

The

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ECOPSY

Interaction between the Manager and His Team: New Reality

page 8

How Employees Survive in Crisis: Research Data

page 33

There Would Be No Fortune, but Misfortune Helped. Development as a Way of Adaption to Changes and Treatment of Stress

page 40

New Normal: Modern Reality for Employees



Contents

Thinking Out Loud	Analytics of the Time of Troubles Mark Rozin	3
Main Topic	A New Journey of the Employees Veronika Lutskina	4
	Interaction between the Manager and His Team: New Reality Andrey Onuchin, Gregory Finkelstain	8
	Coercion vs Help. How the Interaction between Managers and Subordinates Has Changed Gregory Finkelstain	13
	Well-Being Boom. Why the Care of Employees during the Crisis Has Become a Matter of Honor Maya Kolosnitsyna	16
	Sink or Swim. How the Pandemic Will Affect the Level of Industrial Injuries Tatyana Zinovieva, Anatoly Komarov	22
	The Transformation of the Professional Competences in the Context of Crisis Sergey Kuznetsov, Anastasia Matusevich	26
Working with Top Managers	Why It Is Useful for Managers to Feel Like Losers Maria Makarushkina	31
Analytics/Research	How Employees Survive in Crisis: Research Data Andrey Onuchin, Alexander Sevostyanov	33
Personal Record	There Would Be No Fortune, but Misfortune Helped Maya Kolosnitsyna	40
Companies' Experience	New Employee Experience. Company Stories	44

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Analytics of the Time of Troubles



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Dear colleagues, all of us have passed a test over the recent six months that neither our fathers nor our grandfathers have ever faced. It is not only and not so much related to the pandemic. The pandemic itself is not a new phenomenon. The humanity has already had to deal with such a disaster. The total closure of the world that followed the disease was an unprecedented event that would remain in our historical memory forever.

Being your consultants, all the time we have been close to you, our clients. We didn't know more than you did, so we tried to understand what was happening and to adapt to the changes together with you. Now we can say that the most difficult, shock period is over. No matter how many new waves will hit us, they will not be as unexpected and stressful as we had last spring. Over the past six months, we have realized the contours of the new world and learned to live in it. Contrary to the expectations, it has turned out that there are not only disadvantages, but also advantages.

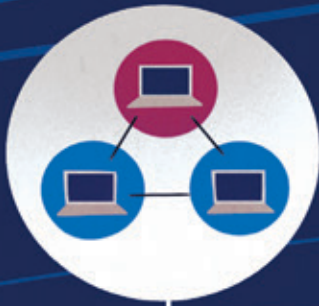
All this time, we have been constantly monitoring the events in our client companies related to the staff and management system as a whole. We analyzed how the remote format of work affected employees, their anxiety, engagement, and how management practices changed in companies. Some observations were qualitative and were made within the framework of consulting projects, while others were quantitative, measured in the course of pulse surveys and other studies.

We wish to share the first analytical conclusions made “on the heels” of the events, with you in this issue of HR Times. We do hope that more data and deeper analytics will appear eventually, but here you will see truly fresh results and feel the spirit of the time and the emotions of its chroniclers.

Take care of yourselves! **■**

REMOTE WORKING

PROMOTION



INTERVIEW

VACANCY

ADAPTATION

EDUCATION



A New Journey of the Employees



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This entire issue of HR Times is dedicated to the employee's new experience, a curious turn of events during his journey through the company, which happened in the spring of 2020.

The approach to HR based on the creation of a positive employee's experience in the company is the development of the marketing idea of the client's experience. To attract customers in competitive markets, companies try to enhance the commitment of the customers to their products and services: they check if the purchasing process is fast and convenient, if the services are performed smoothly, and the product itself should bring joy from its possession and use.

Yesterday you contacted the call center of your bank or visited a supermarket of a major chain retailer, and today (even if it is Sunday, 9.15 am) you are receiving a call from a bot asking you to appraise your experience with the brand at the selling point you have visited. Companies try hard to make their customers' journey from the realization of a need in some products to their purchase fast and comfortable, so that the customers will be happy to come back again. The positive experience of a customer inclines him to make a new purchase, and in the course of his journey he will come repeatedly to the same targeted point — he will buy.

Employee Journey (EJ) is based on the same concept, only in this case our customers are job seekers and employees, while the company provides a service to them finding a job. The journey begins with your first meeting with the company, and ends after you quit). Watching an advertising video about the company; meeting its representatives at exhibitions and business events; replies to submitted resumes, meeting tutors, Friday meetups, training, awards for good performance, career relocation, talking with the Manager when you want to leave the company; meetings at the Alumni club — these are the points of contact between an employee and the company. These points reproduce the experience of cooperation and motivate the employee to buy: to come and stay with the company, or recommend it as a good employer to your friends and acquaintances. HR marketing imposes a new style of the cooperation with the personnel — an employee is the same as a customer.

Chat bot EJ¹ developed by ECOPSY conducts surveys in the environment familiar to employees — via popular messengers or in a dialog box on the site.

It can also be integrated with the internal IT systems. Thanks to these pulse surveys, you can monitor the experience of employees and job seekers at each point of contact.



Despite the current crisis, the market remains alive and dynamic, and the struggle for talented employees, especially of the most required professions, continues day and night. The general trend is that people have become more emancipated, more demanding from the employer, and less attached to one particular company. Moreover, if the remote work becomes a part of everyday life (this is inevitably going to happen in one form or another), then the additional barriers associated with the location of your workplace will be removed. You will not have to move to another region and bring your family to a new apartment, change the school for your child, or live in a plane from Friday to Sunday to see your family on weekends. You will easily find a job in another city or country, and the competition in the market will only increase.

Therefore, **a company with a stronger and more attractive corporate culture and care about the personnel will get a significant advantage in the labor market.** This is why HR services do their best to enhance the prestige of the employer's brand by the promotion of the contacts between the potential and current employees with the company. Companies try to make the experience of the cooperation with them much more attractive, adequate, and relevant to the needs of the target audience they are aimed at, considering this as an opportunity to stand out in the labor market, attract the best people, and keep them inside the company for as long as possible.

Why do we refer particularly to the employee's experience in a new reality in this issue of HR Times? When a journey goes in a usual way, there are no sharp turns, bumps, accidents in the map — the work goes on as usual, the processes are debugged. However, significant points of change along the way become critical. During crisis, facing an unusual, new situation, people become even more sensitive to their experience of interacting with the employer.

Employee Journey (EJ) is a concept where job seekers and employees act as customers, while the company provides a service to them finding a job.

¹ It's a play of words. "Ej" — the Russian for: hedgehog.

What has happened to EJ over the recent half a year? I will share three main observations with you.

1. Concern for the physical and psychological wellbeing of employees has become quite normal

In the spring of 2020, many employees from different companies were transferred to remote work. Everything happened quickly. People were trapped at home, often in the conditions quite uncomfortable for work, confined within a few square meters, in the company of their relatives and children who needed attention and support of their school online studies. Their stress, significantly aggravated by the uncertainty, the concern about the health of their family and the financial state of their company, was off the scale. But unlike many other crises which happened in the last 25 years, **we can see now a completely different phenomenon on the part of the employers — increased care of their personnel**. Of course, there have been lockouts and shutdowns, but the companies remaining “afloat” have fully demonstrated this new trend.

Of course, the requirements of regulatory authorities have provided a strong boost, but employers have met these requirements through concern for the health of their employees. This has become a key message: the care of the safety and health of employees is the company's priority. So we ask you to stay at home, do not let you go on business, etc.

Companies have conducted regular pulse surveys to check whether their employees have enough convenience, comfort and technical support to work remotely, whether those who still have to work outside of their homes are able to fulfill their duties, whether they feel safe, and whether everything is in order for them.

Various measures have been taken to improve the physical and psychological [state of employees](#), to enhance their morale: zoom yoga, trainings to support emotional state and avoid stress, coffee breaks with the manager in the morning to discuss corporate news in an informal setting. The activities have been diverse, but their main objective remains the same: not only to ensure the productivity of employees, but in general to demonstrate the company's care and support of them in this difficult time, to ensure their involvement and harmonious state, so that they could feel physically and mentally more comfortable.

Especially in the crisis period of an employee's journey around the company, it becomes so important to build the interaction correctly, meeting the needs of employees on the one hand, and the overall goal of the company, on the other. Because of the fact that many employers have met the needs of their personnel during the stressful time, we are able now to see the emergence of a new corporate environment making it simply indecent to behave differently. Taking care of the physical and psychological health of employees is becoming quite usual and helps to accumulate a fruitful cooperation experience.

Especially in the crisis period of an employee's journey around the company, it becomes so important to build the interaction correctly, meeting the needs of employees on the one hand, and the overall goal of the company, on the other.

2. The increase of the signal strength leads to a communication denial

Managers have lost physical and visual contact with the staff transferred to remote work. Many are trapped [in a lack of control over the situation](#). **To compensate the lack of usual contact during the quarantine period, companies have significantly increased the signal strength**: endless online contacts, daily reports on work done, monitoring with special software, or additional tasks to prevent the personnel from wasting their time on anything else than work duties. Fatigue from endless meetings and useless reports clearly illustrates, that the signal strength at each point should be adequate.

The failure to send an adequate signal results in the absence of contact. If the signal is too weak and cannot reach employees, they will not feel fully involved in the activity. However, an excessive signal leads to the information noise, high tension, and eventually a desire to get out of contact. Excessive activities may estrange the employees from their employer.

3. Employee's journey is transferred to the virtual world

If an employee switches to remote work, all points of contact move online after him. Thus, the entire employee's journey takes place in the virtual reality — on the screen of a smartphone, tablet, or computer. There is an urgent need to establish remote communications, apply the appropriate technologies to recreate the office space as much as possible, and feel the physical presence of the colleagues at the distance.

Conventional communication platforms are not able to provide this effect. Audio chats, originally used by gamers to keep a background interconnection during a game, come to rescue. Employees log on audio chats during the working day, may be divided into meeting rooms to work in teams, or communicate in a single space. An illusion is created, as if you are just walking around the office and can exchange a few words with your colleagues.

However, even more radical are the attempts to move into the virtual reality completely, model offices, meeting rooms, and shared space. Many companies are actively moving in this direction. For example, Microsoft, Toyota and HP use VR helmets to create the illusion of being present in a remote meeting room. FB promises to create a super-productive workplace in mixed reality. You do not have to be physically present. All the interaction is simulated on the screen. The use of AR and VR technologies maximizes the illusion of being present.

Today we can see a curious trend of the alienation of the Employee Journey from the reality and its transfer to a fictional world. An employee's virtual journey, bright and attractive for solving remote tasks — is a modern trend that will most likely be filled in with various HR tools in the nearest future. Everything looks like a game, but it's already a working reality.

Personification goes through an avatar, which is provided with the individual characteristics that the author wants to be associated with himself, including the selection from the menu of the expressions of different emotions that the author currently wants to demonstrate. On the one hand, we get an opportunity to recreate compatibility in activities, on the other hand, there is a risk of losing a live emotional contact, when a person reads the state and mood of a communication partner through non-verbal signs, and in the same way transmits his own, creating the basis of social communication. This is similar to the story from Ray Bradbury's "Martian Chronicles", where Martians wore masks with various frozen emotions, hiding their faces with the true emotional manifestations behind them.

Competently, innovatively and comfortably built EJ certainly works to increase the attractiveness of the employer's brand. At the same time, the fear of losing contact with employees, the desire to make contact points as comfortable as possible and equip them with the most modern technologies may create the situation when a company, trying to improve Employee Journey, have risks to become a Travel Agency. **Carried away by tools, you can turn EJ into a continuous celebration, shifting the motive to the goal**, where bright "chips" will no longer help to increase the productivity and engagement, but will simply entertain a bored audience. When developing a map of an employee's journey, it is useful to remember that there may be valleys and mountains with ascents and descents on the way — the main thing is that the road would lead to the intended goal. **■**

Today we can see a curious trend of the alienation of the Employee Journey from the reality and its transfer to a fictional world.



Interaction between the Manager and His Team: New Reality



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After the start of the pandemic in the territory of Russia and the beginning of the quarantine period followed by the restrictions of the activities of various companies and institutions, a huge number of employees had to switch to remote work. For some companies, which previously practiced this form of work, the changes were not very notable, but for most of them, this way of organizing the work process was sudden and stressful.

In addition to many organizational problems (lack of a comfortable workplace, computer, access to files and programs protected by security rules and unavailable for remote users, etc.), there was also a certain communication gap between the team and the manager, as well as among employees themselves. This is what we are going to review in this article and give useful advice to those who found the experience of remote work successful, and who want to keep this practice in future (already now, while writing this article, I can mention the names of several such companies).

In April–May 2020, we conducted a series of surveys within ECOPSY (where the remote work used to be always quite normal), as well as in some large Russian companies, and found that even those employees whose work is generally well organized, who are comfortable working at home, whose families do not distract them from work, the computer works properly — note a lack of communication with colleagues and managers, lack of support and interaction.

What is going on? The meeting room symbolizing formalized communication in the office life, and the bureaucracy that structures decision-making processes, have shown their inflexibility, labor intensity, and inability to solve many issues remotely. In order to achieve the same results exclusively through the formalized communication, people had to increase the working day one and a half times on average. The pandemic and the associated need to change the format of work became the catalysts demonstrating the importance of the latent communication.

What do we mean by this?

Latent communication is the communication of employees, not regulated by any rules, which occurs as if by itself (in the corridors, smoking rooms, kitchen, at the cooler). It is out of any form of managerial control and fills all the gaps of bureaucratic communication.

The lack of such informal communication in the life of any company is similar to the Italian strike: everything is done in the strict compliance with the rules but the operations come to a deadlock, because there is no necessary “lubrication” of organizational “gears”. This communication is latent not for interacting individuals — for them it is obvious and clear — but for the company as a whole. Sometimes, having spontaneously realized the role of such communications, the management tries to bring some of them out of the gloom. For example, it prohibits discussing the amount of salaries between employees. This ban is always violated because formal tools don’t work in an informal environment. This is a different dimension of social medium.

The employees working in the time of quarantine from home have faced the lack of such communication. As a result, they started working much longer to maintain the same productivity.

Attempts to transfer latent communications to online have not been successful for most of the companies, because informal communication naturally occurs in the routine practices of a familiar environment, while the online mode is unable to provide such environment so far.

It has turned out, that the importance and significance of formalized communication in the classic corporate life has been overestimated, while independent work and latent communication have been underestimated. From the time of the emergence of the management scientific school in the 19th century, the priority has always been given to formalized communications, while independent work and latent communications have been considered threatening and destructive. However, by the end of the 20th century, more and more researchers came to the conclusion, that a flexible structure required the promotion of the independence of employees and the development of free communications among them. These ideas were not implemented in due time, but the crisis has brought them back to the surface. It has turned out that, despite of the declared openness (in fact, latent communications) and creativity (equivalent to independence), the corporate activities are still based on the gears of formal communication. For example, electronic document management systems are becoming the backbone of formal communication in many companies. Someone pulls the strings of the corporate mechanism, which is contrary to the ideas of creativity and productivity. The crisis has exacerbated these phenomena and demonstrated the inefficiency of formalized mechanisms.

At the same time, **compensatory mechanisms** were naturally activated, and started working at all corporate levels.

The first level of communication is the interaction of individual employees with each other

The lack of latent communications and the consequent disability to make quick decisions without going through formal procedures is partially compensated by the fact that employees, who fear of losing their jobs, do their best to show individual super-efficiency. The classic Russian mobilization method works: people have started working more. Our **research shows that the majority of employees believe, that efficiency is still maintained, only they have to work more.** Previously they did not respond to emails after 19.00, but now schedule their business meetings at 21.00. People can work in this mode for several months, but after half a year they will be completely exhausted. Some will be able to adapt, but they will be a minority.

Bypasses have been used to find a solution: for example, previously it was almost impossible to approach some decision-makers on certain issues, but now they can give you their personal phone numbers, because in such a way you can solve a problem much faster.

Personal messages during online conferences, active correspondence in various messengers — all these are being used with a vengeance. Some of our clients have already a permanent “Smoking room” in Zoom, i. e. a constantly working channel where you can go any time to chat with colleagues, see their faces, or even solve a work issue pending for solution, and quit any time. This is a method of catalyzing latent communication as well.

However, all these mechanisms also take a lot of time and effort. That is why the question arises about the removal of hidden latent communication in the field of reality.

People usually practice a significant part of the communications and feedback in latent, routine ways, which are not realized, not reflected, but provide a density of coordination among the employees staying in the office.

People usually practice a significant part of the communications and feedback in latent, routine ways, which are not realized, not reflected, but provide a density of coordination among the employees staying in the office. Many people are starting to feel nostalgic about their previous office work. Moreover, even those foreign companies (both Western and Asian) which are planning to reduce office hours and make office work more sparse (apparently, we are talking about several years until we can control the pandemic), want to keep the opportunity to visit the office. There is a number of reasonable methods of work organization: some can be implemented remotely, but others — only in the office. In addition, there is a fairly large layer of psychological well-being of employees, which requires regular face-to-face meetings with their colleagues in order to maintain efficient contacts and interaction within the team.

The second level of communications is the interaction of the team with the manager

It is quite easy for the manager to contact his subordinates, but there is no such connection in the opposite direction. We have noticed such a situation recently when we were communicating with some manufacturing companies. In other words, there is only one-way method of communications with the manager. That was quite natural in normal time, but turned out to be critical in the situation when managers had to do their work remotely, while workers remained in the workshops. Flexibility and adaptation were needed even in the situation like that.

The efficiency of communications between the manager and his subordinates depends, first of all, on the management type customary for a given company — whether it is coercive or helping. The coercive type of management gives priority to short and clear tasks and concentrates on the monitoring of their fulfilment. Such formalized, bureaucratic management has played a trick on managers. Even if such interaction remains more or less efficient in the remote mode, the burden on the manager has increased significantly: setting a task and monitoring its fulfilment remotely has turned out to be rather time-consuming. In the helping type of management, the manager trusts his subordinates, controlling and directing their work only at reference points. This method of interaction has proved to be more tenacious and efficient in the time of crisis. However, an interesting trend has emerged: many companies have shifted from the helping type of management to the coercive one. You can read a [separate article](#) about the causes of this phenomenon in this issue of HR Times.

The third level of communications is interaction within the personnel

Interaction within the personnel, between teams and divisions that have suddenly found themselves in the format of an Italian strike. In other words, they have to work in a formalized mode, which could be avoided in the office: you could just go to a specific employee and negotiate. Under quarantine, such opportunities have either completely disappeared or reduced. As a result, cross-functional interaction is starting to falter. We have already mentioned that many people have significantly increased their work time. This is in fact the first compensatory mechanism activated in response to the lack of latent communications.

The same pattern has appeared in intra-and inter-functional interaction: communication in the corridor has died. It has been partially replaced by online meetings, but they are ten times longer than the “corridor” communications.

It's one thing if an employee while walking through the office, decides to talk to a colleague. Then he comes to the right room and solves the issue. However, the things are different in the formalized remote mode, when you must either organize regular meetings of those employees, who previously could solve issues in the office, or create a general chat with many participants and chaotic communication, which irritates a lot. Situationally, people easily solve many small issues when they meet each other in the corridor, in the smoking room or at lunch. In the cognitive science, there is even a concept of environmental thinking — the surrounding space affects decision-making, its speed and quality. The captain in the control cabin of a ship solves problems differently than in the training center, because in each case there is a number of supporting and interfering external phenomena. Environment also influenced the employees in the office. The loss of this environment is an uneasy thing for them.

What can companies do to help employees to establish a more efficient cooperation and bring latent communication to the field of reality? At least, two ways of the solution of this problem are quite obvious.

Organizational network analysis (ONA)

You have to [analyze the communication network](#) in your company. This tool has been familiar for a long time, but has not been used much, because it is not clear, when and what it can be used for. Everyone has always been focused on formal organization. However, only the analysis of internal irregular volatile relationships, the process of creating, breaking up and changing groups over time allows us to understand the staff dynamics. ONA allows to identify who is communicating with whom, why, and what about. It is easy to implement if you create a survey correctly and give it to employees once a week. The answers will take about 5 minutes. Nowadays you can and must analyze online connections as well.

This survey does not formalize contacts, but removes them from non-reflexivity area: in the process of answering questions, employees begin to recall which of their contacts are the most frequent and the longest during the day. Contacts are taken to the reflexive field. In fact, this is a way to emphasize latent communications. When we understand what contacts an employee has and identify mini-teams (which are not always equal to a division or department), we can create an environment that encourages latent communications. Over time, this will also become routine and turn into a new uncontrolled habit. However, you should not set a goal to keep all informal communications under constant control. This catalyzation procedure will only allow you to build up new neural connections, which have been interrupted, but are able to help the company to recover.

The latent communication system should increase the company's connectivity. The classic gear-driven organizational mechanisms do not provide an efficient cooperation inside a company. The stability can be ensured only when many communicate with many about many things. For example, if a manager has built all communications around himself, then with his departure the entire division may find itself in a vacuum. However, in a company with good internal connections the manager's departure causes only a slight discomfort that gradually improves. The process will not stop.

The space of communication

Consider a new zoning for your office. According to all forecasts, companies will have to operate partially in the remote mode for a long time, up to several years. Therefore, they will have to think about the organizational issues of employees' work to provide a field for latent communications on the one hand, and to ensure the safety of work with respect to the epidemiological situation, on the other.

In our opinion, the offices will need three key zones:

- **A quiet area** for those who need to run away from home and work in silence — with social distancing and barriers between workplaces in full compliance with sanitary standards. This is necessary not to expand the communications in the office, but to overcome excessive communications in the family. Social distancing in the office can be provided through work in shifts: morning/evening, even/odd days.
- **Meeting rooms** for official communication.
- **Loud zone** — a place for informal communication, where you can work and communicate comfortably. A good example of this format is the [Splat office](#): tables where you can chat with colleagues, meet partners, and have lunch. Such a zone can be a catalyzer for latent communications of various types. In the current conditions, when people have realized that it is difficult and uncomfortable to work without latent communications at all, setting up a separate chat room for a frequently communicating group or creating such a loud zone in the office is the main trend that will reach us. Work in a loud zone can also be used as a social signal: if the manager is in the loud zone, it becomes a sign for employees that they can come and talk. Of course, this greatly reduces the Manager's efficiency in solving his personal tasks, but it allows to maintain communications with the staff.

The crisis has clearly shown **three features of the interaction within the team**:

1. An employee remained with his/her work tasks alone is able to get results, but this would cost much more time and effort.
2. Formalized communications in the remote mode become either unworkable, or truncated. This takes a lot of time and effort.
3. Latent communications are extremely important, though in the past they were considered useless, or even harmful.

It is impossible to give a full description of the social mechanism. Weber's ideal bureaucracy can exist in exactly the same world as Plato's ideal state. In fact, this is the same idea: an ideal state and an ideal organization, where everything works clearly. However, the real life shows us that this is not the way how the system works. The industrial revolution gave people a false idea that a company is a productive mechanism, but in fact, it is a social one. The idea of banishing latent communication from life has now shown its complete failure. People miss it now most of all. In fact, latent communication used to provide the vast majority of fruitful interactions, giving us more, than all the corporate gears, which continue to work smoothly. The crisis has shown how much a company may lose through the disconnection of informal ties or gain through connectivity, promoting latent communications, even when everyone returns to work in the office. **■**

Give your feedback
of the magazine





Coercion vs Help. How the Interaction between Managers and Subordinates Has Changed



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In the recent months, we have witnessed a definite change of the corporate communication landscape and a substantial polarization of employees' experience, especially in the coordination with the manager. With the consideration of the methods used in a company to ensure the fulfilment of duties by the personnel — through assistance or through coercion — we can identify the type of management or coordination with the personnel — helping or coercive.

The key difference in the responses to the crisis looks like this.

If a company is dominated by the **coercive** management (intended for irresponsible employees), then mobilization occurs during crisis:

- strengthening the role of the manager;
- tighter control, narrowing the goal setting horizon;
- increase of the number and time of meetings;
- increase of working hours.

If a company is dominated by the **helping** management (intended for responsible employees), then self-organization occurs during crisis:

- increase of employees' terms of reference;
- less control, more autonomy in setting goals;
- no requirement to respond ASAP to messages.

Coercive management style

The basic idea of the coercive style: without a whip, employees will not do anything on their own. This idea justifies the main method of the coordination with the team — setting a short-term task (on average, 2–3 days) and monitoring its fulfilment. When everyone is working in the office, the manager has at least a visual illusion of control.

However, when everyone is at home, and, in the manager's opinion, must be sitting idle, the control levers are lost. As a result, the number of tasks grows rapidly, while their scale decreases. This is combined with the constant monitoring: the number and duration of online meetings increases showing that the manager has no other way to monitor the situation.

The basic idea of the coercive style: without a whip, employees will not do anything on their own.

As a result, I can often see our clients with two pairs of headphones connected to different computers, because they are participating in two Zoom meetings at the same time. The second consequence of the coercive style is that employees have started working much more. Previously in many companies employees usually did not reply to messages after 6 pm. Now they reply at 11 pm and later, and sometimes they schedule meetings after 9 pm. According to NordVPN (mail server administrator), the working day has increased by 2–3 hours and there is a new peak of sending emails at 9 pm, which was quite unusual before. The Institute of Employment Studies (IES) released the following data: 64% of employees noted a decrease of the sleeping time, and 48% — an increase of the working time and its irregularity. The repeated pulse surveys data collected by ECOPSY for its clients shows similar results.

The measure of work in the coercive type of management is fatigue. If the manager doesn't see that the employees are tired, he will give them more work to do. Broken communications and a greater focus on the manager as the only decision maker increases the burden on both subordinates and the administration. When everyone was staying in the office, an employee could consult with the colleagues or the boss when making difficult decisions. Now all communications are in writing or via Zoom. In this situation, the inability to take responsibility causes a significant delay in decision-making process.

Coercive bureaucracy is a type of the coercive management style. In office, it is characterized by the precise work schedule from call to call, regulation of processes, detailed documented procedures, etc. The compliance with the rules is strictly monitored. There is a system of fines, reprimands and other punishments. In Russia, the number of the adherents of this style has never been too large. Moreover, it has not increased during the crisis. The situation is different in the West, where an automated coercive bureaucracy has started flourishing. Just look at the following data. People know a lot about the rapid growth of Zoom sales. But do they know that the sales of software for online spying on remote employees have increased significantly? For example, in Australia, the number of the customers buying espionage software [increased by 300%](#) in two months. [The same trend](#) is observed by IT companies in the United States. This software controls what employees are doing: whether they are writing work documents or watching TV shows. This is happening in democratic Western countries! Many manuals describing the methods of control and ensuring the transparency of remote work have been issued recently.

A striking example of the coercive management style and tough mobilization has been recently announced by two Russian banks. Several employees of one of them permanently reside in the office, ensuring the continuity of key operations, while the other bank [has confirmed the readiness to transfer its employees to live in the office](#). In the both cases the boss is a tough, controlling and distrustful “father”, who locks his “children” at “home”.

Helping management style

The idea of the helping management style is exactly the opposite. Employees know exactly what to do, and how to do. They just need some help. This is a fundamentally different approach: people can plan their own time and determine the tasks to start with. The principle of the manager’s work is to coordinate the general direction of efforts beneficial for the company.

In companies focused on employees’ independent work, nothing has changed with the change of the external environment. There is no mobilization, tracking, loss of productivity, because the work there has always been based on the internal locus of the personnel control.

Even though the changes during the crisis for such companies are minimal, I will try to highlight them. The main ones increase employees’ authority and independence in setting goals. The classic cycle provides for weekly or even monthly regular meetings with the manager, depending on how quickly the situation and the business as a whole changes. Such meetings are dedicated to setting goals for the period or summing up and the assessment of the results: what was successful and what was not. Interim meetings may also be held from time to time. This is how the helpful management cycle works.

Note the difference. If the manager holds a large collective meeting, it means that he does not have enough information, and he tries to keep everything under control. If the manager holds individual meetings, where he coordinates with his team the plans for the week, then this is more likely to be the helping type of management.

If a company operates in the helping management style, then during crisis, the manager, trusting his team, allows them to go beyond standard procedures and KPIs, by simple verbal agreements with them. As the number of restrictions and activities decreases, the speed of decision-making and reaction to external circumstances increases.

An example of the helping style management is ECOPSY, where consultants decide what to do and how to move, and the manager is needed only to help. You can often come across the helpful management style in the IT industry. Even in “peacetime”, qualified IT specialists are a valuable resource, and if they will leave if they are forced to do something that they are uncomfortable with. Therefore, there is no compelling guidance, only various degrees of help. The helping style is also quite common for Western companies, but, as mentioned above, some of them have “slipped” into the coercive automated bureaucracy, being unable to trust their employees so much. At the same time, there are opposite examples, like Airbnb, which even during the crisis remains loyal to helping management, according to the recently published letter from Brian Chesky, the company’s CEO.

The idea of the helping management style is exactly the opposite. Employees know exactly what to do, and how to do. They just need some help.

Some companies met the crisis by the traditional mobilization and whipping people. Others met it by increasing the independence of employees. In the second case, perhaps not everyone is comfortable working from home — there is no place, children run around, etc., but employees perceive this as temporary troubles that need to be overcome. On the contrary, those who live in companies with a mobilization type of leadership perceive this situation as hell on earth.

In the midst of a crisis, nobody is likely to change the usual management style, but the ugliness of the coercive style has become apparent by now. Previously, such management had seemed normal, but when everything went online, it became clear how bad the relationship between the manager and his subordinates was.

Will the current experience influence the future? Most likely, there will be a small number of companies that will change, but not all of them. Once in London, drivers went on strike, and people had to look for other ways to get around. It turned out that some routes were even more efficient — faster, shorter, cheaper than the usual ones. But when the strike ended, only a small part of the people continued to use the new routes, the rest returned to the old ones. I think that among the companies that have partially changed their management style recently, there will be a similar ratio. **■**



Well-Being Boom. Why the Care of Employees during the Crisis Has Become a Matter of Honor



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You are tired. You don't want to work. You don't you cope with the heavy load. You don't feel physically well. — All these problems can be addressed to the *well-being* manager. This is how an advertising letter or a leaflet might look like, where a company recommends the personnel to contact a specialist who ensures the *well-being* of employees. Moreover, such specialists do exist in many Western companies, for example, in the business school where I studied.

Today the well-being topic experience arises a real boom, including the corporate well-being. Why has the importance of this topic increased dramatically during the pandemic and quarantine, how has the attitude of companies to the support of their employees changed, and what phenomena can we see in this area now? I will try to answer this question in this article. I would like to note that I have no intention to conduct a deep analysis of corporate well-being policies and conditions, as well as to review comprehensively the programs implemented by different employers. Rather, I will just try to describe my own observations and feelings that may be close to someone.

Formally, a broad concept of well-being in most companies means taking care of the inner life of their employees, which depends on the combination of five factors:

- good health,
- love to what you do (the profession),
- stable financial situation,
- good relations with other people (social connections),
- sense of security and pride for the society (social involvement).

All these spheres have been affected by the pandemic. Both people and companies have responded and tried to overcome the difficulties in different ways. However, there is a number of new phenomena, which we have to deal with now and in the near future. In addition, there are many positive examples and practices in the market. I would like to share them with you.

Phenomenon #1. Care of the physical health — the treatment of physical inactivity and monotony

During the spring quarantine, people confined within the walls of their homes soon felt sick physically, and therefore began to look for a chance of practicing sports right at home. There has been an exponential growth in online yoga, dancing and qigong classes — all types of physical activity. I am sure that many of those, who practised sports via Zoom last spring, had fitness club cards, but in fact they showed up there rather seldom. I am also sure that many of those who are reading this article now also practiced online sports from home. The need for motion, the search of a remedy against inactivity with the view to maintain physical and mental health literally forced people to look for the opportunities to practice sports, even in the “world limited by the Zoom window”.

Many companies quickly noticed this trend and began organizing morning online exercises for their employees, various classes in yoga, pilates and other kinds of sports. Even before the quarantine period, some companies used to take care of their employees' physical health, providing corporate cards to fitness clubs, organizing gyms in offices, and yoga classes at work. However, such examples were rare. They were practised primarily in advanced and profitable companies of the “Western” type. The remote format turned out to be cheaper and easier to implement, and even more popular and relevant. **For the first time due to the quarantine, many people had to practice sports consciously.** Not a few, as before, but many. They realized, that the body is a “working tool”. If the body is sluggish and lazy, then no full life and working productivity is possible. For example, my colleagues quickly got their bearings and purchased barbells, dumbbells, or exercise bikes. By the way, brand new sporting equipment was not always available because online stores had immediately sold it out. The second-hand items came to the rescue. They were sold, for example, through Avito. Almost everyone, whom I know, at least from among Moscow or the Northern Capital residents, bought a new yoga mat during the quarantine period.

The second important block related to the care of the physical health of the personnel, was **the protection against the coronavirus infection and assistance to employees in everything related to it.**

Providing personal protective equipment (masks, antiseptics), thermometry of employees at the entrance to work, organization of testing for infection, quarantine for those who have symptoms, and their colleagues with whom they may have been in contact. Creation of special services providing with the information about medical institutions, which may be required for medical treatment or examination, as well as psychological support to employees.

The care of the health of the personnel has become an important motivational factor. The new virus has given a powerful boost not only to the digitalization of companies, but also to the development of the well-being sphere, even in those companies, where previously the health issues were practically ignored.

Phenomenon #2. Care of mental health — Stress treatment

In addition to the care of the physical health, companies also pay attention to the mental health of their employees. Staying for two months in a confined space with children, husbands and other relatives; the need to have a pass to “go into the outer world”; work duties interfering with the private life; stress and the uncertainty about the future; salary cuts and in some cases — leave without pay. All this inevitably affects the mood and psychological state of the personnel.

Various programs have been launched to support employees: psychological support, services, training, individual work with psychologists, and development of leisure activities.

.Dreamteam restaurant group paid for the psychological consulting



of their employees. Lunch delivery was arranged for the families of employees, and later, when new sanitary requirements forced the company to stop this practice, they began to deliver foodstuff to homes.

Phenomenon #3. Mixing private life and work

The intrusion of the private life into the workspace was one of the most striking phenomena of the quarantine period. Some people believe that it upset the entire balance of their work and personal life. However, others, on the contrary, succeeded in fixing it.

A two months period, when employees had to work from home, and their children also had to study from home, was an interesting experience. A grandmother in a dressing gown in the background of an office video conference, screaming children rushing into the room in the middle of a phone conversation, cats jumping on the computer — all this has become a reality of the new time. This is how many people for the first time met the family members of their colleagues and partners. A funny [video](#), which a few years ago could blow up the Internet, has become an everyday reality. There was an inevitable mix of personal and work.

However, the advantages of such a mix are also obvious, although we are talking about office employees, not production workers. If you plan your time correctly, you can go to cook your dinner in the middle of the day. If you schedule your phone calls properly, you can talk on the phone with your customers and colleagues while walking in the wood (this was possible for those who were self-isolated in the country). Such calls may be very important, but the person can enjoy fresh air at the same time. In addition, you can save your time, which you normally spend to get to work. You do not need to stay in traffic jams, so you can spend more time with your family — isn't it what many people have been dreaming of?

Although many people were eager to return to the office, tired of excessive communication with their family and wishing to work in a more comfortable environment, there were a lot of those who got used to work at home and could see many positive sides of this. Therefore, companies now need to look for a new balance between work and private life of employees carefully and deliberately, think over the new formats of work, new social packages. After all, once you get used to something comfortable and convenient, it is extremely difficult to refuse it.

A mixture of private and official has proved to be rather valuable for some people. That is why it is so important to leave a place for private time and space in the working environment in future. Some companies offer the opportunity to their personnel to choose 2 or 3 days to work remotely even after returning to the office. This is the manifestation of concern for people's desires, their health (it allows to maintain a social distance in the office by reducing the quantity of people being present), and an attempt to save the balance between the private life and work at least by means of free management of a part of the working time. A more flexible work schedule, the ability to shift working hours (someone works from 9.00 to 18.00, while another one — from 8.00 to 17.00) — is a new policy, which many companies can follow. On top of all, some employees already know that from now on, they will always work remotely, and the employer has approved this.

Festool company provided lunches for the personnel, who could not work



remotely from home. Lunch delivery has become a popular practice: because of the shutdown of vending machines as well as cafes and restaurants due to sanitary regulations employees simply had no place to eat.

Phenomenon #4. Appraisal by the result, not by working hours

The third phenomenon will bring to life a very reasonable and sound *Results-Only Work Environment* practice, which means that any work must be assessed by its results, but not by its process. **This gives the employees more freedom to schedule working and non-working hours, as well as more responsibility.** One of the client companies has issued instructions for remote employees how to schedule working hours during the day. It's interesting to mention, that this manual officially allows employees to go to the store or cook lunch during the day. Wise well-being managers know for sure that after such switches employees' mood and productivity will increase.

AlRud lawyer's office organized an online business breakfast for their clients. At first, nothing looked surprising, but exactly at 10 am, at the start of the business breakfast, dozens of couriers rang the door bells of the event participants and delivered coffee and croissants. Business breakfast participants were in high spirits, despite of being limited by the Zoom window.



Of course, some other companies installed special software on the computers of their remote employees to track their exact working time (in minutes). Others began to collect weekly the reports from managers, providing biased assessments of the productivity of their subordinates. I honestly do not believe that a tighter control over the process can have a positive impact on the productivity of the personnel. Anyway, such control is definitely harmful for the psychological comfort of the personnel, it affects their motivation and — what is most important — takes away their responsibility for the results and productivity of their work.

Phenomenon #5. Reduce your needs below the pre-pandemic level

During the quarantine, many people realized that they could go to the store less often and make fewer spontaneous purchases; that they cannot go to foreign resorts or to restaurants and have to use their cars more seldom; that they have to stay away from cinema houses and visit theatres or museums only online. In addition, there is no need to make expensive business trips, if it is possible to solve problems through video conferences, get training not in person, but online, instead of a big office in the Moscow center to rent a smaller one in the suburbs, because many employees can work from home, and many bureaucratic procedures may also be abandoned. You can continue this list. **It has become obvious that people are ready to have less. A useful, cleaning optimization has taken place.** It has turned out that many people are ready to live in the conditions that previously would have seemed "Spartan". After the return to "normal" life, several companies familiar to me were planning to start internal discussions of the topic: "what is the office for us, why is it needed, and how can we restructure the internal space in it". Others are planning or already implementing the projects of the efficiency assessment of the remote work. Their main goal is to make the scientific research to identify the professions, specialties, or people who will only increase their efficiency if they work from home.

The most recent terms "New normal" and "New Reality" reflect many new trends and innovations, which have become quite familiar within a very short period of time:

- need to live in new sanitary conditions (social distancing, masks, antiseptics, and other restrictions);
- acceptance and submission of people to new social conditions (tracking movements through smartphones, issuing travel permits, self-isolation and quarantines);
- readiness to wish less, to give up the usual benefits of the consumer society;
- transfer of most communications to online format.

However, the last element of our new reality has revealed another phenomenon.

Many companies, including **Polyus, Autobahn, Saint Gobain, PhosAgro**, and many others, provided regular testing of employees (and even partners visiting the company office).



Phenomenon #6. The value of human intimacy

Human intimacy, the happiness of human communication, which is worth spending time on, has turned out to be a separate value that was not obvious before. **Now more than ever before, every face-to-face meeting becomes a gift of fate.** In the first days after opening restaurants, they were filled to capacity. At the first opportunity, people started visiting each other, rushed to the gyms, which were having a full house, and some hurried to offices to meet at last their colleagues. People become tired of being online. That became especially clear in summer: online yoga, qigong and Pilates studios were empty, but the halls and pools in sports clubs, on the contrary, were crowded even at night, more than ever before the pandemic. However, it's quite obvious, that online activities in the corporate life will never die. They will be used not only to hold online conferences instead of business trips. In some cases online meetings, including informal ones, where employees can communicate directly with the management and ask questions, can remain an efficient tool. Of course, this will not completely replace face-to-face meetings. However, an ordinary employee did not have a chance to communicate directly with top managers in the past. Now he can do it, even though in video format only. Such communications may also be regarded as a progress in the creation of human intimacy. This is not a zoom party, but rather an effective motivating tool that creates the sense of involvement in the company's business. Previously, this would not have occurred to anyone, but now it is alive and quite popular.

New initiatives, which have grown by leaps and bounds during the pandemic in various companies, are aimed at the variety of the aspects of employees well-being: health and psychological comfort, various leisure activities, involving employees' families in the corporate environment and classes with children, the opportunity to acquire new skills in both professional and any other areas (chess, cooking, playing mafia or whatever). The specific feature of the modern well-being trend is **offering people only what they really need.** Companies try to meet the actual needs of their employees. It is not by chance, that corporate surveys have grown in popularity during the pandemic ([pulse surveys](#) or any others). They provide a convenient and quick way to choose from a variety of ideas the one, which your employees will use with gratitude.

The Dutch division of **Novartis** sent to its employees the kits



containing coloring books for children, a board game for adults and useful little things like antiseptic, so that the company's employees and their families could organize their leisure time during the quarantine. Bouquets of tulips were also delivered — a pleasant surprise!

Saint Gobain provided the personnel with special boxes, containing, besides protective masks and antiseptics, a set for growing plants and a letter of appeal to colleagues from the company's management.



Microsoft has provided a special automation to minimize employees' contacts with surfaces.



When entering the building, an employee does not even need to touch the turnstiles to activate the automatic mode for:

- passing through the turnstiles;
- calling the elevator to the desired floor (1 person per elevator);
- opening all doors on the way;
- downloading the computer at the workplace.

In addition, sensors have been installed for the automation of:

- doors and taps in water closets;
- shared printer;
- coffee machine (each employee has previously selected the sort of coffee which the machine will prepare for him/her);
- water filling machine.

EVRAZ implemented an antivirus mobile app, which helped to inform employees promptly about the suspected coronavirus infection.




It contains instructions on the actions required from an employee infected with COVID-19 and general quarantine recommendations in accordance with the requirements of Rospotrebnadzor.

In order to determine the social circle of employees with suspected infection, the app anonymously exchanges contacts with the devices of other employees of the company located nearby. The exchange may be done either automatically via Bluetooth, or in manual mode.

If an employee is suspected of COVID-19 infection, all his/her contacts will receive a notification about the need for self-isolation. Thus, the service allows an early breaking of the infection chain.

For each installation of the application, Evraz allocates funds for the purchase of protective equipment and antiseptics for medical institutions in the regions where the company operates.

It has been proved many times, that a healthy and wealthy employee is significantly more productive and successful than a sick and dysfunctional one. However, in my opinion, it has not been this simple and rational argument, that has considerably influenced the popularity of well-being policy in the recent difficult time. To my mind, the main message sent to the employees through these programs, says that **the company lives, develops and gives people new opportunities against all the odds.** 

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Sink or Swim. How the Pandemic Will Affect the Level of Industrial Injuries



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April 2020 brought a new experience to the work of not only office employees, but also of production workers. When we talk about remote work, we primarily talk about office personnel. For example, in the first weeks of the pandemic, RUSAL transferred 8,000 employees to remote work, Severstal — 7,000, EVRAZ — 4,500, and ALROSA — about 3,000.

The Moscow office of Norilsk Nickel operates remotely with almost full staff, communication has been mostly switched to video and audio conferences. Most of the production facilities continue to work. Rostech released the information to the mass media that it tried to transfer most of its employees to the remote mode during the pandemic, primarily office and management personnel. As for the manufacturing staff, the situation was quite different: it was impossible to transfer every engineer or production worker to remote work. Those who worked at enterprises fulfilling state defense orders, Federal target programs or participating in military-technical cooperation, were actually on the ground. There were many examples of this. Such industries continue to operate almost in their usual mode. The key word is 'almost', because in the absence of the manager or engineering staff, the workers were left in their shops "unattended", the usual system was broken. Where will this lead us in the near future? What development scenario awaits us in terms of labor protection and industrial safety? What can we do to avoid a surge in injuries? — We will discuss this problem in this article.

Two scenarios of the development of the situation

Let us try to look a little ahead and forecast the situation regarding injuries at enterprises by the end of 2020.

Injury growth scenario

Initially, injuries will be reduced, due to enhanced control measures, but in future, there will be an increase. What parameters allow us to make such conclusions?

- 1. Changing the conditions of the usual way of life and work.** At work, nothing may have changed. Employees continue working as they did before. However, many people changed their living conditions in spring, and that affected the quality of life: they were not able to move freely around the city, visit doctors without urgent need, or visit relatives. The escalation of the situation in mass media and other events happening around make people nervous and distract attention by everyday thoughts in the workplace. It is normal and natural to be distracted from work by thoughts when everything is calm and the situation does not put pressure on a person. However, it is quite different when there are many issues that need to be resolved.
- 2. Rupture of communications with the supervisor and lack of control.** Office personnel — managers, engineers and technicians — were sent to work remotely. The Head of the Department, who was previously difficult to approach, is now not available at all. You can't call him on the phone, you just don't have his phone number. Many HSE specialists have been transferred to shift schedule, for example, instead of two of them constantly present at the enterprise, now there is just one per day. The level of control has dropped.

The absence of the manager has brought additional safety risks. Previously he was on the ground, forcing, prompting, reminding, but now there is no one to "lead by hand". Someone continues to work in the shop or in the mine, while someone else is stays in Zoom trying to control the situation remotely. Managers work in the remote mode, line staff works in shifts, which have been doubled at many enterprises (this increases fatigue and nervousness). As a result, production workers have been left without control. However, production is not a place to retreat to the left or right. The less control there is, the more likely accidents are. This is an additional safety risk.

Initially, injuries will be reduced, due to enhanced control measures, but in future, there will be an increase.

- 3. Temporary downtime.** Some businesses were shut down in spring and workers were sent home. Two months later, they went back to work. It's like starting to drive after a long break: you remember something, even some traffic rules remain in your memory, but the practical skill is partially lost. The loss of fine motor skills after the end of quarantine is quite natural, they need to be restored, and at such time, the risk of injury increases.
- 4. Annual plans have not been canceled.** It should be taken into account, that despite temporary downtime, no one has canceled the annual plan. You will have to catch up at an accelerated pace. Where there is a rush, there is always a disregard for safety.

5. **Cost saving policy due to the crisis.** Reduction of investments, replacement of materials due to rising prices, delayed deliveries due to closed borders, etc. — all this can also affect the safety in the workplace. In spring, there was a serious shortage of the necessary PPE, though it did not directly result from money saving policy. When the rush for masks, half-masks, and respirators began, suppliers were not ready to meet the demand in the full amount. Not only medical workers and ordinary citizens suffered, but also many industries. For example, a gauze bandage cannot be efficient at the plants associated with harmful chemicals and aerosols, so there was just a critical situation. That was also a failure in the area of labor safety. On the other hand, PPE budgets were used to cover unplanned purchase of masks and antiseptics, because it was the requirement of Rospotrebnadzor.
6. **More attention to COVID-19 than other risks.** COVID-19 has also indirectly affected in other ways. For example, many businesses have breathalyzers at the checkpoints to check workers before a shift. Their use was banned during the pandemic. Since no one checks, nothing can stop workers addicted to alcohol which is one of the most common causes of accidents at work. In addition, when everyone is focused on fighting the coronavirus, the rest is somewhat neglected and there are more opportunities to ignore some rules.

When everyone is focused on fighting the coronavirus, the rest is somewhat neglected and there are more opportunities to ignore some rules.

The scenario of reducing injuries

Some experts are more positive and believe that injuries will not increase in the near future. On the contrary, we will see a decrease. The arguments supporting this scenario are as follows:

1. **Increased control from all sides.** The increased attention to public health from Rospotrebnadzor, the managers of enterprises and people themselves, the general idea that you need to be careful — all this somehow enhances industrial safety. Employees have become more attentive to their health and safety. Wearing masks and using antiseptics in everyday life resembles the use of PPE at work, actualizes the importance of protection and safety. At the same time, if the virus is an invisible danger, then a brick falling on your head or sparks flying into your eyes are a more obvious danger, and there are much more arguments for wearing a helmet and protective glasses.
2. **Staff reduction.** Strange enough, but this can have a positive impact on safety. Experts consider the fear of losing jobs and focus on the process to be the factors that reduce injuries. No one wants to be fired because of safety violations.
3. **Temporary downtime as a chance to have a rest.** Forced vacation gave, on the one hand, an opportunity to take a breath, and on the other — to take a fresh look at your workplace, its risks and dangers, to see what you did not notice before, and fix it.

A separate aspect is the mathematical approach to calculations. This is not a completely honest argument, because it is related to data manipulation, but we should not ignore it. Its main idea is that the injury statistics usually covers the entire year. However, if the industry instead of working through the entire year, has been in operation, for example, 10 months, then estimated injury rates would decrease, because they do not consider downtime.

What we can and must do

The crisis has not brought anything radically new to labor protection and industrial safety, but it has aggravated the existing problems. Were there any situations in the past, when people were disturbed by personal problems while working? Of course, there were, but now they happen more often. Surely, there were also PPE shortages, but now they are becoming critical. The pandemic has brought all these problems together at the same time, and the entire system may not be able to resist the strain. A chain fails at its weakest link. Experience has shown, that there is a high probability of the first scenario, which forecasts the increase of injuries. **To prevent the spike of incidents, employers already now need to think how to stabilize the situation and hold their positions.**

It is necessary to define the criteria for the monitoring of the situation, so as not to miss the moment of deterioration, not to pass the point of no return. How can we do this? In our opinion, there are three main levers that need to be used:

1. First of all, it is important to **self-diagnose the state of the safety culture**. This will allow us to track the situation without large investments. It is very important to adjust the self-diagnosis to the current situation as much as possible. You can even conduct it online. You need to repeat it regularly at regular intervals to make it more efficient and quickly respond to the slightest changes. It starts with the assessment of the current situation by independent experts, who can do it remotely: document analysis, online surveys, remote monitoring of processes, etc. This is important for the assessment of the starting positions, which in the future self-diagnostics can be used to compare changes and monitor their graveness and possible negative impact.

Ecopsy Industry Consulting experts can make initial assessment, set up all the assessment tools necessary for subsequent self-diagnosis, and adjust them to a specific enterprise. In different situations, different questions correlate with the results. For this reason, adjustment is so important. General tests taken from the Internet will not work. All surveys conducted by Industry Consulting are made online. To do this, we use the secure Linkis system, which provides anonymity, personal data protection, and other important parameters. After the initial diagnostics, the company's internal HSE specialists can make all further regular assessments, using the materials prepared by Industry Consulting specialists.

2. Maximal **simplification of the production process**. In a usual situation, when we talk about the safety culture, we always advocate for employees' awareness in making decisions. In an unstable situation, it is better if employees do what they understand, and do not think why it is necessary to act this way. This is how the probability of errors is reduced. Simple and short visual memos instead of multi-page instructions and regulations are needed in a turbulent time.

We need to simplify production processes to make them concise and understandable to anyone. Automation of production and various measures to protect personnel — this is the recipe.

3. **Apply the skills of regular management techniques and practices** to deal with the situation remotely. Remote staff management is not familiar to everyone; managers are facing many problems, and this affects the injury level. Regular management practices will help minimize this risk. This will allow you to keep your finger on the pulse, control and focus correctly. In addition, it is important for the manager to be an example, a leader in safety: if there is a requirement to wear masks, then the manager should be the first to comply with it.

Of course, this list of measures is incomplete, but it is the minimum needed to control the situation, identify trends and make decisions in time.

Now, in the middle of the year, it is difficult for us to give a detailed assessment of the results we will have by the end of December, so we can only assume. Of course, it is quite natural to hope for the best. Some research results leave us with a hope that optimistic scenario of reducing injuries will come true. For example, "The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Occupational Injuries" shows that both the number of incidents and the risks are reduced during a crisis (National Safety Council and Elsevier Ltd, 2013).

To prevent the spike of incidents, employers already now need to think how to stabilize the situation and hold their positions.

In any case, it is important to keep your finger on the pulse, so as not to miss the development of the dramatic scenario. This is why managers and HSE specialists need to organize their work and pay due attention to this risky topic. We really want to believe that this article will be an additional factor that will increase the probability of a positive scenario. **■**



The Transformation of the Professional Competences in the Context of Crisis



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The general financial crisis combined with the pandemic causing numerous restrictions affect all the spheres: politics, business, and people. There are two polar opinions: some professional associations and business representatives believe that the forecasts are disappointing and the crisis may drag on, while other experts remain optimistic.

We can observe a similar division now in the areas of business strategy, personnel management, and professional development in various companies. Almost nothing has changed and is most unlikely to change significantly for some professions. This primarily concerns the customary operating methods of manufacturing and large industrial enterprises, where the requirements for professional skills of line specialists and the very contents of the work remain the same. Nothing has changed basically for those companies, which have already practised remote operations. However, many companies have been affected by the crisis and the pandemic, and they have experienced many changes: some have significantly restructured key functions and tasks, some have been forced to reduce their staff or wind down their business, and others have started to develop related businesses or to introduce new remote work technologies.

New challenges have also affected the work of HR departments. Of course, the standard tasks remain the same: attracting and hiring, controlling and motivating, organizing jobs and providing the necessary resources. However, the traditional problem of the quality of human resources is becoming more acute, and in the current situation, it requires specific and quick solutions. Should we continue [training our employees](#) in the time of crisis? If so, then how and whom? Should we train low-performing employees? Alternatively, should we reduce the staff and focus only on experienced professionals with high potential?

In this article, we wish to review the key trends of professional development, which we can observe now in the companies affected by the crisis. We believe that a significant part of these trends will continue in the post-crisis period.

Trend #1. Focus on Autonomy

This trend is globally associated with the changes of all HR management tools. Taking into account the management of the staff professional development this trend is one of the key issues today. The transition to remote work in many companies has stimulated HR specialists to take a fresh look at the staff:

the most valuable are those employees who remain productive and efficient even in a remote location without additional control. Let's call this "*Autonomy*" — the ability of a person to act independently, organize his/her work, make decisions within the framework of job duties, take responsibility for the associated results and the risks. The principle of "*freedom and responsibility*" as one of the basics of the company management system is of vital importance in this

context. Not all companies follow this principle on a corporate scale. In addition, it is a separate HR objective. However, the compliance with such principle within a specific division or project team is quite feasible. Thus, the "*Autonomy*" competence and its individual skill elements, such as planning, goal setting, task prioritization, and risk management, have emerged as a new trend.

The development of employees' autonomy and independence is a valuable investment of the company in the development of human resources. However, we need to be cautious: a strong and independent professional can switch to independence — become a freelancer or open his own business. Taking into account, that many companies will not return to the previous format of work after the crisis, and some employees will be transferred to the remote format of work on a permanent basis in order to save money, the focus on the employee autonomy will be relevant in the near future.

The transition to remote work in many companies has stimulated HR specialists to take a fresh look at the staff: the most valuable are those employees who remain productive and efficient even in a remote location without additional control.

Trend #2. Focus on people: the development of profound professional competencies of key employees

This trend directly results from the first one, since high professionalism is one of the elements of autonomy. Even during crisis, a number of companies focus on experienced experts: they are looking for and are ready to hire such employees; they motivate and try to keep them inside the company. In case of cost optimization and staff reduction, managers try to keep key experts to prevent the loss of the profound knowledge, skills and quality of human resources in general. From the point of view of professional development, the main objective of HR (becoming even more critical in the current

conditions), is to form a team of experienced and well-informed specialists. This is why **companies rely on the deepening of actual professional skills of key employees**. In the past, the financial and time resources allowed us to develop thoroughly a three-dimensional model of professional competencies with more than 40 items per function and to plan the development in all key business areas. However, today everyone focuses on the most vital items and develops only them. In our opinion, it is important to define a short list of the most significant professional skills (no more than 1–2 skills per function) and plan their profound development within a limited group of key experts.

However, such a strategy of staff development is fraught with danger of going into “expert depth”. As a result, the company may get conservative specialists focused on a narrow range of issues. In future, it is almost impossible to re-assign such people to any other work, so it is necessary to assess the real value and demand for such narrow experts in the company not only during the crisis, but also after it.

In case of cost optimization and staff reduction, managers try to keep key experts to prevent the loss of the profound knowledge, skills and quality of human resources in general.

Trend #3. Focus on the functions: the development of related skills

In contrast to the previous trend, **this one focuses not on people, but on the development of individual functions, which may benefit from the possession of related skills**. The focus on the development of people and the one on the development of functions are two parallel trends that may coexist even within the same company. This trend has emerged primarily because employees have to take new functions due to the changes of business or the department staff. The task of HR in this case is to provide “universal” specialists whose skills will be sufficient to fully meet various requests within a separate function. The second reason for the emergence of the trend is that not only companies, but also people themselves want to develop their skills in related areas. Mastering new professional horizons or even a new profession makes a person more flexible and adaptive. In future, it will be easier for such a specialist to find a job or retrain within the company. Some employers in the labor market look for specialists who have experience and knowledge in one professional area, but with a plan to apply this experience in a related area or within a new work context. For example, the position of an IT integrator may require a specialist with the experience in document flow, procurement or project activities, and the programming skills may not be required in this case. It will be easier for such an employee to learn certain basic operations in the company’s information systems than to get the training in “project documentation support” from IT specialists working in the company.

It is worth noting that the development of related skills and hiring universal specialists may cause a number of problems. If the number of competencies increases, the level of their mastering will decrease, and therefore the quality of work performed in each area may suffer. It is important to understand that this approach causes risk of losing narrow specialists capable to provide a high-quality function: they will not be in demand and will leave the company. Therefore, it is important to assess a long-term need of the company for universal specialists in order to understand how such a strategy is justified within a particular business or work function.

Trend #4. Focus on IT competencies: universal digitalization

The transition to a remote format of work during the pandemic forced many companies to optimize internal processes, automate procedures, and develop new digital competencies for employees. First of all, the requirements for the self-sufficient mastering of the main programs (software) used in the profession are increasing. In some cases, employees are even required to be able to install, configure, and integrate software elements. This means that the people have to practically master and develop the related competence “Software Administration”. Besides, the requirements for the general level of computer literacy, business correspondence and online communication skills are increasing. In addition to the direct IT skills, employees need the ability to quickly learn the new functions of the usual software and master “from scratch” the analogues of the necessary professional programs that exist on the market. Universal digitalization also affects the tools of professional development: they are partially transferred online and into digital formats. In our opinion, **it is very important to assess the initial level of the proficiency of the software users before planning the development of their digital skills, since the people need not only to learn how to work in information systems and on online platforms, but also to master a new training format.**

Due to the focus on the IT skills, any professional competence now increasingly requires digital knowledge and skills. Moreover, new approaches to the automation of processes are emerging in some professions. In the current situation, the ability to manage such processes is quickly becoming one of the basic requirements to the personnel.

Trend #5. Focus on the Manager: management competencies again

Any crisis always highlights critical points in any structure or process. Management competencies are no exception. Many line managers, their teams, and even top managers of various companies have shown their managerial incompetence: they cannot control the situation, fail to assess risks and cope with standard tasks, or face the inapplicability of previously used management tools in the new environment. In some companies, management has been built on the principle of “parochial micromanagement”, which includes constant control over subordinates and making decisions for them. Here we can see poorly developed managerial competencies such as planning, prioritization, and delegation, combined with the inability to provide feedback, making line managers helpless to work with remote teams. As a result, the company may find the entire team or division ineffective, while the main problem is the work of an incompetent manager. In some companies, this problem affects the managers who have to supervise a team of narrow-profile high skilled professionals. Such “gurus” often create additional managerial barriers during crisis: a professional expert is valued and respected by the team; most of his colleagues treat him as an authority, so it may be a problem for his manager with lower professional skills to supervise such a subordinate.

Thus, **the development of the components of managerial competencies becomes a priority objective: operational (non-strategic) planning, clear task setting, prioritization and feedback, as well as the ability to manage remote teams.**

Trend #6. Focus on self-learning

Let's review the trends of professional training from the point of view of organizing and building a training system. Companies have to cancel or reduce the list of planned activities and adjust their strategies. However, it is impractical to abandon the professional training completely, so various tools of professional self-learning are tested. We are not offering to leave the professional training altogether within the terms of reference of employees, although some companies practise this method in the event of an acute shortage of financial and time resources. In our understanding, this trend should be aimed at the creation and maintenance of a self-learning professional environment in the company. For example, employees can learn from each other in the course of solving joint tasks or mentoring, as well as outside the company: using the best practices of competitors, partners, or customers. In addition, in the situation of uncertainty in a competitive environment, it is very important to act quickly. This principle should also be followed while planning professional development: the faster specialists will become more professional, the faster the company will become more competitive. All these elements are immanent in the classical understanding of a teaching institution, which creates, acquires, transfers and preserves professional knowledge.

The current crisis may force HR to reconsider approaches to the development of professional skills in the company, as well as stimulate the creation of self-learning communities. In the short term, this will save resources and ensure the transfer of experience within the company, while in future, it may become one of the most efficient tools of the entire professional development system.

Trend #7. Focus on standard operations

Another modern trend is the increasing detalization of the knowledge and skills needed for a specialist to perform a work function. Here we can assume a tendency of the transition from the competencies in the classical sense to a more structured and strict tool, which defines the requirements not so much for knowledge, but for the algorithm of actions within the function. If we go further along this path, we will come to Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), which today are actively used in manufacturing and medicine. SOPs appeared as a set of step-by-step instructions compiled by a company and issued as a document to help employees to perform complex routine operations. This is an effective tool to reduce the number of errors and defects in production, improving labor safety, increasing productivity, and decreasing training time in the workplace.

On the one hand, the operating model creates good conditions for fast learning of new skills. This is extremely important in the situation of uncertainty. However, SOPs require costs for their updates, becoming necessary every time, when any part of the production process or a separate operation changes. Anyway, it is important to remember that in order to perform a high-quality work an employee requires not only the knowledge of operations, but also a slightly broader professional competence. Therefore, it is methodologically more correct to consider combining a competence-based and operational approach to professional development.

In our opinion, seven trends in the field of professional development described in this article are the key ones today.

Some of them may be regarded common for all professional areas: for example, the trend towards developing autonomy, universal digitalization, and managing remote teams. These trends are largely related to the development of individual competencies. They are perceived, first of all, as the areas of employees' growth that the crisis has helped to manifest. We assume that these trends are rather short-term, since in the near future a significant part of key specialists will master the missing skills, and the trends will turn into new standards of professionalism for any employee.

The rest of the trends — such as focusing on employees and functions, operations training, or the creation of self-learning institutions has a longer-term character. The strategic and methodological issues of professional development deriving from these trends cannot always be quickly transferred to practice. Rather, we consider them as different approaches to building a training and development system in the company.

The crisis offers managers new dilemmas in the field of professional development in the form of current trends mentioned here. Thus, companies can choose which of these trends to follow, which professional development strategy to implement, taking into account the business specifics and the operational tasks that a particular company faces at the moment. **■**



Why It Is Useful for Managers to Feel Like Losers

And how it will help top managers to cope with the crisis



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Since our childhood, we have heard the same thing many times: if you want to win, you must believe in victory from the very beginning. Only those win, who believe in their own strength. This applies to both soldiers on battlefields and managers who happen to run their business in a serious crisis.

I do not dare to talk about war heroes. We will talk about managers who faced a crisis and successfully coped with it.

I have always been interested to know, what happens to a person who deliberately takes a big risk. What lies behind this — a subconscious disregard for danger, the desire to become a hero that drowns out the voice of reason, or an unyielding self-confidence?

During my practice as a business consultant, I met many desperate managers who agreed to run their business in the most difficult time. They knew they were taking a serious risk. Their business reputation was at stake.

They talked about their inner state, feelings, and beliefs that helped them not to retreat and maintain stability in the most difficult situations. After analyzing their reasoning and responses, I've got interesting results.

Most managers mentioned that their main motive was a deep inner preparedness to lose. It gave them the strength to fight.

In psychotherapy, the method of “paradoxical intention”, created by Viktor Frankl, a famous Austrian psychologist, is used to work with fears, phobias, and anxiety. The main idea is this: a person is asked to imagine the worst-case scenario. For example, a meeting with a person whom he wants to avoid, or a situation, which he is afraid to get into. Then they must convince themselves that they want this negative scenario to happen. You may need to use a sense of humor, because it is unlikely that anyone will willingly want to implement a negative scenario. However, in the time of crisis, this exercise will help you develop your firmness. This is a useful psychological technique. After all, as soon as the internal struggle with fears is over, the fears themselves recede.

Most crisis managers initially felt doomed to failure. Here are some quotations from managers' stories.

“When I accepted the offer to run a company going downhill, I spent the next day thinking of the most negative outcome. I tried to imagine what would happen to the company and to me later. How will my colleagues, management, and market react to my defeat? Only after that I felt that I was ready to take the job seriously.”

“When you have nothing to lose, you gain strength. My company was only two steps away from the total collapse. I had been stressed all the time, until I realized that the fear of losing, of being defeated was the main obstacle for me. I drew up plan B — my actions in the event of bankruptcy. The plan even included the dreaded option of burying my managerial career. Nevertheless, I realized that I was ready to sacrifice myself. Therefore, I proceeded with plan A to get the company out of the crisis. It was very difficult, but it worked.”

Of course, the idea of the worst-case scenario does not lead to the right actions. Nevertheless, it gives you determination, which, in turn, leads to the right actions. For example, a manager imagines that the worst-case scenario has already come true and that he has failed his task. For example, that he could not make his creditors agree on deferred payments and the bankruptcy is inevitable. Of course, it is excruciating. Nevertheless, there is still time to overcome the sad feelings and develop the best strategy or tactics. Having mentally experienced the failure, a person already looks at the current reality with different eyes. He can accept it and, if necessary, resist it.

To win, you must first lose. Preferably mentally, not in reality. This will help you to strengthen the faith in your abilities and future victory. You must do everything in this order, not vice versa. 🚩



How Employees Survive in Crisis: Research Data



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ECOPSY's Business Sociology practice has been monitoring the dynamics of the involvement in Russian companies for 15 years. During this time, Russia has undergone three major crises. Moreover, every time we could watch interesting trends, and observe the change of different involvement indicators due to the external crisis impact.

Some of them are more affected, while others are only slightly affected. In this article, I would like to draw the attention of HR specialists to the most vulnerable indicators and the factors, which affect them. The understanding of these processes will allow us to develop programs, which will help the employees to overcome the crisis smoothly.

Let's start with the basics. What do we understand as involvement at ECOPSY?

Involvement is the attitude to work for the company, the willingness to take the initiative, to cope with changes (in the time of crisis). In our understanding, the involvement consists of three main blocks (see figure 1). In addition, we always analyze organizational indicators, which affect involvement (see table 1).

Figure 1. Involvement model of ECOPSY.

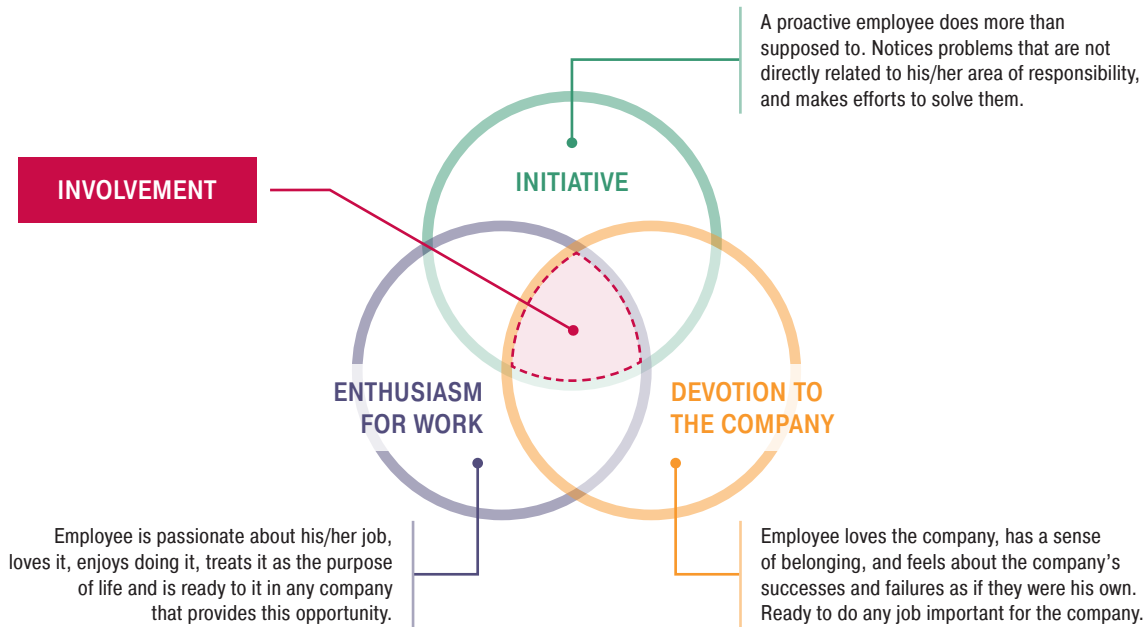


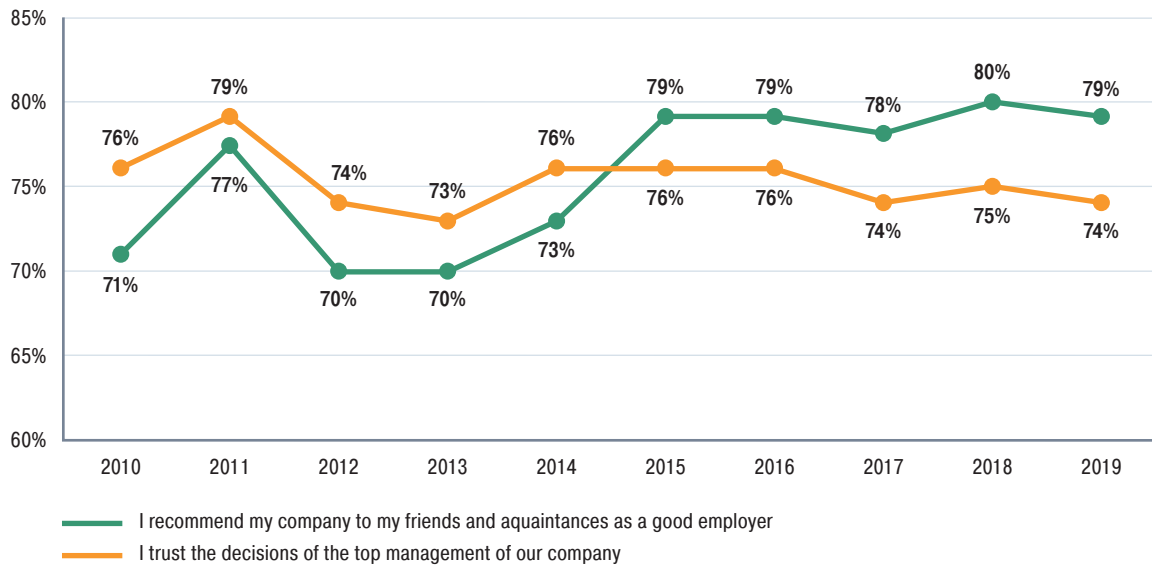
Table 1. Organizational indicators.

ORGANIZATIONAL INDICATORS: attitude to various areas of the company	
1	Objectives and strategy
2	Business processes
3	Communications
4	Training
5	Career
6	Salary and bonus
7	Working conditions
8	Appraisal
9	Environment
10	Colleagues
11	Line manager
12	Top management

We've registered the changes of the involvement and other indicators of the personnel as well as some interesting fluctuations that occur during and after the crisis.

The analysis of **loyalty** — the willingness to recommend the company and trust the decisions of the top management — shows (by the crises of 2008 and 2014) that while the crisis is practically noticeable, these indicators grow: people become more loyal to the company, value their work more, because they are afraid of losing it. But after a while a stage of adjustment comes, showing a decrease of loyalty. This usually happens at the time when the crisis has already ended according to subjective assessments, and the company's recovery is slower than the employees would like to see. For example, in 2008–2011 there was a rise, and in 2012 there was a fall (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. Dynamics of the Russian Employees Loyalty Index over the last 10 years.

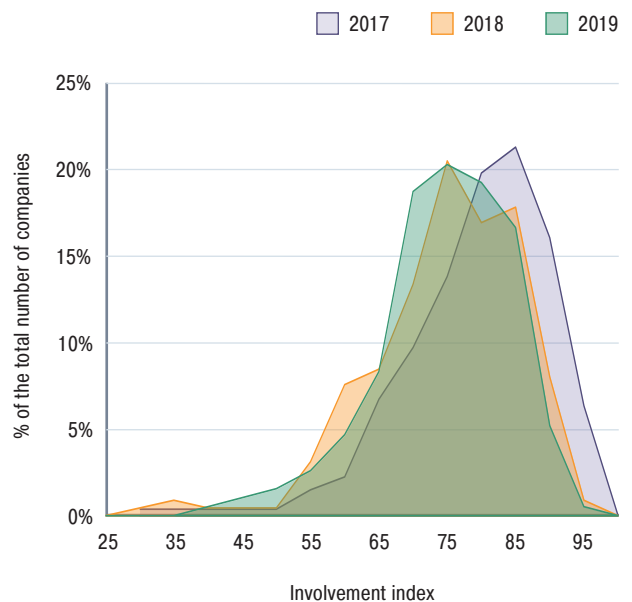


We do not know yet how this trend will manifest itself in 2020 and further on, because over the past last years (2017–2019), both engagement and loyalty in the country as a whole have been fairly stable, with minimal fluctuations of 1%. The company’s commitment hasn’t changed much either (see figure 3). But with the consideration of the experience of 2008 and 2014, we can assume, that in 2020, the indicators of loyalty and commitment to the company will grow, and in 2021–22, they will fall.

The external changes of the economic situation affect the attitude of the personnel to organizational indicators in various degrees. Most of all, the indicators related to material motivation are affected. Employees worry that they are losing the control on their income. The trust in the professionalism of colleagues is one of the least sensitive indicators, which is always positively evaluated in most companies.

A specific state of involvement formed under the influence of external factors can be described by the concept of “**Mobilization Involvement**”. It means that employees put together all their energy and fully realize the value of saving their jobs with the company, as well as the threat from outside. Such mobilization is always short-term, after six months or a year it decreases and yields to fatigue or adaptation to the new order of things. This is not a kind of basic involvement that persists for a long time, and is traditionally developed by employers.

Figure 3. Dynamics of the overall engagement index.



	2017	2018	2019
General involvement index	77	75	75
Enthusiasm for work	76	74	73
Initiative	76	75	74
Loyalty to the company	79	77	78

In order to understand the changes that occur to the feelings and experience of employees during the crisis, it is important to pay attention to three groups of indicators most susceptible to fluctuations during the crisis. They allow us to assess how employees are coping with what is happening, and how ready they are to mobilize and work, ensuring a sufficient involvement:

1. Social and personal optimism.
2. Resource self-esteem: experiencing an increase or decrease in workload, work-life balance, maintaining or blurring the boundaries of personal and work, emotional burnout.
3. The feeling of self-efficacy.

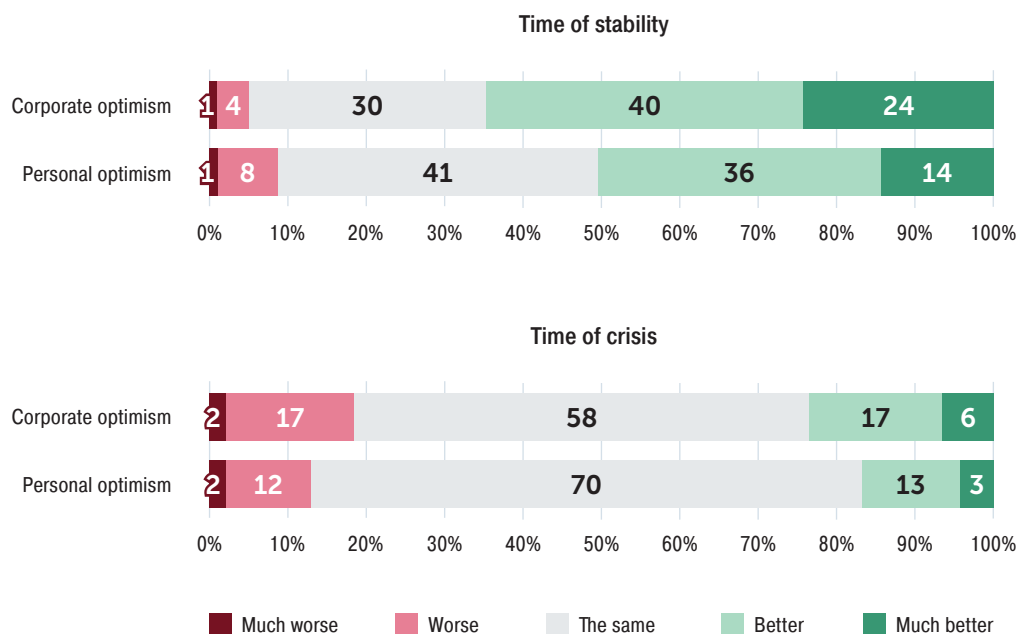
Social (corporate) and personal optimism

An important indicator that we pay attention to during the crisis is connected with the loyalty to the company. It is **social or corporate optimism**. It allows to assess the attitude of employees to the company's prospects: whether the situation will improve, aggravate or remain the same in a year (during a stable period) or in three months (during the crisis). Another similar question evaluates personal optimism — the attitude of employees to the situation in their own family.

In the time of stability in the whole country, we usually see a clear dominance of optimism over pessimism in comparable companies. In addition, employees tend to be much more optimistic about the future of the company than about their own future (family): "Something might happen to me, but the company isn't going to escape."

Comparing the data from the first half of 2020 with similar periods of previous years, we can make a conclusion that the number of optimists has significantly decreased. The share of pessimists has increased, but the overwhelming majority is in the "nothing will change" group: 58% in corporate optimism and 70% in personal optimism. Employees are increasingly hesitant to assess the direction of changes in the future, and express hopes for stability: "We do not hope for any improvement, but we are happy that at least it is not worse now than it used to be." At the same time, the number of "corporate pessimists" is increasing dramatically. Their quantity has increased four times. People are more likely to consider a negative scenario for the company, more often than for themselves (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Изменение показателей социального оптимизма в стабильный и кризисный периоды.



How are social optimism and loyalty to the company correlated? Let's use **ENPS** — Employee Net Promoter Score — the assessment of the readiness to recommend your company to friends and acquaintances as a good place of work.

Respondents are usually divided into three types as per their answers: detractors or critics, neutral or passive, promoters or supporters. Social optimism generally declines during the crisis, but the optimism of “promoters” — the most loyal company employees — has suffered the most. They are, of course, still more optimistic about the company than neutrals and detractors, but their relative decline is the largest. In a stable situation, the assessments of detractors and promoters about the company's future differ greatly. However, during the crisis their assessments get closer, and at the same time the overall index of corporate optimism falls (see figure 5).

In a stable situation the closest link between corporate optimism is loyalty. The higher the loyalty, the stronger is the corporate optimism, and vice versa. Employees are ready to recommend to their friends and family those companies in whose future they are confident. In a crisis situation, this motive declines and other factors begin to work for optimism.

What provides for the corporate optimism during the crisis?¹

- Sense of security** — how much employees believe in their personal safety and security (including health), and the security of their company. What do they feel during the crisis?
- Optimal organization of labor** — how well the processes are built. The higher employees assess the organization of work in their company in a stable period, the more optimistic they are during a crisis.
- Interest in work**, which is formed during a stable period. Those who are passionate about their work are more positive about the future of their company.
- Communication and cooperation**. The presence of efficient communication, cooperation and mutual support between departments and employees in a stable period increases the optimism of the personnel during the crisis.
- Support and feedback from the manager**. We recorded this indicator in all three crises. How do managers succeed building relations with their subordinates during the crisis? How do they keep in contact with them and provide the necessary communication? The compliance of what the manager says or does with the corporate policies and activities is very important. If everything is in conformity, then optimism increases. Any inconsistency and divergence reduces optimism.

The ability to see positive things in future is quite an interesting topic for analysis now, but we will face even more interesting changes, if we are overtaken by the second wave of the pandemic. It was not so difficult for many employees to be tolerant waiting for the end of the crisis which was believed to come soon. Many employees understood the prospect of returning to the office as the final solution, a sign that the innovations associated with the pandemic would soon be over, and everything would return to its normal state. But in the case of the second wave of the pandemic and associated restrictions the hope for normal life in the near future will fade and pessimism will dramatically increase.

Figure 5. Change in social optimism among different groups of employees.



¹ The pulse survey data of the involvement in various companies has been analyzed. The revealed regularities have been arranged in groups as per conceptual blocks. The results are arranged in the descending order of the power connection (correlation coefficient).

Feeling the load

This is a fairly diverse group of indicators.

Load change

At the very start of the massive transfer to remote work people hoped, that the work load would decrease and they would have a lot of time for training and self-development. However, pulse surveys show, that **the load, at least, has not decreased, but in many cases it has increased**. It is noteworthy that in each subsequent survey, the feeling of increment load grew. Largely that happened due to the inability to separate working and non-working space.

Mostly, employees attribute the increase of their workload to the disruption of their working day, the increase in the number of meetings and group calls, as well as the emergence of new tasks and obligations related to the current situation. The last reason is worth noting separately. First, it affected everyone's work — both of those who worked from home and those who stayed in their workplaces. Secondly, it had the greatest impact on managers, because they were responsible for organizing not only their work in the changed conditions, but also helping their subordinates. At the same time, a larger number of meetings could not compensate the main drawback of remote work — the lack of the communication with colleagues. The reason for this, most likely, can be found in the formalization of communications. Even if the company was able to fully debug the formal workflow, the informal connections, which arose in the workplace were affected (more information about this can be found in a [separate article](#)).

Employees burnout

This sense of increased workload may overlap with the topic of employee burnout. In the past years burnout was less common among employees working from home than [among their colleagues in the office](#). Now the reverse side of this coin is being revealed. More and more Western companies in their [research](#) come to the conclusion that **long-term work in the remote mode increases the feeling of burnout among employees**. This is largely due to the inability to regulate the work load without external management tools. The lower is the culture of independent, autonomous work within the company, the more managers lose their control. They start handing a lot of small tasks and feel overworked (more detail about this can be found in a [separate article](#)). A number of companies have even started inventing artificial mechanisms to reduce the load by introducing quiet hours when it is forbidden to hold meetings and calls. At this time employees must work, rather than be in the communication process.

At the same time, we have observed a curious phenomenon in some companies. The self-assessment of the employees transferred to remote work compared with those, who remained in the office show a greater increase of the burnout feeling among those who remained in the office. Everyone suffers from the increased work load, but those, who stay in the office, suffer more.

Denial of vacations

A parallel trend is that **people are afraid to go on vacations**. First, travel opportunities have significantly decreased. There is nowhere to go, and people do not want to spend their vacations sitting at home, so they do not take them at all. This trend is likely to increase fatigue even more, reducing the personnel productivity by the end of the year. A number of companies have prohibited their employees to take vacations. However, there are also those who, on the contrary, have been offered to catch up with the stalled vacation schedule at the end of the self-isolation period. All this leads to the violation of usual temporalities: people have lost the boundaries between work and private life both within the daytime (they have to work early in the morning and late at night, not from 9 to 18, as before), and within the year. Previously, when going on vacations, you could turn off your phone and email, and leave. Now it is very difficult for many people to feel being on vacations without the usual markers of leisure and staying in the same place. The tension between the work and private life and the control over employees' emotional burnout is likely to increase in the near future.

The sense of self-efficiency

In this section, we are going to review two types of efficiency — personal and team. Most of the employees we interviewed said that they and their teams had managed to maintain their previous efficiency. We analyzed what affected employees' sense of efficiency at remote work, and identified two common indicators and one different for each type. All of them reflect what was created during the stable period and determine the feeling of efficiency during the crisis.

Common indicators:

- to what degree employees realized their **personal responsibility for the result**, knew and understood the effects of their actions and their influence on the final product;
- how **innovative and flexible the environment** is in the company — whether new opinions are accepted, how easily people can find solutions to complex problems, remove barriers from work, whether the company is able to adjust the work of the team flexibly.

Different indicators:

- **optimally organized team work and optimally built processes**, their clarity and transparency are particularly important for maintaining the efficiency of teams;
- most important for personal efficiency is the **interest and passion for work**. Employees should be involved in the activities warming their hearts. They are able to work efficiently online, because they are interested in their work.

These indicators largely determined the efficiency of work and how quickly the companies were able to adapt to it during the pandemic: the more had been “ready” before the crisis, the easier it was when it started and the less time and effort it took to establish productive remote work.

Most of the employees’ experience of the present crisis is similar to the situation in 2008 and 2014. However this crisis has its own special features.

The impact of the crisis of 2014 was much milder than of 2008. People now feel that this crisis is more severe than it was in 2014. And in the near future, we may record a stronger impact than from the crisis of 2008, because there are too many visual signs that influenced almost everyone.

The main feature of the current crisis is that **all its components**, including the pandemic, **are not likely to end soon**. Nobody knows, when the crisis will end. By the end of 2008, it was more or less clear that the financial bubble had burst, some companies had gone bankrupt, while others were still afloat and were gradually recovering. The strong point of this crisis is that the situation in the Russian economy is better than in 2008, and there is no serious damage. Of course, there are affected businesses, such as tourism or restaurants, but they have never been key branches of the Russian economy.

The feeling that it is necessary to get ready for a long crisis is unusual for Russian employees. Our history has often forced us to implement mobilization involvement — we rose quickly, suffered for a short period, and then everything was improved. The situation is different now. “Everything for the front, everything for the victory” model requires too much energy and will not work for a long time. Therefore, companies will not only have to adapt to the new reality, but also help their employees to change. **■**

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of the magazine





There Would Be No Fortune, but Misfortune Helped

Development as a Way of Adaption to Changes and Treatment of Stress



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Perhaps this format of an article is not quite typical for HRTimes. It is more like an essay about ups and downs in my life, but through the reflection of my personal experience, I want to tell you how companies can use the crisis for the development of their staff and come out of the crisis stronger than they were at the beginning.

For the first time I thought about the development as a way to adapt to the crisis in 1998. At that time, I was working at the International Institute of Management, where coaching consultants were selling their services. The events described so many times in the History manuals happened in August. By September, we had remained without work orders completely. To my surprise, my colleagues who had been in this business for quite a long while and had a small “reserve of fat”, instead of being discouraged, started learning consulting, and were ready to pay \$ 500 for a course in the Academy of National Economy. I couldn’t afford it at that moment, but for the first time I realized that **crisis** — when there is not enough work, when clients are busy with other things and can’t pay you — was **the best time to invest money in yourself**.

My second interesting experience dates back to the turn of 2004–2005. Serious changes at work and personal crisis, which coincided in time with finishing school and admission to the University of my elder daughter (parents of applicants will understand me for sure), completely devastated me. Therefore, I acted as a consultant for myself and made a program, which after completion would make me feel better. There were only three items in this program, but each of them had a deep meaning for me:

- swimming in the pool in the morning;
- taking care of health — visiting doctors, which previously was always postponed;
- learning English at a more advanced level.

That was the start of an important stage in my life: I began to take care of my soul, body and education. Six months passed, and in July 2005, I found myself fresh and cheerful, with my daughter who had been admitted the Journalism Faculty of the Moscow State University. During the crisis of 1998, I could just observe that effect from outside. In 2005, I was able to get my own positive experience, showing that the **investments in my own development were an efficient strategy**.

The third crisis hit us at the turn of 2008–2009. That was one of the most difficult periods for ECOPSY in my memory. We had to fire 40% of our employees. I have always taken the concerns about colleagues and their work close to my heart. The general tension and personal problems provoked me to transfer all current projects and all “live” clients to my colleagues and start downshifting. I wanted to pull myself together, to try something new, different.

I spent the next half a year in Asia, where I lived in a Buddhist monastery, learned Taoist practices and qigong. Qigong and meditation allowed me to feel the contact with my body and spirit and understand what was really important and necessary for me at that time. When I returned to Moscow, I taught qigong and was busy with various projects, which were not only and not so much related to HR consulting. A year later, I realized that it was extremely important for me to achieve a positive result in my life, make it beautiful, bright, and unusual. I was interested in doing something that no one else had ever done or even known how to start. Without personal achievements, my life would not be colorful, and full-blooded.

Personal development became a way for me to adapt to changes. My top priority during crisis was working for myself and thinking about any possible improvements of myself. I consider it quite a healthy mechanism. No matter how banal it sounds, but getting out of the crisis healthier, more intelligent, skilled, learning something new that we have never tried before, something that develops — this is the right strategy. It allows you to reformat the crisis and stress, to consider them as an area for positive changes, for growth. The attitude to the events around you changes from minus to a huge plus. Moreover, this plus makes a person stronger, more successful, more skilled, and therefore gives him more opportunities.

No matter how banal it sounds, but getting out of the crisis healthier, more intelligent, skilled, learning something new that we have never tried before, something that develops — this is the right strategy.

I am pleased to know that the client companies which I worked with and continue working with share a similar faith. Metinvest mining and metallurgical group chose exactly the same path in 2015. The war in Donbas broke out in 2014. The most part of the corporate businesses was located in that region. Employees and their families were urgently evacuated to Kiev. Expenses were minimized, and investment programs were canceled. The staff development was the only item of expenditure that was not affected. The idea was very simple: **by investing in the development of people during the crisis, the company shows care for people.** I think it is like in real life. As a sprout grows and develops, so people do. As far as we make new neural cells work — we continue to fight for our life and hope for the best. This has become a great method to fight with the extreme form of a crisis — with war and death.

The History of Metinvest group



The story was told by Metinvest company

This is a story about [how to manage the staff in a crisis situation](#), especially how to deal with employees' anxiety when the usual world is collapsing, and people begin to fear even for their lives.

In 2014, Metinvest group, with its head office in Donetsk and assets in Eastern Ukraine, suddenly found itself in the midst of a military conflict. Railways and bridges were destroyed, and cities were shelled. Fearing for their families, employees began to leave the city en masse. We understood that we could not return those who had left. It was necessary to calm down people urgently, but no one could say anything encouraging — it was not known how the military conflict was going to develop further.

Thinking about how to make life easier for our employees, we began to help them organizing relocations to other regions of the group's presence, as well as systematically and regularly inform them about what was happening in the company, the situation, and management plans. However, another direction has become even more important for us. Many companies in a crisis situation reduce costs or completely cancel all training. At such a difficult moment, no one really thinks about successors and the development of the personnel reserve. We decided to behave differently. It was very important for us to continue the investments in the staff development. After all, development provides a fulcrum in a situation of uncertainty, gives a rise to positive thoughts and hopes for the future.

We continued to invest in training: we launched a program with INSEAD and EY, did not cancel training, and started forming the personnel reserve. In this way, we showed our employees that the top management was confident in the positive future of the company. This is how we restored the morale of the mid-level managers, and they restored the morale of their subordinates and the rest of the employees backed by the stress control-training course. This approach helped to stabilize the psychological situation at the plants and allowed to maintain it for another year.

That was an example of a manufacturing company. Here is a new example from a completely different area.

This is a company with a developed digital environment, one of the leaders of the digital transformation in the Russian market. This is a completely different area and situation, but the overall approach to the crisis is very similar to Metinvest. Internal training has always been in demand and quite popular in the company. It is available for everyone by default — every employee can log in to LMS (Learning Management System) at any time and take any of the courses by his/her choice. Statistics of logins showed that during the period of self-isolation, the demand for training increased three times.

The history of CROC



Eugenia Sotnikova, Leading HR Manager

CROC is one of the leaders in the Russian information technology market. This IT company creates a new digital ecosystem in the society, implementing projects in 40 countries.

CROC employees always study a lot. Learning is a part of the corporate culture. CROC is a platform for development. Learning and sharing knowledge is a common value for all company employees.

During the pandemic, the role of training has increased significantly. From the very first days, we decided to be proactive in both business and employee development.

Here is what we have done:

- 1.** We have changed the training structure, significantly expanding the overall training offer for all employees and reducing the amount of external training.
- 2.** We have updated training focuses:
 - adaptation to life in the remote mode, learning new reality and rules;
 - support of employee involvement;
 - diversity and increase of communication channels through training.
- 3.** Diversity and quantitative growth of training required a more systematic manner and new “delicious” packaging: for example, weekly digest “Training with home delivery” has appeared.

What we have got as a result:

- 1.** Learning is everywhere! Geographical boundaries have been erased: training has become available everywhere in the world, and the company employees have become more actively involved in training events.
- 2.** Coverage has been increased at a lower cost.
- 3.** Training has become an excellent way to switch people in the conditions of remote work and restrictions, as the work-life border has been greatly erased.
- 4.** Leaving the office, employees unwillingly lost some of their benefits, but it was important to provide the maximum of opportunities for them. First of all, it is the availability of training.
- 5.** Training has become less formal and more open.

We should note that, despite many difficulties during crisis and seemingly low priority of training, on the contrary, it is becoming a cool working tool, which supports business today!

Having started the story with myself, I will finish it about myself. In this crisis, I have also pursued my proven self-development strategy. I have decided to try something new at work. I had to learn working 100% remotely. From the beginning of the quarantine, I have been living in the countryside. I phone my clients and colleagues literally from the forest. The most important goal is to sell services remotely. It seemed quite unrealistic to me before, because, in my opinion, personal contact is very important in this process. However, it has turned out that even remotely you can be quite a successful “seller”. In addition, in my personal life, I have decided to use the crisis as an opportunity for growth and development: I started learning a completely unfamiliar language — Hebrew. I chose it exactly because it is complicated and unintelligible, different from anything more or less similar and based on Latin. All of us — people and companies — are very different: someone wants to freeze and wait out the turbulent time, and someone wants to open new doors instead of just closing them... **■**

New Employee Experience. Company Stories

This entire issue of the magazine is dedicated to various aspects of corporate activities and the new reality of work performance during the coronavirus pandemic. Our review would be incomplete without telling you the stories about some companies and how they coped with the remote work of their personnel, what processes have already been changed or are going to be changed, how this will affect the psychological climate in the team and the employees' lives in general. We asked the representatives of different companies to share their experience. We hope that our colleagues' stories will be useful to our readers. We will also be happy if you [inform us](#) how your company operated. Your particular story may help some of your colleagues to find answers to difficult questions.

The Future of Blended Learning: Employee Training Support and the Development of Online Training during the Pandemic



Ilya Dementyev

The Rector of Gazpromneft Corporate University

The situation we faced in March was unusual, but the company had a good technological background to adapt to it as quickly as possible without losing efficiency. Long time ago we created many online tutorial programs. We have been developing them in the recent years. That's why **we quickly reorganized our system and changed the balance between face-to-face and online training.**

Before the pandemic, we were focused on two main criteria for creating this balance. The first criterion was the frequency of use (the more often a course was required, the more likely it was to appear online in order to provide access to more employees and minimize organizational costs). The second criterion was the remoteness of the target audience (Gazpromneft operates in dozens of Russian regions and worldwide, and you may need access to training content without moving people).

When the entire company was switching to remote work, we were trying to solve two problems. The first was to change the balance and increase the share of online training, even where it was mainly conducted face-to-face. The second was to provide employees and managers of the company with the necessary information so that they could build their work in a new mode. This also had its own specifics. Gazpromneft is a high-tech, industrial company. Besides office personnel there are many employees working at industrial plants. Some of them are located in severe climatic zones, where people work on rotation schedule. Our most urgent task was to provide everyone with the necessary information and tools to organize our work during that difficult period.

In just two weeks, we created a set of training programs, which became very popular and, according to the employees who had undergone training, helped within a few days to rebuild work, to switch to new methods of coordination with subordinates and managers and to provide joint activities remotely. As a result, in the first few months of remote work, according to our estimates, the efficiency of employees increased by 20–25% in comparison with the office mode (such data was shown by several waves of internal surveys). On average, our programs for both remote individual work and teamwork have proved to be efficient. The most popular courses are “How to Setup Work at Home”, “How to Build Efficient Communications Remotely”, “Self-Support in Changing Situations”, “Tools for Working with a Remote Team”.

The corporate University has created entire ecosystem: a comprehensive set of tools for conducting training events, including both its own platforms (Knowledge Portal) and external ones. The platforms were selected with the consideration of the purpose of use and the specifics of each learning format (video conference, webinars, trainings, etc.).

At the moment external solutions have both advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, to engage the full potential of the corporate training we are developing our own online platform.

An interesting solution for us would be the use of this ecosystem not only for the training of the personnel,

but also for the provision of online practice for the students of Russian universities. Every summer, hundreds of students from all over the country take internships at various production facilities and technology centers of our company. However, self-isolation has imposed great restrictions on this process. Our “Online Practice” project is aimed at the solution of this problem. Students gain theoretical knowledge in online webinars and master classes of Gazpromneft internal trainers. They practice their skills while solving the cases designed by our industry experts. All this requires a huge amount of preparation on our part: technical organization, training employees (speaking to young audience with no personal contact is not an easy task), training students (this format is also unusual for them). However, we have managed to show the real production process to future specialists: the operation of a drilling rig, oil platform, refueling, control of the movement of sea tankers, and much more. They could not see all this at the University.

Of course, online practice will never completely replace face-to-face practice, because it is unable to reproduce a fully realistic work environment, but the project has succeeded beyond our expectations. We will continue working on it and develop its capabilities to enable a larger number of talented students to learn the company's business from the inside.

Naturally, now we are trying to decide what should be left out of the format we have switched to, and what is a temporary phenomenon and should end with the quarantine and remote work. The most important idea is that **there is no general impression that all training can be transferred online.** On the contrary, it has become clear that without face-to-face cooperation, without the opportunity to exchange opinions, without personal contact, without the opportunity to look at the audience's reaction, it is impossible to organize efficient online training on all professional issues. Of course, the overall balance will be shifting to online, and we will more accurately design training programs based on technological capabilities. However, the pandemic has clearly shown that face-to-face training is also necessary, and critical conditions have become a very good marker for understanding that **the future is with blended learning.**

The corporate University has created entire ecosystem: a comprehensive set of tools for conducting training events, including both its own platforms (Knowledge Portal) and external ones.

Accept the Challenge and Use It as an Opportunity to Work in a New Format



Natalia Kulchitskaya

Head of HR Department of Kernel company

Kernel is the world's biggest producer and exporter of sunflower oil and other agricultural products from the Black Sea region to world markets. The company entered a turbulent period with a strong market position. Despite all possible risks, the plants worked smoothly, without staff lockouts, cutting wages, or the reduction of working hours of the staff.

The company's solutions can be divided into several blocks.

1. Implementation of preventive measures against the spread of the virus.

We started this process even before the announcement of a nationwide quarantine (the company operates on the territory of Ukraine — *Editor's note*). For the safety of the staff, we have provided all the necessary PPE, restricted business trips, made PCR testing of employees, etc.

2. Informing.

We have adopted the policy of providing systematic operational information to all 13,000 employees of the company in order to give them a sense of stability and security. The main difficulty is that our company consists of more than 50 enterprises throughout Ukraine and 70% of the staff of working professions do not have access to computers. Therefore, we used all possible channels. In addition to newsletters about the new work rules and publications in corporate social networks, we prepared information posters; sent SMS messages; started our hotline; held weekly online meetings with the company's management; and organized video calls for the company personnel, participated by the CEO. During those video calls, the employees were informed about the company's activities in the quarantine period, and each employee could ask a question.

3. Remote operation mode for the employees who are not involved in the continuous production process.

We transferred 4,500 employees to the remote mode and were surprised to find out how easy it was. The company had previously used Skype and Microsoft Teams for online meetings, and we were technically ready. The IT team did a great job providing the necessary infrastructure in the first week. The previously implemented electronic document management and distance learning system also significantly simplified the transition. Of course, the new management format was a challenge for many managers, so we launched an online course on remote work.

4. Reformatting HR process and tools to online format.

We did not suspend the recruitment process by switching to remote work. All meetings were held through Skype, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom, and our Web Assessment Center was implemented to evaluate candidates. The adaptation of newcomers was moved to online mode either. Now we have an experience in holding adaptation meetings online, and this saves the company time and resources. New employees receive everything they need to get started: an organized workplace, a beginner's package, as well as the complete information about the company and its values and rules. A special chat bot helps us to do this. The process of setting and evaluating tasks during the trial period is also automated. This allows a new employee to adapt to the new work regardless of the work mode.

Information kiosks are provided for the employees who do not have a personal computer and account. They allow them to get a pay sheet for any period, apply for vacations, request a document, or submit an idea how to improve the production process. Information kiosks work around the clock, so they are available even for those who work at night. To access personal information, an employee only needs to enter his mobile phone number and one-time password, sent by the system via SMS.

We have also implemented a separate service for managers. Besides his personal account, a manager has access to the consolidated information of his team: from the adaptation results to training programs and personnel changes. The information is updated online every day. You can view the data from any place with the Internet access available, so the Manager can make any staff decision without requesting additional information from HR.

It's important, that we have not downgraded our level of communication with local teams. For example, all the meetings dedicated to survey results and planning of activities with more than 200 plant teams within the involvement management project were held in the video call format.

We took the current situation with the pandemic as a challenge and an opportunity to work in a new format. Our key focus is on the communication with employees, transformation of existing development programs, and search for new ones.

Corporate MBA online

Kernel provides modular training for managers every year. Business school teachers participate in this activity. We call it our corporate MBA. The pandemic has not prevented our development this year either: we have provided training in Zoom — with a serious theoretical part, full-fledged work in groups and project defense. This has been unusual for us and required some effort, but we have been pleased with the results and the understanding that the thirst for knowledge and the habit of learning won the distance of the remote format.

Department conferences

An unusual practice that we have introduced this time is online conferences of departments. The tradition of annual conferences combined with field trips, summing up results, awarding the best and unusual entertainments has been practised in Kernel for many years, and the pandemic could not become a reason for us to abandon it. Our communications team and PR Department proposed a new format: Zoom, cameras turned on, a jaunty entertainer, music in breaks and pauses, bright thematic backgrounds, dynamic presentations with videos, unexpected guests and an exciting online game at the end. The key intrigue of the conference was the large, beautiful wooden boxes that had been sent to participants the day before with the note: "Do not open until further notice." At some point, the entertainer asked the participants to open the boxes. There were sets of various snacks, corporate souvenirs, mini-bottles of sparkling wine. The participants of the "Personnel reserve" program received diplomas and confederate hats, which they put on during the ceremony of awarding the diplomas for the successful completion of training. Facebook was full of posts with the photos of our graduates in confederate hats!

"The Magic of your Morning with Kernel"

Even before the quarantine, we had a project "the Magic of your Morning with Kernel", where 1–2 times a month we invited an external or internal expert to conduct a master class for our employees, share life hacks over a cup of coffee. Such events were held offline in the office lounge area and broadcasted to the regions.

At the beginning of the pandemic, we transformed meetings into webinars and selected the topics, which would be useful and relevant for colleagues during the quarantine period. For example: "How to maintain relationships and cope with children

during remote work”, “Steel immunity”, “How to stay productive and involved in remote work mode”. Employees showed much interest, asked a lot of questions, and up to 400 people joined the webinars.

In our training portal *Kernel Hub*, we have created a new section with the view to publish the records of these webinars and make them always available for all employees.

Topic “Kernel Develops”

Like most large companies, during the quarantine period, we regularly e-mail to our employees the recommendations concerning the compliance with the rules, requests to stay at home on weekends and take care of their health. At a certain point, we realized that regular e-mails do not motivate our colleagues, and we need to add something positive to distract them from the quarantine. Therefore, we have offered an idea of weekend classes. This is how the “Kernel Develops” section appeared. Every Friday we publish there the recommendations from the top management of the company what to watch/read on the weekend. On the one hand, we create an image of the company managers as people focused on continuous development, interested in current cultural and business trends, while introducing “other” tops, making them closer and clearer, and on the other hand, we offer employees to combine business with pleasure on weekends, relax and develop at the same time.

The category has been a success already for four month, and we are not going to stop. We are launching a new wave of recommendations from the management of regional departments and preparing a separate section on the training portal.

Mental Health

Every day we receive a huge amount of disturbing information about the number of infected people, difficulties in the medical field and the second wave of quarantine. The flow of negative information may depress our employees and affect their productivity. To maintain their emotional health, we have launched the “Mental Health” project.

As a part of this project, Telegram channel “Kernel is the Place of Power” has been started. Every day, the channel receives links to online training: 15-minute fitness breaks at lunch, self-massage lessons, evening pilates classes, and lectures from psychologists. A separate chat has been started for those who want to share their emotions and wishes.

All the projects, which we have launched or adapted, will remain with us after the pandemic. **During the quarantine period, many interesting ideas have emerged. We are gradually implementing them into reality.** Everything has become even more dynamic, only our activities now take place online.

One of the main transformations is the transition to a flexible work schedule. **We have realized that we can effectively work remotely, and have decided that from now on we will always live like this.** Each employee who is not involved in the continuous production can work 50% of his/her time remotely. This innovation saves a lot of time (including daily home-office trips in traffic jams) and forms a new culture of trust. We have also realized that we can hire our staff in different cities without a need for relocation. This opens new opportunities and saves the company resources. This way, we complement our payroll offer with a flexible work schedule.

We have also started using video calls with subsequent recording to provide a chance of reviewing new procedures, projects and programs when communicating. This has turned out to be very convenient.

The quarantine has shown that we are much more ready for e-learning than we expected, although it is important to prepare materials and speakers with high quality, and carefully choose the platform. Of course, we are not going to give up face-to-face training, but it is already obvious that many new forms of online training will remain with us for a long time. This year, we have updated the training portal. It has allowed us to transfer the staff training to the online mode in due time. Of course, professional training is the priority, but we also pay attention to the development of “soft skills”: courses in time management, system thinking, emotional intelligence, change management, and effective remote work. Statistics shows that an average time spent by an employee on our training portal is about two hours. Approximately 100 employees are constantly online, and up to 500 — at peak times. It’s an interesting trend: our colleagues actively learn after work and even on weekends. **IT technologies and remote work have fully revealed the potential of online learning.**

To Save and Secure the Team by Proactive Measures




Maria Novoselok
HR Director of .Dreamteam
(until April 2020)



Irina Zhenyukh
T&D Manager
of .Dreamteam

.Dreamteam is a restaurant group that includes 7 restaurants in Saint Petersburg and Moscow. Unfortunately, the restaurant business has suffered heavy losses during the pandemic. Before talking about the management practices used by our company during the crisis, I would like to mention a few important points.

We are deeply confident that the most important help to overcome the difficult situation in the restaurant business came to us from our processes that we had been building over the past three years. We invested a lot of effort and resources in the development of the management team. Therefore, we could start acting proactively, ahead of time, making the first decisions necessary to save our business in general and our team in particular, when most companies were still in a “relaxed” state. The team is especially important, because they create the product, which our guests like, and they provide the level of the hospitality that makes our restaurants popular. All our actions were aimed at this goal.

The second point is that .Dreamteam company is 12 years old, and that was not the first crisis in our history. The understanding that a crisis was a temporary phenomenon, and we had to overcome it, keeping the team as much as possible, was very supportive. When the problems in the country began, we were deeply confident that we had to apply not the immediate solutions to extinguish the fire, but all the practices that had been built long before the crisis began.

We made the first decision even before the announcement of the general quarantine (in early March), when it became clear that the pandemic would overtake us — we asked our employees not to go away on vacations and to cancel foreign trips (even before the borders were closed). If, however, an employee decided to go, then he would have to remain in a two-week quarantine after arrival. It was important to be consistent: immediately after making this decision, we began to strictly monitor its fulfilment, regardless of the position and value of an employee for the company. The first person to set an example was Irina Zhenyukh, the head of T&D, who was in the UK during all these discussions. After her return, Irina stayed in a two-week quarantine. Employees differently treated that strict condition, but finally, everyone obeyed. On the other hand, the company's actions demonstrated its position and the importance of the measures taken.

The understanding that a crisis was a temporary phenomenon, and we had to overcome it, keeping the team as much as possible, was very supportive.

The second step was **to organize sessions with managers, which in many ways helped us to adapt to the situation faster, to move the management team as quickly as possible from the stage of denial to the stage of acceptance of the changes that were taking place.** In particular, Irina worked with each manager to stabilize the emotional state of our teams and individual employees. She launched supportive training sessions for managers helping them to adapt to the new situation as well as to supervise and communicate with their subordinates. All managers became a bit of a psychologists during that period. Finally, that allowed us to avoid panic at the peak of the crisis and to act ahead of the curve, as quickly as possible, thoughtfully and rationally. We also organized a supportive marathon for the line staff in order to maintain their emotional state and promote a positive view of life, even during that difficult period.

Now we will try to describe briefly, what we have started doing differently or in a new fashion during of the crisis.

1. Transferring goals setting and the appraisal of their achievement from a monthly to a weekly basis.

Deadlines for planning were reduced to one week, becoming similar to sprints. Medium-term decisions were made quickly within a few days, and short-term management was reduced to hours. It was a real crisis management.

2. We started to work individually with each employee.

When the restaurants actually closed, most of the employees were out of work. We talked to each of them individually, as well as gathered them in teams, tried to explain solutions, help, and support them. Of course, we can't say that everything was easy and smooth, but we did what we could. We tried to help those who were interested in part-time work or employment with other companies. We found the employers who at that time were ready to accept the personnel for temporary work — delivery services, order collection in supermarkets. Line employees could find a side job. There are many stories about those employees who left for a part-time job, and now they are back with us again. We provided as much information as possible about vacant positions, rendered free legal support to suspend the mortgage payments and refinance loans of our employees, etc. For example, our brand chief Alexey Kanevsky refused from his salary in favor of his employees and his team, saying that he would live for several months on his own savings.

3. We launched the program of selling certificates for future visits to restaurants.

We contributed the earnings to a special fund supporting our employees — those who had many children or health problems, or whose families had all the breadwinners unemployed. That fund was in operation before the crisis: employees could ask for support in various situations, and the help was not always monetary. Sometimes connections, attention or something intangible was even more useful. However, at the time of the crisis, we began to use financial help more actively.

4. We paid for psychological consultations of employees.

Our company has been using the services of psychologists since 2017 (25% of the costs was paid by employees, and 75% by the company). This spring, there was a situation when the demand for psychological support increased many times, while the financial opportunities of employees, on the contrary, decreased. Then the company started paying the full costs of the psychological consultations in and it has been doing so until now. We worried that the service provided free of charge would cause lack of the desire for self-improvement, but our fears were unfounded: everybody followed the procedures, attended the meetings, and treated the therapy seriously.

5. We provided free lunches for employees and their families.

We organized the delivery of lunches from one of our restaurants to all employees of the company and their families. That continued in March and April. Then, unfortunately, we had to stop that practice due to the restrictions that were imposed. However, we continued doing our best to support our employees. Those who got sick received their meals at home.

6. We developed the delivery service when our restaurants closed and some people went to work there.

In a very short time, we launched a website and a courier service. It is interesting to note, that many employees were willing to work for a lower salary than before the crisis. However, it was important for our people not to stay at home, but to continue doing their jobs and earn money honestly.

7. Testing of employees on COVID-19.

The restaurant business is particularly sensitive to cleanness and sanitary safety. This can be referred both to the visits to restaurants, and to the delivery service. Together with the meals, we bring people pleasure that should not be overshadowed by anything else.

At the company's expense, we tested almost all employees, and if someone had symptoms of SARS, we tested all the contacts.

We took the maximum of safety measures at work. Even before the official orders of Rospotrebnadzor, antiseptic dispensers were installed everywhere. It took us a long time to choose masks for cooks, because working in a hot

kitchen with a mask is comparable to the work of doctors in the “red zone”. Of course, there was a lot of resistance, so we were looking for a solution that could provide both the necessary level of security and comfort for employees. As a result, we decided to use medical masks.

We also chose masks for the waiters comfortable to use for the entire shift. We taught them to “smile with their eyes” at trainings, because half of their face was covered with a mask. In addition, our waiters started using the stickers with the inscription: “I’m healthy”.

Recently the restaurants have resumed working, and we are recruiting people again. Fortunately, most of those who had to leave, are now back with us. We have succeeded keeping the key team and management staff 100%. We have resumed temporarily postponed practices, such as monthly awards of employees who have made the greatest contribution to the company’s development, and birthday greetings. So far, we have not resumed English language training for the staff and gastronomic tours. This is still difficult to implement with the closed borders. We understand that these practices inspire people and provide energy for the company. As soon as the opportunity arises, we will start doing all this again. We have already restored completely our usual adaptation methods including introductory training. In the near future, we are planning to organize breakfasts with the owner so that he could personally thank people for their work.

Throughout the entire period, our shareholders took the responsibility for key decisions, getting ahead of the curve to ensure the safety of our employees and business. They insisted on many measures, which looked unacceptable for the team at first, but eventually they allowed us to pass through the first hard weeks and months with minimal losses. Shareholders had already accumulated the experience of consciously going through a crisis. Their personal involvement was a good support for our teams and helped them to act proactively.

An important conclusion from the whole situation: **you need to talk to people immediately openly and honestly**. Do not be afraid to admit that the situation is also stressful and uncertain for the management itself, but everything possible will be done to overcome this crisis. This is exactly the information which we received from the owners, the company’s CEO, and all the managers from the very first moment. Thus, we won the trust of our employees. In the time of total shock and misunderstanding in Russia, we survived the first outburst of the pandemic relatively well. We were always in touch with our personnel, constantly communicating, arranging individual and group meetings, online meetings. There was always an opportunity to come to us with any questions.

The processes and the trust which were built before the crisis, proactivity in actions, openness and honesty in communications with employees — these are the key points that helped us to survive in that difficult time.

The processes and the trust which were built before the crisis, proactivity in actions, openness and honesty in communications with employees — these are the key points that helped us to survive in that difficult time.

Not Only to Retain Efficiency, but also to Increase Production during the Pandemic



Dmitry Borodich

HR and Social Policy Director of PhosAgro

PhosAgro is one of the world's leading producers of phosphorus-containing fertilizers. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, we were quite traditional in our communications: all meetings, all contacts with our employees, and all training were face-to-face. With the first signals of the impending pandemic in spring 2020, we had to adjust ourselves to the new conditions within the shortest time. We transferred all our administrative staff (3,500 employees, or a fifth part of the total staff) to the remote mode; introduced a comprehensive system of disease prevention; provided all necessary PPE for the manufacturing employees, who guarantee the food security of our country as well as 102 other states of the world; implemented a number of other important management decisions.

1. Online meetings.

We have transferred all meetings to the online mode. This process has its pros and cons. On the positive side, it is now much easier to organize a meeting: there is no need to adjust it to business trip schedules; you can connect with the meeting from anywhere. This has greatly increased our flexibility in terms of planning. Among the disadvantages, we can note a sharp growth of the number of meetings, which affected the workload (instead of one meeting a day, 3–4 meetings were held: morning planning, interim reports, evening report, etc.). Very often, the participants of such meetings were unable to get concentrated due to a large number of distractions.

2. Online training.

We have long discussed the possibility of transferring a part of our training to online mode, but the pandemic has become an impetus for this process. The skepticism about online learning that had prevailed previously was forced to give in. Many people realized that such a format had a number of advantages: the ability to scale and reuse video tutorials, saving money, time and resources of the training center. Our training center held many webinars, and they taught not only managerial skills, but also professional competencies for the work team. Theoretical classes and tests were conducted online through the training portal, while practical classes were face-to-face. This was a big breakthrough for us, and the restrictions on the location and number of participants were lifted.

3. Personnel appraisal online.

Previously, we conducted face-to-face all the staff appraisals — assessments, business games. We are currently testing some tools adapted to the online mode. We haven't implemented a ready-made solution yet, but we will definitely continue this process. We pin our hopes on the great potential for scaling and evaluating the entire company's staff.

4. Appraisal of the performance of certain categories of employees.

The lack of communication between managers and subordinates during remote work has clearly shown the importance of constant and competent feedback to maintain work efficiency. Managers are well aware that without the coordination of the activities of their subordinates and colleagues on a permanent basis, many processes will be idle. Thus, albeit intuitively, they began using developing feedbacks. Previously we did not have a system tool for this, but now the whole situation urges us to implement this procedure — not just annually, but on a more frequent and even constant basis. All subordinates must have an understanding of what they are doing well; how they need to develop; change, or what they need to do differently; why someone is promoted, and his salary is increased, and so on. Such a communication is always very important, but especially when working remotely.

5. Personnel reserve.

We had a well-established mechanism of the replenishment and training of the personnel reserve, but during the growth of the pandemic, we had to change it to a certain extent. In fact, we made a branch in the process of recruiting the personnel reserve, selecting specialists not for development and growth to a higher position, but for horizontal movements. We identified key managerial positions vital for the maintenance of operations in the continuous production. We formed a pool of about 500 employees and divided them into two groups. While the first group was working, the main task of the second group was to stay at home and minimize their contacts to avoid infection. If necessary, they could go out to replace their colleagues. The company did everything possible to provide the manufacturing personnel with everything they needed, including food delivery for the whole family. In the case of the sickness or even at the slightest symptoms of SARS in a specialist working in production, a reservist came to replace him/her. We changed groups every two weeks, because it was not easy to be confined in four walls even if you keep 100% of your salary: you can't call it a vacation.

That system not only allowed us to overcome the morbidity peak without losses, but also made it possible to revise the approaches to the personnel reserve, update the lists of reservists, and improve the quality of the personnel reserve in future by including applicants in the real work process.

6. Compensations and bonus.

All employees of PhosAgro were paid in the full amount, and those who had to work overtime, received an additional payment of 30% of their basic salary. For example, IT specialists, who provided their support to 3,500 employees working online, had an increased workload. Approximately 2,000 of our employees participate in online meetings every day. At the beginning of the process of switching to remote mode, when the personnel had many questions about using special programs, the employees of IT department provided all the necessary support. Some specialists from other departments, in addition to their main duties, worked in our internal call center: they called employees, explained new work rules, and answered many questions that arose.

In addition, annual one-time bonuses on the professional holidays — Chemist's Day and Miner's Day — were increased from 2000 to 40,000 in total.

7. Social Responsibility and Security.

Of course, we provided all employees with the necessary personal protective equipment (masks, gloves, antiseptics). Also, at the peak of the pandemic, when it was difficult to find masks even in the free market, we provided our employees with more than 20 thousand sanitary kits for all family members and 25 thousand packages of Grippferon, which stimulated the immune system.

8. Electronic HR document management.

Even before the pandemic, we implemented the ASIO system — automated tools for handling requests. This system allows you to solve the most popular requests through your personal account or a special terminal: view the vacation schedule and find out the number of remaining vacation days, request for any document, etc. There are also plans to add a news feed and social benefit documentation to this system. We are currently working on the implementation of EDS, which will further expand the system capabilities. It is safe, convenient, and technologically advanced. The system was used in the past, but in the current situation, it helps us a lot to communicate with work teams.

We are also participating in the pilot project aimed at switching to fully electronic HR document management. This has turned out to be very useful in the new reality, especially in the conditions of remote work of a large part of employees.

Summing up the interim results of the measures taken, we have realized that we have been able not only to keep our efficiency at a steady rate, but even have increased the labor productivity. This is evidenced by the outstanding growth of the Group's operating and financial indicators in the first half of the year (during the first six months, our fertilizer production increased by almost 7%, and sales by 10%). Deliveries to the priority Russian market increased by 11.2%. At the same time, we managed to avoid outbreaks of infection at all our enterprises, and the incidence rates in the cities of our presence are among the lowest in the country.

The company fulfills in the full amount all the obligations concerning the payrolls. We even expanded them for a number of items. All social programs are also continued. In the context of the pandemic, we tried to hold mass events and professional holidays online. That was an interesting experience. The assessment based on the loyalty survey has shown that constant online activity, phone calls and other communications help to increase the awareness of the staff of what is happening in the company and where we are moving. Those indicators used to be quite high even in the past, but now there is an understanding that they have reached their peak and it is important to maintain them at this level.

We will keep almost all new practices after the end of the pandemic: many projects were started even before the aggravation of the epidemiological situation and they have proved to be very useful. Many employees were quite skeptical about some online projects, but when everyone began to use them actively, doubts and fears disappeared, while the convenience, speed and efficiency of their implementation became more obvious.

In the near future, we will abandon or at least minimize HR documentation on paper. In addition, we are currently reviewing all the company processes unused or used seldom over the past six months to either modify or abandon them completely. In future, this will allow us to reduce the load significantly. It's too early to talk about the results yet, but eventually we will share them. It's important to make sure that the changes will not make things worse. The process must either stay the same or get better.

Summing up the interim results of the measures taken, we have realized that we have been able not only to keep our efficiency at a steady rate, but even have increased the labor productivity.

Working on the Front Line: How Pharmacy Personnel Survived the Pandemic



Alexander Kuzin

General Director of the retail division of PAO Pharmacy Chain 36.6

During the pandemic, PAO Pharmacy Chain 36.6 was actively developing Internet services. At the end of May, Gorzdrav pharmacies introduced a quick booking service that helped to avoid queues and unnecessary contacts: a person just needed to place an order on the website and pick the package in 25 minutes in the nearest pharmacy. In June, we got the permission of Roszdravnadzor for the delivery of medical supplies. The customers of the pharmacy chain were waiting for this service for a long time, and now it is very popular.

Pharmacy employees were at the forefront of the battle against the pandemic, along with doctors who had a direct contact with the infected patients. Office employees were not immune to the virus either: they had contacts with the pharmacy.

Therefore, the main priority was to ensure the protection of our colleagues.

Pharmacies are a part of the healthcare system, so **we had to ensure the smooth operations of our entire company.** That was our second most important task.

We transferred to remote work all office employees who could work online. The HR and IT departments helped us a lot. Thus, at the peak of the pandemic, no more than 30 employees stayed in the office. They were the specialists whose presence was necessary for the company to function.

During the entire pandemic, our company has had about 100 confirmed cases of COVID-19. This corresponds to the sickness statistics of the Moscow region.

A third part of our employees still works in 'home office' mode. I believe that we must use any opportunity to avoid risks: for example, working from home. Yes, this is a new challenge in our professional life, but everyone has quickly got adapted, and the work process is not affected.

The practice of working in 'home office' mode has been very successful, and we will continue it. Now some of our employees combine work in the office and work at home.



Ekaterina Uspenskaya

Deputy General Director for HR and Corporate Development of PAO Pharmacy Chain 36.6

We were trying to do everything possible to ensure the health of our employees and the availability of the necessary medical supplies and PPE for our citizens even in the midst of the pandemic.

It was clear that events could develop in several scenarios, and we made a detailed plan of action for each of them. Even the worst-case scenario with closed metro and a curfew imposed was under consideration. We tried to understand how we could get our 6,000 employees to work in that case.

The circumstances required unconventional solutions. We collected a huge database of all our employees: their current addresses, the availability or absence of vehicles, contacts of the first-degree relatives, information about chronic diseases, and so on. All that helped us to plan how many people would remain in service even if the pandemic broke out in full force, who would be in a special risk group, whether colleagues would be able to drive each other to work, or we would need to make a contract with a taxi aggregator.

We tried to minimize the risks as much as possible. Almost all office employees were transferred to remote work. Pharmacies installed protective screens, put markings to maintain social distance, provided all staff with masks, gloves, disinfectants, and organized free coronavirus testing for employees. Despite all these measures, the work of pharmacists was certainly fraught with a great risk. Pharmacies were at the forefront, and everyone in the company understood that.

Nevertheless, even in the most anxious period, at the peak of the pandemic, not a single pharmacist refused to go to work, even being fully aware of all the risks. All our colleagues showed their best qualities. They not only fulfilled their direct duties, but also tried to keep up the spirits of our customers who were confused and scared because of the disturbing news. I don't want to say big words, but this is a true patriotism and selfless help to people.

Even in the most anxious period, at the peak of the pandemic, not a single pharmacist refused to go to work, even being fully aware of all the risks.

I was pleased to know that the employees of the Gorzdrav pharmacy in Reutov near Moscow created a special chat where volunteers helping elderly people to purchase food and medical products could place an order for necessary medicines. Our employees collected the items on order and informed the volunteers about the time when they could pick them. Doing so, they tried to schedule the picking time in such a way, that queues in the pharmacy could be avoided. Thus, the volunteers did not have any contact with other customers, and they were less likely to get sick and transmit the virus to their wards.

During the pandemic, we have gained a very wide experience, and now we possess proven technologies, which may be needed in the case of force majeure. In addition, the company was working remotely for three months, and we realized that such a method was quite efficient and it did not interfere with business processes in any way. Therefore, we have decided to leave 30% of the staff working remotely. This will allow us to save on the rental of the office space, and allow employees to spend more time with their families.

During the pandemic, we have gained a very wide experience, and now we possess proven technologies, which may be needed in the case of force majeure.

We continue to comply with all anti-epidemic measures. We test employees for coronavirus free of charge, perform mandatory thermometry before the start of the working day, financially support the families of sick colleagues, and, of course, ensure the availability of all necessary medications and personal protective equipment in our pharmacies. ▀

Useful events

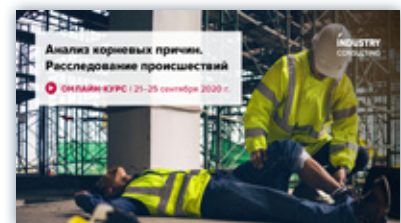
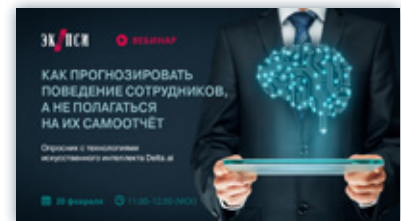
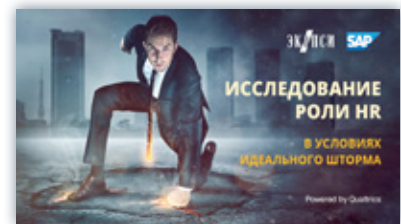
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21 сентября
Понедельник, 10:00
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Вторник, 11:00
Регистрация
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Разработка и внедрение профессиональных компетенций: «вредные советы»
23 сентября
Среда, 11:00
Регистрация
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Оценка персонала: как правильно проводить интервью по компетенциям и давать обратную связь
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