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OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES

WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

WORK MATTERS

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Workplace Surveillance

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Within the workplace, employees are subjected to various pressures, namely managing multiple projects simultaneously, committing to deadlines, and collaborating with strangers that cohabit the office. On top of these experiences, employees often find themselves struggling with the anxiety of the supervisor or employer looking over their shoulder, such is the commonality of workplace surveillance. Workplace Surveillance is professionally defined as the monitoring, record and analysis of employee activities, behaviors and communications by the employers using a variety of methods. These methods range from human spies among the employee pool to digital tracking software and CCTV cameras. It is a measure implemented to measure productivity, enhance security, ensure compliance and manage performance. It has become quite a controversial topic being discussed as either a necessary measure or a violation of privacy.

Many employers describe workplace surveillance as a necessity to ensure productivity is maintained among their employees, claiming it also enhances security and regulatory compliance. While the law requires most employers to be open with their employees, not all monitoring is obvious. For instance, software can be installed to log keystrokes, visits to certain types of websites can be flagged, telephone calls can be recorded, and electronic communications can be checked for inappropriate content or breaches of company policy. Regarding the reason for this surveillance, employers cite increasing concerns related to violence in the workplace, identity and property theft, and workplace injuries due to accidents.

From the perspective of employees, workplace surveillance is often viewed as an invasion of privacy as well as a source of increased stress rather than a protective measure. Many employees believe that the constant monitoring from employers creates an

atmosphere of distrust. This can negatively impact morale, job satisfaction, and even productivity, as workers may become more focused on 'appearing busy' rather than being genuinely efficient. Furthermore, the idea that personal communications, movements, or behaviors are being tracked leads to increased anxiety and discomfort, especially when surveillance methods are not clearly disclosed. Moreover, employees may also worry about how collected data is stored, who has access to it, and whether it could be used unfairly in performance evaluations or disciplinary actions by the employer. Thus, oftentimes, the workplace becomes an uncomfortable environment for employees

In some cases, surveillance has proven effective in improving accountability and resolving disputes. For instance, CCTV footage has been used to investigate incidents of workplace theft, allowing employers to take appropriate action based on clear evidence. Similarly, in industries such as transportation and manufacturing, monitoring systems have helped reduce accidents by ensuring that safety protocols are observed. However, there are also notable negative impacts, as some organizations where keystroke logging and constant screen monitoring were heavily enforced, employees reported feeling micromanaged and stressed, leading to decreased morale and higher staff turnover. Additionally, some employees protest that employers only utilize the surveillance for their own benefit, when it can also be used to aid, or in the defence of other employees. For instance, some employees claim that employers withhold footage of workplace abuse and harassment out of fear of negatively impacting the company's public image. In another example, excessive monitoring of remote workers during the COVID-19 pandemic led to public criticism of companies that tracked employees' movements, with some workers claiming it blurred the boundaries between their professional and personal lives. These cases highlight that while workplace

surveillance can enhance security and efficiency, its implementation must be carefully managed to avoid damaging employee trust and well-being.

Therefore, considering the concerns raised by both employers and employees, a balanced approach to workplace surveillance is essential. One possible compromise is the implementation of transparent policies within contracts that clearly outline what is being monitored, why it is necessary, and how the information will be used. Furthermore, employers can also limit surveillance to work-related activities and ensure that monitoring is proportionate to the risks being addressed. Additionally, involving employees in discussions about surveillance practices can foster trust and mutual understanding. Providing safeguards such as data protection measures, regular audits, and the option for employees to give informed consent can further bridge the gap between both parties. Ultimately, achieving a fair balance between organizational security and individual privacy is key to creating a respectful and productive work environment.

In conclusion, workplace surveillance remains a complex and divisive issue, shaped by the competing priorities of organizational security and employee privacy. While it can serve as a valuable tool for improving safety, accountability, and productivity, its misuse or overuse can lead to distrust, stress, and reduced morale among workers. As such, the effectiveness of workplace surveillance ultimately depends on how it is implemented. By prioritizing transparency, fairness, and respect for employees' rights, organizations can strike a balance that protects both their interests and the well-being of their workforce.