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Forming networks in the tension zone between politics and the economy:  
Consultation and development of the klima:aktiv network

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# Forming networks in the tension zone between politics and the economy: Consultation and development of the klima:aktiv network

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## Abstract

This article is about how to build a performing network in the field of climate protection, based on the example of klima:aktiv, a publicly commissioned Austrian climate-protection initiative. The klima:aktiv network is a medium for different cooperation projects aimed at raising public awareness concerning energy efficiency and the careful use of existing energy resources as well as the quality improvement of certain products in existing markets.

Moreover, this network has to operate successfully in the field of tension between political policy making and the economy.

The article describes success factors and stumbling blocks of building such a network in three different phases. Starting from the “initial phase” with a number of unconnected projects, continuing with the “set up phase”, which is about building up energy and ownership in the network and establishing adequate forms of governance. The third phase describes how to keep an established network alive and running well in a turbulent environment. Furthermore, this paper points out the challenges of consulting in and to such networks.

This process shows the perspective of a systemic consultant in charge of consulting the development of the network. The reader will also find additional important aspects from the point of view of the network manager responsible for klima:aktiv.

## **Introduction**

Many problems in the health, education and climate-protection sectors have attained a degree of complexity that means traditional forms of political governance have reached their limits or are even partly failing. Classic political governance instruments, such as the tightening of the legal framework, the setting of incentives through additional funding and supports or the control of market prices by means of taxes, have been successfully introduced to initiate efficient changes. Thus, in the climate-protection and health-care sectors, we have succeeded in reducing pollutants in whole branches of industry to an acceptable amount and in introducing specific emission limits for new heating facilities in households.

Complex tasks such as the enhancement of public awareness concerning energy efficiency, the careful use of existing energy resources but also the quality improvement of certain products in existing markets can hardly be tackled with “classic” instruments of governance any longer. In order to cope with such tasks, a complex interaction of a multitude of stakeholders from policy-making, political institutions, and companies from different branches is needed. In this landscape, shaped by cooperating and competing actors with varying interests, sustainable solutions have to be developed. A robust network with a firmly rooted cooperation culture provides a good basis for this process.

This paper describes the consultation of network development processes on the basis of the klima:aktiv case study. After a brief introduction of klima:aktiv, the networking process will be described in all its phases from the consulting perspective. Finally, a conclusion is drawn by focusing on the distinctive features of consultation of and in networks. The point of view of the responsible network manager of klima:aktiv, who is co-author of this paper, will complete this presentation by adding further important aspects.

## **Networks are multi-faceted**

Each network is different! Networks show a variety of communication patterns, logical control operations and ways of decision-making. It is this variety that makes processes in networks striking and sometimes even adventurous. The consulting of networks, too, time and again includes adventurous aspects.

Specialist literature seeks to make this variety distinguishable and classifiable through relevant network typologies. The differentiation is based on a multitude of criteria and specifics such as: hierarchy/heterarchy, stability/dynamics, externally/internally initiated, regional/international, decentralised/emergent development, pool-orientated/project-orientated etc. (see also Sydow, Duschek 2003, Loose 2006, Mildenerger 1998 ). In practice, however, these criteria are hardly measurable and often ambivalent. From my point of view, it is not very helpful to grasp this variety analytically, the point is rather to shape this diversity of networks.

This paper aims to show how to succeed in using and shaping the complexity of network development processes. This way of “managing by complexity” distinguishes itself from ways of reducing complexity and practicing a “management of complexity” (see also Weber, 2002).

## **Can networks be consulted?**

If we as consultants go to a marketing organisation, for example, we expect certain basic patterns and dynamics due to the business logic and we know the typical structural conflicts of such a unit. This knowledge provides confidence concerning our approach and (hopefully) makes us able to connect with the clients.

In networks, the fields of interest and basic conflicts are typically more varied. Compared with consultancy for organisations, some essential characteristics for consultancy for networks can be identified:

- The limits of networks are blurred. The following latent questions arise: Where does the consulted system begin, where does it end? Who is “still” part of it and who not (or no longer)?
- In networks, manifold sub-structures take effect, power relations are more diffuse. The complexity of the consulted system is higher.
- Decision-making processes are more intricate – veto positions easily cause stalemates.
- At least in the start-up phase, networks have no established governance structures. Hence, there is no commonly accepted basis upon which consulting can build a meaningful difference.
- Coordination processes in networks are more time-consuming and need more resources.
- In the initial phase of many network development processes there are still no network partners, there are at best fairly incomplete ideas about their potential. Hence, in this phase the question “Who is the client?” and “What is the client system?” remains temporarily unresolved for the consultant. Network consultants thus need suitable behavioural approaches for cases where their client’s system first has to be developed and is then subject to continual change.

Thus I would like to answer the central question “Can networks be consulted?” cautiously: YES, they can, provided that a centre of power accepted by the network awards a contract. Ideally, this contract is a project-like agreement, providing for time and resources, so that consulting can become efficient. Furthermore, it is essential to develop an awareness and suitable management of the project’s complexity together with the client and to define the expectations concerning the consulting.

In 2004, in the initial phase of the Austrian klima:aktiv climate-protection initiative, the manager responsible at the time was looking for support from an external consultant. The main concern regarding the consultation was “*to keep track of the complex structure*”. In order to better understand this complex structure let me say a few words on klima:aktiv.

## **The klima:aktiv climate-protection initiative**

klima:aktiv is part of the Austrian government’s climate-protection strategy. It is “hosted” by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management and managed (operational management) by the Austrian Energy Agency. klima:aktiv is established as an umbrella brand that bundles the voluntary measures of the Austrian climate-protection strategy. The climate-protection initiative officially started in 2004 and is planned to run until 2012, the end of the Kyoto contract period. The first preparations with relevant stakeholders had already started in 2002.

The main goal of klima:aktiv is to support the market introduction and rapid spread of climate-friendly technologies and services in the fields of building and reconstruction, mobility, energy saving and renewable energies. In this process, on the demand side both consumers and investing companies are addressed. On the supply side, incentives for transformation of the supply are set. The most important incentives for the market transformation are the activation and interlinking of the market partners, the qualification of service providers, the establishment of quality standards, information and motivation for a change in thinking as well as consulting and support. In this way, the klima:aktiv climate-protection initiative completes classic instruments such as laws, regulations and supports in the field of climate protection. klima:aktiv also supports the activities of partners in the federal provinces and in the economy.

### **The structure of klima:aktiv at the starting point**

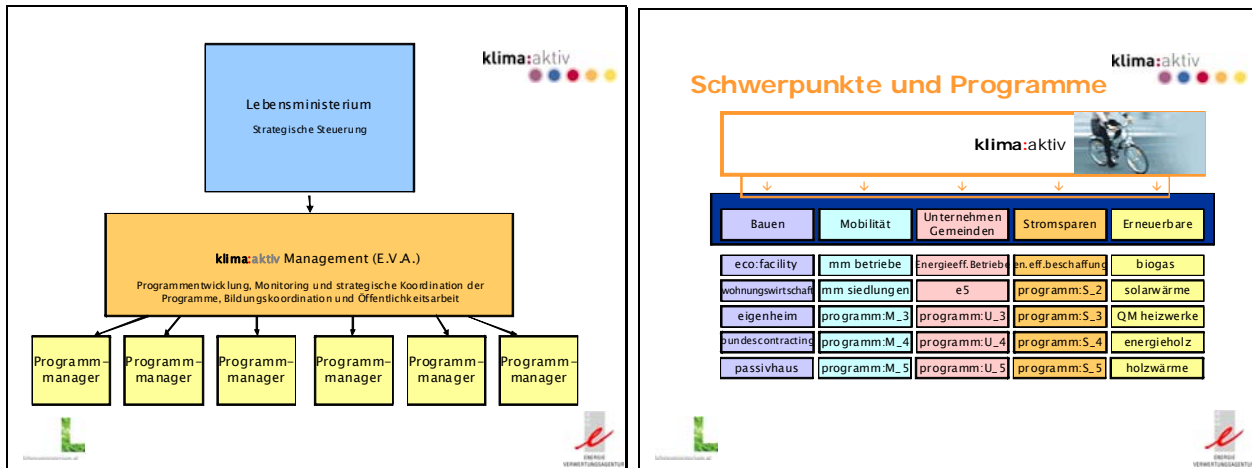
klima:aktiv was started in 2004 as a bundling of multiple subject-related programmes. The focus of the programmes is partly technology-orientated (solar heat, biomass, biogas etc.) and partly product- and target-group-orientated (energy consumption in government buildings, klima:aktiv house, energy-efficient products etc.). Basically, these programmes concentrate with varying emphasis on the following levers:

- Education and further education
- Quality Assurance
- Development and implementation of standards
- Information & consulting
- Market development together with partners in the economy and the federal provinces

Each programme can be perceived as a venture planned in project form, whose contracting authority is the Ministry of Life represented by the Austrian Energy Agency. The programme and the programme management is put out to tender by the klima:aktiv

management team,<sup>1</sup> evaluated through a multi-stage process, before contracts are concluded with individual companies or consortiums. Originally, 16 programmes were planned, today the klima:aktiv management team under the guidance of Stephan Fickl, co-author of this paper, manages 22 programmes, more than 400 company partnerships and about 3.000 competence partners ([www.klimaaktiv.at](http://www.klimaaktiv.at)).

In the initial phase hierarchical governance was the basic structure as the following diagrams tellingly illustrate:



**CONTROL STRUCTURE, KLIMA:AKTIV, MAY 2004**

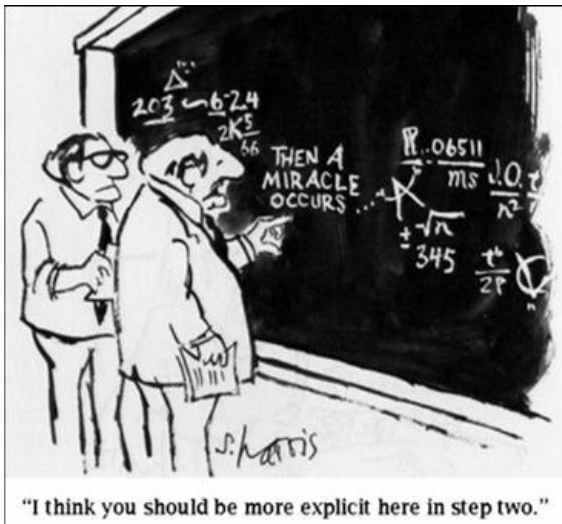
The role allocation among the different actors was already roughly defined:

- Ministry of Life: strategic governance
- klima:aktiv management: programme development, monitoring and strategic coordination of programmes, coordination of education and public relations
- Programme manager: project-type governance of the programme

### Framework agreements for the programmes and the logic model

The programmes were contracted through framework agreements limited in the majority of cases to three to four years. The targets and expected outcomes of the respective programme were defined in annual working programmes. The logic model served as organising basis. Logic models make it transparent how the individual tasks and parts of a programme contribute to the target achievement as well as their interrelation and which short-, medium- and long-term results can be expected.

<sup>1</sup> The terms "klima:aktiv umbrella management", "umbrella management" and "management team" used in this paper have the same meaning.



Source: [www.evalguide.ethz.ch](http://www.evalguide.ethz.ch)

Even at an early stage, the introduction of the logic model as a basis for the annual programme planning as well as the announced regular evaluation resulted in an exceptional focus on results within the programmes and among the responsible programme managers.

## Consulting of klima:aktiv in the initial phase

The main tasks of the umbrella management in the initial phase were the preparation and realisation of the call for tenders for the programme management. Additionally, some already active climate-protection initiatives were integrated in the klima:aktiv project. As governance structure for the project-type governance of the programmes the logic model was established among the programme managers with a great deal of personal communication.

In the initial phase the consulting set itself as target to stabilise the management and governance boards and to support their efficiency as well as to prepare appropriate governance processes for the whole project. The encouragement of a targeted network design was deliberately defined as the next step for the following years. The network was to be able to build on a solid basis.

Accordingly, during the first year the consulting focused on the following topics:

- Strategic positioning of the klima:aktiv umbrella management
- Task and role allocation among the klima:aktiv umbrella management as well as between the umbrella management and its environments
- Support of the management team with regard to team formation
- Specialist counselling with regard to the development of an efficient governance of the programmes

- Early awareness raising among the responsible managers of klima:aktiv concerning the strengthening of the horizontal cooperation between the programmes

## **Success factors and stumbling blocks in the initial phase**

In retrospect, from both the consulting and the network management perspective, some key success factors and stumbling blocks can be identified in the initial phase.

### **Compose a detailed, well-elaborated concept for a quick start**

A prerequisite for the launch of klima:aktiv was a sound concept and a handful of committed people. The new instrument “stimulus for market transformation” had been defined and outlined. The different market segments had been assessed in a study to make it clear where this instrument would make the best profit. And there was support for the project from the industry, especially in the renewable sector. Altogether the preparatory work for the official start of klima:aktiv in 2004 took two years.

### **Participative nucleus from the beginning – opportunity and risk at the same time**

Form and content should be congruent to be productive. Organisation and communication architecture of the project should be fit for the task of building sustainable cooperation in an interorganisational network. Therefore it was essential that participative elements were implemented from the beginning. In an open space workshop in 2002, the stakeholders could bring in their ideas. During the analysis study a lot of the future market partners of klima:aktiv were interviewed, and the business plans for the specific programmes were developed together with the main stakeholders.

This participative development of the programme also brought about conflicts in the strategic orientation. The participating industries were focused on business opportunities, which did not always fit with the mitigation goal of the initiative. For example, not all forms of heat-pump use are sensible from a climate-protection perspective. But the heat-pump industry has been eager to be recognised as a renewable energy industry. This conflict has remained, although we clarified the problem in a mission statement.

Accordingly, a key factor for success was to provide appropriate participative procedures, to achieve clarity concerning the precise degree of integration and to develop the suitable path of integration together with the client.

### **Considerable trust in the project team by the hierarchy**

The department of “Energy and Environment Economy” in the Ministry of Environment was the nucleus for the development of the project. All the different ideas from a lot of stakeholders were focused into one project. So there was a strong and clear will to implement the project. But a lot of good projects die unless there is faith and trust from the top level of the hierarchy. In this case there was a lot of freedom to develop and implement the project and the courage to experience a new kind of instrument to combat climate change. The head of division provided for the midterm financial and political commitment. Thus, a protected space had been created for the breeding and birth of the experiment. The hierarchy engaged with an open process.

In course of the consulting process, it was repeatedly important to maintain the hierarchy’s trust in the project. Any uncertainties or concerns on the part of the Ministry of Life were



handled promptly. An important aspect was to discuss the different governance and decision-making logics between the ministry, the umbrella management and programme partners and help them to refer to each logic clearly.

### **Selection of the players for klima:aktiv – and keeping associated consequences under control**

The tendering phase for the programme management and the following award procedure implied selection. Naturally, this selection caused concerns, lack of understanding and partly even annoyance among the tenderers or the consortiums of tenderers who were not chosen. To some extent, the bid requirements and the award procedure were challenged and criticised. Even in this early phase, there was an increased risk that klima:aktiv's reputation would be damaged and that the future acceptance of the project would be compromised.

With considerable communication we were able counterbalance these interventions and calm the waters.

### **Establishing efficient standards for programme governance while at the same time causing ownership**

Apart from the project-type governance of the individual programmes the question was how the umbrella management could govern the whole process. This leads to the question of how much performance responsibility the programmes should have and how much governance responsibility the umbrella management should assume.

According to the classic hierarchical logic of governance of contracting authorities, the umbrella management would have to assume the whole responsibility. This naturally would have resulted in extensive reporting between the programmes and the umbrella management. The risk that the project would become overloaded by documentation requirements and trapped in bureaucracy would have increased rapidly.

Thus several scenarios for possible forms of hierarchic and participative governance were conceived and discussed with the result that written standards for the monitoring of the programmes were prepared. The monitoring was designed in a way that the responsibility for the performance achievement of the programmes could to a large extent be assigned to the programme managers. This provided a basis for the twice-yearly monitoring talks between the umbrella management and the programme managers. Since then the monitoring standards have been continually reviewed and revised.

At first, this participative form of governance caused of course considerable uncertainty among the contracting authority and created a high degree of personal responsibility at the programme managers.

### **The end of the initial phase – the project-type governance reaches its limits**

Approximately eight months after the official start of klima:aktiv first target conflicts of the programmes became noticeable. Several programmes contacted the same target groups, hence some business partners were addressed by several programmes at the same time.

klima:aktiv increasingly ran the risk to be perceived as uncoordinated from the outside. Coordinating the addressing of target groups and public relations emerged as a new challenge to the klima:aktiv management.

### **A look back at the initial phase from a customer's point of view**

In order to explicitly analyse the consulting from the customer's perspective, the precise contribution of the consulting for the klima:aktiv project was evaluated in an interview with Stephan Fickl in March 2009. The reader will find the outcomes of this interview as quotations throughout the text and in condensed form in the following passage focusing on the initial phase:

*“Initially, we were too much concerned with the content-related topics of the programmes and with questions about the tendering procedure to tackle the question of everything that had to be done to set up klima:aktiv as a comprehensive project. For us it was important to get incentives and to think about all the steps necessary to start a project like klima:aktiv.*

*We also had not previously thought about what could or should be the difference between such a network and its governance and an organisation.*

*As we had commissioned the programmes ourselves it was important to clarify our role as umbrella management in the tension zone between the ministry as contractor and the programmes as customers. In doing so, the tasks in the umbrella management also became clearer.*

*Additionally, the structural and natural potential for conflict embedded in the structure between the umbrella management, the contractors and the programmes as well within the Austrian Energy Agency had also become evident. In this context, it was relieving to decouple the conflicts from the persons acting and to understand and treat them as structural conflicts. The better identification of a multitude of structural conflicts and tensions made it possible that conflicts and tensions between the different actors did not become entrenched.*

*We also became aware that what we wanted to achieve with klima:aktiv and what we were responsible for could only be accomplished through other logics of governance than just through the project logic.”*

The moment to establish new mechanisms of governance had come.

### **Consulting in the set-up phase: building and governing the network**

At the beginning of 2005, the situation of klima:aktiv was as follows:

- The umbrella management had gained a lot of experience with the tendering and awarding of programmes.
- It was in close contact with most of the programme managers.

- Apart from a few exceptions the programme managers used the logic model for planning the next working year.
- The umbrella management was well established among the contractors.
- The governance committees had made themselves familiar with their tasks.
- All in all, there was little coordination and cooperation between the programmes.
- The education management and public relations were rooted in klima:aktiv as a centrally organised function. The first horizontal cooperation between the programmes emerged from these two functions (concerted further education programmes and joint public appearances).
- The standards defined for public relations in the programmes were only partly adhered to.

The main tasks for the umbrella management in this phase were to start further programmes, to establish a horizontal network for better coordinating the programmes and to develop further standards.

In the medium term, klima:aktiv was to distribute its quality standards especially through partnerships with companies and its own impact. Therefore it was important to establish klima:aktiv as a strong brand in the market, which could be distributed through partnerships with commercial enterprises.

One such partnership permitted a commercial enterprise to use the klima:aktiv logo, but also included the voluntary commitment of the enterprise to apply the quality standards developed by klima:aktiv to its own products and services.

The consulting in the years 2005 and 2006 focused on the following tasks:

- Consulting of the umbrella management and the directing teams concerning the establishment of the network as well as the further development of the governance processes and network structures
- The conceptual design and moderation of network conferences with klima:aktiv programme managers as well as the representatives of the government and the provinces to develop a learning network with a strong cooperation culture
- The ongoing coaching of the klima:aktiv management to reflect the whole process and its strategic positioning

## **Success factors in the set-up phase of the network or “The art of establishing self-governance“**

In this phase, it was important to efficiently establish the network and self-governance and thus to enable the programme managers to handle and solve conflicts of goals as self-reliant as possible. In this process it was essential to strengthen the programme managers' autonomy, to encourage ownership while at the same time keeping the governance of the network sufficiently under the umbrella management. The umbrella management was still in charge of the ultimate responsibility for the success of klima:aktiv. Additionally, it was evident that the hierarchically structured klima:aktiv project could only become a success if a broad-based network of actors was built backing the change.

This subject was somehow reminiscent of an expedition to a foreign country – it demanded “drive by sight” and continuous reflections about the chosen approach.

### **Travel arrangements for a journey into an unknown country – establishing and continually developing further standards**

When setting out on a journey in a foreign country, no one knows the exact route or possible risks. To be well prepared for such an adventure, it is important to be well equipped and possibly to establish a routine concerning the activities on an operational level.

In order to establish efficient company networks it is important to standardise the planned communication channels. The pivotal recommendations therefore are: Create standards for everything you can standardise, reduce complexity wherever it makes sense.

Thus the pivotal levers for the success of klima:aktiv were to set standards and to assure quality. The standards developed were efficiently established internally (within the network) and externally (at the partners). It soon became evident that the cooperation with partners was an essential asset of klima:aktiv

Today the following standards, among others, are in use in the network:

- Model contracts for the programmes
- Templates for logic models as well as the annual working programmes and reports
- Standards and guidelines for monitoring
- Guidelines for cooperation with countries
- Standards for the cooperation with commercial partners as part of the continuously improved partner management through cooperation agreements and logo license agreements
- A corporate-design manual for all klima:aktiv partners

Externally, the communication channels to the multipliers were standardised as much as possible and reasonable. Multipliers for market transformation are to be found on the supply side (producers and service providers) as well as on the demand side (consumers).

To be able to set incentives among these multipliers concerning quality enhancement and awareness raising, the following standards were established (excerpts):

- Quality standards for products, services as well as for the introduction of quality management systems, e.g. klima:aktiv house, biomass district heating systems etc. Standards and guidelines for quality assurance for e.g. plumbers and planners or for old-building renovation
- Checklists for consumers to enable them to evaluate the quality of products and services
- Audits for more complex facilities (e.g. solar thermal systems, air pressure systems, building checks etc.)

All these standards were consistently improved and continuously adapted to klima:aktiv's current challenges.

### **Developing a cooperation culture and establishing a network – you need a reason why...**

The forming of networks should never be an end in itself. An important factor of success is to reach clarity among all participants concerning the motive and the goals of the networking project.

As mentioned before, each programme was already successfully under way. The need for improved coordination in addressing common target groups and public relation activities of the individual programmes had become evident at least in the umbrella management. A concrete need for action concerning network formation had thereby been identified.

Classical ways of controlling – for example ensuring that many programmes address the same target group in a coordinated way – are not appropriate to handling these conflicts. New forms of self organised processes became necessary. So we started with the network conferences.

### **Creating an appropriate architecture of participation – the role of network conferences**

Network conferences are special communication architectures with elements of large group interventions such as open space, world cafe and future conference to achieve the following central goals:

- 1.) Produce a common understanding of the problem (e.g. to achieve coordinated contact with the target group)
- 2.) Make transparent who is affected by a certain problem
- 3.) Establish a culture of high personal responsibility by the programme owners
- 4.) Open the space, so that all the function owners concerned can find solutions to the problems detected
- 5.) Be aware of the “umbrella-management” to support the processes of finding solutions if necessary

- 6.) Strengthen the culture of high personal responsibility with a consequent monitoring process, to control the implementation of the planned activities
- 7) Build up and strengthen the identity and vision of the common project

Large group interventions are powerful methods to activate a complex social system of stakeholders with different interests and different goals and to find out the working levers for successful, rapid change.<sup>2</sup> The network conferences enabled the stakeholders and programme managers periodic to get a bird's-eye view of the goals, the strategic plan and the main ideas behind the whole project. The standards for partner management, for corporate design and corporate identity were being elaborated continuously. The conferences also integrated new people and institutions into the project and produced strong overall commitment to the programme.

The network conferences facilitated a positive cooperation experience among the stakeholders.

So we succeeded in building a robust culture of cooperation between the programmes. The challenge for the responsible programme managers is to handle the balance between the cooperation in selected fields in the klima:aktiv network and the consequent competition with other programmes, for example for resources. A robust culture of cooperation is the resource for a living network. A living network is the medium for further cooperation in a field of competitive players.

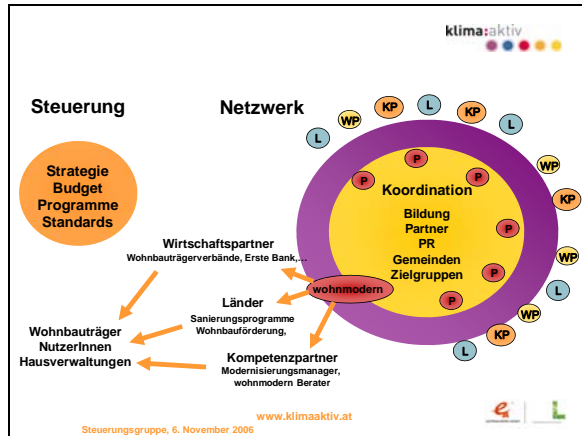
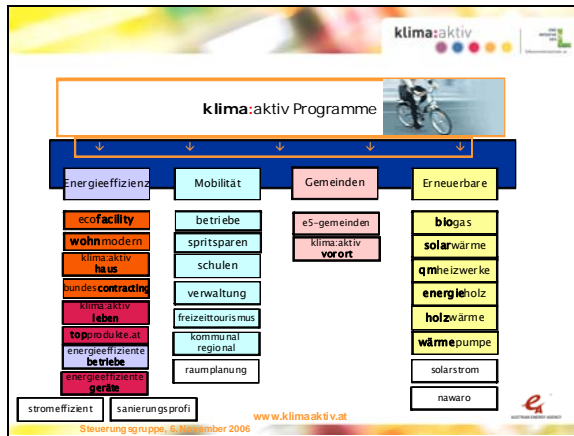
Another important aspect was the integration of the main stakeholders of the provinces and all their activities for climate protection into klima:aktiv. At each network conference half a day was exclusively reserved for communication between stakeholders and programme managers. Thus, scepticism regarding klima:aktiv among those responsible at provincial level decreased and confidence in this government initiative increased.

### **Balancing the paradox: project logic against network**

klima:aktiv is a project with a clearly defined contractor, the Ministry of Life, and a multitude of contracts with different enterprises and institutions to successfully realise a bundle of "soft" climate-protection measures. These contracts facilitated the governance in a project logic. Logic models, annual working programmes and appropriate reports and financing reports served as a binding basis.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.co-opera.com>



## GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES KLIMA:AKTIV, NOVEMBER 2006

To be comprehensively successful, in other words to be able to set incentives for market transformation, a sound degree of horizontal cooperation and autonomous coordination among these stakeholders was necessary. To guarantee good functioning of the network, a governance logic other than that used in projects was necessary:

Networks need more flexibility apart from project plans as well as a high degree of personal responsibility among the stakeholders to find their individual route to achieving targets. Networks need communication channels, liberty and dialogue to find common solutions for problems they are aware of. Networks rely heavily on individual advance inputs of individual stakeholders. In most cases an appropriate balance is not directly obtained, as such services are hard to assess monetarily. In practice, balance “happens”, often unexpectedly, from another part of the network. To govern networks it is above all essential to shape the context. A functioning network of players makes it possible for multiplier effects to develop.

Stephan Fickl, project manager of klima:aktiv, sums up:

*“In the preparatory workshops for the network conferences it became obvious that there was a basic conflict between the programmes with their project logic and the target defined by the ministry. What was demanded in the contract could not be achieved through mere project logic. The networking of stakeholders essential for target achievement had a lot of potential for irritations among the contracting authorities. From hierarchy’s point of view, scope for decision-making and autonomy are perceived as chaos and tendency towards uncontrollability. At that time, the risk was high that our contractors would lose confidence in our management performance. Thus, in the set-up phase especially, our task was to defend the hierarchy from seeming chaos and at the same time the network from selective interventions by the hierarchy. It was essential to balance these two logics effectively.*

*Concerning the monitoring of the programmes by the umbrella management it was also important to avoid overlapping with controlling on the programmes’ level. The responsibility for programme controlling had to be assumed by the people responsible for the programmes. Thus, the monitoring focused especially on the effectiveness, on efficient processes and a possible need for coordination between the programmes.”*



## Making previous experience useful – organising learning on a regular basis

To make previous experience useful, regular analysis loops were integrated on the following levels:

- On the level of the umbrella management, the lessons learnt were evaluated in one or two workshops per year. If necessary, approaches to improvements for the future were developed. The methods were both structured ones, such as spider graphs to illustrate environmental relations, as well as analogue ones, such as elements of systemic structural constellations.
- The lessons learnt from the programmes' interaction with the other klima:aktiv actors were evaluated in twice-yearly network conferences. Here, depending on the thematic focus chosen, a look was taken at cooperation with the provinces, with business partners or the programmes with one another.
- The cooperation between the umbrella management and the programme managers was evaluated within the monitoring talks, which also took place twice a year.

Thus, management of mutual expectations and a continuous learning process for klima:aktiv was quickly established. In the course of these analysis loops the whole project was also repeatedly observed from a bird's-eye view. This sight of the overall picture created some understanding of the different interests in the network and was repeatedly described as being clear added value by those responsible for the programmes. In contrast to the routine perspective they would have on their individual programmes, in this way it was possible for them to acquire a sense of identity with the whole project.

## Keeping and communicating success – internal and external stabilisation

Especially in the set-up phase it was important to communicate achievements of klima:aktiv internally and externally. Seemingly a simple matter of course, this step however required interrupting the operational flow of action at regular intervals to check success together. It was the only way to realise and evaluate the difference between self-set goals and actually realised achievements. The regular and customer-tailored internal and external communication measures on what was a success and what was about to succeed strengthened confidence in klima:aktiv and motivated the stakeholders.



**PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS BY KLIMA:AKTIV 2004 – 2006**

In 2007, the most important processes and structures for the governance of klima:aktiv were established. The network formation was well on course. Some programme managers mutually invited each other on the occasion of planned events or even presented the core contents of other programmes. A certain degree of cross-selling began to establish itself between the programmes. Concerning the coordination of addressing target groups, some



of those responsible for the programmes had taken over the lead specifically for certain target groups.

Now came the phase in which it was important to keep the network running.

## **klima:aktiv as a living network – keep it running**

After more than three years project duration, the status of klima:aktiv can be described as follows:

- The contracts with individual programmes were renewed. The first framework agreements were about to expire. The results were evaluated and most programmes received an extension for two further years. The umbrella management had to issue and approve a multitude of new contracts.
- More and more enterprises were interested in cooperating with klima:aktiv in order to use its brand image as commercial partner and to participate in the furtherance of its goals. After the internal consolidation of klima:aktiv, the point was now to extend the network outwardly. The cooperation with partners and federal provinces was proactively developed.
- Previously, the two subject areas of energy and mobility had been guided by different ministry departments with different governance logics. In future, these two areas were to be better aligned and the cooperation was to be improved.
- In 2007, the Ministry of Life commissioned an external evaluation of klima:aktiv. This was an important milestone in the development of klima:aktiv. The central question was: How will the project be assessed by an independent agency?

In the following years a multitude of uncertainties shaped the environment of klima:aktiv:

- The short-term extreme increase-in-cost of wood pellets in Austria as well as the rise in oil prices on the world market increased interest in the achievements of klima:aktiv, especially in the fields of heating and energy efficiency.
- More and more consumers were looking for a first-class consulting concerning energy-saving measures and alternative energy carriers.
- The companies responding to these market demands tried to increase their visibility and to gain the confidence of potential clients. The alliance of these companies with the klima:aktiv brand was a possible control lever.
- New staff members had to be integrated into the umbrella management team and many leadership positions in the programmes also changed.
- New political priorities were set. With the Climate and Energy Fund, policy-makers established a new institution, and in the beginning it was not clear whether a cooperator or a competitor of klima:aktiv was to be established.

Against the background of these challenges, in the following two years consulting focused on the following tasks:

- Continuous improvement of governance in the klima:aktiv network

- Identification and expansion of cooperation in the fields of mobility and energy (renewable energy + energy efficiency)
- Strengthening of the cooperation of klima:aktiv with the federal states
- Preparation and moderation of network conferences

In this phase it became apparent that it was possible to ensure klima:aktiv's ability to learn and work efficiently in an environment that is becoming even more turbulent.

### **Keep the network robust and flexible at the same time**

A wide range of factors has contributed to the fact that klima:aktiv has remained efficient despite personnel changes and political interventions. Some of the particularly important aspects from our point of view should be highlighted here:

- The network management was well accepted by the programmes and the hierarchy.
- There was a culture of trust within the network. This trust was accorded both to the central functions such as public relations work or training coordination as well as to the other programmes.
- Conflicts that occurred in the development process were professionally dealt with and this usually led to acceptable solutions.
- The flexibility of the players involved, the self-analysis established and the good and strong feedback culture were an important basis for finding a suitable approach to the uncertainties and changes that cropped up.

In all, klima:aktiv can be described as a successful mixture of robustness of the network with simultaneous flexibility of the players involved.

### **Creating an added value for business partners**

A functioning partner network is a clear added value for klima:aktiv. In order to guarantee the added value for the business partners, the people responsible for partner management were constantly in search of an attractive added value for potential and existing business partners. Added value was aimed at, for example, according to each partner through the documentation of best practices, through the creation of new quality standards and new market access, but also through offering consultancy to the businesses. Completely different possibilities were evident in the development of complementary offers for partner companies. Thus, for example, standards were developed for banks, which were then used in the granting of credit for house building.

### **Establishing klima:aktiv as a strong brand**

A strong brand, too, is an added value for the partners of klima:aktiv and for the programme itself. The professional appearance for all public programmes was ensured by the early definition of the corporate design and its continuous dissemination. Although the corporate-design-conform use of the brand initially came up against resistance, it was

possible to clear up these reservations through consistent explanations and the recalling on the part of the umbrella management.

### **Check the profile and the processes regularly**

klima:aktiv was evaluated by the Wuppertal Institute in 2007. This provided a chance to receive a new impetus to further develop of the network. The following sources served as a basis for the external evaluation:

- the examination of existing documents
- participation in a network meeting
- a wide range of qualitative interviews with programme participants
- a written questionnaire of all programme managers, and
- an online interview of the target groups of klima:aktiv

The following core messages can be derived from the evaluation:

- klima:aktiv is a model, integrated national climate-protection initiative – unique in the EU. This is true both with regard to the top brand, the motivation and multiplier function as well as for the quality function
- There are excellent management structures, above all monitoring and reporting.
- klima:aktiv has an above-average market effect – this is also confirmed by the market partners. A noticeable change in market structures is also evident among the end customers.

The recommendations of the evaluation focus above all on:

- the restructuring of the external presentation in a two-dimensional matrix according to subjects and target groups.
- even more focus on the quality improvement and standardisation in selected subject areas, with the simultaneous withdrawal of advertising measures in other subject areas.
- strengthening of the multiplier effect through associated public relations work
- some suggestions regarding the content of individual programmes.

The evaluation was an important learning impetus for klima:aktiv and strengthened the legitimisation for the whole undertaking. The suggestions were promptly taken up. The structure of klima:aktiv as a two-dimensional matrix was portrayed effectively outside and also exists as a new structure within the umbrella management.

## **Conclusion**

The network formation between politics and the economy seems to have been successful at klima:aktiv. The role of consultancy in the development of such a network is special.

Possibly, as a consultant, it is a question of informing the customer early on about the paradoxes to be expected and sensitising them to the possible effects to the different parties in its environment.

In consulting it is probably a question of supporting a network in its multi-faced form. The network described here is very hierarchical and at the same time facilitates a great deal of freedom in cooperation between the players. Cooperation in the network is voluntary, but in the meantime it is demanded by the business partners. klima:aktiv is robust and nevertheless reacts dynamically to outside interventions.

Certainly, as a consultant one has to assume more leadership than in the classical systemic organisation-development processes and consistently demand the implementation of network guidance that has been developed together with the customer.

Very definitely a great deal of continuity and staying power is needed for this.

Only when it is possible to establish a streamlined control system at the right places and to create security through continuity can space for network building be opened up. This open space makes it possible for the network to shape its own form and come alive.

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# Dr. Alexander Schmidt

*Vigorously utilizing the abundance of possibilities*

## Current positions and responsibilities

- Consultant at osb Wien Consulting GmbH, focus on strategy development in networks and organizations, project facilitation in organizations, and consulting of family enterprises
- Commissioned lecturer at several universities and universities of applied sciences on the subjects of change management, project management, and organizational learning in large group settings

## Recent consulting activities

- Consulting for network and program managers in building and leading corporate networks and strategic alliances
- Applying innovative communication architectures and large-group facilitation (50-500 persons) for networking within and between organizations
- Providing support for strategy development in organizational units
- Consulting for family enterprises in transition phases and in strategy development
- One-on-one and team coaching for project managers and executives
- Conceptual design and implementation of project management courses with a focus on leadership, change management, and conflict management

## Professional background

- Doctorate on "Developing and managing interorganizational cooperation in corporate networks" at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research and Studies (IFF), Department of Organizational Development, University of Klagenfurt - Graz - Vienna
- Continuous training on systemic structural constellations
- Training as an organizational developer at the Austrian Association for Group Psychotherapy and Group Dynamics (ÖAGG); certified trainer for Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI, M. Bennett & M. Bennett)
- Large-group facilitation (M. zur Bonsen), systemic coaching, project management (Primas Consulting), train-the-trainer training (TRAIN)
- Group-dynamic self-awareness and personality development training at the Austrian Society for Group Dynamics and Organizational Consulting (ÖGGO)
- Studies in electrical engineering (Vienna University of Technology)
- Fifteen years of professional experience in the subject areas of IT, advancement of environmental technologies in companies, and implementation of management systems (EMAS) in banks
- Several publications on networks and strategic alliances

*"My focus of consulting frequently crosses departmental and corporate borders.*

*In those instances I support organizations and people to make their defined borders permeable as the need arises, to enter into successful strategic cooperation with others."*

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## Current position and responsibilities

Austrian Energy Agency: Head of Division  
"klima:aktiv management"

- Management of the Austrian Climate Initiative klima:aktiv
- Strategic Development of the program
- Development of a partner network, which can bring about a change towards a sustainable economy
- Monitoring of the various tailor-made programs of klima:aktiv
- Implementation of a learning architecture for the network.

## Professional Background

- Project manager of several EU-projects, of the Austrian RTD program on „Innovative Mobility Services“ or the development of the „Climate Protection Program“ for the City of Vienna.  
The development, improvement, monitoring and evaluation of projects, the networking between different stakeholders and design of strategic development have been the major tasks.
- Main topics: Climate Change, Energy Efficiency Analysis, Renewable Energy, Sustainable Mobility.
- Training as a Systemic Coach
- Training in Large Group facilitation
- Austrian Energy Agency: Chief Financial Officer and Human Resource Officer
- Post Graduate Lecturer on Environmental Protection
- Austrian Statistical Office: Development of Environmental Accounting System for Austria
- Master of Economics from the University of Innsbruck

You could as well be  
happy about it !



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