Mindful Dyadic Communication: Countering the Impact of Internal Dialogue on Listening Efficacy within an Organization

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in communication technology has created an information firestorm resulting in sensory overload. As a consequence, interpersonal interactions has become mechanical and disengaged as our minds attempt to process the influx of incoming data. This is recognizable by the swell of our internal dialogue. The effect of this over-stimulation is a decrease in listening efficacy and an increase in mindless exchanges which in some cases has resulted in loss of life. There has been much learned through the research on listening efficacy and mindfulness. In this study, internal dialogue is the communication variable that disrupts our ability to listen effectively and draws us away from being mindfully present. Two traditional interpersonal communication theories was used to frame this study – George Herbert Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Pearce & Cronen’s Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). Also, in an effort to explore this topic holistically a mixed method research approached was used – Likert-type scale survey within an organization, a focus group session with a Dharma Center meditation group, and a close review of research on organizational listening. This tri-fold research approach unearthed an interesting paradigm where what was believed to be true by the survey group was called into question by the focus group findings and research review. The discovery underscored the misperception of stakeholders’ ability to effectively listen. This lack of mindfulness of one’s internal dialogue severed awareness with the present. Martin Buber believed dialogic communication “involves remaining in the tension between holding our own perspective while being profoundly open to the other” (Griffin, 2012, p. 79) – achieved through mindful presence. The study assertion is internal dialogue impacts listening efficacy in interpersonal communication resulting in an adverse impact on organizations.

Keywords: communication, listening, mindful, organizations
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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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

As advancements in communication technology accelerates to hyper-speed, organizational members, family members, and each of us individually are struggling with balancing the pace of technology with the organic pace of day-to-day life. Communication applications (apps) such as text messages, tweets, and snapchats are widening the divide and creating distractions that are concerning on most levels and even dangerous on other levels. Communication apps, much like our own internal dialogue, are diversionary and evoke mindlessness. Just like the interference of a tweet, our internal dialogue proves to also cause a disconnect from the present by drawing us away from the moment-to-moment movement of life.

This study seeks to better understand internal dialogue as it relates to listening efficacy at the interpersonal level within an organizational environment.

The elements of inner speech are found in all our conscious perceptions, actions, and emotional experiences, where they manifest themselves as verbal sets, instructions to oneself, or as verbal interpretations of sensations and perceptions. This renders inner speech a rather important and universal mechanism in human consciousness and psychic activity (as cited by Alain Morin, 1995, p. 46).

Listening as Haroutunian-Gordon (2011) describes it as the “passive reception of information” (p. 119). To foster a receptive listening environment, one must listen in the right way for the “purpose of understanding another” (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011, p. 119).

Burgoon and co-authors investigation on the relationship between mindful processing and effective communication identified increased efficacy in relaying information (as cited by Langer & Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 138). “Mindful communication is, to a large extent, about
mindful listening: listening that is unencumbered by preexisting categories that constrain the attention of the listener to a pre-specified set of characteristics of the other” (Langer & Moldoveanu, 2011, p. 138).

Does internal dialogue then create a barrier to listening effectively when on a mindful plane? This study also pursues a higher level of understanding of the interplay between internal dialogue and mindfulness in relation to organizational listening efficacy.

The Importance of the Study

Our increasing mindless exchanges in day-to-day life are moving into the realm of social concern. Sensory overload is driving our interactions to be mechanical and disengaged. “Mindlessness can show up as the direct cause of human error in complex situations, of prejudice and stereotyping, and of the sensation of alternating between anxiety and boredom that characterizes many lives” (Langer and Moldoveanu, 2000, p. 6).

How then does an individual who mindlessly disconnects impact an organization? Fast moving technology impacts our internal dialogue by overloading our minds with processing incoming messages which impacts our ability to listen effectively resulting in mindlessness. “Mindlessness in organizations is seen in low competency ratings, increased accidents, reduced levels of creativity and memory, and increased health issues and stress levels” (Langer, 2000, p. 220).

Much like training our bodies to run a marathon, our minds can also be trained to recognize mindlessness through meditation. Meditation is an exercise for the mind which allows you to focus your thoughts and align yourself with the present. Individuals that meditate have identified the challenge to keep the mind center in the current moment. They also acknowledge
the consequence of not meditating (not exercising the mind) – they become relaxed and the mind starts to wander. As the mind wanders, awareness of the now is lost and we are no longer present. The mental drifting is a significant distraction from the immediacy of the moment and impacts our ability to be attentive and listen effectively. Langer & Moldoveanu (2000, p. 6) emphasized that even “surgeons and pilots are not immune from mindless lapses in their critical roles”.

Krieger (2005) goes beyond mindfulness at the individual level and provides an analysis of shared mindfulness within an airplane cockpit crisis simulation. Shared mindfulness is “a state achieved conjointly, whereby, in the communicative interaction, the individuals involved are in an active state of attending, responding, and perceiving information correctly. As a result, they are continually updating, attuned and open to incoming data…” (p. 138).

The study establishes a difference between information processing at the interactive level of shared mindfulness (interpersonal communication) with information processing at the individual level of mindfulness (intrapersonal communication). The results in Krieger’s study reported that dyads that were most effective demonstrated more shared mindfulness behaviors. One of the critical characteristics identified was “positive reasoning perspective” (Krieger, 2005, p. 142).

Krieger’s study extends the importance and possibilities of mindfulness beyond an individual level to an organizational level. The concept of shared mindfulness within an organizational environment has consequential significance for company stakeholders.
Statement of the Problem

The problem faced by individuals and organizations today is listening efficacy. And, to compound the problem, individuals within organizations perceive their listening efficacy higher than research results indicate. Distractions from our fast-pace lives draws our attention away from focusing on the current moment. The consequence is two-fold. First, the influx of information floods our mind causing our internal dialogue to increase as we try to process all the incoming messages. Second, the mindless churning of data pulls us away from the present and inhibits our ability to effectively listen when our thoughts are on the before and the after, and not attending to the now.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter two that follows is a review of relevant literature. Starting with the foundational theory of the study grounded by George Herbert Mead’s Symbolic Interactionism (SI) and Pearce & Cronen’s Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM). Three philosophical perspectives are also discussed: philosophy of dialogue, philosophy of listening, and philosophy of mindfulness. Organizational structures, systems, effectiveness, and organizational attentiveness through effective listening round out the chapter review of literature. Chapter three outlines the boundaries and research strategy through the scope and methodology. Chapter four offers an extended introduction to the study and the results of the mixed method research approach. Chapter five notes the study limitations, looks ahead to future research opportunities, and concludes with final reflections on the study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored the listening competency of individuals engaged in a dyadic (face-to-face) communication event within an organization. The investigation focused on the impact internal dialogue had on participant’s ability to actively and effectively listen. Do internal thoughts, intra-communication, distract stakeholders from listening with purpose? What makes a person a good listener? How does mindfulness create a fertile environment for attentiveness? What can stakeholders and organizations learn from the creation of an attending communication environment? Finally, how can one be more attending, attentive, and attuned when listening to others?

The conceptual framework for the study was constructed around scholarly literature of communication theory, organizational communication, intrapersonal communication, listening, and mindfulness.

The first section of this chapter opens with three philosophical perspectives: 1) Philosophy of dialogue, 2) Philosophy of listening, and 3) Philosophy of mindfulness. To create a setting for listening, all stakeholders must free themselves of mindless chatter. Grounding oneself to the present creates an environment for active listening.

Philosophical Perspective

Philosophy of Dialogue

Martin Buber believes dialogic communication “involves remaining in the tension between holding our own perspective while being profoundly open to the other” (Griffin, 2012, p. 79). This openness creates fertile space for listening without judgement which is a level of fervent attentiveness that requires being present. From Buber’s perspective, “the term dialogue
refers to a unique kind of immediacy and connection of two beings that have no conscious intent of influencing the other” (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011, p.207).

Martin Buber’s communication concept was contrasted by two relationship types, the *I-It* versus the *I-Thou*. The *I-It* relationship objectifies through a generalization of terms as he, she, etc. “The *I-It* relation is driven by categories of ‘same’ and ‘different’ and focuses on universal definition. [Conversely], the *I-Thou* relation is the pure encounter of one whole unique entity with another in such a way that the other is known without being subsumed under a universal”-dialogical relation (as cited by Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011, p. 207).

Finally, from Buber’s perspective, *I-You* interaction is a “genuine conversation, and therefore every actual fulfillment and relation between men, means acceptance of otherness...” (as cited by Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011, p. 207). This open receptivity to another without purpose or expectation creates an environment for sincere and honest conversation. “Cultivation of this fertile space through deep listening is a necessary action for the emergence of dialogue” (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011, p.207). Buber’s philosophy of dialogue in the *I-You* relationship is enabled through active listening which cultivates an openness to connect with others. “Genuine listening requires that we pay close attention to the other’s words and meaning rather than, as so often happens, thinking about and planning our own response while the other is still speaking” (Haroutunian-Gordon, 2011, p.217).

**Philosophy of Listening**

Haroutunian-Gordon & Laverty (2011) explore the philosophy of listening. The state of receptivity is the precursor to listening. One must prepare to listen by centering their attention on the present moment – void of distractive thoughts. “Attentiveness is a discipline that the self
engages in for the express purpose of *seeing* reality or the other” (Haroutunian-Gordon & Laverty, 2011, p. 118).

Through Plato’s dialogue, the *Symposium*, Haroutunian-Gordon hypothesizes the following: 1) the aim is to listen with the objective to answer the question, 2) Listening calls for interpretation of what one hears and understanding the meaning, 3) The listener takes responsibility for the act of listening and responding, 4) Finally, “the role of the speaker is to prepare the listener to listen....and the role of the speaker is to show the speaker what needs to be said in order for the listener to attend” (Haroutunian -Gordon & Laverty, 2011, p.120).

“Listening is the counterpart of speaking in a dialogue, and it is no less important. Indeed, learning from the dialogue is less likely to occur as people participate – and sometimes it did not – unless listening as well as speaking takes place” (Haroutunian -Gordon, 2011, p.125).

**Philosophy of Mindfulness**

“*Mindlessness* is marked by a rigid use of information during which the individual is not aware of its potentially novel aspects” (Langer & Piper, 1987, p. 280). From the perspective of Kabat-Zinn (1994), mindlessness stems from the diminished awareness of the present moment through an individual’s unconscious and automatic actions and behaviors. Mindfulness though, centers us within the current moment which can be discovered through meditation. Mindfulness through daily meditative practice is a foundational premise of Buddhism.

Buddhist philosophy and ethics grounds the concept of mindfulness. Harvey (2012) shares distinctions of Buddhism; one of which is moral virtue. Virtue frees an individual from regret and paves a path to meditative calm, insight, and liberation – defined as enlightenment. Meditation allows for a pause in daily life for introspection. From this place of contemplation, there can be a
“deep calming down, a stilling and a transformative waking up” (Harvey, 2012, p. 318). Mindfulness brings about awareness while meditative practice tethers us to the present – all of which drives discipline and control over drifting thoughts – reducing the opportunity for mindlessness to return. Kabat-Zinn (1994) notes that Buddhism, along with other people and practices, have great reverence for the present and the daily devotion to be conscious and mindful. Mindfulness is philosophically grounded as well as theoretically positioned within the framework of communication.

Theory, a proposed belief or supposition, provides academic structure for mining. The theoretical scaffolding that provides the footholds for this study follows.

**Theoretical Foundation**

The two traditional interpersonal communication theories used to frame this study are George Herbert Mead’s symbolic interactionism (SI) and Pearce & Cronen’s coordinated management of meaning (CMM). Classical communication theorists’ concentration was on the “relational process of creating and interpreting messages” (Griffin, 2012, p. 6) which establishes the foundational view of message construction. How messages are structured and interpreted narrows this study to the importance of key communication elements.

**Symbolic Interactionism (SI)**

As cited in Griffin (2012), SI was named by Herbert Blumer after the death of George Herbert Mead who first conceived the theory of SI. SI provides the conversational mechanics for social interaction. Bulmer’s first premise establishes the importance of *meaning* and that meaning is an individual interpretation – the significance of words can differ by individual or group based on the meaning assigned to the word. How meaning is established is Bulmer’s
second premise, *language*. Words breath life by the assignment of meaning through naming and defining the meaning of an object or an action. Meaning is not inherent. Meaning is ascribed through language. The third and final premise is the reflective process of *thinking*. The filtration, distilling, and analysis of language occurs through internal processing of information, which reconciles language and meaning within the context of an individual’s world. SI establishes the iterative interactional process that expresses meaning.

**Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)**

Pearce and Cronen’s coordinated management of meaning (CMM) is an interpretive theory focused on interpersonal communication. Questions that seek to understand who we are and how we shall live. The premise is that communication is interactive and cannot occur alone – communication is co-constructed through an unscripted improvisational interaction. Pearce (2009), identifies the active use of language by the participants as being both the product and the producer of communication patterns. “The theory focuses on a holonic relationship between *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal* rule systems in which rules describes how individuals process information” (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p.128). Our knowledge of reality is then mediated by language – what we know about ourselves and our world manifests through the communication process. Human characteristics then inevitably shape our knowledge of all things.

CMM has also transformed into a practical theory demonstrating strong interactive characteristics. Pearce (2004) defines mindful rules of engagement, in the form of maxims. The interaction is an evolutionary process.

- Be mindful that you are participating in a multi-turn process.
- Be mindful that you are part of a multi-part process.
• Be mindful that the process involves reciprocally responding to and eliciting response from other people.

• Be mindful that this process creates the social world in which we all live.

Communication events, described by Pearce within the maxims, involve progressive responses that create a relational dance. Interactive movement from participating parties uniquely define the collaborative encounter. Interestingly, CMM not only engages artfully, but also rationally by building structure within the communication process.

CMM proposes a logical communication structure based on interpersonal rule systems, which integrates both reason and cause into a single explanatory structure. Communication is inherently flawed though due to the locus of meaning is intrapersonal and the locus of action is interpersonal (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). This offers an interesting dichotomy and a communication complexity during a dyadic exchange. The assignment of meaning is independently established within each individual (intra-personal) while action or a decision to take action is in process (inter-personal).

With consideration given to CMM’s interpersonal rule system, as well as, its mindful assignment of interactional meaning, the importance of silencing one’s internal dialogue when actively listening becomes even more important. Not only is internal dialogue distracting, it can also be weighing importance, making a judgment, or determining significance. This is all based on the listener’s assignment of meaning. This underscores the importance of this study on the affect internal dialogue has on a listener’s ability to effectively listen.
Mechanics of Communication

The Shannon-Weaver’s model of communication maps the process of communication which depicts information flow from a sender to a receiver with transmission variables: communication channel, transmission, reception, noise, and feedback loop. Each element and stage of the message broadcast is vulnerable to interference. This model, known as an information model, is a one-dimensional view of communication as a linear transmission of information (Griffin, 2012, p. 274) – void of meaning and interpretation. Deetz’s view however, interprets this interactional event as the “principal medium through which social reality is created and sustained” (Griffin, 2012, p. 274). The impact of misinterpretation is much greater within the context of creating social reality. The significance of social constructiveness theories, in this context, is that the outcome of the communication directly correlates to the influencing factors of the dyadic interaction. This interpretation is formulated and expressed in the coding and decoding of messages creating our perceived reality. “In interpreting a message, we naturally make sense of that message in terms of our own experience” (Purdy and Borisoff, 1997, p. 9). The translation of information and formulation of meaning is a genesis that originates within the individual.

Organizational Communication

This section opens with the definition of organizational communication and a description of systems theory. The cause and effect relationship between organizations and communication is presented through the concept of relational theory, which is inherent within systems.

Definition

Organizational communication is a collective of two functional parts – ‘organization’ and ‘communication’. Miller contends that most scholars agree an ‘organization’ involves a social
collectivity or group of people in which “activities are coordinated in order to achieve individual and collective goals” (as cited by Burnside-Lawry, 2010, p. 9). Communication is defined by Conrad and Poole (2005) as “a process through which people, acting together, create, sustain and manage meanings through the use of verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols within a particular context” (p. 4). Therefore, in union, organizational communication is the act of individuals organizing to achieve a common goal through the continuous process of managing the meaning of communicated messages.

Systems Theory

The two main components of a system are structure and function. “A system is defined as an interrelated, interactive grouping, structured such that a change in one part of the group affects some or all of the others” (Rohmann, 1999, p. 395). Systems theory encompasses all organic and inorganic structures. Systems, as an evolutionary form, evolve through the act of communicating, which results in a redesign of structural form – “relating or relationships exert influence; [therefore], communication constitutes relationships and, in so doing, it reconstitutes the entities that are related” (Shepherd, St. John, & Striphas, 2006, p. 4).

To follow is a discussion of organizational communication effectiveness, architecture of listening, organizational listening competency, impact evaluation – viewed through the theoretical lens of Media Richness, and concluding with organizational attentiveness through mindfulness.
Organizational Communication Effectiveness

Effective communication within an organization is directly correlated to a leader’s interpersonal communication skill level. Glaser and Eblen (1986) explored organizational communication effectiveness through an established interpersonal competency lens which has a proven research tradition. The study revealed that competent communicators demonstrated special cognitive and behavioral skills. The following are six emergence effective communication themes: 1) Coaching and motivating, 2) Encouragement of participation and involvement, 3) Self-motivation, 4) Problem solving ability, 5) Direct and adaptive interpersonal style, and 6) Listening skills. With listening positioned as one of the top six themes, the problem identified in the study with listening was the refusal to listen – cutting people off, not responding, answering without understanding, and being too preoccupied to stay focused on the person speaking. The contribution of Glaser and Eblen’s study is the illumination of the relationship between effective communication and productivity.

Architecture of Listening

An exploration of organizational listening was discussed by Macnamara (2015) through the review of a small pilot study initiated as a foundation of a larger organizational listening project. The qualitative research was grounded by literature on listening and human communication. The theoretical framework was structured around Habermas’s (1984 [1981], 1987 [1981]) “Theory of communicative action, which affords identification of genuine ‘communicative’ action in contrast with ‘strategic’ action” (as cited by Macnamara, 2015, p. 4).

McNamara’s study of organizational listening found that “other than for strategic planning and targeting purposes, organizations listen to stakeholders sporadically, often in
tokenistic ways and sometimes not at all” (p.5). And, that motivation was self-serving to the organization’s own interest. Gregory (2014) states that the organizational culture needs to be open for listening and “one that recognizes others’ right to speak, pays attention to them, tries to understand their views and responds with at least acknowledgment” (as cited by Macnamara, 2015, p. 6). The conclusion states that “to listen effectively organizations require an ‘architecture of listening’ incorporating a culture of listening, policies for listening, structures for listening, technologies for listening, [and] resources for listening...to balance the ‘articulation of speaking’ (Macnamara, 2015, p. 7).

Media Richness

Barry and Crant (2000) developed a model on how dyadic relationships form within organizations through rich communicative relationships. The theory used to support this study is *information richness theory*, which predicts organizational success by the use of the applicable communication channel. For example, the relationship based on the quality of their connection is determined by the interactional richness of their communication. The quality of their communication can also be predicted by the richness of the medium in which they communicate. For example, face-to-face communication is the richest medium because of the immediacy of the verbal and non-verbal responses between a boss and subordinate. Interactional richness is a most desirable attribute of a workplace communication – “high level of interactional richness ultimately yields more efficient communication” (Barry & Crant, 2000, p. 660).
Organizational Attentiveness

The quality of communication in an organization can be measured by the level of attentiveness. Weick and Sutcliffe (2006), explored the relationship between the quality of organizational attention and mindfulness. Mindfulness in this article is grounded in the interrelationship of patterns, perception and cognition. Organizations, as information processing systems, are computational and inattentive to the human element of organizing. Langer (as cited by Weick and Sutcliffe, 2006, p. 516) argues that routines induce mindless action. For Langer, mindfulness focuses on switching modes of thinking and seeing the similarities and differences.

Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) also note that when being mindful caution should be used to not fall into the predictive pattern of associative thinking. The mental habituation of mindfulness can occur through the repetition of thought and the re-application of perceptions. The act of being mindful could be standardization through the metal processing of information. Implicit in being mindful though is in the quality of attention. Mindfulness is not about normalizing it is about differentiating.

Another aspect Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) considered was in regards to attentiveness within organizations is the scarcity of attention. Time and capabilities are limited. Resource, competence, and time constraints are all mitigating factors to the availability of attentiveness. Also, within an organization, surplus information and meaning creates ‘noise’ within the system. This drives the need to homogenize, which results in countless unexplained details.

Within a dynamic organizational setting, Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) consider an interesting question as to whether “mindfulness and routine are a continuum or a dual process
[which] is significant because the answer affects whether it is conceivable that two processes can operate simultaneously or...can operate only sequentially” (p. 522). The question posed was to address processing capabilities and volume, which could quantify scarcity of attentiveness. A key attribute of attentiveness and information processing is the ability to effectively listen. A discussion on listening follows.

**Listening**

This section opens with the definition of listening followed by: Measurement of Listening, Organizational Listening Competency, and closing with Intrapersonal/Interpersonal Listening.

**Definition**

To preface the definition of listening by Purdy and Borisoff (1997) are a list of listening premises. Listening:

1) Can be *learned.*

2) Is a dynamic process.

3) Is an active process.

4) Involves mind and body with *verbal* and *nonverbal* processes working together.

5) Is *Receptive* to the needs, concerns, and information of others, as well as the environment around us.

Applied definition of listening: “Listening is the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal)
needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings” (Purdy and Borisoff, 1997 p.8).

Measurement of Listening

As Bodie (2013) highlights, listening is an essential element to human communication. Attempting to measure listening as a cognitive, affective, and/or a behavioral phenomenon offers a challenge in differentiating the effects.

As a cognitive process, attempts to measure listening where through commercial listening comprehension tests, which do not conform to theoretically posited models. Results from this commercial measurement process are limited due the scope of the testing which is narrowed to assess recall ability and not the complete process.

Listening research has been relegated to the back of the line as it relates to the amount of attention that has been given to researching this important aspect of communication. What constitutes “good listening”? A question yet to be fully defined or measured. “There is a difference in the way I assess the quality of my own listening behavior and the way an observer may assess the quality of the same behavior” (as sited by Bodie, 2013, p. 81).

Bodie (2011) reports on an area of listening research that is important in supporting the scale to measure Active-Empathic Listening (AEL) which measures interaction competencies such as emotional sensitivity. Listening is multi-dimensional, therefore AEL was viewed as a three-stage activity: sensing (attentive to words and actions), processing information (synthetizing and remembering), and responding (asking questions and demonstrating attention
through verbal and non-verbal actions). The search was for empirical evidence supporting the claim that AEL can be considered as a social skill.

The results from the bivariate and the multivariate analysis provided evidence for the validity of AEL scale measuring important social skills. The AEL scale was primarily related to verbal skills. Being an active-empathic listener is associated with skills that enable one to be an efficient and effective conversational partner.

**Organizational Listening Competency**

For the purpose of this discussion, listening competency was defined as “the presence of affective, cognitive, and behavioral attributes that contribute to ‘accuracy’, the perception that the listener has accurately received and understood the message sent, and the ‘effectiveness,’ where the listener demonstrates supportive behavior...” (Burnside-Lawry, 2012, p.104).

Burnside-Lawry (2012) explores organizational listening competency. Organizational listening differs from others types of listening situations such and classroom-oriented or counseling-oriented. Recent studies indicate that empathic listening is an element missing from modern organizations and that functional listening tests do not accurately measure the competency of an individual’s ability to listen effectively in an organizational setting.

The term participatory communication was introduced by Burnside-Lawry (2012) as synonymous with listening. This link bridges listening to the concept of participatory communication. Habermas’s theory of communicative action, which “examines whether communication between an organization and its stakeholders is aimed at increasing participatory communication rather than increasing organizational influence and control” (as cited by
Burnside-Lawry, 2012, p. 106) provides the framework to evaluate organizational motivation in the context of organizational listening competency.

The Burnside-Lawry 2012 study resulted in the identification of six key factors that influenced stakeholder’s perception of organizational listening effectiveness:

- Interpersonal skills of manager
- Sincerity of the organization as interpreted by the stakeholders
- Proactively seek understanding about stakeholder’s concerns
- Stakeholder’s perception of the organization’s level of understanding
- Strong cultural commitment between the organization and effective communication
- Dedication to maintain ideal speech conditions – mutual equality, actively seek feedback, encouragement of questions, and stakeholder input to name a few

The relationship between an organization and stakeholders involves ongoing engagement, listening, and dialogue to ensure the interests of both the organization and the stakeholders are met. The key communication channel between the organization and the stakeholders is through management.

Interesting to note, Brownell (1990) completed a management study on the perceptions of effective listeners focusing on management. Resulting from that study was a finding which concern the degree to which managers’ self-perception of their listening correlated to their subordinate’s ratings. With the listening skills ratings from “very good” to “good” and “poor” to “very poor”, it was attention-grabbing that all managers rating themselves as “very good” to “good” listeners. This provides a clear divergence between the manager’s self-perception and
the perceptions of their subordinates—“accurate self-perceptions are essential not only for the long-term effectiveness of training efforts but also the managers’ own personal and professional development (as cited by Brownell, 1990, p. 412).

**Intrapersonal/Interpersonal Listening**

Purdy & Borisoff (1997), states that an effective listener is self-aware and connects with other’s thoughts and feelings. Without having an innate awareness of one’s own inner voice though, it is difficult to strengthen listening ability. Listening inward to our internal dialogue we can observe our internal communication practices that are barriers to good listening.

It is important to reconcile whether or not we are listening for confirmation of our own ideas, or are we listening to share an experience. Clarifying our motivation will allow us to consciously mute our internal dialogue in preparation for the speaker to talk. Most messages that are misinterpreted and/or misunderstood are due to wrong assumptions. There is a misconception that there is a commonality in experience, meaning that one experience would be the same for all—experiential normalization—experiences that are the same share the same meaning.

Our internal dialogue may get in the way of effective interpersonal communication, as William Howell (1982) suggests, if we are attending to our “internal monologue” rather than listening to the other person. Listening is how we talk to our self can be helpful in understanding how we relate to ourselves and to others (as cited by Purdy & Borisoff, 1997, p. 37).
Intrapersonal Communication

This section opens with the definition of Intrapersonal Communication followed by: Self-Talk and Inner Speech, Intrapersonal Communication, and Listening Goals.

Definition

Barker and Kibler, discussing a conceptual overview of communication, define intrapersonal communication this way:

_**Intrapersonal Communication**_ is the basic level from which all other forms of human communication are derived. It is that communication which occurs within the individual. It involves the evaluating of and reacting to internal stimuli. These evaluative and reactive processes help human beings to cope with and understand ideas, events, objects, and experiences. Thinking is one form of intrapersonal communication. (As cited by, Shedletsky, 1989).

Self-Talk and Inner Speech

Vocate (1994) explores the topic of self-talk (intrapersonal communication) grounded in the mental foundation of inner speech. “Intrapersonal is one level or context of speech communication performance and that inner speech is the competence that makes possible all levels of performance although it occurs at the intrapersonal level (Vocate, 1994, p. 4). Intrapersonal communication is then defined as the origin of communication. The process starts at intrapersonal (level one) – communication with self, then moves to interpersonal (level two) – face-to-face information sharing with another person or people, and then public communication - information sharing within the public sphere.
The phenomenon of intrapersonal communication and self-talk is differentiated by Vocate (1994) to add distinction to two separate operations to identify external and internal forms of spoken language: “(a) a dialogue with the self (self-talk), which may be internal or external, and (b) a process of coding thought into language or decoding perceived language into meaning, which is one of the functions of inner speech” Vocate, 1994, p. 6).

The purpose of self-talk is the creation of meaning for the self. Mead’s (1934) view, it is the behavioral response that gives the communicative act its meaning (as cited by Vocate, 1994, p.6). Once words have been formulated from thought new meaning has been created by the self. “Self-talk” is critical not only for the establishment of reflective consciousness, but also for an awareness of meaning. Mead maintained that we have no consciousness of meaning except when we indicate symbols to ourselves” (as cited by Vocate, 1994, p.11).

**Intrapersonal Communication and Listening Goals**

Vickery, Keaton, and Bodie completed an investigative study on the mental representation of a conversation – Imagined Interactions (II) and reported tendencies towards Active-Empathic Listening (AEL). As previously discussed, AEL is a three stage method: sensing, processing, and responding. The process results in a higher level of understanding and connects with the emotion and meaning of the person you are communicating with.

The added element in this study was understanding the impact II has on AEL and the influencing factor II has on predetermining or influencing the outcome. The function of II includes “rehearsal, self-understanding, catharsis, compensation, relational maintenance, and conflict management” (Vickery, et al., 2015). These functions demonstrate the potential for
widespread use in imagining conversations and encounters preceding the interaction, which could result in preconditioning our mind prior to the actual conversation occurring.

Though the study was limited due to the use of only two operational constructs, II and AEL, the study resulted in some interesting findings. “The analysis suggests there is a crucial link between functional intrapersonal cognitive processes and competence in listening” (Vickery, et al., 2015). Listening and intrapersonal communication are cohabitating practices within each individual that aids in our ability to mindfully process the information we receive in our social encounters.

**Mindfulness**

This section opens with the definition of Mindfulness followed by: Mindful Attraction, and Integrating Mindfulness.

**Mindfulness Defined**

“The construct of mindfulness is defined as the process of actively noticing new things, which inherently leads to distinction-making, attention to the variable nature of things, and putting things into context” (as cited by Haas & Langer, 2014, p.21).

**Mindful Attraction and Synchronization**

Haas & Langer (2014) through their study seek a deeper level of understanding about how dyadic synchronicity can regulate coordination of activities. This mental alignment and increased connectivity yields efficiencies in execution – mental acuity, increased discernment of gathered information and respective quality. There is a great benefit of synchronously
coordinated behavior through social and creative purposes. Successful collaborative efforts yield some of our most productive, enjoyable, and valuable experiences. This kind of behavioral alliance involves cooperative functioning. Achieving moments and states of peak synchronicity when fully attuned with others creates and optimal flow with a strong desire of the participants to recreate the experience.

Haas & Langer’s hypothesis that mindfulness would increase interpersonal synchronicity was confirmed. The act of simply noticing things of one’s partner evoked mindfulness in those who were prone to be mindful and increased overall levels of general interpersonal “synchronicity”. Lun et al. claim the results suggest that mindfulness has the capacity to enhance relationships when it is desirable to be socially attuned with others” (as cited by Haas & Langer, 2014, p. 32.).

**Integrating Mindfulness**

An integration process to teach active listening skills has been defined and tested (Goh, 2012). The study identifies how mindfulness and reflection exercises can be incorporated into students training modules. The three prominent “bad habits’ that hindered active lessoning: 1) ‘Mind wandering’ 2) ‘Multi-tasking’ while listening 3) ‘Thinking ahead’. The paper focuses on the training module with the key focus areas being active listening, mindfulness, and reflection. (Egan, 2010) states that full listening means listening actively, listening accurately, and listening for meaning (as cited by Goh, 2012, p. 587). Personal observation of actions and internal dialogue is a method to improve one’s active listening skills. This is an exercise that will increase self-awareness of internal thoughts and help reduce the distraction of internal dialogue.
Mindfulness, in the context of this paper, is about nurturing self-awareness of internal thoughts. The use of relaxation and meditation clears the mind of all distractions creating space to be present. This allows for a real-time connection with the current moment, which opens communication channels to enable listening with devotion.

Reflection is a concern with the awareness of one’s assumptions, judgements, values, and intentions. By reexamining our conditional thoughts, perceptions, and internal dialogue with the advantage of perspective, provides insight.

**Mindful Reflection**

Mindful communication is a conscious and overt action. An effective listener is self-aware and in harmony with the thoughts and feelings of others. Within the setting of a dyadic communication event, internal dialogue becomes “noise” and a distraction. Our ability to mindfully connect and reduce the interference of our own internal dialogue directly relates to the macro (organizational) and micro (interpersonal) importance. Ambrose (1995) states: that “to transform our organizations, our communities, or our lives, we must first transform ourselves. Leadership development, then, becomes a process of self-reflection aimed at personal growth: a journey inward” (p.25). We must first learn to quiet our internal dialogue to enable our ability to actively listen and effectively discern communicated messages. Being present and mindful not only opens channels for effective listening, it expands our connection to the world. The simplicity of an action that yields a greater benefit versus cost is what validates the rationale of this study.
Rationale for the Study

An “examination of scholarly and professional literature reveals that communication and voice are predominately associated with speaking and that there is little attention paid in many fields of research or communication practice to the vital corollary – listening” (Macnamara, 2015). A great divide remains between listening and speaking. Speaking stands steadfast as the single voice of communication, while listening silently awaits a counterbalance. The disparity between listening and speaking perpetuates the deficit in listening efficacy. This results in a potential for errors in transmission of information, misinterpretation, and weakening of connections between individuals and groups, all of which confirms “communication cannot exist in the absence of listening” (Rice, 2011). Research by Burnside-Lawry (2012) defined listening competency as the presence of cognitive, affective, and behavioral attributes that contribute to ‘accuracy’, the perception that the listener has accurately received and understood the message sent, and ‘effectiveness’, where the listener demonstrates supportive behavior to enhance the relationship between speaker and listener. It is that support within an organizational setting that is critical to the exchange of information which is vital to business. Berger identifies internal communication, as a central process in which employees share information, create relationships, make meanings, and construct organizational culture and values (as cited by Men & Stacks, 2014, p. 301).

In the first stage of the ‘organizational listening project’ as discussed in Macnamara (2015), it was concluded that “government and private sector organizations do not listen to their stakeholders and publics other than for instrumental purposes to serve their own interests...” (p.7). With the foundation and strength of an organization living within the stakeholder
relationship, an attending community focused on a culture of listening versus a culture of speaking must rise.

Growing beyond the *speaking legacy* requires a social shift in the listening mindset at the individual and organizational level. The value of listening must be transcendent. Purdy & Borisoff (1997) make it clear that to be proficient listeners, the belief must be that listening can be influential and people can be affected by listening. There must be an acknowledgement that listening empowers people to relate, help, and/or work with others personally and professionally. The prescription for the listening evolution turns inward.

To listen effectively one’s inner voice must be acknowledged and then deprioritized. This will provide a place for the message of the speaker in our consciousness. This management of our intra-communication leads to the core of the *speaking-to-listening transformation* which is mastery of one’s internal dialogue or conscious thoughts. Vocate (1994) notes that self-talk is critical not only for the establishment of reflective consciousness, but also for an awareness of meaning – there is no meaning without symbolic definition. The epicenter for change is within the core of our consciousness and one’s ability to shift their mindset from speaking to listening. This mindful transition occurs through a meditative process that quiets the mind. A concentrative awareness that allows for a deepening of meaning through balancing the art of listening and the art of speaking. This research seeks to expand understanding of the co-habitation of internal dialogue and mindfulness, as well as the impact the relational interaction between the two has on individuals and organizations.
Research Questions

*RQ1 – Does internal dialogue impact stakeholder’s ability to listen effectively?*

*RQ2 – Does mindfulness impact stakeholder’s ability to be attentive when listening?*
CHAPTER THREE: SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope of this Study

This study was conducted to determine the impact internal dialogue has on one’s ability to effectively listen. A mixed method research approach was enlisted to evaluate a comparative view of an individual’s belief about their listening skills – measured by survey response data (quantitative) versus information collected from a focus group (qualitative).

The premise stated in this examination is that internal dialogue impacts an individual’s ability to effectively listen. Without concerted awareness, an individual’s intra-communication causes a distraction that inhibits their ability to fully connect with the present moment reducing listening efficacy. Quieting one’s internal dialogue results in a reduction of the noise barrier constructed in the mind by constant chatter. Internal dialogue comes to a place of rest as we become present and mindful. This place opens a fertile space to cultivate active empathetic listening.

Methodology

Research Study Design

Mixed Method Rationale. This study incorporates both quantitative and qualitative research techniques resulting in a mixed method examination. A mixed method approach casts a net that pulls data from two vantage points. “Recognizing that all methods have limitations, researchers felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods. Triangulating data sources [becomes] a means for seeking convergence across qualitative and quantitative methods” (as cited by Creswell, 2003).
Understood as an interpretive social science study, this two-pronged research approach was applied to first measure a population’s perception of their listening abilities and awareness of their internal dialogue. Second, the use of a focus group was conscripted to explore listening through the experiences of individuals within the context of their daily lives. “Purdy (1989) contends human studies, including listening research, are concerned with experience and the experiencing subject. In listening research, concern is with the act of experiencing listening, and the person experiencing the listening” (as cited by Burnside-Lawry, 2012, p. 64). The focus group explored listening competency of individuals who meditate. The premise being those who meditate have a greater likelihood of being mindful and present in a listening situation. This research strategy is defined as sequential – “expanding the findings of one method with another method” (Creswell, 2003, P.16). To discover the impact internal dialogue has on effective listening, a mixed method research approach was used.

The following is a review of the quantitative and qualitative research methods. The research design will be discussed for both methods which includes the selection process of the participants and the data collection technique. From the perspective of the quantitative research, consideration will be given to the validity of the data. Unlike the quantitative method, which is static with boundaries, qualitative research is fluid in the pursuit of experiential data. This observational approach will be reviewed through a brief discussion of the interactive process.

**Quantitative Method.** This approach seeks evidence to support the beliefs of an organizational populace as to whether they actively listen when others are talking to them one-on-one. The methodological technique for the quantitative data collection was in the form of a survey questionnaire given to a target population. Surveyors “seek to describe or explain people’s current attitudes, opinions, thoughts, and, perhaps, reports of behavior (such as whether
they voted or what news programs they viewed) surrounding an issue or event (such as an election)” Rubin, R., Rubin, A., and Piele (2005). This method was utilized with the population described as follows.

Selection of Participants. The selection of the survey participants was determined by the accessibility of a diverse group within an organizational environment. A population of full time employees of a pharmaceutical manufacturing plant was used for this study. The manufacturing plant is in the mid-west. The population of the plant is approximately 400 highly skilled and educated individuals at all levels within the organization with culturally diverse backgrounds. The employees are from local communities as well as transplants from other states and countries.

Data Collection Technique. The research data was collected by a web-based online survey company. “Survey research is an efficient means of gathering data from large numbers of people” (R. Rubin, A. Rubin, & L. Piele, 2005). A plant-wide email notification was sent to all active employees of the manufacturing plant explaining the reason for the survey and requesting their voluntary anonymous participation.

The survey consisted of twenty-four questions formatted in measures of agreement with a Likert seven-point scale. The survey remained open for three weeks. All survey responses submitted during the three-week window were included in the data analysis.

Validity. “Survey research can be used to measure attitudes, opinions, and reported behaviors or behavioral intentions” (Rubin, et al., 2005). Any concern with validity such as data control, data definition or data comparison to official records is out of scope. The survey is in pursuit of the perceptions and beliefs the survey taker has of their behavior as it relates to
listening abilities and their internal dialogue. Consequently, validity issues were not of concern with this study.

**Qualitative Method.** Seeks evidence to support the effect mindfulness has on listening efficacy. The methodological technique for the qualitative data was field research in the form of a focus group. This data collection method “emphasizes inductive, interpretive methods to describe and explain events in the everyday world” (as cited by Burnside-Lawry, 2012, p. 64).

**Selection of Participants.** The primary selection criteria for the group members was that they meditated on a regular basis (defined as no less than once a week). To identify participants for the focus group, a local Dharma Center was contacted to enlist help from their meditation group members. Six individuals volunteered with four people participated.

**Data Collection Technique.** Research data was voluntarily collected from a small focus group (four participants) that meditate on a regular basis (no less than once per week). The group was considered a *nonprobability theoretical sample type*, which identifies participants were not randomly selected and were included based on theoretical relevance.

**Focus Group Preparation and Execution.**

- Define focus members – a local Dharma Center was contacted and visited on two occasions to seek and identify volunteers.

- Focus Group Assistant Moderator was identified and responsibilities reviewed.

- Focus group preparation:
  - A request was submitted to the Dharma Center Board for their authorization to use the center’s facility for the focus group session.
  - Organized date and time with the volunteers via email.
  - Focus group questions were designed.
○ Consent to Participate in Focus Group Form completed.
○ Offered a monetary incentive of $25 per participant along with a $50 donation to Dharma Center – gift cards and Thank You cards where purchased.
○ Purchased beverages and a light snack for the session.
○ Reminder email sent the day before the focus group session.

• Focus group process
  ○ Introductions
  ○ Explained the purpose of the focus group.
  ○ Reviewed focus group rules.
  ○ Explained the digital recording purpose and process.
  ○ Reviewed the implicit confidentiality of the group and the required confidentiality of the research project.

Focus Group Questions.

• Ice breaker – If you had limitless money where would you vacation?
• How has meditation effected your life?
• How does mindfulness manifest in your day-to-day life?
• How has meditation changed the way you interact with people?
• What makes a person a good listener?
• How do you self-regulate your thoughts to remain attentive when listening to someone?
• How has mindfulness improved your business and/or personal relationships?
Data Analysis

The examination of both the quantitative and qualitative data will combine a descriptive statistical review with an exploratory data analysis. Descriptive statistics, as define by Neuman (2011), is used to describe patterns in the data. An exploratory analysis will also highlight themes for probing discussion.

**Quantitative Data Processing.** The online survey data was reviewed. The response rate for the online survey was 23% (91 out of 400). The data collected by the Internet based online survey was converted to pie charts by question with response number and percent data. The percentage data by question was then grouped by four themes and entered into a data table for a thematic review.

**Qualitative Data Processing.** The focus group responses digitally recorded during the session were not transcribed verbatim. A repeated audible review process of the focus group session was used to document group member responses. The responses were documented by detailed note taking of each respondents answer. The responses were logged by question. Thematic responses and participant’s quotes were highlighted as warranted.

Ethical Considerations

Newton (2004) notes confidentiality is at the crossroads of three essential social values – privacy, trust, and promise-keeping. A challenge to confidentiality could then affect any or all three of foundational social values. The consequence of weakening any of the three would have a harmfully immoral impact on society.

It is the responsibility of the social researcher to maintain an unquestionable level of confidentiality to protect the privacy of the participants. The creation of a trusting environment
is important, especially with field investigation, for individuals to feel safe to share their personal stories. There is an inherent and time-honored responsibility of the researcher to protect the information they are entrusted with.

The significance of this responsibility is distinguishable with the two research methods. The survey was disconnected from the human element yielding raw response data to posed questions. Conversely, the focus group was facilitated through human interaction. Answers to the focus group questions were wrapped in personal stories and contemplative reflections – revealing a vulnerability that was void in the survey process. The survey data, also protected, is not associated to an individual due to the anonymity of the collection method. The information shared within the focus group provided great insight for the research project and is now guarded under a code of ethics that above all must protect the individual’s privacy.
CHAPTER FOUR: THE STUDY

Introduction

This study investigated the perception of listening efficacy of one-on-one communication and the impact of mindful meditation on listening. There were three vantage points discussed in this research: 1) Perceptions of a general population on listening. 2) Focus group member’s meditation experiences. 3) Past research on listening efficacy results.

The research took a mixed method approach. The first method discussed is quantitative. A general population was enlisted to complete an online survey to determine their beliefs about the following:

- Their belief whether internal dialogue impacts their listening.
- Their belief about their listening skills and abilities.
- Their belief about their communication with their manager.
- Their beliefs about the impact listening efficacy has on them and the organization.

The second method used was qualitative. A focus group was used to explore the practice of meditation as it relates to mindfulness and listening efficacy. The focus group members were recruited from a local Dharma Center. The group members meditate regularly – as defined as no less than once per week.

The focus group consisted of four volunteers, an assistant moderator, and a moderator. The session, in total, lasted about two hours from setup to completion. There was a digital recording of the focus group session along with notes that were taken by the assistant moderator.
The location of the session was at a local Dharma Center which offered a safe, comfortable, and most importantly, a known environment to nurture sharing of personal thoughts, feelings, and stories.

Results of the Study

Quantitative Results – Survey response data by theme.

| INTERNAL DIALOGUE | Theme #1                                                                 
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q3</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q5</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note

- 85% of responses to Q1 fall within the range of *agree to strongly agree* they are aware of their internal dialogue.
- 74% of responses to Q2 fall within the range of *agree to strongly agree* they can control their internal dialogue.
- 80% of responses to Q3 fall within the range of *agree to strongly agree* they are aware of their internal dialogue when listening to others.
- 77% of responses to Q4 fall within the range of *agree to strongly agree* they remain focused on the person talking during a conversation.
- 67% the lowest of the five questions fall within the range of *agree to strongly agree* they can control their internal dialogue when listening to others.

Theme #1: The survey group responders indicated, with a high degree of confidence, they were aware and could maintain control over their internal dialogue. There was a slight decline, but
still higher than the median, in their belief in their ability to control their intra-communication when listening to others.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LISTENING</th>
<th>Theme #2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q18</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note

- 82% of responses to Q6 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they are good listeners.
- 72% of responses to Q7 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they can make the transition from speaker to listener without difficulty.
- 38% of responses to Q8 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree to the effect internal dialogue has on the interpretation of what others say.
- 64% of responses to Q9 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree their internal dialogue effects their ability to effectively listen.
- 92% of responses to Q10 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree they have difficulty listening in a one-on-one situation.
- 40% of responses to Q11 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree they need to express their ideas when they are listening.
- 70% of responses to Q12 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree their internal dialogue interferes with their ability to listen effectively.
• 66% of responses to Q13 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree they find it difficult to listening without expressing their thoughts.

• 75% of responses to Q14 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree their desire to speak is greater than to listen.

• 90% of responses to Q16 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they remember details from conversations with their colleagues.

• 66% of responses to Q18 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree they try to control conversations with their colleagues.

Theme #2: The results on listening indicate respondents believe they were good listeners and retain details of their conversations. The respondent’s believed their ability to listen was not overridden by the desire to speak. Interesting to note Q8, Q9, and Q11 rates falling closer to the median range suggests an influencing effect of internal dialogue. This proposes a slight impact on listening as a result of internal dialogue.

MANAGEMENT ENGAGEMENT

Theme #3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q15</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q19</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q20</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q21</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note

• 58% of responses to Q15 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they believe their manager listens to them.

• 61% of responses to Q17 fall in the range of disagree to strongly disagree they focus on their thoughts more when talking with a colleague.

• 57% of responses to Q19 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree their input is important to their manager.
76% of responses to Q20 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree believe they know when their manager is listening.

58% of responses to Q21 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree believe their manager respects their ideas and listens to them.

Theme 3#: Shows engagement responses settling into the mid-range questioning the level of listening efficacy. An influencing factor to consider if the different management styles and skillsets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Somewhat Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q22</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note

90% of responses to Q22 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they feel more valued when company leaders listen to them.

91% of responses to Q23 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they are more engaged when they know they are heard.

90% of responses to Q24 fall in the range of agree to strongly agree they are more motivated when company leaders listen.

Theme #4: There is a strong correlation between an employee’s feeling of value, their motivation, and their engagement when company leaders increase their listening efficacy.

**Qualitative Results** – Focus group response data by interview question.

Note: For confidentiality, focus group members (GM) are identified as GM1, GM2, GM3, and GM4. The following is a descriptive analysis taken from the digital audio recording.
of the focus group member’s actual answers. Responses below, though not all verbatim, are an accurate representation of focus group members’ thoughts and input on each topic.

1) How has meditation effected your life?

GM4 – Before starting to meditate she was high strung. When she learned about meditation she was skeptical. After starting to meditate she went through a transition and started becoming more aware of what was going on in the moment. There was a calming effect even when she was going through physical pain. She could look at the experience in the moment and not push it away. During times of emotional distress and judgement, readings and meditation allowed for a compassionate curiosity rather than judgement. The surprise was that it (meditation) worked. That experience of opening up to meditation allowed for a new openness to other things like this focus group. “How much of my life I was working in the past or in the future – not the present moment”.

GM3 – Commented that meditation opens her heart. She now lives in a place of compassion in the present moment. If her practice lags she feels as if she is “shrinking”. This becomes an issue if her practice does lag. She lost her parents when she was young. Meditation lead her to a healing. For her it came from within – a learning of compassion – an “opening of the heart”.

GM2 – An open heart practice of being. Meditation makes her more comfortable because the practice makes her more open – more safe – allowing her more opportunities to be open to what comes up. She can now be like that with other people. She “takes things less personally” and there is more awareness to be more objective with less judgement. Also, she has more curiosity and understanding without immediate judgement on herself and her loved ones.
When doing meditation, she is less cruel and judgmental. She is more kind, understanding, and compassionate. Meditation helps her cultivate that “expansive understanding”.

GM1 – Comes from a place of objectivity and science. His objectively looks at his mind and analyzes suffering. “How am I causing suffering?” How people cling to things makes them suffer. How someone suffers makes them understand better of others suffering. If you can identify thoughts or feelings inside your body, you can stop it before it is said – “Right Speech”. His personal benefit was the more he works on himself the more it helps others around him.

Before moving on to the next question, a story about anger was shared and there was a group reflection on that emotion and situation. Meditation yields a greater wisdom and understanding of emotions and actions – it is noticed. Again, the comment about pushing an emotion away was brought up from another group member. He said that if you would not push it away and drive into it to see what’s under it, you can dismantle it and be not be scared of that emotion.

Another story was shared about an ongoing screening to monitor a health issue and the anxiety, nervousness, and fear that comes before, during, and after while awaiting results. This feeling of helplessness drove her to go out and buy things that she did not need. Her meditation practice helped her see that the feelings do not change it changes your reactions. You see more objectively.

GM4 added that when you are meditating on a consistent basis you are not so harsh on yourself. “You notice the emotion – you just breath – things then start to shift”. There is an evolution of emotions – “what I thought was not actually it. There was shift – a settling process – remarkable”.
2) How does mindfulness manifest in your day-to-day life?

GM3 – She is retired and one of her examples of mindfulness showing up in her daily life was when she walked her dog. She was moving along at her walking pace when she realized the dog continued to lag. As she paused to consider the situation, [being mindful] she realized the dog’s objective was to take a “sniff walk”. With that new awareness, she slowed her pace. She expressed that since starting her meditation practice she has become more accepting and mindful of the ‘now’. It has given her an amazing loving place – a respite from the constant chatter.

GM1 – He said it was a sensation of the body. Mindfulness for him fluctuates on a day to day basis. He is observant of sensations from the body that arise. He draws himself, his attention, to the sensations of the body. This allows him to focus more. This also filters out the external stuff and increases his focus.

GM2 – She is an acknowledged introvert. She is consciously aware of others in terms of their speech. She has more ability to be present with interactions with others. To pay attention to other people and what she says before she speaks. This is different than how she interacted with the world before she started meditating. Her tendency to “overwhelmingly put up the shutters”, she now notices and can handle that kind of interaction and be present for it. She is now able to extend knowledge and awareness outward without being frightened and letting fear stop her.

GM4 – When she starts to have fear or anxiety she questions how to get back into the meditation. Once she has stepped back into meditation she is more aware of what she is experiencing. When things are coming in intensely she thinks about what needs to be done in terms of breathing. When mindfulness has been there she is not as reactive. When she is out of
that mode and wants to get back she just breathes. When there is fear of pain, she just goes there. She tries to be curious as to what else is going on with the experience. She said it was important to note that mindfulness goes quickly if you don’t meditate.

3) How has mindfulness/meditation changed the way you interact with people?

GM2 – She believes it makes her take people less personally. She has more time and space to “consider causes and conditions” that might lead other people to react. She can see and take things less personally. “Situations don’t become so emotionally charged”. She can also identify causes and conditions why a situation could become so emotional charged. For example, someone could be tired or hungry. She has learned that it is not a failure on her part and can now see the larger picture. She can acknowledge the irritant and know that it is not going to last forever. She noticed when she has a more regular meditation practice she does not get so drawn into work drama.

GM1 – There can be misidentification of a lot of things when people say something hurtful to you. He sees it as they are attacking him and he has to protect something. Being more meditative, a person is able to step back and say no they don’t have to protect anything. They realize it is not directed at them. Just words and sounds and they don’t have to cling on to them. They do not have to hold on to things. It is like “holding on to a hot iron ball, if you don’t drop it you will get burned”. At work, he believes that he does not takes things so personally and is more compassionate.

GM4 – At work she finds it is easier to listen to what other people say. An old pattern is feeling like she has to have the answers and know what to say in interactions with other people.
Now she can step back so other people can take care of themselves. She doesn’t have to feel or be responsible. She can now listen and doesn’t have to say anything at all.

4) What makes a good listener?

GM3 – Shared a story about a difficult relationship she had with her neighbor and how distant they were before she reached out to her when she was having a difficult time with her husband. She went over to her house and they sat on the porch and the neighbor talked while she listened. She was just being present and kept on listening. She felt like in the moment with her – something had shifted. Her heart opened which made her a good listener. She felt compassion. It was a bigger energy; more awareness came forward.

GM2 – “Something that recedes when you don’t put as much attention on it”.

GM3 – “Something more conscious than consciousness occurred”.

GM2 – Believes that being a good listener requires concentration and immersion - just “letting that ‘know’ fall” by the wayside. There is a natural tendency to be contrary, at least for her, to hear someone speak and be thinking “no that’s not how it is”. She just concentrates on the other person and not herself. More into the other person’s demeanor. Letting her tongue rest in the back of my throat while letting that ‘but’, ‘but’ settle away. She thinks it is a concentration – directing the concentration from inward to outward – a kind of an immersion. “A good listener requires compassion”. Not being just in your head. She notices their posture, the “timber of their voice” and not put up barriers. Really connecting with the whole experience.

GM3 – “Being with the moment”.
GM1 – “Listening with your heart and your head at the same time”.

GM2 – “Listen without getting drawn in”. Important part of what meditation helps you with. Listening without getting sucked in – without merging.

GM1 – There has to be a “discernment of what to get involved in” and what not to get involved in emotionally. There are certain places you may or may not want to go.

GM2 – It is about equanimity. Through the meditation practice you learn that this is what you are saying. It is not a reflection on her. It is not for her to agree with but just to hear it.

GM3 – “This what I hear you saying”. It is important to be able to discern what they are saying.

GM1 – “Taking care of yourself”. Knowing when you are not ready to listen or able to listen.

GM4 – It is experiential to be with someone for a period of time and not speak and that it is alright to have that experience. She doesn’t believe she has to do anything except to just be with that person. It is ok if she doesn’t get all caught up with changing anything – just be with that person. In that space – she can hold herself in that caring space. The experience changes her.

5) How do you self-regulate your thoughts to remain attentive when listening to someone?
GM3 – For her, it is not conscious. It comes from the meditation practice. “Meditation is a great seed”.

GM2 – Paying attention to her breath.

GM1 – Same thing happens during meditation – the drifting away. You have to bring it back. It has to do with concentration. “Meditation is a concentration skill and so is listening”.

GM4 – “When drifting away - notice it – acknowledge it – go back to listening”.

6) How has mindfulness improved your business and/or personal relationships?

GM3 – Mindfulness has made her a better human. Kinder and more willing to be forgiving. More compassionate. She can accept where situations are now – paradoxically less intentional.

GM1 – Positive impact – ‘Right Speech’. Do not cause damage. Reflect before you speak – pass through filters. Do not have as much expectation. Be less harsh on yourself.

GM2 – Know that this is how it is right now. Explore more tones. Be more compassionate. Shift in harshness and give more benefit of the doubt to others.

GM4 – She is doing the things to be more comfortable and aware. Being with people is not as difficult. It is ok not to be needed. The shift is in my understanding that I don’t have to be responsible for people. Feeling more comfortable to be with people. Having lunch with someone without having that pressure. Would not have come to a session like this before. This is very personal and is a different phase – an internal process.
GM2 – Reflecting on the similarities of meditation and listening. Valuing presence and how to be a good listener. Manufacturing listening opportunities and experiences. Valuing presence and how to be a good listener. She reached out to her mother when she knew she had experienced a difficult situation. GM2 just offered to listen. This practice shows value of presence. Meditation is a mindful practice of presence. Make the decision to be presence and hear someone else.

GM3 – Capacity to be with others in silence.

Focus Group Reflective Comments

When you start to meditate, you go through a transition. There is a calming effect that draws you to the present moment – a heighten awareness of that point in time – the now. The result is a feeling of being centered and calm. You can look at the current moment and not push it away. Your work is in the present, not in the past or the future. This compassionate open state creates receptivity. You become more aware, objective, and less judgmental. Meditation helps to cultivate an expansive understanding and greater wisdom regarding emotions and actions. Meditation does not change your feelings it changes your reactions. Mindfulness also provides a respite from the constant chatter in your mind.

An awareness tool, to bring you back to the present moment, is your breathing. Breathing is a tether to the current moment. Mindfulness does though fade quickly if you do not meditate. Meditation is the discipline or exercise for the mind.

A good listener requires compassion. There are many similarities between meditation and listening. Listening is a concentration skill and so is meditation. When listening and your mind
starts to drift – take notice – acknowledge it – go back to listening. It is important to understand the value of presence and how being present is a requirement of good listening – a capacity to be with others in silence. Meditation is being mindful – equanimity.

Discussion

This study explored the cause and effect relationship of internal dialogue and mindfulness as it relates to listening. The two questions explored: 1) Does internal dialogue impact stakeholder’s ability to listen effectively? 2) Does mindfulness impact stakeholder’s ability to be attentive when listening?

Internal dialogue can impact a stakeholder’s ability to listen effectively. Internal dialogue or inner speech occurs as we interact with the world. Incoming audible or visual stimuli is received. Our minds work to interpret the incoming messages and define meaning. As we interact with the world, this translation is reiterative. A commonly used descriptive equivalent, though far from the same, is the processing of information by a computer. Our mind is constantly processing information in the background. The byproduct of the processing is our internal dialogue. Mead (1934) stated that the creation of meaning requires a state of reflective consciousness that occurs only when the self is an object to itself (as cited in Vocate, 1994, p. 10).

Continuing with this line of thinking, a computer has the capacity to process in the background while working with other applications simultaneously. This is also true with the mind. The mind, in the background, is trying to make sense of all of the incoming stimuli that is constantly being received. This discernment of two concurrent activities provides an example of listening to others while listening to your internal dialogue. Understanding the premise that
listening and internal dialogue are two cohabitating functions, the focus of this discussion is directed towards the findings from the focus group.

The discussion on meditation and mindfulness with the focus group members was about being focused and present through their meditation practice. Meditation is a concentration exercise that trains the mind to be mindful and present. This exercise maintains a level of fitness to sustain the discipline required to be focused. The experience draws you to a center point of calmness and heighten awareness. This is where the constant chatter of the mind, your internal dialogue, is acknowledged and relegated to background processing. When your mind starts to drift, this allows your inner dialogue to move to the foreground disrupting your ability to listen effectively. When mindlessness starts to take over your mind, the meditation practice has trained you to identify the drifting and you pull yourself back to the present moment. This awareness allows for the coexistence of the mind interpreting data in the background while remaining centered in the present. Also, this heightened level of consciousness and alertness that meditation training can obtain begs further inquiry regarding the survey respondent’s assessment of their listening skills.

An opposing point to consider, research by Bavelas and Coates (1992) suggests that due to the number of steps to produce and comprehend information shared in a conversation, one cannot account for the rapidity of responses. Being mindful or mindless in an interaction cannot account for dialogue. Dialogue, unlike reading and writing, does not permit a leisurely pace. It is driven by the real-time movement of interaction. How then does being aware and present adjust to the cadence of the interaction? And, does it have to? Possible questions for future research.
An interesting outcome of this study is the result of the survey. The survey indicates a greater number of respondents believed they were aware of their internal dialogue, could control their internal dialogue, and were effective listeners. The research review on listening efficacy brought forth many attributes of effective listeners. One potentially most unfavorable to the results of the survey respondents was Brownell (1990) that discussed a study using the HURIER model which identifies, among other aspects, indicators of individual’s judgements about effective listening. The findings were managers who fell in the “poor” to “very poor” rating by their subordinates rated themselves as “good to very good”. This misperception accounts for believed variation in the survey results. Also, definitions of aware and control of internal dialogue are subjective and may not correlate to the same definition and understanding the focus group participants have of the terminology. The survey results in this study could be called into question due to the responder’s potential misperception of their ability to listen effectively in a dyadic interaction resulting in a relational miscue.

Relational perceptions are cognitive appraisals by individual dyad members regarding the status and quality of the interpersonal relationship between dyad members. Relational perceptions are products of one’s perceived social environment (Miller et al., 1994). In dyadic communication relationships, relational perceptions are influential – blending the lines between sociology, psychology, and communication theory. Perception based approaches assume individuals interact with others as they perceive them, not as they really are (as cited by Barry and Crant, 2000).

This trifold analysis of the quantitative survey data, the qualitative focus group responses, and the listening efficacy research data provides an expanded view around the impact of internal
dialogue on listening. To increase listening efficacy, the mind is drawn to attention, to acknowledge the present. This shifting of thoughts to the background and moving the current moment to the foreground is practiced through meditation which provides training to enable one to pull or push the mind back to the present – drawing distinction as described by Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) to a state of mindfulness that calms the internal dialogue.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitations of this study are highlighted below by research method – quantitative method first followed by the qualitative method.

Quantitative

The data collected was insightful and meaningful within the defined context. A nonprobability sampling technique, known as a *convenience sampling method*, was used rather than a random survey sample. Due to the narrow sampling frame, the survey population was limited to a group of professionals that worked at the same organization, in the same field, with advanced education, and above median income level.

The study used the results from one organization and incorporated the random response data for the responders who participated. There was a below average response rate of 24% – ninety-one out of four hundred potential responders. Coupling the narrow scope of diversity within the survey pool, along with the lower response rate, caution is urged to broad extrapolation of results.

The existence of the above stated constraint was in part due to time restrictions. Given more time to collect data, the study could have been expanded beyond narrow borders and included additional organizations. The time limitation could not be overcome due to the completion date requirement of the study. Though limiting, the comparative data collected with
the mixed method approach provided a strong structure to house the findings of this study. The limitation in time offers opportunity for further expanded research.

**Qualitative**

Creswell (2003) emphasizes Pearce and Cronen’s construction of meaning by noting that an inherent byproduct of social interaction is the construction of meaning. Therefore, qualitative research is mainly inductive, due to the person questioning is generating meaning from the data collection. With that viewpoint in position, the first limitation were the focus group member stories that were retold by the researcher as supporting evidence – acknowledging a story can be influenced by the storyteller.

The second limitation of the qualitative data was the number of focus groups used. There was only one focus group used in this study. Neuman (2011) noted that “a focus group study would include four to six separate groups (p.459). Also, there were only four group members in the one focus group, which Neuman (2011) identified the number of participants to be 6-10.

A third limitation, as with the qualitative method, was the amount of time and participants available to complete the focus group process (preparation, interview group session, translation of the recording, and analysis). The amount of people who meditate on a regular basis is limited in comparison to those who do not meditate which created a challenge to find participants for the one focus group. Additional focus groups would have offered further observational input for analysis from those who meditate. The consistency in the responses from all four group members aligned with published descriptions from Langer and Moldoveanu (2000) on the affective of meditation: (1) greater environmental sensitivity, (2) openness to new
information, (3) new categories for structuring perception, and (4) enhanced awareness of multiple perspectives – a heightened state of involvement and wakefulness, reinforcing the findings from the four-member focus group.

The focus group constraints were unavoidable due to the intricacy of the group interviewing method. The inquiry process, working directly with people, is dynamic and provides a rich experience while unearthing high quality data. With added time, additional focus groups could have been interviewed. The responses from the members of the one focus group though were aligned with their beliefs about the impact meditation had on them and with their connection with the world around them. This consistency in response data from the group members provided a positional foundation for the impact of mediation and the influence of internal dialogue on day-to-day communication.

The results of this study were not measurably impacted by the limited number of focus groups or the number focus group members. An extended study would offer greater insights, benefits, and a broader understanding of mindful meditation as it relates to the influence of intra-communication. A partially open door if left for future discovery.

Further Study Recommendations

In review, considerations for future studies would require extended time. For both the quantitative and qualitative perspective, expanded data points for analysis would add a longer lens to strengthen and validate the research results. With the quantitative method, adding additional organizations from other industries, other locations and even other counties would add depth and richness to the results. As well as, with the qualitative method, adding additional
focus groups with more participants should be considered. The focus group participants with this study were members of a Dharma Center that followed the Buddhist teachings. Understanding any potential differences between people who take a meditation class at their local fitness center versus the disciplined meditation practice of a religion is a research element that could offer valued insight.

A final, but not exhaustive direction for further research is the shared mindfulness concept. Applying shared mindfulness in other investigative scenarios would further our understanding of the use in interpersonal communication, as well as the benefit with functional teams and cross-functional teams within organizations.

**Conclusion**

What we have learned from this study was the impact internal dialogue has on listening competency. Through the meditative experiences of the focus group members we have expanded our understanding of how our internal dialogue exists within the confines of our mind. Purposefully pausing to acknowledge the presence of our internal dialogue grounds us to the present. This mindful state allows us to be receptive to others and open to actively and effectively listen. Listening competency is “the presence of affective, cognitive, and behavioral attributes that contribute to ‘accuracy’, the perception that the listener has accurately received and understood the message sent, and ‘effectiveness’, where the listener demonstrates supportive behaviors to enhance the relationship between speaker and listener” (Burnside-Lawry, 2012, p. 44).
The quantitative survey results were in direct opposition to the listening efficacy research findings underscoring the power of perception on self-evaluation of listening skills. The theoretical implication points to stakeholder’s misperception of their own listening aptitude. Conversely, opportunity defined by Burnside-Lawry (2012) findings revealed that “appropriate interpersonal skills including verbal, non-verbal, and interaction-based behaviors used by managers to build and maintain organization-stakeholder relationships influenced stakeholder’s perceptions of organizational listening” (p.110).

The evidence collected in this study supports a logical reasoning process that results in a deductive conclusion that listening competency can be adversely impacted by internal dialogue. How will future studies expand our understanding of mindful listening? Langer and Moldoveanu (2012) clarify that “mindfulness is not a product, but a process, that stresses the difference between understanding and explanation and ultimately frees understanding from explanation” (p.138). Through the greater application of receptivity, attentiveness, and mindful listening within our organizations, full potential of stakeholders can be realized.
References


Vickery, A., Keaton, S. & Bodie, G. (2015). Intrapersonal Communication and Listening Goals: An Examination of Attributes and Functions of Imagined Interactions and Active-


“Appendix A”

Survey Question Charts

Figure 1. Survey question #1.

Figure 2. Survey question #2.
Figure 3. Survey question #3.

Figure 4. Survey question #4.
Figure 5. Survey question #5.

Figure 6. Survey question #6.
Figure 7. Survey question #7.

Figure 8. Survey question #8.
Figure 9. Survey question #9.

Figure 10. Survey question #10.
Figure 11. Survey question #11.

Figure 12. Survey question #12.
Figure 13. Survey question #13.

Figure 14. Survey question #14.
Figure 15. Survey question #15.

Figure 16. Survey question #16.
Figure 17. Survey question #17.

Figure 18. Survey question #18.
Figure 19. Survey question #19.

Figure 20. Survey question #20.
Figure 21. Survey question #21.

Figure 22. Survey question #22.
Figure 23. Survey question #23.

Figure 24. Survey question #24.
“Appendix B”

Consent to Participate in Focus Group

You have been asked to participate in a focus group conducted by Laura L. Linton who is a graduate student of Gonzaga University. The purpose of the group is to explore the impact meditation has on one’s internal dialogue. The information learned in the focus group will be used as qualitative research data for a graduate level thesis as required for completion of a Master’s in Communication and Leadership.

Your participation, as stated, is voluntary and you may stop at any time. The focus group session will be digitally recorded. All responses will remain confidential and no names will be mentioned in the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. The objective is to hear different viewpoints to enable an exploration of the topic from individuals with varied life experiences. Open and honest responses, though may be different, is the objective. How we as individuals experience the world is unique and it is that uniqueness we seek to discover. In respect for others and the accurate recording of the session, we ask that only one person speak at a time and that all participants be kept confidential.

I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above.

Signed: ____________________________________________ Date: ________________