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How to best serve our clients?

Input for the KEK/CDC-Retreat

07.08.2026

Overview

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- A special relationship
- Our clients are evolving
- The way we work is evolving
- Lessons learnt

A special relationship

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We are facing the Principal-Agent Dilemma

- We as external consultants as well as our clients, are experts, both in our respective fields. However, we don't know their competences – neither do they know ours (– and our limits).
- **Our clients have** thematic knowledge in their field of responsibility. They know more details than we do. They also have procedural and political know-how and they have an institutional history.
- **We have** methodological competences our clients (usually) lack, as well as insights and overviews from other projects – and external reputation. In long-term mandates, we also may serve as institutional memory.
- These different approaches and interests must be mutually recognized, if we want to be successful in working across the interface of systems and logics. This also means constantly translating, building trust and construc-ting bridges – with two-way systems.

Diversity of our support

- Extended workbench
- Providing expertise
- Evaluations and audits
- Strategic support
- Coaching

Our clients are evolving

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Three «p» guiding current developments.

- **Professionalisation:** Our clients have better insights regarding methodologies we are applying, and they know better what they can expect. Public as well as private clients often have offices specialising in evaluation. These offices may serve as intermediary between us as external experts and the thematically responsible client. Theses offices may have their own agenda.
- **Pressure:** Public and privat organisations are experiencing increasing political, public as well as financial pressure. Thus, they are becoming increasingly risk averse and their openness to innovation and to learning experiences is decreasing.
- **Public:** Today everything may become public. Our clients know, that every report could get political or media attention. In times of increased political pressure, this frightens them.

Our work is evolving

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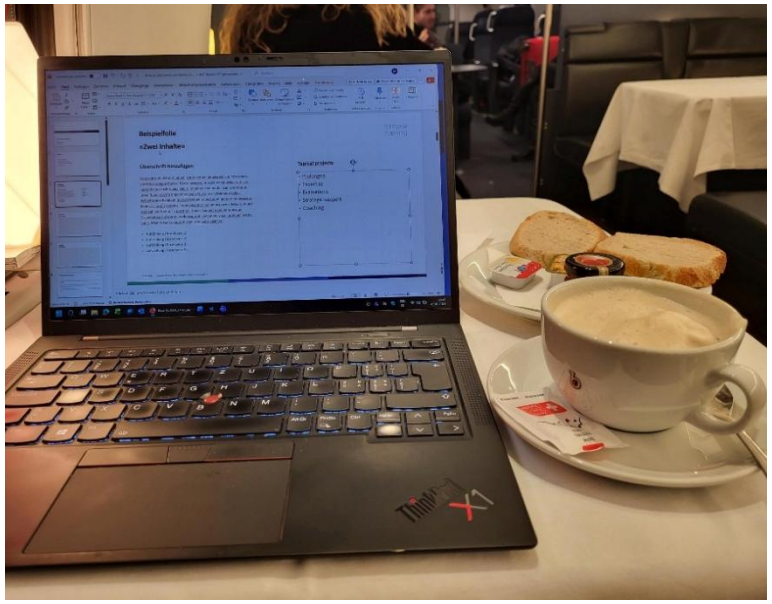
Our mandates depend on our clients more than they depend on us.

- **Speed:** Our clients are increasingly asking for immediate answers. Our time to reflect about findings gets limited. Technological evolutions of the last years are contributing to this speed: We work from wherever and whenever; AI supports our analysis.
- **Pressure:** Our clients put the pressure they are facing on us as external consultants. Thus, they tend to interfere in our work (choice of documentation, experts and stakeholder to be interviewed i.e.) more than they did some years ago – and to make intense editorial interventions to avoid internal or public challenges.
- **International market:** Even for national mandates we are working in an international market. Thus, our fee rates are under pressure as well.



Lessons learnt

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Our work may change considerably in the years to come.

- **High level support:** Senior expertise and reputation are gaining importance. Evaluations will lead to strategic support; strategic support may lead to personal support. Thus, expertise in futures research to support strategic thinking as well as coaching may become more important.
- **Networks:** For smaller companies working in networks becomes decisive, since we will have to offer the whole range of competencies just in time. Integrating international expertise may strengthen the legitimation of our expertise.
- **Analog and digital:** Meeting in person is the only way to clarify roles and expectations as well as to build up mutual trust. Investing in the beginning of a project may pay off down the road. Since we tend to work and meet mainly remotely, setting up a proper kick-off-meeting in person becomes crucial.

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Impressum

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