

Woman: Good morning, nice to meet you. Do sit down.

Man: Thank you.

Woman: Now, you're Human Resources manager of Jenkins, aren't you? Give me some background on the company – so I get a general picture.

Man: Stephen Jenkins founded the company nearly thirty years ago, and named it after himself, and he ran it for a long time. Last year one of our competitors proposed combining, with the idea that separately the two companies were too small to survive. They were probably right, but anyway Stephen turned down the offer. Then, because he was getting on, he handed over the day-to-day running to his daughter, Catherine, while retaining full control himself.

Woman: And you make children's clothes, don't you? Aren't there problems in the sector?

Man: Well, we mostly sell to retail chains, which sell them under their own brand labels. Things aren't as easy as they were, what with cheap imports, and the more expensive children's boutiques making inroads at the top end of the market. But we position ourselves in the middle range, so we're not too badly affected. We're under increasing pressure to cut our profit margins, though, because of growing competition between High Street retailers.

Woman: What would you say is the company's strength?

Man: It certainly helps that we supply those large retailers I mentioned, and in fact some of them have been customers for years. I suppose, though, that we wouldn't have survived this long if it wasn't for the fact that we won't send anything out unless it meets very exacting standards. Our customers appreciate that, plus the fact that we aim to keep the time from order to delivery very short, and they're prepared to pay a premium for it.

Woman: What about weaknesses?

Man: Well, we've got a poor record in providing training on the machines we're currently using. And I have to say that Stephen used to run the company in a very old-fashioned, autocratic way, which alienated a lot of the workers. Despite Catherine's more enlightened approach, it's an uphill struggle to try to change attitudes and improve co-operation.

Woman: Never an easy task!

Man: No.

Woman: You mentioned on the phone that there's a problem with a particular group of workers.

Man: Yes, there's a very high turnover among the machinists, that's the people who actually make the

clothes. They say they're faced with unreasonable demands all the time, like having to learn to operate several machines instead of just one or two. Many of them think they could get an easier job for the money, because there are plenty of other jobs on offer locally. The reasonably healthy state of our order books gives them a certain amount of job security, but they just don't seem to care.

Woman: How's their work organised?

Man: We've changed to a 'sectionalised flow' approach, which means the machinists work in teams. Rather than each machinist being assigned a complete item of clothing, the work is divided into batches involving various operations, each of them undertaken by one machinist. As that person finishes, the work is passed on to the machinist responsible for the next stage.

Woman: Has that had any impact on what you produce?

Man: Yes, it's enabled Catherine to introduce a policy of rapid diversification of the product range, so the number of itemised clothes has leapt. That's the total number of different styles, in all the different sizes. And that's reduced batch sizes: long runs on an item are a thing of the past. At least half the styles used to be carried through from one year to the next, but now only a quarter are, so as you can see, it's had quite an impact on the rate of change.

Woman: What's the effect on the machinists?

Man: That policy was part of a raft of changes, one of which is that the machinists are now paid on a piecework basis, rather than at an hourly rate. They're furious about that, though to be fair, the rate that's paid for learning to use a new machine has been calculated so as to make sure that no-one loses out in the short term. And they're also aggrieved because so much is new, and far more batches of work fail quality inspections and have to be redone.

Woman: Now tell me something about training...

[pause]

Now listen to the recording again.

[pause]

That is the end of Part Three. You now have ten minutes to transfer your answers to your Answer Sheet.

Note: Teacher, stop the recording here and time ten minutes. Remind students when there is one minute remaining.

[pause]

That is the end of the test.