



At a Crossroads: Worker Voice and the Future of Workplace Technology

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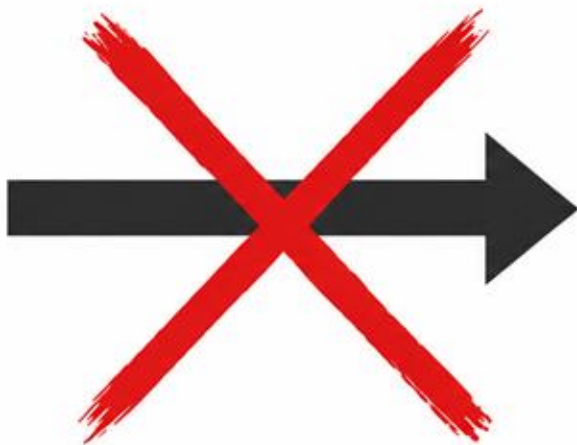
ILO Webinar
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The Myth of Technological Determinism

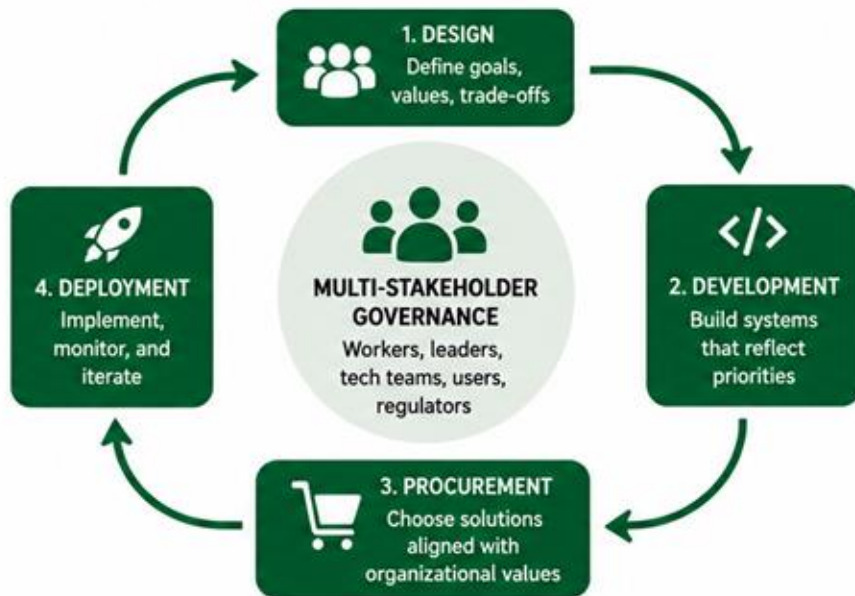
Technology is not an inevitable force—it is a series of human choices.

**INEVITABLE FORCE /
PASSIVE ADAPTATION**



Technology advances
on a fixed path.
Organizations must
simply adapt.

**HUMAN AGENCY /
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER GOVERNANCE**



Technology is shaped by human choices.
The only question is: Are workers at the table
when those choices are made?

Technology Reflects Institutional Context

Public policy and collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) serve as the active design constraints of workplace technology.

Airlines

Institutional Framework

High Federal Policy | High Union Density

Mandated safety: Scheduling algorithms are legally restricted by federal rest mandates and bargained seniority rules.

Code Reality: The union contract is hardcoded directly into the software architecture.

Healthcare

Institutional Framework

High Federal Regulation | Variable Union Density

Code Reality: Software is primarily engineered for administrative tracking over practical clinical workflows.

Variation: In states with mandated staffing ratio laws, algorithms restrict optimization capabilities and prioritize continuity of care.

Retail

Institutional Framework

Limited Public Policy | Low Union Density

Code Reality: Software defaults to unconstrained corporate optimization, producing volatile, "just-in-time" shift scheduling.

Variation: In Fair Workweek jurisdictions, systems must track advance-notice mandates and premium pay triggers.

The Same Technology Can Produce Very Different Outcomes



FAIR SCHEDULING STANDARDS



ADVANCE NOTICE



AUTOMATED RIGHT TO REST



HOURS CONTINUITY



SECURE WORKER AUTONOMY



DIGITAL ACCOUNTABILITY



MARKET-DRIVEN OPTIMIZATION



JUST-IN-TIME VOLATILITY



"CLOSING" DEPRIVATION



INTENTIONAL UNDEREMPLOYMENT



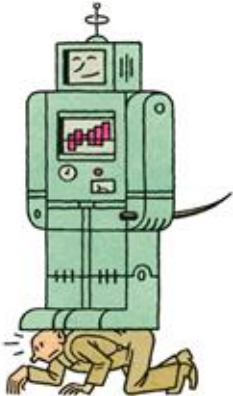
UNILATERAL DECISIONS



OPAQUE RECORD-KEEPING



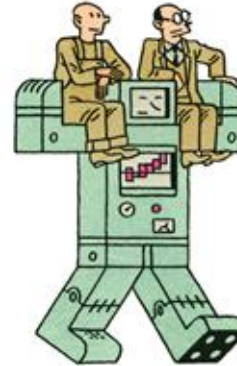
Dystopian Path



Market-Driven Optimization:

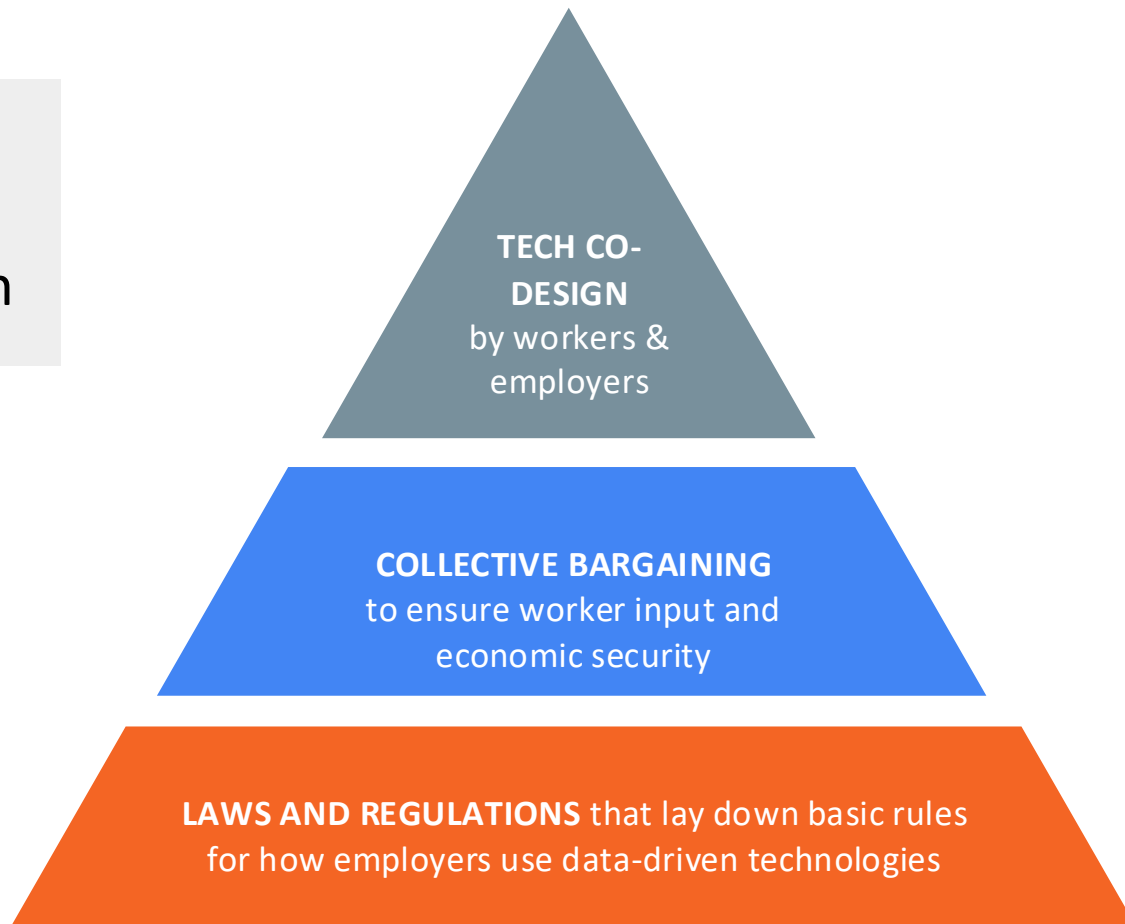
Deploying opaque automated systems optimized exclusively for real-time cost-cutting, risk-shifting, and displacement.

High-road path



Worker-Centered Configuration: Deploying transparent automated systems co-determined to augment and support workers, enabling them to gain new skills while also raising productivity.

A governance
framework for
workplace tech



The EU

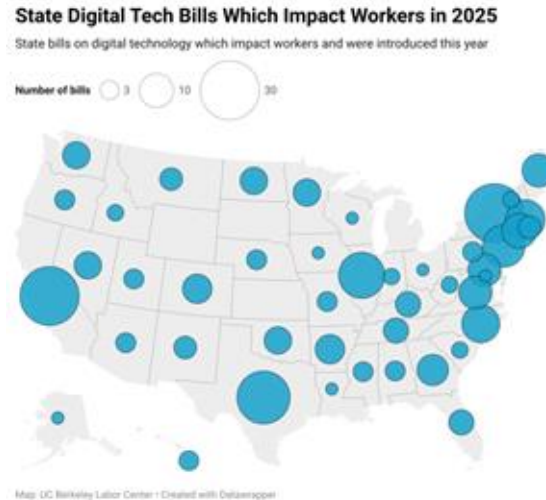
- ✓ GDPR: personal data
- ✓ AI Act: artificial intelligence
- ✓ Digital Markets Act: anti-monopoly
- ✓ Digital Services Act: social media
- ✓ Platform directive: gig work

The U.S. (federal)



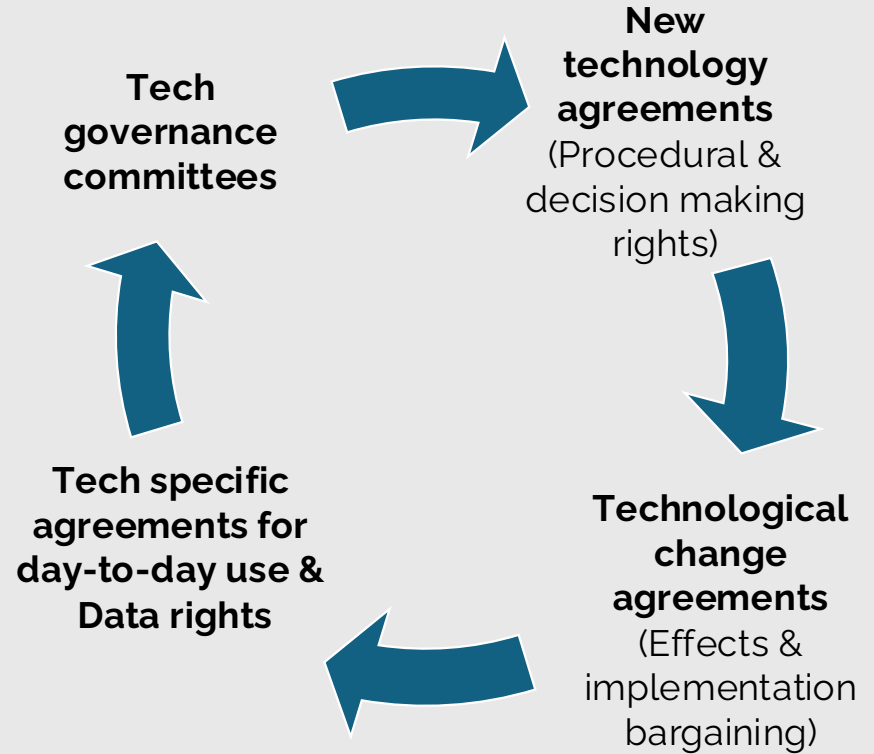
Hundreds of worker-impacting state bills (and some laws) in 2025 & 2026

- Electronic monitoring
- Algorithmic management
- Automation
- Human-in-the-loop
- Bias and discrimination
- Surveillance pricing & wage setting
- Public sector
- Warehouse quotas



- Economic development
- DOGE in the states
- Non-human disclosure
- Copyright/likeness
- Worker training
- Product liability
- Biometric data
- Whistleblower protections
- Data center requirements
- Collective bargaining

Bargaining over the tech lifecycle



Participation throughout the tech lifecycle



Negotiating tech: An inventory of U.S. union contract provisions for the digital age

Search the inventory

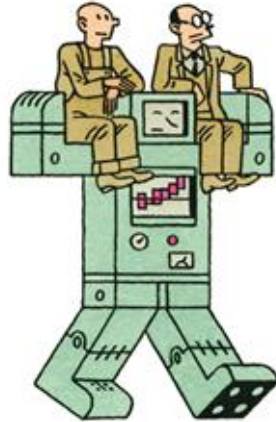
🔍 Search

Access the Inventory

<https://laborcenter.berkeley.edu/negotiating-tech/>



Making Tech Work for Workers



How can workers have a meaningful voice in shaping workplace technologies?

Thank you!

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Scan for Resources



UC Berkeley Labor Center Resources