

# **Sales assistants serving customers with Traumatic Brain Injury**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Sales assistants serving customers with Traumatic Brain Injury**

General lack of awareness regarding neurogenic communication disorders generally, and cognitive-communicative disorders following a traumatic brain injury (TBI) specifically has resulted in pervasive environmental and attitudinal barriers for these individuals. Paradigm shifts within the rehabilitation context have been highlighted which aim to remove barriers, provide social supports, and thereby enhance their participation in all aspects of life. While collaborative communication partner training programs have been advocated as a means to achieve this, a dearth of published programs is evident within the field of TBI, leading to the need for such programs to enhance the awareness and skill of the communication partner, and reduce barriers for the individual. Transformations are likewise apparent in the corporate context, where in spite of legislative changes encouraging diversity awareness programs for employees, few training programs exist worldwide, and in South Africa particularly, which remove barriers between employees and customers with a communication disability, and a TBI specifically.

The current research targeted the retail supermarket environment as a context in which a significant number of everyday communicative exchanges take place. The study investigated the ability of a group of sales assistants to identify barriers to, and facilitators of interaction involving customers with a cognitive-communication disorder, using a control group design. This was achieved by the development and administration of 2 questionnaires on 2 different occasions to determine the confidence and skill with which they identified barriers and facilitators during videotaped sales interactions. A once-off training session was developed and conducted with the experimental group participants, in order to increase their confidence and skill in identifying barriers and facilitators of such interactions. The training session employed a number of customized components considered to be powerful contributors to the positive outcome of the study. These included: extensive use of customized video material professionally produced and comprising real interactions involving individuals with a TBI as “customers” in various stores of the participating national supermarket chain during operating hours. Collaboration with an individual with a TBI in the training, together with use of adult learning and diversity awareness principles were considered effective in shifting previous attitudes and fostering new learning.

Inter-and-intra-group results on the confidence and skill constructs of the pre-and-post questionnaires were examined. All pointed consistently to the impact of the training session on the improvement demonstrated in the experimental group as compared to the control group on the post-questionnaires as compared with the pre-questionnaires. In addition all subjective training session evaluations by the experimental group participants were consistently highly rated, reflecting the active participation observed during training.

The need for companies to expand their concept of customer service to include an acknowledgement of the customer with a disability is emphasized. Training programs empowering their employees to interact with greater awareness and confidence with customers with a TBI specifically will potentially facilitate deeper participation for both. The current research lays the groundwork for more in-depth research that can be generalized beyond this specific population of individuals with a communication disorder.

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**Key terms:** Traumatic brain injury; customer with a cognitive-communication disorder; sales assistants; communication partner training program; retail environment; ICF (WHO, 2001); barriers; facilitators; confidence; skill; South Africa

## OPSOMMING

### **Verkoopsassistent wat deel met kliënte met Traumatiese Hoofbeserings**

Algemene gebrek aan bewustheid aangaande neurogeniese kommunikasiegestremdhede in die algemeen, en kognitief-kommunikatiewe gestremdhede na 'n traumatiese hoofbesering (THB) in die besonder, het omvattende omgewings- en gesindheidsprobleme vir hierdie individue veroorsaak. Paradigmaskuiwe binne die rehabilitasie konteks het ten doel om hindernisse te verwyder en sosiale ondersteuning te bied, ten einde hul deelname aan alle aspekte van die lewe te verhoog. Terwyl samewerkende kommunikatiewe vennootskappe bepleit word as 'n manier om dit te bereik, is daar 'n skaarste aan gepubliseerde programme in die THB veld. Sulke programme is dus noodsaaklik om die bewustheid en vaardigheid van die kommunikasie vennoot te versterk en om belemmerings vir die individu te verwyder. Transformasie is ook sigbaar in die korporatiewe konteks waar, ten spyte van wetlike veranderings wat diversiteitsbewustheid programme vir werknemers aanmoedig, daar wêreldwyd, en veral in Suid-Afrika, min opleidingsprogramme bestaan om belemmerings tussen werknemers en kliënte met 'n kommunikasie gestremdheid, spesifiek THB, te verwyder.

Hierdie navorsing het die kleinhandel supermarkomgewing geteiken as 'n konteks waarin daar daaglik betekenissvolle kommunikasie plaasvind. Die vermoë van 'n groep verkoopsassistent om belemmerings vir, en fasiliteerders van interaksie met kliënte met 'n kognitief-kommunikatiewe gestremdheid te identifiseer, is ondersoek deur gebruik van 'n kontrole groep. Dit is gedoen deur die ontwikkeling en toepassing van 2 vraelyste by 2 verskillende geleenthede, om die selfvertroue en vaardigheid vas te stel waarmee hul belemmerings en fasiliteerders geïdentifiseer het gedurende video-opnames van verkoopsinteraksies. 'n Eenmalige opleidingssessie is ontwikkel en met die eksperimentele groep uitgevoer om hul selfvertroue en vaardigheid om belemmerings en fasiliteerders te identifiseer, te verhoog. Die opleidingssessie het 'n aantal doelgemaakte komponente gebruik wat beskou is as sterk bydraers tot die positiewe uitkoms van hierdie studie. Dit het die omvangryke gebruik van doelgemaakte, professioneel vervaardigde videomateriaal ingesluit. Dit het bestaan uit werklike interaksies tussen "kliënte" met THB in verskillende winkels van die deelnemende nasionale supermarkgroep gedurende besigheidsure. Samewerking met 'n individu met THB gedurende opleiding, tesame met gebruik van volwasse opleiding en diversiteitsbewustheid beginsels is as effektief beskou in die verandering van vorige gesindhede, en om nuwe kennis aan te moedig.

Inter- en intragroep resultate aangaande die vertrouwe en vaardigheid van pre-en postvraelyste is ondersoek. Alles het konsekwent gewys op die impak van die opleidingsessie op die verbetering van die eksperimentele groep in vergelyking met die kontrole groep op die postvraelyste in vergelyking met die prevraelyste. Daarbenewens is al die subjektiewe opleidingsessies konsekwent hoër aangeslaan en dit reflekteer die aktiewe deelname wat gedurende opleiding waargeneem is.

Dit is nodig dat maatsappye hul denkbeeld van kliëntediens uitbrei om kliënte met 'n gestremdheid in ag te neem. Opleidingsprogramme wat werknemers bemagtig om met groter bewustheid en selfvertroue spesifiek met kliënte met THB om te gaan, sal potensieel beter deelname vir albei fasiliteer. Die huidige navorsing lê die grondslag vir meer in-diepte navorsing wat wyer strek as slegs hierdie spesifieke populasie van individue met 'n kommunikasie probleem.

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**Kern woorde:** Traumatisiese hoofbesering; kliënt met 'n kognitief-kommunikatiewe gestremdheid; verkoopsassistent; kommunikasie vennootskap  
opleidingsprogam; kleinhandelsomgewing; ICF (WGO, 2001); belemmerings;  
fasiliteerders; selfvertroue; vaardigheid; Suid-Afrika

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