

LOCATION SWANSEA

LLEOLIAD ABERTAWE

LEVEL 7

LEFEL 7

**EXAMINATION PERIOD
MAY 2022**

**CYFNOD ARHOLIADAU
MAI 2022**

MODULE TITLE: Human Resource Management in Context

MODULE CODE: BMHR7004

TIME: 2 HOURS

INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES:

A copy of the article (section 1) will have been provided three weeks prior to your exam.

Answer all questions in section 1. Answer either question A or B for each question in section 2. You should answer a total of 6 questions, 3 in section 1 and 3 in section 2. You must answer all 6 questions in order to achieve a pass. The questions in section 1 are worth a total weighting of 40 marks whilst the questions in section 2 carry a total weighting of 60 marks, so you should plan your word count to reflect this. Word count: 2500 words +/- 10%.

This is an open book exam and you may refer to any sources whilst completing your answers. Your answers (clearly labelled and in one document) should be uploaded to Turnitin by 2pm on Thursday 19th May 2022. Academic honesty is required. In the main body of your submission you must give credit to authors on whose research and ideas your work is based. Append to your submission a reference list that indicates the books, articles, etc. that you have used, cited or quoted in order to complete this assessment. You should complete this task on your own and without collaboration with others.

SECTION 1:

Case Study:

People Management

Covid enabled Severn Trent to supercharge its strategy

28 Feb 2022 By Caitlin Powell

The water company was able to rethink and improve its long-term plans, despite initially being derailed by the global pandemic

Although it might be more synonymous with Ross Geller's futile attempts to get a sofa up a flight of stairs in that episode of Friends, the word 'pivot' also unexpectedly became a buzzword for Severn Trent in 2020, after it was forced to rethink on its plans to improve employee experience when the pandemic hit.

The water company's work had been in the offing since 2018, yet just a month before it was due to start delivering, Covid reached UK shores. Rather than waver or deviate from its plan, the firm instead worked to "supercharge" it and bolster support for its 7,000 employees.

"It really helped people during that time to know that, while everything outside was uncertain, when they came into work, we knew what we were doing," explains group HR director Neil Morrison, who said the company's approach remained steadfast: "This is the plan, no excuses. We're going to deliver this."

As a regulated company, Severn Trent presents a business plan every five years explaining how it will deliver for its customers and employees. For its HR department, the 2020-25 submission was focused on engaging colleagues and allowing them to feel like they own the company's targets.

Part of this planning process was its 'Bike on the Boat Tour', the concept of which was inspired by a New Zealand team that competed in the America's Cup race with bikes on their boat: lateral thinking which revolutionised its performance. "The whole point was to look at a problem in a different way, with creativity and innovation," Morrison says. "We wanted to ask all our colleagues how we should approach the way they think about the service we provide differently."

The firm's CEO hosted nearly 80 hour-and-a-half-long events over eight weeks, under the 'Bike on a Boat' project, speaking to employees about the innovation they wanted. Having set its KPIs and presented them to 1,000 senior management team members at an event held in an airport hangar, the company hosted another event to kick off the plan in 2020, only – mere weeks later – to be forced to "pivot" as lockdown measures were introduced.

With 40 per cent of staff unable to go into the workplace and the other 60 per cent deemed 'essential' workers, Morrison describes how this split the organisation into distinct groups – but that the company managed to make it work. "Very early on, we decided not to furlough anyone and not make any redundancies," he says. "We would still pay bonuses if we hit our

targets, and that was also really important because people's partners were being furloughed or losing their jobs."

As the pandemic developed, Severn Trent ran a regular CEO video blog, a cross-company news bulletin and communications distilling government messaging on restrictions. "We tried to create experiential learning and communications to help people process information in a way that made sense for them," Morrison explains. But because much of its staff are frontline workers who do not spend their working day in front of a computer, not everyone was able to receive the emails, so Severn Trent also introduced 'Comms Cells', an area on the walls with information employees needed to know.

During the first year of all its changes, despite the challenges of the pandemic, employee engagement increased 2.5 per cent, with an average employee rating of 8.3 out of 10, putting Severn Trent in the top 5 per cent of utility companies globally. According to Morrison, this achievement has continued steadily, remaining at this high level. The company's impressive work in this area also ensured it took home the trophy for 'Best employee experience' at the 2021 CIPD People Management Awards. "All of these measures indicate that people are enjoying what they're doing," Morrison says. "The quality of feedback shows staff are invested in making things better and helping to deliver which, to me, is a sign of success."

Prior to the pandemic, Severn Trent had also launched employee inclusion and diversity advisory groups for LGBTQ+, ethnic minority and disabled staff, and they too were "supercharged" after Covid's emergence, quickly becoming key to the firm's response. "We recognised that everyone was going through a different kind of experience in the workplace, so it was quite easy to take our 'lunch and learn' sessions or Black History Month celebrations virtual, for example," Morrison explains. "The groups created communities working together to talk about what was going on, so people could share things that matter to them, rather than us telling them what to do."

But when restrictions were lifted during the summer of 2020, Severn Trent was quick to bring as many people back to the workplace as possible. "Our performance is better when we are collaborating because of the nature of our business: a 24/7, 365-days-a-year essential service," he explains. "Having people together is really important to be able to solve problems."

So, what next for Severn Trent? Excitingly, the company will be contributing to the Commonwealth Games, hosted in the Midlands later this year. Employees will be volunteering during the event but also act as baton bearers in the run-up. "This is a major sporting event taking place on our doorstep that should be something we're all really proud of," Morrison says.

But despite impressive data and award wins, the firm isn't done pushing employee experience further. "We've had real co-creation with our colleagues and our communities, feeling very much connected to what we're doing, and I don't see that changing at all," Morrison says. "It's a fundamental part of our DNA."

END OF CASE STUDY

All answers should be justified as far as possible using appropriate theory and evidence

Section 1

Read the attached case study. Answer all three of the following questions, taking care in each case to fully justify the arguments you make.

1. In light of recent global events and widespread disruption to businesses critically analyse the value of long-term planning in organisations, both from an organisational and HR point of view. Make reference to the actions of Severn Trent and an organisation you are familiar with, to inform your answer (10 marks).
2. Critically analyse the value of environmental analysis tools such as PESTLE and SWOT, to help with the formulation of organisational and HR strategy (10 marks).
3. Critically analyse the skills required by HR professionals and the way the HR function could be organised to support the organisation through an era of constant change, drawing on priorities mentioned in the case study and your own organisation (20 marks).

Section 2 (Not based on the article)

Answer either A or B in each section (20 marks each).

To communicate your answers more clearly, you may use whatever methods you wish, for example diagrams, flowcharts, bullet points; you need to provide an explanation of each.

2.1

- a. Critically analyse how technology can be embraced by organisations to aid their long-term sustainability, without impacting the workforce in a negative way.

OR

- b. Critically analyse the external influences and competitive forces that have made recruitment and retention major issues for many organisations, and the strategies HR departments can deploy to keep their organisations well placed in the labour market at the current time.

2.2

- a. The pandemic has raised the profile of flexible working and demonstrated its feasibility and benefits to many previously cynical employers. Critically evaluate the impact on organisations if public policy took this concept one step further and suggested that organisations strongly consider implementing a standard four-day working week.

OR

- b. Critically analyse why open and inclusive cultures will continue to be important if organisations are to successfully navigate these turbulent times. Suggest ways organisations can help make their workplaces more open and inclusive.

2.3

- a. Critically examine to what extent legislation or government policy (excluding pandemic-related legislation and government policy) has impacted on your organisation or an organisation you are familiar with, in the last 5-10 years and whether or not the effects have been positive or negative.

OR

- b. Whilst the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of technology in organisations, the fuel crisis and global conflict has placed greater emphasis on the need for alternative energy sources and a responsible attitude towards protecting the planet. Please argue the business case for going beyond adhering to current environmental legislation and driving this agenda forward in your organisation or an organisation you are familiar with.