

## **COMMUNICATION IN CRISIS**

### **HR professionals in the frontline**

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*"Communication plays a vital role everywhere. Effective communication is highly important and necessary for HR, as most of the HR personnel directly interact with people"*

(Dhaarini Srinivasan, HR Officer at International Labour Organization)

The ability to communicate is the glue that keeps together the various competencies that an HR professional needs to perfectly handle, in order to efficiently perform his task. A correct communication manages the information to **motivate** and **lead** the employees, especially when changes occur.

However, moments of crisis could hinder this process. In the Chinese language, the word "crisis" is composed by two ideograms: one means **danger**, but the other one is translated as **opportunity**. For an HR professional, this means a proper management of communication.

In fact, the efficiency of an appropriate communication policy in difficult situations is a key factor that should be defined as the **strategic role** shared by the HR function facing a change of the economic cycle.

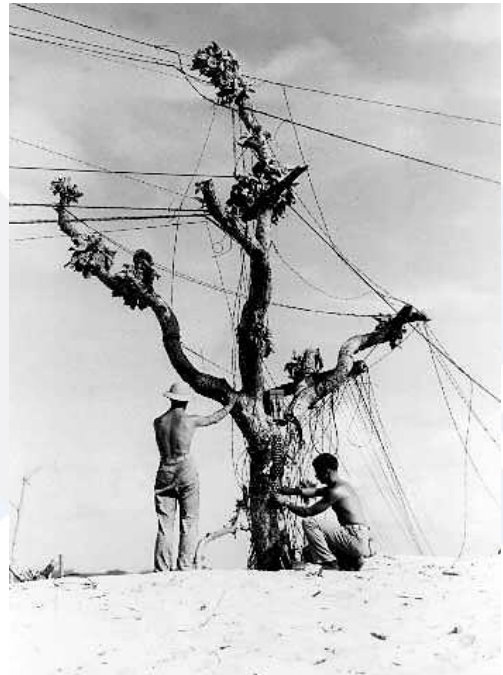
Through crisis periods, the HR Manager may reduce the employees' number or the working hours, modify the contracts

**Crisi** (*wēijī*)  
The Chinese characters for crisis are 危 (danger) and 機 (opportunity).  
Pericolo (*wēi*)      Opportunità (*jī*)

or the workforce adaptation plan: therefore, a communication policy that is respectful towards the employees, sharing with them the reasons of the company decisions, is necessary.

*"Sometimes I found myself reading over and over few lines I had to send to the employees, to be sure the words I used were the best to transmit that information without creating panic, frustration, complaint or anger." (Valentina Marsili, HR Manager at Skybet)*

During periods of economic prosperity it is possible to focus on enhancing HR policies, or searching for actions to foster talent retention and increase employee motivation. In crisis time, these measures may undergo an interruption and the decisive role of Human Resources is to **generate trust** and **facilitate communication**. In some situations, HR activities can boost talent retention and raise employee motivation; but if the communication style is based on closure, consequences are destined to be negative.



*"The risk of an incorrect communication is the loss of talents. In fact, the employee that does not perceive informative transparency may lose trust in the company."*

(Elisa Zazza, HR Specialist & Talent Acquisition at Daiichi-Sankyo)

It is unavoidable that in a crisis situation the ghost of a **job loss** threatens the employee and it is an HR duty to reply to his questions about future uncertainties. Employees must know what's happening, how the crisis concerns them and what actions can they take. When official informations are missing, **rumors** may fill this lack, jeopardizing the solution process of the crisis.

A particular attention is to be put on communication **timing**: where the employee recognizes contradiction through different communication channels, the image of the company and the employees' trust suffer a mortal blow. In many cases, information planning is vital:

*“A famous company was starting to go through an unemployment insurance period without communicating it to its employees. The morning when the house organ was distributed in the workplace, the state of crisis was made official. In that issue the crisis period wasn’t mentioned; instead new products and markets were announced. People expected to find explanations in the paper about the current situation of the company. In this case the company should have delayed the distribution of the paper, or they should have included a focus article about the crisis.”*

(Luisa Macciocca, HR Senior Consultant)

HR Managers must be prepared to the consequences of **insecurity** on employees, especially in a crisis period, when any news, even a negative one, would be better than no news at all.

A clear, fluid internal communication, coherent with the company situation, **increases the employees’ motivation** and their commitment to the firm, and also the image that they’ll transmit to the outers. When this efficiency is lacking, the risk is to create tension and negative publicity.

If knowledge is power, it’s time to give more power to the employees.

**“SHRM Competencies”** is a series of articles **written by the students of the 34<sup>th</sup> edition of GEMA Master’s Degree in Human Resources Management.**