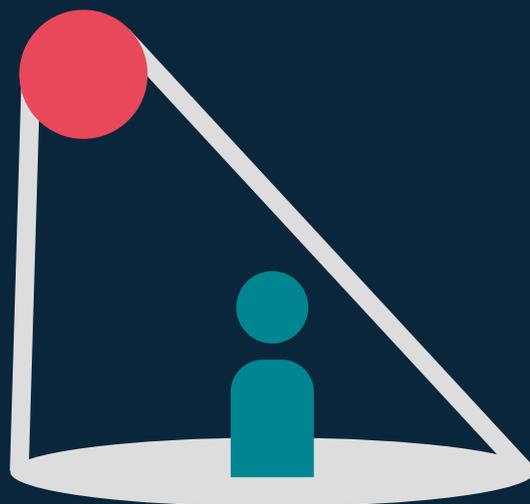


# IDEAS LLYC

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ARTICLE

**#TURNINGPOINT**

## **THE POST COVID-19 ERA. THE NEW NORMAL IN TALENT-COMPANY RELATIONS**

Madrid, 26 May 2020

In his book entitled *“The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action”*, Donald A. Schön defined three types of knowledge. One of them is reflection on and during action, the knowledge we acquire while we act.

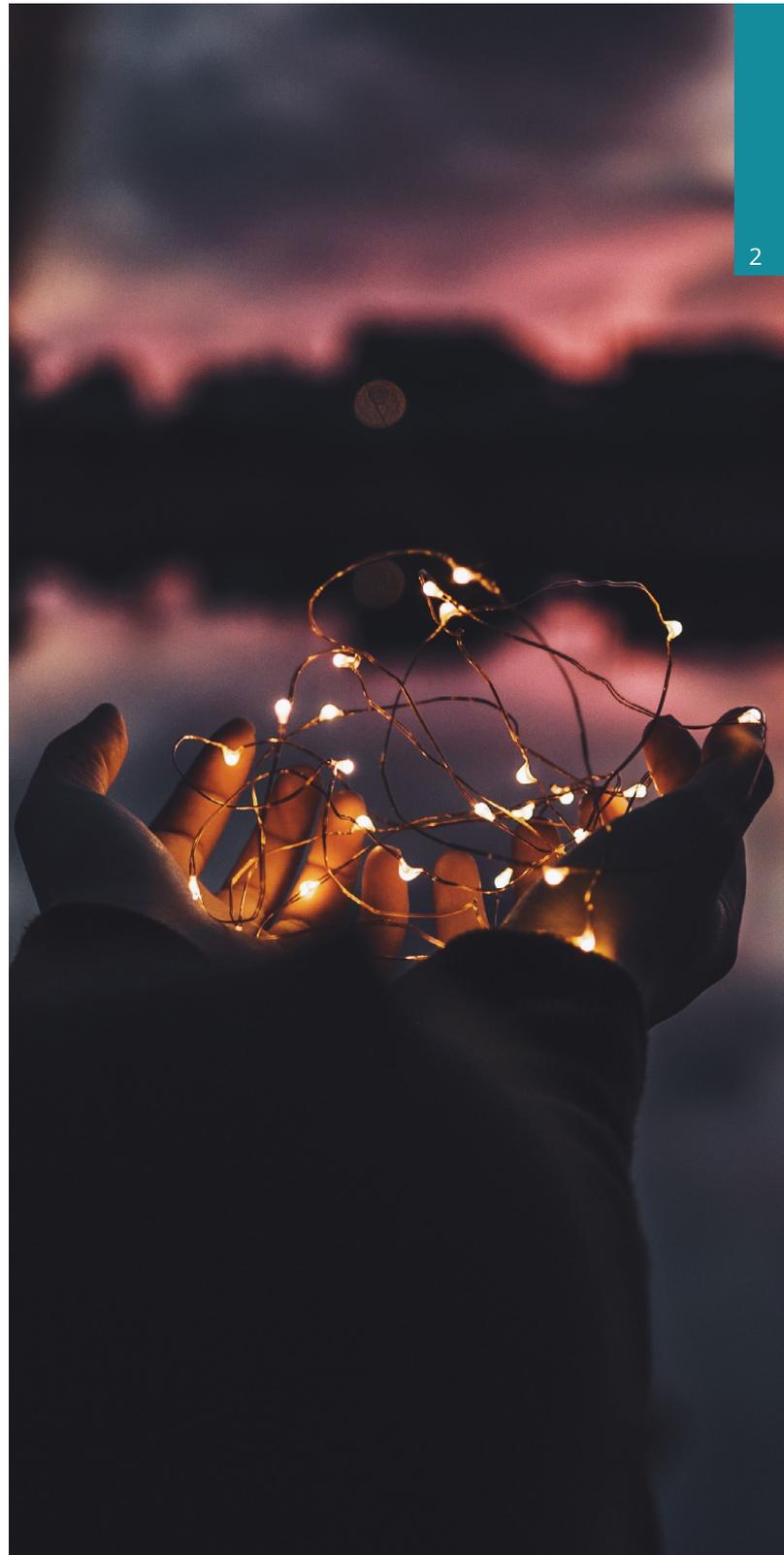
The COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the need to take decisions quickly and against an uncertain backdrop for the most part. According to Schön’s theory, we have been learning and gaining insight into a new way of doing things while taking those decisions that will undoubtedly impact the relationship between companies and their professionals.

At LLYC, we would like to harness that learning and shared knowledge to try to shed some light on a complicated context. That’s why we’ve spoken with experts in communication and human resources at companies including Ecoembes, EY, IKEA, Cosentino, Iberdrola, Enagás,

Novartis, Bankia, Indra, Naturgy and Coca Cola. This article contains the result of those conversations with a view to further delving into the post-COVID reality and the challenges that companies will need to tackle in their relationships with talent.

### EIGHT NEW SCENARIOS IN TALENT-COMPANY RELATIONS

- The rise of a new form of leadership
- The transfer of control over messages
- Digital: a transformation that is now also a cultural shift
- People and their emotions at the heart of decision-making
- Back to basics for responding to uncertainty
- From latent to patent pride in belonging
- Internal communication for building trust
- The birth of a new values scale





become normal for example, there is room for understanding and not blame”, she says.

In turn, Teresa Gallastegui, Head of Talent and Organization at Ecoembes, is convinced that this crisis will be a real trial by fire for leaders. “Genuine leaders emerge in situations of crisis. Communication, collaboration, transparency and innovation are essential levers that organizations need to have now. I would also include two other things that are gaining importance and will become critical: the management of uncertainty and learning in flight. We live in an ever more changing, complex and uncertain environment and we need people who are capable of looking to the future with optimism and generating opportunities around change”, she says....

### THE RISE OF A NEW FORM OF LEADERSHIP

On 3 May, the New York Times published a very revealing article about a new way of leading with an even more revealing title: “Leaders Are Crying on the Job. Maybe That’s a Good Thing.” Among other things, it includes a reference to the video shared by the Marriott CEO, Arne Sorenson, with his team. For many, it was a lesson in leadership based on honesty, clarity and transparency.

The article’s conclusions are very similar to those reached by experts. “We are not in the midst of a conventional crisis, which is why we’ve seen leaders acting differently. And that has highlighted the need for a new form of leadership, a form of leadership that comes from a profound understanding of the situation that others are in”, says Luisa Alli, Head of Communication at IKEA Ibérica. “This requires building a climate that encourages and doesn’t penalize the verbalization of weaknesses. Many employees will have felt guilty about working from home while their colleagues work in-store or at depots, or for not getting all the work done they would have liked. In a climate of trust, empathy and solidarity, where family issues have

**“We are not in the midst of a conventional crisis, which is why we’ve seen leaders acting differently. And that has highlighted the need for a new form of leadership, a form of leadership that comes from a profound understanding of the situation that others are in”**

*Luisa Alli, Head of Communication, IKEA Ibérica*

**Delfina Pérez, Head of Development and Talent Recruitment at Bankia**, adds that “I believe we are heading towards a form of leadership that is increasingly more inclusive and aimed at fostering growth and responsibility in teams, a form of leadership that is based on individual responsibility, trust and delegation. A form of leadership that is aware of how important cohesive and diverse teams are.”

Communication is another attribute of that new form of leadership. **Esther Castaño, Head of Global Internal Communications at Iberdrola**, insists that “a leader who does not communicate is not a leader, and that is even more the case in these circumstances. Leaders must convey messages of calm, mitigate uncertainty, using a very human approach, very informally.” **Inmaculada Vela, Head of Internal Communications at EY Spain**, also adds the qualities of honesty and transparency. “It’s about telling things exactly how they are with responsibility, approachability and humility; our professionals have to know that they are our priority, that we are a team, one big family, and that we’re all rowing in the same direction to overcome adversity together”, she says.

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*Inmaculada Vela, Head of Internal Communications, EY España*

New leaders are setting paternalism aside to adopt more approachable, accessible and transparent methods, which brings us to an extremely interesting concept that could a priori be considered contrary to that of a leader: vulnerability. “If you ask me what will happen, I’ll tell you that I don’t know. That sentence coming out of a leader’s mouth might be surprising, but isn’t it more courageous to recognize one’s own limitations? In a crisis situation such as this one, it’s about providing information on everything we’re doing and saying that we’re making every effort to find solutions and get ahead of the problems; and when we’re asked about something we don’t have an answer for, just saying so”, says **Jordi García Tabernero, Head of Communication and Institutional Relations at Naturgy**. This executive believes that the key lies in “acknowledging the uncertainty and providing certainty wherever possible, because silence generates anxiety, restlessness and rumors. Communication with employees is essential. The company should be one of their most reliable sources of information.”

## THE TRANSFER OF CONTROL OVER MESSAGES

If approachability is a growing trend, it might seem obvious to think that the role played by middle management will become increasingly important. These people are the great allies of communication, the ones who provide a link between the company and its talent, and those who become the first point of reference within an organization.

From **Cosentino**, **María Luisa García**, **Head of Internal Communication**, and **Santiago Alfonso**, **Head of Communication and Marketing**, are convinced that middle management positions are being empowered. “Whether teleworking is here to stay or for the workforce on the factory floor, the role of manager is essential in conveying trust. They are the facilitators and the ones who ensure that messages filter through the organization. Although all our professionals have access to corporate messages via the company’s app and information notice boards, factory managers are responsible for mobilization. They make sure the messages have filtered down and, if necessary, reinforce them”, they say.

**Luisa Alli at IKEA** adds that this also involves being aware of and even encouraging a loss of control over the messages. “Communication success depends on 300 professionals directly. These middle management positions are the network that conveys encouragement and builds trust. There are countless rules and regulations for not crossing the line, being correct and obedient, but the time has come for managers to take control of the team, to not be afraid of taking risks. Although it might look like a big risk, what we have to gain is much more powerful. Things are happening at the bottom of the pyramid and we should harness spontaneous leaderships to support communication,” she says.

# “Whether teleworking is here to stay or for the workforce on the factory floor, the role of manager is essential in conveying trust”

*Santiago Alfonso, Head of Communication and Marketing, Cosentino*  
*María Luisa García, Head of Internal Communication, Cosentino*



## DIGITAL: A TRANSFORMATION THAT IS NOW ALSO A CULTURAL SHIFT

We have been talking about the digital transformation for years, trying to implement it with action plans, pilot schemes, experts and processes. However, the transformation never truly took hold at our organizations. In fact, there is an overwhelming study by Harvard Business Review stating that 91% of organizations fail in this type of process.

However, during the COVID crisis, companies have evolved quickly along the digitalization path to maintain the pace and quality of their work. "We've taken a giant leap forward in digital transformation. We have gone digital all of a sudden. When all this is over, we will be more digital, agile and efficient. You might say that we are evolving towards approachability", says **Teresa Gallastegui at Ecoembes**. There is only one question that follows: What was stopping us before the crisis from completely transforming ourselves into a digital company? "We had the tools but not the culture. Any reticence against using those tools has evaporated now and, although we are accompanying our talent with training, this 'forced digitalization' is becoming a driving force for our digital culture", she adds.

Also on the topic of digitalization, **Juan José Berganza, Head of Communication and Brand at Indra**, says that the new work model also requires a greater level of training and effective time and schedule management. "Team management is undoubtedly different now, it requires a more structured model", he says.

Teleworking is clearly important in the new digital culture, says **Jordi García Tabernero at Naturgy**. "COVID has led to a paradigm shift in how we work and interact with others, something that is here to stay.

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Before the crisis, teleworking was seen as a lesser category of working. Neither organizations nor people had thought that it could be combined with on-site working for genuinely effective results. Nonetheless, it has been shown that work done from the office can indeed be efficiently and productively continued from home", he says.

## PEOPLE AND THEIR EMOTIONS AT THE HEART OF DECISION-MAKING

“Having an in-depth understanding of what is happening to our professionals is essential. For that, you first need to listen to and identify their problems and build according to what people need to hear. The key lies in making sure that the message conveyed by the company meets the needs of its talent”, explains **María Luisa Benlloch, Head of Internal Communication at Novartis**.

**Sara Blázquez, Head of Communication and Media Relations at Coca-Cola Iberia**, agrees. “Closer personal relations need to be built in order to understand the reality for the people in your team and thus connect with the interests of each one. Any issue we identify in the teams, whether at a professional or personal level, is communicated to our executive committee so that its decisions can be based on the personal circumstances of our professionals”, she says.

Along the same lines, **Jordi García Tabernero at Naturgy** explains how the company applies its ‘employees first’ approach and shows us how it is more than just pretty words. “Whenever a committee meets, whether an ad hoc committee for operational monitoring of the crisis or the senior management committee, and even during the board of directors meetings, at all of them, the first point on the agenda is a question: How are our employees today and what more can we do for them?”, he says.

**Victoria Cortés, Head of Internal Communication at Enagás**, believes that “the goal has always been to provide information transparently and convey security. However, we have also taken great care to highlight the work, efforts and commitment from our professionals in all corporate communications, both internal and external.”



**“The goal has always been to provide information transparently and convey security. However, we have also taken great care to highlight the work, efforts and commitment from our professionals”**

*Victoria Cortés, Head of Internal Communication, Enagás*

## BACK TO BASICS FOR RESPONDING TO UNCERTAINTY

“We have seen that the values of Coca-Cola, with a 134-year history, still apply to overcoming this difficult situation. We have shown that we are a resilient, empathetic, universal and democratic company. A capacity to adapt forms part of our DNA and we have seen that yet again”, says **Sara Blázquez**.

**“The values of Coca-Cola, with a 134-year history, still apply to overcoming this difficult situation. A capacity to adapt forms part of our DNA”**

*Sara Blázquez, Head of Communication and Media Relations, Coca-Cola*

The uncertainty has forced us to look at our purpose as companies and to lean on our values and recognize our deeper culture. “It is essential to have done your homework when an unexpected crisis hits. That way, you can forget about what you have internalized or learned already and can focus on other problems. Communication, for example, was already part of the organization’s DNA. Not communicating was never an option before and much less so now. As a result, we have not needed to create new channels but only strengthen what we had been doing before naturally”, says **Esther Castaño at Iberdrola**.

**Teresa Gallastegui at Ecoembes** says something similar. “This situation has highlighted and shone a spotlight on things that have been worked on before. If you haven’t already worked hard on the cogs of commitment with your talent, you run a very high risk of having your professionals disconnect. In our case, the response to this crisis by the team at Ecoembes has been exceptional”, she says.

For companies, the COVID crisis has been the moment to demonstrate whether what they’ve said so often in the past is actually true, and professionals are more aware of this than ever.

## FROM LATENT TO PATENT PRIDE IN BELONGING

Employees have reconnected with their companies in search of answers and security. In the case of **Novartis**, **María Luisa Benlloch** says that they received hundreds of thank-you messages. “This doesn’t happen every day or at every company, only when you see that your company can deal with the circumstances and, above all, look after its employees”, she says. In turn, **Sara Blázquez** knew that **Coca-Cola Iberia** was a company with a strong sense of belonging, “but that has been made clearer during this period through the comments and messages in all channels. People have gone from feeling it to needing to express it, to share it.”

In the same regard, **Victoria Cortés at Enagás** has not only noticed a significant increase in talent engagement with corporate communications but also that “this crisis will only enhance their pride in belonging, because the key role we are playing as an organization has been demonstrated. Something similar will also happen at all those companies with professionals who are committed to others and who are, themselves, committed to the future of society and value creation.”

**Delfina Pérez at Bankia** is clear that “the relationship with our talent has been enriched, and profoundly and suddenly transformed. Everything we’ve seen, and are still seeing, has precisely been used to strengthen the relationship with our talent and their commitment because the importance of absolutely everyone who works in the Bankia team has been made crystal clear. The organization has shown itself to be a cohesive, committed and responsible team.”

**“The relationship with our talent has been enriched, and profoundly and suddenly transformed. Everything we’ve seen, and are still seeing, has precisely been used to strengthen the relationship with our talent”**

*Delfina Pérez, Head of Development and Talent Recruitment, Bankia*

**Jordi García Tabernero at Naturgy** adds that “our response as a company, not only because of the internal measures we have taken to protect our employees but also because of the commitment we have shown to society, has produced a spectacular boost to the pride in belonging expressed by our professionals. They have been more receptive; they have supported many of the actions we set in motion and they have also been more proactive; they haven’t

stopped promoting solidarity initiatives and offering their work to society. Moreover, they did so with their brand held high, becoming one of its best ambassadors. We have all, company and talent, been pulling in the same direction.”

**Luisa Alli at IKEA** points to a possible reason. “In these complicated times, professionals can tell what you’re like. At this time, at the moment of TRUTH in capital letters, this is when you either strengthen that commitment or, perhaps, lose it forever”, she says.

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATION FOR BUILDING TRUST

“If this crisis has revealed anything, it is the importance of having a committed workforce, a workforce that works hard and gives the best of itself every day, a workforce with everyone pulling in the same direction and knowing how to adapt to the circumstances. That is only achieved by building environments of trust through constant communication with employees, simple and direct communication. That is what internal communication should be. That’s why I’m convinced that the role of communicators will be essential at any company for conveying the challenges we are going to face and for achieving objectives”, says **Victoria Cortés at Enagás**.

All the experts agree that the role of communication - more specifically, the role of communication with talent - has gained considerable importance during this tough period; importance that will no doubt remain in the future. “It was essential to communicate in real time, empathetically, transparently and innovatively. We have strengthened our connection with our internal audience and our messages are being heard louder. However, this result is undoubtedly also due to coherence. What we’ve done and the messages conveyed were fully aligned with our culture and attitudes; the DNA that makes us unique and that can be found in every single one of our professionals”, says **Inmaculada Vela at EY**.



**María Luisa Benloch at Novartis** says something very similar. “You need support through difficult times. This is achieved by being less corporate, more human and communicating constantly. The frequency should be increased but more friendly and empathetic messages also need to be constructed”, she says. -----

On this point, **Delfina Pérez at Bankia** highlights the potential of words for their capacity to create realities. “We have the choice to work on positive communication, highlight the successes and celebrate good results, while not forgetting to leave room for dealing with doubts and fears that might arise in our teams so they can grow as professionals”, she says.

In turn, **María Luisa García and Santiago Alfonso at Cosentino** say that the transformation will be accompanied by target-based working methods as a result of employee dispersal. This means that trust will play an essential role at companies in their relations with employees. “Nowadays, internal communication has been strengthened and is being appreciated again. We are convinced that it will be a strategic ally for all parts of the company”, they say.

This communication will need to build new channels for talent relations. “A lack of physical presence will clearly have an impact on the communication model. We need to re-think the tools we use. It’s not about forcing a new channel into existence but rather intelligently harnessing those that the professional already uses naturally”, says **Juan José Berganza at Indra**.

**“You need support through difficult times and this happens for being less corporate”**

*María Luisa Benloch, Head of Internal Communication, Novartis*

## THE BIRTH OF A NEW VALUES SCALE

People's priorities have also been deeply impacted during the crisis. "The meaning of life, both personally and professionally, has been questioned. This reflection on our lives will have an impact on the values scale as employees, as people, as a society and companies cannot ignore this change", says **Delfina Pérez at Bankia**.

**“That they expect leadership from their company. We are no doubt witnessing a rise in ‘employee activism’ tied to sustainability, social issues and good governance”**

*Jordi García Tabernero, Head of Communication and Institutional Relations, Naturgy*

**Jordi García Tabernero** agrees that the things we value from companies and what we look for from them has changed. More than ever, we are demanding them to be responsible with the environment, to be solidarity-focused and to be capable of dealing with the circumstances. Some, such as Naturgy, have seen a strong boost to their reputation during this crisis when compared with the pre-crisis period. "Employees are our main asset. This crisis has shown us that we need to empower them so they can also offer their vision of the company. What has been made clear is that they expect leadership from their company, and for the company to act not only to protect its own interests but also to protect those of society as a whole. We are no doubt witnessing

a rise in 'employee activism' tied to sustainability, social issues and good governance", he says.

"Will this also change our employer branding?", wonders **Juan José Berganza at Indra**. "It's too soon to know that, but we'll probably see how other values, such as security, which were previously further towards the back of our minds, become more prominent when choosing somewhere to work in the future", he says.

A future full of reflection and analysis is opening up before us. It might seem too soon to take stock given that we will need a broader perspective to analyze some of the changes. However, there is no doubt whatsoever that the crisis will lead to new challenges in company-talent relations. Only if we tackle and resolve them will we be able to work successfully on the new normal because, if professionals have been essential during the crisis, they will be even more so during the recovery.

**“We'll probably see how other values, such as security become more prominent when choosing somewhere to work in the future”**

*Juan José Berganza, Head of Communication and Brand, Indra*

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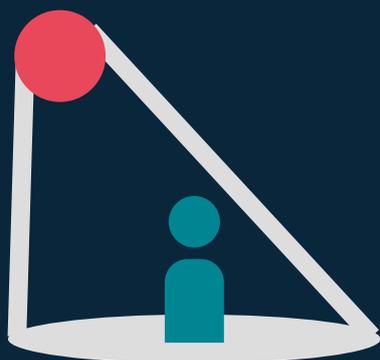
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