Office gossip

1. Listen to the conversation and answer the questions.
   a) Why has Trixy been out of the office?
   b) What is the news which she hasn’t heard?
   c) Is Gary their boss or a colleague?
   d) Why are they worried?
   e) Why don’t they think that Maureen will be worried?
   f) 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. Look at this sentence from the conversation in 1.
   ... he said that we were overstaffed.
   The original statement was ‘You are overstaffed’.
   Listen to the conversation again and complete the reported statements.
   a) ‘You will have to let some people go.’ This consultant __________ have to let some people go.
   b) ‘How many people does it involve?’ Gary __________ it involved.
   c) ‘It depends on individual performance and attitude.’ He __________ on individual performance and attitude.
   d) ‘I often see them in the Café Au Lait.’ I’m not saying who, but someone __________ them in Café Au Lait.
   e) ‘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.
   a) He __________ we were overstaffed.
   b) He __________ me we were overstaffed.
   What is the main difference between say and tell?

4. What words are missing from the following sentences?
   a) ‘Where are you going?’ He asked me __________ I was going.
   b) ‘When are you going?’ He asked me __________ I was going.
   c) ‘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 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.
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?

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 claims 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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gossip is good</th>
<th>Mixed feelings</th>
<th>Gossip is bad</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OFFICE WORKERS’ FORUM**

**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, ___________________________ will ___________________________.

b An employer that ___________________________ will ___________________________.

c There’s nothing worse than ___________________________ is a bad thing.

d I don’t think ___________________________ is a bad thing.

e I try to avoid ___________________________.

17 OFFICE GOSSIP
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 |

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

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

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

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.

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**
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'.

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.

**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?  
He asked if he ___________ use the photocopier.

b What will people ___________ if we try to ban office gossip?  
Sales are at an all-time high.

c Did he ___________ what time you had to be there?  
She said she ___________ at an all-time high.

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?  
She will be home early on Thursday.  
She said she ___________ be home early on Thursday.

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.