

“New Ways of Working” and their managerial myths: the resurgence of liberation and distributed surveillance?

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« New Ways of Working »

A set of discourses, ideas and conceptions about work configurations in which employees work “anytime, anywhere, anyhow”

- By using new technologies;
- By designing modern workplaces;
- By promoting workers’ flexibility in time and space, autonomy and responsibility;
- By promoting output-based and trust-based management;

We question the resurgence and the performativity of two well-known bodies of knowledge, namely **Panopticism** and **Human Relations**, in such working environments

Panopticism and distributed surveillance

Panopticism...

- “Panopticism is a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle coercion for a society to come”
(Foucault, 2012)

Empirical illustrations

- I. Hypervisibility and lack of acoustic privacy

Hypervisibility and lack of acoustic privacy

“The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unites that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately” (Foucault, 2012)

Interviews excerpts

“Very often you hear conversations even if you do not want to”

“The guy coming from the corridor, he can see everything you do on your computer”

“You always have some noise nuisance, this is oppressing”

“People are monitoring their own colleagues. The first leaving the office will be the slacker”

“The manager is always listening. He has an ear and an eye on everything”



“The building’s material capacity to enable total vision and control”
(Simon, 2005)

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Empirical illustrations

- I. Hypervisibility and acoustic privacy
- II. NTIC monitoring capacity

NTIC Monitoring (Assumed) Capacity

“Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, 2012)

“Who is watching? Why are they watching? What will they do?” (Simon, 2005)

Interviews excerpts

“You never know what is really possible. I mean your manager could always check if you are connected or not, if you are working or not. You want to go on Facebook during your working time? Bad idea. I am sure they can monitor what you are doing”

“Our software is generating a lot of data regarding the work that has been done (...) Sometimes, I check the numbers, but I don't always have the time to do so (...) Even if you do not monitor your people, you have to make them believe that they are being monitored. This way they will always remain careful” (Team manager)

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Empirical illustrations

- I. Hypervisibility and acoustic privacy
- II. NTIC monitoring capacity
- III. Peer control as a consequence

Human Relations School

The Human Relations movement

“Being realistic about the nature and workings of the human group is paramount in any successful administrative undertaking” (Mayo, 1949)

I. Small groups efficiency to liberation

“For all of us the feeling of security and certainty derives always from assured membership of a group. If this is lost, no monetary gain, no job guarantee, can be sufficient compensation” (Mayo, 1949)

“[The workers] were happy in the knowledge that they were working without coercion from above or limitation from below” (Mayo, 1949)

II. Office design

“Many other experiments, and all inconclusive: yet it had seemed so easy to determine the effect of illumination on work” (Mayo, 1949)

The resurgence of well-known bodies of knowledge

