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What are the challenges and benefits of cooperation on de-radicalisation ?

The EU funded CHAMPIONS project has analysed which factors networks in the area of counter-radicalisation have to overcome and deal with. The findings highlight a diverse set of challenges and benefits.

The CHAMPIONS project aims to establish permanent offline working groups to counter polarisation, build resilience and protect vulnerable groups in their local communities. To do so effectively, the project has conducted large surveys and interviews with relevant stakeholders. Only when the challenges are identified can they be addressed. Hence, while the results will ensure the success of the CHAMPIONS project, they also support anyone with an interest in creating a network or already engaged in one.

Challenges

For cooperation to occur a network of skilled and relevant persons must first be brought together. However, the CHAMPIONS study revealed that the composition of these networks can bring several difficulties with it. As such, cooperation with teachers and local authorities, while seen as vital, was also identified as difficult. On the other hand, experiences from related projects have shown, that those committing themselves sometimes lack actual interest, doing so out of politeness or feeling of duty.

Even once a network is created, the surveys and interviews of the CHAMPIONS project highlight that they sometimes suffer from mistrust. This can be caused by power imbalances or general feelings of scepticism. Competition between different members, as they aim to promote different political agendas or compete for visibility, can reinforce this problem.

As such, working with different perspectives and opinions as cooperation requires can often be challenging. A recurring problem identified by the surveys and interviews was the often highly different views held by police and first line practitioners in the field of prevention. Thus, while networking lives from a rich amount of opinions, too many of them can also paralyze a network rendering it incapable of formulating any decisions.

Hence, communication is key but also brings challenges on its own, the surveys showed. Ensuring effective communication internally and externally is not only required to produce but also to spread the results of the corporations. As such, remote geographic locations as well as marginalised groups, often the focus of the projects, are sometimes hard to reach. However, the interviews conducted by the CHAMPIONS project also showed, that sometimes projects were targeted at audiences already informed instead of those still in need of support.

Thus, the implementation of the actions agreed upon, while crucial to implement concrete results and to reach the right audience, is often problematic as well. The interviews and surveys conducted



highlighted significant problems in monitoring the implementation of actions agreed upon. This was reinforced by another challenge identified by the project: maintaining continuity.

It was noted in the interviews, that long term success or success at all was challenged by difficulties in maintaining ongoing communication networks as well as recurring meetings.

Additionally, high turnover rates in NGOs but also governments, affected by the election cycle, make long term cooperation difficult. As such, the framework under which the cooperation occurs is also subject to legal or policy changes.

Thus, there is a series of challenges ranging from changing legal frameworks over difficulties in communication to implementation networks have to confront and overcome to be effective. However, by identifying them the CHAMPIONS project has made it easier for those aiming to create cooperation and networks to do so. After all, the surveys and interviews conducted by the project make it also clear that the benefits from cooperation, like increased knowledge exchange and better abilities to raise awareness, outweigh the challenges by far.

Surveys and interviews conducted by the CHAMPIONS project point towards a dual function of cooperation. As such, it does not only advance a project but also the skills and abilities of the participants.

“Cooperation” has become one of the buzz words when addressing radicalisation and extremism. As such, calls for greater cooperation are repeatedly voiced after acts of terrorism. Also, in the area of counter-extremism “cooperation” is increasingly seen as vital ingredient to understand and respond to the many faces and contexts of radicalisation. However, in the ongoing debates over the future advantages arising from cooperation, its present benefits are often ignored. To change this and shine light on those already cooperating the EU funded [CHAMPIONS project](#) has conducted surveys and interviews to better understand the benefits arising from cooperation.

The survey and interview results highlighted several areas in which cooperation advanced the aims, impact and capacities of the participants and the project. These can be loosely divided into personal benefits arising from experiences of collaboration to the participants on the one hand and benefits more directly impacting the outcomes of these projects.

Personal Benefits

Firstly, cooperation was seen as possibility to gain knowledge about the phenomena of extremism. As such, it enabled experts in a specific area, like lawyers or psychologists, to exchange and profit from each other. Through this, a holistic picture of the problem at hand can be developed, taking all its dimensions into account. Enabled by this, it was claimed that cooperation keeps the participants up to date with the phenomena. Thus, those questioned saw cooperation as a mean for ongoing knowledge exchange.

However, not only knowledge was exchanged but also practices, tools and resources. For instance, exchange of information and teaching resources were mentioned often by those interviewed. Hence, the participants gained access and experienced different perspectives and opinions on the topic. Those surveyed and interviewed saw this as opportunity to gain a deeper insight not only into all aspects of radicalisation but also into those working with the phenomena. Thus, cooperation in one area can lead to increased cooperation in other areas, as the different shareholders become more aware of each other, their qualities and services offered.



Indeed, the CHAMPIONS study found that experiences with cooperation lead to a internalisation of a culture of collaboration by the participants. As such, joint projects can create and carry new impulses into the participating organisations and their staff. For instance, the surveys of the CHAMPIONS project, revealed that participants of collaborative projects felt empowered and the experience had strengthened their self-assurance.

Project Benefits

While the above listed benefits also have an impact on the outcome of the collaborative project and its quality, other factors were identified by the surveys to have a more direct impact on the project outcome. Nevertheless, the boundaries between the two dimensions are floating.

This fact is symbolised by the benefit of awareness raising, identified by the CHAMPIONS project. As such, those surveyed and interviewed saw cooperation as beneficial in raising awareness about the project and its results but also to the participants about the dangers and faces of extremism. Hence, better understanding of the phenomena leads to an increased ability to raise awareness. On the other hand, cooperation enables a project to use all the existing channels of communication of the organisations and individuals involved. This increases and diversifies the potential audience that can be targeted as well as the amount of channels to do so.

Through this, the impact of the project can be increased, yet another benefit of cooperation identified by the CHAMPIONS project. As such, synergies to existing projects of the partners can be developed, enabling a direct application of the results of the collaborative project. Hence, those surveyed argued that cooperative projects had the possibility to develop a genuine impact on solving problems.

Finally, cooperation, according to them, also enabled the possibility to conduct joint action. By combining all the benefits outlined, corporations can react quicker to threats or emerging trends, for instance by increasing information exchange. The combined and diverse skills, expertise and capacities of the participants in the cooperation the overall possibilities of the network are increased. This can also lead to the development of new approaches to solutions, strategies and working methods. Hence, cooperation increases the possibility to develop novel solutions responding to the various dimensions of the problem.

Hence, the CHAMPIONS study shows that it is the accumulation and connection of individuals and organisations with a diverse set of skills and backgrounds that is the main benefit of cooperation. As such, cooperation creates platforms for ongoing exchange of a variety of commodities, ranging from resources to knowledge. Through this, collaborative projects not only advance the outcomes but also the individual and organisations participating.

CHAMPIONS - Cooperative Harmonized Action Model to Stop Polarisation in Our Nations

The main objective of the project is to develop collaboration models for establishing working groups between first-line-practitioners. The offline approach is supported by collaborative online tools, practitioner trainings and digital services.

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