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WATCHING THE WATCHERS: PRIVACY CONCERNS AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN SURVEILLANCE AND TRUST

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INTRODUCTION

The fast growth of CCTV, keylogging, RFID and AI surveillance systems in workplaces has started to worry many about how much control employees have, their ability to feel safe and how teams can remain trustworthy (Ball, 2010). These instruments are supposed to increase both safety and efficient when they are used everywhere. However, these instruments often make employees feel their privacy is being invaded, impacting their reaction upon being watched (Jeske & Santuzzi, 2015; Zhang et al., 2022). A major gap in knowledge remains on how employees seeing their privacy invaded influences their trust in the organization, and how this dynamic affects their dynamics (Martin et al., 2017). A model based on Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory is proposed to explain this mechanism to advance the understanding of the effects of surveillance on trust and points the way forward for research and practical applications.

PRIVACY INVASION AND ITS IMPACT ON EMPLOYEE TRUST

It is now easier for employers to know what their employees are doing at work, and this surveillance has a major effect on how relationships in the workplace have changed. Because of new technologies like biometric systems, AI surveillance and location tracking, people are now more worried about employee privacy (Connolly & Kenny, 2016). While the main goal of these technologies is to make operations safer and more efficient, they have also advocated practices where personal data is collected continuously and usually without the consent of workers (Connolly & McParland, 2012). Scholars believe that continuous or unclear surveillance raises feelings of privacy invasion, especially when it seems unfair or lacks moral guidelines (Tolsdorf & Dehling, 2020). Such an invasion is felt on a personal level since employee's question if their private space and freedom will be respected at work (Jung et al., 2021).

The belief that someone's personal data is being invaded greatly affects how employees respond to organization surveillance. Electronic monitoring tends to reduce employees' trust in their management, mainly in cases where manual laborers, who may not have much power at the bargaining table, are involved (Holland et al., 2015). On top of this, digital surveillance can stifle innovation by reducing the amount of autonomy employees have at their jobs (Wang & Bai, 2024). If surveillance is used without consent from everyone, it is more likely to scare and

worry people. Having privacy invaded in this way becomes the lens that changes how surveillance is viewed as a safety measure or a means of control (Xi & Liu, 2024).

Ethically speaking, surveillance technologies should be introduced and used wisely to protect the culture and mental well-being of employees in the organization. Martin et al. (2016) and Chang and Liu (2016) explained that increasing employee empowerment and supervisory support can strengthen their trust toward surveillance. Being monitored in a way employees find unjust or too strict leads to workers feeling insecure and more likely to leave, whereas trusting, two-way monitoring encourages people to feel secured and included (Kayas et al., 2025). Currently, researchers have yet to come up with findings that link surveillance at work, privacy breaches and employees' trust toward employers. Thus, there is a potential research gap. This study fixes the previous gap by formulating a model that shows that people's sense of their privacy being invaded is what affects trust in organizations.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT

The basis of the theoretical approach in this study is Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory. This theory holds that everyone perceives their personal information as their own and anticipates having a say in when and how it is shared (Petronio, 2002). In the workplace, people's privacy is challenged by ways such as video monitoring, tracking emails and biometric systems, which are considered by many as violations of their personal information boundaries. CPM theory, then, gives insight into the emotional and social results caused by people perceiving these challenges as an intrusion. As surveillance is used more often at work, this theory can show us how employees feel about losing privacy and how it changes their trust in the company (Ball, 2010; Petronio, 2002).

In other words, employees' beliefs about how their privacy is being invaded can have an impact on how much they trust their employer. Employees often view surveillance as too intrusive if the company does not explain and discuss it well, which can result in a lack of trust and cause employees to feel irritated (Holland et al., 2015; Wu & Wang, 2020). Even so, clear explanations from officials about the use of data can make people feel less violated and develop more trust (Alge et al., 2006). The concept improves CPM theory for organizational study and helps companies install ethical monitoring to maintain workers' trust and well-being (McParland & Connolly, 2020). Figure 1 shows the privacy dynamics at the workplace according to the Communication Privacy Management (CPM) Theory.

Revealing the Privacy Dynamics at the Workplace

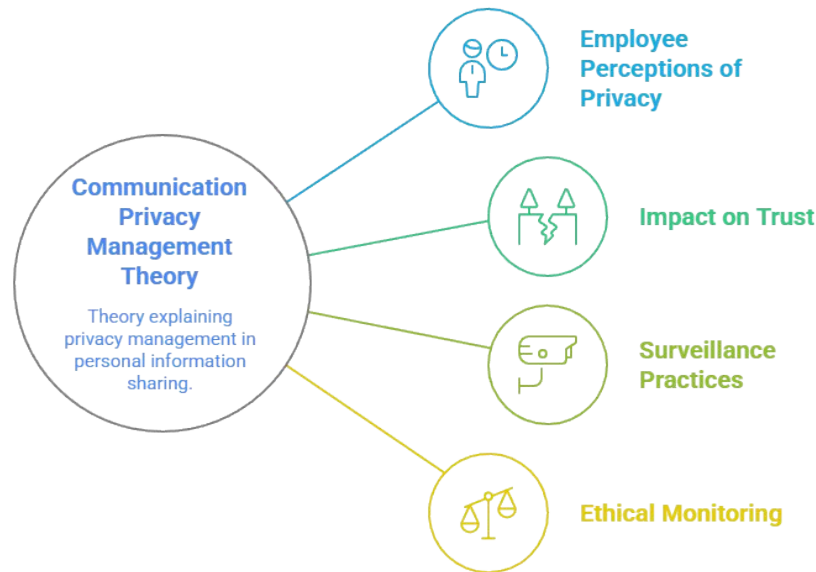


Figure 1: Privacy Dynamics at the Workplace

CONCLUSION

This research shows that workplace surveillance can strongly influence how much employees trust the organization, with the feeling that privacy has been violated by acting as a main mediator. While using surveillance tools may enhance how a workplace is run, employees might trust the company less if they believe their private information is being watched. Related theories are built upon by applying Communication Privacy Management to the workplace, uncovering how monitoring trust and personal boundaries are related in digital workplaces. Effectively, this theory can guide companies to use transparency, let employees give their permission and communicate openly to limit the negative effects. Nevertheless, since the study is meant to provide insight, not based on results, it highlights the requirement for studies on the topic using actual data, in various contexts, as well as researching what effects surveillance and AI might have on privacy and trust in the long run.

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