



**BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS
NOVEMBER 2005**

The examination paper is divided into TWO Sections. Section A is compulsory and carries 40 marks. Candidates are required to attempt TWO questions from Section B, all of which carry 30 marks each.

The total time allowed is 2 hours and 15 minutes (inclusive of 15 minutes reading time). Please note that candidates must not write anything during the 15 minute reading time. You should allow yourself approximately 50 minutes in total to answer the questions in Section A, and 35 minutes for each of the questions attempted in Section B.

Tuesday morning 29th November 2005

*Time Allowed: 2 hours and 15 minutes
(including reading time)*

SECTION A

(Compulsory – answer all parts of Questions 1 and 2)

1. (a) Define "communication". *(2 marks)*
 - (b) What is meant by "effective communication"? *(2 marks)*
 - (c) Identify four sources for the grapevine. *(2 marks)*
 - (d) In a business context, what is meant by "diagonal communication"? *(2 marks)*
 - (e) Describe two ways in which communication techniques can help to resolve conflict. *(2 marks)*
 - (f) From the rules for answering the telephone correctly, choose the four you think are the most important *(2 marks)*
 - (g) Define "synchronous" and "asynchronous" in terms of communication, and give one example of each. *(2 marks)*
 - (h) What is an executive summary in terms of a report? *(2 marks)*
 - (i) Define "feedback" as part of the communication process. *(2 marks)*
 - (j) Define "blue tooth technology" and say briefly what impact it has had on communication. *(2 marks)*
- (Total: 20 marks)*

2. (a) Describe the key elements in the layout of a standard business letter. (4 marks)
- (b) Define and describe a "mission statement". (4 marks)
- (c) Describe briefly the three stages of the information life cycle. (4 marks)
- (d) What is the meaning of the acronym PESTLE C, and what is its implication for organisational communication? (4 marks)
- (e) Give four examples of how IT helps companies communicate with their customers. (4 marks)
- (Total: 20 marks)

SECTION B – CASE STUDY

(Questions 3 to 7 are based on the pre-seen case study)

The Great North Pennine Railway Company

The Great North Pennine Railway Company (GNPRC) was a company in crisis. Responsible for all the rail passenger traffic in the northern region of the English railway system, it had battled for 10 years to overcome under-investment, poor track, ancient rolling stock and a dwindling passenger base. The Directors, however, had formulated a plan to protect the profits, for the business was indeed profitable, despite its problems. The GNPRC operated under a performance system in which the U.K. Government subsidised them to run the services. However, if the subsidy level rose too high, they would certainly lose the licence to run the service at the end of the contract period.

The plan had 3 main elements:

- Re-invest some of the contingency fund built up over the last few years to renew the rolling stock. Suitable (but not ideal) rolling stock had been identified in Holland, standing waiting in sidings as the result of a cancelled order.
- Appoint a Public Relations Director to try to restore public confidence in a service now notorious for running more trains late than on time.
- Start negotiations with the Minister of Transport to get the track repaired. The responsibility for this lay with another licensed company, so this would obviously be a difficult objective to achieve, involving many meetings.

The plan was duly put into operation. After a year, the Board met to consider the results.

- (a) The Finance Director reported that the considerable profit of previous years had dwindled to a loss over the year. She stated that this was because the Government had acted to renew the track, but with such enthusiasm that services had been even more delayed as trains were forced to run more slowly while work was being done on the track all over the region. As a result, passenger numbers dwindled further.
- (b) The Human Resources Director reported that, after many years of industrial harmony, strikes were increasing. This was because the new rolling stock was so different from

any the company had previously operated that all the drivers and other personnel had needed rapid re-training, but this had not been properly explained to them, resulting in loss of bonuses and overtime payments, which brought them rapidly out on strike.

- (c) The Marketing Director reported that complaints from passengers had trebled over the previous year. There was not enough time for him to read the whole of his report on why this was so, but the worsening situation with regard to lateness figured large. He also pointed out that, despite numerous marketing campaigns, sales of tickets continued to fall.
- (d) The Public Relations Director, the new appointment on which so many hopes rested, reported on two public relations disasters:
 - (i) As soon as he was appointed he had conducted a campaign to win over the press. He had announced the work on the track with "a great fanfare", and had succeeded in getting publicity in all the major newspapers about the new rolling stock. After the strikes and the increased number of delayed journeys, the press became hostile.
 - (ii) As a way of winning over the public, the Public Relations Director had worked with the World Wildlife Fund and other environmental charities to get all the verges at the side of the tracks declared "Wildlife Havens", because they were home to many species of plants, birds and animals. Unfortunately, two months later, the company responsible for the maintenance of the track cut down all the trees and bushes, because the leaves from them, in the autumn, caused a hazard by making the tracks slippery, preventing the trains from braking efficiently.
- (e) The Marketing and Public Relations Directors reported jointly that the organisation's switchboard was under great pressure, resulting in enquirers often failing to get the information they needed about the timetable and fares. They had begun investigations into the possibility of offering this service through a website.
- (f) The IT Manager seized the opportunity to make a claim for more investment in this side of the business. All resources available to him had to be allocated to the technology needed to run the trains, and so the administrative side of the organisation lagged years behind in equipment.

The horrified Board began to consider its options.

SECTION B - QUESTIONS

(Answer TWO questions from this section)

3. GNPRC decided to appoint a Public Relations Director to restore public confidence in their service. As part of the interview process, the company has decided that every short-listed candidate should make a 10-minute presentation to the interview panel. The subject of this is to be "GNPRC: raising our profile". All candidates will be sent a copy of the rescue plan, containing a statement of the problems facing the company.
- (a) Write a letter to be sent to all short-listed applicants inviting them to an interview, setting out the necessary arrangements and informing them of the presentation they will be required to make. *(5 marks)*
- (b) You are one of the invited applicants.
- Describe how you would prepare for the presentation, the choices you have to consider and the factors involved in creating a successful presentation. *(10 marks)*
- (c) Prepare the text of the presentation. You may indicate where any audio-visual aids might be employed, but you do not have to describe them in detail. Marks will be awarded for style and clarity *(7 marks)* as well as for your ideas *(8 marks)*. *(Total: 30 marks)*
4. When the Board met to consider the results of its plan, the Marketing Director reported that the overall number and type of complaints had more than trebled over the previous year.
- (a) Faced with such problems, the Marketing Director needs to remember the basic techniques of good customer service. Identify them, and state which you think he needs to be most mindful of in the circumstances. *(5 marks)*
- (b) Before taking any action, he needs to understand the nature of complaints. What are the main characteristics of complaints? *(5 marks)*
- (c) The Marketing Director decides that the best course of action is to appoint a manager whose function will be to respond to complaints. What are the main attributes a person in such a position should have? *(10 marks)*
- (d) The Marketing Director will want to be sure that the organisation's approach to handling all complaints is systematic. Describe such an approach, as it would apply to GNPRC. *(10 marks)*
(Total: 30 marks)

(continued)

5. The Board's plan requires negotiation with the Minister of Transport to get the track repaired.
- (a) A very persuasive case is needed to persuade the Minister to come to a favourable decision. Assist the Directors in preparing a case by writing a brief which explains how decisions are made, and the thinking involved in decision making. *(10 marks)*
 - (b) Imagine you are one of the negotiators who is going to meet the Minister of Transport to open up the discussions about the track. What are the important things you need to remember about the techniques of negotiation? *(15 marks)*
 - (c) The Minister of Transport has accepted an invitation to visit GNPRC Headquarters on a fact-finding mission. You are given the task of organizing the meeting which will be the centrepiece of the visit. Write a checklist for yourself of the most important things to remember when organising a meeting. *(5 marks)*
- (Total: 30 marks)*
6. It is clear the company needs to work very hard to improve the marketing of its services and its public relations.
- (a) The Marketing Director gives you the task of preparing a Marketing Plan. Begin by creating a checklist for yourself showing what the plan should seek to achieve and what format it should take. *(10 marks)*
 - (b) The Public Relations Director needs a press release to explain the disaster caused by cutting down the trees beside the track. Write a press release for his approval. Marks will be awarded for the use of the correct format, for style and clarity, *(5 marks)* as well as for your ideas *(5 marks)*. *(10 marks)*
 - (c) Write a report to the two Directors on the problems and advantages of creating a web page which will offer information online about timetables and fares. Marks will be awarded for the use of the correct format, for style and clarity *(5 marks)*, as well as for your ideas *(5 marks)*. *(10 marks)*
- (Total: 30 marks)*
7. (a) The Finance Director delivered a report to the Board which contained a great deal of numeric data. Discuss the various methods of numeric communication available to her, and indicate the ones you think it most likely she would have used, and why. *(10 marks)*
- (b) Communication within GNPRC is clearly not very effective, resulting at the very least in strikes. The Chairman of the Board has asked you, a management consultant, to explain the term "communication audit", which he remembers hearing at a recent seminar. Write a letter to explain it to him. *(10 marks)*

(continued)

- (c) The IT Manager is trying to make a case for more investment in IT. Write a briefing paper for him covering the implications for the company in the way it communicates with its customers, if his case is successful. *(10 marks)*
(Total: 30 marks)

