

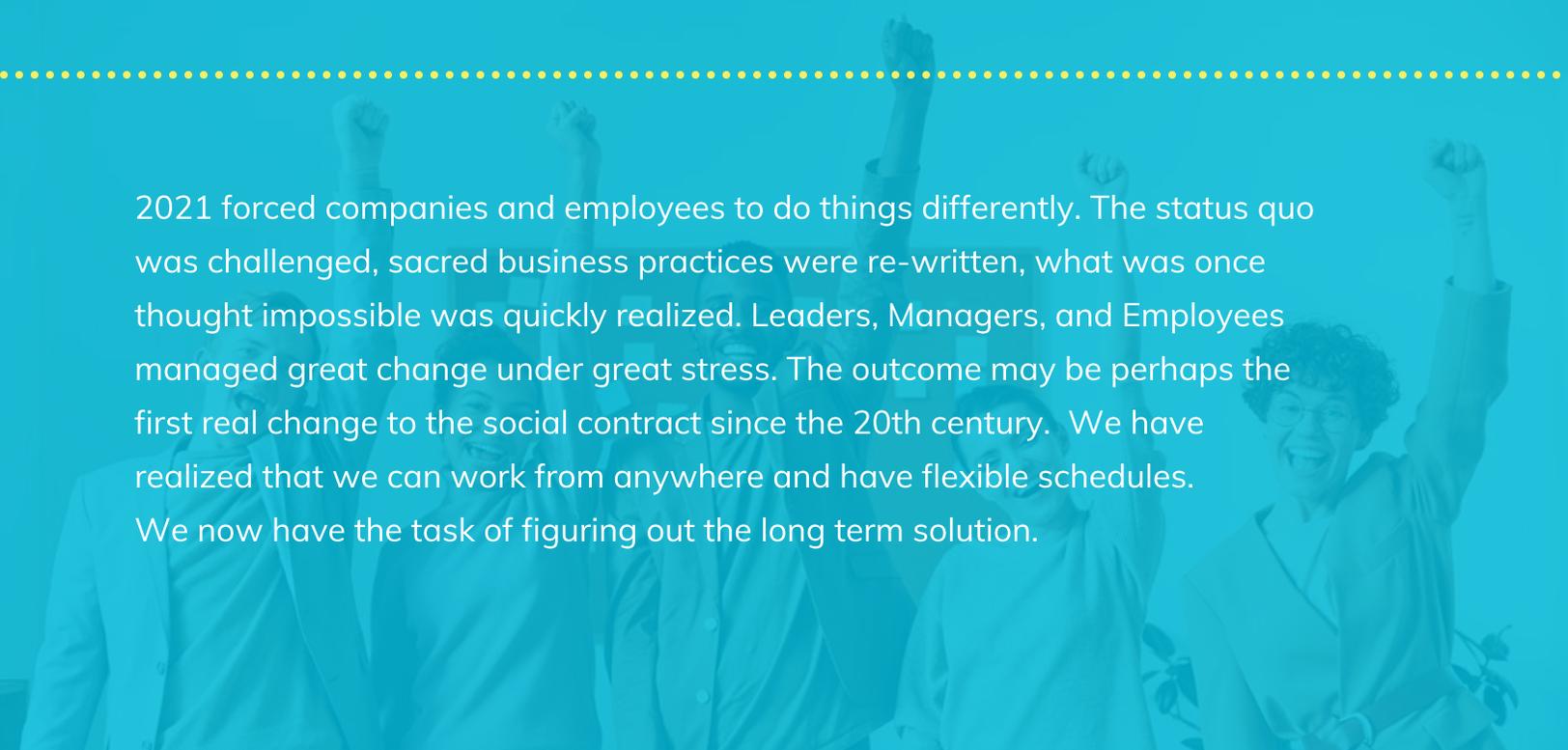
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# Managing to the Green Dot

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2021 forced companies and employees to do things differently. The status quo was challenged, sacred business practices were re-written, what was once thought impossible was quickly realized. Leaders, Managers, and Employees managed great change under great stress. The outcome may be perhaps the first real change to the social contract since the 20th century. We have realized that we can work from anywhere and have flexible schedules. We now have the task of figuring out the long term solution.

Depending on how you are measuring productive activity you may have created a need for your employee to implement a sneaky work around, and you may have sabotaged your initiatives focused on understanding how productive your team really is.

A recent post from boredpanda (<https://www.boredpanda.com/employee-maliciously-complies-with-boss-absurd-productivity/>) highlighted an employee who was frustrated with their employer's implementation of measuring productivity using the active status of their messaging system. They used the amount of time this person was active to determine if they were a good candidate to continue to work from home – exceeding a defined % of time inactive means back to the office.

The majority of employees come to work and want to do their best, they want to be empowered and trusted to do their job. It's the same for the majority of managers. The above is one source but there are other articles, discussions, and posts. There is now an industry built around mouse movers. This article looks at the challenges with managing to an available status, what good intentioned managers are trying to accomplish,

and some of the workarounds that have been implemented by employees.

Let's start with some of the work arounds that have been implemented by employees to ensure the available status stays green,

- Purchase a mouse mover or juggler
- Write powershell scripts that inputs a key at an interval based on your messaging system settings
- Hit dictate on Word and leave a podcast playing on speakers
- Open a blank word document and set something heavy on a key on the keyboard
- Run and minimize a powerpoint slide.

[Be deliberate on defining what productivity means to your organization all the way down to the employee](#)

There may be more creative mechanisms out there. Information on how to implement these is readily available and relatively easy.

But, before you run to your IT department looking for remedies to the work arounds, review the issues with using a messaging system and the challenges you are trying to address in managing productivity.

# Using a Messaging System to Understand Productivity

Managing to the green dot seems to have replaced the age-old management technique that if I can see you and you are at your desk then you must be productive. The assumption is that if I see your status as green you must be at your desk working on very important tasks, it's my visual cue.

However, messaging systems were not built to measure productivity and to determine if an individual is working or not. They were built to aid with communication.

What can the status of messaging systems represent?

## Available (usually green) –

- Busy. Working on productive, unproductive, or other activities. Unless your communication application doesn't recognize work outside of that application, see more below

## At my desk and would prefer no interruptions

- In a meeting. Collaborating with a colleague, a customer, or chatting with a friend
- Do not disturb. Working on a difficult task, or playing a game

## Should be available soon

- Be right back
- Away. This could be deliberately set if colleagues do not respect the do not disturb and want to focus on activity is required
- Inactive. Have not been at my keyboard for a predefined time, or my communication solution does not recognize that I am working heads down in another application

## Disconnected

- Offline. Again, this could be deliberately set if colleagues do not respect the do not disturb
- On Vacation
- Out Sick

Messaging systems are great when used properly. They are an integral part of how we communicate with the team, but they can not be relied upon to determine if an individual is being productive or not.

The more important question is why are we trying to use this indicator to measure productivity?

# Challenge #1

## Tools don't support today's needs

Managers have been thrown into this whirlwind along with everyone else, and are equally unprepared.

They are looking for tools at their disposal to help them manage their remote team, and in some cases seeking ways to accommodate new expectations and requests for flexible schedules. All while having to answer to their leadership on how their disparate team is performing, trying to stay connected to their team without overloading on meetings, and looking to maintain culture.

Let's not forget that managers are also working through their own challenges, need a flexible schedule and are working remotely.

[Managers don't have the right tools to manage work from anywhere alongside flexible hours](#)

Managers have taken the in office practices and moved them to remote scenarios, hence "I need to see you - somehow".

Managers are also turning towards other monitoring tools in an attempt to manage productivity, where there is a reported increase in usage of over 60%. Unfortunately many such tools are militant on metrics, not empowering and invasive to employee privacy.

Collecting data is required to understand how the

team is working, productive or otherwise. These tools also need to support an employee value proposition including flexible schedules, and work from anywhere.

So does the manager need to see me? Does the manager need to understand when the team is working? Do they need everyone to work the same schedule in order to manage productivity?

No, the manager does not need to see you to manage productivity, if they do it is likely a training scenario, or a performance issue with either the employee or the manager. This concept was really a false sense of security in the office. What they need is a solution that provides insights on how the team is working; their ability to focus, how to mitigate interruptions, are they working too much or too little, are they productive.

Yes, the manager needs to understand when the team is working in order to plan meetings, events, and support the new right to disconnect laws.

No, in most cases they do not need everyone to work the same schedule as long as people are responsible to set their schedules for key meetings, and the right expectations are set.

Managers need tools that provide the right data to make informed decisions, and free them to focus on value added activity.

# Challenge #2

## Lack of Trust

Sitting at a desk within sight of a manager does not mean one is working. It doesn't take much to look busy. [Therefore the answer is not to mandate back to the office when it is not imperative for your business - rebuild trust.](#)

Managers have not been trained to handle the nuances that occur from working at home and the lack of visible presence. They have turned towards over monitoring but as previously discussed monitoring tools that don't empower fall short and work against productive initiatives. Instead these tools dig a deeper trust divide between the manager and the employee with the employee feeling a loss of autonomy to do their work.

Sadly there are stealth monitoring implementations where the employee is unaware that they are being monitored, what data is being collected, why it is collected, and how it will be used.

[What says lack of trust more than secretly monitoring your employees who you have hired through stringent hiring practices to run your business.](#)

Legislation is catching up to this practice and introducing laws such as Bill 27, Working for Workers Act in Ontario which will mandate employers to disclose monitoring activity.

Employees understand that some monitoring is required but want to protect their personal data, and feel valued by their employer. In addition they want to know and see policies that data collected will not be unintentionally used.

[Gartner has reported that employers must orient towards employees as people not workers. Delivering on an earned value proposition \(EVP\) is imperative.](#)

Full transparency is required with monitoring tools. Whatever solution you use to monitor employees it should be clearly stated what you are collecting, why, and how it will be used. Employees should easily have visibility to the data collected on them adding to the transparency. Finally, there should be a mechanism for employees to report when they feel the data is being used incorrectly, and visible action taken.

# Challenge #3

## Metrics not always understood

In the boredpanda article mentioned above this individual stated that they had only 3-5 hours of actual work per day and were still able to meet their productivity metrics. This challenge opens many different threads for discussion all of which will not be tackled in this article.

A few questions immediately pop into mind

1. Is the manager aware that this person could handle more work?
2. Why is this person not proactive in seeking additional work which could include helping to redefine best practices as they are clearly good at what they do?
3. Where was the transparency that the active status was being used to measure productivity?

We all know George Doran's S.M.A.R.T. principles when defining goals and objectives:

Specific – target a specific area for improvement.

Measurable – quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress.

Assignable – specify who will do it.

Realistic – state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources.

Time-related – specify when the result(s) can be achieved.

Did the implementation of % active on a messaging system satisfy these principles?

Here are some insights that can help increase productivity and deliver on the EVP, focusing on how works get done.

1. How much work has been assigned?
2. Are the estimates for the work accurate?
3. What % of the day should be focused on productive activity?
4. If the work is completed early, what other activities should an individual focus on?
5. What % of the day is spent on productive vs unproductive vs uncategorized work which can help managers redefine work, refine schedules, and adjust expectations.
6. Are employees able to focus?
7. What is the best time to focus in order to protect that time?
8. What activities are interrupting work which are decreasing productivity and increasing stress?
9. Are employees working too much or too little?
10. Is the right to disconnect being violated?

