

CASE STUDY #3

Performance Tracking Without Making Employees Feel Surveilled

Black Acre HRM -- Productivity Metrics and Data Transparency

Project	Black Acre -- Human Resource Management Platform
Area	Performance Analytics, UX, Data Transparency
Difficulty	Medium -- Product judgment, stakeholder alignment, data framing
Outcome	Management got meaningful performance data; employees trusted the platform

Background

Upper management on Black Acre needed visibility into how their teams were performing. Task completion rates, on-time delivery percentages, and workload distribution were the specific data points requested. These are legitimate operational needs for any company. The challenge was that the employees being tracked were also users of the same platform and could feel the weight of that tracking in how the tool presented itself to them.

The Problem

The first performance dashboard prototype showed real-time task completion counters, a live activity feed of what each employee was working on, and a weekly productivity score ranked across the team. Managers loved it. When employees were shown the same prototype during internal testing, the reaction was immediate and negative.

What Employees Said

- The live activity feed felt like being watched minute by minute.
- The team ranking created anxiety and competition rather than motivation.
- The productivity score was a single number with no context, and employees did not understand how it was calculated.
- Seeing their own data presented the same way a manager sees it made the platform feel like a monitoring tool, not a work tool.

Business Risk

An employee-facing productivity surveillance tool gets abandoned or gamed. Employees learn to make the metrics look good rather than do good work. The data becomes less reliable over time, which defeats the entire purpose of having it.

The Solution

1. Separated Data Views by Audience

The management dashboard and the employee dashboard were treated as entirely different products consuming the same underlying data. Managers saw aggregate team metrics, completion trends, and workload distribution. Employees saw only their own task progress, upcoming deadlines, and a personal completion rate for the current week. No employee could see how they ranked against colleagues. No manager view was exposed to employees.

2. Removed Real-Time Activity Feeds

The live activity feed was cut entirely from the management view. Instead, managers saw daily and weekly summaries. The distinction mattered: a summary says 'your team completed 34 of 40 tasks this week', which is useful. A live feed says 'Sarah has not touched her task in 2 hours', which is surveillance. The summary gave management the signal they needed without creating a minute-by-minute watch environment.

3. Transparent Score Calculation

The productivity score was replaced with a set of named, explained metrics: on-time completion rate, average task turnaround time, and tasks completed per week. Each metric showed its calculation clearly in a tooltip. Employees saw the same metric labels in their personal dashboard with definitions written in plain language. Nothing was hidden or algorithmically opaque.

4. Employee Visibility Into Their Own Data First

Employees could see their own performance data before any manager did. A weekly summary was sent to each employee on Friday before the management report generated on Monday. Employees had the weekend to add context notes to any metric they wanted to explain. Managers saw the metric plus any notes the employee had attached. This made the data feel collaborative rather than one-directional.

Employee Concern	Design Response
Live feed feels like surveillance	Replaced with daily and weekly summaries only

Team ranking creates anxiety	Rankings removed; personal metrics only in employee view
Productivity score is opaque	Replaced with named, explained metrics with visible formulas
Data flows to management without employee knowledge	Employees receive their summary before managers see it

Outcome

After the redesign, employee adoption of the platform increased noticeably. Employees started using the personal dashboard proactively to track their own week rather than avoiding the platform. Management retained all the performance visibility they needed. The data quality improved because employees were not gaming metrics they did not understand. Both stakeholder groups trusted the platform, which was the actual goal.

Key Takeaway

The same data can feel empowering or oppressive depending on how it is framed and who controls it. Performance tracking in an HRM platform only works if employees trust the system enough to use it honestly. That trust has to be designed into the product from the start, not added as a disclaimer after the fact.

-- Ehsan