

Workplace Surveillance and Its Psychological Impacts on Employee: A Review

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ABSTRACT

The growth of digital monitoring technology has led to increased workplace surveillance, affecting both organizational environments and employee experiences. This review examines the psychological effects of workplace surveillance on employee well-being, job satisfaction, productivity, and organizational trust. Excessive surveillance can cause tension, worry, decreased autonomy, and mistrust, despite its potential benefits for security, efficiency, and compliance. Employees may regard intrusive surveillance as a violation of privacy, lowering their motivation and loyalty to the firm. The review uses theoretical frameworks like Self-Determination Theory and Psychological Reactance Model to describe how surveillance influences psychological outcomes. Furthermore, it examines the moderating role of factors such as organizational transparency, perceived fairness, and control over monitoring. Studies indicate that ethical and well-communicated surveillance policies can mitigate negative psychological effects, fostering a balance between security and employee well-being. The review also discusses potential coping mechanisms and adaptive strategies that employees adopt in response to surveillance. In conclusion, while workplace surveillance serves organizational interests, excessive or opaque monitoring can have detrimental psychological effects.

Keywords: *Employee Well-Being, Organizational Trust, Psychological Impact & Workplace Surveillance*

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INTRODUCTION

Employee surveillance has prompted alarm from all corners of society, including commercial organizations, employee interest groups, privacy advocates, civil libertarians, lawyers, professional ethicists, and every possible combination. Each supporter has its own rationale for or against employee surveillance, which might be economic, legal, or ethical. (Martin & Freeman, 2003). Surveillance is the controlling of the action, behaviour and other changing information, usually of people for the motive of the directing, managing, influencing and protecting them (Lyon, 2007). It is a crucial aspect of management in both scenarios commercial and employment. Nobody wants to be under the watchful eye of the company's surveillance, yet it is difficult to debate surveillance without addressing both sides of the issue. Near future, there will be more behind-the-desk positions than field jobs, and corporations will surveil their employees more frequently (Obudho, 2017). Violations of an individual's privacy have an impact on his personality and identity formation. This has an impact on his own autonomy as well. Employees who are constantly monitored may be unable to form meaningful relationships with others. Aside from the effect that a loss of privacy can have on the individual, it can cause accumulated difficulties at the societal level.

Theoretical Perspectives of Workplace Surveillance

Workplace surveillance is a complicated issue that connects with several theoretical fields, including organizational behavior, sociology, and information systems. To ground this research in a coherent conceptual framework, three main theoretical views are used: Foucault's Theory of Panopticism, Labour Process Theory, and the Technology Acceptance Model, Psychological Reactance and SDT models. These theories were chosen because they provide contrasting insights into power dynamics, labor control mechanisms, and psychological responses to workplace surveillance.

Psychological Reactance Theory

Jack Brehm proposed the psychological reactance theory in 1966. He believes that when people feel a threat to their freedom or autonomy, they become driven to reclaim their freedom, even if it means participating in constrained behavior.

Psychological reactance relies around the concept of freedom. Thus, our notion of freedom determines the extent to which we can react.

There are four fundamental principles implicated by the theory:

- Reactance occurs when a person believes they have control over the circumstance.
- The perceived value of freedom determines how strongly people react to threats. If the freedom under assault is critical, the response will be equally crucial.
- The greater number of freedoms threatened, the greater will be the reactance aroused. For instance, if a person is asked to stop drinking alcohol altogether, the reactance to this may be greater than if they are asked to drink in moderate amounts.
- Reacting to a threat can be heightened by the presence of several potential hazards. For example, if a professor instructs a student not to eat in class, the student may assume that this also implies not to drink coffee or water. The reactance will so rise (Brehm, 1966).

Self-Determination Theory

In line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), satisfying the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness leads to optimal motivation and well-being. Autonomy in the workplace, where employees feel they have choice and control, is crucial for engagement, satisfaction, and reduced stress (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Panopticon Theory and Employee Behavior

Panoptes, is a Greek word which means “all seeing”, Bentham’s (1791) idea of the original Panopticon as a circular prison in which prisoners can be observed at all times corresponds closely to the current workplace’s ability to implement CCTV, which can literally watch and record the behaviors of employees at work at all times. A significant justification for management monitoring employees in this manner is to protect against employee crime, fraud, and theft (Findlay & McKinlay, 2003). The downside of employee surveillance, as observed by Mishra and Crampton (1998) and Worsnop (1993), is that conflicts in the employment relationship led to a decrease in trust between parties. This was shown in the findings of both the staff survey and management interviews.

Some other theories’ ground work also align with the theoretical farmwork of the topic:

Labor Process Theory (LPT), developed by Harry Braverman (1974) and anchored in Marxist traditions, defines workplace surveillance as a tool for capital to maximize labor output by exerting control over the labor process. This viewpoint is critical for understanding surveillance in light of organizational power structures and fiscal constraints. LPT contributes to the research by framing surveillance as a tactical reaction to control, resistance, and labor commodification, rather than a management necessity.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), proposed by Fred Devis (1986) and frequently used in information systems research, is intended to investigate how employees perceive and react to surveillance technology. TAM's focus on perceived usefulness and perceived simplicity of use helps to identify how employees' acceptance or resistance to monitoring is impacted by their ideas about the technology's function in improving performance vs infringing on privacy. This approach adds a psychological and behavioral layer to the investigation, allowing for a better understanding of how attitudes regarding surveillance affect organizational outcomes.

These theoretical lenses are not mutually exclusive, but rather interconnected. They give a thorough explanation of workplace surveillance by examining its disciplinary functions (Panopticism), structural implications (LPT), and individual-level responses (TAM). By combining these views, the study obtains a strong framework for analyzing the intricacies of surveillance in modern organizations, improving both academic discourse and practical actions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace surveillance has grown in popularity as digital technologies such as CCTV, keystroke recording, and GPS tracking enable continuous employee monitoring. The literature has evolved in line with technical improvements and organizational desire to maximize efficiency and security. This piqued interest has prompted critical research into how such surveillance tactics harm employees' psychological well-being, privacy, and autonomy. Early research on electronic performance monitoring (EPM), such as Smith and Amick (1989), sparked discussion about the psychosocial hazards of workplace control technologies.

Theoretical Backup

This stream of literature is often grounded in Control Theory (Edwards, 1979), which discusses how managerial methods such as surveillance are employed to impose compliance and discipline among employees. Foucault's (1977) Panopticism framework broadens understanding by viewing surveillance as a method of social control in which employees internalize monitoring and self-regulate their conduct, resulting in emotional stress and anxiety. More recent research has used the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), which suggests that high demands (such as constant surveillance) combined with low resources (such as autonomy and trust) result in burnout and disengagement.

Ball (2010) and Ajunwa et al. (2017) found that excessive monitoring contributes to higher stress, job dissatisfaction, and a loss of confidence in employer-employee relationships. Anxiety, perceived invasion of privacy, and diminished job engagement are some of the psychological responses. Furthermore, workplace surveillance has been linked to what Moore et al. (2018) refer to as "techno-stress," particularly when surveillance becomes intrusive and unrelenting.

Alan Westin (1970) says "If surveillance does not allow a person with the required space for his behaviors and ideas, he may have schizophrenia symptoms." Indeed, privacy is essential for the proper operation of social structures. Only those who are completely committed to the ideal of perfection can withstand total surveillance. However, this is not the case for men in everyday society.

To establish an effective workplace surveillance system, firms employ a variety of tactics, ranging from simple camera monitoring to complex systems that include email monitoring, phone call tracking, screen sharing, and so on. Firms use various techniques to monitor employees' activities to ensure increased profitability, performance and productivity (Gichuhi, Senaji & Ngari, 2016). Surveillance gives the surveillor with enough information about its subjects to carry out its planned aims. Employers subject their employees to surveillance in order to maximize revenues. Corporate firms conduct employee surveillance for economic reasons. Employee monitoring is conducted to prevent theft and sabotage, increase productivity, prevent lawsuits, avoid workplace violence, and prevent terrorist attacks (Lane, 2003). Organizations utilize surveillance to boost efficiency, decrease risks, and maximise profits (Rosenblat, 2014).

While worker surveillance is a long-standing organizational practice, technology improvements over the last two decades have increased the scope and extent that employers may track and evaluate their personnel (Ball, 2021).

Through employee engagement at the workplace ensures that employees are devoted to their organization's aims and values, and driven to contribute to organizational performance while also improving their individual feeling of wellbeing (Gichuhi, Senaji & Ngari, 2016). Business owners and supporters frequently highlight legitimate reasons to monitor their staff, such as security concerns and quality control (Pierce et al., 2015). However, the level of invasiveness given by modern monitoring technology raises major considerations regarding their ramifications for employees' mental health, potentially generating a climate of intimidation, fear, and resentment that can harm psychological well-being (Ravid et al., 2020).

Excessive workplace surveillance has negative consequences for employees, including increased stress, loss of identity, and the establishment of privacy concerns. Many surveys have found that employees who are under surveillance are more likely to experience health, psychological, and moral difficulties. In many situations, workers fail to handle pressure under surveillance settings and abandon their jobs (Ragoo & Chuttoo, 2017).

A lack of privacy can have a negative impact on these folks' growth and willingness to interact with others. One of the economic concerns is that missing employee privacy can hurt labour relations (Stahl, 2008).

According to meta-analyses of electronic performance monitoring studies, monitoring has a detrimental influence on worker well-being by increasing work stress and decreasing job satisfaction (Ravid et al., 2023).

The putative relationship between monitoring and worker well-being is explained using multiple separate routes that relate surveillance to higher job pressure and decreased well-being. First, theories of assessment anxiety show that individuals face heightened performance pressures when being observed (Matthews, 2005). Experiments on data entry workers, for example, found evidence of increased job speed and stress among those who were electronically monitored (Bartels & Nordstrom, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a methodical way to examining the available literature on workplace surveillance and its psychological effects on employees. The

purpose was to collect, appraise, and synthesize peer-reviewed articles to find common themes, gaps, and future research areas.

Selection Criteria of Articles

Inclusion Criteria

- *Topic Relevance:* Research had to concentrate on workplace surveillance (e.g., electronic monitoring, video surveillance, keyboard tracking) and its psychological or behavioral impacts on employees.
- The study types included empirical research (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method), theoretical frameworks, and systematic literature reviews.
- *Peer-Review Status:* Only peer-reviewed journal articles were used to maintain academic rigor.
- *Publication Period:* Studies published between January 2004 and December 2024 were examined.

The Exclusion Criteria Included

- Non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces, and editorials.
- Studies focused only on technical aspects of surveillance (e.g., algorithm design), without relating them to psychological repercussions.
- Research focused on non-workplace contexts (e.g., public surveillance or school monitoring).

The Screening and Selection Process

A total of 350 items were discovered through database searches. After deleting duplicates ($n = 98$), 252 publications were evaluated using titles and abstracts. Of these, 82 articles were excluded because they did not match the inclusion criteria. The full texts of the remaining 170 articles were thoroughly reviewed. Finally, 58 papers were chosen for inclusion in this review according to their relevance, methodological rigor, and addition to our understanding of the psychological effects of workplace surveillance.

Rationale for Timeframe

The 20-year timeframe 2010-2024 was chosen to represent current research trends with the rapid proliferation of digital monitoring

technology and broad use of remote and hybrid work patterns, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic. This decade has also seen a major growth in scholarly interest in workplace surveillance and its consequences for mental health and organizational culture.

OVERVIEW OF MENTAL HEALTH IN WORKING SCENARIO

The importance of mental health can be covered in following headings:

Personal Well-Being: Good mental health is essential for personal well-being. It includes both the emotional and psychological parts of a person's existence and adds to self-esteem, resilience, and the ability to effectively handle life's adversities. Individuals with good mental health are more likely to have a positive self-image and a general sense of well-being. They can endure stress, setbacks, and keep a positive attitude toward life's ups and downs. It promotes joy and contentment in daily interactions and relationships (mentalhealth.com, 2023).

Social Functioning: Maintaining strong relationships, both personal and professional, is crucial for mental health. It fosters effective communication, empathy, and true connections with people. Individuals with strong mental health are better able to negotiate social interactions, resolve disagreements, and form supportive connections. This improves their social functioning and general quality of life (Montez, 2010).

Productivity and Creativity: A healthy mental state promotes productivity and creativity. It helps individuals think critically, overcome difficulties, and approach projects with creativity and excitement. Individuals with good mental health are more adaptive, open to new ideas, and capable of devising creative solutions to obstacles. Productivity and creativity can benefit personal growth and achievement in all parts of life, including professional job and hobbies (Pavitra, Chandrashekar & Choudhury, 2007).

Psychological Impacts of Workplace Surveillance

Stress leads with decreased organizational performance, reduce employee overall performance, a high error rate and poor work quality, high staff turnover, and absenteeism caused by health issues such as anxiety, emotional disorders, work-life balance, depression, and other ailments such as frequent headaches, obesity, and cardiac arrests (Ajayi, 2018).

Workplace stress is a physical, psychological and emotional reaction that occurs when a worker's ability, resources, or needs conflict with the requirements of the job (NIOSH, 1999).

Employees under stress are more likely to be unwell, unmotivated, less productive, and hazardous at work (Goswami, 2015). Which can be the cause of reduced job performance (Ekienabor, 2019).

According to the survey results, employees who had their performance electronically monitored noted their working conditions as more stressful and reported higher degrees of job boredom, psychological tension, anxiety, melancholy, rage, health complaints, and exhaustion. These consequences are thought to be linked to changes in job design as a result of electronic performance monitoring (Smith et al., 1992).

According to a recent study, nearly 59% of those asked believe they had been micromanaged at some point in their lives. 55% of these respondents stated it reduced their productivity, while 68% said it impacted their morale. While most micromanagers have good intentions, 39% of employees have changed jobs to avoid working with them (Wilcocks, 2023).

Supervisor-employee dyads demonstrate that supervisors' close monitoring has a negative impact on employees' creativity and knowledge sharing; a mediation test using a bootstrapping methodology indicates that supervisors' close monitoring has a significantly negative indirect impact on employees' creativity and knowledge sharing with leader-member exchange (LMX) as the mediator (Son et al., 2017). In the monitoring perspective, pervasive concerns about data privacy in the digital age can contribute to a sense of vulnerability and a diminished sense of well-being (Li, Liu, & Energy Rep., 2021).

According to Secure Data, 37% of US workers explicitly associate workplace surveillance with a decline in their mental health. The impact emerges in a variety of ways, the most prevalent of which is a perceived invasion of privacy (46%). Employees who are continually monitored by cameras or software, or who are simply afraid of being watched, believe their personal space is constantly being invaded. Furthermore, 43% of US workers believe their employers dislike them because of surveillance methods, which can lead to resentment and lower morale. Another 38% say their stress levels rose as a direct result of workplace surveillance and the continual feeling of being observed. Surveillance has more than simply emotional consequences. The survey also illustrates how employees cope. Nearly half (47%) of US workers

admit to self-censoring workplace conversations and topics for fear of being perceived negatively. This can inhibit innovation and collaboration, limiting team dynamics.

Understanding the psychological impact of worker surveillance might help firms decide whether to install the program. Although employee monitoring can improve performance and well-being, it can also reduce an employee's sense of moral responsibility and encourage behaviors that the program is intended to discourage.

Employee Monitoring Can Increase Rule-Breaking

The Harvard University report *Stripped of Agency: The Paradoxical Effect of Employee Monitoring on Deviance*, published in the Sage Journal of Management in November 2021, A rigorous study of over 100 US employees was conducted, with some subjected to employee monitoring and others not. The watched personnel were considerably more likely to participate in the following rule-breaking behaviors:

- Ignoring instructions
- Damaging workplace property
- Stealing office equipment
- Purposefully working at a slow pace
- Taking unauthorized break

The suggestive explanation of the above study might be due to the factors for doing the right thing include a person's internal moral compass, the threat of punishment, and the promise of reward. As a result, employee monitoring might reduce a person's sense of accountability for their actions. As a result, monitored employees are more prone to engage in immoral behavior than unmonitored ones.

Maintaining Accountability While Monitoring Employees

The study increased participants' perceptions of workplace fairness by altering how respectfully the administrator dealt with them and whether they received the promised financial reward. The findings revealed that monitored individuals were less likely to cheat if they believed they were handled honestly. Thus, monitored employees who believe they are being treated fairly are more inclined to accept moral responsibility for their behavior.

BEST PRACTICES FOR ETHICAL WORKPLACE SURVEILLANCE

Designing a workplace monitoring and surveillance policy can be difficult because it typically has an impact on staff morale and culture. Being transparent and maintaining an open channel of communication can help to create a better workplace atmosphere. When businesses are open about their workplace monitoring policies, they may convey their reasoning and set clear expectations for their employees. With this understanding in place, employees can submit feedback and discuss the situation with their superiors. This can reduce and fix any complications that may emerge (shrm.org). There are some key points which should be consider while monitoring.

Transparency and Clear Policies

- *Develop a Comprehensive Policy*

Create a detailed monitoring policy that defines the objective, scope, and procedures for workplace surveillance, including what will be monitored, how data will be utilized, and employee rights.

- *Inform Employees*

Clearly convey the policy to all employees, ensuring that they understand what is and is not being monitored, as well as how the data will be utilized.

- *Obtain Consent*

Obtain explicit employee approval before doing more intrusive monitoring (such as keystroke logging or webcam spying).

- *Regularly Review and Update*

Periodically review and update the policy to ensure that it stays relevant and in line with changing laws and best practices.

Limiting the Scope of Monitoring

- Monitor only job-related activities that directly impact performance, productivity, and security.
- Protect personal privacy by not monitoring personal conversations, social media, or non-work-related websites unless necessary for compliance.
- Only monitor employee activity on company devices with their permission or awareness.

- Ensure fair and consistent monitoring policies for all employees, eliminating discriminating techniques.

Respecting Employee Trust and Data Privacy

- *Protect Data Security*: Implementation of strong security assess to prevent illegal access and keep employee data safe.
- *Compliance with Ethical and Legal Frameworks*
 - *Follow Data Protection Laws*: Comply with all applicable data protection laws and regulations.
 - *Consider Ethical Guidelines*: Follow ethical rules and best practices for workplace surveillance.

EMPLOYER TIPS FOR FAIR TREATMENT

Employers can use the following ways to promote justice and responsibility among their employees:

- Engage staff in software monitoring discussions and decisions.
- Establish clear boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate worker monitoring.
- Be open and clear about data gathering and use.
- Use data to educate employees about wellness initiatives and professional development opportunities.
- Provide employees with access to their own data and aggregated, anonymized data from relevant teams.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS OF RESEARCH

In future research can be conducted in the following areas:

Emerging Technologies in Workplace Surveillance

Growing workplace surveillance technologies, such as AI-powered monitoring, biometric tracking, and IoT-enabled sensors, are revolutionizing staff management. AI-powered analytics use facial recognition and sentiment analysis to monitor productivity, discover abnormalities, and analyze emotional states. Wearable devices and RFID tags track mobility and health data, whilst keystroke logging and screen recording software evaluate digital activities. While these advancements improve security and efficiency, they also pose ethical questions about

privacy, autonomy, and data misuse. Maintaining a balance between surveillance and employee rights is critical for ethical implementation (Ajunwa, 2020).

Long-Term Psychological Effects

Workplace surveillance can have serious long-term psychological consequences, including increased stress, anxiety, and worse job satisfaction. Continuous monitoring generates distrust, lowering employees' feeling of autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Ball, 2010). Over time, this can lead to emotional weariness and a decline in well-being. According to research, excessive surveillance might stifle creativity and innovation by instilling fear of inspection (Bhave, 2014). Furthermore, perceived privacy invasions can reduce organizational engagement, leading to increased turnover intentions (West & Bowman, 2016). Addressing these concerns needs ethical regulations that strike a balance between oversight and employee well-being.

Alternative Models to Employee Performance Monitoring

Alternative models to employee performance monitoring prioritize ethical and transparent practices above intrusive workplace surveillance. Goal-based assessments, peer reviews, and self-evaluations all help to build trust and autonomy. Employee feedback systems and constant mentoring promote engagement while maintaining anonymity. Digital solutions, such as project management software, track productivity without invasive surveillance. Furthermore, outcome-based performance measures prioritize results above continuous monitoring. According to research, excessive monitoring might have a negative impact on employee morale and creativity. A balanced approach that combines ethical technology use and participatory evaluation can boost productivity while preserving workplace trust (Stanton & Weiss, 2021).

CONCLUSION

After brainstorming on several articles this study finds that workplace surveillance has major psychological effects on employees, including stress, job satisfaction, life satisfaction and overall well-being, based on analysis of numerous papers. Excessive monitoring can cause anxiety,

limited autonomy, and a loss of confidence between personnel and management, despite its potential benefits for productivity and security. Perceived invasion of privacy can reduce motivation and involvement, creating a culture of fear and anger. Organizations must strike a balance between surveillance and ethics, maintaining transparency and fairness in monitoring processes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS AND POLICYMAKERS

Employers and policymakers must strike a balance between employee wellbeing and workplace surveillance. Excessive monitoring can raise stress levels, restrict autonomy, and decrease job satisfaction. Transparent policies, ethical surveillance procedures, and mental health support can increase trust and productivity while adhering to privacy legislation and ethical labour norms.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research should explore on the long-term psychological effects of workplace surveillance across many industries, custom and cultural contexts. Studies should look into moderating elements such as organizational transparency, employee autonomy, and coping techniques. Moreover, studies should analyse the impact of AI-driven monitoring as well as ethical aspects in order to strike a balance between productivity and employee well-being. Furthermore, research should look into solutions that combine surveillance advantages with employee psychological health, resulting in a more helpful and ethically responsible work environment.

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