

The Impact of Covid-19 on Facilities Management

Since the start of the pandemic, the work of Sébastien VANDEVENNE, Facility Officer at Benelux law firm NautaDutilh Avocats Luxembourg, has shifted 360 degrees. Every day, he makes sure the office is Covid-19-proof and that its employees can work safely in a pleasant environment. In this Q&A, Sébastien reflects on the challenges encountered and shares his thoughts on the future of workspaces.

What is your role within NautaDutilh Avocats Luxembourg?

I am responsible for the management and operation of the firm's infrastructure as well as the supervision and negotiation of contracts with service providers, such as cleaning, parking and security firms. I also try to identify areas for cost savings. Most importantly, I make sure our employees benefit from a pleasant, suitable and safe working environment.

What are the measures the firm has put in place since the start of the coronavirus crisis?



Together with Human Resources, we quickly divided our people into two alternating groups, making sure to maintain a balance on each floor and within each department, so that we could continue to work safely at the office. We ensured that social distancing measures could be respected at all times through the use of

Plexiglas dividers, where necessary, as well as floor markings, designated sensitive areas where only one person can enter at a time, areas for persons at risk, and of course the provision of face masks and hand sanitizer. We also introduced flexible workstations for employees who, for whatever reason, do not have the possibility to work from home or simply prefer being at the office. We furthermore reviewed all contracts with our main service providers, to ensure regular disinfection and aeration.

Did you have to make adjustments in the course of the past few months?

Indeed. We are facing an uncertain situation, which changes every day. We have to keep ourselves continuously informed of new developments in Luxembourg, as well as in neighboring countries, and adapt our actions and behaviour accordingly. We constantly need to ensure that we are in line with governmental guidelines, which entails reinforcing certain measures while relaxing others and keeping the safety of our employees in mind.

Since these are unprecedented times, how did you know which measures to implement?

Very early, in the beginning of April, we put in place a concrete action plan, in cooperation with our Human Resources team, to ensure a safe return to the office. At that time, there were no clear government or administrative guidelines. We conducted research, looked at what other companies were doing, and took away what was most relevant to our organisation and infrastructure.

We integrated each personal situation into the plan and fine-tuned it over the course of weeks. From the outset, I was in regular contact with my facility services colleagues in Belgium and the Netherlands to discuss the actions being taken at our other offices and share best practices. As I was alone at the office at that time, I could test every measure repeatedly.

Which challenges have you faced?

At the beginning of the crisis, it was difficult to obtain the necessary materials at a reasonable price, as there were huge shortages. We also had to make sure the new safety measures were respected by everyone. The main challenge, however, was to remain sufficiently flexible and creative so that we could rapidly respond to changes and keep up with the latest measures as

the situation unfolded. In Luxembourg, we also have to keep an eye on the rules and regulations in Belgium, France and Germany. I have always been a confident person, and I try to remain upbeat when faced with challenges. The fact that we are proactive, constantly evolving and have been thinking ahead since day one really helps me to stay focused without feeling overwhelmed.

How do you see the situation evolving? Any projects on the horizon?

The pandemic is not over yet, but mindsets are already starting to change. The virus will undoubtedly have an enormous impact on our way of living and working. In the post-Covid-19 era, it is unlikely we will go back to the same landscape as before. We will probably have to review our workspaces and keep an eye on costs while continuing to provide high-quality service. The way offices are used is expected to change; they may become places for creative cooperation and exchange, where employees come to interact with others. Home working will most likely become a more substantial part of corporate culture. This is a great time to start a conversation about teleworking and explore the new facilities challenges ahead!