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Gossip is the cement which holds organizations together. Providing communal space such as coffee areas or a lunchroom, allows employees to share information, knowledge and build relations that benefits both the company and the employee.

Judith Doyle

Do you think it's important for employees to have communal areas where they can share information and build relations?

Learning objectives: Unit 17

Business communication skills

Reporting gossip; Discussing the pros and cons of gossip at work; Fluency: Discussing office policy about gossip

Reading Article about a company banning gossip; Posts on a forum about office gossip

Listening Conversation about company gossip; Radio interview about gossip at work

Phrase bank Social conversations

Vocabulary Relationships at work

Grammar Reported speech, *say* and *tell*

Office gossip

1  **2.29** Listen to the conversation and answer the questions.

- Why has Trixy been out of the office?
- What is the news which she hasn't heard?
- Is Gary their boss or a colleague?
- Why are they worried?
- Why don't they think that Maureen will be worried?
- The expression "There's no smoke without fire" means that when people gossip about something, there's usually some truth in what they say. Do you have an equivalent saying in your language? Do you think it's true?



2  **2.29** Look at this sentence from the conversation in 1.

... *he said that we were overstuffed.*

The original statement was 'You are overstuffed'.

Listen to the conversation again and complete the reported statements.

- 'You will have to let some people go.'
This consultant _____ have to let some people go.
- 'How many people does it involve?'
Gary _____ it involved.
- 'It depends on individual performance and attitude.'
He _____ on individual performance and attitude.
- 'I often see them in the Café Au Lait.'
I'm not saying who, but someone _____ them in Café Au Lait.
- 'Will you stay behind to work on this report?'
The other day he _____ stay behind to work on a report.

3 Complete the sentences with *said* or *told*.

- He _____ we were overstuffed.
- He _____ me we were overstuffed.

What is the main difference between *say* and *tell*?

4 What words are missing from the following sentences?


- 'Where are you going?' He asked me _____ I was going.
- 'When are you going?' He asked me _____ I was going.
- 'Are you going?' He asked me _____ I was going.

When reporting questions, when do you use the word *if*?

5 Complete the sentences below.

- a** 'I'm busy.' He said he _____ busy.
b 'I'll start straight away.' He said he _____ straight away.

What changes do you make to the Present Simple in reported speech? What changes do you make to *will* in reported speech?

6  **2.30-2.33** Look at the conversations below. Complete them with words and phrases which make sense. Then listen and compare your answers.

Conversation 1

- A** Jeff, (a) _____ last month's production figures?
B No, Jane, I'm (b) _____. Can I give them to you this afternoon?
A It's no good being sorry. There's always some (c) _____. If they're not on my desk by four o'clock, I'll have to (d) _____ Mr Bradley.
B Yes, Jane. I'll start (e) _____.

Conversation 2

- C** David, have you got (f) _____? There's something I want to (g) _____ with you ... in my office.
D What's it about?
C Oh, well, we're missing a laptop (h) _____ from the store.
D What has that got to do with me?
C Well, you are the only other person with a (i) _____ to the store and ...

Conversation 3

- E** Marie, the figures you need are (j) _____.
F Thanks, Pedro. Is everything (k) _____?
E Yes, no problems. Would you like to (l) _____ them with me?
F Yes, but I'm a bit (m) _____ this afternoon.
E Me too. Er, do (n) _____ that new café they've just opened? It's nice and (o) _____. We can go through them there after (p) _____.
F Oh, I (q) _____ so, but I won't be able to stay for long.
E Great. (r) _____ there at about six, then?
F Yes, all right. See you there.

Conversation 4

- G** Hi, Monica.
H Oh, hello, Jim. (s) _____ things going?
G Great. In fact, you can be the first to congratulate me.
H Yes, you look very (t) _____ with yourself. What's up?
G I'm the new (u) _____ of the eastern sales team.
H Oh, really? What salary are you on now, then?
G (v) _____ a year.
H I can't believe it. Sixty thousand!
G And they're giving me a new (w) _____.
H Oh, really? Congratulations, then. The (x) _____ are on you. See you later.
G Yes. Bye.

7 You are at the coffee machine having a gossip with a colleague. You have overheard the conversations in 6. Use the frameworks in the box to tell your partner what you heard. It is not necessary to report everything.

I heard ... talking to said that told ... that asked ...



Time to talk

- 1 Read the news article and answer the questions.
 - a What is the new law?
 - b Do you think it's a good idea? Why / Why not?

12 **VIEWS**

City Council gags workers

Municipal employees in the Brazilian city of Cascavel have been banned from gossiping during working hours. Under a new law approved by the city council, public employees who

spread rumours or gossip about their colleagues face the sack. The city says civil servants have the right to work in a professional environment and claim the new law will promote integrity in public offices.

- 2 Underline words and phrases in the text which mean the following.
 - a ordered not to do something
 - b pass on information which is not official and may not be true
 - c be in a position where you can be dismissed
- 3 Discuss the following questions with other people in the class.
 - a How do you define 'gossip'?
 - b Is it always a bad thing?
 - c Is it possible to ban it?
 - d Does your company have a policy on gossip? Have you ever heard of a company that does?

4 The comments below were made on a website for office workers. Read them and classify them in the table. Then compare your answers with a partner.

Gossip is good	Mixed feelings	Gossip is bad

OFFICE WORKERS' FORUM

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A Posted by Matthew Hart, England	A friendly and chatty work environment makes employees happy. This results in a better level of work from employees, which means the company makes more money. Any employer who bans office gossip will lose money by making the workforce less productive. If the workplace is friendly and employees can chat, they are happy. Happy employees work harder, so the company makes more money. An employer that bans gossip will make its workforce less productive and will lose money!
B Posted by Janet Jones, Wales	In my office, the only way to find out anything about the company strategy is through gossip. The management refuse to talk to most of the staff.
C Posted by Luke McCarthy, Australia	There's nothing worse than gossip – and it's especially bad when it is done by people who have nothing better to do than talk about other people.
D Posted by Nicole Martin, France	I don't think gossip is a bad thing. It's the best way to learn about office politics. It's healthy to chat at work and it's just part of working in an office.
E Posted by Pieter Groot, Netherlands	Gossip is just information that someone, somewhere, doesn't want you to find out about. It can be great – unless you are the one being gossiped about. But it's definitely not a sackable offence.
F Posted by Sanjay Patel, India	I started a new job a year ago, and I try to avoid gossip. If I'm in a group who start to gossip I walk away. It can really damage your career and your relationship with your colleagues.
G Posted by Claudia Weber, Germany	Freedom of speech is a basic human right. But harmless remarks can easily become hurtful remarks. I think it's up to each person to decide which is which.
H Posted by John Mason, Scotland	I've found solutions to some of my biggest work problems while chatting by the coffee machine. Having a quick chat about completely unrelated topics can actually increase productivity as it helps to break up the day a little.

5 The phrases below are from the comments above. Complete the sentences with your own words and ideas.

- a** In my office, _____.
- b** An employer that _____ will _____.
- c** There's nothing worse than _____.
- d** I don't think _____ is a bad thing.
- e** I try to avoid _____.


6 You are going to listen to an interview about office gossip from a radio programme. Match the words and phrases from the interview (a–f) to the definitions (1–6).

- | | |
|------------------------|--|
| a drive for efficiency | 1 talking informally |
| b scrapped | 2 mobile refreshments service |
| c human resources | 3 effort to get more work done |
| d encouraged | 4 seen as positive |
| e chatting | 5 not continued with |
| f tea trolley | 6 organization and management of company staff |

a b c d e f

7 Before you listen, decide if you agree with the following statements. Why / Why not?

- Companies who provide an opportunity for their workers to socialize are making a mistake.
- Today, people have less time to talk to each other and socialize than they did before.
- The differences between a good job and a bad job are the social parts.
- Employees are more productive when they are happy.
- When employees share information and knowledge, the company benefits.
- Companies should take measures to encourage gossip.

8  2.34 Listen to the interview to see if the speaker agrees with you.

9 Work with a partner and perform the following roleplay about office policy on coffee breaks and gossiping.

Speaker A: Look at the instructions on page 140.

Speaker B: You are one of the management consultants who prepared the study mentioned in the interview in 8. In a client's company you see the notice below next to the coffee machine. Say why you think some 'gossip' is a good thing and try to persuade the client to change the policy.

Company Notice

- **Employees may take up to three coffee breaks per day.**
- **Maximum time at coffee machine: four minutes.**
- **All 'gossip' or discussion of non-work related matters is prohibited.**

10 Based on your discussions in 9, complete the memo below.

FROM: Personnel Manager

TO: Managing Director

With regard to the company policy on coffee breaks, _____

In my opinion, _____

According to a report by the Industrial Society, _____

In the report the author says that _____

It is a question of balance, but _____

In conclusion, _____

17 Office gossip

Phrase bank: Social conversations

- How's it going?
- Where have you been?
- Have you heard the news? What news?
- I can't believe it!
- Really! Is it official?
- Apparently they are going to ...
- That's awful/terrible/wonderful/incredible.
- Catch you later.
- See you there at about six.
- Congratulations!

Vocabulary

Relationships at work

1 Combine one word from A with one word from B to complete the sentences below.

A	B
coffee	consultant
company	room
human	policy
meeting	resources
management	machine

- a People have the best ideas in conversations around the _____.
- b The company has hired a _____ to give advice on improving internal communications.
- c What do you think about this idea of removing the chairs from the _____ so we don't spend so long talking about things?
- d What is the _____ on taking coffee or tea breaks?
- e Nowadays people say _____ instead of 'personnel'.

2 Complete the puzzle using the clues below. Sometimes the first letter has been given.

- 1 Having communal areas benefits relations in the w_____.
- 2 We are having a _____ for efficiency. (You also _____ a car.)
- 3 The topic of this unit.
- 4 Let's make an _____ not to waste time.
- 5 It's not a good idea to _____ rumours.
- 6 Have you heard the _____?
- 7 There's no _____ without fire.
- 8 We have banned smoking in the o_____.
- 9 They don't a _____ of people taking long tea breaks.
- 10 Let's go out for a d_____ on Friday night.
- 11 We should encourage employees to _____ their ideas.
- 12 What has happened to the tea _____?

1				P				
			2	R				
			3	O				
		4		F				
	5			E				
	6			S				
				7	S			
		8		I				
	9			O				
		10		N				
			11	A				
		12		L				

Grammar

Reported speech

say and tell

You can use *say* or *tell* to report what someone said.

say + something

- He **says** (that) he is happy in his new job.

tell + somebody + something

- He **tells** everyone (that) he is the company boss.

Tense

When we use the past forms *said* or *told*, we usually change the verbs in the original.

Present → Past

- 'I **like** working on my own.' →
He said he **liked** working on his own.

Past → Past perfect

- 'I **worked** there for ten years.' →
He said he **had worked** there for ten years.

will → *would*:

- 'I'll help you.' →
He said he **would** help me.

No change of tense

When the situation is still true or there is no chance of confusion, we don't change the tense in the original sentence.

- 'I **enjoy** working there.' → He said he **enjoys** working there.
- 'Sales **are rising**.' → Marta says that sales **are rising**.

Pronouns

- I → he/she
- me → him/her
- my → his/her
- your → my

- 'I speak to **your** secretary every day.' →
He told me he speaks to **my** secretary every day.

Adverbs of time and place

now	→	then/at that moment
today	→	that day
here	→	there
tomorrow	→	the next day/the following day
yesterday	→	the day before/the previous day

- I'll see you **here tomorrow**. →
He said he **would see me there the next day**.

Most of these changes are logical and natural and often similar in other languages. They depend on the differences in time, place and people between the original conversation and the reported conversation.

asked

For reported questions you can use *asked* + *what/when/etc*

- *What do you want?* →
He **asked me what** I wanted.

or *asked* + *if* for reporting yes/no questions.

- *Is it official?* →
He **asked me if** it was official.

Practice 1

Complete the reported sentences using the correct tense.

- a** We're going to have a phone conference.
He said that they _____ going to have a phone conference.
- b** I spent hours on that proposal.
She said she _____ hours on that proposal.
- c** I'll post the letter in the morning.
He said he _____ post the letter in the morning.
- d** It's too early to check in for the flight.
I told her it _____ too early to check in for the flight.
- e** We worked until ten o'clock to get everything done.
She said they _____ until ten o'clock to get everything done.
- f** Can I use the photocopier?
He asked if he _____ use the photocopier.
- g** Sales are at an all-time high.
She said sales _____ at an all-time high.
- h** She will be home early on Thursday.
She said she _____ be home early on Thursday.

Practice 2

Complete the second sentence to report the first one.

- a** I'm really enjoying my job at the moment.
She says she's really enjoying her job at the moment.
- b** It's too late to cancel the meeting.
I said _____.
- c** We are having a lot of problems with the production department today.
He told me _____.
- d** What time is Mr Keegan going to arrive?
He asked _____.
- e** We should buy a new computer system.
He keeps telling me _____.
- f** Is Mr Merchant available?
She asked _____.
- g** The fixed costs include the office rent and equipment hire.
She said _____.
- h** Where do you work now?
They asked me _____.
- i** I'll meet you at the airport at eight o'clock.
She said _____.
- j** I want to see you about the arrangements for tomorrow.
He told me _____.
- k** Does the office open on Saturdays?
He asked me _____.
- l** When will the documents be ready?
She asked _____.
- m** I'm the best salesman in the company.
He keeps saying _____.
- n** Can I make a phone call?
He asked if _____.
- o** What do you think of the new website?
He asked me _____.

Practice 3

Complete the sentences with *say/says/said*, *tell/told* or *ask/asked*.

- a** Why didn't you _____ me you weren't happy with your job?
- b** What will people _____ if we try to ban office gossip?
- c** Did he _____ what time you had to be there?
- d** The boss always _____ that I should keep my desk more organized.
- e** He _____ me he was having second thoughts about applying for the job.
- f** Will you _____ him if he's going to come?
- g** I can't read the small print on this. What does it _____?
- h** Every time I visit them they _____ me how you are.
- i** I'll _____ you if you promise not to _____ anything to anybody else.