Can manager's listening behavior benefit employees? Power distance may have the answer.

Abstract

The current research investigated employee's perception of their manager's listening behavior (MLB). Drawing on the group-value theory, we examined the role of MLB and analyzed its effect through employee's power distance orientation. We distributed questionnaires to 219 employees and adopted two-wave data collection to ameliorate the bias of common method variance. Statistical analysis revealed that MLB was related to employees' well-being and work engagement. For employees with lower power distance orientation, MLB led to more self-esteem. For employees with higher power distance orientation, MLB did not affect their self-esteem. MLB was not always beneficial to the employees, as individuals may interpret MLB positively or negatively. Research findings have brought new insights into the listening literature, particularly from the perspective of manager's listening behavior. We encourage the organizations to incorporate listening skills into the education programs (for training incumbent managers) and recruitment criterions (for hiring new managers). Implications on the manager-employee relationship are also discussed.

Keywords: Employees; Manager's Listening Behavior; Power Distance; Self-Esteem; Well-Being.

Can manager's listening behavior benefit employees? Power distance may have the answer.

Scholars are intrigued to analyze the 'manager-employee relationship' from different perspectives, such as trust, informal communication and communication channel (Bruhl et al., 2018; Chang & Kuo, 2020; Morrison, 2011). Prior studies indicate that a healthy communication channel between the two parties help employees develop better well-being, higher job satisfaction, and more organizational commitment (Morrison, 2011). Van Quaquebeke and Felps (2018) also propose a concept of 'respectful inquiry' to describe manager's behavior in asking open questions combined with attentive listening, arguing that respectful inquiry satisfies employees' psychological needs for competence, relatedness and autonomy.

Following this line of research, scholars have identified a unique and important behavior – *manager's listening behavior* (MLB; Lloyd et al., 2015), claiming that employees who perceive more MLB have less emotional exhaustion, more citizenship behavior and lower intention of leaving the job. From a different but relevant perspective, Castro et al. (2018) claim that MLB makes employees more creative through exploring new ideas flexibly.

Although scholars generally appreciate the importance of manager's active listening behavior, actually little is known empirically about the role of MLB and its potential implication to the employees (Castro et al., 2018). Although employees behave differently when they perceive their managers as actively listening, the mechanism underlying their behavioral change is rarely analyzed (Lloyd, Boer, Kluger & Voelpel, 2015). Extant studies tend to focus on the quality of information transfer, rather than the quality of speaker's speaking and listening (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018). From a different but relevant perspective, scholars also claim the merits of dyadic membership in listening; according to the Episodic Listening Theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, in press), the listener and the speaker both benefit from listening, as it triggers a fleeting state of togetherness, in which both parties co-share a creative thought process. To our knowledge, the studies of listening are numerous, but the role of manager's listening behavior is barely

researched (see exception in: Lloyd, Boer, Keller & Voelpel, 2015).

Given the importance of MLB in the workplace, it is necessary to conduct a new study to research MLB, with the rationale below: First, there is a need to address the theoretical gaps of MLB, so we propose to study MLB through two cognate variables, i.e., '*power distance*' and '*organization-based self-esteem*'. We hypothesize that these two variables affect employees' perception of MLB. Second, we analyze the impact of MLB through two outcome variables: '*subjective well-being*' and '*work engagement*'. We propose power distance and self-esteem as two distinctive mechanisms, affecting outcome variables. It is our hope that research findings will offer new insights into the listening literature and enrich the understanding of MLB.

Literature Review

MLB and employees' self-esteem

In layman's terms, '*listening*' means hearing what others are saying, and trying to understand what it means. Halone et al. (1998) explain that listening comprises three processes. These are: i). *affective-process* explains the motivation of listening; ii). *cognitive-process* includes attending to, understanding, receiving, and interpreting content and relational messages; and, finally, iii). *behavioral-process* describes responding to others with verbal and nonverbal feedback. In the context of workplace (where the current research is carried out), we describe listening as an information-processing behavior, hearing what managers (or colleagues, customers) are saying, and attempting to understand what is being said. In the current research, we are keen to study the role of *manager's listening behavior* (MLB) and analyze its influence on employees. This article now turns to introduce MLB and present the research rationale. Details follow.

Listening is vital at work, and good managers always invest in listening and respond to their followers in a non-judgmental manner (Lloyd, Boer, Kluger & Voelpel, 2015). Listening is important in the organization, as manager's active listening helps nurture the trust and collaboration between managers and employees (Mineyama et al., 2007). Following this line of research, MLB has drawn scholars' attention; specifically, MLB describes a phenomenon that

managers actively listen to the employees (Lloyd, Boer, Keller & Voelpel, 2015). In the eyes of employees, MLB means inclusion; namely, when managers listen to their opinions, employees feel included and supported in the organization (Hollander, 2012).

MLB seems relevant to individual differences. For instance, although listening generally helps increase psychological safety, individual differences still matter, such as personal avoidance-attachment style (Castro et al., 2016). People have various values and observe the workplace differently (Baron & Ilana, 2009), and not all employees benefit from manager's informal language (Chang & Kuo, 2020). Although different in nature, prior studies imply that, due to the individual differences, MLB may be interpreted differently. Following this logic, we therefore include individual differences in researching MLB. We focus on self-esteem, which is one of the most common terms to describe individual differences; self-esteem clarifies the overall sense of self-worth, such as how much people appreciate and like themselves. It is related to self-confidence, leader-follower relationship and teamwork (Burke, 2008; Ellis, 2005).

As the current research is interested in the behaviors within the organization, we thus study 'organization-based self-esteem' (OBSE), which separates from global self-esteem and focuses on one's feeling through organizational membership. Scholars define OBSE as "the degree to which organizational members believe that they can satisfy their needs by participating in roles within the context of an organization" (Pierce et al., 1989: p. 625) and as ''the degree to which an individual believes themselves to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member'' (Pierce & Gardner, 2004, p. 593). Namely, OBSE describes the feelings of worth and value that an employee feels within the organization.

To further discuss the MLB-OBSE relationship, the "Group-Value-Model" (Lind & Tyler, 2013) is adopted. According to the model, the group membership effect occurs when members collect self-relevant information from their own evaluations; for instance, how they are treated by managers, team leaders and other management authorities. The quality of treatment is crucial as members develop their sense of self by knowing that a group they value regards them as

respected members (Lind & Tyler, 2013). The quality of treatment helps members to develop a feeling of respect and form a sense of self-affirmation. Following this logic, we believe that MLB provides different sources of self-relevant information and enhances self-esteem in three ways: i). when managers proactively listen to employees' views, employees feel their views being attended and hence important (MLB acts as the first source); ii). when managers listen to and discuss the views, employees feel their managers are indeed interested in their views and they can contribute to the discussion (second source); and, iii). when the views got accepted, employees gain a feeling of *pride and respect* as they have made real contribution to the organization (third source). Altogether MLB offers employees with multi sources of self-recognition, which in turn improve employees' OBSE.

Moreover, scholars have attempted to explain the mechanism underlying the listening-esteem relationship. For instance, during difficult conversations with customers, employees with listening skills are capable in understanding customers' viewpoints, and these employees have less anxiety and better sense of competence (Itzchakov, 2020). When people perceive that others respond positively to their sharing of negative emotions, people tend to experience positive inclusion and esteem beliefs (Reynolds-Kueny & Shoss, 2020). To sum up, when managers proactively listen to employees' views, employees feel valued and recognized. As such, we propose:

H1. MLB is positively correlated with employees' OBSE.

MLB, well-being and work engagement

As employees demonstrate different attitudes and behaviors at work (Kirkman et al., 2009), we are intrigued to know what consequence might be when employees respond to MLB with different perceptions of self-esteem. As such, two variables (*subjective well-being, work engagement*) are selected in the research. The former describes how people experience the quality of their lives, including emotional reactions and cognitive judgment (Diener, 1984), and it represents an overall evaluation of one's satisfaction and happiness in their life (Lu, 1998). The

latter describes that people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively, emotionally and mentally during role performances (Kahn, 1990). It is defined as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli et al., 2002).

We regard '*subjective well-being*' and '*work engagement*' as outcome variables, with the following reasons: i). MLB is positively related to leadership in management (Lloyd et al., 2015), employees' feeling of inclusion (Hollander, 2012) and trust toward managers (Castro et al., 2018). Namely, MLB facilitates a harmonious manager-employee relationship; ii). Supportive leadership which uses conscious and active listening-centred communication is important to employees' work engagement (Jonsdottir & Kristinsson, 2020); iii). As it is explained by the Group-Value-Model (Lind & Tyler, 2013), MLB provides employees ample self-relevant information, developing their self-esteem; and, iv). To our knowledge, prior studies tend to focus on the general working environment (Mineyama et al., 2007), speaking-listening relationship (Bodie et al., 2012) and organizational management (Kluger & Zaidel, 2013). How MLB influences employees is still unclear. To respond to this knowledge cap, employees' subjective well-being and work engagement are thus included for research. To present the research rationale and variables more clearly, a conceptual framework is proposed (Figure 1).

<Insert Figure 1 About Here>

Prior studies regard MLB as relationship harmonizer, as it builds rapport between managers and employees, facilitating a harmonious relationship between two parties (Hollander, 2012; Lloyd, Boer, Keller & Voelpel, 2015). Lind and Tyler (2013) discuss the relationship between MLB and employees' response through the perspective of quality treatment, indicating that good-quality treatment at work enables employees to develop their sense of self-affirmation.

Specifically, scholars have discussed the role of MLB and its downstream effects; for instance, managers are not always available in listening to their employees, but when managers do listen to their employees, employees may develop a close feeling and intimate perception of

their managers (Reis et al., 2004), employees feel respected and accepted by their managers (Ruan et al., 2020), employees feeling understood and supported by their manager (Tangirala, S., & Ramanujam, R. (2012). MLB is correlated with employees' perception of supportiveness and trust at work, facilitating job motivation and performance (Stephens et al., 2011). In our opinion, prior studies imply that MLB offers a sense of quality treatment, because MLB provides employees with ample self-relevant information and self-affirmation, helping employees develop a feeling of worth and engagement at work.

Similarly, employees feel valued when their managers engage with them impartially, such as listening to their views actively, and responding to their complaint in a non-judgmental manner (Dutton et al., 2016). MLB makes employees feel positive, self-worth and respected, because the perceptions of listening quality are dyadic and positively reciprocated in dyads, such as managers and employees (see discussion in: Kluger et al., 2020). Overall, prior studies have affirmed the importance of MLB, providing preliminary credence to explain why MLB is important to the employee, and why MLB is beneficial to the heathy manager-employee relationship. As such, we propose:

H2a. MLB is positively correlated with employees' subjective well-being (SWB).

H2b. MLB is positively correlated with employees' work engagement (WE).

The mediating role of self-esteem

We hypothesize employees' OBSE as mediator with the following reasons. First, MLB facilitates employees' OBSE, well-being and work engagement (see relevant details in the development of H1, H2a & H2b). Second, MLB can be mediated by employees' OBSE, regulating employees' well-being and work engagement. Details follow:

Self-esteem is important to the employee and their behaviors. Employees with higher self-esteem show more job concentration and engrossment (Quinn & Dutton, 2005), stronger self-worth and self-regard (Hui & Lee, 2000), more pride and vitality (Shefer et al., 2018). OBSE is crucial to work engagement (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Employees with higher self-esteem

demonstrate stronger job identification and teamwork (Gonzalez-Roma et al., 2006), more job participation and collaboration (Bakker & Demerouti, 2008), stronger sense of self-perceived value, competence and efficacy (Pierce & Gardner, 2004). Jointly, previous studies imply that OBSE play a mediating role, regulating the positive effect of MLB on employees; following the same logic, we propose:

H3. Employees' OBSE mediates the positive relationship between MLB and SWB.

H4. Employees' OBSE mediates the positive relationship between MLB and WE.

The moderating role of power distance orientation

Power distance describes the power-inequality between a less powerful individual and a more powerful other (Dorfman & Howell, 1988), such as the inequality between managers (more powerful) and employees (less powerful) (Chang & Lu, 2007). Power distance orientation (PDO; Clugston et al., 2000) refers to what extent an individual accepts the unequal distribution of power in the organization, explaining how people evaluate such inequality and behave. Employees with higher PDO show more obedience and conformity toward managers, such as more acceptance of autocratic leadership and larger social distance, whereas employees with lower PDO behave the opposite (Merkin, 2006). Following this logic, employees with higher PDO regard MLB as part of the common manager-employee communication, as they are used to relying on their managers' leadership and seldom ask questions (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009). Moreover, managers' support (e.g., active listening behavior) may not improve job satisfaction but make employees feel suspicious (Liao et al., 2014). This is because employees with higher PDO do not expect their managers to demonstrate active listing behaviors. In contrast, employees with lower PDO interpret MLB more positively, as they regard MLB as signs of managers' support and appreciation; for instance, compared to the colleagues with higher PDO, people with lower PDO prefer more interaction with managers, as MLB provides them a sense of acceptance, respect and recognition (Liao et al., 2014).

We hypothesize PDO as moderator, affecting the relationships between research variables in

different ways. Earlier literature review concludes that MLB facilitates OBSE; and, when employees have more OBSE, they feel more positive at work, showing more SWB and WE (see relevant discussion in the development of H3 and H4). Namely, MLB affects OBSE directly, SWB and WE indirectly. Yet, PDO also plays a subtle role in these relationships. In our opinion, the underlying mechanism is: MLB tends to be valued by employees with lower PDO, rather than those with higher PDO (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009), and MLB brings negative impact to the employees with higher PDO, not those with lower PDO (Liao et al., 2014). That is, the relationships between MLB and outcome variables (OBSE, SWB, WE) are all moderated by PDO. As such, we propose:

H5. PDO moderates the relationship between MLB and OBSE, such that employees with lower power distance orientation perceive more self-esteem.

H6. PDO moderates the indirect effect of MLB on SWB via OBSE, such that the indirect effect is stronger for individuals with lower power distance orientation.

H7. PDO moderates the indirect effect of MLB on WE via OBSE, such that the indirect effect is stronger for individuals with lower power distance orientation.

Method

Research design and sample

Research data were gathered through a survey website (*blinded for the reviewing purpose*). Participants were recruited from the industries in <city>, <country>, as per the research grant criteria. We emailed the web-link to the industry managers, and they re-distributed it to their employees. The website introduced research aim, participation criterions and information of the two-wave data collection (details to follow). Managers did not know which employees participated in the research, and participants had no knowledge of other fellow participants, ensuring the anonymity of participation (Arnold et al., 1985).

Participation fee (approximately US $3 per person) and book vouchers (raffle tickets) were used as incentives to stimulate the participation rate. As our research focused on employees'

behavior and interaction experience with managers, only full-time employees with at least 6-month tenure were allowed to participate. The research project was approved by the institutional ethics committee, in which the data collection was conducted in line with ethical guidelines. To reduce the bias of social desirability effect, we adopted Nederhof's (1985) strategies in gathering data, such as re-assurance of confidentiality policy, voluntary participation, freedom to withdraw, no standardized answers to the questions, and anonymity of questionnaire responses.

To ameliorate the influence of common method variance (CMV) resulting from the utilization of self-rated questions, we collected the data at two waves (Podsakoff et al., 2003). At Stage One, MLB, demographic data, negative emotion and job stress were measured ($N_1 = 219$). At Stage Two (1 month later), PDO, OBSE, WE and SWB were measured ($N_2 = 152$, Response rate = 69.40%). The Stage Two sample comprised employees from six industries, including: manufacturing, finance, IT services, mass communication, health care and civil department. Demographical details included: gender (F = 65.5%; M = 34.5%), age ($M = 26.57$ years, $SD = 5.66$), tenure of employment ($M = 2.36$ years, $SD = 3.76$), tenure of working with managers ($M = 1.85$ years, $SD = 2.83$) and involvement of managerial duties (No = 73.0%; Yes = 27.0%).

We conducted ANOVAs (analysis of variances) to explore the heterogeneity between the samples from Stages One and Two. Results showed no difference in gender (χ^2 (1, N = 152) = .15, $p > .05$) and age (ANOVA F (1, 376) = 1.060, $p = .30$) between the two samples. Therefore, we adopted '*Stage Two-Sample*' for further analysis.

Measurement

Five standardized scales were used and the responses were recorded using 6-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 6 = *strongly agree*). All scales were originally developed in English but for the research purpose, they were translated from English to Chinese using the back-translation -procedure by bilingual researchers and professional translators. Details follow:

Manager's listening behavior scale (Lloyd, Boer, Keller & Voelpel, 2015) was adapted to measure employees' perception of managers' listening behavior (9 items; α = .92). Sample items

included: "my manager is interested what I have to say", and "my manager makes me comfortable so I can speak openly". Higher scores represent more occurrence of managers' listening behavior.

Organization-based self-esteem scale (Pierce et al., 1989) was adapted to measure respondents' perception of organization-based-self-esteem (OBSE) (10 items; α = .89). Sample items included: "I am taken seriously", and "I am trusted." Higher scores represent higher levels of self-esteem in the organization.

Subjective well-being scale (Lu, 1998) was adapted to measure respondents' subjective well-being (10 items; α = .93). Sample items included: "I feel positive", and "I am happy about my life." Higher scores represent higher levels of subjective well-being.

Work engagement scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002) was adapted to measure respondents' perception of work engagement (9 items; α = .92). Sample items included: "my job inspires me", and "I am immersed in my job." Higher scores represent higher levels of work engagement.

Power distance orientation scale (Dorfman & Howell, 1988) was adopted to measure respondents' orientation of power distance between their managers and themselves (6 items; Cronbach's α = .65). Sample items included: "employees should not disagree with management decisions", and "it is frequently necessary for a manager to use authority and power when dealing with employees." Higher scores represent more acceptance of power distance.

Control variables

As job stress and negative emotion affected wellbeing and engagement (Bell et al., 2012; Padula et al., 2012), we treated these two factors as control variables. As demographic characteristics affected worksite behaviors (Collins & Gibbs, 2003; Watson et al., 1988), we also treated demographic characteristics as control variables. By examining the control variables, researchers can understand the relationships of research variables more accurately (Meyer & Allen, 1997).

Results

The descriptive statistics of research variables are presented in Table 1. Correlation

coefficients were congruent with our expectation; for instance, managers' listening behavior was positively correlated with organization-based self-esteem ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), subjective well-being ($r = .31$, $p < .01$) and work engagement ($r = .37$, $p < .01$). Power distance orientation was negatively correlated with managers' listening behavior ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$) and organization-based self-esteem ($r = -28$, $p < .01$).

<Insert Tables 1 and 2 About Here>

We adopted Harman's single factor test to examine the potential CMV bias. All research variables were first merged into one factor, and the results showed poor fit, suggesting that one single factor of merging all variable was inappropriate for data analysis (χ^2 (90, N = 152) = 1092.69, $p < .001$, IFI = .49, TLI = .40, CFI = .49, RMSEA = .27). We then adopted an unmeasured latent construct method to measure the potential influence of CMV as recommended by Podsakoff ***et al.*** (2003). The outcome ($\Delta\chi^2$ (1) = 3.34, $p > .05$) was consistent with the findings of Harman's single-factor test. Namely, the influence of CMV was slim, so the data were accepted for further data analysis.

Analysis of the measurement model

We applied confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) to examine all research variables. The hypothetic model (five-factor) was compared with alternative models, including two four-factor models, one three-factor model and one two-factor model and one one-factor model (see Table 2). CFAs revealed that the hypothetic model provided sound fit to the data; specifically, the five-factor model had significantly better fit than was the first four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 58.12$, $p < .001$), second four-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 56.61$, $p < .001$), three-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 562.45$, $p < .001$), two-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 793.27$, $p < .001$) and one-factor model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 984.98$, $p < .001$). Taken together, the hypothetic model represented the best fit to the data (χ^2 (80) = 107.71, $p < .001$, IFI = .99, TLI = .98, CFI = .99. RMSEA = .05).

The composite reliability (CR) figures of all measurement scales were outlined below: MLB

= .95, OBSE = .89, PDO = .59, SWB = .93 and WE = .92. These figures were higher than .75 (except PDO), indicating that the composite reliability of research variables was satisfactory (Fornell & Larker, 1981). According to the originators of PDO scale (Dorfman & Howell, 1988), the acceptable CR was ranging from .63 (Western samples) to .51 (Eastern samples). As PDO's CR (.56) fell into the acceptable range, PDO was thus accepted for further statistical analysis.

With regard to the validity of research variables, the average variance extracted (AVE) of all measurement scales were outlined below: MLB = .70, OBSE = .47, PDO = .56, SWB = .56 and WE = .58. These AVEs were close or higher than .50, indicating that the convergent validity of research variables was satisfactory (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Examination of the research hypotheses

We adopted PROCESS (Model 4) to examine the associations of research variables. As it is shown in Table 3, the positive direct effect of MLB on SWB was significant (b = .13, SE = .04, t = 3.13, p < .01), and the positive direct effect of MLB on OBSE was also significant (b = .14, SE = .05, t = 2.97, p < .01). Bootstrapping results showed that MLB had an indirect effect on SWB (b = .06, SE = .02) through OBSE, and that the 95% CIs around the indirect effect did not contain zero (LL = 0.02, UL = 0.12). Although MLB had positive effect on SWB (b = .13, SE =.05, t = 3.13, p < .01), its effect should be interpreted with caution. This is because, when OBSE was considered as competing mediator in the analysis, the effect of MLB on SWB decreased and became non-significant (b = .07, SE = .04, p = .10). These findings revealed a mediating role of OBSE in the MLB-SWB relationship. Altogether, these statistical figures affirmed that MLB was positively correlated with OBSE and SWB, and that OBSE mediated the relationship between MLB and SWB.

Next, Table 4 presented the details of data analysis, including positive direct effect of MLB on WE (b = .24, SE =.06, t = 3.94, p < .001), and positive direct effect of MLB on OBSE (b = .14, SE = .05, t = 2.97, p < .001). Bootstrapping results showed that MLB had an indirect effect on WE (b = .09, SE =.04) through OBSE, and that the 95% CIs around the indirect effect did not contain zero

(LL = .03, UL =.17). Although MLB had positive effect on WE (b = .24, SE = .06, t = 3.94, p < .001), its effect should be interpreted with caution. This is because, when OBSE was considered as competing mediator in the analysis, the effect of MLB on WE decreased (b = .15, SE = 06, p < .05). These figures indicated a mediating role of OBSE in the MLB-WE relationship. Altogether, the statistical figures affirmed that MLB was positively correlated with OBSE and WE, and that OBSE mediated the relationship between MLB and WE. To sum up, we examined the role of MLB and found its positive correlation with OBSE, SWB and WE. These findings provided ample support to H1, H2a and H2b. Next, OBSE was found to mediate the positive relationships between MLB and SWB, and between MLB and WE. Altogether, these findings supported the H3 and H4.

<Insert Table 3 and Table 4 About Here>

To further analyze the moderating effect of PDO, we adopted Aiken, West, and Reno's (1991) procedure to calculate the simple slopeness at two specific values, i.e., one standard deviation above the mean of the PDO (High PDO), and one standard deviation below the mean of the PDO (Low PDO). As it is shown in Figure 2, when exposing to MLB, employees with high PDO did not perceive difference in their self-esteem (simple slope = -.01, SE = .06, p = .88). Yet, employees with low PDO perceived more self-esteem (simple slope = .24, SE = .05, p < .001). Based on the results of data mining and analysis, H5 was supported.

<Insert Table 5 and Figure 2 About Here>

We adopted PROCESS (Model 8) to examine the conditional indirect effects of MLB on SWB and WE via OBSE (see full statistics in Table 5). We adopted Preacher et al.'s (2007) procedure to examine the effect at two specific values, i.e., one standard deviation above the mean of the PDO (High PDO), and one standard deviation below the mean of the PDO (Low PDO). At the low PDO condition, the bootstrapping test revealed that 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for SWB (0.05, 0.18) and WE (0.08, 0.27) did not contain zero, indicating that the indirect effect of MLB on SWB and WE via OBSE was statistically significant. In contrast, at the high PDO condition, the bootstrapping analysis revealed that 95% bias-corrected

confidence intervals for SWB (-0.06, 0.20) and WE (-0.09, 0.07) contained zero, indicating that the indirect effect of MLB on SWB and WE via OBSE was not statistically significant. Based on the results of data mining and analysis, both H6 and H7 were supported.

Discussion

Prior studies define MLB as relationship harmonizer; namely, a harmonious relationship between managers and employees leads to positive employee behaviors (Castro et al., 2018; Lloyd, Boer, Kluger & Voelpel, 2015). Inspired by the Group-Value-Model (Lind & Tyler, 2013), we argue that the relationship between MLB and employees' behaviors may not be as straightforward as previously defined, and that individual difference, such as self-esteem, should be considered when analyzing MLB. Specifically, we have found that MLB is positively correlated with employees' OBSE, SWB and WE. We've also found that OBSE mediated the 'MLB-SWB relationship', as well as the 'MLB-WE relationship'. Namely, OBSE not only describes the feelings of worth and value that employees feel within the organization, but also affects how employees evaluate MLB, which in turn affects how employees feel and behave. To our knowledge, the "MLB-OBSE-SWB" and "MLB-OBSE-WE" relationships have never been systematically examined, and our research findings have clarified the role of OBSE and its mechanism in linking MLB, SWB and WE. Our research has brought new insights into the listening literature.

Next, our research findings have supported the importance of PDO; namely, when exposing to MLB, employees with higher PDO may not perceive difference in their self-esteem, but employees with lower PDO may perceive more self-esteem. This phenomenon is unique and different from prior research that praises MLB's positive influence, such as better performance

(Hollander, 2012) and closer interpersonal relationship (Bodie et al., 2012). Here we propose two reasons to explain this phenomenon. First, the current research was conducted in Asia. Asian employees are acquainted to the hierarchy-oriented workplace (Chang & Lu, 2007) and manager-employee distance (Dorfman & Howell, 1988). Second, MLB did not always benefit employees and, in some cases, employees feel suspicious about it (Liao et al., 2014). When considering two reasons together, one can envisage that people with higher PDO may accept 'manager-employee distance' easily, because the distance is congruent with their expectation. Yet, people with lower PDO may evaluate the distance differently. They do not like the distance between managers and themselves; very likely, when MLB occurs, employees with lower PDO may interpret MLB more positively and gain more self-esteem. Our research has advanced the knowledge of manager's listening behavior, particularly from the perspective of power distance.

Our research findings are important to related topics in which MLB has implied but yet not tested. Concerning the listening literature, scholars describe MLB as antecedent to team collaboration (Hollander, 2012), leadership efficacy (Lloyd, Boer, Keller & Voelpel, 2014) and trusting managers (Castro et al., 2018). Following this line of research, we suggest that, when analyzing MLB, both potential mediating and moderating variables should be considered, so a full picture of MLB's influence to employees could be unveiled. Our statistically-confirmed model (Figure 1) has brought valuable insights into the listening literature, and contributed to the knowledge advancement of manager's listening behavior.

Managerial implications

As MLB benefits employees (e.g., better SWB and WE), we encourage the organization to incorporate listening skills into the recruitment assessment and criterions for hiring new managers. We encourage the organization to offer listening skill workshops (delivered by professionals) to their incumbent managers, which are found to be crucial in maintaining manager-employee relationship, such as empathic listening (Gritten, 2015), reflective listening (Rautalinko & Lisper, 2004), effective listening (Kline, 1996) and active non-defensive listening (Ikegami et al., 2010). Trainings are indeed advantageous, as good listening skills help reduce one's social anxiety, allowing people to engage in deeper introspection (listening circle: Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017). Based on our research findings and aforementioned studies, employees and their organizations shall benefit from managers equipped with good listening skills.

Due to the trend of increased global labor movement, managers often face MEH-related problems in management. MEH stands for 'Manager-Employee-Heterophily', referring to a position whereby the senior managers of a business are from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds to those they employ (Chang et al., 2017); for instance, managers are expatriates from the overseas parent-companies, while the general workforce typically comprises individuals with local permanent residency. Due to the differences between two parties, MEH leads to negative consequences easily, such as poor organizational commitment and low job satisfaction; specifically, power distance is one of the attributors to the MEH-related problems and a large distance between managers and employees also causes misunderstanding and poor communication (Chang & Lu, 2007). Therefore we suggest the organization to be prudent in their management of power distance. One way to maintain a healthy power distance between managers and employees is through the practice of equality and diversity policy (Chang, 2020; Kirkman et

al., 2009; Liao et al., 2014). Based on the research findings and prior studies, a more balanced power distance shall benefit employees with low PDO, which in turn benefits their managers and organizations.

Limitations and future research

MLB was measured through employees' subjective perception, so future studies may include a listening confederate to add additional objective measures of MLB, such as behavioral observations rated by external coders. MLB's influence on the outcome variables was affected by mediator (organizational-based self-esteem) and moderator (power distance orientation), so an important avenue for future research is to investigate other pertinent factors, exploring further information of MLB's influence. Finally, the cross-sectional design could not confirm the causality of variables, and the research data reflected on a specific point of time only. Future studies may adopt a longitudinal approach to measure the variables, so a full picture of MLB's influence can be unveiled.

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Table 1

Variables Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Correlations

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Control Variables:													
1. Age	26.57	5.66	-										
2. Education	3.23	0.52	-.02	-									
3. Tenure of employment	2.36	3.76	.59**	-.21**	-								
4. Tenure with managers	1.85	2.83	.49**	-.16*	.09**	-							
5. Job stress	2.70	0.87	.16*	.06	.09	.05	-						
6. Negative emotion	2.87	0.80	-.17*	-.02	-.12	-.13	.31**	(.88)†					
Research Variables:													
7. Managers' listening behavior (MLB)	3.88	1.11	-.04	.02	-.09	-.18*	-.23**	-.23**	(.95)				
8. Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE)	4.47	0.59	.08	-.05	.05	.04	-.11	-.40**	.32**	(.89)			
9. Subjective well-being (SWB)	1.21	0.58	.15	-.03	.03	.04	-.12	-.42**	.31**	.56***	(.93)		
10. Work engagement (WE)	3.91	0.86	.18*	-.02	-.02	-.04	-.16*	-.31**	.37**	.56***	.65***	(.92)	
11. Power distance orientation (PDO)	2.93	0.61	.04	-.07	.02	.06	-.05	-.20*	-.21*	-.28**	-.19*	-.16	(.56)

Note.

†. Reliability scores (Cronbach's alpha) are presented on the diagonal parentheses. (*** $p < .001$; **. $p < .01$; *. $p < .05$). ($n = 152$)

Table 2

Model fitness analysis

Model	Factors	χ^2	*df*	$\triangle\chi^2$	IFI	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1 (Hypothetic Model)	5 factors	107.71	80		.99	.98	.99	.05
Model 2	4 factors (MLB + PDO)	165.83	84	58.12	.96	.95	.96	.08
Model 3	4 factors (OBSE + PDO)	164.32	84	56.61	.96	.95	.96	.08
Model 4	3 factors (MLB + PDO + OBSE)	670.16	87	562.45	.70	.64	.70	.21
Model 5	2 factors (PDO + OBSE + MLB; SWB + WE)	900.98	89	793.27	.59	.51	.58	.25
Model 6	1 factor (all variables are merged)	1092.69	90	984.98	.49	.40	.49	.27

Note:
MLB = Managers' listening behavior; PDO = Power distance orientation; OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem; SWB = Subjective well-being; WE = Work engagement (n = 152).

Table 3

Regression Results for Subjective well-being (SWB)

Variables	***b*†**	**SE**	***t***	***p***	**LL 95% CI**	**UL 95% CI**
			Direct and total effects†			
SWB regressed on MLB	.13	.04	3.13	.002	.05	.22
OBSE regressed on MLB	.14	.05	2.97	.003	.05	.24
SWB regressed on OBSE (controlling for MLB)	.43	.09	4.76	.000	.25	.60
SWB regressed on MLB (OBSE was entered as a competing mediator)	.07	.04	1.67	.097	-.01	.16

	b	**SE**	**LL 95% CI**	**UL 95% CI**
		Bootstrapping results for indirect effect‡		
Effect	.06	.02	.02	.12

Note.

†. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000 (LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit).

MLB = Managers' listening behavior; OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem; SWB = Subjective well-being; WE = Work engagement. (n = 152).

Table 4

Regression Results for Work engagement (WE)

Variables	***b*†**	**SE**	***t***	***p***	**LL 95% CI**	**UL 95% CI**
			Direct and total effects†			
WE regressed on MLB	.24	.06	3.94	.000	.12	.36
OBSE regressed on MLB	.14	.05	2.97	.003	.05	.24
WE regressed on OBSE (controlling for MLB)	.66	.12	5.60	.000	.43	.90
WE regressed on MLB (OBSE was entered as a competing mediator)	.15	.06	2.50	.013	.03	.26
	b	**SE**	**LL 95% CI**		**UL 95% CI**	
			Bootstrapping results for indirect effect‡			
Effect	.09	.04	.03		.17	

Note.

†. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000 (LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit).

MLB = Managers' listening behavior; OBSE = Organization-based self-esteem; SWB = Subjective well-being; WE = Work engagement. (n = 152).

Table 5

Moderated and Moderated Mediation Results for OBSE, SWB, and WE

Moderator	Value‡	Organization-based self-esteem (OBSE)				Subjective Well-Being (SWB)				Work Engagement (WE)			
		Moderated Effect†	*SE*	*LL 95% CI*	*UL 95% CI*	Conditional Indirect Effect†	*SE*	*LL 95% CI*	*UL 95% CI*	Conditional Indirect Effect†	*SE*	*LL 95% CI*	*UL 95% CI*
PDO‡	Low: -1 SD	.24	.05	.13	.34	.10	.03	.05	.18	.16	.05	.08	.27
	Mean: 0.00	.11	.05	.02	.20	.05	.02	.01	.10	.08	.03	.02	.15
	High: +1 SD	-.01	.06	-.13	.12	-.00	.03	-.06	.20	-.01	.04	-.09	.07
						(Index of moderated-mediated effect)				(Index of moderated-mediated effect)			
						-.09	.03	-.17	-.04	-.13	.05	-.25	-.06

Note.

†. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000 (LL = lower limit; CI = confidence interval; UL = upper limit).

PDO = Power distance orientation;

‡. Values of the PDO (Power distance orientation): -1 SD = -.069, +1 SD = .069. (n = 152)

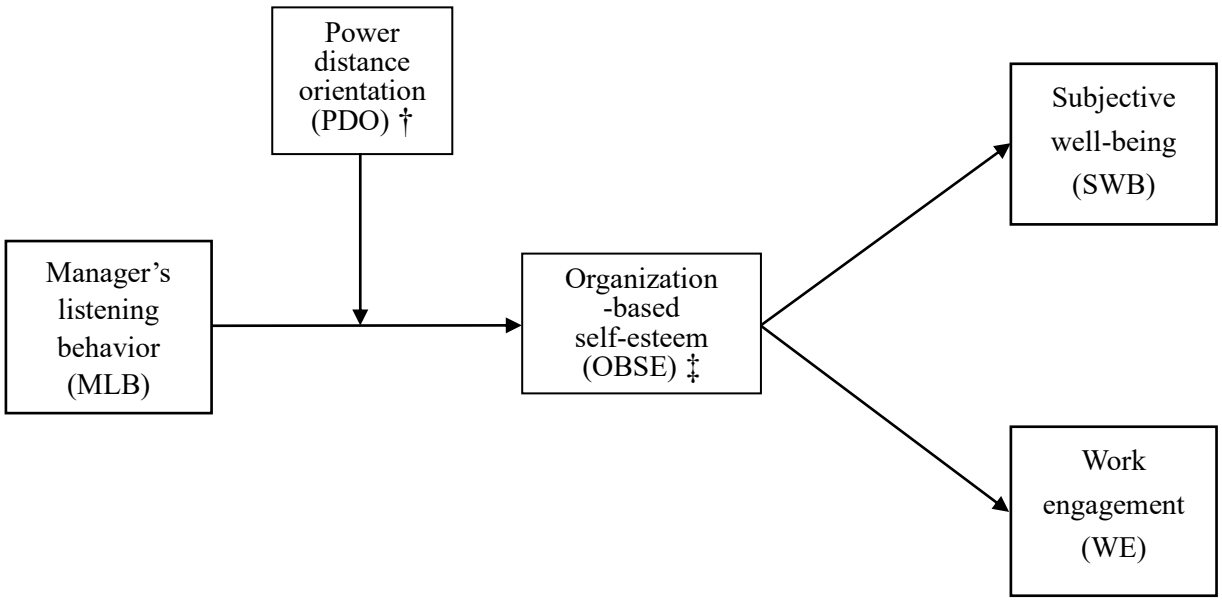
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Figure 2. Moderating effect of power distance orientation

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Note.

†. PDO acted as moderator in the current research.

‡. OBSE acted as mediator in the current research.

Figure 2

Moderating effect of power distance orientation