THE COVID-19 CRISIS

Case study:
How is Marel, a global manufacturing company headquartered in Iceland, dealing with the COVID-19 crisis?

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Thesis of 9 ECTS credits
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ABSTRACT

A global pandemic has disrupted our normal way of living and doing business. An extreme and rare event without precedent in modern times has put large parts of the global community on lockdown, resulting in major implications and disruptions for organizations all around the globe. This research examines how a global manufacturing company is managing the situation. Interviews with top management and the global crisis management team were conducted to learn about the actions taken in the first few months of the pandemic. Furthermore, the documented processes and action plans were reviewed. This research was then compared to ISO 22301 and scientific literature related to Business Continuity Management. The results showed many similarities between methods used by Marel and what is considered best practice in Business Continuity Management, but also some opportunities for improvements. What stands out is the positive effects on the organization, which have emerged from the situation.
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1. INTRODUCTION

We are living in unprecedented times where a global pandemic is deeply affecting the normal life as we know it. When this is written the Coronavirus that causes the disease COVID-19, has spread to over 185 countries, killing more than 300,000 people (Johns Hopkins University, 2020). To minimize the spread and save as many lives as possible, multiple countries have closed their borders. At least a third of the world population is currently on some form of a lockdown, meaning that their respective governments have restricted their movement in some way (Kaplan et al., 2020). This results in major implications and disruptions for organizations all around the globe. The limitations on the number of people allowed in the same space are especially difficult for organizations that are in the manufacturing business. With fewer people working at a time it is difficult to keep up with demand and being able to deliver goods and services in time.

When organizations are facing such rare events of high severity, they are often forced to come up with ad-hoc reactions because there are no plans in place that can tackle this type of situation. That can result in bad decision-making and reactions that might not be in the best interest of the organization.

Business Continuity Management (BCM) is a process that identifies the risks that an organization is facing. The purpose of BCM is to enable the organization to respond to and recover from events such as natural disasters, terrorism, disease outbreaks, system failures, and more (Hiles, 2011).

Marel is a multi-national provider of advanced food processing systems, equipment, software, and services to the poultry, meat, and fish industries. The organization’s headquarters are in Iceland but it operates in over 30 countries, across six continents, with approximately 6,300 people in employment. Marel’s main goal is to provide safe and affordable food, produced in a sustainable way (Marel, 2020).

The goal of this research is to find out how Marel, as a global company headquartered in Iceland, is dealing with the global pandemic, COVID-19, and compare the reactions to the Business Continuity Management literature and standards.
This chapter will discuss the main ideas within Business Continuity Management (BCM) and its subcategories.

The Business Continuity Institute (BCI, 2017) defines BCM as "Holistic management process that identifies potential threats to an organization and the impacts to business operations those threats, if realized, might cause, and which provides a framework for building organizational resilience with the capability of an effective response that safeguards the interests of its key stakeholders, reputation, brand, and value-creating activities."

BCM is a unified process of multiple components, including disaster recovery, business recovery, crisis management, incident management, emergency management, and contingency planning. It has close links to risk management and corporate governance strategies (Smith, 2003).

Top management is responsible for setting up a business continuity policy that fits the purpose of the organization. Most often, this is a high-level statement that includes the scope, objectives, and main activities. The assignation of roles, responsibilities, and authorization is also in the hands of top management. It is very important to create awareness within the organization, and that the policy and the BCM organization is communicated to all interested parties (ISO, 2019).

The most effective way to set up a BCM team is by appointing a BCM manager at a senior level whose role is to draw together, under a matrix team approach, representatives from the various organization functions, together with key line of business heads to ensure a coordinated approach. This ensures a buy-in throughout the organization. The people chosen for the team should have appropriate education, training, and experience (ISO, 2019).

To build up resilience, organizations need to be aware of their environment and understand their context. When setting up a Business Continuity Management System (BCMS), the starting point is to identify external and internal threats that might interfere with the ability to fulfill the organization’s purpose. It needs to be clear how the business works in detail. Which activities are crucial and what the impact would be if a disruption occurs. (Hiles, 2002)

Implementing and maintaining systematic processes for analyzing the business impact and assessing the risk of disruption are important factors of the BCMS. The first step is to define the impact types and criteria relevant to the organization’s context. Once that is clear, all critical activities that support the delivery of products and services are mapped out. It is important to consider all activities and dependencies throughout the value chain. The estimated impact of the disruptions of the activities identified follows next. This can be done by scenario planning where the best and worst cases are set up (Smith, 2003). It is crucial to consider the time factor when estimating the impact and determine the maximum tolerable period of disruption (MTPD), which is the timeframe within which the impacts of not resuming activities would become unacceptable for the organization. Prioritized time frames should be set for resuming disrupted activities at a specified minimum time within the MTPD (ISO, 2019).

The scope of the BCMS needs to be clear. That means that priorities must be set. So, when the most critical activities and tasks have been identified and the potential risks that could disrupt them, the organization can map out which risks should be eliminated and which can be disregarded or monitored without taking any action. Interested parties should
be mapped out, taking into consideration their relevant requirements and needs (ISO, 2019).

The next step is to plan actions on how to deal with risks and opportunities. Business Continuity strategies that consider options for before, during, and after disruption should be selected. These strategies need to meet the requirements to continue and recover the prioritized activities within the identified timeframes and agreed capacity. The aim is to reduce the likelihood, limit the impact, and shorten the period of disruption. When choosing the Business continuity strategies, the amount of risk the organization is willing to take should be considered, along with costs and benefits. The resources that can support the prioritized activities in the best way should be a part of the BCM strategy. According to ISO 22301:2019, the following resources should always be considered when determining the resource requirements for the implementation of the Business Continuity Plans: People, information and data, facilities, equipment and consumables, ICT systems, transport and logistics, finance, partners and suppliers.

The organization should implement and maintain a response structure that will enable timely warning and communication to relevant interested parties. It should provide plans and procedures to manage the organization during a disruption. These plans and procedures should be used when business continuity solutions need to be activated. The organization should identify and document business continuity plans and procedures based on the output of the selected strategies and solutions.

When a disruption occurs, it can happen very suddenly and come as a complete surprise, so the first response is very critical. The immediate steps that are to be taken during a disruption need to be specific and clear. The procedures set up need to be flexible to respond to changing internal or external conditions of the disruption (ISO, 2019).

One or more teams responsible for responding to disruptions should be identified. The roles and responsibilities of each team and the relationships between the teams must be considered and clearly stated. The teams need to possess certain competencies such as being able to assess the nature and extent of a disruption and when it is appropriate to activate a certain business continuity response. One of the most important roles of the team is to establish priorities, where life safety should always be the priority (ISO, 2019).

For each team, there should be dedicated team-members as well as people assigned for back-up. Responsibility and authority need to be clear. Communication planning should always be a part of the BCMS. Relevant internal and external communications should be defined, covering what should be communicated, when, with whom, and by whom. Within communication planning is the recording of details of the disruption, the actions taken, and decisions made (Seeger, 2006).

All business continuity plans and procedures should be documented and maintained. The purpose of the plans is to provide guidance and information to assist teams to respond to a disruption and assist the organization with recovery. The business continuity plans should contain the actions that the teams will take in detail. Pre-defined thresholds and the process for activating response if the situation pushes limits above the thresholds should be clearly defined. All procedures that enable the delivery of products and services at agreed capacity, should be listed up. Each plan must be usable and available at the time and place at which it is required. The organization should have documented processes that guide the way to restoration and return to business as usual (ISO, 2019).

To make sure that the BCM processes work, the organization must implement and maintain a program of exercising and testing to validate over time the effectiveness of its
BCM strategies and solutions. The tests should be conducted in appropriate scenarios that are well planned with clearly defined aims and objectives. The exercises should aim for developing teamwork, competence, confidence, and knowledge for those who have roles to perform concerning disruptions. They should be able to validate the business continuity strategies and solutions and be used for review within the context of promoting continual improvement. Exercises should be performed at planned intervals and when there are significant changes within the organization or the context in which it operates. The organization should use the findings of such exercising and testing to implement changes and improvements (Elliott et al., 2010).

BCM is a dynamic, proactive, and ongoing process. It must be kept up-to-date and fit for purpose to be effective so it is very important to review and maintain the plans regularly. It is recommended to review the plans yearly and when changes are made to, or within the organization. This can be done with internal audits, audits from third parties and, reviews from top management (Tammineedi, 2010). Continual improvement should be the driving force of the reviews. By conducting the reviews at planned intervals, correcting nonconformities, and adjusting plans and processes accordingly, the organization is ensuring the suitability, adequacy, and effectiveness of the BCMS (ISO, 2019).

Too many organizations tend to focus all their efforts on IT since the technology is playing such a big role throughout the operations, leaving them exposed to many other threats (Smith, 2003). Therefore, the flexibility of the plans is very important, so they can be used across different types of disruptions or crises.

When determining “best practice” for managing crises it is important to bear in mind that each crisis is unique, and the same applies to the organizations that experience the crises. Different types of crises require various and diverse reactions for each organization. Therefore, it is more feasible to talk about good practice (Smith, 2003). The Business Continuity Institute has issued the Business Continuity Management Good Practice Guidelines, where the knowledge of practitioners from all over the world is combined with information from international standards.


According to ISO 22301:2019, a business continuity management system emphasizes the importance of:

- Understanding continuity and preparedness needs, as well as the necessity for establishing business continuity management policy and objectives.
- Implementing and operating controls and measures for managing an organization’s overall continuity risks.
- Monitoring and reviewing the performance and effectiveness of the business continuity management system.
- Continual improvement based on objective measurements.

This standard was used to compare the plans and actions Marel has taken to minimize the effect of COVID-19.
3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study is based on a qualitative research method. The method is based on participant observation and in-depth interviews that provide descriptive data. The purpose of applying a qualitative method is to get a deeper understanding of the subject. The research also included a review of documented plans and procedures made by Marel.

Once the research question had been formed, the first step was to get in touch with the Global Crisis Team within Marel. The first point of contact was Auðbjörg Ólafsdóttir who is responsible for Communications. She provided background information about the team and its function and referred to Valdís Arnórsdóttir who is the Global Crisis Team Leader for Marel.

Linda Jónsdóttir Chief Financial Officer of Marel, who is also responsible for HR and IT and Árni Sigurðsson, Chief Strategy Officer were contacted to represent the Executive Team.

All participants agreed to do interviews. Also, Valdís granted full access to the Microsoft Teams site that the Global Crisis Team is using, where meeting minutes, contingency plans, crisis management plans, and more material is stored.

The interviews with Valdís and Linda took place on the 6th and 7th of May, 2020. They received a set of questions beforehand for preparation. Due to the situation, the interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams. Both interviews took one hour and were recorded with Microsoft Teams. Both agreed to be recorded and mentioned by name. The interviews were set up as in-depth, semi-structured interviews, where the interviewer attempts to get information from the interviewee by asking questions. Even though interviewers tend to prepare a list of predetermined questions, these types of interviews usually end up being more like a conversation, offering participants the chance to pursue issues they feel are important. (Longhurst, 2009)

Valdís Arnórsdóttir has been with Marel for 8 years, and currently holds the position as Director of HR Operations.

Linda Jónsdóttir has been with Marel for 10 years, first as Manager of Corporate Treasury and currently as CFO.

The interview with Árni Sigurðsson took place on May 18th and took 15 minutes. It was conducted via telephone. The interview was set up as an unstructured interview, with few questions and mainly aimed at risk management within Marel.

Árni Sigurðsson has been with Marel for 6 years, and currently holds the position as Chief Strategy Officer and EVP Strategic Business Units

In addition to the interviews, Marel’s Contingency plans and Crisis Management plans were reviewed.

Data analysis was conducted when the interviews had been documented. This was done by comparing the results from the interviews and data review to the ISO 22301:2019 Security and resilience – Business continuity management systems - Requirements standard and other scientific literature associated with business continuity and crisis management.
Comparison and analysis of the data were conducted using inductive methods, which is a method used in qualitative research. The method is based on that the researcher considers the data collected and tries to find patterns that form the conclusions. By following this method, the researcher tries to make a conclusion from the data but not the other way around (Bernard, 2013).

The main limitation of this research is that Marel is listed on the stock markets in Iceland and the Netherlands and therefore it was not possible to go into too much detail of the situation, plans, and performance in this research.
4. RESEARCH RESULTS

As soon as COVID-19 started to spread within China, Marel needed to act fast to ensure the health and safety of the personnel working in the manufacturing center and the regional sales and service office in Beijing. To complicate things even further they also have multiple installation projects running in China where personnel from other countries within Asia, Australia, and Europe are involved.

In the beginning, a Global Crisis Management Team (GCMT) was established. The role of the GCMT is twofold, primarily to guard the safety of the employees and secondly, protect the operations of the organization. The focus was put on the safety of the personnel, both those working in-house and the ones traveling or out in the field with customers. Contractors and guests were also a part of the scope.

The core GCMT team consists of four members and the roles and main responsibilities are defined as follows:

- **Crisis Team Leader**: Organizes and prioritizes actions and manages the crisis team. Chairs the GCMT meetings. Oversees all identified risks and ensures that actions are planned and addressed. Reports to top management and escalates when the risk is too high or when there is a lack of decision-making authority. Responsible for alignment on all major decision making and ensures that stakeholders are informed.
- **Scriber/log keeper**: Logs main actions and decisions taken at each time. Makes sure that the GCMT has up-to-date information regarding an ongoing incident. Maintains a record of major events, decisions, and messages throughout the incident/task. Acts as the primary source of information about the scope of the crisis/incidents and the progress of emergency support coordination. Organizes how the data is stored and how decisions are made.
- **Communication**: Maps stakeholders and communication channels and roles and makes sure the right people are informed at the right time with the right information. Creates communication that is posted on information sites and the communication that is sent out to stakeholder groups. Logs all communication that is sent out on the GCMT Microsoft Teams site. Advises on communication activities. Prepares to hold statements and Q&A if/when applicable.
- **Human Resources**: All HR related matters.

The roles mentioned above are the fundamental roles of the GCMT. In addition to these roles, a specialist in relevant crisis subject is also called into the team on ad-hoc basis. Due to the nature of the COVID-19 program, the following specialist functions were involved:

- Travel
- Health safety and environment (HSE)
- IT
- Service
- Supply chain
- Legal

Every role has a back-up member in case of absence, so representation from all functions is ensured. These roles are also identified within the Local Crisis Teams that were set up later in the process.
As soon as the GCMT had been set up, a notice was posted on Marel’s intranet, announcing that a contingency plan had been activated.

Fortunately, Marel already had a Group Crisis Management Plan and a Contingency Plan in place before the pandemic broke out. These plans were used as a framework for the COVID-19 crisis. Representatives from HR, Legal, and Communications had received training in setting up crisis plans and became familiar with the mindset behind such plans. What also helped with shaping the Contingency Plan was a recent crisis experience, when a part of Marel’s office buildings in Iceland was caught on fire. At the time, there were no formal plans available and responsibility and decision-making authority was unclear. This experience helped to define the first reactions, clearer authority and decision-making processes, and more efficient communications. ISO standards number 27000 and 45000 were used for reference when making the plans, which included general procedures and templates to fill out. In the plans the main course of action is defined:

- Which actions you are going to take
- Which steps will be taken
- How will implementation be done
- Who will be involved

In the beginning, the GCMT mapped out related and interested parties that they have been in continuous communication with but were not a part of the team. One of the related parties was an employee who took part in contingency plans against Ebola in Africa in 2013. He gave insight into how he and his team were managing different aspects of the outbreak.

At first, the efforts of the plans were mainly towards protecting the personnel and the operations in China. Travel was the focus since transport and accommodation needed to be safe for those traveling to and from China. Later, the scope of the project started to expand.

When the pandemic started to spread further in China, HSE needed to be taken into consideration to ensure security at the workplace and on the way to and from work. Public transport was not an option anymore nor acceptable. Many information meetings were held online to explain to people how they could protect themselves at work, on the road, and at home. These meetings were also used to explain the risks and the importance of continuing the operations. Contingency plans were activated to prevent infected people from entering the office and the manufacturing center. And if an infection would occur within the workplace, that as few people as possible would be affected. This was done by dividing the teams up into smaller units, dividing the canteen into smaller units, and by a strict schedule and more frequent cleaning of all spaces. People that could work from home were asked to do so.

The requirement to work from home became prevalent and new challenges emerged. Not everyone had laptops and internet connections at home were not always steady enough. The IT department gave input to come up with solutions so people could work efficiently from home, which included getting everyone up and running in using virtual meeting solutions. IT is also responsible for cyber security and have people working on it full time.

As the virus progressed to more parts of the world, the Global Crisis Team Leader contacted each Regional Manager to set up a local crisis team. The role of the teams was to prepare the locations within the regions for the pandemic, roll out contingency plans and
explain them to the employees. Fifteen local teams were formed all around the world and big emphasis was put on coordinated actions. GCMT collected data from each location to see what the respective governments were advising people to do and what limitations were in place. To ensure alignment across locations, Sharing is caring meetings were held, where the teams and relevant stakeholders could share best practices. The local teams have also been in good cooperation with local authorities such as the Chief Epidemiologist, Civil Defense, and the Police.

There was a lot of fear and anxiety due to the whole situation, especially to begin with. People were afraid to travel and to go to the office. The GCMT and the local crisis management teams needed to keep people well informed and calm. Townhall meetings were held and in some cases one on one meetings. New information sites were created to bring information as fast as possible to the people. People have also been struggling with isolation due to social distancing and not being able to go to the office. HSE made contracts with psychiatrists to support the personnel and The Red Cross has acted as a trusted advisor for dealing with mental issues due to fear, stress, and uncertainty. Supporting material like personal training programs, meditation programs, good practices for home offices, and more were included in the information sites to help people stay healthy and motivated.

When the pandemic reached Europe, Global Service was included in the GCMT. The actions taken there aimed at keeping the people safe, get them up and running in servicing customers online and utilize them in other internal projects. In some cases, service employees have been temporarily transferred to Supply Chain or other parts of the business. Global Training stepped in to set up online courses and training material for the service personnel sitting idle at home. The purpose of the training was to teach the service personnel to repair the machines online and to repair the machines that were installed close to them since the options for traveling were rapidly decreasing.

Marel is a critical supplier in food processing, and its employees need to be able to travel and get to their customers to keep the food processing up and running. To be able to do so, the legal department needed to step in and arrange licenses for entering areas that had been closed off partially or completely. This was done in cooperation with the governments in respective locations.

From day one it was decided to completely follow International SOS, and the risk analysis they conduct regarding which zones are identified as high risk. Marel already had a contract with them to ensure safety for employees while traveling. If a zone was identified as a high-risk area, the employees were not allowed to travel there.

In terms of other risk factors, Marel has systematically reduced risk by expanding activity all around the world, in different industries and production stages. The product portfolio and customer range have a big risk mitigation effect and large part of revenues or around 40% is coming from aftermarket and the rest from standard equipment sales and larger projects. In Marel there is also a co-location strategy in progress, which entails that there is both a mother site and a second site that can produce a certain machine and production can be moved between sites. So, if either of the sites becomes temporarily unavailable the knowledge for building the machine is present at another site.

To further mitigate risk, the executive team has established different kinds of analysis and planning. For example, Sales and Operations Planning (S&OP), which is an integrated business management process through which the executive team continually achieves focus, alignment and synchronization among all functions of the organization around resource planning. Scenario planning of order intake is conducted with all the industries where the best, worst, and the most realistic case is forecasted.
When COVID-19 started spreading, the Executive Team started to have weekly meetings with the GCMT leader where concerns can be expressed and status updates given. These meetings are also used by the Executive Team to challenge the approach of the GCMT.

After the crisis hit, more emphasis has been put on connecting with the clients to check their status, their changed needs to understand better how Marel can best support them in keeping their operations running and see if the current condition is impacting the ability to fund their orders or creating other bottlenecks.

In weekly Executive Team meetings, COVID-19 is always on schedule, where mainly the effects on Supply Chain, Service, and Innovation are discussed and, if there are any reasons to be concerned.

Marel only experienced a temporary dip in manufacturing and managed to maintain good manufacturing levels in all of the manufacturing centers. The actions taken within the Supply chain were supported by Gartner standards. The manufacturing centers were split into smaller units and employees were split into different shifts. All major suppliers were contacted and were presented with a questionnaire to measure how confident they were in being able to deliver material and parts. Marel holds a strong position financially and so it was decided to stock up on parts and raw materials to make sure Marel could deliver the right quality at the right time to their customers. It was also decided to produce more to stock. By making these investments, Marel is preventing bottlenecks in production and ensuring short lead time in the delivery of goods.

Sales and marketing activities have moved partially online. All shows were canceled or postponed and Marel has hosted online events instead with the help of virtual conferences where virtual reality technology was used to display Marel’s solutions. This has been very well received by customers attending these events.

Initially, the scope of the Crisis plan that Marel had in place was purely concerning China and the situation there. Processes regarding how the corporate office could ensure the safety of personnel and protect the operations in China. Two months later it was reviewed and improved to reflect the rest of the world.

From now on there will always be a GCMT within Marel. It will be inactive between crises, but there will be people responsible for initiating the crisis plans when applicable.

At this point, the total impact of the crisis is not yet known. The current situation implies that Marel’s locations are no longer in crisis mode. The guidance and processes are in place in every location and operations have been running quite smoothly. The pandemic is still peaking in North America, Latin America, Russia, and the United Kingdom, so the local crisis teams there will still be active for now. But when is crisis management over?

The processes for getting back to business as usual have not yet been set up and the interviewees are not sure what the return policy will be. That is if the previous business as usual scenario is desirable. Both interviewees have witnessed some positive changes coming out of this major crisis. People are working better together, and with increased efficiency even though they can’t sit together in the same room. Technology has played big part in this, since virtual meetings have replaced face to face meetings. This has worked well for Marel, the employees seem happy with the systems, and the options offered. The situation has accelerated the technical progress within Marel and people have been forced to get creative and think outside the box, which has brought new ideas to the table. The outlook for the future is less travel, more online meetings and innovative ways to increase efficiency.
5. DISCUSSION

At the beginning of this research, it was already clear that Marel does not have a formal Business Continuity Policy or System in place. When COVID-19 started to spread, they considered setting up a BCMS. It was decided to leave it out of scope for now, and use the plans they already had in place, since urgent action was required. The plans and actions made by Marel to minimize the impact of COVID-19 bear resemblance to BCMS in many ways. The plans were flexible and defined course of action, so it was easy to adapt them to the current crisis. Included in the plans were checklists and templates that could be filled out to better define the steps that needed to be taken.

The GCMT that was established was comprised of people coming from different parts of the organization, ensuring buy-in throughout the organization and representation from all departments heavily impacted by the disruption. The people chosen for the teams have strong backgrounds and great experience in their fields. All team members have back-ups that can take their place if needed. The authorization and decision-making model was very clear from the start. Which made decision-making faster and more effective.

The health and safety of the employees has always been at the forefront of decision making, which is according to BCM standards and scientific literature. At the early stages of the pandemic, it was not very clear how contagious the disease was, but according to news from China, the outlook was not promising. Marel started early with reactions such as segregation between office and manufacturing and splitting people into smaller groups or shifts. It was very clear to them that if the employees would get sick, there would be no operations to protect. They were always thinking one step ahead and made great efforts in being proactive, so when the constraints on mass gatherings kept getting tighter they already had decided how to implement the next steps in their plans.

When considering impacted resources, Marel considered all the same resources that are listed up in ISO 22301:2019, i.e. people, information and data, facilities, equipment and consumables, ICT systems, transport and logistics, finance, partners, and suppliers.

All actions and decisions have been documented. Great emphasis has been put on information sharing, both between crisis teams and to stakeholders and employees. This has been done via online staff meetings and daily postings on information sites. The plans that Marel already had in place, have been reviewed once and will be reviewed and kept relevant for Marel’s business model going forward. From now on there will always be a GCMT that will be responsible for crises and activating responding plans.

There is also room for improvement for Marel. By setting up a clear BCM policy that is known throughout the organization, people are more aware of critical factors and more alert to possible threats. They would also gain from testing their plans and training their employees that hold roles which are relevant if a disruption occurs.

Although Marel already has strong risk awareness and has strategically built its business up in diverse markets which provides risk mitigation to some extent, they should put more focus on Business Impact Analysis and Risk Analysis. This would help them define and prepare for threats that are also more specific to the business they are in. It would also help them identify which processes are most sensitive to timely responses, so they can prioritize their actions.

As the situation is now it is not clear when the GCMT has fulfilled its role and everything can go back to business as usual. There are no processes in place that support the transition to normal. This is currently being prepared, including what learnings Marel can take from this regarding changes in ways of working.
The GCMT gave all they had to keep the business running and the employees in good health. This has been a huge challenge to take on for the organization and they would have liked to be better prepared. Still they reflect positively on the past months and look at the situation as an opportunity to make positive changes.
6. CONCLUSION

Although Marel does not have an actual Business Continuity Management Policy or System in place, their plans and actions have been quite compatible with Business Continuity strategies and solutions defined by ISO.

Marel has a strong financial position and diversified operations that make the organization less exposed to risk. Even so, it would benefit the organization to put more emphasis on risk assessment and business impact analysis. The benefits would be less uncertainty, faster decision making, clearer responsibilities, and better-targeted actions, all of which can contribute to timely responses and less cost incurred in case of a crisis.

The fact that the capacity of the manufacturing centers stayed at good levels and that only fifteen employees¹ have been infected with COVID-19, thereof none within the workplace gives a good indication of an excellent job done by Marel.

The organization’s reputation seems to be staying strong, compared to steady growth in the stock markets in the past few weeks, even though revenues were lower than expected in the first quarter of 2020.

According to the interview with Linda Jónsdóttir, CFO, the organization has shown great cohesion during these challenging times: “Unity is one of Marel’s core values. When crisis mode is on, it increases focus, and people are showing even more unity. It is great to see how this is making people work even better together. Strong organizations emerge from crises even stronger and I believe that is exactly what will happen”.

¹ This number represents the confirmed COVID-19 cases of employees working for Marel. Some countries do not test for COVID-19 unless people get critically ill, which might offset the accuracy of this number.
7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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Finally, I would like to thank my family for the support and understanding throughout my studies. This would have been impossible without your help.
8. REFERENCES


9. DISCLAIMER
The author takes full responsibility for the content published in this thesis.

APPENDIX – INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions to Linda Jónsdóttir - CFO

General Business Continuity Management questions:

1. Does Marel have a business continuity policy?
   If yes, how aware is the staff and stakeholders about the policy and their role within it?
2. Does Marel have a Business Continuity Management system?
3. Which parts of the organization are covered by BCMS? (departments, subsidiaries, etc.)
4. How is BCMS managed within Marel? (documentation, systems)?
5. How is stakeholder management done?
6. Are Business Continuity Management plans reviewed and updated to make sure they are in line with the strategy and purpose of the organization?
   If yes, how is this done?
7. What is the Executive Teams role in the BCMS plans?
8. Is risk assessment and business impact analysis regularly conducted within Marel?
9. How is Marel's risk assessed? (Are special tools used, if so, what tools?)
10. How is prioritization done in regards of avoiding or eliminating risk?
11. Does Marel have a communications plan?
12. Does Marel have measurable goals for BCMS performance?
13. Is BCMS taken into account when hiring people into a role that is relevant in BCMS?
14. Has Marel's staff been trained in BCMS-related responses?
15. Is BCMS taken into account when organizational processes are being set up or improved?
16. Has Marel used the ISO 22301 standard when setting up contingency and crisis plans?
17. Does the scope of Marel’s contingency and crisis plans cover the before, during and after a crisis has past?

Covid 19 specific questions:
18. What action has Marel taken to ensure the health of its employees?
19. How many employees have been infected with COVID-19?
20. What action has Marel taken to ensure that products and services can be delivered?
21. How has the cooperation with the authorities been?
22. Has Marel consulted with other companies regarding actions and efforts in response to the crisis?
23. Has Marel used the services of consultants to help dealing with the crisis?
24. Has Marel relied more on latest IT and telecommunications solutions since the pandemic started?
25. Has cyber security been threatened during the pandemic?
26. Have there been any incidents that can be linked directly to COVID-19?
27. Will COVID-19 lead to permanent changes in Marel’s operations?
   If yes, what are the main changes you foresee?
Questions to Valdís Arnórsdóttir – Global Crisis Management Team Leader

1. What is the role of GCMT?
2. What is the scope of GCMT?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities within GCMT?
4. Were crisis management plans in place before the COVID-19 situation started?
5. Is a communication plan a part of the GCMT plans?
6. Is stakeholder management a part of the GCMT plans?
7. Are the GCMT plans and procedures documented?
8. Are the GCMT plans regularly reviewed and updated?
9. Were there any standards used as supporting material when making the GCMT plans?
10. What were the main GCMT tasks/projects in the beginning of the pandemic?
11. What action has Marel taken to ensure the health of its employees?
12. What action has Marel taken to ensure that products and services can be delivered?
13. How has the cooperation with the authorities been?
14. Has the GCMT consulted with other companies regarding actions and efforts in response to the crisis?
15. Has the GCMT used the services of consultants to help dealing with the crisis?
16. What has been the biggest challenge so far?
17. Does GCMT have a role after the crisis is over?

Questions to Árni Sigurðsson – Chief Strategy Officer and EVP Strategic Business Units

1. How is risk assessment conducted within Marel?
2. How is business impact analysis conducted within Marel?