

# 1 **Reactive Behaviour When Operating a Proactive Method** 2 **during Crisis: Learning through Reactivity to Proactivity**

3  
4 This paper examines the crisis management response of the Norwegian  
5 Correctional Service (NCS) at the national directorate level to the Covid-19  
6 pandemic. We conducted a document analysis based on the internal report  
7 produced by the NCS to assess their performance during the initial phase of the  
8 pandemic. The aim was to extract key learnings to enhance future crisis  
9 handling. Our research focused on two main questions: 1. How did the National  
10 Crisis Management Unit address the pandemic at the directorate level? 2. What  
11 lessons could the NCS draw from this experience to improve its responses to  
12 future crises? The analysis suggests that the NCS struggled to effectively  
13 mobilize and execute its emergency plans amid the crisis. Additionally, the  
14 report highlighted a lack of clear role definitions within the NCS, which blurred  
15 the lines between routine functions and crisis-related duties. Our findings  
16 indicate that the NCS predominantly displayed reactive tendencies rather than  
17 employing a proactive staff methodology, which is critical during crises. These  
18 insights offer valuable lessons for other organizations in understanding the  
19 dynamics of learning from crises, specifically the factors influencing when,  
20 why, and how an organization adapts and improves its crisis management  
21 capabilities.

22  
23 *Keywords:* Covid-19, crisis management, bureaucracy, reactive behaviour,  
24 learning

## 25 26 27 **Introduction**

28  
29 In our examination, we will shed light on the strategic maneuvers of the  
30 Norwegian Correctional Service (NCS) at the national directorate echelon during  
31 the Covid-19 pandemic. The establishment of the "National Crisis Management  
32 Unit" by the directorate was a pivotal move aimed at ensuring the NCS's adept  
33 management of the pandemic. This unit was responsible for orchestrating the  
34 efforts across the regional levels of the correctional service, all under the  
35 directorate's umbrella, to effectively meet the service requirements and directives  
36 of prisons and community centers at the end of the operational chain. This  
37 hierarchical, decision-focused, and efficiently operating crisis unit was integral to  
38 maintaining order and managing the pandemic within the NCS.

39 In 2019, the Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency Planning  
40 highlighted pandemics and medical assistance as the foremost challenges in  
41 societal risk assessments (Directorate for Civil Protection and Emergency  
42 Planning (DSB, 2019). This revelation prompts us to question the preparedness of  
43 the directorate to face a recognized and eminent threat.

44 Rewinding to the late stages of 2019, the Coronavirus Disease (Covid-19)  
45 surfaced in Wuhan, China, in December, leading to devastating losses of life and  
46 imposing unparalleled challenges on global health systems and work environments  
47 (Brooks et al., 2020; Fiorillo & Gorwood, 2020; Lima et al., 2020). Norway

1 documented its initial case of the virus in February 2020 (Kolberg, 2020).  
2 Subsequently, the World Health Organization (WHO) proclaimed the outbreak a  
3 pandemic on March 11, 2020 (World Health Organization, 2020). Following suit,  
4 on March 12, 2020, Norway enacted the most rigorous countermeasures in its  
5 history during peacetime (Statsministerens kontor, 2021). The pandemic and its  
6 countermeasures wielded significant impacts across all sectors of Norwegian  
7 society. It was incumbent on these sectors to conduct critical evaluations of their  
8 crisis management responses, a process crucial for collective learning  
9 (Statsministerens kontor, 2021). In the case of the NCS, their role was to:

10  
11 "Prevent and manage contagion by providing strategic guidance as the  
12 situation develops. Maintain calm in the business, among employees, inmates  
13 and the population. Motivate and support employees in demanding situations.  
14 Ensures security and trust in the organisation. Inform and ensure a common  
15 understanding of the situation and coordination between the regions, the  
16 University College of the Norwegian Correctional Service, directorates with  
17 an interface to the correctional service and Department of Justice. Provide  
18 guidance and coordinate the regions' responses and measures to ensure an  
19 equal approach. Create professional advice and decision-making basis for  
20 Department of Justice." (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020) (author's translation)

## 21 22 23 **Research Questions**

24  
25 Thus, our two research questions were: 1. How did the National Crisis  
26 Management Unit address the pandemic at the directorate level? 2. What lessons  
27 could the NCS draw from this experience to improve its responses to future crises?

## 28 29 30 **Paper Outline**

31  
32 Our study is structured to systematically answer our two research questions  
33 and is organized as follows: Initially, we provide an overview of the relevant  
34 context and the structure of the NCS. Subsequently, we elaborate on the concepts  
35 pertinent to crisis management and the proactive staff methodology employed by  
36 the NCS staff. We continue by offering a brief account of the Covid-19 pandemic's  
37 progression in Norway, illuminating its impact on the NCS. We then outline our  
38 research method, which involves an analysis of the NCS's internal reports to assess  
39 how the directorate managed the crisis.

40 Following the methodology, we present findings from the internal audit of the  
41 NCS, examining how the organization responded to the crisis. The discussion then  
42 shifts to exploring how reactive measures can paradoxically emerge from a  
43 strategy intended to be proactive, using the NCS's response as a case study. We  
44 reveal that although the NCS intended to implement proactive strategies, they  
45 resorted to reactive tactics in practice.

1 We conclude by highlighting the dichotomy between intended proactive  
2 approaches and actual reactive behaviors within the NCS during the crisis. The  
3 final remarks consider the broader implications this may have for other  
4 organizations in understanding the mechanisms and timing of learning from crises.  
5

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

7

8 The organizational map in the NCS is divided into three levels  
9 (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024). The central level of the organization is the Ministry of  
10 Justice and Public Security Department of Correctional Services with the  
11 Directorate of the NCS that is more operational. Under the central level we find  
12 five regional offices that have the managerial responsibility for 44 prisons and 15  
13 probation offices (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024). In this study we focus on the central  
14 level work, delivered to regional levels and local levels with 58 prisons spread  
15 across Norway (Kriminalomsorgen, 2024).  
16

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

18

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

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

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

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

3 Proactive staff methodology is an approach designed to enhance decision-  
4 making and interaction in crisis and emergency management by focusing on  
5 potential outcomes. This method uses an analytical perspective to address crises,  
6 ensuring that emergency response teams assess, decide, and act appropriately in  
7 any given situation. The emergency management team evaluates the possible  
8 consequences of a critical situation and, using the available information during  
9 planning, devises a tailored plan that addresses these identified risks (Lunde,  
10 2019).

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

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

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

1 The NCS's emergency preparedness plans include various scenarios, with  
2 pandemics listed among potential crises. Notably, the Norwegian Directorate for  
3 Civil Protection and Emergency Planning had also highlighted pandemics as likely  
4 threats in 2019 (DSB, 2019). This raises questions about the readiness of Norway  
5 and the NCS for such widespread health emergencies.

## 6 7 **The Covid-19 Pandemic in Norway**

8  
9 The COVID-19 pandemic, which began as an outbreak of a novel infectious  
10 disease in China around the new year transition from 2019 to 2020, escalated into  
11 a global crisis. The World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared it a  
12 pandemic in March 2020. By late 2022, the death toll of confirmed cases had  
13 reached approximately 6.7 million worldwide (Tjernshaugen et al., 2024).

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

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

26 By autumn 2021, with over 70% of the Norwegian population fully  
27 vaccinated, a fourth wave occurred, albeit with milder cases attributed to the  
28 Omicron variant compared to the earlier Delta strain. Consequently, the  
29 Norwegian government lifted most infection control measures on February 12,  
30 2022 (Statsministerens kontor, 2022).

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

## 36 37 38 **Method**

39  
40 Document analysis is particularly useful as a method for qualitative case  
41 studies (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). As we are studying the internal audit report on  
42 the NCS's evaluation of the Covid-19 situation in the period of March to June  
43 2020, we decided that conducting a document analysis of this report would be a  
44 purposeful avenue in order to shed light on our two research questions.

45 Document analysis is also a systematic procedure used in evaluating or  
46 reviewing documents. The documents can be either printed or electronic material

1 (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis as a scientific method requires that data must  
2 be investigated and interpreted. This in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding,  
3 and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007).

#### 4 5 **Procedure and Material**

6  
7 Our document analysis commenced with an examination of the internal audit  
8 report on the NCS (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020). This initial step provided insights  
9 into the report's methodological diversity, encompassing interviews, document  
10 reviews, and questionnaires. It was established that the report encapsulates the  
11 outcomes of 21 interviews (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020). The responses obtained  
12 through these interviews, alongside the information garnered from document  
13 reviews and questionnaires, were instrumental in our investigation. This  
14 information was crucial in addressing our two pivotal research questions. We  
15 adopted a strategic approach focused on extracting pertinent quotations directly  
16 from the interviewees' responses. This approach was particularly apt given the  
17 qualitative essence of our research questions, thereby underlining the pertinence of  
18 qualitative data in our analytical framework.

#### 19 20 **Participants**

21  
22 We refer to those who answered the interviews and questionnaires in the  
23 internal audit report on the NCS as participants, as this indicates a more active role  
24 in the study than informants or interviewees (Morse, 1991).

### 25 26 27 **Results from the Internal Audit Report on the NCS**

#### 28 29 **The Pandemic Situation in the NCS**

30  
31 During the pandemic, the NCS was faced with challenging decisions to  
32 safeguard the health and lives of inmates. In general, prison populations tend to  
33 have poorer health compared to the general populace, which escalates the potential  
34 severity of illnesses like COVID-19. The NCS addressed this threat by  
35 implementing necessary measures to protect the inmates from the virus  
36 (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

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

41 The NCS's response involved making crucial decisions to mitigate the spread  
42 of the virus, such as granting early release, postponing summons to serve  
43 sentences, suspending sentences, and facilitating home confinement with  
44 electronic monitoring. These actions successfully decreased the prison population  
45 and the usage of shared rooms. To offset the impact of suspending physical visits,  
46 the NCS implemented alternative measures like extended phone privileges and the

1 opportunity for video visits, alongside additional recreational activities  
2 (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

3 From March 13, 2020, in-person visits were suspended. The NCS procured  
4 800 iPads to facilitate digital visitations. Later, visits were cautiously reintroduced  
5 where they did not present significant risks of infection or logistical challenges due  
6 to staff shortages (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

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

13 The execution of sentences at probation offices saw a reduction in activities,  
14 with a consequent rise in the use of electronic monitoring, leading to an  
15 unprecedented number of individuals serving sentences at home. This strategy was  
16 a deliberate choice by the NCS, reflective of the ongoing assessments made by the  
17 National Crisis Management Unit, considering both the societal infection rates and  
18 the implications of relaxing measures within the prison system (Kriminalomsorgen,  
19 2020). Now, we will examine the practical implementation of these decisions by  
20 the National Crisis Management Unit.

## 21 22 **Managing the Pandemic in the National Crisis Management Unit**

23  
24 The internal report reflects that the NCS displayed remarkable work capacity  
25 and a spirit of service, emphasizing the welfare of both inmates and employees. It  
26 was noted that communication channels between various levels, such as the NCS,  
27 the Department of Justice, and the Department of Health, were effectively  
28 maintained. Furthermore, the rapid deployment of digital support by the  
29 Department of Information and Communication Technology was a positive  
30 development (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020)

31 Despite these strengths, the report also identified significant areas of concern.  
32 It was found that the NCS had not prepared adequate risk assessments tailored to  
33 pandemics, nor had they developed comprehensive continuity plans for the  
34 Norwegian Directorate of Correctional Service. The training on emergency  
35 response systems was insufficient, and the lack of crisis drills compromised  
36 preparedness. Additionally, there was confusion regarding the delineation of  
37 responsibilities between crisis staff and line management (Kriminalomsorgen,  
38 2020).

39 Feedback from the regions and units within the NCS, encompassing  
40 probation and prison, indicated that during the initial crisis management phase  
41 (March 2020 to June 2020), several aspects functioned effectively. This included  
42 the success of the implemented measures, efficient information flow and  
43 cooperation between units and regional crisis staff, and the decisive and competent  
44 action of regional and local crisis teams who maintained their usual roles. Despite  
45 the lack of comprehensive practice, the report highlights the resilience of units,

1 staff, and inmates/convicts, ultimately leading to an enhanced organizational  
2 capacity through a steep learning curve (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

3 The report also outlines recommendations for improvement. The  
4 establishment of the National Crisis Management Unit was delayed, which  
5 resulted in a protracted period before a thorough understanding of the situation  
6 was achieved. Consequently, helpful instructions and measures were often issued  
7 after they had already been independently instituted at the facilities. The initial  
8 distribution of roles within the regional crisis unit was ambiguous, making the  
9 work challenging. Additionally, the volume of information provided was  
10 occasionally overwhelming and difficult to manage level (Kriminalomsorgen,  
11 2020).

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

## 20 21 **We were not prepared**

22  
23 Several participants stated that there were too many arms and legs at the start,  
24 and they also states that there was no equipment in place. The three following  
25 quotations describe the situation at hand (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020):

26  
27 "The National Crisis Management Unit got started too late and it took a long time  
28 with the decisions, but that worked better over time."

29 "We tend to throw ourselves around when something happens."

30 "We weren't drilled in establishing the crisis unit, but it eventually worked out."  
31

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

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

46 In response to inquiries about the readiness of the NCS to manage a serious  
47 event like a pandemic, over 70% of the participants at the central and regional

1 levels acknowledged that the organization was "to a small extent" or "very little"  
2 prepared for such a challenge.

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

### 9 10 **Planning is everything, but we had no plan**

11  
12 Former president in USA, Dwight D. Eisenhower's statement «plans are  
13 nothing; planning is everything» (BrainyQuote, 2024) postulates that by conducting  
14 preparations a crisis management team is given a procedural understanding of  
15 what can happen. The emergency plan describes how the crisis room should be  
16 located and set up, but the crisis room was established in a different location than  
17 described by the plan because of the crisis form and scope. Several informants  
18 wanted a more pre-set up crisis room that could be clear with plans, accessories,  
19 equipment, video conference etc. (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

20  
21 "No, it was not clear which plan that should be used. The plan has been in a drawer."

22 "We deviated from the plan too much."

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

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

27  
28 The contrasting levels of preparedness between bureaucratic staff and prison  
29 personnel are starkly highlighted in recent discussions. While bureaucrats seem to  
30 lack the necessary preparation for crises, prison staff appear more equipped, owing  
31 to their operational roles which frequently deal with various emergency scenarios.  
32 Consequently, prisons and probation services have developed and refined their  
33 crisis management plans, which stands in compliance with the expectations  
34 outlined by the NCS (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

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

### 42 43 **Unclear Roles**

44  
45 There was a notable lack of preparation and practice regarding the different  
46 staff roles, commonly referred to as 'F-roles', as highlighted by Lunde (2014).  
47 These roles were neither pre-assigned nor rehearsed, which contributed to

1 operational confusion. Training for the National Crisis Management Unit had been  
 2 planned to precede the establishment of a national crisis staff, but it never  
 3 materialized. According to several informants, this absence of training and  
 4 practical exercises was a significant factor in the ensuing difficulty to delineate  
 5 ordinary line operations from crisis staff tasks, as reported by the NCS  
 6 (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020):

7  
 8 “Hard to wear two hats: be a line manager and a stab-roles at the same time. We  
 9 should have taken better advantage of the resources.”

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

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

14  
 15 These statements indicate that the proactive staff methodology's F-roles, as  
 16 outlined by Lunde (2014), were not put into practice.

## 17 18 19 Discussion

### 20 21 Reactivity as a Path to Deal and Learning about Crisis

22  
 23 “This has been the best exercise you can have!” One participant observed that  
 24 dealing with the Covid-19 crisis served as a valuable practical exercise,  
 25 emphasizing the gravity of the situation and its potential threat to life if the  
 26 pandemic spiraled out of control in Norway. This view lends weight to the  
 27 seriousness of the crisis, suggesting that a higher infection rate could have had  
 28 more severe consequences on the prisons. The slow-burning nature of the  
 29 pandemic, termed a 'creeping crisis' by 't Hart & Boin (2001), allowed the NCS  
 30 some additional time to strategize once the severity was recognized.

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

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

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

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

11 Reflecting on the handling of the Covid-19 situation by the National Crisis  
12 Management Unit, it is crucial to consider what the NCS can learn from it. If the  
13 NCS rests on the notion that their turnaround and diligent response to the crisis  
14 was an unparalleled learning exercise, their cognitive understanding of learning  
15 from the event might be limited. However, by taking the findings of the internal  
16 report seriously (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020), the NCS would recognize the need for  
17 enhancing their proactive approach to crisis management. The relatively paced  
18 progression of the Covid-19 crisis provided some preparation time, which may not  
19 be the case in more urgent crises that demand immediate action. Therefore, it is  
20 essential for the NCS to advance their crisis management capabilities towards  
21 proactive readiness rather than the reactivity observed during the Covid-19 crisis.

22 At a conference on safety and security, two NCS department-level  
23 representatives claimed successful management of the Covid-19 crisis without  
24 referencing the internal report, although they were aware of its existence (K.  
25 Sørensen, personal communication, December 15, 2022). This omission might be  
26 attributed to their reluctance to expose the NCS system's shortcomings or a  
27 concern for the organization's reputation, as reflected in their official values. This  
28 poses a challenge for learning from the crisis: if leaders do not acknowledge the  
29 report's criticisms, how can improvements in crisis management be realized?  
30

## 31 32 **Conclusion**

33  
34 This paper aims to analyze the response of the NCS at the national directorate  
35 level to the Covid-19 pandemic and how it functioned as a top-level authority  
36 within the Norwegian correctional system. We posed two primary research  
37 questions: first, how did the National Crisis Management Unit address the  
38 pandemic at the directorate level, and second, what lessons could the NCS draw  
39 from this experience to improve its responses to future crises? Our study rests  
40 upon a critical document analysis of the internal audit conducted by the NCS,  
41 evaluating the efficacy of their crisis management during the Covid-19 situation  
42 (Kriminalomsorgen, 2020).

43 Our interpretive analysis of the internal audit report suggests that the NCS  
44 faced significant challenges in activating and executing its emergency plans amid  
45 the unfolding crisis. Furthermore, our review reveals that during the Covid-19  
46 pandemic, the NCS suffered from unclear role definitions, resulting in a blurred

1 distinction between routine operations and emergency management responsibilities.  
 2 It appears that the NCS fell into a pattern of reaction rather than adopting an  
 3 anticipatory, proactive crisis management strategy. This finding underlines vital  
 4 lessons for similar institutions on how organizations might better adjust to and  
 5 assimilate knowledge from crisis situations.

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