Workplace Innovation Programmes: bridging research and policymaking

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Abstract
The article reviews the concept of Workplace Innovation Programmes as public policy tools supported by research. Pursuing a socio-political perspective the text explores programme-level issues. To do this, conceptual definitions are reviewed and the programme´s main features, discussed using an analytical model designed by previous researchers. In this sense, programmes underpinned by research as a tool for public policies are presented as mechanisms to link different levels and actors in matters related to productivity and the quality of working life. The article reviews different approaches and strategies for policymaking, aiming at better understand how programmes operate. For this purpose previous European experiences are used. The rationale of this article must be found in a explorative and learning-oriented context to better design and implement programme-based public policies and the use of action-research for policy learning. This is of particular interest in the local context of Gipuzkoa (Basque Country, Spain) where this kind of approach has become of relevance in the policymaking.

Key words: programmes; working life reform; policy learning; actionable knowledge.

Programas de innovación en contextos de trabajo: vinculando la investigación y la formulación de políticas públicas

Resumen
El artículo examina el concepto de los programas de innovación en los contextos de trabajo como instrumentos de política pública asistidos por la investigación. Desde una perspectiva sociopolítica el texto explora cuestiones relacionadas con el diseño e implementación de los mismos. Para ello se revisan las definiciones conceptuales y se analizan las principales características de los programa empleando un modelo analítico diseñado por la investigación acción. En este sentido, los programas sustentados en la investigación como herramienta de políticas públicas se presentan como mecanismos para vincular diferentes niveles y actores en temas relacionados con la productividad y la calidad de la vida laboral. En el artículo se examinan diferentes enfoques y estrategias para la formulación de

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políticas, con el fin de comprender mejor el funcionamiento de los programas. Para ello el artículo se apoya en determinadas experiencias europeas. Po todo ello, la fundamentación de este artículo debe encontrarse en un contexto exploratorio y orientado al aprendizaje en diseño de políticas públicas y el uso de la investigación-acción para el aprendizaje político. Lo anterior resulta de particular interés en el contexto local de Gipuzkoa (País Vasco, España), donde este tipo de enfoques ha adquirido relevancia en la formulación de políticas públicas.

Palabras clave: programas; reforma de la vida laboral; aprendizaje político; conocimiento práctico.

1. Background

"A good programme is a programme that phases itself fruitfully into ongoing processes, helps improve on them for a period of time, and then waves farewell to processes that continue to gain in momentum, speed, and quality"
Gustavsen, Finne & Oscarsson, 2001, p. 9.

In Europe, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, a series of international seminars and conferences were organised around initiatives and activities focused on working life reform known as programmes. In this context back in 1989, an international conference on action research in relation to new ways of organising work was held in Sweden. In 1991, with the collaboration of institutions and universities from the Netherlands, the action research network itself promoted a second conference with the aim of developing new ideas. Under the title "Action Research and the Future of Work" the meeting was used to discuss matters related to the future of work, the development of new methodologies of action research associated with work and industrial relations, the exchange of trans-national experiences, the strengthening of a collaboration network, and the development of international research programmes. The organisation and contents presented and discussed contain many of the proposals and progress made by researchers, with a strong emphasis on aspects linked to organisational changes. The third conference was held in 1993, in Finland, under the title "Active Society with Action Research" and was hosted by the Ministry of Labour and the Finnish Labour Relations Association. The content of this conference was used for the presentation of several assessment reports and other studies on the experiences of implemented programmes and their links to action research. In general, the idea of addressing development programmes was the main focus. The materials are included in the book "National Action Research Programmes in the 1990´s" edited by Kaupinnen & Lahtonen (1994). Recently, after 25 years, these matters related to the future of work and action research have been re-launched in Norway. In 2018, "Coping with the Future: Business, Work and Science in the Age of Digitalisation and Sustainability" was organised with the aim of bringing together separate discourses that concern the future of work (Johnsen, 2018). The materials are accessible in the "International Journal of Action Research" (2018, Vol. 14-2/3) and the "European Journal of Workplace Innovation" (2018, Vol. 4-1). This will be followed by a symposium held in 2020 in the Basque Country (Spain), focused on the support provided by action research for the design and preparation of public policies and organised by Orkestra, the Basque Institute of Competitiveness.

In one way or another, the conferences and meetings mentioned show, in addition to the fact that there is an action research network, the need to identify bridges between research and social challenges for the design and implementation of public policies. From a European perspective as indicated by Pot, Totterdill and Dhondt (2017) this issues gained a recognition with the Commission's Green Paper "Partnership for a new organisation of work" and the policy document "Modernising the organisation of work – a positive approach to change" (See Ennals, 1998). Another good example of networking can be found in the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN), created under request of the European Commission (2013-2017), to exchange good practices and stablish alliances of employers, trade unions, governments, knowledge agents and research organisations. As pointed by Dhondt, Totterdill and Van Hootgem (2019, p. 37) "the European Commission wanted to spread the idea that innovation in companies not only was the result of R&D investments but needed to be supported by the work practices in companies too!". Nowadays EUWIN remains functioning as a loosely coupled network to support any action at the EU-level on the topic.

2. Context

Many of the efforts made in favour of adopting new forms of work organisation have been expressed in the shape of activities organised jointly by public institutions, actors from the labour market and research. From among the different experiences developed during the last half century, we can identify some where action research has played a role. I am referring, specifically, to initiatives that have been described on several occasions (Gustavsen, Hansson & Qvale, 2008). First it was the LOM (Leadership, Organisation and Management) programme in Sweden (1985-90) organised by the Work Environment Fund in cooperation with agents from the labour market (Gustavsen, 1992; Naschold et al., 1993). This programme offered financial support to many interventions in companies and organisations by providing tax reinvestment schemes in jobs at national level (Gustavsen et al., 1996). Then came the Enterprise Development 2000 programme (1994–2000) organised by the Norwegian Work Research Institute, a programme with a regional focus and deployment that was supported by the labour market parties (employers and trade unions), involving both researchers and other development actors (Gustavsen et al., 1998; Levin [Ed.], 2002). Value Creation 2010 is a third example, a programme developed between 2001-2007 also in Norway (Gustavsen, 2001, 2008). These Nordic experiences are proof of the interest in creating development coalitions (Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999) through action research (Gustavsen, 2007b, 2011; Pålshaugen, 2014; Greenwood [Ed.], 1999). To these three references, with widespread recognition in the action research community due to their use of research methodology, I should add the Humanization of Work/Work and Technology programme and the Finnish National Workplace Development Programme. Both experiences were respectively launched by governments of Germany (Fricke, 1997, 2000, 2011) and Finland (Alasoini, 1997, 2004, 2014, 2015). It should be mentioned that all the programmes indicated have been developed based on national agreements, and that these actions have been integrated into broad institutional frameworks.

The choice of the above-mentioned programmes is justified by the logic of extracting local experiences, which in generic terms can help to understand the programmes as a bridge to reform working life in Europe. In countries such as Norway and Sweden, experiments related to industrial democracy or the redesign of job positions date back to 1960. In other countries such as Finland, the Government's role and the centralised nature of the innovation and development policies has been a feature since 1990. Although most of these experiences are circumscribed to what has been called the Scandinavian model, the lessons from this experience favour a continuity or line of development from which it is possible to draw and adopt conclusions. This is why the approach used in this article seeks to support itself with cases that make it possible to explain and understand the progress of these programmes over the course of 50 years. This in turn entails an analysis of the European approach to work organisation (Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999) and Programme Theory (Alasoini, 2016).

3. The emergence and evolution of the Programmes

Despite certain common trends, the evolution and development of working life in Europe has been different as regards approaches, designs and institutional arrangements (Gustavsen et al., 2001; Alasoini, 2009b, 2016; Naschold, 1993). In recent history, the interest shown by governments and the actors of the labour market in the search for new forms of work organisation have varied depending on the period and country in question.

The first *experiments* by K. Lewin focused on the replacement of Taylorism with autonomous forms of work organisation. Using field experiments as a starting point, a series of activities emerged in European industrialised countries in the form of programmes. This emergence must be understood within the context of the debate on industrial democracy that arose around 1960 as a result of the problems associated with the crisis of Taylorism, Fordism and the mass production model. These activities have been developed under concepts that include the humanisation of work, industrial democracy, developmental work, leadership, organisation and co-determination, value creation and organisational development. Since then and up until today, certain European countries, led by the Nordic countries and Germany, have implemented programmes to develop work organisation and promote workplace innovation. From among the studies carried out (Naschold, 1993, 1994; Business Decisions Limited, 2000; Gustavsen et al., 2001; Brödner & Latniak, 2003; Alasoini, 2009; Alasoini et al., 2005; Totterdill et al., 2009; Eeckelaert et al., 2012), it can be concluded that the number of initiatives of this type continues to be limited (Alasoini, Ramstad & Totterdill, 2017). With similar effects, the European community policy (Kesselring, Blasy & Scoppetta, 2014) in this field has been described as fragmented (Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999; Ennals, 2002; Pot, Totterdill & Dhondt, 2016; Totterdill et al., 2009).

Public intervention, whether it is at European, national or local level, resembles a kaleidoscope (Van Beinum, 1993). An example of this can be found in the variety of ways that the programmes are launched and financed (Pot, 2011). In certain cases such as in Sweden, Finland, Germany, France and Scotland the government or governmental agencies have played a key role. In other cases, in countries such as Norway, Denmark, Ireland and

the Netherlands, programme governance has been carried out by the labour market actors. In cases such as Emilia-Romagna (Italy), North Rhine-Westphalia (Germany) and the Basque Country (Spain) it is the regional actors and institutions who promote or have promoted the programmes.

During their long history, learning from the programmes has been a subject of interest and analysis. Specifically, in aspects linked to the capacity for diffusion of new forms of work organisation and the social legitimacy of such interventions (Naschold et al., 1993; Oehlke, 2001; Levin, 2002; Pålshaugen, 2009, 2014; Gustavsen, 2008; Riegler, 2008; Arnkil, 2008; Zettel, 2010; Alasoini, 2016). While the problems of diffusion refer to the difficulty of using the knowledge gained from individual projects in a larger number of organisations and interest groups, social legitimacy refers to the ability of the programmes to generate positive effects that transcend them and the justification in terms of public intervention (Alasoini, 2018). For certain sensitivities, work organisation is a private matter between a company and its employees. In order for programmes financed with public resources to maintain their legitimacy, it is necessary that the effects generated in working life are inclusive and based on learning that is sustainable in the long term (Alasoini, 1999, pp.4-5; 2016, p. 52).

It is precisely the relationship between public action, on the one hand, and the development processes in working life on the other, which are the starting point to consider the programmes as bridges. This article aims to explore these matters in more depth, with a particular focus on learning process and the learning subjects of the programmes. However, due to the institutional differences between the countries and regions that implement these policies, learning between programmes remains as a complex task (Riegler, 2008; Pålshaugen, 2009; Alasoini, 2009). This article pursues a socio-political perspective and focuses on programme-level aspects. By reviewing analytical models[2] generated by previous action-research, my motivation and interest looks towards the description and analysis of the activities and policies used to promote participation in the shape of programmes.

This is of particular importance for Gipuzkoa, a province of the Basque Country (Spain), where policies in favour of workers' participation have a particular root. Being the cradle of co-operativism, the territory of Gipuzkoa has implemented programmes for the promotion of workers participation (Pomares, Luna & Unceta, 2016; Pomares, 2018; 2019). Designed as policy instruments for the implementation and development of organisational human-centred models, workplace innovation programmes are framed within a broader context such as innovation. An example of how action research can facilitate a better design and implementation of programmes can be found in Gipuzkoa Workplace Innovation; a 5 year action research project, which addressing programme level issues. Through the 2014-2019 action research has been conducted in collaboration with the European Workplace Innovation Network (EUWIN), which provides a scene to learn from other EU level programme experiences. Additionally, action research also has its path in the Territory of

2 These models have been developed and disseminated in the action research community at the conferences mentioned above (Kauppinen & Lahtonen, 1994), in assessment reports (Naschold, 1993; 1994), in research and co-operation projects (Alasoini et al., 2005; Zettel, 2010) and in other publications and articles (Alasoini, 2009b; 2016).

Gipuzkoa; Fagor's experience, edited by Greenwood and Santos (1992), and other more recent projects, such as Gipuzkoa Sarean (Karlsen & Larrea, 2014, 2016), account for this.

4. The conceptualisation of the Programmes

"Programmes operate at a different level
than stand-alone workplace development projects do"
Alasoini, 2016, p. 40.

The actions aimed at reforming working life can be launched from different angles that range from business initiatives that include the process of change and development, to other more broader ones that take the shape of programmes. As mentioned at the start of this article, in some countries, the *public* takes the shape of an agent of change in working life (Gustavsen et al., 1996). In Europe, the need to establish policies and mechanisms focused on growth and progress has determined the interest of policymakers in adopting formulas in favour of working life quality and the improvement of productivity (Pot et al., 2016). However, the political response throughout Europe has been unequal (Oeij, Rus & Pot, 2017 [Eds.]; Pot et al., 2017).

Given that the programmes reflect the contemporary changes that take place in the social and economic dimensions (Fricke, 2003) and depend on the context they operate in, they can take a variety of forms (Gustavsen, 2008, p. 16). As regards innovation policies, public action can be carried out by using a diverse range of political instruments (Borrás & Edquist, 2013). Relationships based on regulation typically consist of a group of legal links between a company and an agency or public institution.

In relation to work organisation, at the more general level, we can refer to hard and soft forms of regulation. While the first concept refers to legislation and other binding regulations such as collective agreements or other more or less binding regulations applied broadly, soft regulation indicates a persuasive and non-binding political intervention. Both types, hard and soft regulation, can be divided into direct and indirect forms of intervention (Alasoini, 2011, 2016; Alasoini, Ramstad & Totterdill, 2017).

> *"A soft approach can be a useful policy option, especially in situations where the objects for change (companies) are heterogeneous; processes leading to desired changes (workplace innovations) can take different shapes and means used in the promotion of changes (the introduction of new organizational and management practices) are of a sensitive nature" (Alasoini, 2011, p. 29)*

Soft instruments are distinguished from the others due to their voluntary and non-coercive nature, where public and private stakeholders establish forms of cooperation that are not strongly hierarchical and where there is a mutual exchange of information (Borrás & Edquist, 2013). Many of the alternative experiences to traditional regulations have emerged from the programmes (Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999, p. 71). It can therefore be stated that programmes are a form of regulation widely used to facilitate workplace innovation that range from general frameworks of policies and recommendations, or the provision of training and information frameworks on good practices, to more direct forms such as the provision of advice and consultancy services, comparative evaluation tools, financing lines, sub-

sidies or tax incentives for companies and organisations (Alasoini, 2008; 2009; Alasoini et al., 2005).

Programmes, unlike projects, are more complex in nature and have a larger scope and timescale (Naschold, 1994). In general, programmes have been understood as temporary organisations (Turner & Müller, 2003), temporary systems (Miles, 1964; Packendorff, 1995) and as fixed-term institutionalised activities (Alasoini, 2008). In the literature of management and change, programmes are understood as mechanisms that simultaneously manage, based on a series of pre-planned activities, a series of action-oriented projects (Ferns, 1991, Gray, 1997; Pellegrini, 2002). Conceptualised as a phenomenon of a nature qualitatively different to projects, programmes have been understood as vehicles for strategic implementation and organisational renewal (Pellegrini, 1997); in a traditional sense, programmes have been characterised as support tools for the management of a portfolio of interrelated projects focused on achieving goals that are unachievable via the management of individual projects (Reiss, 1996; Pellegrini, 1997).

However, although the above definitions and approaches may provide a generic conceptualisation of the term, in the case of programmes created for dealing with complex objects such as the reform of working life, programmes as a public policy tool have further particular features. While some programmes operate as simple administrative or financial umbrellas, or as tools for financing projects (Alasoini, 2008, p. 67) others establish a common foundation in the creation of a framework shared by the actors involved (Gustavsen, 1994, p. 15). In coherence with the above, based on the idea that a programme consists of a group of related activities and projects that includes a variety of stakeholders (Brulin & Svensson, 2012), Alasoini (2008; 2016) establishes the existence of three characteristic aspects:

- A shared framework that applies to several organisations simultaneously guides the development.
- The management and the staff of the participating organisations, and other major stakeholder groups such as policymakers, social partners, researchers, consultants and other external experts to the organisation in question agree on the content of the framework.
- The involved organisations engage in an exchange of information, interaction and cooperation.

According to Gustavsen (2008, p. 16) "a programme aims at making enterprise level actors initiate changes and offers support to processes that emerge if the local parties decide to make real the intention of the programme. Beyond this, programmes can be of many forms". With these basic aspects, the programmes can acquire different forms and strategies depending on criteria such as the size of the target group, the nature of the participation, the level of expert knowledge and the role of research, among others (Alasoini, 2005; Gustavsen, 2008). Public programmes designed to promote organisational change and innovation are generally run with the management and staff actively working alongside a group of researchers. A feature that is central to the approach of these policies is that they complement other policy frameworks (Lorenz, 2013) such as those related to employment, maintaining working skills, lifelong learning and working life quality (Alasoini, 1999, pp. 2-3).

5. Objectives of the Programmes: strategies for bridging micro and macro levels

Developing a policy aimed at promoting innovation in work organisation starts off with particular aspects such as the objectives it pursues, the implementation methods and the publicity of the results (Alasoini, 1999, p. 4-5). The main objective of a policy for workplace development must be found in the simultaneous improvement of productivity levels and the legitimate interests of the actors involved. As regards the implementation methods, the actors involved have, at least in principle, the chance to participate in the planning and implementation of activities to be developed within the programme. And lastly, the publicity of the results derived from the adoption of new forms of organisation received with public support require publicity.

Each programme has a defined role and function (Alasoini, 2008). Programmes based on public action respond to different motivations and objectives, and their analysis can be carried out in light of 4 dimensions (Alasoini, 2004): the objectives of the public policy, the objectives of the programme, the generative results and the results at the workplace level. Firstly, the public policy objectives describe the types of social phenomena that an intervention in the form of a programme must have an impact on. In general, the objectives at this level are defined in the mission declaration of a programme. Secondly, the goals at programme level are described as the activities promoted, by means of the available resources, in order to achieve the targets indicated in the objectives of the public policy. Thirdly, the objectives and generative results refer to the ways in which the results and the experiences obtained in individual projects benefit other workplaces, stakeholders or the general public. The objective focuses on the dissemination of new forms, practices and methods of work organisation that leads to new ideas or applications in the contexts where it is applied. Finally, programmes also have objectives at the workplace level that include objectives related to immediate improvements in the activities directed by the project and their sustainability. The objective at job level is to facilitate the adoption of sustainable production models through the action.

As has been stated, another feature of the programmes is related to the type of objectives that they pursue: the production of workplace innovations (WPI). As suggested by Pot, Totterdill & Dhondt (2016, p. 15), the term "describes the participatory and inclusive nature of innovations that embed workplace practices grounded in continuing reflection, learning and improvements in the way in which organisations manage their employees, organise work and deploy technologies". Referring to a wider context Totterdill & Fricke (2004, p. 3) stress that:

> *"Critically, workplace innovation should be seen as the product of a complex process of learning grounded in, for example, vertical and horizontal interaction within firms, networking between firms (industry associations, supply chain relationships, etc.), public policy, vocational training, industrial relations, the financial system, and so on"*

In terms of the programme, the objectives have a twofold dimension. Naschold and Alasoini stress this aspect. For example, Naschold (1994, p. 121) suggests that the main objective of the programmes "is not only to bring about improvements at the micro level, but also to induce spin-off and linkage effects leading to improvements in social welfare and productivity at macro-level". Similarly, Alasoini argues that,

> *"Programmes do not basically aim (only) at micro-level (company- or organization-level) changes. Clearly distinguishable positive externalities, which appear at best as cumulative innovations, can be considered minimum targets of any programme. Cumulative innovations can in turn lead to changes among a larger number of work organizations or, at most, to macro-level changes" (Alasoini, 2016, p. 34).*

According to both authors, establishing objectives for programmes covers two main dimensions: productivity/well-being and micro/macro levels. According to Alasoini, the conditions that make the above possible result from the conjunction of two criteria or strategies. Firstly, the programme strategies must include elements that help to simultaneously improve productivity and the quality of working life at both micro (at the company or organisation level) and macro (public policy sphere where it is implemented) levels. Secondly, these strategies must include elements that facilitate building bridges between the micro and macro levels (Alasoini, 2016, p. 99).

6. Evolution in the design of the Programmes

The design of the programmes has varied during recent decades. Gustavsen (2006) organises this evolution into three sequential phases that he calls demonstration, diffusion and generativity programmes. The first generation of programmes is based on the idea of identifying new forms of work organisation through the description and discussion in terms of research of *star cases*, for their subsequent demonstration of results to a broader group of actors. Due to the problems associated with a limited capacity for the transfer and adaptation of the solutions identified, the demonstration programmes acquire mechanisms for the promotion of learning-based forms of work organisation. During a second phase, by means of *diffusion programmes*, new initiatives are introduced with a focus on aspects such as information, education and training. During a third phase, generative programmes emerge, whose main objective lies in their ability to support transitions towards the adoption of learning-focused forms of work organisation.

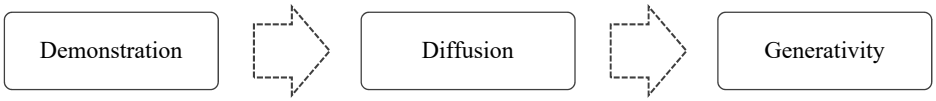

Figure 1: Programme design transition. Source: Gustavsen, 2006.

While in the first programmes efforts focused on a group of exemplary case studies, subsequent initiatives have focused on aspects related to how to achieve far-reaching changes and sufficient critical mass. To the extent that *star cases* tended to disappear, horizontal interaction and cooperation between companies replaced the way in which organisations conceived change (Gustavsen, 2007a). The difficulties that the first programmes encountered with the diffusion of the results led to the need to increase the mass of participants and encourage them to establish networks between them. During the ensuing decades, the networks started to be considered as learning tools instead of simply being the channel for disseminating information (Ennals & Gustavsen 1999; Gustavsen et al., 2001; Alasoini, 2018a,

2018b). The strategies for improving the capacity to produce generative results are linked to the development of the efficiency of the programme's information diffusion channels Instead of limiting participation to a few demonstrative projects, alternative programme strategies include a high number of workplaces, R&D institutes and other stakeholders with permanent, long-term interaction. This strategy represents an alternative approach based on interactive or recurrent innovative logic, as opposed to a linear model based on sequential events (Gustavsen, Hart & Hofmaier, 1991; Alasoini, 2018b).

7. From best practices to learning-oriented models

Programmes have undergone a transformation through changes in the design and implementation methods. Starting from institutional differences, learning from previous programmes and experiences is an issue that, although complex, requires frameworks for the identification of criteria that favour a better understanding of how programmes operate. These can be addressed through existing analytical frameworks.

Based on Naschold's[3] (1993, 1994) model of *good practices*, which has been used for the analysis of the strategies used by the programmes, and the subsequent conceptual and methodological development carried out by Alasoini[4] (2009, 2016, see also Alasoini et al., 2005), in this section the six dimensions that make up this analytical framework are presented. The characteristics described below are six: the political context, learning orientation, participation, horizontal networking, infrastructure and the programme's resources.

Table 1: Six dimensions for understanding programmes

Dimension	Explanation
Policy context	Describes the strategic justification, identifies major players, sets the territorial scope and the research or development focus of a programme.
Learning	Identifies the sources for learning and its orientation.
Participation	Analyses the focus of the activities, the influence of participants in the development activities and their inclusiveness in terms of gender and ageing issues.
Horizontal networking	Explores how strongly activities are connected to each other among workplaces, projects and organisations.
Infrastructure	Identifies how research and training are included in programme activities and the diversity level of the expertise provided by R&D (public and private) infrastructure supporting the development.
Aims and resources	Describes tangible and intangible resources provided by the programme

Resource: Alasoini, 2009

3 The model was presented at the conference held in Helsinki (Finland) in 1993 "Active Society with Action Research" and is documented in a volume published by Kaupinnen & Lahtonen (1994) "National Action Research Programmes in the 1990´s". The model can also be consulted in "Constructing the New Industrial Society" edited by Naschold et al., 1993.

4 The revision carried out by Alasoini is within the framework of the Work In Net Project (Zettel, 2010). This model provides a revision of the content and methodology proposed by Naschold. The model, which over the years has been updated several times, can be consulted in several publications (Alasoini et al. 2005; Alasoini, 2009, 2016).

These six dimensions encourage a better understanding of the critical factors for the improvement of the planning and implementation of the programme:

The strategic justification and the political context of the programme enable an analysis of the reasons or justifications for the strategies adopted. This analysis is carried out based on the understanding of whether the focus of the programme is at a national or regional level, and on the focus of the programme towards research and/or, if applicable, development, and the role of the main actors. The scope of action of a programme is essentially determined by the nature of the public body or institution that drives and promotes the activity and the territorial space in which it is implemented. In this sense, while certain programmes may be at a European or national level, the regional perspective has become relevant (Fricke & Totterdill [Eds.], 2004; Gustavsen, 2006; Gustavsen et al., 2001; Gustavsen, 2007b; Levin, 2002; Qvale, 2008). Alongside the scope of action, the strategies of the programmes may be based on supporting the development of operations or be directly or indirectly supported by research activities (use of data, research strategies and methods…). According to Naschold (1994, p. 111) the strategic justification of programmes must lie in macro aspects related to the industrial policy. In the absence of this link and of adequate ties to the development goals of organisations, programmes can turn out to be interventions that react to problems caused by new technologies, production models or management methods. However, Alasoini (2016, p. 51) argues that more than the subordination of the strategic justification of the programmes to the industrial policy, it is about broadening the foundations of the policy through innovation. In order for the programmes to support new emerging structures it is necessary for there to be an integration of the workplace innovation policy within the scope of the industrial policy (Alasoini, 2009). For this reason, along with the participation of the actors of the industrial system, the inclusion of agents from the industrial relations and from R&D system complements this justification. On the one hand, the participation of actors from the industrial relations system reinforces the social legitimacy of the actions, strengthening the link between the improvement in productivity and the quality of working life, while the inclusion of R&D agents equips the programmes with the capacity to provide new solutions based directly or indirectly on research (Alasoini, 2016; p. 116).

The learning-based orientation of programmes enables an analysis of the reference frameworks of a programme. In general, by focus we understand the way in which programmes support companies and workplaces in the adaptation to change (Alasoini, 2005). The strategies and reference frameworks used by the programmes can vary according to three levels, international, national or regional. Although all programmes are local configurations, instead of identifying a single model or reference framework, the programmes can learn from other programmes and initiatives developed in other contexts (Alasoini, 2009). In this sense, the learning-focus of a programme is understood as "the readiness of programme implementers to monitor developments elsewhere with an open mind and adopt the ideas for local reinvention" (Alasoini, 2016, p. 117). This is why the oversight and monitoring of the programmes can include external reference frameworks in combination with own or local frameworks.

Participation, as a third dimension, directs attention to aspects that determine the way in which the objectives and the development operations designed and implemented in a programme are defined. Programmes can differ in their instrumentation offering design or

process-based solutions. Naschold (1993) argues that instead of the design solutions traditionally provided by external people, programmes should include the actors at the workplace level. Thus, the goal of the programmes must be a type of intervention that combines the design and guidance of the process of change along with broad participation in the workplace. This dimension analyses the strategies used by the programmes in relation to the influence and level of participation of the workers and workplaces on the content of the programmes and the activities or projects developed. In this sense the preference is that the division between the design and guidance of the process must be balanced. The mobilisation of the actors in the workplace in the identification of the objectives of the programmes and projects also includes the perspective of social inclusion, with a particular focus on matters such as the gender perspective or age (Alasoini, 2009, 2016).

The fourth principle is *that the development strategy must be backed and guided by a solid and advanced infrastructure* that includes a stock of knowledge and a sufficient number of experts. One of the most recognised effects of the programmes is related to the creation of local infrastructures; the private and institutional relationships promoted by the programmes can become structures for the search of new development opportunities. The infrastructure is understood as the development of a productive cooperation between actors and systems (Gustavsen, 1998) and refers both to public national/regional centres and private ones that support the innovation of organisations (Naschold, 1993). Public sources include universities, public research institutes, polytechnics, education and training institutes (Ramstad, 2009), while private centres include workplaces, development agencies, R&D organisations and professional associations (Alasoini, 2009b: 623). The infrastructure is analysed by means of the role that the programme plays in the educational activities and developments as an instrument to strengthen the fabric based on expert knowledge (Alasoini, 2016: p. 64).

The fifth characteristic of the model is *the creation of horizontal networks that favour the diffusion of information and the creation of new knowledge*, instead of independent development projects. Networks and other types of relationships between organisations are of critical importance in contexts of development (Gustavsen, 1998; Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999), to the point of being considered "the Achilles' heel of programmes" (Alasoini, 2016, p. 71). This dimension analyses the type of horizontal connection of the actors at a project or workplace level. As the programmes are used for building a bridge between the strategic objectives of the organisations involved and the objectives of the programme itself, this dimension becomes particularly relevant. Networking can take place in many different ways (Alasoini et al., 2005, p. 40); within the projects, through cooperation between projects, through organising interactive debate forums, training sessions or seminars or the supply of documentary material for the diffusion of information (e.g. publications, online information records of cases of good practices). Although the opportunities for learning derived from horizontal networking-focused activities are important in terms of sustainability, their potential is dependent on the diversity and amplitude of the participants insofar as they favour the generation and diffusion of knowledge (Alasoini, 2009a: 161; Andersson, 2006). Networks are considered an alternative to markets and hierarchies, therefore they are of particular importance for productive structures dominated by small and medium-sized enterprises (Naschold, 1994, p. 137). Networking can operate not only in terms of exchanges of infor-

mation between participants in the project, but also as an intermediate-level structure that facilitates further exchanges of information, both inside and outside the programme (Alasoini, 2011, pp. 36-37).

The sixth dimension refers to *the adaptation of the programme's resources to the objective and purposes*. It is possible that the programmes have limited effectiveness if the resources are not fully used over time (Naschold, 1993; Alasoini, 2016; Qvale, 1994). Thus, the volume and composition of the resources are highly relevant to achieve the programme's objectives (Naschold, 1994, p. 112). Aspects such as the financial budget, the number and experience of the staff in the programme and the time structure are decisive as tangible elements. However, in the case of development programmes, intangible aspects such as the visions, guiding principles, concepts for the development of the programmes, and the latter's ability to use different strategies or networks for diffusion are fundamental (Alasoini, 2016, pp. 117-118). These matters, in particular those related to the skills and level of knowledge of the staff in the programme, the commitment and the learning skills, have a positive influence on the results.

The six-dimension model described above frames how programme design and implementation could facilitate, through action research, a learning-oriented form of cooperation, collaboration and interaction. The next section explores the link between action research and programmes in a context of action research.

8. Programmes as vehicles for research and development

> *"A programme is an umbrella organization, which links a number of R&D efforts to each other that is taken to mean explicitly organised efforts aiming at intervening in workplace processes"*
> Gustavsen, 2006, p. 320.

Although approaches to working life assisted and supported by research have had a long and complex evolution (Gustavsen, 2007a), it is debatable whether the reform of working life and the adoption of new forms of work organisation in Europe is programmatic in nature and is assisted by research. Programmatic approaches are known in development literature, where change is understood as an iterative process. The development of working life based on programmes refers to the existence of a shared framework, the content of which has been agreed upon, and whose process is based on an exchange of information and experience based on cooperation and interaction.

Programmes are also tools for the development of work contexts. Research is a type of public resource, which can play a relevant role in the development processes addressed by programmes (Ennals & Gustavsen, pp. 173-176). The assistance of research has been justified by the complexity of adopting new forms of work organisation (Gustavsen, 2006, pp. 322-324). In this sense, research-based approaches aim to produce new knowledge that is applicable in the design of solutions or processes of change (Alasoini, 2005, pp. 43-46). The role of research at a programme level can be represented according to the following aspects:

- The programme uses theoretical models supported by research or experiences that make it possible to identify objects and the way they relate to each other.
- Research questions are proposed in the form of hypotheses on the theoretical and practical foundation for critical examination. These hypotheses can be adapted throughout the process.
- Depending on the critical examination, the research draws conclusions for the preparation of (identified) theoretical models or the reasoning behind them (Alasoini, 2006, p. 45).

Development supported by research at a programme level is usually established in light of three criteria. However, this approach varies from one case to another. The three criteria for research-based development are, first, that local projects are focused on creating models, methods or tools with a broader scope than the original application; second, that the implementation of the project requires research methods and strategies; and third, that the scientific assessments are included as an integral part of the project (Alasoini, 1999, p. 6). Practical examples prove that the role of research covers functions such as the creation of reference frameworks in alternative organisational relationships and that it helps to create, prove and use methodologies and forms of work according to the requirements of the process (Ennals & Gustavsen, 1999, p. 175).

The contribution of research to the reform of working life has acquired different forms (Gustavsen, 1992), where action research plays an important role. An example of this are the studies carried out using different approaches and research strategies (van Eijnatten, 1993; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Svensson, Ellström & Brulin, 2007; Svensson et al., 2007; Engeström, 2005; Alasoini, 2016). Action research (AR) (Greenwood & Lewin, 2007) is a co-generative form of research; i.e., a strategy for social research developed in collaboration between a researcher and the owners of a problem. In a general sense we could say that AR covers different traditions that range from action science (Argyris, Putnam & Smith, 1987), participatory action research (Whyte [Ed.], 1991), participatory research (Fals Borfa, 2000), socio-technical systems theory (van Eijnatten, 1993) and democratic dialogue (Gustavsen, 1992). The differences of these traditions are identifiable, to a large extent, in the way that the research is carried out. As a result we can talk about different strategies (Pålshaugen, 2014) where dialogue acquires particular relevance in the identification of the research questions (Greenwood, 1989, Alasoini, 1999; Pålshaugen, 2009). When providing an answer to these questions, action research has been structured around three questions:

- How to create democratic relations to the field subjects – as a method of research
- How to create new scientific knowledge from constructive social science research processes
- How to create innovative structures aiming at the continuation of participative design and change processes beyond the limited range of projects and programmes (Fricke, 1994, p. 55)

Although it does not correspond to this article to explore these questions in more depth, it does, in turn, seek to position action research in relation to the programmes for reforming working life. In general terms, we can appreciate that "action research in working life is

presumed to be useful to various groups of actors, both within the enterprises and within organisations that are somehow devoted to working life development, reforms and politics" (Pålshaugen, 2009; p. 232). In line with this reflection, the goals of AR are twofold: on the one hand, the use of scientific knowledge in practical development and change processes and, on the other, the generation of new knowledge for the research community that is useful for the actors involved in the development and change process (Pålshaugen, 2009: p. 236-242).

Historically, action research in working life has focused its efforts on changing individual organisations (or even parts of a single organisation), in detriment of the inter-organisational level. In this sense, with the exception of the Scandinavian experiences, action research literature has barely explored the specific aspects of large-scale change (Alasoini, 2016). The reasons can be found in the fact that in this tradition the use of field experiments has exerted strong control, to the extent that much of the history of action research has been limited to projects (Gustavsen, 1998). Next section reflects on how programmes can be useful bridges to connect, through action research in working life, a great variety of knowledge in favour of working life reform.

9. Bridging Programme Learning and Policy Learning

"A programme seeks actors and processes to exert influence on"
Naschold, 1993, p. 43.

Generating changes in work organisation requires developing new practices and narratives in cooperation with a community of stakeholders. Work organisation is a matter that transcends the local framework and which depends on a wider context (Gustavsen, 2007b, p. 651). Public programmes or initiatives require public rationales; they must establish objectives that correspond to the external challenges and the local realities. Here the aim is that a programme has a systemic impact, which involves a deep understanding of the programme's learnings (Ennals, Johnsen, & Normann, 2012).

Action research is mainly concerned with the development of knowledge (Johnsen et al., 2009); in this sense it could be argued that it establishes a context for learning (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). However, this learning process can become complex as it increases the number of participants and its scope in the field (Martin, 2008). The challenge is focused on guiding the learning process through the different levels of actors, which can create tensions between top-down and bottom-up approaches (Ennals, Johnsen & Normann, 2012).

In general, three actor systems are identified (Naschold, 1994, p. 111): the industrial policy, the industrial relations system and the research and development system. In this framework, programmes represent a collective agency (Alasoini, 2016). As can be seen in the table, the actors that form part of the programmes acquire different roles; i.e., they are circumscribed in different domains of different policies

Table 2: System, actors and role in the development Programmes.

System	Actors	Role
Industrial policy	Public administration, labour market organisations, the scientific community	Establishing the general framework for directing the activities
Industrial relations	Collective organisations at company or supra-company level	Social legitimisation of the activities
Research and Development	R&D units of private companies and of the public innovation system	Support from research and development activities

Source: Naschold, 1993; Alasoini, 2016.

A common feature of programmes comes from the creation of new levels of collaboration between local actors and governments, developing different institutional arrangements that mediate between the different roles and interests of the participants. A partnership can be seen as an example that is strategic in nature at system level; a partnership represents a form of organisational cooperation. The concept of development coalitions, extensively discussed by Ennals & Gustavsen (1999), operates in a similar sense. This is why the role that support structures formed by researchers, workers, works council representatives, management, programme managers and policymakers play is so critical (Riegler, 2008). In AR, knowledge is built and co-generated locally through a reflective process between researchers and professionals (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

In this case, the learning subjects are the participants of the programme and those responsible for formulating public policies (Alasoini, 2016, pp. 83-84). In this context, the concept of a programme, both in theory and in practice, is of particular interest. Although they operate in different contexts, programmes can be used as resources for other subjects that are carrying out similar practical processes (Pålshaugen, 2009). In this sense, good practices should be understood as generative ideas instead of ready-made objects, which allows the general knowledge of specific programmes to be regenerated as something useful for others subjects (Alasoini, 2006; 2008; Arnkil, 2008, Pålshaugen, 2009). However, experience shows that the *good practices* created by these projects have been poorly extended (Qvale, 2002, Arnkil, 2004; Brulin & Svensson, 2012; Fricke, 2003; Riegler, 2008; Gustavsen, 2008).

In terms of learning, the ideal effects produced are programme learning and policy learning; while the former refers to the learning that takes place *within* the programme during its implementation, the second, policy learning, refers to the knowledge and learning that extends to the design of new generation programmes (Alasoini, 2016, p. 110). This is why it is decisive, during both the design and implementation phases, to establish mechanisms that enable the learning subjects to identify sources, resources and actions aimed at learning from the exterior. The conditions of possibility for this type of learning, according to Alasoini (2008, pp. 65-67), are based on the capacity of the programmes to act as development systems. However, and as pointed out by Riegler (2008, p. 110), the learning resulting from public initiative development programmes has a condition of possibility of generating an impact when there is the existence of strong participative structures supplemented as innovative and open cultures.

10. Concluding remarks

In "Building Better Programmes: Learning Networks in the Promotion of Workplace Innovation" Alasoini (2008) suggests a taxonomy of the principles, elements, methods and types of projects to be used by programmes in order to achieve the objectives described in this article.. Based on the model, programmes as a production and development system are susceptible of generating learning (at programme level and from public policies) about design, planning and implementation. However, except in European countries and regions with active policies for the promotion of new forms of work organisation, the presence of these programmes seems to be limited (Kesselring et al., 2014; Alasoini et al., 2017). Some of the reasons may be found in the limitations of current policy frameworks (Brödner & Latniak, 2002; Business Decisions Limited, 2002; Totterdill, Dhondt & Milsome, 2002; Totterdill, 2015; Ennals, 2002).

In the digital age, where traditional forms of employment and work are undergoing a profound transformation, the future of programmes involves broadening the scope of traditional industrial policies and opening up innovation policies to related fields such as workplace innovation (Alasoini, 2011, 2012). It is therefore important to pay attention to the design and implementation principles of the types of programmes described in this article, in particular to the objectives, the support processes and the participating agents. As regards the objectives of the programmes, their focus must be aimed at achieving simultaneous improvements in productivity and job quality, at both micro (jobs) and macro (programme) levels. As for the design and implementation of the programmes, three types of knowledge are identified (Alasoini, 2011); about the design, the process and the diffusion. Firstly, the implementers of the programmes must have knowledge about the factors that influence changes in organisations (*design knowledge*); secondly, there must be a deeper knowledge about the different processes of change (*process knowledge*), both those that are guided by external expert knowledge (design-oriented) and in participative models (process-oriented); and thirdly, different strategies are required that enable an improvement in the creation and diffusion of the solutions generated by the programme (*dissemination knowledge*).

Part of the learnings accumulated in Europe over the course of more than five decades through the programmes can be used as a guide for the challenges that companies currently face. Like in the 70s and 80s (programmable machine tools, flexible production systems and automated control processes), they can shine a light on how the programmes must be designed and implemented in the current Digital Age, where automation, robotisation and digitisation have an impact on work organisation (Alasoini, 2016; Fricke, 2019).

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