Operationalising the Framework for Evaluating Capability against Information Influence Operations

A Case Study of the Psychological Defence Agency's Courses

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Contents

Introduction

Evaluation is a crucial step in decision-making and strategic planning in most contemporary organisations. This should also be the case for the development of capability in countering information influence operations (IIO). Different actors, ranging from governments to the private sector, have varying approaches to address these issues, as well as different evaluation norms and standards. However, evaluation of capabilities for countering IIO is a relatively new concept.

IIO capabilities, in a civilian context, include several functions and activities that need to be performed in a coordinated manner, by multiple actors and units, and over different timeframes. It is therefore not always easy to know what kind of strategy and method should be used for assessment; often it differs depending on what is being assessed, the purpose of the assessment, and for whom it is made. Still, without evaluating these capabilities an organisation might not use its resources efficiently or might not be working towards the required capability level. Evaluation is therefore an important and necessary part of quality assurance, and a means for improving the work of the community as a whole.

An initial step was taken in 2022 to establish a common framework for evaluating capability in countering different threats in the information environment through the paper *A Capability Definition and Assessment Framework for Countering Disinformation, Information Influence and Foreign Interference,* written by James Pamment and published by the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.[1] For this follow-up report, we focus on education and training to represent a starting point for applying the framework. Education and training are crucial components in developing a prepared and capable organisation. The benefits of improving education and training capabilities are scalable across society. These benefits often reach beyond the specific area of focus, as individuals gain valuable skills and knowledge that can be applied in other areas of their personal and professional lives. Improving education and training in one area of a community or part of the public can have a ripple effect on the entire society, making it a vital component to address.

This report presents an evaluation of the education and course structure of the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency (Myndigheten för psykologiskt försvar, MPF), in effect applying the framework to a concrete example. The MPF was founded with the main objective of coordinating and developing the advancement of Sweden's psychological defence in partnership with public institutions and other stakeholders in society.[2] The aim of the report is to offer advice on how to deploy the evaluation methodology using the previous framework and also some best practice guidance on how to use the framework toolset in the evaluation process.

Evaluation methodology—the basis

Evaluation processes are an activity where something is being described and measured in a thorough, systematic, and well-thought-out method. Evaluation methodologies are often universal, despite some differences between countries and relative norms for evaluation. Those relative norms can relate to how evaluation is interpreted in different organisations' processes for projects, activities, or individual events.[3] Therefore the basic steps of evaluation are presented here to establish a common understanding of what an evaluation process could look like, as well as to place the framework toolset in a wider context of evaluation structures.

1. Need for action—planned or ad hoc evaluation

The need for an evaluation may arise for various reasons, for example planned activities such as after a risk analysis, or ad hoc after a crisis. For planned activities it should be determined during the early stages which parts should be evaluated, so that evaluation personnel can be involved to ensure the processes and that documentation are established to facilitate a relevant and accurate assessment.[4]

Ad hoc evaluations are also likely to occur at some point, especially after unexpected events have revealed a lapse or deficiency in a process, function, or outcome. It is advisable for organisations to create a structure for such evaluations in order to generate a reproducible process that delivers comparable results.

2. Define the objectives and desired outcome

The objectives of the evaluation must be defined at the beginning of the process, as well as a description of the desired outcome. Setting objectives and describe the desired outcomes should be rooted in an organisational comprehension of the countermeasures that are to be evaluated. It is relevant to understand possible IIO threats, identifying the required capabilities to mitigate these threats, and insight into how these capabilities function within the organisational structure (who is doing what, where in the organisation, and at what time).

It should also be established for whom the evaluation is to be made. This clarifies the purpose and reasoning behind the evaluation and specifies the primary and secondary users, thus increasing the possibility of providing useful information to those who need it.[5]

3. Context

During evaluation it is necessary to reflect on the context in which the object of the evaluation exists. The object is influenced not only by internal functions, but also by its complex surroundings. For example, it is often difficult to measure the effect of activities, in

the short to medium term, since a function or action may have minimal or even unforeseen and unintended impacts and consequences, due to the aforementioned

complex environment. It is worth reflecting on how internal and external influences may have an impact on both the object being evaluated and the evaluation itself.

4. Evaluation types

Understanding and identifying the type of evaluation to be conducted reduces the risk of including too many factors in one evaluation, which could lead to generalised or oversimplified results. Without focus, an evaluation could create a lot of work without producing useful data. There are several types of evaluations, each serving different purposes and the choice depends upon the objectives and desired outcomes.

Needs, goals, and descriptive evaluations can explore an organisation's needs and goals for capability to counter IIO, to create goals based on identified needs and optimal approaches, or to focus on learning from others' experience by describing best practice. These have also been called 'proactive or clarificatory evaluations'.[6]

> **Example:** The evaluation could highlight needs and arguments for and against an action or activity. An organisation could use the Risk assessment tool (Figure 1) and use a scenario to assess the needs and goals they might have in different capabilities in, for example, 'Detection and Monitoring', which could assist in prioritising upcoming actions and activities.

Process and performance evaluation are frequently used in the public sector. Process evaluation assesses qualitative aspects of activities, while performance evaluation focuses on quantifiable aspects and measures the output of an activity.[7, 8]

> **Example:** Often the emphasis is placed on comprehending how the organisation operates. The advantage of gaining such insight is the ability to identify fresh challenges, potentially reframe existing problems, and refine one's operational approach accordingly. By using the Objectives, Indicators, and Process maturity tools, an actor could prioritise comprehending and identifying domains of comparative strength or vulnerability, and provide recommendations for enhancing their efficiency.

Effect evaluations assess the impact of a function and can focus on immediate or long-term effects. It is important to distinguish between wanted, unwanted, and unexpected effects and to establish causation. For this, a baseline assessment may be necessary for an accurate evaluation.[9, 10]

> **Example:** The main focus is on what the effects have been in the intended target area. By using the Objectives tool and breaking these objectives down to measurable Indicators, an actor could gain insight into, for example, the effectiveness of a public awareness campaign. To ensure confidence in the outcome, it would be necessary to measure people's comprehension before and after such a campaign.

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5. Framework tools

After identifying the evaluation type, the most relevant tools from the framework can be selected (Figure 1). These tools can be used individually or combined (see the section 'Using the framework toolset'). The Objectives tool can be used on its own or most often together with the Indicators tool. When used together with Indicators, Objectives are broken down to smaller specific measures. The Risk assessment and Process maturity tools can also be used on their own or can complement Objectives and Indicators, as was done in this case study. It depends on the goal of the evaluation.[11]

OBJECTIVES	**INDICATORS**	**RISK ASSESSMENT**	**PROCESS MATURITY**
Policy goals	Qualitative	Priority risks	Organisation
Norms	Quantitative	Threat scenarious	Efficiency
Archetypes	Process	Vulnerabilities	Optimisation

FIGURE 1. The four different framework tools. *Source:* James Pamment, *A Capability Definition and Assessment Framework for Countering Disinformation, Information Influence and Foreign Interference* (NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2022).

6. Assessment criteria and collection of data

Once the evaluation type and tools from the framework have been decided, it should be determined what assessment criteria to use and how to collect the data needed for the evaluation. Data collection can be either qualitative or quantitative, or a mix of both methods. The evaluation type and tools selected from the framework give guidance in this respect. The method should of course be based on what will give the most valid answers to the question being asked. The quality of an evaluation depends on the assessment validity. Validity in an evaluation depends on whether it measures what it is intended to do.[12]

7. Analysis

Analysis enables us to make sense of data and draw meaningful conclusions. The choice of analytic method depends on several factors, such as the purpose of the analysis, the research questions, and the type of data being analysed. All analytic methods have their own strengths and limitations. For example, comparative analysis is used to compare and evaluate different sets of data, while regression analysis examines the relationship between variables. Factor analysis identifies and defines the relative impact of underlying factors on the outcome, and content analysis looks at patterns in textual or visual data. Cluster analysis groups similar data, and network analysis examines relationships in a network. These are just some examples: the choice must be based on what the evaluation is meant to achieve.

The analysis should be part of a learning and development process once the evaluation is completed. The results of an analysis can include recommendations, but not always. An external evaluator may simply lay out the facts of the evaluation and let the organisation work out its priorities based on its understanding of what needs to be done.

Evaluation map

An evaluation map provides a visual representation of the evaluation process, highlighting the key steps involved in conducting an evaluation (Figure 2). The map is designed to guide evaluators, creating an overview of tasks and activities involved in the process. It also provides a framework for organising the various components of the evaluation and ensuring that all aspects of the evaluation are covered.
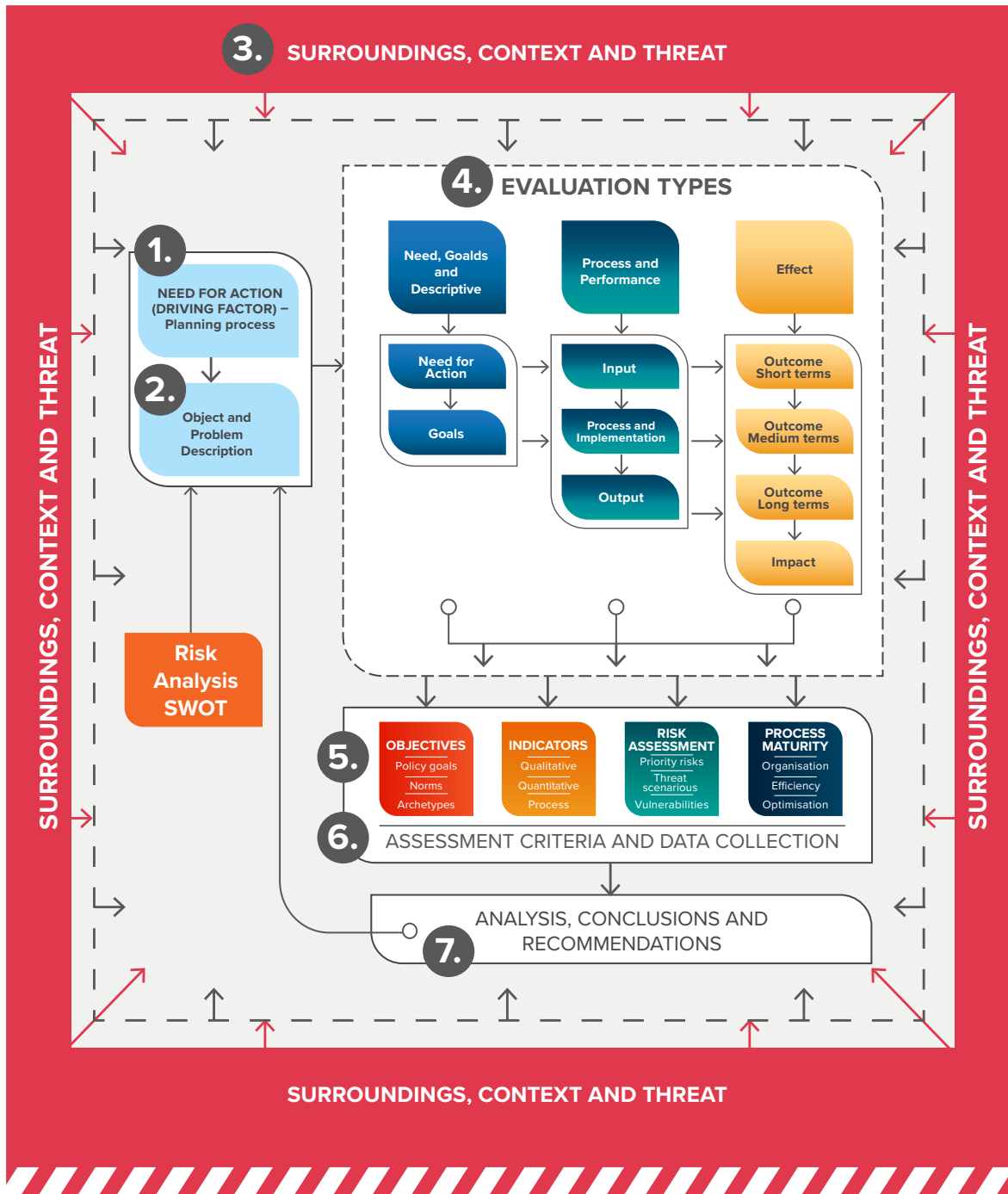
FIGURE 2. An example of an evaluation map that described the basis of evaluation methodology.

The case study's methodological implementation

Following the steps from the basis of evaluation methodology, **the need for action (1)** derived from the MPF's desire to determine whether its courses were generating the required results for "the whole of society". **The objective (2)** was, therefore, to evaluate the MPF's courses with the aim, set by the course coordinator from the MPF, to assess *'whether the courses are building capability with a whole-of-society approach'*. This question has two parts. First: does the courses create an increased capability? Second: does that capability cover what could be considered a whole-of-society approach? The **desired outcome** was to provide guidance to the agency on what parts of the structure might need revising depending on eventual limitations in the courses and outreach to 'building capability' and reaching a 'whole-of-society approach'. The whole-of-society approach emphasises the importance of involving all parts of society in security and crisis management efforts.

Contextual aspects (3) might have had some influence over the results. Since the MPF began providing courses the security situation in Europe has changed. The war in Ukraine is well documented by the media and there has been an ongoing disinformation campaign against social services in Sweden. The MPF is not the only institution that offers

courses on countering IIO. Therefore, it is essential to note that this report focuses solely on the MPF courses' efforts and does not examine aggregated results or efforts from different parts of society. These aspects may present a challenge to determining what capability were achieved based on the courses' efforts only and what resulted from the efforts of other institutions. Additionally, the changing threat landscape may have increased people's general knowledge of threats, and therefore changes in organisations may have happened organically.

The evaluation types (4) for the case study were process and performance evaluation. A detailed explanation of the different components of the **framework tools (5)** is provided in the following sections, along with examples of how they were implemented in the case study. The tools used included: identifying archetypes, setting indicators, and measuring outcomes. **Assessment criteria and data collection (6)** involved a survey study, interviews conducted with experts, and text analysis from national policy documents and the courses' content and curriculum.

The evaluation used a **comparative analysis (7)** to assess the courses' process and performance.

Using the framework toolset

The particular focus on evaluating education and training was established as an important step for civilian actors to identify and address weaknesses in these activities and to revise and streamline their work. This is especially important in the ever-evolving landscape of disinformation and foreign influence, where staying ahead of the curve is crucial.

Our point of departure for this report is *A Capability Definition and Assessment Framework for Countering Disinformation, Information Influence, and Foreign Interference*. In that report the evaluation framework is presented, along with the connection between different information environment threats and various activities that are related to capabilities to counter those threats, illustrated by the

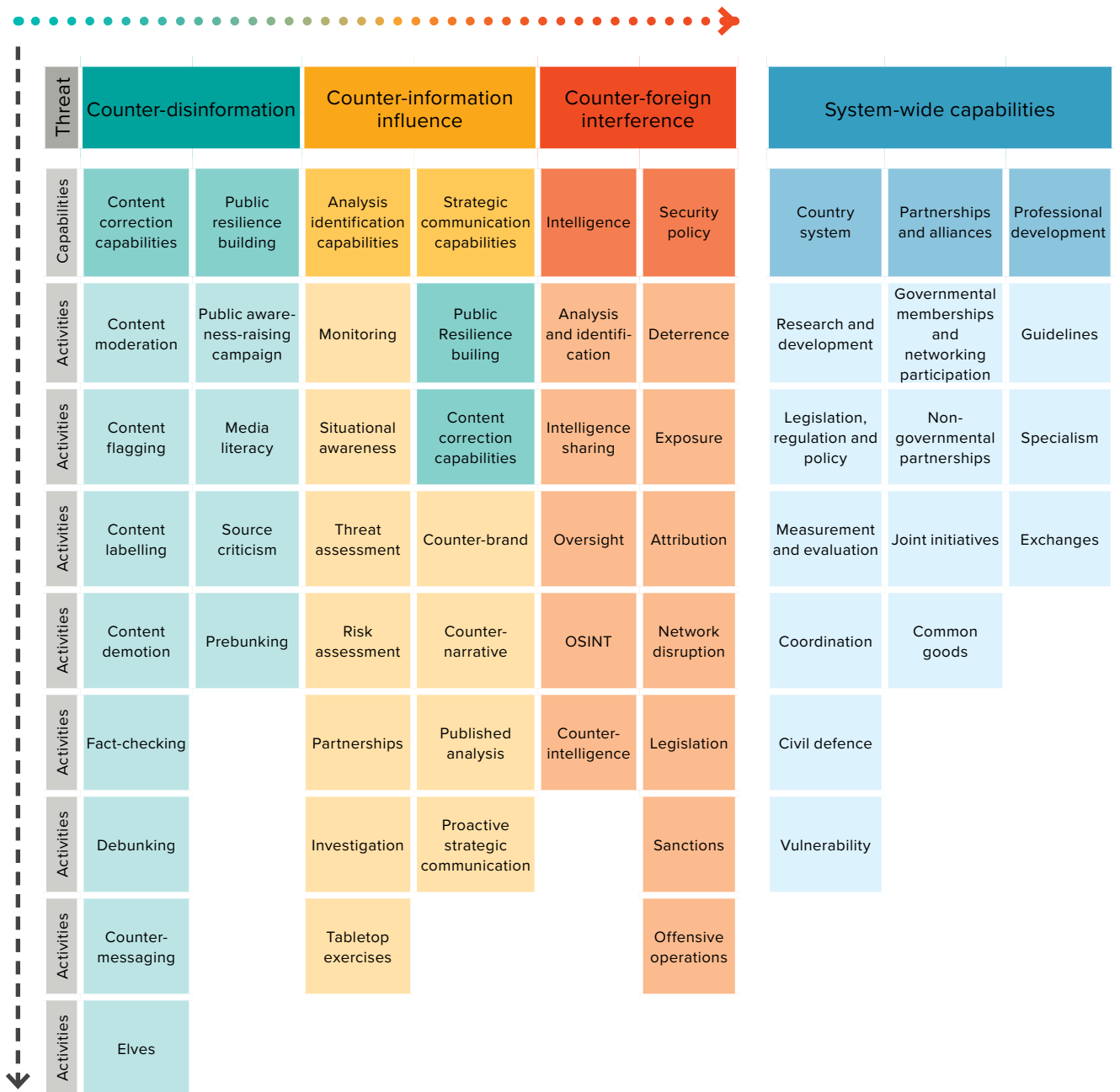|	Counter-disinformation		Counter-information influence		Counter-foreign interference		System-wide capabilities		
Capabilities	Content correction capabilities	Public resilience building	Analysis identification capabilities	Strategic communication capabilities	Intelligence	Security policy	Country system	Partnerships and alliances	Professional development
Activities	Content moderation	Public aware-ness-raising campaign	Monitoring	Public Resilience builing	Analysis and identifi-cation	Deterrence	Research and development	Governmental memberships and networking participation	Guidelines
Activities	Content flagging	Media literacy	Situational awareness	Content correction capabilities	Intelligence sharing	Exposure	Legislation, regulation and policy	Non-governmental partnerships	Specialism
Activities	Content labelling	Source criticism	Threat assessment	Counter-brand	Oversight	Attribution	Measurement and evaluation	Joint initiatives	Exchanges
Activities	Content demotion	Prebunking	Risk assessment	Counter-narrative	OSINT	Network disruption	Coordination	Common goods	
Activities	Fact-checking		Partnerships	Published analysis	Counter-intelligence	Legislation	Civil defence		
Activities	Debunking		Investigation	Proactive strategic communication		Sanctions	Vulnerability		
Activities	Counter-messaging		Tabletop exercises			Offensive operations			
Activities	Elves								

FIGURE 3. Pamment's identified capabilities for countering disinformation, information influence, and foreign interference, as well as system-wide capabilities.

left-hand part of Figure 3. The right-hand part shows broad system-wide capabilities that are not connected to a specific threat level, but are necessary for credible capability against IIO.

The framework was applied in this case study and we present the framework tools and explain how they were used, divided between the two objectives from the evaluation question.

Objectives

OBJECTIVES

Policy goals

Norms

Archetypes

Objectives can be particularly useful for evaluating tasks that require alignment with their intended purpose. Assessments can come from policies, expectations, norms, and archetypes, and while this approach often provides a broad perspective, it may lack detail in explaining the results of an evaluation.

Objective I: Building capability

In this evaluation, the capabilities illustrated in Figure 3 functioned as **theoretical norms** for evaluating content relevance, which included assessing whether the content covered the topics, skills, and knowledge areas relevant to building the desired capability. Theoretical norms are principles or rules derived from theoretical analysis rather than practical experience, and provide an idealised framework for evaluating systems or behaviour.

It was also relevant to examine main **policy goals** outlined in national directives and the MPF instructions. The national directives and agency instructions concentrate on capabilities described in the country system and seen as general capabilities. While these qualitative aspects may not offer much in the way of nuance or details, they provide a useful framework for capturing the bigger picture and can be relevant for understanding if there are any specific goals the courses should aim to reach. The course curriculum objectives were viewed from this perspective, to see if they followed these overarching goals.

Objective II: Whole-of-society approach

The evaluation also included the use of **archetypes and benchmarks** to compare the necessary aspects to determine whether the courses have a whole-of-society approach. The benchmarks were created through interviews with experts from the Swedish Defence University and the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. The benchmarks are qualitative in nature since it is practically impossible to determine exact numbers of people from the total defence structure that would need to take the courses.

Indicators

Indicators can be used to deconstruct tasks, establish baseline data, and weigh the factors contributing to objectives. The framework suggests using a set of indicators to measure an organisation's progress in developing capabilities. The indicators should be designed to be measurable and specific.

Objective I: Building capability

The use of indicators combined the **quantifiable** parts of the courses with **qualitative** aspects. Whether the course curriculum objectives were reached was based on the participants' test results, as obtained from interviews with the course coordinator, as well as from participants' self-assessment. To gather this data, a survey study was conducted between 3 May and 5 June 2023. Respondents were participants who had finished either the basic, implementation, or advanced course that the MPF provides.

When it comes to **process** measures, this included considering whether the course offered opportunities for practical exercises and real-world applications, as emphasising these aspects can enhance building capabilities, and also assessing whether the course teaching approach used a diverse range of instructional formats to enhance the learning experience. Answers to this could be found in the course description as well as through interviews with the course coordinator. It was also relevant to consider the time commitment for the courses, since some capabilities may take longer than others to develop.

Objective II: Whole-of-society approach

For the second part of the evaluation question **quantitative** measures could be used to study how many of the participants fit into the objective benchmarks (representation from different parts of the country, organisational representation, local, regional, or national representation, etc.)

Including the **process** of providing sources and support with learning materials during and after the course could also assist in understanding the outreach of the course.

Risk assessment

RISK ASSESSMENT

Priority risks

Threat scenarious

Vulnerabilities

Risk assessments can be used for identifying and prioritising potential vulnerabilities and threats, as well as evaluating readiness for such scenarios. Risk assessments take a holistic view of capability planning within an interconnected system to better understand how capabilities function together under stress.

Risk assessment had a complementary role to Objectives and Indicators in the case study. By combining the results of the Objectives and Indicators, Risk assessment was used to reflect on potential **vulnerabilities**.

An evaluation could also use **threat or effect scenarios** to workshop vulnerabilities and **prioritise the risks** they identify. Risk assessment could therefore be used as a method both to answer an evaluation question regarding capability to counter IIO and to analyse 'need for action', the first step of evaluation methodology, to initialise an evaluation within an organisation.

Process maturity

PROCESS MATURITY

Organisation

Efficiency

Optimisation

Process maturity allows for the assessment of organisational and process efficiency on a scale that ranges from ad hoc and unstructured practices to highly optimised processes. This can help organisations to assess their overall level of maturity in their capabilities.

Process maturity was used for reflection and as a complement to the other tools. For example, the level of process maturity of **organising** the courses, if there is a learning **optimisation** and structure that extends beyond ad hoc training for individuals and if there is an **efficiency** of embedding learned knowledge in the participants' organisations.

Case study: The Psychological Defence Agency's course structure

The MPF was established in 2021 to provide assistance to government bodies, the public sector, businesses, and organisations, as well as to enhance the resilience of the Swedish public. The agency is not solely responsible for building psychological defence but has a key role in a collaborative national effort. To develop psychological defence and support actors in this endeavour, the agency has created an education and training structure to be able to fulfil its responsibilities.

The main conclusions of the evaluation will be presented in two parts establishing (1) whether the courses accommodates the purpose of building capability and (2) if it can be said to have a whole-of-society approach.

Building capability (Objectives and Indicators)

Building capability refers to the process of developing and improving the skills, knowledge, and resources of individuals and organisations to achieve their goals effectively and efficiently. For the courses, this mainly involves increasing knowledge of democratic principles and awareness of IIO from foreign powers targeting Sweden, as well as tools for identifying and countering these threats.

General objectives at national and agency level (Objectives)

Sweden's national security strategy seldom mentions information influence operations as a threat on their own; most often it is discussed in contrast to cyber security and general civil defence. However, the strategy recognises the importance of psychological defence, crisis preparedness, and civil defence in building the country's resilience to various threats. Even so, it does not provide any specific goals or objectives for actors to strive for regarding IIO.[13] The government's bill 'Total Defence 2021–2025' does not provide more explanation or details regarding IIO's.[14]

The Swedish governing structure consists of three main branches: the executive, legislative, and judicial. Alongside these, Sweden has a tradition of 'no ministerial rule' where certain administrative tasks are delegated to independent public agencies. These agencies operate independently within their areas of expertise, implementing laws and policies and delivering public services. They contribute to the governance system by providing expertise, enforcing laws, and ensuring transparency in public tasks. The government governs agencies mainly through law, written instructions for the agencies, and the annual regulatory letter in which the agencies' grants are distributed. The instructions become the overarching goals for the agencies to live up to, but are not specific enough to indicate any measurable objectives per se. These are for the agencies to formulate on their own. The instructions for the MPF state that the agency should provide support and strengthen the

population's resilience, and conduct training, promote cooperation, and ensure coordinated action in countering threats towards Sweden.[15]

Recommendations and remarks

- Create education and training policy, as well as short- and long-term goals and guidelines for educational activities such as courses and presentations.

- Identify key skills and guiding documents for capability identification for other actors in society.

The continuation of the courses would benefit of the agency creating an education and training policy, and specific set goals and guidelines for what the long-term goals should be for their educational efforts as a whole. It would be up to the agency to formulate these independently according to the instructions and regulations. This would enable the prioritisation of resources to greatest effect when building capability and also indicate how these activities should be evaluated in the future to follow up on the potential impact they have had.

When it comes to countering IIO, there are no clear-cut regulations regarding what capability different actors and parts of society should have. The relevant steering documents only provide vague guidance. Identifying the key skills and knowledge required to effectively detect, identify, assess, and combat IIO is not an easy task. It requires a collaborative and often self-motivated effort from across the various societal sectors, based on both a sense of community and independent consideration of the threats towards their organisations. Different actors might need guidance in this endeavour, and either the MPF should produce this guidance as an identified part of the agency's responsibilities, or it could be regulated at a national level though existing national agreements between national agencies, municipalities, and regions.[16]

Capability development after the courses (Objectives and Indicators)

From when the agency was established in 2021 to the preparation of this report, the MPF has delivered twenty-five basic courses, two implementation courses, and one advanced course.[17] The courses cover a broad range of activities (as explained in the annex). The primary focus has been on public awareness, media literacy, partnerships, and proactive strategic communication, covering concepts such as 'public awareness building', 'analysis and identification capabilities', 'strategic communication capabilities', and some activities relating to 'system-wide capabilities'. However, the courses have not delved deeply into specific activities such as content moderation and flagging, labelling, and demoting content. There has been little to no focus on activities that could help the participants generate a continuing learning process such as creating a plan for evaluation, training, and education within their organisation's field. Applied in-depth subject knowledge is, however, included in the training the trainers course, from a teaching perspective.[18]

Regarding the courses' short-term outcome for the individual, regarding professional development and growth, both the test results19 and the survey study show significant results. For the **basic course** (completed by all respondents), most considered they had gained an increased understanding of countermeasures to identify and counter malign information influence, as well as knowledge to identify the techniques used by an adversary. A large majority of the respondents assessed that they had gained a greater understanding of how IIO can negatively affect society and the importance of strategic narratives in their own organisation, but also how foreign powers

use strategic narratives to influence target audiences.[20]

For the respondents who had taken the **implementation course** (26 per cent of respondents—27 out of 107), the majority agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that they could draft a report on potential IIO and knew the routes to share the report with relevant actors. Only four respondents assessed they lacked this skill since they had not yet had the opportunity to use the report template, they had perceived it as unclear, or there had been insufficient time to practice.[21]

Most respondents believed they understood their own organisation's information needs for identifying and countering IIO. They also used information environment scanning and tools, although there was variation in whether there was a structured system for saving and processing collected information. Approximately 37 per cent of respondents agreed that they did have processes for this in their workplaces, 33 per cent did not, and for 30 per cent it was more ad hoc. These answers indicate that the respondents did recognise the difference, but might be unable to change these structures themselves. However, most respondents agreed that their organisation conducted target audience analysis for important questions.[22]

All respondents from the **advanced course** (14 per cent of respondents—14 of 107) agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that they understood what capabilities their organisation needed to be able to identify and counter IIO; 90 per cent of respondents had confidence that their organisation understood the importance of countering IIO, while 10 per cent considered that the organisation might not fully understand the threat IIO constitutes.[23]

When asked if they had drafted an organisation plan that could systematically prevent, detect, identify, and counter IIO, the respondents were divided: 50 per cent agreed or somewhat agreed, 43 per cent didn't agree or didn't agree at all, and 7 per cent responded

Respondents to the survey study
Out of 426 course participants, 107 responded to the survey (25 per cent). Of these, 73 were women, 32 were men, and 2 preferred not to disclose their sex. Of the respondents, 46% were aged 50–64, 45% were 30–49, roughly 6% were 20–29, and around 4% were over 65.
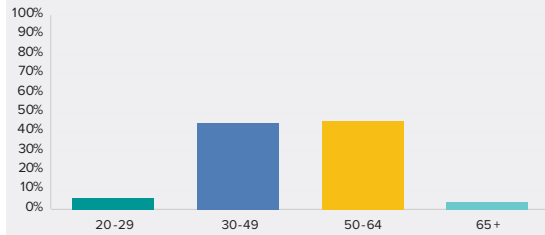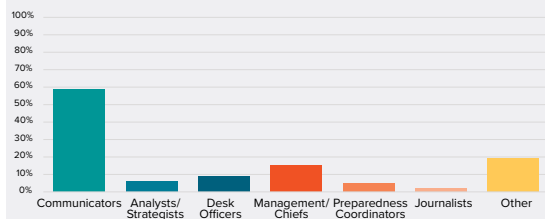

Regarding course participation, 60% had just completed the **basic course**; 26% had continued with the **implementation**
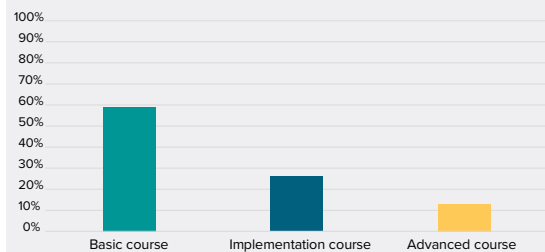
course and 14% the **advanced course**. While most respondents participated in courses in 2022, a significant portion (40%) took the course in 2023, which indicated that the MPF had reached a wide audience in the first half of the year.

Regarding the respondents' professions, 55% were communicators, 14% management/chiefs, 8% desk officers, 6% analysts/strategists, 5% preparedness coordinators, and 2% journalists. Nearly 18% mentioned alternative professions, mostly related to security roles such as security chiefs, information security analysts, or data security analysts.

that they didn't know if such a plan existed or not. Those who hadn't done so either requested more assistance or had not yet had the time to create one.[24]

Almost all respondents agreed or somewhat agreed that their organisation had a plan for strategic communication and had developed an audience analysis for its communication efforts. Only two respondents disagreed with the last statement.[25]

Upon course completion, 50 per cent of respondents somewhat agreed with the statement that they had been able to influence the work in their organisation with the knowledge they had learned on the courses; 28 per cent agreed or completely agreed with this statement and 22 per cent disagreed or didn't agree at all. While 50 per cent agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement that the courses had contributed to a change in how their organisation countered IIO, 40 per cent disagreed or didn't agree at all. This, however, was often because they already had structures that worked with the knowledge they had learned or they were reorganising or developing new structures.[26]

Also, the courses didn't include guides for how participants should themselves promote various actions for their organisations, such as promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills among the general public, working with social media platforms to identify and remove fake news and propaganda, conducting public awareness campaigns, engaging with civil society organisations, and developing partnerships with the private sector to identify and mitigate risks.[27]

Recommendations and remarks

- Develop a map or list of the current courses available in this field to give a valuable perspective on both nationally and internationally available programmes. Such an overview can assist in pinpointing potential collaborative partners for specific

practical skills that need longer time to master.

- Create a structure for regular evaluation and, together with a third party which can assist in impartial assessment, develop a process for improvement and changes in the course content.

Education and training can have different approaches. Courses can provide a broad understanding of subject matter as well as specific techniques and methods. Developing complex skills takes time, practice, and resources, which would indicate a need for longer courses if it is not possible to inculcate in participants a routine to continue exercising after finishing the course. While longer courses can provide more comprehensive training for acquiring practical skills, the participants often lack the necessary time and financial resources to commit to extended courses. It is necessary to offer these kinds of shorter courses to ensure that actors get the knowledge they need; however, longer courses do not need to be ruled out. Partnerships to reach specific audience sets can provide the option needed for longer courses for specific practical skills. Mapping out the existing courses in this field can provide a good overview of national and international courses, and this can help to identify potential partners for collaboration.

It is important to have a plan for continuously improving the courses to ensure that they remain relevant and effective. This requires regular evaluation of the course content and delivery, and assessment of the education and training effect. The MPF can do this on a regular basis itself, but could also seek support from its alumni network to contribute to course evaluations. This would enable the organisation to identify areas requiring improvement and to make the necessary changes to ensure the courses remain valid and effective.

Whole-of-society approach (Objectives and Indicators)

From a Swedish perspective, the whole-of-society approach is closely linked to the concept of total defence. Total defence means that the entire country should be prepared to resist attack, defend the country, and contribute to recovery efforts in the event of a crisis or conflict. A whole-of-society approach also involves collaboration between government and non-governmental organisations to ensure that responses to foreign IIO are evidence-based and transparent, and respect human rights and freedoms. Ultimately, this approach aims to build resilience and protect democratic values against the threat of foreign interference.[28, 29]

Benchmarks (Objectives and Indicators)

The creation of some sort of benchmark on how many participants would be needed to fulfil the statement of having a whole-of-society approach could be based on the identification of which actors can be said to be a part of the total defence structure in Sweden. This would include approximately 500 different actors if also counting companies and voluntary resource groups. There are additionally hundreds of companies that might be relevant for the defence efforts, depending on their role in the specific area of the country.[30, 31]

Until now the main focus has been on educating individuals representing the public sector: municipalities, regions, county administration boards, and national agencies (Figure 4).[32] Participants from industry and private companies to have taken the course account for just 2 per cent, while 42 per cent were from central and government agencies and corporations. Municipalities accounted for 31 per cent, regions and administration county boards made up 9 per cent, and approximately 2 per cent were from the media or other sectors.[33] No respondents were from universities or non-profit organisations. It is hoped that the organisations with a geographical area of responsibility will reach out to businesses and other external partners and inform them about the courses' content.[34]
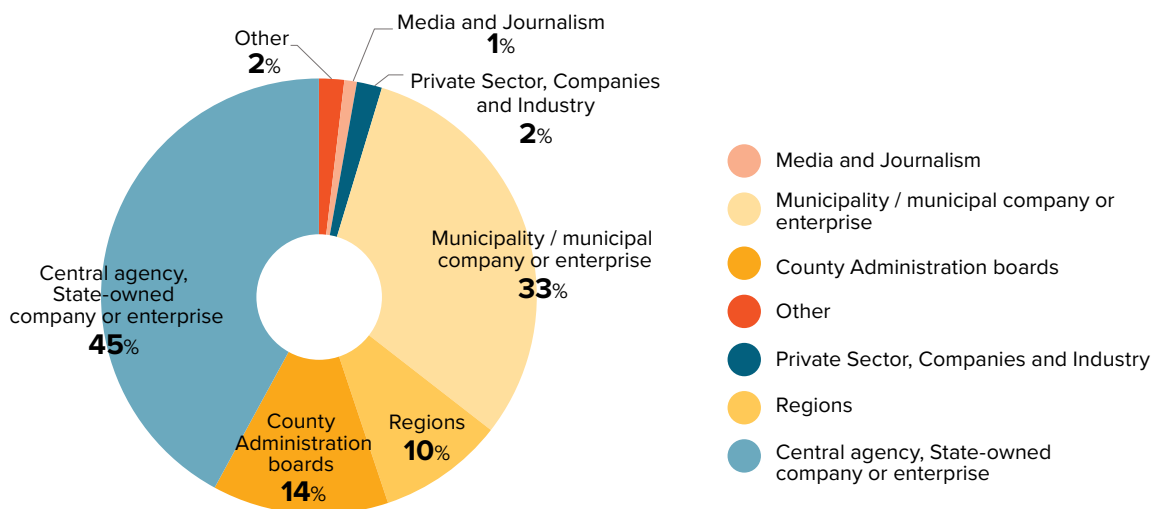

FIGURE 4. The proportion of respondents from different parts of society.

Geographically the survey indicated that a majority of respondents were from the central or eastern areas of the country (Figure 5). The other four areas made up 42 per cent of the respondents, indicating that there was a much larger representation from the middle parts of the country.[35] Notably, only 25 per cent of the participants responded to the survey.Recommendations and remarks

- Identify and develop examples of how companies and industries can understand their needs for capacity.

- Develop additional options for spreading information to reach a larger audience in all parts of the country, as well as an audience outside the public sector.

- Establish connections and partnerships with relevant universities and institutions that can include elements of the courses in their own educational programmes, as well as contributing to reaching a wider target audience.

The lack of representation from companies and industries has been a choice based on the MPF's limited resources. The other institutions interviewed for this report confirm that it has been a struggle to reach these groups but for other reasons, such as lack of awareness of the courses or the feeling that they did not have a mandate or obligation to work on these specific issues. Survey respondents representing companies and industry felt that their organisations did not view working on these issues as a requirement in their workplace, that the organisations lacked knowledge on the topic, and that they would require more guidance regarding national demands for companies and industry in countering IIO. This problem does not have an easy solution. To some extent, it is up to every actor that has a need or relationship with specific companies or industries to collaborate with them in the efforts against IIO. Defining general key skills or capabilities that companies or industries need could be of assistance in this conversation.
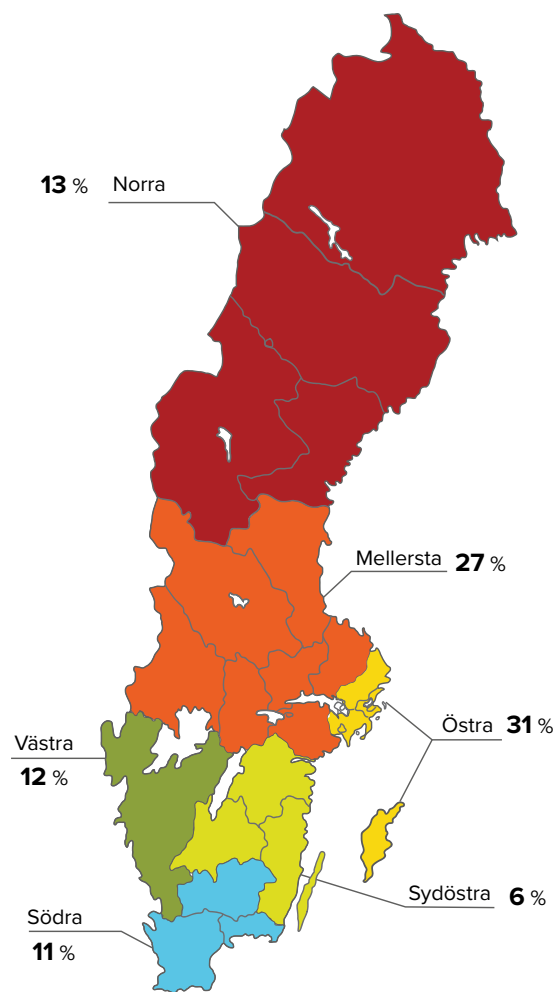

FIGURE 5. The geographical distribution of respondents.

Different target groups may require different forms of information distribution, such as information sheets, general presentations, or other relevant means. It is appropriate to identify the knowledge requirements of each target group and determine the most effective means to provide them with the necessary information. The agency could conduct an analysis to identify key actors and their knowledge needs and levels with respect to IIO prevention, including specific information needs for companies and volunteer organisations.

One option to reach a wider audience is to collaborate with other institutions such as universities, academies, consultancy companies, and voluntary organisations that offer

courses on similar topics. These partners can contribute by teaching the critical parts of the courses to their own participants, providing access to the latest research and best practices. This approach can help fill the gap in the agency's outreach.

Of course to achieve a whole-of-society approach in knowledge development in the area a number of actions and activities must be synchronised and coordinated, led by a range of information-related capabilities, within the Swedish structure, as part of a dedicated, coordinated campaign.

Individual vs organisational learning (Process maturity)

The institutions interviewed for this study believed too much focus on details can hinder learning, and hence their education is seen as an opportunity for personal and professional growth rather than a means to achieve specific organisational goals.[36, 37] It is clear that this has also been the focus for the MPF courses, even if they do have greater ambitions to create a ripple effect in the organisations. The MPF encourages participants to share knowledge within their various organisations by providing them with access to all course materials. While the course materials don't directly mention this, it suggests that it would be beneficial for participants to share their newly acquired knowledge with their colleagues.[38] However, the main emphasis of the course is on comprehending the content rather than on how to distribute, adopt, and proselytise it.[39] In the survey study 26 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that they could spread knowledge through a process or organisational structure, 44 per cent somewhat agreed, and 30 per cent disagreed or didn't agree at all.[40]

Recommendations and remarks

- Creating alternative learning tools for participants and other incentives to spread the knowledge learned in their organisation as well as to interested target audiences could be used as an alternative way to spread information in general.

The participants acquire knowledge and experience during the courses but do not always have the means to embed them in their organisations afterwards. Creating additional learning tools, resources, and materials (games, implementation instructions, etc.) for course participants to share with a broader audience, assisting in spreading the knowledge within and external to their respective organisations, would influence a wider audience. This would help to create a greater process maturity in the system. These kinds of assisting tools could also be used to reach audiences that are unable to participate directly in the courses.

The risk of some actors falling behind (Risk assessment)

As the survey study indicates, the short-term outcome of the courses for individual development are high, and the different courses cover a broad range of capabilities. One of the risks is the lack of representation or interest from the private and commercial sector, companies, and industry. This may limit the range of perspectives and interaction within the course curriculum, leading to a failure to address the full spectrum of challenges and complexities that exist society-wide, which is pertinent to the risks of IIO. Reaching this specific audience could create the opportunities for collaboration that are essential for a whole-of-society approach. The risk is also that companies and industries will fall behind in the capability development the MPF is looking to achieve, making them susceptible targets, or inadvertent proxy actors, for an adversary.[41]

There is also the geographical aspect to consider, with most participants coming from the central part of the country and not as many from the north and the south.[42] This generates a geographical difference in capability, and hence points to further vulnerabilities in the national system that is based on preparation planning from different geographical areas and sectors.

Recommendations and remarks

■ Provide equal opportunities through specific set courses around the country, and use additional learning tools for spreading awareness and increasing knowledge in a wide target audience.

Creating additional or alternative learning materials, resources, and activities designed for hard-to-reach audiences could reduce the imbalance of course participation. Also, having specific courses set in different parts of the country, or online courses, could be a way to create opportunities for actors around the country to participate.

Closing remarks

This report highlights the effectiveness of using the framework as a valuable tool for evaluating courses, education, and training. By following the steps outlined in the framework, one can efficiently assess and analyse the effectiveness of these educational programmes and potentially other capabilities.

By selecting the appropriate evaluation type and utilising the framework's tools—Objectives, Indicators, Process maturity and Risk assessment—evaluators can gain valuable insights into the capability of interest. The assessment criteria are defined and data collection methods are chosen to ensure the validity of the evaluation. Meaningful conclusions can thus be drawn and actionable insights revealed. The evaluation map provides a visual guide, ensuring that all necessary steps and components are covered during the evaluation process.

General conclusions and remarks deriving from the case study

The MPF courses generate meaningful results for the individuals that participate. The aim of creating whole-of-society resilience to foreign, malign IIO is dependent upon those participants and actors having the motivation or compulsion to advocate for and create a process for organisational learning and change, so their knowledge and understanding will spread throughout their organisations and, ultimately, broader society. Nevertheless, in order to create an enhanced capability in society that has a general effect, multiple approaches and a clear vision of what capability means in various sectors of society are necessary. This also requires a number of synchronised and coordinated actions to promote a widespread distribution of knowledge and information.

The courses prioritise a focus on capabilities used for identifying and countering IIO, which is their set goal. To develop the effectiveness and spread of capabilities in society, the agency should focus on developing system-wide capabilities that will support the development of the courses, by:

- Creating educational and training policies, along with short- and long-term goals and guidelines for courses and presentations.

- Identifying common goals, key skills, and guiding documents for capability identification for other actors in society, both public and private sector.

- Creating a map or list of existing courses in the field, providing valuable insights into national and international programmes. Such an overview facilitates the identification of potential collaborative partners who can spread the knowledge and practical skills from the courses that require a longer time to master. This could also assist in reaching a wider target audience.

- Establishing a structured evaluation process, perhaps in collaboration with a third party such as a university, to improve and modify course content. Setting baseline indicators and measurable goals can facilitate future evaluations. Identifying specific course components that require regular evaluation is recommended. Evaluation can encompass various aspects such as outcomes, learning processes, implementation resources, instructors, and

participants. Prior to implementing an education programme, necessary conditions, preferred learning approaches, and desired results should be determined. Upon programme completion, an assessment should be conducted to measure the extent to which the intended goals were achieved.

■ Developing additional learning tools to spread information in the participants' organisations, as well as for interested actors who might not be able to participate in the courses

themselves. This could assist in creating a greater process maturity in the organisations.

■ Setting a schedule for holding courses in different areas of the country, which could create equal opportunities for actors to participate in the courses.

■ Regularly evaluating courses, including how they have been incorporated in agencies or assisted them and actors in their work.

Annex: Education and training courses provided by the Psychological Defence Agency

Web course: The Swedish Civil Contingency Agency (MSB) created a web course that focuses on the information from the report *Meeting Information Influence: Handbook for Communicators*. Participants who wish to take the basic course must first complete the web course. This is to ensure that all participants have a minimum level of understanding and basic knowledge of IIO. After completing the basic course, they can then apply for any of the other courses.
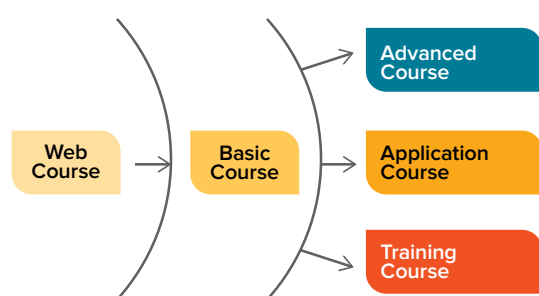

FIGURE 6. The different education and training courses provided by the MPF and their general structure.

Basic course: The goal is to increase knowledge of democratic principles and awareness of undue information influence by foreign powers targeting Sweden, and to develop awareness of threats and vulnerabilities within information influence. Participants learn to explain the difference between advocacy and improper information impact, describe threats and vulnerabilities within information influence, and identify and face information impact.

Following the basic course, there are three different paths for participants to continue.

Application course/implementation course: The goal is to strengthen overall defence and resistance to foreign influence campaigns by developing participants' ability to analyse and report undue information influence within their organisation. It covers topics such as external threats, internal vulnerabilities, analysis methods, and tools. Participants should be able to apply analysis methods to identify undue informational influence and to summarise reports, and should know reporting routes.

Advanced course: The goal is to develop participants' competence to create an organisation that can systematically prevent, detect, identify, and meet information impact to enhance the organisation's capability to resist influence campaigns by foreign powers. Participants should be able to summarise how to manage an organisation to meet information impact, describe capability in an organisation, and prepare a plan for an organisation to meet information impact.

Training the trainers course: This course was not included in the present report, since at the time this case study was conducted, only one such course had been delivered. The goal is to strengthen total defence actors' resilience by increasing their knowledge and commitment to counter the threat to democracy. The course aims to train trainers to spread knowledge and awareness among a larger number of actors, and for participants to develop in-depth knowledge of undue information influence, as well as pedagogy and didactics, to lead and complete a basic course for protection against information influence. Participants should be able to apply in-depth subject knowledge, show pedagogical leadership, and use formative assessment.

Endnotes

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