

Main Challenge Scenario

The Price of Convenience: AI Surveillance, Employee Privacy, and Workplace Rights

Jordan is a delivery driver for SwiftCart, a fast-growing grocery delivery company known for its quick deliveries and excellent customer service. Recently, SwiftCart started using a new AI-driven system to help manage its operations. This system tracks employees' location, productivity, and even biometric data during their shifts. The company introduced the system as a way to improve service and offer incentives for top performers.

At first, Jordan thought the new system might help improve efficiency. However, soon after it was introduced, Jordan began to feel more pressure at work. The system tracked things like delivery speed, time spent at each stop, customer ratings, and even employees' break times, heart rates, and body temperature. SwiftCart explained that the biometric data would help detect fatigue or other health issues, aiming to improve safety. Despite this, Jordan started feeling uncomfortable with the level of surveillance, especially as it seemed to affect performance scores.

The system's main feature was a new "efficiency score" that tracked how well employees performed during their shifts. High efficiency scores led to benefits like better shift schedules, higher pay, and health bonuses. But employees with low scores were given fewer hours, lower pay, and sometimes warnings about their performance. The score was based on factors like punctuality, delivery speed, customer ratings, and even the number of breaks taken during a shift.

Jordan began to worry when they realized that some factors affecting their efficiency score were out of their control, such as traffic patterns and customer locations. Even on days when Jordan did their best, small delays or difficult deliveries caused their score to drop. The system also didn't account for personal challenges, like Jordan's chronic asthma, which sometimes required unscheduled breaks. When Jordan raised these concerns with their supervisor, they were told there wasn't much flexibility because the system's metrics were the same for everyone.

SwiftCart then offered employees a chance to improve their scores by opting into more extensive data monitoring. Employees who agreed to share additional personal data, like sleep patterns, physical activity, and social media activity, could potentially earn higher efficiency scores. Those who didn't agree to share this extra data found themselves at a disadvantage compared to their colleagues who opted in.

As the weeks went by, Jordan felt increasing pressure to consent to this extra monitoring just to keep their job hours and income steady. Although the additional data tracking was technically voluntary, employees who didn't participate often found themselves overlooked for promotions, preferred shifts, and extra benefits. Jordan began to fear that their job security was at risk, as the system seemed to favour those who allowed constant surveillance.

Seeing the workplace culture shift, Jordan and some colleagues decided to raise their concerns with SwiftCart's human resources department. HR explained that the AI system was meant to improve productivity and provide fair evaluations for all employees. They also assured Jordan that the data was stored securely and wouldn't violate privacy. However, Jordan remained skeptical, especially since the data collection felt invasive, and they worried about the potential misuse of their personal information.

Feeling uncertain, Jordan reached out to a labour rights organization for advice. They learned that the legal rules surrounding workplace surveillance and the use of biometric data were unclear. Some protections existed, but there were no specific laws regulating AI-driven employee monitoring. Jordan now faces a tough decision: should they continue to raise concerns about fairness and privacy, join colleagues to push for better protections, or start looking for other job opportunities outside of SwiftCart?

Scenario Questions:

1. Should Jordan have the right to refuse certain types of data collection without risking reduced hours or advancement?
2. What limits, if any, should be placed on workplace surveillance technologies to protect employee privacy?
3. Are there legal protections against employers using personal or biometric data to determine work schedules, pay, or job security?
4. What steps can employees take collectively if they believe the AI-driven system unfairly punishes them for personal circumstances or factors beyond their control?
5. How can SwiftCart ensure that its AI performance metrics system is fair, transparent, and does not disadvantage employees who may have disabilities or other factors that impact their "efficiency scores"?