

# THINK TANK

Process of deliberation on new political culture: Working Document No. 8

## TRUST IN THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

(13 January 2021)

This document sets out the discussion group on the new political culture's reflections on the concept of trust. The group discussed the trust/distrust relationship that can develop between public institutions and the general public. It also explored the trust relationships that are generated in processes in which different actors participate, such as the Think Tank's own working groups. This working paper centres around Mari José Canel's presentation, and the ideas and discussions that arose out of it.

### Trust between citizens and public institutions

*Trust: what is it and what generates it?*

There is a relationship between uncertainty and trust. If there is trust, there is an assumption of vulnerability and uncertainty. This is why if we trust public institutions, it is because we accept vulnerability.

There is a debate among academics as to whether or not trust is good for democracy. It is assumed that:

- Trust is good and it is important because it is a prerequisite for generating social capital. It is a foundation that governments need in order to carry out their actions.
- Mistrust tends to increase conflict.
- A democratic society is one in which there has to be the right mixture of trust and distrust.

At present, the public trusts NGOs, media and companies more than public institutions. Even so, it is important to emphasise the importance of the terms used: the concept of "public" is trusted more than that of "political".

We do not as yet understand what factors condition the degree of citizen trust in public institutions. Nonetheless, it could be argued that trust is a multi-causal phenomenon. In broad terms, there are three major sources of trust:

- Leadership.
- Management results.
- Processes by which management results are achieved/provided.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to establish which particular factor is the source of trust in each case. The three sources of trust blend and overlap.

As for the sources of citizens' distrust in public institutions, distrust can be seen to increase if there is:

- A gap between what is done and what is said to be done.
- A gap between what is done and what people perceive to be done.

Even so, the generation of trust and distrust is influenced by other actors beyond citizens and public institutions. For example, the media, political parties, social movements etc.

### *Improving trust in public institutions*

Communication between institutions and citizens is a key element in building trust:

- The gap between what is done and what is said to be done should be narrowed.
  - Manage communication between public institutions and citizens (there is a danger that the public will view government communication as pure propaganda. That is to say, as being false and faked).
- Establish channels of communication between citizens and public institutions.
- Know and meet the public's expectations: trust is generated when expectations are met.

In the electoral game, politicians usually compete by offering expectations. Expectations should be tempered. Public representatives should also be "humanized: conveying doubt and uncertainty from time to time can build trust.

### *Trust and collaborative governance*

There is a relationship between citizen participation and trust in public institutions:

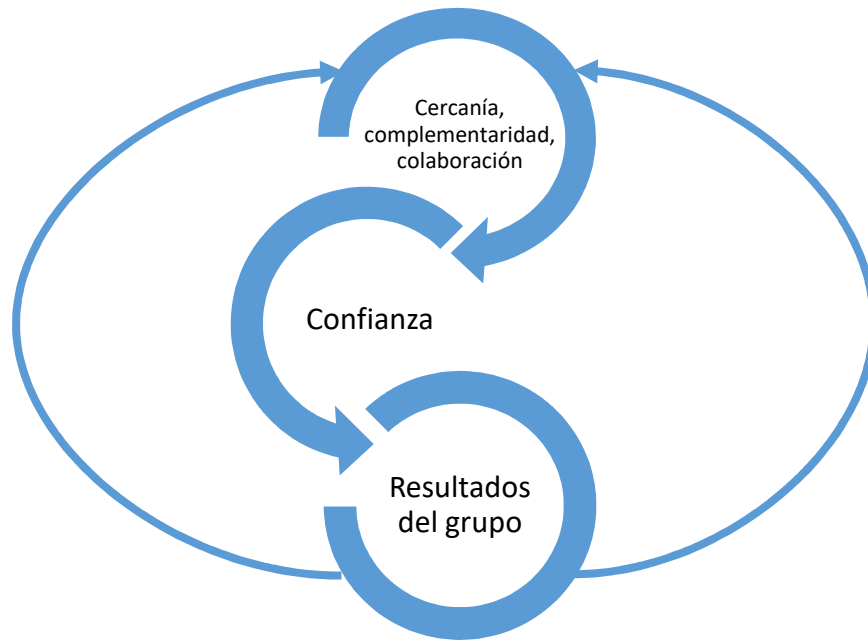
- Cases in which there is co-participation and co-action are associated with high levels of trust because the message is conveyed through action and not just words.
- Trust is positively related to collaborative governance. Experiments in collaborative governance are associated with higher levels of trust and lower levels of distrust.

*The case of Etorikizuna Eraikiz as a strategy for generating more trust and social capital*

- Trust has been reinforced. Organisations pay back the Provincial Government's trust in them and it becomes a virtuous circle, because there is continuous interaction.
- The importance of personal relationships in building trust.
- Possible sources of distrust in Etorikizuna Eraikiz:
  - The possibility or risk of politicization of the project.
  - Perception that it is self-promotion and propaganda.

**Trust in groups. Participants' reflections on the presentation and the lessons learned for the think tank's deliberative process**

- It is important to study which factors generate trust and which generate distrust. Among those that generate trust:
  - immediacy and a feeling of interdependence of the actors.
  - Promote a feeling of complementarity, companionship and collaboration.
  - Encourage communication between the actors involved in the group. But also encourage communication between the different groups.
    - Establish channels for communication.
  - Influence consistency of discourse and concept.
- Trust is positive for the group:
  - Trust reinforces the feeling of group and belonging.
  - The relationship between trust and results: the greater the trust, the more the results.



- There is a correlation between (respectful, friendly, complementary) collaboration between the participants and generation of trust in the group. The better the collaboration, the more trust is built. In turn, trust generates positive results in the group. Positive results in turn lead to greater collaboration. That is why it is necessary to promote:
  - A climate of respect, complementarity and collaboration.
  - Channels should for communication within and between groups.