

COVID-19 – a compliance perspective

Like everyone else, I have been bombarded by news regarding the current pandemic of the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes COVID-19 – the downside of a 24-hour news cycle. However, I have been especially interested in the response from a societal regulation perspective.

Regulation = behaviour change

Any regulation boils down to behaviour change: moving people and corporations from undesirable behaviour to desirable (or compliant) behaviour. In the case of the current pandemic, societal norms have become “undesirable” very quickly. It has become a case study in the rapid application of compliance theory across an entire population.

The trinity of compliance

To maximise the chances of compliant behaviour, there are three critical elements that are required, as shown below:



1. **Knowledge to comply** – There’s a long held common law principle that “ignorance of the law is no excuse”; though, having knowledge of requirements and expectations goes a long way in enabling compliance. This requires timely, concise, clear and consistent messaging. When a message becomes complex or messages conflict, the credibility of the those giving the message suffers.
2. **Ability to comply** – The ability to self-isolate and regularly wash hands can easily be taken for granted by many. When you start thinking of society as a whole, gaps in these abilities appear. It can be extremely difficult for those in share houses, hostels, nursing homes and correctional

institutions to self-isolate. Homeless people and rough sleepers are less likely to have access to the handwashing materials and facilities that are required in the current situation.

3. **Motivation to comply** – This would seem to be the easiest of the three requirements to fulfil: no-one wants to get sick with a potentially fatal disease or alternatively, infect someone else with a potentially fatal disease. However, the need to meet rent / mortgage payments, pay bills and put food on the table pushes back on this motivation. Not everyone can work from home and not everyone can afford to take an unplanned three to six-month break from work.

But, it’s not like a Meat Loaf song

Two of those elements will get you part way to your compliance goal (or, “Two Out of Three Ain’t Bad”), but you need all three elements to be truly successful in achieving compliance.

Learnings to be captured

I am not going to offer any commentary on how the authorities are handling the current pandemic from a compliance perspective. I know they are all doing the best they can in very trying circumstances.

However, once the crisis has passed, the learnings from this situation must be captured and systems, plans and processes reviewed accordingly. This is critical to ensuring that the response to a future situation of a similar nature is improved upon.

Who can I talk to about compliance theory?

Compliance theory applies equally well in response to global pandemics as small compliance programs. If you would like to learn more, get in touch with JS Regulatory Services. We love making regulation work best, for everyone.



Phone: 02 6188 7700

Email: mail@jsrs.com.au

www.jsrs.com.au