BUSINESS NEWS LESSONS

Watching your workers – Advanced Worksheet

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1 Warmer

a. **Make a list of five words you associate with the word surveillance.**

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

b. **Consider an industry where you would expect to see heightened surveillance of staff. Write a brief paragraph outlining the kinds of surveillance you would expect to see and their uses.**

2 Key words

a. **Find the words and phrases in the article that match the definitions below. Use the section numbers to help you.**

1. the skills or luck to make something happen at the most suitable moment (1) _____

2. examining something very carefully (7) _____

3. an area used or allocated for work, for example an office (7) _____

4. an official document that gives an inventor the exclusive legal right to make or sell their

   invention for a particular period of time. (8) _____

5. a visual summary of information used to give an overview (8) _____

6. extremely tired and without energy to do anything else (9) _____

7. the amount of work that a person or organisation has to do (10) _____

8. causing severe damage or loss (10) _____

9. an illness or pain that is serious and lasts for a long time (10) _____

10. making you lose hope, enthusiasm, or interest you had earlier (11) _____

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Workplace surveillance may hurt us more than it helps

MANY EMPLOYERS ARE MONITORING STAFF, SOME DECIDING 'WHO'S A SUPERSTAR AND WHO'S SLACKING OFF'

BY SARAH O'CONNOR

1 You can't fault Amazon's timing. In the middle of a global pandemic, the online retailer has launched a new workplace surveillance tool that could help to slow Covid's spread. Called AWS Panorama, it uses computer vision technology to analyse footage from security cameras in workplaces. It can detect when employees are not complying with social distancing rules, for example.

2 Amazon, which plans to sell the tool to other employers, says it can improve workplace safety in other ways, too. "Are people walking in spaces where they shouldn't be? Is there an oil spill? Are they not wearing hard hats? These are realworld problems," a senior executive told the FT.

3 It's easy to see how the technology could help in the fight against Covid-19, since workplaces are a major source of transmission. It could reveal pinch points in factories where social distancing isn't possible, for instance, which might prompt companies to redesign work processes. But, like any tool, the outcomes will depend on the people who wield it.

4 Having read a lot of corporate safety incident reports over the years, I'm struck by how often CCTV footage is used to blame the worker who was hurt. In a recent example from a British meat factory (an industry where work pressures are often intense), a man fractured his hand when running to fetch a metal plate. "This is a behavioural safety issue [because he shouldn't have run] and he will be disciplined upon his return," the company wrote in the report to the UK's health and safety regulator. There was no mention of why he felt the need to run in the first place.

5 In this context, it's not hard to imagine a future scenario where workers are blamed for contracting Covid-19, possibly with implications for their sick pay, by employers unwilling to consider their own role and responsibilities.

6 There is also the possibility of mission creep. A testimonial on the AWS Panorama website from guitar-maker Fender enthused: "We can track how long it takes for an associate to complete each task in the assembly of a guitar so that we're able to optimise efficiency and track key metrics." The comment has now been deleted from the site.

7 Many employers are exploring how to use technological surveillance to drive productivity and measure performance. In 2018, the research company Gartner surveyed 239 big companies and found more than half were using non-traditional monitoring techniques, up from 30 per cent in 2015. Gartner defines monitoring as things such as "analysing the text of emails and social-media messages, scrutinising who's meeting with whom, gathering biometric data and understanding how employees are utilising their workspace".

8 Walmart, the US retailer, has filed a patent for a system of sound sensors placed near cashiers which could "determine a performance metric for the employee based on the audio data". In the white-collar world, an array of companies are selling software that enables employers to monitor what workers do on their computers. Time Doctor, for instance, will take regular screenshots of each employee's screen, measure their breaks and send nudges if they stray on to nonwork related sites. Supervisors are given dashboards that show "who's a superstar and who's slacking off".

9 But you don't have to be a slacker to recoil at the idea of constant monitoring. Humans are hard-wired to feel uncomfortable being watched all the time, especially when under pressure to meet stretching targets. "It makes me afraid, physically and mentally exhausted," Hibaq Mohamed, an Amazon warehouse worker, told researchers at the Open Markets Institute of the monitoring at work.

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10 A body of research suggests jobs that combine high demands (concentration requirements, workload, time pressure) and low control (discretion to make decisions and schedule one's own work) are ruinous for human health. Our metabolic, cardiovascular and neuroendocrine systems produce short-term responses to stressful situations, but when the stress is chronic, it can damage our bodies or tempt us to self-medicate. One study in the US, published last year, found that people in high-demand jobs with low control were more likely to die than people in high-demand jobs with high control.

11 Workplace surveillance should be subject to regulatory oversight and ideally collective bargaining, since individuals will be better placed to negotiate the details en masse. It would be a dispiriting irony if technology brought in to protect our health in a pandemic made us sicker in the end..

FT Sarah O'Connor, 11 January 2021
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3 Understanding the article

a. **In pairs, read the statements below and decide if they are True (T) or False (F) according to the text. Correct the false statements.**

1. Amazon has been creating software that can be used to monitor staff and ensure that they comply with break time allocations. **T / F**

2. Some companies have been using monitoring equipment on their assembly lines to speed up productivity. **T / F**

3. Technology could be used to help to prove that the majority of workplaces are already free of Covid-19. **T / F**

4. Employers could be held accountable for the spread of Covid-19, with possible implications for profits. **T / F**

5. For businesses whose staff work in offices, there is a range of software that allows employers to monitor what employees do on their computers. **T / F**

6. Workers don't feel comfortable being watched and this has made them feel anxious and exhausted. **T / F**

7. Jobs that combine high demands and high control are often ruinous for human health. **T / F**

8. Regulatory oversight of workplace surveillance is necessary for individual workers to be in a better position to negotiate the details with their employers. **T / F**

4 Business language – compound nouns and phrases

a. **Match the words to make compound nouns or phrases from the article. Then check your answers in the article.**

1. key	a. place
2. social	b. hats
3. slacking	c. metrics
4. work	d. sight
5. screen	e. off
6. work	f. shots
7. over	g. load
8. hard	h. distancing

b. **Write the compound nouns and phrases next to the definitions.**

1. hats that workers on building sites wear to protect their heads _____

2. measures that can help to slow the spread of an infectious disease by avoiding close contact

   between people _____

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3. photographs or printed pages showing what appears on a computer screen

   _____

4. the job of checking that a process or system is working well _____

5. a group of numbers giving the most important information about a particular feature of a piece of

   hardware or software _____

6. slowing down and doing something with less energy as before _____

7. the place where you work _____

8. the amount of work that a person or organisation has to do _____

c. **Choose three compound nouns or phrases and write a sentence about your own job or that of a family member.**

5 Business Language – hyphenated compound adjectives

a. **Complete these sentences with hyphenated compound adjectives from the article.**

1. The pandemic has caused the economy to crash, with the retail, leisure and tourism industries worst hit, while _____ workers have been less affected as businesses have continued to function in a virtual environment. (work done in offices rather than physical work, section 8)

2. Fear of rejection is _____ in everyone and we all want to fit in with the team, which may go some way to explain why workers have pushed themselves to deliver top-quality work even during these most challenging of times. (behaviour that is caused by your genes and the way your brain is made, rather than learnt from experience, section 9)

3. We believe that the recession will improve over the next few years, but businesses are likely to struggle in the _____ and should revisit their sales forecasts. (lasting for a short period of time, section 10)

6 Discussion questions

a. **Read and discuss the questions with your group.**

• Which method of surveillance staff do you think will be the most commercially successful? Why?

• How could the added surveillance negatively impact on the employer and employee relationship? In what ways could it suffer?

• Is improved health and safety at work worth increased surveillance? Why/Why not?

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7 **Wider business theme – pitching an innovative idea**

a. **You have the task of pitching an idea for a new surveillance tool that can be used to monitor bus driver and passenger interactions. The monitoring tool's primary aim is to reduce crime and protect drivers from abusive passengers.**

   • Decide the different functionality that the tool will need and the technology that will make this possible.

   • Consider the position of the driver, passenger and any possible screens or barriers between them, as this may influence your monitoring tool's design.

   • If you need some inspiration, use the internet to research existing technology aimed at protecting people and increasing personal security.

   • Create a pitch plan: practice describing what your surveillance tool is, what is does, why it is needed and why businesses should buy it.

b. **Pitch your surveillance product to the class. Invite them to ask questions about it and answer as best you can.**

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