



Evidence-based recommendations for employee performance monitoring

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Abstract From security cameras to GPS tracking systems, nearly 80% of organizations use some type of electronic performance monitoring (EPM). EPM uses technology to gather, store, analyze, and report employee behavior (e.g., productivity, use of company time, incivility). The objective, real-time data that EPM systems collect can be used for performance appraisal, training and development, logistical tracking, wellness programs, employee safety, and more. Despite the organizational benefits of EPM, these systems can have adverse effects on employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, fairness perceptions, and employee behavior. Research provides evidence, however, that these downfalls can be mitigated by implementing these systems with employee attitudes and privacy perceptions in mind. Using theory and empirical research evidence, we offer five recommendations for maximizing the positive effects and minimizing the negative effects of EPM: (1) Be transparent with employees about EPM use, (2) be aware of all potential employee reactions to being monitored, (3) use EPM for learning and development rather than deterrence, (4) restrict EPM to only work-related behaviors, and (5) consider organizational makeup when implementing an EPM system.

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1. What is electronic performance monitoring?

Electronic performance monitoring (EPM) refers to organizational systems that use technology to

gather, store, analyze, and report employee behavior data to assess performance and observe actions on the job (Alge, 2001). A 2007 survey indicated that 78% of organizations utilize some type of EPM (Ribitzky, 2007), and this number is likely even higher today as the evolution of technology provides more opportunities for data-gathering capabilities. At its most primitive, EPM can include surveillance camera systems and computer and phone monitoring/blocking systems,

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but the world of EPM has evolved recently to accommodate the popularity of wearable technologies and smartphones, including Fitbits and mobile GPS tracking applications. Indeed, in the modern workplace, “every e-mail, instant message, phone call, line of written code and mouse-click leaves a digital signal,” allowing organizations to generate patterns of employee behaviors inexpensively and make big data-driven decisions to improve efficiency and innovation (Lohr, 2013).

Reasons for implementing EPM are directed at both the individual employee and group level, and for measuring both positive (e.g., task performance, productivity) and negative employee behaviors, such as counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs). CWBs are intentional employee behaviors that oppose the interests and functioning of an organization, such as employee theft, absenteeism, and cyberloafing (e.g., spending time on the internet engaging in non-work behaviors such as online shopping or gaming) (Dalal, 2005; Kidwell, 2010). Consequently, EPM systems may be implemented to surveil for theft, monitor use of company time and resources for personal use, and deter cyberloafing behaviors by monitoring internet usage and blocking non-work-related websites.

EPM systems can monitor positive employee behaviors as well, such as productivity, performance, safety, and even personal health behaviors for training/development and work-life management. Tracking software such as WorkIQ and Desk Time allows companies to condense real-time employee behavior data into weekly or quarterly reports that are emailed directly to employees, outlining how they used their computer time throughout the week (Agu, 2016). The reports aim to help employees become cognizant of their work behaviors, but they may also be used to make employment, promotion, or disciplinary decisions. Additionally, mobile tracking systems can provide useful logistic and time-oriented metrics to assist organizations in predicting delivery times and help employees engage in safer behaviors. For example, semi-truck company Ryder recently implemented driver-facing camera docks and satellite-based monitoring systems to record both positive and negative personal driver behaviors such as unproductivity, speeding, safe turning, abrupt braking, and unauthorized stops (Bowman, 2014). The primary goal of the system is to provide the company with minute-to-minute data regarding vehicle efficiency, fuel usage, and hours of service, but the data also provide drivers with useful information on the safety of their driving practices, allowing them to improve their proficiency at job-related behaviors (Bowman, 2014). Lastly, certain employees

may even welcome location-tracking systems in the workplace because the constant surveillance levels the playing field and holds coworkers accountable for their actions, such as arriving or leaving early on any given workday (Zetlin, 2009).

Many organizations now wish to extend the big data capabilities of technology to assist employees outside of the workplace as well. For example, Castlight Health, used by major employers such as Walmart and Time Warner, analyzes self-reported employee behavior, health searches, and self-assessments to assist employees with making better health choices or even recommending medical treatment. Fitbits, wearable devices that record body movements and heart rate, have infiltrated company buildings as well and employees are often rewarded with paid time off for racking up steps and exercise time (McGregor, 2014). Although these examples do not necessarily assess employee performance, the data gathered nevertheless provide information regarding employee behavior and consequently blurs the boundaries between work and personal life.

2. A lesson in the unintended consequences of monitoring

When Myrna Arias accepted her job position with Intermex, a money transferring company based in the U.S., management required her to download a mobile resource management application called Xora that provides useful on-the-go web services for employees that often engage in client-related communication and travel. Although the location and communication capabilities of the app provided useful data regarding employee whereabouts and transportation metrics during work hours, Xora collected location information via GPS 24 hours per day, 7 days a week in order to function efficiently. Cognizant of this feature, Arias objected to the constant surveillance and requested that the application only be activated during work hours. Her manager insisted that Xora be active at all times for client call purposes, but also bragged to Arias about the exceptional accuracy of the application, claiming that he could even see how fast she was driving at any given time. Perturbed by the manager's indiscreet use of the application and her now perceived loss of privacy, Arias decided to deactivate the application for her own privacy concerns. Arias, despite being an excellent employee, was scolded for her actions and was soon fired for noncompliance, leading to a lengthy lawsuit between Arias and Intermex with damages

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