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**EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT
IN DECISION-MAKING**

EUROPEAN MODEL OF COMMUNICATION AND
COOPERATION FOR EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Employee involvement in decision-making in times
of crisis as a key to the effective organization of the
company's work project vs/2021/0081

Contents

Introduction

This document responds to a deliverable for the Project "Employee involvement in decision-making in times of crisis as a key to the effective organization of the company's work." funded by the call for proposals "Information, consultation, and participation of representatives of undertakings" of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion – VP/2020/008.

The Project contributes to: a) Support employee participation in anticipating and managing change, and preventing and resolving disputes in the case of various forms of restructuring of enterprises and groups of enterprises on an EU scale. b) Support employee involvement in the design and implementation of measures to address the impact of the coronavirus crisis on the workforce. c) Strengthen cooperation countries' representatives of European Union (EU) Member States (Spain, Italy, Poland, Germany, and Portugal) and EU Candidate Countries (Montenegro, Serbia) and between representatives of employees from trade and service sector from different organizations; and d) Prepare tools and solutions leading to increase employees' involvement in undertakings in companies from the trade and service sector.

The objective of this deliverable is to bring forward a Model of Communication and Cooperation (MCC) at European level for an effective involvement of employees in the decision making whenever organisational changes happen at the companies of the trade and services sector during times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemics. The MCC is drawn out of the result of the seven countries' models designed by national experts during the first semester of 2022 in the countries participating in the project.

The document is structured as follows, by taking into consideration the three main aspects of an effective MCC:

- Firstly, under "Communication Strategies" the most effective and inclusive approaches are presented in a schematic way, highlighting their contextual aspects, the mechanisms that make them work and their desired outcomes.

- Secondly, under "Tools to improve the involvement of employees in company decision-making" a set of mechanisms is proposed in a comprehensive way by highlighting their functionalities.

- Thirdly, under "Recommendations, good practices and lessons learnt" the report will give clear instructions to be put in practice at a European context and after taking into consideration the proposals from all the countries participating in the project.

The Model includes two extra sections focusing on: A) giving a snapshot of the previous work done in the project, named "How did we get here?" and B) debriefing on what is expected by such a model, named "What is considered a Model of Communication and Cooperation" under the framework of the project.

This report will be accompanied with a Communication Campaign that the partners are working to raise awareness on employee involvement in decision making in the trade and services companies during crisis periods, but not only.

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Whilst the European MCC for Employee Involvement will be based in the seven national models designed in Germany, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Serbia, Spain and Portugal during the first semester of 2022, the knowledge for their design came from the research carried out and its respective analysis during 2021.

The field research comprised surveys to more than 400 employees of different professions and levels in the trade and services sector around Europe, more than 30 semi-structured interviews with their employers and a thorough contextual analysis, including the new legislative and normative measures undertaken by the state governments during the Covid-19 pandemics lock downs and further on. In spite of a natural heterogeneity in the information deriving from the contextual characteristics, a European analysis was drawn that revised the national information and produced a unified piece where the analysis on the employees' involvement during he organisational changes introduced in the trade and services sector during the pandemic could be given out clearly and it could be be illustrated with first hand information from the countries. Some of the conclusions of the exercise were:

• As regards the context since the pandemic, some legal framework were relevant and some norms came to place especially in Germany, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain. The pandemic affected severely the trade and services sector around the world, including the countries under study. Nevertheless, the changes introduced aimed at bringing alleviation and resilience by placing the health of the workers at the forefront of the matter, especially during the first months since March 2020, onwards. In some countries the legislative framework served as a "social shield" to protect employment, such as in the case of Spain.

• The results at European level show that the workers were well informed by their employers, but they were consulted to a lesser degree, and the majority of them were not involved in the decision-making process.

• The employees see their attitude as proactive and positive when the changes came to place, but in spite of that they are unsatisfied with the fact that they have not been asked to present ideas and given opinions on the organisational changes introduced.

- The recognition of the intense use of digital tools is highlighted as the biggest change occurring during the pandemic, and this has influenced the process of involving the employees. Some other mechanisms have been the training and reskilling of staff, regular information on the current state-of-the-art, flexibility in the working hours, teleworking, creation of specific teams to manage the situation, etc. As regards the attitude of the workers, this is seen positively by the employers across the seven countries.

- Two best practices were repeatedly identified: the use of digitalisation, and training. Among the improvements the employers across Europe recognise the need to communicate more effectively and timely, to offer more space for understanding and predictability, to build trust, to offer better training opportunities and to make work simpler.

With those conclusions in mind, the national representatives in the Project worked with the support of national external experts to produce National MMCs specific to the different countries. These MMCs were finalised during the first semester 2022 – fruit of which is now the European MMC presented under this report.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED A MODEL OF COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION (MCC) UNDER THIS PROJECT?

The most intrinsic nature of "models" is their ease in making use of them in similar or different situations, and their optimal characteristic is their replication or reproductivity.

In this specific case, the planning for an MCC between employees and employers in the framework of the Project was made to support both the workers and the employers and/or company owners in the event of a future reorganisation of the company's work, in case of another crisis situation, with the objective to increase the employees' involvement in the future organisational changes in the company. From a general perspective, an MCC contains aspects related to the communication inside an entity in the format of guidelines to support the companies' both employers and employees. As well, it encloses good practices and real situations in which employers of the trade and services sector reorganizing the work of the company in connection with the covid-19 pandemic did so in cooperation with employees that due to its open access nature can be useful by future employees to share with their co-workers and employers, and therefore it may support them in their engagement for a better involvement in decision-making in their companies. The nature of an MCC is its usability by a wide range of stakeholders, i.e.: employers and employees.

More specifically, an MCC contains a communication strategy, tools to be used in practice and a set of recommendations and good practices.

Communication Strategies (CS)

In the framework of the Model of Participation that aims to guarantee the participation and consultation of workers in corporate decision-making, and specifically those that affect employment (as a labour right recognised by law), the Communication Strategy is conceptualised as a means towards that goal.

PRINCIPLES

The core principles of a CS in a company should be those of efficiency, effectiveness and transparency.

- Efficiency in communication means that it must be timely, dynamic and results-oriented. One of the challenges in terms of communication efficiency is certainly the obligation to respect the working hours of the employee, so that the desired efficiency would imply the prior establishment of rules that will apply during the crisis.

- Effectiveness in communication implies the use of modern tools that enable fast and uninterrupted interaction and exchange of information in real time.

- Transparency in communication means that the information on which the work process depends is available to everyone involved in the process

CHARACTERISTICS

The core characteristics of a CS are categorised in three slots: time, space and agency/feeling of belonging/trust and these are interconnected.

CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO TIME

- The CS has to be planned in advance¸ whenever possible, and sustained over time.

- The CS has to be timely, appropriate, and continuously updated.

- The CS has to respond rapidly to the changes of the context, in this case to the crisis and therefore the structural-organisational challenges of a company.

These characteristics when taken into consideration can guarantee that a Communication Strategy responds adequately to the company and its members' needs.
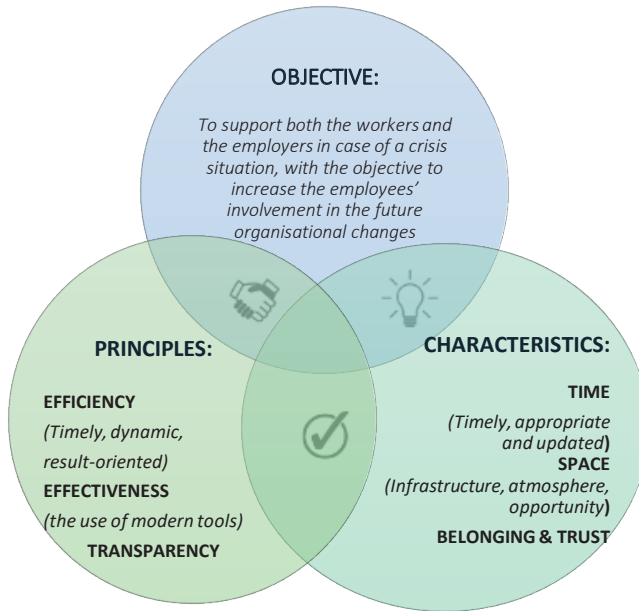
CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO SPACE

- The CS has to guarantee the right space and it has to create the most appropriate space for communication and for the employee involvement.

- The CS must have an infrastructure that will enable the connection of the employers and employees, and among each other, both physically (a meeting room) or digitally (online).

- The CS must take into consideration the atmosphere where changes are decided and implemented.

- The CS must create the opportunity for all the members of the company to present and select ideas.

- The CS must make sure the confidentiality of personal data and personal needs is safeguarded.

CHARACTERISTICS RELATED TO AGENCY, SENSE OF BELONGING AND TRUST

- The CS needs to be people-focused. Shifting the attention from "communicating the facts" to "communicating to people"and therefore involving people.

- The CS needs to involve everyone in the company. The logo "Leave no one behind" is key to ensure that either directly or indirectly the company's managers are reaching with their messages to everyone of their employees, and likewise the employees are getting involved into expressing their opinion.

- The CS must include training, continuous training and renewed training when- ever needed. Training needs to easily reach every single person in the company. A good effort in training reaps the rewards with time, and especially in times of crisis. Continuous training on communication and raising the self-confidence and agency of the workers in a company for a better involvement and therefore a more effective communication strategy.

- The CS underlying objective is to build trust. creation of trust between the employers and employees is a challenge that can be faced through timely and thoughtful com- munication and employee involvement.

The model of communication and cooperation (mcc):

OBJECTIVE:

To support both the workers and the employers in case of a crisis situation, with the objective to increase the employees' involvement in the future organisational changes

PRINCIPLES:

EFFICIENCY
(Timely, dynamic, result-oriented)
EFFECTIVENESS
(the use of modern tools)
TRANSPARENCY

CHARACTERISTICS:

TIME
*(Timely, appropriate and updated***)**
SPACE
*(Infrastructure, atmosphere, opportunity***)**
BELONGING & TRUST

THE PROCEDURE OF A COMMUNICATION STRATEGY[1] – "THE STRATEGY CYCLE"

The strategy cycle can be divided into the following stages: **preparation**, implementation, monitoring/testing, evaluation, and, finally, modification and improvement.

- Under "Stage 1. Preparation", the involvement of employees should be secured already at the stage of drafting possible crisis scenarios which will provide the necessary reference for developing valid schemes and procedures to respond to crises situations – so they are ready for use when a crisis occur. The relevant discussions should involve representative employees.

- Under "Stage 2. Implementation" (getting the communisation system in-place) Once the employee audience has been mapped and communication channels and tools reviewed it needs to be decided what the information flow is going to look like (who informs whom etc.) and how the strategy will secure the different types and vectors of communication. Communication templates prepared ahead of time, may come in handy, once the company is hit by the crisis and the promptness of reaction becomes crucial.

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1   Such as seen under the Polish National Report.

- Under "Stage 3. Testing or monitoring and adjustment" routinely, the crisis management procedures, including communication system should be tested, for instance, once a year, to ensure it is working and not going to fail when it needs to be used. During a crisis the implementation of the communication strategy should be monitored for any deficiencies and adjusted on current basis. The control of the communication process, as very important, must be established at the very beginning, with a good organization of the crisis headquarters and a clear division of responsibilities in the communication process, which implies the creation and placement of key messages to target groups and further monitoring and implementation.

- Under "Stage 4. Evaluation with employees" it is important to evaluate the system so it can be improved and employees should be involved in the assessment process, as they are both, the key audience and – desirably – active participants of the company internal communication in decision-making processes in the company. Establishing a reward system can be useful.

- Stage 5 Modification and improvement of the communication strategy. The results of the assessment should be used by the company to review and improve the crisis communication system and strategy, taking into account the concerns and ideas from employees.

- The CS must be simple and free of unnecessary administration and bureaucracy.

THE STRATEGY CYCLE

1- PREPARATION: *involve employees*

2- IMPLEMENTATION:

3- TESTING, MONITORY AND ADJUSTMENT

4- EVALUATION WITH EMPLOYEES:

5- MODIFICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
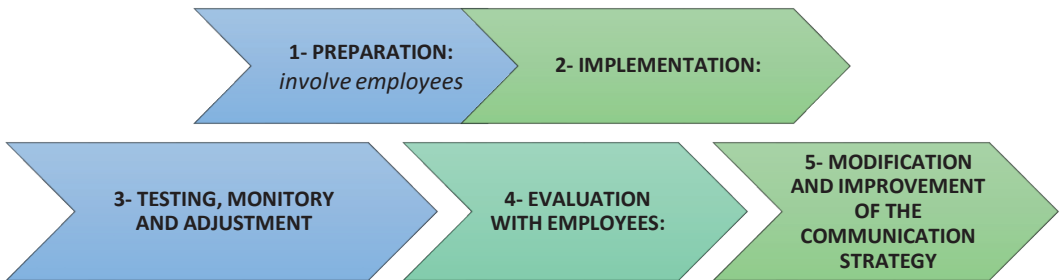
1. Preparation

Setting up **Crisis Team** - including HR, Legal and communication departments

Brain storming session on **potential crisis scenarios**: crisis team, management, representative employees

Assigning responsibilities to Crisis Team members
Setting up a **response team** responsible for crisis communication
Designation of a spokesperson – the **primary contact for employees** for obtaining reliable information

Mapping out **internal audience**: department/ time-zone / access to on-line tools /**needs**
 - grouping into categories

- on-line workers
- on the road workers
- off-line workers etc.

Mapping out and auditing **communication channels and tools**

2. Getting a two way communication system in place

Procedures and mechanisms:
- Who needs to be informed first
- What are the decision-making mechanisms
- Chronology of procedural steps
- A basic communication plan for crisis situation, including feedback

Safety protocols accessible, visible and updated and known to employees

Communication templates with viable information available for use and adaptation as needed

Response team members (and crisis management) **trained in communication** (ways to communicate, use of communication tools, information handling, etc.)

Communication tools
- top-down, bottom-up, two-way, horizontal
- pull and push
- written and personal (face-to-face)

Content to be communicated:
- where to get information
- times when information is to be released (fixed regular schedule)
- what to do /how to behave (instructions)
- how to cope with the situation (emotional support and councelling)
- feedback tools/channels (questions, concerns, ideas and suggestions)
- what company does to address the crisis and the concerns of employees

3. Routine scheduled testing
(once a year)

3. On-going monitoring and adjustment
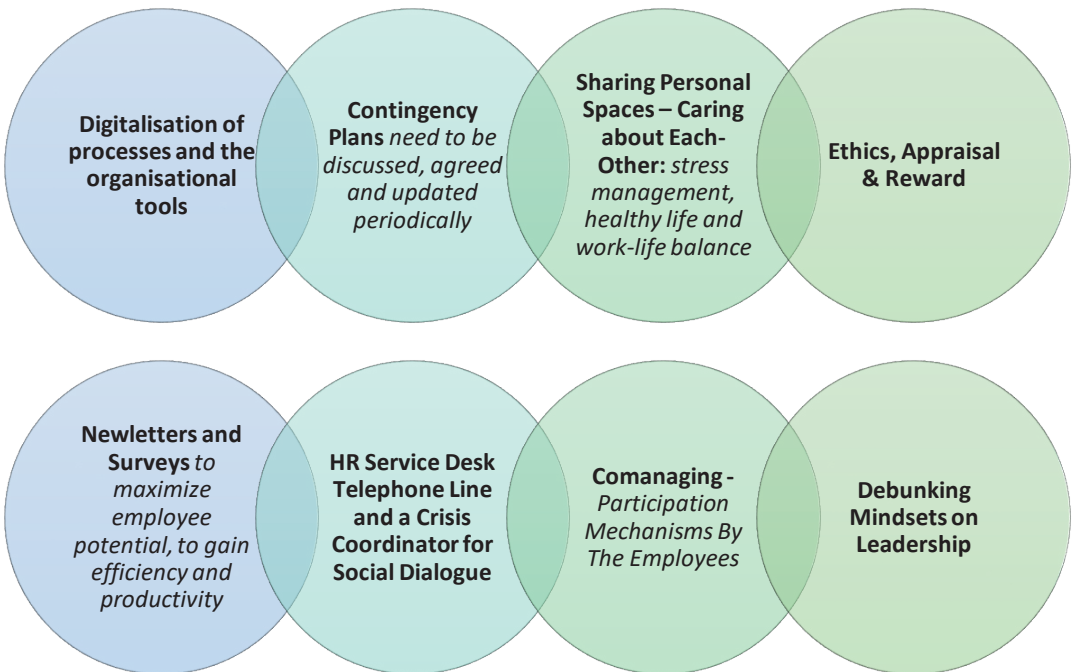(during a crisis situation)

4. Evaluation with employees
(scheduled or following the crisis)

Tools to improve the involvement of employees in company decision-making

After having defined the basic content of an effective Communication Strategy, the objective now is to draw out mechanisms that can implement that strategy and be used to enhance the employees' involvement in the company's crisis situation, and, overall, increase the cooperation between the workers and the employers.

The most highlighted tools to enhance cooperation between employers and employees among the seven European countries are the following:

TOOLS

Digitalisation of processes and the organisational tools

Contingency Plans *need to be discussed, agreed and updated periodically*

Sharing Personal Spaces – Caring about Each-Other: *stress management, healthy life and work-life balance*

Ethics, Appraisal & Reward

Newletters and Surveys *to maximize employee potential, to gain efficiency and productivity*

HR Service Desk Telephone Line and a Crisis Coordinator for Social Dialogue

Comanaging - *Participation Mechanisms By The Employees*

Debunking Mindsets on Leadership

DIGITALISATION TOOLS TO BOOST INVOLVEMENT –
THE "DIGITAL PLATFORM TO MEET AND DISCUSS"

The digitalisation of processes has come out as a result of both the employees' answers and the employers' field research in all the countries of the Project.

As a core part of the digitalization processes in the companies need to be the ones related to the information, consultation and decision making between the employers and company owners and managers, and the employers.

Both the formal processes such as Human Resources management and Accounts and Management of a company, as well as the informal ones can be carried out in digital forms.

In order to increase the employees' involvement, propose the Digital Platforms for Employees Involvement to exist as a hands-on experience – as easy as possible for all the employees – through digital gadgets they already use, such as phones or computers. WhatsApp groups, Skype/Teams/Zoom meetings are useful digital spaces to be considered.

A "Digital Platform to Meet and Discuss" should be made available at a company level, as a part of the HR Management, under the direct Dirección of the Company's leaders and/or owners, where continuous communication can take place. Some HR strategies such as open questions and a directed discussion can take place at a regular bases and previous announcement. The connection with the company leaders should be felt continuously by the workers.

ORGANISATIONAL TOOLS TO BE UPDATED –
THE "INTERNAL SOCIAL NETWORK" INSIDE THE COMPANY

The Covid-19 pandemic brought unexpected turmoil in the working environments that required sudden measures to be put in place. The seven National Reports – from Germany, Italy, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Serbia and Spain, outcome of the research carried out amongst workers and employees in the trade and services sectors in these countries brought forward the need to have become more resilient in terms of organisational aspects. Both the employees and the employers highlighted the importance of the "organisational tools" as an asset for a better involvement and therefore more resilience during crisis management and possible restructuration or reorganisation of companies.

A new organisational tool proposed here with the objective to raise the employees involvement is the so-called "Internal Social Network". In line with the digitalisation aspects seen above, the social networks that are created inside a company and with the

involvement of all the stakeholders, including company's owners, leaders, managers, and of course the employees, help to improve the internal communication in the entity.

A social network at company level can break the rigid hierarchy norms for bringing in more flexibility. It can encourage more informal conversations and bring different people together by fostering good professional relationship.

These tools have shown to have a positive impact on the employee satisfaction and their feeling of agency (See section on Communication Strategy) and they raise the transparency of communication and decision making in the company. When using the "Internal Social Network" there is a need to safeguard the confidentiality of personal data and make aware all the participants regarding this.

A "CONTINGENCY PLAN" IN-OR-OUT OF CRISIS

Contingency Plans are a management tool for companies. They are already a part of all managerial project, be it theoretical or practical. Yet, it remains a mechanism

that is mainly used by larger companies. The micro, small and middle-sized companies either create a plan at the very beginning, when they are constituted, or they do so whenever they are asked for whenever they apply for subsidies or funding from the public administrations or banks. The ad-hoc requirements for contingency plans are a risk, especially in the smaller companies. The plans are not seen as a useful tool and they are not updated, let alone discussed and disseminated among the company members, including the employees.

The Contingency Plan needs to be discussed, agreed, and updated periodically between the company and the workers as an important part of the Model for Participation inside a company. A standard model of Contingency Plan can be considered and then updated for each company.

SHARING PERSONAL SPACES – CARING ABOUT EACH-OTHER

There is no tool that can replace live contact between an employee and his manager. It is very important to create and maintain an inclusive work environment and make every employee feel included and strengthen company belonging and commitment. In addition to some highly technical tools such as Microsoft Teams channels for communication, the Internet, portals, TV screens for information, Viber and other networking communities, it is very important to raise the level of knowledge among employees related to stress management, the importance of a healthy life and the balance between business and private activities. All of this is really possible if companies work hard and listen to the needs of their employees, the environment in which they operate and the community they belong to. Good interpersonal relations and an atmosphere of cooperation and friendship at the workplace are key factors in employee satisfaction both in regular and crisis situations.

Face to-face moments should be enabled. Employers should promote meetings to keep in touch with employees and these must occur regularly, weekly, or biweekly. Ideally, each meeting is supposed to gather 10-15 employees and not more, so that this moment can be more controlled and effective in its goal, the communication.

The option of one-on-one meetings with one employee targeted for a specific and identified performance improvement or randomly chosen from the workgroup. When well conducted, these meetings are a very good way to create personal connections and encourage change in employees. Also, it is the best approach when an employer wishes to communicate more complicated ideas and get the employees' direct feedback and cooperation in the decision-making process.

ETHICS, APPRAISAL & REWARD

We should be guided by the fact that, no matter how successful we are, we need allies in business. An important item is verbal and non-verbal communication. If superiors address colleagues in an unpleasant tone, from above, using sarcasm, it will have bad consequences, especially in crisis situations. It is never allowed to speak to employees in a raised tone, especially in times of crisis when people are extra sensitive. It is necessary to take care that the employees are not brought before the fait accompli, but to discuss the problems that directly concern them and check whether they know what it is about. Sharing credit for achievements with employees is especially important in times of crisis. We should not miss giving recognition, gratitude and rewarding employees who are participants in the company's success chain. It is a very effective way to build good relations between employees, but to strengthen the spirit of cooperation and loyalty of employees and associates, in this way all employees are encouraged to be productive and cooperate with each other. Certain skills and experiences that employees possess should not be neglected, but they should be encouraged to use their potential, thus the company as a whole will benefit. Superiors should praise, recognize and reward everyone's effort, good idea, and contribution. All this contributes to the creation of a working environment where employees will find their own talents and put them at the service of the company. Employees are especially sensitive in crisis situations if the employer does not treat everyone equally.

NEWSLETTERS

Regular communication through internal newsletters to all employees is suggested. The sending cadence of this newsletter can be weekly, biweekly, or monthly, depending on the need for communication flow that the company has. If there is no new information to be communicated every week, then there is no need to send a newsletter weekly. This must be analyzed by managers, and they must decide how frequently the workers will receive this email with company information. Regarding the informational content, it should also be analyzed what is relevant to be shared or not and there must be a wise selection of information, to guarantee the newsletter will not have an excess of information, but at the same time make sure that it has the pertinent information for workers perception and improve their capacity of engagement and participation. It can include content like new acquisitions, new partnerships (with who, why, for how long…), financial information, as long as legally permitted to be shared, and any other kind of new information that will contribute to distributing and creating knowledge, resulting employees being able to make accurate decisions and having active participation. One advantage of this tool is that using newsletters sending platforms it is possible to track and measure its effectiveness. It is possible to consult email opening rates, knowing if workers are actually checking this information and by strategically including clickable sections on the newsletter body, it is also possible to understand if the employees are paying attention and absorbing the information provided.

SURVEYS

If a company wants to make sure they are gathering the most honest responses, then they should look for an anonymous way to do it. Employees will be more truthful if their answers remain confidential. Hence the greatest tool for this information collection is to run a survey. There are several platforms to hold a survey, with free access and that are easy to use. It must be well designed so that employees will be willing to answer it and the answers will have value to their purpose. Surveys are an excellent tool to provide employees feedback to the organization, helping to identify where it is possible to maximize employee potential and where the organization must pay more attention to make improvements that will result in more efficiency and productivity. These surveys can happen often, with general questions that are constantly relevant for companies' decisions, in order to keep the active participation of the employees. Yet a specific survey for a specific problem can also be designed, like crisis situations, in which changes and the scenery are very unusual. The most important part of using this tool is building the survey, not only because it has to be appealing to gather enough answers to make conclusions, but also because the one who designs it has to be wise when choosing parts like the questions or the model of the questions, since no matter how many answers the organization gets, they are only valuable and useful if they answer valuable and useful questions as well. Considering the preparation of the survey goes well, that alone will not be enough to ensure quality information for the company. It is central to guarantee the confidentiality of the participants in the survey, only in that way it is possible to collect honest feedback, otherwise, it can undermine the results or even affect the trust of employees.

HR SERVICE DESK TELEPHONE LINE

A dedicated telephone line operated by the response team members responsible for human resource management, which employees can call to report problems and seek support. Among the advantages are that the access does not require the Internet connectivity or digital skills; fully accessible to off-line and on-the-road workers; offers personal contact (even if not face-to-face); two-way communication with immediate response; and high effectiveness. Immediate clarifications possible; enables better insight to employees needs and moods, then electronic communication. Among the limitations: the limited capacity to handle simultaneous telephone requests; does not prevent the same or similar questions being asked repetitively; and it can be labour intensive.

A CRISIS COORDINATOR FOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Although our Labor Law recognizes a union representative, or a representative of employees in companies where a union is not organized, a crisis situation would require the selection of a person whose task would be to coordinate communication between employers and employees on a daily basis. This person would be in charge of maintaining the online communication platform. Another important role of the coordinator would be to be constantly available to the employer and employees, especially in moments when it is necessary to react quickly and efficiently.

COMANAGING – PARTICIPATION MECHANISMS BY THE EMPLOYEES

The so called „co-management" allows employees direct participation in company decisions which, in the event of a crisis. In addition to the participation of workers in the management of the company, the instrument in question also provides the possibility of presiding over the control body which, in the two-tier administration and control system, it is called the „Board of Surveillance". Based on what has been pointed out, the configurations that can be assumed by the co-management tool are: the provision of the appointment of a member of the Board of Directors by the workers (appointed from among the workers themselves or among the trade unions); the provision for the appointment of a member of the Supervisory Board by the workers (appointed from among the workers themselves or among the trade unions). To achieve this objective, the Legislator should require on the companies involved the obligation to adopt participatory statutes which provide for the procedures for appointing the members representing the workers as well as the procedures for exercising their respective prerogatives.

DEBUNKING MINDSETS ON LEADERSHIP[2]

LEADERSHIP	TEAM LEADERSHIP	SELF LEADERSHIP
Establish an agile mindset.	Allow loss of control. Open up creative freedom.	Flexibility in thinking and acting. Solution orientation.
Create a multifaceted environment	Using diversity. Recognizing potential.	Open mindset. Positive view of mankind.
Open and lively feedback culture	Give orientation. Mistakes can be helpful.	See feedback as an opportunity. Listening understanding perceiving.
Promote networking and transparency	Overcoming hierarchies building networks.	Willingness to share knowledge approaching others with courage

Source: New Work Culture https://www.beyourproject.de/vuca-agilit%C3%A4t

2   Table as in the German National Report

Recommendations, good practices and lessons learnt

The last section of the "European Model for communication and Cooperation of Employees" will focus on giving practical tips and advice for both the employees and employers to improve the involvement (information and consultation) of workers in the company decision-making processes through improved communication and cooperation inside the organizations, with a special focus on the hypothetical case of a crisis situation that may trigger changes in the work organisation.

The knowledge drawn here is an outcome of the seven National Reports from the European countries participating in the Project.

GOOD PRACTICES

As regards the Good Practices, one example per country is given.

SPAIN: "Athenaeum" a space for debate inside the company.

SERBIA: "Listening to the employees".

PORTUGAL: „Recognise the value of employees".

POLAND: „The Auchan workers" – personal contact in the crisis communication is used as much as possible and feasible".

MONTENEGRO: „The importance of trade unions".

ITALY: „The tripartite collaboration".

GERMANY: „Agility and retrospectivity".

Athenaeum – a space for debate inside the company. A space where every member of the company meets to share information, to get trained and to discuss, as well as to give their own opinion and improve organisation.	
Relevance to the Employers	**Relevance to the Employees**
Employers share their opinions regarding the needs of the company in a flexible, open way, with less rigid formalities. They allow space for the employees to understand in their own pace. They encourage the employees to bring forward their opinion.	Employees participate both tacitly or through talking or writing. They read the news given from the employers at a timely manner and can manage the information on their own choice. They feel comfortable with the ways the information is given and may participate by giving their own opinion.

In the Athenaeum, all of the employers and the employees can participate, including the trade union representatives, if there are any.

"LISTENING TO THE EMPLOYEES" BY SERBIA

Changes in the way of doing business in order to overcome the crisis will be more effective if the opinion of employees is respected and followed, they can give concrete suggestions on which areas can be further improved. All this will make it easier for employees to feel included in the collective, to be more productive and to perform their tasks efficiently.

Monitoring modern business trends and listening to the needs of the company's employees introduce new plans and work schedules. Some processes are being simplified and automated. By researching employee satisfaction, employers get great suggestions, they organize a fruit day at the workplace to preserve the immunity of their employees, the employee of the month is chosen within the work unit and rewarded for contribution and effort.

Certainly, in every crisis, crisis management in companies requires the formation of a crisis management team, which gathers at regular meetings, once a week and more often if necessary, taking into account all relevant data and circumstances that could help in finding the best solutions. The team must be multifunctional and made up of diverse members, where employee representatives must also participate, in order to cover all aspects of business operations and the protection of people in the company. adoption by Executive Boards in companies. The management of each company is responsible for making management decisions, while the employees are responsible for implementing, respecting and implementing the decisions made.

"RECOGNISE THE VALUE OF EMPLOYEES" BY PORTUGAL

It is important the employers recognize the value of the employees and make efforts to listen to their concerns, needs, and feedback in general. The third and last recommendation, but no less relevant is to act. After investing in a good communication structure employers must gather all the information collected and act, accordingly, providing the employees with the training or the conditions they need and creating an environment where employees feel supported, valued, and motivated to give their best. It would be useless to have good communication without taking advantage of it to improve results.

"THE AUCHAN WORKERS" BY POLAND

First, in the crisis situation it is the personal contact and oral communication which employees value the most, as revealed by the survey held by the IPA among a group of Auchan employees under the current project. Therefore, in spite of the convenience of use and efficiency of digital tools it is recommended that personal contact in the crisis communication is used as much as possible and feasible. In practical terms, it means that a Q&A service (as described above) which is operated 100% digitally should not replace direct, two-way communication. If a wide audience is to be reached and an on-site meeting cannot be held, a recommended option is a virtual town hall during which the management can share information in person and hold a live question and answer discussion with employees, including those who are in dispersed locations.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Budimex, a Polish construction and development company, organised a series of on-line webinars with employees. Off-line on-site employees may need to be informed and consulted directly by site level managers, and be supported by site level trade union representatives, which was for instance in the case of store workers in Auchan PL. 2. Second, it is important to monitor and recognize the needs of employees and to offer support to help them cope with the crisis situation: clarify doubts, alleviate feeling of uncertainty and help overcome the feeling of isolation, and to obtain feedback on the measures introduced. Besides using communication tools which enable employee feedack on current basis, an anonymous survey can be held by external consultants to obtain a more systematic and comprehensive insight. During the pandemic, in 2020, Auchan PL commissioned such an opinion poll among its employees to find out how they had been coping with the crises posed challenges and what was their perception of the measures applied by the company, including work organisation. (It is worth mentioning, that some employees had a choice with respect to work organisation options). 3. Third, to be efficient in coping with the crisis the company needs to be responsive to the needs of employees which have been identified and the reported problems they have encountered. For instance when Auchan store workers had to cope with insubordinate customers who refused to comply with sanitary restrictions and provoked conflicts, the legal department of the company, following the intervention from trade unions, provided employees with a standardized set of answers to the most frequently reported arguments, which employees could use in such situations. In the cases, where customers went as far as recording the arguments with Auchaun employees and publishing the videos on youtube, the company provided the employees with legal support in relevant lawsuits to get the content removed from the web.

"THE IMPORTANCE OF TRADE UNIONS" BY MONTENEGRO

The economic and health COVID19 crisis in Montenegro has raised a number of issues when it comes to labor relations and social dialogue in general. Although the economy has shown a significant degree of flexibility and ability to adapt to adverse circumstances, many gaps have been observed that have further complicated the situation. The flexibility of companies and employees, along with subsidies and state aid, made it possible to avoid large layoffs, which, given the severity of the crisis, can be considered a privilege. Great support for the survival of jobs was also provided by information technologies and various digital tools, which at some times were the only communication infrastructure, which in itself is a new value that will be widely used in the future. In order to strengthen the social dialogue in the period of crisis and to envisage activities in that direction in more detail, it is necessary to: • At the company level, in cooperation with the trade union or employee representative if there is no trade union, develop a contingency plan that will detail the scope of social dialogue in crisis situations, as well as the rules and obligations of the employer regarding involvement in the decision-making process. • Legally strengthen the position and role of employee representative in companies without trade unions • Create a digital infrastructure for more efficient communication between employers and employee.
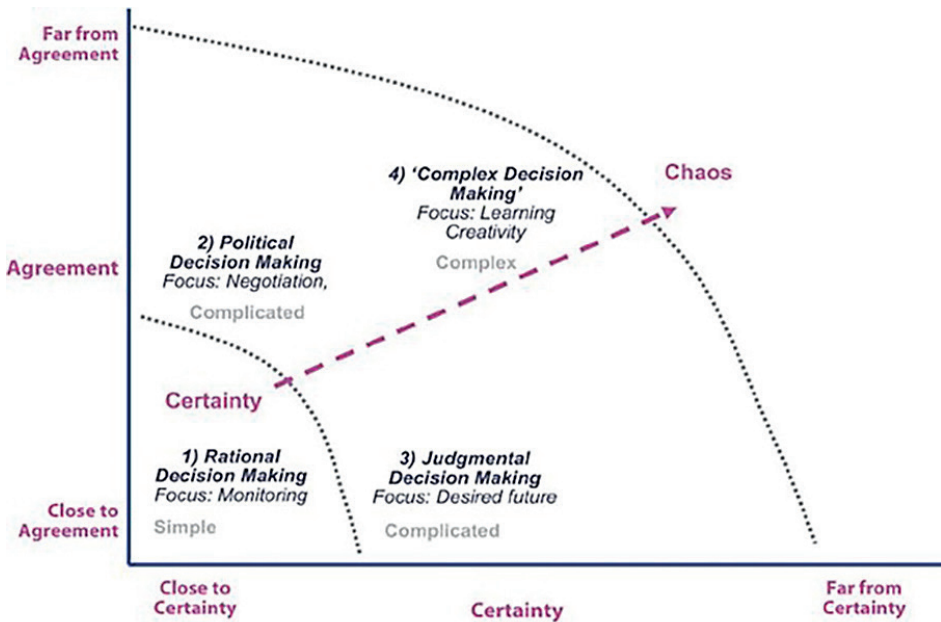
"THE TRIPARTITE COLLABORATION" BY ITALY

During Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a tripartite type of collaboration system in which the institutions have fulfilled the role of legal „translator" of the suggestions made by the social partners in Italy. The following are reported: 1. The shared regulatory protocol of measures to combat and contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus in the workplace of 14 March 2020; 2. The Protocol of Agreement for the prevention and safety of public employees in relation to the health emergency of 3 April 2020; 3. The shared regulatory protocol for the containment of the spread of Covid-19 in construction sites of 24 April 2020; 4. The shared regulatory protocol for containing the spread of Covid-19 in the transport and logistics sector of 26 April 2020; 5. The National Protocol for the implementation of business plans aimed at activating extraordinary anti-SARS-Cov-2 / Covid-19 vaccination points in the workplace of 6 April 2021. 12 A further virtuous practice can be seen in the establishment of joint bodies provided for in collective agreements, which periodically discuss issues relating to the organization of work (e.g. reward systems, occupational safety. Ultimately, the so-called „worker buy out" intervenes, intended as the rescue of the company, or part of it, carried out by the employees who take over the property. Basically, the workers of a company in crisis (even within an insolvency procedure) constitute a corporate vehicle, in the form of a cooperative, where the sums due to them converge by way of severance pay and anticipation of the unemployment benefit, and then proceed with the purchase of the company in crisis. In addition to the contribution of workers,

the operation is financed by the Foncooper and by the special fund for interventions to safeguard employment levels. This practice represents one of the most effective direct participation models of the Italian legal system; workers become entrepreneurs and define company strategies for relaunching production.

"AGILITY AND RETROSPECTIVITY" BY GERMANY

(2) Working in agile teams

More and more companies are using agility to counteract the VUCA world. Agile working is no longer just a topic for Silicon Valley startups . The "new work" is being driven forward because teams are much better able to deal with complicated and complex framework conditions thanks to agile methods, structures and an agile mindset . Agile is an answer whenever a team's environment becomes complex.

Far from Agreement

Chaos

4) 'Complex Decision Making'
Focus: Learning Creativity

Complex

2) Political Decision Making
Focus: Negotiation,

Agreement

Complicated

Certainty

1) Rational Decision Making
Focus: Monitoring

Simple

3) Judgmental Decision Making
Focus: Desired future

Complicated

Close to Agreement

Close to Certainty

Certainty

Far from Certainty

Source: Adapted from Stacey (1996, p. 47)

The Stacey Matrix shows the decision-making environment in which a team operates. For this reason, work with prototypical experiments and customer research should go hand in hand with building agile teams. These are made up of experts from different disciplines. This cross-functional collaboration helps unite different perspectives. In this way, they build up knowledge with which they solve the problems of a defined group of people. The interdisciplinary orientation and corresponding freedom are what make an agile team more successful in this context than a singularly functional department would be.

Retrospectives are meetings whose goal is to learn from the past. "Retrospective" means "looking back." Team members look back together and evaluate what went well and what went poorly. They analyze why things went well or deviated from expectations so they can formulate and address actions for improvement. Learn why retrospectives are so important in the agile workflow and what you should pay attention to when conducting them.

A retrospective works like a feedback loop. After a certain period of time , you look at processes and cooperation in the team. The goal is to identify hurdles more quickly and find solutions. This can concern an automation project, a "bottleneck" to external teams or an interpersonal conflict resolution.
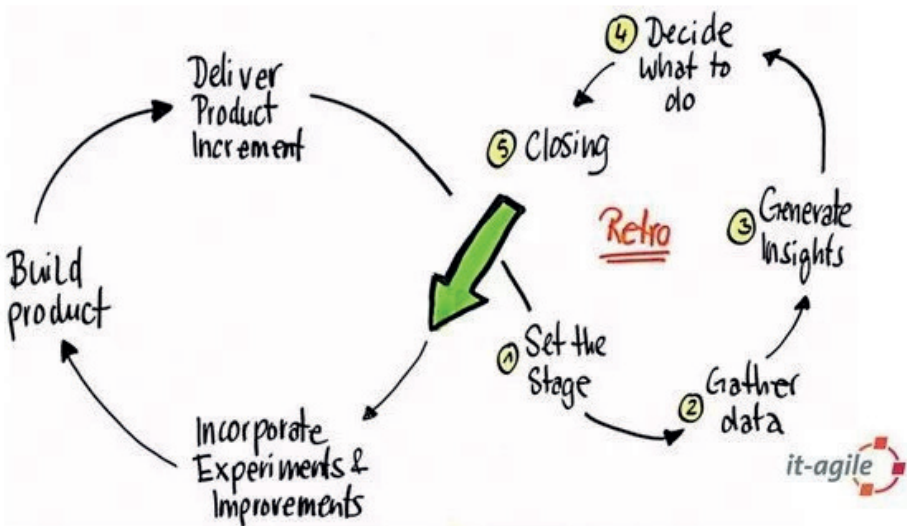
Source: Iterative Lifecircle (https://www.it-agile.de/agiles-wissen/agile-teams/was-sind-retrospektiven/)

A lesson learnt:
More work for joint decision making is necessary

Secondly, the main conclusion from the research drew the need of both the employers and the employees to work together jointly for improving the decision making in the company, especially in a time of crisis.

This conclusion is a fundamental underlying aspect for future collaboration. The most important aspect is that it was mentioned by both the employees and the employers, as a result of the field research carried out in the beginning of the project. While the workers believe that times have changed and a future crisis as well as the "new normality" would require more joint work, the employees believe that they are not very proactive in the consultation and decision-making processes.

Below a table with a brief summary on the joint work and the relevance for both the employers and the employees.

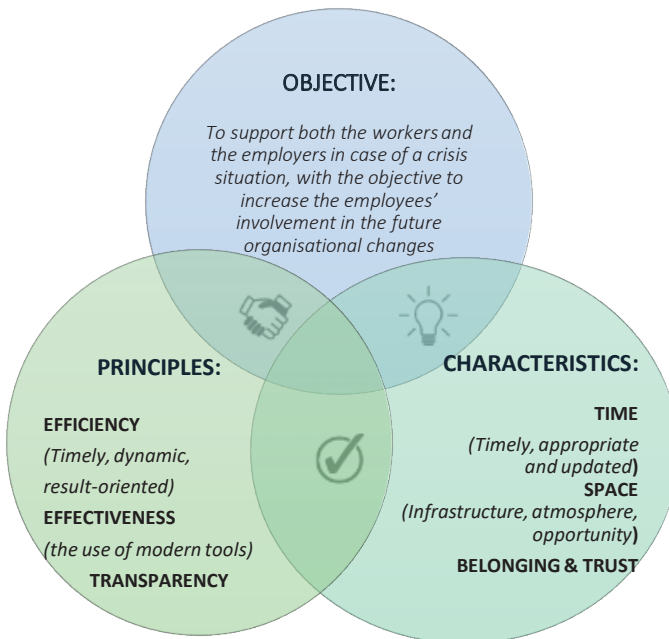| Joint work for better involvement. An effective involvement of the employees in the decision making processes in the company required more work done by both parties in a regular and sustained way.	
RELEVANCE TO THE EMPLOYERS	**RELEVANCE TO THE EMPLOYEES**
For the employers having the engagement of their employees is key to reach a better result of their work and fulfil the objectives of the company. Involvement in the decision-making in the leadership processes creates more satisfied workers that are more effective and efficient. The structural changes in the company in times of crisis are carried out more easily and performed diligently by convinced employees.	Employees feel with the right to bring forward their opinion and to participate in the decision-making processes. They behave more proactively and feel more agency towards the company's shared results. They are happier and perform the tasks with better quality.

Recommendations

The recommendation to the employers is to use the model outlined above, with a strong impetus in the tools, such as the creation of the Internal Social Network through digitalisation means to believe in the quality of the opinions of their employees and grant them agency.

The recommendation to the employees is to raise their participation and involvement in the company decision making processes as they are a part of the company and it is their intrinsic right to be involved in every decision. Enforce their right to be informed and consulted about determining business decisions that directly affect their lab conditions. Experimenting agency in the working life will raise their satisfaction as human beings.

RESUME

THE MODEL OF COMMUNICATION AND COOPERATION (MCC)

OBJECTIVE:

To support both the workers and the employers in case of a crisis situation, with the objective to increase the employees' involvement in the future organisational changes

PRINCIPLES:

EFFICIENCY
(Timely, dynamic, result-oriented)
EFFECTIVENESS
(the use of modern tools)
TRANSPARENCY

CHARACTERISTICS:

TIME
(Timely, appropriate and updated)
SPACE
(Infrastructure, atmosphere, opportunity)
BELONGING & TRUST

THE STRATEGY CYCLE

1- PREPARATION: *involve employees*

2- IMPLEMENTATION:

3- TESTING, MONITORY AND ADJUSTMENT

4- EVALUATION WITH EMPLOYEES:

5- MODIFICATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

TOOLS

Digitalisation of processes and the organisational tools

Contingency Plans *need to be discussed, agreed and updated periodically*

Sharing Personal Spaces – Caring about Each-Other: *stress management, healthy life and work-life balance*

Ethics, Appraisal & Reward

Newletters and Surveys *to maximize employee potential, to gain efficiency and productivity*

HR Service Desk Telephone Line and a Crisis Coordinator for Social Dialogue

Comanaging - *Participation Mechanisms By The Employees*

Debunking Mindsets on Leadership

GOOD PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

SPAIN: "Athenaeum" a space for debate inside the company.

SERBIA: "Listening to the employees".

PORTUGAL: „Recognise the value of employees".

POLAND: „The Auchan workers" – personal contact in the crisis communication is used as much as possible and feasible".

MONTENEGRO: „The importance of trade unions".

ITALY: „The tripartite collaboration".

GERMANY: "Agility and retrospectivity".

A LESSON LEARNT: MORE WORK FOR JOINT DECISION MAKING IS NECESSARY

Both the employers and the employees to work together jointly for improving the decision making in the company, especially in a time of crisis.

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