

MONITORING REMOTE WORK IN CANADA: Support or Surveillance?



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Executive summary

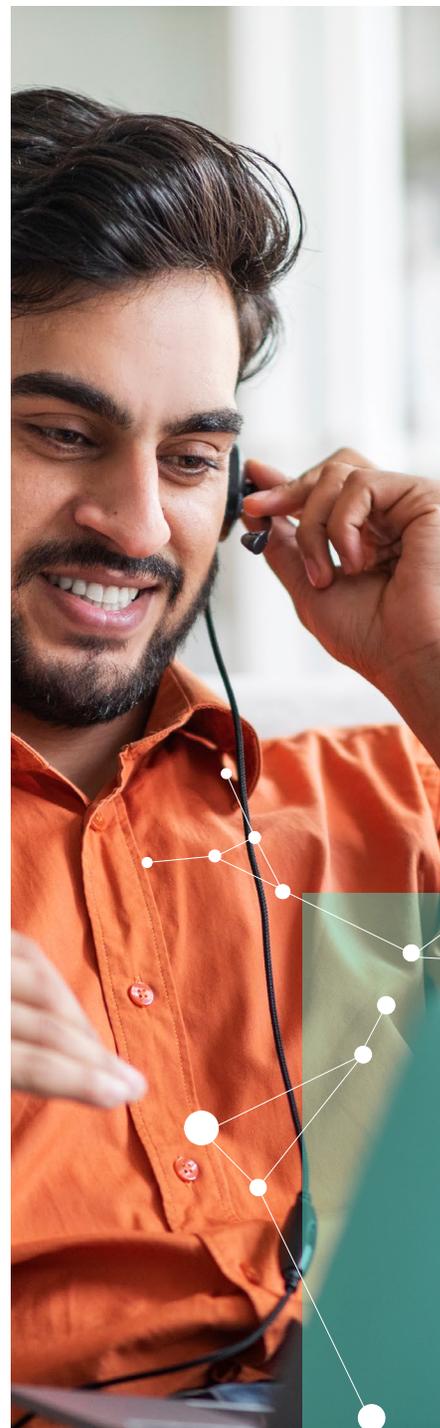
The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally changed work in Canada, with nearly half of workers now regularly working remotely. For many employers and employees, the shift to remote work was a new social and technical undertaking, with important consequences for the quality of work.

For one, the pandemic accelerated the use of surveillance technologies to track worker productivity from home, with previous studies demonstrating the potential negative implications of excessive surveillance on workers. In tandem, managerial support provided to workers, such as regular check-ins and feedback, shifted online, raising important questions about performance support systems and their effects on worker productivity and well-being.

This research study explores the experiences and attitudes of remote workers. It is the first of its kind in Canada since the pandemic to look specifically at the performance supports and electronic monitoring that remote workers experience. A survey of 1,500 employees and 500 supervisors regularly working remotely from across Canada was administered in October 2022. Key study findings include:

Impacts of remote work

- Nearly half of remote workers (44 per cent) either had no fixed requirement to work on-site or were fully remote. These rates were higher among older workers and women, and correlated with higher job satisfaction and sense of trust from their employer
- More than half of employees (55 per cent) said they get more work done since the shift to remote work and 51 per cent of supervisors said the same about their employees, with only 15 per cent saying less work gets done
- Remote work had a perceived negative impact on connections with colleagues, with 43 per cent of employees indicating their connections had been reduced



Performance supports

- 76 per cent of remote employees said they have regular meetings with their supervisor and/or team
- 40 per cent of employees said they receive ongoing feedback on their remote work from a supervisor or mentor
- Rates of feedback from a supervisor or mentor were higher among younger workers (51 per cent aged 16-29), newcomers in the last 10 years (48 per cent) and those with disabilities (55 per cent)
- A majority of employees assessed the performance support systems in place for remote work as helpful (74 per cent) and adequate (72 per cent). Those who received both regular meetings and ongoing feedback were much more likely to assess their support systems as helpful and adequate. Those who received neither meetings nor ongoing feedback (15 per cent) had significantly lower assessments of support and were less likely to say their productivity has increased
- Most employees (84 per cent) felt they have some degree of control over the support they receive, such as the ability to control timing of meetings or request feedback as needed. There was a positive correlation with a sense of control over support systems and overall job satisfaction and employer trust



Electronic monitoring

- Seven in ten employees (70 per cent) said some aspect of their work is digitally monitored (i.e., not just stored, but actively screened or reviewed). Email (33 per cent), websites (24 per cent), chats or messages (23 per cent), and phone calls (20 per cent) were the most common aspects of work that were digitally monitored
- About 32 per cent of employees indicated experiencing at least one of the following list: location tracking, webcam/video recording, keyboard/keystroke monitoring, computer screen capture, or biometrics such as facial features, voice or iris scan. These employees reported significantly lower levels of job satisfaction and trust in their employer and higher stress levels. This group was also more likely to have a disability, be paid by the hour or be lower income earners
- One-third of employees (33 per cent) said the amount of their work that is digitally monitored has increased since the start of the pandemic, with rates significantly higher among workers with household incomes less than \$50,000 (41 per cent), younger workers (47 per cent for ages 16-29), those with disabilities (41 per cent) and racialized workers (36 per cent)
- About 39 per cent of employees who are digitally monitored said they have no control over such monitoring, while only 15 per cent of supervisors said the same. Employees who indicated feeling no control over monitoring reported significantly less trust in their employer: 50 per cent compared to 69 per

cent among those who felt a lot or some control

- Only 30 per cent of monitored employees said they have been provided with complete written information about their employer's digital monitoring. Those who did had significantly higher rates of trust in their employer (72% compared to 54% of those who had received little to some or no information). Rates in Ontario were not yet higher, despite its new law having taken effect requiring employers to have a written policy on electronic monitoring

As organizations continue to grapple with the future of remote and hybrid work, this study sheds new light on its implications, especially as it relates to job quality. Remote workers in this Canadian-based survey have found ways to get more work done with less stress. Three out of four employees said they are receiving helpful support from their employers, with the combined use of regular meetings and ongoing feedback for remote workers having the greatest impact. However, there is room for improvement with respect to Canadian employers' use of electronic monitoring, which should promote the protection of employees' rights, equitable treatment and minimally invasive approaches. These findings underscore that providing employees with a sense of control and transparent information on the use of electronic monitoring correlates with higher employee trust.



Introduction

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept across the world, most governments began to enact emergency measures that accelerated a transition to remote work, spanning both the public and private sectors.¹ Remote work saw a threefold increase over the two decades preceding the pandemic, with 39 per cent of employees working from home at least occasionally by the end of March 2020, when government lockdowns were first announced in Canada.² Remote work is likely to continue well beyond the pandemic, with a hybrid model of some work in-person and some remote work taking pre-eminence. The latest evidence from the Survey on Employment and Skills suggests that nearly half of workers in Canada are still regularly working remotely.³ Statistics Canada estimates that 25 per cent of total work hours may continue to be done from home post-pandemic, up from less than five per cent in 2018.⁴ In the UK, legislation has been proposed giving employees the right to request remote work immediately when starting a new job, amending the current law of having to wait at least 26 weeks.⁵

While the pandemic has proven the potential of digital technologies to connect many workers beyond the physical workplace, the shift has also introduced new challenges for providing remote employees with the right support. Digital monitoring, or electronic surveillance of employees working remotely during the pandemic has intensified with the accelerated deployment of keystroke, webcam, desktop, geolocation and email monitoring in Canada and beyond.⁶

Many of these digital monitoring tools can collect and analyze sensitive and personal information. While many businesses are exploring how to make the best use of new technologies to increase efficiencies and productivity, excessive employee monitoring has been found to have negative psychosocial consequences, including decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment, lower levels of productivity, increased resistance to management and counter-surveillance practices,



increased stress and higher turnover propensity.⁷ At the same time, lack of supervisor support and poor role clarity has been identified as a key psychosocial factor associated with increased rates of a variety of physical and mental health challenges, including premature mortality.⁸ Employees need a high quality of connection to their work that is supportive, but not oppressive.⁹

While we know the pandemic has had a catalyzing effect on the expansion of remote work monitoring in Canada, there continues to be a relative dearth in empirical data on the phenomenon, including its impacts and consequences on workers' well-being and work quality. There is also a growing movement in Canada to address policy gaps on workplace surveillance practices, including insufficient communication to workers regarding the monitoring they may be subjected to at work. In April 2022, the Ontario government passed Bill 88, the *Working for Workers Act, 2022*, requiring employers with more than 25 employees to provide workers with a written policy on their electronic monitoring practices, with the aim to improve transparency.¹⁰ In March 2022, Member of Parliament Michael Coteau introduced a national consultation on remote work surveillance, with plans to introduce a private member's bill to address perceived gaps in existing privacy legislation with respect to workplace monitoring.¹¹

In Canada, there is a patchwork of laws governing workplace privacy which currently provides considerable leeway for employers to monitor employees.¹² The federal *Personal Information and Protection of Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA) does not require workers to consent to collection of personal information in an employment context, but does limit collection of personal information to what "a reasonable person would consider appropriate in the circumstances." The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada states on its website that it does not generally consider surveillance of an individual using their personal device's audio or video functions to be appropriate by a reasonable person.¹³ This law also only applies to those who work within the federally regulated private sector. Some provinces have their own privacy laws including British Columbia, Alberta and Quebec, which apply to their own provincial private sectors, instead of PIPEDA. Unionized workforces may be offered additional privacy protections under their collective agreements.

Monitoring of workers is, of course, nothing new. Surveillance has always been at the heart of capitalist work and organization.¹⁴ It was Karl Marx and his contemporaries in the 19th century who studied surveillance in the workplace and society at large.¹⁵ They, along with Frederick Taylor in the early part of the 20th century, noted how a series of related trends, brought about through the creation of the factory and assembly line, acted as a means to increase profits and reduce the unpredictability of labour; such trends involved worker monitoring, breaking down worker tasks, and establishing a regiment for workers.¹⁶ Direct visual monitoring

played a role then and continues to be a cornerstone of production systems today. However, advances in computerization eventually allowed employers and management to more efficiently pace work and monitor productivity levels, compared to direct visual monitoring of the Fordist assembly-line type.¹⁷ Particularly since the 1980s, academics in organizational behaviour disciplines have been examining and measuring the impacts of workers 'under surveillance'.¹⁸ Today's workplace surveillance practices have changed so dramatically that more dire warnings are being made over their negative impacts on the rights of workers and the workplace environment.¹⁹

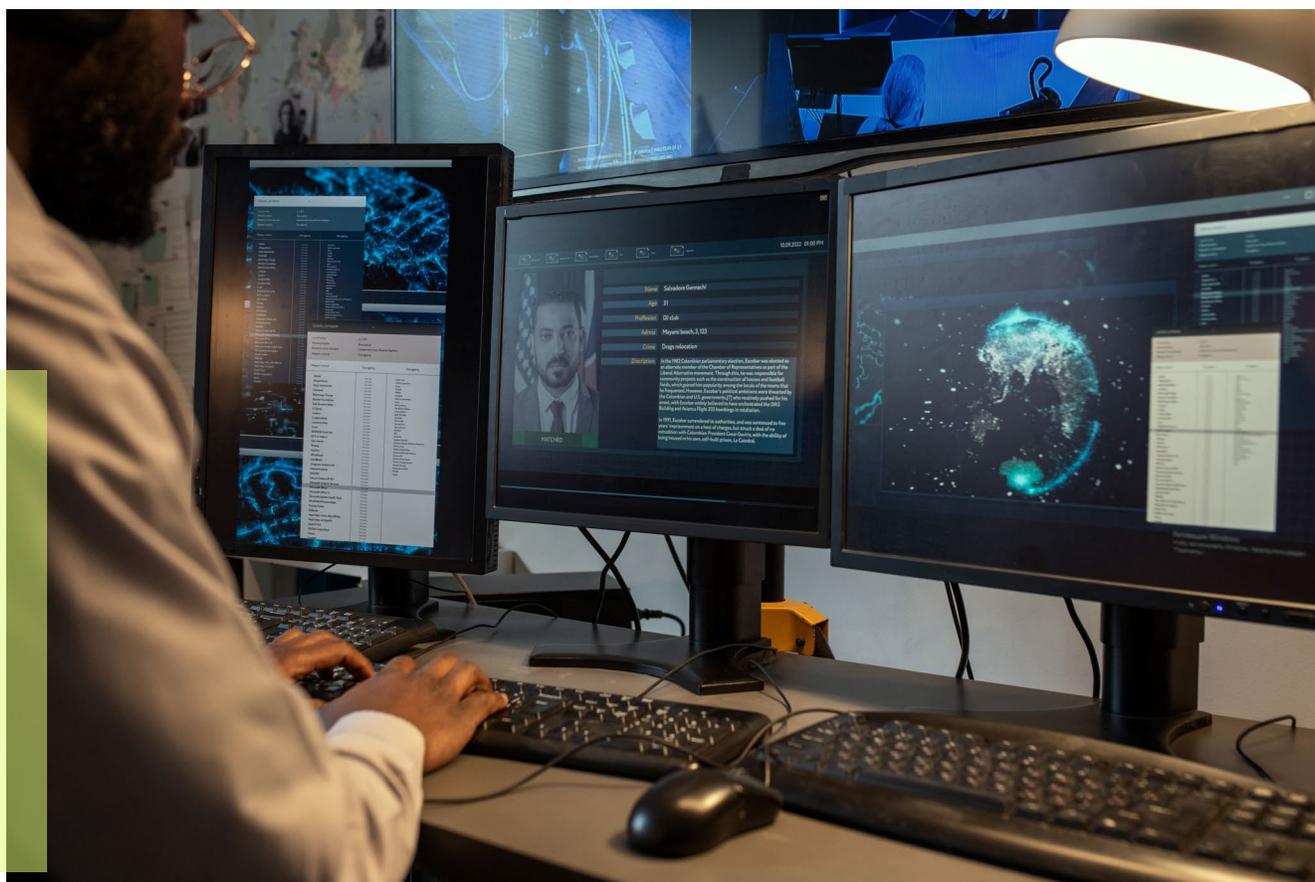


Indeed, it has been argued for some time that a combination of new digital technologies and management culture which emphasizes individual measurement has resulted in an intensification and extension of employee monitoring.²⁰ Digital technologies are increasingly collecting new forms of data on or about workers, resulting in the quantification of activities and even personal qualities, like the characteristics or attributes of their personality, which may be used to evaluate worker performance.²¹ This raises important questions related to rights, power and inequality.

Studies on surveillance provide excellent foundational knowledge on current workplace surveillance practices. However, they remain largely theoretical, take place in either European or American contexts, or have not been discussed in the context of a global health crisis seen as contributing to the expansion of surveillance practices.²²

This report builds upon existing knowledge, while addressing the need for further empirical data on workplace surveillance practices in Canada, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic. The research seeks to bridge the knowledge gap through findings from a national survey exploring the attitudes toward, and experiences with remote work, performance support, and electronic monitoring from the perspective of both employees and supervisors. It explores how changes have affected their levels of productivity, satisfaction, trust and well-being.

The findings of this report aim to inform skills development, including for employers and managers, as well as policy and stakeholder decisions, deepening our understanding of the quality of work in Canada in an evolving and challenging context where workplaces navigate new hybrid approaches to work.



Research project overview

There is a need for a more systematic evaluation of the attitudes toward and preferences for remote work, including electronic monitoring and performance support, from the perspective of employees and supervisors. More must be known about the relationship to work productivity, satisfaction, trust and well-being and the skills and supports needed for supervisors to support remote workers.

The following research questions have guided this study:

1. What are the current experiences of Canadian workers and supervisors with respect to performance support and monitoring in remote work arrangements?
2. What are Canadian worker and supervisor attitudes toward remote work performance support and monitoring approaches?
3. Is there a relationship between remote work performance support and monitoring approaches and perceived quality of work, such as job satisfaction, well-being, productivity and trust?

An interdisciplinary conceptual framework rooted in sociology, surveillance studies, industrial engineering, workplace psychology and human factors was used as a basis to formulate a survey with open- and closed-ended questions, one for employees and one for supervisors. Questions were designed to assess the relationship between performance support and monitoring practices and the outcomes these have on quality of work as perceived by employees and supervisors. To elevate diverse and historically marginalized voices, questions were also included to investigate differences across industry and employer type and demographics, including gender, racial identity, income, years in Canada and disability (see the questionnaire in the Annex).

An online survey of 2,000 people living in Canada aged 16 and older working remotely on a full- or part-time basis was administered by Abacus Data in English and French between Oct. 11 to Oct. 26, 2022. Remote work was defined as work from home or another location of the employee's choosing outside of their employer's physical workplace, whether all of the time or hybrid. A random sample of participants was invited to complete the survey from a blend of panels on the



Lucid exchange platform, with response quotas by region, language, age and gender to ensure the sample reflected Canada’s working age population. Of these participants, 1,500 were workers without supervisory responsibilities (referred to throughout as “employees”), while 500 managed other employees (referred to as “supervisors”). Respondents who indicated they were always working on-site (n=132) were removed from the sample. Further information regarding the survey sample is available in the Annex. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Data analysis included summary statistics and hypothesis testing of quantitative information, while qualitative data was reviewed for themes using the general inductive approach of Thomas.²³ Preferred strategies and approaches to performance support and monitoring were identified, as well as concept frequency counts, to identify the most common viewpoints in qualitative answers. Data analysis included comparisons of supervisors and employees to identify commonalities and critical differences that might affect remote work monitoring approaches and policies. Tests for significance differences across demographics were also conducted, including gender, age, racial identity, income, years in Canada, disability and employer type. For example, results by gender were quite consistent, with the exception of higher rates of remote work and perceived improvement in work-life balance among women, and modestly higher rates of electronic monitoring of work among men.



Findings

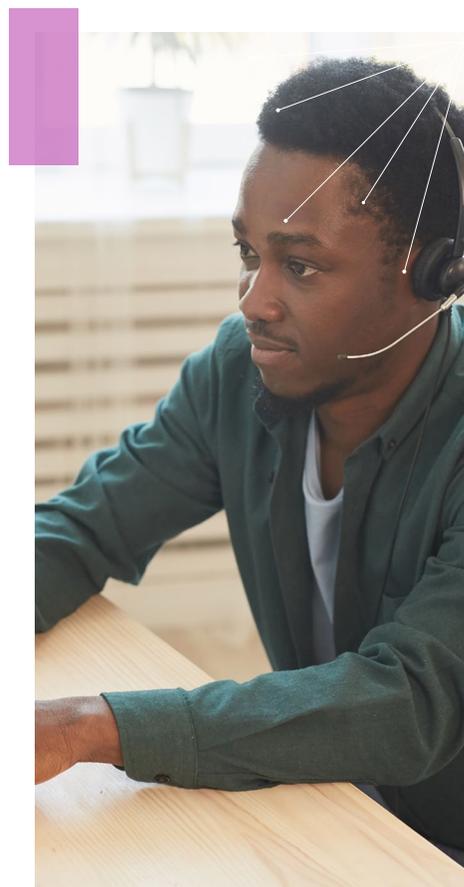
Impacts of remote work

Our findings reveal that remote work is positively correlated with job satisfaction, consistent with other recent studies supported by the Future Skills Centre.²⁴ When asked to rate their job satisfaction, a significant majority of remote workers indicated having somewhat or very high satisfaction (77 per cent). The levels of satisfaction for those workers when working on-site dropped to 40 per cent. When asked to compare their current remote work situation with their situation before the pandemic, 61 per cent of workers said their work-life balance had greatly or somewhat increased. Rates of saying work-life balance had greatly increased was higher among women (39 per cent) compared to men (25 per cent).

This also appeared to have a carryover effect on perceived productivity. More than half of employees (55 per cent) said the amount of work they complete had greatly or somewhat increased compared to before the pandemic, with supervisors providing a similar assessment (51 per cent). This contrasted with only 15 per cent of supervisors who said work output had decreased.

Nearly half (45 per cent) of supervisors said the support they can provide their employees has greatly or somewhat increased with the shift to remote work throughout the pandemic, with 31 per cent assessing no impact and 23 per cent believing support had been greatly or somewhat reduced. In comparison, only one-third of employees (33 per cent) indicated that the support they received from their supervisor had increased as a result, while half (49 per cent) thought it had no impact and only 15 per cent thought support had been reduced (see Figure 1).

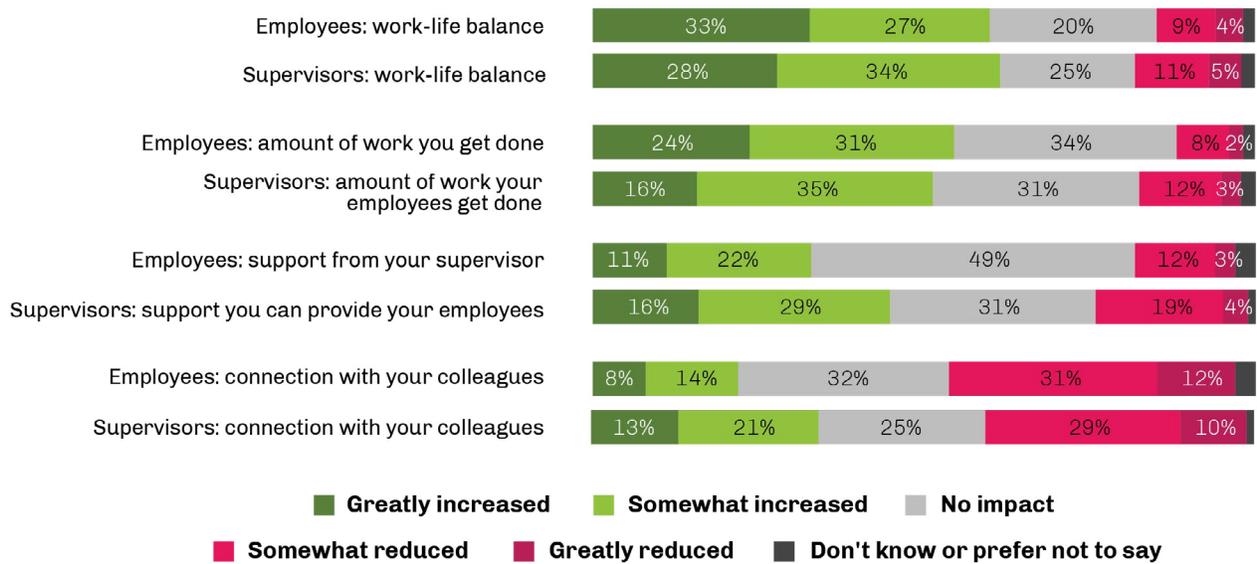
On the other hand, employees and supervisors reported a net negative impact on connection with their colleagues as a result of the shift to remote work throughout the pandemic – 43 per cent of employees indicated their connections were greatly or somewhat reduced, compared to 22 per cent who thought it had greatly or somewhat improved.



More than half of employees (55 per cent) said the amount of work they complete had greatly or somewhat increased compared to before the pandemic

Supervisors had a more mixed outlook: 39 per cent indicated connections were reduced, compared to 34 per cent who thought it had improved (see Figure 1). Studies have shown that low connections to colleagues can also contribute to workers feeling disengaged at work,²⁵ and can even contribute to burnout.²⁶ Conversely, social relations with colleagues and management, perceived as positive by employees, have also been seen as contributors in rejecting remote work.²⁷

FIGURE 1:
Impact of remote work now vs. before the pandemic



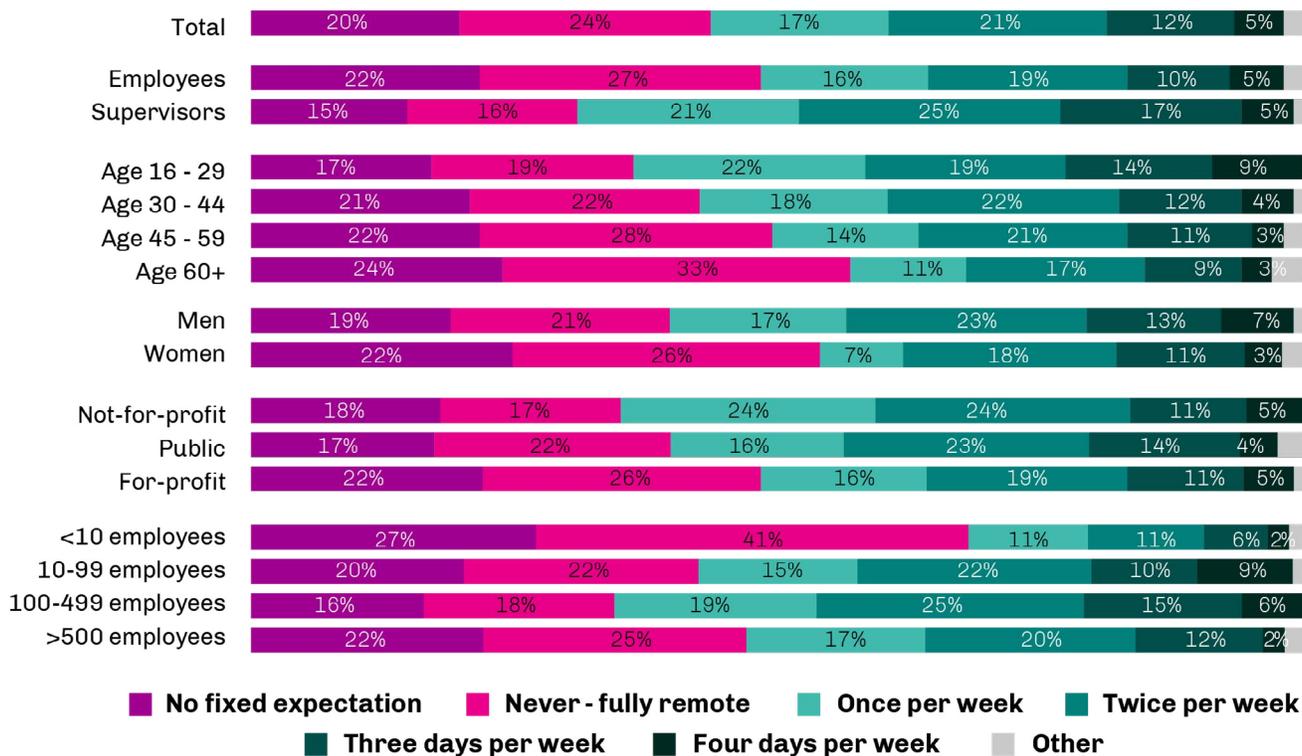
Employees n=1,401 Supervisors n=467

Given these findings, it is not surprising that many organizations are beginning to set expectations for on-site work at least some of the time. Still, nearly half of survey respondents had either no fixed requirement to work on-site or were fully remote (Figure 2). This was followed by 38 per cent of workers who were expected to work on-site once or twice a week, while 17 per cent were required to be on-site three or more days. Rates of flexible remote work (either no fixed requirement or fully remote) were higher among employees (49 per cent compared to 31 per cent of supervisors), as well as for older workers and women. Some research has linked women’s preference for remote work to a greater share of home and care responsibilities compared to men.²⁸ For-profit companies and small employers with less than 10 employees were also more likely to be fully remote than larger and public/government or non-profit organizations.





FIGURE 2:
Requirements for working on-site

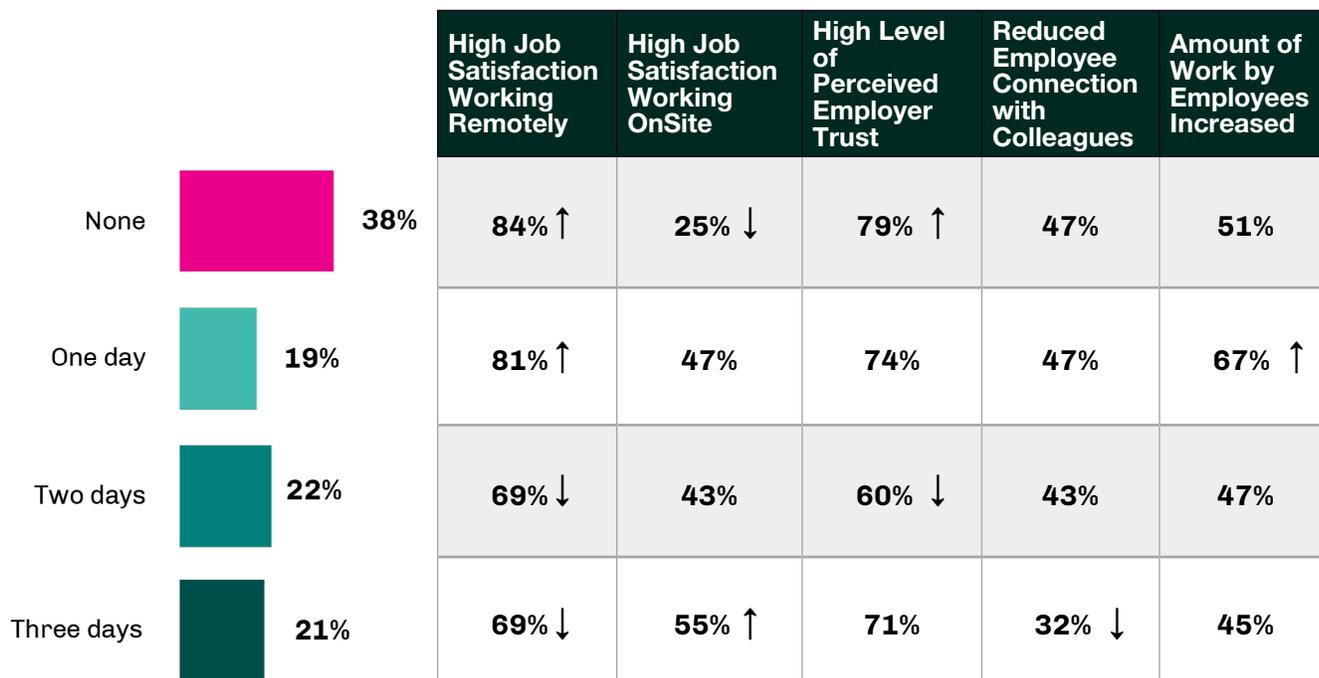


Total n=1869; Employees n=1,401; Supervisors n=467; 16-29 n=498; 30-44 n=676; 45-59 n=516; 60+ n=188; Men n=909; Women n=954

Not-for-profit n=288; Public n=475; For-profit n=1,098; <10 employees n=108; 10-99 employees n=381; 100-499 employees n=416; >500 employees n=999

The perceived quality of remote work, including job satisfaction, employer-employee trust, connections with colleagues, and productivity, varied depending on the frequency of working remotely (Figure 3). Workers who worked fully remotely in the week prior to the survey reported the highest levels of being very or somewhat satisfied with their remote job, and their employer having very or somewhat high trust in them. Satisfaction levels did not fall significantly at one day a week of in-person work. At two or more days of on-site work, satisfaction and perceived trust levels dropped significantly. Supervisors with one on-site day also reported the highest increases in employee work output (67 per cent). On the other hand, connections with colleagues improved with three or more days on-site.

FIGURE 3:
On-site attendance impact on perceived job quality



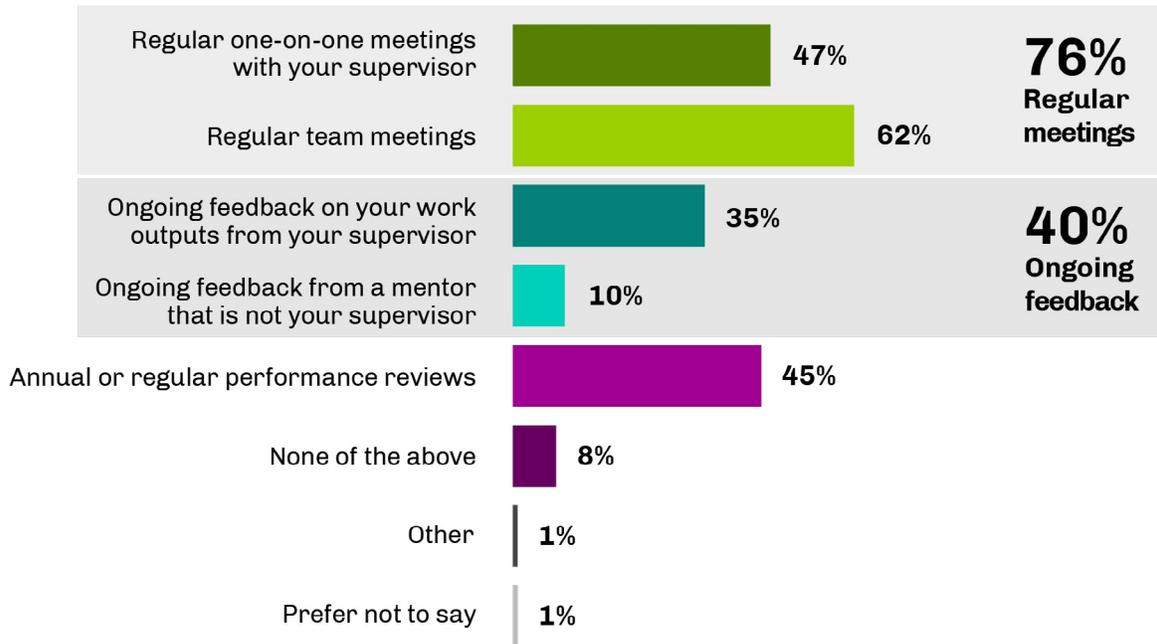
↑ ↓ denote significant difference at $p < 0.05$
Total $n = 1,868$; None $n = 712$; 1 day $n = 347$; 2 days $n = 416$; 3+ days $n = 393$

Canada’s remote workers are still very satisfied and report being able to get more work done with better work-life balance. About half of employers are letting their workers choose when to work in-person, and fewer than one in four were spending most of their days on-site. One of the most significant challenges for employers may be how to maintain flexibility while keeping teams feeling connected and supported. Indeed, the current narrative is shaped by employers who are increasingly being vocal about the perceived harm flexibility is having on work and culture, prompting some senior leaders in organizations to question its effects on productivity,²⁹ despite self-reported gains by employees and supervisors that this study, and other surveys, have found.³⁰ A recent literature review supports that the majority of work-from-home situations support productivity gains, though the research highlights that there are many factors internal and external to an organization that influence productivity.³¹

Performance supports

The vast majority of remote employees reported having either regular meetings with their supervisors or team (76 per cent), or ongoing feedback with a supervisor or mentor (40 per cent) as a development or performance support while working remotely (Figure 4). In addition, 45 per cent reported an annual or regular performance review. While the use of supervisor and team meetings were consistent across age groups, younger workers were significantly more likely to receive ongoing feedback from a supervisor or mentor (51 per cent age 16-29; 39 per cent age 30-44; 32 per cent 45+), as were those with a disability (55%) and newcomers to Canada in the last 10 years (48 per cent), compared to 40 per cent overall.

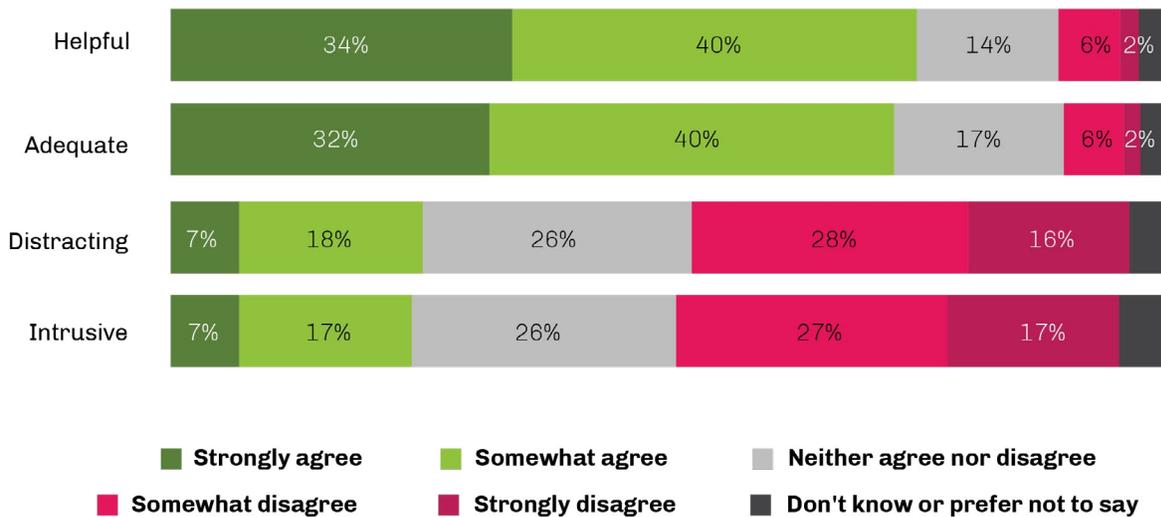
FIGURE 4:
Employee performance support while working remotely



n=1.401

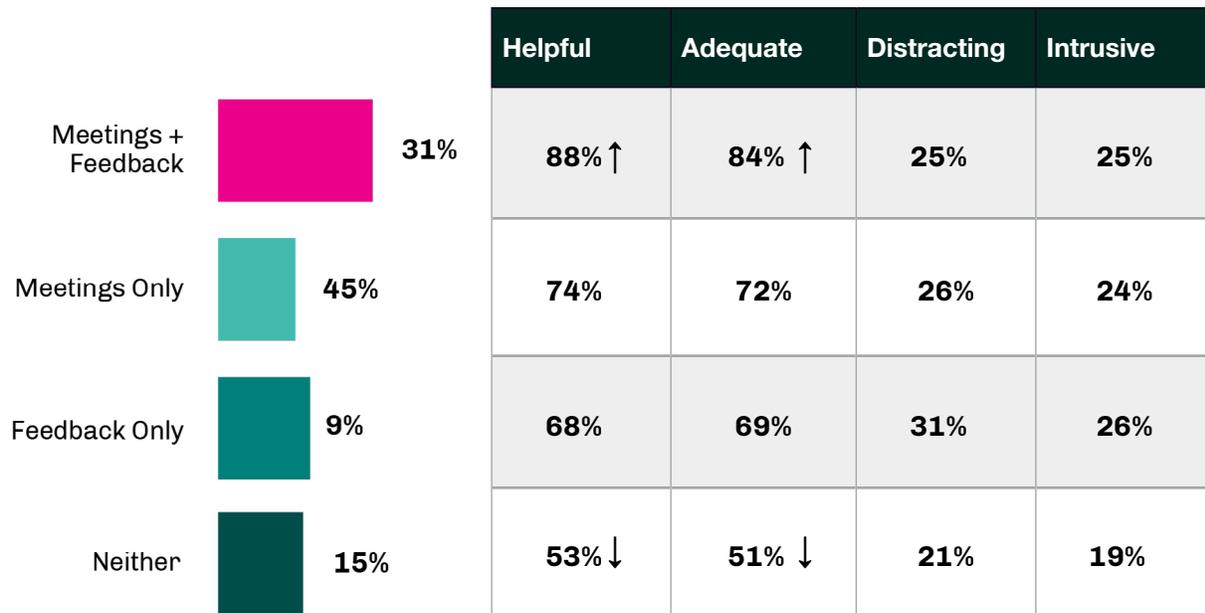
Employees tended to agree that these performance support and development practices were helpful (74 per cent) and adequate (72 per cent), with only one in four assessing the practices as distracting (25 per cent) or intrusive (24 per cent) (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5:
Employees' assessment of performance supports



Those who received both regular meetings and ongoing feedback (31 per cent of all employees) assessed their performance supports as the most helpful (88 per cent) and adequate (84 per cent). Those who received either regular meetings or ongoing feedback – but not both – had similar assessments of the helpfulness and adequacy near the overall average. Those who received neither regular meetings nor feedback had significantly lower assessments of their performance supports (Figure 6). This group also was significantly less likely to say the amount of work they get done had increased since the pandemic (36 per cent compared to 55 per cent overall).

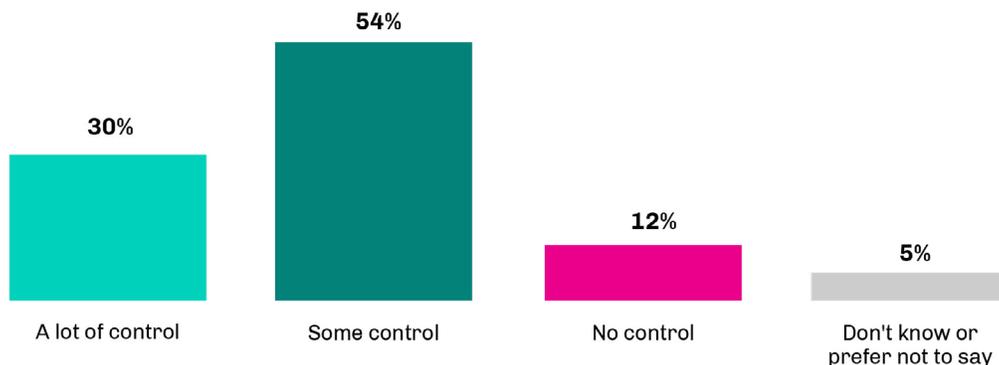
FIGURE 6:
Employees' assessment of performance supports by type received



↑ ↓ denote significant difference at $p < 0.05$
 n=1,401; Meetings + Feedback n=434; Meetings Only n=630; Feedback Only n=127; Neither n=210

Most employees (84 per cent) felt like they have some degree of control over the support they receive, such as the ability to control timing of meetings or request feedback as needed (Figure 7). The accommodation and food services industry (36 per cent) had the highest proportion of workers saying they had no control over their performance supports.

FIGURE 7:
Employees' perceived control over performance supports



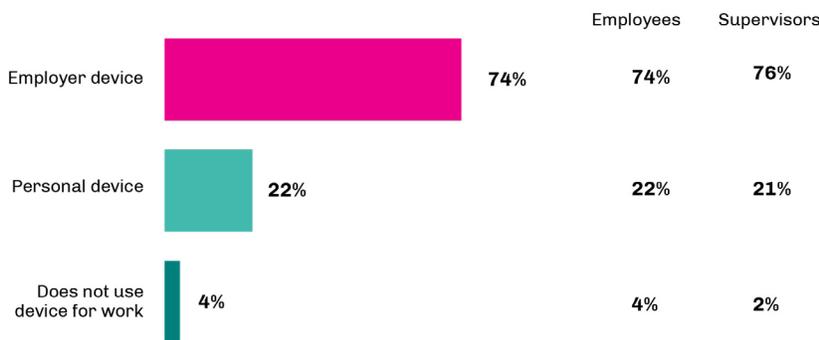
n=1,401

Compared to 12 per cent overall, respondents who had low satisfaction working remotely (35 per cent) or who believed their employer had low trust in them (36 per cent) were much more likely to say they had no control over their performance. This reveals a close relationship between job quality and sense of control over the systems in place to support their performance and development.

Electronic monitoring

As lockdown measures were underway and organizations began to transition to remote work, concerns were raised over the use of personal computers for work. Cybersecurity experts, for instance, warned that use of personal devices for work would increase the risks of hacking,³² while concerns were raised over the legal ramifications of installing surveillance software on personal devices. Given this backdrop, participants were asked whether they used their own personal device for work (i.e., computer or tablet) or one that had been provided by their employer. Most respondents indicated they use a device that has been provided by their employer (74 per cent), while 22 per cent said their own device (Figure 8).

FIGURE 8:
Device used for remote work



Total n = 1,868; Employees n=1,401 Supervisors n=467

Respondents were also asked how their time working remotely was monitored by their employer. About one in three workers (33%) said their time was either loosely monitored (such as logging hours or checking in with a supervisor at the beginning and end of work; 23%) or actively monitored through technology (10%). The proportion of supervisors who indicated they were loosely monitoring their employees was significantly higher (35%) compared to employees, while the proportion that indicated time was actively monitored through technology was the same (10%) (Figure 9). Those paid by the hour (34% loosely and 12% actively) were much more likely to have their time monitored than those paid by salary (18% and 9%). Workers with no fixed expectations to work in-person were much less likely to have their time monitored (16% and 6%).

About one in three workers said their time was either loosely monitored or actively monitored through technology

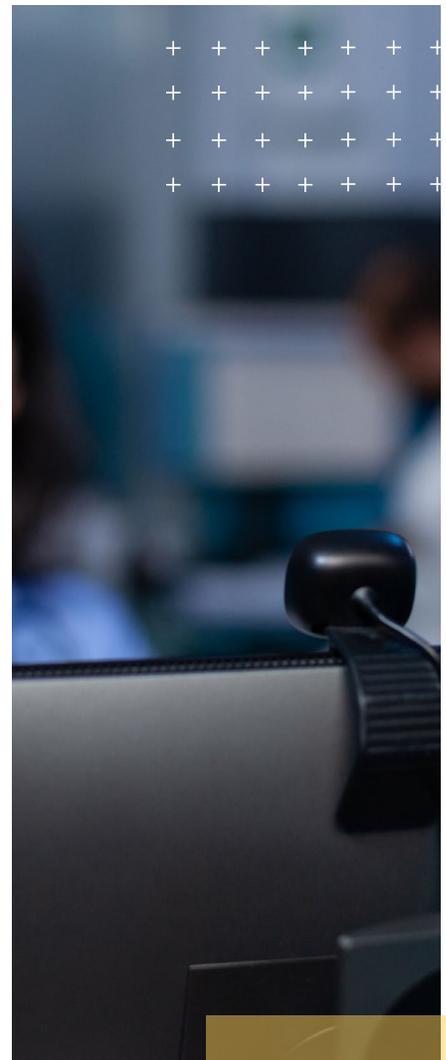
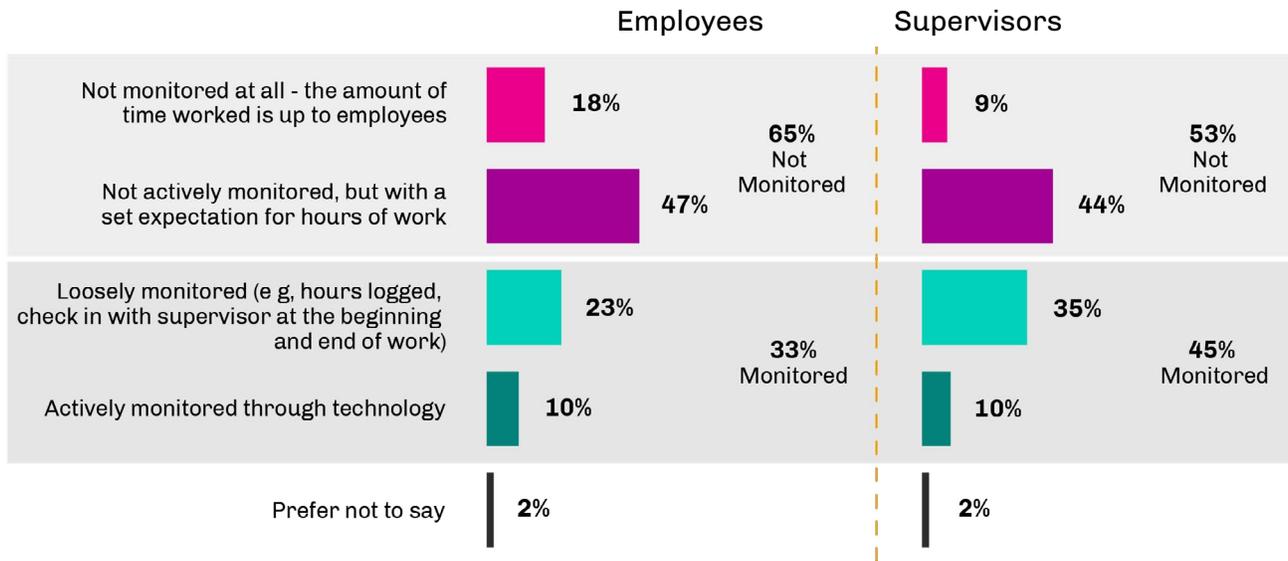


FIGURE 9:
Monitoring approaches to time worked remotely



Total n = 1,868; Employees n=1,401 Supervisors n=467

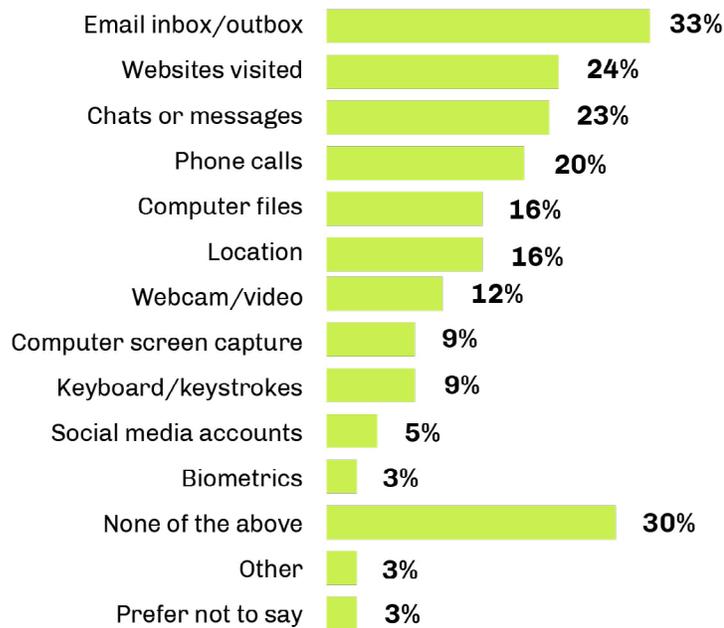
Respondents who were actively monitored were asked to explain the technologies used to track their time working remotely (Figure 10). Answers included the names of specific monitoring software, such as Avaya and Kronos. Somewhat surprisingly, some respondents indicated the use of applications like WhatsApp, Skype and Outlook Calendar — applications repurposed for employee time monitoring. Studies in surveillance and privacy refer to this common practice as surveillance creep, where the intended application of the technology shifts to other contexts.³³ Many respondents were aware of the use of software for monitoring, though were unable to recall names. In such circumstances, respondents provided descriptions of the monitoring tools instead.

FIGURE 10:
Sample of remote work digital time monitoring approaches reported by participants

"Check-in and check-out emails to supervisor."	"Record keystrokes and monitor email activity."
"Use of Microsoft Teams with the expectation that your status shows available all day with the exception of breaks."	"Tracks mouse movements."
"Every phone call and action is visible to them."	"Camera on all the time."
"Kronos tracks every second."	"Remote IP."
"GPS."	"There's a platform put in place called Maestro."
"Outlook calendar."	"Cisco Jabber."
"Safety aware."	"A software called Workspace."
"It's an internally built software that tracks every minute we're at work from meetings to breaks to different channels."	"I have to fill out my daily chart with all my concerns on my clients and how their health is doing as well as setting up my next meetings."
"Our phone system, Workforce, shows when we are taking calls and the supervisors can see if we are logged in and taking calls."	"They check how long I am on the network, logged into the office network, doing work, how many tickets I resolve, etc."
"Amazon Connect to log-in at beginning of shift."	"AI system with planning our workday... we input more specific times as we log our day."
"Vehicles monitored. Phones and laptops monitored."	"The computer takes screenshots regularly so they can see what I'm doing."

Respondents were also asked to identify, to the best of their knowledge, what aspects of their remote work are digitally monitored by their employer — not just stored, but actively screened or reviewed. Seven in ten employees (70 per cent) identified at least some aspect of their work as digitally monitored (Figure 11). Email (33 per cent), websites (24 per cent), chats or messages (23 per cent), and phone calls (20 per cent) were the most common aspects of work that were digitally monitored.

FIGURE 11:
Digital monitoring of remote work reported by employees

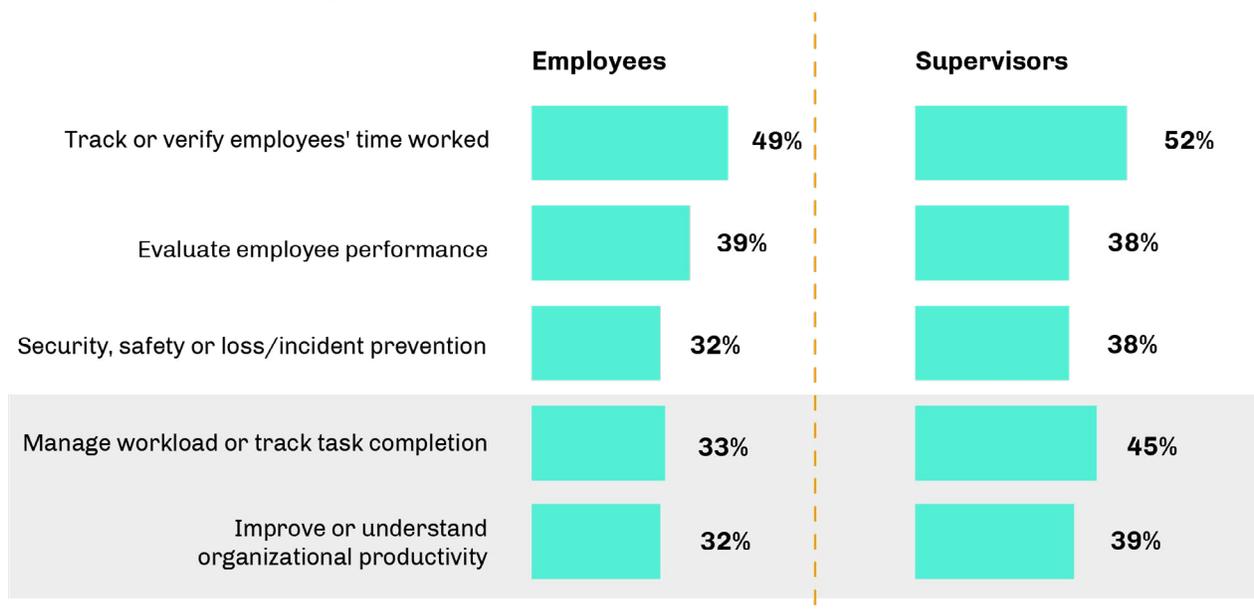


n=1.401

When asked to compare the impact of the pandemic on the amount of their work that is electronically monitored, 33 per cent of respondents indicated monitoring had increased. Rates of increased monitoring were significantly higher among younger workers aged 16-29 (47 per cent), those paid by the hour (43 per cent), those with a household income of less than \$50,000 (41 per cent), those with a disability (41 per cent) and racialized workers (36 per cent). Studies often describe how surveillance practices disproportionately target vulnerable and marginalized communities, producing negative consequences that are felt across the many aspects of such community members’ lives, not only employment.³⁴

Respondents who said some aspect of their work was monitored were asked how they would describe the purpose of the digital monitoring in place. Most employees and supervisors (50 per cent) said it was to track or verify time worked and nearly four in ten cited evaluation of employee performance, or security, safety or loss or incident prevention. About one-third of employees said monitoring was used to manage workload, track task completion, or improve or understand organizational productivity. Interestingly, the proportion of supervisors who indicated these as a purpose of monitoring were significantly higher (Figure 12).

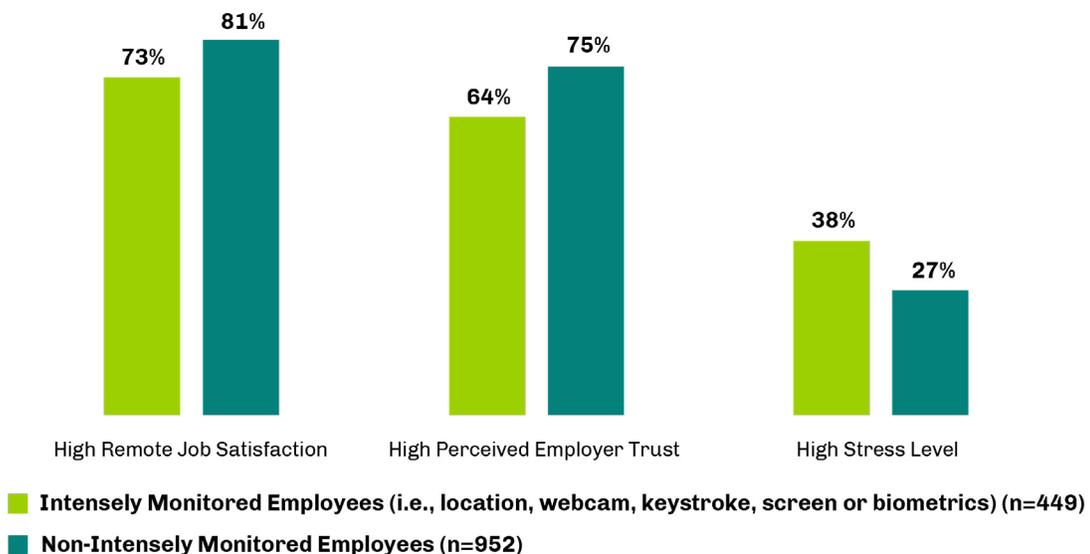
FIGURE 12:
Perceived purpose of digital monitoring of remote work



Employees n=871 Supervisors n=339

In total, 32 per cent of employees indicated experiencing at least one form of ‘intense’ electronic monitoring through location tracking, webcam/video recording, keyboard/keystroke monitoring, computer screen capture or biometrics (e.g., facial features, voice, iris scan). Figure 13 shows how average levels of job quality are negatively impacted for this group of employees, with lower levels of very or somewhat high job satisfaction (-8 percentage points) and perceived trust from employers (-11 percentage points), and higher stress levels (+11 percentage points). Employees who reported being intensely monitored were more likely to have a disability (43 per cent compared to 32 per cent overall), be paid by the hour (41 per cent) or have a household income of less than \$50,000 (39 per cent). The accommodation and food services industry stood out as the industry with a significantly higher than average rate of intensely monitored employees (70 per cent).

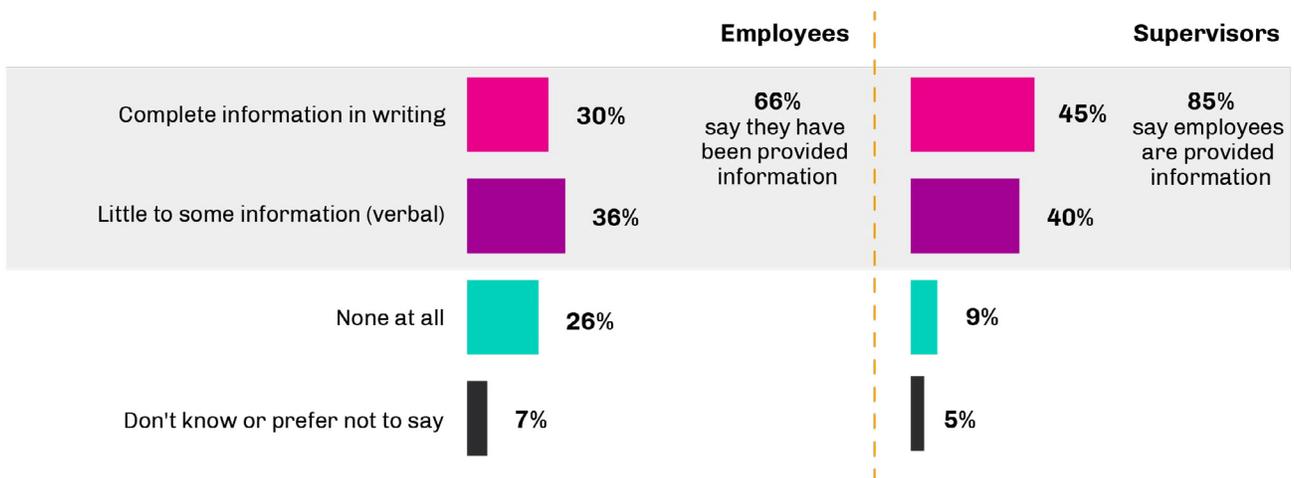
FIGURE 13:
Intense electronic monitoring reduces remote work job quality



Survey respondents who said some aspect of their work was monitored were asked if they had received any information about the purpose and scope of the digital monitoring in place. Only 30 per cent said they had been provided with complete information in writing about their employer’s electronic monitoring policy, while 36 per cent were provided with little to some information about monitoring practices. About a quarter of respondents (26 per cent) said they were not provided with any information at all. Those who had been provided with complete information in writing had higher levels of trust in their employer (72 per cent), compared to 54 per cent of those who had received little to some, or no information.

When the same question was asked of supervisors on whether they provided complete information to employees, 45 per cent said they had (Figure 14).

FIGURE 14:
Information provided about remote work digital monitoring



Employees n=871 Supervisors n=339

The survey was administered immediately after Ontario’s law took effect in October 2022 that requires organizations with 25 or more employees to have a written policy about electronic monitoring in place. Looking specifically at Ontario employees working for organizations with more than 100 employees that said they experience electronic monitoring (n=259), the figures were not better: still, only 31 per cent indicated complete information in writing, 36 per cent said little to some, and 28 per cent none at all.

These respondents were also asked to describe their level of control over the digital monitoring in place for remote work, described as the ability for workers to turn off, change, review or contest monitoring activities. This was particularly important as workplace monitoring technologies are increasingly used to evaluate worker performance against a pre-established metrics baseline (Figure 12). How employees interpret their level of control over surveillance has been identified as a key contributor to their reactions to surveillance measures, including adverse work behaviours.³⁵

Of those employees who identified being digitally monitored by their employer, 39 per cent said they have no control over such monitoring (Figure 15). When supervisors were asked the same question, a majority (80 per cent) said that they have at least some control over the monitoring in place for their employees, while 15 per cent said they have no control. Employees who indicated feeling no control over monitoring had significantly less trust in their employer (50 per cent), compared to 69 per cent among those who felt a lot or some control.

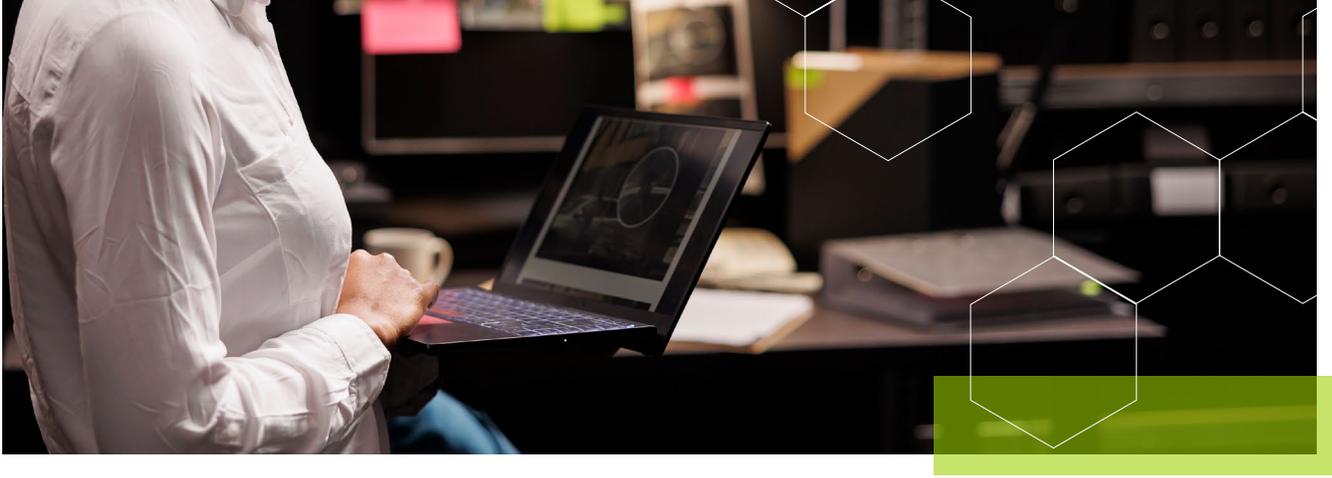
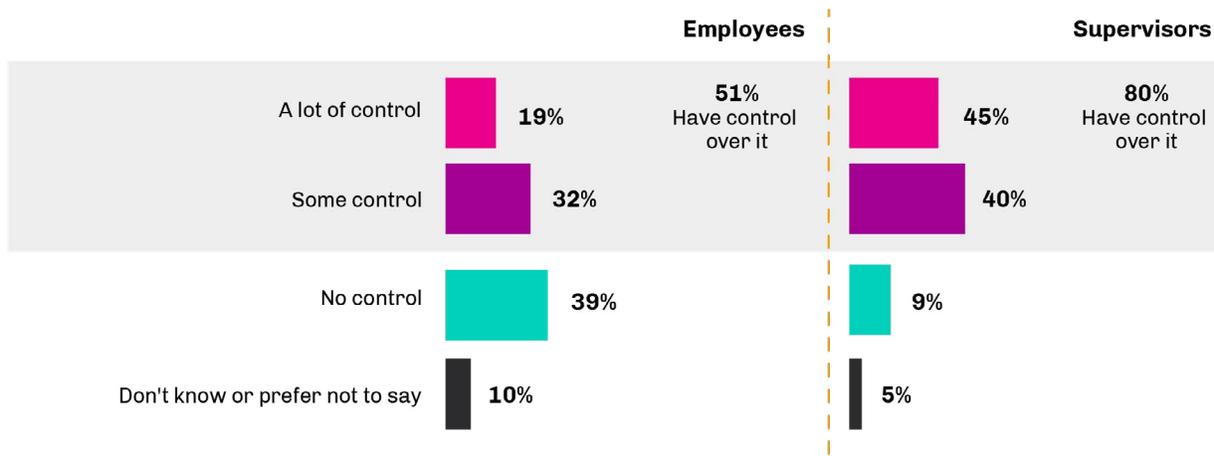


FIGURE 15:
Perceived control over digital monitoring



Employees n=871 Supervisors n=339

When we asked an open-ended question at the end of the survey about what changes respondents would like to see in their organization’s performance support or monitoring approaches for remote work, many emphasized a desire for less monitoring and more one-on-one time with their supervisor (Figure 16).

FIGURE 16:
Sample of desired changes in performance support and monitoring

- "Less monitoring or no monitoring but based on results and project quality and completion."
- "I think end-of-day check-ins instead of constantly checking in on assigned tasks throughout the day would prove to be more helpful."
- "Boundaries for when employers can email and message you outside of work hours."
- "I like to have more check-ins to make sure I am on task!"
- "More frequent discussions or one-on-one meetings."
- "I would like to have a bit more flexibility at work and be less monitored by my employer."
- "I believe in results instead of monitoring time."
- "I would discourage tracking employees and show more trust and flexibility."
- "I would like to see more support encouraged."

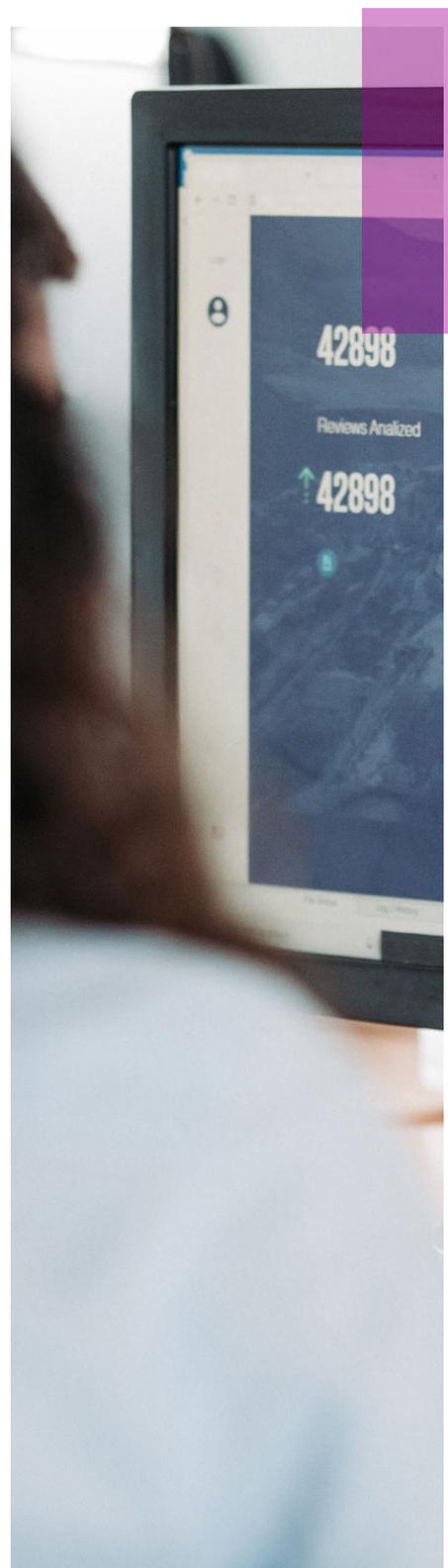
Implications and future directions

The COVID-19 pandemic facilitated rapid growth in remote work. As organizations scrambled to keep their operations running from home, employer concerns over worker productivity loomed. Companies in the business of selling remote monitoring technologies reported a boom in product sales, with anecdotal evidence suggesting that surveillance technologies permeated a wider array of workplaces.³⁶

Studies have emerged highlighting the global rise of electronic workplace surveillance practices since the pandemic and the increased use of AI and analytics software to automate decision-making on and about workers. However, there have been little to no empirical studies in Canada on the extent to which worker performance monitoring and support has changed in Canadian workplaces since the pandemic – and its potential implications for workers, their rights and well-being. The aim of this study was to fill this gap in knowledge, and to further understand attitudes and experiences of both employees and supervisors working remotely since the pandemic, including the types of monitoring and support received by employees. Ultimately, this study aims to provide new insights for organizations developing their remote work policies and managerial approaches.

To that end, this study has revealed that Canadian remote workers, for the most part, prefer working remotely, consistent with the findings of other recent studies.³⁷ An overwhelming majority of workers indicated higher levels of satisfaction working remotely, increased productivity, and higher levels of employee-employer trust. Most have regular meetings with their team or supervisor, and four in ten have ongoing feedback from their supervisor or mentor with rates higher among younger workers (51 per cent), newcomers (48 per cent) and those with a disability (55 per cent). The vast majority find the support they are receiving to be helpful and adequate, and think they have at least some control over the support systems in place. The minority not receiving regular support or who said they have no control over their support systems have lower job satisfaction, highlighting the importance of performance support as a critical enabler of job quality.

Seven in ten Canadian remote employees surveyed said their work is actively digitally monitored. One in three said that the digital monitoring of their work increased throughout the pandemic, with rates higher among



Canadians who are racialized, are lower-income and have a disability. Nearly 40 per cent of those monitored said they have no control over the monitoring, which correlated with reduced trust in employers. A perceived lack of agency or control over monitoring technologies can have negative implications for workers, particularly if they are used to evaluate worker performance, and inform management decisions on or about workers – perhaps most consequentially – as they relate to employee compensation, promotions, demotions and even termination.

This also appeared to have a carryover effect on perceived productivity. More than half of employees (55 per cent) said the amount of work they complete had greatly or somewhat increased compared to before the pandemic, with supervisors providing a similar assessment (51 per cent). This contrasted with only 15 per cent of supervisors who said work output had decreased.

Nearly half (45 per cent) of supervisors said the support they can provide their employees has greatly or somewhat increased with the shift to remote work throughout the pandemic, with 31 per cent assessing no impact and 23 per cent believing support had been greatly or somewhat reduced. In comparison, only one-third of employees (33 per cent) indicated that the support they received from their supervisor had increased as a result, while half (49 per cent) thought it had no impact and only 15 per cent thought support had been reduced (see Figure 1).

On the other hand, employees and supervisors reported a net negative impact on connection with their colleagues as a result of the shift to remote work throughout the pandemic – 43 per cent of employees indicated their connections were greatly or somewhat reduced, compared to 22 per cent who thought it had greatly or somewhat improved.



Further, about one-third of remote workers are subject to the active electronic surveillance of personal data of location, keystrokes, webcam, biometrics or computer screen. Those workers have lower levels of satisfaction and employer trust and higher stress levels, revealing an inverse correlation between heightened surveillance approaches and job quality. Further, several marginalized communities have been subjected to an increase in remote work monitoring throughout the pandemic.

A key finding of this study is that only 30 per cent of employees said they have complete information about the electronic monitoring in place – a practice our study demonstrates increases employees’ trust levels. Several new workplace surveillance technologies, particularly those using automated decision-making, are stretching the boundaries of what is considered appropriate as protected

Nearly 40 per cent of those monitored said they have no control over the monitoring, which correlated with reduced trust in employers. A perceived lack of agency or control over monitoring technologies can have negative implications for workers



by Canada’s current privacy legislation. This becomes particularly problematic as some systems responsible for evaluations, and the algorithms that undergird them, can remain opaque. Canada’s employers need better guidance and enforcement to develop clear and transparent policies on the deployment and use of these technologies, that should promote the protection of employees’ rights, data security, equitable treatment and a minimally invasive approach (see Masoodi et al.’s [Workplace Surveillance and Remote Work](#)). Humans need to be considered in the process of developing these technologies – an aspect frequently ignored in engineering research.³⁸ In short, companies need to find better ways to monitor and support remote employees, providing support as needed without the alienating effects of overly intrusive monitoring technologies.

Interpretation of these findings should be considered in the context of the period of data collection, as well as the concept of remote work and associated societal influences, all of which could be considered further in future work. The survey was conducted in October 2022, in a time of considerable flux for many workplaces across the country transitioning to “return to work” and varied approaches to hybrid work. Consistent longitudinal surveys could help provide insight on changes in attitudes toward remote work as employer practices continue to evolve. Additional case studies are needed to better understand the effects of specific technologies in the context of the work type and employee role.

Although this study aimed to capture responses from remote workers, that term itself is a contested concept. Survey respondents used their own judgment on whether to identify as remote workers. It is possible, for instance, that our response data captured groups of workers outside of the ‘remote workers’ notion that the pandemic has given rise to (i.e., to work from home or tele-work), including, for instance, couriers or delivery drivers. The concept of remote work should not be seen as a monolith. Rather, the experiences and attitudes of remote workers are shaped by visible and non-visible social identities, including race, class, gender and ability, which this study and others have highlighted.³⁹ Thus, the negative impacts and opportunities of remote work are not distributed equally and, in fact, may reinforce or exacerbate existing inequities across the labour market.

While this study helps shed light on the attitudes and experiences of remote workers, including electronic monitoring, it is only a fraction of the larger picture of responsible governance of technology in the workplace. Indeed, the focus of this study was on remote workers – a subset of the overall population that, for the most part, is dominated by white-collared work. Warehousing, trucking and other transportation services, call centres and fast food are some of the types of work that are known to subject workers to excessive forms of data-driven surveillance, requiring further research in Canada.

Annex: Supporting materials

Survey sample

	#	%		#	%
Total	1,868	100%	Total	1,868	100%
Employees	1,401	75%	Employed full-time	1,573	84%
Supervisors	467	25%	Employed part-time	295	16%
Age 16-29	488	26%	Paid salary	1,182	64%
Age 30-44	676	36%	Paid by hour	586	32%
Age 45-59	516	28%	Paid by task	73	4%
Age 60+	188	10%	5+ years with employer	894	48%
British Columbia	256	14%	1-5 years with employer	707	38%
Alberta	197	11%	Less than one year with employer	246	13%
Manitoba/Saskatchewan	99	5%	For-profit company	1,088	58%
Ontario	766	41%	Not-for-profit organization	228	12%
Québec	439	24%	Public/government employer	475	25%
Atlantic	111	6%	<10 employees	108	6%
Women	954	51%	10-99 employees	381	20%
Men	908	49%	100-499 employees	416	22%
Non-binary/third gender	7	<1%	>500 employees	899	48%
High school or less	300	16%	Industry		
College or apprenticeship	546	29%	Accommodation and food services	39	2%
University	1,016	54%	Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	33	2%
Has a disability	186	10%	Arts, entertainment, recreation, information and cultural industries	94	5%
White	1,191	62%	Construction	78	4%
Indigenous	42	2%	Education	165	9%
East Asian	192	10%	Engineering and architectural services	96	5%
South Asian	163	9%	Finance and insurance	298	16%
Southeast Asian	92	5%	Health care and social assistance	161	9%

	#	%		#	%
Black	111	6%	Legal and accounting services	59	3%
Latin American	62	3%	Manufacturing	85	5%
Arab, Middle Eastern or West Asian	53	3%	Public or government administration	220	12%
Born in Canada	1,179	63%	Retail and wholesale trade	139	8%
<10 years in Canada	278	15%	Technology	83	5%
>10 years in Canada	395	21%	Transportation and warehousing	64	3%
Less than \$50k household income	298	16%	Utilities, mining, oil and gas	80	4%
\$50-\$100k household income	782	42%	Other	143	8%
More than \$100k household income	684	37%			

Survey Questionnaire

D1. Where do you currently live? [Province/territory list]

D2. What is your gender?

- a. Woman
- b. Man
- c. Non-binary/third gender
- d. Prefer to self-describe [text box]
- e. Prefer not to say

D3. What is your age? [Drop down]

D4. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- a. No certificate, diploma or degree
- b. High school diploma or equivalency certificate
- c. Certificate of Apprenticeship or Certificate of Qualification
- d. College, CEGEP or other certificate or diploma
- e. University degree
- f. Prefer not to say

D5. Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

- a. Employed full-time
- b. Employed part-time
- c. Self-employed [terminate]
- d. Retired [terminate]
- e. Full-time homemaker or caregiving [terminate]
- f. Unemployed, on a leave or unable to work [terminate]
- g. Other: [text box]

In all of the following questions, we want you to think about what you consider your primary paid job. **Remote work** refers to work from home or another location of your choosing outside of your employer's physical workplace, whether it is all of the time or hybrid (e.g., sometimes remote, sometimes on-site). Which of the following best describes your current remote work situation?

- a. Worked remotely before the pandemic (pre-March 2020) and still do
- b. Began working remotely during the pandemic and still do
- c. Worked remotely during the pandemic but no longer do [terminate]
- d. Have never worked remotely [terminate]
- e. Other: [text box]

1. Approximately how many days per week does your employer expect you to work on-site, rather than remotely at home or another location of your choosing?

- a. Never – fully remote
- b. No fixed expectation – it is up to me when to go in
- c. Once per week
- d. Twice per week
- e. Three days per week
- f. Four days per week
- g. Always on-site
- h. Other: [text box]

2. Thinking about last week, approximately how many days did you work on-site, rather than remotely at home or another location of your choosing?

- a. None
- b. One day
- c. Two days
- d. Three days
- e. Four days
- f. All of the time
- g. Other: [text box]

[if All of the time for both Q1 and Q2, excluded from sample]

3. Is your remote work performed on a device provided by your employer (e.g., computer, tablet)?

- a. Yes
- b. No, I use my own device
- c. No, I don't use a device for my work [skip questions 10-14]

4. Thinking about your job, how would you rate your current:

- a. Job performance
- b. Stress level
- c. Trust in your employer
- d. Your employer's trust in you

And how would you rate your job satisfaction while:

- a. working remotely
- b. working on-site/your employer's workplace

Very low, somewhat low, average, somewhat high, very high

5. Do you manage other employees in your job?
- Yes [If yes: How many people do you directly manage or supervise? Then branch to supervisor survey]
 - No

FOR EMPLOYEES

6. Which of the following do you normally receive to support your performance or development while working remotely? (check all that apply)

- Regular one-on-one meetings with your supervisor
- Regular team meetings
- Ongoing feedback on your work outputs from your supervisor
- Ongoing feedback from a mentor that is not your supervisor
- Annual or regular performance reviews
- None of the above
- Other: [text box]

7. Thinking about those performance and development supports while working remotely, how much control would you say you have over them (e.g., timing of meetings, ability to request feedback as needed, etc.)?

- No control
- Little to some control
- A lot of control
- Don't know or prefer not to say

8. Thinking about those performance and development supports while working remotely, how would you describe them?

- Adequate
- Helpful
- Distracting
- Intrusive

Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree, don't know or prefer not to say

9. Which of the following best describes how the time you work remotely is monitored by your employer?

- Not monitored at all – the amount of time you work is up to you
- Not actively monitored, but with a set expectation for hours of work
- Loosely monitored (e.g., hours logged, checking in with supervisor at the beginning and end of work)
- Actively monitored through technology
 - If selected:* Can you describe the technology that tracks the time you work remotely? [text box]

10. To the best of your knowledge, what aspects of your remote work are digitally monitored by your employer (i.e., not just stored, but actively screened or reviewed)? (select all that apply) [rows with yes/no/don't know]

- Email inbox/outbox
- Websites visited
- Location
- Keyboard/keystrokes
- Webcam/video
- Biometrics (e.g., facial features, voice, iris scan)
- Phone calls

- h. Chats or messages
- i. Computer screen capture
- j. Computer files
- k. Social media accounts
- l. Monitoring software (e.g., ActivTrak, Hubstaff, RemoteDesk, TimeDoctor)
- m. Other [text box]
- n. None of the above

[if none, skip next four]

11. How much information has your employer provided to you about the purpose and scope of the digital monitoring in place for your remote work?

- a. None at all
- b. Little to some information (e.g., verbal explanation)
- c. Complete information in writing
- d. Don't know

12. How would you describe the purpose of the digital monitoring in place for your remote work? (select all that apply)

- a. Evaluate employee performance
- b. Improve or understand organizational productivity
- c. Track or verify employees' time worked
- d. Manage workload or track task completion
- e. Security, safety or loss/incident prevention
- f. Other: [text box]
- g. Don't know

13. How much control would you say you have over the digital monitoring in place for remote work (e.g., ability to change or turn off monitoring; to review or contest monitoring activities, etc.)?

- a. No control
- b. Little to some control
- c. A lot of control
- d. Don't know

14. For each of the items below, how would you describe the digital monitoring in place while working remotely?

- a. Adequate
- b. Appropriate
- c. Helpful
- d. Distracting
- e. Intrusive

Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree, don't know or prefer not to say

15. Comparing your current remote work situation with your previous situation before the pandemic, how would you describe the impact of the change in remote work on:

- a. The amount of work you get done
- b. Your work-life balance
- c. Your connection with your colleagues
- d. The support from your supervisor
- e. The amount of your work that is digitally monitored

Greatly reduced, somewhat reduced, no impact, somewhat increased, greatly increased, don't know, prefer not to say

FOR SUPERVISORS

6. Which of the following do you normally provide your employees to support their performance or development while working remotely? (check all that apply)

- a. Regular one-on-one meetings with you
- b. Regular team meetings
- c. Ongoing feedback on their work outputs
- d. Ongoing feedback from a mentor that is not their supervisor
- e. Annual or regular performance reviews
- f. None of the above
- g. Other: [text box]

7. Thinking about those performance and development supports for those working remotely, how much control would you say your remote employees have over them (e.g., timing of meetings, ability to request feedback as needed, etc.)?

- a. No control
- b. Little to some control
- c. A lot of control
- d. Prefer not to say

8. Thinking about those performance and development supports for those working remotely, how would you describe them?

- a. Adequate
- b. Appropriate
- c. Helpful
- d. Distracting
- e. Intrusive

Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree, don't know or prefer not to say

9. Which of the following best describes how the time your employees work remotely is monitored?

- a. Not monitored at all – the amount of time they work is up to them
- b. Not actively monitored, but with a set expectation for hours of work
- c. Loosely monitored (e.g., hours logged, checking in with you at the beginning and end of work)
- d. Actively monitored through technology
 - *If selected:* Can you describe the technology that tracks the amount of time they work remotely?
[text box]

10. To the best of your knowledge, what aspects of your employees' remote work are digitally monitored (i.e., not just stored, but actively screened or reviewed)? (check all that apply)

- a. Websites visited
- b. Email inbox/outbox
- c. Location
- d. Keyboard/keystrokes
- e. Webcam/video
- f. Biometrics (e.g., facial features, voice, iris scan)
- g. Phone calls
- h. Chats or messages
- i. Computer screen capture
- j. Computer files
- k. Social media accounts
- l. None of the above
- m. Other: [text box]

[if none, skip next four]

11. How much information would you say your employees are provided about the purpose and scope of the digital monitoring in place for remote work?

- a. None at all
- b. Little to some information (e.g., verbal explanation)
- c. Complete information in writing
- d. Don't know

12. How would you describe the purpose of the digital monitoring in place for remote work? (select all that apply)

- a. Evaluate employee performance
- b. Improve or understand organizational productivity
- c. Track or verify employees' time worked
- d. Manage workload or track task completion
- e. Security, safety or loss/incident prevention
- f. Other: [text box]
- g. Don't know

13. How much control would you say you have as a supervisor over the digital monitoring in place for employees working remotely (e.g., ability to change or turn off monitoring; to review or contest monitoring activities, etc.)?

- a. No control
- b. Little to some control
- c. A lot of control
- d. Don't know

14. For each of the items below, how would you describe the digital monitoring in place for your employees working remotely?

- a. Adequate
- b. Appropriate
- c. Helpful
- d. Distracting
- e. Intrusive

Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree or disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree, don't know or prefer not to say

15. Comparing your current remote work situation with your previous situation before the pandemic, how would you describe the impact of the change in remote work on:

- a. The amount of work your employees get done
- b. Your work-life balance
- c. Your connection with your colleagues
- d. The support you can provide your employees
- e. The amount of your employees' work that is digitally monitored

Greatly reduced, somewhat reduced, no impact, somewhat increased, greatly increased, don't know, prefer not to say

FOR ALL RESPONDENTS

16. What changes would you like to see in your organization's performance support or monitoring approaches for remote work? What do you think should be encouraged or discouraged to make working remotely successful? [open text box]

17. Which of the following categories best describes the industry you work in?

- a. Accommodation and food services
- b. Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting
- c. Arts, entertainment, recreation, information and cultural industries
- d. Construction
- e. Education
- f. Engineering and architectural services
- g. Finance and insurance
- h. Health care and social assistance
- i. Legal and accounting services
- j. Manufacturing
- k. Public or government administration
- l. Utilities, mining, oil and gas
- m. Real estate
- n. Retail and wholesale trade
- o. Technology
- p. Transportation and warehousing
- q. Other: [text box]
- r. Don't know or prefer not to say

18. Which of the following best describes the employer you work for?

- a. For-profit company
- b. Not-for-profit organization
- c. Public or government employer
- d. Other: [text box]
- e. Don't know or prefer not to say

19. Approximately how many employees does your employer have?
- Less than 10 employees
 - 10 to less than 100 employees
 - 100 to less than 500 employees
 - More than 500 employees
 - Don't know or prefer not to say
20. Which of the following best describes how you are paid for your work?
- Paid a salary
 - Paid by the hour
 - Paid by the task
 - Don't know or prefer not to say
21. How long have you worked for your current employer?
- Less than one year
 - One to less than five years
 - More than five years
 - Don't know or prefer not to say
22. What was your *individual* income, before taxes and deductions, in 2021?
- No income
 - Less than \$30,000
 - \$30,000 to less than \$50,000
 - \$50,000 to less than \$70,000
 - \$70,000 to less than \$100,000
 - \$100,000 to less than \$150,000
 - \$150,000 or more
 - Don't know or prefer not to say
23. What was your household income, before taxes and deductions, in 2021?
- No income
- Less than \$30,000
 - \$30,000 to less than \$50,000
 - \$50,000 to less than \$70,000
 - \$70,000 to less than \$100,000
 - \$100,000 to less than \$150,000
 - \$150,000 or more
 - Don't know or prefer not to say
24. Do you self-identify as: (select all that apply and/or specify, if applicable)
- White
 - Indigenous, that is First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis or Inuit
 - East Asian (e.g., Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc.)
 - South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)
 - Southeast Asian (e.g., Filipino, Thai, Vietnamese, etc.)
 - Black
 - Latin American
 - Arab, Middle Eastern or West Asian (e.g., Afghan, Iranian)
 - Not listed – please specify [text box]
 - Prefer not to say

25. How long have you lived in Canada?

- a. Born in Canada
- b. Less than 2 years
- c. 2 to 10 years
- d. More than 10 years
- e. Prefer not to say

26. Are you the parent or guardian of children that live with you? (select all that apply)

- a. Yes, children under the age of 5
- b. Yes, children between the age of 5 and 12
- c. Yes, children over the age of 12
- d. No children that live with me
- e. Prefer not to say

27. Do you identify as having a disability?

- a. Yes
- b. No
- c. Prefer not to say

Endnotes

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