

# Article summary: Worker surveillance

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With the massive increase in the number of people working from home, employers have increasingly used technology to keep tabs on what employees are doing. [This article provides a summary of this new technology](#). Below I address the main themes of the article.

## What the technology does

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While technology for monitoring workers existed before the pandemic, it was initially something of a niche market. Its popularity has exploded in the last two years. On major company in the sector, ActivTrak, went from having 50 corporate clients to over 9,000.

The technology comes in different forms. One program, called Sneek, creates a tableau of video of all the people in a given remote workplace. If one employee notices another slacking off, they are encouraged to report it to the boss. Other programs are even more invasive, logging employee's keystrokes, their email, and their browsing history. Some platforms have genuinely creepy names, like 'FlexiSpy' and 'SpyTech'.

## Pros and cons

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As the article notes, whether this is all good or bad depends on where you are in the office hierarchy. Bosses obviously find it useful to make sure they're employees are working (and, though the article doesn't mention it, to make sure they're not doing things like trying to organize a union). From the employee's perspectives, it all feels deeply alienating. One employee quit his job after a few weeks of being completely monitored.

Even from the boss's perspective, the technology has downsides. Not only are workers likely to quite (especially given the labor shortage) and find a more relaxed employer, but the technology also reduces employee morale. So it's not even obvious how much it improves productivity.

## Take home message

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I've tried to use similar technology in my own classroom. I found that I spent all my time disciplining students for being off task. It generally was self-defeating, since it reduces the level of trust between me and students. It seems that it will have a similar effect in the workplace. I would hate it if the DOE started using this technology.