Quality management of P/CVE interventions in secondary and tertiary prevention:

Overview and first steps in implementing monitoring and reporting

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1. The case for implementing rigorous quality management

In recent years, the measures for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have undergone innovation, differentiation and professionalisation. Particularly in secondary and tertiary prevention, such developments have been linked to temporary funding of short-term or pilot projects. Many new approaches are developed and tested in these projects, but the practitioners implementing them are under constant pressure to report quick results ('to deliver'), move on to the next approach or repackage measures to obtain further funding. Under these circumstances, knowledge transfer across projects poses a challenge.

But increasingly, the call for evaluating, learning and monitoring measures of secondary and tertiary prevention is being heard and fulfilled, not least within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) [1]. And this is critical, as all stakeholders in P/CVE measures have an interest in assessing progress in the implementation of measures and the achievement of intended results.

However, evaluations and internal learning efforts will be limited if the necessary data cannot be obtained and if there is inadequate internal coordination and knowledge management. While evaluations may aim at improving internal quality management processes of P/CVE measures, they are simultaneously contingent on the prior implementation of quality management strategies. Yet there has been little discussion to date on how to actually build that foundation: this brief RAN paper seeks to stimulate this debate and systematise some of the key facets of quality management in the context of secondary and tertiary prevention measures. By analysing and breaking down quality management in various processes, tools and methods, the paper provides practitioners with starting points for its implementation in related monitoring and reporting systems.

2. Towards an understanding of quality management

A quality management system (QMS) is a collection of organisational processes and functions aimed at continuous improvement of quality of an organisational entity. This entails systematising methods, policies, procedures, processes, resources and structures, to ensure that:

- a project's responsibilities, schedules, relationships, contracts and agreements are fulfilled;
- learning within or across projects is made possible by better monitoring and assessing the implementation of strategies and better identifying problems and generating solutions.

As such, quality management describes processes and activities **within** an organisation to define, implement, enforce and monitor these standards and goals [2]. The aim is to establish the infrastructure necessary for a project or organisation to function, implement its mandate and increase its viability and effectiveness. This may sound self-evident or even mundane, but in fact, organisations typically conduct many competing activities and comprise a variety of fluid entities – factors which may exacerbate problems in the context of project work in the P/CVE setting.

Evaluation can focus on the same questions and quality criteria as quality management, and thus evaluation and quality management may overlap. But quality management is distinct: it describes an ongoing or regular process carried out chiefly by the organisation itself.

Quality management can be the necessary input or output of an evaluation process. In terms of input, evaluators usually collect their own data via interviews, observations or surveys, but at the same time, depending on the goal of the evaluation, they need to rely heavily on existing systematic knowledge bases (see Chapter 3). This is particularly important in secondary and tertiary prevention, for there are limits to observations or client interviews. Access to case files (processed in accordance with data protection and ethical standards (see Chapter 4)) and further documentation of meetings and experiences is therefore important.

[1] Meines, *RAN 7 Step Evaluation Guide*. Wouterse & de Donk, *Evaluating disengagement, deradicalisation and resocialisation efforts.*
[2] DeGEval, *Glossar der Standards für Evaluation*. https://www.degeval.org/glossar-der-standards-fuer-evaluation/ (retrieved December 2, 2021).

Proper monitoring and reporting systems cannot be implemented within a short time-frame or on the fly. Quality management needs strategic preparation, which will pay off – not at least in allowing for well-tailored and thus beneficial evaluation.

As for the output, QMSs or strategies can be subject to evaluation themselves; an evaluation might end with a recommendation for the implementation of such a strategy or the adaption or amendment of an existing one. Evaluation can even accompany the introduction of quality management measures.

Implementing and organising a QMS can be divided into two basic processes, namely specialisation and coordination, as explained below.

- **Specialisation** refers to the breaking down of a new system or key process into subprocesses and the allocation of staff and resources accordingly.
- **Coordination** is understood as the reconnection of the various subprocess outcomes to form a coherent system.

Both these processes need to be implemented carefully, with enough time to include all relevant stakeholders within an organisation.

Before launching the specialisation process, it is imperative to clearly grasp the 'theory/theories of change' of a given organisational entity or measure. This will define the relevance of information to be categorised and stored and of daily routines and processes. The theory of change is an explanation of a measure's expectations about how activities will ultimately translate into meaningful outcomes. To identify, understand and prioritise both formal and informal activities, a necessary first step (and eventually a lengthy one) is to implement categories for reporting and databases (monitoring) and for defining processes of exchange.

While creating monitoring systems based on sound knowledge bases is vital to any quality management strategy, there is also a second important pillar. Quality management might require a change in organisational culture: one of sharing and exchanging information instead of retaining information.

Data and processes in secondary and tertiary prevention are often sensitive, for instance when based on highly personal, trustful interaction with clients, or due to the nature of the personal data involved or the security-related issues in those processes. This might explain the tendency of actors in secondary and tertiary prevention to not think strategically about the opportunities a data management system provides but rather to draw so many red lines that it renders access to information impossible.

Further arguments posit that working with a client is such a unique process that there is no value in sharing information related to this particular process, or are based on the suspicion that any cross-case analysis would not do justice to the context-sensitive nature of social work. These are legitimate reasons, but they neglect the fact that each learning system requires the exchange of information, as do processes surrounding accountability and safety. As such, it is preferable to do this in a way that carefully considers the context of the given P/CVE measures and organisational conditions than to do so ad hoc, in a rush or not at all. This is the point of a quality management strategy: both to enable learning and adaption, and to ensure that this is done in a way that is legitimate and beneficial for all stakeholders in a given P/CVE measure.

Key lessons and recommendations

1. Quality management can be the necessary input or output of an evaluation process, but is distinct from evaluation, for it focuses on the infrastructure **within** an organisation necessary for it to function, implement its mandate and increase its viability and effectiveness.
2. It is vital to create monitoring systems based on sound knowledge bases.
3. Practitioners need to create a culture of sharing and exchanging, instead of retaining information under strict rules for data processing.

3. Key elements of monitoring and reporting systems

Monitoring is a continuous internal process to check progress against the theory of change and an implementation plan (as stored in Gantt charts [3], for instance). Monitoring can take the form of regular reports on a clear schedule during implementation processes. This allows project coordinators and project teams to identify good and bad practices, learn from them and tackle problems before they become unmanageable.

Monitoring systems should strike a balance between the systematic provision of data and technical documentation and regular feedback from participants and stakeholders. They include the following key elements [4].

- **The creation of knowledge bases**. This involves obtaining and analysing project documentation that provides information on progress (e.g. systematic case files, delivery reports and debriefing documentation).
- **Validation and participation**. Validation involves checking or verifying whether the reported progress is accurate (e.g. through reflection workshops or surveys with social workers involved in daily work with clients). Participation should ideally take the form of obtaining feedback from all stakeholders in an organisation on progress and proposed actions (e.g. through regular stakeholder and focus-group meetings and systematic follow-up processes).

These two elements are briefly introduced in the following section.

Knowledge bases for monitoring

Knowledge is not just information. Often, reports merely contain information (e.g. who met whom and when) rather than knowledge (e.g. how a problem was addressed and what was learned). This does not make reports less valuable; in fact, in case-reporting systems in P/CVE measures, obtaining this basic information is a necessary first step – including the definition of rules and processes for data protection and ethical safeguards for storing and processing this information (see chapter 4 below).

Capturing knowledge, however, is more challenging than collecting information. Firstly, time is needed to allow for reflection and writing/narrating. Further, turning tacit knowledge (experiential) into explicit knowledge (codified, often written, but also presented in formats like workshops) is important, too.

The starting point is the categories and related indicators, which must have the following three characteristics [5].

- They must be **specific**. All contributors to the databases should understand what falls under this category; if they are creating explicit knowledge, they should know what the related causes and effects are. For instance, what does a diagnostic mean if it refers to the higher level of ideological distancing?
- They must be **measurable**. Indicators should be measurable, meaning they should be able to be ranked on some kind of scale, from low to high.
- They must be **achievable**. If categories refer to a target being reached, it must be possible to reach the target within established timescales and using the resources and skills available. They should be realistic, i.e. not be set too high.

Including too many categories or defining too many indicators can make monitoring systems burdensome, costly, impractical and likely to be underused. Indeed, a healthy dose of pragmatism is needed to manage the trade-off between picking the optimal option and having to accept the second-best but realistic option, given the data and resources to hand.

P/CVE measures have often relied on oral or ‘learning on the job’ approaches to sharing knowledge. While these approaches are relevant, they require face-to-face communication and significant time, limiting

[3] Gantt charts are bar charts that summarise a project timetable, with aligning tasks (often on the vertical axis) and time intervals (often on the horizontal axis).
[4] Dawson et al., *Learning and adapting: the use of monitoring and evaluation in countering violent extremism – A handbook for practitioners.*
[5] Dawson et al., *Learning and adapting: the use of monitoring and evaluation in countering violent extremism – A handbook for practitioners,* 28.

sustainability, impact, efficiency and relatively stable staff levels. Systematically documenting experiences needs to be the bedrock of any QMS. This helps preserve details about how a task was completed, retain information and develop institutional memory, and communicate and share information more clearly.

There are various tools and formats to help practitioners meet such documenting requirements. They rely heavily on the following organisational mandate(s) and structures.

- Databases, which include, for instance, software-based case documentation, and ensuring that knowledge is accumulating and is accessible for analysis.
- Databases based on case files, which include the option to incorporate further critical knowledge documents like agendas and minutes of meetings, handover-notes, after-action reviews following critical incidences and document types that allow for open reflection on critical junctures and lessons learned.
- In secondary and tertiary prevention, bundles of activities and even formal and informal networks of prevention actors are commonly formed around one client [6]. It is therefore worth including stakeholder mapping documents that address questions such as 'Who are my knowledge partners in these activities and in the current life of my client?'.

These elements form the knowledge base for a monitoring system. Practitioners considering implementing a QMS should therefore not only include highly standardised case documentation but also add ways of complementing these files with further documents that might gain importance while a project is being implemented. While quality management is focused on processes within organisations, those processes might be dependent on external factors: further actors, political conditions, funding demands and changes in client context. A systematic monitoring system opens up categories and storage opportunities to harvest this knowledge.

Key lessons and recommendations

1. A monitoring system should capture both merely descriptive information **and** knowledge. The latter requires time and therefore financial resources, but constitutes a key pillar of any quality management strategy.
2. Practitioners should go beyond highly standardised case documentation but allow for the potential in the hardware and software to add further documents and reflections into the database.
3. Categories and indicators should be specific, measurable and pragmatically achievable.

Organising validation and participation

While written documentation is the bedrock of any monitoring system, involving all the stakeholders of an organisation is crucial. This is especially true in the context of secondary and tertiary prevention measures, for they rely on work in safe, trustful spaces of communication and interaction, often across long time-spans.

Bringing people together and documenting these joint reflections has three aims:

- to further collect information on actual cases or processes, and as such, contribute to collecting experiential knowledge (validation);
- to reflect across cases, and to turn experiential knowledge into explicit knowledge (validation);

[6] Johansson, *Klientenzentrierte Evaluation in Multi-Agency Settings der Extremismusprävention – Möglichkeiten und Grenzen eines wirkungsorientierten Vorgehens*.

- to discuss the monitoring and reporting process itself, to be able to adapt it to changing conditions, new experiences and new approaches (participation).

Since the implementation of quality management measures and evaluation should be integrated into the work routines and daily practice of P/CVE work as far as possible, it is important to motivate stakeholders to consider themselves involved in these monitoring and reporting processes in a legitimate, constructive and efficient way. This aspect should not be an afterthought or accessory to a P/CVE measure: it is integral and crucial, and should be viewed as a key project deliverable. It is therefore necessary to allocate the time for these formats of exchange and reflection.

The following two formats that are easy to implement should be part of all monitoring systems.

- Reflection and debriefing workshops. Meeting frequently and/or on demand, this brings subgroups of stakeholders together, with the aim of capturing experiences and starting the learning process.
- Communities of practice. This entails creating applied knowledge networks, leveraging expertise and fostering new ideas across organisational entities, as well as including outside expertise or actors, under a wider practice network.

The protocols of these meetings, which include key findings and a binding as well as transparent management response plan, are an important component of any knowledge base that includes explicit knowledge. These target agreements need to be stored and followed up at all levels of the organisational entity. The QMS should put procedures in place to ensure these uptake processes are carried out. To be able to implement all this, the QMS must have a certain degree of flexibility. This is discussed in greater detail in the next section, alongside the other challenges for practitioners who design monitoring and reporting systems.

Key lessons and recommendations

1. The documentation should provide a space for the inclusion of oral exchanges in workshop formats or communication in a community of practice.
2. Managers of P/CVE measures must be sure to consult with all stakeholders when designing and implementing a QMS.
3. An uptake/management response strategy must be in place that makes quality management a learning system.

4. Trade-offs and ambivalences in QMS design: flexibility, ethical standards and data protection

Implementing the QMSs described above is about introducing categories and standards, and storing and processing data. This is not a mere technical process and should not be treated as such for three main reasons: first, P/CVE needs to be context sensitive and eschew inflexible categorising systems; second, the data being processed is often very sensitive; and third, there are ethical considerations in obtaining and analysing the data.

Therefore, accordingly, there is a need to address the following three challenges when designing QMSs: (1) balancing analysability and flexibility, (2) putting safeguards for data protection in place, and (3) adhering to fundamental ethical standards.

(1) Secondary and tertiary prevention measures are complex interventions. They are not black boxes and cannot be copied or scaled up based on inflexible templates. They are highly dependent on the

context in which they take place [7]. This is why, even while P/CVE actors adhere increasingly to standards and systematic monitoring, the reservations and even resistance to the introduction of ever more standards to the field are not without reason [8]. Therefore, reporting and monitoring systems need to be adapted to the context of the interventions they cover; they must also be designed to be flexible enough to allow adaptation and learning. The outright rejection of any standardisation is not optimal, in light of all the benefits afforded by proper reporting and monitoring systems and systematic evaluations. However, a balance must be struck between flexibility and rigidity with keeping standards sufficiently uniform, to be able to monitor progress, changes and practices over time [9].

When designing monitoring and reporting systems, testing them repeatedly before implementing them is key. This time and budget effort is a worthwhile investment. Furthermore, they need to provide flexible opportunities for adjustments and course corrections, while the monitoring and reporting system is up and running. Recommendations include holding regular (for instance, quarterly) review meetings, providing open categories and commentary sections in reporting formats, and setting aside a budget for renewed testing and adaptions (for instance, reprogramming the user interface of data management software).

(2) Many elements of quality management as discussed above are linked to the processing of personal data. Therefore, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), applicable as of 25 May 2018 in all EU Member States, which seeks to harmonise data privacy laws across Europe, must be taken into account carefully. Some personal data (e.g. religious beliefs or political views) is particularly sensitive and is therefore subject to increased protection. Yet, these data points are obviously of interest when dealing with extremism. These types of data can only be processed with the consent of the persons concerned: by giving or refusing consent, they determine how their personal data is disclosed and used. They must be given the opportunity to decide whether and under what conditions their data may be processed. If these conditions change, these persons must be asked anew. As building trust with clients is a sensitive issue, there are limits to how detailed these processes of obtaining consent can be, for instance when work with a client is just beginning. The GDPR is quite strict, with very few exemptions.

At the very least, practitioners should adhere to the following standards when detailed consent is not obtained temporarily. A detailed data management plan must be in place, specifying that:

- the project cannot be implemented without this concrete personal data, for instance if it is required to assist clients in official or administrative processes, or to be able to contact the client and their close environment as part of the agreed joint work, or in case of the need for help;
- the principle of appropriateness is met, requiring that the content and form of data collection and processes does not exceed the necessary level to achieve the objectives;
- the principle of data economy is respected, i.e. the amount of data collected and the scope of processing this data must be necessary for the purpose; also, there must be specification of the storage period, a plan on the (limits of) accessibility of the data, and a clear strategy on how to anonymise or pseudonymise the data.

(3) These legal requirements that any monitoring or reporting system should adhere to are closely related to the ethical standards that need to be met.

In particular, these relate to the following: (a) confidentiality and transparency, (b) beneficence and (c) safety/security.

(a) Ensuring **confidentiality and transparency** means that those who know the identity of a client (or other person) whose data is to be stored must take steps to ensure that this identity is not revealed to or by others. As outlined above, whenever possible, consent should be obtained when using a person's data. Informed consent ensures that a person's personal rights and right to informational self-determination are guaranteed. Clients should be informed in an understandable and comprehensible way. However, knowing that their data will be

[7] Gielen, Countering violent extremism: A realist review for assessing what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and how?
[8] Koynova et al., *Monitoring, Evaluation und Lernen: Erfahrungen und Bedarfe der Fachpraxis in der Prävention von Rechtsextremismus und Islamismus.*
[9] Nordersjö, Framing standardization: Implementing a quality management system in relation to social work professionalism in the social services.

stored or even analysed might lead clients to modify their behaviour. Thus, while transparency is a key ethical principle, practitioners should be aware of the potential effects of disclosing and explaining the data collection and processing methods: in the worst case, this may even lead to clients pulling out of the programme. Practitioners should have a solid strategy for explaining the need for limited data storage and processing to their clients, in a way that mitigates this risk without jeopardising a long-term and trusted professional relationship.

(b) According to the principle of **beneficence,** those designing monitoring and reporting systems are required to ensure that no harm is done to clients and other participants in these systems, and that the benefits of the study are maximised. Practitioners must ensure that clients cannot be re-identified. If such anonymisation cannot be guaranteed, these parts of the monitoring system need to be discontinued or redesigned.

(c) The **safety and security** of both clients and P/CVE practitioners is paramount: while this may be generally precarious in secondary and tertiary prevention, collecting and analysing data adds an additional layer of complexity. Each quality management strategy should ensure that avenues exist for those seeking to communicate unease and for offering psychological support.

Key lessons and recommendations

1. QMSs must be designed to be flexible enough to adapt to new experiences or changing conditions. Striking the right balance between flexibility and rigidity is important.
2. As monitoring and reporting is always about data collection, a data protection plan should be in place for each QMS, addressing issues of consent, necessity, appropriateness and data economy.
3. This data protection plan should include ethical considerations of confidentiality, transparency, beneficence and safety/security.

Further reading

1. European Commission (2021): *Practical guideline for policy-makers and practitioners regarding evaluations in tertiary prevention in the field of Islamist extremism.* https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2020-11/2019_evaluation.pdf

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2. On governing and organising evaluation and quality management:
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