



PARTNERSHIP ON AI

# Workers, Unions, & Worker Organizers: Opportunities for Impact on AI & Job Quality

Workers, unions, and worker organizers can work to influence and participate in decisions about technology purchases and implementations.

RECOMMENDATIONS  
FROM “AI AND JOB  
QUALITY: INSIGHTS  
FROM FRONTLINE  
WORKERS”

## Across industries and around the world, AI is changing work.

The development and deployment of workplace AI, however, often lacks input from an essential group of experts: the people who directly interact with these systems in their jobs. Despite the direct impact of workplace AI on them, workers rarely have direct influence in AI's creation or decisions about its implementation. This neglect raises clear concerns about unforeseen or overlooked negative impacts on workers. It also undermines the optimal use of AI from a corporate perspective.

“[AI and Job Quality: Insights From Frontline Workers](#),” a new report from the Partnership on AI (PAI) based on an international study of on-the-job experiences with AI, seeks to address this gap. Through journals and interviews, workers in India, sub-Saharan Africa, and the United States shared their stories about workplace AI. From their reflections, PAI identified five common themes:

READ THE  
REPORT

1

### **Executive and managerial decisions shape AI's impacts on workers, for better and worse.**

This starts with decisions about business models and operating models, continues through technology acquisitions and implementations, and finally manifests in direct impacts to workers.

2

### **Workers have a genuine appreciation for some aspects of AI in their work and how it helps them in their jobs.**

Their spotlights here point the way to more mutually beneficial approaches to workplace AI.

3

### **Workplace AI's harms are not new or novel.**

They are repetitions or extensions of harms from earlier technologies and, as such, should be possible to anticipate, mitigate, and eliminate.

4

### **Current implementations of AI often serve to reduce workers' ability to exercise their human skills and talents.**

Skills like judgment, empathy, and creativity are heavily constrained in these implementations. To the extent that the future of AI is intended to increase humans' ability to use these talents, the present of AI is sending many workers in the opposite direction.

5

### **Empowering workers early in AI development and implementation increases the opportunities to attain the aforementioned benefits and avoid the harms.**

Workers' deep experience in their own roles means they should be treated as subject-matter experts throughout the design and implementation process.

PAI then drew from these themes to offer initial recommendations for key stakeholders in this space: AI-using companies, AI-creating companies, workers and the organizations such as unions that represent them, policymakers, and investors. This stakeholder-specific summary of the report focuses on workers, unions, and worker organizers, listing opportunities for them to steer AI in a direction that benefits workers as well as their employers.

Actors across the AI investment, creation, deployment, use, and regulation spectrum have opportunities to make decisions that center workers' voices and protect their well-being. These stakeholders have the power to transform AI's trajectory for the better. It is incumbent upon them to use it.

## Opportunities for Workers, Unions, and Worker Organizers

Workers and the organizations and unions that represent them can shape AI's impacts on their workplaces through contract negotiations and other mechanisms to influence corporate policy as well as on-going input into purchase and implementation decisions. Unfortunately, it is not common in many countries for employers to invite this participation and the ways AI technology shapes job quality and worker well-being can be obscured. Education and training programs by unions and worker organizations can help workers understand the functions and roles played by AI products and equip workers to participate in decisions made to purchase and implement AI in their workplaces.

### OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

Unions and worker organizations	Foreground worker voice in development and implementation of AI (and other technology) as a plank of contract negotiations and other mechanisms to influence corporate policies. <sup>1</sup>
	Train members and organizers in relevant technologies and their benefits and drawbacks, spotlighting AI technology and related issues (e.g., data rights) as a major influence on working environments. <sup>2</sup>
Workers	<p>Actively seek to participate in workplace AI purchasing and implementation decisions.</p> <p>Ask for disclosure and transparency on technologies being used, data being collected, how it's being used, and for what purpose.</p> <p>In workplaces with cultures of including workers in management decisions, offer input on areas where AI technology solutions would be welcomed and suggestions about ideal implementation.</p> <p>Seek out worker organizations and unions operating in the same sector and geography undertaking efforts on these issues.</p>

1 Christina Colclough, "Righting the Wrong: Putting Workers' Data Rights Firmly on the Table," in *Digital Work in the Planetary Market*, -International Development Research Centre Series (MIT Press, 2022), <https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/61034/IDL-61034.pdf>.

2 Christina Colclough, "When Algorithms Hire and Fire," *International Union Rights* 25, no. 3 (2018): 6-7. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/838277/summary>.