

PR1- A2: Consultant Training Toolkit

Chapter no.: 9 Working on mental balance and determination in times of crisis, getting back on track, but don't fall back!

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1.0 Information about Chapter

Chapter's title: *Working on mental balance and determination in times of crisis, getting back on track, but don't fall back!*

Duration: 4 hours

A short introduction to the chapter:

The chapter aims to make entrepreneurs aware of the importance of effective time management and the need to improve organizational communication, seen as tools to increase the resilience of companies in times of crisis.

Methods of instructions:

Presentation, debate, exercises

Prerequisites of the students: no requirements

Learning aims and Objectives:

- To use the time in managing the business efficiently
- To learn how to implement time management strategies in SMEs
- To understand how the communication process is taken place, as well as the disruptive factors acts
- To learn ways to improve communication between employees and employers

Learning Outcomes Covered:

After completion of this module, the learners will be able to:

- Understand the importance of time management in SMEs
- Use strategies for implementation of time management in SMEs for business owners
- Learn about the landscape in the EU - Examples of companies based on working life balance
- Learn about the communication between employers and employees in SMEs
- Learn about the communication strategies in SMEs
- Understand the different best practices

Skills and Competences:

Skills to implement time management strategies

The skills to implement time management strategies are the ability to develop and implement principles, rules and measures that aim to manage time efficiently at the individual and organizational levels.

At the end of this chapter, learners will learn the following skills:

- *Understanding the concept of time management*
- *Recognising the importance of using time management in organizations*
- *Identifying the factors that lead to wasted time*
- *Learning how to implement time management strategies for employees*
- *Learning how to implement time management strategies for managers/entrepreneurs*

The skills acquired meet the need for knowledge of methods for prioritizing and planning activities to be carried out by individuals and/or organizations to achieve personal and/or organizational objectives.

These skills are important because they increase the level of satisfaction in personal life and make the work of organizations more efficient.

Skills and Competences: Skills to improve communication in SMEs

The skill to enhance organizational communication represents the capacity to follow a set of rules that make human interaction easier in the organizational context.

At the end of this chapter, learners will learn the following skills:

- *Understanding the importance of communication in organizations*
- *Describing the primary forms of organizational communication*
- *Recognising the disruptive factors for communication*
- *Learning ways to improve communication between employees and employers*

The skills acquired meet the need for enhancing communication in companies.

These skills are essential because they increase the level of cooperation in an organization.

2.0 Information about each subchapter

Subchapter title: **Importance of time management in SMEs**

Short introduction to the subchapter:

In this subchapter, we present the concept of time management and the importance of its use in organizations; we also identify many factors that lead to time wastage.

Importance of time management in SMS

Western culture is obsessed with the concept of "time" and abounds in the symbolism of the passage of time: how do we organize our time? How do we meet deadlines? Philosophers have tried to define time: does time itself exist, or is it just our perception? Words and images constantly refer to symbols of the passage of time: "Time costs money", "Punctuality is the courtesy of kings", "Time is silent and passes", etc.

What is time management?

Personal time management is the set of measures to balance work, relaxation and fulfilling family obligations. Time management is not about working harder and faster but about learning to manage things so that you can balance your professional and personal life and goals.

Organizational time management is the set of rules, practices and principles that allow work to be made more efficient by controlling the time allocated. Time management and activity planning are part of the overall process of organizational management, which aims to achieve specific objectives.

The importance of time management in organizations

The most apparent advantage of organizations that know how to manage their time is that they are more likely to achieve what they want than others: employees increase their productivity, and management has time to review the work and correct mistakes where necessary strategically.

The second significant advantage is that good time management tends to lower employee stress levels because it doesn't put them in a position to meet impossible deadlines.

Let's have a look at the main factors that make us waste time:

- Procrastinating and postponing tasks that we find unpleasant or too complicated
- Attending long and unnecessary meetings/meetings

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- Clutter in working documents
- Inability to set clear priorities
- Visitors who keep us talking too much
- Spending too much time on the phone or the internet
- Perfectionism

Each individual should assess the time-consuming factors in their case and the causes for not being able to complete all their tasks on time. The easiest way is to make a detailed diary of what we have done for a day or two (absolutely everything we have done and the duration of each activity, even if it is only 10 minutes). Then analyze which activities are unnecessary and time-consuming: what should we give up/ reduce? Would it help if we did things differently or in a different order? Could we link our activities in such a way as to save time? It is not a good idea to give up what we like and find satisfaction in unnecessary things.

Subchapter title: **Landscape in EU – examples of companies based on work-life balance**

Short introduction to the subchapter:

This subchapter presents examples of good practices in companies that improve the work-life balance.

Landscape in EU – examples of companies based on work-life balance

In recent years, European companies have been experimenting with various ways to make the working schedule more flexible to obtain, at the same time, increased productivity and an increasing level of employee satisfaction. Among the most common good practices are:

- Working remotely - is entirely performed away from the office
- Hybrid working model - is performed remotely only part of the time
- 4 working days/week – 40 working hours per week can be compressed into just 4 days, and Friday off
- Flexible working schedule – working time can start variously (between 6 a.m. – to 10 a.m.) depending on each preference
- Part-time program – for those who can't work 8 hours/day it can be offered a part-time contract (starting from 1 hour/day)
- Job sharing - is somewhat like part-time work and consists of two or more part-time workers sharing a full-time job.

Subchapter title: **Strategies for implementation of time management in SMES for business owners**

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Short introduction to the subchapter:

In this subchapter, we indicate methods and instruments for time management to be used by employees and managers/business owners in their organizations.

Ways to improve time management for employees

Organizations have developed a series of mechanisms to force employees to manage their time in a certain way, setting deadlines, establishing reporting periods, etc. A worker who knows how to manage his time is more efficient. That's why we present some tips for improving employee time planning:

- **Make lists of what you have to do each day**

Think about what you have to/what you want to do the following day. The targets should be simple and achievable. Don't overcrowd your list, and make your proposals feasible! Try to estimate the time you will spend on each activity!

- **Don't try to multitask**

Multitasking decreases concentration, tires the brain and reduces efficiency. Instead, allocate time to deal with only one activity and take breaks between activities to unwind and rest.

- **Establish and stick to a daily routine**

Routine gives us stability in life, helps us understand how we spend our time and gives us milestones for each day, so it plays a vital role in our lives.

- **Prioritization of activities**

The tasks have to be priorities in the following order:

- ✓ Important and urgent - these need to be done immediately
- ✓ Important but not urgent - set an exact date when we will deal with them
- ✓ Urgent but not important - delegate or do it yourself but don't spend much time on them
- ✓ Neither important nor urgent - forget about them!

- **Limit the number of tasks you take on.**

Learn to assess realistically what you can take on and learn to say NO. Three elements should be involved in a refusal: expressing regret that we cannot help, clearly stating the refusal and the reasons for refusing. If necessary, we can add suggestions for how the problem could be solved or just some elements of courtesy.

- **Stop delaying things that annoy or overwhelm you**

If we have to deal with an unpleasant task, we should allocate a short time in our schedule and promise ourselves a reward. For a significant task that requires days and weeks to complete, we can spread it over several days but with a small number of hours/day. If we are afraid of failing, we should redefine our expectations and set more realistic and achievable goals. If we are faced with a very new task, we should take some time to explore to familiarize ourselves with the unknown. If the deadline for a task is very far away, it is best to divide the task into subtasks for which we set closer deadlines.

Ways to improve time management for managers and entrepreneurs

- **Setting SMART objectives**

Everyone should always know what the purpose of their work is and what goals they are pursuing.

- **Plan by year, by month, by day**

Planning means providing a concrete answer to the question, "What do I need to do in the next period to achieve the goal I have set?". Over-ambitious planning tends to be unrealistic and counter-productive. Managers should regularly check the graphic activities and update them.

- **Set and communicate obvious deadlines**

Whenever we assign a task to an employee, they must know the date by which it must be completed.

- **Help employees learn to use time management**

We have to provide them with clear job descriptions, encourage them to make a daily to-do list, teach them to use IT tools for scheduling activities and impose some rules for keeping order in the workplace.

- **Delegate tasks to competent persons**

When delegating, there are four factors to consider:

- ✓ How important is the quality of the result? Is the result super crucial to the company?
- ✓ How skilled is the person to whom we delegate? Can they handle it?
- ✓ Do we have the capacity to help those we delegate, i.e. to act as a coach?
- ✓ Is there enough time for employees to learn/get used to what they must do?

Suppose we have satisfactory answers to these questions. In that case, we can move forward: clearly define the task to be delegated (what and how it needs to be done), the limits of responsibility in solving tasks, and choose an appropriate control method. If we do not consider all these aspects, the delegation will become a source of frustration and tension between employees and managers.

- **Prioritize activities**

Remember not to let the important things become urgent! Get them done early!

- **Use time planning tools**

There are many modern time planning tools: Microsoft's To Do, Milk's Remember, and Trello, and for planning activities in project management, the Gantt chart remains the most used tool.

- **Organize and conduct work meetings efficiently**

Managers must define the following terms to avoid the meeting being time-consuming:

- ✓ Why we meet - establish the objectives of the meeting
- ✓ What we discuss - agenda of the topics to be discussed
- ✓ Who participates - nominate participants
- ✓ Where to meet - prepare in advance the room and facilities
- ✓ What we work with - background materials (fact sheets, presentations, reports, etc.).

The meeting mediator must be careful with time management: respect the items on the agenda, ensures that participants are equally engaged in discussions, avoid interruptions, and ensures that the meeting achieves its objectives and ends the meeting with an agreement/conclusion.

Subchapter title: **Communication between employers and employees in SMEs**

Short introduction to the subchapter:

In this subchapter, we introduce the concept of organizational communication and describe how this process takes place and the disruptive factors.

Communication between employer and employees in SME

Internal and external communication is vital for the success of an organization and influences the attitude of employees and customers towards it. It is carried out according to the same principles as interpersonal communication, except that communication strongly emphasizes hierarchical relationships and the status of functions in this context.

Organizations communicate verbally (face to face and in writing through regulations, procedures and protocols), but also nonverbally (through the way offices are set up, staff behaviors) and paraverbal (through the atmosphere that prevails in an organization).

Internal communication takes place as follows:

- Top-down communication: information flows from superiors to subordinates, transmitting tasks and work instructions.
- Bottom-up communication: the information goes from the employees to the management, the information transmitted being the status of the implementation of activities, proposals, complaints, etc.
- Horizontal communication: between departments or between colleagues on the same hierarchical line
- Informal Networking: informal communication, which can be focused on any type of subject, between people holding different hierarchical positions in the company

Managers have a primary role in organizational communication because they "translate" corporate objectives for employees, but at the same time, they collect and summarize the results obtained. But the organizational context brings some barriers to effective communication between managers and subordinates.

Disruptive elements in organizational communication are:

- **Excessive filtering of information**

Usually, subordinates and superiors pass on important information, but problems arise when vital information is hidden (by mistakes or omissions). This barrier can be prevented by an "open door

policy", i.e. employees should be able to communicate directly with managers without many hierarchical restrictions and clarify any aspects when needed.

- **Slow transmission of information**

The communication process can take a long time, depending on the size of the organization and the transmission channels used. Therefore, management should prefer face-to-face communication for organizational/change issues and written communication for technical information to streamline this process.

- **Informal communication can become a source of disruption**

These channels usually spread rumors, which can sometimes have serious consequences. It is, therefore, essential to build formal communication relationships on a transparent and honest basis.

- **Conflicting role requests**

Managers need to learn to manage both sides of the role they play towards their subordinates: to give orders, control, and provide support and help.

- **The effect of spoiling**

Nobody wants to give bad news, even if they are not the cause of the problems, but things need to be told by name.

- **Effect of job status**

Sometimes managers tend to place too little value on communication with subordinates in favor of their superiors or peers, and when employees sense it, they will begin to avoid communication in turn.

- **Short time allocated to discussions with subordinates**

Approximately 50% of managers' time is spent talking to subordinates, so managers have the impression that they give enough time to explain/inform. Still, if they have several employees, the time allocated to each is small, a few minutes a day.

Subchapter title: **Communication strategies in SMEs**

Short introduction to the subchapter:

In this subchapter, we will present some ways to improve communication between employees and employers

Communication strategies in SMEs

Ways to improve communication between employees and employers:

- **Allocate enough time and resources to communicate with employees**

This means establishing how communication with employees will occur: scheduling meetings, choosing the proper communication channels, and providing additional information.

- **Use clean and strong language**

In discussions or reports, you should use concrete language, clear words and expressions, and precise meaning that everyone understands. Avoid technical, overly sophisticated language, sexist remarks and phrases that evoke stereotypes of certain categories of people or that put women in an inferior position.

- **Be understanding, empathetic, and accepting of others' ideas and feelings**

The attribution effect is significant: it must start from the idea that others act in good faith and that things can be done differently than in your vision but with equally good results. After all, everyone feels good when their ideas are taken into account.

- **Don't mix the person with the problem, and don't react too emotionally to mistakes**

If an employee has made a mistake, the action should focus on finding solutions and limiting the damage, not punishing the guilty party. Also, attacks on the person are not allowed: if a mistake has occurred, it is most likely due to specific circumstances and not to professional or personal incapacity.

- **Listen actively**

Active listening shows that the receiver is interested in understanding the sender's message accurately and shows respect, involvement and a proactive attitude. Listening is not a passive process and is extremely important in communication.

- **Choose the communication channel according to the extent of the information**

The most appropriate channel for complex information that requires explanation, demonstration and persuasion are face-to-face meetings, individual or collective. Decreasing the level of complexity of the message allows the choice of "remote" channels: online meetings, phone calls, emails, letters, etc.

- **Don't emphasize cross-cultural differences**

Language, customs, values and attitudes are elements that differentiate people from different cultures or minority groups and can lead to barriers in communication: lack of knowledge of the meanings and connotations of words, increased sensitivity to specific issues such as religious and political choices, sensitivity to jokes or criticism that question lifestyle habits, etc.

Subchapter title: **Good practices**

Short introduction to the subchapter:

In this subchapter, we will present some ways to improve the online communication of the SMEs

Good practices:

The pandemic has significantly changed working habits and has emphasized online communication: work meetings, relationships with clients or partners, sales - everything has moved online.

Companies must learn to improve their communication in the online environment, so here are some ideas of good practices in organizational communication.

For every action, managers and employees must learn to choose the proper communication channel

- Email – is excellent for larger volumes of content, allows to attach files, photo and it can be sent to a group of people or just individuals but is not suitable for an instant answer
- Chat – can be used for instant message/conversation between people, is very simple and effective but is suitable for short message and involve real-time participation
- Audio/ video calls – is an inexpensive real-time interaction with a single / group of people, and the major advantage is that you can see them but recalls an excellent internet connection
- Social media – for communicating with many people at a time, allows sharing files, video, and photo and serve various propose, but there is little control over how the information is shared further

Improving online communication means respecting Digital Etiquette:

- Be polite and friendly as in real life
- Acknowledge cultural differences
- Use humor and set a positive note
- Do not involve in the confrontational discussion
- Do not use too many abbreviations, and take time to response
- Use images and videos (emojis)

Choose an online platform that works for everyone - Zoom, Microsoft Team, Google Meetings

- Make sure that the team is prepared: all have downloaded the same platform, have selected the appropriate settings and have functional microphones and cameras
- Learn to use the platform tools in advance to be ready to offer solution advice to the team
- Arrive early for meetings to have time for iced-breaks discussion
- Learn how to integrate into discussions: identify yourself, use the microphone correctly, use chat to avoid interruption

Subchapter title: **References**

Short introduction to the subchapter:

References and bibliography related to the subject of the chapter.

3.0 Detailed Instructions for the trainer

Chapter 9

Step 1: Trainer must first become familiar with the introduction, aims and objectives and learning outcomes of the chapter

Step 2: Trainer must teach the ppt file Chapter 9.

Step 3: At slide 11 the trainer will present an exercise for using Priority Action Matrix

Resources:

PPT:

Readings: /

Exercises: Using Priority Action Matrix

Video:

Additional materials: /

4.0 References

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