

# Maintaining employee morale and team bonding during lockdown

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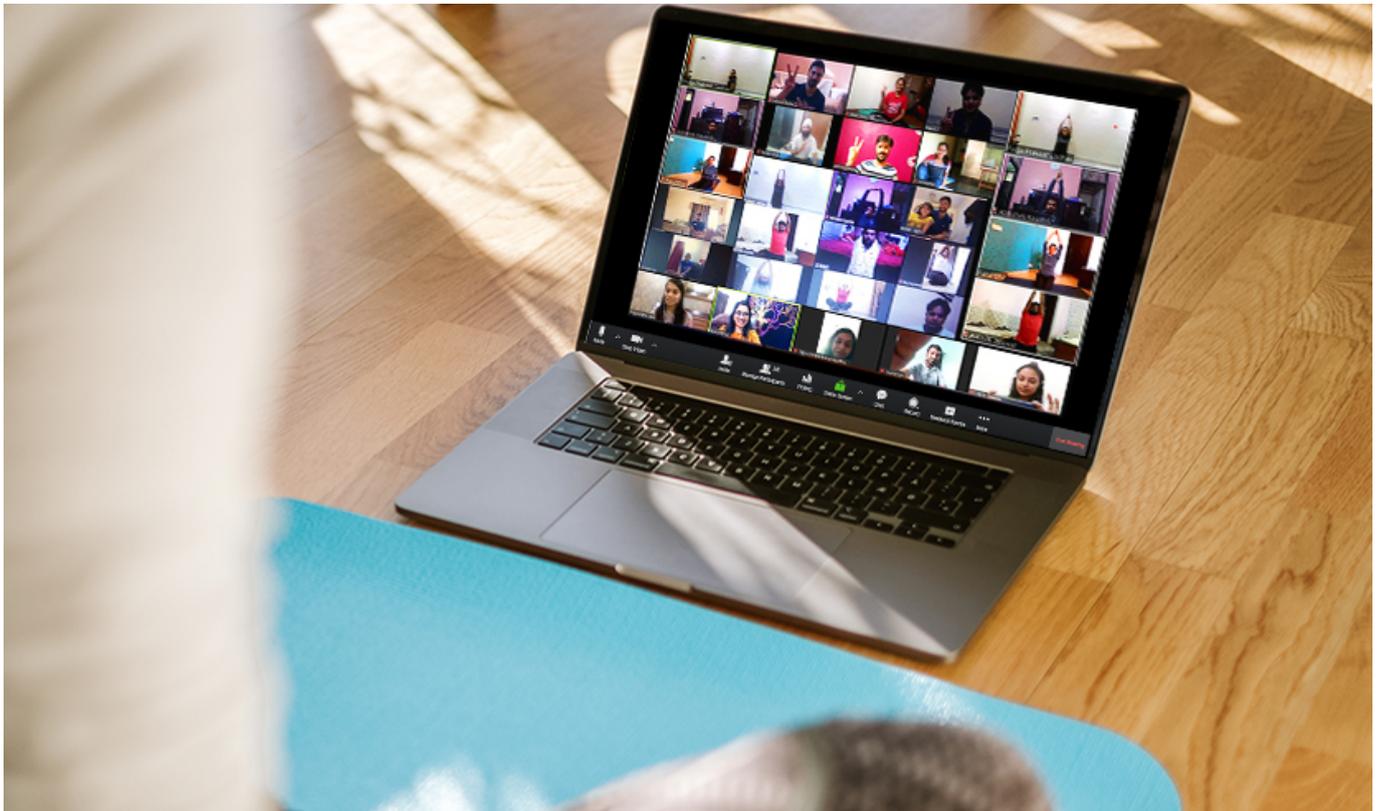
The COVID-19 pandemic has moved our offices to our homes, faster than expected. Unlike technology companies that were equipped to make this change seamlessly, Acuity Knowledge Partners (Acuity), being a financial services KPO, had never explored the work-from-home (WFH) option. That said, adapting to change and demonstrating agility in meeting client needs is in our DNA, and we did not want the pandemic to affect our client commitments; nor did we want to compromise the safety of our employees. Within Fund Marketing Services (FMS), we have met 100% of our client commitments in April, including peak quarterly requests, meeting deadlines and accuracy levels and supporting clients with additional ad hoc requests.

Bangalore, from where we deliver most of our FMS support to clients, went into complete lockdown on 24 March 2020. We had pre-empted this, and the organisation moved at lightning speed to ensure 100% of FMS team members had WFH facilities enabled by 23 March. This in itself was a remarkable achievement.

But wait, how do you manage individuals, work flow and communication, while ensuring deliverables are sent on time? All this had to be achieved taking into account the minor and major hardware and internet bandwidth challenges that crop up regularly. Not to mention managing work at home, taking care of one's own and the family's health, and ensuring the safety of parents and relatives, among other things. These are indeed stressful times for everyone.

That is when we realised that by moving everyone to WFH, we had completed only phase 1 of our challenge. The next phase was to create and enable a "virtual" supervision and team management process that covered the entire spectrum of a manager's responsibility at Acuity – fulfilling client SLAs, quality reviews, team meetings, training, welcoming new team members, tracking and reporting MIS and, most importantly, ensuring that we continue to talk, share, bond and stay motivated as "one team".

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Continue reading to know how we function as a team, despite not meeting each other every day...

1. **Creative substitutes for physical communication** – Unlike human presence to understand the nature of messages by reading body language, and the tone and style of communication, working remotely depends on one's interpretation of text messages and emails. To overcome this problem, our teams use WhatsApp for group chats and Slack to manage real-time communication and project progress.

2. **Fun and games** – To manage the sudden change in our working environment, we have undertaken employee-engagement initiatives to keep teams connected and spirits high. Our teams have, so far, engaged in the following:

- Theme-based games – Recitation of Bollywood movie dialogues
  - Online group games – Team members installed the Ludo King app on their phones to virtually challenge and compete with each other
  - Photo contest – A competition where all participants submitted photographs at ages 1 to 5 that were then shared with everyone to guess whose photos they were
  - Group fitness sessions – A virtual yoga session was conducted for those interested
  - Handwriting competition – To determine who had the most beautiful handwriting
  - Cooking contest – Employees cooked their favourite dishes and shared photos of these on social media, along with the recipes, tagging Acuity's official handles. The most-well-presented dish received an award
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Our Employee Engagement and HR teams help conduct activities for all FMS teams. These include quiz competitions, mental wellness talks, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and celebrating festivals online.

**3. Liberate and manage** – Our managers have developed custom-built time planning and other metrics based on the nature of work for each member of their teams. This has helped employees work towards goal completion, with the flexibility to change their work schedules and hours, while tracking utilisation. We understand the many distractions when working from home, especially keeping kids engaged during a lockdown. We have empowered our employees by giving them more responsibility and ownership, resulting in zero deadline breaches. We have also started “Appreciation Day” every Thursday, when managers highlight and congratulate teams and individuals for their contributions above and beyond their duties.

**4. Leveraging technology** – Our delivery teams are utilising applications such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Skype, Webex, Slack, and Microsoft Office One Drive to collaborate efficiently. Through such means, we continue to deliver quality work and stay connected with our clients and colleagues.

**5. Training and onboarding** – FMS senior management has collaborated with the Acuity Training and Knowledge Management team to compile courses and training sessions for managers and team leaders responsible for managing teams remotely. Managers have advised teams to be extra patient when coordinating with colleagues and dealing with technical challenges. To meet client demands, we are also continuing to hire and expand our teams, train new hires and onboard them virtually to maintain service delivery. Our HR team has put in place a robust virtual onboarding and offboarding process. We use online meeting platforms such as Skype, Google Hangouts and Zoom extensively.

**6. Video huddle and regular one-on-one meetings** – In addition to discussing updates, video interaction helps to ensure team members, especially those staying away from family, do not feel lonely or disconnected. Our managers are putting in extra effort to conduct one-on-one conversations more frequently, to address any possible issues as soon as possible; these could range from mundane issues such as accommodation and grocery deliveries to more critical ones such as connectivity challenges. This forum helps ensure our employees remain calm and composed in the prevailing circumstances. Clarity of direction and some assurance about the future from managers help employees maintain focus on the task at hand.

**7. Virtual tea/coffee sessions** – We generally underplay the importance of taking a break. Informal chatting and discussing things not related to work with your colleagues and friends are vital to staying motivated. Our teams organise virtual tea/coffee sessions to informally connect with friends, colleagues and groups.

Acuity Knowledge Partners offers request-for-proposal (RFP), consultant database (CDB), investment commentary and other marketing function support to leading asset managers globally. We have extensive knowledge and years of experience in supporting our clients through various economic and market cycles. Our service delivery has stood the test of time, navigating all business-impacting events in the past 15 years.

### **Client feedback -**

“We have been so impressed with your team and organization’s ability to adapt to this environment, and we appreciate your support and efforts as you continue to build out the team.

We are also supportive of you taking a creative approach to recruiting in the current environment within your organization’s protocols. We appreciate your continued commitment and dedication to providing

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solutions to our clients' needs”

### Team feedback -

“I am really enjoying the flexibility of managing work and kids at my pace. Interaction with the team has also helped me know I am not alone!”

“We have not faced any disruptions in our RFP and CDB deliveries. Kudos to the management, IT and Admin teams”



### About Acuity Knowledge Partners

Acuity Knowledge Partners is a leading provider of high-value research, analytics and business intelligence to the financial services sector. The company supports over 300+ financial institutions and consulting companies through a team of over 2,500+ subject matter experts who work as an extension of the clients' teams based out of various global delivery centres.

We empower our clients to drive revenues higher. We innovate using our proprietary technology and automation solutions. We enable our clients to transform their operating model and cost base.