

Should companies track employee health?

1 Warmer

- Do you have any health apps on your phone? What do they do?
- Do you own an activity tracker, such as a Fitbit? What information does it give you?

2 Key words

Write the key words next to the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

adequate	anonymous	consent to	disciplinary	enforce
inference	infringe	predict	repercussion	workforce

1. agree to something; give your approval _____
2. a bad effect as a result of something _____
3. say what you think will happen in the future _____
4. an opinion that you form about something that is based on information you already have

5. the total number of people who work in a particular company, industry or area

6. a type of action that is taken to punish people who don't follow the rules

7. when you make sure that something that is supposed to happen really does happen

8. good enough or long enough for a particular purpose _____
9. when no one knows the name of anybody involved _____
10. limit or reduce someone's legal rights or freedom _____

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NO

Companies are turning to tracking measures in order to protect their employees. Some people see this as a way for employers to strengthen the control they have over our social lives; others see it as a way to improve well-being.



JULIAN EARWAKER provides the arguments for both sides.

NO

**“There’s great potential for workforce data to be misused”
Matt Creagh**

1 We are seeing increasing use of health-related data tracking, and rules should be put in place to protect workers. There’s great potential for workforce data to be misused. In the workplace, people often feel pressured to consent to sharing their data because they fear there might be repercussions if they do not. Employers can create profiles of their workers by collecting a wide range of data. A profile can be used to predict how a worker is going to perform in the future. This could lead to situations where negative inferences are drawn from profiles. In a worst-case scenario, this could lead to employers discriminating against workers because of their health.

2 Workforce data can be used to make decisions about disciplinary action, hiring and firing, promotions and pay rises. This is why workers should have a voice in data-driven decision-making processes.

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3 The strongest protection workers have is the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation), which gives them legal rights to ask their employer which of their data is being held, to control the amount and type of data shared and to demand their data be deleted. People need to know what those rights are and that they will be properly enforced.

4 Technology should be used for the benefit of workers, for example to make sure they are taking adequate breaks from working at their desks. Health data could be made anonymous and viewed as a whole across an organization, rather than be connected to individuals. This would enable an employer to bring well-being benefits to the organization as a whole rather than focus on an individual’s health data. In the US, data- protection laws are considerably more relaxed, and in the UK, there is evidence that GDPR is not being followed.

5 Working people have a right to a private life, and the law protects that right. So an employer’s data collection both inside and outside the working environment must not infringe anyone’s privacy rights. We are talking about health-related data, which is obviously very sensitive. We have seen a growing use by companies and their employees of technological devices such as Fitbits and sleep-tracking software. If employees are using these devices in their spare time, they might not be aware that the data is still being collected and used within a work context.

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3 Information sharing

- a. Write the arguments from your text into the Student B column. Include simpler explanations or synonyms for any words and expressions you think you might need to explain to someone who hasn't read the text.

Student A	Student B

- b. Talk to a Student A and complete the Student A column.
- c. Discuss the two authors' opinions, say who you think makes the strongest case and decide what part of his argument most convinced you.

4 Phrases

- a. Find and highlight the following three phrases in your article.
1. worst-case scenario
 2. data-driven decision-making process
 3. as a whole
- b. Talk to a Student A about what these phrases mean and write a definition for each one.
- c. Use each phrase in a new sentence of your own.

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5 Discussion

- **What types of work-related illnesses are most frequently seen in your field of work?**
 - Are these illnesses that you would see in other industries or are they specific to your field of work?
- **Your company wants employees to install health-tracking apps on their phones. It also wants them to allow the company access to this information.**
 - How do you feel about this?
 - What assurances would you require from the company in order to allow them to track you?
- **Even if it is company policy to track employees' health and well-being, are there any specific people, or groups of people, who you think should be exempt from this policy?**
- **How do you feel in general about your company advising employees on how to lead a healthier life?**
- **Should management be required to set a good example to their employees?**

6 Writing

Write an email to the staff in your company trying to convince them to share their health data with the company. Write about the benefits this will bring to the company and offer them some kind of reward in exchange for their information.