



Monitoring productivity when working remotely

One of the key challenges faced by line managers with remote teams is the ability to know exactly what your team are doing throughout the day.

In the office it's much easier to get a sense of productivity levels — you notice whether someone is away from their desk a lot or appears distracted and a quick chat will help you understand why.

But this is much trickier to navigate in a remote environment. Some companies are choosing to tackle this through technology — using surveillance software to monitor system usage, keystrokes and webcams. These methods have attracted criticism, however, over their effect on employee trust, privacy and mental wellbeing, not to mention the risk of tribunal claims if employees don't consent to monitoring (or worse, don't even know it's happening).

So, if monitoring employees' webcams and laptop use is not for you, how do you maintain oversight of productivity without micro-managing?

This article will provide tips and guidance on monitoring productivity and dealing with performance challenges remotely, including:

“How do I know they're working when I can't see what they're doing”
“They keep telling me they're busy but the reports say otherwise”



Ensuring performance expectations are aligned



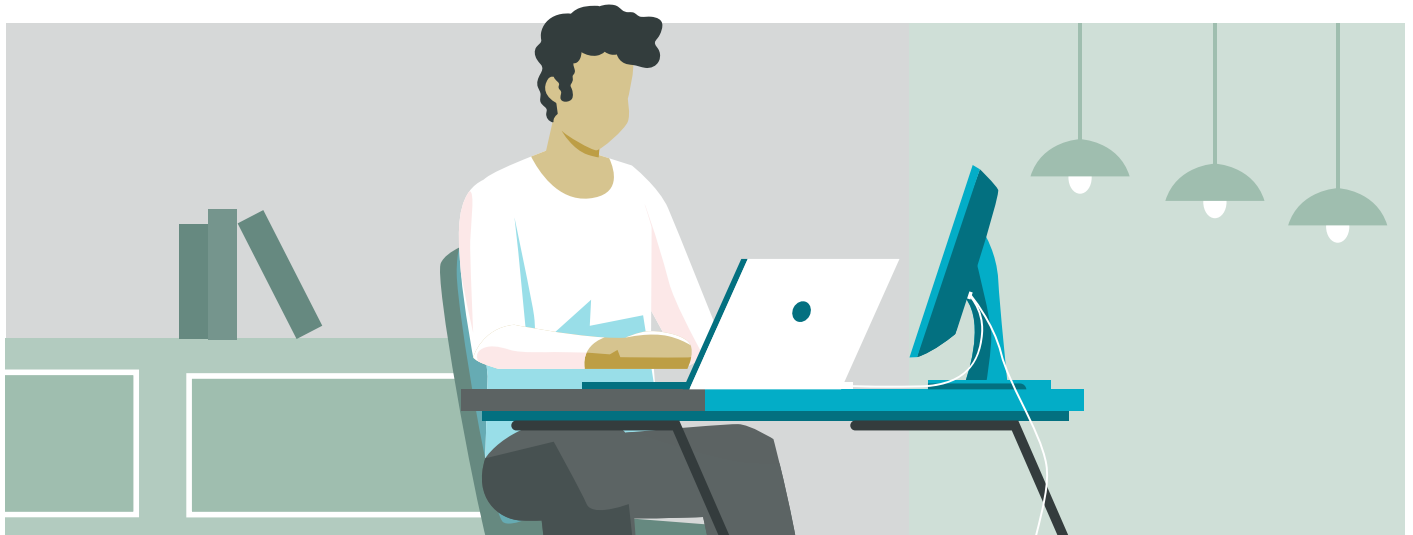
Adjusting expectations to a remote environment



Suggested methods of monitoring productivity



Tips for dealing with performance concerns





1. Ensuring performance expectations are aligned

The first step in ensuring your employees can carry out their role successfully is to make sure you're both on the same page to begin with.

Have you clearly communicated what is expected of them or is there any room for doubt? You may feel frustrated that their output isn't at the level you expect, but it could be a simple case of miscommunication.

You may also need to adapt your management style for different employees – for some members of your team you may just need to have a quick chat to provide them with clarity, whereas others may benefit from written objectives or having documented goals to work towards.



2. Adjusting expectations to a remote environment

Whilst some businesses may not be in a position to lower productivity as they try to deal with the impact of the ongoing crisis, it's fair to say that some employees, through no fault of their own, may be unable to deliver the same level of performance they did in February. Their home working environment, personal circumstances and physical or mental wellbeing could all be affecting their ability to simply carry on as before.

It's important to understand what factors may be affecting your team's performance right now in order to adjust your expectations accordingly.

Having regular, open conversations in which you demonstrate empathy and trust can help you to determine whether there are underlying issues or whether performance management measures are required. Depending on the circumstances, you may need to be accepting of the fact that output won't consistently be at the same level as before and make reasonable allowances where possible.

**“Now is the time to cut staff
some slack given the ongoing
pressures still faced”**

Gethin Nadin,

Director of Employee Wellbeing at Benefex
in a recent issue of People Management.



3. Suggested methods of monitoring productivity

Most managers would agree that it's easier to measure productivity in an office environment, although it could be argued that this is only an accurate measure of time spent at a desk rather than an indicator of meaningful output. Depending on the nature of the role, there are several ways in which you can measure productivity/output:

- **Define metrics** — what does success in the role look like and how can you measure it? For some client-facing staff, this may be done relatively easily by looking at new business and retention rates but for other roles, it might be more helpful to define quality measures, such as the level of customer service provided.
- **Set objectives** — agree with your employee what they need to achieve and when — ensure that any objectives set are realistic and achievable and set a timescale for completion. For more information on objective-setting, ACAS have produced this useful [guide](#).
- **Set process goals** — these can be helpful as they focus on the process rather than the outcome, for example: if you have an Account Executive with a new business target, you could set them a process goal of contacting X number of prospects per week. This can help to build habits, drive the behaviours required for success and also gives them a goal that they have control over.
- **Ask for updates** — it might be easier to simply ask your team members to give you a summary of their key accomplishments each week/month to keep you updated with their output/progress.

It's important to strike the right balance when monitoring performance to avoid micro-management. Empowering your staff with the space and flexibility to manage their own time and workload can help to build their confidence and trust in you as a leader.



4. Tips for dealing with performance concerns

Below are some suggestions for handling performance concerns informally, however it can be helpful to engage with your HR team in the first instance as there may be Company-specific policies or procedures you need to follow. HR can also be a useful sounding board to help guide you through tricky discussions and avoid any potential pitfalls.

- 1. Have a chat** — sometimes an informal conversation is all it takes to ensure expectations are aligned or identify any underlying issues. And in the very rare instances where someone has actually been keeping their eyes on Netflix rather than work, making them aware that you've noticed and setting clear boundaries can be enough to nip it in the bud.
- 2. Fact-find** — gently let them know you've noticed a dip in their performance lately (avoiding accusations) and ask how they're getting on. Try to keep a neutral, supportive tone and ask open questions, giving them space to talk. Download our [top 10 tips for having a challenging conversation in a virtual setting](#).
- 3. Decide on next steps** — depending on the outcome of the conversation, you might decide to:
 - » Take no action
 - » Accept reduced output for the time being
 - » Put support measures or adjustments in place to enable them to achieve the required standard of performance
 - » Arrange for training to take place if skills gaps are identified
 - » Clearly set out the standard of performance required and agree a timescale for review (you could use some of the methods outlined in section 3 to help you with this)
 - » Keep a record — even at an informal stage, it's good practice to document the process, even if you simply keep some bullet points for your own records.
You could follow-up the conversation with an email outlining key points discussed and agreed actions — this can be helpful to ensure clarity and avoid any dispute over what was agreed. You could also consider using a Performance Improvement Plan, but this may seem heavy-handed at this stage. Best practice would be to use informal techniques in the first instance and seek guidance from your HR team if issues prevail despite intervention.
- 4. Check-in regularly** — you don't need to wait until the end of a review period to check progress. By having regular catch-ups you can identify any obstacles to success and provide ongoing support where necessary.

Research has shown that during times of change, employees with high trust levels are more adaptable and resilient.

Whilst some level of performance monitoring may be necessary and can even serve as a useful development tool, it's important to work on building trust with your team.

By providing regular, honest feedback and addressing issues as they arise, you can empower them to carry out their roles to the best of their ability and avoid escalation to a formal process.

Useful Links:

[ACAS Tips for setting SMART performance objectives](#)

[ACAS Tips on approaching a conversation around performance](#)

