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Community Engagement in the Public Sphere: A Comparison of 'Participatory Communication' and 'Listening' Models as Methods for Evaluating Symmetrical Communication between Organisations and their Stakeholders.

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on Stage 1 of a study investigating the listening competency of two organisations during consultation with their respective stakeholders. Stage 1 is a pilot study comprising the first two cases of a larger empirical study exploring stakeholder perceptions of competent organisational listening competency. (Burnside-Lawry, 2007).

The pilot study introduces data analysis through two different prisms to evaluate the extent of competent organisational listening that occurred during two organisation-stakeholder consultations; the framework of listening expectations and perceptions and the norms of communicative action, as measured by criteria derived from the participatory communication model (Jacobson, 2007).

Preliminary results suggest unifying listening competency attributes with participatory communication criteria could provide organisations with a deeper understanding of how competent listening practices are achieved, or conversely, not achieved, during consultations between organisations and their stakeholders.

Keywords: case study, listening, organisational communication, stakeholder, communicative action, participatory communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

The increasing influence of stakeholders on decisions and management of organisations is well documented (Scholes & Clutterbuck, 1998; Bronn & Bronn, 2003; Gable & Shireman, 2005; McVea & Freeman, 2005). In response to the challenge of maintaining both financial competitive advantage and fostering participative communication with vital stakeholders, emphasis is now placed on increasing the ability of organisations to respond to 'incoming messages', listening to stakeholders. A number of scholars have suggested the essential component of stakeholder relationships is communication; however the methods and process involved in genuine stakeholder communication are not well understood (Foster & Jonker, 2005).

Organisational communication literature consistently states that healthy organisations are those that promote effective listening, and that poor listening can cost business millions of dollars ((Harris, 2002; Penrose et al, 2004; Di Salvo,1980; Steil et al, 1983; Brownell, 1990). Engagement with stakeholders can sometimes result in initial conflict and misunderstandings between the organisation and some stakeholder groups; it is in these initial encounters that negotiation and listening skills are most critical (Gable & Shireman, 2005). Managing stakeholders involves finding mutually agreed solutions to issues using processes designed to listen, inform and manage both agreement and disagreement. Literature from both Organisational communication and Communication for development fields suggests a new breed of manager is needed, with skills to consider different points of view, problem-solve collaboratively and manage relationships between organisations and their stakeholders; (Halal, 1998, 2001; Jacobson & Storey, 2004; 2007, 2008).

This article examines empirical data from the first two cases and compares results derived from two methodological approaches; the framework of listening expectations and perceptions and the norms of

communicative action, as measured by criteria derived from Jacobson's(2007), participatory communication model.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature from a range of academic disciplines, including Communication for development, Organisational communication, Stakeholder engagement and Listening, acknowledge more work is required to develop methods of evaluating effective symmetrical, participatory communication within an organisational context. A review of all theories that have informed this study is not possible in this article, however a brief description of listening studies, communication competency and participatory communication models is necessary.

2.1.1. LISTENING STUDIES

A study of literature has found there have been over fifty definitions of listening since 1925 (Glenn, 1989), but the definition accepted by the International Listening Association is "the process of receiving, constructing meaning from, and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages" (International Listening Association, 1996). Literature suggests that meanings given to the term 'listening' vary from the academic to the organisational environment; however both business educators and scholars agree that listening involves a series of behaviours that can be learned and improved, and therefore most corporate training is approached from a behavioural perspective (Brownell, 1990, 1994, 2002).

Brownell notes that listening is a relational activity that, in spite of the value it is given in the workplace, very little training is given to the workforce (Brownell, 1994, 2002). Research by other listening scholars concurs with this view, suggesting that when listening is viewed as a communication behaviour, rather than involving only cognition, social and interpersonal skills are necessary competencies for effective listening (Cooper, 1997).

2.1.2. COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING COMPETENCY

Listening is often included as an aspect of communication competency; communication competency is a performance-based perspective that has its roots in classical rhetoric. To communicate competently is the ability to interact appropriately and effectively in a given context; it involves perceptions that behaviour has been appropriate within the given context and effective in meeting or satisfying needs, desires or intentions of participants (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). As well as perceptions of behaviours, the impression of competency also includes interpersonal considerations including the history of the relationship and listening (Canary & Spitzberg, 1989; Cooper & Husband, 1993).

Listening researchers combined the concepts of listening effectiveness and appropriate listening to define the term 'listening competency', which they conceptualise as based on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that describe effective *and* appropriate listening (Wolvin & Coakley, 1994). The authors state that listening competency should include cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions; a combination of knowing about listening, the process of engaging in appropriate listening behaviours and an attitudinal component, a willingness to listen.

A 'Qualities of an Effective Listener', (QEL) taxonomy of cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions of listening, was developed to elicit how participants account for aspects of competent listening practices (Coakley et al, 1996; Halone et al, 1997; Wolvin et al, 1995). The QEL taxonomy provides a catalyst for this study to explore specific qualities that provide foundations of competent listening practices *within a specific context*, an organisational setting.

A predominant expectation of competent listening is interacting appropriately:

“Individuals appear to conceptualise what listening effectiveness is in terms of what might be considered to be appropriate. The data from this research suggests that appropriateness, as a component of communication competence, may be those behaviours that are enacted in order to achieve listening effectiveness”.

(Coakley et al, 1996, p. 44).

This study builds on findings by listening researchers by taking the stance that listening is a communication behaviour that includes appropriate social and interpersonal skills as necessary competencies for effective listening.

2.1.3. PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION AND LISTENING COMPETENCY

Interacting appropriately, included in the QEL taxonomy,(Coakley et al, 1996),is identified as a validity claim to be assessed when answering “the question of whether community members are listened to”, in recent work by Jacobson (2007, p.4). Habermas’s theory of communicative action is used as a framework to assess just how participatory, in terms of communication, a specific event has been. Jacobson provides a summary of Habermas’s theory of communicative action in a series of articles on social change and political participation in developing nations (Jacobson & Storey, 2004; Jacobson, 2007; Jacobson 2008). In his summary, Jacobson states that communicative action takes place when two sets of assumptions, validity claims and ideal speech conditions are met during discourse.

The first set of assumptions refers to claims to the assumed validity of speech acts regarding the appropriateness, truth, comprehensibility and sincerity of each and every act of speech, even lies. These assumptions may not be met in every instance of daily discourse, in which case, if disagreements over validity claims are to be resolved reasonably, a second set of assumptions must occur, referred to by the authors as ‘ideal speech conditions’. These conditions include the assumption that all participants must be free to contribute to discussion, that all propositions advanced in discussion must be fully eligible for consideration, and that all propositions considered must be dealt with fully to the satisfaction of those who advance them((Jacobson & Storey, 2004; Jacobson, 2007; Jacobson 2008).

The relevance of participatory communication to the pilot study becomes clear when Jacobson proposes the terms ‘listening’ and ‘participatory communication’ are interchangeable, “if citizens are allowed to challenge ...validity claims, and if speech conditions are fully met in resulting debates, then citizens are more likely to feel they have been heard”(Jacobson, 2008, p. 14).

Jacobson’s participatory communication model provides a method to examine whether stakeholders, involved in consultation with an organisation, believe the organisation listens to them, and the extent to which stakeholders believe their views are represented during the consultation.

In summary, Coakley et al’s ‘Qualities of an Effective Listener’(QEL), taxonomy is used as an initial comparative base to view expectations and perceptions of listening practices from stakeholders and organisation members, within the context of organisation-stakeholder consultations. Perceptions by stakeholders and organisation members are then re-examined using Jacobson’s participatory communication model, comprising the concepts of validity claims and speech conditions, to explore whether the consultations were considered participatory, or oriented to understanding, on the surface level.¹

An important contribution of this pilot study is to explore the possibility of unifying listening research with participatory communication research in a model, enabling a deeper understanding of qualities associated with an effective listening organisation, and conversely, qualities associated with a non-effective listening organisation, by stakeholders.

2.2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To explore the above issues, the following questions were developed:

- Does the organisation have an accurate understanding of what stakeholders expect from ‘listening organisations’ and what matters to stakeholders?
- How do participants (stakeholders and organisation members), perceive the organisation’s listening competency within an organisation- stakeholder consultation setting?
- Is there any discrepancy between stakeholders’ expectations of ‘listening organisations’ and their actual perceptions of the organisation’s listening competency?
- Do the organisation’s stakeholder communication strategies promote competent listening between the organisation and its stakeholders?

3. METHOD

3.1. CASE STUDY

The case study, described as “a research strategy which focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings”, seemed the most appropriate means of scientific enquiry for a number of reasons (Eisenhardt, 1989, p.534). It seemed evident that an exploratory study was most appropriate to answer the research questions. Case study research is the preferred strategy when answering ‘how’ and ‘why’ types of questions and when seeking to understand and explain a social phenomenon; the case study can be used to provide description, test or generate theory (Yin, 2003; Eisenhardt, 1989). The purpose of the case study strategy in the pilot study is to provide description and test theory.

Studies by listening researchers also influenced the selection of case study as research method. Imhof (1998), advocates the need to consider the type of listening situation when studying the process of listening, suggesting that, depending on the situation, different listening activities are required of the listener. To examine not only the listening experience, but also to gain an understanding of how these examples of listening fit within the social and cultural context, the case study research method was selected, “to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognizing its complexity and context” (Purdy, 2004, p.150).

3.2. CASE SELECTION

Purposive sampling was conducted to select cases that illustrate features and processes relevant to the research project (Silverman, 2006). Consultations involving some component of simultaneous, face-to-face communication between external stakeholders and the organisation were necessary; organisations facing potential issues requiring stakeholder consultation, that had potential to be resolved to the satisfaction of external stakeholders and the organisation, were necessary.

Two large, global corporations, one each from the mining and telecommunications industries, with head offices based in Australia, met criteria required for the study. Each organisation provided three separate organisation-stakeholder consultations for examination; hence the instrumental case study is extended to cover a total of six consultations (cases).

Both organisations provided a list of all stakeholders and organisation members involved in each consultation. Stakeholders and organisation members recruited for the project were randomly selected from the list by the investigator, prior to commencement of each consultation. All potential participants were sent a plain language statement (PLS) that described the study as a communication project and outlined the ethical standards adhered to by RMIT University research projects. Stakeholders interviewed included both rural and city residents, representing Australia’s six states. Organisation members interviewed were all in managerial roles within their respective company.

During 2006/7, data was collected from six cases, involving forty-two (42) interviews. Nineteen stakeholders, eighteen organisation members and two Community Consultation managers (one from each organisation), were interviewed. For each case, between three to six stakeholders and between three to six organisation members were interviewed. Participants interviewed were all present at the face-to-face component of the proposed stakeholder consultation, and interviewed post-consultation (within one week).

3.3. DATA COLLECTION

One of the characteristics of case studies is that multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods are likely to be used, typically in a naturalistic setting (Punch, 1998). In this study, qualitative data was collected, as it was deemed most appropriate for determining how stakeholders perceive the organisation's listening competency, and for understanding any performance-perception gaps. The principal data collection method was semi-structured, in-depth interviews, based on a combination of pre-established and open-ended questions.

In addition to interviews, sources of data collected were documentation, relevant physical artefacts and archival records to add richness to the data. 'Layering' of subjective data to gain insight into the knowledge, attitudes and perspectives of the person(s) under study included collection of historical and demographic information to provide context for each participant's involvement in the consultation process (Sorin-Peters, 2004, p. 942). Archival records collected include any material related to communication between the organisation and stakeholders, including policies, terms of reference, annual reports, web resources, agendas and minutes of meetings and individual position descriptions.

3.4. TWO INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

Competency can only be determined by a review of both self-reports and observer reports, since each contributes a unique perspective on role performance within the context of a relationship in a particular situation. To answer the question 'what listening factors are consistently seen as competent by others in the workplace?' two survey instruments including responses of both sender and receiver, in an interactive model of listening, were developed in a study by researchers (Cooper & Husband 1993; Husband, Cooper & Monsour, 1988).

Two separate interview instruments, comprising self-report and observation questionnaires, were administered in this study, to compare observations of stakeholders with self-reports of organisation members for this study. Two 24-item interview instruments were developed. One instrument includes questions for organisation members examining their understanding of stakeholders' expectations as well as self-rating questions that probe perceptions of their own listening competency. The second interview instrument, administered to stakeholders, includes exploration of how stakeholders prescriptively account for expectations of competent listening and how such expectations compare to personal listening experiences

Questions were included in both interview instruments to assess accuracy and supportive behaviours demonstrated by the listener during the consultation. In addition, the service quality framework has been incorporated in the formulation of questions, to examine possible perception- vs- practice gaps between the quality of listening stakeholders expect from a 'listening organisation' and their evaluation of the quality of listening provided (Zeithaml et al, 1990).^{2,3}

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Each organisation-stakeholder consultation studied is considered a 'unit of analysis'. This provides opportunity to conduct cross-case analysis, using replication logic as the method of analysis (Yin, 2003). Using replication logic, data collection and analysis is repeated for each case separately; each individual case consists of a whole study in which convergent evidence is sought to learn more about

“the phenomenon, population or general condition” (Punch, 1998, p.437). Each case’s conclusions are then considered to be the information needing replication by other individual cases.

In the larger, overall study, intra-organisational listening competency within each organisation; as well as an inter-organisational comparison of listening competency between the two participating organisations will be reported; convergent categories will be examined to explore possible relationships between key phenomena and identify higher-level themes that can be generalised to theory. However, this article reports on the first step towards a comparative case study of six cases. NVivo v.7 software program was used to collate, code and analyse data for the pilot study (Bazeley, 2007).

3. 6. PILOT STUDY

For the pilot study, the first case from each organisation was selected to refine the interview instrument, review data management and analysis procedures, to ensure veracity of the study (Lee & Fielding, 2004). The pilot study involves two cases, named O1 and T1 respectively, comprising a total of fifteen interviews. O1 consists of six interviews, three stakeholders and three organisation members; T1 consists of seven interviews, four stakeholders and three organisation members. Relevant data from the two Community Consultation manager interviews is also coded.

4. RESULTS

Data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities in qualitative research (Sorin- Peters 2004). Findings coded and analysed to date are stakeholder (receiver-based) and organisation member (self-report) accounts. Emerging categories are noted and initial comparisons made between results from the two cases. Data was initially qualitatively coded comparing numbers of accounts from each case, and then sorted into categories of attitudes, skills and behaviours for further analysis.

4.1. EXPECTATIONS

Interview Question one (Q.1), investigates how stakeholders and organisation members’ account for what it means for someone to be an effective listener by adopting the method of interpreting the construct of listening competence through the role of understanding the ‘effective listener’. This method permits participants to “subjectively define the role of ‘effective listener’ on the basis of personal life experience; and... expectations of listening *process* associated with the role of the effective listener” (Coakley et al, 1996, p. 28).

Question two(Q.2), asks participants to describe characteristics of ‘an effective listening organisation’, on the basis of both personal experience and expectations of listening processes associated within the specific context of an ‘effective listening organisation’. Stakeholder expectations prior to the consultation and organisation members understanding of those expectations are also explored in this section (Q.3).

Initially, a comparison was made of the number of participant accounts provided for Q’s 1 -3. This interpretation is a somewhat crude representation of those attributes associated with effective listening and an effective listening organisation. Participant accounts were coded-on into categories representing qualities possessed by an effective listener and an effective listening organisation. The QEL taxonomy was used as an initial basis for comparison (Coakley et al, 1996).

Case O1 participants provided fifty -six (56) accounts associated with an effective listener. *Appropriate body language* (behavioural), received the highest number of accounts from stakeholders and organisation members. *Attentive/focused* ((cognitive), *open minded, being interested*,(attentive) were qualities rated in the top two number of accounts by both O1 stakeholders and organisation members.⁴

Case O1 participants provided a total of forty-four (44) accounts of an effective listening organisation, primarily in behavioural terms. *Willing /able to take action/change in response to feedback, provide/fund avenues for people to be heard, behave in ways that indicated they are taking the opportunity seriously* (behavioural), were qualities rated in the top two number of accounts by O1 stakeholders and organisation members.⁴

All three (3) stakeholders expected to see the characteristics they described in response to an effective listener and/or effective listening organisation in their consultation with the organisation (Q.3). Organisation members were asked what listening attributes they considered stakeholders had expected from them during the consultation (Q.3); their responses suggest organisation members felt stakeholders expected them to primarily to demonstrate effective listening in affective terms, *respect, empathy and support* received the highest rating.⁴

T1

Participants in Case T1 provided a total of 74 accounts associated with an effective listener, primarily in affective and cognitive terms, *being open minded, willing to listen* (affective) and *understand /comprehend* (cognitive).⁴

A total of sixty-seven accounts were provided by Case T1 participants associated with an effective listening organisation; accounts were primarily in behavioural terms, *willing/able to take action/change in response to feedback* (behavioural) , was rated in the top two number of accounts by T1 stakeholders and organisation members.⁴

Three out of four (3-4), T1 stakeholders expected to see characteristics they associated with an effective listener and /or effective listening organisation in their consultation with the organisation (Q.3). Organisation members felt stakeholders primarily expected the organisation to provide *input into areas organisation members have experience in/put forward their position, willing/able to change action in response to feedback* (behavioural), *be willing to listen, open minded* and *value others ideas* (affective)²

In both Cases participants conceptualised an effective listener primarily in cognitive (thinking), affective (feeling) and behavioural terms. These results suggest support for previous listening research reporting that participants accounted for listening behaviours in primarily cognitive, affective and behavioural (Wolvin, Coakley and Halone1995, Coakley, Halone and Wolvin, 1996).

It is interesting to note that *being open minded* (affective), *and attentive/focused* (cognitive), were rated in the top three, based on number of accounts of an effective listener, in both Cases O1, T1 and also in the QEL taxonomy, however additional dimensions have emerged in this study that did not appear in the taxonomy (Coakley et al, 1996). *Use questions to indicate understanding*(cognitive) and *acknowledge what the other person is saying* (behavioural), were additional qualities associated with an effective listener listening that rated in the top three number of accounts in both Cases O1 & T1 ⁴.

Being open minded is the only quality from the QEL taxonomy that rated in the top three, based on number of accounts, associated with an effective listening organisation for both Cases O1 & T1. Early indications suggest more behavioural dimensions are associated with an effective listening organisation than an effective listener. *Willing/able to take action/respond to feedback, take opportunity seriously, provide/fund avenues for people to be heard, not dominate discussion* (behavioural), *clear transparent process & policies, train, support/brief staff appropriately*(cognitive), are additional categories that emerged in the pilot study.⁴

4.2. PERCEPTIONS

Data generated from responses to Questions 4-13 (Q. 5-13 for stakeholders), compares stakeholder observations with organisation members' self-perceptions, regarding effective and non-effective listening attributes displayed by organisation members. Participants reflect on one specific

encounter, a recent community consultation, and describe either effective and/or non-effective listening attributes organisation members’ displayed during that encounter. Participants are also prompted to consider any conditions or factors that assisted/ detracted from the organisation’s ability to listen; and conditions or factors that may have had an influence on stakeholder perceptions regarding the value the organisation places on listening to stakeholders. Stakeholders described their observations of the organisation’s listening; organisation members self-reported perceptions of their own listening.

4.2.1. EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Findings were initially compared by number of positive responses (effective listening), from each case. Case O1 participants reported a total number of one hundred and thirty eight (138) effective listening attributes perceived during their consultation compared to sixty-six (66) effective listening attributes reported by Case T1 participants, during their consultation. Data was categorised into positive attitudes, skills and behaviours (attributes), reported for each case, and then attributes were sorted into categories based on the QEL taxonomy (Coakley et al, 1996).

O1

Stakeholders and organisation members perceived effective organisational listening primarily in behavioural attributes *that indicated the organisation was serious about the consultation*. Stakeholders reported high numbers of accounts that organisation members *gave response to feedback/ followed up any questions that needed clarification, were inclusive, used appropriate body language, and were organised during the meeting* (behavioural) (Table 1).

An interesting finding concerns the degree to which managers’ self –perceptions of their listening effectiveness correspond to stakeholder observations. Findings from O1 data suggest a discrepancy between organisation members self perceptions and perceptions stakeholders have of their listening behaviour; indicating organisation members may be under-confident of their own listening behaviours. For example, O1 organisation members rated their own listening lower than stakeholders rated them, describing themselves as ‘effective’ and ‘average’ listeners, compared to ‘very effective’ and ‘effective’ ratings given to them by stakeholders. This under-confident trend is also evident when comparing stakeholder and organisation members’ ‘Qualities of an Effective Listening Organisation’ (Table 1). In eleven (11) qualities perceived by O1 participants, organisation members self-perceived lower numbers of accounts than their stakeholders observed. In seven (7) qualities, organisation members self-reported higher numbers of accounts than stakeholders’ observed. 4

QUALITY	O1 Stakeholders	O1 Organisation Members
Take opportunity seriously/sincerely Comfortable venue, conducive atmosphere, hospitable, make S feel at ease , professional approach, appropriate staff involved/available to stakeholders,	21	20
Give response to feedback/ follow up any questions that need clarification	18	2
Include everyone in discussion, inclusive Not dominate discussion	10	0
Uses Body Language Appropriately	7	3
Is organised	7	0
Clear, transparent process & policies for org to follow Train/brief staff appropriately		7
Establishes eye contact	4	2
/supportive/empathy/respectful/unselfish	2	4
sincere, genuine	1	4

TABLE1: COMPARISON OF QUALITIES PERCEIVED BY O1 PARTICIPANTS
(based on Coakley et al, 1996,p. 41).

T1

The highest number for any quality recorded by T1 stakeholders was two (2) accounts; *being attentive* (cognitive), *support/empathy*, *respectful* (affective), and *show interest*, *eye contact* (behavioural). However, organisation members rated themselves higher, recording ten (10) accounts demonstrating they were *serious about the consultation* (behavioural); four (4) accounts of *inclusiveness and make stakeholders feel listened to* (behaviour) and *being attentive/focused* (cognitive), respectively. (Table 2).

Findings from T1 data also suggest a discrepancy between organisation member self perceptions and perceptions their stakeholders have of their listening behaviour; however in contrast to Case O1, T1 organisation members may be over-confident of their own listening behaviour. T1 Organisation members described themselves as ‘very effective’ and ‘between effective and very effective’ listeners, compared to stakeholders rating them as ‘effective’ (1), ‘average’ (2) and ‘ineffective’ (1). One organisation member described himself as a ‘very, very effective listener’, awarding himself a higher rating than was included in the rating scale provided. This over-confident trend is also evident when comparing organisation member and stakeholder ‘Qualities of an Effective Listening Organisation’. Organisation members self-reported higher numbers of accounts than their stakeholders’ observed in thirteen (13) qualities; and self-reported lower numbers of accounts than stakeholders observed in only three (3) ‘qualities. Overall, T1 stakeholders did not record more than two (2) accounts for any qualities they observed indicating the organisation was effectively listening. 4

QUALITY	T1 Stakeholders	T1 Organisation Members
Take opportunity seriously/sincerely Comfortable venue, conducive atmosphere, hospitable, make S feel at ease , professional approach, appropriate staff involved/available to stakeholders,	1	10
Give response to feedback/ follow up any questions that need clarification	1	3
Include everyone in discussion, inclusive Not dominate discussion	1	4
Make stakeholders feel listened to, even if cannot satisfy their needs		4
Attentive/focused	2	4
Establishes eye contact	2	2
/supportive/empathy/respectful/unselfish	2	3
Show interest	2	2
Open minded ,value other ideas	1	2
Put subject/issues in a way people understand		3

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF QUALITIES PERCEIVED BY T1 PARTICIPANTS
(based on Coakley et al, 1996,p. 41).

These findings support results reported in a study of perceptions of managerial listening effectiveness (Brownell, 1990). Brownell recorded discrepancies indicating that managers may be overconfident of their listening ability. Brownell suggests that frequent feedback is necessary for manager’s personal and professional development, to align their self-perceptions with impressions others have of their behaviour (Brownell, 1990, p. 412).

4.2.2. NON-EFFECTIVE LISTENING

Accounts by participants of negative attitudes, skills and behaviours (attributes), for the two cases were coded and analysed. Initially findings from each case were compared by number of negative accounts. O1 participants reported eleven (11) non- effective listening attributes perceived

during their consultation, compared to forty-four (44) non-effective listening attributes reported by Case T1 participants during their consultation. Accounts were then coded-on into qualities, based on the QEL taxonomy. Qualities criteria were converted from positive to negative statements e.g. 'take the opportunity seriously', was converted to 'did not take the opportunity seriously'.⁴

O1

In the eleven (11) accounts of non-effective listening reported by O1 participants, four (4) were behavioural terms that gave the perception that the organisation was not serious about the consultation, and three (3) were cognitive terms giving the impression that people involved were disinterested. One organisation member self-reported "*I had to be hostess so running in and out of conversations*", (M 2) as an example of non-effective listening, but there was no evidence that stakeholders perceived this behaviour as non-effective listening. Another organisation member described himself as "*not an effective listener, I tend to be thinking of what to say next while the person is talking*" (M1), however stakeholders rated M1 as a very effective listener.⁴

Findings from Case O1 again suggest a discrepancy between organisation members' self-perceptions and observations stakeholders have of their listening behaviour. In O1, organisation members' recorded seven (7) accounts of non-effective listening compared to only four (4) accounts recorded by stakeholders; these results are consistent with earlier indications that O1 organisation members may be under-confident of their own listening practices.⁴

T1

Of forty-four (44) accounts of non-effective listening in Case T1, the highest rating categories were: eight (8) attributes that gave the perception that the organisation was not serious about the consultation, five (5) indications that organisation was not willing/ able to take action in response to feedback and four (4) perceptions that the organisation was insincere in addressing stakeholder concerns. One organisation member (M 3), self-reported "*I don't recall saying I was actually going to anything specifically myself or concede any points*", describing these as positive skills; however stakeholders interpreted these as examples of non-effective listening, stating the organisation member '*was not listening*' and '*could not promise us anything*'. Stakeholder perceptions included that M1 '*came to present not listen*', and '*did not engage*' with stakeholders. ⁴

Findings from Case T1 again suggest discrepancies between organisation member self-perceptions and perceptions stakeholders have of their listening behaviour; T1 stakeholders observed twice as many accounts of non-effective listening by organisation members(30), as T1 organisation members self-reported (14), consistent with previous findings indicating T1 organisation members may be over-confident concerning their own listening effectiveness.⁴

It has become evident during analysis of the pilot study, that 'behavioural' traits require further coding. As the larger study progresses, behavioural traits will be broken down into verbal, nonverbal, and interactive subcategories, to better specify what is perceived as effective listening attributes associated with an effective listening organisation by both stakeholders and organisation members(Coakley et al, 1996).

4.2.3. PARTICIPATORY COMMUNICATION

A given communication exchange or context can be described as oriented toward understanding, termed participatory communication, if all individuals are free to engage in any form of speech condition with the aim of challenging any validity claim (Jacobson, 2004,2007,2008).

Empirical data from the pilot study was re-visited to initially extract items indicating whether the consultations met the conditions required for participatory communication as proposed by participatory communication model(Jacobsen, 2004,2007,2008).⁴

Data was initially coded to extract any instances where participants indicated they felt statements or actions by organisation members during the consultation could be considered valid, or invalid. In other words, did stakeholders perceive, or organisation members report, any actions or speech they considered honest/ dishonest, sincere/ insincere, comprehensible /incomprehensible or appropriate/ inappropriate on the part of organisation members, during the consultation? (Table 3).

Data was then coded-on to extract any instances where participants indicated they felt free or constrained when engaged in any form of speech condition with the aim of challenging any validity claim. Items were coded under the three categories of ideal speech conditions, all participants must be free to contribute to discussion, all propositions advanced in discussion must be fully eligible for consideration, and all propositions considered must be dealt with fully to the satisfaction of those who advance them (Habermas, 1990, pp.88-89 cited in Jacobson, 2007). (Table 3).

Validity/Speech Criteria	Illustrative Questions
Truth (accuracy)	Do you feel the organisation was knowledgeable about the opportunities or threats/ local conditions?
Appropriateness	Do you feel the organisation behaved/ in a manner that is appropriate given its legal mandate and responsibilities?
Sincerity	Do you feel the organisation was sincere in its attempts to address stakeholder concerns/solve local problems?
Comprehension	Do you feel stakeholders understand the organisation’s position and the issue’s involved? Do you feel you understand stakeholders’ positions and the issue’s involved? Do you feel stakeholders understood what you were trying to tell them? Do you feel you understand what stakeholders were trying to tell you?
Symmetric Opportunities	Did you feel you or others like you were given equal opportunities to challenge organisational policy?
Free to Raise Any Proposition	Did you or others like you were free to raise any proposal or idea you wished for discussion?
Equal Treatment of Propositions	Do you feel the organisation treated your position/viewpoints fully and to your satisfaction?

TABLE 3: ILLUSTRATIVE QUESTION TYPES (adapted from Jacobson, 2008, p. 17)

**5.2.4. VALIDITY CLAIMS
O1**

Truth

Eighteen (18) statements indicated O1 participants felt the organisation was knowledgeable about local concerns and showed interest throughout the meeting in any emerging community issues introduced by stakeholders. *“no.... dodging topics, not saying too busy, frank honest answers, no hesitation or looking for the right words”(OS.3), “ if you know they are being honest, then it’s a matter of trust”(OS.1).* Organisation members indicated they made an effort to be knowledgeable about stakeholder issues, *“we have regular contact with the community every 6 months, we ask them about what’s troubling them”, “ there’s no secrets”(OM 1).* Organisation members described the community survey, conducted by the organisation prior to establishing the forum, to gain an understanding of community perceptions regarding the company. Results were tabled at the first meeting. *“Going through the process in the first place of broadly engaging the community, gaining their views and then repeating their views back to them is a good step in establishing that you are in fact wanting to listen”. (OM1).* Results of the

community survey were put on the company website for public access, *“they are public documents, that’s fine, we present to CLC so why not present to community”* (OM2).^{4,5}

There were no statements recorded by O1 stakeholders or organisation members to indicate either party challenged the organisation’s knowledge of stakeholder issues, or local conditions.

Appropriateness

Sixty (60) items were coded suggesting O1 participants perceived the organisation behaved appropriately, given its legal mandate and responsibilities. Two stakeholders mentioned the greeting style was appropriate and indicative of being valued and taken seriously by the company *“someone waiting to meet you at the door, showed that yes, this was important”* (OS.2) *“we were greeted by [name]... and, [name]..., and [name] ..., took us down, sat us down then one would go back and wait for the others so no-one had to wander around wondering where to go”* (OS.1). Two stakeholders mentioned the level of organisation was appropriate and was an indication of effort taken by the organisation; *“meeting was organised in a logical way, it wasn’t a chat fest”*(OS.3), *“they seemed genuinely pleased we had turned up”*(OS.2). Two Organisation members also mentioned greeting stakeholders and seating arrangements as factors that send a message the organisation values their attendance, *“we were at the door, 3 of us greeted them then took them in the room”* (OM.3), *“staff know to sit amongst the group”* (OM.1), *“ I think they got the impression that they were fairly important to the organisation”*(OM.3).

Four (4) items suggested instances where organisation members had behaved inappropriately, given their legal mandate and responsibilities. One stakeholder considered a staff member not the appropriate choice for this forum *“not the right person to be speaking to us on the night.”* (OS.2), and that more effort be made to ensure all members of the forum are familiar with each other’s names and who they represent, *“I thought you should introduce people and give their roles. Wasn’t on my name tag”* (OS.2). Organisation members mentioned two items they self-perceived as inappropriate; one was behaviour *“When I was talking to the person next to me, I was listening to them but not listening to the presentation or whatever was going on”* (OM.3), another suggested the room was a too crowded for comfort, *“[there was a] lot of chairs so it [the room] could have been a bit wider”* (OM.2).

Sincerity

Twenty-four (24 items) were coded from O1 participants suggesting the organisation was sincere in its attempts to address citizen concerns. Stakeholder comments included *“I think they are genuine about making an effort to reach out to the groups”* (OS.2); All three stakeholders felt the organisation made a genuine effort to communicate with the community over issues, one described the company as *“.an organisation that shows professional integrity by approaching us”* (OS.2), another *“I think they take talking to the community a high priority, take it very seriously”* (OS.2). All three organisation members felt they were sincere in attempting to help stakeholders solve local problems, *“ the community, they will ultimately decide whether we survive... they need to understand what we do”*(OM.1), *“the articles in the paper try to address issues passed through to us by [name]”*(OM.3). (Table 4).

There were no challenges to sincerity claims by O1 participants. (Table 4.)

Comprehensible

Fifty- six (56) items were coded as evidence O1 participants felt they understood the other parties’ positions and issues, or felt other parties’ understood what they were trying to tell them.

The site tour, included as part of the O1 consultation, was mentioned by two stakeholders as an opportunity to increase their understanding of the operations of the company. Organisation members also mentioned the site tour as contributing to understanding *“tour last night, have given them some more information on how we work..... by doing that it starts to engage a process of them thinking through what are the really specific questions I want to ask?”*(OM.1). Stakeholders indicated they were

provided with adequate information, enhancing their ability to contribute in discussions during the meeting. *“I said now start again and tell me what the two things you use are, and he said oh good, and explained again”*(OS.1), *the questions were simplistic as it’s a very very complicated business, but they explained it in layman’s’ terms,”*(OS.1). The community survey, conducted by O1 prior to the establishment of the Forum, to benchmark community perceptions of the company, was referred to as a way of gaining a greater understanding of stakeholder issues, *“ at the first meeting we actually replayed back that information we had gathered , these are the key themes that came up”*, *“ we had 300 phone interviews about how well do they know [company], how well do they know what we do,...what information would they like etc”*(OM.2). Stakeholder attitudes to the company were articulated by all organisation members *“they are people who understand people like us create jobs, they don’t come along and say well you’re just bad because you belong to a big company.. They say well there’s a standard that we want you to operate to and we’re going to hold you accountable to that standard”* (OM.1). An example given by another organisation member, noted that, in response to the company reporting the number of environmental breaches recorded the previous year, one stakeholder had spoken up, commenting *“it was not good enough; we agreed with her”* (OM .3).(Table 4).

There were no suggestions stakeholders challenged the organisation’s understanding of stakeholder issues, or indications stakeholders did not understand the organisations position; however organisation members criticised themselves, commenting that the website and brochures were outdated and did not assist stakeholders gain a better understanding of the organisation’s position and the issue’s involved, *“brochures but out of date, being updated”* (OM..3), *“They [stakeholders], would struggle to get to us via the website...we are going to put a link probably through the [name] icon”* (OM.2). (Table 4).

	Stakeholder	Organisation members		Stakeholder	Organisation members
Truth (Accuracy)	9	9	Challenge to Truth (Accuracy)	0	0
Appropriateness	22	38	Challenge to Appropriateness	2	2
Sincerity	10	14	Challenge to Sincerity	0	0
Comprehension	22	34	Challenge to Comprehension	0	6

TABLE 4: O1 VALIDITY CLAIMS MET

O1 VALIDITY CLAIMS NOT MET

T1

Truth

Ten (10) items were recorded indicating organisation members felt the organisation was knowledgeable about local concerns, showed interest in any emerging community issues introduced by stakeholders or allowed stakeholders to challenge the organisation’s grasp of local facts; one organisation member felt the dinner held the night previous to the meeting helped him to understand stakeholder issues, *“ we had dinner last night which was a great opportunity for me to understand [local issues]”* (TM.3), *“I’ve got some notes as to who is who and what constituents they represent”*(TM.1), *“I also wanted to seek the thoughts of the different consumer groups that actually sit around the table”* (T13).(Table 5).

T1 stakeholders did not make any statements suggesting they felt the organisation was knowledgeable about local concerns or showed interest in any emerging community issues, but recorded one item indicating the organisation lacked knowledge about local conditions, or opportunities or threats facing the company from stakeholders. Stakeholders felt organisation members’ constant reference to forum members as ‘customers’, when the correct term is ‘consumers’, was indicative of the organisation lacked understanding of the forum’s role. *“[Name of org] is always talking about the customer and we’re always talking about the consumer, and in those two words there is...the difference between those*

two words itself, if we say consumer and they say customer shows that they're not listening at all" (TS.1). Two organisation members seemed unfamiliar with the forum's terms of reference, suggesting the forum was not an opportunity for symmetrical communication between stakeholders and the organisation, *"they can provide the views of their constituents in that meeting. But they can't necessarily for example share some of the detailed data that I presented back out into the public arena"*(TM.1), *"they have to seek approval from the [forum]if they are going to publicly disclose the information that they received in the meeting'* (TM.1). *"did I read the terms of reference? No"* (TM.3). When asked what he knew about the stakeholder groups in the meeting or his own role in the forum, one organisation members remarked *"it wasn't specifically explained to me"* (TM.2). (Table 5).

Appropriate

Thirty-four (34) items were coded indicating T1 participants perceived the organisation behaved in an appropriate manner, given its legal mandate and responsibilities. Three (3) stakeholders rated the horseshoe layout of the room as appropriate for two-way discussion *"I think the room was very, very adequate"* (TS.1), *" Layout of the room of horseshoe semicircle of tables, ..that was good , because it allowed them to walk over to the person who was making a point"*(TS.2). The catering for the meeting was considered appropriate and an indication the organisation valued the stakeholders *"I think the food was great... I think that that definitely showed some value"* (TS.1), *"catering, um, its not lavish, but its ..absolutely adequate, I wouldn't want that to be more lavish"* (TS.3). Two organisation members also felt the set up and catering were appropriate, *"the fact that it was laid up in a U-shape so everybody could see each other,... the room was of the size of people weren't feeling lost"* (TM.1), *"I thought the U-shape essentially made me have to stand up and talk to the audience. Now it was a large audience, so I think that was appropriate"* (TM.2). Two stakeholders felt the Community Consultation manager is an appropriate person for the position, *"he really is someone who is interested in consumer issues and that's the difference"*(TS.1), *"Well meaning secretariat and consultation team"* (TS.4). The forum's two Co-chairs felt that sitting together sent an appropriate message to stakeholders, *"we were seated [together] so that [name] and myself, the two co-chairs, were in the middle of that group, and not in a position of power if you like over the room"*(TM.1). Organisation members again mentioned the previous night's dinner as a positive contribution, *"but then there is a really nice social event for everybody to be able to better get to know each other including the [name]representatives...so I'm sure that was appreciated, and people said so"* (TM.1). (Table 5).

Twenty two (22) items were coded as inappropriate by T1 participants; stakeholders expressed frustration that information and the way it was presented was inappropriate, *"because she fed us a load of rubbish really, let's be honest"* (TS.2), *"but she didn't really know about the issue so she couldn't answer our questions"* (TS.1), *"they presented it to us as if we were shareholders and not people who are representing people who didn't fit into those segments"* (T1.1). All four stakeholders described the dinner, hosted by the company the night before the meeting, as inappropriate, both in choice of venue and the lavishness of the dinner, *"dinner vs. real consultation"* (TS.1), *"well, to me it [the dinner] just sends a message about how corporate Australia live. You know, I'm not used to it, it's another world"* (TS.3). (Table 5).

Sincerity

Fifteen (15) items were coded from T1 participants suggesting the organisation was sincere in its attempts to address citizen concerns. Four (4) examples from T1 stakeholders suggest stakeholders perceived the organisation to be sincere in its communication during the consultation. The physical environment and access to top level management were indications the organisation viewed the consultation seriously, *"I knew that we would have access to relatively high up, and you know, executives within [name of org] which said to me that they obviously took this commitment seriously"* (TS.3). Another example concerned the level of interest shown by organisation members, *"being interested in our opinion, so I do find that they are interested in hearing what you have to say"* however

this comment was followed immediately by the statement “*although they never write anything down*” (TS. 3). T1 organisation members referred to eleven (11), items that were indicative of their attempts to address citizen concerns, and related to their sincerity as individuals, “*I know I’m in a position where I can influence outcomes*” (TM.3), “*I tried to answer as honestly and as openly as I could,*” (TM.2). (Table 5).

Three T1 stakeholders referred to lack of action and a lack of belief in their capacity to change as indications the organisation was insincere in its attempts to address citizen concerns, “*there was quite a long list of things I saw that had never been actioned or had never been heard of again*” (TS.1). In contrast, one organisation member viewed his refusal to commit to taking action as a measure of his honesty and sincerity, “*I don’t recall saying I was actually going to do anything specifically myself, or concede any points*” (TM.2). Stakeholders also suggested cultural change within the organisation was having a negative impact on the organisation’s ability to listen to stakeholders, “*so I think for organisational reasons they’re not particularly listening much to us at the moment, and, I think they compensate for that by taking on the attributes of listeners without actually doing the listening*” (TS.2). “[they] *act as if we are privileged to be given this information*” (TS.2, “*there is a culture of doing what they want to do*”(TS.4). Organisational culture has emerged as a category that may influence organisational listening competency.(Table 5).

Comprehension

Twenty five (25) items were coded as evidence T1 participants felt they understood the other parties’ positions and issues, or felt other parties’ understood what they were trying to tell them, however only three (3) of these items were reported by stakeholders. One stakeholder felt the level of complexity used by organisation members was sufficient for people to understand, and was an indication that the organisation takes the consultation process seriously “*I don’t think they pitch it at too high a level. I think in a way that is something about taking us seriously as well*” (TS.1). One stakeholder noted how useful it was that the organisation funds a half-day workshop for stakeholders prior to the consultation. Twenty two (22), items were self-perceptions by organisation members. All three organisation members admitted they did not know a lot about the stakeholder groups being represented, but had confidence in making assumptions on stakeholder issues, based on their experience or verbal briefings from the Community Consultation manager . “*but based on my past experience I had the impression it was going to be a group of people representing various organisations wanting to know about various products, issues, policies and procedures within [name](TM.. 2), “my view is that the committee wouldn’t expect somebody from [name] to necessarily do everything that they may want because of the commercial objectives that the person will have as well, in that discussion*” (TM.1), “*we spent 45 minutes roughly and plus additional research I’d done speaking with varying people that has had some sort of direct role with the group*” (TM.3). In terms of understanding what the stakeholders wanted, organisation members responses were” *I don’t think they were looking necessarily for any decisions but I think there were looking for a hearing, and I think they got that.*” (T1.2), “*I think in that sort of forum, too, that everybody expects the [name] Co-chair, to obviously be very focused on [name] commercial outcomes*”, (TM.1). An interesting attitude to the forum’s role is reflected in this organisation member’s comment, “*essentially, I allowed the forum to record the issues that needed follow-up*” (TM.2).(Table 5).

All four stakeholders felt their ability to contribute at the meeting was limited because they were not given sufficient information about issues prior to the meeting or information presented was too complex for many forum members , “*you know, you talk in jargon and you have a vision of the world that is completely foreign to me.*” (TS.3). A possible contributing factor to lack of comprehensibility is the selection of stakeholders; this topic emerged from comments by two T1 stakeholders, who noted forum members’ were a mix of people with limited technical expertise and people with advanced knowledge of the technical side of the business, making it difficult for presentations to be pitched at a level all understood, “*I don’t have the expertise. I don’t have that in-depth knowledge. I can think about an issue and how it might affect my constituents, but then there are other people in that room who have far more specific and technical knowledge, who are interested in that from a technical*

implementation point of view” (TS.3), “number of us in full- time [industry category] and across most issues, a number there just from meeting to meeting, involved in limited issues to their constituency” (TS.4). One stakeholder commented that “responses to questions often led to more confusion” (TS.4). (Table 5).

Frustration was expressed that the organisation’s concerns with confidentiality limited stakeholders’ effectiveness as community representatives “they obviously wanted to present us with information and don't even know why they presented us with that information to be quite honest, because they weren't interested in our feedback, and we certainly weren't allowed to talk to anybody about it, you know, because that was made very clear this is commercial in confidence”(TS.3), “use commercial in confidence a lot so we cannot mention what we are being told to anyone so how are we to be community representatives?” (TS.4). Confidentiality, or ‘commercial in confidence’; has emerged as a category for further exploration, in particular its relationship to perceptions of trust between organisation members and their stakeholders. T1 organisation members suggested issues of ‘commercial in confidence’ and lack of knowledge about the groups represented by stakeholders, limited the amount of information presented before or during the meeting. When asked if any background information was provided to forum members in preparation for a presentation, one organisation member responded “no, because of confidentiality”, (TM.1). Another commented “It's difficult to know exactly who was who, because you walk in and you don't know what they're representing”, (TM.2). Two stakeholders specifically mentioned ‘commercial in confidence’ as a limitation to understanding between the two groups, “they couldn't ever tell us that because they couldn't trust that we would keep that commercial in confidence... so they are caught in this place where they go, well we can't tell them now, we'll have to tell them afterwards and then they're going to wallop us” (TS.3).(Table 5).

	Stakeholder	Organisation Member		Stakeholder	Organisation Member
Truth (Accuracy)	0	10	Challenge to Truth (Accuracy)	1	9
Appropriateness	11	23	Challenge to Appropriateness	16	6
Sincerity	4	11	Challenge to Sincerity	21	2
Comprehension	3	22	Challenger to Comprehension	19	10

TABLE 5: T1 VALIDITY CLAIMS MET

T1 VALIDITY CLAIMS NOT MET

4.2.5. SPEECH CONDITIONS

O1

Symmetrical communication

O1 participants recorded eighteen (18) instances suggesting they perceived equal opportunities to raise questions or challenge the organisation’s position on issues. “Anyone sitting quietly they drew them into the discussion..., they'd say so what do you think Pete?” (OS.1), “encouraged questions”(OS.2), “ more two- way conversation last night.....wasn't just them doing all the talking,.. were very approachable” (OS.3). There were no items suggesting stakeholders felt unable to ask questions or challenge the organisations position. O1 organisation members’ examples of symmetrical communication included a comment that one of the more prominent environmental groups now works in alignment with the company , rather than in a confrontational manner, “[name of group] people used to be quite negative, we've been talking to them for so long that it is now an Alliance, instead of watching us they are trying to work with us” (OS.3), and that community feedback is an important part of the forum’s role, “chance for them to provide feedback, on things people have said to them or what's relevant or an issue for

them,(OS.2.) . There was no suggestion of a lack of symmetrical communication from O1 participants. (Table 6).

Free to raise any proposition

Five items (5) were coded as evidence O1 stakeholders felt free to raise any proposal they wished for discussion. “if we email and say we’ve heard a really bad thing about you they will immediately reply” (OS.1), “quite willing to talk about any points brought up, gave direct answers” (OS.1). O1stakeholders all gave examples of times the organisation has asked for any new issues, or responded to new suggestions, “offer was given over and over again to probe and ask question”(OS.3). How agenda items are selected is another indication whether any proposition is able to be raised at the forum. Organisation members stated although “we have never had anyone contact us to include anything on the agenda prior to the meeting, “however matters are raised during the meeting either in specific sections or in the Other Business section”. (OM.1).There were no examples given that indicated lack of freedom to raise any proposition. (Table 6).

Full and Equal treatment of Propositions Raised

All O1stakeholders indicated that propositions were answered to the satisfaction of those attending. “There was never any suggestion that something was left unanswered”,(OS.3), “Most of us asked questions, and he always took the time to answer” (OS.2), “ if you listen to people and then explain as carefully as you can well you can’t expect much more than that”(OS.1). There were no items indicating stakeholders fel issues were left unresolved. Organisation members ‘comments corresponded with stakeholder perceptions, “I didn’t get any sense they were frustrated” (OM.1), “everyone was listened to when asking a question and we answered to the best of our ability with the information we had. It was a bit like sitting down with friends and saying this is what we are doing” (OM..2). There were no items suggesting propositions were not resolved to the satisfaction of all present from O1 participants. (Table 6).

	Stakeholder	Organisation members		Stakeholder	Organisation members
Symmetrical Opportunities	13	5	Symmetrical Opportunities not met	0	0
Free to raise any proposition	5	4	Free to raise any proposition not met	0	0
Full and Equal treatment of propositions raised	8	6	Full and Equal treatment of propositions raised not met	0	0

TABLE 6: O1 SPEECH CONDITIONS MET O1 SPEECH CONDITIONS NOT MET

T1

Symmetrical Communication

T1stakeholders gave no examples of symmetrical communication occurring but identified twelve (12)incidents where they perceived a lack of symmetrical communication, “they obviously wanted to present us with information and don't even know why they presented us with that information to be quite honest, because they weren't interested in our feedback” (TS.2). Stakeholders suggested organisation members seemed skilled at not answering questions, and that organisation members used their seniority within the organisation as a way to intimidate stakeholders “so maybe the reticence to challenge her, although people were muttering quite a lot under their breath, but maybe the reticence to challenge her is around seniority as well” (TS.3). In contrast, organisation members seemed confident there had been an equal opportunity to ask questions or contribute to discussion, giving twelve incidents where they self-perceived symmetrical communication to be evident, “Yeah, there

was a lot of questioning at the end so it was very open” (TM.1), “I think I operated in a manner that allowed questions to be asked.” (TM.2), “I presented today and there was a lot of interaction. I spoke about two or three key themes, and there was a lot of interaction” (TM.3). One organisation members self-reported three (3) examples of a lack of symmetrical communication giving concern for confidentiality as the reason, “we declare upfront what is commercially sensitive in the discussions, so that they know not to share it” (TM.1). The forum may be given information on new policies, “for example, we may give them a preview of some pricing changes that are coming up in the market place and obviously commercially that's extremely sensitive information but we want them to be aware because of the impact it may have on their constituents” (TM.1), when asked if stakeholders can inform the constituents they represent of the changes, the response was “not unless we give express approval”, due to confidentiality (TM.1).(Table 7).

Free to raise any proposition

Organisation members and the Community Consultation manager described the agenda-setting process as an opportunity to raise any issues or introduce new assertions, *all the [forum] members get surveyed and canvassed on agenda items well before the meeting so it is their agenda*”(TM.1), “*If items are raised early enough they can also result in inclusion of a separate agenda item to address it, consumer items canvassed at Caucus the day before or raised earlier by members*” (TM. 4)”. This process was collaborated by stakeholders in their interviews.(Table 7).

Full and equal treatment of propositions raised

T1 stakeholders did not give any examples of instances they felt their proposals were treated equally to other’s viewpoints, including the organisation’s views; in contrast, all stakeholders expressed perceptions their proposals would not be treated equally to the organisation’s views, ‘*they were very deft at avoiding questions*”(TS.1), “*quite often we don't actually get to hear about [policies, issues] them from [name] until they are absolutely imminent, and by that I mean hours away from being implemented*”(TS.2), “*I don't think they want information from us on their --on upcoming decisions because most things are presented to us after the fact, so it's almost like they want us to berate them for bad decisions* (TS.3). Organisation members self-reported they had given people time to express their views “*to ensure that everybody's views were made*” (TM.1). One organisation member suggested that running out of time during his presentation was an indication of meeting stakeholder needs “*we actually ran out of time*” (T1.2). All organisation members and one stakeholder mentioned a mix –up in flight bookings for some stakeholders had resulted in people leaving the Forum early. This was recognised as not conducive to providing full and equal treatment of all propositions. (Flights for all T1 members are booked and funded by the organisation). (Table 7).

	Stakeholder	Organisation Member		Stakeholder	Organisation Member
Symmetrical Opportunities	0	12	Symmetrical Opportunities not met	12	3
Free to raise any proposition	1	3	Free to raise any proposition not met	0	0
Full and Equal treatment of propositions raised	0	4	Full and Equal treatment of propositions raised not met	8	11

TABLE 7 T1 SPEECH CONDITIONS MET

T1 SPEECH CONDITIONS NOT MET

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS TO DATE

When the two cases were studied through the prism of expectations and perceptions of competent listening practices, Case O1 met stakeholders' listening expectations and stakeholders' perceived significantly more effective than non-effective listening practices during the consultation (85 effective, 4 non-effective). Stakeholders perceived the organisation took the consultation seriously, gave response to feedback, followed up any questions that need clarification, and included everyone in discussions as predominant indicators the organisation was listening effectively.

In comparison, three out of four T1 stakeholders felt their expectations were not met during the consultation, and perceived significantly less effective than non-effective listening practices during the consultation (18 effective, 30 non-effective). Due to a higher number of non –effective accounts, it is more enlightening to note the predominant qualities stakeholders recorded as indications the organisation was not listening effectively These included perceptions the organisation was not willing/able to take action in response to feedback, was not open minded, and was insincere in communication with stakeholders.

The participatory communication model was then used to evaluate the extent of adherence to the norms of communicative action by the two cases (Jacobson, 2007). O1 stakeholders' recorded four challenges to the appropriateness of claims made by the organisation; but did not record any challenges to ideal speech conditions during the consultation. T1 stakeholders reported fifty –four(54) challenges regarding the appropriateness, sincerity and comprehensibility of claims made by the organisation during the consultation, and reported twenty(20) instances they perceived did not meet ideal speech conditions, suggesting there were instances of a lack of symmetrical communication and that some propositions were not treated fully and equally to the satisfaction of participants were recorded.

Of course, it is too simplistic to say that stakeholders perceived Case O1 as an effective listening organisation or that Case O1 has allowed participatory communication to occur during consultation with its stakeholders. As Jacobson notes, although participants may believe an organisation listens to them , and there is evidence of representation of citizen views during a consultation, it is not a guarantee that the organisation is listening(Jacobson, 2008). However, it is possible at this stage to say that, when results from both models are interpreted, all speech conditions are obtained and all stakeholder listening expectations were met in Case O1 during the consultation, suggesting that there is a good chance that participation has taken place.

Although generalisation is impossible from this sample size, the strength in associations between the two models suggests this line of research has potential to make a significant contribution to organisation-stakeholder communication.

6. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The sample size was the primary limitation for this study; a larger sample size is necessary to validate results. Data has been collected from an additional four cases, providing a total of six cases. Data analysis and coding of the additional cases will follow procedures developed in the pilot study. In addition, categories that emerged as potential themes will be included in coding parameters. Additional lines of enquiry to pursue include breaking down behavioural categories of effective organisational listening into verbal, nonverbal and interactive subcategories, to improve specifications of what is currently understood in the domain of organisational 'listening behaviour'. Major categories of non-communicative action are yet to be explored for evidence organisation members are consciously or unconsciously behaving in non –communicative action, a behaviour characteristic of unequal power relations. Power, trust, culture and selection of stakeholders emerged in the pilot study as categories deserving exploration to gain further understanding of their relationship to organisational listening competency. Possible discrepancies between organisation members' and stakeholders' in two specific

areas also emerged as warranting further investigation; firstly, what factors contributed to the basis of stakeholder expectations, and do organisation members' have an accurate understanding of these contributing factors? Secondly, is there discrepancy between organisation members' self-perceptions with impressions others have of their listening competency? Results from both these areas could have implications for future organisational communication training.

The study also has potential to inform interpersonal communication research, as results from the pilot study indicate final results may advance understanding of the relationship between affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects of listening competency in stakeholder-organisational settings.

Footnotes

1. Jacobson notes that although citizens may believe an organisation listens to them, and there is evidence of representation of citizen views during a consultation, it is not a guarantee that the organisation is listening, but he considers it a necessary condition (Jacobson, 2008 p. 21).
2. Data related to the service quality framework has been collected but not analysed as part of the pilot study.
3. The two- item survey instrument will be available at the LSE conference.
4. Results will be available at the LSE conference.
5. Case O1 individual stakeholder responses are identified by (OS), organisation members by (OM). T1 individual stakeholder responses are identified by (TS), organisation members by (TM).

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