

“Ethical dilemmas in the workplace during COVID-19”

The Occupational Health and Safety
Perspective

JOEP JOUBERT AND ASSOCIATES
**Occupational Safety, Health, Environment
and Quality Consultants**

- Some of the global challenges
- Specific Industry Challenges
- Ethical dilemmas

Some of the global challenges

- The size of the threat – physical and scope (virus vs machine guarding, whole workforce vs individual).
- Global threat – no hiding place (no obvious, logical solution from a safety perspective, a health issue being made a safety problem).
- Holistic, not a one-dimensional problem (safety likes to tackle things one by one).
- Health care systems globally under pressure (workers affected by something outside of safety's control).

Some of the global challenges

- The role of politics – power, self preservation (safety also jumped on the band wagon)
- Health vs freedom – and the human response (often expressed as discontent which safety had to deal with)
- Communication: saviour or scourge? (dealing with disinformation, extra effort into company communication)
- Global Inequality – government responses, economic threat (also manifested in larger and smaller companies)

Some of the global challenges – personal level

- Limitations to direct contact – social interaction
- Restrictions on movement and travel – migrant workers
- Changes to active lifestyle – fitness, health
- Boredom, monotony – finding other ways to amuse oneself potentially leading to accidents taking place at home
- Uncertainty about the future – trying to find the facts, getting more exposed to the flood of disinformation available

Specific Industry Challenges

1. Loss of jobs/income - potentially using unskilled people
2. Strict prescriptions into hygiene, distancing, PPE - cost implications for projects
3. Logistical challenges on construction sites - water, personnel rotation, PPE
4. Contact tracing - not effective, especially later
5. Recordkeeping for tracing purposes - value debateable
6. Safeguarding of sites during lockdowns
7. Knowledge/availability of information - managing perceptions

Ethical dilemmas

1. Availability of PPE - raising the question: Do I allow the people to come to work with less effective PPE, but trying to make the other controls stricter?
2. How strictly do I enforce the personnel rotation, knowing it will impact on project progress, after the lockdown where we lost a lot of time already?
3. My site is restricted, how do I manage social distancing? Especially in light of the lack of social distancing in transport and at home?

Ethical dilemmas

4. Later on, once it was 'proven' that transfer very seldom took place through contact, how do I enforce the cleaning regimes? On a more philosophical note, how does one really enforce measures he/she no longer believes? Either because of truth or perception?
5. From a training perspective the quality of training being done online vs face to face? Still issuing a certificate for regulatory training such as risk assessment or fire training, knowing full well the person was not competent?