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**Connie R. Bateman
University of North Dakota**

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THE EFFECTS OF HOME COUNTRY, GENDER, AND POSITION ON LISTENING BEHAVIORS

Deborah B Roebuck, Kennesaw State University
Reginald L Bell, Prairie View A & M University
Reeta Raina, Foundation for Organizational Research and Education
Cheng Ean (Catherine) Lee, Sunway University

ABSTRACT

Regardless of national culture, often listening is mentioned as an important component for effective business operations. In addition, understanding how individuals of different national cultures perceive and process listening is fundamental to our global world of work. The present study used Glenn and Pood (1989) Listening Self-Inventory to examine the distracted and attentive listening behaviors of male and female managers and non-managers who worked full time in the countries of India, Malaysia, and the United States of America (USA). Findings in this study suggest USA females and males, in general, are less likely to be attentive listeners than the Indian and Malaysian respondents are. USA and Malaysian managers are less prone to be attentive listeners than non-managers while Indian managers are more likely to be attentive listeners. Regarding distracted listening behaviors, males are more prone to engage in distracted listening than females while managers are less likely to engage in distracted listening than non-managers. USA managers are more distracted in their listening than non-managers while Indian and Malaysian managers are less distracted listeners than the non-managers are. This study indicates differing national cultures, organizational position and gender can affect listening in the workplace.

INTRODUCTION

Frequently listening is stated as an important component and a necessary skill for the workplace (Brownell, 1990, 1994; DiSalvo, 1980; Schwartz, 2004; Sypher, Bostrom, & Seibert, 1989; Wacker & Hawkins, 1995). For over 50 years, researchers have been showing listening as a highly desirable workplace skill for both managers and employees (Cooper, 1997; Coopman, 2001, Husband, Cooper, & Monsour, 1988; Nichols & Stevens, 1957; Rogers & Roethlisberger, 1952; Sypher, 1984). Goby and Lewis (2000) stated that listening is rated in the top 10 practices for business effectiveness, but it is a skill that is frequently overlooked and taken for granted. Managers and employees often cite listening as a weakness within employee communication (Lewis & Reinsch, 1988).

In today's workplace, listening is also impacted by the fact that more business is conducted globally, which requires an awareness of listening behaviors of other cultures (Kumbruck & Derboven, 2005). Given that work has become more global and that effective workplace communication between managers and non-managers is needed to meet goals and to improve working relationships, an understanding of the differences in listening behaviors between managers and non-managers who are males and females in different countries is worthy of study.

Workplace listening is important for several reasons. First, listening is linked to the building of knowledge and helps organizations develop their intellectual capital (Schwartz,

2004). Second, listening helps managers develop their competencies to deal with employee issues (Crittenden & Crittenden, 1985). Third, organizations that emphasize the importance of listening have employees who aligned their actions with organizational goals (Walters, 2005). Fourth, Cunningham (1992) has stated that listening is needed for effective business practices. If the listening practices of managers and non-managers who work in various countries can be understood, then effective listening behaviors can be identified, which will lead to an understanding of the role of listening within the workplace. Before exploring workplace listening further, it is necessary to define listening and explain the theory surrounding this competency.

A Definition and Theory of Listening

According to Witkin and Trochim (1997), there is no universal definition of listening. The International Listening Association offered the following definition of listening: “The process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and or nonverbal messages” (Emmert, 1996, p. 2–3). Purdy expanded the above definition by defining listening as “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” (1996, p. 8). Flynn, Valikoski, and Grau (2008, p. 143) argued that “listening involves hearing and cognition and assumes the ability to selectively perceive, interpret, understand, assign meaning, react, remember, and analyze what is heard”.

According to Witkin (1990), listening research was conducted for a number of years without any theoretical base, but now approximately 13 theoretical perspectives for listening have been established (Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). However, listening research is still not grounded in theory due to a lack of testable theories.

Listening is performed cognitively and perceived behaviorally. Nevertheless, Witkin (1990) stated listening cognitions and behaviors are not always congruent. Up to and including the year 2002, all listening models and definitions could be traced to linear theorists of attention and memory research or to theorists who grounded their work in the linear paradigm (Janusik, 2002). Janusik (2007) took the first step with her research to validate the conversational listening span, which builds a more integrated listening model including cognitive psychology and communication.

It seems that listening has largely been defined in the academic literature as a construct, one with a single definition and without explicitly theorizing about its nature (Bodie & Fitch-Hauser, 2010; Bodie, 2011; Bostrom, 2011). However, Bodie (2011) argued that listening should be viewed as a theoretical term with the theoretical structure a kind of “social context.” In this way, listening is allowed various meanings depending on the practical purpose pursued by an individual or team of scholars. This structure could lay theories of listening, or “what people say or believe about listening (Purdy, 2011 p. 137), or one of various scholarly theories of a particular type or mode of listening. This perspective is helpful as we study listening behaviors of individuals in relationship to organizational position, gender, and national culture. Even though the field of listening has struggled to formulate a legitimate theory, listening is considered one of the most crucial skills for managers and employees in organizations.

Many studies stated how important listening is to the workplace, but in a generalized manner (Buhler, 2001; Crittenden & Crittenden, 1985; Goby & Lewis, 2000; Schwartz, 2004). In addition, listening research has provided little insight into demographic information, such as gender and organizational variables such as position, and how those may influence listening

(Cooper, 1997). Orbe and Bruess (2005) have suggested cultural influences on listening may pose a challenge for listeners in the 21st century. Employees may be expected to listen and communicate with a diverse workforce that comes from different cultures that display specific listening behaviors (Bentley, 2000). Working professionals may find themselves listening to an individual from another culture that does not speak with the same semiotic code. Therefore, the next sections will discuss the relevance of listening to organizational position, gender and national culture.

The Relevance of Organizational Position to Listening

Listening behaviors are more frequently reported by senior managers than mid-level managers (Brownell, 1994). Managers have scored higher than non-managers, on average, on critical listening, which is defined as listening to critically assess a message with the intent to either accept or reject the message based upon what the individual heard and perceived (Welch & Mickelson, 2013). These researchers found that increased listening competency is associated with more managerial responsibility and that the need for listening further increases as the individual gains more experience. Leung (2005), as well as others, suggest empathy and listening skills play a central role in cognitive processes and behaviors needed for management and leadership (George, 2000; Goleman, 1995; Mandell&Pherrani, 2003; Salovey& Mayer, 1990; Sosik&Megerian, 1999).

Listening helps managers not only to understand others, but also increases self-awareness. Since managers need to deal with employee issues, effective listening behaviors can help managers to become successful supervisors (Crittenden & Crittenden, 1985). Managers can create strong organizational cultures that value listening by demonstrating effective listening behaviors themselves (Flynn, Valikoski,&Grau, 2008).

Effective listening brings new ideas forward and allows people to voice their opinions, thoughts and experiences (Bachelet, Kawamura,&TennenhausEisler, 2013). Senecal and Burke (1992) found that listening helped gain coworkers support by providing them with recognition and making them feel that they were valued members of the organization. In addition, listening helped people to obtain job-related knowledge that allowed them to perform their jobs better, to establish rapport with others and to improve interpersonal relations (Floyd, 1985). Listening is a highly desirable workplace skill for both managers and non-managers (Cooper, 1997; Coopman, 2001; Husband,Cooper,&Monsour, 1988; Nichols & Stevens, 1957; Rogers &Roethlisberger, 1952; Sypher, 1984).

In general, organizational position has been shown to influence managers' perceptions of their own listening abilities (Brownell, 1990). In the past, a major congruency issue existed between middle managers' impressions of their own listening skills versus how their employees viewed these middle managers' actual listening skills (Brownell, 1990; 2003). This fact further justifies the need for studying differences between managers and non-managers empirically on the listening variable.

The Relevance of Gender to Listening

According to Collins (2006), men and women listen differently. Men tend to structure their listening in terms of goals, thereby, focusing more on listening to information related to the current task. Women, on the other hand, connect with the emotional message and undertones of a conversation. They tend to be more concerned with the occurrence of the conversation than with the pertinent information discussed. Women often interject with small acknowledgements such as ‘yes,’ “I see” and “mm-hmm” to show the speaker that they are actively listening and processing the information. Men tend to listen silently, interjecting sparsely and usually only asking for clarification. The differences in listening style can cause women to assume that men are not listening while men may think that women “overlisten” (Watson & Barker, 1984).

People associate women with the listening role and thus perceive women to be better listeners (Burke & Collins, 2001; Borisoff& Merrill, 1998, Barker, Pearce,& Johnson, 1992; Borisoff& Hahn, 1992; Brownell, 1990). Rubin (1982) and Pearson, Turner, and Todd-Mancillas (1991) found women are taught a muted form of communication that does not encourage a raised voice or expression of opinion. Therefore, men speak up more than women do; and people perceive women to be better listeners. Heath (2006) believes that women are perceived better listeners because they listen to the issue and do not just hear words, but also listen for content and delivery.

Collar (2005) revealed female psychological counselors were good listeners as they understood effective or ineffective psychological reactions better than male psychological counselors, but Collins (2006) stated that women when compared to men may be better at interpreting emotion, but this difference is not valid when women are compared with men who are trained as counselors and other therapeutic professionals.

In a study by Welch and Mickelson (2013), a gender difference in therapeutic listening was found with female managers indicating they use more therapeutic listening than male managers do. Therapeutic listening involves emotional understanding whereby individuals often act as sounding boards to allow another person to vent. When therapeutic listening is used, the individual listens with empathy and understanding (Wolvin&Coakley, 1993). This study also found that female middle managers had a higher mean for comprehensive listening than did the male middle managers, thus, showing that women, when listening, pay more attention to the details than men do. Schein’s (1992) research on organizational culture also found that male and female managers have different beliefs about listening and approach their organizational culture differently based upon these beliefs. Therefore, how men and women perceive their listening behaviors may influence organizational culture.

It seems that women give more attention to the speaker, paraphrase messages, and ask questions, which shows they may display more effective listening behaviors than their male counterparts do (Levitt, 2001; Trenholm& Jensen, 2004; Devito, 2007). In addition, gender differences have occurred in how managers perceive the usefulness of different forms of listening (Welch & Mickelson, 2013).

The Relevance of National Culture to Listening

Wolvin (1987) suggests that people from different cultures have different perceptions of listening. Scholars have acknowledged the influence of culture on perceptions and patterns of listening (Brownell, 2012; Hall, 1976; Kiewitz, Weaver, Brosius,&Weimann, 1997,

Orbe&Bruess, 2005; Purdy, 2000; Rogers &Farson, 1986; Wolvin, 1987; Wolvin&Coakley, 1988, Zohoori, 2013). Individuals from different countries may perceive listening behaviors differently, approach listening in different ways, and display specific listening styles that reflect the influence of a person's cultural background (Kiewitz, Weaver, Brosius,&Weimann,1997; Lewis, 1999; Aaronson & Scarborough, 1977; Langer, 1980; Shiffin& Schneider,1977)

Mujtaba and Pohlman (2010) stated that working professionals tend to behave according to how they are socialized within their respective cultures. This is called the global-culture approach that assumes organizations conform to the culture and practice of their own group (Zaidman, 2001). Adler (1986) argued national culture has a greater impact on employees than organizational culture.

Brownell (2006) found that "listeners often look to the context of the situation for additional cues to make sense of what they hear" (p. 48). Based upon her belief, it would seem that members of high-context cultures such as Malaysia and India might perceive and process listening differently than do members of low-context cultures such as the USA. Individual expectations for what is considered appropriate social behavior and communication, which includes listening, seem to be determined by an individual's particular national culture (Hall, 1976; Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). As Hall (1976) explained, members of high-context cultures consider the listener responsible for the effective outcomes of communication due to their sensitivity to nonverbal cues in the communication environment, whereas members of low-context cultures hold the communicator accountable for effective outcomes due to their dependence on verbal cues.

Listening in a high-context culture requires an active listener who "does not passively absorb the words which are spoken, but [who] actively tries to grasp the facts and feelings in what he hears, to help the speaker work out his own problems" (Rogers &Farson, 1986, p. 149). Culturally, individuals in the USA are described as members of the low-context culture (Hall, 1976) and individualistic (Hofstede, 1980). On the other hand, Indians and Malaysians are characterized by their collectivistic orientation (Hofstede, 1980) and are considered members of a high-context culture (Hall, 1976). Indians and Malaysians, as members of a high-context and collectivistic culture, are more likely to perceive listening differently than individuals from USA who are members of a low-context and individualistic culture.

Rationale and Purpose of the Study

Clearly national culture does influence listening, but no studies could be found that compared USA working professionals' perceptions and orientations toward listening with working professionals in Malaysia and India. Little published research could be found that investigated listening behaviors within and across different cultures (Bonk, 2000; Imhof, 1998, 2004; Seo, 2002).

Flynn, Valikoski, and Grau (2008) has stated that much of the relevant academic research concerning listening is aging, and thus it lacks empirical research. Most research about listening in the business context is prescriptive or descriptive in nature. The majority of research on listening is based on intuitive and largely anecdotal data (Flynn &Bodie, 2007). Despite the acknowledged importance of workplace listening, little empirical evidence is available, and empirical research regarding listening as an organizational variable appears to be almost nonexistent. Bostrom (1990) and Cooper (1997) concluded little progress has occurred in the last 20 years regarding listening competency in organizations.

While listening is commonly known to have two dimensions—people are believed to be either good or bad listeners—only a handful of studies have ventured deep enough to determine the dimensions of the listening construct. Little is known about how those dimensions correlate with meaningful independent variables studied in the academic literature, i.e. gender, years of experience, age, educational level, type of position held within an organization, and national culture (Bonk, 2000; Imhof, 1998, 2004; Imhof&Janusik, 2006; Seo, 2002). Continued developments in global business suggest a heightened need for more cross-national comparative of management studies of listening (Budhwar, Woldu, &Ogbonna, 2008)

Evidence can be found that gender, position,national culture and effective listening all impact the achievement of organizational missions (Bell & Martin, 2014; Borisoff& Hahn, 1992; Burke & Collins, 2001; Hass & Arnold, 1995). However, thosefour dimensions have never been explored together in an empirical investigation to ascertain their relevance on perceptions of effective listening. It is not known whether the perceptions of males versus females, the position a person holds within an organization (managers versus non-managers) where individuals live, for example India, USA or Malaysia, have scientifically different perceptions of one or more of the true dimensions of the listening construct. It is also not known if the interaction of these variables is meaningful. In other words, will these independent variables interact in a way that has an effect on the magnitude of their perceptions of the listening behaviors in which they engage? Is listening dependent on these factors?

Therefore this study will explore the listening skills of managers and non-managers from three countries — India, Malaysia, and the USA. It will specifically examine the self-perceived listening behaviors of managers and non-managers from these three countries in relationship to organizational position, gender, and national culture. We therefore hypothesize:

H₁: There is no main-effect of organizational position on the perceptions of listening behavior.

H₂: There is no main-effect of gender on the perceptions of listening behavior.

H₃: There is no two-way interaction effect of gender and organizational position on the perceptions of listening behavior.

H₄: There is no main-effect of national culture on the perceptions of listening behavior.

H₅: There is no two-way interaction effect of national culture and organizational position on listening behavior.

H₆: There is no two-way interaction effect of national culture and gender on the perceptions of listening behavior.

H₇: There is no three-way interaction effect of organizational position and gender across national cultures on the perceptions of listening behavior.

SURVEY, DATA COLLECTION AND METHODS

According to Pearce, Johnson, and Barker (2003), several listening self-inventories have been created to meet the needs of organizational executives, trainers, and academicians to provide an instrument to help those in the workplace—managers in particular—to quickly review their listening effectiveness. The ListeningSelf-Inventory by Glenn and Pood (1989) was chosen for this research study as it was designed to help managers identify barriers impacting their

individual listening performance and consequently improve their listening skills. In addition, this self-inventory could help advance cross-cultural understanding and management of listening as well as test the capability of this assessment in a cross-cultural management context.

After Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, the listening-self inventory and demographic questions were distributed to both managers and non-managers of the three countries of India, Malaysia, and the USA.

The 15 questions of the self-inventory measured a respondent's perception of the magnitude of his or her own engagement in listening behaviors. Administered electronically via the Internet, the survey respondents could select from a range of "Definitely yes," "Probably yes," "Maybe," "Probably not" or "Definitely not" on each item.

According to Spector (1994), the use of self-report studies should not be automatically dismissed as being an inferior methodology, but they should be encouraged, where appropriate. He further stated that self-reports can be quite useful in providing a picture of how people feel and can provide inter-correlations among various feelings and perceptions.

Proficiency in English

All the international participants were proficient in reading English. The English language literacy in Malaysia and in India is similar. English is not the first language, but it is used as a medium of instruction from nursery throughout the educational system. The questionnaire used an English language version, which was similar to other English language questionnaires used by researchers (Bochner, 1994; Furnham & Muhiudee, 1984; Schumaker & Barraclough, 1989). All surveys from the three countries were deemed to have no inherent bias in language.

Descriptive Statistics and Chi-Square Tests

To ascertain if significant differences exist in the relative frequency of descriptive and categorical variables, Chi-Square tests were run using SPSS 22.0. Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics for the independent variables of organizational position, gender, and national culture. Of the 504 respondents who indicated their gender, 203 were female and 301 were male. Malaysia, USA and India had 151, 176, and 184 responses respectively. There were 199 managers and 230 non-managers who responded from 13 industries and fields. A list of those industries and fields respondents mentioned specifically more than twice follows:

- Advertising
- Annunciation
- Audit
- Auditing
- Business Intelligence
- Communication
- Consulting
- Consulting & Publishing
- Consulting engineer
- Consumer Products
- Energy
- Engineering
- Entertainment
- Environment Management
- Events Management
- Exploration & Mobiling
- Export Import
- F&B Customer Service Line
- Federal Law Enforcement
- Field Manager, Iffco, (Field Job)
- Film
- Food & Beverage
- GIS
- Government
- Hospitality
- HR Consulting
- Legal
- Lumber Distribution
- Management
- Marketing
- Media Agency
- Military
- Mobile
- NGO
- Nonprofit/Charity
- Office Automation
- Oil & Gas
- Operations
- Pharma & Consumer
- Print Communications (Media)
- Psychological Publishing
- Public Accounting
- Public Relations
- Railways Equipment
- Recruitment
- Research & Development

- Restaurant Industry
- Restaurant/Hospitality
- Risk Consulting
- sales and service of heavy equipment
- Sales Engineering
- Shipping
- Sport and Fitness
- Telecommunications
- Television/ entertainment
- Thermal Power Project
- ToolRoom Engineering
- Training
- Wireless Telecom

Although age, educational attainment and organizational size are not variables to be tested in this study, they are also included in Table 1. The individuals worked in both managerial and non-managerial positions in firms across various sectors. Management level was comprised of personnel who were involved in policy making, planning, decision making processes, organizing and controlling business activity, procurement, manufacturing, marketing, finance, and human resources while the non-managerial level were involved at the operation levels only. This sample was taken cross 13 different industries including banking or finance, construction, education, insurance, healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, production, real estate, retail, sales, service, transportation, and other. We also show a number of fields on the previous page in which respondents said they worked.

Demographics		Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
Gender	Females	203	39.6	40.3
	Males	301	58.7	100.0
	Total	504	98.2	
	Missing	9	1.8	
Total		513	100.0	
National culture	Malaysia	151	29.4	29.5
	USA	176	34.3	64.0
	India	184	35.9	100.0
	Total	511	99.6	
	Missing	2	.4	
Total		513	100.0	
Organizational position	Managers	199	38.8	46.4
	Non-Managers	230	44.8	100.0
	Total	429	83.6	
	Missing	84	16.4	
Total		513	100.0	
Education Attainment	High School to Assoc.	66	12.9	13.3
	Bachelors	250	48.7	63.7
	Masters	137	26.7	91.3
	Doctoral, Prof, other Adv.	43	8.4	100.0
	Total	496	96.7	
	Missing	17	3.3	
Total		513	100.0	
Age	≤ 20 to 30 years old	302	58.9	60.6
	31 to 40 years old	81	15.8	76.9
	41 to 50 years old	58	11.3	88.6
	51 and older	57	11.1	100.0
	Total	498	97.1	
	Missing	15	2.9	
Total		513	100.0	
Organization Size	1 to 20 employees	102	19.9	22.9
	21 to 100 employees	92	17.9	43.5
	101 to 500 employees	124	24.2	71.3
	500 or more employees.	128	25.0	100.0
	Total	446	86.9	
	Missing	67	13.1	
Total		513	100.0	

Some preliminary Chi-Square tests with a Pearson coefficient showed a significant difference between the relative frequency of males and females across national culture. Table 2 illustrates a significant Pearson $p= 0.000$, with Chi-Square = 34.893. Therefore, among the 301 males who completed the survey, the 136 observed count of India males exceeded the expected count of 105.2 significantly. The 90 observed USA females exceeded their expected count of 70.8 significantly. India females, to the contrary, with an observed count of 40, were a bit under represented with an expected count of 70.8. However, the breakdown was 176 USA, 176 India, and 150 Malaysia. Furthermore, the Goodman and Kruskal's (1972) tau test showed national culture as independent variable accounts for 7.0% ($p= 0.001$) of the error in gender as a dependent variable; on the other hand, when gender was independent variable, it accounted for only 3.6% ($p=0.023$) of the error in national culture as dependent variable.

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
USA	Count	86	90	176
	Expected	(105.2)	(70.8)	
India	Count	136	40	176
	Expected Count	(105.2)	(70.8)	
Malaysia	Count	78	72	150
	Expected Count	(89.6)	(60.4)	
Total	Count	300	202	502
Chi-square = 34.893, Degrees of Freedom=2, Significance = .000				
Goodman and Kruskal's Tau Test for Gender and Culture				
	Value		Std. Error	Sig.
National Culture Dependent		0.036	0.011	0.023
Gender Dependent		0.070	0.021	0.001

Table 3 illustrates a non-significant Pearson, $p= 0.286$, with Chi-Square = 2.502. In this case, Goodman and Kruskal Tau (1972) indicates that neither country nor gender predict each other significantly. Nevertheless, there were 211 USA males and females with 0-5 years of work experience, 81 with 6-10 years, and 161 with 11 or more years of work experience. The relative frequency of males and females across the three levels of work experience is the same.

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
0 to 5years	USA	120	91	211
	Expected Count	(127.2)	(83.8)	
6 to 10years	Count	54	27	81
	Expected Count	(48.8)	(32.2)	
11 years or more	Count	99	62	161
	Expected Count	(97.0)	(64.0)	
Total	Count	273	180	453
Chi-square = 2.502, Degrees of Freedom=2, Significance = .286				
Goodman and Kruskal's Tau Test for Gender and Years of Work Experience				
	Value		Std. Error	Sig.
Experience Dependent	0.003		0.004	0.299
Gender Dependent	0.006		0.007	0.287

Table 4 illustrates a significant Pearson, $p= 0.000$, with Chi-Square = 38.074. Professionals differ in their relative frequency or percentage among USA, India and Malaysia residency, with Pearson Chi-Square $p= .000$. The relative frequency or percentage of managers and non-managers in this study are not equal in terms of their national culture. Managers are significantly clustered in the USA sample with a 98 observed count for USA managers compared to an 80 expected count for USA managers; where as in India observed count contained 93 non-managers compared to an expected count of 64.5 non-managers. A Chi-Square with Pearson correlations showed a significant difference between the relative frequency of males and females across three levels of work experience. Furthermore, the Goodman and Kruskal's (1972) tau test showed organizational position as independent variable accounting for only 4.2% of the error in national culture as a dependent variable; on the other hand, when national culture was an independent variable, it accounted for 8.9% of the error in management position as a dependent variable.

		Organizational Position		Total	
		Managers	Non-Managers		
Country	USA	Count	98	75	173
		Expected Count	80.0	93.0	173.0
		% of Total	22.9%	17.5%	40.4%
	India	Count	27	93	120
		Expected Count	55.5	64.5	120.0
		% of Total	6.3%	21.7%	28.0%
	Malaysia	Count	73	62	135
		Expected Count	62.5	72.5	135.0
		% of Total	17.1%	14.5%	31.5%
Total		Count	198	230	428
		Expected Count	198.0	230.0	428.0
		% of Total	46.3%	53.7%	100.0%
Chi-square = 38.074, Degrees of Freedom=2, Significance = 0.000					
Goodman and Kruskal's Tau Test for Gender and Organizational Position					
	Value	Std. Error	Sig.		
National Culture Dependent	0.042	0.013	0.000		
Organizational Position Dependent	0.089	0.025	0.000		

Scale Reliability

Fifteen variables (survey questions 1-15) were selected to represent the listening construct as described in current literature. Scale reliability was .597, standardized items was .592. The scale reliability could not be improved when deleting any of the items. When dealing with a lower than .70 alpha, a lower alpha is often influenced by the number of items, i.e., fewer items often result in lower alphas. An alpha of .70 is normally acceptable, but only when the assumption is that the construct to be measured is unidimensional (Cortina, 1993). It is not proper for the researcher to immediately assume that the listening construct is unidimensional. Most researchers have found that listening is at a minimum a two-dimensional construct: good and bad listening behaviors. Furthermore, when the number of dimensions of a single construct is unknown, a principal component factor analysis is normally required to determine the true number of dimensions of a construct in question (Cortina, 1993). In fact, Cortina (1993) warns against misinterpreting high alphas:

The problem with interpretation arises when large alpha is taken to mean that the test is unidimensional. One solution to such problems with the statistic is to use one of the many factor-analytic techniques currently available to make sure that there are no large departures from unidimensionality. This provides information similar to that provided by the estimate of precision. If this analysis suggests the existence of only one factor, then alpha can be used to conclude that the set of items is unidimensional. (p. 103)

The number of dimensions repeatedly reported in the literature for the listening construct is two types of listeners: good listeners and bad listeners (Imhof, 2004; Imhof&Janusik, 2006; Worthington &Bodie, 2008). Therefore, a factor analysis was done.

Sampling Adequacy and Factor Analysis

Table 5 illustrates the gauge for sampling adequacy using Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy Test, which was .709 and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 735.543, with degrees of freedom at 105, with $p = .000$, along with means and standard deviations. The communalities average is .524; nonetheless, our sample size of 474 useable surveys was well above the sample size threshold of 300. Based on these results, we deemed the sample size appropriate for factor analysis. Responses to the 15 items measuring listening behaviors were subjected to an un-rotated Principal Component Factor Analysis, with a Scree Plot (in IBM's SPSS 22.0). The Scree Plot suggested five factors. An unrotated initial solution also suggested five factors with an eigenvalue of one criterion. Five factors explained 52.444 percent of variance. Some items correlated a bit high on more than one factor in the initial solution and thus the result was a two-factor solution rather than a five-factor solution.

Table 5 Mean, Standard Deviations, Communalities, KMO and Bartlett's Test			
KMO and Bartlett's Test			
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.			.709
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		735.543
	Df		105
	Sig.		.000
Communalities and Survey Items	Mean	Std. Dv.	Extraction
BL1: I frequently attempt to listen to several conversations at the same time.	2.966	1.200	.463
GL2: I like people to give me only the facts and then let me make my own interpretations.	2.439	1.095	.607
BL3: I sometime pretend to pay attention to people.	2.606	1.140	.447
GL4: I consider myself a good judge of non-verbal communications.	2.276	0.989	.650
BL5: I usually know what another person is going to say before he or she says it.	2.892	0.884	.698
BL6: I usually end conversations that do not interest me by diverting my attention from the speaker.	3.059	1.142	.465
GL7: I frequently nod, frown, or whatever to let the speaker know how I feel about what he or she is saying.	2.122	1.045	.434
GL8: I usually respond immediately when someone has finished talking.	2.475	0.997	.542
BL9: I evaluate what is being said while it is being said.	2.055	0.909	.539
BL10: I usually formulate a response while the other person is still talking.	2.544	1.042	.572
BL11: The speaker's delivery style frequently keeps me from listening to content.	2.468	1.061	.340
GL12: I usually ask people to clarify what they have said rather than guess at the meaning.	2.084	0.943	.585
GL13: I make a concerted effort to understand other people's point of view.	1.854	0.831	.548
BL14: I frequently hear what I expect to hear rather than what is said.	3.304	1.020	.370
GL15: Most people feel that I have understood their point of view when we disagree.	2.532	0.922	.607
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	Average Communalities .524.		
Note: Total useable survey responses were = 474			

The rotated factor matrix with component loadings and named factors are shown in Table 6. A two-factor solution was more parsimonious than a five-factor solution with a cut-off of .40. A variable was said to load on a factor if it had a component loading of .40 or higher on that factor and less than .40 on any other factors (Devellis, 1991; Hatcher, 1994; Kachigan, 1991; Russell, 2002). Two factors were deemed appropriate for further analysis. Neither factor had a factor score greater than ± 2 in the initial Factor Score Covariance Matrix, thus allowing us to surmise the factors to be orthogonal, or uncorrelated (Gorsuch, 1983). The derived factors were indicative of two dimensions of listening, with a Rotation Sums of Squared Loading 1.883 for factor 1; and 1.217 for factor 2. Shown in Table 6 is the result of a *Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax Rotation* used to extract the final two factors, which converged in only 3 iterations, with item descriptions in the Table's footnotes. Only six items (BL3, BL1, BL10, BL6, GL13 and GL4) survived the rotation, and the other nine items were not considered when naming the factors.

Rotated Factor Matrix ^a	Factors	
	Distracted Listener	Attentive Listener
BL3: I sometime pretend to pay attention to people.	.504	
BL1: I frequently attempt to listen to several conversations at the same time.	.459	
BL10: I usually formulate a response while the other person is still talking.	.458	
BL6: I usually end conversations that do not interest me by diverting my attention from the speaker.	.422	
BL11: The speaker's delivery style frequently keeps me from listening to content.		
GL8: I usually respond immediately when someone has finished talking.		
BL5: I usually know what another person is going to say before he or she says it.		
GL7: I frequently nod, frown, or whatever to let the speaker know how I feel about what he or she is saying.		
GL2: I like people to give me only the facts and then let me make my own interpretations.		
GL13: I make a concerted effort to understand other people's point of view.		.674
GL4: I consider myself a good judge of non-verbal communications.		.419
GL12: I usually ask people to clarify what they have said rather than guess at the meaning.		
BL9: I evaluate what is being said while it is being said.		
BL14: I frequently hear what I expect to hear rather than what is said.		
GL15: Most people feel that I have understood their point of view when we disagree.		
Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. ^a		
a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.		

RESULTS

Table 7 illustrates the means and standard deviations for males and females on distracted listening across three countries. Our two factors derived from the Principal Axis Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation were used as dependent variables in our factorial ANOVA tests. IMB's SPSS 22.0 gives the option of saving factors as regression scores for each of the 394 survey respondents retained in the factor analysis.

We reject H_1 because there is a main effect of organizational position held on perceptions of distracted listening behavior. A main effect of position occurred on perceptions of distracted listening behavior, with $F(1, 382) = 18.159, p = .000$. Position, with a small size effect ($\eta^2 = .045$) accounts for 4.5% of the variance in the dependent variable: distracted listener.

We reject H_2 because there is a main-effect of gender on perceptions of distracted listening behavior. A main-effect occurred with gender on perceptions of distracted listening behavior, with $F(1, 382) = 5.234, p = .023$. Gender, with a small size effect ($\eta^2 = .014$) accounts for 1.4% of the variance in the dependent variable: distracted listener.

We reject H₅ because there is a two-way interaction effect between national culture and organizational position on perceptions of distracted listening behavior. As a two-way interaction effect between national culture and position on perceptions of distracted listening behavior occurred, with $F(2, 382) = 12.943, p = .000$. Country * Position, with a medium effect size ($\eta^2 = .063$) accounts for 6.3% of the variance in the dependent variable: distracted listener.

Dependent Variable: Distracted Listener					
Gender	National Culture	Org. Position	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	USA	Manager	.144	.913	54
		Non-Manager	.187	.856	28
		Total	.159	.889	82
	India	Manager	-.122	.727	20
		Non-Manager	.166	.743	61
		Total	.095	.745	81
	Malaysia	Manager	-.418	.740	39
		Non-Manager	.641	.670	26
		Total	.005	.880	65
	Total	Manager	-.097	.857	113
		Non-Manager	.279	.776	115
		Total	.092	.837	228
Female	USA	Manager	-.008	.878	41
		Non-Manager	-.239	.810	43
		Total	-.126	.847	84
	India	Manager	-.414	.734	5
		Non-Manager	.383	.655	10
		Total	.117	.762	15
	Malaysia	Manager	-.581	.813	31
		Non-Manager	.063	.686	36
		Total	-.235	.809	67
	Total	Manager	-.265	.880	77
		Non-Manager	-.047	.767	89
		Total	-.148	.826	166
Total	USA	Manager	.079	.897	95
		Non-Manager	-.071	.849	71
		Total	.015	.877	166
	India	Manager	-.180	.723	25
		Non-Manager	.197	.731	71
		Total	.098	.744	96
	Malaysia	Manager	-.491	.772	70
		Non-Manager	.305	.732	62
		Total	-.117	.850	132
	Total	Manager	-.165	.868	190
		Non-Manager	.136	.787	204
		Total	-.009	.839	394

For the distracted listener factor, the male mean is .100, while the female mean is -.133, with a -.233 negative mean difference. Therefore, males are significantly more prone to engage in distracted listening than females. The type of position held was highly significant ($p = .000$) and managers had mean of -.233, while non-managers had a mean of .200, with a -.433 negative mean difference. Therefore, managers were less likely to engage in distracted listening than non-managers. The only two-way interaction that was highly significant was between national culture and position, with $p = .000$. USA managers (mean = .068) are more prone to be distracted listeners than non-managers (mean = -.026); Indian managers are less likely to be distracted listeners (mean = -.268) than non-managers (mean = .274); and Malaysian managers are less likely to be distracted listeners (mean = -.500) than non-managers (mean = .352).

Table 8 illustrates the Tests of Between-Subject Effects for the three-factor model on distracted listening. Also in Table 8 are the means tests for gender, organizational position and country main effects and interaction effects, both two-way and three-way. The R Squared = .133 (Adjusted R Squared = .109), indicates the independent variables accounted for 10.9% of the variance in the three-way model and interact with the dependent variable (distracted listening) in a meaningful way, either as a main effect or in a two-way interaction.

Dependent Variable: Distracted Listener Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	36.961 ^a	11	3.360	5.349	.000	.133 ^a
Intercept	.067	1	.067	.107	.744	.000
Gender	3.288	1	3.288	5.234	*.023	.014
Country	.664	2	.332	.529	.590	.003
Org. Pos.	11.407	1	11.407	18.159	***.000	.045
Gender * Country	.900	2	.450	.717	.489	.004
Gender * Org. Pos.	.055	1	.055	.087	.768	.000
Country * Org. Pos.	16.261	2	8.131	12.943	***.000	.063
Gender * Country * Org. Pos.	1.783	2	.891	1.419	.243	.007
Error	239.973	382	.628			
Total	276.966	394				
Corrected Total	276.935	393				

a. R Squared = .133 (Adjusted R Squared = .109). NOTE: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

Although there was no three-way interaction effect ($p = .243$), Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the plot, range is from -1.0 to +1.0, based on the regression scores generated and saved while running the Principle Axis Factor Analysis, of the estimated marginal means of distracted listener with gender on the separate lines, national culture on the horizontal line, and manager versus non-managers on the separate plots. The Figure 1 plot clearly indicates male managers are more prone to distraction than female managers in all three countries. The Figure 2 plot clearly indicates male non-managers are more prone to distraction than female non-managers in USA and Malaysia are; however, the opposite is true for India female non-managers who appear to be more distracted than their male counterparts are.

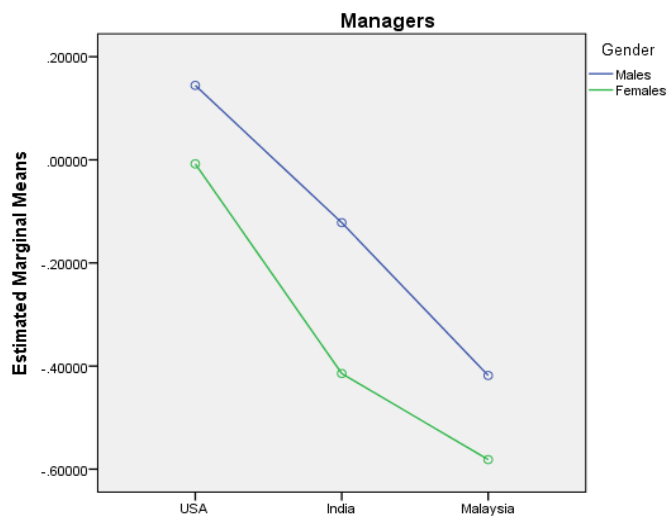


Figure 1: Distracted Listener as a Function of Gender on Culture and Manager

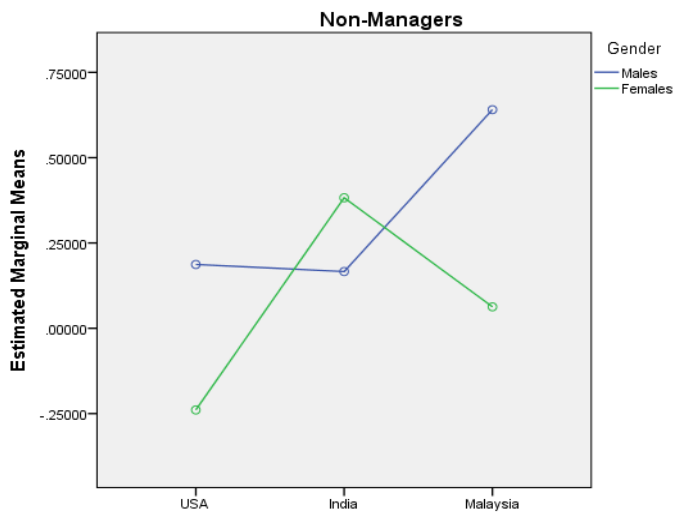


Figure 2: Distracted Listener as a Function of Gender on Culture and Non-Manager

Table 9 illustrates the means and standard deviations for males and females on attentive listening across three countries. We reject H_4 because there is a main effect of national culture on perceptions of attentive listening behavior, with $F(2, 382) = 23.879, p = .000$. National culture, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .111$) accounts for 11.1% of the variance in the dependent variable: attentive listener.

We reject H_5 because there is no two-way interaction effect between national culture and organizational position on perceptions of attentive listening behavior. There is a two-way

interaction effect between national culture and position on perceptions of attentive listening behavior, with $F(2, 382) = 5.526, p = .004$. Country * position, with a small effect size ($\eta^2 = .028$) accounts for 2.8% of the variance in the dependent variable: attentive listener.

We reject H_6 because there is a two-way interaction effect between national culture and gender on perceptions of attentive listening behavior. There is a two-way interaction effect between gender and national culture on perceptions of attentive listening behavior, with $F(2, 382) = 3.386, p = .035$. Gender * National culture, with a small effect size ($\eta^2 = .017$) accounts for 1.7% of the variance in the dependent variable: attentive listener.

For the attentive listener factor, the national culture variable is significant, with $p = .000$. Means for USA, India, and Malaysia are -.313, .234, and .28 respectively. Only the USA differed from India and Malaysia, while India and Malaysia did not differ. The negative mean difference between the USA and India was -.547, and between USA and Malaysia was -.598. Therefore, respondents from the USA are indicating they are less likely to be attentive listeners than respondents from India or Malaysia are.

Depending on the national culture, males differ significantly from females in a two-way interaction effect. The two-way interaction was significant between national culture and gender, with $p = .035$. USA males (mean = -.335) are less prone to be attentive listeners than Indian males (mean = .073) and Malaysian males (mean = .439); Similarly, USA females are less likely to be attentive listeners (mean = -.292) than Indian females (mean = .394) and Malaysian females (mean = -.130).

Table 9
Means and Std. Deviations for Attentive Listener with Three Independents (N = 394)

Dependent Variable: Attentive Listener

Gender	National Culture	Pos. Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Male	USA	Manager	-.353	.760	54
		Non-Manager	-.317	.864	28
		Total	-.341	.792	82
	India	Manager	.094	.638	20
		Non-Manager	.051	.661	61
		Total	.062	.651	81
	Malaysia	Manager	.152	.694	39
		Non-Manager	.727	.857	26
		Total	.382	.808	65
	Total	Manager	-.100	.752	113
		Non-Manager	.114	.837	115
		Total	.008	.801	228
Female	USA	Manager	-.424	.707	41
		Non-Manager	-.160	.796	43
		Total	-.289	.761	84
	India	Manager	.580	.967	5
		Non-Manager	.209	.624	10
		Total	.332	.741	15
	Malaysia	Manager	-.181	.745	31
		Non-Manager	.442	.990	36
		Total	.154	.933	67
	Total	Manager	-.261	.771	77
		Non-Manager	.125	.902	89
		Total	-.054	.863	166
Total	USA	Manager	-.384	.734	95
		Non-Manager	-.222	.821	71
		Total	-.314	.774	166
	India	Manager	.191	.719	25
		Non-Manager	.073	.654	71
		Total	.104	.669	96

	Malaysia	Manager	.004	.731	70
		Non-Manager	.562	.940	62
		Total	.266	.878	132
	Total	Manager	-.165	.762	190
		Non-Manager	.119	.864	204
		Total	-.018	.827	394

Table 10 illustrates the tests of between-subject effects for the three-factor model on attentive listening. Also in Table 10 are the means tests for gender, organizational position and country main effects and interaction effects, both two-way and three-way. The other two-way interaction that was significant was between national culture and position. USA managers (mean= -.389) are less prone to be attentive listeners than non-managers (mean= -.238); Indian managers are more likely to be attentive listeners (mean= .337) than non-managers (mean= .130); and Malaysian managers are less likely to be attentive listeners (mean= -.015) than non-managers (mean= .585). The R Squared = .160 (Adjusted R Squared = .136) indicated the independent variables accounted for 13.6% of the variance in the three-way model and interacted with the dependent variable (attentive listening) in a meaningful way, either as a main effect or in two-way interactions.

Dependent Variable: Attentive Listener--Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	43.040 ^a	11	3.913	6.612	.000	.160 ^a
Intercept	1.134	1	1.134	1.917	.167	.005
Gender	.021	1	.021	.036	.849	.000
Country	28.262	2	14.131	23.879	***.000	.111
Org. Pos.	1.984	1	1.984	3.353	.068	.009
Gender * Country	4.007	2	2.003	3.386	*.035	.017
Gender * Org. Pos.	.005	1	.005	.008	.929	.000
Country * Org. Pos.	6.540	2	3.270	5.526	** .004	.028
Gender * Country * Pos. Type	.681	2	.340	.575	.563	.003
Error	226.056	382	.592			
Total	269.223	394				
Corrected Total	269.096	393				

a. R Squared = .160 (Adjusted R Squared = .136) NOTE: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Although there was no three-way interaction effect ($p = .563$), Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the plot, range is from -1.0 to +1.0, based on the regression scores generated and saved while running the Principle Axis Factor Analysis, of the estimated marginal means of distracted listener with gender on the separate lines, national culture on the horizontal line, and manager vs. non-managers on the separate plots. The Figure 3 plot clearly indicates male managers in the USA and Malaysia perceive they are more prone to be attentive listeners than female managers, except in India, where female managers perceive they are more attentive. The Figure 4 plot clearly indicates USA and India female non-managers are more prone to attentive than male non-managers in USA and India, however, the opposite is true for Malaysia female non-managers who appear to be less attentive than their male counterparts. Women are found to be more attentive and less distracted when listening to people.

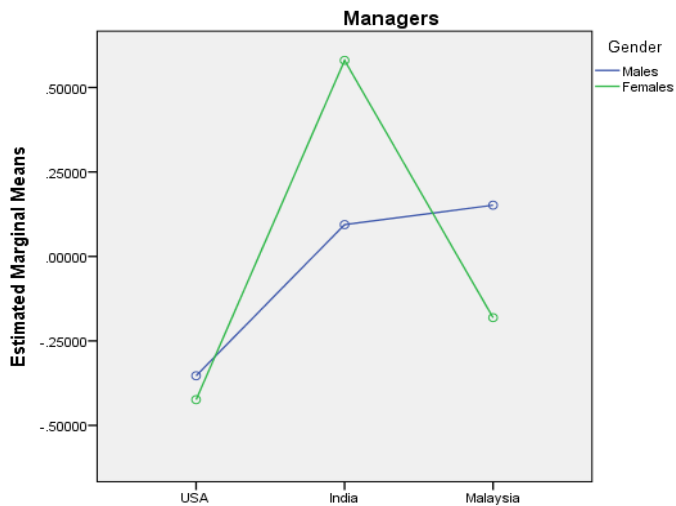


Figure 3: Attentive as a Function of Gender on Culture and Managers



Figure 4: Attentive Listener as a Function of Gender on Culture and Non-Managers

Reduced Models for Distracted and Attentive Listeners

Figures 1 and 2 Plots indicate that male managers perceive they are distracted and attentive listeners, significantly more so than their female counterparts in each country. This seems to be a contradiction. Table 9 earlier showed there were only five female managers from Malaysia, which might inflate the significant tests in the three factors ANOVA model. Moreover,

the earlier Chi-Square test showed the relative frequency of men and women to differ across national cultures; when these types of issues appear in the data, it is always a good idea to run a reduced model to ascertain if these differences across cultures are maintained when gender is removed as a variable from both factorial ANOVA models. The Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for both models (distracted and attentive listener models) were non-significant ($p=.189$ for distracted listener and $p=.039$ for attentive listener). Sample sizes were deemed equal in the two reduced models.

Table 11 that follows provides a summary of the tests of between-subject effects for the two-factor model on distracted listening. There is a main effect of position on perceptions of distracted listening behavior, with $F(2, 392) = 10.997, p=.001$. Culture, with a somewhat small effect size ($\eta^2 = .027$) accounts for 2.7% of the variance in the dependent variable: distracted listener. There is a significant interaction effect on perceptions of listening, with $F(2, 392) = 11.485, p=.000$. The medium effect size ($\eta^2 = .055$) for organizational position and culture together accounts for 5.5% of the variance in the dependent variable: distracted listener. The reduced model also means that position and culture account for an Adjusted R Squared = 0.074, or 7.4 % of the variance in distracted listening.

Dependent Variable: Distracted Listener						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	24.294 ^a	5	4.859	7.323	.000	.085
Intercept	.633	1	.633	.954	.329	.002
Org. Pos.	7.297	1	7.297	10.997	** .001	.027
Culture	1.808	2	.904	1.363	.257	.007
Org. Pos. * Culture	15.240	2	7.620	11.485	*** .000	.055
Error	260.084	392	.663			
Total	284.520	398				
Corrected Total	284.378	397				

a. R Squared = .085 (Adjusted R Squared = .074) NOTE: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$

Table 12 illustrates the tests of between-subject effects for the two-factor model on attentive listening. The reduced two-way model also means that organizational position and culture account for an Adjusted R Squared = 0.135, or 13.5% of the variance in attentive listening. Recall that gender, organizational position and national culture accounted for 13.6% of the variance in attentive listening from the earlier three-way model. This means that gender for attentive listen contributes nearly nothing to explaining the variance in attentive listening. There is a main effect of organizational position on perceptions of attentive listening behavior, with $F(2, 392) = 5.519, p=.019$, with a small effect size ($\eta^2 = .014$) that accounts for 1.4% of the variance in attentive listener. There is a main effect of national culture on perceptions of attentive listening behavior, with $F(2, 392) = 23.496, p=.000$, with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = .107$) that accounts for 10.7% of the variance in attentive listener. There is a significant interaction effect between organizational position and culture, with the small effect size ($\eta^2 = .027$) accounting for only 2.7% of the variance in distracted listener.

Dependent Variable: Attentive Listener						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	39.168 ^a	5	7.834	13.405	.000	.146
Intercept	.567	1	.567	.970	.325	.002
Org. Pos.	3.225	1	3.225	5.519	*.019	.014

Culture	27.460	2	13.730	23.496	***.000	.107
Org. Pos. * Culture	6.311	2	3.156	5.400	** .005	.027
Error	229.070	392	.584			
Total	268.330	398				
Corrected Total	268.237	397				
a. R Squared = .146 (Adjusted R Squared = .135)				NOTE: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$		

The Figure 5 plot clearly indicates managers in the USA are more prone to perceive they are distracted listeners than non-managers in the USA. The significant two-way interaction effect ($p = .000$), shown in Figure 5 illustrates the plot, range is from -1.0 to +1.0, based on the regression scores generated and saved while running the Principle Axis Factor Analysis, of the estimated marginal means of distracted listener with organizational position on the separate lines and national culture on the horizontal line. It is clear to see that managers and non-managers are furthest apart in Malaysia. On the other hand, non-managers in India perceive they are more prone to be distracted listeners than managers in India. And, non-managers in Malaysia perceive they are more prone to be distracted listeners than managers in Malaysia.

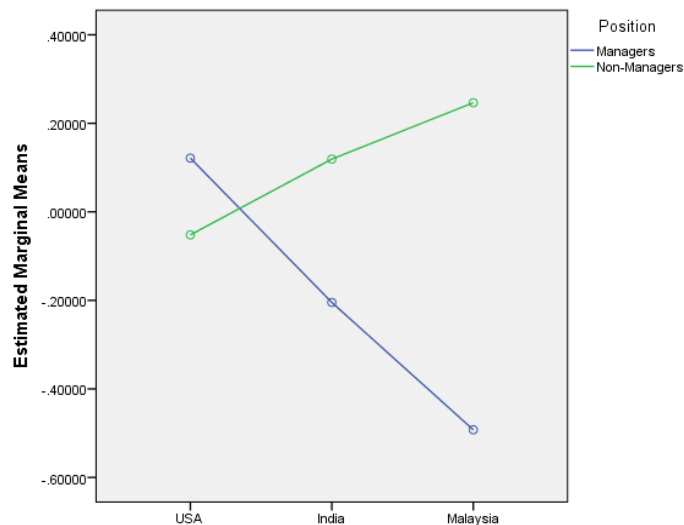


Figure 5: Distracted Listener as a Function of Position on National Culture

The Figure 6 plot clearly indicates managers in India are more prone to perceive they are attentive listeners than non-managers in India. The significant two-way interaction effect ($p = .005$), shown in Figure 6 illustrates the plot, range is from -1.0 to +1.0, based on the regression scores generated and saved while running the Principle Axis Factor Analysis, of the estimated marginal means of attentive listener with organizational position on the separate lines and national culture on the horizontal line. It is clear to see that managers and non-managers are furthest apart in Malaysia. On the other hand, non-managers in the USA perceive they are more prone to be attentive listeners than managers in the USA. And, non-managers in the Malaysia perceive they are more prone to be attentive listeners than managers in Malaysia.

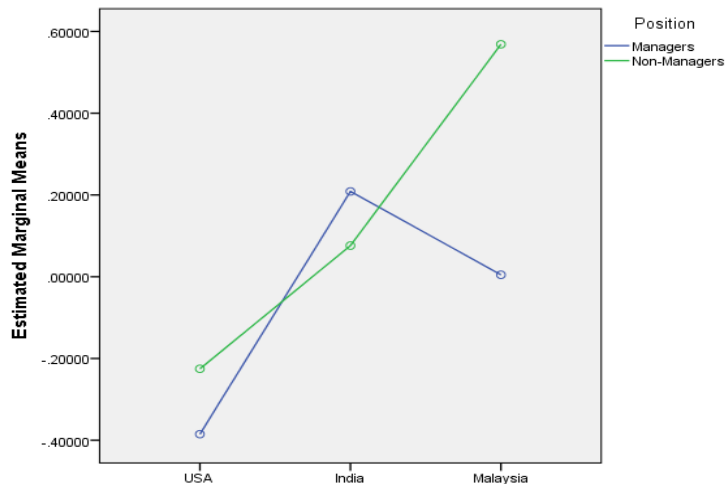


Figure 6: Attentive Listener as a Function of Position on National Culture

DISCUSSION

The most important variables to explain attentive listening are organizational position and national culture. This is contrary to the findings of Watson and Barker (1984) who found that gender had a meaningful influence on listening skills. Our study did reveal that overall men are significantly more prone to engage in distracted listening and not be as attentive as females. However, USA females and males were not as attentive as their Indian and Malaysian counterparts, which may show a cultural difference rather than a gender difference. Nevertheless, when looking at gender overall, regardless of country, men are not as attentive as women are. Our finding seems to support Welch and Mickelson (2013) who found that women pay more attention and are more attentive.

Regarding organizational position, managers are less likely to be distracted than non-managers are regardless of country of origin. This also seems to support the findings of Welch and Mickelson (2013) who found an increased listening competency was associated with more managerial responsibility as well as Sypher, Bostrom, and Seibert (1989) who concluded better listeners in the organizations held higher-level jobs. Some differences did occur across the three countries regarding organizational position. Managers were less distracted and more attentive in India than non-managers were, while USA and Malaysian managers were more distracted than non-managers were. This was an interesting finding, given that from a national culture standpoint, Malaysia and India are both shown to be higher context cultures. Listening in a high-context culture typically requires an active, attentive listener who “does not passively absorb the words which are spoken, but [who] actively tries to grasp the facts and feelings in what he hears, to help the speaker work out his own problems” (Roger & Farson, 1986, p. 149). The results for Malaysia are somewhat a revelation and contrary to what Chaney and Martin’s (2011) observed regarding people from high context culture. These researchers stated that high-context cultures are more respectful towards their elders and people in positions of authority.

Based upon Brownell’s (2006) guideline to evaluate respondents’ perceptions about their listening competence, analysis of USA, Malaysian and Indian working professionals did show that

national culture influenced the perceptions of the working professionals regarding their listening competence and revealed that the working professionals have different listening behaviors, which potentially reflect their cultural socialization. USA working professionals were more distracted and less attentive than the working professionals from India and Malaysian were.

In high context cultures, such as India and Malaysia “the closeness of human relationships, a structured social hierarchy, and strong behavioral norms influence communication style” (Kim, Pan,& Park, 1998, p. 512). The internal meaning of a message is usually embedded deep in the information, therefore, not everything is explicitly stated in writing or when spoken. In this cultural setting, a listener is expected to be able to read ‘between the lines’, to understand the unsaid, thanks to his or her background knowledge. People tend to speak one after another in a linear way, so a listener would not interrupt the speaker or become distracted. Communication is, according to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), indirect, ambiguous, harmonious, reserved and understated. Hall (1976) stated that members of high-context cultures consider the listener responsible for the effective outcomes of communication due to their sensitivity to nonverbal cues in the communication environment, whereas members of low-context cultures hold the communicator accountable for effective outcomes due to their dependence on verbal cues. Listening in a high-context culture requires an active, attentive listener who “does not passively absorb the words which are spoken, but [who] actively tries to grasp the facts and feelings in what he hears, to help the speaker work out his own problems” (Roger & Farson, 1986, p. 149).

While in a low context culture such as the USA, meanings are explicitly stated through language. When something is unclear, people will want further explanations to understand. A low context culture is characterized by direct and linear communication and by the constant and sometimes never-ending use of words and requires much listening, which may cause individuals to become distracted. Communication is direct, precise, dramatic, open, and based on feelings or true intentions (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

In light of high-context and low-context cultural orientations, USA working professionals are members of low-context culture and place a higher value on verbal and written communication than on nonverbal and contextual communication. Indians and Malaysians are members of a high-context culture and are more likely to be sensitive to the contextual elements and implicit meanings of communication and therefore be less distracted. Our study seems to further substantiate the findings of other studies (Mujtaba & Pohlman, 2010; Adler, 1986; Kumbruck & Derboven, 2005) that people within the same operating environment share important characteristics of culture. The findings of the present study also supports the observations made by Kiewitz, Weaver, Brosius, and Weimann (1997) that the USA working professionals display less patience and get distracted when listening to people. These researchers found that the USA participants listened to be entertained, persuaded, and only listened for approximately 30 minutes.

The more attentive listening behaviors of the Indian and Malaysian working professionals may also be influenced by the fact that collectivism, humane orientation, and power distance are higher for these two countries when compared to the USA (Gupta, 2010). The family is patriarchal and so are their management or leadership styles. Within the family setting, elders are revered, listened to, and taken care of by their children (Chaney & Martin, 2011). The USA is an individualistic culture that listens to all individuals and does not necessarily place a premium on listening to elders. India and Malaysia have a higher power distance dimension. Thus in India

and Malaysia, a listener who is considered less powerful will respect the speaker who is more powerful by listening attentively.

While the USA scored lower on Power Distance, hierarchy is established for convenience and managers rely on individual employees and teams for their expertise, therefore they listen to individuals at all levels. Within USA organizations, both managers and employees expect to be listened to and consulted (House, Brodbeck, & Chhokav, 2007).

Working professionals may find themselves listening to a person from another culture who does not speak with the same semiotic code. Thus, individuals may need to learn to adapt their listening styles to accommodate different national cultures (Kumbruck & Derboven, 2005).

We must also be mindful that although the relevance of gender on listening skills has been determined important in a handful of studies, in our reduced models, where gender was excluded as a variable, organizational position had a much greater degree of impact on the dependent variables of attentive listening and distracted listening. The R Square for both models indicates the robustness of the two-factor model over a three-factor model. It also appears that non-managers perceive they are more prone to be significantly higher on both distracted and attentive listening, which is an indication that the two dimensions of listening are in fact mutually independent of one another. The non-manager respondents to the survey in this study perceive they can be both prone to distractions while on the other hand be attentive listeners as well.

IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

For effective cross-cultural communication, all working professionals need to be attentive listeners. The ability to understand differences in semiotic codes and communicate with people from other cultures is becoming critical. Understanding how and if national culture influences listening is important to an increasingly intercultural world of work. Becoming aware of the listening behaviors of managers and non-managers in different countries could further help in identifying effective listening behaviors for doing global business. Knowing how managers and non-managers perceive their listening behaviors could provide important insight into their use of listening skills.

Since limited research is available that explores listening behaviors in the three countries of the USA, India, and Malaysia, this study provides important insights regarding the effects of organizational position, gender, and national culture on distracted and attentive listening skills of working professionals. An implication of the results should be to look for the effect of national culture when conducting comparative studies of listening across cultures. From a practical standpoint, managers and non-managers need to be aware of the complexity and multidimensionality of listening and national cultures. When interacting with business colleagues who have different national culture backgrounds, individuals should be mindful that different cultures listen differently.

Limitations

A limitation of this study is that it is based on a self-perception measurement and only measured the respondents' perceptions of their listening competence. To understand the influence of national culture on listening and to what extent the respondents are actually effective listeners,

additional measures should be included to cross validate these self-reports by taking in the perspectives of others through a 360 assessment.

In addition, the study engaged in a selective population from three countries. The study could further be broadened to include more countries. Given the small sample size, researchers should be careful to not make generalizations based upon the results of this study.

Finally, the sample may be indicative but cannot be said that it is the representative of each country as a whole. Therefore, more regions from these specific countries could be tested to authenticate the results of the present study.

Concluding Thought

This study is the first to explore listening as it relates to organizational position, gender, and national culture in the three countries of the USA, India and Malaysia. It contributes to the cross-cultural listening research regarding the contrast in Eastern and Western cultures. Listening is an area of research that deserves more exploration to advance effective cross-cultural communication and to facilitate an understanding of the impact of national culture.

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