

Debate

Conflicts over Privacy in the Workplace

ISSUE: Should companies have the right to track employees through company-owned devices?

There is tension between companies and their employees over privacy in the workplace. Some companies track employees via company-issued GPS-enabled smartphones and monitor employees' behavior through social networking sites such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Instagram. Currently, there are no laws preventing companies from monitoring and tracking employees. Companies believe not monitoring these platforms leaves them vulnerable to misconduct. For instance, the internet increased the number of distractions in the workplace, and some employees may spend up to 30 percent of their time at work using social media sites for nonwork purposes. With AI and analytics, firms can monitor employees and their digital connections to know about their employee's activities.

On the other hand, employees argue they have a right to their privacy. They see tracking as a clear sign that their employers do not trust them. Another major argument is that employers with access to employee social media sites or smartphones might be able to monitor employee activity outside the workplace. Where is the line drawn on ensuring employees are working appropriately versus respecting their rights to privacy?

There are two sides to every issue:

- 1. Companies should have the right to track employees through company smartphones and monitor their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts.*
 - 2. Employees should be able to maintain their personal privacy and not be tracked through their company smartphones or their Facebook and Twitter accounts.*
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**This debate issue was developed by O. C. Ferrell and Linda Ferrell © 2021. This case was prepared for classroom discussion rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative, ethical, or legal decision by management. All sources used for this case were obtained through publicly available material.*