

TITLE OF THE CASE STUDY: LEADERSHIP IN PANDEMIC IN THE LIKO-S COMPANY

Name of the organisation:

LIKO-S

Country and sector of the organisation:

Czech Republic, constructions and manufacturing

Type of organisation:

- **Business company**
- Public organization
- Private organization
- NGO
- Other:

Size of the organisation:

- small
- **medium**
- large

Brief description of the organisation:

LIKO-S is a Czech family company that was established in 1992. The main focus of LIKO-S is in the manufacturing and construction industry as it does various activities from the installation of partition, sliding walls and acoustic mechanisms for office interiors to assembling “Living Buildings” and green facades and walls with plants. Additionally, the company is involved in sustainable innovations. It cooperates with different universities on research projects to find out how the green area on the walls or roofs of buildings can cool its surroundings.

Short description of the case study (500 characters)

The topic addressed by the Czech partner INSTITUT INPRO is leadership in the times of the Covid-19 pandemic. With this company, we will focus on what are the most common challenges that leaders have to deal with under unpredictable times and uncertain circumstances and how to overcome them. From the challenges, the main focus will be on managing remote work conditions and organizing online team management and maintaining company culture and united spirit in the pandemic.

Key words:

Leadership

Overcoming challenges

Covid-19

Remote working environment

Family Business

BEST PRACTICE PROFILE

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The Covid-19 pandemic left many companies and businesses in shock with its sudden nature and unpredictability. Some companies, however, managed to adapt to the new nature of work and business-run quickly and without major issues. One of them is the Czech family company LIKO-S under the leadership of its CEO Jan Musil, the second generation of the Musil family.

The company started as a small business but it grew during times and now is divided into 4 divisions and has various established offices abroad, having up to 250 employees. The company is led by the top management team that, apart from the CEO, consists of 8 other people and functions as an executive board of the family business.

The role of leaders is valued highly in the company as the authority of such person is not generated solely from his work position but it is based on informal elements as well. Thus, Mr Musil's goal is to have leaders on various levels of the company that are respected by the employees and engage actively in the company run. For that reason, LIKO-S has established a strategic document with 7 principles of the company's values on how to behave in the businesses, including not only the relationships between managers and their employees but also between everyone in the businesses. The document specifies the goals of the company relations and aims at bringing joy to the daily run.

As an example of such principles, Mr Musil describes: *"For instance, we focus on cohesion and togetherness. In case that a weak point emerges in some team, we want people to help, not to mock or blame, we support cooperativity as much as possible. Similarly, we aim to support personal initiative and engagement. That is that not only the boss should be engaged and committed to the job, but by supporting the equal nature of every single employee we try to achieve that people are engaged and participate even on the lowest levels. Without that, a good company can't function."*

It is no surprise that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought some new challenges to the leadership of employees. What are they and how LIKO-S deals with them is further explained by the company CEO.

RATIONALE

Before going into details, it is necessary to describe the context in which the company operates. In the Czech Republic, the first wave of the pandemic hit in the Spring of 2020 and the country went into full lockdown for almost 2 months. After short ease of restrictions throughout summer, the autumn brought a new tightening of rules and restrictions, eventually leading to the second lockdown in early 2021. At the time of the interview, the country had various procurations in action, limiting the access to offices or in-person sales of goods.

“Covid-19-state has somewhat turned into a new standard. It is not new anymore.”, describes Mr Musil the situation over a year after the beginning of the pandemic, *“We were lucky at the beginning though as thanks to having offices abroad, we were already partly used to the online cooperation and the transfer to online environment was quick. However, the difference is in managing teams remotely, that’s the real challenge.”*

As soon as the teamwork is happening online instead of in-person, the cooperation is trickier and demanding. Thus, the role of the leaders has changed and expanded. Not only they had to manage their usual workload and responsibilities, newly they had to spend far more time with communication. Mr Musil emphasized the importance of proper communication in the remote environment, it is crucial to repeat the information, again and again, to avoid creating disinformation and information noise. One has to be clear and unambiguous to deliver a clear message to the employees who may be scared, impatient or just confused from the new work setting. The leaders and team managers must, therefore, plan properly what to say and how to say it. The company uses digital tools like MS Teams, interactive board and screens, online survey and voting tools, etc.

From the experience, it is important that people have their cameras turned on so that they are involved in the remote work and not “hiding” from it. Mr Musil also emphasizes the importance of clothing: *“It may seem like a banality but there is a huge difference between a leader who is dressed professionally even for an online call and does not sit there in sweatpants affects people’s motivation to engage.”*

Apart from the official teamwork, LIKO-S emphasizes maintaining the company informal culture. As informal meetings happened organically in offices, like small talks by a coffee machine, a cigarette break with colleagues or monthly celebrations of employees’ birthday, having that all disappear is a sudden challenge that cannot be avoided. For that reason, LIKO-S started planning these occasions systematically, like organizing voluntary “online coffees” and “online lunches” for employees who want to socialize, celebrating birthdays online to show the importance of everyone in the company even under difficult circumstances. And even the company-wide event of the announcement of the employee of the month was transferred to the online space.

The last activity even brought benefits to the company: *“The online announcement of the employee of the month actually allowed us to include more people in the event. Before that, our workers who were ‘out in the terrain’ could not attend but now they can connect remotely or they can see the stream later up to their convenience”*. Similarly, the event is now held in 2 languages so that employees abroad can be part of it as well. The company does not hire any external translator or professional technological tools as it believes that even with a small budget one can achieve big things. For the recording, only smartphones are used and for the translation, simply, the speaker will say everything in Czech first and then s/he will repeat it in English. It may be a bit more time demanding but it is not impossible when one has the motivation. Another benefit that the company found in the remote working environment was the schooling of employees. All workshops and educational seminars are now done online and can include more people.

The last challenge that is needed to overcome is the lack of motivation of employees to work remotely. In LIKO-S, employees started asking when they will be allowed to go back to the offices as many of them did not have ideal working environment (e.g., small flat, insufficient internet connection, kids on online schooling, partner working remotely as well, etc.). To secure the come-back as fast as possible, the company decided to invest in the offices-layouts and instal safety measure like transparent partitions between tables so that each employee is safe in his own space.

The pandemic brought new challenges to the daily run of a company and required leaders to adapt and expand their activities. Nevertheless, with a positive attitude and motivation to create a good working atmosphere, the online environment can actually bring new possibilities to the company.

GOALS

The LIKO-S company aimed to achieve positive and friendly working environment during the times of pandemic and even under the changed circumstances still follow their principles of cooperation and engagement of all levels of employees.

The main identified aims of remote work were:

- To establish a professional yet comfortable nature of online communication.
- To support informal employees' engagement alongside the official working one.
- To find benefits of the online working space.

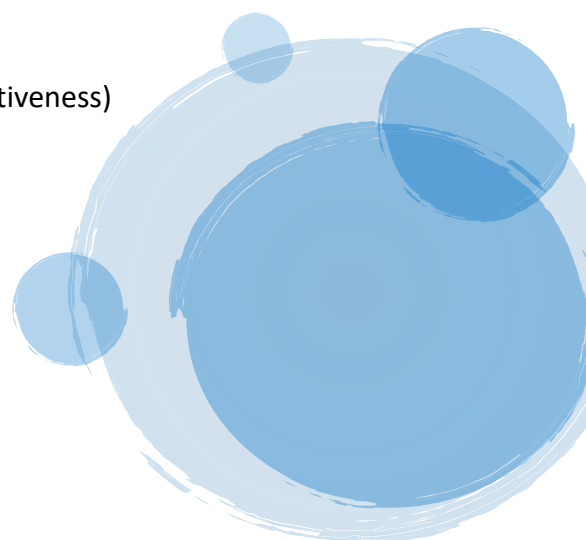
IMPACT

The short-term impact on the work environment is definitely in the physical changes of the offices in a way that are safe for the health of employees. The long-term impact on the work environment is in building resilience of individual employees and therefore of a company as a whole. Thanks to the experience, the company is better prepared to “switch” into remote work system in case of any other unpredictable progress of the pandemic or similar events.

LESSONS LEARNED

Skill and competencies gained throughout the year of pandemic:

- Digital competencies of employees
- Communication skills (importance of clearance and repetitiveness)
- Team work in online space
- Remote engagement



MATERIAL







REFERENCES

Refer here any bibliography reference you use for this case study.

- 1) <https://www.liko-s.cz/>
- 2) Personal interview with the CEO of the company, Mr Jan Musil, on 27.04.2021. (Zoom)

