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Could do better: research inclusion in organization and management studies, and how not to disable deaf workers

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A 10-minute BSL summary of this article by Gardner and Palfreyman can be found on the Open Science Foundation website at: https://osf.io/jpurg/files/bny34.

Purpose

Based on dialogic discussion of an empirical case study narrative, the paper provides a 'better practice' commentary to help hearing researchers include deaf workers as research participants. We argue that more attention should be paid to the concept of research inclusion in all organizational research in order to anticipate and operationalize research methods that allow for a full diversity of research participants to be included.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper draws on Bakhtin's theory for a dialogic exchange between two hearing researchers who provide a reflexive narrative about including deaf workers in a research study, and a deaf academic and a sign language interpreter who provide professional and personal commentary upon it.

Findings

The under-employment, and thus workplace absence, of particular sociodemographic groups such as deaf sign language users can lead to taken-for-granted assumptions about adequate research methods for participant recruitment and data collection in studies of organizations and work sites.

Originality

We fill a gap in the organizational research methods literature by exploring the methodological concept of research inclusion from the perspective of different disciplines, bringing organization research into dialogue with deaf and interpreting studies and health and medical research.

Research limitations/implications

The paper addresses research inclusion specifically in relation to working with deaf British Sign Language (BSL) users.

Practical implications

The paper provides hearing researchers with practical methodological advice to help overcome barriers for deaf workers' participation in organizational research.

Social implications

The paper works towards a greater level of research inclusion for an 'under-served group' that has tended to be marginalised both in employment and in mainstream studies of work and employment.

Keywords: case study research, deafness, disability, diversity, ethics, inclusion, inequalities

Introduction

Growing attention to the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) has emerged alongside dedicated streams of research focusing on inequalities in work and employment experienced by groups defined by specific sociodemographic characteristics or identities. A stream of research focusing on disability has identified structural inequalities and discriminatory practices in the way that work and organizations are organized: for instance, how 'ableist' discourses impact upon disabled people's access to employment and how (or whether) they thrive at work (e.g. Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021, Kwon and Archer, 2022). This research highlights the importance of paying attention to the inclusion of disabled people as workers in organizational settings. Nevertheless we argue that organizational research projects that do not have a specific focus on inequalities and EDI should also be taking issues of inclusion much more seriously: as research inclusion in research design, methods, and ethics. Otherwise, as we show in this paper, it is too easy to unintentionally disable workers and to perpetuate structural inequalities via research practices.

Our paper emerges from a reflexive dialogue between four researchers who provide different perspectives on a case study of job quality where two of the researchers had not anticipated working with deaf sign language users. Clare and Gail, hearing researchers with English as their native language, relate a 'confessional tale' (Van Maanen, 1988) about how they risked disabling the deaf workers through taken-for-granted ableist assumptions within their research methods. Nick, a Professor of Sign Languages and Deaf Studies who is deaf and who uses British Sign Language (BSL), and Sarah, a BSL-English interpreter who has worked as a designated interpreter with Nick for several years, contribute theoretical and methodological insights from their different professional, disciplinary, and personal perspectives.

Together we draw on Bakhtin's theorising of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986) to bring different voices, experiences, and perspectives together – both in the process of developing the paper and in its structure – to present some lessons learnt. These lessons draw on social and cultural models of deafness: we show firstly some structurally disabling effects of everyday research practices, but secondly how hearing researchers might address these disabling effects through better 'insider' knowledge of sign language cultures. Rather than treating deaf workers as disabled in a hearing world, we suggest how hearing researchers may become more culturally competent in a deaf signing world.

The focus on deaf sign-language use offers an opportunity to explore how to enact research inclusion through the way we communicate. The UK charity RNID, that works to end discrimination against deaf people, notes that social attitudes have significant negative impacts upon deaf people, such as making them feel isolated and excluded, with deaf BSL users feeling the worst impacts (RNID, 2023). RNID (2023) notes that, although one in five adults are deaf or having hearing loss, public awareness of deafness and how to communicate with deaf people is low. Meanwhile the employment rate of BSL users is comparatively low. That is, our communicative practices make a difference and yet there is little prompt to consider these practices in mainstream organizational research because researchers may not be expecting to encounter sign language users in the workplace.

The paper's core contribution overall is methodological: to debate why and how the concept of research inclusion, which has dominated agendas in health-related and medical research, should also be applied to organizational research. Through our dialogue we identify gaps and assumptions in organizational research practices and ethics that we share with the aim of developing not only a more inclusive research culture but also more inclusive workplaces for deaf workers. We call for both wider attention to research inclusion across organizational research studies and more detailed attention to communicative practices for deaf inclusion. The paper is presented not as a study of best practice but to suggest *better* practice to dismantle structural inequalities produced and perpetuated in research processes. It invites further dialogic response from others in order to take forward and develop more inclusive research together.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the next section, we set out some background context on EDI and the agendas of organizational inclusion and research inclusion, and why deaf workers should be regarded as an 'under-served group' for inclusion purposes. Clare and Gail then offer a reflexive narrative in five 'chapters' that summarises how they encountered, recruited, and generated data with a group of workers who used sign language as their preferred means of communication as participants in a case study of job quality. This is followed by a dialogic discussion with commentary from Nick and Sarah and response from Clare and Gail. We organize this discussion as four 'lessons learnt', as new understandings about research practices that emerged from dialogue. These move from close-grained practical advice for hearing researchers to a wider and more general call for greater attention to research inclusion in order to dismantle structurally disabling research practices. We end with some research implications and concluding comments that include the paper's limitations and some desirable next steps.

The case for organizational and research inclusion

Structural inequalities and discriminatory practices that face certain sociodemographic groups in work and employment have long been recognised (see for instance Fevre et al., 2013; Oswick and Noon, 2014). Research has explored the specific experiences of discrimination and marginalization. For example, a line of academic work is emerging on the difficulties that disabled people have in accessing and flourishing in good quality jobs (e.g. Fevre *et al.*, 2013; Jammaers *et al.*, 2016; Jammaers and Zanoni, 2021; Kwon and Archer, 2022; Van Laer *et al.*, 2022).

Recently the language of 'organizational inclusion', often twinned with 'diversity', has been gaining ground over terms such as equality, equity, and equal opportunities (Adamson *et al.*, 2021; Nguyen *et al.*, 2024; Shore *et al.*, 2018). Although definitions are contested, inclusion is usually seen as a positive concept and as supporting a diverse workforce to flourish. The proposition is that through emphasizing and implementing inclusive practices, barriers to full organizational participation will be removed for workers who have been traditionally marginalized, and they will feel a greater sense of belonging and of being valued in a heterogeneous workforce (Adamson *et al.*, 2021). Nevertheless how inclusion is operationalised to benefit a diverse workforce is still being debated (see Adamson *et al.*, 2021; Dobusch, 2021).

Meanwhile, the language of *research* inclusion emphasises issues of unequal representation and involvement in the research process. The term may still be uncommon in organizational research but has higher profile in medical and health-related research. For instance, in 2024 the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR), a significant UK research funding body, announced an explicit requirement for all those submitting funding applications to demonstrate how they will address existing inequalities in health and social care[1]. The announcement noted that this approach stems from a concern that the benefits of research do not always translate to 'real-world populations', are not 'deliverable to all groups', and that '[i]mportant findings specific to particular groups might be overlooked, maintaining existing inequalities in health and social care'[2]. One of the important implications was that medical and health researchers would now have to consider how 'under-served groups' could be enabled to take part in research.

This emphasis on enablement moves ethics from defensive (Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009) considerations of participant harm, informed consent, and choices of whether or not to be involved in a study, towards emphasising what researchers can do to encourage a diverse range of people to be meaningfully involved in research that may affect their lives. It focuses more attention on positive promotion and the removal of barriers to participation for under-served groups.

A number of barriers to participation in health research have been identified. In a US context, Passmore *et al.* (2024) note how participation decisions for African Americans are built upon perceptions of the trustworthiness of the research team, influenced by similarity to researcher identities (see also Emmel *et al.*, 2007; Kenway and Riley, 2021) as well as issues of consent and knowledge of the study's purpose and likely data uses. In a specific study of research ethics and protections for deaf participants, researchers' sign language abilities were critical for creating trust and increasing deaf people's willingness to participate (Singleton *et al.*, 2014). Barriers to participation also include *researchers' own perceptions* about who they are targeting: Passmore *et al.* (2021) find that researchers may dismiss research inclusion through perceiving that no relevant under-served groups exist for their study (thus no effort is needed) or that barriers are insurmountable (thus effort will be ineffective).

The emphasis on promoting participation for 'under-served groups' may map easily onto organizational research projects that have a focus on a particular sociodemographic group or protected characteristic such as the studies on disability that we noted above. In this context, a research study lead can assemble a research team with suitable skills and identities that might resonate with the target group. However, this leaves a question about how research inclusion might be applied in other more general research contexts.

For example, in case study research designs that are grounded in a choice of workplace site, organization, or location, the focus is likely to be on the site and its characteristics in terms of the suitability for the study's aims, research question(s) and theoretical goals (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Fitzgerald and Dopson, 2009). The sociodemographic characteristics and the diversity of workers that may be encountered as potential research participants then become a secondary consideration, addressed largely at the stage of ethics applications.

In this context, consideration of under-served groups play out in commonly asked questions set by institutional ethics review procedures. Common ethics questions prompt considerations of: participant inclusions and exclusions couched in relation to the research questions and theoretical focus, about gatekeepers, access, representative voice and sampling, workers on site that might be 'hard to reach'; the voluntary nature of participation and how informed consent, and the ability to withdraw from the study will be handled; participant privacy and data protection; harms that may arise to participants; and whether deception will be involved (Bryman and Bell, 2015, pp.133-134; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008, pp.70-74). These ethics procedures often take a defensive and protective position (Bell and Wray-Bliss, 2009) rather than focusing on a right to participation (see Webster *et al.,* 2014).

Moreover, we found little in methodological and ethics discussions about how communication itself may be a barrier to inclusion, even in texts that focus on encouraging participation (e.g. Birch and Miller, 2002). Where language issues arise in research studies, for example in research on migrant labour (Agar and Manolchev, 2020) or in countries other than the researchers' own (e.g. Jenkins and Blyton, 2017), we found relatively little about the ways in which communication was enabled other than passing references to translation services. Xian (2008) stands out in this regard, providing an explicit discussion of the mediating role of translators. Some studies of disability and employment refer to deaf workers among the participants (e.g. Bend and Priola, 2023; Jammaers *et al.,* 2016; Randle and Hardy, 2017) but with little detail about how deafness influenced research interactions.

Against this background of organizational and research inclusion, in the next section we address deafness and sign language use as characteristics relating to an under-served group in organizational research.

Deafness and workplace inclusion

Statistics suggest 12 million people in the UK are affected by deafness, hearing loss, or tinnitus, with one person in eight of working age affected[3]. Of these, it is estimated that 87 thousand deaf people use BSL[4]. Deafness is captured under the protected characteristic of 'disability' in the UK Equality Act (2010), legislation that is intended to protect subjects from direct and indirect discrimination and from victimisation.

Official UK data suggest that the percentage of deaf and hard of hearing people in employment is relatively high (61.5%) in comparison to employment figures for other forms of disability (ONS, 2019)[5]. However, this may reflect the widespread nature of deafness and the range of conditions involved, from deafness at birth through to common forms of milder hearing loss linked with older age. Across the various categories of deafness, the employment situation for deaf people who use sign language is much starker. RNID indicates that only 37% of people who report BSL as their main language are in employment[6]. Moreover, many of the failings of public bodies reported in relation to deafness occur because of a lack of adequate provision of BSL interpretation or other accessible communication (UKIM, 2023). Deaf people who use BSL therefore appear particularly marginalised in employment and at risk of discrimination in the workplace.

However, this narrative of marginalisation is not the full story. Medical models of deafness as a pathology that needs to be treated or 'cured' (for example through cochlear implants) (Kenway and Riley, 2021) have been countered by structural models that point out that disabled people become disabled via the structures and environments in which they are embedded rather than through any inherent personal deficit (see Bend and Priola, 2023; Oliver, 2013).

Moreover, cultural models of deafness can be distinguished both from social models that focus on structural disablement and from medical models of deafness as pathology (Young and Hunt, 2011). A cultural model acknowledges the unique identity of deaf communities arising from shared practices and norms. The use of sign languages, which inhabit the visual-gestural modality rather than the aural-oral modality for communication purposes, is central to this identity, picking up the sense of ability from community members' perspective and questioning the fundamental link to disability (see Bramwell *et al*., 2000). While many sign languages exist globally, we focus on BSL in this paper. It was legally recognised through the British Sign Language (BSL) Act 2022 as a language of England, Scotland and Wales. Government departments now have new reporting duties and public sector organisations are required to consider BSL use in regard to their equality duties.

Methodology: How we wrote this paper

The main impetus for this paper arose when Clare moved to take up a post in the same UK university as Nick. Nick is the Director of the International Institute for Sign Languages and Deaf Studies at the University of Lancashire. Clare met him by chance, and they discussed her previous involvement with deaf employees in a research study. Clare and Gail had been left with the desire to reflect on their practices and decisions taken during that study, and this seemed an opportunity to develop an 'ethical conscience'. Webster et al. (2014) describe an ethical conscience as addressing not only the ethical dilemmas within the lifecycle of a research project but also reflecting upon these dilemmas subsequently for lessons learnt and future improvements. Nick and Sarah agreed to contribute to a paper of lessons learnt drawing on their personal experiences and professional expertise.

To initiate the paper, Clare and Gail drew on their research study notes, including a memo recording the methodological issues and queries relating to working with the deaf employees, to compile a narrative of the research interaction for Nick and Sarah's comment. We reshaped the paper through a series of re-drafts with Clare and Gail submitting a version to Nick and Sarah and vice versa, and with each author responding to the new version with fresh comments, questions, clarifications and revisions. Online conversations took place twice to discuss and agree the paper's overall arguments. Altogether the dialogue unfolded over 15 months.

We drew on Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984, 1986; Cunliffe *et al.*, 2014) as an analytic lens to support the paper's development. For Bakhtin, dialogue concerns not just language and communication but is also a way of being in the world (Cunliffe *et al.*, 2014, p.336). That is, ontologically we exist always in dialogic relationships with others and it is in dialogic contact with others that (changing) understandings and interpretations of our world emerge.

Bakhtin (1981) describes continuous dynamic tensions in social life that play out in 'unfinalizable' centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centrifugal forces in dialogue operate to open up and decentralise meanings and generate novelty (Cunliffe *et al.,* 2014) as 'the struggle with another's word [or meaning] opens up a new word' (Morris, 1994, p.74). Through considering centrifugal forces in our dialogue, we reviewed the sites of difference in our interpretations and experiences, and where assumptions in Clare and Gail's research training and practice were not necessarily shared by Nick and Sarah. Via discussion of these centrifugal differences, we identified key areas for new understandings and lessons learnt. In our reading around notions of research practices and disability inclusion, we encountered the emerging debates about 'research inclusion' in health research. These resonated with our discussions about including the deaf employees in the case study and brought another 'voice' into the dialogue.

Meanwhile, centripetal forces centralise and unify meanings, create monologic closings, and are 'necessary for sharing social life' (Cunliffe et al., 2014). Through thinking about centripetal forces in our dialogue, we identified and agreed the suggestions for better practice in this paper.

In the next section, Clare and Gail set out a summarised version of the narrative in five 'chapters' that they offered to Nick and Sarah. It describes the empirical research study and key points in the journey to show when and how they engaged with the deaf workers as research participants. Some of the detail in the narrative has been anonymised to protect participant identities. Participants are referred to via pseudonyms.

A narrative of conducting research with deaf workers: did we do enough?

The research project was led by Gail as Principal Investigator. She had secured funding for a case study of job quality in a catering company whose remit was to provide services to a university in England. The managers of the company were keen to develop a research project that would evaluate the impact of recently introduced apprenticeship training and address and improve staff morale amid significant organizational change and restructuring. From an academic research perspective, the study site represented an opportunity to engage with debates about job quality and job satisfaction in low-paid, ostensibly low-skilled employment contexts (e.g. see Knox *et al.*, 2015). Gail proposed a research approach that was longitudinal in design and that would track employees' subjective evaluations of their jobs as the apprenticeship training and organizational change unfolded. In total, the research ran for three years (2017-2020). It followed the first cohort of apprentices and their thoughts on their jobs, job quality and their working lives from before they started their training through to their graduation and beyond.

1. *Setting up the project and ethics*

Through initial conversations with the company's managers, we explored the research focus, developed potential research questions, and considered how we might operationalise them. In these conversations, the managers elaborated on the workforce size and demographics and the various sites of work that included catered student halls of residence (i.e. dining halls in different residential buildings). Job roles included 'front of house' hospitality supervisors and assistants; and 'back of house' senior chefs, junior chefs, and kitchen assistants. The managers mentioned a small number of deaf workers and explained that they often used a BSL interpreter to assist with communication at work meetings. The university and the catering company were working with a local recruitment agency that helped unemployed deaf people to find employment, with support from the UK Government's Access to Work scheme[7]. The managers reported that one of the deaf employees in the catering unit was studying for an apprenticeship.

At this point, no specific issues were raised, by us or to us, on the implications of the deaf workers for our research plans. We had no prior expertise of working with sign language users and did not think about specific questions to ask. Instead, the focus was principally on research design, data collection, and general recruitment options including the logistics and conditions for doing so (interview locations, time off work that might be granted for taking part, etc).

Clare and Gail obtained approval for the study as 'low risk' research from their university business school ethics committee. The online ethics application form requested that we include participants '*only if they have experiences and/or characteristics relevant to the research question(s) being investigated'* and exclude them *'...only when they do not have experiences or characteristics relevant to the research question(s) being investigated.'* For our study, the inclusions and exclusions related to working in the catering sites and jobs identified and to participation in the apprenticeship training. We confirmed that our 'recruitment advertisements or equivalent communication' would *'not be coercive'*, would be *'limited to information that prospective participants need to determine their eligibility and interest'*, and *'without stating or implying a favourable outcome or other benefit beyond what is outlined in the participant information sheet'*. We also specified the methods we would use, which included one-to-one interviews, focus group interviews, and video methods. The latter was included to allow for possible recordings of focus groups in case audio-recordings alone failed to distinguish participant voices clearly enough: at this point we were still thinking largely about spoken voice.

At no point during the ethics review process was there any *explicit* prompt to consider EDI-related adjustments or encouragement for research inclusion that might be needed to support employees to participate. At this stage it was still too easy to carry on thinking in general terms and to gloss over how we might include the deaf employees. Instead, our attention was upon drafting written text in English that we hoped would be appropriate and easy to understand in lay terms to convey the research focus and scope.

2. Recruiting the deaf workers

After receiving ethics approval, Clare and Gail pinned posters onto the notice boards in staff rooms at the student dining halls, provided copies of the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) for managers to circulate to teams, and attended staff meetings where we introduced ourselves and the project with opportunities for staff to ask questions. We then spent time in one of the cafés at the halls of residence where staff tended to congregate socially: this was so that we could talk to workers informally, without the presence of management and without any pressure, to see if they were interested in participation. During this time, we were not aware of any deaf staff being present. None of them contacted us to express interest in being involved in our research, but neither did many of the hearing employees. It was only gradually, as we sat and engaged informally in the café, that individual (hearing) workers mentioned an interest in participating. Recruitment then followed a snowballing trajectory where one participant encouraged colleagues to become involved. Many had worked together for years and indeed were often related to each other through family ties.

The first time we knowingly met one of the deaf workers was at a hall of residence when Clare was preparing to conduct an interview with someone else. By now, Clare knew the other staff in that hall and went to introduce herself to the one person present who she had not yet met. This turned out to be Peter, one of the four deaf employees. To begin with, Peter used lipreading to follow what Clare was saying although he explained that it was not his preferred means of communication[8]. They then conversed briefly through a mix of gesture, reference to the PIS text, supplementary handwritten notes, and some rudimentary BSL assistance from Peter's team supervisor who came to join the conversation. Clare asked Peter whether he would be interested in participating in the study. He indicated that he might but that he wanted to check with his deaf colleagues and think about it some more. He suggested Clare send him an email to follow up. As per our ethics protocol, this was entirely appropriate, giving him time to consider his involvement.

Subsequent to an email exchange, Peter reported that he had discussed the study with his colleagues and confirmed they would all be happy to participate. The four staff comprised:

- Peter, a kitchen assistant in his early 50s;
- Joe, a kitchen assistant in his late 20s;
- Faye, a hospitality assistant in her mid-20s; and
- Monica, a hospitality assistant in her late 40s, who also happened to be Faye's mother.

Faye was enrolled onto the company's apprenticeship programme: she mentioned being keen to progress in a career and to 'show what deaf people can achieve at work'. Each worker brought with them a different life experience of work and employment, and potentially a different assessment of job quality, across a generation age range that might pick up shifting social attitudes towards deafness. We were keen to include them all.

However, one caveat that Peter conveyed was a request for a group interview with Jenny, their usual BSL interpreter, present rather than the individual one-to-one interviews we had been conducting with hearing participants. Peter suggested that we work with Jenny to make the interview arrangements. He put us in touch via email, and Jenny responded in agreement.

3. *Setting up the interviews*

When we met with Jenny to follow up, she provided contextual background about the organization's recruitment of deaf workers prompted by corporate social responsibility commitments, and also about her own role with the four employees. They had all worked together for two years and knew each other well.

Jenny's prior relationship with them made her a formidable gatekeeper both in a positive way, in making the interviews happen, but also (unnervingly for us) taking away our agency so that pre-interview communications and consent arrangements operated quite differently than with hearing participants. While we attempted to communicate directly with the four staff via SMS and WhatsApp, their responses were less forthcoming to us than they were to her. It was Jenny who confirmed interview time, date, and location after the five of them had discussed it together.

There was a paradox in our relationship with her. On one hand it was disconcerting to have organizing power taken away by her; on the other hand, we relied heavily on her direct relationships with the participants. It felt like our research was useful to her. Jenny was strongly supportive of the people she worked with, and passionate about securing opportunities for deaf workers to progress. She described our research as providing an opportunity to highlight issues of job quality for deaf workers. In turn, there were benefits to us from Jenny's longstanding relationship with the participants. They seemed to trust her after working with her for a long time and we felt confident that she was acting in their interests and that she would follow our research ethics requirements, for instance around consent, confidentiality, and data management. We relied significantly on her activism in our attempts to be inclusive.

Because all four employees worked part-time and in different halls, it was difficult to find a suitable time and place for everyone. Ultimately, two group interviews were arranged, neither with all four staff. The first, in May 2018, included Joe, Faye and Monica. Although Peter had instigated the research participation, he was not able to attend this interview, so we missed him out of the first round. First interviews in our research design aimed to explore subjects' constructions of job quality and how they evaluated their current jobs and employment as good quality. Second interviews focused on subjects' constructions of job quality in light of any changes to personal or work situations. The second interview with deaf staff took place in June 2019 and included Joe and Peter. Faye was absent on long-term sick leave, and Monica did not reply to our or Jenny's invitation. In this second interview we invited Joe to comment on longitudinal aspects about how job quality might have changed while inviting Peter to respond also to some of the first-interview questions that he had missed.

4. *The practicalities of data collection*

Once the idea of a group interview had been agreed, we gave more thought to how we were going to capture our data in a group situation using sign language. We still needed an audio recorder and a quiet space to record Jenny's voice responding on behalf of the deaf workers. We brought the usual audio-recording devices that we had been using with other participants. As BSL is primarily visual, Jenny advised that she would bring her own video-recorder and set it up in her usual way when working with the group. She would then provide us with the encrypted video-recording.

We used a meeting room located at a hall of residence to conduct both interviews. In both, the deaf staff sat next to each other along one side of a table, with Jenny and Gail as the research interviewer on the other side of the table. This enabled the research participants to maintain eye contact with Jenny as she interpreted but also with enough space to turn, see, and sign to each other. To check the signing later if needed, Jenny set up her video-recorder to focus principally on the research participants. However, she and Gail also appear in the recorded image. Meanwhile, Clare sat to the side of the room out of video sight, and made notes of methodological issues that felt useful to record[9].

Jenny held a crucial role in how the interview dialogue unfolded, including when it began. Below is an illustrative vignette taken from the beginning of the second interview's audio-recording. There are sounds of whispering, papers shuffling, but no words in English until Jenny speaks after 51 seconds: she says to Gail that she has just explained that the interview is confidential, and in response Peter has made a comment about one his colleagues:

> 'Peter has just said that Faye is cheeky...'

The conversation then continues between Peter, Joe and Jenny, discussing how another deaf worker Faye has said something rude about Jenny and her signing skills. Jenny responds in BSL but with some English spoken aloud, to say that the situation is alright, she will sort it out, and there is nothing for them to worry about. She does not provide a voiceover in English for all of Peter and Joe's signing. The conversation remains between the three of them. Since Gail does not know fully what they are talking about, it is difficult to know whether, when, or how to intervene. Instead, she waits until Jenny starts talking aloud about the research questions on job quality that had previously been provided to her. In writing this paper Gail recalls her feeling of being lost in the conversation and a sense that this must be how deaf workers often feel.

While sometimes Jenny talked aloud in English, so that Gail could follow what she was signing to the interviewee, sometimes she did not. In reverse, neither did she always sign as she relayed in English what the interviewees had just said. There were moments when Gail as interviewer asked a question and continued to provide more context and explanation as Jenny started to sign the question to the research participants. Jenny had to negotiate the multiple activities of translating Gail's initial research enquiry into sign language, listening to the additional information that Gail was providing, and attending to the research participants' responses which themselves sometimes overlapped as the staff conversed between themselves. In hindsight, these overlaps must have been difficult for Jenny to manage though she shows no sign of being flustered in the video-recordings.

Extract 1 from the second interview's transcript illustrates how Jenny's voice represented many participants and positions. (The // marks a line break that we later added to our transcribed document from the recording, retained here to make the text easier to comprehend.)

Extract 1

> 'Clarify, you mean when you're working on your own you feel better, you're happy because you don't feel puh puh other person deaf? // The problem started when Faye started working in the same kitchen, and you started feeling stressed because Faye gossip gossip gossip, yeah? // Yeah. I knew. I knew that was happening. I told [the catering manager] the same. You shouldn't put her in the same kitchen. I told her the same. Because I felt it would puh... do you know what I mean? Faye always gossip gossip gossip... She's a nice girl... sometimes [laughter] ...'

Jenny's vocal output signifies several different roles in this extract:

- It starts with her acting on behalf of Gail as interviewer, requesting that Joe clarify something he has just mentioned, about the conditions under which he feels better about his work. It is a question that Gail might have asked if she had had the capacity to ask directly. Jenny uses sound ('puh puh') as she interprets, as well as English words.
- Secondly, she interprets Joe's signing for Gail as he explains when he started feeling stressed ('The problem started…')
- Third, she responds as herself directly to his comment ('Yeah. I knew …'), expressing agreement with Joe that Faye should not have been placed in the same kitchen as Joe, and that she (Jenny) had suggested so to the manager.
- It is not clear whether the verdict on Faye ('gossip gossip gossip'… and 'she's a nice girl … sometimes') is that of Jenny, Joe, or indeed Peter who was also in the interview.

In this extract, Jenny starts by performing a task for our research project, reporting back Joe's construction of himself as a worker, but then she also provides support and reassurance for him within a longer-term relationship that is important for the two of them to maintain. She is not simply a neutral conduit for translation but an active and trusted agent for this group of staff in this workplace. She was part of the interviewing process and the response. It is her voice, rather than the researcher's, that the interviewees were answering and it is the relationship with her that the interview is drawing upon.

5. *After the interview: transcription, coding, and data analysis*

There were some novel difficulties of transcription that we encountered in these interview recordings. Clare first rendered the data into written English by transcribing from the audio recording. What was striking was the amount of blank space without spoken language. Moments on the audio recording when the interpreter laughs without any voiced explanation reinforce the fact that sign languages are visual languages, and how much of the informal conversation we lost as non-signing researchers. This is arguably the same as any translation in research (see Xian, 2008) but in this case the absence of other spoken voices on the recording reinforces the loss. It was especially difficult to capture the conversation between research participants as they signed to each other without Jenny's interpretation.

It was helpful for transcription purposes when the researcher or interpreter included the name of the interviewee so that this was captured in the audio recording. For instance, in transcript Extract 2 there is a discussion of a diagram illustrating different job characteristics, and which participants feel are essential for 'good quality' jobs:

Extract 2:

Jenny: Peter says 'pay' and 'working relationships', and the third one ... 'working time' hours or 'interesting work' ... one of those two ... what about you? so Joe's just going to have a look at them now ... it's really difficult ... so I would say this one, 'training'

After Jenny has translated Peter's response (choosing 'pay' and 'working relationships', and then either 'working time' or 'interesting work' as his third option), she provides an oral cue to Gail that she is moving to Joe ('what about you?' and then confirming 'Joe's just going to have a look at them [the job characteristics] now'), with the subsequent utterance now part of Joe's response '('it's really difficult').

During transcription Clare frequently left blanks in the participant ID column until it was checked against the video recording. Extract 3 below was initially one monologue in Jenny's voice that needed to be parsed as comments from different participants. It is taken at a point in the interview when the staff were discussing what they disliked about their jobs and Faye has focused on her colleagues' lack of interest in communicating with her.

Extract 3a:

: My staff in my kitchen sign all the time, and are really good, and I love it. Mine don't, they're not interested, they're not bothered, and it really makes me upset and angry, because I've been trying to do things with them. It affects me if they don't communicate with me. Before I was always really quiet, always on my own, very quiet, but it would upset me that the other staff wouldn't try to talk to me as well.

After reviewing the video, Clare made the following cuts:

Extract 3b:

Monica: My staff in my kitchen sign all the time, and are really good, and I love it.

Faye: Mine don't, they're not interested, they're not bothered, and it really makes me upset and angry, because I've been trying to do things with them. It affects me if they don't communicate with me.

Joe: Before I was always really quiet, always on my own, very quiet, but it would upset me that the other staff wouldn't try to talk to me as well.

Without the recorded visual cues of participant signing and Jenny's slightly shifting body position, it would have been difficult to know where to break her voiced monologue and to which research participants to attribute text, thus compromising the interviewees' independence and autonomy of voice.

To conclude this narrative section, we add one final point about our interactions with the deaf employees as research participants: that including their interviews among the other employees was important for our research findings. For example, the deaf workers' choices of job characteristics that were important for job quality were not markedly different to other employees, with pay and working hours/flexibility featuring as top choices. However, one unique aspect was that their constructions of what they liked and disliked about their work drew heavily on the willingness of colleagues and supervisors to include them and to learn at least some sign language. Their involvement pointed out the importance of BSL support and everyday communicative practices for a sense of belonging at work. It prompted the catering company to consider further how to be a more inclusive employer in its everyday actions and organizational norms.

Dialogue: Rethinking 'doing enough' to do better for the research inclusion of deaf participants

Through drafting, reading and discussing the narrative above, we surfaced a number of learning points from the dialogue between different disciplinary, professional, and personal perspectives. We summarise these in this section, retaining a dialogic form that moves between Nick and Sarah's comments upon the narrative and Clare and Gail's responses. In line with Bakhtin's dialogic philosophy, we show how Nick and Sarah decentred Clare and Gail's previous understandings and created new interpretations of research practices. We start with close-grained practical considerations and move on to more general comments about research inclusion and research culture.

Lesson 1: Consider the role of the sign language interpreter

The first lesson learnt is the crucial and highly complex role of the sign language interpreter. In terms of ethical obligations, their positioning matters and needs consideration.

Nick and Sarahs' comments

While it is widely acknowledged that interpreter neutrality cannot be achieved (Metzger, 1999; Wadensjö, 1998; Angelelli, 2004), the scenarios above and the interpreter's involvement within them raise questions about the interpreter role. It has been suggested that interpreters' roles are not fixed or rules-based but rather are dependent on the 'role space' they create and inhabit in any given situation (Llewellyn Jones and Lee, 2014). So what of Jenny's role in these scenarios and what can be learned here for future researchers working with deaf people and interpreters?

Models of interpreting describe how interpreters work and help them understand and reflect on their practice, although Wadensjö (1998) sounds a note of caution about the use of models, contending that interpreting should be viewed holistically as interaction or dialogue and positioning the interpreter as an active participant in the communicative event. These models include: the Helper Model, in which the interpreter adopts a paternalistic role and may act on behalf of the deaf person; the Conduit or Machine Model, where language is expected to pass through the interpreter without influence; the Communication Facilitator model, in which the interpreter actively supports understanding between participants; and the Bilingual/Bicultural Model, which emphasises interpreters' linguistic and cultural knowledge of both deaf and hearing communities while remaining faithful to the intent of the source message (Baker-Shenk and Cokely 1980, McIntire and Sanderson, 1993, 1995).

Through her side conversations and assurances towards the deaf participants through the interviews, Jenny clearly did not view her role as a conduit. Her intentions may have been to demonstrate empathy and build rapport. However, by aligning herself so strongly with the deaf participants, she may have risked alienating herself from the hearing researchers who at times were unaware of what was occurring.

Baraldi (2009) distinguishes between dyadic separation and transformative mediation in regard to the interactional conditions necessary for rapport-building in sign language-mediated interviews. Transformative mediation fosters direct engagement between researcher and participant, supporting trust, agency, and meaningful dialogue. Dyadic separation positions the interpreter as the primary interlocutor, limiting rapport and potentially reducing the richness of interview data. From an observer's perspective, Jenny's approach resembled dyadic separation rather than transformative mediation. Her strong alignment with the deaf participants may have inadvertently hindered the researchers' ability to build their own rapport and follow up effectively.

Jenny's long-standing relationship with the deaf workers meant that she was familiar with their characters and communication styles, workplace practices, and domain-specific vocabulary. She is what is commonly referred to as a designated interpreter, working as an insider. In a designated interpreting role, trust between interpreter and client is paramount and in this case, trust was certainly required given that the research sought honest and open responses. Without familiarity of the work environment, people, practices, and dynamics of a job context, even highly trained interpreters are unlikely to interpret as effectively or seamlessly as designated interpreters with ongoing relationships in the setting (Hauser and Hauser, 2008).

Gile (1995/2009) describes four efforts involved in interpreting: listening and analysis, production, memory, and coordination which includes self-monitoring. When the combined demands of listening, comprehension and production approach or exceed available cognitive capacity, the coordination effort including self-monitoring may be reduced, increasing the risk of errors or omissions. Jenny may not have been aware of how her side conversations and reassurances were affecting the research interaction and may not have considered the appropriateness of these actions in this situation. She may simply have been cognitively overloaded. Alternatively these may be default positions for her. We wonder whether taking on the role of 'gatekeeper' is common practice in Jenny's day-to-day interpreting or if this was solely a coping mechanism in this isolated scenario.

We note that nothing is said about the interpreter's registration status. It may be that Jenny is a fully qualified English/BSL interpreter registered with a body such as the National Register of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). As such, she would agree to adhere to their code of conduct and provide her services in a professional manner[10]. While the definition of 'professional' is open to debate, NRCPD registration provides some assurances regarding the interpreter's qualifications and the possibility of a complaints procedure in the event of any unprofessionalism.

Clare and Gail's response

Neither we nor Jenny had experience of working with BSL interpretation in research. We improvised as we went along and would have appreciated Nick and Sarah's guidance if we had found it before our data collection. From our perspective at the time we felt that Jenny created safety that allowed us to build rapport and follow up questions with the deaf staff. She was certainly aligned with them and not us. We felt the interviews brought an ethnographic richness to our case study as everyday issues the workers were struggling with unfolded in their conversations with Jenny. Through our dialogic discussions now we recognise we under-estimated and under-theorised the interpreter role.

We did not initially appreciate the hard work and complexity of Jenny's task in the interviews, handling spoken and non-spoken language as well as different participants at the same time. Moreover we should have considered her positioning with more ethical care, not only for the workers' benefit but also for Jenny herself. In terms of the workers, our original positioning of her (as helper and advocate) started to feel problematic only as we came into dialogue with Nick and Sarah and started to understand better the distinctions between Helper, Communication Facilitator, and Bilingual/Bicultural models. On Jenny's own behalf, the interview conversations provoked comments about her and her support in relation to the workers' jobs and their job quality, rendering her potentially vulnerable through our research. The dialogue facilitated new understandings of the interpreter role and how their position shapes the nature of research inclusion for deaf participants and how it shapes the nature of the data generated.

Lesson 2: Allow for the logistics of engagement and translation

Our second lesson concerns other practical issues around resources that may enable sign language users to become research participants.

Nick and Sarah's comments

As a matter of good practice, as well as providing information about the project, consent and withdrawal in written and spoken English, this information would be available in BSL at the beginning of the study, explained either in person or remotely.

When the researchers met with Jenny before the first interview, it would have been useful had she explained that interpreting from target to source language would necessitate processing time and that there would be a time lag or décalage in her interpretation. Jenny may also have referred the researchers to the NRCPD website in the UK, which provides resources to ensure they would be aware of certain information beforehand.

It is useful for researchers to provide any preparation material to interpreters ahead of the interviews. Access to preparation materials is essential for effective sign language interpreting from cognitive, interactional, and ethical perspectives. Preparation reduces processing load and supports accuracy in real-time interpreting (Gile, 2009), while enabling interpreters to facilitate participant involvement and rapport in line with transformative dialogic mediation (Baraldi, 2009). It also supports informed role-space decisions (Llewellyn-Jones and Lee, 2014) and appropriate physical positioning, which Sandrelli identifies as central to visual access, turn-taking, and engagement in interpreted encounters (Sandrelli, 2015).

In Lesson 1 we wondered whether Jenny was cognitively overloaded during the interviews. She and the overall research project would have benefited from a co-worker. Hauser and Hauser (2008) note that designated interpreters should be open to working with other interpreters where necessary to allow for turn-taking and to avoid compromising the quality of interpretation. For assignments exceeding two hours in length or that are particularly heavy in content, most sign language interpreters, or those booking their services, will stipulate the need for a co-worker.

A co-worker may have been able to clarify who was saying what when Jenny was unable to do so. The researchers noted a long period of silence at the start of the interview. BSL and English are different languages with their own grammar and syntax: signing in BSL structure whilst vocalising in English is not common practice. A co-worker could have offered an audible side-commentary during the silence, explaining what was happening. This could have improved the researchers' access and control, enabling more interjection and appropriate follow-up questions. A co-worker would also have enriched processes of subsequent evaluation and reflection, which are essential to any interpreting assignment, offering fresh insights from a fellow trained professional on the consequences of choices made.

Sign language interpreters may employ either a simultaneous or a consecutive approach. In simultaneous interpreting, the interpretation is produced in the target language while the source message is still being delivered. In consecutive interpreting, the interpreter waits until the speaker or signer has completed one or more units of meaning before rendering the interpretation (Russell, 2005). Research suggests that consecutive interpreting can allow for greater accuracy and reduced time pressure, particularly in complex or high-stakes interactions, as it affords interpreters more opportunity for analysis and message reformulation (Russell, 2005). A post-interview discussion with the researchers could have provided further insight into this and other aspects of the interpreting process.

Once the deaf participants had been recruited, the researchers, finding themselves in a novel situation, could have sought to consult with a deaf academic or expert. In some circumstances, it might be appropriate to contract a deaf researcher to interview the participants directly. Interviews could be transcribed from BSL into English and passed on to the lead researchers. This would obviously depend on time and cost, but we wonder how different the outcomes of a monolingual interview would have been. There is no single network of deaf researchers in the UK, but happily more deaf academics are now working at HEIs[11].

Clare and Gail's response

In hindsight, we did not fully consider what additional resources we might need in order to include the deaf employees in our research. We did not consider any extra effort around recruitment and assumed the text-based media that we had prepared would be sufficient for all to read. Our first encounter with Peter ('chapter' 2 of the narrative) proved the difficulty of this without additional BSL capability being available. Face-to-face communication, particularly answering queries about the study in real time, was difficult and relied on additional interventions from Peter's team supervisor and additional writing on paper to be accomplished.

Payment for a BSL interpreter's professional time let alone a co-worker had not been factored into our case study research funding bid because it had never been anticipated. Instead, Gail made arrangements from her own personal research budget to pay for Jenny's time. While it may be naïve to suggest that including *potential* resources such as costs for BSL interpretation might be possible in every funding bid, at the very least it is worth thinking in anticipation about how financial costs and compensation for intermediary workers such as interpreters or additional researcher support might be handled to accommodate under-served groups that may emerge in research settings. We return to this point as part of our fourth lesson learnt.

Lesson 3: What need not be different?

While there are issues that need to be addressed for hearing researchers to work well with deaf sign language users, many aspects of the research process remain the same. Therefore we are keen to emphasise the shared humanity and commonality of hearing and deaf subjects, and what does not need to be different in our research designs and methods, in order not to treat deaf people as 'other' and problematic.

Nick and Sarah's comments

The researchers' willingness to accept the deaf participants' requests to be interviewed as a group shows clear accommodation on their part. Would such a request have been accommodated if it had been sought by other hearing participants? Group relationships are complex and in this scenario included a mother and daughter who may not have been comfortable being open in front of each other.

Clare and Gail's response

Nick and Sarah challenge us to think more about why we put in place a different method of interviewing the deaf participants and why we did not interrogate more robustly the request for a group interview. Our answer is that we inferred at the time that it was the only option by which the four workers would feel comfortable and be willing to be involved in the research, and we were keen to include them and learn about their perspectives on job quality. We remember thinking that they had a shared group identity and shared interests, and that the group approach felt an appropriate way forward.

In hindsight, part of the issue was the lack of direct contact between the researchers and each participant, with one employee (Peter) and subsequently the BSL interpreter acting as the mouthpiece for the group. As Nick and Sarah note in Lesson 2, if we had managed the earlier stages of recruitment and negotiation differently, the outcome may have been very different.

Our identity as hearing, non-BSL-signing researchers is important here since, as the methods literature points out (Griffiths et al., 2020; Singleton et al., 2014), researcher identity matters in building the relationship with a target sample group. Gail notes that if this study had been aimed centrally at the experiences of deaf BSL users, it is very unlikely that she would have agreed to lead it[12]. Unlike studies set up right from the start with deaf participants with co-produced research questions and methodologies (e.g. Stone and West, 2012), the issue here arose because the study was incorporating deaf workers into a more heterogeneous sample of catering workers in an organizational setting.

The new understanding that comes from this dialogue is that we needed to find other ways to overcome the 'othering' barrier (Passmore et al., 2021) as we proceeded. We should have tried harder to find a deaf studies centre for advice and a BSL signing researcher to assist. If we had done this we could have discussed the group interview and how appropriate it was: without guidance from deaf academics or sign language interpreters, we did not feel able, or indeed feel it was necessary, to question the request. We did search for materials online at the time but found literature that seemed only minimally useful, focusing upon working with deaf people in research studies specifically relating to deafness (e.g. Young and Hunt, 2011). It might have taken more time to return to an institutional ethics committee with amendments in PIS format and research team constituency, and possibly more cost. However, ethically it could have been a better thing to do.

On the other hand, there are many aspects of working with the deaf group that felt different to us at the time but could be recognised simply as accommodations that might be made for any participant, for instance when agreeing with a hearing participant where, when, and how they would feel comfortable to be interviewed. These are simply options that need to be considered to respond to the specific contexts of people's lives. For example, our study included other participants who spoke English as a second language, for whom sometimes we spoke much more slowly, or repeated or reworded phrases to clarify a question. The main difference between those participants and the deaf staff was that for the latter there was an essential third-party interpreter present in the interview, as noted in Lesson 1.

We emphasise these points here because, while acknowledging that it is important to work through some specific methodological and ethical details, we want to encourage hearing researchers to work with deaf workers as research participants and not exclude them from participant samples through oversight or through perceiving the interaction too difficult to include.

Lesson 4: Face 'ableist' assumptions about languages and communicative practices

Our final lesson returns to the distinction between the static concept of 'disabled' people versus a structural 'disabling' of people as research participants. The lesson here is not only do we need to understand the cultural connotations of deafness and BSL but also to ponder further upon the research culture scaffolding that produces good organizational research. In short we argue that, to be a good organizational researcher and to produce good organizational research, we should be paying closer attention to language and communication issues for research inclusion. This holds not only for EDI-related studies of particular sociodemographic groups but for all empirical studies. It would require certain changes in how organizational research is supported and produced.

Nick and Sarah's comments

The paper raises questions of language preference, modality, and access, against the backdrop of English as the majority language of the UK and BSL as a minority language with associated variation in power and status. According to the social model of disability, we note two kinds of barriers or ways in which disabling conditions were created. Firstly, the hearing researchers lacked competence in BSL, which could be remedied through the use of an interpreter. Secondly, due to educational barriers that many deaf people continue to face, there are deaf people with lower literacy levels or memories of being forced to use English in formal settings (Lane 1992, Ladd 2003, Marschark and Hauser 2012). While some deaf people feel comfortable engaging with materials in English, others would rather receive information in their first or preferred language (Napier and Leeson 2016). This requires greater engagement with modes of communication other than spoken or written English.

Where should responsibility for funding interpreters and other access-related costs lie? We argue that the higher education institution should make provision for this as a reasonable adjustment, motivated by a commitment to research integrity. Promoting this funding to researchers might encourage them to be proactive about inclusion. In general, we lament the fact that BSL interpreters are often regarded as providing a service only to BSL users, and we applaud Clare and Gail both for recognising the valuable contribution of the deaf employees in this situation and for taking the necessary steps to include them.

Clare and Gail's response

A lesson learnt was to think in much more detail, at a much earlier stage in the research lifecycle, about the lived experience of communication and research participation. Nick and Sarah prompt us to consider how we missed much of the social and cultural model of deafness. We emphasise the need to consider communicative practices not as some generic and abstract consideration of disability but as part of a specific lived dialogic experience: in this case, concerning the communicative preferences of deaf BSL users. Such considerations benefit from dialogue with others who have relevant lived experiences to highlight what might otherwise be taken for granted.

In our discussions while drafting this paper, Nick and Sarah noted that university ethics processes in the UK typically include the question 'What arrangements have been made for participants who might not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information, or who have special communication needs?'[13] This question encourages researchers to consider what adjustments might be made so that research processes do not accidentally exclude potential participants based on communication needs. Yet it is not the type of question that the two of us have been explicitly asked to reflect upon as part of ethics reviews during their years employed in UK business and management schools.

Nick and Sarah's comments perhaps highlight the different starting points of our academic disciplines: deaf studies versus organizational studies. While the former proactively considers issues of research inclusion in relation to language and communication, the latter arguably does so in far more limited fashion. We found little in the extant organizational research methods literature on potential adjustments to encourage and support deaf workers' participation. The emphasis above on special communication needs seems to be mostly absent in organizational research ethics. This perhaps highlights an assumption about the typical characteristics of workers who might be found in the workplace. Do we just tend to assume that workplaces will not include sign language users? Yet involving deaf workers in our study of job quality in catering became important not only as an ethical practice of inclusion but as a means to generate pertinent actionable findings from the study that had real-life implications for the workers at the case study site.

In summary, what might a research inclusive approach have looked like?

- In early negotiations of access we could have paid more attention to the workforce demographic data available, considered potential communication preferences of participants even without prior guarantees of involvement, focusing on ethics as enabling participation and meaningful research inclusion rather than the defensive approach of protecting from harm.

- We could have drawn more on a cultural model of deafness that encompasses ideas of linguistic ability and tried to engage support from a deaf researcher as 'cultural insider' (Cowley and Kelliher, 2023) to generate different social dynamics and more direct communications with participants.
- We could have produced signed materials for recruitment purposes, including a PIS in video form. While PIS documents commonly emphasise rights of withdrawal from a study, we could have mentioned more positively that BSL interpretation could be made available.
- We could have taken more care with the positioning of the BSL interpreter and sought a second interpreter co-worker for the interviews.

Research implications

From our dialogue we suggest that researchers could be doing better at promoting the research participation of under-served groups within mainstream studies of organizations and work sites through closer attention to their communicative practices. Traditional exclusions from the workplace should not lead researchers to overlook potential exclusionary barriers to research participation.

While Adamson *et al.* (2021) question who is responsible for 'doing organizational inclusion', here we ponder who is responsible for 'doing research inclusion' in organizational research. Table 1 suggests some prompts at multiple levels based on our lessons learnt.

We note the crucial roles of Principal Investigators and other researchers where the interpersonal dimensions of ethical practice play out directly in relations with research participants who may be 'not like you' (Emmel, 2013). As Bell and Wray-Bliss (2009) note, how we recruit and communicate about research studies renders people more or less able to question, contest, and agree to research terms. Communication influences not only decisions about participation but also subsequent social dynamics and data generation between researcher and participants.

However, adjustments in individual practices would benefit from greater support from wider institutional and disciplinary calls for research inclusion. While the emphasis on the concept of research inclusion in health research is to ensure that findings are relevant and replicable across populations in society, for organizational research the aim might be different: to avoid (unintentionally) producing and/or perpetuating disabling practices and structural inequalities in work and employment. This aim reframes 'under-served groups' as under-represented groups of workers whose presence in work sites may too often be unanticipated; whose research participation is therefore too often under-planned; who consequently may not be adequately involved in research to identify critical issues affecting them in work and employment. Intervening in this 'Catch-22' situation requires an explicit recognition that work and employment settings in which organizational research is carried out may (and should) contain a much wider heterogeneity of workers than previously assumed (or achieved).

There is some wider contextual scaffolding for change that would be beneficial. Firstly, while the formal prompts of institutional ethics reviews during research design stage are insufficient by themselves to produce fully ethical research (e.g. see Lorenzo-Afable *et al.*, 2021), this early stage is nevertheless important for research inclusion. Ethics review panels are well placed to prompt researchers to think more deeply not just about protecting participants through ethics processes but also about barriers to participation and how to encourage the involvement of under-served groups. These prompts are crucial to spread better practices of inclusion to researchers who may not routinely consider them.

At an institutional level, it would be positive to see changes in how support for sign-language interpretation is offered and advertised. This would move away from being seen narrowly as a means to overcome a deaf person's hearing deficiency and instead be positioned as a resource for hearing people to access the cultural knowledge and expertise that sign-language users demonstrate in their daily lives.

Table 1. Prompts for better research inclusion.

All researchers

- Are we paying attention to the communication preferences and needs of all potential participants?
- What ableist assumptions might we be making about how research-related information and communications will be received?

Principal Investigators

- On project initiation, have we asked organization gatekeepers what workers with specific communication requirements might be present?
- Have we put in place the potential resources to include deaf workers (and other under-represented groups) who we may encounter?
- During data collection, what changes are we making to overcome barriers to participation, and why are these changes the best approach?
- If third party support (e.g. interpreters) is needed, how is their positioning to be accounted for? Have power dynamics and existing interpreter-client relationships been considered?
- Are there any networks of under-represented groups that can be involved in this dialogue?

Institutional ethics panels

- Are ethical protocols enabling participation of under-served groups as well as protecting participants?
- Are we asking researchers about anticipatory arrangements for research inclusion of under-represented groups in work sites?
- Do we have adequate signposting support to help research teams deliver inclusive research proposals?

Research / HE Institutions

- Have we made funding and other resources available internally to enable inclusive research practices (e.g. BSL interpreters)?
- Are we telling researchers sufficiently about these resources and how to access them?

Funders of workplace research

- Do we require research inclusion to be addressed in applications to funding programmes?
- How could these requirements lead to more equitable outcomes for deaf people and other under-represented groups in the workplace?

Funding bodies for organizational research also would play a role. We argue for more attention to be paid to research inclusion in the content required for research bid submissions, in how bids are assessed for funding, and how they are monitored and reported on. To build upon deGama *et al.*'s (2019) questioning of what counts as good quality research, we suggest that the degree to which research studies plan for, anticipate, and actively address research inclusion from the perspective of communicative practice might be regarded as an indicator of quality.

Concluding comments

Our paper serves as a resource for better research inclusion by offering methodological support for hearing researchers to work with deaf sign language users in organizational research studies.

Our first prompt is to widen the scope of research inclusion beyond specific EDI-related studies of inequalities in work and employment. We note that how we communicate in all organizational research projects is important to consider. Drawing on a social model of deafness, our paper was inspired by hearing researchers' recognition of their implicit privileges that have allowed them often to engage with research methods without much thinking about the specifics of deaf inclusion. They risked disabling workers who were perfectly competent and able to act as research participants and whose absence would have been to the detriment of their study. Secondly, drawing on a cultural model of deafness, the paper supports empirical dialogue with deaf workers as real people rather than as part of a generic category of 'disabled' workers. Even with the BSL Act 2022 in the UK there is still little in the organizational research literature specifically about deaf employees' inclusion.

The lessons learnt draw on a dialogue not only between the concrete lived experiences of the four authors but also between disciplinary conventions, bringing organizational research into contact with deaf and interpreting studies and with health and medical research. Some limitations of the paper include the fact that Clare and Gail lost touch with the four deaf participants and their BSL interpreter before we started drafting it. This was due to changes in both the catering workers' and Clare and Gail's employment shortly after the research study ended. It would have been highly informative to have included the employees' various personal perspectives of involvement. We acknowledge that their inputs might have highlighted new and alternative aspects in the dialogue. We have also not picked up on the diversity and nuances of communication preferences and linguistic styles across different members of the deaf community, that is, for signing and/or lip reading. This remains an issue to be explored further.

While text books often emphasise reflexivity *within* the process of a research study, our paper emerges from reflexivity after the study had ended. The paper has sought to show the development of an ethical conscience from a dialogue about prior decisions taken from situated ethics in practice. We offer not a static presentation of how to do better but rather an invitation to explore the topic of research inclusion as an ongoing dialogic endeavour. We hope that our paper will bring other accounts of unintentional exclusions in response, and further expansion on concepts of research inclusion and research inclusive practices to support a diverse workforce and inclusive organizational research.

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Endnotes

1. See www.nihr.ac.uk/news/inclusion-now-key-condition-nihr-funding, accessed 14 July 2025.

2. See www.nihr.ac.uk/support-and-services/industry/insights/inclusive-research, accessed 14 July 2025.

3. See https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/support-for-businesses-and-organisations/ accessed 15 July 2025.

4. Estimated by the British Deaf Association https://bda.org.uk/help-resources/#statistics and cited by the UK Government in their 2022 BSL report: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-british-sign-language-bsl-report-2022/the-british-sign-language-bsl-report-2022 accessed 8 March 2026.

5. See ONS 2019 Figure 6 'Employment rate for disabled people aged 16 to 64 years, by main impairment, UK, 2019'. The 61.5% figure for workers with hearing difficulties compares to the employment rate average of 52.3% across all disabled people and the lowest rate of employment of 17.6% for people with severe learning difficulties. The employment rate for people who identify as disabled is significantly lower than for those who do not classify themselves as disabled (just under 83%) (Powell, 2023).

6. See https://rnid.org.uk/get-involved/research-and-policy/facts-and-figures/facts-and-statements-on-employment/ accessed 15 July 2025.

7. See https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work (accessed 18 July 2025). See also https://rnid.org.uk/information-and-support/your-rights/your-rights-at-work/

8. Some people are extremely difficult to lipread. Even when a person does not mumble, is well-lit, and talks about a familiar topic with predictable vocabulary, lipreading is tiring because it requires guesswork to account for the majority of sounds that are not visible on the lips.

9. These recorded noted were developed into the analytical memo that formed the first draft of this paper. They record the lack of support we found in the methods literature for hearing researchers working with deaf participants.

10. See the NRCPD codes of conduct on the website https://www.nrcpd.org.uk/code-of-conduct.

11. Current examples in the UK include Heriot Watt University, University of Lancashire, the University of Manchester, and York St. John University.

12. Gail has declined leading other research studies where she felt that her identity did not appropriately match the target sample, for instance a project focusing on the lived realities of Black women where she felt an all-white research team reflected part of the under-representation the research was trying to address.

13. This particular question is from the ethics application form used by the University of Lancashire. We note that the wording is perhaps not optimal: the designation of another person's communication needs as 'special' because they are different to the needs of the majority is problematic.

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