

## Fluxen Prison Dialogue in Norway

Trine-Line Biong and Christian Valentiner

### Background/context

#### Flux

Flux has been working with Dialogue in Norwegian prisons since the autumn of 2015 and, prior to that, with the practical application of Dialogue since 2009. The story, however, begins before that.

Henrik Tschudi met David Bohm at a private Dialogue Weekend in Denmark in the early 1990s and, although attending the conference because of Bohm's reputation as a scientist, Henrik walked away deeply inspired about Dialogue. A similar private Dialogue Weekend was arranged in Oslo by friends of his the following year, at which time he and Peter Garrett would video-record several conversations with Bohm in Henrik's living room.

In 1993 Henrik founded the Flux Foundation, which had as its primary purpose supporting work towards a harmonic and meaningful world. Its key focus has always been on *consciousness, society, dialogue* and *science*. The foundation has supported many projects to promote scientific approaches to understanding the world, including cosmology conferences and various types of Dialogue work.

In 1993 the Flux Foundation established a life-philosophy magazine which ended its cycle with its 50<sup>th</sup> issue in 2008. *Flux Magazine* is carried forward in an electronic format. In 2003 a book publishing business was added, and since 2009 this has been an independent business, still carrying the Flux name.

#### Experiential programs

Trine-Line Biong, a trained actor, director and coach, joined as chief editor in the Flux Foundation in 1997. Initially, her main role was the publication of *Flux Magazine*, and subsequently the books that would come out under the Flux imprint.

In 2009 Trine-Line and Christian Valentiner, an experienced facilitator and organisational development consultant, decided to turn some of the subject matter on Dialogue into experiential programs. Over the course of the following years dozens of people have been trained as Dialogue practitioners and facilitators under the Flux brand.

#### Flux Dialog

In 2017 a non-profit organisation, Flux Dialog, was established. Its primary purpose is to support society development through Dialogue. The organisation was created separate from the Flux Foundation and From Flux Publishing to enable applying for grants from other foundations, donations and government funds.

From January 2018, the Prison Dialogue work in Norway has been carried out under Flux Dialog. The organisation is also developing other Dialogue-based projects in Norway.

## The Norwegian Prison system

Prison systems provide their own context for Dialogue work, and correctional systems have great differences from country to country. Therefore, we are choosing to describe some highlights of the Norwegian context, as it guides how we work and what we can achieve. With Dialogue we are not attempting to change the correctional system, rather how one may work inside the given framework. We find that to be an approach that creates short-term impact.

Norwegian prisons have the directive *“to ensure a proper execution of remand and prison sentences, with due regard to the security of all citizens and attempts to prevent recidivism by enabling the offenders, through their own initiatives, to change their criminal behaviour”*.

The correctional system also operates with what is called “the principle of normality” meaning that punishment is solely a restriction of the prisoner’s freedom. Otherwise, they retain all other rights as citizens. Also, they will not serve under stricter conditions than necessary for security.

Progression through a sentence should be aimed at re-entering society. Given that, rehabilitation would be thought to be a significant part of a stay in prison. Our experience is that in recent years there has been a political trend of focusing more on security than rehabilitation. Prisoners with long sentences would often move through the system from high security to low security and occasionally via half-way houses towards their release.

Norway has a capacity of almost 3,900 cells in 43 prisons spread over 61 locations. Approx. two-thirds of these are high-security. In 2016 the average number of prisoners was 3,850 (up 2.7% from 2015). Total number of prisoners throughout the year was 13,528 (up 6.1%). Less than one in five prisoners are female. An independent study published in 2010 showed that the number of people who were released from prison and reoffended within two years was at 20 %.

The longest prison sentence in Norway is 21 years, although the new Penal Code provides for a 30-year maximum sentence for crimes related to genocide, crimes against humanity or some other war crimes. The average sentence is around 8 months. More than 60 % of unconditional prison sentences are up to 3 months, and about 90 % is less than a year. There are almost no escapes from prison in Norway and over 99 % of all prisoners on temporary leaves return on time.

Some 3,600 full-time equivalent staff are employed in the prison service. Prison staff in Norway is unarmed and about 40% are female officers. Prison officers in Norway go through a two-year education at the Staff Academy, where they receive full pay and are taught in various subjects like psychology, criminology, law, human rights and ethics.

Flux Dialog does not currently work with offenders with severe psychiatric diagnoses and young offenders, and only on rare occasions with prisoners in preventive detention.

This context allows us to operate in a system that is still highly focused on the individual’s journey to freedom. Many programmes are offered by both central and local government

organisations as well as NGOs, but none actually combine the prisoners with staff and none are focused on understanding where our patterns come from. So, in the context of a prison system allowing human growth, Dialogue is currently in a relatively unique position in the Norwegian setting.

### Prison Dialogues in Norway

Flux was approached in early 2015 by Oslo Prison with an invitation to participate in a cultural offering to the prisoners. Although we thought that Dialogue sessions would be an interesting approach, after several rounds of conversation with leadership, this idea did not manifest. Our initial contact person returned to her permanent position in Bergen and, a few months later, she contacted us about the possibility of working in Bergen.

This led to a series of monthly, one-day Dialogue sessions in the Bergen Prison from autumn 2015 to spring 2016, a total of seven full days. The sessions were offered to a group of prisoners in a drug rehabilitation program as well as to staff and selected civilian visitors.

Trine-Line contacted Peter Garrett and Jane Ball after finding 'Prison Dialogue' on the internet. This led to a highly appreciated collaboration in which Peter and Jane, through regular calls, would mentor Trine-Line and Christian, using their 20 years+ of experience in the UK and US prison systems.

Through his personal network Christian approached Bredtveit Women's Prison in Oslo in the spring of 2016, and the facility's leadership quickly became interested in the work that had been done in Bergen. That initiated a collaboration between Flux and the prison that is currently the main focus of our prison work.

### Aims and objectives

The purpose of our program is to contribute to the rehabilitation and integration of prisoners and reduce conflict between prisoners as well as between prisoners and staff. The long-term desired effect of the program would be a changed culture of collaboration in the prison, though still subject to the strictly regulated environment that it is. The prison Dialogue work seems to have a positive effect on how individual participants see each other, and others, as human beings, which supports long-term rehabilitation.

Initially the project was intended to improve the language skills of prisoners, many of whom do not have large vocabularies. This was to take place through conversation, increased listening to the thoughts of others and, eventually, to oneself. By mirroring each other we see much more than our own reflection; we begin to notice how much alike we are as human beings. Through Dialogue prisoners and staff will also gain insight into essential life topics.

From 2018, The Norwegian Prison Dialogue project will contribute to documenting the positive effects of training as well as the frequent practice of Dialogue as a means of rehabilitation and improving communication skills. It will also provide further development and verification of the methods and models we use for initiating and conducting Dialogues. These current models are described further down.

The project will also require the onboarding and potential training and mentoring of new facilitators, bringing more Dialogue ambassadors into the world.

### Method

The method employed in the Prison Dialogue sessions since 2015 is built on the foundation from the Flux Dialogue training programs. During the sessions in Bergen Prison the method further developed from experiencing the unique context the correctional system provides.

Our approach is inspired by the works of David Bohm, William Isaacs, Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard, Marjorie Parker and David Kantor, and the experiences of Prison Dialogues in the UK.

The approach in a 'Fluxen' session (the prisoners' name for our Dialogues), outlined in more detail below, is currently the following:

- Introduction of facilitators and/or visitors
- Interactively building the Dialogic framework
- Check-in with all participants
- Dialogue on one or more themes
- Meta-Dialogue
- Check-out with all participants

### Introductions

After the participants have gathered the facilitators introduce themselves if there are new participants in the group. On several occasions an external participant has also been invited into the session to add perspective. This person is also asked to introduce themselves.

The significance of the introduction is to create trust and familiarity with the people who are guiding the conversations and who are not part of the daily life of those who are prisoners or workers there.

We move on to defining *Dialogue* and emphasise that the intention is better understanding and deeper meaning, and not to reach conclusions or agreement. We also park the common interpretation of "a conversation between two people" – an opposite to *monologue*.

### Dialogic framework

The foundation of the Fluxen sessions are what we call the 'Dialogic framework'.

The first part of the framework is the 'Dialogic guidelines'. These are a set of ground rule-type statements that we get participants to agree upon at the beginning of each session. They are:

- **Everyone is equal** – We leave our roles and status behind and meet in the Dialogue as human beings.

- **Dialogue is a conversation with a centre, not sides** – We contribute to the inquiry, not to any particular person in the circle. Repeated exchanges of opinions between two individuals in the circle, cuts the circle.
- **We all have a part of the truth** – When we share these truths in Dialogue we see a bigger picture.
- **It is equally important to listen as to speak** – We include those who wish to sit and primarily listen.
- **Nothing is wrong** – Do not judge what you want to say; say it and see how it moves the Dialogue.
- **Only one person speaks at a time** – Self-explanatory 😊
- **Everything that happens in the Dialogue stays in the Dialogue** – We create trust by agreeing that we do not take “quotes” out of the context from the Dialogue to people who did not participate. We may talk about the themes in general and new understanding.

These seven guidelines are introduced by the facilitators on the first session and, given repeat participants, we start building it interactively and collectively going forward. That is, participants are invited to offer their interpretation of each of the guidelines, and the facilitators steer the conversation towards the shared understanding of the original intention of each of these.

Occasionally, mini-Dialogues start out of this run-through of the guidelines. Usually, we do not allow them to be extensive, but sometimes some real learning is harvested at this early point.

The original purpose of the guidelines was to offer tools for facilitating a good conversation. They help the facilitators adjust the process during the Dialogue sessions. In addition, we have noticed the bonus effect of repeating the guidelines at the outset of each session: the participants begin to see that these are applicable to many types of human interaction and conversations, and not only for the structured and facilitated Dialogue sessions.

The second part of the framework are what we have called ‘Dialogic skills’. These are inspired by William Isaacs’ four Practises:

- Listening
- Respecting
- Suspending
- Voicing

These are similarly introduced by facilitators and built interactively with the participants at the beginning of each session. They are primarily used to highlight learning moments of well-used skills (or Practices), and also manifest toward the end of each session in the meta-Dialogue, described below.

Occasionally, participants are invited to work on a skill of choice between sessions and we weave the learning into the introduction of the practices in the following session.

This framework is also displayed on two posters that sit permanently on the wall of the common rooms we use and are therefore available to the participants at all times, and not just during sessions.



We often use the metaphor of a football game to describe the difference between the 'guidelines' and the 'skills': The former are the lines around the pitch; if they are crossed, the referee might blow the whistle (or throw down a flag, depending on your definition of football). These guidelines are non-negotiable unless we agree collectively to change them. Skills, however, are abilities for you can train and become increasingly better at, like kicking the ball far or running through defence. These skills can be practised and developed individually.

By upholding the discipline and investing time during each session to build the container, we create an ongoing embodiment of this framework in the participants, slowly enabling them to operate more intuitively in the sessions and possibly also outside.

### Check-in

After establishing the Dialogic framework, all participants are invited to check in. The purpose of the check-in is to activate all participants and get all voices present. It also marks the opening of the Dialogic container.

The process is stating one's name and responding briefly to a question or theme introduced by the facilitators. We strive to keep the check-in theme appreciative as these Dialogues often tend to circle into the darker side of life in prison and shut down those with a more positive mindset or get them to corroborate the negative. We therefore want to start the Dialogues on a positive energetic note.

Some check-in questions and themes that have worked well are:

- *"Talk about something good that has happened since last time"* (this allow ample space to find something good even if one is feeling down in the moment)
- *"How do you feel right now?"* (can sometimes backfire if someone is very negative)
- *"What moves in you right now?"* (is more open than the previous one, but can be too fluffy for some)

One benefit of the participants stating their name is that it establishes their individual identity in the circle. It also allows the facilitators to learn names of participants, which builds intimacy and trust.

The check-in is usually started by one participant volunteering to speak first, and then going clockwise in the circle.

### Dialogue

The theme for the main Dialogue is invited from the participants. In many cases the facilitators bring a number of themes or questions that may be used, should the participants not find a useful topic. As facilitators we log topics that may arise in Dialogues but are not followed through, and that may be useful later.

The facilitators will monitor the flow and energy of the Dialogue and adjust accordingly, using either the guidelines or other facilitation techniques such as paraphrasing or asking questions. They may also add their own perspectives or inputs to the topics as a way of modelling the skills, or to facilitate the Dialogue.

A Dialogue session usually last about 90 minutes to two hours, with a short break.

### Meta-Dialogue

After the Dialogue the participants are invited to reflect upon the Dialogue process itself— not the theme or where it took us content-wise, but rather how we used the guidelines and skills to improve the quality of the conversation.

We spend most of the time focusing on the skills as they are what can be further – maybe indefinitely? – developed? We may even go through them one at a time and check with participants for reflections and observations.

This is a low-threshold process debrief in which participants often gain new learning in their Dialogic conversations skills or have deeper insights into their habits and patterns.

The information in the meta-Dialogue is instant feedback to the facilitators, allowing adjustment of future sessions based on the experience of the participants.

### Homework

Occasionally we will invite the participants to take on a piece of voluntary “homework”. We then plan to debrief this in the following session. Oftentimes this is related to working with the Dialogic skills, e.g.

- In the next week, notice which of the skills you use most
- Until the next session pick one skill you would like to work more on / improve?

Our experiences with this have been varied. Often the participants may have forgotten by the time we leave the premises. Other times we have been surprised at what they have come back with in terms of new insight. One prisoner reported that she had suddenly noticed how she wasn’t listening at all in the family context.

We plan on continuing this practice as we believe a lot of the transformation is created through a change of our behaviour. Even if you do not do the homework you commit to, just stating in a circle that you would like to work on the way you meet people (Respecting) has an impact; on the individual as well as the circle. It also helps to anchor the Dialogic framework.

Another interesting conversation may come out of debriefing homework: *Why is it that we “forget” to do it or shy away from it?*

### Check-out

Every session closes with an invitation to participants to check out. This is done in similar fashion to the check-in: participants state their names and respond to the question, *“What do you take from this Dialogue today?”*

The information in the check-out is important for the facilitators to calibrate what themes and questions work to break the Dialogue open, what parts of the framework that work and what needs to be emphasized in future sessions.

The check-out closes the Dialogic container.

### Bergen Prison

The first Dialogues at Bergen Prison were one- or two-day sessions with a group of men, largely from an addiction background and with long sentences. They were conducted in the autumn of 2015 and spring of 2016, for a total of seven full-day sessions. The work and learning from Bergen laid the foundational structures for effective Dialogue in the work we are currently carrying out at Bredtveit Women’s Prison.

The sessions in Bergen Prison provided an incredibly steep learning curve for being inside the correctional system and interacting face-to-face with prisoners, some of whom had very long sentences and severe addiction problems. We learnt that this requires good debrief



techniques between facilitators in order to remain outside of the drama, quite similar to the guidance/counselling a professional therapist would seek out.

We also learnt how crucial the relationship is with the ambassadors of the prison staff. When you have sponsors, the navigation inside the walls become so much easier. In Bergen we were well anchored in our unit, but not with management. That provided some challenges when the unit decided to stop the sessions and try something else themselves. The prisoners wanted to continue with the Dialogue. We know that Bergen Prison created a different dialogue forum at a later stage and are happy to have inspired that.

Process-wise, many things landed from our experience in Bergen. When we first started, we would introduce the Dialogic framework at the beginning of a session, but only verbally. After we saw participants struggling to remember the core concepts, we started creating flip charts to illustrate the guidelines and skills. These later evolved into the posters mentioned above. As a pedagogical tool these work excellently, as any participants can step in and facilitate according to them, without having to memorise the materials.

Based on a comment from Peter Garrett's experience in UK prisons, we also found that bringing treats they would not normally get, such as fruits and biscuits—and particularly sweets—would attract people to the Dialogue. As prisoner once told us, "I came for the sweets, but the Dialogue was actually really good".

Participation in the Bergen Dialogue circles was quite high and stable. This was related to the unit's drug rehab purpose, as about 70% of the participants were also part of an ongoing rehabilitation program, and also that the ambassadors were active recruiting prisoners and inviting staff.

One of the beautiful moments created in the Bergen Prison sessions shows how establishing these kinds of cross-group forums matters. It took place in a session to which a senior officer responsible for training officers, including summer temp replacements, was invited. In the Dialogue he learned from the prisoners that the temps often work less effectively with the prisoners as they don't understand how the particular units work in their daily routines. This had for several summers created a lot of frustration and aggressive situations. One of the prisoners suggested that *they* train the temps, because they know how things work, as many of the prisoners had longer experience with the routines than even the permanent staff. Although this initially created some mirth, the senior officer took this seriously and later initiated a closer Dialogue with the prisoners in advance of temp staff training.

### [Bredtveit Women's Prison](#)

Since autumn of 2016 we have conducted biweekly, 2½ hour-sessions at the Bredtveit facility. Initially we worked on Ward Four, which is defined as a 'living unit' with less movement restriction on the ward and more privileges for the prisoners. From the autumn of 2017 we expanded to covering two wards: Ward Four, as before, and also Ward Two, which has higher security. In total we have conducted almost 50 sessions on Wards Two and Four.

Earlier this year, the prison asked us to expand our work to their Open Ward B2, after several prisoners who had moved there talked about 'Fluxen'. This spring semester we have conducted ten sessions at B2, now biweekly after a weekly frequency initially. From autumn 2018, it looks like this will move to a weekly session on request by the prison.

Also, in 2018, we are conducting a pilot project funded by grants from the Scheibler Foundation and the Flux Foundation, both private funders. The pilot has the following activities as its work description:

- Conduct sessions in the three Wards and collect data to document the positive benefits of Dialogue
- Train staff in the practice of Dialogue as an introductory course to increase insight, lower scepticism and inspire use in other work processes in the prison
- Train and recruit facilitators to set the prison up for expansion to other prisons
- Follow-up on volunteer civilians who participate in the Dialogues
- Develop a method for the dissemination of prison Dialogues in Norway

### Prisoner and staff participation

A significant feature of the Fluxen Dialogue is that we invite both prisoners and staff to the sessions. This is key to our aim of creating a better understanding of each other as human beings and, in the long term, potentially improving the collaborative culture in Bredtveit Prison.

It is our experience that sessions in which staff participate—rather than those only with prisoners—are richer, more expansive and more rewarding to all participants. Of course, the more diversity in a Dialogue the better, and staff and prisoners represent distinct polarities within the spectrum of the prison experience.

Sessions with prisoners alone tend to circle around in the group's thinking to the gloomy and negative side of prison life. Many prisoners feel victimised by the reality that they are convicted and imprisoned, rather than by the environmental factors that may have put them in crime's way. It is our observation from many sessions that the 'prison is shit' theme is a popular one between prisoners.

Sessions where at least one staff member participates offer more perspective. Occasionally, prisoners want answers or explanations from staff about (for example) conditions or decisions on the ward. We are careful to facilitate the Dialogue with all participants having an equal voice, and the emphasis on participating as human beings and individuals. Although status or role are therefore less prominent, we still respect the authority and accountability of staff working within the prison.

That, of course, is challenging in a prison environment where the lines are so obvious, but we are succeeding with this line of facilitation. Staff who are confronted with complicated prison issues in our sessions are invited to respond as an equal human being, as well as explaining their role where that is relevant.

The prisoners are very positive about the combined sessions, and often ask for more staff to participate. We see this as a sign of success that a forum has been created which allows a different type of communication between staff and prisoners.

Staff participation, unfortunately, is quite low. We hear many explanations, and are trying to address these with other measures, such as training. See the Staff and management training section below.

We have seen participation from senior management, vocational training staff, the prison vicar and several of her students, as well as prison officers and trainees. From the prisoners' perspective the real need is for the officers to participate, and they are also the staff group with the lowest participation rate. Increasing participation with this group would greatly increase the benefits from the program, we believe.

The prisoners also appreciate management participation. We have seen positive effects, such as when one leader shared personal travel stories and was seen as more a human being than a uniform; they became a person and not a role. Another senior leader, through Dialogue, was surprised by the impact that uniforms have on the prisoners—and arrived for the next session in civilian clothing!

Clergy participation always seems to flow well with the philosophy of Dialogue, and the prison vicar and theology students have participated on several occasions, contributing beautifully to the sessions. The approach of the clergy is one of holding and seeing the human being without judgment and easing the journey through prison in their faith – and sometimes even not, but just as a conversation partner. The formative education of clergy in Norway today appears to integrate well with our way of Dialogue and with the nature of one-to-one conversations between prisoners and church representatives. The clergy participants intuitively understand the flow of: Listening > Respecting (seeing the human being) > Suspending (not judging) > Voicing

### External participants

By recommendation from Peter Garrett and Jane Ball from their positive experiences with Prison Dialogues in the UK, we began inviting external participants to the Dialogue sessions in Bergen, and we have expanded and continued the practice in Bredtveit.

The purpose of inviting external 'civilians' is to add more diversity to the Dialogue sessions as well as elements of normality not otherwise present in the circle of prisoners, staff and facilitators. It also builds a bridge between the prison system and society and helps break down the stigma that criminals typically carry.

These guests are people from our wider network who are interested in Dialogue or societal development, those from other prisons or law enforcement, NGOs, potential facilitators — always good human beings!

The prisoners have generally responded positively to external participants as they bring the 'outside in'. Staff have occasionally wondered why these people were invited and how they have been selected. The prison holds a number of prisoners with significant sentences of

public interest, and concerns have been raised by management of the real value to the sessions versus the risk of unnecessary exposure of the inmates (although confidentiality agreements have been signed).

The feedback from prisoners is that this external contact helps stay “normal” and counters the sense of isolation. They provide other impulses and variety and diversity to the Dialogue; including new perspectives to “prison issues”. One prisoner said: *“It’s good to be seen by a new face”*.

The external participants have, without exception, fed back that the sessions have been incredibly impactful on them. For most externals this would have been their first (and maybe only) visit to a prison or exposure to convicted criminals. The assumptions, judgements and stigma that society holds around convicted people are put into question when people actually meet other human beings in the Dialogue. Apart from having been convicted for a felony, they are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, lovers, lonely, skilled etc. and from all walks of life.

### Connecting the inside and the outside

Flux has for many years invited to and conducted dialogue circles where people come and be in Dialogue for 2-3 hours on various themes. During our work in Bergen we began a communication between the Prison Dialogue group and one of our circles in Oslo where they could send each other questions for inquiry through Dialogue. This was continued with one ward at Bredtveit.

Some questions that were exchanged:

- What “invisible” prison may you be in?
- What would you think about meeting a convicted person after he/she is released?
- Can you admit to yourself that you have done something wrong?

As a prisoner you have very limited contact with the world outside. Some questions you may want to ask are also difficult to put out in a group of people that you serve time with and have not chosen to be in relationship with. It lowers the threshold to “send it to others” and yet it still lands in the group subconsciously.

What we found it enabled was the opportunity to ask questions that you may not have found time, place or courage to do. Nor would you necessarily have access to a group of prisoners – or ever visited a prison – and their unique perspectives.

We also found that most questions were universal. Although asked from a specific place, they would enable the inquiry to take many routes. An experience is that prisoners require somewhat more facilitation to stay with the inquiry as they are attempting to “answer” the question rather than explore it and why it may have been asked.

In every new session, the connected dialogue groups really looked forward to this exchange.

### Staff and management training

In the autumn of 2018 we have been given the opportunity to conduct Dialogue training sessions for staff only. This will allow us to provide some foundational learning for the method described above.

Our experience in Bredtveit has been that staff are much less likely to come to the sessions than prisoners. When staff do come, it is often management or educational personnel rather than the guards who have the daily interaction with the prisoners, even though the benefits of thinking together are thought to be highest with the guards.

There are several assumptions as to why the staff do not participate, or do not return to sessions after participating once. One is a myth that they will be criticised by prisoners for conditions in prison. Another is that they do not want to 'wring their souls' in front of the prisoners or share personal or vulnerable experiences. A third is that they do not have time.

By conducting staff training we intend to address the first two myths and build a strong understanding of and trust in the Dialogue method, so that if the time challenge is real—which it sometimes is—they are more skilled in stepping in and out of session, rather than having to participate from beginning to end in order to learn the framework. We may also address their concerns in the learning groups before participating in sessions with prisoners.

In the Dialogue training sessions with staff only we will be picking themes related to a recent organisational culture survey, which will give us a basis for talking about real-life issues for the staff.

We are also making a pitch to train the two management teams at Bredtveit, so they can be role models, open to incorporating Dialogue in their daily work. This is a longer-term process but the Chief Warden, the Deputy Warden and the Prison Inspector—First, Second and Third in their hierarchy—are all very positive towards this. Again, finding the time is the issue.

Both of these initiatives are supporting the aim of slowly changing the culture in Bredtveit Prison.

### Challenges

Although the Bredtveit Prison wards where we work seem to respond well to Dialogue, conducting such a program is not without its challenges.

### Language

Many prisoners are not of Norwegian origin, and quite a few have not lived in Norway long enough to get by, language-wise. This provides some challenges to the Dialogue sessions, where an eager participant may not be able to listen well or voice their perspectives. We always invite anyone to participate, but it seems that lack of language skill pushes many away. We have also translated into English, German and Spanish on occasion, but our experience is that this fragments the verbal aspect of the Dialogue, and the translation conversely pushes away some Norwegians as it may appear tedious to them.

## Time

Although a prison sentence according to the objectives of the Norwegian Correctional Services is the “restriction of liberty” and one might assume that prisoners have a lot of time on their hands, we have found it surprisingly difficult to land 2½-hour time slots that do not collide with other activities in the prison.

With the aim of creating a communication forum including both prisoners and staff, the complexity further increases. When prisoners have time, it is often because staff members are otherwise engaged. We have gone several rounds on this with prison leadership, and although they encourage staff to participate in the sessions they, too, struggle to create the space for it. There is also the attitude/will part to this conundrum which we addressed above, and we are attempting to change this through training.

## Impact

We have often wondered how we might measure the impact of Fluxen. After working for several years in the same system, we are sensing a change of attitude in a positive direction towards Dialogue. It would be interesting going forward to learn from other practitioners how they measure both the short-term and long-term effects of ongoing Dialogue practice and training.

Specific to the correctional system, we would like to understand if Dialogue practice in prison has had an effect on prisoners once released? Do they communicate differently? Listen more? Suspend judgments? Is there a longer lead time before they end up in situations created by misunderstanding? Are they becoming more aware of thought patterns that no longer serve them?

Despite all these questions we have logged a lot of feedback on individual impact on prisoners. They see that Dialogue works, and can be used outside of prison too, e.g. in their romantic relationships. They see how many vantage points come out through Dialogue. Also, that it may contribute to lowering conflict levels due to better understanding and more patience. One prisoner said: *“We gain an insight into each other’s daily lives. What if we used it every day? Talked about common problems?”* They also notice that after a while it was easier taking up issues outside of the Dialogue sessions.

## Learning

The funding that came in place at the beginning of 2018 led to more effort being put into a structured approach to project learning. We have chosen to follow an Action Research-inspired model.

Since the beginning of our work in Bredtveit Prison in 2016, we have kept detailed logs of each session, including themes, number of participants, challenges etc. From the beginning of 2018 we have also kept a learning log to help us evaluate and adjust the different approaches we are trying. Basically, we ask:

- What was needed?
- What did we do?
- What did we learn?

- What was wise?

This ongoing collection of learnings continuously develops our practice.

### Themes

The topics, or themes and questions, we explore in the Dialogues are essential to having fruitful sessions. Within prison, we have found that these themes are both recurring and impactful (in no particular order):

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Loss and grief</li> <li>• Being misunderstood</li> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Prejudice and assumptions</li> <li>• Being 'labelled'</li> <li>• Resistance</li> <li>• Hate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intimacy and love</li> <li>• Relationships</li> <li>• Attitudes</li> <li>• Humanity</li> <li>• Drug problems and rehab</li> <li>• Isolation and loneliness</li> <li>• Preparing for return to society</li> <li>• Power and control</li> </ul>
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### Facilitators

We always co-facilitate, i.e. work in pairs. Although it may seem resource demanding the benefits for the group and well as the facilitators are great. Particularly if you work with groups of over 8 people, it works well having one facilitator hold the space (notice what is going on) while the other is guiding process.

In particular, if facilitation experience is limited then working with a co-facilitator will give you space to breathe and recover should you need to.

Facilitators are human beings, too! We are consciously making a point about this by showing our own humanity. This may be when we mess up the walk-through of the framework. We will point to it, laugh, and correct course. We will never try to be cool or all-knowing.

We will also participate in the Dialogue with our own inputs to support the principle of equality in our guidelines. With larger groups that is rarely necessary, and the intervention will more likely be in the form of a question or summary than an opinion. Occasionally, and particularly in smaller groups, we as facilitators may be important contributors to the flow of the Dialogue. Self-management is important in those cases, as we do want to be honest and authentic in our contributions, but do not want to manipulate.

Having worked in both men's and women's prisons there are also different dynamics we have observed:

- In men's prison it seems prisoners are comfortable with both female and male facilitators, and although we have not tried an all-female facilitation pair in a men's

facility we believe it would work fine here in Norway. The team we worked with in Bergen had two female officers leading a rehab program and commanded great respect.

- In men's prisons there seems to be more straight talk. Men tend to use fewer words but are powerful when they show up. When there are conflicts, they appear to be sorted with forceful communication, bordering on aggression. Conflicts that arise are short-lived. Facilitation requires an awareness of this and staying open if aggression seems to lurk.
- In women's prison it has been a benefit being a female-male pair of facilitators to balance out gender, and at least have one female representative. There seems to be a higher potential for distance to men as many women's crimes are related to men. An all-female pair has also worked, but we have noticed that women prisoners also appreciate the presence of men, as they operate in a largely female setting around the clock. So, our recommendation would be to go with a female-male pair, or test it with the prison.
- In women's prison we notice tendencies to more drama and slander. There are more cliques and factions. Many things are not said in plenary sessions such as a dialogue but come out in little groups in private, creating bad atmospheres and low levels of trust. Interpersonal conflicts may go on for a long time. Facilitation requires an understanding of how the dialogues only addresses a snapshot of the current system.

Debriefing learning is another area where being two facilitators is very beneficial. Facilitating on your own, you are often very engaged in the process and may be missing what is going on in the bigger space. When there are two, the richness of observations from a session grows exponentially.

It is also useful to debrief what emotional impact the Dialogue has had, as you occasionally hear some horrific stories. One intention of Dialogue is to create impact but carrying other people's emotions or trauma are not healthy. Co-facilitators have a role with each other normalising this. This could also be done as a faculty of facilitators, or through a Practitioner Circle in the Academy of Professional Dialogue. A debrief circle could cover more areas than criminal justice, e.g. people working with war or conflict dialogue, refugees, serious health issues – anywhere trauma is present.

### Recommendations to others

Should you decide to offer this to your own local prison or correctional system, we hope you have gained some insight into how we work through our methods and experiences above.

A couple of other pointers that may help you as it did us:

- **Get ambassadors** – Find some people in the prison who are engaged in making things work. These could be staff doing training programs, clergy or officers with rehabilitation responsibilities. That they have a positive attitude and work with prisoners is more important than their hierarchical status (at least in Norway).



- **Invite leadership** – Mobilising senior staff to participate in the Dialogues helps create an acceptance amongst staff. Also, prisoners are more positive towards their participation than you may think. It is important that they are briefed so they understand that they do not necessarily represent their organisational role in the Dialogue but are there as equal human beings.
- **Use the same method every time** – We have seen the benefit of transparently using the Dialogic framework every single time, also up to the point where we as facilitators find it nauseating. However, the discipline pays off when the participants start referring to elements from the framework themselves and that way help facilitate. Whatever method you use, make it visible.
- **Have good themes** – We encourage the circle to select what they want to talk about, but often it is too superficial or irrelevant to the whole group. We log good themes that emerge in previous Dialogues and keep them for future use. They are often relevant at a later stage. Good themes or questions are critical to a good Dialogue. The participants will often conclude that “Dialogue does not work” when the real issue was “The theme was not good”.
- **Train staff** – Conducting introductory training sessions for staff only in the Dialogic framework may lower the threshold of them choosing to participate the first time. They get an understanding of the purpose, process and their role, so they feel confident going in.
- **Log your progress** – We were encouraged early on by Peter Garrett and Jane Ball to log our experiences. We did some logging work in Bergen and created new structures with the commencement of the Bredtveit project. Currently we log both sessions and general learning as described above. This paper had not been possible to write without our logs.

## References / Literature

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- Prison Dialogue website: [www.prisondialogue.org](http://www.prisondialogue.org)
- Flux website: [www.flux.no](http://www.flux.no)