



Chapter 8

ETHICS & TECHNOLOGY



CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

- After exploring this chapter, you will be able to:
 1. Evaluate the ethical ramifications of recent technological advances.
 2. Explain the opposing employer and employee views of privacy at work.
 3. Distinguish between thin and thick consent.
 4. Evaluate the concept of vicarious liability.
 5. Analyze an organization's employee-surveillance capabilities.



Evaluate the Ethical Ramifications of Recent Technological Advances

- There are **advantages** of technology in the workplace
 - The **intranet** is a company's internal Web site, containing information for employee access only.
 - An **extranet** is a private piece of a company's Internet network that is made available to customers and/or vendor partners on the basis of secured access by unique password.
 - **Telecommuting** (*see next slide*)
- **Disadvantages** of technology in the workplace include the loss of privacy in two key areas:
 - Customers must be aware that companies now have the technical capability to send their personal data to any part of the world to take advantage of lower labor costs.
 - Employees must be aware that employers now have capability of monitoring every e-mail you send and Web site you visit in order to make sure that you really are delivering on *the promise of increased worker productivity*.

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When Are You "at Work"?

- Computer technology allows the capability of **telecommuting** – working from anywhere by logging into your company's network remotely
 - Computer and Smartphone (iPhone/Blackberry)
 - Availability now being defined as accessibility
 - So, does this flexibility apply to employees "at work"?

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Explain the Opposing Employer and Employee Views of Privacy at Work- The Promise of Increased Worker Productivity

- **The Employer Position:**
- Employers mandate that productivity in the workplace is what the employees have to meet for the pay-for-performance contract they agreed to when they were hired.
 - » Employee actions during work time are at the discretion of the company.
 - » Company has obligation to its stakeholders to run efficiently and ensure resources are not misused and information is closely guarded.
- **The Employee Position:**
- Employee time at work represents the productivity and the employee receives compensation in return.
 - An employee is not a servant.
 - The compensation agreement should not allow the employer to intrude the employees' civil rights as an individual.
 - Electronic monitoring implies that employees' can't be trusted to do their job.
- ❖ Arriving at satisfactory resolution of opposing arguments between employees and employers are difficult for the following two reasons:
 - ✓ The availability of ongoing technological advancements has made it increasingly difficult to determine precisely where work ends and personal life begins.
 - ✓ The willingness to negotiate or compromise has risen and fallen in direct relation to the prevailing job market

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Distinguish Between Thin and Thick Consent

- **Thick Consent:** If employment conditions are at the other end of the scale – i.e. jobs are plentiful and the employee would have no difficulty in finding another position – then the consent given to the monitoring policy could be classified as 'thick' since the employee has a realistic alternative if he or she finds the policy to be unacceptable.
- **Thin Consent:** When an employee receives formal notification that the company will be monitoring all e-mail and Web activity—either at the time of hire or during employment—and it is made clear in that notification that his or her continued employment with the company will be dependent on the employee's agreement to abide by that monitoring. Thus, the employee may be said to have given 'thin' consent. In other words, there are two options – agree to the monitoring or 'pursue other employment opportunities'.

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The Dangers of Leaving a Paper Trail

- Employees may be able to monitor every keystroke on computers, but the documents written on the machines do the most harm
 - “Offensive” email postings
 - Viewing inappropriate Web sites
- Internet communication:
 - Damage from electronic trail of emails

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Evaluate the Concept of Vicarious Liability

- **Vicarious Liability:** “...a legal concept that means that a party may be held responsible for injury or damage, when in reality they were not actively involved in the incident. Parties that may be charged with vicarious liability are generally in a supervisory role over the person or parties personally responsible for the injury/damage. The implications of vicarious liability are that the party charged is responsible for the actions of their subordinates.”
 - In other words, a legal concept that means a party may be held responsible for injury or damage even when he or she was not actively involved in the incident.
- **Cyberliability:** Employers can be held liable for the actions of their employees in their Internet communications to the same degree as if those employers had written those communications on company letterhead.

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Analyze an Organization's Employee-Surveillance Capabilities

- ❖ An employer has the capabilities to surveillance every keystroke on your computer, to track every Web site you visit, and to record every call you make.
 - Creating this type of environment may protect your liability, but may drive those employees away who are less comfortable with this method.
 - The Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics:
 - i. Thou shall not use a computer to harm other people.
 - ii. Thou shall not interfere with other people's computer work.
 - iii. Thou shall not snoop around in other people's computer files.
 - iv. Thou shall not use a computer to steal.
 - v. Thou shall not use a computer to bear false witness.
 - vi. Thou shall not copy or use proprietary software for which you have not paid.
 - vii. Thou shall not use of people's computer resources without authorization or proper compensation.
 - viii. Thou shall not appropriate other people's intellectual output.
 - ix. Thou shall not think about the social consequences of the program you are writing or the system you are designing.
 - x. Thou shall not always use a computer in ways that ensure consideration and respect for your fellow humans.



❖ Review Questions:

1. Briefly discuss the ethical ramifications of recent technological advances in the workplace.
2. Briefly explain the opposing employer and employee views of privacy at work.