HOW TO LEAD THE TEAM THROUGH THE CRISIS – COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN BUSINESSES, SELF GOVERNANCE AND HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

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Abstract: The onset of a COVID 19 pandemic has created a general need for appropriate crisis management. The aim of our paper is to compare the degree of crisis management competencies in three different types of organizations - businesses, health care organizations and self-government organizations. Degree of crisis management competencies was determined by the following factors - quality of crisis communication, the leadership style, the quality of decision-making in times of crisis, team performance and teamwork and the information sharing. The highest level of crisis management competencies was achieved by crisis management in business, which we proved on a sample of 122 companies. The leadership is weakest link of crisis management in all the organizations surveyed.

Keywords: crisis management, crisis communication, COVID-19, team work

1 Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic caused an unexpected and global crisis, which will most likely lead to permanent changes in organizational management. The whole society was hit by the COVID-19 crisis rapidly and unexpectedly. The crisis management and change management are currently part of every single company, organization or institution. Every individual had to adapt in his ordinary work life to a large extent to the crisis, which came unexpectedly and caught many of us off-guard. A great deal of uncertainty is evident throughout society. Hotels, restaurants, retail stores, sports facilities, theatres and cinemas remained closed during the acute stage of the crisis without a prospect of future activity.

On the other hand, these facts appeal to the need of quality management competencies, which would be stable and established long-term in the environment of leaders in all kind of organizations, and which in non-standard conditions may develop into higher management skills, and thus allow the leaders to operate on a principle other than by trial and error (which could have fatal consequences for all stakeholders). The aim of our paper is to compare the degree of crisis management competencies in three different types of organizations - businesses, health care organizations and self-government organizations.

The research results will help to identify the weak spots of crisis management in each of above mentioned institutions. Our findings can guide responsible managers from these organizations to improve critical areas of their crisis management. We consider it important to examine the level of key crisis competencies in companies, thus identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the management of individual institutions. Leaders should invest their time in improving the level of weaknesses, which will be significantly reflected in the quality of crisis management of their institution.

1.1 Crisis management competencies

To manage a crisis is to manage the change (Hutchins & Wang, 2008), whereby the human factor plays a significant role in the management of changes, which is the determinant of success/failure in the implementation of decisions,

communication strategies, team work performance and the reach of leadership in crisis.

The more lives that are governed by the value(s) under threat, the deeper the crisis goes (Boin et al., 2005). For this exact reason the Corona crisis is perceived more intensely, since it caused a feeling of uncertainty and concerns for the health and lives of people and their loved ones.

Crisis management creates pressure on using transformational leadership with a focus on charismatic leadership (Johnson, 2020; Johnson & Riggio, 2004), however, with an emphasis on maintaining strength and unity of leadership tools (Jacobides, 2020). At the same time, it creates pressure on higher and top management, which should focus on transparent provision and immediate sharing of information, open communication and acceptance of non-conforming solutions (Gardner & Peterson, 2020).

Several studies show that in the context of effective crisis management, especially during the acute stage of the crisis, major factors of its successful management include especially effective communication (Kim&Lim, 2020; Clementson 2020), use of suitable people management style (Richardson, 2019; Grant-Smith&Colley, 2018), ability of adequate decision-making (Savi & Randma-Liiv, 2015) and the establishment of an effective crisis team and sharing of information within (Uitdewilligen & Waller, 2018; Lee, Woeste, & Heath, 2007). significant factors for crisis management, especially during its acute stage, are efficient and effective communication (especially internal), selection of suitable management style, flexibility of decision-making, establishment of an effective crisis team and sharing of information within it (Pearce et al., 2020; Bhaduri, 2019; Bowers et al., 2017; Comfort et al, 2020).

Communication is the most important tested variable in the effect of competent crisis management on performance. Communication becomes a strategic element to maintain the reputation of the business (Flores et al., 2019). As the authors of this study argue, the commitment of the employees to the company is reinforced by communication taking place in the form of constant and honest dialogue. The author of the normative crisis communication emphasizes that true and relevant information is its foundation and that information overflow is harmful (Clementson, 2020). Although research in the field of crisis communication has recently developed mainly in the field of external crisis communication, internal communication in times of acute crisis in terms of exchange of information between managers and employees for effective decision-making and performance, has been neglected compared to external. The internal dimensions of crisis communication are insufficiently researched also because the results of crisis management are directly related to the perception of co-workers, the creation of feelings, reactions and actions. As an organization enters an acute phase of a crisis, the need for information increases dramatically among co-workers. Collaborators act on how I understand the situation and at the same time discuss the crisis with all stakeholders, especially patients. Johansson & Ottestig (2011) found that managers overestimate their external legitimacy over internal legitimacy, and this is reflected in insufficient communication skills in relation to employees. Coombs (2007) states that communication by management should be perceived by employees as honest, honest, trustworthy, and transparent and open.

Tourish (2020) objects that the Covid-19 pandemic is also a crisis of *leadership theory and practice*. Author compared the decision-making process to gambling, where the leadership has weak knowledge unproven by research. The crisis situation we are currently facing often creates an environment especially for populist (Schneiker, 2020) and destructive leadership (Brandebo, 2020) and he also draws attention to the fact that the crisis

managers are not always equipped to manage relations, which may have negative consequences from the long-term perspective. James et al. (2011) point to the formation of effective leadership styles under the influence of the expectations that employees have from their managers. This is especially important in times of crisis, as employees are key stakeholders in crisis management. In times of crisis, employees expect the leader to successfully manage it, easy to overcome through difficult obstacles. They want to be supported by him, they demand support from him, they want to feel his interest and empathy, and subsequently they want to help him through cooperation and shared leadership (Pearce et al., 2020).

Coombs (2007) points out the fact that the members of the crisis team have to have *decision-making authority*. Olaniran and Williams (2001) and Jehn & Techakesari (2014) state that human factors and team processes play the key role in the improvement of reaction speed, accuracy and effectiveness of team members. Olaniran and Williams (2001) state that crisis management is a process of collective decision-making. Crisis decision-making is associated with a high degree of uncertainty, which increases in the event of a Covid-19 pandemic with a low degree of control over this new type of virus. Hirsch, Mar, & Peterson (2012) state that the adoption of clear goals and structures helps to bring certainty to the great uncertainty that is characteristic of acute times of crisis. An important prerequisite for making the right decision is the ability to think critically, to perceive information in context and to be oriented in a problem (Higgins & Freedman, 2013). In times of crisis, management needs to be able to analyze different solutions, learn on the fly, respond from situations that are actually going on, flexibly to them, related to the existence of effective crisis management in the run-up to the crisis (Reeves, 2020).
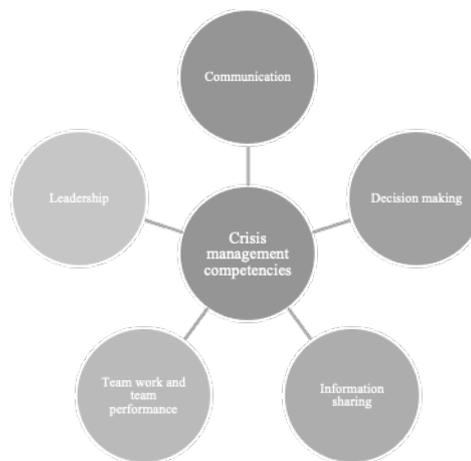
The sharing of information in the form of providing information and creating an environment for the sharing of information explain, based on the results, the greatest effect of crisis management on employee performance in teams. As pointed out by Netten et al. (2018), in reality, the employees often encountered information oversaturation or incomplete information during the crisis, or the combination thereof, which led to reduced quality of decision-making and subsequently lower performance. Given the internal focus of crisis management, crisis managers in the acute phase of a crisis should ensure that their teams perform better by sharing information across the organization to the right extent, quality, time (Vainieri et al., 2017). Important aspects of information sharing are also the comprehensibility, regularity and timeliness of informing about current problems and facts, which in turn lead to team performance (Vos & Buckner, 2015).

Teamwork is a relentless topic in the scientific literature (Manser, 2009; Weller et al., 2014). Kunz et al. (2018) also point to the importance of the existence of team standards that determine expectations about the appropriate behavior of individual team members. The key role in their formation is played by the middle management of organizations, whose importance in managing the crisis should also be recognized by top management. According to Manser (2009), this is also crucial for effective teamwork, especially in environments that face high levels of uncertainty and complexity. The results of the research confirmed that teamwork in organizations was a supporting element in coping with the initial stage of the crisis, the respondents acknowledged high value in their statements, autonomy, a sense of security, the opportunity to learn a lot and pride in their work.

Our research is situated in the acute stage of the Covid-19 pandemic crisis. The question arises about how much the organizations (companies, self-governments and healthcare facilities) were prepared for this situation, if they were prepared at all? How were they capable of effectively handling it under the extreme conditions and with existing resources? What proven tools and techniques implemented during the current crisis management can they implement also during the latter, post-pandemic operation? The studies published so far have not

focused on comparing the level of key crisis competencies between different types of organizations during the first acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is this research gap that we will try to cover with our research We assume that the quality of crisis management is linked to the crisis management competencies. Based on the knowledge presented above, we assume that crisis management competencies are following: communication, decision making process, information sharing, leadership and teamwork – this is illustrated in figure 1. The joint effect of said factors is the precondition for the successful management of difficult conditions and the preparation for new, often changed, post-crisis operations. We further assume that the crisis management competencies positively affects the employees' attitudes to work and their performance. We have therefore measured the level of each of crisis competencies above and we provided the comparison data obtained in three types of organizations – businesses, self-governments and healthcare facilities.

Figure 1: Factors affecting crisis management in organization

Source: Own processing.

2 Methodology

Design and Procedure
Based on the current knowledge and identification and definition of the gap in the research of crisis management during a pandemic crisis, we have formed the research design for the purposes of this study.

Research question: What is the level of crisis management in acute stage of COVID-19 in three different types of institutions – businesses, self-governments and healthcare facilities?
Main research goal: Measure and compare the level of crisis management competencies in three different types of institutions – businesses, self-governments and healthcare facilities.
Partial research goals: Identify crisis management weaknesses for each of these institutions.

We have used a questionnaire survey to collect data. The questionnaires were sent electronically to the managers of businesses, self-government organizations and healthcare facilities. For the objective assessment of management skills of crisis managers during the stage of acute crisis, the questionnaires were sent and collected during the first months of the crisis (during March and April 2020), whereby the first Covid-19 case in Slovakia was confirmed on March 6, 2020. The research sample consisted of 122 businesses, 207 self-government organizations and 216 healthcare facilities. The respondents were managers at different levels with different amounts of management experience (team leaders, middle management, and higher management).

Crisis management competencies were tested by 61 items, which are scaled using the 5-point Likert-type scales (1='strongly

disagree' and 5='strongly agree'). The list of tested items are included in following table 1. The internal consistency of all questionnaire scales was very good, which is confirmed by the Reliability test in all examined categories.

Table 1: Items Used to Measure Selected Variables

N.	Crisis Communication
1.	The leadership provides a credible explanation of what has happened.
2.	The leadership provides directives to manage the spreading of the virus.
3.	The leadership instills hope by emphasizing the positive aspects and positively presents the likelihood of a successful solution to the problems.
4	The leadership expresses empathy to employees, their families and others affected by the health crisis.
5	The leadership is in control of the situation, emphasizes its own responsibility and takes appropriate action to overcome the crisis situation.
6	During the crisis, the leadership supports two-way communication.
7	During the crisis, I see communication on the part of the leadership as honest, sincere and I trust it.
8	During the crisis, I see communication on the part of the leadership as transparent.
	Leadership style
1.	During the crisis, the leadership is an example to its employees.
2.	During the crisis, the leadership shows confidence in its employees even in cases where they face failure.
3	During the crisis, the leadership gives the necessary support to the employees.
4	During the crisis, the leadership empowers employees and gives the space for decision-making and acting, if they have the necessary skills.
5	During the crisis, the leadership expresses support of other entities (for example, communities, self-government, etc.).
6	During the crisis, the leadership places the good of the team above its own interests.
7	During the crisis, the management considers the moral and ethical implications of its decisions.
8	The leadership speaks positively of the future.
9	During the crisis, the leadership critically re-evaluates its expectations in relation to their suitability and accuracy.
10	During the crisis, the leadership helps others to develop their strengths.
	Decision-Making During the Crisis
1	During the crisis, the leadership is oriented in the problem.
2	During the crisis, the decisions of the leadership are still in line with the strategy / vision / values.
3	During the crisis, the decisions of the leadership are fast and the leadership takes responsibility for them.
4	During the crisis, the leadership is capable of critically evaluating information.
5	During the crisis, the leadership is capable of viewing information in context.
6	During the crisis, the leadership is capable of analyzing different possible solutions.
7	During the crisis, the leadership is capable of learning on the go from situations.
8	During the crisis, the leadership is cautious and it is prepared for worst-case scenarios.
	Team Performance
1	This company/organization is a good place to work even during a crisis.
2	I am proud of our company/organization for how it handled the crisis situation.
3	Working in our company/organization is like being part of a big family even during these times of crisis.
4	During the crisis, the morale in our company/organization is high.
5	I do my job with enthusiasm even during the crisis.
6	Currently, my work provides me with enough autonomy.
7	I get useful feedback in the current situation.
8	The work environment in our company/organization is safe during the crisis.
9	The working conditions are satisfactory during the crisis.
10	The company/organization deals constructively with the issues of its employees during the crisis.
11	The employees need to be less controlled in the performance of their tasks during the crisis.
12	The employees help and support each other in their work in the current situation.
13	The employees are willing to work with greater commitment during the crisis time.
14	It matters to me, how successfully the company/organization manages the crisis situation.

15	Despite the crisis situation, my work in our company/organization is a source of energy for me.
16	I learn a lot at my work during this crisis period.
17	All team members may ask questions during the crisis, if there is something they do not understand.
18	During the crisis, the employees receive support they need from other employees in the performance of their work.
19	During the crisis, it is difficult to express oneself critically at this workplace, if I see problems in fulfilling obligations.
20	During the crisis, disputes at the workplace are addressed appropriately; it is not important who is right, but which solution is the best.
21	During the crisis, all employees work together as a well-coordinated team.
22	During the crisis, the corporate culture supports learning from the mistakes of others.
23	Professional mistakes do happen during the crisis and are addressed appropriately.
24	During the crisis, my colleagues encourage me to express possible concerns I might have in relation to the fulfillment of obligations.
25	During the crisis, I receive adequate feedback.
	Information Sharing During the Crisis
1	I am informed about the procedure for solving the crisis situation.
2	The information I get during the crisis is useful to me.
3	I get information during the crisis on time.
4	The information I get during the crisis is understandable to me.
5	During the crisis, I have enough information for my work.
6	During the crisis, I constantly get updated information.
7	The amount of information during the crisis is excessive.
8	During the crisis, I have an overall picture of the situation (not only selected new information).
9	I am informed about the results of the crisis solutions.
10	The communication channels used during the crisis suit me.

Source: Own processing.

4 Results and Discussion

The results are included in table 2. The internal consistency of all questionnaire scales was very good, which is confirmed by the Reliability test in all examined categories.

Table 2: Mean by tested items

N.	Healthcare facilities Mean	Self-government Mean	Businesses Mean	
1	3.74	4.20	4.34	
2	3.96	4.33	4.44	
3	3.53	3.72	4.06	
4	3.54	3.97	4.09	Crisis Communication
5	3.65	4.08	4.37	
6	3.38	3.87	4.11	
7	3.53	3.93	4.18	
8	3.39	3.82	4.26	
Total Mean	3,59	3,99	4,23	
1	3.55	3.82	4.21	
2	3.50	3.64	4.07	
3	3.47	3.97	4.13	
4	3.38	3.77	4.13	
5	3.31	3.13	4.14	Leadership style
6	3.19	3.21	3.96	
7	3.56	3.75	4.11	
8	3.43	3.87	3.80	
9	3.34	3.54	3.94	
10	3.16	3.02	3.64	

Total	3,39	3,57	4,01	
1	3.62	3.98	4.28	Decision making
2	3.51	4.34	4.40	
3	3.68	3.72	4.06	
4	3.53	3.85	4.09	
5	3.60	3.95	4.17	
6	3.60	3.77	4.06	
7	3.78	4.03	4.17	
8	3.81	3.87	4.22	
Total	3,64	3,94	4,18	
1	3.64	4.41	4.38	Teamwork and performance
2	3.67	3.87	4.14	
3	3.28	2.82	3.03	
4	3.49	3.59	3.89	
5	3.81	3.67	4.03	
6	3.60	3.59	4.00	
7	3.58	3.59	3.97	
8	3.52	3.46	3.92	
9	3.41	3.61	3.92	
10	3.59	4.08	4.26	
11	3.68	4.02	4.42	
12	3.48	3.74	4.07	
13	3.60	3.89	4.15	
14	3.70	3,72	4,18	
15	3.74	4.00	4.18	
16	3.44	3.46	3.99	
17	3.75	4.11	4.29	
18	3.60	4.21	4.32	
19	3.28	3.70	4.07	
20	3.03	3.33	3.24	
21	3.65	3.92	4.05	
22	3.54	3.33	3.88	
23	4.26	4.16	4.59	
24	3.69	3.51	3.95	
25	3.92	3.70	4.30	
Total	3,60	3,74	4,05	
1	3.76	4.10	4.32	Information sharing
2	3.76	3.95	4.32	
3	3.44	3.82	4.10	
4	3.68	4.02	4.22	
5	3.49	3.98	4.06	
6	3.66	3.84	4.19	
7	3.46	2.95	3.76	
8	3.66	3.72	4.04	
9	3.41	3.39	3.99	
10	3.46	4.10	4.06	
Total	3,58	3,79	4,11	

Source: Own processing.

The results presented in Table 2 confirmed that the highest quality of crisis management competencies was achieved by businesses, the highest score for each of the crisis competencies is evident. In the area of crisis communication, even the mean value in all indicators for businesses is more than 4. The weakest values are achieved in the area of healthcare facilities. The differences are striking - e.g., in the category of transparent communication – (8th item of Crisis communication) the difference between healthcare facilities and business is up to 0.8.

There are also big differences in Leadership style. For item number 5 (*During the crisis, the leadership expresses support of other entities - for example, communities, self-government, etc.*), the businesses reached mean 4.14, while the healthcare facilities have a value of 0.83 lower, self-government even of 1.01 lower. During a crisis, the employees expect their leader to successfully master the crisis and easily overcome difficult obstacles. They want to trust in him, they need his support, they want to feel his interest and empathy and consequently they want to be helpful through cooperation and shared leadership (Pearce et al., 2020). At a time of crisis, it is necessary for the leadership to be able to analyze different solution possibilities, learn on the go from situations that are actually happening and flexibly respond to them, which is related to the existence of an effective crisis management in the time before the crisis (Reeves, 2020). What is surprising in item 8 in Leadership style *(The leadership speaks positively of the future.)* is the highest score for self-government institutions – 3.87, whereas 3.8 in businesses. In the area of decision making, the differences are again large - in item 2, the businesses level reaches 4.4, while healthcare facilities only 3.51, which represents a difference of 0.89. In the area of teamwork and performance, we see the biggest difference in item 1 - where businesses reach mean 4.38, self-government institutions even 4.41 but healthcare facilities only 3.64. In the area of Information sharing, there is a marked difference in item 3 where businesses reach 4.10, while healthcare facilities only 3.44.

In all monitored items, businesses reached the mean higher than 4 - Communication 4.23, Leadership style 4.01, Decision making 4.18, Teamwork and performance 4.05 and Information sharing 4.11. Neither self-government intuitions nor healthcare facilities achieved above 4 in any of the key crisis competencies monitored.

According to the PwC study (Global Crisis Survey 2019), 7 out of 10 managers have experienced managing a crisis in a company over the past 5 years. Therefore, in general, it is not necessary to think about whether a crisis will happen, but when it will happen and we can say that most business managers have already encountered some form of crisis. 42% of businesses in said study state that after overcoming the crisis they see their position as better than before the crisis 36% of the companies said that they defended and stabilized the position they had before the crisis. As business managers are most often exposed to crisis situations, this will probably be the reason why business managers in our study proved to be prepared the best to face the crisis. As stated by da Silva & Costa (2018), every crisis has its positive aspects, which include especially improvements of control processes, responsibilities and organizational structures. Therefore, all managers of the institutions we examined should approach the crisis as an opportunity to change the way of management in a positive way.
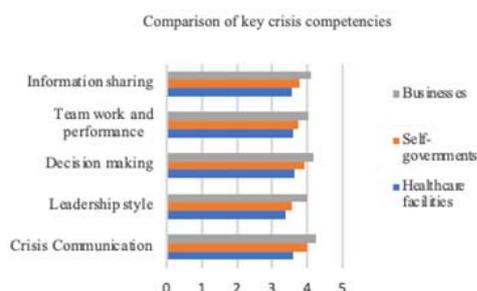
5 Conclusion

The Corona crisis is a source of threats and opportunities for all the institutions and their management. It is important for the organizations to be prepared for the future and to be able to effectively manage their processes, people and the whole system, in the context of resistance and sustainability in a turbulent and changing environment.

Experts have assumed during the first wave of COVID crisis another wave of this pandemic and they also confirm a very high likelihood of a similar type of pandemic happening again in the near or distant future. Therefore, we emphasize preparation of all organizations for such crisis situations as the only effective tool.

As it is illustrated in figure 2, the difference between all organizations is evident.

Figure 2: Comparison of key crisis competencies in businesses, self-governments and healthcare facilities

Source: Own processing.

Our results confirmed that the highest quality of crisis management competencies was achieved by businesses, where we see the highest score for each of the crisis competencies – mean was more than 4 for all of them. Self-government organizations were placed in second place, while in none of the indicators they reach the mean above 4. Among the analyzed organizations healthcare facilities are facing the biggest challenges in crisis management. All organizations in our research sample reached the lowest values in the key competence of leadership style. In times of crisis it is especially important, because the employees are the key stakeholders in crisis management, therefore this is the crucial key competence to be improved in all surveyed organizations.

Research Limitations

The research carried out has several limitations, in particular in the form of other aspects of crisis management, the consideration of which would contribute to a better informative value of the results. A larger and better composition of the research sample would contribute to a higher validity of research results and conclusions for crisis management for individual types of organizations. Another limitation of the research interpretation is the local nature of the research and the limited research sample (122 businesses, 216 healthcare facilities and 207 self-government organizations) in Slovakia. From a regional point of view, the results are relevant; their generalization would require an extension of the sample. Given the fact that the crisis had the same global cause, interpretations of research can be considered important regardless of borders.

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Primary Paper Section: A

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