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SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

Learning to listen: Downstream effects of listening training on employees' relatedness, burnout, and turnover intentions

Guy Itzchakov[1] | Netta Weinstein[2] | Arik Cheshin[1]

[1]Department of Human Services, University of Haifa, Haifa, Israel

[2]University of Reading, Reading, UK

Correspondence
Guy Itzchakov, Department of Human Services, University of Haifa, 199 Aba Khoushy Ave. Mount Carmel, Haifa 3498838, Israel.
Email: gitzchako@univ.haifa.ac.il

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Abstract

The present work focuses on listening training as an example of a relational human resource practice that can improve human resource outcomes: Relatedness to colleagues, burnout, and turnover intentions. In two quasi-field experiments, employees were assigned to either a group listening training or a control condition. Both immediately after training and after 3 weeks later, receiving listening training was shown to be linked to higher feelings of relatedness with colleagues, lower burnout, and lower turnover intentions. These findings suggest that listening training can be harnessed as a powerful human resource management tool to cultivate stronger relationships at work. The implications for Relational Coordination Theory, High-Quality Connections Theory, and Self-Determination Theory are discussed.

KEYWORDS
burnout, human resource management, listening, training, workplace relationships

1 | INTRODUCTION

Effective listening is vital for employees and their organization (Flynn et al., 2008; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018). The benefits include enhanced performance (e.g., higher volume of sales; Bergeron & Laroche, 2009; Itani et al., 2019; Johnston & Reed, 2017), job satisfaction (Tangirala & Ramanujam, 2012), organizational commitment (Tucker & Turner, 2015), creativity (Castro et al., 2018), and work engagement (Jonsdottir & Kristinsson, 2020). Listening may result in more positive workplace outcomes because it is essential for facilitating positive workplace relationships and their associated organizational outcomes (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Managers consider poor listening to be a problem that leads to ineffective performance and low productivity (Hunt & Cusella, 1983). Given the advantages and importance of listening, organizations, and specifically human resources management (HRM), may want to invest time and effort in improving their employees' listening skills (Gilchrist & Van Hoeven, 1994). In this article, we examine through two quasi-field experiments the implications of investment in training employees how to listen well for workplace relationships, which we operationalize through interpersonal closeness. We also test the effects of workplace listening for reducing burnout and turnover intention. In many cases, employees leave high-paying jobs because they are dissatisfied with the social atmosphere in the organization (Griffeth et al., 2000). We argue that feeling heard and related to others at work should make employees less emotionally exhausted (i.e., burnout) and less likely to leave the organization (i.e., turnover intentions), and that listening training can bring about these positive workplace outcomes.

Organizations spend a vast amount of money on training. For example, in 2018, corporations spent over 87.6 billion dollars on corporate training and development in the United States alone. Thus, training employees is a central part of HRM and involves planning, implementing, and evaluating. Researchers state that training must be accompanied by empirical research (Salas et al., 2012). Unfortunately, many training programs are not examined by rigorous research. Here, we test a specific form of training: training for listening skills. Listening facilitates better relationships and connections among individuals (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), and as such, can contribute to work

relationships and potentially reduce turnover. Thus, human resource (HR) managers should have a vested interest in the benefits the organization could reap from this type of training, especially given current empirical evidence, which suggests that listening training successfully increases employees' ability to listen. For example, a meta-analysis of 32 studies totaling 3298 participants found that the average effect size of training participation on listening behaviors was $r = 0.38$, 95% *CI* [0.30, 0.46], $\tau = 0.21$, with no evidence of publication bias (Kluger, 2020).

However, while the evidence above points to the efficacy of listening training on listening skills, much less is known about its downstream consequences for employees. Only a few studies attempted to test training-induced outcomes beyond the immediate improvement in attendees' listening abilities. One such study reported that corporate administrators who took part in active listening training evidenced a significant reduction in their type A behavior pattern (Matthews, 1982). In addition, a quasi-experiment on the effects of listening training on psychiatric nurses showed that during shifts of trained nurses, physical restraint of patients dropped by more than 25% (Gonzalez, 2009). Listening training also reduced employees' state anxiety levels (Itzchakov, 2020) and increased their self-awareness and attitude complexity toward work-related issues (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017a). Thus, in a handful of studies, listening training led to more effective and productive work behaviors. However, its effects on workplace interpersonal and organizational outcomes remain unexplored.

1.1 | Training for positive relationships in the workplace

We base the current work on theorizing that listening is essential for facilitating positive workplace relationships (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2018; Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). Individuals have an innate need to be listened to and feel understood by others (Reis et al., 2017; Rogers, 1975). A colleague or a manager who genuinely listens to an employee implicitly sends messages such: "you are important to me," "your perspectives and feelings matter," and "you belong" (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). Moreover, employees who experience high-quality listening are likely to reciprocate by listening well to others (Kluger et al., 2021), thus building close relationships by creating a mutual sense of "togetherness" as described in the Episodic Listening Theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). When dyad members experience togetherness, they become more open-minded, which, in turn, facilitates increased well-being, creativity, and clarity (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022). In addition, a recent survey found that more than a third of employees felt the greatest sense of relatedness to their work when their colleagues or managers listened to their professional or personal stories, both personally and professionally (COQUAL, 2020).

Thus, listening skills may underlie the types of constructive workplace relationships that are central to positive workplace environments. Established theories in positive organizational psychology such as High-Quality Connection (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Stephens et al., 2012) and Relational Coordination Theory (Gittell, 2016; Gittell et al., 2000) highlight the importance of communication, which listening is a major part of, in building effective and constructive workplace relationships (Bolton et al., 2021; Stephens et al., 2012). Although listening is rarely explicitly mentioned in these theories, it is safe to assume it plays a central role in the communication processes described by them. Furthermore, Self-Determination Theory (Deci et al., 2017; Deci & Ryan, 2000) argues that feeling close and connected (i.e., relatedness need satisfaction) is a critical contributor to workplace well-being. Consistent with how these theories view workplace relationships, high-quality listening can be thought of as involving patterns of communication exchange and responses where the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dynamics among individuals comprise and influence relational and group processes. Namely, employees who feel that their colleagues genuinely listen to them should experience more positive feelings at work (i.e., affective dynamics; Lloyd, Boer, Kluger, et al., 2015), gain knowledge (Albada et al., 2014), role clarity (Cohen, 2013) (i.e., cognitive dynamics), and enhanced performance (i.e., behavioral dynamics; Bergeron & Laroche, 2009). Listening should trigger positive group processes such as increased intimacy and willingness to help one another (Kluger et al., 2021), which are essential for effective coordination.

Based on theorizing and research reviewed above, we believe that organizations and leaders can enhance the extent to which employees feel related or belong to their workplace by implementing listening training as an HR practice to promote positive work relationships. Training is needed because the present state of listening at work is far from ideal. For example, a recent survey of 300 US employees shows that those in nonmanagerial roles tend to be dissatisfied with the listening efforts in their organization (Neill & Bowen, 2021).

Therefore, the present work focuses on listening training, a practical way to enhance listening and relatedness in the workplace. Through doing this, we aim to advance one step further from most prior studies on listening training, which focused solely on enhancing listening skills (e.g., Baum & Gray, 1992; Cho et al., 2016), and test the downstream effects of listening training on relatedness need satisfaction. A recent line of work started to test the effect of listening on speakers' sense of relatedness to their listeners and found that speakers report higher relatedness to them (Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Weinstein et al., 2021). Yet, these studies included only laboratory experiments and were not in the context of the workplace.

Specifically, we hypothesize that:

> **H1.** *Listening training would increase employees' relatedness to their colleagues*.

1.2 | The effect of listening training on burnout and turnover intentions

Colleagues are a significant source of social influence on individuals and provide social and emotional resources to one another when they listen (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017a, 2017b). These resources (along with

the supervisor) impact employees' ability to regulate emotions (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003). Colleagues perceived as good listeners may reduce emotional exhaustion, the core component of burnout (Seidler et al., 2014), by offering social and emotional support (Ashford et al., 2009). Listening is a specific form of social support (Itzchakov et al., 2022; Weinstein et al., 2022) that can promote transparent communication and the sharing of distressing thoughts and emotions, preventing burnout escalation (Wilk & Moynihan, 2005). Empirically and conceptually, feeling listened to has been negatively associated with feelings of burnout (Lloyd, Boer, Keller, et al., 2015; Pines et al., 2002), with meta-analytic findings estimating the association between perceived listening and speakers' burnout ($K = 10$, $N = 3858$) at $r = -0.28$ 95% *CI* [−0.32, −0.23] (Kluger, 2020). This effect size is in the top third of the correlations within the field of applied psychology (Bosco et al., 2015). In line with this previous cross-sectional work, our second hypothesis is:

H2. *Listening training would reduce employees' burnout*.

Furthermore, burnout is positively associated with turnover intentions (Chami-Malaeb, 2021; Fukui et al., 2019). Turnover intentions are defined as employees' thoughts about quitting their job or finding a new job outside the workplace boundaries (Mobley et al., 1978). One of the critical roles of HRM is to employ strategies that make their employees feel valuable, thus lessening their thoughts of leaving the organization (Raza & Nadeem, 2018). Training can be a valuable strategy as it signals to employees that the organization wants to invest in them and wants them to stay on as part of the organization in the future to showcase the skills they are being trained to master (e.g., Memon et al., 2016). Empirically, field studies have reported a negative correlation between the extent to which employees feel listened to and their turnover intentions (Bregenzer et al., 2020; Lloyd, Boer, Keller, et al., 2015). However, these studies have not manipulated listening behaviors directly and are uninformative regarding the directionality of the relationship. Whether listening training can reduce turnover intentions is an important theoretical and practical question because turnover entails costs to organizations such as lost productivity and knowledge and can harm the organization's reputation (Shaw et al., 2005). Thus, we hypothesize that:

H3. *Listening training would reduce employee turnover intentions*.

1.3 | Stability of listening training

To date, there is little research on the stability of listening training in the workplace on employees' listening abilities. To our present knowledge, only one study tested the stability of listening training (Itzchakov, 2020). However, this work focused on listeners (customer service employees) and not speakers and did not measure organizational outcomes. Furthermore, Gayed et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review and a meta-analysis on social support training for managers. They noted that: "…information on organizational stability was not captured in the included studies, the impact of it remains uncertain" (p. 468). The question of stability is important from a practical standpoint because organizations invest time and money in listening training and expect lasting effects. Put differently, given a large amount of money, time, and effort invested in such HR practices, organizations should be able to consult scientific evidence on whether the training was effective in the short term (i.e., immediately after the program) and in the longer term.

Thus, we explore the following research question (RQ):

RQ. Does listening training have positive stable effects on listening abilities, relatedness, and burnout?

2 | OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENT STUDIES

Two studies examined whether listening training has immediate and lasting effects on relatedness (Studies 1 and 2), burnout (Studies 1 and 2), and turnover intention (Study 2).

We conducted two quasi-field experiments to test these hypotheses. In both studies, the HR departments assigned entire work teams to either the listening training condition or the control condition. Therefore, there were not enough repetitions of assignments to conditions necessary to create a fully a-priori equivalence (Cook & Campbell, 1979; Eden, 2017). A quasi-experiment is considered the "silver standard" in organizational research and is recommended when a true experiment is impossible (King et al., 2013).

In Study 1 ($N = 51$), employees from several work teams in a high-tech company (experimental group) received 12 h of listening training. The control group was composed of employees from different work teams in the same company who were placed on a waiting list (who did not receive training). The company's HRs department randomly assigned the work teams to the listening training or the waiting list. Both groups completed measures of their colleagues' listening abilities (manipulation check), relatedness need satisfaction, burnout, and demographics at three different points in time before the listening training (Baseline), shortly after the training (T1), and a few weeks afterward (T2). Study 2 ($N = 73$) was a conceptual replication and expansion of Study 1. In Study 2, two instructors delivered a 15-h listening training course. The experimental group was compared to an active control group that was given a different form of training (i.e., lectures on various work-related issues). The study took place in an insurance company and involved customer service employees in two company branches. We randomly selected one branch of the company for the listening training and the other branch for the control intervention, which included a series of lectures on different work-related topics. The employees completed the same measures as in Study 1 and an additional questionnaire that assessed turnover intentions. We also included examples of exercises from the listening training in the studies (see Appendix).

Note that an improvement in the listening abilities of individual employees should affect those with whom they interact, including the dependent variables. Employees assigned to a control group who work together closely (e.g., in the same work teams) with employees from the listening training group might also be affected by the variables associated with the training course, making it difficult to isolate the effects of the listening manipulation. For this reason, in both studies, the participants in the control group were selected specifically not to have a close working relationship with the participants assigned to the listening training group. Finally, in the Supporting Information, we provide some examples of the content of the listening training program.

3 | STUDY 1

3.1 | Method

3.1.1 | Participants

Participants were employees from a high-tech company in Israel that provides solutions to traders who trade on behalf of institutional and retail clients and make buy-and-sell decisions about investing in its shares. Fifty-four employees agreed to participate in the training sessions. The HR department was in charge of the assignment to the training (i.e., experiment) and the control groups. The HR department was asked to randomly assign entire work teams with consistent work relationships to either the listening training or control conditions. Entire work teams were assigned to the same condition to prevent a spillover effect of potential training-induced effects on the control group. The different work teams did not have many daily interactions with one another.

Twenty-eight employees took part in the listening training course. One employee left the company during the training, and his data were not included in the analysis. The final sample size for the listening training group was $n = 27$ (Age $M = 39.63$ years, $SD = 11.49$; 29.6% female). Employees in the control group were on a waiting list and did not receive any type of training. Of the employees in the control groups, two employees filled in the questionnaires only at Baseline, and their data were excluded from the analyses. This resulted in a sample size of $n = 24$ (Age: $M = 42.38$, $SD = 10.18$; 33.3% female). There was no difference in age between groups, $t = -0.90$, $p = 0.37$. There was no difference in the distribution of gender between groups $\chi^2\,(1) = 0.08$, $\phi = 0.04$, $p = 0.78$.

Based on this sample, the post-hoc power analysis was based on the average correlation between listening and burnout, $r = -0.28$ ($k = 8$, $N = 3.858$, Kluger et al., 2021), yielding a Cohen's f of 0.29. Given this correlation, the present study ($N = 51$) had a power above 0.95 to detect a within-between interaction of this magnitude on burnout in a repeated measure design with three measurements, assuming a correlation of 0.50 between the measurements (Faul et al., 2007).

3.1.2 | Procedure

The listening training course consisted of four 3 h sessions, conducted at intervals of approximately 4 weeks. An instructor, a certified expert in the *listening circle* paradigm (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017b), delivered all the sessions. The listening circle paradigm consists of a group and instructor who sit in a circle facing one another. The instructor presents an overview of the history and rationale of the training method.[1] The attendees practice the techniques of the listening circle a few times; then, the instructor asks the group to discuss a particular topic.

Listening circles have four primary guidelines. The first is known as "speaking from the heart" and refers to speaking honestly in the first person, using "I" and not "we" or "us." Speaking from the heart also entails sharing meaningful content, focusing on personal revelations rather than philosophical contemplation, sharing a story rather than making a speech, and avoiding talking about others in the story. Second, only one person in a listening circle can speak at a given time, signaled by a speaking object that is moved around the circle. Listening is understood to be active participation, and speaking is not required. Third, the instructors teach the attendees to avoid giving advice, comments, feedback, or suggestions to one another. Statements such as "I agree with what X said" and are discouraged because a positive evaluation is also considered as expressing judgment (Rogers, 1980) and can create defensiveness among the group members (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). For example, if Beth says that she agrees with what Roger said, Tammy and Zack might feel hurt because Beth did not say that she agrees with them after they spoke. This process can ultimately undermine a sense of closeness and psychological safety in the circle. Avoiding such responses requires practice since people naturally tend to *evaluate* what they hear (Rogers, 1962). The participants can express support through fillers such as "Hum," which are less evaluative by nature.

The fourth guideline is spontaneity or improvisation. Attendees are asked to trust that the right story will come up at the right moment and avoid rehearsing their story before sharing it. It is understood that "rehearsals" can impair both listening to others and speaking authentically. When released from the need to plan, individuals can free up inner space for insights. Holding the talking object quietly for one moment and allowing silence for insights to emerge can help combat automatic and superficial response habits as well as attachment to firmly rooted opinions, which are usually the first to come to a speaker's mind (Zimmerman & Coyle, 2009).

The participants in the control group (i.e., the other branch of the company) did not receive training. Therefore, they had no additional opportunities for social interaction, as did the employees in the experimental group. We measured both groups on all research variables at three time points: 1 week before the training began (Baseline), 1 week after the fourth session (T1), and 3 weeks afterward (T2). Employees in both groups completed the questionnaires on the same dates in each wave of measurement. All participants signed consent forms before starting the training sessions. An institutional review board approved this study.

3.1.3 | Measures

All measures were paired with scales that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*completely*).

Listening quality (manipulation check)

We assessed listening perception on a validated measure that captures the extent to which a participant *felt listened to* by the group, termed the *team listening* environment (TLE; Johnston et al., 2011). Each attendee reported on the listening quality of the colleagues who participated in the training. Previous work found that self-reported and speaker-reported listening have a low correlation (Bodie et al., 2014; Kluger et al., 2021). Thus, because the focal interest in the present work was the effects of being listened to by one's colleagues, we chose a measure that tapped listening as perceived by the speakers. The TLE is composed of six items, including "The other group members genuinely want to hear my point of view" and "The other group members understand me" ($\alpha_{Baseline} = 0.94$, $\alpha_{Time1} = 0.89$, and $\alpha_{Time2} = 0.91$).

Relatedness need satisfaction

We test relatedness because we believe it informs Relational Coordination and High-Quality Connections. We did not directly measure other constructs directly testing these conceptualizations because they were not part of our initial focus. Instead, we focused on the basic psychological process underlying the quality of relationships.

We measured relatedness with team members on the Relatedness at Work Scale (La Guardia et al., 2000). This measure is composed of eight statements including: "I really like the people I work with," I consider the people I work with to be my friends," and "There are not many people at work that I am close to" (reverse-scored; $\alpha_{Baseline} = 0.82$, $\alpha_{Time1} = 0.90$, and $\alpha_{Time2} = 0.88$).

Burnout

We used the emotional exhaustion scale from the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This measure is composed of nine statements, including "I feel emotionally drained from my work," "Working with people directly puts too much stress on me," and "I feel frustrated by my job" ($\alpha_{Baseline} = 0.88$, $\alpha_{Time1} = 0.89$, and $\alpha_{Time2} = 0.90$).

3.2 | Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the correlations between the variables. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations for each group. We report *Cohen's d* using the formula described in Morris and DeShon (2002) for a pretest–post-test design for each comparison.

3.2.1 | Listening quality (manipulation check)

An independent-sample *t*-test revealed no difference between groups in the participants' perception of being heard by their team members before the intervention (i.e., Baseline), $t\ (49) = -0.76$, $p = 0.45$.

We conducted a repeated-measure ANOVA with listening quality and time of measurement as within-participant factors and the experimental group as a between-participants factor. Maulchy's sphericity test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated, $\chi^2\ (2) = 6.74$, $p = 0.03$, $\varepsilon = 0.88$. We followed the recommendation to apply a Huynh–Feldt correction when ε >0.75 (Girden, 1992). A significant within-between interaction was observed, $F\ (1.87, 91.5) = 16.83$, p <0.001, $\eta^2_p = 0.26$. Specifically, participants in the listening training group reported better listening quality on the part of their team members at Time 1 than at the Baseline measurement, $d = 0.99$, p <0.001, and at Time 2 than at Baseline, $d = 0.96$, p <0.001. There was no difference in listening quality between Time 1 and Time 2, $d = -0.25$, $p = 0.35$. With regard to the control group, no differences between Time 1 and Baseline, $d = -0.08$, $p = 0.50$, Time 1 and Time 2, $d = -0.07$, $p = 0.49$, and Time 2 and Baseline, $d = -0.17$, $p = 0.12$ were found. These results suggest that the listening manipulation effectively improved the participants' perceptions of being listened to by their team members.

3.2.2 | Relatedness

No differences emerged between groups when predicting participants' relatedness to colleagues at baseline (i.e., first measurement), $t\ (49) = -0.51$, $p = 0.61$. To test Hypothesis (H1), relatedness and time of measurement as within-participant factors and the listening manipulation as a between-participants factor were subjected to a repeated-measure ANOVA. The assumption of sphericity was not violated, $\chi^2\ (2) = 5.07$, $p = 0.08$, $\varepsilon = 0.91$. The results indicated a significant within-between interaction, $F\ (2, 98) = 9.86$, p <0.01, $\eta_p{}^2 = 0.17$. Participants in the experimental group reported greater relatedness with their teammates at Time 1 than at Baseline, $d = 1.14$, p <0.001, and at Time 2 relative to Baseline, $d = 1.07$, p <0.001. No difference emerged between Time 1 and Time 2: $d = -0.37$, $p = 0.22$. Concerning the control group, no difference for relatedness was found between any of the measurements, Time 1 versus Baseline: $d = -0.02$, $p = 0.89$, Time 1 versus Time 2: $d = 0.05$, $p = 0.66$, and Time 2 versus Baseline: $d = 0.03$, $p = 0.72$. These results lend weight to Hypothesis (H1), which posited that the listening training would lead to greater relatedness over time than the control group; Time 2 apparently achieved these benefits.

3.2.3 | Burnout

An independent-sample *t*-test indicated no difference in burnout between the groups before the intervention, $t\ (49) = -1.00$, $p = 0.92$. The assumption of sphericity was not violated, $\chi^2\ (2) = 0.84$, $p = 0.66$, $\varepsilon = 0.98$ A repeated-measure ANOVA indicated a significant within-between burnout x time of measurement x listening manipulation interaction, $F\ (2, 98) = 4.27$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p{}^2 = 0.08$. Specifically,

TABLE 1 Study 1: correlations among the variables across time points

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Listening quality (Baseline)								
2. Listening quality (Time 1)	0.76**							
3. Listening quality (Time 2)	0.80**	0.89**						
4. Relatedness (Baseline)	0.75**	0.59**	0.62**					
5. Relatedness (Time 1)	0.56**	0.61**	0.61**	0.59**				
6. Relatedness (Time 2)	0.63**	0.66**	0.66**	0.75**	0.71**			
7. Burnout (Baseline)	−0.33*	−0.18	−0.25	−0.32*	−0.30*	−0.26		
8. Burnout (Time 1)	−0.27	−0.26	−0.40**	−0.23	−0.41**	−0.30*	0.52**	
9. Burnout (Time 2)	−0.35*	−0.28*	−0.37**	−0.32*	−0.52**	−0.41	0.63**	0.66**

*p <0.05. **p <0.01.

TABLE 2 Study 1: descriptive statistics for conditions and measurement times

	Listening group						Control group					
	Baseline		Time 1		Time 2		Baseline		Time 1		Time 2	
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Listening quality	6.27	1.20	7.09	0.87	6.99	0.93	6.54	1.40	6.47	1.22	6.39	1.26
Relatedness	5.91	1.08	7.02	1.03	6.73	1.02	6.09	1.42	6.07	1.47	6.12	1.30
Burnout	3.23	1.00	2.45	0.82	2.78	0.98	3.25	1.04	3.23	1.25	3.12	1.23

participants in the experimental group reported lower burnout at Time 1 than at Baseline, $d = -0.80$, $p = 0.001$, and at Time 2 than at Baseline, $d = -0.52$, $p = 0.03$. The mean burnout at Time 2 did not differ from that at Time 1, $d = 0.49$, $p = 0.10$. There was no difference in burnout between any of the measurements in the control group: Time 1 versus Baseline: $d = -0.02$, $p = 0.89$, Time 2 versus Baseline: $d = -0.15$, $p = 0.42$, and Time 2 versus Time 1, $d = -0.11$, $p = 0.55$. These results support Hypothesis (H2) in showing lesser burnout in the listening training than in the control group.

In summary, Study 1 supported Hypotheses (H1) and (H2) and pointed to the lasting effects of the listening training. That is, listening improved the participants' listening skills as rated by their colleagues, increased relatedness to colleagues, and reduced burnout. The results regarding the lasting effects of the listening training were mixed. On the one hand, the nonsignificant differences between the means at T1 (i.e., second measurement) and T2 (i.e., third measurement) on listening quality and relatedness suggest that the effects remained stable up to 3 weeks after training. On the other hand, although the difference between T2 and T1 was not significant in the trained group, all d values were in the direction of showing a weakening effect. That is, listening and relatedness were lower in T2 relative to Time 1 (nonsignificant), and burnout was higher in T2 relative to T1. Thus, a larger sample might have shown that the effect of the training declines over time.

The conclusions of Study 1 should be viewed with caution. First, the listening training intervention was compared to a control group that did not receive any intervention. Arguably, merely allowing employees to spend time with one another in any social activity could result in better listening quality, greater relatedness, and lower burnout. Furthermore, Study 1 did not include a measure of turnover intentions and therefore could not test our hypothesis regarding training effects on this consequential outcome. To address these issues, we conducted a second quasi-field experiment.

4 | STUDY 2

Study 2 had three goals. The first was to replicate the results of Study 1. Second, a more robust experimental test was designed to account for potential alternative explanations by including an active control group. Finally, in Study 2, we tested Hypothesis (H3) on the effect of listening training on turnover intentions. We view training as a core component of HR practices and consider turnover intentions an important outcome. Behavior intentions are the best predictors of behavior (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977), and theories on turnover consider intentions as the critical psychological motivator leading to actual turnover (Holtom et al., 2008), which in turn impacts organizations by increasing replacement costs (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984), decreasing work integration, job satisfaction, and innovation (Price, 1989). Turnover has also been found to damage firms' overall performance (Hancock et al., 2013), especially in the case of voluntary turnover (Park & Shaw, 2013), and lead to knowledge loss (Eckardt et al., 2014).

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Participants

Employees in the service departments of an Israeli insurance company took part. The company employs over 1000 service employees and about 2500 insurance agents who operate in several regional districts. The company is involved in product innovation in all areas of activity and offers general insurance, long-term savings, and health insurance.

In one branch of the company, customer service employees participated in the listening training course ($n = 38$). Two employees left the company during the training course. One employee participated only in two workshops, and another employee did not respond to the surveys at Baseline (i.e., pretraining measurement). Therefore, their data were not included in the data analyses. The final sample size of the listening training group was $n = 34$ (Age: $M = 30.26$ years, $SD = 5.97$, seniority $M = 2.88$, $SD = 2.21$; 52.9% female). Customer service employees in a different company branch were assigned to the control group ($n = 45$). Of these employees, four completed the surveys only once, and three other employees participated in only one or two sessions. The final sample size of the control group was $n = 39$ (Age: $M = 28.72$ years, $SD = 4.33$; Seniority: $M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.44$; 56.4% female). The participants in the experimental and control groups did not differ in terms of age, $t\ (71) = 1.28$, $p = 0.21$, seniority, $t\ (71) = 0.63$, $p = 0.54$, or gender, $\chi^2\ (1) = 0.09$, $\phi = -0.035$, $p = 0.77$.

Power analysis

Power analysis was calculated based on the effect size of the listening manipulation on burnout in Study 1 with $\eta_p{}^2 = 0.08$, which equals a Cohen's d of 0.58. The sample size in the present study ($N = 73$) had a power above 0.95 to detect this effect size in a between-within interaction with two experimental groups and three measurements (Faul et al., 2007).

4.1.2 | Procedure

Two instructors delivered the listening training course. Neither was the instructor in Study 1. The listening training was composed of five sessions, each lasting 3 h. The instructors delivered the sessions 3–4 weeks apart. The paradigm and content of the training were similar to Study 1. However, because the training course was longer, the instructors taught and practiced more content than could be incorporated into Study 1.

Unlike Study 1, in this study, the control group was not on a waiting list. Instead, in the same weeks that the service employees in the experimental group took part in the listening training, service employees in the branch assigned to the control group engaged in an activity that included a lecture and a discussion. The lectures were on conflict management, customer oriented-service, self-enhancement, time management, and creativity. These lectures included discussions among the participants.

Thus, the employees in both conditions had the opportunity to spend time together beyond their everyday work context. This design allowed us to examine an alternative explanation to the findings of Study 1; namely, that merely allowing the participants to spend social time together increased their need for relatedness and reduced their burnout and turnover intentions. As in Study 1, both groups completed the questionnaires at three time points: 1 week before the intervention (Baseline), 1 week after the final session (T1), and 3 weeks afterward (T2).

4.1.3 | Measures

As in Study 1, the measures ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*completely*). The measures used in Study 1 showed high internal reliability in this study: listening quality ($\alpha_{\text{Baseline}} = 0.94$, $\alpha_{\text{Time1}} = 0.92$, $\alpha_{\text{Time2}} = 0.93$), relatedness ($\alpha_{\text{Baseline}} = 0.81$, $\alpha_{\text{Time1}} = 0.91$, $\alpha_{\text{Time2}} = 0.87$), and burnout ($\alpha_{\text{Baseline}} = 0.95$, $\alpha_{\text{Time1}} = 0.93$, $\alpha_{\text{Time2}} = 0.94$) and were measured with the same constructs as in Study 1.

Turnover intentions

We measured turnover intentions on the scale developed by Kelloway et al. (1999)), which is composed of four statements: "I am thinking about leaving this organization," "I am planning to look for a new job," "I intend to ask people about new job opportunities," and "I don't plan to be in this organization much longer" ($\alpha_{\text{Baseline}} = 0.85$, $\alpha_{\text{Time1}} = 0.88$, $\alpha_{\text{Time2}} = 0.85$).

4.2 | Results and discussion

Table 3 presents the correlations between the variables. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for each group. As in Study 1, for the comparisons between the measurements within each group, we report Cohen's d for repeated measures.

4.2.1 | Listening quality (manipulation check)

An independent-sample t-test revealed no difference between groups in the participants' perception of being heard by their colleagues before the intervention (i.e., Time 1), $t\ (71) = -0.09$, $p = 0.93$.

As in Study 1, we subjected the listening perception scores at the three time points to a repeated-measure ANOVA. Maulchy's sphericity test indicated that the assumption of sphericity was violated, $\chi^2\ (2) = 30.72$, $p < 0.001$, $\varepsilon = 0.74$. Hence, we used the relatively conservative Greenhouse–Geisser correction (Girden, 1992). The ANOVA indicated a significant within-between participant interaction, $F\ (1.48, 51.85) = 14.00$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta_p{}^2 = 0.17$. The participants in the listening training group perceived greater listening quality by their colleagues at Time 1 than at the Baseline measurement, $d = 1.31$, $p < 0.001$, and at Time 2 relative to Baseline, $d = 1.29$, $p < 0.001$. No difference emerged in the perception of listening quality between Time 1 and

TABLE 3 Study 2: correlations among the variables across time points

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Listening quality (Baseline)											
2. Listening quality (Time 1)	0.60**										
3. Listening quality (Time 2)	0.66**	0.89**									
4. Relatedness (Baseline)	0.68**	0.36**	0.50**								
5. Relatedness (Time 1)	0.65**	0.64**	0.71**	0.83**							
6. Relatedness (Time 2)	0.63**	0.62**	0.70**	0.82**	0.98**						
7. Burnout (Baseline)	−0.17	−0.15	−0.24*	−0.24*	−0.29*	−0.30*					
8. Burnout (Time 1)	−0.27*	−0.37**	−0.40**	−0.23*	−0.39**	−0.38**	0.67**				
9. Burnout (Time 2)	−0.22	−0.43**	−0.39**	−0.20	−0.37**	−0.35**	0.70**	0.61**			
10. Turnover intentions (Baseline)	−0.30*	−0.11	−0.23	−0.51**	−0.41**	−0.41**	0.44**	0.17	0.28*		
11. Turnover intentions (Time 1)	−0.21	−0.11	−0.17	−0.36**	−0.30*	−0.32**	0.54**	0.26*	0.35**	0.86**	
12. Turnover intentions (Time 2)	−0.33**	−0.14	−0.21	−0.47**	−0.40**	−0.40**	0.34**	0.16	0.34**	0.87**	0.83**

*p <0.05. **p <0.01.

TABLE 4 Study 2: descriptive statistics for conditions and measurement times

	Listening group						Control group					
	Baseline		Time1		Time 2		Baseline		Time1		Time 2	
Variable	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Listening quality	6.75	1.27	7.84	0.93	7.70	0.99	6.78	1.34	6.90	1.18	6.87	1.14
Relatedness	6.14	1.22	6.74	1.14	6.71	1.12	6.20	1.03	6.29	1.22	6.26	1.56
Burnout	2.92	1.34	2.36	1.00	2.60	1.20	2.83	1.14	2.82	0.90	3.00	1.01
Turnover intentions	3.15	1.23	2.82	1.23	2.93	1.12	2.95	1.23	2.98	1.17	3.01	1.11

Time 2, $d = -0.27$, $p = 0.12$. There were no differences between the measurements in the control group; specifically, Time 1 versus Baseline: $d = 0.22$, $p = 0.46$, Time 2 versus Time 1: $d = -0.06$, $p = 0.77$, and Time 2 versus Baseline: $d = 0.21$, $p = 0.53$. Participants in the listening training group perceived a significant increase in the listening quality of their colleagues. By contrast, the participants in the control group did not perceive a change in the listening quality of their colleagues.

4.2.2 | Relatedness

Participants in both groups did not differ in their sense of relatedness to their colleagues at baseline, t (71) $= -0.24$, $p = 0.81$. The assumption of sphericity was violated, χ^2 (2) $= 88.14$, p <0.001, $\varepsilon = 0.58$. Hence, as with listening quality, we used a Greenhouse–Geisser correction. A repeated-measure ANOVA indicated a significant within-between interaction, F (1.16, 82.75) $= 11.00$, $p = 0.001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.13$. Participants in the listening training group reported greater relatedness to their colleagues in Time 1 in comparison to baseline, $d = 0.84$, p <0.001, and in Time 2 than Baseline, $d = 0.78$, p <0.001. The effect of the listening training on relatedness was stable, as indicated by the nonsignificant difference between Time 1 and Time 2, $d = -0.13$, $p = 0.44$. By contrast, no differences emerged in the control group: Time 1 versus Baseline: $d = 0.21$, $p = 0.43$, Time 2 versus Baseline: $d = 0.12$, $p = 0.59$, and Time 2 versus Time 1: $d = -0.12$, $p = 0.45$. These results replicate Study 1 findings and provide additional support for Hypothesis (H1).

4.2.3 | Burnout

An independent-sample t-test indicated that there was no difference in burnout between the groups before the intervention, t (71) $= 0.23$, $p = 0.78$. There was no violation of the assumption of sphericity, χ^2 (2) $= 0.30$, $p = 0.86$, $\varepsilon = 0.86$. A repeated-measure ANOVA indicated a significant within-between interaction, F (2, 142) $= 4.07$, $p = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.05$. Specifically, participants in the experiment group reported

lower burnout at Time 1 than at Baseline, $d = -0.54$, $p < 0.001$, and at Time 2 relative to Baseline, $d = -0.31$, $p = 0.039$. There was no difference in burnout between Time 1 and Time 2, $d = 0.29$, $p = 0.14$ which suggests that the listening training had a lasting effect on burnout. In the control group, there were no differences in burnout between any of the measurements, Time 1—baseline $d = -0.01$, $p = 0.94$, Time 2—baseline: $d = 0.19$, $p = 0.23$, and Time 1 − Time 2, $d = 0.23$, $p = 0.22$. These results provided further support for Hypothesis (H2) and suggested that the listening training reduced the participants' feelings of burnout characterized by emotional exhaustion.

4.2.4 | Turnover intentions

An independent-sample *t*-test indicated that there was no difference in turnover intentions between the groups before the training, $t\ (71) = 0.68$, $p = 0.49$. There was no violation of sphericity, $\chi^2\ (2) = 2.01$, $p = 0.37$, $\varepsilon = 0.97$. A repeated-measure ANOVA indicated a significant within-between interaction, $F\ (2, 142) = 3.30$, $p = 0.04$, $\eta_p{}^2 = 0.04$. Specifically, the participants in the experimental group reported lower turnover intentions at Time 1 than at Baseline, $d = -0.51$, $p = 0.002$, and at Time 2 in comparison to baseline, $d = -0.35$, $p = 0.03$. There was no difference in turnover intentions between Time 1 and Time 2, $d = 0.15$, $p = 0.34$, which suggests that the listening training had a lasting effect on turnover intentions. In the control group, there were no differences in turnover intentions between any of the measurements, Time 1 versus Baseline: $d = 0.05$, $p = 0.80$, Time 2—Baseline: $d = 0.10$, $p = 0.54$, and Time 1 versus Time 2: $d = 0.04$, $p = 0.77$. These results support Hypothesis (H3), which posited that listening training would reduce employees' turnover intentions. Like the previous measures, benefits emerged immediately after the training and were then maintained.

Overall, Study 2 supported Hypotheses (H1–H3) and the exploratory hypothesis using an active control group, thereby refuting competing explanations that the effects were due to increased perception of listening by the participants in the control group (Table 5).

5 | MINI META-ANALYSIS

In order to provide a comprehensive answer to the research question about the stability of the listening-training induced effects, we conducted a mini meta-analysis of the two quasi-experiments. This is because the nonsignificant differences between Time 2 and Time 1 for each variable might result from a small sample size. A mini-meta analysis is a way to address this issue (Goh et al., 2016). We computed the effect size using Morris and DeShon's (2002) formula for a pre–post design with independent groups.[2] As shown in Table 6 a random effect model indicated that the effect of the listening training on employees' perception of their colleagues' listening remained stable after the training. The meta-analytic effect of the difference between Time 2 and Time 1 was not significant, $d = -0.31$, 95% *CI* [−0.70, 0.08], $p = 0.12$. The meta-analytic effect regarding the stability of relatedness was also not significant, $d = -0.17$, 95% *CI* [−0.55, 0.20], $p = 0.37$. Finally, the effect regarding the stability of the training on employees' burnout was not significant, $d = 0.30$, 95% *CI* [−0.22, 0.83], $p = 0.26$.

The mini meta-analysis indicates that the reduction in employees' listening perception of their colleagues, relatedness to their colleagues, and increased burnout between Time 1 and Time 2 was not significant when aggregated across the two quasi-experiments. Yet, this conclusion should be interpreted with caution as the meta-analytic effect on listening perception was not far from being significant and might become significant with additional training studies. Further research is still needed in order to address the question of the stability of listening training.

6 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

We found consistent support for our hypotheses in two quasi-field experiments in different organizations. The results suggest that listening training improved the attendees' listening skills. When the attendees in the training course felt listened to by their colleagues who participated in the training, they reported higher satisfaction of their relatedness needs with their colleagues, lower levels of burnout,

TABLE 5 Summary of Cohen's *d* (repeated-measures) for each construct

	Study 1						Study 2					
	Experiment group			Control group			Experiment group			Control group		
Variable	Time 1—Baseline	Time 2—Baseline	Time 2—Time1	Time 1—Baseline	Time 2—Baseline	Time 2—Time1	Time 1—Baseline	Time 2—Baseline	Time 2—Time1	Time 1—Baseline	Time 2—Baseline	Time 2—Time 1
Listening quality	0.99	0.96	−0.25	−0.08	−0.07	−0.17	1.31	1.29	−0.27	0.22	−0.06	0.21
Relatedness	1.14	1.07	−0.37	−0.02	0.05	0.03	0.84	0.78	−0.13	0.21	0.12	−0.12
Burnout	−0.80	−0.52	0.49	−0.02	−0.15	−0.11	−0.54	−0.31	0.29	−0.01	0.19	0.23
Turnover intentions	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	−0.51	−0.35	0.15	0.05	0.10	0.04

Variable	k	d	LL	UL	SE	Z	p	τ
Listening perception	2	−0.31	−0.70	0.08	0.20	1.55	= 0.12	0.01
Relatedness to colleagues	2	−0.17	−0.55	0.20	0.19	0.90	= 0.37	0.008
Burnout	2	0.30	−0.22	0.83	0.09	1.13	< 0.001	0.08

TABLE 6 A mini meta-analysis of the training's stability (Time 1–Time 2; $N = 124$)

and reduced intentions to leave the organization (i.e., turnover intentions; Study 2).

The findings shed light on the important role of HR activities in facilitating positive work relationships. These two quasi-experimental studies are, to our present knowledge, among the first to show that training for building relationship skills (listening in this case) has downstream effects on the extent to which employees feel relatedness to other colleagues. In doing so, this work provides a better understanding of how HR systems can shape relationship patterns in organizations and, specifically, strengthen communication skills that facilitate social connections. Second, the impact of the training on reducing employees' burnout and turnover intentions helps clarify how relationship patterns such as the ability to provide good listening impact outcomes relevant to HRM by increasing employees' well-being and reducing unwanted turnover.

We found that listening facilitates a connection between employees, fostering a positive social atmosphere reflected in an increased sense of relatedness. This positive social atmosphere also provides employees with mental resources and energy. This explanation aligns with Relational Coordination Theory (Gittell, 2016) and High-Quality Connections Theory (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). These theories state, and empirical research shows, that a positive work atmosphere that is characterized by constructive communication, support, and mutual respect lead, among other organizational outcomes, to less burnout, higher well-being, and higher performance (for a review see Bolton et al., 2021; Stephens et al., 2012).

Though listening has not been identified as an antecedent of Relational Coordination Theory, it is subsumed implicitly in the notion of interpersonal communication. One possible connection between listening training and Relational Coordination Theory may be through high-performance work practices that increase relational coordination. Gittell et al. (2010) conducted a field study on patient care hospitals and found that high-performance work practices predicted increased relational coordination. While listening was not directly measured as a practice, it appeared to be integrated within some of the practices the researchers assessed, including cross-functional conflict resolution and cross-functional meetings, which positively predicted relational coordination. Specifically, high-quality listening is an important component of value-creation and conflict resolution (Curhan et al., 2022; Itzchakov & Kluger, 2019). In addition, work meetings are much more effective and efficient when employees listen well to one another but can be long and nonfunctional when the listening is poor (see Itzchakov & Grau, 2020). Importantly, the present findings hint that listening training is a valuable element of training for teamwork as indicated by an increased sense of relatedness to one's colleagues. Teamwork training has been identified as an element of high-performance work systems that are expected to strengthen relational coordination (Bolton et al., 2021). Thus, listening training might serve as a form of teamwork training that increases relational coordination. Future studies should test directly test his possibility.

The present work hints that listening might serve as an antecedent of High-Quality Connection Theory (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003), which focuses on positive dyadic workplace interactions that are usually brief, such as a hallway conversation or "checking in" with a colleague (Twaronite, 2019). According to this theory, HQC includes (a) feelings of vitality, positive arousal, and positive energy (Quinn & Dutton, 2005), (b) feeling known, loved, respected, and cared for (i.e., positive regard), and (c) felt mutuality, which is defined as participation and engagement in the connection at the moment (Stephens et al., 2012). The quality of these brief interactions should be affected by the listening of each dyad member. For example, a trained listener can help the speaker get insights by asking questions that convey understanding, paraphrasing the speaker's content, and exhibiting nonverbal behaviors that convey full attention. Laboratory experiments have found that these behaviors are effective in short conversations to increase speakers' psychological safety (Castro et al., 2016; Itzchakov et al., 2016) and are relevant to the context of HQC. Short dyadic encounters that are characterized by good listening should contribute to vitality, felt love, respected and cared for, and mutuality. Supporting this view, research work indicates that listening is mutually reciprocated within workplace dyads (i.e., dyadic reciprocity). Namely, Drew would be more likely to listen to Sandra when Drew perceives that Sandra listens to him well and vice versa (Kluger et al., 2021).

Although we did not directly measure well-being, the results hint that listening training should increase it, as indicated by the effect of the listening training on reduced burnout and turnover intentions, which are related to well-being at work (Belkin et al., 2020; Shanafelt et al., 2017). According to Episodic Listening Theory (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022), when the speaker perceives good listening from the listener, the speaker's psychological safety increases and makes the speaker authentically self-disclose information. When the listener perceives this authenticity, she or he can listen better. This authenticity also sparks an episode of togetherness. Togetherness results in several emotional and cognitive benefits, one of which is improved well-being for both conversation partners (Kluger & Itzchakov, 2022).

Linking listening training to workplace relatedness also informs research from the perspective of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Research informed by Self Determination Theory (SDT), a macro-theory of human motivation that models how the social world drives positive motivation, emphasizes that feeling related, or close and connected to others, is a basic psychological need that is necessary for well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). A sub-theory within

SDT known as relationships motivation theory (Deci & Ryan, 2014) was developed to account for the importance of relationships that encourage genuine self-expression to satisfy the relatedness need and promote well-being. Feeling a sense of relatedness can be influenced in both positive or negative ways by workplace environments (Trépanier et al., 2013; Triandis & Bhawuk, 1997), and can drive positive outcomes at work, including workplace prosocial behavior (Pavey et al., 2011) and well-being (Gomez-Baya & Lucia-Casademunt, 2018).

An empirical contribution of the present study is its internal and ecological validity. The study was composed of two quasi-field experiments considered the "silver standard" in organizational research (Eden, 2017). Specifically, the present studies included control groups from similar organizations as the experimental groups as well as an active control group in Study 2. This methodology makes it possible to draw causal conclusions. Moreover, the implementation of listening training in work settings provides ecological validity to the findings, which were relevant to the population of interest (i.e., employees), and a "real-world" context (i.e., training and measuring employees at work).

A practical contribution of the current research is the stability of the training effects on employees' listening abilities, relatedness, burnout, and turnover intentions several weeks after the training. The findings hint that the investment in listening training is worthwhile in terms of cost–benefit to organizations. This is because burnout and turnover intentions incur high costs to the organization, and an intervention that can reduce costs should save significant resources. However, as noted in the mini meta-analysis, further research is needed to obtain a more robust conclusion.

The present work also highlights the importance of studying training efficacy (e.g., Salas et al., 2012). The advantages are at least twofold. First, programmatic research on training effectiveness in organizations would help managers make evidence-based decisions and avoid spending resources on training that does not deliver the desired outcomes. Second, such practical research would help to reduce the gap between the knowledge obtained by management scholars and its relevancy to managers and organizations, which is often lacking (Locke & Latham, 2021). This work provides additional support for the importance of HR in improving organizational outcomes. The findings indicate the extent to which training—in this case, listening training—has a cascading impact on workers, teams, and the organization. Investing in improving workers' skills and abilities can thus reap substantial benefits.

7 | LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

These studies have several limitations. Study 1, in particular, used a minimal comparison condition that was susceptible to influence by confounds emerging from the higher level of interaction among colleagues in the listening training course. While Study 2 used a more robust comparison to disconfirm many possible effects by matching time and increasing interactions, a closer comparison could involve relationship-building "ice-breaking" exercises that induce closeness without listening. Second, the present research focused solely on the impact of the training on its attendees. Previous research indicates that good listeners benefit their speakers in numerous ways (e.g., Ames et al., 2012; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Pasupathi et al., 1998; Weinstein et al., 2021). Future research could build on this literature and examine whether employees who attend listening training courses serve as positive social agents by influencing the behavior of other stakeholders that the trainees have working relationships with, such as customers and managers.

An additional limitation of the present studies is that they focused solely on individual-level outcomes. This was because the employees came from a small number of work teams, which thus prevented analysis at the team level. In addition, the number of attendees in a typical listening training does not exceed the sample size reported here. An ambitious future study could conduct several listening training sessions in a large corporation and measure constructs at the team level.

The present studies did not control for team variables such as tenure, wage, and rewards. We had no a-priori hypotheses regarding their roles in listening training on relatedness, burnout, and turnover intentions. However, additional constructs are theoretically relevant to listening and should be measured in future work. One of these constructs is the relational climate, which refers to work environments that connect HR systems with employee helping behavior. A relational climate supports various forms of interpersonal relationships among employees and promotes helping behaviors (Mossholder et al., 2011). Listening training, which has not been studied in the context of climate, might promote relational climate within the workplace and increase helping behavior.

Future research should also incorporate listening training in diversity, inclusion, and equity programs in organizations (Pennington, 2020). Feeling listened to has been found to reduce speakers' attitude extremity in the laboratory (Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Itzchakov et al., 2017) and field experiments (Broockman & Kalla, 2016; Kalla & Broockman, 2020), including studies that used a similar listening training technique as was implemented here (Itzchakov & Kluger, 2017a). Recent work found that speakers who experienced high-quality listening reported lower levels of prejudice than speakers who experienced moderate listening quality (Itzchakov et al., 2020). Given this evidence, there is reason to believe that training employees to be better listeners will help colleagues feel valued and included. Incorporating listening training courses in DEI programs might also create an organizational climate that is more nonjudgmental and accepting toward diversity (see Macnamara, 2015). Thus, the return on investment for training employees in listening would be substantial.

The reduced turnover intentions due to the training provide an opportunity to integrate listening within theories focusing on the role of HR systems in promoting predictors of turnover intentions. An example is interpersonal citizenship behavior (ICB; Regts & Molleman, 2013). Settoon and Mossholder (2002) define task-focused ICB as helping resolve work-related challenges related to issues arising within the organization. This type of ICB relates to giving help to solve a challenge that arises due to an employee's role at work. The

opportunity to exhibit task-focused ICB depends on the centrality in the organization network. Namely, employees who have plenty of access to others within the organizational network (high centrality) have more opportunities to provide task-focused ICB than employees who do not (low centrality). Importantly, network centrality and ICB predict employees' turnover (Mossholder et al., 2005). Thus, the relational context might influence the effectiveness of listening training. If so, in order to increase task-focused ICB, it might be helpful to train employees who have high network centrality within the organization to increase ICB and reduce turnover.

Building on the HRs Systems theory (Jiang et al., 2012), training is one of the key ways HRM can strategically impact the organization. Training, a specific HR practice, affects knowledge skills and abilities, which directly affect employee performance. Moreover, this policy has a synergetic effect as it impacts HR domains of motivation as well. In our case, we look at the training of listening, which improves relationships (measured by relatedness need satisfaction) among workers, which enhances their ability to work together and increases their motivation (in our case, reduces turnover intentions). Thus, organizations and specifically HR can strategically improve these elements via listening training.

An additional intriguing question relates to the effect of virtual listening training. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has strained relationships and communication at work. Virtual platforms frequently replace in-person meetings and require adaptation in the way employees and managers listen (Itzchakov & Grau, 2020). In order to adapt to the "new normal," organizations should apply training for computer-mediated listening and communication in general.

Finally, although the current studies tested relatedness needs satisfaction as an important and potent mediator for burnout and turnover intention, this approach only scratched the surface of the theoretical approaches that could explain why listening training is beneficial in the workplace. Future work should apply Relational Coordination Theory to test listening training as an antecedent of relational coordination, a mutually reinforcing process between frequent, timely, accurate, problem-solving communication, and relationships of shared goals, shared knowledge, and mutual respect. Similarly, future work should apply SDT to test listening training as an antecedent of other basic psychological needs in addition to relatedness. Specifically, listening training is likely to increase autonomy need satisfaction in terms of employees' felt sense of voice, self-congruence, and self-expression with colleagues, as well as competence need satisfaction, the feeling that employees are capable of achieving meaningful activities, including conveying critical work ideas and opinions to colleagues (Manganelli et al., 2018).

8 | CONCLUSION

Two field quasi-experiments indicated that training employees in the values and skills of high-quality listening afforded feelings of relatedness with colleagues. Training led to reports of reduced burnout and, ultimately, to lower turnover intentions. These benefits were observed immediately after the training course and weeks later, suggesting that listening training effectively changed the quality of relationships and reduced burnout and turnover intentions at work for some time afterward. Because destructive workplace relationships and turnover intentions have negative economic and practical implications for organizations, these findings suggest that listening training may be a worthwhile investment that comes with a myriad of personal and productivity benefits to attendees and those with whom they interact at work. Thus, training for listening should be a goal of any HR department that wants to improve relations in the workplace.

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ENDNOTES

[1] https://www.centerforcouncil.org.

[2] Equation #6, page 180.

[3] Note that "clean listening" is not isomorphic with a listening technique called "clean language."

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

ORCID

Guy Itzchakov https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1516-6719

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APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF EXERCISES FROM THE LISTENING TRAINING

1. *Goal*: Building an infrastructure of empowering communication by practicing the intentions of the circle and focusing on the language that differentiates listening from opinion/response.

Exercise: One employee tells a meaningful story about him or herself for 2 min, and then the listener reflects back he or she heard. Then the listener describes where the content intersects. The activity takes place both in pairs and in one large circle.

Jane tells a meaningful story about herself for 2 min, and then Harry reflects back on what he heard and asks if he missed anything and/or if Jane would like to add anything else.

Exercise: While Victor in the listening circle speaks and tells his story, the participants practice "clean listening[3]"; that is, listening while suspending criticism and judgment, including positive judgments such as:" I completely agree" and "the same thing happened to me."

2. *Goal*: This technique focuses on speech that encourages listening and the principles of empowering communication. This exercise aims to "clear away" the main barriers to listening, such as distraction, judgment/criticism of the speaker or the terms used in the content, immediate comparison/classification/cataloging, and evaluation.

Exercise: Angelina talks for about 2 min on a work-related topic (the topic can vary depending on the context of the training program) while three other people listen at *three levels of listening*; that is, each person listens at a different level. Specifically, one person listens to the verbal content of the speaker's words. The second person listens to the nonverbal content such as body language, expression of emotions, tone, intonation, etc. The third person listens to the story's central theme and the formulation of a coherent story with a beginning, middle, and end. Each listener then provides feedback to the speaker in terms of his or her own listening level. The participants then receive homework: to practice after the workshop involving conscious observation during their work of their listening patterns and writing reflections about it.

3. *Goal*: to emphasize the importance of validating the speaker (note that validation is different from an agreement), expressing appreciation for a specific action, and authentic expression of one's needs in situations of argument or confrontation.

Exercise: In quadruplets, Diego talks about a work-related challenge that is bothering him at present. He then gets different types of feedback from each of the three listeners. Specifically, Ishmael describes how the speaker's words affect him. Debbie, the second listener, shares the values and strengths in what she heard. Warren, the third listener, shares what unanswered needs caused or contributed to the challenge. After all four have finished talking and receiving feedback, there is a conversation about everyone's observations of the story/challenge. The participants discuss the new insights they gained from the feedback and the modes of action that were revealed to them if there were any.

4. *Goal*: To make participants aware of how they listen, to both the content and their typical ways of responding, experiencing, and evaluating immediately.

Exercise: The participants are divided into pairs for 3 min. Novak starts a conversation about a potentially controversial work-related issue (though the conversation can be about any issue). Each response must then start with "Yes, but…" Afterward, the pairs discuss the same topic for three more minutes, but now each response must start with "Yes, and…."

Finally, the pairs reflect on the two conversations in a group circle. They discuss which conversation resulted in more constructive comments, when they could build off of each other's ideas, and which approach was more about "listening to respond" versus "listening to understand."

5. *Goal*: Understand and practice the power of silence.

Exercise: The attendees are put into pairs. One person takes the role of the speaker and the other the role of the listener. Nicolas shares a meaningful story about work. If he cannot think of a story, he can share any meaningful event that matters to him. The listener is instructed to say nothing at all, just listen for the entire time (4 min). Afterward, the pairs switch roles.

Each attendee shares his or her experience in a circle (or sometimes, in pairs). What was the experience like as a speaker and as a listener? Did the speaker feel heard even though there were no responses? If so, what made this happen? Each attendee reflects on the experience as a listener. What did he or she observe about the speaker's nonverbal communication? Did the tone change throughout the exercise? How was this exercise different from an ordinary conversation at work or in general?

6. *Goal*: Learning to provide reflection, which is a prerequisite for good listening.

Exercise: Mirroring—A listening behavior that involves summarizing and repeating what the speaker says in the conversation, almost word for word. Attendees are grouped into triads, quadruplets, or more and discuss a particular topic. Before each attendee speaks, he or she repeats the content of the previous speaker as closely as possible or in the exact words and then asks, "did I understand correctly?" and "did I miss anything"?

7. *Goal*: Learning how to ask good questions. By asking relevant questions, the listener also helps show that he or she has an interest in what the speaker has been saying.

Exercise: The attendees are divided into listener-speaker pairs. The speaker discloses an upsetting situation at work for 3 min (or any other topic, depending on where the training program is delivered). The listener needs to ask at least one good question during this time. A good question is open, shows an understanding of the speakers' content, and promotes the speaker's needs (rather than the listener's curiosity). After the speaker answers, the listener asks, "Is there more you want to add?" or "can you please elaborate?"

8. *Goal*: Practicing group listening.

Exercise: The listening circle. This technique is designed to create a group atmosphere of intimacy and psychological safety where people feel comfortable sharing with others. This exercise is described in various articles and books. Note that this exercise is relatively complex and requires several hours of training. Research, including the present work, has found that certified trainers deliver effective listening circles.