

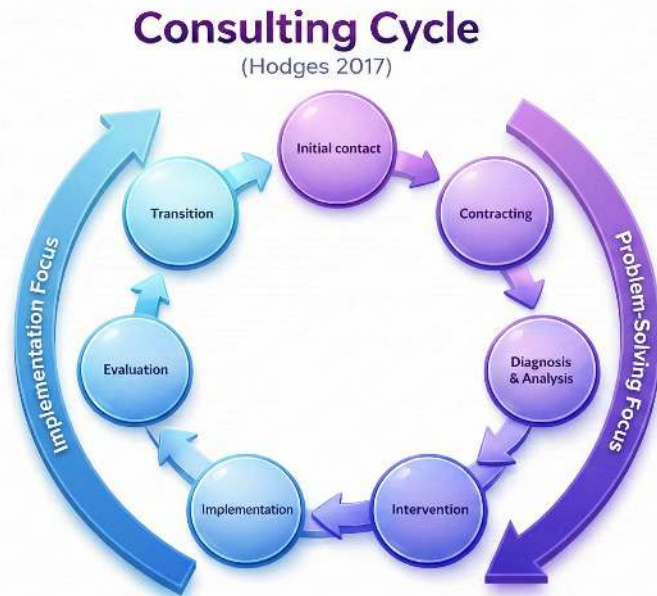
# Consultancy and Professional Practice

## W7: Concluding & Evaluating

### Opportunities & Challenges in Evaluation

Dr Lukas Wallrich ([l.wallrich@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:l.wallrich@bbk.ac.uk))





## Coming Full Circle

We've reached the **concluding phases**: evaluation and transition.

- This connects back to W2: what you **contract** determines how you can **conclude**
- If you didn't agree success criteria at contracting, you'll struggle to demonstrate value now
- Disengagement planning starts **early**, not at the end

# This Week's Agenda

## Part 1

### Evaluation

Opportunities and challenges

## Part 2

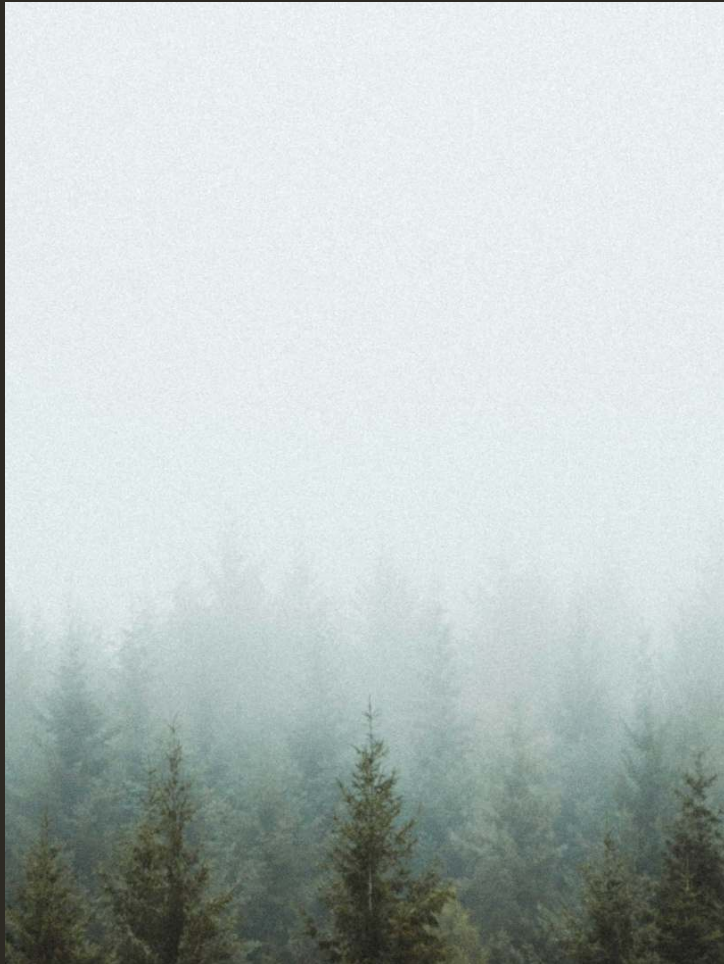
### Handover & Closure

Planning for positive  
disengagement

## Part 3

### Learning & Packaging

Capturing and commoditising  
knowledge



THE FUNDAMENTAL TENSION

---

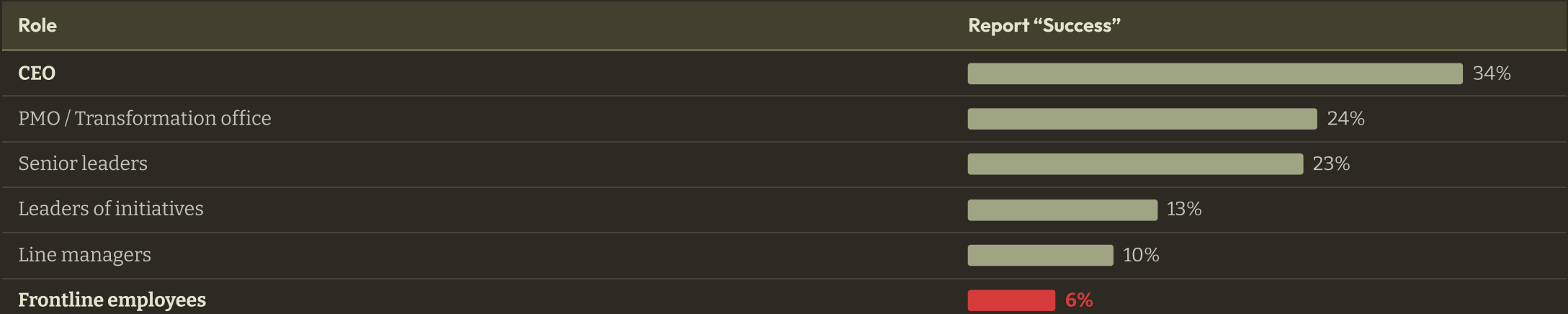
***Organisations face conflicting needs—the need to appear successful versus the need to learn from mistakes.***

— Skinner (2004)

Meaningful evaluation requires acknowledging what didn't work—but this threatens reputations, careers, and carefully constructed narratives.

# Success According to Whom?

McKinsey surveyed 1,487 people across transformation projects. The results reveal a stark perspective gap:



CEOs are almost **six times** more likely than frontline staff to call a transformation successful. The question isn’t “was it successful?” —it’s “successful according to whom?”

Maor, Reich & Yocarini (2017), McKinsey & Company



# Competing Narratives

Evaluation isn't truth discovery—it's a **political contest**.

- Change produces **multiple competing narratives**
- Each serves different stakeholders' interests
- There is rarely one “true” story of what happened

⚠ **Power dynamics** determine whose narrative prevails—  
and whose story gets told in the final evaluation report.

Dawson & Buchanan (2005)





## The Taboo of Failure

If acknowledging failure is taboo, evaluation becomes **performance art**.

- Even tech culture's "fail fast" only celebrates failures that led to later success
- Consultant complicity: we also have incentives to claim success

### Easterby-Smith's Four Purposes

**Proving** • Improving • Learning • Controlling

In practice, "**proving**" dominates and crowds out the more valuable learning purposes.

# The Evaluation Paradox

An industry that advises on evidence-based decisions **rarely evaluates its own interventions** rigorously.

## Why Not?

- Clients rarely pay for evaluation
- Attribution is genuinely hard
- Real impact takes years to materialise
- Nobody wants bad news

## What It Would Take

- Wait months or years for outcomes
- Control for other factors
- Risk finding “we’re not sure”
- Accept ambiguous results



Without evaluation, consulting operates partly on **faith**. The conditions for rigorous evaluation rarely exist, but that is no reason not to try.





## A Similar Tale

The advertising industry faces the **same paradox**:

### **\$250 billion / year**

spent on advertising in the US alone—yet large-scale empirical research finds TV advertising is **15–20× less effective** than the industry claims.

Tuchman, Shapiro & Hitsch (2024)

### **eBay's experiment**

When eBay turned off paid-search ads, sales barely changed. They were **losing 63 cents on every dollar** they thought was earning them 50 cents profit.

Blake, Nosko & Tadelis (2015)



Why don't firms test (more)? Same reasons as consulting: **nobody wants to prove their own work is wasteful**, attribution is genuinely hard, and “companies wouldn't spend billions if it didn't work” becomes its own circular justification.

💭 Think about a project you've been involved with. How was success evaluated? Who defined the criteria? What perspectives were included—or excluded?

→ COMING UP NEXT

**Planning for positive disengagement:  
how endings shape reputations.**