THE ROLE OF CRISIS PREVENTION FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BIGGEST POLISH COMPANIES AND PUBLIC RELATIONS AGENCIES ON THE BASIS OF EXPERT RESEARCH

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Summary

The article constitutes a presentation of the results of research devoted to the current trends in crisis PR. The authors of the work made an attempt to diagnose crisis prevention in a cross-section of two dimensions. On the one hand the perspective of business (survey of companies) was presented and on the other hand experts' opinions (survey of the leaders of public relations agencies) were shown. As a result of analyses a point model of an immune system, which takes into consideration the key instruments of crisis methodology (developed procedures in form of communication management book, dedicated anti-crisis structures in an organization, crisis team with a fixed membership and a system of communication trainings) was designed. Diagnosis of prevention measures of the leaders of Polish business — based on the years 2007–2017 showed major deficiencies in the degree of companies' preparation for the risk of crisis.

Keywords: public relations, crisis management, branch oppressiveness, preventive attributes, analytical model

Introduction

In the contemporary world the term "crisis" is used very often in various forms and repeated many times by company managements and employees. The crisis affects in general all spheres of business activity, people, local government workers, politicians. All those who act in public encounter problems which may turn into a crisis situation. However, crisis is not a term strictly limited to company's image. It is very spacious. Crisis situation is a period in which due to an occurring event, or events efficient implementation of mission and assumed goals of an organization, brand, or public person[1] is endangered. It is necessary to note than in the first place the term is associated with economy and more precisely, with its macroeconomic area. When the concept of crisis comes up, it immediately brings to mind associations with a global crisis, with market, or production collapse, with growing unemployment, inflation, the weakening of other, less important parameters, but of an economic character. The concept of "image crisis" has ties to both the sphere of management and the functioning of societies, as well as social communication. Problems of an economic nature in companies are sources of image crises, which in turn lead to the loss of trust of the environment. As a result, crises emerge, where one of the components is communication with entities from this environment[2]. Crisis may concern also the personal sphere and it is associated with the professional, or personal problems of a human.

In case of companies and the structure in which they are organized it is possible to find a few areas particularly prone to the risk of crisis situation. These are: finances, personnel, production, research-development works, but also image which is a kind of a bracket containing all other areas associated with company management. Image crisis affects a delicate matter which is image and internal relations, as well as relations with entities outside the internal structures of organizations[3].

To make it possible to understand the differences occurring between the definitions of crisis situations, various models of classification have been created. They consist of a series of dimensions among which there are: internal, external, intentional (intended) and unintentional (unintended) dimension. Internal dimension means the occurrence of a

crisis within the structures of a company. At the same time external dimension means that factors concentrated outside of an organization led to the emergence of problems. The second dimension refers to how a crisis situation emerged, whether it was caused deliberately, or whether the company cannot be blamed[4].

In a company there may be intended events, which involve the activity of employees who for various reasons take actions unfavourable for a company that they work for. This can arise directly from the will to harm a company, or is a typically random event, which comes from an employee's lack of knowledge or skills. Mistakes can also be attributed to particular products without the contribution of a human factor. The public opinion seems more willing to accept crises caused by natural forces, than those caused by the human factor. This comes from the fact that an organization has low control, or no control over the forces of nature[5].

Image problems may also arise from the will to hide undesirable actions, which are harmful for a company. The course of a crisis can be particularly problematic for a company when meticulously hidden facts come to light. To make sure that the course of a crisis situation is correct, it is necessary to follow the adopted procedures. In such situations, when crisis grows to an external size and goes outside the walls of a given entity and when it arises from the fault of a company, or its employees, a reasonable solution is to consider admitting guilt and taking remedial measures, which will prevent the escalation of problems.

In order to efficiently manage a crisis situation, it is necessary to be prepared well for it. However, it is obvious that it is not possible to be always prepared and to be prepared for all crisis situations, but nevertheless the process of preparation contributes to working out abilities necessary for reacting as soon as a crisis situation emerges. Preparation is a kind of insurance of a company against unfavourable events. It gives comfort of work and secures stability even in times of small turbulences. Preparation dressed in a set of procedures gives stability of management, similarly as in the cockpit of an airplane procedures contribute to appropriate approach to take-off and landing, or to navigation during flight.

Procedures in the process of managing a crisis situation of an image-related character can be divided into sequences, which are separated by

milestones. The first sequence assumes the identification of a crisis, finding out what has happened in a company and ends with transition to the stage of solving a problem. Lack of procedures means lack of control over what's going on, that's why it is so important to also take into consideration the third sequence, which involves monitoring events and further appearing information concerning the problem which has been generated around the image of a company. The second sequence — problem solving — is a transition from identification to such control over the course of events that makes it possible to conclude that a company is taking control over particular components of a crisis. This sequence assumes precise management with an optimum control over what's happening around a company, but we can also talk about imprecise management, which takes into consideration both the option of proper control and its limited character.

Everything that's happening around a company depends on many dependent and independent parameters, however, preparation always has an impact on the fact that the effect may be definitely more favourable than in case of lack of preparation and securing appropriate procedures. Another sequence of actions in the procedures of crisis situation management assumes extinguishing activities, which aim at returning to the rhythm from before the start of the crisis. Finally, the last sequence assumes the introduction of security measures which will help a company prepare for another hard situation. Unfortunately, this is a sequence of events often ignored by managers managing companies, who assume that if the media are not reporting on a company, the crisis has already been solved.

The surveys presented in the article conducted on the biggest Polish companies show that it is still needed to continuously educated Polish business in terms of the habits concerning the utilization of the prepared methods and techniques which can support solving further image crises. The awareness of managers is still limited in many cases to the conviction that you can deal with a crisis as soon as it comes. By ignoring the threat they expose themselves to the same risk as a person who buys a new car and doesn't purchase insurance against theft hoping that nobody will steal their car.

The results of surveys presented in this article are another of many actions which are based on the foundations of the issues of crisis education. The article presents the approach of companies from "Lista 500" (Top 500) of the Rzeczpospolita daily and PR agencies in the context

of building a system of immunity to crisis situation in communication. The main hypothesis assumes deficiencies in preparation of the biggest Polish companies to image-related situations in communication.

## Cyclical diagnostic surveys measuring the level of preparation of Polish business leaders to crisis management

Over the last decade (2007–2017) three editions of quantitative surveys on the biggest Polish companies from the top-500 ranking "Lista 500"[6]. prepared by Rzeczpospolita daily were carried out. Full statistical analysis of these projects can be found in the work titled "Zarządzanie kryzysem w polskich przedsiębiorstwach. Podsumowanie 10 lat badań nad kryzysami" (Crisis management in Polish companies. A summary of 10 years of research on crises). Additionally, the data collected in 2007, 2010 and 2017 can be used to design a comprehensive crisis management model, which relies on indicators which can be compared in time and its coverage is limited only to "unique records". What has been recognized as one of such records are interviews, which provide information about the most current diagnosis of the situation in a given company, while at the same time duplicates are rejected and data deficiencies are eliminated. For example, if a given company took part both in the 2017 and 2010 edition, in our model only the most up-to-date responses given in a communication audit — edition 2017 — were taken into consideration. This way 416 fully valuable component models were distinguished and their analysis constitutes the subject of the methodological part of this work.

As a result of search for planes of interpretation which affect the level of preparation for fighting image crisis, it is possible to distinguish four factors which substantially differentiate the presence of key prevention attributes in the surveyed sample (Picture 1):

- level of employment (number of employees in a company),
- main activity on the market (technological orientation),
- crisis experiences (whether a company experienced a serious image crisis — a crisis seriously threatening its functioning — in the year preceding the survey),

- oppressive character of the branch[8] (in the context of the potential for emergence of crises means the risk of susceptibility to crisis and the frequency of its occurrence).

Picture 1. **Distribution of the frequencies of important factors determining the processes of crisis management among the biggest Polish companies distinguished from 416 unique models — profile of the sample (in %)**
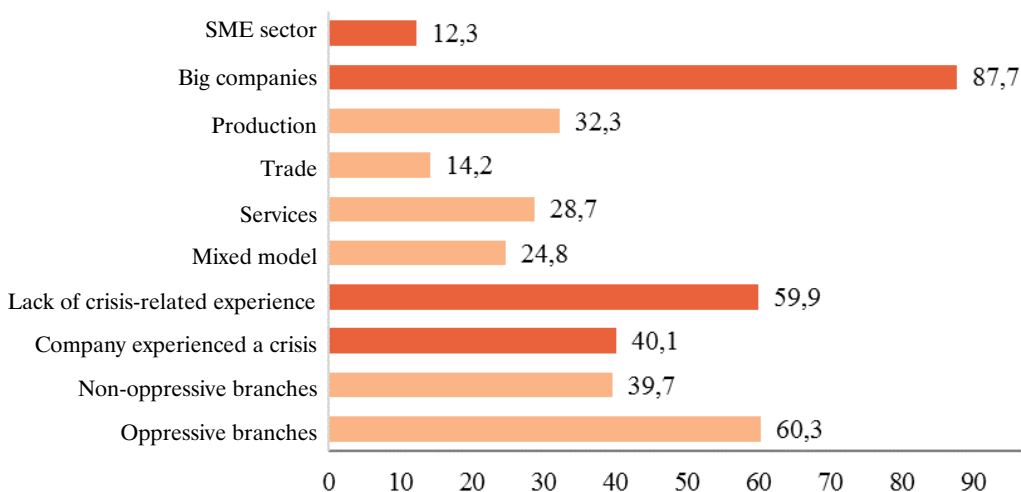
Source: own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from cyclical surveys concerning crisis management in the biggest Polish companies.

The size of a company and the kind of its business activity are typically metric variables, which fit into the demographic area. Among the surveyed companies big companies employing at least 250 people were dominant (88%). This state of affairs results from the choice of the research sample and the attempt to create an image of crisis prevention in main companies in the Polish economy. For this reason the SME sector was a less often represented segment of the market — 12%. The comparably biggest groups were manufacturing companies (32%) and service providers (29%), while traders constituted 14%.

Contact with image crises is a statistical parameter which it is hard to measure. In our research we used the measurement of crisis experiences looking from the perspective of the period of a year preceding the time of interviews with the biggest Polish companies

(2006, 2009 and 2016). If in these years these companies experienced a crisis, they qualified for the layer with crisis experiences (40%). In the opposite case they qualified for the referential layer (without a serious image crisis) — 60%.

Diversification with regard to the oppressiveness of a branch was carried out on the basis of previous qualitative-quantitative projects of the research team of Exacto and information obtained in course of analyses of the community of public relations professionals (e.g. expert panels). The conglomerate of obtained data (Top of Mind research, spontaneous and assisted awareness, tree of oppressiveness, sector risk) makes it possible to distinguish 12 branches characterized by a higher level of susceptibility to the occurrence of crisis situations in communication (picture 2). Next, by rooting the list of oppressiveness leaders in unique models we receive a new interpretation factor with two polar categories. The surveyed companies in 60% of cases operated in oppressive branches, while the remaining part — at least theoretically — is to a lower degree at risk of emergence of image crises.

Picture 2. **Ranking of the leaders of oppressiveness**

Source: own materials prepared on the basis of surveys on companies' susceptibility to crisis.

Companies functioning on the scale of oppressive branches more often have to face public accusations coming from the Internet. Such a problem was reported by on average every third surveyed company from the layer. Oppressiveness also leads to greater problems with the quality of products, or services (30%) and mistakes and crimes of employees (22%). External crises are yet another aspect of threats which severely tests companies from the above 12 sectors of the market. This concerns mainly conflicts with non-governmental organizations and interest groups (15%), as well as authority on various levels (8%). Oppressive branches also have more problems with consumers (6%), as they are connected mainly to areas in which on the other side there are individual clients and each of them may perceive the services provided by business entities differently. At the same time, around non-oppressive branches more crises associated with catastrophes, breakdowns, or accidents (34%), as well as events caused by business partners (30%) are generated. Precise distribution of percentages is presented in the following table, which takes into consideration multiple answers (table 1).

Table 1. **Image crises in the biggest Polish companies in 2007–2017**

Kinds of crises among companies from Lista 500	Oppressive branches	Non-oppressive branches
Public accusations, rumours, hate, attacks on the Internet	32.1%	23.0%
Problems with the quality of products and/or services	30.2%	23.0%
Catastrophes, breakdowns, accidents	22.6%	34.4%
Problems caused by business partners (suppliers, dealers etc.)	22.6%	29.5%
Mistakes, or crimes of employees and/or managers	21.7%	14.8%
Conflict with non-governmental organizations, or other interest groups	15.1%	9.8%
Conflict with competition	14.2%	13.1%
Internal conflicts and/or bad internal communication	11.3%	11.5%
Company's bad financial situation, restructuring, recovery programmes, organizational change	7.5%	4.9%
Unfavourable decisions, or actions of authorities (administration, regulators, supervisors, political authorities)	7.5%	1.6%
Incorrect utilization of products and/or services by consumers	5.7%	1.6%
Crime (e.g. assaults, blackmail, terrorism)	1.9%	1.6%

Source: own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from cyclical surveys devoted to crisis management in the biggest Polish companies titled: *Zarządzanie kryzysem w polskich przedsiębiorstwach. Podsumowanie 10 lat badań nad kryzysami* (Crisis managent in Polish companies. A summary of 10 years of research on crises)

Big companies more often declared that they have a prepared crisis manual in form of a system of implementation procedures, than companies from the SME sector (table 2). Analysis of the companies' business profile shows that in terms of the presence of procedures manufacturing companies are better prepared than service provider. What also turned out to be important in this respect is the oppressiveness of a branch, as higher risk of crisis generation determines the necessity to prepare a crisis book (87%, compared to 77% in the non-oppressive group).

Among big companies running manufacturing operations with crisis experience and operating within oppressive branches a higher percentage of responses pointing to the presence of a crisis team with fixed members was diagnosed. In each of the above categories over 3/5 positive responses were recorded, which shows the level of communication competences. However, establishing a crisis team, in comparison with the implementation aspect of procedures, is a marginalized process in the cross-section of the whole analytical model (59% of companies have a crisis team, while 83% have prepared procedures). This state of affairs may be a source of concern in the context of crisis-related security of crucial companies representing the Polish economy.

Table 2. **The presence of key elements of crisis prevention depending on company's profile (n = 416)**[9]

Interpretation factor		Procedures		Crisis team		Trainings in communication	
		%	p	%	p	%	p
Company's size	SME sector	72.0	0.035	46.0	0.049	34.0	0.014
	Big companies	84.1		60.1		52.5	
Main business activity	Production	87.6	0.001	66.7	0.031	57.4	0.018
	Trade	63.2		49.1		35.1	
	Services	87.0		53.0		53.0	
Crisis experiences	Lack of experience	81.5	0.352	54.2	0.013	45.4	0.008
	Company experienced a crisis	85.0		66.5		58.7	
Opressiveness of a branch	Non-oppressive branches	77.0	0.009	52.1	0.018	44.8	0.052
	Oppressive branches	86.9		63.7		54.6	
	Total	82.6		58.8		50.3	

Source: Own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from cyclical research devoted to crisis management in the biggest Polish companies titled: *Zarządzanie kryzysem w polskich przedsiębiorstwach. Podsumowanie 10 lat badań nad kryzysami.*

The results of the surveyed entities are even weaker with regard to organization of communication trainings for managers, which means closing yourself to efficient management of potential crisis communication (practical aspect). Only every second company in its prepared model invests in training mechanisms. Big companies focused on managing production, which have negative crisis experiences (learning from own mistakes) comparably more often take action in this area. Each of the above three factors substantially differentiated the frequency of organizing communication trainings ($p < 0.05$).

Analysis of the time of functioning of the surveyed companies on the market reveals significant changes in the likelihood of having anti-crisis procedures. Generally, every successive year raises the chance for the presence of crisis documentation by 1.8% (the result of the quotient of chances of logistic regression)[10]. In case of a crisis team and communication trainings no correlation with the time of the company's establishment was observed ($r > 0.05$)[11].

Anti-crisis structure as a shield protecting against an image crisis

Surveys conducted among the biggest Polish companies provide information in the context of qualitative division of the structure of positions, which is responsible for the communication processes of their organizations. Crisis competences are directly linked to human capital that a given company, or institution has. This is about the presence of specialists who are responsible for company's communication with its environment (dedicated manager, spokesman, or a whole public relations unit). What is also significant in this respect is cooperation with external experts, or with public relations agencies specialized in crisis management. Our surveys were supposed to verify the level of the structure of positions associated with communication among the leaders of Polish economy.

Table 3. **Anti-crisis structure in the cross-section of positions, according to the profile of the company (n = 416)**[12]

Interpretation factors		Public relations unit		Spokes-person		Communication manager	
		%	p	%	p	%	p
Company's size	SME's	32.0	0.077	14.0	0.033	4.0	0.129
	Big companies	45.3		28.2		10.9	
Main activity	Production	42.6	0.583	24.0	0.141	10.9	0.875
	Trade	40.4		15.8		8.8	
	Services	47.8		29.6		11,3	
Crisis-related experiences	Lack of experience	34.5	0.001	22.1	0.028	8.8	0.220
	Company experienced a crisis	56.3		31.7		12.6	
Oppressiveness of the branch	Non-oppressive branches	36.4	0.021	20.0	0.025	8.5	0.315
	Oppressive branches	47.8		29.8		11.6	
Total		43.6		26.5		10.0	

Source: own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from cyclical surveys devoted to crisis management in the biggest Polish companies titled: *Zarządzanie kryzysem w polskich przedsiębiorstwach. Podsumowanie 10 lat badań nad kryzysami.*

Analyses reveal an image of companies which approach the issue of creating an appropriate structure of positions in a selective way at various levels of engagement. It is worth pointing out here that this concerns key positions, which in case of emergence of crisis situation in communication have to play the role of a bullet-proof vest protecting strategic organizational areas of the employer. Merely almost 4% of companies declared they have a full set of communication positions, while 37.5% of responses revealed companies had no such positions at all. At the same time 62.5% of the sample has at least one of the considered structures.

Comparably best situation has been observed in case of the dedicated public relations unit. Such a team operated in more than 2/5 of the surveyed companies. The factors that encourage companies to establish such units are above all experiences related to crises (56%) and functioning in the model of oppressive branches (48%). On average every fourth company has a spokesperson who has knowledge from the area of crisis management. Once again the threat of an image crisis determines the managements' decisions to hire such people. The percentage of

positive responses was the highest in the group of companies which in the past were affected by image-related turbulences (32%) and among oppressive branches (30%). What turned out to be an important element in the context of possession of the resource of knowledge — such as a spokesperson — was also the size of a company. In big companies such positions function twice more often than in the SME sector.

The biggest Polish companies very rarely decide to cooperate with a dedicated communication manager. On the basis of an indicator built this way only 10% of companies can be recognized as the elite of Polish economy in terms of crisis resistance. An expert position of this kind is a practical and at the same time a hard piece of evidence for a systemic approach in crisis communication management. What is also important is the centralization of competences, which is concentrated in the hands of a dedicated person. The work of a manager is a guarantee of coordinated activities, which raise the efficiency of communication processes in an organization. What needs to be emphasized is that comparably most often managers find work in companies which have already experienced serious image crises (13%).

### Immune system model in the context of crisis management

In course of analyses four key dimensions of crisis prevention were used. They have been combined into a collective point model (the instruments that companies have at their disposal):

- crisis manual — 82.6%,
- anticrisis structure — 62.5%,
- crisis team — 58.8%,
- communication trainings — 50.3%.

It assumes values between 0 and 4, where for every possessed element a company could receive a bonus in form of one point. The assumption of interpretation is that professional preparation is reflected by higher values. The average for the whole sample amounted to 2.55. The result can be presented by means of a percentage value, which makes it possible

to conclude that the quality of the immune system of the biggest Polish companies is around the level of 64%. The observed deficiencies in preparation give rationale for the confirmation of the main hypothesis, which assumes insufficient level of preparation of the biggest companies (flagships of the Polish economy) for crisis management. This is particularly visible in the SME sector and in the layer of companies specialized in trade.

Picture 3. **Point model of the immune system of surveyed companies (the higher the value on a scale of 0–4, the better the quality of prevention)**
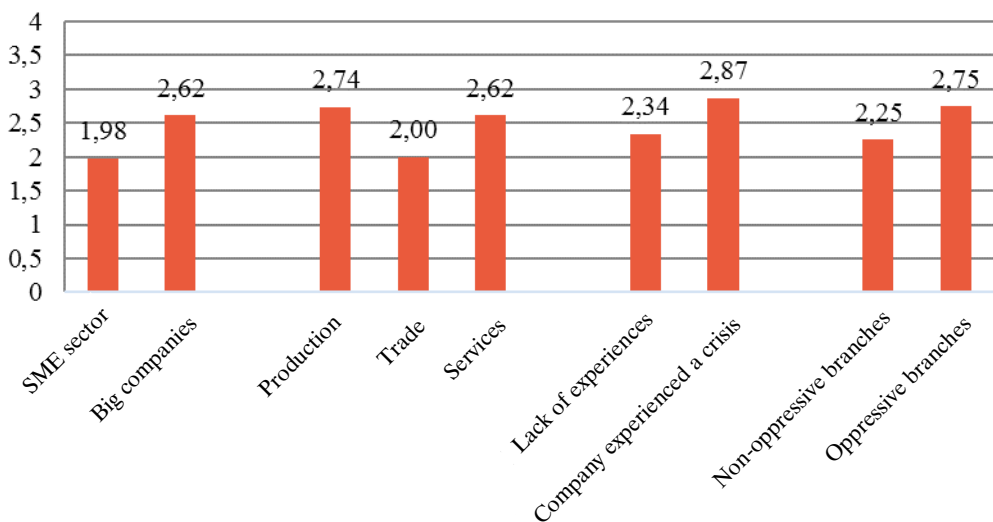
Source: Own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from cyclical surveys devoted to crisis management in the biggest Polish companies.

The designed point model has been verified in terms of interpretation factors discussed in the article. Significant statistical relationships have been found, as better quality of crisis prevention characterized:

- big companies with at least 250 employees (p = 0.001). Additionally, the SME sector is the only out of distinguished analytical layers, where the value of averages dropped below 2.00;
- companies focused on production (average 2.74). A slightly worse result was found in companies providing services (2.62), while

companies dealing with trade were far from the standards present in the remaining sectors — 2.00 (p = 0.003);
- entities which in the past had to cope with a harmful image crisis (p < 0.001) and companies at risk of oppressiveness (p < 0.001).

In the context of a diagnosis of the preventive measures taken by the leaders of Polish business (from the years 2007–2017) it is disturbing that up to 7% of the surveyed companies don't have any element from a designed immune system. At the same time 15% have only one of the tested components of the protective shield. This means completely passive approach in the context of basic activities aimed at creating any anti-crisis shield. Managing a company in such a way is risky, as in the current reality we can't ask ourselves the question whether we will experience a crisis at all, but it is more justified to ask the question when the crisis will arrive. That's why it is so important to appropriately prepare and predict the potential sources and consequences of a crisis. Crisis communication specialists agree and emphasize in unison that every business, or public organization has already experienced, is experiencing, or will experience an image crisis. This arises from the very nature of operations conducted in public (Łaszyn, 2017). That's why 27% of our sample deserve praise, as these are entities with a well-formed immune system, as suggested by the presence of a full spectrum of instruments of prevention.

Priority elements of crisis prevention — voice of public relations agencies

The scale of activity from the area of crisis preparation among the biggest companies, presented above, has revealed deficiencies in the competences of Polish business from the top-500 list of the Rzeczpospolita daily. Companies very often have appropriate documentation and theoretical mechanisms in the manners of applying procedures, but without the practical element they are unable to react appropriately, when a crisis actually hits them (trainings, audits, monitoring, specialist structure of positions). The gap between theory and practice in the context of raising competences is too big and for this reason it is hard to take accurate strategic decisions. Companies'

activities are often the effect of bad experiences related to undergoing crises, which is learning from own mistakes. It is necessary to remember that "learning in combat" is the most expensive and the most painful way of reaching anti-crisis readiness and efficiency in a company.

Surveys conducted among Polish public relations agencies[13] suggest that clients come for support in the area of crisis management too late. Only 7% of the respondents concluded that the dominant trend is a situation, when a company wants to cooperate with an agency to appropriately prepare for the risk of emergence of a crisis and to work out an optimum prevention system. In light of the above, actions following the rule that it is better to prevent than to treat, is a rarely used strategy of activity on the market of public relations services. Definitely more often cooperation with entities specialized in crisis management fits in the framework of implementation of impromptu solutions (improvised management of an existing crisis and extinguishing a crisis) — 44%. What is also worrying is very high percentage of responses pointing to cooperation which has been forced by severe consequences of image crises. Up to 32% of the surveyed agencies concluded that companies mainly ask for help in working out a protection system under influence of the negative effects of experienced crises (hindsight is 20/20). The remaining 17% of respondents don't notice a common denominator in the actions of companies looking for crisis-related support.

Leaders of public relations agencies in Poland have created a ranking of attributes, which shows clearly that communication trainings for the management and a prepared book of crisis communication management are two key planes of crisis prevention. The advantage of these elements over the rest of the instruments of crisis methodology is very clear, as over 3/5 of observations concerned both the trainings of managers (62.3%), as well as the presence of a crisis manual (61.8%). Communication audit was among top three attributes (46.6%) and right behind it there was a crisis team (43.6%). On average every third respondent emphasized also the necessity to predict crises (monitoring, assessment of events on the Internet, identification of symptoms) and investing in communication trainings for lower-rank managers. At the same time 1/5 of responses concerned cooperation with public relations agencies and building a model of managing relations with the media.

What also plays an important role is the experience from past crises — learning from own mistakes (20%). The remaining elements were named comparably less often (table 4).

Table 4. **Priority attributes which help prepare for crisis on the basis of the experiences of public relations agencies (multiple responses)**

What in your opinion are the most important elements of the implementation of crisis prevention in companies which want to properly prepare for the risk of emergence of a crisis?	Percent of observations
Crisis communication trainings for managers	62.3%
Crisis manual	61.8%
Audit of existing procedures	46.6%
Anti-crisis team with fixed members	43.6%
System of early warning about the symptoms of a crisis, e.g. media monitoring, assessment of events on the Internet	38.2%
Communication trainings for employees	31.4%
The position of a press spokesman	28.4%
Model of handling relations with the media (holding statement, declarations, Q&A)	27.0%
Using external support, that is, agencies, or experts specialized in crisis management	26.5%
Crisis experience (that is, when a company has already experienced an image crisis)	20.1%
Dedicated unit for public relations	17.6%
Working meetings with employees	14.2%
Dedicated manager for crisis management	13.2%
Image surveys among clients	8.3%
Surveys in the area of communication processes among employees	7.4%
Identified engaged entities (list of allies and enemies)	5.9%

Source: own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from a survey of public relations agencies 2018.

According to the surveyed PR experts, there is a strong correlation between preparation, predicting and avoiding image crises (picture 4).

The distribution of answers forms a system which can serve as a good basis for the intensification of actions in crisis PR in terms of preparation, as it gives effects in the area of predicting threats, which leads to raising the chance for avoiding crisis situations in communication. PR specialists

Picture 4. Key dimensions of crisis management, according to the leaders of public relations agencies in Poland (n = 204, M — symbol of average, r — symbol of the coefficient of correlation, significance p < 0.001)

On the basis of own professional experience, please assess to what extent – by means of the following 0 to 10 scale – it is possible to...		Statistics	M_{prep}	M_{pred}	M_{avoid}
It isn't possible	prepare an organization for the risk of occurrence of most image-related crisis situations? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10	It is fully possible	M_{prep} = 7.50	1	r = 0.553	r = 0.305
	predict the occurrence of most image-related crisis situations in an organization? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		M_{pred} = 6.96	r = 0.553	1	r = 0.370
	avoid the occurrence of most image-related crisis situations in an organization? 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10		M_{avoid} = 5.99	r = 0.305	r = 0.370	1

Source: own materials prepared on the basis of quantitative data from
a survey of public relations agencies 2018.

have concluded that the scope of public relations activities makes it possible in majority of cases to prepare an organization for the risk of a crisis threat (75%) in a complex way. What seems to be a slightly harder task is predicting (70%) and avoiding image crises (60%).

Summary

The sum of conducted analyses has shown that it is impossible to put an equals sign between the expected and the real state in the context of companies' crisis prevention. Image gap results mainly from problems with implementation and utilization of practical prevention tools by the surveyed companies over the past decade. Marginalization of the practical aspect brings with it a very high risk of image-related problems, reduces competences among communication-related positions and generates additional costs, which is particularly painful during long-lasting crises. That's why the presented cross-section of statistical analyses gives ground for adopting the hypothesis that preparation of the biggest Polish

companies for processes associated with crisis communication management is highly insufficient. We can recall here the fact that the surveys reveal an image of companies with a mediocre quality of the immune system (level of 64% on a scale of 0–100%). Comparably weakest result was observed in the SME sector (49.5%), which also has its representatives in the "Lista 500" ranking of the Rzeczpospolita daily.

Moreover, companies' deficiencies in practical preparation are accurately confirmed by the opinions of the leaders of public relations agencies. In most cases they had many reservations in the context of the adopted strategy of activity of their clients. What constitutes a problem is above all the focus on the implementation of short-term goals which are associated with extinguishing already existing crises, without taking into consideration the necessity to prepare for them in advance. What has also been disregarded is the pursuit of stabilization of post-crisis activities, as clients of agencies often forget that a crisis doesn't end at the moment when the media stop writing about it.

Summing up, it is also worth drawing attention to the oppressive branches analyzed in the article, which are defined as those which to a greater extent than others are exposed to image crises. Branches and more precisely, companies which function in them on the one hand have an advantage, because they to a greater extent are exposed to crisis situations and on the other hand they have the experience of other business entities from a given branch, which can be obtained. Here, it is worth pointing out that there is still much work to be done in the area of education. Apart from typical challenges such as the formation of a crisis team, what is becoming a necessary element are trainings, which give a broader scope of knowledge in key areas of crisis management. The leaders of public relations agencies emphasize in unison that communication trainings are a priority prevention attribute of an organization (62%).

Unfortunately, surveys of companies show that in this area the analyzed entities have a problem, as trainings are not a common activity supporting management processes. Companies quite skeptically approach the utilization of trainings in their operations. In further editions of research in this subject area it is worth making an attempt to diagnose this phenomenon, along with the identification of the sources of approach to communication trainings.

Companies should also pay attention to building teams of a durable

character, which will support companies at the moment when a crisis hits, but also in course of preparation for such situations. In Polish economic reality situations of the lack of proper diagnosis and positioning in this area appear. What can serve as proof of a conclusion formulated this way is major diversification of attitudes in this area. Using both your own resources and the resources of an external character, or combining these approaches leads to a situation in which there is no sign of a model, which could be called an optimum model. However, still taking advantage of external experts during crises is a naturally recommended thing and can support an organization (external point of view).

Crisis situations are certainly phenomena of an unfavourable character for an entity whose structures are affected. Nevertheless, it is possible to help them in a limited scope through preparation, education and building an immune system within which there are such elements as cyclical trainings, or crisis manual. However, as a result of an analysis of the state identified among the biggest companies functioning in Poland, it is necessary to point out that there are still many things which have to be done, especially in the area of raising the awareness of management teams with regard to the necessity to take active measures of preventive character. This will enable proper reacting, as soon as a crisis emerges. This way it will be easier to accept the effects of an image crisis and certainly an image crisis won't leave a company with experiences not allowing it to return to the state that existed before the emergence of a problem.

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[2] G. Hajduk, *Specyfika kryzysów wizerunkowych w mediach społecznościowych*, „Studia Medioznawcze", 3 (70), 2017, p. 101.

[3] D. Tworzydło, *Public relations praktycznie*, Wydawnictwo Newsline, Rzeszów 2017, p. 157–162.

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[5] Ibidem.

[6] The ranking was prepared by: Public Relations Department of University of Information, Technology and Management in Rzeszów (2007–2010), Alert Media Communications agency (2007–2017) and Agencja Exacto (2017).

[7] D. Tworzydło, A. Łaszyn, P. Szuba, Z*arządzanie kryzysem w polskich przedsiębiorstwach. Podsumowanie 10 lat badań nad kryzysami*, Wydawnictwo Newsline, Rzeszów 2018.

[8] Surveys conducted by Exacto agency, conducted by means of various techniques, on many samples, show that oppressive branches should have greater awareness of the threats due to belonging to this category and higher level of competences in communication. A cross-section of main economic specialization reveals the image of 12 sectors particularly exposed to the risk of image-related crisis situations.

[9] What proves statistical significance are values $p < 0,05$ (U Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests).

[10] B = 0.018; Wald = 6.772; p = 0.009; Exp (B) = 1.018; R2 Nagelkerkego = 0.038, % kwalifikacji = 82%.

[11] Measurement based on Spearman's rho coefficient.

[12] What shows statistical significance are values $p < 0.05$ (U Manna-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis tests).

[13] CATI project was carried out in cooperation with ZFPR in 2018. Data was collected from 204 PR agencies, where the respondents were people from management positions, or people responsible for crisis communication. A publication with a collection of results and analyses will appear in 2019.

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