



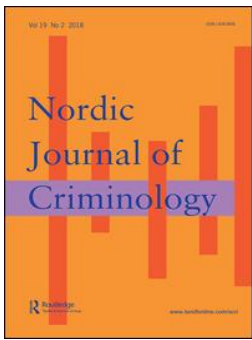
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Social interaction between employee and offender in supervised probationary freedom in Finland

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ABSTRACT

Open sanctions and changes in conceptions of rehabilitation are changing qualification requirements in the field of prison and probation services. In particular, the significance of social interaction between employees and offenders has emphasized. This study examines this issue from the viewpoints of social constructionism and discourse analysis. Research material was collected by interviewing 11 Finnish Criminal Sanction Agency employees who prepared and enforced supervised probationary freedom. According to the results, social interaction was structured from different points of view and linked to differently constructed identities in the interviewees' speech. Professional interaction and a confidential employee-offender relationship were viewed as a means to create occupational safety and prevent security risks, and also to support offender's rehabilitation. In addition, employees used a discourse of daily interaction and support which emphasized the significance of everyday encounters with the offender. Employees were able to overcome the tension between support and control by flexibly combining the discourse of supervision with the discourse of daily interaction and support, which enabled them to support the offender without being a rehabilitation professional. The study reveals the central role of social interaction, which creates challenges for education, and the development of an organizational culture in prison and probation services.

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employee-offender
relationship; desistance;
electronic monitoring; social
constructionism; discourse
analysis

Introduction

In recent decades, the principles employed in the enforcement of sentences have dramatically changed. At the same time, the significance of the social interaction between an employee and an offender has been emphasized. However, it is not obvious what kind of employee-offender relationship is intended when the prison and probation services are being developed to meet these challenges.

The prevention of recidivism and rehabilitation supporting such work have become an essential part of activities in the field of prison and probation services. Rehabilitation programmes based on a cognitive-behavioural premise increased in prisons at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Recently, a desistance paradigm has been offered to replace or to be used parallel with the cognitive-behavioural starting point, and the

programmes which are based on it. Farrall and Calverley (2005) define desistance as a sudden event that makes the offender stop offending, whereas Laub and Sampson (2001) see disengaging from criminality as a procedural chain of events in the offender's life. According to this desistance theory, essential factors in the prevention of recidivism are the relationship between offenders and employees, and the attention paid to the offenders' social situation and its improvement (e.g. King, 2013; McNeill, 2004; McNeill, Farral, Lightowler, & Maruna, 2012). McCulloch (2005) argues that an employee–offender relationship based on discussion, listening and motivation influences how offenders solve social problems. Maguire and Raynor (2006) state that establishing a close, understanding, motivating and supportive relationship with the offender can foster change and reduce re-offending. Furthermore, Burnett and McNeill (2005, p. 221) argue that the employee–offender relationship is 'a core condition for changing the behaviour and social circumstances associated with recidivism'. When the employee recognizes an offender's efforts at reform and gives positive acknowledgement, this can be crucial to the consolidation of a non-criminal identity (Maruna & LeBel, 2010, p. 80).

The importance of social interaction between employees and offenders can be justified from the point of view of not only rehabilitation, but also security. Recent prison and probation studies have presented different perspectives on the significance of social interaction and security. Leggett and Hirons (2006) suggests that dynamic security can be viewed as a new concept and manner of thinking about prison security, and refers to the employees' awareness of offenders and their social situations, and the gathering of relevant information on the prison situation. Employees develop a trustful and communicative relationship with offenders, and work on keeping them occupied. Libling, Price, and Shefer (2011, p. 119) view that in prison surroundings, the right kind of relationship can provide security, order and legitimacy. Nash (2010) emphasizes that interactive work, knowing the prisoners, and the risk assessment of new crimes can significantly affect public protection processes.

Several researchers have emphasized that social interaction is important between employees and offenders, from the perspectives of both security and social support. Bennet and Shuker (2010) argue that prisoners' engagement, rehabilitation-focused regimes and interactive employee–offender relationships all have a central effect on institution security. According to Turner (2010), in community corrections, the employees' 'dual role' in providing offender care and support, and also control, is necessary in order to enhance offender motivation for achieving constructive change and reducing recidivism. The importance of effective case management in community corrections is based on the development of a consistent, continuous, committed and mutually positive employee–offender relationship. In Finland, there has been talk about activating an interactive work process, which means a work orientation that combines the perspectives of supervision and rehabilitation, and highlights the importance of counselling (Ylisassi, Seppänen, Uusitalo, Kalavainen, & Piispanen, 2016).

Changes in the rehabilitation paradigm and dynamic security emphasize the importance of employee personality and daily interaction. However, the meaning of the employees' personality in prison is not without problems. Crewe, Liebling, and Hulley's (2015) prison study illustrated that staff attitudes and behaviours varied from them being confident, knowledgeable, reliably safe regime deliverers, and consistently fair power users, to being punitive, disrespectful and indifferent. Their results showed that

staff professionalism, employee–offender relationships and the use of authority have an impact on the prisoner experience of how they are treated in prison. Tait (2011) states that personal and institutional factors can affect how prison officers show care to prisoners in prison. Caring can be viewed as a malleable concept, which is shaped by the employees' personality and experience, as well as the prison as a working environment. When employees show care and support, and view offenders as people and individuals, it has an influence on the way offenders' cope in prison and also prison culture. Furthermore, when transferring towards gradual release and more open sentences, the social interaction between employees and offenders will occur in everyday environments, which also emphasizes the importance of personal encounters.

A broad communal and cultural change is necessary in the ways of working in context of prison and probation services. Referring to the changes and reforms in prison environments, Hager and Johnsson (2009) use the concept of collective competence. Multidisciplinary collective learning and development in prison environments creates new working methods that can be used in overlapping work duties. This opens opportunities to create new kinds of identities and agency in prison environments.

In this study, we approach these changes using the concepts of discourse and identities. According to Potter (2004, pp. 609–610), discourses can be understood in different ways that reflect the perspectives of different disciplines. However, we can also find some fundamental principles related to the concept of discourse. Discourses are action-oriented and constructed. This means that discourses on the social interaction between employee and offender not only reflect the actual interaction in prison and probation services and their related perceptions, but also how they construct new social practices. Discourses are also situated in interaction, which aligns to identities. Potter (2004, p. 607) suggests that 'language provides the categories and terms for understanding self and others', and thus it is justified to look at the different identities defined in the discourse as part of the discourse analysis.

This study focuses on the Finnish system of supervised probationary freedom (SPF). SPF is a form of sentence (6 months at most) in which prisoners are released under electronic and other supervision in the final stages of an unconditional imprisonment sentence. We examine what kind of discourses Criminal Sanctions Agency (CSA) employees preparing and enforcing SPF use when talking about social interactions and encounters with offenders. In addition, we examine how employees construct their own identity and offenders' identity in these discourses.

SPF in Finland

In the prevention of recidivism, emphasis has shifted in recent years to the release stage. In Finland, this has been responded to by highlighting the gradual release of prisoners and the introduction of the SPF system. SPF is a relatively new part of the Finnish criminal sanctions system. Experiences of SPF have been positive from the very beginning (Mäkipää, 2010), and its use has increased at a rapid rate. In 2008, there were 50 prisoners serving a sentence in SPF on a daily basis, and this increased on average to 214 in 2017 (Statistics of the Criminal Sanctions Agency, 2017).

The Probationary Liberty under Supervision Act (629/2013; The Act on the Amendment... 404/2015) lays down provisions on the preconditions for release in

SPF, provisions on the sentence plan for probationary freedom, and the obligation to participate in an activity during SPF, which may involve work, study or other activities that promote and maintain functional ability, and can be reliably supervised. In addition to GPS tracking, supervision includes supervision phone calls, visits to the prison, drug tests, and visits by the supervision patrol to the prisoner's home, workplace or other similar place recorded in the weekly programme. The supervision patrols are made up of officials of the CSA who support and supervise the agency's clients while they serve their sentence in freedom. The aim of the supervision patrols is to increase or maintain the ability of criminal sanctions clients to live without crime. The patrols support the offender in completing the sentence and ensure that the offender is at a predetermined location at a predetermined time, and not under the influence of substances (Criminal Sanction Agency).

As a characteristic of the Nordic model, the emphasis in the Finnish system of SPF is on supporting the offender's adaptation to society and especially on their obligation to participate in an activity (Mäkipää, 2010, p. 45; Nellis, 2014). Supportive measures for the appropriate enforcement of the SPF and integration into society are also planned as part of the sentence plan by CSA officials in cooperation with the municipality, private or third sector actors, who are supposed to support the prisoner during the SPF. The combination of SPF and outpatient or institutional care for substance abusers has proved particularly useful (Rantanen & Lindqvist, 2018). Finnish experiences of SPF have largely been consistent with the study conducted by Vanhaelemesch, Beken, and Vandeveldel (2014), who observed that electronic monitoring has many positive effects on social life, work and income, as well as on the offender's sense of freedom and other psychological factors.

Probationary freedom also poses some challenges. For example, according to Seppänen et al. (2014, pp. 20–21), tensions can be seen in the cooperation networks related to SPF between standard activities and activities required to meet individual needs, and between the confidentiality of information and the maintenance of a good flow of information. Also, the ethics of electronic monitoring (which is a key element of SPF) have been assessed in international studies (e.g. Bülow, 2014). Criticism has been directed at issues such as the stigma caused by wearing the monitoring devices, the extension of the punishment to the home of the prisoner's family, and the discriminating nature of this form of punishment because of the requirements it sets for both living and work. Electronic monitoring has, on one hand, been criticized for being too soft and free as a form of punishment, and on the other hand, for being too severe as it extends social control increasingly deeply into people's private life (Jones, 2014). In Finland, the critical debate on electronic monitoring and SPF has been minimal, and in implementation, among other things, the supervisory visits are organized as discreetly as possible in order to avoid stigmatizing offenders.

The methodological basis of the study

This study examines CSA's employees' social interactions from the point of view of social constructionism and according to the principles of rhetorical discourse analysis. Social constructionism is based on the analysis of the social construction of knowledge by Berger and Luckman (1966). In the analysis, societal phenomena are understood simultaneously as subjective reality and objective reality. Burr (2015, pp. 2–5) suggests that, although constructionism can be understood in a variety of ways, the different

orientations of social constructivism all share a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. Secondly, constructionism emphasizes the observation of matters in relation to historical and cultural contexts. Furthermore, knowledge is understood to have been created through a social process and closely linked to social activities.

This study represents moderate constructionism. From this point of view, the way in which the social interaction between employees and prisoners is spoken about in prison and probation services in Finland has developed as a result of certain cultural processes, but is itself also undergoing constant change. The discussions conducted at different levels of society, within the administration of the CSA, and also in individual prisons constantly change the understanding of required levels and types of interaction. Particularly, the new Finnish debate on the concept of activating interactive work (Ylisassi et al., 2016) represents one of the perspectives on social interaction in this context.

Conscientiously and with from a constructionist starting point, discourse analysis does not examine language as either an image or as a reflection of reality, but more as a part of our social activities and the building of social reality (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Language is a product of social reality, while it also produces reality itself. Potter (2004, pp. 609–610) suggests that discourse analysis treats discourse as being situated in two principal ways. First, discourse (talk and texts) is embedded in sequences of interaction, and is followed by action. Second, discourse is situated in terms of rhetoric, and rhetorical discourse analysis (Billig, 1987) examines the use of language as a form of argumentation in which positions are presented and justified.

Discourse analysis can be understood differently depending on whether it emphasizes the exact examination of text or speech, or the ideological and political implications the discourse involves (Fairclough, 1993, pp. 136–137). Our approach falls between these two positions, and we use the concept of discourse as an interpretive concept and try to interpret discourses after the material has firstly been categorized from a rhetorical point of view. Our study is focused on the discourse practices related to SPF, and not on the textual, societal and critical analysis of current discourses and their construction. However, in the identification of identities, we have drawn attention to individual word choices that occur in the analyses.

The objectives of the study and research questions

The study examines the Finnish system of SPF and CSA employees' rhetorical resources for building a new social interaction combining the perspectives of supervision and security, and also the perspectives of social support and rehabilitation. We ask: (1) what kind of discourses do prison and probation services employees preparing and enforcing SPF use when they talk about interaction and encountering the offender? (2) How do employees construct their own identity and the offender's identity in these discourses?

Methods and material

The qualitative attitude approach (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007; Peltola & Vesala, 2013; Pyysiäinen & Vesala, 2013) is a methodological orientation, situated within the constructionist tradition. It is based on rhetorical discourse analysis (Billig, 1987) and attitude research traditions, and utilizes specific methodological principles and practical

methods. According to Potter (1996), traditional attitude theory and discursive psychology differ from each other in their theoretical starting points. However, discourses often include evaluation of different objects (Potter, 1998). In addition, Verkuyten (1998) has shown that attitudes, the discursive construction of objects, and the identities that people are given are closely related. Thus, it is justifiable to examine people's positions on statements along with discourses and identities.

The qualitative attitude approach uses attitude statements on which people can take a stance (Vesala & Rantanen, 2007; Peltola & Vesala, 2013; Pyysiäinen & Vesala, 2013). The ordinary and controversial statements are presented in an interview situation and the interviewees are free to express their opinion using their own words. The interviewees are also asked to justify their views and additional questions are posed as they arise from what is said in the interview situation.

In this study, the statements were based on competence discussions and an earlier study of SPF. The interviews comprised a total of 12 statements regarding general conceptions about SPF, occupational skills related to preparing and enforcing SPF, general abilities in occupational agency related to preparing and enforcing SPF, occupational interaction and cooperation related to preparing and enforcing SPF, and desistance from crime. In this study, we look at three specific statements: (1) a flexible combination of activities that support supervision and rehabilitation is an essential part of SPF; (2) the preparation and enforcement of SPF requires the employee to use his or her personality when encountering the prisoner; and (3) a command of many practical skills is required in the preparation and enforcement of SPF. Through Statement 1, we try to reach both sides of the social interaction associated with supervision and dynamic security, and also rehabilitation and desistance. Through Statement 2, we examine the significance of personality and identity in interaction. Through Statement 3, we analyse how interviewees talk about the meaning of interaction when they reflect on the practical skills that are required in the preparation and enforcement of SPF.

Eleven employees of the CSA across Finland were interviewed for the study. The interviewees included senior criminal sanctions officials, and special instructors and instructors of supervision patrols from four open prisons and two community sanctions offices. The choice of interviewees was aimed at achieving a regional coverage and represented all of the three Criminal Sanctions Regions in Finland (Southern Finland, Western Finland, Eastern and Northern Finland). Also, the interviewees actively prepared and enforced prisoners' SPF, and encountered offenders in open prison settings, in their homes, or during their compulsory SPF activities (work, school, rehabilitation, etc.).

Most of the interviewees were highly educated. Eight had completed a bachelor's degree in correctional or social services, and three had also completed a master's degree. Six of the interviewees had completed a one and a half year or shorter degree course in prison and probation services training. This training provides the qualification to act as a prison officer and contains themes, such as legality and ethics, security and supervision, and rehabilitation. The bachelor's degree in correctional services education's main themes are client work in correctional services, the correctional services system, influencing criminality, and the management and development of correctional services. In addition, motivational interview training is included in both education programmes and is offered as part of the CSA's continuing education.

The interviewees were contacted using their official email address and the interviews took place at the interviewees' workplace (open prisons, community sanctions offices) and on

university premises at the Laurea University of Applied Sciences. The duration of the interviews varied between 70 and 137 min, with an average duration of 99 min. An interview situation is always socially constructed. The interviewee's speech is based on the interviewee's questions in the interview situation. However, discourse analysis assumes that the interviewees have different cultural resources that allow certain types of speech (Potter, 1996). Thus, the interview speech can be interpreted from a cultural point of view, as has been done in this study. This study focuses on a culturally divided reality, especially the socially divided conceptions presented by Finnish CSA employees in their speech.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. According to Potter (1996), a transcript is not a neutral, simple rendition of the words on a tape, and different transcription systems emphasize different features of the interaction. This study follows the system used by Peltola and Vesala (2013) in the context of adopting a qualitative attitude approach.

The analysis proceeded from the stage of classification, through to interpretative analysis. The analysis proceeded from the stage of classification, through to interpretative analysis. At first, the material was categorized statement by statement. For each statement, both the comments and their justifications were examined. The opinions were categorized according to whether the interviewee agreed or disagreed with the statement they were offered, and whether the opinion was unambiguous or reserved. The justifications that were offered were analysed on the basis of their content.

Next, the material was analysed by paying attention to matters that were repeatedly referred to in the justifications for different statements, and the different positions that were taken relating to the statements. Especially, the analyses focused on the significance of social interaction. Furthermore, the interviewees' positioning on significance of social interaction was particularly analysed.

In the interpreting analysis, the material was examined using the concept of discourse. Different kinds of discourse related to interaction were identified by analysing the significance of interaction with offenders. Furthermore, the study analysed identities and the dynamics of discourses that appeared in the interview responses. This article examines the results raised through these discourses and the identities that were defined within them (see Figure 1).

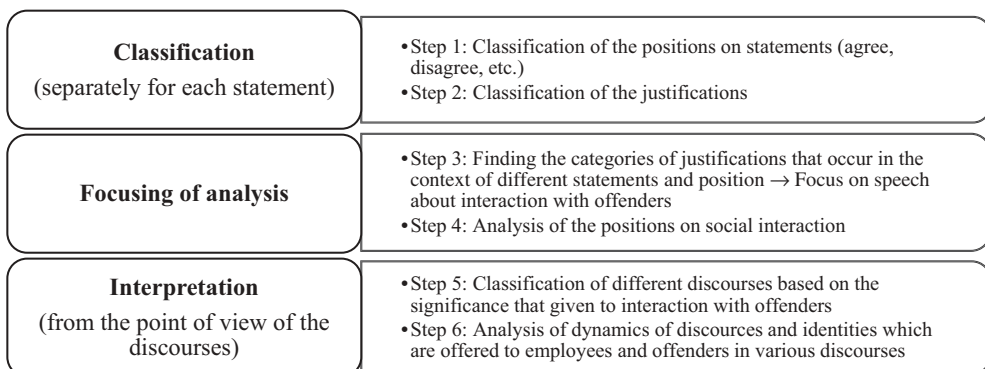


Figure 1. An analysis process.

The study was carried out according to the principles of research ethics and good scientific practice (Responsible conduct of research..., 2012). A research permit for the study was granted by Finland's CSA. Participation in the interviews was voluntary and the interviewees signed an informed consent form. The material was anonymized before the results were reported.

Analysis

The central role of social interaction

The interviewees talked quite positively about SPF and considered it as a fairly well-functioning part of the Finnish criminal sanctions system. Above all, this related to the gradual release process that prepares prisoners for freedom. In particular, the interviewees emphasized that the system works well with long-term prisoners. SPF 'gives the person the opportunity to become part of the normal society'.

On the other hand, the interviews revealed that the operating practices in the criminal sanctions regions and prisons were essentially different from each other in regard to the preparation of SPF, decision-making processes, supervision practices and the handling of different special permits. The interviewees also reflected on how prisoners were selected for SPF. Some of them considered it a risk that prisoners who were not motivated to comply with the rules of SPF or whose condition (substance abuse problems or mental health) was not good enough were also released through SPF. In addition, some of the interviewees also thought that the monitoring equipment used needed improvements in terms of its reliability and the accuracy for positioning.

Statement 1 'A flexible combination of activities that support supervision and rehabilitation is an essential part of SPF' brought out commentary which related to the relationship between support and control. All of the interviewees took a positive position towards the statement, but one interviewee saw security as a priority. Supervision was seen to support the prisoner, which made a flexible combination of supervision and rehabilitation important. For example, the situation of drug-testing contained both control and offender's rehabilitative actions. Several interviewees also felt that all personnel groups should adopt a combined rehabilitative and safety-oriented approach to their work.

Statement 2 'The preparation and enforcement of SPF requires the employee to use his or her personality when encountering the prisoner' raised the issue of personality- and identity-related speech. All interviewees agreed with the statement, although they understood the concept of personality in a slightly different way. Interviewees suggested that using your personality meant encountering offenders as human beings, though some interviewees emphasized the hierarchical structure of the prison and the avoidance of forming too close a relationship with prisoners. Personality was used in social interactions, in creating a confidential relationship with offenders. The use of personality was seen as constructing a relationship of trust, and also to promote security in prison. However, it was proposed that a short duration of SPF (up to 6 months) would hinder any long-term relationship of trust.

In Statement 3 'A command of many practical skills is required in the preparation and enforcement of SPF', all of the interviewees presented both arguments that supported

the statement, and also critical views. Four interviewees commented mainly in agreement with the statement and three took a negative position. Four interviewees presented both positive and negative positions on the statement. The justifications for the positive positions raised various types of special knowledge and skills, such as motivational interviews, rehabilitative programme activities, children's encounters, and child protection issues and competences. The negative positions were justified, above all by viewing that the SPF is not 'rocket science', and that normal interpersonal skills were sufficient. It is noteworthy that social interaction skills were referred to in the justification of both positive and negative positions. In arguments of a negative position, interaction was seen as being a normal interaction between people, which was seen as a natural way of proceeding in encounters. However, interviewees who took a positive position spoke about the interaction and the encounter as being a special skill.

Interactions were related to encountering prisoners, their children and also co-operating networks. All in all, social interaction appeared to be more important than the actual practical skills or knowledge in the data. One interviewee said:

Well, I think [you need] some social skills and skills in encountering people, of course. You should know how to encounter the client. And then there are the close ones, the family, the children. A command of specific practical skills. Yes, encountering, and of course you have to have a command of some kind of techniques. (I4, instructor in a supervision patrol, statement 3)

The excerpt reveals the central role of social skills and skills in encountering a person, not only the offender, but also when encountering the prisoner's family and children. Electronic monitoring entails supervision that extends to the prisoner's home, and poses an entirely new challenge regarding the social interactional skills of employees of the CSA. The challenges of hearing children were also emphasized. When talking about children, some of the interviewees stressed the importance of cooperation with child welfare services. Although cooperation with interest groups was emphasized by many interviewees, different employees carried this out at different intensities and in different ways. Based on the interviews, there were also differences between the prisons in how this type of cooperation was conducted.

Overall, the interviewees presented positive arguments on social interaction, using terms like 'social skills', 'encountering' and 'confidential relationships'. They also presented reserved arguments, which emphasized 'keeping a distance from an offender', 'awareness of hierarchy and authority' and 'being an official'. Perhaps surprisingly, negative terms in the interviewees' speech did not appear in this material. As an open form of punishment, SPF requires prison and probation service employees to have a wide range of social skills and interaction. These relate to encountering the offender and the offender's family and relatives, as well as conducting versatile network cooperation. Next, we describe how the interviewees talked about the encountering between the CSA employee and the offender.

The discourses of supervision, and social support and rehabilitation

On the basis of the interview material, work focusing on supervision seemed to be largely based on social interaction. When using the *discourse of supervision*, the

interviewees spoke about interaction using concepts such as 'situational awareness' and 'knowledge of the prisoners'. These elements help the employee to anticipate the possible future behaviour of the prisoners, and decide, for example, what would be the best course of action regarding any possible threat to security. An escalation of a situation can potentially be avoided in this way, which serves the best interests of the prisoners, and also the employees' own safety at work.

The interviewees talked frequently about 'reading the situation' which requires the employee to remain calm and careful. These situations also have to be processed afterwards, and in this way, learning from such situations is made possible. In the supervision discourse, the employee defines himself or herself as an official and the person serving the sentence as a prisoner. The identities are clear and there is a clear distinction between them. The identity of the supervisory employee emphasized 'strictness' and authority in relation to the prisoner. On the other hand, the discourse of supervision was presented emphasizing the importance of having a confidential relationship with the offender:

They can read us 'like the devil reads a bible'. Since I try to do it in my own way by respecting human dignity, I try to ask questions and be kind and so on. Then they know that if something happens to me or they do something, then I can also intervene easily. So they know that, maybe, they can also be friendly to me. And if not, then I react and say that 'this doesn't work this way'. (...) When you encounter the prisoners in the right way, it creates occupational safety. When you are genuinely interested in the right way in what the prisoner is doing and you listen to him, you achieve a respectful relationship on both sides. When it comes to the situation when they break the rules and we notice, we don't need to begin to wrestle with them. Then they understand that I am the one who has respected them, and they are the one that has made a mistake. (I2, instructor in a supervision patrol, statement 2)

In this excerpt, the interviewee talked about creating a respectful relationship and respecting human dignity. However, their significance appears largely instrumental, and the interviewee emphasized that respectful encountering prisoners creates occupational safety on their part and prevents security risks.

Social interaction was spoken about using the *discourse of social support and rehabilitation*. In this discourse, interaction is seen as a professional action aiming at change, i. e. a desistance from crime, holistic rehabilitation or finding motivation. Talking about different professional working methods or methodological perspectives is also typical of this discourse. For example, emphasizing motivation discussion and the open questions associated with it related to this kind of discourse:

Well, it all starts from a motivating discussion, and it is you yourself who creates that discussion. I'm nowhere near there myself, yet, but you use open questions. And then you can politely in a way close the discussion, and end it so that people don't get a feeling that you started and ended it almost straight away – So that they don't wonder what is happening and it is a natural process. (I2, instructor in a supervision patrol, statement 3)

The interviewee in the above excerpt did not offer any specific indication of their own or others' identities, but some of the employees who used the discourse of social support referred to themselves as instructors, and occasionally as officials. The offender was referred to as a client, or sometimes as a prisoner. All in all, the discourse of social support and rehabilitation was referred to in a pure form in only very few of the

comments. It therefore seems that prison and probation service employees have not adopted a way of talking about support and rehabilitation that is typical in the field of social work, but there is a different kind of change in their discourse.

It can be assumed that the use of discourses is to a certain extent linked to the speaker's professional status and background. It is easy for supervision employees with a prison officer background to use a discourse of supervision, whereas instructors with a qualification in social services find a discourse of social support and rehabilitation more natural. On the other hand, it is visible in the material that some of the interviewees used both discourses, as shown in the excerpts above.

The discourse of daily interaction and support

Daily interaction skills were emphasized in many of the comments, which means that the interviewees linked social interaction with their own personality. They used a *discourse of daily interaction and support* in which they used ordinary words to structure support, instead of professional terms such as dialogue, reflection or motivating discussion. One interviewee spoke about encouraging people and giving tips:

You do need social skills and the skill to sometimes – or often – put yourself into the position and the situation of that person at that moment, so that you can encourage and give the person tips for overcoming and leaving behind different issues. Listening skills, conversation skills, all those skills. And you have to form a certain kind of relationship with that person while he or she is in this institution, so that there is trust between you. Because that is the key to pretty much everything. And [you have to let the person know] that you know them. (I7, instructor and prison officer, statement 3)

The daily interaction described in this excerpt is based on a confidential relationship, listening to another person and putting oneself in their position, which indicates a clear perspective of social support. The discourse of daily interaction and support also means that the identities related to the discourse of supervision are questioned. For example, the speaker in the above excerpt referred to placing themselves in a person's situation, and did not refer to them as a prisoner. The prisoner was also spoken about in terms of a client who is to be encouraged and motivated. The reassessment of identities was also extended to the interviewee's own role, and one interviewee stressed that acting as an official was not enough. Similarly, the drug testing included in the duties of the supervision patrol and daily support were spoken about quite naturally in the same context.

If you focus only on drug testing, some employees can see their work just like that and they want to focus on control. It is only drug testing and they don't want to emphasize rehabilitative work at all. I think that doesn't work. (...) If the prisoner, client, has problems or problems in general in their lives, of course it is easier to motivate and cheer them, it is like gently 'kicking them from behind' and helping them forward. Cheering, I think is a good way of saying it. Even though the interactions are more 'small talk' and we talk about daily stuff in general, usually they say if something is wrong. I use cheering and supporting – I think I use that. (I1, instructor in a supervision patrol, statement 1)

All in all, the interviewees seemed to combine the *discourses of supervision* and of *daily interaction and support* without difficulty. The adoption of everyday social encountering and the new identities related to it would seem to reflect the way prison and probation services employees previously engaged in supervision work, and responds to the

qualification requirements resulting from more open sentences and building new and more versatile interaction resources for themselves.

The challenges posed by a new identity

Moving on from an identity of an official linked to the discourse of supervision to a new identity naturally does not take place without problems. As revealed above, the discourse of daily interaction and support in practice requires that employees somehow distance themselves from an entirely equal relationship, and the defining of identities is one possible way to do this. Moreover, in addition to a reassessment of one's own role and attitudes, the offenders' attitude and attitude change are challenging issues. The rebuilding of identities is manifested as an interactional process and requires a new type of interaction and an overcoming of old tensions.

Often they [offenders] come and tell you about it [some existing tension] when two or three months have gone by. Often, there is still some kind of tension at the beginning when their 'prison mode' is still on, and I know some of them from the prison. So situations where they will open up won't come until later. I suppose it comes with trust. And anyway, I suppose it is a question of personality, too. They observe us a bit to see what we are like, what our intentions are. (11, instructor in a supervision patrol, statement 1)

In the above excerpt, the interviewee described the slow speed of change, and at the same time emphasized the importance of personality, both of which were typical in the discourses of daily interaction and support.

In the material, identities were also linked to the uniform:

Although of course, the uniform [affects] some people. I understand that prisoners have a certain attitude towards government officials. (...) It's not very long ago that I was talking about something like this with one prisoner, and we had some difficult issues to discuss. So the prisoner said the following day that 'it was nice to notice that prison officers are human beings, too'. So although they may only realise it afterwards, they may still blow up in that type of situation. But when they think about it, they will realise that the prison officer is also a human being. (17, instructor and prison officer, statement 2)

In this excerpt, the interviewee talked about prisoners and officials consistently in-line with a discourse of supervision. However, a change is revealed when the offender realizes that the prison officer is also a human being and tells this to the prison officer. The identity perception brought up by the offender in a way confirms the change that has taken place in the employee's work identity.

Dynamics of discourses in an interview

A more detailed analysis of the interview discussion shows that discourses and the meanings given to social interaction may change when the interviewer presents additional questions. In the following example, the interviewee adopts different resources and a variety of arguments related to one statement;

Interviewer: Statement 2: The preparation and enforcement of SPF requires the employee to use his or her personality when encountering the prisoner.

I3: I definitely agree. I think that, or I consider that to be the most important factor in my work with the prisoners. I am not a distant official, I am genuinely present in the situation.

Interviewer: *How do you use your personality? Can you give a few examples to illustrate how it appears in the situation?*

I3: For example, I am genuinely happy if something good happens in the prisoner's life. And then again, if something unfortunate happens, then I am genuinely sorry about it. And I tell them something about myself, too, but of course not where I live or anything like that. For example, if I have the radio on and the prisoner's favourite music is playing, I might say that I like it, too. I might ask if the prisoner has any of the band's CDs or something like that. If the prisoner has a cat, I might say that I have a cat and I like cats. So there is something personal in it, and I am not just a faceless official ... (I3, senior criminal sanctions official, statement 2)

The excerpt above shows how the interviewer's questions direct the speech and argumentation of the interviewee. First, the interviewer asked opinion towards the statement, and the interviewee took a positive position and justified it briefly. Next, the interviewer asked for examples of the use of personality, which makes the interviewee describe situations related to everyday encounters and the empathy involved in the relationship. According to the interviewee, an employee may tell the prisoner something about his or her opinions and personal interests, but due to issues of their personal safety, not everything can be shared. This kind of use of the discourses also requires employees to somehow distance themselves from an equal person-to-person relationship. At this point, the interviewee combines the *discourse of daily interaction and support* and the *discourse of supervision*.

The following interviewer's additional comments were based on the interviewee's arguments concerning a confidential relationship and open discussions with the prisoner. The interviewer's comment about the meaning of open discussion turned the discussion towards *institution security*;

I3: ... If there may be a risk that the prisoner uses intoxicants or something. In the best case, if there is a good worker who has a confidential relationship with the prisoner, then the prisoner is able to talk about these matters. Then by discussing them with the prisoner, the worker can perhaps get the prisoner to realize that there is too much at stake, and there is no point now to mess things up at this stage.

Interviewee: *So you are able to openly discuss the matters, whatever they are.*

I3: Yes. In an open prison environment particularly, this kind of dialogical connection with the prisoner is the most important factor that maintains institutional security. The fact that the prisoners will not be provoked, treated badly, commanded or bullied – they are treated as human beings. Then they don't get so frustrated, which can happen in closed prison settings where their treatment can be a bit different. If the prisoners are in a good mood and they feel good here – as good as it is possible to feel in open prison ...

In the excerpt above the interviewee states that a positive atmosphere, confidential relationships and a dialogical connection with the prisoner were seen as helping to maintain institutional security. Therefore, actions such as provocation, commanding and bullying should be avoided, and prisoners should be treated as human beings. Then, the interviewer's next comment about misinterpretations related to closeness raised arguments about the use of *authority and hierarchy*;

I3: ... There is also [the matter that], if the employee uses too much of his/her personality, the prisoner may take a fancy to the worker.

Interviewer: *So, it can be interpreted in a wrong way.*

I3: In some ways, roles can get blurred. The prisoner may think somehow that we are here as equals. There is a hierarchy which needs to be there. It doesn't have to be emphasised, but it has to be silently present. The hierarchy of employee-prisoner positioning will disappear if you are too familiar or too close with the prisoner. Then we are little off the track, because this is a prison. We are officials. They are our customers or prisoners. From my point of view, I do not support that hierarchy or authority positioning is emphasised in any way, but it must be acknowledged.

The interviewee points out that hierarchy and authority positioning are always present in the prison situation. Therefore, the employee should not be too familiar with the prisoner. As described above, the *supervision discourse* consisted of two different points of view in regard to the *significance of social interaction*. The interviewee emphasizes both the confidential relationship with the prisoner, and the avoidance of forming too close a relationship.

All in all, the example shows that even quite neutral questions or comments can raise new perspectives. However, we cannot assume that used discourses are based only on the interviewer's questions, and from our constructionist perspective, the interviewees have culturally constructed resources which they use to talk about social interaction in different ways.

Discussion

The study makes visible the importance of social interaction and the existence of three different discourses among prison and probation services employees in Finland. In the discourse of supervision, the relationship between the employee and the offender is manifested as a game in which the employee strives to prevent different threats to security by means of observation and interaction. The roles in this set-up are clear: the employees of the CSA are officials, and prisoners are prisoners who are serving their sentence. When employees used a discourse of supervision, they emphasized a respectful employee-offender relationship, but even then the focus was on promoting security. In the discourse of social support and rehabilitation, the employee is seen as an instructor aiming at effecting change, and who attempts to support the offender's rehabilitation and disengagement from crime with the help of motivating discussions and other professional methods. In the discourse of daily interaction and support, the relationship between the employee and the offender is seen as a relationship between two people that in many respects resembles a normal everyday relationship. The study shows that the interviewed employees in prison and probation services in Finland were able to overcome the tension that in principle exists between support and control by flexibly combining the discourses of supervision with the discourse of daily interaction and support. This combination of discourses seems to enable them to support the offender without the need for the employee to be a professional of social work or rehabilitation (see [Figure 2](#)).

This study has been carried out in the Finnish context of SPF that combines electronic monitoring and support activities. Previous experiences of SPF have been positive (Rantanen & Lindqvist, 2018; Mäkipää, 2010) and its use has expanded rapidly in Finland (Statistics of the Criminal Sanctions Agency, 2017). In this study, interviewees also spoke quite positively about SPF. However, the study does not enable us to reliably assess the effectiveness or functionality of the SPF system or electronic monitoring. However, the research reveals that a transition to more open sentences that include electronic monitoring and support activities, changes the employee competence requirements. In particular, the significance and diversity of social interaction in this setting was highlighted.

From the point of view of dynamic security, the employee–offender relationship and social interaction are important elements of an institution’s security and the offender’s desistance from crime. The public protection processes can be implemented by means of risk assessment, interacting with the offender, knowing the offender and sharing information with community agencies in the release phase (Nash, 2010). It is recognized that the right kinds of employee–offender relationship and social support have a significant impact on prison security, order and legitimacy (Libling et al., 2011), as well as on prison culture and the reduction of re-offending (Tait, 2011). Consistent with the principles of dynamic security, the interviewees emphasized not only the anticipation of risks by reading situations, but also adopting a respectful attitude towards the prisoner that fosters a good atmosphere and thus prevents security threats. We contribute that the new working approach provides employees in prisons and probation services with

Positions of social interaction with offenders	Argument	Focus of argument	Discourse	Identity of the speaker	Identity of prisoners in supervised probationary freedom
Reserved	By maintaining hierarchy and authority in the relationship with offenders, security can be ensured	Security/ Safety	Discourse of supervision	Official	Prisoner
	A confidential relationship with prisoners enhances the safety in prisons and probation services	Security/ Safety			
Positive	Interaction supports the offender's rehabilitation and desistance from crime	Desistance from crime	Discourse of social support	Instructor	Client/ Prisoner
	Daily talk is a natural part of human encountering	Daily interaction	Discourse of daily interaction and support	Human being/ Person	Human being/ Prisoner/ Client

Figure 2. The arguments, discourses and identities related to social interaction occurring in the speech of prison and probation employees.

an opportunity to fluently expand their social interaction to daily interaction and support.

According to desistance theory, the relationship between offenders and employees is an essential factor in the prevention of recidivism. For example, McCulloch (2005) emphasizes the importance of an employee–offender relationship based on discussion, listening and motivating (cf. Burnett & McNeill, 2005; Maguire & Raynor, 2006). Consistently with the desistance theory, the interviewees emphasized the importance of discussion and maintaining a respectful relationship with the offender. Some of the interviewees also talked about supporting behavioural change in offenders, for example through a motivational interview. However, these discussions with the offender and the provision of social support were seen above all as part of the everyday encounter. It is acknowledged that a respectful encounter can contribute to the desistance from crime, even if it is not based on goal-oriented rehabilitation. However, the development of rehabilitation-focused regimes requires that social support is seen as part of a systematic criminal sanction process (cf. Bennet & Shuker, 2010).

According to Maruna and LeBel (2010, p. 80), employee support can be crucial to the consolidation of a non-criminal identity. This study also makes it visible that the social interaction supporting the offender in desistance from criminal behaviour is closely related to changes in the employee's social identity. The employee must see themselves not only as an official but as a human being and an instructor, and the offender must also be seen as a human being who is undergoing a rehabilitation process (cf. Tait, 2011). Building a new identity requires the employee to re-evaluate his or her attitudes and roles, but it is also an interactional process in which the offender acts as a mirror that makes the employee's new identity visible.

The Finnish project of activating interactive work (Ylisassi et al., 2016) emphasizes an approach that combines the perspectives of supervision and rehabilitation. Consistent with the results of Ylisassi, this study shows that it is easy for the supervision employee – at least in their discourse – to combine the perspectives of supervision and daily support, but combining the perspectives of supervision and rehabilitation appears more difficult. Therefore, when supervision employees extend their work towards daily support, it does not exclude the need for separate employees whose work is orientated towards rehabilitation.

The interviewees naturally represent only a very small part of the CSA employees in Finland. Therefore, we must be careful in generalizing the results. More extensive material and a different interview strategy might also have revealed other kinds of meanings of interaction and discourses than those found in this study. Most of the interviewees had completed a bachelor's degree in correctional or social services. Therefore, we can assume that they have a better starting point for undertaking flexible interaction with offenders than prison officers who have completed shorter degree course in prison and probation services. In addition, we should remember that the interpretations offered in this study are only based on interviews, and the study did not analyse how encounters between the employee and the prisoner are realized in practice.

The importance of developing education and an operational culture is emphasized in developments in the field of prison and probation services. This is enabled through degree-awarding education programmes, vocational continuing education, and other development activities that take place in the organizations and work communities

themselves. It is possible to strengthen the interaction skills of employees through raising the level of education, improving cooperation between different occupational groups and utilizing the employee's existing social skills. The preparation and enforcement of SPF requires the expertise of different occupational groups, and requires collective competence that is built on multidisciplinary cooperation (Hager & Johnsson, 2009). The focus areas of development would therefore seem to relate to adopting diverse and flexible means of interaction, a change of attitude and multidisciplinary cooperation.

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