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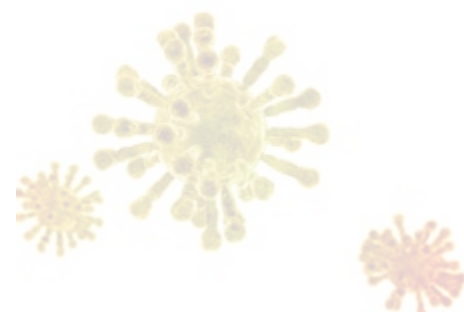

Work From Home:
A new normal

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Monitoring productivity of remote employees

As the world reels of COVID-19 pandemic, work from home has become a new norm for organizations. With organizations forced to allow employees to work from home to maintain business continuity, India Inc. has realized that perhaps, working remotely, when backed by a high degree of connectivity, security, and communication levels, is, at times, more productive than working out of office.

Over the last few weeks, tech giants like Twitter, Facebook, and Google, IT organizations like TCS and IBM has announced extended work from home. While some companies are looking to let employees work from home, some are considering permanent work from home for a percentage of their workforce. Bharani Kumar Aroll, the President of Hyderabad Software Exporters' Association (HYSEA), expects the new normal to have an average of 25-30 percent workforce working from home.
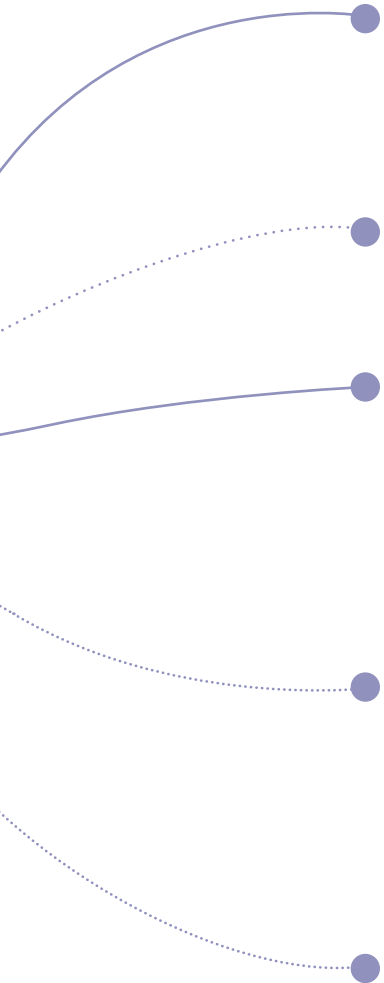
Before the pandemic, globally, 56%[1] of organizations allowed employees to work remotely.

1 https://www.owllabs.com/state-of-remote-work#keyfindings

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Advantages of working from home

Working from home has its advantages. Companies will reduce operating costs significantly. Attrition rates will be lower and productivity higher. Employees will have more flexibility with hours, location, and personalized benefits. The primary reasons why work from home will be the new normal in a post-COVID world are as follows:

Increased productivity

Remote work helps to boost productivity as it reduces distractions like watercooler discussion, extended coffee breaks, impromptu meetings, etc. With the employees being more focused, they can accomplish more in less time.

Social distancing

In the post-COVID era, social distancing will be the new norm. People can avoid unnecessary travel and go to crowded places by working from home.

Curb attrition

Millennials are tech-savvy and do not want to be bound to a place. They prefer working remotely so that they can explore new places over being in office. Senior-level employees also prefer to work remotely over retiring. Therefore, work from home allow employers to have the best of both worlds - hire millennials with fresh ideas and retain experienced employees.

Maintain family/work-life balance

Working remotely enables employees to spend more time with their family without compromising on productivity. They can adjust their work hours and schedule calendars to accommodate both personal and professional commitments, without compromising one for the other.

Savings

Remote work can significantly decrease operating costs of organizations. Forbes report that Aetna saves $78 million in real estate, and American Express saves around $12.5 million annually due to remote workers. Additionally, employees save money as they do not need to spend on the commute and other essentials required to travel.

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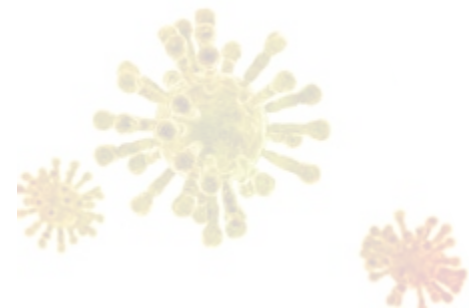
Challenges of working from home

However, work from home is not all rosy. Flexibility in work schedule might give more freedom to the employees, but it can also be distracting. Employers also face the challenge of monitoring employee productivity. Some of the challenges of working from home are:

| Tracking productivity | Cyberslacking | Data theft | Frauds |

Tracking productivity
Keeping track of productivity is a challenge for most employers. Employees, who are used to 9-5 office routine, often mistake work from home as new-found freedom with no monitoring and end up spending time in non-productive work, delaying client deliverables. Managers have no way to track their daily work, keep a check on their work hours, and address challenges on-the-go.

Cyberslacking
Organizations lose approximately 2.5 hours per day per employee on an average for non-productive activities on the internet, which includes social media, personal emails, online shopping, playing online games, and accessing non-work-related (sometimes inappropriate) videos.

Data theft
47 percent[2] of former employees break non-disclosure agreements and steal confidential company information while leaving the organization. While working from home has increased productivity and made the workforce mobile, it has given employees more opportunities to access and steal sensitive information from organizations.

Frauds
Organizations often suffer a loss due to employees passing sensitive information for their gain. Fraudulent activities do not cost only the company money but also damages their reputation and the confidence of the customer.

2 https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/5168-employee-monitoring-software.html

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Statutory challenges

Addressing regulatory issues
Many companies track punch-in punch-out to track attendance. For employees who work on billable projects, tracking productive hours is a necessity. With work from home, HR and finance struggle to find a way to track attendance and map it to billing clients and payroll processing.

Tracking unutilized software
Organizations spend huge amounts of money in purchasing software licenses for employees. However, a bulk of them lies unutilized. Tracking usage of apps and software while employees are working from home can give organizations insight on usage of proprietary software and taking decision on the number of licenses to renew. Companies can significantly reduce software licensing costs.

How a remote workforce monitoring tool can help

If these challenges are addressed, work from home can be a viable option for organizations, irrespective of their size. Some of the benefits of a remote workforce monitoring tool are as follows:

Prioritization
If the senior leadership/managers have visibility on what employees are working on, they can prioritize work and prevent errors at the initial level, before it goes out of control. A monitoring tool can also measure the amount of actual time taken to complete a task and plan future tasks accordingly.

Transparency on employee performance
Employee monitoring prevents unethical usage of time, internet, or information by an employee, and provides valuable insights into the performance. It helps the management identify the top performers and the lowest performers, making the appraisal system transparent.

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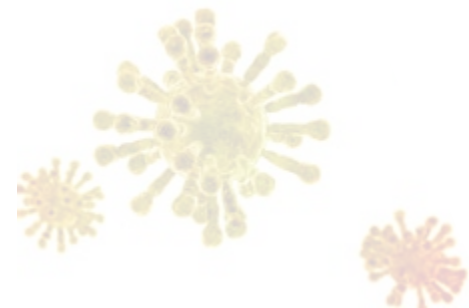
Less time wastage

Employees spend almost 30% of their work time on average doing personal work, which includes surfing the internet, sending emails, etc. Monitoring software can help organizations keep a check on unproductive time.

Security

Tracking emails and locations also help in making the workplace more secure for an employee. For example, emails, phone calls, and video surveillance can help resolve sexual harassment claims, GPS tracking can ensure the safety of the employees while they are out on the field.

Less Administrative Work

Employee monitoring tools can automate a significant portion of the administrative work, like payments, schedule, attendance, and taxes – reducing manual labor and hours spent in Excel considerably.

Things to consider while choosing a remote workforce monitoring tool

A good employee monitoring system can save organizations massive amounts of money by cutting down on unproductive work, improving employee satisfaction index by promoting the deserving employees, freeing up time from unproductive administrative tasks, and identifying insider threats. While choosing an employee activity monitoring tool, consider the following:

- Is the tool easy to use?
- Is the tool lightweight and customizable?
- Can it monitor emails – both personal and work?
- Can it monitor productive and non-productive hours?
- Does it have the capability to monitor the internet and social media usage?
- Can it control checks on end-point devices?
- Can it monitor live chats and video feeds?
- Can the administrator access the tool remotely?
- What is the reporting capability?
- Does the tool/platform have 24x7 tech support?
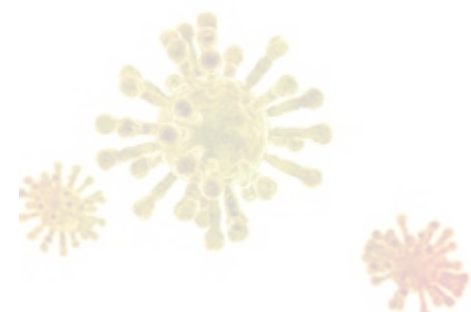
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TO SPEAK WITH OUR CYBER SECURITY CONSULTANT
Call : +91 92666 03983
Email : ask@dataresolve.com

OUR WORLDWIDE PRESENCE
India (Noida, Gurgaon, Mumbai, Bangalore, Pune, Hyderabad)
UAE (Dubai), US, Turkey

DATA RESOLVE TECHNOLOGIES HEAD OFFICE
G-24, 2nd Floor, Sector-6, Noida, Uttar Pradesh, INDIA 201301
Phone: +91-9266603983

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ABOUT DATA RESOLVE TECHNOLOGIES Data Resolve Technologies is an IIT Kharagpur incubated startup, focused towards building futuristic products for Insider Threat Management and Employee Monitoring for mid-sized and large enterprises. We enable CIOs/ CISOs and business managers to monitor and predict employee behaviour and report any anomalous intentions detected, helping them build a secure ecosystem and increasing employee productivity.