Literature Review on Ethical Concerns in Employee Monitoring: The Case of Workday

Introduction

Employee monitoring technologies, such as Workday, have transformed workplace management by leveraging AI and analytics. However, these tools raise ethical concerns regarding **privacy**, **autonomy**, and **fairness** in data-driven decision-making. This review analyses literature on these ethical challenges, applying insights from the **Software Engineering Code of Ethics (SECE)** and ethical theories, including **Kantianism**, **Utilitarianism**, and **Virtue Ethics**.

Privacy and Consent

Privacy issues are central to discussions around employee surveillance, as these tools track productivity, location, and biometric data. According to Moore et al. (2018), such extensive data collection can lead to "datafication" of employees, reducing them to mere metrics on a dashboard. **SECE Principle 1.05** calls for cooperation in addressing public concerns, highlighting **transparency about data practices** to uphold trust. Ajunwa et al. (2017) argues that pervasive monitoring often extends into employees' personal lives, creating **"constant scrutiny"** that intrudes upon private boundaries. **Kantianism** supports respecting autonomy, highlighting the need for informed consent to protect employees' rights. **Virtue Ethics** also aligns with **SECE Principle 1.06**, which discourages deception, underscoring that fostering a culture of honesty and transparency is essential to maintaining trust between employer and employee.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparent monitoring policies are key to fostering trust, yet many companies lack clarity in data collection practices. **SECE Principle 5.06** stresses the importance of full and accurate information for employees, directly addressing issues raised by Alge et al. (2006) on employees' lack of knowledge of the extent of monitoring and its impact on trust. **Virtue Ethics** underscores integrity, affirming that honest disclosure supports a respectful workplace culture. From a **Utilitarian** standpoint, **transparency** is beneficial as it positively influences **morale**, leading to **increased productivity**, as employees who feel respected and informed are more likely to remain motivated.

Impact on Employee Autonomy

Employee surveillance limits autonomy by restricting employees' freedom to self-manage, with **SECE Principle 1.04** urging employers to disclose such impacts on well-being. Continuous monitoring, as Sewell (2012) notes, can stifle creativity by pressuring adherence to metrics, while **SECE Principle 6.01** and **Virtue Ethics** advocate for an ethical environment that supports intrinsic motivation. Platforms like Workday may further drive burnout and disengagement as employees adapt to **automated metrics** rather than engaging in autonomous, meaningful work as supported by (Gerten et al., 2019).

Fairness and Bias in Data-Driven Decision-Making

Bias in surveillance and monitoring systems poses a significant challenge, as data-driven decisions may perpetuate inequalities. **SECE Principle 3.13** calls for ethical sensitivity, particularly regarding **bias** in data analysis and decision-making. Zuboff (2019) highlights how AI-based surveillance, often built on historical data, can reinforce existing biases in workplace decisions. **Kantianism** underscores fairness as a moral duty, advocating unbiased treatment for all employees. **Virtue Ethics** resonates with**SECE Principle 7.05**, which promotes fair hearings, arguing that equal and unbiased treatment fosters a supportive and morally sound organisational culture.

Legal and Ethical Compliance

Legal compliance is essential in surveillance practices to protect employee rights. **SECE Principle 1.03** accentuates data safety, aligning with privacy laws such as **GDPR**, which mandates explicit consent before collecting and using personal data. Zuboff (2019) cautions against bypassing privacy laws, as this can compromise employees' rights. **Kantianism** advocates for legal adherence as an extension of respecting autonomy. **Virtue Ethics**, along with **SECE Principle 6.06**, reinforces that lawful conduct reflects an organisation's commitment to ethical principles, which is crucial to building trust between employees and employers.

Conclusion

The literature identifies significant ethical challenges in employee surveillance, particularly concerning privacy, autonomy, and fairness. **Kantianism**, **Virtue Ethics**, and **SECE** principles highlight the need for transparency, privacy, and fairness. While **Utilitarian** emphasise the need for surveillance benefits to outweigh potential harm, Kantianism stresses respecting **employees' autonomy and rights**. Implementing **transparent policies** that respect employee rights is essential to maintaining effective and ethical monitoring practices in the modern workplace.

References

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