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ARTICLE

COVID-19

**KEYS TO
MANAGING TALENT
ENGAGEMENT IN
UNCERTAIN TIMES**

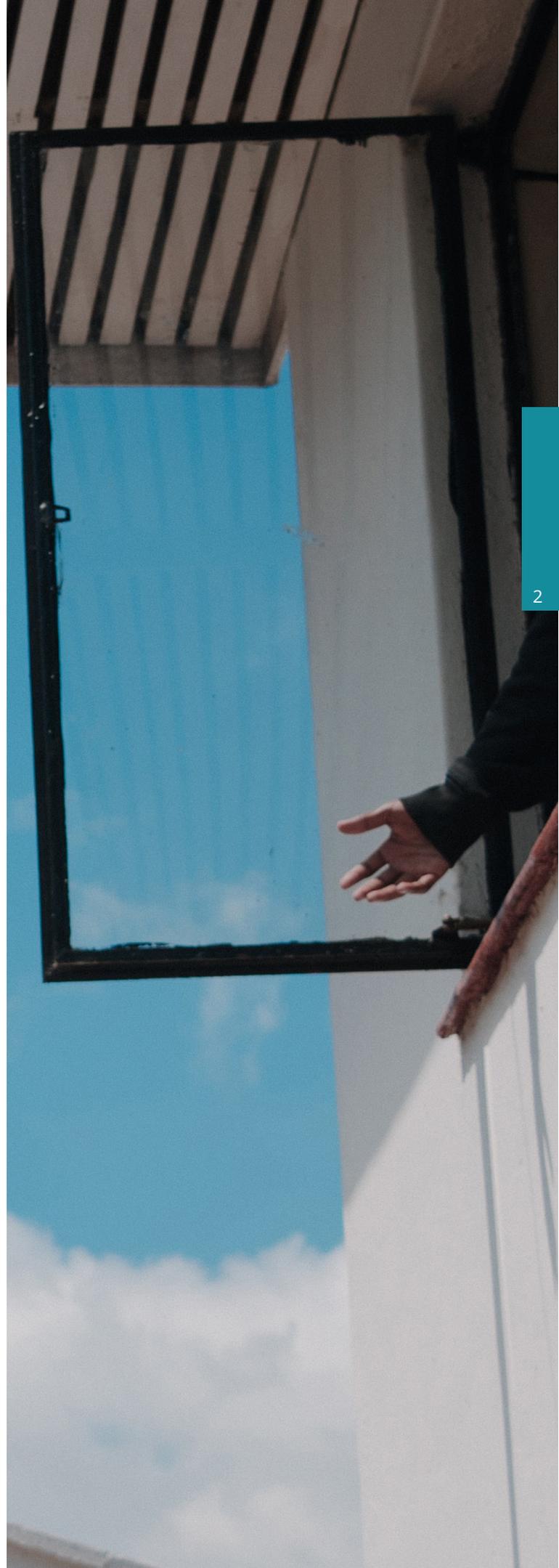
Madrid, April 1, 2020

When we welcomed the new decade on January 1, we never thought we would encounter a challenge as huge as the one we are now facing globally. Without a doubt, the current context is full of uncertainties, and even the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) concept definitely falls short.

The pandemic has affected everything, including the ways we work and interact with our companies. According to a Gartner study, 88 percent of companies have encouraged or mandated that their employees to work from home. Many others are asking essential service professionals—who have become heroes in spite of themselves—to make almost titanic efforts. Still more have been forced to resort to temporary layoffs prompted by the ongoing coronavirus crisis. In every case, these extraordinary circumstances have created at least three key challenges: Maintaining staff motivation when they are being asked to put social responsibility before individual wellbeing, boosting engagement while working separately and lifting spirits during and after a painful process.

We believe **communication plays a key role** in overcoming these challenges. “Creating security is not about offering information, but connecting,” states IESE professor Yago de la Cierva. Therefore, **communicating in uncertain times must be based on good storytelling.** Engaging stories set the tone for everything we say and summarize the most important things we want to tell. Therefore, the narrative must stem from empathy and understanding of our staff’s concerns, relying upon acknowledgement to leverage engagement. This story should be communicated internally but also be visible from the outside, represented in different experiences and pieces of content with a common message.

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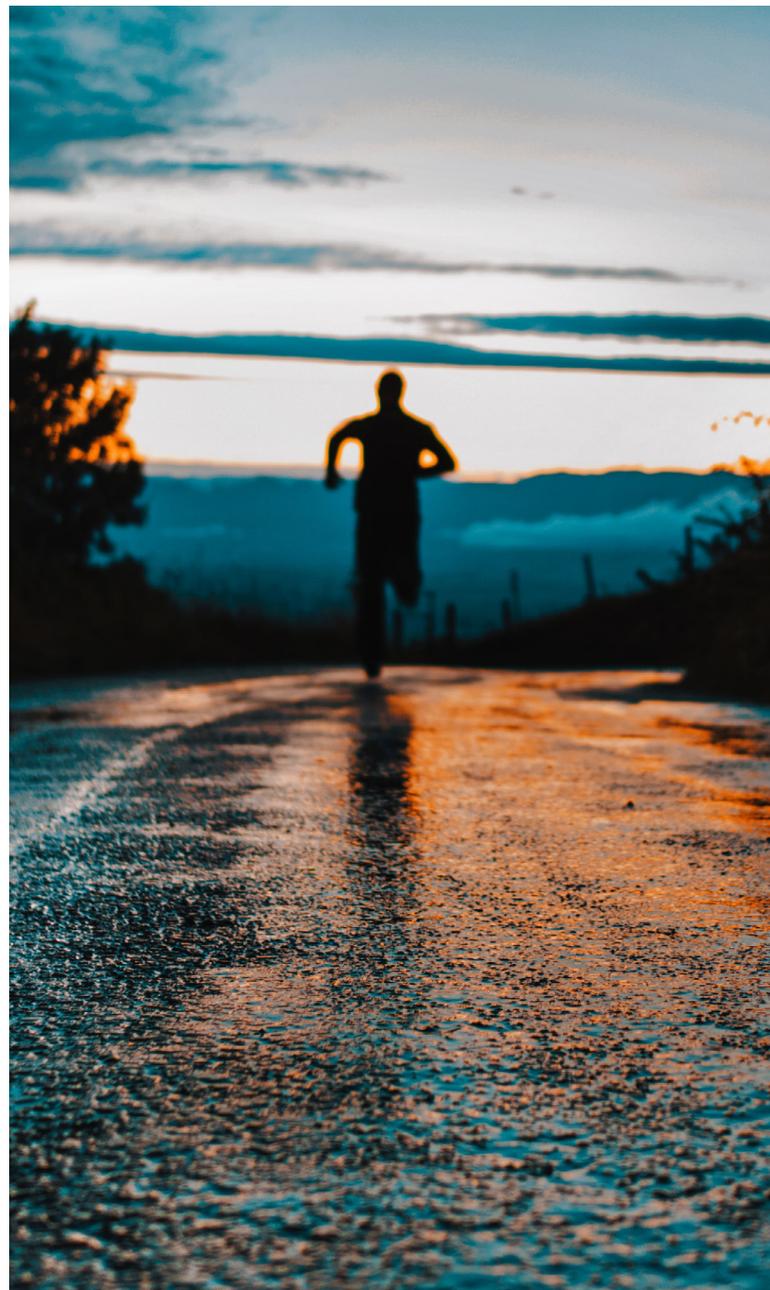


With a good story as a basis and with the goal of shedding some light on this scenario, LLYC's Talent Engagement area analyzed how companies should communicate to ensure they are heading in the right direction. They found that communications should be:

- 1. Close.** Communicate based on listening and understanding, and offer answers to employee questions. It is more important than ever to use direct, clear, comprehensible language. The time for complex corporate speeches is over.
- 2. Honest.** In order to be reliable (always, but now more than ever), we must be completely honest. In many cases, this includes showing vulnerability. It's okay to share concerns about the future and accept uncertainty and allow it to happen.
- 3. Constant.** According to Yago de la Cierva, "anxiety grows in a vacuum." It is more necessary than ever to maintain fluid communication with staff and ensure we do not lose touch. We must be the primary source of information for everything related to their work.
- 4. Two-way.** Two-way communication is a challenge for organizations, since it is not only about creating content, but also about responding. However, offering opportunities for our staff to voice their concerns, listening to them closely and working on implementing measures to address their needs will maximize the benefits. One-way communication offers a false sense of control and does not represent an organization's reality. Keep in mind, if one person in the company feels something, others may feel the same way too.
- 5. Proactive.** Most employee concerns are related to today's uncertainty and not knowing what comes next. Anticipating that feeling and creating a communication channel for them will help you be a step ahead. It will improve connections with and the engagement of staff members.
- 6. Consistent.** Communication must always be consistent with what we do. Complicated times are a true opportunity to showcase a company's culture and way of working. Therefore, we must

resist the temptation to create pompous yet empty messages. Once again, put storytelling before storytelling.

7. Long-term. We should maintain this form of communication and storytelling once this crisis is over. Not many things will be the same again, so even after we can return to our routines, we must bear in mind that our staff just went through a painful time. Try to find chances to generate content and experiences that serve as collective catharsis in the workplace, and always combine short-term reaction capacity with a long-term perspective.





Good communication alone is not enough. How **we deliver** it is also crucial. Our messages and stories must be shared carefully.

- Use **channels** specifically created for or adapted to the current reality facing the organization and its staff. Channels must be agile, participatory and accurate, and existing channels must be reviewed to determine whether they are suitable. If they're not, do not be afraid to create new ones.

- **Middle management** plays a key role and, in moments like this, they are usually under a lot of pressure. Often times they don't have first-hand information, yet they are the main point of contact between many staff members and the company. Create a manual for them to provide guidance on they can manage their teams in times like these, as well as offer them useful communication tools.

- How we choose to do things is more important than ever, and this is why we must lead by **example** to share our story. We cannot ask our staff to behave in a certain way and then not practice what we preach. Reward behaviors you want to see more of, and promote them from the company's top management.

- Create a **network of internal and external ambassadors** to create a more casual form of communication. It's important to convey a sense of normality, as this helps reinforce the team's peace of mind. Appoint ambassadors within the organization and ask them to publicly (on social media, in groups, etc.) and privately (at the water cooler, among their colleagues, etc.) share what their workdays are like in these new circumstances.

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Last but not least, we must **measure results and ask questions at all times**. Today, technology allows us to obtain information from our staff in, essentially, real time. Use survey tools to ask employees how they feel and what they need. This will help them feel heard and give you ideas about what messages and/or actions to reinforce.

It's true, COVID-19 has changed us. It has changed the ways we work and interact with our companies and colleagues. It has changed our priorities and behaviors. So, let's change the ways we communicate as well, both in this moment and when all this is over.

“Use survey tools to ask employees how they feel and what they need.”

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