Leadership Communication on Internal Digital Platforms, Emotional Capital, and Corporate Performance: The Case for Leader-Centric Listening

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Abstract
This research examined the role of leadership communication on internal digital platforms and the nature of digital listening by leaders. A survey of managers showed that in higher emotional capital (employees’ aggregate feelings of goodwill toward a company and the way it operates) and higher performing organizations, leaders are much more active communicators on internal digital platforms. A critical incident study explored the nature of digital listening by leaders, showing that effective digital listening by leaders tends to be leader-centric but focused on the collective voice of employees. Future research about leader listening should explore the notion of collective voice.

Keywords
enterprise social media, internal digital platforms, leadership communication, listening, employee voice, symmetrical communication

Introduction
Contemporary business leaders frequently talk about the importance of employees’ voices. For example, Nike CEO Mark Parker recently told employees at an all-staff meeting they needed to transform its culture from “a place where the loudest voices carry the conversation to a place where every voice is heard” (LaVito, 2018). Listening
to employee voices is complex and time consuming, especially in large organizations. New technologies, however, give leaders more opportunities than ever to connect and communicate with employees across the organization.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, organizations have increasingly adopted internal digital platforms to serve as communication hubs (these platforms are often labeled corporate intranets, enterprise social networking platforms, enterprise social software, and internal social networks). These collections of social tools—including but not limited to user profiles, connections (similar to friending on networks such as Facebook), chat or messaging, newsfeeds or network activity feeds, blogging and other posting tools, online video conferencing, and online polling—afford many opportunities to improve internal communication (Cardon, 2016). Yet, more often than not, these internal digital platforms fail to live up to their potential. Most employees in most organizations seldom use these platforms, resulting in little to no impact on collaboration, employee morale, knowledge management, and employee perceptions of leader effectiveness (Bughin, Chui, Harrysson, & Lijek, 2017; Leonardi & Neeley, 2017; Li, 2015).

Huy and Shipilov (2012) suggest that a positive company culture with strong leadership communication is associated with the adoption and effective use of internal digital platforms. Furthermore, leaders with strong digital communication skills are in high demand (Kane, 2018). Yet it is not clear how specific leadership communication practices on digital platforms influence organizational culture. Furthermore, it is not clear whether leaders’ active engagement on internal digital platforms is associated with organizational performance.

The purpose of this research was to explore how leadership communication on internal digital platforms impacts company culture and company performance. We conducted two studies: a nationwide, survey-based study of management at all levels of organizations that explored the correlations between leadership communication, organizational culture, and organizational performance. The first study showed that organizations with leaders in organizations with strong cultures and strong performance were quite active on internal digital platforms. One characteristic of these digitally active leaders was they were perceived as listening to employees on internal digital platforms. While we viewed this result as compelling, we also thought the notion of “listening on internal digital platforms” was underexplored, so we conducted a second study that explored the nature of digital listening by leaders. Specifically, we sought to understand what employees think constitutes listening by leaders on internal digital platforms and in what ways this digital listening is perceived as effective.

These two studies constitute a replication and extension of Huy and Shipilov’s (2012) work about leadership communication on internal digital platforms. The first study replicates their study to provide empirical support for their claim that leadership communication on internal digital platforms influences organizational culture. It extends their research in the following ways: (a) it makes a direct link between leadership communication on internal digital platforms, organizational culture (in terms of emotional capital), and organizational performance and (b) it provides a multifaceted
view of leadership communication with distinctions between four types of communication on internal digital platforms. The second study provides a nuanced view of what it means to engage in digital listening as a leader. Together, these two studies contribute to our understanding of leadership communication and employee voice on internal digital platforms.

Study 1 Literature Review

The emergence of internal digital platforms has dramatically increased the ease and quality with which employees can connect and communicate with one another. Proponents of internal digital platforms tout the relative benefits of communicating and collaborating via social and collaboration tools compared with email and other less networked forms of digital communication. They emphasize that these platforms represent a new way of communicating and collaborating that is more interactive and bottom-up; involves self-organizing and overcomes the deficiencies of command-and-control approaches to management and innovation; and facilitates productivity gains, enhances knowledge management, increases efficiency, and raises employee morale (e.g., Anders, 2016; Aten & Thomas, 2016; Azua, 2010; Bughin, Chui, & Miller, 2009; Cardon 2016; Cardon & Marshall, 2015; Carter, 2012; Cetto, Klier, Richter, & Zolitschka, 2018; Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Kulhanek, 2010; Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield; 2013; Leonardi & Neeley, 2017; Madsen, 2016; McAfee, 2009a, 2009b; Shah, 2010; Sias & Duncan, 2018; Uysal, 2016; Wright & Zdinak, 2008). These many benefits can be achieved in many ways with the various collaboration tools housed in internal digital platforms. Professionals can rapidly use social networking tools to find experts and partners throughout their organizations; they can use co-editing tools to work on documents together; and they can access content created by others across the organization. Importantly, unified communication systems that include messaging, chat, blogging, and online conferences allow easier and richer communication. Project management tools are often integrated into these platforms to create more efficient workflow. Collectively, these tools on internal digital platforms afford the abilities on team, unit, and organization-wide levels to communicate with people more easily, learn from others, share opportunities, and collaborate more efficiently.

Dittes and Smolnik (2017) conducted a literature review of the outcomes of enterprise social networks. Based on a review of 70 research projects, they discovered 20 outcomes that can be organized into four major categories: (a) direct process-level outcomes, which include communication, collaboration, coordination, and information and file exchange; (b) indirect process-level outcomes, which include network building, decision making, knowledge management, and transparency; (c) employee-level outcomes, which include sharing behavior, learning and knowledge usage, social capital and connectedness, job performance, innovativeness, awareness, and satisfaction; and (d) organizational-level outcomes, which include productivity, innovative capacity, staff capacity, employer attractiveness and staff retention, and culture. Dittes and Smolnik suggested that researchers rarely focus on the negative outcomes of
internal digital platforms. An exception is recent research that suggests internal digital platforms reinforce and even strengthen company hierarchies and power structures (Verheyden & Cardon, 2018).

A variety of research suggests that internal digital platforms are not living up to their potential. In fact, up to 80% of internal digital platforms fail to live up to expectations (Kane, Palmer, Philips, & Kiron, 2014). Factors influencing whether digital platforms are successful include collaborative norms in the organization, existing community ties, ease of use, perceived critical mass, and trust (Kügler, Smolnik, & Raeth, 2013). Broadly, research points to two overarching factors that influence successful enterprise-wide use of internal digital platforms: organizational culture and leadership communication on the digital platforms (Bughin et al., 2017; Kane, Palmer, Phillips, & Kiron, 2015; Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron, & Buckley, 2017; Li, 2015).

The connections between leadership behaviors and organizational cultures are closely connected (Jo & Shim, 2005; Men & Stacks, 2014). While early proponents of internal digital platforms emphasized the bottom-up, participatory culture these tools could engender, later research suggested that the adoption and use of these tools relies on a variety of strategies, including top–down approaches (Guinan, Parise, & Rollag, 2014). While culture and leadership have often been cited as central to successful deployment of internal digital platforms (Kane et al., 2015; Kane et al., 2017; Li, 2015), little research exists to validate these propositions. Perhaps the most important study to explore the role of culture is the work of Huy and Shipilov (2012). They adopted an emotional capital model of culture, consisting of authenticity, pride, attachment, and fun. They found that in organizations with low emotional capital, employees reported that the ease of and amount of vertical (across hierarchical levels) and horizontal communication (within functional units) stayed the same, or in some cases was reduced when companies adopted internal digital platforms. Conversely, in companies with high emotional capital, employees reported the ease of and amount of vertical and horizontal communication increased.

While no known academic study explores the connection between leadership communication on internal digital platforms, organizational culture, and organizational performance, numerous studies about leadership communication within organizations support this relationship. Based on a review of the literature, Argenti (2017) stated,

> The ability of executives to use strategic communications effectively can be a strong predictor of organizational success. . . . Although we could simply draw the line between an emphasis on communication and increased performance, it would be a mistake to underestimate the importance and contributions of a stronger culture that ensues when communication is valued. (pp. 148-149)

We propose the virtuous cycle between leadership communication, organizational culture, and organizational performance likewise applies to internal digital platforms (see Figure 1). In other words, we expect that frequent, engaged communication by leaders on internal digital platforms builds and supports a positive organizational culture, which in turn supports strong organizational performance.
Study 1 Methodology

To explore the connections between leadership communication on digital platforms, company culture, and company performance, we developed a survey to distribute across all management ranks. The study was conducted by a university research institute with corporate partners. The primary focus of the study was online collaboration and innovation. Many of the corporate partners were specifically interested in the role and impacts of leadership communication on internal digital platforms. The researchers developed the survey and then gathered input from corporate partners on the survey design. Participants were recruited from an external company, Empanel Online. Participants were compensated $35 for completing their surveys. To qualify to participate in the study, each professional had to meet the following criteria:

- Works at a large company (more than 500 employees and more the $10 million in revenue)
- Has full-time employment
- Has some level of budgetary and managerial authority

Figure 1. The virtuous cycle of leadership communication, emotional capital, and organizational performance.
Belongs to one of the following vertical markets: (a) manufacturing, (b) wholesale trade/retail trade; (c) finance, banking, and insurance; or (d) health care and social assistance industry

Belongs to one of the following business departments: (a) marketing/sales, (b) information technology/services; or (d) research and product development

Agrees with the statement “Most or all of my daily job functions would be difficult or even impossible if I didn’t have the technologies I use or if that technology failed or stopped working”

The corporate partners of the research institute selected the specific industries as markets that were significant and could gain substantial incremental business benefit from additional technology adoption and improved application of their existing technology investments. Of the 1,014 consenting participants, 10 cases were removed after data assurance check. Data from the remaining 1,004 participants were included in the analyses.

Of the 1,004 survey responses, they came from the following industries: Finance, Banking, and Insurance \(n = 254\); Health Care and Social Assistance \(n = 249\); Manufacturing \(n = 251\); and Retail and Wholesale Trade \(n = 250\). The respondents spanned a wide range of management positions: owner/CEO \(n = 178\), senior executive \(n = 325\), executive \(n = 207\), senior manager \(n = 147\), and manager \(n = 147\). For the purposes of our study, we removed owners and CEOs from our dataset because we were exploring perceptions that various members of management had about senior leaders.

We chose to replicate and extend Huy and Shipilov’s (2012) study of leadership communication on internal digital platforms for several reasons. Their study is the most comprehensive study to explore the impact of leadership communication via internal digital platforms on organizational culture. Yet their study leaves several theoretical and descriptive gaps. It does not measure organizational impacts (we propose a virtuous cycle of leadership communication on digital platforms, organizational culture, and organizational performance). Therefore, we have extended their study to include organizational impacts. Unfortunately, they do not report any quantitative results. While they mention their study involved 1,060 executive respondents, they only provide two case studies to illustrate their study results. Also, their study is based on data from 2010. With significant improvements in technologies, we believe a new study was needed to explore these relationships in a context of more contemporary, efficient internal digital platforms. We likewise extend their study by delineating various forms of leadership communication.

As a measure of leadership communication on digital platforms, we asked respondents to identify the frequency with which senior leaders used internal digital platforms to communicate in the following ways: (a) share updates and announcements with employees, (b) hold conversations with employees, (c) respond to the questions and concerns of employees, and (d) listen to the ideas of employees. As a measure of company culture, we adopted the emotional capital approach proposed by Huy and Shipilov (2012). Emotional capital (EC) involves the aggregate feelings of goodwill
toward a company and the way it operates. It has four sources: authenticity, pride, attachment, and fun. Authenticity refers to the degree to which the words of leaders are aligned with their actions. Pride refers to the belief that the company values and publicly recognizes employees’ achievements. Attachment is the feeling among employees that they belong to a community of shared values and interests. Fun is the feeling of playfulness that employees feel when experimenting with new things at work (Akgun, Keskin, & Byrne, 2008, 2009; Dutton, Worline, Frost, & Lilius, 2006; Huy, 1999, 2005). (The emotional capital survey items and reliability measures are contained in the table in the appendix.) Finally, we measured organizational performance in financial terms (i.e., profitability growth, revenue growth), innovativeness (i.e., innovativeness over the past 5 years, perceived innovativeness), and overall internal communication (related survey items are contained in the Table 1 note).

We wanted to understand how leaders behaved differently in organizations of varying levels of emotional capital. A K-means cluster analysis revealed three clusters of emotional capital, which we label high emotional capital organizations, medium emotional capital organizations, and low emotional capital organizations. The table in the appendix displays the emotional capital survey items as well as means and standard

### Table 1. Chi-Square Analysis of Emotional Capital (EC) and Relationships to Past Financial Performance, Innovation Potential, and Overall Communication Environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low EC (%)</th>
<th>Medium EC (%)</th>
<th>High EC (%)</th>
<th>$\chi^2$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational financial performance</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profitability growth &gt;5% in the past year$^a$</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>25.5</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>49.14</td>
<td>&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revenue growth &gt;5% in the past year$^b$</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>48.8</td>
<td>37.98</td>
<td>&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational innovation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative products and services in past 5 years$^c$</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>116.53</td>
<td>&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company is perceived as innovative by employees$^d$</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>158.89</td>
<td>&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall communication with employees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Company communicates well with employees$^e$</td>
<td>27.5</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>81.4</td>
<td>174.54</td>
<td>&lt;.01**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. There were 328 executives and managers in high EC companies, 377 in medium EC companies, and 109 in low EC companies.

$^a$Based on survey item Over the last year, how has your company’s total profitability changed. $^b$Based on the survey item Over the last year, how has your company’s total sales revenue changed? $^c$Based on survey item In comparison with our competitors, our company has introduced more innovative products and services during the past 5 years. $^d$Based on survey item Our company is an excellent innovator. $^e$Based on survey item Our company is an excellent communicator with employees.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
deviations for the three final clusters. Because of the categorical nature of our measures of organizational performance, we used chi-square to examine relationships with organizational performance and analysis of variance to examine the relationship between leadership communication and emotional capital.

**Study 1 Findings**

As displayed in Table 1, there were significant connections between emotional capital and organizational performance. High EC organizations were much more likely than medium and low EC organizations to have experienced profitability and revenue growth of greater than 5% in the past year. Furthermore, employees in high EC organizations were much more likely than medium and low EC organizations to report their organizations had developed innovative products and services over the past 5 years and much more likely to consider their organizations innovative. Finally, companies with high emotional capital had significantly higher perceptions that the company communicates well with employees.

As displayed in Table 2, leaders in high EC capital organizations were significantly more active on their internal digital platforms than leaders in medium and low EC capital organizations. For nearly all communication behaviors and at all management ranks, these relationships were significant. When comparing all executives and managers in low, medium, and high EC companies, there were significant differences across all EC levels based on leader frequency of the following behaviors: responding to the questions and concerns of employees, sharing updates and announcements with employees within the company, holding conversations with employees, and listening to the ideas of employees.

**Study 2 Literature Review**

Our first study showed that higher EC organizations performed better than lower EC organizations. Furthermore, it showed that leaders are much more active communicating on internal digital platforms at higher EC organizations. The communication behaviors with the highest effect sizes, particularly with senior managers and managers, were responding to the questions of concerns of employees and listening to the ideas of employees. However, we found ourselves wondering exactly what constitutes listening by leaders in a digital environment. In other words, our study begged the question what does it mean for a leader to listen on internal digital platforms? Our second study focused on this very issue. To develop our study about digital listening by leaders, we explored research literature in the following areas: competencies associated with listening, leaders as strategic communicators, and employee voice.

**Competencies Associated With Listening**

A vast amount of research exists about the nature of listening and related competencies. Among the most well-known models of listening is the HURIER model, which involves...
Table 2. Analysis of Variance Tests of Significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low EC (1)</th>
<th>Medium EC (2)</th>
<th>High EC (3)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>η²</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% Active</td>
<td>% Active</td>
<td>% Active</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Respond to the questions and concerns of employees</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All executives and managers</td>
<td>4.33 (1.81)</td>
<td>5.33 (1.43)</td>
<td>5.84 (1.50)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>&lt; .01**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior executives</td>
<td>4.45 (1.67)</td>
<td>5.31 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.72 (1.23)</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>4.55 (1.84)</td>
<td>5.33 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.73 (1.26)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>&lt; .01**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>4.47 (1.87)</td>
<td>5.45 (1.27)</td>
<td>6.33 (0.97)</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>4.03 (1.85)</td>
<td>5.28 (1.61)</td>
<td>6.00 (1.48)</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Share updates and announcements with employees within the company</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>All executives and managers</td>
<td>4.35 (1.56)</td>
<td>5.43 (1.30)</td>
<td>5.74 (1.23)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior executives</td>
<td>4.06 (1.56)</td>
<td>5.42 (1.20)</td>
<td>5.62 (1.17)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>4.13 (2.05)</td>
<td>5.27 (1.39)</td>
<td>5.77 (1.39)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>4.63 (1.47)</td>
<td>5.62 (1.27)</td>
<td>6.08 (0.91)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>5.05 (1.60)</td>
<td>5.43 (1.40)</td>
<td>5.77 (1.46)</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>&lt; .01**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hold conversations with employees within the company</td>
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<tr>
<td>All executives and managers</td>
<td>4.24 (1.80)</td>
<td>5.27 (1.31)</td>
<td>5.64 (1.28)</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior executives</td>
<td>4.35 (1.18)</td>
<td>5.14 (1.35)</td>
<td>5.62 (1.27)</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>4.64 (1.81)</td>
<td>5.35 (1.28)</td>
<td>5.59 (1.29)</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>4.23 (1.97)</td>
<td>5.66 (1.12)</td>
<td>5.96 (1.21)</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>3.95 (1.93)</td>
<td>5.10 (1.38)</td>
<td>5.42 (1.43)</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to the ideas of employees within the company</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All executives and managers</td>
<td>4.00 (1.65)</td>
<td>5.27 (1.40)</td>
<td>5.68 (1.23)</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>&lt; .01**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior executives</td>
<td>3.76 (1.52)</td>
<td>5.29 (1.43)</td>
<td>5.65 (1.22)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
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<tr>
<td>Executives</td>
<td>4.27 (1.80)</td>
<td>5.15 (1.54)</td>
<td>5.66 (1.25)</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior managers</td>
<td>4.60 (1.71)</td>
<td>5.47 (1.14)</td>
<td>6.02 (1.15)</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>3.49 (1.66)</td>
<td>5.07 (1.55)</td>
<td>5.94 (1.18)</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>&lt; .01***</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Note. EC = emotional capital; M = mean; SD = standard deviation. There were 328 executives and managers in high EC companies, 377 in medium EC companies, and 109 in low EC companies. Scale was the frequency with which employees said their senior leaders engaged in the communication behaviors on the internal digital platform: 1 = less often than once a year; 2 = once or twice a year; 3 = once every 4 to 6 months; 4 = once every 2 or 3 months; 5 = once a month; 6 = once every 2 or 3 weeks; 7 = once a week or more often. Superscript refers to significant differences with the following: (1) low EC; (2) medium EC; and (3) high EC. % Active refers to percentage of respondents who reported their leaders engaged in the communication behavior at least every few weeks. η² refers to effect size. According to Cohen (1988), a small effect size is η²=.01; medium effect size is η² =.06; large effect size is η² =.14. *p < .05, **p < .01.
hearing, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating, and responding (Brownell, 1985, 1990, 2006). The HURIER model is like most models of listening—it is considered an interactive, interpretive, even collaborative process that involves effort to reach shared meaning and to understand the motivations and intentions of others (Burleson, 2011). Nearly all taxonomies of listening and listening competency are conceptualized from in-person situations involving speech acts. In fact, in nearly all these models, listening cannot be complete or appreciated without auditory and visual stimuli. Not only should the listener see and hear to understand and comprehend, the listener should also engage in attending behaviors—such as eye contact, body posture, and other nonverbal behavior—to show interest and engagement (Welch & Mickelson, 2013; Wolvin & Coakley, 1993). Moreover, active listening involves strategies, such as paraprasing and asking clarifying questions, that are most often described and researched in the context of speech acts. Active listening also involves emotionally supporting others (Jones, 2011). One aspect of ethical listening is it should be focused on others, with the listener “setting aside” oneself “for the other” (Bodie, 2010, p. 186).

To illustrate the most common listening competencies, Fontana, Cohen, and Wolvin (2015) reviewed 53 listening competency scales. They identified the following traits as the 15 most common: responding or giving feedback; asking questions; using nonverbal communication as a listener; understanding; concentrating and paying attention to the speaker; making eye contact; understanding the speaker’s feelings or emotions; the listener makes positive statements and communicates with warmth; the listener does not interrupt; and the listener is available, meaning having enough or unlimited time; the listener enjoys listening to the speaker; the listener summarizes or restates the speaker’s comments and intent; the listener gives clear feedback; and the listener encourages the speaker to talk freely.

While listening has been recognized as a key skill for leaders for decades, little research has focused on listening competencies for leaders. Moreover, the need to research and develop new models of listening is necessitated by forces such as globalization and technology (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008; Kluger & Zaidel, 2013). Most research about leaders focuses on managerial roles in dyads or small groups (Aritz, Walker, Cardon, & Zhang, 2017; Bodie, Cyr, Pence, Rold, & Honeycutt, 2012; Lloyd, Boer, & Voelpel, 2017; Pasupathi & Hoyt, 2009). This research about leaders in small group situations appears to show that listening is somewhat distinct from common listening competencies in most research about interpersonal listening. For example, Omilion-Hodges and Baker (2017) researched leader–member relationship quality in dyadic communication exchanges. Few of the leader–member exchanges they examined involved listening to employees’ ideas. More of these competencies involved mentoring, support, concern, and gratitude. Their listening scale also assumes dyadic in-person interactions, with emphasis on items such as nonverbal communication.

Some other research focuses on team- and organization-level listening (Johnston, Reed, & Lawrence, 2011; Johnston & Reed, 2017). While this research does not examine listening competencies of leaders, it suggests that leaders are responsible for developing positive listening environments.
Leaders as Strategic Communicators

Scholars in recent years have increasingly recognized the critical role of leaders who focus on strategic internal communication. For example, Argenti (2017) sums up this research with this definition of a leader:

We define a leader as a person in a company who develops and executes organizational strategy through management of people and communication. . . . With that definition in mind, among the myriad roles a senior executive leader fills within an organization, one of the most fundamental is that of chief communicator of the organization’s vision. (p. 147)

Hart and Quinn (1993) identify this role as the vision setter and describe it as “one of creating a sense of identity and mission—the definition and articulation of the firm’s basic purpose and future direction” (p. 551). How institutional leaders use language to communicate this vision is a concept that has also been studied (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Sharbrough, 2015; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Westley and Mintzberg (1989) further describe strategic visionaries as those “who not only stick doggedly to the oral and written repetition of the vision, but who are able also to translate that vision across different mediums, exposing employees to this vision through word and deed” (p. 147). Among charismatic leadership theories, creating and communicating vision is one of the most important characteristics to improve organization improvement (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996).

Employee Voice

The view of leaders as strategic communicators, vision tellers, and charismatic directors may come at cross-purposes with leaders’ ability to foster two-way communication and capture employee voice. Grunig’s (1984; Grunig & Grunig, 2011) excellence theory, which focuses on two-way symmetrical communication, has been explored in a variety of leadership communication contexts. Some research suggests two-way symmetrical communication is associated with higher employee engagement and organizational performance (Men & Stacks, 2014; Ruck, Welch, & Menara, 2017). Closely tied to the notion of listening, particularly in the context of leadership communication, is that of employee voice. Employee voice as a construct has been approached from a variety of disciplines, often without a shared definition (Ruck et al., 2017; Wilkinson, Dundon, Marchington, & Ackers, 2014; Wilkinson, Donaghey, Dundon, & Freeman, 2004). Ruck et al. (2017) suggest a key distinction in the literature about employee voice is management-centric versus employee-centric communication. They cite a growing number of studies that critique traditional models of leadership communication as management-centric rather than employee-centric. These studies suggest that the goals of transformative leaders are not necessarily aligned with those of the employees. Moreover, transformational leadership models do not have mechanisms for leaders to respond to the corrective feedback of employees (Carroll & Gillen, 1987; Fairhurst & Uhl-Bien, 2012; Tourish, 2013; Walker & Aritz, 2014).
Ruck et al. (2017) have developed a measure that captures the two aspects of employee voice that are common in the literature: upward communication from employees to senior management and senior management receptiveness. Specifically, the traits associated with employee voice include the following: (a) employees have opportunities to feed their views upward, (b) employees have ways to pass on criticisms, (c) employees have ways to communicate ideas to senior management, (d) leaders seek the views of employees or employee representatives, (e) leaders respond to suggestions from employees or employee representatives, and (f) leaders allow employees or employee representatives to influence final decisions.

Ruck et al. (2017) concluded their study of employee voice by calling for leaders to “develop . . . employee voice capabilities” with enterprise social networks. Neill (2015) likewise concludes that leaders must use technology-mediated communication to listen to employees, focusing specifically on millennials who expect even more dialogue in internal communication.

Overall, our review of literature revealed little about what constitutes leader listening, particularly in the context of technology-mediated environments. The literature about listening reveals concepts that may be relevant to leader listening but appears ill-equipped to explain listening on a mass scale and listening in networked and technology-mediated contexts. The literature about leaders as strategic communicators focuses primarily on leaders as broadcasters, with less attention on two-way communication that includes listening. Finally, research about employee voice suggests leaders should adopt an employee-centric orientation to listen. Scholars in this vein promote the idea that leaders can use technology to understand employee voice, yet little research exists to describe how leaders should accomplish this. Thus, our second study was developed to explore the unique nature of leader listening in digital environments and tie it to notions such as strategic communication, two-way communication, and employee voice.

**Study 2 Methodology**

We adopted a critical incident approach to understand what employees view as digital listening. The critical incident approach is an effective way to evaluate organizational communication, especially to make sense of new forms of communication (Zwijze-Koning, De Jong, & Van Vuuren, 2015). We asked respondents to describe effective digital listening by leaders and provide one concrete example they had observed in the workplace. Specifically, respondents were given the following prompt:

We are conducting research about how leaders listen to employees on internal digital platforms. Internal digital platforms go by many names (i.e., internal social networks, enterprise social networking platforms) and include a suite of tools, including but not limited to social newsfeeds, blogs and wikis, messaging and chat apps, forums, and online conferencing and streaming tools. We want to learn how leaders use these tools to listen to employees. Please share how well leaders use these digital tools to listen to the views of employees in your organization. Please include at least one concrete example of what you view as effective listening by leaders with these digital communication tools.
We contacted recent students in our part-time MBA program and asked them to participate in an online survey. Altogether, we received 122 responses from former MBA students. On average, these respondents had 7.49 years of work experience. There were 87 men (71.3%) and 35 women (28.7%). They self-identified in the following roles: executive (2, 1.7%), senior manager (16, 13.9%), manager (52, 45.2%), sales and development (11, 9.6%), analyst/accountant/engineer (27, 23.5%), and consultant (7, 6.1%).

The final dataset contained 124 pages of text. On average, each respondent wrote 431 words. The critical incidents were evaluated through several rounds of coding for refinement. We initially coded in the following ways: leadership actions, employee actions, principles of effective communication, and the platform/channel (see Table 3). We then developed higher-level themes from these initial codes (see Study 2 Findings for more details).

We report our findings with a balance between narrative and quantification (see Patton, 2002). In-depth direct statements of participants are presented to provide authentic examples of digital listening. Counts of coded items are provided throughout this article and in Table 3 for several reasons. First, numerical counting allows for systematically assessing the potential importance of various explanations, tendencies, and causes associated with the qualitative data. Second, since qualitative data are generally lengthy, counting aids in selecting representative quotations to report. Finally, reporting counts of coded items assists readers in drawing their own conclusions about the data and leaves a more complete audit trail of data analysis (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Bryman & Bell, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Throughout the Study 2 Findings section, we use the phrases most professionals when more than 50% of participants stated a view; many professionals for between 25% and 50%, and some professionals for less than 25%.

**Study 2 Findings**

Our findings fall into a variety of themes about what employees view as effective digital listening by leaders and what constitutes feeling heard. These themes include leader-generated vision and ideas create the agenda for listening; employees view asking questions as a form of voice, employees view accessibility as being heard by leaders, leaders posing targeted questions gives voice to employees, anonymous input allows leaders to listen to employees’ real views, participating in competitive ideation gives voice to employees, effective leader listening is often gauged by follow up (or the lack thereof), and effective leader listening involves human connection and praising.

**Leader-Generated Vision and Ideas Create the Agenda for Listening**

Whether it is townhalls, webinars, video meetings, or through other communication channels, most respondents described leaders’ ideas as the starting point for effective listening. Leaders initiated conversations by describing company vision, strategy, and initiatives in many forms. Typically, employees felt they were listened to or given
voice through the acts of asking questions or reacting to the leaders’ ideas. A participant from an aerospace company explained:

Executives hold a monthly webcast that is broadcast throughout the entire organization. At the end of these webcasts, they always hold a lengthy Q&A session where viewers can submit questions real-time. This open dialog allows employees to voice their concerns and probe for a clearer understanding on the future vision of the organization. Leaders have done a tremendous job communicating in this format because they constantly encourage everyone to take part in the discussion.
A contracts manager similarly described this:

We also have company-wide webcasts—this is the tool the top level of leadership at the company uses the most. They communicate company strategy, initiatives, major market changes, and various performance factors. They also take questions via a link under the webcast. People are free to submit questions throughout the webcast and then they will select a few to answer at the end. This usually ends up being an effective way to communicate information out to employees.

Many employees emphasize these leader communications should be strategic and well-polished. For example, one participant stated,

When used judiciously and strategically, digital tools are a great medium to increase visibility, communicate the company’s goals and challenges and virtually remove the degrees of layers that separate a CEO from an intern. It is important to remember to use these tools judiciously, and not as “thinking out loud” tools.

In some cases, leaders allow employees to vote on ideas. For example, a manager explained. “Sending out simple surveys/polls where employees can vote is effective to see what the consensus is on a certain issue or idea. This is effective because it can be completed very quickly.” Consistently, participants described a similar pattern of leaders generating and communicating vision, strategies, and initiatives. Typically, employees could ask questions and provide reactions at the end of these events.

**Employees View Asking Questions as a Form of Voice**

More so than any other communication behavior, employees view the ability to pose questions as a form of voice for employees. An assistant vice president in the banking and finance industry explained:

In the townhalls . . . the CEO has a screen where he pulls up questions submitted to the Q&A in real time. He typically answers two or three questions then time runs out. Although he only answers a few questions, they are not pre-selected and help really clear up and answer questions the employees have about what he just communicated. During the third quarter townhall people usually ask about healthcare benefits and if there are going to be changes to the plans for next year. The CEO is good at explaining how changes to the plans are determined and also what additional benefits we should expect. For example, a few years ago he mentioned during a townhall in response to a question about maternity leave that the company was increasing the amount of time they are allow.

A marketing representative in the hospitality industry explained a common view that listening on the part of the leader is essentially equated with fielding questions:
I’ve seen leaders of companies engage in live podcasts and interviews where their associates are able to submit questions while streaming, and the leader would respond to each incoming question. I believe that this is an incredibly efficient and effective form of digital communication, particularly with regards to the listening aspect. This puts them on the spot and forces them to open up with honest, authentic answers, which is precisely what employees are looking for from their executives.

A senior manager in the defense industry explained that when leaders respond to employee questions, they are creating an open communication environment.

Our offices are spread across the country and at various international locations. . . . Skype is the main form of communication that they use. The VPs will have an open discussion with employees through online questions submitted. This allows a live free flowing discussion to be held across the company.

**Employees View Accessibility as Being Heard by Leaders**

Participants often explained that accessibility demonstrated leaders’ interest in hearing from employees. For example, a business development specialist from a tech company described the importance of accessibility, “From other leaders I have observed, availability is a key component toward better listening. A few examples include having open forums or being able to directly message managers when they are online.”

Often, this accessibility is expected through multiple channels:

Lately the leaders of my company have been using digital tools to listen to our employees. We have a major culture problem in our company. Employees are disgruntled, turnover is at an all-time high; however, our leadership team has recognized this and is connecting with our company base through multiple channels whether it be townhall discussions, quarterly companywide call updates, and smaller group sessions. Our employees are finally being informed and being heard.

A senior manager at a manufacturing company described how this availability puts a new meaning to an open-door policy:

The leaders in my company use Phone, Voicemail, Email Voicemail, WebEx and Skype to communicate with employees in the organization. The leaders try to follow-up and listen to the views of as many employees at least once a month. Since my company has 15 distribution centers it can be difficult to listen to views of employees from different areas but the leaders in my organization effectively utilize WebEx and Skype to listen to ideas, concerns, and feedback. My leaders have an open-door policy even for people in distribution centers meaning they can call, Skype, or schedule a WebEx meeting. People in the organization appreciate the ability to communicate with the leaders in my organization even if it is remotely.

**Leaders Posing Targeted Questions Gives Voice to Employees**

Another form of voice described by some respondents was when leaders posed targeted questions to employees. For example, a manager in the aerospace industry explained,
Several times a week, managers will open a thread regarding organizational performance and users can provide their feedback. Additionally, executives will often post organizational goals and changes to the forum, which allows employees to give their feedback. In some cases, major organizational changes have come from overwhelming feedback on an insight thread created by company leaders . . . The insight platform also allows leaders and employees to crowdsource solutions to problems they face. Oftentimes a manager will solicit advice or help from the community and find the problems they are facing have been solved eloquently by another organization. I’ve found the insight platform to be one of our greatest digital communication assets because it allows people to discuss ideas on a wide-open platform. Leaders often find their ideas reaffirmed by the responses they receive from the community and at times, rework their ideas based on the response from the community . . . Our webcasts and insight platform have been great tools to foster an open discussion between leadership and the employees.

One interesting aspect about leaders posing these targeted questions is the questions emerge from the leaders’ own ideas. The response above is indicative of this as leaders “find their ideas reaffirmed” or “rework their ideas.”

**Anonymous Input Allows Leaders to Listen to Employees’ Real Views**

Many respondents emphasized the importance of anonymous input so leaders would hear their candid views. Typically, this anonymous input came in the form of surveys. For example, one respondent explained,

[Our company] has grown much bigger in the past few years and now utilizes surveys and data analytics to get feedback/information from employees . . . [Our company] recently had employees fill out a survey to anonymously review how managers and the executive board were performing. They even encouraged the various facilities to compete with each other to see which facility could get the highest percentage of surveys returned. This friendly competition yielded almost 100% survey responses company-wide. Overall, I think anonymity allows employees to provide honest feedback without worrying about repercussions. Also, I think that while it is fair to evaluate an employee’s performance, it is meaningful for employees to feel like they have a voice too.

These forms of anonymous questions and input can occur in real-time communication as well. For events and real-time communication, this comes in the form of anonymous chat functions:

Leaders in my organization do a pretty good job at utilizing digital tools to listen to the views of employees. Every quarter, my company holds a “town hall” meeting where the CEO goes over the company’s financial performance as well as addresses any other pertinent company information. Where digital tools come into play is the use of an anonymous online portal for employees to ask questions to the CEO every quarter. This platform allows the employees to ask the CEO a question without the fear of any repercussions.
Participating in Competitive Ideation Gives Voice to Employees

Rarely, respondents described instances of giving employees an opportunity to generate original ideas. For example, idea competitions that culminate in review by senior executives accomplish this. A banking analyst explained,

> There has been a big push to better engage the junior populations empowering them to provide feedback and their own ideas on product development. We have a tool called collaborate, which is an internal document sharing and idea sharing site. . . . Junior employees brainstorm ideas that senior management should consider, and the competition vies for the backing of our venture capital arm that backs the winning ideas . . . In today’s environment with technological change and FinTechs rising and dis-intermediating traditional banking structures, it’s critical the firm focuses on the ideas of its own employees to tackle these challenges.

Effective Leader Listening Is Often Gauged by Follow-up (or the Lack Thereof)

Participants frequently described that when leaders follow through on collective employee feedback, they are listening to the employees. For example, a respondent explained how anonymous surveys were perceived as given voice to employees only when they were followed by action:

> My company sends out a survey every year with questions about trust, knowledge transfer, goal setting, management styles and pretty much anything that would help a company succeed. We usually get around 85% participation throughout the company. Once all the results are in, we have a team meeting to see what our team thinks about where the company is headed and what we can do better. Since it’s a companywide survey, we compare our team’s results to that of the rest of the company. That way our manager can see if we need specific things for our team or if we align with what the rest of the company thinks. Our leadership team is pretty active about making changes every year based on the results, so it’s a good way for us to voice our opinions.

Another participant explained,

> More than anything, their acceptance of employee feedback is what I’ve found most effective. They routinely take suggestions from employees, and very visibly put these suggestions into action. . . . The open back and forth is really appreciated by the employees and makes us feel as though we have a direct line to those running the company.

Effective Leader Listening Involves Human Connection and Praising

Some respondents explained how leaders can use digital communication to publicly praise employees. One manager explained,
Recently, one of my colleagues received recognition from upper management in the form of an all-staff email. I thought this was effective because it keeps everybody involved and “in the know.” It also sets an example for what is expected of you to earn that kind of praise.

Interestingly, many respondents equate feeling appreciated as being heard. For example, one respondent explained,

Recently one of our senior executives shot a YouTube video of him visiting one of our new stores. . . . He shared his experience and vision for the new project. I felt that his method of communication was effective in feeling connected with the senior executive and feeling appreciated for the work that got put in the project.

In these examples of leaders praising others, the act of leaders acknowledging employees and their contributions appears to be associated with awareness of what employees are doing. This awareness seems to be associated with the notion of listening.

**Discussion of Conclusions and Recommendations**

Our first study showed leaders in more positive organizational cultures (i.e., those with high emotional capital) are 3 to 4 times as likely to frequently communicate on internal digital platforms than those in less positive organizational cultures (i.e., those with low emotional capital). These leaders in high EC organizations are able to extend their influence much more broadly across their organizations. No aspect of communicating more distinguishes leaders in high EC organizations from those in low EC organizations than the ability to listen to employees on internal digital platforms (see Figure 2). In many ways, these leaders characterize Argenti’s (2017) description of contemporary leadership communication:

> Above all, leadership communication entails nurturing and maintaining a workplace environment in which communication flows freely and quickly in all directions with minimal distortion or lag time. The leader of an organization is automatically the designated chief communication officer and is accountable for all communication in the organization—not only his or her own, but that of the entire workplace community. (pp. 1-2)

Leaders in high EC cultures appear to understand that internal digital platforms extend their abilities to communicate across the organization often and rapidly. In fact, we suggest that leaders who are not actively communicating across their organizations with internal digital platforms are missing opportunities to dramatically improve organizational culture and organizational performance.

Yet our second study demonstrated the perplexing nature of what constitutes digital listening by leaders. Based on employee accounts of what is perceived as effective digital listening, our exploratory study of digital listening by leaders suggests that it is primarily leader-centric rather than employee-centric. Moreover, employee voice is more often than not perceived as a collective voice rather than an individual voice.
Contrary to listening research in interpersonal contexts and employee voice research in organizational contexts that emphasize employee-centrism, digital listening by leaders appears to be leader-centric. It emerges primarily from the leaders’ presentation of strategies, initiatives, and other ideas. Leaders may also ask questions to employees. Yet these questions are rarely focused on employees’ original perspectives. The questions tend to be framed, specific questions to address issues of interest to leaders. In many cases, these targeted questions are no more than testing grounds for preestablished ideas of the leaders. Employees do expect interaction primarily in the form of asking questions and to a lesser degree receiving questions from leaders. Furthermore, they expect follow-up. Generally, the nature of digital listening by leaders can be characterized as two-way yet asymmetric (Grunig, 1984).

Employees appear to be content when the collective voice—not their individual voices—is expressed. Participants described dozens of scenarios in which individual employees could not be heard: leaders were running events, posting messages, and responding to questions in synchronous and asynchronous environments when hundreds, if not thousands, of employees were watching and generally passively participating. They also described the value of anonymity if giving input. Overall, it appears employees expect leaders to understand representative views of the employees. They rarely expect to be heard on an individual level.
Our studies open many opportunities for future research. First, our studies suggest there is need for new models of leader listening, particularly in technology-mediated environments. Our study suggests that some of the key competencies of digital listening by leaders involve frequently sharing information about the strategic direction of the organization while allowing employees to ask related questions, asking for input—sometimes in anonymous form—from employees about leaders’ ideas, following up on employee suggestions, and demonstrating awareness and appreciation for employee efforts. Digital listening requires adeptness at technologies that allow two-way communication, albeit generally in an asymmetric manner. Broadly, our research tends to support the view that leaders need to be strategic internal communicators on digital platforms and allow mechanisms for identifying the collective voice of employees. We view our study as a starting point for future empirical work and theorizing about the nature of digital listening by leaders.

Second, our studies suggest there is a great deal to learn about what employees believe constitutes being heard by leaders. Our expectation was that digital listening would in many ways reflect Ruck, Welch, and Menara’s model of employee voice. While it is true our study showed employees sometimes described instances of providing input to leaders, much more frequently employees suggested that their voice was heard by asking questions. While our study showed employees want leaders to follow up on employee suggestions, participants rarely mentioned a desire to influence final decisions. Most importantly, most successful examples of digital listening by leaders are clearly management-centric, with the starting and ending points of all interactions being the agenda and ideas of leaders. Most participants were comfortable with this asymmetric arrangement. We believe that the notion of the collective voice should feature prominently in future studies of leader listening.

Finally, our studies suggest there are opportunities to explore the normative, even ethical, nature of leader listening. Concepts such as two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Grunig, 2011) and employee voice (Ruck et al., 2017) are in part studied and promoted out of beliefs of fairness and equity. Our research appears to show that employees do not expect symmetrical communication and view leader-centric listening as appropriate. In fact, they appear to value leader-centric digital listening and align it with high organizational performance. Yet it is not clear that employees have seen other models of leader listening. It is plausible that employees would also value more symmetric leader listening were they to experience it. With rapidly evolving technologies that facilitate two-way, networked communication, leaders would be wise to explore and experiment with symmetric forms of digital listening. Scholars would be wise to carefully control for various forms of digital listening to evaluate their outcomes.
## Appendix

**K-Means Cluster Analysis of Emotional Capital (EC).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low EC</th>
<th>Medium EC</th>
<th>High EC</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Authenticity ($\alpha = .77$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees believe that what leaders at this organization say and do are aligned.</td>
<td>4.37 (1.07)</td>
<td>5.51 (0.92)</td>
<td>6.22 (0.72)</td>
<td>5.67 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees think that managers at this organization follow through on their commitments.</td>
<td>4.49 (1.04)</td>
<td>5.57 (0.85)</td>
<td>6.21 (0.77)</td>
<td>5.71 (1.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pride ($\alpha = .77$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization values the achievements of its employees.</td>
<td>4.76 (1.08)</td>
<td>5.78 (0.92)</td>
<td>6.31 (0.80)</td>
<td>5.88 (1.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaders at the organization publicly recognize the contributions of employees.</td>
<td>4.43 (1.17)</td>
<td>5.60 (0.90)</td>
<td>6.36 (0.65)</td>
<td>5.78 (1.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attachment ($\alpha = .73$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees feel like they belong to a community with shared values and interests inside the company.</td>
<td>4.43 (1.18)</td>
<td>5.54 (0.91)</td>
<td>6.36 (0.69)</td>
<td>5.75 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization helps create a feeling of community among employees.</td>
<td>4.71 (1.19)</td>
<td>5.61 (0.86)</td>
<td>6.33 (0.71)</td>
<td>5.80 (1.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fun ($\alpha = .83$)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization encourages employees to experiment.</td>
<td>3.96 (1.23)</td>
<td>5.51 (0.92)</td>
<td>6.20 (0.74)</td>
<td>5.61 (1.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization tolerates mistakes of employees who take initiative.</td>
<td>4.17 (1.12)</td>
<td>5.43 (0.94)</td>
<td>6.04 (0.92)</td>
<td>5.53 (1.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization provides a work environment that is fun and playful.</td>
<td>4.01 (1.38)</td>
<td>5.44 (1.03)</td>
<td>6.08 (0.89)</td>
<td>5.54 (1.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organization encourages employees to innovate.</td>
<td>4.39 (1.10)</td>
<td>5.54 (0.88)</td>
<td>6.37 (0.74)</td>
<td>5.75 (1.07)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* EC items were on a 7-point Likert-type scale from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). Cluster analysis revealed three primary clusters: high emotional capital ($n = 399$), medium emotional capital ($n = 447$), and low emotional capital ($n = 112$).

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