

## **Reactive Behaviour when Operating a Proactive Method during Crisis: Learning through Reactivity to Proactivity**

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This paper examines the crisis management response of the Norwegian Correctional Service (NCS) at the national directorate level to the Covid-19 pandemic. We conducted a document analysis based on the internal report produced by the NCS to assess their performance during the initial phase of the pandemic. The aim was to extract key learnings to enhance future crisis handling. Our research focused on two main questions: 1. How did the National Crisis Management Unit address the pandemic at the directorate level? 2. What lessons could the NCS draw from this experience to improve its responses to future crises? The analysis suggests that the NCS struggled to effectively mobilize and execute its emergency plans amid the crisis. Additionally, the report highlighted a lack of clear role definitions within the NCS, which blurred the lines between routine functions and crisis-related duties. Our findings indicate that the NCS predominantly displayed reactive tendencies rather than employing a proactive staff methodology, which is critical during crises. These insights offer valuable lessons for other organizations in understanding the dynamics of learning from crises, specifically the factors influencing when, why, and how an organization adapts and improves its crisis management capabilities.

*Keywords:* COVID-19, crisis management, bureaucracy, reactive behaviour, learning

### **Introduction**

In our examination, we will shed light on the strategic maneuvers of the Norwegian Correctional Service (NCS) at the national directorate echelon during the COVID-19 pandemic. The establishment of the “National Crisis Management Unit” by the directorate was a pivotal move aimed at ensuring the NCS's adept management of the pandemic. This unit was responsible for orchestrating the efforts across the regional levels of the correctional service, all under the directorate's umbrella, to effectively meet the service requirements and directives of prisons and community centers at the end of the operational chain. This hierarchical, decision-focused, and efficiently operating crisis unit was integral to maintaining order and managing the pandemic within the NCS.

In 2019, the Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning highlighted pandemics and medical assistance as the foremost challenges in societal risk assessments (Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning (DSB, 2019).

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This revelation prompts us to question the preparedness of the directorate to face a recognized and eminent threat.

Rewinding to the late stages of 2019, the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) surfaced in Wuhan, China, in December, leading to devastating losses of life and imposing unparalleled challenges on global health systems and work environments (Brooks et al., 2020; Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020; Lima et al., 2020). Norway documented its initial case of the virus in February 2020 (Kolberg, 2020). Subsequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed the outbreak a pandemic on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Following suit, on March 12, 2020, Norway enacted the most rigorous countermeasures in its history during peacetime (Statsministerens kontor, 2021). The pandemic and its countermeasures wielded significant impacts across all sectors of Norwegian society. It was incumbent on these sectors to conduct critical evaluations of their crisis management responses, a process crucial for collective learning (Statsministerens kontor, 2021). In the case of the NCS, their role was to:

“Prevent and manage contagion by providing strategic guidance as the situation develops. Maintain calm in the business, among employees, inmates and the population. Motivate and support employees in demanding situations. Ensures security and trust in the organisation. Inform and ensure a common understanding of the situation and coordination between the regions, the University College of the Norwegian Correctional Service, directorates with an interface to the correctional service and Department of Justice. Provide guidance and coordinate the regions' responses and measures to ensure an equal approach. Create professional advice and decision-making basis for Department of Justice.” (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020) (author’s translation).

### **Research Questions**

Thus, our two research questions were: 1. How did the National Crisis Management Unit address the pandemic at the directorate level? 2. What lessons could the NCS draw from this experience to improve its responses to future crises?

### **Paper Outline**

Our study was structured to systematically answer our two research questions and is organized as follows: Initially, we provide an overview of the relevant context and the structure of the NCS. Subsequently, we elaborate on the concepts pertinent to crisis management and the proactive staff methodology employed by the NCS staff. We continue by offering a brief account of the COVID-19 pandemic's progression in Norway, illuminating its impact on the NCS. We then outline our research method, which involves an analysis of the NCS's internal reports to assess how the directorate managed the crisis.

Following the methodology, we present findings from the internal audit of the NCS, examining how the organization responded to the crisis. The discussion then shifts to exploring how reactive measures can paradoxically emerge from a strategy

intended to be proactive, using the NCS's response as a case study. We reveal that although the NCS intended to implement proactive strategies, they resorted to reactive tactics in practice.

We conclude by highlighting the dichotomy between intended proactive approaches and actual reactive behaviors within the NCS during the crisis. The final remarks consider the broader implications this may have for other organizations in understanding the mechanisms and timing of learning from crises.

### **Context of the Norwegian Correctional Service**

The organizational map in the NCS is divided into three levels (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024). The central level of the organization is the Ministry of Justice and Public Security Department of Correctional Services with the Directorate of the NCS that is more operational. Under the central level we find five regional offices that have the managerial responsibility for 33 prisons and 15 probation offices (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024). In this study, we focus on the central level work, delivered to regional levels and local levels with 33 prisons spread across Norway (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024).

### **Crisis Management and Proactive Staff Methodology in the NCS**

In this paper, we delve into various key terms and ideas critical to comprehending the response of the NCS to the pandemic and their management strategies during this crisis. We will delineate these pertinent concepts to enrich our readers' understanding of the subject matter. Central to our exposition is the concept of proactive staff methodology, as this study focuses on analyzing the effectiveness of the NCS's implementation of this approach during the pandemic.

First, Rosenthal et al. (1989, p. 10) defines a 'crisis' as “[...] a situation in which there is a perceived threat against the core values or life-sustaining functions of a social system that requires urgent remedial action in uncertain circumstances”. According to crisis researchers they have recognized and described a difference between two theoretical ideal types in their study of crisis, the “fast-burning” and “slow-burning” crises (’t Hart & Boin, 2001). To deal with crisis it is necessary for an organization to have a management that can deal with the crisis. Crisis management is defined as “avert crisis situations when possible and how to minimize the damage caused when crisis is unavoidable” (Pearson & Clair, 1998, p. 60).

The approach an organization takes to confront a crisis is contingent on the nature of the crisis and the organization's capacity to manage the given situation. A prison operates with a bureaucratic framework that relies on a substantial level of task specialization and is highly hierarchical. It maintains clear lines of responsibility focused on coordination and control, in compliance with the governing laws, rules, and regulations that establish its authority (Fivesdal, 2000; Mintzberg, 1983; Sørensen, 2017; Sørensen & Kruke, 2022). Prisons are stable and accountable organizations that works slowly to maintain bureaucratic ideals about trustworthiness to the public. This slow-working capacity is a problem when a crisis occurs, shown in Sørensen (2023). In crisis there is a need for a faster working organization to secure the values that are under threat.

Lunde (2014) has detailed the proactive measures an organization can take to safeguard its core values during a crisis.

Proactive staff methodology is an approach designed to enhance decision-making and interaction in crisis and emergency management by focusing on potential outcomes. This method uses an analytical perspective to address crises, ensuring that emergency response teams assess, decide, and act appropriately in any given situation. The emergency management team evaluates the possible consequences of a critical situation and, using the available information during planning, devises a tailored plan that addresses these identified risks (Lunde, 2019).

The proactive staff methodology is based on six elements (Lunde, 2014). The *first* is *immediate actions* that are implemented as soon as a need for action is identified. The *second* is the *initial meeting* where all the facts about the emergency incident are gathered and the potential consequences are defined so that a situation-specific plan can be drawn up. The *third* is *focus*, where it is prioritized which parts of the situation-specific plan should be prioritized for implementation. The *fourth* phase is *actions* based on the priorities made before the *fifth* phase, *situation description*, provides a visual and written description of the situation. The *sixth* and final phase is *status meetings*, which are held regularly by the emergency management team to share information and establish situational awareness, coordinate, plan and prioritize further handling (Lunde, 2014).

In the NCS, it is the prisons in particular that experience the most serious undesirable incidents such as violence in connection with escapes, cell fires, serious violence and murder (Sørensen, 2023). It is the prisons that are responsible for resolving such incidents on their own, and the regional level and possibly the directorate level will only be informed and have certain support functions in connection with the undesirable incidents that occur. Some prisons have good experience of setting up staff to deal with the undesirable incident in the best possible way. According to Sørensen (2017) and Sørensen and Kruke (2022), the proactive staff methodology has also been used in the imprisonment of the terrorist Anders Behring Breivik at Ila prison, who killed 77 people in the attack on the government quarter in Oslo and on Utøya.

The proactive staff methodology is a decision-making forum that works solely on the emergency situation (Lunde, 2014). It is organized alongside the ordinary line management at a prison, but actors who are key to solving the emergency situation are often in key positions from the management and are thus involved in both the staff and the ordinary line management. The staff has a chief of staff who leads the work and has various functions that are filled by different people from the organization (Lunde, 2014). In the NCS these roles are called F-roles, which include F1 Personnel, F2 Intelligence, F3 Operations, F4 Logistics and F5 Information. The overall responsibilities of these functional managers are to gather and process information, participate in status meetings, contribute to prioritization, translate decisions and plans into actions, and finally control and conclude the implemented actions in their respective areas of responsibility (Lunde, 2014).

The NCS's emergency preparedness plans include various scenarios, with pandemics listed among potential crises. Notably, the Norwegian Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning had also highlighted pandemics as likely

threats in 2019 (DSB, 2019). This raises questions about the readiness of Norway and the NCS for such widespread health emergencies.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic in Norway**

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began as an outbreak of a novel infectious disease in China around the New Year transition from 2019 to 2020, escalated into a global crisis. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared it a pandemic in March 2020. By late 2022, the death toll of confirmed cases had reached approximately 6.7 million worldwide (Tjernshaugen et al., 2024).

Norway reported its first COVID-19 case on February 26, 2020, with its first death recorded on March 12. On the same day, the Norwegian government, under Prime Minister Erna Solberg, enacted stringent measures to curb the virus's spread, described as the most drastic in Norwegian peacetime history (Røed-Johansen & Torgersen, 2020). These initial efforts proved effective, as infection rates dropped significantly by spring, allowing for relaxation of restrictions over the summer. However, a second wave hit in the fall of 2020, prompting a reinstatement of preventative measures (Myrstad et al., 2021).

The vaccination campaign commenced on December 27, 2020, but a third wave surged in spring 2021, fueled by new virus variants. This wave led to record infection numbers and necessitated further temporary shutdowns and strict measures (Tjernshaugen et al., 2024).

By autumn 2021, with over 70% of the Norwegian population fully vaccinated, a fourth wave occurred, albeit with milder cases attributed to the Omicron variant compared to the earlier Delta strain. Consequently, the Norwegian government lifted most infection control measures on February 12, 2022 (Statsministerens kontor, 2022).

Despite maintaining one of the lowest COVID-19 mortality rates in Europe, Norway experienced significant excess mortality in 2022, with around 5,000 deaths, predominantly due to COVID-19, after surpassing 1,000 deaths by the end of 2021. By February 2022, Norway had recorded one million infections (Tjernshaugen et al., 2024).

### **Method**

Document analysis is particularly useful as a method for qualitative case studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). As we are studying the internal audit report on the NCS's evaluation of the COVID-19 situation in the period of March to June 2020, we decided that conducting a document analysis of this report would be a purposeful avenue in order to shed light on our two research questions.

Document analysis is also a systematic procedure used in evaluating or reviewing documents. The documents can be either printed or electronic material (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis as a scientific method requires that data must be investigated and interpreted. This in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007).

## **Procedure and Material**

Our document analysis commenced with an examination of the internal audit report on the NCS (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020). This initial step provided insights into the report's methodological diversity, encompassing interviews, document reviews, and questionnaires. It was established that the report encapsulates the outcomes of 21 interviews (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020). The responses obtained through these interviews, alongside the information garnered from document reviews and questionnaires, were instrumental in our investigation. This information was crucial in addressing our two pivotal research questions. We adopted a strategic approach focused on extracting pertinent quotations directly from the interviewees' responses. This approach was particularly apt given the qualitative essence of our research questions, thereby underlining the pertinence of qualitative data in our analytical framework.

## **Participants**

We refer to those who answered the interviews and questionnaires in the internal audit report on the NCS as participants, as this indicates a more active role in the study than informants or interviewees (Morse, 1991).

## **Results from the Internal Audit Report on the NCS**

### **The Pandemic Situation in the NCS**

During the pandemic, the NCS was faced with challenging decisions to safeguard the health and lives of inmates. In general, prison populations tend to have poorer health compared to the general populace, which escalates the potential severity of illnesses like COVID-19. The NCS addressed this threat by implementing necessary measures to protect the inmates from the virus (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

Given the nature of prisons, where many individuals share close quarters and common areas, the potential for rapid transmission of infections is increased, especially in facilities lacking en-suite showers and toilets. High occupancy rates further intensified these risks (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

The NCS's response involved making crucial decisions to mitigate the spread of the virus, such as granting early release, postponing summons to serve sentences, suspending sentences, and facilitating home confinement with electronic monitoring. These actions successfully decreased the prison population and the usage of shared rooms. To offset the impact of suspending physical visits, the NCS implemented alternative measures like extended phone privileges and the opportunity for video visits, alongside additional recreational activities (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

From March 13, 2020, in-person visits were suspended. The NCS procured 800 iPads to facilitate digital visitations. Later, visits were cautiously reintroduced where they did not present significant risks of infection or logistical challenges due to staff shortages (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

In late March 2020, to further prevent the spread of the virus, the NCS decreed a mandatory 14-day quarantine for all new inmates. During this period, limited staff contact was allowed, with some inmates receiving approval for extended interaction based on individual evaluations. Eventually, new inmates were permitted to mingle with the general population post-negative COVID-19 tests (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

The execution of sentences at the probation offices saw a reduction in activities, with a consequent rise in the use of electronic monitoring, leading to an unprecedented number of individuals serving sentences at home. This strategy was a deliberate choice by the NCS, reflective of the ongoing assessments made by the National Crisis Management Unit, considering both the societal infection rates and the implications of relaxing measures within the prison system (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020). The next section will examine the practical implementation of these decisions made by the National Crisis Management Unit.

### **Managing the Pandemic in the National Crisis Management Unit**

The internal report reflects that the NCS displayed remarkable work capacity and a spirit of service, emphasizing the welfare of both inmates and employees. It was noted that communication channels between various levels, such as the NCS, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health, were effectively maintained. Furthermore, the rapid deployment of digital support by the Department of Information and Communication Technology was a positive development (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020)

Despite these strengths, the report also identified significant areas of concern. It was found that the NCS had not prepared adequate risk assessments tailored to pandemics, nor had they developed comprehensive continuity plans for the Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Service. The training on emergency response systems was insufficient, and the lack of crisis drills compromised preparedness. Additionally, there was confusion regarding the delineation of responsibilities between crisis staff and line management (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

Feedback from the regions and units within the NCS, encompassing probation and prison, indicated that during the initial crisis management phase (March 2020 to June 2020), several aspects functioned effectively. This included the success of the implemented measures, efficient information flow and cooperation between units and regional crisis staff, and the decisive and competent action of regional and local crisis teams who maintained their usual roles. Despite the lack of comprehensive practice, the report highlights the resilience of units, staff, and inmates/convicts, ultimately leading to an enhanced organizational capacity through a steep learning curve (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

The report also outlines recommendations for improvement. The establishment of the National Crisis Management Unit was delayed, which resulted in a protracted period before a thorough understanding of the situation was achieved. Consequently, helpful instructions and measures were often issued after they had already been independently instituted at the facilities. The initial distribution of roles within the regional crisis unit was ambiguous, making the work challenging. Additionally, the

volume of information provided was occasionally overwhelming and difficult to manage level (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

To address these issues, the regions/units had proposed several measures. It was recommended that the planning system be revised for long-term scenarios, with additional drills to establish the crisis unit, integrating multiple organizational levels. There is a call for enhanced training to better define staff responsibilities in relation to line functions. Additionally, adopting a unified electronic crisis support tool is advised to facilitate systematic work and manage information more effectively. Finally, media management should be incorporated into the emergency response system (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

### **We Were Not Prepared**

Several participants stated that it was chaotic and unstructured at the start, and they also stated that there was no equipment in place. The three following quotations describe the situation at hand (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020):

“The National Crisis Management Unit got started too late and it took a long time with the decisions, but that worked better over time.”

“We tend to throw ourselves around when something happens.”

“We weren't drilled in establishing the crisis unit, but it eventually worked out.”

The National Crisis Staff highlighted a significant gap in the Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Service's preparedness efforts. Notably, no member had been trained in the agency's preparedness system, and crisis drills had not been conducted. Additionally, there was an absence of a structured approach to training and skills development for such critical situations within the agency (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

When inquiring about the proactivity of staff within the Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Service, the average response from the National Crisis Management Unit was a concerning 2 on a scale ranging from 1, indicating to a very little degree, to 6, signifying a very high degree. There was a consensus among participants that there was considerable room for improvement in being more prepared and proactive. The deficiency in risk assessments further underscored the inadequacy of the preparations in relation to the established plans (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

In response to inquiries about the readiness of the NCS to manage a serious event like a pandemic, over 70% of the participants at the central and regional levels acknowledged that the organization was “to a small extent” or “very little” prepared for such a challenge.

Different regions reported varied levels of preparedness and crisis practice. Nonetheless, there was a clear consensus on the necessity for more comprehensive crisis management exercises that engage multiple levels of the organization simultaneously. Ideally, these exercises would also involve cooperation with administrative partners, such as health services and educational institutions, to ensure a more robust and unified response to crises (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

## **Planning is everything, but we had no plan**

Former president in USA, Dwight D. Eisenhower's statement “plans are nothing; planning is everything” (BrainyQuote, 2024) postulates that by conducting preparations a crisis management team is given a procedural understanding of what can happen. The emergency plan describes how the crisis room should be located and set up, but the crisis room was established in a different location than described by the plan because of the crisis form and scope. Several informants wanted a more pre-set up crisis room that could be clear with plans, accessories, equipment, video conference and so on (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

“No, it was not clear which plan that should be used. The plan has been in a drawer.”

“We deviated from the plan too much.”

“It was probably unfortunate that so many platforms were used without a plan for it.”

“The prisons probably have plans for a pandemic. We don't have that in the Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Service. The further into the organization you go, the better prepared they are.”

The contrasting levels of preparedness between bureaucratic staff and prison personnel are starkly highlighted in recent discussions. While bureaucrats seem to lack the necessary preparation for crises, prison staff appear more equipped, owing to their operational roles which frequently deal with various emergency scenarios. Consequently, prisons and probation services have developed and refined their crisis management plans, which stands in compliance with the expectations outlined by the NCS (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

The available quotes paint a clear picture regarding the state of readiness within the National Crisis Management Unit, revealing a significant lack of preparedness. This unit's failure to adhere to a well-defined crisis management plan has resulted in an inability to effectively prevent or mitigate crisis situations. This approach, or lack thereof, starkly contrasts with the principles outlined by Pearson and Clair (1998), who stressed the importance of robust crisis management strategies in 1998.

## **Unclear Roles**

There was a notable lack of preparation and practice regarding the different staff roles, commonly referred to as 'F-roles', as highlighted by Lunde (2014). These roles were neither pre-assigned nor rehearsed, which contributed to operational confusion. Training for the National Crisis Management Unit had been planned to precede the establishment of a National Crisis Staff, but it never materialized. According to several informants, this absence of training and practical exercises was a significant factor in the ensuing difficulty to delineate ordinary line operations from crisis staff tasks, as reported by the NCS (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020):

“Hard to wear two hats: be a line manager and a stab-roles at the same time. We should have taken better advantage of the resources.”

“The logging worked surprisingly well, even though it was distributed among many people.”

“It was experienced as a 'split exercise'; the municipal medical superintendent in the various municipalities handled this completely differently and had "trump cards.”

These statements indicated that the proactive staff methodology's F-roles, as outlined by Lunde (2014), were not put into practice.

## **Discussion**

### **Reactivity as a Path to Deal and Learning about Crisis**

“This has been the best exercise you can have” One participant observed that dealing with the COVID-19 crisis served as a valuable practical exercise, emphasizing the gravity of the situation and its potential threat to life if the pandemic spiraled out of control in Norway. This view lends weight to the seriousness of the crisis, suggesting that a higher infection rate could have had more severe consequences on the prisons. The slow-burning nature of the pandemic, termed a 'creeping crisis' by 't Hart and Boin (2001), allowed the NCS some additional time to strategize once the severity was recognized.

The preparedness of the NCS to activate a national crisis management unit in such a crisis was found wanting. Analysis indicates that while central levels were largely reactive in addressing the COVID-19 crisis within the NCS, operational levels, including prisons and probation services, exhibited more proactivity by promptly implementing risk-reducing measures upon learning of the pandemic, despite a general lack of preparedness for such a rapidly evolving situation.

The ability of the NCS to adapt quickly, or “throw themselves around,” likely contributed positively to the crisis outcome. Nevertheless, the organization's emergency preparedness fell short, with insufficient relevant plans and practice in crisis management, leading to confusion about roles during the crisis response. An informant pointed out that readiness increases further down the organizational hierarchy, suggesting that prisons and probation centers are better equipped and trained for crisis situations. At the directorate level, the primary function is bureaucratic administration, as characterized by Blau (1957) and Fivesdal (2000), contrasting with the day-to-day operational engagement with convicts at prisons and probation centers. It is plausible that the operational core's direct interaction with potentially risky individuals fosters a more proactive stance in their work.

The crisis management at this level is more operational and action-oriented, different from regular office work, which may complicate joint sensemaking, as described by Boin and Renaud (2013), between the directorate and operational levels.

Moreover, the bureaucratic personality described by Merton (1940) might influence the work at the directorate level, which typically revolves around developing and disseminating circulars within the chain of command for operational compliance. In contrast, setting up a proactive National Crisis Management Unit requires a hands-on and timely approach, distinct from the more methodical bureaucratic methodology.

Reflecting on the handling of the COVID-19 situation by the National Crisis Management Unit, it is crucial to consider what the NCS can learn from it. If the

NCS rests on the notion that their turnaround and diligent response to the crisis was an unparalleled learning exercise, their cognitive understanding of learning from the event might be limited. However, by taking the findings of the internal report seriously (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020), the NCS would recognize the need for enhancing their proactive approach to crisis management. The relatively paced progression of the COVID-19 crisis provided some preparation time, which may not be the case in more urgent crises that demand immediate action. Therefore, it is essential for the NCS to advance their crisis management capabilities towards proactive readiness rather than the reactivity observed during the COVID-19 crisis.

At a conference on safety and security, NCS department-level representatives claimed successful management of the COVID-19 crisis without referencing the internal report, although they were aware of its existence (Sørensen, personal communication, December 15, 2022). This omission might be attributed to their reluctance to expose the NCS system's shortcomings or a concern for the organization's reputation, as reflected in their official values and critically commented in research about NCS by Mjåland and Ugelvik (2021). Taking control of the story of what happened in a crisis is described in the crisis management literature as “blame games” (Boin et al., 2015). The NCS can choose a “blame game” strategy, but that will pose challenge for learning from the crisis: if leaders do not acknowledge the report's criticisms, how can improvements in crisis management be realized?

## Conclusion

This paper aimed to analyze the response of the NCS at the national directorate level to the COVID-19 pandemic and how it functioned as a top-level authority within the Norwegian correctional system. We posed two primary research questions: first, how did the National Crisis Management Unit address the pandemic at the directorate level, and second, what lessons could the NCS draw from this experience to improve its responses to future crises? Our study rested upon a critical document analysis of the internal audit conducted by the NCS, evaluating the efficacy of their crisis management during the COVID-19 situation (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

Our interpretive analysis of the internal audit report suggests that the NCS faced significant challenges in activating and executing its emergency plans amid the unfolding crisis. Furthermore, our review revealed that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the NCS suffered from unclear role definitions, resulting in a blurred distinction between routine operations and emergency management responsibilities. It appears that the NCS fell into a pattern of reaction rather than adopting an anticipatory, proactive crisis management strategy. This finding underlines vital lessons for similar institutions on how organizations might better adjust to and assimilate knowledge from crisis situations.

We recommend that instead of responding passively to crises, NCS must shift from reactive approaches and blame-focused strategies to a more proactive stance. This can be achieved by actively involving all levels of the NCS in training and preparing for potential crises, equipping them with the skills to manage future situations in a more professional and effective manner.

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