

De'ge'pol criteria catalogue for quality management in political consulting

Political consulting contributes considerably to the preparation, coordination and mediation of political decisions. With the ever growing demands on politics, the need for quality assurance in political consulting is also increasing.

The German Association of Political Consultants e.V. (de'ge'pol) views the development and continual improvement of standards as an indispensable precondition to the professionalisation of consulting activities for organisations that engage political consultants.

The quality of political consulting can thus be measured by:

- the ability to effectively direct the planning of resources towards the preconceived goals and the available means in political, economic and societal conflicts and in competitive situations,
- the individual and specialist knowledge of the political consultancy personnel,
- the efficiency and verifiability of the process of political consulting.

Internal and external political consultants always act in the interests of their clients or businesses, and are aware that they also outwardly represent them during the course of the assignment. In this respect they understand customer orientation.

The quality criteria offer political consultants and clients a basis for:

- an optimising of their own services,
- a differentiation within the field of political consulting,
- assistance in differentiating between the choice among providers of consultancy services.

The de'ge'pol criteria catalogue for quality management in political consulting, which was adopted in 2005, complements the de'ge'pol code of conduct from the year 2003. The code of conduct and the criteria catalogue comprise the basic principles of professional political consulting, as held by de'ge'pol*.

* The texts of the de'ge'pol criteria catalogue and the de'ge'pol code of conduct are copyrighted. The de'ge'pol prohibits thus political consultants who are not members of de'ge'pol from advertising any adherence to the de'ge'pol regulations in their documentation. de'ge'pol members are required to notify the board of corresponding malpractice.

1. Personnel

1.1 Quality of expertise

1.1.1 Political expertise

Political consultants seek solutions that do justice to the standings of scholarship, the development of the branch and their respective assignments to the best of their ability.

Political consultants know of the relevant political organisations, institutions and processes of decision making and communication, as well as the basic

constitutional standards, processes of legislation making, rules of procedure and executive and legislative codes of practice.

Political convictions, basic principles and Weltanschauung are important starting points for the work of political consultants. They are, however, required to separate clearly between their own political opinions and the political goals of their consulting.

Political consultants maintain a far-reaching web of contacts in the political sphere that they use as resources for their consulting activities under adherence to the de'ge'pol code of conduct.

1.1.2 Communicative competency

Professional political consulting places high demands on communicative competence and the ability to analyse the respective stakeholders, and from this to derive recommended courses of action.

Political consulting presupposes the ability to convert specific political expertise into goal oriented communication measures. Among this is included, on the one hand, a good knowledge of the instruments which are made available to political scientists and communications scientists, and on the other hand a personal integrity and communications skills for appearances and dialogue with stakeholder groups.

1.1.3 Competency in problem solving as a condition of the assignment acceptance

Political consultants only take on assignments for which their skills, experience and personnel meet those required for the work.

Political consultants in their responsibility for personnel only assign this responsibility to staff members when they possess the required professional and commercial qualifications.

1.1.4 Training and development

Political consultants continually keep up with the latest developments in political practices in their specialist area and the scientific disciplines relevant to them. They continually strive to improve their knowledge, skills and methods of procedure.

Characteristics of a continual improvement in the rendering of political consulting services are appropriate measures of further education, the acquiring of additional qualifications, as well as the utilisation of scholarly literature.

1.2 Personal qualities

1.2.1 Independence, neutrality and integrity

Professional political consulting is carried out in accordance with the professional issues and goals of the client. In their consulting activities, political consultants strive, as far as possible, for a personally impartial, objective and neutral analysis

and evaluation. They inform their client of particularly critical positions and situations in order to avoid conflict of interest or goals in good time.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants inform their members of staff of the assignment and the requirements for independent consulting, especially in consideration of financial and personal relations to clients, and supervise their members of staff in this respect.

1.2.2 Confidentiality/ discretion

Discretion is understood in the sense of the de'ge'pol code of conduct.

Political consultants are aware of particular position of confidentiality in the consulting relationship. They treat all information regarding the consulting relationship as strictly confidential.

Political consultants inform their members of staff of the obligation to safeguard the relationship of mutual trust, and explain to them the consequent requirements and supervise their members of staff accordingly.

2. Process/ assignment processing

2.1 Process orientation as quality management

In political consulting, processes are often difficult to define and distinguish from one another. Effective and goal orientated political consulting thus requires an intensive exchange of information between consultant and client, in order to analyse processes, to plan, to lead and to improve.

This includes information regarding:

- process functions
- working stages
- timing
- resources
- costs
- employees
- documentation
- evaluation

2.2 Efficiency

2.2.1 Objectives

Political consultants ascertain and adhere to the client-intended goal of a process-orientated course of action. This goal builds the fundamental foundations of the assignment and allows for the formulation of strategy, as well as for its implementation.

In the implementation of public affairs and lobbying measures, political consultants orientate themselves to the concrete business goals of their client.

The measuring of success and results is based upon the fulfilling of goals of clearly defined process stages.

Individual stages and goals will be defined with the client in close consultation prior to the start of collaboration, and will be reviewed at regular intervals.

2.2.2 Formulation of assignments

Based on the defined goals, political consultants formulate concrete tasks in consultation with the client. They build the requirements for the formulation of a process-orientated procedure.

Political consultants develop proposals for priorities and scenarios as an aid to the assignment formulation, which could lead to alternatives contingent on different situations. They take into consideration both external factors and internal factors of the client.

2.2.3 Resource planning

An appropriate planning of resources is necessary, which guarantees an appropriate and methodical development of the consulting.

The elements of a goal and appropriate planning of resources involve:

- knowledge of clients, political and thematic fields
- information on qualifications and availability of members of staff
- leadership experience of the project manager
- appropriate time scheduling
- planning of buffer times

2.2.4 Orientation towards stakeholders

Political consultants systemise and analyse the complex relationship networks of the stakeholders that are relevant for the implementation of the assignment.

The achieving of goals and fulfilling of assignments requires the capability of the political consultant to research, identify and analyse the significance of all relevant stakeholders and their specific interests.

In their consulting, political consultants take into consideration all players who could be or become meaningful as stakeholders for the goal/ assignment.

2.2.5 Assignment supervision

Political consultants assure supervision of the assignment, which incorporates the consulting process from the establishing of contacts to the following-up at the end.

This includes:

- the gathering, processing and preparation of information (including the compiling of new information) in order to fulfil the assignment.
- the control and, if need be, correction of the detailed plan of work with all individual tasks and quality requirements.
- the appropriate co-steering of the consulting process from the client.
- the adherence to the control of proceedings and successes that have been agreed upon when accepting the assignment, if possible not only after its conclusion, but while the project is being carried out.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants inform their clients, without prompting and at regular intervals, about the proceeding of the assignment, unless the client specifically demands another arrangement. The

informing must take place in such form that it remains possible for the client to give instructions regarding the direction of implementation.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants adopt modern procedures of project planning and project management, in order to continually observe the use of instruments and operating procedures according to requirements of an optimal cost-value-ratio, and from this to derive options for supervision.

2.2.6 Reliability of services

Political consultants inform their clients as early as possible if stipulated binding guidelines cannot be observed, and declare the precise reasons for this. Political consultants guarantee a monitoring of deadlines for legal and other dates relating to the assignment (such as meetings of bodies, mid-term presentations, the releasing of reports.)

2.3 Adequacy of process strategy

2.3.1 Structures

In the consulting of clients political consultants are aware of the decision-making processes, decision-makers, courses of action and deadlines predetermined by the client.

Political consultants appropriately propose alternative structures which may be more beneficial and effective for the consulting process and the development of strategies.

Political consultants particularly propose alternative structures if the implementation of strategies by the consultant or the client demands other decision-making processes, decision makers, courses of action or deadlines.

2.3.2 Resources and instruments

Political consultants are aware that resources such as time, funds and personnel must be clearly defined and organised in order to carry out a strategy. Political consultants thus give their clients clear advice and recommendations as to how their proposed strategies can be best carried out using the corresponding resources. They also give clear recommendations as to which resources should not be utilised.

Political consultants identify and recommend appropriate instruments for the implementation of strategies by exhausting all relevant fields of political consulting and political agencies.

2.4 Dynamic adjustment

2.4.1 Continual observation

Political consulting is ideally a service where the consulting and its supply required by the client are available according to the specific requirements, at the right time, on the right scale, to the required quality and in the right place. Regarding quality assurance, political consultants continually adapt their actions to the changing circumstances.

Political consultants ensure an optimal flow of information and continually observe the political situation and the relevant respective players in order to optimise their consulting performance and the consulting process. They observe in particular: the political sphere and relevant players, the client's opponents and their behaviour, economic issues of other market participants and their relationship with the market.

Political consultants document the acquired results, which can be compared and from which lessons can be learnt, and instruct their clients as well as their colleagues accordingly in order to optimise the applied strategy for comparative cases in the short- and long-term.

2.5 Verifiability

2.5.1 Competency distribution

Political consultants agree areas of authority and responsibility for procedures and project contents with clients and colleagues.

This agreement takes into consideration the qualifications of those responsible and the internal business practice in the consultancy firm, as well as of the client. The client will be provided with a contact person for all phases and sections of a project, whom the client is guaranteed to be able to reach for the duration of the project.

2.5.2 Information and documentation

Political consultants continually update and improve the level of information in the consulting process via exchange with the client. They strive for regular work and project reviews.

Professional political consulting includes systematic and easily understandable documentation, which, above all, lists costs and resources, expenditure, activities and appointments.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants should present their activities in a written agreement to the client in two sections: as documentation in the project plan or project handbook; to be used as a guide in the project report documenting the individual stages of planning, organisation and implementation. These individual stages include plans for mid-term and final report production, of milestone and end presentations, information, demonstration and learning functions, monitoring, supervision and evaluation.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants document projects through administration of:

- proposals, planning documents, statistics and released documents-correspondence, meeting protocols and contract amendments,
- phase reports, activity reports, appointment reports, concluding reports, cost receipts,
- other project documents.

Political consultants administer documents via measures which comply with the legal protection of data and the regulations on the saving of data.

2.5.3 Supervision

Political consultants are aware that political activities and communication, as part of the strategic management, represent a business added value factor to the client. Political consultants make this business management connection transparent and accept it as an assessment factor of their work.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants accept that the establishment, supervision and control of strategic political activities and communications must be adapted to the supervisory system of the client.

Political consultants take part in the further development of methods and indices for the supervision of their services. Political consultants see it their responsibility primarily, however, along with the pure microeconomic quantification, to bring the societal and political perspectives to a position of equal standing.

2.6 Acquiring and carrying out of assignments

2.6.1 General rules for the acceptance of assignments

Political consultants who acquire assignments as external consultants are aware that political decisions and procedures are associated with public goods. The integrity of state run institutions and political processes must not be allowed to be damaged by the carrying out of assignments.

Political consultants who acquire assignments as external consultants guarantee to diligently observe laws, professional rules and developments during an assignment. This applies especially to tenders and anti-corruption regulations. They inform their members of staff correspondingly.

Political consultants only accept or undertake such assignments that can be carried out in accordance with the regulations mentioned in the previous paragraphs.

Political consultants examine all risks linked to an assignment that could compromise the reputation or the economic situation of the client.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants provide a rough planning of the assignment in their bid.

On accepting an assignment, political consultants who are active as external consultants recommend to their clients an unambiguous and written agreement regarding the content, scope, and aim of the assignment, as well as the allocation of responsibility. This agreement should include:

- the form the service takes
- regulations regarding the evaluation of the success of the consulting
- the limits of liability
- the time and appointment planning
- personal allocation and responsibilities
- the utilisation of third parties affecting the consulting
- the remuneration

2.6.2 Fair competition

Political consultants respect the intellectual authorship of proposals, concepts and publications of others, and use such material only with clear references.

When necessary for reasons of subject or expertise, political consultants employ only those colleagues who adhere to the quality criteria of the de'ge'pol.

When cooperating with others, political consultants who are active as external consultants define to the client the project responsibility as well as the type and scope of the cooperation openly and clearly – unless it concerns simply a short-term cooperation for reasons of personnel shortage.

2.6.3 Reliable pricing

Political consultants who are active as external consultants charge fees based on the nature and scope of the assignment.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants provide fixed price quotations only for those projects whose scope can be overviewed. Scope and difficulty of the problems to be solved are precisely and bindingly specified, and are subject to review by both parties to the contract.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants render their proposals precisely so that the client is clearly aware of any additional costs involved in the invoicing beyond the basic fees.

2.6.4 Reliable advertising

Political consultants who are active as external consultants practice competitive restraint in advertising. They present their qualifications exclusively in respect of their competencies and their experience.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants adhere to the current standing when presenting their turnover, employees, areas of activity etc. The representation is bound to the principles of accuracy, clarification and honesty. References or descriptions of concluded projects may only be made public with the prior consent of the client regarding the wording.

Political consultants who are active as external consultants and who are members of the de'ge'pol inform clients and third parties of their membership of the de'ge'pol where possible and of the basic principles of the profession that are included in this catalogue of criteria.