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# Gossip in the workplace and the implications for HR management : a study of gossip and its relationship to employee cynicism

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**Gossip in the Workplace and the Implications for HR Management:  
A Study of Gossip and its Relationship to Employee Cynicism**

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## Gossip in the Workplace and the Implications for HR Management: A Study of Gossip and its Relationship to Employee Cynicism

### ABSTRACT

Gossip is a common phenomenon in the workplace and yet relatively little is understood about its influence to employees. This study adopts social information theory and social cognitive theory to interpret the diverse literature on gossip, and to develop and test hypotheses concerning some of the antecedents of gossip, with an aim of developing knowledge of the relationship between gossip and employee behaviour in the workplace. The study analysed survey data in a two stage process, from 362 employees across a range of industries in Taiwan. The findings revealed that job-related gossip predicted employee cynicism and mediated the relationship between psychological contract violation and cynicism, and that non-job-related gossip showed a similar but weaker effect to employee cynicism. The contribution made by this paper is of value to both the academic subject domain and managers in Human Resources. Firstly, we have identified two constructs of gossip, job related and non-job related gossip not previously reported and a validated scale has been created. Secondly, we have confirmed that these different constructs of gossip impact differently on employee behaviour and therefore HR managers should be cautious about gossip in the workplace, as it can cause cynical behaviour amongst employees.

**Keywords:** Abusive supervision; Employee cynicism; Gossip; Human resource management; Psychological Contract.

## Introduction

Gossip is a common phenomenon at work. Virtually all employees find themselves producing, hearing, or otherwise participating in evaluative comments about someone who is not present in the conversation. Gossip is often seen as informal, casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true (Foster, 2004; Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Scholars indicate that 14% workplace coffee-break chat is actually gossip and about 66% of general conversation between employees is related to social topics concerning talk about other people (Cole & Dalton, 2009). Thus, gossip provides a channel of informal communication and information exchange, although the information conveyed in gossip may not be accurate or complete.

False and incomplete information such as that which is transmitted via gossip triggers employee cynicism (Abraham, 2000; Anderson & Bateman, 1997), whilst McAndrew *et al.* (2007) posits that positive gossip facilitates information transmission and group dynamics. These findings suggest that gossip and employee behaviour are somehow connected. Surprisingly, despite the connection, researchers do not appear very interested in gossip and its role and influence in employee behaviour and the literature on gossip-cynicism is also limited, with the exceptions of Kurland & Pelled (2000) and Kuo (2010). Furthermore, from a human resource management perspective, there is a need to conduct further research on the role of gossip in the workplace, as through a better understanding of the antecedents of gossip and its relationship to employee behaviour, managers and leaders can monitor the formation of gossip and respond appropriately to alleviate any resulting negative impact on employees. Specifically, this study adopts social information theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1988) to help interpret the diverse literature on gossip, and to develop and test hypotheses concerning some of the antecedents of gossip, with the aim of contributing to knowledge on the relationship between gossip and behaviour in the workplace.

### ***Gossip: Construct, formation and effect at work***

Foster (2004) defines gossip as the practice of producing, hearing or participating in evaluative comments about someone. In the workplace, gossip is often regarded as idle talk about other colleagues who are absent and, interestingly, researchers seem to have mixed views of how gossip actually gets started and the role it plays. Michelson *et al.* (2010) suggest that gossip is a dynamic process and the effects of gossip depend on the interaction between gossipers, listener/respondent, and target, i.e., the gossip triad. For gossip

1 to occur, three contextual conditions have been identified; *sociability*, *shared frames of reference*, and  
2 *privacy protection*. Firstly, in acquaintance-type relationships, gossip rarely takes place as neither party is  
3 certain of the other's disposition on anything, making it unsafe to engage in value discussions. Only when  
4 the interacting parties have developed a congenial relationship through a level of socialising, is gossip more  
5 likely to emerge (Rosnow, 2001; Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985). Secondly, as gossip fulfils the human need to  
6 belong, group settings can provide a thriving ground for gossip (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994). This is often because  
7 members from the same or cognate groups are familiar with each other's values and ethics and share frames  
8 of reference. As the conformity and consensus between two parties increases, the likelihood to engage in  
9 gossip also rises (Kurland & Pelled, 2000). Thirdly, gossip may not necessarily become public information,  
10 therefore gossipers can avoid accountability and freely express their views without fear of discovery. Thus  
11 privacy provides a sound place for emotional release without the fear of being culpable or held liable for  
12 one's remarks (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985). Hence, once the privacy of speakers is protected, gossip is  
13 more likely to occur.

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28 From a different perspective, McAndrew *et al.* (2007) suggest that gossip is a necessary function of  
29 society because the constant flow of information within a network of human exchange needs to evaluate  
30 situations to assist people in making sense of their environment. Through gossip, people become able to look  
31 at pieces of information from different perspectives and interpret it according to their own knowledge base.  
32 Gossip facilitates critical thinking as a social sense-making tool (Bok, 1982). Similarly, Levin and Arluke  
33 (1987) claim that gossip includes positive information, and that gossip can deliver a more accurate,  
34 experiential truth than objective explanations. More specifically, positive gossip facilitates group member  
35 co-operation, and that the levels of reciprocity, trust and reputation between individual members are also  
36 enhanced (Somerfield *et al.*, 2008). Negative gossip however, is effective for increasing the intimacy of  
37 social bonds (Bosson *et al.*, 2006). Thus, gossip provides an effective way to learn and validate social  
38 guidelines and norms.

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50 Interestingly, other researchers suggest that gossip is essentially negative and stealthy, e.g. sensitive,  
51 personal or cannot be unveiled in public (Leaper & Holliday, 1995). The information discussed as gossip is  
52 meant to be private (Foster, 2004). Indeed, gossip has received pejorative criticism and all cultures and  
53 societies experience similar scandalous effects of gossip (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985). Gossip may cause  
54 embarrassment and discomfort to employees, as gossip often involves private and sensitive issues (Foster,  
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2004) and may be used to ruin the reputation and credibility of colleagues and competitors (Cole & Dalton, 2009). There are also many instances when gossip may have had negative consequences for the person targeted, especially when the gossip is entangled with fantasies of jealous, antagonistic, or over-zealous individuals (Rosnow, 2001). In addition, the relationship between two parties (the gossipers) may have subtle impact on the influence of gossip. Grosser *et al.* (2010) argue that, when the two gossipers have a close or intimate friendship, they may engage in both positive and negative gossip. Conversely, if the gossipers have an instrumental relationship as general colleagues or social contacts, they are more likely to engage in merely positive gossip.

### ***New construct of workplace gossip and its role in employee behaviour***

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In this research, we are interested in the role of gossip at work. To further analyse the role of gossip, we suggest that gossip shall be re-conceptualised into *job-related gossip* (JRG) and *non-job-related gossip* (NJG). We propose that JRG and NJG differ in their relationship with employee behaviour, for the following reasons. Firstly, gossip may not necessarily tell the truth and cause problems (Dunbar, 2004). Very likely, if the gossip *per se* is not related to the job but general social factors (such as relationship with girl/boyfriend, children's problem at school), an employee may not treat gossip seriously in the workplace and may not vehemently respond to the source of gossip such as colleagues or the organisation. Second, DiFonzo *et al.* (2003) described gossip as superfluous and insignificant. The purpose of gossip is to entertain and to amuse. Following this logic, if the gossip *per se* is not related to the job but to someone's personal life (such as massive debts or drug use), an employee may not necessarily attribute the pressure of that gossip to his/her colleagues or organisation. Very likely, at the individual level, the influence of *non-job-related gossip* may be less salient at work than compared to the influence of *job-related gossip*. Finally, gossip at work may impact upon the perceptions of status, power and esteem (Rosnow, 2001). *Job-related gossip* shall have higher tendency (or possibility) to influence employee's behaviour, as *job-related gossip* is directly associated with the job, colleagues and or the workplace.

As employee behaviour is many and varied it is unfeasible to examine all types of workplace behaviours, and so this research focuses on a specific behaviour - *employee cynicism*, which is characterised by frustration, hopelessness, and disillusionment, as well as contempt toward and distrust of business organisations, executives, and/or other objects in the workplace (Andersson, 1996), the justification for this

1 choice now follows. To being with, recent studies indicate that cynicism is one of the most significant factors  
2 in organisational performance (Kuo, 2010; Oreg & Berson, 2011). Scholars also suggest that the changing  
3 nature of work and work organisations, particularly the unmet expectation of the workplace has also  
4 encouraged a rise in cynicism (Pate *et al.*, 2000). Moreover, cynicism may undermine leaders, institutions  
5 and HR strategies. For instance, cynics at work distrust the motives of the leaders, and employees with  
6 cynical views may feel that their employers, will exploit their contributions (Abraham, 2000; Kanter &  
7 Mirvis, 1989). In short, although earlier studies of cynicism were wide ranging, their findings collectively  
8 imply that cynicism affects employees, is related to poor employee performance and leads to poorer  
9 organisational performance. For the same reason, we believe that focusing on employee cynicism and  
10 analysing its connection with gossip is crucial to both academic researchers and HR practitioners. This paper  
11 now turns to examine the construct of employee cynicism and, more importantly, to analyse the proposed  
12 gossip-cynicism relationship.

### 27 ***Employee cynicism and the proposed gossip-cynicism relationship***

28 Employee cynicism is conceptually different from constructs such as job satisfaction and trust.  
29 Cynicism is anticipatory and outwardly-directed, whereas job satisfaction is retrospective and self-focused  
30 (Wanous *et al.*, 1994). Andersson explained that trust is one's expectation that the word, promise or  
31 statement of another party can be relied on, whereas cynicism is an attitude consisting of a self-belief and  
32 affective component such as hopelessness and disillusionment.

33 Cynicism has been studied and defined in a variety of ways, including dispositional conceptualisations  
34 (Cook & Medley, 1954), negative attitudes regarding unmet expectations of authorities (Andersson, 1996;  
35 Kanter & Mirvis, 1989), and cynicism as an individual and organisational phenomenon (DeCelles *et al.*,  
36 2013). Dean *et al.* (1998) defines cynicism as a negative attitude toward one's employing organisation,  
37 comprising of three dimensions: i). a belief that the organisation lacks integrity; ii). a negative affect towards  
38 the organisation; and, iii). tendencies to exhibit disparaging and critical behaviour towards the organisation.  
39 Dean *et al.*'s definition has provided a clear and comprehensive construct of cynicism and inspired a series of  
40 cognate research such as Kuo's (2010) analysis of cynicism influence and the development of a cynicism  
41 scale for Chinese employees/population. Hence, we have adopted Dean *et al.*'s definition of cynicism in this  
42 research.

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Cynicism has been proposed as a paradigm of employee–employer relations as a result of longer working hours, work intensification, ineffective leadership and management, new deals in the workplace and the continual downsizing and delayering of organisations (Bunting, 2004). For instance, after repeated exposure to mis-managed change efforts and an unpleasant working environment, employees may accumulate negative emotions and engage in disparaging behaviour towards their organisations (Wanous *et al.*, 1994). During a period of unsuccessful organisational development and defective changes, employees with cynicism beliefs tend to attribute such events to their managers, leaders and officials. These employees simply distrust the management policies and disbelieve that their voices are heard by their managers, leading to lower or even no performance (Wanous *et al.*, 2000). Similarly, Andersson and Bateman (1997) reveal a correlation between cynicism, organisational citizenship behaviour and compliance with unethical requests. Stanley, Meyer and Topolnysky (2005) also state that employees with higher cynicism are more likely to doubt their managers' strategies and to suspect the intention underlying these strategies. 'Cynicism is often triggered by business practices such as layoffs and inflated salaries commanded by corporate executives, creating an implicit sense of alienation and frustration towards the organisation may be displayed through cynicism (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). The preceding discussion has also implied that gossip is a plausible antecedent to cynicism. This paper now examines the formation of employee cynicism through social information theory and social cognition theory.

Salancik & Pfeffer (1978) provide a valuable contribution to understanding employee cynicism via their social information theory. This theory posits that the social context has two salient effects on individual attitude, behaviour and needs. Firstly the social context provides a direct construction of meaning which acts as a guide for socially acceptable reasons for action. Secondly, the social context focuses an individual's attention on certain information, making that information more salient, and provides expectations concerning individual behaviour and the logical consequences of such behaviour. Thus, social values, environmental factors and relationships with others all influence individual perceptions, attitudes and behaviours. Social information theory does not explain the mechanism nor direction of influence, but Pollock *et al.* (2000) suggest that social context and individuals are like ties and nodes in a wider network. Individuals need ties to fulfil their social/psychological needs, whereas ties need nodes to form the foundation of a network. Following this, it seems logical to support the gossip-cynicism relationship, predicated on the following reasons: i). gossip contains contextual information shared by the gossipers and bystanders (DiFonzo *et al.*,



1  
2 1994); ii). gossip requires social context as a means of information transmission (Rosnow & Georgoudi,  
3 1985); and, iii). people may collect valuable information from gossip and guide their behaviours accordingly  
4 as an extension of social information theory. In addition, people may interpret gossip as a malicious attack  
5 and thus resent or retaliate against the source and location of the gossip, the workplace, with the purpose of  
6 defending their self-esteem and to reassure themselves (*cf.* self-affirmation theory; Sherman & Cohen, 2006).  
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11 In addition, Bandura's 1988 paper on social cognitive theory indicates that portions of an individual's  
12 knowledge acquisition are directly related to observing others within social interactions, experiences, and  
13 external media influences. People do not learn new behaviours solely by trying them and either succeeding  
14 or failing, but rather, people learn and behave by watching what others do, by listening to what others say.  
15 Therefore, the gossip-cynicism relationship can be proposed, based on the following reasons: i). people  
16 evaluate gossip carefully as it affects them in diverse ways, e.g. reputation and credibility (Foster, 2004); ii).  
17 gossip may contain unfavourable information against a particular person and thus bring about detrimental  
18 effects on one's social interactions with others, such as colleagues at work (McAndrew *et al.*, 2007); iii). if  
19 individuals have seen other colleagues suffering as a result of gossip, then when they experience gossip in  
20 person, they may be more cautious with their own words and deeds, thus extending social cognitive theory.  
21 For instance, when facing gossip such as false information, individuals may feel stressed and uncomfortable  
22 with their organisation (the location of the gossip) and, consequently, alienate themselves from the  
23 organisation. In addition, a recent study (Chang *et al.*, in press) has found that organisational dis-  
24 identification (a type of alienation) is correlated with workplace deviance. This finding offers a preliminary  
25 but crucial clue to supporting the gossip-cynicism relationship.  
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42 In sum, although social information and social cognitive theories differ in nature, both theories provide  
43 support for the proposed gossip-cynicism relationship. Social information theory helps explain the  
44 foundation of gossip-cynicism relationship, whereas social cognitive theory helps clarify the mechanism of  
45 how and why negative gossip may lead to employee cynicism. Furthermore, following the aforementioned  
46 analysis and dichotomy of gossip at work (*job-related gossip vs. non-job-related gossip*), we suggest that  
47 *job-related gossip* (JRG) and *non-job-related gossip* (NJG) differ in their relationship with employee  
48 cynicism. To begin with, as *NJG* is not related to the job, employees tend to pay less attention to *NJG* and  
49 may not respond to the source of gossip vehemently. As *NJG* is more related to personal life, employees may  
50 not attribute the pressure of that gossip such as colleagues or the organisation. Different from *NJG*, *JRG* may  
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1 have higher possibility to influence employee's perception and their behaviours at work, as it is linked to  
2 their job and the people they work with (e.g. colleagues, customers). Thus, two specific hypotheses are  
3 proposed below:  
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7 H<sub>1</sub>: Job-related gossip (JRG) has a stronger effect on employee cynicism.

8 H<sub>2</sub>: Non-job-related gossip (NJG) has a weaker effect on employee cynicism.

9 (These two hypotheses suggest that, compared to NJG, JRG is more likely to predict cynicism).  
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### 12 *Antecedents of job-related gossip and non job-related gossip*

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15 In order to underpin the development of the hypotheses, two antecedents of job-related gossip (JRG)  
16 and non-job-related gossip (NJG), psychological contract violation and abusive supervision are outlined  
17 below for completeness.  
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20 Psychological contract describes an individual's beliefs, shaped by the organisation regarding the terms  
21 of an exchange between an individual and the organisation (Rousseau, 1995). Robinson (1996) defines  
22 psychological contract as the employee's perception of what they owe to their employers and what their  
23 employers owe to them. The interpretation of psychological contract between employee and employer may  
24 not be necessarily shared by both parties as it is highly perceptual and subjective. Scholars also indicate that  
25 the differences in perceptions may result in one party believing that the other has violated the terms of the  
26 contract. Employees' perceptions of the obligations established at the time of employment may change as the  
27 years of employment increases; hence, employees tend to attribute increasing perceived obligation from their  
28 employer while their own perceived obligation decreases (Robinson, Kraatz & Rousseau, 1994). In light of  
29 Robinson *et al.*'s view, one can regard psychological contract violation as an emotional and affective state  
30 that may follow from the belief that one's organisation has failed to adequately maintain the psychological  
31 contract. Robinson *et al.* also indicate that violation leads to low organisational commitment, less  
32 organisational citizenship behaviour and poor job satisfaction.  
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49 In addition, the relationship between violation and employee cynicism may be explained by social  
50 exchange theory (Homan, 1958) further. An employee develops and maintains a transactional psychological  
51 contract by exchanging transactional resources such as work productivity (performance) for a certain amount  
52 of payment (reward). An employee also develops and maintains a relational contract by exchanging  
53 relational resources such as proactive work behaviour and loyalty for better quality relationships with leaders  
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1 and managers (Dulac *et al.*, 2008). When violation occurs (a sign of unbalanced exchange), individuals are  
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3 prone to feel frustrated and disappointed about the organisations. Such frustration and disappointment may  
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5 consequently convert into job-related gossip (JRG), for instance, *Mr.X said that the company does not really*  
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7 *appreciate the effort from employees, Mrs.Y said that the organisation should do more to support their*  
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9 *employees, and someone said that line managers only favour the persons who can achieve sales targets.*  
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11 Very likely, when the organisation violates its obligations, the employee is likely to feel frustrated at work,  
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13 have poor attitude toward their jobs, and behave against the organisation, such as cynicism attitude and  
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15 behaviour against their colleagues and organisation. The employees may also use gossips to cope with their  
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17 negative emotions and feelings against their organisations. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:  
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20 H<sub>3</sub>: Psychological contract violation predicts job-related gossip (JRG) and employee cynicism.

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22 H<sub>4</sub>: Job-related gossip (JRG) mediates the relationship between psychological contract violation and  
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24 employee cynicism.  
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26 In addition to psychological contract violation, abusive supervision (AS) warrants discussion as an  
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28 antecedent of job-related gossip (JRG) and non job-related gossip (NJG) based on the following reasons. To  
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30 begin with, abusive supervision focuses on the personal perception towards the employee's immediate  
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32 managers whilst psychological contract violation is concentrated on an overall evaluation of the whole  
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34 organisation. Through analysing both organisational and personal level variables, a better understanding of  
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36 the antecedents of gossip will be reached.  
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38 Moreover, abusive supervision refers to the extent to which managers are perceived to engage in  
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40 sustained displays of hostile verbal and non-verbal behaviours (Tepper, 2000). Examples of abusive  
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42 supervision behaviour may include explosive outburst (e.g. slamming doors, yelling at someone for  
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44 disagreeing), using derogatory language (e.g. 'idiot', 'useless'), threatening (e.g. job insecurity, promotion  
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46 opportunity) and non-verbal behaviour (e.g. ignorant attitudes or aggressive eye contact). Zellars *et al.* (2002)  
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48 found that abusive supervision can have a negative effect on organisational citizenship behaviour, and that it  
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50 can act as a mediator of the perception that an employee holds towards their organisation. Zellar *et al.*  
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52 continued that, when abusive supervision occurs, employees tend to denigrate the reputation of their  
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54 organisation and refrain from pro-social behaviour at work. Following this reasoning, it can be suggested that  
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56 when receiving abusive supervision, employees may develop a negative attitude against their managers and  
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58 organisation, which in turn becomes negative behaviour at work such as cynicism.  
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An abusive supervision–employee relationship may also be explained by leader-member exchange theory (Deluga, 1998), which asserts that leaders develop an exchange with their subordinates, and that the quality of these leader-member exchanges influences the subordinates' responsibility, influence over decisions, access to resources and performance. Thus the application of leader–member exchange theory to the current research would indicate that abusive supervision may relate to *job-related gossip* (JRG) and *non-job-related gossip* (NJG), because abusive supervision has been found to produce a sense of incongruence between individual members and their organisation. Such a sense of incongruence then evolves and becomes a motivation for gossip. For example, *Mr. X said that the manager was totally useless and he just has a leg in the boardroom*, and *Mrs. Y said that the manger should be sacked as he has no subject knowledge and receives no respect in the team* (both examples above are job-related gossip). *Mr. X said that the manager was an alcoholic and recently divorced, explaining why he always shouted to his subordinates*, and *Mrs. Y said that the team leader just broke up with her boyfriend and hence was very moody at work* (both examples above are non job-related gossip).

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In summary, when abusive supervision occurs, employees tend to refrain from citizenship behaviour and form negative attitude against their organisation. As abusive supervision causes stress and disappointment, the employees may use gossip (both JRG and NJG) to cope with their negative emotions and feelings against their organisations. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

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H<sub>5</sub>: Abusive supervision predicts employee cynicism.

H<sub>6</sub>: Abusive supervision predicts job-related gossip (JRG) and non-job-related gossip (NJG).

Furthermore, as *non-job-related gossip* (NJG) has a weaker effect on employee cynicism (*c.f. please refer to the discussion of the second hypothesis*), we propose the following final hypothesis:

H<sub>7</sub>: Non-job-related gossip (NJG) shows a weaker mediating effect on the relationship between abusive supervision and employee cynicism.

### **Research framework**

To consolidate the seven hypotheses and clarify the associations between the research variables, an integrative framework (hypothetic research model) has been developed (See Figure 1). This framework is informative in several ways. Firstly, a new concept of workplace gossip has been developed, comprising two dimensions: *job-related gossip* (JRG) and *non-job-related gossip* (NJG). Secondly, two antecedents of

1 gossip are proposed: *psychological contract violation* and *abusive supervision*. Specifically, psychological  
2 contract violation predicts JRG and employee cynicism, whereas abusive supervision (AS) predicts both JRG,  
3 NJG and employee cynicism. Finally, JRG mediates the relationship between psychological contract  
4 violation and employee cynicism, and NJG does not mediate the relationship between abusive supervision  
5 and employee cynicism.

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## 12 13 14 **Method**

### 15 ***Sample and procedure***

16 To enhance the external validity of data collection, authors considered different types of businesses and  
17 sizes of organisation during participant recruitment. Authors focused on the industries in Taipei - the capital  
18 of Taiwan, as per the research grant criteria of the National Science Council of Taiwan. Authors contacted 34  
19 business companies from different industries, and 26 companies agreed to participate in the research and  
20 provide data access.

21 To improve the sample representativeness, authors distributed different numbers of  
22 questionnaire copies to different organisations, subject to their organisational sizes. Specifically,  
23 large organisations (with more than 1000 staff) received 50 copies, medium organisations (with  
24 1000 to 100 staff) received 20 copies, and small organisations (with less than 100 staff) received 10  
25 copies. Authors dispatched all the questionnaires to the HR managers of each company and these  
26 managers then distributed copies to their employees using the snowball sampling technique (a  
27 similar technique has been adopted by Chang *et al.*, 2013).

28 To ameliorate the effects of common method variance (CMV) resulting from the utilisation of  
29 self-rated measures, the authors collected the data in two stages. CMV emerges when self-rated  
30 measures are simultaneously used, as in some cases the observed relationships between variables  
31 are inflated, jeopardising the reliability of data analysis (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Specifically, four  
32 research variables (i.e. psychological contract violation, abusive supervision, job-related gossip and  
33 non-job-related job) were measured at Stage 1 and employee cynicism at Stage 2, which was  
34 conducted one month after Stage 1.

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At Stage 1, 450 copies of the questionnaire were distributed and 392 were returned. At Stage 2, the questionnaires were distributed to all those who had responded to Stage 1 and 362 copies were returned, yielding a gross response rate of 79.11%. The breakdown of responses across the sample was: large organisations (3 companies, 126 copies), medium organisations (10 companies, 138 copies) and small organisations (13 companies, 98 copies). The research sample (362 copies) was gathered from five industries, including: manufacturing (42), finance (50), IT (44), services (131) and civil departments (89).

The sample comprised a wide range of employees including junior and senior managers and also non managerial and low skilled staff. Incentives were provided in the form of a nominal fee NT\$ 100 (£2 approximately) to each participant to thank them and raffle tickets for book vouchers were used as incentives to stimulate the questionnaire response rate.

A series of ANOVA tests were conducted to examine whether internal heterogeneity exists between Stage 1 and Stage 2 groups. Results showed no significant difference in gender ( $\chi^2 (0.95, 1) = 0.19, p > .05$ ) ( $p < .05 @ 3.84$ ) and age ( $\chi^2 (0.95, 42) = 33.63, p > .05$ ) ( $p < .05 @ 55.76$ ) between the respondents at stage 1 and stage 2. Thus, the Stage 2 dataset was used for statistical analysis and hypothesis testing. Demographic details of the participants were: gender (*male = 34.25%, female = 65.75%*) and age bands (*20 yrs & below = .01%, 21-30 yrs = 46.96%, 31-40 yrs = 19.89%, 41-50 yrs = 21.55%, 51 yrs & above = 11.05%*). The mean age of the participants were 34.95 years old ( $SD = 10.71$ ). Control variables included: gender, age and working tenure. These control variables were incorporated into the data analysis process, and the findings suggested no significant correlation with employee cynicism and gossip .

### Measures

We adopted three standardised scales but also developed two scales for the survey, these were:

*Psychological contract violation (PCV)*. This survey adopted the PCV scale (Robinson & Morrison, 2000) to measure employees' experiences of PCV (9 items;  $\alpha = .92$ ). Sample items include: *I feel my organisation betrays me* and *the way that my organisation treats me is frustrating*. Responses were recorded using a 6-point Likert scale (*1 = extremely unsatisfied, 6 = extremely satisfied*). Higher scores represent a higher occurrence of psychological contract violation in the workplace.

1 *Abusive supervision* (AS). Tepper's (2000) scale was used to measure employees' experiences of AS (15  
2 items;  $\alpha = .90$ ). Sample items include: *My line manager disrespects and is rude to me* and *my line manager*  
3 *intrudes into my privacy*. Responses were recorded using a 6-point *Likert* scale (*1 = never, 6 = always*).  
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5 Higher scores represent a higher occurrence of abusive supervision in the workplace.  
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9 Both PCV and AS scales were originally written and validated in English, so the questions (scale items)  
10 were translated into traditional Chinese for the survey, with a back-translation procedure to ensure language  
11 equivalence and appropriateness. We invited two bilingual experts in Management studies to examine the  
12 validity and clarity of scale items, and revisions were made accordingly.  
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17 *Employee cynicism* (ECN). Kuo's (2010) scale was adopted to measure the experiences of employee  
18 cynicism in the workplace. This scale was developed in line with employee cynicism (Cole, Bruch & Vogel,  
19 2006) and workplace cynicism (Dean, Brandes & Dharwadkar, 1998). There were totally eight items ( $\alpha =$   
20 .90) and all items were preceded by a statement: "*In the place/company I work for...*". Items included: i).  
21 *some colleagues are suspicious of other people's opinions and behaviours*; ii). *some colleagues only look*  
22 *after their own business and interests*; iii). *some colleagues deliberately let you make mistakes without*  
23 *telling you what's going wrong*; iv). *some colleagues look down on others due to their seniority or authority*;  
24 v). *some colleagues resent when being oppressed by the organisation*; vi). *I disdain people when they play*  
25 *games against my performance*; vii). *some colleagues deliberately criticise and/or sneer at others*; and, viii).  
26 *some colleagues adopt a muddle-along approach to deal with unreasonable demands*. Responses were  
27 recorded using a 6-point *Likert* scale (*1 = extremely disagree, 6 = extremely agree*). Higher scores represent  
28 more experiences of employee cynicism in the workplace.  
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43 *Gossip at work*. The literature review supported the view that gossip at work should be re-conceptualised  
44 into two dimensions: *job-related gossip* (JRG) and *non-job-related gossip* (NJG). Following this, prior  
45 gossip studies (e.g. Foster, 2004; Kurland & Pelled, 2000) were revisited to develop a new workplace gossip  
46 scale, in line with the 3-staged scale development process (Hinkin, 1995). Three independent samples were  
47 also adopted to facilitate the development process (See Table 1). Details follow:  
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52 <Insert Tables 1 & 2 About Here>  
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55 At Stage 1 (item generation), we collected the information of gossip at work using Sample 1, asking  
56 these employees to provide any gossip that they heard in the past three months. Stage 1 gathered 372 gossip  
57 comments, yielding the average rate of 3.54 gossips from each employee. Based on the gossip concept  
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1 (Kurland & Pelled, 2000), authors re-categorised these gossips into 187 *job-related gossips* and 185 *non-job-*  
2 *related gossips*. The former included, for instance, performance-, capability, colleague relationship, moral  
3 and emotion management related gossips. The latter included, for instance, life events, social relationships,  
4 children, family, marriage and affair related gossips. Three HR managers were invited to inspect all gossips,  
5 with an aim to improve the content validity and representativeness of selected gossips (items). Finally, 24  
6 items were selected for the next stage analysis.

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14 At Stage 2 (scale development), an exploratory factory analysis was conducted using Sample 2. The  
15 results suggested four principal factors (Eigen-values = 8.56, 3.08, 2.01, & 1.36, respectively; Variance  
16 percentage = 35.69%, 12.84%, 8.36%, & 5.66%, respectively; Cronbach's  $\alpha$  = .87, .88, .82 & .77,  
17 respectively; Cumulative variance percentage = 62.54%). Factor 1 was largely related with job-related  
18 gossips (more negative comments), Factor 2 was largely related with non-job-related gossips (more positive  
19 comments), Factor 3 was largely related with non-job-related gossips (more negative comments) and Factor  
20 4 was largely related with non-job-related gossips (more positive comments). To refine the findings further,  
21 we adopted Tabachnik and Fidell (2007)'s guidance, i.e. factors with lower loadings (< .33) were omitted.  
22 Four items with cross-loading on multiple factors were also omitted. This data deduction process led to  
23 twenty items for the next stage analysis.

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34 At Stage 3 (scale evaluation), in line with prior gossip taxonomy (Kurland & Pelled, 2000) and data  
35 deduction techniques (Hall, Snell & Foust, 1999), two parcels of main factors were created. Parcel 1  
36 included all job-related gossips (both positive and negative comments), and Parcel 2 included all non-job-  
37 related gossips (both positive and negative comments). To examine the structure of these newly created  
38 parcels (Hinkin, 1995), a hierarchical confirmatory factor analysis (HCFA) was conducted using Sample 3.  
39 Specifically, LISREL8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) was adopted and the findings discovered that the two-  
40 parcel model ( $X^2 = 655.45$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $df = 165$ ,  $NFI = .92$ ,  $CFI = .94$ ,  $IFI = .94$  &  $RMSEA = .08$ ; composite  
41 reliability = .87 & .85 respectively) outperformed the four-factor model ( $X^2 = 989.98$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $df = 164$ ,  $NFI$   
42 = .90,  $CFI = .92$ ,  $IFI = .92$  &  $RMSEA = .11$ ). These findings supported a good model fitness of the newly  
43 created parcels. The authors then converted these parcels into a gossip scale. Finally, a new workplace gossip  
44 scale was developed (see Table 2), including two dimensions: *job-related gossips* ( $\alpha = .97$ ), and *non-job-*  
45 *related gossips* ( $\alpha = .89$ ). All items were preceded by a statement: *Have you recently talked about x gossip in*  
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*the workplace* ( $x$  = a specific type of gossip). Responses were recorded using a 6-point *Likert* scale (1 = never, 6 = always). Higher scores represented a higher frequency of  $x$  gossip participation.

## Results

The descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability coefficients of the research variables are shown in Table 3. The statistics revealed that psychological contract violation was positively correlated with abusive supervision ( $r = .48, p < .001$ ), job-related gossip ( $r = .12, p < .05$ ) and organisational cynicism ( $r = .31, p < .001$ ). Abusive supervision was positively correlated with job-related gossip ( $r = .23, p < .001$ ), non-job-related gossip ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ) and employee cynicism ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ). Job-related gossip was positively related with non-job-related gossip ( $r = .57, p < .001$ ) and employee cynicism ( $r = .21, p < .001$ ). These preliminary findings showed significant inter-correlations between the research variables.

<Insert Table 3 About Here>

We adopted Harman's single factor test to examine the potential CMV bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). All the research variables were first merged into one factor, and the results showed poor fit, suggesting that one single factor of merging all variable was inappropriate for data analysis ( $\chi^2(230) = 4796.65, p < .001$ , RMSEA = .23, NFI = .66, CFI = .68, IFI = .68, SRMR = .18). We then adopted an unmeasured latent construct method to measure the potential influence of CMV as recommended by Podsakoff *et al.* (2003). Chi-square difference test was not statistically significant ( $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 3.64, ns$ ). Results were consistent with the findings of Harman's single factor test. To simplify, the influence of CMV was very slim and hence the research dataset should be accepted for further data analysis.

### *Analysis of the measurement model*

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were undertaken on all research variables. The hypothetic model (5-factor) was then compared with alternative models, including two 4-factor models, one 3-factor model and one 2-factor model and one 1-factor model (see Table 4). CFAs revealed that the hypothetic model provided a sound fit to the data; specifically, the 5-factor model had significantly better fit than was the first 4-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 97.52, p < .001$ ), second 4-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1243.96, p < .001$ ), 3-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 1511.43, p < .001$ ), 2-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 3096.68, p < .001$ ) and 1-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 4018.82, p < .001$ ).

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2 Taken together, the hypothetic model represented the best fit to the data ( $\chi^2(220) = 776.93, p < .001$ ,  
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4 RMSEA = .08, NFI = .92, CFI = .94, IFI = .94, SRMR = .07).

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6 With regard to the reliability, the composite reliability (CR) of all measured variables are as follows:  
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8 psychological contract violation (.89), abusive supervision (.93), job-related gossip (.87), non-job-related  
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10 gossip (.85) and employee cynicism (.85) (See Table 5). All the CRs were higher than .75, indicating that the  
11  
12 composite reliability of all variables was satisfactory (Fornell & Larker, 1981). With regard to the validity,  
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14 the average variance extracted (AVE) of all measured variables are as follows: psychological contract  
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16 violation (.63), abusive supervision (.73), job-related gossip (.58), non-job-related gossip (.49) and employee  
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18 cynicism (.50). All AVEs were close or higher than .50, indicating that the convergent validity of all  
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20 variables was satisfactory (Fornell & Larker, 1981).

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23 <Insert Table 4 & 5 About Here>

#### 24 ***Examination of the hypotheses***

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27 To examine the research hypotheses, we conducted structural equation modelling (SEM) using the  
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29 LISREL8 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) (See Figure 2). Results revealed that the hypothetical research model  
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31 fits the data well ( $\chi^2(223) = 806.18, p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2/df$  ratio = 3.61; Byrne, 1989; Carmines & McIver, 1981;  
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33 Marsh & Hocevar, 1985). Alternative fit indices were also satisfactory (RMSEA = .08, NFI = .92, CFI = .94,  
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35 IFI = .94, GFI = .90). The findings of SEM analysis are informative in several ways. To begin with, job-  
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37 related gossip had a stronger effect on employee cynicism ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ), and non-job-related gossip had  
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39 no significant effect on employee cynicism ( $\beta = -.01, n.s.$ ). These findings suggest that, compared to non-job-  
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41 related gossip, job-related gossip is more likely to predict cynicism. Results also indicated that psychological  
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43 contract violation predicted job-related gossip ( $\beta = .14, p < .05$ ) and employee cynicism ( $\beta = .30, p < .001$ ),  
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45 and that abusive supervision predicted job-related gossip ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ) and non-job-related gossip ( $\beta$   
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47 = .27,  $p < .001$ ). In addition, abusive supervision predicted cynicism ( $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ) independently and  
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49 such predicting effect was reduced when job-related gossip was introduced ( $\beta = -.01, n.s.$ ; this phenomenon  
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51 implies a sign of mediating effect and is discussed next). Thus, these SEM findings have provided ample  
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53 support to the Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6.

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56 <Insert Figure 2 and Table 6 about Here>

To examine the mediating effect of job-related gossip (Hypothesis 4) and non-job-related gossip (Hypothesis 7), we regarded the integrative research framework (Figure 1) as the theoretical model, and we then compared it against alternative models by adding possible pathways (See Table 6) (*c.f.*: Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Kelloway, 1988). Specifically, Model 1 added a PCV→ECN pathway ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 28.35, p < .001$ ; pathway  $\beta = .29, p < .001$ ), Model 2 added an AS→ECN pathway ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 3.92, p < .05$ ; pathway  $\beta = .13, p < .05$ ), and Model 3 added both PCV→ECN and AS→ECN pathways ( $\Delta\chi^2 = 28.38, p < .001$ ; pathway  $\beta_{PCV \rightarrow ECN} = .30, p < .001$ ; pathway  $\beta_{AS \rightarrow ECN} = -.01, n.s.$ ). When compared to the theoretical model, Models 1, 2 and 3 shared similar fit indices but the pathway  $\beta$  values changed. Specifically, the  $\beta$  value of PCV-ECN pathway increased ( $\Delta\beta = .01$ ), whereas the  $\beta$  value of AS-ECN pathway decreased ( $\Delta\beta = -.14$ ; PCV and ECN correlation coefficient = .48,  $p < .001$ ). These findings are informative in several ways. To begin with, psychological contract violation and abusive supervision directly predicted employee cynicism (supported by the Hypotheses 3 and 5), but they also predicted cynicism via job-related gossip (supported by the Models 1 and 2). In terms of their predicting effect, psychological contract violation outperformed abusive supervision (supported by the Model 3). In addition, findings of the model comparison analysis suggested that Model 1 (partially mediated model) should be supported, due to its significant  $\Delta\chi^2$  against the theoretical model (best fit across three models). Finally, based on these findings, the Hypotheses 4 and 7 should be supported.

## Discussion

The current research draws insights from social information and social cognitive theories as a theoretical extension to explain the gossip-employee cynicism relationship. We regard employee cynicism as an attitude where an organisation lacks integrity and employees engage in disparaging behaviour against their colleagues and the workplace. We also regard workplace gossip as idle talk about the personal or private affairs of others at work. Based on the literature review, we found a variety of different views regarding the influence of gossip, some researchers regard gossip as positive, whereas others negative (e.g. Bok, 1982; Foster, 2004; Leaper & Holiday, 1995; McAndrew *et al.*, 2007). Hence, we conducted this new research to further discuss and examine the role and influence of gossip in the workplace.

In this paper, we reviewed literature on gossip and proposed that the construct of workplace gossip should be re-conceptualised into two components, *job-related gossip* (JRG) and *non-job-related gossip* (NJG). This proposal was rigorously examined by the research and supported by the survey data. We also

1 proposed seven research hypotheses and all were supported. Overall, the findings have enriched the  
2 understanding of the link between gossip and employee cynicism over and above what we know from  
3 previous empirical studies of gossip (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; McAndrew *et al.*, 2007). Compared to the  
4 previous studies which focused on the function of gossip (Foster, 2004; Michelson *et al.*, 2010) and gossip  
5 influence (Cole & Dalton, 2009; DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007), our research has provided a further and more  
6 systematic perspective to interpret the gossip-employee cynicism relationship.  
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14 Prior studies on gossip have often referenced gossip as facilitator of behaviour. For instance, gossip  
15 facilitates critical thinking as a social sense-making tool (Bok, 1982), and gossip includes positive  
16 information and delivers a more accurate experiential truth than objective explanation (Levin & Arluke,  
17 1987). Similarly, gossip is essentially negative and cannot be unveiled in public (Leaper & Holliday, 1995),  
18 and gossip has received pejorative criticism with all cultures and societies experiencing similarly scandalous  
19 effects of gossip (Rosnow & Georgoudi, 1985). These findings are valuable and help interpret the influence  
20 of gossip. Yet, our research has found that whether gossip leads to a positive or a negative outcome is related  
21 to the essence of that gossip. Our findings suggest that, compared to non-job-related gossip, job-related  
22 gossip has a stronger effect on employee cynicism. Job-related gossip also demonstrated a stronger  
23 mediating effect on the relationship between psychological contract violation, abusive supervision and  
24 employee cynicism. Our findings suggest that, if the gossip is about work performance, capability and other  
25 job-related events, it may cause cynicism and hence negative outcome. If the gossip is nothing to do with the  
26 job, the chance to cause cynicism is significantly reduced.  
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40 Prior studies on employee cynicism have often referenced organisational justice (Dean *et al.*, 1998;  
41 DeCelles *et al.*, 2013; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989) as its dominant theoretical foundation. Whilst we agree with  
42 those prior studies that injustice may facilitate employee cynicism, our research has proposed a new  
43 perspective to explain the formation of employee cynicism by identifying a new crucial variable: *workplace*  
44 *gossip*. Managers should not underestimate the significance of workplace gossip, as previous studies and our  
45 research have found that different types of gossip are associated with different outcomes. Specifically, our  
46 findings have affirmed that job-related gossip is a valid and strong ingredient, contributing to the formation  
47 of employee cynicism.  
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56 In addition, this paper has contributed to the gossip-employee cynicism knowledge over and above what  
57 was known from prior studies of gossip (Kurland & Pelled, 2000; McAndrew *et al.*, 2007). Specifically, our  
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1 research discovered two antecedents of workplace gossip: psychological contract violation and abusive  
2 supervision. Although both factors predicted cynicism independently, psychological contract violation  
3 actually showed a stronger effect on cynicism when two factors were present at the same time. This  
4 phenomenon is rather interesting, as it implies that psychological contract violation indeed affects general  
5 employees; to be exact, violation not only facilitates job-related gossip, but also causes cynicism via job-  
6 related gossip. One of the possible reasons underlying this phenomenon may be that, unlike abusive  
7 supervision that its influence mainly occurs in the workplace and may decrease after work (Tepper, 2000;  
8 Zellars *et al.*, 2002), employees may still feel (or being influenced by) the experience of psychological  
9 contract violation after work or outside the workplace ((Robinson *et al.*, 1994).

10 From the perspective of human resources management, we have conducted new research to examine the  
11 role of gossip in the workplace, in order to better understand the antecedents of gossip and its relationship to  
12 employee behaviour. Managers and leaders can monitor the formation of gossip and respond in a timely  
13 manner which may alleviate any resulting negative impact on employees. This paper now turns to discuss the  
14 implications of our research findings for human resource management.

### 15 ***Management implications***

16 Sommerfeld *et al.* (2007) states that gossip facilitates the level of reciprocity and contributes to group  
17 dynamics. However, this research found that job-related gossip not only predicted employee cynicism, but  
18 also mediated the relationship between psychological contract violation and employee cynicism. Another  
19 finding was that both abusive supervision and psychological contract violation predicted job-related gossip.  
20 Based on these findings, the authors suggest that managers should be cautious about job-related gossip in the  
21 workplace, as such gossip affects their workforce and causes cynical behaviour amongst employees. If  
22 applicable, a clear HR policy or practice should be implemented to reduce the occurrence of job-related  
23 gossip in the workplace. If this policy or practice is not applicable, at least, a work ethos of anti-job gossip  
24 should be created, promoted and sustained.

25 Managers and team leaders need to pay more attention to their own supervision and managerial style, as  
26 the research findings have shown that employees' experiences of abusive supervision showed a strong effect  
27 on job-related gossip and non-job-related gossip. Therefore, the authors suggest that managers and team  
28 leaders may use existent appraisal systems (e.g., PDR, annual reviewing process) to analyse their own  
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1 supervision and managerial style. If any inappropriate or uncomfortable styles of management were  
2 discovered or commented on by the employees, managers and team leaders should be directed towards  
3 management and supervision training, so that they are equipped with the latest management skills and, more  
4 practically, lead and support their employees and teams in an appropriate and effective manner.  
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10 This research found that psychological contract violation predicted job-related gossip, and that job-  
11 related gossip predicted employee cynicism, the authors make two specific suggestions to general HR  
12 practitioners. The first suggestion concerns the recruitment of new employees. Apart from the job  
13 specification, an additional role analysis should be provided in the recruitment policy and/or application  
14 package. With such information in mind, the prospect employees can stand in a better position to analyse  
15 whether they fit the role, e.g. the job content/demands, the people they are going to work with, and the  
16 organisation they are going to work for. The second suggestion is for the management of current employees.  
17 Managers and team leaders may wish to use different occasions to observe and investigate the expectation  
18 and needs from their employees. These occasions may include, for instance, appraisal schemes, monthly  
19 team meetings, department away days and other formal and informal events. It is our hope that these two  
20 suggestions may form the best synergy to improve the mutual understanding between the organisation,  
21 managers and employees and, ultimately, contribute to the employees' psychological contract towards their  
22 organisations.  
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### 37 ***Limitation and future directions***

38 We originally planned to measure gossip antecedents and gossip dimensions separately. However, as HR  
39 managers of the participants thought that our two stage data collection procedure was already troublesome  
40 and disruptive to their employees, we measured the antecedents and gossip simultaneously, so the causality  
41 between these variables cannot be concluded. Future studies may focus on this causality so the *PCV-AS-*  
42 *JRG-NJG relationship* can be examined further.  
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49 To avoid CMV bias, we measured gossip (JRG, NJG) at Stage 1 and ECN at Stage 2. Although the  
50 findings revealed that JRG predicted ECN, we could not ignore a possibility of a reverse prediction, that  
51 ECN predicts JRG, or ECN and gossip are interactive (*see rumour influence* in: DiFonzo & Bordia, 2007,  
52 Chapter 2). Perhaps, NJG offers a means of revenge for cynical employees, especially in the aftermath of  
53 abusive supervision. Another issue to be recognised is that this research did not measure the tenures of  
54 employees, age of companies or manager-subordinate relationship. How these factors impact on the  
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1 occurrence of gossip and likelihood of employee cynicism remains unclear and hence requires further  
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3 research.  
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5 Moreover, only one outcome variable employee cynicism (ECN) was measured and the impact of  
6 organisational-level variables, such as marketplace competitiveness, were not investigated in relation to  
7 gossip. Perhaps also, organisations struggling to survive may be more prone to negative gossip and employee  
8 cynicism (ECN). Similarly, although JRG and NJG are found to have different relationships with ECN, we  
9 cannot assert whether the findings are applicable to other outcome variables, such as organisational  
10 identification and citizenship behaviour, which are found to be crucial in influencing organisational  
11 performance (Chang *et al.*, *in press*). Finally, Abraham (2000) indicates that cynicism may be related to  
12 personality, so we recommend future studies to consider personality factors, so that the knowledge of  
13 employee cynicism may continue to be advanced.  
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## 24 **Conclusion**

25 Gossip is a common phenomenon in the workplace and yet relatively little is understood about its  
26 influence to employees. This study adopts social information theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) and social  
27 cognitive theory (Bandura, 1988) to help interpret the diverse literature on gossip, and to develop and test  
28 hypotheses concerning some of the antecedents of gossip, with an aim to contribute to the knowledge of the  
29 gossip-employee behaviour relationship within the workplace. The study analysed survey data completed by  
30 362 fulltime employees from a range of industries in Taipei, Taiwan. A two-stage process of data collection  
31 was adopted to alleviate the potential bias of common method variance on data mining and interpretation.  
32 The findings revealed that *job-related gossip* predicted employee cynicism and mediated the relationship  
33 between psychological contract violation and cynicism, and that *non-job-related gossip* showed a similar but  
34 weaker effect to employee cynicism. Two antecedents of workplace gossip were also identified, including:  
35 *psychological contract violation* and *abusive supervision*. Based on these findings, the authors suggest that  
36 managers should be cautious about gossip in the workplace, as it affects their workforce and causes cynical  
37 behaviour amongst employees.  
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For Peer Review Only

**Table 1:** Independent samples for the new gossip scale development (3 stages)

	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 3
Development stage† (purpose)	Stage 1 (item generation)	Stage 2 (scale development)	Stage 3 (scale evaluation)
Sample size	105	228	305
Gender ratio (female/male) ‡	64/38	142/86	179/124
Sampling technique	Convenience sampling (fulltime employees)	Same as Sample 1	Same as Sample 1
Age bands (years old)‡:			
• 25 and below	28	42	47
• 25-34	42	109	148
• 35-44	19	40	56
• 45 and above	12	37	53
Working tenure (years)‡:			
• Less than 1	25	57	66
• 1-3	39	66	95
• 4-6	21	42	58
• 7 and above	17	63	84

*Note.*

†. In line with the 3-stage scale development process (Hinkin, 1996), these three samples were adopted from our parallel research projects and hence independent from the main study sample.

‡. Total numbers may not equate to the sample size, due to missing values.

**Table 2:** Workplace gossip scale

Dimensions and items†	Cronbach's $\alpha$
<i>Job-related gossip (JRG)</i>	.97
1. Colleague's excellent job performance	
2. Colleague's diligence and dedication to work	
3. Colleague's credibility in job role and experience	
4. Colleague's good interpersonal skills	
5. Colleague's demonstration of job morality	
6. Colleague's poor job performance	
7. Colleague's carelessness and poor work engagement	
8. Colleague's inexperience and poor job knowledge	
9. Colleague's poor interpersonal skills	
10. Colleague's lack of demonstration of job morality	
<i>Non-job-related gossip (NJG)</i>	.89
1. Colleague's recent joyful life events such as purchasing a house or car	
2. Colleague's recent sorrowful life events such as illness or car accident	
3. Colleague's new friendship or love relationship	
4. Colleague's lying to or betrayal of their partners	
5. Colleague's poor interaction with children	
6. Colleague's good interaction with children	
7. Colleague's divorce, separation and marital problems.	
8. Colleague's engagement or getting married.	
9. Colleague's good relationship with family	
10. Colleague's poor relationship with family	

*Note.*

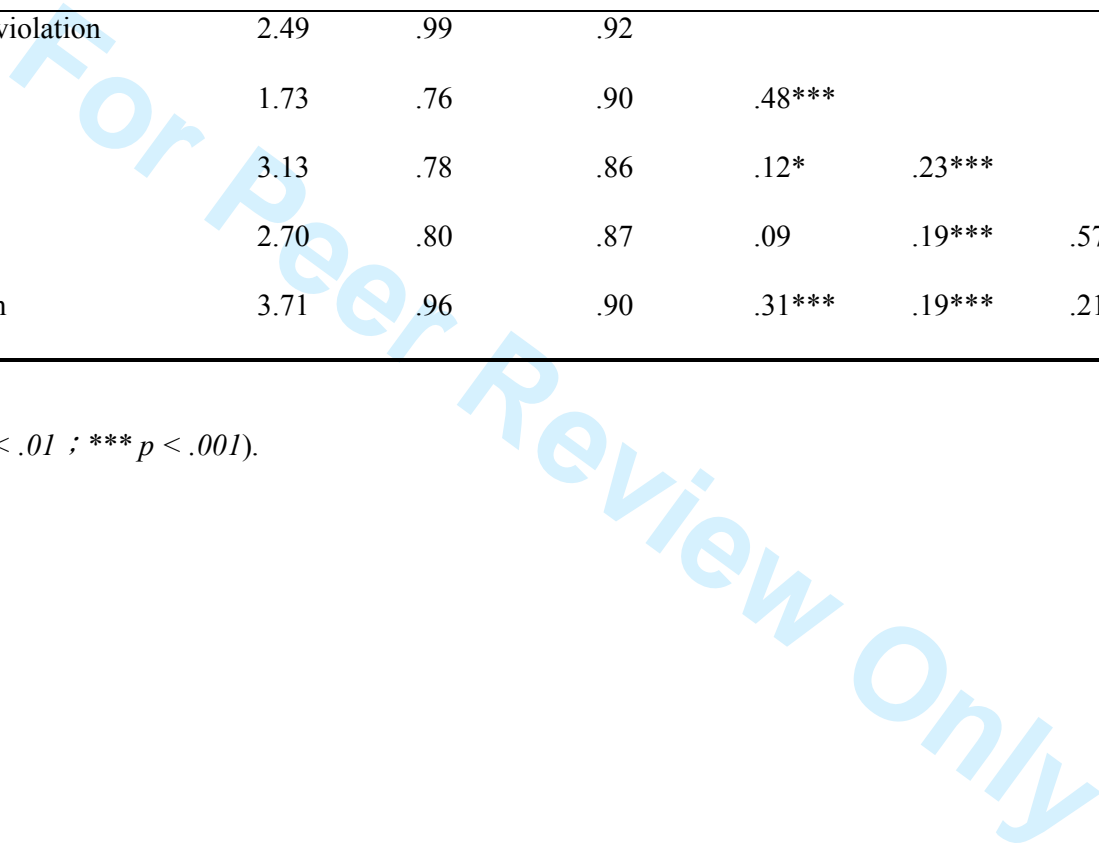
†. All items were preceded by a statement: *Have you recently talked about x gossip in the workplace (x = a specific type of gossip). Responses were recorded using a 6-point Likert scale (1 = never, 6 = always). Higher scores represented a higher frequency of x gossip participation.*

**Table 3** : Means, standard deviations, and correlations <sup>a</sup>

(variables)	Mean	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4
1. Psychological contract violation	2.49	.99	.92				
2. Abusive supervision	1.73	.76	.90	.48***			
3. Job-related gossip	3.13	.78	.86	.12*	.23***		
4. Non-job-related gossip	2.70	.80	.87	.09	.19***	.57***	
5. Organisational cynicism	3.71	.96	.90	.31***	.19***	.21***	.14**

*Note.*

<sup>a</sup> N = 362 (\*  $p < .05$  ; \*\*  $p < .01$  ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ).



**Table 4:** Comparison of the model fitness

Model	Factors	$\chi^2$	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	SRMR
Hypothetic model	5-factor model: PCV, AS, JRG, NJG & ECN	776.93	220		.08	.92	.94	.94	.07
Model 1	4-factor model: PCV, AS, (JRG & NJG merged) & ECN	875.35	224	97.52	.09	.91	.93	.93	.09
Model 2	4-factor model: (PCV & AS merged), JRG, NJG & ECN	2021.79	202	1243.96	.16	.82	.84	.84	.11
Model 3	3-factor model: (PCV & AS merged), (JRG & NJG merged) & ECN	2289.26	227	1511.43	.16	.81	.83	.83	.11
Model 4	2-factor model: (PCV, AS, JRG & NJG merged) & ECN	3874.51	229	3096.68	.21	.71	.73	.73	.16
Model 5	1-factor model: (PCV, AS, JRG, NJG & ECN merged)	4796.65	230	4018.82	.23	.66	.68	.68	.18

*Note.*

PCV = psychological contract violation; AS = abusive supervision; JRG = job-related gossip; NJG = Non-job-related gossip; ECN = Employee cynicism (\* $p < .05$  ; \*\* $p < .01$  ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .)



Table 5: Summary of the validity analysis

(Research variables)	Composite Reliability	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological contract violation	0.89	<b>0.63<sup>†</sup></b>	<i>0.24<sup>‡</sup></i>	<i>0.02</i>	<i>0.01</i>	<i>0.10</i>
2. Abusive supervision	0.93	<u>0.49<sup>‡</sup></u>	<b>0.73</b>	<i>0.06</i>	<i>0.04</i>	<i>0.03</i>
3. Job-related gossip	0.87	<u>0.13</u>	<u>0.25</u>	<b>0.58</b>	<i>0.37</i>	<i>0.04</i>
4. Non-job-related gossip	0.85	<u>0.11</u>	<u>0.21</u>	<u>0.57</u>	<b>0.49</b>	<i>0.02</i>
5. Employee cynicism	0.85	<u>0.32</u>	<u>0.18</u>	<u>0.20</u>	<u>0.15</u>	<b>0.50</b>

Note.

<sup>†</sup>. Bold diagonal figures represent the AVE (average variance extracted) of variables;

<sup>‡</sup>. Italic figures (upper-right triangle) represent the shared variances of variables.

Underscored figures (lower-left triangle) represent the correlation coefficients (Φ) of variables;

**Table 6:** Summary of mediation analysis

Model	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	$\Delta\chi^2$	$\Delta df$	RMSEA	NFI	CFI	IFI	$\beta$
Theoretical model	806.18	223			.08	.92	.94	.94	
Model 1: Added PCV→ECN pathway	777.83	222	28.35***	1	.08	.92	.94	.94	.29***
Model 2: Added AS→ECN pathway	802.26	222	3.92*	1	.08	.92	.94	.94	.13*
Model 3: Added PCV→ECN pathway Added AS→ECN pathway	777.80	221	28.38***	2	.08	.92	.94	.94	.30*** -.01

*Note.*

PCV = psychological contract violation; AS = abusive supervision; ECN = Employee cynicism (\* $p < .05$  ; \*\* $p < .01$  ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .)

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Figure 1: Hypothetic research model

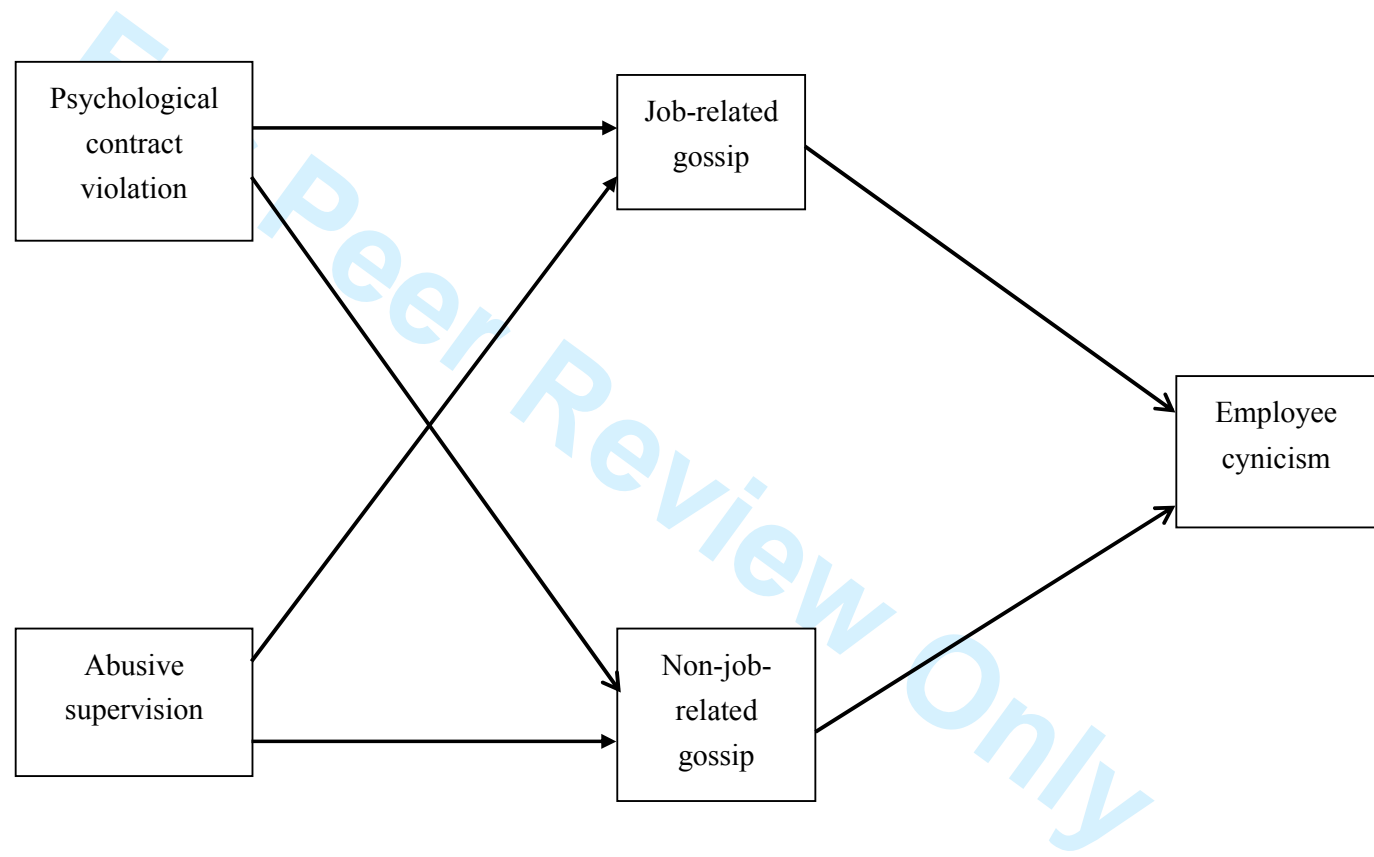
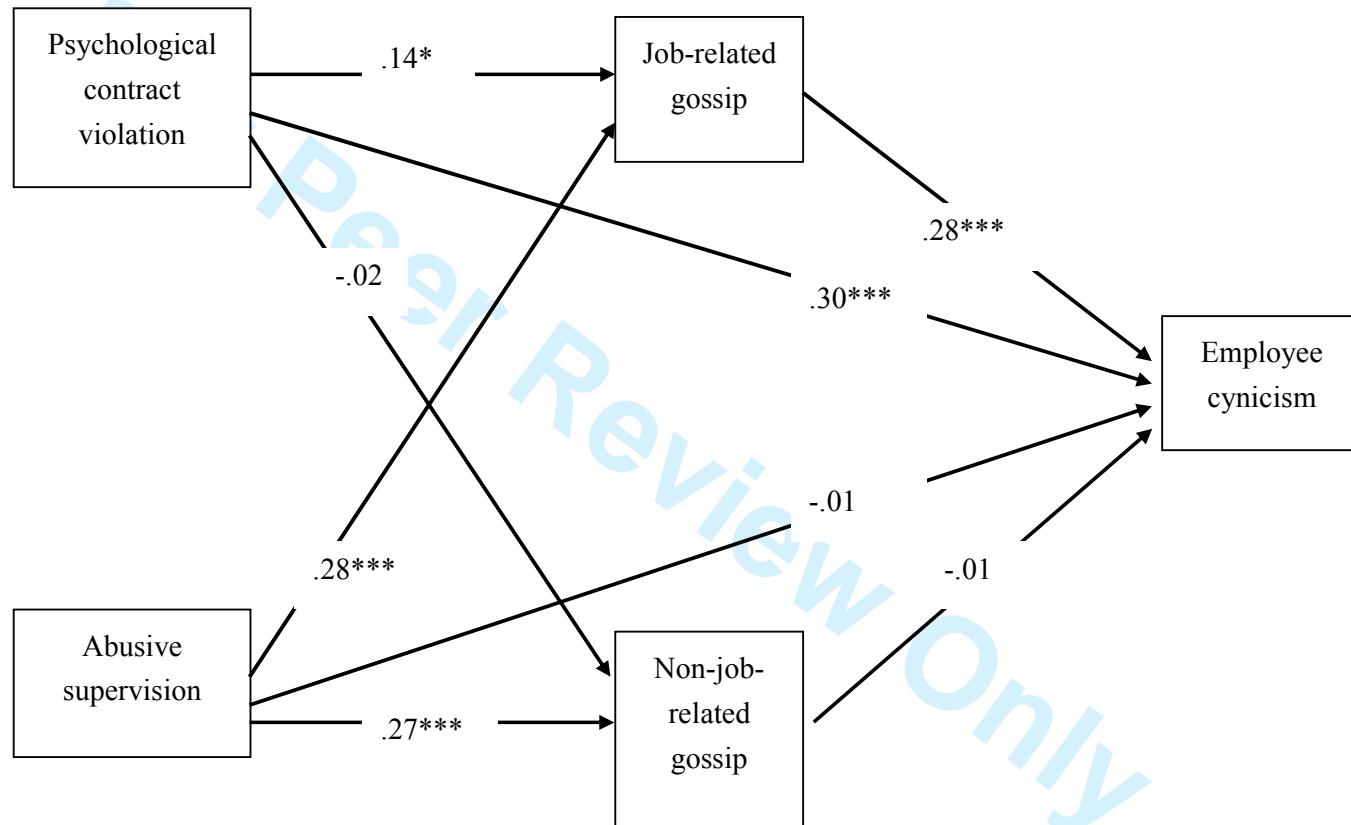


Figure 2: Summary of SEM and mediation analysis



Note. \*\*\*.  $p < .001$ ; \*\*.  $p < .01$ .