

DISCUSSION

SURVEILLANCE AND THE WORKPLACE

Working in the fire & security business for seventeen years and at the same time being active in academics, specifically in the multidisciplinary field of Surveillance Studies, may seem to be a little bit schizophrenic. Why? Because the security business is mainly about providing surveillance solutions, i.e. technologies and services, and Surveillance Studies is a subfield of Humanities, which mainly criticizes the growth of surveillance in contemporary times. On the other hand, it is the aim of this journal to bring business and academics together. Let me then present a short reflection on surveillance and especially on surveillance in the workplace.

What is surveillance? Everyday life is becoming the target of monitoring and surveillance more frequently. Institutions, employers and individuals watch, listen, record, and manage personal data and communication, and it does not have to be only about some top secret information. Information and communication technologies (ICT) play a very important role in all of this. They have radically changed the possibilities of contemporary surveillance for institutions and organizations, but also for small groups and individuals. State institutions and corporations are able to collect large amounts of data (data-mining) and algorithmically process information for profiling and further actions as never before. The main targets are citizens, employees and customers, but this isn't only about some top to bottom structure. As Mark Andrejevic puts it, we can also talk about growing lateral surveillance, when people watch each other or also recently as a part of entertainment (e.g. a reality show). Described like this, surveillance is very broad phenomenon, standing for focused and systematic attention to personal details for purposes of protection, influence, management and control.

Theorists such as David Lyon and Elia Zureik note that surveillance is ambiguous. On one hand, surveillance is an expression of care, for example looking after another or protecting assets. On the other hand, surveillance is a means of control. Care and control are two sides of one coin, but

perhaps even more, we can talk about the line where it is difficult to recognize when care becomes control and when control becomes intrusion into privacy.

When we focus on the workplace as one site of surveillance, historically we can recognize several phases of development. Originally surveillance was done only face-to-face, especially visually, when some overseer watched over others. Later, in modern times, starting with manufactories in the eighteenth-century, surveillance started to be more organized and bureaucratized. Employees became objects of drill like in the military. A time schedule, limited workplace, exact working instructions, as well as prohibition of drinking, gambling and swearing were introduced. Many information items regarding workers started to be stored in file-based dossiers. Another step came at the beginning of the twentieth-century with F.W. Taylor's scheme of "scientific management". His application of time-and-motion studies on maximization of effectiveness spread all over the world. Today's employee supervision and monitoring is more sophisticated, but it is based on the rationalizing trends of the past few centuries. The idea of worker supervision has changed little except in its intensity, which is enabled by ICT. Video surveillance, access control systems, location technologies, control of e-mail and Internet activities, key-stroke counting, drug testing etc. allow not only more control on site, but allow also mobile control over distances. Technologies also allow better profiling when recruiting new employees. Many public and private databases can be used for scanning applicants. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) may represent yet another form of surveillance; they are designed to detect, prevent and ameliorate the psychological or personal problems of employees, but this also implies that personal issues are brought to work and shared with an employer.

Is this all for good or bad? Of course the answer is not so simple. The answer is based on equilibrium: employers need to achieve profit and protect their assets, they also need to protect employees' health and safety; it is also based

on employees' well-being at work, which should not be forgotten, and finally on cost effectiveness. Decision makers should always be able to answer the following question: Based on the above aspects, is it worth using such surveillance technology? I am afraid that many would not be able to answer this question. Of course, it is necessary to differentiate between different kinds of surveillance technologies. Some workplaces may require conditions such as those at the Pentagon while others can be areas of "total freedom". But in practice, I can often see how surveillance technologies such as cameras or access control readers are used excessively. These decision makers probably accept the idea of using surveillance because one never knows what can happen. And it is always easier to invest in surveillance technology than having some personal responsibility.

Surveillance is necessary when one feels unsafe, when trust is weak. But we should not forget that social space is about trust. Our societies are very complex and problematic; therefore they are demanding more and more surveillance. However, we should not turn every space into a totally surveilled one nor does every workplace need to be like that either – especially when it costs money.

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