



CORRECTIONS CAREERS

First Stakeholder's Checkpoint **Focus Group** Methodology, Script and Summary National Report



BRAINLOG

Results of The Focus Group

Date: 08.04.2021

Place: Odense, Denmark

Project Partner: BrainLog

Participants: 3 (BrainLog) & 3 (The Trade Union)

Basic Information About the Participants

The focus group was conducted at BrainLogs offices in Odense, Denmark on the 8th of April 2021. Besides the three participants from BrainLog, three additional participants from the Danish trade union for prison guards were present.

- The first participant was the head of communications of the trade union.
- The Second participant has 20 plus years as a prison guard and officer but has spent the 4 years being part of the trade union full-time.
- The last participant was a current prison guard who has worked as such, for the last 19 years in multiple prisons in multiple roles.

The focus group was led in Danish by Kristian Frevert and assisted by Martin Savchev. The session was recorded.

Focus Group Description

The focus group participants were recruited through the Danish Trade Union for Prison Guards, which protects and fights for the interests of danish prison guards. The Trade Union selected people they believe would be good participants and who could help us understand the current situation. The participants were familiar with the topic, through their many years of experience. Besides, they were willing to help us with their opinions on the current tools available and suggestions for future improvements.

Before initiating the discussion, Kristian Frevert, as the moderator and lead, made a presentation of the CCJ4C project, going through the objectives of the project, the target group, the methodology, and expected results.

Afterwards, the purpose of the focus group as well as the duration and the rules were explained. Before starting the open discussion on the pre-determined set of questions, two guest speakers had been invited to participate and give a presentation. The speakers were Gary Hill, Staff Training and Development Director of the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA), and Adrian Neagoe, Vice-president of The National Trade Union of Prison Policemen Romania (SNPP). After

30 min. of presentation and collegial discussion, the focus group began with the open discussion of the predetermined questions.

Main Discussion

1. How do you assess current staffing career opportunities? Feel free to share both positive and negative opinions.

The current work conditions in Kriminal Forsorgen in Denmark are quite strenuous. The system is heavily understaffed, resulting in many usual practices being suspended or down prioritized for the time being. These practices include the yearly performance reviews and other kinds of career promoting practices. The yearly performance review is the main tool a guard can use to help advance his career and enlist his superior in the endeavor. Having someone guide you and show you the different opportunities, including how to navigate and achieve them, is very helpful. It saves the employee a lot of time and effort and instills a sense of belonging.

Hopefully, the system will normalize post-Covid-19, and some of the previous options to further one's career will return. Before the system stabilize the understaffed prisons, there will always be a certain down prioritization of anything besides daily operations.

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- *" They are actually okay. Currently, Kriminal Forsorgen is very understaffed, but if someone wants a career, it is definitely possible, but you have to be very proactive."*
 - *" Creating a career path is very self-reliant. It is on the employee to seek out possibilities and make your superior aware of you wanting to further develop your career."*
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2. What is your family's and friends' perspective on being a prison officer?

As shown by the survey that the participants are referring to during the interview, being a prison guard is rather highly respected. Especially by family. There is a lot of sympathy among the Danish population towards prison guards. This might have emerged from the fact that it is a very demanding and stressful job, and everyone is aware of that. Besides, it is also a rather low-paying profession. Especially when taking into account the risk involved.

According to the participants, the ones who most often have the lowest opinion of the profession, are the guards themselves. They can have a tendency to downplay the risk and how stressful the profession often can be.

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- *” We have just conducted a large survey among the guards in training and it concludes that there is rather widespread respect among their friends and family for what they will be doing when they finish their education.”*
 - *” Creating a career path is very self-reliant. It is on the employee to seek out possibilities and make your superior aware of you wanting to further develop your career.”*
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**3. What kind of innovation will have a positive effect on the topic?
(What do you and your colleagues think should be done with career guidance?)**

Currently, career guidance is very personal. This is meant in the way of it being up to the individual to seek out information and be proactive. The usual process is planning with your supervisor during the yearly reviews and having one-to-one on how you should proceed and their thoughts on it all.

One of the ideas on how to improve the process of career guidance could be to make the material on the process and the different options more readily available. Having an online directory could help guards better plan their careers and give them ideas on what they might aspire to become.

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- *” Currently, the available material to improve careers of guards, are online courses on basic training and courses in specific knowledge. One instance is a course on how to handle gangs and gang behavior in prisons.”*
 - *” The issue with a lot of the basic online courses, are that the skills you learn and the knowledge is not useful or very applicable. The content needs to be changed and more online content needs to be available to guards on how to plan your career and what it takes to get there.”*
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4. Are there sufficient opportunities to fulfil your duty as a prison officer? Feel free to share your opinions and suggestions according to experiences you may have had in the past.

In Denmark, there are not issues surrounding sufficient options to fulfill the duty of being a prison officer. It is often, more the lack of staff that curtails many options of further developing oneself. Since the system is so focused on just maintaining and operating the current system with the minimal resources it has available, it is more often on the guards to drive their own development.

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- *” it is very possible to fulfill your duty as a prison officer. What really makes this job more challenging than what it should be, is the lack of staff and the complications that brings.”*
 - *” More regular training. Increased specialized training in areas that interests the individual guards so that they can tailor their expertise to what they feel they need to be the best version they can be.”*
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5. If given the opportunity, what changes would you introduce to support the career development of staff working in prison institutions?

It has become harder trained prison guards to move up in the ranks. Kriminal Forsorgen has begun to recruit for leadership positions from outside the prison. The profile of these candidates spans from policemen to people with a background in law. This has made it much more difficult for normal prison guards to further their own careers as the competition for management is much tougher now.

It is important to remember that not everyone wants to be part of management. Many guards would much rather further educate themselves and specialize within certain areas. For example, with gangs and gang behavior. What needs to be done to help support the development of staff is increased resources set aside for this specifically. There needs to be a time that has been specified for developmental purposes.

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- *” With regards to having a career in Kriminal Forsorgen and moving up in the system, it is becoming increasingly difficult. Kriminal Forsorgen has begun recruiting outside the current system. The background of newer recruits for management divers. For example, they have begun recruiting people with a background in law or from the police.”*
 - *” The central issue still comes back to the lack of staff. If that issue is not alleviated somewhat, very few actions can change anything significantly.”*
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Is there adequate training for prison officers?

What are your thoughts and suggestions?

The base education of prison guards is very good and thorough. It takes three years and includes 3 periods of 8-10 months of practical experience in prisons.

The training and further education available to current guards need changes though. Assuming that the time and resources are present, there are courses and training available to the guards, they often just need guidance and have the information be visible.

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- *” More or less. Increased specialized training in areas that interests the individual guards so that they can tailor their expertise to what they feel they need to be the best version they can be.”*
 - *“The basic three-year training program all guards go through is very thorough. It gives them a solid foundation of both theory and practice.”*
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Conclusions

When it comes to career guidance in the danish correctional system, Kriminal Forsorgen, is a very individual process between the guard and a supervisor. With the yearly reviews being rather optional in the previous years, with covid and understaffed prisons, there needs to be increased awareness of how the guard can improve and handle their own career. It is important to notice that career guidance is available. however, it is up to the guards to be proactive and seek out opportunities.

In the danish system, guards, more or less, have two different career tracks to choose from. They can either try to climb the ladder and compete for management positions, or they can educate themselves and specialize in different areas. Climbing the ranks has become increasingly competitive in recent years since the guards now have to compete with outsiders for the same jobs. Further training and education have been a bit impeded by understaffing and covid and therefore been more up to the guards to seek out and complete.

Regarding the perception of being a prison guard. It may come as a bit of a surprise to some, but there is rather high respect towards people who choose to undertake such a demanding job under very stressful and risky conditions while receiving a very low salary. Surprisingly, the ones who seem to have the lowest opinion of the profession are the guards themselves.

Lastly, innovative improvements that could be developed or implemented could either be online resources that help guide prison guards in what it takes to further their career and the skills they would need to do so.

Appendix



Formålet med projektet er at udvikle, teste og etablere en arbejdsmetode til at starte eller forbedre karrierevejledningsprocessen inden for kriminal Forsorgen (CCJ) med fokus på de nødvendige kompetencer der skal til for at styre sin egen karriere. Dette vil ske med direkte slutbrugerinddragelse (fængselspersonale), arbejdsgivere (fængselsadministrationer), arbejdspladser (fængsler), efteruddannelse (virksomheder og ngo'er). Derudover vil fængselsadministrationer, fagforeninger og internationale organer også blive inddraget i processen

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FORVENTET PROJEKT RESULTATER

- En "current situation" rapport, der er relevant på europæisk niveau, og som fremhæver udfordringerne ved at levere karrierevejledning inden for kriminal forsorg.
- Europæisk profil af specifikke kompetencer til karrierehåndtering, for ansatte i kriminalforsorgen.
- Uddannelse i hvordan man bruger struktureret offentlige høringer til at påvirke den politiske dagsorden.
- Offentlige høringer afholdt i hvert partnerland.

RESULTATER



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PROJEKT PARTNERE

- Nationale fængsels administrationer: Det er dem, der sætter "spillereglerne" i forhold til at gøre karriere inden for kriminal forsorg.
- Internationalt organ, der repræsenterer slutbrugeren og flere europæiske netværk.
- Repræsentanter for arbejdspladserne.
- Direkte repræsentation af de ansatte, der har brug for karrierevejledning og support til udvikling af karriere kompetencer.
- Service sektoren - NGO'er, foreninger, fonde og firmer, som har indflydelse på aktiviteter der leveres til fængsler.



DIGITALE VÆRKTØJER FOR KARIERE VEJLEDNING AF NUVÆRENDE OG FREMTIDIGE FÆNGSELSBETJENTE



- Hvordan vurderer du de nuværende personalemæssige karrieremuligheder? Del gerne både positive og negative meninger. (fx personale rekruttering eller forfremmelser)
- Hvad er din families og venners perspektiv på det at være fængselsbetjent?
- Hvilken slags innovation vil have en positiv effekt på emne.
(Hvad synes du og dine kolleger der skal gøres ved karrierevejledning?)
- Er der tilstrækkelige muligheder for at udfylde sin pligt som fængselsbetjent? Del gerne jeres meninger og forslag i henhold til oplevelser i måske tidligere har haft tidligere har haft.
- Hvis du fik muligheden, hvilke ændringer ville du indføre for at støtte karriereudviklingen af personale, der arbejder i fængselsinstitutioner?
- Findes der tilstrækkelig efteruddannelse til fængselsbetjente?
Hvad er jeres tanker og forslag til dette?

