

THINK TANK

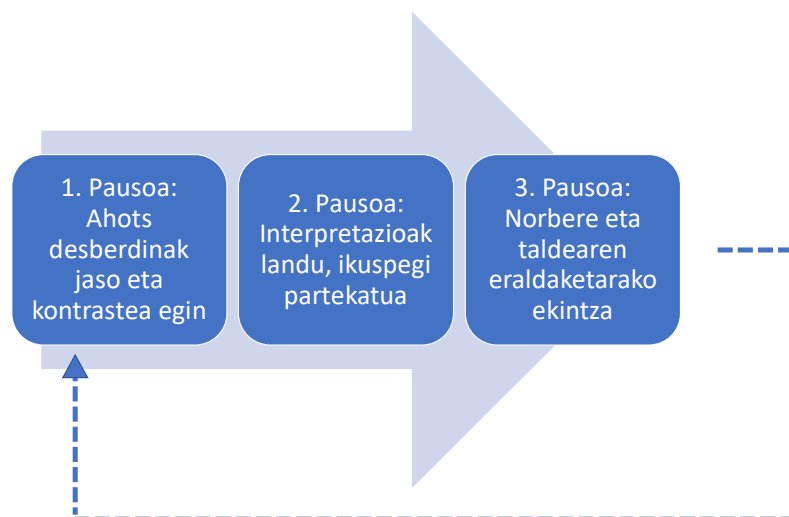
Process of deliberation on New Political Culture: Working Document No. 9

EXERCISE of LISTENING TO THE DELIBERATION GROUP

(17 February 2021)

This working document contains two types of content. On the one hand, it corresponds to the agenda set out by the deliberation group on the development of a New Political Culture, working on this occasion on the challenge of developing effective systems for listening to society. The approach to this challenge was not conceptual, but involved a listening exercise by the group. The framework used for this exercise is shown in Figure 1.

Figure No. 1. Steps in the listening exercise



Through this listening process, the deliberation group reviewed a series of methodological bases that had been drawn up throughout its trajectory, marking a series of criteria for the future. The following lines set out the group's reflections and decisions, which together make up the knowledge of the process co-created by the group or the methodological knowledge.

The listening exercise was based on what the group members said about the process on the evaluation sheets or in the post-session interviews. The following axes were collected:

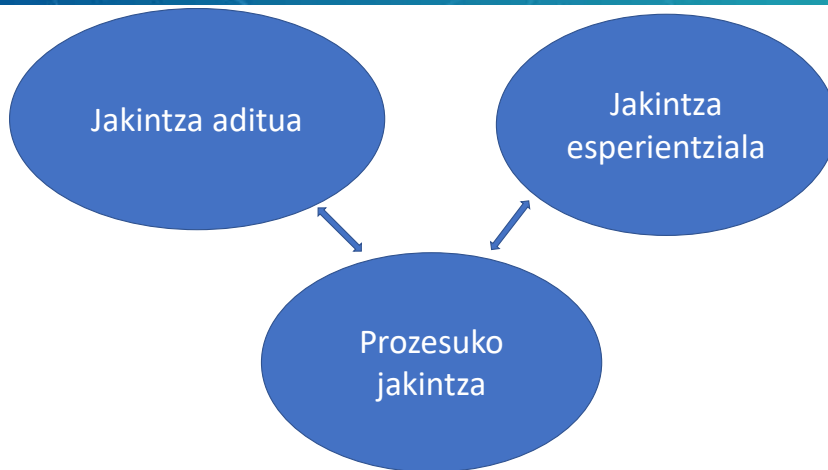
- Difficulties of the group in leading their process
 - “the point is given to us by the experts; we should try to establish it ourselves”
- Lack of time to work on the issues among group members
 - “There is not enough time left for the dynamic”

- “I felt good, but in the second half we were rushed due to the lack of time”
- Difficulties in learning from other members of the group
 - “From what we discussed today, it would be good to have a chance to share in the next sessions what we are doing in the different working groups”
 - “It would be helpful to work better on communication and mutual knowledge between the different projects or to think of mechanisms/channels for this purpose”
- Difficulties in situating reflection in the process of transformation
 - “we felt out of place/disengaged with the dynamic”
 - “some of you are very involved in the process, but others amongst us do not follow the process to the same extent from one meeting to the next”
 - “the questions were too complex, they shouldn't require so much effort from us”
 - “what I really wanted was to continue debating what the experts had said”

To aid reflection, one of the participants shared the narrative of the process she herself went through in the Think Tank group, setting out the doubts and discomfort that arose during the process. Among other areas, she mentioned the feeling of chaos, the discomfort, the need to learn, and the fact that the process takes longer than expected. As a contribution to the process, she explained how the theory is being constructed; the way in which collective transformation and personal transformation are incorporated; and, in addition to reflection, emotions and subjectivity are placed at the service of the processes. Finally, she also mentioned that there are different positions when it comes to understanding the link with action.

As a complement to this narrative of the process, a working hypothesis on what was happening was shared with the group. In this hypothesis, the action/research methodology that has been developed combines three types of knowledge: expert knowledge in the field; knowledge based on the participants' experience; and process knowledge or methodological knowledge. According to this hypothesis, the necessary balance that this type of knowledge should have in the group process has been lost: more space has been dedicated to expert knowledge, leaving less time for experiential knowledge and therefore process knowledge has practically disappeared from the space of deliberation (see Figure 2). Without explicitly discussing methodological knowledge, it is difficult to properly understand the link between expert and experiential knowledge.

Figure No. 1. Balance between different types of knowledge in the action research process



With this working hypothesis on the table, another idea was discussed; that behind this evolution of the process there is a hierarchy between the different types of knowledge. The one most highly-valued in society is expert knowledge, followed by experience-based knowledge and process knowledge. To summarise this idea, the contribution of a foreign researcher who has analysed the process was used. That person remarked that if Aristotle were alive today he would not be a university professor (expert knowledge), but a dual vocational teacher (who works on theoretical knowledge by integrating it into action). This remark was intended to highlight value of experiential knowledge and process-based knowledge.

Within these frameworks, a group listening exercise was again conducted, in which any participants wishing to do so could share their point of view. Below are some of the contributions on the group's activity:

- “We have to try to find a theoretical validation of practice”
- “I'm glad to value not only the experts but also the specialists”
- “We're working on a progressive approach in order to move away from chaos”
- “I am surprised by those who are downplaying the importance of theory”
- “The knowledge we need at any given moment may vary; we have to see what knowledge we need at any particular point in time”
- “It's a time of regeneration for the group”
- “It will be important to work on subjectivity and emotions”

As a result of this reflection, the group decided to work on the knowledge with their fellow group members for a time, instead of bringing in external expert knowledge, combining theoretical knowledge and experience. It was also decided to devote more time to sharing knowledge of the process. This will help to experiment with combining different types of knowledge.