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President
Michael Sweetmore EngTech MSOE MIRTE LCGI
Chief Executive
Bruce McGill

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Registered Office
 22 Greencoat Place, London SW1P 1PR
 Tel: 020 7630 1111
 Fax: 020 7630 6677
 Email: soe@soe.org.uk
www.soe.org.uk

Editor
Will Dalrymple
 Email: will.dalrymple@markallengroup.com

Contributing Editors
Steve Banner, John Challen, Toby Clark, Laura Cork, Dan Gilkes, Peter Shakespeare, Richard Simpson, Chris Tindall, Lucy Radley, Brian Wall

Art Editor
Chris Charles

Production Manager
Nicki McKenna
 Email: nicki.mckenna@markallengroup.com

Advertisement Manager
Craig Molloy
 Email: craig.molloy@markallengroup.com
 Tel: 01322 221144

Publisher
Jon Benson

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Planning for the worst

During the first COVID lockdown, I had to adopt new ways of providing a critical support function to my organisation. I am the head of fleet and transport services for a large blue light emergency service. While facing many new challenges, I had to maintain fleet service levels and manage the welfare of staff who may have had to self-isolate for long periods.

The formation of a two-shift working pattern of staff in effect became our “bubble” approach.

A close eye on the fleet supply chain ensured the continued integrity of parts and equipment supply. We kept open lines of communication with manufacturers and their technical support provisions. In addition, we built up contingency stocks of high-use parts, such as brake components, tyres and general service parts.

While many business continuity plans are designed with short-term scenarios, with COVID-19, the plans had to be continually reviewed daily and weekly. In retrospect, operations should plan for months of disruption.

My organisation has to be very proactive in planning; there is no way we can use sub-contractors. We are reviewing and changing the way that we work, we use reflective learning and analyse what we did well and where we could improve. This is crucial as we prepared for the second wave.

A very cohesive team approach allowed for us to continue operations should a colleague become unavailable due to illness or self-isolation. I worked closely with my deputy (while socially-distanced), so we both understood what direction we were going, the decisions that were made and what we had to do to support front-line operations.

A learning point is that people naturally tend to work in a ‘silo’ mentality, just looking after their job without reflecting on the bigger picture. Sometimes you have to help, support and understand what other people do and what challenges they face in order to do your job effectively.



Michael Sweetmore
President, Society of Operations Engineers

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