2.3 Communication, culture and employee relations

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 30 marks**

KEY WORDS formal communication • grapevine • jargon • organizational culture • trade union • collective bargaining

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **communication** in organizations and, at HL, **organizational culture** and **industrial relations**, and to bring the HRM unit together in one case.

You must be able to:

- distinguish formal and informal communication and choose suitable methods
- explain barriers to communication and how to reduce them
- link structure, leadership and motivation in one human resource case
- explain Handy's four types of organizational culture and the causes of culture clashes
- explain collective bargaining, industrial action and methods of resolving conflict

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

Communication

Communication is passing information from a sender to a receiver through a channel, with feedback. **Formal communication** uses official channels (meetings, reports, emails, notices). **Informal communication** happens outside them (chats, the **grapevine**): fast but often wrong.

method	good for	weak for
face-to-face meeting	discussion, sensitive news, feedback	large or spread-out groups
email and messaging	speed, a written record, many receivers	complex or emotional issues
written report or notice	detail, a permanent record	quick feedback
video call	remote teams	time zones, weak connections

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Barriers to communication: language and **jargon**, too much information, the wrong channel, distance and time zones, cultural differences, long chains of command in tall structures, lack of trust. **Reducing barriers:** clear plain language, the right channel, fewer levels, two-way feedback, training.

Linking the unit: structure (how many levels), leadership style and motivation all shape communication. A flat, democratic firm usually communicates faster and with more feedback.

AHL – organizational culture: the shared values, beliefs and norms of a firm ("the way we do things here"). **Handy's four cultures: power** (one person or small group at the centre), **role** (clear rules and procedures), **task** (teams formed around projects), **person** (independent experts under one roof). **Culture clashes** arise after mergers, a new leader or entry into another country, leading to conflict, low motivation and staff turnover.

AHL – industrial relations: employees act together through **trade unions**. Methods: **collective bargaining**, **work-to-rule**, **overtime ban**, **strike**. Employers may use threats of closure, lockouts, or offer improved terms. Ways to settle conflict: **negotiation**, **conciliation** (a third party helps both sides agree), **arbitration** (a third party decides).

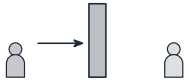
Answer shapes: identify the barrier or culture → explain the effect on staff and performance → suggest an improvement → judgement.

2 Practice

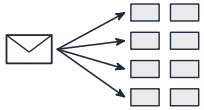
2.1 Distinguish between formal and informal communication. [2]



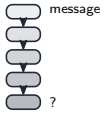
2.2 State **two** barriers to effective communication. [2]



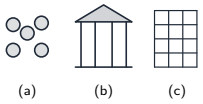
2.3 A manager tells 40 staff by email that their shift patterns will change next month. Explain **two** reasons why this may be an ineffective method. [4]



2.4 Explain how a tall organizational structure can create a barrier to communication. [3]



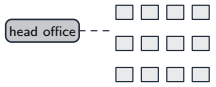
2.5 Identify Handy's culture type in each firm: (a) a law firm of independent experts; (b) a government tax office with strict procedures; (c) a design agency that forms teams for each client. [3]



3 Exam-style questions

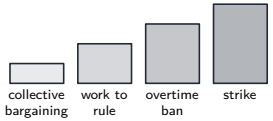
3.1 Brightline Logistics has 600 drivers and warehouse staff in 12 depots. It has seven levels of management and an autocratic chief executive. Instructions reach depots weeks late, and drivers complain that nobody listens to their ideas about routes. Staff turnover has risen to 28%.

Discuss how Brightline could improve communication and motivation. [10]



3.2 Brightline's drivers' union asks for a 6% pay rise. Managers offer 2%. The union threatens an overtime ban, then a strike.

Explain **two** methods the union may use and **one** way the dispute could be resolved. [6]



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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

formal: through official channels set by the organization, e.g. meetings, reports; informal: outside official channels, e.g. conversations, the grapevine

2.2

any two: jargon or language differences; too much information; long chain of command; wrong channel; physical distance or time zones; cultural differences; lack of trust

2.3

any two, explained: no chance for immediate questions or two-way feedback, so misunderstandings remain; bad or sensitive news by email may feel impersonal and lower motivation; some staff may not read it or may misread it, so rumours spread

2.4

many levels / a long chain of command; the message passes through many people, so it is slow; and may be changed or distorted at each level before it reaches the workers

2.5

(a) person culture; (b) role culture; (c) task culture

3.1

award up to [10]: problem: seven levels slow and distort messages; autocratic style gives one-way communication and ignores drivers' knowledge; options: delayer to shorten the chain of command; but costs, overload of remaining managers, and fear of job loss; more democratic or consultative style with regular depot meetings and feedback; motivation: involving drivers meets esteem and relatedness needs (Maslow/Deci and Ryan); empowerment of depot managers to act on route ideas; communication tools, e.g. a driver app for quick updates, with training; judgement on priorities, e.g. two-way communication first because it is cheap and fast; conclusion linked to the 28% turnover

3.2

any two methods, explained: collective bargaining: negotiating for all members; overtime ban / work-to-rule: limits output without a full strike; strike: stops deliveries and puts strong pressure on the firm; resolution: conciliation (a third party helps both sides reach agreement) or arbitration (a third party decides); explained in context

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