

Gossip - Building Cultures of Conflict and Disrespect

How corridor conversations quietly become an organisation's operating system

By Kalpesh Raichura | Culture | 3 min read

Organisational gossip is not merely a communication problem. Repeated often enough, it becomes a parallel culture.

The meeting after the meeting

The formal meeting ends with agreement. Ten minutes later, a second meeting begins in the corridor, on a private chat or during the drive home. Objections that were withheld from the room become sharper outside it. Motives are interpreted. Leaders are labelled. Decisions are weakened before they are implemented.

This is how gossip becomes a shadow operating system. The organisation has official structures for decisions and unofficial channels for meaning.

Why good people participate

People do not always gossip because they are malicious. They may not feel safe enough to disagree openly. They may have learnt that direct feedback changes nothing. Sometimes leaders themselves invite triangulation by listening to complaints about a colleague without bringing responsibility back into the conversation.

Gossip can therefore be both a personal choice and a cultural symptom.

What the culture begins to lose

The immediate cost is confusion. People no longer know which version of a decision is real. The deeper cost is respect. Teams begin protecting themselves through alliances, selective information and silence.

Energy that should serve customers and outcomes is spent managing perception. Strong performers withdraw. New employees quickly learn that survival requires understanding the unofficial map.

Leadership sets the route

Leaders do not eliminate gossip through warnings. They change the route through which concerns travel.

When someone complains about an absent colleague, listen without feeding the verdict. Ask what was directly observed, what impact it created and whether the person has spoken to the colleague concerned. Offer support for the conversation, not an audience for repeated accusation.

Leaders must also make dissent usable in the formal room. If respectful disagreement is punished, it will simply relocate.

A culture of clean conversation

A clean-conversation culture separates facts from interpretation, behaviour from identity and concern from condemnation. It makes directness compatible with dignity.

Teams can adopt three simple norms: speak to the person before speaking about the person; bring concerns to someone capable of helping; and close the loop by naming the agreed next step.

The goal is not a silent organisation. It is an organisation where truth does not need to hide in corridors.

Culture changes when people experience that an honest conversation inside the room is safer and more useful than a clever conversation outside it.

A question to carry forward

What truth is travelling around your organisation because it has not yet found a safe, responsible route?

With respect and possibility,



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