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## COVID-19

**Productivity Management while Working Remotely**

# Productivity during COVID-19

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a sharp increase in people doing their jobs remotely. A top priority for most organisations during this time has been to ensure business continuity. Engaged and productive employees can be an organisation's greatest asset. Consequently there has been a rising interest in how to remotely manage employee productivity to achieve optimal performance.

Productivity does not automatically translate from the physical world of work to the virtual world. While virtual teaming reaps many benefits, it also presents a higher risk of misalignment and lack of collaboration, which can take a toll on team trust and employee engagement if not done right; all of which will impact team productivity. A key principle in improving productivity is removing clutter for teams - reducing the number of meetings, managing multiple technologies and minimising distractions.

In order to effectively manage productivity in your organisation, leaders must embrace virtual working as the new normal and **redefine what productivity looks like**[1] in this environment. In most cases, productivity does not mean working longer hours –

it's about finding ways to produce greater value in the same amount of time.

This is an unprecedented time for many organisations, therefore it is important to note that no one solution fits all when it comes to productivity. Leaders should consider taking a broad approach, which involves adopting leadership behaviours to motivate individuals to achieve maximum results. It involves having the right collaboration tools in place to benefit your team, and using methods that allow you to effectively oversee progress in work tasks. Take thoughtful action and if one method does not work for your team, try another. Consider the views of your team when determining how to monitor productivity remotely during COVID-19. There may be individuals with prior relevant experience to share.

## Top takeaways

- Productivity may not present itself in the same way now, as it did prior to COVID-19

- Leaders need to redefine what productivity looks like for your team

- There is no one size fits all solution when it comes to monitoring productivity. Be willing to try different methods to find the right one for your team

- Remove clutter for teams where possible, such as unnecessary meetings and admin

## Key considerations

- How would you define productivity for your team?

- How did you measure productivity before COVID-19?

- Have you discussed this with your team? Do you know what their biggest challenges are right now?

- Are your team members still hitting their milestones? E.g. meeting deadlines for reporting.

1 Forbes, 2020. 'Here's What To Do When You're Feeling Unproductive'

# Leadership behaviours that enable productivity

Leaders need to think, act and react differently to lead high performing teams in uncertain times; to create clarity, capacity and commitment across virtual and onsite workplaces.

**Act as a virtual role model for your team**
Demonstrate commitment to the success of remote working. Energise your team by reminding them of their shared purpose and vision. Be accountable for engaging your teams and making work meaningful. Engaged employees are more productive.

**Effectively allocate and monitor tasks remotely**
Set goals for each week, and agree them with your team. Ensure objectives are understood; ask team leads to play them back to you to be sure. Be clear on deadlines, and avoid being overly ambitious. Seek employee feedback while setting tasks, to understand what is achievable. Your team will have greater focus on tasks at hand when they know what is expected of them and have been included in planning of shared deadlines.

**Offer appropriate support resources**
Provide support to enhance virtual new ways of working and improve employee experience. Create tailored solutions to help resolve the specific needs of your team.

**Get to know your team**
Don't underestimate the power of social interaction. People are more productive and engaged when conversations with leaders and peers aren't solely focussed on business. Understand that remote working may have different impacts on each individual in your team. As a leader, the more empathetic you are the more motivated your team will be to perform their best.

**Intentionally design collaboration and work experiences**
Understand your team members' time limitations and commit to and document them; work with them to best increase their autonomy and preserve their well-being. Understand that the workforce spans five generations and includes varying levels of technology fluency when considering using new tools.

# Monitoring employee productivity

Productivity is typically one of the most difficult things to measure. Striking a balance between monitoring employee productivity and allowing them space to be autonomous can be challenging. A number of ways in which productivity can be virtually managed, in combination or in isolation, are outlined below:

• **Monitor work outputs.** At the start of each task, agree a desired output with your team member. Monitor progress against this output on an ongoing basis in an identified tracker (% complete).

• **Use online collaboration tools** (such as a virtual KANBAN* board, virtual task list etc.) to keep track of tasks that are outstanding, in progress and completed across the team. Ensure progress is visible to your team, to encourage productivity towards a shared goal.

• **Establish feedback loops.** Hold short feedback sessions every fortnight to pulse check how your team are finding their workload, identify any challenges, and discuss how it could be improved.

• **Select your online status accurately.** Encourage your teams to use their Skype / Microsoft Teams / Zoom status to accurately reflect their workload at any given time. This will allow team members to concentrate without distraction if they are 'busy', and indicate if they are 'available'.

• **Keep tabs on employee wellbeing.** Productivity and wellbeing are intrinsically linked. Wellbeing is a top priority for many organisations today, as it is a key driver of individual and organisational performance. Take time to regularly check in with your team members, creating a psychologically safe environment for them to express concerns that may be having an impact on their job.

We would encourage leaders to avoid focussing solely on measuring productivity based on 'time spent' on a particular task. While time tracking can be useful for leaders to gain transparency and tangible insights into productivity, you may run the risk of demotivating team members if they are monitored too closely.

*Sample KANBAN tools are provided on page 5

# A potential approach to remote productivity management

### Monday

- Hold a 30 minute team meeting at the beginning of the week to outline priorities for the week ahead

- Run through a task list adding any emerging priorities

- Set due dates and allocate owners to all tasks, to ensure accountability

- Ask owners to playback the tasks if in doubt

### Wednesday

- Hold a mid week team meeting to monitor progress on tasks

- Consider using an online KANBAN board (evaluate if items in the task list are to-do, in progress, or done) to visualise progress

### Friday

- Hold a wash-up session at the end of every week to tick off completed tasks

- Flag any un-complete items as a priority for the following week

- Celebrate what the team has achieved this week

## Use an online platform to organise and prioritise tasks in a way that is visible to the whole team

**Sample KANBAN tools:**

Trello

Microsoft Planner

Microsoft Teams

# Trust your team

When leading remotely, you cannot lead everything at once. Instead, you will need to build trust and empower your team to take action and learn from their mistakes. Teams cannot reach maximum productivity without a level of trust to work autonomously. Building trust in your teams will create an opportunity for your people to explore new ideas, act fast, and make decisions for themselves – all of which have positive effects on productivity. It will empower your people to do their job, knowing that their unique contribution is valued.

To achieve high performance, we suggest that you strike a balance between monitoring performance and instilling trust amongst your team. It is important when establishing trust that leaders are accessible and establish open channels of communication for questions or concerns. Leaders should also play an active role in carefully guide teams to make choices which focus on work outcomes.

**Tips for employees to boost their own productivity**

### Establish a good work-life balance
Virtual working means you are often 'always-on' and always connected. Take regular breaks during the day to keep your concentration strong. Find a routine and try to stick to certain work hour parameters to reduce risk of burnout. Refrain from sending emails outside working hour parameters. Put a 'delay' on your emails if the content is not urgent, until the next working hour/day. This will encourage your peers to also maintain the work-life balance needed to recharge.

### Use your calendar for 'time-boxing'
Block out your calendar with tasks that you need to complete. This will encourage you to stick to your plan and finish items that are on your to-do list. It will also indicate to your managers and peers that you are engaged, and help minimise distractions from people interacting with you.

### Set yourself boundaries
There is a difference between being 'busy' and being 'productive'[1]. If you find yourself in back to back meetings every day, and unable to complete your to-do list, speak to your manager. Meetings should be brief and effective, with adequate amount of time left to complete the work itself.

1 Forbes, 2020. 'Here's What To Do When You're Feeling Unproductive'

# Further reading

Deloitte, 2020. 'The heart of resilient leadership: Responding to COVID-19'

Deloitte, 2020. 'Global Human Capital Trends'

Deloitte, 2020. 'Meaningful work increases productivity: A Boston Business Journal series'

Deloitte, 2020. 'Building trust during COVID-19 recovery'

Deloitte, 2020. 'The chemistry of trust: 8 ways to build more of it'

Deloitte, 2020. 'Leading virtual teams'

Deloitte, 2020. 'COVID-19: Practical workforce strategies that put your people first'

Deloitte, 2015. 'Becoming irresistible: A new model for employee engagement'

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