Deaf people's coping strategies and experience in employment

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Deaf Studies Conference: Transformation

Agenda

1. Critical disability studies and the labour market
2. Coping strategies in employment contexts
3. Deaf businesses in neo-liberal context
4. Methods
5. Findings

Fox and stork

Metaphor for
structures of the
labour market

AUDIST STRUCTURES

- Linguistic disadvantage (small talks e.g.)
- Identity disadvantage (sociality, identifying)
- Knowledge and educational disadvantage
- Representational and perceptual disadvantage (influenced by wider society's perceptions, less productive, lazy)

(Kendall 1999)

Different attitudes towards disabled/deaf workers

- India: Neoliberalism
- Coffee shops: employing deaf people
- Discourses on disabled workers as stable workers
- Appeals to affective economy

(Friedner 2013)

But from deaf perspective:

...not always positive experience, not promoted,
isolated.

(Friedner 2013)

Identity work/adaptation strategies among minority groups

Feminist studies: humour/irony, casting themselves as mothers for younger male employees/ claiming to work extra hard

Gay men: struggles with normative discourses of professionalism (as masculine/heterosexual) to maintain a positive identity

ADAPTION STRATEGIES OF DISABLED WORKERS

1. Hiding strategy

Doing jobs where impairment can be hidden, staying in the same job for years

2. Over-achiever strategy

Contesting the discourse that workers with disabilities are less productive

3. Homo-sociality strategy (deaf sociality)

[homosociality strategy]

Entrepreneurship and self-employment

- A strategy for entering the labour market for many people who belong to a 'minority' in the context of employment.
- Push: Overcoming prejudice and discrimination in labour market
- Pull: creating and working in an environment defined by themselves

Methods

- Pilot study performed in the UK.
- Focus of research is the Danish labour market.
- All of business owners/employees: well-educated, white people, middle class, many are leading figures and between 30-50 years old.
- Field studies reveal some preliminary findings – not the conclusive results.

Aims at understanding

- Coping strategies employed by deaf business owners/employees in the intersection between a deaf-structured work place and a hearing structured labour market
- Disability/deafness in deaf-led business context: how is deafness valued and stigmatised?

Push factors

- Direct discrimination in job applications
- Audist microaggressions at previous work
- Imagined experiences of discrimination
- Austerity and fewer jobs in deaf world

→ Self-employment/business ownership can be seen as push factors

Pull factors

- Aspirations of entrepreneurship
- Family background (habitus of self-employed)
- “Deaf development”: “the desire for the emergence of deaf-administered structures and institutions”

(Friedner 2014:504)

- Social capital and linguistic capital

Construction of deaf workers as positive

“The hearing applicant had better qualifications. But I decided to employ the deaf applicant. It is much more easy. “

(deaf business owner 2)

Construction of hearing employers as unaware

“Hearing employers would not know how to use the deaf people without education. Some of the deaf-led business owners like (*names*) know how to use them “ (deaf owner 1)

Communication and networking strategies

1. Not only through interpreters – meet halfway
2. giving first lesson free to hearing customers / participating in formalized networks
3. Performativity strategies : show confidence /pushy (SPIDSE ALBUER)

Deaf stigma?

"I don't specifically aim at employing deaf people. Deaf people talk too much". (business owner 4)

It could be because of the different generation/age/employment values...

Small talk is provided as powerful practice in workplace

Different ways of managing problems

- “I experience some differences between deaf and hearing managers” (deaf business owner 1)
- different kind of sociality experiences and communicative strategies

Ontological insecurity

- Austerity/increasing control of interpreting service
- Disabling contexts Controlling/disabling practices (micro aggressions)
- Many of the employees/owners: working hard and worrying about their job opportunities

Creating alternative workplace culture/practices

Sustainability of these 'new' structures?

Also depending on surrounding attitudes/support

The fox can also be seen as predator: then what happens if the fox is left hungry?

Many of the employees/owners:
Ontological insecurity

Thank you

Your own experiences, opinions and observations on deaf-led businesses would be much welcomed – email to Msl2@hw.ac.uk