European Practice Exchange:

Review and Evaluation

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1. Introduction

1.1. European Practice Exchange (EPEX)

This paper is an interim review of the European Practice Exchange (EPEX). The EPEX is a knowledge exchange programme that links first-line practitioners who deliver interventions in the field of radicalisation. The aim of the network is to help practitioners develop good practice based on concrete examples of de-radicalisation. To achieve this aim, Violence Prevention Network (VPN), Germany and The RecoRa Institute (RecoRa), United Kingdom have established a network of 14 organisations from 11 countries with a dedicated programme of activities. The project is funded by the Open Society Foundation, the King Baudouin Foundation, the Robert Bosch Foundation and the Fritt Ord Foundation and is hosted by the Network of European Foundations (NEF).

1.2. The project's aims and activities

There are already several existing networks that connect practitioners working on radicalisation such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), but the participants often represent government bodies or are linked to public agencies. They can involve a large number of actors who work several steps removed from the experiences of first-line practitioners. In contrast, EPEX aims to exclusively link organisations that work directly with: groups identified to be vulnerable to or at risk of radicalisation, the families or close social networks of individuals who are radicalised or are foreign fighters/returnees, and returnees/individuals convicted of offences related to violent extremism in prisons or closed environments. In practice, many of the organisations involved work with one or more of these groups.

For the founders, the network aims to amplify the voice of first-line practitioners which they identify as an untapped resource within communities, and to make this more visible to mainstream society. The exchange provides opportunities for first-line practitioners from different countries and perspectives to *'exchange experiences and discuss questions from practice and to further develop their methodologies'.*[1] The project aims to develop good practice that is grounded in

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[1] EPEX proposal update of march 2016

concrete examples of de-radicalisation, in contrast to theory-driven learning. As one of the organisers described, their intention is to *'bring the process of developing good practice as close to the ground as possible'* (Int14)[2], to see if the outcome differs from the agenda as shaped by academics and policymakers. To do this, the network gives first-line practitioners the chance to directly observe and discuss each other's working practice through job-shadowing visits.

The project will achieve these aims by a systematic programme of activities spread over 3 years. Beyond the first year, the schedule is provisional dependent on funding and how the form and content of the exchange is shaped by its members. In year one, the following activities took place:

1. Two plenary meetings held in Berlin: a kick-off event on the 14-15th April 2016 with a second plenary towards the end of the project's first year (5th-6th December).
2. Four job-shadowing visits happened (out of 6-8 which were planned for the first two years).

   If the project is continued, these activities will take place in year 2 + 3:

3. Around 2-3 small group developmental meetings.
4. A Publication reporting the knowledge gained through the exchange.

2. The evaluation

2.1. Approach

This report provides a robust, transparent and systematic review of the project's activities up to the present (30/12/2016). For funders and the organisers, the report gives an objective assessment of how the project's activities have contributed towards its outcomes and aims. As this is an interim evaluation conducted over the first year, expectations on how far these outcomes have

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[2] For this evaluation report, 28 interviews have been carried out (not transcribed but documented as audios), which are quoted throughout this report

been reached must be limited[3]. As a result, the report evaluates the logic that links the project's activities to the intended outcomes and aims. It assesses the extent EPEX has provided opportunities for participating organisations to *exchange* experiences and *reflect* on theirs and other's working practice. As these are the principle outcomes by which the exchange's aims will be realised. The report also offers some suggestions for the future structure of the exchange. The framework of the report is represented in figure 1, which sets out how the different activities relate to the exchange's outcomes, and the objectives of the evaluation.

As important, the intention is also to hold up a mirror to participants to reflect on their involvement. The report hopes to act as a catalyst to encourage the participants to think through and take ownership of the process through which shared learning can be turned into good practice. The chief value of the project is that it potentially offers an effective model of how to accomplish this process, and is the core task for the exchange's members if the project is extended. Part of this process is the development of signposts or indicators by which we can recognise and judge the effectiveness of good practice. The report aims to support practitioners to achieve this, by providing enough distance from the project to identify some shared ingredients, common to the practices of network members.

Figure 1. Evaluation Framework

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[3] The project has interim funding till the 31/12/2016 and the presentation of the evaluation to funders. It is proposed that the project is extended for a further 2 years.
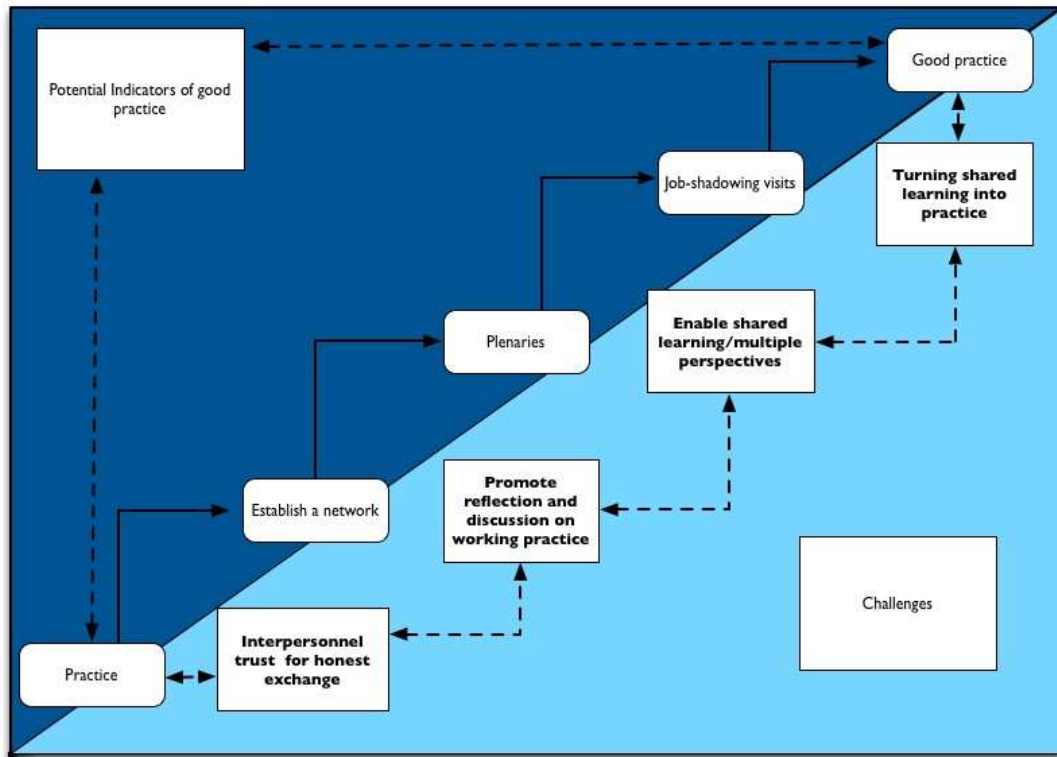
2.2. Structure

Section 2 of this review briefly sets out the methods that the evaluation uses. Section 3 gives an overview of the participants and explores the fit between the network's members and the project's aims. Section 4 explores the contribution that the project's activities have made to its short- and mid-term outcomes through four main themes that have emerged from the data. The final section summarises the findings and offers some suggestions for the direction of the exchange. As well as offering some recommendations, the conclusion raises a series of points to help participants think through their involvement in the network and shape its future direction.

2.3. Method

Dr Gareth Harris, an independent and external researcher has carried out this evaluation (see authors details). The evaluation uses three methods of data collection:

a) Review of the project's documentation including the project proposal, feedback sheets and reports following the project's activities.
b) Interviews with the project's participants before and after the job-shadowing visits.
c) Structured overt observation of two of the job-shadowing visits and both plenaries.

As an aim of this report is to encourage reflexivity among all participants in the project (including the funders and founders as well as participants), the review has tried to reflect the participants' own experiences and understanding of events while maintaining enough objective distance to identify commonalities between the network members and their practice.

28 interviews were carried out with participants, 17 were carried out prior to the job shadowing visits, and 11 after to capture the participants' experiences of the visits. Interviews were carried out primarily by skype or telephone. As the research team is UK-based, 5 interviews with UK based participants were carried out face-to-face. All interviews were recorded but due to budget were not transcribed.

The researcher also observed two job-shadowing visits: the first in Groningen, between the Revive (UK) hosted by MJD Social and Legal services (Netherlands), and the second in Luton hosted Stand UP Luton for the Extremism Information Centre (Austria) and Violence Prevention Network Denmark. The researcher also observed two plenary sessions of the EPEX network in Berlin; a kick-off event on 14/15th April 2016, and a second plenary on the 5th/6th December 2016. At the second plenary, the interim findings were presented to the network to incorporate a participatory element to the evaluation. The feedback from the structured discussion that followed is written into the report. The presentation slides are included in the appendix.

In addition to the interviews and observations, the researcher had access to reports and evaluation sheets that were sent to participants before and after their job-shadowing visits. These texts combined with field notes taken during the observations and interview data were subject to thematic analysis. Initial broad brush codes were developed from the background literature and text was coded under these themes. These themes are discussed in section 4.

3. The participants

3.1. Guiding criteria

The impetus to establish the EPEX came from the founders' participation in networks such as the RAN (Radicalisation Awareness Network) and ENoD (European Network of Deradicalisation) [4] , and experiences from a job shadowing visit to RecoRa by VPN staff. Although it was recognised that networks such as the RAN were effective in bringing organisations together who worked around de-radicalisation, they often involved different stakeholders, such as researchers and academics as well as state agencies working at the policy or strategic level, and could not focus solely on the concerns of grassroots or first-line practitioners. To address this gap, the criteria for participants for the EPEX is targeted at first-line practitioners from established NGOs as well as grassroots organisations who work directly with the following groups in primary, secondary or tertiary interventions. These groups are:

a) Primary: Target groups within communities considered to be vulnerable to the risk of radicalisation.
b) Secondary: The families and relatives of radicalised individuals or foreign fighters.
c) Tertiary: Radicalised individuals or foreign fighters in prisons or closed environments

The project brought together 14 organisations from 11 European countries with 2 organisations from Tunisia.[5] The participants are set out in table 1 outlining their work areas, the stage of development and the interventions they work on.[6] The understanding of de-radicalisation as a linked process with different points of intervention (and different ways to frame them) is reinforced by several participants.[7] One described the process of de-radicalisation as three links in a chain,

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[4] A former networking project of VPN that is not active anymore (www.enod.eu)
[5] Tunisia is not in Europe but it is the largest per capita contributor source country for foreign fighters in Syria and has large diaspora populations in some European countries, notably France.
[6] Many of the organisations deliver more than one type of intervention.
[7] This understanding of de-radicalisation as a series of linked interventions does not imply that radicalisation is linear.

'How do you prevent people from becoming radicalised or involved in violent extremism, then once you become engaged how do you actually deal with them within their homes or within prisons, how do you manage them and re-integrate them?' (Int08)

The understanding of how different interventions are linked is important. As the exchange's members work on a range of interventions, they need to have enough in common to enable shared learning. Whatever their differences, all participants appeared to share this understanding of de-radicalisation as a linked process and understood where their work was located within it. The tension between diversity and the ability to learn from each other is discussed in more detail in section 4.4.

It is clear that in practice, the criteria for participants had to be refined as the project developed. As the project's organisers acknowledged, the process of putting together a pool of participating organisations was more problematic than originally envisaged. Several organisations who were approached to become involved in the exchange were reluctant due to concerns over confidentiality, or because their projects were at too early a stage of development.

As table 1 shows, the exchange has brought together a diverse but representative group of participants. Nine organisations deliver work with target groups deemed to be vulnerable to the risk of radicalisation in primary interventions, 9 work with the families or relatives of radicalised individuals in secondary interventions, and 7 work with both groups. The remaining 6 work with returnees or radicalised individuals in prisons or closed environments. VPN and BRAVVO are the only two organisations currently delivering all 3 types of intervention. It is worth noting when thinking about engagement and ambitions to work in other areas, that for the organisations working in more than one intervention, the group in common is the families and relatives of either returnees or those who are vulnerable in the community.

Table 1: Overview of EPEX participants

Organisation/Country	Stage of development	Work area	Intervention-Target group	Methods
Austrian Extremism Information Centre	Established in 2014	Counselling/training provider	Primary/secondary-vulnerable youth and families/relatives	Counselling/training-multi-disciplinary approach
BRAVVO (Belgium)	Has been working on preventing violent extremism since 2012	Coordination of strategic response to radicalisation/managing risk with radicalised individuals and prevention of recruitment	Primary/secondary/tertiary-vulnerable communities and families	Situational analysis/training/support to individuals and families/mentoring
Premier centre de prévention, d'insertion et de citoyenneté (France)	New project	Radicalised youth in secure and closed environment	Tertiary-individuals referred to centre due to concerns over radicalisation	Counselling from psychotherapeutic perspective
Directorate of Norwegian Correctional Services	New project (under established organisation)	Mentoring programme in prison	Tertiary-works directly in prisons with convicted returnees	Mentoring/training
Kosovan Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)	New project within research organisation established in 2008	Engagement of citizens in preventing violent extremism	Primary/tertiary (unstructured)-raising awareness of extremism/radicalisation among citizens (some work with students)	Citizen engagement with roundtables-some initial direct contact with extremists
MJD Social and Legal Services Groningen (Netherlands)	Large organisation established for over 20 years	Integration of marginalised groups and prevention of polarisation between communities	Primary- communities with poor integration outcomes (Somali community)	Mentoring/practical support around integration, legal status, employment and housing
Rescue Association of Tunisians Trapped Abroad (RATTA)	New project	Provides support to families and relatives of foreign fighters and broader	Secondary-families and relatives of foreign fighters	Embedded community work

		community/helping foreign fighters to return		
The RecoRa Institute (United Kingdom)	Established	Mentoring and training of community activists and families to build self-sustaining community networks to challenge extremism	Primary/secondary	Mentoring/training and mediation-brokers between community organisations and public bodies
Revive UK (United Kingdom)	New project	Parenting/well-being	Secondary-works with Somali families and relatives	Face-to-face work in parenting workshops/training courses
Stand Up Luton (SUL) (United Kingdom)	New project established in 2016	Network of community activists who work together to challenge extremists and street violence within their communities	Primary/secondary	Mentoring/providing grassroots activities for vulnerable youth/production of newspaper promoting positive messaging
TSG Security and Intelligence consultants/Step In, Step Out (SISO) (United Kingdom)[8]	New project within organisation established in 2009	Works directly with families who have been affected by the involvement of relatives in extremist groups in Western Sahel	Primary/secondary	Brokering and negotiation for people to leave extremist groups/some direct work with extremists
Violence Prevention Network (VPN) (Germany)	Advice Centre Hesse of VPN	Provides prevention/ counselling in prisons/support for families and relatives of extremists/disengagement assistance for radicalised people, returnees	Primary/secondary/tertiary	Face-to-face work, mentoring, training and counselling of relatives and family members

[8] SISO is a separate organisation that is part of TSG Security and Intelligence Consultants

Violence Prevention Network Denmark	New project in development with VPN	Direct work with convicted returnees and extremists in de-radicalisation process	Tertiary	Counselling/psycho-therapeutic perspective
Eyra Jyrad (participant, Tunisia)	Has been involved in United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project but is now active on a voluntary basis	Community dialogue projects in affected areas (Ben Guerden and Bizerte)	Primary/secondary	Advocacy, awareness campaigns and promotion of community dialogue

Although the participants come from a range of countries, the United Kingdom is over represented. This reflects the relatively long history of work around radicalisation in the UK, compared to countries such as Belgium or France, and the emphasis on community-led responses to radicalisation in the UK. It is notable that the UK participants (RecoRa, Revive UK, Stand Up Luton) are embedded in the community in a way that is unmatched by many other participants (apart from Tunisia). As one of the UK participants noted at the kick-off event, *'we are not first-line practitioners, we are the first line'* (Int15). They are also often run on a voluntary or semi-professional basis and not linked into formal networks or public bodies unlike some of the other organisations involved.

A related point is how different national institutional and cultural contexts have affected the choice of participants. In practice, this meant that not all the participants represent NGOs or community groups. For example, the Norwegian prison mentoring project is delivered by the Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Services, MJD Social and Legal services and BRAVVO work with or are part of local municipalities. In Scandinavia and countries such as the Netherlands, participants felt there was a higher level of trust and respect in public institutions. So, links between civil society and public bodies are not as problematic in terms of credibility and trust than in the UK, where the policy agenda around radicalisation has engendered considerable levels of mistrust between particularly Muslim communities and public bodies.[9] However, as participants pointed out, even in countries where people generally look favourably on public institutions this is an agenda within which there are high levels of distrust towards state actors.

Although it is primarily a European network, an unexpected benefit of the exchange is its potential reach beyond Europe. As well as the involvement of 2 participants from Tunisia, other organisations also have links that extend to the Western Sahel (TSG, SISO) and Somalia (Revive). This is a major strength, as it is

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[9] This maybe the case in other countries such as France, Belgium and Kosovo for a variety of reasons. However, the UK is unusual as the 'Prevent' policy response to radicalisation has generated a vociferous anti-Prevent lobby. For example, see https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/apr/21/government-prevent-strategy-promoting-extremism-maina-kiai or in section 3, Radicalisation, the Counter-narrative and the Tipping Point at
http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmhaff/135/13502.htm

important to recognise that radicalisation and violent extremism is a global phenomenon that stretches across continents, as one of the participants stated, *'everyone's bed is on fire'* (Int08). As well as bringing non-European perspectives to the project, several participants stated that to deal effectively with radicalisation, we have to look at diaspora communities in Europe and points of origin. The potential exists to develop co-ordinated responses to radicalisation in and beyond Europe. There was also considerable interest among a sub-group of the network in convening future non-European hubs, such as an Arab, Balkan or African hub based on the model of EPEX. One member has already started this process by convening an Interpol network with a focus on Africa. The exchange has the potential to be an effective model for non-European hubs on radicalisation as well as a mechanism to develop good practice.

4. The Themes

Rather than offer a simple description of the exchange's activities, this section discusses the project's activities and how they have contributed to the projects outcomes through four themes/frames which emerged from the data. The intent is to offer both an assessment of the exchange, and a framework for the members to think through how best to take ownership of the network.

4.1. Self-reflexivity

One of the key themes is the need for practitioners to be reflective in their working practice. How we discuss radicalisation and how practitioners situate themselves to the debate has a direct impact on practice. It is clear from the interviews and discussions with participants that a plethora of terms is used to describe their work: Countering violent extremism, countering radicalisation, violent radicalisation, de-radicalisation, rehabilitation and re-integration and so on. Network members saw the exchange as an opportunity, to reflect on their working practice and to reshape the agenda around radicalisation from a practitioner perspective, rather than dictated by policymakers or academics.

This is not simply an academic debate, although as one participant put it, you can argue about definitions but in practice, *'a bad idea is simply a bad idea'*

(Int14). How practitioners define the objective of their work; i.e. de-radicalisation, re-integration, is linked to how we judge the effectiveness of interventions, which in turn provides a benchmark to determine good practice. If the objective is countering violent radicalisation, is it enough that the concerned individual turns away from direct violence? Is the intervention simply aimed at disengagement from radical groups or re-integration back into society? These questions need to be addressed to allow us to judge what is a good/effective method, and from there develop good practice.

These are issues that members discussed in depth at the plenaries. For many, there was no fixed answer or single standard but the effectiveness of a method depends on the wider environment and type of intervention. How we judge practice has to be contingent on context. The job-shadowing visits are well placed to address this, as part of their value to practitioners is to improve their understanding of how radicalisation is related to context. As one commented on their visit, *'it really helped me to understand how the wider environment affected radicalisation'* (Int03). The value of the job shadowing visits is that they offered them the chance to see practice that was grounded in the wider environment, whether local or national. This is a direct contrast to learning from the conventional conference style setting where good practice can be presented but is disembedded from its context.

On one hand, for practitioners involved in delivering tertiary interventions in prison the object of the intervention is clear, an individual who has been sufficiently radicalised to travel to conflict zones, or commit terrorism-related offences. While, for those who are working on primary interventions with groups who are perceived to be at risk of radicalisation, this is more problematic. How do we identify such groups without, *'instrumentalising communities or cultures'* (Int05) and potentially contributing to an environment that is conducive to radicalisation, i.e. increasing the marginalisation and stigmatisation of communities? One guide to method that appears to be prominent in many of the participant's approaches is to avoid pathologising culture, culture in this sense being mainly Islam (but can also be ethnic) as a causal driver of radicalisation.

The point about the instrumentalisation of communities, especially regarding primary interventions is crucial, and a potential indication of good practice. There was a strong message from several participants, that the best way to build

resilience and reduce vulnerability to extremism in communities lies in enabling them to become *'the subjects of communication rather than objects of intervention'* (Int05). In other words, the aim of intervention is to enable self-help and change rather than acting on and doing to people. This is equally true of individuals as much as groups. An example is Stand Up Luton's publication of a local newspaper that offers a positive alternative view of their town. This is a case of the community offering an alternative (rather than counter) narrative to those that are employed by extremists. The implication of not instrumentalising people is to recognise them as active agents - people have agency in a positive as well as a negative way - as one participant cautioned, *'we have to remember we are working with people not eggs, the people we work with interact'* (Int06). There was agreement among the group that effectiveness of an intervention depended on the extent it enabled people to change themselves and their environments rather than change them.

One thing that comes out of the data, is that if the objective is to refine and develop working practice then it is important to also have the space to be reflexive in how practitioners work, and this is an ongoing process. In this respect, practitioners felt that EPEX offers a valuable resource. The plenaries allowed practitioners the space to discuss and reflect on practice in a way that they did not have the time or distance from their daily work. The experience of being able to meet with their peers and discuss practice in detail encouraged them to look at their work from multiple perspectives. While the chance to compare practice with others allows them to look at their own work afresh.

In several sessions, the need for participants to reflect on issues around gender and intersectionality (how it crosscut with race and class) came up and how it impacted on their working practice. As one participant said, *'I like projects that work with youth around football and teach them martial arts, but why is always about teaching them to fight, why not get them to think about what it means to be a man and violence, why not teach them to run away'* (Int05). As another stressed, the role of women was also *'a hidden issue'* in the discussion of radicalisation. Others mentioned that the role of women in radicalisation both in a positive (as agents of change) and negative roles (as agents of radicalisation) was something that they were aware of but had little knowledge of how to approach in practice. There was a strong interest among the group on approaches which focused on the role of women and gender. This is a key area where members who are experienced in working around gender could

support less-experienced members. The job-shadowing visits are a key tool; to match synergies such as these between needs and skills/knowledge, to expose members to working practice that addresses these issues, and to encourage them to reflect on the impact of these issues on their work.

4.2. Networks and relationships

The project aims to encourage knowledge exchange between practitioners. A first step is to establish a practitioner network. The plenaries and the visits have provided opportunities to introduce the participants to each other's work, promoted interpersonal trust, and planted the seeds for stable working relationships. Although it is unclear how far this has stabilised into a more formal and sustainable network, there is a clear and strong group dynamic.

Several participants have had informal and continued contact after the kick-off event. When this has been frequent, it has occurred through a natural affinity between participants, i.e. a personality match, or when there has been a clearly identified need. For example, regular contact was made between two participants when specific advice was needed on how to encourage participation from women in de-radicalisation projects. Another strong bond was formed between participants when advice was needed on how to engage with a specific community that one of the participants had worked with extensively.

8 participants had experience of belonging to other networks, in particular the RAN but also Women without Borders, FATE (Families against Terrorism and Extremism) and ENoD. Members belonging to other networks felt that the EPEX was offering something significantly different. An interviewee stated, *'that they found the plenary allowed deeper dialogue and less superficial than the usual conference setting'* (Int03). The fact that the plenaries had a mix of formal and informal activities was perceived by many to have promoted this, *'what was different about the network was that it felt that the organisers had thought about the group rather than the meeting. We are the project and there is an evolution with the others.'* (Int01). Many felt that the structure of the plenaries with practical work, discussions and less emphasis on formal conference-style presentations facilitated the feeling that people were part of a group with shared objectives. The small group work was found to be especially useful in

introducing the members to each other's work. Some would have liked more time to be allocated to this.

In addition to EPEX activities, some interviewees discussed the possibility of setting up an online website or forum. The general impression given was that this would be of limited use, as participants are short on time and already involved in several forums that they do not regularly use. One pointed out that people will use online resources in response to a specific need, or when it relies on communication that the participants already use. However, there was widespread support to set up an online platform to host a directory of network members with a personal brief of methods or approaches they were skilled in. The platform would help members to *'know exactly who is doing what?'* (Int06) and provide a go-to resource when members were faced with a specific need or challenge. A participant described this, *'as a platform for collaboration'* (Int06). For example, if A wanted to use counselling approach with young people, then they could go on the platform and directly contact B who they can see has extensive experience of youth counselling. The platform would allow network members to match needs to skills in a way that facilitated members to take ownership of the network without relying on the organisers. The platform could also be used to systematically disseminate documentation, information and updates about good practice.

On the question whether the network has become stable, it is too early to tell. Especially for those directly involved in the job-shadowing visits, there is evidence that strong bonds have started to cement between participants. Unsurprisingly, stronger relationships between participants are promoted by direct contact and time spent together. This should be borne in mind when considering whether the job shadowing visits should involve multiple visitors or be one-on-one. Job-shadowing visits between multiple participants increase the range of interaction but this needs to be balanced against lessening the opportunity for in-depth discussion of methods. As all participants stated, for a network to stabilise it takes time and preferably as much direct contact as possible.

One thing that become immediately apparent was that participants welcomed the opportunity to meet other practitioners and found it deeply inspiring. There was a remarkably strong group dynamic for the short amount of time the network members have spent together. This is partly explained by the strength

of emotional bonds and should be considered if the network is to be extended. As one participant described how he felt on meeting people at the plenary, *'On human level, you see, I think it is a good thing that as a person and as a practitioner to see that there are other people in the world that care. I think this is a really big thing to see people who care, who not only talk about it or write articles about it but also care by working practitionerly on it.'* (Int07)

This affective component to the network and emotional benefit to participants must not be understated. As many of the participants stated, it is a demanding area to work in, within a hostile social and political context, as a member said, *'it's hard to get funding to work with violent offenders'* (Int04). The level of hostility varies across countries but in the current political climate is likely to increase. It is important that practitioners feel supported in their work and that they are aware that there are other people out there who care deeply about de-radicalisation, and that they are in contact with them. As one participant stated, *'I felt like I was in a community of care'* (Int07).

Figure 2: Network members at the kick-off event in Berlin

What is striking from the observations and interviews is the amount of passion and energy that practitioners convey when they talk about their work and that this is true, whether they work in large public bodies or small grassroots

organisations. Again, this may indicate how to promote effective engagement between first-line practitioners and their clients many of whom are inherently suspicious of public bodies. Passion for this work brings energy and energetic people do things, and can effectively engage people even if they are initially suspicious of their intentions. Several of the participants expressed considerable scepticism to the effectiveness and intentions of what has become a *'de-radicalisation industry'* (Int05) within which the role can be more important than the person.

A related point is the importance of personalisation in the members' approaches. The conventional approach to practice is to maintain an objective and emotional distance from the groups you work with. Whereas many network members emphasised that their capacity to use personal stories and experiences, to be reflexive about how they situate themselves to radicalisation, and show commitment to the people they work with is key to successful engagement. This is also echoed in the use of mentoring/role models as an approach that is shared by many of the practitioners in the group. This is particularly important for the larger-scale organisations where links to state apparatus can create issues around trust with the groups they engage. MJD Social and Legal Services, Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Service, and VPN all use mentors/role models who are recruited externally from civil society to ensure credibility and engagement with target groups. In this way, they are able to circumvent potential issues of trust and credibility that result from being perceived to be complicit with state apparatus. What was less clear, is what qualities make a good or effective mentor with disagreement within the group over the importance of shared culture/religion. Despite these differences, there was a shared approach, which stressed the qualities of people as more important than roles or organisations.

4.3. Shared learning

One of the network's outcomes is to facilitate shared learning. To enable this, participants need to have common purpose and objectives, to trust each other enough to share their working practice in an open and honest way, and are able to move beyond discussion of *what* practitioners do to an understanding of *how* they do things in practice.

As discussed, the plenaries and job visits have helped to create a strong group dynamic. One element that encourages this apart from emotional bonds is a sense of shared purpose. Participants demonstrated a clear idea of the project's short-term and interim outcomes. As described by one, *'the main goal is to share information and ideas to develop ideas that are based in practice'* (Int08). Although the network involves a range of actors, their expectations of what they can gain from their involvement is broadly the same, the chance to compare and learn from people's experiences in other countries *'to see how practitioners deal with the issue in other countries and how they discuss radicalisation'* (Int03).

What was the value of this to practitioners? It exposes you to approaches that you might not be familiar with and, *'it allows you to appreciate contextual differences, the local settings, political structures and how they affect different approaches. How other countries deal with these challenges teaches something about context'* (Int04). Similar to how practitioners can benefit from situating themselves in regard to radicalisation, a contextual approach also emphasises, *'that radicalisation is a social phenomenon and needs to be understood in its social context'* (Int08). As discussed earlier (see section 4.1.), what good practice looks like and the effectiveness of methods and approaches is highly dependent on context, both local and national. Highlighting this, some organisations who are operating within countries with little or no formal institutional support, had more immediate needs than the exchange of information. Some of these needs are within the capacity of the network to address, such as networking opportunities. Others in terms of basic support, office space, etc., maybe best addressed by other projects, but even these can be facilitated or signposted by network members. An example has been the signposting of the network organisation to officials in its national government by a network member.

All participants felt that the plenaries were an effective way of introducing them to each other's working practice, *'the basics of getting to know each other'* and creating the interpersonal trust that is an essential step in encouraging people to share, sometimes sensitive, information. As several people stressed, to develop good practice it is important not only to see what people do well, i.e., *'putting out your best china when your aunt comes around for tea'* (Int14) but also what has gone wrong. Consequently, it is important that participants felt comfortable enough with each other to discuss projects or initiatives that had stalled or not worked. As one participant said about conventional conference style events, *'you have to be careful with letting people see what you have done*

wrong but I'm pretty sure you can't get really good at doing what you do without making mistakes' (Int04).

The opportunity to hear of methods or approaches that other people have tried and not worked offers a *'shortcut'* to practitioners which means they do not repeat the same mistakes, i.e. cumulative learning. As a participant said, *'what they hoped to gain out of the project'* was *'to avoid duplicating other people's mistakes and replicating work that has already been done'*. This is important as *'it cuts short the journey that people have to make in new projects'* (Int08). Here is another indication of good practice, the freedom for practitioners to take risks, to get things wrong and learn from their mistakes. In this sense, the exchange has encouraged cumulative as well as shared learning. To be allowed to get things wrong points to the need to take risks. This can also extend to how to engage effectively with people, one practitioner described how their organisation had built up trust with individuals by allowing people who had been involved in anti-social behaviour to take the lead in running football programmes, *'sometimes you have to take a little risk to build up trust'* (Int11). In this example, risk taking is part of what can build successful engagement.

The trust between participants at the plenaries facilitated by strong sense of group belonging was felt to bring a real advantage. People were willing to discuss their practice openly and honestly without being judged or disadvantaging themselves in competition for funding (as many felt they would if the network was within a single country), or opening themselves up to criticism.

Participants demonstrated a good awareness of and commitment to the exchange's long-term aim of developing good practice through comparison of each other's working practice. But were less sure of the best ways to achieve this, and how to capture any learning in a joint publication. Before the second plenary, none of the participants talked about this as a benefit or future output. It is recognised that this is to be expected given the project's extension is conditional on funding. At the second plenary the intention to publish was discussed. Initial discussions among the group focused on potential content. The consensus was that the publication would be of most use to practitioners as a handbook of case studies with concrete examples of practice and could be used to showcase their most effective projects/methods. How this is to be achieved is something that needs to be explored more systematically by the

group. It is recommended this is done by the group as soon as possible, so that the process of putting a publication together is foregrounded in peoples' minds and fully co-produced by the group. The production of a tangible and concrete output could be one concrete way to stabilise the network beyond the duration of the EPEX.

As with the short and mid-term outcomes, participants were very clear on the purpose of the shadowing visits, as one interviewee said that they understood the purpose of the visit as, *'to really understand the area we are dealing with and by actually visiting other areas/practitioners who are working on these issues, what that gives us is a different perspective on what they are dealing with on the ground and how do we learn directly from their work. It's as straightforward as that.'* (Int08)

Interviews were held with all participants prior to the job-shadowing visits, and after with visitors and hosts. It is too simplistic to attribute any impact on practice directly to the visits; they certainly inspired people to think about different ways of doing things but how this is translated into practice needs to be evaluated over the long-term. However, an immediate advantage of the visits was that they brought multiple perspectives to bear on the same problem. Both by exposing participants to different approaches to radicalisation from other countries but also from bringing different disciplinary perspectives together. Within the group, there was a wide range of perspectives approaches, and skills, such as psychological, counselling to more theological approaches. The diversity of approaches that the network brings together should be seen as a major strength, although thought needs to be given to how best to exploit this.

Certainly, the job-shadowing visits offered guests insights and new perspectives into how the hosts went about their working practice. Feedback from the job-shadowing visits were overwhelmingly positive, although the largest learning gains generally were felt by the visitors. Guests were able to see different methods of working with which they had no experience, such as the rough and tumble of holding community meetings on radicalisation in largely hostile environments. Visitors said they had a chance to appreciate how contextual differences affected the types of approaches that could be used in de-radicalisation programmes, for example, how attitudes towards offenders in the penal system varied across countries and how this links to practice. Visitors also

reported how the visits exposed them to ways of working that were unfamiliar to them but complementary to their existing working practice. On one visit, the visitor who had experience of parenting work with mothers learnt about methods that engaged fathers and their children, a target group they wished to work with in future.

While visitors gained the chance to see different approaches to radicalisation that are contextualised and grounded in practice, the gains were not entirely one-sided. For example, by showing their work to others, the hosts in job-shadowing visits were made to reflect on how they work. As a host described, *'the positive feedback from visitors on a job exchange confirmed the feeling we were on the right track with what we do'* (Int09). There was also evidence that the learning from the visits was disseminated further within the organisations that the participants represented. Most visitors reported that they fed back insights in the form of seminars, presentations and short briefings to colleagues within their respective organisations.

Figure 3: Job-shadowing visit to Oslo

However, the general impression from the hosts was that the job-shadowing visits allowed participants to '*get an idea of what each other do but not how they do it'* (Int04). There were practical reasons for this that are discussed later, but there is a challenge about how best to enable shared learning that fully benefits hosts and visitors, and how to turn that into good practice. Part of the answer is simply time, but the issue remains on how to promote more in-depth discussion of approaches.

From the interviews and observation of two visits, one way to make the process more efficient is for visitors to prepare more systematically in advance with as much background research as possible. Several participants suggested short briefs giving an overview of the hosts and visitors work would have been useful. In this respect, the suggestion to have a simple online platform would also facilitate more detailed discussion of methods (see section 4.2.). For example, on one visit the hosts and other visitors were given a presentation on how they went into schools to talk to educational staff about radicalisation. This offered a concrete insight into a participant's working practice and prompted in-depth discussion of methods. When asked about this the host said, that this came about because of previous communication between the participants. Another way to achieve more in-depth discussion is to offer a more focused and targeted programme. As one host put it when asked if they would do anything different in hindsight, *'more time, less ingredients'* (Int05).

A key outcome for the visits was to enable the participants to see each other's working practice and despite considerable difficulties, all the visitors felt that they got a good insight into the hosts' work. It must be recognised that to see day-to-day practice can be difficult when there are issues over shared language and security. But even for the prison group, visitors reported that they gained an insight into the host's working practice through visits to a halfway house and a maximum-security prison, although they could not speak directly with prisoners.

A suggestion that network members strongly supported was that future visits would benefit more from being more of an exchange rather than a shadowing visit. Although members acknowledged budgetary considerations, there was a strong preference for visits to be reciprocal to deepen working relationships and maximise learning outcomes for visitors and hosts. Discussions at the second plenary focused on ways to help members move from an understanding of what people do to fully understanding how they do it in practice. The suggestion from the group was to make future job-shadowing visits reciprocal, task-orientated and more of a collaborative enterprise between members.

As one participant said, '*they were tired of talking and as a group wanted to be doing*' (Int05). Collaboration could mean either *'appropriating a practice and applying it domestically'* or *'working jointly to develop an approach to intervention'* (Int06). If possible, it is recommended to build this approach into

future job exchanges especially when there is a specific and targeted need that can be matched between members. Moving from job-shadowing to reciprocal exchanges in which members were engaged in a collaborative approach dovetails with the wider emphasis within the network on leveraging learning that is grounded in practice.

What was particularly impressive in the discussion was that it demonstrated the ability of network members to discuss the issue in an in-depth way and to resolve it successfully as a group. The members as a group went from an initially polarised debate to a practical consensus in a measured and non-judgemental way. Two things were striking: how well the members functioned as a cohesive group, and that this is a group of people who are orientated to doing rather than talking.

4.4. Challenges and strengths

The network faced considerable logistical and practical issues. The flexibility to absorb these difficulties is a major strength of the network and testament to the organisers' hard work to resolve them. Beyond the logistical problems which are to be expected in this type of undertaking, the major challenges were how to match participants on job-shadowing visits, and how to manage the balance between the diversity of participants with creating enough common ground to share knowledge and compare practice.

Particularly in the organisations of the job-shadowing visits there were unforeseen difficulties. Two participants could not go on their scheduled visit because of illness[10], one could not obtain a visa and the location of another visit had to be changed. On the whole, the capacity of the network to absorb changes, even at short notice, meant these had a negligible impact on the visits. The involvement of VPN and RecoRa as organisers meant that there was a sufficient range of options available to re-arrange visits. For the 2 visitors who were not able to make their visits in 2016, the opportunity may arise during 2017.

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[10] One of those participants was able to join a later visit.

Other barriers to the capacity of the project's activities to enable shared learning are broadly linked to resources. First, language and how it can impede the ability of the participants to understand and discuss each other's working practice in depth. The plenaries were conducted in English and there was little feedback from the interviews that participants found this a major problem. However, there was data to suggest that this was more problematic on the job-shadowing visits; that language difficulties made it harder to discuss approaches to radicalisation in detail. For hosts, this also means that it is not always possible to show their normal working practice. As one host described, *'I could show a normal team meeting but since they are in French and my visitors don't speak French, then it wouldn't have been any use to them'* (Int04). There is an obvious point to be made that shared language needs to be considered when matching participants for visits.

A broader point is that it is not always straightforward to show your working practice to visitors. One participant pointed out when they observed the day-to-day running of a day centre, *'they were so busy dealing with people's needs, like sorting immigration papers for their son, that it isn't really possible to talk about things'* (Int10). The ambition is to allow visitors a snapshot of the host's working practice but feedback from hosts suggests that this needs to be balanced against putting on some sort of special programme. This is especially true for those working in secure environments where access and security is an issue.

The amount of time spent together at plenaries and visits was also an issue. Several participants felt that the plenaries were too short with too little time spent on small group work. This was largely due to people's travel, with people arriving late and leaving early to catch flights. In future, it would be beneficial to meet the cost of the members' accommodation to arrive the day before. The expense would be offset by the benefit of having two full days of plenary sessions with the full engagement of participants. It is noted that there are no plenaries planned if the exchange continues. Members were not aware of this and assumed that there would be continued opportunities to meet as a whole group. It is strongly recommended that if funding is available, there should be future opportunities to meet as a group. As stated earlier, this is an exchange with a strong group dynamic that is task-orientated; future plenaries can capitalise on this. A suggestion from members was that plenaries could also be more pragmatic focusing on specific case studies and hosted by partner

organisations rather than VPN. Although for many participants, capacity would need to be considered.

However, the majority of participants felt the time spent on visits was sufficient to gain insight into working practice. For hosts, the general feedback was that longer than two days takes too much out of their time. This reinforces the point that the job-shadowing visits do mean that the hosts do something different from their normal day-to-day work. It is acknowledged that the amount of time spent on visits will need to be revised if the suggestion to move to more collaborative exchanges is followed.

Where time has also been an issue for participants is in the return of documentation, such as evaluation sheets prior to and after visits. The group needs to explore ways that this can be made easier for them to carry out. Reflecting on this at the second plenary, it was clear that members were unsure what they were being asked, and that they felt it was too much for them to do. This can be resolved by some clarity and simplification of what members are being asked to do.

Beyond the logistical difficulties, there are two deeper but interlinked issues that pose questions for the network: What is the best way to match participants for job-shadowing visits? And, how does the diversity of the group effect the capacity of participants to learn from each other?

It was apparent from the organisers' experiences of setting up the visits, that the most contentious part of the project is matching hosts and participants for visits and how it affects learning outcomes. The original intention at the first plenary was to break participants into thematic groups based on the interventions outlined in section 3.1. Then participants would be matched for visits within those groups, so they shared a work activity from which to compare working practice, and might be able to discuss methodology in more detail.

It quite quickly became apparent that this was not going to work as planned. Understandably, participants gravitated to groups who were delivering interventions that they had ambitions to work on in future. One participant who worked with families and relatives was drawn to the prison group, as they wished to learn about a method, which united family members with returnees

in prison. Several of the groups had cross-cutting themes, and could belong to more than one group.

There was a distinct practitioner preference to be matched with the more community orientated organisations/networks/groups. One participant who delivered tertiary interventions said that she initially wanted to be matched with the prison group but felt, *'that they could often have these sort of visits, and they could learn more by looking at people who work with communities, to learn how people start getting radicalised at the start'* (Int03).[11]

On the question of how to best match participants within the network to maximise learning gains there is no easy answer. At this stage, the best learning outcomes are not necessarily produced by comparing the same-to-the-same. Two out of the four job shadowing visits were matched within the thematic groups and it was hard to distinguish any difference between them and those who were matched outside the thematic groups. This may become less of an issue if the group's recommendation is followed to make the job exchanges more of a collaborative exercise focusing on a specific task, and matched more on need against interest. To an extent, the difficulties experienced by the organisers in matching network members for visits should not be seen as a problem but an indication of the group's capacity and willingness to take ownership of the exchange. What was clearly demonstrated at the second plenary was the willingness of network members to take ownership of the exchange process, and to put the breadth of skills and talents that network members have into practice. As one member put it, *'to turn skills into tools'* (Int05).

5. Conclusion

The network members are broadly representative of the types of organisations and the interventions the founders wanted to include. Although it has not always been possible to only invite grassroots organisations or NGOs to participate. This is not critical, as large-scale organisations that have become involved in the exchange tend to either have enough credibility to work directly with the target groups or use mentors to act as bridges between the target

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[11] The use of 'they' here refers collectively to colleagues within the wider organisation.

groups and public institutions. Also, it is the qualities of the people rather than their roles or respective organisations that is important. Although any future expansion of the network should target grassroots groups as there is a clear practitioner preference. The decision to expand the network should also balance the gain of doing this against the strong group dynamic. An unexpected benefit is the potential of the network to have impact beyond Europe.

It is important to discuss radicalisation in a way that avoids instrumentalising or pathologising individuals/communities as the objects of interventions. For many, the very success of an intervention was based on reversing this relationship, *'turning communities from the objects of interventions into subjects of communication'* (Int05). A necessary step in developing good practice is to clarify how we discuss radicalisation as we need to agree on our aims before we can judge the value of a method. A core question for the network to address, is how do we know what we are doing is good and how do we recognise good practice? Part of the answer is an understanding of the relationship of context to practice which job-shadowing visits are well-placed to address. The plenaries have provided a valuable opportunity for members to find time and space to reflect on their work with the advantage of bringing multiple perspectives to bear on their working practice. While the job-shadowing visits add the value of exposing the social/political context in which practice is embedded.

The stability of the network cannot be forced but needs to develop organically. When the need arises, participants contact each other. What is clear that the participants warmly welcomed the opportunity to meet, and found the level of care and passion conveyed by participants deeply inspiring. It is recommended if possible the plenaries should be continued to build on this. The affective side of this should not be understated and should be considered when developing good practice, energetic people do things. While there was scepticism towards the need for discussion boards or similar online forum, there was a strong demand for an online platform that would host members' project briefs and skillsets, and provide a platform for future collaboration between members. It would also offer a more systematic dissemination of information, such as reports on good practice, latest developments, etc. This would help to encourage more detailed discussion of method.

The key short- and mid-term outcomes of the project have been communicated clearly and members have a good grasp of the benefits they can gain from their participation. Less clear was their understanding of how to achieve the long-term goals and outputs. This is to be expected due to the early stage of the project but needs to be foregrounded as soon as possible. Participants were very positive about the job-shadowing visits and gained valuable insights into approaches to de-radicalisation in other countries. The general impression is that people gained a good idea of what people did and their methods but more time needs to be devoted to fleshing this out in detail. From observation, more systematic preparation by visitors in the form of case studies would be one way to resolve this. From the group discussions, members believed the way to move through from what to how is to turn job-shadowing visits into exchanges, to make them more collaborative and orientated to a specific task.

There are inevitable logistical difficulties in an undertaking of this nature. What is important is the capacity of the network to work around them. The hard work of VPN and RecoRa, provided the flexibility to resolve them successfully. Language barriers and time were mentioned as the main barriers to effective shared learning. The division into thematic groups and the matching process were the most problematic part of the project's activities. This is partly linked to the diversity of the organisations involved and the overlap between thematic groups. At this stage, it does not appear to have negatively impacted on any knowledge gains. Again, this would be largely resolved if job exchanges are matched according to need against skills/knowledge.

The core problematic for the group is how to turn learning gains into good practice. This report cannot offer any hard and fast solutions, the direction and the structure of this process is one that has to be co-produced by the network. In this way, the exchange will develop practice that is fit for purpose. The core ingredients to resolve this lay in collaboration between network members that is task-orientated and in members taking ownership of the exchange. The evidence from the interviews and observations is that the groundwork for this to happen is firmly in place. What the report has done is to assess this foundation. The organisers can take credit for getting the network to this point. For the network to progress means not only that the members start to take more ownership of the exchange but also a recasting of the founders' roles from organisers to enablers. The implications of the latter need to be discussed between the founders and funders.

To answer what does good practice look like is not within the remit of the report. Although it is something that is inherently tied to evaluation, as a component of developing good practice is to be able to judge whether an intervention is effective or successful. What this report offers is a mirror for participants to reflect on their involvement, a catalyst for the group to arrive at some consensus over what might indicate good practice, and an understanding of the context that determines it.

However, the members' approaches do share some common ingredients. The evidence from this review offers some potential signposts to what might constitute good practice. These are: it is undertaken by passionate, caring and energetic individuals who bring that energy and commitment to the projects they work on and to the people they engage with. It allows practitioners the freedom to make mistakes, take risks and be honest about failure, so others do not duplicate their mistakes. It also allows them to be reflexive about their work, be open to insights from different perspectives, and take into account the wider social context of radicalisation. It avoids instrumentalising individuals, communities or cultures and has the long-term aim of enabling people to change themselves and their environments and not change them.

A final point to be made, is that the exchange is in itself an example of good practice, by offering an effective model on how to leverage shared and cumulative learning from diverse actors, and putting that learning into practice through collaborative work. The foundation for this has been accomplished to a remarkable degree in the exchange's first year. It is recommended that the future direction of the network is guided by the aim of realising that potential.

Appendix: *Presentation slides*

EPEX Evaluation
Dr Gareth Harris

Q2: How do we make the network stronger, better and sustainable (beyond the project)?


Aims and Outcomes

- Establish network
- Discuss each others practice
- Exchange experiences
- Develop good practice
- Capture it in a publication

Shared Learning

- See other approaches/multiple perspectives-importance of understanding context
- Common purpose & trust
- Move from the superficial to in-depth discussion
- From understanding *what we do* to understanding *how we do it.*

Freedom to take risks and learn from mistakes

Evaluation?

Develop Good Practice
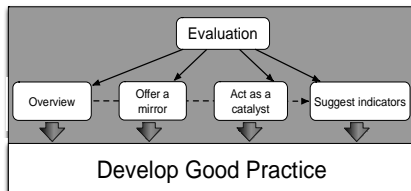
Barriers to shared learning

- Logistical
- Language
- Time
- Not always easy to see practice
- Matching and diversity

People more important than roles/organisations?

Reflexitivity

- How we talk about radicalisation/de-radicalisation/violent extremism, etc
- Instrumentalisation
- Space to think reflexively about what you do.

'Enable people to become subjects of communication rather than objects of intervention'

Q3: How do we turn shared learning into good practice? (from what to how)

Q1: Where do we draw the line for success and how do we recognise good practice?

- Q1: Where do we draw the line for success and how do we recognise good practice?
- Q2: How do we make the network stronger, better and sustainable (beyond the project)?
- Q3: How do we turn shared learning into good practice (from what to how)?
- Q4: What's the best way to match groups and to learn, same-to-same or different?

Networks, the group and relationships

- Discuss/observe each others work
- Promote interpersonal trust
- Supportive and inspiring
- Build a sustainable network

Energetic and passionate people do things (+ maybe people trust them)

Q4: What's the best way to match groups and to learn, (same-to-same or different)?