Why start with the end in mind?

*A tool to understand communication needs in the workplace*

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“*Interpersonal relationship issues are at once the most common and the most difficult catalyst to predict workplace separation*”

(Sale et al, 1991)
What will be covered today?

- Background and context
- Workplace communication task analysis tool
- Case studies from the Acquired Brain Injury Transitional Rehabilitation Service (ABI TRS)
Communication Skills and RTW

- Return to work (RTW) rates after ABI are **globally low**
- In Australia and NZ employment is **40-45%** (2 years post injury)
- Interpersonal communication skills have been linked to **employment stability** after ABI.
- Communication skills needed for the workplace have been **understudied**, making it difficult to support.

Communicating in a modern workforce

• Focus on *soft skills* and becoming more service orientated.
• **Work speech acts**: instructing, clarifying, informing, advising.
• **Needed for**: Relationships, recruiting, training & managing, explaining concepts, verbal reasoning etc
• **Channels**: Meetings, small groups, online and social forums, phones, emails etc.
• Studies estimate that between **80-90% of people with ABI** experience communication disorder.

(Modified from MacDonald & Wiseman-Hakes, 2010; Mulenbroek et al, 2016).
Communication in the workplace context

**Seven communication-related skills for RTW after ABI**

1) Spoken language processing  
2) Verbal memory  
3) Reading and writing  
4) Verbal reasoning  
5) Expressive pragmatics  
6) Multi-tasking; and  
7) Social cognition.

**Model of Cognitive-Communication competence**

- Conceptualises range of ABI communication impairments

**Communication Ax emerging as predictors for RTW**

- FAVRES, Discourse Analysis, La Trobe Questionnaire etc

(Meulenbroek et al, 2016; MacDonald & Wiseman-Hakes, 2010; Meulenbroek, Bowers, Turkstra 2016).
Guidelines for therapeutic approach...

Vocational treatments should:

- Be individualised
- Involve employers
- Be supported through an interdisciplinary approach
- Understand a person’s strengths and weaknesses
- Build awareness of abilities and barriers early on
- Provided in context, be meaningful, focus on breakdown situations
- Involve an understanding of person’s work role

How can we do this if we don’t start with an end in mind?
Our Approach – Supporting RTW communication

Background of:
Growing strong evidence related to work communication skills after ABI and modern and changing workplaces

ABI TRS Vocational Rehabilitation Framework

Communication Ax
- Client’s current abilities (evidence-based Ax of communication skills for RTW with FAVRES, Discourse, LaTrobe etc)
- Understanding of client’s workplace communication

Communication Tx
- Personalised therapy related to work role (simulation of work activities – scenarios, role play etc)
- IDT therapy sessions
- Communication partner training
- Group therapy program

Missing...deep understanding of individual’s communication environment
Communication Needs Analysis Tool

Client

Employer checklist

ABI Transitional Rehabilitation Service
Division of Rehabilitation

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Workplace Communication Needs Assessment - Client

**Client Version**

- Semi-structured interview with client
- Premorbid strategies that can be used in therapy.
- Allows awareness building.

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Workplace Communication Needs Assessment - Employer

Employer Version

- Checklist
- Can be performed by SP / OT/ other discipline during worksite visit.
- Able to be cross-checked against client report.
Case Study 1: Using the client version

Client 1: Personal Trainer

**Function:** cognitive communication deficits – comprehension, recall / memory, poorly organised verbal expression, reduced initiation and maintenance.

**Client version used:**
- Helped him retrieve detail and expand on how he communicated in role and strategies he used.
- Raised awareness of high communication need in his role.

**Outcomes:** Work activities were incorporated into therapy program. Client wrote his own PT program and delivered to therapists. He was able to identify and practise his previous strategies in the gym.
Case Study 2: Using the employer version

Client 2: Signals Maintainer (& Safety Protection Officer)

Function: Moderate CCD – poor comprehension, recall, verbal output; social communication, insight, ability to reflect and understanding of impact of actions on others, poor pragmatics, fatigue.

Using the tool (employer):
- OT completed on worksite visit – observation of colleagues working

Outcomes:
- Better able to simulate workplace activities in joint OT/SP sessions.
- More robust RTW plan and medical clearance for parts of role that had lower communication demands.
Outcomes

Understanding the end is helping:

• Identify therapy targets
• Personalise therapy
• With strategy development
• Inform RTW plans
• With handover to other services

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References

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Questions

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