

# THINK TANK

Process of deliberation on new political culture: Working Document No. 14

## ACTION RESEARCH AT THE THINK TANK: STUDIES AND POST-EVALUATION ADAPTATIONS

(22 September 2021)

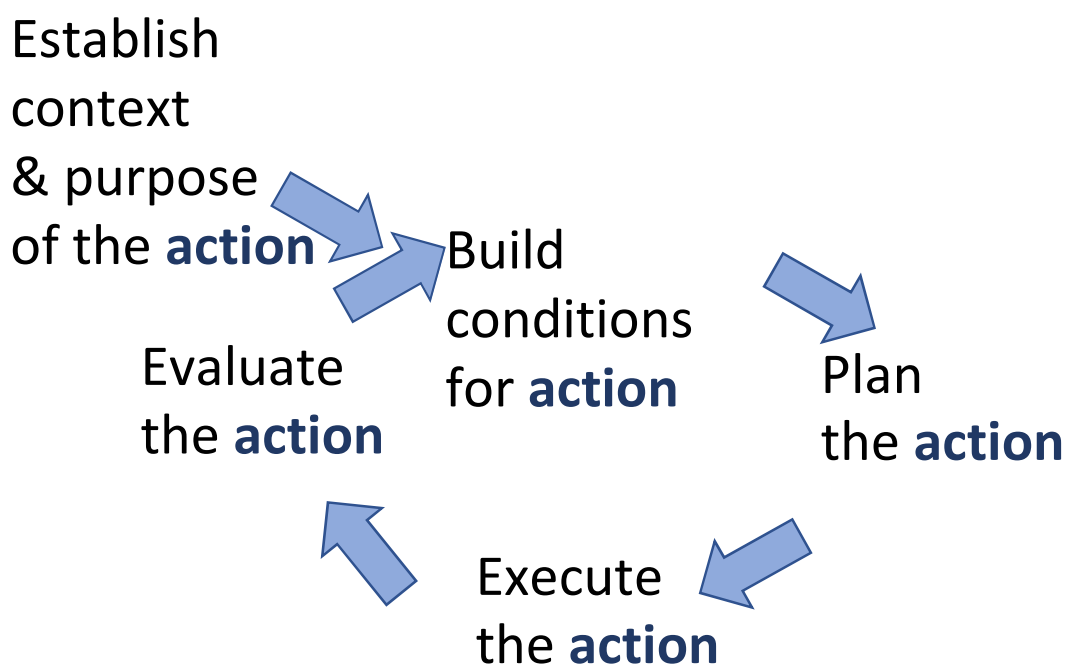
### Introduction

At the September 2021 session, the discussion group on the new political culture began a new phase of its work, which will continue through to the 2023 elections. Once again, the new phase will be based on action-research methodology. However, whereas previously the focus was on the co-generation process, this time the work will focus on action. This working document sets out the adapted methodological framework and addresses two basic issues that are needed to start working within the new methodology: (a) the definition of the basic concept (collaborative governance) and the presentation of the actions to be addressed.

### Adaptation of the methodology

The reference point for the new phase of the think tank is the book by Coghlan and Brannick (2010). These authors develop action research on a cyclical basis.

Image. Cycle of action research



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010:8).

Each step is described below.

#### *Context and purpose of the action*

In this section the team will carry out the following actions:

- a) Reflect on the necessity or advisability of the project
- b) Understand the economic, political and social forces influencing this change
- c) Understand the cultural and structural forces influencing this change
- d) Define the desired situation
- e) Develop collaborative relationships between those who have "ownership" of the change being sought

### *Building the conditions for action*

In this phase the group will work on:

- f) Share the idea that there is no one single truth to be discovered or one 'right' form of organization that is independent of the people who make up that particular organization
- g) Establishing the theoretical and practical basis for action

### *Planning the action*

Based on the above, the group will take the following steps:

- h) Establish the need for transformation
- i) Establish the situation it is hoped to have in the future
- j) Establish the steps to be taken, taking the two previous ones into account

### *Executing the action*

For this phase, the steps are as follows:

- k) Develop an operational plan with targets, activities, structures, projects and experiments
- l) Develop a *commitment plan* outlining who will be responsible for the changes in the organization

### *Evaluation of the action*

The aspects to be observed in this phase are as follows:

- m) Whether what was said in the initial "construction" phase was subsequently implemented
- n) Whether the actions carried out followed what was said in the "construction" phase
- o) Whether the action has been carried out properly
- p) What we want to take into the next cycle of construction, planning and action

### **Action to be placed at the centre of the process**

The cycle described in the previous section places the main focus of the process on action. Consequently, the actions to be placed at the heart of the deliberation process have been defined from the outset:

- a) Project for internal transformation of the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa.  
The project will be based on the search for facilitators within the Provincial Government and on channelling their training and empowerment processes to ensure that they promote collaborative governance in their areas of action. The facilitator for the process will be Eider Mendoza, who will bring to the deliberation group the questions to be answered to support this process
- b) Project for preparing a map of collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa. The aim of the project is to draw up a map of the institutions and projects that are promoting collaborative governance in Gipuzkoa in order to understand their trajectory and activity in depth and to lay the foundations for the networking process between them. The facilitator for the process will be Naiara Goia, who will propose in the group the necessary reflections to promote the process
- c) Project to strengthen the influence of the deliberation group on the new political culture in the ecosystem. Based on the new knowledge generated in the two previous projects, the deliberation group will transform the nature of the group and its ways of working in order to strengthen its influence in Gipuzkoa. In this way it is hoped to propose new members or new networking processes. The facilitator for the process will be Miren Larrea, who will provide help to the group in transforming itself.

### **Defining collaborative governance as a starting point**

Further exploring the conceptualization of the new political culture, addressed in the previous phase, the concept adopted as the central theme for the new phase is collaborative governance. The first steps of the methodology agreed upon require laying the theoretical and practical foundations of the action. To do so, Etorkizuna Eraikiz's definition of collaborative governance was used as a starting point, and the criteria to be taken into account when drawing it up were listed.

Definition of collaborative governance: Collaborative governance is a specific response, proposed by a specific area of policy (government) and is fundamentally based on establishing new forms of communication and collaboration between governments and civil society, both within and between organizations, to strengthen collaboration between institutions and society.

### Criteria:

- Governments must show themselves more willing to cooperate and interact with society than to act on their own
- Governing is, above all, an open dynamic of collaboration and learning so that decisions are taken in better conditions.
- Governments create spaces for listening, reflection and sometimes —but not necessarily— decision-making. These spaces are not directed through a hierarchy; instead, horizontal relationships are established.

- The priorities and applications of the public agenda and, therefore, of public policies, are established through exchange and collaboration between the government and the network of agents.
- They create specific structures, first to promote the stability of the open and collaborative governance process, and then to guarantee it.

Two working groups reflected on the definition of collaborative governance. The majority considered the definition above to be suitable and added the following criteria, among others:

- Preference is given to diversifying those involved
- We work in the action, to learn from it
- It is aligned with the foundations of the new political culture
- It includes mutual evaluation in its ways of working
- The processes are transparent
- It is defined from a position of complexity and from there it develops the systemic approach
- There is agreement in advance as to how decision-making will be carried out

Two other groups addressed the proposed actions. In general, the actions were rated highly (see the specific contributions in the report for this session). Some of the items highlighted included the existence of conditions to be more efficient in the new phase and the legitimisation of the process by the Provincial Government through internal transformation.

### **Expectations of the action**

Participants were asked to describe what the situation should be in 2023 with regard to each project/action. The contributions are summarized below:

#### **a) Internal transformation processes in 2023**

- Collaboration between facilitators and referents is seen and work is being carried out to develop competencies.
- We have gone from experimenting to integrating the issues addressed in this process into the working dynamics, on a wide scale across all departments.
- Government employees see the project as being sincere. In other words, it is not just political marketing.
- The political staff who will be incorporated following the 2023 elections are aware that there are "new" ways of doing things in the provincial government and that this conditions ways of working.
- Within the Provincial Government, there has been progress in the relations between political and technical staff and the technical staff are included in the deliberation process.
- Collaboration is a reality in the day-to-day work of the Provincial Government.
- It is in tune with the theories of organizations that study the activity (Koldo Saratxaga + "Peter Senge") and theories on management democratization (J. Subirats).

- Application of "Dancing silos" theory facilitates coherence between OECD policies.

b) Mapping process in 2023

- The collaborative governance network has been created and we are addressing the challenges.
- Instead of channelling the changes in a few isolated spaces, they are unified and led from the Provincial Government.
- With this mapping, a better and deeper understanding has been gained of the real situation in Gipuzkoa.
- New networks have been built and strengthened, generating new initiatives.
- More knowledge about the Think Tank has been created, cemented and disseminated.
- In addition to the ecosystem, collaborative governance has been strengthened in Gipuzkoa.

c) Influence of the deliberative group on the province in 2023

- The Think Tank has become a reference point in society (not only in the ecosystem).
- The deliberation team is able to reinforce the new transformation processes with its work.
- Ordinary citizens of Gipuzkoa have assimilated/taken on board the new political culture to a greater extent.