

Business principles for people-centered technology transformation

Putting people at the heart of the
Future of Work

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Introduction

Work is the engine at the center of our economies. Shaping a future of work where people can thrive is essential for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and lies at the heart of WBCSD's Vision 2050 where 9+ billion people live well and within the limits of the planet.

Around the globe, the world of work is facing complex disruption. Emerging technologies are changing tasks and work patterns, challenging how companies function, and raising concerns of mass job disruption and displacement. This is taking place against a backdrop of increasing inequality and socio-economic polarization at a global scale, making it harder for companies in all industries and geographies to meet the rising expectations of workers and wider society.

Workers are at the frontline of this transformation. And companies are making technology-related decisions every day that have an impact upon workers' rights, wellbeing and futures. As technology is evolving at an unprecedented pace, its impact can be difficult to predict and, even with the best intentions, negative impacts on the workforce can be overlooked or underestimated.

In response to this challenge, 22 leading companies have come together through WBCSD's Future of Work Project to develop a shared set of principles to ensure technology transformation benefits the workforce, now and in the future.

Adopting **WBCSD's Business principles for people-centered technology transformation** (the Principles) will help companies to ensure the ongoing trust, preparedness and resilience of their own workforce, attract and retain the best talent, stay ahead of the curve on expectations and regulations, and contribute to a thriving workforce, company, labor market and society.



Objectives of the Principles

The Principles provide a touchstone that all companies can align to when their workforce faces impacts from the development and implementation of new technologies. Adopting the Principles will help companies:

- clarify the business responsibility towards their direct workforce and workers in their supply chain, based on the positions of leading companies;
- take a clear and transparent position on technology and their workforce, and build trust with current and future workers and stakeholders;
- ensure that business decisions lead to people being respected, engaged and empowered for a positive future of work.

Scope of the Principles

The Future of Work Principles aim to fill a specific gap by focusing on **the impact of technology transformation on workers and how work is carried out**.

The Principles apply to any technology that impacts a company's **direct employees, contract and temporary workers, and workers throughout their supply chain** – hereafter referred to as 'workers'.

This can include automation, digitization, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, information and communication technologies (ICT), platform technologies, Internet of Things (IoT), virtual and augmented reality, 3D/4D printing, and more.

The scope of the Principles does not extend to the wider social or environmental impacts of technology, as there are significant ongoing efforts in this space. See, for example, the [Harvard Principled Artificial Intelligence](#) project, and the [WEF Responsible Development Deployment and Adoption of Technology](#) project for two initiatives that are mapping and convening the actors developing human rights and ethical principles in this much broader and busier space.

Audience for the Principles

The Principles can be applied by any business embarking on technology transformation initiatives. They are particularly relevant to:

Senior Executives setting technology transformation agendas and positioning their companies' responses to the future of work.

Technology and Innovation leaders guiding the procurement, strategy, planning or implementation of new technology in the workplace and supply chain.

Human Resource leaders shaping hiring practices, job redesign, upskilling or redeployment of workers in response to and making use of new technology.

Procurement leaders responsible for sourcing temporary and other forms of employment in the supply chain using new technology.

In addition, the Principles can be used as a reference for employees and stakeholders to better understand the responsibilities of a company towards workers when applying new technologies that impact people's work.

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By adopting these Principles, companies commit to:

1. Respect workers' human rights when developing and implementing new technology that impacts work

- A. **Implement policies** to ensure respect for workers' human rights in relation to the development and implementation of new technology.
- B. **Conduct effective due diligence** to identify current and potential human rights impacts of new technology on workers, considering the diversity and future inclusion of those workers.
- C. **Be accountable** for any negative human rights impacts of new technology on workers and provide channels for effective remediation.

2. Engage workers in technology transformation

- A. **Communicate transparently** on the anticipated current and future impacts, challenges and opportunities related to new technology for the workforce and how companies are preparing for the associated transitions.
- B. **Consult openly** with the workforce and relevant stakeholders to understand and address their expectations and concerns related to the impact of new technology on workers and their work.
- C. **Involve the workforce when** designing, adopting and working with new technologies.

3. Empower workers to benefit from new technology, now and in the future

- A. **Prepare the workforce** ahead of technology implementation by enabling workers to envision their future roles, equipping them with new skills, and providing access to lifelong learning, training and support.
- B. **Enable inclusion** by ensuring under-represented groups are fully engaged and benefit equally from the opportunities that arise from new technology.
- C. **Drive equality** by fairly sharing the benefits of technology-driven improvements in work quality and productivity with all workers.



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