

## **Mitigating the Challenges of “Industrialisation” in the Prevention of Violent Extremism**

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With the concept of “industrialization of societal initiative” I refer to all phenomena that usually occur when a subject is suddenly receiving much public/ political attention and financial investment. This is presently the case with CVE which has increasingly become a focal point of political and media awareness, of policy writing and of significant raise in budgets. This attention doubtlessly concurs with the fact that violent extremism and terrorism have caused a high level of concern and anxiety among the general population(s); which in turn increases the pressure on political parties and governments to raise the issue and deliver action.

It seems key to recognize these phenomena and build mitigation strategies, since the “industrialisation” of a complex subject of societal work generally produces significant risks for finding sustainable solutions. Broadly speaking, “industrialisation” may result in losses of quality of the work done on the ground. Consecutively, brain drain and loss of good practice methods may occur since relevant methodologies/ organisations tend to drift into the background and experienced practitioners leave the field. Eventually, a loss of trust in politics and in the interventions themselves may ensue on the part of both the general populace and the at-risk target groups in the country, thus multiplying the decrease of quality.

The mechanisms of “industrialisation” are manifold – and they seem widely un-acknowledged and un-researched. To give but some examples from general experience: When much attention and finances come into a field some of the relevant organisations will put an emphasis on expansion, marketing, lobbying and business development. A dynamic of cartel formation unwittingly sets in. The more ambitious organisations generally begin to stake claims and expand their services in more sectors of work than were originally their expertise. These organisations then also tend to buy out small and well field-embedded practitioner organisations and integrate their work into their portfolio. As a consequence most of the time staff is restructured and personnel/ training is reduced and streamlined, often resulting in more functionary kind of employees and less experienced field practitioners/ experts.

Additionally, the more ambitious organisations tend to make more compromises with politics and funders in terms of procedures and methodologies. However, politics and funders tend to request quick action, output oriented measures, and graspable/ presentable results irrespective of the actual needs and complexities on the ground. Sometimes business consultants and lobbying experts are brought in (often by foundations/ associations) which further propels the described dynamic of “industrialization”.

A particularly detrimental effect of “industrialization” is ‘hostile double production’. For instance, if the latest topic in the field is: We need an international network and/or formulate

practice guidelines, then quite a few organisations will become highly active to build international networks and undertake efforts to formulate practice guidelines – and they will not cooperate on this but rather act competitively. Overburdening the practitioner organisations (as potential network partners and research subjects) and a general loss of trust in networks/guidelines will be the result.

Governments, ministries and policy makers sometimes unwittingly support such “industrialisation” dynamics in that they generally prefer dealing with a small number of well acquainted contractors (who tend to compromise) rather than with many practitioners with a solid vision of quality standards and work requirements. Sometimes ministries even outsource entire sectors of work to one contractor.

### Preliminary conclusion

Already these general observations seem to suggest: The “industrialisation of a complex area/subject of societal work”, when unchecked, may easily result in a paradoxical outcome: that a multiplication of expenditures leads to a decrease of intervention capacity and impact.

Yet, the phenomena of “industrialisation” seem to be widely unacknowledged – and un-researched; and there seems to be no systematic thinking invested in developing mitigation strategies and action plans. Generally, “industrialisation” is not openly talked about much – while many people seem to have quite some experiential knowledge about it. At this point we don’t even seem to have proper terms for referring to what I preliminarily subsumed under the concept of “industrialisation”.

For instance, the experts of the Soufan Group have recently coined a phrase which touches upon the issue while it still is far from grasping the underlying challenge. In its report on the White House Summit on CVE (in Feb. 2015)<sup>1</sup> the authors (while cautioning high expectations about the internet and prevent) quite nonchalantly say: “What briefs well in presentations to policy-makers likely won’t work with the actual people” on the ground. Briefing well versus working well seems to be a conflict. This conflict may come from the dynamics of “industrialization”.

### As to solutions - what actions are needed?

Being un-researched in any empirical ways, the phenomena of “industrialisation” need to be investigated and researched in more depth.

From this research, mitigation strategies need to be developed and specific precautions and actions recommended.

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1 Countering Violent Extremism: Challenges and Solutions, <http://soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-countering-violent-extremism-challenges-and-solutions/?catid=3>. The Soufan Group, February 19, 2015, quoted March 2015.

Systematically drawing on and further developing first-line practitioner knowledge will certainly be a crucial element of any such mitigation strategy – which is why the RAN seems to be a suitable place for such initiative. Yet, how this should be done and what else would be needed in order to effectively mitigate the risks of “industrialisation” on international, governmental and field organisations level is an open question which would require some investigation upon which viable recommendations may be produced.