

# CEP Simulations 2022 Report

Exploring the use of simulations for training and measurement within probation

December 15th 2022



...se you committed a crime, remember?

...and building a plan for your two-year prob

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CEP commissioned the UAS Hogeschool Utrecht in collaboration with four CEP member organizations and DialogueTrainer to develop online conversation training for probation workers in four different EU member states: Romania, Estonia, Spain/Catalunya and Finland.



Confederation of European  
Probation

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## Executive summary

In the period from March to November 2022, a pilot-project was done to create simulations on the DialogueTrainer platform with four European member states: Estonia, Romania, Finland and Catalunya. The objective of this project was to:

1. To create four online, playable conversation simulations in local languages, with English translations;
2. To learn how online conversation training is appreciated by players and what they learn from playing.

To include local expertise, experts from the member states were trained to develop simulations on the platform, guided by professionals from the HU – Hogeschool Utrecht – and DialogueTrainer. These simulations were consecutively tested with 10–50 participants per local organization to evaluate effects and appreciation as a learning tool. On November 25th, an evaluation was planned to compare results, reflect on lessons learned and explore opportunities. Conclusions were drawn regarding local similarities and differences, including opportunities to advance Motivational Interviewing and Working Alliance related skills.

### Four validated simulations

As a common context, the cases were defined as *'getting to an agreement for a community supervision plan'* for a medium-risk client without predominating addiction or mental health problems. Combined with local expertise, two overarching principles were chosen which the simulations gave feedback about, namely:

- Building an effective working alliance;
- Using the principles of Motivational Interviewing.

As a result of the project, a learning module was created which includes the four local simulations including translations in English. These can now be used by CEP members.

### The process of building

The simulations were built during online sessions with local professionals who showed great dedication to contribute to the simulations and test them. As part of building, characteristics of the local situation and overarching principles were discussed and combined. This also provided insights in local differences which we could explain by characteristics of the local work environment.

## Evaluation of the simulations and process

The simulations were tested with 10–50 professionals per member organization. These professionals showed dedication in playing, which resulted in multiple playthrough per player, and measurable progress. A local survey of 18 questions in their native languages, showed appreciation for the work method, which challenged them to reflect on their work practice and spawned discussions about the goals of probation.

## Conclusions

Once developed, the scenarios were played by probation workers, each in its own language and feedback provided by the training tool. The platform Dialogue Trainer clarified that:

- Developing simulations is a very practical way to create learning material and clarify expertise at the same time;
- As validated conversation models, simulations provide insights into what probation work in different local environments requires. Particularly, scenarios can emphasize aspects of effective communication within probation aimed at behavioral change;
- The CEP, for example through their network for Training & education, can supervise (future) development of simulations for quality assurance, and consequently set standards on good, practical evidence-based probation. This can also help to emphasize the importance of standards for policymakers of probation work in their country.



## Introduction

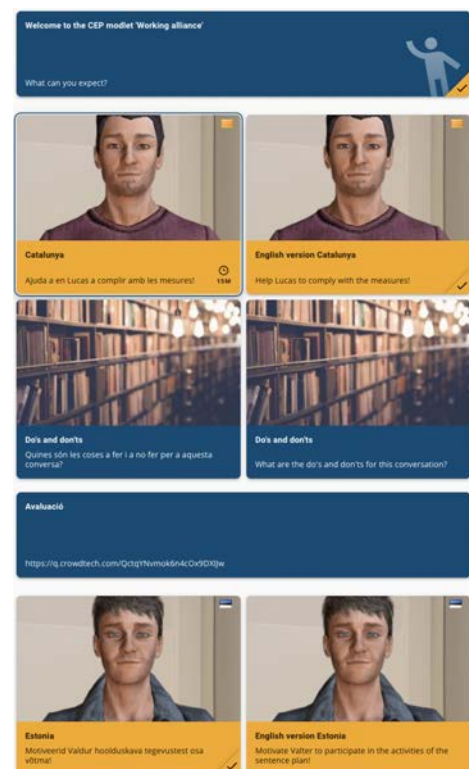
The Confederation of European Probation (CEP) launches initiatives to strengthen the training and education of probation workers in the different EU member states. The aim is a more permanent network of organizations to exchange expertise on pre-employment training and in-career further professional development in probation.

Following a series of activities, the CEP commissioned the UAS Hogeschool Utrecht in collaboration with four CEP member organizations and DialogueTrainer to develop online conversation training for probation workers in four different EU member states: Romania, Estonia, Spain/Catalunya and Finland. It uses an online platform for virtual training of conversations via simulations <https://www.dialoguetrainer.com/en/>. This platform - developed at Utrecht University - combines a virtual avatar with a structured scenario as a 'playable' conversation model.

The general objective of the project was to develop one simulation per country, based on the principle of creating an effective working alliance between probation workers and clients. Effective in the sense that the working alliance matches the dual role of control and support that characterizes the work of community supervision of clients.

The combination of counseling and control requires extra attention in establishing a working alliance. In working with mandated (involuntary) clients, goals can differ, and clients can show reactance against the constraints. Therefore, one cannot presume the intention of the client to collaborate from the start. This is one of the key features of probation that is addressed in this project: how to learn to build an effective working alliance from the start of a professional-client relationship that fits the dual role of control and support that characterizes the work of community supervision.

Simulations were experienced as an effective training intervention, as they allow professionals to gain experience with the dynamics of building a working alliance in a safe learning environment that adds measurement.





## Project outline and goals

The objective of the project was to develop four simulations: one for each participating member. These simulations are developed on the DialogueTrainer simulation platform. The editor of this platform allows professionals to co-create simulations in a clear analytical process that relates a 'best practice' and choices in line with learning objectives to different effects. The aim of engaging learners with this simulation is:

- to engage them in an immersive, realistic and challenging training exercise;
- to practice with different approaches and experience effects;
- to receive thorough feedback on performance;
- to reflect on the situation and learning objectives;
- to connect with the challenge the scenario presents.

Each service developed a scenario for a conversation to set a plan with the probation client for community supervision. The skills to be successful in this include:

- Managing the working alliance;
- Motivational interviewing.

The client's characteristics were fixed as middle-high-risk offenders, without severe, predominating addiction or mental health problems. The scenarios were to be developed in the language of each country and in line with their mission within the judicial system.

An online kick-off for the project took place on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of December '21 with a follow-up on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February. We discussed:

- The objective of the conversation and the profile of the client;
- The best practice approach to the conversation as the core of the simulation;
- How the editor of the software builds the scenario works;
- A plan for on average 10 meetings per country to develop the scenario.

After development, these simulations are tested with about 30 professionals from the specific organization to conclude on the simulation's content and the effects of use within the group on individual skill development and the consecutive group discussion.

## Process of development

To create a simulation on the platform, a process of five steps was followed:

1. Selecting a case relevant to the organization and to professionals;
2. Mapping a best-practice and scenario phasing, based on the expertise of the authors;
3. Addition alternative answer options;
4. Testing;
5. Implementation and improvement via results analyses.

The four scenarios were developed in bilateral sessions by two to four senior professionals/training experts per contributing organization. A draft version was tested with two professionals, translated if this was still needed and finalized with a sound recording.

## Evaluation/measurement

As a digital learning tool that scores performance, simulations are a measurement instrument. This is one of the platform's benefits. The quality of the measurement depends on the quality of the simulation. To evaluate the project, we looked at four aspects: the process of development, the play activity and appreciation by users:

- Observations were made during development;
  - Who plays which role during the build?
  - Which local expertise – MI and Working alliance – do we include?
- Use of and scores on the simulation;
  - Amount of playthroughs;
  - How professionals perform (scores);
  - How professionals learn (progress in scores through various playthroughs).
- A discussion afterward;
- A research questionnaire to assess appreciation by participants.

The research questionnaire focused on the following question:



*Does online conversation training present a recognizable work situation to professionals, which challenges them to think about interventions in relation to achieving their conversation goal(s)?*

*Sub-questions:*

- *Is the simulation realistic in its challenge and goal?*
- *Do the answer options lead to reflections in which the goal of the conversation and answer options are weighed against each other by the player?*
- *Does the automated feedback help players reflect on the choices they make?*

The evaluation consists of 18 questions. For a complete overview, the full reports are available.

The actual process of development of the scenarios started in March 2022 for Estonia, Catalunya/Spain and Romania. Due to taking a new offender management system into use, Finland started the construction of the scenario in May. So Finland finished the development, implementation and evaluation phases of the project in November, whereas the others ended this project within September to the end of October. On November 25<sup>th</sup>, the developers met in Utrecht, together with Jana Špero, secretary of the CEP to discuss results and future steps.

## Spain/Catalunya

The simulation in Catalunya was developed together with Blanca Bombi Arrieta, a probation officer and instructor, and Ainhoa Pradas del Rio, a probation officer team coordinator and instructor. These experienced professionals were provided a CREATE license as part of the building process. Support was delivered by a DialogueTrainer author, Sofia Barroca Henriques Sales, who also speaks Spanish. In several sessions, Michiel Hulsbergen and Dr. Joep Hanrath sat in.

The construction of the avatar profile stemmed from an agreement between the participating countries of working with a medium to low-risk client. Accordingly, a case surrounding a persona without predominating addiction or mental health conditions was developed. Later, it was discussed how addiction and mental health conditions might be more prominent in the scenario, as many clients of probation officers in Catalunya do have such problems.

### Specifics of the simulation

The case is about a 35-year-old construction worker who's been convicted of driving under the influence of alcohol. The simulation consists of four phases:

- During "Making contact", you explain how probation works and start building a working alliance with the client;
- During "Agreeing on risks", the client shows resistance as he considers the offense to be an incident, but after you discuss his personal life, he agrees he has challenges. The client's risk factors are explored, to ensure they are considered when planning his compliance with the measure. Moreover, he expresses his intention of not repeating the infraction in the future;
- During "Agreeing on strengths", you engage with him about his work and hobbies, to then discuss how he can combine obligations with community service;
- During "Agreeing on plan", you affirm your agreements and give him space for questions and offer your support for later.

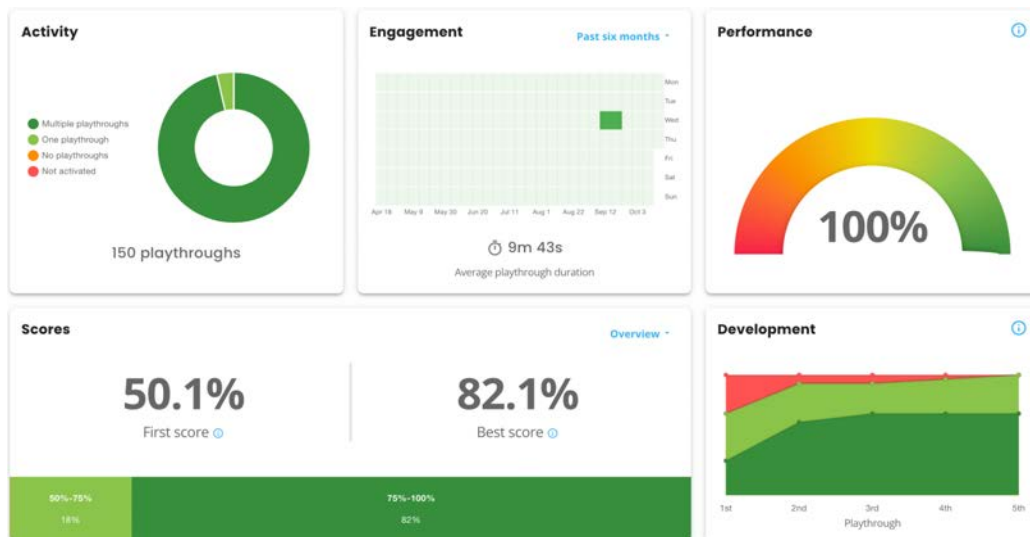
## Characteristics of professionals who played the scenario

The simulation was tested with 28 people, all probation workers with different levels of experience.

- 11 respondents with 0–3 years of experience;
- 10 respondents with 4–10 years of experience;
- 7 respondents with more than ten years of experience.

## Play activity

The 28 experienced probation officers played 150 sessions in total, which means an average of 5.3 sessions per player. We consider this active use. An explanation is that time was reserved for players during a two-hour session. Several players played 7 to even 10 times.



## Play results: performance and score development

Below, we will discuss their scores and the content of the discussion to assess the validity of the simulation as a tool for instruction and measurement.

### Scores and score development

Most players score relatively high on their first playthrough (average 50.1%). This does speak to the quality of the professionals in the test group, but it might also mean that our scoring is relatively forgiving. For this group, finding the right approach to a positive outcome of the conversation and a consecutive high score is relatively easy.

Players show clear development during consecutive play sessions, which indicates they are learning. After several playthroughs, high scores are achieved and all participants manage to individually reach these high scores, which means they master the simulation. The pictures below illustrate the players' development across all the assessed parameters. The graphs show relevant statistics considering the players' first (first picture) and highest-scoring playthroughs (second picture). We can see substantial development, as the second figure shows all of their average scores per parameter represent a "pass" grade.



First scores on set parameters



Highest scores on set parameters

The question then is: 'what does the simulation teach them?' For that, we turn to the measurement in the evaluation and the content of the discussion. A deeper analysis of score development per player shows score profiles in which players experiment with different routes of action, as they were instructed to do.

## Content of the discussion

In the discussion, players from the Catalan group stand out in how they evaluate the challenge in the simulation, which they consider 'easy'. This is in line with their (relatively high) initial score and consecutive score profiles. Although the dynamics of the conversation are stated to be recognizable, participants say they rarely find cases like these in their workload or invest much time in them. As stated in the introduction, many of their actual cases include mental illness or addiction. Several players also claim that they find the conversation relatively short and that they would like to have been able to deepen the conversation with the virtual client.

Regarding score development, some players seem to repeat mistakes after they are given feedback about them. The platform offers functionalities to either provide feedback afterward or during play. Feedback afterward has the benefit that it increases engagement. Feedback during play has the benefit that it provides players with suggestions right after a choice. This 'direct feedback' leads to shorter learning cycles, as it enables players to conclude about individual interventions right after their choice. Although the player interface does enable players to turn 'direct feedback' on, multiple players did not notice this function. We conclude that this function could be given more attention.

Numerous participants reported finding it strange to give compliments, which was included as part of building a working alliance. For instance, they interpreted player nodes that emphasized the client's strengths (such as "your job sounds important") as condescending, sarcastic, and ironic. Players assume they should be direct about what is acceptable behavior and what is not. In general, they found that you have to be "too correct", and "too delicate" in the simulation. As one participant suggests: *"throughout the whole interview, we are reinforcing all the time points about his family, work... In this sense, it could be that the client ends up developing too much trust in the probation officer and will not take the measure seriously then"*.

In regard to motivational interviewing techniques, the discussion with the group after the play sessions revealed a difference between younger and more experienced professionals. Regarding using reflection in the engaging phase, younger professionals claimed they liked the answer options and the learning content, while the more experienced ones "found it hard to accept" that reflections would represent the best practice during engagement. For instance, a reflection of feeling, at the beginning of the conversation, was consistently seen as "judgmental".

This leads to an internal discussion about how the two main objectives of probation, as stated by the organization, can be achieved through using communication skills. These objectives are:

- To ensure (motivate) compliance with sanctions/restrictions;
- To prevent reoffending.

Taking the impressive workload of professionals (around 70 and up to more than 75), it is understandable that working towards these objectives is not regarded as a core objective, as this requires a large investment in each client’s development. Although professionals take the objectives of the service to heart, any work activity by necessity also depends on resources and (thus) priorities.

### Results from the evaluation form

The evaluation form consists of 18 questions. For a complete overview, the full report is available. The evaluations support the impression of the local experts involved, that the simulation is perceived as relatively easy, which leads to high scores. This does not represent their everyday client. On the other hand, most participants claim that the client’s behavior is recognizable. This supports our assumption that the case is perhaps easy, but realistic.



The behavior of the client in the simulation is recognizable.

Almost all participants claim that it is essential for the client to understand what is expected of them by the court decision, which could be regarded as a clear necessity for probation to be successful. Slightly fewer participants claim that the client agreeing with the community service plan is essential in this specific simulated situation, or that gaining confidence in their ability to follow these agreements is essential. Although this is perhaps understandable and in line with the work practice, it does indicate that this is an area where principles of promoting pro-social change can be strengthened.

## Conclusions

The experts from Catalunya conclude that simulations may well be an efficient instrument to inspire a conversation about motivational interviewing skills as part of standard procedures. Most professionals appear to use skills in line with motivational interviewing when given the choice between different approaches. At the same time, as observed by the local experts, it does appear that motivational interviewing skills are more prevalent amongst the new generation of professionals, while seasoned professionals seem to be influenced more by a structural challenge in the system. Their workload is stated to not leave enough room for extensive interventions aimed at behavioral change. The data about their learning trajectories does indicate that seasoned professionals are able to apply motivational-interviewing-related skills, or learn them. This means skill application could be a matter of changing objectives and adopting a different role in the probation process.



## Estonia

The simulation in Estonia was developed together with four experienced probation officers and experts. Laura Kikas, director of the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences. Liisa Tarkus, chair of prison management and lecturer. Maret Miljan, chair of prison management and manager-lecturer and Mariel Männiste, a senior trainer. The scenario was written together with an English-speaking DialogueTrainer author.

### Specifics of the simulation

The case centers around a 27-year-old unemployed man accused of domestic violence in the context of alcohol abuse.

The simulation consists of four phases:

1. During “Making contact”, you show interest in his personal situation and discuss the process of probation;
2. During “Agreeing on risks”, he shows resistance as he considers the offense to be an incident, but after you discuss his personal life, he agrees he has challenges which include alcohol and financial problems. You tell him you can help him with employment;
3. During “Agreeing on court decision”, you discuss with him his relationship and he shows resistance to sharing details of his personal life.
4. During “Agreeing on plan”, you affirm your agreements concerning him attending a program about dealing with conflict and finding employment.

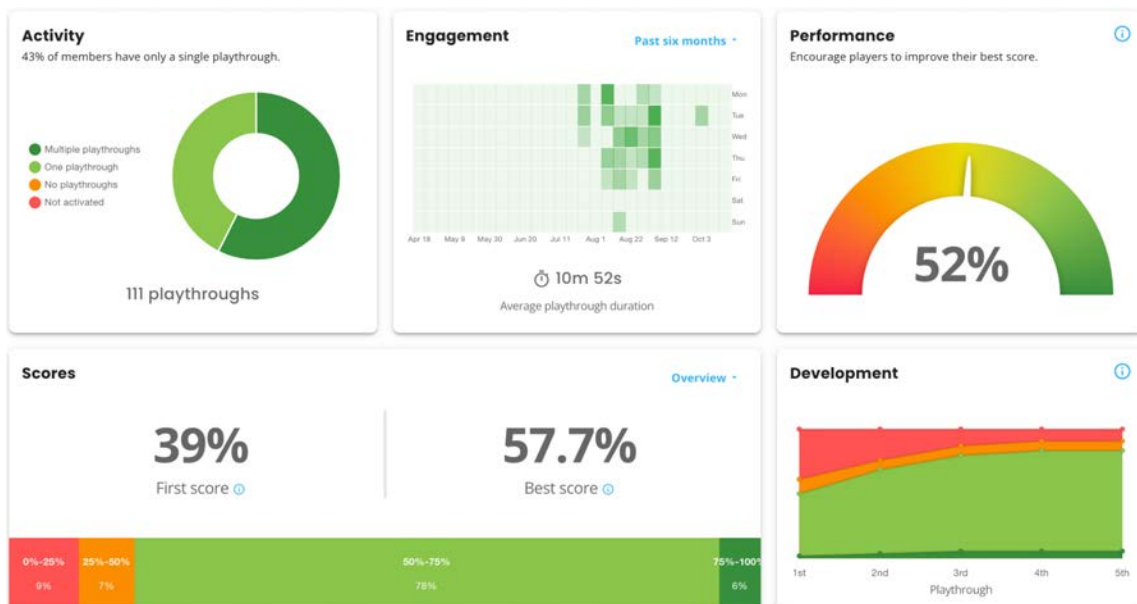
### Characteristics of professionals who played the scenario

The simulation was tested by 54 people, of whom 26 filled out the survey. The larger part of these, 19, were probation workers. The respondents also included five managers and two staff members, of which one is a trainer. Levels of experience within the organization vary:

- 11 with 0–3 years of experience;
- 8 with 4–10 years of experience;
- 7 with more than ten years of experience.

## Play activity

The 54 participants, mostly probation officers, played a total of 111 sessions, which means an average of 2.06 sessions per player. 23 players played one time, 16 players played two times and 15 players played three times or more. We consider this moderately active use. Four of the 23 players, playing one time, scored lower than 55%, which we interpret to be an insufficient score. Five players remained at an ‘insufficient’ level after two or more playthroughs.



## Play results: performance and score development

### Scores and score development

Of the total of 54 players, 44 (81%) scored over 55% which we regard to be a “pass” score. Players improve their scores over various playthroughs, which indicates they are learning.



First scores on set parameters

Highest scores on set parameters

With an average score from the first playthroughs at 38.3% and an average highest score of 57.7%, scores on this simulation are relatively low as compared to the scores on the simulation of Catalunya, however, high when compared to Romania. Meanwhile, players do indicate in the survey they do not find the avatar's profile particularly difficult to handle. This tells us that the simulation might score relatively strictly, which is also supported by the highest-scoring player, scoring a total of 81%. Apparently, it is difficult for players to score higher than this.

A deeper analysis demonstrated that, on many occasions, a lower score results from best-practice steps being missed. Players, thus, miss scores from optimal choices in parts of the conversation they skip, while the feedback about this may at times be unclear. For example, they may get positive feedback about the choices they do make, while not getting feedback about what they missed. After the initial test, scores were added for several interventions, and feedback was added when players skip parts, which should contribute to the perceived 'fairness' of the simulation outcomes.

## Content of the discussion

The players are very enthusiastic. They did report experiencing their scores to be low, compared to their expectations. It was concluded that scores could be improved and that feedback could be clarified to refer more clearly to the best-practice route.

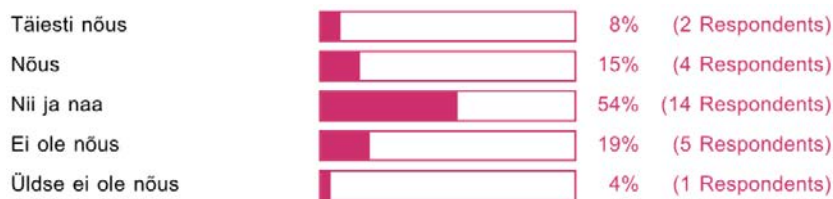
The simulation is considered realistic but not particularly difficult. According to the players, the objective should be that the client has clarity on (judicial) conditions and is actively engaged in the supervision.

Moreover, the players perceive the simulation as helpful to reflect on the leaning objectives, to think options through and to weigh for themselves what would help to bring

the conversation to a proper conclusion. Additionally, the automated feedback is taken to heart by the players so, according to them, it helps them in their learning process; Overall, playing is considered fun, which definitely helps learning. Using this tool is considered to support their learning process for effective conversation.

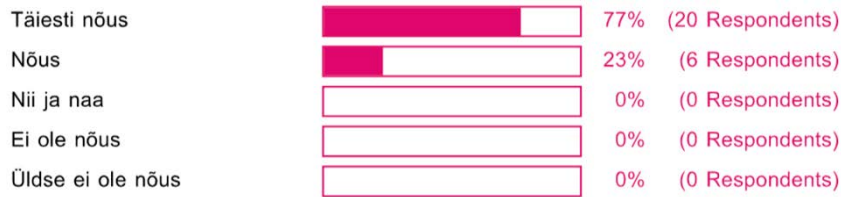
### Results from the evaluation form

The evaluation supports the impression of the local experts that the simulation is interesting and recognizable. 77% state this represents well their everyday client: no participant claims the profile does not represent the clients they regularly meet. Most individuals consider the behavior of the client as recognizable, with only one respondent disagreeing with this to some extent. At the same time, most participants do not perceive drawing up a community supervision plan for this particular client to be challenging, but they do feel challenged to reach a successful conclusion for the conversation. This supports our assumption that the case is easy, but realistic and engaging.



*It's a challenge to draw up a community supervision plan with such a client.*

Almost all participants claim that it is essential for the client to understand what is expected of them by the court decision, which could be regarded as a clear necessity for probation to be successful. Slightly fewer participants claim that the client agreeing with the community service plan is essential in this specific simulated situation, or that gaining confidence in their ability to follow these agreements is essential. Although this is perhaps understandable and in line with the work practice, it does indicate that engaging a client into behavioral change is something to be discussed.



It is important that a client feels understood by me as a probation worker.

## Conclusions

Players find the simulation fun, they make good use of feedback and the simulation spawned reflection. Initially, the simulation scores rather strictly, while participants showed clear proficiency in building a working alliance and using motivational interviewing skills. Changes in scores were made following further analyses. Also, feedback was analyzed and improved, including clear directions to the player for how they could improve. This also helps players understand why their score was lower than perhaps expected and how they can improve.

## Finland

The simulation in Finland was developed together with two experts from the Prison and Probation Service of Finland: Satu Saastamoinen and Pia Andersson. Pia Andersson is a CEP board member and Satu Saastamoinen is a senior trainer. The writing process was guided by an English-speaking DialogueTrainer author.

### Specifics of the simulation

This scenario consists of a conversation between a probation officer and a client, who has committed an assault. He is a 20-year-old male, under supervision, sentenced to a year and three months of community work. He has previously committed two infractions: as a 16-year-old, for shoplifting, and as an 18-year-old, for assault. He is not diagnosed with any psychological disorders; however, he presents frequent impulse behavior, anxiety, and difficulty distinguishing and expressing feelings, he demonstrates a lack of understanding concerning the consequences of actions. Moreover, he presents poor self-esteem and has a pro-crime friend circle. He presents a quite high IQ, but his school experience was overall poor as he was often restless in the classroom. During his childhood, he was placed in a child welfare institution, due to his poor relationship with his parents, who were divorced and could not communicate with each other.

1. During “Engage/making contact”, you show valuing his presence and address his defensiveness through techniques of attentive listening. You mention a topic he shared with you previously, making him feel heard and directing the conversation to a topic that accentuates his new sense of responsibility and willingness to change;
2. During “Engaging and exploring”, you explore his sense of responsibility and how he is currently changing, jointly agreeing on the importance he places on being autonomous;
3. During “Discussing content of sentence (groundwork)”, you introduce a conversation about the content of the sentence and he demonstrates pessimism. Emphasizing that he can benefit from the process helps him to be less defensive;
4. During “Defining your role”, he shows resistance towards meeting up regularly and you tell him the importance of establishing what to address in the next sessions;
5. During “Structure: what to discuss”, he agrees to define the content that will be addressed;

6. During "Sentence plan", you discuss the risk assessment, exploring the meaning of the infraction and drinking to him, jointly defining to avoid risks related to drinking as a goal in his sentence plan. He mentions his friends as a relevant factor in this context.
7. During "Defining working alliance", you agree to meet up every two weeks, give him space for questions and offer him support by emphasizing he can contact you when needed.

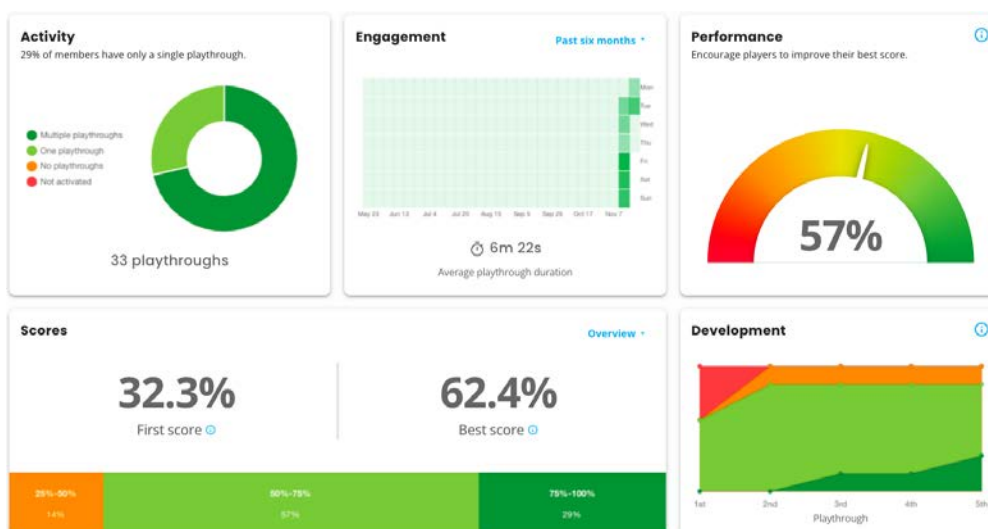
## Characteristics of professionals who played the scenario

The simulation was tested with 7 people, 5 probation workers with different levels of experience and 2 specialized trainers.

- 2 probation workers with 0–3 years of experience;
- 1 probation worker with 4–10 years of experience;
- 2 probation workers as well as 2 specialized trainers with more than ten years of experience.

## Play activity

The sample of seven participants reached 33 playthroughs, with an average of almost five playthroughs per player. This constitutes an active use of the platform. One of the subjects has played the scenario 14 times while two of them only played it once.





## Play results: Performance and score development

### Scores and score development

Most players (57%) achieved scores higher than 60%. Four participants obtained first scores between 50% to 65% after which two did not practice further. Three players achieved first scores between 0 and 5% which we consider low. Two of these players achieve high scores during consecutive playthroughs, reaching 88% and 71%.

The progress shows the players are clearly learning, as illustrated by the graphs below:



First scores on set parameters

Highest scores on set parameters

The graphs show the players' first (first picture) and highest-scoring playthroughs (second picture). We can see substantial development.

### Content of the discussion

The participants reported wishing the second part of the simulation to be more detailed and cover more aspects of the sentence plan. The engaging and exploring part was generally considered too long. The experts have hypothesized a reason underlying this result: it could be more aligned with the Finnish culture to be more direct, explaining why the players could prefer to dive into more detail when discussing the sentence plan instead of the initial phase of the conversation. Indeed, the second most common mistake was to choose "Of course, so let's talk about how we will work together" as the third quote right in the first phase of the simulation. In this sense, a question emerges whether teaching players to engage thoroughly is, in fact, much-needed. Regarding the inclusion

of more details of the sentence plan into the simulated dialogue, this is rather a simpler part of the conversation and a 'situation node' describing it might be sufficient.

The experts from Finland mentioned their system's comprehension of this working alliance dialogue is based on the duality of relationship skills and structuring skills. With this respect, they notice that most probation officers are confident when engaging but still need to develop their structuring skills further; Generally, they strive to maintain harmony with their clients and, thus, fear disrupting the atmosphere when discussing contents that might be tough for the client. Future simulations could focus more on these skills.

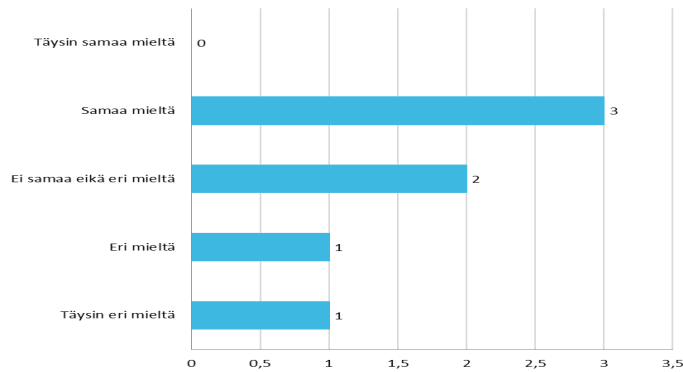
The translation and the number of answer options could be improved. Regarding the translation, certain formulations were experienced to resemble English. Advancing the Finnish translation can make the players' experience more realistic. In some cases, two or five answer options are shown. Ideally, we should aim to present 3 or 4, to foster optimal player experience.

The feedback provided by the players was extremely positive. They expressed enthusiasm over the avatar's facial expressions and stated playing the simulation is a pleasant way to practice. They state the importance of this tool as it also covers an important demand of theirs, given that no other ways to practice this conversation are available. They appreciated the opportunity to find sentences they may use in the actual conversation later and emphasized that it helps their learning to go beyond what other traditional methods can offer.

## Results from the evaluation form

Almost all participants claim that it is essential for the client to understand what is expected of them by the court decision. Equally significant is that '*a client feels understood by me as a probation worker*' both of which could be regarded as a clear necessity for probation to be successful. Slightly fewer participants claim that the client agreeing with the community service plan is essential in this specific simulated situation, but participants consider it relevant that clients on probation gain confidence in their ability to follow these agreements.

The evaluations show the large dispersion (variability) on the topic '*It's a challenge to draw up a community supervision plan with such a client.*' Nobody fully agrees that it's a challenge, two players don't agree (at all) that it is a challenge.



Exempt from the evaluation: *“it’s a challenge to draw up a community supervision plan with such a client.”*

The scenario stimulates reflection on ways to reach the objective of the conversation. Participants emphasize that they value comparing different answer options and how this supports them in their reflections on what would help to achieve their goal. They consider the feedback integrated into the play as supportive and the simulation as helpful in mastering conversation techniques.

## Conclusions

Participants show progress in their score development which indicates learning and most participants eventually achieve a “pass” grade. Accordingly, they report the dialogue motivates their thinking and the feedback provides them with relevant insights into their performance and goals. They report enjoying the scenario and the interaction including the facial expressions of the avatar and appreciate the tool as an addition to traditional training methods. Benefits they see include giving them examples of how to phrase questions and sentences in such a conversation.

The translation of the simulation to Finnish and the clarity of the feedback can be improved. Following the observations during play and the consecutive discussion, adaptations to the simulation were made which included: clarifying scores after corrections to the best practice, feedback at early endings and changing abrupt endings. Future simulations can further explore structural skills when building work alliances.

## Romania

The simulation in Romania was developed together with two experts from the Prison and Probation Service of Romania: Catalin Ionete, probation officer and researcher, and Adelina Tremura, a senior probation worker. The writing process was guided by an English-speaking DialogueTrainer author.

### Specifics of the simulation

This simulation concerns a conversation between a probation officer (player) and a client (avatar), who aggressively stole a woman. He was sentenced to two years of probation and 60 days (120 hours) of community service. He does not assume full responsibility for this offense; this is the first time he has been convicted, even though he admits to previous infractions. Moreover, he has unfinished education, problematic friends that seem to influence him and he does not present any serious problems of substance abuse.

1. During “Start: engaging”, you make initial contact with him, showing interest in his current state and addressing his concerns by showing him he has something to gain with the talk, expressing that you value him being present there. He slowly starts opening up about his personal life, especially talking about content that shows his sense of responsibility and recent changes in his life;
2. During “Discussing risk assessment”, you encourage him to share his perspective on the risk assessment and make room to discuss his willingness to change;
3. During “Agreeing on challenges”, he shows resistance to the consideration of drinking as a problem for him but ends up agreeing that it is a problem in certain contexts, such as with his friends;
4. During “Focus on drinking”, he talks about the role of drinking and of his friends in the occurrence of the offense. He recognizes alternative ways to approach such a situation;
5. During “Agreeing on needs”, you jointly agree that drinking is a problem to be worked on and he realizes that one of his friends leaves the group early, which protects him from eventual infractions;
6. During “Setting smart goals”, he agrees that, before the next session, he will talk to this friend about how he leaves the friends at a desirable time;
7. During “Acknowledging working alliance”, you determine the content to be discussed in the next session and conclude the meeting on a positive note.

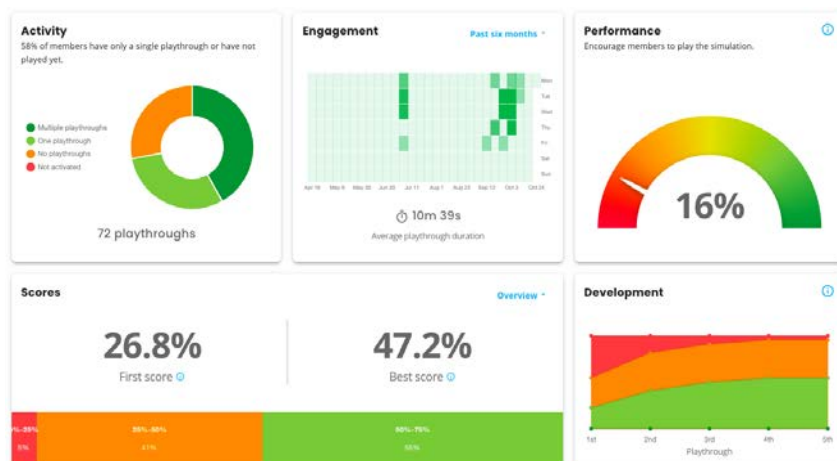
## Characteristics of professionals who played the scenario

The simulation was tested by 31 people, of which 16 filled out the survey, all of them probation workers except for one manager. Levels of experience vary:

- 1 with 0-3 years of experience;
- 11 with 4-10 years of experience;
- 4 with more than ten years of experience.

## Play activity

The 31 participants present a total number of 72 playthroughs, an average of 2,3 sessions per person. 13 players engaged in a single session, while 18 played multiple times (twice or more). Thus, this can be accounted for as moderately active use. The average score for the first play sessions was 26.8%, whereas the average of the highest scores per player was 47.2%. As we determine outcomes of 55% as a "pass" grade, these grades might indicate a strict simulation.



## Play results: performance and score development

### Scores and score development

Overall, the average of the best scores from each player (44.2%) is not classified as a "pass" grade (higher than 55%). However, most players (55%) have achieved scores between 50% and 74%, the latter (74%) representing the highest result in the sample.

The participants' learning progress can be observed through a noticeable increase in their scores across all the parameters assessed in the simulation. The highest progress found concerns 'defining SMART goals' (with an increase of 28.3%), 'acknowledging working alliance' (29.9%), 'agreeing on the plan' (30.7%) and 'working alliance' (31.5%).



First scores on set parameters



Highest scores on set parameters

The impressive progress when it comes to forming a working alliance is a strength of this scenario, as the simulation seems to be a strong tool for accelerating development in this regard. Moreover, among the parameters that indicate the strongest improvements, 'acknowledging working alliance' and 'agreeing on a plan' were the ones with the lowest baseline scores (17.7% and 16.1%, respectively). These might be challenging points for first-time players, but the results suggest the simulation can successfully support them to address these shortcomings.

### Content of the discussion

The players perceive the simulation helps them to reflect on the options presented, to think options through and to weigh for themselves what would be helpful to bring the conversation to a proper conclusion. They take the automated feedback to heart, considering it to effectively support their learning process. Therefore, the players seem to

be eager to learn and engage their cognitive resources and the simulation appears to adequately motivate them to do so.

When it comes to the samples' convictions regarding best practices, the participants believe the orientation should be that you are clear on the (judicial) conditions. Also, the client feels understood by the probation worker and gains confidence in achieving his goals. However, getting to an agreement is not considered equally important.

## Results from the evaluation form

The full report, with the responses to the 18 questions, can be consulted for a complete overview. The created character is well-received: Every respondent considers the avatar to adequately represent an everyday client and 83% see him as recognizable (no participant disagrees with that).

Moreover, the participants' beliefs about best practices are consistent with the simulation's model. For instance, They find it important that the offender understands the court conditions and nearly all of them place relevance in making the client feel understood.

In terms of learning, the participants seem optimistic. 94% of the participants regard playing the simulation as "great fun" (one participant feels neutral about it) and they all agree that it can help them to master the desired techniques. The simulation generates reflection and stimulates players to weigh different answer options.

### 11 Opțiunile prezentate în simulare m-au făcut să mă gândesc cu privire la ce răspuns să aleg.

Aantal respondenten bij deze vraag: 16 (100%)



The options in the simulation, made me think about my answer.

Additionally, the feedback seems to be effective, as the players indicate they can grasp what they do well and in what areas they can improve, based on the input from the scenario. They all agree that the simulation helps them to master the techniques to reach an effective conversation.



**17 A juca o simulare de acest fel mă poate ajuta să perfecționez tehnici de conversație eficiente**

Aantal respondenten bij deze vraag: 16 (100%)



Playing a simulation can help me master techniques for an effective conversation.

**18 A juca o simulare de acest fel este foarte distractiv.**

Aantal respondenten bij deze vraag: 16 (100%)



Playing a simulation is great fun.

## Conclusions

The simulation is considered realistic and the avatar's conduct is deemed to be recognizable. Thus, besides stimulating thought, characteristics of the scenario seem to facilitate the players to feel immersed in the training, which fosters the users' learning experience.

The difficulty of the simulation was analyzed and adapted. As the highest score found was 74%, achieving greater results might be too difficult in this simulation. At the same time, 86% of the survey respondents considered it challenging to draw up a community supervision plan for this profile and 93% felt challenged when attempting to reach a successful conclusion in the conversation. Therefore, improvements in the scenario were made, so the players can achieve better objective results (the proportion of negative-scoring nodes, in comparison to positive-scoring ones, was adjusted), but the user experience is already successful. We see a motivated sample that has fun while feeling challenged.

## What have we learned?

Underneath are conclusions including what we learned about the simulations, the effectiveness of our intervention and differences between the users' groups. Following our session on November the 25th, we also conclude on future steps.

### Differences between local organizations

During the co-creation sessions, professionals from the participating organizations show themselves as committed and knowledgeable. They are dedicated to creating material that is valid and immersive. With them we succeed in creating four simulations that focus on the same stage of intervention: building a strong basis for a plan after the sentence has been decided. The interaction and feedback are based on local expertise, combined with theory about the "Working alliance" and "Motivational Interviewing".

We do encounter differences between local professionals, in both the created content and process, which lead to differences in the conversation models for the simulation. Possible explanations for these differences are:

- differences in procedures and local law;
- differences in culture, including expectations of the client;
- differences in expertise, including knowledge of MI;

To clarify differences and similarities, we created "do's and don'ts tables" to describe conversation phases and important do's (best practices) and don'ts (prevalent learning objectives). Each scenario uses the same parameters, to allow comparison between results. Also, we created English versions of each simulation, to be played by all CEP members. This creates new opportunities for measurement and to learn from each other.

## Conclusions from our meeting on November 25<sup>th</sup>

On November 25<sup>th</sup> 2022, the developers from the four different states met in Utrecht to complete the project. The objective of this session was:

- to play each other simulations;
- to exchange experiences on the (learning) process of the development of the scenarios;
- to discuss future plans.

## The end product: four simulations

As an end-product of the project CEP now has four simulations about building a “Working Alliance” in different work environments. These simulations exist in their local language and English, so they can be played by members from different parts of Europe. Beside on the “Working Alliance” the simulations focus on “Motivational Interviewing” skills, which is considered a very relevant area of expertise by all participants.

All participants see these simulations as a very practical tool to training “soft skills” in a safe environment. In particular, the individual learning experience, including rich personal feedback from each playthrough was mentioned. Also, the “DialogueTrainer Dashboard” was seen as very insightful, as it combines aggregated data about use and performance, and individual results including learning objectives. Such data is generally rare in any kind of training, but becomes possible with digitized learning. Furthermore, colleagues who played the scenarios considered it *“a safe way to experiment with different approaches”*, an *“attractive way of learning about a conversation model”*, which is *“fun to do”*.

## Conclusions from the building process

The experiences in the development of the scenarios was described as intense and insightful, as creation requires precision in the definition of the objective of the conversation, the phases and the actual phrasing. The reflection on these aspects was considered a very rich learning process in itself. All participants worked with great tenacity, even when ‘the devil was in the details’. The clarity of steps in the process was considered motivating, as it showed that the goal would be within reach.

## Conclusions on the value of simulations

The following conclusions were drawn about potential benefits for wider use of the tool within the CEP:

- With four simulations available in both a local language and English, other members of the CEP can discover the potential of online-model-based conversation training;
- Following the same building procedure, more simulations can be added to support the dissemination of evidence-based interventions that improve effective probation supervision;
- Particularly, scenarios can emphasize aspects of effective communication within probation aimed at behavioral change;
- As the platform allows for users to provide comments, improving simulations becomes an interactive process between players exchanging experiences and trainers, as part of a culture of learning from each other.
- As validated conversation models, simulations provide insights into what probation work in different local environments requires. For instance, in the extent to which there are opportunities to motivate behavioral change.
- The CEP, for example through their network for Training & education, can supervise (future) development of simulations for quality assurance, and consequently set standards on good, practical evidence-based probation. This can also help to emphasize the importance of standards for policymakers of probation work in their country.
- In regard to financing, the distribution of knowledge and quality assurance can be a consecutive European project, while also an opportunity is seen in integrating the use of DialogueTrainer in training programs as a task for national/local probation organizations. Both routes are explored.

## 2023 and beyond: where from here?

As a result of this project, four simulations are now available in local languages and English, for users to experiment with.

With participants, meetings are planned about including the simulations in local training programs.

The English versions are made available on the DialogueTrainer platform via a joincode, upon request.

The creation of new scenarios or the purchase of other conversation models could be financed as a bilateral project agreed upon by a CEP member for probation and DialogueTrainer.

Via a joincode, CEP members now have access to a demo:

<https://en.dialoguetrainer.app/join/IIKVLNEB>



[nl.dialoguetrainer.app/join/IIKVLNEB](https://en.dialoguetrainer.app/join/IIKVLNEB)

Utrecht, December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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