soundwave®

Language of Leadership

Mastering conversational effectiveness for leaders

Leadership Development

How we think we talk, versus how we are actually heard.

When leaders, managers and professionals spend time with each other, they talk. They plan, discuss, argue, play, strategise, gossip — and through their talk— seek to maintain and to change the world.

They do gesture to one another, though these gestures often always accompany their talk. So whilst 'body-language' does have an impact on the quality of interaction, it is, in fact, talk that is the real instrument of progress. Is it any wonder that we're good at talking? Is it any wonder that we seek to get things done by being really, really good at it?

Our SoundWave voices have clear and powerful effects on how the people we talk to end up thinking, feeling and being. The table below offers a high level view of the impact of each voice.

Articulate for influence	Create the space for the involvement of all and become quietly influential
Advocate for impact	Take clear positions to assist the process of decision making
Advise for credibility	Offer professional perspective to assist others helping them to feel informed
Challenge for change	Interrupt commonly held thoughts and actions to promote change
Critique for judgement	Offer neutrality and impartiality to build trust
Correct for improvement	Guide others in the necessary way to do things helping them to feel competent
Probe for insight	Discover new possibilities and surface new issues on behalf of the team
Inquire for engagement	Open up the discussion space. Widen the range of what is possible.
Diagnose for solutions	Move self and others towards answers through deductive reasoning

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It is of course, one thing to think we are talking in a particular way, and it's another thing entirely, to know how we are heard. So how are we heard?

We looked at just under 1000 leaders, managers and professionals in our international SoundWave data set and compared the results of individuals' SoundWave self-perceptions with their 360's.

We also looked at whether the four respondent groups in the SoundWave 360 (Manager; Peer; Team Member and Independent) heard the same individuals differently.

In the aggregate, this is what we found:

1. **We're good at talking to others and to ourselves.** In the aggregate, self-perception tracks 360 results closely, meaning that other people are hearing the voice that we ourselves are using.

2. **We are reluctant to hold difficult conversations.** The aggregate use of the voice of 'correction' is the least preferred voice.

3. **We offer solutions before we invite opinion.** This is supported by the high use of the voice 'to diagnose'.

4. **Our dialogue becomes skewed in social hierarchy.** Managers hear their team members making greatest use of the more assertive voices (challenge, advocate, critique).

5. **We hear the voice 'to challenge' clearly and fast.**

6. **We modify the way we talk depending on who we are talking to.**

7. **We assess our own skills in listening and in talking a little harshly.**

So, what is the evidence for, and what are the implications of these findings?

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Key Findings

01 | We're good at talking to others and to ourselves.

Our Evidence

In the aggregate, 360 results (how people hear us) track self-perception results very closely. For example, if I think I am inquiring a lot, others are likely to hear me inquiring a lot as well.

The Implications

We should be confident in our use of talk but recognise that others hear less of what we think we say. There's often good sense in checking understanding.

02 | We are reluctant to hold difficult conversations.

Our Evidence

The voice 'to correct' is the least preferred (and used) voice in SoundWave self-perception and 360. Most of us do not like using it.

The Implications

People need to learn how to hold effective correctional conversations rather than avoid them or go in too hard. It's simple to do.

03 | We offer solutions before we invite opinion.

Our Evidence

The diagnostic voice is the most preferred in the SoundWave self-perception and equal first with inquire in the 360. We are quick to diagnose others' problems and fast to offer solutions ahead of inquiring.

The Implications

This desire to help others by believing we can diagnose their problems is paradoxical - it hinders rather than helps independent thought and action. Inquire ahead of diagnosing.

04 | Our dialogue becomes skewed in hierarchy.

Our Evidence

Managers hear their team members using more of the assertive voices than they hear from other respondent groups. This includes greater use of the assertive and accentuated voices (attack, criticism and preach)

The Implications

Perhaps team members in a trusting relationship with their boss feel comfortable in 'sounding off'. Perhaps managers are revealing an underlying anxiety in hearing voices in their accentuated form?

05 | We hear the voice of challenge clearly & fast.

Our Evidence

SoundWave 360 and self-perception results correspond almost exactly on this 'voice'. When we challenge, it's heard for what it is.

The Implications

To challenge well, use the voice consistently and thoughtfully, and monitor the impact its having.

06 | We can modify the way we talk.

Our Evidence

SoundWave 360 results show that we heard differently by each of our respondent groups, proving that we speak differently depending on who we are with.

The Implications

Talk is malleable. By bringing our SoundWave to conscious attention, we can better control how we talk and the effect that our talk has.

07 | We assess our own skills in listening & talking harshly.

Our Evidence

SoundWave 360 results for 'listening' show that we listen better than we think. We also use the accentuated voices at a lower level than we report doing.

The Implications

Be confident in our use of talk and in the quality of our listening, but don't take its skill for granted.

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The Data

Chart 1 below shows the aggregate results for the SoundWave self-perception and 360 from our sample population.

Notice the proximity of the self-perception to the 360.
Notice the exaggerated managerial line.
Notice the exaggerated independent line.

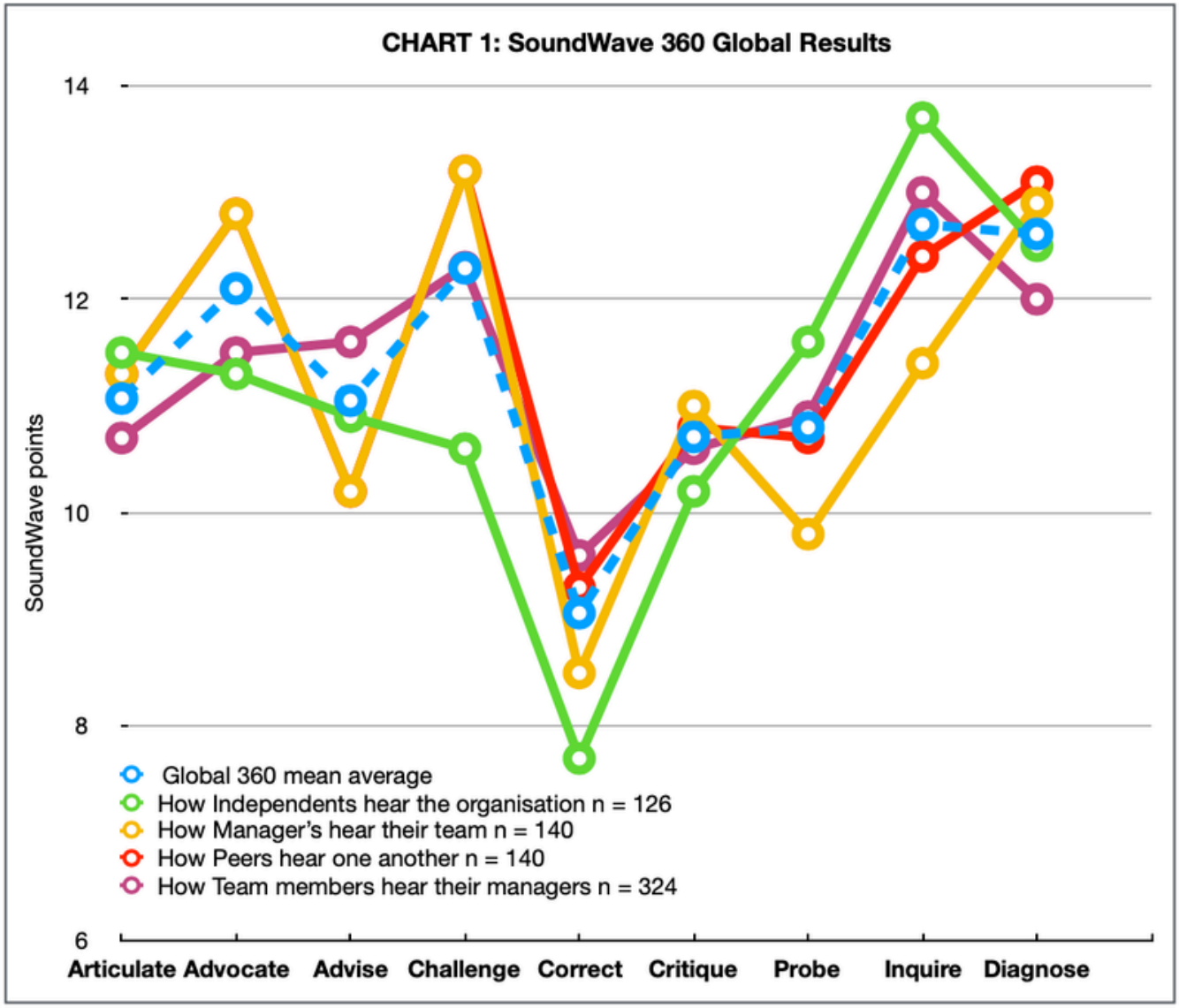

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Chart 2 below shows the aggregate results for the SoundWave self-perception and 360 from our sample population for the use of accentuated voices.

Notice the exaggerated managerial line.
Notice the exaggerated independent line.

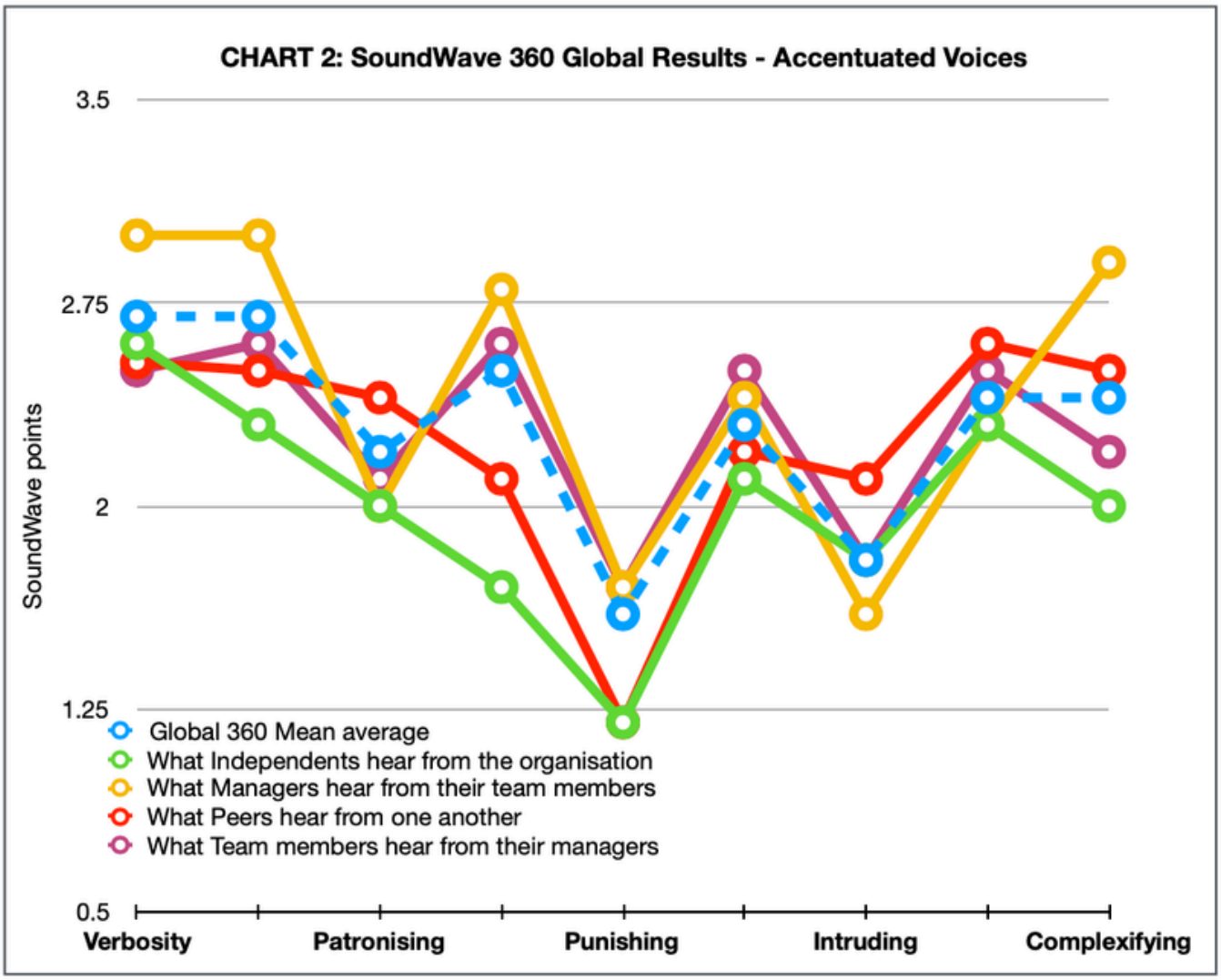

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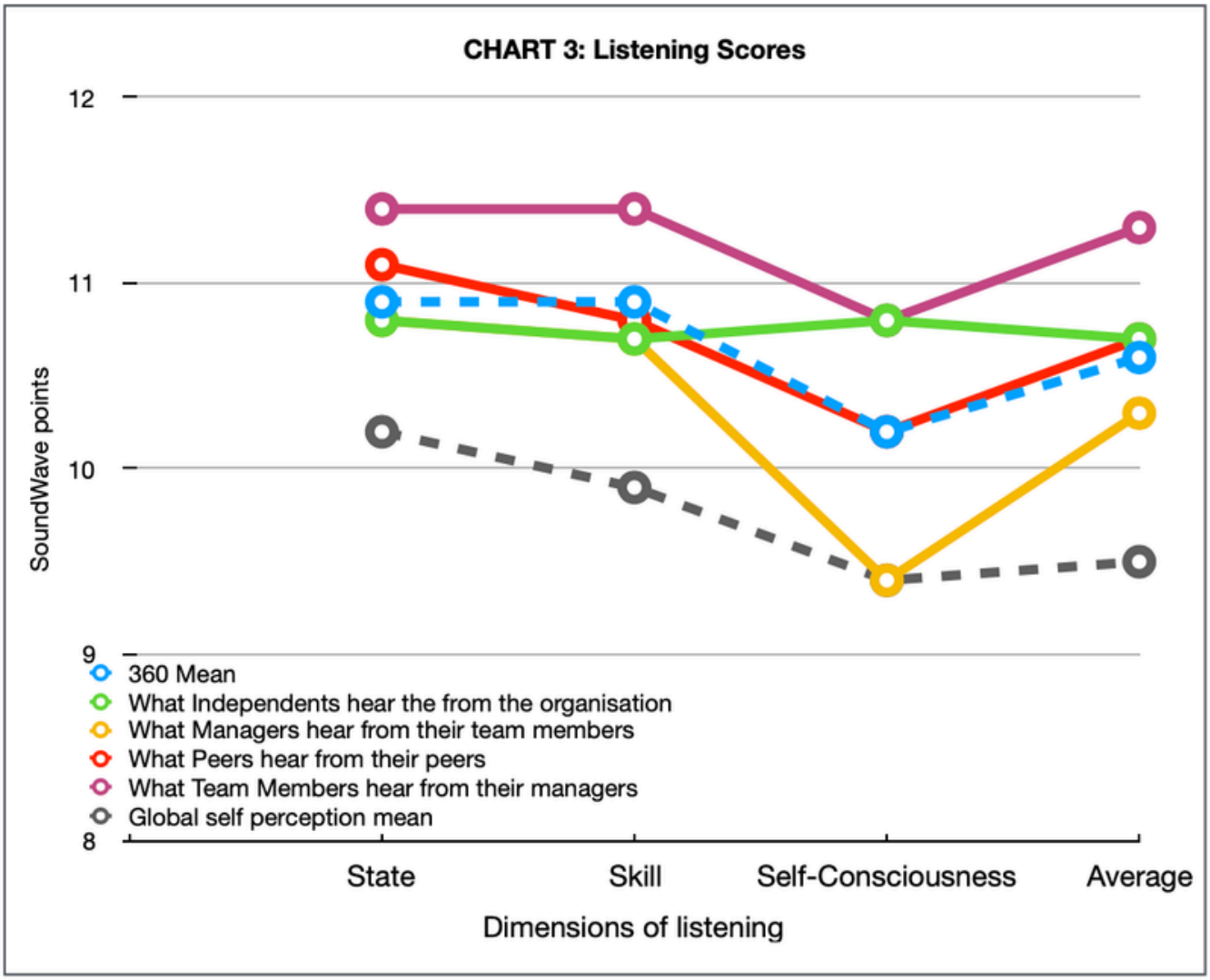
Chart 3 below shows the aggregate results for the SoundWave self-perception and 360 from our sample population for listening.

Notice how the self perception score falls below all other scores, lending some weight to the idea that even when it comes to listening, we are our own worst critics.



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www.soundwave.global

enquiries@soundwave.global

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