

CoVa

volgens plan?

Een vooronderzoek naar de mogelijkheden
en reikwijdte van een effectonderzoek
van de cognitieve vaardigheidstraining



Summary

Beke // reeks

CoVa volgens plan?

Een vooronderzoek naar de mogelijkheden
en reikwijdte van een effectonderzoek
van de cognitieve vaardigheidstraining

Henk Ferwerda
Anton van Wijk
Nicole Arts
Jos Kuppens

Beke // reeks

Summary

The Cognitive Skills Training (cognitieve vaardigheidstraining in Dutch) is one of the behavioural interventions aimed at adult justiciables (offenders subject to criminal justice orders) that is fully recognized by the Recognition Committee for Behavioural Interventions (Erkenningscommissie Gedragsinterventies Justitie) of the Dutch Ministry of Justice.

This Cognitive Skills Training is provided to justiciables both intramurally and extramurally. A training course consists of twenty sessions and is generally given by two permanent trainers. Ten to twelve people participate in such a training course. The training course follows a carefully defined teaching programme (guide).

One of the conditions for recognition was that an evaluation of the effects of the Cognitive Skills Training had to be carried out within five years. Before such a study can be carried out it is important to determine whether the Cognitive Skills Training was given as intended or, in other words, whether the teaching programme was strictly adhered to in the training sessions. To this aim, the following three research questions were formulated:

- Is the Cognitive Skills Training behavioural intervention applied consistently and according to plan with respect to the Cognitive Skills Training inclusion criteria?
- Is the Cognitive Skills Training behavioural intervention applied consistently and according to plan with respect to the preconditions that apply to the training?
- Is the Cognitive Skills Training behavioural intervention applied consistently and according to plan with respect to the implementation of the programme guide?

In order to be able to answer the research questions, the available Cognitive Skills Training data from the 2005 test phase onwards were collected in close consultation with the Dutch Probation Service (Reclassering Nederland). Unfortunately, it turned out that it was impossible for us to obtain all the relevant data concerning participants, trainings and training staff. In addition to interviews with various experts, the following source material was available (to a certain extent) and accessible for our study:

- recordings of the numbers of trainings, participants, dropouts;
- forms about the course of the trainings and the deployment of training staff;
- trainer evaluation forms;
- video recordings of trainings.

Finally, research results were presented to five experts. They were asked what implications the research results should have for a possible future study into the effects of the Cognitive Skills Training.

The study shows that until the second half of 2008 99 trainings took place. A total of 1,106 participants entered a training programme and 812 participants completed the training (a dropout rate of 27%).

If we look at the research results in order to answer the first research question, it turns out that we have gained information on two of the seven inclusion criteria, viz the RISC total score and the scores on scale 11 (patterns of thinking, behaviour and skills) of the RISC. Hence, we cannot determine whether all participants met the inclusion criteria of the Cognitive Skills Training. As far as information is available, it turns out that 82.8% of the participants met both inclusion criteria.

The second research question regarding the training preconditions was operationalized by looking at the dropout rate and changes in training staff. A complete training consists of twenty sessions and each session is led by two trainers. The study shows that in 22.4% of the training courses no dropouts and/or changes occurred. However, in the other training courses drop-outs and/or changes did occur; in the majority of cases it concerned changes in training staff (68.2%).

The last research question, which addresses the adherence to the programme guide, has been operationalized by using quantitative and qualitative evaluations of the training staff. The results show that 46 out of 94 trainers who gave the trainings in the past few years, could be assessed on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative data. The evaluation shows that on the basis of various sources 22% of the trainers were assessed as not up to standard.

As mentioned before, the research results were finally presented to five experts, who were asked whether they thought the available data could be used for an effect study (retrospective study). Generally speaking, the experts thought this was indeed possible, but that it should be assessed to what extent the rather poor quality of the training sessions, the non-compliance with the inclusion criteria and the dropout rate have affected the outcomes of the Cognitive Skills Training. Caution is required, however, because in spite of all the reservations the results of such a study might start leading a life of their own.

Should a retrospective effect study be decided upon, though, it is roughly estimated that a maximum of 725 participants can be included in such a study. Given this size, the number of variables to be studied or controlled will be limited in any case. Research must definitely be done into the type of training (intramural or extramural), the inclusion criteria, participant dropout rates, cancellation of trainings, changes in training staff and the quality of the training staff.

In order to thoroughly study the effects of the Cognitive Skills Training, prospective research is required anyhow. This study makes clear that in that case sufficient attention must be paid to the systematic collection of relevant data with the help of a predesigned data collection format.