

Chapter 12: Exam practice question

Switching off is no way to handle job losses: how not to communicate bad news

- 1 Define the term ‘effective communication’. (2)
- This is the exchange of information between people or groups, with feedback.

Use **Resources table 3a** mark bands.

- 2 Outline how this case could harm employer–employee relationships in this factory in the future. (9)
- lack of trust of management by employees
 - source of future conflict
 - lack of respect for management
 - future belief of rumours could create problems
 - worker insecurity could result in loss of motivation, downward trends in productivity and staff leaving, all of which could undermine the employer–employee relationship
 - any other relevant point

In a 9-mark question a conclusion is usually required, although this particular question does not immediately signal that a conclusion is necessary.

Suggested conclusion:

In reality, a combination of all factors could harm future relationships because different employees are likely to react in different ways. These factors could interact and have a knock-on effect in all aspects of company operation.

SL: apply **Resources table 1** mark band descriptors.

(SL questions do not usually go up to 9 marks, so the HL table is best used for SL students.)

HL: apply **Resources table 2** mark band descriptors.

A justified conclusion is required.

- 3 Evaluate the different ways in which Panasonic might communicate any future redundancies to staff and the media. Refer to all aspects of effective communication – the appropriate sender and receiver, the clarity of the message, the medium to be used and the opportunity for feedback. (9)

Definition of redundancies: this is job loss due to the employee’s job no longer being required. This may be because the business reorganises or because it can no longer afford to employ the employee. Redundancy may be compulsory or voluntary.

For legal reasons redundancy needs to be formally stated in a letter, whichever primary method of communication is used.

Suggestion 1: group meetings

- Sender: a senior UK executive.
- Receivers: groups of workers small enough to make questions possible, e.g. a maximum of 50.
- Medium: speech and question-and-answer session.
- Opportunity for feedback: possible but may be limited.

For:

- Direct questions may be asked and followed up with more questions until full understanding and satisfaction are achieved.
- The message may be reinforced with caring body language.
- Colloquial language used may soften the message and/or be easier to understand.

Against:

- Questions may be limited to a few workers brave enough to ask questions in front of an audience.
- Time limitations may mean that not all questions are asked.
- Questions thought of after the meeting may not be asked.
- Some workers will have their meeting before others – this can result in incorrect transmission of information and/or the feeling that some workers are considered more important than others.

Suggestion 2: one-on-one meetings

- Sender: senior department or HR managers – many managers would be needed to do this for mass redundancies and so the task would need to be split.
- Receiver: each individual worker.
- Medium: speech.
- Opportunity for feedback: possible but may be limited.

For:

- Direct questions may be asked and followed up with more questions until full understanding and satisfaction are achieved.
- Every employee can ask the questions which individually concern them.
- The personal importance of each employee is recognised.
- The message may be reinforced with caring body language.
- Colloquial language used may soften the message and/or be easier to understand.

Against:

- The high-stress, face-to-face situation may be too much for some workers.
- Questions thought of after the meeting may not be asked.

- Some managers may conduct the meeting better than others: special training may be needed in advance and this may cause rumours to spread.
- As soon as some employees have had their meeting, rumours and stress will spread quickly.
- Sequencing of meetings may be difficult – some employees will have their meeting before others, which may give the impression that some employees are considered more important than others.

Suggestion 3: letter

- Sender: a senior UK executive helped by HR specialists and lawyers.
- Receivers: individual workers.
- Medium: writing.
- Opportunity for feedback: questions could be asked by letter or by requesting a meeting with direct manager or HR managers. This would need to be stated clearly in the letter.

For:

- For legal reasons, redundancy needs to be formally stated in a letter, whichever primary method of communication is used.
- The wording can be made clear and easy to understand.
- It is a permanent legal record of redundancy.
- It can be re-read and thought about carefully over a period of time before questions are formulated.
- Questions may be individually asked and answered.

Against:

- It may seem impersonal to employees who may resent it, especially after long service.
- Letters to a lot of employees may arrive through the postal system on different days. (The solution to this – email – is not usually well received and not all employees may have email. Email is sometimes not a legally enforceable or valid means of communication.)
- Answering individual questions may take a long time.
- The written interchange of questions and answers can be very long.
- The language used may be formal and this may make it seem even more impersonal and uncaring. Some employees may not understand formal language.

Any other relevant positive or negative points may be accepted.

Other valid suggestions of methods of communicating future redundancies may be accepted but each should include a full evaluation.

SL: apply **Resources table 1** mark band descriptors.

HL: apply **Resources table 2** mark band descriptors.

For 9 marks a conclusion is required.