

# LISTENING IN A TIME OF CRISIS

COVID-19:  
EVOLVING YOUR  
LISTENING STRATEGY  
POST-PANDEMIC



# WHAT DO I DO NOW?

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused organizational disruption on an unprecedented scale. Yet as the challenge rapidly expands from a public health crisis to an economic one, organizations need to adjust to this new reality as well. For businesses to survive and thrive, employees are going to have to work differently and be engaged and enabled as never before. To ensure that this happens—and, vitally, to benefit from the lessons learned—it is imperative that existing listening programs be flexed, adjusted, and refocused so that leaders can determine how well their strategies are working.

## **The transition back to work**

As offices slowly begin to reopen, it is key that employees feel they can transition back to work safely. Employee engagement and enablement are now at a critical juncture, with employees fearful not only for their health but for their jobs as well.

With organizations juggling to keep employees physically safe while facing a significant economic downturn, leaders will need to be nimble—and many organizations will need to change how they operate. This, in turn, will have an impact on how workforces are managed and what the workplace looks like.

This transition to a new way of working may well have some similarities to the transition caused by COVID-19, but it will also present new challenges and new opportunities.

To drive successful change, your employee listening and employee experience strategies will need to evolve. In fact, as your business prepares for life in a post-pandemic world, now is the ideal time to take stock of new listening practices, evaluate listening programs that may have been on hold, and determine how to blend these together to sustain a culture of feedback in the new era.





**When the pandemic first emerged, organizations were forced to adapt with an unprecedented level of speed and agility.**

Entire organizations switched to virtual work, forgoing business-case reviews and cost-benefit analyses. Teams demonstrated agility, openness, and higher degrees of collaboration. Leaders became more visible and accessible, made decisions without perfect information, and communicated in more transparent and authentic ways.

And with that has come a golden opportunity for organizations to capture and build on what they've learned by preserving and reinforcing what has worked well and identifying any gaps that need to be addressed.

At the same time, understanding your employees' experience at this inflection point can also help inform your strategy. To this end, we recommend using the following question sets to gauge employee perceptions about returning to work, while capturing cultural shifts and emerging benefits.



# CORE QUESTIONS: CULTURAL SHIFTS

**Please indicate the degree of change you observed in the following areas during your company's COVID-19 response.**

*(scale: greatly increased to greatly decreased)*

1. Encouragement for employees to take reasonable risks (e.g., try new ideas, new ways of doing things).
2. Decisions being made in a timely manner.
3. Decisions being made at the lowest level appropriate.
4. Senior leaders being visible and accessible.
5. Company openness and transparency in communications with employees.
6. Sharing of resources and ideas across the company.
7. Managers in different work groups working well together to deliver on shared organizational goals.
8. Opportunities for employees to learn new skills and contribute in different ways.





## CORE QUESTIONS: **EMERGING BENEFITS**

**Please indicate the degree of change you observed in the following areas during your company's COVID-19 response.**

*(scale: greatly increased to greatly decreased)*

1. My ability to be productive at work.
2. Availability of Internet-based and digital tools to help me collaborate with co-workers and other teams.
3. Availability of Internet-based and digital tools to help me work flexibly (e.g. from home, remotely).
4. My pride in working for the company.
5. My motivation to do more than is required.
6. Please describe examples of positive changes during your company's COVID-19 response that you think can and should be sustained after this crisis. (free text).



# CORE QUESTIONS: **SAFETY & WELL-BEING**

**Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements related to your company's COVID-19 response.**

*(scale: strongly agree to strongly disagree)*

1. I understand the steps the company is taking to support health and safety for employees returning to company workplaces.
2. I am confident that company policies and procedures will create healthy and safe work environments for employees.
3. My work schedule is flexible enough to allow me to meet my family and personal responsibilities.
4. The COVID-19 situation has increased my interest in working remotely in the future where possible.





**As you capture key learnings from across the organization, don't forget to include a review of your employee listening program and any listening plans for the future. For example, we would recommend the following:**

1. If you introduced pulse surveys to gather employee feedback during your COVID-19 response, build a plan to incorporate these into your ongoing listening program.
2. If you postponed your enterprise program, determine how you can best use your next program to gather post-crisis feedback.
3. Segment analysis is particularly important. Determine if there were shifts in engagement and enablement based on job function, location, or other characteristics.
4. Supplement surveys with live employee feedback in the form of focus groups, individual or small-group interviews, and/or change networks. This will provide an additional layer of context and insight to support the data you've collected through your listening approach.

Since COVID-19 concerns may continue for some time, and with uncertain economic conditions ahead, organizations will operate in unknown territory for the foreseeable future. Maintaining a focus on keeping employees motivated and engaged moving forward will therefore be critical.

To reap the benefits of the lessons learned during the pandemic—and to continue driving business agility—leaders should clearly demonstrate to employees that they are being heard and how their feedback is being incorporated into the adjustment of the enterprise support programs designed to benefit them.



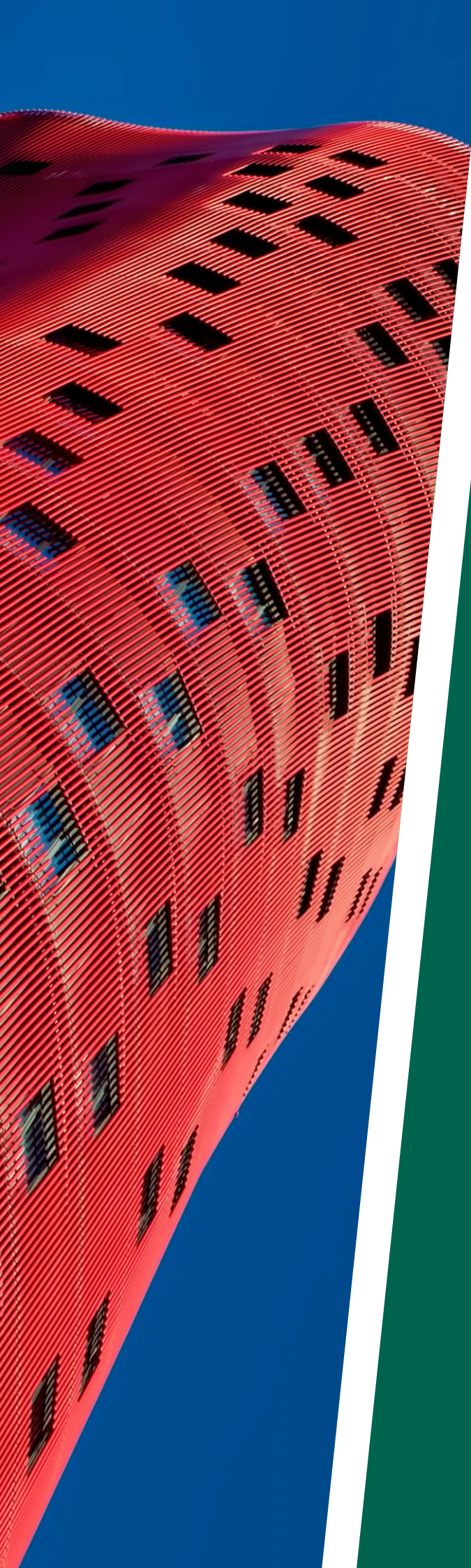
# LISTEN, UNDERSTAND, **ACT**

## **COVID-19 has shone a bright light on the need for employee listening.**

The best organizations go beyond simply pushing communications out—they encourage and analyze feedback in order to determine whether communications are resonating and whether support programs are having the desired impact. In this way, organizations create a two-way communications loop and organizational leaders can determine whether their strategies and programs are working.







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