EX POST PAPER
RAN YOUNG Empowerment Academy Session 4
21-22 October 2019, Berlin, Germany

GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG ACTIVISTS: HOW TO SET UP A P/CVE INITIATIVE – paper 4

Part 4: Professionalise your PVE initiative

The RAN YOUNG Empowerment Academy (RYEA) held its fourth session on 10 and 11 September in Berlin: this session focused on professionalisation of the participants as individuals, in their teams and of their initiatives. Several sessions were dedicated to defining what professional behaviour is, reflection on participants' own professional attitudes and the professional development of their initiatives.

A number of key lessons are:

- If other people, your colleagues and partners, consider you as professional, this will result in their willingness to cooperate with you. This is key as you will always need to cooperate with other organisations, colleagues, funders and communities.
- A professional attitude entails reliability, punctuality, communication skills, responsibility, flexibility, continuous focus on your goals, discipline and self-discipline.
- Teams that work effectively together deliver better work.
- You can't control the situation, however you can control your own behaviour.
- What is your unique selling point? Have a clear main activity that makes your initiative stand out; try it out, learn from it, and improve it over and over again. When this is your proven effective unique selling point, you can start thinking about expanding.

This paper is written for young activists who have decided to take action and seek solutions to the issues and challenges in their communities by setting up their own local initiative in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism. This is the fourth practical paper published by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) in 2019. The aim is to support this target group. Each paper corresponds to each stage of initiative development.

Guidelines for young activists: how to set up a P/CVE initiative

In the course of 2019, RAN produced a series of four papers offering practical advice to young activists wishing to take action in P/CVE. A paper was added following each RYEA session. While each paper addresses one essential part of the process, collectively, the four papers form the guidelines for young people starting their own P/CVE initiatives. See Figure 1 for a breakdown of the papers.

Young people who are willing to contribute to the prevention of violent extremism are typically very motivated, brimming with creative ideas. But where to start? The first paper of the series guides young people through the process of developing their initiatives by posing key questions to help them determine the target audience and identify the relevant local context, the problem and the solution. This first paper also provides young people with a clear understanding of the root causes of radicalisation and of related prevention work.

Once the problem has been clearly defined and the initiative's contribution to resolving the problem determined, they can proceed to the next step: preparing a project plan. The second paper of the series explains the significance of drawing up this plan, how to go about it and what kind of information to include. Several methods are outlined to help young people keep sight of their goal and create a document that underpins their work and serves as a basis, helping them stay on track and remain focused on their goals throughout the implementation of their P/CVE work.

In the implementation phase of the initiative, effective teamwork and cooperation become a key factor for success. It is not sufficient to merely develop a decent project plan. In addition, project teams should be aware of and learn about their personal and collective qualities and place attention on focus areas for development. In this paper, tools and methods for personal development and teamwork are shared that have been introduced in the RYEA, and that have been experienced as useful by its participants.

This final RAN YOUNG guidelines paper of the year 2019 focuses on professionalisation on all levels: personally, within the team, and of the initiative. After a successful implementation of activities, the question is: How can you ensure sustainability? This paper contains many tips and tricks on how to ensure the initiative has a clear focus with core values and activities, how to work together within the team in a respectful manner, and how to present yourself as a reliable partner.

Figure 1. RAN guidelines for young activists: contents of ex post editions 1 through 4. The current ex post is edition 4.

Introduction

People often wonder about the high quality of extremist video footages that reach young people on a wide range via the internet. This is not a big surprise, since extremist groups that start their work as a spontaneous action, find themselves in a process of professionalisation, tend to set up a structure, and become more and more effective in reaching their goals. So, how come that many volunteer groups preventing radicalisation vanish and dissolve after a strong but short period of productive engagement? Wouldn't it be better to have strong, structured and well-funded initiatives at a local and regional level that prevent extremism, especially when it comes to youth? Those initiatives are needed. All over the globe, hate, violence and extremism pop up. For this reason, a strong and dedicated engagement for tolerance and togetherness is necessary. Through the last three papers in the year 2019, readers and participants of the RYEA were guided through the process of establishing a PVE initiative in their local context. After a successful implementation of activities, the question is: How can you ensure sustainability? This question is the red thread through the ex post paper: professionalisation at all levels. Professionalisation has to start on the personal level — a very important step, especially for young people for whom it is often their first experience in PVE project work. Besides, the paper focuses on the wider perspective, the philosophy behind professionalisation of an initiative and the most important questions to ask yourself and decisions to take during such a process.

How to develop as a professional

Personal level

If other people, your colleagues and partners, consider you as professional, this will result in their willingness to cooperate with you. This is key as you will always need to cooperate with other organisations, colleagues, funders and communities to be able to carry out your work. To develop as a professional, it is key to reflect on your behaviour. Reflect, learn, improve and grow! The RYEA identified the following behaviours as necessary to become a professional:

- Reliability – it is important that other people can trust you will meet your commitments.
- Punctuality – it is key to deliver your tasks on time and meet your agreements.
- Communication skills – to be able to communicate to connect to others and inform your partners adequately.
- Responsibility – if you feel responsible for everything you do, you show that people can rely on you, that you take yourself and your work seriously, and therefore others will also do that. Responsibility also means you are accountable for the work you carry out.
- Flexibility – be able to change your activities and planning if needed.
- Focus on your goals and make decisions in line with those.
- Discipline and self-discipline – follow your own schedule, keep yourself to your planning and do not postpone.

A good model to reflect on your behaviour is the ***situation – behaviour – consequence model***. You can use this model when you end up in a certain difficult situation. The way you behave always impacts the consequences or the outcome of the situation. You cannot control the situation, but you can control your own behaviour. This model shows that you can always assess your behaviour: look at your behaviour and see whether it brought you closer towards your goals or not. Being professional means you take actions and decisions that help you reach your goals.

Practice in groups

1. **Step 1:** Each person, individually, first takes the time to think about a situation where it was hard to be professional.

   - Describe the situation
   - Describe your goal in the situation
   - Describe what behaviour you displayed in the situation
   - Describe the impact of your behaviour / the outcome of the situation

2. **Step 2:** Share step 1 with your group. Discuss in your groups how you could change your behaviour and what the impact would be with that changed behaviour. Let all team members contribute to this exercise by sharing their ideas for behaviour and assess the best option.

3. **Step 3:** Is that behaviour in line with your goals? Does it support what you are trying to achieve? Ensure all team members have shared and received input on their situations.
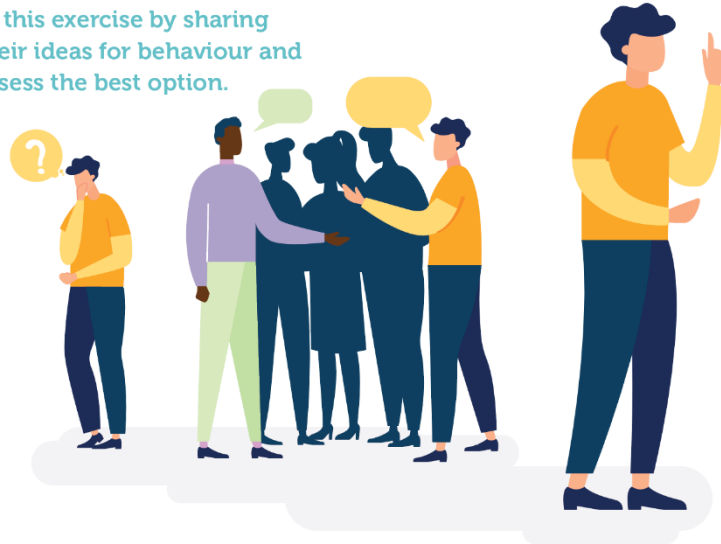
When is it hard to be professional on a personal level? Quotes of RAN YOUNG participants:

- When you work together with friends: it is hard to be professional because you know them in another setting. I don't feel pressure to respond, call back, as they will forgive me.
- When I count on people and trust them, and they disappoint me, it is hard to be professional: I show my frustrations, but I should discuss this in a constructive manner.
- It is hard to be professional if you don't believe in the aim of your work: if you are not passionate, you will not work hard for it.
- As a young woman, I need to convince others more of my professionalism. I need to convince them that I am reliable, responsible, and adequate in my work. I try to show this with my actions, with my behaviour.

How do you know if you are being professional? Quotes of RAN YOUNG participants:

- When you see concrete good results.
- When you get positive feedback.
- When you are the best version of yourself, trying to do your job the best way possible.
- When your project is sustainable.
- Working for a purpose: trying to achieve something.
- When taking actions that help you reach your goal, your decisions are based on what you are trying to achieve.

Team level

You may remember the teamwork mantra of the 1990s: "There is no 'I' in teamwork." Perhaps that expression should be updated to say "There should be a 'we' in teamwork", because people who function effectively as a team tend to view themselves as a singular unit. In other words, they think in terms of "us", not "I". You hear it

in the way they talk; you see it in the way they behave. They constantly cast themselves as members of a group and "park their ego at the door" ([1]).

Working in a team is essential. No one person is competent enough to carry out all the tasks and activities needed to achieve a goal on their own. To develop a professional team, it is key that the team is learning, reflecting, growing and working effectively together. Teams that work effectively together deliver better work ([2]). There are two fundamental dimensions of team functioning: the task the team is required to carry out, and the social factors that influence how members work together as a social unit ([3]).

Research evidence now convincingly shows how important positive emotions, such as hope, pleasure, happiness, humour, excitement, joy, pride and involvement, are as a source of human strength (Frederickson, 2009). When we feel positive emotions we think in a more flexible, open-minded way, and consider a much wider range of possibilities than if we feel anxious, depressed or angry. We are also more likely to see challenges as opportunities rather than threats.

- Compose a team of people with a **variety of complementary characteristics and talents**. Teams are composed of people who have a variety of emotional, social and other human needs that the team as a whole can either help to meet or frustrate ([4]).
- **Develop a feedback culture** within your team. To improve yourself, you have to seek out and welcome feedback. Feedback is a gift that can help the recipient of the feedback grow ([5]). To stimulate this culture in a team, you need to create a safe environment, ensure you give the right example and stimulate the growth mindset of your team members, and make it a regular part of the working process.

- Dedicate time to personal and team development. **Enable your team members to develop their knowledge and skills** and dedicate time for team reflection to learn and grow. Organise sessions where you reflect on the performance of the team, identify your successes and failures, and decide as a team how you would like to grow.
- As a professional team, you have developed **rules and procedures that support your work**. These could be rules regarding internal working processes (e.g. division of roles, regular team meetings), and procedures that facilitate and assist the impact of your initiative (e.g. to always involve the target audience of your initiative, to answer emails within 1 day). Both should support the aim of the work of your team.

Good teams distinguish themselves by three traits ([6]): how they treat each other, how they view their work, and what they value.

- *Effective Team Members Treat Each Other Respectfully*
  Treat each other with respect, and even outsiders can see how an implicit trust binds them together. Support and encourage each other, giving each other space when needed but rising to the challenge of putting all hands on deck when necessary. Communicate freely and easily, sharing their ideas and opinions and offering constructive criticism without being harsh or judgmental. They enjoy hearing feedback, too.
- *Effective Team Members Take Their Work Seriously*
  Support the organisation's mission and purpose. They may question some policies and procedures — what employee doesn't from time to time? — but they're as loyal to the company as they are to their co-workers. Play to each other's strengths — and downplay each other's weaknesses — to fulfil their respective roles. Their clear sense of purpose enables them to appreciate how their roles contribute to the organisation's mission.
- *Effective Team Members Are Bound by Similar Values*
  With any luck, those differing personalities keep your workplace interesting and lively. Still, not everyone can be an enthusiastic, supercharged and high-fiving force of nature. It's values that bind effective team

---

([1]) Wroblewski, M. T. (2019). *Characteristics of effective teamwork*. Small Business - Chron.com, 12 February. Retrieved from https://smallbusiness.chron.com/characteristics-effective-teamwork-691.html
([2]) Information Resources Management Association. (2017). *Operations and service management: Concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
([3]) West, M. A. (2012). *Effective teamwork: Practical lessons from organizational research* (3rd ed.). Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell.
([4]) Information Resources Management Association. (2017). *Operations and service management: Concepts, methodologies, tools, and applications*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global.
([5]) Woltman, P., & Gssime, Y., GUIDELINES FOR YOUNG ACTIVISTS: HOW TO SET UP A P/CVE INITIATIVE – paper 3. Part 3: Effective teamwork and personal development, Ex Post Paper. Madrid, Spain: RAN Centre of Excellence, 2019.
([6]) Wroblewski, M. T. (2019). *Characteristics of effective teamwork*. Small Business - Chron.com, 12 February. Retrieved from https://smallbusiness.chron.com/characteristics-effective-teamwork-691.html

members, and they include: honesty, integrity and empathy — the good human qualities that help bind people who work together towards common goals. There is a desire to find joy in work and celebrate accomplishments together. They have a sense of pride about being part of a team and a genuine belief that the team functions better together than it could if the members worked individually.

How to professionalise your P/CVE initiative

First of all…

Professionalisation is the process of providing an occupation, activity or group professional qualities, typically by increasing training or raising required qualifications. Professionalisation is a clear path towards growth and more impact and not an easy decision nor easily realised. So, before you professionalise your initiative we want you to start a reflection process in your group to detect first and foremost if a professionalisation is necessary and how you could lay the ground for a successful professionalisation process. Please keep in mind that these steps should be taken as a project team and on an individual level to gain as many creative ideas as possible and to ensure the continuity of a positive group dynamic among your team members.

To what degree is professionalisation necessary? Reading this question and this statement in a handout about professionalisation may be surprising, but it is indeed a question that has to be raised from the moment you see fruitful results from your prevention engagement and receive positive feedback. Sometimes it is urgently needed to sustain the initiative or work that you do through an effective process of professionalisation. In a context where you establish the only intercultural dialogue centre in a neighbourhood with a lot of violence, hatred and tensions, you need to find a way to sustain this work for future neighbourhood inhabitants to come — which also means you will have to professionalise. But what about a group of students dedicating their free time to share awareness of radicalisation among fellow students in a small university context? Many small initiatives at a local level lose their initial vision and big parts of their identity after a professionalisation process. In those cases, the focus of the professionalisation was maybe not the right one. To make it easier for you to go through this process, you will find an exercise to start with below.

Practice in groups

1. **Step 1:** Take 15 minutes to discuss the core element of your initiative.

   For example: the positive promotion of cultural diversity.

2. **Step 2:** Take 15 minutes to discuss the core activities of the initiative.

   For example: trainings or podcasts.

What is the core element? What are the core activities?

A question that makes the professionalisation decision easier is one about the future in general: "What is your aim and how will you try to achieve it?" To identify exactly what your initiative could deliver to a certain target group, you have to ask: What is your core element? And, what are your core activities? During your volunteer initiatives, you already answered the question about the core element of your initiative. For example, you said our core element is "Gathering people". To reach this aim, you realised many different activities during the project implementation phase. Let us assume that one activity was a book club where students read books about values like togetherness

and tolerance, a second activity was a tolerance event on the national day and a third activity was a social media discussion group about alternative narratives. During a professionalisation process, you have to find an answer to the question: What have you been good at, and which activity of the three was the most successful and could be focused on in an upcoming process of professionalisation?

If this answer turns out to be blurry then everything that happens after that is a waste of time and energy. Or, to put it in other words: Because of the unclear definition of the core identity of your initiative, the continuation of the initiative is at risk. Many business start-ups fail because of their lack of focus. The lack of focus is the thin line that defines failure or success in project work. It is maybe the most important factor when it comes to professionalisation. People who want to do everything in every field and everywhere will usually not become very successful. There is always a continuous need to refocus and rethink what you have done in the past. A possible and realistic answer to the question surrounding your core activity could be in the end to just have the definition of one core element and one core activity. It is way better to have one core activity and improve it over time over and over again than to do 10 different things and not be good at at least one. Staying intentionally small as initially stated is also a good decision and even a step forward towards professionalisation.

What are your key rules?

Institutions are commonly defined by a set of rules. If you want to grow and become professional and receive the credibility of an organisation, you need to adapt rules that make you, your team and your organisation reliable. Reliability is the key word for growth and expansion. But what does reliability mean? Reliability is according to one common definition the quality of being trustworthy or of performing consistently well. If for instance a media outlet sends you an email message and wants to write an article about your initiative and you do not respond to that email, this media outlet will not reach out to your organisation again. If you ask for a meeting and do not show up or send someone else who does not even know about the essence of the meeting and does not represent your organisation accordingly, then you are going to negatively surprise the other side, which will negatively affect your cooperation in the future. People often refer to this kind of behaviour as "unprofessional", saying "Someone is unprofessional" or "This initiative is unprofessional". What they basically mean is the fact that this organisation is not reliable and not trustworthy. If you do not want to be labelled as such then you have to sit down with your team and define a set of rules that always have to be followed, no matter how challenging or impossible it seems to be. For example: A weekly team meeting can be one such rule. If you meet up every week and define it as a rule, then you are going to meet up even if only two members have the time on a certain day. You define your rules and you follow your rules; then you will become a reliable partner for others and an organisation that is worth investing in and supporting. Another rule could be to have everything in a written form and to report about every activity in the project. Imagine how a small set of rules will change the working atmosphere and how it will positively affect the perception of your organisation by others. A reliable organisation is always a good partner for potential funding institutions and a competent, professional partner.

Who is going to lead the professionalisation process?

When you are starting an initiative with other young activists, not everyone involved is interested in continuing with the initiative due to different commitments such as study, family, etc. For this reason, you need to ask yourself and your team if you are going to continue together. If this is the case, then you need to define the rules according to which you are going to design your team. You will certainly need people who take a more leading role in that team. But to make it happen, you also need to define decision-making mechanisms and decide on responsibilities in your organisation. For example: Your team should decide about a possible legal status of your initiative and on the creation of a board, and lay down structure and decision-making processes in a founding document. This will logically lead to the election of a president or head of the group. It is of utmost importance after having chosen a leader in a democratic way to ensure that this leader has the competence to lead but also enough space to manage and hold other team members accountable. A democratic leader takes responsibility and guides the group but is aware of the fact that they cannot do everything alone and needs their team members. They are taken seriously and involved in all relevant impact decisions. A strong democratic leader knows how to share a vision with fellow team members, is dedicated and does the utmost to be as inclusive as possible.

If we look at success and failure of volunteer initiatives, we can see two extreme scenarios that pose a realistic threat for every volunteer work on the way to professionalisation. On the one hand, there is the risk of lack of leadership, where teams dissolve or end up in internal fights. The other risk is that someone fills in the role as a leader in a very direct manner; be it from good intention and the lack of ability to delegate or from bad intention, it is always a mistake and the beginning of the end.

Professionalisation – dos and don'ts

How to professionalise?

Yourself
Communicate
Reliability
Responsability
Ponctuality
Flexibility
Discipline

Practice!
1. Situation
2. Behaviour
3. Consequence

"You can't control the
situation, but you can
control your behaviour!"

The Team
Trust and respect
Clear goals
Similar values
Discuss frustrations
Give feedback
Complement each other
Rules and procedures
Task division
Democratic leadership
Transparency
Face-to-face contact

RAN YOUNG

The Initiative
Communication
(online and offline)
Evaluation
Sustainability
Consistency
Visibility
Clear core elements...
... And core activities
Follow the market
Funding

"Do the activities
contribute to reaching
the goal?"