# The meaning of work

## Conceptual framework for the Etorkizuna Eraikiz Think Tank (The Future of Work) pilot project

Gipuzkoako Foru Aldundia
Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa

ETORKIZUNA ORAIN
Es futuro

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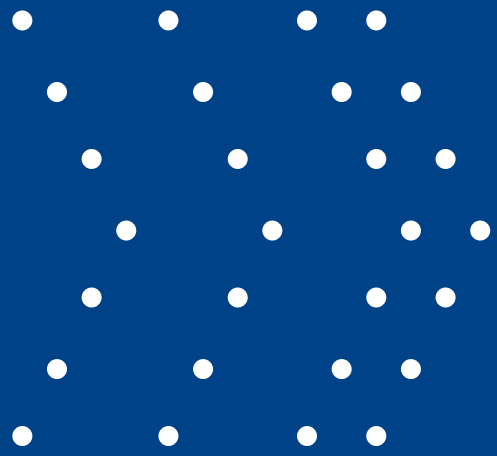


**Publication:**

Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa
Gipuzkoa plaza s/n.
20004 Donostia

**Publication Coordinator:**

The Future of Work
Deliberation Group

**Design and Layout:**

Adaki

**Legal Deposit:** D-1240-2022
**ISBN:** 978-84-7907-844-7

## PREAMBLE

**MARKEL OLANO ARRESE.**
***General Deputy (Head of Government) of Gipuzkoa***

Donostia-San Sebastián, 30 May 2022.

In her latest book, entitled *The Twilight of Democracy*, American writer Anne Applebaum warns that the democratic world is growing old, cold and tired. She says that the trend has become more pronounced in the last decade, since neither public institutions nor political agents are at their best moment in terms of legitimacy. We are experiencing democratic fatigue; citizens are increasingly distanced from democratic values and institutions; and to a great extent, the Covid-19 pandemic has only served to increase this alienation.

Even in the maelstrom of a complex and changing world, this situation should lead us to reinforce and experiment with new models for promoting public policies. It is a challenge we cannot avoid for those of us who believe in the need to reinforce democracy. For those of us who believe that it is necessary to make a firm, structural effort to bring politics closer to society. Empowering citizens and opening spaces for debate and decision making is an essential step for ensuring the future of democracy.

Gipuzkoa has an internationally recognised track record in this area, working hand in hand with a committed and dynamic civil society. In 2016 the Provincial Government launched the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** programme, aimed at creating a new political agenda for Gipuzkoa and developing its own model of collaborative governance. Since then, we have managed to bring together the most important agents in the province to promote transformative initiatives.

Five years after laying the foundations of **Etorkizuna Eraikiz**, it is now a very vital reality. There is no turning back; in this province, it has transformed the Provincial Government itself and the very relationship and form of government between the society of Gipuzkoa and the provincial institution.

As a sign of this vitality, over the last five years we have jointly promoted 125 citizen projects with the participation of more than 200 agents; 32 pilot projects in the areas of care, co-responsible reconciliation, equality and digitalisation, among others; nine strategic projects developed through an innovative model of collaborative governance to address the major challenges of our society, such as healthy aging, cybersecurity, new mobility, climate change, the future of language and integration of the most vulnerable members of society into the labour market.

Institutions, universities, third sector associations, companies and social and economic agents have managed to reach a consensus and develop a common agenda on the major problems and challenges facing the province. Almost 30,000 people have taken part in these dynamics and, together, we have configured our own model for jointly creation public policies. A model based on active experimentation, on the aim of creating a competitive economy and on the firm will to build a territory with less dispersion of social inequalities.

Collaborative governance, in my opinion, must pursue two fundamental objectives: on the one hand, the integration of organised society into the public policy deliberation process to make popular policies more democratic and effective. On the other hand, the incorporation of the citizen into the political community, favouring participation in deliberative processes.

When it comes to fulfilling these aims, the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank is carrying out fundamental work as a community space for reflection and experimentation that sets the course for the province as a whole. It has not addressed all areas of work, focusing on the economy and the work of the future, climate change and the green economy, the future of the welfare state and care models, and the new political culture. However, it has not only devoted its work to reflection and to generating advanced knowledge; it has also fostered cooperative

experimentation, as the participants have carried out collaborative initiatives to transform the territory.

For all these reasons, it has become a point of reference in our territory, as a collective beacon in the face of the uncertainty generated by the social and economic transformation, made even worse in today's turbulent world by the pandemic.

We live in a situation of immediacy, we are immersed in an individualistic society; in the political space (one need only look at the international stage), it seems that political action is guided by confrontation and short-termism. What we are proposing is the exact opposite; we want to agree on collective response processes, responding effectively to the challenges facing the province. **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** is the way we propose to channel this collective effort.

If we do not make progress in meeting this goal, then the consequences could be serious. If mutual trust between institutions and citizens cannot be restored, we could be facing a dark future. Without wishing to repeat the dichotomy raised in other fields, I believe that the fundamental debate of our times is this: democracy based on cooperation or authoritarianism. If we do not succeed in reinventing the foundations of our democracy and rebuilding bridges with society, then we will see the arrival of xenophobic populism and authoritarianism, and they will damage democracy and the very democratic coexistence between different people.

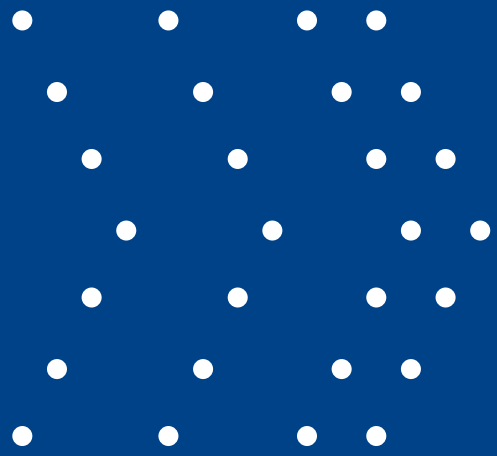
I would like to thank all the representatives and experts who have participated in the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank. My recognition and gratitude goes to them for having set multiple and valuable examples in the shared effort of working for the future of Gipuzkoa.

We must not stand still. Let us continue to work together for a better future, for a more just and democratic society. The Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa is sincerely committed to continuing with this endeavour. And we shall do so with humility, but putting all our effort into it. Thank you.

## CONTENTS

ETORKIZUNA
**ERAIKIZ**

— **Think Tank**
The Future of Work



## INTRODUCTION

In advanced industrialised societies, work occupies a peculiarly ambivalent position. On the one hand, it offers a means for personal development yet on the other, it is viewed as a burden and an obligation. Work can be a source of human expression, or an experience of oppressive degradation, from which we strive to escape as much and as often as possible. What leads us to attribute one meaning or another to our work? How does the sense of one meaning or the other affect our lives? And how does it affect society? Meaningfulness in work is a key element in fulfilling human beings' innate need to make sense of their lives. This is because work is central to our lives; we see ourselves as both working to live and living to work (Shershow, 2005). It would be a mistake to give up on viewing work as a space with the potential for personal growth and for achieving 'eudaimonia' (Aristotle's notion of the greatest well-being humans can attain, the result of the growth of their full potential). This 'sense of work' which will help to give meaning to life, is a concept that must be developed; It is neither received nor found, and obviously we are not born with it. According to Yeoman, (2014) our lives have the sense that we ourselves give them. How we develop that sense is our human contribution to the world.

This document is intended to act as a starting point to generate debate and reflection on the meaning of work and its contribution to the lives of individuals, organisations and society. It seeks to offer some guidelines that will allow managers of organisations and political action to orient their initiatives in such a way as to provide the contexts and resources that people require to develop this meaningfulness.

The text is structured in four parts. The first, entitled '**Etorkizuna Eraikiz**: Framework for Meaningful Work', explains the context in which this document is published: the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Gipuzkoa Taldean programme and more specifically, the think tank on the future of work. This section briefly sets out what **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** is, where the Think Tank on the future of work is positioned and the work being carried out by the think tank to contribute to the experimental project on the meaning of work (this document reflects the conceptual framework).

The second part of the paper, entitled simply 'Work', aims to briefly develop a more philosophical view of this notion. It is a concept that can have many different meanings, and to an important degree it conditions the range of initiatives that can be implemented through political action and/or in the context of the company/organisation. In other words, the philosophical basis of what is understood as work will condition initiatives for change that seek to encourage greater development of the meaning of work. To this end, this first part seeks to answer the following questions: What is work? What are the predominant definitions of work in today's society? In order to understand the definitions assigned to it today, the document briefly reviews how the concept of work has evolved in history. It therefore also seeks to answer the question: How has the meaning of work evolved over time?

The third part of the document, entitled 'The Meaning of Work', aims to narrow down the definition of meaningful work and provide theoretical frameworks that can guide the initiative within the context of the company/organisation. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: What is meaningful work? Why is it important? This section is more psychological than philosophical and attempts to delimit the concept of the meaning of work and understand to what extent the concept is important for people.

Finally, the fourth part of the document, entitled 'How to Favour the Development of Meaningful Work', tries to provide some guidelines for political action and/or for the organisation itself to take initiatives that will favour meaningful work in the context of the organisation. The guiding question for this section

is: How can people develop a sense of work in the context of the organisation? In seeking to answer this question, we have drawn on sources from two main disciplines, philosophy and psychology.

Finally, it is important to briefly explain the purpose and scope of this document. The document has been written with public policy makers and/or organisation leaders interested in the subject and willing to experiment. In other words, it is not intended to be a comprehensive academic work oriented towards academia. It is intended to be useful in guiding experimentation/ action within the context of the organisation. To this end, theories are selected and presented (with reference to the academic world) with the ultimate aim of guiding action/experimentation in the company.

With respect to the limitations of the text, it does not explore studies of the meaningfulness of work in unpaid jobs — those that Marx called 'reproductive'. Reproductive work is work that is normally carried out within the family sphere (housework, care of elderly relatives, children, etc.) mainly by women. It is unpaid and tends to be rendered invisible by society, although a section of society (for example the feminist movement) is trying to bring greater visibility to this type of work. Were we to include such work in our initiative, it would greatly widen our scope for action, and since it is necessary to limit our approach, this document focuses only on paid work (what Marx called 'productive' work).

Finally, it is possible that in many parts of the document the text suggests 'that managers can develop a sense of work' amongst the people in their organisations. This document is not intended to convey the idea that a manager can develop meaningfulness in work, but rather that he or she can 'foster the organisational conditions' that will allow people to develop meaningful work (on their own and by interacting with each other). Consequently, Section 6 is entitled 'How to Favour the Development of Meaningful Work' rather than 'How to Develop Meaningful Work'.

# CHAPTER 1

# **Etorkizuna Eraikiz:** framework for meaningful work

## GENERAL FRAMEWORK IN WHICH THIS DEVELOPMENT IS LOCATED: ETORKIZUNA ERAIKIZ

This document reports on one of the results of the deliberation group on the future work of the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank. However, this result cannot be understood without a broader understanding of the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** initiative more generally. This chapter will therefore provide a brief introduction to **Etorkizuna Eraikiz**.

**Etorkizuna Eraikiz** is a strategy of the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa for addressing the political agenda and the most relevant strategic challenges facing the province through collaborative governance.

From an open and participatory vision, the aim is to develop public policies with society in a shared manner. This strategy forces politicians to relearn and to abandon theory and bureaucracy and instead apply real solutions in real scenarios. It obliges us to take a new approach to the way we manage, with a new model of open and collaborative governance that involves organisations, companies, associations and universities working together towards a more egalitarian future for all. The Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa defines this strategy as follows:

'**Etorkizuna Eraikiz** is intended as a specific model for understanding, applying and representing open and collaborative governance, a way of 'making politics'. Its purpose is to work collectively to detect the future challenges facing the province of Gipuzkoa, design the best means of addressing them, experiment with possible responses in real contexts with the aid of different agents and apply the results to the ecosystem of the provincial government's public policies'.

**Etorkizuna Eraikiz** was born out of the idea that the way in which we tackle the magnitude of the demographic, economic, social and environmental challenges that society will have to face in the future will lay the foundations for the medium and long term social and economic model in Gipuzkoa.

**Etorkizuna Eraikiz** is based on four principles that give meaning to all its subsequent development:

1. **Institutional leadership:** The programme is promoted and led by the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa, which acts as the agent that proposes and finances it, as well as actively participating in its development. The Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa has shown its commitment to the programme not only by facilitating articulation and interaction between the different agents, but also by committing itself to ensuring that the various deliberative processes are linked to the development of the institution's public policies.

2. **Consistency with the Gipuzkoa model:** The programme is based on those characteristics of the territory that contribute to favouring its development. Gipuzkoa is a territory made up of very dynamic and advanced regions in terms of socioeconomic resources and infrastructures, with a dense fabric of voluntary associations. It is an example of the capacity and culture of participation and exchange that exists in the province.

3. **Open contexts for learning and experimentation:** The idea of open context entails involving a broad group of agents and agencies who give meaning to the cooperation processes and also shape the results that can be obtained. By its very nature, public-private collaboration involves interaction between different organisational cultures and experiences. It thus becomes a learning process.

4. **Generation of democracy, trust and public value.** The **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** programme, as a generator of democracy, trust and public value, must necessarily be placed above political partisanship. It must propose a model of administrative management and political governance capable not only of stimulating but also of stabilising a new relationship of cooperation and proximity between citizens, intermediate social agencies and public institutions.

**Etorkizuna Eraikiz** is built around three fundamental spaces: Gipuzkoa Taldean, Gipuzkoa Lab and the Centres of Reference.

1. **Gipuzkoa Taldean** is a space for active listening, for deliberation through the research-action methodology with the aim of influencing the public policy ecosystem, both in terms of the contents and of the forms and methodologies used in implementing the action. It consists of several different programmes: for example, the mission of this programme is —through collaborative governance— to co-generate transferable and applicable knowledge that will help to shape a new agenda and political culture to modernise the ecosystem (actors, contents and processes) of the Provincial Government's public policies.

2. **Gipuzkoa Lab:** This is the space where active experimentation projects are implemented to incorporate a new political agenda into the development of the Provincial Government's public policies. More than 40 experimental projects are underway, enabling experiments to be performed on different themes. Each project links three key players: civil society, universities and public administration.

3. **Etorkizuna Eraikiz Reference Centres:** these are public-private-social work spaces for strengthening certain sectors considered strategic for the future of the territory. Regardless of the legal formula, the reference centres are ways of institutionalising collaborative governance. The starting point for the Reference Centres is the strength of Gipuzkoa's society in addressing the strategic challenges facing the province. Through the RIS III smart specialisation strategy, the Basque Government sets out the fundamental guidelines that must be focused on in order to build the future of the Basque Country as a whole and Gipuzkoa more specifically. In line with the RIS III strategy, the Provincial Government of Gipuzkoa has decided to focus on strengthening certain sectors, taking into account the conditions and potential already existing in the territory. Within this line of work, the following centres of reference have been set up: MUBIL, ZIUR, ADINBERRI, NATURKLIMA, 2DEO, LABe, ARANTZAZULAB, BADALAB and Elkar-EKIN LANEAN.

Development of and experimentation with the Meaning of Work is framed within **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank Gipuzkoa Taldean. A think tank was developed and established to deliberate on the work of the future and to set up experimentation projects. This document is written within this overall context.

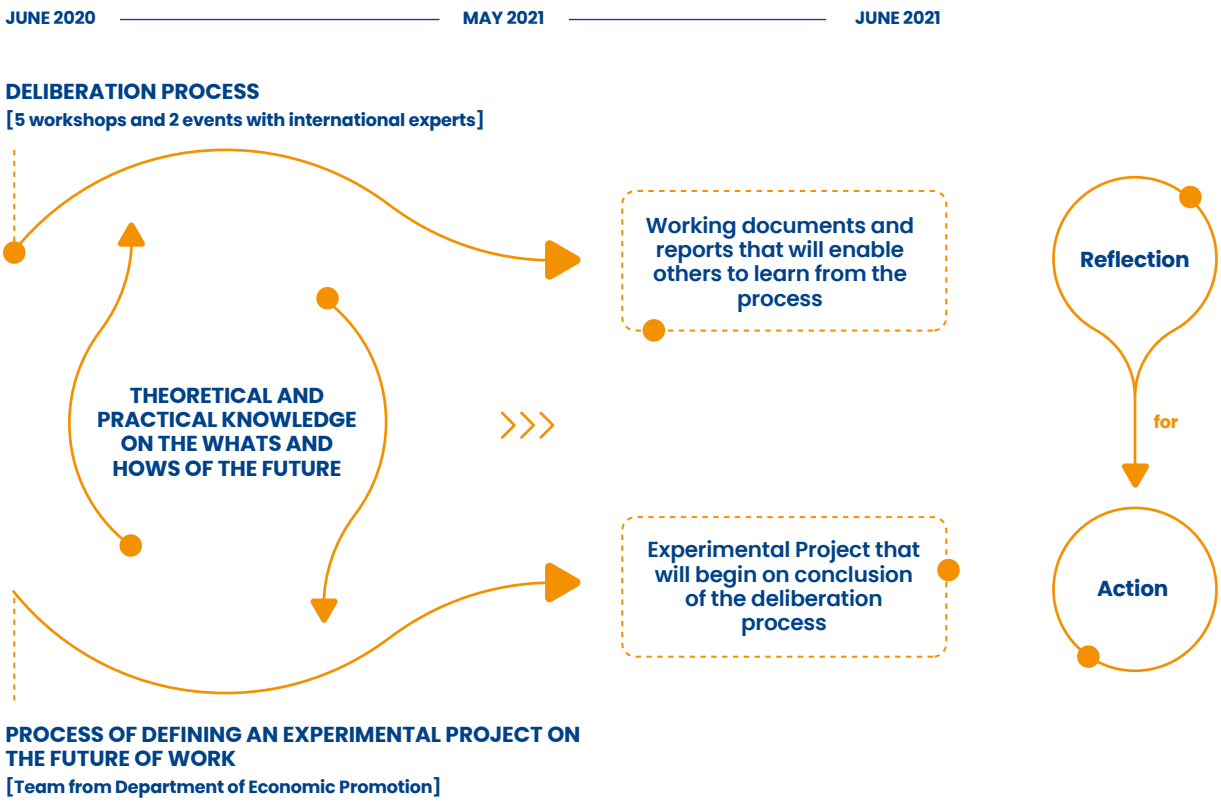
## THINK TANK ON THE FUTURE OF WORK

This section explains the deliberation process that drove the decision to address meaningfulness in work in the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank. The process began in June 2020 and ended in April 2021 with the presentation of an experimental project (on the meaning of work). To describe this deliberation process, we will highlight three issues: (i) the commitment of the Provincial Government, (ii) the design of the deliberation process and (iii) the agenda used.

a] *Commitment of the Provincial Government to promote deliberation and the consequent launch of an experimental project.* On 18 June 2020, the deliberation group on the work of the future met for the first time. Imanol Lasa presented the first working document setting out the bases of the process:

> 'In this context, it is necessary to initiate processes of experimentation that allow us to learn and lay the foundations for the future. However, prior to experimentation, it is important to set up a deliberative process to lay the groundwork for experimentation. The future of work will be influenced by very diverse phenomena that require business or political leaders from the field of competitiveness to integrate into their multidisciplinary frameworks reflections from such diverse fields as psychology, sociology, pedagogy, law and a range of areas linked to technology.
>
> The main goal of the deliberation group on the work of the future, operating within the framework of the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank, is to analyse the contributions that these areas can make to solving the challenges perceived in the field of business

*Figure 1*: **The Think Tank's deliberation process on the future of work**




and competitiveness in relation to the work of the future. The result of this analysis should be the prioritisation of a series of dimensions of the work of the future on which experimental processes can be initiated.'

b] *The process for linking the deliberation and design of the experimental project.* The group met again on 17 September and agreed on the process shown in the figure (see Figure 1). The process was designed around two main axes. On the one hand, the deliberation group, with the support of experts, would reflect on the work of the future and set out its views in working documents. Those working documents would also be used by the Department of Economic Promotion to define a pilot project. In addition, the Provincial Government envisaged organising two open events with international experts.

c] *Agenda of the deliberation process and contribution to the pilot project.* Based on these foundations, the deliberation process was developed over seven meetings. The table below shows how each session contributed to the experimental project and identifies the working documents that reflect this contribution (see Table 1).

At the end of this deliberation process, the last session of this phase of the Think Tank was held on April 15, 2021, during which the pilot project was presented. The overall goal of the pilot project was defined as follows:

> ***To generate knowledge to develop the meaning of work in the context of the company, with the aim of identifying and implementing policies that will in the near future help develop the meaning of work throughout the territory.***

*Table 1:* **Think Tank deliberation process through to definition of the experimental project**

| Date | Presenter | Results for experimentation | Work Doc |
|---|---|---|---|
| **18/06/2020** | Imanol Lasa | Within the framework of this contribution, commitments were made to share the deliberations of the Provincial Government and at the same time to define an experimental project | 0,1,2 |
| **17/09/2020** | José Luís Larrea | Based on a conceptual model sharing a broad agenda, priorities were established for deliberation | 3 |
| **15/10/2020** | Genís Roca | Future trends were introduced into the deliberation, addressing the impact they will have on the work environment in Gipuzkoa | 4 |
| **19/11/2020** | Iñigo Larrea | Within the framework of these trends, using an example, it was shown what companies in the territory can do in concrete terms. | 5 |
| **17/12/2020** | Charles Leadbeater | The focus was shifted away from business to analyse the role of government and establish the role that the Provincial Government should have in the project | 6 |
| **18/02/2021** | Javier Larrañaga | Taking all of the above into account, it was agreed to focus on experimenting on the meaning of work | 7.8 |
| **18/03/2021** | Pablo Costamagna | A systemic vision was brought to the process, situating the overall impacts previously addressed, the vision of the company and the role of government within the 'meso' level of the province. | 9 |

This general objective was subsequently broken down into sub-objectives:

1. Develop a conceptual framework on the Meaning of Work to serve as a basis for subsequent experimentation projects.

2. Develop a system of measurement to gauge the effectiveness of pilot projects (growth curves).

3. Develop pilot projects in six companies.

4. Define the methodology for an organisation to develop Meaningfulness in Work and draw up a map of available tools.

5. Synthesise the knowledge that can be used to define provincial policies.

This report presents the results of the first sub-objective. It proposes a conceptual framework for developing experimental projects on the Meaning of Work. It also offers theoretical references that will enable any organisation to understand meaningful work and define the different lines of work for developing it. The following sections explain the development of this conceptual framework of Meaningful Work.

# CHAPTER 2
## Work

### WHAT IS WORK?

This question has aroused much debate. The definition itself is conditioned by the meaning we attribute to it. It is a term with many definitions (and therefore many meanings). How one defines work probably says more about oneself than about the concept itself; depending on the discipline from which we examine it, the definitions tend to differ. For example, from an economic-business perspective, work is a means of creating value for society (Dupré & Gagnier, 1996). From a philosophical perspective it is a way of being in life, where work is a means of humanising the world and contributing positively to society (Yeoman, 2014). Viewed from the ambit of psychology, it is something that marks our identity, our way of being in life and it conditions to an important extent our well-being, our growth and even our way of seeing life (Baumeister, 1991). For those analysing work through the logic of class struggle, it is a source of oppression and degradation that needs to be combatted (Marx & Engels, 1930). For more spiritual people and viewed from the world of theology it is a human activity whose purpose is to build the Kingdom of God, a means of completing God's unfinished work (Lozano, 2011).

All these definitions denote different meanings or senses. However, the predominant meaning in society today is economic; work as an activity (of manual or intellectual origin) that is performed in exchange for financial compensation. Some authors argue that this perspective reduces work to a purely economic issue (Dupré & Gagnier, 1996; Voswinkel, 2020). However, it is a perspective that has been taking shape and gaining strength over several centuries (probably since Luther's Reformation).

The sense or meaning we attribute to work in the context of our lives is strongly conditioned by the 'frameworks of meaning' (also known as 'systems of meaning') that have developed socially and culturally (Martela & Pessi, 2018). These frameworks of meaning are defined as 'a complex web of propositions we hold about the way things are in the world' and they are cognitive tools we use to navigate and operate in everyday life.

These 'frameworks of meaning' have evolved throughout history and with them the notion of work. In order to understand how this evolution has taken place over time and how it has led to a predominantly economic perspective on labour, it is useful to review the history to find answer to questions such as: What significance has labour had in recent history? What milestones in history have contributed to its predominantly being attributed an economic sense?

### HOW HAS ITS SIGNIFICANCE EVOLVED IN HISTORY?

In ancient Greece, work was seen as a punishment. The ideal individual, as envisaged by Plato and Aristotle, was one who was not subject to necessity and therefore did not need to work, unlike craftspeople and slaves (Cerdà, 2017). Humans were rational beings whose purpose was to develop that reason that makes them persons and makes them similar to the gods. Work is a punishment, as represented in the myth of Sisyphus, condemned forever to roll a stone uphill, in a constant, futile effort.

In the Middle Ages, individuals voluntarily accepted servitude to their feudal lord, because, for those from humble backgrounds, it was not always desirable

to be free. Again, those who worked were on the lowest rung of the social ladder. The word for work in Spanish (*trabajo*) has its roots in 'tripalium', an instrument of punishment / torture; the word itself denotes discomfort, burden, suffering and humiliation (Azurmendi, 1984). Individual profit was frowned upon; individuals working for their own profit through trade were condemned by the church. Work had a religious aspect; it was seen as a means to absolution rather than as a means of progress (Rosso et al., 2010).

With the coming of the Reformation, the first steps were taken towards the capitalist system (Cerdà, 2017). Calvin and Luther proposed the ascetic ideal of the active life around work. Seen from this perspective, people are born with sin and can only seek God through work. Work is thus an ideal means of disciplining human passions. Wealth began to be seen as a sign of doing one's job well.

During the Enlightenment, Mandeville proposed that the unfettered selfishness of each individual would positively intervene for the benefit of the community. He argued that society has a necessary structural inequality; that workers are excluded from self-esteem and therefore cannot find fulfilment as individuals. The liberal class was to remain focused on private interest, while the working classes were to engage in manual labour. Countering this idea of the worker lacking in self-esteem, Helvetius proposed the concept of work motivated by self-interest (Cerdà, 2017). Individual are passionate beings. They are passionate because they have interests, and this interest can be an indispensable motor for (i) shaking off their idleness and (ii) developing great social purposes. Helvetius wanted to reclaim the passionate behaviours of the individual to give work meaning for its own sake. In general, and despite the differences between various authors, work tended to be extolled as a necessary condition for a happy life. In our day-to-day lives, we want to find what makes us happy, what gives meaning to our existence.

The Industrial Revolution saw the birth of the proletariat. Artisans gained in status over wage earners (because they were free and were less threatened by penury). Marx developed and coined the concept of 'alienated labour' for those who do not own what they do and therefore cannot find any meaning in work (Gros, 2016). From this perspective, workers only feel that they are themselves outside their jobs, and therefore work cannot be voluntary but must be mandated. For this reason, he advocated political change to eliminate class (Marx & Engels, 1930). Marx never renounced work itself; work is an essential place for the fulfilment of the individual; human beings transform their natural and social environment while shaping themselves and becoming fully aware of their powers and qualities. However, this will only be possible when the work is 'non-alienating'.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Frederick W. Taylor set out his proposals on the scientific organisation of labour, which were later implemented with great success by Henry Ford. It is not the purpose of this document to detail Taylor's proposals, but it is important to highlight the motivations that led him to make them. For Taylor, the problem with the industry of his time was that it was in the hands of the workers. Because the workers avoided working, they did not encourage industrial production and efficiency. Under these conditions (with knowledge residing in the workers) the accumulation of capital pursued by the employer depended on the workers and the 'workers' resistance' was in a position of power. The challenge was to 'overcome the obstacle of the journeyman' (Cerdà, 2017). His solution was to propose dividing labour both horizontally (into small routine impoverished tasks) and vertically (leaving the planning/management in the hands of some and the execution in others). The primary motivational element he proposed was retribution: the greater the pay, the greater the motivation, since it was assumed that in a context of need, workers would seek to 'free themselves' from these needs through higher pay. The worker is asked (in exchange for a salary) to pursue (blindly and without the option of participating) the ends that others have chosen, using the means that others have deemed appropriate. This 'division' of labour led to a simplification and impoverishment of work. This had two notable consequences (among others): (i) it was possible to dispense with craftspeople, and (ii) unskilled people could also be employed in industry. The productivity gains obtained allowed the economy to develop. However, this scientific organisation has had an important social cost; for many years, it has removed people's autonomy through a process of deskilling (Yeoman, 2014). Workers do not 'control' their work; instead their function is reduced to that of a mere 'resource' without being 'owners of their work'. In this context, the scope for the development of a person's sense of work is significantly limited. The meaning of work is mainly reduced to a mere economic issue.

In contrast to the industrial model proposed by Taylor, authors such as Ruskin and Morris championed the value of artisan work (Cerdà, 2017). They refused to accept the division of labour because it 'fragments people'. According to them, only through work that has both an intellectual and manual part (as opposed to the vertical

division proposed by Taylor that separates thought from action) can a full and meaningful life be achieved. The artisan is free, intelligent and creative, in keeping with their free human labour, unlike the dehumanising work of industrial capitalism (Yeoman, 2014).

These alternative approaches to the scientific organisation of work have not had any major practical implementation. The success of Taylor's proposals in industry has been undeniable. The scientific organisation of work has been developed in standardised manual production (where it leads to gains in productivity) to such a degree that it has extended beyond industry and is nowadays the primary model of business organisation. This organisation of work stands within an economic system that favours the values of capital accumulation, competition and individual responsibility (over solidarity, cooperation and social responsibility). In this context, work has a largely reductionist meaning; workers exchange their time, skills and effort for a remuneration that allows them to live as decently as possible. However, labour thus configured is reduced to a mere commodity, devoid of dignity (Azurmendi, 1984). This reductionist perspective of work as a commodity does not offer many possibilities for developing meaning in work and to respond to the innate need of human beings to give meaning to their lives. The consequence is that individuals bring meaning to their lives outside work (in leisure, family, volunteer work, etc.) and tend to minimise the time, contribution and energy they expend at work.

## WORK AND THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT IN GIPUZKOA

This reduction of work to a simple economic dimension met with a counterproposal in Gipuzkoa. The cooperative movement that arose in the second half of the twentieth century was based on a different perspective on work, which promoted (with greater or lesser success) a different sense of work. It is worth briefly discussing this perspective given the importance of this cooperative movement in Gipuzkoa as compared to other regions of Europe. According to Azurmendi (1984), the cooperative movement in Gipuzkoa was mainly inspired by three sources:

i. Christian theology, which defines work (according to the Second Vatican Council) as a human activity intended to continue God's unfinished labour. In this perspective, humans are God's co-creators. According to Arizmendiarrieta, God turns human beings into 'partners of his own enterprise'. Therefore, work should not be viewed as a punishment imposed by God on humans. On the contrary, work is as a divine provision whereby people can achieve well-being (Ortega, 2021).

ii. The philosophy of Hegel and Marx. Hegel proposes that work makes the individual a subject; this is where he finds himself (freeing himself from the chains of nature), and sees himself reflected and recognised as an individual (Gros, 2016). Marx follows Hegel's logic, with the qualification that this form of labour must be non-alienating.

iii. In personalist philosophy (mainly Mounier), which sought formulas (in Gipuzkoa, this would be translated into the cooperative formula) as an alternative to the two dominant socio-cultural currents of the twentieth century, (i) 'egocentric individualism reinforced by capitalism' and (ii) 'collectivism that subordinated the value of the individual to his or her adherence to collective projects such as the triumph of a race or revolution' (Azurmendi, 1984). In contrast to the former, this approach emphasised the need for interpersonal relationships and solidarity; in contrast to the latter, it stressed the absolute value of each individual, regardless of his or her qualities.

Arising out of all these sources, the co-operative movement (in Gipuzkoa) proposed viewing work as a means of dignifying people, allowing them to grow and develop. In this perspective, work is a means of self-improvement and self-realisation (Ortega, 2021) and above all a means by which the individual will be free and therefore dignified, since there is no human dignity without freedom; the individual will be emancipated through work. This view of work as a source of freedom and dignity contrasts with the critique of the traditional view of 'work as a commodity in the service of capital' (Azurmendi, 1984). Arizmendiarrieta stressed that capital should be an instrumental factor, subordinate to labour; This is a key basic principle of the cooperative movement in Gipuzkoa: labour stands above capital. Thus, in the cooperative perspective, work is a vehicle for being free, transforming society and contributing to the common good, and capital is an instrument at its service.

From this viewpoint, it is not work that is painful, but its actual organisation and structuring. An organisation where there is no participation is an organisation that is not in keeping with the demands of human dignity. For

this reason, the promoters of the cooperative movement in Gipuzkoa ended up opting for the legal formula of the cooperative firm as the one that best matched these principles of freedom, dignity, self-fulfilment and transformation of society. Over time, as the cooperative movement has grown, it has become permeable to the prevailing influences of society where values such as community and solidarity may be growing weaker in the face of individualism and competition. In addition, as cooperatives have grown, they have successfully implemented the practices of scientific organisation of work in order to become more competitive in an increasingly globalised market. To what extent is this form of organisation and management (coupled with the currents of values in today's society) eroding the sense of work on which the cooperative movement was built? It is undeniable that the meaning of work in the cooperative movement is influenced by prevailing social and cultural trends (e.g. the primacy of capital, individualism, etc.) and that this influence is being felt ever more strongly as cooperatives grow larger and larger (because as they grow they become ever more open to the social trends of their surroundings). However, it is important to note that there is a debate on principles as to what work means within the cooperative movement and other ways of understanding business.

# CHAPTER 3
## Meaningfulness Of Work

### SENSE-MAKING: A HUMAN NEED

Different disciplines such as psychology (Baumeister, 1991) and moral philosophy (Wolf, 2010) defend the idea that the desire to make sense of life is a universal human motivation. Human beings need to feel that their lives are worth living. This does not mean that the search for meaning has to be an exclusive matter of the individual, since to a great extent the social context in which the individual is situated conditions the 'resources' available to him/her in developing meaning (Yeoman, 2014).

Given the importance and centrality of work in our lives today, work is one of the great domains in which to develop a sense that meets that need to find meaning in life (Martela & Pessi, 2018). Work is an important avenue for the development and exercise of human capabilities and skills. It can instil virtues such as honour, pride, dignity and self-respect. It can therefore be a very important way of developing a sense of work and contributing to the growth and development of the human being (Veltman, 2015). A person who finds meaning in their work will most likely find meaning in life and fulfil a basic human need, an innate impulse. As an indication of the need and interest people have in developing meaning at work, studies by Hu and Hirsh (2017) show that people are willing to accept 30% lower pay for meaningful work.

This perspective of work as a central element in the life of the individual to meet the need for meaning in life is refuted in the pluralistic perspective of values. From this perspective, the individual could have an alienating job (in which he/she finds no meaning) and satisfy the need for meaning in life through sources other than work (e.g. leisure). Seeking meaning in work, it is argued, is not an indispensable element for a meaningful life because in liberal democratic societies, individuals should be free to choose the sources of value and meaning in their lives (and their work may not be one of them). In this logic it is assumed that (meaningless) work does not impact negatively on individuals' lives as long as they have a space outside work (e.g. leisure) where they can feel fulfilled. However, work is a much more influential and important sphere in people's lives than, for example, leisure, for several reasons (Veltman, 2015). Firstly, because repetitive and routine jobs have been shown to harm the individual by making them less intelligent and competent (Yeoman, 2014). Secondly, because the mere existence of meaningless (e.g., routine and repetitive) jobs in society stifles and frustrates the growth potential of, for example, young people who study to work in such jobs. And thirdly, because it is mostly work (and not leisure) that 'positively connects us, as contributors, to the wider social world' (Veltman, 2015) thus improving both self-esteem and social recognition. Therefore, finding meaning in work should be a higher priority than developing meaning in other areas of life, such as leisure.

Within the logic of philosophy, psychology and business ethics, it is a moral obligation of those in charge (of business and society) to help people find meaning in work (Martela & Pessi, 2018). To this end, it is important to ensure that jobs are designed in such a way that they have a 'minimum structure for meaning', and that the company and society are organised in such a way as to offer the component individuals a context / plurality of options that allow them to develop the meaning of work (Yeoman, 2014).

It is probably not possible to provide all jobs with a minimum structure that will enable the work to be meaningful. The idea that everyone can have access to a job with a minimum structure for meaning is possibly utopic (Veltman, 2015). However, this does not mean that it is not worth trying, since there is great potential for improvement. Yeoman (2014) suggests that even the most alienating (impoverished, repetitive and routine) jobs have a potential path for improvement in terms of meaningfulness. For example,

ethnographic studies of what people actually do when they work provide significant evidence that, even in very impoverished and routine job conditions, workers are motivated to seek autonomous expression in their working activities, regardless of rewards such as status or pay (Yeoman, 2014). That is, even in the most alienating working conditions, people seek meaning in work because it is an innate desire (or drive).

## DEFINITION: WHAT IS 'MEANINGFUL WORK'?

Although the concept may seem intuitive, it is not easy to define. In English, two terms are used that should be distinguished from one another (Allan et al., 2019; Rosso et al., 2010): (i) 'meaning' and (ii) 'meaningfulness'. The first refers to the type of meaning that individuals attribute to work in the context of their lives. The meaning of work can be negative ('work is oppression'), neutral ('it is a pay check') or positive ('work is a space in which I can develop'). However, the fact that the work has a certain meaning does not necessarily mean that it is meaningful. Meaningfulness refers to the amount of (positive) meaning the work has for the individual; it always has a positive valence. When people perceive a negative meaning (e.g. 'work is oppressive'), they feel that their work is meaningless or not meaningful. In contrast, when they perceive a positive meaning (e.g. 'work is a calling'), they feel that their work is meaningful. In short, in all cases there is 'meaning' (of one type or another, positive or negative) but only in some cases is there a perception of 'meaningful' work. (In this document, the term '*sentido del trabajo*' is used in the sense of meaningfulness. When reference is made to the meaning of work, it is in terms of 'meaningful work'.) We will not enter into the debate of what kind of meaning people attribute to work (what 'meaning' they attribute) but instead discuss the extent to which they find that work meaningful). Therefore, the more sense people perceive, the better (regardless of the type of sense).

Martela's review of the state of the art found thirty-two different definitions of meaningful work' (Martela & Pessi, 2018). One of the oldest definitions, for instance is: 'The degree to which the individual experiences the job as one which is generally meaningful, valuable, and worthwhile' (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). From their review of the thirty-two definitions, Martela and Pessi conclude that meaningful work contains the following three dimensions: (i) significance, (ii) broader purpose, and (iii) self-realisation. They propose that the 'significance' dimension is in general terms the overall measure of the meaningfulness of work and that 'purpose' and 'self-realisation' are two sub-dimensions that contribute to augmenting that meaningfulness (see Figure 2).

The 'Significance' dimension provides a measure of the level of meaningfulness of the work (see grey cloud at Figure 2). In other words, the meaningfulness of work is the amount of 'significance' that people believe their work has (Martela & Pessi, 2018). 'Significance' means whether or not the work has some intrinsic value. It is the individual's general judgment as to whether or not the work has value (Allan et al., 2019), their judgment of whether or not it is worth committing to. For example, an individual may hold certain values but feel that their work is no aligned

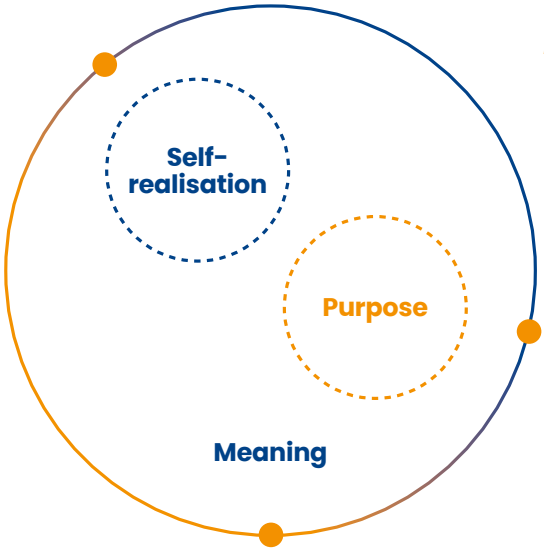



*Figure 2*: **Definition of meaningfulness in work**

with (or does not satisfy) any of these values. In these cases the work will have no meaningfulness; work will be a means of subsistence and the individual will seek to develop his or her interests outside work. It is therefore an overall assessment of the value of one's work.

'Beneficence', on the other hand, is related to the idea of whether the work is something 'something bigger'; something beyond individual benefit. It has to do with transcendence (Rosso et al., 2010). Beneficence is oriented toward others rather than the self and arises as a result of participating in building (or contributing) something of shared value with others. Beneficence can take many different forms; for example when it helps others (e.g. customers), relieves suffering, removes difficulties from society, reduces risks of tedious work, makes someone happier or healthier or when it contributes to the intellectual enrichment of others (Yeoman, 2014). For example, one may feel that through work one is contributing to the prosperity of one's family (especially in situations where work is precarious and/or income is low). In this context, even in cases where the work is tedious and repetitive, the work can have a very clear purpose and contribute positively to meaningfulness. Having beneficence at work means believing that one is capable of having a positive impact (through work) on society (towards others).

Finally, 'Self-realisation' has to do with the extent to which we are able to realise and express ourselves through our work. It measures the extent to which work satisfies the needs, motivations and desires associated with the individual's self-realisation (Lepisto & Pratt, 2017). In contrast, there are alienating jobs; those that have been designed with narrow and restrictive working conditions leading to a sense of disconnection from work. When one feels like a simple 'cog in a machine', doing something repetitive with no possibility of influencing the content of one's work and constantly controlled by some authority, one may consider that the work is not worthwhile, even if it is well paid and has a noble purpose.

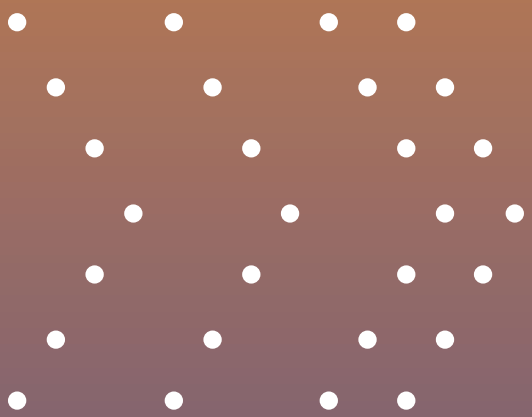
Beneficence and self-realisation are two important sub-dimensions that contribute to the significance (and therefore the meaningfulness) of the work. They complement one another, since Beneficence is related to 'others' while Self-Realisation is related to 'oneself' (Martela & Pessi, 2018).

## CONSEQUENCES: HOW DOES THE MEANINGFULNESS OF WORK INFLUENCE PEOPLE?

The degree of meaningfulness of work perceived by individuals has significant consequences at three different levels: (i) the individual, (ii) the organisation and (iii) society. Regarding the effect at the individual level, there are empirical studies that show that the perceived meaningfulness of work affects both physical and mental health. For example, Kornhauser (1965) concluded that when people work for a long time on tasks that offer little meaning (e.g., routine and repetitive tasks), workers' ambition, initiative, and orientation toward their life goals are extinguished. Separately, the Whitehall I and II studies showed that jobs without a minimal structure for meaning, such as lack of control at work, were associated with an increase in heart disease among government office workers (Bosma et al., 1997).

At an organisational level, meaningful work has been empirically demonstrated to have a relationship with individual indicators such as motivation (Hackman & Oldham, 1976), absenteeism (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997), individual performance (Allan et al., 2019) and well-being (Kahn, 2007). This is therefore an issue that has a direct impact both on the well-being of individuals (and by extension on society) and on key organisational performance indicators.

Finally, with respect to the effect of meaningful work at the level of society, it should be noted that insofar as a lack of meaning affects the individual, it ends up affecting society. The ill-effects of meaningless work undermine the individual's sense of efficacy, self-esteem and self-worth. This, in turn, erodes their 'position in relation to others in society' thus limiting their ability to act with others in society.



# CHAPTER 4
## How to favour the development of meaningful work

### THE OBJECTIVE AND SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION

From a position of moral philosophy, Wolf (2010) proposes that for people to develop meaningful work, two dimensions must be integrated: (i) the objective dimension, and (ii) the subjective dimension He calls this model the 'Bipartite Value of Meaningfulness' (BVM). The two dimensions are briefly developed below:

- The objective dimension: refers to the fact that work must be configured in such a way that it contains a minimum structure for meaning (in terms of autonomy, freedom and social recognition). A job that has no social recognition and is configured without any autonomy on the part of the person does not offer the minimum conditions for people to develop meaning. For example, impoverished, repetitive labour —what Marx called alienating work— does not meet the objective conditions because it does not have a minimum autonomy of labour (Yeoman, 2014). On the other hand, certain jobs that are necessary and have an important social purpose, such as sanitation and garbage collection, may not meet this objective dimension due to a lack of social recognition. A lack of social recognition can cause workers to lack self-esteem and even feel stigmatised and see themselves as being inferior in society (Veltman, 2015).

- The subjective dimension: there is variability in what a person considers to be of value or meaningful. Therefore, sense-making ultimately involves an exercise of 'subjective judgment'. The extent to which different people experience the same work as being meaningful (or having sense) will differ depending on their values, beliefs, motivations and personality (Smids et al., 2020). For example, in the case of jobs that meet the objective conditions for meaningfulness (they have value, a social purpose, social recognition, autonomy and freedom at work, etc.) there may be people who do not subjectively value such work and therefore do not attribute meaning to it.

Wolf stresses that both dimensions are needed for meaningful work to develop: 'meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness' (Wolf, 2010). Ultimately, meaningfulness of work is the individual's subjective interpretation. However, for such subjective interpretation to take place, the work must have a minimum 'objective structure' for people to develop a sense of meaning to their work, for example, in the myth of Sisyphus, if a drug were to be inoculated that made Sisyphus find meaning in his work of rolling a stone uphill. Their efforts are objectively useless and despite feeling that work is meaningful (subjective satisfaction) it is not the solution sought in the realm of meaningful work (Yeoman, 2014).

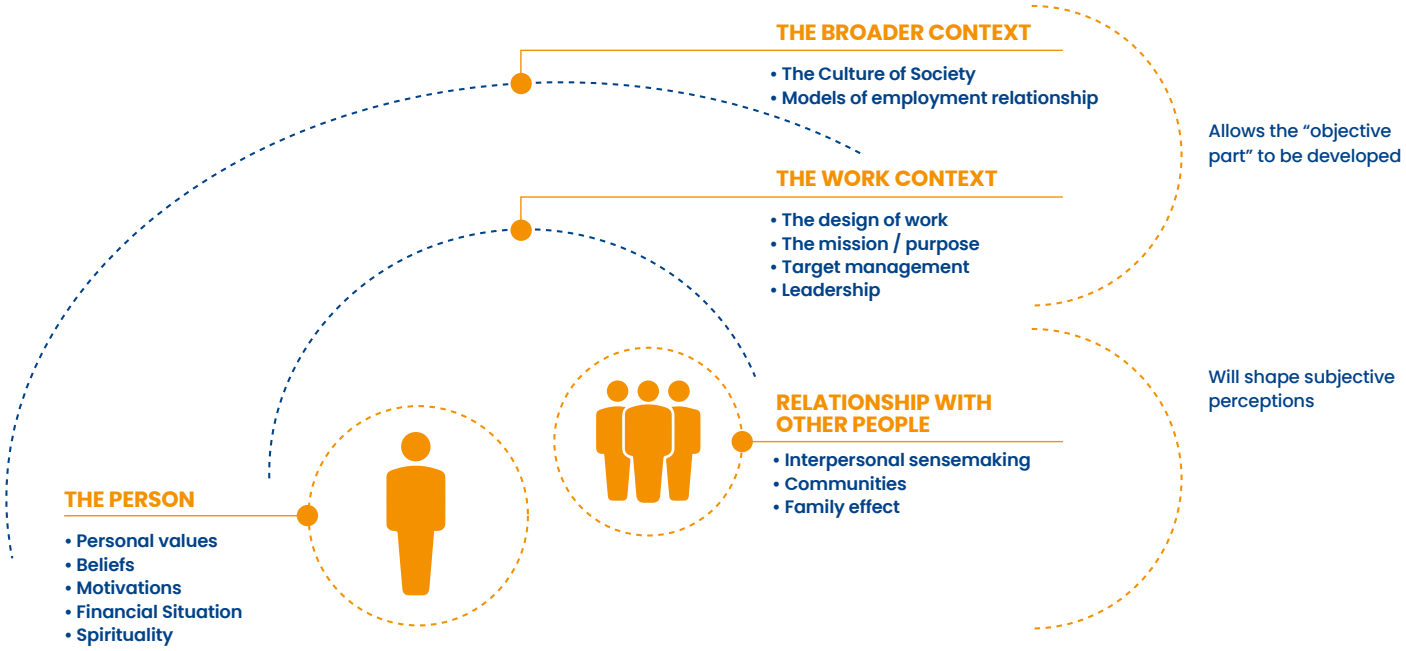
For the 'objective' and 'subjective' dimensions to develop within an organisation, it is necessary to take into account different 'sources' of intervention. These sources are developed below.

### SOURCES: WHAT LINES OF WORK EXIST TO DEVELOP MEANING?

Rosso *et al.* (2010) propose several 'sources for the meaning of work': (i) the self, (ii) the relationship with other persons, (iii) the work context and (iv) spiritual life. The sense of work that people attribute to work is a combination of these sources.

- **The 'self'** refers to how one's values, motivations and beliefs influence one's perception of the meaning of

*Figure 3*: **Sources that condition the meaning of work**




work. Although Rosso *et al.* classify spiritual life as a different section, in this report, we consider it to be an inherent part of the self. Therefore, both sources (self and spiritual life) fall within the sphere of the 'self'.

- **'Relatedness':** refers to the way in which co-workers influence one's interpretations of the meaning of one's work through a collective process of meaning attribution (which occurs through mutual conversations). For example, the profession one belongs to or the 'tribe' one feels part of within the organisation condition the development of meaning.

- **The 'working environment':** this is the context in which the work is performed (the design of the work and the organisation, the purpose of the organisation, the behaviour of the leaders, etc).

Each of these 'sources' of meaning can be classified as 'objective' or 'subjective' as discussed above. The source of intervention called 'work context' allows the development of the 'objective' dimension of the 'Bipartite Value of Meaningfulness' (BVM). It is the responsibility of the organisation's managers to develop this organisational 'context' and to do so in a way that provides a 'minimum objective structure' for meaning to develop. It therefore entails the development of the 'objective' dimension of BVM by the organisation's managers. One example of developing the work context is to address the design of work (level of autonomy, information shared in day-to-day operations) or the degree of participation in important organisational decisions.

On the other hand, the sources of 'the person' and 'relationships with other persons' will shape the 'subjective' perceptions of the BVM. This 'subjective' dimension of work is constructed both individually and socially. The literature uses a predominantly individual approach, assuming that meaning arises from people's subjective perceptions of their work (Rosso et al., 2010). These subjective perceptions will differ among individuals

who have different values, beliefs and motivations. This perspective is that of psychology. However, sense is also constructed in interaction with other people and in a given social and cultural system. Sense is attributed to events that occur at work in interaction with colleagues and within a value system (the prevailing system in the organisation and society). This is the perspective of sociology. People attribute greater or lesser meaning to work by combining the two 'levels': (i) from their 'self' ('person'; field of psychology) and (ii) in interaction or relationship with other people (field of sociology).

Figure 3 shows in graph form the different 'sources' of the meaning of work. The 'context' responds predominantly to the 'objective' dimension while the self and relationships with others correspond to the 'subjective' part'.

The 'Bipartite Value of Meaningfulness' proposes that both dimensions (objective and subjective) are needed to develop a sense of work). Therefore, any intervention to favour meaningful work should combine initiatives related to the 'context of work' (the objective part; creating organisational contexts with an 'objective minimum structure for meaning') on the one hand, and on the other, initiatives in the areas of 'the self' and 'relationships with other people' (to encourage the self and group interactions to contribute to the development of subjective interpretations that favour meaningful work).

What specific initiatives should be developed at the source of the 'organisational context' to provide a 'minimum objective structure' for people to develop meaning? What requirements must be met in the 'self' source for meaningful work to be developed? In order to provide the best possible guidance to the company, the following section develops in greater detail the specific initiatives that the organisation can develop at the level of 'organisational context' and the minimum requirements that need to be put in place to enable the 'self' to attribute meaning to work.

## FOUR BASIC NEEDS THAT TRANSLATE INTO FOUR LEVERS

Martela et al. (2021) propose four basic levers of action to be promoted in the organisation: autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence. These levers are based on Self-Determination Theory - SDT - (Chen et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000), the theoretical proposal developed by Rosso et al. (2010) and on the operationalisation of meaningful work developed by Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012). On the one hand, Self-Determination Theory proposes three levers of intervention (autonomy, competence and relatedness) to which a fourth lever is added, corresponding to the dimension of beneficence(Martela & Ryan, 2016), due to its importance to the meaningfulness of work. This correspondence of concepts is summarised in Table 2. Each of these concepts is briefly developed below:

**Autonomy:** As shown in Table 2 this lever corresponds to the 'self-connection' in the theoretical framework of Rosso et al. (2010) and 'developing and becoming self' by Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012). It is defined as the experience of self-determination, of volition as opposed to feeling constrained, limited and controlled (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When people have a sense of ownership over their work, feel in control of it, make decisions, express their self through their work and feel connected to their self (authenticity) they are self-realised and contribute positively to the meaning of work.

**Competence:** this lever corresponds to 'Individuation', in the theoretical framework of Rosso et al. (2010) and 'Expressing full potential' in Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012). It is defined as feeling capable of achieving the proposed results; feeling effective in achieving what one is pursuing (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This dimension may also be an important predictor of meaningfulness of work. Having a high sense of mastery and effectiveness at work can make work feel personally meaningful, as individuals feel they are able to make an impact through their work (Martela et al., 2021).

**Relatedness**: this lever corresponds to 'Unification' in Rosso et al. (2010) and 'Unity to others' in Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012). It refers to the experience of intimacy and genuine connection with others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The relationship with others and feeling part of the group (connected to it) is considered an important element of the meaning of work (Rosso et al., 2010).

**Beneficence:** Rosso et al. (2010) define it as 'Contribution' while Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012) define it as 'Serving others'. It has to do with the feeling that one is contributing positively to the lives of other people, a feeling typically arising when one is engaging in prosocial behaviour (Martela & Ryan, 2016). Many researchers have argued that contributing to others could be a crucial part of what makes work meaningful (Bailey et al., 2019).

According to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and its adaptation to the field of work sense (Martela et al., 2021; Martela & Riekki, 2018), these four levers are actually 'innate basic needs' of the individual. Meeting these basic

needs will help people to find meaning in their work and will promote intrinsic motivation. They are called innate basic needs because research is showing that they are universal needs producing a positive effect on the well-being and intrinsic motivation of people, regardless of the cultural context and the individual characteristics of the people (p.ej. Chen et al., 2015). When people feel that some of these basic needs are not met, there is a lack of sense of work, intrinsic motivation and well-being. In the absence of a sense of work and intrinsic motivation, the organisation will be forced to implement mechanisms of extrinsic motivation (e.g. incentives, higher salaries). In turn, the lack of a sense of work and intrinsic motivation will foreseeably lead to higher absenteeism and staff turnover, which will have a negative impact on the competitiveness/sustainability of the organisation.

Two of the levers (or basic needs) are aimed at the 'self' (the development of capabilities and self-realisation), while two other levers/needs target 'contributing to others' (see Table 2). This balance between actions for oneself and actions that contribute to others is central to the literature on meaningful work (Bailey et al., 2019).

The four levers (or basic needs) are independent of one another, that is, all four will contribute uniquely to the meaningfulness of work and do so through three different mechanisms. A mechanism is understood as the theoretical explanation that describes how and why the levers produce an effect on the sense of work. All three mechanisms are shown in Figure 4. Autonomy and competence have a positive effect on the meaningfulness of work according to self-efficacy theory. Beneficence will contribute positively to the meaning of the work, according to beneficence theory. Finally, relatedness will contribute positively to the sense of work according to belongingness theory.

Each of these theories is enlarged upon briefly below:

**Mechanism 1: Self-efficacy**. This is defined as individuals' belief that they have the power and ability to produce a desired effect or to make a difference (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). This theory explains the positive effect of autonomy in the sense of work (Rosso et al., 2010): When people feel free to choose and manage their own activities effectively, they behave proactively, have the feeling that

*Table 2:* **Theories guiding proposals for organisational action**

| **Theoretical proposal** | Self-Determination Theory (SDT) | Four Pathways for Meaningful work | Lips-Wiersema for meaningful work |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Reference** | (Ryan & Deci, 2000) | (Rosso et al., 2010) | (Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012) |
| **Self-oriented** | Autonomy | Control/Autonomy (Self-connection) | Developing and becoming self |
| | Competition | Competition (Individuation) | Developing / expressing capacities (Expressing full potential) |
| **Oriented to others** | Relatedness | Social identification; Belongingness (Unification) | Unity to others |
| | | Purpose (Contribution) | Serving others |

*Figure 4*: **Four proposals for developing meaningful work**


they are 'in control of their destiny' and thus their work becomes more meaningful. Self-efficacy theory also explains how competence contributes positively to the meaningfulness of work (Rosso et al., 2010): When people feel that they learn, grow and feel more competent, this feeling of competence contributes positively to the sense of work. Autonomy and competence combined with each other can make people feel that what they do has an (important) impact on the organisation and among their peers, contributing positively to the individual's sense of self-realisation (and by extension to the meaningfulness of their work).

**Mechanism 2: Purpose.** In this paper, purpose (or beneficence has been defined as a sub-dimension of meaningful work (Martela & Pessi, 2018). However, it can also be seen as a mechanism that contributes to improving the meaningfulness of work (Rosso et al., 2010). It is defined in several ways; as a sense of direction and intentionality in life; as something beyond oneself (Martela & Pessi, 2018). It contributes to the development of meaning by connecting present actions with future states or desires. Having a purposeful job means that you feel you are able to have a positive impact on the wider world through your work. For example, a person who perceives that their work is important to society, to a customer, to other colleagues, or to their community is likely to perceive the work as meaningful and serving a greater purpose, and therefore their work will be meaningful.

Organisations that promote clear missions provide employees with a value system that fosters the development of meaningfulness (Bartlett & Goshal, 2002). Three conditions must be met for the company to be able to offer people a purposeful context that contributes to giving work a meaning (Lleo et al., 2021): (i) clearly define the purpose (Collins & Porras, 1996) through a simple four-word formulation in the style of think tanks, (ii) implement (Cardona & Rey, 2006) through a display of purposes and their linkage with specific objectives, and (iii) internalise the purpose (through initiatives for participation in the creation of 'spaces' for review/discussion, etc.).

**Mechanism 3: Belonging.** This is defined as a pervasive human drive to form and maintain a minimum number of lasting, positive and meaningful interpersonal relationships. A range of research suggests that belonging to, identifying with, and feeling connected to social groups through work can provide individuals with meaning by helping them experience a positive sense of common identity, destiny, or shared humanity with others (Rosso et al., 2010). This identification with the group is especially strong when the individual feels that the group to which he or she belongs is very different from other groups.

## THE FOUR LEVERS IN ACTION

The proposal to combine the 'objective' and 'subjective' dimensions (based on the 'Bipartite Value of Meaningfulness') together with the proposal to develop four levers gives rise to the conceptual framework summarised below. Figure 5 shows the work proposal in graph form. This figure suggests that initiatives have to be taken at an organisational level, with the aim of providing a 'minimum objective structure' for meaning. The organisation will have several strategic challenges to develop (automation, digitalisation, innovation, efficiency improvement, etc). To develop them, the organisation will be designed in a certain way: work will be designed, coordination mechanisms between units will be established, the organisation will be managed with a specific leadership style, etc. The criteria that should guide this organisational design should be to ensure that people's needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness and purpose are met at all times.

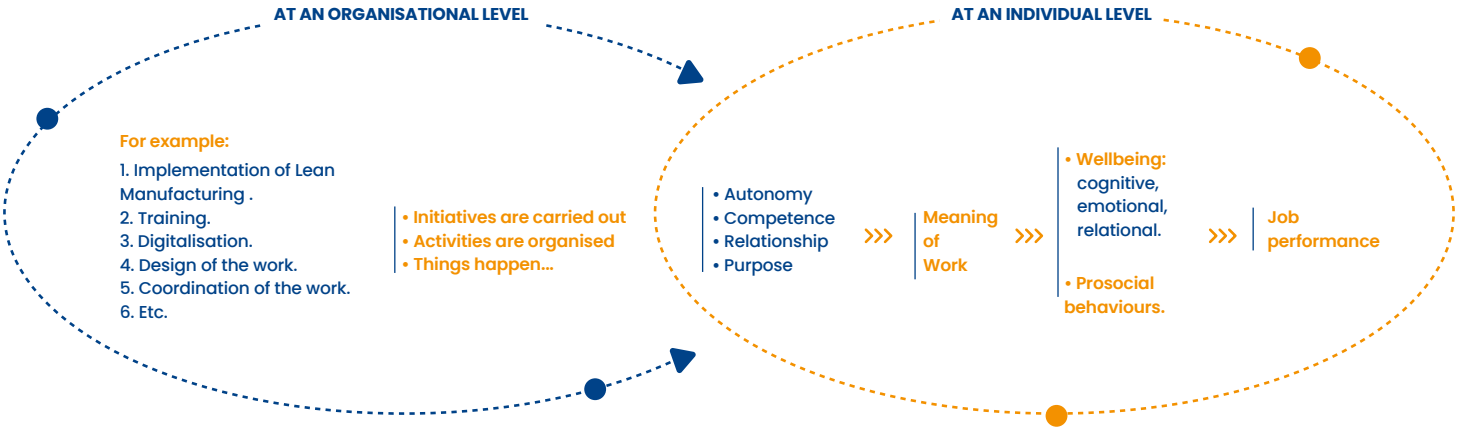
This organisational context with a 'minimum objective structure' for meaning will influence the development of subjective perceptions by individuals. They will develop subjective perceptions according to their personal beliefs and values ('the self') and also according to their interactions with others ('the group'). This is the subjective part of the 'Bipartite Value of Meaningfulness'. If the part related to the organisational context is properly developed, people will feel that their innate needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence are being met, contributing positively to making their work meaningful.

To sum up, these factors of organisational design, work design, roles of those in charge, forms of management, etc. are what will ultimately provide a 'minimum structure' for meaningfulness (the objective part of the BVM) and enable people to meet their basic needs for autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence. If successful, the organisation will be in a better position to meet its strategic challenges (improvement in efficiency, digitisation, innovation, etc.) as people are likely to find meaning in their work and/or feel more intrinsically motivated.

According to the theoretical framework set out in Figure 5, to what should managers of organisations pay particular attention? There are basically two key issues:

- Assuming that it is up to management to ensure a 'minimum structure' (objective part) for meaningfulness by paying special attention to elements of organisational design, inter alia: (i) design of the work, (ii) the creation (or not) of groups and teams in the organisation, (iii) organisational design and mechanisms for coordinating activities, and (iv) the roles and responsibilities of the management function.

*Figure 5*: **Operationalisation of the development of the four levers**



- Monitoring and ensuring that people feel that the four basic needs of autonomy, competence, relatedness and beneficence are being fulfilled (subjective part). To this end, Self-Determination theory (Chen et al., 2015; Ryan & Deci, 2000) proposes a measurement scale for autonomy, competence and relatedness, to which is added the scale of measurement of beneficence proposed by the theoretical frame of meaningful work (Martela & Ryan, 2016). These measurement scales can provide managers with an objective measure of how people's subjective perceptions are evolving, since it is ultimately these four basic levers or needs that will contribute to improving the meaning of work and intrinsic motivation. The scales for measuring basic needs, as well as the scale for measuring the meaning of work, are set out in Appendix I.

# CHAPTER 5
## Conclusions

This document aims to provide a framework that can guide initiatives to improve the meaningfulness of work in the context of paid work. It has not entered into the debate on how to improve the meaningfulness of work in the context of other unpaid work (volunteer work, care work, etc). Nor is it intended to offer an exhaustive state of the art of the various theories currently used with regard to this challenge. We have selected some of the theoretical frameworks and mechanisms that have been interpreted as being of greatest interest for guiding political and/or managerial action in the company.

Meaningful work can help fulfil people's innate need to find meaning in life, thus contributing significantly to their well-being. In turn, meaningfulness of work is closely related to people's motivation, thus contributing to improve organisations' sustainability. Healthier people and more sustainable organisations will necessarily contribute to a better society.

Currently, however, the view of work in society is predominantly limited to an economic perspective. Organisational managers and decision-makers tend to organise their processes according to the principles of scientific work organisation, offering financial remuneration as the main motivating element. These work contexts do not offer good starting conditions on which to develop the meaning of work. Given this situation, and the innate human need to find meaning in life, many people tend to look for meaning outside work (in their family space, in leisure, etc). Thus, work-avoidance and work-rejection behaviours crop up and the individual's potential for growth in the context of the organisation is lost.

Who should drive the meaning of work in the context of the organisation? This is a challenge that directly affects the managers of organisations, but also political action, since the development of meaningfulness at work is a basic ingredient for people to live a full human life (Yeoman, 2014) and has a major impact on the psychological health of individuals (and by extension of society). The task of societies (and by extension of political action) 'is not simply to keep people alive by providing enough food, shelter, or paid work, but to secure their capabilities for living a life worthy of a human being, where human needs are expressed and fulfilled in ways consistent with their humanity.' (Yeoman, 2014; pp 273). This does not mean that business and political action must guarantee that each individual finds meaning in his or her work, but rather that initiatives must provide contexts and resources to support and facilitate the process of each individual's search for meaning. The meaning of work is an individual process (influenced by the context in which the individual operates and lives). It is a process that is developed, built, and worked upon (as opposed to the idea that it is found or received). It must be a process of deliberate development, a process to be carried out by each individual in the context of his or her company. The role of managers and political action is to provide the conditions (a job with a minimum structure for meaningfulness), the context and the resources necessary for this individual process to be successful.

What is required to develop a sense of work in the organisation? The temptation to make rapid progress can steer our thinking towards discussing what concrete initiatives need to be implemented so that meaningful work can be developed in the context of the organisation. However, the important debate is not so much about which initiatives to implement; rather we must first think about what we mean by 'work'? This is a more philosophical question that leads us to review our notion of work. An evolution in the concept (beyond its current economic reductionist notion) will lead to an evolution in the actions that can be implemented. In short, any initiative aimed at fostering the development of meaningful work should entail the transformation of work not only in its organisational dimension but also in the understanding / definition of what 'work' means'.

# CHAPTER 6

## Closing words: meaningful work, a factor in Gipuzkoa's competitiveness

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One of the first challenges in launching the **Etorkizuna Eraikiz** Think Tank on the future of work was to specify the approach with which we wanted to address this issue. There was no doubt as to its great importance, but it encompassed many different areas which we were unable to cover in their entirety. From the initial idea, which focused more on lifelong learning, we evolved, after a process of active listening, towards the notion of meaningful work as the main axis of our reflection. Concerns that this approach might prove too philosophical or abstract were quickly dispelled. Companies showed great interest and agreed that this approach had an impact on a key factor in our competitiveness. This was especially true of SMEs, which form the bedrock of our economy. In addition to the fact that this was a much more novel approach that similar initiatives in the past, the decision was clear.

There is no doubt that the economy, society and business are all undergoing profound transformations that will have major implications for employment. The sense we give to work has changed a great deal over the last few decades. It used to be the immovable pillar that structured our lives and livelihoods. Subsequently, other aspects such as personal life and leisure began to take on greater importance, displacing it from its central position. And what about the future ? The truth is that we do not know, but during the pandemic we have seen how contexts such as teleworking and a search for a work-life balance have led many people to question the role of work in their lives.

Nor can we ignore other realities such as demographic change. Our aging society, coupled with a low birth rate could lead to a shortage of talent and a fierce competition for any that exists (as several agents are already warning) which could negatively impact our competitiveness. In turn, in Gipuzkoa we have ample room for improvement in everything related to intangibles: non-technological innovation, investment in people, and professionalisation of ownership. If we really want to commit ourselves to a knowledge economy, people are our main asset, and we must invest time and money in them, creating the conditions that will allow them to develop their full potential.

Our companies, especially smaller ones, face a major challenge in attracting and retaining talent. First of all, they cannot compete with other large companies that can offer better salaries, better hours, greater flexibility and the possibility of an international career. Nor can they offer greater security than the public sector or larger companies. Other countries, or to go no further, cities such as Madrid and Barcelona, already exert a significant power of attraction for highly-qualified professionals.

In this situation, we need to speak the language of young people, try to understand their motivations and expectations. It is necessary to challenge the discourses that question their commitment or willingness to work, because they do not match the real situation and because they evade their own responsibility. Nor is it of any use to present the skills issue as a problem, when it is precisely the factor that determines both the employment opportunities and the strength of our companies. The challenge is precisely to generate projects that allow us to employ all the talent we prepare, and to make this investment we make as a society profitable, avoiding the opportunity cost of well-trained professionals pursuing excellence outside the workplace, in their personal lives or in sports, because they cannot find employment opportunities for their skills.

Our SMEs are faced with the challenge of developing their own appeal, of being able to offer exciting projects, new forms of relationship for hungry professionals that will allow them to face the great global transformations (digital, green and social) with guarantees, address generational change, and grow, so that they can remain competitive. One of the guests experts at the Think Tank told us: 'Your parents worked in one or two places in their entire lives. You will work in six or seven. Your sons

and daughters will work in seven places at the same time'. The future will without doubt largely depend on our ability to adapt to this scenario, offering individualised options tailored to the situation of each person, and to play a more active role in training professionals, contributing to what one might call 'last mile education'.

The size of our companies —which in other areas might be seen as a weakness— can in this case be an advantage when it comes to introducing this new relational and organisational framework to attract and develop talent. Nonetheless, we are aware that this is a challenge that can only be addressed through co-responsibility, since it requires the commitment and self-demand of professionals, the contribution of the educational system, and the support of institutions. Only in this way will we be able, on the one hand, to generate these much-needed capabilities for our SMEs and, on the other, to ensure that these capabilities have a positive impact on the competitiveness of Gipuzkoa.

Our responsibility is to bequeath to future generations a strong economy in Gipuzkoa and the Basque Country, as did those that preceded us, allowing them to enjoy levels of welfare and public services at least comparable to those of today, and to continue to be one of the societies with the lowest rates of inequality in the world. As part of this aspiration to make Gipuzkoa the best place for people to develop and work, meaningfulness in work can help satisfy people's need to make sense of their lives, contributing to their wellbeing, and it is directly related to their motivation, helping to increase and improve the strength and resilience of our companies.

It is in this context that the Think Tank was launched in 2020, with the participation of more than twenty representatives from companies, development agencies, economic agents and the educational field and I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for their willingness and enthusiasm. To date we have held more than fifteen working meetings, as a result of which, with the backing of experts from Mondragon Unibertsitatea, we are developing pilot projects in six companies in Gipuzkoa (Oribay, IZT, Lazpiur, Fagor Industrial, Sutargi and Zorrotz), working on aspects such as autonomy, purpose and relational aspects. These experiments are showing that these factors have a direct impact on people's motivation and performance, and are therefore of key importance in attracting and retaining talent in our companies.

The initial results are promising and our intention is to obtain from these experiences a proven methodology that will help our business community as a whole to successfully address this challenge, as well as incorporating them into our aid programmes. We have already launched a process with the agents involved to extend this methodology, as well as establishing the first contacts with universities and vocational training centres to enable this issue to be addressed in the education system. That, however, together with the result of this collective learning process, will be the subject of another book.

# CHAPTER 7
## Appendix I

These questions represent the basic needs to be covered through the management of the organisation. The underlying hypothesis is that a work context that meets these needs is generating the right conditions for people to find and develop the meaning of work. These measurement scales are originally taken from Chen et al. (2015) but have been adapted to the work context (Martela et al., 2021).

### Need for Autonomy.

- In my work, I feel a sense of choice and freedom in the things I undertake.
- I feel that my decisions at work reflect what I really want.
- I feel my choices at work express who I really am.
- I feel I am doing what really interests me at work.

### Need for Competence:

- I feel confident that I can do things well at work.
- At work, I feel capable at what I do.
- When I am at work, I feel competent to achieve my goals.
- In my work, I feel I can successfully complete difficult tasks.

### Need for Relationship:

- I feel that the people I care about at work also care about me.
- I feel connected with people who care for me at work, and for whom I care.
- At work, I feel close and connected with other people who are important to me.
- I experience a warm feeling with the people I spend time with at work.

### Need for Beneficence (Martela & Ryan, 2016):

- I feel that my actions in my work have a positive impact on the people around me.
- The things I do in my job contribute to the betterment of society.
- In general, my influence on other people's lives (work and non-work) is positive.
- Through my work, I have been able to improve the well-being of others.

### Meaningfulness of work as a result of feeling that basic needs are met:

WAMI Positive Meaning Scale (Steger et al., 2012).

- I am working in a meaningful career.
- I understand how my work contributes to my life's meaning.
- I have a good sense of what makes my job meaningful.
- I have discovered work that has a satisfying purpose.

Spreitzer Meaningful Work Scale (1995):

- The work that I do is very important to me.
- My job activities are personally meaningful to me.
- The work I do is meaningful to me.

# CHAPTER 8
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