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Titre : Microsoft productivity score feature criticised as workplace surveillance

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Microsoft productivity score feature criticised as workplace surveillance

Microsoft has been criticised for enabling “workplace surveillance” after privacy campaigners warned that the company’s “productivity score” feature allows managers to use Microsoft 365 to track their employees’ activity at an individual level.

5 The tools, first released in 2019, are designed to “provide you visibility into how your organisation works”, according to a Microsoft blogpost, and aggregate information about everything from email use to network connectivity into a headline percentage for office productivity.

10 But by default, reports also let managers drill down into¹ data on individual employees, to find those who participate less in group chat conversations, send fewer emails, or fail to collaborate in shared documents.

“This is so problematic at many levels,” tweeted the Austrian researcher Wolfie Christl, who raised alarm about the feature.

15 “Employers are increasingly exploiting metadata logged by software and devices for performance analytics and algorithmic control,” Christl added. “MS is providing the tools for it. Practices we know from software development (and factories and call centres) are expanded to all white-collar work.”

20 In a statement, a Microsoft spokesperson said: “Productivity score is an opt-in experience that gives IT administrators insights² about technology and infrastructure usage. Insights are intended to help organisations make the most of their technology investments by addressing common pain points like [...] inefficient document collaboration, or poor network connectivity. Insights are shown in aggregate over a 28-day period and are provided at the user level so that an IT admin can provide technical support and guidance.”

25 “We are committed to privacy as a fundamental element of productivity score,” wrote Jared Spataro, the corporate vice-president for Microsoft 365, in online documentation. “Let me be clear: productivity score is not a work monitoring tool. Productivity score is about discovering new ways of working, providing your people with great collaboration and technology experiences ... For example, to help maintain privacy and trust, the user data provided in productivity score is aggregated over a 28-day period.”

30 But the response has not reassured all critics. [...] “Being under constant surveillance in the workplace is psychological abuse,” tweeted Heinemeier Hansson co-founder of the office productivity suite Basecamp. “Having to worry about looking busy for the stats is the last thing we need to inflict on anyone right now.”

¹drill down into: examine

²insight: knowledge, understanding