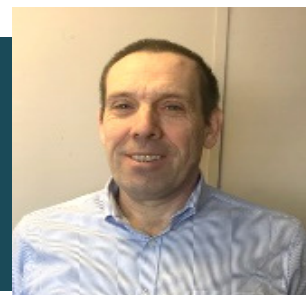




Case Study: Graham Smith Site Director at Emerald Kalama discusses the impact of COVID-19 on business operations

Emerald Kalama is a leading global manufacturer of specialty materials such as benzoic acid, benzaldehyde, and downstream chemistries, with a focus on flavour and fragrance ingredients, non-phthalate plasticizers, antimicrobials, synthesis intermediates, and rubber additives.



How many years have you worked for Emerald Kalama and in the industry?

I joined Emerald in October 2017 and have worked in the chemical industry since 1985. Most of this time was in agrochemical intermediate manufacture with Rhone Poulenc / Aventis / Bayer and prior to joining Emerald I worked for Speciality Chemical manufacturer William Blythe Ltd.

What is your role at Emerald Kalama?

As Site Director, I have overall accountability for the site operations and P&L for the UK entity. I have a passion for skills development in all areas of the workforce that really grew 15 years ago when I myself gained an MSc in Business Management and then achieved Chartered Manager status.

a Competency Management System (CMS) from which skills grids will be developed for all roles on site and Training Needs Analysis's (TNA) completed in order to assist in personal development plans and CPD.

“With respect to apprentices, four (2 Process and 2 Maintenance EC&I) were taken on in 2018 and in 2020, an Administration Apprentice has been taken on. In March 2020, six employees trained as SIP STEM Ambassadors.”

“Since then I have championed a number of workplace development initiatives and in 2013, William Blythe won the CIA Award for Skills Development for the bespoke Gold Standard programme that was executed across the operations group.”

Having successfully upskilled the operations group, it was necessary to upskill their managers and so a Leadership Team was established with first line managers studying for the Institute Leadership & Management (ILM) Level 3 and ILM Level 5. The group were also one of the first to complete the National Examination Board in Occupational Safety and Health (NEBOSH) for The Process Industries course. Whilst at William Blythe I recruited two Process Apprentices, the first the Company had taken on for over 30 years.

Now at Emerald, five new shift operators have been recruited which has allowed a 3 year competency and flexibility project to be established for the operations group (currently in year 1). A forerunner to this was generation of all the training materials that was completed during 2019 via the 'Emerald Academy'.

First line management training & development has started, in 2020 the NEBOSH for The Process Industries will be completed and in 2021, CMI Level 3 Management Training will start.

In order to ensure all other groups are included in the workforce development project, Emerald is now working with Cogent Skills to develop

What COVID-19 protocols have Emerald Kalama implemented?

As a chemical manufacturer Emerald have been fortunate to be able to continue running but only after assessing the risks and ensuring it was safe to do so. During lockdown, like many companies, those staff that could work from home did so or department member's attended on a rota basis in order to ensure key tasks were covered. The shift crews continued to work through but layouts to operational areas were modified to respect social distancing, sanitisation regimes were introduced, as were staggered start and finish times. Unfortunately, most contractors were stood down so only key breakdown cover was provided and Capex work was suspended. As lockdown was lifted, full site and departmental risk assessments were carried out using the guidance documents issued by the government and once further measures were implemented, the site was back to full attendance by early July.

In order to ensure ongoing compliance to the measures, members of the site management team on a weekly basis carry out formal audits of the whole site and employees and contractors are encouraged to carry out a more behavioural-based check sheet audit in their areas. Actions arising from the audits are tracked on a weekly basis by the management team.

How have apprentices helped to keep the site running through COVID and lockdown?

During lockdown, the apprentices worked mainly from home on college work or site generated learning materials. The main reason being that when on site they normally shadow other employees as part of their practical training and this would have caused some issues with social distancing and was further complicated by the rota systems in place. However since lockdown was lifted they have returned to work and are actively supporting the site operations subject to new working practices and are currently playing a key role in the annual shutdown.

Using the collaboration of SIP members to challenge providers to deliver bespoke content rather than having to accept an off the shelf offering also ensures value for money. When developing the Emerald CMS it will also allow benchmarking of existing roles to current industry best practice or mapping of skills for new roles.



5 new Process Operators, initially responsible for generating training materials through the Emerald Academy and now working on shift.

“Having a suite of new apprenticeship Standards developed by SIP members ensures that the skills learned will be relevant to the industry current needs.”



Current Apprentices at Emerald.

L-R. Adam Parker, Process Apprentice; Damon Holland, Process Apprentice; Dave Gravett, EC&I Apprentice; Joe Twist, EC&I Apprentice; James Gillaspay, Administration Apprentice

Any new working practices emerging because of COVID -19?

The importance of the risk assessment process and behavioural safety in compliance of everyday tasks not just those deemed as hazardous in operational environments. During lock down like many organisations, we used virtual training as this was the only mode of delivery available in most cases. Our experiences were mixed and found this to be down to either how easy the content was to deliver virtually,

how well the IT held up or how well the provider had thought through possible issues.

On site, one of the biggest compromises has been the reduction of occupancy in meeting rooms and steep decline in visitors that has led to an increase in external and internal virtual meetings primarily using Skype, Zoom and Teams.

Based on your own learnings, is there any best practice around skills that you would like to share?

- Always identify the need for the training or skills development – normally to satisfy business needs.
- Don't train for training sake – sometimes people's requests have to be refused if they are not relevant to business needs.
- Ensure skills can be utilised at the earliest opportunity, if they cannot then question why the training was needed?
- Where introducing new skills to a large group, run a change management project in parallel. This ensures a better understanding of the need, can flag up the barriers to success, and allows them to be addressed. This way the chances of success are increased and the project and its benefits realised earlier.
- Do not underestimate employee's willingness to develop themselves and take on new skills.

“Initiatives such as SIP Liverpool Plus and other regional clusters give businesses the opportunity to share common best practices and address common areas for improvement on a collaborative basis. Not only does this give value added solutions it ensures that skills delivery is bespoke to industry needs.”

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