



The Manager's Guide to Burnout and Quiet Quitting

How to assess, identify and address employee burnout and quiet quitting

How to Identify Burnout Before It Becomes Quiet Quitting

According to a recent study by Gallup¹, 28% of employees surveyed said they were burned out “very often” or “always” at work. Employee burnout and fatigue is detrimental to both the employee and the business. This same study found that employees who frequently experience burnout are:

63%

more likely to take
a sick day

23%

more likely to visit the
emergency room

2.6x

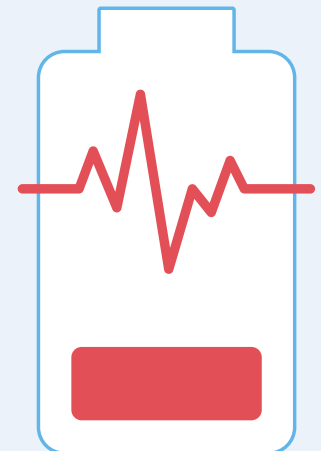
as likely to be seeking
a different job

Within an organization, the manager is critical in assessing and addressing employee burnout before it becomes quiet quitting². Workload balance varies over time throughout projects, business cycles and changes in team staffing levels. But, when heavy workloads are sustained over a significant period of time, or other factors impact an employee’s engagement and satisfaction with their work, burnout can quickly develop and lead to quiet quitting if not addressed by the manager.

How can you keep a pulse on burnout risk for your team and effectively address concerns around quiet quitting?

This guide provides an overview of:

- Guiding principles for managers to address both burnout and quiet quitting
- An overview of the 6 key types of burnout (hint: it’s not all about hours worked)
- Signs to watch out for to help you proactively engage with employees
- Actions to take to acknowledge and address burnout and quiet quitting



¹ Source: [Employee Burnout: The Biggest Myth](#), Gallup, March 13, 2020

² Source: [Is Quiet Quitting Real?](#), Gallup, September 6, 2022

Guiding Principles to Get Ahead of Burnout and Quiet Quitting

The goal for any manager should be to watch for leading indicators of burnout, so you can engage proactively with team members and take action as quickly as possible and in many cases prevent quiet quitting. Some guiding principles to keep top of mind include:

1. Invest time and attention in your team members

The best managers hold regular (at least bi-weekly) 1x1's with each team member. They know each person as an individual, celebrate accomplishments, touch base on project deliverables, conduct coaching conversations and discuss possible sources of frustration.

2. Promote transparency and problem-solving

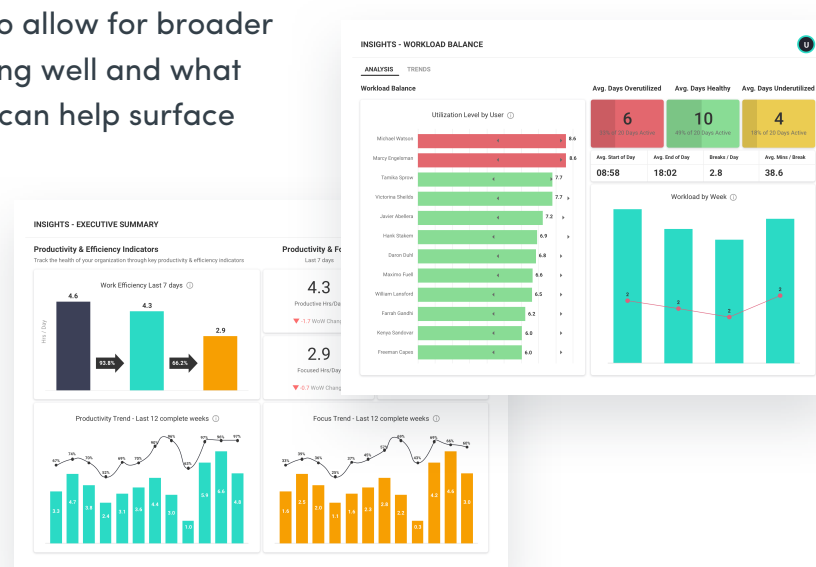
Host a monthly team check-in to allow for broader team discussions on what is going well and what can be improved. This meeting can help surface sources of friction, resource gaps, and process improvements that can help boost team productivity and satisfaction.

Check out our [blog post](#) "How to hold a Ways of Working discussion with your team" for tips on gaining team alignment.

3. Advocate for the resources your team needs

Combine team sentiments with workforce analytics data to help justify and plan for headcount:

- Has the workload for your team scaled at a faster pace than headcount?
- How does the workload for your team compare to other similar teams?
- Is your team often working on the weekend or evenings?



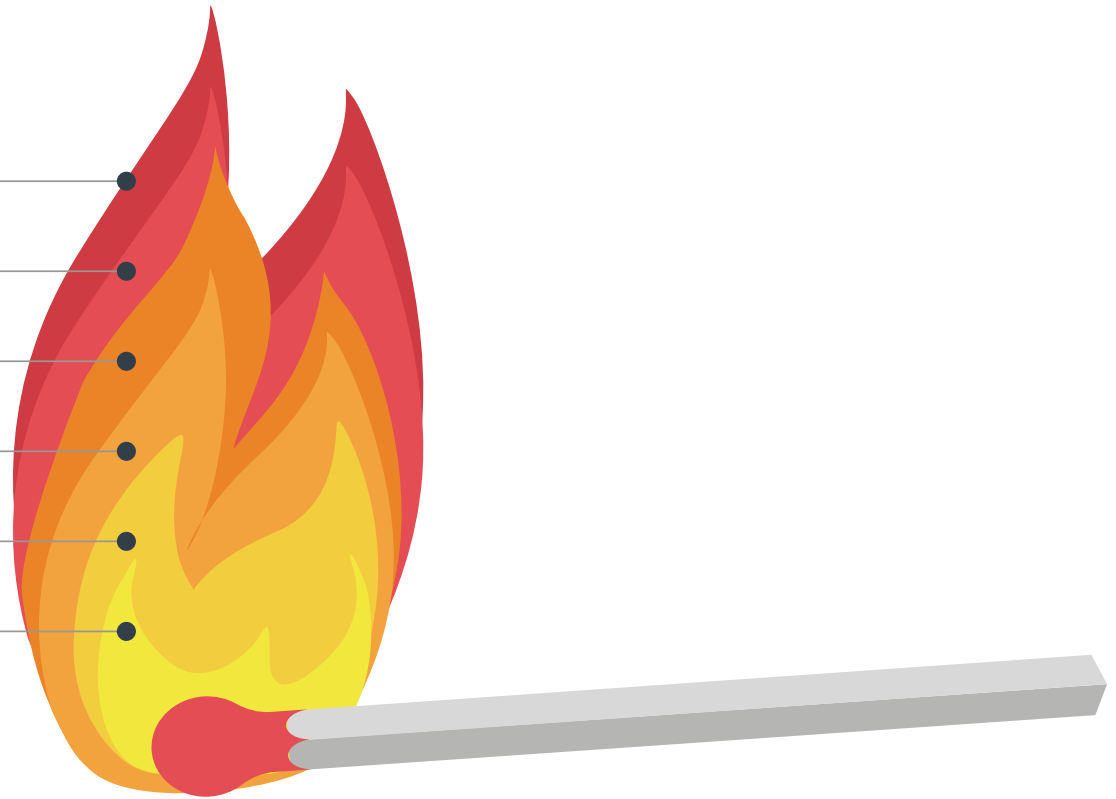
Using a workforce analytics solution like [ActivTrak](#), you can measure productive time, working hours, burnout risk, break frequency and focus habits to justify additional resources, or shift expectations to help support teams who are facing burnout.

The Most Common Types of Burnout

Burnout comes in many different forms across organizations. Understanding the culprit behind the burnout can help you coach your team or individual team members through the challenge.

The most common types of burnout include:

1. **Deadline Burnout** _____ ●
2. **Culture Burnout** _____ ●
3. **Personal Burnout** _____ ●
4. **Passion Burnout** _____ ●
5. **Skill Burnout** _____ ●
6. **Alignment Burnout** _____ ●



Read on to gain an understanding of the root causes of each type of burnout, and practical tips you can leverage when engaging with team members to provide support and collaborate on solutions for both burnout and quiet quitting.

Burnout Type #1

Deadline Burnout

Deadline burnout occurs when specific deadlines are aggressive and compounded by obstacles, so the ability to get work done on time is a challenge. The stressors of “figuring it out” on time, while preserving quality, have an impact on employees. Whether it’s working additional hours or working the same hours at a higher intensity, deadline burnout can be particularly draining.

Common causes:

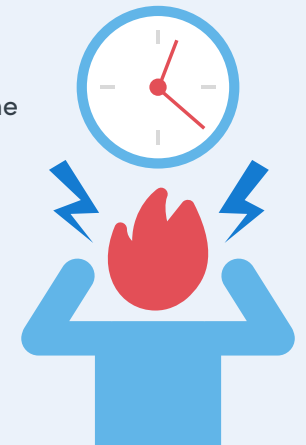
- Disconnect between project management and team members
- Improper scoping
- Unrealistic timelines
- Unforeseen project risks, dependencies and challenges
- Inadequate stakeholder management and expectation setting

What to look for:

- Team members working longer days, and outside of their normal working hours
- Hastened or canceled meetings to free up additional working time
- “Shortcuts” on processes or quality to complete activities faster
- Errors in work or a decline in work quality/thoroughness
- Missed deadlines

How Managers can help:

- Reach out to the impacted individual(s) to check in, not just about project deadlines, but how they are feeling about their work.
- Before problem-solving:
 - Acknowledge that they may be feeling stressed
 - Show gratitude for this work and empathy for the pressure created by tight deadlines
 - Express your desire to explore ways to relieve the pressure, if possible/acceptable to stakeholders
- Ask questions around what resources may be needed to:
 - Alleviate the burnout
 - Help get the project/work done well and at a reasonable time
 - Remove obstacles/friction that could be causing frustration
- Commit to providing support and working towards a solution within a clear period of time



Burnout Type #2

Culture Burnout

Culture burnout happens when a group within an organization has collectively reached levels of exhaustion that are uncomfortable and is further perpetuated by the shared exhaustion of others. The exhaustion does not always stem from long hours, but can also come from team-wide dynamics that are depleting employees' energy, engagement and commitment levels.

Common causes:

- Disconnect between leadership mission, vision, strategy, goals and employees beliefs
- Inconsistency in strategic direction and approach to work
- Distrust/lack of transparency
- Unclear communication from leadership to employees
- Tension within the organization and among peers
- Stress around company or team performance
- External current events that have a substantial impact on morale and anxiety levels

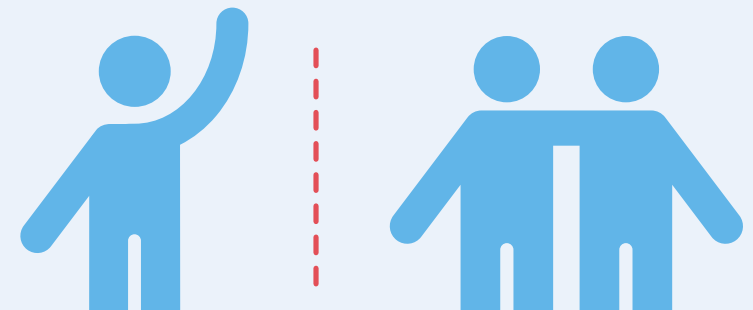
What to look for:

- Decrease in work hours or variation from typical work schedule
- Negative or unusually little feedback from typically vocal/engaged employees
- "Shortcuts" on processes or quality due to lack of commitment/understanding of purpose
- Errors in work or a decline in work quality/thoroughness
- Missed deadlines

How Managers can help:

Culture burnout within a team can quickly spread to surrounding teams and become pervasive throughout the organization. For this reason, recognizing it quickly and devising a strategy to solve it is essential.

- Try to sort out the primary causes referring to the list above and remember that causes are often interrelated, so more than one is likely to exist.
- Depending on the primary causes:
 - Work among leadership on what actions can be taken to communicate with the impacted group
 - Collect feedback and share understanding
 - Commit to improving the implications
- Actions taken must be consistent over a period of time to regain trust and alleviate the culture burnout felt by employees. The risk of engaging with the impacted group once and not remaining consistent and committed to your promises can cause even greater cultural burnout over time.



Burnout Type #3

Personal Burnout

Personal burnout is different from culture burnout in that it impacts a single individual within the workplace. While the impact is more limited, it's important to highlight that a series of individuals experiencing personal burnout can often aggregate into a culture burnout dynamic. It is important to address personal burnout so that it does not trickle into team dynamics and lead to greater risk across a group.

Common causes:

- Unclear expectations between manager and employee
- Inconsistent communication and guidance
- Unclear career pathing, performance feedback, or job growth for employee
- Role misalignment and fatigue
- External extenuating circumstances that put pressure on ability to focus and perform in the workplace
- External current events that have a substantial impact on morale and anxiety levels

What to look for:

- Expressed challenges and difficulties during 1x1 meetings or with other team members
- Deviations from typical work quality (including errors and missed deadlines)
- Decrease in work hours and variation from typical schedule
- Negative or unusually little feedback from typically vocal/engaged employees
- Hastened or canceled meetings to free up additional working time on the calendar

How Managers can help:

- Reach out and set up 1x1 time and let your employee know in advance that you aim to discuss how they are doing personally and professionally
- Before problem solving:
 - Express your concern and care for the employee and emphasize that there's no pressure on the conversation
 - Share a few examples of symptoms you've recognized over the course of the previous weeks
 - Ask the employee if your observations/perceptions feel accurate or if you've made any misinterpretations (this is very important, as this burnout lends itself to being highly personalized)
- Inquire about what resources the employee may need to feel supported in their work. This could include:
 - Reshifting of workload
 - Modification of deadlines to alleviate pressure
 - Support with at-home workplace resources
- Commit to providing support and working towards a solution within a very clear period of time. If you're unable to offer immediate solutions in the conversation (which is common), let your employee know when you both can expect to revisit the conversation.

Burnout Type #4

Passion Burnout

Passion burnout is most typically identified at the individual level within the organization. Passion burnout can occur when someone's focus (sometimes by their own choice) on a particular work topic, skillset or set of work activities becomes overwhelming due to the degree of perceived completeness and perfection required, the lack of work variety, or feelings of isolation.

Common causes:

- Focus on a single topic for a prolonged period of time; lack of workload diversity
- Lack of short term, achievable goals to help showcase progress towards overarching goals
- Limited exposure to other parts of the organization and thus, diminished line of sight into bigger picture
- Self-criticism as a result of misalignment in the degree of thoroughness/perfection required
- Being overwhelmed by details; despite caring deeply, the individual may struggle with where to begin

What to look for:

- Working outside of typical work schedule
- Hastened or canceled meetings to free up additional working time on the calendar
- Hyperfocus on a task or topic of interest at the expense of critical business needs or other responsibilities
- Delivering work far beyond the necessary scope
- Excessive time devoted to analysis versus decision-making to achieve business outcome
- Disengagement in the topic after extended period of time of high engagement

How Managers can help:

Passion is something that we aim to foster in our organizations so addressing passion burnout requires a high level of sensitivity on the part of the manager. The key to maintaining the passion while reducing burnout is to provide a clear scope of work, time-bound milestones and a desired set of objectives. Achievement and progress is a key way to alleviate the pressure of burnout. Without direction and distant or ambiguous deadlines, employees can get so deeply immersed in their specialty areas that they burn out before reaching the goal.



Burnout Type #5

Skill Burnout

Skill burnout is a result of individuals facing skill deficiencies or excesses in their specific roles. Ultimately, this type of burnout leads to employees feeling frustrated and misplaced in their roles. Providing team members with the skills required for their role is key for establishing strong alignment. When employees have skills that exceed their role, it becomes important to diversify the workload, introduce stretch projects, or provide role mobility so that they can grow.

Common causes:

- Limited and/or inadequate training opportunities
- Limited career mobility leaving employees in roles for too long
- Limited project and work diversity
- Insufficient career-pathing to provide role growth opportunity and skill development
- Lack of performance management process
- Inadequate communication between managers and employees around necessary and desired skills

What to look for:

- Working outside of typical work schedule
- Displays of boredom (low meeting participation, high distractions, etc.)
- Disengagement from work
- Time spent on work unrelated to role
- Requests for additional training and development

How Managers can help:

Skill deficiencies can be uncomfortable and trigger insecurities for employees and must be handled delicately.

- Explore with your direct reports what skill gaps may exist for their particular work or where they may feel overqualified and seek greater challenges.
- An open discussion around skill burnout is the first step which should be swiftly followed with:
 - A commitment to additional learning opportunities
 - Career mobility for those ready and qualified for additional experiences
 - Additional training and support for those who need further development



Burnout Type #6

Alignment Burnout

Alignment Burnout stems from dissonance between what something is intended to be and what something is. This can occur across the entire organization as it pertains to the mission, within a team as it concerns its strategy, or at the individual level as it relates to a role description. The disconnect between what should be and what is can create ambiguity, anxiety and frustration that over time, leads to burnout.

Common causes:

- Limited, unclear or inconsistent goal-setting
- Lack of communication between leadership, teams and individuals
- Absence of job descriptions and career paths across the organization
- Lack of established performance management process with opportunities for two-way feedback

What to look for:

- Working outside of typical work schedule
- Disengagement from work
- Time spent on work unrelated to role or team priorities
- Missed deadlines or lower quality of work
- Duplicative and/or redundant work across roles

How Managers can help:

While misalignment can lead to frustration, it also presents an opportunity to improve communication and clarify objectives. However, it is also important to recognize that alignment may not always equate to making all parties happy. There are many different ways to solve a problem, each with its own tradeoffs. The goal for establishing alignment is not to ensure all employees agree or are happy, it's to ensure that everyone is working together with clear objectives and expectations.

Addressing Team Misalignment

- Bring the group together to acknowledge the burnout sentiment and provide space for shared concerns
- Understand where and why the confusion may exist:
 - If perceived objectives and goals vary due to miscommunication, clarify the strategy
 - If perceived objectives and goals vary due to disagreement on approach, discuss it

Addressing Organizational Misalignment

- Understand from your own team where they see misalignment across teams
- Connect with other team managers to establish understanding and alignment in work approach
- Host one or multiple meetings to understand what different teams expect from one another
- Once expectations are set with other team leaders, return to your team to communicate expectations and established alignment

How Burnout Can Lead to Quiet Quitting and How to Address It

Any of the types of burnout previously covered can lead to quiet quitting, a term we at ActivTrak define as **intentional declines in employee problem-solving, participation, innovation, buy-in and morale or active disengagement**.

With this in mind, businesses should focus on proactive engagement strategies and intentional culture building, but who's responsible for those things? Ownership to address quiet quitting sits across multiple layers of the organization.

Below, we explore at a high level how each part of the organization can play a role. And how, as a whole, the organization can address quiet quitting.

Employees

Empower your employees to self-advocate and share what drivers cause them to disengage from their work and business goals.

As pandemic restrictions subside, one thing is clear: Our shared experience from the past two years has had a profound impact on how we interact with the world and derive value from our daily lives. For many, that means work is no longer 1a or even 1b. For working parents it's even lower. In fact, 53% of respondents in Microsoft's 2022 Annual Work Trend Index, indicate they are more likely to prioritize their health and wellbeing over work than before.

For employees, this shift in mental model presents a unique opportunity for self-advocacy – to redefine their roles around unique aspects of value and create a more symbiotic relationship with their employer. For organizations looking to guard against quiet quitting and the corresponding business impacts, proactively nurturing employee interactions is table stakes.

Managers

Equip managers with the data to better inform how they solve for the drivers unique to their organization. Coach them to remove challenges.

Organizations and employees are asked to produce more with less. In this environment, addressing quiet quitting and employee burnout – particularly amongst critical workforce segments – is imperative for the business.

We own this as common knowledge, but given its potential impact on the very fabric of your organization, it bears repeating. A strong manager bench is a critical factor to mitigate against employee disengagement. It must be a focal point for organizations to drive sustained employee satisfaction and proactively address quiet quitting. Providing people managers with actionable insight into individual and team capacity levels, burnout risks and overall productivity will empower them to effectively guide their teams to generate the best results.

Leadership

Ensure leaders own the drivers that are contributing to employee disengagement and quiet quitting. Identify and invest in the measures to improve them.

Trust in organizational leadership is even more pronounced in today's virtual environment. One of the greatest impacts leaders can make in building trust is taking deliberate actions based on what they've seen and heard from their employees. These actions serve as demonstrated evidence that they're committed to improvement. As leaders actively *listen*, they are rewarded with the insights and opportunities to take *strategic actions* that provide the very relief and support their teams need. Through the lens of quiet quitting, leaders must consider how they create space to listen and see the warning signs that indicate disengagement drivers. Whether it's business misalignment, low employee morale, or unclear roles and responsibilities, these signs suggest a need for positive intervention and investment. Leaders who choose to *own the drivers* as a challenge that they must help others overcome not only build trust, but also unlock productivity, improve organizational culture, and elevate engagement.

Organization

Create the right environment for employees, before it's demanded by employees. Improvement thrives when an organization establishes continuous insights, feedback and action.

As W. Edwards Deming, a leader in the quality movement, writes "People are born with intrinsic motivation, self-esteem, dignity, curiosity to learn, and joy in learning." Organizations, when designed correctly, should inspire innovation and allow for employees to engage their passions. Sure, this may sound aspirational given the current environment, but that doesn't detract from its importance as a force to improve the satisfaction that people derive from their job. Quiet quitting, by its very name, indicates a subversive phenomenon. It doesn't have to be. Employees are more apt to come together and openly discuss the very things hindering their engagement when they feel supported, encouraged and empowered. Embrace this moment in time and lean into addressing matters of employee disengagement.

For more on quiet quitting, check out these additional resources:

- [Blog: Four Ways to Empower Your Organization to Address Quiet Quitting](#)
- [On-Demand Webinar: Using ActivTrak to Identify Quiet Quitting Across Your Team](#)
- [Video: How Can You Solve for Quiet Quitting?](#)
- [Video: What is Quiet Quitting?](#)
- [Video: What is Driving Quiet Quitting?](#)

Getting Ahead of Burnout

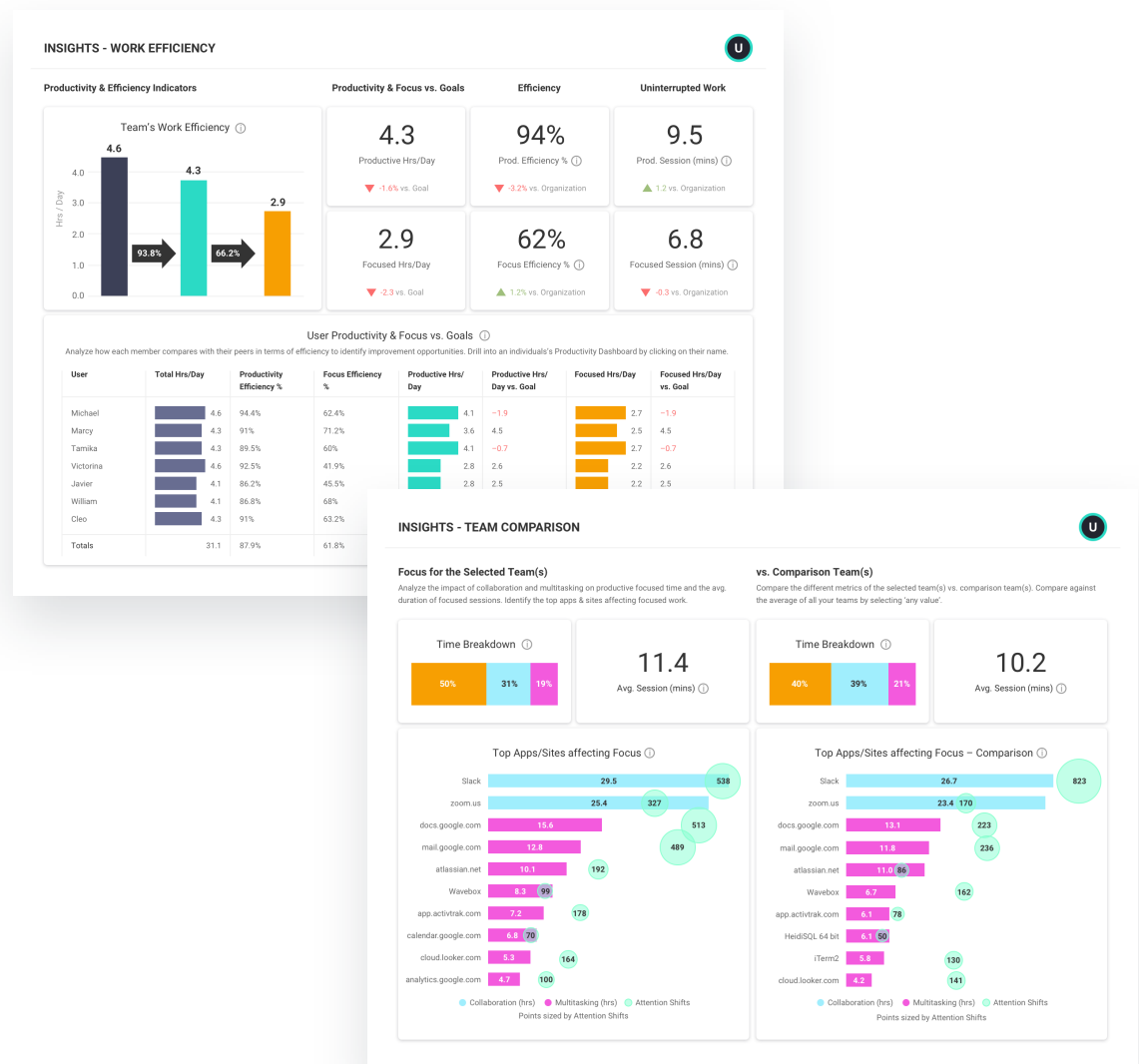
While six burnout types are outlined in this guide, the categories, causes and symptoms are not mutually exclusive. The prevalence of one burnout type can lead to other types of burnout, which is how it can compound and become harder to address and contain. This is why it is so critical for managers to have the right tools and knowledge to watch out for signs of burnout, and address them as proactively as possible.

How ActivTrak can help

Quantitative productivity data can be a great asset in the decision making process for headcount, technology budgets and other resources. ActivTrak is a workforce analytics and productivity SaaS application that provides data-driven insights to help organizations:

- Measure productivity trends across teams and individuals
- Assess workload balance and burnout risk
- Understand focus and engagement for remote and in-office employees
- Leverage historical benchmarks and trends to set team goals
- Enable managers to be rock-star coaches to employees

[Learn more](#) [Request a Demo](#)

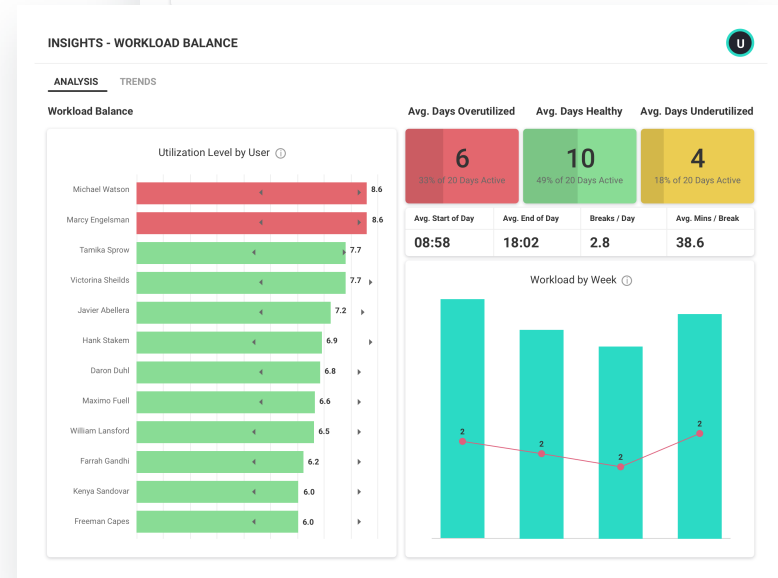
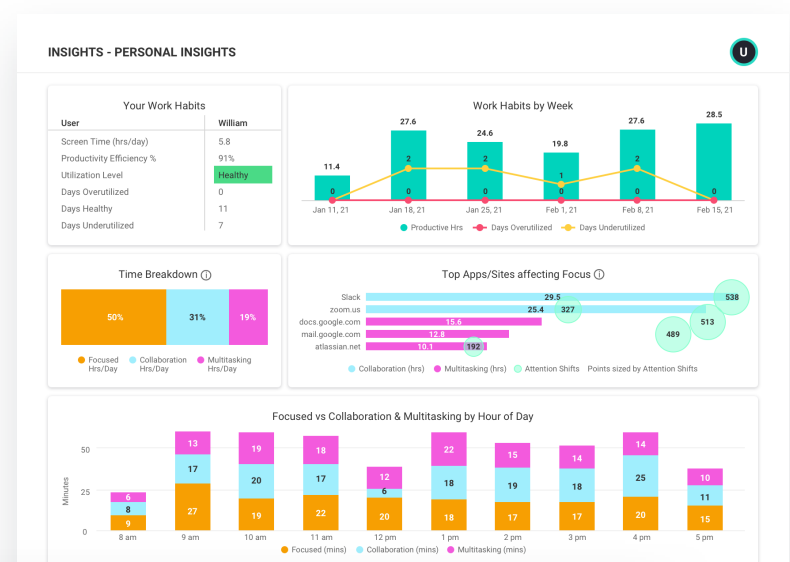


Provide Better Coaching and Team Development with ActivTrak

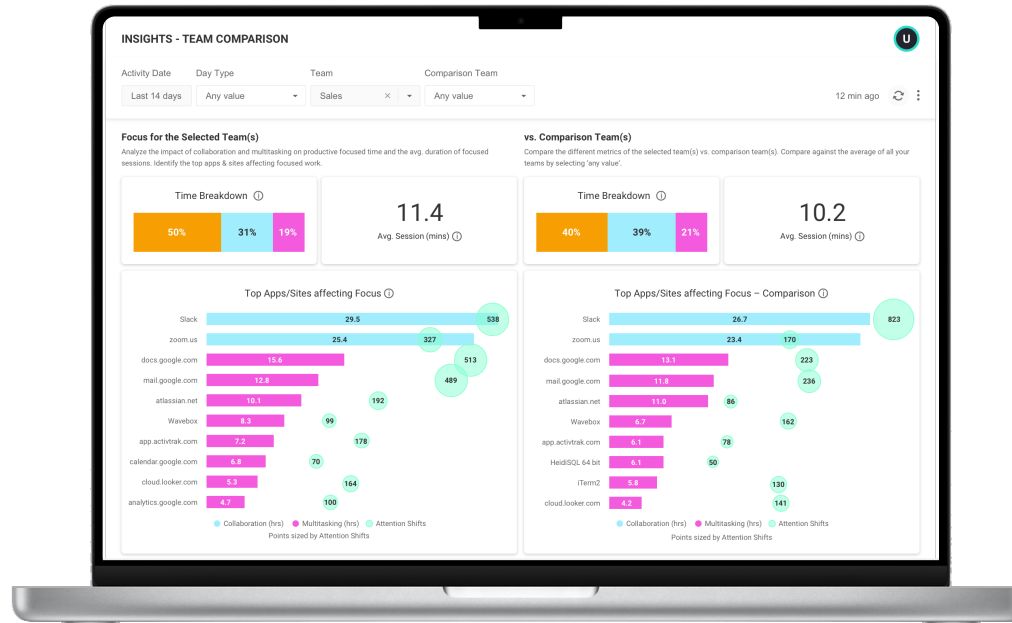
ActivTrak provides data and insights to help managers identify productivity blockers like burnout and quiet quitting, along with insights and best practices to support healthy and effective team work habits, including:

- **Burnout risk analysis:** View trends of working hours, and utilization summaries to assess who might be at risk for burnout
- **Team comparisons:** View consistent data across teams to understand where more resources are needed, or workloads need to be shifted
- **Productivity trends:** Get consistent, continuous trends to understand employee engagement and productivity
- **Focus time summaries:** Understand how much time is spent on focused work vs. collaboration and multi-tasking to help teams assess how to best work together
- **Technology usage summaries:** Understand what tools are used most and least to ensure investment in the right technologies to power productivity
- **Personal productivity insights:** Share data with individuals so they can better understand their own work habits and where they can improve productivity and focus
- **Benchmarks and Goals:** Understand historical averages, set goals and track improvement as you experiment with new ways to increase focus and productivity

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"ActivTrak has been a pivotal tool in helping us **track activity and productivity, forecast burnout risk, and more.** I have recommended this software to companies who are currently remote-first or are looking to become remote."

Administrative Assistant
Corporate Real Estate Company
11-50 employees



"We have many employees who tend to overwork themselves and one of the best features is being able to gauge that and to help our employees from **being overworked and burnt out.**"

Technician in Information Technology
Non-profit Organization Management Company
51-200 employees



"ActivTrak has given us some great insight into how employees spend their working time when out of the office. **We've been able to better track those employees close to burnout** and those that are not using their work time to our standard of productivity."

Professional in Human Resources Health
Wellness and Fitness Company
501-1000 employees