

Research Topic Abstract: Workplace Monitoring, Privacy, and Power

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Abstract

Employee monitoring software has expanded from time clocks to pervasive surveillance systems that log keystrokes, capture screenshots, track location, and generate productivity scores. This project will examine how these tools reshape worker privacy, autonomy, and informed consent in contemporary workplaces. The central research question is: under what conditions does monitoring become ethically abusive, especially when power imbalances limit meaningful consent, and what safeguards can align organizational security needs with employee rights?

The study will map common monitoring capabilities and the rationales employers cite (security, compliance, performance management), then analyze their privacy impacts using frameworks from information ethics, labor studies, and consent theory. Particular attention will be paid to contexts where workers have limited alternatives or where monitoring is bundled into essential job functions, creating coerced or uninformed consent. The research will evaluate thresholds for abuse, including excessive scope, continuous collection, opaque scoring, secondary use of data, and lack of appeal or redress.

The project will propose practical policy and technical safeguards such as data minimization, clear notice and explanation of monitoring logic, collective bargaining inputs, meaningful opt-out mechanisms, purpose limitation, and auditable access controls. The goal is a set of criteria that helps organizations protect legitimate interests while preserving worker dignity, autonomy, and trust.