

## LISTENING IN ORGANIZATIONS: A SYNTHESIS AND FUTURE AGENDA

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**We conducted an integrative review of research on listening relevant to work and organizations published from 2000 to 2021 and across three disciplines (management, psychology, and communication studies). We found that listening research is fragmented across three perspectives: (a) *perceived listening*, (b) *the listener's experience*, and (c) *listening structures*. We discuss how integrating these perspectives highlights two major tensions in listening research. First, there is a tension between the speaker's perceptions and the listener's experience that reveals a *listening paradox*—while listening is perceived to be beneficial for speakers, it can be experienced as costly and depleting for listeners. This paradox reveals why people struggle with listening when it is needed the most. Second, listening structures in organizations can create tensions between organizational goals and the listener's experience. While organizations use listening structures to enable and signal listening, these efforts can impose greater costs on listeners, reinforce existing power structures, and create opportunities for unwanted surveillance. Managing these tensions provides fertile ground for future research, in part because recent advances in communication technologies are changing the dynamics and structure of listening in organizations.**

The biggest block between two people is their inability to listen to each other . . . This deficiency in the modern world is widespread and appalling.

—Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1952

Like Rogers and Roethlisberger (1952), scholars have long recognized that listening must occur for people to organize effectively. Listening is an interpersonal communication process that involves a *listener* receiving messages from a *speaker*<sup>1</sup> (Rogers &

Farson, 1957; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). It also involves responses that signal comprehension of those messages and support for the speaker (Lipetz, Kluger, & Bodie, 2020; Ramsey & Sohi, 1997). Listening underlies many critical organizational processes. For instance, without effective listening, leaders would not be able to engage followers (Toegel, Kilduff, & Anand, 2013), teams would fail to coordinate tasks (Lee, Mazmanian, & Perlow, 2020), and executives would not understand their stakeholders' interests (Pope, 2017). Given the importance of listening to diverse topics, such as leadership (Alvesson & Svingsson, 2003; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), problem-solving (Behfar, Cronin, & McCarthy, 2020), issue selling (Dutton, Ashford, O'Neill, Hayes, & Wierba, 1997), organizational learning (Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005), teamwork (Kluger et al., 2021; Lee, Mazmanian, & Perlow, 2020), and voice (Morrison, 2011; Yang, Lee, Zheng, & Johnson, 2021), organizational scholars must pay close attention to this critical topic.

Despite its importance, research on listening in organizations remains fragmented. This fragmentation has inhibited the accumulation of knowledge about listening and its antecedents and consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> People with hearing loss often use sign language for real-time communication, rather than auditory spoken messages. When referring to “speech,” “speakers,” “verbal,” or related terms, we mean to include sign language. However, empirical research on interpersonal listening in organizations has seldom specified whether the receipt of sign language is included in their studies.

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Researchers have examined listening from the listener's perspective (Goss, 1982; Hackenbracht & Gasper, 2013), whereas other studies, including prior literature reviews (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), have focused on the perception of listening from the speaker's perspective. Conceptualizations of listening vary, including different definitions and constructs, such as "active listening" (Rogers & Farson, 1957), "reflective listening" (Rautalinko & Lisper, 2004), "active empathic listening" (Bodie, 2011), "supportive listening" (Jones, 2011), and the "challenger listener" (Behfar, Cronin, & McCarthy, 2020). Listening is sometimes included as a component of other constructs, such as respectful inquiry (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), leader humility (Cojuharenco & Karelaia, 2020), and respectful engagement (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015). Moreover, listening research has developed across different disciplines, including management, psychology, and communications, each with varied theoretical and methodological approaches. The problem of fragmentation is evident in the development of research streams on listening that risk parallel development rather than the creation of a cumulative body of knowledge. The danger is that continued theoretical and methodological fragmentation will make synthesis even more difficult in the future.

To address fragmentation issues, we conducted an integrative review of the literature on workplace listening in the disciplines of management, psychology, and communication studies. Our findings reveal that conceptions of listening depend on the extent to which one focuses on the listener, the speaker, or the organizational context. We offer a framework for integrating fragmented conceptualizations of listening in organizations, including new directions for future research inspired by changes in communication technologies and practices in organizations.

Because listening occurs in and across groups and in organizational environments, the scope of our review extends beyond prior reviews that have focused on listening as a dyadic process between speakers and listeners (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). To arrive at a comprehensive collection of peer-reviewed articles, we retrieved articles published in the last two decades (2000 to 2021) using keyword searches of social science and business databases (i.e., EBSCO's Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, PsycArticles, and PsycInfo) with the terms "listen" and "listening." Additionally, we searched the archives of major journals represented in the *Financial Times*' "FT50" list of peer-reviewed journals. Moreover, several exclusion criteria were used

to find the articles relevant to the purposes of this review. First, only articles that explicitly measured or conceptualized listening (as a process or construct) were included. Second, articles without explicit relevance to listening in organizational contexts were excluded. Third, we excluded articles not situated in the interpersonal context (e.g., research on the effects of listening to music and "listening" to social media). This criterion is consistent with our focus on interpersonal listening.

We identified 117 peer-reviewed articles published in the last two decades. Ninety-eight of these articles (84% of total articles) were empirical studies, with a good representation of studies conducted in organizations and randomized controlled experiments. Among the empirical studies, 81% employed quantitative methods, and 19% employed qualitative methods. The articles represent insights from three primary disciplines where listening is researched: management (50%), communication studies (30%), and psychology (20%). Table 1 provides a breakdown of the articles by method and discipline. The articles we discuss in detail are those with substantive empirical support or conceptual articles that advance theoretical insights on listening.

## CONCEPTUALIZING LISTENING

### What Is Listening?

Listening is multidimensional and must be conceptualized from both the listener's and the speaker's perspectives because of its dyadic nature (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). However, the extant literature has varied in its focus on whose perspective is prioritized, leading to differing definitions and conceptualizations of core listening processes. As Janusik (2007: 139) specified, "listening research is a challenge, as listening is performed cognitively and perceived behaviorally, but listening cognitions and behaviors are not always congruent." Representative definitions of listening from different perspectives are shown in Table 2.

In our review, we found that conceptions of listening depend on the extent to which one focuses on the listener, the speaker, or the structures that govern the listening process. This has led to the parallel development of three research perspectives on listening: (1) *perceived listening*, (2) *the listener's experience*, and (3) *listening structures*. The first two perspectives are the predominant approaches to research on listening. The third perspective, on *listening structures*, is one that we have identified as an emergent perspective, represented in studies that

**TABLE 1**  
**Peer-Reviewed Papers on Listening (2000–2021) by Discipline and Type of Article**

Type of Article	Total	Management	Psychology	Communication Studies
Quantitative	79	35	19	25
Qualitative	19	13	1	5
Conceptual	19	11	3	5
All Articles	117	59	23	35

have examined social and organizational influences on listening.

The dominant conceptualization of listening in organizational research is *perceived listening*, which emphasizes the speaker’s perspective on listening quality. Perceived listening encompasses listeners’ behaviors that can signal attention, interest, and comprehension, known collectively as *responses* (e.g., Jones, 2011; Lewis & Reinsch, 1988; Purdy & Borisoff, 1997; Teng, Zhang, & Lou, 2020). For instance, Castro, Kluger, and Itzchakov (2016: 763) defined listening as “behavior that manifests the presence of attention, comprehension, and good intention toward the speaker.” Because speakers’ attributions of listening are foregrounded, speakers determine what constitutes listening behavior; all responses they use to assess listening quality are conceptually included as part of the listening process. These responses often include nonverbal behaviors like eye contact, facial expressions, head movements, and verbal reassurances (e.g., “uh huh”) (Cooney, Mastroianni, Abi-Esber, & Brooks, 2020). They sometimes include verbal responses like paraphrasing (e.g.,

Jones, 2011) or questions (Itzchakov, DeMarree, Kluger, & Turjeman-Levi, 2018; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

The second perspective on listening focuses on *the listener’s experience*—research that has examined the cognitive and emotional demands of listening for the listener. The listener is foregrounded, and listening is conceptualized as a “process of interpreting the communicative behavior of others in the effort to understand the meaning and implications of that behavior” (Bostrom, 2011: 28). In this and similar definitions (e.g., Wolvin, 2013), listening is a function of the experience and cognition of the listener only—not speakers’ perceptions. Studies on the listener’s experience have primarily been found in psychology and have not been well represented in management research to date.

The third perspective on listening focuses on *listening structures* that enable and constrain the listening process. Listening structures can exist independent of the individual or dyad. They include listening routines such as the practice of rounding in healthcare (Golden-Biddle, 2020), formal “listening

**TABLE 2**  
**Representative Definitions of Key Listening Constructs**

Listener’s Experience	Perceived Listening	Listening Structures
“The mental exertion required to attend to, and understand, an auditory message” (McGarrigle et al., 2014: 434).	“Behavior that manifests the presence of attention, comprehension, and good intention toward the speaker” (Castro, Kluger, & Itzchakov, 2016: 763).	“. . . a <i>listening post</i> that is perceived as a legitimate communication arrangement and that acts as a safety valve” (2018: 155).
“The acquisition, process, and retention of information in the interpersonal context” (Bostrom, 2011: 23).	“. . . behavioral processes, such as responding with verbal and nonverbal feedback (e.g., backchanneling, paraphrasing)” (Jones 2011, 85).	“. . . <i>architectures for listening</i> . . . applied by an organization to give recognition, acknowledgment, attention, interpretation, understanding, consideration, and response to its stakeholders and publics” (Macnamara, 2016: 52).
“Listening is a multidimensional construct that consists of complex (a) cognitive processes, such as attending to, understanding, receiving, and interpreting messages; (b) affective processes, such as being motivated and stimulated to attend to another person’s messages; and (c) behavioral processes, such as responding with verbal and nonverbal feedback (e.g., backchanneling, paraphrasing)” (Jones, 2011: 85).	“. . . responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages” (Purdy & Borisoff, 1997: 6).	
	“. . . a set of interrelated activities, including apparent attentiveness, nonverbal behavior, verbal behavior, perceived attitudes, memory and behavioral responses” (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988: 18).	

tours” conducted by leaders (Wolvin, 2005), and “listening circles” that structure turn-taking and conversation (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). These structures shape the behaviors and experiences of speakers and listeners.

### What Listening Is Not

Our focus is on listening as an interpersonal and organizational process; thus, our review excludes some related, but distinct, phenomena. First, listening is a process that includes but extends beyond hearing, that is, the physiological detection of auditory stimuli. Hearing is automatic, whereas listening is controlled (Burlison, 2011; Smith & Collins, 2009). One hears sounds involuntarily but purposefully listens only to some of them (Cohen, 1993). Second, our interpersonal focus excludes one-way asynchronous speech (e.g., listening to a podcast or recorded message) and observing auditory stimuli that do not aim to communicate with that specific recipient (e.g., listening to music or the sounds of the ocean). Although these are active areas of research in physiology and cognitive psychology, they are beyond the scope of this review.

The remainder of this review includes only studies in which input has been both auditory and interpersonal. We excluded studies that used the word “listen” but did not meet these criteria. For instance, in some studies, advice was provided automatically as written text (e.g., by an algorithm or as part of a written experimental procedure) and did not involve auditory communication from the speaker. Second, some literature using the phrase “listen to” was not interpersonal or auditory (Gino, 2008; Tost, Gino, & Larrick, 2012). For instance, some advice-taking studies have investigated advice searched online (e.g., internet articles on advice on buying a car). We do not consider these asynchronous, one-way communications interpersonal and thus exclude them from our review, although we discuss how changes in technology may challenge some of these distinctions in the future.

We organize our review by detailing research on each of these three conceptualizations in turn. Broadly, the literature on perceived listening, the listener’s experience, and listening structures have evolved in parallel, using different definitions and research paradigms. We review research findings from each perspective in the sections that follow. We then propose future directions for integrating among these perspectives in the context of a changing technological and organizational landscape.

### PERCEIVED LISTENING

Perceived listening has been the dominant focus in listening research (e.g., Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Scholars have long realized that listening is not merely the passive receipt of speaker messages—the listener’s behavior shapes the speaker’s thoughts, feelings, and behavior. For instance, Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) speculated that researchers’ willingness to listen to employees was a key trigger for the Hawthorne effect<sup>2</sup>—increased worker productivity due to being observed in a study.

Initially, scholars turned to clinical and humanistic psychology to explain how perceived listening could trigger changes in speaker behavior. Carl Rogers’s concept of *active listening*<sup>3</sup> has been foundational to understanding the effects of perceived listening on speakers (Rogers, 1951; Rogers & Farson, 1957). Based on their work on psychotherapeutic relationships, Rogers and Farson (1957) argued that active listening can lead speakers to meaningful cognitive and behavioral changes, including changes in their deepest values, attitudes, and personality. Active listening theory posits that to experience empathy, listeners must avoid their natural tendency to judge or evaluate speakers (Rogers & Farson, 1957; Tyler, 2011). By listening non-evaluatively, listeners can both experience and convey empathy, interest, and care for the speaker. This allows listeners to understand the content of the message and speakers’ feelings about it:

[Active listening] requires that we get inside the speaker, that we grasp, from his point of view, just what it is he is communicating to us. More than that, we must convey to the speaker that we are seeing things from his point of view . . . Any message a person tries to get across usually has two components: the content of the message and the feeling or attitude underlying this content. Both are important; both give the message meaning. It is this total meaning of the message that we try to understand. (Rogers & Farson, 1957: 4)

<sup>2</sup> Many subsequent studies have doubted Roethlisberger and Dickson’s (1939) conclusions (Muldoon, 2017). We reference them here to note that these insights inspired organizational research on listening, not to endorse their conclusions.

<sup>3</sup> Some scholars have used alternative terminology to describe listening that is empathic, attentive, respectful, and nonjudgmental (e.g., active, empathic, active-empathic, supportive, therapeutic, and reflective listening). Meanwhile, we adopt the term active listening, as it is most widely used.

This quote acknowledges the importance of listeners' two related goals in understanding a message (Cooper, 1997): (a) *accuracy*, in which listeners correctly comprehend the meaning speakers hope to convey; and (b) *support*, in which listeners show interest, attention, and care for speakers' well-being. Accuracy provides listeners with information, allowing them to tailor their behavior to the speaker and situation. Meanwhile, support is generally linked with relational outcomes, such as trust and speaker well-being. When speakers feel understood in both senses and do not feel judged by the listener, their anxiety and defensiveness lessen. This allows them to speak more freely, providing them with new self-insights and preparing them for attitudinal and behavioral changes.

### Perceptions of High-Quality Listening

Perceived listening researchers have adapted Rogers's (1951) criteria for active listening to a conceptualization of *high-quality listening*, defined as empathic, attentive, respectful, and nonjudgmental listening (Itzchakov et al., 2018; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Itzchakov, Kluger, & Castro, 2017). Substantial research on perceived listening in conversations has focused on relational outcomes rather than the listener's cognitive understanding of the speaker's message. In terms of emotions, psychologists have found that high-quality listening reduces speakers' social anxiety and defensiveness (Itzchakov et al., 2018; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Itzchakov et al., 2017).

When high-quality listening lessens speakers' anxiety and defensiveness, it also alters their cognitions. Specifically, perceiving high-quality listening increases speakers' self-awareness, clarifies their attitudes, and increases their motivation to express those attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2018; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Lloyd, Boer, Kluger, & Voelpel, 2015; Pasupathi & Rich, 2005). For example, Itzchakov, Weinstein, Legate, and Amar (2020) conducted a series of experiments, recruiting participants who endorsed prejudiced attitudes. They found that after being exposed to high-quality listening, speakers talking about their prejudiced attitudes became more aware of their cognitions and emotions and thus reported less prejudiced attitudes and more openness to change.

Perceived listening also changes speakers' speech content in two ways. First, high-quality listening leads speakers to disclose more thoughts, feelings, and information (Lewis & Manusov, 2009) and to discuss new insights during a conversation (Itzchakov et al.,

2018; Itzchakov et al., 2020; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). Second, perceived listening can directly affect the quality of a speaker's speech (Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2010; Weeks & Pasupathi, 2011). Manusov and Trees (2002), for example, found that negatively-valenced nonverbal listening cues elicited more negative speech. Bavelas, Coates, and Johnson (2000) further argued that listeners "co-narrate" speakers' accounts through their facial and vocalized (e.g., "hmm") responses while listening; they found that speakers' storytelling skills were rated more highly when listeners were instructed to listen well than when given a distracting task of counting the narrator's words.

In sum, perceived listening affects speakers' emotions, thoughts, and behavior in important ways. One concern about this area of research, however, is the degree to which perceived listening research relies on conceptions of "high-quality," "effective," or "supportive" listening. These normative conceptualizations of listening risk equating outcomes of perceived listening with the construct itself. For instance, is listener empathy an antecedent or component of high-quality listening? Maintaining construct clarity and separation between predictors and outcomes can be difficult with normative interpersonal concepts that are, in part, defined by their effects on others (see van Knippenberg & Sitkin, 2013). Perceived listening research must maintain discipline in separating outcomes like positive attributions, trust, and psychological safety from the concept of high-quality listening itself.

### Perceived Listening at Work

The benefits of perceived listening have been extended to work contexts in three ways: (a) organization-customer listening, (b) manager-subordinate listening, and (c) listening as means to enable influence and leadership. First, research has shown that when organizational members are perceived to listen well, it leads customers to trust organizations more and be more satisfied with their interactions in the context of sales (Drollinger & Comer, 2013; Ramsey & Sohi, 1997) and customer service (de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000). However, this raises the question: How enduring are these changes observed following social interactions with customers? Further research in this area could focus on longer-term customer outcomes such as repeat business or increased sales.

Second, organizational scholars have examined how perceived managerial listening (from a manager, supervisor, or leader) affects followers' behavior.

Managerial listening serves a dual function of providing social–emotional support to employees (Kriz, Jolly, & Shoss, 2021; Kriz, Kluger, & Lyddy, 2021; Lobdell, Sonoda, & Arnold, 1993; Toegel et al., 2013) and enabling managers to understand the diverse perspectives of coworkers (Itzchakov, 2020). For instance, in a qualitative study of managers in an international knowledge-intensive company, Alvesson and Svingsson (2003: 1446) found that listening functions “to make people feel reassured, to understand and gather and structure information, to get people to feel confirmed and less anonymous, and to facilitate decision-making” (see also Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005). Similarly, Van Quaquebeke and Felps (2018) developed a theory of respectful inquiry that has foregrounded listening as a specific behavior that can meet a follower’s self-determination needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy.

Scholars have theorized that managers who listen well signal that they are open to new ideas (Dutton et al., 1997), thus encouraging subordinates to speak up (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, et al., 2015a; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Noort, Reader, & Gillespie, 2021). As noted, managerial listening can, in and of itself, signal interest and care for the speaker (Burriss, Detert, & Romney, 2013), whereas failing to listen well to subordinates is a negative signal (Yang et al., 2021). For instance, Castro, Anseel, Kluger, Lloyd, and Turjeman-Levi (2018) found that managers who listened well fostered psychological safety among their subordinates, that is, perceptions of the consequences of taking interpersonal risks in a given situation (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). This increased psychological safety allowed followers to generate more creative ideas. Similarly, Yang et al. (2021) found that when managers were attentive and listened to their subordinates, voice opportunity was positively related to creative process engagement and performance. It is unclear from studies of listening and voice whether listening is an antecedent to voice, a moderator of its effects, or both. Managers who are deemed to listen well might elicit more voice via psychological safety. Moreover, managers who listen well are better able to understand and respond to issues that employees voice, thus making voicing issues more potentially impactful. More research is needed to specify the precise links among these concepts.

A final important outcome of perceived listening at work is that those perceived as better listeners are also more likely to be seen as influential (Ames, Maissen, & Brockner, 2012) and perceived as leaders (Johnson & Bechler, 1998). Good listeners acquire

more information than poor listeners do, allowing them to customize their influence attempts to the situation. Supporting these arguments, Ames et al. (2012) found that the perceived listening behavior of MBA students predicted the level of perceived influence they had on their peers. They also found that listening partially explained the relationships between personality (i.e., agreeableness and openness) and influence.

Despite the dyadic nature of listening, research on perceived listening has assumed a single direction of influence from the listener to the speaker. In a positive example of moving beyond unidirectional effects, Behfar et al. (2020) found that listeners who responded to venting in a challenging way were more successful at helping speakers reappraise their emotions and solve problems than listeners who responded in a purely supportive way. However, venters were more likely to seek out supportive listeners than challenging listeners. As in studies like this, effects on both parties and others in the workgroup are all important areas to study. Thus, future research of listening at work should examine the effects on listeners and when listening and speaking roles are exchanged over time.

### Markers of Perceived Listening

What cues lead a speaker to attribute high-quality listening to a conversation partner? Numerous studies seeking to validate self- and other-report survey measures of listening have explored this question (see Appendix A for a list of surveys used in studies we reviewed). For example, Fontana, Cohen, and Wolvin (2015) conducted a qualitative and quantitative review of 53 listening scales found in the literature. They found four listener behaviors that occurred in over half the scales: (a) responding or giving feedback, (b) asking questions, (c) using nonverbal communication, and (d) understanding the message. Consistent with our diagnosis of the fragmented state of the literature, their analysis concluded that the 53 scales are surprisingly dissimilar to each other, reflecting important differences in how scholars conceptualize and measure high-quality listening.

Although conceptual definitions of listening are multidimensional, these separate dimensions may not align well with how people perceive listening. Lipetz et al. (2020) investigated lay construals of listening in a particularly thorough set of studies. They found lay definitions of listening corresponded with scholarly definitions: people’s free descriptions of what constitutes good listening were captured well by attention, understanding, support, and cooperation.

Conceptions of good listening were consistent across various domains (e.g., work, peers, and romantic relationships). Surprisingly, they found that a scale composed of 77 items designed to measure perceived listening at work was best explained by a single factor ( $n = 505$ ), and a reanalysis of the previously developed listening scales produced similar results. This suggests that people perceive listening “holistically”; they form a generalized impression of whether their conversation partner is listening well, rather than aggregating disparate behavioral cues. These findings raise questions about the value of trying to create scales that mimic the theoretical dimensions of listening when measuring perceived listening. They also suggest that relatively short, gestalt measures of listening are sufficient for most research purposes.

#### **Behavioral correlates of perceived listening**

There is strong agreement that nonverbal behaviors contribute to the perception of listening. In the communication literature, nonverbal signals have been studied as “back-channeling” (Weger, Castle, & Emmett, 2010), such as nodding, changes in facial expressions, and vocal responses like “yeah” or “hmm.” Back-channel responses are important ways that listeners seek to convey attentiveness and understanding, rather than conversational information. Such responses are persistent in face-to-face communication; Bavelas et al. (2000) found they occurred every 3.5 seconds. Behavioral measures of “listening” behavior often use verbal back-channeling as indications of listening. For instance, Lehmann-Willenbrock and Chiu (2018) coded “hmm” and “yes” as indications of listening (see Kauffeld & Lehmann-Willenbrock, 2012). Speaker gaze is also used as an important cue for listeners to back-channel (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2002; Richardson & Dale, 2005).

Paraphrasing is another important cue associated with perceived listening (de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000; Jones, 2011). Within humanistic psychology, Roger’s idea of “reflective listening” included counselors paraphrasing what they heard in their own words (Arnold, 2014; Sundararajan, 1995). This paraphrasing was seen as a key aspect of Rogerian active listening, although its application has sometimes been caricatured as merely repeating what a speaker says as an ersatz imitation of high-quality listening (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022; Tyler, 2011).

A more disputed area of listening research is whether questions are a marker of listening or should be studied as a separate concept. Questions are often included in measures (Drollinger, Comer, & Warrington, 2006; de Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000; Itzchakov et al., 2020) and manipulations of high-quality

listening. However, whether question-asking should be viewed as an indicator of listening is an ongoing debate (Huang, Yeomans, Brooks, Minson, & Gino, 2017; Kluger & Malloy, 2019; Yeomans, Brooks, Huang, Minson, & Gino, 2019). Previous studies provided strong evidence that, like listening, follow-up questions are an indicator of conversational responsiveness (Huang et al., 2017). The circumstances under which question-asking leads to perceptions of listening require further research. Kluger and Malloy (2019) argued that question-asking should not be unconditionally viewed as an indicator of listening. For instance, one can ask a question but not listen to the answer. Some paraphrases or questions may seem curious, attentive, and supportive, whereas others may seem inattentive or dismissive. Because speakers are the arbiters of perceived listening, cues that lead to perceptions of listening may vary between people and circumstances.

#### **Disambiguating Perceived Listening from Related Constructs**

A major issue in research on perceived listening at work is that listening has been included as a facet of several closely related constructs such as respectful inquiry (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), leader humility (Cojuharenco & Karelaila, 2020), managerial consultation (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012), conversational flow (Truong, Fast, & Kim, 2020), and respectful engagement (Carmeli, Dutton, & Hardin, 2015). When embedded in these other constructs, the effects of perceived listening are difficult to isolate and may be complex. For example, Truong et al. (2020) found that “conversational flow,” which includes perceived listening ability, led observers to rate the listener as more effective at networking. These studies’ findings have been broadly consistent with other findings on listening at work in encouraging voice and leading to attributions of influence. However, it is unclear the extent to which perceived listening has caused these effects or whether they were caused by other aspects measured as “conversational flow.”

A similar issue arises in the relationship between listening and concepts that may partially or completely overlap with listening: respectful engagement and conversational responsiveness. Huang et al. (2017: 432) described conversational responsiveness as “encompass[ing] the verbal and nonverbal behaviors that fulfill the needs and wishes of one’s conversation partner,” which includes listening and asking questions (Yeomans et al., 2020; Yeomans, Schweitzer, & Brooks, 2022). People perceive a partner as responsive to the extent they see them as

understanding, validating, and caring for them. Similarly, Carmeli et al. (2015: 1022) posited that respectful engagement, that is, “interpersonal actions that confer a sense of value and worth,” is conveyed through effective listening and other forms of supportive communication. In these overlapping concepts, perceived listening is one method for conveying understanding and respect to relational partners, but spoken communication can also serve the same functions.

An overlap between the concepts of high-quality listening, conversational responsiveness, and respectful engagement is apparent. These concepts have commonalities with the broader literature on social support, which has often included empathy and listening as indicators (for a review, see Bavik, Shaw, & Wang, 2020). The specific and differential roles of listening and verbal communication in engendering perceptions of understanding and support are both important conceptual and empirical questions. Given the findings that people perceive listening holistically (Kluger & Itzhakov, 2022), whether high-quality listening, conversational responsiveness, and respectful engagement are empirically separable (e.g., discriminant validity) in their relationships with the main outcomes they seek to explain must be explored. We feel that perceived listening has unique value in that it aligns well with people’s experience of social interaction: people have clear lay theories of high-quality listening (Lipetz et al., 2020), and organizational leaders consistently report listening as a unique and important activity (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005; Toegel et al., 2013). Regardless of the concept that is used, scholars should choose one that best represents the phenomenon they seek to study while being wary of proliferating new, similar concepts without persuasive conceptual and empirical arguments for the importance of doing so.

### THE LISTENER’S EXPERIENCE

Where research on perceived listening has examined interpersonal consequences for the speaker, research on the listener’s experience has centered on the listener’s effort toward attending, understanding, and making meaning from speaker messages (Imhof, 2003; Pichora-Fuller et al., 2016). Definitions of the listener’s experience include “the mental exertion required to attend to and understand an auditory message” (McGarrigle et al., 2014: 434) and “the process of interpreting the communicative behavior of others in the effort to understand the meaning and implications of that behavior” (Bostrom, 2011: 28). This research stream is particularly important in

understanding the challenges that listeners face when listening to messages with strong emotional content (e.g., how listeners experience listening to an angry or grieving coworker) and when people are motivated to listen to others.

Research on the listener’s experience has its origins in cognitive psychology and communication studies. Nichols’s (1947) pioneering paper distinguished listening from hearing, defining hearing as “the perception of sound only” (83) and listening as “the attachment of meaning to aural symbols” (83–84). This definition highlighted that listening is not just the assimilation of an auditory message; it involves *selective attention* and *meaning making*. In contrast to perceived listening, Nichols (1947) examined the value of good listening for the listener—listening skills were considered important because they improved listeners’ access to information and comprehension of that information. Thus, listening was primarily viewed as a workplace skill that could improve communicative and career outcomes for the listener.

To date, research on the listener’s experience has been most prevalent in communications and psychology, but it is still uncommon in management scholarship. However, some organizational research has noted how members who listen more often or more effectively should better receive and understand important information. For instance, scholars have theorized that if leaders and managers could learn to listen effectively, they would understand the thoughts and feelings of their subordinates better, enabling them to manage more effectively (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008). Moreover, employees who listen well could better understand customers’ needs (Flynn et al., 2008). However, empirical research has seldom separated listeners’ understandings from speakers’ perceptions to test these specific propositions.

### Cognitive Demands in the Listener’s Experience

Research on listening effort has surfaced the cognitive demands of listening for the listener. More specifically, cognitive psychologists have defined listening effort as “the deliberate allocation of mental resources to overcome obstacles in goal pursuit when carrying out a [listening] task” (Pichora-Fuller et al., 2016: 10). The “deliberate allocation of mental resources” assumes that people have a finite cognitive capacity for processing information (Kahneman, 1973). In addition to the effort needed to comprehend the content of a speaker’s message, a listener is also processing the speaker’s tone of voice, the velocity of speech, vocal signals of emotions, and nonverbal behaviors

associated with the spoken message (Cheng, Tracy, Ho, & Henrich, 2016; Hildebrand, Efthymiou, Busquet, Hampton, Hoffman, & Novak, 2020).

Because listening is effortful, scholars have sought to document barriers to listening and how to overcome them. For instance, in a survey study of 279 business school students, Golen (1990) identified six self-reported factors that were experienced as personal barriers to listening effort: (a) avoiding a complex subject, (b) refusal to relate to the speaker, (c) disagreement with the speaker, (d) avoidance of eye contact, (e) lack of interest, and (f) inability to concentrate due to the speaker's mannerisms. All six factors suggest that the listening experience, as a form of effortful attention, is inevitably shaped by characteristics of the speaker, the speaker's message, and the listener's motivation.

In comparison with speaking, listening arguably requires greater effort and self-regulation. It takes motivated effort to focus on another person's perspective and not interrupt. Further, the listening environment and task can determine the extent of cognitive demands on the listener. More specifically, psychological studies have found that listening is influenced by cognitive load, situational demands, and the listening task (Cooney et al., 2020). As Pichora-Fuller (2016) noted,

When we listen to others, we offer not only our time but also our psychological presence, our cognitive attention, and our emotional responsiveness, all of which are finite and thus valuable interpersonal resources. Extending the effort to listen to someone may therefore be conceptualized as an expression of affection for that person, at least in situations when listening is not otherwise expected or compensated. (Pichora-Fuller, 2016: 2)

Research on listening effort has built on cognitive energetics theory (Kruglanski, Bélanger, Chen, Köpetz, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2012) and motivational intensity theory (Brehm & Self, 1989), which has described how cognitive effort is influenced by task and motivational demands. When listening becomes too demanding, people lose motivation to persist (Brehm & Self, 1989; Pichora-Fuller et al., 2016). For example, listening to a different language or familiar language with an accent can be more demanding on the listener (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010; Russo, Islam, & Koyuncu, 2017), leading listeners to withdraw effort and understand the message less well. Communication scholars have found that listeners who are familiar with an accent require lower listening effort than listeners who are less familiar with the accent (Porretta & Tucker, 2019). Similarly, Livingston, Schilpzand, and Erez (2017)

found that decision makers preferred companies and products described by speakers with an American English accent over those described by speakers with a Mandarin Chinese or French accent.

Studies on listening effort have demonstrated how listening, as a controlled process, requires both attentional capacity and motivational effort (Francis & Love, 2020). Furthermore, communication scholars found that listening effort can decline over time in long-standing relationships. In one study, older married couples showed less responsive listening behavior than middle-aged married couples (Pasupathi, Carstensen, Levenson, Gottman, 1999). According to Pichora-Fuller et al. (2016), "when and how much effort we expend during listening in everyday life depends on our motivation to achieve goals and attain rewards of personal and/or social value" (Pichora-Fuller, 2016: 6).

Listening effort can be an indicator of a person's motivation or resistance to understand the perspective of another. For example, Eveland, Coduto, Appiah, and Bullock (2020) found that when conversing about race-related topics, listeners find it harder to listen to cross-race speakers than same-race speakers. On the other hand, intergroup listening can improve relations by increasing cross-group understanding (De La Chaux, Haugh, & Greenwood, 2018) and decreasing the extremity of prejudiced attitudes (Itzchakov et al., 2020). A critical perspective on listening effort can surface how individual listening effort might be shaped by asymmetries in power and intergroup differences (Hinz, Stephens, & Van Oosten, 2022).

To date, research on listening effort has been concentrated in psychology, particularly cognitive psychology. However, the empirical and theoretical insights are relevant to management scholarship. The evidence base and methods deployed by cognitive psychologists to study listening effort could be used to examine organizational barriers to listening, such as how and why listening effort might differ by one's position in the organization, across power differentials between leaders and followers, and how organizational factors (e.g., culture and climate) could increase or impair listening effort. Ultimately, research on listening effort has put the listener at the center of listening research. It can also illuminate how context shapes a listening response.

### **Emotional Demands in the Listener's Experience**

Although listening is beneficial for the speaker, it can be emotionally draining for the listener. Listening sets up an expectation that the listener will respond to

the message communicated by the speaker. Accordingly, listening demands are higher when a speaker shares a request for help or a distressing event. For example, Lewis and Manusov (2009) found that discussing a distressing event is beneficial for the speaker but stressful for the listener. More specifically, Lewis and Manusov (2009) conducted a two-week study of participants who were asked to respond to a survey when they engaged in a listening conversation with a distressed other. The authors found that the level of perceived negative distress predicted listeners' felt responsibility, time spent listening, and levels of negative distress. These findings suggested that the emotional content of a message can take an emotional toll on the listener.

Similarly, organizational research on listening to employee venting and emotions (Behfar et al., 2020; Rosen, Gabriel, Lee, Koopman, & Johnson, 2021; Toegel et al., 2013) has surfaced how listening requires emotional labor and self-regulation on the part of the listener. In an experience sampling study of 112 managers, Rosen et al. (2021) found that listening to an employee's venting can trigger a manager's negative emotions, making the manager more likely to mistreat others. However, managers with a higher need for cognition (i.e., who enjoy effortful thinking) were less likely to experience negative emotions resulting from listening to a vent. Similarly, Sessions, Nahrgang, Newton, and Chamberlin (2020) found that supervisors who listened to more prohibitive voice (expressed concerns about harmful issues to the group) tended to be more emotionally exhausted and thus performed worse. However, listening to promotive voice (suggestions to improve work practices and procedures) had the opposite effects, boosting morale and improving performance.

Considered together, the findings of Sessions et al. (2020) and Rosen et al. (2021) suggested that the experience of listening to employee concerns can have mixed effects on the listener. On the one hand, listening to employee concerns (negative emotions or prohibitive voice) can generate a negative response when the listener is not motivated to understand (Rosen et al., 2021) or when the listener perceives the content to be a hindrance (Sessions et al., 2020). On the other hand, listening to employee concerns can energize a supervisor when the concern is perceived as a challenge (Sessions et al., 2020). These findings could be layered further with insights on the benefits of perceived listening for supervisors. Listening is valued and expected from supervisors. However, listening can be a double-edged sword—emotionally exhausting or energizing—depending on how listening is

approached and the content of the message. This dynamic tension suggests that listening interventions and training can be beneficial for supervisors to yield the benefits of listening and mitigate emotional exhaustion.

Because listening can be cognitively and emotionally taxing, it often requires self-regulation. In a set of three studies on listening to emotional disclosures, Hackenbracht and Gasper (2013) found that people experience listening differently between listening to descriptive information and listening to emotional disclosure. Their first study revealed this distinction in a factor analysis of listening items—the factor analysis supported a two-factor solution with a factor on listening to descriptive disclosure (“I consider listening to friends talk about their thoughts really important”) and a separate factor on listening to emotional disclosure (“I consider listening to friends talk about their feelings really important”). The authors followed up with two additional experimental studies that established a causal and positive relationship between a person's need for belonging and their ability to listen to emotional disclosure. Conversely, the need for belonging was not associated with a person's ability to listen to descriptive disclosure. This suggests that the priming of psychological states can motivate people toward specific forms of listening and represents a promising direction for future research: listeners can benefit from listening beyond just the information that they receive, deriving psychological and social-emotional benefits from the experience of listening.

### Listening in Groups

A handful of studies have examined the experience of listening in group conversations, highlighting the special challenges and opportunities of listening beyond dyads (Cooney et al., 2020; Lehmann-Willenbrock & Chiu, 2018; Stephens, 2021). In their paper on “the many minds problem,” Cooney et al. (2020) provided a theoretical perspective on distinctions between dyadic and group conversations by theorizing how dyadic and group conversations differ along three dimensions: (a) airtime, (b) turn-taking, and (c) listener feedback. Of relevance to listening research, Cooney et al. (2020) noted that listening in groups is cognitively more demanding than dyadic listening. In group conversations, a listener must attend to multiple speakers with greater complexities in airtime and turn-taking. More specifically, Cooney et al. (2020: 21) asserted that “more minds reduce the airtime available to each person, makes turn-taking

increasingly intractable, and dampens and ambiguates back-channel feedback.”

Despite its challenges, listening in group contexts may benefit collective performance. In a statistical discourse analysis of team conversations, Lehmann-Willenbrock and Chiu (2018) found that the practice of active listening in teams was associated with a lower likelihood of team members disagreeing on content. The authors analyzed 32,448 turns of talk across 43 videotaped team meetings that were coded for active listening when a listener provides a communicative response (e.g., saying “hmm”). Similarly, Stephens (2021: 22) observed in his 18-month ethnography of a community choir that “listening more closely to others helped singers hear how others’ sounds aligned with theirs.” While there have only been a handful of empirical studies on listening in groups, the research thus far has suggested that listening serves a distinct function in groups. Further research is needed to examine these functions, especially functions that may be distinct to group-level coordination and effectiveness.

## LISTENING STRUCTURES

This section reviews research on listening structures—procedures, norms, and practices—that shape how listening is experienced and perceived. By structure, we refer to “recurrent patterns of interaction or the mechanisms that cause them” (Cardinale, 2018: 137). Listening structures include formalized structures, such as an organizational town hall, and informal structures, such as group norms on conversational turn-taking (Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hashmi, & Malone, 2010). Relative to research on perceived listening and the listener’s experience, research on listening structures is the least common and has been the most theoretically and methodologically heterogeneous. An emerging body of research has examined how organizational practices can shape and structure listening between members. We found that these listening structures vary in the extent to which they (a) enable listening to occur within and across groups and (b) signal that listening is valued. Although most listening structures serve both functions to some degree, we structure our review based on which function takes primacy.

### Listening Structures That Enable Listening

In the current literature, we found a set of studies that focused on the enabling role of listening structures. Research on listening structures has included

studies on listening interventions such as the use of a “listening circle” intervention in which participants take turns listening and speaking while passing around an object to signify whose turn it is to speak (Bommelje, 2012; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). Such interventions enable people to take turns to listen and refrain from value judgments (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017), thus allowing for more speech on difficult issues. Listening structures can also establish specific time and space for listening-focused interactions. For example, Golden-Biddle (2020) found that the practice of “collaborative care” (a structured routine for physicians, pharmacists, and nurses to listen to patients at their bedside) leads to improvements in how physicians listen and collaborate with other healthcare professionals.

Listening structures have also been found to be beneficial to intergroup communication. Structured conversations between groups in conflict can offer a potential though difficult path to improving intergroup relations (Chen, Minson, & Tormala, 2010; Harrell & Bond, 2006; Hendriks, Ercan, & Duus, 2019; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017; Yeomans et al., 2020). For instance, in a qualitative study of a globally distributed technology consulting teams (in India and the United States), Lee, Mazmanian, et al. (2020) explored how team members in the United States could improve their deteriorating working relationships with their teammates in India. Using an intervention based on “interaction scripts” (i.e., a list of questions each member asked an assigned partner), members were able to overcome their initial discomfort with working across group boundaries to build deeper relationships and discuss difficult work challenges. As Lee, Mazmanian, and others (2020: 116) noted, “taking the form of reciprocal sharing, empathetic listening, and active responding, positive responses fostered a sense that the group cared about each other’s work experiences and who they were as people.”

Listening structures can provide a space to voice and non-judgmentally try to understand conflicting perspectives, which is potentially useful in seeking to address long-standing intergroup conflict. Listening, particularly in intergroup contexts, does not require the listener to agree with what the speaker is saying. Listening structures encourage the listener to seek to understand the speaker’s message and sentiments, rather than refute them, but these interventions have mostly been used in situations in which conflict was quite clear. Since the listening structures studied thus far may take a great deal of time and effort to implement, more research is necessary on how costly these interventions might be for organizations and the conditions

under which they are most likely to have their intended effects, as few studies have reported less successful implementations of structured listening practices.

### Listening Structures That Signal Listening

A smaller set of studies in our review examined how organizational listening structures, such as listening posts (De La Chaix et al., 2018), town halls (Neill & Bowen, 2021), and listening tours (Wolvin, 2005), serve a symbolic social function by signaling that organizations or their leaders are listening. These studies adopted a more critical perspective on the role of listening structures. For example, Neill and Bowen (2021) raised their concern that listening structures, such as town halls, can be a form of “pseudolistening,” referring to “when employees share their concerns, but their feedback has no impact on decision making” (p. 5). Similarly, De La Chaix et al. (2018) found that “listening posts” were established in refugee camps to serve as a “safety valve” for refugee concerns and to maintain social stability (De La Chaix et al., 2018).

Organizational listening structures create opportunities for speakers to express themselves but can also create dissonance between the signaling of listening and people’s experiences. When listening is signaled but not experienced, it can be perceived as “inauthentic listening” by employees and result in increased resistance toward organizational initiatives (Sahay, 2021). For example, in a study of 31 organizations, Sahay surfaced how listening structures create negative repercussions when the signaling of listening is not coupled with actions taken by the organization. In these situations, listening is perceived to be performative and “inauthentic”:

Another COO spoke about providing spaces for conversation to make the employees feel included . . . The phasal approach sometimes caused more confusion for input providers. A technology input provider suggested, “they initially took our feedback and we were involved in brainstorming and then silence. They didn’t care and I felt more anxious and unclear” (Input Provider, Technology). As suggested by this participant, perceptions around organizational listening were impacted by unclear rules of engagement, signaling inauthentic listening. (Sahay, 2021: 6)

The current direction in listening research has focused on its benefits at various levels (for individuals, relationships, and the organization). However, more critical studies, such as De La Chaix et al.’s (2018) study of listening posts as “safety valves” and Sahay’s (2021) study of organizational listening initiatives as “inauthentic listening,” can point to how

social and political elements of listening may have unintended consequences and may not always be benign.

### CONCEPTUAL INSIGHTS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Integrating the fragmented literature relevant to listening in organizations yields several conceptual insights to guide future research. The perceived listening literature has offered clear insights into speakers’ needs and how listeners can meet them. For a speaker to perceive high-quality listening, the speaker must feel understood and supported. To convey such a perception, listeners must not only receive messages but also respond to them. However, research on the listener’s experience details how listening is challenging—it requires cognitive and emotional effort, which are easily disrupted by the demands of organizational life. In short, there is a *listening paradox*—research on perceived listening has focused on the benefits of listening for the speaker but these benefits could have an emotional cost for the listener.

In our review, we found that in situations where listening involves negative emotions, a contradiction is present between the benefits of listening for the speaker and the emotional cost of listening for the listener. For example, Behfar et al. (2020) found that speakers who vent are more likely to reappraise their emotions after being listened to. Separately, Rosen et al. (2021) found that leaders who listen to vents are more likely to experience negative affect and subsequently engage in mistreatment behavior.

The listening paradox (contradictions between perceived and experienced listening) can be further unpacked by considering the role of listening structures. Listening structures (for example, town halls to address employee concerns) could amplify the tensions created by the paradox—a town hall (many speakers to a few listeners) can scale the benefits of perceived listening for a larger group of employees but it also increases the demands of listening for the listeners. The listener’s experience of feeling “too tired to listen” or having “listened enough” are some examples of the paradox in action.

The three perspectives on listening have clear connections to each other, creating specific opportunities for integration (see Figure 1). Moreover, changes to communication technologies provide new frontiers for listening research but present challenges to past conceptualizations of listening. We depict these connections in Figure 2 using a triangle framework.

The most important step toward integration is for future listening research to account for all three aspects of the triangle—listeners, speakers, and structures (or lack of structure). Generally, this will mean that organizational researchers should seek to specify the role of listening in what have previously been considered speaker-centric phenomena (e.g., leadership, voice, feedback, disclosure, advice, and helping) and account for formal and informal structures that enable or constrain listening. Additionally, organizational researchers should consider the possibility that increases in text-based and multi-modal synchronous communication (e.g., texting, chat, and direct messaging during video calls) may challenge or extend prior definitions and findings of listening. These changes are most likely to influence listening via listening structures, providing new communication channels, norms, and practices. In the following subsection, we detail directions for future research from each connection in Figure 2.

### **Connection 1: Listening Structures and the Listener's Experience**

We first consider the connection between listening structures and the listener's experience. Research on listening structures has thus far described routines, norms, and practices that shape the listening process. Listening structures, such as listening posts (De La Chaux et al., 2018) or listening circles (Bommelje, 2012), can lessen the burden on people to signal their willingness to listen, especially across power and intergroup divides. Moreover, they can scale efforts to listen to many stakeholders, lowering the costs of time and attention for the listener. For example, listening structures, such as town halls and listening posts, can consolidate listening to many stakeholders into smaller time periods, thus minimizing some listener costs while keeping open the possibility that speakers feel understood and acknowledged.

An additional tension between structure and experience is that those with the power to create listening structures often disproportionately bear the costs of having them (Sahay, 2021). In organizations, managerial listening is especially important. Managers have greater influence over the psychological safety that subordinates experience and are often thought to be responsible for listening to subordinates' issues and concerns (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2003; Toegel et al., 2013). Managers, especially high-ranking leaders, have the power to create and revise listening structures but then must spend the time and effort to use them. For example, CEOs who hold town halls

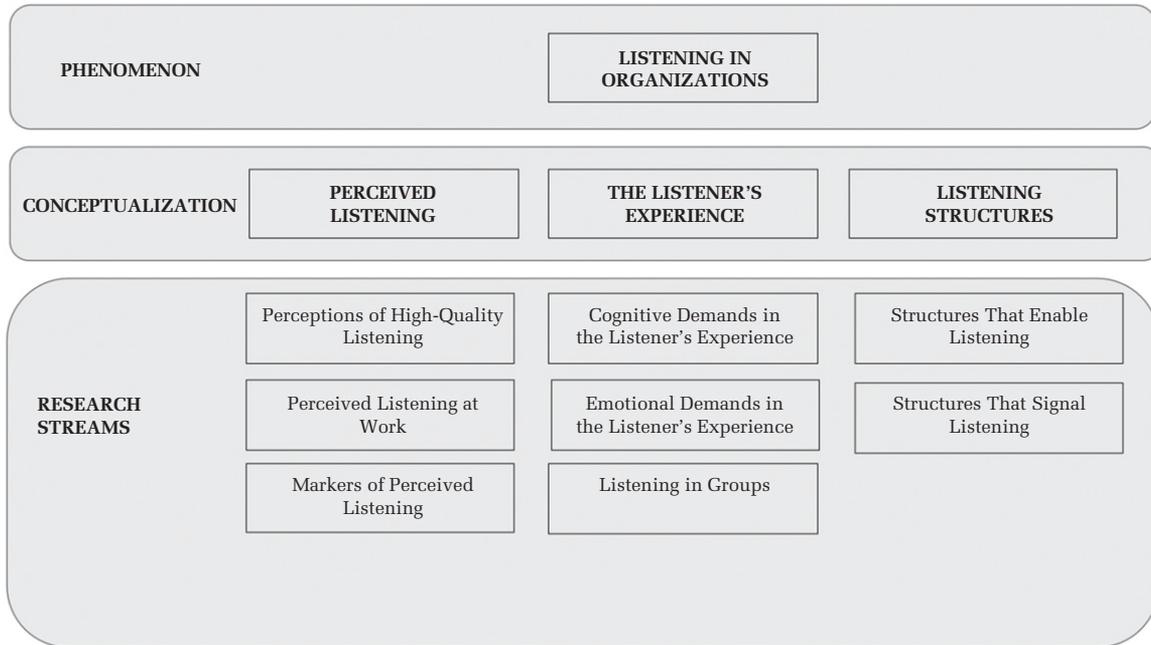
face increased expectations to listen and respond to criticism. Listening structures like these may increase the access to and volume of information but not reduce listeners' information-processing load. Further, listening structures may create increased expectations for the listener to respond to the information conveyed (Sahay, 2021). In creating listening structures, managers are imposing a potentially costly and emotionally difficult system on themselves. Although research suggests that the costs are worthwhile, it may also explain why they are not more common within organizations. Future research should explore the conditions under which listening structures manage the tension between speakers' and listeners' needs, addressing a central listening paradox.

### **Connection 2: Listening Structures and Perceived Listening**

Next, we consider the links between listening structures and perceived listening. While listening structures such as town halls are, in theory, designed to increase listening, these efforts can have mixed results on perceived listening (Sahay, 2021). Indeed, formally structuring of listening inherently lessens individualized consideration within a conversation—those who use the listening structure are treated equally. Given that some structures appear engineered to avoid interacting dyadically with all stakeholders and to reduce listener time and effort (e.g., town halls), listening structures can be perceived as a sign of lack of care for speakers. Thus, the same advantages of scale for listeners may be seen by speakers as anathema to high-quality listening.

Listening structures that emphasize norms for turn-taking or restatement, however, serve a different function. Structures such as listening circles (Bommelje, 2012; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017) or interaction scripts (Lee, Mazmanian et al., 2020) are intended not to reduce time and effort for listeners but to overcome the lack of listening skills or anti-listening social norms. Moreover, such structures promote the perception of high-quality listening. However, this comes at the expense of time and effort for listeners and speakers, as they increase the communication volume and, presumably, time spent communicating. Moreover, whether such structures help listeners process the increased volume of information received is unclear. Future research will ideally attend to the impact of listening structures on both speakers and listeners, as different structures offer varied costs and benefits for each party.

**FIGURE 1**  
**Taxonomy of Listening Research**



Additionally, the imposition of listening structures may reinforce power and status dynamics they are intended to overcome. For example, in research conducted with U.S. employees, Neill and Bowen (2021) found that gender, position, and managerial role predicted perceptions of being listened to within organizations. Specifically, they found that women, nonmanagers, and employees in lower positions reported lower levels of perceived listening. As Bickford (1996: 156) observed, “more powerful groups in society are often, deliberately or unintentionally, the

ones who do not listen or who silence others.” From a critical perspective, one could examine how listening structures, such as CEO town halls, may be a means for a powerful agent to engage in performative listening while avoiding deliberate and direct listening to employee concerns. A CEO could convene a town hall as a political move to reinforce legitimacy by increasing perceived listening. Moreover, this hypothetical CEO could use the town hall as a platform for speech to justify their actions. Like dynamics in intergroup helping (e.g., Nadler & Chernyak-Hai, 2014), providing resources across status divides can highlight the differences in power and status between groups. Because listening is particularly important in the context of historically oppressed groups (e.g., Beaugard, Arevshatian, Booth, & Whittle, 2018), future research should investigate how listening structures transform or amplify asymmetrical power relationships.

**FIGURE 2**  
**The Listening Triangle: Integrating Listening Research Across Perspectives**



**Connection 3: Experienced and Perceived Listening**

We recommend that researchers integrate perspectives on experienced and perceived listening to examine the dyadic tension inherent in the listening paradox. Specifically, emotionally sensitive issues

are more demanding for listeners and may negatively affect them (e.g., Rosen et al., 2021). However, perceived listening in these situations can be beneficial for the speaker (e.g., Behfar et al., 2020). Intuitively, although relatively untested, speakers are motivated to express themselves when trying to change deeply ingrained attitudes and behaviors (Itzhakov et al., 2018) or when expressing strong frustrations and struggles about their work (Behfar et al., 2020; Rosen et al., 2021; Toegel et al., 2013). In these moments, speakers are taking an interpersonal risk to express their thoughts and feelings, especially in work situations where discussing such issues is inconsistent with the emotional culture of the workplace (Barsade & O'Neill, 2014). Thus, speakers are likely to be especially attuned to perceived listening as an indicator of acceptance or rejection of their risky behavior. Listening to emotionally sensitive issues requires effort (Toegel et al., 2013) and emotional labor (Lewis & Manusov, 2009), which listeners are likely to find taxing. In combination, speakers are likely to value high-quality listening under the very circumstances in which listeners have difficulty providing it.

Surprisingly few studies have examined the relationship between experienced and perceived listening. Those that have reported these data showed mixed results. Lloyd, Boer, Kluger, et al. (2015) collected self-reports of supervisor listening and employee perceptions of supervisor listening. They found a strong correlation between supervisor self-reports and employee perceptions of listening ( $r = .93$ ). In contrast, Bodie, Jones, Vickery, Hatcher, and Cannava (2014) did not find significant correlations between the listener and speaker perceptions of listening quality ( $r = -.14$ ) or perceptions of listening behavior ( $r = -.07$ ). Building on a social relations approach (Kenny & Albright, 1987), Kluger et al. (2021) showed that in a team context, speaker–listener dyads predicted greater than 40% of the variance in perceived listening, more than double the effect for actors or partners was found. This suggests that listening has reciprocal influences in a relationship. More research is needed on the individual, dyadic, and contextual factors that lead to convergence (and divergence) between experienced and perceived listening.

Surprisingly, the impact of perceived listening on listeners themselves is underexplored (for a positive example, see Behfar et al., 2020). This creates opportunities for integrating temporality and change into listening research. For instance, when listeners become speakers, how does prior listening affect

their speech? Do supervisors who listen well use the information and trust to tailor requests and work to their subordinates, as theorists have proposed (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018)? How can supervisors regulate their listening to manage the negative emotions associated with listening to complaints (Rosen et al., 2021)? Are there circumstances in which listening is used for strategic manipulation? Insights on the bidirectional process of listening and speaking can open up avenues for studying communicative work processes, such as leadership, work relationships, and group dynamics.

Over time, listening research can unpack the reciprocal and complex relationship between experienced and perceived listening in organizational contexts. Doing so would require more dynamic methods, such as an analysis of relational event sequences (Schechter, Pilny, Leung, Poole, & Contractor, 2018) and longitudinal research. New observational measures of listening (e.g., Pichora-Fuller, 2016) offer the potential for more real-time, dynamic research on listening. For instance, pupillometry (the recording of changes in pupil diameter) is a method used to measure real-time changes in listening effort (Porretta & Tucker, 2019). At longer time scales, longitudinal studies could examine when supervisors who offer a great deal of high-quality listening may succumb to or avoid the costs of listening well to many people for their job performance and well-being (e.g., burnout). In short, incorporating sequence and temporality into listening research will do much to bridge the gap between experienced and perceived listening.

### **Advances in Communication Technology Create New Research Opportunities**

Advances in communication technology have introduced new forms of listening in organizations, such as artificially intelligent “listening agents” and virtual meeting platforms (e.g., Zoom) that enable users to listen to large groups while synchronously signaling listening using non-verbal text and emoticons. With the shift toward remote and hybrid work, communication in organizations is increasingly virtual and mediated by technology (Raghuram, Hill, Gibbs, & Maruping, 2019). This poses new challenges for listening and questions for research. Would the same cues to perceive listening operate in video conferencing as in face-to-face conversations? How does the use of various communication technologies (e.g., headphones, telepresence, and multimodal calls) shape the experience of listening? Can real-time

“reaction” emoticons or written chat responses convey listening in new ways? More research is needed to understand how technology gives rise to new listening structures and how listening is perceived when it is augmented by technology.

As technology advances, the use of artificial intelligence “listening agents,” such as Amazon’s Alexa (Hu & Lu, 2021; Lee, Lee, & Sheehan, 2020) and humanoid service robots in health care (Mende et al., 2019), raises questions about the future of listening by organizations. These listening agents have been programmed to provide nonverbal listening feedback by mimicking the speaker’s behavior (Rifinski, Erel, Feiner, Hoffman, & Zuckerman, 2021), expression of emotions (El Hadad et al., 2016), and through back-channel feedback (e.g., “hmm,” “yeah”) (Poppe et al., 2011). This allows organizations to employ nonhuman agents, such as a chatbot or an automated listening response to a phone call, to create the perception of listening.

The growing use of technology-enabled *listening substitutes* in organizations is a phenomenon that requires further investigation. More specifically, listening substitutes are nonhuman agents that replicate listening functions or signal that listening has occurred. Listening substitutes, particularly unobtrusive devices, could provide organizations with increased opportunities to listen in on customers and employees without their knowledge or permission (Hendriks, Ercan, & Duus, 2019), with ominous implications. For example, organizational surveillance research has pointed to the consequences of surveillance on social conformity, mistrust, and resentment (Bernstein, 2017). Thus, future research must address questions about what happens when organizations deploy machines to perform interpersonal listening functions (Van Pinxteren, Pluymaekers, & Lemmink, 2020) and the conditions under which the deployment of nonhuman listening agents can be productively and ethically employed. To the extent that listening substitutes are perceived to be agents of surveillance, it could create a backlash of resistance from employees who perceive that listening has occurred.

## CONCLUSION

Integrating the fragmented literature on listening provides a road map to advance research on listening within organizations. In doing so, we surface tensions among the different needs of listeners and speakers, the unintended consequences of listening structures, and the changing context of listening with advances in communication technology. Among these tensions,

we recommend further research on the *listening paradox* (how listening benefits speakers but can be costly for listeners), the use and misuse of listening structures, and the effects of changing communication technologies on listening. We hope that the barriers and tensions identified in this review paper will inform efforts to address listening problems in organizations and between groups, especially in situations where listening is hard and yet critical for moving forward.

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#### APPENDIX A LISTENING MEASURES

Measure and Citation	Year Developed	Number of Items	Method	Dimensions and $\alpha$ (from Original Study)
Listener Reactions (Reynolds-Keuny & Shoss, 2021)	2021	18	Survey	1. Positive listener reactions (0.94) 2. Negative listener reactions (0.89)
Layperson-Based Listening Scale (Lipetz, Kluger, & Bodie, 2020)	2020	10	Survey	0.97
ECHO Listening Profile. (Bodie, Winter, Dupuis, & Tompkins, 2019)	2019	40	Survey	1. Analytical listening (0.85) 2. Conceptual listening (0.83) 3. Connective listening (0.86) 4. Reflective listening (0.76)
Listening and Oral Expression (Costigan & Brink, 2020)	2019	8	Survey	Not provided
Listening Experience (Itzchakov, Kluger, & Castro, 2017)	2017	7	Survey	0.97
Perceived Listening Quality (Lloyd, Boer, Kluger, & Voelpel, 2015)	2015	7	Survey	0.93
Listening Competency Scale - Revised (Mickelson & Welch, 2013)	2013	20	Survey	1. Discriminative (0.82) 2. Comprehension (0.82) 3. Appreciative (0.85) 4. Critical (0.80) 5. Therapeutic (0.80)
Listening Styles Profile - Revised (Bodie, Worthington, & Gearhart, 2013)	2013	24	Survey	1. Relational listening (0.82) 2. Analytical listening (0.91) 3. Task-oriented listening (0.88) 4. Critical listening (0.86)
Listening to Friends: Disclose Emotional and Descriptive Information (Hackenbracht & Gasper, 2013)	2013	12	Survey	1. Listening to emotional disclosure (0.83) 2. Listening to descriptive disclosure (0.77)
Supervisor Listening Behaviors (Ames, Maissen & Brockner, 2012)	2012	5	Survey	0.79
Active Empathic Listening Scale (Bodie, 2011) - Revised to suit a more general social context	2011	11	Survey	1. Sensing (0.73) 2. Processing (0.66) 3. Responding (0.78)
Facilitating Listening Scale (Bouskila-Yam & Kluger, 2011)	2011	52	Survey	1. Constructive listening behavior (0.95) 2. Destructive listening behavior (> .90) 3. Positive listening consequences (> 0.90)

**APPENDIX A  
(Continued)**

Measure and Citation	Year Developed	Number of Items	Method	Dimensions and $\alpha$ (from Original Study)
Team Listening Environment Scale (Johnston, Reed, & Lawrence, 2011)	2011	5	Survey	Reliability scores reported as above 0.90.
Active Listening Observation Scale (Fassaert, van Dulmen, Schellevis, & Bensing, 2007)	2007	7	Survey	0.84
Active Empathic Listening Scale (Drollinger, Comer & Warrington, 2006)	2006	11	Survey	1. Sensing (0.76) 2. Processing (0.74) 3. Responding (0.77)
Listening Behavior Patterns (Imhof, 2003)	2003	24	Survey	N/A
Listening Styles Inventory (Pearce, Johnson & Barker, 2003) - revised version of the measure	2003	10	Survey	0.70
Active Listening Attitude Scale (Mishima, Kubota & Nagata, 2000)	2000	31	Survey	1. Listening attitude (0.84) 2. Listening skill (0.78) 3. Conversation opportunity (0.74)
Listening Behaviors (Johnson & Bechler, 1998)	1998	9 statements of effective listening used to rank others	Coding schema for listening behaviors in groups	0.66 (interrater reliability)
Salesperson Listening (Ramsey & Sohi, 1997)	1997	13	Survey	1. Sensing (0.80) 2. Evaluating (0.64) 3. Responding (0.91)
Listening Styles Profile (Watson & Barker, 1988)	1995	16	Survey	1. People (0.62) 2. Action (0.64) 3. Content (0.58) 4. Time-oriented (0.65)
Organizational Listening Survey (Cooper & Husband, 1993)	1993	30	Survey	0.93
Listening Styles Inventory (Pearce, Johnson, & Barker, 2003)	1992	10	Survey	0.75
Managerial Listening Survey (Husband, Cooper & Monsour, 1988)	1988	40	Survey	0.82