

Article

Exploring Frontline Workers Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Within Drug Courts in Norway - a Qualitative Study

by

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines the perceptions of interprofessional collaboration among frontline workers involved in Norwegian drug courts. Using the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model (PINCOM), and Goffman's theory of front stage and backstage communication, the study explores the complexities and informal dynamics of collaboration processes. Semi-structured interviews with 16 frontline workers revealed key factors influencing collaboration, including motivation, personality style, group leadership, organizational culture, and organizational environment. Findings suggest that both formal and informal aspects of collaboration, such as physical proximity and interpersonal relationships, play significant roles in achieving successful outcomes. The study highlights the challenges of interprofessional collaboration in addressing the complex, multifaceted needs of drug court participants, and underscores the importance of continuous reflection on informal dynamics to enhance collaboration.

Keywords: interprofessional collaboration, PINCOM, drug courts, substance abuse, frontline workers, Norway

Introduction

The life situations of convicted people with severe drug abuse issues are multifaceted, and can be understood through the lens of wicked problems theory (Larsen & Ødegård, 2024; Hansen, 2015). Their problems encompass a wide range of issues, including housing, mental health, unemployment, crime, and economics (Cramer, 2014; Friestad & Skog-Hansen, 2004; Revold, 2015). These areas may be interconnected and defined in various ways by different welfare agencies (Larsen & Ødegård, 2024; Hansen, 2015; Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Drug courts have emerged as an alternative punitive approach to addressing these multifaceted substance abuse-related issues, both in Norway and internationally, and are reported in some cases to be a matter of life and death for the participants (Revier, 2021). The Norwegian drug court programme was introduced as a pilot project in 2006 in Oslo and Bergen, in response to an increasing concern over repeated incarceration of individuals with severe drug addictions. Following positive evaluations, the programme was made permanent and national in 2016, and is regulated through the Regulation on Drug Treatment with Court Supervision (2017).

According to §3 of the Regulation, the programme targets individuals convicted of drug-related crimes who have a serious and documented substance use disorder, and who express a genuine willingness to undergo rehabilitation as an alternative to incarceration. The programme combines punitive legal supervision with individualized treatment and social support, and aims to reduce recidivism while promoting long-term recovery. It is not merely a rehabilitative initiative, but a legally binding form of punishment, regulated by Sections 37 f and 38 of the Norwegian Penal Code (Lov om straff [straffeloven], 2005) and overseen by a judge. Participation requires consent, and violations may result in a subsidiary prison sentence, in accordance with Penal Code §39 and §13 of the Regulation.

The Regulation on Drug Treatment with Court Supervision (2017) further elaborates the structure and purpose of the programme. According to §1, it aims to 'prevent new criminal activity, promote rehabilitation, and contribute to strengthening and coordinating practical help and treatment services for convicted drug addicts who fall

under the programme.’ §4 stipulates formal collaboration with other services, and §9 outlines the content: an ‘intensive programme with fixed and frequent appointments’ that includes compulsory measures such as regular drug testing and individualized measures planned in collaboration with each participant. This distinction between mandatory and flexible elements has direct implications for interprofessional collaboration.

Together with the supplementary national guidelines (KDI-2018-9001), the Regulation defines the mandates, responsibilities, and arenas for collaboration. These documents clarify which elements of the programme are fixed by court order and which are open to professional discretion, thus structuring the dynamic between legal obligation and collaborative practice. While some measures are strictly mandated, others allow adaptation, though still within predefined legal boundaries.

Effective collaboration among frontline professionals is essential for the success of drug courts. Nowhere else in the criminal justice system do such diverse actors (e.g. courts, prosecutors, defence attorneys, corrections, psychologists, social workers) have a formal obligation to work together and hold each other accountable for outcomes (van Wormer et al., 2020; Regulation, §4). However, this collaboration occurs within asymmetrical structures, where some agencies—such as courts and correctional services—are governed by non-negotiable legal mandates that can constrain flexibility and limit the discretion of social and health professionals. This reality may generate tensions in collaborative processes and shapes the power dynamics among actors. As Gittel et al. (2008) point out, this kind of integration transcends agency boundaries and bridges entire systems.

Despite the significance of collaborative efforts within drug courts, limited research exists on the challenges, best practices, and dynamics of interprofessional collaboration in this context, both in Norway and internationally. The primary objective of this study is therefore to address this knowledge gap and contribute to the existing literature.

Research on interprofessional collaboration within drug courts

In recent decades a substantial body of research has developed on interprofessional collaboration concerning various contexts within health, social sciences and education (Barr, 2007; Doornbosch, Achterberg, & Smaling, 2024; Larsen & Hean, 2021; Reeves et al., 2017). Internationally, drug courts have been the subject of research for decades, although the primary focus is typically on exploring the effects of the programmes (Belenko, 2001; Bouffard et al., 2010; Carey et al., 2012; Kearley, 2019; Mitchell et al., 2012;). To gather relevant empirical data for the current study, focusing on collaboration issues, a brief literature search was conducted. A relatively modest sample of studies was discovered on this subject matter. Wenzel et al. (2004) found a moderate to strong perceived linkage between drug court administrators and service providers. They further identified barriers to stronger linkages, including limited funding, inadequate management information systems, and insufficient staffing (Wenzel et al., 2004). van Wormer et al. (2020) highlighted that drug court teams should prioritize the provision of continuous training for all staff, require and encourage the attendance and involvement of all team members in both staffing and court proceedings, and consistently cultivate a shared vision of their operations. Farringer and Manchak (2023) conducted qualitative interviews with 19 members of a single drug court team in a midwestern urban setting in the United States. Farringer and Manchak (2023) highlight the importance of developing methods to operationalize and measure daily, individual-level communication and collaboration practices in future research on drug court processes.

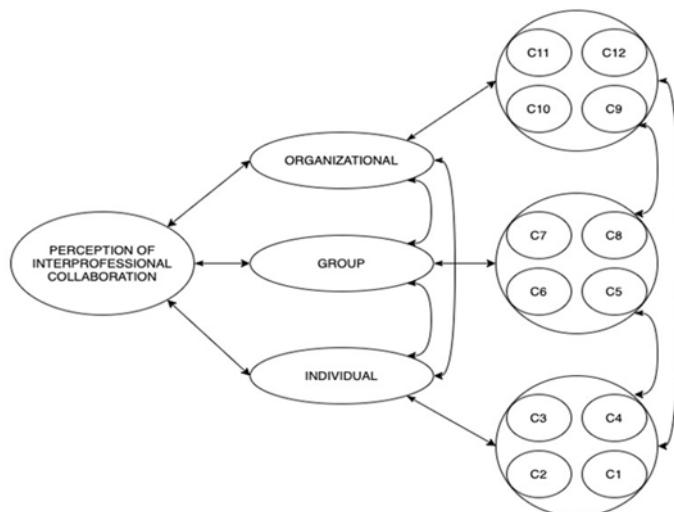
In Norway, research on drug courts generally comes down to two main research reports, Falck (2014) and Johnsen and Svendsen (2006). Falck (2014) found that over one third (34%) of the individuals required to undertake the drug court programme successfully completed the programme. This result is satisfactory, and aligns with outcomes from other treatment programmes for heavy drug users. Johnsen and Svendsen (2006) did include collaboration as part of their report. They concluded that the drug court is a cross-agency and interdisciplinary programme. To ensure this is properly managed, it is important that all frontline workers involved feel a sense of ownership in the collaborative practice, and that they take an active part in

the collaboration process. Especially in a start-up phase that has been characterized by frontline workers working similarly, this seems to be important. The collective knowledge capital managed by the team is unique, and can become influential in the legal and treatment system.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model (PINCOM) as a theoretical framework for understanding the complexities of interprofessional collaboration within drug courts. Ødegård (2006) developed PINCOM, and the model has since then garnered international attention in the research field (Hynek et al., 2020; Johnson, 2016; Jörns-Presentati et al., 2021; Rousseau et al., 2012; Rousseau et al., 2017; Yusra et al., 2019). PINCOM encompass 12 constructs designed to elucidate and provide insights into the phenomenon of interprofessional collaboration.

Figure 1: Perception of Interprofessional Collaboration Model (PINCOM), (Ødegård, 2006)



C1=motivation, C2=role expectancy, C3=personality style, C4=professional power, C5=group leadership, C6=coping, C7=communication, C8=social support, C9=organizational culture, C10=organizational aims, C11=organizational domain, C12=organizational environment

The theoretical constructs incorporated into the model are representative of various aspects of the phenomenon from an individual level, such as motivation and personality style, a group level, such as to an organizational level like organizational

culture and goals. PINCOM was used to develop the semi-structured interview, which will be presented in more detail in the methods section.

Furthermore, we utilized Goffman's theory of front-stage and backstage communication, which offers a valuable framework for analysing interprofessional collaboration processes. According to Goffman, front-stage communication occurs in public settings, such as meetings between colleagues or interactions between professionals and patients, and is typically characterized by formal and structured interactions. In contrast, backstage communication tends to be less formal, and may take the form of prearranged or hidden communication. Notably, front-stage and backstage communication are closely interconnected, and understanding their interrelatedness can provide insight into the complexities of collaboration, as outlined in the PINCOM model. It is suggested that by exploring how front-stage and backstage communication relate to different aspects of collaboration, we can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in interprofessional collaboration scenarios in drug courts.

Aims

This qualitative study endeavours to address an identified knowledge gap regarding interprofessional collaboration within drug courts in Norway. More specifically, the study aims to: a) examine drug court frontline workers' perceptions of interprofessional collaboration, b) analyse the obtained findings through the theoretical lens of Goffman's front- stage and backstage communication, and c) explore potential avenues for enhancing interprofessional collaboration in drug courts based on these findings. Additionally, the study critically assesses both the strengths and weaknesses of its own methodology and profound possibilities for further research in this area.

Method

The aim of this qualitative study was to comprehend and interpret the phenomenon of interprofessional collaboration in the context of drug courts in Norway, as perceived by the frontline workers. To understand a phenomenon, an interpretation or explanation of it is required, which relies on past experiences related to that

phenomenon. Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation and meaning, and how it has evolved into its current form (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Thus, the study aligns with Gadamer's perspective, viewing hermeneutics as an approach rather than a specific method (Debesay, Nåden, & Slettebø, 2008). While the study is underpinned by a hermeneutical orientation, it is most visible in the analytical method and emphasis on the researcher's position and reflexivity. The researcher acknowledges their own value-based subjectivity and the participants' value-based subjectivity during the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

In the present qualitative study, nine frontline workers (N=16) with firsthand experience with participants in drug courts took part in the study. Lipsky (2010) identifies frontline workers as essential 'street-level bureaucrats' in welfare services, responsible for carrying out daily tasks at the ground level. In the context of this study, these workers play a critical role in addressing the challenges associated with the convict's rehabilitation and future welfare needs. The frontline workers were all employed in the Norwegian correctional service, and were based in different parts of Norway.

Table 1: Participant's education and gender

Education	Social work	Lawyer	Other
Men	1		2
Women	7	6	

In Norwegian drug courts, lawyers play a distinct role compared to frontline workers trained in social work or related fields. The lawyers (n=6) are responsible for ensuring that the legal aspects of the programme are properly adhered to, and also serve as legal representatives during court meetings. In contrast, the participants in this study with a background in social work or similar fields (n=8) take on a role comparable to probation officers. They maintain frequent contact with the convicts, and oversee rehabilitative measures to support their progress.

The recruitment of participants was partially organized by the Norwegian Correctional Service. The authors of this current paper first sent an information letter about the study to the central level of the Norwegian Correctional Service, which was then

forwarded to the relevant units within the organization. A contact person at these units was established and contacted the first author. Participants then expressed their interest to the contact person at the units, and the first author made individual agreements regarding interviews with them.

Data collection and materials

Data collection was guided by an interview framework derived from the 12 constructs of the PINCOM model (Ødegård, 2006; Figure 1). As noted by Ødegård (2006), while perceptions may not directly produce observable behaviour patterns, they are likely to exert a significant influence on professionals' actions in collaboration processes.

The PINCOM model identifies a range of constructs that are likely to impact perceptions of interprofessional collaboration at the individual, group and organizational level.

The interview guide was based on the factors of PINCOM, such as 'personality style', 'group leadership' and 'organizational culture', and questions in PINCOM-Q, such as 'In what way is the frontline workers motivation important in interprofessional collaboration?', and 'Is interprofessional collaboration prioritized in your workplace? Please explain why or why not;'

The interviews lasted about one hour, and were conducted at the Norwegian Correctional Service offices where the frontline workers had their daily work. It was recorded, transcribed and translated from Norwegian to English.

Data Analysis

The data material was analysed by the first and second author using a deductive approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Fife & Gossner, 2024; Tjora, 2017) based on the 12 PINCOM categories for categorization purposes (Ødegård, 2006). Deductive approaches in qualitative research utilize different forms of pre-existing theories to analyse meanings, processes, and narratives of individual and relational phenomena. It is argued that deductive qualitative research contributes to the progress of science by enabling the investigation of previously published literature, resulting in increased validation, enhancement, or rejection of the concepts being explored (Casula,

Rangarajan, & Shields, 2020; Fife & Gossner, 2024). Additionally, the relevance of the analysis can be enhanced by utilizing a well-established framework, such as PINCOM (Ødegård, 2006), because it can help to identify relevant patterns and themes aligned with the theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis was done by the following three steps: 1) The first author and the second author read and re-read the transcripts, and listened to the recordings of the interviews to acquire a deeper understanding of the content, context, and meaning, 2) We then identified the codes related to the 12 constructs in PINCOM. This was done by creating a template with PINCOM's three levels (organizational, group and individual) and the 12 constructions (C1-C12). The transcripts were then reviewed, and the content of the text was sorted into each level, and under each of the 12 constructions. A lot of text content gathered in some of the constructions. We interpreted this as these constructions being of greater importance than those with less text content. The importance was determined not just by the volume of text within each construct, but by the meaning and significance of the content. Finally, we did a comprehensive analysis, detailing how the themes relate to the research question and the potential meaning of the themes.

Ethics

Evaluation from SIKT (reference number 375370) 01.06.23. Approval by The Norwegian Correctional Service Region West (reference number 202300564-26), date 15.08.23. All the participants were given written information about the study, and gave their consent to participate. They were also informed that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. This article is one of three planned publications based on the same dataset. Each article addresses a distinct research question and analytical angle, though some thematic overlap may occur.

Findings

PINCOM categorization

Findings show that the most striking facets of PINCOM are the constructs 'motivation (C1)' and 'personality style (C3)' on an individual level, 'group leadership (C5)' on a

group level and 'organizational culture (C9)', as well as 'organizational environment (C10)', on an organizational level.

Individual level (motivation, personality style, role expectancy and professional power)

Regarding the individual level, participants perceived the construct of 'motivation' as both meaning the willingness to assist individuals participating in drug courts in improving their life situations, and the motivation frontline workers must collaborate on with other agencies and professionals. Both types of motivations were considered important, but the strength of the motivation varied depending on the individual, and it must be based on the right premises, as reported by the participants. They believe that it is important for professionals working with issues related to drug addiction not feel obligated for it to be their life's passion, yet still be able to do an excellent job:

'I believe it's important for people who work with addiction to be able to do so without feeling like it has to be their life's calling, but still be able to do an incredibly good job.' (social worker)

The participants also acknowledge that although professionals in this field may go to great lengths to help those affected by drug addiction, their level of involvement and accessibility may vary depending on the individual. Additionally, the participants mention that the willingness of the person struggling with addiction also plays a significant role in the success of the treatment:

'I have a perception that people go to great lengths to help those affected, but of course, if the person in question does not show willingness.' (social worker)

The significance of professional power was not deemed particularly salient or noteworthy by the participants. One participant expressed this by stating that in many interprofessional meetings he attended, he was unaware of the professions of the people he was collaborating with. According to the participants, the individual behind the profession is considered to be more significant. They stated that one should do their job, and not carry the profession like a solemn actor in such a collaboration. They further stated that the judges in drug courts do not appear to be at the top of the hierarchy, even though they are. One of the participants stated that we do not have nobility in Norway:

'One should do their job. One should not carry the profession like a solemn actor in such a collaboration... In the way we have it in XX, the judges do not appear to be at

the top of the hierarchy even though they are... We do not have nobility in Norway.'
(other education)

Although one participant mentioned being unaware of the professions of the people he was collaborating with, the construct of 'role expectancy' is still considered important by frontline workers. The emphasized that they usually have interprofessional meetings where they go through the different roles, and that these roles have been discussed beforehand:

'We usually have an interprofessional meeting where we go through the different roles. I find that useful.' (social worker)

Furthermore, participants highlighted the distinct roles of lawyers and social workers within drug courts. Lawyers typically focus on maintaining a structured, legal-oriented role, thereby ensuring compliance with legal frameworks and programme requirements. In contrast, social workers and other professionals engage more directly in emotional and rehabilitative support for the participants. It is important to note, however, that this difference in approach may not simply reflect a professional culture or individual attitudes. Rather, it stems from formal role expectations and legal mandates. Lawyers and judges are required to ensure that the conditions set out in the court ruling are upheld, and that they operate within strict legal boundaries, which may limit their ability to adjust or accommodate individual circumstances—even when they might wish to do so. As such, their approach is not necessarily a result of limited collaborative intent, but of structural necessity. Acknowledging this helps avoid misattributing a legal rigidity to interpersonal or professional shortcomings, and instead invites a more nuanced understanding of how differing mandates shape collaboration dynamics.

Several lawyers in the study expressed concern that social workers sometimes prioritize emotional and rehabilitative aspects over legal requirements. As one lawyer stated:

'At the time, it was clear that the programme should have been terminated because he didn't fulfil the programme's demands, but the social workers didn't entirely agree.' (lawyer)

However, these tensions appear to be openly acknowledged, discussed, and accepted by frontline workers within drug courts through meta-communication and dialogue.

Group level (group leadership, coping, communication and social support)

Regarding the group level, the construct 'group leadership' was considered crucial for a successful collaboration. However, it seemed that there were variations in who was identified as being responsible for taking on the role of group leader. While in some cases, the correctional service assumed this task, one frontline worker emphasized the importance of other agencies, besides the correctional service, in taking on this responsibility:

'I am clear that someone else must take that responsibility. What if the participant ends up in prison? Who will take responsibility then?' (social worker)

The participants reported that communication across agencies and professions varied. There was an inconsistency in the flow of information among the frontline workers involved in the collaboration. Moreover, there appeared to be a lack of mutual knowledge among the collaborating professions. Other agencies had limited knowledge about the correctional service, particularly outside legal justice agencies, such as health care agencies. However, the communication with the courts was perceived as good:

'The way I see it; we have a good dialogue with the court.' (social worker)

The frontline workers emphasized the importance of personally knowing the individuals with whom they collaborate, rather than solely relying on digital means of communication. They value face-to-face meetings for effective collaboration. They stated that human contact is absolutely essential for things to work properly:

'The human contact is absolutely essential for things to work properly.' (social worker)

'It is important to know the members of the responsibility group. Then it is easier to make contact. XX and its surrounding areas are not that big, and it often happens that the same people are followed up on. This way, one gets to know them well.' (other education)

All the participants also highlighted how informal discussions, such as team meetings and ad-hoc conversations, contributed to a deeper understanding of cases. They referenced the importance of personal chemistry and team dynamics in overcoming formal communication gaps.

Organizational level (organizational goal, organizational domain, organizational culture and organizational environment)

When it comes to the organizational level in PINCOM, it is reported from the participants that organizational goals are mutually shared and understood across agencies and professionals.

Regarding the construct of 'organizational culture,' the participants provided inconsistent responses when asked if they perceived the agency where they work as having a pro-collaborative culture. One of the participants praised their leader for their efforts in creating a pro-collaborative culture within the organization:

'Yes, then I must be allowed to praise the leader here. She is really skilled, you know, but I think it's not just about her personality, but also her professional abilities. She is truly focused on collaboration, and she has been for as long as I have known her.' (social worker)

In general, others perceived the correctional service as being a closed and anonymous organization, when asked if he perceived the correctional service as having an extrovert organizational culture:

'No, one does not have that kind of presence. Very anonymous, yes. It feels a bit like an island in the welfare state. Very few people actually know what we do.' (social worker)

The participants noted that some agencies struggle to fully understand the role and structure of drug courts, leading to inefficiencies in collaborative efforts:

'We have held numerous meetings to inform the agencies we collaborate with about drug courts, but I believe the impact of these meetings diminishes significantly over time,'
one lawyer remarked.

In Norway, drug courts are organized in two drug court competence centres in Bergen and Oslo, with the others placed within the local probation offices. In the drug courts centres in Bergen and Oslo, there are frontline workers employed by the specialist health care services and employment services stationed at the centres. This is not the case in the probation offices. Different agencies working under the same roof are perceived by the frontline workers interviewed in Oslo and Bergen as being a huge advantage when it comes to interprofessional collaboration. This creates a feeling of being a team pulling in the same direction, according to the participants:

'It is absolutely crucial. It would never work if we were in different locations.... It is the availability and the feeling of moving in the same direction.' (social worker)

Discussion

This study aims to explore interprofessional collaboration from the point of view of frontline workers employed in the Norwegian correctional service involved in drug courts across Norway based on the theoretical framework of PINCOM and Goffman's theory of front stage and backstage communication. As interprofessional collaboration is fundamental to the existence and function of drug courts, we were interested in understanding which factors are deemed important by frontline workers. The findings indicate that frontline workers perceive work motivation, personality style, group leadership, organizational culture, and organizational environment as the most critical factors in collaboration processes.

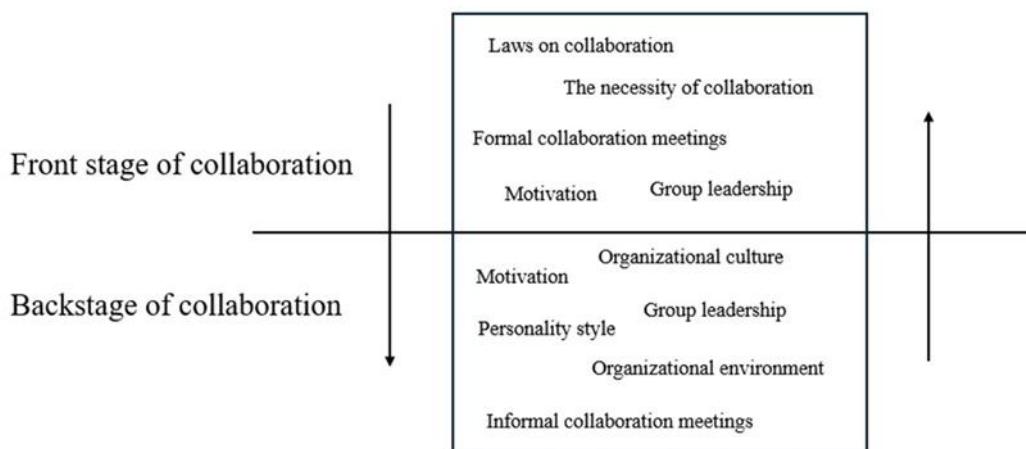
The front stage and backstage of interprofessional collaboration in drug courts

Based on the findings, it seems that informal factors are significant for the success of collaboration processes in drug courts. According to the frontline workers, it is not the profession, but the individual behind their formal work tasks that play a central role when different professions are collaborating. According to one participant, he did not even consider the profession of those with whom he was collaborating. In other words, the personal seems to precede the professional. The frontline workers also highlighted the importance of 'working under the same roof' with other agencies and professions (organizational environment in PINCOM). Working in physical proximity to frontline workers from other agencies can also underscore the importance of informal factors, as the organizational environment facilitates these workers in getting to know each other on a personal level. A potential consequence of this could be the development of an organizational culture that is conducive to interprofessional collaboration.

Scott Reeves (†2018) discusses the importance of informal factors in a chapter published posthumously in 2023, where he employs Goffman's classic theory of front stage and backstage. In his study conducted within a healthcare context, he found that professionals engaged in formal front stage collaboration meetings. However,

they also fostered an informal backstage collaboration, where they discussed significant issues concerning the patients that were then brought up in the formal front stage meetings (Reeves, 2023).

Figure 2: Front stage and backstage of interprofessional collaboration in Norwegian drug courts



As previously mentioned in this paper, interprofessional collaboration and cooperation between welfare services are legally mandated in Norway. Moreover, due to the complex nature of issues faced by participants in drug courts (including mental health, employment, crime, somatic health, and drug abuse issues), collaboration between professions and agencies is essential. This collaboration can be considered the foundation for the existence of drug courts.

All the frontline workers interviewed regularly conduct meetings with other professions and agencies, often referred to as 'responsibility meetings'. These meetings are deemed formal, as they are prearranged and follow a specific timetable, as well as notes being taken during these meetings, which are subsequently stored as public documents. However, the frontline workers also mention informal meetings, particularly in the drug court centres where multiple agencies are housed 'under the same roof'. Here, the frontline workers have daily contact and get to know each other. This organizational environment may create a pro-collaborative organizational culture. By meeting up during lunch and coffee breaks, the frontline workers can build

relationships, discuss urgent issues that arise on the spot, and share information. The frontline workers stationed at local probation offices also mention informal meetings in the form of phone calls to colleagues in other agencies whom they know personally. However, they are missing out on the opportunities that come with the drug court centres to build a proactive culture of collaboration based on daily physical encounters.

According to the frontline workers, group leadership is not formally determined. Sometimes the responsibility falls to the correctional service, while at other times agencies outside the correctional service take on the role. The interviewed frontline workers express a preference for the latter scenario because the correctional service is involved with the case for a limited period of time. Thus, group leadership can be perceived as both a front-stage and backstage function. A similar scenario may apply to motivation. As a professional, there is an inherent obligation to help and assist the clients with whom you work. This is a fundamental principle of being educated and employed in health and social services. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, collaboration between agencies and professions is legally required. However, according to the frontline workers, motivation appears to vary, both in terms of assisting the participants in drug courts, and collaborating with other professions and agencies.

While the findings emphasize the importance of personal characteristics, such as motivation, communication skills, and interpersonal chemistry, it is essential to acknowledge that some aspects of the collaboration within drug courts are legally predetermined and leave limited room for professional discretion. For example, lawyers and judges are required to act within the boundaries set by the court ruling and relevant legislation, including Sections 37 f, 38, and 39 of the Penal Code (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2005), and the Regulation on Drug Treatment with Court Supervision (2017). These legal instruments define specific conditions for participation and consequences for non-compliance. As such, frontline workers' roles are not entirely shaped by personal inclination or institutional culture, but also by formal mandates and legal obligations. For instance, if a participant fails to meet the conditions set in the judgment, legal actors are obligated to respond in accordance with the law, regardless of their professional preferences.

This implies that interprofessional collaboration is not purely relational or contextual, but structurally embedded in a regulatory framework that defines what is negotiable and what is not.

The wickedness of collaboration

Interprofessional collaboration has long been recognized as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, which has proven difficult to fully comprehend in literature. For example, several studies have attempted to explore the link between interprofessional collaboration and patient outcomes (Reeves et al., 2017). However, the complexity of the relationship remains a challenge to uncover. Given the absence of a clear and comprehensive understanding, interprofessional collaboration may be regarded as a wicked problem, where there is no straightforward solution that equally caters to all actors' needs.

Figure 2 presented in this study suggests that an increased focus on various aspects of collaboration, including front- and backstage communication, has the potential to enhance interprofessional processes. The figure may be utilized as a reflective tool for professionals involved in drug courts, with the objective of highlighting both formal and informal communication between participants. For example, by asking reflective questions during initial meetings, professionals can gain a deeper understanding of the formal requirements and organization of the drug court, as well as informal factors. It is therefore suggested that reflective questions should be broad, ranging to provide a full and comprehensive overview of the situation. Importantly, hidden backstage communication can present a challenge to effective collaboration, and acknowledging this issue during initial meetings may have the potential to mitigate insecurity among participants.

Moreover, it is worth considering the 12 constructs outlined in the PINCOM model as a tool to develop reflective questions relating to both formal and informal aspects of collaboration. Figure 2 highlights the critical role of motivation in shaping successful collaboration, while reflective questions could explore whether all participants are motivated and/or whether factors in the backstage influence motivation. At a group level, participants' role expectations may impact collaboration, and reflective

questions could investigate this. Finally, at the organizational level, informal cultures or other organizational aspects may impact collaboration, and thoughtful reflection on these issues could facilitate effective collaboration processes.

Methodological limitations and issues

First, it should be acknowledged that this study possesses limitations, as it only provides a snapshot of interprofessional collaboration by drawing upon a small pool of participants. Furthermore, it is also essential to recognize that the primary author boasts an extensive practical background within the Norwegian Correctional Service, including a substantial involvement in drug court operations. Consequently, this experiential perspective may have influenced the researcher's outlook, hence potentially impacting the interpretation and conclusions derived from this research. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that the work experience could have bolstered the study, insofar as the primary author possesses a nuanced understanding and domain-specific knowledge regarding the information conveyed by the interviewees. Moreover, it is crucial to consider the specific context in which the interviews took place, alongside the dynamics between the researcher and participants, as these factors may have influenced the data collection process.

Second, given the intricacies associated with interprofessional collaboration within a criminal justice setting, it may be advisable to adopt a mixed methods approach, one that combines qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This can help facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the multidimensional nature of collaboration, as previously suggested by Mathieu et al. (2008) and Ødegård and Bjørkly (2012). Lastly, it is important to note that the utilization of the theoretical framework of PINCOM may impose certain limitations by circumscribing the scope of analysis, thus potentially leaving unexplored factors beyond the framework's purview.

Concluding comments

This study helps shed light on the intricate nature of interprofessional collaboration within Norwegian drug courts, emphasizing the interplay between formal structures and informal interactions. By applying PINCOM and Goffman's theoretical concepts, the findings reveal that successful collaboration hinges not only on organizational

systems, but also on the personal relationships and motivations of the individuals involved. Informal interactions, such as those facilitated by shared physical spaces, were found to contribute significantly to a pro-collaborative culture.

The research underscores the importance of fostering environments that encourage both formal accountability and informal relationship-building. It also highlights the need for clear leadership roles and mutual understanding across professional boundaries. To help enhance interprofessional collaboration, future initiatives should address barriers such as inconsistent communication and unequal resource distribution, while promoting reflective practices based on both formal and informal dynamics.

Further research is recommended to explore these dynamics in greater depth, potentially using mixed method approaches to validate and expand on the findings. Addressing the 'wicked problems' inherent in drug court operations will require a nuanced understanding of collaboration, balancing systemic requirements with the human factors that drive effective teamwork.

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