

Implementation and impact of the method of Giving Up Crime in Dutch Prisons

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Introduction

This paper starts with discussing in more detail the structure and the content of the workbook Giving up Crime and how the aim of mobilizing personal agency and motivation for change is achieved through the educational elements of the workbook (www.givingupcrime.com).

Then the process of implementing the method of Giving up Crime in the Dutch prison system will be addressed. Implementation was conducted in 2 stages: a pilot phase of testing the use of the workbook in 4 prisons and a phase of nationwide implementation of the method in all Dutch prisons.

The impact of the method was investigated in both stages by interviewing detainees, prisoner officers and managers and by analyzing questionnaires filled in by detainees. The main results of this inquiry will be discussed.

I will also more deeply go into the method of Giving up Crime and **how** it is implemented in Dutch prisons nowadays.

The workbook

The idea for this book resulted from many years of research and close collaboration with detainees. We interviewed them about their wishes to change their life and the factors that either blocked or supported successful recovery and desistance from crime.

We collected information about motivation for change and its relationship to relevant life domains. In other words, we applied the concepts of personal agency and motivation to the specific situation of detainees. We wrote draft versions of the workbook and then let them read by detainees who gave useful feedback.

We were afraid that parts of the content would be too difficult but we learned that it was a good assumption not to underestimate the competencies of this target group.

The structure of the workbook

The workbook is divided in three parts.

- The *first* introductory part of the book invites the detainee to determine for him/herself the costs and benefits of two possible courses of action: abandoning or continuing a life in crime. After being invited to reflect on these costs and benefits the detainee is asked to consider these options of abandoning or continuing a life in crime. If preferred, one can decide already now on one of these options. If one decides to stop with offending one may continue with reading the book. If the person decides to continue a life in crime the

message is that it is better to put the book aside because most likely, it will not work. The message is further that the person in question is probably not yet ready for change but the reality is that sooner or later, he/she, like all offenders, will eventually become more open to change.

To get involved in the process of change, the detainee engages in reflecting on personal values and goals referring to both the present and the past marked by periods of engaging in criminal activities. It is explained that the underlying needs related to criminal involvement were probably positive but the means to satisfy these needs and the produced outcomes were certainly not. Understanding that the same personal needs can be addressed in a non-criminal way is the next important step. In addition, detainees are introduced to the concept of identity and the 'real me' or 'true self' which refers to the part of the self that conflicts with or puts in doubt one's orientation on criminality.

Next, the detainee is encouraged to discover his/her own good reasons to change one's life and to think about the inner and outer obstacles and strengths that may either block or promote personal reform.

This part leads to a personal life plan with goals to achieve a more fulfilling life and a desired end state sustained by positive contributions to self, others and society. Goals involve the life-domains of accommodation, relationships with (significant) others, physical and mental health, education/employment, financial matters and balance in life. The selection of these life domains is based on: 1) their relationship with problems in living and the experience of adversity that foster criminal coping and 2) strengths or exceptions in terms of more quiet life episodes marked by positive contributions to self, others and society, less criminal activity and conformist behavior.

- The next, *second* part of the workbook concerns working on the various life domains. The order of working through these life domains depends on the priorities derived from the personal goals. If housing is for example the main issue, the detainee should start with the chapter 'find a place to live', and so on. Detainees learn to formulate goals that comply with Berg & Miller's (1992) *seven characteristics of well-formed goals* such as being small, realistic within the present context of life, specific, behavioural, emphasizing presence rather than absence and having beginnings rather than endings. This strategy facilitates the experience of success with conventional, productive actions. Experiences of success, in their turn, help uncover the value of enhanced commitment to a desired end-state and the power of personal agency, inner resources and self-initiative.
- Experiencing initial success also feeds into a further process of reflection on why pro social goals are relevant, important or challenging and why transformative actions are difficult or easy. Once desisting offenders successfully engage in transformative actions, their appraisal of opportunities for reform shifts towards an interpretation in terms of their value and contribution to desirable outcomes. In addition, changed appraisals draw the attention away from (anticipated) undesirable outcomes and negative thoughts.
- The *third* part of the workbook learns detainees how to cope with difficulties and prepare for setbacks. In this part the main problems and difficulties detainees would normally

encounter after release are tackled. To think about one's own expected problems and how these can be solved in cooperation with significant others is the focus of this important chapter.

The titles of the chapters of the workbook are:

1. Giving up, or not giving up crime?
2. Choosing change
3. Find a place to live
4. Relating to others with care
5. Take good care for yourself
6. Look for a job
7. Keep your affairs in order
8. Manage your time well
9. Giving up crime, how do I hold on?

Motivation enhancing strategies of the workbook

The aim of the method is to prepare detainees for re-entry, and supporting them in the natural process of recovery and desistance from crime;

Promoting self-activity, self-directed learning and taking responsibility is a major means to achieve the aim of autonomous self-motivation and effective self-change. As a matter of fact, these means reflect the effective *educational* elements of the method referring to the principles of promoting people's motivation to learn: *setting* goals that have subjective value and *actively* working towards them. These are main elements of how adults can be motivated to take responsibility for their own learning and engage in the agentic pursuit of change.

This is very important as most detainees suffer from desistance pessimism and many of them had negative experiences during their educational career.

In the book the reader is addressed directly by providing realistic examples we gained from the interviews with detainees.

Multiple assignments and exercises are used to actively engage the reader in the process of reflection, self-change and to mobilize personal agency and responsibility for one's own process of change.

The use of option choice is also motivating. Depending on personal goals specific chapters can be chosen to address these issues.

By the end of every chapter, activities to be taken have to be summed up in a paragraph *Agreements with myself*. This enhances commitment to these activities. Every chapter concludes with a *to remember* section, to prime the focus of the specific chapter.

Correspondence with stages of change

Prochaska & DiClemente's (1992) theoretical framework of motivational change is applicable to the parts of the workbook. Of the five stages, the stages of pre-contemplation, contemplation and preparation are related to the first part of the workbook

The stage of action is related to the second part of the book which involves working on one's situation in the main life domains of housing, relating to others, healthy behaviour etc..

The stage of maintenance is related to the third part of the workbook concerning the preparation for setbacks, preventing relapses and detainees' endorsement of risk-reduction strategies.

Re-entry as an exam-like situation

This is a quote from a detainee named Roy, 27 years old.

"I am going to leave prison and that keeps me busy. When you enter here it's easy, it is just like switching off the button. But if you go outside, it's like you are going to exam. You have to arrange a lot of things and you do not know if you will succeed".

What he says is that when he enters prison he switches off the button in order to 'doing time' and to survive his sentence, but when he leaves prison he feels like going to an exam and this makes him very nervous. He is ambivalent and not prepared for this exam. And this is what the workbook is about. To take the time to prepare for release and to promote the experience of success in this important exam-like situation.

The role of the mentoring prison-officer

While the detainee is working with the book, the role of the mentor prison officer is of crucial importance. He/she supports the detainee in making progress while working through the book. Support involves expressing empathy, discussing important topics, guiding the detainee, praising for his/her positive and self-directed attitude, listening, posing questions to clarify issues, stimulating etc. This is important in the reinforcement of the desired behaviour towards positive changes.

The implementation of the method of Giving up Crime in the Netherlands

The implementation of the method of Giving up Crime was part of the Prison Modernization Programme that has been launched by the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency in 2008. The modernization of the prison is based on 3 anchors:

1. a person oriented approach of prisoners ;
2. a constructive prison climate;
3. and cooperation with external partners.

Especially with regard to the first two anchors, the method of Giving up Crime was considered as of value for the modernization programme.

Giving up Crime was introduced in 2 phases: first a pilot was conducted in 4 prisons and in the second phase the method was implemented nationwide in 2012. Both phases were evaluated.

Implementation of the pilot-phase of Giving up Crime

Implementation of the pilot-phase was conducted and monitored by Nelissen Research. A guidance committee was appointed. The research questions for this pilot concerned:

1. the usefulness of the workbook for detainees as well as for mentors
2. gaining information about the way the book was used
3. the effects of the workbook
4. enabling and inhibiting conditions in the organisation
5. recommendations: what is the most productive way to use the workbook?

To answer the research questions Nelissen Research organized:

- information meetings for all the staff members involved;
- training sessions for prison officers/ mentors to prepare them for their new role
- supervision sessions to discuss and solve difficulties which came up during the process,
- evaluative interviews with detainees, mentors and managers about their experiences

Results of the pilot-phase

What were positive experiences reported in this pilot study?

There was diversity in attitude among staff members towards the Prison Modernization Programme, as well as towards the introduction of the workbook, ranging from positive to sceptical.

The training sessions all went well. There was a cooperative attitude by the prison officers, and the heads of their unit facilitated them during the implementation-phase.

The detainees reported that the workbook functioned as an eye-opener. They remarked that the workbook encouraged them to reflect on experiences in a way they never did before.

The mentoring prison-officers reported that the workbook helped to facilitate and deepen the contact with detainees.

And detainees experienced success and feelings of pride while they worked through all the exercises in the book and discovered themselves how to proceed in a positive way with their current and future life.

In one of the prisons detainees spontaneously wrote letters and notes referring to their enthusiasm about newly gained insights from the workbook.

But, there were also negative experiences

First: the role of the mentor was not well implemented already in most of the prisons. The prison officers reported time and work constraints, also related to this new role.

It also seems to be a difficult task for some of the prison offices to guide detainees because they were too much focused on their tasks related to issues of order and safety.

Another problem was the fact that the mentor was not always available, for example during the weekends. And collaboration with other relevant disciplines within the prison organization was lacking. (for example education department, department of social work, mental health services)

Relocation of detainees was another negative factor. In addition, creating opportunities for a seamless transition to post-release guidance and aftercare was experienced as problematic.

Nationwide implementation

In 2012 the nationwide implementation of the workbook was launched. Some imported changes were proposed.

The method of Giving up Crime became part of a program of activities to prepare for release and the **name** of the method was changed in to: Choose for Change;

It was no longer organised as an individual activity by detainees guided by a mentor but it was offered in 8 and finally, 6 weekly training sessions, conducted in small groups. The training sessions covering the first and the third part of the workbook, are guided by professional trainers recruited from the own prison organisation and from probation services.

The role of the mentor became a more supplementary one of supporting and helping detainees with implementing their life plans in the various life domains.

Results of the evaluation of the nationwide implementation

A study was conducted by a research company to get a first impression of the experiences with this new strategy. They interviewed detainees, trainers, mentors and members of the management of prisons. The collected data show a large majority of both detainees and trainers with very positive reactions about the content and impact of the training. Dropout rates were remarkably low. Although the right detainees were selected for the training, the impression was that more detainees are potentially eligible.

The trainers were experienced enough to work with the trainer manual. There was room to tailor the material to the questions, needs and characteristics of the individual group members. They recommended that other staff members should be more informed and involved, so that the training will be better embedded in the context of the prison.

Also the introduction of intervision and supervision is recommended for the trainers and mentors, to share their experiences and discuss and solve problems they encounter.

The preliminary conclusion regarding the method of Giving up Crime organised as a training, is positive about its impact as experienced both by detainees and trainers. Its experienced impact refers to:

- the role of self-directedness which worked out positively compared to approaches with strictly obliged or prescribed topics;
- more freedom of choice led to more engagement of the detainees;
- the report of detainees reflecting thoroughly about crucial issues, sometimes for the first time during their life.

Another main finding was that the activity should be better imbedded in the context of the prison. Information to other staff members and the supportive role of management could be improved.