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THE SUCCESSFULNESS OF CRISIS MANAGEMENT TEAMS' RESPONSE TO THE CRISIS CAUSED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Uspešnost kriznih timova u odgovoru na krizu izazvanu pandemijom COVID-19

Abstract

Crises are an inevitable part of the life cycle of any organisation, regardless of its location, size, market, and sector. At the beginning of 2020, all organisations faced a new crisis caused by a COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid spread of the disease and its consequences to human health required a quick reaction of organisations to protect the health and safety of employees through physical distancing. Organisations had to reorganise their way of doing business and adapt to new circumstances. The first response to the crisis is to activate or form a crisis management team. The main goal of the crisis management team is to prepare the organisation for a new way of functioning by using all its opportunities and strengths to minimise the negative effects of the crisis. The success of crisis management and the recovery of an organisation depend on the quality of functioning of the crisis management team. The results of a survey conducted during April and May 2020 which included 108 members of crisis management teams showed that the respective teams responded adequately to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research results showed that team members reacted quickly to the first signs of the crisis. They made real-time decisions by using a holistic approach due to their different knowledge, skills and experience, clear team roles, commitment to a common goal, open, honest and effective communication, and mutual trust.

Keywords: *organisational behaviour, teamwork, crisis management, leadership, communication, decision-making, engagement, COVID-19.*

Sažetak

Krizu su neizbežan deo životnog ciklusa svake organizacije, bez obzira na njenu lokaciju, veličinu, tržište i delatnost. Sve organizacije su se početkom 2020. godine suočile sa novom krizom koju je izazvala pandemija COVID-19. Naglo širenje i posledice koje ova bolest ostavlja po zdravlje ljudi zahtevale su brzu reakciju organizacija i zaštitu zdravlja i bezbednosti zaposlenih kroz fizičko distanciranje. Organizacije su morale da reorganizuju svoj način funkcionisanja i pronađu načine da nastave svoje poslovanje u novim okolnostima. Prvi odgovor organizacija na kriznu situaciju bio je aktiviranje ili formiranje timova za upravljanje krizom. Ključni cilj tima za upravljanje krizom jeste da organizaciju pripremi i osposobi za nov način poslovanja, odnosno da pronađe način da iskoristi sve prednosti i snage kako bi minimizirao negativne efekte krize. Kvalitet i način funkcionisanja tima za upravljanje krizom u velikoj meri determinišu uspešnost kriznog menadžmenta i oporavak organizacije nakon krize. Rezultati istraživanja sprovedenog u aprilu i maju 2020. godine u kojem je učestvovalo 108 članova kriznih timova pokazali su da su ovi timovi adekvatno odgovorili na krizu izazvanu pandemijom COVID-19. Članovi kriznih timova su brzo odreagovali na prve signale krize i donosili odluke u realnom vremenu primenjujući holistički pristup zbog različitih znanja, veština i iskustava, jasnih uloga, posvećenosti zajedničkom cilju, otvorene, iskrene, efektivne komunikacije i međusobnog poverenja.

Ključne reči: *organizaciono ponašanje, timski rad, krizni menadžment, liderstvo, komunikacija, odlučivanje, angažovanost, COVID-19.*

Introduction

Organisations operate in a very complex environment characterised by a high degree of uncertainty, risk, and turbulence caused by various natural disasters, terrorist attacks, health and environmental disasters, economic and technological crises, political instability, corporate scandals, etc. [28], [69]. The unforeseen high or low-intensity crisis events, caused by natural or human activity [39], have profound and far-reaching consequences on the organisation and employees and require their rapid response [50].

The crisis often reveals the true face of an organisation, because it exposes the organisation to new circumstances and provides a completely new insight into how the organisation operates, which is difficult to notice in normal circumstances [61]. Each crisis moves the organisations from their usual way of doing business to a whole new context in which their vulnerabilities, but also the abilities not noticed before, come to the fore [9], [37]. The ability to adapt the entire organisation and its business in times of crisis determines the organisation's business outcomes and performance in the coming period [20].

This paper aims to highlight the role and importance of crisis management teams in organisations, with reference to the global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. On 31st December 2019, the World Health Organization received information about the outbreak of an epidemic of pneumonia of unknown origin in the city of Wuhan in China. On 7th January 2020, the Chinese authorities identified a new SARS-CoV-2 virus, known as coronavirus or COVID-19. As the virus began to spread with significant consequences, the Director-General of the World Health Organization declared an epidemic on 30th January 2020, and a global pandemic was declared on 11th March 2020 [20]. Global risks that COVID-19 poses to human health are specific because it spreads rapidly and easily [75], with a far-reaching social, psychological, and economic impact [76]. Consequently, COVID-19 has caused crises in organisations, industry, the market and society [67], challenging them to find new ways of functioning while adhering to the physical distancing measures as a means of prevention of further transmission and spread of the

virus [64]. Networked business and the dynamism of the environment caused a faster and more intense transmission of the crisis effects. Flattening the infection curve inevitably unbalanced all the supply chains and increased business uncertainty [33]. All of the abovementioned facts and circumstances called for a systematic and planned crisis management.

Key characteristics of a crisis situation

Theorists and practitioners agree that any crisis is an uncertain, unknown, and undesirable event that imposes the need for a quick response and that has significant consequences for the organisation and all the stakeholders [62], [69], [52]. Each crisis tests an organisation's ability to adapt to new circumstances and to direct its future [30]. Regardless of its intensity and origin, a crisis poses a great danger to organisations because it can jeopardise their reputation, financial stability, and human lives [12], [50], [51]. Likewise, a crisis leads to possibilities for organisations to open up for new business opportunities, as well as to strengthen their capabilities and capacities [4], [5], [62]. Organisations do not just face more crises today than they did a decade ago, but the rate of the crisis occurrence is also increasing [14]. Dealing with a crisis involves changes in the way an organisation functions, leading to uncertainty and the need for rapid response and organisational adjustment and change [21]. For all those directly or indirectly exposed to the crisis, it is a complex, stressful, and an energetically and mentally exhausting event [63]. In times of crisis, it is very important for organisations to be resilient and to rely on their business continuity plans [6], [56]. The International Organization for Standardization defines business continuity as the ability of an organisation to continue delivering products or services at an acceptable level in conditions of disruption, while business continuity management aims to provide an effective response to a crisis and protect the interests of all stakeholders, reputation and brand [31].

Since its appearance, COVID-19 has started to spread very quickly and massively, with grave consequences for the health of people, the health systems of countries, and the entire economy and society. There is a high degree of

unpredictability during a pandemic [59], and epidemiologists, health systems, politicians, community, and leaders of organisations need to direct and coordinate all their efforts and activities to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by physical distancing and hygiene measures [16]. COVID-19 led to the emergence of a new, so-called socially distant world [15]. In organisations, it has launched and stimulated the process of reducing the bureaucratic mechanism in order to foster faster responses and flexibility [55]. Therefore, the crisis is an invitation to organisations to acquire new knowledge and skills [4]. In addition to learning from their own experiences and mistakes, organisations can also learn from other organisations that had previous experience in the same or similar crisis [58]. There are various directions in preparation for post-pandemic business, such as openness to innovation [7], focus on consumers, and demonstration of value [61]. A large number of organisations have realised that they must find new ways of doing business by relying on digital technologies [59]. The crisis requires changes in the way employees work, thus finding motivational drivers for greater employee engagement during and after the pandemic [48].

Any crisis may have negative consequences regarding the profit and overall business of the organisation, its reputation, and internal and external stakeholders. That is why every crisis is unique and requires a different approach. There is no universal crisis management solution that can be applied in all situations [4], [21], [41], [62]. The main goal of crisis management is to systematically prepare the organisation and all its stakeholders to avoid a crisis and to adapt to the new working conditions with as few negative consequences as possible [54]. The first step in strategic crisis management is to form a crisis management team [8], [45].

The role and importance of the crisis management team

Regardless of the type of team, teamwork has numerous advantages: higher employee productivity, better decisions, higher degree of innovation, better quality of products and services, greater flexibility, and agility of the organisation [43]. Due to that, many organisations upgraded their

organisational structures with appropriate teams [42], [46]. People behave differently when they work in teams, hence to have effective teamwork, it is necessary to make an effort during the process of forming a team and to monitor the way it works [25]. Effective teams are those that successfully perform their tasks and achieve goals [72]. Clear roles of team members, commitment to a common goal, heterogeneity of knowledge, skills, competencies, and experiences of members, mutual trust, and good leadership are the key characteristics of successful teams [44].

A specific type of team in organisations that is a very important factor during crisis management is the crisis management team [26], [65]. Each crisis needs a crisis management team, because an individual (leader/manager) cannot respond to all of the challenges, especially if such individual has never left their comfort zone and has no previous experience in dealing with crises [54]. In general, teams are nowadays different from the teams in the past – they are more diverse, digital, dynamic, and remote [27]. Those differences and characteristics are even more expressed in crisis management teams, as they are responsible for conceiving strategies, policies, and plans in order to respond quickly and adjust the way the organisation operates so that the negative consequences of a crisis are minimised or completely avoided [59], [66]. The key role of crisis management teams is to anticipate the sources of risk, provide adequate support to other employees, and position the organisation to the new normal course of operation [74]. Members of a crisis management team should review, consider, analyse, plan and evaluate all the effects of the crisis on the organisation's operations and prepare the organisation for new ways and methods of work. The activities of the crisis management team continue when the crisis ends with the aim to evaluate the entire crisis event, minimise the post-traumatic effects on employees, and mitigate the negative effects on the business [1].

Many organisations have established permanent crisis management teams that are activated once a crisis event is detected [68]. However, in cases when organisations do not have a permanent crisis management team, one should be formed at the first sign of crisis so that team members may understand their roles and establish the

way of functioning before the crisis hits. Management should always have a list of employees that would be suitable members of the crisis management team so that it can quickly form this team [24]. In practice, there are organisations that select team members and form crisis management teams when the crisis has already started to take its toll.

The spread of COVID-19 has intensified the role and importance of crisis management teams. A crisis management team for dealing with COVID-19 is primarily focused on physical distancing, which means a different organisation of work processes and organisation of business as much as possible in the remote mode, by using modern technologies [18]. The crisis management team should consider all the effects of the crisis on employees, customers, and business as a whole [15], [71]. For effective functioning of a crisis management team, it is important to have engaged team members. Employee engagement is interpreted as the extent to which employees feel committed to their jobs and to investing maximum knowledge in their work with the aim to produce added value [36]. In a crisis situation, it is more than ever necessary to have employees that will invest their energy, hearts and minds in order to help the organisation to overcome all the negative effects of a crisis.

Composition of the crisis management team

Crisis management teams are generally cross-functional [35], composed of representatives and managers connected to the key organisational processes that have specific knowledge, skills, and experience. A combination of talents and competencies ensures successful crisis management and certainty of achieving the planned results. Team members provide effective and supportive leadership during stressful times. The members of the crisis management team that are considered mandatory are the owner or director, top management, employees from the communications department, employees from the human resources department, and a project manager [41]. The crisis management team should include employees working at the front office (sales, customer relations, marketing) and employees from the back office (finance, procurement, quality, legal department, risk management,

security, safety and health at work) in order to ensure a variety of knowledge, skills and experiences [34]. The key goal of forming a cross-functional crisis management team is to provide a holistic view of the organisation and to quickly communicate all relevant circumstances within the entire organisation [2]. The practice has shown that the formation of a cross-functional crisis management team creates a sense of security that the response to a crisis will be adequate [22], [53]. However, the effectiveness of a crisis management team depends not only on the composition of the team (selection of team members and their roles), but also on the team's size, knowledge of the team members, leadership and defined norms and rules of team behaviour [40].

The leader of the crisis management team should encourage team members to actively engage in knowledge sharing and in the process of formulating crisis recovery strategies [73]. In addition to this, each member of the crisis management team should have a clearly defined description of duties and responsibilities regarding their assigned team role. A team role is a set of expected behaviours that suits each member of the team. It is a tendency for each team member to behave in a precisely defined way following the role assigned to them [3]. Forming a team involves engaging members who will be assigned the roles of a lead coordinator who stimulates new ideas, an evaluator who considers and evaluates the alternatives, implementers, researchers, and finishers. One of the potential obstacles in the functioning of a crisis management team is the overlapping of roles in a situation when team members do not have clearly defined duties and responsibilities, but rather perform all activities ad hoc [19]. In crises, where circumstances are changing rapidly, it is especially important to ensure that every employee has a clear role that corresponds to the knowledge and competencies of that employee.

The pressure to quickly form a crisis management team sometimes leads to the wrong choices of team members by not taking into account their personality characteristics, capabilities, and inclinations towards teamwork [11], [63]. Since the key challenges of the crisis management teams are high risk, time pressures, and uncertainty [37], all team members need to actively listen, understand all relevant information, analyse problems, evaluate, and consider all

the positive and negative effects of the alternatives [26]. In organisations that have permanent crisis management teams, team members go through various trainings and acquire adequate knowledge and skills needed in crises: group decision-making, active listening skills, conflict resolution, stress management [13] and so forth. Training the team members during crisis is essential and it is supposed to prepare them to assume the key business processes and activities in the event of absence or sick leave of another team member [18].

The ability of team members to perceive all the circumstances that seem unrelated at first glance, to understand them and translate them into a simple form is of key importance for the effective functioning of the team [70]. In times of crisis, team members need to think creatively about how to minimise the negative effects of the crisis or how to turn them into advantages [73]. A crisis is sometimes a catalyst for a different way of thinking and functioning of organisations.

Research methodology

The research was conducted by using a specially designed online questionnaire consisting of several groups of questions: (1) questions related to the members of the crisis management team (gender, length of service in the organisation, work position); (2) questions related to the organisation (place, industry, number of employees); (3) statements relating to the functioning and operation of the crisis management team, by using the five-point Likert scale; (4) open-ended questions to which the respondents submitted their views related to the key problems, difficulties, and challenges they faced during the crisis. In the period from April to May 2020, a total of 108 members of crisis management teams filled the questionnaire. The collected answers were processed and analysed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences – SPSS, version 21.0. (Armonk, NY: IBM Corporation).

The normality of data distribution was tested by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, as well as by reviewing histograms, skewness, kurtosis, normal probability curve (Normal Q-Q plot) and boxplot. As the tests performed confirmed the normality of data, parametric statistical

techniques were applied. A t-test was used to examine the differences in two groups within the measurement scale, while the One-Way ANOVA was used to examine the differences in three or more groups. The confidence interval was 95%.

In all of the tests comparing differences between groups, the Levene's test for equality of variances was applied. In all cases, the homogeneity of variance assumption was met ($p > 0.05$). For all parametric tests of the difference between the groups, the effect size was calculated by eta square (η^2), where the values of the effect size of 0.01; 0.06 and over 0.14 were considered small, medium, and large, respectively [10].

Basic information regarding organisations in which crisis management teams operate

Crisis management team members that participated in this research came from three different countries: Serbia (56.5%), Bosnia and Herzegovina (30.5%), and Croatia (13%).

In terms of the size of the organisations measured by the number of employees, the highest number (44%) are medium-sized organisations that have between 50 and 249 employees. 22% of the sample was made up of small-sized organisations, 27% of large organisations, and only 7% were micro organisations. The highest number of team members that participated in this research works in organisations from the private sector (63%), while 37% works in organisations from the public sector.

When it comes to the core business of the organisations, the majority of crisis management team members work in education (37%), manufacturing (15%), and health care (14%). Approximately one-third of crisis management team members are from banking and finance (8.3%), trade (7.4%), consulting (7.4%), state authorities (6.5%) and transport and logistics (4.6%).

Basic information regarding the members of crisis management teams

When observing gender structure, there is almost an equal number of male and female members of crisis management teams (51% male and 49% female).

More than half of the respondents have more than 10 years of work experience in the organisation (54%), while 22% have from 6 to 10 years, and 21% have from 1 to 5 years of work experience. Only a small number of team members have less than 1 year of working experience in the respective organisation. Experience and tacit knowledge about the organisation and its processes are very important factors in dealing with crises. This result is positive because a crisis management team should have appropriate work experience and knowledge about the organisation.

Crisis management teams consist mostly of top and middle managers. About one-third of the members of the crisis management teams are in top management (34%) and middle management positions (33%). About 16% of team members are first-line managers, while 17% are employees with no managerial position.

Out of the total number of respondents, 101 answered the question regarding the size (number of members) of the crisis management team. The smallest crisis management team consists of 2 members, while the largest counts 39 team members (the respective organisation is large in terms of the number of employees). An aggravating circumstance in the process of forming a team in large organisations is the fact that a maximum of ten team members is considered optimal for effective team functioning [40]. Research results showed that the average number of team members in the crisis management team was 7.64.

More than half of the organisations (56.5%) did not establish a crisis management team before the emergence of COVID-19, while 50% of organisations did not have a crisis management plan. Those results showed that more than half of the organisations were not prepared for the crisis that occurred. This situation is not so rare in practice – according to EY Global Risk Survey, 79% of companies responded that they were not sufficiently prepared to deal with the current crisis [71].

Results regarding the functioning of crisis management teams

A Likert scale called “Crisis Management Team Composition and Functioning” which consists of 15 statements was created with the aim to examine the functioning of the crisis management teams. Respondents were asked to select a number from 1 to 5 for each of the statements in accordance with the level of their agreement or disagreement (1 – strongly disagree, 5 – strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for all the statements in the scale was 0.954, which demonstrated a high degree of reliability of the scale [23], while the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed a normal distribution of data.

All statements have a mean value higher than 4, which is a very satisfying and positive result. The highest mean value is awarded to the statement that all members of the crisis management team are committed to a common goal (4.50), which reflects a great unity of team members

Table 1: Mean values for statements in the Likert scale Crisis Management Team Composition and Functioning

Statements	Mean
Team members come from different parts of the organisation (different organisational units).	4.20
The team responded quickly to the first signs of crisis to prevent possible business losses.	4.31
Team members completely understand their role in the team.	4.16
The new roles of team members largely match their roles prior to the crisis.	4.09
All members of the crisis management team are committed to a common goal.	4.50
The team has all the resources necessary to function normally.	4.15
The team is constantly taking action to mitigate any losses and prevent problems from escalating.	4.40
The team responds immediately (in real time) to new circumstances.	4.39
The team makes important decisions quickly (in real time).	4.38
Team members consider how their decisions will affect the business of the entire organisation.	4.26
There is trust between team members.	4.27
Communication channels were quickly established within the team.	4.45
Communication between team members is effective.	4.40
Communication between team members is open and honest.	4.21
The team quickly shares all relevant information with other teams and employees.	4.29

Source: Authors’ calculations based on SPSS.

and their shared vision. The second highest mean value is awarded to the statement that communication channels were quickly established within the team (4.45), which means that there is an undisturbed and formalised flow of information between team members.

Results showed that:

- 79.6% of the respondents agree that team members come from different parts of the organisation (different organisational units).
- 82.4% of the respondents agree that team members consider how their decisions will affect the business of the entire organisation.
- 80.6% of the respondents agree that team members completely understand their role in the team.
- 77.8% of the respondents agree that the new roles of team members largely match their roles prior to the crisis. Almost 14% of the respondents take the neutral stand regarding this statement.
- 81.5% of the respondents agree that team quickly responded to the first signs of crisis to prevent possible business losses.
- 89.9% of the respondents agree that all members of the crisis management team are committed to a common goal.
- 87% of the respondents agree that the team is constantly taking action to mitigate any losses and prevent problems from escalating.
- 86.1% of the respondents agree that the team responds immediately (in real time) to new circumstances.
- 86.1% of the respondents agree that the team makes important decisions quickly (in real time).
- 82.5% of the respondents agree that there is trust between team members.
- 75.9% of the respondents agree that the team has all the resources necessary to function normally. About 18% of the respondents take the neutral stand regarding this statement.
- 88.9% of the respondents agree that communication channels were quickly established within the team.
- 87.1% of the respondents agree that communication between team members is effective.
- 81.4% of the respondents agree that communication between team members is open and honest.

- 82.4 of the respondents agree that the team quickly shares all relevant information with other teams and employees.

Research results showed that crisis management teams responded quickly to the first signs of crisis. Members of those teams reacted in real or near real time to the crisis, which allowed the organisation to conduct its regular processes and activities with minimal waste and bottlenecks. Furthermore, research results showed that the team context was stimulative for the effective functioning of the team: members were empowered to contribute to the shared vision with their knowledge, expertise, skills and experience. As an ideal crisis management team is cross-functional and consists of employees from different hierarchical levels and organisational units [29], research results regarding this aspect are also positive.

Results regarding communication in crisis management teams are also encouraging, because one of the key challenges for organisations during the COVID-19 pandemic was how to stay connected during physical distancing. Rapidly established communication channels with clear, open, honest, and real-time communication are of great importance in a crisis situation. This kind of communication consequently leads to mutual trust between team members, their greater unity, commitment, and better results [46].

Crisis management teams had to deal with some challenges in their functioning at the onset of the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to identify them, the last question in the questionnaire was open-ended, allowing the respondents to point out to the key problems, obstacles, and challenges they faced during crisis management team functioning. Out of the total number, only ten members of crisis management teams answered this question, stating that the key problems, obstacles, and challenges were:

- Establishment of a new model of functioning and communication;
- Initial misunderstandings and confusion between team members;
- Lack of equipment needed for effective team functioning;
- Communication problems – information overload, ambiguities, late feedback;

- Uncertainty, concern, fear, nervousness, panic reactions of some employees;
- Consolidation of the team during the first week;
- Lack of consensus between all team members in the decision-making process;
- The need to make decisions in real time;
- Making priorities when there is a large number of activities;
- The speed of adaptation to new information, rules and change.

The occurrence of those problems is not surprising, because they are commonly present during the first two stages of team development – the forming stage, when there is confusion, tension, conflicts, and nervousness of team members, and the storming stage, when team members slowly begin to understand their duties and responsibilities, but when there are still frequent disagreements, conflicts, low level of trust and cohesion. Forming effective and high performing teams requires a planned approach, a lot of effort, hard work, time, and energy [47].

Key differences between organisations regarding crisis management teams

Further statistical analysis with t-test and ANOVA revealed the following results.

Members from different parts of the organisation are more frequently observed in crisis management teams of public organisations than in those of the private ones.

There is a statistically significant difference in the statement *Team members come from different parts of the organisation (different organisational units)* between members of crisis teams who come from public ($M=4.50$; $SD=0.906$) and private organisations ($M=4.03$; $SD=1.315$), $t_{(108)}=-2.195$, $\text{Sig.}(2\text{-tailed})=0.030$. Out of the total variance, 4.35% can be accounted for by the sector of the organisation (η^2 is medium 0.0435).

Public organisations quickly established channels of communication in crisis management teams more frequently than the private ones.

There is a statistically significant difference in the statement *Communication channels were quickly established within the team* between members of crisis

teams who come from public ($M=4.68$; $SD=0.526$) and private organisations ($M=4.32$; $SD=0.871$), $t_{(108)}=-2.756$, $\text{Sig.}(2\text{-tailed})=0.010$. Out of the total variance, 6.01% can be accounted for by the sector of the organisation (η^2 is medium 0.0606).

Public organisations responded quickly to the first signs of the crisis in order to avoid possible business losses more frequently than the private ones.

There is a statistically significant difference in the statement *The team responded quickly to the first signs of crisis to prevent possible business losses* between members of crisis teams who come from public ($M=4.60$; $SD=0.672$) and private organisations ($M=4.13$; $SD=1.091$), $t_{(108)}=-2.756$, $\text{Sig.}(2\text{-tailed})=0.007$. Out of the total variance, 6.69% can be accounted for by the sector of the organisation (η^2 is medium 0.0686).

Organisations that had adopted a crisis plan before the COVID-19 crisis formed teams made of employees that are members of different parts of the organisation more frequently than the organisations that did not have a crisis plan.

In the statement *Team members come from different parts of the organisation (different organisational units)*, a statistically significant difference was identified between the organisations that had adopted a crisis plan before the crisis ($M=4.53$; $SD=0.902$) and the organisations that did not have such a crisis plan ($M=3.89$; $SD=1.369$) $\text{Sig.}(2\text{-tailed})=0.006$, $t_{(105)}=2.813$. The difference between the mean values of the features by the groups is medium, $\eta^2=0.07$.

Organisations that established a crisis team before the COVID-19 crisis had in their crisis management teams employees from different organisational units more frequently than the organisations that did not have a crisis team.

There is a statistically significant difference in the statement *Team members come from different parts of the organisation (different organisational units)* between the organisations that had a crisis team before the crisis ($M=4.53$; $SD=0.935$) and the organisations that did not have such a crisis team ($M=4.02$; $SD=1.271$) $\text{Sig.}(2\text{-tailed})=0.006$, $t_{(104)}=2.396$. The difference between the mean values of the features by the groups is medium, $\eta^2=0.053$.

There is a statistically significant difference in the statement *Team members come from different parts of the*

organisation (different organisational units) $F_{(107)}=4.434$; $\text{Sig.}=0.002$. Additional comparisons with Tukey HSD test showed that the mean value of micro organisations ($M=3.14$; $SD=1.345$) is significantly different from the mean value of small ($M=3.63$; $SD=1.555$) and medium-sized organisations ($M=4.52$; $SD=0.799$). The difference between the mean values is large, $\eta^2=0.1469$. This result is not surprising, because micro and small organisations are not as complex in terms of the number of organisational units and hierarchical levels.

Results from the conducted statistical tests showed that, compared to private organisations, crisis management teams from public organisations were better prepared for the crisis in terms of the team composition (team members came from different organisational units), establishment of communication channels and the speed of reaction. Public organisations expected guidance and recommendations from the Government on how to act and perform during the COVID-19 pandemic. A group of authors stated that governments reacted quickly in order to respond to the crisis, recover from its impact, and move on after the crisis ends [17]. Governments' role is to provide information about the crisis, maintain order, provide support and coordinate the recovery from the crisis [32]. Furthermore, statistical tests showed that organisations that had permanent crisis management teams had a better composition of team members in terms of different knowledge, skills, and experience.

Discussion, implications and limitations of the research

Results from the conducted research showed that crisis management teams in organisations responded adequately to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crisis management team members came from different parts of the organisation, unified under a common goal, and shared a vision to quickly respond to the crisis in order to prevent business losses and protect the health of employees. Each member of the crisis management team used their expertise to solve problems and propose solutions, having in mind the overall functioning and results of the organisation. In addition to that, team

members possessed diverse knowledge, skills, different perspectives regarding the crisis, methods of thinking and examining the situation, and took a holistic approach in the decision-making process. Such composition of team members enables the organisation to cover all key areas of management during the crisis. The majority of team members understood their new roles in the crisis management team, which largely matched the roles they had before the crisis. In general, the most important factor for effective teamwork is that team members understand their roles, responsibilities, and have an awareness of the overall situation [49].

According to the results, the majority of team members disposed of all the necessary resources and tools to act. Communication channels were established quickly – communication was effective, open, and honest, with real-time information flow and decision-making. Consequently, members of the crisis management teams built and nurtured mutual trust and responded immediately to the new circumstances. The inability to respond to new information during a crisis may be very dangerous for organisations [60], but the development and massive usage of modern digital technologies as one of the key features of the 21st century [57] has made it possible for organisations to quickly establish new ways of functioning.

Most of the existing literature regarding teams and teamwork assumes a stable environment and does not cover the key characteristics of a crisis situation (uncertainty, dynamics, time pressure, changed business environment). In this paper, these topics were explored by examining the way in which teams functioned in the crisis situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is obvious that this kind of crisis will also be present in the future, therefore an increasing amount of attention is being and will be paid to the effective and efficient functioning of crisis management teams. For that reason, this paper may be useful to leaders and managers, but also to all members of crisis management teams.

The conducted research has certain limitations. The first limitation is the sample size. The reasons for the low response rate may be the engagement of members of the crisis management teams in consolidating the business, as well as a large number of various surveys conducted

during the respective period (April and May 2020) with the aim to investigate the work of companies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the results obtained cannot be generalised. Another limitation is the number of countries covered by the survey. Future research on this topic should include a larger number of countries, taking into account other variables, such as cultural differences.

Conclusion

When a crisis occurs, a single individual cannot deal with it adequately. Proper response to the crisis in an organisation requires coordinated effort of different actors, i.e., employees. One of the key activities in organisations when dealing with a crisis is to activate or form a crisis management team with the aim to deal with the crisis as best as possible for organisations and all the stakeholders.

This paper indicates that even those organisations that do not have permanent crisis management teams can adequately respond to a crisis if they timely decide to form a crisis management team and respond to the imposed challenges. Results of the research conducted during April and May 2020 which included 108 members of crisis management teams showed that those teams managed to respond adequately to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Crisis management team members quickly responded to the first signs of the crisis. They made real-time decisions by using a holistic approach due to their different knowledge, skills, and experience, clear team roles, commitment to a common goal, open, honest, effective communication, and mutual trust.

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