



modus | zad

Modes for bridging the gap between research and practice
in the field of deradicalisation and the prevention of violent extremism

| Table of Contents

1 Preface: Why modus zad?	04 - 05
A brief description of the organizational purpose and goals	
2 Three central challenges	06 - 09
in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention	
3 A theoretical framework for innovation	10 - 19
in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention	
4 Supporting the research phase	20 - 21
modes tested for bridging the gap between research and practice:	
a trend calls	22 - 24
b network dinners	25 - 29
5 Ideas for future development of further modes	30 - 35
6 modus zad	36 - 39
organizational facts and leadership team	
Imprint	40 - 41

1 | Preface: Why modus|zad?

Our organisational purpose and goal

| The challenge

Extremist actors are consistently in the lead over researchers and practitioners of deradicalisation and extremism prevention, often as a result of better targeted communication campaigns, quicker adoption of new technologies, and more competent use of social media.

| The idea

For many industries, investment in research & development has proven to be the only way to catalyse innovation and maintain a competitive edge in fast-changing market environments. In medicine and technology, we now rely on the close connection of research and development to bring new, life-saving products to market at scale as quickly as possible. Given how rapidly extremist groups and recruitment strategies evolve, why not also apply a R&D model to develop and test new solutions for the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention?

| Our goal

The goal of modus|zad is to improve our societal reaction (speed and impact) to emerging developments of extremist groups and actors. We seek to prevent new extremist strategies and ideologies that promote violence from gaining a stronghold, and therefore ultimately hope to decrease the number of ideologically motivated violent crimes (including acts of terror).

| Our methods

modus|zad identifies and brings together relevant experts from academia, business, tech, politics, and non-profits to identify new trends and close acute research gaps, and then rapidly develop, test, and widely disseminate new approaches to counter emerging developments across a broad-range of extremist groups and ideologies. The impetus for our applied research projects results from the pressing needs and challenges of practitioners in deradicalisation and extremism prevention.

modus|zad focuses on innovative formats for trend and needs identification and analysis, the development and iteration of new approaches, and the dissemination of new insights into professional practice that seek to go beyond the abstract policy recommendations typically produced by think tanks. As a result, we ultimately hope to keep better pace with the accelerating change of extremist groups, their ideological argumentations and their recruitment strategies.

2 | Three central challenges in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention

Despite the fact that extremist groups and ideologies are rapidly evolving and new dangerous ideological manifestations are emerging regularly, the societal response rate to these new developments is in dire need of improvement. In the best-case scenario, responses lag behind, but still somewhat succeed to address unfolding new developments. In many other cases, however, innovation has stalled out completely and new developments of extremist groups proceed entirely unchecked.

In our view, three central challenges contribute to this pervasive lag in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention:

| 1. lack of flexible financial investment that supports innovation

The lack of diverse investment in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention is

1) a lack of flexible financial investment that supports innovation, 2) a lack of innovation infrastructure and capabilities in the field of extremism prevention, and 3) a disconnect between research and practice.

While we will briefly outline all three challenges in order to sketch their overall influence on the advancement of the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention, this report primarily focuses on challenge 3) the disconnect between theory and practice, due to its pervasive impact on our ability to detect new trends and generate ideas for potential new approaches to prevention.

observable on numerous levels. In Germany, in contrast to many other national contexts,

¹ For example, see the German national programme for prevention of all forms of extremism funded with roughly 400 million € between 2016-2020: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/115448/cc142d640b37b7dd76e48b8fd9178cc5/strategie-der-bundesregierung-zur-extremismuspraevention-und-demokratiefoerderung-englisch-data.pdf> and <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/ICCT-Said-Fouad-Countering-Islamist-Radicalization-in-Germany-Sept2018.pdf>

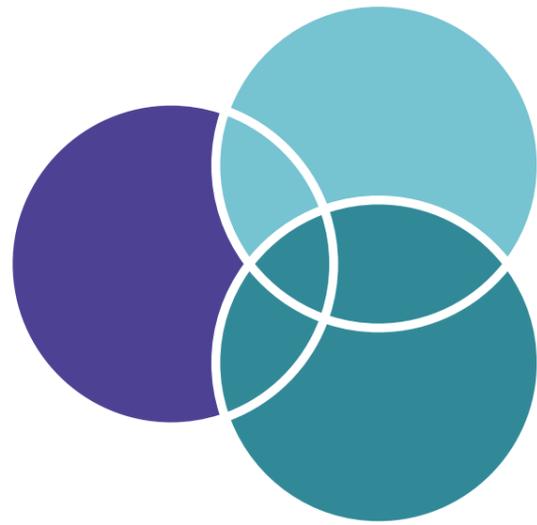
funding from various ministries and other government entities for extremism prevention has been generous and plentiful. Nonetheless, this type of funding is often inflexible in terms of application timelines, budgeting, and strict reporting requirements, so that it is ill suited to foster innovation and promote more rapid response rates to new developments of extremist groups and scenes.

| 2. lack of innovation infrastructure and capabilities

Given the increased rate of change in market environments, innovation has been a central topic within business for decades now. However, successful innovation practices have been adopted by the social sector at a far slower rate. While the rapid rise of social entrepreneurship and social innovation significantly contributed to accelerating the uptake of proven innovation practices in the social sector over the last decade or more,

Furthermore, very few private foundations specifically dedicate funding to extremism prevention, and corporations – even those whose business models and profits may be directly influenced by a rise in extremist groups or terrorist attacks – have been hesitant to centre their corporate social responsibility efforts around extremism prevention.

certain fields and topics – in particular those with a high-level of “security concerns” and more “politicised” issue areas – were slower to adopt certain methodologies. To the best of our knowledge, aside from modus|zad, we are unaware of innovation labs using applied research and innovation methodologies to focus specifically on the challenges of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism. Practitioners in the fields of deradicalisation



and extremism prevention may also be significantly less familiar with methodologies (for example design-thinking and human-centred design) that are already commonplace in other fields of non-profit work (e.g. international development and aid, sustainability, etc.). Capacity-building for innovation by way

of supporting practitioners and other staff of non-profit organisations working in the fields of deradicalisation and extremism prevention to learn and apply innovation skills and methodologies could have a significant impact on boosting the outcomes of extremism prevention efforts.

| 3. the disconnect between research and practice

Mutual partnership and true collaboration between researchers and practitioners in the fields of deradicalisation and extremism prevention is rare. As a result, one can easily observe a disconnect between research

and practice on a thematic level, i.e. in the topics proposed and taken up on the side of research, and their occasional utter irrelevance to practice. Additionally, even when research insights are highly relevant, knowl-



edge transfer of key insights into practice generally takes place unilaterally, without the experience and needs of practitioners sufficiently taken into account. For example, abstract, standardized recommendations for action have little prospect of success.

As a result, unsurprisingly, only very selectively do relevant research insights even reach practitioners in the field of extremism prevention, and when they do, the format often proves to be severely inhibitive to full adoption by practitioners. Furthermore, technological innovations and social media tools that are already applied at scale in the fields

of business and marketing struggle to achieve significant uptake in the strategies of extremism prevention and thus their potential for impact in the field remains unrealized.

In summary, as a result of these disconnects, research is often far removed from the actual acute challenges of extremism prevention practice, technological innovations fail to generate much needed social value-add, and crucial research insights are made available to extremism prevention practitioners far too late or in ways that cannot be sufficiently absorbed by practitioners.

3 | A theoretical framework for innovation in the field of deradicalisation and the prevention of violent extremism

modus|zad was founded in 2018 based on the hypothesis that better connection, collaboration and partnerships between academic research, extremism prevention practice, as well as tech, business and policy makers would foster innovation, which could catalyse greater impact for extremism prevention and deradicalisation efforts.

| working definition of innovation

In this context, we understand innovation as the process by which 1) new developments within and across extremist groups and ideologies are identified, 2) corresponding unmet needs of practitioners in the field of deradicalisation or extremism prevention,

that arise as a result of new developments are spotted or anticipated, and 3) these needs are addressed by generating and then translating new insights and ideas into sustainable products or services.

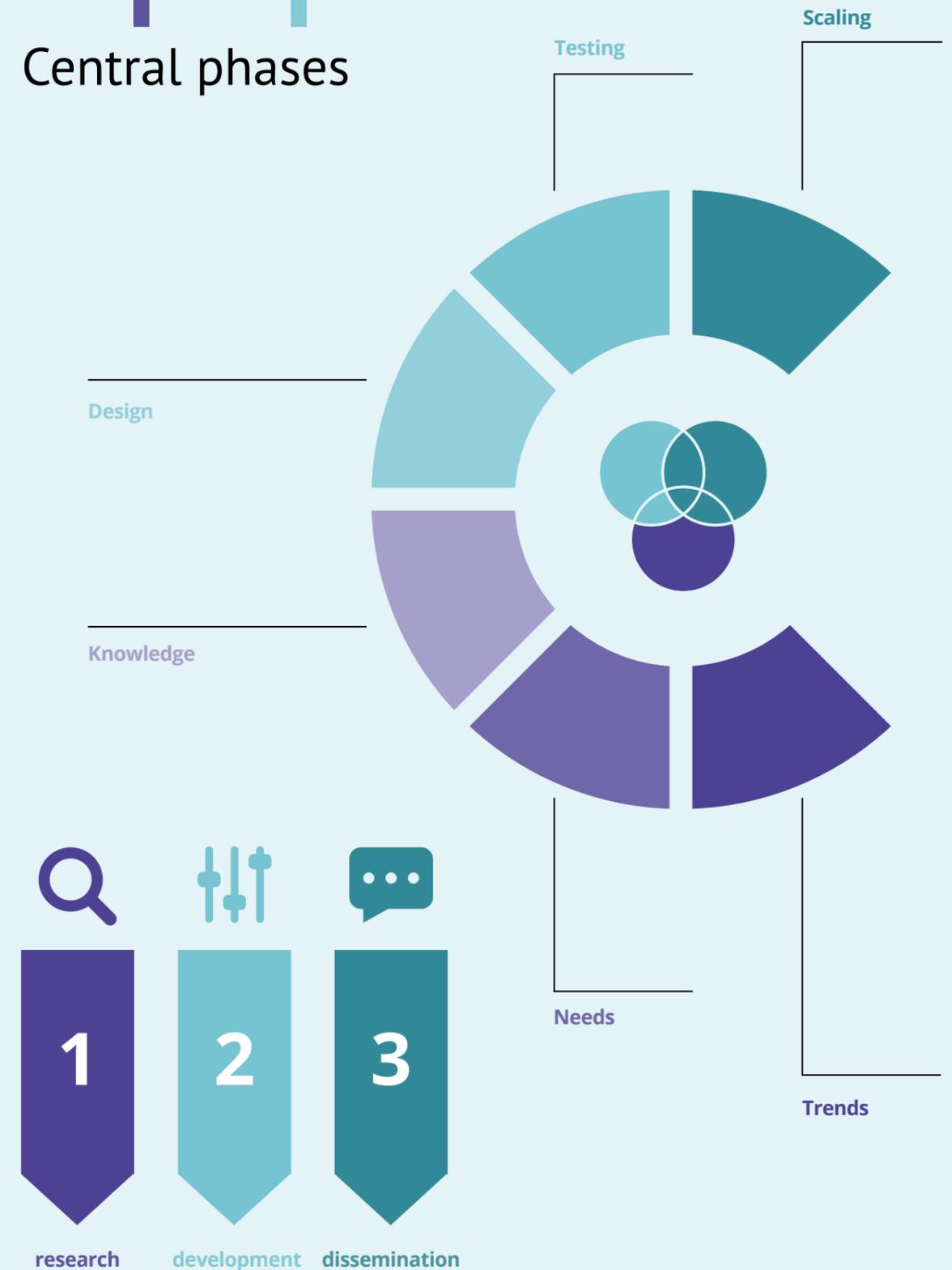
| cycle of innovation

Similar to many R&D models in other fields and industries, modus|zad is developing an inno-

vation cycle that includes three central phases: **research**, **development**, and **dissemination**.

1 | 2 | 3

Central phases



1 | 2 | 3

Questions we are seeking to answer

Trends

What's changing?



Needs

What will practitioners of extremism prevention need to keep pace with these changes?



Knowledge

What information and whose perspective is missing?



Design

How might we help address the emerging needs of practitioners?



Testing

How will we know whether the needs have successfully been met?



Scaling

How can we disseminate tested products and services to the scale of the need?



1 | 2 | 3

Goals of each component

Identification of new trends, developments within and across extremist groups and ideologies

Spotting or anticipating corresponding unmet or emerging needs

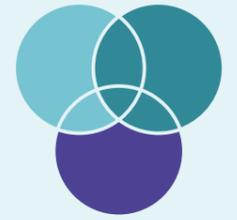
Creation of new knowledge and insights as the basis for appropriate design of products and services

Design of new (knowledge) products or services that have the potential to successfully meet identified needs

Establishing proof of concept, by testing products and services based on selected indicators of success

Development and implementation of dissemination strategies to scale successful products and services

| research



Three aims are central components of the research phase:

1. identifying new developments or trends by monitoring emerging insights in extremism research, deradicalisation and extremism practice, as well as directly monitoring new developments within and across extremist groups and ideologies,
2. spotting, or even anticipating, corresponding needs of practitioners related to these new developments, and
3. closing knowledge gaps through original research.

In line with each of the three aims, answers to the following questions are pursued:

Aim 1

What are new developments among extremist groups and ideologies? What are new radicalisation trends? What new insights are emerging from research and practice?

Input from researchers and practitioners is gathered to answer these questions and monitoring projects are designed to rapidly fill information gaps about identified new trends and developments.

Aim 2

What needs are emerging across deradicalisation and extremism prevention practice as a result of these new developments and trends?

Input from researchers and practitioners is gathered to pinpoint the most urgent unmet needs of the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention. These could be new challenges that practitioners are encountering in their day-to-day

work as a result of new recruitment strategies by extremist actors.

Aim 3

What knowledge and insights are missing? What missing knowledge must form the basis of any products or services we design to meet the identified needs?

Hypotheses are developed and original research conducted in order to fill apparent knowledge gaps based on new developments.

Activities in the research phase include:

- | monitoring of extremist actors, groups and scenes for new developments
- | monitoring the research landscape of (de)radicalization, extremism, and terrorism
- | connecting with practitioners on the front-lines, who directly work with radicalised individuals and/or those at-risk of radicalisation, to learn about new developments and acute needs

- | scanning relevant new research findings for insights pertaining to identified trends
- | analysing trends and developing relevant research questions and hypotheses
- | defining acute, priority needs of practitioners based on data and information gathered
- | developing and implementing original research projects to support further steps to address identified trends and needs

These aims are not completed sequentially, but rather all constitute continuous aspects of modus | zad's work during the research phase. Each activity in the research phase is complemented by the others in order to achieve a holistic perspective on emerging needs of deradicalisation and extremism prevention practice.

In summary, during the research phase modus | zad engages in continuous monitoring of research, practice and new developments within and across extremist groups and ideologies, so that the latest trends in radicalisation and extremism are systematically captured, evaluated and incorporated into the ongoing hypothesis formation.

We actively conduct original research, collect and synthesise existing research, sift it according to relevance for extremism prevention and use it for the subsequent development of innovative approaches, concepts and methods for the field of extremism prevention and deradicalisation.

criteria for selection

In order to prioritise and select appropriate needs to be addressed in modus | zad's innovation cycle, following criteria are applied:

- | level of relevance and urgency claimed by practitioners
- | potential for impact in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention
- | feasibility of addressing this particular need
- | availability of key experts for the research, design, testing and dissemination phases (essentially asking the question: Is modus | zad and available partners the right team to tackle this particular need?)
- | availability of needed financial resources

| development



Based on the outcomes and findings of the research phase, the goal of the **development** phase is to generate ideas for new approaches and solutions that address identified needs as a result of new trends and emerging developments, and to translate these ideas into products and services that can address the needs of practitioners in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention. Secondly, a proof of concept must be established for new products and services by testing and evaluating them based on pre-determined indicators of success.

In line with the aims of the development phase, answers to the following questions are pursued:

Aim 1

How might we help address these emerging needs of practitioners?

Methods of design thinking and other solutions-oriented, creative modes are employed to generate innovative new ideas and approaches. Regular interdisciplinary and cross-sector expert workshops bring together researchers and practitioners to work on specific problems in a solution-oriented manner. Joint problem analyses and case studies enable an exchange as equal

partners, which focus strictly on anticipated and current needs of extremism prevention and deradicalisation.

Aim 2

How will we know whether the needs have successfully been met?

Developed approaches and concepts (e.g. workshops or training modules) are tested directly with the target group and evaluated in detail and to the latest scientific and ethical standards in order to ensure that developed products and services connect to the acute challenges of deradicalisation and extremism prevention.

If the developed approaches, concepts or methods prove insufficiently helpful or relevant, the design and testing phases of the development process can be repeated.

It is precisely these planned reflection points and iteration loops that enable continuous, innovative and needs-based development of new products and services. If the approaches, concepts and methods developed are tested and evaluated as successful, the dissemination phase begins.

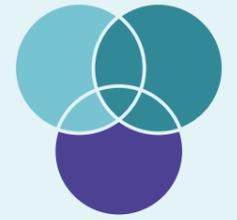


activities

in the development phase of the innovation cycle include:

- | Selecting key insights from research projects that must form the foundation of ideas generated for new approaches and solutions
- | Employing a diverse set of design methodologies to develop new products or services that utilize research insight and have the potential to address the identified acute need of practitioners
- | Testing and iteration of new products and services to see if these actually adequately address the identified need for practitioners on the ground

| dissemination



The aim of the dissemination phase is to make current research insights and new approaches available to the appropriate target group as quickly as possible in the form of new products and services, and to ensure that developed solutions are implemented where needed. In order to achieve this, modus|zad focuses on the development and implementation of custom dissemination strategies to scale successful products and services.

During the dissemination phase, answering the following question becomes central:

Question

How can we disseminate tested products and services to the scale of the need?

Given how young modus|zad is as an organisation, we lack expertise and experience in strategies for scaling developed products and services. This area of competence will become increasingly important to acquire as modus|zad matures and produces more products and services. This area of competence will become increasingly important to acquire as modus|zad matures and produces more products and services. It is clear, however, that the right cross-sector partnerships will play a pivotal role in succeeding at this final step, which is responsible for delivering the bulk of the potential impact of all of modus|zad's work.

Different formats are used for dissemination,

such as publications, reports (modus|insight), blog posts (modus|blog), as well as workshops and praxis-relevant learning and teaching material (modus|manual). Consulting and training of practitioners of deradicalisation and extremism prevention as well as train-the-trainer models are utilised for the dissemination phase. With its podcast modus|extrem, modus|zad also has already developed a wide-ranging and innovative format for disseminating its insights to a broad audience.

activities

- | in the dissemination phase include:
- | Creating delivery vehicles and formats (such as podcasts, trainings or workshops) appropriate for dissemination of new knowledge, products and services
- | Developing custom dissemination strategies for each product and/or service
- | Identifying potential partners that have significant reach with the target group of developed products and services
- | Creating mutually beneficial cross-sector partnerships that achieve the goals of disseminating key products and services

Given that modus|zad is still in the early stages of development as an organization, this is mostly still a theoretical framework, rather than "tried and true" model of innovation. We have only just begun testing and implementing this framework for a small number of projects. It is therefore in the process of refinement and optimization, and will likely change significantly over the next few years.

What is already clear, however, is that since modus|zad evaluates the results of its work primarily with a view toward its usefulness to practitioners, the earliest possible involvement of practitioners in all three phases is key. Practitioners of deradicalisation and extremism prevention are involved in the identification of trends, the needs assessment, problem definition and hypothesis development of the research phase, in all components of the development phase

(design, testing and (re-) evaluation), as well as in the selection and development of effective formats for the dissemination phase. And each step of the innovation cycle carries unique challenges when it comes to initiating and strengthening the connection, collaboration, and partnerships between theory and practice, without which none of the phases can truly succeed.

While testing modes to initiate and strengthen the connection, collaboration, and partnerships between theory and practice is crucial to the success of every phase of the innovation cycle, this report primarily seeks to share our experiences designing and testing new modes for a better connection between research and practice within the research phase of the innovation cycle. The next chapter is a report on our tested approaches and what we have learned.

4 | Modes for bridging the gap between theory and practice

As previously outlined in chapter 3, a central commitment of modus|zad is our belief that in order to achieve improved societal reaction time to new developments of extremist groups and ideologies, we must find formats for researchers and practitioners to benefit from each other's insights and collaborate as equal partners in a shared mission of deradicalisation and extremism prevention.

Our hope then, in developing new modes to bridge the gap between researchers and practitioners at this stage in our organizational development is to advance the research phase of our innovation cycle, which at the front end, addresses questions such as: What are new developments among extremist groups and ideologies? What are new radicalisation trends? What emerging insights can researchers and practitioners contribute? And what needs are emerging across deradicalisation and extremism prevention practice

as a result of these new developments and trends? Too often, models for connecting research and practice implicitly design a "one-way street", in which the insights generated in the "ivory tower" of research are "disseminated" towards practitioners. Little is done to ensure that the insights are packaged in a way that is digestible and/or useful to practitioners. Similarly, to the best of our knowledge, there are few to no formats designed and initiated with, or even by, practitioners to funnel their acute and sometimes highly consequential (research) questions emerging from their day-to-day work with radicalised individuals to the research community.

If successful modes of such a kind existed, detrimental research gaps could be identified sooner, and if closed, would have that potential to dramatically improve the impact of the work of extremism prevention practitioners.

| From "one-directional" to "multi-directional" communication cycles

Only if we can get researchers, practitioners, and experts from other relevant fields working together as equal partners, will we succeed in engineering a fully functional engine of innovation for the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention. For us, this quality of "equalness," which acknowledges and values each partner's unique contributions as essential, can only be achieved, if we ensure that the modes of working together that we develop to initiate and strengthen connection, collaboration, and partnerships between theory and practice truly operate "multi-directionally." In other words, input and feedback must travel in both directions: from research to practice, but just as much from practice to research.

Thus, in order to be successful, modus|zad must implement workable "modes" for research insights to reach practitioners, but also for researchers to be made aware of new trends and corresponding research gaps detected by practitioners on the ground. Additionally, communication may not turn into "dead ends." Rather, continuous feedback loops between theory and practice must maintain constant multi-directional communication. Identifying useful and frequent opportunities for both researchers and practitioners to get deeply involved at key stages of the innovation cycle and experience mutuality in their work together has been a central concern of the work of modus|zad over the last year.

| Overcoming scepticism and hesitation by honouring unique perspectives and contributions

A founding commitment at modus|zad is our deeply held belief that only by constantly and rapidly comparing, contrasting, and reconciling our own monitoring results along with emerging insights from both the research and the practice landscape will key trends be identified soon enough.

Practitioners play a unique role in this process of trend identification, given that in their day-to-day encounters with radicalised individuals and those endanger of radicalisation, practitioners encounter new arguments, sense a shift in their clients' needs, or can observe new extremist recruitment strategies locally on the ground. We hope our interventions can help alert practitioners elsewhere to new trends early on, and new approaches can be developed in response to these new developments of extremist groups – ideally before they have a chance to

become widespread.

However, unfortunately, practitioners are rarely positioned as having unique access to potentially crucial insights and lack the appropriate space for exchange about what they have been observing and experiencing with their clients. Furthermore, practitioners' experiences with researchers can often feel "extractive," in the sense that researchers can often pose a slew of interview questions, disregarding the need for giving sufficient context, building trust, and re-engaging practitioners with the results of their research, which are sometimes only available many months or even years later. Negative experiences such as these can make practitioners hesitant and perhaps suspicious as to whether an engagement opportunity with research is truly designed with practitioner interests at the centre.

↔ Trend Calls

In response to aforementioned obstacles, we tested three different modes and settled finally on a “trend call” as the most appropriate for detecting insights directly from practitioners that might offer hints at new trends developing amongst extremist groups and the narratives they propagate. Our approach was to create a space that prioritised the experiences of practitioners, and relegated researchers primarily to a listening role, in which they were not in a position to set the agenda of the conversation by selecting and directing the questions, as is frequently the case in the research setting familiar to them.

| Version 1 – “participatory observation”:

On a quarterly basis, all practitioners active in deradicalisation and extremism prevention working across Germany for the *modus|zad* sister organisation Violence Prevention Network gather in working groups to collectively address shared topics of concern. The *modus|zad* team was invited to participate and listen in. We thought this might be the ideal venue to gather insights on new developments among extremist groups or new challenges in practitioners’ work with their clients. The *modus|zad* team participated in three separate working groups, and gathered afterwards to share their experiences with

this format.

Insights: The types of challenges that were discussed at the practitioners’ working groups often had to do with structural challenges and less frequently touched on new phenomena or emerging trends. As such, the purpose of the practitioners’ working groups and our goals at *modus|zad* did not coalesce in the ways we had hoped. Nonetheless, participating in these meetings was helpful in strengthening relationships and building trust with a large set of highly experienced practitioners.

| Version 2 – “practitioner workshop”:

We invited a group of practitioners who directly work with radicalised individuals as well as individuals at risk of radicalisation to attend a *modus|zad* “Viewing Workshop,” during which the *modus|zad* monitoring

team presented material from a grey-zone of Islamist extremism on YouTube. The participants, which in addition to practitioners, also included researchers and media experts, were asked open-ended questions, such as:

“What did you find convincing about this content? What did you find problematic? How would your clients respond to it? Are your clients familiar with this content? What aspects of this content particularly speak to them?” were asked of the participants, which in addition to practitioners, also included researchers and media experts.

Insights: Responding to up-to-the-minute and highly relevant “real life” material made for a fascinating and lively discussion that produced remarkable insights for both researchers and practitioners. Practitioners

| Version 3 – “Trend Call”:

Finally, we organized a simple 60-90 minute video conference call that brought together six practitioners and researchers working across different ideologies and groups for a very informal, open-ended exchange. Given that practitioners can be somewhat unfamiliar (and perhaps at times uncomfortable with) academic modes of exchange, we went to great lengths to communicate in our personalized invitations to the trend call, that no preparation was necessary, and that this was not an interview for traditional research purposes. We wanted to learn from their day-to-day experiences and new challenges they may be currently facing.

shared that clients often mentioned certain YouTube channels, but having researchers present the most popular ones along with frequently viewed videos, helped brief them in a way that they would have never had time to do on their own, and prepared them for conversations with their clients in a new way. Similarly, researchers were given new insights by practitioners on how the narratives and arguments have changed and what aspects of the content seem to truly pose dangerous “attraction points” to individuals at-risk of radicalisation.

The *modus|zad* team attempted to play a facilitating role and create space for practitioners and researchers to ask questions of each other and use the opportunity to listen carefully and ask targeted follow-up questions, when we thought we were hearing something new.

Insights: When we took increasing steps to de-center ourselves and create a platform for practitioners working across different types of extremism and different regions of Germany to come into conversation with each other on topics that concerned them, we also were able to gain highly valuable insights on where to direct future research efforts.

| **Example:** During Version 3 “Trend Call”,

the modus|zad online monitoring team shared that they had observed the increased relevance of themes of “home”, “homeland” and “nature” on extremist social media channels. Practitioner S., trained to work with Islamist extremists, echoed that in his offline work with radicalised clients the topic of “home” and in particular forms of Turkish nationalism were playing an increasingly important role.

He noted that triggers of radicalisation processes still revolved around conflicts of identity, but rather than having religion, in this case Islam/Salafism, as a focal point, clients experience these identity conflicts across the lines of their Turkish and German identities, of which religion is only one aspect.

Practitioner P., trained in work with right-wing extremists, echoed this experience by sharing that he was newly confronted with clients that exhibited strong ties to Russian nationalism – an ideological space that rendered his traditional methodological toolbox in working with clients on German nationalism and right-wing ideology somewhat limited. This led modus|zad researchers to realize that further research was necessary into various nationalisms – their differences and commonalities – in order to successfully tackle these potential new triggers of radicalisation, and that across the currently strongly defined sphere of Islamist extremism, the focus on religiously motivated aspects of radicalisation may be obscuring a new need to understand and respond to unique factors of various nationalisms.

| Lessons learned based on all three iterations of organizing trend calls:

- | Taking time to build and maintain trustful relationships between researchers and practitioners is crucial.
- | Moving from concrete to abstract can be helpful. By providing real-life material for practitioners to respond to and share their experiences, researchers can derive new research questions and hypotheses.
- | New trends can be detected when practitioners talk to each other about what they are observing and/or are puzzled by in their day-to-day work, and when researchers are listening and not heavily directing the conversation.



The network dinner

Conferences are one of the traditional modes through which current research is supposed to be effectively disseminated and new trends and relevant research questions identified. Despite the abundance of conferences, panels, and workshops, however, we were left generally dissatisfied with our ability to identify new trends and corresponding unmet needs regarding various extremist groups and scenes from participating in these learning modes.

Although these formats fulfil many crucial functions, we found it more difficult than expected to find the right partners for collaboration with whom one could innovate new solutions in these spaces. It seems these formats are not always designed to meet the needs that feel particularly acute to us at modus|zad with regards to innovation in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention.

In order to develop and test additional modes of connecting research and practice that might be able to meet our needs, we sought to identify what we perceived as inhibitors inherent in these traditional learning formats: conferences, panels and workshops. An initial brainstorming yielded following hypotheses.

- | In most cases, participants of conferences, panels and workshops join these formats having attended dozens of similar events previously. They come with a fairly rigid sense of what they will encounter, what will be expected of them as participants, and what they want to contribute. As a participant, believing to know what

is about to happen – this orientation itself can be an inhibitor of authentically new insights and the possibility of innovation.

- | Generally, we found that we would frequently encounter the same people and hear from the same experts again and again, many of whom have been working in the field of extremism prevention for decades. While this level of expertise is indispensable, we believe it must be coupled with crucial “newcomer” or “outsider” perspectives to offer the necessary components from which innovation can emerge.
- | Because of the usually relatively large number of participants, conferences, panels, and workshops lack the intimacy necessary for a deeper trust among participants to emerge, so that people are willing to share their hunches, intuitions, and half-baked ideas, which are the raw material for innovation.
- | Conferences, panels, workshops are effective mechanisms for gathering a large quantity of input in a short amount of time, but Q&A sessions after a panel for example, only allow for a very surface-level and perfunctory engagement with the issues at hand. A certain sense of spaciousness and ample time is necessary for truly new insights to emerge.
- | Although unstructured networking sessions during coffee breaks are common, few participants seem to feel confident and able to utilize this format to build relationships to the extent necessary that they can provide a shortcut to identifying the right partners for collaboration.

Based on these hypotheses, we distilled following design principles for a new format we wanted to develop that seeks to identify new trends and corresponding unmet needs

| Design principles for the mode of "network dinner"

- | Do as you say: lived "equalness" of researchers and practitioners = participatory co-creation
- | Disrupt expectations of what will happen next and take risks
- | Bring in unusual perspectives and voices
- | Create a safe space that nurtures intimacy and trust
- | Allow time for the necessary depth of exchange
- | Focus on building and strengthening relationships

To develop an alternative mode of interaction that could overcome some of the inherent obstacles of conferences and panels to generating authentically new insights, we drew on the concept of a "fireside chat." Inspired by those unexpected moments of spaciousness, mental relaxation and flow that we achieve when we let our minds wander while

as well as generate new ideas both regarding crucial research gaps as well as possible new products and services to advance deradicalisation and extremism prevention efforts.

"watching the flames dance," and the highly generative conversations that usually accompany these times and places in our lives, we sought to recreate a similar state of mind for the purposes of generating new insights for extremism prevention and deradicalisation.

What could provide this sort of environment that was particularly conducive to this type of trustful exchange? We ended up opting for the dinner table. For each dinner, we invited six to eight experts selected from very diverse sectors, some of which had never really come into contact with the field of extremism prevention. We intentionally sought to bring in expertise from novel, but adjacent fields.

For this format of the network dinner we iterated three versions, each time slightly tweaking the format for what we thought could improve upon the last iteration.

| Version 1

Organized in a space with an actual fireplace, we invited twelve diverse experts, briefed them each extensively and developed a detailed agenda with clearly stated goals and hoped for outcomes. The entire conversation over two to three hours was guided by an external moderator, who ensured that participants each had sufficient chance to contribute their ideas.

| Version 2

In the second iteration, we scaled back the highly planned and detailed agenda and opted for simply offering as topic what we felt was a significant development across extremist groups with accompanying questions that we hoped to explore over dinner. We divided the dinner into a more moderated part during the first half of the evening, and then switched to more networking and non-moderated open conversation, which

Insights: The heavy moderation made the whole dinner feel very weighty and official, which counteracted the relaxed state of „flow“ that we were hoping to achieve among the group of participants. The upside was that participants came prepared to contribute ideas – and these were indeed new and useful – but our sense was that insights did not necessarily emerge as a result of collaboration between researchers and practitioners that evening.

broke in to smaller dyads and triads during the second half of the dinner.

Insights: We succeeded in achieving a more relaxed atmosphere, where participants were willing to „think aloud,“ but sensed that for some participants it wasn't clear enough to them why they had been invited or what they truly had to contribute to the conversation.

| Version 3

In our final iteration, we chose to couple the dinner with the production of a special episode of our podcast modus|extrem. We invited participants not just as dinner guests, but also as talk show guests. The first part of the evening, modus|extrem moderated a recorded talk show, and then in the second half of the evening we switched to the dinner table and continued the conversation “off record.”

Insights: The combination of participants’ substantial preparation for the podcast talk show as a result of the targeted interview questions participants received in advance – the performance aspects of being recorded and the pressure of needing to say something of significance – coupled with the “release” and relaxation that followed post-production during dinner, proved to be a winning combination in order to generate the kind of relationships and conversations that we were hoping for.

modus | extrem



| Lessons learned for organizing network dinners based on all three iterations:

- | Participants must be very carefully selected – although diversity is key, still it must be very clear – to hosts as well as participants – why they were invited and what they can contribute.
- | Set expectations for Chatham House rules: “Thinking aloud” and speculation should be heavily encouraged. Therefore, there should be an agreement in place, to the effect that what is said at the dinner table may be shared afterwards, but not attributed to particular participants. These rules allow participants to somewhat release the filter of the priorities and commitments connected to their institutional affiliation, and lets the group bond more with each other for a truly shared conversation through which new ideas can emerge.
- | Light moderation: We learned to set the tone of the conversation, but then allow the direction of the conversations to emerge organically. It must be clear from the get go, that the host/moderator will not steer the direction of the conversation throughout the evening, but signal an authentic openness to priorities and urgent question from individual participants, as long as they fall within scope of the topic for the evening.
- | Especially when it is the first time that participants meet, only so much can be accomplished during the time it takes to have dinner together. True partnership and good collaboration emerge over time. The outcome of stronger, trustful relationships with heightened potential for future partnership and collaboration is a legitimate and sufficiently positive outcome of the network dinner.

5 | Ideas for future development of further modes

As the expertise of modus|zad gradually became more well-known with practitioners, we had an opportunity this past year to serve as consultants to the creators and producers of “alternative narrative” extremism prevention video content to be published on YouTube. Our consulting experience helped us gather further evidence of the need for very fast research support and thus how bridging the gap between research and practice can support the impact of extremism prevention efforts. As a result, the idea for a “research help desk” was born.

A research help desk would essentially be available for custom research on any questions that practitioners in the field of deradicalisation and extremism prevention encounter in their work. Key to the designing of this mode of working together is speed. A teacher needs to know what he is going to say to his at-risk student tomorrow, and the media producer of “alternative narrative” extremism prevention content needs an evaluation on whether the narrative she is developing will resonate with the target group of radicalised individuals this week. If the narrative is “off” it will decrease receptiveness of the target group for the message, and therefore research support can be pivotal in realizing the potential impact of extremism prevention efforts.

Through the research help desk we envision building our capacity to be available for short-term, urgent research requests from practitioners at any time. Flexible, free

capacities are necessary for faster reaction times. Supporting practitioners in addressing challenges encountered in extremism prevention more quickly by delivering relevant cutting-edge research is part of modus|zad’s mission. To achieve this, we must have access to the necessary staff capacity and research expertise exactly when it is needed, which requires flexible financial resources. In order to credibly create this flexibility for direct collaboration, a reliable contact person is needed for practitioners, who will then take up research requests and immediately develop a custom research plan. A research help desk could therefore significantly strengthen the connection between research and practice and allow knowledge-transfer to become more nimble, agile and fluid.

In addition, running a research help desk is, in and of itself, a mechanism for early trend spotting. Of course, a certain critical mass of research requests is necessary in order for the information to be anything more than anecdotal, but nonetheless even single requests may offer first hints at potential trends to be investigated. By tracking what concerns and topics practitioners approach the research desk with, modus|zad will be in a position to spot new patterns early on, and feed relevant research questions into modus|zad’s cycle of innovation.

Following is a “real-life” example from our consulting practice, which serves to illustrate how a research help desk could function and what value it could provide to practitioners:

| Example of e-mail exchange between modus|zad researcher and creators/producers of video content for extremism prevention:

| **From:** D.
| **Sent:** Thursday, November 21, 2019 12:58
| **To:** T. **Cc:** J.
| **Re:** Your assessment of our video



Dear T.,

I hope you are doing well! We have a question/favour to ask of you. Please give us your assessment of our extremism prevention video (download link) that is supposed to go live very soon. We hope you can support us with your expertise!

In the video A. visits J. and the two discuss how they first came into contact with Islam, their connections to the community, and their identity as Muslims.

Particularly relevant are the first four minutes, especially the part where J. tells the story of how she spoke her profession of faith up on the mountain.

Some partners and team members are concerned that viewers will not find J. credible, because she supposedly did not convert properly. More specifically, whether the target group will feel that her conversion did not take place "lawfully" because there were not "two witnesses present." So they are not sure whether the video should go live.

What's your sense of the risk? Do you anticipate that there will be more hate speech and/or problematic comments than usual? We are a little uncertain especially since there seems to be no clarity among Islam scholars, as to how exactly a conversion must take place to be legit.

Of course, we are planning to talk to J., but we are very interested in your research perspective.

We would really appreciate a quick answer from you with your assessment.

Many thanks! D.

| **From:** T.
| **Sent:** Thursday, November 25, 2019 10:01
| **To:** D. **Cc:** J.
| **Re:** Your assessment of our video



Hi D., hi J.,

Here's our sense on „J.'s conversion“ in your video

1. Schahada, the confession of faith. There is no need for witnesses for the conversion to Islam („God and the angels completely suffice“), as long as one speaks the confession of faith sincerely and is convinced of its truthfulness. If this is the case, then after speaking the confession of faith, one is Muslima. There is no “wrong” way to find God, as long as these requirements are heeded. Only at a wedding are two (Muslim) witnesses needed.

This view is widely accepted, even at the periphery of extremist actors and views as can be confirmed by way of the following sample content:

Conversion in two minutes: how does one speak the confession of faith (Shahada, Schahada)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b88SplXUcOU>

Conversion via phone: First my sister converted, and now I would like to accept Islam:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TEvKjAmjLA>

Pierre Vogel explains how to do it: Accept Islam now! Convert to Islam!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KTmJGlt8MwM>

2. Likely reaction of the community: I think the majority of the community will receive the video positively. The way the conversion happened, isn't really contestable. I am sure many emotional comments will be posted (e.g. „Inshallah it is wonderful, sister, that it took place at such a beautiful

beautiful place, " or „I also converted with my friend at a lake inshallah" etc.).

Since there is nothing that really can be said against the way the conversion took place, of course you will still have the typical comments, that J. is not really a Muslima, but for the usual reasons:

„Do you even pray? If not, you are not really a Muslima.“

„You are not wearing a hijab, that is haram.“

Etc. etc. but I am sure your community manager is well familiar with these types of comments already.

Certainly there will be a few comments to „right or wrong" of conversion, probably also the accusation that there were not two witnesses (seems to be a wide-spread myth...), but the community manager can respond to this, if needed with source material/references, since it is quite clear and commentators are oftentimes not particularly knowledgeable.

That's our two cents. Our Islam scholars were actually a little perplexed at the question whether one needs two witnesses to convert.

Do let us know if there is anything else we can help with.

Cheers, T.

| **From:** D.
| **Sent:** Thursday, November 25, 2019 12:58
| **To:** T. **Cc** J.
| **Re:** Your assessment of our video



Hi, T.!

Thanks so much for your input. This helps us a lot!(...)

Take care, J.

6 | modus|zad: organizational facts and leadership team

The overarching goal of Modus – Centre for applied research on deradicalisation (modus|zad) is to improve the societal reaction time (efficiency and effectiveness) to new developments of extremist groups and ideologies.

| Focus areas

modus|zad projects currently focus on monitoring of extremist actors on various online (social) networks such as YouTube, and process and impact assessment and evaluation

of deradicalisation and extremism prevention projects, particularly projects working with radicalised individuals in prisons and during probation.

| Funding

Current projects are funded by the federal ministry of family and youth (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend - BMFSFJ), the federal ministry of the interior (Bundesministerium des Innern, für

Bau und Heimat - BMI), the federal agency for civic education (Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung - BpB) as well as private foundations, such as the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung.

| Projects

Following is a short selection of past and current modus|zad projects:

ABAT Online-Salafismus (2019; Funding: BMI): Current terms, actors and trends in Salafist (online) discourses and implications for the practice of preventing radicalization

Salam to You (2017-2019; Funding: BMFSFJ): Civic education and equal participation of young people in extremism prevention on social media

DISLEX 3D (2019-2022; Funding: BMFSFJ): Distancing processes in Islamist extremism: a systematic survey of parameters for internal (self) and external (other) observation across three dimensions

REASSURE (2019-2020; Funding: CHERISH Digital Economy Centre und Facebook): The Researcher Security, Safety and Resilience project

Teach2Teach (2017-2019 Funding: BMFSFJ): Training for teachers and youth workers in radicalisation prevention at the nexus of right-wing populism and right-wing extremism

modus|extrem (2019-2020; Funding: Robert-Bosch-Stiftung): modus|extrem podcast disseminates key insights around (de)radicalization and extremism (prevention) with research and practice in dialogue



Leadership – Judy Korn,

executive board, holds an MA in education, is a member of the Radicalisation Awareness Network’s executive board and board member at Impact Europe, and previously co-chaired RAN’s EXIT Working Group for many years. Since founding Violence Prevention Network in 2007, the organisation, with currently over 120 staff members across Germany, has grown to the largest practitioner organisation working on the deradicalisation of offenders of ideologically motivated violent crimes in Europe. To address the lack of data-driven, needs-oriented R&D in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism, Judy founded modus|zad in 2018 and serves as its executive director.



Leadership – Michèle Leaman,

managing director. In 2017, she partnered with Judy Korn (founder and CEO of Violence Prevention Network) to write a concept note describing a new, social impact organisation to counter the rapid evolution of extremism by better leveraging academic research and insights from business innovation practices. Having together brought this concept to life, Michèle now oversees modus|zad’s organizational strategy and operations. She develops mechanisms to detect relevant trends in radicalisation as early as possible, and she designs projects to address the needs so identified.

Michèle draws on nearly 20 years of experience in for-profit, non-profit, and academic sectors in the US and Europe. She spent six years at Ashoka, the leading global organisation for social entrepreneurship, building and implementing an accreditation process for universities developing social innovation programs. There she advised dozens of institutions—ranging from Brown University to Singapore Management University—across four continents. Prior to her time at Ashoka, she managed a US-wide initiative on social responsibility at the Association of American



Colleges and Universities. She holds a BA in Economics and MA in Philosophy.

Leadership – Dr. Dennis Walkenhorst,

director of research. His research interests comprise extremist movements, (de-)radicalisation, political sociology, and systems theory.

Dennis Walkenhorst spent most of his studies at Bielefeld University, from which he graduated with a Doctorate in Sociology in 2018. His dissertation focused on a system-theoretical analysis of Islamist movements. During his studies, he spent time at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore and Hebrew University in Jerusalem as a visiting doctoral research fellow. Between 2018 and 2019, he had a teaching assignment at the Berlin School of Economics and Law (HWR).

In addition to his work at modus|zad, Dennis Walkenhorst is also the director of research at Violence Prevention Network, Germany’s largest P/CVE practitioner organisation, where he has worked since 2017.

Team

The team of ten modus|zad colleagues and associated fellows is highly interdisciplinary, composed of sociologists, historians, philosophers, Islam scholars, as well as team members with extensive expertise and experience in extremism prevention, media communications, education, and social work.

| Imprint

Imprint

Modus – Zentrum für angewandte Deradikalisierungsforschung gGmbH
Alt-Reinickendorf 25
13407 Berlin

Author

Michèle Leaman

Layout und Infographics

Natascha Baumhauer



modus | zad

modus | Zentrum für angewandte
Deradikalisierungsforschung gGmbH

Alt-Reinickendorf 25
13407 Berlin

www.modus-zad.de