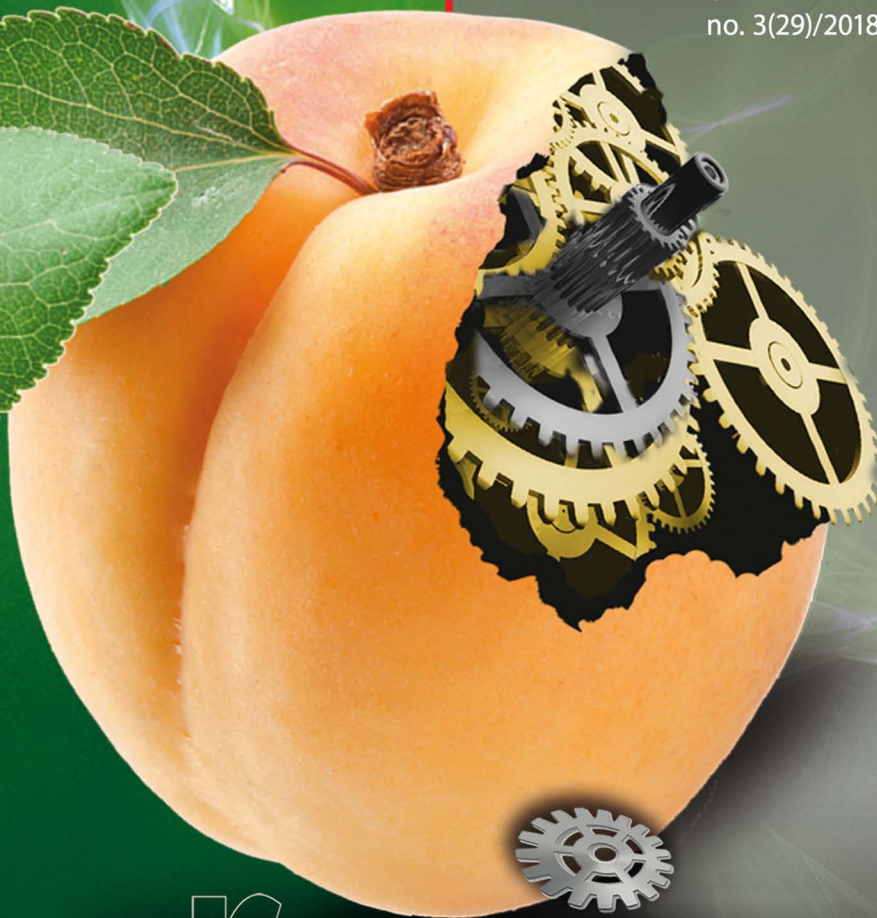# minib 29

marketing of scientific
and research organizations
no. 3(29)/2018

RESEARCH FIELDS IN THE AREA OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

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RESEARCH FIELDS IN THE AREA OF PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL PUBLIC RELATIONS ACTIVITIES

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Summary

The article constitutes a presentation of the areas of research which can be used in course of planning and implementation of public relations activities in a company. Also, those which can be regarded as crucial and necessary have been highlighted. Research described in the article concerns to a large extent building image and relations with the representatives of a company's environment. In the publication areas of research conducted by means of various techniques, e.g. CATI, CAWI have been presented. The material also presents a method which is supposed to systematize research projects. It makes it possible to use comprehensive data collected in a company in the decision-making process. The article also contains a presentation of analyses which are conducted in association with the process of preparing a company for potential image crises and carried out during and after the emergence of threats bearing the characteristics of an image crisis.

Introduction

Nowadays, apart from the standard resources at the disposal of companies in form of technologies, personnel, material components, or financial assets, know-how and information play an important role. Especially in case of the latter, acquiring, securing and keeping them is becoming one of priority tasks of company managements. The difference between the set of data held by a company and what it needs to efficiently manage processes constitutes the so-called information gap. This gap can be eliminated by means of a series of research works based on qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative research methods can be understood as those which make it possible to generate conclusions which can be extrapolated to the whole population, e.g. employees, or clients. Within these methods we can distinguish such techniques as CAWI, CATI, PAPI or research conducted by means of the technique of audience interview. Qualitative methods are particularly useful in public relations — as support for quantitative methods, e.g. during creation of research tools, or deepening the identification of particular methods which exist in an organization, or outside the organization. They are used e.g. for investigating the issue of employees' loyalty, engagement and approach to work. Among the typical qualitative techniques we can find: desk research, IDI and focus groups. The methods and techniques highlighted above are most often used in the process of support for managing image and building the relations of companies and organizations.

Every research project has to focus on clearly defined goals. Their character may be: exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. Exploratory character assumes the search for knowledge in a particular area, the second one concerns the description of what a researcher observed during exploration, while the third focuses on the search for the answer to the question: why? The above constitutes a kind of a model situation, because in practice it is possible to work on all three goals at the same time[1]. In analyses conducted within public relations the above goals may be highly complex and may concern every task sphere, including[2]:

- relations with the media,
- anti-crisis and crisis management,

- internal communication (internal public relations),
- event management,
- relations with current and potential investors (investor relations),
- relations on the Internet (e-PR),
- visual identification (corporate identity),
- corporate social responsibility (CSR),
- sponsoring,
- public affairs,
- lobbying,
- relations with influencers (influencer marketing),
- employer branding,
- manager's PR (personal branding).

Each of the task spheres of public relations mentioned above can and should be subject to audit and assessment. Taking the above into consideration it is necessary to point out that the main goal of this article is to order and describe the key research areas which can be investigated in course of the assessment of internal and external relations and image of a company. Another goal of this article is identifying the research areas which should be particularly interesting for managers looking for managers in the area of image and relations, which can support the decision-making processes.

The research areas analysed in this article may constitute a set of recommendations and directions for decisions from the area of implementation of communication processes and building relations within the framework of strategic and operational public relations activities in a company.

This text is addressed to people dealing with the measurement of the efficiency of public relations activities and should constitute an element in the discussion concerning the subject of the measurement of effects of public relations activities. It may also be a basis for PR professionals who are not always able to correctly assess the effects of the particular tools that they choose in order to support communication and build relations. This article orders the above, highlighting the areas which should be particularly emphasized in actions associated with the measurement of each of the task spheres in public relations.

Internal research in an organization

Internal image, relations within teams of employees, or tools used in the process of communication constitute a key aspect of internal public relations. Here it is worth pointing out that in many aspects internal PR is close to the perspective of human resources. Some parameters e.g. motivating, team building are important both in case of one, just as in case of another area. That's why a thought-out strategy associated with human resources, which remains coherent with the strategy of public relations may contribute to achieving a synergy of effects resulting from each of the presented areas of management.

At the moment when a research problem is defined within an organization, the researcher's effort is focused on the acquisition of data. First of all, to achieve real savings it is reasonable to use for analysis secondary data, that is, data which has already been collected in course of other research projects[3]. However, when a researcher doesn't have the possibility to use such data, he has to focus on the organization of primary research. Within the framework of techniques from the area of quantitative research in the area of internal image it is possible to conduct multiplanar research among managers. The research process is dominated by communication audits conducted by means of the PAPI, CATI and CAWI techniques, whose subject area refers to the following components[4]:

- **recognisability**, and in particular in this case it means:
  - recognisability of goals, measured as the assessment of the knowledge of particular categories of goals which on the one hand gives an image of the assessment of the state of knowledge of employees in the above-mentioned areas and on the other hand shows whether a company communicates about them in a sufficiently clear and precise way,
  - recognisability of mission and vision, which gives an image of the knowledge of employees and identification with a mission defining the direction in which the company is going, constituting a point of reference in the context of actions taken by the company,
  - recognisability of the employer's brand in employee's closest environment (image of the employer in the region).

- **identification with the company**, which can be measured as:
  - the assessment of identification of employees with their company, together with the full set of values adopted by the company,
  - assessment of the degree to which a company is close to the employees, to what extent they treat their company as something more than a place in which they have to engage in activities to obtain funds for subsisten,
  - assessment of approach to work and engagement,
  - assessment of loyalty towards the employer and readiness to recommend your employer outside the company, measured with the degree of attachment to the company, the will to participate in the process of building and developing the company,
  - estimated likelihood of further cooperation with the employee, measured on a time scale as declaration of will to carry out the ordered tasks in following time periods,
  - attitudes of employees towards the employer, approach to work, activity and willingness to take up additional obligations, even obligations which don't result directly from the scope of work defined by a work contract,
  - assessment of the phenomenon of rotation and personnel changes in a selected period, which is particularly significant, when we are dealing with the employee's, rather than employer's market,
  - types of employees — from malcontent to optimist, along with identifying the dominant group,
  - the level of engagement in an organization measured according to the so-called Gallup 12 questions[5], the questions formulated by Gallup Institute make it possible to assess the quality and attractiveness of a workplace and at the same time the method of measurement of good workplaces attracting the best employees has become one of the most often used techniques of identification of engagement.

It is particularly the last aspect, namely, the level of employees' engagement in an organization that can facilitate the acquisition of precious data, which can later be used by HR and public relations departments. Measuring the engagement, which affects the motivation of

employees, may be done by means of Gallup questions mentioned below (table 1), as they give a full image of this parameter within an organization.

Table 1. **An exemplary question used in internal research,**

taking into consideration Gallup 12 questions[6]

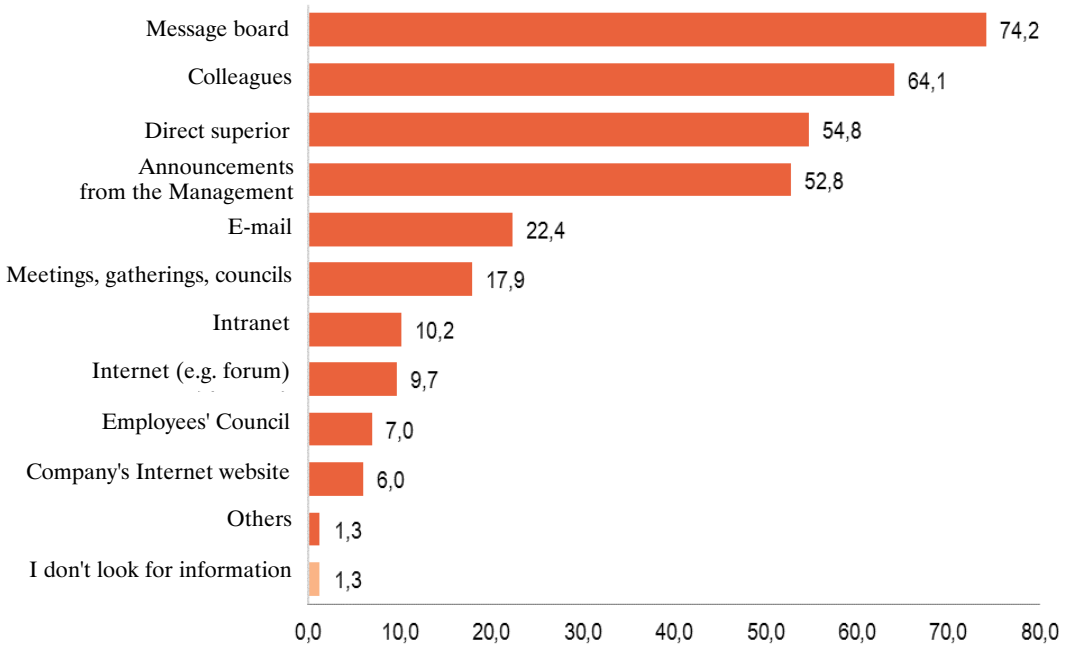| P1	Could you say whether You agree with the following questions? Answer all questions with yes, or no		Yes	No
	1.	Do I know what is expected from me at work?	1.	2.
	2.	Do I have appropriate tools at my disposal?	1.	2.
	3.	Do I do what I can do best every day?	1.	2.
	4.	Does my opinion count at work?	1.	2.
	5.	Does the boss, or anyone else care about me?	1.	2.
	6.	Have I been appreciated over the last seven days?	1.	2.
	7.	Does anyone encourage me to develop?	1.	2.
	8.	Do I have a feeling that my work is important?	1.	2.
	9.	Did I find my best friend at work?	1.	2.
	10.	Do my colleagues care about doing their best at work?	1.	2.
	11.	Do I have the possibility to educate myself and develop at work?	1.	2.
	12.	Has anyone talked to me about my progress and the path of development over the past six months?	1.	2.

Source: Prepared on the basis of a survey questionnaire prepared for the implementation of an internal research project in an IT company.

- **the process of internal communication**, with the consideration of the following categories which may be researched:
  - communication goals and their hierarchization,
  - standards in internal communication processes with particular attention paid to the range of communication tools,
  - verification of the procedures conditioning the quality of communication,
  - standards in the processes of managerial communication,
  - standards in the processes of employee communication (vertically and horizontally),
  - tools used in the process of communication.

In course of internal research it is possible to verify not just the

reception of particular communication tools used in it, but also to assess them in terms of their efficiency. It sometimes happens that research verifies the justification for further utilization of particular tools, leading to significant savings for a company.

Picture 1. **Chosen tools used by employees in the process of looking for information in a manufacturing company**

Tool	Value
Message board	74,2
Colleagues	64,1
Direct superior	54,8
Announcements from the Management	52,8
E-mail	22,4
Meetings, gatherings, councils	17,9
Intranet	10,2
Internet (e.g. forum)	9,7
Employees' Council	7,0
Company's Internet website	6,0
Others	1,3
I don't look for information	1,3

Source: Materials prepared on the basis of a report on research conducted for a manufacturing company

Internal research gives a full image of the functioning of an organization. It makes it possible to e.g. identify to what extent an organization uses certain tools in the whole process of building image and relations with employees. Sometimes the results of conducted research provide hints concerning reduction of spending on tools which are completely inefficient, or are not used by the employees.

In the group of further research areas investigated within the framework of internal communication and building strategically profitable relations with employees there are:

- motivational factors, the following processes are carried out on their basis:
  – assessment of an employee's potential of development (identifying the possibility of going through the organizational structure, the existing training system, or the training system expected by the employees),
  – analysis of factors determining employee's satisfaction with the work he is doing,
  – assessment of the scope of employer's investments in equipment, infrastructure etc.,
  – assessment of the system of employee remuneration, including motivational factors of financial and non-financial character,
  – assessment of the level of balance between the interests of employees and the interests of a company,
  – self-assessment of an employee's potential — declarative dimension,
 – measuring the feeling of job security.

It is worth pointing out that motivational factors are a kind of a reflection of what belongs to the competences of HR departments. However, motivating is within the scope of interest of not just human resources teams, but also public relations teams. It is because on the basis of the synergy of actions we can achieve coherent image effects based on motivation. Another area of research are:

- **internal relations**, among which we can distinguish the following areas:
  – relations between employees (assessment of colleagues, or management by the respondent),
  – atmosphere at work,
- **work environment**
  – the image of the environment in the eyes of the management measured as the assessment of the approach of the employer to employees, their needs, as well as the quality of relations formed between the two groups often regarded as distant,
  – the way work environment is perceived by employees who function in the environment on a daily basis carrying out their assigned duties,
  – identification of flash points, which require fast reaction and introducing changes,

– barriers and obstacles that employees have to cope with while carrying out their daily professional duties (demotivators),

– assessment of the strategic areas of functioning of a company,

● **employees' satisfaction**, which is classified as one of key elements influencing the functioning of a company, which may consist of a series of factors named also in earlier part of this work.

Fast identification of factors which have an impact on the satisfaction of employees, relations, satisfaction and motivating makes it possible to implement actions streamlining the areas which require such works. For this purpose a satisfaction index can be prepared. It can be distinguished thanks to the application of appropriate research tools. The index is based on chosen questions referring to e.g. the general degree of satisfaction, level of recommendation, repeated choice of the same work, other employees' engagement in work and faith in the success of the company. The distinguished elements forming the broadly understood image are measured by means of partial indicators.

Picture 2. An exemplary chart illustrating the satisfaction of employees of an analysed company in chosen departments and lines
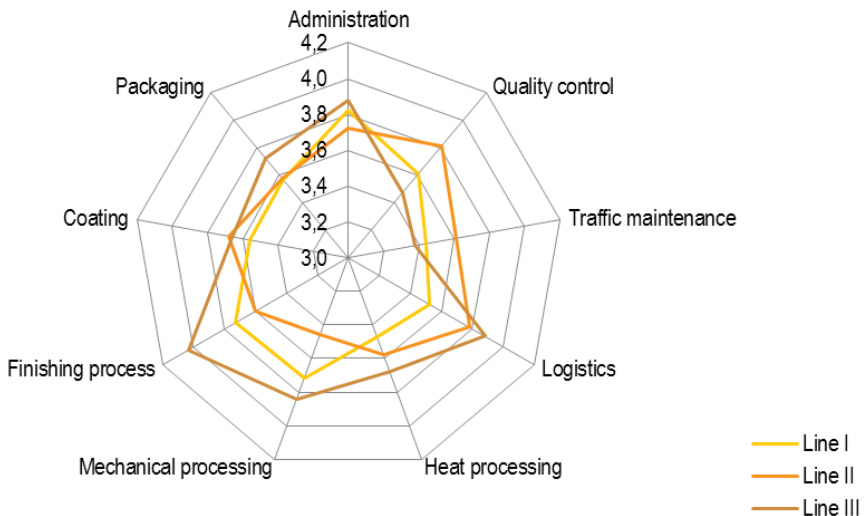
Source: Material prepared on the basis of a report on research conducted for a manufacturing company.

Conducting research requires a multilateral approach. Apart from collecting the opinions of operational employees, an important aspect is also an analysis of the opinions of the management. Taking the above into consideration, communication audits can be complemented by individual interviews and strategic workshops with the leaders of the surveyed organizations. This makes it possible to optimize methodological recommendations and to better diagnose the starting situation. Qualitative research makes it possible to choose more adequate indicators for survey questionnaires (aid in construction of the target tools). An exceptionally helpful element in the comprehensive process of the assessment of image and relations is investigating leadership traits, which constitutes an additional option for the quantitative employee surveys discussed above. They are supposed to confront the opinions of leaders on the method of managing an organization with the perception of these traits among the subordinates.

Research on the external environment
of a company in the area of image and relations

Researching the external image requires taking into consideration not just the structure of an organization, but above all its current needs in the context of the measurement of effects and the kind of branch in which it operates. It is needs and the information gap that to a large extent determine what should be subject to research. They define the directions and contribute to putting emphasis on what's necessary in the decision-making process. Moreover, they expand knowledge in the area of missing information for efficient management. Apart from this also the conducted relations and processes of communication with e.g. clients, subcontractors, local governments and other groups of stakeholders are important. In the decision-making process managers also take into consideration an analysis of competition, specific character of the region in which they operate.

Nevertheless, most research projects conducted in this area refer to the measurement of satisfaction of clients with products and services offered by the surveyed entity and the image of a company in its market environment. What is also becoming important is learning the assessment of the potential of further cooperation and the possibility of optimizing the current standards

of client service. The aspect of the client's general knowledge about a company (brand awareness) is also important for the preparation of a recommendation model. For this purpose quantitative research based on survey questionnaires (individual, or phone interviews) may be useful. The dominant research fields from the area of the external image of organizations are as follows[7]:

- **investigating knowledge about the company** and information that the environment has about its offer, in particular:
  – level of knowledge about a company, its external activity and in particular in the context of conducted sponsoring activities, or patronage,
  – availability of information about products and services offered by a company, in particular, among the target groups whose members are, or can be potential clients of the company,
  – frequency of appearance of information about a company in mass media, which affects, among others, the measurement of the effects of conducted promotional activities,
- **investigating the awareness of a company and its relations with the external environment,** including:
  – assessment of the awareness of the offer on a basic level and exceeding the package, e.g. additional services, sources of information about a company,
  – assessment of the leading aspects of cooperation with a company such as: price, quality of service, punctuality of carrying out orders and responses given to the reported problems, the functioning of complaint mechanisms, consulting, level of negotiations etc.,
  – assessment of employees assigned to cooperation and the quality of relations with them in the context of building long-term bonds between the client and the company,
  – defining the indicators of satisfaction based on the collective aggregation of dedicated questions e.g. the dimension of satisfaction and loyalty of clients,
  – assessment of after-sales service, which often determines the client's decision with regard to potential, further purchases,
  – complex assessment of the quality of offered products and services (ServPerf method — assumes the measurement and assessment of the quality of services understood as perfection of execution of particular tasks; in case of utilization of this method only the subjective

assessment of clients' remarks is taken into consideration, while expectations are not subject to assessment)[8],

- **the position of a company in its market environment**, including:
  - the assessment of the level of trust of the representatives of the environment for the surveyed company and its employees,
  - general, external assessment of the stability of functioning of the market organism,
  - analysis of the factors distinguishing a company in the environment, compared to the competition, or other components from the environment,
  - identification of factors which influence the choices and decisions of a company's clients,
- **assessment of activities from the area of media relations conducted by a company** (analyses on the basis of complex media monitoring), including the assessment and scope in such issues as the coverage of media which receive information, the number of readers, journalists' opinions and sentiments, growth of the number of internal inquiries, the occurrence of key words[9],
- online relations and **activity in social media,** including: redirections, links, shares, likes, number of participants, number of views, changes in activity and others[10],
- **assessment of communication processes** taking place between the company and its clients, as well as other groups from the external environment such as: contractors, business environment, local administration and others,
- **assessment of the readiness to give a recommendation** to a company and/or its offer by recommending and potentially choosing the service-provider/producer again, which is an exceptionally important component of the whole process of measuring the efficiency of building loyalty towards a company,
- **assessment of a company's public relations activities** in terms of the achieved effects of implementation of tasks from main task spheres.

Above the main research areas have been presented. Among them particularly important are the assessments which concern a company's activity and actions taken in association with its functioning in a changing environment. These are e.g. the assessment of promotional activities, public relations, or

investigating the awareness of the company. However, decisions with regard to the choice of research projects usually result from the assessment of needs and identification of the gap in knowledge necessary to make decisions.

Systematization of research processes based on the matrix of image goals

Research can be conducted ad hoc, or systemically. A definitely more favourable solution from the point of view of aggregation of knowledge is systemic action which guarantees that the activities conducted by a company will be comprehensibly assessed. In case of systemic research it is possible to use methods which constitute a complex summary of research on image, including e.g. the matrix of image goals, which is defined as an analytical tool allowing precise identification of the place and goals in the area of internal and external image of the surveyed organization. This is a method of analysis of the starting situation, defining trends and directions of actions faced by company managements[11].

Picture 3. Matrix of image goals
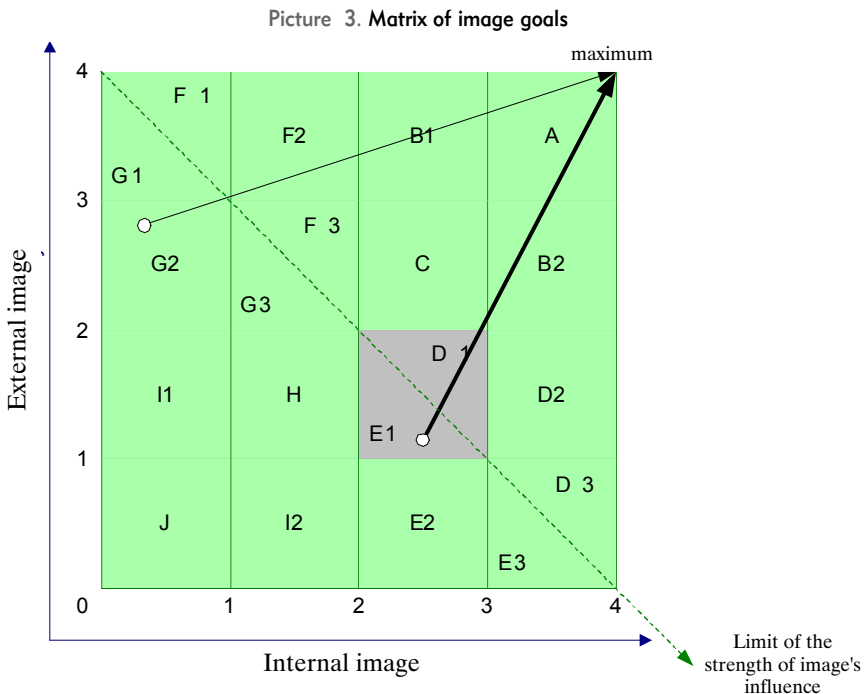
Source: D. Tworzydło, *Macierz celów wizerunkowych jako metoda oceny efektów działań public relations*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Informatyki i Zarządzania, Rzeszów 2008.

The matrix shows the exact point in which a company finds itself in terms of the internal and external image. It helps prevent image crises and when such crises happen, it prevents their consequences. Additionally, designing it preceded by complex internal and external surveys gives the possibility of:

- classifying all determinants which contribute to the formation of the surveyed company's image,
- assessing the image and the changes taking place within it in the analysed periods,
- analysing trends,
- calculating and interpreting the image gap.

Thanks to the matrix of image goals it is also possible to systematize all previously conducted research processes in the aspect of a company's internal and external communication.[12] That's why it can constitute a summary of analytical projects carried out in a company every calendar year.

Research and the utilization of research
in crisis situation management

The analysis of the image situation in which a company finds itself conducted by means of various techniques and research methods is, from the point of view of the entrepreneur, above all knowledge. Taking into consideration the fact that crisis communication is a particularly sensitive area, in which changes are fast, sometimes even abrupt[13], remembering that crisis may threaten the stability of functioning of every business entity[14], knowledge is becoming the key determinant of success. In case of a systemic approach to crisis situations it is worth pointing out that an analysis of a company in this respect lets the management accurately monitor the internal and external environment.[15] Surveys can contribute not just to the detection of potential crises, but also to protecting the organization against potential problems associated with any image crisis.

Analysis in the area of managing preparatory actions before the occurrence of a crisis and during a crisis means a series of benefits including, among others:

- **before crisis**
  - detection and assessment of the appearing symptoms of potential crisis situations,
  - identifying target groups of potential crises,
  - support in the process of developing a comprehensive tool in form of a crisis manual,
  - security and psychological support for managers working in an organization,
- **during crisis**
  - monitoring of the course of crisis situation and the identification of the paths of its development,
  - qualitative and quantitative analysis of press materials appearing in the media,
  - generating decision-making conclusions and recommendations within the scope of further steps necessary during a crisis situation,
- **after the end of crisis**
  - assessment of the effects of crisis situations experienced by a company,
  - assessment of the factors which influenced the emergence of a crisis situation,
  - selecting actions necessary to protect a company against the occurrence of further crises, which should be taken,
  - distinguishing potential symptoms of possible further crises.

Support for the management processes before, during and after the occurrence of a crisis situation is becoming a key task of managerial teams of professionally run companies, and in particular their emergency managements. It is also a condition for long-term, reliable and optimum protection of a commercial entity against the consequences of expected and unexpected crisis situations.

Summary

Taking into consideration the areas of research, which can be used for the assessment of the internal and external image of a company and its relations with environment, it is necessary to highlight key conclusions which can be drawn from the above. The choice of areas for research should result from an analysis of needs and identification of the information gap, which remains to be filled in a company, for the purpose of making efficient decisions.

It is necessary to point out that one of priority elements of company management is monitoring image and internal relations, including, among others, such areas as employees' satisfaction and level of engagement. It is also exceptionally valuable to obtain from them feedback in form of opinion concerning the company. What to a large extent has a major impact on the efficiency of work done by teams of employees is satisfaction which consists of many elements, including, among others, the system of motivation, method of management, atmosphere. By means of investigating the opinions of employees it is possible to obtain also information about sentiments in a company, to identify factors which have a positive impact on the work of a team and to obtain data concerning potential flashpoints emerging in a company, as well as to express needs in the area of implementing changes of various kinds. In order to make it possible to develop an organization and at the same time maintain high level of motivation among the employees, it is important to first identify and next to integrate values important for both sides. If these common values are defined early enough, it will be possible to take appropriate actions, which will bring the desired effects.[16]

The situation is similar within the scope of building external image and relations. However, taking this area into consideration in planning and operational activities has to be based on properly acquired knowledge and premises which will secure the accuracy of decisions. Thus, it is necessary to monitor changes in the way a company is perceived, the assessment of actions and activities taken up by the company, the product offer, or employees who by means of their actions become, or not, the ambassadors of the company in its environment.

Functioning in a void won't bring the desired results and mistakes in the decision-making process often result from the deficit of information. That's why research areas from the scope of relations, as well as internal and external image highlighted in the article may constitute a starting point for

the implementation of complex audits and thus they can serve the purpose of filling the information gap — filling the gap is a duty of a good management team in every company.

One of important elements outlined in the article was an illustration of the importance of research conducted in the context of preparation for crisis and reacting to crisis when it comes up. Research from this area may constitute an element of key support for management processes. It can contribute to efficient protection of an organization.

The above shows that the highlighted areas, with particular consideration of those which have been recognized as crucial, should be investigated within the framework of a systematic and planned process, as only in such case it is possible to achieve the expected results.

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[2] More about task spheres: D. Tworzydło, Public relations praktycznie, *Newsline*, Rzeszów 2017, p. 39–42.

[3] G.A. Churchill, *Badania marketingowe. Podstawy metodologiczne*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2002, p. 250–251.

[4] The mentioned research areas are investigated within the framework of an integrated system of internal research conducted for market entities by research entities, as well as departments dealing with internal and external communication in companies.

[5] http://www.projektgamma.pl/strefa-wiedzy/wiki/co-to-jest-dobre-miejsce-pracy-poznaj-test-12-pytan-gallupa (viewed 01.04.2018).

[6] As the data acquired from the surveyed entities (companies) are confidential and taking into consideration the provisions of contracts concerning the protection of data against publication, the provided examples have been anonymised.

[7] The mentioned research areas are investigated in course of an integrated system of external surveys of companies and institutions.

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[9] https://www.curzonpr.com/theprinsider/measurements-pr-roi-branding-digital-marketing/ (viewed: 03.2018).

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