



# Strategic Listening as a Capability for Organizational Renewal

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## Abstract

Organizations operating in uncertain and rapidly changing environments require more than the capacity to communicate decisions efficiently; they require the institutional capability to notice, interpret, and respond to knowledge distributed across employees and stakeholder groups. This study conceptualizes strategic listening as an organizational capability through which voice, weak signals, operational concerns, emerging opportunities, and alternative interpretations are systematically received, evaluated, integrated, and translated into renewal-oriented decisions. The study examines strategic listening through the combined theoretical lenses of organizational listening, employee voice, psychological safety, organizational learning, sensemaking, and dynamic capabilities. Because no primary organizational dataset was supplied, a transparent simulation-based explanatory design was adopted.

A synthetic dataset of 300 organizational profiles was generated using four seven-point constructs: strategic listening capability, psychological safety, knowledge integration, and organizational renewal readiness. The simulated analysis indicated a strong positive association between strategic listening and renewal readiness ( $r = 0.804$ ). Multiple regression analysis further showed that strategic listening, psychological safety, and knowledge integration jointly explained approximately 72.0% of the simulated variance in renewal readiness.

Mean renewal readiness increased from 3.60 among organizations classified as having very low listening maturity to 5.83 among those with very high listening maturity. The findings are not presented as evidence from real organizations; instead, they demonstrate the internal logic and empirical testability of the proposed framework. The study argues that organizational renewal depends not simply on creating channels for employees and stakeholders to speak, but on developing an institutional capacity to recognize consequential information, protect constructive voice, integrate competing interpretations, and visibly connect listening with organizational action. Strategic listening is therefore positioned as a potentially important microfoundation of organizational learning and adaptive renewal.

**Keywords:** strategic listening, organizational renewal, employee voice, organizational learning, psychological safety, knowledge integration, dynamic capabilities

## 1. Introduction

Organizational renewal has become an enduring concern in management research because organizations must preserve valuable capabilities while simultaneously revising assumptions, routines, structures, and strategic priorities that no longer fit changing conditions. Renewal is therefore not equivalent to episodic



restructuring. It involves an ongoing capacity to recognize consequential changes, reconsider established interpretations, mobilize new knowledge, and selectively reconfigure organizational activities. Crossan, Lane, and White conceptualized strategic renewal as a central outcome of organizational learning, emphasizing the interaction between learning processes occurring across individual, group, and organizational levels. Crossan and Berdrow subsequently demonstrated how learning processes can contribute to strategic renewal in organizational settings.

A central difficulty, however, is that knowledge required for renewal is rarely concentrated exclusively at the senior-management level. Employees close to technologies, customers, production processes, suppliers, communities, and operational failures frequently encounter information before it becomes visible within formal strategic reporting systems. Stakeholders outside the organization can similarly identify dissatisfaction, emerging expectations, unintended effects, and market changes. Yet the existence of information does not guarantee organizational learning. Morrison and Milliken showed how organizational silence can prevent relevant information from reaching decision makers, while subsequent voice research has demonstrated that employees continually assess whether speaking is safe and whether their contribution is likely to have meaningful impact.

This distinction between the availability of voice and the organizational capacity to listen is theoretically important. An organization may conduct surveys, establish suggestion platforms, hold meetings, and maintain customer-feedback systems while remaining weak at listening if received information is ignored, fragmented across functions, stripped of uncomfortable meaning, or disconnected from consequential decisions. Macnamara's work on organizational listening argues that listening requires an organizational architecture involving culture, policies, systems, resources, processes, and practices rather than merely opportunities for speaking. Research by Reed, Goolsby, and Johnston similarly indicates that an organization's listening environment can influence how customer and employee information becomes internally useful.

The present study extends this reasoning by treating strategic listening as a capability for organizational renewal. Strategic listening is defined here as the repeatable organizational capacity to purposefully acquire diverse internal and external voice, interpret its strategic significance, protect the expression of challenging information, integrate relevant knowledge across organizational boundaries, and connect credible insights with decisions or learning responses. This perspective links organizational listening with the broader dynamic-capabilities tradition. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen emphasized organizational capacities for adapting, integrating, and reconfiguring competencies under changing conditions, while Eisenhardt and Martin described dynamic capabilities as identifiable organizational processes through which resources and strategic positions can be altered.

The research problem is consequently not whether communication occurs but whether organizations possess sufficient listening capability to convert distributed experience into renewal-relevant knowledge. The study develops a framework connecting strategic listening with psychological safety, knowledge integration, and organizational renewal readiness. Because no primary survey or organizational dataset was available, the empirical component is explicitly simulation based. Synthetic observations are used to examine the statistical behavior expected under the proposed theoretical relationships rather than to claim findings about an actual organizational population. The resulting



framework provides a basis for later validation through employee surveys, longitudinal organizational studies, multilevel designs, or comparative case research.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Strategic Listening as an Organizational Capability

The first objective is to distinguish strategic listening from interpersonal listening and routine communication activity. At the organizational level, listening involves more than individual attentiveness during conversations. Organizations must establish repeatable mechanisms through which signals originating across different hierarchical levels and stakeholder groups can enter decision processes without losing their contextual meaning. Macnamara's research emphasizes that organizational listening is mediated, distributed, and dependent on enabling structures and resources, particularly when organizations must process large volumes of heterogeneous stakeholder voice.

Accordingly, the study conceptualizes strategic listening through five connected functions: access to consequential voice, interpretive openness, psychological safety, cross-boundary knowledge integration, and response accountability. These functions transform listening from a communication courtesy into an adaptive organizational routine. The objective is not to claim that every stakeholder preference must determine strategy, but to establish whether organizations are capable of receiving and seriously evaluating information that can challenge existing assumptions or expose emerging strategic requirements.

### 2.2 Examining the Relationship Between Listening and Renewal Readiness

The second objective is to examine whether increasing strategic listening maturity is theoretically associated with stronger organizational renewal readiness. Renewal readiness refers to the capacity to reconsider assumptions, learn from emerging information, coordinate adaptive responses, and reconfigure practices when environmental or internal evidence indicates that established arrangements are becoming inadequate.

This relationship is examined through a synthetic analytical framework rather than real organizational observations. Strategic listening is expected to contribute both directly and indirectly to renewal readiness. Directly, listening broadens the informational basis available for strategic sensemaking. Indirectly, it can support psychological safety and knowledge integration, thereby increasing the likelihood that locally held knowledge moves across levels and becomes available for organizational interpretation.

### 2.3 Assessing the Roles of Psychological Safety and Knowledge Integration

The third objective is to assess the complementary roles of psychological safety and knowledge integration. Psychological safety is relevant because employees may possess valuable information without expressing it when interpersonal or organizational consequences appear threatening. Edmondson's foundational research associated psychological safety with learning behavior in work teams, while Liang, Farh, and Farh showed that psychological safety is particularly relevant to forms of employee voice involving potential interpersonal risk.



Knowledge integration represents a second necessary mechanism. Listening produces little adaptive value when observations remain isolated within departments or databases. Renewal requires information to be interpreted, connected with other knowledge, and incorporated into broader organizational understanding.

The study therefore evaluates whether renewal readiness is stronger when listening capability is accompanied by conditions that permit voice and processes that transform dispersed information into usable organizational knowledge.

### **3. Review of Literature**

#### **3.1 Organizational Listening, Voice, and Silence**

Organizational communication scholarship has historically devoted considerable attention to voice, messaging, stakeholder engagement, and information dissemination. Listening has received comparatively less systematic attention as an organizational process. Macnamara challenged this imbalance by arguing that organizations require an architecture of listening if voice is to produce meaningful engagement. His later analysis further clarified that organizational listening involves structures and mediated processes capable of receiving, interpreting, and responding to potentially large volumes of diverse communication. In 2020, his corporate-listening research emphasized the value of integrating the voices of customers, employees, and other stakeholders rather than treating these sources as disconnected information streams.

The employee-voice literature complements this argument by explaining why valuable information may never enter organizational channels. Morrison and Milliken identified organizational silence as a systemic barrier to change and development. Morrison's later synthesis of employee voice and silence emphasized that speaking decisions are shaped by whether individuals expect their voice to be safe and effective. Detert and Edmondson further demonstrated the significance of implicit beliefs concerning circumstances in which speaking upward is perceived as risky or inappropriate. These contributions suggest that strategic listening begins before information is received: organizational conditions influence whether consequential information is expressed at all.

#### **3.2 Listening, Psychological Safety, and Organizational Learning**

The relationship between listening and learning can be understood through the concept of psychological safety. Edmondson's research demonstrated that teams characterized by greater psychological safety were more able to engage in learning behaviors involving interpersonal risk. This is relevant to organizational renewal because strategically useful knowledge is often incomplete, critical, uncertain, or inconsistent with dominant organizational assumptions. Employees who anticipate dismissal, reputational damage, or punishment may rationally withhold such knowledge.

Organizational learning extends the argument beyond individual expression. Crossan, Lane, and White's framework describes learning through processes operating across individual, group, and organizational levels and identifies strategic renewal as the underlying phenomenon of interest. March's earlier analysis of exploration and exploitation likewise demonstrates the importance of balancing established knowledge with the search for new possibilities. Strategic listening can be situated within



this learning architecture because it helps organizations acquire signals that challenge existing routines while also allowing experience accumulated within established operations to inform strategic adaptation.

### **3.3 Sensemaking, Dynamic Capabilities, and Strategic Renewal**

Listening becomes strategically consequential when information is interpreted rather than merely collected. Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld describe sensemaking as a process through which ambiguous circumstances are rendered sufficiently meaningful to support action. In environments characterized by uncertainty, organizations must therefore do more than accumulate data. They must preserve contextual information, compare competing interpretations, and determine which signals deserve organizational attention. Strategic listening can support this process by increasing the diversity and timeliness of inputs entering collective sensemaking.

Dynamic-capabilities and renewal research provides the strategic dimension of the proposed framework. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen focused on how organizations adapt and reconfigure competencies in changing environments, while Eisenhardt and Martin emphasized identifiable adaptive processes. Floyd and Lane approached strategic renewal as an organization-wide process involving differentiated managerial roles and potential role conflict. Crossan and Berdrow empirically connected organizational learning with renewal. Taken together, these traditions suggest an unresolved theoretical opportunity: organizational renewal research explains why learning and adaptation matter, while listening research explains how strategically useful voices can enter organizational cognition. Strategic listening provides a conceptual bridge between these bodies of scholarship.

## **4. Research Methodology**

### **4.1 Research Design and Analytical Logic**

The study employed a simulation-based explanatory research design. This design was selected because no primary dataset containing real employee, managerial, or organizational observations was provided. The analysis therefore does not represent field evidence and should not be interpreted as estimating effects in an actual organizational population. Instead, simulation is used as a transparent methodological device for testing whether the proposed theoretical model generates coherent statistical relationships under explicitly defined assumptions.

A synthetic dataset containing 300 organizational profiles was generated. Each profile represented a hypothetical organizational unit rather than an identifiable company or respondent. Four constructs were simulated on a seven-point scale: strategic listening capability, psychological safety, knowledge integration, and organizational renewal readiness. A fixed random seed was used during generation to support reproducibility of the reported analytical illustration.

**Table 1: Operationalization of the Simulation Framework**

| Construct                        | Scale | Analytical Meaning                                                                                          | Expected Relationship with Renewal |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Strategic Listening Capability   | 1–7   | Capacity to receive, interpret, evaluate, and respond to strategically relevant internal and external voice | Positive                           |
| Psychological Safety             | 1–7   | Perceived safety of raising questions, concerns, mistakes, and alternative interpretations                  | Positive                           |
| Knowledge Integration            | 1–7   | Capacity to combine distributed information across people, functions, and organizational levels             | Positive                           |
| Organizational Renewal Readiness | 1–7   | Capacity to reconsider assumptions and reconfigure priorities, routines, or practices                       | Outcome variable                   |

**Note:** All observations and numerical values are simulated for methodological demonstration. They do not represent surveyed organizations or employees.

## 4.2 Data-Generation Procedure and Measures

Strategic listening capability was generated first as the principal explanatory construct. Psychological safety was modeled as positively associated with listening because a credible listening environment should reduce the perceived futility and interpersonal risk associated with voice. Knowledge integration was modeled as dependent partly on both strategic listening and psychological safety because information must first become expressible and accessible before it can be combined across organizational boundaries.

Renewal readiness was subsequently generated as a function of strategic listening capability, psychological safety, knowledge integration, and a stochastic error term. Random variation was deliberately retained so that renewal readiness was not mechanically determined by listening. This reflects the theoretical expectation that organizational renewal depends on numerous additional conditions—including resources, governance arrangements, leadership, environmental pressures, and implementation capability—that are not represented in the simplified model.

## 4.3 Statistical Analysis and Evaluation Criteria

Three analytical procedures were applied. First, descriptive statistics were examined to confirm reasonable dispersion across the seven-point scales. Second, Pearson correlations were calculated to examine the direction and magnitude of associations among the simulated constructs. Third, an ordinary

least squares multiple-regression model was estimated with organizational renewal readiness as the dependent variable and strategic listening, psychological safety, and knowledge integration as predictors. For interpretive comparison, the 300 observations were also divided into five equal strategic-listening maturity groups containing 60 synthetic profiles each: very low, low, moderate, high, and very high. Mean renewal-readiness scores were then calculated for each group. Because these groups derive from a constructed dataset, inferential results indicate the statistical properties of the simulation rather than evidence sufficient for generalization to real organizations.

## 5. Analysis

### 5.1 Descriptive and Correlational Patterns

The simulated dataset produced sufficient variation for analytical comparison. Mean strategic listening capability was approximately 4.15 on the seven-point scale, while organizational renewal readiness averaged approximately 4.66.

The central purpose of the simulation was not to reproduce a known population distribution but to explore whether the conceptual mechanism connecting listening, safety, integration, and renewal remained statistically distinguishable when random variation was introduced.

**Table 2: Simulated Results by Strategic Listening Maturity**

| Strategic Listening Maturity | Synthetic Profiles (n) | Mean Listening Capability | Mean Psychological Safety | Mean Knowledge Integration | Mean Renewal Readiness |
|------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| Very Low                     | 60                     | 2.56                      | 3.09                      | 3.19                       | 3.60                   |
| Low                          | 60                     | 3.48                      | 3.82                      | 3.88                       | 4.31                   |
| Moderate                     | 60                     | 4.10                      | 4.16                      | 4.31                       | 4.60                   |
| High                         | 60                     | 4.73                      | 4.60                      | 4.68                       | 4.95                   |
| Very High                    | 60                     | 5.89                      | 5.42                      | 5.54                       | 5.83                   |

**Source:** Author-generated synthetic dataset. Values are simulated and should not be interpreted as observed organizational performance.

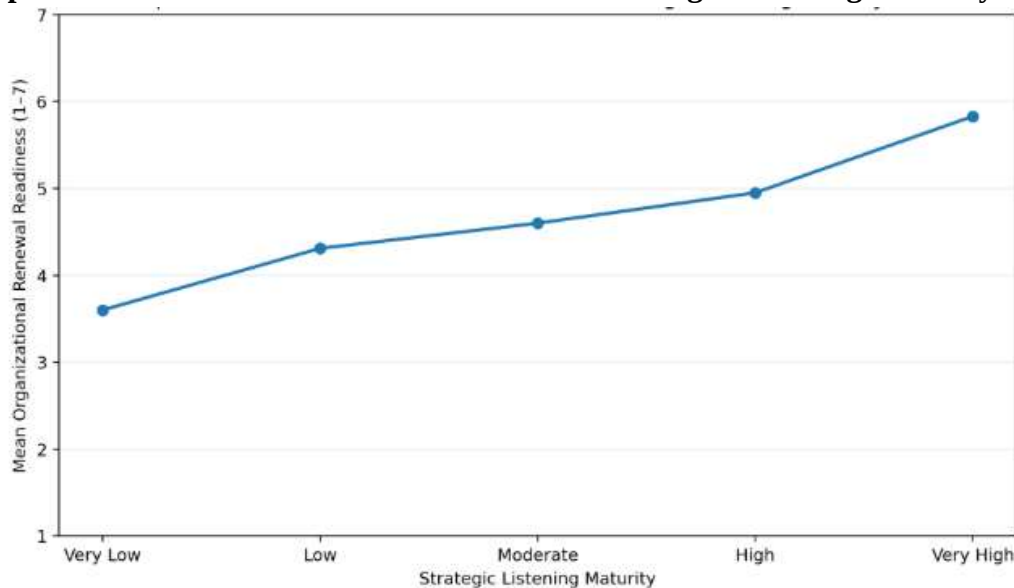
### 5.2 Strategic Listening Maturity and Renewal Readiness

The maturity-group analysis displays a clear progressive relationship. Mean renewal readiness was 3.60 in the very-low-listening group and increased to 4.31 in the low group, 4.60 in the moderate group, 4.95 in the high group, and 5.83 in the very-high group. The difference between the two extreme categories was therefore 2.23 scale points.

The pattern is theoretically consistent with the proposition that organizations become more renewal-ready when they systematically acquire and use distributed knowledge. Importantly, the interpretation is not that listening alone produces renewal.

The simulation assumes that listening contributes to the informational and relational conditions from which adaptive decisions become more feasible. Actual renewal still requires strategic judgment, resource allocation, implementation capacity, and accountability.

**Graph 1: Simulated Renewal Readiness Across Strategic Listening Maturity Levels**



**Interpretation:** The line pattern indicates a progressive increase in simulated renewal readiness as strategic-listening maturity rises. The largest overall contrast occurs between the very-low and very-high maturity categories.

**Key Finding:** Under the assumptions of the proposed model, stronger strategic-listening maturity is associated with substantially stronger organizational renewal readiness.

### 5.3 Multivariate Assessment

The result reinforces the theoretical logic of treating strategic listening as a multidimensional organizational capability. Listening appears most consequential when it is connected with a climate in which people can communicate difficult information and with organizational routines capable of integrating that information.

The model therefore does not support a narrow interpretation in which organizations become adaptive simply by increasing the volume of feedback they collect. Renewal depends on what happens to information after it is voiced.

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 From Employee Voice to Organizational Listening Capacity

The principal theoretical implication is that voice and listening should not be treated as interchangeable organizational achievements. An organization may possess multiple channels through which employees and stakeholders can communicate while remaining strategically deaf. Surveys can be administered without meaningful analysis, consultations can be conducted after decisions have effectively been finalized, and digital feedback platforms can generate large quantities of information that remain disconnected from strategic deliberation. Macnamara's organizational-listening research is particularly important in this respect because it shifts analytical attention from whether people can speak to whether organizations have the architecture and resources required to listen.

The simulated findings extend this distinction by showing how listening can be positioned within a renewal model. The strong constructed association between listening capability and renewal readiness should not be interpreted as empirical proof, but it illustrates a testable theoretical proposition: organizations that institutionalize listening may acquire richer signals concerning emerging problems, opportunities, stakeholder expectations, and failing routines. Such information can strengthen renewal only if managerial actors treat disagreement and inconvenient evidence as potential strategic resources rather than merely communication problems.

A further implication concerns response accountability. Listening is weakened when contributors cannot determine whether their information was considered, why it was rejected, or whether any action followed. A strategically mature listening system therefore requires visible closure. Closure does not mean accepting every suggestion. It means demonstrating that consequential voice enters a legitimate evaluative process. This distinction protects strategic judgment while reducing the perception that participation mechanisms are symbolic.

### 6.2 Psychological Safety as an Enabling Condition for Renewal-Oriented Listening

The second implication concerns the relationship between listening and psychological safety. Edmondson's work established the importance of psychological safety for learning behavior, and employee-voice research has subsequently shown why interpersonal risk influences whether potentially useful information is expressed. Detert and Edmondson further demonstrated that individuals can develop deeply embedded assumptions regarding situations in which speaking upward is unsafe or inappropriate.

For organizational renewal, this issue becomes strategically significant because valuable information is frequently uncomfortable. Employees may need to report the declining viability of a favored project, identify failures associated with senior decisions, challenge optimistic forecasts, disclose operational weaknesses, or question assumptions that have become embedded in organizational identity. A communication system that functions effectively only for agreeable information cannot support serious strategic listening.

The simulated model accordingly positions psychological safety as complementary to strategic listening rather than as an independent cultural benefit. Leaders seeking renewal should examine whether organizational responses to dissent reinforce or weaken future information flows. When individuals observe that constructive disagreement is punished, ignored, or attributed to disloyalty,



subsequent silence may become rational. Conversely, credible demonstrations that difficult information is examined fairly can strengthen the information infrastructure required for learning.

### 6.3 Knowledge Integration and the Translation of Listening into Renewal

Listening becomes strategically valuable only when received information can cross organizational boundaries. A front-line employee may recognize an emerging customer problem, a technical team may identify a technological limitation, and a regional office may observe changing market behavior, but none of these observations automatically becomes organizational knowledge. Crossan, Lane, and White's multilevel learning framework is valuable here because organizational learning requires movement between individual insight, shared interpretation, coordinated understanding, and institutionalized action.

The proposed framework therefore interprets knowledge integration as a translation mechanism between listening and renewal. Information must be contextualized rather than stripped into decontextualized metrics; competing interpretations must be compared; and decision makers must have mechanisms for distinguishing recurrent strategic signals from isolated preferences. Sensemaking research further supports this point because ambiguous circumstances do not arrive already interpreted. Organizations construct meanings through interaction, categorization, and subsequent action.

This perspective also connects strategic listening with dynamic capabilities. Teece, Pisano, and Shuen emphasize adaptive organizational capacities in changing environments, while Eisenhardt and Martin emphasize recognizable processes through which organizations alter their resource configurations and strategic positions. Strategic listening can be understood as contributing to the informational microfoundation of such processes: organizations cannot adapt effectively to developments that they systematically fail to hear, recognize, interpret, or escalate.

## 7. Conclusion

This study conceptualized strategic listening as an organizational capability that can support organizational renewal by improving access to distributed knowledge, enabling constructive voice, facilitating collective interpretation, and connecting stakeholder information with adaptive decision processes. The central argument is that listening should not be reduced to an interpersonal communication skill or to the existence of feedback channels. At the organizational level, strategic listening requires structures, norms, resources, analytical practices, leadership behaviors, and response mechanisms capable of transforming diverse voice into usable strategic knowledge.

The simulation-based analysis provided an internally consistent illustration of this argument. Within the synthetic dataset, strategic listening was strongly associated with renewal readiness, and organizations represented by very-high listening maturity displayed substantially stronger simulated renewal readiness than those represented by very-low maturity. Psychological safety and knowledge integration also contributed independently within the constructed regression model. These numerical results are deliberately presented as simulated analytical outcomes rather than real-world organizational evidence.

The study's principal contribution lies in connecting organizational-listening research with organizational learning, employee voice, sensemaking, psychological safety, dynamic capabilities, and



strategic-renewal theory. This integration suggests that listening may function as a neglected antecedent of renewal because it determines whether strategically significant experiences and interpretations can enter organizational learning processes. Organizations that invite voice but do not process it may appear participative while remaining informationally rigid. By contrast, organizations that institutionalize listening can potentially identify weak signals earlier, challenge obsolete assumptions, and broaden the evidence available for adaptive decision making.

Several limitations require emphasis. The numerical evidence was generated through simulation, constructs were simplified, causal parameters were specified rather than empirically discovered, and potentially important contextual variables were excluded. Future research should therefore validate the framework using real organizational samples, preferably through multilevel and longitudinal designs. Studies could examine whether strategic listening predicts subsequent innovation, strategic adaptation, employee voice, learning behavior, or renewal outcomes after controlling for leadership, organizational size, environmental turbulence, and resource availability.

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