

Provide approximately 800 words which details how employment relations has been affected at your organisation as a result of the recent global pandemic of COVID 19. Examples could include furlough of employees, updating your remote working policy, maintaining regular communication updates across the workforce, increase in sickness levels from key workers, a huge ramp-up (such as delivery drivers) or decline of work activities, increased or decreased engagement, a better relationship between SMT and the workforce or more tensions with the same etc.

My job role is to manage a contingent workforce of manufacturing employees at Dow Silicones for recruitment agency Adecco, many of the contingent workers have been there 10 years+ and are therefore well integrated into the organisation. Employment relations were affected in many ways throughout the Covid19 pandemic. Initially without the government announcement of the furlough scheme then not knowing whether this would cover agency workers Dow held a meeting to advise they were looking at ending the assignments of the agency workers to account for potential order dips and allow for social distancing in the production area. We asked them to hold off from doing this until we knew whether furlough would cover agency workers, with the reasoning that they were skilled workers with it taking up to 3 years to train for the roles they were in, if they were to be laid off, when market conditions increased again it could mean they will find work elsewhere and not be loyal to Dow believing they were not loyal to them during the tough time. When it was confirmed the furlough scheme was available Dow decided that 50% the agency workforce would be moved onto the scheme, and a new shift pattern was created to allow for social distancing at work along with mask wearing. We communicated as often as possible with all employees and held virtual meetings regularly to ensure employee voice was coming through, we also set up a focus group for the covid19 crisis whereby each shift and production area had 1 person as a focal point to communicate to, with those people then having a weekly meeting with senior management. I held calls every two weeks with furloughed employees to check on their wellbeing. Due to the product, we make, the employees were classed as key workers which initially came with some resistance with employees who were cautious and scared of the virus not wanting to come to work. We ensured the safety of those who were vulnerable or had family who were in the risk category by giving them the option of being furloughed. Three months into the pandemic and with half our workforce furloughed our orders increased dramatically due to companies within the EU wanting to stockpile products due to Brexit and the pandemic, we therefore had to put a plan together to bring those that could be brought back safely off furlough, opening more areas for production on our site. Sickness was at a higher rate with employees contracting Covid or needing to isolate due to close contact and therefore we needed to set up a way to cover these employees, we held various conversations with our employees on the best options for this and with their feedback set up a primary cover rota with a premium overtime payment for those who covered the shift. A better relationship with management was established through the pandemic and engagement was increased as there was a feeling of 'we are all in this together' employees also felt they were well looked after and cared for by the organisation by how seriously the virus was taken, how those who were vulnerable / at risk were able to stay on furlough, and our onsite occupational health team were on hand throughout, along with payment of bonuses to thank employees for working through difficult times.