

Productive Subjects: Workplace wellness programmes, big data and affective control

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This paper will draw on qualitative research into the implementation of corporate wellness (CW) programmes using digital self-tracking (DST) to consider the use of big data practices as a means of enabling a critical, reflexive feedback mechanism aimed at increasing productivity and improving affective relationships at work. When seen as part of broader trends of self-tracking and Quantified Self the large-scale observation and analysis of human behaviour it can be suggested that exercise activity is in the process of being conceptually reconfigured as work. Exercise activities are increasingly being experienced and understood through quantified measures which enable accumulation and comparison with others and generate valuable data. Personal and corporate health are being conflated and private companies increasingly see it as part of their ethical responsibility to intervene in the everyday (non-work) life of individuals. It will be suggested that a significant part of the rationale for the implementation of CW DST is the promotion of an affective and aesthetic relationship between employer and employee. The health of the individual and the health of the economy/organization are increasingly intertwined and the definition of health (through a focus on 'wellness') is being aligned with productive capacity to form a new corporate health ethic. It will be proposed that CW DST have commercial, economic interests in the incitement to health (the generation of data or a more productive workforce) which are merged with an ethical concern for the health of the population and a drive to 'do good' as part of social responsibility. While such initiatives are notionally open to all they subtly (and probably unintentionally) target particular groups who increasingly demand "meaningful" from an employer who is driven by values. Consequently, groups who are most in need of intervention are tacitly excluded.