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# Mapping the COVID Communication Curve.

A practical worksheet for IC and HR

**W**e know this is an uncertain time for all, and uncertainty can feel scary. But there are things within our control — such as how we plan for known risks and how we anticipate the unknown risks.

Drawing inspiration from the Kubler Ross change curve model, there are IC and HR teams who will go through similar stages of experience as the pandemic starts, peaks and then ebbs in various territories. The stages have associated emotional impacts and will require different levels of support. As is always the foundation of what we do, knowing our audience in order to define the message is key. And we hope this tool will help you assess, prepare and plan through the coming weeks and months.

## LET'S LEARN FROM THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE

The COVID-19 outbreak is not like any other we've seen, so it would be misguided to look to other outbreaks, such as the 2003 SARS or 2010 Swine Flu outbreaks, as examples of what will unfold. Predictive models regarding how COVID-19 may develop are just that — predictive. Therefore, we looked for real-life experiences. Who better to ask than those in Hong Kong who are further along the curve, with experiences to share with those who are earlier in the journey. This is not a definitive guide by any means; world markets had not yet experienced the dramatic drops and border closures when Hong Kong was experiencing their COVID-19 containment measures. However, it may help you anticipate the business messages, potential impacts and emotional experiences for your people over time.

## THE ART OF PROSPECTIVE HINDSIGHT

COVID-19's economic and social projections range from benign to severe and are location-dependent. Unfortunately, we won't know what specific impacts the pandemic will have until we emerge from the other side. However, we can utilise 'prospective hindsight' to better arm ourselves to manage business activity around the outbreak. This technique asks you to imagine you're six months out from the launch of a campaign or strategy — and it's failed spectacularly. What are all the reasons it failed? The exercise we created allows you to potentially head off disastrous decisions and optimise brilliant ones before they've been made. It's your chance to think about what could go wrong (and what could go right!) and create a responsible internal communication plan.

**Employers have a role to communicate responsibly. Use this worksheet to proactively map the potential impact to the employee experience and plan your communications.**

You know what's right for your organisation. While we've seeded the worksheet with sample impacts based on real experiences, you'll need to tailor it to your specific audience, location, workforce distribution and economic impacts. The sample message from businesses is what you'll likely need to communicate — not the suggested best practice for communicating the message.

**WORKSHEET: SAMPLE PREDICTIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF MESSAGES OVER TIME**

**Phase 1: Containment**

WHAT WILL WE SAY TO EMPLOYEES?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT?	WHAT WILL THE WEEK OF WORK LOOK LIKE?	WHAT INFORMATION WILL PEOPLE WANT?	HOW CAN WE PROVIDE REASSURANCE?	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INSIGHTS
<p><i>Sample message:</i></p> <p>We're monitoring the situation. Please work from home if you can.</p> <p>Follow government and local authority advice regarding travel and access to public facilities etc.</p> <p>Take practical and pragmatic steps to limit your exposure to potential infection.</p> <p>Avoid unnecessary meetings and travel for work.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>Part of the workforce with the ability to work from home begins to do so.</p> <p>Some non-essential projects and workstreams may be disrupted.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>Incident response meetings start to fill up diaries of your leaders, managers and key logistics people.</p> <p>Focus for many will change from business as usual to preparing for continuity and contingency.</p>	<p><i>Sample employee wants:</i></p> <p>Permission, clarity and tools to do their job when they are not in their usual working space.</p> <p>Instructions on how and where they should focus their efforts.</p>	<p><i>Sample actions:</i></p> <p>Timely communication — don't leave people guessing.</p> <p>Access to official information and advice.</p> <p>A check list of do's and don'ts.</p>	<p>People have trouble accepting change, and you may find resistance to changing ways of working, as day-to-day life still seems like business as usual. People may underestimate the severity of impact in later weeks.</p>
<b>YOUR TURN: MAP PHASE 1 FOR YOUR ORGANISATION</b>					
YOUR MESSAGE:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED EMPLOYEE WANTS:	YOUR PROJECTED ACTIONS:	

**WORKSHEET: SAMPLE PREDICTIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF MESSAGES OVER TIME**

**Phase 2A: Early delay**

WHAT WILL WE SAY TO EMPLOYEES?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT?	WHAT WILL THE WEEK OF WORK LOOK LIKE?	WHAT INFORMATION WILL PEOPLE WANT?	HOW CAN WE PROVIDE REASSURANCE?	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INSIGHTS
<p><i>Sample message:</i></p> <p>We're continuing to monitor the situation, but we strongly encourage all those who can work from home to do so. We are also reviewing our business contingency plans.</p> <p>All non-essential travel and contact should be avoided.</p> <p>Official advice should be followed.</p> <p>Our priority is maintaining our operations, but within government guidelines.</p> <p>Your priority is limiting your exposure to potential infection.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>More colleagues begin working from home. Some impacts to remote working systems.</p> <p>Pause on non-essential projects and workstreams.</p> <p>Events and proactive collaborations are postponed.</p> <p>Other digital means of communication, such as WhatsApp groups may need to be explored.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>The communication landscape becomes more crowded as crisis comms compete with business as usual material.</p> <p>Leaders and contingency planners spend significant time and capacity on crisis planning.</p> <p>Barriers to effective remote working start to surface.</p> <p>Minor operational disruption occurs in certain areas.</p>	<p><i>Sample employee wants:</i></p> <p>Where is our company's resource hub for COVID-19?</p> <p>Guidance on remote working.</p> <p>Clarity on priority and focus.</p> <p>Reassurance that the business has the capability and plans to manage any escalation.</p> <p>Those who cannot work from home will want reassurance on steps to protect their health and wellbeing.</p>	<p><i>Sample actions:</i></p> <p>Your IC team will need to gather the COVID-19 resources in one place and push it out to employees.</p> <p>You'll also need to ensure work from home policies are updated and disseminated to the team.</p> <p>Managers will be inundated with questions so this group will need resources (e.g. tip sheet, FAQ).</p>	<p>Adjustment to remote working in the first week will be difficult for those adopting it for the first time. Social isolation and new ways of working will all have to be considered.</p> <p>Gossip could start to run rampant – make sure you continue to be a trusted source of news.</p>

**YOUR TURN: MAP PHASE 2A FOR YOUR ORGANISATION**

YOUR MESSAGE:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED EMPLOYEE WANTS:	YOUR PROJECTED ACTIONS:

**WORKSHEET: SAMPLE PREDICTIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF MESSAGES OVER TIME**

**Phase 2B: Late delay**

WHAT WILL WE SAY TO EMPLOYEES?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT?	WHAT WILL THE WEEK OF WORK LOOK LIKE?	WHAT INFORMATION WILL PEOPLE WANT?	HOW CAN WE PROVIDE REASSURANCE?	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INSIGHTS
<p><i>Sample message:</i></p> <p>Some offices and outlets will remain open, but new procedures are in place to ensure safety. We'll be doing temperature checks at the door. All who can work from home, should do so. Certain offices in severely affected locations will be closed until further notice.</p> <p>All travel and contact is prohibited, without prior permission.</p> <p>All departments are being asked to review current activity to limit our exposure to commercial risk.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>A majority of colleagues are now working from home; only those who cannot complete their duties remotely are on-site.</p> <p>Those who cannot work from home feel upset that they are unable to do so and worry about their health.</p> <p>Concerns for the financial impact of the situation surface.</p> <p>The start of subtle culture shifts start to emerge.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>Productivity declines as cooperation and collaboration suffers; workers struggle to adjust from in-person interactions to virtual.</p> <p>Employees in certain functions are insecure about their personal situation.</p> <p>Spirits also rise as we start to feel 'we're in this together.'</p>	<p><i>Sample employee wants:</i></p> <p>Reassurance that business is equipped to survive, and that their job is safe.</p> <p>Guidance on remote working.</p> <p>Over communication from colleagues.</p> <p>Guidance on how they can best do their part.</p>	<p><i>Sample actions:</i></p> <p>Continued company communication — especially from leaders.</p> <p>Prioritisation of non-essential initiatives in your communication calendar will need to occur to make space for your crisis comms.</p> <p>Communicate company efforts to combat the spread of the virus.</p> <p>Share good practice and hero stories of innovation and achievement, despite current challenges.</p>	<p>Shock could set in as real impacts start to be felt — disruption to ways of working, public space closures, school closures, threats to job security and travel bans. In this time, people need a sense of normality. Maintaining psychological safety will be key here.</p>

**YOUR TURN: MAP PHASE 2B FOR YOUR ORGANISATION**

YOUR MESSAGE:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED EMPLOYEE WANTS:	YOUR PROJECTED ACTIONS:

**WORKSHEET: SAMPLE PREDICTIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF MESSAGES OVER TIME**

**Phase 3: Mitigate**

WHAT WILL WE SAY TO EMPLOYEES?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT?	WHAT WILL THE WEEK OF WORK LOOK LIKE?	WHAT INFORMATION WILL PEOPLE WANT?	HOW CAN WE PROVIDE REASSURANCE?	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INSIGHTS
<p><i>Sample message:</i></p> <p>Offices and outlets are closed indefinitely, but essential work will continue. Schools are closed and that places a burden on parents.</p> <p>Please follow all government guidance on travel and try to limit non-essential outings of any kind.</p> <p>Proactive steps are being taken to protect the future sustainability of the business.</p> <p>While the shape and short-term success of our business may change, our focus is on coming out the other side in as strong a position as possible.</p> <p>We are in this together. We have all made sacrifices. We have downsized and that is hard. But together we can emerge from this.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>All colleagues are now advised by government to work from home, or stay away from their place of work.</p> <p>Lay-offs and redundancies may become unavoidable.</p> <p>Working from home is the new normal – but this is having an impact on mental welfare and productivity.</p> <p>Colleagues may be affected by the virus. There may be casualties.</p> <p>Financial projections begin to determine the potential business impact and the steps needed to be taken to ensure the survival of the business.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>We’ve ironed out the teething problems and are working as efficiently as possible.</p> <p>We’re meeting slightly less regularly and formally as a large team than in the early days.</p> <p>People are starting to work more varied hours as work/life separation becomes harder to maintain due to environmental crossover.</p> <p>Colleagues may be working on workstreams and projects with which they are unfamiliar.</p> <p>Collaboration and face time is critical – we’re social creatures and miss the buzz and energy we get from our team mates.</p>	<p><i>Sample employee wants:</i></p> <p>Reassurance that their job will still be there for the foreseeable future as economic instability and other business impacts move from theoretical to concrete.</p> <p>Increased need for connection with colleagues.</p> <p>Counselling for those who may have lost loved ones and colleagues.</p>	<p><i>Sample actions:</i></p> <p>Leadership acknowledgment of the tough realities — delivered as a virtual town hall by CEO.</p> <p>Promote counselling services, such as the Employee Assistance Program.</p> <p>Continue to share positive stories within the business.</p> <p>Reiterate prior communications around virtual ways of connection – a ‘web-reakfast’ or a ‘wine-fi’.</p>	<p>Looking after social wellbeing will be paramount. We will look to the actions of leaders and others in the business as a sign of how to act — signalling confidence and compassion will help allay fears.</p> <p>Impacts from social isolation will start to manifest in a myriad of ways.</p>
<b>YOUR TURN: MAP PHASE 3 FOR YOUR ORGANISATION</b>					
YOUR MESSAGE:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED EMPLOYEE WANTS:	YOUR PROJECTED ACTIONS:	

**WORKSHEET: SAMPLE PREDICTIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF MESSAGES OVER TIME**

**Phase 4A: Containment**

WHAT WILL WE SAY TO EMPLOYEES?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT?	WHAT WILL THE WEEK OF WORK LOOK LIKE?	WHAT INFORMATION WILL PEOPLE WANT?	HOW CAN WE PROVIDE REASSURANCE?	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INSIGHTS
<p><i>Sample message:</i></p> <p>Essential offices and outlets are beginning to reopen.</p> <p>Non-essential workers should continue to work from home.</p> <p>Preventative measures remain in place. Hand sanitisers are available and we'll continue to check temperature upon entry.</p> <p>Our business has survived and we should all be proud of our individual and collective contributions.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>People start returning. Half days at first, then full days, then several full days.</p> <p>The business may not return to the state it was previously. Change will remain a feature of the landscape.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>Activities concentrate on reshaping the operations to cope with the impact.</p> <p>Restructuring is front and centre of most people's minds.</p>	<p><i>Sample employee wants:</i></p> <p>What will my role look like in the future?</p> <p>Guidance for returning to work.</p>	<p><i>Sample actions:</i></p> <p>Develop a roadmap for getting back to business, closing revenue gaps, formatting and re-welcoming customers. Share with employees. Involve them and help them take ownership of it.</p> <p>Take the opportunity to listen to employees' concerns and where they need reassurance.</p>	<p>Change fatigue will start to kick in, but can be tempered with the excitement that life starts to feel normal.</p>
<b>YOUR TURN: MAP PHASE 4A FOR YOUR ORGANISATION</b>					
YOUR MESSAGE:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED EMPLOYEE WANTS:	YOUR PROJECTED ACTIONS:	

**WORKSHEET: SAMPLE PREDICTIVE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL IMPACT OF MESSAGES OVER TIME**

**Phase 4B: The new normal**

WHAT WILL WE SAY TO EMPLOYEES?	WHAT WILL HAPPEN AS A RESULT?	WHAT WILL THE WEEK OF WORK LOOK LIKE?	WHAT INFORMATION WILL PEOPLE WANT?	HOW CAN WE PROVIDE REASSURANCE?	BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE INSIGHTS
<p><i>Sample message:</i></p> <p>COVID-19 is contained, but that doesn't mean we become complacent on best practices for health.</p> <p>We have learned that we need to remain diligent at all times. Hygiene and good practice will protect our health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Agility and innovation will protect our business.</p> <p>We can and will emerge from this stronger, though different.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>Operations gradually settle in to the 'new normal'.</p> <p>Legacy issues will often slow or taint progress.</p> <p>Medium- to long-term workstreams and projects kick off.</p> <p>Companies return to business as usual, but some culture changes remain.</p>	<p><i>Sample impacts:</i></p> <p>People will take time to acclimatise to new structures, processes and ways of working – this may have a medium-term impact on productivity.</p> <p>A sense of normality will gradually return, leading to people re-establishing a sense of belonging (though some colleagues may leave).</p>	<p><i>Sample employee wants:</i></p> <p>A period of stability.</p> <p>A sense of ownership and ability to take back control of their own work life and career.</p> <p>Draw a 'line in the sand' and enable employees to leave behind their worries and turn them into positive best practice.</p>	<p><i>Sample actions:</i></p> <p>Share and implement the roadmap. Continue to evolve and shape its implementation in collaboration with colleagues.</p> <p>Be transparent with financial plans and projections.</p> <p>Encourage a step change in culture. This is the new normal and is a positive evolution on our business.</p>	<p>This could mark a natural transition point that can be harnessed as a 'fresh start'.</p> <p>It's a great time for new initiatives, especially wellness, and to put new energy behind what matters most to moving your business forward.</p>
<b>YOUR TURN: MAP PHASE 4B FOR YOUR ORGANISATION</b>					
YOUR MESSAGE:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED IMPACTS:	YOUR PROJECTED EMPLOYEE WANTS:	YOUR PROJECTED ACTIONS:	

# In conclusion.

We'll get through this, together!

If you have questions or want assistance completing this exercise for your specific organisation's needs, drop us a line at [hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk](mailto:hello@scarlettabbott.co.uk)

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