# Internal Crisis Communication

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24 March 2022

# Identification and advocacy

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## IDENTIFICATION
Employees have another kind of organizational identity that makes them different from external stakeholders

They typically feel another sense of **belonging** and **commitment** to their job and to their workplace unlike an external stakeholder.

## ADVOCACY
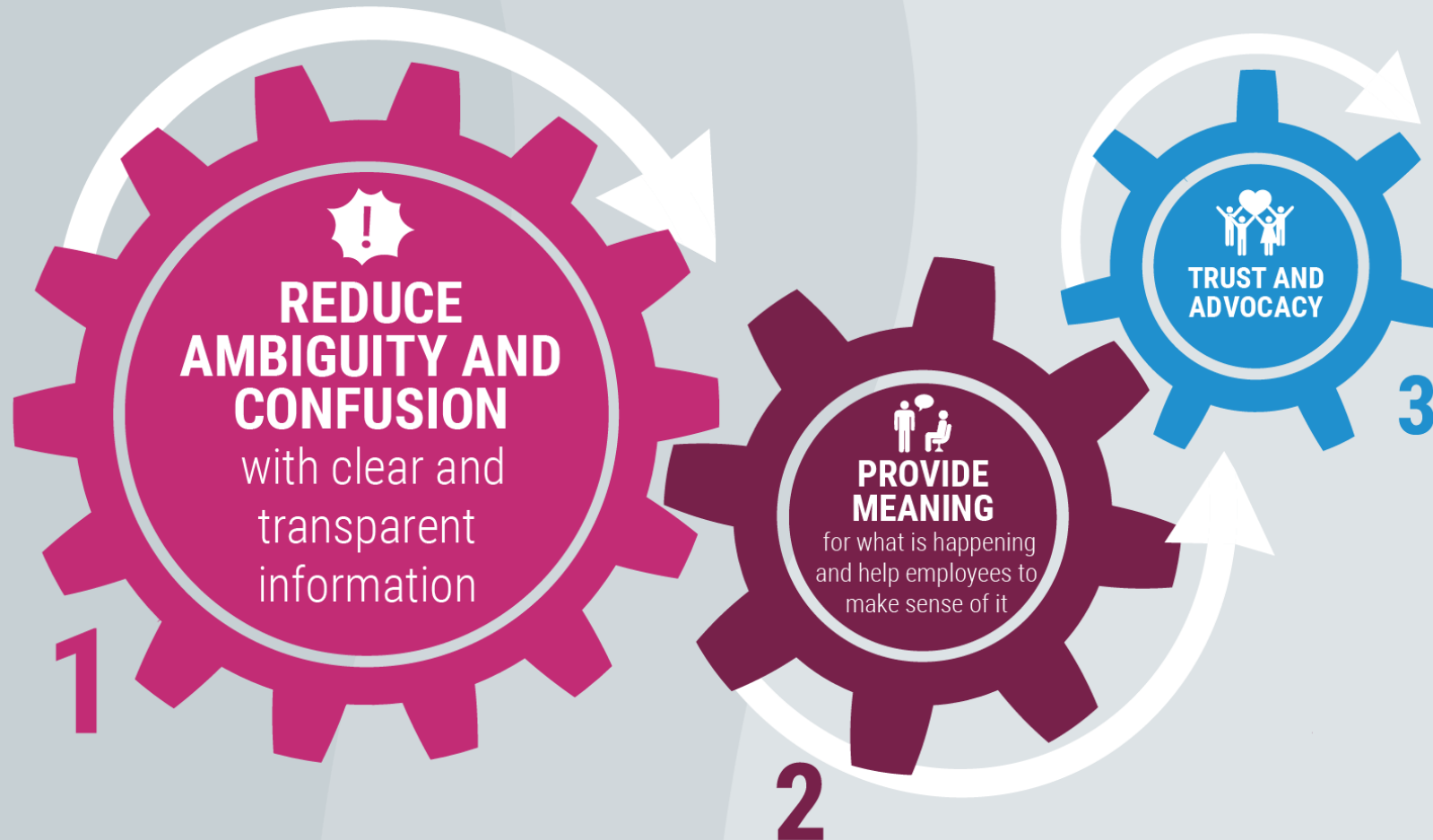Employees can be mobilized, not only as receivers but also as senders in a crisis situation.

They will talk about their feelings and attitudes towards their workplace with their colleagues, families, and friends and perhaps also post on social media. Whether they act as negative or positive **ambassadors** can be very important to an organization in a crisis situation.

**INTERNAL CRISES ARE EPISODES WHEN NOTHING MAKES SENSE.**

*"I've never been here before, I have no idea where I am, and I have no idea who can help me".*

In such circumstances, employees naturally seek information, reassurance and support from their employer and this is, of course, why internal communication is so important.

Frandsen, F. and Johansen, W. 2011. The study of internal crisis communication: towards an integrative framework. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, (16) 4.

# Ambiguity and confusion

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## 1 — REDUCE AMBIGUITY AND CONFUSION
with clear and transparent information

## 2 — PROVIDE MEANING
for what is happening and help employees to make sense of it

## 3 — TRUST AND ADVOCACY

INTERNAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION IS BEST UNDERSTOOD AS A MERGER OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION AND CHANGE COMMUNICATION AS THESE FIELDS FOCUS ON HIGHLY COMPLEX SITUATIONS WHERE STAKEHOLDERS AND EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE AMBIGUITY AND CONFUSION.

In both cases, there is a need for **information, communication** and **sensemaking** in order to understand the situation and act accordingly.

Badly handled internal crisis communication can turn the initial crisis into a double crisis, negatively impacting **organisational trust.**

Frandsen and Johansen, 2017 Organizational Crisis Communication. London: Sage.

# Impact of a crisis on employees

**!**

A LACK
OF KNOWLEDGE
OR INFORMATION
CAUSES
**STRESS**

- **Feelings of insecurity and uncertainty:** what is going to happen?

- **Chaos:** the breakdown of the whole well-known and orderly universe

- **Stress:** as a consequence of an enormous pressure of work and time, or lack of knowledge, information or competences or, worst of all, lack of meaning

- The feeling of betrayal by management or by colleagues

- Fear of losing job, status, position, esteem, and good social networks

- **Grief:** physical and psychological losses like the loss of close colleagues or external

- **Anger:** towards the responsible persons or the ones believed to be responsible

Frandsen, F. and Johansen, W. 2011. The study of internal crisis communication: towards an integrative framework. Corporate Communications: An International Journal, (16) 4.

# Sense giving and sense making in a chaotic place

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Managers and employees discuss the situation to **better understand** what is happening and how to work through it

**SENSE MAKING**

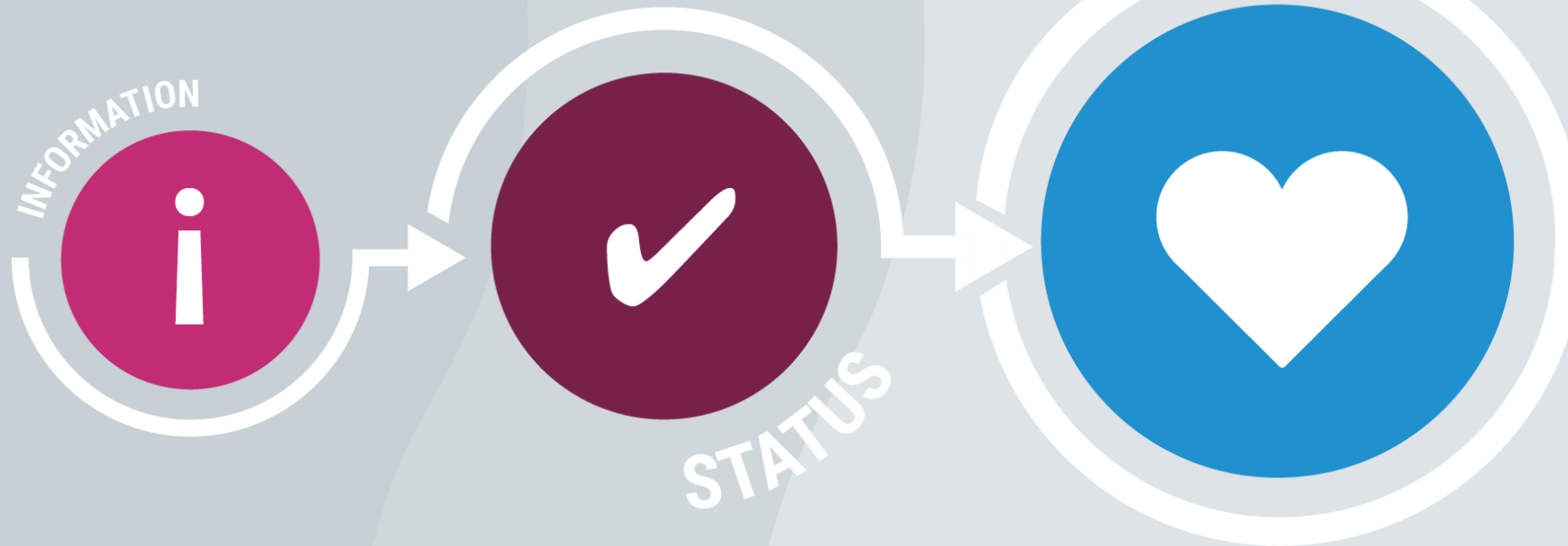Senior managers communicate new **'sense'** of the organisation and the way forward

**SENSE GIVING**

**CHANGING NARRATIVE**
Conversation and regular re-framing rather than concrete narratives that are simply transmitted to employees.

Emphasise **emotional support**
Listen and respond to employees
Demonstrate **appreciation** for what they do to support the organisation in a crisis

Bowman, S. and Yeomans, L. (2021), Internal crisis communication and the social construction of emotion: University leaders' sensegiving discourse during the Covid-19 pandemic, Journal of Communication Management, 25(3).

# Information and support

**LOVE**

**INFORMATION**

**STATUS**

**Information** - advice, opinions, instruction, enlightenment

**Status** - an expression of evaluative judgment conveying regard or esteem

**Love** - an expression of affectionate regard, warmth, or comfort.

**INFORMATION ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS ON THE ORGANISATION IS IMPORTANT DURING THE ACUTE PHASE OF THE CRISIS AS IT SIGNIFICANTLY FOSTERS EMPLOYEES' ACCEPTANCE OF MANAGERIAL DECISIONS.**

Importantly, the information needs to be substantial (i.e., relevant, timely, complete, understandable, accurate, and reliable).

Einweller, S., Ruppel, C. and Stranzl, J. (2021), Achieving employee support during the COVID-19 pandemic–The role of relational and informational crisis communication in Austrian organisations, Journal of Communication Management, 25(3).

# Listening

## OPENNESS

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- Appears willing to learn
- Values others' perspectives
- Asks many questions
- Appears humble and curious

## EMPATHY

- Shows sensitivity to feelings
- Highly visible
- Seeks informal opportunities to gather feedback
- Is approachable and self-confident

## RESPONSIVENESS

- Clearly uses others' input to aid decisions
- Links action to previous feedback
- Acknowledges views/feelings while offering alternative perspectives
- Collaborates when solving problems

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- Appears unwilling to learn
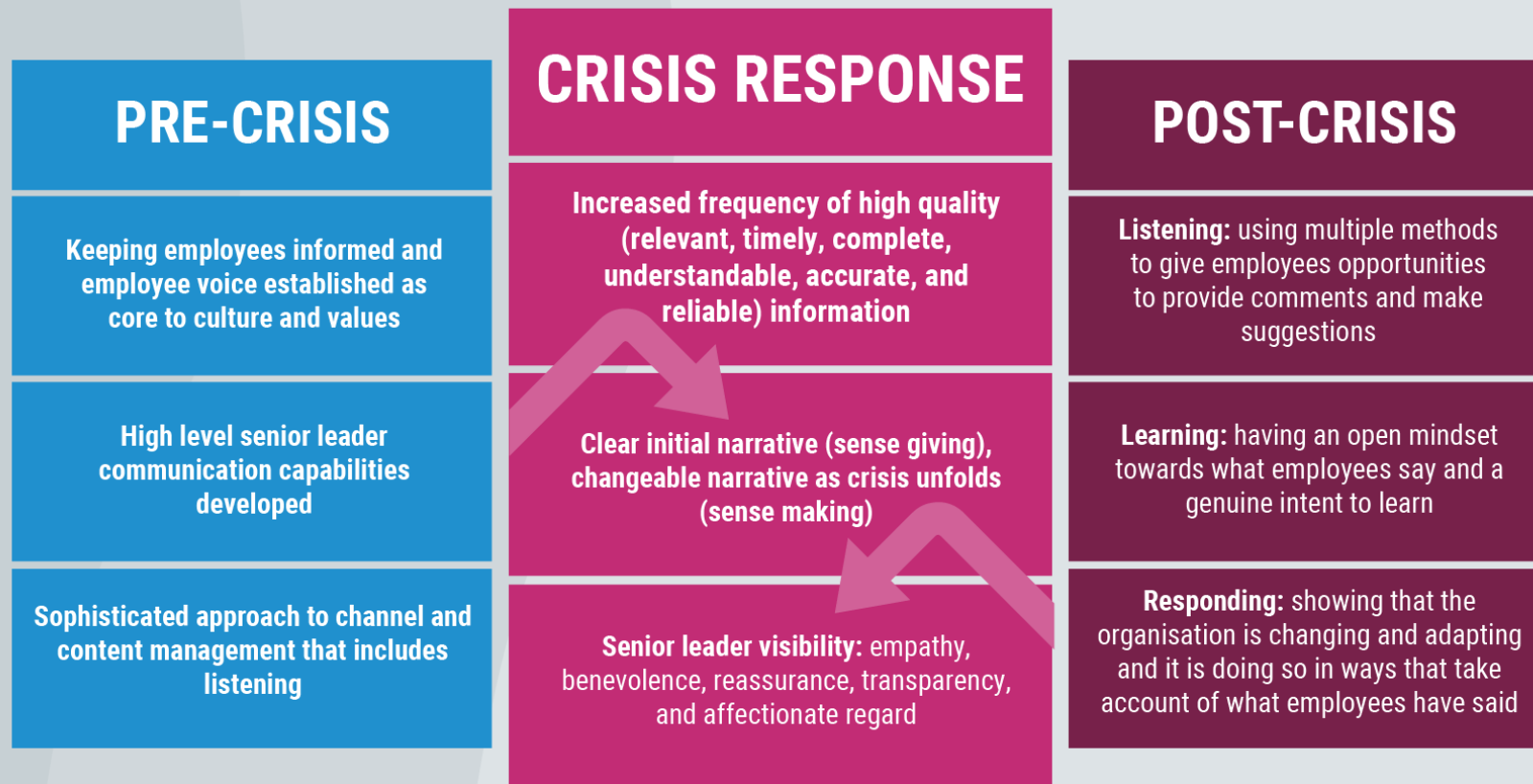- Discounts feedback
- Asks few questions
- Knows all the answers

- Appears insensitive to feelings
- Tends to be more remote
- Listens more via formal channels and processes rather than face to face
- Appears disinterested

- Listens selectively
- Responsive to first views aired
- Biased to the perspectives of a narrow group
- Closed to suggestions
- Fails to connect actions to feedback

# Framework for internal crisis communication

## PRE-CRISIS

Keeping employees informed and employee voice established as core to culture and values

High level senior leader communication capabilities developed

Sophisticated approach to channel and content management that includes listening

## CRISIS RESPONSE

Increased frequency of high quality (relevant, timely, complete, understandable, accurate, and reliable) information

Clear initial narrative (sense giving), changeable narrative as crisis unfolds (sense making)

Senior leader visibility: empathy, benevolence, reassurance, transparency, and affectionate regard

## POST-CRISIS

Listening: using multiple methods to give employees opportunities to provide comments and make suggestions

Learning: having an open mindset towards what employees say and a genuine intent to learn

Responding: showing that the organisation is changing and adapting and it is doing so in ways that take account of what employees have said

# Thank you

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