STIVEN CATALYST

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MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.



ROLE

LISTENING: WHAT THE OTHER PERSON TAKES AWAY

What a manager's listening is linked to at work, how strong the evidence really is, the three parts of good listening, why a conversation can be undone by what happens after it, and a card for the follow-up.

66 of 81 stories of being heard or unheard at work were about an employee trying to do good work: an idea, a concern, a suggestion.

KRIZ, KLUGER & LYDDY, 2021

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NO. 101 · ROLE

In this issue

Most of what a manager learns is about talking: presenting, deciding, giving feedback. Listening is treated as something everyone can already do. This issue asks what a manager's listening actually changes, for the person speaking and for the work, and what the speaker needs to see before they feel heard.

Across 664 effects, feeling listened to at work went with better outcomes, most of all with the quality of the relationship (0.51). Three quarters of the data were self-reports; with other sources the link is weaker but remains. Good listening has three parts: attention, comprehension and acceptance. In 81 stories from a bank, attention alone was rarely enough: people felt unheard when the expected follow-up never came. A card for the follow-up closes the issue.

Stiven Janaqi EDITOR · STIVEN CATALYST

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HOW TO READ THIS ISSUE

Figure
Every figure has its source and year at the foot of its page.

Our reading
Where the editor interprets rather than the research, it says so.

Practice
The steps and the card are proposals to try, not research results.

COVER STORY

What listening is linked to

Avraham Kluger, Herman Aguinis, Guy Itzchakov and colleagues gathered 664 effects from 144 samples, 400,020 observations in all, on how the speaker's sense of being listened to relates to outcomes at work. Managers were the listeners in 36% of the effects, salespeople in 21%. The average correlation was 0.39.

AVERAGE CORRELATION WITH PERCEIVED LISTENING, BY KIND OF OUTCOME (2024)



Relationship covers trust, liking and satisfaction with the relationship; thinking includes knowledge and a more balanced view of a topic; feelings include job satisfaction and commitment. The authors' reading: listening may lift performance mainly by building the relationship.

OUR READING

The strongest link is with the relationship itself. People work better with someone they trust, and they trust the one who listens.

Source: Avraham N. Kluger, Michal Lehmann, Herman Aguinis, Guy Itzchakov, Galit Gordoni, Jetmir Zyberaj & Cafer Bakaç, Journal of Business and Psychology 39(2), 2024

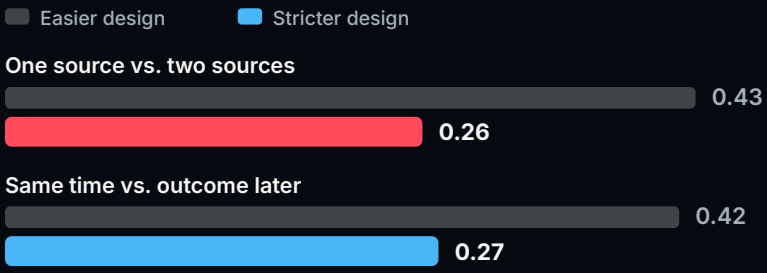
Kluger et al. (2024), three-level meta-analysis, table 5; correlations weighted by sample, not corrected for reliability. Most data are surveys at one moment, so they show association, not cause. Feedback, the talking side, is in No. 19.

THE NUMBERS

How strong, honestly

In 75% of the effects one person answered one questionnaire about both the listening and the outcome. That inflates a correlation. The meta-analysis therefore compared studies by how the two were measured, and the link shrinks, though it does not vanish.

AVERAGE CORRELATION OF LISTENING WITH WORK OUTCOMES, BY STUDY DESIGN (2024)



Experiments, where listening was made good or poor on purpose, gave 0.39, close to the surveys. Of their 30 effects only one was negative, at −0.04. The authors set this against feedback, where 38% of experimental interventions lowered performance, as No. 19 describes.

OUR READING

Even on the strictest reading, listening is not a soft extra. And it rarely does harm, which cannot be said of all management habits.

Source: Avraham N. Kluger, Michal Lehmann, Herman Aguinis, Guy Itzchakov, Galit Gordoni, Jetmir Zyberaj & Cafer Bakaç, Journal of Business and Psychology 39(2), 2024

Kluger et al. (2024), table 7 and discussion. Two sources: listening and outcome reported by different people or records. Outcome later: a predictive design. Effects with outcomes such as burnout or misconduct were weaker (0.17) than with desirable ones (0.43).

THE MODEL

Three parts of good listening

Guy Itzchakov and Jennifer Grau describe a good listening experience in three parts: attention, comprehension and acceptance. The speaker judges all three from small signals, and the meta-analysis lists the signals that tell them the opposite.

Attention

eye contact, the phone away
nodding, short sounds
signal: doing two things at once

Comprehension

questions that clarify or confirm
saying back what was heard
signal: changing the topic

Acceptance

no judgment, even in disagreement
“What led to it?” rather than “Why?”
signal: advice nobody asked for

Even a neutral question can sound like judgment from a manager. “Have you talked to accounting about this?” is often heard as advice and a doubt; “What might you try next?” leaves the next step with the person.

OUR READING

The speaker does not hear the intention. They hear the question, the glance at the screen and the advice that came too early.

Sources: Guy Itzchakov & Jennifer Grau, Organizational Dynamics 51(2), 2022; Avraham N. Kluger, Michal Lehmann, Herman Aguinis, Guy Itzchakov, Galit Gordoni, Jetmir Zyberaj & Cafer Bakaç, Journal of Business and Psychology 39(2), 2024

Parts and examples from Itzchakov and Grau (2022), signals of poor listening from Kluger et al. (2024), shortened by the editors. The authors add that field studies of listening training for managers are scarce: they know of two. Coaching is in No. 11.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

81 stories from a bank

Tiffany Kriz, Avraham Kluger and Christopher Lyddy interviewed 41 employees of a US bank about a time someone at work had an important chance to listen to them, and took it or missed it. They told 81 stories: 47 of feeling heard, 34 of feeling unheard.

STORIES BY WHAT DECIDED THE OUTCOME, 41 BANK EMPLOYEES (2021)



Attentive behaviour in the conversation did not tell the stories apart. What did was whether the listener met the need the speaker came with. Sometimes that took a tool, a change or a reason for a no; one employee stopped bringing ideas after a no without a reason.

OUR READING

A warm conversation followed by nothing can do more damage than a short one. It raised the hope that then went unanswered.

Source: Tiffany D. Kriz, Avraham N. Kluger & Christopher J. Lyddy, Frontiers in Psychology 12, 2021

Kriz et al. (2021), table 3: one bank, employees chosen by HR as mid to high performers, stories told in retrospect; the editors grouped the paths. The authors expect the role of action to vary across cultures. Silence and voice are in the treatise's volume 7.

HOW IT IS MEASURED

Ask the speaker, not yourself

The meta-analysis defines listening from the speaker's side: their judgment of the listener's interest and reaction. Kriz and colleagues cite a study in which the listeners' ratings of themselves did not match the speakers' ratings at all (−0.06). Your own impression is the weakest measure you have.

01	**One question**	after an important conversation: did I listen to you well? researchers suggest one item may be enough
02	**What was asked for**	written in the speaker's words: a tool, a change, a decision, or only to be heard
03	**Follow-ups closed**	promised follow-ups closed on time, out of all promised
04	**A no with a reason**	every rejected idea answered with the reason, in person
05	**Ideas over time**	does the same person still bring ideas a month later?

OUR READING

The closing rate of follow-ups is a number a manager can see every week. The feeling of being heard is built on it.

Sources: Avraham N. Kluger, Michal Lehmann, Herman Aguinis, Guy Itzchakov, Galit Gordoni, Jetmir Zyberaj & Cafer Bakaç, Journal of Business and Psychology 39(2), 2024; Tiffany D. Kriz, Avraham N. Kluger & Christopher J. Lyddy, Frontiers in Psychology 12, 2021

The rows are the editors' proposal, built on the definition and the single-item remark in Kluger et al. (2024) and the findings of Kriz et al. (2021). The −0.06 is from Bodie et al. (2014) as Kriz et al. report it; that study was not read.

TOOL OF THE ISSUE

The follow-up card

One card for each conversation that matters: an idea, a concern, a complaint about the work. Filled in by the manager right after, and closed only when the speaker has had an answer. The Action Tracker keeps the follow-ups with an owner and a date.

01 Who, when, about what one conversation per card

02 What I heard in their words; said back and confirmed, after "And what else?"

03 What they need only to be heard, or an action: tool, change, decision

04 What I will do, by when or who has the power to act, and when I take it to them

05 The answer given done, under way, or no with the reason; in person

06 Did you feel heard? their answer, not mine

Sources: Tiffany D. Kriz, Avraham N. Kluger & Christopher J. Lyddy, Frontiers in Psychology 12, 2021; Guy Itzchakov & Jennifer Grau, Organizational Dynamics 51(2), 2022

The card is the editors' proposal, built on Kriz et al. (2021) and the questions in Itzchakov and Grau (2022); it has not been tested. The essay linked below gives the author's five steps for the talk after a mistake: listen before you judge, end with an action that is checked.

More in the essay How to talk to someone who made a mistake

Open the tool: Action Tracker stivencatalyst.com/tools/action-tracker/

SOURCES AND METHOD

Every figure has a source.

The figures in this issue come from the sources below. The year shows how recent each one is.

A Meta-analytic Systematic Review and Theory of the Effects of Perceived Listening on Work Outcomes
Avraham N. Kluger, Michal Lehmann, Herman Aguinis, Guy Itzchakov, Galit Gordoni, Jetmir Zyberaj & Cafer Bakaç, Journal of Business and Psychology 39(2), 2024
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-023-09897-5

Feeling Heard: Experiences of Listening (or Not) at Work
Tiffany D. Kriz, Avraham N. Kluger & Christopher J. Lyddy, Frontiers in Psychology 12, 2021
https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.659087

High-quality listening in the age of COVID-19: A key to better dyadic communication for more effective organizations
Guy Itzchakov & Jennifer Grau, Organizational Dynamics 51(2), 2022
https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2020.100820

EDITORIAL METHOD

Each figure was checked for its year, its publisher and what it measures, in the full text where it could be opened. A source read only in a summary, an abstract or excerpts is marked “via”. A figure not confirmed in what was read is marked so on its page, or left out. The editor's interpretation is marked “Our reading”.



MANAGEMENT REVIEW

Management without theatre.

Every issue, one management question, checked against the best research.

ALL ISSUES

stivencatalyst.com/magazine/management-review.html

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Edited by Stiven Janaqi, who answers for it; “the editors” in this publication means him. Its texts, translations, layout and the checking of figures against their sources are done in working sessions with Claude, an AI model by Anthropic.
stivencatalyst.com/how-this-is-made.html