

“The Quantified Self”

Abstract:

Dr Calvard will discuss the ethical issues around greater digital monitoring of employee health by reviewing theory and research on the concept of ‘the quantified self’. On the one hand, if employees are allowed to own, measure, understand and participate in gathering and analyzing digital information about themselves, quantifying the self should be empowering and beneficial to their health. On the other hand, there are likely to always be wider structural concerns about how this data is used and related back to power imbalances in the context of employment relationships, in terms of how the data is shared, interpreted, contextualized and acted upon beyond the individual. This presentation argues that one way forward in managing these tensions is to theorize the quantified self as representing a process of embodied sensemaking, emphasizing the importance of interpreting health data flexibly and reflexively in ways that are socially and politically acceptable to a range of stakeholders. In doing so, the presentation draws further on the work of various digital sociologists and historians of data and science to critically understand the emergence of a ‘statistical-digital employee self’ made up of highly personalized physical and mental health information.