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Framing local collaboration among frontline workers in the field of preventing violent extremism

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Abstract
Local collaboration among frontline workers is probably one of the main challenges for the PVE field. Many Western countries working in this field have developed multi-agency models to address this problem and there is a growing interest in the literature on these challenges. However, few efforts have attempted to analyze these issues theoretically and empirically. Thus, this article aims not only to provide empirical information from practitioners' field experience on these issues but also to provide a comprehensive analytical framework for interpreting them. To this end, frame analysis theory has been used to describe and understand the challenges of collaboration in this field. A total of 90 participants from 64 organizations in 27 countries were interviewed for this study. Personal ties, professional alignment, conflicts of interest, law enforcement involvement, governmental framework, competition, and time invested in collaborative efforts were highlighted as the main factors explaining the success or failure of local collaboration.

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Introduction

In a world of multiple spheres of power and levels of governance, multifactorial problems, and multiple actors from different sectors, the effective coordination of actions on the ground and collaboration between these actors has probably become one of the main challenges of public policy in our century (Shearing, 2005). Preventing violent extremism (PVE) policies and programs, being itself a new field of intervention, encounters the same dilemma at different scales and levels of governance (Heinke, 2017). O'Halloran for example (2021) found limited evidence on the integration and coordination of counterterrorism policies in Canada both vertically and horizontally. This is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that violent extremism is perceived as a multifactorial and complex problem that requires a

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multitude of actors and disciplines to be comprehensively addressed. Several initiatives in many countries have for example tried to respond to this complexity through multi-agency models. This is the case of the Scandinavian multi-agency initiatives in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland, the "Hub" models in Canada or the *Réseau Anti-Radicalisme* (RAR) in Belgium (Franssen et al., 2019; Sivenbring & Andersson Malmros, 2020; Thompson et al., 2020). In other cases, this complexity has been addressed through multidisciplinary teams working in a specific territory, often associated with the leadership of clinical teams in mental health. Examples of these initiatives are the Polarization clinical team and the vPiP project (virtual Partnering in Practice) in Canada or the Community Connect initiative in the United States. (Ben-Cheikh et al., 2018; Ellis et al., 2020; G. Hassan et al., 2021). Whatever the case, these initiatives are the clear realization for many frontline workers that the prevention of violent extremism is of such complexity that it is extremely difficult for a single person, a single team, or a single discipline to address this issue in a timely, relevant, and comprehensive manner. This has recently led to an increasing number of studies that have begun to address these issues.

Despite the obvious needs that have led to the implementation of multi-agency and multidisciplinary models and the theoretical and empirical advantages that their application can provide, collaborating is extremely difficult. As we will see below, this process depends both on personal relationships and on the different ways in which people understand the phenomenon and seek to intervene in it. This is particularly key in a field of work that has recently experienced a broadening of its boundaries of interpretation and intervention, through what I will call the preventive turn. By "preventive turn," I refer to the process that began initially in Europe with the new wave of Islamist extremism, in the middle of the first decade after the turn of the millennium, and which focused mainly on the explanatory factors and trajectories and on the early and preventive intervention of a phenomenon that had been until then approached almost exclusively from the national security sphere. Psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, and community actors gradually began to play a predominant role in the intervention of these phenomena, competing and/or collaborating, most of the time in tension, with the law enforcement agencies (G. Hassan et al., 2021; Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021; Madriaza et al., 2017; Sestoft et al., 2017). These new psychosocial actors and

disciplines have contributed not only with new practical and theoretical ways of understanding the phenomenon but also with a new ethic of intervention (Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021). This new approach does not replace the security model, instead, both frames coexist in tension because of this preventive turn. This has led to the existence of two souls within contemporary violent extremism prevention, fueling the perception of a lack of coherence within the field as well as problems of collaboration between actors representing both approaches. To put it in simple terms: the *security frame* is aligned under the concept of "counter-terrorism" and places special emphasis on the "threat" to security. Meanwhile, the *psychosocial prevention frame* seeks to prevent vulnerable people from following a violent path. Bjorgo and Andersson Malmros (2023) identified similar frames in Nordic multiagency models calling them institutional logics (social security and social care logics). There is thus no common narrative that clearly delimits the disciplinary boundaries of this field, an absence that has been key to the development or the entrapment of the processes of collaboration. Indeed, as we will see below, the inclusion of law enforcement in the field of intervention has been persistently resisted by psychosocial actors and is probably perceived as the main obstacle to the facilitation of these processes (Ellis et al., 2020; Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021; Solhjell et al., 2022).

The tension between these two approaches is not, despite its importance, the only explanation for the difficulties in establishing timely and relevant collaborative processes in this domain. The tension between the two approaches to preventing extremism is, however, a good example to justify a point in this argument: if this process is undermined by the absence of a common narrative, collaborative processes can then be understood as a process of constructing this narrative, or as I will put it hereafter, as a framing process. This means that collaboration depends on the degree to which the different frames of interpretation of reality around violent extremism are aligned around shared concepts, priorities, and strategies among the different actors involved in these events. In this way, the frame analysis, initially developed by the sociologist Irving Goffman (1974), and then applied to social movements by Snow et al. (1986) in the mid-1980s, will be the conceptual starting point on which I will try to interpret this process. This theory proposes multiple conceptual and explanatory components that, as we will see below, are easily adaptable to the context of collaboration.

This is because this theory was conceived to try to understand how diverse individuals with diverse ways of thinking can work together to carry out a collective action. However, few studies have tried to think of collaboration as a problem of aligning frames and there are also, as far as I am currently aware, no studies that address the complexity and tensions around collaboration in the field of PVE from this perspective. In fact, interest in collaboration in this field is relatively recent and there are very few studies that have attempted to address it systematically (Mazerolle et al., 2021). In this sense, this study is exploratory and as such proposes two general objectives: a) to explore, through the results of an international study, the factors that influence the process of framing collaboration among PVE actors, particularly at the local level and b) to contribute with new knowledge on collaboration, an area of study that has been little addressed in the specialized literature of this field and particularly from the point of view of frontline workers.

For the purposes of this article "front-line worker" will be used as a synonym of "practitioner" or "first-line worker" and it is defined as any person having direct, in-person contact with the participants in an intervention. In turn, "Collaboration" is defined as the relationships and interactions among different actors operating within the same environment, to enable them to work together effectively in order to pursue the specified objectives.

This paper will have several sections. The following section will provide a brief review of the literature on the factors that influence collaborative processes in this field. In the subsequent section, the principles of frame analysis and how they could eventually be applied to this field will be explained in more detail. Then, the methodology will be described, and the results of this study will be presented, especially concerning the factors influencing the collaboration process. Finally, in the last section of this paper, these results will be briefly discussed in light of the proposed theoretical approach.

Collaboration at the Grassroots Level: An Everyday Challenge

The collaborative capacity depends on multiple factors at different scales of analysis. The factors mentioned by recent systematic reviews on cross-sector or multidisciplinary collaboration in other fields include the motivation and purpose of the collaboration, which is

associated with common goals and visions around this process; the difference between organizational and professional cultures; the quality of interpersonal relationships and trust between partners; the clarity of roles and responsibilities of network members; the available and shared resources; the governance and leadership of the teams; as well as the social, institutional and political context in which these relationships are established (Alderwick et al., 2021; Schot et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2022).

Although there is a growing interest in addressing collaboration in this field, the literature on this subject is still quite limited. In a recent systematic review of multi-agency programs that included the police as a partner, the authors found only one study that addressed the effectiveness, the underlying mechanisms, or the moderating factors of these collaborations and 3 studies that addressed the economic considerations of these issues (Mazerolle et al., 2021). They also found 21 studies that qualitatively addressed the factors facilitating the implementation of these multi-agency models and 16 studies focusing on the barriers to this process. The limited literature on these issues in PVE is, however, not far from the results observed in the global literature on collaboration. The difference between organizational and professional cultures, which is probably one of the consequences of the tension between the two frames mentioned in the introduction of this document, as well as the quality of interpersonal relationships and trust between partners, are also frequently mentioned (Madriaza et al., 2017; Mazerolle et al., 2021; Sivenbring & Andersson Malmros, 2020; Solhjell et al., 2022; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). In addition, factors such as inter-organizational competition (Anindya, 2019; G. Hassan et al., 2021), lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities (Götsch, 2017; Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021; Mazerolle et al., 2021) and lack of clear definitions (Christmann et al., 2012) have been mentioned as having an impact on multistakeholder collaboration.

Among all these factors, trust is probably the main, underlying moderator of this process. (Ellis et al., 2020; Görgen et al., 2021; G. Hassan et al., 2021; Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021; Madriaza et al., 2017; Solhjell et al., 2022; Stephens & Sieckelinck, 2019). Trust, in this case, is fundamental. Too often, as mentioned by Van der Vet & Coolsaet (2018), the effectiveness of collaboration and coordination “depends on the interpersonal relationships of officials instead of formalized and institutionalized exchange” (pp. 3–4). Bjorgo and

Andersson Malmros (2023) mention that in the case of the Nordic countries, this trust is developed through three levels: structural trust in institutional procedures, professional trust that includes understanding the mandates and logic of other institutions, and personal trust that is built over time through working together. This trust unfortunately faces multiple structural barriers. Although law enforcement agencies, for example, have been leading and promoting coordination and collaboration processes between different actors in various regions of the world[2], their role in intervention processes is controversial. The exchange of information between psychosocial actors and law enforcement agencies about users, and therefore the confidentiality of the latter, appears to be the main concern of practitioners in the field (Ellis et al., 2020; G. Hassan et al., 2021; Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021). Probation agents in France, for example, expressed apprehension about abuses by the state security agencies, particularly its intrusions on individual liberties; they were worried that they could be perceived as security agents (Madriaza et al., 2018). Researchers from the UK noted that front-line workers were concerned about increasing expectations that they will share confidential information, especially since the enactment of the Prevent Duty (Bryan, 2017; Busher et al., 2019; Kundnani, 2009). The reluctance to share information does not come, however, as mentioned by Hassan and his team (2021), exclusively from psychosocial actors. Law enforcement agencies are also reluctant to share information because they fear leaks in their criminal investigation processes.

Mistrust among psychosocial actors is due in part to the fact that they consider that law enforcement agencies have mandates, missions, and codes of ethics that diverge from their own and that police actions may contribute to the stigmatization and ostracism of the communities targeted by these actions (Githens-Mazer et al., 2010; G. Hassan et al., 2021; Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021; Mazerolle et al., 2021). In Germany, for example, cooperation between civil society actors and the police is much more difficult when the focus of the intervention is repression rather than prevention (Görgen et al., 2021). Bjorgo and Andersson Malmros (2023) mention that cooperation in Scandinavian multi-agency models tends to reach mutual understandings when the focus is placed on the logic of social care rather than

[2] This is the case of the multi-agency models in Scandinavian countries (Sivenbring & Andersson Malmros, 2020), the Hub in Canada (Thompson & Leroux, 2022) or the "counter-terrorism local profiles" meeting in England (Police and Crime Committee, 2015).

on that of social security. In many cases, the very fact of establishing linkages with the police appears to be problematic for practitioners. Ties with law enforcement agencies could have an impact on front-line worker credibility and trust on the part of program users, knowing that relationships of trust and credibility are crucial to the success of any type of intervention (Fitzgerald, 2016). Building ties with other actors on the ground and with the community is probably one of the greatest challenges that practitioners face in the field (Romaniuk, 2015), considering that national policies, such as PREVENT in the UK, were having a negative effect on community relations (Christmann et al., 2012; Githens-Mazer et al., 2010).

Some factors seem to moderate trust between these actors. Some researchers mention that previous and consolidated work on other issues between police and practitioners may facilitate collaboration regarding PVE activities (Ellis et al., 2020; Görgen et al., 2021; G. Hassan et al., 2021; Sivenbring & Andersson Malmros, 2020; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). In Canada, multi-agency models that work with a diversity of issues beyond violent extremism appear to be more effective in the collaboration process than models that have focused exclusively on PVE (Thompson & Leroux, 2022). These same authors mention that the personality characteristics of the police officers in charge of coordinating these situational tables were a positive factor in facilitating trust and collaboration. Mazerolle et al. (2021) have identified other factors associated with good police practices that could contribute to improving relations between police departments and other agencies. Among these factors are those related to how information is shared and how collaborative relationships are established. Police departments that do not merge intelligence practices with community work, that deliver information based on the needs of partners, and that establish formal processes for sharing information appear to be more successful in establishing good collaborative spaces. Some basic conditions are however required, such as placing special emphasis on privacy protection, civil rights, public liberties, and transparency of engagements and actions carried out. In addition to all this, there is the need to be open-minded and offer confidential spaces for partners to talk openly.

Competition among stakeholders, including governmental and non-governmental organizations, is probably another neglected issue in the literature and the public policy field, given the increasing but limited funding for these kinds of programs and the involvement of

private companies in PVE initiatives (G. Hassan et al., 2021; Heinke, 2017). When assessing the reintegration program for Indonesian deportees in 2017, Anindya (2019) stresses the influence that competition among non-governmental organizations has had on this program, particularly in terms of overlapping actions, absence of clear guidelines, and sharing information. Because the chain of coordination was not clear, practitioners did not have any clear guidelines and information for running the program and often deportees received several visits from different frontline workers from different organizations. In the case of Canada, Hassan et al. (2021) suggest that competition was accentuated in organizations that served the same territory and depended on few sources of funding.

As has been mentioned in the global literature on the factors influencing collaboration, the problems associated with the latter are also the result of the lack of a clear definition of the different roles and responsibilities within the constellation of organizations working in this area (Götsch, 2017). In the context of a de-radicalization program for returning foreign fighters in Denmark, this issue appeared as the main functional challenge, especially in terms of leadership during the transition from prison to society (A. Hassan, 2019). Social workers in Norway who collaborated with the police perceived that their traditional client support functions were blurred by the influence of collaborative work with the security services (Haugstvedt & Tuastad, 2021).

Finally, the lack of a clear definition of the field and the program participants has also practical implications for the collaboration process. Christmann et al. (2012) point out in their study that several interventions at the primary level had not adopted a precise definition of the target population, resulting in inaccurate reference criteria. The majority of those interviewed in this study indicated that these programs were not reaching most at-risk youth and admitted that they had never been referred to an already radicalized youth.

Framing Collaboration

In the context of the need for collaboration and lack of trust, how can we align the different frames to produce collaborative work? In 1986, Snow et al., proposed in a seminal paper inspired by Goffman's (1974) "frame analysis theory" using these frames to understand how

social movements recruit new members and expand the understanding of their struggles. The term "frame" "denotes 'schemata of interpretation' that enable individuals 'to locate, perceive, identify, and label' occurrences within their life space and the world at large" (Snow et al., 1986, p. 364). Scholars from political sciences have used this model to understand how the frames influence policy implementation: "frame the problem opens up and legitimizes certain avenues of action and closes off and delegitimizes others" (Coburn, 2006, p. 344). Collaboration is, in fact, a framing process. As we have seen above, most of the collaboration problems in this field are associated with how individuals and groups interpret each other work. When "frames" are aligned between two organizations, collaboration is a natural process that does not need to be forced. The extent of this collaboration depends on the extent to which the organizations share similar interpretations of their motivations, ethics, and, of course, their "real intentions". In another field of study, Klitsie et al. (2018) suggest for example that the presence of multiple frames in tension or the forced intention to homogenize a diversity of these into a single frame, can increase disagreement between organizations and hinder the collaborative process. Croteau & Hicks (2003) use the concept of "contending frames" to refer to the fact that two or more organizations use different conflicting frames to legitimize their work.

When multiple actors in most organizations identify and interpret a problem in the same way, and this results in concrete actions during the same time, then we are in witness of a master frame (Snow & Benford, 1992). A master frame is a generic type of collective action framework that has greater scope and influence than standard frames (Snow & Benford, 1992). Waring et al. (2022) point out for example, that although health services research collaborative networks with other local partners were embedded within the same master frame, multiple parallel frames emerged at the local level generating points of tension and disagreement between organizations. The two souls of the prevention of violent extremism mentioned in the introduction—the security frame and the psychosocial frame—, operate indeed as two master frames. In other words, a significant number of organizations and actors in this field share similar interpretations of the prevention of extremism, justifying and legitimizing their actions according to the inherent logic of their master frame of reference. Although there are actors who can be considered as representatives of each of these master

frames, such as the police or social workers, these master frames act beyond the field of intervention and are also present, for example, in the field of scientific research in this field.

Specialized literature in different fields of study has used the concept of frame alignment as a way to understand how multi-stakeholder collaboration processes can be successful or unsuccessful (Croteau & Hicks, 2003; Le Ber & Branzei, 2010; Vandenbussche et al., 2017; Zimmermann et al., 2021). This concept was coined by Snow et al. (1986) and "refer to the linkage of individual and [organizations] interpretive orientations, such that some set of individual interests, values and beliefs and [organizations] activities, goals, and ideology are congruent and complementary" (p. 464). According to Snow et al. (1986) there are four types of frame alignment: "bridging", which links two or more congruent but initially disconnected frames; "amplification", which allows emphasizing, within a frame, on specific cultural values and beliefs which are aligned with potential participants; "extension", which enables to extend the original boundaries of the frames in order to adapt them to the views of potential adherents; and finally "transformation," which facilitates the transformation of old conceptions and the acquisition of new ones. Croteau & Hicks (2003) propose a complex pyramidal alignment process, in which alignments, in order to be successful, must occur horizontally and vertically at different hierarchical levels within and between organizations and individuals. Zimmerman et al. (2021) criticize the one-way interpretation of the original perspective of Snow et al. (1986) and propose that in the case of collaborative processes, frame alignment should also be interpreted in terms of interaction. Vandenbussche et al. (2017) suggest for example that successful collaboration between different actors is based on the interaction between the frame and the relational dynamics. On the one hand, frame alignment is facilitated by the quality of interpersonal relationships, and, on the other hand, these relationships are influenced by the degree of the frame alignment.

Method

Participants

A total of 90 participants from 64 organizations based in 27 countries were interviewed for this study: 27 experts and academics from 24 organizations based in 14 countries and 63

front-line practitioners from 43 organizations based in 23 countries. The front-line practitioners in this study had various professional profiles and backgrounds: psychologists, social workers, youth workers, police officers, teachers, and former extremists. They were recruited for the study using a snowball sampling strategy (Hennink et al., 2020).

The following table presents the breakdown of the respondents of the study:

Table 1.
Participants Characteristics

		Experts	***Practitioners***
Gender	Men	14	41
	Women	13	22
Region	Sub-Saharan Africa and Sahel	2	8
	North America	6	10
	Asia	4	6
	Europe	10	31
	The Middle East and North Africa	5	6
	Oceania	0	2
Type of organization	Non-profit organization	13	27
	Research Institute	8	1
	Educational institution	2	3
	Government organization	1	11
	Other	0	2
Type of radicalization targeted	Islamist radicalization	4	11
	Far-right	1	1
	All forms of radicalization leading to violence	17	26
	Unknown	2	5

Data Collection

The data was obtained by conducting semi-structured interviews designed to elicit discussion of the personal experiences of front-line practitioners involved in the prevention of radicalization. Due to the geographical locations of the respondents, most of the interviews were conducted over online platforms. As a prior step, a conceptual framework comprising the study dimensions and variables was developed. The variables were operationalized as questions for inclusion in the interview guide. In the case of this paper, the front-line workers were asked to talk about their professional relations with other actors operating in the same environment: "Do you prevent radicalization in partnership with other organizations?" "What have been your difficulties and successes in terms of collaboration?" "How would you describe the quality of this collaboration?" In addition, they were asked for their opinion on the necessity of working with other organizations.

Analysis

This study used a coding technique inspired by grounded theory. Grounded theory is a process for the development of theories based on empirical data (Charmaz, 2014). Given time constraints, it was not possible to produce verbatim (word-for-word) transcripts of all the interviews. Instead, a grid of the main themes addressed in this research was used, transcribing only the excerpts from the interviews in which these themes were addressed. The partial transcription and the initial coding process were carried out by two research assistants and the principal investigator. For this purpose, the assistants were initially trained in the methodology and the topics to be coded. Most of these themes were predefined and established from the structure of the interviews, which facilitated both their understanding and the coding process itself. The entire team coded two interviews to harmonize the coding criteria. Subsequently, the same team members coded another two interviews to refine these criteria. In case of discrepancy, the final decision was made by the principal investigator. After this process, the interviews were divided among the assistants and coded independently. The process of data collection and analysis followed however a non-linear, circular approach. In other words, the analysis work commenced while the data collection was still ongoing. This methodology, aligned with the principles of grounded theory (Hennink et al., 2020),

proved valuable in enhancing the data collection process. The utilization of codes allowed for the identification of missing subjects or themes, which were then incorporated into the analysis framework. This iterative approach fostered a more comprehensive understanding of the data. Thus, if new themes were incorporated into the analysis, the same process was followed, i.e., excerpts from two new interviews addressing those themes were selected for coding as a team. Once the coders had a complete mastery of these new themes, the rest of the interviews were divided up for coding.

Procedure

The interviews were carried out in two phases. The first phase consisted of interviewing experts and academics in the field of radicalization and asking them for advice on countries, cities, and organizations that were pursuing interesting and/or promising lines of work in this field, as well as identifying potential participants for the second phase of the study. Following this exploratory phase, front-line practitioners were interviewed. In both cases, before conducting the interviews, participants were sent the corresponding consent form, which was sent in most cases signed by e-mail to the researcher. In other cases, people were unable to send a signed copy by e-mail, but took a photo and sent it to the researcher.

Findings

This section will present some results regarding the factors that influence the process of aligning frames for collaboration in the context of preventing violent extremism. These data are not intended to be a demonstration of the use of frame analysis theory in this field, but rather to respond to the two objectives that were proposed in the introduction, namely, to explore the factors that influence the process of collaboration in this field and to contribute new knowledge in an area that has been underdeveloped in other studies. To do this, this section will be divided into two subsections that will address two topics that may be relevant to understanding and improving collaborative processes. The first subsection will address the sources of motivation for the collaboration process and the second will focus more specifically on the factors that influence facilitating or hindering this process.

Motivational Sources for Collaboration

Despite the multiple tensions, conflicts, and difficulties related to the collaborative process in this field that have already been pointed out, the participants in this study recognize the need for collaborative work. This is the main reason why this section will present the main sources of motivation evoked by them. These sources of motivation are important, as they allow to identify points of leverage on which the collaborative process can be built and, interpreted from the point of view of the frame analysis theory, they allow to build bridges between the frames of reference of different organizations working on these issues. Six sources of motivation have been identified: to share knowledge and practices and provide support, to improve the referral system and beneficiary support, to obtain funding and approval, to facilitate bridging, to improve influence and lobbying, and to improve coherence between national- and local-scale efforts.

To share knowledge and practices and provide support: Generally, partnerships are formed for the purpose of working together on projects, sharing knowledge and experiences, and also offering or requesting support or expertise. Several respondents said that other organizations had sought them out for collaboration because of their expertise. One organization intervenes for example in difficult cases, while another conducts mediation sessions between hostile communities. Other groups invite key actors and professionals to attend their cultural activities or training sessions. Requests for assistance can even become onerous, as in the case of one European respondent. She and her team are solicited "24-7" by local organizations and other actors, and have "tried to help them, coach them, teach them to handle requests from parents, or what to say if they get the youth back." (EUR10).

To improve the referral system and beneficiary support: PVE collaboration is said to rely first on the capacity to refer people to the right service. Collaboration creates conditions under which professionals can more easily refer cases to another agency, thus taking advantage of a multidisciplinary network. This is especially important for the police officers in this study since their mandate does not permit them to be involved in a youth's case from beginning to

end; they depend on other agencies to dovetail with them for follow-up and support work. Along these same lines, one North American worker strives to build collaboration among different entities and to persuade competent government agencies to work towards offering a support service for victims and offenders, even while encouraging communities to contact the police:

> …when you see a child being abused, you don't only think about calling 911. Of course, you think about calling 911 for immediately protecting that child, but then you think about rehabilitative services, protective services, not just for the victim but for those parents as well. We need to broaden that thinking in radicalization to violence as well. With a lot of these cases, there might have been underlying behaviours, problems, issues, that had they been addressed, ameliorated or completely taken care of, you know, the person may still have had radical beliefs, but he … or she may not have then moved on that path towards feeling that violence was the solution. (NAM8)

To obtain funding and approval: Partnership often affords opportunities to obtain government funding. Frequently, frontline-workers make connections with key officials of government to try to convince them of the importance and value of their projects. In this context, contact with other relevant stakeholders on the ground can be useful to obtain this funding. Some respondents stated that collaboration among local actors—committees, schools, the health sector, prisons, community groups, etc.—can also be necessary to obtain approval and support for the program implementation.

To facilitate bridging: The relationship can also entail the facilitation of interaction between different actors. One respondent holds a position enabling him to act as an intermediary between communities and government agencies. Part of his work consists of counseling communities and referring them to the right agencies, particularly social services, and healthcare. Conversely, government contacts allow getting in contact with the communities of focus. Local agencies know the various communities' needs and have already built bridges

with them. Collaboration with these government services facilitates the identification and initial contact.

To improve influence and lobbying: Networks of front-line workers and institutions make it possible to join forces to lobby decision-makers on behalf of minority groups, or for consideration of alternative perspectives, but also the development of bolder projects. The analysis of the interviews points to the existence of numerous networks of NGOs and other groups (e.g., groups working on security issues) in which front-line workers are active participants. One respondent, in fact, acts as the coordinator of an NGO coalition formed for the purposes of lobbying, media relations, and other collective tasks. Networks of NGOs and individual workers are thus useful in forming a common front vis-à-vis state or religious authorities. Large networks, particularly those created in the context of municipal strategies, provide a forum for developing strategies to meet the needs of returning extremists so that they do not become invisible after being repatriated.

To improve coherence between national- and local-scale efforts: Several respondents explained that collaboration between different levels of government—national, regional, local—is essential to the effectiveness of counterterrorism strategies. National governments and departments would generally be responsible for collaboration since they have an overarching vision of the action plan. They have access to large budgets, more extensive expertise (as a rule), and access to information (e.g., police and intelligence agency databases) that is off-limits to the public. Local authorities, in contrast, are said to have a better understanding of local needs and specificities as well as access to the populations of interest. A coherent pathway through both levels is consequently fundamental to prevent frontline workers from misunderstanding, contradicting messages, and useless actions.

What are the Main Factors Explaining the Success or Failure of the Collaboration Process?

As indicated in the introduction to this section, this second part of the results will directly address the factors or mechanisms that influence the collaboration process in the PVE field. These results then seek to respond concretely to the question that is the title of this

section. Seven factors or mechanisms were identified: Personal relations, Professional alignment, Conflicting interests, Involvement of law enforcement agencies, Influence of governmental frame, Limited funding and competition among organizations, and Time and complexity.

Personal relations: The quality of the working relationship appears to be specific to the person and the organization. Above all, collaborative work depends on the development and maintenance of ongoing relationships. Several respondents said that this involves meeting and talking with people in person, and that personal contact needs to be a priority. In addition, the durability of a partnership depends on the quality of the relationships developed, but also on the capacity to ensure sustainability and continuity when an original contact leaves the organization. A police officer in this study explained that she prefers to work with people she knows and that the same is true for her community partners, who prefer a degree of stability in their interactions with the police. Positive personal relationships are critical to accelerating procedures that would otherwise take too long. One respondent from the Middle East explains that its cases are processed more rapidly, and its members have the government's attention because they have close relations with them.

Professional alignment: The quality of the relationship is also attributed in part to the consistency of the various partners' views and the clarity with which they state their objectives. If the issues are not clearly defined and the purpose of the strategy clearly delineated, or if the actors cannot agree on the approach to be taken, the collaboration is likely to fail. One North American front-line worker said that multidisciplinary collaboration is only feasible if all the actors share the same professional objective. For a European worker, collaboration was good until the national government changed its messaging, at which point divisions arose among the actors: "There were people who were in the right place and who shared the same basic postulates and interpretive framework. So, they were able to be very consistent and functional" (EUR10). In other words, a professional relationship is more likely to work when the individuals meet and agree on the professional plan and build mutual trust.

Conflicting interests: Inversely, collaboration and coordination become very difficult when there are different interests, ideas, and frameworks, but also when partners have donors with conflicting priorities. As mentioned above, working with partners with similar professional interests is recommended, but this is not always feasible, particularly in the case of round tables or meetings taking place within the framework of a municipal strategy (e.g., a partners' round table). The issues here concern confidentiality and upholding one's mandate. Numerous front-line workers do not wish to speak freely about their users in the presence of law enforcement officers or other authorities. Confidentiality is again a dilemma that gets in the way of information-sharing during meetings with counterparts.

Involvement of law enforcement agencies: As stated above, relations between front-line workers, police departments, and intelligence agencies are often fraught, particularly where information-sharing is concerned. Many respondents said that they do not work with the police, and relations with intelligence agencies are even less common. Several frontline workers explained that collaborating with the police in prevention work with youth can be unhelpful, as the police have a different understanding of PVE and consequently address it differently. Indeed, several respondents refuse to work with the police because they do not want to be involved in security work. They are not interested in partnerships that require them to collect information on the youth and communities they are trying to help. In certain African countries, the presence of the police can be a danger signal; as one respondent put it, terrorist groups have spread the message that the police are "Muslim killers." However, the communication of certain information to the police is also a legal matter. Prevention workers are required to notify the police of any development that could represent imminent danger. That said, several respondents explained that communication is one-way: the police relay files and information to the organizations without any expectation of a follow-up.

From the point of view of the police officers interviewed, community relations are an indispensable means of prevention. This approach can provide useful information in the context of police investigations. Police officers interviewed are motivated to create partnerships guided by a vision of shared responsibilities. The job of the police is to preserve law and order, that of the community to help them do so. The strategy of a specialized unit

consists in establishing trust with the community (Muslim faith communities in this example) by offering security services, but also by having a presence on site during cultural and religious events. But collaboration with governmental and nongovernmental organizations remains necessary to adequately redirect certain problematic individuals toward specialized services.

Influence of governmental frame: Most of the time, the influence of the government frame is structural, legal, and financial in nature. First, national, regional, and local policies and laws determine the objectives and guidelines through the implementation of a chain of responsibilities, information exchange structures with different degrees of flexibility, as well as specialized committees and cells, which have a direct impact on the room for maneuver to implement networks and improve collaboration. The ban on intelligence agencies to release information and the laws of confidentiality between client and practitioner are some examples of this. These rules also determine the budget allocations to the projects. Second, the constitutional provisions of the country place certain limits on interventions and restrict the workers' options; put another way, the arguments they use with their clients cannot violate the constitution.

In other cases, this influence is more specific and depends on political factors, in other words, it depends on the government's political agenda. Some organizations, for example, must obtain local government approval to hold events. Others depend on government funding, which affects the scope and continued existence of their projects, but also the rhetoric they can embrace and the populations and partners they can work with. One African NGO must have government approval to give training for police forces, and this is not obtained without lobbying. The same is true for another worker in the African region who helped implement an NGO coalition to lobby politicians, the clergy, and the media. Another NGO in Africa explained that it does not need national government approval to carry out its projects yet prefers to avoid confrontation with the authorities by letting them know about its events.

A change of government can also have a major effect on the efforts of front-line workers. The new national discourse and concomitant legislative changes could have to some extent a negative effect on the work done to date, along with the relationships that have been

created. One respondent from Europe argues for example that in her case, such a change had a negative influence on the climate of collaboration: professional relations between the various actors have become more strained because their differences of opinion are too great.

Limited funding and competition among organizations: The increasing number and diversity of organizations working in this field and the limited funding have created a climate of competition, according to some respondents, which requires fineness and constant adjustment. A respondent explained for example that her organization has to vie with others for grants from the city since it belongs to a network created within the framework of a European municipal strategy for the prevention of radicalization and extremism:

> It is difficult. The city is also providing money to different programs. So, they gave the money to the two largest organizations. And our organization gets a very small amount. You see that grassroots initiatives get little money, but big institutionalized youth organizations get most of the money. So, there is a kind of conflict. The municipality, the city, tries to prevent the conflict, to solve it in a peaceful way. But that can jeopardize cooperation sometimes. (EUR3)

Time and complexity: Europe is notable for its formalization of structures allowing for the creation of institutional and professional networks, a phenomenon much less visible in non-Western countries. Nevertheless, as one respondent told, the larger and more complex the organization, the slower and more difficult the collaboration process tends to be. In addition, bureaucracy at times renders collaboration a lengthy and arduous process. In fact, several European respondents are of the view that such structures for sharing information and experiences take a great deal of time to put in place that they lack transparency and that they are highly complex, albeit functional.

Discussion

The results of this research prove that a significant number of factors that influence the collaboration process in the field of PVE depend on how the actors and organizations interpret reality based on their frames of reference. To the extent that the concepts, problem diagnosis, and priorities of the different actors involved in this process are aligned, the collaboration process is smooth and efficient. When these frames of reference are divergent, then the relationships between the actors are a source of tension and conflict. Collaboration is then effectively, but not exclusively, a framing process. Factors such as Professional alignment, Conflicting interests, Involvement of law enforcement agencies, and to a lesser extent, Influence of the governmental frame, are proof of the importance of working on the alignment of these frames of reference. The sources of motivation are indeed a good starting point. They demonstrate the need to collaborate, but they also provide us with the leverage points on which we can work to build bridges between the different frames active in the prevention of violent extremism.

These factors are, however, not very different from those that have been studied in other fields of study or disciplines. The motivation to collaborate associated with common visions, the differences between organizational and professional cultures, the quality of interpersonal relationships, trust, available and shared resources, as well as the social and political context, are factors that have already been observed in other fields concerning multi-sectoral collaboration (Alderwick et al., 2021). In this sense, the field of PVE is not necessarily very exceptional, and strategies to improve collaboration used in other fields can probably also be reused in this domain.

While not exclusively limited to the PVE field, the complex interplay between psychosocial actors and security actors appears to exert a significant influence within this domain compared to others. Studies that have used frame analysis have tended to identify the presence of a unique master frame (Benford & Snow, 2000). Nevertheless, in the field of PVE, both logics seem to work as two parallel contending master frames. Both the security frame and the psychosocial frame have adherents in a huge number of organizations that share common views on how violent extremism should be prevented and implement internally

coherent but mutually contradictory strategies. This has a clear consequence: collaborating between actors who interpret reality in opposite ways is extremely difficult. Evidence justifying this judgment is found throughout this text.

However, difficult does not mean impossible. Quite the contrary. Despite this challenging environment, front-line workers are aware of the importance of networks and, in fact, they are highly valued. Beyond the benefits in terms of information-sharing and facilitation of project-based partnerships, these structures serve to increase the scope of interventions, either by giving access to a greater range of resources and services or by reaching a larger number of individuals. Both actors are also mutually dependent due to the very nature of the phenomenon they are trying to prevent, which could be observed in sources of motivation for collaboration, such as improving the referral system and improving coherence between national- and local-scale efforts. The experience of multi-agency models in different countries led mostly by the police is also a concrete example that such collaboration is possible and can be positive. This experience could suggest that police-led models that include psychosocial actors seem to be more successful than the reverse. The literature, as I have pointed out, also suggests that these models should build on previous experiences, not focus exclusively on preventing extremism, and place special emphasis on positive team leadership. (G. Hassan et al., 2021; Sivenbring & Andersson Malmros, 2020; Thompson & Leroux, 2022). In Nordic countries, experience shows that mutual understanding increases when this understanding converges towards a logic of social care (Bjørgo & Andersson Malmros, 2023).

The existence of these two frames does not then imply either that one frame is superior to the other. On the contrary, it implies two ways of looking at the reality that are in constant negotiation when actors close to one or the other must collaborate. Which is the case with multi-agency models. As mentioned by Bjørgo and Andersson Malmros (2023), both logics or frames tend to mix and co-exist in practice and the more experience of collaborative work the actors have, the more a mutual understanding is developed. This result that has also been observed in the case of Germany (Görgen et al., 2021). The framing problems of collaboration are not thus reduced to the tension between these two contending master frames. As stated by Croteau & Hicks (2003), Vandenbussche et al. (2017) and Zimmerman et al. (2021),

collaboration is a dynamic and ongoing process that involves constant negotiation between all actors involved at different hierarchical scales. Within each master frame there also coexist different frames or logics that are not always consistent with each other. This is the case of the preventive and security approaches within law enforcement agencies, or the managerial or clinical logics within social care agencies. Although psychosocial actors are aligned on how violent extremism should be interpreted and intervened, there are multiple factors from the individual and organizational level to the public policy level that influence the success or failure of a collaborative process both within the psychosocial and security frames. This study was able to identify some of them.

Following Vandenbussche et al. (2017) and Zimmerman et al. (2021), contending frames, understood as cognitive frames, cannot be isolated from the interactions and context in which they develop. Collaborating takes a great deal of time and maintenance, which demands considerable effort and resources from front-line workers and their organizations, especially in an environment where multiple sectors, with different points of view, work together or are supposed to. Other organizations capitalize on their regular contacts and on their shared frameworks (e.g., health and social services-related issues) to organize accurate protocols and referral systems. In these non-structural contexts, personal bonds seem to be one of the few ways to bridge the differences. As previously mentioned, “trust” is probably one of the most repeated words in the context of PVE programs. Front-line workers, including police officers, need to gain trust of the community and users to successfully implement their projects (Haugstvedt, 2019; Madriaza et al., 2017; Solhjell et al., 2022). PVE organizations also need trust among them to pursue common goals. However, trust must be earned and sustained. Trust depends on several factors including credibility and transparency. Credibility can rapidly dwindle; the work of proving one’s sincerity to participants and communities is a continual necessity. This can be illustrated by the words of a respondent in North America: “Suspicion from the community is the enemy of this work; this is a continuous struggle” (NAM4). In this context, forced collaboration stands a good chance of being counterproductive and donors must be made aware of this.

This research has however some limitations. As already mentioned, international exploratory studies inherently face a trade-off between the diversity of experience and depth

of analysis. To broaden the scope and include a variety of perspectives, it is inevitable to sacrifice some level of in-depth analysis. Despite having interviewed frontline workers from 27 countries, it proved extremely difficult for example to dig deeper into the challenges on the ground in this paper. Comparison is another issue to mention. 59 individuals in Western countries and 31 individuals in non-Western countries were interviewed and then, experiences from non-Western participants were relatively underrepresented in our sample. As a result, these numbers impose certain limitations on the extent of our comparative analysis and, more importantly, on any generalizations that could be derived from it. Considering this, my focus has been directed toward gaining an overall perspective on the challenges of collaboration. The generalizability of these data is also complex due to the diverse national and cultural contexts in which the interviews were conducted. In addition, as with all qualitative research, these findings depend on the subjective information provided by the participants and the subjective interpretation that the researcher can bring to the data analysis.

Conclusion

This article attempts to fill one of the main gaps in the literature on PVE: the factors that explain collaboration issues. Because of the limited literature on the subject, this study could only be exploratory. It is probably one of the first studies, to my current knowledge, to focus exclusively on these issues from the point of view of front-line workers. In this sense, this research opens up a new way to understand conflicts and relations among PVE actors. The use of frame analysis applied to the field of collaboration has also shed new light on how to understand collaboration from the perspective of contending interpretation frames and may provide some insights to improve these processes. This study has been an overall view of relations and networks, which is its main limit. To gain new insights into this process, it is necessary to go into the micro space of the ground and observe specific local networks of PVE programs to map the relationships, conflicts, frames, and actual interfaces operating in such environments.

Despite the challenges and complexities of collaboration in the field of PVE, there are nevertheless examples that demonstrate its potential for positive impact. Experiences from

various countries, including successful multi-agency models, highlight that collaboration can lead to improved prevention efforts and more comprehensive approaches to countering violent extremism. By leveraging the strengths and expertise of diverse actors, such as law enforcement, social welfare agencies, and community-based organizations, collaborative initiatives can show promising results in improving information sharing, mobilizing resources, and developing effective intervention strategies. These success stories underscore the transformative power of collaboration, demonstrating that when actors come together, share common goals, and build trust, they can create synergies and achieve greater collective impact in preventing violent extremism.

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