

THE EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION COUNCIL  
PRESENTS A RESEARCH REPORT

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## **Executive Communication, Now**

*The coronavirus crisis has revolutionized the practice of exec comms, mostly for the good. But will these changes last?*

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AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**E**XECUTIVE  
**C**OMMUNICATION  
**C**OUNCIL

## **Dear Executive Communication Colleague,**

Ask a stranger what “executive communication” is, and you’re likely to get nothing more than a wild guess. Ask an executive communication professional what “executive communication” is, and you’re likely to get something similar.

As important as it is to corporate communication, exec comms has heretofore been too niched a specialty to receive specialized study. Also, so tied is it to the quirks of the leaders it serves, exec comms has heretofore so widely from organization to organization as to make the field barely worthy of a common name.

At the Founder’s Meeting of the new Executive Communication Council earlier this year, participants decided to create a comprehensive study of the field—its size and scope, its range of practice, its burgeoning trends.

Mere weeks after that momentous meeting, coronavirus transformed exec comms as it transformed so much else—and this study was adapted to quantify those changes.

Well, those changes—as you’re about to read—are by far the most clearly defined and profoundly important developments in the vaguely written history of executive communication.

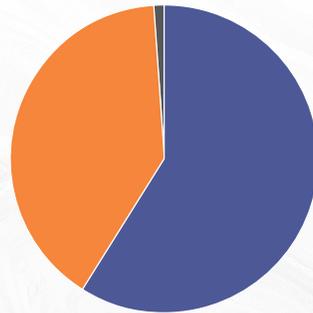
And whenever COVID-19 recedes and however the rest of society reacts, exec comms professionals will fight for most of these developments to become permanent characteristics of more strategic, more vital corporate communication practice. Indeed, they ought to be fighting for that already.

The survey, commissioned by the Executive Communication Council and sponsored by And Then Communications, was conducted by the communication research firm Tekara Organizational Effectiveness. It reflects the quantitative and qualitative input of 105 respondents, all queried in June 2020.

This executive summary describes four dramatic developments in exec comms that this report revealed.

1. **Exec comms pros' roles are profoundly changed, mostly in good ways.** You're more heavily relied upon, and you have more direct collaboration with the leaders you serve. (The downside being, you're operating with the same resources, or even less than before.)

### HOW HAS YOUR ROLE CHANGED SINCE THE PANDEMIC?



● **59%** Changed Significantly

● **40%** Little Change

● **1%** No Change

### DIRECT COLLABORATION WITH C-SUITE OVER THE LAST THREE MONTHS HAS:



Increased



Stayed the Same



Decreased

### WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO YOUR BUDGET IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS?



Increased



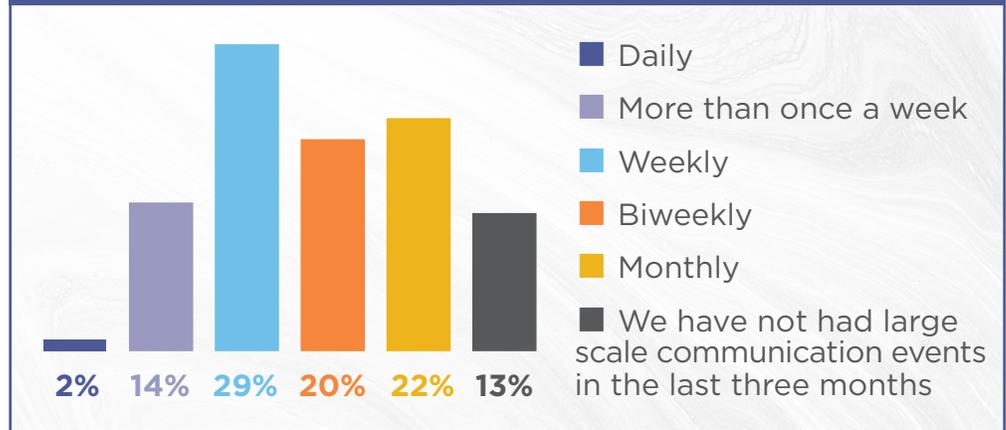
Stayed the Same



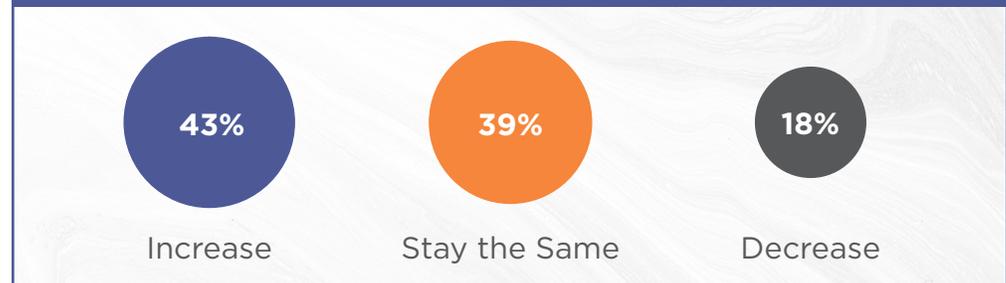
Decreased

**2. Executive communication is far more frequent.** As of late June, when this survey was conducted, almost half of top execs are communicating in live large-scale events once a week or more and almost everyone is communicating at least once a month. And if anything, exec comms pros see the frequency of exec comms increasing from here. What would you have done to have that kind of engagement pre-COVID?

**HOW FREQUENTLY HAS YOUR CEO/ EXECUTIVE CONVENED COMMUNICATION EVENTS DURING COVID-19 I.E. VIRTUAL TOWNHALLS, LARGE SCALE CONFERENCE CALLS, AND LARGE-SCALE ZOOM/SKYPE/WEBEX MEETINGS?**



**OVER THE NEXT THREE MONTHS, I EXPECT THE FREQUENCY OF OUR CEO/ EXECUTIVE INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS TO:**



**OVER THE NEXT THREE MONTHS, I EXPECT THE FREQUENCY OF OUR CEO/ EXECUTIVE EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS TO:**



**3. Leaders are doing more internal communication—the substantive kind.** Exec comms folks have traditionally spent most of their time and the best of their thinking on external communication, largely because they saw internal communication as HR-related and tactical, rather than strategic and message-focused. But employees' rising clout in stakeholder capitalism, and the obvious workforce issues created by COVID and then George Floyd, have executives communicating much more meaningfully inside the organization—and leaning on their exec comms pros for help.

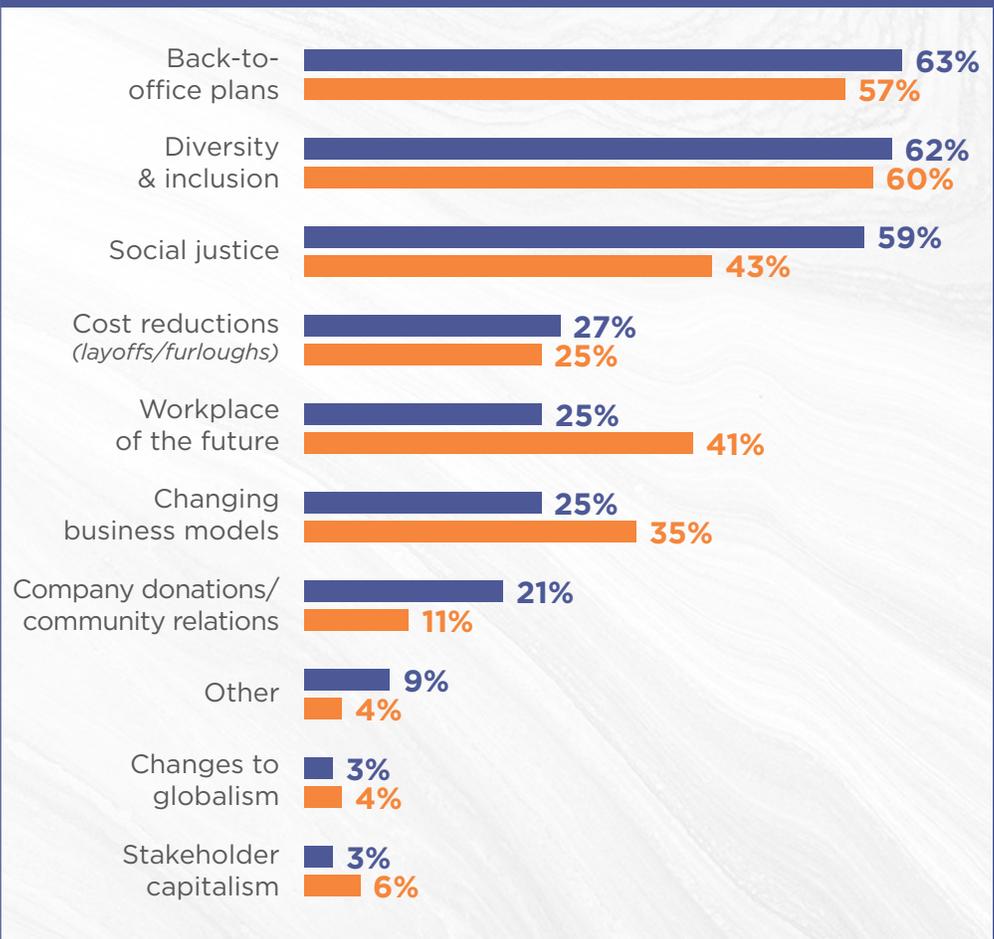


**4. Leaders are discussing the most vital topics—diversity and inclusion, social justice, the workplace of the future.** These are the kinds of issues CEOs have either glossed over with platitudes or assiduously avoided, in favor of ... glossing over or avoiding other issues, like sustainability and executive compensation. Now they know they must face these issues head-on, and the more they do it, the more comfortable they will be doing it, especially if they have the savvy support of thoughtful, encouraging exec comms professionals.

**BEYOND THE MOST DIRECTLY COVID-19-RELATED UPDATES AND INFORMATION, WHICH OF THESE TOPICS HAVE YOUR CEO AND/OR OTHER EXECs DISCUSSED IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS?**

**VERSUS**

**WHICH OF THESE TOPICS DO YOU EXPECT YOUR CEO AND/OR OTHER EXECs TO ADDRESS IN THE NEXT THREE MONTHS?**



## Conclusion: This Isn't the Most Vital Time in Exec Comms—It's the First

Listen to the words that came up most frequently in respondents' comments describing exec comms since coronavirus and in near future: "urgent, intense, bigger stakes, valued, relevant, transparent, curious, constant, candor, frequent, authentic, empathetic, sensitive, vulnerable ... culture, social justice, sustainability."

Taken together, these words, and the reality they describe, evoke the aspirational charter conceived by the Executive Communication Council on the trembling eve of pre-coronavirus, to describe the ideal exec comms operations of the future.

In short, coronavirus has in many ways transformed exec comms in many organizations into exactly what this Council hoped it could become. Of course, it has done so more rudely than anyone would have asked for—and in most cases without the accompanying increase in budget, staff or intellectual support that a sustainable transition would actually need.

This not an insignificant concern. All the gains in exec comms will be lost if exec comms staffers burn out, wash out or cop out, and thus fail to capitalize on and consolidate the inroads they've made in terms of c-suite access and leadership trust.

While they've excelled so far by applying their current skill set responsively during the first months of this crisis, exec comms pros will have to learn and grow ahead of their leaders, to figure out new ways of communicating beyond on-high emails and scripted presentations, to broaden exec comms' portfolio far beyond c-suite support, to embrace a much greater, more imaginative vision that is now within reach.

And they must make the case for getting the resources they need to do so over time.

That's the work of the Executive Communication Council.

Stay tuned. (Or better yet, get involved.)

Sincerely,



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