

SPOKEN ENGLISH FOR INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE (SEFIC)

LEVEL 4 – SET A

Section A - General Conversation

Section B - Special Topic

Instructions

Examiner to:

- listen to the presentation without interruption
(allow 5 minutes minimum, 10 minutes maximum)
- ask questions on aspects of the presentation for the discussion phase
(5 minutes minimum)

Candidate to:

- hand their written summary of the special topic to the examiner
- present the topic
- respond fully and appropriately to the examiner's questions

REDUNDANCY

Instructions

Examiner to:

- explain procedure
- play the introduction
- stop the recording after the introduction, allowing the candidate sufficient time to note the speakers' details (and check with the candidate that the sound level is acceptable)
- play the dialogue
- ask the candidate to give a summary of the dialogue (see **key points** below)
- ask any necessary follow-up questions, and ask for the candidate's opinions or predictions regarding the issues raised in the dialogue
- take in all notes made by the candidate.

Candidate to:

- listen to the recording (and make notes if they so wish)
- give a summary of the dialogue (see **key points** below)
- answer any follow-up questions, and give their opinions or predictions regarding the issues raised in the dialogue.

Key points

- the relationship between the speakers and the circumstances of the meeting
- the importance for openness and honesty when dealing with job cuts
- Phil's attitude at first
- different ways of avoiding redundancy – flexible working, annualised leave, re-training
- references to examples given of other companies
- what to do if job cuts are the only option – helping staff to find alternative employment etc
- potential pitfalls to watch out for
- Phil's view by the end of the conversation

Discussion questions

- Why do you think Phil was initially unreceptive to some of the ideas put forward by Cathy?
- Do you think these methods are truly effective?
- Do you think a company should spend extra money on re-training its employees or helping them to find other work if they are made redundant?
- (From your experience) how would an organisation in your country deal with the issue of redundancy?

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LEVEL 4 – SET A

Section C - Listening Comprehension

REDUNDANCY

Tapescript

Cathy Sanderson is an adviser on employee relations. She is talking to Phil Cox, a Human Resources manager for a large supermarket chain, Kesco's. They are discussing the problem of making redundancies.

CATHY Hello Phil. Good to meet you. I hope I can be of some help to you.

PHIL Yes – I'm pretty worried about the amount of redundancies we may have to make this year. I'm wondering how best to go about it. I mean, we've done everything we can to avoid it, but now we are just going to have to make some cuts.

CATHY Well, in my experience the best way is to treat staff with openness, respect and generosity. It's the way you introduce the job cuts which is important.

PHIL It all sounds good, but impossible to put into practice. I mean, how do you make redundancy a positive thing for someone? I mean, that's just being idealistic, isn't it? Not to mention the negative effect it has on staff who remain – all their trust and loyalty is damaged - something we've prided ourselves on building here at Kesco's,

CATHY Well, yes, of course I agree. But if a company is making great efforts to explore other options, this can make a real difference. For example, some companies retrain staff to work in other departments, or they offer paid or unpaid leave. Take KPCD, for example - they had to make 78 job losses last year, and are in the process of making another 150 job cuts this year, but they are also offering staff part-paid 6-month sabbaticals, and encouraging workers to move to other areas where they are actually short of staff.

PHIL That may work for a different kind of company. But we're a supermarket chain – our workers aren't going to be interested in sabbaticals!

CATHY Have you asked them?

PHIL Well, no – but – well, it just sounds like having to spend more money to me.

CATHY There are other ways, you know, which you might find useful here. What about re-evaluating working hours? Kesco's must have seasonal fluctuations, so you might be able to switch to a system of annualised hours.

PHIL How would that work, then?

CATHY Well, the staff might do five 12-hour shifts per week in December, for example, but then only work three days a week in January. Another similar idea which might work for you is to encourage flexible working hours. A recent survey by the Trade Union Congress has shown that around 35% of staff would like to work flexible hours but aren't given the opportunity.

Tapescript (continued)

- PHIL We already offer quite a lot of flexible hours, mainly to female staff at the moment. Perhaps a mixture of retraining, annualised hours and more flexible hours will help. But even with that I know that we'll definitely have to make some cuts. It really is unavoidable.
- CATHY So then it comes back to what I was saying earlier – openness and honesty should come first. Giving a full explanation of why job losses are being made and whether there may be more is much easier for employees to accept than trying to hide it from them or evading the issue.
- PHIL And then what?
- CATHY Here's another example – the Whitwheat Hotel Company, which was very hard hit by the downturn in the travel industry, made 109 job cuts 2 months ago. They had to restructure the company completely. So all the affected managers were gathered together, told about the changes, and invited to apply for the new management jobs. Whitwheat also used a recruitment agency to help staff apply for other jobs, give them advice etc.
- PHIL Yes, some of our people have been in the same job for years and have never had to write a CV. Also they'd need interview practice and advice on how to network. It's a good idea. But it will cost us more money, I suppose.
- CATHY Certainly some outlay will be necessary. But it'll be worth it in the long-term. You're enabling people to leave with their self-esteem intact and you're also giving out a strong message to those staff staying on that you're doing the best to try to help everyone.
- PHIL Well, you've given me some really useful ideas here. I can start to put together a package of different options to prepare ahead.
- CATHY I can't stress enough, though, that face-to-face involvement is essential. Management must be open and let staff know what is happening. Otherwise you run the risk of losing the most talented staff because they feel insecure.
- PHIL Yes – I can see that now. In fact, that is something we were definitely not going to do! Senior management has been discussing all this behind closed doors for months!
- CATHY Then you can bet that the staff already know about it anyway. Rumours will have circulated. And that usually only makes things worse.
- PHIL Oh yes, because it starts to erode trust and loyalty. No – I can see that really being upfront with the staff is a crucial step. Thank you so much for your insights. Really much appreciated.
- CATHY I'm only too glad to help. Here's my business card. Do feel free to give me a ring or e-mail me if you have any more questions or you just want to bounce some ideas off me.
- PHIL Thanks very much. I will. And I'll let you know how we're getting on!

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Section D - Reading Comprehension

Examiner to:

- select a reading passage for the candidate
- ask the candidate to study the text and the accompanying graph (allow 2 minutes maximum)
- ask the candidate to provide a brief summary of the text to demonstrate comprehension of gist
- ask at least 1 follow-up question requiring the candidate to draw information from both parts of the text – written and graphic
- test a selection of the underlined words (possible indicators of credit/distinction level)

Candidate to:

- study the text and accompanying graph
- provide a brief summary of the content
- answer any subsequent follow-up questions to demonstrate comprehension
- explain a selection of the underlined words

Passage 1 – HIGHWAY CAMERAS THAT CAN DIRECT TRAFFIC

Passage 2 – LOCAL PLAYERS IN GLOBAL COMPETITION

Passage 1

HIGHWAY CAMERAS THAT CAN DIRECT TRAFFIC

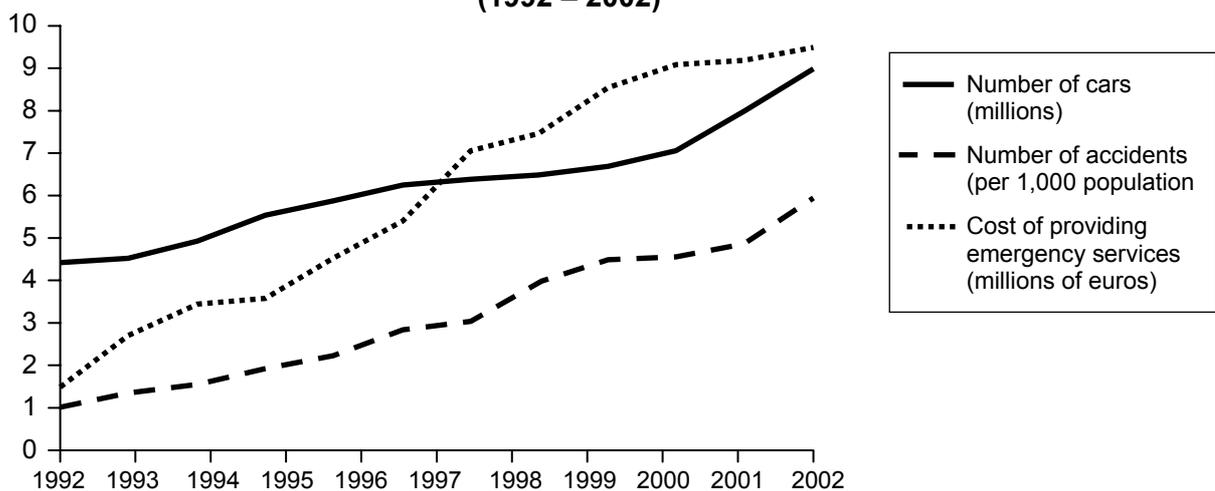
Heavy traffic is more than just an annoyance for harried commuters. The wasted hours, lost fuel, lost work hours and other effects of congested roads cost a fortune.

Scientists from the University of Warsaw are now developing clusters of networked smart cameras to improve transportation authorities' ability to respond to bottlenecks and traffic jams. If traffic builds up in one spot, for example, the cameras might automatically trigger electronic signs warning commuters heading that way – but still miles away – to take an alternative route.

Unlike the stand-alone cameras used today, the cameras in this experimental system share information over high-speed links and can interpret the information very fast. There is also another use for these cameras. In theory, if a roadside camera detected an accident it could send a wireless signal to a robotic camera which would move towards the accident to take close-up shots. This could help authorities provide more detailed information about the crash to police and ambulances, as well as allow doctors to observe victims and provide medical advice to ambulance workers as they're driving to the scene.

Graph 1

Increase in traffic/accidents/cost of providing emergency services over 10 years (1992 – 2002)



Questions

- What is the difference between this new technology and the present system of stand-alone cameras?
- What are the two ways that are mentioned in the text in which this new system may help?
- What does this graph show?
- Do you think this position might change in the future?

Passage 1

HIGHWAY CAMERAS THAT CAN DIRECT TRAFFIC

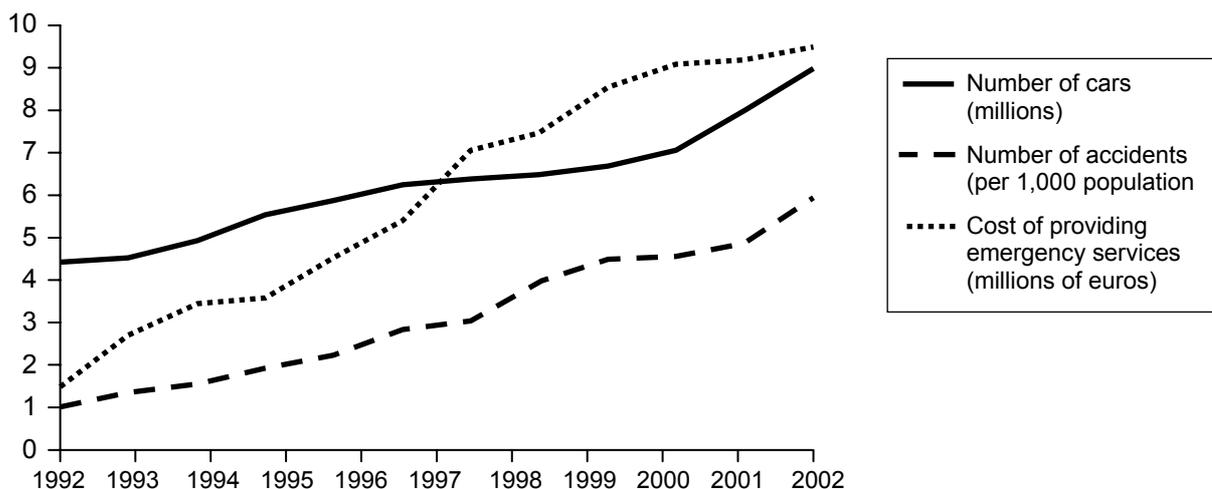
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Increase in traffic/accidents/cost of providing emergency services over 10 years (1992 – 2002)



Passage 2

LOCAL PLAYERS IN GLOBAL COMPETITION

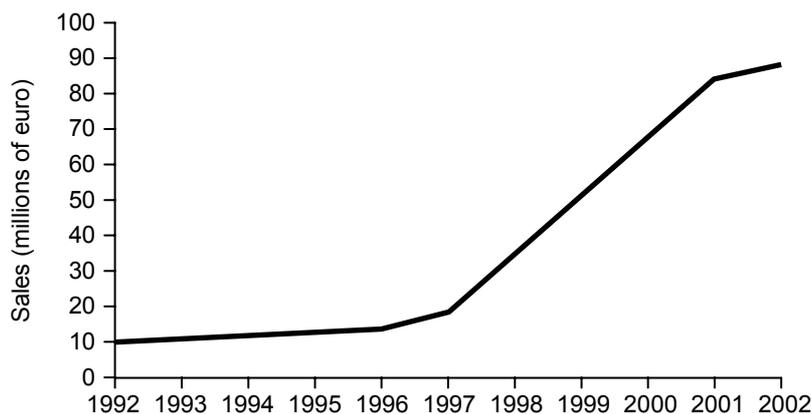
Car manufacturers are generally not keen on venturing into new markets alone. Most prefer to go in hand-in-hand with their trusted suppliers so that they can be sure they have access to the right components, even in remote locations.

Yet, the success of one Czech firm, the Brano Group, is a good lesson in how local players can thrive when globals venture into their territory. Brano made the car door locks for Skoda. When Volkswagen bought the Czech car manufacturer in 1996 they insisted on huge increases in productivity and quality from Skoda's suppliers.

Many local suppliers failed to meet VW's standards and were either taken over by West European suppliers or went out of business.

But those that hit the targets thrived, and Brano was one of them. It now has annual revenue of 100 million euros from the sale of components such as pedals, handbrakes, levers and doors. Profit margins now average 5% of sales. Brano's clients now include General Motors, Daimler Chrysler's Mercedes-Benz division and Russia's GAZ in Nizhny Novgorod. Companies like Brano need not fear the fresh wave of investment pouring in as the Czech Republic prepares to join the EU in 2004.

Graph 2

Annual Sales for Brano over the past 10 years (1992 – 2002)**Questions**

- Why are manufacturers generally not keen to venture into new markets alone?
- How did Brano manage to thrive in this environment?
- From the information given in the graph, how have the sales changed over the last 10 years?
- What has happened to cause this?
- Do you think this position will change in the future?

Passage 2

LOCAL PLAYERS IN GLOBAL COMPETITION

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