MERCER

scale your employee **listening strategy**

and better lead through a time of uncertainty

Contact us
Shireen Kwan
shireen.kwan@mercer.com

Lewis Garrad
lewis.garrad@mercer.com

welcome to brighter

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Mercer Employee Listening Strategy
Introduction

- **Uncertainties and unprecedented changes** are impacting businesses and people.
- 86% of companies are somewhat concerned about the **Covid19 pandemic.**
- 495 of companies are expecting an **economic impact** due to disruptions in the normal course of business.

- Findings from Mercer's Public Remesh session reveal that 64% of employees are concerned with the impact of **working from home** on their **work/life balance**.
- 57% of employees also feel that the outbreak is affecting their **ability to get their job done**, to at least a moderate extent.

- High performing companies are based on **open, honest exchange** of information and feedback.
- By shifting away from processes and **focusing more on people and individuals**, companies are creating integrated, **trust-based work communities** that support each other and help drive the bottom line.

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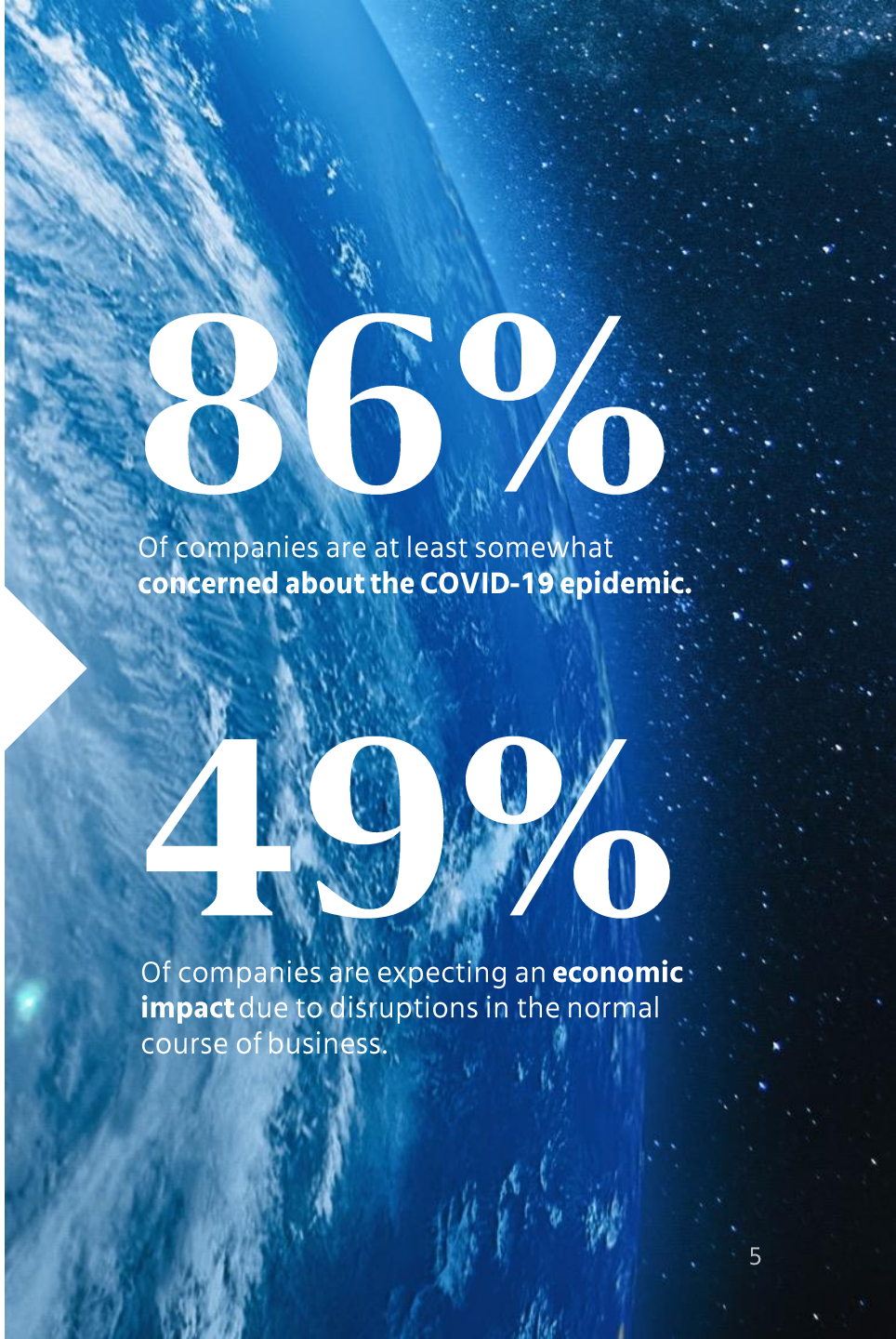
1/Listening To Your Employees in Times of Crisis

We now live in a world of unprecedented change



86%

Of companies are at least somewhat **concerned about the COVID-19 epidemic.**

49%

Of companies are expecting an **economic impact** due to disruptions in the normal course of business.

Businesses and people are finding themselves in an unfamiliar position...

64%

Of employees are concerned with the impact of working from home on their **work/life balance.**

57%

Of employees feel that the outbreak is **affecting their ability to get their job done**, to at least a moderate extent.

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and are constantly shifting priorities to navigate disruptions

67%

Of **non-managers** reported that **living in isolation and adapting to new way of working** from home were the biggest challenges they faced during the lockdown period.

66%

Of **managers** struggled to deal with **redundancies**. Many expressed concerns around **excessive meetings calls** and the added responsibility to support and **care for their team members' emotional health.**

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More than ever, organizations need to

listen and learn quickly

to hear what their employees are experiencing in order to address those challenges in a timely manner.

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This is a defining moment for Human Resources professionals

How we respond will have lasting impact on our employees' career and life journey. We hold the power to transform the way our employees live, work, and think.

Introduction & Summary

Our Point of View

- First, we've seen many organizations **tightening their budgets while** trying their best to **maintain the integrity of their operations**.
- Second, organizations are also **challenged to rethink the way they approach work** and get people to refocus their attention on critical priorities
- Last, there is an urgent need to **configure existing business structure, operations and people strategy** to meet new market reality

- Three ingredients for **effective crises response – clarity, connection, contribution**
- This is **enabled by healthy exchange of information** between employees and employers – *What are our challenges? What do we need to do now? How can we support each other?*
- The key to this is to **focus on your employees' most critical current needs** and the only way to find out about that is to **ask**.

- Through **deep employee listening**, organizations will be able to **pinpoint unseen gaps and potential pitfalls**, and chart out the right strategy keep the business and people focused.
- We recommend asking employees a set of topics related to each of the organizational issues, and help prepare the workforce return to work.

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2/Navigating The Pandemic Lifecycle

Navigating the Pandemic Lifecycle...

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way we work and these changes are permeating far beyond the peak of the contagion. As we navigate these unchartered waters **we find ourselves dealing simultaneously with more than one issues:**

1. **Adjust cost base while maintaining workforce productivity & reduce risk**
2. **Expecting a change in organizational growth plans and the need to rethink how the way work works**
3. **Configure business structure, operations and people strategy to meet new market reality**

To emerge stronger from this disruption, a core strategy that balances both the health of business and people is vital.

This is **Mercer's approach to building a crisis resilient workforce**:

- Organizations in the early phases of Covid19 responses will need to make changes to **reduce risk in a responsible way**.
- Taking an **adaptive approach to crisis response** is crucial.

- Rethink how to better **align people to the new economic environment**
- Get people refocused on new challenges and opportunities ahead of them.

- **Reinvent existing business model** to meet new customer needs.
- Transform the way work works to take advantage of new opportunities.

During stressful times, organizations either pull together or pull apart

Dysfunctional Response

- Limited information sharing & increased power struggles
- Tightening of controls (e.g., micro-management)
- Resource hoarding (e.g., increased turf wars, silos)
- Isolated, insulated leaders

Adaptive Response

- Extensive information sharing & collaborative problem solving
- Loosening of controls (e.g., empowerment)
- Resource sharing (e.g., synergy & collaboration)
- Connected, integrated leaders

Based on Sutcliffe & Vogus's Resilient and Rigid Responses to Threat model (2003)

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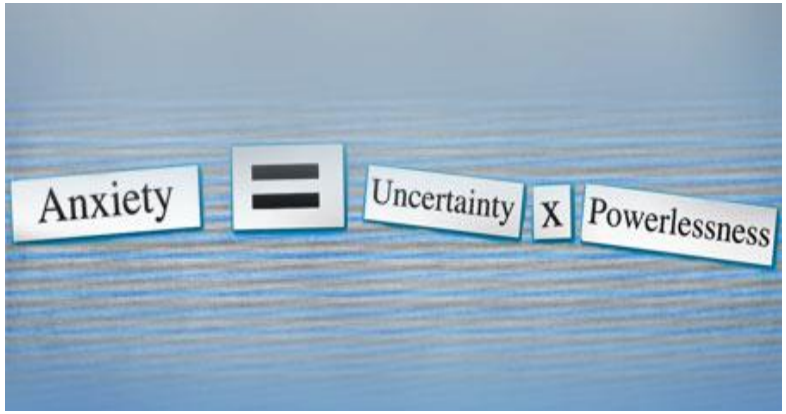
Taking an adaptive approach to crisis response is crucial because uncertainty creates anxiety in people

Many studies have shown that uncertainty about a possible future threat can cause distress and anxiety. In a social science experiment by a group of British researchers, they found that:

- Participants who knew for sure they would receive a painful electric shock felt calmer and less agitated
- Those who were told that they only had 50% chance of getting the electric shock was more agitated and showed signs of high distress and anxiety

From an evolutionary perspective, our brains are wired to scan for threats in the environment and are constantly making judgement about what is safe and what is not. **When certainty is questioned, excessive stress may activate our fight/flight response which further contributes to anxiety.**



Archy O. de Berker, Robb B. Rutledge, Christoph Mathys, Louise Marshall, Gemma F. Cross, Raymond J. Dolan, Sven Bestmann. Computations of uncertainty mediate acute stress responses in humans. Nature Communications, 2016; 7: 10996 DOI: 10.1038/ncomms10996

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Effective adaptive response to crisis requires these ingredients

Enabled by a healthy exchange of information between the employer and employee

Clarity

Clarity of business plans, goals and performance

- Communicate clearly and frequently **where your organization is going** and how you're going to get there
- Establish **clear guidance about performance expectations** during this pandemic and

Connection

Being present and staying connected

- Set up **listening sessions** to encourage discussion of any challenges, ideas or observations
- Explore new ways for employees to work together on projects/tasks to ensure **business integration and coordination**

Contribution

Ensure employees are getting the support they need to work effectively

- Place a priority on filling in any **information gaps** that cause stress, distract from or hinder performance.
- Help employees **remove performance barriers** to enhance productivity
- **Keep employees focused** on their goals to ensure business continuity

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The key to this is to focus on your employees' most critical current needs

Based on our preliminary research, employees are concerned about a variety of topics, including:

- Working remotely & remaining balanced
- Work redundancies
- Pay cuts and layoffs
- Team collaboration

Data also suggest that employee concerns vary across organizations, regions, and job levels.

The only way to find out what your workforce is worried about is to ask.

Poll Options	All (138)	Manager	Non-Manager
Impact on work-life balance	64%	63%	67%
Redundancies	62%	66%	56%
Impact on pay	45%	43%	50%
Loss of team cohesion / spirit	43%	40%	50%
Impact on customer / client satisfaction	42%	43%	39%
Changing work culture	40%	40%	39%
Effect on cross-functional collaboration	32%	37%	22%
Less opportunities for training / growth & development / career opportunities	30%	26%	39%
Enforced work from home	28%	23%	39%

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Annual pulsing is insufficient to generate the organizational sense-making, learning, and change needed.

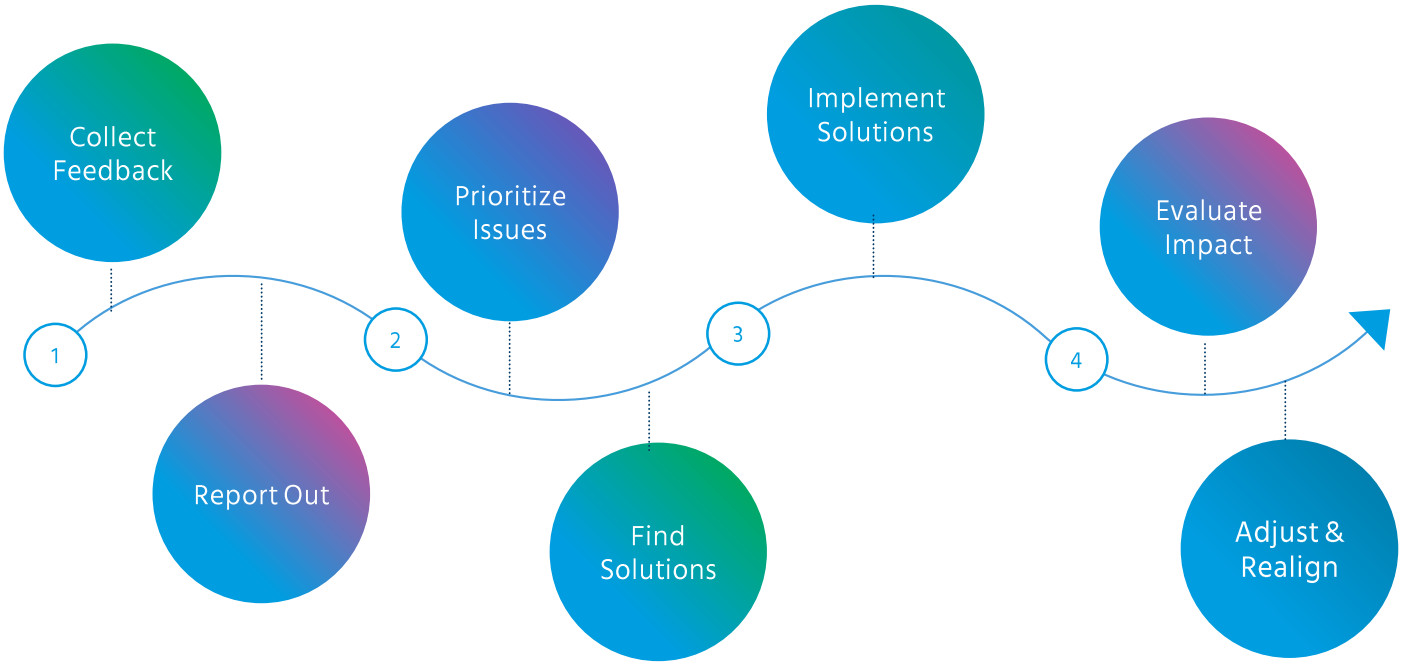
It's time to shift from...
Once-a-year check in

More frequent feedback

to understand every crucial moment and experience of your people

This will allow you to make rapid, adaptive responses...

Considering the dynamic and chaotic nature of events right now, it is important to develop a **listening strategy** to understand your employee concerns and **act at the right time.**



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...and help prepare your employees to return to work.

Here's an example of the actions you can take through employee listening

	1 **Pre-Return** Several weeks prior (if possible)	2 **Initial Return** After week one of return	3 **Return Evaluation & Refine** 2 – 4 weeks after return
What Do you ask?	• Are employees ready to return to work? • What are their concerns?	• What is the initial experience as employees return to work? • What are their concerns?	• How well is the organization executing its return strategy? • What are their concerns?
How Do you ask?	• Digital focus group • Employee concerns assessment	• Manager discussion guide • Digital focus group • Weekly brief pulse	• Evaluative return to work pulse survey
Why Do you ask?	Understand employee concerns and plan accordingly	Identify risks and patterns; adjust early	Identify risks and opportunities for improvement

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To listen and respond quickly to your workforce needs, leverage on Mercer's pre-designed Covid19 questionnaire

Pre-Designed Pulses	Sample Items
Baseline Awareness/Concerns	Our organization is taking the right steps to support employees during this outbreak.
Remote Work	I can maintain a reasonable balance between my personal life and work life while working remotely.
Communication	My organization is doing a good job communicating with employees during this outbreak.
Remote Community	I am getting the help I need to get my work done right now.
Physical Safety	My organization has made employee safety a top priority during this pandemic.
Immediate Manager Effectiveness	During this outbreak, my immediate manager has been available and accessible when I want to talk or need help.
Senior Leader Effectiveness	Our senior leaders are setting reasonable performance expectations and goals during this outbreak.
Employee Wellness	I have been able to detach (disconnect) from work during non-work time (i.e., when I choose not to be working) during this pandemic.
Front Line Manager	I have the information I need to support the health and wellbeing of my employees right now.
Confidence in the Future	Our senior leaders are providing a clear picture of how our organization is going to get through this pandemic.

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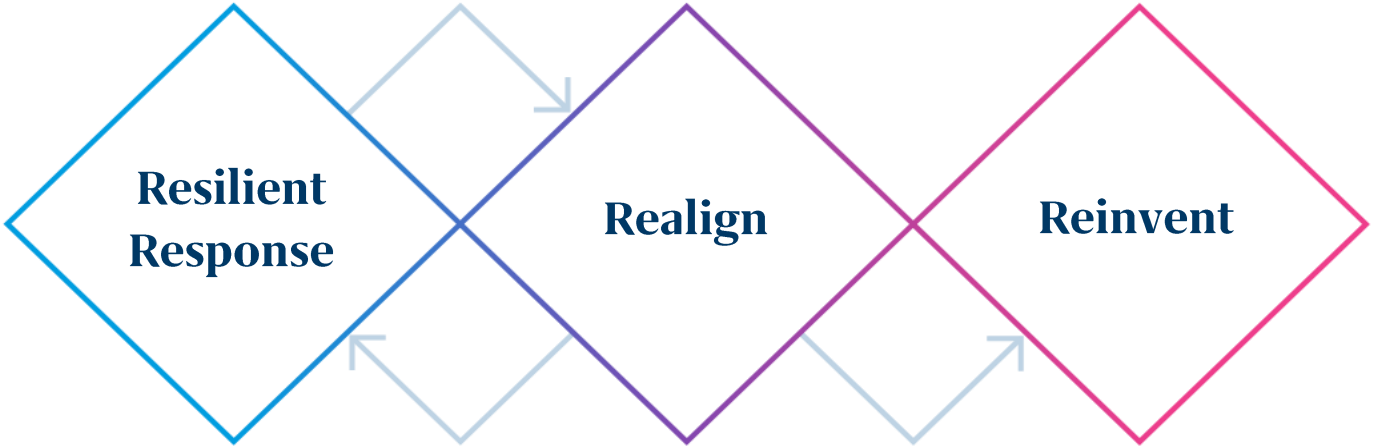
Depending on where you are in the crisis phase, we recommend asking your employees about these topics



- Physical safety
- Employee Wellness
- Financial well being
- Front Line Workers
- Remote Work
- Resilience

- Response Effectiveness
- Employee Wellness
- Employee Readiness
- Organization Strategy
- Performance Management
- Innovation

- Impact of Crisis on People, Business, Industry
- Org Transformation Strategy
- Customer Focus/ Market Needs
- Processes & Work Experience
- Innovation

- Communication
- Immediate Manager Effectiveness
- Senior Leader Effectiveness
- Confidence in the Future

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