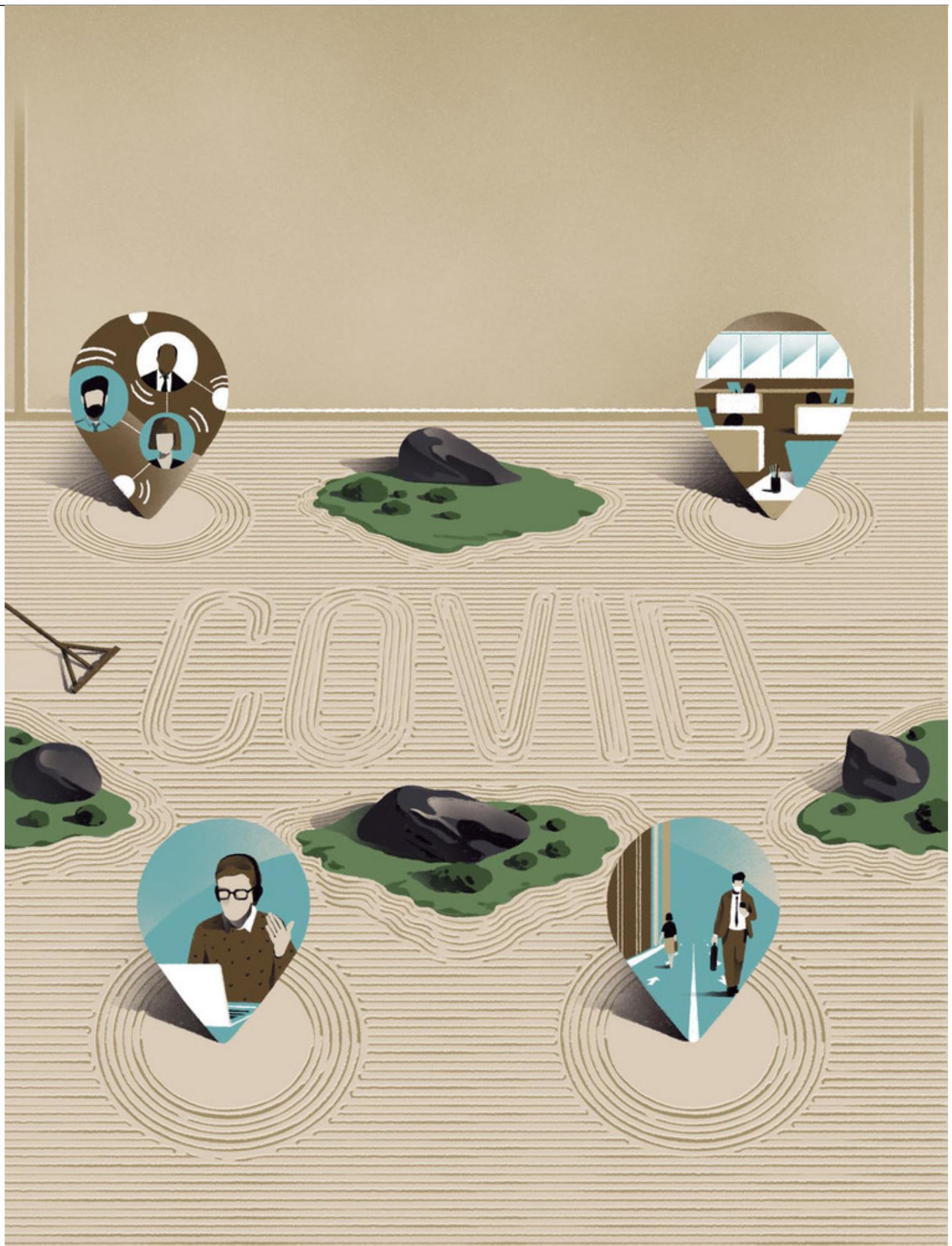
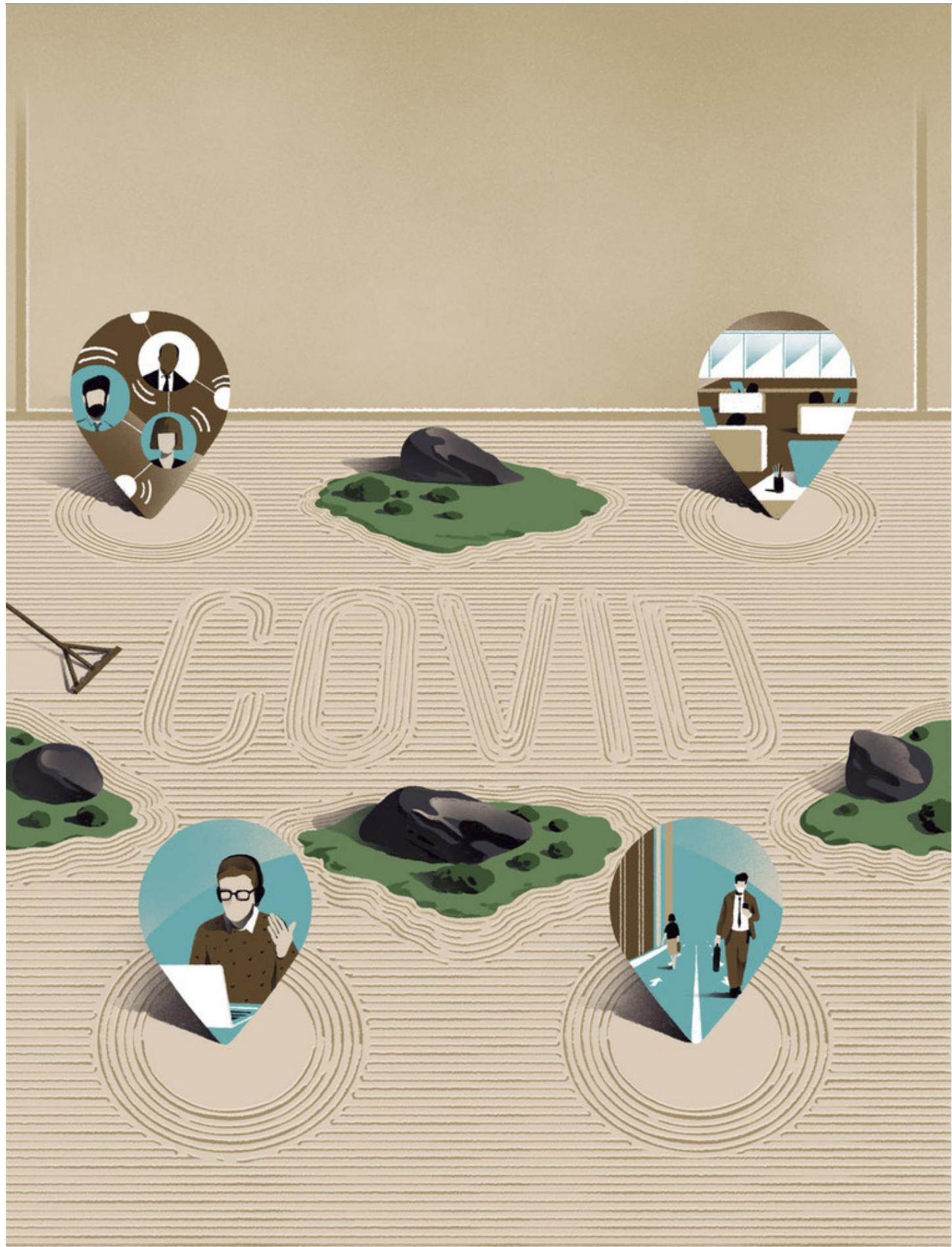




## **Leveraging Silver Linings**

### **Skills and Professional Development**





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## CHEAT SHEET

- **Positive connections.** Maintain a recurring virtual team check-in that mimics the morning interactions that we once had in-person at the office. Make sure to diversify the communication method: voice calls, video calls, or chats.
- **New working habits.** Whether working at home or in the office, take account of how different spaces (or rooms) are more conducive to certain tasks — move around and remember to set boundaries between personal and work time.
- **Morale.** Company morale and culture are being tested during COVID. Acknowledge and celebrate team members for their contributions and encourage professional development through virtual options.
- **Service providers.** Your external legal or technology vendors may be adapting their service offerings during this time and can potentially help you fill gaps and needs left by hiring freezes.

It's fair to say 2020 will be remembered — and not fondly. What is particularly unique about this year and the pandemic that will be forever associated with it — is the collective global burden. Every single person in the world is, in some shape or form, feeling the effects of COVID-19.

The pandemic has forced everyone out of their routine behavioral patterns — both at home and at work. Everyone has changed how they plan for, think about, react to, and approach daily tasks. We all know change is uncomfortable — let alone change spurred on by a sudden health crisis. But with change comes growth and opportunity. Consider how you might take this situation as a chance to improve your connectedness with your teams? Or try out alternative ways to motivate others? Embrace new working habits? Supercharge team morale? While difficult circumstances can cause gloomy sentiment, they also have a way of unifying people under the right leadership.

**“Though you might not be talking to people 24/7, you know you can — the feeling of knowing your team is there is sometimes all you need.”**

— Niki Haralambidis, Legal Counsel, HESTA

It is a delicate path to traverse. Right now emotions are heightened and varied; some of the most common adjectives describing how people are feeling are unsettled, anxious, concerned. Scott Berinato for *Harvard Business Review* aptly pointed out that processing the new landscape is akin to experiencing the key stages of dealing with grief: denial, anger, depression, and acceptance. In many ways, we are certainly grieving over the loss of our ordinary ways of life. That however doesn't mean going overboard and inadvertently conveying a manufactured, cliched proliferation of empathy and understanding to our teams. Be sensible. Be sensitive. And recognize everyone is dealing with their very own unique situation.

Easier said than done, I know. It is worth exploring some of the opportunities to lift our spirits, ensure longevity through social distancing, and enable us to emerge from lockdown enhanced and energized.

## Put effort into positive connections

Most of us office ants have now swapped walking into work, post-detour via a favored coffee haunt, with rolling out of bed to a desk at home — sans makeup and suits. Working remotely has the benefit of enabling greater focus on tasks without interruptions (rejoiced by all the introverts), although those interruptions are often a key part of gelling as a team. Whether it's important communications, throwing around ideas, or sharing the discovery of a new amazing bagel place — the interruptions add value. Don't underestimate the value of debating which bagel is the best lunch option.

It is straightforward enough to use Zoom for all formal and necessary work communications, but what happens now to those valuable, fun (albeit sometimes unwanted) interruptions? How can that connection be re-created? Every team and organization is going to be different, but think about what can be done to ensure positive interactions still occur with everyone working from home. It isn't about implementing something arbitrary. Be assured, forcing hour-long Zoom video meetings with 30 people who wouldn't ordinarily chit-chat or interact with one another is not going to produce social or even valuable professional connections. Be sure to consider your team members and reflect on how they derive and perceive positive interactions with their peers. In particular, have regard to the mix of introverts and extroverts and the myriad of needs that should be juggled and balanced.

One very simple and unobtrusive tool that has been adopted by the HESTA legal team has been to maintain a running Zoom team chat that has naturally developed to include things from quick callouts to one another for work questions to sharing memes and cookie deliveries. People are naturally logging on at the start of the day and saying good morning, just as they would when arriving at their desk in the office.

Additionally, having the ongoing team chat has fostered a heightened level of inclusiveness as all the former in-office hallway tête-à-têtes are now with the whole team — although perhaps sometimes to the chagrin of others.

When you implement ways of fostering connections that work well, make sure to add them to your list of things to continue doing when we all head back into our more usual workplaces; they may be just as effective or more so than what you were previously doing when physically congregated.

## Implement new working habits

Each person has a way of getting into their working rhythm. For some, it's blocking out a few hours with headphones in to draft that gnarly contract. Others need to discuss ideas with their colleagues on how to best advise on a regulatory change. The work processes underpinning those tasks have changed. Old habits serve us well, but maybe now is a good time to hit the reset button. Consider new ways of working effectively that could develop into new habits workable post-lockdown.

## Right space for the right kind of work

This may sound trite or even silly, but certain kinds of work lend themselves to being done in certain types of environments. Finding the right space for doing the right work can naturally increase productivity and quality of output — or may simply allow you to multitask. Working from home over a prolonged time period has made some of us inadvertently more willing to move around and work in different areas of the house to avoid distractions like television, children, pets, etc. And perhaps subconsciously we occasionally seek out those distractions. Using your laptop in the living room with

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some reality TV on in the background and the fun of your household bustling around you may not be a bad idea while going through routine administrative tasks like submitting your expense form or other relatively low concentration items. You then naturally reserve the serious study set up for reviewing tedious legislation and other to-dos that need a lockdown in isolation to get done.

There's absolutely no reason why you can't take this way of working back to the workplace. Ponder the different categories of work tasks you and your team members have and challenge people to consider what type of environment is best for doing it whether it be at their desks, in a borrowed executive office, downstairs in the foyer cafe, while out walking, etc.

Analogously, if you're a "white-boarder" in the office, then you may need to replicate some of your work environment in your home space to increase your productivity. Consciously turning your mind to your working environment can do a great deal to boosting your own morale and motivation.

## **Setting hard boundaries**

Working from home during this extended timeframe means the professional bleeds more into the personal. Home is now also the office. It is hard enough for people to set boundaries to maintain work-life balance and well-being with the physical separation between the spheres of work and play. Now that work is invited into our personal spaces it is even more important to ensure you and your teams are setting clear boundaries to ensure the longevity of team morale and effectiveness. Without the boundaries, your team will find themselves losing hold of their valued and necessary home/family/personal time.

Respect the time and personal space of all your team members and model that behavior yourself. While it may be tempting to finish reviewing that document straight after dinner, is it really going to make a difference if you pick it back up first thing the next morning? Now is the time to reset your personal boundaries. After dinner time may be better spent arguing with your partner on who is likely to win *Masterchef*.

Eating at your desk also becomes easier when working from home. You're more inclined to work for longer without getting up to stretch your legs or take a decent break from the screen. Be mindful that when you find yourself less focused, then that is a cue to take a break from your screen and get some fresh air outside.

While you start being more conscious of these work boundaries, this is an important practice to definitely take back to the office. Use this time to perfect what works best to separate personal and work time. It can become an enhanced habit when we are back at the office.

## **Zoom more!**

For those leading multi-functional teams, it can be all the more challenging to maintain your relationships and communications across all your different team members. Upping the communication channels and regularly checking in is time-consuming but so important to ensuring people remain supported and motivated. But not every Zoom (or whatever alternative technology tool you're using) call has to be video-enabled. We have already started seeing commentary about how exhausting it is for some people to be constantly on camera. Mixing up the communications between video and voice-only Zooms replicates the pre-COVID workplace. It also facilitates increasing channels to connecting and discussing issues with your teams without overdoing the in-your-face stress that video-chats can cause.

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In many ways, it has been quicker and more efficient to have a quick Zoom meeting to discuss issues that arise than it was in the office when a physical meeting needed to be booked days later to align calendars. This more agile way of working is one to maintain when we return to the office.

On a wider scale, using Zoom check-ins to provide targeted communication and broader employee support on company-wide initiatives is very helpful to achieving a collective connection to the organization's goals and purpose — which all still exist despite the changes to working environments. Maintaining a sense of purpose for team members is vital to ensuring positive team morale and high performance. Make sure you are taking time with your teams to reflect on the impact their work continues to have on the organizational purpose and objectives. It is important for employees to see their leaders more in times of stress and for their leaders to be transparent about the challenges they are facing as well.

## Test and strengthen organizational/team culture and morale

Boards and management are notoriously trigger-happy when it comes to engaging external strategy consultants to formulate mission statements. But the challenge really lies in how these flowery statements of corporate virtue are genuinely brought to life through its people and measured through culture and morale. In times of economic crisis, actions speak volumes. Now is a time where if there are shaky foundations, cracks will start to show in a business. Strong team culture and morale are pivotal to repairing any cracks that appear.

**"Being connected to what we are doing as an organization makes me feel less like I'm riding solo, and more as though what we do is meaningful (especially as our members are so involved with community care at the moment)."**

— Nikki Howie, Legal Counsel, HESTA

To that point, there are widely known things that test the foundational strength of a relationship. For a new romantic relationship, that may be the first overseas trip you take together. For a marriage, it's renovating a house. For an organization and its relationship with its employees, the truth and authenticity behind its values and culture are certainly being tested by the coronavirus.

If team members were feeling disengaged or demotivated before, they will be more disengaged now. This can be observed by the level of effort individuals put into interacting with and supporting the rest of their team given the physical barrier of distance. When previously vocal employees are now silent soldiers, it's important to query and understand the impetus for the behavioral change. As a manager and leader, you should be using this time to observe your team to ensure the culture you have fostered remains healthy. As for morale ... not so much positive, but rather, stable. Listen carefully to the actions of your team and what picture they show of the underlying culture and morale. Make sure your team members know where they can get help if they need it.

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Teams and organizations with positive cultures will be operating as a united front. They will continue to work through business priorities, adapting fluidly to a changing environment. Clarity of organizational purpose is more important than ever in times of crisis. It is this clarity that fosters the unity of a team and builds resilience through challenging periods. This unity also ensures that individuals don't feel alone in their work since they are no longer physically sitting with others in an office. They can still feel like the work they're doing matters and makes a difference.

"Being connected to what we are doing as an organization makes me feel less like I'm riding solo, and more as though what we do is meaningful (especially as our members are so involved with community care at the moment)," says Nikki Howie, legal counsel of HESTA.

Furthermore, acknowledging and celebrating the contributions that do make a difference is a simple and important message. Acknowledge the success by sharing the details so that the acknowledgment is meaningful. Whether in the form of verbal acknowledgment or having a Zoom drink to celebrate together — embrace innovative ways of celebrating when physically separated to foster team well-being.

## Upskilling

With people adapting to a revised working norm, it may also be a good time to consider upskilling. That is, as a means of unifying a team, consider the collective strengths and capabilities met across your team and consider what areas could be improved upon. There is an abundance of e-learning modules being released across all industries by a multitude of service providers for people to take advantage of.

Investing in the development of your team has the added benefit of providing a commitment to their continued ability to contribute and add value — which nurtures team morale. There is a lot of corporate speak and communications circulating, with organizations asking employees to remain resilient and focused. Just as important is ensuring team members continue to feel valued and see a commitment from leaders in their continued growth with the organization.

Don't shy away from the professional development of your team if budgets are a constraint. You need to go to bat for your teams, and a key reason this is important from an organizational perspective, apart from building team morale, is for any potential deployments that may be necessary if your organization does potentially require changes to resourcing and staffing levels. It may be daunting to try and plan too far into the future, but implementing team learning and upskilling individuals right now is going to cover a lot of bases in the foreseeable future.

## Use your service providers for greater insights

Finally, on a slightly tangential note — external legal or legal technology businesses can be helpful in filling new gaps and needs. Use them. For example, many organizations have implemented hiring freezes, so those extra lawyers that were due to join the team are now on ice. The work, however, is not. It's not a matter of simply briefing out the work to external counsel, but thinking about how you might invest in your relationships with external partners to bring some capability in-house to support the team in the interim. And again, if it's a matter of budget, don't let that deter you. The roles on ice are perhaps being deferred to the next financial year. Funds are fungible; if the workload has not been deferred then there is an argument to expend dollars on external assistance.

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One useful example of this was in a technology platform that had been built by a HESTA service provider for another client. As it turns out, HESTA had the same business need for a similar platform and was considering more manual solutions. The service provider has since been able to facilitate discussions between their other client and HESTA to share knowledge and consider what solutions have been and would be potentially appropriate. These types of engagements happen in the usual course of business but are adding greater value now by removing the need for HESTA to go through a tender process or develop their own solution.

Reaching out to your service providers to broadly understand how they are adapting their service offering and what they can share about work being done with other clients can go miles in helping you short-cut the solution for issues you may be grappling with. The wider industry insight of external advisors is tremendously valuable right now as we all learn from one another in a difficult economic environment.

**The pandemic has created a new world for all individuals at a global level. It can be hard to see a silver lining while many of us try to put out multiple spot fires. But the silver lining is there: a routine disrupted. Not for a day or two. But for a prolonged — and undetermined — period of time. And as we all have come to accept, disruption yields newness.**

## **Coming out of COVID-19 enhanced and energized**

Harnessing connectedness, communicating more, strengthening team morale, effective working habits, upskilling yourself and your team, using service providers better — it all sounds like an enormous list of things to do in uncertain times.

The pandemic has created a new world for all individuals at a global level. It can be hard to see a silver lining while many of us try to put out multiple spot fires. But the silver lining is there: a routine disrupted. Not for a day or two. But for a prolonged — and undetermined — period of time. And as we all have come to accept, disruption yields newness. Improvements. Innovations. This is an opportunity to leverage the current disruption to our routine working lives to practice some behaviors, observations, and reflections to come out enhanced, energized, and united as teams.

**For more wellness advice during the lockdown, read the “Well-being During the Pandemic” column on ACC Docket’s website. [accdocket.com/articles/well-being-during-covid-19.cfm](http://accdocket.com/articles/well-being-during-covid-19.cfm)**

## **ACC EXTRAS ON... Staying positive while at home**

### **ACC Docket**

[How Technology Shrinks Our Fictional Divide and Fosters Positive Change](http://accdocket.com/articles/technology-shrinks-fictional-divide-and-fosters-positive-change.cfm) (June 2020).

[In-house at Home: Avoiding Burnout When Working from Home](http://accdocket.com/articles/in-house-at-home-avoiding-burnout-when-working-from-home.cfm) (June 2002).

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[How to Thrive in Uncertainty: Networking While Social Distancing \(June 2020\).](#)

ACC HAS MORE MATERIAL ON THIS SUBJECT ON OUR WEBSITE. VISIT [WWW.ACC.COM](http://WWW.ACC.COM), WHERE YOU CAN BROWSE OUR RESOURCES BY PRACTICE AREA OR SEARCH BY KEYWORD.

[Jorden Lam](#)



General Counsel

HESTА

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**Jorden Lam** is the general counsel of HESTA, an Australian superannuation fund for people working in health and community services.