

# Sharing Circle from Italy to Turkey: Senior HR Leaders on What They're Learning

Because we live and work globally, we have the opportunity in this unprecedented crisis to share our experiences and advice even as the virus makes its way around the world. The countries and communities which are hit first, can share what they've seen and how their learnings can guide and support colleagues in other parts of the world.

Around sixty senior Turkish Human Resources Leaders gathered via video call on 25 March 2020 to hear first-hand what professionals are facing and learning in Italy and share their experiences from their own organizations as the global community moves to a new reality with COVID-19.

Key headlines from the discussion:

- Prioritize employee health over everything else;
- “Over” communicate to keep employee morale up at all times;
- Socialize above and beyond business needs through virtual coffee chats, virtual happy hours, virtual birthday parties and even virtual sports hours;
- Invest further on data and information security as work-from-home proliferates
- Create learnings from new ways of working and institutionalize good practices permanently

## Voices from the Trenches

As an introduction to the Sharing Circle, two senior Turkish HR Leaders based in Italy shared their experiences during the last few months:

“The country didn’t take it seriously in the beginning,” acknowledged one of the two senior HR executives based in Italy. “That was especially true for the older generation. The average age in Italy is 48 and many wanted to continue their regular lives engaged in

sports and other outdoor activities. One of the biggest local challenges for HR executives is, the HR operations and payroll system being very complex and it takes time to run it remotely, slowing the country's ability to fully initiate work-from-home options".

Executives emphasized how important it is to maintain employee engagement. "Routines are important to stay psychologically safe and sound," said one executive. "I continue to wake up early every day and I set up a coffee chat with my direct reports at 10 AM to talk about key agenda items. We talk more about operational actions for the day and do not discuss much about the future. We also invite some of my indirect reports to this coffee chat meeting in order to be more inclusive and keep the team's sense of belonging at a higher level. We also set up a special intranet site to continuously inform our staff and keep their morale up." The other executive shared that her company formed a task force of senior executives to drive employee engagement and their CEO is sharing weekly update videos with all staff.

Leaders also addressed the important topic of psychological impact on employees. "The future of our ongoing projects is uncertain, and this creates potential confusion for the team," said one executive. "We are busier than normal times, but agendas have changed significantly. We need to adapt ourselves to the new reality. To help our employees, we have also set up a psychological support line".

The difficulty of working globally in times of crisis was also discussed. "I work in a group that has retail operations in 14 countries, so taking actions according to each country's own regulations and laws requires quite complicated plans," the executive underlined. "We have established systems for both communication and motivation, while still keeping an eye on time and regulative differences." The other executive mentioned that their company policy is to utilize phone calls for 1-on-1 discussions in order to avoid putting undue strain on the broadband in their markets – pointing out the need and importance of relevant (technological) infrastructure.

Further deepening the discussion, Turkish-based executives shared their experiences along with learnings and practices so far in the COVID-19 crisis.

Keeping employee engagement is the top priority for most organizations in crisis times. An executive from a start-up company reported efforts to maintain morale and avoid burnout with group video chat time and virtual movie clubs with a very young audience of employees (average age: ~ 27). Another HR leader emphasized efforts to unite employees around the same purpose as much as possible. "All of our leaders have daily coffee chats with their teams. We will bring a majority of our employees together in a single video call for a company meeting."

Executives mentioned learning together as another top priority within their company and as a broader HR community. One HR leader said “We should empathize each other more in this difficult time. Over communication and sharing with others is much more important than under communication now.” And added, “Everyone is working more but we should learn how to do it more efficiently. We are more effective in meetings, not interrupting others while talking. We should keep the momentum on more strategic projects, however, we may need to change our thinking and way of doing it. We can move resources more efficiently”

Leaders also shared their views and plans about recruitment. One executive said, “We didn’t stop our recruitment activities. However, it seems that the people whom we contact or even interview are less intrigued to leave their jobs because of their questions about the future of business in different companies.” Another HR professional added, “Employee loyalty will also be affected at a high level, because this period will further increase people’s search for purpose and meaning.”

Last but not least, HR leaders shared their learnings and practices for blue-collar and field employees. One executive said, “It is very important for top management to engage with blue collar employees through routine interaction and give the message of unity.” Another executive added “in addition to the measures taken at the factory/plant level, we also send hygiene kits to employees’ families.” Indeed, the topic around blue-collar employees’ engagement, treatment, health and safety is listed as a priority topic for one of the future Sharing Circle meetings.

## Possible Post-Crisis Implications

The adjustments we are making today are likely to give rise to permanent changes in the global work experience. What to look for:

- Remote work as a standard. As employees get used to working from home and companies create systems to manage the workflow, this may evolve into a long-term workforce trend. Companies will revisit their headcount and office space planning accordingly. Impact of this on culture and engagement should be a priority topic to discuss in upcoming days.
- Increased emphasis on good communication. During a crisis, executives agree over-communicating is better than under-communicating. Post-crisis, watch for companies to place new emphasis on communications strategies for both blue-collar and white-collar workers.
- Impact on interaction between employees. As we are keeping social distance from each other now, there may be a psychological impact from it even after Covid-19.

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## **Covid-19 Micro-Website**

We have launched a micro website where this and other informative pieces are posted. This site will be regularly updated: [click here](#) for further details.

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