

THINK TANK

Deliberation process on the Work of the Future: Working Document No. 12

THE MEANING OF WORK: THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

(23 September 2021)

Introduction

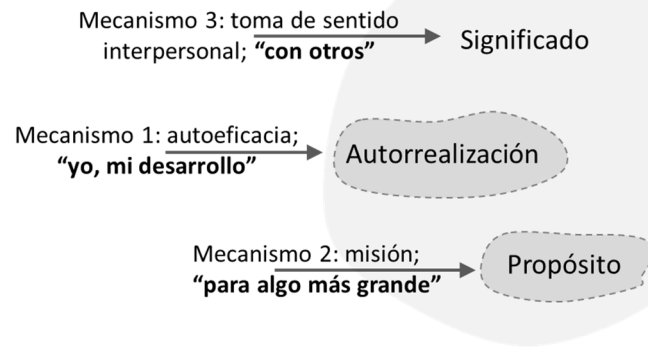
The previous working document (2021. About the June session) covers the start of the new discussion group. The bodies participating during the new period, 2021-2023, met for the first time and the bases of the new deliberation process were explained to them. This new group will participate in the experimental initiatives arising around the meaning of work. These experiments will take place in the context of the companies, but in June the participating companies had not yet been decided upon. This September meeting was also attended by the companies that will participate in the experimentation, specifically: IZT, Fagor Industrial, Sutargi, Zorrotz, Lazpiur and Oribay. One person will participate in the deliberation group in representation of these companies. Therefore, given that most of the members of the deliberation group are new (some joined in June and others in September), it is important to share in the working group what the Meaning of Work is and what lines of experimentation there may be.

The purpose of this process of sharing the conceptual framework is (i) to start to use a common language; (ii) to begin to agree on a common understanding of some possibly abstract concepts; and (iii) to understand the different lines of experimentation that may exist in different experimental projects.

Meaning of Work: The Conceptual Framework

The first version of the conceptual framework presented is set out in greater detail in the report of the session. However, the following were some of the most important conclusions:

- 1) The sense of work is something that is developed. It was emphasized that the Meaning of Work is a theme that is developed within the context of the company; it is not something that is either found or can be given. It is the result of a process that each of us has to go through.
- 2) The Meaning of Work has different sub-dimensions, as can be seen in the image: (i) meaning, (ii) purpose, and (iii) self-fulfilment. The last two sub-dimensions contribute to improving the first one.
- 3) Each sub-dimension engenders different lines (or mechanisms) of work for conducting experimentation in the company: (i) improving self-efficacy to improve the subdimension of self-fulfilment, (ii) developing the purpose of work in order to understand each individual's contribution to society, (iii) working on the processes of interpersonal sensemaking in order to develop the subdimension of meaning.



Source: Adapted from Martela and Pessi (2018).

The deliberation group reflected on this conceptual framework. Two topics were discussed in different subgroups:

- 1) The actions subsequently taken in the company are conditioned by the manager's understanding of work in the context of the company. Participants were therefore asked the following question: Do you think it is necessary to reflect / agree on what the work is before beginning concrete experimentation initiatives? Most of the subgroups in the deliberation group responded in the affirmative, so this reflection will be included in the schedule for later sessions. Specifically: What do we understand by work? How does this understanding condition our daily management and action? What influence does this management and action have on the meaning of work that people develop?
- 2) Participants were also asked a second question: Of the three proposed lines (or mechanisms) of work, do you see any one as being more important than any other? Do you think there are any missing? The different subgroups that met generally endorsed these three lines (or mechanisms) of work. However, several subgroups stressed the need to address these three lines of work together from a systemic point of view. This may condition the experimental cases to be organised with the companies. The experimentation in these three lines of work with a systemic point of view will determine the type of experimentation to be decided upon in the companies.

Summarising, this working session in September, fostered the first reflections on the Meaning of Work among the participants. This was a first attempt. It will not fully unify the language and/or create a common point of view. This will be a topic that they will have to continue working on in subsequent sessions. However, it will help to define the types of experimentation to be carried out in the companies. It would be advisable to start holding rounds of meetings with each of the companies (IZT, Fagor Industrial, Sutargi, Zorrotz, Lazpiur and Oribay) in order to discuss with them the three lines of work shown in the figure above and determine the form the experimentation in each company should take. This process of specification will also help to compile everyone's perspectives.