Listening as key management skill –
An empirical analysis of psychological drivers
and organizational outcomes

by

Karina Jade Lloyd

a Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in Business Administration

Approved Thesis Committee
Prof. Dr. Sven C. Voelpel (chair)
Prof. Dr. Avraham N. Kluger
Prof. Dr. Adalbert F. X. Wilhelm
Prof. Dr. Ronaldo Parente

Date of Defense: December 13, 2013

School of Humanities and Social Sciences
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................... 1  

SUMMARY ............................................................................................................................. 3  

CHAPTER 1  

GENERAL INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 5  

GOAL OF THE THESIS .............................................................................................................. 10  

THESIS OVERVIEW ................................................................................................................. 11  

REFERENCES .......................................................................................................................... 14  

CHAPTER 2  

BUILDING TRUST AND FEELING WELL – EXAMINING INTER-INDIVIDUAL AND 
INTERPERSONAL OUTCOMES AND UNDERLYING MECHANISMS OF LISTENING ... 23  

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................... 24  

INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................................... 25  

METHOD ................................................................................................................................. 33  

RESULTS ................................................................................................................................. 38  

DISCUSSION ............................................................................................................................ 41  

REFERENCES .......................................................................................................................... 48  

APPENDIX ............................................................................................................................... 59
# Table of Contents

## Chapter 3

**From Listening to Leading: Towards an Understanding of Supervisor Listening within the Framework of Leader-Member Exchange Theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 4

**Is My Boss Really Listening to Me? The Impact of Perceived Supervisor Listening on Emotional Exhaustion, Turnover Intention, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 1</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results and Discussion</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study 2</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results and Discussion</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Discussion</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Table of Contents

**CHAPTER 5**

**GENERAL DISCUSSION** ................................................................. 121

- SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS .................................................. 122

**INTEGRATION OF RESULTS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION** .......... 124

**MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTION** ......................................................... 127

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH** ........................................... 128

**CONCLUDING REMARKS** ................................................................. 131

**REFERENCES** .................................................................................... 132
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was most fortunate to have many sources of encouragement and support along this creative journey and I am deeply grateful to all of them.

First, I would like to thank Prof. Sven Voelpel without whom this thesis would not have been possible. Sven, you introduced me to many companies and enabled fruitful insights into management practice. Foremost, you gave me the autonomy to develop and pursue my own ideas, and always encouraged me to aim high. I am highly thankful for your encouragement and all the opportunities you provided for learning and growing.

I especially express my appreciation to Prof. Avraham Kluger. Avi, you invited me to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and introduced me to listening research, and guided me in finding my “niche” in management research. Together we developed my first study and you accompanied me ever since. It was a pleasure working you and I am grateful for your invaluable contribution to this thesis.

I also thank Prof. Adalbert Wilhelm who so readily became a member of my PhD committee. Thank you for your scientific curiosity and openness to my research, and our valuable discussions on the development of my work.

My thanks are also due to Prof. Ronaldo Parente from Florida International University for being on my PhD committee. Ron, your expertise in business research and consulting benefited my thesis a lot and I would like to thank you for your contribution.

I express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Diana Boer, my mentor, co-author, and friend. Diana, you were my role model and made me the researcher I am today. Your positive energy and amazing methodological knowledge inspired me. You were always
available for guidance, no matter what time zones lay between us, and accompanied and motivated me through all my ups and downs. Thank you for your dedication. Your contribution is priceless.

My gratitude is owed to Prof. Joshua W. Keller, whom I was able to work with at Nanyang Business School in Singapore. Josh, our heated discussions on definitions and core research constructs were not only intellectually stimulating and fun, but significantly contributed to the development of our paper and the whole thesis. Thank you for devoting so much of your time and ideas to our project. I am also grateful to the SHSS for supporting this thesis financially with a scholarship and a part-time position at the Career Services Center (CSC). It was a great experience working at the CSC – officially awarded “The Department with the Best Mood” in 2012 – and fruitfully completed the theoretical part of this thesis with practical insights of employee management and organizational practice. Predrag, Petra, and Ines, it was a pleasure working with you and I am grateful for all I was able to learn about training, coaching, and career development.

I also thank my colleagues and friends of the WISE research group for all their constructive discussions, invaluable thoughts, and creative input to my research. I am particularly thankful to my PhD companions Katharina and Anika for supporting my data collection but foremost for sharing the grad school experience with me and making this time so enjoyable.

Special thanks go to all my friends of the Jacobs community, in Bremen, and around the world who accompanied me on this journey and made it all the way worthwhile.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my parents, Pat and Peter, for their never-ending, unconditional support. You are true listeners!

Karina J. Lloyd
SUMMARY

Management literature over the past 60 years has highlighted the importance of effective listening in the workplace and suggested it to be a key management skill of successful leaders. Yet, most of this work has been intuitive, descriptive, and prescriptive and has received little scientific attention. Despite its popularity in the managerial literature and in executive education, little is known empirically about how effective listening affects interpersonal relationships, leader-follower interactions, and more distal work outcomes such as job satisfaction or voluntary turnover. The goal of this dissertation is to open this black box and shed light onto fundamental aspects of listening. Specifically, this research addresses the questions of how important listening is within interpersonal relationships, what kind of distal and proximal outcomes it affects, and through which underlying mechanisms it may operate.

To this end, this thesis employs a multi-method approach in four empirical studies, including a zero-acquaintance paradigm, two cross-sectional questionnaire studies, and a multi-rater organizational survey study. First, the findings from a controlled setting with a student sample indicated the importance of feeling listened to for individual well-being and building positive relationships with others. Perceived listening quality was associated with trust in the unacquainted partner and enhanced situational well-being. The results also indicated that these two listening effects are driven by distinct cognitive and socio-emotive mechanisms – clarity and social attraction. Transferring these findings to the workplace, the organizational data suggested that effective listening is similarly beneficial in the dyadic leader-follower interaction in which perceived supervisor listening was positively associated with
employee attitudes towards their leader, the leader-follower interaction, and the job (i.e., satisfaction with the leader, interactional justice, and job satisfaction). Most important, this study empirically examines the validity of the listening construct for organizational research, and integrates the concept of supervisor listening into the framework of leader-member exchange theory. Finally, two organizational studies address effective listening as a management skill. The results demonstrated that employee perception of supervisor listening is important for three different organizational outcomes: one proximal (emotional exhaustion) and two more distal (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions). Furthermore, these organizational studies address the questions of why listening is important and how it affects these work outcomes, and put forward evidence that suggested positive and negative affect as two distinct mediating mechanisms.

In conclusion, this thesis deepens our theoretical and practical understanding of listening effects in dyadic (leader-follower) interactions and their underlying mechanisms. It revealed that employees’ perceptions that the supervisor is listening can have major consequences for employee well-being and the organization as a whole. The findings have important managerial implications for successful employee management and overall organizational functioning as well as significant implications for future research on listening and its integration into organizational theory.
CHAPTER 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION
Since the *Harvard Business Review* (HBR) published Rogers and Roethlisberger’s (1952) article *Barriers and Gateways to Communication*, practitioner handbooks on effective listening as a desirable workplace skill have been prolific (e.g., Cooper, 1997; Nichols & Stevens, 1957). Until 2013, the HBR has published 120 articles with the keyword ‘listen’ in the abstract, emphasizing the importance of listening as a key management skill (e.g., Drucker, 2004; Frey, 1993) and important leadership behavior (Reave, 2005). Yet, these broad assertions have received little attention in the academic business environment and empirical research in peer-reviewed business journals remains scarce (Brownell, 1994). Scholarly data on listening has been largely descriptive, prescriptive, and anecdotal and seldom goes beyond intuitive textbook descriptions. Hence, although highly recommended for successful workforce management (Bechler & Weaver, 1994; Steil & Bommelje, 2004) and implicitly included in descriptions of effective leadership behavior (Bass & Riggio, 2006), our scientific understanding of the nature of listening in the organizational setting is far from complete. This appears even more surprising since managers claim to spend the majority of their time communicating (Axley, 1996), 45% of that time listening (Abrams & Hibbison, 1986), and rate listening as the most important aspect of their communication (Goby & Lewis, 2000) and of successful employee management (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003). Therefore, the scarce theoretical and empirical consolidation of the listening concept is astounding and calls for empirical elucidation.

In a variety of business fields, including practitioner and academic accounts, listening has been discussed as a vital interpersonal skill for success concerning customer retention (De Ruyter & Wetzel, 2000), customer interactions (Bonoma, 1982; Schaeffer, 2002), sales performance (Castleberry & Shepherd, 1993; Ramsey &
Sohi, 1997), change management (Heifetz & Linskey, 2002), executive coaching (Good, 1993), as well as employee satisfaction (Brownell, 1990; Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003), commitment (Lobdell, Sonoda, & Arnold, 1993), and performance (Stine, Thompson, & Cusella, 1995). Business scholars have lamented the current state of listening as a sheer paradox: despite its acknowledged value as a vital management skill, the empirical investigation of the nature, mechanisms, and outcomes of listening has received little attention (Brownell, 1994; Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Without a sound basis, however, listening as an organizational variable will continue to lack the necessary credibility and legitimacy in business science. This necessitates rigorous research on listening in the workplace.

Scientific research from a variety of academic disciplines – including cognitive, clinical, developmental, and lifespan psychology – have suggested diverse positive effects of listening such as, for instance, the development and social construction of people’s narrative identity (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000) and autobiographical memory (Pasupathi, 2001; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009), client progress in psychotherapy (Aspy, 1972; Rogers, Gendlin, Kiesler, & Truax, 1967) and trauma treatment (Shay, 1994), strong interpersonal relationships (Davis & Oathout, 1987; Deci, La Guardia, Moller, Scheiner, & Ryan, 2006), as well as increased well-being and life satisfaction (Lun, Kesebir, & Oishi, 2009; Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000). Experimental manipulations of listening have revealed that listeners can influence speakers’ effective encoding of information, choice of language, conciseness and quality of reproduced information, facial expression, as well as speakers’ affective reactions and attitudes towards the listener (Bavelas et al., 2000; Beukeboom, 2009; Krauss, Garlock, Bricker, & McMahon, 1977; Krauss & Weinheimer, 1966; Kraut, Lewis, & Swezey, 1982). Hence, listening is not only
important in management literature but is also an important psychological construct. This thesis will examine listening as a management skill – that is, as a psychological phenomenon in the organizational context.

While business scholars and organizational research mainly tend to focus on managers’ effective expression and assertive communication (e.g., Anderson, Spataro, & Flynn, 2008; Billing & Alveson, 2000), there are reasons why receptive behavior – that is, listening – may be as important as a workplace skill, particularly for supervisors. Effective listening, defined as listening with empathy, positive regard, and nonjudgmental attitude – “listening with understanding” (Rogers et al., 1952/1991), “empathic listening” (Rogers, 1951), or “facilitative listening” (Kluger, 2011) – has been claimed the gateway to communication (Rogers et al., 1952/1991). Listening is an important behavior that signals managerial openness (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998) and motivates employees to speak up (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Effective listeners encourage productive two-way communication (Bass et al., 2006) in that they elicit speaker self-disclosure of job-related and personal information (Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983). Hence, effective listeners may encourage employees to open up and reveal critical information more readily and effectively (Miller et al., 1983; Milliken et al., 2003). All too often, employees refrain from disclosing information in fear of negative consequences (Morrison & Milliken, 2000) or in anticipation of not being heard (Detert & Burris, 2007; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Milliken et al., 2003). In many cases, this information can be decisive for the success or failure of projects. Hence, supervisors who listen well may get the crucial information about what is going on in the team, the job, and in the company. Similarly, effective listening also provides insights into others’ more personal motives and attitudes, which may allow for a more precise
assessment and understanding of the individual and his or her behavior and motivation.

In addition to this informational account, listening has important implications for relationships. John J. Gabarro (1991), professor of human resource management at Harvard Business School, called it “the grey flannel ethic”: the idea that people’s feelings matter and that, with one key management skill, a leader is able to understand both thoughts and feelings of others, through active listening. Effective listeners foster an atmosphere of safety to speak openly, create intimacy and positive interpersonal interactions (Beukeboom, 2009; Edmondson & Moingeon, 1999). Listening affects perceptions of consideration, respect (Bass et al., 2006), and justice (Blader & Tyler, 2003), as well as trust in and liking of the listener (Collins & Miller, 1994). A relationship paved with trust and respect lays the foundation for successful working relationships, commitment, and open communication (Detert et al., 2007; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Gerstner & Day, 1997). This thesis will examine how these psychological aspects of listening affect diverse components of perceived leader behavior, the leader-follower interaction, and important organizational outcomes.

Considering employee perspectives of what is important to them in a leader, further highlights the importance of listening as a management skill. For instance, investigating employee interests, the Walker Information survey (Walker Information, Inc., 2001) revealed fairness and “care and concern for employees” as priorities for employees. Similarly, in a national survey by Personnel Decisions International (PDI, 1999) employees rated communication and interpersonal relationship skills as most important qualities of good supervisors. Complementary to these employee ratings of what is important in a leader, research found expressing empathy towards employees to be a key variable of perceived management effectiveness (Kellett, Humphrey, &
Sleeth, 2002) and performance (Bass & Avolio, 1989; Collins, 2001, Goleman, 1998; Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996), and to positively correlate to job satisfaction, low voluntary turnover, group cohesion, group performance, and group efficiency (Bass, 1990; Champoux, 2000; Keller, 1992). In sum, various research disciplines indicate that listening to employees may well be an important component of perceived leader behavior, the leader-follower interaction, and – since it has important effects on work outcomes – also overall organizational functioning.

**GOAL OF THE THESIS**

This thesis primarily seeks to achieve a broader scientific understanding of the nature of listening in the workplace. Specifically, it aims at examining listening as a vital management skill by illuminating the main questions of what kind of effects listening has on individuals, employees, and work outcomes, and why – that is, through which underlying mechanisms does listening operate. To this end, this thesis empirically investigates diverse (proximal and distal) outcomes of listening and their distinct underlying psychological mechanisms. Four systematic studies will include a zero-acquaintance paradigm within a student sample, two employee survey studies, and an organizational multi-rater study. With these four studies, the thesis aims to contribute towards a more precise and comprehensive understanding of listening as a management skill and as a credible and valid construct in organizational research. Particularly, this thesis contributes to generating new theory concerning the psychological drivers of listening and advances current academic knowledge of the effects of perceived supervisor listening on employees and work outcomes. It also contributes to academic knowledge on the listening phenomenon in more general, and fosters its integration into organizational research disciplines.
THESIS OVERVIEW

This dissertation contains three empirical chapters (Chapters 2-4) followed by a general discussion. The chapters all have a common thread, consecutively contributing to the dissertation’s overarching goal: the theoretical and practical understanding of managerial listening in the workplace. The empirical chapters are written as individual scientific articles to be published in peer-reviewed journals and follow the same structure – theoretical background, methods, results, and discussion. In acknowledgement of the other collaborating parties who contributed to this research, the term ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ is used throughout the thesis.

Together, the three empirical chapters provide a series of four studies that all have in common that they examine a) different individual, interpersonal, and organizational outcomes of listening, and b) the distinct psychological mechanisms that drive these listening effects.

We start in Chapter 2 – Building Trust and Feeling Well – Examining Intraindividual and Interpersonal Outcomes and Underlying Mechanisms of Listening – by examining listening effects in a controlled setting of student dyads. Before investigating listening in the broader context of leadership behavior and workforce management, it is essential to investigate if and to what extent listening is actually important. To capture mere listening effects, we employ a zero-acquaintance paradigm to analyze dyadic interactions in which one participant tells a personal story while the partner listens silently. Based on early theories and current research, we examine two outcomes of listening quality – one for the individual (emotional well-being) and one for the interpersonal relationship (trust) – as well as two distinct underlying psychological mechanisms (situational clarity and social attraction).
We continue in Chapter 3 – *From Listening to Leading: Towards an Understanding of Supervisor Listening within the Framework of Leader-Member Exchange Theory* – by transferring the results into the hierarchical leader-follower relationship. We examine the validity of the listening construct within the framework of leader-member exchange theory and test its usability to measure perceived supervisor listening. Using survey data of employees from various professional backgrounds, we assess the convergent, divergent, and predictive validity of perceived supervisor listening, while integrating supervisor listening and leader-member exchange. In sum, this study provides a sound basis for the next studies, which examine perceived supervisor listening and its mechanisms and organizational outcomes more closely.

While the first paper examines *if* listening affects strong dyadic interactions, and the second paper creates the basis for examining leader listening in the workplace, Chapter 4 – *Is My Boss Really Listening to Me? The Impact of Perceived Supervisor Listening on Emotional Exhaustion, Turnover Intention and Organizational Citizenship Behavior* – deals with the core questions of *how* supervisor listening affects employees, *why* it matters for them, and *what* the consequences are for the organization. Based on organizational data from two studies – a two-level team study and a cross-sectional survey study – we address current theoretical and empirical gaps in listening research by showing that perceived supervisor listening is important for employees and affects three different work outcomes: one proximal (emotional exhaustion) and two more distal (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions). We also address the question why listening is important and how it affects these outcomes, and suggest positive and negative affect as two distinct mediating mechanisms.
Chapter 5 concludes with an overall review of the thesis’ findings and discussion of the theoretical and practical contributions in light of the overarching goal. The chapter closes with a critical review and directions for future research.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 2

BUILDING TRUST AND FEELING WELL – EXAMINING INTRAINDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL OUTCOMES AND UNDERLYING MECHANISMS OF LISTENING

1 I am particularly thankful to Diana Boer, Avraham N. Kluger, and Sven C. Voelpel for co-authoring this manuscript.
2 Accepted for Publication: April 28, 201, International Journal of Listening. Reprinted by permission of The International Listening Association
ABSTRACT

We investigate perceived listening quality in relation to individual (self-clarity and emotional well-being) and dyadic variables (social attraction and trust). Specifically, we proposed that the link between perceived listening quality and emotional well-being is mediated by self-clarity, and that the link between perceived listening and trust is mediated by social attraction. We obtained data in a controlled setting from a sample of 50 unacquainted student dyads, in which the narrator told a personal story while the partner listened silently. The data showed a good fit to the model. Our work expands the understanding of listening by illuminating the role of mediating processes and by demonstrating correlates of perceived listening quality in the context of unacquainted dyads.

KEYWORDS:

Perceived listening quality
Emotional well-being
Self-clarity
Social attraction
Trust
CHAPTER 2

INTRODUCTION

Listening is at the heart of every healthy relationship and an important factor for individual well-being according to Rogers (1951). Although it is one key component of communication, listening has received little empirical attention (Bodie, Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012; Janusik, 2010). The small body of empirical research suggests that listening may have far-reaching implications for both individual emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships. For instance, effective listening has been linked to strong relationships in contexts such as romantic couples (Davis & Oathout, 1987), therapist-patient (Rogers, Gendlin, Kiesler, & Truax, 1967), salesperson-customer (Drollinger, Comer, & Warrington, 2006), and leader-follower (Stine, Thompson, & Cusella, 1995). Furthermore, perceived supervisor listening has been found to relate to employee health (Dolev & Kluger, 2011; Mineyama, Tsutsumi, Takao, Nishiuchi, & Kawakami, 2007). While these examples suggest that listening may play an important role in social relationships and for individual well-being, only few studies (e.g., Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson 2000; Beukeboom, 2009) have attempted to isolate the specific influence of listening perceptions.

Furthermore, while some evidence of listening benefits has been put forward, the theoretical understanding of the underlying mechanisms is far from complete. To better understand if and how listening perceptions translate into well-being and strong relationships, the present study attempts to open this black box and considers the psychological processes that may be facilitated by listening. The overarching purpose of this study is to examine correlates of perceived listening quality concerning two outcomes, one for the self (affective well-being), and one for the interpersonal relationship (trust) between unacquainted individuals, and to explore the underlying
mechanisms that may explain these associations (*situational self-clarity* and *social attraction*).

*Listening* as a concept began receiving new attention of scholars, practitioners, and lay public outside the educational field (Wilt, 1950; Wolvin & Coakley, 1979) through Carl Rogers’ work on client-centered therapy (Rogers, 1951, 1957). Rogers stated that in mentally maladjusted individuals, inner communication has broken down, which – in turn – also damages the interpersonal communication with others, and consequently their relationship. Being listened to empathically (e.g., by a therapist or friend) can facilitate interpersonal communication and eventually also restore communication within the self. According to Rogers (Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1991/1952), “psychotherapy is good communication within and between people,” and, conversely, “good communication, or free communication, within or between people is always therapeutic” (p. 105). This statement already indicates some link between listening perceptions, interpersonal relationships, and (psychological) well-being. Following Rogers’ conceptualization, the current research focusses on how the discloser of a positive life event perceived an unacquainted listener and how this perception is related to the internal states of perceived trust and emotional well-being. Non-arguably the actual behavior of the listener is important and there has been considerable work on what specific behavior may account for perceptions of listening competencies (e.g., Bodie et al., 2012). However, when it comes to evaluating the development of psychological states in first encounters, the speaker’s perceptions of effective listening may be the driver of speaker's reaction, regardless of the objective listening behavior. Hence, rather than defining listening as any specific behavior, we conceptualize listening as a subjective perception of *listening quality*. In the next sections, we elaborate these links and examine two
outcomes of perceived listening quality: interpersonal trust and individual well-being. Moreover, we develop two underlying psychological mechanisms that contribute to our understanding of how listening unfolds its effects.

LISTENING AND TRUST

Clearly, listening has important relational implications. Listening is a dyadic process between individuals. Listening conveys appreciation and interest in the other and has the potential to create, maintain, and enhance positive interpersonal relationships (Bodie et al., 2012). The influence of listening was demonstrated by Beukeboom’s (2009) experimental research, in which different listeners with either a positive or negative nonverbal expression influenced the speakers’ mood such that it was congruent with the manipulated nonverbal expression. Furthermore, speakers’ perceptions of listening quality determine speakers’ decisions to speak openly and reveal information (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1999; Miller, Berg, & Archer, 1983), and influence the content, language, and quality of information shared with a listener (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson 2000; Beukeboom, 2009; Petronio, 2002; Rubin, Hill, Peplau, & Dunkel-Schetter, 1980). These aspects, in turn, can influence subsequent communication and interaction quality. For instance, research revealed that mutual sharing of personal information is pivotal for creating closeness and intimacy (Greene, Derlega, & Mathews, 2006; Petronio, 2002; Reis & Shaver, 1988). In sum, listening is an interactive, bilateral process in which listeners and speakers mutually influence each other (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009, 2010), and it is likely that perceptions of listening quality and relationship quality are positively interrelated.

The fundamental characteristic of strong relationships is interpersonal trust (Miell & Duck, 1986; Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 1985), since it is the essential factor that enables relationship partners to lay down continuous vigilance and protective
measures (Hosmer, 1995). Hence, we will use trust in this study as an indicator of relationship quality. There is some empirical research that listening is a trust-enhancing factor. For instance, Mechanic and Meyer (2000) examined the antecedents of patient trust in their attending physician and found that patient perceptions of physician listening were the strongest determinant of patient trust in their physician.

This direct link between listening and trust has also received support from business research. For instance, salespersons’ listening behavior was positively associated to clients’ trust in them (Drollinger et al., 2006). A similar relationship was found for supervisor listening and employee trust in their supervisor (Stine et al., 1995). While this research suggests a positive effect of listening on trust, these listening effects were examined within samples of already established relationships (e.g., salesman-client, physician-patient, and supervisor-employee). Less is known about the contribution of listening perceptions in the process of building trust between unacquainted individuals. Yet, if perceived listening quality contributes to creating closeness and intimacy, then it is likely to facilitate the development of trust between unacquainted individuals. Therefore, we propose that people who are perceived to be good listeners will also be perceived as more trustworthy, even after a first short encounter.

*H1a: Perceived listening quality is positively related to trust in the listener.*

H1a is mainly intended to re-evaluate the link between perceived listening quality and trust which has been suggested by prior research. Extending current knowledge, we now consider the psychological mechanisms that may mediate listening effects on trust. Trust is a fundamental characteristic of relationships (Miell et al., 1986) that allows individuals to make predictions about a partner’s behavior and influences risk-taking decisions related to the partner (Hosmer, 1995). Hence,
trust is inherently directed to the future (Luhmann, 1989) and develops over time on the basis of iterative social interactions (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996). In an early stage of a relationship, other more immediate, short-term mechanisms may facilitate the development of trust.

The small body of experimental research that has investigated listening effects between strangers demonstrates how listeners can affect speakers. For instance, Beukeboom’s (2009) experimental manipulation of nonverbal listening behavior significantly explained differences in speakers’ language use and affective reactions (i.e., the extent of positive or negative feelings). Listeners’ positive facial expression and responsive behavior affected speakers’ affective expressions and mood in a positive way, while nonresponsive listeners affected these aspects negatively. Bavelas and colleagues’ (2000) results from several experiments also demonstrate how listeners and speakers mutually influence each other’s listening and speaking behavior. Taken together, perceived listening quality might affect initial positive or negative perceptions of the partner, that is, influence interpersonal attraction (e.g., Berscheid & Walster, 1969). More precisely, social attraction of a partner refers to the socio-emotional component or “liking component” of interpersonal attraction (e.g., Kiesler & Goldberg, 1968). This, in turn, determines the next sequence, including decisions about whether and how to continue the communication. Over time, this mutual exchange may iteratively develop and determine the relationship. Empirical evidence from research areas related to listening suggests that mutual exchange of information influences interpersonal attraction between partners (Collins & Miller, 1994; Reis, Maniaci, Caprariello, Eastwick, & Finkel, 2011) and is positively linked to the development of close relationships (Altman, Vinsel, & Brown, 1981; Petronio, 2002). We propose that perceived listening quality is associated with immediate
positive perceptions of a partner (i.e., social attraction), which then encourages future interactions and fosters the development of trust. Therefore, we predict:

\[ H1b: \text{The effect of perceived listening quality on trust is mediated by social attraction.} \]

LISTENING AND WELL-BEING

Effective communication in which individuals are perceived to listen to each other well can be therapeutic (Rogers et al., 1991/1952). However, the effect of listening on emotional well-being remains relatively unexplored. The well-being literature suggests that meaningful conversations in which partners feel understood and appreciated are strong predictors of subjective well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), life satisfaction and physical health (Lun, Kesebir, & Oishi, 2009). Similarly, an extensive body of research has put forward evidence for the positive relationship between talking about experiences (e.g., sharing secrets) and emotional well-being and health (e.g., Greene et al., 2006; Kelly, 2002; Kelly & McKillop, 1996; Pennebaker, 1995; Pennebaker & O’Heerons, 1984). As positive psychology suggests, happy people have strong social relationships (Diener & Seligman, 2002) in which people understand each other’s needs and values (Reis, Clark & Holmes, 2004). While this research implicitly indicates well-being effects of listening, listening was not examined explicitly in these studies.

In the previous section, we elaborated on experimental studies that demonstrated listening effects on speakers’ mood and feelings. Hence, there is some indication that listening may contribute to emotional well-being. A small body of organizational research explicitly examined the link between listening and broader facets of well-being in the organizational context. For instance, supervisor listening skills were related to employee ratings of psychological stress reactions – fatigue,
anxiety, and depression (Ikemi, Kubota, Noda, Tomita, & Hayashida, 1992; Mineyama et al., 2007). While the absence of illness is not equivalent to well-being (Ryff & Singer, 1998), these findings are nonetheless intriguing since they present initial evidence for a link between perceived listening and well-being. Dolev and Kluger (2011) extended these studies and revealed a positive association between supervisor listening and employee well-being and life satisfaction. Yet, relatively little is known about the distinctive association between perceived listening quality and well-being. Partial support for such listening effects comes from research on supportive communication that suggests, similarly to Rogers’ work, emotional support must be person-centered and nonverbally immediate (Burleson, 2003; Jones, 2004). Bodie and Jones (2012) have suggested one essential component of supportive communication to be active listening. To better understand if and how perceived listening and well-being are related, the current study examines the short-term emotional well-being association of perceived listening in the context of unacquainted individuals. Individuals who perceive their partners as effective listeners should reveal higher levels of emotional well-being than those who do not perceive their partners as effective listeners. Therefore, we predict:

**H2a:** Perceived listening quality is positively associated with affective well-being.

Coming to the underlying process, positive effects of perceived listening quality on emotional well-being have been theorized to be facilitated by the communication within the self (Rogers, 1951; Rogers et al., 1991/1952). The self is supposed to be composed of different ‘voices’ that represent different aspects of the self (Rogers, 1951, 1975). It is suggested that listening fosters the inner dialogue between these voices and enables the individual to pay attention to aspects that may
have been unattended or even suppressed. Being listened to in an accepting and understanding way enables the individual to become aware of these different aspects of the self, and to reevaluate, accept, and integrate those (Rogers, 1975). For Rogers, this was the basis for personal development and psychological well-being (Rogers, 1957). More contemporary research describes cognitive mechanisms (e.g., Blascovich & Tomaka, 1996; Fiedler, 1990) that point towards similar well-being effects of listening (e.g., Lepore, Ragan, & Jones, 2000).

According to contemporary theories, opening up and sharing (burdensome) cognitions with others facilitates cognitive processing of experiences. This enables understanding of the experience, facilitates acceptance, and – finally – positive reintegration (Lepore et al., 2000; Weeks & Pasupathi, 2011). Similar effects of perceived listening quality, in a broader sense, have been found in the business context for mentor listening on mentees’ perceptions of role clarity\(^3\) (Cohen, 2013). Role clarity is based on the theory of need for clarity (Ivancevich et al., 1974) and a lack of role clarity has been related to psychological and physical stress (House & Rizzo, 1972; Lyon, 1971). Cohen’s (2013) study revealed that perceived mentor listening is positively associated with mentee ratings of situational clarity directly after a mentoring session and related to a broader scope of clarity regarding their work role. In sum, incorporating these different theories and literatures, listening is likely to unfold its well-being effects through increasing clarity. Perceptions of attentive listening may enable the speaker to structure aspects of a story, to see different or new perspectives, and to gain new insights. Thus, the speaker gains clarity, which may not only concern the story, but also clarity within the self.

---

\(3\) Role clarity encompasses all information regarding the expectations associated with one’s role at work (Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974).
Therefore, we propose that the relationship between perceived listening quality and well-being are derived – at least in part – from clarity.

\textit{H2b: The effect of perceived listening quality on affective well-being is mediated by clarity.}

\section*{Method}

\textbf{Sample}

One hundred first-year students at the beginning of their first semester volunteered to participate in this study as part of a communication workshop. Of these, 51\% were female and 49\% male, ranging in age between 16 and 25 ($M = 18.95$; $SD = 1.24$). The study took place at an English-speaking university in Germany.

\textbf{Procedure}

The study was conducted within the framework of a soft-skills workshop in order to increase the likelihood of a balanced sample of first year students. All first-year undergraduate students had received an invitation to a ‘communication skills workshop for success in business and personal life’ on their first day on campus. Upon arrival at the workshop, subjects were randomized to an unacquainted partner. This resulted in 50 dyads ($n$ (male-male) = 8; $n$ (female-female) = 10; $n$ (male-female) = 32). Due to ethical considerations, we were not allowed to record information that revealed the pair membership (see Discussion).

Participants first answered a short questionnaire concerning demographics and control variables (e.g., gender, attachment style; see measures below). To evaluate correlates of perceived listening quality in the dyadic setting more precisely, we applied methods commonly used in co-counselling (for more details see Evison & Horobin, 1988; Jackins, 1970). Co-counseling, similar to Rogers’ conceptualization of
listening within client-centered therapy, focuses on putting attention on the speaking individual. Following this approach, subjects were then instructed to talk to their partner for seven minutes each about ‘a positive experience in their life.’ This topic was chosen for two reasons. First, it was necessary that every participant would be able to talk about this topic. Second, this allowed controlling for the emotional states that may arise during storytelling.

The 7-minute speaking-listening task was designed to isolate and measure listening effects more precisely than is possible in natural conversations. While one participant spoke, the partner was only allowed to listen quietly – without speaking, asking questions, or commenting. Participants were allowed to show their attentiveness non-verbally (e.g., by nodding and by saying ‘Aha’). After the listening exercise, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire and were debriefed about the study purpose.

**Measures**

Unless otherwise noted, we measured items using 7-point Likert scales, with response categories ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*.

**Perceived-listening quality.** Perceived listening quality was assessed with a 7-item scale specifically designed to capture how the speaker perceived being listened to. The items were prefaced with “When my partner listened to me, I felt that he or she” and sample items included “was interested in me personally” and “understood my feelings” (see Appendix A). The scale was pretested to assess internal consistency and usability. The pretest revealed acceptable internal reliability ($N = 20$; Cronbach’s alpha = .93). In the current study, a CFA confirmed a one-factor model structure, $\chi^2$
(14) = 28.59; \( p < .01 \), SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.94, TLI = 0.94\(^4\), of the listening scale. We allowed a covariance of residuals of two items (“cares about me” and “is interested in me personally”) which shared semantic similarity to achieve a reasonable model fit\(^5\). The internal reliability was acceptable, alpha = .84.

**Well-being.** We used a short-term affective measure of well-being, using 10 positive affect (PA) items of the *Positive and Negative Affect Schedule* (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). Items were prefaced with “After this interaction with my working partner, I feel,” sample items included “interested” and “determined.” The CFA revealed that the one factor model fitted the data well according to the fit indices, \( \chi^2 (34) = 64.77, p < .01, \) SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94. We allowed a covariance between two residuals (“interested” and “attentive”) due to semantic similarity to improve model fit. Cronbach’s alpha was .91.

**Trust.** Trust was measured using five items adapted from the *Organizational Trust Inventory* (Cummings & Bromley, 1996). Sample items included “tells me the truth” and “is reliable”. Trust was well represented by one factor, \( \chi^2 (4) = 4.57, p = .33, \) SRMR = 0.04, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99. The residuals of two items (“is reliable” and “will keep his word”) were allowed to covary due to high similarity in semantic meaning. Cronbach’s alpha was .85.

**Clarity.** A 6-item scale was designed to assess self-clarity, that is, the extent to which participants felt clearer about their thoughts, feelings, and their self. Items were prefaced by “When my partner listened to me” and sample items included “I got

---

\(^4\) We refrained from considering the commonly reported RMSEA due to the low complexity of the model and low number of degrees of freedom (df). For small df and low N models, especially for the former, there is greater sampling error, which can result in artificially large values of the RMSEA (Kenny & McCauch, 2003).

\(^5\) Similarity between items’ content that go beyond the conceptual content of the latent factor often lead to shared variance in residual terms. Adding those to the measurement model is a common and adequate practice when the covariations are theoretically justified as in our case (see for instance, Byrne, 2012; Kline, 2012).
a clearer picture of who I am,” “I learned more about myself,” and “I detected new aspects of myself which I wasn’t aware of” (Appendix B). The scale was pretested to assess internal consistency and usability, and revealed acceptable internal reliability ($N = 20$; Cronbach’s alpha = .85). In the main study, the clarity scale was well represented by the one factor model, $\chi^2 (14) = 17.49, p = .23, \text{SRMR} = 0.03, \text{CFI} = 0.99, \text{TLI} = 1.00$. Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

**Social attraction.** We assessed social attraction – that is, the socio-emotional component or “liking component” of interpersonal attraction – using four items from Mikulincer and Nachshon (1991). Items were prefaced with “After I worked with him or her” and included sample items such as “I like him or her” and “I liked the conversation”. The data fitted the one-factor model well, $\chi^2 (1) = .003, \text{SRMR} = 0.00, \text{CFI} = 1.00, \text{TLI} = 1.02$, all factor loadings were significant and ranged between 0.66 and 0.94 (standardized). Two items (“like him/her” and “like the conversation”) were allowed to covary due to similarity in semantic meaning. Cronbach’s alpha was .90.

**Control variables.** We collected data on other variables that may offer alternative explanations for the link between perceived listening and affective well-being as well as trust based on previous research. Control variables were attachment style, life satisfaction, as well as gender match and speaking order. First, attachment style may influence how comfortable participants generally feel in dyadic interactions, their willingness to disclose information, and their ability to build trust (e.g., Collins & Read, 1990; Mikulincer et al., 1991). We measured attachment style using the 12 item *Experience in Close Relationship Scale* (ERC-Short Form, Wei, Russell, & Mallinckrodt, 2007). Four items measured avoidant attachment style reliably ($\alpha = .71$) and as a one-dimensional construct, $\chi^2 (2) = 0.19, \text{SRMR} = 0.01, \text{CFI} = 1.00, \text{TLI} = 1.07$, and four items measured anxious attachment style as a
reliable ($\alpha = .69$) one-dimensional construct, $\chi^2 (2) = 0.35$, SRMR = 0.01, CFI = 1.00, TLI = 1.08. Four items had to be excluded due to low factor loadings.

Second, research indicates that individuals who are generally more satisfied with their life may also have a more positive attitude towards others and may feel better in specific situations. Their stories about a positive experience in life may also be more positive. Taken together, satisfied participants might reveal higher well-being ratings after the listening task than individuals with lower life satisfaction. We measured life satisfaction using five items ($\alpha = .78$) of the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS, Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Sample items included “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal” and “I am satisfied with my life”. The one factor model fitted the data well, $\chi^2 (5) = 10.60$, SRMR = 0.04, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.90).

Last, gender effects and order effects were assessed. Some individuals might be more comfortable talking to same-sex partners and hence they may benefit more from the listening situation. Similarly, the first speaker’s performance may have an influence on the second speaker.

**Analytical Strategy**

To evaluate listening effects on trust and well-being, as well as the hypothesized mediation effects, we conduct individual indirect effects analysis (via bootstrapped bias corrected and accelerated 95% confidence intervals; Preacher & Hayes, 2008a, 2008b). In a second step, we examine all the links simultaneously using path modeling techniques in Mplus6 to show that there are two distinctive paths. We analyze observed instead of latent variables due to sample-size considerations.
RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of the study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Zero-order Correlations of the Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Listening quality</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>(.84)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social attraction</td>
<td>5.89</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>.68**</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clarity</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>.39**</td>
<td>.21*</td>
<td>(.90)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Trust</td>
<td>5.92</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>.47**</td>
<td>.53**</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>(.85)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Emotional well-being (PA)</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.31**</td>
<td>.22*</td>
<td>.56**</td>
<td>.24*</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01. Cronbach’s alpha in brackets.

We used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to determine the distinctiveness of the study measures. The five-factor model including the above mentioned model specifications revealed a moderate overall fit, $\chi^2$ (290) = 415.62, RMSEA = 0.06 SRMR = 0.07, CFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.92. The baseline model in which all items loaded on one factor revealed poor fit, $\chi^2$ (296) = 900.48, $p < .001$; RMSEA = 0.14; SRMR = 0.15; TLI = 0.64; CFI = 0.60, and differed significantly from the five-factor model, $\Delta \chi^2 = 484.85$, $\Delta df = 6$, $p < .001$. Thus, these results indicated acceptable discriminant validity of the study variables.

We conducted two separate indirect effects analyses. First, to evaluate listening effects on trust (H1a) and the mediating role of social attraction (H1b), a bootstrap mediation analysis (Preacher et al., 2008a) was run, entering social attraction as
mediator while controlling for attachment style, life satisfaction, gender match, and speaking position. Mediation is based on a point estimate and bootstrapped 95% confidence interval (CI based on 1,000 bootstrap iterations). A mediator effect is significant if zero is not included in the CI. The analysis revealed that perceived-listening quality was positively associated with trust (Figure 1a). Furthermore, social attraction mediated the link between perceived listening quality and trust, point estimate = .27, CI = .13/.40. The model explained 36% of the outcome’s variance. Taken together, the results were in line with H1a and H1b. None of the covariates were significant, all βs < .23, ns, indicating that the listening-trust model is not dependent on attachment style, life satisfaction, gender match, or speaking position.

**Figure 1:** Intraindividual and Interpersonal Outcomes of Perceived Listening Quality and Mediating Mechanisms: a – b) Results of indirect effects analyses (bias corrected and accelerated; 1000 bootstrap resamples). N = 100. Control variables: attachment style, life satisfaction, gender match, speaking position. Unstandardized coefficients reported. c) Results of path modeling analysis. N = 100. Standardized coefficients reported. ***p < .001; **p < .01, *p < .05.
Second, the association of perceived listening and well-being (H2a) and the mediation of clarity (H2b) were evaluated. Clarity was entered as mediator in the bootstrap mediation analysis, while controlling for attachment style, life satisfaction, gender match, and speaking position. The analysis revealed that perceived listening quality was positively associated with well-being (Figure 1b) and that clarity mediated the link between perceived listening quality and well-being, point estimate = .28, CI = .13/.49. The model explained 36% of the outcome’s variance. Again, none of the covariates were significant. In sum, perceived-listening quality was positively associated with well-being, and this link was mediated by clarity, supporting H2a and H2b.

Finally, we simultaneously examined the proposed links and relationships between study variables (Figure 1c) using path modeling procedures. Since no effects of the covariates were found in prior mediation analysis, they were excluded from further testing. The data revealed a good fitting model, $\chi^2 (5) = 7.50$, RMSEA = 0.07, SRMR = 0.05, CFI = 0.98, TLI = 0.96, according to criteria presented by Vandenberg and Lance (2000). This inclusive model suggested two independent paths of listening effects – one for the self and one for the relationship. Perceived listening quality is related to social attraction which in turn is related to trust in the partner. Perceived listening quality was associated with clarity which was linked to positive affect.

---

6 Since all variables were closely related we conducted additional indirect effects analyses to test the possibility of other mediators (e.g., positive affect as mediator for self-clarity). No significant indirect effects were found.

7 We built the holistic listening model on deductive considerations. However, we tested various alternative models that seemed reasonable (e.g., trust as a mediator of positive affect). None of the models revealed acceptable fit indices.


**DISCUSSION**

In this study, we looked at the role of perceived listening quality in the context of a first interaction of unacquainted individuals. Employing a zero-acquaintance paradigm, we sought to investigate the direct correlates of perceived listening quality with emotional well-being and on interpersonal relationships. We also addressed the question how perceived listening may unfold its links to trust and wellbeing by examining two distinctive psychological mechanisms. The results suggested that perceived listening quality is linked to situational indicators of emotional well-being and interpersonal trust. These individual and interpersonal correlates of perceived listening quality were mediated by distinctive cognitive and socio-emotive mechanisms. The inclusive analysis of study variables suggested that listening effects may follow two separate and distinctive paths.

**THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS**

This study has important implications for theory and practice. First, the study empirically highlights the importance of how listeners are perceived. With this, we followed the call for research by scholars who deplored the neglect of the listener in scientific research in which “listeners are considered non-existent or irrelevant because the theory either does not mention them or treats them as peripheral” (Bavelas et al., 2000, p. 941). However, perceptions of being listened to are a crucial factor in the communication process (Bavelas et al., 2000; Pasupathi, 2001) that drive the decision to open up (Miller et al., 1983) and whether or not to continue the exchange, and is thus an important variable for building (new) relationships and developing trust. Clearly, the listening interaction in this study only presents a small part of this sequential process. Yet the results indicate the importance of perceived
listening for dyadic interactions. Second, we integrated Rogers’ (1951) theory of
listening effects on emotional well-being and current well-being research that
revealed that sharing information and feeling understood by a partner is essential for
(psychological) well-being and life satisfaction (Kelly, 2002; Lun et al., 2008;
Pennebaker, 1995; Reis et al., 2000). The results suggest that perceived listening
quality is linked to increased (short-term) emotional well-being. The short listening
interaction in this study arguably only reflects a small part of the whole story. Well-
being is composed of and influenced by various (situational and dispositional) factors,
and this study examined listening effects on short-term situational well-being. Our
results indicate that listening may influence short-term affective facets of well-being,
which in the long run may play out on more general aspects of well-being.

Third, the results supported our hypothesis that listening associations on trust
are, at least partly, explained by increased social attraction of the partner. This result
is in line with previous research showing that perceived responsiveness of interaction
partners is related to social attraction (Reis et al., 2011). This socio-emotive mediator
did not explain the other association of listening, that is, on well-being. In
accordance with prior theoretical considerations, the current findings suggested that
the well-being association might be related to situational clarity, that is, the extent to
which individuals felt clearer about themselves and their story in this situation.
According to different theories, listening may foster internal dialogue (Rogers, 1957,
1975) and raise awareness for (unknown) aspects of the self, enabling the speaker to
structure and reintegrate cognitions and emotions (Lepore et al., 2000; Weeks et al.,
2011), and thus to gain clarity. In the listening interaction in this study, perceived
listening quality was found to be linked to increased clarity, which in turn was related

\[ \text{Indirect effect} = .02, CI = -.28 / .34 \]
to higher well-being. Situational clarity was not related to the interpersonal outcome of trust. Integrating the results, this study suggested that the different outcomes of listening are driven by distinctive cognitive and socio-emotive mechanisms.

**Practical Implications**

Being an inherent component of communication, perceptions of listening may have important implications for social interactions. Perceived listening quality seems essential for well-being as well as relationships. The listening concept and its positive correlates suggest that people may benefit from putting more attention on listening to each other. For business professionals, the results may offer promising avenues for treating newcomers, initiating mentoring, or coaching. In therapy, perceptions of listening in the initial encounter may be crucial to the client’s progress. The results also have important implications for training in diverse contexts. Our results suggest that even if listeners cannot respond verbally, speakers perceive large variation in their partners’ listening quality. This in turn, may suggest that speakers are sensitive to the amount of attention the listener pays and the perceived listener’s intentions and attitudes towards them. Thus, training that emphasizes "being there" for the speaker, rather than any specific active-listening behavior, may be fruitful. This suggestion is consistent with some observations that active-listening instructions may be perceived as cynical in business settings (Tyler, 2011) and ineffective in the context of marriage (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998). Effective listening training could be integrated into employee and management training or in educational contexts where positive relationships are essential for organizational or educational success. Based on our current understanding and practitioners’ appreciation of the topic (e.g., Rogers et al., 1991/1952), perceptions of listening quality might contribute to developing and maintaining positive work relationships among employees and with supervisors.
(Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2014) or between teachers and pupils. This might be especially fruitful in positions that afford building strong relationships very quickly. On a more personal note, life quality may generally benefit if people spent more time listening well.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

The results are based on a small sample, which does not allow for certain analyses (e.g., latent paths analysis) and decreases the findings’ generalizability. We counteracted this limitation by analyzing observed (instead of latent) variables, and by using a bootstrapping approach for analyzing indirect effects, which yields robust mediation effects, particularly for small sample sizes (Preacher et al., 2008a). Similarly, the sample size may have limited the scale reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha), which could have biased the model results. However, all Cronbach’s alphas were of similar size and acceptably high (all alphas > .84, Lance, Butts, & Michels, 2006). Yet, future studies are needed to determine the findings’ stability within larger and different types of samples.

Another limitation refers to the correlational nature of the data in this study. Although we employed a zero-acquaintance paradigm to better isolate listening effects, the listening measure still reflects naturally-occurring (instead of manipulated) variance in listening. Future studies should include an experimental manipulation of listening. For instance, two experimental conditions could be designed in which confederate listeners demonstrate particularly good (versus poor) listening behaviors.

The study’s controlled setting also entails some points of discussion. For instance, we employed a zero-acquaintance paradigm and instructed participants to listen silently, while the other partner was tasked with talking about a positive event.
Real-life encounters are marked by mutual interaction and exchange, including asking questions, providing reassurance, and interrupting. Consequently, the study’s focus on isolating perceived listening quality, that is, on increasing internal validity, entailed the trade-off of decreasing generalizability. Yet, the methods commonly applied in co-counselling offered a validated approach to investigating listening as in Rogers’ initial conceptualization. That is, that the focus on the individual being perceived with positive regard and full attention. Of course, silent listening must be attentive as to send signals of attentiveness, known as back-channeling (Bavleas et al., 2000). Moreover, the type of listening we employed was found to increase the degree of psychological safety experienced by speakers, relative to a normal conversation condition, in a laboratory experiment (Castro & Kluger, 2011). Therefore, we encourage future research to extend and compare our findings in more natural interactions in the field. We speculate that this type of listening helps people become more attentive to their partner, and that the attentiveness or the positive intention towards the other is responsible for the effects we observed (cf. reappraisal function of emotional comforting, Jones & Wirtz, 2006). Such alternative processes could be explored in future research by expanding the theoretical exploration of the mediators of effective listening.

Related to this limitation, the measure of perceived listening quality shares considerable conceptual overlap with the responsiveness measure (Reis et al., 2011). Listening is a multidimensional construct (Bodie et al., 2012; Jones, 2011) of which responsiveness and perceived listening quality are certain dimensions. Obviously both concepts are overlapping, and thus future research should attempt to distinguish conceptually and empirically, if possible, between these concepts.
Furthermore, while the positive event that participants recounted might have influenced situational well-being ratings to the positive end (Lambert, Gwinn, Baumeister, Strachman, Washburn, Gable, & Fincham, 2013), this procedure was necessary to ensure that individuals would talk about experiences with similarly positive valence, which countervailed the possibility that different emotional states would arise during storytelling over the whole sample. We also controlled for individual differences in the broader well-being measure of life satisfaction. Consequently, although individual differences might have led to a positively enlarged baseline in affective well-being, the procedure and instructions cannot fully explain the association between perceived listening quality and situational well-being. Yet, future research is necessary to specifically address these issues. For instance, it would be intriguing to compare different samples in which participants report a neutral, positive, or negative event, and test for interaction effects of story content and perceived listening quality on well-being. This would allow for insights into when listening shows its effects the best – that is, maybe recounting of sad experiences requires especially good listening and under these circumstances listening may have the greatest benefit for the speaker.

Last, we were not able to account for the possible interdependency of responses within dyads which might have led to an overestimation of degrees of freedom and, consequently, of effect sizes (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). We sought to attenuate this inconvenience by controlling for the speaking order, and did not find any order effect. Considering the strong correlates of perceived listening found in this study, we are confident about the findings’ robustness despite this methodological limitation. Yet, if data collection allows for matching dyads, we recommend testing for the reciprocal influence of partners.
CONCLUSION

Clearly, To conclude, we have shown that perceived listening quality is related to interpersonal outcomes (trust), a link that was mediated by social attraction, and to intrapersonal outcomes (emotional well-being), a link that was mediated by clarity. Hence, listening seems not only essential for interpersonal relationships, but it also plays a crucial role for emotional wellbeing. These findings beg the question of whether these associations are causal. Future research may test whether experimental variation in actual listening behavior indeed simultaneously benefits interpersonal and intrapersonal processes.
REFERENCES


50


Reis, H. T., Clark, M. S., & Holmes, J. G. (2004). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing construct in the study of intimacy and closeness. In D. J. Mashek,


APPENDIX

A) Measure of Perceived Listening Quality

The response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

When my working partner listened to me, I felt that he/she...

1. was interested in what I had to say.
2. made me comfortable so I could share my inner truths.
3. made it easy for me to open my heart.
4. understood my feelings.
5. was interested in me personally.
6. cared about me.

B) Measure of Clarity

The response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

When my working partner listened to me, I felt that he/she...

1. I got a clearer picture of who I am.
2. I became aware of my needs.
3. I learned more about myself.
4. my thoughts became clearer.
5. clearer about myself.
6. I detected new aspects of myself I wasn’t aware of before.
CHAPTER 3

FROM LISTENING TO LEADING: TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF SUPERVISOR LISTENING WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE THEORY

---

9 I am particularly thankful to Diana Boer and Sven C. Voelpel for co-authoring this manuscript.
10 Revised version of the manuscript, submitted to the Journal of Business Communication, July 12, 2014
ABSTRACT

This study explores the value of supervisor listening as a seeming key competence in effectively leading employees. We conceptualize listening within the theoretical framework of leader-member exchange (LMX). Specifically, we argue that supervisor listening contributes to satisfaction with the supervisor, interactional justice and job satisfaction, and that listening unfurls its effect through fostering strong leader-member exchange. Data from 250 German employees from various professional backgrounds was used to assess validity criteria as prerequisites for the examination of listening vis-à-vis LMX for the three outcome variables. Good performance in all validity criteria and path modelling results indicated that perceived supervisor listening provides value for future research on supervisor-employee interactions in the work setting.

KEYWORDS:

Leader listening
Empathy
Leader-member exchange theory
Construct validation
INTRODUCTION

Since Rogers and Roethlisberger’s (1991/1952) thought-provoking essay in the Harvard Business Review, Barriers and Gateways to Communication, scholars and practitioners have embraced the concept of empathic listening in management literature or handbooks on effective leadership (e.g., Drucker, 2004; Frey, 1993; Reave, 2005; Steil & Bommelje, 2004). Although this concept is elusive, there appears to be a practical and intuitive appeal of the positive effects of listening, which has led to increased attention of this concept in psychological literature (e.g., Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000; Beukeboom, 2009; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). However, in the fields of organizational psychology and management research, the term listening still appears both vague and conjectural due to a lack in theory and specification (e.g., Bodie, Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012; Brownell, 1994). Bodie (2012) summarizes approaches to listening research in a variety of academic fields and argues that research is in need of incorporating “listening” into theoretical frameworks that are “capable of explaining how listening works and functions to the betterment of people’s lives” (p. 121). The current paper aims at contributing to this call by investigating perceived supervisor listening and its links to related constructs and work outcomes within the theoretical framework of leader-member exchange theory.

Leader member exchange theory (LMX) in its core suggests that “effective leadership processes occur when leaders and followers are able to develop mature leadership relationships (partnerships) and thus gain access to the many benefits these relationships bring” (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 225). Such quality leader-member interaction has been linked to more positive organizational outcomes such as increased performance, job satisfaction, or commitment (Gerstner & Day, 1997). However, LMX
is a rather broad term (see below) and does not detail, what specific leader behavior may establish strong leader-member relationships. Listening to employees has the positive potential to create and maintain strong leader-follower partnerships (Bodie, 2012; Steil et al., 2004) and may thus be one specific component that foster LMX.

Originally based on Carl Rogers’ (1951) observations in client-centered therapy, empathic listening or “active listening” has been described as an accepting and nonjudgmental approach of attending to an individual (Rogers, 1959). Empathic listening creates a mutual bond between interaction partners, which over time evolves into a relationship of trust and reciprocal understanding (Rogers, 1957, 1975). When applied to organizational settings, listening may have similar effects in the supervisor-employee interaction (e.g., Brownell, 1990; Reave, 2005). Rogers’ work on empathic listening can help to provide specificity to the meaning of listening in the business context. Empirical research in the organizational context suggests that listening may be a crucial factor in the supervisor-employee relationship that may affect other work-related attitudinal (e.g., Ellinger, Ellinger, & Keller, 2003) and behavioral outcomes (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, & Voelpel, 2014; Stine, Thompson, & Cusella, 1995). For instance, Lobdell, Sonoda, and Arnold (1993) showed that perceived supervisor listening competence is positively associated with employee perceptions of leader responsiveness and support. Similarly, empirical evidence suggested a link between supervisor listening and perceived relationship quality with employees (Stine et al., 1995), which might, in the long term, also affect more distal variables such as employee perception of the climate of organizational openness and supportiveness (Husband, Cooper, & Monsour, 1988), overall job satisfaction (Brownell, 1990; Ellinger et al., 2003), and organizational citizenship performance (Lloyd et al., 2014).
While this work indicates the importance of listening in the organizational context, there is no clear conception of “listening” in the workplace. Although indicated within leadership literature (Ashford, Rothbard, Piderit, & Dutton, 1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006; Blader & Tyler, 2003), empirical studies on listening as a leadership skill are still scarce (for some exceptions, see Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Ames, Maissen, & Brockner, 2012; Johnson & Bechler, 1998; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013). This is astounding since listening research suggests a link with positive work outcomes such as perceived leadership effectiveness (Johnson et al., 1998), employee commitment (Lobdell et al., 1993), organizational trust and performance (Stine et al., 1995). Two studies by Lloyd and colleagues (2014) recently demonstrated the link between perceived supervisor listening and three important work outcomes – one proximal (emotional exhaustion) and two more distal (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions). Together, these findings indicate that assessing listening in the workplace may promise similar value as in clinical or psychological research and hence needs specification in terms of its relationship to related constructs and outcomes.

Empirical examination of listening in the work setting is undermined by the lack of theoretical underpinnings and conceptual differentiation (Brownell, 1994). Especially in terms of supervisor-employee interactions it is essential to include listening into related frameworks of leader-follower interactions. One important conceptually related construct is leader-member exchange (see Graen et al., 1995 for a detailed review), which describes similar work outcomes that have been discussed in listening research.

This paper’s overall purpose is to foster the scholarly dialogue, and advance the understanding of listening in organizational research by providing a more precise clarification of listening in the workplace. Specifically, we seek first to evaluate validity criteria of perceived listening quality in the context of supervisor-employee
relationships and its links to work-related variables. Empirical examination of internal reliability as well as convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity intends to foster the refinement of listening within the supervisor-employee relationship. More importantly, we seek to integrate listening and LMX in a holistic model based on theoretical considerations that listening fosters strong relationships between leaders and followers.

THE CONCEPT OF LISTENING

Listening is a multi-faceted process (Bodie et al., 2012) and as such, conceptualizations have ranged from studying listening attitudes and skills (e.g., Mishima, Kubota, & Nagata, 2000) to behaviors (e.g., Bodie et al., 2012; Ramsey & Sohi, 1997), and differ in terms of underlying theory and measurement. To provide a conceptual framework for listening in the supervisor-employee relationship it is helpful to review Rogers’ initial work on empathic listening. In this paper, we build on Rogers’ (1951, 1975) definition of empathic listening as an appreciating and nonjudgmental way of perceiving and responding to an individual. When the individual feels accepted and cared for, Rogers argued, mutual understanding and trusting bonds are possible. Hence, in this paper we focus on how the person being listened to perceives the listener (see also Barnlund, 1962; Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999; Tyler, 2011) and conceptualize listening as a subjective perception of listening quality. Listening quality captures the individual’s perception of being attended to, accepted, and appreciated (Rogers, 1975). This is in line with the leadership literature that describes supervisor listening as demonstration of active acceptance of employee opinions and ideas (Spears, 1995) or the willingness to do so (Bass & Avolio, 1994).
Leadership handbooks (e.g., Covey, 1989; Gordon, 1977; Steil & Bommelje, 2004), business journals, and management scholars have long argued in favor of listening as a “key management skill” (e.g., Drucker, 2004; Ewing & Banks, 1980; Frey, 1993) that enables both, understanding of feelings and the demonstration of concern (Gabarro, 1991). Some empirical evidence has been put forward in support of this, demonstrating for example a link between supervisor listening and perceived relationship quality with employees (Stine et al., 1995). Overall however, it is noteworthy that leader listening and leadership styles have only rarely been considered simultaneously (for exceptions see Bechler et al., 1995; Johnson et al., 1998; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013). Yet, listening most commonly takes place in dyadic interactions, develops in a unique way during the process of interacting (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009), and may consecutively develop each interaction in a unique way. Hence, to enhance our understanding of listening in the supervisor-employee relationship it is necessary to embed it in leadership theories. The leadership approach arguably most closely related to our conceptualization of listening is leader-member exchange theory.

**THE LISTENING LEADER AND LEADER-MEMBER EXCHANGE**

Leader-member exchange theory (LMX), which originated from vertical dyad linkage theories (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975), is unique among leadership theories in that it focuses on the dyadic and specific leader-follower relationship (Graen et al., 1995; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997). According to LMX theory, this relationship may have a unique quality for each dyad, which in turn predicts organizational outcomes at the individual level of analysis (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Meta-analytical results also suggest that strong leader-member relationships significantly influence outcomes such as job performance, satisfaction with supervision,
overall satisfaction, commitment, role conflict, role clarity, member competence, and turnover intentions (Gerstner et al., 1997).

LMX contains certain aspects that relate to listening. Strong leader-member exchange requires that employees feel appreciated, cared for, and supported by a supervisor (e.g., Graen et al., 1995; Liden & Graen, 1980). These are essential features of the listening construct (Rogers, 1951, 1975). The strongest similarity is that both concepts predict tight bonds and strong relationships between the interaction partners.

The range of components inherent in the LMX construct appears fairly broad and touches various components such as support, responsiveness, and consideration, leaving room for the actual behavior and interpersonal perceptions that elicits the creation of strong relationships. The theory does not specify which specific behavior fosters such strong leader-follower bonds. Listening – as a mean to actively demonstrate acceptance of follower opinions and suggestions (Bass et al., 1994; Spears, 1995) – may be a viable component in developing sustainable leader-follower relationships. Since listening facilitates the development of mutual understanding and trust (Lloyd, Boer, Kluger, & Voelpel, in press; Stine et al., 1995) it might lay the basis for fruitful partnerships and strong relationships. In the long run, this fosters further positive interactions, mutual cooperation, and support. Inevitably this will also enhance further communication. In other words, listening and leader-member interaction are mutually interwoven; yet, especially in an early stage of a relationship listening may have the beneficial effect of creating strong leader-member interaction which both, in turn, will be positively related to organizational outcomes. In this paper we examine the possibility that listening quality may precede the development of LMX – that is, suggesting a sequence of listening quality impacting positively on LMX which then contributes positively to outcomes.
From numerous potential outcome variables of organizational behavior, we will focus on a choice of three that reflect different interaction levels: (1) employee satisfaction with the supervisor, (2) interactional justice, and (3) overall job satisfaction. Listening quality should have the strongest effect on the more proximal outcomes that are affected by direct interaction with the supervisor.

Perceived supervisor listening affects employee perceptions of interaction processes. As outlined earlier, listening quality can influence speaker attitudes and feelings towards the listener (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000; Beukeboom, 2009). Hence, not being listened to and not feeling understood by a supervisor may elicit negative affective reactions such as the feeling of disrespect and injustice (Bass et al., 2006; Blader et al., 2003). Thus, we chose satisfaction with the supervisor and interactional justice (Kim & Leung, 2007) as proximal outcome of supervisor listening. Interactional justice captures the degree to which individuals feel treated with respect and dignity by authorities or third parties (e.g., the leader) involved in executing or implementing procedures (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1987). Although we expect that listening quality will affect outcomes closely related to the interaction, listening quality might also have effects on more distal variables related to the job and affect overall job satisfaction. Hence, to get a more inclusive view on listening quality’s predictive validity, we will examine its relationship to three outcomes related to the supervisor, the supervisor-employee interaction, and the job.

**Overview of this Study**

To extend our understanding of listening within the supervisor-employee relationship we investigate listening quality based on Rogers’ conceptualization of empathic listening within the framework of leader-member exchange theory. We obtain
validity evidence for the listening quality scale by assessing its relation with measures closely related to listening such as feeling understood (Lun et al., 2008) and active-empathic listening (Bodie, 2011; Drollinger, Comer, & Warrington, 2006), as well as LMX (Janssen & Van Yperen, 2004) which all already have a validity portfolio. We expect that employee perceptions of supervisor listening quality will be positively related to both, employee ratings of their supervisor’s active empathic listening and ratings of feeling understood by the supervisor. We then examine in detail how listening quality is related to LMX and the unique predictive contribution of the two constructs to three outcome measures. We then simultaneously examine listening vis-à-vis LMX in predicting satisfaction with the supervisor, interactional justice, and job-satisfaction. We then integrate listening quality and LMX in a path model that tests a sequence between listening quality, LMX, and work outcomes. Building on theoretical considerations we examine the possibility that listening precedes LMX which in turn is related to the three outcomes.

**METHODS**

**PARTICIPANTS**

251 German employees from different companies participated in this survey study voluntarily and without monetary reward (57% women; mean age = 34.1, $SD = 8.7$; = 60% with university degree or equivalent). Participants were recruited by convenience sampling methods as described below. A wide range of job functions were represented in the sample – including administration, engineering, finance, marketing, and teaching. The average tenure at the company was 4.8 years ($SD = 5.4$), and the average time participants had been working for their current supervisor was 3.2 years ($SD = 2.6$).
PROCEDURE

Convenience sampling measures were taken to recruit a heterogeneous sample of employees to increase generalizability. We administrated an online survey through various online discussion forums to reach a maximum variety in age, job level, and industry. Examples included general work related forums in which employees discuss or exchange work related information as well as job specific forums for occupational groups (e.g., police officers, mechanics, engineers, etc.). Permission to post an invitation to participate in our study was obtained from the web administrators. Only questionnaires that were fully completed were included in the analysis.

MEASURES

All measures were adapted to German by translation and back-translation techniques (Brislin, 1970) by a team of bilingual psychologists and professional translators. Unless otherwise noted, we measured items using 7-point Likert scales, with response categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). All measures were presented in random order to control for order effects (Bishop, 2008). Since all measures referred to internal psychological states and perceptions (e.g., job satisfaction), employees were best positioned to provide ratings on these.

Perceived listening quality. To assess the extent to which employees felt listened to by their supervisor, we adapted a 7-item listening quality scale (Lloyd et al., in press) to the context of supervisor-employee interactions (Appendix). Participants were asked to refer to a typical interaction with their supervisor when answering the questionnaire. The items were prefaced with the statement “Generally, when my supervisor listens to me, I feel my supervisor…;” sample items included “is interested in what I have to say,” “makes me comfortable so I can speak openly” and “understands my feelings.”
A pretest \((N = 51; 53\% \text{ women}; \text{ mean age} = 32.26, SD = 9.97)\) was conducted to test the items concerning internal consistency and applicability to the supervisor-employee interaction. The items revealed acceptable internal reliability \((\alpha = .92)\). Principal component analysis yielded one principal component that explained 71\% of the variance.

In the current study, listening quality was well represented by the one-factor model (Chi-square \((df = 13) = 74.78, p < .01, \text{ SRMR} = .03, \text{ CFI} = .96, \text{ TLI} = .94)\)\(^\text{11}\). The residuals of two items (“cares about me” and “is interested in me personally”) reveal covariance, most likely owing to high semantic similarity. The internal reliability of the seven items was acceptable \((\alpha = .95)\).

**Active empathic listening.** Employee perceptions of their supervisor’s active empathic listening was measured by 11 items of the *Active Empathetic Listening Scale* (AEL, Drollinger et al., 2006) which contains three subscales (sensing, processing, responding). All items were adapted to refer to the supervisor. Participants were instructed to think of a typical interaction with their immediate supervisor when answering the questions. The items were prefaced with “Generally, when my supervisor listens to me”; sample items included were “my supervisor is sensitive to what I am not saying”, “my supervisor listens for more than just the spoken words”, and “my supervisor shows me he or she is listening by his or her body language (e.g., head nods)”. The scale revealed acceptable internal reliability \((\alpha = .95)\).

**Feeling understood by supervisor.** The degree to which employees felt overall understood by their supervisor was measured using two items from Lun and colleagues.

\(^{11}\) We refrained from considering the commonly reported RMSEA owing to the low complexity of the model and low degrees of freedom \((df)\). For small \(df\) and low \(N\) models, especially for the former, there is greater sampling error, which can result in artificially large values of the RMSEA (Kenny & McCoach, 2003). For this reason, Kenny, Kaniskan, and McCoach (2011) recommend that one not even compute the RMSEA for low \(df\) models.
“During your interaction with your supervisor, to what extent do you feel understood by your supervisor?” and “To what extent do you feel misunderstood by your supervisor?” (reverse-coded). Response categories ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (totally). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .91.

**Leader-member exchange (LMX).** LMX was assessed using seven items from Janssen and Van Yperen (2004). Sample items were “My supervisor would be personally inclined to help me solve problems in my work,” “My supervisor understands my problems and needs,” and “My working relationship with my supervisor is effective.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .95.

**Interactional justice.** Respondents were asked to assess how they felt treated in interactions with their supervisor at work. Sample items of the 3-item scale (Kim et al., 2007) were “In interpersonal encounters, my supervisor gives me fair treatment” and “The way my supervisor treats me is fair.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .95.

**Satisfaction with supervisor.** We adapted three items from the *Job Dissatisfaction Scale* (Zhou & George, 2001) to capture the extent to which employees were satisfied with their supervisor. Sample items were “In general, I like working for my supervisor” and “In general, I don’t like my supervisor” (reverse-coded). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .94.

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was measured using the 3-item *Job Dissatisfaction Scale* (Zhou et al., 2001). Sample items were “All in all, I am satisfied with my job” and “In general, I don’t like my job” (reverse-coded). The 3-item scale revealed acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach’s alpha of .85.

**Control variables.** We controlled for individual’s tenure of working for the specific supervisor, since the time period might relate to both work outcomes such as job satisfaction and quality of leader-member exchange. We also controlled for the
influence of major demographic variables including sex, age and educational level in the analysis.

**Analytical Strategy**

First, a set confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) examined the adequacy of the measurement components and to evaluate the discriminant validity of the measured constructs: differentiating between all 7 measured concepts (LQ, ALS, LMX, feeling understood, supervisor satisfaction, interactional justice, job satisfaction) distinguishing the two listening scales (ALS, LQ) from each other, and discriminating between LMX and LQ. Using zero-order correlations, we assessed convergent validity of the listening quality scale with the AEL and the indicator of feeling understood by the supervisor.

**Predictive validity.** Multivariate hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the predictive validity of listening quality and LMX on each of the three dependent variables: satisfaction with supervisor, job satisfaction, and interactional justice. To assess each independent variable (IV) or block of IVs in terms of their contribution to the equation at their own point of entry, we entered control variables in the first block, then individually tested listening quality and LMX. At last, we tested LMX and perceived listening quality simultaneously by entering LMX first and then adding listening quality to evaluate the contribution over and beyond LMX.

**Additional analysis.** We assess the possibility that LQ may precede LMX which then relates to outcome variables. In order to test this path sequence model, we employed latent variable modeling (SEM in Mplus6). This analysis additionally accounts for two potential limitations inherent in the present data: (a) to account for the relatedness of the three outcome variables, and (b) to control for common method variance that might arise from the cross-sectional study design and mono-method
approach (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Following previous studies, we control for the effects of a single unmeasured latent method factor by including it in the SEM analysis (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; Elangovan & Xie, 1999; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Paine, 1999; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1995). All item loadings were constrained to be equal in their loadings on the method factor (Conger et al., 2000; Elangovan et al., 1999; MacKenzie et al., 1999).
RESULTS

Table 1 presents means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all study variables.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Zero-order Correlations of All Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Listening quality</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(.95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. AEL</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.89***</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Feeling understood</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>.78***</td>
<td>.79***</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. LMX</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.87***</td>
<td>.86***</td>
<td>.82***</td>
<td>(.95)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Satisfaction with supervisor</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.82***</td>
<td>.79***</td>
<td>.79***</td>
<td>.89***</td>
<td>(.94)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Interactional justice</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>.76***</td>
<td>.71***</td>
<td>.75***</td>
<td>.80***</td>
<td>.83***</td>
<td>(.82)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Job satisfaction</td>
<td>5.51</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>.54***</td>
<td>.56***</td>
<td>.55***</td>
<td>.65***</td>
<td>.64***</td>
<td>.57***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *N* = 251; the diagonal displays Cronbach’s alphas of the study variable. ***p < .001.

We used confirmatory factor analysis to determine the distinctiveness of all measures. First, we computed an overall model including all study variables. The seven-factor model\textsuperscript{12} revealed a moderate overall fit, Chi-square (df = 557) = 1265.04, p < .001; RMSEA = .072; SRMR = .043; TLI = .92; CFI = .93. In comparison, the baseline model in which all items loaded on one factor, did not reveal satisfactory fit, Chi-square (df = 594) = 2684.88, p < .001; RMSEA = .119; SRMR = .055; TLI = .78; CFI = .79, and differed significantly from the seven-factor model (ΔChi-square = 1419.84, Δdf = 37, p < .001).

\textsuperscript{12} ALS consists of three sub-facets (sensing, processing, and responding, Drollinger et al., 2006), which are modelled via a second order factor.
Next, we analyzed the distinctiveness of perceived listening quality vis-à-vis AEL (again differentiating its three subscales). The model separating LQ and AEL revealed a moderate overall fit (Chi-square \( df = 128 \) = 428.10, \( p < .001 \); RMSEA = .097; SRMR = .043; TLI = .92; CFI = .94). The baseline model in comparison, did not reveal satisfactory fit, Chi-square \( df = 135 \) = 859.01, \( p < .001 \); RMSEA = .15; SRMR = .06; TLI = .83; CFI = .85, and differed significantly from the four-factor model (\( \Delta \text{Chi-square} = 430.91, \Delta df = 7, p < .001 \)). Taken together, the results indicate discriminant validity of the study variables. Furthermore, the model separating LQ and LMX revealed a good overall fit of the measurement model, Chi-square \( df = 75 \) = 242.85, \( p < .01 \); SRMR = .028; RMSEA = .095; TLI = .95; CFI = .96. The covariations of the residuals of two items of the listening quality (“cares about me” and “is interested in me personally”) were again considered in the analysis (see method section). In comparison, the one-factor model did not reveal satisfactory fit (Chi-square \( df = 77 \) = 503.08, \( p < .001 \); SRMR = .04; TLI = .87; CFI = .89) and differed significantly from the two-factor model (\( \Delta \text{Chi-square} = 260.23, \Delta df = 2, p < .001 \)). These results in sum support adequate discriminant validity of the listening construct vis-à-vis LMX, AEL and the other measures. Listening quality was correlated to both comparative measures of active empathic listening (AEL, \( r = .89, p < .01 \); see Table 1), and feeling understood by the supervisor \( (r = .78, p < .01) \), and LMX \( (r = .87, p < .01) \). The correlations support adequate convergent validity of listening quality.

The predictive validity of perceived listening quality on three outcome variables (i.e. satisfaction with supervisor, interactional justice, and job satisfaction) was determined by three regression analyses for each outcome entering 1) LQ as sole predictor, 2) LMX as sole predictor, and 3) LQ and LMX both as predictors. The last regression model determined if perceived listening quality still accounted for the
prediction of organizational outcomes beyond what is afforded by differences in LMX. Table 2 displays the standardized regression coefficients ($\beta$), changes in $R^2$ ($\Delta R$) as well as changes in $F$ ($\Delta F$) values for each model.
Table 2. Results of Hierarchical Regression Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfaction with supervisor</th>
<th>Interactional justice</th>
<th>Job satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gender</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>-.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenure (supervisor)</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>-.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>education</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>-.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main variables</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX</td>
<td></td>
<td>.82***</td>
<td>.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening</td>
<td>.77***</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.74***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 ) (for main variables)</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( AR^2 )</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.66</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta F )</td>
<td>225.46***</td>
<td>315.46***</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(df1, df2)</td>
<td>(1, 152)</td>
<td>(1, 152)</td>
<td>(1, 151)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: \( N = 250 \). Model 1: Control variables and listening quality. Model 2: control variables and LMX. Model 3: control variables and LMX (Step 2) and listening quality (Step 3). Control variables: age, gender (dummy-coded), tenure (respective supervisor), academic background (dummy-coded; 1 = university or equivalent, 0 = other). ***(p < .001.\)
As shown in Table 2, for satisfaction with the supervisor, entering the main effect of listening quality (Model 1) results in a significant increment in $R^2 (\beta = .77; \Delta R^2 = .59, \Delta F (1, 152) = 225.46, p < .001)$. Regression results were similar for LMX (Model 2) as sole predictor ($\beta = .82; \Delta R^2 = .66, \Delta F (1, 152) = 315.46, p < .001$). Adding listening quality to the equation after LMX (Model 3) the effect of listening quality on supervisor satisfaction was reduced to a $\beta$ of $.20 (p = .059; \Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F (1, 152) = 3.72, ns)$. The results suggest that over two-thirds of variability in satisfaction with the supervisor is predicted by perceived listening quality. However, listening quality did not significantly contribute to this prediction when the effect of LMX is accounted for.

A similar pattern was found for the prediction of interactional justice. Listening quality, as sole predictor (Model 1), explained 53% of the variance in interactional justice ($\beta = .74; \Delta R^2 = .53, \Delta F (1, 152) = 182.59, p < .001$). LMX as sole predictor (Model 2) revealed similar results ($\beta = .78; \Delta R^2 = .60, \Delta F (1, 152) = 244.00, p < .001$). Entering listening quality to the equation with LMX (Model 3) reduced the effect of listening quality to $\beta$ of $.20 (p = .09; \Delta R^2 = .01, \Delta F (1, 152) = 2.90, ns)$.

Last, the results for the prediction of job satisfaction showed that listening quality’s main effect (Model 1) explained 28% of variability in overall job satisfaction ($\beta = .54, \Delta R^2 = .28, \Delta F (1, 152) = 59.61, p < .001$) and LMX (Model 2) accounted for 31% of variability ($\beta = .57, \Delta R^2 = .31, \Delta F (1; 152) = 69.87, p < .001$). After adding listening quality to the equation, however, listening quality’s main effect, was again reduced to insignificance ($\beta = 15; \Delta R^2 = .00, \Delta F (1, 152) = .99, ns$). The results’ pattern indicate that the effect of listening quality is absorbed by the broader construct of LMX.
Next, we employed latent variable modeling (SEM in Mplus6) to test for the possibility that listening may precede LMX which then in turn relates to the outcome variables. The results of the SEM analysis are presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Latent Path Model of Listening Effects and LMX. N = 250; SEM analysis accounted for covariation among outcome variables; standardized coefficients reported, controlling for a common method factor.***p < .001.](image)

As indicated by the standardized coefficients, perceived supervisor listening was positively associated with LMX which in turn was positively associated with the three outcome variables (supervisor satisfaction = .95, \( p < .001 \); interactional justice = .86, \( p < .001 \); job satisfaction = .73, \( p < .001 \)). Overall, the SEM model displayed in Figure 1 fitted the data well (Chi-Square (\( df = 220 \)) = 545.17, RMSEA = .077, CFI = .949, TLI = .941, SRMR = .035). To control for common method variance, we estimated the model with and without common method factor. Table 3 displays the standardized parameter estimates before and after controlling for this common method factor.
Table 3. Standardized Parameter Estimates With and Without Controlling for Common Method Variance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Not controlling for CMF</th>
<th>Controlling for CMF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening → LMX</td>
<td>.92***</td>
<td>.93***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX → Satisfaction with supervisor</td>
<td>.94***</td>
<td>.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX → Interactional justice</td>
<td>.84***</td>
<td>.86***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LMX → Job satisfaction</td>
<td>.69***</td>
<td>.73***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 250; standardized coefficients reported; CMF – common method factor; ***p < .001.

All relationships were significant and of similar if not the same magnitude, which indicated that the data was not influenced by common method variance. Taken together, the analysis supports the robustness of the findings in account of the weaknesses of the study design.

**DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of perceived listening quality in the supervisor-employee relationship within the theoretical framework of leader-member exchange theory. Therefore, we examined their relationships to three work outcomes and tested a path model that aimed at integrating listening and LMX. Initial validity assessments were conducted as prerequisites to the usability of listening quality as measurement tool within the work context. Convergent, divergent, and predictive validity were assessed vis-à-vis validated measures. Positive correlations between perceived supervisor listening quality and two related constructs – supervisor’s active empathic listening and employee’s feelings of being understood – demonstrated
acceptable convergence. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that although listening quality and LMX may share considerable variance, these two concepts are distinguishable and demonstrate acceptable discriminant validity. Listening quality’s demonstrated acceptable predictive validity concerning three organizational outcomes – employees’ job satisfaction, satisfaction with their supervisor, and interactional justice. However, when LMX was statistically accounted for, listening quality did not significantly explain variance over and beyond LMX, as indicated by the results of the hierarchical regression analysis. We followed the commonly used procedure to examine the additional contribution of two constructs. LMX is a relatively broader construct that encompasses various components of interaction towards employees. Listening might be one more specific components of those and thus in its’ effect on work outcomes statistically swallowed by LMX. As indicated by the path modelling results, supervisors who listen well might establish strong relationships to their employees more easily and foster good quality leader-member exchange. This in turn may benefit work outcomes such as satisfaction with the supervisor, their interaction, and the job.

CONTRIBUTION

This study contributes to the listening literature, but also to the leadership literature, in several ways. First, our results underline previous research that suggested the positive impact of supervisor listening on followers’ job satisfaction ratings (Brownell, 1990; Ellinger et al., 2003; Kluger, 2013) and extend these results to two other work outcomes: interactional justice and satisfaction with the supervisor. Taken together, these results highlight that listening is a leadership skill that deserves more attention, both in research and in everyday work life.
Most important, we incorporated listening and leader-member exchange theory which provides a theoretical framework and more clarity for studying listening in the organizational context as was suggested by Bodie (2012). Within this theoretical framework, the term “listening” becomes clarity as a specific part of leader-follower interaction that fosters strong relationships. Our results reflected the close relationship between listening and LMX, while showing their unique contribution.

With this we also add to the scarce body of research that empirically examines listening in relation to leadership theories. Since listening has been proclaimed a ‘key management skill,’ it is critical to include and investigate listening in a broader framework of leadership theory. The results indicated that listening – as a specific component of leadership behavior – can help us better understand how leaders influence their followers’ attitudes and behaviors – through growing strong relationships with employees.

In this study, we attempted to incorporate both listening and LMX and their links to organizational outcomes more holistically. Although conceptually distinctive, the results reflected a close link between the two. The path-modelling analysis indicated that the effect of listening on work outcomes might be unfolded by LMX. However, these results have to be interpreted with caution. They are based on cross-sectional data and do not allow for causality statements. Clearly, in any established leader-follower relationship, listening quality and quality of leader-member exchange are inseparably interwoven. Leader-member exchange is a broad construct that combines for instance perceptions of leader support and relationship effectiveness. Hence, this construct always refers to and is based on an established relationship. In contrast listening has to be treated within this theoretical framework as a specific receptive behavior, which is important at any stage of a relationship. It is similarly valuable in first encounters
between strangers (Lloyd et al., in press) and contributes to establishing of strong relationships.

Clearly, in the current sample, the relationship between listening and leader-member exchange presents a chicken-and-egg problem, which cannot be solved without further studies. On the whole, the results advance our understanding how supervisor listening, as a specific part of leader-follower interaction, interacts with leader-member exchange and hence may offer particularly important implications for organizational practice.

**PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

Our research suggests that feeling listened to by leaders may foster satisfaction with the supervisor, the perceptions of fair treatment, and overall perceptions of job satisfaction. It also suggests that listening may be a valuable lever for building and sustaining strong leader-subordinate relationships. When leaders exert high motivation to listen, an organizational culture of mutual understanding is possible – as has been suggested before (Rogers et al., 1991/1952). Early resolutions of interpersonal and task-related issues may be an example of such a work culture, which may translate into additional positive work indicators.

Organizations that want to implement such a work culture should select managers who are truly interested in listening and understand their followers. Listening may afford far more patience than speaking or advising, and followers may quickly notice when leaders listening is an attempt at mutual understanding or employed as a ‘technique to manipulate’ (Tyler, 2011). In the case of the latter, all attempts and future ones, however honest, may be detrimental to the supervisor-employee relationship.
For unfolding and developing the full value of leader listening, additional management training will be a necessary supplement to selection criteria. Research has demonstrated that people can successfully be trained to listen (e.g., Ikegami, Tahara, Yamada, Mafune, Hiro & Nagata, 2010; McNaughton, Hamlin, McCarthy, Head-Reeves, & Schreiner, 2008). Taken together, our results draw the attention to listening as ‘powerful management skill’ (e.g., Drucker, 2004; Ewing et al., 1980) that may, however, require correct usage and extensive training.

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Our study is limited by its cross-sectional design and the data available reflects only a specific point in time. Hence, this does not allow for making any causal inferences of the effects. As discussed earlier, listening and leader-member exchange are inseparably interwoven in any leader-follower relationship. At an early stage of the relationship, effective listening could be a viable engine for creating strong relationships. In the long run, a mutual interaction should be expected: listening affects strong relationships, and strong bonds will affect the quality of future listening. In the extreme, it seems unlikely that employees who perceive their supervisor as bad listener would perceive their supervisor as understanding, and their relationship as effective. One intriguing approach to the chicken-and-egg problem would be a longitudinal study design that observes the effects of listening and leader-member exchange over time. It would be particularly interesting to incorporate a sample of new employees who started freshly at a company.

Similarly, another limitation of this study is that respondents answered all questions, and all at the same time. For the purpose of our research question, however, it was inevitable to have participants answer all variables: All items referred to followers’
perceptions and hence employees were best positioned to answer them. A “second source” could not have answered this adequately. Thus, common method variance might have inflated the results. To overcome this shortcoming, we applied SEM methods and controlled for a common method factor as well as the relatedness of all outcome variables. However, depending on the nature of the study variables, future research should nonetheless include complementary ratings by the supervisor to get a more holistic picture, especially for observable measures such as performance.

Third, our sample consisted of German employees, limiting generalizability to other cultures. In this study, we chose to examine a wide range of different industries and job functions to get a broader picture of listening effects. Additional studies are needed to examine listening effects in different cultures and specific industries. For instance, leadership styles and leader-follower interactions vary between Western and East Asian cultures (e.g., Chen, 1995; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Dorfman et al., 1997; Kim et al., 2007). Evaluating how listening effects differ in a cultural comparison would be a particularly fruitful avenue.

Finally, future research may incorporate additional outcome variables. For instance, it would be important to investigate supervisor listening effects on work-related outcomes such as for example turnover intentions. Prior research demonstrated that job satisfaction and strong work relationships are the strongest attitudinal drivers for turnover. Thus, if listening affects job satisfaction and high-quality interactions, a link between listening and turnover may be likely.

**CONCLUSION**

The current research revealed evidence for listening as an important management skill within the theoretical framework of leader-member exchange. Strong relationships
between leaders and followers are clearly an indispensable factor for fruitful and productive interactions, and hence organizational success. Follower perceptions of being listened to by their leader are linked to their perceptions of fair treatment and satisfaction with the supervisor as well as their job in general. These results show promise for using listening as a valuable variable in the investigation of leader-follower interactions.
REFERENCES


Tyler, J. A. (2011). Reclaiming rare listening as a means of organizational re-


Zhou, J., & George, J. M. (2001). When job dissatisfaction leads to creativity:

Encouraging the expression of voice. *Academy of Management Journal, 44*(4), 682-
696.
APPENDIX

Measure of Perceived Supervisor Listening

The response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Think of a typical interaction with your supervisor. Generally, when my supervisor listens to me, I feel my supervisor...

1. is interested in what I have to say.
2. makes me comfortable so I can speak openly.
3. makes it easy for me to open up.
4. understands my feelings.
5. is interested in me personally.
6. accepts me for what I am.
7. cares about me.
CHAPTER 4

IS MY BOSS REALLY LISTENING TO ME? THE IMPACT OF PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR LISTENING ON EMOTIONAL EXHAUSTION, TURNOVER INTENTION, AND ORGANIZATIONAL CITIZENSHIP BEHAVIOR

13 I am particularly thankful to Diana Boer, Josh W. Keller, and Sven C. Voelpel for co-authoring this manuscript.

14 Manuscript accepted for publication, May 28, 2014, Journal of Business Ethics. Manuscript reprinted with permission by Springer
Is My Boss Really Listening to Me? The Impact of Perceived Supervisor Listening on Emotional Exhaustion, Turnover Intention, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior

Karina J. Lloyd · Diana Boer · Joshua W. Keller · Sven Voelpel

Received: 7 January 2014 / Accepted: 28 May 2014
© Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht 2014

Abstract Little is known empirically about the role of supervisor listening and the emotional conditions that listening facilitates. Having the opportunity to speak is only one part of the communication process between employees and supervisors. Employees also react to whether they perceive the supervisor as actively listening. In two studies, this paper examines three important outcomes of employee perceptions of supervisor listening (emotional exhaustion, turnover intentions and organizational citizenship behavior directed toward the organization). Furthermore, positive and negative affect are investigated as distinct mediating mechanisms. Results from Study 1 revealed that employee perceptions of supervisor listening reflected supervisors’ self-ratings of how they listen to their employees and these perceptions were associated with the three work outcomes. Study 2 replicated the findings in a larger sample and found evidence for two explanatory mechanisms. Positive affect mediated the effects of perceived supervisor listening on organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention, whereas negative affect mediated listening effects on emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. Implications for organizational research and managerial practice concerning workforce sustainability are discussed.

Keywords Supervisor listening · Work affect · Affect-driven work outcomes · Emotional exhaustion · Organizational citizenship behavior · Turnover intentions

Introduction

We have long known that employee voice is important (e.g., Hirschman 1970). However, in emphasizing the primacy of voice, research on leader–subordinate relations may have overemphasized traditional perspectives on assertive communication (Billing and Alvesson 2000; Grant 1988). In particular, less is known empirically about the role of leaders’ listening and the emotional conditions that listening facilitates in employees. The opportunity to speak is only one part of the communication process between employees and supervisors. Employees also react to whether they perceive their supervisor as actively listening. Yet while there has been a lot of discussion and research on the antecedents and outcomes of voice (e.g., Morrison 2011), we know little about the outcomes of listening and their underlying mechanisms.

Previous literature suggested listening as an important behavior that signals managerial openness (Ashford et al. 1998) and motivates employees to speak up (Milliken et al. 2003). It encourages productive two-way communication (Bass and Riggio 2006; Dutton et al. 1997) and elicits speaker self-disclosure (Miller et al. 1983). The listening process may also have important relational implications. Attentive listeners foster an atmosphere of safety to speak openly, create intimacy, and elicit positive perceptions of the listener (Beukeboom 2009; Edmondson and Moingeon...
For instance, this affects perceptions of consideration and respect (Bass and Riggio 2006), justice (Blader and Tyler 2003), as well as trust and liking of the listener (Collins and Miller 1994; Lloyd et al., in press). Additionally, psychological benefits have been claimed for listening with empathy, acceptance, and non-judgmental attitude (Rogers 1951, 1957, 1975) on (psychological) well-being (Reis et al. 2000; Lloyd et al., in press; Lun et al. 2008) and personal development (Pasupathi and Hoyt 2009). However, whether these positive effects of listening are applicable to employee–supervisor relations and how supervisor listening affects important organizational work outcomes has rarely been empirically investigated (for some exceptions see Ellinger et al. 2003; Kluger and Zaidel 2009). The purpose of this paper is to address this theoretical and empirical gap by showing that employee perceptions of supervisor listening are important for three different important outcomes: one proximal (emotional exhaustion) and two more distal (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention). More importantly, we address the question of how employee perceptions of supervisor listening affects these outcomes and suggest positive and negative affect as two distinctive mediating mechanisms.

Clearly, employee citizenship behavior, turnover intentions, and emotional exhaustion are important organizational outcomes and determinants of overall organizational functioning (Motowidlo and Van Scotter 1994) and organizational success (Cropanzano et al. 2003; Organ et al. 2006; Schlesinger and Heskett 1991). Empirical work in the organizational behavior field indicates that individuals may be more favorably influenced by supervisors who listen well (Ames et al. 2012), be it in terms of reactions toward their superiors (Detert and Burris 2007), their work (Ellinger et al. 2003), or the organization (Ashford et al. 2009). Moreover, existing theory and research suggest that employee feelings about work (affect) tend to drive some work behaviors (Brief and Weiss 2002; Weiss and Cropanzano 1996). In this paper, we suggest that employees recognize how supervisors listen, and employee perceptions of being listened to are related to positive and negative affective reactions to their supervisor’s listening, which—in turn—translate into work outcomes such as turnover intentions, citizenship performance, and emotional exhaustion.

Contributing to mutual exchange of information, fruitful interactions, and strong relationships, effective listening may create a positive interpersonal work experience that reflects positively on the organization and translates into more positive work outcomes. However, establishing trusting relationships with employees that influence employee attitudes and work behavior are long-term processes. Given the importance of work outcomes such as citizenship behavior, voluntary turnover, and employee well-being for overall organizational functioning, it is essential to understand how supervisor listening unfolds its effects.

Based on theory and prior research, we investigate short-term positive and negative affective reactions as underlying mechanisms of perceived supervisor listening. For instance, experimental research revealed that a short interaction with a non-responsive superior elicits significant affective speaker reactions (Bavelas et al. 2000; Beukeboom 2009). If experienced repeatedly, these short-term affective reactions may translate into long-term effects on employee attitudes and behavior. This is in line with evidence from organizational research that suggests some work behaviors (e.g., organizational citizenship behavior and counterproductive work behavior) are direct reactions to employees’ affective experiences at work (Brief and Weiss 2002; Dalal et al. 2009; Spector and Fox 2002). Employees may react emotionally to whether they believe the supervisor is effectively listening (or not) which, in turn, may distinctively affect work outcomes. This paper examines the mediating mechanisms—the psychological underpinnings—that may explain listening effects.

The main focus of this research is to examine whether perceptions of supervisor listening are associated with proximal and distal work outcomes and the distinctive mediating mechanisms that may explain listening effects. To examine the relationship between supervisor listening, employee perceptions of supervisor listening, and the three work outcomes. Then, we examine the distinctive mediating mechanisms of positive and negative affect in a larger cross-sectional employee survey. For the two studies, we predict that perceived supervisor listening is (a) related to supervisors’ listening behaviors (Study 1), (b) associated with employee work outcomes (Study 1 and Study 2) and (b) that these latter relationships are mediated by distinctive affective mechanisms (Study 2). Drawing from events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996), the basic tenet of our theoretical argument is that employee observations of supervisor listening and employees’ affective reactions to these observations provide a basis for understanding how supervisor listening may lead to various work-related outcomes. Accordingly, we first discuss the relationship between perceived listening and affect. Then, we will introduce our two studies.

Affect and Perceived Listening

In this paper, affect is conceptualized as a generic term that encompasses both emotion and mood (Brief and Weiss 2002) and refers to a short-term state with negative and positive affect representing distinct and independent
domains of emotions (Watson and Clark 1997; Watson et al. 1988; for more general frameworks of two-dimensional affect theory, e.g., valence and activation, see Russell and Barrett 1999). Negative affect describes a state of subjective distress which subsumes a variety of aversive mood states such as feeling upset, guilty, and jittery (Watson and Clark 1984; Watson et al. 1988). Positive affect, in contrast, includes positive emotional states such as interested, proud, and determined (for an extensive list see Watson et al. 1988).

According to affective events theory (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996), employees’ affective experiences at work can lead to consecutive work behavior such as helping coworkers or withdrawing effort. Organizational research has already demonstrated such links between affect and a variety of work outcomes, including employees’ decisions to quit (George 1996; George and Bettenhausen 1990; Shaw 1999), employee health (Janssen et al. 2010), organizational citizenship behavior (George 1991), and counterproductive work behavior (Lee and Allen 2002). Although positive affect is likely to elicit positive behaviors such as helping others (e.g., Isen and Baron 1991), voluntary work (Spector and Fox 2002), and extra-role contributions (George and Brief 1992; Parker and Collins 2010; Warr et al. 2014), negative affect is likely to elicit negative work behaviors such as social withdrawal and effort withdrawal, theft, sabotage, and workplace violence (Dalal et al. 2009; Fox et al. 2001; Warr et al. 2014). This implies there is some valence specificity between affect (i.e., positive or negative) and the valence of behavioral reaction (positive behavior or negative behavior). In fact, social psychological research has found that positive affective states are related to more positive behaviors (e.g., helping others, see Isen and Baron 1991) and negative affect to negative behavioral reactions (e.g., aggressive behavior, Baron 1971).

As previously discussed, perceptions of listening can elicit positive and negative affective reactions (e.g., Beukeboom 2009). Effective listeners may be more positively experienced by their employees and drive short-term positive affect. For instance, listening supervisors may be perceived as more open, interested, and supportive (Ashford et al. 2009), and make employees feel more comfortable to approach. Hence, effective listeners may elicit more positive affective reactions in employees. This, for instance, may positively motivate or energize employees to show initiative and demonstrate more positive work behaviors such as increased organizational citizenship behavior (Spector and Fox 2002).

Not being listened to is an unpleasant experience which can be frustrating and distressing, and lead to negative perceptions of the source of listening. Social psychological evidence suggests that states of negative affectivity (e.g., anger or frustration, Robinson and Bennett 1997), induced by unpleasant stimuli (e.g., pain or insults) influence aggression (Berkowitz 1998). In the workplace, negative affect (e.g., elicited by insults) has been related to norm-violating and deviant behavior including aggressive behavior toward clients, coworkers, and the organization (e.g., Robinson and Bennett 1995, 1997). Employee perceptions of not being listened to may constitute a similarly unpleasant stimulus that induces (short-term) negative affect. Occurring repeatedly, this may have long-term negative effects on employees and work outcomes.

In sum, we suggest that employee perceptions of supervisor listening have distinct effects on work outcomes via the relationships to positive and negative affect. We argue that effective listening is related to positive affect which has a constructive, energizing effect on employees. In contrast, low listening quality is a negative experience related to negative affect which has deconstructive, demotivating effects on employees and work outcomes.

We present two studies. In Study 1, we examine the relationship between supervisor listening and employee perceived supervisor listening and whether there is a main effect of employee perceived supervisor listening on work outcomes (H1–H3). In Study 2, we examine the mediating effects of positive affect and negative affect (H4–H6).

Study 1

The relationship between supervisors and their employees is a social-perceptual process (Lord and Maher 2002). The effects of supervisors’ listening behavior on their employees’ subsequent behavior depend on how their employees perceive the listening. When a supervisor attentively listens to an employees’ concerns and demonstrates interest and care while listening, the employee is more likely to make an overall assessment that the supervisor is a good listener. When a supervisor pays little attention or demonstrates little interest or care while listening, the employee is likely to make an overall assessment that the supervisor is a bad listener. Perceptions of supervisors create affective responses (Fitness 2000; Newcombe and Ashkanasy 2002), which in turn lead to behavioral outcomes. Therefore, the extent to which an employee perceives the supervisor as a good or bad listener will influence the employees’ affective response to their supervisor’s listening efforts, which in turn will lead to various behavioral outcomes.

Emotional Exhaustion and Listening

The frustrating or distressing nature of not being listened suggests that emotional exhaustion is a proximal outcome
of the perception that the supervisor is a poor listener. Emotional exhaustion refers to the extent that individuals feel emotionally overextended and “drained” by their work, often caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding (Maslach 1982; Maslach and Jackson 1986; Wright and Cropanzano 1998; Zohar 1997). Cordes and Dougherty (1993) describe this experience as “a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up” (p. 623). The consequences of emotionally overworked employees can be costly for the individual and the organization, including, for instance, lower job performance and lower organizational commitment (Cropanzano et al. 2003; Grandey et al. 2004; Wright and Cropanzano 1998).

Several factors within the individual or the work environment determine the extent to which employees feel emotionally exhausted, such as personal resources, coping strategies, emotional culture, and supervisory regulation of “display rules” (Grandey et al. 2004, 2005; Wilk and Moynihan 2005). Supervisors, in particular, are likely to be a strong source of influence on the work environment since they set goals and expectations about demands, provide social, emotional or material support, and resources. Additionally, the supervisor sets “display rules” (e.g., appraisal or suppression of emotions) that guide employees’ regulation of emotional expression and influence the organizational emotional culture (Diefendorff and Richard 2003).

Supervisors who are perceived as poor listeners may increase the risk of emotional exhaustion. For instance, employees may perceive such supervisors as less socially and emotionally supportive and approachable (Ashford et al. 2009). Employees may also feel less comfortable and safe to open up to ineffective listeners and thus refrain from sharing burdensome thoughts early in time, and feel discouraged to safely express emotions in the workplace (Cooper et al. 2003; Wilk and Moynihan 2005). Taken together, this can hamper early resolution of problems and necessary changes that otherwise may prevent further emotional draining. Therefore, we posit:

**Hypothesis 1** Perceived supervisor listening is associated with low emotional exhaustion.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Listening

Listening effects, although primarily at the interpersonal level between employees and supervisors, might also extend beyond that and affect employee behavior toward coworkers and the organization (i.e., employee citizenship behaviors, OCB). OCB refers to “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ 1988, p. 4). The distinctive aspects to this construct are that these behaviors are not critical to the task or job but exceed core obligations and are performed as a result of personal choice and proactive initiative (Katz 1964; Smith et al. 1983). They can be directed toward the individual (OCB-I) or the organization (OCB-O) and include, for instance, helping coworkers or offering ideas to improve the functioning of the organization (Smith et al. 1983; Williams and Anderson 1991). Clearly, these are behaviors that are beneficial for organizations. Researchers have demonstrated that OCB is positively related to organizational success, including sales performance (Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1994), product quality (Podsakoff et al. 1997), operating efficiency and performance quality (Yen and Niehoff 2004), and overall profits (Koys 2001).

Previous research has found that supervisor behavior does not only influence employees’ organizational citizenship behaviors toward the supervisor (e.g., Sparrowe et al. 2006) but to the organization as a whole (Organ and Ryan 1995; Podsakoff et al. 2000). This is because employee attitudes to the organization are shaped by their supervisors’ actions (e.g., Rhoades and Eisenberger 2002). Since perceived supervisor listening can influence employee work experiences, it is likely to also influence employees’ attitude toward the organization and thus employees’ OCB-O. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 2** Perceived supervisor listening is positively related to employee organizational citizenship behavior (OCB-O).

Listening and Turnover Intentions

Perceived supervisor listening is also likely to influence turnover intentions. Happy employees are likely to be committed to their job regardless of other opportunities (Meyer et al. 2002), whereas unhappy employees may be motivated to quit their job and leave the company (e.g., Allen et al. 2010). This is a particularly salient issue because voluntary turnover can be costly to organizations due to required training, lost productivity, loss of critical knowledge, and damage to the company’s image (Mitchell et al. 2001; Shaw et al. 2005).

Previous research has found that supervisor behaviors can influence turnover intention (e.g., Allen et al. 2010; Aquino et al. 1997; Griffeth et al. 2000). Perceived supervisor listening is likely to play a particularly important role concerning voluntary turnover decisions because strong relationships between supervisors and employees are key drivers of voluntary turnover (Allen et al. 2010). For instance, by fostering open communication, listening enables early detection of dissatisfaction and facilitates early
resolution of problems. Effective listeners may also be perceived as more caring and supportive and may establish stronger relationships with employees. Interactions of this kind create a positive experience, which—in turn—may influence employee attitudes toward their supervisor and the work place. In fact, Kluger (2013) presented meta-analytical findings which suggest that supervisor listening is positively related to employee satisfaction. In contrast, employees who continuously experience bad listeners may develop a negative attitude toward their supervisor and the organization. As a result, this negative experience may motivate employees to seek a different work environment. Similarly, a lack of positive experience may also reduce the incentive of staying at their job when employees have the opportunity to leave the organization in pursuit of a potentially more fulfilling position. Therefore:

Hypothesis 3  Perceived supervisor listening is negatively associated with employee turnover intention.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Study 1 contained data from 18 directors and department managers as well as their subordinates (n = 43) collected at a midsized North German sports company. Average team size was 2.4 employees. Of the employees, 41.7% were female and 58.2% male. The average age of the employees was 34.4 years (SD = 8.6), average organizational tenure was 7 years (SD = 6.1), and the average tenure within the team was 4.6 years (SD = 3.63). In terms of education, 8.3% of the employees reported to have a certificate of basic secondary education, 25% had done an apprenticeship or vocational education, while 66.7% had a university degree. With respect to the supervisors, 70% were male and the average age was 42 years (SD = 8.3). Their average organizational tenure was 12 years (SD = 7.9), 23.3% had completed vocational training, and 76.5% held a university degree.

Data were collected within the framework of leadership trainings targeted at directors and department managers. Questionnaires were filled out directly or taken back to the office. Team members received sealed questionnaires at the company which they returned anonymously to the researchers. Participation was voluntary and anonymous; supervisors and teams were matched via a matching code. Only matching data from supervisors and their subordinates were considered for the analysis, resulting in 18 complete teams, including their supervisors.

Our main independent variable was employees’ assessment of their supervisor’s listening. However, employee perceptions may not necessarily be consistent with the actual supervisor behavior. Hence, supervisor self-ratings provided an additional and complementary measure.

Measures

Questionnaires were designed in German. All measures had been adapted to German using the method of translation and back translation (Brislin 1970) by a team of bilingual psychologists and professional translators. We measured items using 5-point scales, with response categories ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Employees provided self-ratings on all measures that referred to internal psychological states (e.g., turnover intentions).

Employee Perceived Supervisor Listening  Employees rated the extent to which they perceived being listened to by their supervisor using 8 items that had been developed in previous studies (Lloyd et al., in press) and adapted to the supervisor–employee interactions (Lloyd et al. 2013). Items referred to “Generally, when my supervisor listens to me,” and sample items included “is interested in what I have to say” and “makes me comfortable so I can speak openly” (Appendix). The 8 items’ internal reliability was good (α = .96).

Supervisor Listening  Supervisors rated their own listening behavior toward their subordinates on the same 8-item listening scale (Lloyd et al., in press, 2013; Appendix) which was adapted to refer to the employees. Accordingly, items were prefaced with “Generally, when I listen to my employees,” and a sample item was “I am interested in what they have to say.” The scale revealed acceptable internal reliability (α = .93).

Emotional Exhaustion  We measured emotional exhaustion using the 5-item subscale from Maslach’s burnout inventory (Maslach 1982; Maslach and Jackson 1986). Sample items included “I feel emotionally drained from my work” and “I feel tired when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was .85.

Turnover Intentions  Employee intentions to leave the company were measured using the three items from Novosky and Cropsanzo (1991). Sample items were “I often think about quitting my job at this company” and “I would like to get a new job.” This 3-item scale had a Cronbach’s alpha of .91.

Organizational Citizenship Behavior  We assessed organizational citizenship behavior directed toward the
organization (OCB-O) using six items from Lee et al. (2002). Sample items were “Defend the organization when other employees criticize it” and “Offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organization.” Cronbach’s alpha for this measure was marginally acceptable, .63 (Lance et al. 2006).

**Analytical Strategy** Since all employees were nested within teams and the supervisors, we employed two-level analysis techniques. Intraclass correlation coefficients (Bliese 2000) were calculated examining the ratio of between-group to total variance (ICC), corrected for average team size (Biemann et al. 2012). The ICC indicates the amount of variance in a variable attributable to group membership. We examined the hypothesized links of our model using two-level path modeling procedures in Mplus6. Thus, we simultaneously accounted for the nested data structure and the relatedness of all outcome variables. Observed variables were analyzed due to sample size considerations.

**Results and Discussion**

Results presented in Table 1 include descriptive statistics, scale reliabilities, and zero-order correlations between employee ratings of listening quality and work-related outcomes.

The zero-order correlations reveal significant associations of perceived listening quality and work outcomes. However, these results do not account for the nestedness of employees in teams and supervisors. The ICC results confirmed that 49 % of the variance in employee perceived supervisor listening is explained by workgroup/supervisor membership (ICC = .49). The ICCs for the three outcome variables were .27 for OCB-O, for turnover intentions .18, and for emotional exhaustion .10. Consequently, to test our hypothesis (Fig. 1), we conducted two-level path analysis, analyzing both employee perceptions of supervisor listening and the outcome variables on the individual level, while accounting for workgroup membership.

Results show first that supervisor listening (i.e., the supervisor’s self-ratings on listening) and employee perceived supervisor listening were highly correlated ($r = .93$). This result demonstrated that the employees’ perceptions were not simply self-constructed, but reflected reliable observations of supervisors’ behaviors. Furthermore, employee perceived supervisor listening was associated with citizenship behaviors (OCB-O), turnover intention, and the extent to which they felt emotionally exhausted. The model-data fit was good (RMSEA = .000; SRMR = .001 (within)/.004 (between); TLI = 1.00; CFI = 1.00) and all of our hypotheses (H1–H3) were confirmed.

Alternative models, which either included additional direct paths from supervisor self-ratings to work outcomes or that tested solely a direct link between supervisor self-ratings (without employee ratings in the model) and outcome variables, yielded nonsignificant results. For instance, when the direct link between supervisor self-ratings and work outcomes was included, supervisor self-ratings did not significantly predict any of the organizational outcomes—emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.59; p = .90$), OCB-O ($\beta = .45; p = .30$), or turnover intentions ($\beta = -.55; p = .76$). Nor did the model which considered only the direct link between supervisor self-ratings and the three work outcomes—emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.31; p = .88$), OCB-O ($\beta = .39; p = .56$), or turnover intentions ($\beta = -.38; p = .77$). The effects all are in the predicted direction though, and they may have failed to reach significance because of a) the small sample size and b) the analysis took into account all three direct effects and intercorrelations between the outcomes, which reduces the degrees of freedom as compared to simple correlations. Hence, while employee perceptions of supervisor listening were in line with supervisors’ self-perceptions of their listening behavior, the results suggest...
that foremost employees’ perceived supervisor listening has an influence on all three work outcomes.

Taken together, the results indicated how important it is for employees to feel listened to by their supervisors. Supervisors who actively engage in listening behaviors that demonstrate attention, interest, and care will be noticed by their employees. And employees who believe they are listened to appear to be more motivated to support the organization, less prone to leave the organization, and experience less emotional exhaustion. These main effects provide a basis to examine how perceived supervisor listening influences these work outcomes and specifically the mediating mechanisms of positive and negative affect.

**Study 2**

For Study 2, we increased the sample size and sought to generalize the findings to a wider range of professions than covered in Study 1. We expect the main effect of perceived supervisor listening to parallel the effects found in Study 1 in predicting employee citizenship behavior, turnover intention, and emotional exhaustion (H1 to H3). More importantly, we examine the specific mediating mechanisms associated with positive and negative affect. As discussed earlier, PA and NA are independent constructs, and thus, they may play different mediating roles. As found in Study 1, employees’ perceptions that supervisors are poor listeners were associated with employees’ emotional exhaustion. One primary reason might be that the perception that one is not being listened to is emotionally distressing and hence elicits negative affect. Constantly occurring, these emotionally distressing situations might transfer into long-term negative effects on emotional well-being. Similarly, research on supervisor support showed strong links of supervisor behavior on emotional exhaustion and physiological stress reactions (Mineyama et al. 2007). We propose that perceived supervisor listening elicits a strong negative affective reaction—which if experienced repeatedly—can translate into emotional exhaustion. Specifically, we predict that the perception of poor supervisor listening elicits negative affect and this in turn facilitated emotional exhaustion. We do not, however, predict a similar mediating effect of positive affect, as employees can have a lack of positive affect without feeling emotionally exhausted. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 4** The relationship between employee perceived supervisor listening and emotional exhaustion is mediated by negative affect.

In Study 1, we also found that employee perceived supervisor listening was associated with citizenship behaviors aimed at the organization (OCB-O). A potential factor is that supervisor listening exerts its effects on constructive work behavior via its effects on positive affect. As discussed earlier, listening perceptions can significantly influence speakers’ affective reactions and attitudes toward the listener (Beukeboom 2009). Immediate positive affective experiences in turn have been suggested as important drivers for positive (constructive) employee work behaviors (Brief and Weiss 2002; Dalal et al. 2009; George 1991; Warr et al. 2014). Helping behavior is one of the most widely studied types of social behaviors, and the strong role of positive affect in stimulating this behavior has been well established (e.g., George and Brief 1992; Isen and Levin 1972). Individuals in a positive mood tend to be more likely to help others (Brief and Weiss 2002; see Isen and Baron 1991), exhibit affiliated altruistic behaviors (Isen and Levin 1972), and increased levels of prosocial behavior at work (George 1991). Hence, positive affect could also increase levels of other extra-role behaviors directed toward the overall organizational functioning such as protecting the organization or making suggestions for improvement (George and Brief 1992). Positive affect has been suggested as an energizing motivation (Watson et al. 1999) that gives the necessary impetus to perform beyond

---

**Fig. 1** Two-level path model of listening effects.

- \( n \) (employees) = 43;
- \( n \) (supervisors) = 18; \( m \) (team size) = 2.39 employees;
- covariances between the outcome variables were included in the two-level path modeling analysis; standardized coefficients reported;
- \(* p < .001, ** p < .01; * p < .05\), two-tailed
This link between positive affect and positive work behavior has received support from organizational research findings between positive affect and employee initiative (Den Hartog and Belschak 2007; Fritz and Sonnenstag 2009), proactive behavior (Tsai et al. 2007), and citizenship behaviors (Dalal et al. 2009). We therefore predict that the link between perceived supervisor listening and OCB-O is mediated by positive affect. In addition, since research indicates that organizational citizenship behavior is distinctively driven by positive affect, we do not expect negative affect (related to the absence of effective listening) to be related to positive behavior since they lack the necessary impetus for positive action (for a more extensive review see Warr et al. 2014). In sum, effective listeners, perceived as caring and respectful, may constitute a positive affective experience for the employee which, in turn, plays out on employee citizenship behavior and motivates employees to ‘walk the extra mile’ for the organization. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 5** The relationship between employee perceived supervisor listening and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB-O) is mediated by positive affect.

Finally, Study 1 results also revealed that employee perceived supervisor listening was associated with turnover intention. Unlike the effect on emotional exhaustion, which we predict will be mediated by negative affect, and the effect on OCB-O, which we predict will be mediated by positive affect, positive and negative affect are both possible mediators that link perceived supervisor listening to turnover intention. Experiencing non-perceptive supervisors can be frustrating and dissatisfying and drive employees to seek a different workplace. That is, non-responsive supervisors may stimulate negative affect which in turn is related to employee turnover intentions. Similarly, it is possible that a lack of or absence of positive affect (low PA) has similar effects on turnover intentions, particularly because many employees seek a workplace that entails professionally and affectively satisfying working conditions. Hence, the lack of positive affective experiences due to poor supervisor listening can encourage employees to seek new job opportunities. Therefore:

**Hypothesis 6a** The relationship between employee perceived supervisor listening and turnover intention is mediated by negative affect.

**Hypothesis 6b** The relationship between employee perceived supervisor listening and turnover intention is mediated by positive affect.

### Method

**Participants and Procedure**

328 German employees from different companies voluntarily participated in this survey study without monetary reward. The sample consisted of 58.8% women (mean age = 34.4, SD = 8.9). Approximately 60% had a university degree or equivalent, their average tenure at the company was 4.76 years (SD = 5.4) and the average time they had been working for their current supervisor was 3.2 years (SD = 2.6). Participants were recruited by convenience sampling methods in order to get a more heterogeneous sample. Online surveys were administered through various online platforms and discussion forums to reach a maximum variety in participant age, educational background, job position, and industry. For instance, we addressed general work forums in which employees discuss and exchange work-related information as well as specific forums for occupational groups (e.g., police officers, mechanics, and engineers). We obtained permission to post an invitation to participate in our study from the web administrators. The order of scales as well the item order within the scale was randomized to account for order effects (Bishop 2008). Only questionnaires that were fully completed were included in the analysis. The final sample included employees from a wide range of job functions and jobs including administration, engineering, finance, marketing, and teaching.

**Measures**

To increase comparability between the studies, we applied the same measures and scales for perceived listening supervisor listening (Appendix), emotional exhaustion, turnover intention, and OCB-O as in Study 1. **Positive and negative affect** were measured using the 20-item **Positive and Negative Affect Schedule** (PANAS; Watson et al. 1988). The positive affect (PA) measure includes items such as “attentive” and “strong,” while the negative affect (NA) measure includes items such as “irritated” and “upset.” Respondents were asked to think of their interactions with their supervisor in general (i.e., most of the times) and asked to indicate how they generally felt in those interactions. PANAS was paraphrased with “Generally, in the interaction with my supervisor I feel.” The measure captures short-term state affect (versus trait or dispositional affectivity) related to the general supervisor–employee interaction. Cronbach’s alphas for both positive and negative affect were .93.
Analytical Strategy

Structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus6 was conducted to test the effects of perceived supervisor listening on PA and NA as well as on the three work outcomes simultaneously in one model (see Fig. 2). To evaluate model fit, we followed recommendations by Vandenberg and Lance (2000). Prior to that, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the adequacy of the measurement components and to evaluate the discriminant validity of the constructs used.

Next, since all measures were obtained from the same source, we employed techniques to account for potential effects of common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Following prior research, we controlled for the effects of a single unmeasured latent method factor by including it directly in the SEM model (MacKenzie et al. 1999; Moorman et al. 1998). All item loadings were constrained to be equal in their loadings on the method factor (Conger et al. 2000; Elangovan and Xie 1999; MacKenzie et al. 1999). Finally, to explicitly examine the mediating effects of PA and NA, we conducted indirect effects analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2008; Preacher et al. 2007).

Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations of all study variables. All scale reliabilities were above .80.

Perceived supervisor listening was linearly correlated to all variables. We used confirmatory factor analysis to determine the distinctiveness of all outcome measures. The five-factor model revealed a moderate overall fit (chi square \((df = 485) = 1335.41, p < .01\), the standardized root mean square of the residuals (SRMR) was .065, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) .07, the non-normed fit index—Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) 1.88, and the comparative fit index (CFI) was .89. In comparison, the baseline model in which all items loaded on one factor did not reveal satisfactory fit, chi square \((df = 495) = 4,331.09, p < .001;\ RMSEA = .154;\ SRMR = .125;\ TLI = .47;\ CFI = .51, and differed significantly from the five-factor model \((\Delta chisquare = 2,995.68, \Delta df = 9, p < .001)\). Taken together, the results indicate discriminant validity of the study variables.

Consecutively, we examined the hypothesized mediation mechanisms. Figure 2 displays the results of the SEM analysis.

Overall, the SEM model displayed in Fig. 2 revealed an acceptable model fit (chi square \((df = 763) = 1,763.28, p < .001;\ RMSEA = .06;\ SRMR = .06;\ TLI = .91;\)

---

1. The values of the CFI and TLI are below the conventionally accepted value of .90 (Vandenberg and Lance 2000). However, this is acceptable since all constructs and no distinctive paths (e.g., differentiated indirect effects) had been included in the model.
CFI = .90). As indicated by the standardized coefficients (Fig. 2), perceived supervisor listening was positively associated with PA ($\beta = .79, p < .001$) and negatively with NA ($\beta = -.66, p < .001$).

In accordance with our predictions, we found distinct associations for PA and NA on the outcome measures. PA was positively related to employee OCB-O ($\beta = .44, p < .001$) and related negatively to turnover intentions ($\beta = .40, p < .001$). However, PA was not significantly associated with emotional exhaustion. NA, in turn, had a positive association with emotional exhaustion ($\beta = .50, p < .001$) and turnover intentions ($\beta = .35, p < .001$), but no effect on OCB-O. Overall, these results already indicated mediation effects of PA and NA.

Next, we examined the potential for mediation in detail running a bootstrap indirect effects analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2008; Preacher et al. 2007) with PA and NA. Mediation is based on a point estimate and bootstrapped 99% confidence interval (CI based on 1,500 bootstrap iterations). A mediator effect is significant if zero is not included in the CI. PA mediated the link between perceived supervisor listening and OCB-O (point estimate = .19, CI = .08/.29) and turnover intentions (point estimate = -.30, CI = -.44/-1.16). As already indicated by the SEM results, PA did not mediate the link to emotional exhaustion (point estimate = -.04, CI = -.14/.06). Concerning NA, the analysis revealed that NA mediated the link between perceived supervisor listening and emotional exhaustion (point estimate = -.32, CI = -.42/-2.1) as well as turnover intentions (point estimate = -.30, CI = -.42/-1.7). As predicted, NA did not mediate the link to OCB-O (point estimate = .01, CI = -.07/.09). In sum, Hypotheses 4–6 were all supported.

Furthermore, we tested an alternative model that additionally included the direct links between perceived supervisor listening and work outcomes; this revealed almost identical model fit (chi square ($df = 762$) = 1,761.82, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .06; SRMR = .06; TLI = .91; CFI = .90) and did not differ significantly from our hypothesized albeit simpler model (Achi square = 1.46, $\Delta df = 1$). Based on the parsimony principle, the model without direct links between perceived supervisor listening and outcomes is superior.

Finally, we included a first-order common method factor (CMF) while estimating the model again to control for common method variance. Table 3 displays the standardized parameter estimates before and after controlling for this common method factor.

All relationships were significant and of similar if not the same magnitude, which indicated that the data were not influenced by common method variance. Average loading of all standardized estimates with CMF was $-.76$. Taken together, the results provide further evidence for our hypothesized model of listening effects. Replicating Study 1 findings, employees who perceived their supervisors as effective listeners also demonstrated higher levels of citizenship behavior, lower turnover intentions, and less emotional exhaustion. Additionally, we revealed first evidence for affect as a mediating mechanism. Perceived supervisor listening was associated with employee positive and negative affectivity. PA and NA appeared to operate in distinctive ways that go beyond a simple mirroring of the two dimensions. High PA had an energizing effect on employees that was related to increased levels of citizenship behavior. High NA was related to increased emotional exhaustion and explained the relationship between perceived supervisor listening and emotional exhaustion. Voluntary turnover was related to both low PA and high NA. This was in line with theoretical considerations that employees may be motivated to quit their job in order to leave behind the negative work environment or because they want to find an optimally positive one.

**General Discussion**

In two studies, we demonstrated how perceived supervisor listening is important for employee work-related outcomes. We found that supervisors’ listening efforts were reflected in the perceptions that employees have of their supervisor’s listening. We found that these perceptions were associated with emotional exhaustion, citizenship behaviors, and turnover intention. Moreover, the relationship between perceived supervisor listening and work outcomes was mediated by affect. Negative affect mediated the effect on emotional exhaustion, positive affect mediated the effect on citizenship behavior, and both negative and positive affect mediated the effect on turnover intention. Therefore,
while we found that perceived supervisor listening triggered both positive and negative emotions, each of the emotions was associated with different outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

One purpose of this research was to investigate the effects of perceived supervisor listening on three important organizational work outcomes. Each of these work outcomes (emotional exhaustion, citizenship behavior and turnover) substantially influences organizational performance, which highlights the importance of these results for organizational research. Since listening is ultimately linked to the dyadic interaction between individuals (e.g., employee–supervisor), most research has focused on leader-referenced variables, such as supervisor support or responsiveness. Since the value of listening was first suggested in clinical psychology, positive effects on employee well-being appeared obvious. Our finding that perceived supervisor listening was associated with emotional exhaustion is in line with previous research that indicated effects of supportive supervisor behavior on emotional exhaustion (Rafferty et al. 2001) and physiological stress reactions (Mineyama et al. 2007). We broadened and extended these findings by showing that effects of supervisor listening go beyond such proximal outcomes and also affect more distal work outcomes such as turnover intentions and organizational citizenship behavior. Citizenship behavior (OCB-O) and turnover intentions have not been empirically addressed in the listening literature before. Clearly, these outcomes contribute to overall organizational functioning. By investigating these three work outcomes simultaneously, we contribute to a more holistic understanding of the detrimental and beneficial effects of perceived supervisor listening.

Foremost, we revealed two mechanisms that explain how supervisor listening affects proximal and distal outcomes in distinctive ways. Our results suggest that employees’ emotional reactions serve a complex and nuanced role. Negative affect mediated the listening effects on emotional exhaustion, while positive affect mediated the effects on organizational citizenship behavior, and both positive and negative affect explained the relationship to turnover intentions. Therefore, positive and negative affect provide distinct mechanisms in explaining why perceived supervisor listening is important within organizations. These findings on the distinctive role of positive and negative affect in driving specific work outcomes are in line with previous research that indicated work behavior as reactions to affective experiences at work (e.g., Dalal et al. 2009; Tsai et al. 2007; Warr et al. 2014). This is the first study that introduced an affect paradigm (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996; Spector and Fox 2002) to explain listening effects at work. It advances not only the current research on listening but also the field of organizational behavior in its search for understanding employee behavior.

Last, our findings may also be significant for related topics in which supervisor listening effects have been implied but yet not tested. Concerning the organizational voice literature, for instance, supervisor listening might present a positive lever to employee voice behavior. Supervisor behavior has been extensively discussed as an important antecedent to subordinate voice behavior, including employees’ decisions to speak up or their beliefs about when and why speaking up at work is safe or appropriate (Detert and Burris 2007; Detert and Edmondson 2011; Detert Detert and Treviño 2010; Walumbwa and Schaubroeck 2009). Perceived supervisor listening may be one decisive factor that facilitates positive voice behavior.

Limitations and Future Research

As in most research, several limitations should be taken into consideration when interpreting the results. First, the listening measure we used reflected perceptions of naturally occurring variance in listening. We encourage future research to include experimental manipulations of listening behavior (e.g., a listening confederate in the organization) and to add additional objective measures of listening behavior such as behavioral observations rated by external coders. For instance, team meetings or dyadic interactions (e.g., appraisal interviews) could be soundlessly filmed and compared to perceptual ratings of listening and associated reactions.

These suggestions might also counteract our studies’ second limitation of the cross-sectional design of both studies, which does not allow for causal inferences of the effects. Our model suggests that employees react more favorably to those who listen well. Although our analyses support this, it may also be possible that supervisors listen more to employees who are highly motivated and committed or express positive emotions. Yet, the available data reflect only a specific point in time. In the long run, a mutual interaction should be expected: Effective listeners might elicit positive affectivity and create positive work relationships which both, in turn, affect the quality of future listening.

An important avenue for future research is the investigation of determinants or moderating factors of effective listening. For instance, the research by Ames et al. (2012) suggested a link between (leader) personality and listening behavior. Their research indicated that highly “agreeable” individuals who tend to be more cooperative, empathic, and concerned (Graziano et al. 2007) may also be better listeners. Employees may feel more comfortable approaching those supervisors and speak openly (Detert
and Burris 2007). In sum, effects may evolve in the complex interplay of individual characteristics (e.g., personality dimensions) and much work remains to understand what distinguishes good listener.

Similarly, moderators associated with the listening recipient (e.g., employee) need further investigation to define boundary conditions of listening effects. For instance, employees’ dispositional affectivity—their “emotional baseline” or trait affect (e.g., George 1991, 1996)—may determine the extent of listening effects on short-term affective experiences. High-trait positive affectivity has been proposed to be a personal resource that can buffer ongoing challenges and crises and decrease the risk of emotional exhaustion (Fredrickson et al. 2003; Janssen et al. 2010). Similarly, employees who are generally more motivated may be more prone to engage in extra-role activities that contribute to organizational functioning. Concerning “state affect,” research by Dalal et al. (2009) indicates the importance of within person variability for determining effects on productive and counterproductive work behavior. In this context, it is also noteworthy that recent research has called for deeper differentiation of affect in terms of valence and activation to better understand the link between affect and work outcomes (Warr et al. 2014). Future research is needed to provide a fine-grained understanding of the emotion-related factors within the individual and the environmental context.

Managerial Implications

Besides the theoretical contributions, our findings concerning effects of perceived supervisor listening on employee work outcomes also have important managerial implications. Each of the three work outcomes, we examined significantly contribute to overall organizational functioning which highlights the importance of this topic for managers and organizations more broadly. Moreover, because our results point to a strong association between supervisors’ listening efforts and employees’ perceptions of listening, our results suggest that work outcomes can be improved through changes in supervisors’ behavior. This suggests that listening should become an integral part of leadership education, training, and development. Techniques of active listening or non-defensive communication can be trained successfully (e.g., Ikegami et al. 2010; McNaughton et al. 2008). Our results suggest that such training may have an impact on important organizational outcomes.

Second, when it comes to improving listening behavior, it is important to pay attention to the emotional well-being of the employee. If leaders can engage in listening behaviors that can make employees more happy and excited about their job, while also reducing sorrow and anxiety, both the employees’ overall well-being and the employees’ contribution to the organization may improve.

Conclusion

To conclude, when it comes to listening, our results demonstrate that supervisor listening is important and it is the employees’ perceptions of supervisory listening that matters. And it matters because of how employees feel emotionally about being listened to (or not being listened to). Creating the conditions that facilitate employees’ recognition that the supervisor is listening can have major consequences for employees’ well-being and the organization as a whole, including whether employees are proactive and whether they choose to stay.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Anika Deinert from Jacobs University Bremen for her support in the data collection process of study 1.

Appendix

Measure of Supervisor Listening (Supervisor Self-rating)

The response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Think of a typical interaction with your employees.

Generally, when I listen to my employee, …

1. I am interested in what he/she has to say.
2. I make him/her comfortable so he/she can speak openly.
3. I make it easy for him/her to open up.
4. I understand his/her feelings.
5. I am interested in him/her personally.
6. I accept him/her for what he/she is.
7. I care about him/her.
8. I don’t judge him/her.

Measure of Perceived Supervisor Listening (Employee Rating)\(^2\)

The response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Think of a typical interaction with your supervisor.

Generally, when my supervisor listens to me, I feel my supervisor…

\(^2\) In Study 2, the response format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).
1. is interested in what I have to say.
2. makes me comfortable so I can speak openly.
3. makes it easy for me to open up.
4. understands my feelings.
5. is interested in me personally.
6. accepts me for what I am.
7. cares about me.
8. doesn’t judge me.

References


Watson, D., Wiese, D., Vaidya, J., & Tellegen, A. (1999). The two general activation systems of affect: Structural findings, evolu-


CHAPTER 5

GENERAL DISCUSSION
SUMMARY OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

This thesis followed the call for research of business scholars who lamented that listening as an organizational variable is almost non-existent in scientific business research (e.g., Brownell, 1994) and that this, conversely, impedes any progress in empirical research which is needed to fully understand the nature of listening in the workplace and to make it a credible and legitimate construct in business research. Although listening has gained popularity in the business context as a key management skill, most of the literature is prescriptive or descriptive, and largely based on anecdotal or intuitive data (Flynn, Valiskoski, & Grau, 2008). Hence, despite the managerial popularity and acknowledged importance of listening in the workplace, there is a lack of empirical evidence in support of these claims and a knowledge gap concerning a firm understanding why listening is effective, and what kind of consequences it entails for leaders, employees, and the organization. The current thesis set out to fill this theoretical and empirical gap by investigating different outcomes of listening and their distinct underlying psychological mechanisms in the organizational context.

We addressed this goal stepwise – from the individual, to the relationship, and into the organizational setting. The first article of this thesis (Chapter 2) took a micro-perspective on listening effects by seeking to isolate listening in a zero-acquaintance paradigm and investigated how perceptions of listening quality impact on emotional well-being and building interpersonal trust. The results suggested that effective listening benefits the individual (listening recipient) as well as the relationship between listeners and speakers. Effective listening was linked to individual well-being and interpersonal trust. Furthermore, first evidence for underlying mechanisms was put forward that contributed to our understanding of how listening unfurls its effects.
on the individual and the relationship in distinct ways. The results indicated that the
listening effects were driven by two distinct mechanisms: the link between listening
and trust was mediated by social attraction, whereas the listening effect on well-being
was mediated by clarity. With this study we established first evidence that listening is
important for the speaker and the dyadic interaction, which laid the cornerstone for
further studies in the business context. Additionally, the study had meaningful
theoretical and practical implications concerning mentoring, coaching, and building
positive relationships with clients and business partners.

The second article of the thesis (Chapter 3) made the transfer to the
organizational setting and explored the value of supervisor listening in the
hierarchical supervisor-employee relationship. Based on the implications from
Chapter 2, effective listening was predicted to also play out positively in the
supervisor-employee relationship. Chapter 3 investigated perceived supervisor
listening within the framework of leader-member exchange theory and assessed the
validity criteria as necessary prerequisites for the examination of listening in
organizational research. Perceived listening quality was demonstrated to be a valid
measure to capture employee perceptions of supervisor listening, which predicted
how satisfied employees were with their job, their supervisor, and how fair they felt
treated in interactions with the supervisor. We also tested a path model that
sequentially integrated supervisor listening as a distinct part of the leader-member
interaction. Findings suggested that perceived supervisor listening may foster strong
leader-member exchange which in turn benefits work outcomes. Taken together, this
study provided initial evidence that measuring perceived supervisor listening provides
value for organizational research.

The third article (Chapter 4) examined important outcomes of employee
perceptions of supervisor listening: one proximal (emotional exhaustion) and two
more distal (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions). Furthermore, positive and negative affect were investigated as distinct mediating mechanisms. The results of two consecutive studies empirically supported the central assertion of ‘listening’ as a key management skill. Particularly, the findings of Study 1 revealed that supervisor self-ratings of listening reflected employee perceptions of how their supervisor listens to them and those perceptions were associated with the three work outcomes. Study 2 replicated these findings and suggested that supervisor listening unfolds its effects on work outcomes through two distinct mechanisms, positive and negative affect. Positive affect mediated the effects of perceived supervisor listening on organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention, whereas negative affect mediated listening effects on emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. These results advocated that supervisor listening contributes to shaping employees’ affective perceptions which, in turn, relate to important work outcomes, including organizational citizenship behavior and the decision to stay or to leave the company.

**INTEGRATION OF RESULTS AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION**

On the whole, this thesis makes several important contributions to organizational theory and practice. Listening has a meaningful impact on the individual and interindividual interaction, and entails consequences that may also reach beyond the dyadic interaction (e.g., affect the organization). Clearly, voluntary turnover intentions, organizational citizenship behavior, and employee well-being are important determinants of overall organizational functioning (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994) and organizational success (Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003). Thus, the thesis’ findings broaden our understanding of the nature of listening in the workplace and its implications for the whole organization.
Second, by providing empirical evidence, we followed the call for research of scholars who lamented that listening is the most neglected aspect of communication and, as an organizational variable, almost non-existent in scientific business research. The findings present the necessary empirical evidence that listening is a crucial factor, particularly in the workplace, and a legitimate and credible variable in scholarly business research. Hence, this dissertation not only contributes to the current state of listening research, but also encourages future research on listening, and its integration as organizational variable into management research.

Most important, the thesis contributes to a better understanding of how listening unfolds its effects, that is, the psychological mechanisms of listening. Little research has been put forward to explain the potential inherent in effective listening. This thesis integrated knowledge from various academic fields and theoretically derived predictions for mediating mechanisms, and tested them empirically. We embedded listening within trust theories (Hardin, 2002; Luhmann, 1979; Mayer & Schoorman, 1995) and put forward evidence that suggested that one way listening may foster the development of trust is by means of social attraction (Chapter 2). Although these findings are at a preliminary stage and need further investigation and replication in more natural settings, they presented first insights into how listening contributes to building sustainable relationships.

We also put forward first evidence towards a cognitive mechanism (clarity) that provided an explanation of listening effects on emotional well-being. This finding integrates and extends the different literatures that put forward some mechanism of ‘clarity’, be it for instance that listening facilitates the internal dialogue between aspects of the self (Rogers, 1957, 1975) or the contemporary theory that the speaker is enabled to structure and reintegrate experiences (Lepore, Ragan, & Jones, 2000; Pennebaker, 1995) and thus gain clarity. The thesis also puts forward a micro-
perspective of the established effects of role clarity (or its absence: confusion and ambiguity) on health and well-being (House & Rizzo, 1972; Lyon, 1971) and individuals’ need for clarity (Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1974).

In the organizational research (Chapter 4), we integrated affect theory (Watson & Clark, 1997; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996) that fosters our understanding of how perceived supervisor listening affects proximal and distal work outcomes. The effects of perceived supervisor listening on emotions serve a complex, nuanced role in predicting employee well-being and work outcomes such as organizational citizenship behavior. For instance, whereas positive affect was revealed as a driver for organizational citizenship behavior, negative affect mediated the effects of listening on emotional exhaustion. The integration of affect theory provides a more nuanced understanding of the diverse effects of perceived supervisor listening in the business context.

In sum, the results suggested that listening unfurls its effects through distinct affective, socio-emotive, and cognitive mechanisms. Hence, this thesis advances academic knowledge on the psychological underpinnings of listening effects and provides an answer to the question how listening affects proximal and distal outcomes. This contributes considerably to the progress of listening research, but also to the broader field of organizational behavior and business science.

Furthermore, the thesis findings emphasize the importance of employees’ subjective experience of supervisor listening. Particularly in the last study (Chapter 4), the results suggested that although self and other ratings of supervisor listening are highly related, it is the employee’s perceptions of listening that matter in terms of supervisor influence on work outcomes. This has important implications for future research that investigates listening in organizational research, but also for the assessment of previous empirical research that considered listener self-assessments.
(e.g., Mineyama, Tsutsumi, Takao, Nishiuchi, & Kawakami, 2007). In case of the latter, the true effect sizes of listening on work outcomes might be underestimated. This also has important implications for organizational practice in which leader self-assessments are used, for example, in listening trainings.

**MANAGERIAL CONTRIBUTION**

Finally, this thesis offers important action implications. The findings suggested that feeling listened to is important for individuals and their relationships, and can have far-reaching consequences. Particularly, the findings’ indications that leader listening may impact employee satisfaction with both their supervisor and their work, as well as their organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intentions, highlights the importance of this topic for managers and organizations more broadly. While listening is rarely seen as a hard skill, these work outcomes clearly contribute to overall organizational functioning (Motowidlo et al., 1994) and performance (Cropanzano et al., 2003).

Organizations that want to benefit from these results should carefully integrate listening into management selection, training, and development processes. Effective listening may require far greater effort and patience, and employees may quickly notice whether leader listening is an attempt to mutually understand them or used as a “technique to manipulate” (Tyler, 2011). In case of the latter, all attempts may not only fail to flourish, but may have detrimental effects on the supervisor-employee relationship. Since the results emphasize the importance of employees’ subjective experiences, management training on active listening may particularly focus on behavioral reflection techniques and integrate employee feedback. In terms of content,
management trainings should place specific emphasis on understanding employees and attending to their emotional well-being.

Including feedback on listening into management appraisal interviews or personnel development instruments allows for continuous measurement and monitoring of listening skills. This may further stimulate the development of listening and also increase the awareness for listening as a significant workplace skill. When managers and employees are motivated to listen, this can lead to an organizational culture of listening in which mutual understanding allows for early resolution of interpersonal and task-related issues, which may then translate into additional positive work outcomes.

Finally, the findings’ implication that listening is a valuable trigger and engine for building and sustaining strong relationships also offers promising avenues for other business areas, such as mentoring and coaching, in which strong relationships are crucial for the client’s progress. Similarly important are the implications for effective teamwork or project cooperations which often require one to build strong relationships very quickly.

**LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Despite our multi-method approach in research designs and analyses to address the thesis’ overarching question, the results should be interpreted in light of their limitations and much work remains to fully understand the nature of listening and its mechanisms, antecedents, and consequences.

First, the results largely rely on self-reports and reflected perceptions of naturally occurring variance in listening. Similarly, the cross-sectional designs of most studies (Chapter 3 and 4) and the correlational nature of all data limits us in
making any causal inferences of listening effects. Various steps were taken to alleviate common method concerns (Conger, Kanungo, & Menon, 2000; MacKenzie, Podsakoff, & Paine, 1999; Moorman, Blakely, & Niehoff, 1995; Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), as discussed in each empirical chapter individually. However, future research is needed to better understand the complex nature of listening effects. In terms of methods, experimental manipulations of listening are necessary to make clearer inferences concerning listening effects. For instance, by integrating listening confederates who listen particularly well or poorly. Longitudinal and time-lagged studies would be valuable to understand how listening effects develop over time and affect leader-follower interactions and work outcomes. Quasi-experimental designs in organizations and field studies with third-party behavioral observations are also encouraged to extend our knowledge on the specifics of listening behavior and its perception by others.

Next, the convenient samples used in two organizational studies (Chapter 3 and 4) consisted of employees from diverse industries, occupations, and educational backgrounds. Organizational practices of interacting and communicating may differ depending on the industry, job level, and the structure of the work. For instance, Stine, Thompson, and Cusella (1995) found differential, both beneficial and detrimental effects of listening on absenteeism and group performance for organic work structures compared to mechanic work structures. Organizations have increasingly turned to organic environments with flat hierarchies, horizontal communication, and participative team approaches (Voelpel, Leibold, & Fürchtenicht, 2007). Similarly, the nature of work has been changing due to globalization and technological progress towards, for instance, globally separated virtual teams and virtual communication. Much work remains for future research to investigate the
context factors and specific conditions that hinder and foster listening effects and require particularly high or low supervisor listening.

Another important question that remains concerns the costs of effective listening and potential gains of “poor” listening. For instance, research by Hurwitz and Kluger (2013) suggested that a listener’s loss of perceived dominance and status can be a barrier that prevents people from listening well. The results indicated that poor listening can enhance feelings of superiority and may satisfy power and status seeking needs. An intriguing research endeavor would be the investigation of further determinants and barriers that hinder effective listening.

Promising avenues for future research offers the integration of listening as organizational variable into other areas of business research. One example would be the organizational voice literature (e.g., Hirschman, 1970) that investigates the conditions under which employees speak up (e.g., Morrison, 2011) and the consequences of not speaking up (Burris, Detert, & Chiaburu, 2008; Hirschman, 1970; Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988; Spencer, 1986). Perceived supervisor listening could be crucial in making employees feel more comfortable about approaching their supervisor and in providing a secure environment for the employees to speak up (Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009; Detert & Edmondson, 2011; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003). Another example concerns the management of culturally diverse workforces. Leadership styles, leader-follower interactions, and worker expectations vary between Western and East Asian cultures (e.g., Chen, 1995; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004; Dorfman, Howell, & Hibino, 1997; Kim & Leung, 2007). Evaluating how workers’ perceptions of supervisor listening and the effects on work outcomes differ between cultures would be a fruitful avenue for future research.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

In pursuit of a better understanding of listening as a key management skill this thesis set out to empirically investigate the core questions of how supervisor listening affects employees, why it matters for them, and what the consequences are for the organization. To this end, the thesis addressed and tested diverse proximal and distal work outcomes of listening and their underlying psychological mechanisms. The findings suggested that listening unfolds its effects in the complex dynamics of cognitive, socio-emotive, and affective mediators. In the organization, this can make employees more satisfied with their supervisor and their job, and has important implications for employee well-being, workforce sustainability, and overall organizational functioning. This thesis contributes to a better understanding of the complex nature of listening in the workplace and to making it a credible and legitimate construct in business research. We trust that we have inspired organizational practice and future research in this field.
REFERENCES


