature. When it comes to the generalisability of the theory, prior studies have identified a large number of variables functioning as each of the three social exchange elements, without clearly disentangling the linkages between action initiators and targets' initiator-specific responses, thereby leading to similar and vague conceptualisations of target responses in terms of specificity, intention, and organisational setting (see Cropanzano et al., 2017 for a more detailed review). As discussed above, workplace gossip is clearly defined as an instance of employee behaviour intended to validate his or her evaluative (i.e., positive and negative) information about specific others (i.e., organisations and supervisors) in the workplace. Furthermore, given that employees are likely to identify with the specific entity with whom they are engaged in a social exchange relationship (Rupp & Cropanzano, 2002), the target similarity model (Lavelle et al., 2007) has been suggested as a solution to improve accuracy in predicting behavioural outcomes resulting from initiating actions. In this sense, our focus on positive and negative workplace gossip about organisations and supervisors helps to illuminate the fact that employees can discern the objects of reciprocity and then react to specific justice initiators in a positive or negative manner, according to how they were treated in the workplace.

We first propose focus-matching linkages between justice perceptions and positive gossip at work. According to the norm of reciprocity in the social exchange framework, employees who perceive fair treatment from their organisation and supervisor are motivated to engage in a reciprocating response towards the justice initiator in a positive manner. Some studies have demonstrated that organisation-initiated justice perceptions (i.e., procedural and distributive justice) are related to organisation-directed positive outcomes such as organisational commitment (Baker, Hung, & Andrews, 2006; Gumusluoglu, Karakitapoğlu-Aygün, & Hirst, 2013), perceived organisational support (DeConinck, 2010), and organisational embeddedness (Ghosh et al., 2017), whereas supervisor-initiated justice perceptions (i.e., interpersonal and informational justice) are related to perceived supervisor support (DeConinck, 2010) and supervisor commitment (Gumusluoglu

et al., 2013). In contrast, others have examined the linkages between interpersonal justice and affective organisational commitment (López-Cabarcos, Vázquez-Rodríguez, & Piñeiro-Chousa, 2016) and between procedural justice and supervisor satisfaction (DeConinck & Stilwell, 2004), regardless of the target similarity. As part of a positive reciprocating endeavour, it is likely that employees with high organisation- and supervisor-initiated justice perceptions channel their positive evaluations about their organisation and supervisor specifically through positive gossip about each of those justice initiators at work, thereby positively reinforcing the reputation of the organisation and supervisor. As the target similarity model suggested, justice perceptions pertaining to a certain initiator will best predict employees' positive gossip about that initiator. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Procedural (a) and distributive (b) justice perceptions are positively related to positive gossip behaviour towards the organisation.

Hypothesis 2. Interpersonal (a) and informational (b) justice perceptions are positively related to positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor.

Furthermore, we expect negative target-similar linkages between justice perceptions and negative workplace gossip. In organisations, employees use gossip as a coping mechanism in unfavourable situations (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998); thus, those faced with unfair treatment can initiate an informal negative talk about the injustice initiator. Employees intentionally share negative information about the unfair party to relieve stress and to make sense of their situation. Similarly, prior research has indicated that employees who perceive that their organisation is treating them poorly tend to exhibit negative behavioural responses (Bennett & Robinson, 2003; Robinson & Greenberg, 1998) such as theft (Greenberg, 1993b), sabotage (Ambrose et al., 2002), aggression (Dupre & Barling, 2006), antisocial communication behaviours (Chory & Hubbell, 2008), and deviance (El Akremi, Vandenberghe, & Camerman, 2010). It was also found that interpersonal injustice, associated with supervisor treatment, leads to negative outcomes such as workplace deviance (Ferris, Spence, Brown, & Heller, 2010) and withdrawal (Bell, Wiechmann, & Ryan, 2006). In particular, unlike those prior studies that did not examine employees' target-specific reactions of injustice, we examine how employees' experiences of injustice are differentially linked to malproductive behaviours such as negative gossip, depending on the source of the injustice. Given that avoiding a negative behaviour can be regarded as an instance of positive reciprocating behaviour (Colquitt et al., 2013), we expect that employees who view their organisation's decision-making procedures and outcomes to be fair will feel obliged to refrain from negatively talking about their fair organisation. Likewise, when employees believe that their supervisor shows dignity and provides sufficient information to them, they will avoid engaging in negative gossip about the supervisor, to reciprocate. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. Procedural (a) and distributive (b) justice perceptions are negatively related to negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation.

Hypothesis 4. Interpersonal (a) and informational (b) justice perceptions are negatively related to negative gossip behaviour towards the supervisor.

As discussed above, employees may positively or negatively gossip about their organisation or supervisor in the workplace because of their higher or lower justice perceptions. However, their reactions to justice or their injustice perceptions may vary depending on their personal situations (Baker et al., 2006; Gumusluoglu et al., 2013). Extending to social exchange theory, an individual who has enjoyed a more positive social exchange relationship with his or her supervisor and/or organisation may be involved in more positive and less negative gossip about

the object. Therefore, the quality of the social exchange relationship that employees have with their supervisor or organisation will likely moderate the link between their justice perceptions and gossip behaviours.

We expect that perceived insider status, denoting a perceived relationship between employees and others in their organisation, may serve as a boundary condition for the linkage between justice and positive workplace gossip. Perceived insider status refers to the extent to which employees recognise themselves as an insider in their organisation (Stamper & Masterson, 2002) and results from a cognitive assessment of their relative standing in the organisation (Lapalme, Stamper, Simard, & Tremblay, 2009). The perception that employees regard themselves as valuable members of their organisation (i.e., insiders) is attributed to the differential benefits and support that they receive in the organisation (Stassen & Schlosser, 2011). From the social exchange perspective, employees who consider themselves insiders are likely to have high-quality social exchange relationships with the organisation and its members. Owing to this high social exchange quality, employees with high perceived insider status may be more involved in positive gossip when perceiving high fairness of their organisation and supervisor. Those insiders will feel a stronger sense of obligation to positively reciprocate by using positive gossip (e.g., praise) when they are treated fairly to further heighten their pride in the community and its members (cf. Elias & Scotson, 1994). In addition, speaking positively about favourable action initiators can improve gossipers' reputations (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012) and fulfil their need for status (Michelson & Mouly, 2004). As such, when employees experiencing fairness regard themselves as insiders, they will intend to boost their own and others' positive work morale and esteem by spreading 'good news' about their organisation and supervisor because of their concern for the organisation. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5. Perceived insider status strengthens the positive linkages between organisation- (a) and supervisor-initiated (b) justice perceptions and positive gossip behaviours towards the organisation (a) and the supervisor (b).

In contrast, we further argue that employees who feel that their organisation and supervisor are unfair to them are less likely to engage in negative gossip when they feel a sense of being an insider. Employees' perceived insider status is grounded in their high-quality relationship with the organisation and its members, including supervisors, which has been shaped by favourable long-term support and care among employees and others (Blau, 1964). As a result, employees with perceived insider status tend to have affective commitment to their organisation (Chen & Aryee, 2007) and pursue social integration (Wang & Kim, 2013). Even when confronted with unfair treatment, they will be motivated to defend or protect the parties (i.e., organisations and supervisors) responsible for the unfair treatment in lieu of retaliating against those injustice initiators through negative gossip in the workplace (Tassiello et al., 2018). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6. Perceived insider status weakens the negative linkages between organisation- (a) and supervisor-initiated (b) justice perceptions and negative gossip behaviours towards the organisation (a) and the supervisor (b).

3. Methods

3.1. Sample and procedure

Our sample involved 329 nurses working for four hospitals in South Korea. A sampling frame of 446 nurses was determined from a list of nurses provided by the administration directors. The administration directors served as survey coordinators, distributing the survey packages to the nurses and collecting the completed surveys on behalf

of the research team. In order to ensure confidentiality and reassure respondents, an envelope was enclosed in the survey package. Of the 446 contacted nurses, 408 nurses returned their surveys, resulting in a response rate of 91.5%. After excluding returned surveys with outliers and insincere responses, responses from 329 nurses were included in our analysis. The relatively large number of disqualified data could be attributed to the nature of a front-line care provider (i.e., moving around to take care of patients, rather than staying in a personal workspace). All participating nurses were female and had graduated from a nursing college. Of the respondents, 1.5% of the respondents had received a master's degree. Respondents' average age, organisational tenure, and workgroup tenure were 31.65 years (s.d. = 8.1), 3.58 years (s.d. = 3.4), and 2.74 years (s.d. = 2.4), respectively.

3.2. Measures

Brislin's (1990) back-translation procedures were employed to translate pre-validated measures written in English into Korean. A bilingual researcher initially translated the survey from English to Korean. Hospital staff, excluded in the sampling frame, reviewed the Korean version and provided feedback to improve its readability. Finally, another bilingual researcher back-translated the Korean survey into English. This iterative process generated two equivalent versions; we used the Korean survey for this study. Unless otherwise noted, all survey items were rated by individual nurses on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree).

3.2.1. Justice

Justice was measured with the 20-item scale developed by Colquitt (2001). Following the conventional approach in the justice literature (Colquitt & Rodell, 2011), we referenced seven items of procedural justice ($\alpha = 0.83$) and four items of distributive justice ($\alpha = 0.89$) to the organisation (i.e., the hospital and its management), as well as four items of interpersonal justice ($\alpha = 0.86$) and five items of informational justice ($\alpha = 0.92$) to the immediate supervisor (i.e., the head nurse in the workgroup).

3.2.2. Perceived insider status

Perceived insider status was measured by six items ($\alpha = 0.86$) developed by Stamper and Masterson (2002). Sample items are "I feel very much a part of my work organisation" and "My work organisation makes me believe that I am included in it."

3.2.3. Gossip

Our measures for positive and negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation and supervisor were based on the seven-item scale developed by Wittek and Wielers (1998). This measure consisted of three items for positive gossip behaviour and four items for negative gossip behaviour. Taking into account the specific targets of employee gossip in the workplace, we referenced this two-dimensional measure to the organisation and the supervisor in the workgroup. As a result, we created a 14-item measure, including positive gossip behaviour towards the organisation ($\alpha = 0.82$; e.g., "I sometimes praise my organisation's capability when the management is absent"), negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation ($\alpha = 0.83$; e.g., "I sometimes criticize my organisation for a negative characteristic while the management is absent"), positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor ($\alpha = 0.73$; e.g., "I sometimes make a positive comment about my supervisor when (s)he is absent"), and negative gossip behaviour towards the supervisor ($\alpha = 0.83$; e.g., "At work I sometimes complain about my supervisor while (s)he is absent"). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = does not apply to me at all; 5 = applies to me).

3.2.4. Control variables

In line with prior research on justice (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Judge, 1993) and gossip (e.g., Ellwardt, Steglich, &

Wittek, 2012; Grosser et al., 2010) in organisations, we controlled for organisational membership (three dummy variables representing four organisations), age (years), education level (one item with four categories ranging from 1 = a two-year vocational college to 4 = a doctoral degree), and organisational tenure (number of years working for the hospital). We also controlled for workgroup tenure (number of years working in the current workgroup), because it may influence individual nurses' social relationships and interactions through which gossip is channelled. In addition, following Ellwardt, Steglich, and Wittek (2012), negative gossip behaviour was controlled in the model of positive gossip behaviour and vice versa.

3.3. Confirmatory factor analysis

Using AMOS 21.0, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the factor structure of the survey measures. Kline (2005) noted that acceptable model fit is inferred with a χ^2/df ratio lower than 3, a comparative fit index (CFI) and incremental fit index (IFI) greater than 0.90, and a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) of less than or equal to 0.08. Our hypothesised nine-factor model yielded a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 797.30$, $df = 398$, $\chi^2/df = 2.00$; IFI = 0.93; Tucker Lewis index [TLI] = 0.92; CFI = 0.93; RMSEA = 0.06). Given that the four types of justice perception have significant correlations with each other and that positive gossip behaviour is correlated with negative gossip behaviour in the extant research, our hypothesised nine-factor model was compared with alternative models collapsed across those dimensions. As summarised in Table 1, none of the alternative models provided an acceptable fit to the data. Hence, these results verified our hypothesised nine-factor model.

3.4. Common method variance check

Following the recommendation of Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003), our hypothesised nine-factor model was compared with the one-factor model. As seen in Table 1, the one-factor model did not produce an acceptable fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 4358.07$, $df = 434$, $\chi^2/df = 10.04$; IFI = 0.32; TLI = 0.27; CFI = 0.32; RMSEA = 0.17). This result diminished concern for common method variance.

4. Results

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations among the study variables. In general, correlations

between study variables were similar to our expectations. For instance, from the target similarity perspective, we found that organisation-initiated justice perceptions are correlated with organisation-targeted gossip, while supervisor-initiated justice perceptions are correlated with supervisor-targeted gossip. Against this view, we also found that distributive justice, one of the organisation-initiated justice perceptions, is positively correlated with positive gossip about the supervisor ($r = 0.12$, $p < .05$), while supervisor-orientated perceptions such as interpersonal ($r = 0.16$, $p < .01$) and informational justice ($r = 0.16$, $p < .01$) are positively correlated with positive gossip about the organisation. These results are probable, because supervisors, as primary performance evaluators, especially in small organisations such as our sample hospitals, have significant impact on the distribution of financial rewards, and because leaders providing fair treatment to followers are a good cause of positive recognition of the organisation for hiring such good leaders. Our overall results are comparable to Brady et al. (2017), who reported significant correlations between supervisor-initiated justice perceptions and supervisor-targeted gossip at work. Both studies found that negative gossip about the supervisor has slightly stronger correlations with interpersonal and informational justice perceptions compared with positive gossip.

In our sample, the frequencies of positive gossip (mean = 2.87) and negative gossip (mean = 2.91) in reference to organisations are almost similar, whereas positive gossip (mean = 3.11) is more prevalent than negative gossip (mean = 2.58), in reference to supervisors. Although only comparable to supervisor-related justice and gossip, these patterns are similar to Brady et al. (2017), indicating that positive gossip (mean = 2.72) is more prevalent than negative gossip (mean = 2.03), in reference to supervisors. By aggregating the targets, our data also show that gross positive gossip is more prevalent than gross negative gossip in the workplace, which is also consistent with Ellwardt, Steglich, and Wittek (2012) that reported the relative prevalence of positive gossip.

Hypothesis 1 predicted the positive linkages between organisation-initiated justice perceptions and positive workplace gossip. As seen in Table 3, procedural ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < .01$) and distributive justice ($\beta = 0.17$, $p < .01$) perceptions have significant positive relationships with positive gossip behaviour towards the organisation. Thus, these results supported Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 suggested positive linkages between supervisor-initiated justice perceptions and positive workplace gossip. As viewed in Table 4, both interpersonal ($\beta = 0.14$, $p < .05$) and informational justice ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < .05$) perceptions are positively related to

Table 1
Comparison of hypothesised and alternative models.

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Hypothesised 9-factor model	797.30	398	—	0.93	0.92	0.93	0.06
Alternative 7-factor model ^a	1328.31	413	531.01***	0.84	0.82	0.84	0.08
Alternative 7-factor model ^b	1985.75	413	1188.45***	0.73	0.69	0.73	0.11
Alternative 7-factor model ^c	1361.97	413	564.67***	0.84	0.82	0.84	0.08
Alternative 6-factor model ^d	2357.37	419	1560.07***	0.67	0.63	0.66	0.12
Alternative 6-factor model ^e	1912.71	419	1115.41***	0.74	0.71	0.74	0.10
Alternative 3-factor model ^f	3400.13	431	2602.83***	0.49	0.44	0.48	0.15
Alternative 2-factor model ^g	3722.86	433	2925.56***	0.43	0.38	0.43	0.15
Alternative 1-factor model ^h	4358.07	434	3560.77***	0.32	0.27	0.32	0.17

^a Combining positive gossip behaviours towards the organisation and supervisor; and combining negative gossip behaviours towards the organisation and supervisor.

^b Combining positive and negative gossip behaviours towards the organisation; and combining positive and negative gossip behaviours towards the supervisor.

^c Combining procedural and distributive justice; and combining interpersonal and informational justice.

^d Combining procedural, distributive, interpersonal, and informational justice.

^e Combining positive and negative gossip behaviours towards the organisation and supervisor.

^f Combining four justice dimensions and combining four types of gossip behaviours.

^g Combining perceived insider status and four justice dimensions; and combining four gossip behaviours.

^h Combining all variables.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and correlations^a.

Variable	Mean	s.d.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Age	31.65	8.06	—														
2. Organisational tenure	3.58	3.44	0.27**	—													
3. Workgroup tenure	2.74	2.41	0.14*	0.70**	—												
4. Education	1.30	0.47	0.09	0.16**	0.05	—											
5. Organisation 1	0.21	0.41	0.05	0.18**	0.03	0.02	—										
6. Organisation 2	0.29	0.46	0.13*	-0.20**	-0.21**	0.13*	-0.33**	—									
7. Organisation 3	0.21	0.41	0.34**	-0.19*	-0.09	-0.05	-0.26**	-0.33**	—								
8. Procedural justice	2.83	0.54	0.01	-0.08	-0.01	0.14*	-0.06	-0.01	0.08	—							
9. Distributive justice	2.78	0.68	0.16**	-0.03	-0.01	0.11*	-0.08	0.10	0.07	0.56**	—						
10. Interpersonal justice	3.38	0.70	0.14*	0.08	0.10	0.12*	0.08	0.05	0.24**	0.27**	0.24**	—					
11. Informational justice	3.29	0.69	0.05	-0.01	0.08	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.33**	0.25**	0.25**	0.61**	—				
12. Perceived insider status	3.42	0.66	0.17**	0.06	0.06	0.14*	0.08	-0.01	0.36**	0.31**	0.24**	0.36**	0.29**	—			
13. PGB towards the organisation	2.87	0.70	0.16**	0.10	0.04	0.11*	-0.13*	0.20**	0.03	0.23**	0.25**	0.16**	0.16**	0.23**	—		
14. NGB towards the organisation	2.91	0.72	-0.14*	0.05	0.11*	-0.07	0.09	0.08	-0.18**	-0.18**	-0.30**	0.05	-0.00	0.15**	0.15**	—	
15. PGB towards the supervisor	3.11	0.58	0.18**	0.11*	0.05	0.11*	0.10	0.01*	-0.04	0.06	0.12*	0.26**	0.23**	0.25**	0.53**	0.29**	—
16. NGB towards the supervisor	2.58	0.67	-0.01	0.19**	0.18*	0.03	-0.05	0.03	0.02	-0.08	-0.04	-0.26**	-0.29**	-0.19**	0.20**	0.42**	0.05

^a n = 329. PGB = positive gossip behaviour. NGB = negative gossip behaviour.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

Table 3
Regression results: Gossip about the organisation^a.

	Positive gossip behaviour towards the organisation (PGBO)			Negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation (NGBO)		
	Model 1	Model 2 (H1a/b)	Model 3 (H5a)	Model 4	Model 5 (H3a/b)	Model 6 (H6a)
Age	0.16**	0.14*	0.10	-0.14*	-0.10	-0.09
Organisational tenure	0.16*	0.20**	0.20**	-0.06	-0.11	-0.11
Workgroup tenure	-0.07	-0.11	-0.11	0.17*	0.20**	0.20**
Education	0.07	0.03	0.01	-0.09	-0.06	-0.05
Organisation 1	-0.09	-0.09	-0.10	0.13*	0.12*	0.13*
Organisation 2	0.21**	0.19**	0.16*	0.07	0.08*	0.09
Organisation 3	0.08	0.07	0.09	-0.08	-0.07	0.12
PGBO				0.19***	0.27***	0.28***
NGBO	0.18***	0.26***	0.27***			
Procedural justice		0.18**	0.13*		-0.05	-0.04
Distributive justice		0.17**	0.17**		-0.30***	-0.30***
Perceived insider status (PIS)			0.18***			-0.07
Procedural justice × PIS			0.14*			-0.06
Distributive justice × PIS			-0.10			0.02
R ²	0.13	0.22	0.25	0.10	0.20	0.21
F	5.86***	8.81***	8.11***	4.51***	8.11***	6.36***
ΔR ²		0.09	0.12		0.10	0.11
F for ΔR ²		18.10***	2.50		20.31***	0.40

Regression coefficients used for the formal hypothesis testing are bold.

^a n = 329. Standardised coefficients are reported.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor, supporting **Hypothesis 2**.

We expected negative relationships between organisation-initiated justice perceptions and negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation (**Hypothesis 3**) and between supervisor-initiated justice perceptions and negative gossip behaviour towards the supervisor (**Hypothesis 4**). With the exception of the non-significant effect of procedural justice on negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation (Model 5 of **Table 3**), we found significant negative effects of distributive ($\beta = -0.30, p < .001$ in Model 5 of **Table 3**), interpersonal ($\beta = -0.18, p < .01$ in Model 5 of **Table 4**), and informational justice ($\beta = -0.22, p < .001$ in Model 5 of **Table 4**) on negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation and supervisor. These findings revealed that distributive, interpersonal, and informational justice perceptions are negatively related to negative gossip, supporting **Hypotheses 3b, 4a, and 4b**, while rejecting **Hypothesis 3a**.

Finally, we presupposed positive (**Hypothesis 5**) and negative (**Hypothesis 6**) moderation effects of perceived insider status on the positive linkages between justice perceptions and positive gossip, and on the negative linkages between justice perceptions and negative gossip. As for positive gossip, we found that perceived insider status significantly strengthens the positive relationships between procedural justice and positive gossip about the organisation ($\beta = 0.14, p < .05$ in Model 3 of **Table 3**), and between informational justice and positive gossip about the supervisor ($\beta = 0.22, p < .01$ in Model 3 of **Table 4**) but not other relationships. We unexpectedly found that perceived insider status weakens the positive linkage between interpersonal justice and positive gossip about the supervisor ($\beta = -0.16, p < .05$ in Model 3 of **Table 4**). Regarding negative gossip, we did not find any significant moderation effect of perceived insider status on the linkages between

Table 4
Regression results: Gossip about the supervisor^a.

	Positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor (PGBS)			Negative gossip behaviour towards the supervisor (NGBS)		
	Model 1	Model 2 (H2a/b)	Model 3 (H5b)	Model 4	Model 5 (H4a/b)	Model 6 (H6b)
Age	0.16**	0.13*	0.10	-0.09	-0.05	-0.03
Organisational tenure	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.18*	0.12	0.12
Workgroup tenure	0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.10	0.17*	0.16*
Education	0.06	0.03	0.02	-0.01	0.02	0.03
Organisation 1	0.17**	0.15*	0.16**	-0.03	-0.01	-0.01
Organisation 2	0.24***	0.20**	0.22***	0.09	0.11	0.09
Organisation 3	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.11	0.08	0.07
PGBS				0.04	0.12*	0.15*
NGBS	0.03	0.13*	0.14*			
Interpersonal justice		0.14*	0.10		-0.18**	-0.16*
Informational justice		0.16*	0.13*		-0.22***	-0.21**
Perceived insider status (PIS)			0.16**			-0.12*
Interpersonal justice × PIS			-0.16*			0.07
Informational justice × PIS			0.22**			-0.03
R ²	0.09	0.16	0.21	0.06	0.18	0.19
F	4.07***	5.84***	6.32***	2.59**	6.75***	5.68***
ΔR ²		0.07	0.12		0.12	0.13
F for ΔR ²		11.81***	5.45**		22.05***	0.58

Regression coefficients used for the hypotheses testing are bold.

^a n = 329. Standardised coefficients are reported.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

justice perceptions and negative gossip. Hence, Hypothesis 5a and 5b were partially supported, whereas Hypothesis 6 was rejected.

Fig. 1 depicts how procedural justice interacts with perceived insider status for positive gossip about the supervisor. The simple slope for high perceived insider status is positively significant ($\beta = 0.31$, SE = 0.11, $p < .01$) and stronger than the slope for low perceived insider status ($\beta = 0.02$, SE = 0.10, *n.s.*). Fig. 2 depicts how supervisor-initiated justice perceptions interact with perceived insider status for positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor. In Fig. 2a, a significant positive linkage between interpersonal justice and positive gossip was found at low levels of perceived insider status ($\beta = 0.20$, SE = 0.08, $p < .05$), whereas the simple slope for high perceived insider status was not significant ($\beta = -0.04$, SE = 0.07, *n.s.*). Fig. 2b

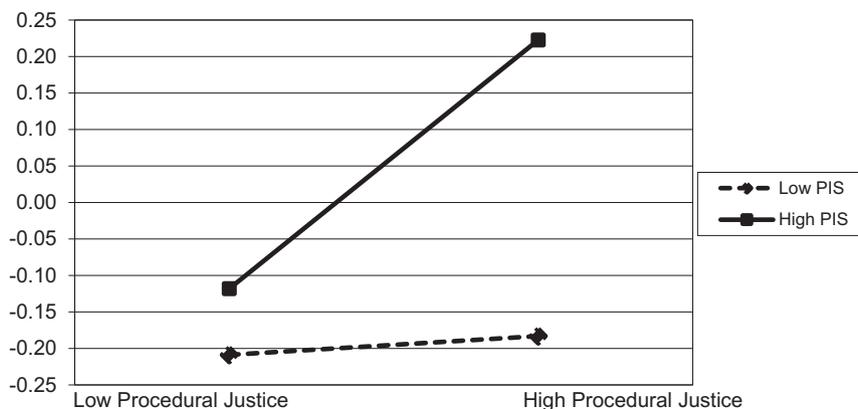


Fig. 1. Interaction effects between procedural justice and perceived insider status (PIS) on positive gossip behaviour towards the organisation (H5a).

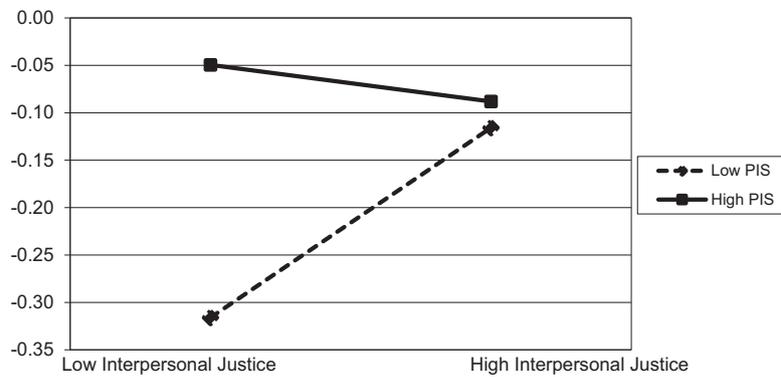
indicates that at high levels of perceived insider status, the positive linkage between informational justice and positive gossip was significant ($\beta = 0.29$, SE = 0.08, $p < .01$), while it was not significant for low perceived insider status ($\beta = -0.07$, SE = 0.08, *n.s.*).

5. Discussion

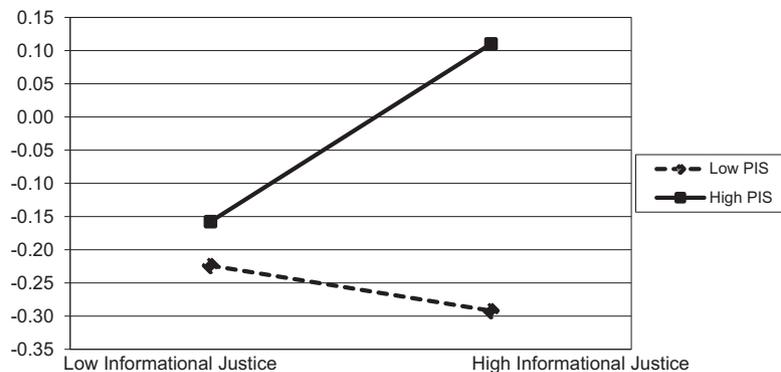
Our study aimed to identify the roles of perceived justice and insider status in relation to workplace gossip. Building on social exchange theory, our empirical investigation suggested that organisation- and supervisor-initiated justice perceptions are associated with gossip behaviour towards the organisation and the supervisor, respectively. Specifically, both procedural and distributive justice perceptions are positively related to positive gossip behaviour towards the organisation, whereas only distributive justice perceptions are negatively related to negative gossip behaviour towards the organisation. In addition, both interpersonal and informational justice perceptions are positively related to supervisor-directed positive gossip behaviour and negatively related to negative one. Lastly, we found that perceived insider status differentially moderates the linkages between justice and gossip, depending on the valence of the gossip. As for positive gossip, perceived insider status has significant moderation effects on the linkages between justice perceptions, except for distributive justice, and gossip about the organisation and the supervisor; however, it does not significantly strengthen or weaken the effects of justice perceptions on gossip about the organisation and the supervisor when it contains negative messages.

5.1. Theoretical implications

Our work enriches workplace gossip research in three ways. First, we identified some personal motivators leading employees to become gossipers at work. Previously in this research field, noting that gossip is a communication activity among multiple individuals, researchers have mainly regarded gossip as a relational and dynamic process (Foster, 2004), which involves the gossip triad of gossipers, receivers, and objects (Michelson et al., 2010). Such group or relationship contexts in which gossip becomes rampant are characterised by friendship ties, relational cohesion (Grosser et al., 2010), and trust in colleagues (Ellwardt, Steglich, & Wittek, 2012). These findings highlight the role of gossipers' social relationships with their peers who engage in gossip together. However, as Brady et al. (2017) noted, workplace gossip does not always require dyadic reaction and instead can be a single behaviour of a unidirectional evaluative communication from a gossip to gossip recipients. Despite the individual behaviour view of workplace gossip, little scholarly attention has focused on gossipers' personal motives (Jaeger et al., 1994) as the antecedents of workplace gossip. In fact, while trustworthy peers and friendship ties per se create the social



(a) Interaction effects between interpersonal justice and perceived insider status (PIS) on positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor



(b) Interaction effects between informational justice and perceived insider status (PIS) on positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor

Fig. 2. Interaction effects between interpersonal and informational justice and perceived insider status (PIS) on positive gossip behaviour towards the supervisor (H5b).

environment for workplace gossip, the more immediate motivation for gossip, communicating ideas, feelings, and information in an organisation (Michelson & Mouly, 2004) may be generated on the basis of what employees experience and perceive in the organisation. By identifying that perceived justice in organisational and supervisory treatment is significantly related to workplace gossip about the organisation and supervisor, this research established initial findings on the personal motives of workplace gossipers.

As reported earlier, despite our interesting findings, some of our hypotheses were not supported by our data. In particular, nurses' poor procedural justice perceptions did not predict their negative gossip behaviour towards their organisation, while distributive justice was strongly related to negative gossip. This implies that what determines the level of employees' motivation to negatively discourse with their peers about the way their organisation treats them is the amount of inducements they receive from the organisation, rather than the procedure through which such resource distribution decisions are made. However, our sample might be more sensitive to the outcome of decision-making than the procedure of decision-making. According to our post-hoc qualitative investigation on participating hospitals, the procedure of reward distribution for nurses in hospitals tends to be based on simple and limited factors (e.g., head nurses' recommendations based on their own subjective standards), rather than on sophisticated

and multiple factors, as in organisations in other industries, which may reduce variance in nurses' perceptions of procedural justice. This lack of formal management policies and practices is typical of small organisations (Huselid, 1995). Thus, future research needs to retest our research model with a sample of employees in large organisations, where performance management practices are well and systematically established.

Second, our investigation on the target-specific linkages between the full domain of justice information sources and the four types of workplace gossip synthetically provides unique insights into the differential patterns across gossip objects. As there has been a growing awareness of the positive and negative forms of gossip (Grosser et al., 2012), both forms of employee gossip behaviour were considered in this research. Furthermore, we classified the gossip objects into supervisors and organisations, and thus investigated four types of gossip at work. This attempt goes beyond previous research that mostly focused on a single target, predominantly supervisors (e.g., Decoster et al., 2013) or colleagues (Kuo et al., 2015), without also considering the valence aspect of gossip. In particular, our consideration of both supervisors and organisations as gossip triggers and objects is worthwhile to understand how gossip varies according to the features (e.g., power, status) of the gossip objects (Brady et al., 2017). Although some studies (Brady et al., 2017; Kuo et al., 2015) have examined how organisation-initiated (i.e.,

organisational justice and psychological contract violation) and supervisor-initiated (i.e., interactional justice and abusive supervision) actions are together associated with workplace gossip, their gossip objects (i.e., gossip about the supervisor and colleagues) were not specifically matched according to the action initiators. Our analysis revealed that supervisor-initiated justice perceptions more actively trigger target-specific workplace gossip (i.e., all four main effects are significant in Models 2 and 5 of Table 4) than organisation-initiated justice perceptions (i.e., the linkage between procedural justice and negative organisation-directed gossip is non-significant in Model 5 of Table 3, whereas other linkages are significant in Models 2 and 5 of Table 3). This evidence may make sense, because workplace gossip about high-status objects (i.e., organisational authorities or top management in this study) is not only riskier for gossipers but also less instrumental for them to influence their targets (Gilmore, 1978). We believe that our findings lay the foundation for further gossip research that examines various gossip objects inside or outside of the organisational boundaries and theorise general patterns of gossip according to the nature of objects. In line with Tassiello et al. (2018), indicating that the valence of gossip depends on object-receiver interpersonal closeness (i.e., psychological distance), object proximity (i.e., the gossiper-object or object-receiver physical distance) may serve as a determinant of gossip direction. In addition, it is intriguing to investigate how workplace gossip depends on customers and significant others outside of the organisational boundaries as gossip objects to build up the findings of this study. Taken together, this research expands the types of gossip in terms of objects by incorporating the management of organisations and reveals differential findings depending on the type of gossip, which warrants a fine-grained approach to gossip triggers and phenomena, as in this study.

Third, the results of this research provide theoretical implications for how workplace gossip hinges on the personal situations of gossipers. By incorporating perceived insider status as a boundary condition into our research model, this research contributes to existing gossip literature, in which the role of individual differences has largely been overlooked (Foster, 2004). Perceived insider status refers to the extent to which employees are perceived as valuable organisational members (Stamper & Masterson, 2002) and the result from a cognitive assessment of an employee's relative standing in the organisation (Lapalme et al., 2009). Hence, it represents whether an employee has high-quality relationships with their employer, supervisor, and colleagues (Choi et al., 2018). From a social exchange perspective, it is conceivable that perceived insider status may yield variation in gossip behaviours among employees, even when perceiving similar levels of fairness regarding organisational and supervisory treatment. Our analysis substantiated that perceived insider status has a significant moderating effect on the linkages between procedural justice and positive organisation-directed gossip, and between supervisor-initiated (i.e., interpersonal and informational) justice and positive supervisor-directed gossip, but we did not find the same pattern for negative gossip. These results may lead to the conclusion that perceived insider status largely alters the justice-positive gossip linkage, rather than the justice-negative gossip linkage. This finding could be attributed to the favourable and positive feelings of employees who perceive high insider status, which stems from their high-quality relationships with authorities. That is, employees with high perceived insider status are likely to focus on the desirable actions of their employer and supervisor, who provide them with unusual support and care, which boosts the effects of fairness perceptions on positive gossip. However, since average individuals are more strongly stimulated by, and reactive to, negative information than positive information (Taylor, 1991), even causing them to usually equate gossip with negative talk about others (Turner, Mazur, Wendel, & Winslow, 2003), employees may be strongly motivated to engage in negative gossip, regardless of the level of perceived insider status when experiencing unfairness. Also, regarding our finding that perceived insider status did not strengthen the positive linkage between interpersonal

justice and positive gossip, we speculate that high perceived insider status may make employees feel as though they deserve fair treatment from their supervisors, and thus, they take it for granted. Hence, they may not necessarily be motivated to spread positive and complimentary words about the supervisors who do treat them fairly. Overall, our investigation on the moderating role of perceived insider status is important to understand how individual differences affect the linkages between gossip triggers and target-specific gossip in the workplace.

In addition, this research provides theoretical implications for social exchange literature and justice research. As Colquitt et al. (2013: 203) noted, justice researchers "have continued to link justice perceptions to reciprocal behaviours targeted to individual coworkers (i.e., organisational citizenship behaviour directed to colleagues) despite the fact that those coworkers are not responsible for the justice levels (e.g., Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Fassina, Jones, & Uggerslev, 2008; Lavelle et al., 2009; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1998; Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002)." Social exchange theorists have also noted a multifoci of social exchange relationships (Cropanzano & Rupp, 2008), given that individual organisational members are simultaneously involved in diverse social exchange relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and their organisation (Emerson, 1976). In the realm of justice research, despite some prior studies showing that organisations' negative treatment elicits negative reactions from employees, it has been somewhat equivocal on whether those outcomes are directed at the injustice initiator (i.e., organisations and/or supervisors) owing to their fragmented approach of examining partial domains of justice information sources in predicting their behavioural outcomes, without clearly targeting the parties who should be held accountable for unfair treatment. With the target similarity perspective and a clearly defined construct of workplace gossip, we attempt to complement the aforementioned studies. In particular, our study considered the full domain of justice information sources, including informational justice, which has often been omitted in prior research, and connected organisation- and supervisor-initiated justice perceptions to target-specific positive and negative gossip behaviours. In so doing, our findings clarified how organisation- and supervisor-initiated justice redounds to its reputation via target-specific workplace gossip. Furthermore, we incorporated perceived insider status to delineate why workplace gossip is more encouraged or discouraged among a certain group of employees. We found that employees who perceive that they are outsiders tend to recognise fair interpersonal treatment as a supervisory action for positive gossip, whereas procedural and informational justice appeals to employees with perceived insider status as a praiseworthy quality or action by their organisation and supervisor. These results articulate that the impact of actions initiated by organisational actors on behavioural responses of target employees depends on the personal situations of the target employees regarding long-term and more generic exchange relationships between the two parties. That is, the same action may result in different behavioural responses, depending on the relationship quality, which is consistent with the notion of social exchange theory. Overall, our study helps to promote the accuracy of theoretical prediction of the linkages among initiating actions, behavioural reactions, and the actor-reactor relation.

5.2. Practical implications

The findings of this research provide some useful implications for business leaders and managers, who should better understand why employees engage in gossip at work, in order to constantly monitor the formation of workplace gossip and thereby effectively alleviate negative gossip that could likely result in negative consequences (Kuo et al., 2015). Our findings on various fairness and status perceptions of employees may allude to methods of effective gossip management. One such method is to entirely improve the perceived insider status of employees. As discussed above, employees with higher perceived insider status are more likely to be interested in positive gossip because of their

more favourable treatment and the inducements offered by their organisation and supervisor. Hence, in order to foster positive gossip and lessen negative gossip in an organisational hierarchy, it is necessary to make employees feel as though they are insiders and belong to their organisation. In particular, managers may attend to individual employees' needs and help them become well connected, not only with their coworkers but also with managers, by providing various social activities (e.g., mentoring programs, workshops across different role levels). These activities ultimately function to enhance an employee's sense of being an insider who possesses greater social capital within the organisation.

As for organisation-initiated justice perceptions, leaders and managers who are interested in preventing negative discourse among employees should care more about distributive justice for all employees, rather than procedural justice, because we found that the negative effect of distributive justice on negative gossip about the organisation ($\beta = -0.30, p < .001$ in Model 5 of Table 3) is larger than the positive effects of distributive ($\beta = 0.17, p < .01$ in Model 2 of Table 3) and procedural justice ($\beta = 0.18, p < .01$ in Model 2 of Table 3) perceptions of positive gossip about the organisation. These results mean that an effective way to mitigate negative gossip among employees is the fair distribution of financial rewards, in a way that is generally accepted by employees. In contrast, for employees perceiving insider status, organisations should also be concerned with the fairness of performance evaluation practices and decision-making criteria, given that perceived insider status significantly interacts with procedural justice to increase positive gossip about the organisation ($\beta = 0.14, p < .05$ in Model 3 of Table 3).

Likewise, our findings provide similar implications pertaining to supervisor-initiated justice perceptions for practitioners. In general, interpersonal and informational justice perceptions lead employees to engage in gossip about their supervisor, and this pattern is more salient for the linkages between those justice perceptions and negative gossip (see Models 2 and 5 of Table 4). Furthermore, interpersonal justice matters more to the positive supervisor-directed gossip of employees who perceive themselves as outsiders, whereas informational justice matters more to the gossip behaviour of self-perceiving insiders. Overall, these results suggest that organisations need to promote positive gossip about supervisors (thereby potentially improving supervisor self-efficacy) by developing their interpersonal skills and information sharing skills. In addition, our findings highlight that supervisors need to care more about interpersonal justice for outsiders and informational justice for insiders.

5.3. Limitations and future research directions

Despite the aforementioned informative findings and implications, this research has some limitations that we hope will be addressed in future research. First, the use of a single rater (i.e., employees) is problematic owing to concerns about common method bias. We followed the recommendation of Podsakoff et al. (2003), and the results of comparing our nine-factor model with the one-factor model lessened concerns about common method bias. Nevertheless, future researchers are encouraged to use a multisource survey (e.g., Decoster et al., 2013).

Second, our findings may have less generalisability, since we examined data collected only from female nurses in South Korea. Gossip is often seen as a female preserve or women's talk (Jones, 1980), but it is not dependent on gender, according to the review by Foster (2004). Nurses in health care organisations are an ideal study group for gossip at work (Waddington, 2005), because gossip is a feature of nursing practice (Castledine, 1994), in which verbal communication (Kerr, 2002) and coordination with other care providers (Gittell, Seidner, & Wimbush, 2010) are crucial. However, it has been suggested that the tendency to gossip is related to occupational contexts (Nevo, Nevo, & Derech-Zehavi, 1993). Furthermore, employees' gossip as a reaction to perceived contexts and situations in the workplace may depend on

cultural values (see Wu, Kwan, et al., 2018). Therefore, subsequent research needs to consider other occupational and cultural settings and then provide the unique nature, antecedents, and processes of workplace gossip across various contingencies.

Third, the cross-sectional design does not allow for the inference of causal relationships in our findings. It should be noted, however, that participation in a paper-pencil survey would be more difficult for nurses who do not have their own workspaces and are required to move around to attend to patients than it would be for ordinary office workers sitting at their own desks. In particular, it was very difficult for nurses to respond to negative constructs such as negative gossip in our research. Therefore, combined with what we have discussed above, we encourage future researchers to replicate our proposed model with samples from different occupations, in which multitime survey administration is possible.

Fourth, a multilevel perspective is necessary to broaden our understanding of employee motivation towards workplace gossip, but unfortunately, it was not considered in our research, which focused on the between-individual variation in terms of justice, perceived insider status, and gossip. As noted by Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, and Mathieu (2007), an organisation is a multilevel system; thus, a multilevel conceptual model promotes a systematic understanding of employee behaviour at work. In general, individual motivation in workplace behaviour is typically amplified through interpersonal dynamics within workgroups (Kim, Kim, Han, Jackson, & Ployhart, 2017). In particular, it has been noted that gossip occurs as a function of interpersonal interactions in social contexts (Noon & Delbridge, 1993). Hence, we encourage researchers to investigate the social context of gossipers and to delve into the top-down cross level influences on individual gossip at work.

6. Conclusion

As gossip is an inevitable organisational phenomenon (Mills, 2010) and influences workplace outcomes, it is important to know what motivates workplace gossip and how it can be managed. Extending social exchange and justice research to workplace gossip, our study proposed not only the target-specific relationships between justice and gossip but also perceived insider status as a boundary condition for those linkages. We hope that more studies will delve into workplace gossip patterns across diverse targets and their boundary conditions, thereby helping organisations to effectively manage employee gossip.

Declarations of interest

None.

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