

LINK GLOBALLY

IMPACT LOCALLY



A Trade Union Guide to Networking

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Introduction

Trade unionists are creating permanent links with one another across national borders inside the global companies that dominate modern industry. The “networks” that these contacts provide give workers in those companies the chance to:

- Exchange information about work and conditions
- Warn one another about changes and developments in working life
- Strengthen the negotiating position of their unions
- Support one another’s organising efforts
- Make joint representation to company management
- Sign global agreements with central management
- ... and much more

This brochure will show why, how and with whom to link for maximum effect. It will introduce ideas for effective international networking.

The techniques described here have been used successfully by others to increase their union’s bargaining power with local management.

Maybe for you too?

Hopefully these techniques will help you, too.

1. ‘Compete or Die’?

Giant corporations rule our industries. Their brand names are known in every corner of the world.

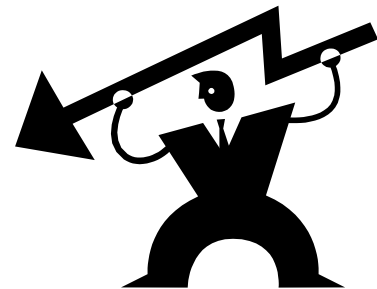
They manufacture their products in many different countries – often through sub-contractors - especially where wages are low or where workers are unable to fight for better standards.

If you work for one of the subsidiaries of a global company, or one that relies on contracts with such a company, you will often have heard the argument: *“We have to compete with lower prices from elsewhere, or move our business to where it is cheaper. Compete or Die!”*

It is not just workers in the richer countries of the world that are being told this story. The same message is being told to workers in Indonesia, in Mexico, in Bulgaria, in South Africa, in China ...

This has been called the ‘Race to the Bottom’ -

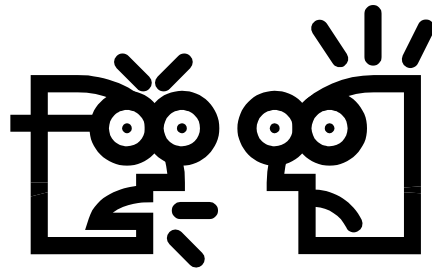
and everyone is expected to join in!



2. 'Cooperate and Prosper'

How can you find out what is the TRUE situation in other parts of the company where you work?

How can you link with workers elsewhere to stop the company using fear of job loss as a bargaining weapon?



Workers in some international companies have formed links through their union with organized workers elsewhere in the same company. These links form a union 'network' inside the global company. Through the network, members can cooperate by exchanging information on wages, working conditions and company industrial relations strategies around the world.

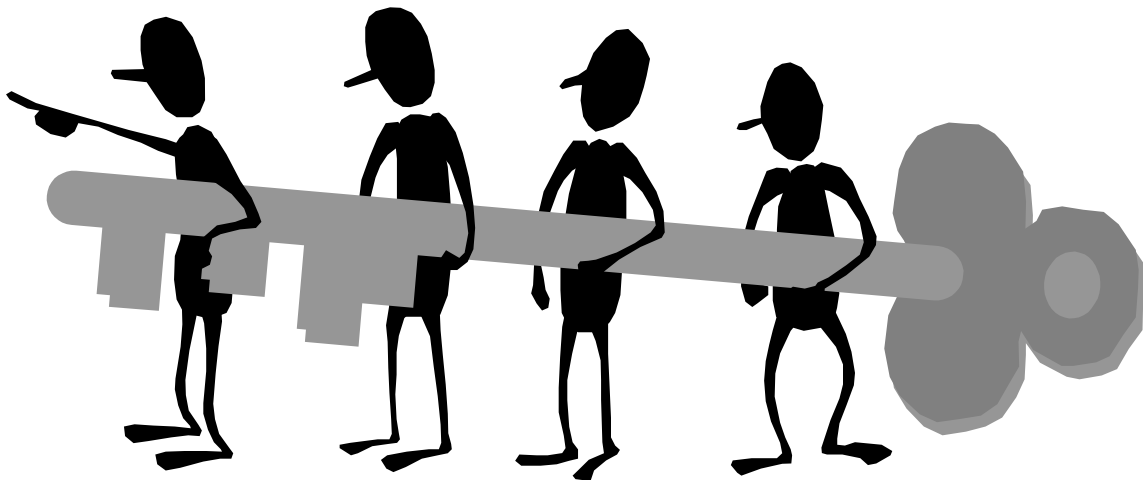
No longer do they need to rely only on stories told to them by management – they have their own, direct, reliable, access to the facts.

The information they gather provides a way for workers to improve the bargaining strength of their representatives. Better knowledge of conditions elsewhere is a good base for effective arguments about local conditions.

The choice for workers is a simple one:

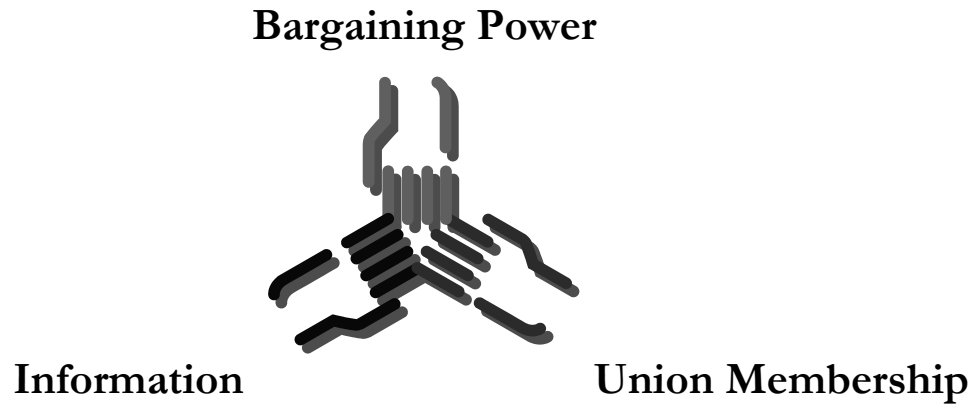
Accept the employer's cry to 'Compete or Die' and join the race to the bottom; or

Link with organized workers in other factories of the company to 'Cooperate and Prosper'.



Cooperation is the Key!

3. Networking is Power



Global trade union networks provide:

- A link with workers in other parts of the company around the world
- A tool to collect and to exchange information
- A way to build trade union membership across the company
- A base for solidarity when you need it

The modern company runs on global knowledge and communications. So the modern union must match this approach by building its own capacity to link and to communicate globally.

4. Where do I start?

- **Take the initiative.** A successful global network will need the enthusiastic support of local workers - working with and through their union. Talk to other union members about the idea; lend them this booklet to read. Raise the question for discussion at your next union committee meeting.

This effort will need the support of the national union office. You may need a small budget to pay for basic costs – postage, phone calls, e-mail time, etc – contact your union for help.

- **Gather information.** If you work for, or negotiate with, a globally operating company, you probably know a lot already about its worldwide spread and its attitude towards trade unions. Your knowledge is a valuable starting point. It is a good idea to write down everything that you already know about the company as a first step.

Add to your basic knowledge from other sources.

You will need to know:

- Where the company has production sites and subsidiaries in your country and around the world. If you know what is produced at those sites, list that too. It will be useful information later on.

- Who runs the company?
- Who owns the company?
- How well is the company doing financially?
- How and where does the company see its future development?

Good sources for this kind of information are:

- Your union research department (they will probably also ask the Global Union Federation and/or the regional federation of which your union is a member);
- The company's Annual Report and Internet website
- Standard reference books, or Internet databases, that are often available to your union or via your international federation
- Internet search engines (e.g. yahoo , google)

Network Membership

Remember: This is a **trade union** network. To be successful in building workers' collective strength, it is essential to involve the different representatives of your union at every level – local, regional, national and international – from an early stage.



5. Reach out

Once you have an idea of where the company has other sites, you can begin to establish contacts with union representatives in other countries

Find contacts

- In European Union countries a Works Council Directive requires every company employing more than 1000 workers in the EU, with over 150 in at least two member countries , to establish on European Works Council (EWC), (a list of these EWC's can be found at : www.etuc.org/etui). A EWC includes representatives of workers from all the company's European factories. (Beware, however – these are not always trade union representatives.) Unions that are affiliated to a European Federation will know whether an EWC exists for your company. If so, your union may be able to find out the names of union representatives elsewhere.

- Ask your union to obtain for you (e.g. from the Global Union Federation) the names of union officers who cover your industry branch in other countries where you know the company operates. Your network should reach out to include local, regional, national and international union representatives.

- Remember that trade union structures are often different in different countries. It makes sense to go through your union and international federation to get links to the correct level of the union elsewhere.

- Keep a careful list of your contacts. See the comments later in this booklet headed 'Organise Your Data'.

Introduce Yourself, Your Union and the Network

Your first letter to your new contacts is your most important one. There is just one 'golden rule': **KEEP IT SIMPLE.**

- EXPLAIN who you are and where you fit into your union...
- EXPLAIN what benefits you expect to get from the network
- EXPLAIN briefly about your factory (How many workers; how many union members; what you produce at the factory; what kind of relationship the company has with its workforce)
- EXPLAIN if there is a specific general problem that you know about (e.g. an upcoming merger, a shift of production, a new type of production system, etc) and what your members think about it.
- ASK your new contact's opinion of the situation
- ASK for similar details about their factory
- SEND a list of the company's other factories around the world. Many workers have no idea that their local company is part of a worldwide group.
- ASK your contact to check and add to your existing information on other factories.
- ASK for any names and contact details they may have of other trade union reps who should be contacted from other factories/unions.
- SUMMARIZE any annex material in the main message
- DON'T make your messages too long. The aim is to encourage easy communication.

6. Cultivate the Network



- **Maintain your contacts.** Write back quickly to replies you receive to your first contact letter. Even if you only receive a few replies at first, treat them like the first buds of spring. They will grow and flourish with cultivation!

- **Organise your data.** Create a central list of your contact addresses and keep it up-to-date. Again, **Keep it simple.**

Essential details are:

- Name of Contact
- Trade Union affiliation (+ e-mail/website/telephone)
- Position in the Union
- Country
- Company Site (+ website)
- Address and contact details (e-mail, telephone, mobile, fax)

Remember: It is almost always better to use personal or trade union e-mail or telephone contacts, rather than e-mails routed through company systems. Information security is less likely to be a problem and rules for using company systems for trade union work vary from country to country.

- **Language** is a key issue. Here, above all, **keep it simple. Use simple words and short sentences.** Ask your contacts from the start what language(s) they are able to use for communication. Obviously, it is quicker, easier and cheaper if

everyone on the network can use a common language. The most widely understood is usually English.

If you find that it is not possible for everyone to communicate in the same language, you will need to consider translating important information and messages. If you have access to the Internet, there are some free translation services (like <http://www.freetranslation.com>; <http://world.altavista.com/>; <http://www.t-mail.com/cgi-bin/ttext>) that you can try. The result is not poetry, but it helps!

- **Distribute a questionnaire.** A key purpose of the network is to gather information on terms and conditions in the factories of the company elsewhere. By pooling this knowledge across the network, you can help put local union negotiators one step ahead. Some successful networks have distributed questionnaires to collect this data.

Sample questionnaires have been prepared alongside this booklet and are available to network coordinators from your union on demand (*Link Globally – Impact Locally, Questionnaire Examples*).

- **Feed back to the network.** Prepare summaries of the information that you get from correspondents and redistribute it to everyone on the network. The sight of some interesting facts may help persuade others that the network is a useful tool and that they should play their part in it more fully - but don't overload people with too much detail.

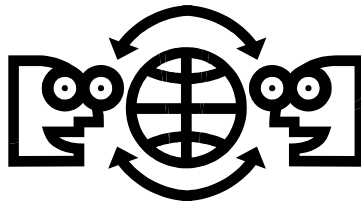
- **Keep the network alive.** Once your network is producing results in the form of new contacts, new factory links, new information and interesting stories from around the world, you should consider publishing a **simple newsletter** that pulls all this information together and invite contributions from network members about the situation in their own countries.

7. Meeting

Common Issues

As the network grows, key issues will show up. Problems with aspects of company policy or practice; or specific events (like a merger or restructuring).

Common problems need common solutions. Although good networking can take you a long way to understanding where the common problems lie, there always comes a point when a face-to-face meeting among network members seems necessary.



Global Meetings

Global meetings can be costly affairs. They require interpretation, translation of documents, long distance travel and accommodation costs. It is usually necessary to get the help of one of the bigger unions on the network to underwrite costs.

The union in whose country the company headquarters is located has a special interest in helping. Your union may help with some meeting costs.

A travel cost pooling system for all participants is a good way to show solidarity.

Global Agenda

A typical agenda for the first network meeting might include:

- Analysis and overview of the company and its strategies
- Descriptions by participants of circumstances in their own country
- Identifying common aims, interests and problems
- Discussion on building a common approach to the company
- Election of a network committee drawn from leading factories
- Election of a 'network coordinator'
- Discussion of sources of financing future activities
- Decisions on publicity, newsletter or website
- Matters for further investigation or action by the network



8. Approaching the Company

A Channel of Communication

All this activity has a clear purpose. To get the attention of the company to the issues raised by its employees, you will need to decide when and how to tell management about your network and how you expect them to respond. Good management will know the value of keeping open channels of communication with the company's workforce.

The trade union movement has evolved 'Global Union Federations' (GUF's) for the different industry sections, whose job it is to provide help for national unions to come to grips with global company managements. An officer from the relevant GUF will usually be a part of your basic network.

Working together with your GUF, network members will need to decide when to raise a clear demand for recognition of the network by central management. The network should be seen as a vehicle for open dialogue on matters that will have an impact in several countries.

Carrots and Sticks

Managers of big companies cannot be relied upon to welcome dialogue with a united group of their own workers. Some need more firm persuasion. Luckily, the public mood is shifting away from the notion of management by secret dictatorship.

Recent scandals involving some major global companies (like Enron and WorldCom in the USA, Ahold, Mannesmann and Parmalat in Europe, etc) have put a lot of pressure on company management to behave 'ethically'. Their shareholders expect it,

governments expect it and the consuming public increasingly expects it.

For companies that wish to operate in the USA, new legislation has been introduced that enforces more open administration by company directors (Sarbanes Oxley Act); <http://news.findlaw.com/hdocs/doc/gwbush/sarbanesoxleyact072302.pdf> . Among other things, this law aims to protect ‘whistle-blowers’ inside the company who act to expose wrongdoing.

Most big companies have developed comprehensive programmes to express their ‘corporate social responsibility’. Many have produced their own ‘codes of conduct’ that aim to show the public how they meet those responsibilities. The way the company should treat its employees is almost always a central feature of these codes.

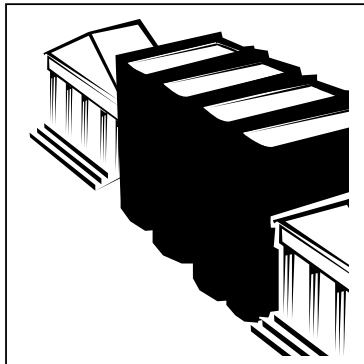


Union representatives should make themselves aware of any such codes used by the company they are networking. The union network can play a positive role in monitoring application of these codes in practice. The network should signal to management its ability and its intention to perform this key function.

9. Worker Rights are Human Rights

To hear some people talk, you might think that it was a very novel idea that workers should be able to demand decent treatment. But, in fact, there has been widespread agreement for many years between most governments on the minimum standards to be expected of companies in their dealings with workers and their trade unions.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed in 1948 by all the member governments of the United Nations, guarantees the right of workers to build and to join trade unions ‘for the protection of their interests’.



Together with representatives of trade unions and employers, standards have been negotiated and agreed under the protection of the **International Labour Organisation (ILO)** over the past 75 years. These standards are called ‘**Conventions**’

All member governments of the ILO are expected to abide by certain ‘Core Conventions’ that deal with the most important issues. A list of these conventions appears on the following page.

ILO ‘core’ conventions

Against Forced Labour

*(Convention 29 Forced Labour (1930)
and Convention 105 Abolition of Forced Labour (1957)*

Defending the Freedom to Form and to Join Trade Unions and to Bargain Collectively

*(Convention 87 Freedom of Association and the Right to Organize (1948)
and Convention 98 the Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively
(1949)*

Against Discrimination and Defending Equal Treatment

*Convention 100 Equal Remuneration (1951) and
Convention 111 Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (1958)*

Against Child Labour

*Convention 138 Minimum age convention (1973)
and Convention 182 Prohibition and immediate elimination of the worst
forms of Child Labour (1999)*

Global compact

In 1999 the United Nations General Secretary challenged companies to declare their public commitment to 10 key principles of ethical operation - based on the above standards, on protection of the environment and on avoidance of corruption.

Companies who have signed the Global Compact are listed at www.globalcompact.org

10. International Framework Agreements

Once regular contact with central management of the company has been established by the network, it makes sense to set this relationship in an agreed framework. Several 'global framework agreements' between companies and their organised workforce have been signed already via the Global Union Federations (GUF's), www.global-unions.org. These agreements guarantee minimum standards for the company's treatment of its employees throughout the company – regardless of the country in which it is operating. Some examples of such agreements are:

• **ICEM Agreements**

- STATOIL
- FREUDENBERG
- ENDESA
- NORSKE SKOG
- ANGLOGOLD
- ENI
- SVENSKA CELLULOSA AKTIEBOLAGET (SCA)
- LUKOIL

• **IFBWW Agreements**

- IKEA
- FABER-CASTEL
- HOCHTIEF
- SKANSKA
- BALLAST NEDAM

• **IMF Agreements**

- MERLONI ELETTRODOMESTICI
- VOLKSWAGEN

- DAIMLERCHRYSLER
- LEONI
- GEA
- SKF
- RHEINMETALL
- BOSCH
- PRYM

• IUF Agreements

- ACCOR
- DANONE
- CHIQUITA
- FONTERRA
- CLUB MEDITERRANEE



11. Computers as Networking Tools – (and some useful links)

More and more people use computers in their work and at home. The computer can also be an aid to better networking. If you have colleagues who know a bit about computer use, it is relatively easy to set up a 'bulletin board', or 'listserv' that can help your network exchange information. It is worth considering publishing your newsletter in electronic form for easy access. Why not consider setting up **a network website**?

More sophisticated use of computers has even enabled some networks to use online discussions to debate common issues. (Free web groups for such discussions can be set up on the Yahoo system, for example, see www.eproject.com).

But don't get carried away! One problem can be that not everyone on the network is likely to have a similar access or skill level. Basic e-mail, telephone, fax, or ordinary mail is just fine to maintain contacts.

But if you have Internet access, here are some website addresses that can provide helpful information:

www.efbww.org (European Federation of Building and Woodworkers)

www.fffat.org (European Federation of Trade Unions in the Food, Agriculture and Tourism sectors and allied branches)

www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int (European industrial relations observatory on-line)

www.emcef.org (European Mine, Chemical and Energy Federation)

www.emf-fem.org (European Metalworkers` Federation)

www.etuc.org (European Trade Union Confederation)

www.unia.ch (Swiss general Union)

www.gurn.info (Global Union research network at ACTRAV, ILO)

www.icem.org (International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine & General Workers Unions)

www.icftu.org (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions)

www.ifbww.org (International Federation of Building and Wood workers)

www.ilo.org (International Labour Organisation)

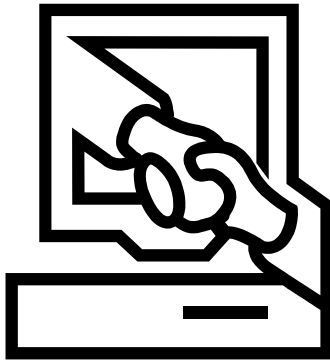
www.imfmetal.org (International Metalworkers` Federation)

www.iuf.org (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers` Associations)

www.labourstart.org (General news of trade union activity worldwide)

www.sgb.ch (Swiss Federation of Trade Unions)

www.tuac.org (Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD)



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October 2004



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