

# Never work alone

## Work after the corona virus Radical change or back to normal?

**HR**  
From gutfeeling to scientific basis

**Open hiring**  
Less chance of discrimination

**Social security**  
The importance of social security

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## Never work alone

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## Colophon

ACV Kader is the network for professional and managerial staff within ACV. The framework has grown from the LBC-NVK, recently ACV Puls, but since 2018 also addresses managerial staff and knowledge workers who are affiliated at ACV BIE. This publication appears four times a year and is sent to all members.

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## Editorial

# Solidarity will get us through

Since the introduction of the coronavirus measures, I have filled in the University of Antwerp's COVID-19 survey on a weekly basis. It's objective is to determine how the Belgian population is feeling and behaving during the crisis. I consider each new survey on Tuesdays as a moment of (self-) reflection. I'm not so much interested in the questions about compliance with the social distancing measures as in the impact on our income and emotional wellbeing.

This weekly introspection has taught me to look differently at myself and my relation with my loved ones and colleagues. After all, the situation we are currently in also impacts our professional relationships. As a coach, I am more than ever aware of the importance of online group contacts as numerous colleagues who are working from home haven't seen each other for a long time. Individual conversations with team members have also taken on a new significance.

The contacts between ACV employees and members have also taken on a new dimension and make our work all the more meaningful. We do more than just provide legal advice and answer questions. The circumstances have forced us to listen even more attentively and become even more engaged in the challenges our members are facing: temporary unemployment, teleworking while caring for children, imposed wage cuts, imminent layoffs, etc. As one of my colleagues put it: "We can mean so much to our members! The workload is considerable, but a phone call to a co-worker or

member certainly makes a big difference. And that is very satisfying!"

To make an actual difference or to contribute to a warmer working environment, I can do little more than coach my colleagues. That's frustrating because it's not enough. I am concerned about the income and wellbeing of lots of people. That is why I have consistently and consciously included a call for action in the survey's empty field every Tuesday. A call for action to take structural measures on behalf of those who are most vulnerable in our society.

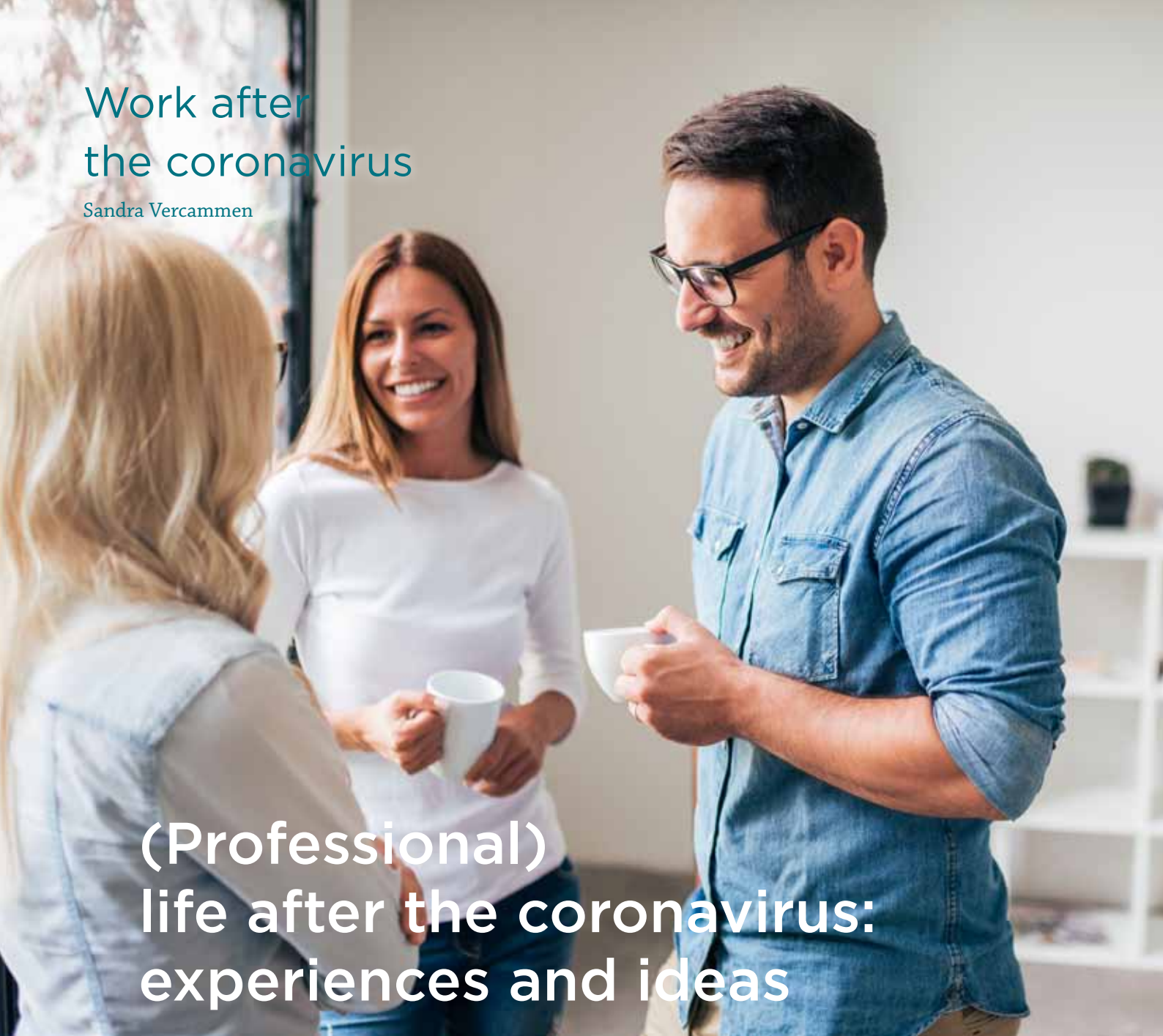
We are all vulnerable in some way or another. The theory that hard work always pays off has been debunked. No-one is immune for income loss or restructuring, unemployment or psychological problems. This has always been the case and will remain so in the future. If you believe otherwise, you're in for a rude awakening.

The only appropriate answer is institutionalised solidarity. It's true that is costly. Every month, I can see this on my pay slip in the form of taxes that help fund healthcare, childcare and other necessities. And in the form of the social security contributions that finance sickness and unemployment allowances, pensions and parental leave. I realise now more than ever that this is my contribution to a humane society, every day, every week and every month. Year in, year out.

[Sandra Vercammen](#)

# Work after the coronavirus

Sandra Vercammen

A photograph of three people in a bright, modern office environment. On the left, a woman with long blonde hair is seen from the back, wearing a light-colored top. In the center, a woman with long brown hair is smiling broadly, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and holding a white coffee cup. On the right, a man with short brown hair and glasses is smiling, wearing a blue denim shirt and also holding a white coffee cup. They appear to be in a casual conversation.

## (Professional) life after the coronavirus: experiences and ideas

What effect will the coronavirus have on our future? What will its impact be on (our outlook on) society and work? Will radical changes consolidate the effects of the crisis? We asked several professionals who have been interviewed in this magazine before (Prof. Dr. Peggy De Prins, Olivier Pintelon, Marc Van den Broeck, Tine De Moor and Sarah De Groof) for their opinion. Be inspired!



## A cooperative outlook on work

**Tine De Moor**

*Professor at the department for social and economic history of Utrecht University*

“Crises encourage us to try out ‘crazy ideas’. We often draw inspiration from history. Citizens’ collectives have been gaining popularity for several years now – ranging from energy cooperatives and community food systems to cohousing and care initiatives. They have overcome their teething problems and are becoming more widespread, since a cooperative approach could minimise the impact of the crisis. The unemployment figures will force us to redefine our outlook on work. Perhaps people will start ‘income pooling’, i.e. combining several small jobs or gigs. The gig economy has been growing significantly lately thanks to platforms such as Uber. But numerous cooperative platforms have sprung up as well. This phenomenon is relatively new, and a lot of issues concerning workers’ rights are still unclear. Thanks to the crisis, ‘platform co-ops’ may develop into a valid alternative to platforms that give little or no consideration to workers’ rights. In addition, the interest in workers’ co-operatives, which were popular in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, is growing as they may provide a solution for companies that are no longer able to raise fresh capital. It has happened, although not very often, that employees have taken over a family business to ensure its continued existence. This, however, presupposes that such a business is operated entirely differently. There are plenty of examples that show it’s possible. The conclusion is that citizen participation in policy and politics is a hot issue at the moment. The crisis may result in citizen participation playing an important part in the business world too.”



## Social dialogue as a lever

**Prof. dr. Peggy De Prins**

*Faculty & Academic Director 'Master in HRM', 'Future of Work' Exertise Center 'Next Generation Work'*

“We are all looking forward to returning to business as usual. Yet at the same time, we are put off by the new normal. What if it turns out that our job is no longer what it used to be? What if the combination of work and family life suddenly becomes more complicated? I also have questions and concerns. I’m a bit worried that ‘back to business’ will soon turn into ‘back to problems’. However, I am convinced that social dialogue can be a powerful lever to overcome the crisis. The principal challenge we are all facing is tackling the crisis in a spirit of solidarity and partnership, starting from our common (and not opposing) interests. We will have to engage in dialogue on the basis of progressive insight. Stubborn adherence to an initial point of view conflicts with the current, unpredictable and challenging reality. This is true for both parties: employers as well as employees. We need to set good objectives for ourselves: new, collectively supported agreements on topics such as workload, telework, training and sustainable careers. New arrangements on physical, mental and social hygiene can also breathe new life into the (post) coronavirus dialogue.”



## Right to disconnect and work less

**Olivier Pintelon**

*Core member of Minerva think tank and author of 'De strijd om tijd' (The battle for time)*

“My wife and I have been combining telework with child care for several weeks now. It’s far from easy, despite the commuting time savings. You cannot be 100% employee and 100% parent at the same time. I have the impression that this ‘second shift’ of unpaid labour has long been ignored in politics and in society. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, the amount of time spent caring for young children was 20 hours for men and 32 hours for women. These numbers have without a doubt increased significantly since formal childcare, care provided by grandparents and other helplines are no longer available. Winston Churchill famously said: “Never let a good crisis go to waste”. I hope the current crisis will put the mismatch between paid and unpaid labour more prominently on the agenda, just like the right to disconnect. The line between work and private life has blurred, with all that this entails. The digital age we live in forces us to make new arrangements concerning working time limits. In addition, a 30-hour working week could make work in the healthcare sector more attractive and sustainable. Examples from Scandinavian countries have demonstrated that this is a win-win for health professionals and patients alike. Finally, a shorter working week could help address the healthcare crisis as well as the economic crisis. In case telework is impossible, reduced working hours could help keep the virus under control.”



## Telewerk remains the norm

**Sarah De Groof**

*Substitute lecturer at KU Leuven and senior consultant at Acerta*

“When I wrote this, we had been under (semi) lockdown for nine weeks. Like many other people, I had to juggle family life and telework in those nine weeks. But it also allowed me to have lunch and play board games together with my family. I discovered what my seven-year-old son is being taught at school and came to the conclusion that I don’t mind if my five-year-old daughter doesn’t cut straight. What have I learned from all this? I’m glad I had to juggle. European research institution Eurofound surveyed over 85,000 European citizens prior to 30 April. The survey showed that mostly young people are feeling lonely. Those who did not / could not work were most tense. Another conclusion was that Belgians teleworked considerably more and lost fewer working hours than other Europeans. I therefore hope that telework has made a breakthrough, but not in its current form. There is a limit to the juggling, both for me and for my employer. We should therefore begin to shape telework 2.0. Even coronavirus expert Marc van Ranst is planning to telework more with his team in the future.”



## Digitale coaching: here to stay, but in moderation

**Marc Van den Broeck**

*Career Development Centra Manager*

“Do I miss my colleagues? More than ever. I even miss the coffee at the office. And yet I’m not afraid to say: ‘Thank God for the coronavirus.’ From one day to the next, a career coach’s job changed completely. Although explanation and assistance had sometimes been provided via video chat and we had experimented enthusiastically with new tools, low priority used to be given to webinars, blended learning, LinkedIn and microtargeting. All of a sudden, we had to offer all these things. And we succeeded. Digital coaching is here to stay, but in moderation. Of course, the situation has had other consequences as well. The threat of layoffs, employers making a fuss about sick leave, economic unemployment, telework, remote management: employees rely on a career coach to address new work issues. What are my preferences? How do I approach this? So there are plenty of reasons to prepare your next career step together with a career coach. It is the ideal opportunity to try out a video chat tool.”

# HR according to “A Skeptic’s HR Dictionary”

Vic van Kerrebroeck



## From gut feeling to scientific basis

Suppose you have suffered from inexplicable abdominal pain for some time. You go to your GP who refers you to a gastroenterologist. You assume the latter will examine and treat you on the basis of the latest medical findings and not rely on his gut feeling (no pun intended). Then shouldn't you expect the same in an entirely different context, which may also give you a stomach ache: your working environment?

According to HR expert and author of “A Skeptic’s HR Dictionary” Patrick Vermeren, the sad truth is that you cannot just assume your employer, manager(s) and HR team will base their decisions on robust and reliable scientific research. Learn more about Vermeren’s struggle against the many myths, lies, hypes and half-truths that have plagued the labour market and his argument for an evidence-based HR policy.

### **Vermeren’s crusade**

Patrick Vermeren, who is also a journalist and board member of Belgian sceptical organisation SKEPP, has made it his life’s work to challenge HR practices that cannot deliver what they promise and can even cause major damage. (He wrote “A Skeptic’s HR Dictionary” in part in response to the tragic loss of a relative who blindly believed in pseudoscience .) Armed with an impressive arsenal



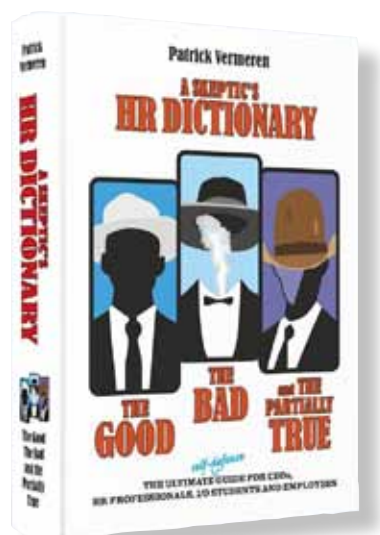
of specialist literature from various disciplines, Vermeren guides you through various theories and practices that companies use to make their human resources more productive and thus maximise profit, but that in reality have not been sufficiently substantiated or proven. The author is very critical of the discipline which, with a few exceptions, does not stand the scientific test: psychology.

Various topics are addressed in the book. Which factors should companies that hire new staff really take into account? What are the best practices for enabling people to manage change? What does it mean to be an impactful leader? What are the facts and myths about self-managed companies where there is supposedly no hierarchy? How to enable employees to acquire knowledge throughout their career? Is there such a thing as effective coaching? Which characteristics and evolutionary patterns result in which types of behaviour in the workplace? These are just a few of the questions which Vermeren answers in his one thousand plus page book. He draws the conclusion that people are essentially still driven by latent primeval instincts. They determine to a large extent how someone will behave in a particular context towards their peers. These conscious or unconscious motives can cause managers, colleagues, HR consultants or other people, who are inherently neither good nor bad, to do a lot of damage to their working environment. This happens frequently and results in a great deal of human suffering.

### Trade union's finger on the pulse

As a trade union, we aim to assist employees with our expertise in finding solutions to the problems they are faced with in their working environment. We gladly debunk useless theories that are harmful to employees and their motivation (the principal resource in our knowledge-based economy). An employee organisation is primarily based on values which many employees support, and we have no need for the current HR nonsense. On the other hand, we gladly introduce theories that are sufficiently substantiated and create added value into the thousands of organisations where we are involved in social consultations.

We can make use of new psychological insights to better achieve our objectives as a trade union. We therefore have to continue developing our expertise, keep a finger on the pulse and establish connections on the basis of shared analyses. If we want to remain a future-oriented employee organisation, we also need to be aware of the risk of biologically flawed thinking and act with appropriate humility. Practical experience and "A Sceptic's HR Dictionary" have shown us how extremely complex human beings and interpersonal relationships are. Continuously learning, asking questions and entering into dialogue are the preconditions for an employee organisation to make progress towards a working environment where every individual is treated with respect. Personally, I can hardly imagine a more useful mission.



Vermeren does not make it easy for the reader. The book is very bulky (which testifies to the thoroughness of the author's analysis) and presents a host of hypotheses, propositions, argumentations and comparisons. But the satisfaction is all the greater if you succeed in taking it all in.

# Hiring and selection

Lieveke Norga



## Open hiring: more opportunities, less chance of discrimination

Don't you feel like doing the same job for the rest of your life, but do you find applying for a new job a time-consuming and nerve-racking process? Are you looking for new talent for your team, but have you experienced that expensive assessments do not predict the chance of a good match as well as they should? This year, the municipalities of Ghent and Mechelen have begun experimenting with open hiring.

### First come, first served

Open hiring was first conceived in the 1980s at Greyston Bakery, an American producer of brownies and other baked goods. The aim was to play a connecting role within the community and to give equal opportunities to every motivated applicant. Instead of having applicants go through an extensive selection procedure or attaching great importance to their level of training and specific experience, application forms were arranged in chronological order: the first applicant got a call. No longer interested? Then it was the next applicant's turn. This alternative selection procedure has been adopted by a lot of other companies.

### Optimistic outlook

Initially, the recruitment concept was mainly popular among employers who idealistically

wanted to create employment opportunities for groups who often faced discrimination. But nowadays, in a tighter labour market, it may become more widespread. This strategy constitutes evidence of an optimistic outlook, a willingness to invest in opportunities and a rejection of the belief that an employee's character and qualities can be analysed, objectified and assessed on the basis of a few tests or interviews.

The selection costs which employers save through open hiring can be invested in training and coaching of recruits, who are highly motivated to begin employment but are still lacking some technical skills.

Open hiring attracts employee profiles who cannot rely on their CV, but just want to show what they have to offer. The first months of employment are a mutual trial period.

The city of Mechelen has developed a platform that has attracted numerous prospective employers who want to give open hiring a chance, ranging from Het Anker Brewery to Absolem, an engineering consultancy firm. It remains to be seen whether we will be hearing of this approach once the coronavirus crisis ends.

## A reminder of the importance of social security

The coronavirus has seriously shaken things up. Several months after the start of the outbreak, it has become difficult to imagine the period before the lockdown. That was a time when people still greeted each other by shaking hands or even kissing, when we still met at a café or restaurant, and when we were able to enjoy a live performance, football match or play. Unfortunately, we cannot do any of these things at the moment, but of course these inconveniences are nothing compared to what COVID-19 patients, caregivers and the friends or relatives of victims have had to endure. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic has also had a positive effect. The awareness that social security is crucial has been growing everywhere. To ensure that the momentum is maintained, ACV has launched a campaign to strengthen our social security system. In this article, we will discuss it in detail and share testimonials from blue-collar and white-collar workers as well as executives who have become (more) conscious of the importance of a social safety net.



## Strengthening the social security system after the coronavirus crisis

“Never before in recent history has the value of social security proved been so obvious,” says Sandra Vercammen, general coordinator of ACV Kader. There are numerous examples of this. The applause for health professionals is also a sign of support for the system as a whole. We have relied on the government in great numbers to keep our heads above water or absorb the financial shock to a greater or lesser extent. Compensation for loss of income softens the blow for the self-employed and business owners. Temporary unemployment and coronavirus parental leave make the difference for countless employees.

“Social security has suddenly become highly visible and tangible,” Sandra continues. “More than ever, it connects people from different backgrounds, as we are all in the same boat. We want to support this widespread appreciation for the social security system and make sure it does not ebb away soon.” With this aim in view, ACV launched a campaign to strengthen the social security system in May. Via Puls Magazine, the membership magazine of ACV Puls, posters were distributed to highlight the importance of social security. We asked every member to put up the posters in prominent places, and they now adorn countless windows and doors throughout Flanders. These lovely posters are also displayed on notice boards at companies to draw attention to the issue.

Of course, the timing of this campaign is no coincidence. “Once the coronavirus crisis is over, social security will remain a necessity, not least because we will feel the impact for a long period of time,” Sandra explains. It is in everyone’s best interest that the government continues to invest in healthcare and a social safety net. Admittedly, this is costly, but recent events have shown that it is well worth the investment. Social security has protected our people and our economy from much worse consequences. Those who want to cut social security spending had better think twice and take a look at other countries where this shock absorber is lacking or much smaller.”

**Want to know more about the campaign?  
Then have a look at [www.acv-puls.be](http://www.acv-puls.be).**

## What has changed for Mieke, Jannie and Lies

Everyone has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis, and government support has been most welcome for many Belgians. Mieke, Jannie and Lies share their experiences of the past few months.

Mieke (41, manager at an advertising agency): “Over fifteen years ago, I started out as a project assistant at a communication agency, changed jobs every couple of years and eventually became manager of a sizeable team. I love my job, but in our industry everything revolves around the figures. When our activities took a nose dive a few weeks into the lockdown, the temporary unemployment system was a real lifesaver for me and my colleagues. I had never received unemployment benefits before, but layoffs would have been inevitable without this option. I definitely see the point of social insurance.”

Taking coronavirus parental leave has been a great help for Jannie (36). “Working from home is not always easy in the banking sector. Since our IT networks are highly secured, there are few tasks we are allowed to carry out from home. As soon as the schools closed, my husband had to take care of our children on his own – and this situation lasted for several weeks. Especially with the increased allowance, the possibility of taking coronavirus parental leave has been a great solution for us.”

Lies (34, copywriter at a communication agency): “The coronavirus crisis has caused a lot of our customers to spend their advertising budget more prudently, as a result of which we saw a decrease in our workload. Fortunately, we have been able to fall back on the system of economic unemployment. Most of my colleagues have been forced to make use of this system for two days a week over the past few months. Our industry is quite hard, and I think very few members of our team had ever considered the importance of support measures, let alone the possibility of ever relying on these measures themselves. But the crisis has been a wake-up call and has made everyone experience how crucial a social safety net actually is. In addition, we did not really have a teleworking culture, but now the management also realises that it works perfectly well and that it may benefit the work-life balance.”



## Lots of questions from our members

Over the last couple of months, our inbox has been flooded with messages from members who have been hit unexpectedly hard by the coronavirus crisis. We have received countless questions from blue-collar and white collar workers as well as executives, and would like to share some of these with you. We hope to demonstrate that you are not alone in this crisis. In addition, these messages may inspire you to share your concerns with us. Do not hesitate to contact us!

“I work at PC 200 and am temporarily unemployed due to the coronavirus crisis. What arrangements have been included in the CLA with regard to hospitalisation and collective insurance, the Christmas bonus and profit participation in case of temporary unemployment due to the coronavirus?”

“Hi, I’m in charge of three retail businesses. Our company will soon reopen, but the managers want to keep several colleagues on the dole a little longer. Is that allowed? And if so, for how long? Does a particular percentage need to get back to work? Thanks in advance!”

“Good morning, I work as a consultant and fell ill at the beginning of April. I have just received my payslip and I have noticed that do not get any pay

from my employer for my sick days. The payslip states: 88 hours of sickness ‘during temporary unemployment’. The client I’m currently working for did not at any time deny me access and my employer did not inform me at all about my temporary unemployment. I only learnt about it when reading my payslip. Is my employer allowed to do so? And if this is allowed legally, how can I receive wages or benefits for those days? Thanks in advance!”

“Hi, due to the coronavirus crisis I have been working from home full-time for nearly two months. I have learnt that the employer can pay an allowance for office-at-home costs ([www.rsz.fgov.be](http://www.rsz.fgov.be)). Is this an acquired right? I work as a legal professional at an estate agency (building management sector). Thank you for your reply.”

“First of all I want to thank you for your hard work in this period! My employer applied for temporary unemployment from 13 March onwards, but since then we have had several online meetings about the situation and approach (so far, five hours in total) and he also expects us to follow up on our emails and phone calls on a daily basis. We do not receive any pay for this. Does this comply with the rules? Thanks in advance!”

“As an executive, I work full-time. Due to the exceptional coronavirus circumstances, my salary has been reduced by 25% at the request of my employer. Is that allowed?”

**Do you have any questions? Feel free to contact us at [acv-kader@acv-csc.be](mailto:acv-kader@acv-csc.be) or via the contact button at [www.hetacv.be](http://www.hetacv.be).**

# Collegial bond

Lieveke Norga



## Informal contact between colleagues: crucial to our wellbeing

If the COVID-19 measures forced you to work from home in the spring of 2020, you may have become (more) aware of the importance of high-quality relations between colleagues. A survey among over 8,000 of our members has revealed that no less than 42% of home-based employees miss informal contact between colleagues. The most unpleasant aspects of the coronavirus crisis turned out to be the uncertainty as to the duration and the substantially different work situation. The major impact of good contacts with colleagues on our professional wellbeing is well-known, but we would like to take this opportunity to highlight this insight once more. After all, high-quality and supportive relations between colleagues do not come about of their own accord: they need to be developed and invested in.

### **Collegial bond: important, yet not self-evident**

The interpersonal aspect influences how we feel at work in various ways. Did you know, for instance, that this factor is often more important for our wellbeing than an optimum work-life balance? More than a source of social contact, a warm collegial bond provides a lot of support in terms of the

work itself. Colleagues who trust each other rely on one another to find solutions to problems.

Like no other, your colleague knows how much work you do and what difficulties you had to overcome to complete a particular task successfully. This enables you to share positive emotions as well as setbacks or frustrations.

But such a bond does not come about spontaneously. You share a common background with your family, while friendships are the result of more or less conscious choices. You can't choose your co-workers. You work together with people who have diverse profiles, various communication styles and particular ambitions and who sometimes come from different cultures. It is naive to expect that this diversity will automatically dissolve into a professional rapport. Good working relations are an asset that is well worth your space, attention and time.

### **Efforts to be made by the employee as well as the employer**

It's not a matter of course for you and your colleagues to understand each other, but you can do your bit. You can establish a rapport by showing interest, asking questions and listening without judging. You contribute to a pleasant atmosphere by paying attention to your colleagues' workload and by sharing your knowledge. Clearly communicating what's troubling you also helps to bring tensions out into the open.

However, individual good intentions are often not sufficient if the employer fails to create a climate that structurally focuses on collegial relations. An occasional team-building activity may be fun, but it is not nearly as important as the formal work organisation. Do you have sufficient time and space to pay attention to one another? Are mutual help and knowledge sharing encouraged or discouraged? Does the employer take your interdependence into consideration when setting individual objectives? Do the bonus and assessment systems guarantee that you don't have to assess each other or that one co-worker is not set against the other? Are there any initiatives that promote personal contact with international colleagues you seldom see in person? Does the employer enable groups who work together as colleagues but have a different legal status (e.g. permanent workers and freelancers) to establish a rapport or does he play them off against one another?

### **Key topic in social dialogue**

As an employee organisation, we consider the connection between colleagues as our core business. It is our job to connect employees with each other

and to serve as a platform for sharing concerns and creating support for improvement proposals. Moreover, not only do we seize the opportunity of social dialogue to create space for high-quality and supportive relations between colleagues, but we also rely on relations and consultations to achieve a constructive and result-oriented social dialogue. We firmly believe in this approach.

## **Guy Bleyenbergh, employee representative at AXA Bank**

“After about two weeks of lockdown, we thought it was high time we make our voice heard as a trade union. We normally communicate with our members on a monthly basis, but this time we sent out a message to all colleagues. In doing so, we tried to hearten them and express our trust in the employer's efforts. Afterwards, we conducted a survey among our members and asked them the following questions: How are you? How do you experience the current situation? What has gone right or wrong? One hour after sending out the survey, we had already received a quarter of the replies. The response rate was excellent and the input was positive. We provided the participants with feedback on the results of the survey and with a few tips. In view of the lack of contact with co-workers, which weighed heavily on many employees, we advised them to plan a five-minute informal one-on-one Skype meeting every now and then. We repeated this initiative a few weeks later. We wanted to encourage colleagues to show understanding for each other's situation. If you're at home with young children, you may be more irritable than usual. And if you spent the past weeks on your own, you are probably in need of a chat. Moreover, it is important to share your concerns. In all probability, you are not the only one in that situation. This way, we make it possible to talk about these issues and find a solution together.”

### **Never work alone**

Quarterly ACV-magazine  
for professionals and managerial staff

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