

Expanded abstract

Trade union organizations as agents of collaborative change. The inclusive-participatory business model

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to analyze, from the trade union perspective, the proposal of the business model called the inclusive-participatory business model (IPM), promoted by the ALE and the Arizmendiarieta Foundation and designed and agreed upon by different people belonging to the political, trade union and business world of Euskadi. Despite the existence of various experiences in participatory companies in most countries of the European Union, in our country this business model has had little development, being in the gestation process. Thus, this proposal arises from the consensus of the various participating groups that grant plurality of thought in its design. More specifically, the participants bring diverse sensibilities in the political, trade union and business spheres of the Basque Autonomous Community and the Foral Community of Navarra.

Therefore, the objective of the study is to evaluate, from the trade union perspective, the potentialities and limitations of the inclusive-participatory business model (IPM), identifying the fundamental characteristics of the participation system that should be taken into consideration in the specific development of the model to enable it to be used as a reference model in our economic and social environment. The theoretical foundation of participation and the identification of existing models define the theoretical discussion.

The methodological design

In order to achieve the objectives of the study, that is, to analyze the potentialities and limitations of the inclusive-participatory model, from the perspective of the trade unions, a qualitative and transversal methodological approach has been used (Patton, 2014), based on the method of in-depth semi-structured interviews and on the critical analysis of texts and documentation provided by the participating organizations and the statements made publicly by them.

The qualitative methodological approach consisting of semi-structured interviews held with members of the most representative trade unions in the Basque Country: Trade Union Confederation of Workers' Commissions (CCOO), General Union of Workers (UGT), Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna-Solidarity of Basque Workers (ELA), Langile Abertzaleen Batzordeak (LAB) and General Confederation of Labor (CGT); and also with representatives of the ALE and the Arizmendiarieta Foundation, as the promoters of the inclusive-participatory business model.

The field work has consisted of a set of personal interviews. The interviews were carried out in the month of March 2022. The approach has been transversal, with a single interview

per participant and for each social and economic agent. The sampling has been based on the following selection criteria of the people: 1) members of the entities, 2) participants in leadership or management positions, 3) with more than 5 years of seniority, 4) familiar with the MIPE and 5) with the ability to offer a relevant reflection on participatory business models. Based on these criteria, six people were selected: 5 union leaders from the CCOO, UGT, LAB, ELA and CGT (SINDCT), and 1 representative from the ALE and the Arizmendiarieta Foundation. In choosing the trade union organizations, the relevance of nationalist trade unionism in the representative space in which the proposed participatory company model was born, the Basque Country and Navarra, which coexist in these territories with the large confederations of trade unions, has been taken into account.

Triangulation has been used (Cabrera, 2005) in order to increase the strength and quality of the study. To this end, three data sources have been used: that obtained through semi-structured interviews, documentation from trade union organizations and public demonstrations.

Results

Starting from the information obtained through the methodology already explained, by means of personal interviews with members of the most representative trade unions in Euskadi and of the ALE and of the Arizmendiarieta Foundation, the study provides a qualitative analysis of the potentialities and limitations of the model, as well as the identification of the key elements to be taken into consideration in its institutional and organizational design for its development in business praxis.

Thus, the reflections of trade union action in Euskadi on participatory models, in general, and on the inclusive-participatory business model (IPM), in particular, are offered in an aggregated manner. Likewise, new elements for reflection have been identified on specific aspects to be determined in the participatory model for its practical implementation.

The study provides elements of analysis that can be used for a more complete and informed debate on labour participation in the firm and so thus allow progress from a trade union perspective in the development of participatory business models.

Conclusions

The participation of work in the company is a topic with a long history, although with little practical impact in our country, considering the few experiences both in number and in the scope of participation. This reality contrasts, however, with the presence of these business models in other countries in our economic environment.

The growing interest in participatory business models largely responds to the limitations of the neoclassical economic system, with an increasing number of detractors, due to the devastating social and environmental consequences that it has generated, and to the search for new models of company to replace the current one. Trade unionism, as a social agent, is no stranger to this reality and claims its role in the configuration of these new models, as a new way of acting in defense of the rights of working people.

This article analyses, from the trade union perspective, the proposal of the inclusive-participatory business model (IPM), designed and agreed upon by different people belonging to the political, trade union and business world of Euskadi. Despite the existence of various experiences in participatory companies in most countries of the European Union, in our country this business model has had little development, being in the gestation process. The theoretical foundation of participation and the identification of existing models define the theoretical discussion.

Through personal interviews with members of the most representative trade unions in Euskadi and the ALE and the Arizmendiarieta Foundation, as the promoters of the IPM, the study provides a qualitative analysis of the potentialities and limitations of the model, as well as the identification of the key elements to be taken into consideration in its institutional and organizational design for its development in business praxis.

Original Value and Limitations

This article analyses, from the trade union perspective, the proposal of the inclusive-participatory business model (IPM), designed and agreed upon by different people belonging to the political, trade union and business world of Euskadi. Despite the existence of various experiences in participatory companies in most countries of the European Union, in our country this business model has had little development, being in the gestation process.

The study provides elements of analysis that can be used for a more complete and informed debate on labour participation in the firm and so thus allow progress from a trade union perspective in the development of participatory business models.

The model is born as a result of a consensus sought among different political, economic and social agents given the necessary acceptance of all of them for its possible implementation in the practice of companies. However, perhaps this is also its main limitation, and it is that the configuration of a model that brings together so many different sensitivities has not allowed it to go down to detail in its configuration, leaving room for potential further development.

From its design and implementation in each company, the IPM will respond to a greater or lesser degree to the interests of the workers and their representatives. It is not the object of this study to design a single model with universal validity, but rather to outline, in the light of the trade union perspective, a set of aspects that should be taken into consideration due to their importance and effect on working people.

As a limitation of the study and future line of research, we plan to carry out a more in-depth analysis of the inclusive participatory business model from the trade union point of view, carrying out a more complete study using the Delphi method. On the other hand, it is necessary to complete the analysis of the IPM with another research from the capital point of view. Thus, we considered a second phase in this study in which interviews were carried out with the main representatives business organizations of the Basque Country.