

## The impact of technology

### Lead-In

Talk about a technological product/device that you would find it impossible to live without.

- When did you first use it/hear about it?
- Why did you start using it?
- How did it change your life?
- What's so good about it?
- What disadvantages/negative impact does it have?

Think of a time when you've been let down by technological product/device.

- Give some background.
- What happened and why?
- How did you overcome the problem?
- Do you still use this type of technology?
- What have you learnt from the experience?



**Input**

## You Can't Stand in the Way of Progress

Businesses will always look to integrate new technologies which they believe will improve their working practices, efficiency and ultimately their balance sheet. And there will always be those who resist and criticise at every step; people have opposed such progress from the days of the industrial revolution. There may be some truth in the idea that new inventions bring both positives and negatives, but at the end of the day we have to accept that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Companies which don't keep up-to-date with the latest developments soon begin to lose out to the competition. Effective use of technology increases efficiency, boosting business and therefore generating wealth.

As evidence, let's take a look at some examples of how technological progress has benefitted working practices. Firstly, communication technologies: nowadays a range of communication tools are available to employees, which facilitate interaction and the sharing of information between colleagues and with clients. Email, text messaging, instant messaging and video conferencing tools are obvious examples of this. Then there are social media websites which allow businesses to connect with customers to inform them of promotions, campaigns and new products and services as well as reaching out to potential new customers. From the consumer's point of view, more efficient communication technology means enquiries, complaints and requests can be dealt with more speedily.

Another obvious benefit is that technology saves us time. Computers have allowed many tasks and processes to be automated, freeing us up to spend our time carrying out other duties, thereby increasing output. Information-sharing has also been facilitated by recent advances, with databases allowing information to be accessed by different people working in different locations.

This brings us on to one of the other positive impacts of technological progress: a shrinking world. Not only does the internet make it possible for companies to explore markets in different corners of the world, but also allows people greater freedom in terms of where and when they work. Without the internet, working from home would be impossible for many. Technology also allows companies to employ people from different countries, making physical location irrelevant and giving opportunities to people working in developing economies that would otherwise be denied them.

These are just a few of the many reasons to be positive about the impact of technology on our working lives. There are many other reasons, such as promoting environmentally-friendly working practices and boosting creativity and innovation, which should convince the sceptic that, on balance, the pros outweigh the cons.

## **A Price Too High?**

Nobody can deny that technological advances have had a huge impact on our lives, not least how we work. There's also no denying that many of these developments have brought about positives, but the question is: at what price?

Mobile phones, emails and the internet have doubtless made communication more efficient and immediate, but often at the expense of a healthy work-life balance. Nowadays, the line between work and home life is becoming blurred. Companies provide employees with mobile phones with the expectation that they answer calls from colleagues or clients outside of work hours, at weekends or even when they're on holiday.

Information technologies have also made it possible to work from home. Some view this positively but, on the other hand, it sets a dangerous precedent. In the past, many of our duties could only be performed when we were physically on our employer's premises. Being able to work from home means that we are expected to do so, even if it means working more than our contracted hours. All of these factors inevitably lead to greater levels of stress.

Add to this the fact that many technological developments isolate individuals. It is now not uncommon for people to spend their working days sitting in front of a computer screen with little in the way of face-to-face or even spoken interaction. This limits the possibility of developing relationships with both colleagues and clients with negative consequences for staff morale and business.

Then there are problems with the technology itself. Aside from data security issues, there is also that problem surely familiar to all of us: what happens if the technology stops working? We have become so dependent on computers, email and the internet that if, for some reason, it breaks down, whole offices are paralysed. There is also the financial cost of technology, not just of purchasing and installing it, but also maintaining it and employing staff to provide IT support.

Finally, there's the fact that technology can be something of a distraction at work with employees spending work time to check personal emails, surf the net or visit social media websites. With this comes an attempt by companies to monitor their staff's use of IT, thereby creating an atmosphere of distrust amongst employees who feel they are not respected by their employers or that their personal privacy is being compromised.

It should be clear from these examples that welcoming every new advance in technology with open arms is not the most sensible policy. Before any new technology is introduced, there should be a detailed assessment of its impact, not just on a business level but also in terms of people.

**Task****Talk show host**

It's your job to keep the debate on subject and make sure that everyone contributes.

Keep the debate moving by asking for opinions and getting people's responses to what others have said:

"What's your view, Jane?"

"Do you agree with that, David?"

Begin by introducing the theme of the debate and who the participants are (you'll need to ask them at the planning stage).

**University student**

You're a big fan of the internet. You've grown up with it and couldn't imagine life without it.

You think it's particularly useful for:

- study and research
- storing information and documents
- speaking with friends
- entertainment (games)
- downloading films and music
- promoting social movements and causes

**Secondary school teacher**

You recognise the benefits of the internet, but also have some reservations.

Pros

- it's great for student research
- students are more motivated when using the internet as a learning resource
- gives students greater autonomy and the internet is now an important life skill

Cons

- plagiarism
- exposes students to inappropriate content
- lots of "facts" on the internet are untrue
- students no longer remember facts and information because it's always at their fingertips

**Parent**

You know that the internet is very important nowadays and your children love using it for fun (playing games, listening to music etc). You also think it's a very educational too.

You are worried though that:

- children can become obsessed with the internet.
- it affects social interaction- kids spent all their time in front of a computer or tablet.
- your children will come across inappropriate material- it's difficult to know what they're looking at.

**Police detective**

You fight internet crime and are particularly concerned about:

- online fraud (e.g. e-banking, using someone else's credit card)
- online bullying (particularly among teenagers) and stalking
- cyber terrorism (terrorists, foreign governments damage sites/systems and steal sensitive information)
- criminals and terrorists using the internet to plan and organise their activities