

Using Bliss symbolics to advance emergency information – results from a co-creation workshop with experts

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- Bliss symbolics
- Communication
- Emergency information
- Co-creation
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Abstract (300 words):

During the Covid-19 pandemic, it became clear that emergency management on a societal level largely failed to reach many groups within the disability community, particularly those with difficulties accessing, understanding, or responding to information.

Bliss symbolics is a symbol-based language used by persons who require the use of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) due to severe speaking difficulties, most commonly in combination with physical disabilities. Bliss communicators often use a combination of both low-tech printed paper charts and high-tech computers with speech generating devices. While the high-tech communication programs offer the possibility to independently change and personalize the user's vocabulary, it is often a complex task with which many require help. When something unforeseen happens, a new vocabulary is needed instantly – but many emergency -specific words are not yet developed for Bliss symbolics.

The purpose of this study was to investigate what individual needs Bliss users can identify in an emergency, and to explore how these relate to national emergency recommendations. The method used was a co-creation workshop where Bliss expert users participated. Using scenarios of different emergency situations, the group identified main challenges in relation to various crisis set-ups, both regarding recommended actions and how these recommendations were communicated. They also identified flaws in examples from previous emergency information, and proposed ideas for improvements on how to interpret emergency information using the Bliss symbolics.

To conclude, Bliss users constitute a unique group of expert users, combining the need for technological, communicative, and physical adaptations. Using co-creation together with Bliss users proved to be a creative way to reach new knowledge about emergency information design. The insights also provided valuable input and an increased interest to develop this research area.