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Digital Supervision and Work Discipline: A Review of Business Ethics with a Foucauldian Approach

Anisa Kartika Sari[1], Mukhtaruddin[2], Rina Tjandrakirana dp[3], Umi Kalsum[4]

[1,2,3,4] Department of Accounting, Sriwijaya University, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: anisakartika020203@gmail.com

Abstract

Digital surveillance in the workplace is becoming increasingly widespread with technological advancements, but its impact on the formation of worker discipline and autonomy has not received much critical examination. This article aims to analyze how digital surveillance shapes work discipline according to a Foucauldian perspective and how this practice should be assessed within a business ethics framework. The research uses a qualitative approach with a library study method, utilizing secondary data from relevant scientific literature. The results indicate that work discipline is formed through five mechanisms: asymmetric visibility, scrutiny transformed into continuous calculation, normalization through the narrowing of the meaning of performance, internalization and self-responsibility, and algorithmic opacity. From a business ethics perspective, the appropriateness of surveillance practices is determined by the validity of the objectives, proportionality, transparency, workers' rights to access and correct data, and respect for privacy and autonomy. Cybersecurity monitoring is relatively justifiable, while monitoring keystrokes, screenshots, and webcams during remote work, as well as algorithmic decisions without human review, are difficult to justify. This article proposes the principle of reciprocal visibility as a normative response to the one-way visibility of panopticon power. Supervision can be accounted for to the extent that it can be seen, understood, and challenged by the party being supervised.

Keywords: Discipline, Foucault, Power, Employees, Digital Surveillance

INTRODUCTION

The development of modernity opened up a wider space for humans to actualize their potential. One of the main markers of this era was the emergence of capitalism, which is an economic system that not only regulates production and distribution, but also shapes the structure of people's social life. The initial idea of how this system works can be traced in

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the work of Adam Smith, The Wealth of Nations, which describes the market mechanism as an "invisible hand" (invisible hand) that drives economic activity. However, in its development, capitalism gave birth to a working class whose labor was exploited by the owners of capital. As a result, the relationship between the two parties is asymmetrical, because the owner of capital controls the work process and the results of production. To maintain this control, the owner of capital implements various forms of supervision to enforce work discipline for the benefit of the company. On a proportionate scale, the enforcement of such discipline may not have a significant impact on workers. However, when supervision exceeds proportional limits, it has the potential to become a form of control that limits the autonomy of workers (Chatra et al., 2023).

This form of control did not appear suddenly, but developed as the way supervision itself was carried out changed. In the early phase of modernity, supervision of workers was carried out directly, either through foremen as intermediaries and through the presence of capital owners at the production site to observe the work process. In addition to this direct supervision, the company collects data on each worker as a basis for evaluating their eligibility to remain employed. Thus, supervision in this phase relies on the physical presence of supervisors and administrative records. This limitation is then overcome when entering the digital era, when the supervision mechanism transforms through the use of digital devices that monitor workers' activities on an ongoing basis. This technology increases the efficiency of supervision because it is no longer limited by space, time, or the number of supervisors. However, this efficiency raises questions about its implications for workers' autonomy and welfare, as mentioned earlier (Judijanto et al., 2025).

To analyze how power can control individuals even from invisible positions, Michel Foucault's thought provides a relevant conceptual framework. Foucault, who is often categorized as a poststructuralist thinker, critically elaborated that power not only operates externally, but also penetrates the subject's personal space. According to him, discipline in modern society no longer relies on physical coercion to form an obedient subject, but rather works through mechanisms of supervision, normalization, and internalization of norms so that individuals supervise and regulate themselves. This mechanism is conceptualized through the idea of the panopticon, which is a condition when individuals feel constantly supervised and thus discipline themselves independently. In the context of digital space, these mechanisms are intensified because discipline is able to penetrate the most private realms of the subject's life. At this point, the subject has the potential to lose the autonomous space to express himself as a consequence of a discipline that is sustainable (Zubair & Sudrajat, 2023).

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The loss of this autonomous space cannot be separated from the systematic efforts of capital owners in forming disciplined workers. The establishment of this discipline aims to make workers obedient subjects, so that their mental and psychological conditions can be controlled relatively easily and encourage submission to the company's authority. These efforts are realized through a set of formal rules, such as the provision of work uniforms, wage deductions due to absences, the absence system, the determination of working hours, and other regulations. These various rules serve to establish disciplinary standards that are used as a benchmark for workers' behavior, so that compliance no longer depends on direct coercion, but on norms that have been institutionalized. Based on this framework, this article seeks to answer two research questions, namely how digital supervision shapes work discipline according to Foucauldian readings, and how these practices should be assessed within the framework of business ethics.

METHOD

Method is a way to express objective truth. The truth is the goal while the method is the way. The use of methods is intended so that the truth revealed is really accompanied by strong scientific evidence. Therefore, method can be understood as a systematic procedure or series of ways in exploring scientific truth. In relation to this paper, data and information are collected through literature studies with the technique of listening, reading and recording objects learned through books, literature or relevant library materials, so that the data (in the form of words) is then analyzed according to the needs of writing, namely revealing scientific truth (Yam, 2023).

This research uses a qualitative approach with the type of library research (literature study). This approach was chosen because the main purpose of the research is to explore, analyze, and synthesize theories and empirical findings related to the use of coercive power and rewards in employee performance management. This research does not involve experiments or field data collection, but relies on secondary data in the form of relevant and credible scientific sources (Yam, 2023).

RESULTS

Power, Knowledge, and Subject: A Foucauldian Conceptual Framework and Business Ethics

The starting point of the Foucauldian reading is Discipline and Punish (1977), which traces the transition of forms of power from spectacular corporal punishment in public to a quiet, continuous, and scattered discipline in various institutions, such as prisons, schools, barracks, hospitals and factories. Discipline, according to Foucault, works through three

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mutually supportive instruments: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination. With hierarchical observation, the individual is placed in an organized space of visibility. With normalized judgment, behavior is measured against a norm, and deviations from that norm are marked for correction. By examination, the two are combined in a record-keeping ritual that makes the individual as Case that can be described, compared and managed. The pinnacle of this logic is the Panoptikon, Jeremy Bentham's prison design with a watchtower in the center and cells facing inward. The supervisor can see each inmate intruder, so that the inmate never knows when he is being observed. The effect, Foucault said, is to instill in the subject under his supervision a consciousness of permanent visibility that guarantees the automatic functioning of power. The subject who knows he can be seen exercises restraint over himself, and thus becomes his own principle of subjugation (Foucault, 1977).

For Foucault, panoptics does not play a repressive role. In The History of Sexuality (1978) and a collection of interviews in Power/Knowledge (1980), he asserts that power is productive: it produces the realm of objects, rituals of truth and types of individuals. This is where the power/knowledge relationship is key. The practice of observing and measuring produces knowledge about human beings and that knowledge in turn allows power to be exercised more precisely. Knowledge is never neutral; it is shaped by the goals and categories that the observer uses, and then re-shapes what is considered normal, reasonable and feasible. In organizational contexts, categories such as "productive worker", "high-potential employee", or "substandard performance" are not natural descriptions, but rather the result of a particular measurement regime that is then naturalized (Foucault, 1978).

Foucault's ideas of governmentality (1991) and self-technology (1988) expand this picture. Modern power, he argues, works not only by disciplining from the outside, but by directing the "conduct of conduct", that is, the way in which individuals manage their own behavior (Mudhoffir, 2013). Individuals are encouraged to be free and responsible subjects, but that freedom is channeled through established norms. Foucault-inspired organizational studies show how this plays out in the workplace. A time-consuming production system equipped with electronic supervision creates a visibility that makes the supervisory worker for his or her colleagues, on the other hand how teamwork combined with electronic supervision and peer pressure results in more difficult control than hierarchical command. The move from panopticons to self-technology is a transition that is particularly relevant to reading performance dashboards and real-time feedback systems today (Siswadi et al., 2023).

This Foucauldian reading needs to be reconciled with business ethics, the field in charge of assessing whether an organizational practice is morally justifiable. Foucault

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himself deliberately avoided formulating universal normative principles, and his criticism was more of an attempt to reveal how something that seemed to be contingent and power-charged (Mudhoffir, 2013). Business ethics, on the other hand, provides criteria for judgment. The deontological tradition that originated with Kant proposes that human beings should be treated as ends in themselves, not merely as means, so that dignity and autonomy become the limits to what can be done for the sake of efficiency (Artama et al., 2026). The utilitarian tradition weighs the total benefits and losses for all parties affected. Justice theory, for example in Rawls's (1971) version, asks whether burdens and powers are distributed fairly and whether rules are acceptable to those who are most weak. Virtue ethics asks what kind of character a practice fosters in an organization and its members (Sulaiman et al., 2025). Stakeholder theory asserts that workers have legitimate claims and should not be treated only as production inputs. In the field of privacy, the notion of contextual integrity is judged appropriately or not according to the norms of the context in which the information is shared, not simply according to whether the information is "public" or "private" (Yusuf et al., 2026). this article uses the two side by side: Foucault to dismantle the way power works, business ethics to weigh what to do about it.

Panopticons Moving to the Screen: Digital Surveillance and the Formation of Work Discipline

Digital surveillance has a number of characteristics that set it apart from traditional surveillance, and it is precisely these characteristics that make the panoptic analogy feel so appropriate. First, it is continuous and almost without marginal cost. A foreman can only observe a certain number of workers at a time, whereas software can record thousands of workers at a time for twenty-four hours. Second, it is documented and playable: what a worker did at nine o'clock past ten minutes on a Tuesday three months ago can be recalled at any time. Third, it is often invisible. Workers often do not know what data is being collected, how often it is reviewed, who is viewing it, and what decisions it is used for. Fourth, it is increasingly automated. In algorithmic management, assessments and sanctions can be generated by the system, so that what workers are facing is no longer a boss to talk to, but a blurry interface. This development has coincided with the broadening of definitions of what is considered relevant to monitor, from work output to behavior, from behavior to communication, and from communication to emotion, health, and even life outside of working hours (Noviance & Rahardi, 2025).

This uncertainty about when someone is being observed is what produces the panoptic effect. Workers who know that the software can record their activities, but do not know when the recording is actually being reviewed, will act as if they are always being

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watched (Firmansyah et al., 2025). The behaviors that seem to be born out of these conditions are very diverse: keeping the online status green, moving the mouse so that the system doesn't log inactivity, delaying breaks, avoiding informal conversations that aren't related to tasks, or structuring work schedules based on what "looks good" on the dashboard rather than what makes the most sense for the job itself. The depiction of how control shifts from boss to team can be even tighter than previous bureaucratic control, an "iron cage" built by shared norms and no longer by one-man orders. In Foucault's framework, this is where discipline moves from the outside in. The supervisor does not need to be present; what is present is the worker's awareness that he can be seen, and that awareness is enough to regulate his actions (Sulistyowati & Sukino, 2026).

However, if supervision only results in pseudo-compliance, it will be easily interpreted as a failure. Foucauldian readings highlight precisely the productive side: digital surveillance generates knowledge and that knowledge produces norms (Jannah & Hidayat, 2024). Data on the number of typs, call duration, active time, number of tickets completed, or shuttle speed are converted into performance indicators and that indicator establishes what is considered a good worker. The problem is, what is easy to measure is not always what is valuable. The quality of consideration, creativity, informal collaboration, empathy for customers, and the ability to respond to unexpected situations are difficult to quantify and tend to be marginalized from the definition of "performance". Workers then optimize what is measured, not what is important, while deviations from the quantitative norm are labeled as laziness or incompetence without questioning the validity of the measure. Here the power/knowledge relationship works very clearly: a particular knowledge regime defines what is normal, and power is exercised through comparison to that norm. The unlimited collection of worker data even opens up the possibility of inferences into characteristics that workers never disclose, such as health conditions, political orientations, or plans to quit their jobs, which can then influence hiring, promotion, and termination decisions (Siswadi et al., 2023).

Furthermore, digital surveillance not only disciplines behavior but also shapes subjectivity. Self-tracking features, personal targets, real-time feedback and leaderboards invite workers to become self-managers, "entrepreneurs in themselves" in the language of governmentality literature, responsible for optimizing their measurable performance. The freedom of workers to manage their time and work seems real, but they are directed within the framework of indicators that the organization has set. The distinction between control and autonomy becomes blurred: workers feel chosen, even though their choices are already framed. In the discourse of remote work, for example, flexibility is offered as a benefit, but it is often accompanied by the obligation to always be "visible" available and responsive. It is

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this flexibility that becomes a conduit for new disciplines, which are more subtle because they appear as freedom (Wahyudin, 2026).

Finally, it is unfair to stop at this reading of the worker as a passive victim. Foucault asserts that where there is power, there is resistance, and resistance is not something that is outside the power but part of the field of its relations. Workers do not simply absorb discipline; they get around it, negotiate, and sometimes reject it. They install mouse-driven devices, manipulate reports, build informal solidarity, lodge objections through unions, or simply quietly quit that meets the size but refuses more. These everyday forms of resistance are the weapons of the weak, rarely in the form of open defiance but undermining the effectiveness of control from within. This resistance, in turn, often triggers a new intensification of scrutiny, so that the relationship between scrutiny and resistance is spiral rather than a straight line. This reading is important because it prevents the essay from falling into determinism: digital discipline is not an inevitable end result, but rather an ever-changing battleground.

Weighing Oversight: Privacy, Autonomy, Justice, and the Interests of Stakeholders

If digital surveillance is a technology of power, the ethical question that arises is no longer "whether companies are allowed to supervise", but "under what conditions, to what extent, and for whom". The most fundamental starting point is human dignity. In the Kantian tradition, human beings should not be treated solely as means, and workers whose entire movements are transformed into streams of data to be optimized risk being reduced to a factor of production. Employment relations are indeed legally instrumental in the sense that workers sell their energy and time, but not the whole of themselves. Privacy here is not a luxury, but a prerequisite for freedom to think, experiment, and be yourself. The disadvantage of surveillance is not always the leakage of secrets, but also the shrinking effect on behavior and unequal power relations produced by the collection of information itself. The difference between acceptable and unacceptable cases: network traffic monitoring to prevent company data leaks falls within the norms of the employment relations context, while tracking the location of workers outside of working hours, camera surveillance into workers' homes, or analysis of private conversations violate those contextual norms even though they are technically possible.

The second dimension is autonomy and trust, which are often overlooked in the calculation of supervisory benefits. Healthy working relationships rely on mutual trust: the company trusts the worker to carry out the task responsibly, and the worker trusts the company to treat him fairly. Excessive supervision erodes this foundation. From the point of view of virtue ethics, organizations that rely heavily on control show a suspicious disposition

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and tend to foster pseudo-obedience instead of sincere integrity. The moral character of the worker can also be eroded: when goodness is measured and rewarded through scores, the intrinsic motivation to do well because the value of the job itself is replaced by the motivation to look good in the eyes of the system (Mahardika et al., 2023).

The third dimension is fairness, which must be read on two levels. At the procedural level, the question is whether workers are clearly informed about what is being monitored, how the data is used, how long it is stored, and whether there are mechanisms in place to review and challenge decisions. Inexplicably algorithm-based decisions violate the principles of transparency and the right to be heard, two basic conditions of procedural fairness. At the distributive level, the question is who is most burdened by the burden of supervision. In general, workers with low status, short-term contracts, or those in labor-intensive sectors experience the most intense scrutiny, while top management is relatively exempt from similar scrutiny (Noval et al., 2026). Fair oversight is a rule that can be accepted by someone who doesn't know whether he or she will be an owner, manager, or frontline worker. Plus, algorithms trained on historical data can reproduce pre-existing biases, so old injustices return in the form of decisions that seem objective and are therefore more difficult to sue.

The defense against oversight needs to be honestly weighed, because good ethics should not be naïve to the legitimate interests of the organization. Companies bear real risks in the form of data leaks, internal fraud, regulatory violations, and work accidents, and proportionate monitoring can protect the workers themselves, for example through safety tracking at high-risk jobs or the detection of unauthorized access that could harm co-workers (Mutaqin, 2025). Utilitarianly, supervision is justified to the extent that the benefits to all parties outweigh the losses (Hanato, 2025). The problem is that the disadvantages of supervision, such as chronic stress, burnout, loss of intrinsic motivation, and declining trust, are difficult to measure and often do not include in the calculation, while the benefits, which are in the form of productivity figures or cost savings, are easy to quantify. This kind of measurement bias is itself an example of how certain knowledge regimes are shifting moral judgments. The principle of proportionality is a very important intermediary: supervision must be commensurate with its purpose, limited to data that is really necessary, and chosen only when there are no other less invasive ways to achieve the same goal.

Stakeholder theory adds one more demand, namely that workers are not just policy objects but parties whose claims must be considered from the moment the policy is formulated. Surveillance policies that are unilaterally established and announced as fait accompli treat workers as targets, not partners. Conversely, the involvement of workers or their representatives in designing, testing, and evaluating monitoring systems increases the

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legitimacy and quality of decisions, because workers know best what is really happening on the ground and where performance measures are misleading (Yusuf et al., 2026).

Between Consent and Power: Ethical Paradoxes and Governance Directions

The Foucauldian reading and business ethics seem to complement each other, but between them there are tensions that deserve to be openly acknowledged. Business ethics tends to look for conditions that make supervision "justifiable": legitimate goals, proportionality, transparency, and consent (Rustandi & LAH, 2023). Foucault would ask further: what if all these conditions of supervision still served as a mechanism of normalization? Even transparent supervision, for example, does not eliminate the panoptic effect. It is precisely because workers know exactly that they are being observed and measured against certain indicators, that they will conform to them more compliantly. Transparency accompanied by narrow norms can strengthen discipline, not relax it. Consent must also be read critically. When workers sign a monitoring policy as a condition of employment, with a weak bargaining position and limited work alternatives, the consent resembles formalized coercion rather than free choice. Business ethics that are content with formal compliance with consent procedures risk becoming the enabler of power, not its critic (Wardiono, 2026).

The implication is that the ethics of supervision cannot stop at the question of compliance, but must ask about the power structure behind the employment relationship itself. At this point Foucault's contribution and the contribution of business ethics can be brought together in a single working principle: legitimate supervision is supervision that does not rule out criticism and correction from the supervised party. That is, it is not only what is supervised and how much determines the legitimacy of the practice, but also whether the worker has access to the knowledge generated about him, the ability to question the measures used, and a real path to refuse or renegotiate. A system that makes workers "visible" without making the system itself "visible" to workers maintains the asymmetry that is at the heart of panoptic power (Foucault, 1977).

From there can be derived some realistic direction of governance, which here is structured as a set of arguments rather than a list of recipes. First, the purpose of supervision must be specific and legitimate, for example cybersecurity, occupational safety, or legal compliance, not simply "increase productivity" as a general reason that can justify any oversight. Second, proportionality and minimization of data should be the rule: only data necessary for that purpose is collected, stored adequately, and not misused without a new basis. Third, workers' private spaces, including off-work hours and personal devices, must be given strict limits. Fourth, decisions that have a major impact on workers, such as sanctions, termination of contracts, or promotions, should not be left entirely to algorithms,

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and workers have the right to know the basis for their judgment and raise objections to the competent humans. Fifth, performance indicators need to be audited regularly, both for their validity and their potential for discrimination, so that the knowledge regime that shapes norms does not harden into an untouchable truth. Sixth, workers or unions must be involved from the moment they are designed, not just notified after the system is up and running. Seventh, and perhaps most fundamentally, organizations need to shift from a culture of control to a culture of trust based on results, with oversight as a complement rather than the foundation of the working relationship (Siswadi et al., 2023).

The Indonesian context provides a legal basis as well as its own challenges. Law Number 27 of 2022 concerning Personal Data Protection stipulates the rights of data subjects and the obligations of data controllers, including lawful processing grounds, restriction of purpose and data security (Gustryan & Hoesein, 2025). In employment relationships, employers act as data controllers over employee data, so these principles should apply to activity monitoring, attendance biometric data, and location data. Other related arrangements, such as the Electronic Information and Transactions Act and labor regulations, provide additional frameworks, but there are no operational guidelines that specifically regulate the limits of employee monitoring and the use of algorithms in human resource management. This gap makes practice in the field highly dependent on the internal policies of each company and on the bargaining position of workers. In the platform economy sector, the problem is more complicated because employment relationships are often framed as partnerships, making it difficult to claim the protections that are prevalent in employment relationships even though algorithmic control over partners is very real. For policymakers, the lesson from this reading is that regulation needs to touch not only data protection, but also algorithmic transparency, the right to human review, and recognition of the de facto power exercised by employers, regardless of the formal label of the relationship.

DISCUSSION

This article starts from two questions: how digital supervision shapes work discipline according to the Foucauldian reading, and how it should be assessed within the framework of business ethics. The previous sections have laid down conceptual tools and offered an overview. The following discussion attempts to answer both questions in more detail, starting with a description of the mechanisms that explain how discipline is formed, then moving to an ethical assessment of concrete practices, and concludes with a synthesis that formulates criteria for accountable supervision.

The first mechanism that explains the formation of discipline is asymmetric visibility. Take for example the attendance app that requires workers to send a selfie along with the

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coordinates of the location each time they enter and return. Workers know that the data is being collected, but do not know who is reviewing, how often, and for what decisions. It is this structure that in Foucault's (1977) analysis is at the heart of panopticism: what matters is not actual observations, but the unascertainable possibilities of observation. Power becomes economical because a single appraiser can reach hundreds of workers, and even the appraiser does not actually need to look all the time. Foucault called this kind of power economy a way of making power lighter, faster, and more effective. The practical effect is easy to recognize: workers adjust in advance to what is possible, and the adjustment takes place even when no one is actually seeing (Foucault, 1977).

The second mechanism is the transformation of examination into continuous calculation. For Foucault, examination is a ritual that combines observation and judgment so that the individual can be documented as Case. Digital surveillance automates this ritual. Each action leaves a trace, the trace is aggregated into a profile, and the profile is translated into a score that can be compared between workers (Sulistyowati & Sukino, 2026). It is this comparison that gives birth to horizontal competition: workers supervise their own position relative to other colleagues on the leaderboard, so that pressure no longer comes only from superiors, but from fellow workers. Control channeled through peers can be tighter than hierarchical control, as it appears as a shared norm and not an outside command. Thus, digital supervision not only expands the reach of superiors, but distributes supervisory functions throughout the collective of workers (Fahlevvi et al., 2025).

The third mechanism is normalization through narrowing the meaning of performance. In customer service, for example, the average duration of call handling is easy to measure and therefore easy to target. Once that number becomes a measure, workers optimize it: calls are speeded up, conversations are interrupted, complex customer problems are solved superficially, or passed to others for a short time. This phenomenon is known in management studies as Goodhart's law, which is that when a measure is targeted, it ceases to be a good measure. The Foucauldian reading adds a deeper layer: indicators not only mismeasure, but define what is considered good work, so that unmeasurable things, such as patience, consideration, and willingness to help colleagues, lose their status as performance. Workers who do not conform to quantitative norms are then categorized as deviant, and corrections are directed at workers, rarely to the measure itself. (Mutaqin, 2025).

The fourth mechanism is internalization and accountability, which is most evident in remote work. When flexibility is offered as a leniency, it is often accompanied by the requirement to always appear available, whether through online status, quick replies, or neat activity tracks. Workers learn to structure their workday to look good in the eyes of the system, and slowly feel guilty when taking breaks when the dashboard displays

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unsatisfactory numbers. In the framework of governmentality, this is the point at which discipline becomes an ethos: workers no longer simply obey, but rather individuals who feel full responsibility for their measurable performance and therefore keep an eye on themselves. The boundaries between work time and personal time are blurred because the norm of visibility ignores office hours.

The fifth mechanism, which distinguishes the digital panopticon from the Bentham panopticon, is algorithmic opacity. In Bentham's design, the prisoner knows exactly the rules in force and knows that someone is watching him, only not knowing when. In algorithmic management, workers often don't know even the criteria of their judgment, let alone who is responsible for the decisions. Platform drivers who suddenly receive fewer orders or whose accounts are suspended often don't get traceable explanations. Power here becomes faceless: no boss can be excused, only the system. This creates a moral accountability gap, as decisions that have a major impact on one's livelihood seem to be taken by no one. The power/knowledge relationship becomes radically asymmetrical: companies know almost everything about workers, while workers know almost nothing about how he or she is judged (Siswadi et al., 2023).

Of these five mechanisms, the answer to the first question can be formulated. Work discipline in a digital surveillance regime is formed not primarily because workers are forced, but because of the conditions under which their actions are likely to be organized: what is seen, what is calculated, what is compared, and what is considered appropriate. Workers then act in that order as subjects who appear to be free, but whose freedom has been framed. Nevertheless, this reading should not be understood as a claim that discipline always works. Strict discipline can result in pseudo-obedience, fatigue and a decline in learning ability, Everyday resistance continues to eat away at control from within. The discipline that is formed, in other words, is not stable compliance, but rather the result of an unfinished negotiation between the attempt to regulate and the attempt to avoid being regulated (Idham, 2026).

To answer the second question, ethical judgment needs to move from general principles to concrete practices, because "digital surveillance" is not a uniform thing. This essay weighs each practice against the five tests derived from the above ethical framework: whether the purpose is legitimate and specific, whether the scope is proportionate and there are no less invasive alternatives, whether the worker knows what is being monitored and what is being used for, whether the worker can access, question, and correct data and assessments about himself, and whether the practice respects the boundaries of the worker's private space and autonomy.

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Monitoring for cybersecurity and data leak prevention is the easiest case to justify. The purpose is legitimate and specific, protecting information assets concerning customers and colleagues, and its scope can be limited to company-owned systems. From a utilitarian perspective, the benefits for many parties are clear, and from a contextual integrity perspective, corporate network traffic monitoring is in line with the norms of the employment relations context. However, this case shows the risk that Foucault highlighted sharply, namely a shift in function. Data collected for security purposes is easily outsourced to assess performance or find fault with workers, and knowledge that was originally protective is transformed into a disciplinary instrument. Therefore, purpose restrictions, internal access restrictions and retention periods, which are in line with the principles of the Personal Data Protection Act, are ethical requirements and not just administrative requirements (Rahman, 2025).

Location tracking for field workers, such as couriers, salespeople, and technicians, is in a conditionally justifiable gray area. The goal of work coordination and safety has a solid foundation, especially in high-risk jobs. But the test of proportionality and private space demands clear restrictions: tracking is only active during duty hours, can be turned off outside of those hours, and is not used to reconstruct a worker's personal life, such as residence, habits, or visits to healthcare facilities. Location data is particularly sensitive because it easily uncovers things that have nothing to do with work. Practices that require constant tracking on workers' personal devices without separation of working and non-work hours fail to respect those limits.

Monitoring keystrokes, periodic screenshots, and webcams in remote work are the most difficult practices to justify, and the reasons are multilayered. From a deontological perspective, cameras and screen recordings that enter the worker's home space and personal screens treat workers as objects that must be continuously proven to be honest. In terms of proportionality, there is a much less invasive alternative, namely assessing outputs and outputs, so that the "no other way" requirement is not met. In terms of validity, keyboard activity is not directly proportional to the quality of work, so the knowledge generated misleads and punishes workers who think, read, or plan. In terms of consequences, excessive observation undermines experimentation and learning. Exceptions may be considered for jobs that handle highly sensitive data in highly regulated sectors, but even so, compensatory controls, such as clear notifications, restrictions on devices and working hours, and human supervision of monitoring results, are still necessary.

Algorithmic management that determines sanctions, deactivation, or termination of employment faces the most serious questions of procedural justice. Decisions that determine a person's livelihood should be explainable, reviewed by humans, and sued. In

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Rawls's (1971) framework, such a rule is only fair if it is acceptable to a person who does not know whether he or she will be the decision-maker or the decision-maker; almost no one will accept a system that can close his livelihood without explanation and without an opportunity to defend himself (Sulaiman et al., 2025). This problem is exacerbated in Indonesia's platform economy, where workers are framed as partners so that claims for labor relations protection are weakened even though algorithmic control over them is very real. In the Foucauldian view, the framing of "partners" itself is part of a regime of truth that disguises power relations: workers are treated as free entrepreneurs when what is required is obedience, and as employees when what is needed is availability (Noviance & Rahardi, 2025).

There are three common objections raised to this critical assessment, and each is worthy of attention. The first objection states that the worker has consented to monitoring in a contract or company policy. In response, consent given under the inequality of bargaining position and without meaningful choice is more appropriately called forced acceptance; meaningful consent demands sufficient information, the possibility of refusal without undue consequences, and limits on what can be approved. The second objection states that the company pays for the worker's time and therefore has the right to know how that time is used. The response is that the right to paid working time does not automatically mean the right to the worker's entire self; the employer's claim is limited to the performance of the work, and the method must be commensurate with that claim. The third objection states that supervision increases productivity. In response, the evidence suggests a modest effect: surveillance can raise the numbers on monitored measures in the short term, but at the cost of pseudo-compliance, system-circumventing behavior, and weakened initiative and trust. Narrowly measured productivity is not the same as actual productivity.

Of all this analysis, the article proposes one synthetic idea as its contribution, namely the principle of reciprocal visibility. This idea is not part of Foucault's theory, but rather a normative answer to the Foucauldian diagnosis. If the core of panoptic power is one-way visibility, when the worker is visible while the system is invisible, then supervision can only be accounted for to the extent that visibility is made reciprocal: the worker knows what is seen about him, understands how judgments are made, can access and correct data, and has a real path to sue. This principle safeguards the most valuable of both traditions. From Foucault he takes a sensitivity to the asymmetry of knowledge as the root of power, and from business ethics he takes the demands of procedural fairness, proportionality, and respect for dignity. The visibility of reciprocity does not remove power, but it makes it questionable, and it is the ability to question that distinguishes accountable power from power that merely works.

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The practical implications are different for each party. For management and human resources, the key lesson is to distinguish control from leadership: a good monitoring system should be designed with workers, tested for validity, and evaluated for side effects, rather than adopted because the technology is available. For policymakers, operational guidelines are needed that bridge the Personal Data Protection Act with the employment context, contain monitoring limits, algorithmic transparency, and the right to human review, as well as affirmation that employment relationship labeling should not be used to avoid ethical and legal obligations. For workers and unions, data literacy is a new form of resistance: the ability to read what is collected, demand explanations, and negotiate boundaries collectively. With this formulation, the answers to the two research questions become intertwined. Digital surveillance shapes the discipline of work by organizing visibility, calculations, norms, and self-responsibility, and the practice can be judged ethical to the extent that it remains visible, understood, and sued by those under surveillance (Gandariyah Afkari et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that digital surveillance in the workplace works on two levels at once. On an apparent level, it is a set of technical tools for recording, measuring, and assessing performance. On a deeper level, it is a technology of power that generates knowledge about workers, sets norms about what is considered good work, and invites workers to internalize those norms so that discipline no longer requires the presence of supervisors. Foucauldian readings help uncover these deeper levels, whereas business ethics provides a tool for weighing whether and to what extent the practice is justifiable.

The conclusion that can be drawn is not that all supervision should be rejected. Organizations have legitimate interests that cannot be ignored, and some supervision does protect workers as well as other stakeholders. What needs to be rejected is the notion that supervision is neutral, that data always reflects reality, and that the formal consent of workers automatically removes ethical issues. Ethical supervision is supervision that is tied to specific goals, proportional, open to scrutiny by those supervised, and with room for workers to have a voice, sue, and renegotiate. Thus, power is not abolished, something that Foucault thought was impossible, but that it is exercised in a way that remains accountable.

This article has limitations because it is conceptual and has not yet relied on primary empirical data from organizations in Indonesia. Further research can use case studies or in-depth interviews in specific sectors, such as banking, manufacturing, customer service, platform economics, or government agencies, to explore the experience of workers directly. Comparisons between office work and remote work, as well as longitudinal studies of the

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impact of supervision on well-being, creativity, and trust, are also worth developing. In the end, the question left by Foucault remains relevant to the digital world of work: not how to be completely free from power, but how not to allow oneself to be regulated in such a way without having time to ask who regulates, on what basis, and for whom.

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