The Lost Art of Listening

The Missing Key to Democratic and Civil Society Participation

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Long before the EU referendum that is now both fondly and infamously referred to as *Brexit* and the election of Donald Trump as President-Elect in the US, Les Back warned us about the lost art of listening in contemporary societies[1].

Whether listening has been lost, I am not sure. A loss of listening presupposes a golden age of listening – and golden ages are mostly mythical, based on nostalgia and wishfulness.

But what we do know is two things. First, listening is essential in our lives. We crave to be listened to. In democracies, we have a right to be listened to. And we need to listen to others – our parents, at school, at work, in relationships, to know what is happening and to function in the world.

I will give you a simple experiment to do before I conclude that will demonstrate just how essential listening is to our relationships and the fabric of society.

But the second thing we know from research that I will share with you this evening is that listening is in short supply in many spheres of life today. It could even be said that there is a **crisis of listening** in contemporary societies. I recognise that the term 'crisis' is over-used, but I will try to justify that warning.

In particular, I want to talk about listening in and on behalf of **organisations**. Today, we live in industrialised and post-industrial societies – what Nick Couldry calls "complex" societies[2]. As Bruce Bimber and colleagues[3] note, in such societies organisations such as government departments and agencies, corporations, non-government organisations (NGOs), and various non-profit organisations play a central role and affect almost every aspect of people's lives.

From the national government and large corporations, which we depend on for services such as health care and phone and internet connectivity, to local businesses, hospitals, schools, police, fire brigades, libraries, and clubs and associations, people have to interact on a daily basis with organisations.

Listening is important and at times challenging one-on-one and in small groups – as many of us are reminded from time to time by our families.

Organisational listening involves some special challenges. In using the term 'organisational listening' I am not trying to anthropomorphise organisations. Even though listening ultimately has to be done by people, organisations need to be able to engage in **large-scale listening** often to thousands, hundreds of thousands, or even millions of customers, members, patients, students, and citizens. Also, listening in organisations is **distributed and delegated** to various functions and units. Therefore, organisational listening is shaped by **systemic and institutional factors** including culture, structures, policies, processes, and technologies, as well as human factors.

But, whereas listening receives close attention in interpersonal communication and fields such as psychology and leadership, there has been relatively little study of how, to what extent, or even whether organisations that we depend on – including many that are established to serve us – listen. The importance of listening at a social, cultural, political, and commercial level is well established in a substantial body of research literature.

John Dewey said "society exists … in **communication**"[4]. By this he meant that society – the coming together and functioning of groups of people as communities, businesses, and organisations – is impossible without communication. James Carey noted the importance of **conversation**[5] and he and many others have identified communication as "the organizing element of human life"[6].

But what of listening specifically?

Well, most of us know that talking – as much as we like to do it – does not on its own constitute communication.

Communication is defined as **two-way** interaction.

Furthermore, we define communication as being composed of **dialogue** drawing on seminal work such as that of Mikhail Bakhtin[7] and Martin Buber[8], not monologue or what Buber calls "monologue disguised as dialogue". As Hans Georg Gadamer emphasised, it requires **openness to the other**[9].

As Leslie Baxter says more recently, dialogue is **not turn-taking at speaking**[10].

Communication is *transactional*, not *transmissional*.

In short, communication must involve **speaking and listening**.

The eminent US communication studies scholar Robert Craig defines communication as "talking and listening"[11].

Similarly, Nick Couldry, who inspired some of the research that I will talk about this evening, says that what we call **voice** – particularly "voice that matters" – is the "implicitly linked practices of speaking and listening"[12].

In a **democracy**, in particular, *vox populi* – the voice of the people – is the basis of legitimacy and policy. It is actually explicit in democratic political theory that politicians and governments listen to the people. Andrew Dobson's 2014 book, *Listening for Democracy*, gave us one of the first signs that part of the malaise in Western democracies might be to do with listening[13].

Recently, governments in many countries have launched initiatives variously called **open government**, **open policy**, and new-age terms such as **Gov 2.0** emphasising (allegedly) openness and two-way interaction.

Governments and commercial organisations today profess to want **engagement** and **relationships** with those they call **stakeholders**. In fact, *engagement* has been labelled one of the buzzwords of the decade[14].

But how do public communication, 'voice that matters', two-way interaction, open government and open policy, engagement, relationships, and even democracy itself, exist if listening is done poorly, or sometimes not at all, by the organisations that represent us and govern our lives in various ways?

Before I address that question, I need to define what I mean by listening. If we have unrealistic expectations of listening, it is bound to fall short. On the other hand, tokenistic efforts and various forms of *pseudo-listening* or pretend listening do not meet the requirements of communication, social and democratic political theory – or indeed the reasonable expectations of those who neoliberalism likes to call *consumers*, but who are more accurately and respectfully recognised as citizens, or as staff, customers, members, patients, students, and so on.

In my book on organisational listening published earlier this year, I identify what I call **seven canons of listening**, drawing on communication studies, sociology, psychology, and ethics including the work of Susan Bickford[15], Axel Honneth[16], Charles Husband[17], Sarah Lundsteen[18], Roger Silverstone[19], and others. To be open, ethical, and effective, listening should involve:

1. ***Recognition*** of individuals and groups as having a right to speak and be listened to. Listening is often selective, with many individuals and groups in society marginalised and disenfranchised;

2. ***Acknowledgement*** – Something we learned from the 2008 Obama presidential campaign is the importance of acknowledging expressions of voice such as letters, e-mails, submissions, and so on;

3. ***Paying attention*** to others;

4. ***Interpreting*** what is said by them as fairly and accurately as possible, noting that not everyone can express their views articulately and that sometimes people will be emotional. Insistence, for example, on rational, formal submissions closes down listening;

5. Trying as far as possible to gain ***understanding*** of others;

6. Giving ***consideration*** to what they say; and

7. ***Responding*** in some appropriate way. Listening does NOT necessarily require *agreement* or acceptance and, interestingly, research shows that people generally do not expect that organisations will always do or be able to do what they request. In fact, public expectations are actually low. Recent research in the UK found that 70% of UK citizens do not believe the national government is listening to them[20].

The Organisational Listening Project Stage 1

Against that backdrop, in 2014 I set out on a two-year, three-country study of organisational listening. I will just briefly explain the methodology of the study to give a sense of the depth and therefore the legitimacy of the findings.

The Organisational Listening Project Stage 1 involved analysis of **36 case studies** – 18 government departments and agencies; 14 corporations; and 4 non-government organisations in Australia, the UK, and the USA.

In these organisations, I looked at up to eight functions or units that could potentially involve listening including:

*   Research;
*   Corporate communication or public relations;
*   Government communication;
*   Organisational internal communication;
*   Customer relations;

- Public consultation;
- Social media; and
- Correspondence units (i.e., those handling inquiries, letters, e-mails, and complaints).

All organisations were studied in their natural setting over a period of several days or even several weeks in some cases using **triangulation** of three research methods:

1. **In-depth interviews** with the heads of the various functions that involve communication as I have just listed. Up to **seven interviews** were conducted in some organisations and more than **1,000 pages of verbatim transcripts** were analysed using **NVivo**;

2. To verify claims made in interviews, **content analysis was conducted on more than 400 documents** such as communication, consultation, research and various other plans and reports. For instance, if an organisation claimed to have done public consultation, the report of the consultation was examined to validate the claims;

3. **25 field tests** were conducted in which real-life inquiries, comments requiring a response, or genuine complaints were submitted by research associates to the organisations and their response tracked.

Key findings

The first and last questions asked of organisations tell the story.

First, despite gaining introductions to organisations through trusted third parties, or having a personal contact, **20% of the organisations contacted did not respond in any way**.

The last question asked of participating organisations was their confirmation or challenge to my estimate based on my interviews, observation, and document analysis of the percentage of their resources and time that was devoted to distributing their organisation's messages (i.e., speaking) compared with the resources and time devoted to listening to stakeholders and publics. **The organisations studied agreed that, on average, 80% of their communicative efforts were focussed on speaking**.

In some organisations, **up to 95% of their communicative efforts were devoted to distributing their messages (i.e., speaking)**.

Furthermore, when organisations do listen, the study found a predominant focus on *instrumental listening*. That is to say, listening is undertaken mainly to achieve the objectives of the organisation. For example:

- Research and public consultations most typically **seek answers to the questions that the organisations want to ask**;

- Research is also mainly undertaken to gain information that helps organisations **target** potential customers or citizens with messages or products;

- Customer relations is mainly undertaken for **pacification** in aggravated cases and increasingly for **upselling** as part of marketing.

- Even **social media** are used by organisations primarily for posting their messages rather than listening to the conversations and comments of citizens, customers, and other stakeholders.

Despite the fact that the research was open and transparent in that I told the participants that I was exploring organisational listening, the most common terms used by interviewees in discussing their day-to-day work were "**informing**", "**disseminating**", "**educating**", "**showing**", "**telling**", and "**distributing**".

I summarised from this stage of research that "**most organisations listen sporadically, poorly at best, and sometimes not at al**l" to their stakeholders and publics.

It seems strange and sad that today we have the **skills and technologies to listen to the universe, but we often don't listen to the people around us**.

The study concluded that, in the name of public communication and related practices such as consultation and engagement, organisations create a sophisticated *architecture of speaking* such as through the practices of advertising, public relations, marketing communication, promotional events, sponsorships, Web sites, and even social media.

It recommended that organisations need to counter-balance this brutalist architecture of near non-stop speaking with an *architecture of listening*.

I propose an ***architecture** of listening* because organisational listening cannot be achieved simply by conducting the occasional 'listening exercise' or adding on a piece of technology such as a social media monitoring application. The study proposed that an *architecture of listening* requires eight key elements, namely:

- A **culture** for listening – organisations need to want to listen;
- The **politics** of listening need to be addressed, such as selective listening to certain voices, while others are marginalised;
- **Policies** need to be put in place for listening;
- **Structures and processes** need to exist for listening;
- **Technologies** certainly can play a key role in listening;
- **Resources** need to applied to listening;
- **Skills** are required for listening; and finally and importantly
- There needs to be **articulation** of listening to decision-making and policy making.

Proposing an *architecture of listening* to facilitate large-scale organization-public communication is not intended to be prescriptive or suggest a single solution. The overall framework of an *architecture of listening* not only leaves room for, but encourages creativity, innovation, and customisation. Like built architecture, there can be many forms, many styles, and infinitely varying scales. Furthermore, it is not only about creating structures, but about creating spaces in which people can interact with organisations in mutually beneficial ways and an environment that is open and inclusive.

But the story does not stop with an architecture of listening. Beyond my first overall research question of 'how and how well do organisations listen', a number of additional questions present themselves.

The first of these is what should be done?

First of all, organisations also can listen through a more open approach to:

- **Social and market research**;
- **Public consultation**;
- **Stakeholder engagement**;
- **Customer relations**;

- **Correspondence** such as inquiries and complaints received; and
- **Social media**.

As well as identifying a number of failures to listen, The Organisational Listening Project did find some exemplars and specialised initiatives in organisational listening that are informative such as:

- The **MasterCard Conversation Suite** is a multi-million dollar investment in social media listening. A dedicated team of analysts in New York monitors 6,000 key words in 26 languages across traditional and social media globally 24/7. In 2015, the system was annually identifying 36,000 traditional media articles and more than three million social media items and prompting MasterCard executives to respond to those considered to require or warrant a response. This technology-based system is commendable in many respects, although inevitably it has an ultimate focus on **marketing** MasterCard's brand and products;

- **Behavioural insights** is an innovative approach to research and strategic planning being used by UK government departments. This approach, which uses an iterative trialling and testing methodology to identify audience preferences and gain engagement has been used to reduce missed medical appointments and increase blood donations in the UK – although I must caution that this technique, referred to colloquially as '**nudge marketing**', can also be used for manipulative purposes.

In addition, the study identified other potential methods of organisational listening in the literature studied. Basic simple methods include:

- **Listening posts**;
- **Citizen juries**;
- **Trust networks**;
- **Study circles**;
- **Customer engagement summits**;
- **Reconciliation committees**;
- **Ombuds**;
- **Community liaison officer** appointments;
- **Advisory boards and committees**;
- Public diplomacy techniques such as **turn taking** at presenting with reciprocal listening.

More advanced and specialised initiatives or methods to increase listening identified in literature include:

- Government regulatory initiatives such as the **National Commission for Public Debate (NCPD)** [*Commision Nationale du Débat Public*] established in France in 1995 that was the topic a public lecture here at LSE in 2015;

- The *argumentation tools and argument mapping* technologies of the **MIT Deliberatorium**, an online consultation and collaboration experiment to conduct debates on major issues such as climate change;

- **Deliberative polls**[21], which recognise the weaknesses of traditional polls and surveys that gain 'off the top of the head' responses to a narrow set of questions and, instead, explore audience views in two waves – first by introducing the topic on which response is sought, then allowing participants time to reflect and discuss the issue often over several days or even weeks, before finally recording their views. The results are much more considered responses and provide deeper understanding and insights;

- **Sense making methodology**, which I cannot go into in detail here, but which goes even further than deliberative polls to gain deep insights into participants' views. I encourage you to read Brenda Dervin's work on SMM[22].

So, there are methods from basic to advanced approaches through which organisations can listen more effectively – although some of these have not been tested in practice and there are legitimate questions about the time required and cost.

Identifying these methods for improving organisational listening and discussions with colleagues including some of the participants in the first stage of the project from the UK Government, led to the next very important question and to a second stage of my project.

After presenting my findings in various fora, including to the Cabinet Office, Whitehall, the question was asked: How can we implement and test the recommendations of The Organisational Listening Project? In other words, how can we operationalise the methods I have mentioned?

The Organisational Listening Project Stage II

Thus was born The Organisational Listening Project Stage II in which I have been engaged here in the UK since early June this year.

My answer to the previous question was to propose a **participatory action research** project in which I and potentially other researchers work collaboratively with one or more volunteering organisations to implement various listening strategies and methods and track the costs and time involved; the skills, tools and technologies required; and, very importantly, benefits that can be identified through evaluation.

I must acknowledge the **Cabinet Office, Whitehall** and the **UK Government Communication Service** in particular for supporting this further stage of research and the **UK Department of Health** for volunteering as a site to conduct participatory action research (PAR) into ways to improve organisational listening. Also, a number of UK arm's length bodies (ALBs) in health including NHS England and Public Health England, and several other UK government departments are collaborating.

This cooperation means that The Organisational Listening Project Stage II is focussed on **government** at this stage. However, I still hold out hope that a **corporation** might step up to participate as well.

At this stage we are only six months into implementing strategies for improved organisational listening, so we cannot present conclusive or final discoveries. However, I can share with you some important additional findings and provide a progress report on some specific initiatives that are underway and which look promising.

I will report briefly on five areas.

1. Public consultation
First, public consultation, because this is one of the most explicit sites in which governments purport to listen to various stakeholders and citizens.

Governments have made public consultation mandatory in many circumstances. However, this has bureaucratised and formalised the process to the extent that the current system does not serve stakeholders or citizens well in many cases. Observation inside the planning of public consultations and analysis of consultation submissions have revealed several issues.

- Consultations mostly attract **the 'usual suspects'** – i.e., major organisations and elites. Many with an interest in consultation issues do not have the time, skills, or desire to write formal submissions and there is little or no *outreach*. For example, a public consultation on the proposed high speed train project (HS2) attracted considerable input from industry and business lobbies. But a farmer in the Midlands is unlikely to make a submission online to a consultation conducted from London – even if the proposed train is going to run through his back field.

  [LISTENING INITIATIVE] To address this, a number of **outreach measures** are being planned, including field visits by Government Communication Service (GCS) staff and extension of community engagement to 'fish where the fish are', as marketers say – such as going to working men's clubs to talk about men's health issues rather than expecting them to come to seminars.

- Submissions to public consultations are generally **not acknowledged**.

  [LISTENING INITIATIVE] Lack of acknowledgement of submissions, or any inquiry or contact, undermines trust in the process. This is basic human nature: if we don't hear back, people assume that their communication has been ignored. To help address this, the Department of Health has recently invested in an **automated e-mail system** that can generate acknowledgement e-mails for public submissions as well as other communication such as correspondence.

- Submissions to public consultations are often **not analysed in detail**, particularly when large volumes of submissions are received – and you could argue that those are the times when government should be listening most. For example, in 2015, the NHS Mandate public consultation, which seeks views from a wide section of the community on expectations and views of the future of the NHS, attracted **127,400 submissions – many of them up to 20 pages. More than half a million pages**. The staff responsible did not have any specialist tools, or the skills, to analyse this volume of unstructured data in detail and had to rely on manual reading and summarizing. This is a classic example of why I am concerned about organisational listening. While, ultimately, humans in management roles in organisations need to listen, organisational listening is dependent on a range of systemic and institutional factors that to date have not been addressed in academic disciplines or in practice.

  LISTENING INITIATIVE: In September 2016 the Department of Health used **Method52**, a UK-developed text analysis application that incorporates active machine learning to re-analyse the 127,400 submissions. Method52 was developed by researchers at the University of Sussex in partnership with DEMOS and is similar to other robust text analysis systems such as NVivo; MAXQDA; the IBM, SAP, and SAS Text Analytics packages; and R, an open source text mining and sentiment analysis package. This in-depth analysis found seven further findings. Furthermore, through categorisation and coding it found that several thousand of the submissions were from health professionals, some with 20 or more years of experience in the health system, as well as from patients reporting their experiences. Senior medical practitioners rarely attend focus groups. But, tragically, these voices were not listened to at the time. Half a million pages of public feedback was not processed – not through lack of civil service dedication I must add, but because of a lack of systems, tools, processes, and resources.

2. *Correspondence*
   Most large government departments in the UK receive between 40,000 and 70,000 pieces of correspondence a year in the form of e-mails and letters. These are quite diligently recorded and responded to individually. However, there is no analysis of correspondence as a total data set to identify patterns, key themes, geolocation trends, and so on.

[LISTENING INITIATIVE] In the next month or so Method52 will be used in a trial to analyse correspondence to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Health over a 12 months period and possibly up to three years for how it might provide further insights into public concerns and issues of interest.

3. *Complaints*

Complaints are similarly dealt with individually is a quite robust way. However, again, few government bodies conduct analysis of complaints over time to identify patterns, major themes, 'hot-spots' based on geographic data, and so on. To show the value of complaints analysis, two of my colleagues at LSE have analysed hospital complaints over a number of years and found that certain types of complaints about safety and quality of care, not simply the volume of complaints, are leading indicators of mortality in the subsequent year. In some cases, it can be established that lack of listening can cost lives.

[LISTENING INITIATIVE] A number of NHS Trusts are now using a Health Complaints Analysis Tool (HCAT for short) developed at LSE and the UK government is considering wider use of this tool in health and other fields.

4. *Lack of data sharing and data management*

A fourth major finding of Stage II of The Organisational Listening Project, and a further example of the systemic and institutional aspects or organisational listening, is the discovery that UK government departments and agencies, as examples of large organisations, have terabytes and possibly petabytes of data from surveys, focus groups, public consultations, forums, and so on. But these are used by the originating agency for their specific objectives at the time and then stored in 'data siloes' on servers behind firewalls inaccessible to others.

I must emphasise that I am speaking here of general research data and public feedback. Official records would appear to be managed well, and data such as personal medical records clearly need to be stored securely and used under strict conditions.

But when stakeholders and citizens give feedback to their government in surveys, focus groups, or public consultations, I believe that they expect the government as a whole to take notice and consider the information provided.

Currently, however, there is **no data centre or knowledge management system** in place in relation to social research and public feedback in the UK Government Communication Service or policy units. I suspect it is much the same in many other organisations. So-called '**Big Data**' is a bit like Big Foot – a very large somewhat mythical monster that we believe is out there somewhere and which we talk about a lot, but about which we know very little and fear.

[LISTENING INITATIVE] The introduction of a knowledge management system or some form of data warehousing has been recommended and is currently being investigated by the Cabinet Office.

5. *Social media listening*

The fifth example of systemic non-listening that I must mention is that during my 2014–2015 research, only two organisations out of the 36 studied used social media for listening – one of which was MasterCard as mentioned before. Despite the two-way conversational nature of social media and their enormous popularity as sites of public comment and discussion, the overwhelming use of these open, interactive channels by organisations has been posting organisational messages and marketing materials. While social media do not provide comment

from representative samples, they are an unprecedented source of fast feedback and a site to listen to the conversations of groups of people about various issues.

[LISTENING INITIATIVE] I am pleased to say that the Department of Health where I am currently doing participatory action research has established a special **Digital Listening team** that focusses entirely on **digital listening** and reports insights gained across the organisation. Hopefully this is a pilot that will be rolled out to other government departments and agencies.

There are a number of other issues that stymie listening that I could talk about, but time will only allow me to briefly mention a couple more examples.

1. There is a heavy focus on quantitative research, particularly **polling**, in government. Quantitative methods, metrics, and analytics also dominate research in the commercial sector. While quantitative research is necessary in a number of circumstances, in-depth understanding of citizens and communities is more likely to come from **qualitative research** and I argue that there needs to be an increase in the use of qualitative research;

2. There is a strong focus in government, particularly in Number 10, Downing Street on **campaigns**. However, campaigns are what the government wants to tell people. There needs to be more focus on understanding what the people want to tell government;

3. Despite audience fragmentation and a decline in the influence of traditional mass media, there remains a **preoccupation with traditional media** – the major newspapers and TV networks in particular – especially among politicians and their special advisers (read 'spin doctors' if you wish).

I have been asked about **listening by politicians** as opposed to the civil service. While I have not focussed on politicians, my close observation over the past three years suggests that politicians do listen. But they listen **selectively**. This occurs because they live in two bubbles:

1. The **Westminster Bubble** in which media headlines of the so-called 'mainstream media' are believed to reflect and influence stakeholders and the public, as I mentioned a moment ago. However, most of the London editors and journalists they talk to live in the same bubble. And traditional media have themselves substantially lost public support, which should serve as a warning about their representativeness;

2. The **political party bubble**. Visits by politicians to their electorates and wards are arranged by political party faithful and their policies are largely informed by the views of their party. However, the membership of the three main political parties in the UK comprises just **1.6% of eligible voters**[23]. 1.6%! A tiny minority.

So what? Why should organisations listen more?

The final question that arises on which I would like to conclude is the ultimate question in research – **so what**? Why should organisations listen more? What are the potential benefits of improved listening by organisations versus costs and effort?

As part of the research project we have reached out to studies in other disciplines including business and management studies, political science research in relation to 'the democratic deficit', and sociological research in relation to disengagement, marginalisation, and even radicalisation.

When we look around in our society, we can't help but notice:

- **Declining trust in government** – The OECD reported in 2014 that only 40% of UK citizens trust the national government overall and that this has declined since 2007. This reflects findings in a number of developed democracies such as the USA where only slightly more than one-third of citizens trust the national government overall, and in France less than 30% of citizens trust the national government[24]. Young people, in particular, do not trust government and are turning away from democratic participation. For example, a 2015 Harvard University study found that **only 14% of 18–29 year old Americans trust the US Congress** and only 20% trust the federal government[25].

- **Declining participation and disengagement** in democracy. This is evident in low voter turn-outs in some areas and in some demographics. The percentage of eligible UK voters who voted in the 2015 national election (66.1%) was only slightly higher than the lowest voter turnout since World War II that occurred in 2001. In a 2012 by-election, only **12% of the constituents of Manchester Central in north-west England voted** – the lowest voter turn-out since 1945. Under a headline 'Apathy central: where people see no point in casting a vote', *The Guardian* commented: "Either the people of Manchester Central have given up on Westminster politics or it has given up on them"[26]. Also, membership of political parties that influence pre-selection of political candidates and shape party policies is declining. For example, the total **membership of the three largest political parties in the UK is just 1.6% of the eligible voters** in this country.

- **Declining trust in business** as reported in successive years by the Edelman Trust Barometer[27].

- Business studies also report **declining employee loyalty and retention** and **declining customer loyalty and retention**.

- We are also seeing **radicalization, particularly of young people** in formerly mature, stable democracies.

While identifying the benefits of improved organisational listening needs further research, studies available do indicate that more open, ethical and effective listening by organisations such as governments, corporations, and NGOs could afford a number of significant potential benefits including:

- **Increased trust in government**;
- **Increased participation** in democratic politics and civil society;
- **Increased trust in business** and improved reputation;
- **Increased employee loyalty, retention, and productivity**;
- **Customer retention**;
- **Reduced issues and crises**; and very importantly
- A **more equitable society**.

If you feel that these claims are overblown and that listening is not as important as I say, try this experiment. After you go home tonight to your husbands, wives, partners, children, and friends, spend the next month talking. Talk and talk and talk – and don't listen. See how those around you react and how your relationships go.

The great British physicist and philosopher Isaac Newton who gave us understanding of gravity and who said "If I have seen further than others, it is by standing upon the shoulders of giants", also said "we build too many walls and not enough bridges"[28].

When we are trying to resolve an issue or build a relationship, we often say 'we need to talk'. But **listening** is one of the most effective bridges between humans and between groups in society.

I hope that my organisational listening research can continue with the goodwill that it has received so far – and of course the necessary research funding – because I believe it can lead to significant social impact.

As well as interpersonal listening, effective organizational listening can afford new opportunities to create **understanding**, **insights**, **positive relationships**, **sustainable businesses**, **democratic legitimacy**, and an **equitable society**.

Thank you.

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