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The modern workplace is rapidly changing. Although the traditional 9-5 workplace still exists, an increasing number of organizations are shifting towards a blended or entirely remote workforce. Thanks to the Internet and the explosion of cloud-based business tools, the way we work has transcended physical barriers and opened doors to new and exciting opportunities that were unheard of not too long ago.

However, with innovation and change come new challenges, including employee engagement and visibility into how their time is being spent.

To keep pace with dynamic new workforces, management strategies need to adapt.

This guide includes:

1. What’s driving the remote workforce and what it means for organizations
2. The unique challenges in remote workforce management to be aware of
3. Management tactics to maximize remote worker productivity while ensuring cybersecurity and data privacy compliance
What’s Driving the Remote Workforce Trend?

The trendline of the remote workforce has been growing exponentially. The types of flexible work arrangements have diversified and now include telecommuting, hot desks, flex-time and the gig economy powered by domestic and offshore freelancers and consultants. But what are the root causes behind the trend?

There are a number of factors driving the global growth of the remote workforce. According to a 2015 commissioned study by UpWork, the primary drivers cited by hiring managers were shortage of talent, greater interest among workers, emerging technologies, and increased globalization.¹ These drivers also highlight the varied and significant benefits that remote workplaces offer to employees and organizations alike.

Leading drivers of flexible workforce models:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>driver</th>
<th>percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shortage of talent</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater interest among workers in pursuing flexible work arrangements</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emerging technologies (AI, robotics, blockchain, etc.)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased globalization</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of hiring managers agree that companies are embracing more flexible teams as compared to three years ago

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1. **Shortage of Talent: Bridging the Talent Gap with Remote Employees**

Globalization and rapid advancements in technology have created enormous demands for specialized skill sets, especially in technical fields. Remote workers are widening the talent pool, helping to fill these crucial recruitment gaps.

According to the Global Talent 2021 report by Oxford Economics, many parts of the developed world have failed to keep pace in meeting the supply for these high-demand skill sets.\(^2\) While many initiatives are in place to help “re-skill” the workforce in these regions, efforts have largely fallen short. Added to this problem is the nearly 41.7% decline in fertility rates in G7 nations over the past 70 years, coupled with a rapidly aging workforce. These factors combined have resulted in a dramatic slowdown in talent replenishment rates.\(^3\)

### Leading markets for annual talent growth from 2010 to present:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% growth 2010–2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Oxford Economics


Growth in the college-educated talent pool for E7 and G7 countries:

Source: Oxford Economics

While talent growth in the United States has fallen behind, college-educated talent from the top 7 emerging markets (Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia and Turkey) will more than double that of the developed world — producing an estimated 217 million workers by 2021 in contrast to 143 million from developed regions.
Talent growth in developed regions has fallen behind:

- USA
- Canada
- France
- UK
- Italy
- Japan
- Russia
- Germany

Waiting for supply to catch up to demand is not a realistic solution, especially during periods of strong economic growth. **How, then, can businesses bridge these deep talent gaps?**

The answer is in expanding recruiting efforts beyond national borders to tap into alternative, emerging market talent pools. Remote employees can fill the gap to provide the skills that businesses need now.
2. Interest Among Workers: Flexible Work Options Are in High-Demand and Can Improve Employee Engagement

In addition to bridging the talent gap, remote work also fulfills high demand amongst top talent for more flexible work options. Studies and surveys in recent years show that remote work is more than just a trend, and rather a growing demand among workers across every industry. In fact, Buffer’s annual report on The State of Remote Work found that 99% of the 2,500 workers surveyed desired to work remotely. By offering remote and flexible work options, employers are better positioned to attract top talent, even in niche and high-demand skill sets.

The high-demand for remote work options:

Question: Would you like to work remotely, at least some of the time, for the rest of your career?

99% Yes 1% No

State of Remote Report, 2019

Top-ranked companies implement remote work policies

Furthermore, The Great Place to Work Institute recently published its annual report on the World’s Best Workplaces in 2019. A close examination of the participating organizations reveals that 60% of top-ranked companies actively implement remote work policies in their organizations. These policies enable them to attract and retain top talent and while creating competitive opportunities for their firms.

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3. Emerging Technologies: Efficient Solutions Are Enabling Remote and Blended Workforces

Another dynamic driving the increase in remote workers is the evolution and adoption of new technologies. The proliferation of software applications has made working remotely dramatically easier and more efficient for workers and employers alike. The emergence of the cloud infrastructure, in addition to free and low-cost SaaS applications like Google Suite, Slack, Microsoft Office365, Jira and others promote effortless collaboration between team members residing in different geographic regions, thus removing previous barriers to talent. Not only are these platforms widely available, but they’re in high-demand amongst modern business professionals. According to a 2019 survey from SoftwareAdvice, business professionals favor tools that are centralized and empower collaboration.

Most used features in collaboration software:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chat/Messaging</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File Sharing</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document collaboration (edit, track changes)</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity feed, project progress</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View team members' online status</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion forums/group boards</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>View profiles for project or users</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge base</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User @ mentions/notifications</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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With the rapid advancements in cloud-based collaboration solutions, technology now provides a solution to nearly any workplace activity — even those that would traditionally require employees to work on-site. Meetings can now be held via video conferencing platforms; hallway conversations can occur in Slack channels and even tactile activities like real-time whiteboarding can happen with software tools like Miro.

In addition, software tools for business managers have made significant advancements. It’s now easier than ever for managers to track employee activities and overall team productivity using user activity monitoring, behavioral analysis and project management systems.

In 2020 and beyond, remote work doesn’t have to mean working alone. Employers can leverage emerging technologies to empower remote employees to stay engaged, collaborative, and productive without compromising the visibility of their actions to management.
4. Increased Globalization: Remote Workplaces Meet Global Customer Service Demands

Access to high-speed internet, WiFi hotspots, video conferencing, project management tools and instant messaging platforms has made working from anywhere at any time not only a reality, but a key component to business survival. With a global marketplace comes global customer service demands.

Agility has become ever-critical as the business and economic landscapes tightly integrate and become interdependent. Shifts in one market can drastically affect others. Furthermore, it is no longer sufficient to offer business hours convenient to an organization’s home market. All markets must have a coverage plan, including leveraging workers who can keep the business running around the clock, whether a physical office is open or not.

The Remote Workforce Revolution:⁷

86% Remain connected via instant messaging apps as well as telephone
82% Monthly face-to-face meeting with their line manager(s)
81% Speak with their remote workers several times each week
66% Use IT systems that track and measure their levels of work activity
66% Use IT systems that track and measure their productivity
65% Video calls at least once a week

Because of these dependencies, having a dispersed workforce helps organizations mitigate risks by improving responsiveness with resources available around the clock.

5. **Emergency Response:** Pandemics and Natural Disasters

When communities are faced with unexpected catastrophes, such as global pandemics or natural disasters, managers must react quickly. These unexpected events can compromise health and make it unsafe for employees to either leave their homes, congregate in groups, or commute to work. Under these circumstances, organizations have a responsibility to ensure the safety of their employees by allowing remote work.

**Catastrophes and events with negative impacts that can be mitigated by remote work policies include:**

- Pandemics
- Epidemics
- Endemics
- Wildfires
- Earthquakes
- Floods
- Snow and Ice
- Hurricanes

The global coronavirus outbreak is a recent and notable case study. The pandemic has infected nearly 100,000 people and caused 3,000 deaths across 60 countries over the course of only four months (data current as of March 2020). To prevent the spread of this virus through person-to-person contact, organizations around the world have implemented remote work policies. This has allowed firms across a wide variety of industries to take preventative measures that protect their employees’ health and safety without halting operations entirely. Notable companies who have implemented remote work in response to the coronavirus pandemic include IBM, Goldman Sachs, PwC, and Stripe.

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Using a more localized case study on natural disasters, the bushfires across Australia in November 2019 prompted government officials to declare a state of emergency. While much of the media coverage at that time focused on the devastating effects to local wildlife and infrastructure, the air quality in many areas also rose to hazardous levels. To mitigate the risk of smoke inhalation while commuting to work, many Australian companies instructed employees to work from home until it was safe to commute to their offices again.

Enabling remote work allows businesses across a wide variety of industries to continue operations without compromising the health and safety of their employees during global crises and catastrophes.
6. The Impact of Remote Work for Employers

The benefits of remote work to both professionals and employers alike are numerous. Remote employees tend to express better work-life balance due to less time wasted commuting, flexible work schedules that decrease conflicts with other commitments, and an overall less stressful lifestyle. Many remote workers also cite experiencing less distractions during work hours such as meetings, coworker interruptions, and in-office noise.

Flexibility at work has also been associated with increased employee retention rates and higher productivity levels compared to non-remote workers. Recent research from Gallup, notes that workers who spend about three to four days of the week working offsite are substantially more engaged in their jobs than their counterparts who work in offices. Studies have proven that an engaged employee is less likely to leave his or her role.

The positive impact of remote work cultures:

**Question:** How would you rate your company in the following areas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Permitted (%)</th>
<th>Not permitted (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee moral/satisfaction</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall workplace culture</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Base: 17,000 business professionals aged 16–64
Source: GlobalWebIndex Work 2019

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Conversely, disengaged employees are more likely to leave — resulting in some hard financial costs for organizations. In fact, Gallup recently found that each disengaged employee could cost a business 34% of their salary. Overall, employees who are considered “actively disengaged” cost the U.S. anywhere from $483 to 605 billion each year in lost productivity.

The real cost of disengaged employees:

According to Gartner, by 2020, organizations that support a “choose-your-own-work-style” culture will boost employee retention rates by more than 10%, thereby also decreasing the associated high costs of staff turnover.

Actively disengaged employees in the U.S. = $483-605 billion annually.

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Remote work options help attract and retain top talent while improving employee engagement, which can result in cost savings equivalent to 34% of each employee’s salary.
3 The Unique Challenges of a Remote Workforce

While there are clear advantages to using a remote workforce, this new dynamic also poses unique challenges that many employers and managers struggle to overcome.

In this section, we’ll explore some of the top challenges facing remote employees and their managers, including:

1. Unclear productivity and accountability
2. Breakdowns in team communication and collaboration
3. Heightened cybersecurity and data compliance risks
4. Employee isolation and mental wellness
5. Difficulty achieving and maintaining work-life balance
1. Unclear Productivity and Accountability

With the ability to work from anywhere, at any time, how can managers baseline remote worker productivity and ensure priorities and projects stay on track? Keeping remote employees consistently productive and accountable to business objectives is a key concern for many organizations, and challenges managers to find new tools and techniques that can accurately measure and boost productivity while recognizing and rewarding high-performers.

Productivity and Accountability Challenges for Remote Teams

Project management and task prioritization

Without the benefit of face-to-face guidance throughout a project lifecycle, remote employees may struggle with daily time management and task prioritization. This could lead to inefficient workflows, missed deadlines and other costly consequences for the organization.

Management tip: Use data to analyze your remote employee workflows and guide, evidence-based opportunities for improvements.

Performance measurement and tracking

Because of the lack of in-person facetime, remote employees often have fewer interactions with their managers and team members. That can, in turn, lead to decreased visibility into their performance or potential workflow bottlenecks. To adapt, managers need new strategies and technologies that can provide this visibility.

Management tip: Use employee monitoring software like ActivTrak to gain visibility into remote employee performance.
Adherence to company policies
Remote employees are more likely to lack sufficient training on company policies including those outlining telecommunication, security and compliance rules and expectations. Managers of remote workers are also more likely to have limited visibility into their remote employees’ adherence to these policies.

Management tip: One of the most important things is for employees and employers to understand that they are all in this together, and have shared responsibilities’ to make remote work productive. Remote work policy essentials should include clearly defined expectations around working hours and maintaining productivity levels, as well as being safe and secure where work is happening.
2. Breakdowns in Team Communication and Collaboration

Despite emerging technologies, remote teams may face breakdowns in communication, particularly when team members are operating within different time zones. Language and cultural differences can also factor in for global teams. Additionally, there may be an even higher risk of breakdowns in communication for junior-level remote employees who feel less comfortable voicing their ideas or asking for support. Managers of remote teams must face the unique challenge of creating and maintaining effective communication across their dispersed teams.

Key Communication and Collaboration Barriers

Establishing strong relationships
Remote employees may have a harder time building rapport with distant coworkers. They also lack the benefit of socializing with coworkers outside of work. In a 2018 study commissioned by Slack, 85% of on-site workers want to feel closer to their remote colleagues.¹³

Management tip: Support your remote team members with clear communication policies, guidelines and training that can help establish a culture of open communication, regardless of location.

Blended team communications
For blended teams, those including both remote and on-site employees, managers are tasked with ensuring that all their direct reports feel equally supported and respected by their colleagues. According to research by authors Joseph Grenny and David Maxfield, 52% of remote workers feel that they are treated unfairly by their on-site counterparts.¹⁴

Remote employees often feel left out:

% who are agree with survey statement

1. Colleagues don’t fight for my priorities

2. Colleagues say bad things about me behind my back

3. Colleagues make changes to a project without warning me

4. Colleagues lobby against me with others

Management tip: Ensure that on-site and remote employees have equal access to support and launch team-building initiatives to increase cohesiveness.

Managing and avoiding misunderstandings

Global distributed teams may encounter cultural differences that lead to misunderstandings, cause conflict, evoke tension, and hinder productivity and teamwork. Even when all team members communicate in the same language, misunderstandings can still occur with non-native speakers.

Management tip: Proactively support employees through communication training, remote team-building, and clear conflict management techniques and processes that can be effectively used when misunderstandings arise.

3. Heightened Cybersecurity and Data Compliance Risks

Despite its many benefits to business professionals and employers, the remote workforce has created added cybersecurity and data compliance risks. Remote employees may lack sufficient compliance awareness and training and access to the same level of cybersecurity protections found in traditional offices.

Cybersecurity and Data Risks in the Remote Workplace

Unsecured public and personal WiFi networks

Location flexibility is a key benefit to remote employees, but this same benefit also poses a threat to a firm’s sensitive data. When employees work at coffee shops or in other public spaces, company data is at a heightened risk for hacking or phishing attacks.

Management tip: Design and socialize cybersecurity policies that include remote employee considerations. Ensure your team is well educated on the various risks and consequences of certain actions regarding sensitive data.

Theft device and information privacy in public

In addition to accessing unsecured networks, working in public spaces makes remote employees more vulnerable to theft of their devices. Without sufficient awareness and preparation, remote employees may also not realize that bystanders can see and overhear conversations regarding a company’s sensitive data while they work in public.

Management tip: In addition to creating new policies, consider ways to support and guide remote employees in setting up secure home work spaces.
Personal device usage and unsecure file transfer

In a study by Cisco, 45% of telecommute workers admitted to using personal devices for work.¹⁶ This is an alarmingly high percentage, given the lack of cybersecurity software and measures deployed on these devices. Even more concerning is the possibility that employees may transfer and privately keep a firm’s sensitive data without detection. This, along with the frequent use of unsecured networks creates significant security and data compliance issues for organizations.

Management tip: Educate remote workers on the risks associated with personal device usage and file transfer, and reinforce corporate policies around the handling of sensitive data.

4. Isolation and Mental Wellness Concerns

The appeal of location independence and perceived freedom can quickly become a downside for many remote workers when they are isolated from their teams. Without face-to-face interaction with peers or opportunities to socialize outside of work, loneliness, anxiety and overall morale can negatively impact remote worker performance. In 2017, a joint International Labour Office and Eurofound report found that 41% of remote workers reported high stress levels, compared to just 25% of office workers. Individuals, managers, and organizations need to be aware of the potential mental health risks of remote work and take proactive measures to prevent their impact on remote employees.¹⁷

Mental Wellness Challenges for Remote Workers

Loneliness while working from home

According to The State of Remote Work, 21% of remote employees cited loneliness as their top concern. Additionally, in a recent study by Cigna, 46% of all adults reported feeling alone “sometimes” or “always,” and found that employees experiencing loneliness are more likely to take sick days and less likely to be committed to their work.¹⁸

Management tip: Management tip: Leverage communication tools like Slack and Zoom to encourage daily communication between remote team members, offsetting feelings of loneliness in their roles.

Motivation and morale

Although many studies find that the majority of remote workers are able to stay motivated at home, each worker is unique. For some, especially extraverts who are energized by the


company of others, remote work can be more challenging.

Management tip: Establish recruiting, hiring, and onboarding processes that ensure candidates are a good fit for remote roles.

Achieving work-life balance

With the ability to work from anywhere, it can become easy for remote workers to lose track of time and struggle to unplug from work. In fact, according to a survey by Remote.co, 40% of remote workers said that unplugging after work hours was their biggest pain point.¹⁹

Management tip: Use data from employee monitoring software to identify and support employees who are at risk for work-life balance issues such as burnout.

Despite these challenges, remote and blended workplaces provide numerous benefits to both workers and their employers. And, with the number of remote workers increasing by 159% between 2005 and 2017, it's clear that remote work is here to stay.²⁰

But how can managers adapt?
We’ve identified 5 remote workforce management tactics that address these challenges head-on and capitalize on the benefits of remote workers.

4 Top 5 Remote Management Tactics that Work

It’s clear that remote workforces are here to stay and this trend will continue to expand due to worker preferences, talent supply gaps and global business demands. In order to reap the benefits, and overcome the challenges of a remote workforce, organizations must continue to refine workplace policies, processes and tools to accommodate this ever-evolving work landscape. Building on the research outlined in this guide, we’ve developed 5 specific management tactics you can use to ensure an effective, productive and sustainable remote workforce.

1. Establish open communication policies for remote work
2. Evaluate support systems and fully integrate software tools
3. Track productivity to understand how remote work is completed
4. Prevent cybersecurity and data compliance risks from open perimeter devices
5. Coach with data to prevent burnout and work-life balance issues

These five tactics are important to address now, but also must be continuously evaluated and optimized to ensure processes, policies and tools facilitate success of remote workers.
1. Establish Open Communication Policies for Remote Work

Many organizations lack specific, formal remote work policies and guidelines, thus forcing remote employees to rely on standard policies designed to accommodate on-site workers. This can cause misunderstandings, workflow bottlenecks, and frustrated or disengaged remote employees.

In the 2019 State of Remote Work report by Owl Labs, remote workers said that the biggest communication challenges they experienced were interruptions and being talked over in remote meetings (67%) and IT issues during meetings (59%).²¹ Another common complaint made by remote workers who use teleconferencing technologies such as GoToMeeting and Zoom, is dealing with noise associated with “side-bar” conversations that happen amongst colleagues in the same room. These side-bar conversations make it difficult to hear, decipher, or interpret important pieces of information that is shared by the presenter. Fortunately, this can be easily resolved with clear communications policies and guidelines. Onsite employees likely don’t exclude their remote colleagues intentionally, but simply aren’t aware of how to accommodate them.

Another area of concern for remote work is the slow transition to digitizing business documents and centralizing communications. When information and communications are scattered or difficult to find, remote employees can struggle to stay connected or productive. This issue is tricky as it often requires teams to implement new software and workflow processes. Collaboration and project management platforms like Slack, Jira and Github can help modernize processes in a remote-friendly way and encourage teams to be more flexible in the way they work with both on-site and off-site colleagues.

To support remote and blended workforces, create and socialize remote-specific communication policies and centralize communications whenever possible. Specific training can also help blended teams recognize and overcome challenges to work better together.

Take Action: Analyze Operations of Dispersed Teams

To learn which operational processes may create bottlenecks, test them with remote employees and collaborate on adjustments needed for improvement. Some of this information can come during direct conversations with employees, but will lack the real data insights needed for true workflow visibility. ActivTrak's ActivConnect lets you integrate user activity data collected with popular BI data visualization tools such as Tableau and PowerBI. With ActivConnect, you can slice and dice your data to identify key patterns, analyze trends and understand remote employee workflows in comparison to the workflows of on-site workers. Leveraging activity and productivity data will help you identify key areas of your operational policies that need to be adjusted to better support remote worker productivity.
Benefits of analyzing operational processes:

- Discover gaps in productivity due to mismatched operational policies
- Leverage activity and productivity reports to learn remote work behavior
- Compare productivity levels across geographic locations or remote teams
- Establish remote policies and measure their effectiveness
- View insights and results of newly implemented operational processes and tools
- Analyze work patterns and optimize for on-going improvement
2. Evaluate Support Systems and Fully Integrate Software Tools

A remote workforce introduces new and varied workflows and specific technology requirements. To ensure the success of your remote workforce, evaluate and continuously monitor your infrastructure to identify and respond to bottlenecks that can impede a remote worker’s productivity. In a 2019 study conducted by Regus, 86% of remote worker participants said that they stay connected to their organizations via instant messaging application and 65% engage in video conferencing at least once a week.²² Given the impact of these tools on productivity and collaboration, it’s essential to ensure that business tools are properly working and centralized.

How remote employees stay connected:

- 86% of remote workers stay connected via instant messaging apps
- 65% engage in video conferencing at least once a week

Integrating systems and tools

Remote workers are often the ones who uncover poorly integrated systems and processes that can negatively impact productivity. This can include accessibility issues due to insufficient VPN bandwidth, issues with applications that don’t function well outside the firewall perimeter, or insufficient collaboration software tools. Make sure to establish processes and open communication lines that enable remote employees to report issues.

You can also use software like ActivTrak to quickly identify these bottlenecks with a team’s own user activity data.

Typically, remote employees will set up their own home office systems, including downloading the standard business applications they use for their roles. During this process they may discover that these apps are painfully slow to load, sometimes don’t work at all or require additional permissions for access which can slow productivity to a crawl. More often than not, remote employees will use more cloud applications that are unsupported by the organization in an effort to bypass insufficient tools and get their work done another way.

**Apps most commonly leveraged by the remote workforce:**

- Slack
- Zoom
- ActivTrak
- Asana
- Collaboration 101
- G-Suite
- Dropbox
- Wi-Fi Map
- Evernote
- Every Time Zone
- Calendly
- Microsoft Teams

Discovering which tools and processes are inefficient or sparsely used can help you make informed decisions that will boost team productivity. ActivTrak can provide user data insights to help locate where employees are getting stuck and how they can resolve bottlenecks to get work done. When an employee is working remotely, for example, you can identify which company applications are actually being used, which are restricting workflows, and which can be eliminated to streamline operations and reduce associated license costs.
Take Action: Identify Workflow Bottlenecks in Operational Systems

Struggling with how to monitor the user experience of your remote workers and identify any operational challenges? Poorly integrated systems and processes that hamper employee productivity can be resolved easily with the right tools. ActivTrak, a cloud-based workforce analytics and productivity solution, provides real-time visibility and data insights that help you identify where employees are getting stuck and how they can eliminate bottlenecks to get work done. You can use ActivTrak to easily identify workflow hurdles and opportunities that can streamline processes and improve your team’s productivity and boost work outputs.
By monitoring user activity, ActivTrak allows you to:

- Uncover which company applications are restricting workflows
- Identify frequently used unproductive websites or applications and set usage limits and alarms
- Understand remote employee collaboration processes and tools and how they are used
- Discover how much real time is spent using tools relevant to a remote employee’s role
- Track the effectiveness of new operating system deployments and verify which systems were updated and which were missed
**Take Action:** Analyze Application Usage to Manage Costs

Uncovering every application being used compared to the licenses and subscriptions you pay for across your remote workforce is critical to improving your team’s productivity and your organization’s bottom line. ActivTrak lets you easily take inventory of all the programs being utilized by every employee, giving you better control over costs and license allocation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Photoshop CC 2019</td>
<td>12:09:34</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Fusion XD</td>
<td>12:47:32</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sketch App</td>
<td>10:33:41</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figma App</td>
<td>06:52:23</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeplin</td>
<td>07:31:03</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Office</td>
<td>05:35:13</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle</td>
<td>04:49:35</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinema 4D</td>
<td>03:45:41</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Illustrator CC 2019</td>
<td>03:34:25</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maxwell Render 3.5</td>
<td>03:28:50</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MixR (Oct. 2020)</td>
<td>03:14:27</td>
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Taking inventory of programs enables you to:

- Understand what types of applications and websites remote employees use most
- Learn which cloud applications remote employees use and analyze trends
- View application and website usage logs to determine how many licenses you actually need to pay for
- Optimize application costs by discovering which are efficient to operations and which can be eliminated from your stack
- Uncover poorly performing software or low systems usage patterns
3. Track Productivity to Understand How Work is Completed

The rise of the remote workforce has brought heightened focus on the need to monitor output and ensure productivity is consistent amongst dispersed team members. It is increasingly important to get answers to “how do you work?” instead of “are you working?”. Tracking productivity via regular team syncs, one-on-one meetings and other methods are being used by managers to stay informed of progress made on projects and to ensure employees are staying focused on the right tasks and priorities.

In the Flexjobs annual survey, 65% of remote workers said they are more productive in a home office vs. a traditional business office setting. Although there are many other studies confirming this belief, analyzing employee productivity is complex, and tracking it has been a bit of a mystery. Definitions of employee productivity vary by organization, by industry, by department and even across individual roles. Often, there are no real benchmarks available to help managers understand what defines a productive employee, much less how to measure productive work behavior. Additionally, you may have concerns about how time is spent when employees are out of sight, as is the case with remote workers.

With the right software tools like ActivTrak, employee productivity and the completion of desired work outputs can be easily measured, analyzed and improved.

**Take Action:** Analyze Remote Worker Productivity and Accountability

ActivTrak makes it possible to supervise any number of employees regardless of where they are located. It’s a team effort between remote employees and managers to stay accountable and make time for routine check-ins to ensure there is a continued effort to stay aligned. Start the process of improving productivity by measuring user activity. ActivTrak lets you assign “Productive” and “Unproductive” labels to logged activities. These productivity values are given a standard set of colors that are visible on all reports and screenshots.
With ActivTrak, you can:

- Get an accurate picture of each employee’s engagement. With Productivity Reports you can see how much productive and unproductive time was recorded.
- View productivity data by users to identify top performers and less productive members on your team.
- Use Activity Logs and Screenshots to understand employee work patterns and where time can be better allocated and schedules optimized.
- Gamify operations and encourage friendly competition with a Top Groups leaderboard.
Take Action: Increase Visibility and Accountability

It’s natural to have concerns about how remote workers spend their time since you’re unable to physically see what they are working on. ActivTrak’s reporting agents continuously run in the background of users’ computers, meaning every action is recorded and uploaded to the Dashboard, giving you accurate insights into what your remote workers are actually working on. Using real data analytics from ActivTrak, you’ll also have clear visibility into how your team or department utilizes time as a whole.
Analytics from ActivTrak help you:

- Understand work durations and trends for both remote and in-office employees
- View productive and unproductive time spent to develop best practices for your team
- Compare workload patterns to identify potentially overworked or underperforming employees
- Track tasks and hours and correlate with costs for outsourced or remote teams
- Use the data insights to optimize teams, processes and workflows to better achieve business objectives
4. Prevent Cybersecurity and Data Compliance Risks From Open Perimeter Devices

The growing volume of remote workers has expanded the security perimeter beyond what many organizations can effectively handle. The safety and security of an organization’s internal network is as important as safeguarding the externally-facing firewall from cyberattacks. Remote employees, contractors, freelancers and third-party suppliers have access to an organization’s IP, customer data and other sensitive data as part of conducting routine business. Organizations put security policies and protocols in place in an effort to secure its data, but complexity arises with identifying insider threats and negligent handling of sensitive data across the organization. According to a report by Shred-it, 47% of business leaders said human error had caused a data breach at their organization.²⁴ This striking statistic has increased the need for businesses to address these unique security and compliance challenges head-on with more dynamic approaches.

In addition to data breaches, there are specific laws in place that govern how an organization can legally handle sensitive data, such as Europe’s GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and California’s new CCPA (California Consumer Protection Act). Failure to comply with these laws can lead to costly fines and severe damage to your company’s reputation. As an example, in the course of daily activities, employees will inadvertently share sensitive data, which then gets passed around via email trails and instant messaging tools. The practice is quite common, but not intentionally vicious.

How, then, can you effectively minimize this risky behavior? User behavior monitoring software like ActivTrak can help you uncover risky remote worker behaviors that put security and sensitive data at risk so you can swiftly take preventative and corrective action. Screenshot redaction, for example, protects sensitive information from being shared inadvertently by automatically blurring the sensitive data captured within a screenshot. With user activity monitoring software, you can also proactively block access to websites that could introduce malware, and set alarms that will alert you when suspicious employee actions occur.

Take Action: Uncover Compliance and Security Gaps from Offsite Access

ActivTrak provides not only data, but also insights and context so you can understand employee behavior and the intent behind specific actions. ActivTrak’s technology allows you to discover certain behaviors of remote workers that could be especially risky to compliance laws and security policies so you can instantly take corrective action.
With ActivTrak’s cloud-based User Activity Monitoring application, you can:

- Secure sensitive data from being shared using screenshot redaction
- Flag screen content that introduces data compliance vulnerabilities
- Prevent access to distracting websites and terminate unapproved applications
- Review screenshots and video recordings for instances of data compliance issues
- Receive notifications when an employee deviates from standard operating procedures
Take Action: Identify Accidental and Malicious Insider Threats

It’s important to understand your employees’ typical work patterns. Having a clear understanding of what is routine and what is an anomaly can help you pinpoint harmful and risky activities. By reviewing reports and screen captures in ActivTrak, you can easily locate any suspicious behavior.
With ActivTrak, you can:

- Quickly review activity and alarm logs to detect potentially harmful activity
- Inspect users’ screen activity captured in screenshots and video recordings
- Configure risk scores to denote suspicious activities and users performing those activities
- Use data insights to identify gaps in security policies and fix vulnerabilities
- Set alarms to track user behavior considered suspicious or risky
- Configure email or external alerts (such as Slack) so you’re immediately notified when suspicious activity occurs
- Terminate prohibited applications when accessed by a user
5. Coach with Data to Balance Workloads

While studies have shown the many benefits associated with remote work, we have also explored the various unique challenges facing remote and blended workforces. One of those challenges include work-life imbalances brought on by more frequent transitions between work and personal priorities throughout the day. With a blended lifestyle, remote workers can easily lose track of where they are spending their time.

In a study by PWC of the Future of Work, more than half of the respondents strongly agree that they seek work-life balance—yet only 34% say they’ve attained it.²⁵ It’s not uncommon to hear remote workers talk about how they love the flexibility of working from home, or from anywhere, but complain about working longer hours or forget how to unplug. Certain roles require collaborating with teams across different geographic time zones, thus requiring longer or odd work hours. This could include being available to attend meetings and video conference calls into the late hours of the night or over the weekends, among other inconveniences. This can be difficult to navigate as remote workers struggle to maintain their personal lives and achieve an optimal work-life balance.

Some managers may rely on employees to communicate when they need help with work-life balance, but this is largely ineffective. Employees may not realize they are struggling until it’s already a problem, and they might not ask for help at all, fearing negative responses. Instead, managers must be proactive by relying on data that can indicate workload imbalances.

Use employee monitoring tools to enable remote workers to track their hours, while helping them understand how to work smarter to achieve the same results in less time.

User activity monitoring software like ActivTrak helps employees understand where they have spikes in working hours, identifying unproductive gaps where time can be better allocated. You can then use data insights from reports as coaching opportunities to drive engagement, change staffing levels (including using data to provide a business case for additional budget needed) and redistribute project tasks to level team workloads, boost success and proactively prevent burnout and turnover risks.

**Take Action:** Identify and Coach Overworked Remote Employees to Reduce Turnover

Use ActivTrak to understand and manage remote employee activities, analyze patterns, and identify bottlenecks. Then, use insights gained from out-of-the-box reports and dashboards to coach your remote employees and help them reprioritize their schedules. ActivTrak lets you track employee working hours, analyze behavior patterns to identify anomalies, and flag signs of disengagement.

Here's a sample report that shows work trends:
With ActivTrak, you can:

- Leverage Productivity Reports to understand applications and websites employees routinely use and where their time can be better allocated
- Measure activities to benchmark time needed for individual tasks
- Consult User Risk Scores to understand which employees are becoming disengaged
- Uncover sources of distractions such as entertainment and social media websites
- Locate spikes in workloads to identify potentially overworked remote employees
- Use data insights as coaching opportunities to drive engagement, adjust staffing levels and redistribute project tasks
The digital workforce transformation has made remote and virtual employment a reality for many workers around the world. The state of remote work has improved during the last decade for a variety of reasons including advancements in cloud technologies, changes in values regarding work-life balance by both employees and employers, flexibility preferences, and more.

All signs point to exponential growth of remote work during the coming years as talent gaps widen, technology solutions for remote workers become more powerful, and work preferences (especially those of Millennials and Gen Z) evolve. As global crises like pandemics and natural disasters arise, traditional organizations will be forced to explore remote work as an option to protect employee health and safety. As a result, it’s clear that management strategies and employee policies need to adapt and include remote work considerations as soon as possible.

Organizations and managers must continue to refine remote work policies, processes and tools to improve workflows, boost productivity, secure data, ensure compliance and promote employee engagement to achieve better business outcomes. Looking for an immediate solution with long-term impact? Create a free ActivTrak account and start improving your remote workforce now.
Final Takeaway: 8 Steps to Improve Remote Work with ActivTrak

1. **Analyze Operations of Dispersed Teams**
   Use ActivConnect to analyze employee behavior and identify areas for operational improvement.

2. **Identify Workflow Bottlenecks in Operational Systems**
   Get real-time visibility into employee behavior to identify and document bottlenecks and streamline productivity.

3. **Analyze Application Usage to Manage Costs**
   Take inventory of all the programs (including cloud applications) utilized by every employee for improved cost planning and license allocation.

4. **Analyze Remote Worker Productivity and Accountability**
   Manage employees with ActivTrak, and assign “Productive” and “Unproductive” labels to logged activities.

5. **Increase Visibility and Accountability**
   Leverage ActivTrak’s reporting agent that continuously runs in the background and see exactly how employees are spending their time.

6. **Uncover Compliance and Security Gaps from Offsite Access**
   Understand employee behavior that could compromise security along with the intent behind their activities to take the appropriate action.

7. **Identify Accidental and Malicious Insider Threats**
   Review reports and screen captures to locate any suspicious behavior.

8. **Identify and Coach Overworked Remote Employees to Reduce Turnover**
   Track employee behavior, analyze patterns and identify bottlenecks, then use the insights to coach your remote employees.
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