

Chapter XLV

The Listening Styles Profile

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BACKGROUND

Traditionally, communication scholars have been most concerned with how, when, where, and with whom individuals choose to communicate. While investigating communication events from an encoder perspective is important, it is equally important to investigate communication from a decoder perspective. Many researchers agree that gaining insight into the listening process—how individuals perceive, process, remember and understand oral messages—should enhance our understanding of communication events substantially. There appears to be a good deal of theoretical support for the notion that listening is a multidimensional concept. For example, descriptions of listening constructs such as “appreciative,” “critical,” “discriminative,” and “therapeutic” appear throughout the literature. Furthermore, empirical evidence provided by broadly administered listening-performance tests highlights considerable individual differences across divergent constructs such as content, relational, and emotional listening.

Differences in listening styles reflect attitudes, beliefs, and predispositions about the how, where, when, who, and what of information reception and

encoding. Several examples illustrate the diversity of listening styles. Some people prefer listening to factual information or statistics, while others favor personal examples and illustrations. Some are more willing to linger on content, while others prefer concise and to the point presentations. The listening styles profile (LSP-16) was developed to identify an individual’s predominant listening style (Watson, Barker, & Weaver, 1995). The listening styles profile is a 16-item inventory designed to assess four distinct listening preferences labeled people, action, content, and time.

The people listening style emerged as a preference where concern for others’ feelings and emotions appear paramount. People-style listeners appear to seek out areas of common interest with others and are responsive to their emotions. Action-style listeners prefer to receive concise, error-free presentations, and can become particularly impatient and easily frustrated when listening to a disorganized presentation. Content style listeners, on the other hand, display a preference for receiving complex and challenging information that they can carefully evaluate before forming judgments and opinions. Time-style listeners demonstrate a preference for brief, hurried inter-

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actions with others. and tend to let others know how much time they have to listen or how long they have to meet.

RELIABILITY

Watson, Barker, and Weaver (1995) computed two estimates of reliability for each listening style. First, internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's test. The strongest coefficients emerged for the people (0.62), action (0.64), and time (0.65) oriented listening styles, while the alpha for the content (0.58) style was slightly weaker. Given the small number of items in each listening style, these coefficients suggest a great deal of internal consistency for each listening style (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

The second estimate of reliability was computed using the test/retest procedure, where undergraduate students completed the listening style profile two times and results were compared. These coefficients, derived from the Pearson product-moment correlations, were all moderately high: people, $r = 0.68$; action, $r = 0.75$; content, $r = 0.73$; and time, $r = 0.71$, and significant ($p < 0.0001$) indicating considerable stability in the listening styles measures over time.

Other studies utilizing the listening style profile (LSP-16) have also reported similar reliabilities: people-ranging from 0.60 to 0.76; action-ranging from 0.56 to 0.68; content-ranging from 0.55 to 0.72; and time-ranging from 0.61 to 0.69. Different sample sizes and varying response metrics appear to account for these variations.

VALIDITY

The 16 listening items were subjected to a principal components factor analysis that yielded a four-factor solution and accounted for approximately

50% of the variance. The first factor, labeled people-oriented listening style, was defined by high loadings on four items such as "I focus my attention on the other person's feelings when listening to them." The second factor, labeled action-oriented listening style, was defined by high loadings on four items including "I am frustrated when others don't present their ideas in an orderly, efficient way." Factor three was defined by four items including "I interrupt others when I feel time pressure" and was labeled time-oriented listening style. The fourth factor, labeled content-oriented listening style, was defined by high loadings on four items including "I like the challenge of listening to complex information." The factor loadings for the four indices ranged from 0.57 to 0.80.

In the 10-plus years since the listening styles profile was developed, many researchers have used the instrument successfully in a variety of research projects, further suggesting the instrument's validity. Studies have examined listening styles and empathy (Weaver & Kirtley, 1995), individual differences in listening styles (Johnston, Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 2000; Weaver, Watson, & Barker, 1996; Worthington, 2003), communication apprehension and listening style preferences (Sargent, Weaver, & Kiewitz, 1997), the relationship between listening preferences, communication apprehension, receiver apprehension, and communicator style (Bodie & Villaume, 2003), listening styles and second guessing (Kirtley & Honeycutt, 1996), the listening styles of the Type-A personality (Sargent, Fitch-Hauser, & Weaver, 1997), effect of listening style preference on juror decision making (Worthington, 2001), using listening style preferences to identify sex differences in perceptions of ourselves and our peers (Sargent & Weaver, 2003), and cross-cultural applications (Kiewitz, Weaver, Brosius, & Weimann, 1997).

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