# Factors influencing the Conception of Rumours in Workplace

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| ARTICLE INFO | ABSTRACT |
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| | The study aims to provide understanding on the way people understand rumours at their workplace from the other person's perspective. Specifically, this study examines the factors that influence the conception of rumours. Using purposive sampling and the researchers as the instrument, this study found that the conception of rumours in workplace are caused by several factors and these factors are categorised into rumour context and functions reliant and rumour content reliant. Rumour context and functions reliant comprise of ambiguity, making sense of unclear issues, threat management and self-image enhancement. Rumour content reliant includes instrumentally relevant and communicated information statements, not so sure, it is a matter of assumption and as a mode of transmission and structure. This study also found that frustration is a foundation to rumour's gateway. The findings in this study highlight the widespread, yet remarkably under-researched practice in organisational behaviour in relation to informal communications. |

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Rumours are like dusts – they are everywhere in spite of our social spheres. Rumours are also the oldest form of communication [11], and this have coincide with our history lessons in school whereby before writing existed, word of mouth was the only social channel of communication for conveying thoughts and ideas. It is believed that rumours are capable of transmitting news; build but also ruin reputations, set off riots and wars. Yet the advents of newspapers, the radio and most recently, the audiovisual explosion, have not smothered rumours. In spite of the media, the public continues to glean some of its information from word of mouth. The arrival on the scene of mass medi, instead of suppressing talk, has merely made it more specialised: each form of communication now has its own territory [11, 29, 32]. Even though studies on rumours are in abundance in the West, however, little is known about rumours in Malaysia. It is unusual for such an important social phenomenon to be so rarely studied; as mysterious, almost magical events, rumours still constitute a sort of no man's land *Mato Grosso* of knowledge.

Where does the phenomenon known as "rumours" begin and where does it leave off? How does it differ from what is commonly called "word of mouth"? What is the difference between rumour and gossip? The concept in fact slips away when one believes one has pinned it down. Everyone thinks that they could recognise rumours when they comes across them, but very few people have yet managed to provide a satisfactory definition of them. On the whole, whereas everyone feels quite certain that rumours exist, there is no consensus concerning the phenomenon's precise delimitations.

How is the scarcity of works on the subject to be explained? The difficulty of the task is at least partly to blame. It is quite easy to study the press, radio, and television as their messages are preserved. Anyone can peruse complete collections of magazines and newspapers. Similarly, tape recorders and VCRs allow one to listen to and/or see old broadcasts again. This is not at all the case with rumours. However, in very few cases, social scientists generally only hear of them when it is already too late: when the rumour has faded away or is in its final stages. Only then can they carry out interviews about people's recollections of the rumour, which are subject to forgetfulness, rationalisation, and distortion. In doing so, social scientists are not studying the rumour but rather, the trace it left behind people's memories. The object thus lends itself but poorly to observation. Another reason for the death of studies on the subject stems from the fact that more energy has been spent on stigmatising rumours than on clarifying their mainsprings.

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Since rumours through organisational grapevine seem to be effective in creating unverified news, hence, it can be regarded as one of the avenues for strategic communication that can be utilised either for constructive or corrosive purposes. Various researches have proven that rumours have a great deal of effects to organisations and individuals [13]. Most of the studies however, examined the consequences and impacts of rumours on people in communities and organisations. In contributing to the domain of knowledge in strategic communication study especially in regards to the potential of rumours in constructive manner, this study focuses on the root cause of the phenomenon and its capabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to highlight the widespread, yet remarkably under-researched practice in organisational behaviour in relation to informal communications, which focuses on the rumour and gossip activities by examining the factors that trigger the conception of rumours and gossips at workplace.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. Section 2 describes the conception of rumours. The next section, Section 3 presents the literature on the factors influencing the conception of rumours. Section 4 details the theoretical perspective of this study and Section 5 presents the research design of the study. This is followed by Section 6 which presents the results of the analysis. The last section provides the discussion and conclusion.

## 2.0 THE CONCEPTION OF RUMOURS

What are the sources of rumours? How do they emerge? What kind of events and people do they use as springboards? These are always among the initial questions asked in taking up the subject of rumours. As fascinating as it may be, the question of its conception is paradoxically enough, not the most interesting. To search for sources is to lend credence to the myth that rumours are triggered with a specific intent. Certainly there are notorious cases of rumours in which the appearance in the right place at the right time clearly cannot be accidental. An example of this is the private lives of political candidates for ministers and state elections, which generally coincide with impending trips to the ballot box. This is evident that rumours are most often spontaneous social productions, devoid of ulterior motives and underlying strategies. Kapfarer [39] concludes that the myth of hidden sources (source of rumours) is terribly persistent, being pleasing and useful – pleasing as it catapults use into an imaginary universe of conspiracy, manipulation, misinformation, and economic and political warfare.

The source continues to imbue with mythical importance because it has social utility [39]. As fascinating as it may be, the question of the source credentials, paradoxically enough, not the most interesting. In order to search for sources, Allport and Postman [2], Esposito and Rosnow [13], Mills [20] and Kapferer [39] all state that a person should lend credence to the myth that rumours are triggered with a specific intent. Certainly there are notorious cases of rumours whose appearance in the right place at the right time clearly cannot be accidental, but rumours are most often spontaneous social productions, devoid of ulterior motives and underlying strategies.

The myth of hidden sources is terribly persistent, being pleasing and useful---pleasing as it catapults us into an imaginary universe of conspiracy, manipulation, misinformation or misinterpretation, and economic and political warfare. Rumours are seen as crimes committed by third parties [39]. However, Knapp [19] states that the first systematic work on rumours was done in America which most of the research on rumours during the Second World War and their deleterious effects on the morale of the troops and population at large which has led several research teams to look into the subject.

According to Allport and Postman [2] , a rumour is "a specific (or topical) proposition for belief, passed along from person to person, usually by word of mouth, without secure standards if evidence is present.. Rumours arise when information is scarce. It is a process of exchanging information constituted by rumours where the ruling principles of information exchange in practice. Information circulates because it has value and in our localities many rumours stem from secrets that have been more or less intentionally leaked [2, 13, 19, 33, 39].

Psychologists have for a long time wondered whether the fact of hearing a message in such a way was more persuasive than hearing it directly from people's mouth. From Allport and Postman's experiments, it showed that messages overheard that are unknown to the speakers were superior if the over hearer was already concerned by the subject discussed and if the message confirmed has already formed opinions [2].

In overhearing conversations, we do not think anyone is attempting to persuade us, and thus unconsciously consider the conversation to reflect perfectly the speaker's opinion – to be authentic. The procedure can of course be reversed if one wants to start a rumour.

The conception of many rumours is indeed a troubling event or fact. A rumour consists in the mobilisation of the group's attention – in the course of successive information exchanges; the group tries to reconstruct the puzzle made up of scattered pieces gathered here and there. The fewer the pieces they have, the greater the role of the group's unconscious play in their interpretation; the more pieces they have, the closer their interpretation is to reality. The most satisfactory interpretation circulates and is, in general, passed on to posterity. It is the only one that is remembered [13].

In another situation, rumours can also be emerged from testimony [19]. Believing that there is a grain of truth in certain rumours involves a risk that many take lightly: Knapp [19] concludes that, on the whole, rumours are grounded. In reality what one calls the grain of truth is the ambiguous fact (taken to be important) that rumours echo. In this case, since facts do not exist (only the reporting of facts), such as testifying that one has seen or heard, has any real existence. In other words, rumours start less from facts than from their perception. Hence, the study of rumours inescapably leads to that of the psychology of testimony [39].

## 3.0 FACTORS INFLUENCING CONCEPTION OF RUMOUR

Rumour activity in ambiguous context therefore functions to make sense; it is response to the core human motivation to understand [15]. The resolving of ambiguity is always a sense-making explanation of events that are unclear for some part of a group or community. As Allport and Postman [2, p.121] put in their seminal text, *The Psychology of Rumour*, "in ordinary rumour we find a marked tendency for the agent to attribute *causes* to events, *motives* to characters, a *raison d'etre* to the episode in question". Explanations primarily attempt to make reality perceptible and meaningful [3]; rumours are collective effort at such explanations when a group – or subset of a group – is faced with uncertainty [10]. To some extent, these explanations must pass some group norm of plausibility. When groups' standards of plausibility are high, rumours discussions look very much like fact finding. When the group standards are low, rumour discussions look very much like contagion or panic. Rumour is thus part of *"normal collective information seeking"* [33] wherein the group is trying to define an ambiguous situation with a *"lower degree of formalisation* of many of its component acts" [32, p. 23]. Norms for verification, sources, and other aspects of fact finding are typically relaxed but they remain a group sense making activity.

Threatening situations may also be those in which one feels emotionally endangered, in which one's sense of self – or indeed anything that one cherishes – seems threatened. For example as reiterated by Allport and Postman [2], "Eleanor Club" rumours (among Whites) that Black servants were found using the "lady of the house's" combs occurred during times of racial turbulence in American History (these rumours were so named after Eleanor Roosevelt). The context of these rumours was a sense that one's identity as a White person was under attack. In a similar way, at the heart of *wedge-driving* rumours – rumours that derogate other groups or classes of people – is a defensive sentiment: one feels threatened. To cope with such feelings, the wedge-driving rumourmonger enhances his or her sense of sell by putting others down [10]. Thus, in the face of threats to one's sense of self, rumours that portray other groups in a negative light help people think of themselves in a more pleasing way. In addition, rumour may also fulfil other functions such as entertainment; wish fulfilment; alliance making and maintenance, and enforcement of communal norms [18, p. 10), but these are secondary.

From Shibutani's [32]; Rosnow and Fine's [29] studies all raise the issue of the vital social role played by sceptics. Sceptics do not simply act as a quantifiable countervailing force upon the credulous, through that may be desired social role and intent. Instead, they act as barriers around which rumour must travel. Yet in the process, the rumour adapts. For an example, in another study by Muda et al. [21] in examining rumour phenomenon in rural areas on local political figure's rumour, they found sceptics merely asserted their disbelief or displeasure with the rumour in much the same way that believers endorsed it. The sceptics may only have prevailed because some other political figure in other area did; if he or she committed adultery such an outcome would be less certain.

Themes common to rumour, in other words, involve the digging in of heels rather than an active construction or critique [12]. The process is not always about conscious making of social claims. Kapferer [39] also takes up the issue of rumour content denial and its effect on the career of the rumour. Here the flexible nature of rumour, in the face of denial, is emphasised. Implausible details are replaced with plausible ones and the story can then be believed. Denials of certain types can be absorbed. Reiterated by Kapferer [39, p.244], "the person who spreads the rumour generally does not try to stick to the precise message he has heard, but rather to persuade his public, and willing to correct or improve the message in order to do so… It is because rumours are supple and malleable throughout their construction that they are so at ease when faced with objection bearing on details".

Rumour, then, is not defeated by factual objection itself. Kapferer emphasises rumour's independence from conscious social reality [39]. This 'official reality' is represented sometimes by debunkers and thus rumour debunking may have little satisfaction in the long run. Yet Kapferer defines rumour not by its falsehood, but primarily but its word-of-mouth character and its essential resistance-to-modernity meta-theme. Kapferer [39] in his work, "Even before knowing the exact answers, rumours try to reject innovation the intruder, foreigner, or symbol of changing habits. Rumours are one of the defence mechanisms by which certain citizens try to preserve their old habits. They proffer up 'facts' that justify resistance to change and, more generally speaking. To our society governed by science and technology" [39].

### 3.2 Rumour as an Illustrative Story-Telling
An interesting article on a particular shopping mall abduction rumour, a tale descendant from the Orleans episode, which as its origins in the 19th century, have been circulating in the United States as a child-capture rumour. Samon's 1993 article on urban legends in the popular women's magazine, *McCall's*, featured the one of the more common versions.

*"A good friend of mine told me this, and it still gives me chills. A young mother and her four-year-old daughter were shopping, and while the mother was busy trying on clothes, the little girl disappeared. The frantic woman called security guards, who combed the mall for the missing child. They were about to give up when one of the guards found the girl standing on a toilet in the men's restroom so you couldn't see her feet. Her long, dark hair had been chopped off and dyed blond, and she was dressed in boy's clothes! Apparently she had been abducted by a notorious child-snatching ring who abandoned her once they realised the search was on."*

The fact is there is no truth to this story. It is just one example of what is known as an urban legend [31].

Donovan [12] terms this legend as "The Attempted Abduction" and notes that while it was routinely debunked in New Orleans' local newspaper during the 1970s, it has maintained its basic narrative structure. In the 1970s versions, girls were captured from shopping malls, it was alleged in American instance, for procurement into local prostitution rackets [12]. In some versions, both old and new, it is also maintained that other bystanders did nothing to intervene in the kidnapping because they believed the captors when they explained that the hysterical or unconscious victim was their relative who had fallen ill in the restroom. The bystander is thus exonerated from complicity by the shrewdness and complexity of the capture scheme, and simultaneously admonished for a lack of hyper-vigilance.

### 3.3 Rumour as a General Anxiety Remedy
If we accept the basic observation of Allport and Postman that anxiety may be reduced by levelling and sharpening of rumour content, which simplify problems [2] and thus, by implications, solutions, and Von Roretz' early observation that the rumour form enables the distance of the repressor from the intentions of the expression, by presenting the information as 'fact' or 'news' then it is easier to see the cathartic quality of the practice of rumour apart from its particular content.

Best and Horiuchi [7] studied legends about tainted Halloween treats because they were interested in the growth in public-claims making about threats to children and their social construction. Best [6] also argues that urban legends concerning harm to children are a part of an intensified public focus upon threats to children beginning in the late 1970s. The researchers describe "Halloween sadism" as a persistent legend that enabled parents to take individualised action (candy inspection) rather than act collectively for social reform as other, better-organised, claims-making activities would require. It works fairly well to place Halloween sadism within the context of the 'fixing' theory. In this way, a variety of threats to the safety of

children can be concentrated into a threat that enables parental control and intervention. The greatest threat by fat to children on holidays or any other day may be automobiles; it would, however be difficult to acknowledge and subsequently act upon this threat without substantial changes in the American (particularly suburban) lifestyle. Returning to the mall-abduction legends, the researcher will examine the contemporary version from a 'fixing' perspective.

Most current versions of the child-napping tale involve the foiling of the plot by an observant mother who recognises her child's outfit. Fathers tend to be altogether absent; neither rescuer nor distracted parent. Still other versions suggest that security personnel are so used to this sort of kidnapping occurring that they instruct the mother to scan the exiting crowd for her child's outfits. In either case the implication is that little safety is provided by numbers. Another study to be taken into account is the current version involves similar abductions from theme parks. Despite the fact that in reality it is fairly easy to lose a child in a theme park, no such incidents have been reported to the authorities [22, 34]. This means either that no such abductions have taken place there or that a massive conspiracy cover-up campaign involving parents, media, the theme park owners and the local police

## 4.0 ORGANISATIONAL RUMOURS: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

In brief, communication activities that involve gossiping by employees in organisation will normally ended up as rumours. This phenomenon can occur in any setting, either in organisation or natural environment for people to do their routine tasks such as market place, train station, bus stations, around neighbourhood areas and others – as long as there is mutual consensus between two people or groups to discuss an issue of same interest [39]. In this manner, the rumour started off from a decent conversation and later it is circulated by word-of-mouth from one person to another with reasons and agenda. Due to this, the discussion here on will be directed on these three aspects: i. Rumours conception, ii. Rumours Dissemination and iii. Rumours control.

As a normal human being, we are bound to communicate to get things done either through verbal or non-verbal communication. Regardless where we are, we need to communicate in enabling other people understand what we meant prior to our actions or regarding ourselves. Thus, at workplace especially, people are compelled not to avoid from communicating with each other in order to enhance the bonding of team spirit among employees. This can be done either discussing about work issues or sometimes about personal matters. Ranging from formal to informal style of communication and interaction at workplace, depending on type of issues, people normally will end up in engaging themselves into gossips and rumours. More often than not, initially a rumour in an organisation will take place among few colleagues who share common interest in an issue such as bonuses, promotions, change management, embezzlement, scandals, divorces, marriages among others. Then the issue will spread to other employees in a grapevine manner like infectious diseases. When this happens in organisations, employees will end up in uncertainty and anxiety state. When this phenomenon subsists, people or employees are compelled to seek for more information in reducing their anxiety and uncertainty. Thus, the more people become uncertain about an issue, the more they will scour for truth by asking each other. However, some of them will just deliberately convey unverified information from what they have known, heard, or believe to be true. This is the point where rumours have started to be fabricated.

Theoretically, this situation can be comprehended via the perspective of *Uncertainty Reduction Theory* (URT). This can be described through two types of uncertainties, which are cognitive uncertainty and behavioural uncertainty. Both of these uncertainties contributed to the motivation of self-disclosure and relational development among groups as being described by Berger and Luckmann [5]. According to them, uncertainty is connected to another seven concepts rooted in communication and relational development such as verbal output, non-verbal warmth (gestures), information seeking, self-disclosure, reciprocity of disclosure, similarity, and liking. In a nutshell, it demonstrates that there is a high rate of interpersonal communication and informational exchange that occur amongst the organisational members (employees) in order for them to reduce all sorts of uncertainties encountered. Here, these people are trying their best to put things together in making sense from the pieces of information that they have gathered. At times, the information that they have gathered might be quarter truth, half truth or the truth itself. The information that are not fully true or being distorted will remain in the grapevine and continues to spread all over the organisation for quite some time until the issue resolves.

The metaphor discussed above can be further explained through an article by Pearce and Cronen [23]. According to the CMM, when two people interacting socially, they will be able to construct the meaning of their conversation. Each of the individual is also comprised of an interpersonal system that assists in explaining their actions and reactions. This theory therefore can be utilised in understanding the reason why rumours are constantly being disseminated in organisations since people who are involved in rumour mongering activities need to share the meaning (interest) by conveying the news or information to the other party. When they hear or see, or experience certain "interesting" and "unverified" source of information, they try to make sense of it by sharing the "story" with others – the situation can be considered normal as it happens to almost anyone. In this case, the activity become more rapid if the interaction is well coordinated, cohesive, and the issue or subject matter seems to be very mysterious. In CMM, *Coordination* suggests that all events and objects in our social world are constructed by interweaved activities of multiple reasons. *Coherence* on the other hand, directs our attention to the stories that we tell to other which makes our lives more meaningful and normally it focuses for the joys, frustrations, surprises, and tragedies of social life. *Mystery* directs our attention to the fact that the universe is far bigger and subtler than any possible set of stories by which we can make it coherent. It does make sense for people to ask, of any social pattern, "How it is being made?" and "how might we remake it differently?"

All conditions mentioned above more or less have contributed to the shaping of the organisational culture. This is due to the situation where employees will be affected by the rumours sociologically and psychologically. Impacts of rumours are seen in term of the employees' morale, their productivities, work concentration as well as their loyalty towards their organisation. As stated by Esposito and Rosnow [13], rumours always influence the motivational state, anxiety, uncertainty, and believe on rumour mongering itself. Rumours that are transmitted (disseminated) in organisation more or less assist in creation of new organisational culture as per explained in Organisational Cultural Theory (OC).

In Organisational Cultural Theory (OC), it explains the essence of organisational life. It consists of the elements of psychology, attitude, experience, belief, and values (personal and cultural) of an organisation. It has been define as "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organisation and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organisation [17]. Therefore, West and Turner [33] agree that people shape organisational culture. According to them, people are like spiders that are suspended in webs that they created at work. It composed of shared symbols, each of which has unique meaning. Organisational stories, rituals, and rites of passage are examples of the culture of an organisation. Thus, rumour conception, dissemination and its control in organisation is also the determinants in shaping the organisational culture.

## 5.0 RESEARCH DESIGN

### 5.1 Sampling Procedure
This study employs purposive sampling, aided by criterion-based selection and conducting it through theoretical sampling. In purposive sampling, a specific sample was chosen intentionally because it contains several aspects that have allowed the researchers to obtain as much detailed information, and a deep understanding of the thesis and research hypothesis.

This study analyses the data from one informant and look or new themes that emerged based on the objectives of the study. Once this had been done, the researchers shall move to the next informant and replicate the same process until no new themes shall emerge. When this happens, therefore, the data has reached to its point of saturation.

### 5.2 Informant's Selection Procedure
Research informants are selected using purposive sampling with maximum variation type and through the process of theoretical sampling as explained earlier. The informants are chosen because they have particular features or characteristics (criterion-based selection), which have enabled detailed exploration of the research objectives. The characteristic of the informants should meet the criterion as stated include have to be the youngest being 24 and the eldest of 58 years and regardless of gender, multi-cultural diversity and socio-economic status, should be working in any governmental agencies or corporate organisations, willing and voluntarily participates in this research and at least hold an executive level post with minimum of two (2) years working experience.

**5.3 Researchers as an Instrument**
In order to ensure first hand meaningful and rich data, the researcher is required to feel and experience the informants' thoughts and feelings by interviewing them. The best way to this was the researcher himself had to be the instrument and involved in the process of data collection from the start until the end of the field work activities. This study utilises in-depth interview as a technique of collecting data in this study, the researcher acted as an interviewer and initiated the atmosphere for the informants to be stimulated and open in participating interactively, and at the same time tried to include each participant in a balanced discussion, and constantly guide informants in refraining themselves to touch on issues that are not related to the interview topic [14]. The role of instrument during the interview session is depending on the dynamism and the chemistry between the informant and the instrument based on the roots of the research question being discussed as participants' interests and attention heavily influence by these factors. At this moment, the researchers experienced that there were some participants who were not keen to share. When this situation occurred, the instrument had to play his role to ensure the discussion stays "alive" and fresh by asking questions, probing questions and debating on other issues that may attract the interests of the informant to continue talking.

**6.0 FINDINGS**

The main concern of this study is to understand the way people understand rumours at their workplace from the other person's perspective. Specifically, this study examines the factors that influence the conception of rumour. Therefore, in understanding the conception of rumours at workplace, the focus on the contexts in which how rumours are being concepted, the contents of the rumours and what the functions of rumours are on the group that it serves are investigated in detail.

**6.1 Rumour Context and Functions Reliant**
*6.1.1 Ambiguity*
Rumours arise in situations that are ambiguous or threatening in some way [2, 28, 32]. According to them, ambiguous situations are those in which the meaning or significance of events is unclear, or in which the effects of events are not certain. Ambiguity is problematic to people. Thus, an ambiguous situation motivates the informants to make sense of situations that are not clear to them. In explaining this situation, conversation episodes from the informants below may illustrate further:

*"For example, our CEO has announced that her contract shall be over in 2 months time, however when the time comes, she's still here. Some people said that the Minister renewed her contract. But these things make us feel unsure what exactly happening".*
(Informant 1, Line 44 - 47)

*"I heard that this person was hospitalised for 6 months and yet he got promoted... for what reason eh? There are other people who is more deserving than a sick person?."*
(Informant 3, Line 1622-1624)

*"The reason for him to be transferred is unclear, but the most common issue for things like this to happen is due to taking bribes. Many of us here believed that"*
(Informant 5, Line 4185-4188)

*"Of course they bitch about me... you know... In my company, when we're young and successful, people normally assumed that our employment is basically depending on whom we know up there... I used to get that...."*
(Informant 14, Line 10248-10252)

*6.1.1 Making Sense of Unclear Issues*
In any context, humans have a core social motive to understand and act effectively [15]. Culturally defined categories ordinarily help individuals do this [33]. Yet sometimes events do not fit well together or fail to convey meaning. In these cases, individuals refer back to the group to understand the situation and to act [4]. This referring back to the group what we could call as rumour discussion. Hence, rumour occurs when a group is attempting to make sense of ambiguous, uncertain, or confusing situations.

The resolving of ambiguity is always a sense-making explanation of events that are unclear for some part of a group community. Explanation to this situation is primarily an attempt to make reality perceptible and meaningful [3]; rumours are a collective effort at such explanations when a group – a part of a group – is faced with uncertainty [10]. To some extent, these explanations pass some group norm of plausibility. When group standards of plausibility are high, rumour discussions look very much like fact finding. When the group standards are low, rumour discussions look very much like contagion or panic. Rumour is thus part of "*normal collective information seeking*" [italics in original] [33, p. 247] wherein the group is trying to define an ambiguous situation with a "*lower degree of formalisation* of many of its component acts" [italics in original] [32: p. 23]. Norm of verification sources, and other aspects of fact-finding are typically relaxed, but it remains a group sense making activity. The episodes below may illustrate the above explanation in detail:

*"Normally, among us (the management team) when we received the news and unsure with what's happening on our CEO contract renewal issue. We would discuss it among ourselves. Some of us said that the minister would not want her to leave just yet due to her excellent performance. There are some said that, there's nobody else that are suitable for that post besides her. But from my point of view, I said to them that she's close to the minister, that's why her contract was renewed for another 4 years…"*
<div align="right">(Informant 1, Line 49-54)</div>

*"All in sudden, this particular girl who works in the same department with me got married with this guy from another department, they have never dated before. Me and other friends when we discuss about it, we think she's pregnant. That's why they got married so quickly".*
<div align="right">(Informant 10, Line 7491-7495)</div>

*"I don't really like to gossip, but whatever happen to her, we think that the husband always makes her life miserable. No maid and 4 kids with unemployed husband. What else makes a lady that miserable?"*
<div align="right">(Informant 6, Line 4952-4954)</div>

### 6.1.3 Threat Management

In response to the core human motivation is to control one's environment or to protect one's self image [15]. Threatening situations are those in which people feel that their welfare or sense of self is endangered. Threatening situations may indeed imperil one's welfare, as when a company faces possible layoffs. They may also involve threats to one's death or life, as with catastrophic situations as road accident, floods or fire accidents. Prasad [26] has documented one such outbreak of catastrophic rumours after the great Indian earthquake of 1934. Rumours also abounded after the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986 (Peters et al., 1990). In the face of such threats to welfare, rumours help groups to make sense of the situation and thereby prepare for or act effectively against the threat. The preparation for threat may take the form of "secondary control" whereby simply interpreting events within a framework that makes sense to people helps them gain a sense of control [35]. Threatening situations may also be those in which one feels emotionally endangered, in which one's sense of self – or indeed anything that one cherishes seems threatened. This is termed as the *wedge-driving* rumours – rumours that derogate other groups or classes of people - is a defensive sentiment; one feels threatened. The episodes below by the informants will exemplify the statements above:

*"Yes, but, you have to look at the rumour issues at hand. It differs. Aaaa…Like few years ago, ummmm…. I heard that I will be transferred to state branch because my immediate boss don't like me… I also don't know why…. Errrr….Since I am very comfortable here, I don't feel like going anywhere else anymore, besides that my home is near where I work now. To save myself, I made a rumour that another colleague of mine is more suitable for the post since he's due for his promotion and all. To my shock, the management did send him to the branch state. I am relieved."*
<div align="right">(Informant 1, Line 59-67)</div>

*I constantly being shunned away from people here, I totally understand that I am a minority here. Whatever they do here, they never ask for my opinion. Sometimes I feel that I am not needed here".*
<div align="right">(Informant 3, Line 1661 – 1663)</div>

*"Being a Malay is not easy when you're working with most of the majority here is Chinese. Sometimes they gave such an awkward look at me as though I am not wearing anything. I love my job here, but people here seems do not fond of me lah"*
(Informant 15, Line 10825-10829)

*"I am in Managed Services Division, most of my clients are from Financial Services industry. Some clients are okay with me. Some of them would refuse to work with me since I am Malay... There is one time, when I was in a project meeting, this one director just blurted in the meeting saying that next time my company should send Chinese representative since it's very difficult for them to communicate in English or Malay".*
(Informant 12, Line 8991-8997)

### 6.1.4 Self-Image Enhancement
To cope with such feelings, the wedge-driving rumourmonger enhances his or her sense of self by putting others down. Thus, in the face of threats to one's sense of self, rumours that portray other groups in a negative light help people think of themselves in a more pleasing way.

*"About that, actually.... Ermmm...I confronted him and... if he keeps complaining about me, I would compare myself with others, especially to those that he likes the most. As long as I can make myself look good by making other people look bad. Why not?"*
(Informant 1, Line 72 – 75)

*"Whatever they want to do they can do lah, I don't care. Once I am retired, nobody can handle this department like I did. Then they know what they going to miss".*
(Informant 3, Line 1750-1752)

*"Darling, I am the only sales manager here that can meet the club numbers ok... if I leave this place for better opportunity. Then serve them right!"*
(Informant 13, Line 9498-9500)

In short, the essence of rumour has to do with sense making and threat management amid uncertainty.

### 6.2 Rumour Content Reliant
### 6.2.1 Instrumentally Relevant and Communicated Information Statements
Rumours are being construed firstly of all information statements [10]. They tell rather than interrogate or command (although a rumour statement may indeed raise questions or direct behaviour). The gist of a rumour is an idea conveyed by a meaningful statement or set of statements.

Second, rumours are communicated information. A rumour is not seated at rest inside individual; it moves among and through a set of persons. A rumour is never merely a private thought. Rumours are threads in a complex fabric of social exchange, informational commodities exchanged between traders [30]. In this sense, rumours are a subclass of *memes* – ideas that survive through processes similar to those of natural selection; "unfit" rumours die – they stop circulating – whereas "fit" ones persist [16].

Third, rumour is information that is circulated because it is instrumentally relevant to rumour participants in which where the information relates to, affects, interests, or threatens them in some way. Here, I mean *instrumental* in the sense that Dewey [9] intended: having some weighty purpose, rather than being entertaining, sociable, or aimless. That is, rumour tends to be about topics of significance to participants [30]. This instrumental relevance may be of a recent nature, that is, it may pertain to current events. Rumour is similar to news in this way; it tends to be information that is new. Relevance of this sort often stems from potential consequences to persons [29] and Rosnow [28] dub it *outcome relevance*. For example: workplace rumours that have involved these few episodes by the informants will be beneficial in explaining this situation:

*"Do you remember the Datuk Sosilawati Lawiya murder? The girl that sat at the workstation near the window is her niece. According to her, the murder obviously due to business deal gone bad. That's why the Indian attorney and his counterpart killed her and her entourage".*
(Informant 2, Line 1027 - 1031)

*"All this GTP things is only benefit for the Malays, I dare to say this because I can see most of the NKRA benefits the Malay".*

*Researcher: Are you sure what are you saying right now?*

*"Yes, the Government only protects the Malays.  To get scholarship also we Chinese have to struggle.  The Malays don't have to work hard for it.  Everything is already served on silver platter".*

(Informant 3, Line 1765-1767)

*"Again this year, we government officers did not get any bonus. The government being spending funds on 1Malaysia projects which I doubt can bring improvement for the future.  How to motivate us to work harder and bring better performance if our salary remains the same?".*

(Informant 11, Line 8600-8605)

*"Yeah, yeah…eh… wait wait… don't turn your head… and he'll pass you soon enough…. When I tell you to turn…. You turn ok?  Did you see the guy just passed us by?  Someone in HR told a friend of mine that he has AIDS.  Sometimes his skins just shed by itself… Ewww…Gross…".*

(Informant 14, Line 10260-10264)

The above episodes can be understood from the study by Difonzo and Bordia [10] whereby the issues being brought up by the informants were being raised by collective concerns such as job duties and advancement opportunities (turnover rumours), job security and compensation (layoff rumours), and deleterious health effects (contamination rumours). However, the relevance may be of an established nature. Rumours may pertain to topics of long standing interest such as ritual murder and flying saucers [30]. To the extent that informants considered such topics to relate to, affect, or threaten them in some way, such statements would be considered rumours.

### 6.2.2    *Not so sure, it is a matter of assumption*

The most central is that rumour is important communicated information that is unverified. To verify is to "prove to be true by demonstration, evidence, etc.; to confirm" [1, p. 683]; unverified statements therefore, are unproven, not demonstrated to be true, and unaccompanied by "secure standards of evidence" [2]. As Rosnow [27] put it, rumour is "constructed around unauthenticated information. Note that this is not say that rumour never have a basis; they often do. Rather, the basis is simply weak or absent – it is not secure evidence. Secure or stable evidence is usually empirical in nature or consists of testimony from a credible source. This type of evidence coheres even under scrutiny, testing and questioning. The difference between news and rumour is helpful here; news is always confirmed, but rumour is always unconfirmed [32].

To some people, statements appear to possess secure evidential moorings but on further scrutiny do not. Episodes in point:

*"and… I heard the replacement of PTK is a lot harder than PTK is concerned. This time most probably to increment or promotion might be very difficult.  This is another way for the government to cut cost."*

(Informant 7, Line 5534-5536)

*"I've been serving my agency for almost 30 years. I've not been posted outside of Asia.  I guess it's the directive of the Ministry not to allow senior staff to be posted outside Asia".*

(Informant 2, Line 1229-1232)

*"Here is different… different…. I assume…. Promotion here is different, even though it's one of government agency, promotions are basically depending on your manager. If your manager likes you, there are high chances for you to go places.  HR has no say in this.  They will just expedite the process".*

(Informant 6, Line 4971-4974)

Thus, rumour includes what is sometimes called *misinformation*, or false statements thought to be true by some people. The implications of this reflection are sobering and (rightly) lead to a general sense of caution about what is heard: Evidence that initially seems firm may in fact easily crumble. These characteristics of being unverified highlights the fact that some rumours are more vulnerable to reality testing that are others.  The eminent philosopher of science, Popper [25] suggests that a scientific theory is

vulnerable to falsification; non-scientific theories are not. This is the principle of falsifiability. Like scientific theories, some rumours are observable or specific in character.

### 6.2.3    *Mode of transmission and structure*

Many scholars have attempted to describe rumour on the basis of the transmission mechanisms. Allport and Postman [2] mention that rumours were often passed through mouth to mouth from a person to person. Rosnow [27] states out that this definition was outdated. Today, print, electronic media and the Internet may be added to word-of-mouth medium of communication through which rumour flow. In understanding how the informant mongers the rumour around their workplace, they explained that:

*"I assume with instant messaging, our activities in discussion about any issues or people are seamless.  Other people wouldn't notice if we were doing our work or gossiping".*
<div align="center">(Informant 8, Line 6389-6391)</div>

*"Hello…. We have Facebook now to stalk and to bitch about people.  Seriously I don't have time to go around and talk to others. What they going to say about me?".*
<div align="center">(Informant 14, Line 10235-10238)</div>

*You know the right thing to do is not getting involved but you know gossiping you know being in the work place obviously you wanna gossip right, it's fun to gossip or else … would not be there…  and nobody has caught me doing this because the technology is wonderful… while eavesdropping.. I can straight away BBM my friends and sometimes using Lotus Notes IM makes my life easier, I would just create a group of my close colleagues here in IBM, and then we can bitch from there on… people just don't know… they thought I am busy doing my work… hahaha*
<div align="center">(Informant 13, Line 9513-9522)</div>

Attempts have also been made to define rumour by its structure.  For example: rumours are often prefaced with a cautionary statement indicating lack of verification such as "I don't know if this is true…" or "I heard that…" Because these prefaces indicate a lack of verification, however, they are attached only to those rumours for which the transmitter perceives the statement to be a rumour. They are thus only statements about which people are unsure. In addition, some researchers propose that rumours are simply short expressions. Rumours are non-narrative in structure, that is, they tend not to have a plot sequence.  They are one-liners.  In contrast, longer tales are classified as legends, tall tales, fables, or myths. There is some merit in this distinction, although the story-like quality of rumours varies considerably. For example, in this research, most of the episodes of discussions in regards to rumour are encapsulated in a single sentence.

*"Yeah… like…I heard from someone that she was pregnant for 6 weeks then the Personal Trainer guy took her hand for marriage.. this is true… you know [referring to the researcher] who is this person ok…".*
<div align="center">(Informant 13, Line 9452-9455)</div>

*"It seems that people say that her poltergeist will stay at home whenever she's travelling".*
<div align="center">(Informant 2, Line 1047-1050)</div>

*"I don't know if this is true, but most of the sales people here would bring out their clients to karaoke centres or night clubs just to close deals".*
<div align="center">(Informant 12, Line 9016-9018)</div>

However, Caplow [8] observed that military rumours were typically composed of three statements rather than one. Also, Peterson and Gist [24] reported rumours surrounding the murder of a babysitter; these rumours had snowballed – became elaborated – and were quite story like in nature. The distinction in structure stems from the differential functions of these statements.  Rumours tend to relate information that pertains to an ambiguous situation or event of which people are already apprised and in which they are involved in ferreting out the facts; legends and myths tend to provide a setting, plot line, and interpretation all-in-one. Viewed in this way, rumours are like plot twists revealed serially over time rather than pre-packaged as a coherent story. In this research, it was very difficult to make the informants able to differentiate between rumours and gossips. Therefore, in serving the purpose of this research to unravel the causes of rumours conception in workplace, it is timely to turn our attention to rumour's cousin, gossip.

### *6.3 Frustration is a foundation to rumour's gateway*

Frustrations also contribute to the conception of rumours. There are many ways for people especially employees to convey their feelings of dissatisfaction at their work environment. When this happens, employees just lash out things without any conscience just to gratify themselves or their colleagues. This can be seen at the below expression of frustrated informants:

*"Sometimes when they frustrated, they just say things they like…. They just don't care….whether its right or wrong is not a matter for them… "*
(Informant 10, Line 7617-7618)

*"Employees would just come to see me, and screamed at me because they're not happy with their managers. Some of the time might be true… but most of the time they just say things to blow their steam off. I just listened to them and ask them what can I do to help them. When I asked them, whether they would like me to talk to their bosses. They just shook their head. From what I can gather, accusations on their bosses that they have made is not right somewhere".*
(Informant 8, Line 6638-6642)

*"At my site office, there is one Chinese guy that have been working with us for more than 10 years. He never gets promoted. I guess his attitude makes him not favourable to the boss…. Because of that… I guess… that's why he always make stories about the boss… he knows when the boss meets his girlfriend and whatever private things about the boss… The funny thing is… the boss lives two doors down from my house".*
(Informant 15, Line 10869-10875)

## 7.0    CONCLUSION

In sum, rumour function is to make sense of an ambiguous situation or to help people adapt to known or potential threats; gossip serves social network formation and maintenance. In another way of understanding this, rumour is intended as a hypothesis to help make sense of an unclear situation whereas gossip entertains, bonds, and normatively influences group members. Rumour may convey useful social information [8]. Theoretically, rumours conception can be understood from the perspective of the Organisational Information Theory (OIT). According to OIT, members of organisation normally will reduce the equivocal messages through the process of enactment, selection, and retention [38]. West and Turner posit that enactment starts with the bracketing or framing a message in the environment by an individual. At this stage, members of organization (employees) examine the message received in determining the expanse of the equivocality that is available in order to assign meaning to the information. Existing rules are reviewed in making decisions about how the employees will deal with the ambiguity [37, p. 303]. Hence, when an employee believes that he or she do not have sufficient number of rules for reducing the equivocality, various cycles of communication must be understood in determining their effectiveness in assisting him or her in understanding the information. This is what Weick [36] believes that the employee undergo a process of enactment called sense-making.

Sense-making is notably described by Weick [36] as a process that is grounded in identity construction that is retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on a by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy that allows people to make sense of their experiences. Thus, sense-making is an effort to build an understanding of situations that are difficult and uncertain. Weick [36, p.6] adds that, sense-making includes "the placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning". Weick [37] argues that sense making wraps many forms of communication, including stories, routines, arguments, symbols, commitments, and other actions and behaviours. This pattern could be seen in most of the informants in trying to make sense of a phenomenon that leads to the conception of rumours in their workplace. When they are trying to understand situation without having proper information or fact, or when the intention is to appreciate organisational members' evolving and idiosyncratic understandings about a particular phenomenon from their perspective.

Several interesting questions remain, however. This study has explored the possible reasons for a rumour to emerge. What has the researcher explored are those that occurred in workplaces, but what about in natural settings of a society and culture? This question may be addressed by collecting rumour and gossip – and the

many intermediate and nebulous forms that exist – from archived sources (blogs and online forums), by recording conversations in public places, or by conducting a survey. Special attention should be paid to the pattern of functional and contextual differences that have studied in this study. Such investigations would shed much needed light on the roles – unique, complimentary, or common – that each form of communication plays during ordinary social discourse.

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