

Understanding the relationship between quality of work and remote work support and monitoring

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Executive Summary

The pandemic expanded digital technologies to connect and support remote workers, and increased electronic monitoring of those working remotely. While some employers see value in monitoring, overuse can negatively affect employee well-being and job satisfaction.

This research examined the experiences and attitudes towards remote work in Canada for employees and supervisors and sought to understand how the arrangement has affected productivity, satisfaction, trust and well-being.

Overall, employees and supervisors were satisfied with working remotely with job satisfaction, productivity and trust reported higher among employees. Many people also reported reduced levels of connection with colleagues, although 76 per cent continued to hold meetings.

Remote work is here to stay with workers increasingly seeking remote or hybrid work arrangements. There are limited guidelines and policies to support Canadian employers in finding the best approach for electronic monitoring and employee supports in remote work. Further policy discussions are needed to outline best practices for employers and protections for remote workers.

KEY INSIGHTS

1

About 70 per cent of surveyed employees who use a digital device for work indicated that some aspect of their work was digitally monitored by email, websites visited, chats or phone calls.

2

Employees who experience close monitoring report lower levels of job satisfaction and trust in their employer and higher stress.

3

Intense monitoring is not equitable. Workers who are low income, younger, have disabilities or are racialized are more likely to be monitored than other groups.

▶ The Issue

As COVID-19 spread across Canada, many employees shifted to remote work in response to public health measures. However, the end to those measures has not resulted in a full return to the office. Remote working conditions continue for many workers in Canada, with many now employed in a hybrid model – where some days are in the office and the rest are remote.

The increase in remote and hybrid work has, at the same time, expanded digital monitoring of employees. Research has already shown that an over-reliance on digital tools for employee monitoring can result in decreased job satisfaction and increased employee stress. It has also demonstrated the continued need for supervisor support and connection for employee well-being and productivity.

There is a gap in understanding of how these issues have played out in Canada in the post-pandemic context in order to inform policy-making. Federal and provincial governments have recognized the policy gap around remote work and workplace surveillance and have begun to make efforts to address it. For example, in April 2022, Ontario passed legislation requiring employers with more than 25 employees to have a written policy on their electronic monitoring practices.



What We Investigated

This research examined the experiences and attitudes towards remote work, the availability of performance supports, and the prevalence of digital monitoring from the perspectives of both employees and supervisors in Canada. It also sought to understand how the arrangement has affected productivity, satisfaction, trust and well-being.

The project conducted a survey that explored:

- What are the current experiences of workers and supervisors in Canada regarding performance supports and monitoring in remote work arrangements?
- What are worker and supervisor attitudes toward remote work performance support and approaches to monitoring?
- 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?

The survey was conducted in October 2022 and was available in English and French. Results were analyzed to identify approaches to work performance support and monitoring and to draw comparisons between what was reported by supervisors and employees.

What We're Learning

The surveys collected responses from 1,401 employees and 467 supervisors living in Canada and working remotely either on a full- or part-time basis.

Impacts of Remote Work

Overall, working remotely had benefits for workers and supervisors including higher levels of job satisfaction, higher levels of employee-employer trust, better work-life balance, higher perceived productivity and increased supervisor support.

- 77 per cent of remote workers surveyed indicated higher job satisfaction. When workers had to work on-site, their level of job satisfaction dropped to 40 per cent.
- 61 per cent of workers reported having better work-life balance compared to before the pandemic.
- 55 per cent of workers and 51 per cent of supervisors noted that the amount of work completed increased compared to before the pandemic and only 15 per cent of supervisors reported that less work got done.
- 45 per cent of supervisors surveyed said they were able to provide better support to employees in the shift to remote work.
- Both employees and supervisors noted a decrease in personal connection with colleagues due to the transition to remote work.

As we emerge from the pandemic, more organizations are focused on getting workers to return to the workplace at least some of the time. However, the benefits of remote work and a tight labour market have maintained interest in remote or hybrid work arrangements. At the time of the survey, almost half (44 per cent) of respondents either had no set requirement to work on-site or worked fully remotely. Employees with flexibility about coming into the workplace were more likely to be supervisors and more likely to be older workers and women.

Performance Supports

For most respondents, performance and development supports continued while working remotely, with 76 per cent of employees surveyed having regular meetings with their teams or supervisors and 40 per cent receiving ongoing feedback from supervisors. Most employees agreed these practices were helpful (74 per cent) and/or adequate (72 per cent). Most people surveyed (84 per cent) felt they had control over the support they received. Respondents who felt their employer had low trust in them or had low job satisfaction reported feeling no control over their performance support.

Electronic Monitoring

One-third (33 per cent) of employees reported an increase in monitoring since the beginning of the pandemic, especially younger workers, low-income workers, racialized workers and workers with disabilities.

One-third (33 per cent) of employees reported their time at work was loosely monitored (i.e. logging hours or checking in daily with their supervisor) and 10 per cent were actively monitored through technology (i.e. software-Kronos, Avaya or applications-Outlook Calendar, Skype, WhatsApp). About 35 per cent of supervisors reported loosely monitoring their employees. Employees who were paid by the hour were more likely to be monitored than those who were paid a salary.

Of employees who used an electronic device for work, 70 per cent indicated some aspect of their work was digitally monitored such as by email, websites visited, chats or phone calls.

About a third (32 per cent) of employees reported experiencing at least one form of intense electronic monitoring such as location tracking, webcam/video recording or keystroke monitoring. Employees who were intensely monitored also reported lower levels of job satisfaction, trust for their employer and higher stress.

Only one-half of employees said they received information in writing about their organization's electronic monitoring practices, and about one-quarter were not provided any information at all.

While employees and supervisors understand the need for some monitoring, survey respondents expressed a preference for loose monitoring tactics like check-ins with colleagues at set times.

★ Why It Matters

In the rapid transition to remote work, organizations were forced to adapt and find ways to keep up engagement and monitor employee performance while respecting privacy and developing trust.

Remote work will continue to be part of the new approach to work. Most workers enjoy working remotely and it contributes to higher job quality and life satisfaction. However, employers continue to struggle with how best to monitor and support employees in a remote work environment. There are limited guidelines on the best approach and Canadian employers need more support to find ways that maximize productivity but not compromise the benefits that remote work has brought to employee well-being.



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Insights from this project are particularly important for employers struggling with how to balance productivity and monitoring, as intense electronic monitoring (through webcams, keystroke, etc.) negatively affects employees and leads to lower job satisfaction, lower employer trust and higher levels of stress. Finding the right balance of monitoring without being intrusive to employees is critical to the success of remote work.

Additionally, organizations need to do a better job of informing employees of their electronic monitoring practices and policies. As the findings show, only about one-third of employees had complete information about electronic monitoring in the workplace. This raises issues related to privacy and trust, and highlights a need for policy intervention. As electronic monitoring continues, having clear and consistent information about monitoring policies available to all employees is critical to maintaining employee trust.

► What's Next

This project is part of our [Quality of Work](#) series, which explores different dimensions of quality work and how these dimensions interact with current challenges in the labour market, including skills and labour shortages across sectors. Part of a comprehensive strategy to improve the quality of work for individuals entails ensuring workers in vulnerable employment situations have access to similar rights and benefits as other workers. This include protections, such as employment insurance, the right to disconnect and informed monitoring policies. The strategy should also provide access to upskilling and reskilling initiatives for individuals seeking to advance their careers or transition into different occupations or sectors.

The Quality of Work series explores current practices related to compensation and benefits, employment security, work environment, professional growth and overall social environment for workers, employers and policy makers. [FSC-partnered research initiatives](#) address key gaps in policy and practice related to quality of work issues in the Canadian context. We are working with partners to generate insights across the projects. They will be shared throughout 2023.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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