

CHAPTER 3

CONTEMPORARY CORPORATE PRACTICE AND TRAINING TRENDS IN RELATION TO INDIVIDUALS WITH A COMMUNICATION DISABILITY

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 noted some of the shifts that have been observed in the field of rehabilitation, from a medical model to a social model, advocating increased participation for an individual with a disability by means of the removal of environmental and attitudinal barriers. This chapter examines the legislative changes that have taken place worldwide generally and in South Africa particularly, in relation to such individuals, and the extent to which they are daily impacting on contemporary corporate doctrines and practice in the workplace. In addition, the dearth of corporate training programs, specifically in relation to customers with a communication disability following a TBI, is considered.

3.2 The corporate legislative environment

In 1994, South Africa emerged from four decades of Apartheid, inheriting a legacy of inequalities across all spectrums of society (Fisher, Katz, Miller & Thatcher, 2003; Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2002; Swart, 2001). In the South African workplace specifically, various legislative changes have since been made (in line with worldwide trends) aiming to address these inequalities through the removal of some of the existing barriers for previously disadvantaged and minority groups, including those within the reported approximately 2,5 million individuals with disabilities in South Africa (Silver & Koopman, 2000; Swart, 2001). These have included the Employment Equity Act (No 55 of 1998) (outlawing discrimination on the basis of disability during the recruiting process, as well as within the workplace itself), applying to employers with more than 50 employees, or with a turnover annually that exceeds a specific amount (DPSA, 2000). Such companies are termed: designated employers. Other laws include the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) aimed at improving the skills of the South African workforce and encouraging employers to use the workplace as an active learning environment (Alant, 2001; DPSA, 2000; Grobler et al., 2002; Silver & Koopman, 2000). The Code of Good Practice (Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998)

serves as a guide for the employer and the employee with a disability, promoting equal opportunities and fair treatment for individuals with disabilities. Silver & Koopman (2000) note how in spite of the legislation, very few companies in South Africa have addressed these issues to date, and they challenge South African businesses to join worldwide trends in becoming socially-responsible companies, integrating these laws, and creating inclusive workplaces, which Grobler et al.(2002) likewise emphasize as being “necessary for organizational survival” (p.45). Grobler et al. (2002) have further stressed how companies will need to commit themselves to a diverse workforce, tapping the potential of that workforce, and changing attitudes within the culture of the company from the top management down towards accommodating such a workforce, and removing prejudice and stereotypes.

Swart (2001) undertook research to determine the attitudes of a sample of businesses in the Cape Province as regards: complying with the Employment Equity Act (No 55 of 1998); employing and accommodating individuals with disability; together with the perceptions of non-disabled employees regarding colleagues with a disability. He noted how (as compared with research carried out by companies in the UK and USA on the costs and benefit of employing individuals with disability), in South Africa “very little, if any research has been done locally on these issues” (p.1-2). His findings included the ignorance and discomfort of non-disabled people around people with disabilities, lack of knowledge concerning the abilities of such individuals, difficulties reported in finding suitably-qualified people with disabilities to employ, and he reported that 25% of his sample of companies (in spite of being designated employers), had no policy in place to integrate employees with disability. Swart (2001) concluded that South African companies need to be more “pro-active” (p.9-1) in implementing policies dealing with such issues. Silver and Koopman (2000) likewise observe that a major change of attitude is needed in the culture of organizations in order to integrate individuals with disability, to match the job with the individuals, and to put the correct supports in place. They encourage South African businesses to become “the employer of choice” (p.9) for people with disabilities, thereby “positioning your organization and managing it in such a way that the most talented people with disabilities and people with the greatest potential are drawn to work for your organization” (p.9).

The ability to be gainfully employed and enjoy the job is one of society’s “most valued life participation events” (Garcia et al., 2002, p.187). With regard to individuals with communication disorders specifically, Garcia et al. (2002); Jordan and Kaiser (1996); and Ruben (2000) have highlighted how people in many workplaces need good communication skills, placing such individuals at a disadvantage when seeking and maintaining employment, owing in large part to

the obstacles they encounter. These include the attitudes of colleagues within the workplace who are mostly ignorant about communication disorders, owing to their invisibility. Jordan & Kaiser (1996) advocate the need for partnerships with employers to educate them about reducing barriers for these individuals, and setting realistic goals. However, in spite of this recommendation, since Supported Employment (SE) was defined in the 1986 Amendment to the Rehabilitation Act in the USA, Wehman et al. (1988; 1990); and Wehman, West, Kregel, Sherron & Kreutzer (1995) describe the many challenges remaining of integrating individuals with a TBI specifically, in the workplace. The need for individualized models incorporating trained employment specialists working closely with the supervisor/employer, and ensuring that environmental modifications, strategies and contextualized cognitive supports are in place in an ongoing way to assist them in maintaining employment, has been emphasized by these authorities, together with Ylvisaker, 2003; Ylvisaker & Feeney, 1996, 1998b, 1998d, 1998e, 1998f; Ylvisaker, Feeney & Feeney, 1999.

3.3 Corporate practice and training trends

A customer is the most important visitor on our premises.

He is not dependent on us.

We are dependent on him.

He is not an interruption on our work.

He is the purpose of it.

He is not an outsider on our business.

He is a part of it.

We are not doing him a favour by serving him.

He is doing us a favour by giving us an opportunity to do so.

(Mahatma Gandhi, cited in Ackerman, 2005, p.2)

In South Africa, the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998) was implemented to encourage businesses to invest in educating and motivating their workforce, and in so doing, to ensure the ongoing broadening of employees' skills in order to improve the quality of life of their workers (Fisher et al., 2003; Grobler et al., 2002). The process of employee education describes training in which the employee gains information and skills tailored to their own workplace (Grobler et al., 2002). Grobler et al. (2002) refer to the terminological shift from training and development to learning and development, highlighting the acquisition of knowledge that is sustainable. These writers refer to the contemporary shift in focus in business today to empower employees from

management downwards to be responsible to the customer, and how customer service gives the company the competitive edge in their own industry. Grobler et al. (2002) have pointed out that the traditional South African company is undergoing change, with a shift of values from (among others) “individualism to teamwork and from short-run profits to a customer-driven focus” (p.4), where people form the intellectual growth of the organization, and empowerment and enabling becomes an integral part of the culture of the organization. Ackerman (2002) has consistently emphasized the endeavour to practice this philosophy through his company’s ‘caring for the customer is everything policy’ (p.186). A review of numerous well-recognized business resources emphasize the importance of the customer, and personalized customer service in contemporary retail practice, without any specific reference to interacting with customers with a disability (Ackerman, 2002, 2005; Cheales, (retrieved April 26, 2004 from <http://www.petercheales.co.za/presentationsiwasyourcustomer.htm>); Covey, 1992, 2004; Hammer, 2001; Kotter & Cohen, 2002; Lewis & Bridger, 2000; Majchrzak & Wang, 1998; Raymond, 2003; Ulrich, 1998; Underhill, 1999). Hammer’s concept of ‘customer economy’ (2001, p.6) reflects his belief in how “executives of the most powerful companies in the world now tremble before their independent and demanding customers” (p.5). Although Hammer (2001) stresses the need to remove any barriers for customers, his concept of barrier only includes brands and product availability, with no mention of barriers for a potentially diverse range of customers. Similarly Underhill (1999), in examining the ‘science of shopping’ (p.33), in which he emphasizes the need to spend time with the shopper, makes no mention of diversity issues, or the necessary skills to interact with customers with a disability.

Bramley (2003a, 2003b); Coats (2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d); and Codrington (2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2004), (a group of generational experts developing strategies for both large and small South African and global businesses), have extended the concept of customer service to a consideration of the corporate environment. They propose that the focus of contemporary business needs to start from within a relationship economy, where the 21st century model concerns relationships, respect and a human touch in relation to both its employees and customers. This concept can likewise be aligned with the conceptual framework of the ICF (WHO, 2001), emphasizing the benefit of creating an environment that is facilitative, more accommodating for diversity, and potentially barrier free, thereby facilitating enhanced participation (WHO, 2001). Coats (2003d) has stressed how “relationships ultimately will be more important than transactions” and that loyalty to any company will be facilitated through the customer to whom they need to listen and relate. The company that functions in terms of a

relationship focus will, according to Coats (2003d) and Codrington (2003c, d) be different from all its competitors selling the same products and services at similar prices. Coats (2003c) and Codrington (2003a) maintain that future leadership will have to ask new questions about relationships including: “Do people here know how to listen and speak to each other?” and “Do we respect and embrace diversity?” (Coats, 2003c, retrieved March 28, 2004 from <http://www.tomorrowtoday.biz/article011.htm>). G. Codrington (personal communication, April 21, 2004 (*Appendix 1B*)) has noted that companies today should create an environment that is “internally attractive to the employee and externally attractive to the customer” where companies no longer pay “lip service” to caring about their customers, and adds that this needs to be cemented into the culture of the company. Furthermore, he stresses how “the spirit of Ubuntu positions us in Africa and globally for a relationship economy.”

Individuals in corporate transformation training, and human resource development in South Africa specifically (including Bhengu, 1996; M. Boon (personal communication, April 12, 2005); Bramley, 2003a, 2003b; Coats, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d; Codrington, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d, 2004; Mbigi & Maree, 1995) are among the many who have encouraged companies to harness their own African culture in an innovative way to various managerial concepts and practices, and in so doing, to contribute to and expand global corporate trends. They advocate revisiting the concept of Ubuntu (a Southern African term for humanity implying caring, sharing and being in harmony) (Bhengu, 1996; Mbigi & Maree, 1995) “on a journey to recovery” (Ackerman, 2005, p.130) in order to reduce the disharmony within companies, and to promote co-operation and team-spirit between employees across the diversity of languages and cultures. Bhengu (1996) and Mbigi & Maree (1995) have shown how an Ubuntu management approach incorporates many of the ingredients of finding soul in the workplace, encouraging a spirit of working together and respecting human dignity. These above-described shifts comprise what Pascale, Millemann and Gioja (1998) refer to as “leading from a different place” (p.179), resulting in “transformations that need to begin with the operating state of the leaders themselves” (p.179). Zander and Zander (2000) likewise refer to these shifts as “creating visions and establishing environments where *possibility* is spoken” (p.163). Through discussion of the concept of possibility, they examine the ways in which one can shift paradigms in endeavouring to remove “the barriers that divide us” (p.194), and in creating a more habitable and compassionate world.

3.3.1 Implementation of legislative changes in corporate practice

Having highlighted the focus within the contemporary corporate world on the customer and a relationship economy, a closer examination of the implementation of the earlier-described diversity-related legislative changes in current corporate practice revealed the following trends in business both locally and worldwide: In the USA, Barbian (2003) has noted that diversity awareness programs are widespread and “gathering strength as an essential business practice,” and that “75% of Fortune 500 companies have diversity efforts in place” (p.44), mostly geared towards awareness of incorporating employees and customer-related race and gender issues, together with accommodations for individuals with physical disabilities. Large companies such as Australian-based Franklins (2001) (a national supermarket chain) developed a disability awareness program based on a 2.5 hour training program “dealing with athletes with a disability” that was, according to B. McGrath (personal communication, May 13, 2004) originally developed for volunteer and paid staff working in the Olympic and Paralympics Village of the 2000 Olympic games. This aimed at making them more comfortable in dealing with people with disability. Franklins adopted and modified this program into a 3.5 hour program, Franklins disability awareness in a retail environment training manual (2001), initially developed for managers, but ultimately planning to implement it with all “customer facing staff who provide services to people with disability on a daily basis” (B. McGrath, personal communication, May 13, 2004). The program comprises a number of activities for small groups to consider surrounding a range of issues related to the Australian Disability Discrimination Act; their own experiences with disability; and some basic procedures to offer assistance to customers with a range of disabilities.

The incentives given to businesses to accommodate diversity by both private consultancies, as well as Governmental agencies worldwide, relates to encouraging them to comply with their country’s disability legislation, as well as to be aware of the numbers of customers out there with disability, and the potential buying power and disposable income within that sector of the market (Australia: Commonwealth disability strategy, retrieved April 26, 2004 from http://www.facs.gov.au/disability/cds/cds/cds_index.htm; British Disability Rights Commission, retrieved April 26, 2004 from www.drc.gov.uk); Canadian Human Rights Commission, retrieved April 28, 2004 from <http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/discrimination/default-en.asp>; Coleman, 2002; DPSA, retrieved April 23 2004 from http://www.dpsa.org.za/documents_pocketguide.htm; Katz,1998; Richards & Richards, 2003; South African Federal Council on Disability (D.A. Howitson, personal communication, May 3, 2004); Wilkerson, 2001). Prager (1999) has likewise

referred to the concept of ‘handicapitalism’ to signify the “dawning realization that people with disabilities shouldn’t be viewed as charity cases or regulatory burdens, but rather as profitable marketing targets.”

Roosevelt Thomas (with Woodruff), (1999a, 1999b) is recognized as one of the pioneers of the application of diversity awareness principles in practice, through his establishment of the American Institute of Managing Diversity in 1984. His training programs make extensive use of his fable, the Giraffe and the Elephant (Roosevelt Thomas (with Woodruff), 1999c) (*Appendix 22*) which relates the story about a giraffe and an elephant struggling to share a workshop. It captures with simplicity a number of issues regarding diversity awareness around which businesses can develop both awareness and skills. Consultancies such as Washington-based W.C. Duke Associates provide training modules to business concerning disability etiquette for all employees interacting with colleagues with different kinds of disabilities; attitudes towards the person; physical accommodations; as well as for front-line employees and management coming into contact with customers (C. Duke, personal communication, May 5, 2004; Duke, retrieved April 23, 2004 from <http://www.wcduke.com/programexp.html>). Wilkerson (2001) refers to increasing numbers of companies in the Ontario, Canada business sector with inclusive policies in place, and he strongly advocates the need for executives within organizations to reduce discrimination and educate their employees about diversity. Wilkerson (2001) focuses on two Canadian companies (UPS and AmEx) that have their managers undergo “immersion training” working with non-profit organizations for 4 week blocks of time, learning to deal with “the same issues that some of our employees deal with on a daily basis” (p.4). Codrington (2004) has likewise advocated the benefit of applying principles in business practice that are used in non-profit volunteer-based organizations, where managers learn the concept of service towards their employees. M. Boon (personal communication, April 12, 2005) in his South African-based company the Vulindlela Network, launched a powerful program of personal transformation (Vuka) in 2000, where he works with corporate groups, and through the process of immersion aims to get them to deal with issues concerning diversity, racism, gender and cultural differences.

3.3.2 *Disability issues*

In spite of these diversity-awareness trends that are reportedly becoming an increasing part of the corporate culture and training focus in contemporary South Africa specifically, the reality, according to Silver and Koopman (2000), is that very few companies in South Africa have

seriously addressed the issues of integration of individuals with a disability in the workplace, or of transforming their company values to becoming a role model, through modifying the attitudes of their employees to individuals with a disability. Oakley-Smith (2004) has likewise expressed the opinion that South African employment equity (EE) targets are not being met by companies, and has stated that “there is a lack of commitment from senior leadership and management, often derived from a failure to grasp that EE is a business imperative, a strategy that can add real value and continued value to the bottom line” (p.8).

The same omissions have similarly been noted from the rehabilitation perspective where Simmons-Mackie et al. (in press), refer to how in spite of the increasing recognition given worldwide by government and accreditation bodies to issues of access for individuals with disability, resulting in legislative changes, guidelines and mandates, “communicative access has not been widely championed in the same way as physical access”. They add that communicative access is “narrowly defined in terms of technology for the hearing impaired rather than defined in terms of broader issues including language barriers” (Simmons-Mackie et al., in press). In order to facilitate long-term and sustainable changes in communicative access, they, together with many other authorities in the field of rehabilitation, propose changes within societal systems such as healthcare and other realms, in order to reduce barriers and enhance participation and satisfaction (Alant, 2005b; Alant & Lloyd, 2005; Cruice et al., 2003; ICF (WHO, 2001); Parr et al., 1997; Sarno, 2001, 2004; Simmons-Mackie et al., in press). Cottrell (2001, p.102) likewise strongly advocates the “need for wide-ranging and increased training and awareness-raising among the general public about communication disability” (p.102). Similarly, Togher et al. (1996, 1997b; 2004) have emphasized the need to improve communication in Governmental agencies and private organizations dealing directly with the general public, through training programs “for the uninformed sections of the community” (1997b, p.502) aimed at enhancing interactions when dealing with customers with a TBI.

The model of a barrier-free and facilitative environment as proposed by the conceptual framework of the ICF (WHO, 2001) encourages individuals with disabilities to participate in society at a deeper level (Alant, 2005a; Seligman, 2002). Individuals with neurogenic-based communication disorders have likewise been shown to need a more facilitative environment in order to thrive as empowered human beings (Threats, 2002). This concept of participation can be conceptually extended into the corporate sector (in South Africa specifically), which is reportedly poised for a more humane relationship economy (Codrington, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d), together with an Ubuntu management approach (Bhengu, 1996; Mbigi & Maree, 1995).

In spite of this, and the legislation in place aiming not only to upgrade employees' skills, as well as to integrate individuals with disability in the workplace, Silver and Koopman's observation (2000) that this has been largely ignored to date, represents a disappointing indictment of our society. Given this situation, together with an apparent absence of training programs which deal particularly with individuals with a TBI in the retail environment specifically, the current research has targeted the supermarket environment as a system integral to our everyday lives that requires social change and accommodations in order to enable sales assistants to become facilitators, while customers with a TBI participate more fully and function more independently in the shopping process.

3.3.3 Principles in the development of a training session for sales assistants dealing with customers with TBI

The training session developed for the main study incorporated principles and methods used for adult learners, who come to the process of learning with a rich pre-existing background of knowledge and experience that needs acknowledgement, and is the foundation on which new information is built (Caffarella, 1994). Extensive use was made of video material reflecting simulations of daily in-store scenarios that were produced during the pre-experimental phase of the study (Table 4.1). Silberman (1990) has emphasized educating rather than training the adult learner, using meaningful content and in so doing, to "expose participants to new ways of thinking, feeling and acting and to allow them to integrate these ways into their being" (p.34). Mintzberg (2004) likewise advocates exposing learners to realistic and customized problems to solve, facilitating the reframing of assumptions and "the ability to see their world in different and deeper ways" (p.378). He refers to this process of education as "experienced reflection" (Mintzberg, 2004, p.264), encompassing the process of integrating and adapting new ideas and insights into established beliefs, which then impact on behaviour back in the workplace.

The current training session also included the use of collaboration with an individual with a TBI as a research assistant, in order to expose the sales assistants in the experimental group to his personal perspective, to help to generate knowledge and bring about personal and social change (Krogh & Lindsay, 1999; Mertens, 1998; Oliver, 1992; Sohlberg et al., 1998). This form of strongly experiential training has likewise been advocated by Silberman (1990) where "learning flows not from didactic presentations, but from what participants discover for themselves as a result of powerful experiences that the trainer has designed for them" (p.155).

A participation-based training format was used to incorporate principles advocated by Mayo and DuBois (1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 1987d, 1987e, 1987f, 1987g), who include the centrality of participation by the participant as the first of seventeen important principles pertaining to training. They stress the importance of participants doing something, rather than simply having information presented to them, adding how “individual involvement is important when changes in attitude are desired” (1987f, p.16). Active participation in a group format has likewise been advocated by Bornman, 2001; Franklin’s disability awareness in a retail environment training manual (2001); Kagan and Shumway (2003a); Mintzberg (2004); Silberman (1990); Togher et al. (2004) and Wastell (1995). Slavin (1996) extends this concept by referring to the positive effects of cooperative learning, where participants work in mixed ability groups, sharing and debating concepts among one another, letting go of misconceptions, considering other solutions for discussion at the end of a period with the group as a whole, which he notes as being a critical component of cooperative learning, resulting in “cognitive restructuring” for the participant (Slavin, 1996, p.50).

Specific strategies that have been advocated for effective cooperative learning include the careful structuring of interaction among participants in small groups, the use of strategies such as question-generation, as well as summarization of topics discussed with the group (Silberman, 1990; Slavin,1996). Napier and Gershenfeld (1983), and Silberman (1990) have stated that the first thirty minutes of training are the most crucial for setting the tone for the entire training, where participants “decide how they perceive you, what role they expect to play during the training program, and what they intend to accomplish during the course” (Silberman, 1990, p.198). It is during this period that they stress the need to create group motivation and interest in the training topic, primarily through the opening exercise. Silberman (1990) also advocates tapping the knowledge of the group about the topic to be trained before training commences, and suggests returning to the same questions later to determine the learning that has occurred. He furthermore advocates the need for the training to be well-paced and sequenced, with a good mix of activities both to maintain group interest and teach new skills. He adds that training sequences should be closed, with a discussion by participants of the implications of that section of content. Silberman (1990) refers to a growth in confidence as individuals master exercises at increasing levels of difficulty. The use of relevant video material is likewise suggested together with key questions to help focus the groups’ attention while observing the videos. Silberman (1990) notes how “concluding a training program can be as difficult as beginning one” (p.184), and the importance at this stage of internalizing the discoveries participants have made through making connections to skills previously learned, thereby growing in confidence.

The formulation of a training session combining the above principles and strategies may create the “possibility” (Zander & Zander, 2000) for “experienced reflection” (Mintzberg, 2004, p.264), with a concomitant increase in both levels of confidence and skill.

Figure 3.1 below represents a visual representation of the theoretical rationale for the study, reflecting the needs (described in chapters 2 and 3) in both the rehabilitation and corporate contexts for communication partner training programs to remove barriers for individuals with a TBI, and their communication partners.

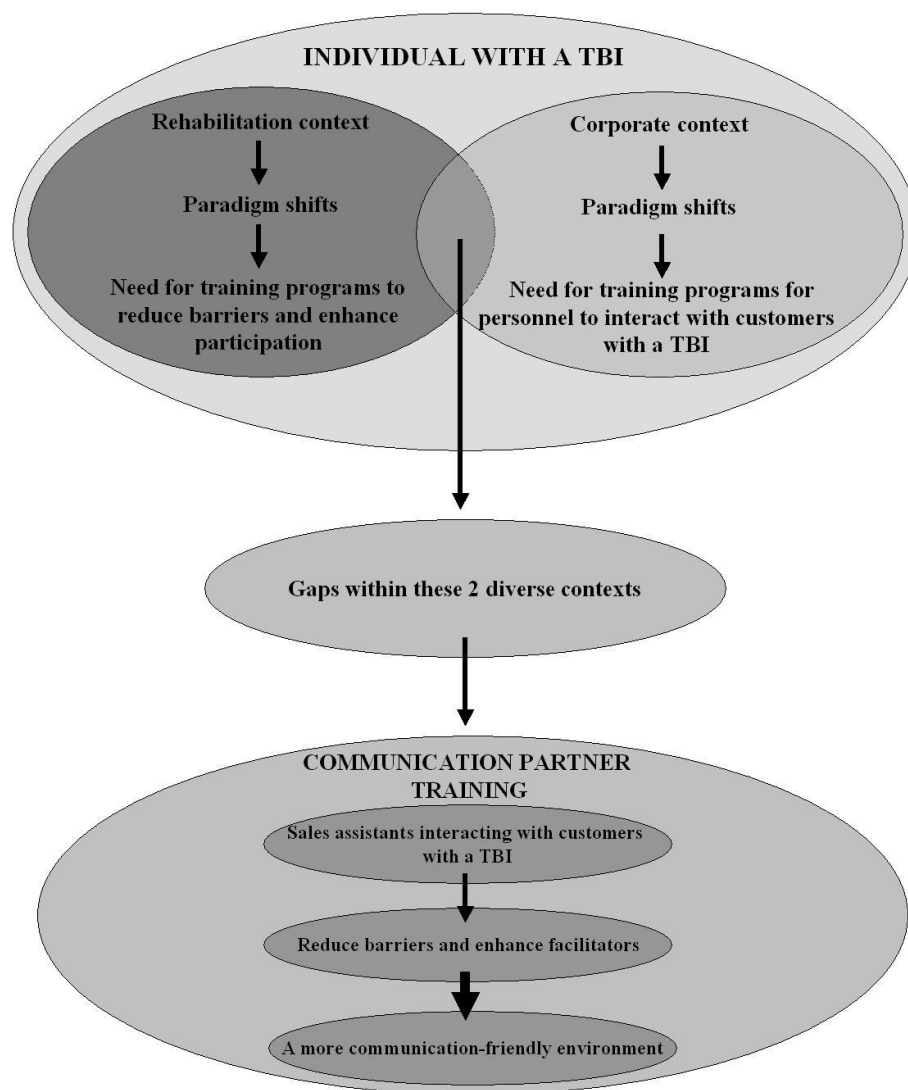


Figure 3.1 Visual representation of the theoretical rationale for the study.

3.4 Summary

In accordance with the above recommendations proposed by among others, Cottrell (2001); Simmons-Mackie et al.(in press); and Togher et al.(2004), together with the corporate sector being poised for a more humane relationship economy (Codrington, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2003d) in an environment lacking in training programs aimed at dealing with individuals with a TBI specifically, the current research has targeted the retail supermarket environment as a system integral to our everyday lives that requires social change and accommodations in order to enable customers with a TBI to participate more fully, and thereby function more independently as a consumer. The chapter ends with a visual representation of the theoretical rationale for the study (Figure 3.1), reflecting the needs (described in chapters 2 and 3) in both the rehabilitation and corporate contexts for communication partner training programs to remove barriers for individuals with a TBI, and their communication partners.