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Social bonding and social capital as gossip mechanisms for desirable cooperation in the workplace

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Cooperation is needed when individuals cannot achieve specific outcomes on their own (Giardini & Wittek, 2019). The relationship between cooperation, gossip, and reputation has been extensively documented in experimental conditions (e.g., Sommerfeld et al., 2008; Wu et al., 2016), as well as some of these relationships partially in field studies. Gossip affects reputation (Burt, 2008); and reputation can be gained or lost through gossip (Foster, 2004). As various disciplines have studied some of these relationships, so are the social mechanisms (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998) identified to explain that gossip and reputation sustain cooperation in groups. This paper aims to empirically study the effect of two social mechanisms of gossip on cooperation in three working units of Hungarian organizations. These mechanisms are distinguished both by the presence of some kind of emotional or instrumental tie between the sender and the receiver of a gossip, and also by the underlying reasons that make cooperation desirable. In this paper we will analyze the multiplex network of gossip, frequent working conversations or friendship (for their respective mechanism to be assessed) and desirable cooperation. At the same time, we will study the structural logic of the network of gossip that emerges among colleagues in the working units. To evaluate our hypotheses, we use Exponential Random Graph Models (ERGM) for the gossip and cooperation networks (Lusher et al., 2013; Pattison & Wasserman, 1999). Preliminary results demonstrate the existence of both mechanisms in these three working units. However, when controlling simultaneously for social bonding and social capital, only the latter remains significant.

Keywords

Gossip; ERGMs; Organizations; Cooperation

Topics

• Statistical methods and models for network analysis

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