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## Role of Communication and Listening in Leadership

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# Role of Communication and Listening in Leadership

## Abstract

In our world today, leadership is important in many organizations. Leaders create the opportunity to develop relationships based on listening. Listening is a multidimensional construct that requires further integration within leadership studies. This study aimed to seek the validity of focusing on listening within the study of leadership. The research promotes the understanding of the verbal and nonverbal characteristics of the listening process that have the greatest ability to influence a person's leadership potential, as well as examining what leadership characteristics can influence a person's listening. Understanding these characteristics presents evidence that listening deserves the recognition to be studied as an important communication skill. Specifically, the focus was to send a survey to an equal number of educational institutions and businesses to create a balance of education and implementation within a workforce. The survey was sent to these organizations and then a snowball sampling occurred. Total completed surveys included a response rate of 97.4 percent, and respondents indicated behavioral characteristics, as well as nonverbal responses to be important in a listening setting. Responses were compared to Kouzes and Posner's Ten Commitments of Leadership and Greenleaf's model of Servant-Leadership. Further results of this study, indicated that leadership settings incorporate certain verbal and nonverbal behaviors. This study supported that leadership is about behavior, rather than personality or character. Also provided are suggestions for further studies regarding these topics.

## Keywords

thesis, communication, listening, leadership, servant leadership

## Disciplines

Communication

## Comments

- A thesis submitted to the faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies of Gonzaga University in partial fulfillment for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP STUDIES
- Dr. John Caputo, Major Professor
- © 2012 Kae Van Engen

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THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING IN LEADERSHIP

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A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty in Communication and Leadership Studies

School of Professional Studies

Gonzaga University

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Under the Supervision of Dr. John Caputo

Under the Mentorship of Dr. David Givens

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In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication and Leadership Studies

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By

(Elinor) Kae Van Engen

May 2012

We the undersigned, certify that we read this thesis and approve it as adequate in scope and quality for the degree Master of Arts.

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MA Program in Communication and Leadership Studies

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Everyone participates in communication on a daily basis. Communication is about people speaking and listening. Listening to others, as well as understanding others is essential. It is often said that listening is the first language skill one develops, and as a result all cognitive skills are dependent on the ability to listen. The Greek philosopher Epictetus may have been the first person to notice that humans were created with two ears, but only one tongue, so that humans may listen twice as much as they speak (King, 2008, p. 2718). Today, we hear and use many proverbs about this wisdom.

Leadership is also about people; people communicating, developing relationships and people working to improve society. Leadership depends on interactions and the use of communication. Since meaning is generated through communication, developing relationships with others and leading others requires knowledge of listening.

### **The Problem/Goal**

The concept of listening in leadership is not without many challenges. Listening is an important behavior; however, it should also be considered a leadership quality. Both servant-leadership and transformational leadership seek to earn respect and trust by developing relationships, and relationships develop through shared dialogue. The International Listening Association advocates for listening, yet theoretical research in the listening field is lacking currency (Janusik, 2010, p. 203). Research has focused on developing listening as a skill required for effective leadership. De Pree (2004) states “a leader’s most trusted and familiar tools are communication skills” (p. 104). Hackman and Johnson (1994) indicate “leadership competence is the product of communication competence” (p. 50). As a leader, listening for understanding is

important, as well as listening for needs and desires of those served (Steil & Bommelje, 2004; Wolvin 2010a). The intent of this study is to look at listening and connect the overall success of a leader to the component of listening. In so doing, the various components of the listening process will be understood.

### Importance of the Study

This study explores the concept of listening and its relationship to effective leadership. Listening is often equated with hearing; however, this is not the case. Having the ability to hear does not guarantee a person's ability to listen, since hearing happens automatically (Barker & Watson, 2000, p. 7; Imhof, 2010, p. 100). Hearing involves the reception of sounds and occurs automatically without a conscious effort. Listening requires the combination of verbal and nonverbal responses, along with a person's cognition and behavioral traits. Interpersonal relationships are built and developed through listening, by giving other people the attention and respect they deserve.

Leadership incorporates listening, yet listening is a skill that is not taught in leadership studies nor is a subject in leadership books. It appears to be assumed, rather than studied. Through this research, characteristics of listening should be recognized and correlated with behaviors leaders seek to imitate.

### Statement of the Problem

This thesis is seeking to uncover what verbal and nonverbal aspects of listening have the greatest impact on the listening process and what specific aspect of leadership has the greatest potential to influence a person's listening.



## Definition of Terms Used

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions are used:

*Behavioral*—one’s visible response to the internal processing of what was just said or observed

*Cognitive*—the thought process behind one’s perception, memory and reasoning of what was just heard or said. These cognitive characteristics within a leader are the beginning of the servant-leadership model (Russell & Stone, 2002).

*Empathy*--feeling and thinking with another person, entering the other person’s frame of reference (Brownell, 2010a, p. 173; Stewart, 2009, p. 555) or walking in someone else’s shoes (Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012, p. 31).

*Foresight*—strategies for making decisions and leading (Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 106), combining “head, heart and gut” (p. 111) within servant-leadership

*Leader*—a person who guides an organization by inspiration and tends to focus more on the vision of the organization

*Leadership*-- a unique form of human communication which develops into a relationship to enhance organizational effectiveness and “modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others to meet shared goals and needs” (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 11).

*Listening*—“the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken or nonverbal messages” (International Listening Association, 1995, pp. 4-5).

*Servant-leadership*—“a transformational approach to life and work, that has the potential for creating positive change throughout society, whereby others grow as people because their needs are being served” (Spears, 2002, p. 4).

*Transformational leadership*—“a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents” (Burns, as cited in Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 103).

### Organization of Remaining Chapters

This chapter has introduced the idea of listening within the leadership field, noting there are differences between hearing and actual listening. Chapter two will review the philosophical and theoretical basis of studying listening and leadership and provides an exemplary review of the literature in this field. The research methodology and scope are presented in chapter three. Chapter four provides the results of the study, as well as an analysis of the data. Finally, chapter five reports on the relevance of the current findings, describes the limitations of the study and suggests opportunities for further research.

## **Chapter 2: Review of Literature**

Listening is a vital component to creating and maintaining relationships. Listening is the first skill developed, and from listening, language can be acquired and mastered (Lundsteen, 1979; Wilt, 1950; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). By listening, relationships can be enhanced through dialogue, as indicated by the phenomenological tradition of communication.

This review will provide an overview of the concept of listening, particularly in the cognitive and behavioral dimension. A review of literature regarding listening within a leadership setting will follow, along with discussion on how these two concepts are related. While most communication theories are relevant to listening, the congruence theory, Buber's dialogue theory and the social penetration theory best represent the listening and leadership aspects. In addition, Ernest Bormann's theory of symbolic convergence will be discussed in relationship to community and small groups.

Leaders cannot lead without recognizing the importance of communicating and listening. This literature review will define leadership, and examine leadership from a theoretical perspective, particularly in transformational leadership and servant-leadership. Many theories of leadership incorporate listening; however it is these two theories that emphasize the importance of listening. Other characteristics essential to being an effective listening leader in a small group or organization will be addressed. This review seeks to connect the process of listening with the overall success of a leader. By connecting to the impact listening has on the leadership role, various components of the listening process can be understood.

## Philosophical Assumptions and Theoretical Basis

Carl Rogers indicated the need to have congruency between words, along with understanding and action (Craig, 1999). Rogers' perspective of empathic listening includes listening for understanding, which is necessary and integral to being a leader. Stewart (2009) posits that this incorporates focusing, encouraging and reflecting skills (p. 227).

Martin Buber was a Jewish philosopher whose theory equated dialogue with ethical communication, and theorized about the importance of human relationship dialogue in his "I-Thou" perspective (Stewart, p. 62). His theory is developed through trust which includes a mutual respect of others and a willingness to listen. Buber's thoughts relate to acting on one's principles (Buber, 1970). In essence, when a leader treats others as people, rather than objects, they demonstrate respect and follow Buber's theory of "I-Thou" (Craig, 1999).

The social penetration theory focuses on relationship development and posits that behavior is based on how intimate one becomes with information, and that disclosure is dependent on what the long term rewards and costs of the situation are, as well as one's vulnerability (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Brownell, 2010a; Taylor & Altman, 1987). Social exchange theories, according to Taylor and Altman, seek to maximize gains and minimize costs. Therefore, in this theory, relationship outcome equates to rewards minus costs (Taylor & Altman) and is seen as motivation for relationship growth. Altman and Taylor's theory reflects a desire to have a genuine exchange of information for meaningful relationships with others, rather than actions that inhibit or deter.

Bormann's theory of symbolic convergence recognizes the fact that leaders are communicators who can articulate a vision, often through fantasies, which creates reality for the

group (Johnson & Bechler, 1997, p. 58). Most of Bormann's work was with small groups; however, his later work recognized this reality which emerged through the small group to become a culture (Borman, 1982). Bormann (1996) posits that in the social convergence theory the signs, symbols, and experiences that create meaning and understanding of individuals. Values and attitudes are tested and legitimized through fantasy themes (Bormann, 1972, pp. 396-397). As a leader, it is necessary to motivate others to reach their goals (Bass, 1990, p. 21). Often this requires the need to have direct communication by listening and developing relationships.

Historically, the study of listening began with Paul Rankin's work in 1926, when listening was determined to be the most frequent mode of communication. However, it was not until the 1940's when more explicit attention was given to listening (Janusik, 2010, p. 195). At this time Nichols (1947) brought listening instruction to the forefront by establishing a listening emphasis course at the University of Minnesota. Since then, Nichols has been designated as the "father of the field of listening" due to his pioneering research in the topic (Steil & Bommelje, 2004, p. 75). Other researchers have continued to study this method of communication. In 1979, the International Association of Listening (ILA) was formed. This organization promotes listening and has brought together scholars from education, business, medicine, psychology, and other fields of interest for the advancement and promotion of developing and using effective listening skills in all areas of life.

### The Literature

Listening has been defined in a variety of ways; however, it is posited that listening is the most important of all communication skills (Hunt & Cusella, 1983, p. 394). To define listening, the role of cognition must be recognized, as well as the behavioral aspect (McKenzie & Clark,

1995). Communication scholars cannot agree on a single definition for listening, though, there are similar elements scholars agree should be included in this definition. These five elements include perception, attention, interpretation, remembering and responding. These common elements have been a part of the definition of listening for over 60 years (Janusik, 2010, p. 204). Since listening occurs in different settings, a single definition for listening is inadequate. For example, listening in a conversation will require a response; however when listening to a television program, no response is required. The key to defining listening is to take the time to think and create a personal definition of listening (Steil & Bommelje, 2004, pp. 30-31). Steil and Bommelje's philosophy promotes the idea that listening must be defined personally, so that a person can "see it, find it, do it, measure it, enhance it, teach it, or live it and repeat it" (p. 31). This appears to fit in with the contingency approach of leadership, which suggests transformational leadership (Hackman & Johnson, 1994, p. 54). An effective listener or leader will determine the type of listening the setting or situation requires and establish a goal conducive to the setting (Thompson, Leintz, Nevers, & Witkowski, 2004, p. 228; Wolvin 2010a). This understanding will allow one to incorporate listening in all settings which concurs with what Griffin (2009) says about Carl Rogers' perspective on listening—one listens to others with the desire to seek understanding (p. 483).

### *Types of Listening*

Two types of listening are foundational, discriminate and comprehensive. Listening discriminatively can be aural or visual and is basic to any other type of listening. This allows a listener to perceive and identify sounds in the environment and then use these sounds to adapt to the environment (Wolvin, 2009, p. 142; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996, pp. 158-160). Listening comprehensively is listening for the understanding of the message and its variables including

memory, concentration and vocabulary (Wolvin, p. 142; Wolvin & Coakley, pp. 211-230).

Specific behavioral skills include matching speech speed and thought speed, taking good notes, asking questions and paraphrasing (Brownell, 2010a, pp. 119-123; Nichols, 1957, p. 83; Wolvin & Coakley, pp. 232-244).

The third type of listening is therapeutic listening and scholars indicate everyone has a need for this type of listener at some point in his or her life (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996, p. 266). Specific skills for this empathic form of listening include giving attention, being present, demonstrating eye contact, facial expression, touching, silence and demonstrating empathy (Brownell, 2010a, pp. 173-174; Wolvin & Coakley, pp.269-274).

Critical listening is listening to comprehend and evaluate the message. This stage is often used in leadership and includes a component of judgment (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996, p. 320) and reasoning (Caputo, Hazel, McMahon, & Dannels, 2002). Critical listening is used in leadership as these skills appear to sharpen with maturity, while determining acceptance or rejection of a message. It is important to be reminded that critical does not mean negative, but rather is defined by the purpose and goals of listening (Brownell, 2010a, p. 219). Critical listening is often connected to the concept of persuasion; hence the need to mention Aristotle and ethos, logos and pathos. Aristotle's ethics reflected character over conduct (Sipe & Frick, 2009, pp. 19-20) which ties in to critical listening. One's credibility is important in leadership and the skills required for this type of listening include evaluating arguments and avoiding faulty reasoning (Wolvin & Coakley, pp. 326-344). The listening leader needs to connect to what was heard and experienced, while searching for the value it has in life.

### *Listening Process: Cognitive Dimension*

Cognitive listening includes how one thinks about listening and how one thinks during the process of listening (Janusik, 2005, p. 16). The social penetration theory sees the cognitive dimension as an internal process that precedes, accompanies and follows the development of a relationship (Taylor & Altman, 1987). Cognitive psychologists see listening as the first act of information processing (Imhof, 2010, p. 98); others view listening as a social purpose (Janusik, 2002; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). Listening includes receiving information from various stimuli—both verbal and nonverbal, which includes perception, attention and processing (Imhof, pp. 97-109). Listeners can function as senders and receivers of a message at the same time (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Through listening and dialogue, human relationships are sustained and enhanced (Maguire, 2006, p. 90) allowing communication to create connections to others. Empathy, from a cognitive perspective seeks to view the situation from another's perspective (Brownell, 2010a).

Listening, as part of the social penetration theory, implies that a conscious effort be made about who, what, when, why and how listening can be achieved (Barker & Watson, 2000, p. 70; Brownell, 2010a, p. 5-8; Imhof, 2010, p. 100). For example, when an employee is working in his/her office with the radio playing in the background, it is usually not considered to be interference. However, occasionally something piques the person's attention on the radio, such as an update on the pending weather advisory, which interrupts concentration in regards to the current task. At this point, listening becomes a deliberate decision.

Focusing one's attention is often driven by interest. The desire to pay attention to a variety of stimuli takes away from the overall attention given to a specific stimulus. Dividing



listening is equated with multitasking and the desire to focus on multiple agendas. However, listening cannot be divided and still be considered successful (Imhof, 2010, pp. 101-103; Steil & Bommelje, 2004, pp. 221-223). In fact, if a stimulus is never consciously attended to, it will not become part of the listener's memory. Listeners have a tendency to focus on what he/she wants to hear or expects to hear (Brownell, 2010a, p. 150). Ideas need to be connected to what is already known if they are to be placed in one's memory. Anything unpleasant or negative will often be blocked from one's memory (Brownell, p.142).

Listening effectiveness is enhanced by memory. In order to remember, information must be attended to in order to be able to move information into memory. Short term memory holds information just long enough to use the information. On the other hand, long term memory is dependent on the strategies used to remember what was heard. Various strategies exist to enhance long term memory, from association to visual imagery to mnemonic techniques (Brownell, 2010a, pp. 146-149). Other methods of improving memory and ultimately listening, includes improvement of personal health—proper nutrition and getting enough sleep, along with increasing creativity and reducing stress (Brownell pp. 151-154; Nichols, 1947, p. 83).

While listening, not only is attending important; so is perception. Cognitive psychologists include the schema theory when processing information (Wolvin, 2010b, pp. 13-14). The schemata in a brain are mental representations of knowledge. Schemas are ways of organizing information in a brain to allow the interpretation and remembering of information. Schemas aid the listening process and are constantly changing and/or being modified depending on experiences, cultures and background. Schemas make sense of new and incoming information and assist in identifying information that should be stored or forgotten (Brownell, 2010a, p. 338; Wolvin & Coakley, 1996, pp. 90-91; Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012, pp. 55-56). The

schemata stored in long term memory, aids recalling information. Schema creates cognitive structure; however, listening researchers have discovered that those with a more complex schema have greater listening memory (Wolvin & Coakley, pp.90-91). Janusik (2005) posits that the mind has the capabilities for attention and memory; what isn't used for attention is available for memory (pp. 16-17). As a result, as schema is built, there is more availability for storage which ultimately aids memory.

The phenomenological tradition supports including perception as a component of the listening process. Listening allows for perception of people, relationships and events. Perceptions can be based on impressions of people's attributes, ethnicity and various other features. Griffin (2009) posits that communication occurs through the phenomenological tradition because of perception and interpretation of personal experiences (p. 14). Hackman and Johnson (2009) suggest that the communication process includes shared understanding and interpretation. Littlejohn and Foss (2008) imply interpretation is the key component to the phenomenological tradition, as it is the portion of the communication process that assigns meaning to an experience. Learning from others and seeking common ground, while avoiding dishonesty is how Craig (1999) viewed this phenomenological tradition. All this suggests social penetration theory—what is shared creates meaning and understanding; how intimate the communication becomes depends on self-disclosure and sharing (Altman & Taylor, 1973). This type of information exchange will enhance the growth and development of relationships between people (Altman & Taylor).

#### *Listening Process: Behavioral Dimension*

How a person acts, as well as how one's actions are interpreted, is part of listening behaviorally (Janusik, 2005, p. 20). Behaviors are often used to perceive effectiveness of one's

listening. The behavioral aspect of listening indicates a listener will control the amount of information received, process it via cognitive and schemata influences, and ultimately have the last words regarding the message. By understanding the listening process, the goal of shared meaning will have a greater possibility of achievement. After listening, effective speaking occurs through learned and improved behaviors. (Brownell, 2008, p. 214; Brownell, 2010b, pp. 142-143). This aspect will impact the leadership of a listener.

The social penetration theory posits that exchange between individuals needs to be reciprocated (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Taylor & Altman, 1987). Their theory indicates this reciprocity is behavioral in nature (Altman & Taylor; Taylor & Altman). This action is seen as a basis for establishing trust in the relationship, and once this is achieved, there is little chance for vulnerability in the relationship. This appears to be based on reciprocity on a superficial level, rather than an intimate one (Taylor & Altman). Trust is crucial for effective leadership.

The concept of empathy from a behavioral dimension recognizes the ability to demonstrate care for another person. This idea leads to the opportunity to create a community by serving others (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, pp. 129-135). Ernest Bormann posits that community is created by narrative communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 162). In a listening setting, nonverbal behaviors show openness and interest, rather than evaluation (Brownell, 2010a, p. 195). Listener-centered communication is also influenced by the particular situation. A person's for listening and the particular setting often requires different skills, and it is important to weigh out the different behavioral variables. The social penetration theory includes not only verbal, but also nonverbal—the facial expressions, body gestures and the proxemics (Altman & Taylor, 1973); all important in a leadership role.

Listening incorporates cognition and behaviors that occur in everyday activities. As relationships change and evolve, personal listening barriers affect receiving sounds and information, distinguishing between them, focusing attention, giving meaning to these sounds and then remembering the information. Listening is most effective when it is considered to be a connection to others, circular in nature, a give-and-take relationship (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 8; Sipe & Frick, 2009, p. 67; Steil & Bommelje, 2004, p. 349).

Through listening, relationships develop, feedback is offered and leaders are formed. Communication, empathy and feedback are the core competencies of a skilled communicator practicing servant-leadership (Sipe & Frick, 2009, pp. 5-6). Empathy is an important component of effective relationships and one can seek to improve one's empathic listening through paraphrasing and objectivity (Caputo et al., 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2007) link empathy to effective leadership. Steil and Bommelje (2004) posit that outstanding leaders are outstanding listeners. If people fail to listen in society; its individuals and organizations will fail.

### *Leadership*

Just as communication is about people, so too is leadership. Barge (1994) posits that leadership is best explained by communication skills. Effective leaders understand that listening and leading are inseparable (Steil & Bommelje, 2004). Wolvin and Coakley (1991) suggest that businesses and organizations desire effective communication (p. 151), which is linked to transformational leadership behavior (Bass, 1990; Flauto, 1999, p. 86; Hackman & Johnson, 2009; Zorn, 1991). Listeners cannot be passive in their communication (Steil, Barker, & Watson, 1983), as listening is the foundation of organizations (Brownell, 2010a, p. 343). Stewart (2009) concurs, as organizations replace the chain of command communication with dialogue among

individuals (p. 234). In fact, not including listening in the discussion of communication and leadership means “at least 40 to 45 percent of the process of communication” (Barrett, 2011, p. 239) is left out.

Hunt and Cusella (1983) posit that the most important skill for organizations is a listening behavior, as leaders can shape the setting and the context of an organization simply by listening. Bennis and Nanus (as cited in Russell & Stone, 2002); state that servant-leadership is about a person’s character (p. 151). Leadership is important in the work environment, and listening should be valued as a leadership quality (Johnson & Bechler, 1997, p. 63; Orick, 2001; Wolvin, 2009, p. 137); because leadership is not about personality, but rather it is about behavior and relationships (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, pp. 338-339; Steil & Bommelje, 2004, pp. 18-19)

Servant-leaders know that being a role model includes listening and respecting others, while being visible; however it is a leader’s behavior that earns respect and trust by building relationships through listening (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 113). Trust and credibility are necessary before a sense of community can be developed (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, pp. 129-135). Within servant-leadership, trust makes organizations functional (Russell & Stone, 2002, p. 148). Gaining trust creates cohesiveness within the organization and ultimately benefits the influence a servant-leader can have within an organization, as listening is critical to the empowerment of others (Kouzes & Posner; Russell & Stone). A transformational leader will offer personal attention to others, as well as empower, coach, advise and treat each person individually (Barge, 1994; Hackman & Johnson, 2009, pp. 104-124).

Being a leader requires the desire to facilitate relationships. In order to do this, a leader must be able to demonstrate personal characteristics such as trust, integrity, accountability, as

well as a genuine care and concern for others (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Hackman and Johnson (2009) posit that a leader needs to demonstrate passion for others. A leader must also demonstrate components of leadership, including intelligence, verbal fluency, responsibility and involvement (Hackman & Johnson, 1991). Leaders who foster these attitudes will most likely demonstrate there is a need to listen and ask questions; along with a need to encourage and support through actions and words spoken (Hackman & Johnson, 1991; Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 321).

Transformational leadership aids in the strengthening of the vision and foresight of an organization (Bass, 1990, p. 30; Yukl, 2010, pp. 417-418). Leaders are known to be willing to breathe life into the hopes and dreams of others, using vivid language and expressive style; they demonstrate confidence and optimism (Yukl) while promoting a follower's beliefs, needs and values (Barge, 1994; Bass, 1990, p. 21; Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Russell and Stone (2002) posit that how open a servant-leader is to receiving input (or listening), influences others within the organization (p. 151). Listening is integral in these settings, as leaders need to be able to articulate and create understanding and meaning for others (Johnson & Bechler, 1997, p. 64-65). When a leader treats others as people, rather than objects, respect is demonstrated and follow Buber's theory of "I-Thou" (Craig, 1999, pp. 138-140).

Kouzes and Posner (2003) posit that when a leader reaches out and listens to others, the leaders and the organization benefit by creating a sense of community. Bormann posits that through the use of fantasy themes a sense of shared consciousness and identification is formed to emulate a community (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). Active learning occurs when there is a mutual sharing of ideas, versus articulation of only one perspective. Giving undivided attention to

someone talking can demonstrate leadership, but only if genuine interest in what is being said is demonstrated.

The critical skill to understand what others value is demonstrated through listening. (Hesselbein, 2003; Steil & Bommelje, 2004). It is critical for a leader to realize that listening means asking questions for clarification and paying attention to the needs and desires of others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 245). If an atmosphere of trust has been established, it creates a much easier setting in which to ask questions (Kouzes & Posner, 2003, p. 213). The skill of listening is important for a leader to possess and affects the influence when interacting with others (Kouzes & Posner, 2007; Steil & Bommelje, 2004). Nichols (1948), (as cited in Johnson & Bechler, 1997) drew correlations between comprehension and the physical environment; however more research has been on the organizational environment in regards to listening (Johnson & Bechler, p. 64).

Listeners process information in terms of symbols (Bormann, 1996) and schemata. This provides for more perception, interpretation and the remembering of information (Brownell, 2010a), as well as the understanding in conversations (Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012). However, to act on these schemas, they must be activated—or pulled from long or short term memory. Schemas continually adjust based on personal experiences, as well as the learning of new ideas and concepts.

The ability to process information and adapt personal behavior requires the use of empathy. This process of empathizing with someone demonstrates the ability to seek to communicate trying to understand the speaker's situation (Caputo et al., 2002). Empathy is also essential in recognizing the consequences of a person's actions, as well as the spoken words

(Hackman and Johnson, 2009). Bormann (1972) posits that with empathy and response connections to each other in a relationship, moves from private to public disclosure (pp. 403-405).

Leadership is seen to be more successful when it incorporates communication that seeks feedback (Wolvin, 2010a). Listening too draws on the desire for feedback, especially when participating in active listening. It is essential for a leader to first be a listening communicator who desires to understand and respond to others. Feedback consists of verbal—the paraphrasing, asking of questions, as well as the nonverbal feedback—the eye contact, nodding, touching and attentive behaviors. Good feedback will benefit both the sender and receiver of the communication. Both are essential in a communication setting (Caputo et al., 2002).

Schultz's study (as cited by Flauto, 1999) found that communication behavior predicts the ability to become a leader (p. 91). The outcomes of studies on small group settings (Bechler & Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Bechler, 1997; Johnson & Bechler, 1998) found that perceived leadership behavior and perceptions of listening performance are related. Barge and Hirokawa (1989) recognize that a symbolic outcome for small groups is the perceived effectiveness of leadership (p. 183). This became evident through the approach of Bormann's emergent leadership (Bechler & Johnson, p. 78).

Leaders are good listeners (Wolvin, 2010a) and listening effectiveness is an important skill as effective listening is influential (Bechler & Johnson, 1995, p. 85). Listening is a core component in successful leadership (Hunt & Cussella, 1983, p. 394; Johnson & Bechler, 1997, p. 58). In fact, several studies support the idea of individuals who demonstrate solid listening skills, hold higher organizational positions and are promoted more often (Johnson & Bechler, 1998, p.



457). It is apparent there is less focus on the traits of leaders; rather more focus on behavior patterns, skills and attributes that make leaders successful (Johnson & Bechler, 1998, pp. 456-457).

Steil and Bommelje (2004) posit that to be a successful listening leader, a person must listen and lead oneself and others; as well as teach others how to engage and teach other leaders to be successful (p. 32). H. S. Firestone stated, “The growth and development of people is the highest calling of leadership” (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 119). To truly transform life and society; the desire to respect others must be incorporated, as well as allowing others to grow into leaders through a genuine desire to listen and care for each other. Sounds easy, yet it is a daunting task!

#### Rationale

Listening and leadership are about people and communication. Listening is widely addressed in literature supported by the International Listening Association; however challenges in the listening field include the need for current theoretical research (Janusik, 2010, p. 203). Because leadership is so important for everyone, understanding the value of a strong listening background can enhance the opportunities for success in a leadership role.

This research will promote the understanding of what characteristic(s) of the listening process is the greatest asset to the ability to lead as well as understand what leadership characteristics potentially influence listening.

#### Research Questions

This work will attempt to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1) What specific aspect of the listening process has the greatest influence on leadership?

RQ 2) What specific aspect of leadership has the greatest potential to influence listening?

Chapter Three will indicate the scope and methodology of the study.

## Chapter 3: Scope and Methodology

### The Scope of the Study

People's perception and interpretation are important in the study of both listening and leadership. Looking at the phenomenological tradition of communication will be an important foundation for this research to determine the impact listening has on leadership, as well as how leadership impacts listening.

It is important to look at and examine the role listening plays in each person's life. By looking at listening within the educational and business contexts, the value of the cognitive and behavioral dimension will be apparent. Listening is integral to what all human beings do and while there is much research on listening, weak and outdated theoretical data make it difficult to connect listening as a leadership trait. Communication skills rank high for job skills and in the leadership field, listening should be ranking high as well.

This study will implement an interpretive social science approach to explore the following research questions: 1) What specific aspect of the listening process has the greatest influence on leadership? and 2) What specific aspect of the listening process has the greatest influence on leadership? Interpretive social science has roots in empathic understanding (Neuman, 2011, p. 101) and will be beneficial to the research in determining if there is an understanding between what is experienced and one's actions in listening and leadership.

The scope of this study will focus on adults in organizational settings, who are employed full or part-time. The study will not be limited to any particular type of organization or a particular geographic location. It is desired to include respondents from both educational and business organizations, as well as individuals labeled leaders and students.

The purpose of this analysis is to assess the impact of the role of listening within a leadership setting. In so doing, listening will be understood to be important not only in the educational field, but also in the business field. This research will apply the findings to develop strategic arguments for studying the topic of listening beyond the interpersonal/relationship topic.

### Methodology of the Study

The sampling method for this thesis will be survey research, due to this method's efficiency and productive gathering of data. Generally, survey research poses fewer ethical issues than a field design or experimental design (Schutt, 2012, p. 272). Survey research is used frequently in social science data-gathering (Neuman, 2011, p. 308) and will allow the sampling to be not only classroom participants, but also others in various educational and business sectors. The survey participant selections will include the students from a private college located in the upper Midwest enrolled in various communication classes. Other students will be from a university in the northwestern region of the United States. Local participants include educators at local schools, as well as some prominent businesses in the area. The survey will include a snowball sampling of educators and business leaders. This will allow the opportunity for each network of people or organization to be represented (Neuman, 2011, p. 268). The method will be particularly beneficial to the study as a broad range of respondents will be developed to correlate listening from a cognitive and behavioral dimension within leadership

The survey will be conducted via an online survey using the commercially available Survey Monkey tool. This product was chosen because of its ease of use and distribution, as well as the opportunity to use an organization's Survey Monkey account. An initial set of respondents

will receive a link to the survey via an email. The sampling method will be a snowball sampling, allowing participants to forward this survey to others in their network or organization (Neuman, 2011, p. 268). The initial group of respondents will be a non-random, purposive sample (Rubin, Rubin, Haridakis, & Piele, 2010, p. 202) of the upper Midwest geographical area, which will be balanced between those in education and business organizations.

The original email will contain a brief introduction, indicating the purpose of the research and the desire to have the survey link forwarded to as many members of each respondent's network or organization within a specified time period. The email will also inform potential respondents of their anonymity and thank them for their honest and thoughtful participation. The survey is completely voluntary, and respondents may quit at any time. There will be no risks or benefits for the respondents regarding the completion of the survey. The use of Survey Monkey will only provide raw data to the researcher, and will not provide information that will allow individual responses to be connected to personal information such as an IP address. Except for the initial respondents, using the snowball technique will allow for the identity of respondents to be completely anonymous. The survey tool will not track who has received the link or who has or has not completed the survey.

The survey questions were created with the goal to gain an in-depth understanding of the role listening plays in each person's life through the analysis of the individual responses. The survey contains several sections. The first will request demographic information. Respondents will be asked to indicate their current employment status, their sex, their age, their level of education and whether they are involved in a leadership position by using a drop-down list. The second section of the survey will be focused on listening. The survey includes questions on perceptions of listening, the time spent on listening in a day, as well as statements regarding

characteristics of listening, which are ranked on a 5-point Likert scale. The final section of the survey will focus on leadership. These survey questions will involve a series of statements regarding different characteristics of a leader ranked on a 5-point Likert scale.

The survey will contain instructions for each section for clarity of understanding. Only surveys where all items are completed will be considered valid and included in the final analysis. Responses will be grouped by students, educators, and those involved in the business sector. A copy of the survey and email sent out to the initial respondents is located in the Appendix.

As stated in the Appendix, the informed consent outlines the lack of risks, benefits or adverse effects for participation in the survey. No record of who completes the form is kept except for the demographic information.

Understanding the validity of listening behaviors is essential to leaders (Hunt & Cusella, 1983). Listening involves not only behaviors, but also cognition. By focusing only on one entity of listening limits the various contexts of using listening. Chapter Four will analyze the data, results of the study, and a discussion.

## **Chapter 4: The Study**

### **Introduction**

Listening is important in all settings, but particularly in the role of leadership. This study looked at listening within various leadership settings to be able to recognize the impact listening had on leadership, as well as recognize how leadership possibly influenced listening.

As relationships develop and mature, information is shared which creates an opportunity to dialogue with others. In a leadership setting, this dialogue often occurs in small groups, working for a common goal, impacting the rewards and costs of a relationship.

### **Data Analysis**

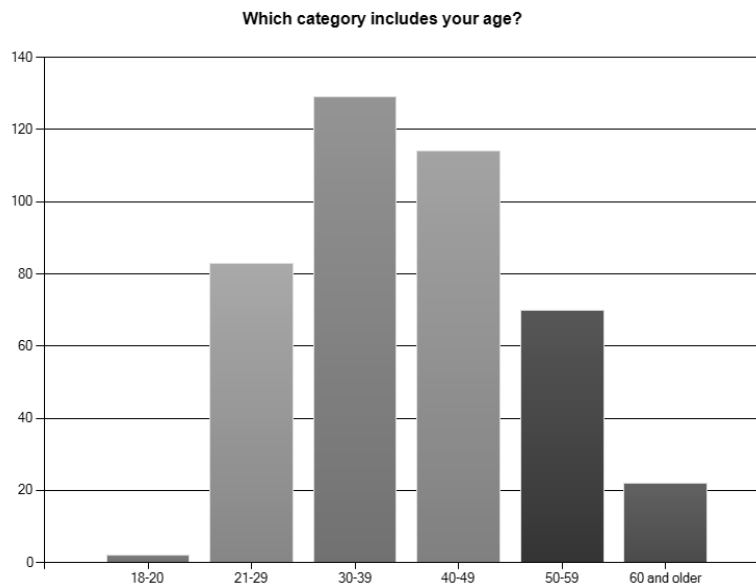
An Internet-based survey link was distributed via email to eight organizations comprising four educational institutions and four business organizations. These key individuals were asked to forward the email, including the survey link, to their staff and colleagues, as well as others who would be interested in providing a response. Information was received from the original group indicating the information had been forwarded to others. Since the survey was conducted anonymously, it cannot be determined what percentage of recipients filled out the survey or how many times it was forwarded. After 14 days, data collection from the survey was terminated and the raw results were downloaded from the survey tool. The results were filtered so that only completed surveys are included in the data.

A total of 431 people began, and 420 completed the survey. Only fully completed surveys were collected which was 97.4 percent of the total completed surveys. The distribution of respondents was broken down to include:

Categories	Number	Percentage
Part-time Student	70	16.8
Full-time Student	111	26.6
Part-time Educator	21	5
Full-time Educator	74	17.7
Part-time Business Employee	19	4.6
Full-time Business Employee	122	29.3

**Table 1: Respondents to Survey**

Additional demographic information was collected, but not used for further analysis. Respondent rate was almost a ratio of 2:1 for female responses compared to male responses. The majority of respondents had completed a Bachelor’s degree (61.4% or 258 respondents); 21.7 percent completed a Master’s degree, and 10.7 percent have completed a PhD, with 67 percent of the respondents indicating they were in a position of leadership. There appeared to be a broad age range for respondents. The largest group of respondents (30.7%) was in the age bracket of 30-39 year olds and the 40-49 age brackets were 27.1 percent, as represented below.



*Figure 1. Age distribution*

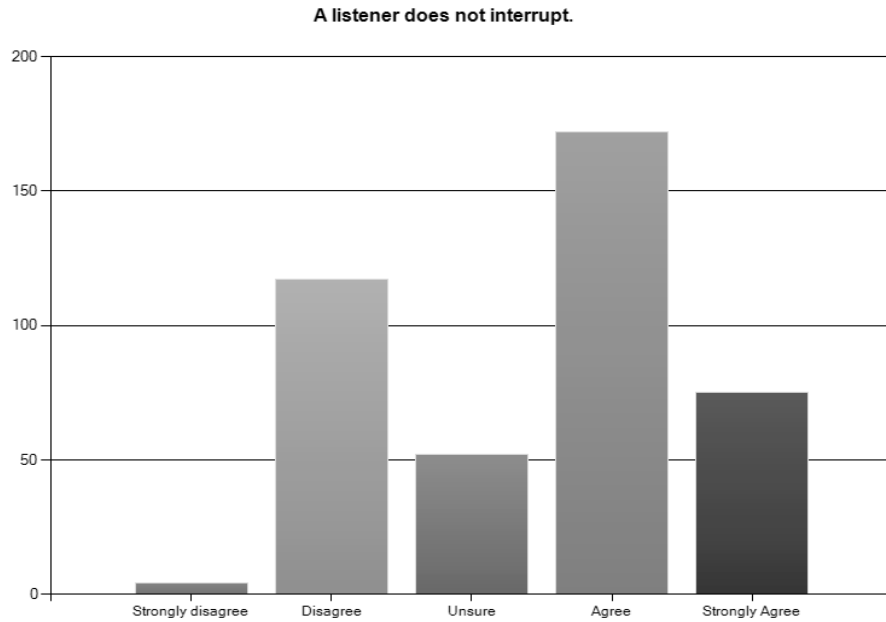


## Results of the Study

Several statements or questions were asked on the survey regarding the concept of listening. Results from the statement, “A listening response should include a verbal and nonverbal response to demonstrate interest” yielded 86.4 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing that listening includes both verbal and nonverbal responses. “A listener should demonstrate a behavior of trust through nonverbal mannerisms” generated 90.7 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing. When surveyed if “A listener should ask clarifying questions,” the respondents agreed or strongly agreed a total of 94.3 percent. Only 74.2 percent of respondents indicated that “A listener includes feedback to signal understanding,” while 95.5 percent of respondents recognized the need for “A listener’s body posture demonstrates the listener is ‘focusing’ on the conversation.

Behavioral characteristics of listening regarding “A listener should maintain eye contact” included 80.5 percent strongly agreeing, while there was about an equal number of respondents who disagreed (8.2%) or were unsure (8.4%). The use of hand gestures in a listening setting was fairly balanced between disagree (24.3%) and agree (33.4%); the largest response on the scale was those who were unsure with 36.5 percent.

The action of a listener in interrupting created a variety of answers. The statement was “A listener does not interrupt.” Four respondents (1%) strongly disagreed, 117 respondents (27.9%) disagreed, 52 (12.4%) were unsure, 172 (41%) agreed, while 75 (17.9%) strongly agreed.



*Figure 2. A listener does not interrupt.*

Question 16 allowed for multiple answers to the question, as well as a box marked “other”. The question asked “As a listener, what do you believe to be the most important in a listening setting? Check all that apply.” Facial expressions (76.4%) appeared to be most important for a listener in a listening setting, followed by body gestures (57.7%), vocal tone and inflection (57.2%) and proxemics (33.7%). Other responses included environment issues (noise or distractions), context, timing, interest, purpose for listening, as well as an awareness of other’s needs.

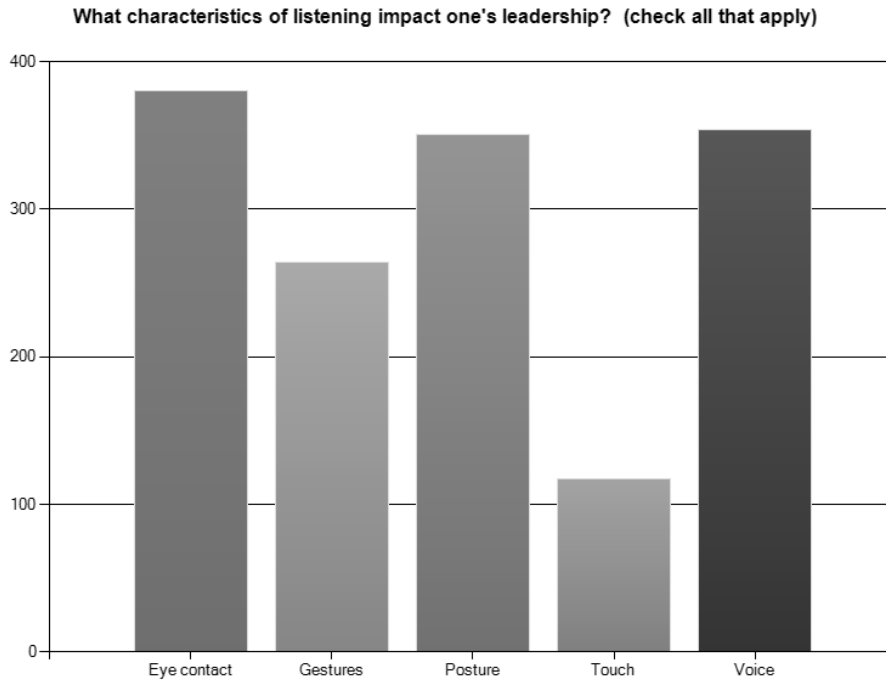
The last portion of the survey focused on leadership. Leadership has many different behavioral characteristics and this survey highlighted various behaviors leaders should demonstrate that represent a mindset of listening.

<b>Behaviors</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Trust and Integrity	24.8% (104)	71.8% (301)
Empowering Others	31.6% (132)	65.8% (275)
Building Community	39.1% (154)	58.2% (244)
Sharing of Self	49.3% (206)	44.3% (185)
Clear and Confident Voice	57.2% (238)	31.7% (132)
Ability to ask and answer questions	53.2% (223)	42.5% (178)
Visionary	44.4% (185)	51.6% (215)

**Table 2: Behaviors of Leaders**

Those responding to this survey indicated that leadership is predominately about relationships (83.6%), behaviors (71.3%), one’s character (79.2%), and one’s personality (46.9%). Other suggestions respondents offered for leaders included these characteristics: assertiveness, persuasive, walking the talk, wisdom, service, ethics, accountability, encouraging, integrity, commitment and mentoring.

When respondents were asked the question, “What characteristics of listening impacts a person’s leadership? (Check all that apply).” The respondents’ choices reflected 91.3 percent selected eye contact, 63.5 percent selected gestures, 84.4 percent marked posture, 28.1 percent opted for touch and 85.1 percent checked the box indicating voice. Some respondents added more comments in the “other” box. These responses included proxemics, empathy and patience, the ability to ask questions, as well as attentiveness and sincerity.



*Figure 3. Listening Characteristics of Leaders*

The last statement focused on feedback. Feedback in listening and leadership settings included 94.7 percent of the respondents indicated it is necessary, 3.3 percent suggested feedback is necessary only in leadership settings and 1.7 percent say feedback is never necessary.

### Discussion

The survey conducted in this study sought to connect the role listening has within leadership and also to recognize how leadership influences one's listening. The intent was to balance responses from education and business; however more business employees than educators responded. A large number of students who are studying these very topics also responded.

One question was asked about how much time in a day is spent listening and given the responses it was a bit surprising at the larger number ranking for 50 to 75 percent of the time on the phone. Responses indicated that 44 percent spend 50 percent of their day listening and 37.4 percent spend 75 percent of their day listening. Comments later offered during the survey reflected that business individuals indicated they spend their entire day on the phone. What proved interesting was how large the response was regarding verbal and nonverbal being a part of a listening response—84.6 percent responded that a listening response needs both verbal and nonverbal. This begs the question, if one spends his/her time on the phone, how does one know if they received a nonverbal response? It must be specifically through one's tone of voice, *how* something is said, which is considered a nonverbal response.

A large number of respondents indicated that vocal tone and inflection was important in the listening setting. Perhaps this too reflects the amount of respondents who spend their day on the phone for their profession. However, a person's voice, according to Brownell, (2010) "accounts for up to a third of the meaning assigned a given message" (p. 189). Voice can be influenced by its volume, pitch, resonance and rate. The volume of voice reflects confidence, and a listener who can detect one's pitch and resonance may have a greater awareness of the emotions connected to the speaker, as vocal cords tighten when anxious and "pitch automatically becomes higher" (Brownell, p. 191) and the resonating cavities reflect this change. A speaker's rate can also indicate stress or enthusiasm. This combination of nonverbal and verbal elements corresponds with the components of the social penetration theory. Taylor and Altman (1987) recognize their theory incorporates not only verbal exchanges, but also nonverbal behaviors (p. 259).

Eye contact is important in the listening setting, according to 80 percent of the respondents; however, 16 percent definitely disagreed. Since no record of ethnicity was asked, this could represent the cultural diversity regarding eye contact. In North America, looking someone in the eye is acceptable and considered honest; however in “other cultures it is considered an invasion of privacy” (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 5).

Facial expressions are important in nonverbal communication, and so too is body movement and gestures. These actions reflect the relationship between two people (Stewart, 2009, p. 155). It is often thought that a forward-leaning posture reflects a more focused approach in the listening environment and when in a dialogue, mirroring others’ personalities reflects the desire to create and build rapport (Stewart, p. 171).

Proximity is part of everyone’s relationships, and the distance between others is easily indicative of the depth of relationships. North Americans typically look at a space of up to 18 inches as intimate, up to four feet as personal, and social distance expands to 12 feet, and a more public space expands further to 25 feet (Stewart, 2009, pp. 152-153). It is important to recognize that these distances differ in each culture.

A challenge for respondents was the question regarding interruptions. Due to survey results that incorporate responses of agreement and disagreement, along with a large number of “unsure” comments, it is possible that this question was poorly written. The respondents did not understand the definition of interruption, and/or indicated a response of *unsure* due to the unknown context or setting. When in a listening setting, the listener can listen completely to ideas without interrupting or can interrupt for clarification and a check of understanding. Perhaps respondents were unsure of the kind of interruptions that can occur in a listening setting. At

times interruptions occur during times of conflict, but at other times, interrupting can cause the conflict, since hearing someone out did not occur.

The concept of trust is important in the listening and leadership contexts. Trust allows the development of relationships, and allows for an opportunity of great risk taking (Brownell, 2010, p. 11). Developing a feeling of trust is then considered essential as well in the social penetration theory as relationships are reciprocated. The social penetration theory advocates that to maintain or continue in a relationship, “rewards are necessary for deeper levels of exchange” and rewards incorporate a “positive exchange of symbolic signs, attitudes and feelings” (Taylor & Altman, 1987, p. 263). Trust is essential in leadership settings, as it boosts productivity and profits, as well as morale (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, p. 254). Steil and Bommelje (2004) posit that listening is essential to build and reinforce trust during good times and challenging times (p. 337). Without trust, people do not disclose to others. Hence the continual reference to trust in respondents comments.

Leadership, according to Kouzes and Posner (2007) is “not about personality, but rather about behavior” (p. 15). Question 17 made the following statement, “I believe leadership is about (check all that apply)—character, behavior, personality, relationships, other.” Respondents too preferred behaviors, as seen above in Table 2, rather than personality. It appeared in this study that responses indicated in Table 2 (trust and integrity, empowering others, building community, sharing of self, clear, confident voice, ability to ask and answer questions, visionary) favored many of the same behaviors advocated by Kouzes and Posners’ “ten commitments of leadership” (p. 26). When viewing the ten attributes of servant-leadership, comparisons continue to be similar. Listening is the first characteristic of servant-leadership, as cited in Russell and Stone

(2002, p. 146) and Kouzes and Posner posit that “the best leaders are great listeners” (p. 119).

Hackman and Johnson, (2009) recognize that good listeners are more effective leaders (p. 389).

The concept of being visionary is integral to leadership. Respondents also suggested this with 96 percent responding strongly agreed or agreed. Being visionary is supported by Borman’s theory of symbolic convergence. This theory promotes there are shared emotions and meanings which lead to action, while creating vision and shared group consciousness (Borman, 1972). The symbolic convergence theory recognizes that leaders can articulate a vision. Kouzes and Posner (2007) suggest that while being visionary, it is important to dream big and feel passionate. A visionary leader combines passion, hope and leadership to focus on the future, no matter the setting (pp. 110-114). Hackman and Johnson (2009) suggest that “communicating a vision may well be the most important act of the transformational leader” (p. 114).

Feedback is important in interactions. Feedback is part of a transformational leader’s communication style as it works with employees, customers, competitors and suppliers (Hackman & Johnson, 2009, P. 114). Offering feedback keeps people making progress toward a specific goal or challenge. Feedback is an asset to motivation (Kouzes & Posner, 2007, p. 288). Brownell (2010) posits that feedback is challenging, yet necessary in a listening setting (p. 23). She suggests that feedback should focus on behavior, be descriptive rather than evaluative, be specific versus general, have the appropriate timing and be offered rather than imposed (pp. 23-24).

Chapter 5 will provide a summary and conclusions that can be drawn from the results of this study as well as the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of this work.



## Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion

Leaders cannot lead without recognizing the importance of communicating and listening. Listening and leadership are related concepts. Great leaders recognize the value of practicing listening, as well as creating opportunities for dialogue to enhance the listening experience. This study showed that listening has an impact on leadership and leadership does indeed influence listening. While the study aimed at looking at leadership within education and business settings, most respondents were from the business sector. This study asked questions about listening and leadership, regarding respondents' opinions of characteristics, perceptions and behaviors of listening and leadership.

One's words and behaviors need to reflect congruency. Carl Rogers indicated that congruency needs to be between words, to demonstrate understanding and action (Craig, 1999). Within leadership a leader can emulate understanding through empathic listening, as well as a response that demonstrates attention, a voice that projects an appropriate tone and nonverbal actions that match the verbal. All these behaviors were highlighted in the survey responses as necessary within a leadership setting. Martin Buber reflected the need to show respect to others through dialogue, and combining one's verbal and nonverbal response can positively validate this perspective, since listening requires both verbal and nonverbal responses. Mutual respect can be developed through trust, and through trust, more dialogue can occur, and ultimately relationships can develop, as demonstrated through the social penetration theory of Altman and Taylor. This survey demonstrates that trust is an important component of nonverbal behaviors. Within a small group setting, Ernest Borman's theory of social convergence recognized listening is essential to develop relationships to aid in the understanding of individuals. Steil and Bommelje (2004) recognize that if one listens to connect to the speaker's purpose, more

congruency and understanding occurs (pp. 140-141). Listening and leadership are intertwined and each is dependent upon the other.

### Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted by initially sending the survey link to four businesses and four educational institutions. The study used the snowball technique. The snowball technique incorporates interconnectedness of people and/or organizations. The results between listening and leadership should not be generalized; since a challenge with a snowball sampling is “the initial contacts may shape the entire sample” (Schutt, 2012, p. 158). Using a larger initial sample for this study could have possibly produced a wider sample. Since no information was recorded regarding the type of leadership role of the participants, conclusions cannot be drawn regarding differences in the roles of leadership or management.

The sampling technique used in the study yielded a higher response rate from students (43.4 percent) and business employees (33.9 percent) and a lower response rate from educators (22.7 percent). It could be concluded that students reflect what is ideal, rather than what is actually occurring in the work place environment. Further studies would benefit by more judiciously targeting survey respondents in the field of education and business, and contrast that with student responses. It may also be advantageous to allow for more response time, as the survey response time overlapped many educational institutions’ spring break, which could have deterred responses from in this category. It may also have negatively affected business leaders’ responses, as well.

It may have been also valuable to gather information from respondents by using a focus group and thereby testing their skills with a tool, such as the Watson-Barker Listening Test

(WBLT). This would however, limit the geographical responses to the survey, but may have provided information regarding respondents' listening skills. The WBLT measures evaluating message content, understanding meaning in conversation, understanding and remembering lecture information, evaluating emotional meanings and the ability to follow instructions or directions (Worthington & Fitch-Hauser, 2012, p. 22). Other tests and instruments for measuring and testing listening have been developed; however these tests often reflect measuring only a particular component, even though listening is defined as a multidimensional skill (Worthington & Fitch-Hauser). Since the WBLT offers a standard testing instrument, it would be the better option (Watson, Barker, Roberts, Bommelje and Roberts, 2011, p. 3). In the study by Johnson and Bechler (1997) perceptions of listening effectiveness and the perceptions of leadership are related; however there is no relationship between these perceptions and the listening skills measured by the WBLT (p. 59).

#### Further Study or Recommendations

The ILA addresses listening ideas and concepts in their research; however challenges in the listening field include the need for more current theoretical research (Janusik, 2010, p. 203). The study of listening is multidimensional; therefore it appears that listening and its research have focused on individual listening differences (Bodie, Worthington, Imhof & Cooper, 2008, p. 109). Bodie et al. posits that scholars seek to do more integration of various models and theories in upcoming research. This builds upon conclusions of Hunt and Cusella (1983). King (2008) suggests listening needs to be more integrated into the process of message reception and encoding, particularly in the cognitive dimension. Craig (1999) also posits that there is a need to see communication theory integrated, rather than just one theory standing alone. Connections as

to the impact listening has on the leadership role can be made by understanding the various components of the listening process.

### Conclusions

Although the concepts of listening and leadership are related, this study did find that respondents feel that listening behaviors impact and influence leadership, and the characteristics of listening impact a leader's behavior. This study did not separate out each characteristic of listening; that information will be used in another time and place. A leader needs to connect, and that connection requires listening. When listening, a leader must recognize the importance of eye contact, voice and posture, along with gestures and touch. Depending on the listening setting and context, facial expressions and proximity are also important to consider.

Leaders should be able to demonstrate various behaviors that emulate leadership. These behaviors were listed in Table 2. Leadership is not however just about behaviors, but also encompasses relationships with others, along with one's personality and character. These traits are reflective in the behaviors seen in leaders. As Kouzes and Posner (2007) state, "leadership is an affair of the heart" (p. 351), serving others, while listening.

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## Appendix A

### Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study being conducted by Kae Van Engen as a part of her thesis for a Master's degree in Communication and Leadership at Gonzaga University. This research study is examining the impact that listening has within a leadership setting. Please complete the survey found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/9F5SVVP>

The survey will ask demographical questions and questions regarding your thoughts on listening and leadership. Please complete the survey to the best of your ability by selecting the most appropriate answer.

Your involvement in this research study is voluntary and you are not required to answer any questions. There are no risks or benefits associated with participating in this study. You will be asked to provide some personal demographic information to the researcher. You will also be asked to provide information regarding your personal work experience, communication skills and leadership skills. All survey participants' information will be kept confidential and anonymous. There will be no names or identifying information attached to your responses.

By agreeing to complete the survey, you confirm you have read and understood the information presented in this consent form, including the fact that participation is voluntary. There are no financial costs to any participants who complete this survey.

Thank you!

*Kae Van Engen*

## Appendix B

### Listening and Leadership Survey

Thank you for accepting this invitation to participate in a brief, yet significant research study. I want to remind all of you that your answers are ANONYMOUS. Your participation is voluntary; you can stop participating at any time. You must be 18 years old or older to complete this survey.

This survey should take less than 10 minutes to complete. If you have questions about the survey, please contact Kae Van Engen at [evanengen@zagmail.gonzaga.edu](mailto:evanengen@zagmail.gonzaga.edu)

### Demographics

Please provide the following demographic information about yourself:

1. What identifies your current status?
  - Part time student
  - Full time student
  - Part time educator
  - Full time educator
  - Part time business employee
  - Full time business employee
  
2. Are you male or female?
  - Male
  - Female
  
3. What category below includes your ages?
  - 18-20
  - 21-29
  - 30-39
  - 40-49
  - 50-59
  - 60 and older
  
4. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
  - High school degree or equivalent (e.g. GED)
  - Some college but no degree
  - Associate degree
  - Bachelor degree
  - Graduate degree
  - Doctorate degree

5. Are you currently in a leadership position?

Yes

No

## Listening

On this page, please express your opinions about listening characteristics, perceptions or behaviors.

6. Do you believe listening is an important communication skill?

Yes

No

7. On average how much time of your day is spent listening?

25%

50%

75%

100%

8. A listening response should include a verbal and nonverbal response to demonstrate interest.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Agree

Strongly agree

9. A listener should demonstrate a behavior of trust through their nonverbal mannerisms.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Agree

Strongly agree

10. A listener should ask clarifying questions.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Unsure

Agree

Strongly agree



11. Listening includes a feedback response (saying “uh-huh” and “yeah”) to signal understanding.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
12. A listener should maintain a body position that indicates “focusing” on the conversation.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
13. A listener does not interrupt.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
14. A listener will maintain eye contact.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
15. A listener incorporates hand gestures.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
16. What do you believe to be the most important in a listening setting? (Check all that apply)
- Vocal tone and inflection
  - Facial expressions

- Body gestures
- Proxemics (personal space)
- Other (please specify)

## Leadership

On this page, please express your opinions on leadership characteristics, perceptions and behaviors.

17. I believe leadership is about (check all that apply)

- Character
- Behavior
- Personality
- Relationships
- Other (please specify)

18. A quality of a leader should include behaviors that demonstrate his/her trust and integrity

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure
- Agree
- Strongly agree

19. A quality of a leader should include the ability to empower others (allow others to be able to take authority).

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure
- Agree
- Strongly agree

20. A quality of a leader should include the ability to building community of the organization.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Unsure
- Agree
- Strongly agree

21. A quality of a leader should include the sharing of oneself (being able to connect to others).
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
22. A quality of a leader should include a clear and confident voice.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
23. A quality of a leader is the ability to ask questions and to answer questions.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
24. A leader elaborates on topics being discussed instead of answering with short statements like “yes” or “no”.
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
25. A leader should demonstrate a visionary perspective in his/her organization (Visionary is defined as “the ability to imagine the possibilities”).
- Strongly disagree
  - Disagree
  - Unsure
  - Agree
  - Strongly agree
26. What characteristics of listening impact a person’s leadership? (check all that apply)
- Eye contact

- Gestures
- Posture
- Touch
- Voice
- Other (please specify)

27. Feedback is necessary in
- A listening setting
  - A leadership setting
  - Both settings
  - Neither settings

Thank you for your participation!

Feel free to forward to others in your listening and leadership circles.