



Source, Creative Commons License.

Conflict mediation as organisational capacity building in Kriminalforsorgen

ALMA FONSECA FJELDSTED

Since February this year, mediation is being implemented as an essential tool in the management of conflicts evolving internally in the Danish Prison and Probation Service (Kriminalforsorgen, 2024). The newly hired Prevention and Mediation Corps is implemented in order to improve the working environment, foster development, and enhance cohesion across the organization. The director of Kriminalforsorgen, Ina Eliassen, welcomes the mediators and expresses pronounced confidence in mediation as a method of changing a culture, improving the working environment, and preventing criminality (ibid.; Eliassen, 2024).

An Extensive Demand for Mediation

Charlotte Wegener is head of the Prevention and Mediation Corps and works full-time as part of the mediators. She was trained by the FBI as a hostage negotiator and has worked in the field of mediation ever since, inter alia as the coordinator of the Danish police's conflict council. When asked why mediation within Kriminalforsorgen is important, she states that there is a huge

“ I neither belong to the employer, the employees, or the department. I am not positioned in the workplace and therefore not personally implicated in the conflict.



demand for mediation across the organization, partly because employees in Kriminalforsorgen are put under a lot of pressure: “Working with people who are deprived of their freedom is highly demanding. Prison is not typically where people flourish. And working in an environment where conflicts are frequent requires certain qualities of the employees.”

Furthermore, like correctional services in other European countries, Kriminalforsorgen is facing multiple challenges these years (Gregersen, 2023). While the continuously rising number of inmates has reached its highest since the aftermath of World War II, Kriminalforsorgen has been struggling to hire and retain uniformed employees (Fængselsforbundet, 2023a; Kriminalforsorgen, n.d.: 3). As a result, the pressure which the employees are put under when tending their jobs has risen. Charlotte Wegener recounts that mediators have been used in mediations in relation to all sorts of professions so far: from social workers, teachers, and psychologists to craftsmen and prison officers. Often, the conflicts between colleagues are based on different work philosophies or approaches to a certain task, which then give rise to misunderstandings. What was initially a small disagreement can spread to entire departments and evolve into a bigger conflict. She highlights the mediators’ position as non-partial, as an important improvement compared to previously. Before, the leader of the department would deal with conflicts between colleagues: “I neither belong to the employer, the employees, or the department. I am not positioned in the workplace and therefore not personally implicated in the conflict.” Additionally, she states that the introduction of professional mediators in Kriminalforsorgen sets the leader free to

handle their other responsibilities. Charlotte Wegener therefore lauds Kriminalforsorgen for establishing the Prevention and Mediation Corps. To her, it proves a skillful leadership that prioritizes the well-being of the employees: "It is a recognition of the work that is done here. I find it very progressive that there is a group of psychologists and now also a group of mediators to draw on when concrete situations get tense. It is most definitely a step in the right direction." Charlotte Wegener hopes that perhaps Kriminalforsorgen's Prevention and Mediation Corps will inspire other institutions in society to implement mediation. She underlines that all sorts of workplaces could benefit from the method: "I have worked with mediation for many years now in various public institutions. And everywhere I have seen a huge demand for mediation." She describes that it redeems people, restores relations, and offers an opportunity to learn and grow together. More concretely put, mediation is a tool to improve the mental health in an organization and reduce the rate of sick leave.

Supporting an Awareness of the Social Dynamics

Taking the case of Kriminalforsorgen as an example, the mediations implicitly deal with more than what is at stake in the concrete mediation sessions. The benefits that the Prevention and Mediation Corps generates exist on two levels: on the most overt level, the corps deals with concrete conflicts which benefit the parties involved in the actual mediation. On the more long-term level, their work affects the social pattern of Kriminalforsorgen as a workplace through supporting an awareness of the current social dynamics and thereby preventing future conflicts. She explains with apparent enthusiasm that: "It is a way of capacity building through supporting a mediating approach across the organization that stretches further than to the current conflicts." Therefore, implementing mediation is a concrete tool to improve the work environment through creating a sense of cohesion.

Charlotte Wegener even claims that the prioritization of the working environment in Kriminalforsorgen benefits society in a broader perspective. She explains that the well-being of the employees inevitably influences the inmates, fostering a more cohesive environment. And that this will potentially affect them in a positive direction when they have served their sentences and are to participate in society. To some, mediation might seem like a courageously fluffy approach to put forward as a solution to the issues in Kriminalforsorgen. Charlotte Wegener concludes: "The larger the bet, the larger the profit. Society has everything to gain from mediation. During my time in the police and as a hostage negotiator, I have never experienced anything as powerful and tangible as mediation. It is an impressively smart move by Ina Eliassen."

Bibliography

Eliassen, I. 2024. *Så kom vi endelig i gang. I dag bød jeg velkommen til vores nye forebyggelses- og mæglerkorps. Metoden mægling er kendt fra mange forskellige sammenhænge – og det er en ret potent metode, uanset om man taler om at ændre en kultur, forbedre arbejdsmiljøet eller om at forebygge kriminalitet. Vi arbejder med alle dele i kriminalforsorgen, så det er et vigtigt nyt arbejde, vi sætter i gang lige nu.* (LinkedIn Post). Retrieved April 18, 2024, from <https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:716575769928291234/>

Gregersen, Søren. 2023. "Opfordring til EU: Husk vores arbejdsvilkår". *Fængselsforbundet*. <https://faengselsforbundet.dk/fagbladet-net/opfordring-til-eu-husk-vores-arbejdsvilkaar/>

Gregersen, Søren. 2023a. "Den dårlige nyhed: Det bliver værre". *Fængselsforbundet*. <https://faengselsforbundet.dk/fagbladet-net/den-daarlige-nyhed-det-bliver-vaerre/>

Kriminalforsorgen. 2021. "Strategi for Kriminalforsorgen 2022-2025". In <https://kriminalforsorgen.dk/om-os/kriminalforsorgens-opgaver/fleraarsaftaler/>.

Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorgen :Copenhagen. Retrieved on February 21, 2024, from <https://kriminalforsorgen.dk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/koncernstrategi-for-kriminalforsorgen-2022-2025-aa.pdf>

Kriminalforsorgen. 2024. "Nyt forebyggelses- og mæglerkorps skal styrke arbejdsmiljøet i kriminalforsorgen – Kriminalforsorgen." Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorgen :Copenhagen. Retrieved on April 18, 2024, from <https://kriminalforsorgen.dk/om-os/nyt-og-presse/nyheder/nyt-forebyggelses-og-maeglerkorps-skal-styrke-arbejdsmiljoet-i-kriminalforsorgen/>



About the author

Alma Fonseca Fjeldsted is a master's degree student in the Human Security program at Aarhus University. Her interest in conflict was ignited during her last year of her bachelor's degree in Anthropology when attending an elective course in Humanities and Conflict. She is an affiliated member of Aarcon.

Email: 201908305@post.au.dk

[Connect on LinkedIn here](#)