

Research Retreat: Principles for 2024

This is not a planning meeting. Annual planning happens primarily in centres, programmes and projects. Rather, we want to use this meeting to internalize certain principles so as to ensure those planning sessions are more than the usual box-ticking exercise. Our overall goal today is to make sure that DGAP is greater than the sum of its parts in 2024 - that we are visible as an organisation that collectively and routinely produces interesting and coherent research and ideas, and not just as a platform for a few voices:

1. We want, firstly, a greater awareness inside DGAP that we are a German organisation that focuses on German policy choices, strategies, grand strategy. We speak every year of the need to sew a red thread through DGAP's output, and then we miss this obvious one. Please all of you, take that sensibility back into your own planning processes: you are experts on particular phenomena, but you are also experts on *Germany's* response to those phenomena. There is huge demand to understand German thinking. Germany is facing heavy scrutiny of its policies, and is viewed as a power that finds change difficult. But when it does change, this has a strong signal effect, not least to those countries hiding behind it. The DGAP colleagues who best understand German policy reform are often most reticent at explaining it to the world outside. In the first session, we therefore want to compare notes on the German outlook: what are the sources of change from within, what are the expectations for change amongst Germany's partners, and does supply match demand?

2. We want, secondly, to ensure that you each define and justify your research more deliberately this coming year. This is the theme of the second session. Our assumption is that greater self-definition will pay dividends for cooperation, both inside the DGAP and with external partners. Too often, our annual planning descends into a series of listicles of deliverables and foreseeable upcoming political events. As a result, we end up reactively adding more items to our listicles as the year goes on. If you define yourselves, what you do and how you do it, then you can focus better - and we can hold you more accountable. Each year since I have been at DGAP, we always started the planning process with speeches about the need for greater collaboration. But when it came to implementing that, center work or project deliverables took precedence. Fine. This year, we will start with the centres and projects. We ask you to define yourselves and what you do. Tell us your mission and added value, so we can judge whether extras are worth it and whether you can justifiably say no to collaborations.

3. We want, third, to position DGAP more coherently as a whole (and not just through a shared focus on Germany). We need to communicate a sense of what DGAP does and why, and how each of us feeds into it. In smaller European countries, which cover a narrower range of foreign policy issues, the national think tank has a clear role and people know what to expect from it. In Germany, where policymaking is complicated and sometimes unpredictable, think tanks position themselves through a greater degree of agenda-setting and even advocacy. They become a hub for those who have ideas and a reform agenda. In the second session, we'll ask you to think about how your work contributes to establishing DGAP as *the* place that

supports the German government to deal constructively with international change and disruption. That might be in the substance of your output or in the way you reach out to stakeholders and disrupters.

4. Last, and this is the theme of our final session, how do we ensure that, when it comes to our publications in 2024, we are more than the sum of our parts? If you look back at some of our splashiest publications over the past year, they were standalone products, and readers did not necessarily understand their place in the whole. Too often, they gridlocked the publications process, long-announced, then delayed and messy. Other research colleagues had no idea that they were about to be published. And too often, we heard from the communications department that they were not respected as professionals in their own right – people who can only sell your products if you give them fair warning and a fair hearing. We have limited means– how do we use them best?

Three months ago, I said that I wanted visitors to our landing page to see a more coherent output – not just the red thread of a focus on Germany, but also a sense that DGAP is the place that helps Germany deal with change and reform, anticipating international disruptions, sympathetically assessing the impact on Germany’s alliances and choice of partners, and reaching across policy fields to formulate an overall notion of German foreign and security policy. We envisioned a *matrix* structure that incorporated the work of the centres in their own right but also as case-studies in cross-cutting themes - themes of disruption, ordering and the German response.

Today, we are part of the way there. There is a more overt focus on Germany, but we still have random external publications featured on the landing page that barely mention Germany at all, let alone a clear focus on the dilemmas related to change. And even when we do hit the right notes, we don’t always practise what we preach towards German policymakers – using international events for strategic sends, rather than merely responding to them; offering clear answers rather than merely raising questions; and producing “marketable” ideas for German policy rather than just pure analysis of international problems.

Please take these elements back with you into your planning process:

- a readiness to maximise our potential shared impact;
- the desire to contribute to DGAP not just as a platform but rather as an institution with an important task;
- the red thread of a shared focus on Germany;
- and the aspiration to help Germany come up with strong signalling strategies that build alliances in times of disruption.