THINK TANK

Deliberation process on the Work of the Future: Working Document No. 16

THE MEANING OF WORK: PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES

(17 February 2022)

Introduction

At the November 2021 deliberation session, the conceptual framework was presented in greater detail. Four key variables were highlighted: autonomy, competence, relationship with others and purpose. If a person can see these issues in their work, it will make their work more meaningful and thus increase their well-being and motivation. After presenting this conceptual framework, the experiments to be worked on in each company were discussed. At IZT, it was decided to restrict it to the programming area, in order to work on experimentation, autonomy and purpose. It was also decided that in the area of the meaning of work at Fagor Industrial, they would study the possible impact of digitalisation. At Zorrotz, autonomy, purpose and influence of information would be studied in the blade and guide departments. At Sutargi, an analysis would be conducted of the way in which the process of training people influences the meaning of work. At Oribay, it was decided to experiment on the development of autonomy in the powder metallurgy section in order to later analyse its impact on the meaning of work. Finally, at Lazpiur it was decided to work on purpose.

Once the conceptual framework had been defined and the experimentation processes launched in each company, the aim of the February session was to bring certain individuals' experiences to the discussion group. The session was intended to analyse the case of some individuals who quit their employment voluntarily and looked for another job. After the presentations, the deliberative team had time to reflect and decide whether there was anything missing from the conceptual framework and/or the experiments.

People's experiences

A more detailed account of the experiments presented can be found in the report on the session. The presentations were divided into three sections:

- The cases of six engineers who were not present, all aged between 33 and 39, were presented. All had left their jobs (in an industrial company) and wanted to work in organisations in another sector (e.g. in education).
- The experience of Maite Zaitegi (aged 36) in two automotive companies (engineering departments). In her case, she twice left her job and steered her professional career in another direction (research and education).
- Finally, the case of Abel Armendariz (aged 27). After working in a small industrial company, he left his job to move into the world of education (vocational training).

All the examples set out involved engineers. After these presentations, the discussion group was asked whether these experiences in any way alter the conceptual framework defined so far; and whether they saw any new variables. The following topics emerged from the group's reflections.

1) Doubts arose as to the extent to which these cases represent society, given that they only represent the experiences of engineers.

2) In almost all cases they have a high degree of autonomy and skill. The variables that are lacking are relationships with people (absence of a group relationship) and/or absence of purpose. The lacks faced by a person working in production may be related more to autonomy, but in the cases of engineers, they may be more in the field of relationship and purpose.

3) The issue of salary was also mentioned. It is not a variable that gives meaning to work, but the lack of a decent salary could lead to demotivation. It was mentioned that engineers have relatively low salaries (in many cases less than in the education sector).

4) The conceptual framework set out so far establishes specific variables to address and promote the meaning of work, but does not contain any reference to organisational culture. This issue may be important (as a shortcoming).

5) It was also mentioned that work-life balance is important. This topic is not specifically mentioned in the conceptual framework.

6) In our conceptual framework we address the organisation's purpose, but not so much the purpose of individuals and harmonisation between the two. There is currently a mismatch between what the company asks for and what the employee wants. Perhaps this is another issue to be considered.

To sum up, this working session, which was held in February, made new proposals with regard to the current conceptual framework. The existing framework contains four easy-to-understand and easy-to-remember variables, but there may perhaps be some other important variables that should be taken into account: culture, personal purpose, salary, etc.