

THINK TANK

Process of deliberation on new political culture: Working Document No. 11

TRANSFORMATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION - STUDIES CARRIED OUT IN THE AURRERABIDE PROGRAMME

(14 April 2021)

Introduction

On 17 February 2021, following a debate on the working methodology, it was agreed to conduct a process of reflection until May on the input from the group members. The second of these sessions was held on 14 April and was facilitated by members of the team who are studying the transformation of public administration within the framework of the Aurrerabide programme.

Taking the experience of the group members as a starting point, they shared their reflections on complexity, as summarized in the following table:

Situation	Description	Solution
Simple	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Between Towns A and B there is a river.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">It is obvious to everyone. "Do as I say"
Complicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none">The river is wideThe flow is very variableThe soil is unstable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Not obvious, there are several possible solutions.With the right knowledge, an answer can be reached. Expert knowledge
Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Build bridge near town square vs. near industrial zoneNo funding from Provincial GovernmentTown A is willing to finance only 30% of the bridge.WWF and Greenpeace have set up a biosphere protection committee to oversee the project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">There is no rational or adequate solution.Expert knowledge is not enough to solve the problem. The solution is negotiated on and built through dialogue.

Following presentation of the table, the group's main working hypothesis was set out: managing complex problems requires facilitation, and since transforming political culture is a complex problem, facilitators are needed.

On these conceptual bases, a project was presented to recruit and train facilitators and for them to start working in Aurrerabide. Indeed, this process has been the space for learning about facilitation.

After sharing their experience, the focus group was invited to reflect on the following questions (in order to discuss the working hypothesis):

- What kind of problem is the construction of a new political culture (simple, complicated or complex)?
- What kind of solutions should we consider ("Do as I say"; based on expert knowledge; based on facilitation)?

The following are the comments made on these issues by the members of the focus group.

The construction of the new political culture is a complex problem/challenge

Building the new political culture is complex. It is true that administrations, companies and civil society often believe that expert intervention will be enough to provide a solution, but in many cases, this answer does not lie anywhere; it has to be constructed and, therefore, the solution has to be developed in an experimental framework that allows collaboration.

However, within this complexity, there are also complicated and simple situations. The solution, therefore, requires interaction between different elements: "Do as I say", the role of experts and collaboration-based environments. Consequently, shaping the new political culture involves participation from multiple groups and agents among which different types of relationships may develop, depending on the nature of the specific problem to be solved. However, it should be noted that:

- a) the entrenched political culture (hierarchical, centralized power, etc.) clashes with the new political culture that it is intended to promote
- b) the current conditions and context make the transition to a new political culture essential
- c) the new political culture must be capable of effective structural transformation

How should we respond to the complex problems that arise in the construction of the new political culture?

The following are some of the issues raised in answer to the second question:

POWER, LEGITIMACY AND THE CLASHES BETWEEN PERSPECTIVES

- "Do as I say" means that someone has to have power. To have power someone must have legitimacy
- The most important challenge is how spaces for deliberation are created. Although it often appears necessary to choose between "Do as I say" and an assembly culture, the answer more usually lies somewhere in between (grey)
- Democratic legitimacy must be maintained, at the very least, or augmented, as there is a risk of "being new" in building a new political culture, but not a democratic one
- The problem lies in who has the criteria when the problem is complex. The role of experts is not enough. Although there is sometimes a technical critic, when this solution is extended to society there is a clash. This is the case, for example, with the ecological transition.

DELIBERATION AND ACTION

- The most innovative solution is deliberation. Faced with complexity, organization does not usually occur automatically or spontaneously. Therefore, someone has to channel the initiative. Someone must stimulate deliberation, generate convergence and guide the process towards results.
- The answer will be developed in specific situations and not in abstract models. Sometimes deliberation will be enough and at specific points expert knowledge will be required.

In other situations, someone will need to make the decision. This decision should be taken by those with political responsibility.

EMPOWERMENT

- Because the process of creating the New Political Culture is a new one, it will bring new challenges. The people who have to participate must feel empowered and this must be achieved in the processes. The New Political Culture, to prevent disengagement, must enable people to state their opinion as well as empowering them.

These reflections will be fed back into the Aurrerabide programme, in a continuation of the learning process.