

UK Business Awards 2021

Entry Identification

Entry Title	██
Organisation Name	████████████████████
Category Entered	Team of the Year - Large Organisation
Organisation Description	████████ is a leading national water retailer, dedicated to helping businesses drive down water use and lower their utility bills. ██████████ supports over ██████████ customers across the UK to benefit from the non-household water market in England since it opened in April 2017. With approximately ██████████ people working across two offices across the UK, we pride ourselves on providing a happy, healthy place to work, with a culture everyone is proud to be part of.
Precis for awards e-brochure	Within its first 3 years, ██████████ has won awards for its culture and approach to its people. Covid-19 presented the biggest challenge so far, yet ██████████'s employees have thrived during this time. Engagement, creativity, involvement and trust in our people has led to a great employee experience in a crisis

Criteria

Summary and Business Strategy

Provide an overview of the entire initiative, capturing the most important information from beginning to end. What was the background of the initiative? How did it meet the strategic needs of the business? For the Business Heroes categories include an overview of the role and responsibilities of the team/individual.

Covid-19 presented a huge challenge to ██████████ (a B2B company) for a number of reasons; the potential impact on our people and their families, finding a way to work from home when 1/3rd of our employees were phone based, keeping ██████████ afloat when so many of our customer's businesses were closing down due to lockdown and we would potentially suffer a huge revenue loss. At the heart of all of this was going to be how we treated our people during the crisis, to enable productivity to maintain but not at the expense of anyone's mental health. This

was going to require a bespoke team.

The HR Director set up a Covid-19 Project team in March 2020, with one other Director, a dedicated project manager and the Support Services Manager. There were four other co-opted people who joined fortnightly meetings, someone from systems, Learning and Development, internal communications and the CEO. The core team met weekly, and the [REDACTED] Board was updated monthly. Daily communications were issued to all employees and all ideas were either generated by, or consulted with, the [REDACTED] forum. Surveys were issued to all employees so the project planning was data driven, and feedback was regularly obtained in new fortnightly virtual all employee business update calls. Metrics were developed for planning for office returns and a whole new virtual approach was adopted to e-learning, communications and ways of engagement.

We have had overwhelmingly positive qualitative feedback from all levels of the organisation and [REDACTED]% of our people rated our support of them through the pandemic as 'Excellent'.

Goals and Objectives

What were the specific goals and objectives of the initiative? What business benefits did the initiative set out to achieve?

Maintaining attendance

Initially [REDACTED] worried that absence could increase hugely due to people contracting Covid-19, caring for loved ones with the virus, or suffering from mental health related absence. Wave wanted attendance to not slip below [REDACTED]% throughout the pandemic to ensure a level of productivity required by a start-up/young business.

Moving to homeworking

The team had to work with relevant stakeholders to make a seamless switch to working from home for the entire workforce while maintaining customer response levels.

Covid-19 Communications

Communications were to be owned by this team with an aim of educating employees with all the Government advice and rules, but in a way that they understood and engaged with. In addition in these new times, it had to advise the Leadership team on the best way to stay in contact with all [REDACTED] employees while being entirely remote from our offices.

Low employee Turnover

We set out to keep our regrettable losses below [REDACTED]% at a time we knew it would be imperative to keep all of our good employees.

Health & Safety

Another goal was to keep our people thinking Health and Safety, even when they weren't in the office and this was something both our Shareholders wanted evidence of.

Employee Engagement

With an employee survey to conduct late in 2020, the aim was to at least maintain the employee engagement score from the previous year of █%. So much research shows that supported and happy employees achieve far better results which in turn helps the business to provide great customer service and boosts brand reputation. To achieve this, the overarching Covid-19 Project Team objective was to keep our people connected and feeling supported while working from home.

Most importantly, we wanted to see a positive improvement in our customer review scores which measure how our employees treat them in any interactions.

Implementation and Stakeholder Engagement

How was the initiative implemented? Was there an opportunity to plan? Who was involved and how was communication maintained? What was the leadership model and who were the relevant stakeholders? How were their needs identified and understood, and how were they and others engaged in the process?

The project team was set up by the HR Director within days of the Government announcing that Covid-19 was taking hold of England. The team consisted of a senior member from HR, Systems, Facilities, █, Industrial and Commercial (large section of the business), a project manager and the CEO. A sub-group was also established that included staff from HR, facilities, a manager from customer facing teams and the internal Communications advisor. A specific budget was not applicable to this project as it was more about how we treated people, how we communicated with them, plans for working from home etc. The Covid-19 project plan had weekly or monthly deliverables and a communications plan ran throughout. A decision was taken early on to begin daily communications written initially by the HR Director, that updated all employees with Covid-19 facts and information as being released by the government. This continued for the first month and then Covid-19 specific communications went out once or twice a week and upbeat internal communications were issued daily. That has continued all the way through the pandemic and has focused on top tips, mental health boosters, recipes, sharing of advice in home schooling, budget savers etc. Employees asked for these to continue and have themselves contributed to the content on many occasions.

A near miss at home campaign was launched via the █ forum and all employees completed a special temporary working from home █ assessment which generated █ actions that enabled █ to address █ risk for everyone.

We developed our own visual metrics for a return to the office and these were communicated, alongside other business updates in new virtual fortnightly employee business update calls.

Every project action has been completed to time, and money saved from the

usual travel and accommodation budget was used to fund initiatives mentioned in later sections.

Innovation and Creativity

What was especially creative and innovative about the initiative? Was anything unique introduced or which proved an interesting twist and contributed to the overall success?

There have been many creative elements of the Covid-19 project from the daily upbeat communications that have been going for a year with overwhelming feedback, through to the idea of starting a [REDACTED] virtual walk around the UK coastline to keep physical health going while virtually connecting to colleagues. The latter, [REDACTED]'s [REDACTED], got so many people involved that employees asked for another walk when this was completed. They are now walking Route 66 and they have even made a [REDACTED] accompanying soundtrack on [REDACTED].

The change in [REDACTED]'s [REDACTED] approach has been extremely successful with our mandatory e-learning module take-up going from around [REDACTED]% to [REDACTED]%. We have worked with external learning partners to update resilience training, have stopped work for every employee to allow them to take part in a 2 hour session on how to cope with living with the current uncertainty and have provided [REDACTED] learning for their families as well as for them. [REDACTED] has provided material on home-schooling and has worked with so many different people to agree ways of working to deliver business needs but balanced with their own unique home circumstances.

Perhaps the most innovative was bringing in a psychologist specialising in burnout and trauma. A 90-minute session was rolled out across the organisation, beginning with our phone-based teams who were dealing with angry or emotional customers on a daily basis. One particular team who had gone through redundancy consultation was then offered extended individual therapy to help them deal with the additional pressures on top of Covid-19.

The [REDACTED] team are now offering a range of lunchtime 'audience with' sessions with external specialist external speakers covering autism and aspergers, the [REDACTED] advising how to gradually going back to the office without upsetting pets who have been at home with owners for a year, financial education, and a range of health topics.

Impact and Benefits

What has been the the resulting impact on the business? What impact has this

initiative made on others within the business? What other benefits have been achieved in relation to the goals and objectives, and were there any additional unforeseen benefits?

11 months from beginning the Covid-19 project, [REDACTED] has seen a positive impact on the business that will help us flourish over the next few years. We were expecting a lower uptake of the employee survey as everyone was working from home, yet we had a [REDACTED]% response rate. Our employee engagement has increased by [REDACTED]%, in the most challenging of business years. [REDACTED]% of our employees said our support of them through the pandemic was excellent (with the remaining [REDACTED]% scoring good), and an incredibly high [REDACTED]% of employees said that they now strongly agreed their line manager cared about them as a person. Our new starters have given great feedback on their experience of joining the company remotely and our [REDACTED] is as strong as it has ever been. Our attendance rate is only just below [REDACTED]%, we have continued to provide qualified psychiatric assessment for all employees needing help, we are tackling topics our employees are requesting and we are seeing employee involvement like never before. We have not furloughed any employees and we have provided people with working from home toolkits as well as financial education ones, mental health toolkits and many 'lunch and learn' opportunities. The virtual book club continues to grow. Our customer NPS score that was at [REDACTED] before the pandemic, is now at [REDACTED] (on a scale from -100 to +100) and our [REDACTED] scores have soared to [REDACTED] which is categorised as excellent.

Accountability and Commitment within the Team

To what extent did each person understand their individual and the team's goals and objectives? How did they hold themselves and others accountable for delivery and teamwork? Could they depend on one another to deliver their own responsibilities?

The team was specifically set up to oversee the business' approach to Covid-19 and each person had a specific role, with the need to work together on some items. The project manager held the project plan, set all project meetings, created and monitored the action plan and then played a key part of the implementation of actions. The Industrial & Commercial Director chaired the Project teams and worked jointly with the HR Director to make and give presentations to all stakeholders throughout the Project life. The HR Director led communications, and then handed over daily communications to the Internal Communications Manager. She also set all employee and legal guidance and steered the Health, safety and wellbeing elements. All key decisions were run by the CEO for full buy-in. This demarcation of areas to subject specialists ensured

that each person understood their individual goals and the project team approach meant that they were also fully aware of the whole team's objectives. Some elements of this ambitious project were extremely large, for example purchasing a newly developed [REDACTED] module to ensure that all employees working from home were not going to sustain injuries by having incorrect workstations. Rolling that out to all employees generated [REDACTED] actions and although we divided these into different risk levels, each one carried a health and safety risk and so we took a whole team approach, training up [REDACTED] assessors and working our way through these.

The team were juggling this on top of their day jobs - with some elements of those day jobs being backfilled by others. In the first month there were daily evening calls at 6pm after the Government's press briefings as well as the comms to get written for the next morning and the only way we achieved so much was the total trust each member had in each other. Progress was measured weekly then fortnightly against action logs and if anyone was struggling with an objective, then someone else would step up and help so that the accountability existed both at individual and team level.

Not only have the project goals and objectives been met, but team members have gone on to receive recognition and even apply for promotions as a result of their experiences and achievements in this Covid-19 project team.