



English summary  
of Fafo-report 2019:21

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## Monitoring and surveillance in the workplace 2019

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This report is based on, and expands on, a previous survey that Fafo conducted among Norwegian employees in 2010 on attitudes to monitoring and surveillance in working life (Fafo report 2010:46). The report is based on a survey among a sample of 6003 employees in 2019, and the responses are compared to those from 2010. In 2019 we concentrated on electronic or digital forms of monitoring and surveillance, while the 2010 survey also included physical control measures.

The main issues to be discussed in this report are:

- What attitudes prevail among employees with regard to monitoring and surveillance in the workplace, and have they changed over the last ten years?
- How prevalent are various forms of monitoring and surveillance in different parts of Norwegian working life?
- What are the consequences of the use of different digital monitoring and surveillance systems with regard to the working environment, and what are their implications for employee privacy?
- How formalised is the use of digital monitoring and surveillance systems?
- To what extent do employees trust the existing rules for monitoring and surveillance in the workplace, and to what extent do they trust their employers to comply with these rules?

The following summary is based on the summaries provided after each chapter in the report.

## **Chapter 2 Attitudes to monitoring and surveillance**

In Chapter 2, we take a detailed look at attitudes to monitoring and surveillance in working life and society as a whole, and see whether these have changed over the last ten years. The main findings are:

- Attitudes to camera surveillance in specified places have changed little since 2010. There is however, a small tendency for people to be somewhat less positive to camera surveillance in more of the specified places in 2019 compared to 2010. The main pattern is that the closer to employees' own lives and personal activities the camera surveillance occurs, the less positive is their attitude to it.

- Identical questions were asked about development trends and the necessity and consequences of monitoring and surveillance in working life and society in general in 2010 and 2019. A comparison of the assessments made ten years later shows that no major changes have occurred. There is nevertheless a small tendency for employees today to agree less to the assertion that there is an increasing need for monitoring and surveillance measures, when compared to the answers given ten years ago. There is also a strikingly larger proportion of ‘don’t know’ answers to more of the questions in 2019 when compared to 2010.

### **Chapter 3 Use of digital monitoring and surveillance systems in working life**

In Chapter 3 we identify the extent to which various digital monitoring and surveillance systems are found in Norwegian workplaces. We asked about a total of eleven such systems: monitoring of telephone calls, monitoring of the use of telephone/other communication technologies, monitoring of emails, monitoring of web pages, monitoring of computer/screen use, electronic registration of entry and exit, camera surveillance, field technologies when work is undertaken outside the employer’s premises, biometric tools, electronic registration of time use/productivity and monitoring of internal chat rooms.

We found that:

- 59 per cent of the respondents have one or more of these systems.
- 36 per cent report to have at least two of these systems. A combination of multiple different systems will provide increased opportunities for monitoring and surveillance of employees at work.
- In general, these systems are more common in the private than in the public sector. Altogether 63 per cent in the private and 44 per cent in the public sector have at least one of these systems.
- Industries differ when it comes to the use of various monitoring and surveillance systems.

### **Chapter 4 Impact on the working environment**

In this chapter we take a more detailed look at how employees assess the effects of the monitoring and surveillance systems on the working environment.

The systems we asked about differ in many ways in terms of their technology, purpose and opportunities for monitoring and surveillance of employees in the workplace. The questions reveal a complex picture of the ways in which the different systems impact on various aspects of the working environment. There are major variations between different systems as well as in how employees assess identical systems. Although the main impression is that the employees generally cope well with employers’ use of digital monitoring and surveillance systems, the survey also shows that a considerable minority also considers it to have a negative impact on the working environment. Digital systems used for access control and registration of entry and exit are generally perceived as notably less troub-

lesome when compared to other systems. However, we have noticed that new digital systems for direct monitoring and surveillance of the employees' communication by email and use of the internet, computers and internal chat rooms are more often considered to be a source of stress and permit the employer to have excessive control of work performance, when compared to many of the other systems. Camera surveillance in particular is perceived as providing security in the interaction with external parties, such as clients, users and students, but a considerable proportion also feel uncomfortable with camera surveillance. One main finding that we would like to highlight is that employees tend to perceive digital systems that provide opportunities for direct and detailed monitoring and surveillance of individuals as more uncomfortable than traditional systems for monitoring of entry and exit, time use and productivity.

## **Chapter 5 How formalised?**

In Chapter 5 we take a more detailed look at the extent to which the use of different monitoring and surveillance systems has been formalised. This question is discussed in light of Norwegian legislation and regulations, which emphasise requirements for employee participation. Main findings in this chapter include:

- 37 per cent respond that the system has been discussed with employee representatives/ safety delegates, as required by the regulations. Nearly half report not to know whether the system has been discussed.
- Altogether 63 per cent respond that the employer has informed the employees about the objective/purpose of the system. 24 per cent respond that they are uncertain as to whether the employer has provided such information. There are considerable variations between the different systems when it comes to the answers to the question about information.
- A little more than one-half respond that the employer has informed the employees about the purposes for which the information generated by the system in question is used. One in four reports to be uncertain of whether the employer has done so or not, but an equally large proportion respond that the employer has provided no such information. Moreover, there are large variations between the different systems with regard to the question of whether the employees have been informed about how the information is used.

## **Chapter 6 Trust**

A fundamental issue associated with monitoring and surveillance in working life is their impact on trust. This includes trust in the employer-employee relationship as well as trust in the regulations and compliance with them. In this chapter we investigate various areas where employee trust may play a key role for the legitimacy of various monitoring and surveillance systems and their potential consequences for the working environment. The main findings are:

- The employees' assessments of the regulations pertaining to monitoring and surveillance in industry and their degree of familiarity with these regulations changed little from 2010 to 2019.
- In 2019, employees have less trust that the employers will comply with applicable rules for processing of personal data in the employment relationship than what they did in 2010.
- On the other hand, employees generally show little concern about personal data falling into the wrong hands. However, they are somewhat more concerned about this in 2019 than they were in 2010.
- Employees have a varying impression of their employer's concern with the implementation of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the new rules for protection of privacy, which may indicate similar variability in the employers' efforts when it comes to the GDPR.
- One in three reports to be using an enterprise app or a website as tools in their work, and of these, 21 per cent report that the client or the patient/relative has the possibility to provide feedback on work performance through this app or website. 27 per cent report to use tools linked to a cloud or chat room outside the enterprise.
- One-half report to have the opportunity of using the employer's ICT tools for private purposes in their leisure time.

## **Chapter 7 Conclusion**

In the conclusion we sum up and assess the prevailing status and challenges when it comes to employers' use of digital systems for monitoring and surveillance of employees in Norwegian working life as of 2019. Main findings that can be highlighted by way of a conclusion include:

- Attitudes to monitoring and surveillance in the workplace and society in general have changed little from 2010 to 2019. However, the proportion that respond 'uncertain' to the various questions about attitudes is larger in 2019 than it was in 2010.
- The majority (59 per cent) are exposed to digital monitoring and surveillance systems at work. The proportion is the same as it was in 2010, but because the questions were worded differently it is hard to say whether the extent has increased or remained stable.
- Different systems entail different consequences for the working environment. One main finding is that systems that provide opportunities for direct and detailed monitoring and surveillance of individuals are perceived as more uncomfortable than traditional systems for monitoring of access, time use and productivity.
- There may be reason to pay extra attention to the introduction of new digital systems in those parts of industry where industrial relations are weak at the local level. In enterprises with poor collaborative industrial relations locally, there appears to be little compliance with the provisions calling for employee participation.

- Trust in employer compliance with the regulations in this area has declined considerably from 2010 to 2019. This notwithstanding, very few respondents report to have witnessed abuse of information from such systems by their employer.
- Systems that enable increased monitoring and surveillance of employees may also come in various disguises and be presented as, for example, new digital tools intended to enhance efficiency and productivity. In practice, new digital tools may bring with them some of the same challenges in terms of the working environment and protection of privacy as the more traditional control measures in working life and help increase employee vulnerability when it comes to privacy and working environment burdens, for example as a source of increased stress.