



TRANSFORM ARTICLE

CONSISTENCY IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY



The COVID-19 Pandemic has ushered the corporate world into an era where rapid, unprecedented change has permeated almost every organization across the globe. It is easy to see that agility and innovation are essential capabilities during this extraordinary time. However, consistency is also important, particularly in communication and coordination across widely distributed teams and individuals. In addition, Core Values should act as a source of consistency and stability, a north star that guides behavior and decisions when there may not be others to readily turn to for direction.

Denison Consulting took a deep dive into the data captured through their recent Resilience Campaign, an assessment taken by over 15,000 employees from organizations across the globe. The campaign was designed to help support organizations, and to help provide an opportunity for them to listen to their employees share about what their organizations are doing well in response to the pandemic, and where there are opportunities for improvement in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. Those insights offered employers actionable feedback intended to help them survive, and ultimately thrive in the face of adversity.

The assessment included 10 survey items that allowed employees to evaluate how well their organization was doing in several key areas including the tools needed to work effectively from home, clarity of priorities, work-life balance, and the extent to which the company was demonstrating care for their workforce. There were also two open-text items that asked, "During the COVID-19 crisis, what are some things our organization has done well?", and "What are the most important things that our organization could do to better support you during this crisis?"

Employees were grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback and there were several key insights captured that remind us of the importance of consistency, even when things are changing all around us. Communication and coordination prove critical to effectively navigating the challenges presented by COVID-19.

Communication: Transparent, timely communication from the top and giving rise to the employee voice.

Companies that have fared well in this time of uncertainty increased the level of communication and transparency within their teams. When faced with

rapid, constant change, it is incredibly important for the members of an organization's leadership team to update their employees, and provide information from the top down. Transparency helps alleviate questions and confusion across the organization and creates higher organizational alignment. Even when answers are hard to find it is important that leaders share what they know and acknowledge the ambiguity and uncertainty of the situation. One of the top themes that surfaced in the open-ended feedback from clients across the organizations in our benchmark was the importance of communication and the desire to stay informed.

In addition to providing your team with frequent updates, additional one-on-one check-ins and encouraging employee feedback creates even more alignment as a company. Allowing your employees to have a voice during this time is more important than ever. It offers a chance to be heard and to ask questions in the face of great uncertainty. It fosters a feeling of care for each member of the organization, encourages teamwork, and helps to clarify priorities.

After analyzing comments from the first 4,500 respondents using Natural Language Processing, the top theme shown in figure 1 on the next page that emerged for the first question (what have we done well?) was "Communicating Effectively". The top three themes in response to the second question (what the organization could do better?), depicted in figure 2 on the next page were: (1) "Understanding

and Supporting Work-Life Balance", (2) "Continue Doing A Great Job", and (3) "Facilitating Consistent and Effective Communication". In both instances, communication is listed as one of the top three areas of priority. The primary takeaway is that while communication is always important, the effective transfer of information throughout the organization creates greater alignment and higher resilience during a time of unprecedented change.

Coordination: The need for coordination of both knowledge and work activities to create awareness and drive execution.

The ability to coordinate across teams and departments has always been critical to business success. It is also among the most challenging aspects of getting work done in organizations. During this pandemic, when many employees are required to work from home, coordination across departments was among the greatest challenges noted in our Resilience assessment. Coordination can be thought of in two primary ways – 'coordination of knowledge' and the 'coordination of work activities'.

The **coordination of knowledge** is about sharing information and creating awareness. When employees are more informed, they have a better understanding of how everyone's efforts contribute to the success of the business. Priorities are clear, decisions are well informed, duplication of effort is minimized, and the overall efficiency of the organization is improved. The companies that excel at coordination believe that employees benefit from

Figure 1.

Question: During the COVID-19 crisis, what are some of the things that our organization has done well?

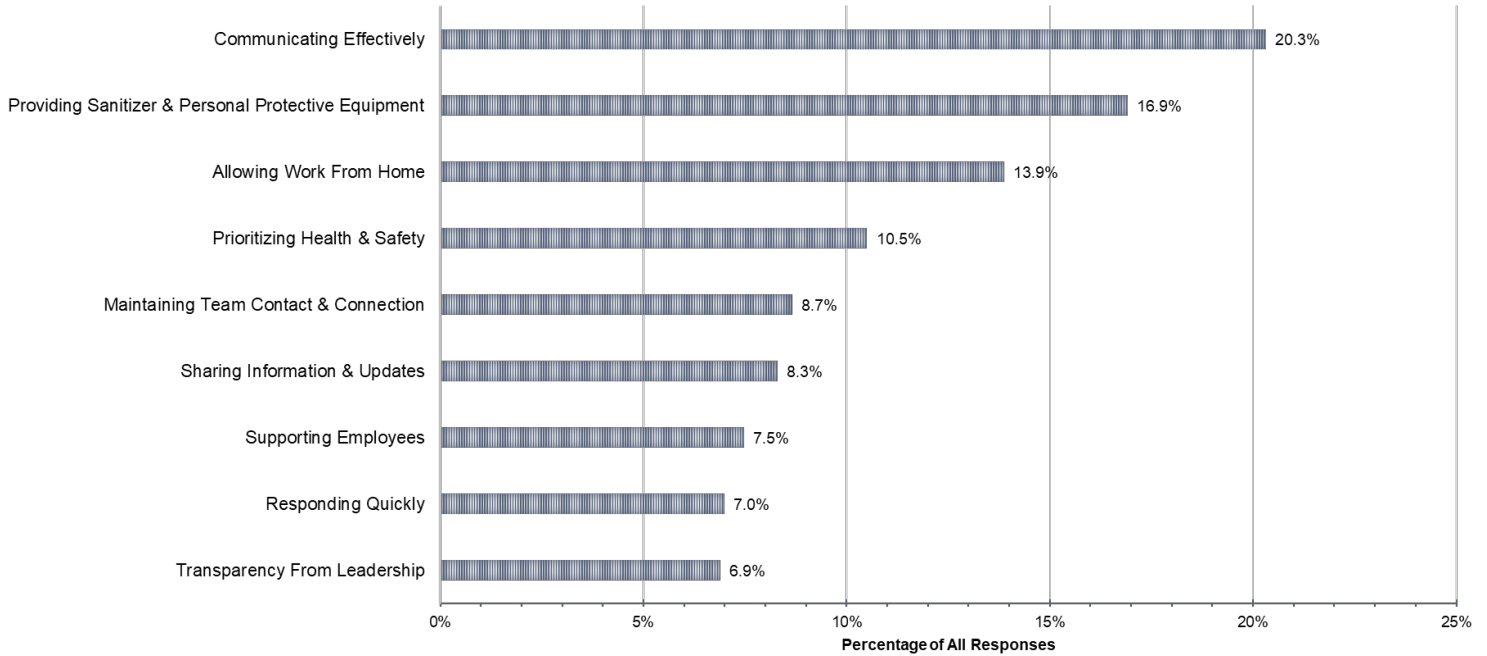
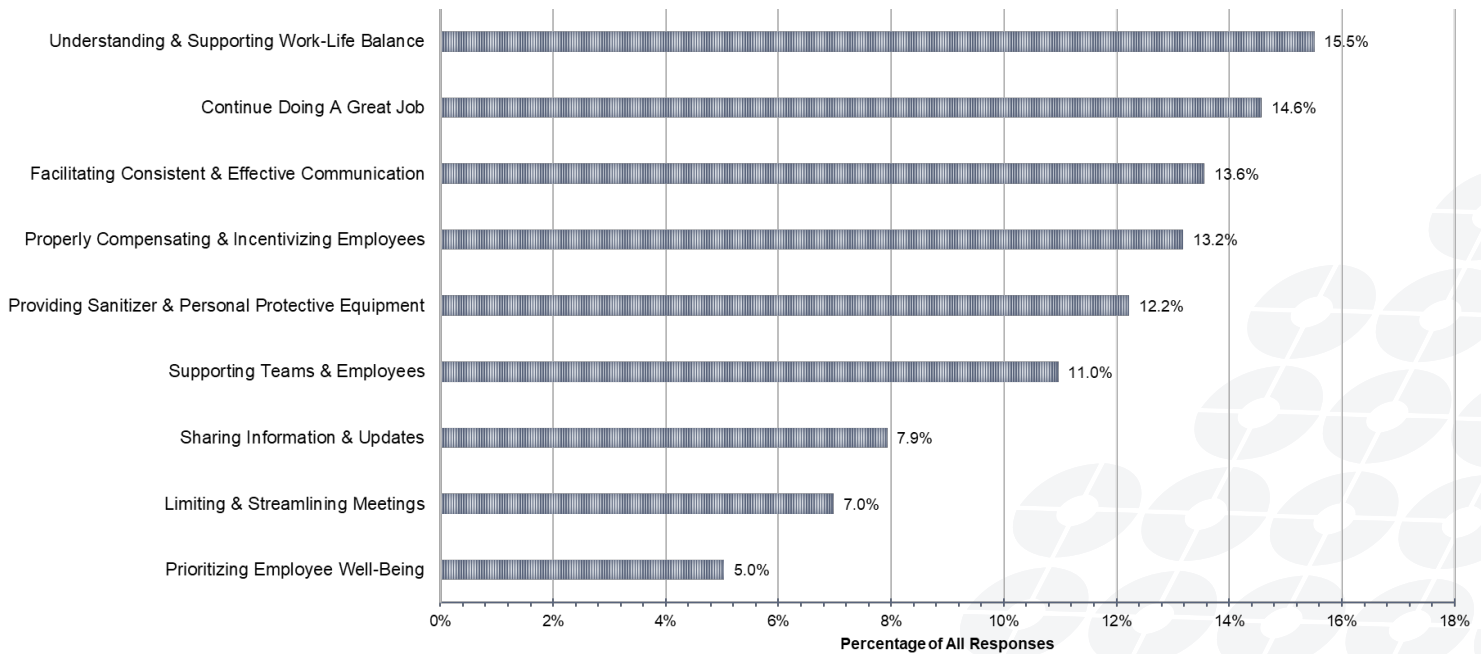


Figure 2.

Question: What are the most important things that our organization could do to better support you during this crisis?



knowing what is going on across the organization. They value curiosity and encourage leaders and teams to:

- Share updates on their priorities and progress.
- Involve people from outside of their own team to promote transparency, as well as ensure they are not missing vital input or working against the efforts of others.
- Develop informal relationships with key people in other departments to create additional channels of communication.

Today's technology allows people who are not physically connected to continue most of these activities using virtual meetings and shared platforms. However, the informal spontaneous interactions (water cooler conversations) are no more. Replacing those interactions requires a more explicit effort to identify important relationships and scheduling one-on-one check-ins to maintain awareness of other team's activities.

The **coordination of work activities** takes information sharing to a higher, more consequential level. It recognizes that many teams have specific interdependencies that impact the ability to get work done. The level of interaction required to create products and services is more effective when clear expectations are developed for both what will be produced and how it will be produced.

Teams with interdependencies, also known as stakeholders, need to meet regularly to understand and agree on

the joint goals they are trying to achieve. In these meetings it is important to set clear expectations for what each team can expect from the other and when. The focus is on the specific deliverables being exchanged. Working in a virtual environment places even more emphasis on what is getting done as we have less visibility into how the work is getting done.

How the work gets done is often dependent on a clear set of norms developed for the way the teams will engage with one another in pursuit of common goals and objectives.

- How often will we meet?
- What will be the agenda?
- How will we track our progress?
- How will we resolve conflicts that arise?

In a virtual environment, the norms may need to be re-examined. Information that was once posted in a physical environment now needs to be shared on a common application. Meetings need to accommodate the multiple demands that team members face in a home environment. The ability to walk down the hall to check on the status of another team or resolve a conflict requires a text, email, or virtual discussion to resolve.

Core Values: A potential source of guidance, pride and alignment when distanced from colleagues.

We know that another important factor of a resilient, high performing culture is your company's core values. This is a time when they will truly be tested. Will your values

revert to words on a poster or will they be front and center as you work your way through the pandemic?

Core values reflect a common set of beliefs and behaviors deemed important to the identity of the company. Effective core values should help create the framework for how your organization communicates, sets priorities, and makes decisions. They provide clear expectations and, if they are integrated consistently into your company culture, they provide greater alignment for your team. When the values are both clear and practiced, the way that work is done has a familiarity that is important when surrounded by so much uncertainty.

An important question to ask yourself today is whether you are staying true to your values during this period of disruption. It is also important to ask yourself what the values look like in practice in this new environment. Now, more than ever, your

values can help set you apart from others, serve as a source of pride, and unify a virtual workforce.

These are unprecedented times. All of us must be flexible and adapt to the changes occurring around us. At Denison, we often talk about the dynamic tension between Adaptability and Consistency. Consistency plays a critical role in responding to change. Consistent, two-way communication reduces anxieties and ambiguity. Developing new, consistent ways to interact with other individuals and teams whose work impacts yours and vice versa maintains the quality and efficiency of your outputs. Staying true to your values helps everyone make better decisions in the face of uncertainty. Combined, these practices build trust and confidence, both of which will be critical to your company's success as you navigate through the weeks and months ahead.

For questions related to our #RESILIENCE Series or "Consistency in the Midst of Uncertainty" please contact:



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