

Appendix 8

A Consultant's Note on New Technology Agreements¹

The main features of 'best practice' approaches contained in new technology agreements may be summarised as follows:²

Procedurally, the agreements typically specify:

- the commitment of both management and trade unions to the introduction of new technology and the satisfactory management of change;
- the provision of information by management to the trade unions on the introduction of new technology, at an early stage, before decisions are taken and when final choices can be influenced. The information should allow for transparency with regard to the effects of changes and the choices to be made;
- the establishment of management/trade union bodies to discuss, monitor and negotiate change;
- the opportunity for the election and training of trade union representatives with specific responsibilities for monitoring the introduction of new technology, but with close links to the membership;
- the possibility of access by the trade union in a plant to outside expertise, in some cases paid by, although independent from, management;
- the establishment of a procedure for monitoring and regulating the collection of personal data on individuals working in a plant and for regulating its use; and
- the inclusion of a 'status quo' clause whereby the trade unions have the right to veto changes unless they are agreed.

In terms of the substantive issues regulated by these procedures, new technology agreements typically specify that:

- there should be ‘no redundancies’ as a result of the introduction of new technology. In some cases, trade unions have even been able to ensure that there should be no reduction in the volume of employment;
- staff whose jobs are changed or eliminated due to technological change should be retrained and given jobs of comparable status in the same enterprise. Downgrading should be limited;
- for older workers, voluntary schemes of early retirement should be introduced and, in general, working time should be reduced to ease employment problems;
- the introduction of new technology should not be used to increase the pace of work, control and supervision or to reduce job contact or lead to a higher incidence of shift working;
- the health and safety aspect of working with computerised equipment and visual display units (VDUs) should be closely regulated; the design of the equipment and working place should conform to ergonomic standards; the amount of time spent working with VDUs should be limited; regular breaks away from the machine should be provided; and regular medical check-ups made available;
- the personal information collected on employees should be strictly limited to that relevant to the activities of the company; and
- the pay of displaced workers should be guaranteed; new grading should be introduced for those operating new equipment, but it should not be used to increase pay differentials.

These points might be taken to represent a code of good practice in introducing new technology. It is clear that the particular form of agreement or approach needs to be adapted to national circumstances. Table 8.1 summarises the way in which technological change has been regulated at the workplace in several developed countries. As can be seen, in some countries legislation has laid down basic trade union rights to deal with change, such as the work environment and co-determination laws in Sweden. Elsewhere custom and practice or general framework agreements have laid down rights, such as in Norway and Denmark. In some sectors, including printing, sectoral agreements are the norm, whilst in others company-level or local agreements covering technology have become increasingly widespread (for example in Germany (FR) and Britain). In developing countries, particular attention needs first to be given to establishing and developing free trade unions, and to developing training and education to equip the workforce and

Table 8.1
Summary of Procedures of Joint Regulation of Technological Change in Selected Countries

<i>Country</i>	<i>Unionisation rate (%)</i>	<i>Laws used</i>	<i>National framework level</i>	<i>Sectoral level</i>	<i>Company or plant level</i>
Germany (FR)	40	Works Constitution Act 1972 Works Safety Act 1973 & regulation on work with VDUs 1981	None	Job protection agreements in metalworking, textiles, footwear, leather, paper processing, printing	Upwards of one hundred agreements concluded
United Kingdom	50	Health and Safety at Work Act 1975	None	Parts of public sector	Upwards of one hundred agreements concluded
Norway	45	Working Environment Act 1977 & regulation on work with VDUs 1982	Agreement on computer-based systems 1975	Banking	Most of industry and services covered by local agreements
Denmark	70		Agreement for private sector 1981	Banking/public sector	
Sweden	73	Working Environment Act 1978 & regulation on work with VDUs 1981 Co-determination Act 1977	Work environment agreement 1976	Technology agreement in the printing sector, co-determination agreements in central government, local government, private sector	Use of legislative rights
Italy	43	Statute of Workers Rights 1970 Health and Safety Act 1978	None	Clauses included in sectoral agreements on metalworking	Clauses included in several company agreements, e.g. Fiat, Olivetti, Alfa Romeo

			Collective agreement on new technology 1983	Printing	Local agreements implementing national agreement
Belgium	75		None	Technical change clauses in general agreements	
United States	20		None	Telecommunications	Agreements in parts of printing and public sector
Australia	45	Unfair dismissal legislation	None	Limited clauses in existing agreements	
Canada	30	Recommendations for legal rights	None	Telecommunications	Plant committees
Japan	25	Health & safety legislation (e.g. France); co-determination legislation (e.g. Austria)	None	Printing sector in the Netherlands, Austria, Greece	
Other countries					

its representatives with the expertise to handle the issues raised by technological change.

NOTES

1. John Evans, European Trade Union Institute, Brussels. For an elaboration see Evans (forthcoming).*
2. For a more extensive 'model' agreement, see that published by the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees (FIET), Geneva, 1983.

* See also Appendix 10, Selected Bibliography.