

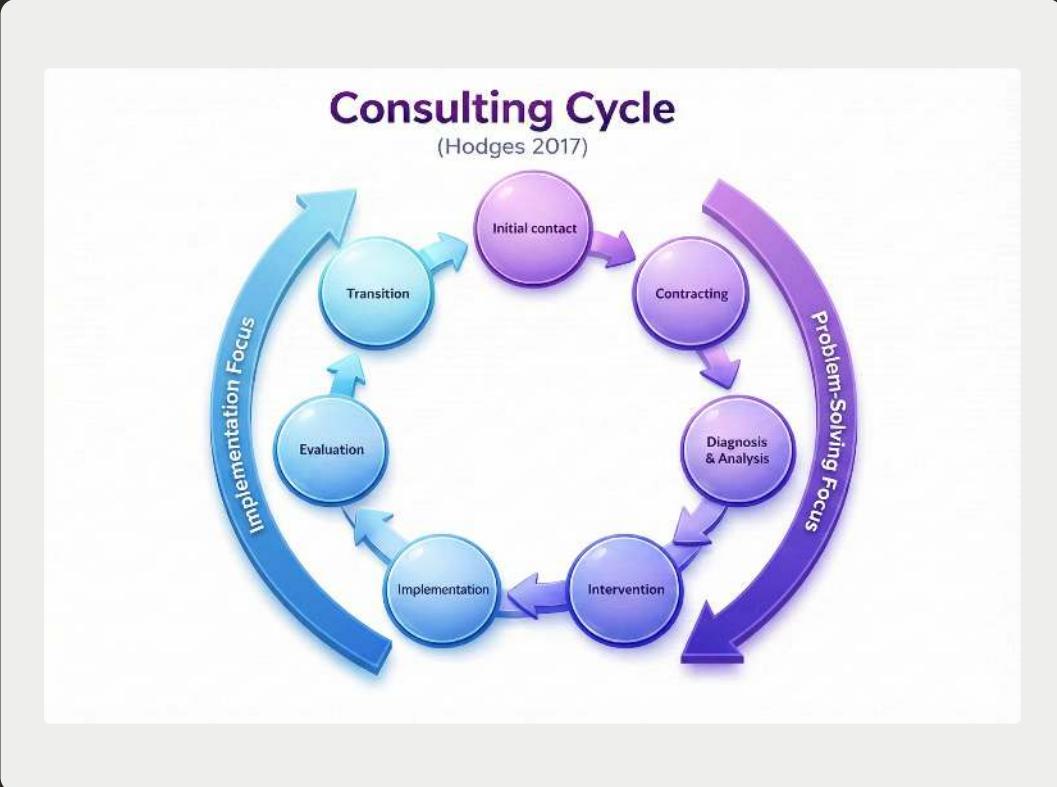
Consultancy and Professional Practice

W7: Concluding & Evaluating

Opportunities & Challenges in Evaluation

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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

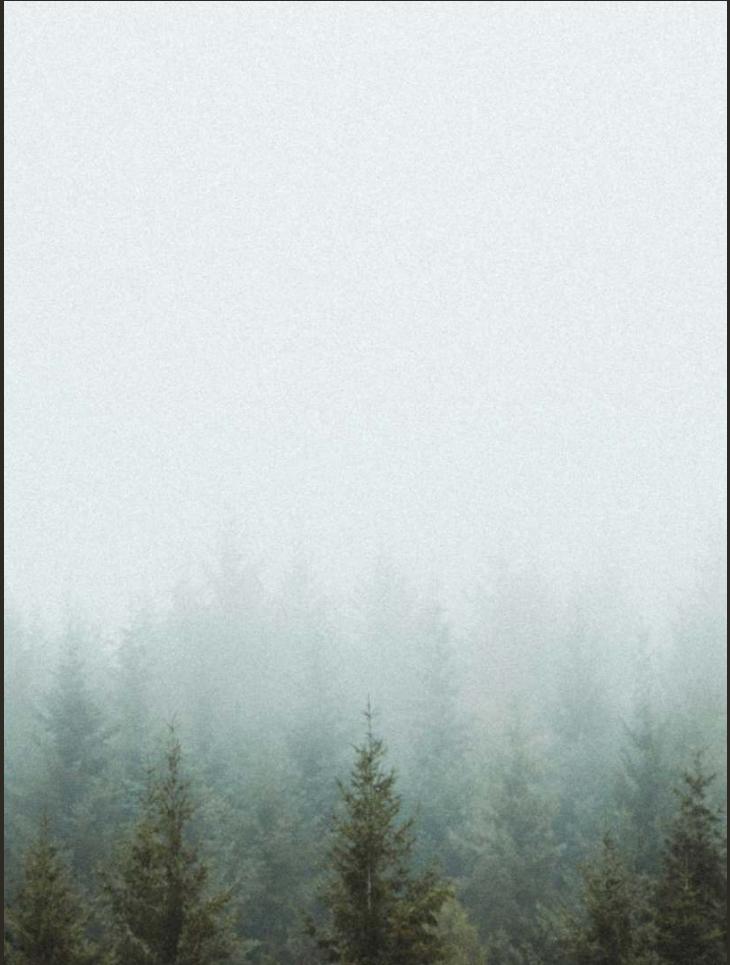
Handover & Closure

Planning for positive
disengagement

Part 3

Learning & Packaging

Capturing and commoditising
knowledge



THE FUNDAMENTAL TENSION

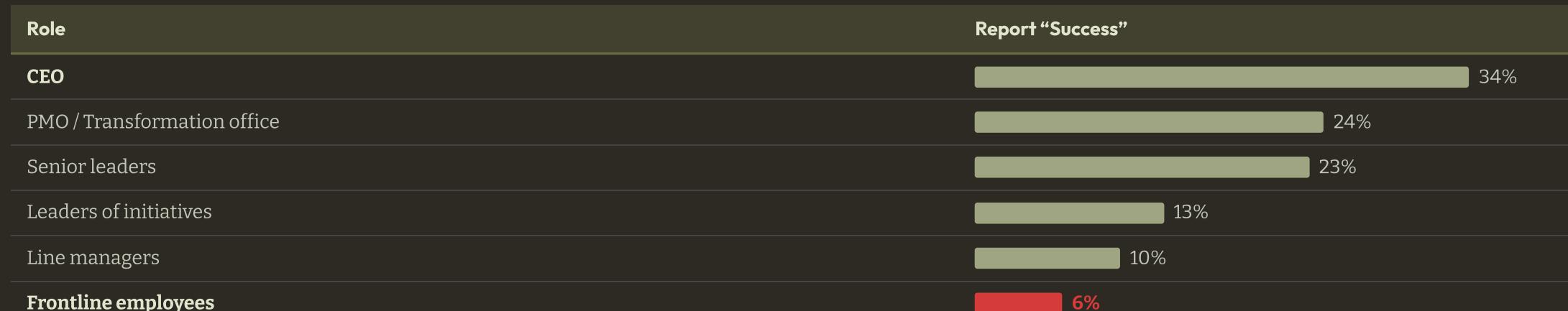
Organisations face conflicting needs—the need to appear successful versus the need to learn from mistakes.

— 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?”

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)

*Everyone
HAS A STORY*





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.

Sturdy (2011)



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.