

Model of the diagnostic field as an element of support for public relations activities in the crisis

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KEY WORDS

public relations, crisis, media, crisis management, diagnostic field, research

ABSTRACT

One of the key issues related to crisis management is awareness combined with the actual state of preparation. Not always awareness goes hand in hand with the resources and documentation that the company has. This is the subject of analysis carried out within the diagnostic square, which is an attempt to capture within one analysis two key planes in image crisis situations: the actual situation and the declared preparation on the part of managers.

An image crisis is a phenomenon that always forces a specific reaction on the organisation. Looking at the reasons for the emergence of crisis situations, it is worth pointing out that a significant part of crises results from inadequate responses to existing problem situations¹. Thus, the question of reaction can be treated as an element of understanding the essence of *crisis management*.

In both cases (at the input - in the analysis of causes and in the output - in the analysis of consequences), preparation is important, which does not guarantee absolute security, but gives comfort in the form of increased probability of making correct decisions. That is why preparation is a key element in the search for researchers creating solutions and methods to prevent image problems.

This paper presents methodology of testing the organisation's vulnerability to image crises. The publication mainly describes the problem of preparation for the crisis, because the indicated model of the diagnostic field is a tool that favours the correct assessment of the degree of preparation of a specific entity to the occurrence of crisis situations, as well as the prevention of its consequences.

Identification of the crisis as the basis for proper preparation

A crisis is defined, among other things, as any incident, a real situation or gossip that can focus negative attention on the organisation or on its inside in the media or in front of key audiences². In the model of strategic management of public relations, James E. Grunig indicates that it is the active audience who have a special impact on the creation of problems, react negatively or have a constructive impact, trying to force the organisation to behave with useful consequences³. With this in mind, it is assumed that crisis situations can be generated by the lack of public involvement before making final decisions, for example, on the implementation of an investment that can be a social problem.

¹ J.E. Grunig, *Instytucjonalizacja, zarządzanie strategiczne i media elektroniczne: Czy badania naukowe kształtują przyszłość public relations? [Institutionalization, strategic management and electronic media: does scientific research shape the future of public relations?]* [in:] *Public relations we współczesnym świecie: między służbą organizacji i społeczeństwem* [Public relations in the modern world: between the service of an organisation and society], ed. J. Olędzki, Warszawa 2011, p. 40.

² P. Ruff, K. Azziz, *Managing communications in a crisis*, Burlington, 2003, p. 3.

³ J.E. Grunig, *Instytucjonalizacja, zarządzanie strategiczne...* [Institutionalization, strategic management...], op cit., pp. 34–35.

Subjective state of preparation for crisis situations (conviction about the state of preparation of responsible persons) usually differs significantly from the real one, which results from the verification performed based e.g. on the lists of tasks, documents developed, and actions carried out. Due to the fact that the crisis is defined as any unexpected situation that may turn out to be unfavourable for parties involved⁴, one should bear in mind the fact that the prepared company is one, but the actual state of this preparation is a completely different dimension.

Crisis does not necessarily have to be a negative phenomenon. It may have adverse effects, but also favourable to the organisation⁵. On the one hand, it can be a real preparation, on the other it shows what approach to crisis management is presented by the management and employees assigned for crisis tasks. The crisis may lead to the loss of technical facilities as a result of a catastrophe, the departure of important employees or entire teams, especially in small entities; the consumers' avoidance of the brand in the FMCG sector; allegations of dishonesty. All these examples have from the point of view of public relations one basic feature, which is the loss of trust or the risk of such a loss. Thus, the primary goal of fighting a crisis or preparing in case it should exist is to protect basic values such as credibility, reputation and image⁶. Reputation is based on trust. So what gives you preparation? If it is real, carried out in a planned way, based on a set of procedures, the effects may affect the entire organisation and may even contribute to a real reduction of the effects of the potential crisis, as well as the elimination of what may occur. However, if the crisis arises, the procedures and strategies that will help protect the company's reputation will be of key importance⁷. Preparation consists in organising anti-crisis processes, but also in:

- planning tasks between members of the crisis staff
- gathering materials, as well as data relevant to the organisation in terms of potential crisis
- putting the organisation in a state of readiness that will identify symptoms of crisis situations that may appear, for example, in the media
- checking existing procedures and, if necessary, making changes to them.

⁴ T. Gackowski, M. Łaczyński, *Metody badania wizerunku w mediach* [Methods of image examination in the media] Warszawa, 2009, p. 88.

⁵ M. Friedman, *Everyday crisis management: How to think like an emergency physician*, Naperville, 2002, p. 5.

⁶ A. Łaszyn, *Komunikacja kryzysowa* [Crisis communication] [in:] *Sztuka public relations. Z doświadczeń polskich praktyków* [The art of public relations. Experiences of Polish practitioners], ed. 2, ed. B. Janiszewska, Warszawa, 2011, p. 156.

⁷ U. Khattab, S.B. Fonn, S. Ali, *Strategic communication management of corporate crises: Case analysis*, „e-Journal of Social & Behavioural Research in Business” Vol. 8 (2017), no. 1, p. 16.

Preparation can also support the reaction. There are situations when a journalist in his question or statement more or less consciously misses the truth, repeating a false thesis⁸. Lack of preparation can contribute to the generation of broadened negative effects, which is certainly one of the causes of crisis situations. Among them there are also a number of other problems that lie in the organisation and beyond and affect such areas as communication or organisation management. Media crisis - from the point of view of public relations - means the moment when the crisis is made public by the media⁹. One of the important areas that must be taken into account by the organisation is the process of media relations, because the crisis situation creates a huge tension in the company, which causes increased interest from the media¹⁰. Cooperation with the media and individual journalists plays a special role in the process of solving crisis situations¹¹. Therefore, these relationships should be implemented taking into account the potential benefits and threats that may arise.

One of the reasons for the crisis may be the publication of an article with a negative overtone in the media. Yet another - the leak of data and important information outside the company', for example, financial situation or know-how. The problem may also be the strained reputation of the company's representatives. Other important reasons for the occurrence of crisis situations include events directly affecting the employees themselves or related to them, such as changes in the company, mutual dislikes in teams or between departments, misunderstandings, matters related to non-compliance with health and safety at work regulations. Causes also include unforeseen events inherent in the forces of nature¹².

Journalists, like PR workers, carry out many tasks that are assigned to very similar goals. In both occupations, the goal is to provide information tailored to the target groups. However, despite convergence in this area, there are significant errors in understanding what we mean by information. Above all, it is a serious mistake that from the point of view of some representatives of the public relations industry, every information they prepare is so attractive that it must please the journalist and must be published. Nothing more wrong. A lot of information sent to the media by PRs is advertising material, which should be directed not to

⁸ A. Łaszyn, *Media i Ty. Jak zarządzać kontaktem osobistym z dziennikarzami* [Media and you. How to manage personal contact with journalists], Warszawa, 2017, p. 145.

⁹ M. Kaczmarek-Śliwińska, *Public relations w zarządzaniu sytuacjami kryzysowymi organizacji. Sztuka komunikowania się*, [Public relations in managing crisis situations in the organisation. The art of communication], Warszawa, 2015, p. 55.

¹⁰ E. Pluta, *Public relations – moda czy konieczność. Teoria i praktyka* [Public relations - trend or necessity. Theory and practice], Warszawa, 2001, p. 172.

¹¹ D. Tworzydło, *Public relations praktycznie* [Public relations in practice], Rzeszów, 2017, p. 192.

¹² U. Khattab, S.B. Fonn, S. Ali, *Strategic communication...*, op cit., p. 17.

the editor, but to the advertising department. Going further, sometimes the problem is the journalists' approach to the public relations employees, as well as people outside this group. The demanding attitude and preconceived theses make contact between journalists and public relations representatives difficult by definition. These and other problems are just a section of a wide range of topics important from the point of view of both representatives of public relations and the media.

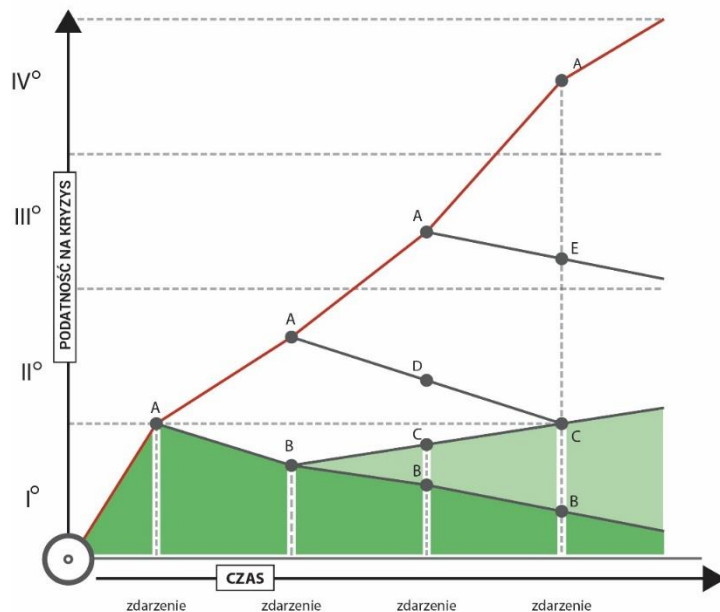
Analysing relations between public relations and the media only from the perspective of *crisis management*, the correlation of two areas is noticeable: preparation for possible crisis situations in the context of media relations, the effects on the company, and the scale of problems it must face. Lack of preparation is definitely more likely to escalate the crisis when it arrives. It is also an increased risk of taking chaotic actions without analysing the effects of these. In the end, it weakens the organisation when the crisis drags on and permanently affects the organisation.

In order to obtain effects based on mutually beneficial relations, which is possible even in crisis situations, it is necessary to build mutual trust. Competition, or even more widely mutual struggle, can lead to deepening problems, and also create new, even more serious impact on the organisation. Trust does not have to be based on full information transfer, it is about limited trust, which is based on mutual understanding of created content, along with their adoption as a starting point for dialogue. In this way, it will be easier for representatives of the PR industry to provide information in a crisis, because they are assessed and treated differently by the media. Their credibility for a journalist in the case of a good relationship based on trust is definitely higher than in a situation where there is no direct understanding of their own work.

Preparation based, among others, on media training or data analysis, gives the conviction that the chances for more advantageous solutions will increase in the event of a crisis. Knowledge about the principles of cooperation with the media facilitates obtaining favourable relations, which then translate into the reception of the message.

Vulnerability to crisis situations

The company's vulnerability to a crisis situation can be identified in a variety of ways. This is mainly due to the approach and preparation in case of occurrence. There are four degrees of organisation's vulnerability to the crisis (Figure 1).



Zdarzenie – event

Podatność na kryzys – crisis vulnerability

Fig. 1 Degrees of organisation's vulnerability to the crisis

Source: D. Tworzydło, *Public relations praktycznie* [Public relations in practice], Rzeszów, 2017, p. 161.

First degree testifies to the strength of the company, its preparation, as well as the well-shaped structures and procedures¹³. First degree can be achieved with:

- developed crisis manual containing a description of processes and procedures that should be implemented by the organisation
- prepared databases, including opinion leaders that can be used in crisis, journalists and the media
- conducted communication audit
- regular press office or if the organisation does not conduct such activities on a daily basis, establishing within a crisis team, person responsible for relations with the media in the event of a crisis
- media monitoring, including discussion groups, especially if they were created by employees or officially participated by them
- templates and model statements to be used during the crisis
- developed communication procedures:

¹³ D. Tworzydło, *Public relations...*, op cit., p. 160.

- ✓ with the internal environment
- ✓ with the external environment
- prepared crisis staff with a clearly defined composition and competences
- systematic training in the event of a crisis
- management and employees aware of the risks, which can be seen on the basis of their actions
- identified crisis situations, potentially emerging in the company, recorded in operational or strategic documents.

The first degree of vulnerability to the crisis is proof that the company conducts ongoing audits and draws conclusions from them. It is also possible that the enterprise described by the first stage of PK (crisis vulnerability) did not experience a serious crisis, and individual image perturbations are not significant enough to make them visible. Usually, the first major crisis is a test for the organisation and verification of its procedures - if it has any. With a significant impact on the interior or external environment of the organisation, the crisis may put it on the verge of the first and second degree. It depends on the organisation and its reaction whether it will maintain the analysed degree of its resistance. This is particularly influenced by the preparation for potential crises.

Figure 1 presents paths that illustrate vulnerability to crisis situations. Symbols A, B, C, D, E are identifiers of subsequent crisis situations, through which the subject under analysis is subjected, based on the scheme of assessing the organisation's vulnerability to crisis. The path marked with the A symbols indicates a very rapid transition from the first to the fourth degree of the organisation's vulnerability to crisis, which may be the result of, for example, lack of preparation or ignorance in this regard.

The second level shows that the company has had crisis situations not always solved correctly, but it is still an acceptable level. Some industries, such as energy, construction, finance, waste management or motorization are particularly vulnerable to crises and companies from such industries occur more often than others. The transition of the organisation to the second degree is a signal that the company made mistakes, including those that could aggravate the crisis situation, e.g. of a communication nature. Recognition that the company has a second degree of vulnerability is proof that it can have procedures, it can also already use them in carrying out its structures through image problems - however, they cannot always be prepared in the right way.

Analysing the second step of PK, it should be pointed out that after the introduction and application of appropriate and properly prepared management procedures in the event of a crisis it will be possible to mitigate the effects of the crisis, but it is also possible to return to the first degree in the crisis vulnerability pattern¹⁴. But in order to achieve the described effects, it is necessary to have the correct procedures, both in terms of their preparation and implementation. Procedures can refer to:

- flow of information:
 - ✓ with internal target groups
 - ✓ with groups beyond the structures of the company
- communication with the media
- identification of symptoms and analysis of the causes of crisis situations
- obtaining information about past crisis situations, their causes and consequences
- reacting when the crisis comes
- analysis of the effects of crisis and drawing conclusions.

The horizontal line separating the second stage from the third one (Figure 1) is a transition to a higher risk level, because from this point crisis situations begin which require constant monitoring. Moreover, this does not apply only to media monitoring, but to any type of monitoring of the image and economic situation in the company. At this time, the impact of image crisis situations is noticed not only on the image itself, but also on the economic stability of the company. Each subsequent crisis causes more and more serious consequences, including the transition to the next stage illustrating vulnerability to the crisis, i.e. the highest one - the fourth.

The third degree indicates a largely limited control, as opposed to the first and second stages, during which the control is complete or limited to a small extent. Once it has been defined that the company is in the third degree of crisis vulnerability, it will still be possible to mitigate the emerging effects of the crisis, although due to the increased vulnerability to the organisation, significant costs and involvement of both external entities and internal services are expected in the process of solving further crises. For an entity in third degree of vulnerability, it is much harder to go down to the second level than from the second level to go back to the first one. It takes much more time, requires preparation, systematic audits and monitoring of the environment and procedures¹⁵.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 161.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 161–162.

The fourth level of crisis vulnerability signals on the one hand total ignorance of managers in the field of crisis management, on the other hand it can be a testimony of lack of knowledge, skills and preparation, which translates into further effects of crises in the form of a weakened image. The fourth level shows that an entity assessed in terms of vulnerability to crisis cannot cope with crisis situations, or is very heavily burdened with the fact that it operates in an industry more vulnerable to the crisis than others¹⁶.

Critical vulnerability levels are reflected in the areas of the diagnostic field, and additionally, they can be used for in-depth analyses in the field of explaining the affiliation of particular companies to individual segments. Diagnosis of the situation is facilitated by the assessment of potential changes in the organisation in the context of vulnerability levels (Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis of potential changes in the organisation in the context of the degree of vulnerability to the crisis

	I	II	III	IV
ability to easily absorb future crises	small	small	significant	significant
impact of subsequent crises on employees	small	small	significant	significant
impact of the crisis on the company's financial situation	none	none	significant	significant
the impact of the crisis on the changes in the perception of the company	none	small	significant	significant
impact of the crisis on the company's immediate surroundings	none	small	small	significant
decrease in the company's strategic potential	none	none	small	significant
decrease in the company's operational potential	small	small	significant	significant
impact on the control of subsequent crises	significant	significant	small	none
ability to mitigate the effects of emerging crisis	significant	significant	small	small
ability to achieve positive effects of the crisis	significant	significant	small	none

¹⁶ In the further part of the paper, the term “oppressive industry” will be used, i.e. limiting the possibilities of intuitive action, without professional crisis preparation, prone to crisis.

costs of anti-crisis measures	small	small	significant	significant
media's trust during the crisis	significant	small	small	none

Source: D. Tworzydło, *Public relations praktycznie* [Public relations in practice], Rzeszów, 2017.

The structure of the diagnostic field - methodological context

One of the key issues related to crisis management is consciousness combined with the actual state of preparation. It does not always go hand in hand with the resources and documentation that the organisation has. This is the subject of analysis carried out within the diagnostic field.

The diagnostic field model is an attempt to capture in the area of one analysis of two key areas in the image crisis situations: the actual state (the answer to the question of how it really is) and declared preparation (as the starting situation is assessed by managers dealing in communication in crisis situations). In business environments, we hear about the need for proper preparation, response and organisation of the organisation's image. Experts and communication trainers constantly repeat that it is better to prevent than to combat a crisis¹⁷. They compare the crisis with smouldering fire, which in time gains strength and destabilises the organisation both in internal structures and in the external environment. That is why it is not only a good idea but indeed a necessity to recognise the symptoms of crisis situations and extinguish them when there is a chance.

Authors of this article undertook to develop a methodology allowing to diagnose the degree of preparation of specific companies for possible crisis situations. The human factor plays a key role in this respect, especially the awareness of people who are responsible in their companies for strategic planning and image management. Practice shows that it often happens that employees are responsible for crisis situations. It is not only about disregarding procedures, ignoring recommendations or other negligence while performing duties. From the point of view of the designed studies, the lack of competence, low level of knowledge and too high self-confidence of the staff responsible for the image has particular importance in this respect. Therefore, it is necessary to use a matrix with a crossover analysis, which will check whether the aware company is in practice prepared for the risk of a crisis¹⁸. It is also important to verify whether the largest Polish companies deserve the title of management leader or, on the contrary, should be referred to as crisis illiterates.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 160.

¹⁸ The OCM designations (short for Objective Crisis Management) and SCM (Subjective Crisis Management) will be used.

Situational context and sensitivity of the subject matter imply the necessity to use two separate ways of collecting empirical data within a given group of companies (e.g. companies employing at least 250 employees)¹⁹. Therefore, when examining the OCM (Objective Crisis Management) questions measuring the presence of the factor in organisation management method and the overall level of knowledge of managers will be used. While SCM (Subjective Crisis Management) is more concerned with the personality sphere of respondents, it will be reasonable to use minimally invasive interval estimates, which are designed to determine the level of acceptance of selected claims in the field of communication in crisis situations, e.g. due to the semantic differential scale. In this way, the effect of reality deceiving will be limited.

In the final phase of the diagnostic field construction, the OCM and SCM dimensions will be combined with each other by converting both indicators into percentages. Next, using the medium (M), the following company models will be separated:

- Crisis management leader: OCM > M and SCM > M
- unaware of the potential: OCM > M and SCM < M
- vain smarty: OCM < M and SCM > M
- crisis illiterate: OCM < M and SCM < M

Primary research will be based on the relative average rate. Based on the obtained results, the tool will be calibrated towards the application of the diagnostic manual, which the companies will be able to use in their market environment. Thanks to it, it will be possible to analyse individual case studies, which in turn will allow to classify a specific company to standard intervals within four models of the diagnostic field. The results from the first edition of the research will allow to prepare scenarios for expert panels with leading communication strategy experts in Poland. Based on their experience, analytical weights for individual components of the matrix axes will be developed. In this way, lists of key and additional tasks will be created as part of the preparation for managing crisis situations. The diagnostic manual will allow us to objectify the results regardless of how other companies in the industry or similar specifications will perform in the measurements. Meanwhile, the average-based calculation model will be able to be used in *benchmarking* research.

Objective Crisis Management

¹⁹ The first edition of the research should be started among companies that should at least theoretically be oriented to crisis management processes.

The actual state of the company's preparation for the occurrence of a crisis situation can be measured by means of the knowledge test of managers and the verification of the operationalized preventive list in the context of *crisis management*. In the preventive sphere, each company tested will be checked for the presence or absence of the most important strategic processes affecting the quality of preparation for a possible crisis in the unit of time adopted for the needs of the study, e.g. the last three years. Verifiers will be the following set of questions, which will be adapted to the needs of the study and the target group:

- Does the company have procedures for reacting in a crisis situation?
- Was there an audit of existing procedures regarding preparation and reacting in the image crisis?
- Have the procedures been brought to the attention of the staff, for example during working meetings?
- Are there any other necessary procedures describing the flow of information in the organisation?
- Does the company have an anti-crisis board with a fixed composition?
- Does it involve a member of the management board or a person authorised to make decisions on behalf of the management board?
- What is the construction diagram of the crisis board in your company (internal, external, hybrid)?
- Is a crisis management plan developed (*crisis manual*)?
- Is there a crisis management plan on the internet (in a situation where the company is present in the network or when it is particularly vulnerable to hate)?
- Are there involved entities, the so-called list of allies and enemies?
- Is there an anti-crisis training system for the management (management, senior management, crisis board, spokesman)?
- Is there a communication training system for the executive team?
- Is there a well-established model for maintaining media relations (holding statements, declarations, Q&A)?
- Have crisis simulations been or are being carried out in the company?
- Has a rapid alert system been developed (e.g. diagnosis of symptoms)?
- Does the company constantly monitor the media (have keywords been established that can capture the symptoms of crisis situations)?

- Does the company have any crisis experience, i.e. at least one situation has been recorded in the company's recent history (specification of the time period) that endangered its image or even the stability of its functioning?
 - ✓ presentation of the adopted definition of crisis to the respondent, to set one direction for the entire measurement in the sample
 - ✓ based on the definition adopted, please specify how many communicational crisis situations have occurred in the last three years of the company's operations on the market?
 - ✓ when did the last image crisis take place (attempt to fix the exact date)?
 - ✓ have any positive effects of the last crisis been observed?
- Does the company have a public relations cell or a dedicated crisis situations manager?
- Is there a spokesperson with knowledge in the field of crisis management?
- Did anyone conduct image research or other research to measure public relations effects, e.g. communication audits?

In the final survey questionnaire, each of the above dimensions defining the actual state of preparation of the company should be subject to development and appropriate adaptation to the content of the study, as well as to the specifics of the company. The initial measurement assumption assumes the implementation of a block of questions with three separate categories of answers: “Yes”, “No” and “I’m not sure”. The use of such standardization will enable the implementation of appropriate calculations that will allow to illustrate the actual state of the company's preparation for the occurrence of a crisis situation in the form of points. This is one of the first steps in extracting the diagnostic field segments. It is assumed that all elements of the crisis methodology are equivalent and influence the decision-making processes in terms of management. The methodology described in this article is aimed at identifying and determining the strength of the impact of individual elements, which ultimately may translate into changes in the assessment of their impact on these processes. In the crisis management research carried out in the largest Polish enterprises (according to “Rzeczpospolita” ranking) realised by the Public Relations Department of the University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszów in 2007 and 2010, comparable interest was recorded in the area of the presence of fundamental elements of the *crisis management*, which justifies the mechanism of giving equal importance to individual elements in the assessment.

The preventive dimension based on the actual state of preparing the company for crisis situations can be enriched with the result of the test of knowledge of the managers under

examination in terms of broadly understood *crisis management*. It will be advisable to check the objective knowledge of the crisis among PRs. To achieve this, it is advisable to apply a test consisting of general questions with one correct answer.

This is a new concept in the approach to measuring *crisis management*, which works well in other areas, such as finance or economics. It is necessary to develop a set of test questions that will allow to verify the level of knowledge of managers in a reliable way. For this purpose, in addition to analysing the literature on the subject, it will be important to conduct interviews with communication management practitioners in crisis situations. The implementation of desk research technique and IDI interviews (Individual In-depth Interview) will allow us to optimise the measurement and develop a tool that, despite the thematic sensitivity, will contribute to the implementation of the research objectives set.

The knowledge test issues should touch key elements of communication strategies during image crises. Examples of issues are: preparation for a possible crisis, possible strategies for action, types of crisis situations, cooperation with the media, identification of individual phases in the image-crisis cycle. It seems interesting to check whether individual groups of positions responsible for communication processes during crises in companies differ in their level of knowledge, e.g. press spokespersons (group 1), dedicated managers of crisis situations (group 2), communication specialists (group 3). Additionally, it will be possible to check if there is a correlation between the result obtained in the block of preventive questions and the test of knowledge of managers, together with determining the direction of its impact.

The summary result of the knowledge test and the collective score from the preventive list will allow us to design a meter that will use the percentage to express the state of actual preparation in the event of a crisis situation (OCM). In further analyses, the average measure will be used, which will allow to distinguish well-prepared companies ($> M$) and those prepared to a lesser extent for the occurrence of a possible crisis ($< M$). In this way, the first dimension of the diagnostic field will be created, responsible for assigning the surveyed companies along the vertical axis of the matrix.

Subjective Crisis Management

The subjective level of preparation of the company in the event of a crisis situation (SCM) within the diagnostic field is measured by the opinion of managers on a series of claims based on a 5-point Likert scale (declared state). Dispersion in the degree of acceptance of individual claims is a factor classifying the examined companies on the horizontal axis of the diagnostic field. For this purpose, a similar mechanism is used as for OCM, based on the average value

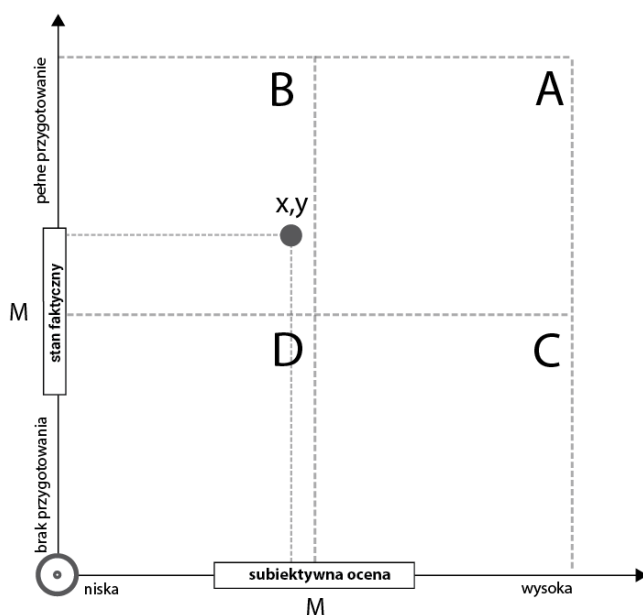
grouping the examined units to one of the two planes (more or less subdued assessments). The task of the respondents is therefore subjective description of:

- general level of preparation of the company for the occurrence of the crisis, along with the assessment of its own management actions (tendency to overconfidence)
- the degree of crisis resilience (image crisis, estimated probability of crisis, analysis of potential changes in the organisation)
- the strength of current internal procedures
- needs for crisis management from the company's point of view
- experience of the team responsible for public relations activities
- undertaken actions in the field of anti-crisis prevention
- the degree of readiness to take appropriate measures to normalize the situation
- frequency of updating crisis documentation.

The SCM indicator is calculated on the basis of the total management declaration, which is located on the horizontal axis of the diagnostic field.

Visualization of the diagnostic field

The model of the diagnostic field is described by four squares, each of which is an expression of the relation of the subjective assessment of managers in the organisation's preparation for a crisis situation to the actual state, whose measurement is determined by the indicator. For ease of interpretation, mean values (M) will be calculated on the basis of a standardised percentage (Figure 2).



Brak przygotowania – lack of preparation

Pełne przygotowanie – fully prepared

Stan faktyczny – actual state

Niska – low

Wysoka – high

Subiektywna ocena – subjective assessment

Fig. 2. Diagnostic field model (MPD)

Source: own development

The individual fields in the above model determine the relative limit of the impact of the four segments. They are described in the following way:

A - crisis management leader: organisation with high competences, as well as high self-awareness in this area. Self-esteem is not a result of erroneous belief, but it is the result of many years of work and self-evaluation of undertaken activities. It is an ideal model to which companies should strive to improve the quality of communication processes in the event of crisis situations.

B - unaware of the potential: organisation that, on the one hand, has the potential visible in the actual anti-crisis preparation, but lack of awareness may impact possible coping in a crisis situation.

C - vain smarty: self-confident organisation, which results only from high self-esteem, but does not translate into actual state. Managers seem to be well prepared in the event of a crisis, but this preparation after the analysis and assessment of the actual state turns out to be only declarative.

D - crisis illiterate: organisation whose managers are not aware of the risks, but are also not prepared for such crisis threats. They simply await a problem, which can lead to disastrous consequences. In the field of impact of this field, there is a relatively highest risk of finding a state of permanent crisis.

Graphical separation of segments is a helpful reflection of the initial situation for the studied market area. Each square of the diagnostic field will be verified in terms of the frequency of key tools for crisis management, such as: the presence of a crisis staff, documentation, e.g. model statements, procedures or, finally, a crisis manual. An important element during profiling will be the question of the crisis experience possessed by target groups. It will be estimated on the basis of managers' declarations regarding whether the company has recently undergone a crisis and by including the levels of crisis vulnerability (Table 1). The key in this case is to follow one standard definition of a crisis situation in the organisation.

The diagnostic fields will also be able to be used by public relations agencies when working with an individual client. The application of previously separated indicators will allow to classify the company in the scope of the impact of one of the available fields (the point of intersection of axis “y” and axis “x”). However, it should be remembered that using the field for the company's needs will be possible after calibrating the tool in the course of expert research. It is also necessary to conduct several editions of quantitative research that will verify the methodological protocol described in the article.

Direction for further analyses

Having calculated OCM and SCM values, it becomes possible to characterise four separate segments for interesting differentiating factors in individual groups. At the beginning, it is worth focusing on the issue of the oppressiveness of the industry by checking whether, together with the vulnerability to a crisis, the affiliation to individual segments changes significantly. The oppressive industry should be understood as one in which the entities that create it are particularly exposed to image crisis situations, and at the same time their vulnerability to the crisis and the frequency of its occurrence increase. An important role in this respect is played by the selection of a research operational, which must be exhaustible and available for the study. In a similar trend, the analysed market can be divided into smaller sectors, e.g. private and public, SMEs and corporations, Polish and foreign companies.

Bearing in mind the classification due to PKD, many industries can be distinguished that meet the conditions described in the definition of the oppressive industry. These are such industries as: food, mining, construction, transport, automotive, development, fuel, energy, chemical, pharmacological, railway, telecommunications, financial, insurance, FMCG, and road infrastructure. Oppressive industries are characterised by vulnerability to image crisis situations, ease in their absorption, susceptibility to further crises. The oppressive industries are mainly those that touch areas where there are a number of individual clients on the other side, each of whom may otherwise perceive services provided by a given economic entity. It is also such industries where the probability of errors, breakdowns or problems in the use of produced goods increases due to the scale of production.

Entities operating in oppressive industries are usually more often exposed to the possibility of crisis situations. Such companies should be aware of this fact and be prepared for image-related problems. Companies operating in oppressive industries may themselves provoke crises by their actions, therefore the preparation should be included in their standard management tasks. For this reason, the first edition of the study will aim at capturing the

relationships characteristic of selected oppressive industries with reference to the reference group (with lower crisis vulnerability).

Summary

Appropriate preparation, appropriate messages during the crisis to established stakeholder groups, as well as post-crisis activities are the three main areas of professional management that affect two sensitive areas of the company, such as image and reputation. Actual preparation sometimes deviates from the declared state, which may cause increased susceptibility of the company and lower the strength of the immune system that the given entity has. The gap between real and declared preparation should be as small as possible, with a high rate of assessment of this preparation. Only then will it be possible to recognise the company as being safe or one that professionally implements image protection activities.

In order to be effective in crisis and anti-crisis management, it is necessary to achieve compliance in the real state and state declared by the managers dealing with prevention and response. If there is a big discrepancy between these two states, it is really bad from the company's point of view, because the greater the threat, the more ignorance of the people responsible for building the image and reputation.

Presented diagnostic field model can be successfully used in the audit of an organisation or a company in the context of crisis management. It indicates critical areas, i.e. those that need to be repaired, which may lead to the capture of symptoms of potential crisis situations or, when a possible crisis comes, to minimise its effects. Additionally, the use of this tool will contribute to the deepening of knowledge resources in the context of the broadly understood *crisis management*.

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