

# Editorial 28.1: Are we truly listening?

In the first editorial, I wrote after two years of editing the *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* (CCIJ), I called for increasing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) scholarship and emphasised how much has CCIJ contributed towards this field of inquiry during the first two years of my editorship, calling also for further scholarship. In the same editorial, I argued that CCIJ has always been at the forefront of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) scholarship and that these works will continue to be published along with mainstream works because CCIJ will remain open to all (Topić, 2022). This issue, Vol. 28, No.1, continues along the lines of that promise and we offer our readers papers tackling gender equality, and CSR including innovative papers combining gender equality with CSR initiatives and crisis and social media papers.

Whilst these papers focus thematically on the topics mentioned above, they also reveal that we do not listen to each other, and organisations are not always listening to their publics. As humans, we often do not listen to what others are saying because we are too busy registering the topic and trying to prepare an answer (Brownlee, 2020). Listening to others and observing them can make an impact at the level of human relationships. For example, if we listen carefully, we can notice covered-up meanings, such that maybe someone is struggling and needs help, and this can save lives. Or, in other words, if we adopt a listener-centred strategy, we can provide more supportive communication (O'Keefe and Delia, 1982). Moreover, good listeners can have more productive interactions, increased academic and work success, relational satisfaction and better healthcare (Bodie and Fitch-Hauser, 2010). Scholars have argued since the 1930s that human communication scholarship should take seriously the importance of listening (Adams, 1938; Borden, 1935). However, the art of listening has never been taken off as seriously as a general human communication discipline, and even encyclopaedias do not always include this important concept (Bodie, 2011). Listening is important in communication scholarship because it shows “how communication creates and helps maintain, transform, and dissolve relationships” (Bodie, 2011, p. 4). King (2008) noted that “many listening texts continue to be more practical than theoretical: oriented toward improved relationships, improved message comprehension, and improved retention of information” (p. 2719). What is more, listening to people presents an important part of the democratic process (Dobson, 2014), thus listening emerges as something that should be essential for human existence, but it often is not.

What does this mean for organisations? In organisational studies, a lot of research has been done on organisational communication generally, including external and internal communication and there is a myriad of studies showing how organisations do, could or should communicate. CCIJ has over the years published some works on listening in organisations. For example, Macnamara (2001) wrote about organisational listening and sense-making of the information provided. As with human communication, organisational listening is often seen as underdeveloped despite listening showing tangible benefits for organisations (aside from the obvious democratic question). For example, organisational research has argued that giving a voice to employees links with engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, retention and work productivity (Bashshur, 2015; Ruck *et al.*, 2017). In addition, studies have shown that having an employee voice heard links business success and profitability (Harvard Business School, 2013). Freeman and Medoff (1984) argued that



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employee voice provides workers with a means of communicating with management, and [Hirschman \(1970\)](#) argued that employee voice can be used to communicate with and petition the management to instigate organisational change. However, what is often missing in scholarship (both human and interpersonal communication, as well as organisational communication) is listening to one another, noticing things and showing respect for those who are different at the human level, be it in interpersonal encounters or in cross-country communication and scholarship. This CCIJ issue shows that quite well and whilst this is not a special issue nor authors come from the perspective of listening in their work, this is something that comes out of their work, that we need to listen more attentively to build better relationships that will benefit our careers, health, reduce work-life conflict, improve organisational performance, etc.

Adamu Abbas Adamu, Syed Hassan Raza and Bahtiar Mohamad write about the effect of mindfulness and internal listening on internal crisis management linking this with crisis outcomes and emotional exhaustion. Authors argue that mindfulness and internal listening positively affect employee perceptions towards internal communication during a crisis. Internal crisis communication also similarly positively influences employees' perceptions of loyalty, job insecurity and organisational reputation. What this article shows is how important it is for organisations not to just communicate internally but also to listen to their employees and how listening benefits them when a crisis happens.

On the other hand, in a paper on personalisation on Facebook as a tool for corporate communications, Nora Denner and Hannah Schneider write about social networks as places for private conversations and explore how organisations could personalise their communication to become more effective, thus corporate communications moving towards the area of personalised, private and therefore, more engaging and authentic. This paper shows that corporations are attempting to communicate with social media users, but they are not always doing that attentively and thus, they do not always notice what form of communication has more reactions and continue with old communication patterns. In other words, they are not attentive, and they are not listening.

Albert Anani-Bossman and Isaac Tandoh write about African public relations scholarship in the context of globalisation, thus looking at the literature on globalisation and societal change from the African perspective. The paper proposes an African public relations framework that reflects African worldviews, humanist, relational, communalist and strategic. This framework does not work just for Africa but also the world as the authors correctly observe that communications go across borders and being inclusive and respectful should be considered within the public relations framework. In other words, we should notice and listen to each other and show respect towards differences in communication and how we handle each other, which will not just improve relationships but also organisational outcomes.

Katherine Taken Smith and Yu-Shan (Sandy) Huang write about a shift in corporate prioritisation of CSR issues. In that, the authors have looked at Fortune 100 companies and explored what CSR issues they prioritise. Authors argue that companies have reduced the number of CSR issues prioritised in their website communication suggesting that companies are narrowing their focus on fewer CSR issues including decreasing the focus on supply chains despite research showing consumers still want to know about unsustainable practices and worker's exploitation, and equally, companies are using the term sustainability differently, i.e. no longer linked to the environment but also the perpetuation of products, company or society at large. This paper opens a question of whether organisations are listening since they are shifting their prioritisation which sometimes goes against all research showing what consumers care about, thus not listening to them.

Elzbieta Lepkowska-White, Amy Parsons, Bridget Wong and Alexandria M. White write about B Corps on social media and how these companies build a socially responsible global

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community. Authors argue that many consumers are unaware of companies spending significant time and money in obtaining B Corps status to show they are a force for good. The authors conducted an analysis of the social media activity of 100 US B Corps companies using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and Instagram as social media networks and looking for the way companies communicate about their work. Results showed that half of the B Corps companies have no social media presence and those who are active on social media did not mention B Corps status even though many B Corps discussed socially relevant issues on social media such as workers, environment, community and governance, which are the areas used to award B Corps certificate to companies. In the age where almost everyone has some sort of social media presence, and with statistics showing that even the traditionally most resilient senior generation is increasingly using social media (Ofcom, 2021; Statista, 2022), this paper shows that some organisations fundamentally do not listen and thus do not follow trends that their publics follow, which can be interpreted that their efforts in being more responsible towards workers and environments will be largely unrecognised and consumers are left to purchase from less responsible companies. The latter can then lead to a question of whether this presents a different form of irresponsibility.

Feifei Chen and Sherry J. Holladay write about paracrisis research to conceptualise what constitutes paracrisis and identify adequate response strategies. Drawing from Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), authors argue that there are identifiable paracrisis response strategies, i.e. refusal, refutation, repression, recognition, revision, reference to organisational values and dissociation and then draft appropriate response strategies, thus contributing to both scholarship and practice. However, authors argue that paracrises often emerge from CSR crisis risks and CSR reputational crises and whilst their paper offers a useful strategy on how to overcome these issues, it also links to the previous papers published in this issue and a general concept of listening. If organisations listened more, there would be fewer crises to deal with.

Yeonsoo Kim writes about consumer responses towards LGBTQ+ diversity CSR, taking CSR engagement and perceived CSR fit into consideration. An experiment with real consumers was used and findings showed that including LGBTQ+ diversity initiatives in CSR increases the perception of altruism amongst consumers who value companies that pursue these forms of diversity initiatives, which then also positively affects their purchase intentions. The paper extends CSR scholarship by showing what CSR initiatives can be used to reach out to consumers and this also presents a valuable contribution towards practice. What is more, the paper shows that following the public debate and thus focussing diversity initiatives on initiatives that matter to consumers or listening to consumers, will not just help a valuable social cause but also has tangible benefits for organisations.

Jo-Yun Li, Yeunjae Lee and Dongqing Xu write about the role of strategic internal communication in empowering female employees to cope with workplace gender discrimination. The authors conducted an online survey on female employees in the USA and findings have shown that featuring transparent internal communication about workplace gender discrimination increases the sense of empowerment amongst female employees, which feel more empowered to tackle problems and encourage them to adopt problem-focussed coping and participate in coping behaviours. What this paper shows, again, is that organisations that listen to their employees and show transparency in their communication by acknowledging the wrongdoing and issues, again not just do good to their employees but will likely perform better as employees who feel listened to and empowered will likely have a lower employee turnover and higher satisfaction.

Juan Meng and Marlene S. Neill write about women's work-life balance in public relations and communications. Authors report findings from original research on women practitioners and demonstrate that women continually need to find ways of coping with work and family life. According to this study, one of the effective strategies, as suggested by the authors, is

establishing mentor-mentee networks to support women in managing work and family life, but not all mentor-mentee relationships are successful. Importantly, the authors emphasise that “mentorship is not just about having a meeting with an influential senior colleague, but more importantly, it is about learning from someone’s experience to reflect on current situations and strategies. Such mentor–mentee interaction and communication will also lead to mutual learning and *listening* regarding different approaches to facilitate self-reflection, self-exploration and self-reinvention” (my emphasis). This again leads towards the importance of listening to build relationships and succeed in career development.

Going back to listening in general, this starts first and foremost with humans. Organisations are not independent bodies that exist in their own right. They are formed and run by humans and when it comes to organisations, it is up to humans who run them to start listening to their employees and publics, and equally, it is up to every one of us to generally start listening to one another. It has been evidenced that the rise of digital media has impeded the human ability to concentrate and process information (Firth *et al.*, 2019), however, it should not alter our everyday behaviour and what makes us human, talking to one another, observing those around us and caring, which will ultimately benefit both humans and organisations.

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