

# Internal crisis communication in a particular Russian company

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2. Define the main goal, state the research questions, and choose adequate research methods.
3. Conduct primary research to gather in-depth information about the internal crisis communication in a selected company.
4. Provide an interpretation of findings, answer the research questions, and choose relevant outcomes for the project.
5. Based on the research findings, develop a manual for internal crises communication in the project part.

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Hlavním cílem této práce je vypracovat interní krizovou komunikační příručku pro společnost “North windows”. Teoretický rámec krizového řízení se zaměřením na vnitřní krizovou komunikaci je představen v první části práce. Druhá část práce se skládá z kvantitativního a kvalitativního výzkumného hodnocení vnitřní krizové komunikace v Organizaci. Ve třetí části této práce je prezentována aktuální interní krizová komunikační příručka určená pro konkrétní firmu.

Klíčová slova: vnitřní krizová komunikace, krize, vnitřní krizový komunikační plán, interní krizová komunikační příručka.

## **ABSTRACT**

The main goal of this thesis is to develop an internal crisis communication manual for the company “North windows”. The theoretical framework of crisis management with the focus on internal crisis communication is introduced in the first part of the thesis. The second part of this work consists of quantitative and qualitative research evaluation of internal crisis communications in the organization. The actual internal crisis communication manual designed for the particular company is presented in the third part of this thesis.

Keywords: internal crisis communication, crisis, internal crisis communication plan, internal crisis communication manual.

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I hereby declare that the print version of my Master’s thesis and the electronic version of my thesis deposited in the IS/STAG system are identical.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the times of high uncertainty when the whole world is in the expecting phase waiting for the solution to be found, the ability to keep business running and profit coming seems exceptional. This is the moment for crisis management professionals to embrace their knowledge in planning, implementing and monitoring activities that are used to help the company in dealing with a significantly negative event. Usually, in the crisis communication plan that organizations often have prepared in advance as their backup, there is an important part devoted to the internal crisis communication. If this section is designed thoughtfully, then there is an opportunity for business to reduce misinformation and rumors and provide an effective communication flow even during hard times. Apart from that, generally the availability of this type of internal plan shows that the company cares about its employees, trusts their personal and professional experience and, moreover, is ready to engage personnel in decision-making processes. Thus, a wisely designed internal crisis communication plan can help to avoid the crisis in the first instance, overcome the crisis influence as it evolves, and, finally, extract positive outcomes after it will be over.

A company called “North windows” was chosen as a research subject that was investigated in order to reveal details on how the firm managed the recent crisis in terms of internal communication. The main goal of this work is to create an internal crisis communication manual that will be presented to the company’s executive team for its further implementation. So, in order to achieve this goal, this thesis work consists of three parts: theoretical background about the crisis communication with focus on internal crisis communication, research involving data collection and its interpretation, and a project representing a manual for internal crisis communication.

# **I. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

# **1 INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION DEFINITION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

## **1.1 Internal crisis communication definition**

It can be argued with conviction that managing the crisis is an inevitable part of doing business. According to statistics, 69% leaders have experienced at least one corporate crisis during the period from 2014 to 2019, with an average number of crisis experienced being three (PWC). Furthermore, 2020 added another huge crisis that affected almost all industries. It is said that more than a half of small and medium-size enterprises in Europe worry that they might not be in business during next 12 months (McKinsey).

In times of crisis, people have a stronger need to understand and make sense of the situation (Heide, Simonsson, 2019). So, the role of communication in the company is critical and includes instruction, information, training, and management through conversations. The most important goal of internal communication in the organization is to create support among employees for the goals and policies pursued by the organization's management. Through communication, employees gain the necessary knowledge and motivation, and become the best advocates and promoters of the company's plans. Thus, communication within the company is an important organizational tool and a necessary condition for the effective development and implementation of corporate policy.

For a long while significance of internal communication was overshadowed by external one, or was not even distinguished as a different type of communication that the company should take into account. However, internal communication has a very specific feature that makes it more influential and powerful – it is directly connected with the main foundation of any company, namely its employees. Since personnel is closer to the crisis event than external audiences, employees being internal stakeholders should be perceived as active participants of the communication process. They are not passive receivers of the message but the side that is fully engaged in the conversation. Thereby, the quality and the quantity of communication, in fact, affect the level of trust and involvement of employees (Thomas et al., 2009), which is particularly relevant in time of crisis.

Employees as internal stakeholders have a stronger and more complex psychological dimension than most of the other stakeholders. This psychological dimension is often characterized by specific emotional and cognitive reactions and feelings in a crisis situation such as the feeling of insecurity and uncertainty (what is going to happen?), chaos (the

breakdown of the whole well-known and orderly universe), stress (as a consequence of an enormous pressure of work and time, or lack of knowledge, information or competences or, worst of all, lack of meaning), the feeling of betrayal (by management or by colleagues), fear (of losing job, status, position, esteem, and good social networks), grief (physical and psychological losses like the loss of close colleagues) or external lives (because of accidents), and anger (towards the responsible persons or the ones believed to be responsible) (Frandsen, Johansen, 2011).

When internal communication is effective and successful the employee related outcome is evident in increased productivity, decreased attrition, enhanced image and reputation of an organization they are working for and ultimately additional financial profits (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Therefore, companies which devote their efforts, time and financial resources to internal communication can get positive results which include increased capacity and profitability even during the crisis.

In times of instability, the openness of the leadership, the willingness to engage in dialogue, the ability to accurately convey information and form the emotional mood of subordinates become an invaluable advantage and even a chance for survival. When the system collapses, the attitude of the manager, his interaction with employees is exactly what will allow the company to get out of the crisis with minimal losses and even open new opportunities. This is the moment when the crisis becomes not a test for the company, but an opportunity to develop and open new directions.

## **1.2 Internal crisis communication goals**

It is important to note different goals that internal crisis communication can reach (Frandsen, Johansen, 2011):

**Information support for management decisions.** In order for management decisions to be adequate and implemented in practice, they need information support. The adequacy of decisions requires the collection and analysis of information. The organization's staff acts as an expert in this case – knowing the situation from the inside increases the importance of information for the correct decision.

**Identification of communication and management problems of the company.** Many problems in the company can be hidden, latent in nature. The personnel can be a valuable source of information that allows to find unexpected solutions to problems.

**Mobilization of employees' resources to solve corporate tasks in a crisis situation.**

Involving employees in the process of discussing corporate tasks activates their participation in solving these tasks. By presenting their position on the problem, the employee assumes some responsibility in solving the problem. Moreover, an important task for the top management of the company is to ensure a high degree of employee involvement in participating in management programs during crisis situations. This will ensure a benevolent attitude, trust of the staff to the management system of the organization, which is especially important in this period, since the loyalty of employees to the organization and motivational factors are largely decisive.

**Informing the staff about the activities of the management.** This means organizing the flow of sincere information about the external and internal situation. It can be solved by optimizing:

- a) intra-corporate communication by creating channels of vertical and horizontal communication that would allow information to effectively run in the specified directions, while ensuring the development of a two-way process of internal communication;
- b) the quantity and quality of the transmitted information.

**Communicating goals, norms, and rules of behavior to employees in a crisis.** Ensuring that employees understand the HR policy of the organization and the principles of working with personnel in this situation.

Therefore, effective internal crisis communication reduces uncertainty and ambiguity by filling the communication gap between management and employees; to achieve this, organizational management should understand employees as one of the important strategic constituencies (internal publics) to be communicated with (Heide, Simonsson, 2019).

Of particular importance for the internal public (both for the staff and top management) in a crisis is the type of corporate culture that has developed in the organization. Corporate culture, as a set of the most important provisions and guidelines, can help to overcome the crisis or, on the contrary, cause its aggravation (Thomas et al., 2009). It is during a crisis situation that doubts about the values of the organization are most likely. Crises of leadership and cultural norms are very possible. Thus, the result of the crisis may be the destruction of the existing structure of the organization, and serious reform of the leadership and cultural norms of the organization may be required.

### **1.3 Internal crisis communication problems**

Several typical problems that may arise when forming crisis internal communications should be also mentioned:

1. Often, the company's management is not used to or does not know how to communicate with the team, and especially on negative occasions. In organizations where internal communications programs are absent, the spontaneously formed news streams are overgrown with the most bizarre details and interpretations, complicating the already difficult management process. As a result, destructive processes are occurring: staff loyalty is falling, negativism and disintegration are increasing. The silence of the management confirms the worst fears both about the fate of the company and the personal prospects of employees. Top management is not ready to communicate even with middle managers or key employees (Coombs, 2010);
2. Employees of the company who could organize a single communication center – communication specialists, HR specialists, middle and senior managers – often cannot agree on the division of responsibilities. As a result, the company does not have a single language for describing the company's problems, mutual understanding and willingness to create a strategy and implement it (Coombs, 2010);
3. It is considered that communication is a rather expensive and time-consuming process, so there are no resources for it. Although providing effective internal communications does not require significant costs, it is quite a time-consuming process, since a crisis situation always creates an increased need for employees to know about the state of the company. However, no additional tools are required, only the willingness of the management to communicate, awareness of its importance, honesty and openness in communicating with the staff (Coombs, 2010).

Thus, mentioned potential issues of organizing an effective internal crisis communication should be taken into account.

### **1.4 Internal crisis communication principles**

In addition, it is crucial to take into account principles of an effective internal crisis communication that are described in detail below (Schmidt, 2005):

**Priority of internal communications over external ones.** The first news about the company should be found out by its employees, a big disadvantage of the work of communication

specialists is the situation if the employees of the organization learn news about it from the media or from acquaintances and friends.

**Consistency and regularity of communication.** Both in stable and especially in crisis communications, timely and more frequent communication contributes to the growth of trust. It also helps to remove the feeling of paralyzing uncertainty from employees. This condition leads to the emergence of rumors, the displacement of a sense of stability and security, creates panic moods and the inability to perceive facts systematically and logically. Even the small steps that the company takes today bring an element of stability and give a sense of control over at least today. Therefore, communication messages should contain information that measures are being taken that are necessary, meaningful and serve to stabilize and develop the company. In addition, the principle of “communicating both good and bad news to the staff” is mandatory, the lack of information on problematic situations causes unwanted rumors, and contributes to the growth of staff distrust in the organizational policy pursued by management.

**Personification of communications.** Getting first-hand information is a priority for the staff. According to the personnel, it is the management representatives who have all the information about the current crisis situation, and they can and should provide it regularly and promptly. In addition, employees want personal attention, especially from their closest managers. The personification of communications demonstrates the fact that it cultivates the principle of visibility and proximity of top management.

**Availability of feedback.** The implementation of this principle is helped by regular research on the attitude of employees to the organization and management, and allows to identify problems before they lead to a crisis. Implementation of the feedback principle gives an opportunity to express opinions, feel its significance, see actions aimed at eliminating negative factors

**Clarity and consistency of communication.** This principle can be also expressed with the sentence – “one organization – one voice”. The key messages of management should be consistent, not contradict each other, and give the impression of a well-thought-out corporate strategy. The version of a crisis event or process should be constant and unchangeable in its essence. Each subsequent interpretation of the crisis should logically correspond to the previous one.

**Careful selection and dosing of information.** This general principle of communication in a crisis is most difficult to apply to the internal public, since the staff has the opportunity to obtain information from various sources, including “internal” sources. However, compliance with it is necessary in view of possible conflicts of interest within the group. It is obvious that it is for

internal corporate communications that the use of a stream of false and unreliable information is most unacceptable.

**Friendly tone, sense of humor, sincere communication.** These factors are becoming increasingly important in the face of increasing pragmatism and skepticism of employees and their increased requirements for the content and form of messages.

**Innovation in the choice of new communication solutions.** The need for this principle is dictated by the rapid development of technology and the need to compete for the attention of employees with a huge number of bright TV and video images surrounding people in everyday life. In this regard, the work of communication professionals is very welcome to “invent” new technological solutions that allow solving everyday communication problems in an unconventional way.



## 2 CRISIS DEFINITION AND ITS TYPES

### 2.1 Crisis definition

A crisis is, by definition, “an event, revelation, allegation or set of circumstances which threatens the integrity, reputation, or survival of an individual or organization. It challenges the public’s sense of safety, values or appropriateness. The actual or potential damage to the organization is considerable and the organization cannot, on its own, put an immediate end to it” (Sawalha et al., 2013). While being more detailed, crisis is a situation that destabilizes the normal order in company’s existence, creates significant level of uncertainty and demand a fast reaction. Another definition according to Fearn-Banks (2011a) can be mentioned: “a crisis is “a major occurrence with a potentially negative outcome affecting an organization, company, or industry, as well as publics, services or good name. It interrupts normal business transactions and can sometimes threaten the existence of the organization.” Thus, with this view of the crisis in mind, preparedness of the company for the crisis can become a strong competitive advantage.

A business crisis occurs when an unexpected problem puts the stability of a company or organization at risk. These dilemmas can either originate internally or they can be brought on by external influences. The problem affecting the business escalates to the point where it is out of the company’s control and they cannot resolve it. If left unaddressed, this issue may permanently damage the business or cause it to fail.

The easiest way to identify a business crisis is to assess the problem for three key elements. First, the problem must pose an imminent threat to the organization. Next, the situation must involve an element of surprise or shock. Finally, due to the severity of the problem as well as its unexpected nature, the situation will place pressure on the business to make timely and effective decisions. Therefore, knowing the elements that make up a business crisis can be instrumental in identifying these problems before it is too late (Myer et al., 1992).

### 2.2 Crises types and their characteristics

Otto Lerbinger (2012) in addition to define the crisis as “an unexpected event threatening the reputation and stability of the company”, has categorized seven types of crises that are described below:

1. **Natural crisis.** Destruction created by the forces of nature may seem like an unmanageable event. However, unlike other forms of crisis, natural disasters are

generally predictable. Only their timing and severity are unknown. These can be earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, storms, volcanic eruptions, floods, and tsunamis. Thus, if the company is located in an area that is exposed to extreme weather conditions, it is advised to prepare an emergency response for the unfortunate event that the organization can be influenced by;

2. **Technological crises.** Those crises are caused by human application of science and technology. They are seen as the result of human failure and are far greater in number and consequences;
3. **Confrontation crises.** These are crises deliberately caused by individuals or groups determined to win acceptance for their demands and expectations. They might be members of general public, employee, protestors or single-issue activists. Some examples include boycotts, blockades, occupation of buildings, disobeying;
4. **Acts of Malevolence.** Those crises are numerous and it is really difficult to foresee them. They include terrorism, kidnapping, extortion, corporate espionage, rumor;
5. **Misplaced management values.** This category is described as when the company places the short-term economic gain above societal responsibilities. This is illustrated by a narrow focus on shareholders at the expense of other stakeholders;
6. **Acts of deception.** As misplaced management values, acts of deception are also deliberating acts. Such cases occur when management hides or even misrepresents information that might affect the sale or use of its products. It could be because the profit motivation is more powerful than concern for consumer safety;
7. **Management misconduct.** These are wrongful acts which, once publicly revealed, quickly become scandals. It includes cheating, fraud, bribery, embezzlement, offering kickbacks and other swindles.

To sum up, a crisis is nevertheless always a change, a decisive turn, after which the organization and the world and individuals around it are different in comparison with the time before the crisis. During a crisis an essential change occurs in the organization and its immediate surroundings. The organization, staff and operational principles acquire a new form, a new position. It is an old truth that no crisis will ever repeat itself in exactly the same manner.

### **3 DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

The critical elements in the definition of internal crisis communication strategies are objectives (Myer et al., 1992, 2007) and contents (Barrett, 2002; Balle, 2008; Aggerholm, 2008). Therefore, the combinations of these elements define internal crisis communication strategies. The objectives of internal crisis communication, which can operate on a cognitive, affective or behavioral level (Myer et al., 1992, 2007), have been categorized into security, belonging and activating behaviors objectives. Cognitive objectives tend to reduce uncertainty and increase realistic expectations among employees, thus enhancing a sense of security. Affective objectives are directed to increasing identification with and trust of the organization, thus creating a sense of belonging. Behavioral objectives aim to sustain employees' commitment in their roles and collaboration to overcome the crisis, thus activating behaviors.

The contents of internal crisis communication have been categorized as informative, identification and factual contents (Barrett, 2002; Aggerholm, 2008; Balle, 2008) along a continuum that implies an increasing assumption of responsibility (Coombs, Holladay, 2006; Lucero et al., 2008). Informative content focuses on data and the dissemination of information about the situation of the organization and its business. Identification content spreads the distinctive values and culture of the organization and its perspective on the future. Factual content consists of acts and facts to face the crisis, tangible signs that the organization is taking responsibility and going beyond simple rhetoric and communication messages.

By combining objectives and the content of internal crisis communication, a mapping with five possible internal communication strategies emerges: transparency, cohesion, activation of behaviors, evasion, and under-utilization.

**The Transparency strategy** of internal crisis communication combines security objectives with informative content, and is adopted by organizations that want to release information to reduce the uncertainty that is linked to the scarcity of information itself. For example, the organization communicates the reduction of the market share and makes explicit expected behaviors. When identification content is included in the communication strategy, it is assumed that the objective of creating a sense of security will be achieved.

**The Cohesion strategy** includes identification content, usually combined with transparent information, to increase the sense of belonging to the organization and thus create greater cohesiveness. For example, the organization encourages loyalty through messages based on its solid history and consistent behavior towards employees.

**The Activation of Behaviors strategy** is the most complex and aims to stimulate proactive behaviors among collaborators through factual communication that is based on corrective actions (Benoit, 1995, 1997) or accommodative responses (Marcus, Goodman, 1991; Coombs, 2010; Coombs, Holladay, 2006) taken by the company and its management to address the crisis. For example, communicating a reward system that engages all employees in gaining new customers.

To be effective, the foundations of transparency and cohesion should have been established before. These first three strategies presume consistency between the objectives and content of internal communication: content is designed to reach the declared objectives.

However, it is also possible that companies pursue internal crisis communication strategies that present elements of inconsistency between objectives and content. These strategies are most threatening to trust and reputation. They include the strategies of Evasion and Under-utilization of internal crisis communication.

**The Evasion strategy** aims to activate behaviors but does not include a description of actions or the factual communication that could give credibility to the explicit messages and formal declarations (Benoit, 1997; Aggerholm, 2008). Organizations evade responsibility and do not implement actions that directly commit them to resolving the negative event (Marcus, Goodman, 1991; Benoit, 1995, 1997; Coombs, 2010; Coombs, Holladay, 2010), while expecting employees to respond actively in the face of the crisis.

**The Under-utilization strategy** is pursued by companies that have no real awareness of the role that internal communication can play in times of change (Barrett, 2002). Organizations accept a high level of responsibility and implement corrective actions, but it is not a good idea to try to involve employees actively and explicitly, and the organization limits its communication objectives to enhancing a sense of security and belonging.

According to the SCCT (Coombs, 2010; Coombs, Holladay, 2010), companies with strong reputation and trust are expected to adopt more accommodative strategies because they are more capable of protecting them during a crisis. Other research has shown that organizations that produce consistent crisis responses will enhance their legitimacy, while organizations that produce inconsistent crisis responses will reduce theirs (Massey, 2001). Specifically, the most accommodative and consistent strategy is the Activation of Behaviors strategy, while the least accommodative one is the Evasion of responsibility.

## 4 IMPORTANCE OF AN INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION PLAN

It goes without saying that prevention and mitigation are preferable in a crisis situation. But if a crisis does emerge, the organization and its employees must be prepared for it, resolve it quickly, have the necessary information, processes, and channels freely available, and understand what is expected of them.

Preventative measures, crisis management plans, and post-crisis evaluations are integral components of crisis management (Coombs, 2010). Thus, creation of an internal crisis communication plan is a part of crisis management that is used as a tool designed to fight crisis, minimize the inflicted damage and protect the organization, stakeholders and industry from harm.

Having a crisis communication plan is imperative to ensure that the company can remain functional even during times of crisis. According to DPK Public Communications, these are the benefits of having a crisis communication plan:

- **Higher awareness:** one of the top benefits of a crisis communication plan is that it creates a heightened sense of awareness for all parties involved. By taking the time to consider all the risks a company may face, employees are more likely to be in tune with the company and pay closer attention to things that could potentially be catastrophic to the company;
- **Lower impact:** although a crisis cannot necessarily be prevented, a crisis communication plan can reduce their impact. A crisis communication plan will expose the vulnerabilities in the company to strengthen them before a problem occurs;
- **Accelerated responses:** rather than waiting until a crisis occurs to create a plan, creating a crisis communication strategy beforehand will allow to spring into action as soon as crisis hits;
- **The strength of being prepared:** when a major crisis occurs, it can be easy for a company to play the role of a victim. A crisis communication plan allows to focus on the mission statement and move forward, rather than allowing the negativity to fester and wreak havoc on the company.

A communication plan for internal crisis communication comprising a series of rather traditional questions that is possible to find in almost every communication plan (Frandsen, Johansen, 2011):

1. What is the desired outcome of the communication? [Objective];

2. What will be communicated? [Message];
3. Who will initiate the communication? [Sender];
4. Which group of employees (and management) will be communicated with? [Recipient];
5. How and/or where is the communication going to happen? [Channel/venue];
6. When will the communication take place? [Timeline] (Schmidt, 2005, 2010).

Crises cannot be avoided or mitigated altogether but with effective planning and preparation they can be successfully managed. Without an internal crisis communication plan, organizations place themselves at considerable risk. Employees and stakeholders may respond inappropriately or incorrectly, safety may be threatened, and crises can escalate, rather than resolve. The resulting impact on the external brand can prove disastrous. What is more, reputational damage can take months or even years to overcome.

## 5 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Main goal and subgoals

The **main goal** of this thesis is to develop an internal crisis communication manual for the company “North windows” that will include procedures to implement in the selected company based on the research results. In order to achieve it the following **subgoals** were set:

1. To determine how internal communication in the company changed during the crisis;
2. To reveal employees’ satisfaction level towards the internal crisis communication strategy that the company applied during the crisis;
3. To identify ways of how the company can be more prepared for crisis situations and what improvements should be introduced.

### 5.2 Research questions

In the frames of this thesis work the following **research questions** aimed to be answered:

1. What have changed in the company during the crisis in terms of internal communication process?
2. What was the employees’ opinion regarding the internal communication changes that appeared during the crisis?
3. What improvements can be introduced in the company in terms of internal crisis communication?

### 5.3 Research methods

In order to answer the research questions, achieve the main goal of the thesis and design the internal crisis communication manual for the company both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. It gave an opportunity to get the full perspective on how the company was going through the crisis in terms of internal communication.

Starting from the quantitative research method, a **questionnaire** including opened, closed and numeric questions will be created for the middle management of the company in order to reveal the satisfaction level of personnel with the changes that occurred in internal communication and in general working conditions in the company during the crisis. The advantages of this type of research method are firstly that it is highly flexible since it is possible to study a lot of research questions by conducting it (Muijs, 2010). Secondly, it is efficient in terms of gathering large numbers of data at reasonably low cost and effort. Thirdly, this approach is relatively low time consuming and it is easy to reach a larger audience, which is, in return, increasing the

validity of the results. Moreover, a questionnaire method provides access to groups and individuals who would be difficult to reach through other channels (Wright, 2005). A disadvantage of using a questionnaire as a measurement instrument can be that only limited amount of data and insight can be collected. Another limitation is that questions can be interpreted differently by the respondents and there is no way to clarify it and give an additional explanation for filling it out.

Turning to the qualitative research method, four interviews will be conducted with the executive team of the company “North windows”. Among respondents there will be the CEO of the company, the vice president, the financial director and the company development executive. The interviewees were selected from the top management personnel in order to get insights from another side of the company. Since particularly those people are in charge of all decisions made during the recent crisis, it is important to understand their point of view and specific reasons supporting their solutions. During an interview, researcher and interviewees jointly construct new knowledge (Kvale, Brinkmann, 2014). In this particular case, new knowledge was connected with the evaluation made by interviewees of the way the company handled the crisis in terms of internal communication, as well as with their professional ideas of how internal working processes could be strengthened. In order to reveal those insights, semi-structured interviews (Flick, 2002) that are following an interview guide approach (Patton, 2014) will be used. The pre-planned guide will include open-ended questions that will give the interviewees the opportunity to talk freely of the experiences that they went through (Bell et al., 2019). Semi-structured interviews allow more flexibility while answering, and open-ended questions encourage interviewees to elaborate on the themes that they found important to mention but that were missing in the list of original questions. However, this qualitative method has some limitations. According to Patton (2014), a limitation of the interview guide approach is that some topics of great value can be excluded. This became the reason why apart from the questions that were pre-planned, at the end of each interview there is an open question, so that the interviewee has an opportunity to add something that have not been covered. As a result, the interview guide approach along with an inductive analysis provide the opportunity to identify the perspectives and standpoints of the executive team and answer the research questions.

To sum up, two types of research methods will be used where each of the approach will focus on a particular part of the company’s personnel. This holistic way of gathering primary data will help to get information from different points of view and take them into consideration when designing the internal crisis communication manual. Moreover, this mixed-method



approach is chosen to provide a better understanding of crisis perception in the company and increase reliability and validity of the findings.

## **II. ANALYSIS**

## **6 INTRODUCTION OF THE COMPANY**

The company “North windows” was set up in 2006 in Syktyvkar, the capital of Komi Republic in Russia. Nowadays, there are four offices including the main one located in Syktyvkar as well as 4 branches situated in other cities on the territory of the Republic. In the beginning, the company’s services were limited to windows production and installation, while at present it also offers setup of window blinds and roller shutters, all kinds of doors and other related services. “North windows” complete not only private orders from individuals or other companies (usually property developers), but also public ones that they get by winning tenders. In whole, there are 5 departments in the company: department of corporate orders and wholesale trade, installation department, purchasing and production planning department, logistics department and marketing department. In addition, there are 80 employees working for the company in all 4 Syktyvkar offices including CEOs, accountants, sales and office managers, logistic managers, installers, production and administration workers (Source: ©North windows website).

## 7 PANDEMIC MEASUREMENTS

Regarding the government reaction to the beginning of the pandemic, starting from March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, the Komi Republic started to be on high alert. Educational institutions switched to “distance learning”, all sports classes and events were canceled, cinemas and cultural institutions stopped working, and government agencies restricted the reception of visitors. However, commercial companies were still continuing its usual activities until March 31<sup>st</sup>, when the quarantine became a reality for almost all residents of the Komi Republic: a self-isolation regime was introduced. Those who violated it were punished with fines.

As the additional note it should be mentioned that on the whole territory of Russia the emergency regime was never established. Instead, the new regime that never existed before – self-isolation regime – was introduced. It obliged people to stay at home, commercial companies to continue pay salaries and taxes in the usual way while almost all the processes stopped. What is more, since there was no governmental support, a lot of firms had to get loans in order to be able to keep business alive.

In addition to established limitations, on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020, it was approved to issue special temporary passes for employees of organizations for the duration of the self-isolation regime to go to the place and from the place of activity (i.e. work). A digital pass for a citizen was issued by the employer. The number of employees allowed to get the pass was limited according to the company type and specificity of its activity. Thus, a list of businesses that were directly affected by newly introduced rules due to the virus spread (including tourism, education etc.) was created by the government. Those organizations were a subject to additional financial support, flexibility regarding taxes and the amount of employees needed to go to the office. Other companies that were not incorporated in a special range had to continue paying regular salaries and taxes even for no work done. Moreover, each case connected with the dismissal and redundancy of workers was considered by the employment centre together with the prosecutor’s office regarding the validity level of this decision.

Only on May 14, 2020, the residents of the Komi Republic were able to breathe more freely: people were allowed to walk and exercise outside in pairs. On May 29, 2020, another part of the restrictions was lifted, returning the opportunity to work to enterprises in the service sector and trade. The self-isolation regime was extended only for people over 65 years of age and people with chronic diseases.

## **8 THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT MEASURES ON THE COMPANY**

The company “North windows” was not included in the “special” list of companies whose businesses were directly influenced by the beginning of pandemic. Thus, according to the new passes’ regulation, only 10 employees were chosen who were allowed to work in the office. There were 7 employees including office and sales managers and an accountant and 3 executives including the CEO of the company, Vice President, the financial director. Installers and production workers were almost completely excluded from the work processes and were coming only upon a request. Therefore, executive team of the company was performing multidirectional functions as universal soldiers.

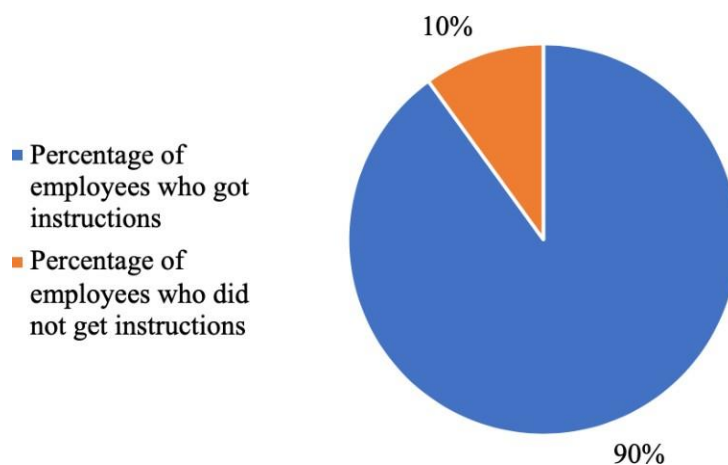
It also should be mentioned that a few employees left the company on their own (mostly pensioners) as they decided to address the employment office and got registered as unemployed. They explained this decision by the fact that this option seemed more proven and stable since, after all, no one knew whether the company would be able to provide them regular financial compensations. “North windows” decided not to employ new staff on the positions of those who left. In addition, during the quarantine period, some employees took leave at their own expense or went on sick leave, thus, reducing the financial burden of the firm. Therefore, it can be concluded that the company worked as a single organism where employees mutually supported each other and made every effort to help business stay afloat.

In general, the main crisis period that coincided with the self-isolation regime lasted about 3 months (from March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2020 to May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020). For the particular business of “North windows”, spring is the beginning of profitable season which slows down closer to winter months, which are usually the least lucrative due to climatic conditions of the city. In 2020 the winter period occurred to be not the worst, but specifically the period, when the amount of orders was usually increasing, distinguished itself as one of the most unproductive even comparing with the first years of the business existence. Therefore, these circumstances resulted in a mortgaged CEO’s apartment and 11 mortgages taken by “North windows” in order not to stop functioning.

## 9 QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH EVALUATION

Starting from the quantitative method, a total of 20 filled questionnaires were obtained from the employees. 14 of them were working from home during the whole lockdown, while other 6 were working in the home office partially as they got temporary passes after the regulation was established by the government. The questionnaire was anonymous and consisted of 16 open, close, numeric and statistical questions (Appendix 1).

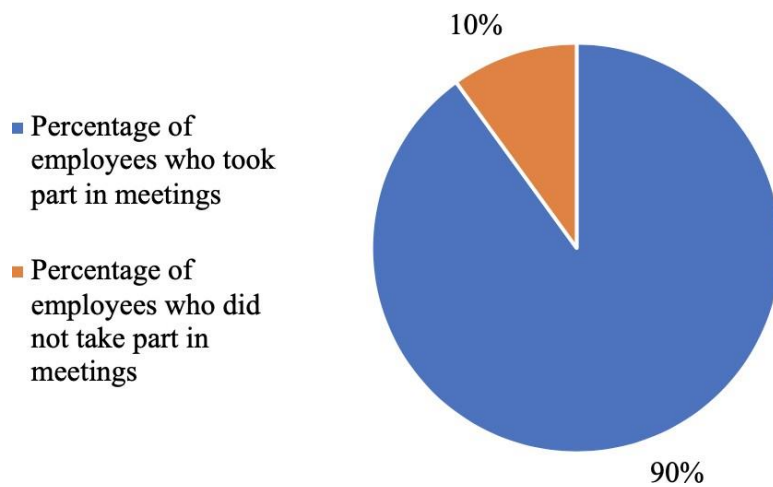
The 1<sup>st</sup> question was connected with the instructions given by the executives and heads of departments to the employees at the moment when new working rules were announced by the government. According to obtained answers, 18 workers got them, while the rest 2 did not (Graph 1).



*Graph 1. Percentage of employees regarding issuance of instructions (Source: own research)*

Based on obtained statistics, it can be assumed that in general guidelines were given not to everybody. This happened due to the fact that among respondents there were several administration employees with such job titles as, for example, a warehouse supervisor, whose work was temporarily stopped. Moreover, this kind of job position was not in priority when the decision about the temporarily pass issuance was made. Thus, since no working activity was performed during a particular period, no instructions for that were given.

The 2<sup>d</sup> question was about the regular online or/and offline meetings providing the updates on work processes, discussing current situation as well as future plans and activities, exchanging opinions and ideas, and, certainly, expressing appreciation and keeping each other motivated. The received results are equal to ones for the 1<sup>st</sup> question: 18 respondents claimed that they were attending those meetings, whereas 2 employees stated the opposite (Graph 2).



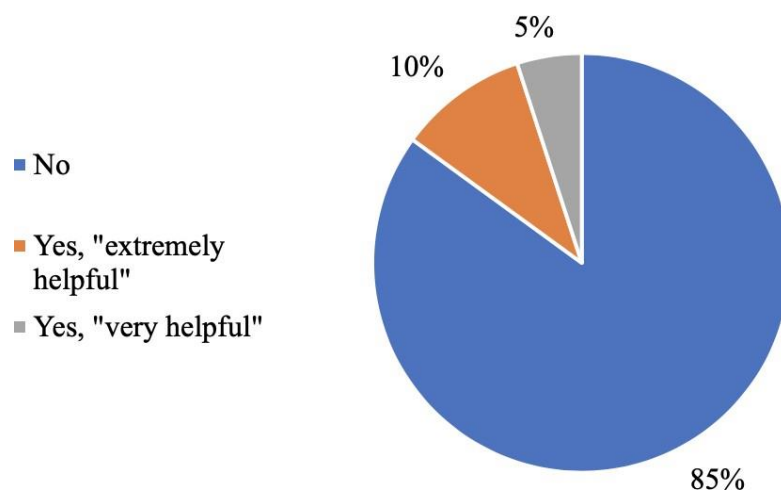
*Graph 2. Percentage of employees regarding meetings participation (Source: own research)*

The outcome can be connected with the reason that not all workers needed to take part in meetings. As main intentions of those kinds of meetings were to discuss the nearest course of action or provide a feedback in order to modify some working processes, the participants were the ones who continued working either in the office or from home. Therefore, the obtained percentage did not reveal any potential problem.

The next 3<sup>d</sup> question was also tied to staff meetings and more particular to their frequency. Originally, those meetings were held each week for all the company's employees. But after the self-isolation regime was announced the regularity dramatically increased. As the question was opened, there were diverse answers including: once in two weeks, once and twice a week, once a day. Moreover, some respondents noted that meetings were organized even several times a day when the external environment was highly uncertain. Presumably, the variation in collected answers stems from the same reason which explained the responses to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>d</sup> questions: workers that are related to higher management level position were more engaged in decision making and planning activities, and, consequently, attended those meetings more often.

The questions №4 and 5 were included in the questionnaire in order to ask about the professional trainings or psychological courses connected to crises situations and the effectiveness of these activities if they were organized. 17 employees answered that no such courses were provided, and the rest 3 answered "yes", out of whom 2 evaluated them as extremely helpful and the last as very helpful (Graph 3). These statistical results could be

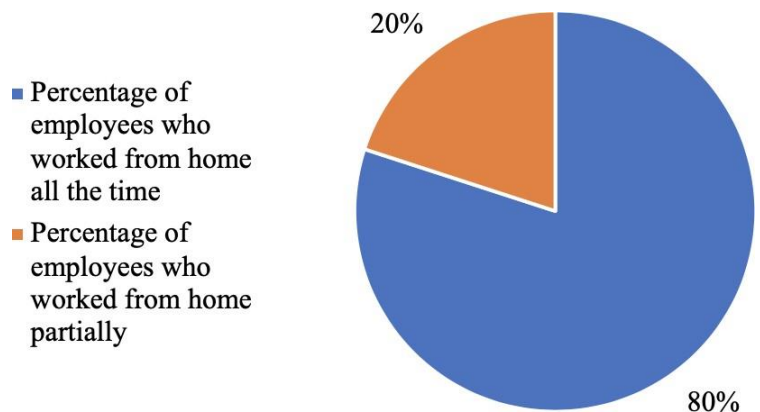
explained by the fact that due to limited company's budgets only limited amount of people could attend various courses, thus, the choice has usually fallen on employees occupying higher posts and/or working longer in the company. In this case it can be recommended for the company to organize at least some basic regular seminars of how the crises can affect companies and how to deal with the circumstances professionally and personally for all employees. While more specified and costly courses would be provided to the executive management as, at the end, they are the ones who take action and responsibility for dealing with crises.



*Graph 3. Percentage of employees regarding the organized (or not organized) professional courses and the assessment of their effectiveness level (Source: own research)*

According to the 6<sup>th</sup> questions, 16 employees were working from home during the whole self-isolation period, and the rest 4 partially as they received special temporarily passes (Graph 4). The choice of employees allowed to work in the office was made based on the position level and the diversity of professional skills as one worker was obliged to accomplish tasks of several other who was at home at that time.

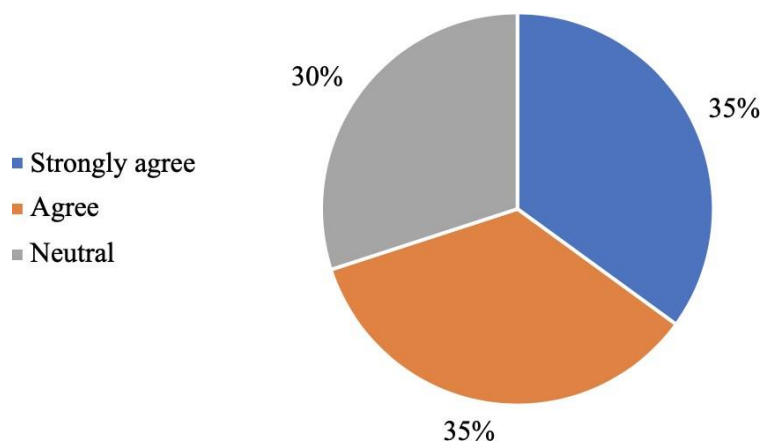




*Graph 4. Percentage of employees regarding working from home during the self-isolation period (Source: own research)*

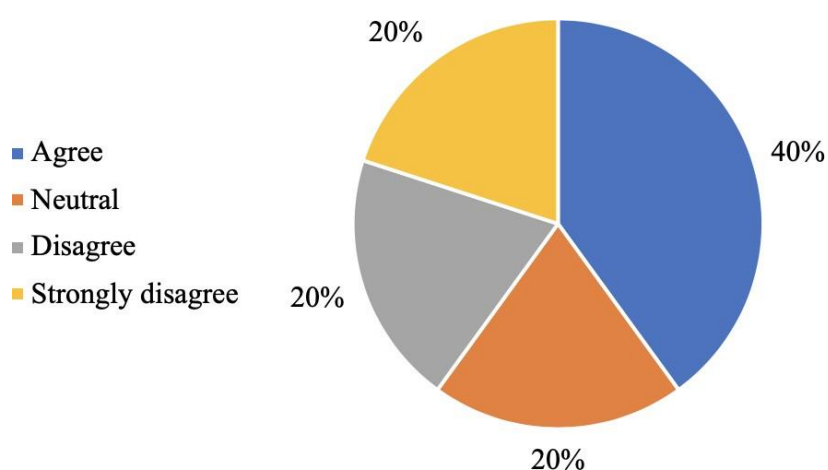
The 7<sup>th</sup> question consisted of 18 statements with which employees should have been expressed their level of agreement. Mostly those statements were connected with the work process that took place during the self-isolation period when the majority of the employees were working from home.

Statement №1 was related to the ability to easily focus on job responsibilities while working from home. 7 respondents answered that they managed to concentrate on their tasks well, other 7 indicated that sometimes it was difficult not to distract, the rest 6 were neutral (Graph 5). This diverse employees' attitude towards working from home is connected with personal preferences as well as with personal circumstances, because, for example, for people living alone it may be easier to work from home than for people living in a big family.



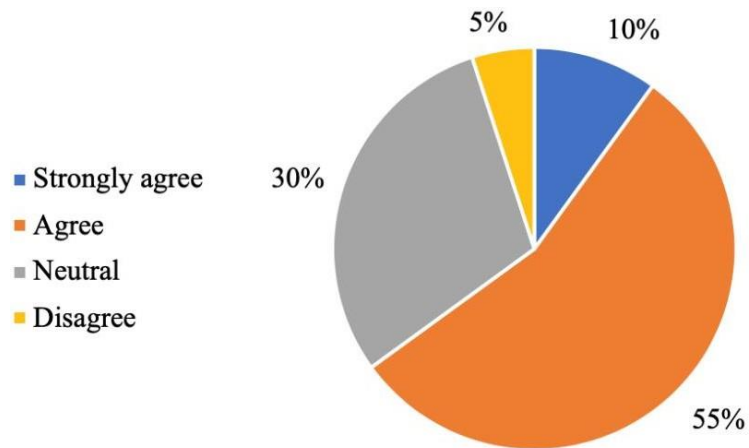
*Graph 5. Reactions to the statement: "While working from home I was 100% focused on my job responsibilities and duties" (Source: own research)*

Statement №2 asked about the decrease in work productivity during the home office period. 8 respondents indicated that they are agree about the decline, however, another 8 were disagree and strongly disagree with this statement, the remaining 4 were neutral (Graph 6). Probably, answers to this statement are various due to the same external reasons that include organized working place availability and accessibility of necessary documents and additional equipment like computers and printers, also distracting factors presence.



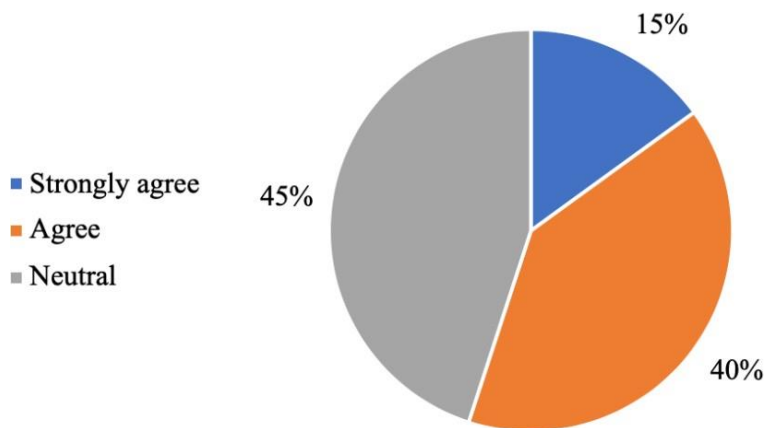
*Graph 6. Reactions to the statement: “My work productivity decreased because of work from home” (Source: own research)*

Statement №3 claimed that the employee is satisfied with the amount or work responsibilities. 19 respondents chose that they were strongly agree, agree and neutral, and only one employee was disagree (Graph 7). Obtained statistics could be explained by the fact that the workload of some employees increased due to the forced shift in functions. At the same time, for some other employees all tasks were cancelled, which meant the significant decline in their financial compensation with which they were not pleased. Thus, it is assumed that in conditions of a crisis it is impossible to oblige all the employees’ requests and sometimes they have to accept the current permanent situation.



*Graph 7. Reactions to the statement: “Overall, I was satisfied with the amount of my work responsibilities” (Source: own research)*

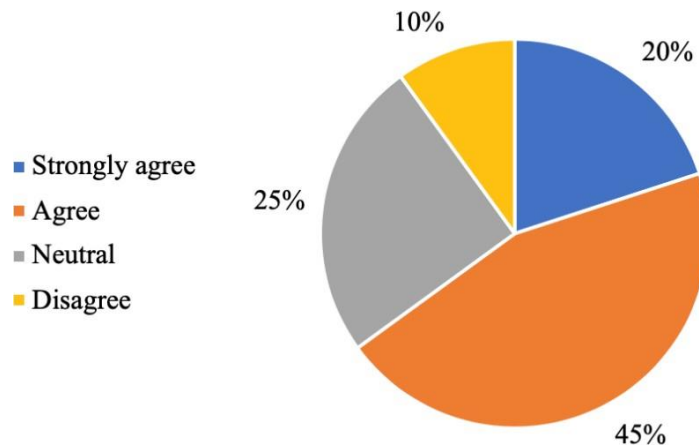
The next statement №4 was connected with the fair work load distribution among employees. 11 employees answered that they absolutely agreed and agreed that responsibilities were allocated evenly and 9 pointed neutral (Graph 8). It can be concluded that generally allocation of assignments was perceived equitably even in the time of crisis.



*Graph 8. Reactions to the statement: “According to my opinion, work was distributed fairly and evenly across employees” (Source: own research)*

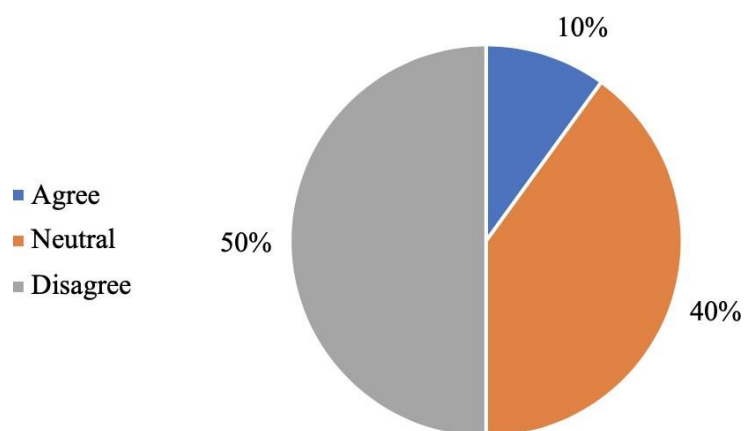
The statement №5 argued that deadlines were set appropriately and employees had enough time to accomplish work. According to answers, 18 workers admitted that they were strongly agree, agree and neutral, and only 2 were disagree (Graph 9). The variety of the answers stems from different workload of employees that is connected to the job position, the change of responsibilities due to the introduced regime, the level of adaptation to working online and

ability to focus on job while being at home. It is believed that it is hard to provide enough time and set adequate deadlines in conditions of crisis but it seems that “North windows” managed to deal with it well as the majority of employees were satisfied.



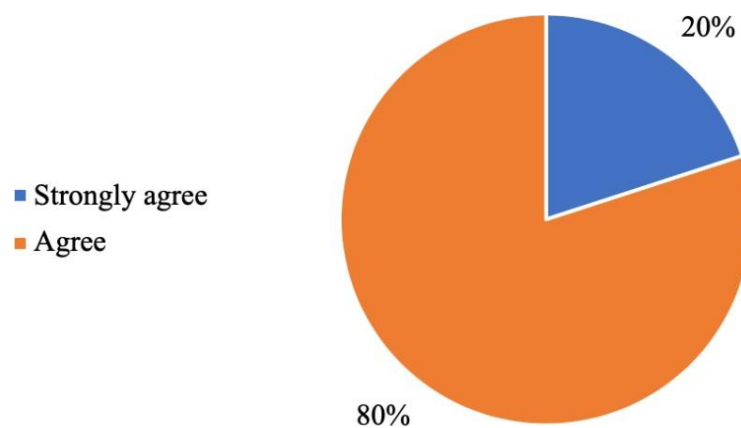
*Graph 9. Reactions to the statement: “Meeting deadlines was fine, I had enough time to do my job well” (Source: own research)*

The statement №6 asked if more work occurred during the self-isolation regime. Only 2 respondents agreed with it, 8 were neutral and 10 disagreed (Graph 10). Thus, it can be inferred that for a half of the respondents the amount of work they needed to accomplish decreased. This happened due to the sharp decline in the amount of orders as well as with refusals and postponements that occurred because of pandemic and fear of customers to undertake works at their homes.



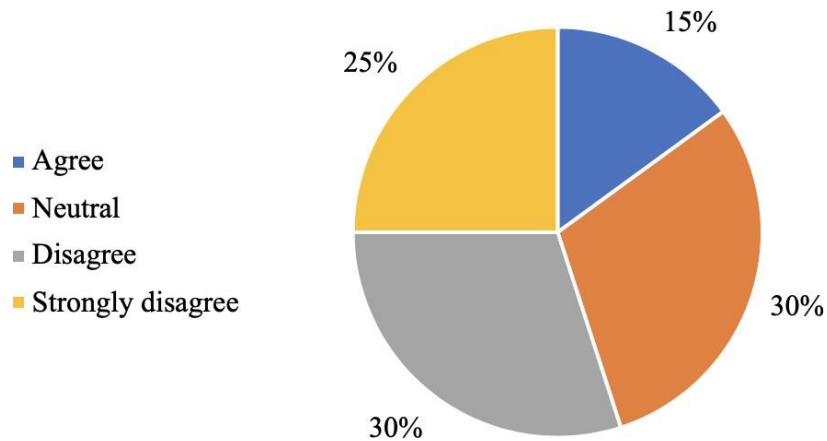
*Graph 10. Reactions to the statement: “It was more work when the crisis occurred” (Source: own research)*

Based on the answers to the statement №7, it can be said that all employees had necessary tools and resources to perform their functions (Graph 11). These results show that overall employees of the company were provided with laptops and relevant installed programs and applications for work (the ones who did not have their own computers got them delivered from the office). What is more, during pandemic several chats and groups were created by executives for permanent communication. In addition, some processes like drawing up and signing contracts were automatized, so the home office employees were able to continue their responsibilities freely and comfortably. Therefore, it can be said that the company was already partially ready for the home office adaptation, as well as it was ready to provide workers with any equipment according to their needs.



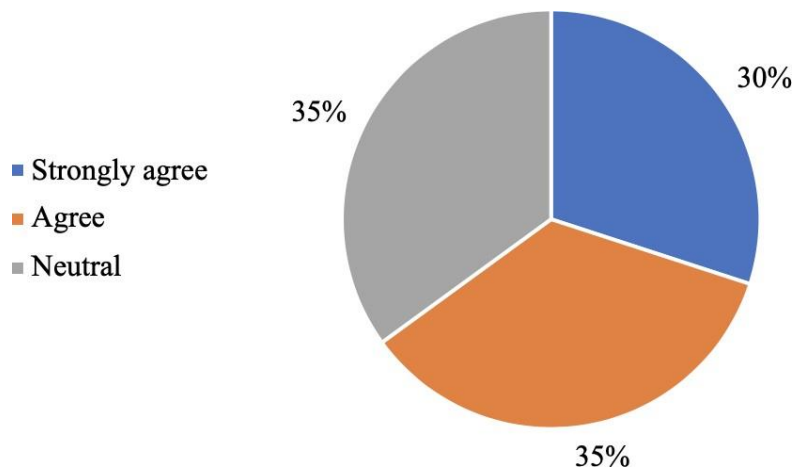
*Graph 11. Reactions to the statement: "I had all the tools and resources needed to do my job (Internet, laptop)" (Source: own research)*

The statement №8 revealed ambiguous attitude towards working from home, it asked whether employees prefer home office or not. 11 workers were disagree and strongly disagree, 6 were neutral and 3 were agree that working from home is better (Graph 12). This variety of answers is influenced by personal preferences of each employee. The only thing that the company can do for keeping everybody satisfied is to take into account those preferences when deciding who can work from home and who from the office. However, as it was already said that sometimes it is impossible to oblige all the employees' requests especially during harsh conditions of a crisis.



*Graph 12. Reactions to the statement: “I enjoyed doing my job online” (Source: own research)*

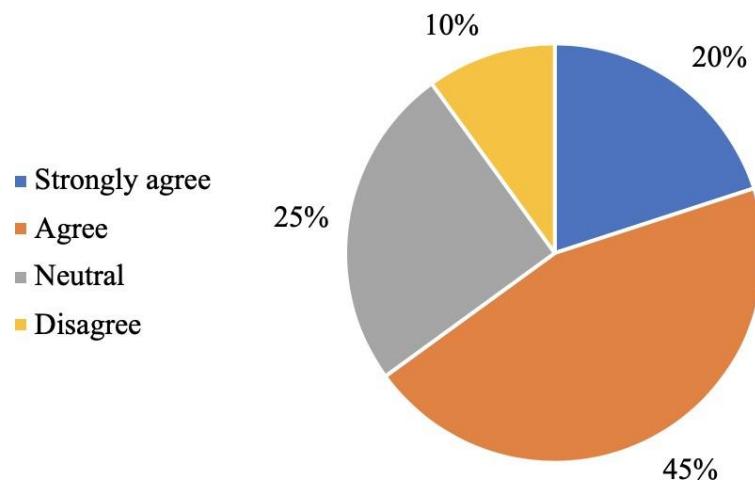
The statement №9 was related to the clear and detailed definition of employees’ goals by their superiors. Overall, all employees indicated that their objectives were explained distinctly (Graph 13). This positive result can be explained by frequent and regular meetings, constant communication online and given instructions in the very beginning.



*Graph 13. Reactions to the statement: “My goals were clearly defined by my superior, I knew what he/she is expecting from me” (Source: own research)*

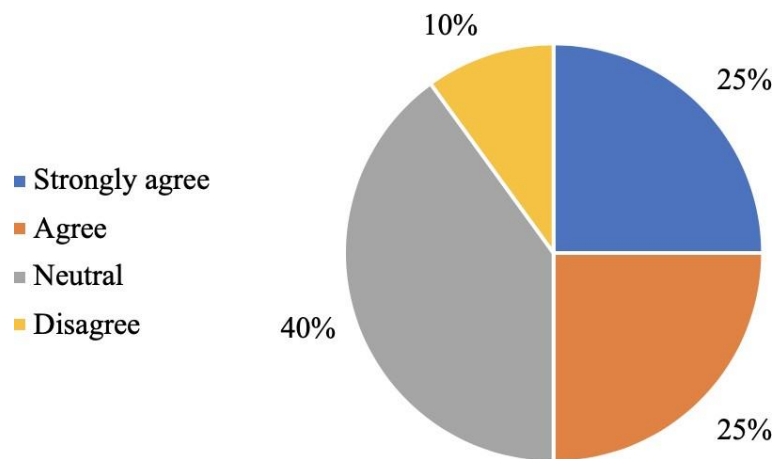
The statement №10 claimed that it was easy for employees to get help and supervision from their executives or colleagues. 4 respondents chose that they are strongly agree, 9 – agree, 5 – neutral and only 2 were disagree (Graph 14). Generally, these responds are assessed as positive. The minority that was not completely satisfied could face slow reaction from company’s staff

to their request because of the over-occupation with tasks. At this point, it is advised to stay patient and, firstly, try to resolve the situation independently, and only in the case when external help is the only option, make the statement.



*Graph 14. Reactions to the statement: “It was easy to get help and supervision from the supervisor or colleagues” (Source: own research)*

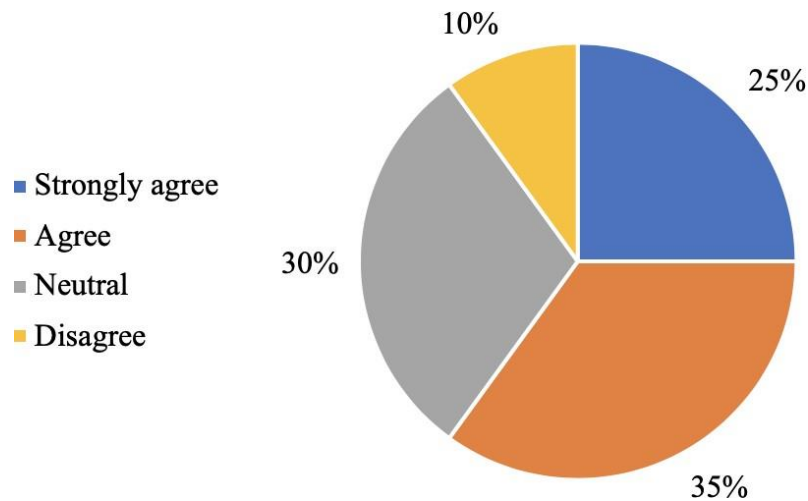
The next statement №11 stated that the employee felt that his efforts were recognized by the executive during the crises. 10 employees were strongly agree and agree, 8 were neutral and 2 were disagree (Graph 15). Overall, workers were satisfied with the level of support and appreciation. However, in order to increase the number of positive answers and address the negative ones, it is important to allocate time during meetings for gratitude and encouragement of all employees’ force invested in the company’s success. It can be also done via chats on regular basis because emotional well-being of employees should not be underestimated. Emotional and social support can help workers alleviate stress and adjust to new work-life expectations.



*Graph 15. Reactions to the statement: “I felt supported and appreciated by my executive” (Source: own research)*

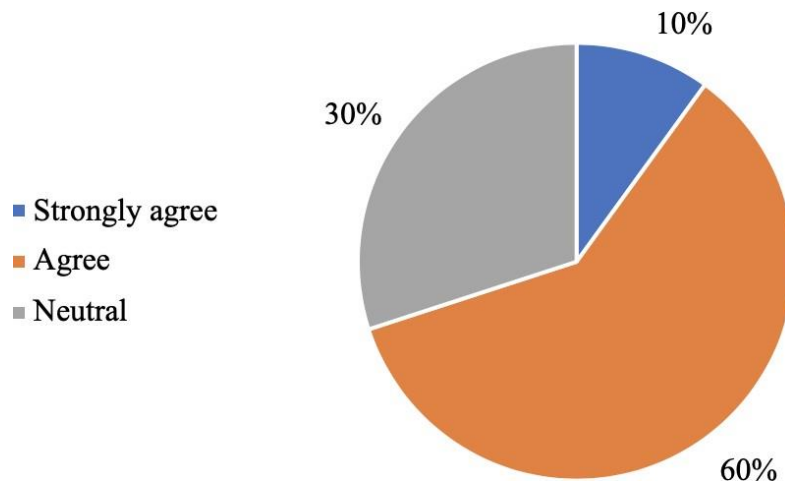
The statement №12 argued that workers could freely talk with their supervisors about any problems, discuss their suggestions and offers. According to received answers, 12 workers were strongly agree and agree, 6 were neutral and 2 were disagree (Graph 16). Even though the general evaluation of the obtained answers can be named as positive, there is still some space for improvement. It is assumed that sometimes it was hard for employees to reach their colleagues as the only way to do it was by phone or online. Even harder the situation was with the executive management since they were the ones who were in the epicenter of all the processes creating the solutions and at the same time working for those who could not be in the office. In this case it can be recommended to allocate specific time during regular meetings with heads of the departments and executives of the company for sharing challenges and suggestions, but also to provide day-to-day survey in a form of a questionnaire for employees for getting the feedback. In addition, specific chat, group or another channel type can be created particularly for the purpose of discussing those topics. Therefore, by implementing those recommendations it will be easier to get and store related information, return to it if needed and offer solutions respectively.





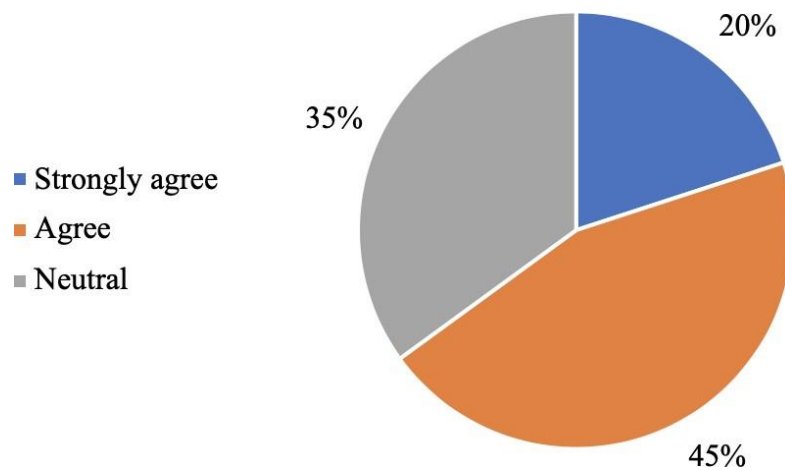
*Graph 16. Reactions to the statement: “I could freely talk with supervisors about problems, and they were taking into account my suggestions on how some job processes could be changed” (Source: own research)*

The statement №13 was intended to assess the level of employees’ autonomy and stated that the worker was totally independent and did not need additional approval on each step. 14 respondents were strongly agree and agree with this statement, while the rest 6 were neutral (Graph 17). Received answers indicate that generally employees had a high level of autonomy that could be explained by given guidelines and recommendations in the beginning of the self-isolation regime. During the regime it was especially useful because main managers were already overloaded with the amount of work to deal with. Moreover, this level of autonomy can also be connected with the fact that even before the pandemic workers already had quite independent positions and were able to perform their responsibilities without constant supervision and delivering whole responsibility for making decisions to the executive management. Therefore, these facts show that the company trusts its employees and value their professional experience and personal intuition.



*Graph 17. Reactions to the statement: “I had total autonomy in my job and did not need my supervisor’s approval on each step” (Source: own research)*

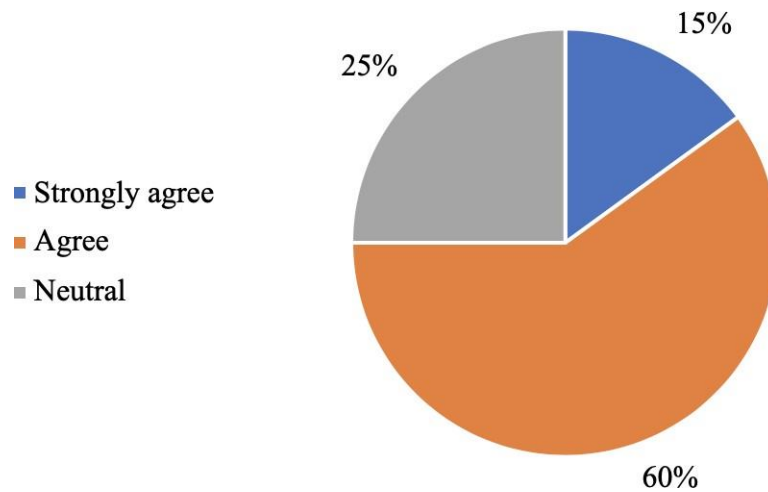
Based on the answers to the statement №14, 13 employees answered that working in teams was easy and very easy, the rest 7 kept neutral position (Graph 18). It is assumed that these statistics are provided by the fact that there were several internal online groups organized for these kinds of purposes, so that employees were able to contact each other fast and coordinate their roles and tasks among each other even without the physical presence in one place.



*Graph 18. Reactions to the statement: “Working in teams was easy” (Source: own research)*

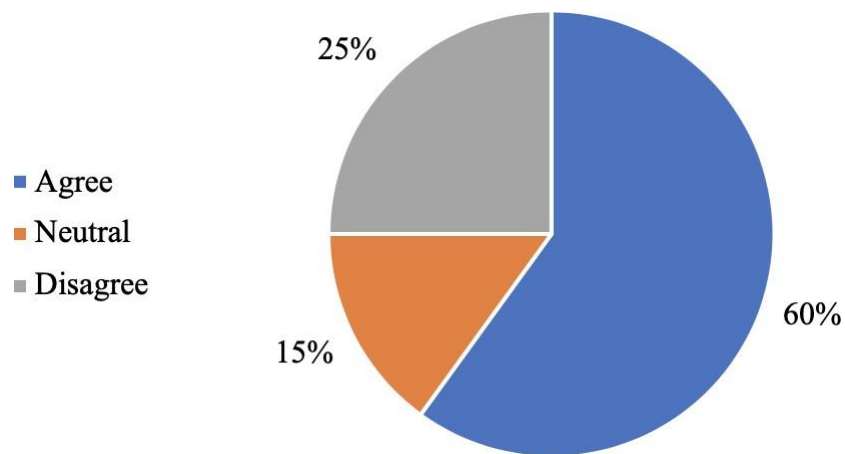
According to answers to the statement №15, all employees felt connected to their colleagues even during the self-isolation regime, they kept communicating and supporting each other

(Graph 19). Those statistics can be also explained by the created online groups where workers were able to interact with each other while staying at home which is especially important because during those months people were generally feeling lonely and separated from the outside world.



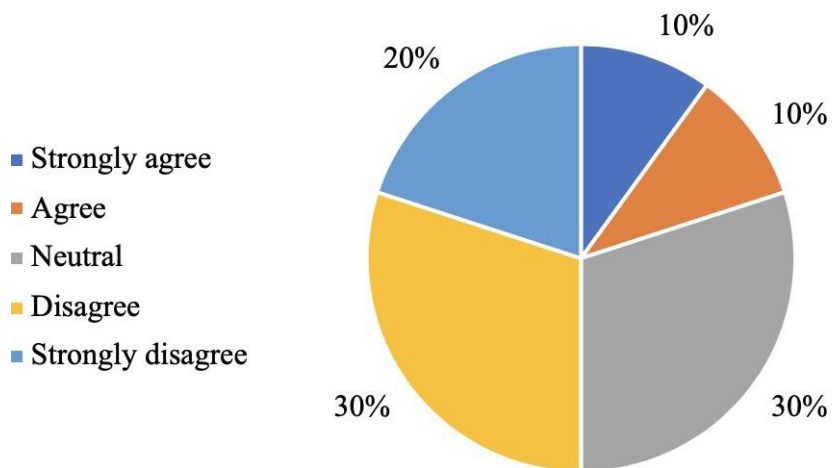
*Graph 19. Reactions to the statement: “I still felt connected with my colleagues, we kept communicating and supporting each other” (Source: own research)*

The statement №16 was related to working through the intranet and online programs. 12 workers agreed that it was comfortable, 3 stayed neutral and 5 disagreed that it did not require extra efforts (Graph 20). It can be presumed that these answers are due to a different level of familiarity and lack of practice of working with these kinds of programs. Thus, it is recommended for the company to provide related trainings to all employees aimed at increasing their online literacy and confidence in using computer applications for work. It can be useful even if the self-isolation regime will not be repeated but because we are living in fast-developing world where technologies are introduced in our everyday life more and more each day and resisting it is not going to change it.



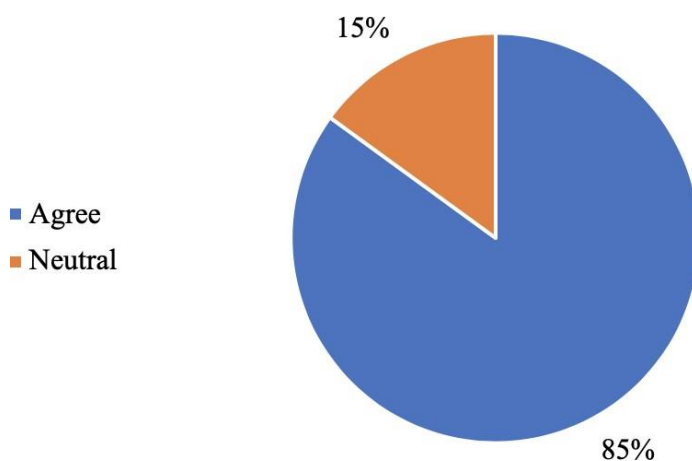
*Graph 20. Reactions to the statement: “Working through the intranet and online programs was comfortable” (Source: own research)*

The statement №17 identified very controversial positions towards the complexity of adaptation to new rules and work processes. 2 respondents were absolutely agreed that it was hard, again 2 were just agree, 6 were neutral, again 6 were disagree saying that it was easy to adapt, the rest 4 were absolutely disagree (Graph 21). Even though the answers are dispersed, more employees believe that adaptation process was manageable. However, 20% expressed the opposite opinion that can result from the same reasons as why it was not that comfortable to work through intranets. Some regular operations were forced to be changed according to new working conditions and since it was unexpected and never happened before some employees were disoriented. Thus, in order to smooth the adaptation process of employees it is recommended for the company to conduct not only professional courses but also personal ones in order to prepare them for possible crises vocationally and mentally. Moreover, in order to keep the adjustment to any new conditions seamless it is advised to conduct regular surveys to keep the record of feedbacks that helps to reveal problems which should be eliminated.



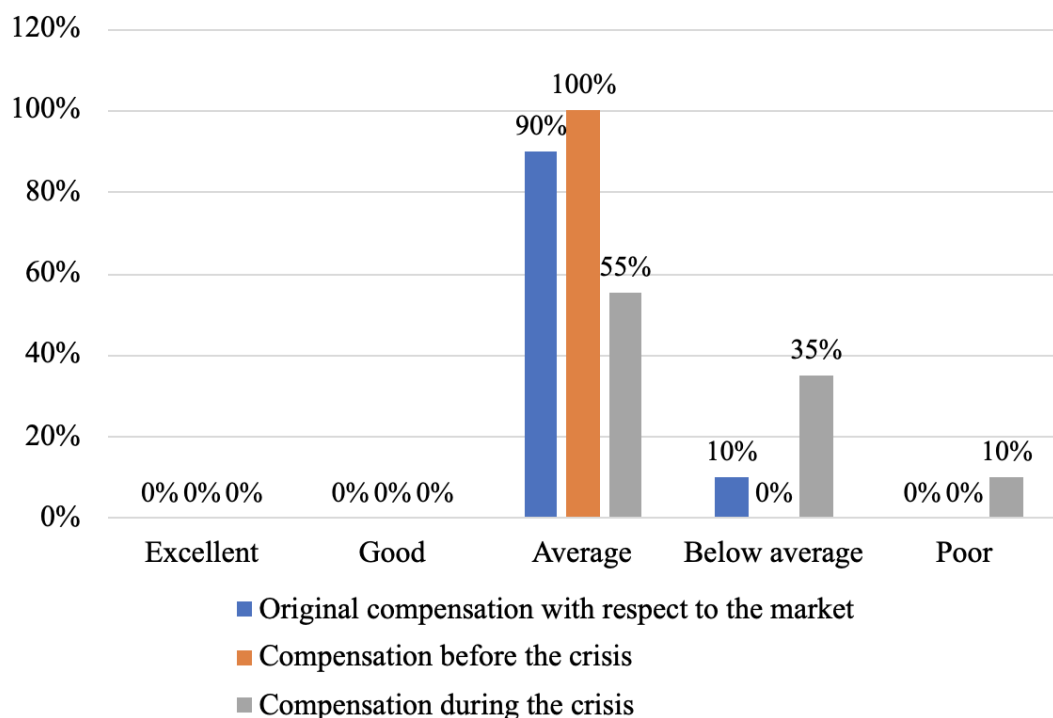
*Graph 21. Reactions to the statement: “It was hard to adapt to new rules and work processes” (Source: own research)*

The last statement №18 claimed that the company managed the crises well with the minimum severe circumstances. Generally, everybody admitted it (17 were agree with the statement and 3 stayed neutral, (Graph 22)). These results lead to the conclusion that the decisions made by the executive management were right and that staff of the company worked well together as a team trying to continue business activities no matter what. Thereby, the way the company handled the crisis deserves respect. More than that, together with the recommendations that will be summarized at the end, it could be even more unhindered.



*Graph 22. Reactions to the statement: “I think that the company managed the crisis well with the minimum severe circumstances” (Source: own research)*

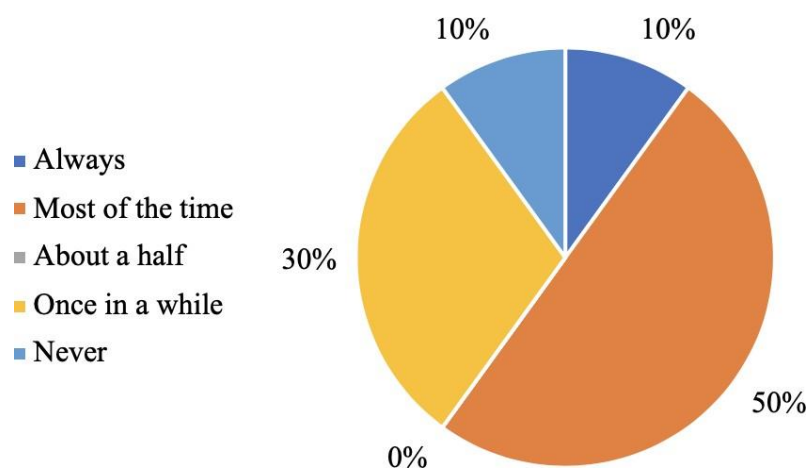
According to received answers to the *question №8*, 2 employees out of 20 believe that their original financial compensation rate is below average with respect to the market, while the majority (rest 18 employees) rates it as average. Regarding the benefits provided by the company before the crisis, all the respondents answered that they were averagely good. The last question concerning the level of the same provided benefits but during the crises showed some controversy in answers. For example, 11 employees estimated it as average, 7 of them as below average and the rest as poor. Results are shown on the Graph 23 below, from which it is possible to conclude that the compensation provided by the company in relation to the market and before the crisis was assessed as average, while during the self-isolation period the possibility for the company to maintain the same level of reimbursement significantly decreased due to the reduced number of orders, its postponements and cancellations. The difference in answers to the last questions can be explained by the fact that during the self-isolation the workload of some employees reduced more considerably than of others, so the compensation was paid accordingly.



*Graph 23. Compensation and benefits rate provided by the organization (Source: own research)*

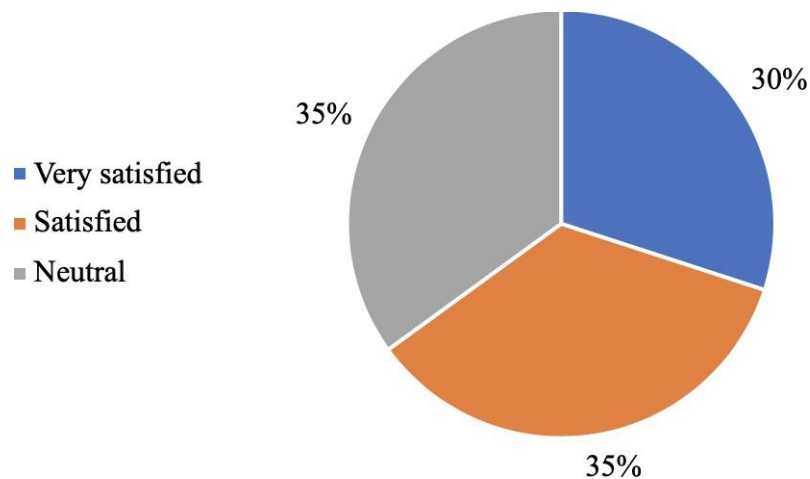
The *9<sup>th</sup> question* was intended to find out the ability of executives of the company and co-workers to listen to each other’s suggestions and take them into consideration in future business

decisions. 2 employees responded that their proposals were always borne in mind, 10 of them were sure that it happened most of the time, 6 workers replied that their recommendations were considered only once in a while, and the rest 2 said that their ideas were never taken into account (Graph 24). Based on the received information, it can be inferred that most of the time employees in this company were given the opportunity to make suggestions, hear each other and make choices on the grounds of all expressed opinions. Some of them were taken more seriously, which can be connected with the level of a job position and experience, as well as with the amount of years of work in the company. Therefore, the diversity of answers to this question is perceived as normal and adequate.



*Graph 24. Reactions to the question: “How often your suggestions at work were taken seriously by your co-workers and executives?” (Source: own research)*

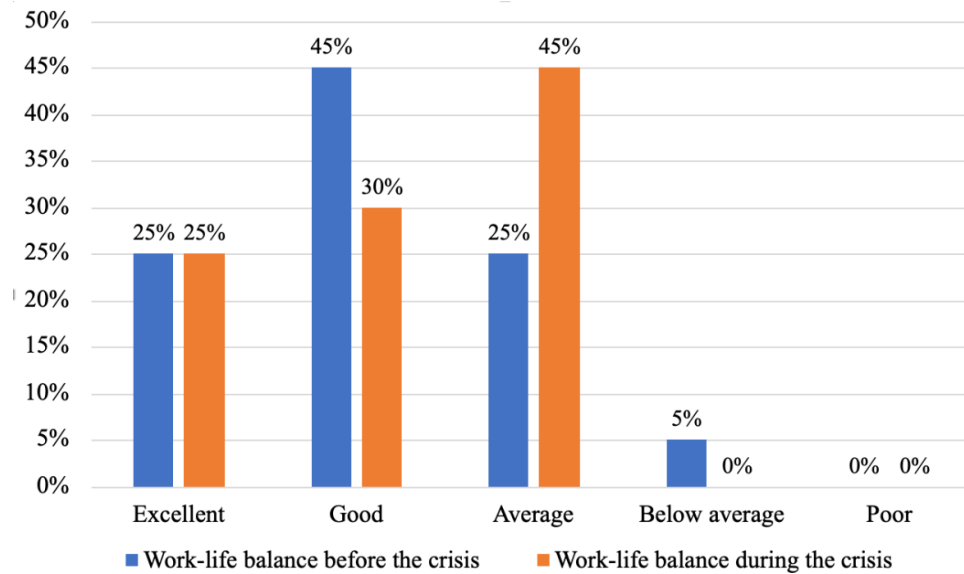
The 10<sup>th</sup> question was connected with the communication process satisfaction during the self-isolation period, in particular, with the level of its simplicity, clarity and speed. According to the obtained answers, 6 employees were very satisfied, 7 were satisfied and also 7 answered neutral (Graph 25). Generally, employees rated the interaction in the company during working from home positively.



*Graph 25. Reactions to the question: “How satisfied were you with the communication process (it was easy to get the response and support, goals and tasks were understandable) during the crises?” (Source: own research)*

The next 11<sup>th</sup> question was focused on the work-life balance of employees in usual working conditions before the pandemic and in modified conditions during the pandemic. They were offered to rate it from 1 to 5 where 1 meant very bad and 5 – excellent. Results turned out to be a little bit controversial (Graph 26) probably due to individual factors and perception of work from home. It can be explained by the fact that some people prefer working from a home office more as they can spend more time with their family, while others believe that it becomes harder to set working hours and the work process lasts throughout the whole day without even a break. In this situation it is important for a leader to set boundaries for working hours and adhere them as well in order to encourage the whole team.





*Graph 26. The level of satisfaction with the work-life balance by employees before and during the pandemic (Source: own research)*

The 12th question was included in the questionnaire in order to reveal advantages and disadvantages of the new way of work during the pandemic according to the employees' opinions. Among pluses of home office there were the ability to spend more time with the family and children, to properly take care of household, to save commuting time to/from work, to economize money on transport and office dinners. Moreover, it was mentioned that at home it was possible to work at any time, it was comfortable and there was no dress code as in the office. In addition, there was one more not personal note saying that due to work from home the company was able to save money on electricity and water bills. Turning to minuses that were highlighted by workers, there was the lack of real interaction together with a feeling of loneliness and the same external environment every day during several months. What is more, the decision-making processes were significantly decelerated and some simplest working activities were taking a lot more time than usual. These could be connected with the absence of the working place, some office facilities (for instance, printers and scanners) and particular documents that were kept in the office. The slow work progress could be also connected with the abnormal amount of calls and messages on different platforms with which it was difficult to keep up. Besides, a lot of respondents were concerned about the effectiveness decrease throughout the regular working days due to external factors such as the presence of kids at home and general high level of distraction that prevented from focusing. At the end of the day, some employees were feeling more exhausted also because of the fact that sometimes during the day they did not find any time for a break and in the evening they could not stop working.

This was explained by a mixed feeling of time frames that people get while being at the same place for a long time. To sum up, it may seem that there are more disadvantages than advantages that workers have mentioned. It leads to the conclusion that working in the office is easier, more comfortable and habitual. However, it should be noted that those weaknesses of home office could be converted to strengths if all the processes were well forged and fully mature. More than that, it is clearly seen from the answers that for some employees home work conditions fit more due to personal reasons and features, while others could be less disciplined in both directions – working less than necessary or working more than necessary. In this case the role of the executives should be in showing their entrepreneurial and management wisdom by matching the right people with the right places of work to reach the highest productivity and satisfaction.

The last open *13<sup>th</sup> question* offered to write down notes and comments that respondents would like to indicate. Several times it was mentioned that the government does not care about people and small-scale business in Russia, that there is no additional support to expect. Besides, some employees said that they missed working in the office and communicating with colleagues, while others stated that their home is the best place in the world. The rest of the notes are specified below:

- The society will never be the same;
- People are tired of crises;
- Stability is a very unstable concept;
- Personal well-being and strong health of the family are the most important;
- Masks and antiseptics are vital nowadays;
- People should take care of each other and follow the rules to save not just themselves but also others around;
- People have to work even harder to keep their jobs in these uncertain times;
- During the crisis sales among young people fell, but rose among nurses and doctors (this note is connected with the wage rise of medicine workers during pandemic).

According to received statistical data, among 20 respondents there were 18 females and 2 males. After analyzing the questionnaires no correlation between answers and the gender was disclosed. In addition, regarding the work duration in the company, 9 employees indicated that they have been working there for more than 5 years (the maximum of 14) and the rest 11 have been working for less than 5 years (mostly, 3 and 4 years). This factor influenced the answers to the questions about: the level of autonomy, the opportunity to talk freely with supervisors

about problems, the frequency of taking into account suggestions by the executive management.

## **10 SUMMARY OF THE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

Generally, employees of “North windows” expressed the positive view on working in the company during crisis. In particular, they were completely satisfied with the following: the amount of work responsibilities; the workload distribution; definition of employees’ goals; the level of autonomy; teamwork; continuous interaction with colleagues; availability of all necessary equipment; general communication process.

Towards such statements employees expressed not that positive reaction: easiness of getting help or supervision from colleagues; freedom to discuss problems with executive managers; simplicity and comfort of working via intranets and online programs; appropriately set deadlines; the level of received support and gratitude; adaptation process to new conditions (home office); compensation during the crisis; taking employees’ suggestions into account for future decisions.

Before naming several recommendations, it should be mentioned that one tip can simultaneously tackle several problems. As the first advice, several types of professional courses for all workers of the company should be introduced: time management (in order to handle deadlines easier and set adequate working time boundaries); technological trainings explaining work via online applications and programs; crises management courses (professional and psychological). Moreover, more concrete and frequent seminars should be offered to the executive management. In addition, it is encouraged to deliver written guidelines with details on modified work processes to all staff so nobody is feeling left and forgotten. Besides, during meetings it is suggested to allocate more time to employees’ offers (even if not all of them will be used) and expression of gratitude and appreciation as well as discussion of some regular personal situations. What is more, it is urged to create chats according to specific topics (it will be easier to find necessary information or request and send the answer respectively). Apart from that, systematic surveys for getting feedback from employees should be introduced.

Regarding work from home, it is advised to allow workers who prefer not to come to the office and whose productivity while working from home does not decrease to perform their functions from there. What is more, if some of their responsibilities require office presence, an exchange of responsibilities with office employees could be done. This decision will lead to decrease in payments of office space, bills, supplies, snacks etc. More than that, the loyalty of employees will be increased and appreciation of understanding will definitely pay off.

In conclusion, it can be added that under the conditions of crisis it is impossible to satisfy all the employees' requests fully, so in some cases they have to accept permanent circumstances.

## **11 PRIMARY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH EVALUATION**

Turning to the second research method, 4 interviews were organized with the CEO of the company (R1), Vice president (R2), the financial director (R3) and the company development executive (R4). They will be analyzed according to questions one by one in the same order as it was in the interview guide (Appendix 2).

**Question №1: Have you ever experienced the crises before in this company or others you worked for? Were there any similar features that you faced?**

R1 and R2 mentioned that they encountered two other crises in the same company being in the same position as they are now – the executive director and the vice president. Those crises happened in 2008 and 2014 and both of them were economic unlike the recent one. Economic downturns of these years affected the company less as in terms of business at that time the firm was mainly dealing with the market of private clients, while the crises more influenced those who worked with corporate clients and real estate developers. A sharp decline in economic activity froze payments, whereas in the private sector market, on the contrary, people were afraid of devaluing money and started to spend all their savings. In order to use this situation in the company's favor, it was decided to increase the volume of advertising and do not dismiss sales managers (unlike competitors did), thus, the company remained in the public eye. In addition, "North windows" was distinguished by a high quality of service. Therefore, the decline in sales did not occur and the company survived the crises quite safely, so it did not encounter with the problem of finding new clients. R1 also noted that such a large-scale crisis as now has not yet been met and R2 added that the gradual economic decline that started in 2014 due to political decisions of Russian government is still going and started to develop faster since 2018. Decline in demand and purchasing power that is connected with the sanctions establishment and shift in the ruble exchange rate is continuously affecting business until today. R3 said that during past economic crisis she was on maternity leave and she was not directly engaged in any work activities. And the last respondent R4 admitted that he went through other crises but not in this company and he surely named the following similar features of how these difficult circumstances were handled: firstly, the reduction of planning horizons as the decisions that are made are short-term but not strategic; secondly, the company should be ready for changes in the established business processes; and thirdly, the executives should be aware of the fact that there are factors that cannot be predicted or influenced by them.

**Question №2: Do you think that crises can be good for organizations in a certain way? Why?**

According to R1 and R2, in such extreme situations, there are always 2 sides of the coin. One of the positive outcomes that the crisis can provide any business with is that it is possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the organization as a whole and identify business processes that do not bring any benefits to the final consumer. After their detection they should be simplified and/or automated or totally excluded. Moreover, it is possible to reveal job positions that also do not bring direct value to the end-consumer, so that they should be removed or outsourced or the functions of these posts should be simplified and ungrouped among other ones. Another advantage is that difficult circumstances immediately highlight which staff members useful for the company, who are proactive and seeking the ways out and who are, on the contrary, alarmist. That is, if necessary, to choose which of the employees should leave the team, it is clear what decision will be appropriate. In addition, thanks to the occurred crises it is easy to identify which business directions are the locomotive ones and more profitable, therefore, on which the organization should bet. R4's opinion coincided with the one of R1 and R2. He additionally noted that in the crisis period the company should mobilize its processes, search for new approaches to work in place of the existing ones. Therefore, sometimes crisis can give an opportunity to take a closer look at already established working methods, re-evaluate them and improve accordingly. In contrast to previous answers, R3 said that nowadays it is fashionable to say that crises are useful but she cannot fully agree with that. R3 pointed out that they have been already living in a protracted crisis for the past few years, so one more or one less it does not matter that much. The only solution here is to try to continue developing in existing conditions and accept the fact that the crises happen from time to time.

**Question №3: Does the organization have the crisis communication plan? (Why do you think it is important for the company to have the crises guidelines? Does this organization have the crisis response team?)** This question is only for the CEO of the company.

According to her answer, there is no plan as such as they just act logically: executive management team that includes the heads of all departments is gathering together and discussing current situation and the director of the company announces the final decision as she is responsible for the entire business. Later, those meetings are becoming as regular as they needed in accordance with the development of the situation. In addition, gadgets and CRM allow to stay in touch with everybody and quickly resolve issues, it was especially useful during the last pandemic crisis.

**Question №4: Did your role and responsibilities somehow change during the crisis?**

Answering to this question all the respondents agreed that their roles changed during the crisis. They mentioned that a lot of functions and processes previously performed by other employees

had to be taken over. For example, executive managers that had temporary passes had to combine roles of loaders and drivers, sales managers and storekeepers, employees who prints the technical task for the production department and employees who sorts the parts for the product production. Sometimes the result was not that fast or of high-quality but this was the work that had to be done by somebody who was present in the office. Apart from that, R1 referred to the Kaizen approach as the participation of the departments' heads became mandatory and they relocated to "gimba", that is, to the place where the product itself is produced. Moreover, she added that the company switched to a manual type of management that is characterized by formulating clear and understandable commands and collecting feedbacks. Excessive democracy was not allowed and strict control of the execution of orders was introduced.

**Question №5: Did the internal communication between employees change in the company? (How did it change?)**

Responses to this question were similar as they all included the fact that the bigger part of staff had to switch to home office and that the role of social applications increased dramatically. Different programs were allocated for different purposes: bitrix24 (the social business platform) was used for tracking tasks, WhatsApp group for executive managers and VKontakte groups (Russian social media platform) for managers and according to departments were created for operational decisions and mobilization. Actual meetings in the office remained only for those who got temporarily passes. Besides, R3 concluded that the company itself narrowed down to a much smaller organization with minimum people as most of the employees were removed from the business processes, therefore, internal communications in general was significantly reduced. She also added that the work instructions created for each job position did not help and for efficiency it was easier to call and ask personnel all the nuances. R4 agreed that the number of people for decision-making during the crisis decreased. Moreover, he noted that some operations of paper documents circulation disappeared due to the lack of use.

**Question №6: What do you think is it possible to be prepared for this kind of situations and, according to your opinion, what could be done for this?**

Answers to this question differed in two directions. In accordance with R1 and R4, the company can be partially ready for unexpected external circumstances. For that it is necessary to do the following: provide employees with access to the internet, online applications and equipment, establish online sales, regularly gather feedback from workers and listen to their needs and requests. Those notes are more relevant to the recent crisis. Turning to more common ones, R4 said that even if it is impossible to be always ready for the crisis, the main manager should



consider possible risks and all options on a particular issue and business development including the negative ones.

Respondents R2 and R3 had different opinion that was more categorical. They were sure that it is impossible to be prepared for such situations. R3 noted that the only thing that the company can do is to have some financial reserve for unforeseen situations and even during the crisis it should be used very carefully. Apart from that, she also added that in order to secure itself the organization should always have serviceable equipment and stationery, an adequate supply of materials and a simplified workflow. Thus, if all these remarks will be taken into account any adaptation to the new crisis conditions will be easier. Additionally, R2 stated that if an official emergency regime was introduced in the country, for which the state has a developed plan of measures and actions and there are prescribed powers of state bodies as well as their roles, then there would be no special need to be prepared for pandemic. In this case, all contracts would be suspended and people would be provided with state payments while being at home. But such plan is not profitable for the state, so they introduced a new regime called the self-isolation regime without explaining what it means. Therefore, the company did not have any plan, since it was impossible to assume such a development of the situation, it acted according to the new regulations, held planning meetings every day and tried to adapt to the new regularly updated rules. According to R2, no plan would help here, only sound improvisation. Moreover, he added that the introduction of such regimes in emergency cases will be repeated, as it turned out that panic is beneficial to the state as it realized that it is possible to lock people at their homes, pay fines, if someone violates, not provide any support and people will somehow survive by themselves.

**Question №7: If you had the chance to go back and change something what would it be?**

Answers of R1 and R4 to this question overlapped stating that everything was done correctly as all actions brought a positive result, even if not in the predicted figures. According to statistics, during the pandemic, several millions of businesses throughout Russia were closed, the last time it happened in 2014. Respondents admitted that it was hard but they continued working and retained most of the team. R2 agreed with R1 and R4 that even if he had a chance to change anything, he will not do it, because, as he said, no decisions were specifically made, the company was just floating in a stream and nothing really depended on them, so the only way to survive was to maneuver wisely. R3 saw the whole situation differently, she believes that the situation was not that fatal, circumstances were difficult but not incomprehensible. All that the executive team needed to do and they did was getting together and looking for solutions, sometimes changing decisions several times a day. As per changes that could be

made if there was a chance, R3 suggested that she would inform customers more about the security of working with the company, be less afraid of restrictions and taking risk, so that the organization would keep the distinct level of incoming orders and maintain general well-being of the company.

**Question №8: What were the main professional and personal lessons for you due to the crisis?**

R1 highlighted that she again made sure that it is necessary to preserve the loyal backbone of the organization and, by all means, not to reduce their pay, since the company can hire new workers and train them, but only if it already has the prevailing executive management. In addition, as the executive team was directly participating in all business processes during the quarantine and took a look at them from the inside, it came to an understanding of which positions are the buffer, that is, which are not really needed and can be reduced. According to R1, it was also revealed who among employees needs to be constantly double-checked, who is not really taking responsibility for their actions. She realized who among personnel is a universal soldier, who is resourceful, comes up with creative ways out of situations, not afraid and ready to take risks. Moreover, as a result of constant flow of new difficulties, a drive appeared as the familiar routine was replaced by excitement of encountering with new challenges. As a conclusion, she added that such crisis situations force to look at business in a different way, generate new ideas and get even more energized by overcoming difficulties.

Regarding answers of R2, he mentioned that the main lesson for him was that it is extremely important to accumulate reserve funds in case of emergencies. However, since now the economy is in decline, there is no opportunity to do this, especially after the recent pandemic and all the taken loans. Furthermore, in this crisis, 2 extremes of people's attitude were identified: the ones who did not care about the virus and believed that it is a lie and continued living as usual; and others who, by contrast, reacted very sensitively and panicked. The main thing in such situations that should be kept in mind is that a good leader should work with both types. That is, not to allow panic, but also to conduct explanatory conversations about the security. More than that, if necessary, it should be considered to involve a third party, specialists like, for example, doctors who are able to explain any issues from a professional point of view, being authorities in this field.

The respondent R3 expressed the following opinion. She said that in crisis conditions, any experience even the one that was not useful for the long time became vital. A professional lesson that she formulated for herself once again is that the company should always have financial reserves. Apart from that, she mentioned that it is important to be less afraid, be ready

to take risks and do not hesitate to use contacts either in business field or any other. Besides, she added that it was crucial to understand that the company was ready to work during the crisis, moreover, most of the employees were ready to continue performing their activities while respecting security measures. In fact, the clients themselves were not ready to cooperate with the company, because if the customers were ready, the firm would not have to narrow down its functioning that much. R3 also said that she cannot complain about action or inaction of the government as nobody can predict crises of this nature. All that remains in this situation is to “roll up your sleeves” and act. Furthermore, she pointed out that she became convinced again that women are more adaptive in a crisis. Men are becoming paralyzed and seem to freeze, while female employees immediately begin to analyze and proceed accordingly.

The last respondent R4 stated that in crisis situations it is essential not to go into denial but to perceive these circumstances as an opportunity to improve business and reveal its weak points. Moreover, it is generally advisable to periodically review any prescribed business processes because it can happen that the situation when a particular process was regulated by a certain rule could already be changed. During the last crisis, the company was forced to reevaluate some operations and now it can be surely said that the general efficiency of the firm performance got higher, there was a sweep of both staff and working procedures.

## **12 SUMMARY OF THE PRIMARY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

In general, it can be said that previously the company “North windows” did not face extreme crises as the ones that happened earlier did not affect business that much due to some specific factors. Hence, the recent crisis or, as some interviewees mentioned, unusual circumstances that the firm was involved in happened to be the first one.

According to the respondents’ opinions that they expressed during interviews there were some advantages of the crisis even though the profitability level of these months was extremely low. First of all, redefining of all business processes from the very beginning occurred. At the end, it affected both the way how working activity is performed and who is fulfilling the obligations. As a result, some processes were decided to simplify, automate, regroup, improve or totally exclude. For instance, some paper documentation operations were completely eliminated which is more ecological and time-saving. Another example is the introduction of preparing, negotiating and signing agreements online which was very useful during the quarantine and is still applicable nowadays. Besides, it was revealed which business directions are vital so the company need to make an accent on them in the future. In addition, among personnel there also was some kind of an inventory. It was identified how each employee is reacting to the crisis conditions: who is able to take risk and responsibility, who is flexible and initiative, who is able to adapt to new conditions quickly, on whom the executive team can unconditionally rely on.

Therefore, it was defined what additional measures could be established for the company to be more prepared for uncertain circumstances and have more sustainable position. Especially, it should be mentioned that the firm’s personnel realized that they can lean on only each other and there is no reason to hope for some external support. In this case, it is critical to accumulate a financial reserve that will represent reliance for a company during hard times. Turning to a particular internal communication approach, the following notes should be pointed out. First of all, the leader should be able to take a strong-willed initiative position and be a role model for all employees. In the conditions of a crisis he/she should be ready to manage the company in a manual mode without additional democracy, formulate orders but still give an opportunity for expressing suggestions. However, they may be not taken into account as the last word is on the director. In order to be able to play this comprehensive role the chief executive has to build the authority among personnel appropriately. Apart from that, workers should be kept motivated and encouraged to embrace their creativity and adventurous approach to taking decisions in indefinite conditions. Additional personal conversations and discussions should be

continuously organized in order to increase and maintain trust, loyalty and strengthen the bond among people as it was mentioned by the director of the company, it is highly important to save the established team.

## **13 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

In this part answers to the research questions mentioned in the methodological part should be noted.

### **RQ1: What have changed in the company during the crisis in terms of internal communication process?**

When the crisis occurred, the company had to change the way its personnel perform their duties due to established restrictions. First of all, most of the staff started working from home and fulfill their obligations remotely. Therefore, since employees were not able to go to the actual office and communicate with their colleagues face-to-face, they had to start using online programs, chats and phones more frequently. Thus, the biggest change was connected with the fact that all communication processes were transformed to online ones. For instance, regular weekly staff meetings were held in Zoom and all working questions were decided through specifically created groups on different platforms (WhatsApp, VKontakte) or by phone.

### **RQ2: What was the employees' opinion regarding the internal communication changes that appeared during the crisis?**

As generally employees expressed positive attitude towards how the internal communication was organized during the crisis, overall, they did not have any negative experience in working in teams, understanding their goals and tasks. However, since there were limitations on face-to-face interactions, sometimes it was hard for the personnel to get support or supervision from their colleagues or executives as well as discuss some working issues. Those problems were directly connected with the fact that the whole communication process was held online and sometimes it was hard to reach out to a particular person for a discussion as everybody was constantly involved in several conversations. Moreover, some employees also mentioned that they felt the lack of personal communication within the company. It is reasonable since there were limitations on personal interactions and they were allowed to use only their laptops or phones to connect with each other.

### **RQ3: What improvements can be introduced in the company in terms of internal crisis communication?**

In order for the company to be better prepared for the crisis in terms of internal communication, it is advised to establish the following innovations: organize different types of professional courses, allocate more time to employees' offers and expression of gratitude for their contribution to company's success during regular online meetings, create chats and groups according to particular topics, frequently conduct surveys for getting feedback from the staff

and design and deliver written guidelines for employees on changed work processes during the crisis. Talking about working remotely, it is recommended to allow workers who would like to perform their duties from home to change their job location.

In conclusion, it can be noted that the company overcame the crisis situation decently judging from the personnel feedback and even from the fact that the firm is still operating. Talking specifically about the internal crisis communication, it is possible to state that generally decisions regarding it were appropriate and helped to maintain the employees motivated, involved and provided with everything needed to perform their responsibilities productively. However, recommendations that were formulated should be taken into consideration. Furthermore, insights that were gathered during the interviews with the executive team should also be addressed.

To sum up, it is advised for a company to establish a detailed manual that will take into account all mentioned notes as well as include some additional tips to be better equipped for an effective response to specific incidents.

### **III. PROJECT**



## **14 OUTCOMES FOR THE MANUAL**

With the onset of the crisis, the competitiveness of the business environment increases dramatically. This environment requires a prompt response to any information signal and any change. In a competitive race, the winner is not the one who owns the information, but the one who quickly and efficiently manipulates it: finds, structures, transmits, receives. This is exactly what the effective internal communication is. All major business operations must be carried out quickly, accurately, and efficiently. In this situation, a thoughtfully established internal crisis communication can become a big competitive advantage for the company and help it to survive hard times.

According to the results of the research that was presented above, several problems that the company have in terms of internal crisis communications were revealed. In order to solve them, some recommendations were formulated that are able to improve the company's internal interaction. The implementation of this advice will give the opportunity for the organization to transform their internal crisis communication to a strong competitive advantage and use it during the crisis situations for running the company more smoothly.

## **15 CONTENT OF THE INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANUAL**

Based on the conclusions given in the previous chapters the internal crisis communication manual should be established. It includes several procedures that will strengthen the bond between the company's employees, increase their motivation level and loyalty to the company, and generally help workers to be more prepared for potential crises. As it is already known, people are the company's most important investment, therefore, happy employees return greater value and lower turnover resulting in better performance and efficiency.

The plan of the project part consists of the following:

1. Implementation of the necessary procedures based on the research results including:
  - 1.1. the creation of the specific chats and groups for employees (Procedure 1);
  - 1.2. the organization of online and offline training courses and seminars (Procedure 2);
  - 1.3. a new format of a weekly staff meeting (Procedure 3);
  - 1.4. a new working strategy for employees preferring working from home (Procedure 4);
  - 1.5 the regular feedback surveys (Procedure 5);
  - 1.6 the creation of written guidelines for employees (Procedure 6).
2. Distribution of responsibilities connected with the manual implementation among employees;
3. The budget of the manual implementation;
4. Effectiveness measurement of the manual implementation;
5. Risks and limitations of the manual implementation.

Thus, after considering each procedure of the manual separately and creating a particular time frame for its realization, the final schedule incorporating all information together will be developed. The general schedule together with the duties' allocation will provide an easy-to-follow and clear plan ready for exercising. The part mentioning the costs and savings will help to distribute the activities according to the budget that the company has. Besides, the part concerning the effectiveness evaluation will allow to continuously monitor and improve the results. And finally, the section about risks and limitations of the manual implementation will give the company the ideas it should take into account in order to succeed.

## 16 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANUAL

### 16.1 Plan of the manual introduction

Firstly, it should be noted that it is advised to present the project in April, 2021 as from the beginning of February till the middle of March the company passes an annual governmental personnel check that requires a lot of additional time and efforts. Therefore, it is recommended to wait until the end of this process plus two weeks break. Moreover, if the manual program starts in April, 2021, the employees of the company will have enough time to adapt and feel the positive result before the summer period which is considered as the busiest and, consequently, lucrative one.

The plan of introducing the manual to the employees of the company is the following:

1. April 1<sup>st</sup>, Thursday, 2021 – introducing it to the CEO of “North windows”;
2. April 5<sup>th</sup>, Monday, 2021 – introducing it to the executive team including vice president, the company development executive and heads of the departments on a meeting;
3. April 9<sup>th</sup>, Friday, 2021 – announcing the manual’ procedures to all the company employees on a weekly staff meeting that is held each Friday.

The list of the procedures to establish in the company includes 6 operations and each one includes 3 phases of implementation: preparation, actual execution and evaluation. So, each procedure will be described and its realization will be outlined according to the mentioned stages and a particular timeframe. Thus, at the end the general schedule combining information regarding all necessary operations will be created. Below there is the characterization of each procedure together with the relative schedule.

### 16.2 Implementation of Procedure 1

**Procedure 1.** The creation of the specific chats and groups where employees can leave their feedback or business proposals.

*Preparation phase:* designing and distributing questionnaires among employees asking topics of those chats and the preferred forms and channels where they will be created. In this way employees can give ideas not obvious to the executive team and feel that the company trusts them and values their professional experience and personal insight. Further, the information from filled polls should be analyzed and particular conclusions should be made.

*Implementation phase:* based on the withdrawals, creating the chats for sharing opinions and thoughts.

*Evaluation phase:* continuous analyzing of the data gathered in these groups. Moreover, it is important regularly design surveys and get the feedback from personnel in order to understand if any changes should be made on the first procedure.

Table 1 below represents the action sequence for the first procedure according to dates.

*Table 1. First procedure time frame (Source: own research)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Starting designing the questionnaire for employees
April 9 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing news about the emerging procedure, distributing the relative questionnaire and setting the deadline for its completion (April 13 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday)
April 13 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Collecting filled questionnaires and starting analyzing the answers
April 15 <sup>th</sup> , Thursday	Reporting the conclusions from questionnaires to the CEO and the company development manager for the final approval before proceeding to the implementation phase
April 16 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing the results of questionnaires to the personnel and the future respective plan of its realization
April 19 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	Starting creating the appropriate chats and groups
April 23 <sup>d</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing the news that everything is ready for usage starting from this date
May 7 <sup>th</sup> , Friday	Delivering the first report to the CEO and the company development manager on the chats usage and information they are gathering, evaluating the effectiveness and improving if needed. It is crucial to continue monitoring this procedure constantly providing the report each 2 weeks

## 16.3 Implementation of Procedure 2

**Procedure 2.** Online and offline training courses and seminars on different topics including time management, crisis management (professional and personal) and technologies (new equipment, applications, programs).

*Preparation phase:* creating the specific questionnaire for the personnel to reveal their offers and preferences regarding topics or particular fields on which trainings should focus on. Moreover, some more specific and costly courses should be provided to the executive management.

*Implementation phase:* based on the results, the responsible employees should start doing the research on those trainings and plan them accordingly.

*Evaluation phase:* constant overseeing of employees' feedback on held trainings and pursuing new courses opportunities.

Below there is table 2 showing the actions sequence for the second procedure by dates.

*Table 2. Second procedure time frame (Source: own research)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Starting designing the questionnaire for employees
April 9 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing news about the emerging procedure, distributing the relative questionnaire and setting the deadline for its completion (April 16 <sup>th</sup> , Friday)
April 16 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Collecting filled questionnaires and starting analyzing the answers
April 22 <sup>d</sup> , Thursday	Reporting the conclusions from questionnaires to the CEO and the company development manager for the final approval before proceeding to the implementation phase
April 28 <sup>th</sup> , Wednesday	Holding a meeting with the CEO of the company, the executive management team and the HR manager to provide the final decision and define priority topics regarding future training courses
April 29 <sup>th</sup> , Thursday	Starting conducting the research regarding trainings, evaluating costs, planning dates and scheduling the events

May 12 <sup>th</sup> , Wednesday	Presenting the report that includes the schedule of events to the CEO of the company for the final confirmation
May 14 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing the news about the plan of future seminars, continuously looking for new training opportunities and delivering reports on each held event about its effectiveness

### 16.4 Implementation of Procedure 3

**Procedure 3.** A new strategy for the staff that prefer working from home meaning the full transition of their responsibilities' performance to a new location, i.e., the home office.

*Preparation phase:* the responsible worker should distribute applications to those who want to change their work place. These employees should indicate reasons why they think they fit for this kind of modification. Later, the applications should be analyzed and a discussion meeting between the CEO and the heads of the departments should be held to finally approve the transfer of a particular employee to the home office.

*Implementation phase:* managing the document preparation for the employment office, adaptation of the work place, provision of necessary equipment, documents and programs.

*Evaluation phase:* permanently monitoring how employees are adapting, revealing their additional needs or issues and managing them, assessing the effectiveness of this change.

Table 3 below shows the schedule of the third procedure realization.

*Table 3. Third procedure time frame (Source: own research)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Starting designing the application for employees
April 9 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing news about the emerging procedure, distributing the relative application and setting the deadline for its completion (April 13 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday)
April 13 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Collecting filled applications and starting creating the report on them to the CEO of the company and the heads of the departments from which employees have applied
April 16 <sup>th</sup> , Friday	Delivering the reports

April 21 <sup>st</sup> , Wednesday	Holding a meeting with the CEO of the company and the heads of the departments to come to the conclusion on the employees who can start working remotely
April 22 <sup>d</sup> , Thursday	Starting preparing documents for the employment office, creating the list of necessary equipment (including laptops, printers, documents, online programs and applications, software) for the new work place for each employee and getting ready for the transition
May 10 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	Finishing the transition phase and starting working in new conditions
May 24 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	Distributing the first questionnaires to employees who started working remotely and their supervisors for getting feedback on first two weeks of working in a new format
May 26 <sup>th</sup> , Wednesday	Collecting the questionnaires and preparing the report with the conclusions
May 28 <sup>th</sup> , Friday	Delivering the first report to the CEO and the heads of the departments on the new way of working, evaluating the effectiveness and improving if needed. It is crucial to continue monitoring this procedure constantly providing the report each 2 weeks

## 16.5 Implementation of Procedure 4

**Procedure 4.** The new weekly meeting format implying the incorporation of additional discussions. In particular, from 10 minutes to half an hour at the end of each meeting will be allocated to the expression of staff suggestions related to work procedures. In addition, during this time, the director of the company will be announcing particular achievements reached by a specific employee, the department or the whole company during the week. This will serve as a part of the general personnel motivation strategy that the company has. More than that, personal discussions and news exchange during these dedicated minutes should be encouraged. *Preparation stage:* monitoring the staff achievements weekly and reporting to the CEO of the company accordingly (the report regarding that should be delivered each Thursday to be presented on the next day (Friday) when the weekly personnel meeting takes place).

*Implementation phase:* performing the procedure as it was described above.

*Evaluation phase:* continuously tracking recalls of the personnel regarding those introductions and changing it respectively if necessary.

Table 4 below represents the time frame of the fourth procedure implementation.

*Table 4. Forth procedure time frame (Source: own research)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Starting gathering information regarding the employees' achievements to be announced on the Friday weekly staff meeting
April 8 <sup>th</sup> , Thursday	Delivering the first report on achievements to the CEO of the company
April 9 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing the new format of weekly meetings and presenting the achievements for the past week
April 16 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Repeating the same format each weekly meeting and constantly tracking its effectiveness by data gathered from regular online surveys

## **16.6 Implementation of Procedure 5**

**Procedure 5.** The regular feedback surveys that will be published each two weeks in the general group for all employees and is mandatory for completing by everybody. This procedure reconciles all the previous procedures as each of them includes the evaluation stage that is connected with constant gathering and analyzing of employees' reviews on performed operations.

*Preparation stage:* designing the questionnaires on different topics and procedures including the ones mentioned above.

*Implementation phase:* publishing questionnaires online for easier completion by employees.

*Evaluation phase:* constantly monitoring staff feedbacks, study them steadily and react according to the results.

Table 5 below shows the sequence of actions to realize the fifth procedure by dates.



Table 5. Fifth procedure time frame (Source: own research)

Date	Action
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Starting designing the surveys that will be repeatedly filled by employees each 2 weeks
April 9 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Announcing the introduction of questionnaires that will be monitoring the company's well-being and employees' satisfaction
April 12 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	Publishing questionnaires online, starting continuously tracking its completion, analyzing the results and act accordingly

## 16.7 Implementation of Procedure 6

**Procedure 6.** Another important operation to accomplish is to design written guidelines for the personnel that will include their responsibilities and roles during the crisis. This will give employees a feeling that everybody in a team is valued and has their specific place and influence on the company's activity. Moreover, those guidelines will bring more certainty and determinacy on the staff's particular obligations especially in the times when nothing is clear. *Preparation stage:* creating drafts of the guidelines for each job position and discuss it with the heads of the departments and the executive team.

*Implementation phase:* delivering the approved guidelines to employees.

*Evaluation phase:* continue monitoring any changes in the personnel' responsibilities and adjusting the guidelines respectively when needed.

Table 6 below represents the sequence of actions that are needed to implement the sixth procedure by dates.

Table 6. Sixth procedure time frame (Source: own research)

Date	Action
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	Starting creating the guidelines for employees
April 26 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	Holding a meeting with the heads of the departments and the executive team discussing and confirming the prepared guidelines

April 30 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	Delivering the prepared guidelines for employees on a regular staff meeting and explaining its value
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## 16.8 General schedule of the manual implementation

After considering each procedure separately and creating the relevant time frame, the summarizing schedule integrating all mentioned information should be designed. Below there is Table 7 presenting the general time frame for the manual implementation.

*Table 7. The general schedule of the manual implementation (Source: own research)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Action</b>
April 1 <sup>st</sup> , Thursday	1. Introducing the manual to the CEO of the company
April 5 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	1. Introducing the manual to the executive team including vice president, the company development executive and heads of the departments on a meeting
April 6 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Starting designing the questionnaire on chats and groups for employees</li> <li>2. Starting designing the questionnaire on training courses for employees</li> <li>3. Starting designing the work from home application for employees</li> <li>4. Starting gathering information regarding the employees' achievements to be announced on the Friday weekly staff meeting</li> <li>5. Starting designing the surveys that will be repeatedly filled by employees each 2 weeks</li> <li>6. Starting creating the guidelines for employees</li> </ol>
April 8 <sup>th</sup> , Thursday	1. Delivering the first report on achievements to the CEO of the company to be announced on the Friday weekly meeting
April 9 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Announcing news about the emerging procedure №1, distributing the relative questionnaire and setting the deadline for its completion (April 13<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday)</li> <li>2. Announcing news about the emerging procedure №2, distributing the relative</li> </ol>

	<p>questionnaire and setting the deadline for its completion (April 16<sup>th</sup>, Friday)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Announcing news about the emerging procedure №3, distributing the relative work from home application and setting the deadline for its completion (April 13<sup>th</sup>, Tuesday)</li> <li>4. Announcing the new format of weekly meetings and presenting the achievements for the past week</li> <li>5. Announcing news about the emerging procedure №5 (the introduction of questionnaires that will be monitoring the company's well-being and employees' satisfaction)</li> </ol>
April 12 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Publishing questionnaires of the procedure №5 online, starting continuously tracking its completion, analyzing the results and act accordingly</li> </ol>
April 13 <sup>th</sup> , Tuesday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collecting filled questionnaires and starting analyzing the answers regarding chats and groups</li> <li>2. Collecting filled work from home applications and starting creating the report on them to the CEO of the company and the heads of the departments from which employees have applied</li> </ol>
April 15 <sup>th</sup> , Thursday	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reporting the conclusions from questionnaires on chats and groups to the CEO and the company development manager for the final approval before proceeding to the implementation phase</li> </ol>
April 16 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Announcing the results of questionnaires on chats and groups to the personnel and the future respective plan of its realization</li> <li>2. Collecting filled questionnaires and starting analyzing the answers regarding trainings</li> <li>3. Delivering the reports on employees who applied for working from home</li> <li>4. Repeating the same new format for each weekly meeting and constantly tracking its</li> </ol>

	effectiveness by data gathered from regular online surveys
April 19 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	1. Starting creating the appropriate chats and groups
April 21 <sup>st</sup> , Wednesday	1. Holding a meeting with the CEO of the company and the heads of the departments to come to the conclusion on the employees who can start working remotely
April 22 <sup>d</sup> , Thursday	1. Reporting the conclusions from questionnaires on trainings to the CEO and the company development manager for the final approval 2. Starting preparing documents and new work places for the work from home transition
April 23 <sup>d</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	1. Announcing the news that chats and groups are ready for usage starting from this date
April 26 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	1. Holding a meeting with the heads of the departments and the executive team discussing and confirming the prepared guidelines
April 28 <sup>th</sup> , Wednesday	1. Holding a meeting with the CEO of the company, the executive management team and the HR manager to provide the final decision and define priority topics regarding future training courses
April 29 <sup>th</sup> , Thursday	1. Starting conducting the research regarding trainings, evaluating costs, planning dates and scheduling the events
April 30 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	1. Delivering the prepared guidelines for employees on a regular staff meeting and explaining its value
May 7 <sup>th</sup> , Friday	1. Delivering the first report to the CEO and the company development manager on the chats usage and information they are gathering, evaluating the effectiveness and improving if needed.
May 10 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	1. Finishing the transition phase of work from home employees and starting working in new conditions

May 12 <sup>th</sup> , Wednesday	1. Presenting the report that includes the schedule of the nearest events to the CEO of the company for the final confirmation
May 14 <sup>th</sup> , Friday (weekly meeting)	1. Announcing the news about the plan of future seminars, continuously looking for new training opportunities and delivering reports on each held event about its effectiveness
May 24 <sup>th</sup> , Monday	1. Distributing the first questionnaires to employees who started working remotely and their supervisors for getting feedback on first two weeks of working in a new format
May 26 <sup>th</sup> , Wednesday	1. Collecting the questionnaires on working from home and preparing the report with the conclusions
May 28 <sup>th</sup> , Friday	1. Delivering the first work from home report to the CEO and the heads of the departments on the new way of working, evaluating the effectiveness and improving if needed.

To sum up, during around 2 months the mentioned 6 procedures will be incorporated in the company's activity. It is also advised to use the Bitrix platform to set goals according to specific deadlines as this program helps to monitor their executing in a very clear way.

## **17 DUTIES DISTRIBUTION AMONG EMPLOYEES REGARDING THE MANUAL IMPLEMENTATION**

Generally, the majority of the workload connected with the implementation of the crisis manual will be placed on the HR department. Currently, there are two people working there: the main HR manager and the assistant. Since nowadays the company is not hiring new personnel but, conversely, tries to retain the minimum number of employees due to the occurred crisis, the amount of daily responsibilities performed by the department decreased. Thus, they will get the following additional duties:

1. Providing the report to the director of the company on the achievements of a specific employee, the department or the whole company on the weekly basis (each Thursday evening) to be announced on each weekly staff meeting (each Friday morning);
2. Creating questionnaires (regarding the specific groups and chats), distributing, collecting and analyzing them and reporting the results to the director and the company development executive;
3. Implementing the procedures according to the results of surveys (creating chats and discussions in appropriate channels);
4. Creating applications for working from home requests, distributing, collecting, analyzing them and reporting the results to the CEO;
5. Organizing meetings with the CEO and the executive team for the final approval of the training courses plan and the candidates for the home office;
6. Creating written guidelines for employees and holding a meeting with the heads of the departments and the executive team for its final approval;
7. Preparing necessary documents to the employment office indicating who among personnel is working from home, helping in adapting their new working place;
8. Being responsible for organizing trainings and courses on different topics (searching for speakers, scheduling and managing them);
9. Gathering regular feedback from online feedback surveys, analyzing and reporting the results to the CEO and the company development executive.

Apart from that, the personal CEO's assistant can support the HR department in performing some operations. For example, in creating, printing, collecting and analyzing papers filled by the staff. In addition, they can negotiate the functions distribution among each other in order to present the result according to the deadlines.

Furthermore, some new duties of the director of the company, heads of the departments and the company development executive occur when implementing the procedures of the project.

They include:

1. Announcing additional achievement notes during the weekly staff meetings (only for the CEO);
2. Participating in meeting regarding trainings, work from home employees and the personnel's guidelines;
3. Regularly checking reports on employees' suggestions and feedbacks.

## 18 BUDGET OF THE MANUAL IMPLEMENTATION

Turning to the costs that will accompany the realization of the project, they will mainly consist of the ones connected to the participation in online or offline courses and invitation of speakers. Besides, moving of employees to home office will also require supplementary budget as the company will have to provide employees with some new equipment. However, this investment can be considered as long-term and will pay off in the future as the company will save money serving less people in the office.

Below there is table 8 presenting the approximate budget of the project in more detail. It includes not only costs related to the project implementation, but also savings that will occur due to the transit of several workers to home office. The budget is calculated for the year starting from April, 2021 when the project implementation starts and ending in April of 2022.

The calculations are made with the following conditions in mind:

1. there are 5 approved candidates who will be working remotely and whose adaptation have to be provided (with the assumption that some employees already have their own computers and printers to use);
2. there are 5 trainings planned for the employees during the year.

*Table 8. Calculation of the project budget (Source: own research)*

<b>Project costs/savings category</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Actual number</b>
Training courses fees (first 4 courses are for all the company's personnel and the last one is only for the executive team)	Time management course	210 EUR
	Professional crisis management course	200 EUR
	Personal crisis management course	180 EUR
	Technical course	150 EUR
	Leadership training	550 EUR
Material resources (additional equipment for new 5 remote employees)	Laptops (2 items)	480 EUR
	Printer (1 item)	90 EUR
	Software installation (5 items)	50 EUR
	Program's installation (5 items)	50 EUR



<b>Total costs number</b>		<b>1960 EUR</b>
Contingency reserves	Contingency project fund for being more flexible and reduce risks (-10% of the whole budget)	200 EUR
<b>Total costs number + reserves</b>		<b>2160 EUR</b>
Utilities savings (per month for 5 employees)	Electricity, heating, water, air-conditioning costs	90 EUR
Transportation savings (per month for 5 employees)	Commuting costs covered by the company	80 EUR
Office supplies savings (per month for 5 employees)	Printing paper, stationery, office snacks	45 EUR
<b>Total savings number</b>	Per month	<b>215 EUR</b>
	Per year	<b>2580 EUR</b>

To sum up, as the budget presented above is created for a year, the costs that are connected with training courses will be distributed among 12 months which makes the general financial burden not that serious. However, the expenses related to the change in work location of several employees are simultaneous even though the costs itself are not that high (with the exception of a purchase of laptops). Turning to the savings part, from the first sight it seems that they are not that impressive. Nevertheless, after calculating them for the whole year the total number appears to be even higher than the number of costs. Thus, it can be concluded that the project implementation is lucrative even with the realization of different procedures.

## **19 EFFECTIVENESS MEASURING OF THE MANUAL IMPLEMENTATION**

The effectiveness of the manual that offers the procedures described above will be evaluated by the questionnaire and interviews that will be established in May 2022. A questionnaire will be offered to the employees of the company and include questions regarding their level of work satisfaction, motivation, engagement, as well as the effectiveness of provided trainings. Moreover, additional questions will be addressed to those workers who started to work from home. They will be related to the level of satisfaction and comfort of performing professional operations from the home office. In addition, 4 interviews with the same representatives of the executive team (the CEO, vice president, the financial director and the company development executive) will be organized to reveal their opinion on the procedures introduced a year ago, their influence on the company's well-being and, finally, their effectiveness.

## **20 LIMITATIONS AND RISKS OF THE MANUAL IMPLEMENTATION**

### **20.1 Limitations of the manual implementation**

There are certain limitations to implementation of the manual that was presented above. Starting from the restrictions, firstly, the number of interviews that were conducted during the research was only four and therefore, the results cannot be generalized fully. In this case more executives including all heads of the departments of the company should have been interviewed. In addition, the number of respondents to the questionnaire was also not that high and equal to 20. All these 20 employees are working in the main office located in Syktyvkar, while there are other branches that the company has in other cities. There are also people working and they were not offered a questionnaire to fill in. Furthermore, some of these 20 questionnaires that were collected for analysis were not completed fully by personnel, especially the part with the opened questions. Therefore, those limitations in addition to the limitations of used research methods should be taken into account while reviewing this work.

### **20.2 Risks of the manual implementation**

Turning to the risks of establishing the manual from this thesis, two of them can be pointed out. The first one is connected with high uncertainty of the current pandemic situation and the opportunity of the next lockdown arrival. It will lead to the appearance of new restrictions and can ruin the implementation of the presented plan. The second risk is related to the budget and financial problems that can be caused by the establishment and prolongation of the lockdown in the Republic. That will result in the decreased amount of orders and, consequently, in declined budget that can be used for the realization of the project. Thus, mentioned risks also should be taken into consideration, so that the company can be ready for them.

## **21 SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT**

To conclude, the project consists of implementation of 6 procedures that were revealed during the research as necessary improvements to establish in the company “North windows”. Each operation is described according to 3 phases (preparation, implementation and evaluation) and according to a particular schedule. The outcome of combining all 6 time frames represents a detailed scheme that can be used by the firm. Moreover, the project also includes the allocation of work obligations among employees so that duties and responsibility for their performance are clearly defined. In addition, the budget of implementing the project is calculated in order to have an appropriate vision on how to plan particular training courses as they represent the most expensive part. The next part is devoted to approaches that can be used for further effectiveness assessing of operations that were realized. And the final step was to describe risks and limitations that the company may face while realizing the presented manual. Therefore, implementation of this project will improve the employees’ satisfaction, motivation and boost loyalty and trust among workers.

## CONCLUSION

In crisis situations, internal communication in the company becomes one of the business priorities. Rash statements, lack of accurate information can lead to demotivation and even panic and, as a result, destroy the company's reputation and the business itself. Therefore, during crisis it is important to properly build relationships and information flows in the organization, as well as connections between management and subordinates. One of the most important part for the firm of being prepared for hard conditions is to have a thoughtfully established internal crisis communication plan. This will help to maintain a normal psychological climate in the personnel team, create a sense of unity, cohesion, increase labor productivity and discipline. Moreover, the company should perceive the crisis as not a threat, but as an opportunity. A carefully managed incident allows the firm's immune system to be developed, allowing the risks to be used as a competitive advantage. Thus, since nowadays the world state is highly uncertain and it is hard for business to plan its activities, being internally prepared for the crisis is becoming highly crucial.

This work consisted of three main parts that were created in order to achieve the main goal of the thesis and answer the research questions. The major aim of this paper was to create the internal crisis communication manual for a particular Russian company "North windows". For achieving it, this thesis included 3 parts. The first part focused on the theoretical framework regarding internal crisis communication, crisis types and their descriptions, various crisis strategies and importance and special value of an internal crisis communication plan. The second part included quantitative and qualitative research that were revealing the changes in internal communication of the company during the crisis according to the middle and high management employees. The last third part was devoted to the principal objective of the thesis and included the internal crisis communication manual designed for the chosen company. It described 6 procedures that are needed to be established in the firm based on the research results. Further, one general timeline was designed that included all necessary actions for the company to perform and, as a result, strengthen its internal crisis communication approach. Moreover, the project part also consisted of the duties' distribution, the manual budget, effectiveness evaluation and limitations and risks of its implementation. Thus, the main goal of the work was reached.

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix P I: Questionnaire for employees

Appendix P II: Interview guide

## APPENDIX P I: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR EMPLOYEES

### Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madame, I would like to ask you to fill in this questionnaire. The aim of this research is to identify how the company was dealing with the recent crisis and how it influenced the work process in the company. The survey is conducted at the Faculty of Multimedia Communications of Tomas Bata University in Zlin, the Czech Republic. It is anonymous and will be used only for non-commercial and educational purposes.

1. Did you have any instructions from the CEO or the head of your department on how the work process is going to change when the new rules were established due to the crises?

Yes

No

2. Did you have any regular online (or offline) meetings discussing how the current situation and if everybody is comfortable and able to do their work properly?

Yes

No

3. How regular were those meetings

---

4. Did you have any professional trainings or psychological courses on how to deal with the crises?

Yes

No

5. How helpful were these programs in doing your job better?

<b>Not helpful at all</b>	<b>Slightly helpful</b>	<b>Moderately helpful</b>	<b>Very helpful</b>	<b>Extremely helpful</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Were you working from home during the lockdown?

Yes

Partially (had the pass)

7. Please state your level of agreement to below questions about work process during the crises.



<b>Statement</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
While working from home I was 100% focused on my job responsibilities and duties	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My work productivity decreased because of work from home	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall, I was satisfied with the amount of my work responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
According to my opinion, work was distributed fairly and evenly across employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Meeting deadlines was fine, I had enough time to do my job well	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was more work when the crisis occurred	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I had all the tools and resources needed to do my job (Internet, laptop etc)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I enjoyed doing my job online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
My goals were clearly defined by my superior, I knew what he/she is expecting from me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was easy to get help and supervision from the supervisor or colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I felt supported and appreciated by my executive	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I could freely talk with supervisors about problems, and they were taking into account my suggestions on how some job processes could be changed	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I had total autonomy in my job and didn't need my supervisor's approval on each step	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working in teams was easy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I still felt connected with my colleagues, we kept communicating and supporting each other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working through the intranet and online programs was comfortable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It was hard to adapt to new rules and work processes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I think that the company managed the crisis well with the minimum severe circumstances	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Kindly rate the compensation and benefits provided by your organization.

	<b>Poor</b>	<b>Below average</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
Rate your original compensation with respect to the market	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How good were the benefits offered by your organization <b>before the crises?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How good were the benefits offered by your organization <b>during the crises?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. How often your suggestions at work were taken seriously by your co-workers and executives?

<b>Never</b>	<b>Once in a while</b>	<b>About half the time</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	<b>Always</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. How satisfied were you with the communication process (it was easy to get the response and support, goals and tasks were understandable) during the crises?

Very dissatisfied	Not satisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very staisfied
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. On a scale of 0-5, please indicate (where 1 is very bad and 5 - excellent):

	1	2	3	4	5
How would you rate your work-life balance <b>before</b> the crisis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
How would you rate your work-life balance <b>during</b> the crisis?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Please indicate minuses and pluses of the new way of working during the crisis

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13. Kindly name 3 notes you realized after the crises

---



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### Statistical data

Gender

Male

Female

Your position in the company

---

Years working in the company

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## **APPENDIX P 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE**

### **Interview guide**

#### **Introduction**

Hello, my name is Evgeniia. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my thesis research. I would like to inform you that the interview will be recorded. Moreover, you can decide not to answer to some questions, or to stop the interview any time you want.

The aim of this research is to identify how the company was dealing with the recent crisis and particularly how the internal crises communication plan was established and to what extent it was effective.

#### **Questions**

1. Have you ever experienced the crises before in this company or others you worked for? Were there any similar features that you faced?
2. Do you think that crises can be good for organizations in a certain way? Why?
3. Does the organization have the crisis communication plan? (Why do you think it is important for the company to have the crises guidelines? Does this organization have the crisis response team?) *This question is only for the CEO of the company.*
4. Did your role and responsibilities somehow change during the crisis?
5. Did the internal communication between employees change in the company? (How did it change?)
6. What do you think is it possible to be prepared for this kind of situations and, according to your opinion, what could be done for this?
7. If you had the chance to go back and change something what would it be?
8. What were the main professional and personal lessons for you due to the crisis?

#### **End**

I would like to thank you for your participation. It has been a pleasure to talk to you.