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ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

LESSONS STILL NOT LEARNED FROM THE PANDEMIC



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Christine Adeline is senior vice president of product management and product marketing at SAI360. She has worked in the environment, health and safety (EHS) and sustainability software industry for more than 14 years in numerous capacities, from implementation and project management to advisory roles at some of the largest organisations in the market. Through working closely with leading industry analyst firms such as Verdantix, Gartner and Forrester, she has an enviable knowledge of the EHS software industry and its vision for the future.



R&C: The world has been dealing with the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic for almost two years. How has risk management changed for companies since March 2020 and what would you say are the biggest lessons learned?

Adeline: One of the biggest lessons is that businesses rely on people, and we have a duty to protect those people. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is a human health crisis and as such has put a greater focus on managing health and safety risks. We are seeing mental health and wellbeing getting more focus and managing risks like burnout that are associated with the 'whole person' has become more important. The 'Global Corporate 2021 Survey' by independent analyst firm Verdantix tells us that market data from wellbeing solutions providers support the idea that mental health has deteriorated, and that 94 percent of environmental, health and safety (EHS) decision makers expect to assume greater responsibility for employee mental health and wellbeing. There are more studies and data available to link presenteeism with reduced productivity and a damaged bottom line. We have also seen the need for EHS and operations to collaborate so organisations can manage risks holistically. Overall, COVID-19 has transformed how companies view and manage EHS risks, putting EHS in the spotlight for greater focus and development.

R&C: At the start of the pandemic, many companies were quick to dust off old business continuity plans, while those without one scrambled to implement programmes to restore and resume critical and essential functions. How has business continuity management (BCM) evolved? Have companies kept pace with those changes?

Adeline: Business continuity management (BCM) plans have traditionally been built to withstand single or specific incidents rather than the ongoing and constantly-evolving pandemic. Some existing plans are just not built to generate sufficient longer-term resilience. With the crisis management timeline stretched into months, companies have had to lean hard into collaboration, agility and resilience. Companies have also had to increase their perspective of risks that impact business continuity. EHS has become an integral element of BCM as companies restructure for distributed teams, digitalise for greater flexibility, and share data and insights to create an honest dialogue about the organisation's future. The pandemic showed the need to also account for the interdependence of environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks and factors like global warming and energy crises. The organisations best positioned to withstand the turmoil of long-term disasters are those that embed

ESG practices throughout the business instead of isolating it.

R&C: Digital transformation became the buzz phrase for much of the pandemic and the rapid proliferation of emerging technologies has made the business landscape that much more complex. What has been the fallout for companies as they increasingly rely on technology-centric operations?

Adeline: From our perspective, growing digitalisation has had a mostly positive impact on business outcomes and has not come with ‘fallout’, per se. However, there are challenges that hinder implementation. Slow adoption can become a problem when companies do not have proper change management, and the sheer volume of new technologies can be overwhelming. Organisations can fall into ‘pilot purgatory’, where they may do multiple pilots but never achieve large-scale adoption due to low funds and failure to learn quickly while adopting a fail-safe approach. Solutions are sometimes adopted for specific purposes with limited use and limited long-term return on investment, which reinforces silos that need to be broken down if the organisation is to become more agile and collaborative. The greatest risks come from

an IT and cyber security perspective. If companies are not putting effective processes and systems in place, the opportunity for successful cyber attacks and accidental data breaches does increase.

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*Christine Adeline,
SAI360*

R&C: At the start of the pandemic, contact tracing was a big point of contention. Now we are dealing with vaccine mandates and vaccine passports. How should companies best manage this increase in restrictions and are there any lessons to be learned from the early days of contact tracing?

Adeline: Contact tracing has had mixed results and mixed reviews since it began. Fluctuations and differences in public sentiment, general culture, rates of infection and rates of adoption have led to efforts

being less successful than initially anticipated. It is the same with vaccine mandates and passports. The greatest lesson learned is that increasing restrictions demand increasing digitalisation. As we have seen, contact tracing apps alone will not provide a lot of benefits. We need to combine a range of options to manage check-ins, symptom reporting, vaccination tracking and passports into a multipronged approach that generates better outcomes through integration. To stay agile in response to changing restrictions, you need your tools to be as digitalised and interconnected as possible, so if a new restriction crops up, your organisation has at least some of the infrastructure needed to implement it. **RC**