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“It felt like having a second job”: Perspectives from Deaf Professionals on Communication Equity in the Workplace

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Cover Page Footnote

This article represents a portion of Paul Harrelson’s doctoral dissertation on workplace interpreting. Brenda Nicodemus, who served as chair of the dissertation committee, is the co-author of this paper. We extend gratitude to the other members of the dissertation committee, Jules Dickinson, Khadijat Rashid, Emily Shaw, and Lori Whynot, for their support of this research. Finally, sincere thanks are due to the Deaf professionals in this study who graciously shared their time and wisdom. Without their insights, this paper would not have been possible.

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Abstract

More than 50 years of nondiscrimination legislation in the United States has resulted in greater diversity in the workplace; however, questions persist about the communication equity of Deaf employees who use a signed language. In this study, we investigate systemic factors that underlie the provision of signed language interpreting services in the workplace. Using the Critical Incident Technique, observations were collected from 17 Deaf professionals regarding the systems of interpreter provision at work. The data resulted in four main findings: (1) Deaf professionals hold a sophisticated understanding of their communication needs, (2) both quality and quantity of interpreting are important, (3) effective systems are necessary for the provision of equitable communication access, and (4) the pursuit of cost savings usually results in less equitable systems. The aim of this paper is to offer evidence-based data that can guide employers in creating communication access and equity for Deaf employees.

Keywords:

Deaf professionals, workplace communication, signed language interpreting, interpreter, systems, Critical Incident Technique, effectiveness

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“It felt like having a second job”: Perspectives from Deaf Professionals on Communication Equity in the Workplace

Introduction

Susan¹ is a Deaf professional who serves as a federal contract officer for the U.S. government. In her position she is frequently stationed in international settings where she interacts with representatives of other countries. When discussing her work, she states,

Listen, I work for the United States government and when I’m interacting with people, they aren’t meeting with the President, they are meeting with me! I’m the one who leaves a lasting impression. So, if I don’t have effective communication, it matters (Harrelson, 2019a).

Susan’s remarks are interesting for what they reveal about how she perceives her work; that is, she recognizes the importance of her role and understands the gravity of maintaining public trust. Susan strives to represent the U.S. government in a positive and professional manner and, critically, she acknowledges the importance of effective communication in achieving that aim.

Susan is not alone in her professional intentions. Many studies show that Deaf individuals are dedicated public servants who, like their nondeaf colleagues, strive to be effective employees (Dickinson, 2017; Harrelson, 2019b; Hauser et al. 2008). These studies also reveal that, like their nondeaf colleagues, Deaf professionals endeavor to use their education, experience, and talents to make contributions in the workplace. Furthermore, they want to be recognized for their efforts and be considered for increasingly challenging opportunities in the workplace. However, Deaf professionals report being deterred in their goals by ineffective systems that do not adequately address the communication needs of employees who use signed language. For example, Deaf employees frequently cite obstacles to workplace communication due to the length of time required to schedule an interpreter or being assigned interpreters who are unqualified. Deaf professionals report being treated like a child or “an annoyance” when requesting services that would simply allow them to do their jobs. In addition, Deaf professionals often report that the interpreting services they receive at work are effective only “sometimes” and in “some places.” They express doubts about being considered for new employment opportunities requiring “fast-paced communication;” thus, they may see job postings come and go without taking any action (Harrelson, 2019b).

In this study we sought to learn how Deaf employees characterize effective provision of interpreting services in their workplace. To address this question, we report on a subset of data drawn from a study of 17 Deaf professionals regarding interpreting services in the workplace (Harrelson, 2019b). In this paper, we make two assertions: First, the standard of communication access for Deaf employees should always be that of direct communication (i.e., two or more people communicating with one another in the same language). Namely, the communication access experienced by most nondeaf employees in the workplace should be the same standard for assessing the communication access experienced by Deaf employees. Second, given better

¹ All participant names are pseudonyms.

information, employers can create well-designed systems that support effective communication in the workplace for Deaf employees.

Background

Work is recognized as providing a range of benefits to the individual and society. In a meta-analysis of studies about work, Waddell and Burton (2006) found that employment plays a crucial role in individuals' mental and physical health as well as their financial well-being. Work is also tied to a society's perception of an individual's citizenship and patriotism (Kymlicka & Norman, 1994) and even their moral goodness (Brawer, 2014). In recognition of such advantages, work is viewed as a fundamental human right (Donnelly, 2013; Siegel, 1994). As such, work has been codified in declarations from global institutions, and in several countries, the right to work has been legislated for individuals in protected classes² (World Health Organization, 2011). In recent years, the experience of interpreter-mediated workplace communication for spoken languages has been receiving more scrutiny (Raymond, 2017; Rudvin & Tomassini, 2011). We suggest that the topic of workplace communication warrants more attention for Deaf employees as well.

Since the 1960s, Deaf citizens in the United States have been identified as a protected class and thus are included in legislative mandates regarding educational and workplace accommodations. Increased attention on reasonable accommodations for Deaf people in the workplace led to government-funded research, including a study by Alan Crammatte (1968), a Deaf professor of business at Gallaudet University.³ In his study, Crammatte examined numerous aspects of the lives of Deaf professionals in the workplace. Critically, Crammatte designed his study with the assumption that Deaf employees themselves were the best source of information. Also worth noting is that Crammatte briefly mentions interpreting as only occurring on an informal, ad hoc basis and typically being provided by clerical employees who have learned some signs. Thus, Crammatte's study reflects the limited availability of professional interpreters and interpreting services at the time.

As sign language interpreting became increasingly professionalized in the 1970s, research studies about the practice began to surface in the literature. One of the first empirical studies about interpreting was published in a special issue of the *Journal of Rehabilitation for the Deaf* (Brasel et al., 1974). Early research on signed language interpreting focused primarily on source-to-target language comparisons and target language output (Metzger, 2006). Over time, research topics broadened and increased attention was given to various interpreting settings (e.g., educational, medical, legal, religious); however, workplace interpreting remained largely unexplored in subsequent decades.

In 2008, a groundbreaking volume emphasized that workplace interpreting has its own specific demands by highlighting the issues surrounding effective communication for Deaf employees (Hauser et al., 2008). Chapters in the edited volume include such topics as interpreting in social

² The term *protected class* refers to groups of people who are legally protected from laws, practices, and policies that discriminate against them because of a shared characteristic such as disability, race, and gender.

³ Gallaudet University, located in Washington, DC, is a bilingual (American Sign Language and English) federally chartered private university for the education of Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and hearing students.

settings (Clark & Finch, 2008) and interpreters' representation of Deaf academics (Kushalnagar & Rashid, 2008; Campbell et al., 2008). Overall, the authors emphasized that a system promulgating ad hoc interpreting is insufficient and argued that self-reflective, experienced interpreters who are scheduled for an extended engagement should be the minimal requirement for workplace accommodation.

Hauser et al. (2008) was followed by Dickinson's (2017) extensive study of the discourse of Deaf and hearing employees in the United Kingdom. Dickinson's multimethod study revealed that sign language interpreters have a considerable impact on the success of interaction between Deaf and hearing employees in the workplace, specifically through interpreters' management of small talk, humorous exchanges, and participation in collaborative endeavors. Her findings also documented that workplace discourse can be challenging to interpret because of profession-specific terminology and jargon. Interpreted meetings also pose interactional challenges because of rapid turn taking, overlapping talk, and role ambiguity among participants. In sum, Dickinson argues that the management of workplace discourse influences the degree to which collegial relations can be established between employees.

In a related study, Bristoll (2009) interviewed seven Deaf employees in the United Kingdom to explore the impact of interpreter-mediated communication. Findings suggested that although legislation has improved access for Deaf employees in the United Kingdom, its provision is based on miscalculations about the quantity and quality of communication needed to provide workplace parity. Bristoll's results indicate that workplace parity for Deaf employees requires interpreters with specialized content knowledge, bilingual fluency, and organizational information and who are readily available throughout the workday.

A later study by Young et al. (2019) examined perspectives of eight nonsigners toward their Deaf colleagues. Their findings suggest that "phonocentrism" is pervasive in workplace relationships between the nonsigning and signing employees. The authors suggested that this "assumed phonocentric primacy can work to reproduce an inequality of person, not just of language" (p. 106). In another study, Harrelson (2020) reported on data drawn from two focus groups of Deaf employees. One finding showed the varied methods used by Deaf employees to monitor the accuracy of interpreters' English target-language output. The comments by the Deaf participants provided detailed insights into the dual impact of discrete interpreter behaviors as well as institutional systems that influence the effectiveness of their workplace communication.

Taken together these studies reinforce the critical importance of having highly skilled interpreters in the workplace. In this paper, we present data from an extensive research project in which Deaf professionals were interviewed about interpreting services and systems of interpreter provision. Two thirds of the data emphasizes that interpreter quality impacts how communication unfolds in Deaf employees' workplaces. The data also points to the critical importance of systemic structures to achieving workplace access. In this paper, we focus specifically on the data regarding systems that underlie interpreter provision.

Methods

This study utilized the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) methodological approach, which was first documented by Flanagan (1954) and has been used for studies across an array of workplace settings, including hospitals, restaurants, and manufacturing (Butterfield et al., 2005). The aim of CIT studies is to create functional and practical solutions for everyday workplace problems. A key principle of CIT is to gather information from individuals closest to the activity in question by eliciting their specific, observed behaviors that they characterize as *effective* or *ineffective*.

CIT was determined to be an ideal approach for the present study because Deaf employees are the direct consumers of interpreting services and thus can best characterize the effectiveness of interpreted interactions. The aim was to collect actual observed occurrences rather than participants' perceptions and opinions. Because prior studies suggest that Deaf professionals recognize the importance of systems of interpreter provision, our interview questions were designed to elicit observations about specific occurrences of those systems (e.g., how interpreting services are provided, how specific interpreters or agencies are selected, how the Deaf worker requests or schedules interpreters, how requests are approved). Following the stated aim of CIT research, this study gathered observations from Deaf professionals with the goal of improving the quality of workplace communication.⁴

Participants

The participants were recruited via the researchers' personal networks and professional referrals. Each participant was compensated \$60 for participating in the study. The participants consisted of 17 Deaf individuals who held professional positions in either the federal government ($n=12$), state government ($n=3$), a nonprofit agency ($n=1$), or a for-profit company ($n=1$). The participants held a wide variety of positions, including communications specialist, contracting officer, foreign service officer, legislative assistant, marketing director, nuclear engineer, paralegal specialist, senior business analyst, supervisory information technology specialist, technical analyst, and vocational rehabilitation counselor. Federal employees represented such workplaces as the Department of State, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Congress, Department of Justice, Federal Communications Commission, Department of Defense, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Transportation. The participants' workplaces were in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area ($n=6$), in various states across the United States ($n=8$), and various countries abroad ($n=3$). Each of the participants had completed either an undergraduate degree ($n=9$) or a graduate degree ($n=8$). The demographic information of the 17 participants reveals a group of well-educated Deaf employees who are compensated at a mid- to upper-level salary range and who work across a spectrum of professional positions.

The participants' ages ranged from 27 to 58 ($M=39$). Nine participants identified as female; eight as male. Fourteen participants identified their ethnicity as White/Caucasian, one identified as African American/Black, one as Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and White, and one as Other/Mediterranean.

⁴ This study was approved by the Gallaudet University Institutional Review Board number PJID# 2951.

Procedures

The participants were scheduled for two individual interviews with one of the researchers. The interviews were conducted in American Sign Language, either in person or via an online video platform. The interview protocol consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to elicit observations of effective and ineffective interpreter-mediated communication in the workplace. Part of the interview contained questions specific to the systems that underlie interpreter provision. The researcher used probing questions to elicit discrete specific observed behaviors, rather than general impressions. Each question prompt was repeated until no further observations were forthcoming.

Qualitative Validity Strategies

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that the goal in qualitative research is to achieve, to the extent possible, a deep knowledge of a social setting, individuals, or phenomenon. To gain a deep knowledge requires the use of qualitative validity controls (trustworthiness, authenticity, credibility) that result in transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Creswell, 2014). These measures assist in determining "...whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

In this study, trustworthiness was addressed in multiple ways as suggested by Butterfield et al. (2005), Creswell (2014), and Flanagan (1954). To reduce bias and better frame the results, the background and standpoint of the primary researcher was given in the full study (see Harrelson, 2019b). Next, the researcher included the participants in the process of verifying the accuracy of the data (i.e., participant cross-checking) by offering them the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the coding, translation, and selection of illustrative quotes. In addition, trustworthiness was addressed in the following procedures: (a) an external researcher conducted an independent review of critical incidents, (b) the researchers consulted with experts in the field regarding the utility of the findings (i.e., expert review), (c) an external researcher replicated the categorization of desired behaviors into categories, and (d) the researchers determined the percentage of participants who observed similar behaviors as a means of inferring the key desired behaviors (e.g., calculating participation rate).

The researchers also engaged in thick description of the data by analyzing and reporting the extensive narrative collected from the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, negative, or discrepant, information was reported and incorporated into the themes. For a full description of these and other qualitative reliability procedures used in the study, see Harrelson (2019b).

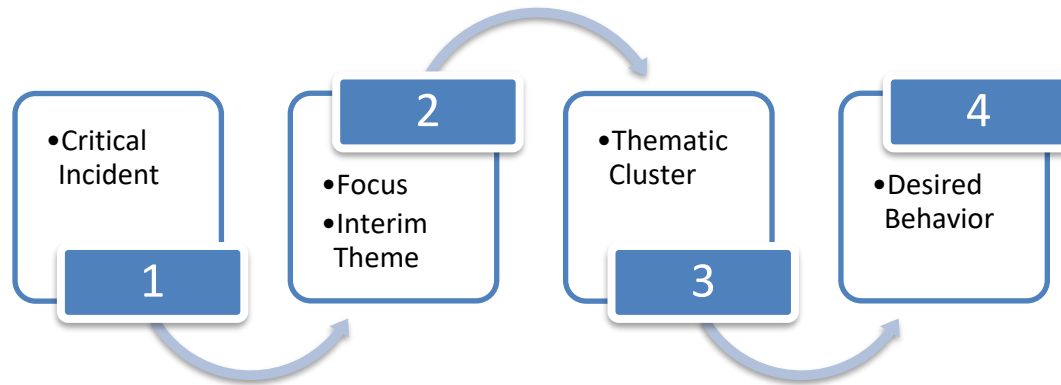
Data Analysis

In adherence with the CIT approach, the participants were asked to reflect on specific instances regarding interpreter provision in their workplace and describe the instances in detail. The participants' narratives were examined for detailed descriptions of a specific observed behavior and that distinguished between effective and ineffective behaviors. Each narrative was reformulated into a critical incident—a brief statement that summarizes a salient point of the narrative. The critical incidents were then assigned to an interim theme—an underlying topic—

and a focus (Interpreter Behavior or Systemic Factor). Finally, the interim themes were grouped into thematic clusters. See Figure 1 for the phases of the data analysis procedure.

Figure 1

Four Phases of the Data Analysis Procedures



In the CIT approach, research findings are presented in a manner that provides maximum utility. Thus, the critical incidents were examined within each theme to determine groupings that support the expression of a specific desired behavior—discrete replicable behaviors of an action that could result in an improvement. The critical incidents, both effective and ineffective, were grouped into desired behaviors.

Taxonomy

The analysis resulted in the following taxonomy: (a) critical incident, (b) desired behavior, (c) theme, (d) thematic cluster, and (e) focus. Critical incidents were organized into the following system of classification: (a) desired behavior, (b) theme, (c) thematic cluster, and (d) focus. In other words, critical incidents are situated in a five-level taxonomy that was created for the data analysis and that emerged from a combination of top-down and bottom-up analysis. See Table 1 for the taxonomy classification and examples.

Table 1

Classification Taxonomy with an Example from the Data

Taxonomy	Example
Critical Incident	Interpreters are available for same day requests
Desired Behavior	Employer provides interpreters for short-notice requests
Theme	Level of Service
Thematic Cluster	Employer
Focus	Systemic Factors

This study was designed to examine questions regarding how Deaf professionals characterize the effective provision of interpreting services in the workplace. In the subsequent Results section, we provide data that address that research question. Ultimately, the aim of the CIT approach is for data to be used to improve the services being examined, which we consider in the Discussion section.

Results

The full data set resulted in a categorization of two areas of focus: Systemic Factors and Interpreter Behaviors. We are reporting only on Systemic Factors, which is further divided into two thematic clusters: Employer and Interpreting Office or Agency. The two Systemic Factors and full list of the themes are provided in Table 2. The focus of this paper is to provide an in-depth analysis of five desired behaviors reported by a minimum of eight participants about Systemic Factors that impact interpreter provision in their workplace.

Systemic Factors Themes

The researchers grouped the Systemic Factors into two overarching thematic clusters of roughly equal size: Employer and Interpreting Office or Agency. We note that although one of the thematic clusters is “Interpreting Office or Agency,” every desired behavior in this study, including interpreter behaviors not reported here, are ultimately the responsibility of the employer. The two Systemic Factors and full list of the themes are provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Complete List of Themes in Both Systematic Factors Thematic Clusters

Employer	Interpreting Office or Agency
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer Policies and Practices • Level of Service • Interpreting Services Contract • Interpreting Coordinator • Interpreting Budget • Staff Interpreter • Setting Where Interpreting Occurs • Interpreter Location While On Call • Interpreters and Real-Time Captioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interpreter Scheduling Consistency • Interpreter Requests • Interpreting Office or Agency Policies and Practices • Interpreter Preference • Interpreter Screening and Selection • Interpreting Rates • Services and Resources

Desired Behaviors

Based on participants' observations of critical incidents in the workplace, the researchers formulated 116 desired behaviors regarding Systemic Factors affecting interpreter provision: 62 related to Employer (Appendix A) and 54 related to Interpreting Office or Agency (Appendix B). Table 3 provides a high-to-low ordering of 17 desired behaviors. Of these, 5 were based on observations by eight or more participants (in bold) and are analyzed in this paper.

Table 3

Desired Behaviors for Systemic Factors of Interpreter Provision for Deaf Professionals

Desired Behaviors	Participants ^a		Critical Incidents
	<i>n</i>	% ^b	<i>n</i>
Interpreting office or agency ensures small group of interpreters assigned on an ongoing basis	11	65	18
Interpreting office or agency provides streamlined and efficient interpreting request system	10	59	21
Employer provides interpreters for short-notice requests	9	53	15
Interpreting office or agency follows Deaf consumer's preferred interpreters list	8	47	15
Interpreting office or agency follows Deaf consumer's unsuitable interpreters list	8	47	10
Employer provides on-call interpreters	7	41	17
Employer consults Deaf employees regarding interpreter provision	6	35	9
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to independently submit interpreting requests without prior approval	6	35	7
Employer provides interpreters for work-related social events	5	29	9
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to submit interpreting requests directly to interpreting agency or office	5	29	6
Interpreting office or agency provides system for Deaf consumer to provide feedback about interpreting services	5	29	5
Interpreting office or agency rigorously screens interpreters	4	24	6

Employer does not require Deaf consumer to justify interpreting services	4	24	6
Employer assigns staff interpreter to manage interpreting contract	4	24	6
Interpreting office or agency ensures consistency in interpreter scheduling for related assignments	4	24	4
Interpreting office or agency provides RID-certified interpreters	4	24	4
Employer provides interpreters for Deaf consumer while on work-related travel	4	24	4

Note: Bolded items represent desired behaviors reported by eight or more participants.^a Participants who reported one or more critical incidents contributing to the desired behavior. Some of the desired behaviors in the table have more critical incidents than the total number of participants because of participants reporting more than one critical incident expressing the same desired behavior.

^b Percentage of participants in the study.

The following subsections present desired behaviors created from the critical incidents related by approximately half of the Deaf professionals in this study. The five most frequently reported desired behaviors, followed by a contextual description and samples of quoted material from the participants.

Interpreting Office or Agency Ensures Small Group of Interpreters Assigned on an Ongoing Basis

In their interviews, the participants most frequently recounted experiences that point to a desire for a small group of their preferred interpreters who are assigned to their workplace on an ongoing basis. Critical incidents included narratives about interpreters who were full-time staff interpreters, direct-hire contractors, and interpreting-agency-assigned staff and freelance interpreters. The critical incidents provided insights on the effectiveness of a small number of preferred interpreters in the workplace; for example, interpreter consistency increased efficiency and productivity. Described Melanie, “It is important to have the same group of interpreters so when they arrive we can get to work. I shouldn’t have to spend a lot of time getting them up to speed.”

In addition to efficiency, Diana pointed to improved linguistic accuracy of the interpretation as a result of having consistent interpreters, stating:

My office is very different from other offices in this agency. I’ve had interpreters tell me that they can’t keep track of the terminology in my area and that is unfortunate.... The more communication two people have the better they understand each other.

The participants also described the value of having ongoing interpreters for understanding the interpersonal dynamics in the office. For example, Tiwa observed that having regular interpreters positively impacted the dynamic between him and his colleagues, saying:

I have two groups of interpreters. ... We have a really good relationship. I see them every week. I tell them what I want and what I'm looking for. As a result, they know me and my office really well... I love them. You have no idea!

Throughout his interviews, Tiwa repeatedly mentioned the value of strong interpersonal connections with colleagues in his workplace, which enabled his ability to navigate issues and perform at a high level.

In the same vein, another participant, Diana, observed that *not* having consistent interpreters negatively impacts her work life and the quality of the communication she has with her hearing colleagues:

It would be so much easier if I had the same interpreters every day. I would be able to manage expectations better. I don't want to supervise interpreters but.... I would be able to build a rapport and relationship with the interpreters if I had the same ones on a regular basis.

Several participants expressed specific preferences for an ideal number of interpreters and recognized that increasing consistency often requires negotiation and compromise. As Melanie stated, "I like having interpreters here two or three days each week, preferably two regular interpreters and two alternates."

The participants reported that securing interpreters through agencies makes consistency difficult. For instance, Steven described this issue, along with the size of the interpreter pool for his workplace:

That is really the nature of interpreter contracts. The churn rate [turnover] for interpreters is generally very high and that makes it difficult to get the same group of interpreters with any regularity.... You don't want the pool too big because then interpreters aren't in our agency often enough. You don't want the pool too small because then you don't have a lot of interpreters to choose from and you can't fill assignments.... It's tough. It doesn't really help if a certain interpreter only works with me once every three weeks.

Taken together, the Deaf professionals' observations about having a small group of interpreters assigned on an ongoing basis pointed to their underlying goals for greater workplace efficiency and productivity, increased accuracy of interpretations, and personal rapport with colleagues. They emphasized that the quality of their interactions is heightened by having interpreters who are familiar with the dynamics of the workplace. Numerous participants noted barriers to achieving this level of service and observed that it requires negotiation with employers. They repeatedly stated that obstacles were due to a lack of understanding among employers and interpreting agencies regarding the importance of interpreter consistency.

Interpreting Office or Agency Provides Streamlined and Efficient Interpreting Request System

The second-most frequently cited observation was the value of a simple and reliable system for submitting interpreting requests. The participants expressed a desire to have a system with straightforward processes for monitoring the status of interpreter requests without cumbersome follow-up communication. When a system is in place that provides transparency, the solutions can appear deceptively simple. As Richard explained, “I send the request and interpreters are assigned. It just works.”

The participants also described the impact of inefficient and unreliable systems on their productivity. A recurring theme among the participants was the wish to focus on their professional responsibilities, rather than dealing with byzantine systems for requesting interpreters. Susan described her experience:

I used to have to follow up on my interpreter requests every day to make sure they were working on them, hadn't lost the request, et cetera. It might require months of daily thirty-minute calls.... It felt like having a second job. I was doing the work I was hired to do as well as spending thirty minutes or an hour every day on interpreting requests. I could have been using that time to do my job. Instead, I'm doing work for the interpreting office. ...It feels like I'm their mother.

The participants also expressed value in the ability to have access to the requests made by other Deaf professionals and the schedules of the on-call interpreter in their office. Diana mentioned that she uses the information to better accommodate her interpreting needs:

It helps me understand why my last-minute request may not be able to be covered. And I can see who is available to be assigned for other assignments that day.... Sometimes I may reschedule an important meeting because of the interpreters who are available.... The more information you have the better decisions you can make. Less information leads to poor decisions.

Gloria expressed appreciation when she receives updates on the status of her requests, stating, “I get cc'ed when a request is made. Also, once the request is filled it shows up in my Outlook calendar. Knowing the status of the request is really helpful.” Halah also mentioned the benefit of getting updates from the scheduling system, “My assistant can check the scheduling system to find out which interpreter is coming. I like that.”

The participants described the impact of customer service of less-efficient interpreter request systems. Diana noted:

In our process we have to make a request by placing the assignment on the shared calendar and, if it is what they call a last-minute request, which is less than a two-day notice, we also have to email them. Sometimes I feel like “who is supporting who?” Is the contractor supporting us or are we supporting them?

The data indicate that clear and efficient systems for interpreter requests result in increased productivity by Deaf professionals. Having trust in systems reduces employees' anxiety and allows them to focus on their professional responsibilities. In addition, the interviews point to the burden of arranging interpreting services and the significant access work it imposes upon Deaf professionals. That is, the unspoken expectations of managing their own interpreting services results in Deaf professionals doing additional work merely to access everyday workplace communication, creating an additional workload that is not experienced by their nondeaf colleagues. This access work becomes labor that is unrecognized, unrewarded, and unequal. Said another way, if the systems worked as they should, Deaf employees could just get on with their actual jobs.

Employer Provides Interpreters for Short-Notice Requests

The third-most frequently cited observation was a preference for the employer to provide an interpreter for short-notice or same-day requests. That is, the participants need interpreters to be available when needed. Simon says:

Having interpreters available allows me to not be an impediment to my team. I don't want to be the reason that a project is held up simply because I don't have an interpreter. My colleagues are pretty understanding and willing to make workarounds, but I don't want to have to ask for that. Interpreter availability is key to me being the functional equivalent of a hearing team member; that is, to be able to have last-minute interpreter scheduling, to be able to get an interpreter for a meeting the next day. I'm very lucky to have an interpreter with that kind of availability. Many Deaf employees don't.

As Richard succinctly described, having unfettered access to interpreting services is a high-stakes matter, "I've been able to move up here and earn the respect of my hearing colleagues. That is directly related to my communication access."

Comments by Simon and Richard comments mirrored other participants' remarks regarding the impact of being unable to schedule short-notice interactions with colleagues, having no one available when a previously submitted interpreting request was misplaced, or being unable to replace an interpreter who is absent due to illness. The participants described how onerous workplace policies, such as requiring interpreter requests be submitted from 2 days to 1 month in advance, negatively impact their job performance.

Several participants remarked that scheduling policies ignore the realities of the workplace. Simon made a point in each of the interviews that he works in a fast-paced enterprise and values being able to join and make contributions in spontaneous meetings, "All of our meetings are highly time sensitive and impossible to reschedule." The narratives reflect the participants' dedication to contribute and perform their work with a high degree of effectiveness.

Another reality that Deaf professionals face are the subtle but obvious annoyance conveyed by the interpreting office or agency when interpreters are requested in a timeframe that the system defines as "last minute." Gloria described this experience:

I get playfully scolded about last-minute requests.... They make it seem like they're doing you a favor if you need an interpreter in two or three days. I can't ever get an interpreter the same day.... I really don't appreciate the phrase "last-minute request." It suggests that it is my fault for making certain requests. It wasn't my fault for setting up the meeting.... I get that same message from HR, the agency, and from the interpreters. They ask me to move meetings because they can't cover them. I didn't set up the meeting. And they won't tell my colleagues to move their meetings because they can't find interpreters. I have to do that. It is as if no one else is using the interpreters but me!

The participants also acknowledged that technology has caused a shift in workplace communications, recognizing that text-based communication has become both pervasive and the status quo. At the same time, they expressed concerns that administrators use technology as a rationale for reducing interpreting services for all workplace communications. Gloria noted two conditions that constrain her communication access: first, a number of face-to-face meetings were replaced by text-based communication and, second, when interpreters are necessary for meetings, her prior on-site interpreting services are no longer available. Gloria observed:

Technology has reduced the need for that kind of thing [on-call interpreters] but I used to be able to instant message on-call interpreters and they would come over if they were available. Now everything has to be in a formal request submitted in advance and I can't get that kind of immediate service anymore.

The participants reported that the lack of the ability to obtain short-notice interpreting services has a deleterious impact on ongoing projects. As Edward described, "Customers who know me are able to manage if the interpreter isn't there; however, new customers are more reluctant to engage with me." In a similar vein, participants reported that their career trajectory can be stalled by the lack of prompt interpreter availability. Gloria reported that her career aspirations have been hampered by her expectations about the provision of services, stating that:

I don't apply for positions that say things like "fast-paced work environment" because I know that means I'll need interpreters more often or with short notice. The interpreting situation is okay for my current position, but it wouldn't work if I had a different job.

Interpreting Office or Agency Follows Deaf Consumer's Preferred Interpreters List

The fourth-most cited observation being able to request *specific* interpreters. The participants reported that they provide agencies with a preferred list of interpreters who have worked well in their workplace and that when their requests are not granted, their work is impeded. For example, Steven was temporarily placed in a supervisory position in his workplace and described the ability to schedule his preferred interpreter as being crucial to his success. As Steven described:

I was asked to become acting branch chief when my boss was going to be out of town for a week. Luckily, our agency has on-call interpreters booked. I looked to see who was available and when, and I was able to ask the contractor to assign my preferred interpreter from the group who was available to my office whenever he was free the following week. It is important to have someone who knows my signing style and is familiar with my

department, so I don't have to keep such a close eye on the interpreter all the time to ensure they are following me. Eye contact is really important in communication, but if I don't trust the interpreter, I can't make the same connection with my hearing colleagues. I'll be distracted by having to make sure the interpreter isn't struggling. I was able to have meetings with my division directors and the supervisor of my boss and was comfortable knowing that effective communication was happening.

A significant, but possibly overlooked, point made by Steven is his need to keep "a close eye" on interpreters who are not on his preferred list. In situations without his preferred interpreters, Steven is both taxed with supervising other employees as well as being burdened with monitoring the interpreter's performance. The additional work required of Deaf professionals is an issue that is observed by other participants time and time again.

Joseph provided a specific example of the benefit of scheduling interpreters from a preferred list, observing a perpetuating cycle of improving performance seen in interpreters who are constants in the workplace.

My preferred interpreters know my work and can apply it when they are interpreting the training. They become familiar with the content of the training and then can apply it in my workplace. And when the training is done, I'll have to give a presentation to my colleagues about the information. As a result, the interpreters who were at the training are more prepared for that presentation. That's why it's so important for me to be able to use my preferred interpreters.

These comments reflect the efforts made by Deaf professionals in securing their preferred interpreters within their immediate work environment, but Deaf professionals must also contend with interpreter provision for work communication that occurs *outside* their office. A positive experience was related by Richard who is able to schedule his preferred interpreters for external meetings because of his level of authority in the workplace. Richard described how a government vendor worked to meet his needs because of the professional influence that he wields. As Richard stated, "Having that kind of formal authority helps."

In contrast, Joseph described the complicated logistics to secure his preferred interpreters for training outside of his workplace:

I can't bring my interpreter because the interpreting expense needs to come out of the training budget of the other agency. It's a lot of work to contact them, explain what they need to do, and have them look for interpreters. Can't we just use my interpreter, and the other agency can reimburse us? Should I give them the contact information for my interpreter so they can contract my interpreter through their interpreting agency? Or should my office just pay for the interpreting? It's complicated and awkward.

Clearly, Joseph is operating within a system that treats interpreters as interchangeable parts that can fit in every situation they are placed. Joseph gets stuck both navigating the bureaucratic hurdles of scheduling interpreters for the training and dealing with preparing, supervising, and monitoring interpreters who have not worked with him in the past.

Administrative structures themselves may be an impediment to providing high-quality interpreting services from preferred interpreters in the workplace. Some participants reported situations in which an interpreting agency denied providing preferred interpreters because their contractual obligations did not require it. Other participants reported working in organizations that held contracts with agencies that allowed preferred interpreter scheduling even when not required by their contracts. Edward noted that agencies that provide interpreters from his preferred list may, in fact, be violating what are government contractual obligations in ways that are illegal. This catch-22 is not lost on Edward; that is, his goal of attaining interpreters who provide effective communication for his work may be thwarted by the very systems that ensure interpreters will be provided.

A different but related administrative structure that creates an obstacle for Deaf professionals in obtaining preferred interpreters is the decision-making process of interpreting agencies. Melanie related her perception of getting “only satisfactory” interpreters because of how agencies may view the level of difficulty of her workplace. Specifically, Melanie expressed dissatisfaction with submitting a preferred list of interpreters to the agencies that express motivation to schedule interpreters from her list because the preferred interpreters never materialize. Melanie’s comments reveal a perception that her preferred interpreters are assigned to work in “more challenging situations,” while she is provided interpreters who have less competency. Melanie eloquently described the vital importance of impromptu interactions with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates that affects both the operations of the office and her own career trajectory. As the structure stands, Melanie must rely on the well-meaning schedulers at interpreting agencies to determine the qualifications and competencies of the interpreters assigned to her workplace. Melanie questioned why she can’t have excellence all the time, stating:

Even if there are interpreters who are a good fit, there are interpreters out there who would be an even better fit, but they are never assigned. Why stop at good when we can aspire to perfect? It sounds like a minor thing but this has an impact on my upward mobility.

These comments reveal that many Deaf professionals feel powerless when employers and agencies assign—or reassign—preferred interpreters to other assignments deemed more important or to other Deaf professionals deemed more deserving. Such actions imply that Deaf professionals must acquiesce to whoever has been scheduled, without concern or recognition of the repercussions to them.

After years of working with interpreters, Deaf employees understand how the system works, including that in a pool of available interpreters, their preferred interpreter may already be scheduled on another assignment. Steven’s workplace employs multiple Deaf employees who receive interpreting services, a situation that may occur in government employment. Steven acknowledged that for various reasons the pool of available interpreters for a single workplace may not reflect any one Deaf consumer’s preferences. He conveyed that “Some Deaf people in my building have different preferences and different needs so we can’t all always have the interpreters we prefer.”

Collectively, the participants' comments reveal that their ability to effectively perform their work can be highly affected by the quality of the interpreters. The participants' comments are a reminder that the contemporary workplace is not limited to an office cubicle and, critically, that preferred interpreters are valued inside the office, at training sites, and when on travel, both within the United States and abroad. Working closely with a person to mitigate their communication, Deaf professionals become acutely aware of what constitutes high-quality interpreting services and can readily develop a list of their preferred interpreters. External qualifications are merely a starting point for scheduling interpreters; quality depends on the particular needs and preferences of each Deaf employee. Preferences are driven by features such as interpreters' language fluency, educational background, experience in the setting, and interpersonal skills.

Interpreting Office or Agency Follows Deaf Consumer's Unsuitable Interpreters List

The fifth-most frequently cited observation—a twist to the theme of the preferred interpreter list—was the value of being able to provide interpreting agencies a list of unsuitable interpreters. The participants reported valuing the ability to influence which interpreters the agency assigns by providing not only a list of interpreters the agency should assign but also a list of interpreters the agency should *not* assign, which is sometimes called a “do not send” (DNS) list. The participants described their DNS list as a valuable tool to both ensure that they receive high-quality interpreting services and prevent the assignment of interpreters they perceive as unqualified, unprepared, or exhibiting behaviors that actively cause harm. The DNS list reflects the Deaf professionals' ultimate aim of providing their best performance in the workplace. As Halah described:

I have a list of seven interpreters who I won't work with. I don't have any input on the agency we use but so far, that agency hasn't sent any of the people on my DNS list to work with me. I need to represent my agency to the best of my ability. If the interpreters aren't qualified to do their job, I can't do my job. For some reason, it's been difficult to get this point across.

Halah also described using the DNS list as an alternative to making an ethical standards complaint about the interpreter accepting an assignment for which they are not suitable, a process that may be lengthy, cumbersome, and ultimately not fruitful. She stated that:

Having a “do not send” list is much less work for me. I could make a complaint to my state certification board or RID but it's just too much hassle. I do give feedback to the agency that a certain interpreter needs more training or experience, for example. Because of how my schedule works I've worked with each of them more than once and finally, I had enough.

Another participant, James, has a lengthy DNS list, which he developed over years of experiences with interpreters. He observed that agencies generally honor his DNS list when scheduling interpreters, except in cases when the agency relies on their own staff interpreters or when filling a last-minute request. James commented:

I've been told I have one of the longest DNS lists in the area. Agencies generally follow it except when it comes to their staff interpreters. If my preferred interpreter is sick that day, none of my other preferred interpreters are going to be available at the last minute, and so they send one of their staff, ignoring my DNS list. I understand from a business perspective that it's a difficult situation. Do they pull a freelancer from another assignment? The freelancer may not be thrilled with that and it possibly hurts another Deaf consumer. Of course, other people's communication challenges are not my problem.

In this remark, James echoed Melanie's earlier comments about how schedulers attempt to exploit their sense of obligation for a larger good in the Deaf community. If an interpreter is reassigned, one Deaf consumer benefits while another is put at a disadvantage. As a Deaf individual who utilizes interpreters, James struggles between doing what is good for himself versus what is good for the Deaf collective.

The participants' comments reveal that submitting a DNS list is not an action that is taken lightly; rather, placing the name of interpreter on the DNS list is the result of repeated and significant lapses in service provision. The comments further point out that creating a DNS list is a preferable, more expedient, and perhaps more humane course of action, than other forms of recourse, such as lodging a formal complaint through ethical review mechanisms. Some may argue that Deaf employees are responsible for providing feedback to interpreters so they can improve their services, and the data reveals that feedback is the normal course of action, but when that fails, a DNS list is a logical fallout of being consumers of a service. Ultimately, although called upon to do so, Deaf employees are not responsible for the professional development and quality improvement of interpreters.

Discussion

The data in this study lay bare a range of issues Deaf professionals experience with systems that underlie communication services in their workplaces. In this section, we aggregate these data into four main findings and provide recommendations for improving the systems operated by interpreting agencies and employers. As discussed in the introduction, the main findings are grounded in a central assertion of this paper, that is, the reference point to measure communication success for Deaf employees is that of direct communication. In addition, we contend that the legal mandate of "reasonable accommodation," while helpful, does not sufficiently address what protocols need to be in place to achieve successful workplace communication for Deaf employees. This mandate for equity and accommodation most often points to issues of affordability and reasonableness and offers no clear metric of what is meant by "reasonable." We propose that direct communication be acknowledged as the metric because that is the condition experienced by nondeaf employees. That is, "reasonable accommodation" should be viewed as how closely Deaf employees can approach the experience of direct communication in the workplace through interpreting services.

Direct communication serves as the mantle upon which our four main findings are placed. This study argues that to address equity in communication for Deaf employees, one should always begin by asking Deaf employees about their needs and preferences in the workplace. That said, as is the nature of qualitative research, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all Deaf

professionals; however, these results may apply in varying degrees to various groups of Deaf workers, including blue collar employees. We offer this discussion to be instructive and thought provoking when considering communication equity in the workplace.

Main Finding 1: Deaf Professionals Hold a Sophisticated Understanding of Their Communication Needs

A foundational finding of this study is that Deaf professionals have a sophisticated understanding of the mechanisms affecting communication access in their workplaces and how to optimally function in their professional roles. In this study, participants provided hundreds of specific observations regarding interpreting services provision, including comments about scheduling consistency, screening and selection of interpreters, level and type of service, contracts and budgets for interpreting services, and settings where interpreting is (or is not) provided. This knowledge is not surprising given that many Deaf adults in the United States hold a lifetime of experience negotiating communication in an English-dominant society and, as a result, have a trove of knowledge about interpreters and systems of interpreter provision (Holcomb & Smith, 2018). Through their repeated experiences, Deaf professionals bring expertise about what is needed to create a level playing field with their nondeaf colleagues. It follows that Deaf professionals should be consulted in shaping the systemic factors that underlie policies that drive communication in the workplace. We argue that without recognition of this level of expertise, systems will falter or fail to adequately meet Deaf professionals' needs.

We offer the simplest of arguments: If Deaf employees know what they need and there is a legislated societal obligation to provide what they need, then Deaf employees should receive those identified services. This is a reasonable expectation, especially given that Deaf professionals' expectations for interpreting services are not idealistic, unrealistic, or impractical. Naturally, the Deaf professionals in this study showed divergent perspectives on what constitutes quality interpreting services. We note that the recommendations that follow have been created by the researchers and necessarily must be discussed in each individual workplace and with Deaf employees.

Recommendations for Employers

1. Assume that Deaf professionals request the communication services they need for access and that work for them.
2. Advocate for and, critically, with Deaf employees for the systems that would result in workplace communication that is as much like direct communication as possible.
3. Establish regular communication sessions with Deaf employees about the provision of interpreting services in the workplace.
4. Create satisfaction measures for Deaf and nondeaf employees that can identify whether the systems deliver an optimal and desired communication experience. Assessing systems for interpreting services should dovetail with other quality control measures used within the organization.
5. Incentivize and reward Deaf professionals for the additional work they perform to

secure access to workplace communication. This access work should be reduced to the extent possible but also acknowledged as a de facto part of the Deaf professional's job.

Main Finding 2. Both Quality and Quantity of Interpreting are Important

Both *quality* and *quantity* are paramount to creating as close to a direct communication experience for Deaf employees as possible. The idea of *quality* is evident in comments related to interpreter selection and specifically qualifications, experience, consistency, and preferences. *Quantity* is evident in comments about issues scheduling interpreters for a specific length of time, on-call, and ad hoc as well as in specific settings. Quantity of interpreting services is evidenced in the data by numerous examples related to scheduling interpreters for the entire workday or just a few hours; providing interpreters for 2, 3, or 5 days a week; or for example ensuring preferred interpreters are on-call when Deaf employees work from home. Quantity also emerged as a variable regarding the various settings where interpreters are provided.

The data reveal that both quality and quantity of interpreting services can either support or diminish the goal of providing direct communication for Deaf employees. To secure high-quality employees, government agencies and private sector employers routinely recruit, train, and incentivize professionals of all types. Similar employment approaches to secure interpreters could result in high-quality, consistent services. Securing interpreters with the requisite expertise and availability is a human resource recruiting and training task, as with securing other professional roles in the organization. This approach may be unfamiliar to employers; however, unfamiliar does not mean unreasonable.

Recommendations for Employers

1. Establish specific qualifications for interpreters needed in the workplace that are beyond a generalist interpretation credential.
2. Begin with the assumption that interpreters need a similar background and education in the content area of Deaf professionals. It may not be the case that an interpreter interpreting for a Deaf attorney also needs to be an attorney. At the very least, such credentials should be considered when hiring an interpreter.
3. Consider hiring options, in consultation with Deaf employees, such as (a) staff interpreters that meet the identified qualifications or who can be trained to meet those standards, (b) designated interpreters (full-time interpreters specifically assigned to one or a small group of Deaf professionals on an ongoing basis), and (c) a small group of independent interpreters regularly scheduled in the workplace.
4. Budget for Deaf professionals' out-of-office work communication needs, such as off-site meetings and travel, including costs for preferred interpreters to accompany the professional.
5. Establish protocols for video remote interpreting services—that is, have a staff interpreter provide video interpreting when a Deaf professional works from home, rather than relying on nonspecialized, itinerant video relay service interpreters.

Main Finding 3: Effective Systems Are Necessary for the Provision of Equitable Communication Access

The systems that provide interpreting services are inextricably linked to the quality of those services. Systems include bureaucratic protocols, detailed rules and guidelines, complex software, and layers of approvals, among other obstacles hampering equitable communication. In short, convoluted systems frequently stand between the communication need and the approximation of direct communication access.

The Deaf professionals in this study recognize that efficient and responsive systems support their communication in the workplace; however, creating responsive systems requires a paradigm shift from systems of suspicion, scarcity, and bureaucratic hurdles to systems of efficient provision of appropriate resources. Repeatedly, participants reported observations of rigid, time-consuming systems that yielded far-from-optimal results. Well-designed and convenient systems for requesting interpreting services may seem unimportant to employers, but they qualitatively increase access for Deaf employees. When systems protract the delivery of interpreting services, access delayed is access denied.

The data further revealed the burden carried by many Deaf professionals in order to have communication access in their workplaces. This added responsibility is exacerbated by inefficient systems that create, amplify, and even require this Deaf access work. For example, several Deaf professionals reported that they were expected to manage numerous tasks surrounding interpreting including advocating for services, creating interpreter requests, overseeing scheduling, reviewing interpreters' applications, serving on committees related to interpreting, reviewing bids for services, preparing interpreters, and escorting interpreters throughout secure facilities, among other activities. Access work borne by Deaf employees also includes social and emotional costs, which are time consuming and energy draining. And yet, Deaf employees are expected to bear these costs.

Critically, the added access work takes the employees' focus away from their area of professional expertise and, furthermore, such access work is typically unacknowledged and unrewarded. For Deaf professionals, this situation creates an unequal and inherently unfair distribution of labor that is not required of their nondeaf counterparts. That is, Deaf professionals have all of the duties of their colleagues but with the burden of additional and unpaid labor. More efficient systems reduce the burden of access work.

In sum, a commitment to equitable communication access is demonstrated by being dedicated to quality system design. Inefficient and unresponsive system design ensures that quality interpreting services will not be delivered. Simply put, poor systems result in poor access, which may result in employee overwork or underperformance. Put another way, inefficient system design is an indicator of an employers' lack of commitment to equitable communication access in the workplace. We argue that it is disingenuous to position an organization as being "pro-equity" without a clear investment in a quality system and continuous quality improvement.

Recommendations for Employers

1. Create seamless systems for interpreter provision.

2. Regularly assess systems surrounding interpreter provision to evaluate services and procedures with the goal of quality improvement.
3. If utilizing an interpreting agency, create contractual arrangements that are responsive to the needs of Deaf employees. The level of service (e.g., securing a preferred interpreter, frequency of interpreting service, efficiency of submitting and approving requests) are a reflection of the specific contractual elements established by the employer.

Main Finding 4. The Pursuit of Cost Savings Usually Results in Less Equitable Systems

Although a cost-accounting approach may be justified on the grounds of making systems leaner and more efficient, cost reductions usually result in less-equitable systems for Deaf employees. Institutions naturally strive for cost reductions; however, the participants in this study repeatedly acknowledged that budget concerns impact decision making surrounding communication access. In no case did the participants in this study link a reduction in costs to greater access. The argument for cost reductions is often framed as “doing more with less;” however, participant comments point to the reality of doing less with less. The scientific management of workers, known as Taylorism, emerged in the early 20th century industrial age and has perpetuated the perspective that people are replaceable parts within an organization-as-machine metaphor (Nowasad, 2021).

For example, if organizations view interpreters as easily interchangeable “components,” then scheduling is an easily managed problem—simply replace one component for another on demand. In this scenario, interpreters can be dropped into any assignment without regard for their language fluency, specialization, content knowledge, training, or other personal and professional characteristics. In this view, interpreters are viewed as being “more productive” by providing more hours of service in a given period; thus, the overall system is viewed as “more efficient.” As a result, each hour of service is, in theory, less expensive. However, the actual costs associated with the “interchangeable component view” is unexamined and therefore unknown. In fact, the interpreter-as-component approach may actually be *more* expensive in terms of interpreter effectiveness, communication quality, and reduced Deaf professional productivity.

Do employers neglect or ignore service improvement efforts on purpose? Of course, not taking action is a decision of sorts. Notably, some participant comments suggest that current workplace systems are deliberately preserved as if trapped in amber, rather than reformed and improved. Maintaining cumbersome systems may be a de facto method of rationing interpreting and thus rationing the access of Deaf employees. The undercurrents of this study give the sense that cumbersome logistic arrangements are a mechanism to reduce costs, which, in most cases, reduces access.

The findings made clear that improved access through high-quality interpreting is an important element of increasing equity and furthermore that providing quality interpreting may be more expensive. Cutting costs and avoiding service improvements directly impact and reduces access. Incremental cost reductions result in incremental reductions in access. Waiting 2 minutes or 2 days or 2 weeks to get an interpreter undoubtedly has an impact on Deaf professionals’ career

mobility and their ability to contribute their talents to achieving organizational goals. The pursuit of efficiency sabotages the possibility of equity.

Recommendations for Employers

1. Create a budget that acknowledges the employer's role and responsibility of ensuring access and equity in the workplace.
2. Hire more Deaf professionals. Hiring Deaf professionals may initially seem to be a counterintuitive prescription to reduce costs, but more Deaf professionals in an organization may be effectively provided with interpreting services by a small team of interpreters who are each engaged in interpreting for a larger portion of their day, thus creating efficiencies.

Conclusion

This study used the Critical Incident Technique to gather observations from 17 Deaf professionals about communication access in their workplace. The data resulted in four main findings: (1) Deaf people know what they need for communication equity in the workplace; thus, employers should listen to Deaf employees and provide what they request; (2) both quantity and quality of interpretation are important to communication access; therefore, systems should be established in which interpreters with specialized skills and knowledge are readily available as needed; (3) communication access through high-quality interpreting services is a critical component for creating workplace equity; and (4) cheaper services typically mean less effective and less equitable services for Deaf employees.

The stated intent of disability employment legislation is to enable full participation in the workplace so that all people can use their talents and skills for the benefit of both the employer and society. All too often, this vision is ignored by a disregard for alternative systems as well as a lack of reflection on whether current systems are even effective. Perversely, the road blocks faced by Deaf professionals when making interpreting requests may also cloud their own vision of what full access in the workplace could be. That is, the constant barriers encountered by Deaf employees may result in their acceptance of less. If fairness and equality are the legal and moral benchmarks, then the meaning of what constitutes effective services must be seriously examined. The data suggest that, to date, most systems have taken an unexamined, "good enough" stance toward the provision of interpreting services for Deaf employees. However, the findings reveal that systems are far from being good enough.

At its core, this paper is about fairness and equity; specifically, how these ideals are manifested in the workplace of Deaf professionals. The stakes are high. Deaf citizens—indeed all Americans—have reaped the benefits of 50 years of nondiscrimination legislation. But, as shown by this study, the promise has not been fully realized. Employers are in the key position to create systems that will fulfill the dream and promise of equity for all employees in the workplace.

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Appendix A

Employer Thematic Cluster

Appendix A provides the 62 desired behaviors in the Employer thematic cluster. Comprising 171 critical incidents, this cluster includes specific behaviors regarding employer policies and practices, such as staffing, contracts, logistics, and where interpreting takes place.

Desired Behaviors	Participants ^a		Critical Incidents
	<i>n</i>	% ^b	<i>n</i>
Employer provides interpreters for short-notice requests	9	53	15
Employer provides on-call interpreters	7	41	17
Employer consults Deaf employees regarding interpreter provision	6	35	9
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to independently submit interpreting requests without prior approval	6	35	7
Employer provides interpreters for work-related social events	5	29	9
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to submit interpreting requests directly to interpreting agency or office	5	29	6
Employer does not require Deaf consumer to justify interpreting services	4	24	6
Employer assigns staff interpreter to manage interpreting contract	4	24	6
Employer provides interpreters for Deaf consumer while on work-related travel	4	24	4
Employer funds interpreting services from a centralized account	3	18	7
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to communicate directly with interpreting agency	3	18	5
Employer provides staff interpreters	3	18	5
Employer does not require Deaf consumer to escort interpreters who do not have security clearance	3	18	4
Employer includes Deaf consumer in the selection of interpreting agencies and contractors	3	18	4

Employer includes Deaf consumer in staff interpreter screening and hiring	3	18	3
Employer ensures interpreting coordinator maintains strong rapport with Deaf consumers	2	12	4
Employer assigns staff interpreter to perform administrative tasks	2	12	4
Employer requires host of meeting or event to submit interpreting requests	2	12	3
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to manage the interpreting budget and contract	2	12	3
Employer ensures availability of multiple high-quality interpreting agencies	2	12	3
Employer provides on-call interpreter waiting area located near Deaf consumer's workspace	2	12	3
Employer provides interpreting services when meeting extends past scheduled ending time	2	12	2
Employer ensures interpreting requests are filled	1	6	2
Employer ensures interpreting coordinator shares logistical information on interpreter assignments with relevant parties	1	6	2
Employer has methods to gauge interpreter performance beyond social interactions with interpreter	1	6	1
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to approve extending ending time of an assignment	1	6	1
Employer provides a single point of contact for requesting interpreters	1	6	1
Employer maintains decentralized interpreter scheduling	1	6	1
Employer requires Deaf consumer to submit interpreting requests	1	6	1
Employer has staff, other than the Deaf consumer, qualified to serve as a resource about interpreting	1	6	1
Employer does not consider Deaf employees a lower priority for interpreting services than Deaf members of the public	1	6	1
Employer shows flexibility when applying to interpreters workplace policies related to employee arrival time	1	6	1

Employer equally responsive to all Deaf employees including those who don't speak, hear, or lip-read	1	6	1
Employer responsive to Deaf consumers about overarching concerns regarding interpreting service provision	1	6	1
Employer takes appropriate action when Deaf consumer informs an interpreter is providing unsatisfactory services	1	6	1
Employer quickly initiates interpreting services for new employee	1	6	1
Employer provides interpreters only for scheduled interactions	1	6	1
Employer provides interpreters for evening and weekend assignments	1	6	1
Employer provides interpreters for two half-days each week	1	6	1
Employer provides a sufficient number of interpreters for large events	1	6	1
Employer provides in-person interpreting services	1	6	1
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to determine interpreter schedule	1	6	1
Employer authorizes Deaf consumer on overseas assignment to use interpreter for emergency medical situations involving family member	1	6	1
Employer drafts detailed interpreting contracts including accurate costs and level of service	1	6	1
Employer contracts with a local interpreting agency	1	6	1
Employer effectively manages interpreting contract without unnecessarily engaging Deaf consumer	1	6	1
Employer contracts with agency specializing in signed language interpreting	1	6	1
Employer ensures no lapse in interpreting services between contracts	1	6	1
Employer provides Deaf interpreting coordinator	1	6	1
Employer allocates sufficient budget to interpreting coordinator	1	6	1

Employer does not cancel work-related travel because of interpreting expense	1	6	1
Employer manages budget authorizations for new interpreting services in a timely manner	1	6	1
Employer does not assign staff interpreters to excessive administrative tasks	1	6	1
Employer maintains a sufficient number of staff interpreters	1	6	1
Employer provides reserved seats for Deaf consumers at large events	1	6	1
Employer ensures low ambient sound levels in interpreting environment	1	6	1
Employer ensures adequate lighting in interpreting environment	1	6	1
Employer provides headset for interpreter to use when interpreting phone calls	1	6	1
Employer provides on-call interpreter waiting area located in partially hidden area	1	6	1
Employer provides interpreting and real-time captioning for meetings	1	6	1
Employer does not provide interpreting and real-time captioning for meetings	1	6	1
Employer ensures interpreter and real-time captioning screen placed on opposite sides of the podium	1	6	1

^a Participants who reported one or more critical incidents contributing to the desired behavior.

^b Percentage of participants in the study.

Appendix B

Interpreting Office or Agency Thematic Cluster

Appendix B provides the 54 desired behaviors in the Interpreting Office or Agency thematic cluster. Comprising 162 critical incidents, this thematic cluster includes policies and practices such as interpreter scheduling, screening, preferences, and requests. We note that Interpreting Office or Agency items shown in this Appendix may be provided by an employer via an internal interpreting office, an external interpreting agency, directly contracted independent interpreters, or a combination of all three.

Desired Behaviors	Participants ^a		Critical Incidents
	<i>n</i>	% ^b	<i>n</i>
Interpreting office or agency ensures small group of interpreters assigned on an ongoing basis	11	65	18
Interpreting office or agency provides streamlined and efficient interpreting request system	10	59	21
Interpreting office or agency follows Deaf consumer's preferred interpreter list	8	47	15
Interpreting office or agency follows Deaf consumer's unsuitable interpreters list	8	47	10
Interpreting office or agency provides system for Deaf consumer to provide feedback about interpreting services	5	29	5
Interpreting office or agency rigorously screens interpreters	4	24	6
Interpreting office or agency ensures consistency in interpreter scheduling for related assignments	4	24	4
Interpreting office or agency provides RID-certified interpreters	4	24	4
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters of a specific gender	3	18	4
Interpreting office or agency quickly replaces unsuitable interpreters when requested by Deaf consumer	3	18	3
Interpreting office or agency provides two interpreters for longer meetings	3	18	3
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters scheduled on an ongoing basis for an extended period	2	12	5

Interpreting office or agency provides people of color as interpreters	2	12	5
Interpreting office or agency provides preferred interpreters for Video Remote Interpreting	2	12	3
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters who complete continuing education opportunities	2	12	3
Interpreting office or agency provides highly qualified on-call interpreters	2	12	3
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreter logistical information about the assignment	2	12	3
Interpreting office or agency provides automatic interpreter scheduling and cancelation using email software	2	12	3
Interpreting office or agency discusses scheduling options with Deaf consumer when preferred interpreters are not available	2	12	2
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters who have Deaf parents	2	12	2
Interpreting office or agency quickly responds to interpreting requests including evenings and weekends	2	12	2
Interpreting office or agency allows interpreters to convey interpreting requests	2	12	2
Interpreting office or agency charges reasonable rates	2	12	3
Interpreting office or agency has Certified Deaf Interpreters available	2	12	2
Interpreting office or agency ensures interpreters are assigned to the same day each week	1	6	2
Interpreting office or agency provides overlapping schedule when one interpreter is leaving and a new interpreter is arriving	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency maintains enough interpreters in scheduling rotation to ensure variety for Deaf consumer	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency ensures preferred interpreter available when needed	1	6	1

Interpreting office or agency allows Deaf consumer to use regular channels to schedule preferred interpreters for events in other parts of the organization ⁵	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency successfully manages unique logistical challenges for interpreter scheduling for Deaf employees working abroad	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency clearly explains policies to Deaf consumer	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency has policy discouraging extended small talk with Deaf consumer	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides preparation materials to interpreter with adequate time to prepare	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency quickly responds to Deaf consumer communications	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides information about scheduled interpreters to Deaf consumer in a convenient manner	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency responsive about consumer concerns regarding interpreting service quality	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides direct supervision of interpreter performance	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreting coordinator in the workplace	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency ensures that interpreters appear for confirmed assignments	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides one interpreter for meetings with few participants	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency informs interpreter that the Deaf consumer finds the interpreter unsuitable for future assignments after interpreter has left the workplace	1	6	1
Interpreting office able to directly contract with preferred interpreters	1	6	1

⁵ This desired behavior is indicative of the challenges faced in drawing distinctions between the employer and the internal or external administrative entity that coordinates interpreting services. This desired behavior was previously worded “Employer authorizes Deaf consumer to use regular channels to schedule preferred interpreters for events in other parts of the organization.”

Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters who have an undergraduate degree	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters who have the required level of security clearance	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides freelance interpreters who have site-specific knowledge for workplace social events	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides interpreters who live close to the workplace	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency provides qualified but unlicensed interpreters when necessary	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency screens and orients new interpreters by scheduling them for low consequence interactions	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency schedules new interpreters on a timely basis for screening by Deaf consumers on authentic assignments	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency charges nothing or minimal additional fee for last-minute requests	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency does not charge minimum fee	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency has general informational materials available about interpreting	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency able to provide justification for level of service required	1	6	1
Interpreting office or agency offers real-time captioning	1	6	1

^a Participants who reported one or more critical incidents contributing to the desired behavior.

^b Percentage of participants in the study.