MS ritgerð í
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Exalted Road of Silence

How active-empathetic listening for supervisors is associated
to subjective well-being and engagement among employees

Stefán Karl Snorrason

Leiðbeinendur: Inga Jóna Jónsdóttir, Dósent
og Kári Kristinsson, Lektor

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how the active-empathetic listening skills of supervisors are associated to the subjective well-being and engagement among their employees, using the Active-Empathetic Listening (AEL) scale, Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) scale and Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UEWS). The sample constisted of 159 participants, aged 20 to 71, with 55.3% being male and 44.7% being female. Examining data showed that employees with a supervisor who scored higher on the AEL scale had a higher score in the *general well-being*, *home-work interface*, *job and career satisfaction*, *control at work* and *working conditions* factors within WRQoL scale and the *vigour* and *dedication* factors within UWES. The only factors with no significant difference were the *stress at work* factor of the WRQoL scale and the *absorption* factor of the UWES. These results indicate that employees working for managers who exhibit higher active-emptathetic listening skills deliver higher job performance, show less absenteeism or counterproductive work and are healthier both mentally and physically. This opens up many possibilities for future research on active-empathetic listening within organizations, such as whether this is a causal relationship and how it varies among different personalities.

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To be human is to communicate.

- Moss (2008, p. 1)

Communication is a key factor for succesfull organizations (Holbeche, 2006). This is particularly true for managers, as they spend around three quarters of their working day communicating (Mintzberg, 1973, 2009; Eccles & Nohria, 1991). The focus of research in communication has been near unidirectional on speech, but this contradicts to what managers actually spend most of their time practicing. Managers spend near half of their communication time listening and listen twice as much as they speak (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). The focus should therefore be mainly on the listening part of managerial communication, but research in this area is surprisingly scarce.

Human resources are critical assets for organizations and their effectiveness (Lawler, 2003). Human resources are also the assets that depend the most on effective communication. Organizations want their employees to deliver a good performance and the two scientific areas that have been highly associated with employees' job performance are subjective well-being and engagement (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000; Zelenski, 2008; Bakker, 2009). In both areas, communication has been established as a contributing factor through aspects such as social support, leader-member exchange (Macey and Schneider, 2008), healthy relationships (Jayawickreme, Forgeard and Seligman, 2012) and transformational leadership, who engage in two-way communication, have focused interactions and exhibit effective listening skills (Hackman and Johnson, 2009). There is an abundance of indicators suggesting that communication is a major contributor to increased subjective well-being and engagement. If communication is a contributor, listening should be a contributor as well. Nonetheless, there is an extreme paucity of research on the association.

The purpose of this thesis is to verify the importance of listening for supervisors and to establish its connection with the subjective well-being and engagement of their employees. This is important both theoretically, as research in this area is scarce, and practically, since it is possible to train managers to become better at active listening (Kubota, Ishima and Agata, 2004).

The thesis begins with examining subjective well-being and engagement. Commonalities will be found between these two scientific areas and shown why they are related. Communication will than be examined in detail and the importance of listening highlighted. This is followed by an introduction to a relatively new approach in effective listening within organizations called active-empathetic listening. When these three areas have been broken down into detail, they will be summarized to see what they have in common and hypotheses developed. The procedures and results of this research will then be elucidated in detail, ending the thesis with discussing implications, limitations and the possibilites for future research.

Subjective Well-Being

Aristotle, a philosopher from ancient Greece, argued in his book *Nicomachean Ethics* that the ultimate goal of human life was to be happy (Rowe & Broadie, 2002). Happiness has since then been the topic for many academics and has been examined within a variety of scientific fields, mainly on the subject how one is to gain happiness. A famous view on this comes from Utilitarians like Bentham (1789/1949) who state that happiness comes from gaining pleasure and avoiding pain. Especially the avoiding pain side gained much attention as research in various areas started focusing mostly on negative states. The focus became so intense, that psychological articles concentrating on negative states outnumbered those that concentrated on positive states by a ratio of 17 to 1 (Myers and Diener, 1995). As a response to this, a new scientific area emerged, focusing mainly on positive states with happiness as one of its key elements (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999). There is even an entire branch within psychology, called positive psychology, which focuses strictly on this (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). However, scholars have nowadays mostly dismissed the term “happiness” to be too simplistic (Haybron, 2008; Seligman, 2011) and are now mostly considering it to be part of a larger construct named *subjective well-being*.

Subjective well-being has been defined as “an individual’s personal assessment of his own well-being according to his own opinion” (McBribe, 2001, p. 253) and as “a person’s cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life” (Diener, Oishi and Lucas, 2009, p. 187). The main aspect of subjective well-being is that it is bound to each individual and the only way to assess it is to ask individuals to describe it as best they can. This is proving to be a difficult task, because scholars keep debating to exactly *what* should be “assessed” or “evaluated”. The exact composition of subjective well-being is different between theories, which is raising concerns among academics. This high diversity between theories is even considered to be hampering research in this area (Diener, Scollon and Lucas, 2003). Scholars do agree on one important thing, though. Subjective well-being is nowadays not considered to be a single construct, but as a scientific area of interest (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999) with a variety of inter-correlating constructs (Stones and Kozma, 1986), also called factors.

Altough the term subjective well-being is used in most cases, its meaning can vary between articles. It’s therefore important to establish in what sense the term will be used at any given time by specifying the appriopriate factors. For this purpose, two important meta-analyses will be examined that have shed viable light on how research on subjective well-being has evolved and what theories in this field may have in common. Their findings will act as building blocks to establish in what sense subjective well-being is used within this thesis. Subjective well-being can be a confusing field, so it’s time to simplify it.

Three Decades of Progress

Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) conducted the first of the two meta-analyses after examining three decades of progress in the literature. According to them, subjective well-being consists of two important components. The first one is called *affect balance*, which is a summary of ones moods, feelings and emotions. These can be both pleasant and unpleasant and there are six different types of affect in both cases (see table 1). Although pleasant and unpleasant affect may seem opposites of each other, they are actually independent of one another (Bradburn and Caplovitz, 1965; Diener and Emmons, 1984; Diener, Smith and Fujita, 1995). This means that one cannot guarantee positive emotions simply by omitting the bad ones. For example, the absence of depression does not necessarily mean that one is happy. Most scales that focus specifically on affect balance (e.g. The Affect Balance Scale) have separated the two into a positive affect scale (PAS) and a negative affect scale (NAS). These two scales are independent of one another and correlate to different areas. PAS is, for example, positively correlated with morale and avowed happiness, while NAS is correlated with poorer mental health and greater role loss (Moriwaki, 1974).

The second component of subjective well-being is called *life satisfaction*, which is the judgement of one’s satisfaction within a certain domain. Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith (1999) listed five different ways to gain satisfaction within six different domains (see table 1). From their point of view, subjective well-being is a gigantic area with a lot of interplaying variables. It doesn’t just matter what exactly is being measured, but also what timeframe is being evaluated and within what domain. An organization that wants to evaluate the subjective well-being of its staff should therefore measure it within their present work life and not, for example, within their family life eight years ago.

Table 1. Components of Subjective Well-Being (Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999).

Pleasant effect	Unpleasant effect	Life satisfaction	Domain
Joy	Guilt and shame	Desire to change life	Work
Elation	Sadness	Satisfaction with past	Family
Contentment / Pride	Anxiety and worry / Anger	Satisfaction with current life	Leisure / Health
Affection	Stress	Satisfaction with future	Finances
Happiness	Depression	Significant other's views of one's life	Self
Ecstasy	Envy		One's group

The Engine of Well-Being

Jayawickreme, Forgeard and Seligman (2012) conducted the second meta-analysis after examining most major theories in well-being. They concluded that theories differ in many ways, but by putting them together in a coherent whole, they give a broader picture of what well-being actually stands for. They sorted all theories into three different categories: wanting (fulfilling desires), liking (how well does one like certain things related to his or her life) and needing (what is required to feel good). From there, they proposed a new model consisting of three levels: *The Engine of Well-Being*.

The first level of the model is called *input*. This level is a combination of all the external resources or internal traits that can influence well-being. A few examples of this are income, political freedom, values, talents/virtues and needs. The second stage is called *process*. This level is a combination of all internal states that influence individual choice. Affect balance is considered part of this stage along with cognitive evaluations, self-control and capabilities. The last stage is called *outcome*. This level is a combination of all voluntary behaviours that emerge from well-being. It is in this stage that people feel engaged and have meaning, feel that they have accomplished something or contributed to the human heritage, build good relationships or are functioning in a goal-driven manner. See table 2 for the entire framework of the model.

Table 2. The Engine Framework (Jayawickreme, Forgeard and Seligman, 2012).

Type	Role	Domain
Input	Exogenous resources and endogenous traits that influence well-being	Income
		Adequate nutrition
		Political freedom
		Education
		Healthcare
		Personality/strengths
		Values
		Talents/virtues
		Needs
		Capabilities[a]
Process	Internal states that influence individual choices	Positive affect
		Cognitive evaluations
		Self-control
		Capabilities[b]
Outcome	Voluntary behaviors characteristic of well-being	Engagement/meaning
		Accomplishment/contribution to the human heritage
		Relationships
		Goal-driven functionings

[a] Nussbaum (2003); [b] Sen (1992).

The engine does not work in a one-way causal fashion. Items listed in the input level do not necessarily lead to items in the process level, which in turn lead to certain behaviours within the output level. The relatedness between levels is correlational, meaning that the pattern can go back and forth through out the model. For example, engagement at work (output) could lead to more positive affect (process), which in turn could lead to a higher income (input). The purpose with this model is to encourage "researchers to declare what part of the engine their variables are then to seek out causal relationships as well as correlations and other regularities among the three levels" (Jayawickreme, Forgeard and Seligman, 2012, p. 336). It's basically a tool to clean up unnecessary measurements that hamper research, so that one can focus on the measurements that truly contribute to the well-being literature.

According to the model, two aspects can affect subjective well-being, namely external resources and internal traits. Knowing that organizations can only control external resources, to what extent do these two aspects influence well-being?

Internal vs. external factors

Diener (1984) pointed out two perspectives in subjective well-being. The first one is the bottom-up perspective, stating that external factors have an impact on one's subjective well-being. The second is the top-down perspective, where internal factors, like personality, have an impact. Personality is indeed a big contributing factor to one's subjective well-being (Diener and Lucas, in press). Tellegen et al. (1988) examined the relationship between personality and subjective well-being through research on twins. Firstly, they showed that monozygotic twins raised apart showed more commonalities in well-being then dizygotic twins raised either together or apart. Secondly, there wasn't such a difference between monozygotic twins raised together and raised apart. These findings where later confirmed by Lykken and Tellegen (1996) and more scholars. The current debate is how much of the variance of subjective well-being can actually be explained by personality (e.g. Baker, Cesa, Gatz and Mellins, 1992; McGue and Christensen, 1997; Silberg et al., 1990).

The two main personality traits that have been associated with subjective well-being are extraversion and neuroticism. Extraverts, for example, tend to be happier whether they are living alone or with others, living in cities or urban neighbourhoods, or if their job is a social or non-social one (Diener, Sandvik, Pavot and Fujita, 1992). Extraversion is mainly correlated with positive affect, while neuroticism is mainly correlated with negative affect (Costa and McCrae, 1980). Looking at long-term subjective well-being, personality is said to be its stability factor (Kozma, Stone and Stones, 2000). Headey and Wearing (1989) posit that personality determines a certain baseline of emotional response. Good or bad events can move people above or below this baseline, but with time, the level falls back to the baseline. Other internal elements that have been associated with subjective well-being are self-esteem (Dunning, Leuenberger and Sherman, 1995) and optimism (Scheier and Carver, 1985). Subjective well-being does, however, fluctuate over time (Kozma, Stone and Stones, 2000), because of fortune or adversity (Veenhoven, 1994). Subjective well-being is therefore not a considered to be a trait, although it's controlled by traits to a great extend.

External factors can have an impact on subjective well-being as well, although this impact is not as great as that of the internal factors listed above (Diener, Suh, Lucas and

Smith, 1999). Yet, there is one external factor does that does have a big impact on one's well-being and that is the social factor. The overall happiness in one's social network can have a significant impact on one's own well-being (Fowler and Christakis, 2008).

Subjective Well-Being at Work

People can be at many different places, but those between 24 and 54 years of age spend most of their time at work. A survey conducted in the United States in 2012 revealed that people spend on average around 37% of their time at work (including non-holiday weekends). Looking at the fact that they spend around 32% of their time sleeping, this means that people actually spend more than half of their time they are awake at work (54% approximately; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Work is therefore not just a place where people come to earn their money; it is a big part of their life.

Subjective well-being at work should therefore be an important factor for both employees and employers alike. One would at least think that a happy worker is a good worker. This notion is known as the happy/productive worker thesis and has actually gained a lot of attention over the past decades (Zelenski, Murphy and Jenkins, 2008). Some have even called it the "holy grail" of organizational psychology (Landy, 1985; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Rightly so, because a higher level of well-being has been associated with many positive traits for organizations. Greater well-being is a good indicator of higher job performance (Wright and Cropanzano, 2000) and lower employee turnover (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002). Lower well-being has on the contrary been associated with more job strain (Cooper and Quick, 1999) and more absence from work (Griffin, Greiner, Stansfield and Marmot, 2007). The subjective well-being of employees is even important on a broader scale as it can affect entire societies and nations (Robertson and Cooper, 2010). In the United Kingdom alone, costs directly related to absence do to sickness stand at about £29 billion annually (PwC, 2013). Lower well-being has also been shown to cost around 5-10% of Gross National Product annually (Worrall and Cooper, 2006). Fixing things quickly through negative reinforcement will not help organizations in the long run (Juniper, Bellamy & White, 2010). Simply increasing income will not help organizations in the long run either (Diener, Sandvik, Seidlitz and Diener, 1993).

According to Cropanzano and Wright (1999), there are two ways for organizations to turn the happy/productive worker thesis into their favour. Firstly, organization can hire people who score the highest on a subjective well-being measurement test, but the credibility of these measurements diminishes over time. This means that current subjective well-being scores do not tell if an employee will be productive over a long period. Going this way can be very risky, especially since the U.S. Department of Labor has estimated that the average cost of a bad hiring decision can equal 30% of the first year's potential earnings (Hacker, 1999). The second way is to make the direct environment more favourable for employees (Cropanzano and Wright, 1999). This is mainly because situational variables have an impact on subjective well-being and people often use the most current salient information to evaluate how satisfied they are (Schwarz and Strack, 1999). This is good news for organizations, because they can use this approach to have an impact on the subjective well-being of the employees through interventions (Diener, Lucas and Oishi, 2009). The biggest problem, however, is that research on effective interventions is extremely scarce. Would it therefore not be better if organizations would simply stick to objective measurements?

Objective measurements

For a long time, objective measurements were considered the only rational way of indicating the well-being within countries and organizations. The main difference between objective and subjective well-being is that, while subjective well-being is bound to individual's evaluation, objective well-being is measured through observed and actual conditions that are not misguided through human evaluation (Gasper, 2007). Because of difficulties in creating stable indicators of well-being in the past, strict economic measures became popular and widely used (Gruenwald, Andrew, Gail and Michael, 1997). How well a country prospers, for example, has been estimated throughout time by objective measurements like income (GDP per capita) and life expectancy (McBribe, 2001). From an economist's perspective with strict objective measurements, money buys happiness and so a higher income should mean more happiness (Gardner and Oswald, 2001). Nevertheless, it has long been speculated that these measurements do not tell the whole story. Easterlin (1995) for example has pointed out that simply increasing everyone's income will not simply increase everyone's happiness. Income only affects happiness when it is compared to the incomes of others. Increasing someone's salary will likely not result in more happiness if that person is still the lowest paid employee. However, increasing salary such that the person becomes the highest paid employee could indeed increase that person's happiness. Although income is an objective measurement, it's often the subjective comparison that determines whether it will increase happiness or not.

Looking at the broader picture, objective measures do indeed have a big impact on general happiness, but subjective measures like trust also play a big role (Helliwell, 2006). The importance of subjective measures in well-being for nations and organizations is ever growing. Diener (2000) has even proposed the use of a subjectively measured national index in determining the general well-being of a nation. Nevertheless, objective measures will always play a vital role, especially for organizations. Their main concern is creating profit through increased revenue or lowered costs, which are both objective measures. So, even when subjective well-being is being examined in organizations, objective measures are what determine if it really matters or not. All in all, objective measures are inevitable for organizations and it's highly important to understand that subjective measurements are not replacing objective measurements, but that combined they tell a broader picture. This is why it is also important to examine the subjective well-being of employees within organizations, but how is that measured?

Quality of Work Life

According to Veenhoven (1991), the best way to measure subjective well-being (correct term he used is happiness) is to subjectively estimate ones quality of life. So, to measure the subjective well-being at work, employees subjectively estimate the quality of their work life. Easton and Van Laar (2012) call this *work-related quality of life*, which they describe as one of those "theoretical concepts [that] aims to capture the essence of an individual's work experience in the broadest sense" (p. 1). The strength of this theoretical concept is that it both measures work and non-work related elements and assesses workplace elements that can be directly influenced by management (Juniper, Bellamy and White, 2010). Work-related quality of life captures six different areas, which are called factors from now on. It's important to note that work-related quality of life is not simply the same as subjective well-being. It' specifies certain factors within the subjective well-being literature and it's therefore vital to examine each factor in detail. The following review is based on information from Easton and Van Laar (2012).

General Well-Being

The first factor is *general well-being*, which is how employees evaluate their well-being when they are considering their life as a whole. As mentioned before, there can be spillovers between work and personal life and work can therefore have an impact on one's general well-being. General well-being has mostly been associated with health problems, and as stated above, health problems can be costly. Most of the literature that has been detailed this far can be directly associated with this factor and it will therefore not be examined in more detail.

Home-Work Interface

The second factor is *home-work interface* or how much employers are helping their employees in balancing the workload between work life and personal life. This factor is also known as *work-life balance* or *work-family conflict* within related literatures. People spend a lot of time at work, so it is understandable that people want their employer to respect their personal life. This factor therefore evaluates how much respect employers have and support their employee's personal life.

Conflicts between home and work life can be dreadful. Lower levels of home-work interface have been associated with an increase in physical health symptoms (Schmidt, Colligan and Fitzgerald, 1980), depression, hypertension (Frone, Russell and Cooper, 1997) and decrease in job satisfaction (Bruck, Allen and Spector, 2002). One way to counter this is by introducing flexible hours policies, as they have been related with increased work performance and job satisfaction (White and Beswick, 2003). Other resorts are maternity and parental leave, child and dependent care and alternative work schedules (e.g. job sharing and job rotation; Zedeck and Mosier, 1990).

Job and Career Satisfaction

The third factor is called *job and career satisfaction*, which is intended to evaluate how employees can use their ability within their chosen job or career. It represents how well an organization motivates their employees, which gives them a sense of achievement, high self-esteem and fulfilment of potential.

Mostly related to this factor is whether employees are in harmony with their salary, feel that they can work independently, have clearly defined career opportunities and are satisfied with their colleagues (Souza-Poza and Souza-Posa, 2000). Job satisfaction has also been associated with the physical and psychological well-being (Faragher, Mass and Cooper, 2005), life/work characteristics and job performance of employees (Iaffaldno and Muchinsky, 1985). The ideas behind job satisfaction mirror the basics of Herzberg's (1966) Hygiene Theory and Maslow's (1954) Higher Need Theory, indicating that employees have basic needs that need to be fulfilled in order to gain satisfaction.

Control at Work

The fourth subclass is called *control at work*. It can have many benefits for employees when they feel that they can directly affect their work and this subclass therefore evaluates to which degree employees are involved in such decision-making.

A loss of control at work has widely been associated with stress symptoms (Parkes, 1991; Jex and Spector, 1996), negative emotional reactions (e.g. anxiety), physical problems in both the short term (e.g. headache) and the long term (e.g. cardiovascular disease; Spector, 2002) and strain (Karasek, 1979). A loss of control at work has also been associated with counterproductive behaviour (Spector, 2002) and a decrease in job satisfaction (Spector, 1982; 1986). According to Karasek (1979), support at work is an important factor to improve mental health without sacrificing productivity.

Working Conditions

The fifth subclass is *working conditions*. Working conditions can mean a variety of things, but it mainly focuses on the fundamental resources available, work environment and job security. Safety and hygiene are, for example, two important things for employees and so this subclass is meant to evaluate how satisfied employees are with the working conditions in which they work.

First of all, safety regulations at work can be vital, even lifesaving. According to the National Safety Council (1997), nearly 78,000 fatalities of civilian workers between 1980 and 1992 can be associated to injuries sustained at work. On top of that, occupational injuries contribute to an annual cost of $119 billion in lost wages and productivity. Poor working conditions have been associated with a higher staff turnover, more absenteeism (Oxenburgh and Marlow, 2005) and more health problems (Health &

Safety Executive, 1997). The Health & Safety Executive (1997) showed that improving working conditions can lead to reduced absenteeism, reduced staff turnover, reduced sick pay costs, improved production and improved job satisfaction.

Stress at Work

The sixth and final subclass is called *stress at work* and is the only subclass that focuses on negative affect. Certain jobs can be high demanding and since people spend a lot of their time at work, this can create a lot of stress. Stress is considered a serious health problem within organizations and this subclass is therefore meant as an evaluation to how much employees agree to feeling stress at their work.

Stress at work is critically common within today's workforce. One-third of workers within the United Kingdom experience high levels of work-related stress and more than half said it had increased over the last five years (Allen and Hogg, 1993). 20% of the British working population have experienced high levels of stress at work (Health & Safety Executive, 2000). Work-related stress is even considered to be a top five health problem within the U.S. work market (Kinman, 1996) and around 30-40% sickness absence can be associated with work-related stress (Earnshaw and Cooper, 1994). According to calculations from the Confederation of British Industry and HSE, around 180 million working days are lost each year through sickness do to work-related stress, costing around £8 billion to organizations (Sigman, 1992). In the United States, this cost was estimated to be around $150 billion per annum (Karasek and Theorell, 1990).

Subjective well-being will from now on be used in the same meaning as work-related quality of life. It will measure one's satisfaction with current life within the work domain. Work-related quality of work is therefore mostly within the processing stage of The Engine of Will-Being. The key ingredient mentioned throughout the subjective well-being literature is the focus on social factors. Relationships are listed as one of the behavioural characteristics of well-being and positive relationships can have positive outcomes for more domains. This means that positive relationships should have an impact on subjective well-being to some degree, since domains within The Engine of Well-Being are supposed to be correlated. But there is another important domain that is known to have a great impact on overall performance of employees, namely engagement.

Engagement

When it comes to engagement in organizations, two different schools have evolved: work engagement and employee engagement. Although these schools are very similar at the core, there is one difference. “Work engagement refers to the relationship of the employee with his or her *work*, whereas employee engagement may also include the relationship with the *organization*” (Schaufeli. 2013, p. 1). Because these two schools are closely intertwined, they will from here on be addressed together as simply *engagement*, although engagement in this thesis will have more in common with work engagement. Engagement is not to be confused with job satisfaction, well-being, work-related flow, motivation (Bakker, 2011), job involvement, organizational commitment (Hallberg and Schaufeli, 2006) or workaholism (Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen, 2008).

Where the term engagement first came from is up for debate, but Kahn (1990) is often considered to be the founding father of this school after he defined personal engagement as “the harnessing of organisation members' selves to their work roles; in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, and emotionally during role performances” (p. 694). Engagement as a scientific area is therefore relatively young, but that does not change the fact that it already facing difficulties. Just like subjective well-being, research in engagement is being hampered by its inconsistent definition and operationalization of the term (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011). After conducting a meta-analysis in the engagement literature, Shuck (2011) concluded that there are four emerging perspectives in how to approach the term: Need-satisfying approach (Kahn, 1990); Burnout-antithesis approach (Maslach, Schaufeli and Leiter, 2001); Satisfaction-engagement approach (Harter, Schmidt and Hayes, 2002); and Multidimensional approach (Saks, 2006). It becomes even more complicated looking at the term from a practitioner’s point of view, as MacLeod and Clarke (2009) discovered at least 50 different definitions for the term engagement. They concluded that engagement is more of an approach than a state of mind. Truss, Mankin and Kelliher (2012) call it *doing* engagement rather than *being* engaged (as cited by Truss, 2014). According to Schaufeli et al. (2002) it is both, as they describe engagement to be a relatively stable state of mind that may fluctuate over time.

Burnout-Antithesis Approach

So, to take out all controversy, the term engagement in this thesis will carry the meaning of the following definition: “Engagement is a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption. Rather than a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behaviour” (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2003, p. 4-5). This is on par with the burnout-antithesis approach.

A person that is showing *vigorous* behaviour is someone who is showing high levels of energy and mental resilience to his work. He is willing to invest a lot of his time and effort into work and is showing great persistency, even though things are not going according to plan. A *dedicated* person is someone who is willing to get highly involved into his work. He will be experiencing a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge through this. A person that gets *absorbed* is someone who is completely and happily concentrated on his work. Time flies by quickly while working and he has a sense of difficulty in detaching himself from work (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

Benefits of Engaged Employees

An engaged employee is an active agent who believes in himself, generates his own positive feedback, has values that match with his organization, is satisfied although he may sometimes feel tired and is also engaged outside of work (Schaufeli and Salanova, 2007). Higher engagement in employees has been associated with positive outcomes for the organization, especially in higher job performance. The reason that engaged employees perform better is that they are often experiencing positive emotions like happiness, joy, and enthusiasm; are more healthy; create their own job and personal resources; and are capable of transferring their engagement to others (Bakker, 2009). Aside from this, research in this field is fairly new and a big portion of this area remains to be discovered. The main consequence of engagement, and the only consequence that has been determined to date, is job performance (Christian, Garza and Slaughter, 2011).

Job and Personal Resources

The two main drivers for engagement are job resources and personal resources (Bakker, 2011). Job resources “refer to those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that either/or (1) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (2) are functional in achieving work goals; (3)

stimulate personal growth, learning and development" (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004, p. 296). Personal resources refer to "positive self-evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully" (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008, p. 213; see Hobfoll et al., 2003). Examples of job resources are social support from colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety and autonomy. Examples of personal resources are internal traits or psychological states like optimism, self-efficiency, resilience and self-esteem (Bakker and Demerouti, 2008). Put into more simplistic words and in context with subjective well-being, job resources are the external recourses that affect engagement, while personal resources are the internal traits that affect engagement. This shows that it is important for organization to both hire employees that have a good set of personal resources and to provide these employees with the right job recourses.

Engagement Framework

The big question academics have asked themselves is whether engagement really is an abstract construct or if it's simply a repackaging of similar constructs, something that is known among academics as "Jangle Fallacy" (Kelley, 1927). This led Macey and Schneider (2008) to examine if engagement really is a single abstract construct or if it's simply "old wine in new bottels" (p. 6). From their research, they proposed a framework of engagement where it related to three areas: job characteristics, leadership and personality traits. According to them, engagement functions as a proximal factor between these three areas and job performance (see table 3). Christian, Garza and Slaughter (2011) used this model in their meta-analysis and showed that engagement is indeed independent and functions much in the same way as described in the framework. They conceptualize engagement as a higher order construct, meaning that it's not single dimensional, but a collection of correlated factors. This is in line with the definition of engagement used within this thesis, where engagement is a combination of the three factors *vigour*, *dedication* and *absorption*. A quick glance on the three antecedents within the framework shows that they have a lot in common with job recourses and personal resources.

Table 3. Conceptual Framework of Engagement (Macey and Schneider, 2008).

Distal Antecedents	Proximal Factors	Consequenses
Job Characteristics	Job Attitudes	Job Performance
Autonomy	Job Satistaction	Task Performance
Task Variety	Organizational Commitment	Contextual Performance
Task Significance	Job Involvement	
Problem Solving	Work Engagement	
Job Complexity		
Social Support		
Physical Demand		
Work Conditions		
Leadership		
Transformational		
Leader-Member Exchange		
Dispositional Characteristics		
Conscientiousness		
Positive Affect		
Proactive Personality		

The first distal antecedent is called *job characteristics*, which is built on research from job characteristics theory (Hackman and Oldman, 1980). With regard to subjective well-being, work conditions and social support stand out from this list, indicating the relatedness between subjective well-being and engagement. This relatedness can therefore be justified by using both frameworks of subjective well-being (The Engine of Well-Being) and frameworks of engagement (the framework described here), making it highly credential. Comparing this list with work-related quality of work shows a lot of commonalities as well. The second antecedent, called *leadership*, shows the importance of good management within organizations to enforce engagement. Transformational leaders are described as those who engage in two-way communication, have focused interactions and exhibit effective listening skills (Hackman and Johnson, 2009). Communication is therefore a key ingredient. The last antecedent describes *dispositional characteristics* that are mostly internal traits. Personality and positive affect have already been discussed in detail within subjective well-being and will therefore not be discussed further here.

One thing is clear when these three antecedents are reviewed and that is the importance of communication within organizations. Social support, transformational leadership (those who engage in two-way communication, have focused interactions and exhibit effective listening skills) and leader-member exchange all indicate this. According to the literature, communication is an important antecedent of both subjective well-being and engagement. This is why focus will now be shifted to communication and what is already known within this scientific area.

Communication

Good communication is a crucial factor for organizations (Holbeche, 2006) and is even considered the lifeblood for success (Wyatt, 2006, cited by Dasgupta, Suar and Singh, 2013). Communication creates a shared meaning or vision within the organization and helps it as a social unit to strive in unity for specific goals (Etzioni, 1964; Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977; Deetz, 1994). This is considered one of the most difficult challenges management faces within their organization (Kreitner, 2007). Communication is very time consuming, as every day, managers spend 70 to 90 percent of their time communicating with others on the job (Mintzberg, 1973, 2009; Eccles & Nohria, 1991). Though there is an ongoing debate to the difference between leadership and management, it mostly co-exists and it's hard to do the one without the other (Mintzberg, 2009). Even managers doing their mundane obligations are regarded as leaders by their subordinates (Alvesson & Svenningson, 2003). Because of this, no distinct difference will be made between management and leadership within this thesis.

Communication comes from the Latin word *communicare*, which means *to share* and can be viewed as literary meaning *to make common* (Harper, n.d.). The term communication has also been defined as "the transmission of meaning from one person to another or to many people, whether verbally or nonverbally" (Barrett, 2010, p. 5). Shockley-Zalabak (2002) shares this definition and goes into even more detail as to how communication takes place. She recognizes that people do communicate for different reasons, but communication in its core is always built upon the same basis. Every time there is both a source who sends out a message and at least one receiver who the message is intended for. The message is encoded by the source and can be sent out both verbally and nonverbally. To create a shared meaning, the receiver has to decode the message so that it is understood correctly. Many things can influence the way messages are decoded by receivers, for example the medium that is chosen to transmit the message, noises that are interfering, the context of the communication and the competence and field of experience of both the source and the receivers. These influencers alter the original meaning of the message which could lead to receivers not understanding the message correctly. An example of experience is when a doctor is trying to explain to a patient what is going on, the message will most likely not be decoded correctly if the doctor only uses the Latin names he learned in medical school. Another example is when a teacher is teaching his class on a Friday afternoon, the message might not be decoded correctly, because noises of tiredness are blurring their concentration.

It's therefore vital for the source to ensure that he encodes his message in such a way that it guarantees correct decoding and understanding by all the receivers. This is indeed why good communication from the manager's perspective has mostly been examined with the manager being the source of the message (Jacobs & Coghlan, 2005). The manager is the one who has to create shared meaning within his team and ensure that everyone is on the same page (Mintzberg, 2009) and good communication is a key component in optimizing team effectiveness (Connaughton, Shuffler & Goodwin, 2011). This view seems to indicate that managers are mainly communicating in a one-way fashion: the manager speaks and his team members listen. However, reflecting on the leadership literature, effective communication is defined as a two-way communication style where the leader both talks and listens (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). As communication is considered to be a critical and even a defining aspect of leadership (Fairhurst, 2007), it should be just as important to investigate the listening part of the communication process. Although listening seems to be growing in importance as an essential tool for managers (Johnson, Pearce, Tuten & Sinclair, 1998), little research has been conducted that directly focuses on this subject (Bodie, Worthington, Imhof & Cooper, 2008).

Listening

"Listening is the forgotten factor in communication skills training." (Kreitner, 2007, p. 320). Even though listening is the most used sub-dimension of communication, it is rarely taught (Gilbert, 1997). As stated before, managers spend 70% to 90% of their time communicating and spend around 45% of their communication time listening, while only 30% goes to speaking (Rankin, 1928). Research by the U.S. Department of Labor (1991) showed that government managers even spent 55% of their communication time listening, while only 23% went to speaking. This means that for about half of their workday, managers are not the source of the message, they are the receivers, and they are listening far more than speaking. Alvesson and Sveningson

(2003) categorize listening as a mundane but highly appropriate act for managers. Listening, in their eyes, is actually an activity managers seem to make extraordinary. As Sharifirad (2013) puts it, listening is “a taken-for-granted aspect of interactions in leader-follower relationships” (p. 198).

Listening is not just hearing, although these constructs are related. While hearing is defined as “the process, function, or power of perceiving sound” (Hearing, n.d.), listening is defined as “to pay attention to someone or something in order to hear what is being said, sung, played, etc.” (Listening, n.d.). Jacobs and Coghlan (2005) call it a difference between the individual level (hearing) and the social level (listening). So, to be socially active in communication, one has to not just hear the message, he has to truly pay attention to it. According to them, listening leads to two social conditions: a stronger relationship and the generation of new meaning.

People are not only speaking to managers, they are also asking them a lot. This means that managers are not only listening to statements, they also have to listen to a lot of questions over the day. For Waldenfels (1994), questions are also a form of statements and it’s therefore just as important for managers to interpret the correct meaning behind questions. Managers will always be forced to give an answer in one way or another and it’s therefore important that the answer is actually in line with what is precisely being asked. One can also choose not to answer, but not answering a question is actually an answer in itself. All in all, the main purpose of listening for managers is discovering the true meaning behind what is being said or asked. It’s therefore vital for managers to ensure that they understand the message correctly by paying undivided attention to the speaker. This is precisely what is meant with effect listening in the leadership literature (Hackman & Johnson, 2009). Today, it is mainly called active listening with an extra emphasis on empathy.

Active-empathetic listening

Active listening at its core is a higher form of listening to gain deeper understanding of the message. It has been used effectively in a wide variety of places such as counselling, therapy and healthcare (Fassaert, Van Dulmen, Schellevis and Bensing, 2007). Drollinger, Comer and Warrington (2006) later adapted this literature to sales “as a form of listening practiced by salespeople in which traditional active listening is combined with empathy to achieve a higher form of listening” (p. 162). They build their theory on Rogers’ (1959) definition of active listening which was “the ability to perceive the internal frame of another with accuracy, and with the emotional components and meanings … as if one were the other person” (p. 210). Although Rogers (1957/2007) had already highlighted the importance of empathy in active listening, Comer and Dollinger (1999) where the ones who permanently added it to equation and called it active-empathetic listening. Empathy, as Rogers (1957/2007) described it, is “to sense the client’s private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the ‘as if’ quality” (p. 243). He uses the word client in the doctor-patient relationship, but this definition can also be used for the manager-subordinate relationship. Although it was originally developed for salespeople, active-empathetic listening has been shown to work within most social situations (Gearhart and Bodie, 2011).

Active-empathetic listening has three stages. The first stage is the *sensing* stage where the message is first interpreted. Here the words are heard, but the listener also implies that he is truly listening through the use of body language, gestures and other nonverbal acknowledgements. The correct proximity also plays a vital part in implying that one is truly listening. The second stage is the *processing* stage where cognitive operations of the one who is listening are maintained. Here the listener evaluates the true meaning behind the received message and has to do this simultaneously as the message is being sensed. This means that the listener has to understand the meaning of the message, interpret the underlying implications, evaluate the importance of various cues and remember the message by constantly updating the material in memory. The last stage is the *responding* stage where the listener indicates to the speaker that the message has been received. This can be done both verbally and nonverbally, but the main reason for this is to encourage the speaker to continue speaking. This is also the stage where the listener can use prompt statements or targeted questions to enhance the mutual understanding between the speaker and the listener (Drollinger, Comer and Warrington, 2006).

Looking at these stages from the managers-subordinates relationship point of view, the two main stages are sensing and responding. It can be hard for the subordinate to know that the manager is indeed processing the message correctly. The only way to assure the subordinate of this is for the manager to use the responding stage wisely. The sensing stage is important as it gives the subordinate vital clues to whether the manager is truly paying attention or not. Employees that work directly under middle managers that show high skills in active listening have shown to be less depressive (Dormann and Zapf, 1999), less fatigue (Bültmann, Kant, Schroer and Kasl, 2002) and less stressful (Mineyama, Tsutsumi, Takao, Nishiuchi and Kawakami, 2007). It has even been shown that leaders with active-empathetic listening have a positive impact on the well-being and innovative work of their employees (Sharifirad, 2013). It is also possible to train managers to become more effective at active listening (Kubota, Ishima and Agata, 2004). By training their managers to exhibit active listening, organizations could have an impact on the well-being of their employees, which is precisely the main implication of this thesis. It’s therefore time to summarize the literature and form a coherent whole of these three scientific areas that have been described so far.

Hypotheses and implications

It’s clear that both subjective well-being and engagement are of great importance for organizations as it can bolster profits through better job performance and lower costs through lower job absenteeism. A clear notion throughout the literature is that one of the most important contributors for employees to feel well and engaged is to create a positive social environment. The people trusted with this task are the managers who control their team within a division. Communication is a key ingredient for creating a positive social environment and through the transformational leadership literature it is clear that the best communication scheme is a two way operation. Speaking and listening are therefore both essential, but as stated before, managers spend far more time listening then speaking. Listening should therefore be a vital part for creating this positive environment that bolsters well-being and engagement. Communication between managers and subordinates are often times not simple chitchats, but mostly important issues that need to be dealt with. Listening for managers is therefore not simply hearing words, but they have to evaluate the message correctly so they can truly handle the issue. Active-empathetic listening should therefore be important for managers if they are to do this correctly. From this arise two hypotheses that this research will examine:

H1: Employees who work directly under a supervisor that exhibits higher active-empathetic listening skills will have a higher level of subjective well-being then employees who work directly under a supervisor that exhibits lower active-empathetic listening skills.

H2: Employees who work directly under a supervisor that exhibits higher active-empathetic listening skills will have a higher level of engagement then employees who work directly under a supervisor that exhibits lower active-empathetic listening skills.

Method

Sampling and Participants

The sample was a convenience sample where the researcher used his social network to find participants with at least two degrees of separation from the researcher himself. Participants received an e-mail where they were asked to participate in an online survey. The number of participants that started to respond were 221, but 62 were completely removed do to missing data, and thus the sample analysed consisted of 159 participants. Of these, 88 where male (55.3%) and 71 female (44.7%). Their age spanned from 20 to 71 with the mean age of 40.73 (SD = 12.83) and median age of 41. The mean age of the males was 41.85 (SD = 13.87) and median age of 42. The mean age of the females was 38.50 (SD = 11.43) and median age of 38.5. Of the 159 direct supervisor's that were assessed, 95 were male (59.7%) and 50 female (31.4%). 14 participants (8.8%) did not mention the gender of their direct supervisor.

The 62 participants excluded were the ones that did not complete the survey and were their data removed altogether. Some participants had missing questions within certain scales and were they only excluded when that particular scale was being analysed. The selection process was not restricted in any way other than you had to have a job over the past 3 months to be able to participate. Considering that the sample was a convenience sample can be considered a restriction as it is not a fully randomized sample, but based on the premise that when fundamental psychological processes (Katz, 1972) are being examined or when testing a new theory (Calder, Phillips and Tybout, 1981, 1982), convenience samples will not hamper research.

Design and Materials

Three different scales where used to measure the three key components of this research. To measure subjective well-being within a work place, the Work-Related Quality of Life (WRQoL) Scale (Van Laar, Edwards and Easton, 2007) was used. It has six factors: *General well-being*, *home-work interface*, *job and career satisfaction*, *control at work*, *working conditions* and *stress at work*. These six factors are combined into a list of

23 statements where one determines to which degree he or she agrees to each statement on a five point Likert scale. At the bottom of the list is also a 24^{th} statement that focuses on the overall satisfaction with ones work life on the same Likert scale. The full WRQoL scale consists of 36 statements, but to increase the likelihood of participation, it was considered more effective to use the shorter scale consisting of 23 statements.

To measure engagement, the highly validated Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES; Schaufeli and Bakker, 2001) was used. Most work on work engagement has been examined through this scale, and it was therefore chosen as it opens up the possibility to combine this research to what has been examined before. In line with the definition used for engagement in this thesis, UEWS consists of three factors: *vigour*, *determination* and *absorption*. The original UWES consists of 17 statements, but the shorter scale of 9 statements was used for the same reasons as mentioned for the WRQoL scale. For each statement, participants are asked to rank how often they have felt what the statement specifies on a scale from 0 (never) to 6 (daily).

The last scale is the Active-Empathetic Listening (AEL) scale (Drollinger, Comer and Warrington, 2006) that was used to measure the active listening skills of the supervisors. It concists of three factors: *sensing*, *processing* and *responding*.The original scale is a self-report scale, but it was changed to an observer report scale to assess the active listening skills of the participant’s direct supervisor. It’s originally 21 items longs, but a shorter version of 11 statements was used in this research for the same reasons as listed above. For each statement, participants are asked to note how much they agree with it on a five point Likert scale, much like the WRQoL scale.

There were also four basic background questions asked in the survey, three of them before answering the scales and one afterwards. The first three questions asked for the participant’s gender, age and employment over the last three months (full time job, part time job, summerjob or no job). The last question asked for the gender of the participant’s direct supervisor. All in all, the survey consisted of 48 questions.

The survey was conducted in Icelandic and all scales had to be translated into Icelandic. The translation was conducted by the researcher with help from various individuals around him. After translating the scales to Icelandic, a fellow student at the

University of Iceland was asked to translate it back to English and his translation compared to the original scale in accordance to Brislin’s (1970, 1986) back-translation procedure. The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey.com.

Procedure

The survey was set up online and activated. The researcher then asked the closest people in his social network to send out an e-mail to people they know with jobs and don’t have the same direct supervisor. This was done to ensure that participants were at least separated from the researcher at two degrees, the researcher did not directly know who are participating and to govern that two or more participants would not assess the same direct supervisor. As the survey was conducted online, there was minimal control over environmental factors that could affect the participants. All participants received the same instructions, which is the only control the researcher could have over them. Each scale in the survey had its own instructions on how it should be answered. This was especially important for the AEL scale, because insurance was needed that all participants would share a common understanding to what was meant with direct supervisor. Direct supervisor was therefore explained as someone the participants have to answer to or obtain permission from before executing something work related. The survey was set up using standard equipment and no custom materials were used.

Pre-testing was performed before the survey was launched online with 8 participants who were not included into the final sample. It took them between 5 and 6 minutes on average to complete the survey. Pre-testing was also used to judge if the participants correctly understood all instructions, statements and questions in the survey. Some minor modifications were made before launching the survey online after reviewing the comments from participants in pre-testing.

Results

Three different scales where used in this research consisting of a total of 13 factors. The gathered data will therefore be examined in context with these factors along with the total score of each scale. Subjective well-being and engagement will almost entirely be interpreted from their cohesive factors. The independent variable of this research, active-empathetic listening (AEL) skills of the supervisors, will on the contrary mainly be interpreted using the total score of the scale. The three factors it comprises (*sensing*, *processing* and *responding*) will mainly be used as a posibility for a more detailed analysis. For each of the three factors, along with the total score of the scale, the median was found and used to divide the supervisors into two separate groups. The supervisors that scored above the median were listed amongst those with higher skills and those that scored below the median were listed amongst those with lower skills. Because this is done independently for each category, supervisors could fall into different groups with respect to each category. If someone had one answer missing within any of the factors, said participant was exluded from that factor. These participants were also exluded from the overall score of the scale. No participant was exluded from all factors, meaning that each participant's data was present in at least one factor. The statistics of the groups are listed in table 4. For simplicity's sake, the group which scored below the median will from now on be called *lower AEL skilled group*, while the group above the median will be called *higher AEL skilled group*.

Table 4. Statistics of the two divided groups with respects to the overall score of the AEL scale and the score in each of its factors.

	Median	Below median			Above median			Missing
		N	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Overall	3.36	72	2.62	.62	81	3.79	.35	6
Sensing	3.00	90	2.40	.69	67	3.67	.41	2
Processing	3.33	76	2.45	.64	80	3.79	.44	3
Responding	3.75	84	3.04	.69	73	4.31	.85	2

Subjective well-being and engagement, representing the dependent variables in this research, were also divided into their respected factors. Subjective well-being was divided into the following six factors: *general well-being* (GWB); *home-work interface* (HWI); *job and career satisfaction* (JCS); *control at work* (CAW); *working conditions* (WCS); and *stress at work* (SAW). *Overall satisfaction with work life*, the 24th statement within the WRQoL scale, was only used as a comparison with the total score of the scale, to see if it is evaluated similarly. Engagement was divided into its three factors: *vigour* (VI); *dedication* (DE); and *absorption* (AB).

A correlation matrix was used to examine the reliability (in bold) and validity of each factor, as shown in table 5. Because each scale represents a scientific area consisting of cohesive factors, it's understandable that the factors are highly correlated within each scale. The scientific areas of interest within this research are also expected to be closely related and strong collerations expected between cross scale factors. The only factor that does not correlate to any degree with the other factors is *stress at work*. It's also the only component that represents a negative affect. The reliability of each factor was presented in with Cronbach's alpha and interpreted according to estimates from George and Mallery (2003). The correlates between factors are presented with Pearson's *r* and interpreted according a rule of thumb presented by Quinnipiac University (2000).

Table 5. Correlations matrix. The reliability of each factor is listed in bold.

	GWB	HWI	JCS	CAW	WCS	SAW	VI	DE	AB	SE	PR	RE
GWB	**.814**											
HWI	.411*	**.847**										
JCS	.570*	.452*	**.772**									
CAW	.462*	.618*	.622*	**.833**								
WCS	.536*	.641*	.537*	.568*	**.724**							
SAW	.181	.343*	-.037	.043	.284*	**.742**						
VI	.548*	.342*	.507*	.489*	.418*	-.032	**.800**					
DE	.408*	.188*	.575*	.405*	.280*	-.248*	.788*	**.886**				
AB	.427*	.204*	.623*	.451*	.258*	-.233*	.740*	.790*	**.812**			
SE	.502*	.414*	.546*	.461*	.455*	.073	.401*	.338*	.253*	**.911**		
PR	.341*	.416*	.471*	.421*	.556*	.164	.252*	.272*	.166	.653*	**.838**	
RE	.473*	.428*	.452*	.359*	.526*	.217*	.345*	.304*	.224*	.613*	.719*	**.907**

*. Correlation is significant at α = 0.05.

To test the hypotheses of this thesis, a comparison will be made between the *higher AEL skilled group* and the *lower AEL skilled group* within each factor using independent t-tests. Because the scales are measured in units that people can't normally comprehend, Cohen's *d* will be used to make it easier to understand what the difference is indicating. A rule of thumb from Field (2009) will be used for evaluation, but as he mentions, these coefficients will not be taken too seriously and will rather be used as estimates. All differences will be tested for significance at $\alpha = .05$. As stated before, the data will mainly be examined within the overall score of the AEL scale. Results within each factor are listed in table 6. The mean scores for each division are also shown graphically in figures 1 and 2.

Table 6. The difference that emerges when comparing higher AEL skills group with the lower AEL skills group within each factor. The overall scores of the scales are listed in bold, with SWB being the overall score for subjective well-being and WE being the overall score for engagement.

	High skills	Low skills	Difference	95% Conf.		Ind. t-test			
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	Low	Upp	t	p	df	d*
SWB	**3.75 (0.53)**	**3.24 (0.59)**	**0.52 (1.11)**	**0.33**	**0.70**	**5.52**	**0.00**	**141**	**0.46**
GWB	3.92 (0.59)	3.51 (0.68)	0.40 (1.26)	0.20	0.61	3.91	0.00	148	0.32
HWI	3.90 (0.92)	3.34 (1.07)	0.55 (1.98)	0.23	0.87	3.41	0.00	149	0.28
JCS	3.90 (0.56)	3.39 (0.65)	0.51 (1.20)	0.32	0.71	5.18	0.00	146	0.43
CAW	3.85 (0.75)	3.16 (0.94)	0.69 (1.68)	0.42	0.96	5.00	0.00	150	0.41
WCS	3.73 (0.85)	3.03 (0.80)	0.70 (1.65)	0.44	0.97	5.26	0.00	151	0.43
SAW	2.46 (1.01)	2.24 (0.98)	0.22 (1.98)	-0.10	0.54	1.36	0.18	151	0.11
WE	**4.94 (0.91)**	**4.44 (1.13)**	**0.50 (2.03)**	**0.17**	**0.83**	**2.98**	**0.00**	**147**	**0.25**
VI	4.91 (0.94)	4.31 (1.21)	0.60 (2.14)	0.25	0.95	3.41	0.00	148	0.28
DE	4.86 (1.11)	4.24 (1.38)	0.62 (2.48)	0.22	1.01	3.05	0.00	151	0.25
AB	5.07 (0.99)	4.74 (1.09)	0.33 (2.07)	-0.01	0.66	1.93	0.06	150	0.16

* Cohen's *d* for the difference.

All factors show a significant difference except for the *stress at work* and the *absorption*. It's therefore save to say that both the first and the second hypotheses hold true, except in the cases of *stress at work* and the *absorption*. According to Cohen's d, the difference in subjective well-being is more identifiable (d = .46) that the difference in engagement (d = .25), indicating that AEL skills of supervisors are having a bigger more associated with the subjective well-being for their employees then with the engagement of their employees. Although the difference in both scales are near identical ($M_{SWB} = 0.53$; $M_{WE} = 0.50$), engagement is scored on a broader scale (from 0 to 6) then subjective well-being (from 1 to 5). The standard deviation of the difference is also larger for engagement ($SD_{SWB} = 1.11$; $SD_{WE} = 2.03$), most likely for the same reason.

Within subjective well-being, the three biggest differences are in the factors *control at work* (M_{CAW} = 0.69, SD_{CAW} = 1.68) and *working conditions* (M_{WCS} = 0.70, SD_{WCS} = 1.65). These two factors also score the lowest amongst the *lower AEL skilled group*, but are much closer in scoring amongst the *higher AEL skilled group*. The high difference is therefore established because of the low scores among the lower *AEL skilled group*. These two factors have a moderately identifiable difference according to their Cohen's *d* value. Another division that seems to have a moderately identifiable difference is *job and career satisfaction*, but the difference here (M_{JCS} = 0.51, SD_{JCS} = 1.20) is quite lower than for the other two factors already mentioned. Although there is a significant difference in the factors *general well-being* (M_{GWB} = 0.40, SD_{GWB} = 1.26) and *home-work interface* (M_{HWI} = 0.55, SD_{HWI} = 1.98), these differences are not as identifiable. The last factor, stress at work, did not sow a significant difference ($t(151) = 1.36$, $p = 0.18$). The AEL skills of supervisor do therefore not have an impact on the levels of stress their employees are experiencing at work.

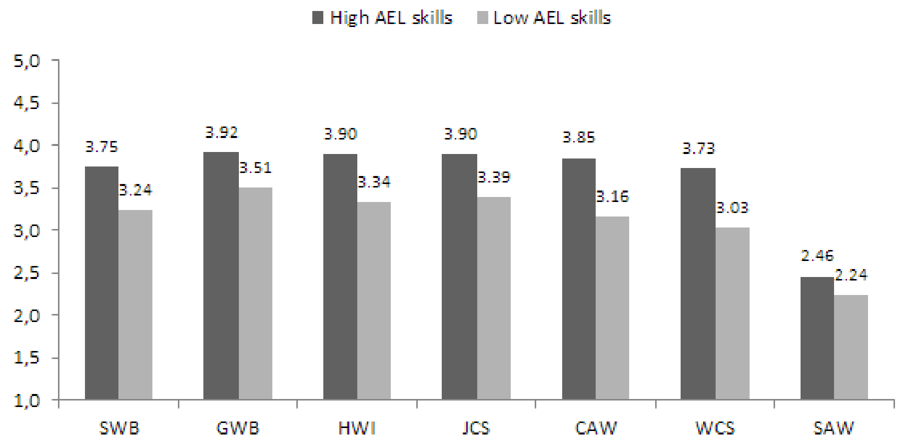

Figure 1. Comparison between the mean scores in all factors of subjective well-being.

As stated above, the AEL skills of supervisors are not as highly associated with engagement as with subjective well-being. There are only two factors within engagement that show a significant difference. *Dedication* is the factor that has a bigger difference (M_{DE} = 0.62, SD_{DE} = 2.48) while vigour has a slightly lower difference (M_{VI} = 0.60, SD_{VI} = 2.14). Both division have a rather small effect and are therefore not so easily identified. There was not a significant difference for the factor *absorption* ($t(150) = 1.93$, $p = 0.06$), although this difference is not far from being significant.

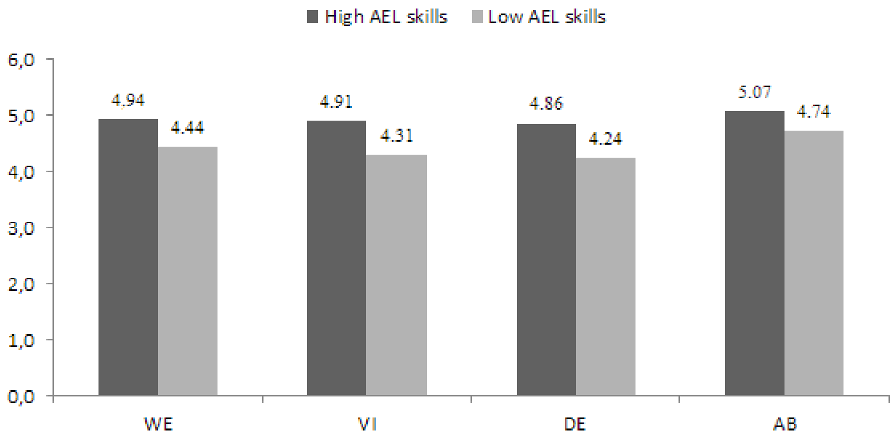

Figure 2. Comparison between the mean scores in all factors of engagement.

Comparing the differences between factors within AEL skills, an interesting pattern appeared. Firstly, within every single factor the sensing factor always scored the lowest. Even when the results are divided between the higher AEL skills and lower AEL skills, the factor sensing still always scored the lowest. This is also the factor with the biggest average difference between the two groups. On other notes, breaking down AEL skills into its factors still yields the same results, with one apperent exemption. The factor *stress at work* actually has a significant difference of 0.383 (SD_{SAW} = 1.95; $t(154) = 2.432$, $p < .02$) when its examined within the *responding* factor of AEL skills.

The variables *age*, *gender of participants* and *gender of supervisors* were not associated to any of the scales, except for a view cases. Scanning the data for interactions showed none, but it did point out to a ciew interesting results. First point of interested came when males with a male supervisor were compared to females with a female supervisor. The females with a female supervisor tend to score higher on the *general well-being* factor with a difference of 0.330 ($t(86) = 2.28$, $p < .05$).

The second interesting result came when the age and gender of participants is examined compared to engagement with respect to the males. Firstly, the sample was divided into 3 groups. The first group were *younger people* who were younger then 30 years old. The second group was *middle aged people* who were between the age of 30 and 50 years old. The last group were *older people* who were older then 50 years old. Splitting the data between males and females and then comparing tese three age groups in relation to engagement yielded some interesting results. First of all, there was a significant difference between young females and middle aged females in relation to the *vigour* and *dedication* factor of engagement. Young females scored 0.653 (SD = 2.02; $t(46) = 2.19$, $p < .05$) lower then middle aged females in *vigour* and scored .738 (SD = 2.41; $t(47) = 2{,}08$, $p < .05$) lower in *dedication*. Males, on the other, had a significant difference in overall engagement, *vigour* and *absorption* factors between young and older males. Young males scored 0.622 (SD = 1.94; $t(48) = 2.23$, $p < .05$) lower in overall engagement, they scored 0.613 (SD = 1.83; $t(48) = 2.32$, $p < .05$) lower in *vigour* and they scored 0.757 (SD = 2.11; $t(49) = 2.52$, $p < .02$) lower in *absorption*. All in all, data indicated that younger people were less engaged with their work then those who were older.

Discussion

It has long been established that communication is a key factor for success in business. Most research had, however, been conducted on the speech side of communication. What this thesis attempts, therefore, is to show that the listening part is also a vital for success. Data showed that higher active-empathetic listening skills of supervisors are associated with higher subjective well-being and engagement of their employees, although the association is greater with the former than the latter.

Where suporvisors are exhibiting higher active-empathetic listening skills, employees feel they have more control at work and are more satisfied with their working conditions. Looking at what has already been associated with working conditions, good relationships with colleagues and supervisors was listed as one of them. One of the things that are achieved through listening is stronger relationships (Jacobs and Coghlan, 2005) and therefore it should make sense that there is an association between active-empathetic listening and working conditions. This was also the factor that was mostly based on needing fulfilment and this could indicate that listening is an important part of essential working conditions. That is, people need to be listened to within their work environment. A huge part of having control over work is to be involved in decision making that affects one directly. The only way to accomplish this is when others are truly listening to what ones opinion. This should especially hold true for managers, as they often have the final say in decision making.

Job and career satisfaction, general well-being and home-work interface are also associated with active-empathetic listening. Better working conditions have already been linked to a higher job satisfaction. So, the connection between working conditions and active-empathetic listening depicted above should explain to a large degree way job and career satisfaction goes up. Another factor where it seems rational that active-empathetic listening matters is when employees are trying to balance thei home and work life. When employees are organizing how to divide their time between work and thei personal life, it matters that their wishes are actually listened to. It's of minor importance to organize ones time is the manager will not even listen to ones wishes.

Since people spend a lot of their time at work, having a desirable work environment should play a big role in controlling ones general well-being. Why women with a female supervisor have more generally well-being then men having a male supervisor is hard to say. It could be the caring nature of women versus the more toughen-up nature of man, but this is of course pure speculation. Identifying a real reason for this difference is, however, beyond the scope of this research.

One factor that was expected to be affected in some degree by higher active-empathetic listening skills was *stress at work*. There was, however, no significant difference between higher and lower active-empathetic listening skills of supervisors. This is in contrast with what Mineyama, Tsutsumi, Takao, Nishiuchi and Kawakami (2007) discovered when they trained managers to be more active listeners. A key difference between their study and this one is that the same employees were evaluated before and after their managers had gone through their training, meaning differences were measured within the same group. It could be that knowing that their managers had undergone training did decrease the stress level for their employees. In this thesis, however, the difference was evaluated between two different groups. It could therefore be that active-empathetic listening does have anything to do whether employees feel a lot of stress or not.

There is one other possibility to why stress at work did not matter. In both the higher and lower AEL skills group, stress at work was by far the lowest scoring factor, indicating that people feel a substantial amount of stress within their work environment. This could actually be a concequense of the harsh economy within Iceland at the moment. The nation is still recovering from the 2008 crisis and there is still a conciderable high load on the Icelandic workforce. Unemployment within Iceland, for example, has been rocking from 4.4 to 6.2 percent this year (Hagstofa, 2014). This is of course pure speculation.

Engagement is on the other hand not as highly associated with active-empathetic listening as subjective well-being. The main factors that matter here are vigour and dedication, while absorption is not as relevant. Vigorous bahviour is having high levels of energy and having mental resilience at work. Listening could indeed contribute to this, as employees would spend more time trying to find solutions if they know that there manager will listen to them. Why should employees dedicate their time and energy when they know that the manager has already made up his mind? The same can be said for dedication, as it could be linked in way to control at work. One is involved in decision making, indicating that people (especially managers) are taking their time to listen to ones opinion. This should in turn make an employee dedicated to his work. Absorption, on the other hand, is how much someone gets carried away doing his work. This does not have to indicate an absorped employee needs to be listened to. Listening could matter, though, to make an employee absorped in the first place. But there is no apparent link between being happily concentrated on work, where times flies by and one has a difficulty detaching oneself from work, and having the need to be listened to.

Why younger people are less engaged at work is not obvious. A contributing element could be that there is a much higher probability that people under the age of 30 are still educating themselves. This often means that they have not yet found the job they truly want to be working, making them less engaged. It’s also a possibility that the work they are doing is not particularly interesting, as students often tend to end up with jobs that higher educated people have little or no interest in. A third possibility is that although listening might be a contributor to more engagement, there is some other important element missing for people under the age of 30 that is not being measured within this thesis. It’s therefore impossible to identify the real reason for the lack of engagement in people who are younger then 30 years old.

Implications

As all the factors have been examined, the literature can be used to determine what implications can be drawn from these results. There are three major implications that will be discussed here in detail, but it’s essential to address an important point before moving on. Although a causal relationship between active-empathetic listening and both subjective well-being and engagement has not been established, it’s highly likely that an environment with more active-empathetic listening is also an environment with higher subjective well-being and engagement. The implications listed below are therefore not listed as great outlines to why active-empathetic listening should be fostered within organizations, because it is impossible from this research to determine that an increase in active-empathetic listening will automatically increase subjective well-being and engagement. The implications listed below are purely presented to why environments with higher active-empathetic listening should be more favourable then environments with lower active-empathetic listening. The research conducted by Kubota, Ishima and Agata, (2004) does, however, incidacte that active listening is a contributing factor to a more positive work environment.

The first implication from this research is that supervisors with higher active-empathetic listening skills have employees with higher job performance. The first factor to indicate this is *home-work interface*, as employees feel they have more control over their working hours. This results in less tension between work and home, meaning that employees are not carrying as many problems between the two domains of their life. So, when they are at work, they can focus more on their job leading to a higher job performance. *Job and career satisfaction* is also one of the benefits of better work-home interface, which on its own can lead to higher job performance. As indicated within this factor, good colleagues relationships and good relations with one supervisors were good indicators of increased job satisfaction. Active-empathetic listening should be an important ingredient in creating these good relationships. Employees working under supervisors with higher active-empathetic listening skills also tend to be more *vigorous* and *dedicated* to their work. These two factors within engagement are also highly associated with improved job performance as they can make employees feel more competent within their work environment.

The second implication is that supervisors with higher active-empathetic listening skills work in a division with less staff turnover and have employees who show less counterproductive behaviour and are less absent. This is indicated through the *control at work* and *working conditions* factors within subjective well-being. There are several possible scenarios for employees to indicate their dissatisfaction within these two factors. Employees could turn up for work, but not do what is expected of them by displaying counterproductive behaviour, leading to decreased job performance. They could also decide to simply not show up by calling in sick or even worse, quit altogether meaning an increase in staff turnover. As has already been discussed at the beginning of the thesis, costs that can be directly related to absence do to sickness stand at about £29 billion annually, and the average cost of a bad hiring decision can equal 30% of the first year's potential earnings. A higher staff turnover will increase the likelihood of a bad hiring.

It's most likely that employers need to meet certain standards of their employees to create satisfactory working conditions and give them a feeling of control at work. When these standards are not met, they will lead to the undesirable consequences listed above. It could be that one of those standards that need to be met is being listened to. So, it's not that active-empathetic listening necessarily increases productive behaviour or makes people want to show up for work. It's more that active-empathetic listening prevents employees from showing undesirable behaviour, calling in sick or quit their job altogether. Putting it in other words, active-empathetic listening may not be a luxurious trait that creates better working conditions. It's more likely a necessary trait to keep working conditions desirable. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that both control at work and working conditions scored the lowest within the lower AEL skills group, but were on par with the other factors within the higher AEL skills group.

The third implication is that supervisors with higher active-empathetic listening skills have healthier employees. This is one of the key consequences of subjective well-being in its entirety, as health problems have been associated with every factor of subjective well-being and with almost every aspect of the entire subjective well-being literature. It's already been addressed how much it can cost organizations when their employees are calling in sick. Absent employees will not do any work either, creating a heavier load on those who do indeed show up for work. This could indeed create more strain among employees through less control at work and more occupational injuries do to less favourable working conditions. Other health related symptoms can be negative emotional reactions (e.g. anxiety), physical problems in both the short term (e.g. headache) and the long term (e.g. cardiovascular disease), depression, hypertension and to some degree fatigue.

Limitations

There are some crucial limitations to this research. The first one is that this is practically one of the first studies to really test the association between active-empathetic listening and both subjective well-being and engagement. Although there is a significant difference within many factors, it remains to be seen if these results can be repeated.

The results of this thesis should therefore be interpreted with care. They are functioning more as an indicator rather than a fact.

One of the problems that follow this is the lack of causel relationships. Although there is an association between these scientific areas, data from this research cannot establish the nature of this association. It's therefore impossible to imply that higher active-empathetic listening skills of supervisors truly cause employees to have higher levels of subjective well-being and engagement.

The second limitation is the scope of the research. To encourage participations, the length of the questionnaire was kept at a minimum. Questions like profession, years of employment (overall and at the firm), education and the area in which ones organizations functions are all important variables that could shed viable light on the association between active-empathetic listening of supervisors and the subjective well-being and engagement of employees. These questions are, however, often viewed as sensitive information and because the relatively small scope of this thesis, they were omitted from the questionnaire.

The third limitation is the sample this data was worked from. Although convenience samples are not considered to be drastically hampering research when fundamental psychological processes and new theories are being tested, randomized samples are always better predictors.

Future Research

The results from this thesis open up a lot of possibilities for future research. To begin with, more research is needed on the association between active-empathetic listening and both subjective well-being and engagement. This is especially essential in establishing the nature of the relationship between the scientific areas. It could be a causal relationship, where more active-empathetic listening leads to higher subjective well-being and engagement. Maybe there is an important mediating variable missing or it could be that these three areas are correlated parts of a higher order variable. It could be that a certain environments promote subjective well-being, engagement and listening, or that environments with higher subjective well-being actually promote listening among all of its members, including the supervisor.

Finding the true nature of the relationship is of high importance for the practical uses of active-empathetic listening. A causal relationship means that organizations can benefit from simply training their managers in become better in active-empathetic listening, because it has been shown that managers can indeed be trained to become better at active-empathetic listening (Kubota, Ishima and Agata, 2004). If it’s all part of an environment that promotes all three scientific areas, it’s important to identify specific details to be able to enhance those kinds of environments. Establishing the influence of active-empathetic listening could be achieved by training managers to become better at it. The subjective well-being and engagement of their employees will be measured before and after the training and these two measurements compared to see if there is a difference.

It would also be interesting to study active-empathic listening on a broader scale than just subjective well-being and engagement. It’s possible that there are more important variables that are missing within this thesis. Some variables have already been mentioned within the limitations chapter, such as profession, years of employment (overall and at the firm), education and the area in which ones organizations functions. These results do not have to apply in all professional fields or educational backgrounds. There were some associations within this research that could not be explained within the scope of the thesis. One example is why younger people are less engaged at work, but that is a topic outside of active-empathetic listening.

Other interesting perspectives would be to identify the importance of internal traits associated to listening. It would, for example, be interesting to see if certain personality traits are associated to the importance of listening or being listened to. Maybe there are other traits that determine this as well, such as optimism or self-esteem, which are internal traits that have already been associated with subjective well-being. Objective measurements like income, profits and staff turnover are all interesting variables to examine as well. Are people with lower or higher income more pronce to listening? Do high profitable organizations promote listening? What about non-profit organizations? Expanding the scope of the research, by including all these (and possibly more) variables, would give a more accurate account on the importance of active-empathetic listening.

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