

# Principles of Technology Change



community

# INTRODUCTION

Technology change, whether it's introducing new machinery at work, a new app, or new types of surveillance, brings a real opportunity to create a different relationship between work and individuals.

We all need good quality and well paid work. But as technology advances, it is dramatically altering the types of work we do and the way we do it. Technology change brings with it risks of atomised work, worse conditions, or even mass unemployment.

There is also a risk that through technology change, inequality deepens. Workers produce more, but business owners pocket the profits, without sharing the rewards. We've seen what happens to workers' lives, towns, and communities when mass job displacement occurs as a result of industry failure, globalisation or industrialisation.

**All these forces threaten the very fabric of our social contract.**

But there is a more optimistic path available to us. A path in which better jobs are created through use of technology. Through the careful management of technology change we can ensure that people are able to contribute in more fulfilling ways and do work that is more engaging and rewarding.

Technology change has the potential to increase productivity and profitability. The benefits of technology change gained by businesses can be shared with workers through more freedom and flexibility at work, better hours, or higher wages. Good work will strengthen communities up and down the country.

At Community, we believe there are principles we can put in place which will steer us away from the risks threatened by technology change, and towards a world of better work. That's what we set out to share with you in this document.

We know technology is already changing work for all of us. That's why we need everyone, employers, trade unions and individuals, to get to the table and take on the task of shaping a better future.



**Roy Rickhuss CBE**  
**General Secretary, Community**

# A fair share

## A share in the rewards of productivity gains

If the continued development of technology results in greater productivity and profits for a company, then we believe workers should receive a share of this reward. This could be in the form of increased pay, or alternatively, reduced hours — it will depend on the circumstances facing each individual workplace.

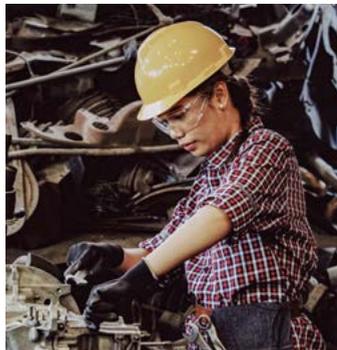
Community believes that organisations should use collective bargaining to deliver gains for workers where technology increases profits or makes production more efficient.

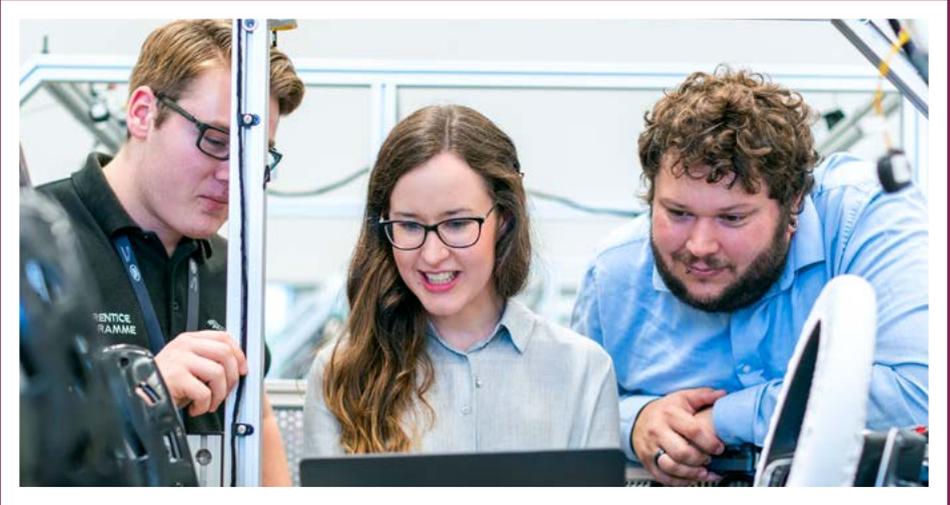
### Case study: Voelstapine, Austria

Voelstapine is an Austrian steel works. It improved its processes by switching from blast furnaces to Electric Arc ovens. This resulted in productivity increases, but workers, through the works council, told bosses that they wanted to translate this not into higher pay, but into reduced hours.

In addition, because blast furnaces required many more people to keep them running than the new Arc ovens, workers were retrained from jobs at the furnace into other roles, like data scientists and other office-based roles.

This was a great example of a just transition as workers were supported to adapt to technology change.





# Support to adapt

## Opportunities to reskill and retrain

Where efficiency gains are made, employers should work to retain as many jobs as possible rather than making redundancies. They should make commitments on redeploying workers into new roles and offering retraining and re-skilling to support workers into other roles. We know that employers can make this easier for themselves by planning for the long term — analysing their future workforce needs to understand what skills workers will need to have to be ready to re-deploy.

Ideally, trade unions and organisations should have agreements on how large-scale change is managed, underpinned by these principles. Agreements should set out how workers will be prioritised for redeployment, including assurances that new roles will be advertised internally before going out to the market, particularly where workers might be at risk.

When change programmes happen, unions and employers should negotiate how the specific situation will be managed with a goal of retaining all staff in other roles.

The self-employed need training support to ensure that they are equipped to use and adapt to new technology. By offering the self-employed spaces to exchange knowledge and best practice, trade unions can facilitate innovation and the adoption of technology among the self-employed. They can also provide a valuable source of training and education.

## Training for future jobs

Employers should analyse their future workforce needs to develop plans for transition before it becomes urgent. They should take pre-emptive action to start to provide training to workers and support them to transition.

Access to training must be broadened and improved generally. We know that not enough adults continue to learn throughout their careers.

With the pace of change increasing, employers should ensure that workers have the opportunities to prepare themselves for the future.

Employers can also help with this by ensuring that workers have the knowledge of which skills and competencies will be most relevant to likely future roles. This could be through the use of sharing insights from data and research they have undertaken, and through targeted training offers to particular roles and functions.

Employers can also offer such training to contractors and freelancers that they engage to support widespread reskilling.

# Monitoring and surveillance

Workers should not be subjected to unreasonable monitoring or surveillance whilst they are doing their work. Employers should agree with trade unions before any new technology to track workers is introduced.

Workers should not be subject to restrictions that fail to respect their autonomy and dignity, such as unnecessary restrictions on toilet breaks.

Workers' autonomy should be valued, and digital technologies should not be used to manage all of their time. Workers should be allowed, as far as is reasonably practicable, control over their own work tasks and the order in which these are done.

Workers should be consulted about monitoring technology to ensure that there are no unforeseen side effects or harm to workers through the use of such technology. For example, careful design should ensure that workers are not put off from completing certain types of tasks because they aren't rewarded appropriately for doing them.

The above also applies to the self-employed, especially gig workers, who are regularly subject to excessive surveillance.

## Equalities impact

Employers should explicitly consider how technological change will affect different groups and ensure biases do not creep in.

One example is, the use of monitoring software to track productivity. Employers should consider whether certain groups of people, for example, disabled workers, will be affected by these policies disproportionately. Any time an employer takes a decision that could adversely impact workers they should undertake an Equality Impact Assessment. This will ensure they look at whether there is a specific impact on workers with protected characteristics (such as women, older workers, or disabled workers). This is a legal requirement in the public sector but good practice everywhere.

Employers should also consider equalities when engaging with the self-employed — for example when hiring a freelance contractor for a particular project.

Considering the impact on equality also includes specific monitoring of algorithmic decision making.

## Algorithmic decision making

Community recognises the potential for discrimination by algorithm (an algorithm is a series of rules used by a computer to make decisions).

Policy around algorithmic decision making should build on existing rights. We believe workers should understand who is accountable and liable for all decisions and actions which affect them. We encourage employers to ensure that ensure that workers are provided appropriate training to understand how they will interact with automated decision-making tools.

Legally, algorithmic decisions must be subject to a review by a human on request. This is particularly applicable to decisions made in the hiring process, or disciplinary decisions which may have an automated element.

Also the results of algorithmic decision making must be checked for systemic bias on a regular basis to ensure that inequality is not being entrenched through the use of such technologies. We believe workers should be involved in this process.

Employers should generally look to make a decision that can be explained. For example, if a decision about a worker's performance is based on automated decisions, then the employer should be able to provide the worker an explanation in plain language, so they are able to understand why they have received the rating they have.

# Worker data

**Legally, employers must inform employees about how their data is collected and used.**

**We believe workers should understand and be meaningfully consulted over:**

- The extent to which they are monitored and what data about them is collected
- How their data is collected and repurposed
- Their rights to access their data, and to receive a copy of it
- How their data is stored and protected.

Although there are strong existing data protection rights, workers often don't get all the information they are entitled to, and consultation isn't always meaningful.



## Right to disconnect

Many workers, employees and self-employed, experience an ‘always on’ culture, feeling pressure to respond to work emails and calls at all times of the day and night. Community believes this isn’t necessary for workers to be productive and can contribute to anxiety and stress. Unfortunately, widespread access to work devices only increases the pressure on workers to be available to your employer or clients.

### Case study: The Financial Services Union, Ireland

The FSU were proud to enshrine in law the right to disconnect in Ireland – the only worker commitment in the most recent programme of government. The provisions in Irish law allow organisation to negotiate their own agreements – and the union provides a model agreement.

The principles include:

Meetings should only be scheduled during working hours, excluding lunch hours where possible

An expectation for people to disconnect from work emails on evenings, weekends and holidays

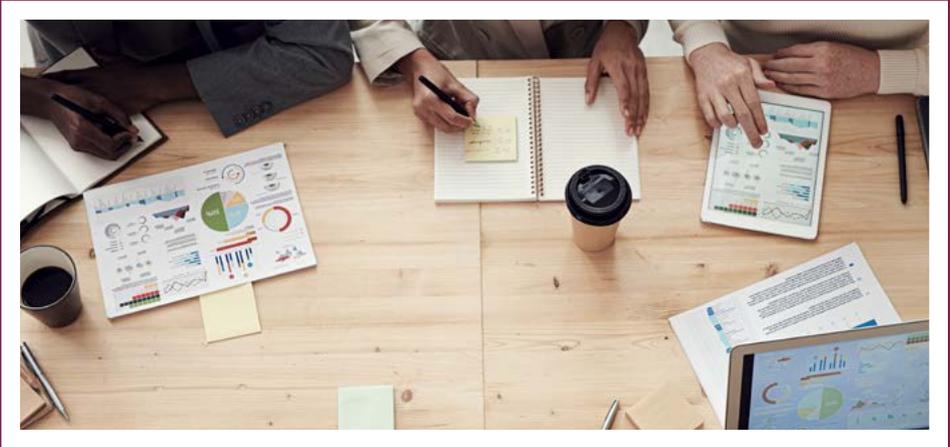
In the absence of UK legislation relating to the right to disconnect, Community wants to support all our members to have a better and healthier relationship with their work. With our self-employed members we’re working to explore how the self-employed can have better control of their hours and work when juggling various clients and responsibilities, such as reviewing contracts.

For our members who are employees, we believe that employers and unions can create agreements for themselves. Such agreements should set out a framework for working outside of core hours and define reasonable expectations that allow workers the space to choose to take time away from work.

Community recognises that the sheer variety in the types of jobs that workers do means that such agreements are best negotiated on a workplace level. We also recognise that many workers welcome the advantages of flexible working, and the opportunity to work outside of working hours as part of managing their own work life balance.

## Better working conditions

If technology results in increased productivity we think this should create better jobs rather than worse ones. This means that rather than atomising jobs or creating insecure work, employers should look to create jobs which give workers more autonomy, control, and security.



# Representation and voice

## Technology forums and technology reps

All workplaces should develop structures that allow workers to be consulted and to shape their workplaces, and we believe that having a dedicated technology forum is a powerful way to ensure that workers' voices are heard, and that workers are involved in design, implementation, and monitoring processes.

Community believes in a partnership model where employers and employees work together to shape change.

Of course, we recognise that it's not always practical to create new forums, especially in smaller organisations, so we know that in many places, consultation around technology will be done through existing negotiating structures such as consultation boards, or workplace councils, in conjunction with trade unions.

We believe that having technology reps in place will help workers who receive specialist training to bring their expertise to questions of technology change.

## Meaningful consultation on changes

Community believes that workers know best how to do their jobs. Therefore before a changes are made, workers should be consulted, to understand how the change will affect them. But consultation doesn't just mean talking, it means acting too, and really listening to what workers have to say.

We believe employers should work with employees to co-design changes and should recognise the expertise that workers have about the tasks they do regularly.

### Case study: Denmark

In Denmark a social dialogue model is used to manage technology change. There is a national framework on how to introduce new technology which focusses on training and skills.

- The model sets out the ways in which technology will be introduced, in a manner similar to the technology change agreements negotiated on an ad hoc basis between trade unions and employers in the UK.
- Use of this framework is compulsory for every organisation with more than 35 employees.

If a task is being automated, unions and managers should jointly agree when the implementation has been a success, and only then make redundancies or alterations to roles. This prevents workers from struggling with too few staff or technology that doesn't work.



# Resources

If you're a Community rep then you can access our handbook to bargaining around technology which is available in our [rep centre](#). You can also find an example of a technology agreement to help you with your negotiations.

[Community and the Fabian Society's Commission on Workers and Technology](#)

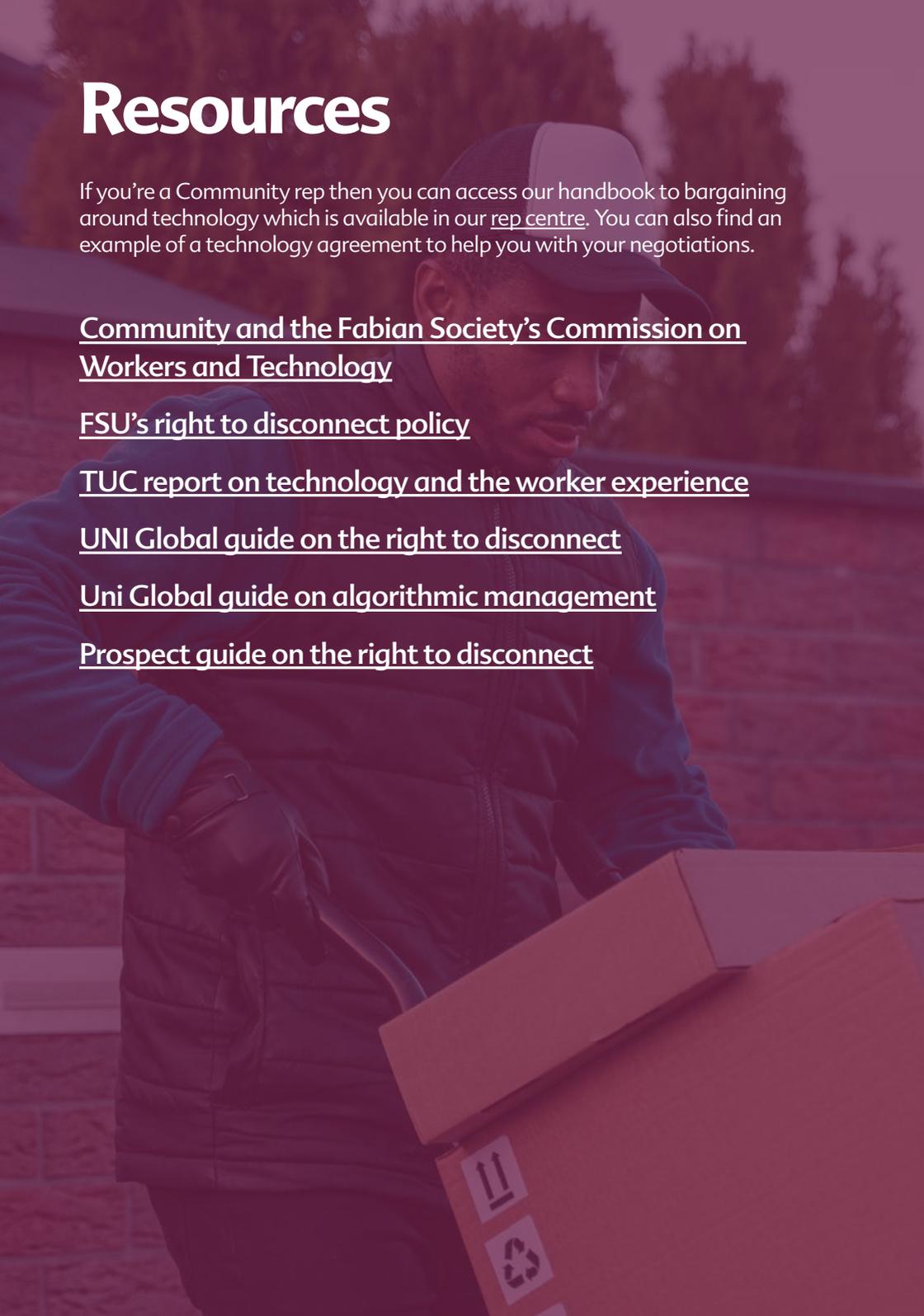
[FSU's right to disconnect policy](#)

[TUC report on technology and the worker experience](#)

[UNI Global guide on the right to disconnect](#)

[Uni Global guide on algorithmic management](#)

[Prospect guide on the right to disconnect](#)



# We are Community

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