



Hybrid Contexts of Learning and Practice in Social Innovation

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During the first half of 2014, at Sinnergiak Social Innovation¹ (UPV/EHU) we developed the Hedabide project (Social Innovation-oriented Hybrid Contexts of Learning and Practice) financed by the Regional Government of Gipuzkoa (Department of Innovation, Rural Development and Tourism) and the European Social Fund. Hedabide aims to use and develop the knowledge of people by creating Learning and Practice Communities (LPCs), with collaborative strategies and multilateral commitment focused on human capital, social capital and social innovation.

Methodology: Social Innovation-oriented Learning and Practice

The project's main lines of action concentrate on enhancing the culture of learning, the dynamics of collaboration among agents and demand-driven learning. This fosters learning and support for all types of organisations and contexts. In its methodological design the project is based on the concept of expansive learning which facilitates learning processes amongst people diverse in terms of gender, ability and origin. The approach enables the development of shared knowledge at two levels: the first lies in the LPC itself and its participants, and the second affects the wider social and demographic spheres that the people involved in the LPCs represent.

The participants of each of four Communities carried out dynamic activities on a weekly basis for one month and a half. Each Community was oriented towards finding solutions to a specific strategic challenge faced by the Region, one of which was that of future work organisation or workplace innovation. Project methodology comprised five different stages:

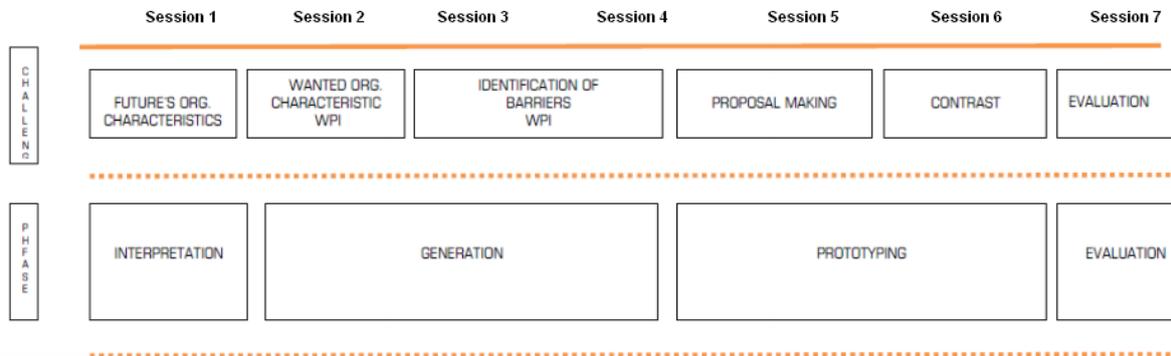
- identification and integration of different bodies of knowledge;
- the generation of ideas;
- collaboration through the interaction between the group's participants and people external to it;
- the prototyping stage;
- evaluation.

¹ Established in 2012, **SINNERGIAK Social Innovation (UPV/EHU)** is a Social Innovation Centre promoted by the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU) as part of the strategy of the EUSKAMPUS – Campus of International Excellence. SINNERGIAK promotes the development of knowledge and fosters collaboration with heterogeneous agents, both from a social and territorial perspective and both locally and internationally. All of which encourages cooperation between different agents, providing solutions to problems and meeting social needs through innovative approaches, perspectives and activities.

Therefore, SINNERGIAK's activity aims to promote the development of skills in people and the innovation capabilities of organisations and communities, both of which are basic requirements for achieving results with a socially visible and useful impact.

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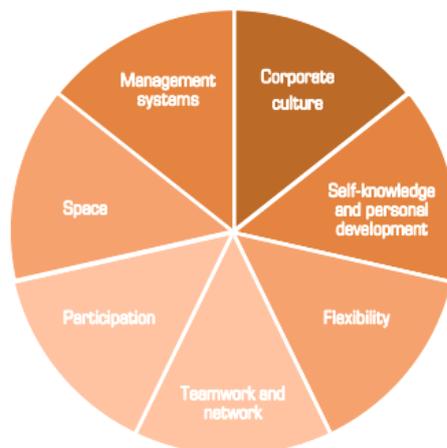
Figure 1: Hedabide project session structure and plan
Combination of methodological stages and challenge problem solving



This methodological trajectory, which has a first stage of divergence and a second stage of convergence, incorporates an external critique in which the group in charge of proposing solutions to the challenge was reviewed by Professor Steven Dhondt, the EUWIN (European Workplace Innovation Network) Coordinator. At this stage it was recognised that the proposals generated by the LPC from the ideas of its participants and in the absence of external knowledge, converged strongly with the factors identified in EUWIN's **The Fifth Element** concept. Thus the prototyped solutions achieved a high level of consistency with the findings of studies, research, good practice cases and policies to promote innovative workplaces or innovation in the context of work.

Examples of this include the following workplace innovation dimensions or areas which the proposals addressed:

Figure 2: The LPC's workplace innovation outcomes



Innovation and Participation

A further dimension of the results obtained from the methodology described above relates to governance, particularly in terms of social participation in the decision-making processes of organisations and in the formulation of public policies. The methodology addresses governance at two levels: on the one hand in identifying and agreeing the nature of the strategic challenges facing the region (through dialogue between the Regional Government and Sinnergiak), and on the other by means of the process to solve these challenges through the Practical Learning Communities.

This has been a twofold process addressing both challenges and competencies. The LPCs have been shown to be an effective and efficient tool for the participation of people in solving shared challenges. Likewise they have had a real impact in improving Social Capital, Individual Capital and Social Innovation competencies. It is precisely this twofold process that has had a direct impact on the organisations of the Region, particularly the four groups of actors called to collaborate in the project: Public Administrations, SMEs, Social Organisations and Universities.

Conclusions: learning, knowledge and innovation in hybrid contexts.

A culture of innovation requires a social and organisational structure that develops human and social capital and promotes knowledge. The culture of learning and innovation does not take place "per se"; it is built. It therefore depends on strategies, processes and mechanisms that help it take root.

In a sense, workplace innovation as a concept and even more so as a practice, has all the features of an innovation process. As in other innovations, the penetration of a concept such as workplace innovation requires new competences in people: competences that are learned and experienced, and which are linked to creativity, to interdisciplinary teamwork, to adaptation to new situations, to analysis and synthesis of information, to the application of knowledge in practice, to learning to learn and to research, and to communicating and making decisions, amongst others.

Additionally, the creation of communities for the development of innovations is a new approach to cooperation networks: transferring competences between people who converge from different life experiences, different organisations, and heterogeneous cognitive and relational attributes. Through practice and exchanges in Learning and Practice Communities it is possible to promote ideas banks and new models of networked operation among heterogeneous organisations. These experiences offer the chance to determine, share and retain a set of competences at a regional level for the development of workplace innovation-type innovations.

The Learning and Practice Communities project has contributed towards the generation of information, knowledge and competence in workplace innovation. New social relationships and collaboration models generate favourable contexts for the enrichment of social capital, promoting shared challenges with a cooperative, participatory approach that generates competences and learning, all oriented towards the development of innovation in work-related contexts.

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