

## **Top-Line Findings from “How Companies Are Engaging Employees During COVID-19”**

**Released: April 21, 2020**

**Communication executives are heavily involved with the COVID-19 crisis response and nearly all said their company’s leadership has done well.** 8-out-of-10 said the communication function is “very involved” in communicating internally about COVID-19 and 75% of respondents said the CEO is “very involved” with internal communication. Overall, 9-out-of-10 communication executives say their company’s leadership has handled the COVID-19 crisis effectively.

**Less than one-third of respondents have made a commitment to not lay off or furlough their employees.** More than half of communication executives said their company is not planning to layoff (55%) or has not furloughed (67%) employees but only 31% has made a commitment not to do so in the future.

**Health guidelines and policy changes are the most communicated topics to employees.** Safety guidelines (84%), COVID-19 updates (79%), and new organizational policies and procedures (75%) were the top three topics communicated to employees. Nearly two-thirds (65%) said their company communicated information about employee mental health.

**Diversity, equity, and inclusion was not a top priority for some communication executives.** Only 19% of companies are communicating information focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion to their employees.

**Personal touchpoints were favored to be the best channels for communicating to employees.** Nearly all respondents used emails (99%) and supervisors/managers (91%) to communicate internally. One-on-one check-ins (85%) were also frequently used. Direct communication through supervisors/managers (61%) and one-on-one check-ins (76%) were noted to be “very effective” channels.

**Internal sources and federal agencies were the top sources where communication executives were referring their stakeholders to for more information.** Internal executives (69%), federal agencies (66%), and internal media platform/sources (64%) were the top three sources. Country leaders (13%) and unaffiliated medical practices (2%) were recommended the least.

**Informal feedback and listening tools were the top methods communication executives used to track internal communication, but nearly one in four were not tracking at all.** One in four respondents (27%) were not using any metrics/listening activities with their employees. Only one-fourth (28%) surveyed their employees. Web visits/downloads (44%), email/newsletter open rates (39%), and social media/engagement metrics (34%) were also used by less than half the respondents.

**The COVID-19 pandemic has had positive outcomes on employee engagement, collaboration, and trust in companies, but has impacted productivity.** Nearly 2 out of 3 respondents said employee engagement had increased with nearly half (49%) reporting trust had increased. Nearly 6 out of 10 said

employee collaboration had increased. However, overall productivity was mixed; 25% saw an increase while 40% said it had decreased.

**Most companies are helping external stakeholders affected by COVID-19.** 61% of companies have implemented initiatives to help external stakeholders affected by COVID-19 and have engaged employees directly in these initiatives.

**More than three-quarters of employees are now working from home and the number of employees who will continue working from home will increase by 10 percentage points.** Respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of employees who worked from home (WFH) before COVID-19, during COVID-19, and after COVID-19. On average, 13% of employees WFH before COVID-19, compared to 77% during COVID-19, and an estimated 23% following COVID-19.

**Return-to-office preparations were in the early stages as only 10% of communication executives had done extensive planning.** 60% of respondents had not started planning for the return or did not know about return-to-office preparations. Only 42% of respondents have done at least “some” planning for when WFH employees return to the office. One-quarter (27%) of respondents said they are planning for a phased or gradual return of their employees, while 12% said they will return all at once.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of respondents had not discussed any changes to the physical work environment or were unsure if their organization was going to make any changes. Some noted changes include increasing physical distancing of employees (closing shared spaces, creating physical barriers, adding plexiglass shields, more contact-less meetings), increasing shared space such as eliminating desk ownership, instituting temperature checks, offering more WFH opportunities, and banning handshakes.

###

**Methodology:** The Institute for Public Relations and Peppercomm conducted a global online survey of 403 communication executives and senior leaders from April 6 -12, 2020, to determine how companies are communicating to and engaging their workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. The margin of error based on the sample size is +/- 5%, but please note this is not a random sample.

To give context to the survey, as of April 14, there were 609,531 confirmed cases and 26,057 deaths in the U.S. Globally, more than 2 million people have been infected with 130,000 deaths.

#### **About the Institute for Public Relations**

Founded in 1956, the Institute for Public Relations is an independent, nonprofit foundation dedicated to the science beneath the art of public relations™. IPR creates, curates, and promotes research and initiatives that empower professionals with actionable insights and intelligence they can put to immediate use. IPR predicts and analyzes global factors transforming the profession, and amplifies and engages the professional globally through thought leadership and programming. All research is available free at [www.instituteforpr.org](http://www.instituteforpr.org) and provides the basis for IPR’s professional conferences and events. Follow us on Twitter @instituteforpr.

#### **About Peppercomm**

Peppercomm is an award-winning strategic, integrated communications and marketing agency headquartered in New York City with offices in San Francisco and London. The firm combines 25 award

winning years of expertise serving blue-chip and breakout clients with forward-thinking new service offerings and the freshness of a start-up. This unique mix of experience and energy enables the firm to attract and empower teams with a creative edge, drive and passion for promoting, protecting and connecting clients in a fast-changing marketplace. Founded in 1995, Peppercomm has received numerous accolades, including The Holmes Report's North American Corporate/B2B Agency of the Year and Bulldog Reporter's Midsized Agency of the Year. The agency has been listed as one of Fortune's 10 Best Workplaces in Advertising and Marketing, 100 Best Workplaces for Women, 50 Best Small and Medium Workplaces and 50 Best Workplaces for New College Grads. For more information, visit [www.peppercomm.com](http://www.peppercomm.com) or follow us @Peppercomm.