



Information Sharing: Why Transparency and Communication Are Crucial in a Crisis

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN FROM THIS ARTICLE

1. Why information sharing matters in times of crisis
2. Common mistakes organizations are making
3. Three pillars of information sharing

INTRODUCTION

Communication and sharing of information are critical during a crisis. Three-quarters of employers have a crisis communication plan, according to research published in the Public Relations Review. However, internal communications is often a gap. In fact, poor internal communication can negatively impact an organization's performance at any time, according to a 2019 Journal of Business Management article. This research finds that poor internal communication is directly related to an organizational crisis – even before adding an external crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

When it comes to internal crisis communication, Italian researcher Alessandra Mazzei finds that there is misalignment between what employers intend to communicate, and what employees actually perceive. Employers have not been successful at using “internal communication as a strategic lever,” she says.

What does using internal communication as a strategic lever look like?

THREE PILLARS OF INFORMATION SHARING

CONSISTENCY

“Crisis communication plans and strategies are very crucial as they provide the means to gather and release information as quickly, accurately and specifically as possible during a crisis,” says Francis Marra in the Australian Journal of Emergency Management. “Excellent crisis communication often results when the top communicator in an organization is a strategic manager who reports directly to the chief executive officer and who uses research to plan communication activities.”

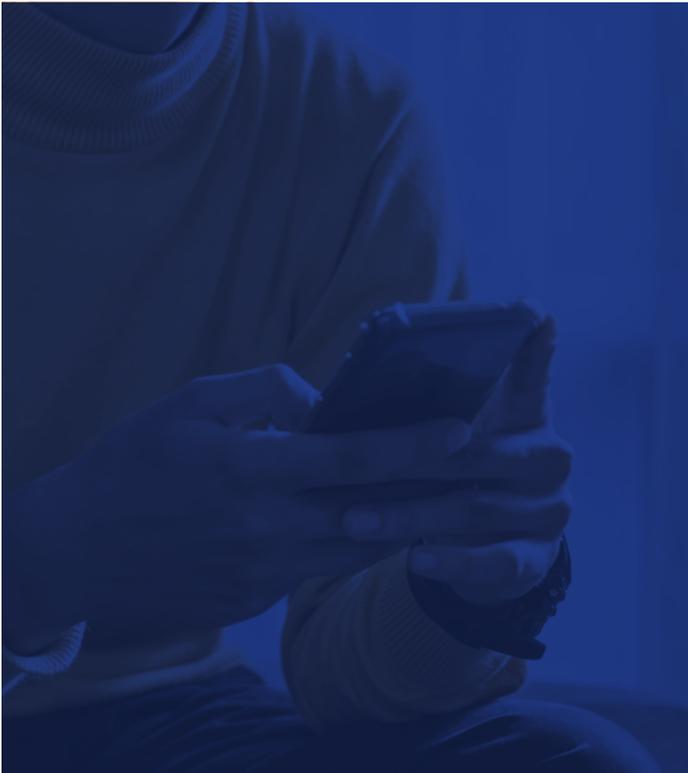
So your communication should all come from the same person, a member of the senior leadership team, and should be frequent, accurate, and specific. You also need a plan for your communication activities – ad hoc messaging is insufficient.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency can feel difficult to achieve during a crisis. How much information do employees really need and when should you share certain details or concerns? Research published in the Asian Journal of Public Relations shows that transparent employee communication improves how employees view their company and increases job engagement. What does transparency look like? According to Kim et al, there are three key tenets: that information is sufficient and accessible, embraces accountability and authenticity, and encourages participation and openness.

BALANCE

Promotion-oriented communication is positive and focuses on growth and ideals, while prevention-oriented communication emphasizes responsibilities, vigilance, and the potential negative outcomes. Leaders need to balance both types of communication to keep employees aware and engaged. According to Stam et al, this balance is necessary because some employees are prevention-focused and others are promotion-focused. Their most recent research shows that in times of crisis, promotion-oriented communication becomes more important because people are already hyper-aware of the negative, or prevention-oriented, side.



CONCLUSION

If you asked most leaders, they would say that internal communication is critically important. However, research shows that few organizations are doing it well. By focusing on the three key pillars of successful information sharing – consistency, transparency, and balance – your organization can ensure its communication plan is meeting expectations and driving business results.

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