



MetaSpark



An Introduction To Enabling Employee Productivity in 2021

The Complete Guide to Enabling Employees to be
More Productive In and Out of the Workplace

www.metaspark.io





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Introduction

For any organization that is focused on growth, team productivity is crucial. Increased profits are dependent on quality work and making deadlines on time. On the other hand, if a workforce is not highly productive, or worse if productivity is trending downward, organizations can lose business and clients, resulting in reduced profitability.

Optimum productivity relies on many everyday factors. When there is a sudden reduction in production, it is imperative to find the cause. But it is not always easy to pinpoint where the culprit is when you don't know where to look, especially in 2021, when the workplace landscape has rapidly changed since the start of the pandemic.



The 3 Main Productivity Obstacle Categories

Whether employees are working in the office or from home, blockers to efficiency can be broken down into three main categories:

- ✔ **Environmental:** Noise, visual, or human distractions
- ✔ **Organizational:** Unrealistic goals, multitasking, lack of flexibility, unclear objectives & tasks, or inadequate tools
- ✔ **Psychological:** Bad communication, lack of trust & respect, or negativity

Categorizing these productivity obstacles can help organizations better identify which areas need the most attention. Some may be easier to fix than others and require fewer resources, leading to issues being resolved more quickly, while others may involve major organizational changes.

Internal vs. External Productivity Barriers

To further break down productivity obstacles your team might face, we put them into two categories: internal and external. Examples of internal barriers can be fatigue, lack of interest, mistrust, fear, or negative attitudes. External barrier examples can include noise, distractions, systems not working, time of day, or bad phone service.

An internal barrier, for instance, may have to do with bad communication. There are several ways poor communication can affect productivity. Let's say managers aren't communicating with workers because they have too many things to do and don't have enough time. If the employees they manage are putting in hard work every day for weeks on end and receive no positive feedback, they may start to feel like their hard work and dedication is going unnoticed.

This can slowly lead to detachment and disengagement, resulting in productivity reduction. Internal barriers can be difficult to spot because they're often hidden and hard to measure. And they can be even more difficult to find with so many employees working remotely. External barriers, on the other hand, can be easier to spot. They usually include distractions in the workplace such as surfing the web, checking social media accounts, co-workers stopping by for a chat, noisy environment, and similar things of that nature. These are all too common.



According to [a survey](#) conducted by HubSpot, employees spend an average of 5 hours a week surfing the web on non-work-related sites.

Of those surveyed, 40% said that co-workers stopping by their workspace is a major distraction, and 61% blamed loud colleagues as their biggest distraction. However, this may be good news for those that switched to a remote workforce during the pandemic, especially when you consider 86% of those surveyed said they prefer to work alone to reach maximum productivity.

But there are external barriers that aren't so obvious, such as multitasking, switching between too many programs and applications, lack of necessary tools to efficiently complete tasks, unclear goals, and overworking. These barriers affect people's focus, concentration, ability to work, and can lead to procrastination. However, with the right intervention and controls implemented, these barriers can be easily minimized and treated.

If you are having trouble removing these barriers, then this eBook is for you.

Below you will learn six key concepts to improve employee productivity, such as:

- ✔ How task management systems help organizations
- ✔ The importance of rewarding employees for their efforts
- ✔ How leaders can support their team's mental health
- ✔ And more!

Let's dive into our best strategies for enabling employee productivity in 2021.

Chapter 1:

Use a System to Manage and Centralize Tasks



From improving productivity to keeping your processes running smoothly, managing tasks using software provides an array of benefits. For companies that are inefficient at executing tasks, miss deadlines consistently, and lack team collaboration, implementing a task management system will help overcome these challenges. Here are some of the main benefits of effectively using a system to manage and centralize tasks:

Manage Everything from One Platform

Task management systems allow employees to work on a single project or several projects in one single place. It keeps all essential information and tasks together in the form of notes, reminders, cards, calendars, and more. With information from every team member organized under one roof, individuals don't need to guess what other members are working on or worry about forgetting tasks, information, or deadlines — no more stacks of papers or inaccessible data.

Prioritizes Tasks Much Easier

The only way to meet deadlines for important tasks is to prioritize them. Unfortunately, it's only natural for people to focus on low-priority tasks first, which can eat up a large portion of the day. Task management tools allow managers and employees to reorganize tasks by importance to ensure deadlines are met on time. They can also prioritize and alert workers of visible HITs (high impact tasks), the tasks that have the biggest impact on an organization's achievements.



Keeping Track of All Tasks

For larger organizations, in particular, it is important to view the status of many tasks that are going on at the same time so managers can see how things are going. The process of manually checking the status of every task for every individual is not only time-consuming but difficult to keep track of. With a task management system in place, progress can be tracked in a matter of seconds.

Easily Delegating Tasks

A big contributor to unproductivity has to do with some employees being overworked and others sitting idle. Task management systems allow managers to assign tasks to the right individuals — those that are not only available but more capable of completing tasks due to their skillset.

Centralized Platform for Work-related Files

With multiple employees assigned to several tasks, document sharing can easily get unorganized. Finding the right file or document when an individual needs it is paramount to maintaining a productive workforce. Using a centralized task management system allows workers to access files related to their tasks with ease and speed.

Enables Remote Workforces

With so many organizations employing remote workforces, having a central hub to exchange ideas, assign tasks, reschedule, and provide live updates keeps everyone on the same page. Task management systems allow managers to see how their remote workers are doing on the job without making much effort.

Recurring Task Automation

For any organization, there are always tasks that need to be repeated on a weekly or monthly basis. In the past, calendars or Outlook were used to manage recurring tasks, but technology has come a long way in automating these tasks to perfection. Now managers and workers can save time to work on tasks that benefit the organization.

A Better Task Management Solution

Project management solutions are clearly beneficial to the organizations that adopt them. Everything from improving efficiency to removing the risk of losing information and having all your tasks in one place. They also remove the need for tedious and repetitive work, while also removing the need to have multiple accounts and passwords.

However, not all project management software is easy to use, and it can also be a costly investment. For a lot of organizations, what is supposed to help them get streamlined and stay organized, ends up taking more time to learn than anticipated. That's because project management software typically has a steep learning curve and requires a lot of manual data entry. This can be a lot to ask for salespeople, for example, that just need to focus on selling and don't have time to learn a complicated system.

But there is an easier way, with a solution that can automatically bring all your tasks from all your systems into one platform. Instead of manually entering data into a project management software, [MetaSpark](#) brings all your applications and programs together into one dashboard. That can be Trello, Salesforce, Slack, Jira, HubSpot, Workday, or hundreds of others. MetaSpark uses artificial intelligence to consolidate your employees' countless tasks from every system into a single streamlined screen.

Less manual entry and less time learning means more productivity. While employees might have more time to do work, productivity can happen at any time of the day.



Chapter 2: Provide Flexible Scheduling for Employees


With millions of people around the US and the world now working from home, the “nine to five” workday is looking a lot different. Many organizations are adopting flexible scheduling because of the benefits it provides. Even the Monday to Friday work schedule is starting to look a lot different. That doesn’t necessarily mean the number of hours per day/week has changed, but flexible scheduling allows employees to customize their hours based on their individual needs.

But what works for one business may not work for another. Many are still keeping their core business hours, the hours in which employees have to be available for meetings, team exercises, training, social events, and so on. But those may only be a few hours during the day. Aside from those hours, employees can choose to work whichever hours convenient them. Some employers have even adopted the 9/80 schedule, which allows their employees to work 80 hours over 9 days, giving them an extra day off every other week.



How Flexible Scheduling Affects Productivity

Flexible scheduling has really shaken up the way organizations think of productivity.



[An Airtasker survey](#) actually found that flexible workers are working 1.4 more days a month on average than traditionally scheduled workers, which is nearly 17 days more per year.

While [another study from TINYpulse](#) found that remote workers are much happier than traditional workers. Not only that, but they also feel more valued, which results in increased productivity.

This spike in productivity for flexible scheduled workers is likely due to the hours they choose to work — the hours they feel most productive. This not only results in more productivity but also in higher quality work as well because they're working more effectively during those hours. Plus, they can be more productive in their personal lives when they have more time during the day to attend doctor appointments, get their kids ready for school, or any other responsibilities.

Flexible scheduling also reduces burnout by giving employees personal time to deal with physical or mental health. Burnout can significantly impact employee productivity and an organization's bottom-line, according to the [2020 Global Culture Report by O.C. Tanner](#). The report showed that work output decreases by 22% when companies experience moderate to severe burnout.

While flexible scheduling may not be for every organization, there is a good amount of data compiled within the last couple of years that proves it can boost productivity for those that can make it work.

Working at 'odd' hours will help employees feel more in control and get even more work done, which will impact how managers view their performance.

Chapter 3: Implement Better Employee Performance Management Practices


While a lot has changed due to the pandemic and the shift to remote work, some things still remain the same — goal achievement, drive, and initiative still matter in terms of measuring performance. According to a Brandon Hall report, there are 5 trends managers want to prioritize in 2021:

- 1 Higher quality check-ins with employees for better feedback/coaching
- 2 Higher frequency of check-ins with employees for better feedback/coaching
- 3 Linkage of skills and competency development
- 4 A process for goal setting
- 5 Building a performance culture

It's evident in the report that employee performance management will be driven by manager development. To implement better performance management practices, here are a few imperatives for 2021.

Offer Peer-to-Peer Opportunities for Recognition

Reflektive, a productivity and engagement platform, [conducted a survey](#) that showed 63% of its respondents agree that the data provided by performance management technology is not comprehensive enough to accurately assess employee performance. A lot of the rater bias is due to the fact that only managers give ratings. One way to solve this would be to provide peer-to-peer recognition feedback to add more balance to the ratings. Especially when it comes to employees working from home, pre-existing management bias can easily result in negative ratings.



Performance management technology will require optimal and effective use by managers. To eliminate performance management bias, companies can embrace performance based on data. By accessing employees based on their output and performance according to the metadata rather than opinions, bias can be mitigated. Tools like MetaSpark reduce bias by allowing you to measure employee performance against company goals and their contributions toward OKRs.

Encourage Open Communication Between Managers and Employees

In this new age of remote work, continuous and frequent communication between managers and employees will be a permanent trend going forward. While these regular check-ins may make employees feel like they aren't trusted, it's up to managers to make them feel that they are, and this is where training comes in.

“Great leaders take the time to get to know their employees – developing genuine connections, offering continuous feedback, and providing an open line of communication to every member of the team.”

- Sam Naficy, CEO of the productivity intelligence software Prodoscore.

With this continuous line of communication, managers can identify employee expectations and better understand successful behaviors. This can also greatly improve retention when managers can identify at-risk employees.



Offer Professional Growth Opportunities

Employers who don't offer formal or informal professional development opportunities are doing themselves a disservice. Employees that seek out growth opportunities in their career tend to have increased productivity and higher job satisfaction. By providing [professional development programs](#), you are arming employees with resources to help them succeed and preparing them to accept more duties down the line. This will also help them feel like they aren't stagnant in their positions, which leads to increased employee engagement and teams working harder.

Of course, employee recognition and feedback is closely tied with how an organization offers employee rewards.



Chapter 4: Reward Individual Employees for their Contributions

Employee recognition looks a lot different than it did just two short years ago. Those were the days of game rooms, lounges, massage chairs, and chill-out areas. We now live in a virtual world where meaningful experiences and rewards are very different. With so many people working remotely, individual awards are the new norm. Some people are being forced to work from home and have to deal with distractions, some have to work alone at home, and others are forced to come to work because they don't have any other option. This is creating new ways to motivate individuals and teams to work together.

[According to Gallup](#), employees who are motivated work 20% better, business profitability increases by 21% when teams are highly engaged, and absenteeism is reduced by 41% when employees are engaged and motivated. But how do you engage and motivate people who work at different times in different locations?

[2021 is all about providing rewards](#) that work for each individual. This can mean home office equipment for some, a flexible work schedule for others, or mental health support for those that need it.

However, financial rewards can be important as well, especially after a difficult year, some people would really appreciate the extra help. That can be in the form of educational support and advice, or cash rewards such as gift cards to places they shop at or restaurants they frequent. MetaSpark offers a unique approach to rewards using micro-incentives called "Sparks." Over time, Sparks add up to meaningful rewards like gift cards to an employee's favorite store or donations to their favorite charity.

The right recognition software combined with a modern leadership approach will make virtually rewarding individual employees simple. For example, peer-to-peer recognition, like sending an e-card or thank you, can happen with the click of a button. More people may be working remotely, but that doesn't mean meaningful experiences and tailored support should take a backseat. With the technology we have at our disposal, this could just be the year of connection.

Motivated (i.e. rewarded) employees are created from open communication with their managers. But there are always areas where managers can improve meetings or in-person reporting.

Chapter 5: Improve Team Communication

Building a solid team is all about ensuring that employees are on the same page and that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities. Even in a workplace environment where everyone is located in the same building at the same hours and days, this can be difficult. But things should have become more complicated now that employees are working apart from each other during different hours, sometimes on different days. Luckily, that didn't happen. The tools we now have in 2021 allow us to stay more connected than ever before. We've made communicating via video conferencing and team massaging work. For most of us, it's the new norm. But that doesn't mean it doesn't come with some obstacles that we have to overcome.



According to [PwC's U.S. Remote Work Survey](#) published in January of this year, 83% of employers and 73% of employees find remote work to be overwhelmingly successful.

Less than 20% said they want things to go back to how they used to be. Yet both employees and executives (97%) say badly aligned teams negatively impact the outcome of a project. That means managers now need to figure out how to effectively communicate with both their employees at the workplace and those working remotely, sometimes in different time zones.



Make Time for One-on-One Meetings

One-on-one meetings create a successful feedback model because they give managers time to review performances, discuss projects, remove blockers, and more. These are all great ways to stay on top of employees and ensure their work is getting done, but they are also a way for managers to get to know their employees. Whether they're held bi-weekly or monthly, one-on-one meetings give managers the chance to learn about their employees' interests, professional growth opportunities, and aspirations. When employees feel like their work matters and that they're making progress within the organization, they'll feel more engaged and invested, which leads to long-term happiness.

More Effective Communication System

With employees working from different locations during different hours, organizations need an effective communication system that makes communicating easy and comfortable. By combining messaging, video, email, and phone into one unified communication system, employees can choose their mode of communication more easily and without having to switch between systems.

When there are multiple platforms to choose from, employees tend to confront mental roadblocks that lead to less communication and messages getting lost or forgotten. MetaSpark brings all forms of communication into one easy-to-use platform, which can lead to increased productivity and teamwork. No more switching between different email accounts and communication platforms.

When team members are so closely linked in the workday, managers should also get a sense of their employees' mental health.

Chapter 6:

Support Employee Mental Health


Fortunately, the state of mental health is improving from one year ago, according to [The Mental Health Index: U.S. Worker Edition](#). But that doesn't mean businesses should stop worrying about mental health. We're not out of the woods yet.



“While the numbers are very encouraging, the data tells us that there is still a workplace mental health epidemic that cannot be ignored.”

- Louis Gagnon, CEO of Total Brain

That's because the impacts of the pandemic are going to have long-lasting effects on employees and their families. Some people may have lost people they care about to the virus, some have spouses that were laid off, and some are struggling financially.



While it's great news that people's well-being is starting to look up. However, organizational leaders should still focus on providing health programs such as healthy living programs, flexible scheduling, improved work/life balance, and increased education to support the well-being of their workforce. Many organizations are creating mental health policies for their team members to show support and encourage people to have an open conversation, which can lead to a more supportive work environment. These policies can include the following:

- ✔ **Acknowledgment to let employees know they can disclose their illness**
- ✔ **Offerings to let employees know about the resources that are available to them**
- ✔ **Accommodations to let employees know what they can provide for them**

One big way companies can help their employees is by providing employee assistance programs. These programs allow employees to call a licensed clinician whenever they want in-the-moment clinical support. For organizations with a large remote workforce, these programs are ideal because they can be 100% virtual. Whether it be through text counseling, video therapy, or over the phone, this gives employees an easily accessible avenue to talk about their issues.

Providing employees these kinds of resources takes away the stigma around mental health and shows them that the company cares about how they're feeling. Engagement is a two-way street — when organizations engage in the support of their employees, employees will be more engaged and motivated to be more productive.





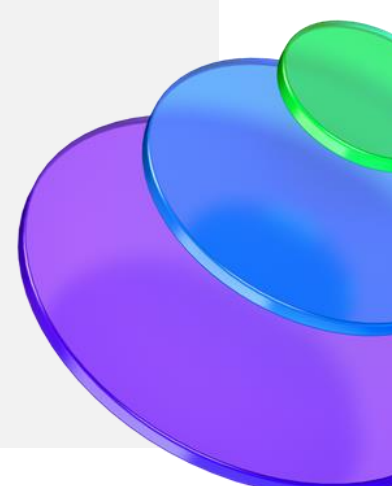
Conclusion:

Productivity, productivity, productivity. It's a word we hear so much that it begins to lose its significance. What's going to be the next buzzword? Unfortunately, there isn't going to be one. Productivity is here to stay because it's the only way we can measure how efficiently work gets done. Working efficiently to get tasks done on time is how workers and organizations succeed. Workplace productivity equals success. Plain and simple. And task management tools help workers be more productive.

So, what's next?

Since the pandemic threw a wrench into typical workplace dynamics, it's easy to be uncertain about the future. The new office normal is already here, and managers are doing all they can to help employees complete their work at the same high-level as before.

If you focus on flexibility, reward your employees, keep communication consistent, and use technology to simplify task workflows, then you won't need to worry about productivity, because the work will already be done.





About MetaSpark:

The AI-Driven Workforce Productivity Hub

MetaSpark is more than just [productivity software](#). It's software that helps you accomplish all of the recommendations in this eBook.

With MetaSpark, managers and employees don't need to switch between multiple applications and programs all day. With every task from every system automatically brought into one dashboard, you can simplify task management and track productivity all in one place.

That means your employees' tasks from email, CRM, project management tool, expense reports, communications apps, and more are pulled into the MetaSpark dashboard. With everything right in front of them, deadlines get met, communication runs smoother, and team collaboration improves. Plus, our AI analyzes everyone's work, so you can see who is performing best by numbers and dashboards, not by appearances and guesses.

By centralizing all of the tasks MetaSpark, and analyzing the data from those tasks, enables you to:

- ✔ Provide more flexible scheduling, because you can focus on people's actual productivity rather than how which exact hours they work.
- ✔ Make performance management be data-driven using dashboards and advanced analytics, to improve employee engagement and job satisfaction.
- ✔ Reward employees based on their actual contributions to the organization and its profitability, offering a superior alternative to most incentive programs.
- ✔ Support employee wellness by getting AI-driven wellness suggestions for individuals and teams to reduce fatigue and ultimately attrition.



Are you ready to keep your employees on top of what's ahead?

See how MetaSpark can enable your employees to be more productive by getting your demo today. The productivity revolution starts here!



[GET YOUR DEMO](#)