The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs: Development and Pilot Testing of a Toolkit

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Abstract

Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) requires coordination among multiple agencies, stakeholders and systems. The complexity of this task (compounded by the variety of P/CVE programming around the world) creates a challenge for those hoping to develop these initiatives. The purpose of this project was to develop a replicable process and corresponding toolkit to engage multiple stakeholders in consensus building around the efficacy and improvement of nascent, developing or mature systems-level P/CVE programs. As a method, we adapted the process of nominal group technique (NGT), a structured-brainstorming tool that provides an orderly procedure for obtaining qualitative and ranked information from heterogenous participant pools. The technique we developed is based on a case-study approach ("scenario") which we then tested in three countries (USA, Sweden, and North Macedonia) with existing P/CVE initiatives at different stages of development. We conducted scenario-based NGT sessions in each location and then systematically analyzed the results using iterative qualitative coding based on a common framework. Results were analyzed to achieve consensus on the most common system-level challenges and system-level functions, necessary to overcome those challenges, in each location. Practitioners in each local jurisdiction were then able to utilize the results derived from the NGT for their own purposes, such as advocacy to policy makers, strategic regional P/CVE planning, and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

Introduction

The development of stand-alone programs aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is widely understood to be a difficult task due to a constellation of

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political, logistical, and theoretical challenges. When the objective, however, is to develop a comprehensive system of organizations--a whole-of-government plus civil society approach--collaborating to prevent and counter violent extremism, these challenges are amplified. Comprehensive P/CVE initiatives typically require the coordination and engagement of agencies and stakeholders, often with different core missions and objectives, belonging to a variety of public and private systems such as criminal justice, public health, social welfare, immigration, education, and civil society. Such initiatives typically develop and operate at the intersection of these systems and rely on their pre-existing functions, capabilities, and authorities. And at the same time, these collaborative efforts are often shaped by geographic and jurisdictional diversity, government funding cycles, and varied approaches to engaging stakeholders and the public. The complexity of this environment creates a significant challenge for those tasked to develop and implement comprehensive and effective P/CVE initiatives. To aid in this task, this project aimed to develop a replicable approach for bringing together the diverse groups of stakeholders involved in these efforts to identify the specific challenges to the development of comprehensive (i.e., system-level) P/CVE programming and the corresponding functions that a given system must be able to perform to overcome the identified challenges. The purpose of this project was to develop a replicable process, and corresponding toolkit, to engage multiple stakeholders in consensus-building around the efficacy and improvement of nascent, developing or mature systems-level P/CVE programs.

Understanding the development of P/CVE programs

Terrorism scholars, and experts in radicalization and extremism, have long recognized that pathways to ideological violence are contingent on such a wide array of cognitive, social, and environmental factors -- the so-called push and pull factors -- that it will never be possible to develop a one-size-fits-all solution to countering or preventing violent extremism. It should come as no surprise, then, that P/CVE programs are incredibly varied in their design. In some cases, the programs are modest, stand-alone, or local initiatives intended to mitigate risk factors associated with radicalization in discrete populations. [1] In other instances, they are

systems - level strategies and efforts -- at the local, state or national levels -- to grapple with a seemingly intractable security threat in coordination with a wide variety of stakeholders. [2-4] While the literature on P/CVE efforts is still maturing, most of the work has focused on the design, implementation, and evaluation of modest, stand-alone, and local programs. [5-7]

Missing from the literature is work oriented to the *practical problems* of designing and implementing P/CVE initiatives in the second category--that is, holistic or whole-of-government plus civil society efforts to respond to the challenges posed by violent radicalization and extremism. [8] Drawing from the theoretical literature that does exist, holistic efforts to prevent violence are overwhelmingly understood to be most effective when they include a constellation of capabilities, services, and programs for specific communities or individuals perceived to be at risk. [9-12] The list of capabilities, services, and programs often includes the ability to collect information on an at-risk individual, the expertise to conduct a threat assessment, the legal authorizations to share information across government jurisdictions and agencies, and the resources to provide a range of services including, but not limited to, psychosocial support, mentorship, housing, theological engagement, employment training and placement, and education assistance.

Achieving consensus during the development of P/CVE programs

Providing this robust and varied collection of capabilities, services, and programs requires the involvement of a wide range of jurisdictional actors, such as social, youth, and health workers, family counselors, religious and other mentoring figures, family members, peers, teachers, local civil society organizations and, when appropriate, law enforcement personnel.

Different localities and countries are using different mechanisms and interventions to implement these programs — some newly developed, others already in existence — with the shared goal of enabling a diverse population of practitioners, professionals, and community members to apply their distinct skills, knowledge, and capacity to the task of identifying

vulnerable individuals and providing them with the support needed to steer them down a non-violent path.

To date, however, little attention has been paid to the development of tools that would aid the practitioners who lead these in-context efforts. Importantly, this is not to deny the increasingly robust body of literature on the design and evaluation of P/CVE programming. A growing number of studies have grappled with the question of how to design and evaluate these programs, and many of these efforts solicit stakeholder input through key informant interviews, focus groups, and moderated discussions. [13-15] Researchers have also proposed the use of multi-attribute utility theory (MAUT) as a decision-making tool given that it is especially well-suited to high-risk decisions. Specifically, MAUT has been identified as a potentially valuable tool that leverages stakeholder input to "(a) monitor the performance of these programs, (b) identify any problems associated with the individual initiatives, and (c) select which attributes in each program would be most appropriate for the development of an effective risk." [16] Additionally, researchers have also produced a number of guides to help implementers design and evaluate P/CVE programs. [5, 17]

Despite this growing body of work, there is no validated and replicable mechanism for soliciting stakeholder input-- and consensus--across the multiple agencies and organizations collaborating to tackle this issue. This paper thus intervenes in a space that has been largely overlooked. It does not target the theoretical design phase or the critical evaluation phase; nor does it focus on stand-alone P/CVE programs. Instead, this paper explores the utility of a scenario-based NGT for facilitating the messy and complicated interagency integration that is critical to whole-of-government plus civil society interventions. Moreover, unlike key informant interviews, focus groups, or moderated discussions, the scenario-based NGT seeks consensus from the various participating stakeholders working to design, implement, and troubleshoot system-level programming at the local, state or national level. The complexity of P/CVE systems -- and the complexity of the environments in which these systems need to be created, implemented, and operate -- poses a real challenge for those who want to assess these

systems, identify their weaknesses, and focus resources on the specific areas that need to be strengthened.

A consensus-based approach that focuses on the system (i.e., instead of focusing on the at-risk individual or community) and is capable of engaging a heterogeneous group of stakeholders is imperative for initiating, evaluating, and sustaining the development of successful programs. Such a tool is critical to achieving consensus among groups of stakeholders with distinct perspectives and priorities. To overcome this challenge, the primary goal of this project was to pilot test a version of the Nominal Group Technique (NGT), a methodology designed to reach consensus via a structured use of group discussion, in the context of developing systems-level P/CVE interventions. We applied this technique and tested a toolkit that we developed, to support P/CVE program developers across three study sites with P/CVE systems in distinct phases of maturity: Denver (USA), Gothenburg (Sweden), and Skopje (N. Macedonia). The goal was to identify areas of consensus, across a broad range of local organizations, on what challenges the programs faced and what functions should be strengthened to improve more mature programs (i.e. Sweden) and on what functions were critical to the development of nascent ones (i.e. Denver and Skopje). The paper below outlines the potential value-added that the NGT brings to P/CVE system developers, a description of its implementation at these three sites, and a description of the results it produced from the perspective of the practitioners involved. The toolkit developed as part of this effort can be found online here. As such, this paper contributes to the relatively nascent literature on the design and implementation of system-level P/CVE efforts in pre-existing, imperfect, and limited environments.

Methods

The Nominal Group Technique

The Nominal Group Technique (NGT) can be defined as a "structured meeting that attempts to provide an orderly procedure for obtaining qualitative information from target

groups who are most closely associated with the problem area." [18] It is primarily useful at the preliminary phase of a project, initiative, or study -- or when a diverse group of stakeholders are brought together -- as it offers a structured way both to generate a list of ideas relevant to the topic at hand, and to quantify the group's assessment of the ideas (via a ranking). [19] NGT has largely been used in the fields of education and public health. In 1978, one of the first NGT sessions resulting in an academic article took place in Missouri, where 200 educators from 100 school districts were asked to identify challenges in their careers as primary or secondary school teachers. [20] The use of NGT made it possible for this diverse group of educators to identify which factors inhibited their ability to teach efficiently and productively. In the field of public health, NGT sessions have brought together medical professionals and coordinators to identify the best ways to solve practice problems when scientific evidence is lacking and recommendations for practice need to be based on the opinions and experience of professionals with knowledge of the relevant field. Successful examples include NGT applied in the fields of pediatric preventive care, lung cancer care, end of life care, and dementia care, among others. [21-24] The NGT has also, however, been used by criminologists and in terrorism contexts. In fact, in 2013 a study designed to develop a baseline counterterrorism strategy for hotels collected data via an NGT. [25]

Broadly speaking, NGT sessions follow a specific 4 step process:

1. Generating Ideas: The moderator presents the question or problem to the group and directs everyone to write ideas in brief phrases or statements and to work silently and independently. Each person silently generates ideas and writes them down.

2. Recording Ideas: Group members engage in a round-robin feedback session to concisely record each idea (without debate at this point). The moderator writes an idea from a group member on a flip chart, whiteboard, or screen that is visible to the entire group, and proceeds to ask for another idea from the next group member, and so on. This step ends when all members' ideas have been documented.

3. Discussing Ideas: Each recorded idea is then discussed to determine clarity and importance.

   For each idea, the moderator asks, "Are there any questions or comments group members would like to make about the item?" This step provides an opportunity for members to express their understanding of the logic and the relative importance of the item.

4. Voting on Ideas: Individuals vote to prioritize the ideas. The votes are tallied to identify the ideas that are rated highest by the group as a whole.

Notwithstanding this four-step process, the execution of the technique can be quite varied. For example, no rigid guidelines dictate the number of participants, the time duration during which they consider the question, the number of questions being considered by the group, the plan for sharing the individual's responses, or the format for ranking the collected answers. Nor do all NGT sessions pursue the same goal; some seek to find the best solution to a problem, while others seek solely to identify the challenges that participants may face in solving the problem. Most NGT sessions take less than two hours, but some sessions have been held over eight hours or across two full days. [26] In some cases, participants were asked to fill out a pre-meeting survey so that the first step (individual brainstorming of ideas) was finished before the session began. [20, 25] The commonality in the NGT process is that it is used for consensus building and to solicit feedback from multiple individuals in a meaningful and structured way.

We adapted the NGT process to the P/CVE context to create a structured-brainstorming format that would provide an orderly and replicable procedure for obtaining qualitative and ranked information from heterogeneous participant pools. Our approach included a PVE case study ("scenario") that oriented participants to a common problem at the beginning of the session. In each of the three study sites, the same process was utilized to prompt stakeholders to think through the challenges that the scenario might pose to their system and the functions that would be necessary to address those challenges. The remainder

of this report explains our methodology in detail and explores some of the data collected during these sessions. A complete toolkit for implementing this approach can be found online here.

Study sites

To identify how P/CVE stakeholders in different contexts can work towards building more collaborative, integrated systems, an NGT was conducted in three different contexts: Denver (Colorado, U.S), Gothenburg (Sweden), and Skopje (North Macedonia). These three locations were selected by building on an existing partnership in a transatlantic project focused on P/CVE evaluation.

Stage of P/CVE programs in the three study sites[2]
Denver, Colorado (USA)

Colorado has a complicated history of mass casualties, including the infamous massacres at Columbine High School and the Aurora Theatre, and most recently the STEM school shooting occurring in May of 2019. The Colorado Department of Public Safety reports a six-year high in hate crimes, with doubling rates from 2017 to 2018. There were 185 hate and bias-motivated crimes in Colorado in 2018; 112 were related to race and ethnicity, 32 due to sexual orientation and gender identity, and 26 were religion-based. Almost all of these incidents were perpetrated by people who identify as white supremacists. [27, 28] Therefore, the conversation in Colorado has been moving towards the use of a new term, "targeted violence," that would encapsulate domestic terrorism, hate crimes, school shootings, and other attacks that are committed to making an ideological or social statement by harming others. In 2018, Colorado was awarded funds from the National Governors Association (NGA) to address targeted violence in the state. The NGT described in this manuscript was a central component of the first Summit on Preventing Targeted Violence hosted in 2019 by the

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[2] When referring to terminology such as "far-right" or "targeted violence" we use the language of the host country

Colorado Resilience Collaborative to convene state departments and raise awareness about the need for their engagement and cross-agencies coordinated prevention efforts in targeted violence. The CRC is currently working with the Colorado Department of Public Safety, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Colorado Department of Human Services to execute a multi-year strategic plan to build awareness and train professionals working in behavioural health, education, and law enforcement on recognition and interventions in the area of targeted violence.

Gothenburg, Sweden

Sweden is a country that faces serious challenges regarding violent extremism. For example, Sweden is among the European countries with the highest per capita number of foreign fighters joining terror organizations such as Al-Qaeda and Daesh, second only to Belgium and Austria. [29, 30] Right-wing extremism has a long history in Sweden with several highly active individuals. Swedish extremists are inspired by international events and trends in Sweden reflect those in the West more broadly with a decreasing number of violent Islamist motivated attacks and an increase in attacks and protests by persons adhering to white supremacist ideologies.

According to the Swedish Security Service, individuals within the violent extremist milieus in Sweden are systematically using violence, threats, and harassment, and their ideologies provide a breeding ground for recruitment to violent groups. [31] The city of Gothenburg, Sweden, is the hometown of a third of the 300 persons who are known to have left Sweden to fight for ISIS in Syria and Iraq. [32] At the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017, three explosive attacks were carried out against asylum camps and the office of a syndicalist organization by individuals closely related to a violent right-wing group in Gothenburg. [33] The overall coordination of PVE in Sweden is shared between the City Office and Social Service Department with a team consisting of various municipal branches (pre-, primary and secondary schools, culture, leisure), probation services, police, and mental health service. The City Office focuses on universal and selected prevention levels, while the

Social Service Department focuses on individual cases, and engages the team depending on what issue is at hand. Since 2015, Gothenburg has had a coordinator against violent extremism who coordinates efforts from various stakeholders such as education, social services, and leisure activities. If needed they can also coordinate with law enforcement, probation services, and housing companies, but they primarily serve to coordinate across agencies, while targeted agencies work with individual cases. An NGT-workshop was carried out in the city of Gothenburg in December 2019. A second Swedish workshop was planned for March 2021 in Malmö but delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The city of Malmö has worked with PVE challenges since 2010 but more intensely since 2013.

Skopje, North Macedonia

As of 2018, 150 North Macedonian citizens had left the country as foreign fighters to join paramilitary formations in Syria and Iraq. The overwhelming majority of these foreign fighters have been ethnic Albanian Muslims. [34] Compared to other Western Balkan countries, North Macedonia has the highest per capita of foreign fighters emanating from its Muslim population. Moreover, North Macedonia also has the second-highest number of returnees (80) amongst its regional neighbors (Kosovo leads with 130). [35] Given the lack of reintegration and rehabilitation programs in place to deal with returnees, however, the domestic landscape is becoming increasingly convoluted and problematic. [36] As part of the national CT/CVE effort, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia has created a National Counter Violence Extremism and Counter Terrorism (NCVECT) Committee consisting of forty-four members and led by a National Deputy Director. The role of the Committee is to coordinate and facilitate cooperation and planning between institutions that are required to prevent, prosecute, and respond to potential threats that may lead to violent extremism in the country. The national CT/CVE plan recognizes that law enforcement efforts are not enough to address violent extremism and that a holistic approach is necessary. For this reason, the government has placed a high priority on mapping out all of the local organizations and NGOs working on CVE efforts.

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

The government also recognizes the country's infrastructures have limited capacity to achieve the stated goals and to implement CT and CVE programs. The NGT event hosted in Skopje was aimed at bringing together local and state agency counterparts to discuss challenges and capabilities regarding a fictional scenario involving possible extremism. The stakeholders involved during the NGT were selected in accordance with the National Strategy of The Republic of North Macedonia For Countering Violent Extremism and previous cooperation in the field. [37]

NGT Sessions

At each study site, the same NGT process was applied: an introductory presentation on the scope of the meeting was followed by the presentation of a scenario and a two-stage brainstorming session. The scenario included a fictional prompt involving a father who discovered his son's interest in white supremacist propaganda and activities through his online activity, and who then shared his concerns with a member of one of the agencies belonging to the system in context (the specific agency varied based on the geographic location). The scenario was designed to encourage thinking among participants as to the challenges their agencies would face if asked to address this case and the functions that a system would need to prevent the escalation of the situation to an act of targeted violence. A copy of the scenario is provided in the Appendix.

Participants were divided into groups of approximately eight people. Each group had a facilitator and a notetaker. In the first stage, participants were asked to identify, in a silent brainstorm, the challenges posed by the situation described in the given scenario (step 1: generating ideas). Following the silent brainstorm, participants shared their thoughts in a round-robin format (step 2: recording ideas), and the group discussed and ranked, in order of importance, the identified challenges (step 3: discussing ideas; step 4: voting on ideas). In the second stage of the technique, participants repeated the process with a focus on the functions necessary to meet the challenges that were identified during the first stage.

Toolkit Development and Testing

Prior to developing the toolkit, the NGT process was tested during a June 2019 summit hosted in Italy and focused on P/CVE evaluation techniques. This event included over twenty P/CVE practitioners and researchers from nine countries and provided an ideal forum for exploring the utility of NGT in the P/CVE context. The NGT was conducted by two trained facilitators from the research team. Participants were divided into three groups and a scenario was used to identify P/CVE challenges and functions. During the process each group was led by a facilitator and included a designated notetaker. Participants were asked to write down the challenges in the scenario, then the group discussed and ranked the challenges. The process was repeated in relation to functions.

A total of 376 challenges were initially identified, which were then synthesized into 23 categories by three P/CVE experts reviewing the challenges. A total of 156 functions were identified which were synthesized into 17 categories by three P/CVE experts reviewing the functions. The synthesized categories were shared with the convened experts during a report-out session. In that report-out session, the session facilitators asked for feedback from session attendees. The qualitative feedback participants gave included that the session was helpful in seeing systematic challenges and what could be done about it, and in identifying similar themes that exist regardless of context. Four participants voiced interest in hosting a NGT process in their own country with cross-sector participants.

This session served as the foundation for the development of a more formal process that was solidified in the form of a toolkit. Based on feedback provided by the participants, and NGT data collected during this pilot testing phase, a draft toolkit was created and deployed at the first NGT site, in Denver. After this first NGT session, we created a customizable toolkit (see online Appendix) so that other localities could implement the NGT without the help of external experts. This consisted of a narrated training that is available online, as well as a customizable PowerPoint template, instructions for facilitating the meeting, and templates of the documents needed to run the technique. The toolkit was utilized

in the subsequent NGT processes in Gothenburg and Skopje with limited support from the toolkit developers.

NGT Data Analysis Process and Coding

At the end of each NGT session, the research team aggregated the notes, translated into English by the NGT implementers, derived from each group discussion and ranking. As each group used context-specific terminology to identify the challenges and functions in response to the scenario, the research team developed a categorization approach to be applied across contexts. The team also reviewed the categories that had come up during the Italian NGT and drew on their expertise in the field of P/CVE systems. The initial set of categories were created by having two members of the research team independently examine the data from the Denver NGT session. The coders then compared the terms they had each deductively generated to finalize a set of common codes that could be applied to any other NGT session. Codes were separated into primary codes which described the persons and activities that had been identified in the statements from the session, and secondary codes that added further detail to the primary codes. The categories agreed upon by the two coders are summarized below. Items could be both challenge and function codes, if they were discussed in both parts of the NGT.

Primary code: Entity being described	Allied professionals	Allied professionals
	Case subject	Case subject
	Case subject family	Case subject family
	Community	Community
	Extremist group	Interagency

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

	Interagency	Jurisdictions
	Jurisdictions	
Primary code: Activity being described	Communication	Communication
	Coordination	Coordination
	Intelligence collection	Intelligence collection
	Reporting	Reporting
		Triage
Secondary codes: Additional Details	Behaviors	Education (existence of a program)
	Biographical data	Resources/services (existence of)
	Dynamic (family)	Risk assessment
	Dynamic (social)	System/Protocol
	Education (provision of a program)	
	Mindset	
	Resources/services (provision of)	
	Risk factors (resources, age, etc.)	
	System/Protocol	
Secondary codes: Legal considerations	Legality	Legality

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group
Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

	Ethics	Threshold
	Threshold	

The same two coders also reviewed the data from Sweden to determine if any additional codes were necessary to capture information from another geographic setting. No additional codes were added at this time. Subsequently, the same two coders reviewed the data from N. Macedonia and did not identify the need for any additional codes in the schema. The final coding schema, and a corresponding codebook, became part of the NGT toolkit. The goal in generating the codes was to create a set of pre-identified categories to summarize the concepts described in the sessions. The categories were then used to synthesize some of the more salient constructs that were discussed and identify patterns. Rather than a grounded theory approach which relies on entirely deductive coding approaches, the coders drew on their knowledge of P/CVE systems and their experience during the session to generate the categories that would be coded.

In order to analyze the data collected at the three data collection sites, five independent coders were then given the categorization and the codebook and asked to code the data from each session. This was not done to establish perfect intercoder reliability, as doing so would require rigid definitions that sacrificed nuance and forced the subjective dataset into submission. Instead, the goal was to preserve the subjective nature of the data by capturing the broadest possible range of thematic interpretations. Additionally, because the issues under analysis were so complex and subjective, coders were instructed to code a single piece of raw data with up to three distinct codes. Thus, as one example, a raw data result might be coded differently across coders:

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

Raw Data	Coder 1	Coder 2	Coder 3
"Be ready for Lucas radical views and sympathies"	Case subject	Case subject	Case subject
	Mindset	Mindset	Mindset
	Allied professionals	Extremist group	(left blank)

That the raw data was vague creates the potential for considerable variation across coders. Our analysis centered not on the differences, but on the codes that occurred frequently, interpreting repetition as broad consensus around core concerns. A list of the codes, along with a codebook containing their definitions, can be found in the toolkit.

Results

The NGTs were not implemented with the intent to compare systems across sites, but rather to test an approach and toolkit by identifying local challenges and the specific functions required to address these challenges. That said, the data we gathered, and the systematic coding procedures we applied, made it possible to conduct some preliminary analysis at the site and aggregate level across the three sites. At the individual site level, we can speak not only to the data collected but also to its practical impact. However, the data collected over the course of this project came from markedly disparate environments--not merely in terms of geography, but also in terms of the degree to which the locale had a system in place to address the type of situation raised by the hypothetical scenario. As a result, we can only make modest conclusions at the aggregate level as to any implications for P/CVE programs across contexts.

Preliminary analysis began with coding the results to identify the most common systems- level challenges and the system-level functions (necessary to address the identified challenges) that had been suggested in each location. In the following section, we describe

who participated in each NGT meeting and the results from each of those sessions before outlining some modest findings from both site-specific and aggregate data analysis.

NGT Participation

Table 1 describes the type of participants across the three study sites. The Denver NGT took place on June 19, 2019, and was hosted by the Colorado Department of Public Safety.

Seventy-eight people were in attendance from forty different organizations including government and non-governmental agencies and academic institutions. The greatest number of participants came from various state departments (n=28), followed by not-for-profit organizations (n=22), law enforcement agencies (n=18) and federal agencies (n=10). Three members of the research team (names redacted for blinding) in collaboration with local facilitators, led the Nominal Group Technique (NGT) process.

The Gothenburg NGT took place on December 3, 2019, and was hosted by the City of Gothenburg and the Swedish Police. In Gothenburg, there were thirty participants from sixteen different organizations including government agencies, municipalities, non-governmental organizations, housing companies, and regional organizations participated in the workshop. The greatest number of participants (13) came from the city of Gothenburg (municipality). With support from local facilitators, one member of the research team (name redacted for blinding) on evaluation techniques and one Swedish expert on P/CVE (name redacted for blinding) led the NGT process. The Skopje NGT took place on September 2, 2020, in Skopje, in the Republic of North Macedonia, and was hosted by a not-for-profit organization with expertise in crisis management. Twenty-seven participants from seventeen different organizations including government agencies, municipalities, academia, and non-governmental organizations/civil society organizations (NGO/CSO) participated in the NGT. Due to COVID-19 travel restrictions, no member of the research team was present during the implementation of the NGT, so the local team implemented the technique by following the procedures outlined in the toolkit.

Table 1. NGT participants across study sites

Denver, Colorado (USA) (n=78) June 19 2019	- State departments (n=28): Departments of Human Services (CDHS), Education, Corrections, Local Affairs, Regulatory Agencies, Public Safety, and Public Health & Environment (CDPHE). - Not-for-profit organizations (n=22): Anti- Defamation League, Serve2Unite, and the Denver Collaborative Partnership. - Law enforcement agencies (n=18): Aurora Police Department, Denver Police Department, Colorado State Patrol, and the Adams County Sheriff's Office. - Federal agencies (n=10): U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), U.S. Attorney's Office, and the National Counterterrorism Center. - Other types of organizations (n=13): Academic institutions, think tanks and consulting groups, local government departments, and mental health service providers.

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

Gothenburg, Sweden (n=30) December 3 2019	- Local agencies (n=16): Social services, coordinators against violent extremism (central and local level), coordinators in "special intervention teams" (individual level intervention) and safety coordinators (general level intervention), the unit for leisure and one of the local housing companies - Not for profit organizations (n=3): Building Bridges and Fryshuset. - Law enforcement agencies (n=8): Gothenburg police, neighbouring city of Kungalv; Swedish security service. - Other types of organizations (n=3): National Center against violent extremism, regional board

* Some attendees at the Denver NGT held multiple appointments at different institutions, as such, the categories are not mutually exclusive

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

Site-specific data analysis

NGT Results from Denver, Colorado, USA

The independent reviewers coded a total of 1,320 participants' quotes on challenges and 1,178 quotes on functions. The challenge codes that appeared most frequently in this dataset suggested that participants were primarily concerned with issues related to the case subject - the individual at risk for engaging in an extremist act (13% of all challenge codes), the legal, ethical, and appropriate processes for the gathering of information (7%), and the existence of protocols for interagency work, coordination, or information-sharing (7%). Because each coder was permitted to assign multiple codes, we were also able to evaluate *pairings of codes*. Specifically, we were able to ask what codes were most frequently paired with other codes in the dataset, and our analysis found that the codes that were most frequently combined with other codes were those referring to the non-observable activities of the case subject (7%), the relationship and dynamics between the case subject and his family (6%), and the observable activities of the case subject (5%).

The function codes that appeared most frequently in this dataset reflect the functions that participants believed were most critical to addressing the challenges listed above. These included: information sharing (11% of all function codes), availability of allied professionals (social workers, guidance counselors, psychologists, etc.) engaged in preventing acts of extremism and/ or mass violence (10%), and governmental and non-governmental agencies in charge of coordinating a response to threats of acts of violent extremism and/or mass violence (10%). The function codes that were most frequently paired with other codes referenced the need for interagency information sharing amongst agencies (6%), educational services for the broader community (5%), and legal, ethical, and appropriate information sharing between relevant parties (4%).

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group
Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

NGT Results from Gothenburg, Sweden

The independent reviewers coded a total of 1,226 participants' quotes on challenges and 1,263 quotes on functions.

The challenge codes that appeared most frequently in this dataset suggested that participants were primarily concerned with issues related to the case subject - the individual at risk for engaging in an extremist act (16% of all challenge codes), information sharing between agencies (7%), and limitations in the pre-crime space established by the law (6%). Additionally, the codes that were most frequently combined with other codes were those referring to the observable activities of the case subject (7%), non-observable activities of the case subject, and the relationship and dynamic between the case subject and his family (5%).

The function codes that appeared most frequently in this dataset reflect the functions that participants believed were most critical to addressing the challenges listed above. These included: the availability of allied professionals engaged in preventing acts of extremism and/ or mass violence (15% of all function codes), legal, ethical, and appropriate coordination between relevant parties (13%), and agencies in charge of coordinating a response to the threat of acts of extremism and/ or mass violence (12%). The function codes that were most frequently paired with other codes referenced the need for legal, ethical, and appropriate protocols for information sharing between relevant parties (8%), cooperation between agencies (6%), and cooperation between allied professionals (6%).

NGT Results from Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia

The independent reviewers coded a total of 498 participants' quotes on challenges, and 365 quotes on functions.

The challenge codes that appeared most frequently in this dataset suggested that participants were primarily concerned with issues related to the case subject - the individual at risk for engaging in an extremist act (11% of all challenge codes), lack of allied professionals engaged in preventing acts of extremism and/ or mass violence (11%), and the broader

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group
Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

community (at the state or local level) lack of understanding or support (8%). Additionally, the codes that were most frequently combined with other codes were those referring to the risk factors of the case subject (10%), the dynamic between the case subject and his family (9%), and the lack of educational programs for allied professionals (8%).

The function codes that appeared most frequently in this dataset reflect the coding of functions: the functions that participants believed were most critical to addressing the CVE system-level challenges listed above. These included: the need for allied professionals (20% of all function codes), the existence of legal, ethical, and appropriate protocols for interagency work (14%), and the need for educational programs regarding the appropriate course of action when concerned about the possibility of extremist, targeted, and/or mass violence (10%). The function codes that were most frequently paired with other codes referenced the need for resources or services that would aid allied professionals (11%), the need for educational programs for allied professionals (10%), and the existence of legal, ethical, and appropriate protocols for interagency work between allied professionals (9%).

Aggregate data analysis

In this study, we applied a scenario-based NGT in the context of CVE with two goals: first, to test the utility of the tool as a replicable way to collect data on the systems-level issues that must be addressed to develop and implement P/CVE programming; and second, to collect site-specific data in order to support individual sites and organizations in the development of such programs in Denver, Gothenburg, and Skopje of their own programs. While it was not our original intent to use the technique to identify similarities or differences in CVE programs across sites, the fact that we gathered comparable data from three sites in a similar format allows for some broad conclusions about the similarities and generic discussions on what commonalities and differences exist across sites. It is interesting to note that, despite the diversity of contexts and maturity of CVE programs, the challenge code that appeared most frequently in all three datasets was 'case subject' (though this was tied with 'allied professionals' in North Macedonia).

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

However, a single code is difficult to interpret because the codes in isolation lack context. For example, if 'case subject' is paired with 'intelligence collection' there may be an implication that the challenge is to identify information about the case subject vs. if the 'case subject' codes are paired 'allied professionals' then the challenge is more clearly related to the fact that there are not allied professionals to support or identify warning signs for the case. Because of the value add of pairing codes to add this level of information, we explored how pairs of codes varied across each site. This additional context makes clear that there are both similarities and differences across the sites. For example, in Skopje, the code most commonly paired with 'case subject' was 'risk factors', while in Gothenburg it was 'behaviors', and in Denver, it was 'mindset'. Notably, at three sites the professionals engaged in discussing the scenario identified the need to gather additional information about the case as a primary challenge. This conclusion is based not only on the fact that 'case subject' was the most common code in the final dataset but also because it was most frequently paired with terms that speak to *the need to gather additional information*: 'risk factors,' 'behaviors,' and 'mindset.' Thus, the application of a replicable NGT across sites highlights areas of agreement (around the idea that the lack of information about case subject presents a major challenge) and disagreement (around which type of information is most challenging and critical to collect).

In the analysis of functions, there was less consistency across sites; however, the 'allied professionals' code appeared most frequently for both Skopje and Gothenburg, and in the Denver data was effectively tied between 'allied professionals,' 'interagency,' and 'communication.' The greater variation across functions may reflect the fact that the three systems have P/CVE programs at different levels of maturity. Thus, while all three have identified information about the case subject as a major challenge, the functions needed to meet that challenge differ across systems. As with the challenges, it is possible to nuance this data by identifying the codes most frequently paired with 'allied professional' (a top concern for all three sites). In Skopje, the code most frequently paired with 'allied professionals' was

'resources/services', in Gothenburg, it was 'coordination', and in Denver, it was 'resources/services.'

While it is tempting to focus on similarities, context can also help to explain some differences in the data. As one example, in both Denver and Gothenburg the existing infrastructure includes the use of trained social workers and psychologists. Thus, perhaps unsurprisingly, 'allied professionals' was not a top-three challenge code in either site (it was sixth for Denver and seventh for Gothenburg). By contrast, 'allied professionals' was the most important concern in Skopje (tied with 'case subject'). In Skopje, participants saw the lack of allied professionals as a major challenge to address the case, highlighting the need for enhancing local resources on this front including addressing the educational needs of these professionals and availability of services at the community level.

Finally, despite the distinct contexts and state of P/CVE programs, there was a consistent set of top tier functions identified across all three sites: allied professionals, system/protocols, coordination, interagency, communication, resources/services, and education. This suggests that though the relevant import of these functions will differ, these may be seven critical elements to designing a functioning system. Additionally, in the qualitative data, across all sites, participants identified three key elements in responding to the scenario. The first element is the need to understand the case, which the NGT participants described as the need to understand various characteristics of the case including the mindset, the behavior, the resources available to her/him, the family dynamics, and social dynamics of the community from which the case has been identified as well as appropriate channels of communication to the case. The second element is the existence of allied professionals. Across all sites, professionals recognized the need for a multidisciplinary response with allied professionals with adequate training and accessible services in the community. The third element is the availability of a system and tools that support the professionals while responding to the case, consisting of the availability of risk assessment tools, communication

channels between agencies, protocols for coordination and information sharing, and legal frameworks.

Again, though, while these broad comparative findings are interesting, the real value of this scenario-based NGT is in its capacity to consensus-build at the site level, providing policy-makers with clear information about the challenges and functions that stakeholders are most concerned about.

Discussion

In this study, we applied a scenario-based NGT in the context of CVE with two goals: first, to test the utility of the consensus-building process as a replicable way to collect data on the systems-level issues that must be addressed to develop and implement P/CVE programming; and second, to collect site-specific data in order to support the development of such programs in Denver, Gothenburg, and Skopje through bringing diverse stakeholders together. The results of these NGT sessions mark an important contribution to systems-level P/CVE design insofar as they generated site-specific data for those who work in these systems.

How were results used in each context?

These analytic conclusions were used by practitioners in the respective locations to identify critical next steps. With these results, each local jurisdiction was able to utilize the information for its own purposes such as advocacy to policymakers, strategic regional P/CVE planning, and ongoing stakeholder engagement.

In Denver, the NGT results were provided to the organizers of the Summit, who are also tasked with planning statewide CVE initiatives. The NGT results were used to inform statewide plans to build awareness of violent extremism and the competency and capacity to respond to potential threats regardless of geographic area. The needs that were identified by professionals through the NGT process were incorporated into training curricula. Finally, the

NGT results have been used to prioritize the design of programs as evidence to further support how to allocate future funding.

In Gothenburg, the NGT workshop in many ways formalized and validated the assessment that many of the stakeholders already had. The challenges identified, and the functions needed to target these challenges were clearly illustrated in the workshop. Some of the solutions (limitations in the law and exchange of information) are subject to revisions of current practice, however, this is not something that local agencies in Gothenburg can solve. The results of the workshop can be used as an illustration of why changes are needed to overcome the coordination of functions attached to individual persons, rather than roles.

After the NGT workshop in Skopje, participants were asked to brief their superiors about the identified challenges and functions necessary to address those challenges. The results of the NGT were specifically discussed in international forums such as the opening ceremony of the "twinning project" aimed at building national capacities in cooperation with the Italian carabinieri national coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism - (CVECT). The challenges and functions were seen as the baseline in developing P/CVE capacities. In a separate event aimed at improving media and information literacy among North Macedonian youth, the representative of the Ministry of Education recalled the NGT findings, suggesting that the family's role (identified among the top challenges during Skopje's NGT) is of paramount importance in traditional family capital-enhancing activities such as information gathering or perception development while advancing knowledge. Moreover, the North Macedonian committee for CVECT has launched a program to improve cooperation with local authorities focusing among others on improving mechanisms in the school system to tackle the radicalization among the students, following the NGT. Skopje's NGT results are and will be the leading background for local authorities and CSOs in future project development activities focusing on enhancing community resilience to violent radicalization, but also improving study curriculum at different levels.

Piltch-Loeb, McBride, Ekström et al.: The Use of a Scenario-Based Nominal Group Technique to Assess P/CVE Programs

Conclusion

In addition to providing site-specific data that could be implemented at a variety of levels, this project made clear that the use of a scenario-based NGT is an effective means of collecting data from the diverse set of stakeholders tasked with contributing to the systems designed to reduce violent extremism. There is no question that P/CVE programs in various states -- such as those in Denver, Gothenburg, and Skopje -- can benefit from stakeholder engagement. Using the NGT can lead to consensus building across stakeholders. In addition to the intra-system benefits, as illustrated by how the results were used in each country, the NGT process can increase collaboration across countries. Finally, the standardized and yet customizable nature of this scenario-based NGT makes possible the collection and comparison of data across a wide variety of sites which could potentially yield important results about the key components of a successful *system-level* P/CVE intervention. Research on the efficacy of P/CVE programming is widely recognized as critical to success in this space, but research on the efficacy of the system-level mechanisms tasked with executing this work is similarly important. This toolkit and corresponding analysis is a first step in the direction of developing the tools that local, county, state, and national governments need to be successful in meeting this critical challenge.

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above institutions, nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

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