

Running Head: LISTENING AND ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCE

Not Just Holding Forth: How Listening Relates to Exerting Influence

### Abstract

The present study explored various ways in which listening relates to organization members' success in influencing others. Based on the notion that listening is positively related to influence through informational and relational mechanisms, we found that: (1) how well organizational members listen is positively associated with their tendencies to influence others, over and above how well they engage in expressive communications, (2) listening also interacts with expressive communication to predict influence, such that the positive relationship between listening and influence is more pronounced among people with stronger expressive communication tendencies, (3) organizational members' dispositional narcissism moderated the positive relationship between listening and influence, with this positive relationship being stronger among those higher in narcissism, and (4) listening mediated the relationship between organizational members' personalities (from the "Big Five") and their influence. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed, as are limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

*Keywords:* listening, influence, personality, Big Five, narcissism

## Not Just Holding Forth: How Listening Relates to Exerting Influence

Everyday views of those who exert influence in the workplace seem to suggest people who speak up and hold forth, articulate a course, and show decisiveness, and yet who also display sensitivity to and consideration of others' input. Scholarly theories of influence similarly acknowledge the roles played by both the expressive aspects of communication (i.e., *sending* messages, such as conveying a vision) and the receptive aspects of communication (i.e., *receiving* messages, such as listening). Although both aspects of communication have been recognized in theory and research on influence, expressive behaviors have received a considerable degree of attention whereas receptive behaviors—in particular, listening—have received somewhat less empirical coverage. For both theoretical and practical purposes, it is important to understand better the various ways in which listening may be related to how influential people are in the workplace. The present study was conducted with this noteworthy purpose in mind.

### The Roles of Listening in Exerting Influence at Work

Influence is the process through which individuals change the beliefs, attitudes or behaviors of others (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; French & Raven, 1959; Lewin, 1951). Two assertions, well established in prior theory and research, serve as the point of departure for the present study: (1) listening is related to influence, such that those who are better listeners are more influential, and (2) the positive relationship between listening and influence is due to two conceptually distinct mechanisms: an informational one and a relational one. On the informational front, effective listening gives organizational members access to coworkers' knowledge regarding operational tasks, including insights about customers, competitors, and

products (e.g., Schotter, 2003; Yaniv & Milyavsky, 2007). In addition, when organizational members listen well, their interaction partners will deliver information to them more effectively (Bavelas, Coates, & Johnson, 2000). Moreover, listening yields potentially important information about coworkers' attitudes, emotions, preferences, and values, which the influencing parties may use to tailor and thereby heighten the efficacy of their influence attempts.

On the relational front, effective listening has important benefits aside from eliciting information. Theory and research in the procedural justice literature (Earley & Lind, 1987; Lind & Tyler, 1988) has shown that it is not the giving of voice that elicits perceptions of procedural justice, but rather the demonstration that others' views have been seriously considered (i.e., listened to) that is critical (Shapiro, 1993). Being listened to influences the extent to which people feel valued, respected, and understood (Bies & Moag, 1986; Blader & Tyler, 2003; Cahn, 1990; Lewin, 1951; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Morrison & Milliken, 2000; Petersen, 1999; Shapiro, 1993). Relatedly, research suggests that listening contributes to subordinates' trust in their managers (Eisenberger, Fasolo, & Davis-LaMastro, 1990; Morrison & Milliken, 2000). Without trust, targets of influence attempts may question the agents' motives, regardless of their knowledge and expertise, making influence less likely. Research from the influence literature also has demonstrated that consultation (i.e., participation)—with superiors, subordinates and peers—is significantly related to task commitment and managerial effectiveness (e.g., Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). Further, studies show that individuals are more likely to be influenced by people they like (Cialdini & Trost, 1998) or with whom they feel psychologically safe (Detert & Burris, 2007; Edmondson, 1999, 2003), both of which may be enhanced by listening.

The distinction between ability and motivation may further help to differentiate the informational and relational mechanisms. Listening enhances organizational members' ability to persuade by allowing them to acquire more information (informational). Listening also motivates those on the receiving end to go along with (or be influenced by) the party doing the talking because they feel more connected to him/her (relational). Indeed, a handful of studies have provided evidence of a positive relationship between listening and whether people emerge as leaders, and perhaps more importantly, the extent to which they are seen as effective in their roles as leaders (Bechler & Johnson, 1995; Johnson & Bechler, 1998).

### The Present Predictions

The present study examines four theoretically important questions pertaining to the relationship between listening and influence, all derived from prior theory and research positing that listening is positively related to influence via informational or relational mechanisms. First, does listening (a receptive aspect of communication) account for additional variance in organizational members' influence, over and above their tendencies to be good expressive communicators? Second, in addition to explaining unique variance in influence, do listening and expressive communication interact to predict influence? Third, do individual difference variables, in particular organizational members' narcissism, moderate the positive relationship between listening and influence? Fourth, does listening help to account for or mediate the relationship between organizational members' personalities (as reflected in the "Big Five") and their influence? Below, we provide conceptual rationales for each of these questions.

#### *The Relationship between Listening and Influence, Over and Above Expressive Communication*

Expressive communication involves sending messages to others (e.g., articulating a rationale for change, or promoting a vision). It could be argued that listening matters largely to

the extent that it helps organizational members with their expressive communication. In other words, it may be that listening promotes organizational members' influence because doing so allows them to gather information which may be used to express themselves more effectively. Indeed, there is ample evidence that expressive communication behaviors are critical to influence. For example, research has demonstrated that individuals attain greater influence when they speak more often and in a rapid, fluent and confident manner (Carli, LaFleur, & Loeber, 1995; Driskell, Olmstead, & Salas, 1993; Ridgeway, 1987; Ridgeway & Diekema, 1989). In addition, rational persuasion (i.e., the use of logical arguments and factual evidence) has been found to be an effective influence technique with superiors, subordinates and peers, and is associated with task commitment and managerial effectiveness (e.g., Yukl et al., 1996; Yukl & Tracey, 1992).

Whereas expressive communication is clearly related to how influential people are, we hypothesize that listening is conceptually distinct from expressive communication; that is, the positive relationship between listening and influence will emerge over and above the impact of expressive communication on influence. One way to think about the difference between expressive communication and listening is the distinction between process and content. Expressive communication, and the items that measure it, refer to the process (e.g., "when making a point, s/he is concise, brief, and clear"). Listening may facilitate the process of expressive communication by enabling one to figure out *what* to say. For example, through listening, one can get advice and use it to make the right policy or strategy judgment. Furthermore, the very fact that people feel listened to could make the influencing party's expressive communication more effective. Both the informational and relational bases of influence associated with being a good listener refer to a conceptually different skill set of

behaviors, relative to the skill set of behaviors associated with effective expressive communication. Prior studies evaluating the relationship between listening and influence have tended not to control for (or examine simultaneously) expressive communication. Hence, one purpose of the present study is to evaluate whether listening accounts for distinct or unique variance in influence, beyond that attributable to expressive communication.

*Hypothesis 1:* The positive relationship between organizational members' listening tendencies and the extent to which they are seen as influential will emerge over and above (that is, upon controlling for) how well they engage in expressive communication.

#### *The Interactive Relationship between Listening and Expressive Communication*

Our conceptual foundation suggests not only that listening should be related to influence over and above the effect of expressive communication, but also that listening and expressive communication should interact with each other to predict influence. Being a good listener enables people to be more influential for the informational and/or relational reasons set forth above. Those higher in expressive communication, moreover, are more effective in getting their message across. Thus, organization members should be particularly influential when they combine good listening skills with the tendency to be high in expressive communication. To state the interaction effect differently, the positive relationship between listening and influence should be stronger when people are relatively high in expressive communication. Being a good listener puts people in a better position to be influential, and having expressive communication skills enables them to make good on their potential for influence.

*Hypothesis 2:* Listening and expressive communication will interact to predict people's tendencies to be influential, such that the positive relationship between listening

and influence should be more pronounced among those who are higher in expressive communication.

*The Interactive Relationship between Listening and Dispositional Narcissism*

An important implication of the previous reasoning is that our understanding of the relationship between listening and influence may be enhanced by unearthing moderators, that is, factors that make listening more or less strongly related to influence. Closely related to the reasoning underlying Hypothesis 2, we suggest that organization members' degree of dispositional narcissism also may moderate the positive relationship between listening and influence. Narcissism involves a grandiose sense of self and entitlement as well as a preoccupation with success and demands for admiration (for a review, see Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001). Individual differences in organizational members' narcissism have been shown to be related to a range of their work attitudes and behaviors (Judge, LePine, & Rich, 2006; Rosenthal & Pittinsky, 2006). Narcissists tend to be seen as visionary, self-confident, and full of zeal and energy; in other words, they are relatively high in expressive communication. However, high narcissists may be at risk of failing to elicit and consider others' viewpoints and information (e.g., Sedikides, Rudich, Gregg, Kumashiro, & Rusbult, 2004); in other words, they may be relatively low in listening. Indeed, Hayward and Hambrick (1997) found that CEOs who are high in hubris pay higher premiums for corporate acquisitions, particularly when board vigilance is lacking, which may be due in part to their failure to listen to the advice of others. Other research suggests that narcissists disparage (that is, they do not listen to) negative information about themselves as well as the messengers who deliver it (e.g., Kernis & Sun, 1994). Narcissists also may be at risk of straining their relationships with others. Whereas they may make positive initial



impressions, these early appraisals often deteriorate with greater acquaintanceship (e.g., Paulhus, 1998).

In short, narcissism may give an organizational member passionate drive, but if the organizational member fails to elicit and consider relevant information, she may “drive in the wrong direction” (an informationally-based deficit). Narcissism also may give organizational members self-assuredness, but if they fail to show an appreciation of others’ viewpoints, they may stunt their relationships (a relationally-based deficit). This reasoning led us to predict an interaction effect between narcissism and listening, in which the positive relationship between listening and influence is expected to be stronger among those higher in narcissism. Whereas narcissism generally was expected to be inversely related to listening, organizational members who display both high narcissism *and* effective listening may be particularly influential. Such persons may effectively combine both the expressive and the receptive aspects of influence, in which they harness their zeal, build relationships and bring others along. However, high narcissism combined with poor listening may lead to the lowest levels of influence. Narcissists who do not listen may damage their relationships with others, and thereby reduce their influence power.

*Hypothesis 3:* Narcissism and listening will interact to predict influence such that the positive relationship between listening and influence will be stronger among organizational members who are relatively high in narcissism.

#### *Listening as a Mediator*

One of the dominant frameworks of personality traits is the “Big Five” (e.g., Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1990). In a meta-analysis of 222 correlations from 73 samples, Judge et al. (2002) reported positive relationships between each of the Big Five traits (extraversion,

conscientiousness, openness to experience, agreeableness, and emotional stability) and a dependent variable closely related to perceived influence: whether managers were judged to be effective in their roles. The fact that the Big Five personality dimensions are related to managerial effectiveness suggests that the Big Five also may be related to the dependent variable in the present study, namely, the extent to which organization members are judged to be influential. After all, the ability to influence others is an important element of managerial effectiveness.

In addition to documenting relationships between the Big Five and managerial effectiveness, Judge et al. (2002) called for future research designed to explain (or mediate) these relationships. We hypothesize that there are conceptual linkages between listening and four of the Big Five dimensions in particular—openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability—which may help to explain why these factors have been shown to be positively related to managerial effectiveness. Thus, the present study also seeks to extend Judge et al.'s previously established relationships between the Big Five personality dimensions and managerial effectiveness, by evaluating whether listening serves to mediate (at least in part) the relationships between four of the Big Five and a key element of managerial effectiveness, namely, influence.

Openness to experience, or the tendency to be intellectually curious, creative, insightful and unconventional (John & Srivastava, 1999), maps onto the informational side of listening. Open individuals embrace change and appreciate diverse and novel ideas and perspectives (McCrae, 1996). Being high in openness to experience may predispose people to be more likely to incorporate (that is, to listen to) different points of view. Detert and Burris (2007) found that

subordinates whose managers were open to change and willing to act on subordinate input were more willing to voice ideas and suggestions.

*Hypothesis 4A:* Listening will mediate the relationship between openness to experience and influence.

In addition, agreeableness, or the tendency to be warm, caring, empathic, trusting and trustworthy (Graziano & Eisenberg, 1997), maps onto the relational side of listening. Agreeable individuals are cooperative and get along well with others (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, & Hair, 1996). Agreeable individuals may be more likely to listen due to their empathy, concern for others, and trusting nature. There is also evidence that subordinates perceive agreeable supervisors as more approachable (Hogan & Sheldon, 1998). Accordingly, agreeable individuals may be more successful at building relationships, which, in turn will make them more influential.

*Hypothesis 4B:* Listening will mediate the relationship between agreeableness and influence.

Moreover, conscientiousness, or the tendency to be self-disciplined, dependable, thorough, hard working and achievement-oriented (Costa & McCrae, 1992), maps onto both the informational and relational sides of listening. Conscientious individuals are cautious, deliberate, organized and attentive to details. They also are trustworthy and dutiful. Conscientious individuals may be more likely to consider others' points of view (i.e., listen) when making decisions due to their desire to gather all of the facts; in the course of doing so, they also may form good relationships with others.

*Hypothesis 4C:* Listening will mediate the relationship between conscientiousness and influence.

Emotional stability, or the tendency to be calm, even-tempered and free from persistent negative affect such as anxiety and depression (Costa & McCrae, 1992) also maps onto the informational and relational sides of listening. Emotional stability makes people less self-preoccupied, which may enhance their ability to be attentive to others. If they are better able to take in others' perspectives, they may use the information gleaned to influence others. Furthermore, their ability to focus on others also may promote their ability to form solid relationships with them.

*Hypothesis 4D:* Listening will mediate the relationship between emotional stability and influence.

In short, to the extent that listening helps organizational members gain information and/or build relationships, it may at least partially mediate or account for relationships between each of openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and influence. Prior studies have not considered the mediating role of listening in the relationship between organizational members' personalities and their effectiveness. Thus, our examination of the mediating role of listening may shed light on the mechanism through which organizational members' personalities are predictive of their efficacy in the workplace. *A priori*, it is not clear whether listening will completely mediate or partially mediate the relationship between each of openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and influence; hence, this matter will be treated as an exploratory question.

Whereas extraversion—the other Big Five dimension—has been shown to be positively related to managerial effectiveness (Judge et al., 2002), we do not hypothesize that listening will mediate the relationship between extraversion and influence.<sup>1</sup> For one thing, extraversion is not expected to be positively related to listening. Instead, we raise the possibility that the relationship

between extraversion and influence may be accounted for, at least in part, by expressive communication. Extraversion refers to the tendency to be articulate, emotionally expressive, sociable and dominant and to experience positive affect such as energy and enthusiasm (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Watson & Clark, 1997). Thus, the link between extraversion and influence may at least in part be due to extraverts' tendencies to be relatively high in expressive communication.

*Hypothesis 5:* Expressive communication will mediate the relationship between extraversion and influence.

In sum, based on prior theory and research which have shown that listening is positively related to influence due to both informational and relational mechanisms, we hypothesize that: (1) listening will be related to influence, over and above the effect of expressive communication, (2) the positive relationship between listening and influence will be stronger among people relatively high in expressive communication, (3) the positive relationship between listening and influence will be stronger among people who are relatively high in dispositional narcissism, (4) listening will at least partly mediate the relationship between each of openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability and influence. Finally, and in addition to the various listening-based hypotheses, we predict that expressive communication will at least partially mediate the relationship between extraversion and influence.

Figure 1 provides a graphic summary of the relationships examined in the present study.

## Method

### *Participants*

The sample consisted of 274 students enrolled in a full-time Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at a private East Coast university. Of the sample, 109 (36.0

percent) were women, and participants' mean age was 28.29 ( $SD = 2.51$ ) years. (There was no evidence of gender differences in our results. Therefore, we collapsed across gender in the analyses reported below.)

### *Procedure*

As part of a course requirement, participants completed a feedback exercise in which they were rated by several former co-workers on their listening, expressive communication, and influence, along with the Big Five personality dimensions. Participants identified their respondents and contacted them directly with a standard set of instructions. The survey was completed on-line and anonymously. On average, participants had 3.87 ( $SD = 1.69$ ; Range = 1-10) former work colleagues serve as raters. We asked raters to clarify how well they knew the target, using a four-point scale, ranging from "not well at all" (1) to "extremely well" (4). The average score on the familiarity measure was 3.12 ( $SD = 0.46$ ). In addition, participants' dispositional narcissism was gathered through an online self-report instrument at a different point in the course.

### *Measures*

We drew upon existing measures of personality (the Big Five and narcissism). For the other measures (listening, expressive communication, and influence), we developed our own scales. The newly-developed items were constructed on the basis of multi-rater feedback and individual coaching sessions with working managers and MBA students. We drew on qualitative comments about listening, expressive communication and influence offered by targets' coworkers (including open-ended comments about leadership strengths and weaknesses offered in multi-rater surveys) as well as commentary offered by professionals in coaching sessions (e.g., discussions of behaviors they sought to reinforce or develop). By developing our own scales of

listening, expressive communication, and influence, we were able to assess the constructs directly, which would not have been the case if we used existing scales which consisted of correlates or predictors of these three constructs. Furthermore, developing our own scales enabled us to identify specific behavioral indicators of the constructs. For example, if listening refers to considering another person's point of view (e.g., Shapiro, 1993), we believed it would be both theoretically and practically important to measure behaviors that reflect the extent to which people actually are considering another person's point of view.

*Influence.* Respondents rated how strongly four statements characterized the target's influence behavior at work, using a seven-point scale, ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (7). Sample items included: "S/he is able to build coalitions to get things done," and "S/he fails to direct and steer meetings in his/her favor" (reverse-coded; see Appendix A for the text of all items).

*Listening.* Respondents rated how strongly five statements characterized the target's listening behavior at work, using a seven-point scale, ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (7). Sample items included: "As a listener, s/he gets others to open up, elaborate, and share information," and "When someone else is speaking, s/he interrupts and/or shows impatience" (reverse-coded; see Appendix A for the text of all items).

*Expressive Communication.* Respondents rated how strongly seven statements characterized the target's expressive communication behavior at work, using a seven-point scale, ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (7). Sample items included: "When making a point, s/he is concise, brief, and clear," and "S/he speaks up and shares his/her view when it is appropriate" (see Appendix A for the text of all items).

*Big Five Personality.* We drew on the scale developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003) who have provided considerable evidence of the validity of their short form of the Big Five. Their ten-item measure (known as the TIPI, which stands for the Ten-Item Personality Inventory) includes two items for each of the five dimensions. For each of ten statements, respondents rated how strongly it characterized the target's behavior at work, using a seven-point scale, ranging from "disagree strongly" (1) to "agree strongly" (7): One of the measures of openness to experience was, "S/he is open to new experiences, complex." One of the measures of agreeableness was, "S/he is sympathetic, warm." One of the measures of conscientiousness was, "S/he is dependable, self-disciplined." One of the measures of emotional stability was, "S/he is calm, emotionally stable." One of the measures of extraversion was, "S/he is extraverted, enthusiastic."

*Narcissism.* Whereas all of the constructs mentioned above were drawn from raters of the focal participant, the narcissism measure was based on self-reports. We measured narcissism using the previously validated NPI-16 (Ames, Rose, & Anderson, 2006). Participants were asked to choose which of a pair of items was more descriptive of them; each of the 16 pairs consisted of a narcissistic-consistent item (e.g., "I really like to be the center of attention") and a narcissistic-inconsistent item (e.g., "It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention"). Scores were computed as the proportion of narcissistic-consistent items chosen.

## Results

### *Inter-Rater Agreement*

We examined two estimates of inter-rater agreement for each of the scales within each of the 274 participants, namely, within-group inter-rater agreement (multi-item rWG(J); James, Demaree, & Wolf, 1984) and average deviation indices from the scale means (ADM(J); Burke,



Finkelstein, & Dusig, 1999). We calculated the average for these indices in order to determine whether the judges sufficiently agreed in their ratings of targets to justify aggregation of the raters' judgments. As indicated in Table 1, the results of these analyses demonstrate that raters were sufficiently consistent to justify aggregation. Specifically, an  $r_{WG(J)}$  value of .7 or above is considered necessary to demonstrate within-group agreement ( $r_{WG(J)} = 1.0$  indicates perfect agreement; James, 1988). All variables exceeded this .7 cutoff. The value of 1.2 is the upper-limit cutoff for acceptable inter-rater agreement with the  $AD_{M(J)}$  index for seven-point Likert-type items (Burke & Dunlap, 2002). (The  $AD_{M(J)}$  index measures the dispersion of responses above the mean; therefore, a smaller score indicates higher agreement.) All variables met this criterion as well. Accordingly, we used the average of the raters' judgments of their focal participant in the analyses.

*The Relationship between Listening and Influence, Over and Above Expressive Communication*

Table 2 presents a summary of descriptive statistics, correlations and coefficient alphas for all variables in the study. Included in Table 2 is the finding that listening was positively associated with perceptions of influence,  $r(272) = .54, p < .01$ , as was expressive communication,  $r(272) = .63, p < .01$ . To examine whether the relationship between listening and influence was significant over and above the relationship between expressive communication and influence, we conducted a multiple regression analysis, in which we regressed participants' influence simultaneously on ratings of their expressive communication and listening. A summary of this analysis is reported in Table 3, which showed that expressive communication was positively related to influence,  $\beta = .63, t(273) = 13.52, p < .01$ . Of greater importance, and in support of Hypothesis 1, listening also was a significant predictor of influence even when we controlled for expressive communication ( $\beta = .30, t(272) = 5.79, p < .01$ ).

*The Interactive Relationship between Listening and Expressive Communication*

Following Aiken and West (1991), the independent variables of listening and expressive communication were mean-centered to minimize the impact of multicollinearity. We then conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, in which influence was regressed on listening and expressive communication in Step 1, and the interaction between listening and expressive communication was added in Step 2. As can be seen in Table 4, the interaction effect was significant, ( $b = .19$ ,  $t(271) = 3.13$ ,  $p < .01$ ). To illustrate the nature of the interaction effect we followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), in which we generated the predicted values of the relationship between listening and influence at a high level of expressive communication (one *SD* above the mean) and at a low level of expressive communication (one *SD* below the mean). As can be seen in Figure 2, listening was more positively related to influence among those who were high rather than low in expressive communication. The latter assertion was further borne out by the results of simple slope analyses, which showed that listening was more strongly related to influence when expressive communication was high ( $b = .38$ ,  $t(271) = 6.57$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than when it was low ( $b = .19$ ,  $t(271) = 3.56$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

*The Interactive Relationship between Listening and Dispositional Narcissism*

We assessed whether listening would be more positively related to influence among those higher rather than lower in narcissism, as set forth in Hypothesis 3. Once again, following Aiken and West (1991), each of the independent variables was mean-centered to minimize the impact of multicollinearity. We also controlled for expressive communication in this analysis. We then conducted a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, in which influence was regressed on listening, narcissism and expressive communication in Step 1, and the interaction between

listening and narcissism was added in Step 2. As can be seen in Table 5, the interaction effect was significant, ( $b = .48, t(259) = 2.12, p < .05$ ).

Once again, to illustrate the nature of the interaction effect we followed the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), in which we generated the predicted values of the relationship between listening and influence at a high level of narcissism (one *SD* above the mean) and at a low level of narcissism (one *SD* below the mean). As can be seen in Figure 3, and consistent with Hypothesis 3, listening was more positively related to influence among those who were high rather than low in narcissism. The latter assertion was further supported by the results of simple slope analyses, which showed that listening was more strongly related to influence when narcissism was high ( $b = .35, t(259) = 5.85, p < .001$ ) than when it was low ( $b = .19, t(259) = 2.79, p < .01$ ).

*Subsidiary Analysis: A Test of Mediated Moderation.* In support of Hypothesis 2, the positive relationship between listening and influence was stronger when expressive communication was relatively high. Furthermore, and consistent with Hypothesis 3, the positive relationship between listening and influence was stronger among those higher in dispositional narcissism. We conducted a subsidiary analysis to evaluate whether it was the expressive communication associated with dispositional narcissism (rather than dispositional narcissism per se) that interacted with listening to predict influence. That is, narcissists were expected to be higher in expressive communication than their less narcissistic counterparts; the correlational results presented in Table 2 supported this expectation, albeit modestly. Narcissists who also are good listeners were expected to be particularly influential, because they presumably are effective at both the expressive and receptive aspects of communication.

In a test of mediated moderation (i.e., that it was the expressive communication associated with narcissism that interacted with listening to predict influence), we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis. In the first step we entered the main effects of listening, expressive communication, and narcissism. In the second step, both interaction effects (listening x narcissism and listening x expressive communication) were entered simultaneously. The results showed that the interaction between listening and expressive communication continued to be significant ( $p < .05$ ), and the nature of the effect remained the same: listening was more positively related to influence when expressive communication was relatively high. In contrast, the interaction between listening and narcissism was no longer significant ( $p > .15$ ). Moreover, a Sobel test conducted on the interaction between listening and narcissism showed that the reduction in its significance level when we simultaneously entered (or controlled for) the interaction between listening and expressive communication was itself significant,  $t(260) = 2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ . These findings are noteworthy because they provide insight into *why* listening interacted with narcissism to predict influence. That is, listening interacted with narcissism because of narcissism's link with expressive communication.

#### *Listening as a Mediator*

Next, we assessed whether listening accounted for the relationship between four of the Big Five factors—openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability—and influence, drawing on the mediational procedures specified by Baron and Kenny (1986). We also controlled for expressive communication in these analyses by entering it in the steps which included listening as a predictor of influence (i.e., in Steps 2 and 4, described below).

*Openness to Experience.* As shown in Figure 4, we found that: (1) Openness to experience (the independent variable) was a significant predictor of influence (the dependent variable); (2) Listening (the hypothesized mediator) also was a significant predictor of influence; (3) Openness to experience was a significant predictor of listening; (4) The relationship between openness to experience and influence decreased when listening was added to the model, whereas the relationship between listening and influence remained highly significant; and (5) The Sobel test showed that the relationship between openness to experience and influence was significantly lower when listening was controlled, relative to when it was not,  $t(271) = 3.67, p < .01$ . These findings support Hypothesis 4A: Listening mediated the relationship between openness to experience and influence. Given that the relationship between openness to experience and influence remained significant even when listening was controlled, it can be concluded that listening *partially* mediated the relationship between openness to experience and influence.

*Agreeableness.* As shown in Figure 4, we found that: (1) Agreeableness was a significant predictor of influence; (2) Listening also was a significant predictor of influence; (3) Agreeableness was a significant predictor of listening; (4) The relationship between agreeableness and influence decreased when listening was added to the model, whereas the relationship between listening and influence remained highly significant; and (5) The Sobel test showed that the relationship between agreeableness and influence was significantly lower when listening was controlled, relative to when it was not,  $t(271) = 2.93, p < .01$ . These findings support Hypothesis 4B: listening mediated the relationship between agreeableness and influence. Given that the relationship between agreeableness and influence remained significant even when listening was controlled, it can be concluded that listening *partially* mediated the relationship between agreeableness and influence.

*Conscientiousness.* As shown in Figure 4, we found that: (1) Conscientiousness was a significant predictor of influence; (2) Listening also was a significant predictor of influence; (3) Conscientiousness was a significant predictor of listening; (4) The relationship between conscientiousness and influence became non-significant when listening was added to the model, whereas the relationship between listening and influence remained highly significant; and (5) The Sobel test showed that the relationship between conscientiousness and influence was significantly lower when listening was controlled, relative to when it was not,  $t(271) = 4.17, p < .01$ . These findings support Hypothesis 4C: Listening mediated the relationship between conscientiousness and influence. Moreover, given that the relationship between conscientiousness and influence became non-significant when listening was controlled, it can be said that listening *fully* mediated the relationship between conscientiousness and influence.

*Emotional stability.* As shown in Figure 4, we found that: (1) Emotional stability was a significant predictor of influence; (2) Listening also was a significant predictor of influence; (3) Emotional stability was a significant predictor of listening; (4) The relationship between emotional stability and influence decreased when listening was added to the model, whereas the relationship between listening and influence remained highly significant; and (5) The Sobel test showed that the relationship between emotional stability and influence was significantly lower when listening was controlled, relative to when it was not,  $t(271) = 3.62, p < .01$ . These findings support Hypothesis 4D: Listening mediated the relationship between emotional stability and influence. Given that the relationship between emotional stability and influence remained significant even when listening was controlled, it can be concluded that listening *partially* mediated the relationship between emotional stability and influence.<sup>2</sup>

*Testing the Mediating Role of Expressive Communication*

As set forth in Hypothesis 5, we evaluated whether expressive communication accounted for the relationship between extraversion and influence, once again drawing on the mediational procedures specified by Baron and Kenny (1986). We also controlled for listening in this analysis by entering it in the steps which included expressive communication as a predictor of influence (i.e., in Steps 2 and 4). As shown in Figure 5, we found that: (1) Extraversion (the independent variable) was positively related to influence (the dependent variable); (2) Expressive communication (the hypothesized mediator) also was positively related to influence; (3) Extraversion was positively related to expressive communication; (4) The relationship between extraversion and influence decreased when expressive communication was added to the model, whereas the relationship between expressive communication and influence remained highly significant; and (5) The Sobel test showed that the relationship between extraversion and influence was significantly lower when expressive communication was controlled, relative to when it was not,  $t(271) = 3.97, p < .01$ . These findings support Hypothesis 5: Expressive communication mediated the relationship between extraversion and influence. Given that the relationship between extraversion and influence remained significant even when expressive communication was controlled, it can be concluded that expressive communication *partially* mediated the relationship between extraversion and influence.

### Discussion

In summary, all hypotheses were supported. In support of Hypothesis 1 listening accounted for unique variance in influence, beyond that attributable to expressive communication. As set forth in Hypothesis 2 listening interacted with expressive communication to predict influence, such that the positive relationship between listening and influence was stronger when expressive communication was relatively high. Consistent with Hypothesis 3, the

positive relationship between listening and influence was stronger among those relatively high in dispositional narcissism. Moreover, a subsidiary analysis suggested that the reason why dispositional narcissism moderated the relationship between listening and influence was because dispositional narcissism was positively related to expressive communication. As predicted in Hypothesis 4, the relationship between all of the Big Five dimensions (except extraversion) and influence was mediated by listening, in whole or in part. Finally, as specified in Hypothesis 5, expressive communication (partially) mediated the relationship between extraversion and influence.

#### *Implications for Theory and Research on Listening*

The idea that interpersonal communication is important to influence is hardly new. Yet, the balance of research has focused considerably more on one form of communication (organizational members' expressive behaviors) than on the other (organizational members' receptive behaviors). We took as our starting point the notion that organizational members' listening tendencies will be positively related to their influence, via informational and relational mechanisms. From there, we examined a number of more nuanced questions designed to deepen our understanding of the positive relationship between listening and influence. For instance, we examined several moderating influences on the positive relationship between listening and influence, showing that the positive relationship is stronger among those higher in expressive communication and dispositional narcissism. Moreover, the results of the subsidiary analysis suggested that narcissism interacted with listening due to the positive relationship between narcissism and expressive communication. We also found that listening may act as a mediator of the relationship between four of the Big Five personality dimensions and influence. Previous research has shown that these same four dimensions predict the effectiveness of those in



positions in which effectiveness rests on the ability to influence, namely, managers (Judge et al., 2002). The present findings suggest that regardless of whether people formally occupy management positions the same four dimensions are positively related to how influential they are, and furthermore, that listening mediated the relationships between these four personality dimensions and influence, in whole or in part.

#### *Additional Theoretical Implications*

*Narcissism.* In the course of deepening our understanding of the positive relationship between listening and influence, the present findings also contribute to several other literatures in organizational psychology. For example, whereas the concept of narcissism has long been of interest to clinical and personality psychologists, relatively few empirical studies have examined the workplace consequences of narcissism, in particular, the relationship between organizational members' narcissism and their influence (e.g., Judge et al., 2006). Contrary to the view of some organizational scholars who have depicted the predominantly negative managerial and organizational consequences of narcissism (e.g., Conger & Kanungo, 1988), the present findings suggest that narcissism is not inherently good or bad. For example, narcissism was negatively related to listening tendencies but was positively related to expressive communication, although both relationships were rather modest. Moreover, narcissism was associated with higher or lower influence, depending on organizational members' tendencies to listen. As can be seen in Figure 3, when organizational members were rated as good listeners, narcissism was positively related to their influence. However, when organizational members were not seen as good listeners, narcissism was inversely related to their influence.

*Personality and Influence.* The present findings also provide a useful extension to the body of research examining the relationship between organizational members' personality (as

reflected in the “Big Five”) and their influence. Judge and colleagues (Judge et al., 2002) found that all of the Big Five personality dimensions were significantly related to managerial effectiveness. Given that the Big Five are related to managerial effectiveness, a key component of which is influence, an important next step is to delineate the factors that account for or mediate these relationships. We predicted and found that the relationships between each of openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness and emotional stability and influence were at least partly mediated by organizational members’ tendencies to listen. Also as expected, the relationship between extraversion and influence was not mediated by listening, but rather by organizational members’ expressive communication. Future research needs to further unpack the critical behaviors through which personality is related to people’s work attitudes and behaviors. Capturing these mediators conceptually and empirically does not mean that a trait perspective is not valuable; on the contrary, such work would give scholars a better understanding of when and how traits shape interpersonal influence and organizational life.

#### *Limitations and Future Directions*

In addition to its contributions, the present study has a number of methodological and conceptual shortcomings. In acknowledging them, we simultaneously are identifying some avenues for future research.

*Methodological issues.* Given the cross-sectional nature of the research design, the internal validity of the present findings is open to question. For example, consider Hypothesis 1, which posited that listening will be positively related to organizational members’ influence (over and above the influence of expressive communication). It is possible that reports of organizational members’ listening represent the consequences rather than the determinants of influence. Staw (1975) showed that people who have knowledge of their group’s performance

may reinterpret the group's process, such that good performance leads to more favorable reports of group process. In rebuttal to this alternative interpretation, the nature of Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4A-4D move us somewhat closer to evaluating whether listening leads to influence, rather than the other way around. That is, the logic underlying Hypothesis 2 (3) is that if listening leads to influence, then the relationship between the two should be more pronounced when organizational members are relatively high in expressive communication (dispositional narcissism). Moreover, the mediational reasoning underlying Hypotheses 4A-4D is that four of the Big Five dimensions of personality are likely to lead to listening, which in turn, will lead to organizational members' influence. Taken together, the fact that Hypotheses 2, 3 and 4A-4D were supported provides suggestive evidence that listening led to organizational members' influence. Nevertheless, future research in which listening is experimentally manipulated, or in which the consequences of listening are studied longitudinally, is needed to enhance the internal validity of the present findings.

It also could be argued that the present findings are an artifact of common methods bias. Most of our measures consisted of judgments from the same source, namely, people who had interacted with the target person. Although the common methods explanation cannot be summarily dismissed, several findings render it less plausible. For example, it is not clear how common methods may explain why listening accounted for additional variance in influence over and above the impact of expressive communication. If the significant relationship between dimensions (such as between each of expressive communication and listening and influence) were due to the commonality in how the dimensions were measured, then it would be less likely for both expressive communication and listening to account for *unique* variance in influence.

Further evidence against common methods bias stems from the results associated with Hypothesis 3, which posited that narcissism would moderate the relationship between listening and influence. We offer this speculation for two reasons. First, common methods were not present in the case of Hypothesis 3. Whereas observers rated the target person on the listening and influence dimensions, the measure of narcissism came from the targets' self-reports. Second, even if all of the measures came from the same source, it would be unclear how common methods would account for the fact that *the relationship between* some of the measures (judgments of organizational members' listening and their influence) was significantly stronger among those who were high rather than low in narcissism. For that matter, a similar argument counter to a common methods explanation may be offered about the interactive relationship between listening and expressive communication set forth in Hypothesis 2. That is, all three constructs were measured via others' reports, and yet listening and influence were more positively related when expressive communication was relatively high.

We also conducted additional analyses to evaluate the extent to which the mediational tests in Hypotheses 4A-4D may have been tainted by common methods. Specifically, we identified individuals who were rated by exactly four raters ( $n = 98$ ) and averaged the ratings of two randomly selected raters for listening, expressive communication and the Big Five and then averaged the ratings of the other two raters on the measure of influence. In this way, the independent variables and mediating variables for our various hypotheses came from one source (i.e., the average of two raters), whereas the dependent variable of influence came from a different source (i.e., the average of two other raters).

We then reran Hypotheses 1, 4A-4D, and 5 because these were the analyses that could potentially be biased by common methods.<sup>3</sup> The results of these additional analyses were

consistent with what we reportedly previously, when common methods were present. For example, the multiple regression analysis testing Hypothesis 1 revealed that listening continued to be a significant predictor of influence over and above the effect of expressive communication ( $\beta = .30, t(96) = 3.13, p < .01$ ). With respect to the mediation tests (Hypotheses 4A-4D), we found that listening fully mediated the relationship between each of openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness and influence, and that listening partially mediated the relationship between emotional stability and influence. Moreover, we found that expressive communication fully mediated the relationship between extraversion and influence, supporting Hypothesis 5. In short, these additional findings show that even when common methods are eliminated, the results are quite similar to what was found when there was a potential for common methods bias. In other words, the presence of common methods does not appear to be necessary to produce results supportive of our hypotheses.

Further construct validation efforts should be directed towards the measures developed explicitly for this study, namely listening, expressive communication, and influence. Whether to use existing scales versus develop new ones entails tradeoffs. On the one hand, existing scales may have proven validity, and their use may lend itself to cross-study comparability. On the other hand, developing new items may better enable researchers to assess the constructs they are trying to assess or in the way that they are trying to assess them. For example, in the present study we wanted to measure listening, expressive communication, and influence directly and with specific behavioral measures. Future research could triangulate on the present findings by examining whether existing measures yield converging results. For example, transformational leaders score high on expressive communication. The extent to which people believe that their views have been seriously considered (Shapiro, 1993) seems similar to our notion of listening.

To the extent that the present findings may be replicated with alternative measures of similar constructs, we will gain even greater confidence in their generality. For now, however, the fact that the present set of theoretically-derived hypotheses (summarized in Figure 1) received strong support provides encouraging evidence that the measures used in the present study had at least some construct validity.

*Conceptual issues.* Whereas the present study provides initial evidence on when listening is likely to have more versus less of an effect on organizational members' influence, future research should explore additional potential dispositional and situational moderators of the relationship between organizational members' listening tendencies and their influence. Moreover, the foundational principles used to derive the moderators in the present study, namely, that listening is positively related to influence via informational and relational mechanisms, may help generate additional moderating influences. Furthermore, focusing on attributes of the party being listened to rather than on the communicator, we also speculate that listening may be more important to (and hence will have more of an impact on) individuals with more egalitarian values, who expect to be treated fairly and equally. For example, Brockner et al. (2001) found that the well-established tendency for employees to respond more favorably when they have higher levels of voice depends on their level of power distance (Hofstede, 1980). Employees lower in power distance, who presumably expected or wanted to have input into decisions, were shown to respond much more positively when they had higher levels of voice. In contrast, among employees with high power distance beliefs, the extent to which they were involved in decision making had much less of an influence on their work attitudes and behaviors. In a similar vein, it may be that the effect of listening on influence depends upon the extent to which the targets of influence expect to be listened to.

Relatedly, future research should examine whether there are other limits to the relationship between listening and influence. For example, prior research suggests that leaders who allow “too much” voice in group decision making may be evaluated less positively under certain conditions (Petersen, 1999). Although we did not find evidence of a curvilinear effect of listening in the present study, it seems plausible that the impact of listening on influence may reach a point of diminishing returns.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, it would be important to specify when and why the positive effects of listening are accounted for by informational and relational mechanisms. The present study was based on prior theory and research from a variety of literatures which suggested that listening makes people more effective for informational reasons (i.e., by heightening their ability to be influential) and/or for relational reasons (i.e., by heightening others’ motivation to be influenced.) Further research is needed to delineate more precisely the role played by these two mechanisms in accounting for the positive consequences of being a good listener.

### *Practical Implications*

The present study also has a number of practical implications. By devising our own measure of listening we were able to delineate some of the specific behaviors that comprise effective listening. It is one thing to tell organizational members that they “need to be good listeners.” It is quite another to define exactly what it means to be a good listener. The items used to measure listening referred to specific behaviors; see Appendix A. Thus, training programs could emphasize the development of these (or other) listening behaviors that are predictive of influence.

Relatedly, whereas certain precursors of influence refer to dispositional qualities that may be difficult to change (e.g., charisma), listening may be somewhat more malleable.

Greenberg (2006) recently showed that employees whose managers underwent training in interactional fairness (which included listening) were significantly less stressed than their counterparts whose managers had not undergone training. The present results highlight the potential value of listening and suggest that organizational members may have much to gain by improving their listening skills. Organizations may likewise benefit from measuring, developing and rewarding effective listening behaviors. Multi-rater feedback on the listening measures shown in Appendix A, along with skilled coaching may help organizational members chart a course towards being better listeners, and, in so doing, enhance their influence.



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## Footnotes

1. Nevertheless, for exploratory purposes, we examined whether listening mediated the relationship between extraversion and influence. In fact, it did not.
  
2. The relationship between influence with each of openness, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and emotional stability was significant in separate analyses. Moreover, the results of the separate analyses showed that listening either partially or fully mediated the relationship between each of these traits and influence. However, as can be seen in Table 2 the four traits were themselves significantly (albeit modestly) related to one another. To evaluate which of the four traits accounted for unique variance in influence, we regressed influence on all four traits simultaneously. Agreeableness was no longer related to influence but the other three dimensions were, with conscientiousness significant at the .05 level and openness and emotional stability significant at the .01 level. We then added listening as an additional predictor, to see if doing so would reduce the relationship between the three traits that continued to be significantly related to influence (i.e., conscientiousness, openness, and emotional stability) and influence. In fact, the presence of listening did reduce the influence of all three variables. The results of Sobel tests showed that the reduction attributable to listening was significant in the case of conscientiousness ( $p < .05$ ) and emotional stability ( $p < .01$ ), but not in the case of openness ( $p < .25$ ).
  
3. To examine whether listening had a curvilinear relationship with influence, we reran our model including the squared term of listening as a predictor of influence. A significant negative

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coefficient for the squared term would have indicated a curvilinear effect; however, this did not occur.



Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Inter-rater Agreement Indices*

Variable	$R_{WG(J)}$			$AD_{M(J)}$	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Influence	.95	.08	.64 to 1.0	.82	.59
2. Listening	.96	.07	.48 to 1.0	.66	.33
3. Expressive Communication	.98	.02	.84 to 1.0	.73	.42
4. Openness	.89	.13	.19 to 1.0	.63	.40
5. Agreeableness	.86	.15	.22 to 1.0	.74	.44
6. Conscientiousness	.89	.18	.13 to 1.0	.53	.43
7. Emotional Stability	.83	.19	.12 to 1.0	.73	.48
8. Extraversion	.83	.19	.13 to 1.0	.76	.48
9. Narcissism	---	---		---	---

*Note.*  $N = 274$ . Narcissism is a self-rating.

Table 2

*Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations and Coefficient Alphas*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Influence	5.54	0.53	<i>.70</i>								
2. Listening	5.75	0.58	0.54**	<i>.79</i>							
3. Expressive Communication	5.86	0.50	0.63**	0.51**	<i>.75</i>						
4. Agreeableness	5.66	0.91	0.36**	0.57**	0.16**	<i>.53</i>					
5. Openness	6.05	0.65	0.40**	0.29**	0.39**	0.30**	<i>.63</i>				
6. Conscientiousness	6.26	0.73	0.38**	0.42**	0.37**	0.36**	0.26**	<i>.58</i>			
7. Emotional Stability	5.81	0.89	0.49**	0.56**	0.42**	0.51**	0.28**	0.44**	<i>.75</i>		
8. Extraversion	5.46	1.11	0.23**	-0.07	0.27**	0.00	0.33**	-0.03	-0.08	<i>.76</i>	
9. Narcissism	0.37	0.18	0.02	-0.12*	0.13*	-0.16**	0.05	-0.11	-0.14*	0.23**	---

*Note.*  $N = 274$ . Correlations of scale scores are presented below the diagonal. Coefficient alphas are in italics on the diagonal. A scale alpha cannot be computed for narcissism, because it is a binary measure.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 3

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Expressive Communication and Listening as Predictors of Influence*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				0.40	
Expressive Communication	0.68	0.05	0.63**		
Step 2				0.47	0.07**
Expressive Communication	0.51	0.06	0.48**		
Listening	0.27	0.05	0.30**		

*Note.*  $N = 274$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 4

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Listening, Expressive Communication and their Interaction as Predictors of Influence*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				0.47	
Listening	.27	.05	.30**		
Expressive Communication	.51	.06	.48**		
Step 2				0.49	0.02**
Listening	.29	.05	.31**		
Expressive Communication	.53	.05	.50**		
Listening x Expressive Communication	.19	.06	.14**		

*Note.*  $N = 274$ .

\*\*  $p < .01$ .

Table 5

*Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Listening, Narcissism and their Interaction as Predictors of Influence, Controlling for Expressive Communication*

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$
Step 1				0.44	
Listening	0.28	0.05	0.32**		
Narcissism	0.02	0.15	0.01		
Expressive Communication	0.48	0.06	0.44**		
Step 2				0.45	0.01*
Listening	0.27	0.05	0.30**		
Narcissism	0.03	0.15	0.01		
Expressive Communication	0.49	0.06	0.45**		
Listening x Narcissism	0.48	0.23	0.10*		

*Note.*  $N = 263$ .

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

Figure 1. Summary of Relationships Set Forth in Hypotheses 1-5

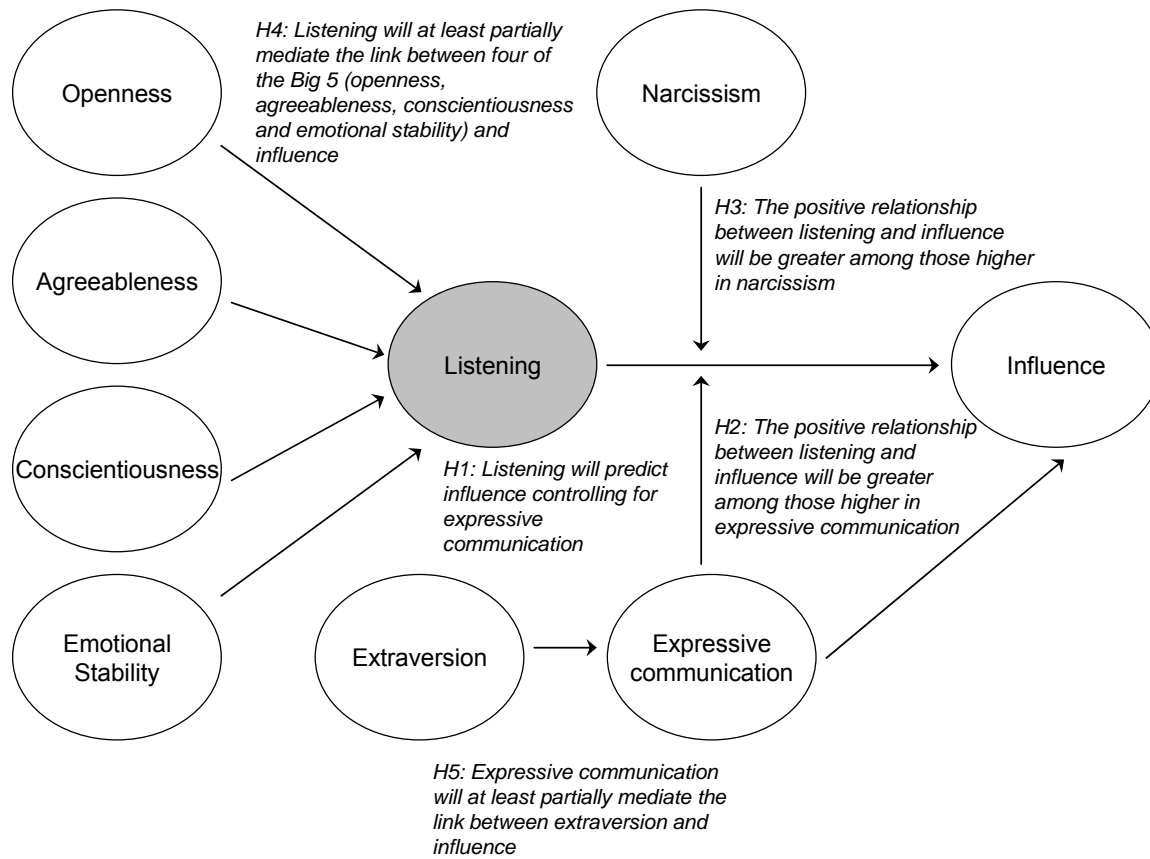


Figure 2. The Interactive Effect of Listening and Expressive Communication on Influence

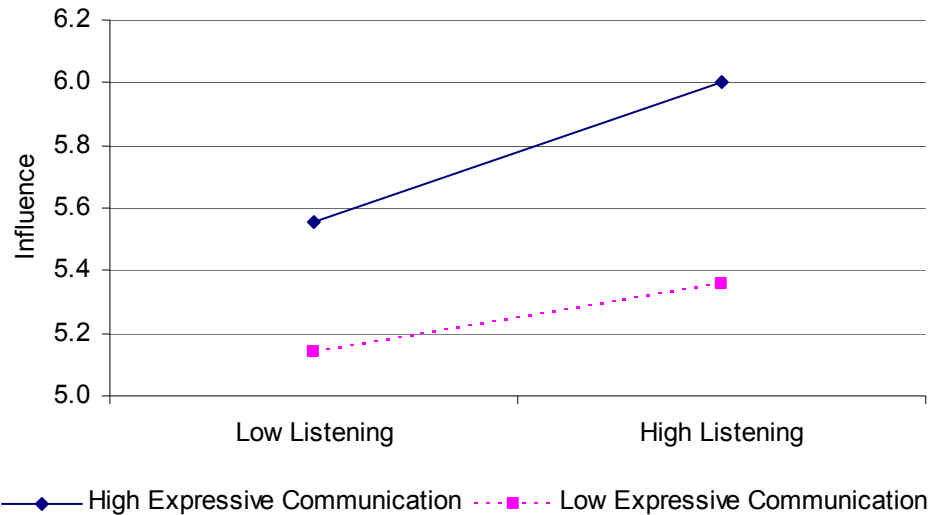


Figure 3. The Interactive Effect of Listening and Narcissism on Influence.

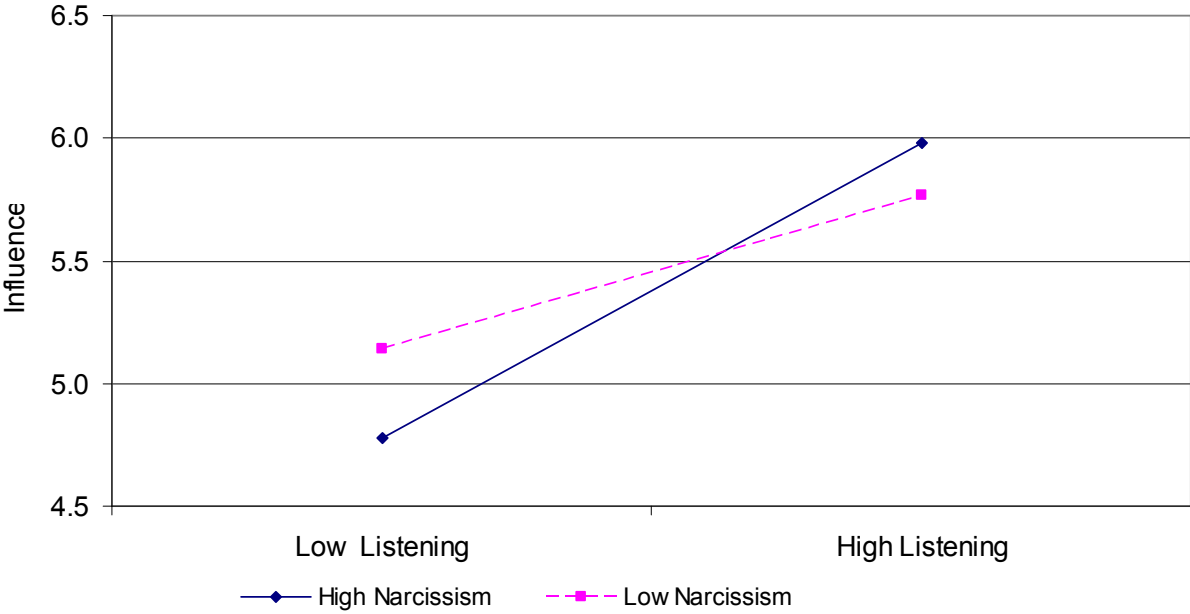
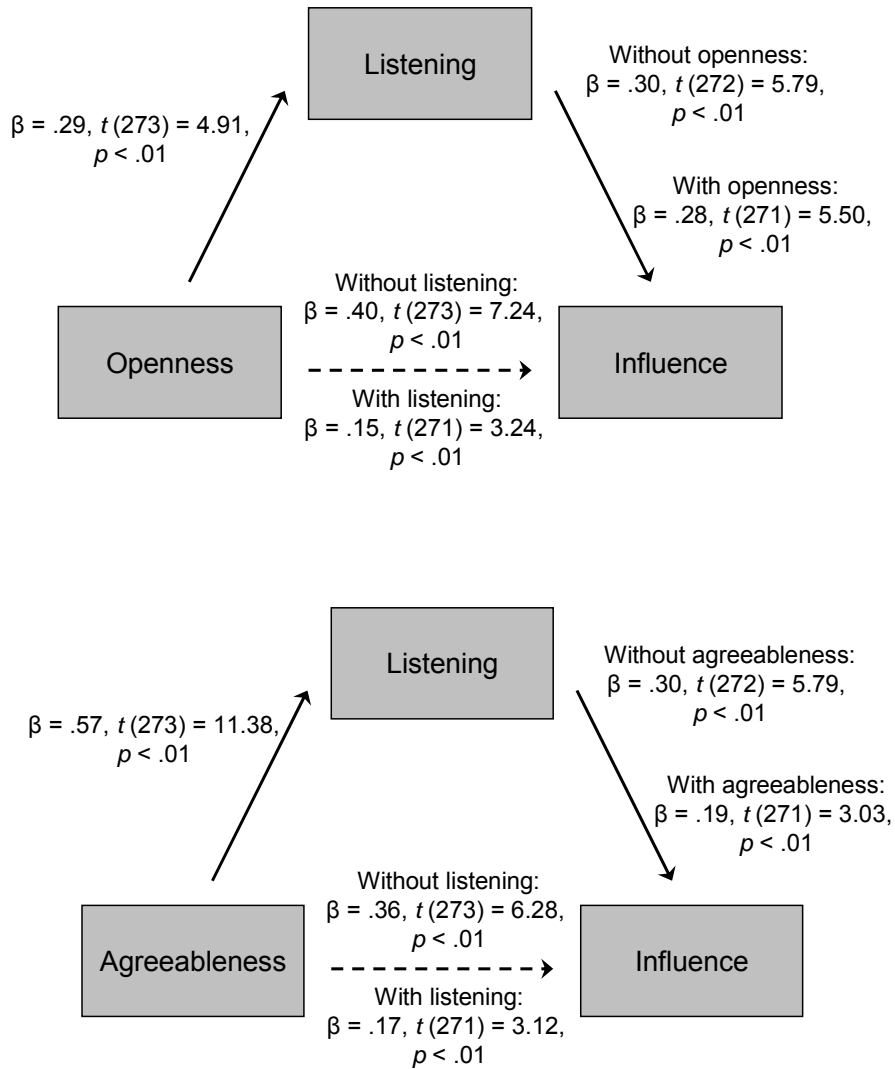




Figure 4. Listening as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Four of the Big Five (Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Emotional Stability) and Influence.



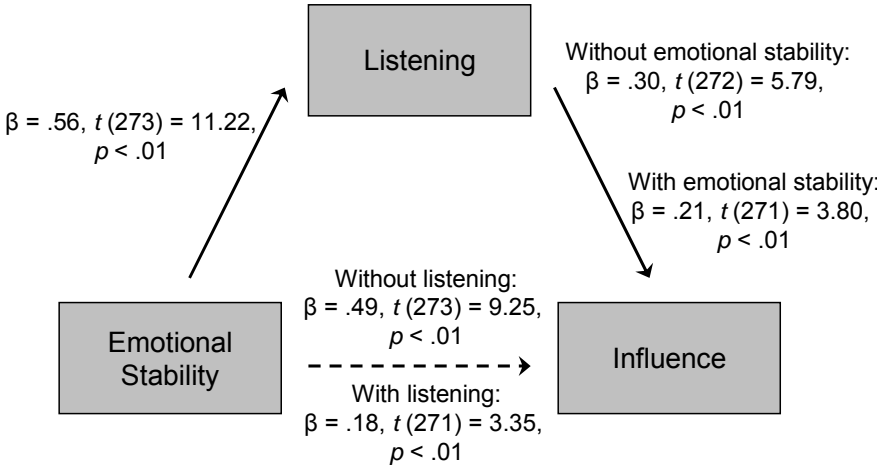
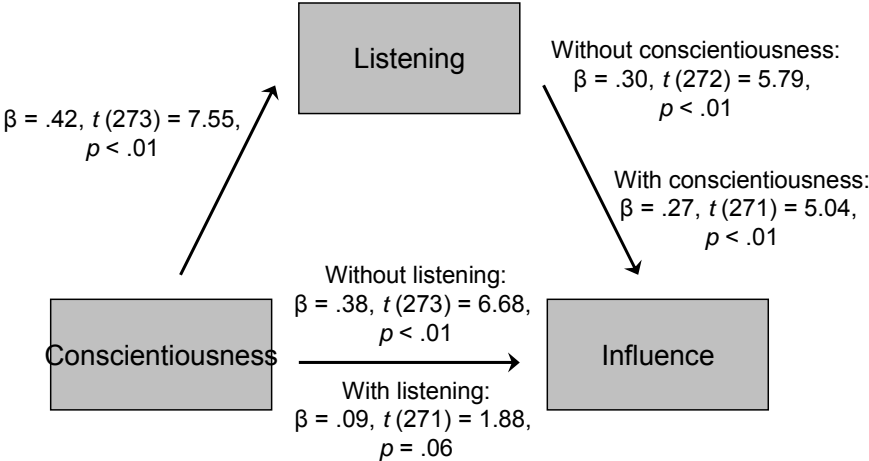
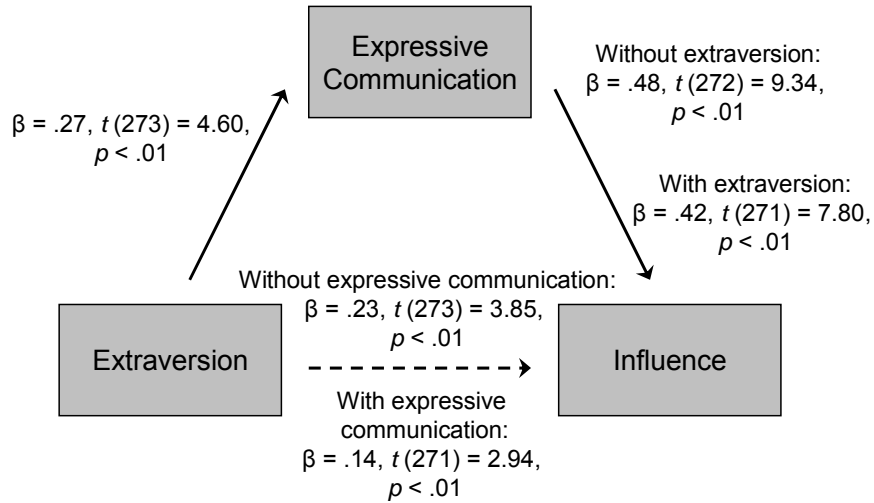


Figure 5. Expressive Communication as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Extraversion and Influence.



## Appendix A

## Influence Items

1. S/he is able to build effective working relationships with others who have different opinions or interests
2. S/he is able to persuade other people and change their opinions
3. S/he fails to direct and steer meetings in his/her favor (reverse-coded)
4. S/he is able to build coalitions to get things done

## Listening Items

1. When someone else is speaking, s/he interrupts and/or shows impatience (reverse-coded)
2. As a listener, s/he gets others to open up, elaborate, and share information
3. S/he listens effectively to criticism and alternative points of view
4. When someone is speaking, s/he tends to drift off, appearing distracted or inattentive (reverse-coded)
5. After listening, s/he builds on what s/he has heard, incorporating it into the conversation

## Expressive Communication Items

1. When making a point, s/he is concise, brief, and clear
2. S/he is able to use vivid images and compelling logic and facts to support an argument
3. S/he is unable to communicate effectively in person with larger groups and audiences (reverse-coded)
4. When communicating with others, s/he is honest, open, and candid
5. S/he does not produce well-written work and communications, including letters and email (reverse-coded)
6. S/he speaks up and shares his/her views when it is appropriate
7. The substance of his/her messages gets lost because of how they are communicated (reverse-coded)