Module 3: Using technology to address labor issues in global supply chains

Introduction
This module on technology to address labor issues is a valuable resource for faculty and lecturers interested in enhancing their syllabi that focuses on both the opportunities and dangers of technology solutions. This module is useful for those at the Haas Business School, the Goldman School for Public Policy, the Labor Center, the Information School and in the Departments of Sociology, Political Science, and Economics.

Learning objective
Understand the opportunities as well as the dangers of using technology to address labor issues in global supply chains

Speaker video
(31 minutes video clip)

Speaker Bio: Katrina Gordon, Senior Manager, Forced Labor & Human Trafficking at Humanity United.

Katrina recently graduated from the full-time MBA program at UC Berkeley Haas School of Business where she was a Consortium Fellow and focused on social entrepreneurship. Last summer, she interned at Deloitte Strategy & Operations Consulting in the technology and social impact service lines, and completed project work in Peru with early stage impact investor NESsT.

Prior to business school, Katrina was based in Nairobi, Kenya working with Kiva to scale its Kiva Zip 0% interest loan product. She also worked with Global Village Energy Partnership, a grant funded advisory services group supporting energy access focused small and medium-sized enterprises with market studies and capital raises. Previously, Katrina worked at The Boeing Company as an analyst in airspace solutions and defense. Katrina received her bachelor’s in finance and international business from California State University, Long Beach, completing coursework from Hogeschool InHolland Haarlem in The Netherlands.

Readings

- Open Society Foundations (2018). Transformative Technology for Migrant Workers Opportunities, Challenges, and Risks
**Possible assignments**

- *(Approximate time- 10 minutes)* Discussion forum prompts:
  - What are the potential dangers for workers of using technology to address labor issues?
  - Reflection on Katrina Gordon’s video

- *(For smaller classes, approximate time- 40-50 minutes)* In class discussion among four groups:
  - Break the class up in to four groups
    - Group 1: Workers
    - Group 2: Suppliers in the global South
    - Group 3: Retailers in the global North
    - Group 4: Technology solutions provider
  - Ask each group to meet for 15 minutes and ask them to think about the following questions:
    - What do you want to solve?
    - What are your goals?
    - How could technology help?
    - What could be the pitfalls?
    - How can you overcome them?
  - Ask each group member to present back to the rest of the class

- *(Take home assignment)* Research a technological solution used to address labor issues in global supply chains. What problem was this solution trying to address? Did they achieve what they were trying to? What were some of the drawbacks? How would you improve this solution?

**Key teaching points**

- Supply chains can be very opaque and companies don’t always know where everything is coming from
- Technology can start to help with some of this opacity and by scaling technology, we can bring some of these issues to light to have more ethical and transparent supply chains
- Some of the areas focused on through a philanthropic fund are: looking at responsible recruitment of workers, worker engagement, traceability and big data or risk assessment

- Opportunities with using technology
  - Reach scale (i.e. through a phone app you can survey a large number of workers to get the labor rights information that is needed)
  - Get information in real time (i.e. workers put in their grievances as they are happening, rather than having to wait)
  - Get the information directly from workers rather than from audits
  - Using augmented reality as a training tool
• Pitfalls of technology
  o Privacy risks and surveillance
  o Risk of least productive or most outspoken workers getting fired or penalized
  o Data gathered can be insufficient to lead change
  o Lot of data generated but not getting shared with brands or suppliers; need to give the data to the right groups (i.e. civil society, trade unions) who can actually make changes

• Some examples of technologies
  o Creative approach to a challenging problem (a company can go by dozens of names; hard to know the exact company) by giving every factory in the world an unique identifier to see where these factories are in relation to their GPS location. Many times there aren’t adequate addresses or locations given. Allows brands to know who is actually in their supply chain.
  o Create health and safety and labor rights trainings by animating modules and putting them in local languages. Workers can watch them on their ipads or iPhones.
  o Worker voice tool where they can send surveys to different types of phones to get real time insights. Brands and suppliers can see what those grievances are and whether or not they have been addressed