

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

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

for organizational research and managerial practice concerning workforce sustainability are discussed.

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

Introduction

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

Previous literature suggested listening as an important behavior that signals managerial openness (Ashford et al. 1998) and motivates employees to speak up (Milliken et al. 2003). It encourages productive two-way communication (Bass and Riggio 2006; Dutton et al. 1997) and elicits speaker self-disclosure (Miller et al. 1983). The listening process may also have important relational implications. Attentive listeners foster an atmosphere of safety to speak openly, create intimacy, and elicit positive perceptions of the listener (Beukeboom 2009; Edmondson and Moingeon

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1999). For instance, this affects perceptions of consideration and respect (Bass and Riggio 2006), justice (Blader and Tyler 2003), as well as trust and liking of the listener (Collins and Miller 1994; Lloyd et al., in press). Additionally, psychological benefits have been claimed for listening with empathy, acceptance, and non-judgemental attitude (Rogers 1951, 1957, 1975) on (psychological) well-being (Reis et al. 2000; Lloyd et al., in press; Lun et al. 2008) and personal development (Pasupathi and Hoyt 2009). However, whether these positive effects of listening are applicable to employee–supervisor relations and how supervisor listening affects important organizational work outcomes has rarely been empirically investigated (for some exceptions see Ellinger et al. 2003; Kluger and Zaidel 2013; Mineyama et al. 2007; Stine et al. 1995).

The purpose of this paper is to address this theoretical and empirical gap by showing that employee perceptions of supervisor listening are important for three different important outcomes: one proximal (emotional exhaustion) and two more distal (organizational citizenship behavior and turnover intention). More importantly, we additionally address the question of *how* employee perceptions of supervisor listening affects these outcomes and suggest positive and negative affect as two distinctive mediating mechanisms.

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

Contributing to mutual exchange of information, fruitful interactions, and strong relationships, effective listening may create a positive interpersonal work experience that reflects positively on the organization and translates into more positive work outcomes. However, establishing trusting relationships with employees that influence employee attitudes and work behavior are long-term processes. Given the importance of work outcomes such as citizenship

behavior, voluntary turnover, and employee well-being for overall organizational functioning, it is essential to understand how supervisor listening unfurls its effects.

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

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

Affect and Perceived Listening

In this paper, *affect* is conceptualized as a generic term that encompasses both emotion and mood (Brief and Weiss 2002) and refers to a short-term *state* with negative and positive affect representing distinct and independent

domains of emotions (Watson and Clark 1997; Watson et al. 1988; for more general frameworks of two-dimensional affect theory, e.g., valence and activation, see Russell and Barrett 1999). Negative affect describes a state of subjective distress which subsumes a variety of aversive mood states such as feeling upset, guilty, and jittery (Watson and Clark 1984; Watson et al. 1988). Positive affect, in contrast, includes positive emotional states such as interested, proud, and determined (for an extensive list see Watson et al. 1988).

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

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

Not being listened to is an unpleasant experience which can be frustrating and distressing, and lead to negative perceptions of the source of listening. Social psychological evidence suggests that states of negative affectivity (e.g.,

anger or frustration, Robinson and Bennett 1997), induced by unpleasant stimuli (e.g., pain or insults) influence aggression (Berkowitz 1998). In the workplace, negative affect (e.g., elicited by insults) has been related to norm-nonconformity and deviant behavior including aggressive behavior toward clients, coworkers, and the organization (e.g., Robinson and Bennett 1995, 1997). Employee perceptions of not being listened to may constitute a similarly unpleasant stimulus that induces (short-term) negative affect. Occurring repeatedly, this may have long-term negative effects on employees and work outcomes.

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

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

Study 1

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

Emotional Exhaustion and Listening

The frustrating or distressing nature of not being listened suggests that emotional exhaustion is a proximal outcome

of the perception that the supervisor is a poor listener. *Emotional exhaustion* refers to the extent that individuals feel emotionally overextended and “drained” by their work, often caused by long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding (Maslach 1982; Maslach and Jackson 1986; Wright and Cropanzano 1998; Zohar 1997). Cordes and Dougherty (1993) describe this experience as “a lack of energy and a feeling that one’s emotional resources are used up” (p. 623). The consequences of emotionally overworked employees can be costly for the individual and the organization, including, for instance, lower job performance and lower organizational commitment (Cropanzano et al. 2003; Grandey et al. 2004; Wright and Cropanzano 1998).

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

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

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

Organizational Citizenship Behavior and Listening

Listening effects, although primarily at the interpersonal level between employees and supervisors, might also extend beyond that and affect employee behavior toward coworkers and the organization (i.e., employee citizenship behaviors, OCB). OCB refers to “individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system and that in the aggregate promotes

the effective functioning of the organization” (Organ 1988, p. 4). The distinctive aspects to this construct are that these behaviors are not critical to the task or job but exceed core obligations and are performed as a result of personal choice and proactive initiative (Katz 1964; Smith et al. 1983). They can be directed toward the individual (OCB-I) or the organization (OCB-O) and include, for instance, helping coworkers or offering ideas to improve the functioning of the organization (Smith et al. 1983; Williams and Anderson 1991). Clearly, these are behaviors that are beneficial for organizations. Researchers have demonstrated that OCB is positively related to organizational success, including sales performance (Podsakoff and MacKenzie 1994), product quality (Podsakoff et al. 1997), operating efficiency and performance quality (Yen and Niehoff 2004), and overall profits (Koys 2001).

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

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

Listening and Turnover Intentions

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

Previous research has found that supervisor behaviors can influence turnover intention (e.g., Allen et al. 2010; Aquino et al. 1997; Griffeth et al. 2000). Perceived supervisor listening is likely to play a particularly important role concerning voluntary turnover decisions because strong relationships between supervisors and employees are key drivers of voluntary turnover (Allen et al. 2010). For instance, by fostering open communication, listening enables early detection of dissatisfaction and facilitates early

resolution of problems. Effective listeners may also be perceived as more caring and supportive and may establish stronger relationships with employees. Interactions of this kind create a positive experience, which—in turn—may influence employee attitudes toward their supervisor and the work place. In fact, Kluger (2013) presented meta-analytical findings which suggest that supervisor listening is positively related to employee satisfaction. In contrast, employees who continuously experience bad listeners may develop a negative attitude toward their supervisor and the organization. As a result, this negative experience may motivate employees to seek a different work environment. Similarly, a lack of positive experience may also reduce the incentive of staying at their job when employees have the opportunity to leave the organization in pursuit of a potentially more fulfilling position. Therefore:

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

Method

Participants and Procedure

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

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

Our main independent variable was employees' assessment of their supervisor's listening. However, employee perceptions may not necessarily be consistent with the

actual supervisor behavior. Hence, supervisor self-ratings provided an additional and complementary measure.

Measures

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

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

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

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

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

Organizational Citizenship Behavior We assessed organizational citizenship behavior directed toward the

Table 1 Zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics of the study variables^a

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5
1. Listening (supervisor self-rating) ^b	4.15	.35	(.94)				
2. Listening (employee rating) ^a	3.87	.58	–	(.96)			
3. Emotional exhaustion	2.38	.81	–	–.35*	(.85)		
4. Turnover intentions	1.51	.77	–	–.66**	.38*	(.91)	
5. OCB-O	4.14	.40	–	.34*	–.32*	–.56**	(.63)

Values in brackets represent Cronbach's α

* $p < .05$, two-tailed, ** $p < .01$, two-tailed

^a $n = 43$ (employees); ^b $n = 18$ (supervisors)

organization (OCB-O) using six items from Lee et al. (2002). Sample items were “Defend the organization when other employees criticize it” and “Offer ideas to improve the functioning of the organization.” Cronbach's alpha for this measure was marginally acceptable, .63 (Lance et al. 2006).

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

Results and Discussion

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

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

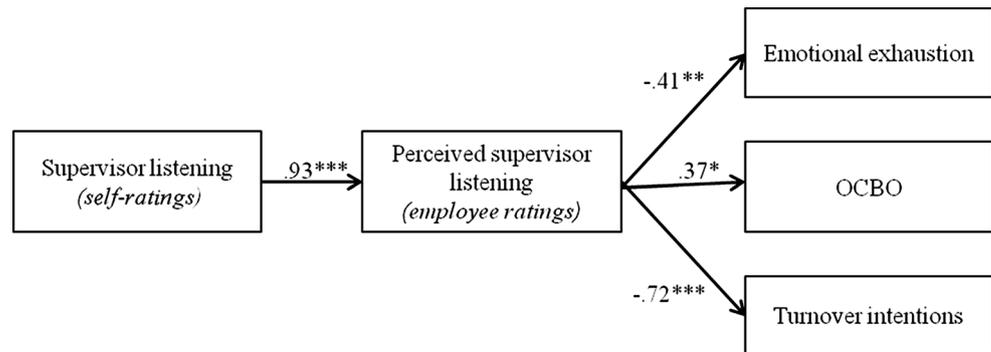
analyzing both employee perceptions of supervisor listening and the outcome variables on the individual level, while accounting for workgroup membership.

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

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

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

n (employees) = 43;
 n (supervisors) = 18; m (team size) = 2.39 employees;
 covariances between the outcome variables were included in the two-level path modeling analysis; standardized coefficients reported;
 *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$;
 * $p < .05$, two-tailed



that foremost employees' perceived supervisor listening has an influence on all three work outcomes.

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

Study 2

For Study 2, we increased the sample size and sought to generalize the findings to a wider range of professions than covered in Study 1. We expect the main effect of perceived supervisor listening to parallel the effects found in Study 1 in predicting employee citizenship behavior, turnover intention, and emotional exhaustion ($H1$ to $H3$). More importantly, we examine the specific mediating mechanisms associated with positive and negative affect. As discussed earlier, PA and NA are independent constructs, and thus, they may play different mediating roles. As found in Study 1, employees' perceptions that supervisors are poor listeners were associated with employees' emotional exhaustion. One primary reason might be that the perception that one is not being listened to is emotionally distressing and hence elicits negative affect. Constantly occurring, these emotionally distressing situations might transfer into long-term negative effects on emotional well-being. Similarly, research on supervisor support showed strong links of supervisor behavior on emotional exhaustion and physiological stress reactions (Mineyama et al. 2007). We propose that perceived supervisor listening

elicits a strong negative affective reaction—which if experienced repeatedly—can translate into emotional exhaustion. Specifically, we predict that the perception of poor supervisor listening elicits negative affect and this in turn facilitated emotional exhaustion. We do not, however, predict a similar mediating effect of positive affect, as employees can have a lack of positive affect without feeling emotionally exhausted. Therefore:

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

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

routine in-role performance (Dalal et al. 2009; Spector and Fox 2002). This link between positive affect and positive work behavior has received support from organizational research findings between positive affect and employee initiative (Den Hartog and Belschak 2007; Fritz and Sonnentag 2009), proactive behavior (Tsai et al. 2007), and citizenship behaviors (Dalal et al. 2009). We therefore predict that the link between perceived supervisor listening and OCB-O is mediated by positive affect. In addition, since research indicates that organizational citizenship behavior is distinctively driven by positive affect, we do not expect negative affect (related to the absence of effective listening) to be related to positive behavior since they lack the necessary impetus for positive action (for a more extensive review see Warr et al. 2014). In sum, effective listeners, perceived as caring and respectful, may constitute a positive affective experience for the employee which, in turn, plays out on employee citizenship behavior and motivates employees to ‘walk the extra mile’ for the organization. Therefore:

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

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

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

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

Method

Participants and Procedure

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

Measures

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

Fig. 2 Latent path model of listening effects. $N = 328$; SEM analysis accounted for covariation among outcome variables; standardized coefficients reported, controlling for a common method factor. *** $p < .001$

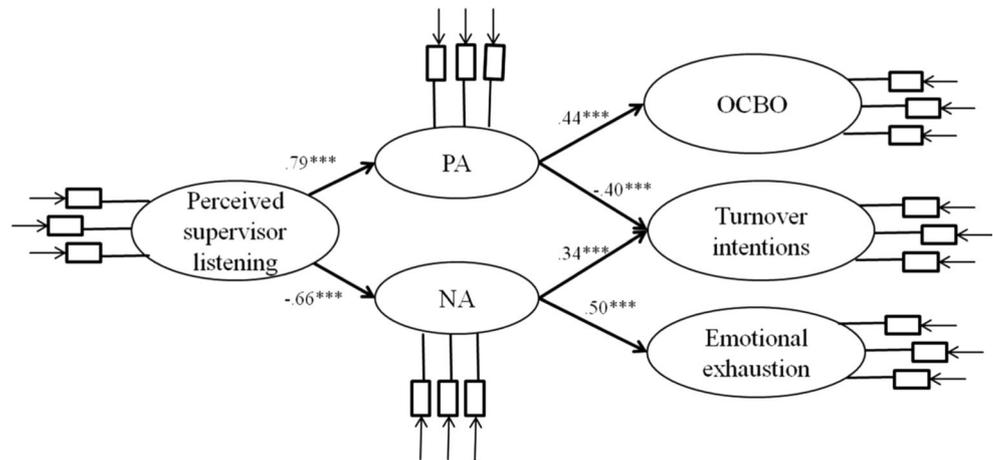


Table 2 Zero-order correlations of the study variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Perceived supervisor listening	4.48	1.72	(.95)					
2. Emotional exhaustion	3.79	1.74	-.38**	(.92)				
3. Turnover intentions	3.31	2.21	-.53**	.46**	(.82)			
4. OCB-O	5.04	1.28	.31**	-.20**	-.30**	(.82)		
5. PA	4.27	1.20	.70**	-.32**	-.53**	.37**	(.93)	
6. NA	2.79	1.39	-.62**	.54**	.54**	-.21**	-.51**	(.93)

$N = 328$; values in brackets represent Cronbach's α
** $p < .01$, two-tailed

Analytical Strategy

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

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

Results and Discussion

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

Perceived supervisor listening was linearly correlated to all variables. We used confirmatory factor analysis to determine the distinctiveness of all outcome measures. The five-factor model revealed a moderate overall fit (chi square ($df = 485$) = 1335.41, $p < .01$), the standardized root mean square of the residuals (SRMR) was .065, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) .07, the non-normed fit index—Tucker-Lewis index (TLI)¹—was .88, and the comparative fit index (CFI) was .89. In comparison, the baseline model in which all items loaded on one factor did not reveal satisfactory fit, chi square ($df = 495$) = 4,331.09, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .154; SRMR = .125; TLI = .47; CFI = .51, and differed significantly from the five-factor model (Δ chi square = 2,995.68, $\Delta df = 9$, $p < .001$). Taken together, the results indicate discriminant validity of the study variables.

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

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

¹ The values of the CFI and TLI are below the conventionally accepted value of .90 (Vandenberg and Lance 2000). However, this is acceptable since all constructs and no distinctive paths (e.g., differentiated indirect effects) had been included in the model.

CFI = .90). As indicated by the standardized coefficients (Fig. 2), perceived supervisor listening was positively associated with PA ($\beta = .79$, $p < .001$) and negatively with NA ($\beta = -.66$, $p < .001$).

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

Next, we examined the potential for mediation in detail running a bootstrap indirect effects analysis (Preacher and Hayes 2008; Preacher et al. 2007) with PA and NA. Mediation is based on a point estimate and bootstrapped 99 % confidence interval (CI based on 1,500 bootstrap iterations). A mediator effect is significant if zero is not included in the CI. PA mediated the link between perceived supervisor listening and OCB-O (*point estimate* = .19, CI = .08/.29) and turnover intentions (*point estimate* = -.30, CI = -.44/-.16). As already indicated by the SEM results, PA did not mediate the link to emotional exhaustion (*point estimate* = -.04, CI = -.14/.06). Concerning NA, the analysis revealed that NA mediated the link between perceived supervisor listening and emotional exhaustion (*point estimate* = -.32, CI = -.42/-.21) as well as turnover intentions (*point estimate* = -.30, CI = -.42/-.17). As predicted, NA did not mediate the link to OCB-O (*point estimate* = .01, CI = -.07/.09). In sum, Hypotheses 4–6 were all supported.

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

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

All relationships were significant and of similar if not the same magnitude, which indicated that the data were not influenced by common method variance. Average loading of all standardized estimates with CMF was -.76. Taken together, the results provide further evidence for our

Table 3 Standardized parameter estimates with and without controlling for common method variance

	Not controlling for CMF	Controlling for CMF
<i>Description</i>		
Listening → PA	.78***	.79***
Listening → NA	-.68***	-.66***
PA → Emotional exhaustion	-.08	-.01
PA → OCB-O	.42***	.44***
PA → Turnover	-.40***	-.40***
NA → Emotional exhaustion	.51***	.50***
NA → OCB-O	.01	.01
NA → Turnover	.35***	.34***

$N = 328$; standardized coefficients reported

CMF common method factor

*** $p < .001$

hypothesized model of listening effects. Replicating Study 1 findings, employees who perceived their supervisors as effective listeners also demonstrated higher levels of citizenship behavior, lower turnover intentions, and less emotional exhaustion. Additionally, we revealed first evidence for affect as a mediating mechanism. Perceived supervisor listening was associated with employee positive and negative affectivity. PA and NA appeared to operate in distinctive ways that go beyond a simple mirroring of the two dimensions. High PA had an energizing effect on employees that was related to increased levels of citizenship behavior. High NA was related to increased emotional exhaustion and explained the relationship between perceived supervisor listening and emotional exhaustion. Voluntary turnover was related to both low PA and high NA. This was in line with theoretical considerations that employees may be motivated to quit their job in order to leave behind the negative work environment or because they want to find an optimally positive one.

General Discussion

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

while we found that perceived supervisor listening triggered both positive and negative emotions, each of the emotions was associated with different outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

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

Foremost, we revealed two mechanisms that explain how supervisor listening affects proximal and distal outcomes in distinctive ways. Our results suggest that employees' emotional reactions serve a complex and nuanced role. Negative affect mediated the listening effects on emotional exhaustion, while positive affect mediated the effects on organizational citizenship behavior, and both positive and negative affect explained the relationship to turnover intentions. Therefore, positive and negative affect provide distinct mechanisms in explaining why perceived supervisor listening is important within organizations. These findings on the distinctive role of positive and negative affect in driving specific work outcomes are in line with previous research that indicated work behavior as reactions to affective experiences at work (e.g., Dalal et al. 2009; Tsai et al. 2007; Warr et al. 2014). This is the first study that introduced an affect paradigm (Weiss and Cropanzano 1996; Spector and Fox 2002) to explain listening

effects at work. It advances not only the current research on listening but also the field of organizational behavior in its search for understanding employee behavior.

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

Limitations and Future Research

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

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

An important avenue for future research is the investigation of determinants or moderating factors of effective listening. For instance, the research by Ames et al. (2012) suggested a link between (leader) personality and listening behavior. Their research indicated that highly "agreeable" individuals who tend to be more cooperative, empathic, and concerned (Graziano et al. 2007) may also be better listeners. Employees may feel more comfortable approaching those supervisors and speak openly (Detert

and Burris 2007). In sum, effects may evolve in the complex interplay of individual characteristics (e.g., personality dimensions) and much work remains to understand what distinguishes good listener.

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

Managerial Implications

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

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

anxiety, both the employees' overall well-being and the employees' contribution to the organization may improve.

Conclusion

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

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Appendix

Measure of Supervisor Listening (Supervisor Self-rating)

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

Think of a typical interaction with your employees. Generally, when I listen to my employee, ...

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

Measure of Perceived Supervisor Listening (Employee Rating)²

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

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

² In Study 2, the response format ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

1. is interested in what I have to say.
2. makes me comfortable so I can speak openly.
3. makes it easy for me to open up.
4. understands my feelings.
5. is interested in me personally.
6. accepts me for what I am.
7. cares about me.
8. doesn't judge me.

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