

Strategic Importance of Corporate Communication and Leadership Styles in the Performance of Slovakian SMEs

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Abstract

Effective internal communication plays a key role in shaping organisational culture, increasing employee satisfaction and improving performance, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of two-way communication and leadership styles on the employees of Slovakian SMEs, with a particular focus on the challenges posed by the pandemic COVID-19. A mixed methodology was used in the research, which included questionnaire data collection and statistical analysis of the results to explore the frequency and effectiveness of communication and the impact of leadership styles on conflict management. The results highlight that assertive communication and two-way information flow help to increase trust and commitment while having a positive impact on employee motivation and job satisfaction. However, hierarchical communication gaps and inappropriate leadership styles often lead to dissatisfaction and inefficiency. The research has also shown that sustainable development goals, such as incorporating the principles of a circular economy, can contribute to increasing the effectiveness of internal communication and strengthening organisational stability. The new communication challenges brought about by the pandemic, including the consequences of remote working such as feelings of isolation and difficulties in information flow, further reinforce the importance of effective management practices and communication strategies. The paper offers practical suggestions for optimising internal communication systems that can help to increase organisational resilience, improve employee well-being and implement effective leadership practices. The results can contribute to the development of communication strategies and the achievement of organisational success in SMEs.

Keywords: *Internal Communication, Two-Way Flow of Information, Leadership Styles, Circular Economy, Effects of COVID-19.*

Introduction

Communication is an essential element of organisational life, determining not only the flow of information but also the effectiveness of the organisation and the satisfaction of its employees. In the case of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), effective internal communication is particularly important to strengthen organisational culture, reduce conflict and optimise managerial decision-making and employee performance. The communication and leadership style of managers has a major impact on how employees perceive the organisation and the extent to which they feel motivated and engaged at work. The proper functioning of internal communication not only contributes to the achievement of organisational goals but is also a key determinant of the long-term success of the company. Organisational stability and employee satisfaction are closely linked to effective communication practices. Such practices play a key role in supporting sustainable operations, especially in small and medium-sized enterprises, where continuous feedback and clear information flow are essential (Bacsi & Vízvári, 2019). Moreover, the presence of corruption in organisational processes and the perception of transparency are also linked to employee trust

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and satisfaction, as highlighted in the context of financial inclusion (Kálmán et al., 2024b). Effective communication promotes information transparency and a culture of feedback, thereby increasing employee loyalty and performance. It is particularly important for SMEs to minimise the risks arising from internal communication gaps, as these can hinder the achievement of organisational goals and the stability of the work environment. Studies have also suggested that sustainable practices and green transition efforts in organisations necessitate effective internal communication to address perceived corruption and foster trust (Kálmán et al., 2024c). For managers, the selection and application of the right communication style is of paramount importance, as it has a direct impact on the workplace climate, team spirit and organisational cohesion (Mansoor et al., 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly increased the importance of internal communication, as new working arrangements such as teleworking and hybrid working have brought challenges that require new approaches to communication. In such circumstances, the establishment and maintenance of two-way communication channels played a key role not only in managing conflict but also in ensuring organisational stability. The aim of this research is to explore the impact of two-way communication and the use of different management styles on employees in SMEs in Slovakia, particularly in the context of the challenges posed by the pandemic. This aligns with findings that highlight how effective communication strategies are vital for fostering trust and maintaining organisational resilience, especially in environments impacted by global challenges such as the pandemic (Kálmán et al., 2024d).

The analysis presents the theoretical foundations of internal communication and then uses empirical data to explore the impact of leadership and communication styles on organisational well-being and employee satisfaction. It focuses on how managers can use effective communication to facilitate conflict resolution and the achievement of organisational goals.

Additionally, research on sustainable management practices has demonstrated that effective leadership combined with assertive communication can help organisations navigate crises and ensure long-term growth, which is particularly relevant for SMEs (Kálmán et al., 2024a). The study highlights how assertive communication and two-way information flow foster trust and commitment and support employee motivation and performance. Recommendations based on the findings can contribute to the development of internal communication strategies, especially for SMEs, for which these factors are essential for long-term success.

Literature Review

Communication plays a key role in our daily lives and in the workplace. In our private lives, it is essential to maintain a sense of security, relationships and comfort, while in the workplace it is necessary to achieve common goals. None of these goals can be achieved without effective communication. We connect with others through the expression of messages, thoughts and feelings. The higher our level of communication, the more successful we can be in achieving our goals, as it is the fundamental means of expressing our desires and needs (Mazzei, 2014). Communication is the process of sharing information, ideas and messages across space and time. It includes both written and spoken language, as well as non-verbal means such as facial expressions, body language and gestures, and visual forms of communication such as pictures and videos. It also includes electronic communication, such as email, telephone and television (Schulz Von Thun, 2012). Communication is present in all aspects of our lives, whether it is personal relationships, education or business interactions (Sargent - Fearon, 2014). The development of electronic communication has enabled information to flow rapidly within organisations, but has also created new challenges, such as information overload and reduced face-to-face interactions (Cardon, 2008).

The basic process of communication is the flow of information from sender to receiver, in which encoding, transmission channel, decoding and feedback play an essential role (Carnegieho, 2013). At any stage of the process, obstacles can occur that can lead to misunderstandings or confusion (Schulz Von Thun, 2012). In interpersonal communication, for example, the interpretation of body language and facial expressions can often differ in different cultural contexts, which can lead to misunderstandings (Clampitt, 2010). It is

therefore crucial that communication is clear, to the point and well-articulated, which minimises the possibility of misunderstandings. From a business perspective, effective communication is of paramount importance as it determines the success or failure of a business. Internal communication within an organisation is particularly important as it directly affects employee satisfaction, motivation and productivity (Heide et al., 2005). The shift to a circular economy is a key to achieving sustainability goals as it supports the efficient use of resources and the reduction of waste. The success of such strategies, however, depends to a large extent on the quality of internal organisational communication to ensure employee commitment to change (Rahmat et al., 2024). The circular economy model highlights that the success of resource efficiency and waste reduction strategies depends to a large extent on the effectiveness of organisational communication. Transparent communication processes encourage employees to adopt sustainable practices, while contributing to strengthening organisational resilience and long-term success (Kabil et al., 2024). According to the principles of the circular economy, effective communication and sustainable management strategies can help SMEs adapt to the ever-changing economic environment. Such approaches not only support the optimization of organizational operations, but also promote long-term sustainability (Bai et al., 2023). Where there are gaps in internal communication, this can lead to misunderstandings and confusion between managers and employees. This is particularly true in hierarchical organisations, where employees at lower levels often lack access to important information that affects them (Dobák - Antal, 2010). Two-way communication promotes the free flow of information, the possibility of feedback and the strengthening of organisational cohesion (Tourish, 2010). The principles of the circular society point out that organisational communication can support not only internal processes but also wider social sustainability. Transparent information flows and two-way feedback facilitate innovation and sustainable development, especially for SMEs, which play a key role in implementing the circular economy model (Dadkhah et al., 2023).

According to Botez (2019), managerial communication is a continuous process of information exchange that takes place through different levels and channels in order to achieve the goals of the organisation. Leaders typically use multiple communication styles, but over time a dominant, habitual form emerges. The communication style should be adapted to the situation and the communication partner, as it determines the effectiveness of problem management and the development of relationships within the organisational structure. Rovňáková (2019) classifies managerial communication styles into three main categories: assertive, aggressive and passive. Assertive communication is based on honesty, respect and openness. This style promotes two-way communication, where the leader takes into account the other party's point of view while also asserting his or her own interests. Such adaptability in communication is a key factor in fostering an organisational culture that aligns with contemporary research on financial and social security, as indicated by Németh, Kálmán, and Malatyinszki (2024). In contrast, aggressive communication is dominant and controlling, ignoring the views of others and often generating conflict. Passive communication, on the other hand, avoids conflict and tends to subordinate itself to the interests of others, which in the long run can lead to mistrust and indecision within the organisation (Hadfield & Hasson, 2012; Tripathy, 2018).

The essence of an assertive communication style is the ability of a leader to take into account the views of others, in addition to representing his or her own interests. The essential elements of this style are honesty, respect, openness and objectivity, which promote clear, consistent and credible communication (Men, 2014). Assertive leaders emphasise the importance of two-way communication, in which all parties are free to express their opinions while respecting the right of others to express theirs. This form of communication fosters employee engagement, as respectful and open communication builds trust, which increases employee motivation and performance (Heide, Johansson, & Simonsson, 2005). The assertive style is often associated with the Socratic method of communication, in which the leader and employee jointly develop solutions to increase effectiveness. This method encourages employees to try new approaches while increasing their self-confidence. The 'Pygmalion effect' (Livingston, 2003) also builds on this dynamic, whereby managerial expectations have a positive impact on employee performance. When leaders show trust and support, employees make more effort to achieve better results (Mazzei, 2014).

Aggressive communication, although firm, often relies more on dominance and suppression of others' opinions. Such leaders tend to insult their employees in the process of asserting their interests, which

reduces organizational cohesion and employee commitment (Hadfield & Hasson, 2012). Aggressive communication has a negative long-term impact on organizational culture, as such leadership behaviour can lead to a decrease in employee motivation and hinder the achievement of organizational goals (Clampitt, 2010).

The passive communication style is characterised by leaders often subordinating themselves to the will of others and not standing up for their own interests. This approach tends to avoid conflict, but in the long run it reduces the credibility of the leader and the effectiveness of the organisation (Tripathy, 2018). Employees need clear guidance and support from the leader, which passive communication cannot provide. This style often leads to misunderstandings and mistrust within the organisation, as information is not communicated clearly and consistently to stakeholders.

Organisational Communication

Effective communication is a cornerstone of organisational success, as it directly affects employee productivity, satisfaction and organisational cohesion. Organisations that encourage open and two-way communication achieve higher levels of employee satisfaction. Research has shown that open information flow increases employee well-being and job satisfaction (Borgulya & Somogyvári, 2007). Two-way communication provides opportunities for feedback, which helps to involve employees in decision-making and in achieving organizational goals (Men, 2014). The two main types of organizational communication are internal and external communication. Internal communication focuses on the flow of information within the organisation, while external communication aims to connect with external partners and customers (McCurdy, 2017). Internal communication ensures collaboration between organisational units, while external communication shapes the image and reputation of the organisation among external stakeholders (Mazzei, 2014). In order to operate effectively in an organisation, it is essential to coordinate these two forms of communication (Surbhi, 2017).

The primary purpose of internal communication is to facilitate the effective exchange of information between managers and employees and to support the maintenance of an organisational culture. This form of communication contributes to employee motivation and performance, while enhancing trust and organizational cohesion (Clampitt, 2010). Well-functioning internal communication has a positive impact on employee satisfaction and organizational stability by ensuring a continuous and clear flow of information (Heide, Johansson, & Simonsson, 2005). However, its absence can lead to organizational conflict, misunderstandings, and failure to achieve goals (Krause, 2019).

Effective communication is one of the most important skills an organisation's employees can acquire, as it is a tool to help them achieve their goals. Clear and comprehensible information transfer is essential to avoid misunderstandings and confusion (Borgulya & Somogyvári, 2007). Poorly designed communication systems can not only lead to information distortion, but also to loss of time and resources (Krause, 2019). To address such challenges, organisations need to develop transparent and structured communication systems that support clear messaging and reduce the risk of conflict. Developing communication skills is key to working effectively and achieving organisational goals. Leaders who can communicate clearly and effectively foster collaboration among employees and increase engagement (Tourish, 2010). A well-functioning communication culture can contribute to the long-term success of an organisation and maintain its competitiveness.

Experienced business leaders know well that satisfied employees lead to higher levels of productivity, which ultimately leads to organisational success. Good communication is the foundation for quality performance and strong working relationships, which are essential to maintaining organisational cohesion. Open, two-way communication between managers and employees increases employee engagement and motivation (Borgulya & Somogyvári, 2007). Research shows that organisations that use transparent communication systems achieve higher levels of satisfaction and productivity than those with less effective communication (Tsai et al., 2020). However, when communication is incomplete or inadequate, it can lead to a loss of trust and inefficiency, resulting in conflict within the organisation. Companies with poor communication cannot achieve the same level of success and performance as those with effective communication systems.

Communication problems can have a negative impact not only on internal operations, but also on relationships with external stakeholders, especially in today's digitalised work environment (Ruck et al., 2017).

For organisational effectiveness and efficiency, it is essential for managers to create an environment in which employees feel stability and optimism, and which enables effective communication. For employees, continuous feedback is of paramount importance, as it not only increases motivation but also job satisfaction (Jiang & Men, 2017). Effective communication is particularly important in remote working environments, where the quality of information flow has a significant impact on collaboration between team members (Marlow et al., 2017). Communication creates a close link between employer and employee, and its effective functioning is essential to achieving the internal goals of the organisation. If direct managers use inappropriate communication strategies, this can lead to conflict and tension, which reduces productivity. Uncertainty and dissatisfaction often result from managers not providing clear guidance and feedback (Alonso et al., 2021). Therefore, it is the responsibility of direct managers to ensure clear and consistent communication that helps achieve corporate goals. Inadequate communication can be a major cause of confusion and poor planning within the organisation. All companies should strive to place a strong emphasis on two-way communication that ensures clear objectives and effective execution (Karanges et al., 2015). Large companies such as Google consciously create a work environment that encourages two-way communication and provides space for employees to relax beyond their daily tasks. Such an environment increases employee satisfaction, which contributes significantly to the success of the company. Organisations that base their operations on respect and trust perform much better than those that ignore these values (Xu et al., 2022).

Improving the Quality of Communication and Opportunities

Open communication is essential to maintain organisational well-being and effectiveness. Companies can offer a variety of ways to increase job satisfaction, such as competitive pay, promotions, job security, open and transparent communication, and recognition of employees' efforts. All these factors contribute to employee well-being and have a positive impact on their performance (Harausová, 2013). Recent research shows that a flexible working environment and the use of appropriate communication channels can further increase satisfaction and job performance (Kim et al., 2020). Open communication between employer and employee plays a key role in increasing job satisfaction. When employees feel that their work and efforts are recognised, they contribute to the success of the organisation with greater productivity and commitment. The implementation of open and honest communication in a company is essential in order to increase well-being at work and to enable employees to perform at higher levels (Borgulya & Somogyvári, 2007). In addition, initiatives such as regular performance reviews and feedback also contribute to increasing satisfaction (Ruck et al., 2017).

Communication is an essential tool for managing any organisation. Whether it is implementing new policies, preparing for a crisis, or creating organizational security, effective communication is an integral part of effective management. For successful management, it is essential that organizations develop comprehensive strategies that ensure ongoing communication with internal and external stakeholders, employees, and communities (Heidrich, 2001). The use of new technologies such as artificial intelligence and collaborative platforms can facilitate the speed and accuracy of information flow (Budianto et al, 2021). Leadership is a key function of management that contributes to achieving organizational goals and maximizing efficiency. It is important to distinguish between manager-type leadership and entrepreneurial leadership roles, as they have different characteristics. The managerial type of leader is essentially an administrative role, aimed at maintaining stability and order. This type of leader sets short-term goals and makes detailed plans to achieve them, while typically making decisions alone (Papp & Szabó, 2015). However, recent research suggests that leadership effectiveness can be significantly increased by using a democratic leadership style and open communication within the team (Jiang et al., 2019). The entrepreneurial leader, on the other hand, is more likely to initiate dynamic changes and create visions that need followers to implement. This leadership style relies less on concrete planning and more on passion and vision. The entrepreneurial leader is able to motivate others by transferring his or her passion to employees, thereby increasing their engagement and performance (Papp & Szabó, 2015; Arruda, 2016). Transformational leadership, with its strong emphasis

on inspiration and support for individual development, also has a significant impact on organisational performance (Xu et al., 2022).

Global events - pandemics, political changes, natural disasters and social movements - put companies, their managers and employees under considerable pressure. These circumstances affect the way companies operate, as well as stakeholders and markets. A company's position in such situations can be crucial: it can shape consumer perceptions, stimulate the movement of markets and strengthen or weaken corporate values. It is therefore of paramount importance that company leaders carefully consider what issues to address, how and when to respond, and who is best placed to do so. The strategic role of corporate communication becomes particularly critical in a crisis situation, as decisions and messages can determine the company's image, market position and future success in the long term. An inappropriate communication strategy can easily undermine an organisation's reputation, whereas well-planned and well-applied communication can help strengthen a company even in times of crisis (Heide & Simonsson, 2020).

In periods of crisis, speed, transparency and empathy in communication are key to business success. When leaders communicate with urgency and honesty, it helps employees and stakeholders to adapt more easily to the changes brought about by the crisis. This kind of communication enables effective decision-making and helps mitigate damage while building trust in leadership (Anthonissen, 2009). Furthermore, the role of technology is increasingly important in crisis communication: digital platforms provide a fast and direct transfer of information (Liu et al., 2018). Crisis situations activate survival instincts, which in workplace settings are manifested in employees' concerns about job security, family responsibility, and available resources. The primary responsibility of managers at such times is to ensure that employees feel safe and receive the support they need to get through difficult times (Anthonissen, 2009). Appropriate support and communication can directly contribute to maintaining employees' mental well-being (Boin et al., 2020). Urgent communication encourages people to make quick and effective decisions that help minimize the damage from crises. Transparency enhances trust in leadership and reassures employees that their leaders are communicating openly and are able to manage the situation. An empathic approach and conveying a message of hope can help to increase resilience, which is essential when dealing with crisis situations (Anthonissen, 2009; Johansen & Johansen, 2018).

Maintaining regular, open lines of communication within the company is particularly important in times of crisis. Effective communication with employees has a positive long-term impact on the internal functioning of the organisation and can contribute to successfully managing the crisis and maintaining organisational culture and morale. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges for companies, particularly in the area of remote working communication. Teleworkers often reported feeling isolated, insecure and lacking confidence, which reduces their organisational commitment and job satisfaction (Pozen & Samuel, 2022). However, the use of appropriate digital communication tools could help to reduce these problems (Yarberry & Sims, 2021). During the pandemic, companies around the world faced the challenge of how to maintain business as usual while adapting to changing circumstances. The mandatory use of masks, which has become essential in many countries, has created another barrier to effective communication. Face masks impeded voice transmission, limited the visibility of facial expressions and made oral communication difficult. This not only caused stress and frustration in workplace interactions, but also made it difficult to establish and maintain interpersonal relationships (Varagya, 2021).

Methodology

The aim of the research is to analyse in depth the internal communication systems and management styles of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Slovakia. We focus on the impact of two-way communication on employee satisfaction, employee engagement and organisational culture development. The study pays particular attention to the communication challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has significantly transformed the way companies operate, and the strategies managers adopt. The aim of the research is to provide practical guidance on how to optimise communication systems, increase managerial effectiveness and improve employee well-being and organisational resilience. To this end, the following research questions were formulated.

- How does the quality and frequency of two-way communication affect employee satisfaction, engagement and workplace climate?
- Which styles of leadership - assertive, aggressive or passive - are most conducive to conflict management and strengthening organisational cohesion?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic changed internal corporate communication and what strategies have managers adopted to meet the new challenges?
- Are there communication gaps between senior and middle managers and what impact do they have on organisational effectiveness?
- To what extent does the communication style of managers influence employee job satisfaction and the creation of a positive workplace atmosphere?

As a first step of the research, we analysed secondary data, using national and international literature to explore the processes of internal communication in companies. Then, empirical research was conducted using a quantitative method to determine whether there is a communication gap within Slovakian companies.

The questionnaire survey was conducted using Google Forms and consisted of 19 questions, consisting of single- and multiple-choice questions and scales. The questionnaire was designed to assess the effectiveness of internal communication, conflict management and employees' experiences in the workplace, with a particular focus on the COVID-19 epidemic period.

In this section, we analyse the results of the questionnaire survey and present the data in the form of charts. The questionnaire was completed by 102 participants, who were completely anonymous. In addition to the demographic questions, we examined employees' interactions with their immediate supervisors and co-workers, with a particular focus on conflict management strategies, managerial communication and employee well-being. We also analysed how the pandemic affected internal communication within organisations. The results were processed using Microsoft Excel, and the number and percentage distribution of responses was determined. Descriptive statistical methods were used, taking into account that the sample was not representative.

Results and Discussion

The results of the research are based on the responses to a questionnaire on internal communication and its impact among employees of small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia. The aim was to investigate how organisational communication influences employees' attitudes, happiness, job satisfaction, and the extent to which the COVID-19 epidemic has changed the dynamics of workplace communication.

Demographic Data

The demographic section of the questionnaire included five questions. The first question concerned the gender of the respondents, which showed that 76.4% of the respondents were male (78), while 23.5% were female (24). An analysis of the age of the respondents showed that middle-aged respondents dominated, with the largest group being 46-55 years old (30.3%), followed by the 36-45 age group (25.4%). This also showed that the majority of the respondents had active managerial or managerial experience, which contributed to the relevance of the survey.

The educational attainment of respondents also showed a diverse picture. Half of the respondents (50%) have a school leaving certificate, 29.4% have a university degree, while 20.5% have only a bachelor's degree. The survey sought to ensure that the sample of respondents was representative of different social strata and educational backgrounds.

The questions on the nationality and residence of the participants showed that some foreign citizens who work in Slovakia but live in other countries also took part in the survey. This commuting pattern was also reflected in the responses, which is particularly interesting in terms of international labour mobility.

Workplace Data

The second part of the questionnaire looked at the type of work respondents do. The results show that 61.7% of respondents do mental work, while 38.2% do physical work. The next question asked how long respondents had been working in their current job. The answers showed that a significant number of respondents have been working in the same job for many years, indicating that they have a longer-term experience of the company culture and the communication style of their superiors. The age of managers was also an important factor in the research. The results show that the majority of respondents' immediate supervisors (42.1%) are between 56 and 65 years old, with fewer managers in the younger age group. This result suggests that a large proportion of senior positions are held by the more experienced, older age group, which may influence communication dynamics in the organisation. The number of subordinates was also a critical factor, as managers with more subordinates are at greater risk of misunderstandings and communication problems. In the analysis, we looked at the number of employees reporting to a manager and found that managing larger teams can be more challenging.

Leadership Styles

The research has devoted specific questions to the communication and leadership styles of managers. According to 40% of respondents, although managers define the tasks, they are also actively involved in communicating with employees. This style not only increases productivity, but also employee esteem, which can lead to long-term organisational stability. Another 32 respondents felt that managers put more emphasis on work results than on workplace relationships. This approach can improve performance in the short term but can also generate conflict in the long term. 28% of respondents said that managers involve them in decision-making processes, which increases employee engagement and motivation. Only two respondents felt that their supervisors were minimally involved in providing direction and support, which can lead to lower employee satisfaction.

Demographic Aspect	Category	Data
Total Respondents		102 people
Gender distribution	Male	76.40%
	Female	23.50%
Age distribution	18-25	8.80%
	26-35	15.70%
	36-45	25.50%
	46-55	30.40%
	56-65	18.60%
	65+	0.98%
Education level	Primary	20.60%
	Secondary	50%
	Tertiary	29.40%
Citizenship	Slovak	94.10%
	Hungarian	5.90%

Residence	Slovak	92.10%
	Hungarian	7.80%
Type of Work	Manual	38%
	Intellectual	62%
Length of Employment	Less than 1 year	5.90%
	1-5 years	13.70%
	6-15 years	47%
	16-25 years	21.60%
	26-35 years	6.90%
	36+ years	4.90%
Direct Supervisor's Age	18-25	0.98%
	26-35	1.96%
	36-45	15.70%
	46-55	35.30%
	56-65	42.20%
	65+	3.90%
Number of Subordinates per Leader	10 or fewer	58%
	11-20	32%
	21-30	9%
	30+	1%

The results showed that leadership styles and communication have a significant impact on job satisfaction and organisational stability. Active, two-way communication that takes into account the needs of employees can be more effective in the long term, while an overly controlling management style can produce short-term results but can also cause conflict and dissatisfaction in the organisation.

Intra-Organisational Conflicts

The research asked targeted questions about management communication, workplace conflict, its frequency and nature. We also looked at how feedback is managed, how opinions are listened to and taken into account, and communication strategies between employers and employees. Six questions were used to gauge respondents' perceptions of their managers' information communication practices, problem-solving skills, conflict management styles and their approach to creating a positive workplace environment. Responses to the questions on managers' conflict management revealed that 43.1% of respondents believe that managers take into account the opinions of others and try to avoid situations that could cause divisions among employees. Conversely, 28.4% of respondents reported that their managers' conflict management is dominance-based, where the manager always wins the dispute while the other party emerges as the loser. This type of approach can often lead to manipulation and aggressive communication.

A further 14.7% believe that some leaders are passive to conflicts, do not actively participate in solving problems and remain mere observers. On the other hand, 5.8% of respondents believe that there are also leaders who seek joint solutions to conflicts, where a win-win outcome is reached. Open communication between employees and managers, allowing opinions and suggestions to be expressed, is key to office culture. If managers want to create a positive atmosphere, it is essential to ensure that information flows and opinions are heard. Two-way, open communication is an important factor in developing organisational

culture and ensuring employee well-being. Satisfaction with conflict management styles was measured on a scale of one to five. Respondents' feedback ranged widely, but overall, the level of satisfaction was balanced, with no extreme opinions. We also looked at the frequency of conflicts and found that 30.3% of respondents experience conflicts with their immediate supervisors more than once a month, while 28.4% reported that they experience disagreements with colleagues on a weekly basis. The main reasons for conflicts included favouritism with certain employees, poor or incomplete communication, workload and differences of opinion between management and employees. It was also found that 68.6% of respondents believe that conflicts generally involve open and honest dialogue that seeks common solutions. However, 31.3% of respondents believe that conflicts often have a negative impact on organisational well-being and do not always lead to positive outcomes.

Category	Scale 1 (%)	Scale 2 (%)	Scale 3 (%)	Scale 4 (%)	Scale 5 (%)
Leadership conflict management	28.4	43.1	7.8	14.7	5.8
Satisfaction with conflict management	4.9	23.5	26.5	35.3	9.8
Pandemic impact on communication	0	33.3	5.9	42.2	18.6
Communication efficiency during pandemic	12.7	58.8	0.9	23.5	3.9

The Impact of The Pandemic on Organisational Communication

In the last part of the research, we focused on how the COVID-19 pandemic affected communication in the workplace. The results of the questionnaire showed that participants unanimously felt that the pandemic had a significant impact on organisational communication. The mandatory use of protective masks and physical distancing made verbal communication particularly difficult, as they impeded the transmission of verbal and non-verbal signals. 56.8% of the participants worked in a home office, which created additional communication challenges. In jobs requiring physical presence during the pandemic, strict safety measures such as maintaining proper hygiene, keeping a distance and wearing a protective mask had to be implemented. These measures made a transformation of workplace communication inevitable. Hybrid workers (12.7%) benefited from both face-to-face and online communication. Respondents' views on the effectiveness of communication during the pandemic were mixed, but the majority agreed that circumstances had forced organisations to adapt to new communication situations.

Conclusion

The research provides a comprehensive picture of the impact of two-way communication and management styles on the functioning of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Slovakia. The analysis highlighted that the effectiveness of communication and managerial decisions directly influence employee satisfaction, employee engagement and the maintenance of a positive organisational culture. The study placed particular emphasis on the changes brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, which have created new challenges and opportunities for corporate communication.

The results of the research clearly demonstrate that two-way communication is not only paramount for employee satisfaction, but also essential for organisational effectiveness. Participants emphasised that communication based on mutual feedback strengthens trust, improves the workplace atmosphere and facilitates the rapid and effective resolution of conflicts. Employees consider it particularly important that managers take their feedback into account and incorporate it into decision-making. The results show that two-way communication works best in organisational cultures where openness and collaboration are core values. The research separately analysed the impact of leadership styles - assertive, aggressive and passive -

on organisational functioning. The assertive leadership style was found to be the most effective, as it supports employee motivation, fosters team cohesion and promotes workplace harmony. Aggressive leadership styles often led to conflict, while for passive leaders, lack of direction led to dissatisfaction and uncertainty. Assertive leaders were able to adapt communication channels to the needs of employees, thus increasing engagement and performance. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to significant changes in corporate internal communications. Challenges to the shift to remote working included a lack of face-to-face interaction and limitations to the effectiveness of online communication. The research found that during the pandemic, companies that adapted quickly to the changes, such as adopting hybrid working patterns and effectively integrating online tools, performed better. Digital communication made up for the lack of face-to-face meetings to some extent but could not fully replace them. The research highlighted the communication gaps between senior and middle managers. Middle managers often felt that they did not receive enough information from senior managers, leading to uncertainty and decision-making difficulties. This gap hindered the achievement of organisational goals and reduced employee commitment. The results suggest that closing communication gaps is key to increasing organisational effectiveness.

The research confirmed that the quality of feedback is directly linked to employee satisfaction. Employees who regularly received constructive feedback from their managers were more likely to identify with organisational goals and to be more engaged in their work. Managers' communication skills, in particular their open and empathetic approach, contributed significantly to a positive workplace culture. The results suggest that two-way communication and an assertive leadership style play a significant role in the success of SMEs in Slovakia. Effective communication systems not only increase employee satisfaction but also contribute to organisational resilience and sustainable development. The experience of the pandemic has highlighted the importance of managerial flexibility and the use of digital tools, which are essential to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. The results of this research provide valuable insights into how to improve internal communication and optimise management practices to support the long-term success of organisations. These results are not only relevant for SMEs in Slovakia, but also offer lessons for the development of internal communication strategies in companies in general.

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