

Beyond Obedience: The information behaviour of assistance dog trainers

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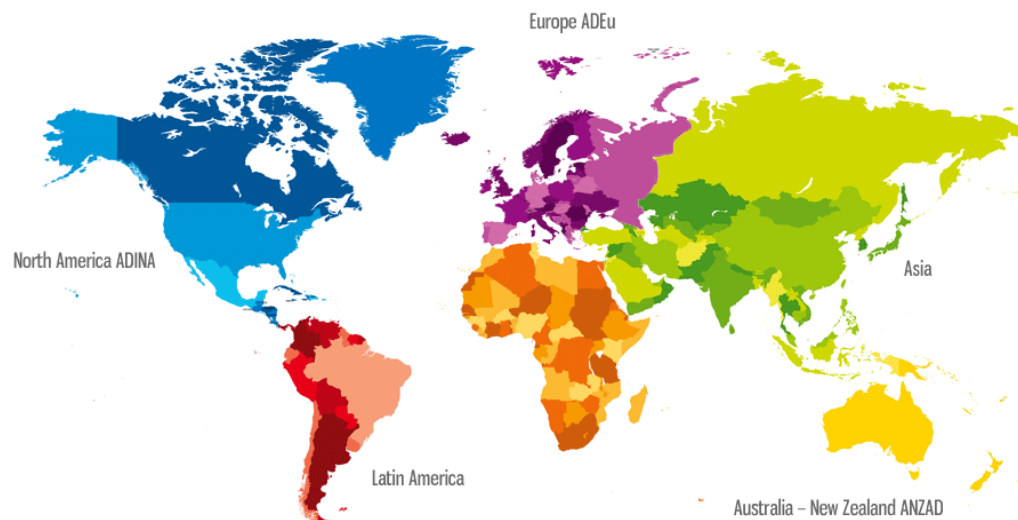


Overview

- Background information
 - Population
 - Concepts from the literature
 - Purpose
 - Research question
 - Methodology
- Results
 - Consultation
 - Selection
 - Information use
- Applicability to academic librarians

Population

- Assistance Dogs International (ADI):
North American chapter
 - 16 programs in Canada
 - 89 programs in US



(Assistance Dogs International, n.d.-a)

Image source: <http://www.assistedogsinternational.org/members/programs-search/>

ADI's Standards for trainers

1. Trainers must understand and adhere to all ADI Minimum Standards and Ethics.
2. Trainers must be able to produce effective working teams that meet ADI Standards (i.e. Public Access Test, demonstration of tasks) as reviewed at the 1 year anniversary of the team.
3. **Trainers must have up to date knowledge of best practices in many areas including:**
 - **learning theory**
 - **canine behavior**
 - **canine care and safety**
 - **a variety of training techniques, equipment and methods**

(Assistance Dogs International, n.d.- b)

Concepts from the literature

- Work tasks:
 - Components: beginning + pre-defined procedure or outcome (Hackman 1969)
 - Workplace information behaviour derives value from its role in work task completion (Byström 2002, 2005)
- Information selection and use: following information seeking or acquisition, the individual engages in:
 - Processing: integration into knowledge or beliefs
 - Use: prompting change of behavior, knowledge or beliefs (Wilson, 1997)

Purpose

To investigate the following 3 processes in a work context:



Consultation

Selection

Information
use

Research Questions

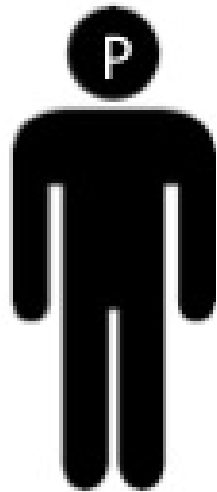
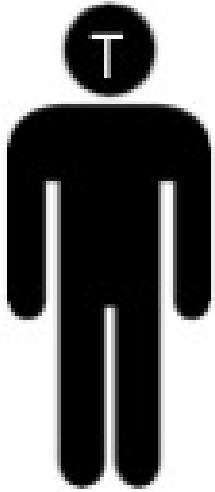
- What are the work tasks of assistance dog trainers?
- What is the relationship between work tasks and the information that assistance dog trainers consult, select, and use?
- What challenges do assistance dog trainers face in consulting, selecting, and using information?

Methodology

- 8 research participants from AD member & candidate organizations, selected by purposive sampling
- Demographic questionnaire
- Semi-structured interview (average ~45 minutes):
 - Work tasks
 - Instances when participants consulted, selected, and used information
 - Challenges to information use
- Analysis: open coding

Results

- The players



The early life of



▼ Birth



▼ Intensive training (with T)



▲ Fostering



▲ Matching (with P)

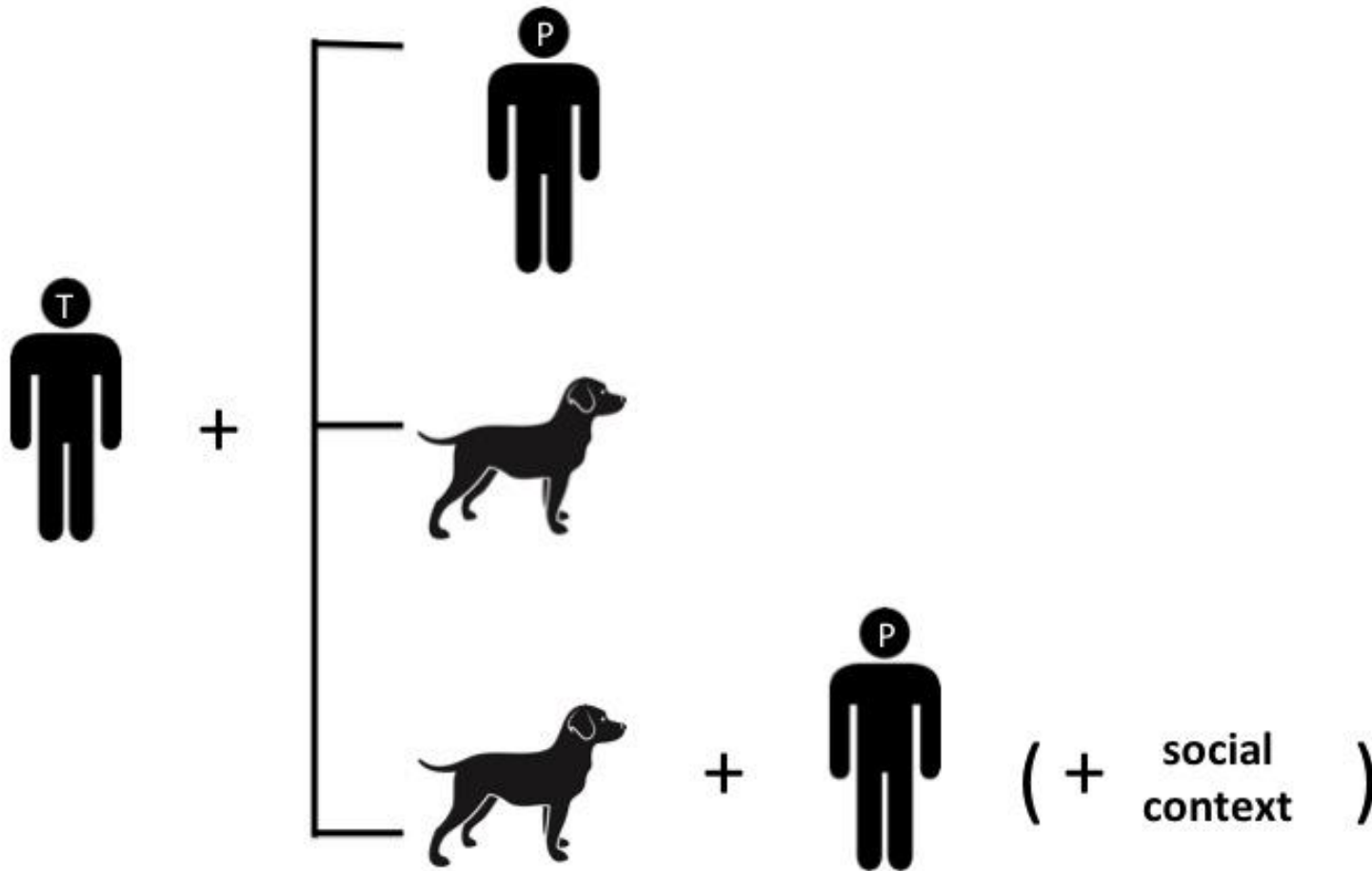
Image sources (L-R)

<http://dunsmarshlabs.com/bbfarmblog/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/summerpups5days.jpg>

http://mira.ca/en/vitrine/1/15/en-vitrine_00629.html ; http://www.mira.ca/en/about-us-/3/jobs_19.html

<http://globalnews.ca/news/483216/service-dogs-can-help-autistic-children-study/>

Task categories



T = Assistance Dog Trainer; P = Assistance Dog Partner (Recipient)

Consultation

- Partner-specific information
- Training methodology
- Behavioural troubleshooting
- Professional development

Consultation limitations

- Time
 - Pressure to deliver quickly
 - Filled daily schedule
- Money
 - Employers have charitable status
- Accessibility
 - Specialized resources
 - Resources may require leave and/or money

Selection

“So, every, everybody has these different [...] ideas of how dogs learn, and that kind of thing. So we read up on these things and, sometimes we can take little bits and pieces from all of that information, and use it with what we’re doing.”

Selection factors



Philosophy

“I’ve had trainers tell me that if I would just leash-correct the dog, [...] that would solve the problem. We’ve gone from that in the past, [but] it doesn’t comply with our [current] philosophy.”

Past experience

“A colleague [...] is extremely talented, like, she’s extremely intuitive with animals, like dogs, and horses, and probably lots of animals. So she herself has developed a new technique that is based on [...] how she trains horses, how to move their feet. [...] And it’s not classically positive reinforcement, using different – a different, her own technique. And if I didn’t know how amazingly talented she was, I would probably be going, ‘Hm, I’m not sure.’”

Peer opinion

“Someone else will tell me about a book, or I’ll hear about it, or someone’s posted about a book, and I’ll look into it. I’ll ask questions, ‘Well, how did you feel about it?’”

Use

- Training methodology: situation-dependent
 - “Some dogs are very, what we call a soft dog, and so I can’t correct that dog really hard, I have to be more positive. I’ve got one right now. She doesn’t heel very well, but if I’m really positive with her, heels beautifully. And then I might have a really tough dog, that needs a really firm handler, giving direction, and then he’s in line and beautiful. But I can’t do that to the other dog, I’d shut her down.”
- Partner-related information: essential to work tasks

Implications for academic librarians

- Overlap with:
 - Specialized professional education (e.g. rehabilitation medicine)
 - Focus on best practices
 - Need access to highly specialized materials
 - Distance education learners
 - Geographically disparate individuals
 - Working to meet assessment criteria
 - Need for materials to accommodate diverse learning styles

Sources

- Assistance Dogs International, (n.d. - a). North America - ADINA. Retrieved from: <http://www.assistancedogsinternational.org/location/north-america-adina/>
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- Hackman, J. R. (1969). Toward understanding the role of tasks in behavioral research. *Acta Psychologica*, 31, 97-128.
- Wilson, T. D. (1997). Information behaviour: An interdisciplinary perspective. *Information Processing & Management Information Processing & Management*, 33(4), 551-572.

Questions?



Image source: <http://www.assistedogsinternational.org/standards/>

Demographic Questionnaire

excerpt

5. How long have you worked as a trainer of assistance dogs?

- less than 1 year
- 1 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- 16 – 20 years
- 21 – 25 years
- 26 – 30 years
- 31 years or more

6. How long have you worked with an assistance dog organization, in any capacity?

- less than 1 year
- 1 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- 11 – 15 years
- 16 – 20 years
- 21 – 25 years
- 26 – 30 years
- 31 years or more

Interview guide excerpt

- Please tell me what makes you decide to use new information in your work.
 - Can you tell me about a time when you looked for and used information?
 - Can you tell me about a time when you received information without looking for it, and used it in your work?
 - Can you tell me about a time when you decided not to use information that you had encountered?