

# Fit for Partnership with Germany Journal

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ENGLISH

MANAGER TRAINING PROGRAMME OF THE GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY FOR ECONOMIC AFFAIRS AND ENERGY



## In Focus: The Virtual Manager Training Programme



### A Response to the Crisis

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### “Find the Containers!”

How MP alumna Ainur Abdina is steering her enterprise through the pandemic

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IN FOCUS IN THIS ISSUE:

# Protection to Get Through the Crisis

The Corona pandemic has led to a historic slump in the German economy in 2020. The aim of the German Federal Government is to prevent insolvencies and mass unemployment of the magnitude typically experienced as a consequent of such crises. The softening of the economic consequences is due in part to an extensive package of measures implemented by the German Federal Government. [READ MORE FROM PAGE 21.](#)

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Dear Readers,



At the beginning of 2020 who would have thought that we would only be able to offer our world-wide programme participants a virtual welcome to Germany for a while. We’ve now been doing this for a few months – and are very pleased with how well the Virtual Manager Training Programme has been received and how much positive feedback we have been given from all over the world. This issue of the journal is therefore dedicated to the new Programme format and ways of dealing with the Corona pandemic. Starting from page 8, read all about our participants’ and alumni’s experience of the digital seminars, virtual on-site visits and specialised events, and the challenges that switching to a virtual format has presented.

While the pandemic has resulted in lost sales and planning problems for many entrepreneurs in 2020, new opportunities have also opened up for some MP alumni. From page 38 on, our success stories reveal new ways of doing business and ideas for overcoming crises. In our specialist articles towards the end of the journal, you can find out what role digital communication has to play during times of challenge and how to promote team spirit in your enterprise.

To conclude, I will soon be retiring, so I would like to say goodbye to you with this issue. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank you all once again for your loyalty to the Manager Training Programme and ask you to continue to support the Programme in the future.

You are welcome to send your comments or questions regarding the articles in this issue of the journal to [mp@giz.de](mailto:mp@giz.de).

**Reimut Düring**  
Head of the Manager Training Programme



## Dear Reader,

Like so many people and businesses all over the world, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy's programmes for the promotion of foreign trade have also been affected by the Corona pandemic. Due to wide-ranging restrictions, this pandemic has also had an impact on the operative implementation of the international Manager Training Programme. In spring 2020, for instance, groups which had already started their training could no longer continue in the usual way because of restrictions to protect health and regretfully this training had to be brought to an unscheduled end.

The Manager Training Programme thrives on international exchange. Therefore we are particularly pleased that the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), together with the various training centres, quickly found ways to make these exchanges possible even during the Corona pandemic and, unlike in the past, to have them take place online. Following a brief interruption, 33 groups participated their training as part of the new digital Manager Training Programme since summer. This virtual Programme spans a period of eight

rather than the previous four weeks and continues to include all the key elements: The training has been carried out in this digital format by the training centres since August and international B2B contacts are still being initiated between the participating enterprises. Even "on-site" visits to firms are taking place virtually and have hence remained an important part of the Programme even during the pandemic.

Germany's international economic relations, in which the Manager Training Programme also plays a role, are of significant importance to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy. Strengthening these relations is one of the Ministry's key tasks. We are therefore extremely glad that the Programme has also been a success in its digital format and has already led to initial business transactions being concluded; with these having been negotiated and finalised online.

Despite the positive aspects of the Virtual Manager Training Programme, let us hope we will return to normality in the coming year and that face-to-face

meetings will soon replace the currently digital ones. As it is these which are at the heart of our Programme. Until such a time we wish all the participants every success with, and great enjoyment of, our new Manager Training Programme and we would like to take this opportunity to thank all the stakeholders, both in the partner countries and also here in Germany at GIZ and the training centres, for their commitment to developing the Programme further and to keeping it running, even during difficult times.

Yıldız Götze

**Yıldız Götze** is head of the division Institutional Partnerships (incl. EU Twinning), Manager Training Programme, Advice to the Government at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi).

## Kyrgyzstan to Continue to Be an MP Partner in the Coming Years



State Secretary Aidin Sharsheev (left) and Ambassador Monika Iwersen after signing the memorandum in Bishkek.

The partnership with Kyrgyzstan within the scope of the Manager Training Programme will be continued until the end of 2022. On 2 October 2020, Aidin Sharsheev, Kyrgyz State Secretary for the Min-

istry of Economy for the Central Asian country, and the German Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Monika Iwersen, signed a joint Memorandum of Understanding to this effect.

“We are very glad that this successful Programme will be continued. It is a great support for the Kyrgyz economy and is very popular”, State Secretary Sharsheev said. Kyrgyzstan has been a Manager Training Programme partner country since 2008 and since then has enabled more than 250 of the country’s entrepreneurs to participate in it. As a result of the travel restrictions due to the Coronavirus, the Programme is taking place in a virtual format this year. Kyrgyz executives also participated successfully in this virtual training and have already been able to conclude some initial contracts.

Representatives of the Kyrgyz Chamber of Commerce and Industry also attended the event on the occasion of the ceremonial signing in Bishkek. The Chamber coordinates the MP in Kyrgyzstan on behalf of GIZ and is the main point of contact for those interested in participating in the Programme and for Programme stakeholders.

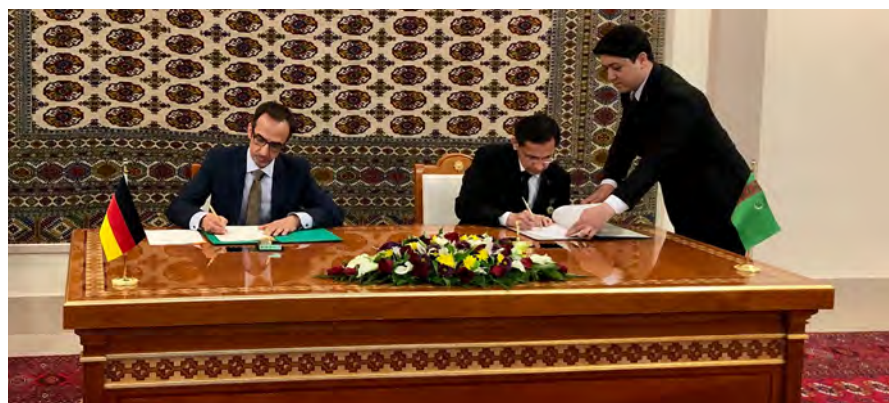


## MP with Turkmenistan to Be Continued

Enterprises in Turkmenistan are able to participate in the BMWi Manager Training Programme for a further three years. This has been agreed by representatives of Germany and the Central Asian country. On 11 December 2020, Dirk Jakobi, Chargé d’Affaires at the German Embassy in Ashgabat, and the Turkmen Minister of Finance and Economy, Muhammetgeldi Serdarov, signed a Joint

Declaration in the Turkmen capital Ashgabat on the extension of the Programme until the end of 2023.

Turkmenistan has been a partner country in the Manager Training Programme since 2008 and since then has sent 250 specialists and executives to Germany for training.



Dirk Jakobi (left) and Muhammetgeldi Serdarov signing the Joint Declaration.

## Programme with Ukraine Extended to 2023

The Manager Training Programme with Ukraine is entering its next phase. On 8 December 2020, Anka Feldhusen, the

German Ambassador to Ukraine, and Iryna Nowikowa, Deputy Minister for Development of Economy, Trade and Ag-

riculture of Ukraine, signed a Joint Declaration on the extension of the Programme. On the occasion of the now sixth declaration of extension, Ambassador Feldhusen said: “I am glad that with this declaration we are providing a reliable basis for the future of the Programme until at least 2023. The renewed extension of the term is proof of the strong commitment on both sides and the willingness to further strengthen our cooperation.”

Since 2001, more than 1,500 Ukrainian executives have benefited from this Programme for promoting international trade, which is provided by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi).




Anka Feldhusen (right) and Iryna Nowikowa (left) after signing the declaration in Kiev.

## Video Clip Promotes the Virtual Programme

A new video presents the Virtual Manager Training Programme in a concise form. It provides information on the content and structure of the digital Programme. The clip, in which participants, German enterprises, tutors and trainers feature, is to be used to promote the Programme in the partner countries. “Using this video, we want to succinctly present

what the virtual Programme is all about and the benefits it offers. For foreign enterprises, participation can be the key to gaining access to the market in Germany and even the EU”, Reimut Düring, Head of the Manager Training Programme, explains. In the brief three-minute clip, the protagonists talk about the opportunities and possibilities participation offers.

The video was made available to the 21 partners for promoting the Programme in their respective countries. It can also be accessed on the Programme’s website and on Facebook.

 [www.managerprogramme.com](http://www.managerprogramme.com)



## The Course Has Been Set for Further Cooperation

Germany and Russia have committed to continuing their cooperation within the framework of the Manager Training Programme (MP). On 9 July 2020, German Ambassador to Russia Dr Géza Andreas von Geyr and Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation Vladislav Fedulov signed a joint declaration in Moscow to extend the Programme until 2022. "We are united in our goal: economic cooperation works better when the business community knows each other better," von Geyr said afterwards. At their meeting on 3 December 2020 the members of the German-Russian Steering Committee also underlined the importance of the MP in promoting economic cooperation between the two countries. The co-chair of the 12th session, Dr Andreas Nicolin from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), sees the MP alumni's experience and expertise as a great asset for bilateral economic cooperation. His counterpart Al-

xei Boldin from the Russian Ministry of Economic Development proposed a joint evaluation of the impact of the MP. In future, online elements of the Programme will be linked with face-to-face events.

Russia joined the MP as a partner country in 1998 and since then over 6,000

Russian executives have participated. Launched in 2006, the hands-on training courses under the "Fit for Business with Russia" programme have also given many German entrepreneurs the opportunity to get to know potential business partners in Russia. A total of 435 German entrepreneurs have taken advantage of this opportunity so far.



Dr Géza Andreas von Geyr (left) and Vladislav Fedulov (right) signing the joint declaration in July 2020.



## Joint Declaration Signed with China

The Manager Training Programme with China has been extended. In June 2020, Germany and China signed a joint declaration confirming that the cooperation would continue until 2022. China joined the MP in 2007 and since then has sent more than 600 entrepreneurs to Germany for training.



## The Virtual Manager Training Programme

# A Response to the Crisis

The pandemic in 2020 brought about the biggest change in the 20-year history of the Manager Training Programme: since August 2020 the Programme has been operating online – and is experiencing ever increasing popularity. The *Journal* spoke with Reimut Düring, Head of the Manager Training Programme, about this significant development and the plans for the Programme's future.

*Journal: In spring 2020 all Programme activities were stopped. What led to this decision and what consequences did it have?*

**Reimut Düring:** When the travel restrictions were tightened in both Germany

and the Manager Training Programme's (MP's) partner countries in mid-March 2020 due to the Coronavirus, it became clear that we would not be able to continue with the Programme's face-to-face format involving a four-week stay in Germany. The participants who were in Germany at the time had to travel back to their home countries, and all the scheduled visits to Germany by further groups had to be post-

poned for the time being. A solution for how to continue the Programme had to be found. In close consultation with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and our Programme partners in the 21 partner countries, we decided to establish an online version which, with the support of the training centres across Germany, has now been implemented.

*What characterises the online Programme?*

The participants complete an eight-week online Programme under the "Fit for Partnership with Germany" motto, during which they become familiar with German corporate culture and are prepared for initiating business with German firms. This is achieved through interactive training sessions and video meetings with German entrepreneurs. The classic components such as on-site visits to enter-



The result was a series of online events with specialist lectures, further training and formats which facilitated an intensive exchange of experience. Demand remains at a high level, which naturally pleases us very much.

"We are on the right track", says Reimut Düring, Head of the Manager Training Programme, with conviction.



prises, management training and B2B meetings all still take place, just in a virtual form. A one-week visit to Germany is planned for 2021 to supplement the digital Programme. During their stay, the participants will have face-to-face on-site meetings with German entrepreneurs, visit trade fairs and interact with other Programme participants.

*What advantages does this format offer?*

The digital Programme enables our participants to expand their management skills and to build and strengthen business relationships with German enterprises – without having to even leave their own firms. Thus, the foreign and German enterprises which participate are able to establish lasting economic relations and advance their businesses despite the current Covid-19 related restrictions. The virtual Programme's training modules are highly interactive and provide a lot of room for questions, exchange and personal support. And, following their participation in the Programme, the entrepreneurs become part of a worldwide network of more than 15,000 alumni.

*Numerous options and new features were also available to the MP alumni in 2020.*

Right from the start, it was important to us to continue the work between the partner countries and Germany and to deepen mutual economic relations. So, we wanted to consciously support our alumni in these times of crisis and continue to give them the opportunity to network with each other. The follow-up events, which are normally held for one or two days in the home country, were also held virtually. We spoke with each partner country to find out which topics were of concern to the enterprises there. The result was a series of online events with specialist lectures, further training and formats which facilitated an intensive exchange of experience.

## The 3 modules of the Virtual Manager Training Programme

- 1) **Manager training** Executives are familiarised with the German business culture through online training modules. Simultaneously they deepen their skills in management and international cooperation.
- 2) **Learning on-site** By means of virtual visits to German enterprises, participants gain insights into successful corporate management and become familiar with modern technologies and equipment. They further develop their management skills and benefit from exchanging their experience with German managers.
- 3) **Initiating business** During one-to-one online discussions (B2B) with German enterprises, the participants present their enterprises and products based on their individual corporate profiles and enter into negotiations regarding opportunities for cooperation.

Demand remains at a high level, which naturally pleases us very much.

*What conclusions have you drawn after the first few months?*

The MP can also be run under Corona constraints, is well accepted and leads to economic results – as the past few months have shown. Roughly 650 managers participated in 2020, many of them very successfully. The numerous business contacts that have been established and the contracts concluded show that the new format is effective, as does the direct feedback from participants. This confirms to us that we are on the right track.

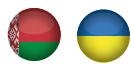
*What are the next steps for 2021?*

For the time being, the virtual Programme will continue in its current form. It has established itself and we are glad that almost all the partner countries are now participating in it. We are expecting more than 50 groups to participate in the Virtual MP in 2021. Nevertheless, we naturally want to enable our foreign managers to have face-to-face contact with the German business sector as soon as possible. A one-week stay in Germany is planned as a supplementary element to the virtual Programme in 2021. However, this will depend on how the global pandemic and the opportunities for travel develop. In the long-term, we foresee hybrid models that will comprise both online and physical attendance modules. In the meantime, we are keeping our fingers crossed for all our participants and alumni that they will have a successful business year. And we hope that our new video clip will convince many more entrepreneurs to apply to participate in the Programme.



## How can I participate?

The Virtual Manager Training Programme is aimed at executives, particularly those from small and medium-sized enterprises, from the Programme's 21 partner countries. Anyone who is interested can receive information on the application procedure from their local partners in their respective country. Details are available at [www.managerprogramme.com](http://www.managerprogramme.com)



# Initial Links Have Been Established

As part of the Manager Training Programme (MP) a group of Ukrainian and Belarusian executives focused on the key topic of Industry 4.0. After eight weeks of online training they were of the same opinion: By participating in the virtual MP, stable links to the Germany economy can be established.

The complete Programme was provided online for the entrepreneurs, which, in addition to IT specialists, also included project developers, plant manufacturers and networkers. Instead of taking a bus to visit the German firms – as is otherwise customary – the group visited, via a live link, the Dresden Technology Centre as well as Volkswagen’s Future Mobility Incubator and a virtual Christmas Market organised by Erzgebirge artisans in Seiffen.



**The Programme came at just the right time for us, it was the perfect match.**

Mitya Kovalsky

Based on lectures and profiles, as well as a virtual 360-degree tour, all of which were recorded in the studio of the start-up Cinector Mittweida, the participants discussed questions about business and human resource management relating to the firm IMM electronics GmbH Mittweida. Top-class experts from the network Smart Systems Hub in Dresden talked with the Ukrainian and Belarusian executives about various fields of activity, from 5G to learning robots and the reuse of heat-waste generated by data centres run by cloud operators.

“The Programme came at just the right time for us, it was the perfect match”, says Programme participant Mitya Kovalsky, the head of marketing at the IT firm Intelsoft from Kiev. “We have changed our way of thinking and now better understand the expectations that our German partners in the fields of information and communication technology have”, added the managing director of Evergreen, Sergey Kravtsov.

Although it was more difficult for the Eastern European entrepreneurs to initiate business partnerships with German firms than it would have been had they been physically present in Germany, they intend to recommend the Manager Training Programme in their home countries. And they hope the situation with regards to the pandemic in Europe improves so that they can consolidate the initial contacts, which have already been established, in person during their “Completion Stay” in Germany.



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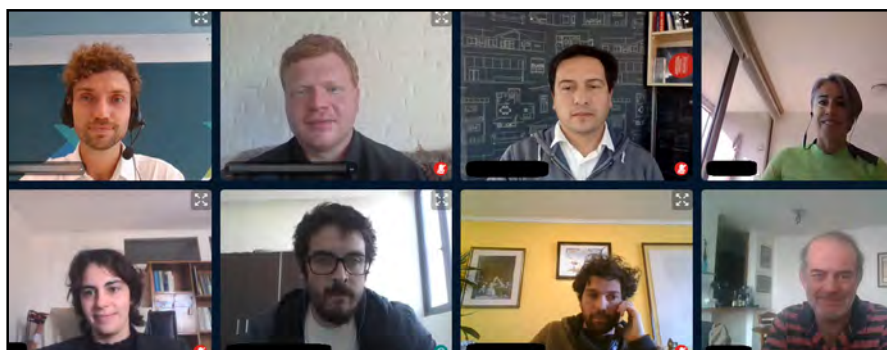
#### About the author

Peter Rösler has been working for the MP since 2002. As project director at GICON-InTraBiD GmbH, his responsibilities include programme development and establishing working relationships between foreign participants and German enterprises.



# Green Energy Goes Global

As part of one of the first virtual training courses, 17 MP participants from Chile explored green business options in a variety of applications from production, import, and export to environmental economics, and consulting in the energy sector. Given the ongoing energy transition underway in Chile, there was great interest in digitally exchanging information with two German companies in September 2020.



The two companies – SunOyster Systems GmbH and EasyWind GmbH – are both located on the GreenTec Campus; a green technology and energy cluster in northern Germany for firms involved in renewable energies. The seven-person staff at SunOyster Systems develops innovative solar technology. The founder and CEO, Dr Carsten Corino, addressed Chile’s enormous solar potential in his presentation: “The northern part of Chile has the best solar resources in the world, especially when it comes to direct radiation.” Although Germany’s solar potential is only a fraction of Chile’s, Corino also outlined the local development opportunities for German solar energy. This is of key importance for the company’s business model,

which is entirely geared towards the use of solar energy. The Chilean participants were particularly interested in the “SunOyster” solar collector’s innovative design and industrial applications. The systems co-generate electrical and thermal energy, and the waste heat created by power generation can be directed into a variety of heating applications. The SunOyster name hints at another special feature: the solar power modules close automatically, almost like an oyster, when storms and high winds hit.

The MP participants took the opportunity to ask more in-depth questions about the business model and technical issues, including Claudia Puentes, who works in Chile’s solar industry at ENERGÍA MC2.

During the meeting, she announced that she would be contacting SunOyster GmbH regarding a possible cooperation.

The virtual tour of EasyWind was also a highlight for the Chilean executives. John Witt, who is in charge of international business at EasyWind, talked about the company structure and philosophy. For over 30 years, EasyWind has made small wind turbines for power generation and marketed them worldwide. The company’s turbines are designed and manufactured in Germany to operate in harsh climates and with little maintenance. Participants were particularly interested to learn from Witt that the competition in the market for wind turbines has dropped in recent years and that the EasyWind 6 is the only IEC-certified small wind turbine currently on the market. Witt also pointed out that the high quality which is associated with the “Made in Germany” is in demand among international customers, noting: “If you want to be competitive as a German company today, it’s not about price, but about quality.” EasyWind’s concept of using long-lasting quality to win over customers, beyond just the national boundaries but also in some selected countries abroad, and despite the resulting higher production and labour costs, was an important aspect for the participants. Equally valuable was the realisation that the durability of the products is a prerequisite for recouping the investment through the savings, which from an economic perspective, can be achieved after a few years.

The subsequent discussion focused on questions about local challenges regarding the use of the products and export opportunities in other countries through local distribution partners.

The Chilean managers valued the exchange with the two companies which have different innovative solutions that can be transferred to their own country, and the openness of the two representatives. Accordingly, the interest in continuing the bilateral dialogues was high and further potential for cooperation looks to be on the cards.



#### About the author

Bianca Schnober works as an organisational consultant at IMAP GmbH, Düsseldorf, which supervised the Chilean group.



# “Everyone Should Seize this Opportunity”

The Virtual Manager Training Programme has been running since August 2020. It is being implemented by training centres throughout Germany. But what challenges are associated with the new format and which advantages do the online modules offer? The *Journal* put these questions to **Timo Tekhaus**, Executive Director of Akademie International, and **Katharina Bömers**, Project Manager at the Chamber of Industry and Commerce for Munich and Upper Bavaria.



*Journal:* Mr Tekhaus, you have successfully completed the first virtual Programme groups. What is your verdict?

**Timo Tekhaus:** In general, the virtual Programme is running very successfully. So far, the seminars on management skills have worked particularly well, which also has a lot to do with the fact that the participants were very motivated and contributed actively and consistently. I was pleasantly surprised that even in the digital setting real group dynamics developed. In the case of an Iranian group, there was a Skype discussion among the participants after every virtual on-site visit to reflect on what they had experienced, and there were even physical meetings to share thoughts on the Programme. But the virtual on-site visits were also very well received and always involved lively discussions.



*There were surely also some obstacles to overcome.*

Indeed, there were. For example, it is a bit tricky to accurately present an enterprise's production line using a video. That is where the digital format has its limits. However, the firms have good presenta-



**The Programme is a way to quickly and effectively establish contact with German firms.**

Timo Tekhaus

tions that explain the products, so our participants definitely benefited from them. Arranging business meetings with entrepreneurs whose home countries are affected by sanctions is a challenge. But, of course, this also applies for the standard Manager Training Programme with

its four-week stays in Germany. Furthermore, participating in virtual trade fairs only provides a limited means of establishing business contacts. Many of the participants are now looking forward to a final week's stay in Germany. As far as the technology is concerned, we have all become quite familiar with the online formats. We explained the respective video conference tools to our participants in advance, and technical checks were always carried out with the German entrepreneurs and trainers before every module.

*In retrospect, what proved to be an advantage?*

Certainly the fact that the participants did not need to travel; besides the travel expenses saved, the environmental factor should not be neglected. For many of them, being able to participate in the vir-

tual Programme in parallel to continuing their work is very convenient. It is often not easy to reconcile being absent from their own businesses for four weeks with entrepreneurial duties. In many cases, the digital format makes that easier.

*What has been your personal highlight so far during the virtual training?*

I was very touched to see the photos of the real meetings of a group that met in a city in their home country. It shows that the virtual Programme also has a strong influence on physical cooperation. At the closing event of one group, it was clearly noticeable how they had grown together as a team – and that is, of course, wonderful. In their feedback, participants often said that the significance of teamwork was an important insight they had gained from the seminars and which they want to

apply in their enterprises to improve the involvement of the employees.

*What advice do you have for future Programme participants and those interested in it?*

I can certainly recommend the virtual Manager Training Programme. It is currently the only possible way to quickly and effectively establish contact with German firms. These contacts can be strengthened through face-to-face meetings at a later stage. Everyone should seize this opportunity. In any event, the virtual Programme requires a high degree of discipline. That means that the participants should be very focused and motivated and must really be prepared to get involved. Then the Programme can also be very successful and attractive – even in its virtual form.

*Journal: Ms Bömers, you have successfully completed the first virtual Programme groups. What is your verdict?*

**Katharina Bömers:** The emphasis here was on conveying the content in a digital way that was as lively and interactive as possible. A lot of things are new to the trainers too, and they have taught themselves what is needed to be best prepared for the virtual training. The preparation of the participants for the Programme is now also done digitally, and we are very pleased that this has been so successful. Through countless telephone conversations with German firms and also virtual trade fair visits, many of the Programme participants were able to initiate business contacts with the prospect of achieving economic results. And we hear time and again from German firms that they are glad to have this digital opportunity of meeting potential business partners. Many of them keep in contact by phone afterwards.

*And where do you see the greatest challenges in the virtual implementation of the Programme?*

In part, better technical solutions must still be found. Not all of the group participants have continuous access to a stable internet connection, and this sometimes has an effect on the seminars. But it also depends on the respective platforms for video conferences.

*In retrospect, what proved to be an advantage?*

The exchange between the participants themselves was surprisingly good. For instance, in the evenings after the training sessions they met in the virtual classroom to reflect on the seminars and jointly think about ways to drive their business with Germany forward. Some managers got to know each other really well and dedicated a lot of time to this exchange; we saw real cooperation there. With regard to content, we were able to offer a large number of professional presentations by German firms, and there were some very interesting contributions.



**Anyone interested in the German economy should definitely participate.**

Katharina Bömers

*What has been your personal highlight so far during the virtual training?*

During one virtual on-site visit, the participants were able to visit a coffee roasting plant by video. The firm gave a tour of their production area with a camera, so that the participants were practically seeing everything live. I knew the firm already from previous visits, but the digital visit was something special – the participants' numerous questions made it a very animated event. Moreover, I found it enriching to accompany the training as a co-trainer for the virtual Programme. This way you get to know the participants and their questions and ideas particularly well.

*What advice do you have for future Programme participants and those interested in it?*

Anyone interested in the German economy should definitely participate. It is important to free up the amount of time required because, in addition the roughly 10 to 12 hours a week, time must also be allocated for research as well as preparation and following-up on business contacts. This means that a lot of initiative is required. I believe that the opportunity to educate oneself further as an adult is a gift; that is why executives should seize this opportunity which is being offered by Germany: to develop their managerial skills further and gain a sense of how the Germans operate.



# Market Entry Support

The second group of Ethiopian managers started their training in November as part of the Virtual Manager Training Programme. The entrepreneurs came from a variety of fields, however many represented the coffee and oilseed industries. The Programme included online training courses and offered insights into coffee roasting facilities and glimpses behind the scenes of ecological food manufacturers.

The digital visit to the Bonn Import Promotion Desk (IPD) was especially well received because the participants were very interested in entering the German and EU markets. IPD advises foreign-based enterprises on market entry – independently and affordably. The goal is the sustainable and structured promotion of the import of certain products from a selection of partner countries while complying with high quality, social and environmental standards. The MP participants were pleased to learn that Ethiopia is one of the partner countries.

After Tabea Mack from IPD detailed the services offered and the requirements for entering the European food market,

opportunities for support for the participants were discussed: The Ethiopians have, for example, the option of submitting their enterprises' profile data to IPD which would then be reviewed. The challenges to market entry can then be discussed together. Thanks to these consultation and capacity building services, the requirements of the EU market become clearer for the enterprises and appropriate adjustments can be made. Only then does networking with European importers take place. IPD is especially active in Ethiopia in the food sector, with the exception of the coffee sector, Tabea Mack explained. "It is quite possible that this will change in the future. Contacts such as those that are established via the Manager Training

Programme help us to further expand and optimise our services for Ethiopia."

In a discussion afterwards the managers exchanged ideas with Tabea Mack about the opportunities and risks associated with importing Ethiopian products. They also discussed price policies and distribution channels: How are product prices decided? How can fair prices be negotiated for food producers in Ethiopia? The discussion also covered certifications and labels such as organic or fair trade labels. With regards to production, the group also grappled with the issue of how to cover costs but also maintain competitiveness on a global market.

"It is so important for countries like Ethiopia that are not so developed yet, to learn about such facilitating organisations as IPD that make transactions and business processes easier. I understood that IPD fills in the gap in the area where businesses select their buyers and lead to successful and long-term outcomes between them", said MP participant Dagmawi Hailegiorgis, Deputy Factory Manager for the firm Beza Mar Agro-Industry.

At the end of the Programme, trends and developments which offer participants a solid footing for their mid-term European market entry strategy were discussed. Tabea Mack emphasised: "Ethical aspects such as fair supply chains are becoming increasingly important, especially with regard to food – organic food is becoming more and more important. There is a good opportunity here, especially for the smaller enterprises among the Ethiopian participants, to set themselves apart from the large competitors." All of the participants now hope to travel to Germany soon to gain more insights into the German economy and meet possible cooperation partners.



#### About the author

Christian Codreanu is responsible for all international training programmes and projects at the Chamber of Commerce and Industry (IHK) for Munich and Upper Bavaria.

## Participants' Comments

# “What Was Your Experience of the Programme?”

“ The online training has enriched my life. My field of activity – tourism – is dying out due to the pandemic, and the training courses have given me new impetus and opened up a new way of business development.

Bolat Cherniyazov, participant from Kazakhstan

” In the future, the world and the markets will change a lot. I have to prepare my business and team for that. The Manager Training Programme is a great opportunity to establish new business connections with German firms and to find new ideas and new ways for product processes.

Participant from China

” I learned a lot about the keys to overcoming a crisis during the training: Firstly, the power of motivation. Secondly, the search for new emergent strategies. Thirdly, ways of organising complex structures. The fourth thing was the development of intelligent marketing and, the fifth was the competitive intelligence approach.

Participant from Tunisia

” I appreciate that I had the opportunity to participate in the Virtual Manager Training Programme during the Covid-19 pandemic. Thank you so much for the extraordinary management, amazing support and all the effort you have put into the Programme. I knocked at the door of learning and this Programme opened the door of life for me. I have had an unforgettable experience, a remarkable event that I will always be proud of.

Mohammad Reza Haghghat Nama, participant from Iran

” Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Virtual Manager Training Programme. I have an online shop, and due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we are having a hard time at the moment. Therefore, I am happy to have had this experience and to find new business opportunities in Germany.

Elvira Zarozhnaya, Participant from Belarus



# Inspiration for Entrepreneurs from Seven Countries

A training seminar for an international group of 19 entrepreneurs focused on healthcare and energy efficiency in industry. From August to October, entrepreneurs from Belarus, Georgia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan learned all about how to successfully conduct business in Germany.

Most participants worked in medical and clinical areas, including doctors and people from the pharmaceutical industry, healthcare facility construction and information technology, though the group also included entrepreneurs from social technology, water filtration, toy production, construction materials and the printing and the restaurant industries.

The participants were extremely interested in the virtual on-site tours and took the opportunity to talk about very hands-on, practical management issues and gain some insight into German corporate culture. Such as at Celle-Uelzen Netz GmbH, where Head of Human Resources Martin

Wichmann and two trainees talked to participants about the vocational training system in Germany and how it worked at Celle-Uelzen Netz. He also assured the MP participants: "Celle-Uelzen Netz will continue to support course participants in finding and establishing individual contacts and B2B meetings throughout Germany." MP participant Myroslav Bessarab, a project manager at an IT firm in Ukraine, expressed a desire to stay in contact with Celle-Uelzen Netz after the Programme as well.



**I got valuable tips and suggestions from the training sessions on successful international project and cooperation management.**

Myroslav Bessara

Other virtual on-site tours gave executives useful take-aways for their work. Faryad Shafiee from Iran noted that "the detailed

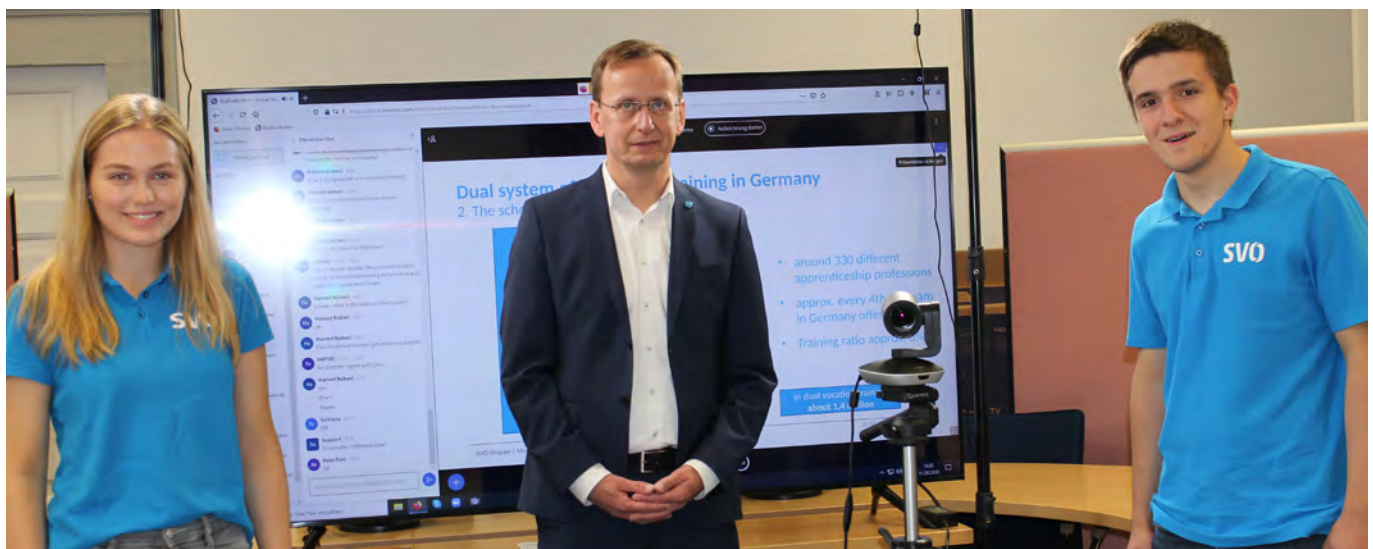
information about export financing and insurance provided by the Euler Hermes AG was of key practical importance." Fellow team member Myroslav Bessarab agreed: "I got valuable tips and suggestions from the training sessions on successful international project and cooperation management and on developing an efficient marketing and sales strategy".

After the seminars, participants highly praised the modules in the break-out rooms, which left them feeling encouraged and motivated. They agreed that the Manager Training Programme was not just a chance to get to know Germany's business environment and culture better, but also a way to establish valuable contacts with participants and enterprises from different countries.



#### About the author

Dr Ronald Pschierer is a programme manager at DMAN (German Management Academy of Lower Saxony) and is responsible for designing and carrying out qualification programmes as part of the MP.



Celle-Uelzen Netz representatives talked about the enterprise in a live feed from a DMAN conference room: HR Manager Martin Wichmann with trainees Sina Geers (left) and Paul Agergaard (right).



The Grohe bathroom taps are well-known all over the world. During a virtual on-site visit in September 2020, MP participants from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan had the opportunity to take a look behind the scenes at the company and learn more about environment-friendly production and sound brand building.



# About Brands and Sustainability

Although most of the participants from these four countries were not from the industry, they were all very interested in the management topics discussed during the virtual on-site visit, because the topic of comprehensive quality and sustainability management is important and forward-looking for SMEs – in terms of successful corporate management, customer retention and as a competitive factor against rival firms.

Following an short video that provided a tour around the Grohe showroom for the managers from Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, the firm’s marketing expert took the group on a journey into the world of brands. With a vivid description of Grohe’s strategy for the development of the firm’s superb pro-

ducts, the interactive presentation was the highlight of the visit. The expert shared numerous tips with the MP participants, including how a brand can be successfully established and developed on the market in the long-term. “I admire the attractive design of the products and the groundbreaking decision Grohe took to assume the entire responsibility for the design with an in-house design department”, one participant said.

As a manufacturer of high-quality bathroom taps, Grohe believes in sustainable production, and this was the topic of a further presentation. The variety and diversity of the Grohe water systems, which are used worldwide, impressed the entrepreneurs and provided them with valuable impetus. A participant from Azerbaijan

enquired about the exact function and areas of application of the Grohe Blue Pure drinking water system: “In our country, drinking water is often of poor quality, which is why it is not used directly from the pipe for drinking. The filter system could also be a good solution for us”, the businesswoman said.



**About the author**  
Rüdiger Focks has worked for Carl Duisberg Centren as a project manager for international strategic business development and has been organising and implementing the MP since 2013.



# “Enterprises Cannot Afford to Postpone Their Development”

Partner organisations around the world are implementing the Manager Training Programme (MP), at the present time in a virtual format. One of them is the Chilean business development initiative CORFO. The *Journal* talked to Vice-President **Pablo Terrazas** about what the switch means for a local partner.

*Journal: CORFO has been an MP partner organisation since 2017. What is your perception of the Programme?*

**Pablo Terrazas:** Over the years, it has become an excellent support tool that CORFO makes available to SMEs for their internationalisation. Our alumni often emphasise that the Programme

offers a unique opportunity to establish contacts and promote sustainable business with German enterprises. The Programme also triggers innovations within their firms. This was confirmed by a survey carried out by us in 2019 among the 63 participants who had travelled to Germany between 2017 and 2019. The

results show that 95 per cent of the participants recommend the Programme and 46 per cent had concluded deals with German firms. It was also shown that the Programme not only generates business between German and Chilean firms, but inspires and activates business innovations too, since 86 per cent of



those surveyed had generated one or more innovations in their enterprise.

*How was the switch to the virtual Programme received by entrepreneurs in Chile?*

In a crisis, we must be creative and innovative enough to continue supporting SMEs and enterprises in our country. SMEs have been greatly affected and had to change their plans and strategies to get out of the crisis. So the change in the Programme was well received. Especially people who were forced to stop operating their business were able to make virtual visits to businesses and to hold online meetings with German SMEs. It is crucial now to generate income and to maintain the businesses in the market. All that has been key to sparking interest and achieving high participation in the Programme.

*Where do you see the main challenges of the virtual format?*

One of the main challenges was to be able to associate the topics of the training with our participants' key business aspects. The contents of the training had been modified as a result of the pandemic, especially in relation to sales and marketing. In addition, our entrepreneurs were not fully aware of the technical possibilities and feared losing control of the learning process. Thus, another challenge was to reassure them that digital business-to-business meetings are just as effective as face-to-face meetings.

*And how did you approach these challenges?*

We tried to apply a good dissemination campaign, positioning the central elements of the online Programme in a communicational way. With regards to its content and structure, we took the results of a CORFO survey on the needs of our SMEs during the pandemic into account. This survey was conducted at the end of the first half of 2020 with responses from more than 25,000 SMEs. It revealed that currently support is most urgently required in relation to digitisation, innovation, technical support, support in restarting or realigning businesses as well as working capital. We therefore linked the opportunity to generate revenue with maintaining business operations through the digitalisation of processes. Additionally, the innovative aspect, the opportunity to learn from others whilst receiving high quality training, was directly linked to the online Programme.

*What advantages do you see, and what advantages do participants see, in the virtual Programme?*

As a consequence of the pandemic, enterprises around the world have cancelled or rescheduled face-to-face business meetings, and hence workplace learning and business meetings are the most affected activities. However, businesses cannot afford to postpone their development in order to transform their operations or to continue generating revenue. In this context, one of the main advantages for the participants in the virtual Programme is the high probability of initiating business in markets

which have not yet been tapped into, and thus the possibility of creating value in one's own enterprise.

In the current situation, it is of utmost importance that business operations can be continued and the virtual Programme enables us to address many of the problems that our SMEs are facing at present, without neglecting the health of their staff.

*Why would you recommend participation in the virtual Programme?*

This Programme offers the participants a number of benefits: to educate themselves in various fields, to learn about German business culture as well as opportunities for internationalisation, innovation, and quality management. Moreover, it also allows for "on-site" visits to enterprises and meetings with businesspeople, all exclusively online, thus overcoming the difficulties of the pandemic. In addition, when circumstances allow again, they will be able to visit Germany and apply what they have learned in their local business meetings. With regard to the programmes we offer on this subject, one specific aspect of the virtual MP which is of great interest to CORFO is that the Programme allows to advance digitalisation.

As such, the Programme not only offers the participants the opportunity to use digitalisation for online sales and to therefore increase the reach of what they offer, but it also promotes greater digitalisation of the business processes and the creation of sustainable competitive advantages.



Responses from Chilean entrepreneurs to the question of what support they most need at this time.



# A Glimpse Behind the Scenes at a German Bank

A group of 17 specialists and executives from Central Asia participated in the Virtual Manager Training Programme which took place between August and October 2020. The training courses, virtual on-site visits and B2B meetings with German business partners offered them new impetus for their own work.

“The Programme offered me an excellent opportunity to develop my skills and establish contact with German partners. My working world will no longer be the same” said the participant Bakhtiyor Marupov, the CFO of the Uzbek construction firm Nortec Company. “The Programme was very effective. For instance, I learned a lot about work contracts and negotiations with Germans. That was important for me because I would like

to be exporting to Germany soon,” notes Marklen Dzhanibekov, the deputy head of production for the Kirgizstan solar panel producer New-Tek.

The virtual visit to Landesbank Baden-Württemberg (LBBW), one of the leading institutes providing funds to small and medium-sized enterprises, was deemed to be especially educational for the individual cooperation projects. Ildar Kamachev, the Executive Director for Financial Institutions at the LBBW, guided the participants, by means of video and PowerPoint, through the company and explained the borrowing options for international projects. It was informative for the group to acquire inside knowledge of the workings and structure of a German bank and familiarise themselves with the internal criteria used for making lending decisions. Some of the participants had already established business contacts and were working on contracts at that point, consequently many

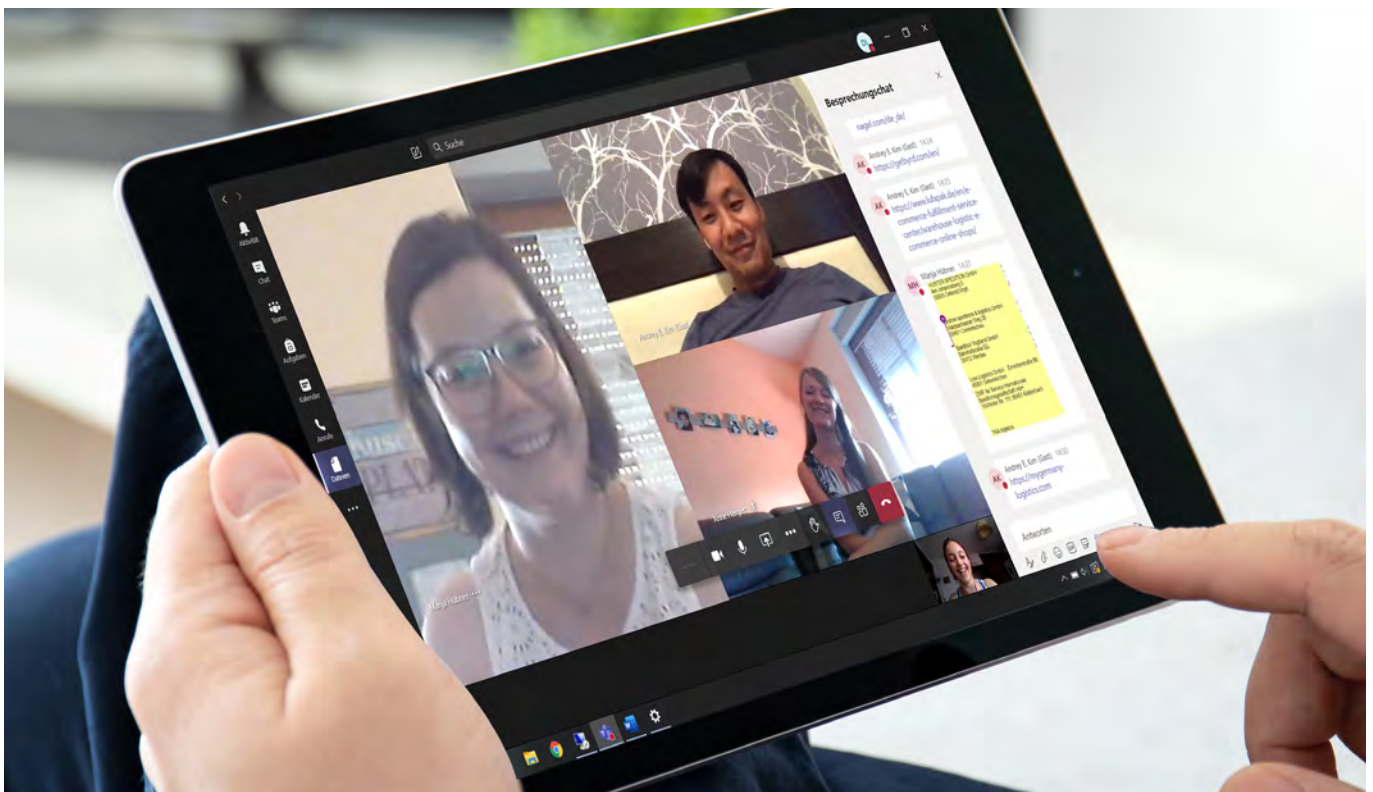
individual issues could be examined in a lively discussion. “The online presentations were a lot of fun. The group was very active and thirsty for knowledge,” is how Kamachev summed it up.

Despite the extensive knowledge transfer and the fruitful online encounters, the entrepreneurs from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan stated that they missed the physical experience of being on-site, as the appeal of the Programme lies not only in the pure transfer of skills, but also in the first-hand impressions of the country and its people. They are therefore looking forward to an actual visit to Germany.



#### About the author

Désirée Limburg works as an online editor and English-language employee at bbw Bildungswerk der Wirtschaft in Berlin and Brandenburg and is responsible for conducting the Manager Training Programme.



# Protection to Get Through the Crisis



The Corona pandemic has led to a historic slump in the German economy in 2020. The aim of the German Federal Government is to prevent insolvencies and mass unemployment of the magnitude typically experienced as a consequent of such crises. The softening of the economic consequences is due in part to an extensive package of measures implemented by the German Federal Government.

In 2020, Germany decided on comprehensive measures to support the economy on an unprecedented financial scale. For instance, unlimited protection was established for enterprises and employees, which comprised financial support for furloughing workers, loans from the KfW-bank (a German state-owned development bank), tax deferrals and immediate financial assistance programmes. A crisis management programme worth around EUR 140 billion will provide targeted stimulus to support the economy up to 2021. In addition, investments have been made and are still being encouraged in important future oriented fields in order to secure long-term economic growth.

### Targeted Relief for Enterprises and Households

The government's special programme builds on existing assistance programmes and provides targeted financial and other relief measures for businesses. Furthermore, it creates economic stimulus for a swift increase in demand. Here temporary aid and tax measures to secure enterprises' liquidity in addition to the conventional stimulus measures, such as the VAT reduction or the "child bonus", are of central importance. Furthermore, investments in crucial areas such as digitalisation, artificial intelligence,

# 140 billion

## euros for the crisis management programme

hydrogen technology and the transformation of the energy and mobility sectors are also being encouraged. The objective is to also safeguard competitiveness beyond the crisis and to continue on a path of sustainable growth in Germany.

The total volume of the stimulus package is spread almost evenly across the following five areas:

- Securing livelihoods
- Relief for enterprises and households
- Stimulating demand
- Private and public investments
- Relief for municipalities

It will be necessary for the Federation to take out additional loans in the years 2020 and 2021 to finance these crisis measures. Given the strong restrictions placed upon the private sector's activities and the macro-economic stimulus that goes hand in hand

with these measures, they are sensible from an economic perspective and the burden on the state budget is justifiable. During the financial and economic crisis of 2008/2009, it became clear that resolute and targeted stabilisation measures can contribute to preserving sustainable economic structures and increasing economic performance again.

A large part of the measures is limited to a period of a few months or up to the end of 2021 in order to provide targeted economic stimulus. At the same time, it offers an exit strategy depending on economic development and prevents an undue burden on the public finances.

### Well Prepared for the Future

In order to be able to also maintain the protection in 2021 and safeguard economic development against the risk of further setbacks, the decision was taken in August to, among other things, extend the simplified furlough scheme (to the end of 2021) and to successively extend the financial allowances to June 2021, as well as to refine the programme's access requirements and the eligibility conditions. Furthermore, the Conference of Minister-Presidents agreed on 28 October 2020 on extraordinary fi-





financial assistance (“November Assistance”) worth EUR 10 billion for the businesses affected by the renewed compulsory closures.

The assistance measures were well received by the German economy. By November 2020, loans amounting to EUR 45.3 billion with favourable conditions had been taken out within the framework of the KfW’s special programme. Under the immediate assistance programme for covering operating costs, one-time pay-outs amounting to EUR 13.5 billion were provided to self-employed individuals and micro businesses in the months from April to June 2020. This helped almost two million enterprises

**Almost 2 million enterprises** were helped through a period of significant drops in revenue by the immediate assistance programme.

get through the phase of dramatic drops in turnover. The comprehensive assistance measures provided by the German Federal Government were successful in stabilising the economy, which showed noticeable signs of recovery in the third quarter of 2020. However, further economic development depends largely on the successful containment of the pandemic in the long-term.

Further information can be found at:



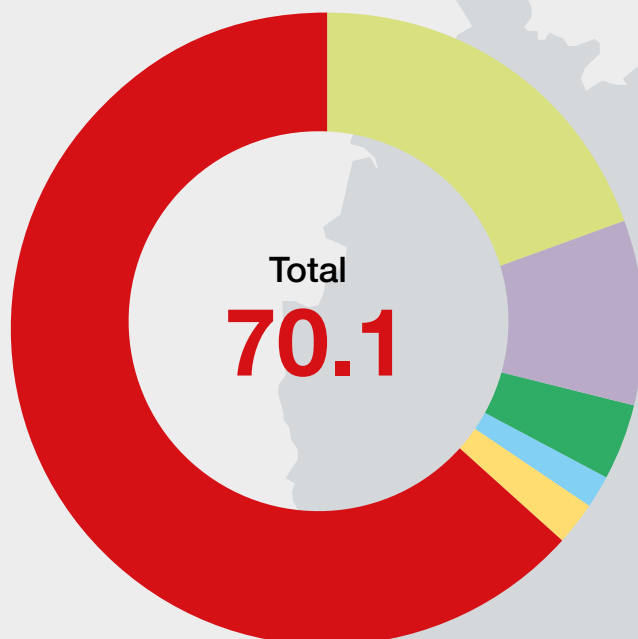
**About the authors**

Verena Lauber, Martin Meurers and Lisa Oberländer work in the policy department at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) and are primarily responsible for the area of economic and fiscal policy.

**Corona-Assistance for Enterprises**

Grants in billion EUR

- 44.6  
KfW’s Special Programme
- 13.7  
Immediate Assistance Programme
- 6.5  
Economy Stabilisation Funds
- 2.7  
Large Guarantees
- 1.3  
Guarantees from Guarantee Banks (Bürgschaftsbanken)
- 1.4  
Exceptional Business Aid I



\* Differences in totals are due to rounding

Source: BMWi (11/2020)

# The Corona Pandemic is Causing Uncertainty in Foreign Trade



The German economy has a strong focus on export trade; therefore, the global crisis is hitting it particularly hard. **Anna Westenberger** und **Achim Haug** describe what is really important for enterprises now and the tendencies that are emerging for the export sector.

According to the autumn survey conducted by the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad (AHKs), the mood among German enterprises abroad has improved again slightly in comparison to the beginning of the pandemic but is still far from the pre-crisis level. While the situation was still more positive in summer 2020, the second Corona wave has been rolling mainly across Europe and America since the beginning of autumn, again having a sobering effect, also on export business.

The economic slump should, however, not be as serious as it was in spring. For the most part, industry has adapted to the situation brought on by the disease, and production in most countries is continuing smoothly. Supply chains that broke down in spring because upstream products were not supplied or logistics were interrupted are now in many cases more robust.

## The Search for New Suppliers and Growth Markets Has Begun

For firms, it is now important to put the lessons learned in the Corona crisis into daily practice. The digitalisation of business models is paramount. Enterprises that were already advanced in this area, for example through a high level of automation in their production and warehouse logistics, have been better able to survive lockdowns. A fundamental analysis of the supplier structures is also advisable – this often means more regional procurement and diversification of the supplier structure.

The search for new growth markets is being carried out in parallel. All continents are in recession in 2020; the global gross domestic product (GDP) is expected to drop by 4.4 per cent in real terms. The International Monetary Fund (IMF)

predicts a strong recovery of the global economy in 2021, i.e. 5.4 per cent growth. The prospects for businesses differ significantly from region to region: In the AHK survey, 51 per cent of the German firms in China already expected an upswing for the coming twelve months; in contrast, in the euro zone, only 27 per cent did.

## Europe Is Particularly Badly Affected

The strong second wave of infections in Europe is the reason that practically all of the states are regarded as high-risk countries, with the exception of parts of Scandinavia. Although the restrictions on travel are not as strict as they were in spring, quarantine regulations are still to be observed. Moreover, there is a renewed threat of a debt problem as well as that of a hard Brexit in 2021. Accordingly, the euro zone must expect a decline in real



GDP in the high single-digit percentage range for 2020.

Due to weak demand and interrupted supply chains, German exports to the countries of the European Union declined by 11.8 per cent from January to September in comparison to the same period of the previous year. While countries with high infection rates, such as Italy, Spain, and France, suffered a sharp decline, the national economies in Northern Europe and Central Eastern Europe have weathered the crisis relatively well. Particularly the Balkan States, Poland or Hungary hope to receive foreign direct investments within the scope of nearshoring of supply chains from Asia.

### Supply Chains Could Be Orientated Towards South-Eastern Europe

The situation in Eastern Europe is mixed: Russia is holding up relatively well, and mechanical engineering firms are also rather optimistic with regard to that market, according to a survey conducted by the German Mechanical and Plant Engineering Association VDMA. However, German exports dropped again sharply by 15.8 per cent in the first nine months of 2020. In contrast, exports to Turkey increased by 5.8 per cent, which is much more than those to any of the other large markets.

In America, countries like the USA and Brazil are battling with the highest infection rates worldwide. The economic performance of Latin America including the Caribbean is likely to fall by 8.1 per cent in the current year and also to recover more slowly than the global economy in 2021. Mexico in particular – with its strong international ties – is being hit hard by the crisis. In the USA, on the other hand, the decline is less dramatic. Moreover, German firms are hoping that US policy will be more predictable under the new president, Joe Biden. However, a turning point is becoming apparent: While the United States’ share in German exports has fallen in 2020, China is increasing its significance and could soon position itself at the top of Germany’s export ranking.

### Good Prospects in Asia-Pacific

China, the country in which the SARS-CoV2 virus first occurred, is also driving the development of the emerging Asian economies. In a global comparison, they

will be least affected by the end of 2020. According to the IMF, their real GDP will decrease by 1.7 per cent and grow strongly in 2021. In addition to the People’s Republic, Vietnam, South Korea, and Taiwan have been able to quickly get the virus under control and have good economic prospects. Countries like India and the Philippines, on the other hand, have been hit hard by the virus and the economic consequences of the hard lockdowns.

Some regions of the world are facing further challenges in addition to the Corona virus: Oil exporters in the Near and Middle East are suffering from low prices, and in some African countries, farmers have had to battle with floods, droughts, and locust plagues. However, the direct effects of the Coronavirus on Africa have, all in all, been limited; hence, the drop in GDP by 3 per cent is moderate. But there is a threat of indirect effects, such as less development assistance, lower investment in the healthcare system and higher unemployment. The predicted economic recovery in 2021 is comparatively weak at 3.1 per cent.

### Digitalisation and GreenTech with Growth Potential

Now it is important that export-oriented firms take a close look at new business opportunities that may arise. Demand for medical technology, hospital equipment and medicines is likely to remain high in many countries. In contrast, the outlook

for industrial products is gloomy: In view of subdued demand for consumer goods and general uncertainty, businesses are reluctant to invest. Solutions for automation and digitally connected production are exceptions. In general, digitalisation is the big winner of the crisis – from medical technology to digital farming and e-commerce, which has kept consumer demand going during lockdowns.

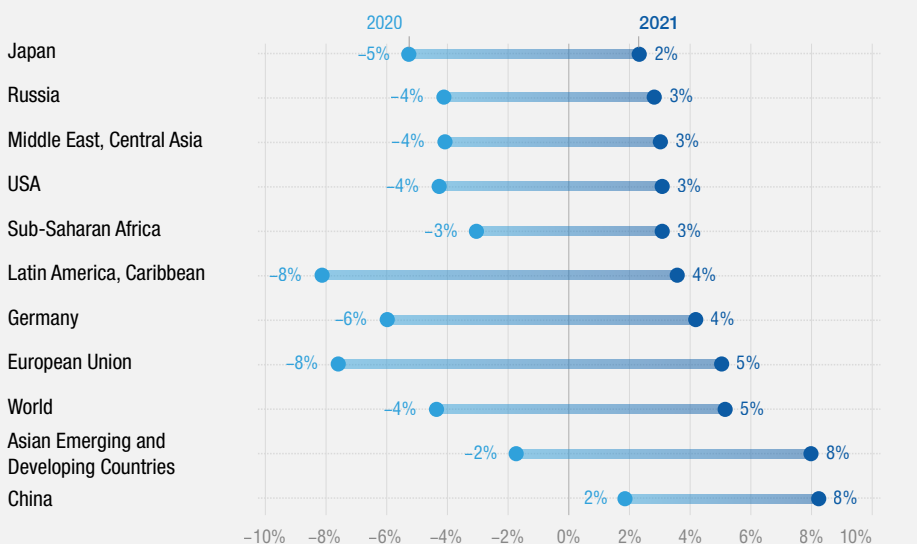
The battle against climate change will become even more urgent; this provides business opportunities for those offering solutions. The year 2020 will go down in history as the year with the most severe global economic slump; however, many countries want to use the crisis for reorientation. Here green technologies will play an important role – German firms should keep an eye on the, partly extensive, measures to promote economic recovery and growth abroad. The signs point to a strong recovery for large sections of the global economy in 2021. And the great progress being made in the development of vaccines provides hope of a way back to normality.

#### About the authors

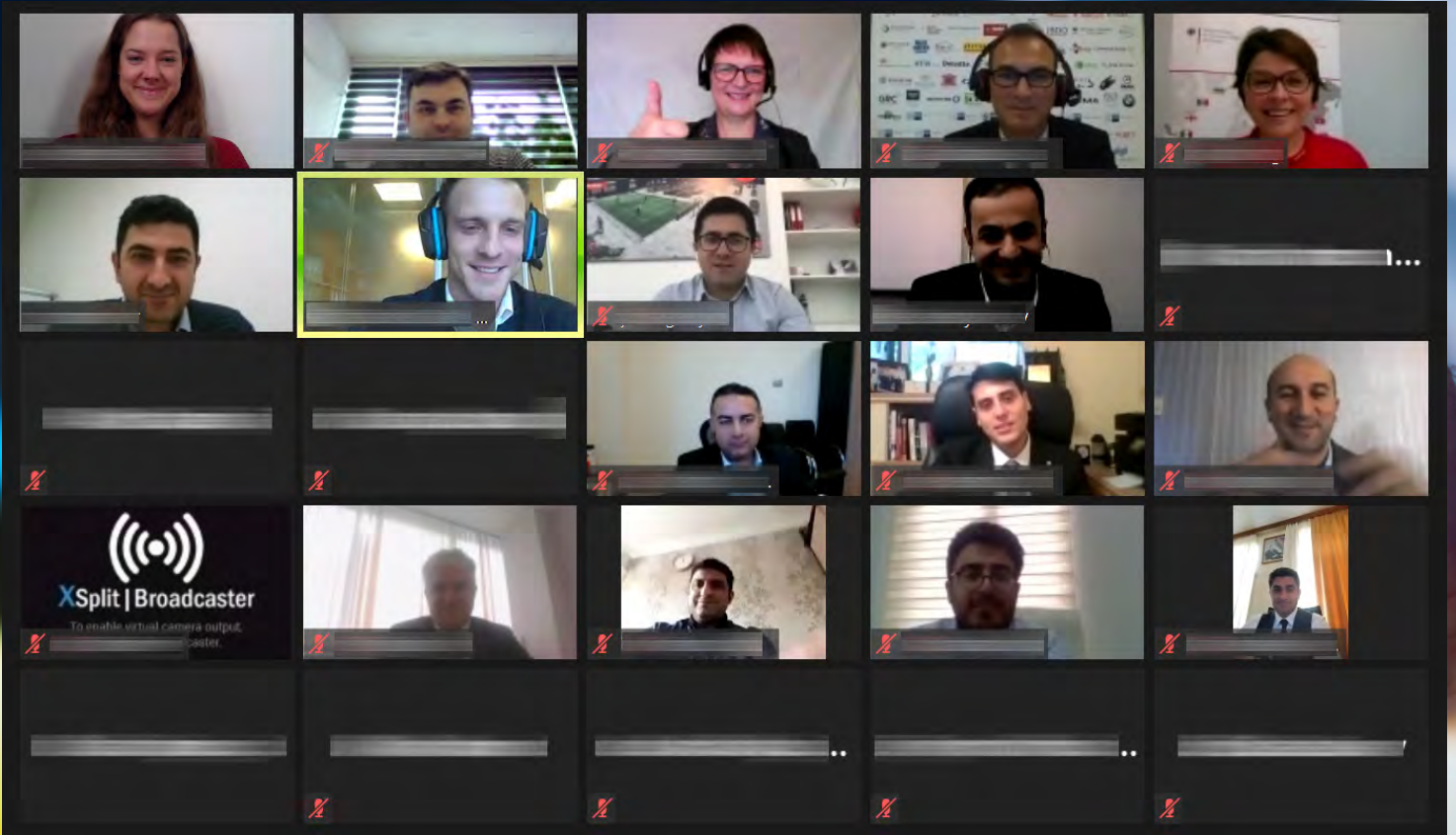
Anna Westenberger is the area manager for South and South-East Asia, and Achim Haug is the area manager for East Asia at Germany Trade & Invest (GTAI). [www.gtai.com](http://www.gtai.com)



### GDP Growth by Region Real Year-on-Year Change in Percent



Source: International Monetary Fund, October 2020



# Alumni Take a New Approach

The Coronavirus pandemic is impacting the enterprises of the more than 15,000 Manager Training Programme (MP) alumni worldwide. Virtual meeting options are providing them with access to further training and networking during the crisis – and are paving the way for continued economic cooperation with Germany.

Many of the enterprises for which the MP alumni work are experiencing a decline in sales and disruptions to operational processes, supply chains and joint projects with business partners as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. “This is why we want to show our alumni effective ways of making it through these difficult times together, and sustainable options for overcoming the current business crisis,” Head of the GIZ Manager Training Programme, Reimut Düring, explains.

The GIZ has been working with alumni associations and networks, and consulting with the respective implementing partners, to learn what issues are especially important to alumni in each MP partner country right now. Some of the questions raised include: How do I deal with the crisis? How can I implement the new hygiene measures in my business? What are my digital management options? Are other firms in my industry going through the same thing? These findings went into tailoring online options, some of them industry-specific, to offer alumni a range of training and coaching seminars along with virtual trade show visits and business hacks in the second half of 2020.

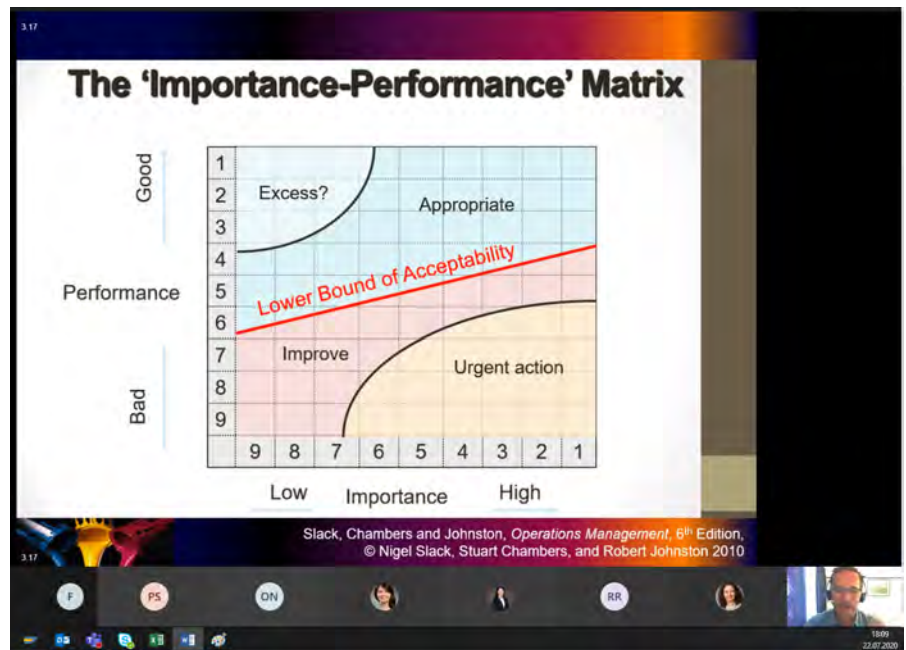
Many of the digital events were designed in cooperation with other German organisations, including chambers of foreign trade, the German Engineering Federation (VDMA), the German African Business Association, the Business Association for



Latin America (LAV), the Deutsche Messe and the Hannover Messe. “Participants were really enthusiastic about our range of online sessions. This makes us especially happy because it also allows many alumni to stay in contact with German business networks. It also keeps the communication channels to our alumni open,” Reimut Düring says.

### Networks for Business Success

The increased use of digital communication boosted the cooperation among the alumni in 2020. Alumni associations in the 21 MP partner countries expanded their digital activities in response to the global pandemic. New networks were also formed, including on social media platforms. Now MP alumni are not just able to easily connect with entrepreneurs in their region but can also get in touch with German enterprises. The alumni networks also serve as an effective means of advertising for the MP and draw in new participants. “The Programme really benefits from alumni activities and outreach. We are also interested in continuing international networking. So, we are very grateful to all the active alumni and associations, partners and institutions in the German business community for their hard work and dedication,” Reimut Düring says.



Numerous online events with expert lectures and further training for alumni contributed to an intensive exchange of experiences in 2020.



**Participants were really enthusiastic about our range of online sessions. This makes us especially happy because it also allows many alumni to stay in contact with German business networks.**

Reimut Düring

## Participants' Comments

# “How Are You Dealing with the Corona Crisis?”

“ The pandemic has had a huge impact on our activities. We need to adapt to new communication methods with our stakeholders. For internationalisation processes, the new communication is very useful. I think that people are more connected. This is very useful.

Victor, a 2020 participant from Chile

“ Our enterprise is an innovative enterprise with leading technology. In the early stages of the epidemic, our production department did not go to work due to government requirements. But our management prepared for subsequent experiments and research during that time. This was good preparation for the later production recovery.

Jiarong Li, a 2020 participant from China

“ During the Covid-19 pandemic, our enterprise mainly did three things to combat the challenges posed by the pandemic: Firstly, we worked together with our customers to survive Covid-19 by adjusting prices and postponing deliveries. Secondly, we developed new products and new sales channels. Thirdly, we reduced the production costs.

Liping Wang, a 2020 participant from China

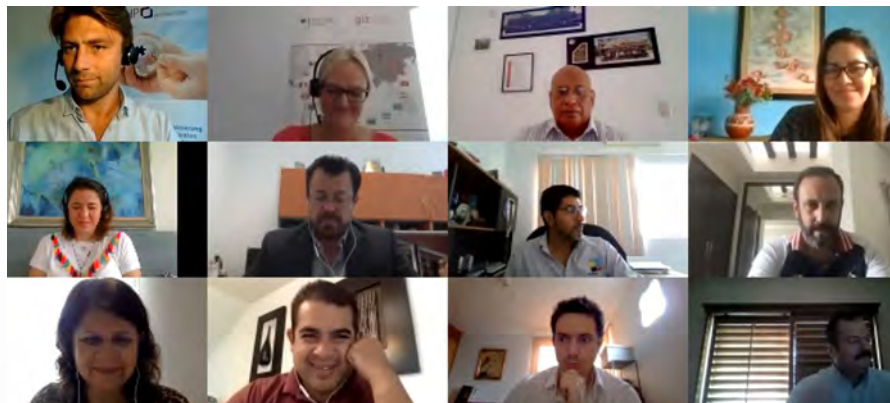
“ We didn't do it for the profit; we wanted to do our part in combatting this virus.

Maria Plesca, alumna from Moldova


“ Despite all the difficulties related to the pandemic, you have to choose this path: look for advantages, even in very difficult situations, and be tolerant. Take small steps, even if they are tiny. You will still be able to move forwards. Be optimistic, be able to mobilise your strength and mind. If possible, help others and do a little bit more than you should!

Bibigul Boleeva, alumna from Kazakhstan

The 400+ Mexican Manager Training Programme alumni are part of the reason that the German-Mexican trade relations are so successful. In September, 80 alumni took part in kicking off a series of digital events designed to help entrepreneurs do business with Germany during the current crisis.



# Networking to Get Through the Crisis



## Panel Discussion

German Side	Mexican Side
<p><b>Heinrich Schäffler</b> CEO</p>  <p><b>Miguel Villanueva</b> Area Sales Manager Americas</p> 	<p><b>Jorge Solalinde</b> CEO</p>  <p><b>Adrian Mendoza</b> Project Manager</p> 
 	 

For the first session, titled “German-Mexican business challenges and opportunities in times of Covid-19”, 80 Mexican MP graduates gathered in front of their screens to participate. The event was jointly organised by the GIZ and the Productive Development Unit (UDP) of the Mexican Ministry of Economic Affairs. In her presentation, UDP Chief Ana Bárbara Mungaray-Moctezuma provided information on current activities, projects and funding opportunities for Mexican enterprises during the Corona crisis. Andreas Müller, Deputy Managing Director of the German-Mexican Chamber of Commerce CAMEXA, talked about the chamber’s

work and gave a presentation on the current economic situation in Mexico and the impact of the Corona crisis from the perspective of local firms.

Organised by the German AHP International Training Centre, the overriding message of the virtual exchange was that the crisis presents opportunities to those enterprises which are flexible enough to adapt. German and Mexican entrepreneurs talked about new business ideas that emerged during the pandemic. Alumnus Adrian Mendoza reported that the stagnation of existing business contacts with Germany due to the Corona pandemic

was his impetus for asking external cooperation partners for advice. Similarly, MP alumnus Jorge Solalinde joined an international group that has kept him in touch with alumni from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine, which has opened up additional cooperation opportunities for him to explore.

A survey during the kick-off revealed many Mexican alumni are extremely interested Industry 4.0 and digitalisation. Therefore, the next session in the series was “Industry 4.0 Check-Up” which was run on 23 October 2020. Participants learned from the Fraunhofer Institute for Factory Operation and Automation (IFF) about its Industry 4.0 check-up tool, which alumni can use to critically reflect on their own enterprise’s state of automation. Additional seminars are currently being planned for 2021.

MP alumni enjoy support for their business activities long after the Programme has ended, in part through various alumni associations. Two alumni associations are currently active in Mexico: EMAAC (Empresarios México Alemanes) and the Mexican Forum for international Business. There is also an alumni platform available on the LinkedIn web-portal.

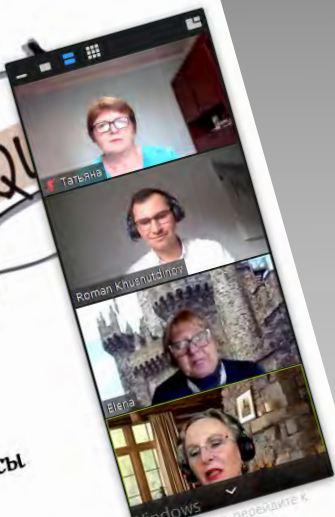
Пожалуйста, соблюдайте правила делового виртуального общения



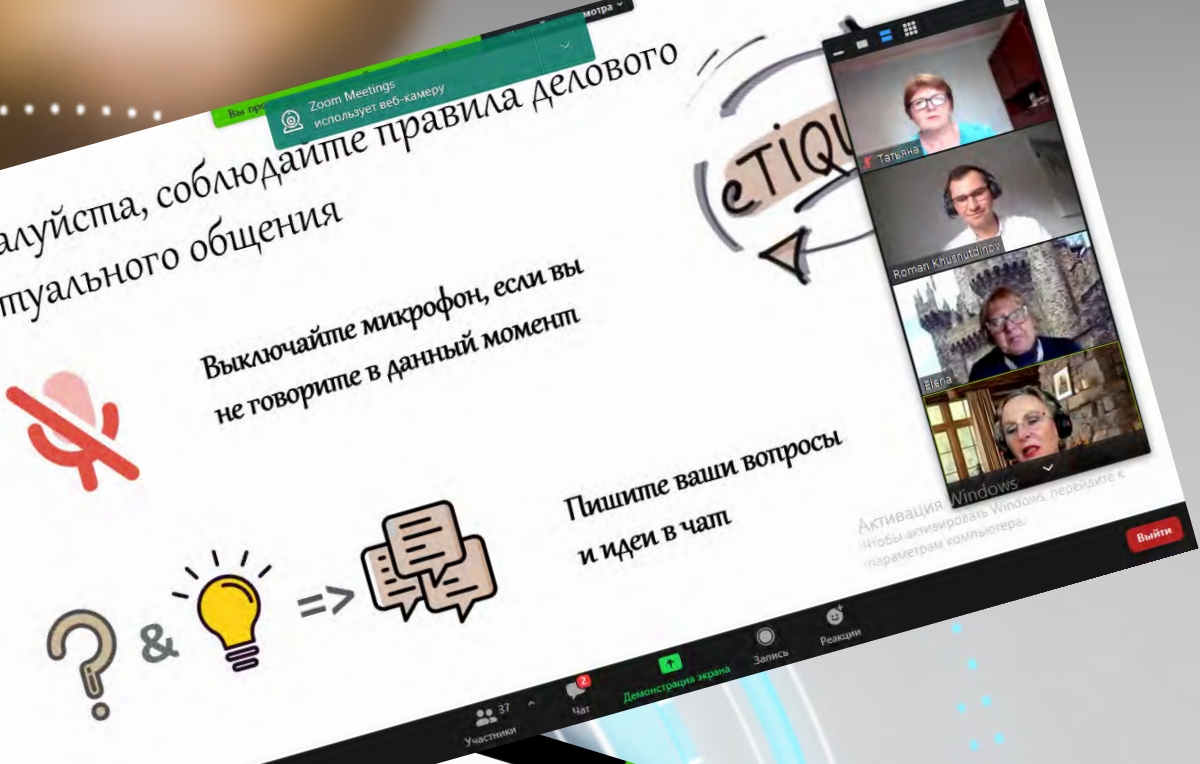
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### ГАЛЕРЕЯ СТАЖИРОВКИ



# Alumni from Central Asia Give a Positive Review

In autumn 2020, a three-day follow-up meeting brought Programme alumni from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan together online. Their conclusion: Economic relations with Germany had strengthened despite the constraints of the pandemic.

Approximately 60 participants – all MP alumni from 2019 – came together virtually for a review. Together, they evaluated their progress with regard to the implementation of cooperation projects with German firms and the changes in their own businesses. Within the framework of the conference, they also participated in training sessions on the topics of working from home, finance management and presentation techniques as well as practising using new online tools.

In order to make the exchange as rich in variety as possible and include a good portion of fun, the follow-up session was set up in the form of a strategy game: during the competition the best participants and groups were to be selected. Criteria such as economic results and creativity were evaluated, but also original ways of presenting their own business activities. The winners had the opportunity to have their business and activities captured in a short video created by an agency.

After the three days many of the MP alumni concluded: The on-site visits to firms in Germany and the experience (and for many of the alumni the first experience) of negotiations had helped them to overcome their uncertainty when approaching German business representatives. Additionally, the alumni all confirmed that they had been able to maintain and expand existing contacts with German enterprises since their stay in Germany despite the constraints of the pandemic. Contracts with German businesses had been concluded in the areas of energy, agricultural machinery, spare parts for cars and coffee machines, and others. Among the important insights the entrepreneurs had gained were the numerous ideas for the realignment of their own businesses.



**The follow-up went very well and it was great to meet other alumni. In spite of all the difficulties that have occurred during this year, we are glad to continue our work.**

Altynay Utemuratov

The feedback from the participants was consistently positive. “The follow-up went very well and it was great to meet other alumni. In spite of all the difficulties that have occurred during this year, we are glad to continue our work”, said Altynay Utemuratova from Kazakhstan. Team colleague Nail Khaybulin from Kyrgyzstan agreed, adding: “The follow-up was very useful and productive for me. And it was very good to look back on our training in Germany.”

Project Manager Dr Angela Leeke from GIZ was also satisfied with the first virtual follow-up for Central Asian alumni: “We are pleased that our alumni were able to take so many “Aha” moments and valuable impetus from their participation in the Manager Training Programme back home with them. This became very clear again during the three days. The fact that the participants were committed and enthusiastic right up to the end and there was such a good response is partly due to the new, innovative format.”



At the follow-up, alumni reminisced about the time they spent on the training course in Germany, where this photo was taken.

# “Dialogue Is the Most Important Thing Now”

## 12<sup>TH</sup> GERMAN-RUSSIAN BUSINESS TALKS



Manager Training Programme (MP) alumni from Germany and Russia also want to work together closely in the future and find new ways of implementing joint projects despite the crisis. This is something which they agreed at the German-Russian Business Talks which took place online for the first time this year. Opportunities and challenges within the context of the Coronavirus pandemic were discussed over the course of three sessions.

At the kick-off event on 8 July 2020, the focus was on the opportunities for German SMEs on the Russian market. In her welcoming address, Dr Angelique Weikum-Groß from the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi) stressed that Russia remained an important partner for Germany and it was crucial to strengthen economic relations within the scope of the sanctions currently in force. “However, German and Russian enterprises need more competition and less bureaucracy”, she said. The speakers at the first session included Alexej Boldin, Acting Director of the Central Department of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation. Boldin drew attention to the more than 450 German managers who have already visited Russia within the framework of the MP and received valuable impetus for

cooperation with Russian businesses. In his speech, Alexej Bunkin, the Director of the Federal Resource Center in Moscow, emphasised the alumni’s high degree of satisfaction with the MP.

The speakers highlighted the continued activities of the Programme despite the temporary difficulties caused by the pandemic and highlighted the significant contribution of the Programme to improving the efficiency of economic cooperation between the two countries.

Various presentations provided an overview of the current economic situation in Russia and the opportunities for export-oriented SMEs. Wladimir Nikitenko, Director of the German-Russian Chamber of Commerce Abroad (AHK) in St Petersburg, addressed the new approaches





## More than **450**

German managers visited Russia as part of the MP, and in doing so gained valuable impetus for co-operation projects with Russian enterprises.

content we offer will also offer an opportunity after the crisis and become a future component of the MP, especially when it comes to international networking among the alumni. I am sure that we will continue our good and close cooperation.”

### Alumni Form Mentorships

More than 120 MP and the “Fit for Business with Russia” programme alumni attended the second part of the Business Talks on 29 July 2020 under the title “Alumni for Alumni: Ideas and Opportunities for Cooperation”. At the event, they gave the go ahead for new ways of cooperation between the alumni associations. The most important result on this day was the agreement to introduce regional mentorships. In the future, there will be contact persons in the German-Russian Management Network (DRMN) for specific Russian regions, who, on request, can provide German entrepreneurs with information and contacts to Russian enterprises. On the flip side, Russian businesspeople will be able to contact specific people via their alumni network who will be able to answer questions regarding the German market. “This type of cooperation will help to bring interested businesses together”, explains MP alumna Natalie Wenzel, who presented the project. “This will really boost the alumni work”, added Andreas Steinborn, Chairman of the German-Russian Management Network (DRMN), the alumni association of “Fit for Business with Russia”.

Besides the regional cooperation with the Russian alumni associations, the German alumni can also imagine industry-specific

and topic-specific cooperation in the future. Virtual cooperation, which the event participants consider to be a great opportunity in view of the current Corona crisis, was another important discussion point.

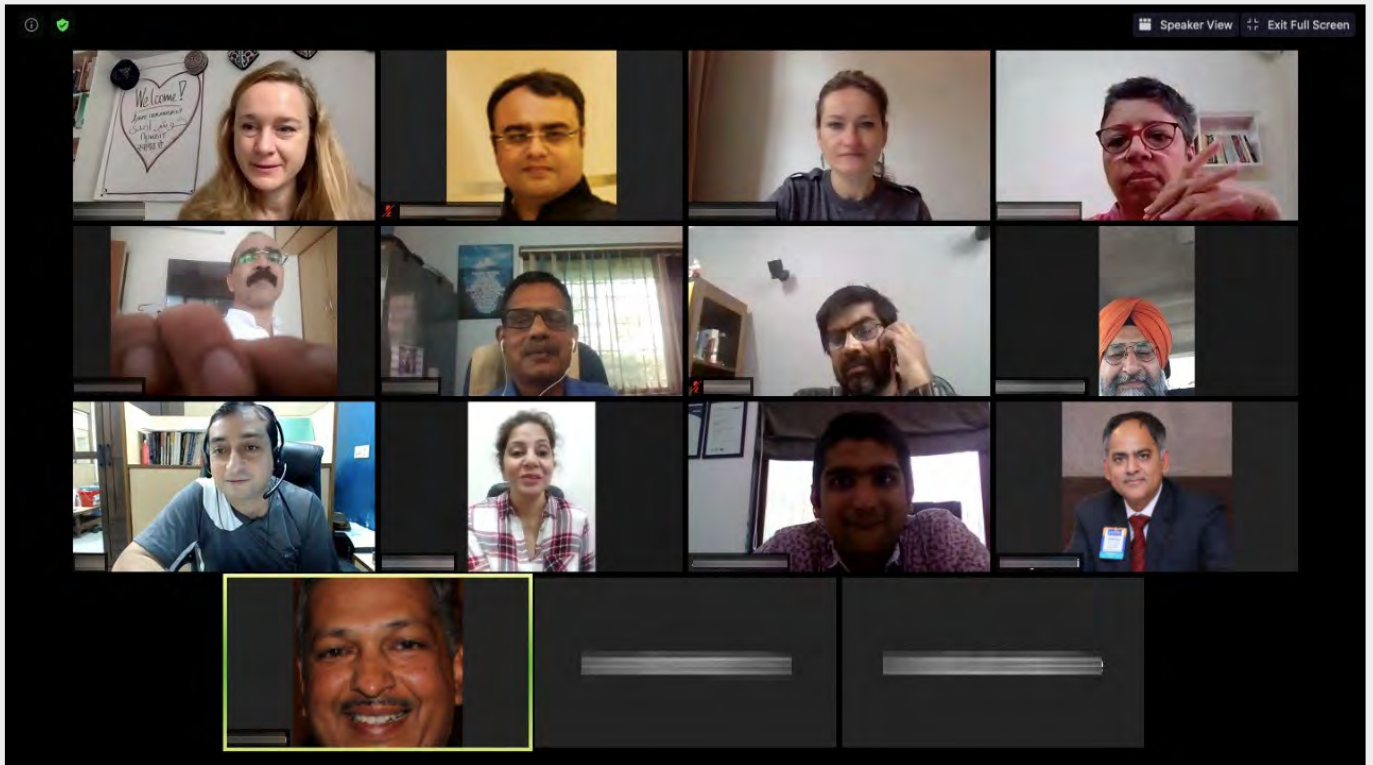
### Closer Exchange Between Industries

The third and last part of the Business Talks on 26 August 2020 was about actually initiating business contacts between German and Russian entrepreneurs. David Wilkens from the German Embassy in Moscow, Julia Nüssen from BMWi and Alexej Bunkin welcomed more than 150 participants. In the presentations that followed, topics such as market entry in Russia and Germany and sales and distribution strategies were addressed. German and Russian business representatives from the mechanical engineering and metalworking, agriculture and foodstuffs, construction and building materials sectors as well as from services, consultancy and other industries came together in four virtual spaces and presented their opportunities for cooperation. Throughout the event, the participants were able to actively exchange ideas and share contacts, presentations and suggestions for cooperation with one another via the chat. These contacts and discussions on the respective suggestions and opportunities were continued and deepened after the event.

The German-Russian Business Talks are a joint event of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy (BMWi), the Consulate General of the Russian Federation and GIZ and serve as an opportunity for exchange between entrepreneurs in both countries. This event has been held on a yearly basis since 2009. In 2020, the Business Talks were jointly organised by GIZ, the Federal Resource Center, the AHK St Petersburg, DRMN and the Russian alumni associations.

to economic cooperation and emphasised the support the Chamber provides for German firms entering the Russian market and Russian businesses entering the German market. “The most important thing now is to remain in dialogue”, Nikitenko said. He sees opportunities and possibilities for development particularly in mechanical and plant engineering, the healthcare sector, and in the energy and renewable energy sector. Renal Manjapow, Director of the “Center for Coordination of Support of Export Oriented Small and Medium-Sized Businesses of the Republic of Bashkortostan”, introduced his Center.

Yıldız Götze, Head of Division at the BMWi, underlined the importance of accepting the crisis as a shared opportunity and maintaining the dialogue even in extraordinary times like these. With regard to the MP becoming digital, she said: “At the BMWi, we are convinced that the new



# Working with Peers on the Best Solutions

Indian Manager Training Programme (MP) alumni had the opportunity to learn all about peer coaching over the course of four online sessions. This decision-making approach employs a group's swarm intelligence and is very popular in Germany, where it has been used with success for years.

Peer coaching helps identify solutions for professional, technical or entrepreneurial issues and for personally challenging or complex situations. Four to six people come together in group and work in tandem to offer advice to another group member on a specific issue. A coaching session generally lasts from 30 to 45 minutes and follows a methodically precisely defined procedure. The method works best when the peer group is composed of people with a wide variety of professional backgrounds and range of experience. Group members should also not have hierarchical or competitive relationships to one another so that everyone can work together on a level playing field.

MP graduates are an ideal community for this approach. While training in Germany, MP alumni learned just how much exchanging ideas and learning from one another could boost their enterprise's

success. The online peer coaching courses, which featured lively exchanges, again confirmed that it is a great tool for having discussions among peers, and everyone profits from it, not just the person posing the question. The Indian entrepreneurs were very open to the idea of adapting their mindset and decision-making approach in times of crisis to help ensure their business model was ready to withstand any future challenges.

More than 65 alumni participated in the four coaching sessions, some of them even took part more than once. Taking part multiple times is the aim of the sessions and also a sign of their quality: Those who have taken part once, quickly grasp how it works and are happy to take part again, often bringing their own business question, or possibly wanting to try their hand as a facilitator and offer a session for their own circle of peers. "Peer coaching works,"

says Sandeep Jain, an active member of the Indian alumni network. He was a case-owner, a member of the group and facilitator. For him it was very important to get diverse feedback from peers who are not just from the same industry or field. During all four of the sessions the participants expressed an interest in taking part in more peer coaching meetings. During all four of the sessions the participants expressed an interest in taking part in more peer coaching meetings.



#### About the author

Dr Julia Moritz organised training courses within the framework of the Manager Training Programme from 2009 to 2019 and currently works as a freelance trainer and consultant for businesses with international operations.

# “There’s Never the Right Time”

How can I increase my turnover in times of crisis, improve customer satisfaction and advance my business? These were just some of the questions MP alumni from Eastern Europe discussed within the scope of the Business Hacks Festival. The exchange of experiences provided the participants with numerous new insights.



Some of the alumni presented their firms virtually. Here we can see the Ukrainian confectionery firm Voldi.

The Business Hacks Festival was made up of online meetings (mini festivals) which were spread over a number of months. More than 150 entrepreneurs from Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine came together in front of their screens to share knowledge and experience, but also to work together on solutions to business challenges. These approaches were collected on an online platform, the digital “Library of Business Hacks”, and served as an entrepreneurial guide for many of them during the pandemic in 2020.

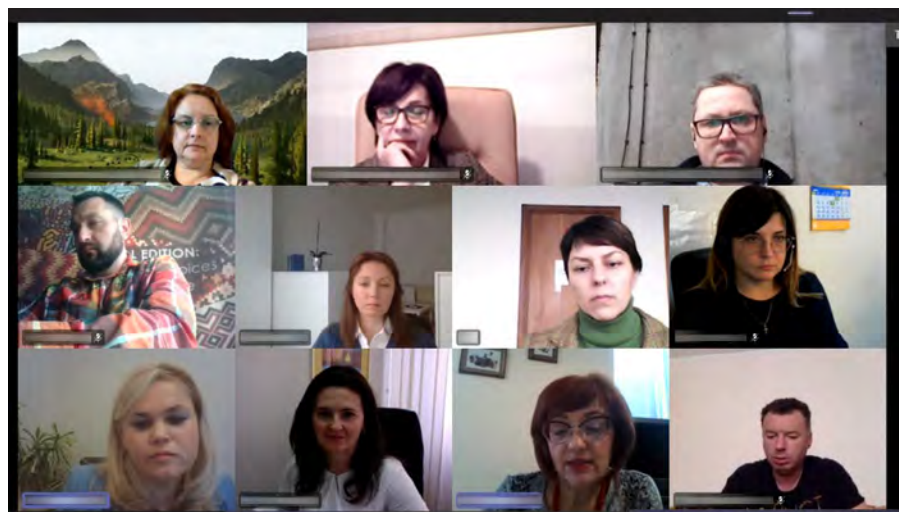
In addition to best practice examples, the sessions also addressed effective teamwork and employee motivation as well as the concrete difficulties of entrepreneurial activities furthermore mistakes were openly discussed. A number of MP alumni presented new approaches to business management and innovative business ideas. Many of them struck out in a new direction in 2020. For example, Ilya Kotov, co-owner of an engineering and consultancy firm, presented the development of a new system for online seminars and added: “We have improved the dialogue with our customers and partners and have even put several ideas into practice that had previously been regarded as technically impracticable.” Iryna Petelytska, founder of the Ukrainian confectionery firm Voldi, said that she had been able to tap into new markets in the EU and also in Azerbaijan and Macedonia during the Corona pandemic. The firm’s

chocolate brand was even nominated for the People’s Choice Award 2020. “There will never be an ideal time to establish or expand your business, tap into new markets or introduce a new product to the market.”

During the Business Hacks event it became clear that most of the alumni saw the crisis as a challenge that has encouraged both their professional and personal growth as well as the search for new ideas and solutions. Maryana Rybay and Yur Samets, owners of a sewing workshop, for instance, decided at the beginning of 2020 to make protective equipment for doctors: “This time of uncertainty turned out to be a time of new opportunities for us because we manufactured new pro-

ducts”, the two Ukrainians explained. The MP alumni Valerii Maksyutenko and Vasyl Voloshinov provided information on the business areas in which unusual approaches can be pursued and how risks can be minimised. Olga Tsyukh, Vladyslav Sushko and Kyryl Krasnoselskii presented their joint solutions in the areas of strategy development, diversification of markets, human resources and outsourcing.

In between the individual mini-festivals, networking sessions were held in which the alumni discussed business cases which were on the next mini-festival’s agenda. The participants agreed that such events motivated them to make changes and, at the same time, gave them strength and self-confidence.



# Seminars for Tunisian Entrepreneurs



The training centre Akademie International and GIZ organised a virtual training programme in September 2020 to support Tunisian MP alumni in managing the Coronavirus crisis and offer an opportunity for better networking.

Alumni from various years got to know each other during a kick-off workshop and discussed their needs for the upcoming training programme. Following on from this, three half-day online seminars were held on the topics of remote sales, crisis management and “leading through change”. About 20 alumni participated in each session, meeting in small groups and sharing ideas.

In pairs and by means of role-plays during the seminar on remote sales, the participants could apply what they had learned – and then later put it straight into practice, as some participants reported during the closing event. “We have learned a lot today. We really rely on good international negotiation skills to grow our partnership

with German companies. We have a good idea now how to structure our proposal and support it with DNF (data, numbers, and facts). We can use this knowledge in our next negotiations with German business partners.” says Alumnus Bougobba Haythem, CEO of Tunismart Consulting, who attended the MP in 2019.

In all three of the sessions the alumni were given practical advice on coping with the Coronavirus crisis: As in any instance of rapid change, it is about questioning conventional ways of doing things and developing new strategies. One of the central aspects of successful crisis management and any change process is getting your employees on board with the process and motivating them to take on new tasks. The MP alumni were given proposals on these issues and worked together to develop possible solutions for Tunisian SMEs.

At the end of the training programme, the Tunisian participants met again to summarise the training sessions’ most important points and discuss their implementation in practice. In addition to many individual aspects that the participants had taken from the training, there was one over-

riding point that was especially important to them: Although the Coronavirus crisis makes personal communication and face-to-face contact more difficult, the virtual world also offers new ways of maintaining contact. This is true of in terms of both cooperation with German enterprises and supporting the Tunisian alumni network. To expand both, regular (virtual) alumni meetings are to be held, to which interested business representatives from Germany are also to be invited.

Of the many positive effects for the Tunisian alumni, one of the most important is that the participants renewed their courage and came to value the opportunities of virtual collaboration. The participant Meriem Ben Dlala, a project manager at Rose de Sable, summed it up as follows: “This training programme came at the right time to help us in this difficult situation.”

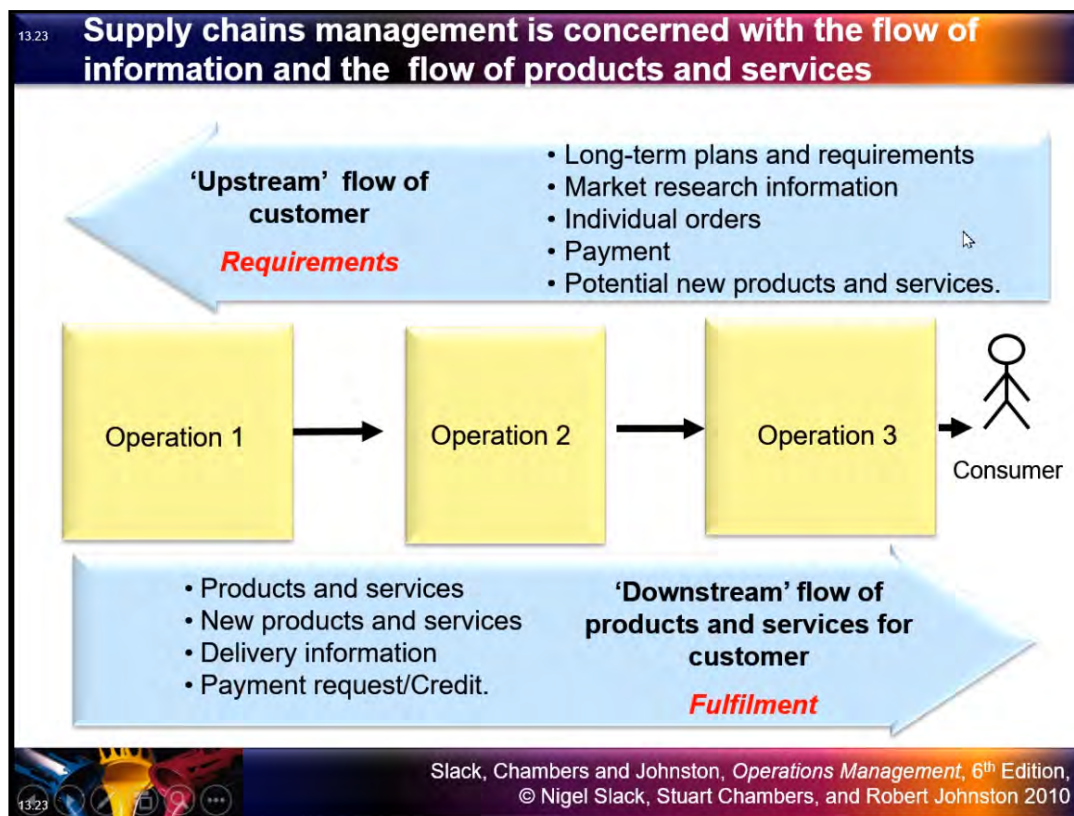


#### About the author

Timo Tekhaus is head of the Akademie International in Hamburg. He has worked for the MP since 2009, currently as a trainer and project manager.

# Managing Value Chains During Covid-19

A drop in orders during the Coronavirus crisis is forcing many businesses to engage in short-term crisis management. In order to stabilise the business in the long term, it has become necessary, among other things, to precisely understand the current value chains – from the buyer through to the supplier. This was the subject of a series of online seminars which MP alumni from Georgia and Iran attended.



This online series also gave the alumni the opportunity to share the experience they have gained within their own enterprises and to network. The individual courses were very well received. "I especially liked the cordial atmosphere and the opportunity to talk to the others personally. One new thing I learned was how we can assess our performance and the performance of our suppliers. I am sure that this can help put us in a position to better satisfy our customers," said the Iranian participant Rahil Radfar.

Under the guidance of the innovation consultant Dr Jeff Readman the participants learned over the course of three sessions, with the title "Managing value chains during the Covid-19 pandemic: Challenges and possible opportunities", which activities are needed for a product or service to succeed on the market. That includes filtering out those activities an enterprise performs that add value, operationalising the interests of the stakeholders, and selecting and managing the most important suppliers. By aligning the supply chain to the goals of the stakeholders a business can also become more reactive and better adjust to challenges in times of crisis.

In order to counteract the current bottlenecks in supply chains, Readman advised the participants to identify their weaknesses in how they cooperate with their suppliers, to diversify their enterprise's supply base, and to benefit from new process innovations. Readman introduced the 9-point importance scale as one way to make use of purchaser information. It asks purchasers and customers to use a questionnaire to assess the performance of the business. Then the business obtains information directly from its stakeholders concerning whether it is meeting its goals and can derive opportunities for improvement. Based on this the business can optimise its performance during this time of crisis.



## Opportunities for Further Education for Alumni

In addition to the topic of global value chains, the Manager Training Programme also offers its alumni further online seminars, including seminars on online marketing, strategic management of SMEs, and market development and location-based marketing in Germany. Additionally, legal advice in international commercial law and in export planning to the EU is offered.

# Full Steam Ahead into the Future



Despite the severe economic consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic, **Max Mabuti** is optimistic about the future. He set the right course for his firm at the right time. And that is now paying off: His turnover is to double during this “Corona year”. Among other things, the new partnership with a steam boiler manufacturer in Germany is also contributing to his success.

South Africa has taken tough measures in combating Corona, with extreme effects on the economy; Max Mabuti's business also came to a standstill. "My turnover was practically non-existent", the 44-year-old CEO of the firm Flat Foot Engineering says. From June on there was a gradual easing of restrictions, and the first joint project with the new partner could be realised.

### Setbacks and Successes

Originally, the self-made engineer wanted to market his filter systems for oil-fired boilers in Germany. However, these boilers are no longer installed in Germany. A minor setback, which the former professional boxer overcame with professionalism. He concentrated all his energy on searching for a strategic partner for expanding in Africa. And in Germany he met the international sales manager from a manufacturer of high-speed steam generators. "We were soon in agreement; we had the same goal", says Mabuti. Flat Foot is now the exclusive distribution partner for Africa.

### Flexibility in Cooperation

The first joint project was the installation of a steam boiler in a brewery in Cape Town. The hidden champion from Germany was in fact meant to have a representative on-site locally. The plane ticket had already been bought but Corona turned these plans upside down. The team at Flat Foot was therefore given all the preparation it needed for the assignment via video conferences and online training.

Further joint projects outside South Africa are planned but can currently not be realised due to the trade and travel restrictions still in place. In Ghana and Namibia customers are already waiting for their steam boilers from Germany. Mabuti is waiting too – for a further easing of economic restrictions so that they can get the projects started. The ex-boxer says that making the right move at the right time is something he is good at. "I learned that in my boxing matches".

### Social Responsibility

Flat Foot switched to modern technologies at the right time. The technicians manage the orders, from record keeping right through to their completion, using an app on a smartphone; digital collaboration takes place using clouds. During the pandemic, this has been an advantage for the business; working from home presented no problem for the administration. Despite the heavy blow to his business, Mabuti has been able to keep all 45 of his employees. This is also an important success for the country, which is potentially faced with unemployment increasing from 30 per cent to 50 per cent due to Corona.



**When a boxer steps into the ring, his goal is to win.**

Max Mabuti

Mabuti takes his corporate social responsibility seriously and supports the government in the promotion of vocational training. In September 2020, the first group of 30 students started their vocational training in the field of electromechanics. This is also an investment in the future for Flat Foot.

### "Stepping into the Future"

"Stepping into the Future" is Flat Foot's slogan. And their vision is also future oriented. "We want to become a global player", says the ambitious businessman. He originally established his business with the distribution of air-conditioning systems and, over the years, specialised in the

installation and maintenance of boilers, laundry equipment, emergency generators and sterilisation equipment. That is quite a lot for a small business owner; during the MP, Mabuti realised that he needs a core focus. Consequently he has changed his strategy. Now he is concentrating on his many years of experience in the construction of pressure vessels. He intends to offer these to his customers in addition to the German systems. The pressure vessels can be used for sterilising, for instance in hospitals, hotels, and restaurants or in the food industry. Flat Foot wants to become a leading manufacturer with these products and be unrivalled on the African market.

The South African Ministry of Health with its numerous hospitals throughout the country is currently Flat Foot's main customer. Here Mabuti would like to become less dependent and wants to buy small businesses in the private sector. He would never have dreamed that Corona could ever be of benefit to him in this respect. The government recently launched a programme to promote the economy, through which he can apply for government-guaranteed loans. "This is unique in the history of South Africa and a great opportunity for us", says Mabuti.

In spite of the losses due to Corona, Flat Foot expects to double its turnover to EUR 2 million in 2020. Mabuti manages his firm with the same ambition he showed in his sporting career: "When a boxer steps into the ring, his goal is to win".



Max Mabuti (seated in the centre) with his team at a customer, the Bhisho Provincial Hospital, where he provides maintenance for the boilers.

# Growth in the Middle East

**A success story of a partnership between a German and an Egyptian business.**

German RepRap GmbH manufactures 3D printers. Through the Manager Training Programme, the enterprise has established a sales partnership with the Egyptian firm Promech and now has an impressive track record in the region. In an interview with the Journal, International Sales Manager **Ismail Serrhini** explains what makes the partnership with Promech so successful and why 3D technology is currently in such high demand.







"Intercultural know-how is the most important thing when it comes to initiating business", says Sales Manager Ismail Serrhini.

### What does German RepRap do?

We are a fairly young company that develops, manufactures, and markets 3D printers. We serve customers in the automobile industry, in medical technology and in a variety of fields of manufacturing. Our technology is also being used in unexpected contexts. For example, the opera house in Zurich recently created life-like birds using one of our printers.

### You cover the Middle East and Asia/Pacific region. How has the pandemic impacted business there?

Overall, I would say these regions have been hit just as hard as all the others. In the Asia/Pacific region, there is an ongoing effort to get back to "business as usual" more quickly. Some of the countries I deal with are better versed in dealing with a pandemic than Europe, although there are some differences among countries.

### 3D printers are in especially high demand in the Middle East. Why is that?

Systems for additive manufacturing are basically used to complement traditional production technologies. With its strategic location between Asia and Europe, the Middle East region knows first-hand what happens when supply chains suddenly break down and components are no longer available. 3D printing provides the flexibility and independence needed in such situations.

### What has made the partnership with Promech so successful?

I think there are several factors at play here. Promech is an established enterprise with offices in Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. It is well connected, its work is valued, and customers often recom-

mend it to others. This is a cultural environment that really values recommendations. Our contact Karim Mohsen is the sales manager for Promech in Egypt and the Middle East. He completed the Manager Training Programme, so he is familiar with Germany's business culture. He also has the intercultural skills to handle cultural differ-

ences sensitively and has passed his knowledge on to colleagues in additional training courses. In my opinion, intercultural know-how is the most important thing when it comes to initiating business. Then come the technical aspects. And only at the very end of the journey is the successful conclusion of the deal.



## Face Shields Made Using a 3D Printer

The "Makers vs. Virus" initiative is an alliance of coders and 3D printer owners. With the support of German RepRap and using a print file provided by the alliance, Egyptian Promech has been making face shields. The shields were donated to medical care workers in Egypt at the start of the pandemic when there was hardly any protective equipment available. "3D printers can quickly close supply gaps. And it makes us particularly happy when they can be used for good deeds," Ismail Serrhini, Sales Manager at German RepRap, says.

### Karim Mohsen, Promech Sales Manager, on Working Successfully with German RepRap



"German companies are known for their excellent quality and reliability. These are qualities we also value highly. The challenge for us as a partner in the region is that we have to persuade potential customers that the high purchase price is worth it. So, we really need support from partner enterprises which support us, whether that is in the form of a spontaneous business trip or the short-notice delivery of a key component. In our culture there tend to be a lot of long discussions at the beginning and a focus on personal contact. Yet things can happen very quickly sometimes as well. German RepRap has proven to be an excellent, flexible partner that can adapt to the needs of our cultural and business environments."

Karim Mohsen from Egypt completed the Manager Training Programme in Germany in 2017. Read his success story here:



# “The Programme Has Changed My Life”



Looking back on her participation in the Manager Training Programme (MP), **Maria Plesca** states, that it changed her entire life. Following the training in Germany, she was so inspired that she not only reorganised her parent's business, Tingrimar, but also took over another firm.



The path which led her to that point was sometimes a stony one. Plesca was not immediately accepted onto the MP. It took three attempts before the entrepreneur was successful and until she could finally hold the letter of acceptance in her hand. In Germany she took on board everything she could that might help her develop Tingrimar. The enterprise has made a name for itself in Moldova as a manufacturer of workwear and protective clothing.

### Education “Made in Germany”

Moldova has a shortage of skilled workers. Plesca was particularly impressed by the quality of apprenticeships and the vocational training system in Germany. After returning home, she contacted Moldova’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry and to her surprise discovered that the country already had a programme in place to implement the German training model. Furthermore, she had timed it perfectly to take part in a pilot project for Moldovan manufacturers which provide on-the-job training, and which was being supported by the GIZ in Moldova. After just six months, she had completed her “Master Craftsmen” certificate based on the German Meisterbrief framework, along with her mother with whom she had “gone back to school”. In the meantime, the two entrepreneurs have trained 75 seamstresses. Tingrimar is one of 50 firms in Moldova which offer on-the-job training based on the German system and is therefore actively contributing to the modernisation of vocational training in the country.

### Change Management

After returning to Moldova, Plesca refurbished their production hall to improve the working conditions for her staff. Furthermore, she also established a centrally located and modern showroom in the capital city, Chisinau, in which sewing also takes place. Across the 100m<sup>2</sup> showroom, the customers can look at the products and materials and watch the production process live. Plesca states that transparency is very important to her, especially in the textile industry which has been plagued by scandals. She also decided to close two retail stores that were not proving profitable, introduced an inventory system, and optimised internal production processes. These changes were not

## Current Situation

On average, textile enterprises in Moldova have suffered a 45% drop in business due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Comparatively, Tingrimar has got off lightly experiencing a fall in income of 25%. Production was halted for four months, and the business was forced to let some staff go due to hygiene restrictions and social distancing guidelines. Finance expert Marta Plesca is however confident that 2021 will be better and is predicting growth of 15%. Meanwhile Moldova’s GDP has – like in many other countries – plummeted: According to the IMF for 2020 it suffered a 4.5% drop.

implemented without some resistance: Some members of staff were not ready for these innovations and left the firm. In the meantime, Plesca is now working with a new and motivated team.

### If You Can Make it There...

Currently the bulk of Tingrimar’s turnover is generated from the domestic market. But that is set to change. To boost their international trade, Plesca has organised for a promo-video and a photo shooting to be done for their new Facebook page. The website was relaunched and the corporate design underwent a makeover. Gaining their first international customers in Romania and Italy, Moldova’s two most important trade partners, is evidence of the success of this marketing strategy. The new customers have ordered workwear for the catering and medical sectors and protective clothing for the construction industry. Plesca also wishes to enter the German market within the next two years. “If we can make it there, we can make it anywhere,” she says, as the quality requirements and certifications for the German market are seen as the strictest in the EU.

### Producing Masks

In order to protect the local population from Corona, this year Tingrimar has been making masks. Plesca regrets that she has not been able to produce masks for other countries, but the requirements for exporting hygiene products are particularly high. Their campaign has produced around one million masks for the domestic market. This resulted in little profit. “We didn’t do it for the profit; we wanted to do our part in combatting this virus,” says the entrepreneur.

### A Second Line of Business

The Manager Training Programme catapulted Plesca forwards. Her work is now even more structured and better organised. And it emboldened her to make another enterprising move: In May 2019 she took over the financial consulting firm Pro-Biznet Ltd. The 35-year-old numbers-expert is now putting all her passion and energy into leading these two enterprises. And yet she still manages to switch off and enjoy her hobbies; preferably whilst horse riding, reading or cooking.

With its training programme based on the training German model, Tingrimar is helping to modernise vocational training in the country. Among other things, the business produces workwear.





Quality management lessons: a group of students in Riyada's production department.

# Setting an Example for Vocational Training

**Ramy Soudan** is the managing director of Riyada. In an interview, he talks about modernising his company after completing the Manager Training Programme. He has recently started in-house training for dairy technologists and is driving the development of the profession which is still new in Egypt. His training programme is modelled on Germany's vocational training system.

*Journal: What does Riyada do?*

**Ramy Soudan:** We are a milk processing company headquartered in Port Said, a port city in the north of Egypt. We process around 70 tons of milk a day into cheeses such as gouda, mozzarella, and feta. We have been on the market for 15 years now

and have grown to become Egypt's leading producer. Everyone in the country knows our Cheesa, Asala and Diafa brands.

*What is your role in the company?*

I manage the plant. The company is part of our family holdings, which include other

enterprises of the food industry. My father founded the first and oldest one in 1977.

*What were your take-aways from the Manager Training Programme?*

I brought back a lot of new ideas from Germany. The German economy is struc-



tured differently to ours. There are a lot of non-governmental enterprises which compete. This competition drives them to keep improving, a concept I decided to employ in our sales departments. I started by defining set targets and introducing bonuses and incentives. Now all the results are recorded and compared in quarterly reports, which helps me manage sales. I learned that you can only manage what you can measure.

*What impact have the changes had?*

I have seen how much more motivated my teams are now, and how important it is for the whole team to believe in and get behind a goal. The first task though was building team spirit. There is a saying in football: Argentina has Messi, Brazil has Neymar, and Germany has a team. I took this idea on board in my management, dividing our units into teams with team leaders and introducing “dailies,” daily ten-minute organisational team meetings.

*How are you coping with the Corona pandemic so far?*

My employees are like extended family to me. Fortunately, we have not had to lay off any of our 500 employees. They appreciate that and are very loyal. Together we have tried to make the best of the situation, even though as a food processing company we are subject to particularly strict hygiene regulations. We had to temporarily introduce shifts to maintain a safe distance among the workers, for example. Women worked during the day, men in the evenings and at night. Generally speaking, we have been lucky and seem to be making it through the crisis relatively unscathed. Cheese is a staple. Sales to the hotel industry have dropped because there are few to no tourists at times.

*What are you doing to make up the difference?*

We are working on developing new markets in countries like Libya. We currently sell 70 per cent of our cheese in Egypt and export 30 per cent to the Middle East and Russia.

*Do you also work with German enterprises?*

We use German and foreign equipment in our production line, such as for packaging our cheeses. We have also worked with the Foundation of German Industry for Inter-

national Cooperation. A quality management and automation expert visited and gave us tips for improvements that we are now working on implementing. Apart from how motivated employees were, what impressed me most in Germany were the high hygiene standards and the technical equipment.

*You have recently started a vocational training programme based on the German model. How has that been going?*

We started it last year and are incredibly happy with it. Trainees are at the company two to three days a week and go to school on the other days. They are training to be dairy technologists. As another element of the programme, we offered seminars to teach our engineers how to pass their knowledge on to trainees in a professional and understandable way. We want to train 200 milk technologists and offer all of them a job. We were the first dairy company to be accredited for the programme by the Ministry of Trade and Industry. We just completed a manual on our vocational training programme to serve as a guide in the city and region. We played an active role in developing the curriculum and worked with the Chamber of Food Industries and other partners. Our programme was modelled on Germany’s vocational education system. We also just signed a contract with the Ministry of Education to establish a technical college that will offer vocational training as well. We also have a group of students from this new programme at the company, so there are two groups doing in-house training with us at the moment. We are not just doing this for ourselves, but also for our country. It is a way we can contribute to modernising vocational training in Egypt.


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**My employees are like extended family to me. Fortunately, we have not had to lay off any of our 500 employees. They appreciate that and are very loyal.**

Ramy Soudan



Ramy Soudan



**Ainur Abdina** is making the impossible possible while successfully navigating her business through the pandemic. The entrepreneur from Kazakhstan acquired the necessary confidence and know-how for achieving this through the Manager Training Programme.

## “Find the Containers!”

What began like a detective story actually became one of Ainur Abdina’s unusual assignments during the Coronavirus pandemic. In June 2020, she recalls, she got a phone call. Five containers of high-quality systems for a solar-power project had vanished without a trace, somewhere on their way from China to Kazakhstan. “Find the containers” was the urgent request from the man on the other end of the line. She had just three days to locate the containers for a German enterprise and then transport them to Kazakhstan. The response she heard the most was the word “impossible”, says Abdina. “It was a crazy time, and the rules and regulations were constantly changing. Nobody really knew what was going on, and the situ-

ation at the borders was difficult to assess,” remarks the logistics and customs expert. Despite the difficult circumstances, she finally found the containers at the Chinese border and managed to get them to their destination within the required timeframe. When a delegation of investors arrived a short time later, the systems had already been installed. The project had been saved, the customer was grateful, and Abdina was exhausted but satisfied.

### **The Manager Training Programme Plants the Seeds of Success**

Ainur Abdina shows no hesitation when asked about where she found the confidence to tackle projects like this one. The

Manager Training Programme planted the seeds for it, she says. “In Germany I saw that I can become an entrepreneur myself. That was the most valuable realisation,” she remarks.

This confidence has led her on her career path to becoming the managing director of her own business.

### **From Teacher to Entrepreneur**

Ainur Abdina was 27 when she attended the Programme. She had just quit her job as a German teacher in the province of Qostanai to start a career as a sales manager in the metropolis of Almaty. In Germany she had intended to acquire



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**In Germany I saw that I can become an entrepreneur myself. That was the most valuable realisation.**

Ainur Abdina

this work on the side, free of charge: it is simply her wish to pass on her knowledge, she says.

### **Growth Despite Coronavirus**

When Abdina took over the enterprise in 2019, she did not yet know that a major challenge would be awaiting her in the form of the Coronavirus pandemic. Luckily, she made the right adjustments in time. “We were able to go remote within 24 hours,” she says. Abdina had her own software programmed for processing orders as a cloud solution, which was finished just before the pandemic broke out. Thanks to that all of the employees were able to switch to working remotely within one day.

In addition to the existing orders, Abdina succeeded in generating new business as well. Many shipping agents in Kazakhstan were overwhelmed by the crisis. Abdina was able to get goods that were stuck in customs released for a large German industrial firm, for instance. Abdina is particularly pleased about the newly acquired customer. She had been trying for years to win them over. Now, during the crisis, she has been able to prove what she is capable of – even though, as a mother of two children, she was especially affected by the lockdown restrictions. In addition to her full-time job, she looked after her one-year-old daughter and helped her seven-year-old daughter with schoolwork. Nevertheless, she still managed to be there for her employees and customers. In her free-time she relaxes by going swimming and doing yoga. She also switches off by doing handicrafts: creating pictures with wool and pursuing the traditional art of crochet.

“only” the necessary skills for her new career path. But in addition to the intensive training units, she also gained a lot more. “The Programme not only gave me knowledge, it also opened my eyes,” she says. In the years to come, a fast-moving career path was awaiting her. After positions in various enterprises and marketing studies at the German-Kazakh university, she was recommended in 2011 to join C. Spaarmann Logistics GmbH, a logistics company in Brandenburg that specialised in Eastern European markets. She became the managing director in Kazakhstan and expanded the business there. In 2019 she took an opportunity to become the proprietor of the affiliate there. “I started small at Spaarmann, with one computer

and one co-worker,” she remembers. In the meantime, she has now become responsible for the entire enterprise with three branches and all of their employees. Her clients include well-known firms from Germany and other countries.

### **Cooperation with the German-Kazakh University**

Ainur Abdina has maintained ties to her university after her marketing studies. She accepted interns at her firm and has held lectures there for several years. Her topic is “Transport and Customs from A to Z”. She loves this return to academia, as she had taught German for many years at the university in her hometown. She does

# How Enterprises Manage Crises with Effective Communication



It is impossible to plan for crises. There is hardly ever any warning, instead they arrive suddenly and unexpectedly. This makes it all the more important to have carefully thought-out crisis communication both internally and externally, in order to prevent a crisis of communication. That is how **Silke Schulz** sees it.

The causes of crises vary widely and can have the most varied impacts, whether they be the diesel fuel scandal at Volkswagen AG or a global crisis like Covid-19. But all crises have one thing in common: they impair the stability of an organisation. The German economist Armin Töpfer explains that a sudden (company) crisis is understood to be “unplanned and undesirable processes of a limited duration and ability to be influenced which also have an ambivalent outcome”.

## Essential: A Plan for the Crisis

Not every crisis is public and even though crises are unplanned, crisis management ideally should not only start once the enterprise is in a crisis, but rather with preparation for a possible crisis event; and a well-developed crisis handbook can be of some help.

It is therefore useful to define a common understanding of crises. When is a crisis



occurring from the perspective of the business? Does a crisis begin with a few critical comments on social media or with an environmental catastrophe caused by the firm?

Crisis communication in and of itself should be led by executive management, but especially in larger organisations it is advisable to transfer crisis management to a team. Roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined, for instance who is the primary contact for journalists, who is responsible for communication and on which channels (online, social media, etc.), and might employees from specialised departments such as IT or the legal department need to be involved?

Particularly in the field of social media, regular monitoring of activity and good community management is advisable to keep an eye on isolated negative comments and to avoid hateful comments spiralling.

### Speaking with One Voice

In crisis situations communication, in the sense of the flow of information, exchange and dialogue, is important. A cold silence or “sitting it out” are thus the worst conceivable types of (non)communication. A crisis needs to be met with a swift response and doing things just for the sake of doing them must be avoided. Instead rapid and prudent action is needed. A balance must be found between the provision of current, transparent information and facts on the one hand, and a strengthening of customer, service provider and stakeholder loyalty on the other. Assigning blame, glossing things over or denial are of just as little use in a crisis as obviously burying information. But that does not mean that every detailed fact needs to be made available to the public. It is more a matter of finding a well thought out balance between the provision of information at the right time during the crisis and honesty throughout the entire process. Beyond just offering facts, planned measures that will be undertaken to handle the crisis should also be published to strengthen the public’s confidence in the business’s own crisis competency.

All public relations efforts should take the “one-voice policy” into account. This means publishing the same statements



**In crisis situations communication, in the sense of the flow of information, exchange and dialogue, is important.**

with identical content on all channels of communication. Putting out different messages on different channels not only creates confusion, but also undermines the enterprise’s credibility.

### Internal Communication as Interpersonal Exchange

Uncertainties are a part of any crisis. How the crisis and its associated uncertainties are dealt with inside the business can however be managed positively through transparent and continuous communication. Internal communication should always take place prior to public relations. If employees learn of the business crisis not through internal channels, but via social media or internet reports, confidence in the enterprise and its corporate culture will be shaken. The organisation’s culture is then marked by worries and fears which lead to rumours and speculation, and a

poor, possibly even destructive, mood amongst the staff is inevitable.

Dialogue with the employees should start early on and it must be ensured that absolutely everyone receives the information they need. It is not advisable to wait until all the facts are there – when will such a time ever arrive? Using concise and clear wording in messages, providing new information in a timely manner and keeping all employees abreast of the latest developments form the core of internal communication. But that does not mean that the employees need to know all of the facts down to the last detail, but they should at least know the information that is communicated outside of the enterprise and the information that concerns them on a personal level. ▶

**A purely facts-based provision of information is not sufficient for internal communication. Interpersonal exchange is what is needed.**

Crises are often **triggers of change** since they show that previous strategies and procedures are no longer viable.

A purely facts-based provision of information is not sufficient for internal communication, however. Interpersonal exchange is what is needed to actively shape trust and credibility. It is also important not to neglect the anxieties and the needs of the employees, but instead to actively address them and engage with empathy. Video messages, for instance, are much more personal and often do not leave as much room for interpretation as the written word.

An organisational culture based on trust also manages to maintain credibility with the employees. This is more difficult to achieve in a corporate culture in which these values have no relevance. In addition, in times of crisis it is harder to build trust between executives and employees anyway.

### Crisis as an Opportunity

Global crises such as the Coronavirus pandemic have shown that business as usual is not possible under such circumstances – and neither is marketing as usual. Regardless of whether an organisation is directly or indirectly affected by the crisis, it is advisable to adjust to the current situation with sensitivity as regards the content of the communication and the tone in order to guarantee empathetic communication with the target audience. Otherwise, a disastrous barrage of negativity is inevitable – as was the case when the sporting goods manufacturer Adidas announced during the Coronavirus crisis that it no longer intended to pay the rent for its stores. Adidas was immediately criticised



in social media as lacking solidarity and sensitivity, since this is a time in which solidarity is important and in which the crisis can only be managed when people work together.

The positive thing about crises is that they are of limited duration per definition. Nevertheless, they mark a cut or even a turning point in the development of an organisation. This is because crises are often triggers or drivers of change since they show that previous strategies and procedures are no longer viable and that a change is more urgent than ever, especially in an emergency situation. Organisations and individuals thus have the opportunity to come out of a crisis with renewed strength and the ability to survive into the future. In other cultures, the view that every crisis is also an opportunity has deep

roots: The Chinese word for “crisis”, for instance, is made up of two characters: risk and opportunity.



#### About the author

Silke Schulz is a Marketing Advisor with IMAP GmbH, a systemic consultancy firm for human resources and organisation development and one of the training centres for the Manager Training Programme. Silke Schulz combines her strategic skills and passion for communication in corporate and brand communication.

Through her international experience in various industries, she has become familiar with the needs of the most diverse target groups.





# Encouraging Team Spirit Through Digital Communication

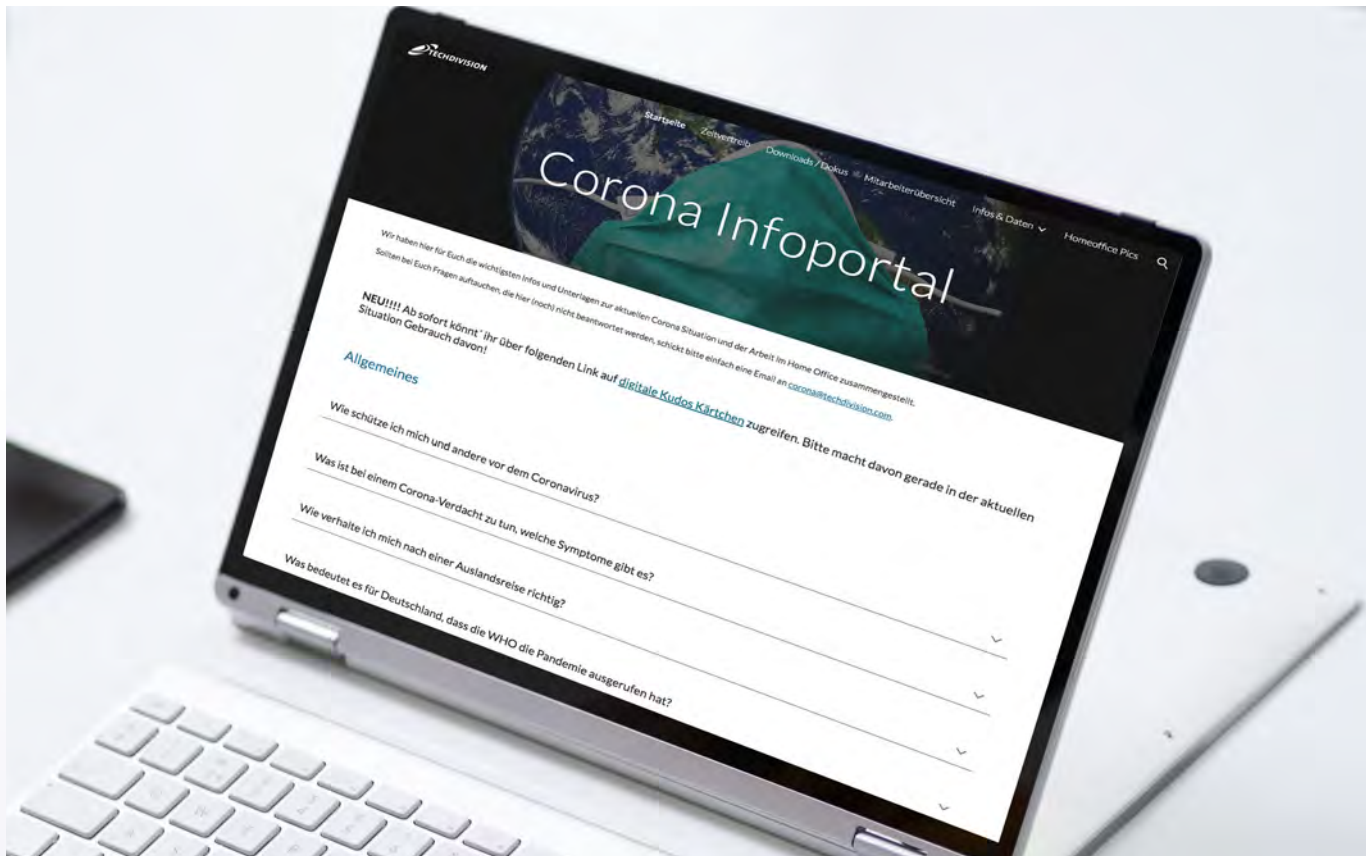
Roughly 120 employees at TechDivision GmbH have been working from home since March. With that, almost everything has changed, but not necessarily for the worse, according to CMO **Josef Willkommer**. He describes what is important for working together in virtual teams and how leadership can be successful despite remote working.

Although our enterprise has already facilitated working from home for many years now, we discovered that it is one thing when individual employees or teams work from home for a defined period, but a very different situation when the entire firm including the management

are all doing so. In a kick-off meeting in mid-March, we decided to shift the entire business operation to home working as soon as possible – initially until Easter. Here a big advantage right from the start for us was the fact that we had successfully developed our IT infrastructure

towards cloud technologies in recent years and practically all of our employees already had laptops.

A transition period of three working days was defined to enable a smooth adjustment, during which all the employees moved out of their offices and commenced working from home. They were allowed to take any items they needed for work home with them – from desk lamps to monitors and office chairs – and to pass on the costs for additional office equipment they had bought to the firm. In parallel, an internal Corona infor-



An in-house information portal keeps employees up to date on the current developments during the pandemic.

mation portal was set up, which continuously provided information on internal measures and behaviour guidelines. In addition, we initiated a crisis unit that serves as a contact point for any questions our employees have.

### Transparency Through Regular Meetings

We have regular monthly team meetings in which the entire staff participate and receive information about the latest news and current developments concerning our enterprise. Employees from our locations in Munich, Leipzig and Hamburg had already previously participated virtually. Openness and transparency are a core part of our corporate philosophy, and it was therefore important to us right at the start of the pandemic that team meetings also take place during this period of working from home. From March onwards, we even had weekly team meetings in view of the special circumstances.

In addition, since we all started working from home, we have regularly asked our employees, as part of a so-called “health check”, about their current mood so that appropriate measures can be introduced at an early stage, if necessary. This con-

cerns their satisfaction with the communication and with working from home, but also what their stress level is like and how they judge the support provided by the firm. Besides the standard points, this brief survey also provides an opportunity for feedback, questions, and suggestions. Up to the end of May, this survey was carried out on a weekly basis and since then twice a week. Our crisis unit evaluates the results and determines suitable measures. The results of the survey are also made available to all employees.

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**It soon became evident that a lack of social contact with colleagues is the greatest challenge of remote working.**

### Cloud Technologies as a Major Advantage

Our firm has already taken a cloud-first approach for some time now, in which preference is placed on a cloud version when new tools are introduced or used, as long as the scope of functions and security is comparable. We only make use of classical on-premises or installable software in exceptional cases. For instance, we have been using Google Workspace, formerly GSuite, for about two years now as the primary infrastructure and basic solution. This tool enables comprehensive cooperation in real time. Moreover, all the data, which is stored in the Google data centre, can be reliably recovered. From a retrospective viewpoint, the use of these cloud-based tools in the Corona situation has saved us a lot of time and expense.

Regarding our project management, over the past few years we have had positive experiences with Atlassian Jira and Confluence as an intranet solution. In addition, we have been using a voice over IP telephone system for some time now, with which we can quickly contact our employees via their computers or smartphones using the usual telephone



**Even before the Corona pandemic, we gave our team comprehensive decision-making autonomy regarding their time and place of work; we primarily evaluate the final results.**

number. And a collaboration tool called Miro has proved to be extremely helpful for interactive workshops – with internal participants but also with external partners and customers; it is a kind of online whiteboard on which several people can work at the same time.

### Leading Through Trust

Even before the Corona pandemic, we gave our team comprehensive decision-making autonomy regarding their time and place of work; we primarily evaluate the final results. We have not changed this approach during the working from home period; in fact, we have made allowances for the additional burden that many of the colleagues have, for example due to home schooling. Over time, we have seen that productivity and output are often just as high when staff work from home as they are when they are in the office and that they even tend to work more when at home. Altogether, there have been more advantages than disadvantages and our team has so far also responded very favourably to the way in which we are dealing with the Corona situation, as a survey confirms.

### Social Components as the Greatest Challenge

While we were able to manage the technical side very well right from the start due to the use of suitable cloud tools, and regular remote team meetings ensure the necessary transparency, it soon became evident that a lack of social contact with colleagues is the greatest challenge of remote working. A survey after the first few weeks of home working showed that 80% of the employees are comfortable with working from home and can imagine continuing to do so. However, many of them mentioned that they missed the personal contact and exchanges and were looking forward to returning to the office, despite well-functioning surroundings at home.

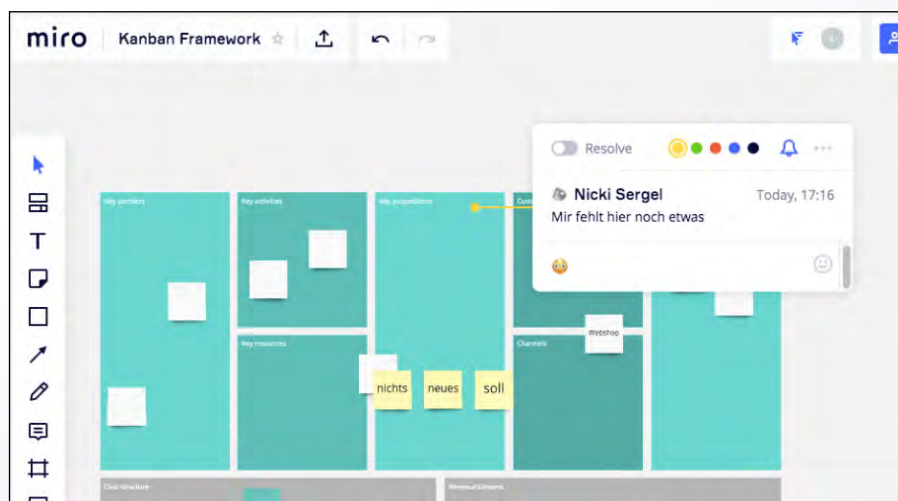
So, we tried to promote personal exchanges – also beyond work topics. The “TechDivision Home Stories”, a photo competition in which each colleague sends in photos from their “home office” and the other team members can vote on them, is just one example. The winners are announced during the team meeting and receive vouchers for local restaurants or delivery services. Furthermore, we have installed a virtual coffee lounge, an online meeting room that is always open, where colleagues can spontaneously meet. On Friday evenings, they can have their weekly after work beer there.

As an enterprise, we have learned a lot from the Corona situation. Some of the things we have learned will also apply in the future. Reduced costs and increased flexibility are positive side effects of this crisis.

### What we have learned from the Corona situation

For the time being, we will continue to primarily work from home but have already determined some points that we want to give more consideration to after returning to the office:

1. The use of modern cloud infrastructures that save time, money, and work.
2. Almost all everyday office situations, including employee appraisals and job interviews, can be managed using modern web meeting and collaboration tools – saving both time and travel expenses.
3. The greatest possible transparency in dealing with the situation helps the team to adapt to the new situation and to mutually grow from the challenge.
4. A transparent exchange of experience and knowledge between staff and stakeholders is a significant advantage.
5. Face-to-face meetings and social exchange cannot be replaced by technical tools.
6. The topic of working from home or working from everywhere should become an even more important part of our corporate culture after the crisis.
7. Trust in the employees and the acknowledgement of their work is the foundation for everything else.



#### About the author

Josef Willkommer is co-founder and CMO of TechDivision GmbH, one of the leading service providers for the technically sophisticated digitalisation projects in the DACH region (Germany, Austria, and Switzerland) and official Adobe Gold Partner with a focus on medium-sized customers. Josef Willkommer has already been intensively involved in the topic of digitalisation for more than 20 years, with an emphasis on e-commerce, online marketing, and modern management. He is the publisher and editor-in-chief of the eStrategy magazine and also an author and speaker on topics around e-commerce, online marketing, digitalisation, and management.



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