## Ethics for the IT Professionals Coursework

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Topic: **Using Information and communication technologies as a mean of monitoring employees is a blatant violation of privacy**

### Introduction:

Monitoring is starting to get popular in organizations, every day, more enterprises are using monitoring tools including surveillance cameras, phone call monitoring and recording tools, email filtering, spy-ware and other network filtering and monitoring tools to ensure only the business interest is served. Some people argue that’s a completely violation of privacy whilst other defends it’s a motivation-driven process and that if employees have nothing to hide they shouldn’t be concerned. In this paper we are going to talk about different ways of monitoring employees, the impact of monitoring to the businesses and employees and the ethics bound to these actions.

Before proceeding we would highlight what is meant by “employee monitoring using information and communication technologies”. Wikipedia defines “Employee monitoring” as “any method of tracking what an employee does while at work. This may include the use of video cameras, keystroke logging, email filters, or even just watching or listening to the employee.” Another definition has been given by Office of Technology Assessmentized (1987) "computerized collection, storage, analysis and reporting of information about employees' productive activities ... [obtained] ... directly through their use of computer and telecommunication equipment".

After going through numerous papers one would say that using Information and communication technologies as a mean of monitoring employees is the process of collecting information about employees’ work time activities, analysing and reporting to make employees accountable of what they do at work since they are hired to serve the company. However, the process of monitoring might infringe the privacy of employees. some would say that, that is blatant violation of employees’ privacy.

In relation to monitoring, privacy and rights, other issues are raised including the questions as follows:

* What impact does monitoring employees has on a business?
* What impact does monitoring has on employees?
* What has it to do with ethics in IT?
* It’s justified that the employers monitor their employees as a way of ensure the money invested in them is not wasted?
* Is monitoring a way to award the hard-worker employees and punish the lazy ones?
* How should the information being monitored be treated?

Answer to these questions are imperative to IT professionals, employers, employees as business as a whole. However, we can’t respond to these without a deep study, because “monitoring the employees is a ethical issue for the IS experts and academics” (Karen D. Loch et al. 1998) and “Use of monitoring data for worker evaluation and control by far has generated the most controversy since it is here that most of the potential for abuse exists” (Hawk 1994).

The paper presents the negatives and positives views of academics about using ICT tools to monitor employees and try to make some reflections and critical approach to provide more insight into the topic.

In addition, the paper also highlights employer’s view that monitoring is completely justified and there is no really violation of privacy since employees are being paid and is their duty to monitor the enterprise resources. Moreover, whilst the employers defend the points read above, it’s still violating the employee privacy, even sometimes this violation exceeds the limits that anyone will consider ethical. We will expose what experts say in the Case for and Case Against sections of the paper.

### Literature Review supporting the “Case For” the chose topic:

Technology surveillance and monitoring has been creeping into peoples’ life from all directions with a speed beyond our imagination. Eventually, it becomes a norm to organizations, businesses and governments around the world claiming to protect their interests against terrorists, criminals, and unproductive or disgruntled employees. However, in the light of ethics some commentators asserted that using information and communication technology as a means of monitoring employees is a blatant violation of privacy. Research into some assertions is presented below.

Creativity is borne out of creative thinking and mostly doing away with norms and rules everyone is used to. Tyler Boone (2007) A democratic and capitalist society benefits by having untroubled citizens who are at their creative and productive best. Creativity comes from a free flow of ideas between people. This flow of ideas is stifled by a lack of privacy because people that are creative and have new ideas are inherently different from the norm. Unless these creators thought differently than most people, their ideas and inventions could not be considered revolutionary. Not surprisingly when people act different or strange they are more likely to be watched by authorities.

Use of ICT surveillance at workplace may lead employers become judgmental or jump to conclusion that a particular employee is not acting in the interest of the business and must go. Lucas D. Introna (2003) suggested that “In the interest of ethics we need to suspend the judgements implied by the monitoring data, we need to walk the further mile to get the ‘whole’ picture. We need to treat as suspicious every possible judgement rendered by the data. We need to insist that the ‘monitored’ are allowed to speak, and explain themselves in their own terms. We must remain open to the possibility that we probably will get it wrong.”

Technological surveillance and monitoring may result those carrying out the monitoring to perceive being given power over other employees. In a business environment where there is no proper regulations or polices, the perceived power holders can intimidate others under their watch, especially when they come to know intimate information about their victims. N. Ben Fairweather(1999).

In a survey about using workplace monitoring and surveillance, numerous employees express their concerns of trust and other expressed concern about their position. One said she did not know if she would stay when the company should start ICT monitoring and surveillance. Two other employees contended that their personal ethics motivates them to give their best for the good of the company and not monitoring. Some had the concern they were not trusted and viewed monitoring as an implications by management. Other also felt that monitoring capabilities would not use appropriately or sensitively. (Stanton & Stam 2006)

**Literature Review supporting the “Case Against” the chose topic:**

Nowadays, as marked by Ciocchetti (2001) about the growth of the monitoring services, there are many programs that allow companies to monitor the employees without violating their privacy. For example, some software can be used to get details about the emails sent and received in the business network without getting it’s content.

Use of enterprise tools for personal ends is a clear issue that affect a large part of the companies, actually, the misuse sometimes is becoming abuse: “Studies revealed that 84% of employees sent non-work related e-mail, while another 90% surfed the Internet for recreational purposes during work hours” (Vault, 2002) or “About 88% of respondents reported that it is acceptable to use company Internet access to cyberloaf (surf the Internet during work hours) when they perceived that everyone else engaged in it” (Lim & Teo 2005).

We should understand that the companies use these tools as ways to improve the productivity, and not to waste companies resources and time. Those tools are being paid for, just like the salary of all employees. And in some cases, we can see that those inversions are being wasted (Websense, 2002). From these issues, monitoring became a valuable solution, a way to determine who are really working for the interest of the company or their personal ends.

If a company purchases email services, it has the right to control it (George,1996), and to ensure that is being used as the way it’s supposed to, it needs to be monitored.

Some experts argue that monitoring could have a bad effect on the employees’ trust, but we can mitigate it or even improve it if they "receive advance notice of monitoring" and "they perceive organizational support prior to the implementation of monitoring" as seen in a study made in 2006 about Internet monitoring effects.(Alder et al. 2006).

Another story by Hoffman (2003) talks about all the purposes that monitoring serves for, as “Managing the workplace, Ensuring effective, productive performance, Protecting information and guarding against theft, Protecting investment in equipment and bandwidth or Protecting against legal liability” and we can see in the same article that most of the companies, in one way or the other, are using monitoring for some of the above purposes.

There is an interesting paper wrote by G. Stoney Alder (1998), who tried to analyse the general the picture, where he wrote "conversation should focus not on whether monitoring is ethical or unethical but rather on how monitoring technology may be utilized ethically" and he described a way to create a monitoring with an ethical approach from deontological and teleological views. Quoting him, the way to get it is: "First, employees subjected to monitoring should be permitted to communicate their preferences and give input into the design of the system. Second, organizations should fully communicate monitoring-related practices and inform employees when monitoring occurs. Third, organizations need to supplement electronic feedback with face-to-face human feedback. Finally, steps should be taken to ensure that such feedback is supportive and non-punitive."

Finally, it’s important to have in mind: “information technology has forced people to rethink their concept of privacy” (Kirsten Martin & R. Edward Freeman 2003) and there are so many things to consider before answering the question in quote “Does employee monitoring respect their privacy?”

**Arguments on balance:**

The section gives a review of both sides and the impact of the monitoring on both the business and the employees.

From the perspective of the employer and the business, monitoring could be implemented to increase the productivity of the workplace in different ways;

First, ICT surveillance and control can help reduce the misuse to enterprise tools. It is a legitimate right for the enterprise to keep good control of their resource to ensure continuity of the business. If resources are left without any control, as shown in the literature review above, some employees could steal, damage, or misuse. As an example, in the case of software tools, employee can illegally copy them in an unauthorised systems or computers. This kind of abuse can do more damage to the business than the benefit the employee would have.

Another way to improve productivity, is to monitor and rate the productivity of employees. This would help to get more objectivity vision of employee performance. This will give opportunity to provide appropriate support to the employees and that can improve their confidence and performance at work. Base on data collection it is possible to fairly gauge individual employee performance and productivity, thus fair promotion is resulted. This control procedure can also prevent credit being given to the wrong employee.

Further more, productivity is improved by restricting unnecessary waste of time on the workplace. As indicated in the literature review above, many employees waste lots of business valuable time surfing the Internet, watching porn, sending personal emails, looking holiday promotions,chatting with friends, etc. As a result it incurs big lost to businesses. Use of ICT monitoring tools help to prevent these acts from the employees without violating their privacy rights. As matter of policy, employees are not allowed to conduct personal activities using enterprise resources, if they adhere to this, their privacy right would not be violated. Further more, their are number of monitoring tools that enterprises can use to monitor without violating others privacy.

Information Technology has completely change the perception and context of privacy in general to which enterprise environment is not an exception. Computers can collect, manage and store large amount data about people, but they are now more secured than before in the context of data Protection Act.

Finally, from the employer view point, it is important to keep in mind that employee is being paid by the employer and has some right to control the business, this can only be successful when there is a good and fair monitoring system.

**Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations:**

**References:**

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