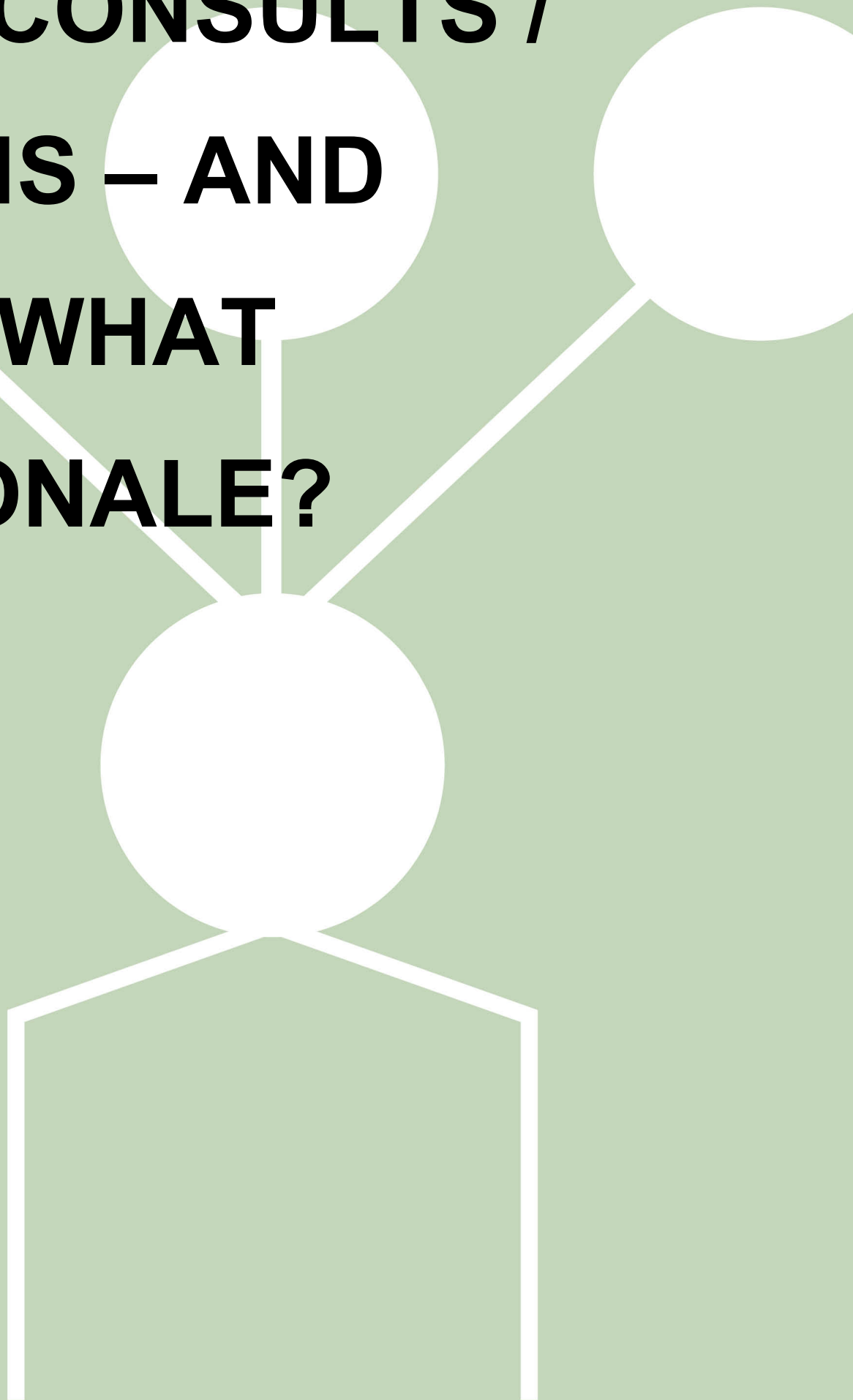# WHO CONSULTS / TRAINS – AND WITH WHAT RATIONALE?

Consulting ➤➤ Education

"Who can we talk to when we have questions?", "How comprehensively should we digitise our institution?", "How should our digital learning environment look like?", "Which digital teaching and learning tools do we want to use?", "Which infrastructure (such as Wi-Fi, but also wiring, appropriate rooms etc.) and devices do we need?". These and similar questions have been on the minds of many employees in educational institutions for some time. But where to find answers? Who can help? And who is to trust?

Consulting in the education sector

The need for advice and consulting around the topic of digitisation of education is immense. However, clear responsibilities, interdisciplinary expertise and non-commercial advisory services are often lacking (with a few exceptions such as the Landesmedienzentrum (media center) Baden-Wuerttemberg or the Medienberatung (media consulting) in North Rhine-Westphalia). It is therefore not surprising that commercial actors have increasingly discovered the new business area of "infrastructural and school development consulting" in recent years. Thus, for example computer retailers, software firms or IT companies are offering IT know-how, but also increasingly provide consulting and advise in the context of general school development. Additionally, entirely new consulting agencies and companies have emerged that advertise a whole portfolio around "digital learning environments" – including media development planning, advice about infrastructure and devices, IT operation, and trainings.

Profit or pedagogy?

These consultants often have a fundamental economic interest in equipping educational institutions with digital technologies and offering relevant consulting. In doing so, the pedagogical purpose of the respective digital technology and its application in the educational setting is often only an afterthought. Fundamental pedagogical questions are sometimes disregarded from the outset (for example: Is a digital solution really necessary? What do honest cost-benefit calculations show?). This, however, sometimes even applies for governmental solutions (such as the school cloud by the Hasso Plattner Institute, supported by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research). Moreover, cooperation with IT companies can lead to a non-neutral consulting that favours specific products or companies (for example when a system provider is an official "Gold Microsoft Partner").

The following indicators can be signals for educational actors to pay close attention, scrutinise and ask critical questions:

- New labels for alleged experts, such as "Educational Technology Coach", "DigitalEd-Consultant", "Digital Learning Expert", "Education Engagement Manager", "Transformation Officer" or "Educational Hacker" are not pedagogical titles and therefore do not tell anything about the interests, profession and vocational qualification of a consultant.
- If a software supplier or consultant proclaims the "digital transformation" or "digital revolution", or promises "quick" and "easy" solutions, it is questionable if problems are (intended to be) solved in a pedagogically sophisticated manner.
- If a supplier uses "plastic words" such as "personalised education", "individualised learning", "adaptive learning", "contemporary education" or "agile leadership", questions about the concrete meaning of these terms should arise.
- If a seemingly pedagogical term is unfamiliar – for example "dynamic curriculum" – it could be, as in this case, a marketing-neologism.

➤➤ Questions

- Which background and which expertise – pedagogical, didactical or technological – does the consultant or their institution have, and is this communicated transparently?
- Which understanding of education is underlying the consulting?
- Are Open Educational Resources (OERs) / open-source systems considered?
- Are also analogue options considered (for example for the promotion of media literacy)?
- Is a technology (impact) assessment carried out (for example in relation to developmental-psychological aspects)?
- Who is the software supplier (non-profit, for-profit, governmental, private, established, new, etc.)?
- Who does the supplier cooperate with? Are there any financial advantages for the supplier (such as commissions) when recommending certain products?
- Are there any connections to IT businesses / specific companies (partners, overlap in staff, etc.)?
- If yes, could this affect the concrete consulting offer?
- Do any subsequent costs arise for licenses, updates, trainings or further consulting (also for allegedly free offers)?

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UNBLACK THE BOX is a network initiative founded in 2019 by researchers from education science, sociology, information technology, media and health education, as well as teachers in schools, universities and pedagogical training. Our goal is to enable educational institutions and teachers to respond to the growing datafication and digitization of education with enlightened, critical and conscious decision-making, even without extensive IT knowledge.
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