ASSERTIVE MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION: A PURPOSEFUL FACTOR FOR CAREER SUCCESS DURING COVID-19 TIMES

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Abstract: The pandemic complexified the way we communicate, work and interact, revealed shadows of professional and personal life's frontiers, unexpectedly accelerated the known trends in digitization. Equally the leaders and the employees had to face and react fast, the assertive communication empowered by emotional intelligence being a key to success. This research paper reflects a comparative analysis of the way in which the managerial communication is approached in the pandemic period by different types of organization, profit or non-profit ones, aiming to highlight the importance of language acts for career success and organization progress, the way it becomes critical in shock moments and how the company policies are adapted for a business continuity plan and more. The study highlights that, no matter the type of organization, profit or non-profit, big or small, all used types of communication represent the most valuable element that keeps the pieces together both in business and in manager's professional life in order to maintain the business and to have career success, in the short and long term. Communication skills is something that we all hold or we can improve and does not always imply financial resources but if it is well done, with emotion, ethics and in due time, brings an incommensurable return on investment. The practical implications of this research are for the HR strategies and policies, with a focus on developing the communication skills by valuing the emotional intelligence competencies that can positively be perceived as relevant for personal development and career success or for the resilience of the organization.
Keywords: career success, Covid-19 crisis, emotional intelligence, leadership, managerial communication, neuro-linguistic programming, resilience

1. INTRODUCTION

No matter the ownership and purpose of the organizations (for profit or non-profit), in pandemics all had to adapt the usual managerial communication approaches both for continuity, for the progress of business goals but also for the employee wellbeing and engagement. The organizations' history, organizational culture and specific technological advancements mattered, as the adaptation, although in a fast pace, was smoother for both leaders and employees if those were built on a solid ground. New communication channels were used, different communication styles were employed, increased psychological needs and expectations were addressed, both for survival and career success.

The importance of communication as a key success factor in career success is stressed, where not only the content is important, but also the assertiveness, authenticity and resilience. Adapting to the new context plays

a significant role, mainly referring to the place, persons, channels of communication, inner personal balance, personal ambitions and challenges, individual ethics, to verbal and non-verbal language and tone and so on, most affected or made them more difficult by pandemic. The study also highlights the communication methods in pandemic as a factor that can make or break a career or a company, the emotional intelligence and personal leadership that may mark a positive impact or less as a result of differences in approaches, and the influence on the results regarding the performance and motivation of people.

The company strategies and policies are done by people, with their own values, beliefs, education, history and dynamic evolution. Understanding the diversity of people's perspectives and the importance of their alignment can be done through NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming) techniques, which implies having emotional intelligence. The leaders can make the difference by their validation and lively relevance on a daily basis in their work with all stakeholders involved, employees, customers, authorities etc.

The pandemic and other ongoing crises are shocking events that may determine the way we perceive our own professional environment, the personal balance and the future career challenges. There is no unique answer, as we all have various backgrounds, needs and aspirations. But for all, at least the way we communicate our mind and soul counts, may influence positively or negatively our career success, the company's organizational success in the short and long-term. The future career choices will take into account the way the personal and professional pandemic bridge was crossed, a process where assertive communication skills are critical.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Importance of communication

A leader should prove continuous performance being able to be a role model for the teams, influencing people, being able to attract and maintain followers that cannot be done without certain skills. Communication is one of them, being the essence of interpersonal relations (Tanascu et al.,2020; Taun, 2022), so relevant for career success itself. Even more, in shock times, when all emotions are gathered, the way we manage the communication is very important.

Realizing or positively perceiving the importance of communication skills is valuable for one's evolution especially in early stages of career (Kleckner & Butz, 2020). Even more, when rated by perceived importance, there are recent studies that reveal that communication and risk analysis were the most important non-financial topics needed for early career success.

2.2. New ways of communication

Due to the fact that communication could not be done through face-to-face meetings during Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions, companies carried out the communication through classic ways such as newsletters, e-mails, phone-calls, phone-conferences etc. Companies immediately looked for new communication solutions that could simulate face-to-face communication. This is how online video platforms such as Zoom, WebEx, Skype, Teams etc. found their best moment to be overnight widely implemented into companies, with an overnight adoption rate, enabling communication, collaboration, learning and management. But online video platforms brought something unexpected in communication for remote employees, the opportunity to use these platforms for informal interactions, as a booster of team spirit and quality communication (Blanchard, 2021).

2.3. Internal communication, employees' engagement

Covid-19 crisis brought a lot of extra risks for mental health due to the lockdown, fear for life, health, family members, work therefore managers and human resources professionals had to figure out fast ways to keep close to people, to communicate more, to help them organize their work from distance, help them feel supported and cared for.

Hesse et al. (2021) examined the impact of affection deprivation brought by Covid-19 lockdown on mental health and relational communication and found out that affection deprivation brings stress, loneliness and depression (Hesse et al.,2021). Stress and depression bring difficulties in the performance and productivity

process (Adler et al., 2006). This is why companies had to find ways to keep a good communication level between managers and their teams, inside teams and cross teams communication in order to reduce the level of stress and even depression, therefore maintaining mental health and performance. The authors also argue that the negative impact of depression on performance continues, even after the depression is cured, therefore all efforts have to be done to avoid arriving at this point.

It has become imperative for all managers to establish, like a purpose, the well-being state of each employee and to focus their attention on empowering each person's emotional intelligence. (Daniel Goleman 2018) presents the research of two psychologists (Mayer and Caruso 2000) that tried to form a broader picture of intelligence by reinventing it to the level of necessity for success in life and specifies that Salovey includes (Gardner's 2013) personal intelligences in his basic definition of emotional intelligence, by extending these abilities to five main areas: knowing personal emotions, emotion management, self-motivation, recognizing emotions in others, relationship management (Goleman, 2018). These psycho-relational skills cannot be developed properly and completely in a work environment where communication is computer mediated, because the nonverbal communication and the natural affective side of the communication is disrupted.

For a company to perform at its best, managers should work with and through subordinates. Business managers have various resources at their disposal, and the quality of work depends on how well these resources have been used to achieve corporate goals (Alebiosu et al., 2022; Ciocoiu et al, 2020).

During the pandemic, many organizations, companies or institutions have resorted to working from home. A diary study regarding the organizational commitment and the work engagement when teleworking is embraced as an organizational innovation expected to improve the working conditions of public servants shows that they "*experience quite negative effects from teleworking, including greater professional isolation and less organizational commitment on the days that they worked entirely from home*" (de Vries et al., 2018). The authors also found that higher leader–member exchange (LMX) reduced the impact of teleworking on professional isolation. Therefore, their article not only shows the unfavorable effects of teleworking but also highlights that LMX can limit these negative effects. LMX is a dyadic theory in the leadership literature that explains the relationship between leaders and members based on the idea that leaders are friendlier and more communicative with some members that report to them and their high-quality exchange have a social rather than an economical side. Each party in the dyad behaves in ways of reciprocity in order to suit the other's needs. The concept is related to emotional intelligence due to its affective dimension and also to job performance because the members are very likely to have greater levels of motivation and desire to benefit the leader and the organization. However, this does not mean that this theory is suitable for teleworking. It could be for hybrid work which involves a specific percent of face-to-face social interaction.

In early research, although limited, a direct association between individual performance (PFIP) and work engagement (WE) was found, an indirect correlation through the motivation due to pay and a joint link through the pay level and pay satisfaction (Kulikowski, 2018). Exacerbated by the pandemic crisis, hopes and fears at the same time, make all these observations relevant, especially viewed via communication lenses.

2.4. Own emotional intelligence

In order to obtain that- individual performance and work engagement- managers have to exploit all the resources of assertive communication with a focus on the stakeholder's emotional intelligence. Nguyen et al. (2019) highlights the fact that researchers consider that managerial communication was significant on feedback and listening behaviors among international cultures after communication training and when the gender variable was controlled. The authors state that "having certain educational credentials and work experience are not enough to become an effective leader. Paying attention to your emotions and practicing self-control helps to ensure that you are rational." The organizational communication in the pandemic crisis was mostly mediated by computer, telephone or fax and that meant losing the benefits of face-to-face communication, which involves affective processes.

(Marembo and Chinyamurindi, 2018) showed that emotional intelligence, an important key success factor of good communication, may reveal dissimilarities when ethnic differences appear, but rarely for gender, age and work experience variance. This is to be reanalyzed not only in other contexts, but also post-pandemic, as the

online work and business models changes exposed other factors to be taken into account in HR strategies and policies.

On the other hand, leaders had to show their personal example and to guide employees to follow the scientific advice to stop the virus and protect the vulnerable one at home as well as at work (Antonakis, 2021).

Moreover, managerial communication has faced various challenges during the pandemic that forced companies to move their employees, including managers to work from home. All this happened without pre-notice, everyone had to find their way to succeed.

It seemed to be an opportunity for managers to control less their teams and delegate more, but this did not happen easily at all managerial levels. Lower-level managers had more difficulties to delegate more and control less of their teams, some even delegated less than before, which is totally counterintuitive for work from a distance. Delegation went very well at higher level or higher quality managers who were able to use certain leadership behaviors to influence productivity and therefore be able to delegate more and control less (Stoker et al., 2021).

To be able to delegate more involves a lot of personal skills in the field of emotional intelligence. Analyzing Plutchik's wheel of emotions, it can be noted the diversity of our emotional states which cannot be separated from our professional life. (Gomes, 2017) states that by categorizing and ranging emotions, as in Plutchik's representation one can more accurately evaluate their role with respect to the impact they have over attention and the search for information and knowledge, which are central elements of any decision-making process (Gomes, 2017). Making a brief selection of the positive emotions in Plutchik's wheel like: interest, admiration, trust, joy, serenity, optimism and love, it can be stated that all these contribute to the manager's performance due to the motivation and to the cohesion with the team. Instead, emotions like: anger, fear, disapproval, sadness may lead to conflicts, to rejection or to the impossibility of working with a team.

Post-pandemic, for several reasons, business integrity decreased worldwide, due to various reasons, mainly connected to the new ways of working (Gordon, 2022; Marewska & Tokar, 2022). The respondents were ready to bend the ethical line in order to still benefit from a career progression or remuneration increase.

2.5. Resilience

Long-term successful leaders are true to their values and beliefs, where communication is a great tool that may enhance the career self-efficacy that mediates the relationship between authentic leadership fully with hierarchical status and partially with career satisfaction (Chughtai, 2018).

Organizational conditions include two secondary conditions: attention distribution and the competence of the leader (Cao & Wang, 2022).

In an organization it may go in both ways too if they are enhanced by the company's strategies and policies towards authentic leadership promotion. In pandemic, when most of the work done in isolation, was clearly contributing to the general good.

In post pandemic we talk a lot about career adaptability to circumstances in professional and personal life, as our study well reflects both the organization and the personal actions and perceptions. During the (long) history of health in schools, teaching has been situated at the intersection of science education, health education, medical education, and public health. Today, newly emerging frameworks offer cross-disciplinary inspiration to teach about health from a wider theoretical perspective (Heuckmann & Zeyer, 2022).

Communicating well, may help the process for career success, as enhancing the work self-efficacy regardless of the professional status, equally important for career-skills and attitudes to better cope with the VUCA environment (Bocciardi et al., 2017).

(Etuka et al., 2021) observed that COVID-19 has placed leaders in a unique and challenging scenario, which sees them repositioning their companies and workforce in ways that were impossible to foresee and therefore their paper sets firmly the idea that by using the tools offered by emotional intelligence (EI) and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) leaders/managers act in ways that are more empathetic and intentional in managing the emotional impacts caused by workplace stress, distress, isolation and other factors caused by the pandemic, both professionally and personally. For instance, NLP tools can help different approaches for communication,

help to see things from different perspectives and therefore aligning different perceptual positions and that means being more careful when communicating, when giving feedback or when taking decisions.

In career success, the social capital is strategic both internally at least for credibility, image and more efficient business help, but also externally for business development or advocacy, for instance.

Having a construct based on social capital theory, (Otto K et al., 2019) argued that social skills, communication and cooperation skills are decisive for success, especially the first one for objective career and second one for subjective career.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In order to obtain a comparative picture of how the process of communication has been working in different organizations profit and non-profit ones - since Covid-19 started - and to realize what managerial communication focuses on, we have organized face-to-face and on-line interviews with the local decision makers and managers:

A. of a big international French company from the financial services field with more than 1300 employees; and

B. of a primary school founded by an NGO dedicated to supporting children, young people and families in need, towards a more independent and responsible life.

The interviews were done openly, having only a few questions to support the discussions and to have a general red-line. The interviews in the French company had been applied on-line, in April and August 2020, as quick surveys, through Lime survey platform, to collect from all employees an organized feed-back about their state of mind and about their inputs that could help the managerial decisions regarding the continuity of the activity and their well-being. In April, the response rate was 46% because the questionnaire was open for only 5 working days and in August 75% because the answers were collected during 10 working days. The questionnaires used in our research were developed by the HR (Human Resources) and the BCP (Business Continuity Plan) teams, in Romanian language. The electronic invitation to complete the surveys were sent to all employees, in order to receive as many answers as possible in order to get relevant input and answer back with relevant decisions to the real needs. The employees answering to the interviews are representing all areas of the business and are located all over the country, still, the majority being located in Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca where the headquarters are. Due to the fact that the number of answers is big, 555 and 1016, and the answers are being received from all departments and all over the country, we can say, through extrapolation, that the results are representative for the entire industry. Both interviews had two types of questions with free answers and answer options with 4, respectively 5 answer options, as appropriate. The results were extracted from the Lime survey and transferred into Excel files. The outcomes were gathered at company level, and reported in MS Word® and MS PowerPoint® format and presented to Top management in the executive committee, and to all employees through internal communication.

4. RESULTS OF THE INTERVIEWS

4.1. Results of the interviews performed at a French international company (activates in the financial field) - for profit organization

Our first research was done on a French international company, in the financial field, with over 1300 employees, present in Romania since 2009. This company is one of the leaders of the insurance market offering a diverse portfolio of products and services so that it can address all the insurance needs of a person, from property to those of life because they want to build quality relationships with their partners and customers.

The company's mission is to help its clients and partners to look at life optimistically, to enjoy every moment, smaller or bigger, knowing that we will stand by them in case they face challenges.

4.1.1. Context

Before the pandemic, the products and services were distributed mostly face to face and most people worked daily from the office, except the 20% of the employees who were actively benefiting from the partial work from home (WFH) program.

When the lockdown started in Romania, in March 2020, the entire activity of the company had to be moved in WFH mode, as a result of the decisions taken by the authorities and of the care of the company for the health of the employees. The virus was unknown, everybody was afraid, things were changing all the time, information was not clear, so the management had to make sure that the situation was well managed, where the communication was critical, in order to gain trust and continue the company activity. Even more, it was also a challenge for all managers, as the managerial communication could be a tipping point in employees' physical and psychological health and performance.

In this respect, a daily Crisis Cell was set up, composed by the Top Management team, the Business Continuity Plan (BCP) team and the Risk Manager, in order to plan the activities within the new normal, take notes of all new legal changes and make decisions. Daily communication became a key success factor, more frequent communication of the news and decisions to the employees, including the number of sick employees, became a daily managerial routine, where the content and the style were very important for the credibility and efficiency.

In the Crisis Cell, the following seven sections had been followed: People, IT, Clients & Partners, Business & Operations, P & L, Covid-19 linked Legislation, Internal Communication.

First, regarding the People, the most important thing was to do all necessary actions to transfer them into WFH mode, in order to be safe, to feel safe and continue their activity from a distance. For some of the employees it was easy to work totally from home but for others, especially the ones that did not experience such a work model was more difficult, not to mention the employees with small children for whom the difficulty was double.

It was very difficult for managers as well to manage the activity and their teams from a distance, to make sure that people feel well, that they are able to continue their activity, that they are overcoming their fears etc. Their way of working and communicating with the team radically changed.

This is why, the human resources (HR) team communicated daily with managers and employees through phone, calling proactively, to find out about their state of mind, about their problems and help them find solutions, to give advice and internal consultancy. Besides the 1-2-1 discussions, the HR team, through the colleagues responsible for training, have set up training for managers and non-managers about how to work from distance and how to manage the activity, how to manage clients and teams from distance. A contract with a mental support specialist had been signed to offer free support for employees and their family members. Second, in what concerns IT, it was mandatory to find solutions for the employees that did not have mobile working devices and to find solutions to access from a distance all systems and platforms in order to continue the activity. The solution for employees without a mobile device was to move their desktops to their homes, until new laptops were ordered, this way avoiding putting them into temporary technical unemployment.

Video communication was also implemented, choosing WebEx for team meetings, one to ones, for the sales process and for the claims process from distance. For many teams, situated all over the country, the video meetings actually were an upgrade to the initial phone conferences used in the team meetings. We must say that, for activity management purposes and internal communication purposes, WebEx became an excellent tool to keep close, energize the team members and keep in contact with clients. In regard to the section for Clients & Partners, Business & Operations and P&L we will not enter into many details, daily, all these sections were discussed and different decisions had been taken accordingly. In what concerns the Covid-19 linked legislation, the authorities issued weekly, sometimes even more often decisions linked to Covid-19 measures which had to be transferred into different procedures or policies and had to be communicated to employees. The internal Newsletter was sent daily to all employees letting them know what were the subjects discussed in the daily crisis cell, what were the decisions issued, what new Covid-19 linked legislation occurred from the authorities and how many colleagues are sick, how many are direct contacts, what is their health situation and so on.

3.1.2. Research

In the two questionnaires, employees had been asked if they find WFH easy or difficult, to which, most of them answered positively, except 14% who find it difficult and 2% very difficult (Figure 1). From further data checks it came out that these respondents are mainly sales people for whom WFH is bringing difficulties in the relationship with their clients. This showed that more sales from the distance training needed to be developed to help them succeed in their day-to-day job, as new communication skills must be added for their career success.
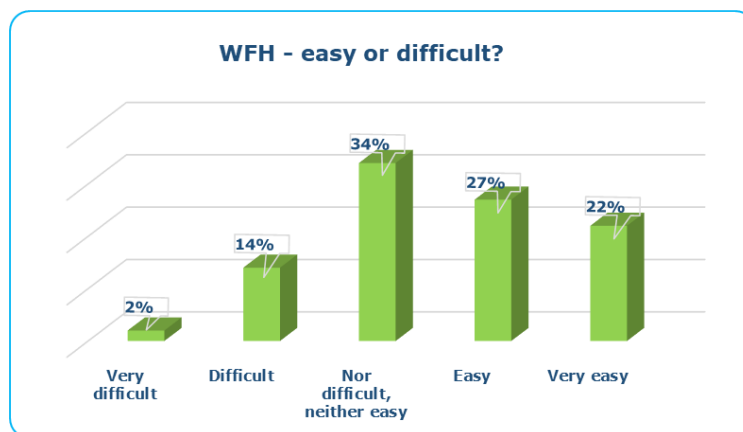
FIGURE 1 - APPRECIATION OF WFH DIFFICULTY
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

To the question "How concerned are you about the Covid-19 impact on you and your family", 50% of the respondents answered that they are quite concerned and 14% are very concerned (Figure 2), but it is interesting to notice that 36% of the people remain on the optimistic side, even though, by then, no vaccine was yet available on the market. Leaders' emotional intelligence is important when addressing personal matters, representing a tipping point for the teams.
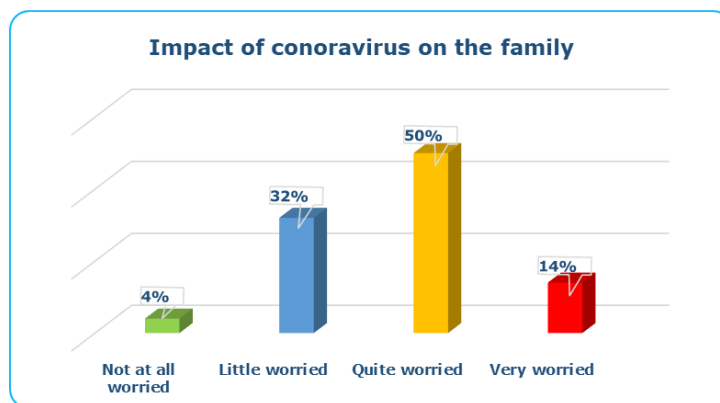

FIGURE 2 - APPRECIATION OF COVID-19 IMPACT ON THE FAMILY
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

When it comes to the company, only 25% are optimistic and 75% are mostly and very worried (Figure 3). It is quite a normal state of mind, knowing that the entire Romanian economy seemed to be affected by Covid-19 crisis, especially some sectors. This shows us that people are concerned for their jobs and their future, therefore, more actions and communication should be done to lower the stress of people on this side. So, an open, transparent, constructive communication may determine on one hand a retention of talents and continuation of their career success in the same company, and on the other hand a performance level allowing the business continuity.
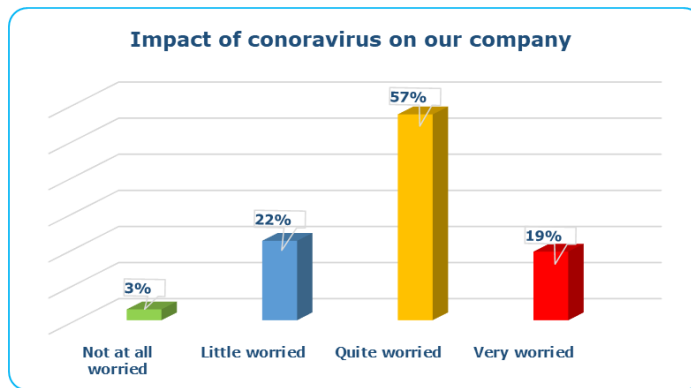
FIGURE 3 - APPRECIATION OF COVID-19 IMPACT ON THE COMPANY
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

In what concerns the specific Covid-19 crisis measures, almost all (98%) respondents stated that the measure implemented by the company regarding the measures to protect the employees had been efficient and effective (Figure 4). No action is fully perceived like this if it is not accompanied by explanations. Thus, again the managerial communication of respective measures was essential, as a part of career success continuation 'reassuring.
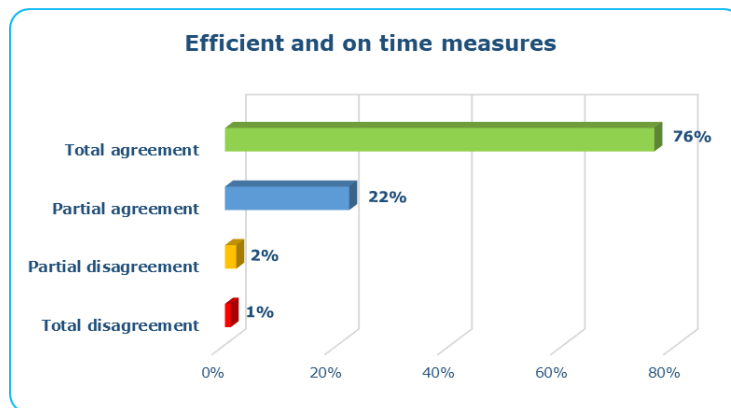
FIGURE 4 - APPRECIATION OF THE EFFICIENCY OF COVID-19 MEASURES
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

In what concerns the frequency of the communication and the decisions taken to manage the Covid-19 crisis, 81% of the respondents declared themselves satisfied and very satisfied, with similar explanations as above (Figure 5).
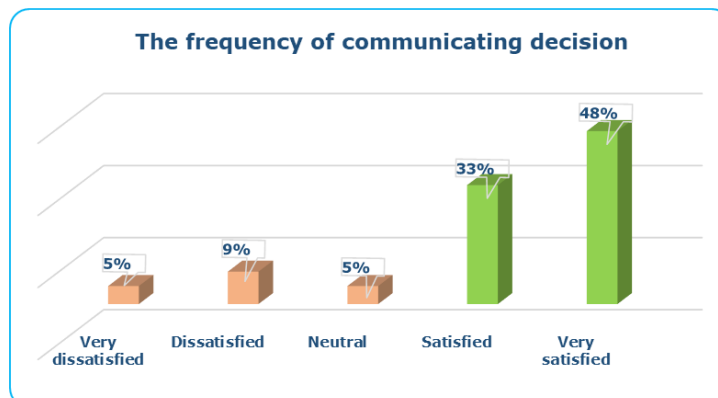
FIGURE 5 - SATISFACTION REGARDING COMMUNICATION OF THE DECISIONS TAKEN
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

Regarding the quality and utility of the information sent daily through the internal communication channel, 84% of the respondents declare themselves satisfied and very satisfied (Figure 6). The quick and efficient adaptation of the managerial communication was noticed by the employees, representing an important step in managing the situation and in consolidating the managers actual positions success.
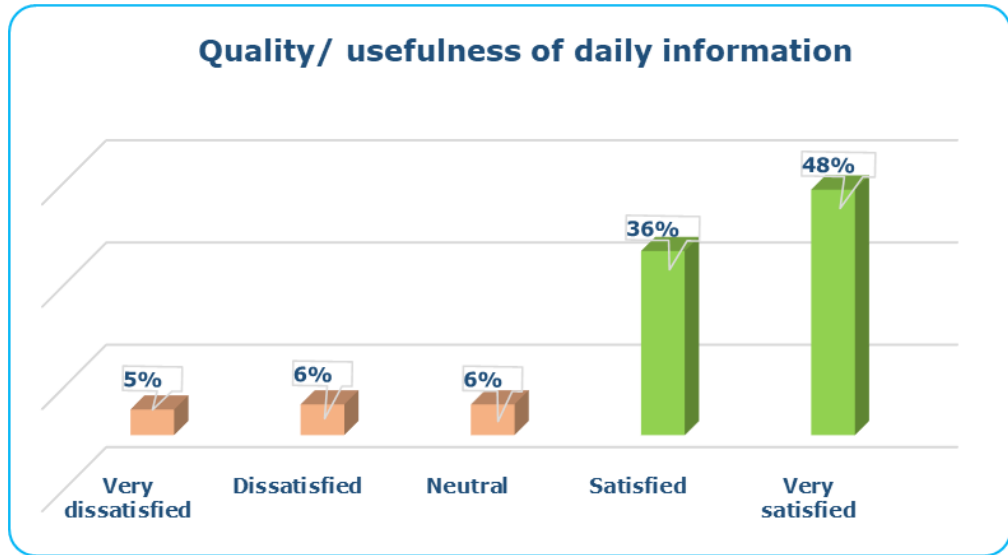
Quality/ usefulness of daily information

FIGURE 6 - SATISFACTION REGARDING THE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

The employees had been asked about the biggest problems that they face since Covid-19 crisis started. They mention that social isolation (74%), the anxiety regarding the impact of Covid-19 on their lives (40%), the physical space (21%) and maintaining a fixed work program (21%) are the most difficult during these periods (Figure 7). This is one of the most relevant aspects related to managerial communication, the needed competencies to do it well both for the managers and their teams. Without a proper way of message delivery, the professional and personal lives would have been affected, the company's activity as well.
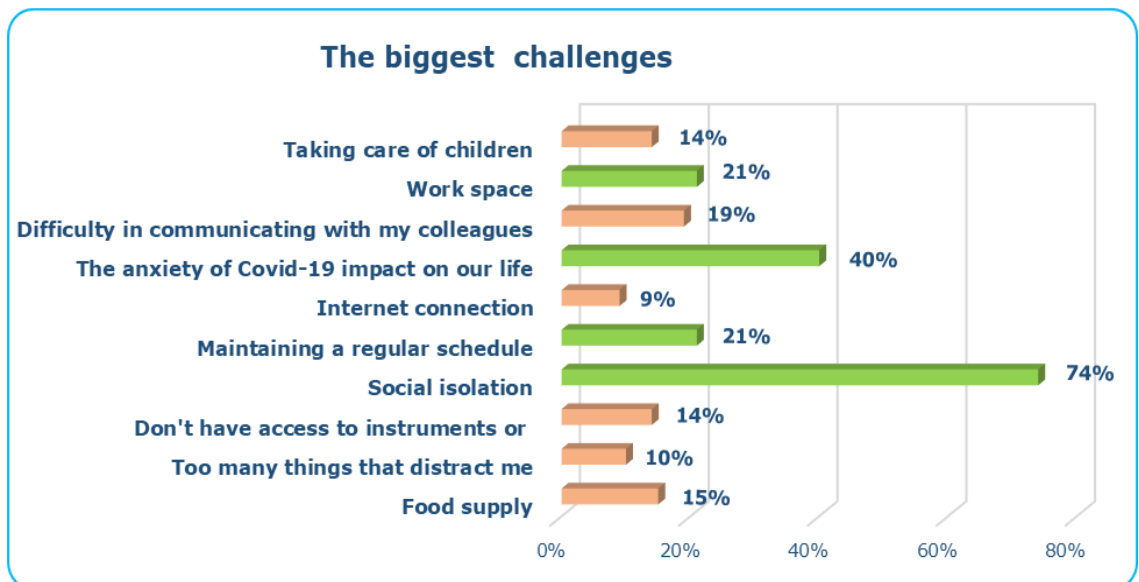
The biggest challenges

FIGURE 7 - THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES OF THE EMPLOYEES
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

But the fact that they have a good relationship with their colleagues, with their direct manager and that they trust the management of the company are good indicators that these difficult times could be overcome by good communication, that enables a great cooperation and the understanding of the proper vision and leadership's will when it was most necessary as risks were highest, in pandemic (Figure 8).
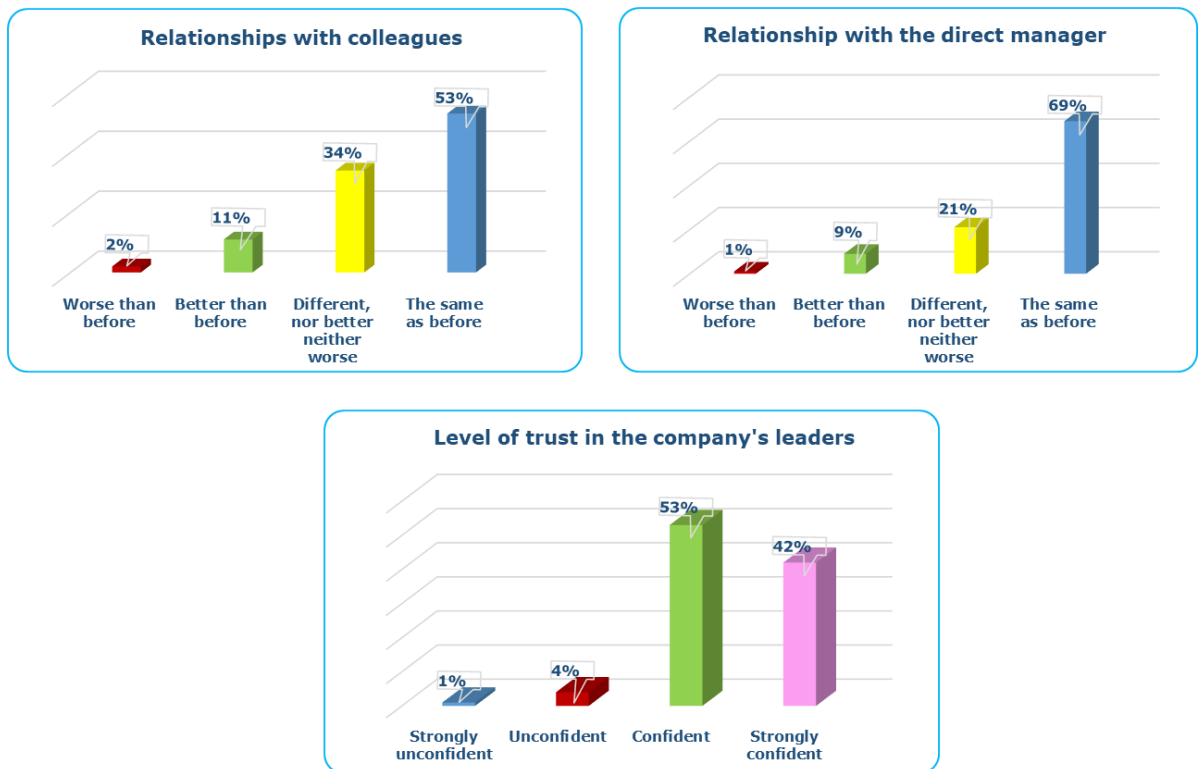
Relationships with colleagues

Relationship with the direct manager

Level of trust in the company's leaders

FIGURE 8 - RELATIONSHIP WITH COLLEAGUES, DIRECT MANAGER AND TRUST IN TOP MANAGEMENT
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

The good communication and cooperation with the colleagues from their teams and other teams reported in the September questionnaire also, seems to be a positive factor for keeping the morale up, essential for career success continuation (Figure 9).
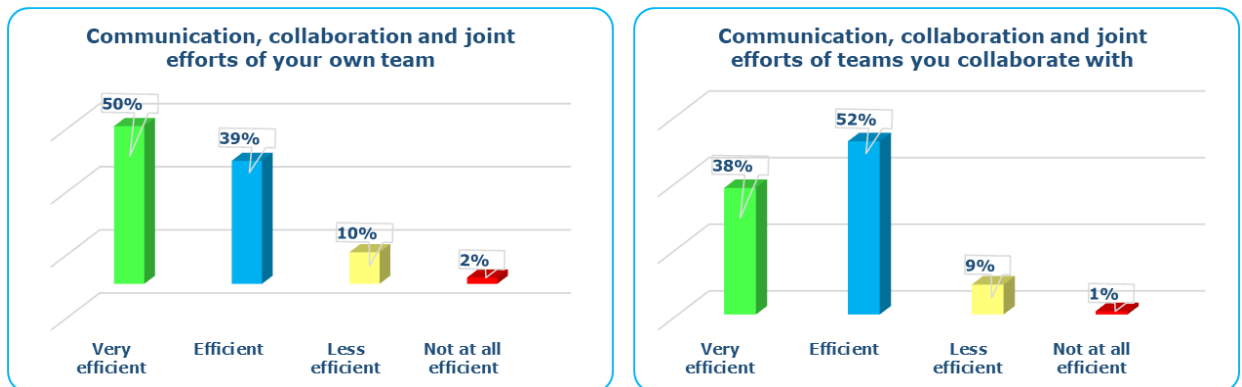
Communication, collaboration and joint efforts of your own team

Communication, collaboration and joint efforts of teams you collaborate with

FIGURE 9 - COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION AND JOINT EFFORTS OF TEAMS
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

The fact that managers made sure that they keep close to their teams and they give constant or sufficient feedback and recognition to their teams helped employees navigate easier in such difficult times, and therefore feeling at least from this perspective less anxiety (Figure 10).
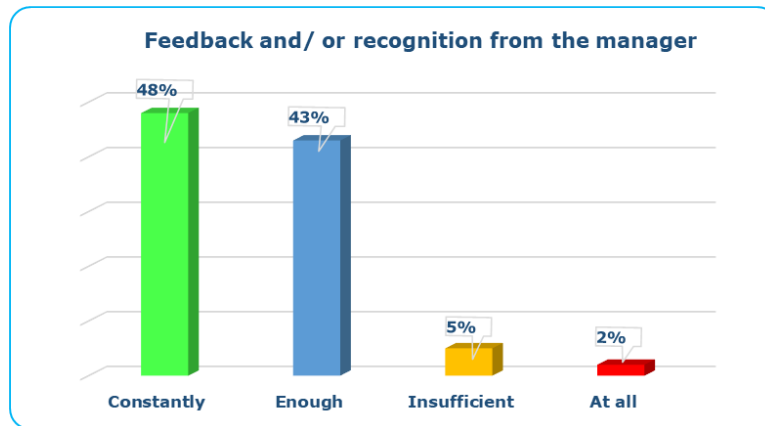
Feedback and/ or recognition from the manager

FIGURE 10 - FEEDBACK AND RECOGNITION FROM THE MANAGER
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

It was important to also find out if the feedback and relationship with the manager and the good communication with others have a positive input on the work life balance of the employees. The outcomes were good enough to understand that the whole mechanism is working well, people manage to deliver in the new reality, without losing work their life balance which was good before the pandemic (Figure 11).
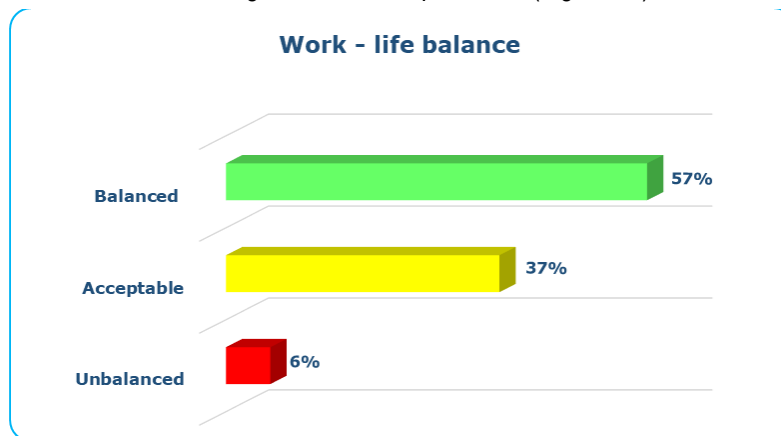
Work - life balance

FIGURE 11 - WORK LIFE BALANCE
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

The perception of the company's support was measured as well, because it is important to find out whether all employees perceive the effort and care of the company. We see that there is a number of people who feel that it was insufficient or did not feel it at all. Well, this was to be further investigated, and push more communication or actions to make sure that nobody feels left behind (Figure 12).
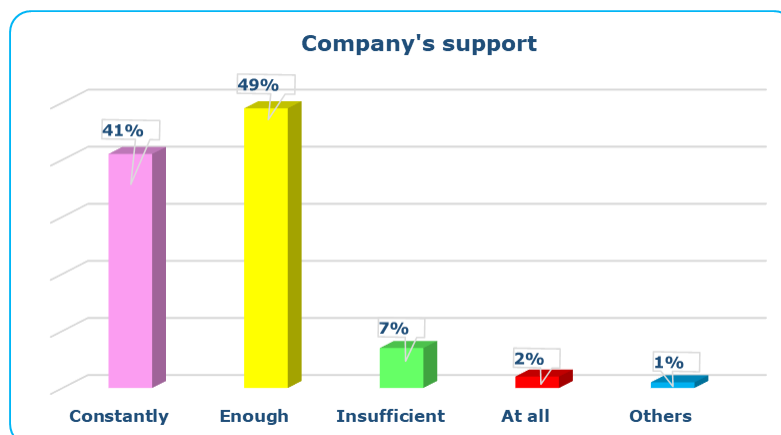
Company's support

FIGURE 12 - THE PERCEPTION REGARDING THE COMPANY'S SUPPORT
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

And, since the lockdown was over, the company started tackling the preference of the employees regarding the way to work within the pandemic times. It came out that 60% of the employees wish to continue in a hybrid work environment while 40% were on the extremes, either working totally from the office or totally from home (Figure 13).
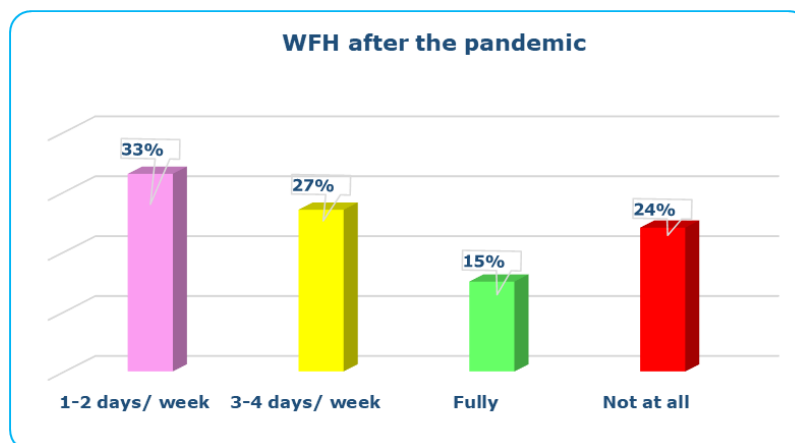

FIGURE 13. WORK FROM HOME (WFH) AFTER THE PANDEMIC
Source: Authors' own research – April 2020

3.2. *Results of the interview at a primary school (activates in the education field) - non-profit organization*

Being a smaller organization (20 employees and 68 students), we chose a qualitative method, interviewing the manager, as a quantitative method wouldn't have been more relevant. Although, the measures taken are clear and factual, addressed to all stakeholders of the organization. Furthermore, we wanted to have a subjective perspective versus the objective one presented above, at point A.

The Primary School vision is that every child has the right to a quality education, equal opportunities, dignity and respect.

The Primary School is an inclusive organization, part of a bigger social organization.

The questions of the interview with the headmaster (which can be found as an appendix to this article) have specifically targeted the pandemic challenges regarding the managerial communication both with direct and indirect beneficiaries and with school employees.

The principal stated that they have communicated effectively because they did not deviate from the routine already created. They supported each other emotionally in times of crisis, when team members or their families were affected by the COVID virus.

The school policies relevant for the managerial communication during Covid-19 crisis and post Covid-19 crisis are part of their institutional development plan:

1.   The complaints policy;
2.   The staff and volunteer's recruitment policy;
3.   The partnership policy and communication with families;
4.   The community involvement policy
All these policies have been elaborated but can be revised at any time according to the newly gained experiences. The headmaster emphasized their openness for modeling them on the way.

Regarding the communication resources and tools for pupils, teachers and auxiliary personnel the headmaster mentioned that they have:

▪   Weekly meetings each Thursday;
▪   WhatsApp group 1: with the whole school team;
▪   WhatsApp group 2: pedagogical team and the principal;

- WhatsApp group 3: parent's group for each class with class teachers;
- Pedagogical days: after the school year for 2 weeks the pedagogical team assesses the last school year and sets the new objectives and topics for the next school year.

In order to raise awareness of the need to focus on an assertive type of communication, the manager arranged appraisals, feedback meetings and workshop days on team-building and internal communication with two experts.

Because of the pandemic, board meetings were held online via WhatsApp. The whole team met and still meets every Thursday from 12.30 – 13.30/14.00 where all organizational challenges are talked about on a weekly basis and in a participatory way as well as set up the objectives for the forthcoming 4 months. The attitude and tonality of these meetings is collaborative and informal.

The whole team takes part in supervision meetings 1x/month. Unfortunately, because of the pandemic there were only 2 meetings/year.

In the Case Management meeting (3/year) each member of the pedagogical team notes down their own observations for the last 3 months and the proposed socio-pedagogical interventions for each child both for him/herself and at group-level. (What can I do in concrete terms for the individual growth and success of this child and how can we as a group contribute?)

Also, the teachers and/or psychologist/director meets with parents and discusses progresses and challenges of each kid on an individual, structured basis. On top, parents are invited and take part in lessons.

There are also field visits done by the social assistant/school mediator who is responsible for the liaison in particular with vulnerable parents in order to guarantee their participation in decision processes. There is also the parents' folder: a folder with all relevant information for parents about the school.

The factors that helped the principal communicate better with her staff were: first, the training at Academia leadership Scholar and secondly, the supervision meetings as it allowed her to better understand her colleagues' needs – also at emotional and social level and the appraisals. There is a clear improvement and opening-up to be observed in the talks with the colleagues. Her impression is that the longer they use this format, the more she will feel able to express but also accept feedback and suggestions for improvement.

The need to empower the stakeholder's emotional intelligence

The principal's opinion is that in an ideal world, there is even more time and room to address the staff's emotional intelligence or needs. Working in a demanding socio-educational setting with vulnerable groups (both parents and children) represents a challenge to each school members' resilience and coping strategies.

Being an inclusive school, the socio-emotional growth and the development of a respective mindset represents a key pillar of their concept. Hence, they developed the above tools in order to help establish:

- An overall culture of openness, ethics and respect in the school;
- Means of communication that help „anchoring" and „managing" this culture such as 3x/year informal appraisals, 3x/year Case management-meetings, every week and extensive meeting with focus on organizing the forthcoming week (where in the end, they often end up talking about emotional aspects of their work).

For the future

After the pandemic, the headmaster's goal remains to give the school board an appropriate framework by meeting face-to-face with the stakeholders.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The novelty of this paper is coming from the fact that we had the curiosity to check the similarities and differences in what regards assertive managerial communication during pandemic times in two very different organizations from objectives, structure and number of people point of view. Also, we had an objective perspective for organization A. due to the number of people answering the interviews and a subjective perspective for organization B due only to the headmaster's interview.

The evidence is that managerial communication empowered by leader's emotional intelligence is valuable. Furthermore, it is an important part of the business continuity plan in terms of content, frequency and style. The way managers are able to perform it well, is also a strategic criterion for their career success and for the stability and efficiency of the organization. It represents an evaluation measurement of stress and change management, of leadership capability to manage teams and attract and retain valuable followers that can only be increased in the VUCA world we are living in.

When comparing for profit with a non-profit organization in managerial communication during and post-Covid-19, we noticed several similarities and differences.

Most similarities are arising from the human ability to constantly adapt to the disruptive factors of the social order and from the willful or determined behaviors to remain on the market strong and resilient. The only major difference was mainly depending on the size of the organization and on the available financial resources and also on the real need for more. There's no need to say that the non-profit organization had a bigger challenge in its survival because of the difficulties in fundraising, that the organization "mother" had, but their resilience wasn't less stronger than the one of the organization A.

Firstly, it was observed that both organizations reacted fast, adapting their ways of working and communicating using different strategies on-line and offline and also have been open minded in order to deliver on time the needed information. Also, the managers had an increased interest in efficiency, credibility, mental support for stakeholders and Covid-19 legislation.

Secondly, the managers were preoccupied with applying constant and assertive ways of communication with their stakeholders, creating right contexts for the liberty of expression and being there for their subordinates in on-line meetings and also on appraisals and this fact led to an increased employee level of satisfaction regarding the quality of communication and to a strong level of trust in the organization's leaders. Also, the managers quickly adapted their style, frequency and content of communication in order to facilitate the employee' training, valuing the need to be well informed and kept up to date. The success was dependent on everyone's existing skills, but new needs were discovered in the process and included in the future HR strategies.

By doing so, all managers instantly realized their leading role and responsibilities in face of a crisis, both for personal career success and future progress, for organization's survival and success, while taking care of all stakeholders. Moreover, their emotional intelligence was put to good use in a critical crisis and this was a similarity in general for all managers' communication. Competences like: self-awareness, emotional self-control, adaptability, empathy, achievement orientation, positive outlook, conflict management and inspirational leadership can be the main key for a manager's career success.

The pandemic determined an unexpected, yet favorable context for managers to develop their skills in the field of emotional intelligence, meaning intrapersonal and interpersonal (social) skills, calling only on resources and tools of the on-line environment.

The differences are coming from the fact that in a big organization, spread all over the country, the communication needs to happen both in a formal and informal manner. The formal part is managed by the headquarters in an organized way through questionnaires and by the direct managers through informal discussions to further.

The formal part of communication is very useful for management to be able to form a general opinion and to provide employees a framework and guidelines while, the informal part of communication is useful for the direct manager and the team member to find out the details and the things that are very specific to a team or a person.

We can also sense that, in big companies, for profit organizations, there are more available resources, therefore they are able to conduct more often formal communication sessions with their employees, have more time to analyze the data and debrief the results in order to include the fresh inputs in their decisions, while in the non-profit organization, formal meetings were fewer than in the last years.

From the feedback received by the international French company, we can see, from the multiple types of responses that people are used to giving feedback, are comfortable to speak their mind and are willing to be open because they know that they are contributing to the quality of decisions. Instead, in organization B, there

is still the need of obtaining feedback as the organization deals with vulnerable groups, with different backgrounds and education.

 Still, regardless of the ownership, profit or non-profit organization managers realized that getting continuous and structured feedback helps the decision process because they could take into consideration the needs and the vision of employees, enriching the final decision, making it more qualitative and tailored, increasing the business and employees career success.

The limitations of this research are linked to the fact that we have analyzed a big for-profit organization and a small non-profit one which can have a relevance on our inferences and deductions. Furthermore, we aim to unveil how the NLP tools can improve managerial communication in an organization.

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