

Qualification: CIPD Diploma in Applied Human Resources

Understanding the Management of Employee Relations -On the Job Submissions

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Signed:



Date: 4 January 2022

How has employment relations been affected at your organisation as a result of the recent COVID-19 global pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic began in China on 31 December 2019 and reached the UK in January 2020 (Safi 2020). This global pandemic has completely changed the way in which we work, communicate, and collaborate.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Bluestone enormously. As a large holiday resort, we were forced to close from 23 March 2020. All employees remained on full pay until the end of March, before 90% of our 700 strong workforce were placed on furlough. Skelton teams of Security, Maintenance, Sales and People Services weren't furloughed to ensure the resort was maintained during this period of closure. Sales and People Services worked from home during the first lockdown. Working from home isn't something Bluestone has ever offered before, meaning remote working, and working from home processes and policies needed to be implemented.

To maintain positive employment relations during this time, communication took priority- keeping in touch with fellow colleagues in the same department and those working in other departments using Zoom, email, and phone calls. Conflict during this time was inevitable, some employees struggled when others in their department/organisation had been placed on furlough, but they faced increasing work demands. When this occurred, we encouraged managers to have supportive conversations with these employees so they understand the importance of their role, why they haven't been furloughed and how we can support them through these unprecedented times.

In less than three weeks of closure our Adventure Centre was transformed into 'Ysbyty Enfys Carreg Las' a 144-bed recovery and rehabilitation centre for Covid-19 patients. This took just 26 days. When this work began an additional 14 employees were brought in to feed the 150+ contractors. The Security team and People Services Teams were under considerable pressure to ensure and facilitate a safe and supportive return to the physical workplace.

To keep furloughed employees informed and updated during these uncertain times, Bluestone @WorkandHome was created. This is a bi-weekly newsletter emailed to all employees- detailing any changes on resort, updates to policies and links to our company well-being services for employees to access as and when needed.

The resort reopened on 6 July 2020 with a large number of restrictions in place including two metre social distancing, one-way systems, mandatory face coverings and limits on household mixing. This meant that Bluestone needed to change the way we work and support our employees throughout this. The Security team and People Services Teams were once again under considerable pressure to ensure a safe and supportive return to the physical workplace. We organised a COVID-Secure Induction and 2 e-learning modules- Coronavirus Customer Service and Coronavirus Staying Safe which all employees needed to complete before returning to the workplace. This aimed to ensure all employees felt safe and confident to return to work as well as communicating legislation updates and explaining how these have been implemented across resort. For example, in F&B outlets, tables had to be placed 2 metres apart with a limit of six people per table. To overcome this, we changed the way we worked, all outlets now offered both sit in and takeaway options which we had never done before, this led to a recruitment drive as we needed delivery drivers to ensure this was possible.

Resort remained open and at full capacity until Mark Drakeford introduced a 'firebreak' which started on Friday 23 October and ended on Monday 9 November. During this period, we temporarily laid employees off to avoid redundancies. This led to conflict between employees and senior management which contributed to employee turnover and negatively impacted employee relations.

Since this 'firebreak' lockdown Bluestone has endured further lockdowns and restrictions which are constantly being both added and taken away. This is negatively affecting engagement levels as employees are constantly needing to adjust to new ways of working whilst facing growing work demands. Due to this we are facing increased absence and turnover levels from almost all departments which is also having a knock-on negative effect on engagement levels and employee relations.

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused huge implications to employee relations in Bluestone, both positive and negative. We are finding that our employees have better relationships with senior management as they are most present on the 'frontline' and are constantly communicating, consulting, and supporting employees. However, increasing absence levels and high turnover is contributing to negative employee relations and leading to conflict. We strive to resolve all conflict in a timely and efficient matter, the method for doing so varies based on the form of conflict.

Bibliography

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