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## Working Paper: Designing Narrative-Based CVE Products With A Structured Professional Judgment Approach

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### **Abstract**

Inspired by methods used in risk assessment, this paper suggests a structured professional judgment approach (SPJ) to facilitate the decision-making process in expert group settings tasked with the development of narrative-based countering violent extremism (CVE) products. The added value of this concept is to systematically apply the relevant knowledge distributed among the literature and identify the strengths and weaknesses of the narrative-based CVE product in early stages like the baseline assessment. This may enable campaigners to avoid expensive mistakes and accelerate the development of products. A tentative checklist is provided. Furthermore, indicators for monitoring and evaluation are suggested.

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### **Introduction**

Radicalization is still an ongoing challenge which requires tailor-made countermeasures in many different contexts in terms of geographical distribution, target group and institutional setting such as school, community or prison (RAN, van de Donk & Lenos, 2019). Such countermeasures can be repression, prevention or intervention in nature; and are targeting the micro-, meso- and macrolevel (Koehler, 2017, p. 115). With increasing knowledge on the phenomenon, there has been a shift in the approach from repression to prevention and intervention (Holmer, 2013). Accordingly, also the European Commission recommends preventive strategies including counternarrative campaigns to tackle the issue (European Commission, 2016). Hereby, the multi-agency approach is key to success (RAN, van de Donk & Lenos, 2019). As terrorist organizations are extensively and successfully exploiting the

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Internet to recruit individuals, the idea is to strike back online. Extremist propaganda is being taken down from social media (Reed, Ingram & Whittaker, 2017), governments issue strategic communication to refute extremist narratives and misinformation (RAN, Brown & Marway, 2019) and numerous campaigns using counternarratives and alternative narratives were launched (Reed, Ingram & Whittaker, 2017). Such campaigns operate on the macrolevel and can be both prevention and intervention (Koehler, 2017). Narrative-based products can be any medium which is capable of transporting a message, such as videos, cartoons, stories or songs.

The present paper was developed within the project DECOUNT in which an online game addressing right-wing and jihadist narratives was launched. Other good examples include Open Your Eyes by Safe Space Group (2015) and the German speaking campaign Jamal Al-Khatib by Turn (2016). These campaigns focus mainly on vulnerable youth, the latter one also on individuals who are already radicalized.

Assessment is important in this context as quality and effectiveness are crucial when designing a campaign made up of alternative narratives (AN) and counternarratives (CN). But there is not only the issue of no effect. Also, it is important to avoid negative effects such as stigmatization, polarization or inspiring individuals to commit illegal acts. And neither should a campaign involuntarily trigger fascination for violent extremism in vulnerable individuals (CSEP, 2019; Koehler, 2017, 188).

In order to discuss these topics and to collect and further knowledge, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) runs the Communication and Narratives Working Group. In this framework the members publish papers and checklists on various issues concerning ANs and CNs such as construction, mental biases, monitoring and evaluation. Furthermore, many practitioner-friendly guides and handbooks were published such as those by Tuck & Silverman (2016), Braddock & Horgan (2016) and Reynolds & Tuck (2016). This paper aims at integrating the relevant knowledge into a new approach.

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## Stages of campaigning

In a campaign's planning phase, the campaigners establish an evidence-based causal logic model of what the campaign shall achieve and how, a so-called "theory of change". This helps to clarify the input, output, expected outcome and impact of the campaign, as well as the causalities between the different elements. Furthermore, realistic and specific goals are set. (Wouterse & Verdegaal, 2019, Funnell & Rogers, 2011)

What follows is the subsequent "testing phase" in which the theory of change can be reviewed and adjusted (Wouterse & Verdegaal, 2019). Hereby, a baseline assessment is carried out in order to establish a basis for comparing the situation before and after an intervention and for making inferences regarding the effectiveness of the campaign (UN WOMEN, 2012). If the result of the assessment is promising, the product can be tested on members of the target audience. In case the product fails the testing, the campaigners need to make changes, or in the worst case, create a new product. In this regard, it is beneficial if campaigners are aware of the sunk-cost fallacy, a mental bias that keeps people spending more money on products that had already required a lot of resources and still do not show the desired effect (Kahneman, 2011). Instead, it is advisable to move on and invest in a new idea. When the campaign is in execution, one should monitor the performance. A post-campaign evaluation is recommended as well in order to obtain a reliable feedback. However, as most campaigners face budgetary constraints, one must consider carefully how much, when and how often resources are allocated to the aforementioned processes (Beerli & Santana, 1999). As it is expensive to carry out testing on a sample of the target audience, it is extremely important to achieve a good product or campaign since the beginning, so to minimize the risk of multiple testing and further adjusting of the product.

So far there is no checklist to help experts design and evaluate products and campaigns in different stages of the process, beginning from the baseline assessment and the subsequent testing on the target audience until the final evaluation. Especially concerning the assessment of effectiveness in the baseline assessment there is little research yet. Therefore, the present

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working paper introduces a new approach into the scientific discourse and provides two tentative checklists which may support campaigners in narrative-based CVE projects.

### Methodology

Assessments can be structured to various degrees. The expert opinion or clinical judgment is unguided, whereas a simple checklist does structure only one component: the identification of indicators. The next step is the structured professional judgment approach (SPJ). It structures already two components of the assessment process: the identification and also the measurement of indicators (Monahan, 2012). This degree of standardization ensures that important aspects are not forgotten or neglected. Furthermore, it provides a visualization that helps experts to discuss the product to be assessed.

There are many instruments following this approach in order to assess the threat of violence posed by an individual (Hart, Cook, Pressman, Strang & Lim, 2017). Prominent tools are the Historical-Clinical-Risk Management - 20 (HCR-20, Douglas et al., 2014) and the widely used assessment tool specifically for violent extremists: the Violent Extremism Risk Assessment Protocol (VERA-2R) by Pressman, Duits, Rinne & Flockton (2018); see also Sadowski et al. (2017) for a published German version.

Professional assessors use this methodological approach if the development of a quantitative tool is not possible or if the subject of assessment requires great flexibility and focus on the very case at hand. Both issues are valid for narrative-related products and campaigns. Therefore, the present paper suggests this approach for the field of counternarratives.

In order to assess a product, one must examine it from many different perspectives. Therefore, indicators were collected and grouped in two ways. A distinction was made regarding the object of analysis. One can distinguish between indicators that refer to the narrative-based product and those that refer to the campaign as a whole. The first ones will be referred to as “microlevel indicators” while the latter ones will be referred to as “macrolevel

indicators”. Moreover, the indicators were grouped in clusters/dimensions of related indicators.

The indicators that make up the checklists had been extracted from the literature following a literature review using search terms such as “effectiveness counternarratives” or “assessment counternarrative”. Moreover, the snowball method was applied. Starting from recognized handbooks and RAN publications the search was extended to referenced literature. Furthermore, the paper draws from the author’s experiences in CVE campaigning and the exchange of expertise within different project teams.

### **Working with the SPJ approach**

In order to channelize the experts’ knowledge to reach a sound decision, the assessors are suggested to follow five steps using the “microlevel indicators”.<sup>2</sup>

1. Exploring the product
2. Rating of items and dimensions
3. Identification of relevant items
4. Application of strengths & weaknesses on the scenarios of intended use
5. Expert group decision how to proceed

Firstly, the very foundation of a joint expert meeting is to familiarize oneself with the product. This applies in particular to external experts joining the assessment. They are informed about the selected target group and the overall concept of the campaign. When exploring the product, experts should first take brief notes about the pros and cons they found still without the checklist. Afterwards, in order to facilitate the subsequent discussion, the rating sheet (see annex) may be printed or shared on the screen.

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<sup>2</sup> The outlined procedure is inspired by the SPJ approach according to Hart & Logan (2011), the methodology of the HCR-20 (Douglas et al., 2014) and VERA-2R (Pressman, Duits, Rinne & Flockton, 2018). However, in order to make it applicable to narrative-based products, certain aspects were adapted.

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In step two, the assessors rate the indicators of the checklist which are present in the product. This step can be useful to identify if some item or aspect has been neglected or forgotten. In order to rate the subject of assessment (the product), one follows the operationalization provided for each item of the checklist. The underlying structure is always a three-point scale. The lowest rating is “insufficient”. The next level states that there is still potential for improvement while the highest rating indicates that the issue is sufficiently considered. If an indicator is not present in the product, it is not rated. Not every indicator needs to be present for the product to be effective. If an expert wants to insert an additional indicator into the checklist to be rated, he shall consult with the others.

After every dimension (e.g. “Message” or “Distribution”) the whole dimension is rated according to the single items. Following the SPJ approach, there is no quantitative rule of how to sum them up. Rather, the single ratings of the items serve as an aid for the experts to visualize the relevant aspects of the dimension and to decide for a rating based on the overall impression of the profile of the dimension. Thus, already one or few high scoring indicators can provide a dimension with a “well done” rating. On the other hand, a few “insufficient” ratings of very crucial items may mark the whole dimension as a failure.

In step three, the relevant indicators are identified. Relevant indicators are those that seem to be particularly influential – causally or functionally – for the campaign’s desired outcome, or which on the contrary might impair its effectiveness (Hart & Logan, 2011). One may mark them with a highlighter on the rating sheet. It is easily possible, that all or most indicators are relevant.

After having rated the indicators and dimensions and decided for the relevant indicators, the assessors are provided with a profile that highlights the strengths, weaknesses and potentials for improvement.

In step four, the assessors apply their understanding of the product – the strengths and weaknesses – on the scenarios of intended use. How will the target audience react to a product with these strengths and weaknesses? If a product is used in different settings e.g. online via social media and offline at schools, both scenarios must be considered separately.

Scenario planning is a process of developing several informed, plausible, and imagined alternative future environments in which decisions about the future may be played out for the purpose of changing current thinking and improving decision making (Chermack & Lynham, 2002). According to the scenario researchers Godet & Roubelat (1996), good forecasts are not necessarily those which are realized, but those which lead to appropriate action in order to arrive at the desired objective. For example, even an extreme scenario which is unlikely to happen might reveal a specific weak point of the campaign. This finding in turn allows to undertake the appropriate measures to improve the product.

The scenario typology of van Notten et al. (2003) describes scenarios following three main characteristics: project goal, process design and scenario content. According to this typology, scenarios generated for the purpose of the assessment of CVE products can be categorized as structured forecasting scenarios, characterized by a high degree of interaction among its variables. These can be individual and organizational actors, factors like religion or education; and sectors where actors and factors interact, for instance social media platforms or schools. Helpful scenarios take into consideration all these kinds of variables and seek to depict their interactions or even possible interferences, such as individuals playing an antagonistic role or youth workers and teachers who might present the product in a way that reinforces prejudice if not provided with the appropriate instruction. It is suggested to generate both probable and worst-case scenarios.

What follows is a discussion in which the experts debate on the necessity for changes of certain aspects of the product. If this assessment is conducted in the framework of the baseline assessment, the experts decide if the product is ready to proceed with the testing on the target audience. If the assessment is conducted after the testing on the target audience, the decision to be made is whether to launch the campaign or to make further changes. One strategy might be to work on the potentials whereas another strategy can be to tackle the missing or the lowest rated indicators.

This non-algorithmic, structured approach has been investigated thoroughly in risk assessment and it has been shown in several studies that the approach was as accurate or even

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more accurate compared to numerically based estimates (Douglas et al., 2014). Moreover, the inter-rater reliability was found to be high (Hart & Logan, 2011).

It is important to emphasize that the suggested checklist of “microlevel indicators” is intended to be a supportive assessment tool in the hands of experts who possess knowledge of and experience in ANs/CNs, campaigning, radicalization and the target audience. Preferably, at least one assessor should not have been part of the project so far. The suggested approach clearly does not enable anyone to assess a product who lacks the specific competence required for an evaluation, with or without a checklist. Such a competence and in-depth knowledge can indeed not be provided by the present paper. However, judging the wide array of high-quality narrative-based products, there are many colleagues who can make use of this approach.

Due to the above reasons, the suggested criteria are described briefly. The checklist is to be conceived flexible as counterterrorism is a dynamic field with changing actors and changing tactics. Therefore, experts are free to disregard or add criteria if deemed appropriate.

### Assessment in different stages

In the framework of the baseline assessment as recommended by Wouterse & Verdegaaal (2019), one may apply the “microlevel indicators” to the product following the SPJ approach. In case of an expensive production like a videoclip or an online game, the checklist is applied to the concept or script in order to execute the assessment at an early stage. Then one can develop the product further according to the outcome of the assessment. Only when the assessment is satisfactory, the product will be tested on the target audience. The added value of this approach is to enhance the quality of a narrative-based product before testing it on the target audience so that it is more likely to be successful. This spares expensive changes and retesting. Additionally, the “microlevel indicators” can be applied once again after testing on the target audience in order to recalibrate the product on an empirically grounded basis.

For the overall campaign, especially as far as the monitoring and evaluation of the actual outcome is concerned, another checklist with “macrolevel indicators” is suggested. Unlike the previously mentioned “microlevel indicators”, they are embedded in a simple



checklist that does NOT follow the SPJ approach. However, during the campaign, one may employ an expert group setting to decide for adaptations of the campaign to enhance the outcome. After the campaign, the “macrolevel indicators” can be used within an evaluation.

### Checklist for narrative-based CVE products - Microlevel indicators

#### 1. Consumption

It is fundamental for the success of the campaign that the product is consumed. Two steps can be distinguished: attraction and adherence.

##### 1.1 Attraction

Would the members of the target audience be attracted to the product, meaning that they would open the video or stop scrolling to read the content, etc.? A multitude of factors relating to the content, the messenger, the target group, the time and setting in which the product appears etc. play a role in this regard. While also individual personality traits have an effect which cannot be foreseen, the other factors mentioned above can be controlled and forecasted in scenario planning.

- ✗ The target audience would not be attracted.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The target audience will be attracted.

##### 1.2 Adherence

Individuals are supposed to consume the product sufficiently. It might be necessary for instance that a video clip is being watched long enough to deliver the message Ritzmann, Wouterse, & Verdegaal, M. (2019). Is there a point where people tend to disengage from the product for whatever reason?

- ✗ In general, the target audience would disengage too early.
- ~ Many members of the target audience would disengage too early.

- ✓ The target audience will consume the product sufficiently.

## 2. Message

The second dimension deals with indicators focusing on the message and its properties. On the one hand there are formal criteria like clarity or language, and on the other hand the message's content is to be assessed. For this purpose, one may also check the section of criteria to be avoided.

### Formal criteria

#### 2.1 Clarity

The message/call for action needs to be clear (Meines, 2017). On the contrary if the aim of the message is to cause confusion, one must rate this indicator high if this aim is reached.

- ✗ The message/call for action is not clear.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The message/call for action is clear.

#### 2.2 Coherence

Is the message coherent? Casebeer and Russell (2005) refer to logical coherence of the message and the call to action.

- ✗ The message/call for action is not coherent.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The message/call for action is coherent.

### The message's content

#### 2.3 Proper Target Themes

In order to construct successful counternarratives it is important to first identify and understand the themes that the group uses as the fundamental tenets of its ideology as communicated in its narratives. According to Braddock

and Horgan (2016) content analysis—a group of techniques designed to describe the elements of messages—can be useful (p. 387).

- ✗ The themes used are inappropriate.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The themes used are appropriate.

#### 2. 4 Use of Religious Themes

Braddock and Horgan (2016) also mention that individual religiosity may influence the degree to which a person is affected (or not affected) by a counternarrative comprised of religious themes (p. 399).

- ✗ The use of religious themes or the degree of religiousness is inappropriate in this case.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The use of religious themes or the degree is appropriate in this case.

#### 2. 5 Facts

Cook and Lewandowsky (2011) describe that debunking a myth creates a gap in the individual's mind. To be effective, debunking must fill that gap. This may be achieved by offering facts.

- ✗ The facts provided do not refute the narratives spread by extremists.
- ~ The facts provided do not resonate enough.
- ✓ The facts provided resonate with the target audience.

#### 2. 6 Alternative future prospects

Van der Heide & Schuurman (2018) interviewed specialized probation officers in the Netherlands and were explained that discussing the client's worldviews was a way to focus on a different future perspective. Narrative-based CVE products are ideal means to transport alternative future prospects for vulnerable youth.

- ✗ Alternative future prospects are used in an

improper way/it is not taken seriously by the target audience.

- ~ Alternative future prospects are used but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ Proper alternative future prospects are provided. The product has the potential to inspire the target audience in a positive way.

### 3. *Distribution*

The distribution relies on the channels to put the product across to the target audience as well as on the messenger who uses the channels, i.e. the individual or organization that posts content on social media.

#### 3. 1 Channel of distribution

It is imperative to choose the right channels of distribution consumed by the target audience. These can for instance be Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, television, etc.. Also, the product needs to intrude the individual's filter bubble and echo chamber. Does the social media platform allow to target the respective audience? Apart from social media, a campaign can also be facilitated by distributing content via organizations present in the field.

- ✗ The product does not reach the individual.
- ~ The product reaches only a part of the target audience.
- ✓ The product reaches the target audience.

### 4. *Messenger*

#### 4. 1 Credibility of the messenger

It is crucial for the success of the campaign that the target audience perceives the messenger as credible (Tuck & Silverman, 2016, p. 11), or trustworthy (Braddock & Horgan, 2016, Beutel et al., 2016).

Eligible messengers include:

- Members of the target audience,

- “Former extremists (“formers”),
- Survivors of extremism (“survivors”),
- Respected organisations, charities, or projects relevant to who you want to reach,
- Individuals who the audience respects such as sporting figures, musicians or actors,
- Influential and respected faith, community or youth leaders and activists.” (Tuck & Silverman, 2016, p. 11)
- unknown messengers

As peers and members of one’s social network are perceived as less authoritative and controlling, it is more likely that persuasive messages delivered by characters perceived as peers are not seen as attempting to control one’s beliefs or attitudes (Braddock & Horgan, 2016, p. 384).

For some counternarratives, it may be advantageous to present an ideological expert as the message’s author as some (sub)cultures value legitimate leadership and guidance. In other cases, it may be useful to conceal the message’s origin (Braddock & Horgan, 2016, p. 391, 392).

In the case of the unknown messenger the sleeper effect (e.g. Kumkale & Albarracín, 2004) may set in. People sometimes forget the (noncredible) source but remember the information itself, thereby giving it more credibility. Even when using this strategy, the source must not be obviously suspicious.

- ✗ The messenger is not credible/trustworthy.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The messenger seems credible.

#### 4. 2 Language/Linguistic register

It is important that the language used fits the target audience. Some target audiences are attracted by use of their sociolect or dialect.

- ✗ The language used does not fit the target audience.

- ~ The language fits but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The language used fits the target audience well.

## 5. Technology

### 5.1 Appropriate Technology

The level of technological proficiency used to produce counternarratives like videoclips or songs must be considered within the overall concept. On the one hand, terrorist organizations' professional media outlets produce high level material to convey narratives (Briggs & Feve, 2013). On the other hand, radicalized individuals create material using just their smartphones.

Depending on the concept one can for example produce a high-quality song or a seemingly self-made video testimonial of a returnee using the cell phone's camera. It is not about budget. What matters is authentic and appropriate use of technology.

- ✗ The technology/level of technological proficiency used is inappropriate.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The technology used is appropriate.

## 6. Criteria to avoid

### 6.1 Exceeding the attention span - Length

The product's length must fit the attention span. Take into account the product (clip, song, comic, etc.), the distribution channel (Facebook, YouTube, presentation by teacher, etc.)!

- ✗ The product exceeds the attention span.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The product's length fits the attention span.

### 6.2 Backfire Effect - Inappropriate level of confrontation

The 'backfire effect' explains how the original beliefs will often be strengthening one's view, when someone is confronted with information and facts that contradict something one believes in.

On the contrary, information is more likely to be accepted by people if it is consistent with other things, they assume to be true (Lewandowsky, Ecker, Seifert, Schwarz & Cook, 2012).

The more radicalized someone is, the more his individual identity, morals and sacred values are fused with those of the extremist ideology or group (Gómez et al, 2017; Meines and Ritzmann, 2018). Therefore, it is less likely that confrontation will work. Rather the chances increase that the backfire effect will kick in. “Your target audience – when not chosen with sufficient care – will be even more convinced of their beliefs than before you confronted it with your message.” (Meines and Ritzmann, 2018, p. 5)

On the contrary, another option is to use a more confrontational message but over a longer period of time. One would have to form a constant stream of messages on the same topic or issue to have a chance of affecting the beliefs of someone at some point. (Meines and Ritzmann, 2018, p. 6).

Moreover, when addressing a rather convinced target audience it might help if the narrative does not seem confrontative at first sight.

- ✘ The level of confrontation is inappropriate.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The level of confrontation is appropriate.

### 6. 3 Reinforcing violent extremist themes

It is important to avoid reinforcing the themes emphasized within the target violent extremist narratives. Braddock & Horgan (2016) provide the example of William Luther Pierce - founder of the white nationalist hate group, the National Alliance – who wrote a novel depicting a guerrilla war by white Americans on the American government, persons of color, Jews and white “race-traitors.”

“Authors developing counternarratives that target these White nationalist narratives should not incorporate words and phrases that reinforce the war motif found in this book (e.g., “battle,” “fight”). Doing so may give audience members the impression that Pierce’s perceived enemies are, in fact, belligerent and

preparing for the war that he described.” (Braddock & Horgan, 2016, p. 389).

- ✗ The product reinforces violent extremist themes.
- ~ The themes used are too close to the violent extremist themes.
- ✓ The product does not reinforce violent extremist themes.

#### 6. 4 Stigmatization/Prejudice

A campaign can have unintended consequences. Focusing on one group bears the risk of stigmatization. People might ask “Why us?”, “Do you think there is something wrong with us?” (Meines and Ritzmann, 2018, p. 3) The product should rather promote mutual respect. Also, one must avoid the reproduction of prejudices. Therefore, it is important to present everyone in a respectful way.

- ✗ The product is likely to stigmatize a group or to reinforce prejudices.
- ~ The product is not stigmatizing but still questionable.
- ✓ The product presents everyone in a respectful way.

#### 6. 5 Polarization

The campaign is supposed to unite instead of polarizing people. Polarization can happen among society as a whole as well as among the target audience. One possible strategy to counter polarization is to promote a shared identity (Lenos et al., 2017).

- ✗ The product is likely to polarize.
- ~ The product is not polarizing but still questionable.
- ✓ The product is not polarizing.

### 7. Drivers

When extracting and categorizing indicators it turned out that there was a group of which only one or a selection seemed necessary to be present in a successful product. These indicators describe pathways for putting across the message in a way that it circumvents reactance such



as via emotions and humor; and this way the message can bypass the barrier built by attitudes, beliefs, opinion or ideology (see Braddock & Horgan, 2016).

### 7. 1 Emotion

Emotion might be the strongest driver. Therefore, it is widely recommended to use it in a product and campaign (Tuck & Silverman, 2016; Ritzmann 2017).

- ✗ The product does not arouse emotion.
- ~ The product arouses emotion but not sufficient/there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The product arouses sufficient emotion.

### 7. 2 Morality

Feinberg and Willer (2015) carried out several studies on moral arguments and persuasion. As theoretical basis they took the moral foundations theory (MFT) which proposes five primary moral foundations: harm/care, fairness/reciprocity, ingroup/loyalty, authority/respect and purity/sanctity. Different groups favor some core values more than other core values. Their research demonstrates the effectiveness of framing moral arguments in terms that appeal to the values of those on the other side of the political spectrum. This way the target individuals perceived an increased agreement between the political position and the individuals' own moral values. However, this is to be done in a cautious way as appealing to the other side's values might reinforce or validate those values (Feinberg & Willer, 2015).

Does the message resonate with the target audience's moral foundations?

- ✗ Morality is used in an improper way: violent extremist values are reinforced or people cannot connect to the message.
- ~ Morality is used but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The moral aspects resonate with the target audience and do not reinforce violent extremist values.

### 7. 3 Cognitive dissonance

Meines and Ritzmann (2018) were considering cognitive dissonance in CNs. "Cognitive dissonance (or disharmony) is a

state of conflict in the mind, whereby someone has two opposing views simultaneously. The theory suggests that the mind naturally wants to eliminate dissonance where possible. How can it do this? By changing the way someone feels about or perceives certain things (changing the attitudes and beliefs).” (p. 4)

It is not recommended to use this strategy on a deeply radicalized audience as the cognitive dissonance would cause the counternarrative to be rejected and lead to even stronger radicalization (backfire effect) (Meines & Ritzmann, 2018). It might be helpful in addressing not (deeply) radicalized audiences.

One way is to highlight the adversarial narrative’s incoherence with the ideology or the target audience’s experiences. “Incorporate themes in the counternarrative that reveal incongruities and contradictions in both the terrorist narratives and the ways in which the terrorists act with respect to those narratives.” (Braddock & Horgan, 2016, p. 389)

What a terrorist organization says and does, might be two different things, e.g. pretending to help Muslims but killing Muslims and declaring takfir on all opposing Muslims.

- ✘ Cognitive dissonance is used in an improper way/it cannot work.
- ~ The way cognitive dissonance is used might work but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ Cognitive dissonance is used in a proper way/it works.

#### 7. 4 Humor

Tuck and Silverman (2016) mention humor as another way to question narratives. The campaigners must be careful though not to provoke the opposite by ridiculing the target audience or triggering the backfire effect. Humor might be more effective in primary prevention.

- ✘ Humor is not used in a proper way/it is not funny although it is intended to be.
- ~ Humor is used but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The product is regarded funny by the target audience.

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7. 5 Discrediting the adversarial messenger      Discrediting the adversarial messenger might be more effective in primary prevention as it can easily lead to reactance and rejection.

- ✘ Discrediting the adversarial messenger is used in an improper way; leading to rejection.
- ~ Discrediting the adversarial messenger is used but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The adversarial messenger is being effectively discredited.

7. 6 Disillusionment

Tore Bjørge (2011) explains that in general individuals engage in terrorism to fulfill a dream, a need or an urge to do or achieve something. “The frequent failure to achieve what they expected or dreamed about is also usually the source of their disillusionment, and subsequently, a main reason to disengage from violent extremism.” (p. 277).

On the one hand, disillusionment is one of the desired outcomes of an effective product or campaign. On the other hand, one may aim directly at causing disillusionment by showing that certain ways or means employed will not work out and that certain dreams will never come true. It can be communicated that the individual would rather impair the overall situation as well as the personal or the family’s situation if engaging in extremist activity.

- ✘ The product does not target disillusionment in a proper way.
- ~ The product targets disillusionment but further effort is to be invested.
- ✓ The product targets disillusionment without causing reactance or fueling a conflict.

### Testing narrative-based CVE products

When it comes to testing a product, it depends greatly on the stage of radicalization one is dealing with. In primary prevention one can recruit members of the target audience and

expose the counternarrative products to them. This can be in a single setting or in a focus group.

In later stages of prevention, it will become increasingly difficult to recruit members of the target audience willing to discuss counternarratives. Therefore, one can discuss the product with an expert. Here there are three options: former members of the target audience, members of similar audiences (vulnerable individuals) and experts like specialized psychosocial front-line staff such as specialized probation officers.

Sometimes a former member of the target audience is already available as he or she is the messenger who spreads the content or speaks on a videoclip. If not, one may try to recruit a former member by getting in touch with the services that work with the target audience. Sometimes they already employ “formers” in their interventions.

#### *Interviewing – target audience*

The first stage is the willingness to consume. When offering the counternarrative among other content such as on Instagram, Facebook or twitter, would members of the target audience open the link without being told? This can be tested by showing a member of the target audience different content and ask if they would be curious to open one of those links and if so, which one or which ones.

The next step is the exposure. Here one can distinguish between exposure with and without observation. If the counternarrative is supposed to be consumed alone, e.g. an emotional video testimony on YouTube, testing it without observation will increase the external validity of the assessment. In this case the subject can better empathize with the messenger and would not have to suppress emotional arousal in order not to feel embarrassed. However, after exposure without observation he may be asked about the narrative’s ability to cause emotions.

Following the exposure to the product a semi-structured interview may be carried out. One can explore the subject’s perception beginning with an open question and follow-up questions according to the indicators provided in the checklist and additional indicators chosen by the assessor.

*Interviewing – former member of the target audience and other experts*

The former member of the target audience is to be treated like an expert and not like a member of the target audience. The aim of the assessment is disclosed. One may begin by showing the product as it would first appear to the target audience like a Facebook post, tweet, blog entry, etc. and consult with the expert if it appears interesting to open it or how it can be improved. The next step is the consumption by the expert and the application of a semi-structured questionnaire with relevant indicators.

*Focus group and group discussion*

In primary prevention a focus group is feasible whereas concerning radicalized individuals it is unlikely to even being able to recruit subjects (Mohlenkamp, Wouterse & Gielen, 2018). Compared with interviews, the group dynamics of focus groups can help draw out details that might not emerge in interviews (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016; Mooi, Sarstedt & Mooi-Reci, 2018). One must consider if it has an influence on the concrete assessment if the individuals know each other. In a natural group like a class some people might be more open because they trust their comrades while others distrust them. When producing a clip to be shown by teachers at school for instance, one can expose the clip to a class, observe the reactions and let the teacher discuss the clip. Of course, the researcher should be properly introduced to the class in order to establish a trustful atmosphere.

Focus groups with consumers in market research should consist of 4-6 individuals in order to allow for interaction between the participants and to ensure that all the participants can speak (Mooi, Sarstedt & Mooi-Reci, 2018). This number is also recommendable in discussing with the target audience or experts.

**Assessment at later stages**

Evaluation of any social program can be roughly distinguished into two types: process and outcome evaluation (Koehler, 2017). Drawing from own experiences, the process of

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developing and executing a campaign sometimes needs to be adjusted to encountered difficulties or changing circumstances. This is done in order to achieve the desired outcome. Therefore, this chapter focuses on indicators related to the campaign's outcome.

Already in the planning phase, one should set a series of objectives related to the overall goal of the campaign. First, objectives should be specific, i.e. not relate to abstract ambitions such as “engage young people”, but quantifiable measures of a desired effect, such as “have 200 online conversations with young people through comments or direct messages.” Second, objectives should be measurable. Already before the inception of the campaign one should know which indicators are available via metrics/analytics tools or via official statistics. Third, they should be realistic. When setting an objective, the campaign's time-span, budget, intended audience size and available resources, as well as the performance of previous campaigns, are to be considered (Tuck, 2017).

## Macrolevel indicators

On the macrolevel, instead of using the SPJ approach, basic requirements must be met and indicators are to be compared with the objectives defined in the campaign's planning phase. The information can be obtained via social media analytics, by observation of the target audience's behavior or by official statistics. The following indicators are a suggestion of requirements and goals that were found relevant in CVE campaigning.

### 1. Basic requirements

- 1.1 Target audience      In the planning of a counternarrative campaign the features of the target audience are defined. Are they rather males or females? How old? Which socioeconomic, educational or ethnic background do they have? What are they interested in? Are they organized within networks? If so, which are those?  
It is important to check if the individuals who were reached or who interacted with the content or the messenger or who executed a call of action shared these features.

For instance, using Google Analytics one can see under

Audience/Geo/Location the visitor's city. This allows to assess whether the target audience of a specific area was reached. Furthermore, under Audience/Demographics one can check age and sex of the visitors. Under Acquisition/All Traffic/Channels one can see how the visitors found the page: "Social" means via social media, "Direct" means that the visitor entered the URL directly, "Referral" means that they arrived via links from other sites and "Organic Search" refers to visitors finding the website via Google's search engine (Kemmis, 2019). This allows to check if the target audience reached the site via social media or because they were looking for it on Google. (Hall, 2017)

- ✗ The individuals reached are not the target audience.
- ~ There is considerable overlapping between the individuals reached and the target audience
- ✓ The individuals reached are the target audience

#### 1. 2 Time

When is the target group to be targeted? Social media allows time specific targeting.

- ✗ The time used does not fit the target audience.
- ~ There is considerable overlapping between the time to target the target audience and the chosen time.
- ✓ The time used fits the target audience.

#### 1. 3 Place

Where does the target audience consume the product?

- ✗ The campaign does not take into account the place of consumption.
- ~ The campaign does not properly take into account the place of consumption.
- ✓ The campaign takes into account the place of consumption.

#### 1. 4 User device

It is important to know which device is used by the target audience to access social media and to develop the product/campaign accordingly. In Google Analytics under audience/Mobile/Overview one can see if people access via desktop or via mobile or via tablet (13:10). If many people access via mobile devices, the page must be designed for mobile use. (Hall, 2017)

- ✗ The campaign does not fit the user devices.
- ~ The campaign does not properly take into account the user devices.
- ✓ The campaign fits the user devices.

#### 1. 5 Responsible contact

After the project, a team member should remain responsible for the campaign. This person may answer questions and must have access to remove the product if necessary.

- ✗ Nobody is responsible after the project.
- ~ It is not clear yet who will be responsible.
- ✓ It is clear who will be responsible for the product after the project.

### 2. *Awareness indicators*

Awareness refers to the perception of the campaign's content (be it videos, ads, posts, websites or other digital content). It is important to consider awareness metrics which help understand the characteristics of the audience: how, when and where they were exposed to the campaign, and which parts of the campaign reached them. (Tuck, 2017)

#### 2. 1 Impressions

“Impression” means that the content e.g. a post or a video appears on someone's screen. It represents a very basic measure as it is possible that an impression can take place without an individual even noticing the content. For this reason, it is advisable not to focus too much on impressions. (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016)

- ✗ The number of impressions is far below the defined goal.
- ~ The number of impressions is considerable but still below the defined goal.
- ✓ The number of impressions meets the defined goal.

#### 2. 2 Reach

“Reach” is the total number of people who receive an impression of the content on their screen. Total reach will be lower than the total



number of impressions, as some social media users will receive more than one impression of the content. (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016)

Reach can also happen offline for example by teachers' video presentations at school.

- ✗ The number of reached individuals is far below the defined goal.
- ~ The number of reached individuals is considerable but still below the defined goal.
- ✓ The number of reached individuals meets the defined goal.

### 2.3 Impression frequency

“Impression frequency” is the number of times a targeted individual saw the content over a defined period of time. If the content promoted is being delivered through ads, a high impression frequency may indicate that one is spending too much money too quickly or that the targeting criteria are too narrow, thus showing the ad too often to the same individuals. (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016)

- ✗ The impression frequency is below or far above the defined goal.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The impression frequency meets the defined goal.

### 2.4 Views

The number of times a video is watched or played is referred to as “views”. “What counts as a view varies across social media platforms. For example, on Facebook (where a video is automatically played without sound on a user’s news feed) or Instagram, a video is counted as ‘viewed’ if it is watched for 3 seconds or more, while on Twitter (which also employs auto-play) the same rule applies as long as a video is 100 per cent on a user’s screen for those 3 seconds. For YouTube a view is only counted if a video is watched for 30 seconds or more.” (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016, p. 13)

- ✗ The number of views is far below the defined goal.
- ~ The number of views is considerable but still below the defined goal.
- ✓ The number of views meets the defined goal.

### 3. Engagement indicators

“Engagement” is defined as the various interactions between audience members, messenger and content. “Engagements can include everything from likes and shares to email responses; and can be positive or negative. The number and nature of engagements can help campaigners understand their audience’s reactions to the campaign or its content.” (Tuck, 2017)

#### 3.1 Visitors

Google Analytics is a free tool that gives helpful insight into the website’s audience. For example, under Behavior/Site Content/All Pages one can see how many individuals visited the website in a definable period of time and which pages are visited how often. (Hall, 2017)

- ✘ The number of visitors is far below the defined goal.
- ~ The number of visitors is considerable but still below the defined goal.
- ✓ The number of visitors meets the defined goal.

#### 3.2 Clicks

“Clicks” are the number of times people have clicked on an ad or a link in the posts. Therefore, it is a useful indicator of the number of individuals who have made a proactive decision to engage with the counter-narrative content (Reynolds & Tuck, 2016).

In Facebook Analytics for example the indicator CTR means that somebody clicks to hear the video he found in the newsfeed while CTRL means that somebody clicks to open the link of the video he found in the newsfeed. Therefore, CTRL is an indicator of visitors being more interested, they engaged more with the content. (Cereal Entrepreneur - Jordan Steen, 2018)

- ✘ The number of clicks is far below the defined goal.
- ~ The number of clicks is considerable but still below the defined goal.
- ✓ The number of clicks meets the defined goal.

3.3 Number of Sustained engagements According to Reynolds & Tuck (2018) “sustained engagements” are interactions between campaigners and users that go on for an extended period of time. “Frequently, sustained engagements take the form of conversations, for example, they may be conducted through comment feeds, direct messages or email. While sustained engagements consist of an exchange of multiple messages, there is no formal definition of what constitutes a sustained engagement.” (p.16)

The campaigners must check if it is the target audience interacting or other audiences. Even if it is someone else commenting a post, depending on the content of the comment it might be an added value and help engage the target audience and a discussion evolves. Furthermore, a post with many comments might seem more interesting to the target audience.

- ✗ The number of sustained engagements is far below the defined goal or (almost) no members of the target audience engaged.
- ~ The number of sustained engagements is below the defined goal and too few members of the target audience engaged.
- ✓ The number of sustained engagements meets the defined goal and sufficient members of the target audience engaged.

3.4 Quality of Sustained engagements Not only the number of sustained engagements but also their quality is important (Reynolds & Tuck, 2018). In the planning phase, quality and operationalization are to be defined by the campaigners.

- ✗ The quality of sustained engagements is insufficient.
- ~ There is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The quality of sustained engagements meets the defined goal.

#### 4. *Real World Impact*

4.1 Action executed Frequently, a campaign contains a call to action. This can for instance be a call for sharing a link, the participation in a demonstration or the performance of the ice-bucket challenge.

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Is the counternarrative's call to action being executed; or retrospectively, was it executed?

- ✗ The call to action has (almost) not been executed.
- ~ The number of people who executed the call to action lies below the defined goal.
- ✓ The number of individuals who have executed the call to action meets the defined goal.

4. 2 Official statistics      Can one see the impact in the official statistics? For instance: Did the number of convictions decrease retrospectively?

- ✗ The official statistics show no impact.
- ~ The official statistics show little impact.
- ✓ The official statistics show considerable impact.

4. 3 Increasing knowledge      Some campaigns aim at increasing knowledge about the threats of extremism, consequences or ways to combat extremism (Beutel et al., 2016; Mattei & Zeiger, 2018).

Did the target audience gain knowledge?

- ✗ The target audience did not gain knowledge.
- ~ The target audience gained knowledge but there is still potential for improvement.
- ✓ The target audience gained knowledge according to the goals of the campaign.

## Conclusion

Methods of risk assessment and scenario planning inspired a new approach to examine the strong points, weaknesses and potentials of narrative-based CVE products in an expert group setting. For this purpose, a checklist with indicators concerning the single CVE product is provided. The advantage of this approach lies in the applicability in early stages where

expensive mistakes are frequently made. A structured assessment of the intended product may reduce mistakes and lead to a better outcome in testing with the target audience. Assessments in later stages i.e. monitoring and evaluation require different methods. Therefore, one may use the “macrolevel indicators” suggested in this paper.

Further research would be needed to validate the suggested approach in assessing narrative-based CVE products, identify other valuable indicators and refine the instructions for application.

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**Appendix: The Checklists**

Microlevel Indicators		✗	~	✓
To be rated by experts or according to testing, SPJ approach				
<b>1. Consumption</b>				
1. 1 Attraction	Would the members of the target audience be attracted to the product?			
1. 2 Adherence	Is there a point where people are expected to/tend to disengage from the product for whatever reason?			
Further indicators:				
<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>2. Message</b>				
<u>Formal criteria:</u>				
2. 1 Clarity	Does the product contain a clear message/call to action or is it confusing?			
2. 2 Coherence	Is the message coherent?			
<u>Content:</u>				
2. 3 Proper Target Theme	Are the themes used appropriate?			
2. 4 Religious themes	Is the use of religious themes or the degree of religiousness appropriate in this case?			
2. 5 Facts	Does the campaign provide facts?			
2. 6 Alternative future prospects	Does the campaign show alternative future prospects for members of the target audience?			
Further indicators:				
<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>3. Distribution</b>				
3. 1 Reach of the target audience	1. Which means of distribution are consumed by the target audience? (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, television, ...) 2. Does that platform allow to target the respective audience?			
Further indicators:				

<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>4. Messenger</b>				
4. 1 Messenger's Credibility	Does the target audience perceive the messenger as credible?			
4. 2 Language/Linguistic register	Does the language used fit the target audience?			
Further indicators:				
<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>5. Technology</b>				
5. 1 Appropriate Technology	Is the technology used appropriate?			
Further indicators:				
<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>6. Criteria to avoid</b>				
6. 1 Exceeding the attention span - Length	Does the product's length fit the attention span?			
6. 2 Backfire Effect - Inappropriate level of confrontation	Is the level of confrontation appropriate?			
6. 3 Reinforcing violent extremist themes	Does the product reinforce violent extremist themes?			
6. 4 Stigmatization/Prejudice	Is the product stigmatizing anyone? Does it reinforce prejudices?			
6. 5 Polarization	Does the product have a polarizing effect?			
Further indicators:				
<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>7. Drivers</b>				
7. 1 Emotion	Does the narrative arouse emotion?			
7. 2 Morality	Does the message connect to the target audience's moral foundations?			
7. 3 Cognitive dissonance	Is cognitive dissonance used in a proper way? Are violent extremists' incoherences highlighted?			
7. 4 Humor	Is humor used in a proper way/is it funny?			
7. 5 Discrediting the adversarial messenger	Is the adversarial messenger effectively discredited?			

7.6 Disillusionment	Does the product target disillusionment?			
Further indicators:				
<u>Dimension judgement</u>				
<b>Overall judgment</b>				

Macrolevel Indicators		✗	~	✓
<b>1. Basic Requirements</b>				
1. 1 Target audience	Does the campaign reach the target audience?			
1. 2 Time	Does the campaign fit the time of consumption?			
1. 3 Place	Does the campaign fit the place of consumption?			
1. 4 User device	Does the campaign fit the user device?			
1. 5 Responsible contact	Will there be someone responsible for the campaign after the project?			
Further indicators:				
<b>2. Awareness</b>				
2. 1 Impressions	Does the number of impressions meet the defined goal?			
2. 2 Reach	Does the number of reached individuals meet the defined goal?			
2. 3 Impression frequency	Does the impression frequency meet the defined goal?			
2. 4 Views	Does the number of views meet the defined goal?			
Further indicators:				
<b>3. Engagement</b>				
3. 1 Clicks	Does the number of clicks meet the defined goal?			
3. 2 Shares	Was the content shared sufficiently?			
3. 4 Followers	Does the number of followers meet the defined goal?			
3. 5 Number of Sustained engagements	Does the number of sustained engagements meet the defined goal?			
3. 6 Quality of Sustained engagements				
Further indicators:				

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<b>4. Real world impact</b>				
4. 1 Action executed	Is the counternarrative's call to action being executed; or retrospectively, was it executed?			
4. 2 Official statistics	Can one see the impact in the official statistics?			
4. 3 Increasing knowledge	Does the target audience know more about risks, etc. now?			
Further indicators:				

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