

Proposal for Expert Review and advice

RAN offers practice owners throughout Europe the opportunity to receive advice on how to improve the quality and impact of his/her project/tool/method from an expert of the RAN expert pool. This advice is only meant for the practice owner, on a voluntary basis, and will not be published online.

Name of practice: Jamal al-Khatib

Date of review: 15.-28.11 2020

Review author / expert:

1. What is the theoretical basis / implication of the practice? What theoretical aspects could be specified?

Answer:

The original Kick Off for the project came from practical youth work experience, actually a former ISIS/Jihad supporter who wanted to prevent youngsters from falling into the Jihad Scene by telling his story. Around this initiation, a project group aroused, made by practitioners, researchers and not the least young adults who have had connection to the Viennese Jihadi scene.

The group worked more or less parallel practically with the young adults on their story and theoretically in building the theoretical basis. The diverse composition of the expert group, coming from several fields such as social work, Islamic studies, political sciences sociology etc. allowed coming up with a very holistic theoretical framework around narrative biography work, a comparably new approach in Social work.

Actually, there is a need to specify two different implications, one on the offline and one on the online target group.

The narrative biographical work is done with the offline target group what allows very high level of active participation development of self-esteem and experience of self-efficacy. However, it has to be admitted that a comparably big number of 12 professionals worked with 9 clients.

The online part of the projects looks like a by-product of the initial idea on first sight, but actually is at least as important. Both unfold impact together. In this Online part we can clearly define a second implication being a new approach in secondary prevention as it focuses on persons already affiliated with the topic, effecting them either directly when they watch the movies online – and introducing a possible deeper involvement by what the project calls “Online Streetwork”, getting into direct communication via messaging or chat.

Concerning this new approach the theoretical framework is still under development and this project will add plenty of insights for it. Building relationship with the user (customer) via establishing common ground is on one hand well known from traditional social work, on the other hand a common practice in merchandising and campaigning. (I will elaborate in this and its limits under 3.)

2. Is there a clear understanding what this practice should contribute to/which problem is being tackled?

Answer:

The project owner can clearly answer this in the questionnaire. Separated in the offline and online component.

Positive individual development of persons being at risk for the Offline part

Raising doubts on their possibly dangerous way for the target group in the Online part plus an offer of active communication at least for some weeks after release of the videos

3. To what extent are the practice owners able to explain the mechanism at work: how are the particular activities leading to achieving the desired objective? (i.e. theory of change)

Answer:

There is a clear explanation for the mechanism and a comprehensible Theory of Change concerning work with the offline target group (see Q3 in their questionnaire). Two aspects seem further remarkable though not outlined in the Questionnaire:

- 1.) The initial relationship with the young adults had not been established via this project but via prior youth work activities in other coherences. This is remarkable concerning the repeatability of the project. An established relationship at least to some target persons is a requirement*
- 2.) In terms of quantity there is a need for a tremendous amount of resources, considering the variety of expertise and the ratio number of experts vs number of clients (though you have to add the additional output for the Online component)*

When it comes to the Online component several more factors need to be considered. The Theory of Change is clear, the practise beyond releasing the videos is challenging

With no doubt other similar video productions could prove long term effects when videos are used within educational settings (compare <https://extremedialogue.org/>) in closed groups with trainers present

The approach to offer debate and discussion anonymously directly upon online release and the use different social media platforms for this is new and its effects so far unexplored.

As Jamal Al-Khatib was (is), only active for a very limited time (due to its poor funding and not on its own fault!) there is a lack of evidence that the latter offering had remarkable impact (besides number of pages views which do not really offer qualitative evidence)

4. Are there clearly defined quality standards to ensure the quality of the practice? What other resources or mechanisms should be elaborated on in order to improve the practice?

Answer:

The project put big efforts in fulfilling high standards in all sectors. This is remarkable and important. I agree with the paper, which had been handed in, that the big standard in theoretical background (e.g. Islamic studies), technical competence (e.g. filmmaking), social competence (e.g. involvement of formers) and creativity (visual language ad music in the movies) was an important prerequisite.

To gain long term Impact it would be important either connect or even embed a project like this with long term secured (youth work) activities which would guarantee a better and sustainable connection with the respective target groups. This is a challenge for every "stand alone" theme-specific project; equally it is for "Jamal Al-Khatib".

6. To what extent has there been either an evaluation on process and/or effect to better understand the quality and impact of the practice? What recommendations can you give in order to increase success factors of the practice?

Answer:

The respective elements of the project have been evaluated in different ways.

The Offline part of the project, the participate development and direct work with the group of young adults has been undergoing a thoroughly external evaluation by a University Institute. This is more than several comparable activities can show. Once again, it has to be pointed out that in terms of quantity we are talking about a very small group of persons that were affected.

The Online component was evaluated internally, mainly on a quantitative base. Comparable benchmarking is almost impossible due to the lack of directly comparable Online campaigns and the totally novel approach of as it is called "Online Streetwork". Therefore, the interpretation of data is also internally. Despite plenty of positive qualitative feedback I got questioning external local practitioners concerning the quality of the video material itself, there is no evidence of the

quality of impact. It has to be acknowledged that this is almost impossible for any kind of Online campaigning in this sector, as it would need a direct feedback from the target group. By “likes” and comments this happened in a limited way, still the anonymity of Online communication sets its borders on gaining reliable data – what, again, is not a fault of the project but rather a general problem.

7. To what extent does this practice introduce new working methods or tools, or a new perspective to preventing radicalisation?

Answer:

One of the major gains of Jamal Al-Khatib is that it went a new and sophisticated way. The outstanding quality of the films in terms of content, visualisation and sound is new to the field. The power is gained by this and its authenticity, though this also limits the impact geographically. Target groups could be gained in German speaking countries only, more specifically in Vienna mainly, where it was produced and which was clear by pictures and accent. Still it is something repeatable in case it is possible to recruit local young people who can provide comparable locally specific authentic narratives which can be combined with the general Muslim Narratives (the film is quoting the Quran several times using Arabic as in Daesh videos in order to reach out to the proper target groups).

The “Online Streetwork” component is an interesting new approach as such and needs further discussion and development. It is something necessary to be developed further. Jamal Al-Khatib – as it has been a time limited project – could add some insights.

Summary of the review (max. 200 words):

“Jamal Al-Khatib” is a project around counter-narratives targeting religious extremist propaganda such as delivered by Daesh (ISIS). It started with an Offline component including some young adults having dropped out from the local Viennese Jihadi scene. Together with a bigger group of social workers, academics (Islamic Studies, Sociology et al) and filmmakers, they produced a series of short movies. This approach is following a clear theoretical path of narrative biography work.

The short films were placed on YouTube (still available) and the release was accompanied during time limited period by what the project calls “Online Streetwork”.

Though the Offline part was carried out only in a small group of target audience, the Online component gained more broad attention (in German speaking countries). Vice versa, the Offline part was intensively evaluated externally whereas for the Online part some quantitative data is available.

The project was time limited and is repeatable in other countries under certain specific circumstances. It convinces through excellent professionalism and a new approach in Online work. Specifically the latter needs to be further developed and would reach sustainable impact only by continuous embedding in a broader (Online and Offline) Offering.