



## Exchange in an atmosphere of trust

**What added value does case counselling from colleagues bring to tenure-track professorships? And how exactly do the rounds of discussions take place? We talked to Professor Mirco Göpfert about his personal experience.**

More than four years ago, Prof. Dr Mirco Göpfert was appointed as a tenure-track professor at Goethe-University. The first 100 days went by quickly. For various reasons, he only later opted for the learning opportunities for newly appointed professors. The professor of social and cultural anthropology chose peer-to-peer advice. A new position with more responsibility prompted him to take up this offer of training and support.

For the academic, the professorship means a new leadership role also a new self-image – in terms of the tasks and expectations from others. “To deal with this uncertainty, I thought it was a wise idea to start talking to other people – especially to professors who are similarly affected,” says Mirco Göpfert.

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The peer-to-peer case counselling, which is specifically tailored for people in tenure-track professorships, connects people who are taking on leadership responsibilities for the first time and facing similar challenges. “As part of the discussion among colleagues, we are provided with a guided setting in which we can talk about challenges,” says Göpfert. And often these problems are not as insurmountable in the end as they initially seem.

Göpfert remembers the first case he brought to the case counselling session. At the time, he had to contend with different expectations, which he viewed as challenges – be they from the team or from doctoral students. Over the course of the discussion with colleagues, someone told him: “Mr Göpfert does not dare to want anything.” This phrase has remained in his memory to this day. What the person meant was that the social and cultural anthropologist ought to look at what he actually wants in addition to the expectations of others. “I had forgotten that

### Peer-to-peer advice for tenure-track professors

Peer-to-peer counselling for tenure-track professors is an element of leadership development within the framework of the 100-day programme for newly appointed professors. During the systematic consultations, tenure-track colleagues exchange views on professional issues and key topics and discuss solutions together. The format is moderated by a professional consultant, who works with the Personnel and Organisational Development Department.

More information about the content can be found here: [www.goethe-lerncampus.de](http://www.goethe-lerncampus.de).

I was now in a position where I could want things myself,” he says. Today, he perceives the creative freedom of a professorship less as a burden and more as a joy.

#### Discussions with method

One does not need to bring up a case of one's own to benefit from these sessions with colleagues. Göpfert describes the conversations and facts that others bring to the sessions as instructive in themselves. Often, the cases revolve around staff or teaching responsibilities. At its core, the process is about everything a person is bombarded with when in a new position. The case counselling sessions among colleagues take place about once a month. Usually five to six people are present, sometimes more. The discussion rounds are based on a specific method. What is special about them is that participants have to find solutions together. The round is moderated and structured by a qualified consultant. After a person has described their situation, they listen in silence as others discuss. In the end, they have the opportunity to comment on what is proposed and try it out for themselves.

**Mirco Göpfert** is Professor of Social and Cultural Anthropology at the Institute of Ethnology. He has been working for the Goethe University since 2018 and went through the appointment process of a tenure-track professorship.



“Basically, this is about personal development – and making room for this in the cramped world of everyday working life has done me good,” says Göpfert. For him, the format is characterised primarily by the possibility of exchanging ideas with others in a safe space. Mirco Göpfert describes this exchange as incredibly valuable.