**Hypotheses connected to the NYT article on digital performance monitoring tools**

The quotes in the following text are from a New York Times article *The Rise of the Worker Productivity Score,*By Jodi Kantor and Arya Sundaram, Aug. 14, 2022**.** The article is about digital performance monitoring tools which – partly related to developments during the Covid pandemic – are more and more used in organizations, also in the “laptop-domain”.

*“The arrival of the pandemic, spurring businesses to keep tabs on workers at home, hastened a shift that was already underway. As more employers adopted the tools, more workers shared Ms. Kraemer’s experience: The software was warping the foundations of time and trust in their work lives.”*

The article brings up a few questions forward which are also relevant for STS and its intention to contribute to “Work fit for humans”. This is not just an instrumental issue, but also relates to the normative intentions of STS. The article starts by making a few observations about the developments around digital performance monitoring:

*“IN LOWER-PAYING JOBS, the monitoring is already ubiquitous: not just at Amazon, where the second-by-second measurements became notorious, but also for Kroger cashiers, and millions of others. Eight of the 10 largest private U.S. employers track the productivity metrics of individual workers, many in real time, according to an examination by The New York Times. Now digital productivity monitoring is also spreading among white-collar jobs and roles that require graduate degrees. Many employees, whether working remotely or in person, are subject to trackers, scores, “idle” buttons, or just quiet, constantly accumulating records. Pauses can lead to penalties, from lost pay to lost jobs. Some radiologists see scoreboards showing their “inactivity” time and how their productivity stacks up against their colleagues’. At companies including J.P. Morgan, tracking how employees spend their days, from making phone calls to composing emails, has become routine practice. In Britain, Barclays Bank scrapped prodding messages to workers, like “Not enough time in the Zone yesterday,” after they caused an uproar. At UnitedHealth Group, low keyboard activity can affect compensation and sap bonuses. Public servants are tracked, too: In June, New York’s Metropolitan Transportation Authority told engineers and other employees they could work remotely one day a week if they agreed to full-time productivity monitoring. Architects, academic administrators, doctors, nursing home workers and described growing electronic surveillance over every minute of their workday. They echoed complaints that employees in many lower-paid positions have voiced for years: that their jobs are relentless, that they don’t have control — and in some cases, that they don’t even have enough time to use the bathroom. In interviews and in hundreds of written submissions to The Times, white-collar workers described being tracked as “demoralizing,” “humiliating” and “toxic.”*

A result of such developments is that “micromanagement is becoming standard”. The article notices that foundations of trust are being swept away as a result. The NYT article furthermore observes that the use of digital monitoring tools leads to an inaccurate picture of the work that is being done:

*“But the most urgent complaint, spanning industries and incomes, is that the working world’s new clocks are just wrong: inept at capturing offline activity, unreliable at assessing hard-to-quantify tasks and prone to undermining the work itself. UnitedHealth social workers were marked idle for lack of keyboard activity while counseling patients in drug treatment facilities, according to a former supervisor. Grocery cashiers said the pressure to quickly scan items degraded customer service, making it harder to be patient with elderly shoppers who move slowly. Ms. Kraemer, the executive, said she sometimes resorted to doing “busywork that is mindless” to accumulate clicks. “We’re in this era of measurement but we don’t know what we should be measuring,” said Ryan Fuller, former vice president for workplace intelligence at Microsoft.”*

So the NYT article is critical, but how should STS relate to such developments? Given the foundational idea of STS that technology itself is not bad, but particular ways of connecting the social and the technical are, how should we view these developments?

**Hypotheses**

1. While a typical STS view on digital technology is that it can be either constraining and liberating, digital performance monitoring tools which surveil behavior hierarchically in untransparent ways are fundamentally incompatible with any notion of “working fit for humans”.
2. Any valid objections against Digital Performance Monitoring as brought forward should primarily be focused on their effectiveness rather than on their ethics.
3. Digital Performance Monitoring tools as a broad category can be effective if they are implemented in participative ways to create transparency in how a group operates.
4. Digital performance monitoring tools will rapidly become ubiquitous and therefore STS has to look for tailoring these tools rather than to fundamentally object them.