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A multilevel leadership process framework of performance management

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ABSTRACT

Performance management is a critical human resource management practice intended to facilitate performance and development in organizations. Unfortunately, recent discourse among researchers and practitioners suggest that current performance management practices in organizations are less than satisfactory and not effective. A popular recommendation to improve the performance management process is to focus less on the formal procedures and more on the manager-employee interactions embedded in the process. However, current models of performance management do not reflect this focus on social processes. We present a multilevel leadership process framework of performance management that highlights the pivotal role of managers. Within this framework managers carry out this process through their influence on employees, teams, and the organization. Recommendations for future directions are also provided.

1. Introduction

The topic of performance management has received much attention and scrutiny from academics and human resource professionals in the past few years. Articles in the popular press (e.g., Buckingham & Goodall, 2015; Cappelli & Tavis, 2016; Peck, 2016) and academic outlets (e.g., Adler et al., 2016; Levy, Tseng, Rosen, & Lueke, 2017; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011) have sparked debates and stimulated discussions ranging from whether to get rid of performance ratings (Adler et al., 2016; Baer, 2014; Hunt, 2016; Martin & Kropp, 2016) to critiques on performance management practices in general (Colquitt, 2017; Levy, Silverman, & Cavanaugh, 2015; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Discussions have centered around the recent perceptions among practitioners that current performance management practices are unsatisfactory, not as effective as they can be, and not worth the trouble of implementing them (Cappelli & Tavis, 2016; Pulakos, Hanson, Arad, & Moye, 2015; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). To address these issues, a popular recommendation from researchers and practitioners alike is to focus on improving manager-employee relationships (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). This suggestion is not new, considering that scholars have long recognized that managers are at the frontline of performance management systems and carry out performance management tasks as part of their managerial duties (den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004; DeNisi & Sonesh, 2011). This suggestion to focus on managers and their relationships with employees also aligns with the increasingly prevalent sentiment that performance management practices should be more fluid and involve regular check-ins beyond traditional annual appraisals (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011).

Although the direction that performance management appears to be moving toward involves a social process (Levy & Williams, 2004) in which relational dynamics between managers and employees connect practices and outcomes, most existing models of

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performance management do not explicitly address this. Current models of the performance management process either outline how broad organizational practices lead to organization performance improvement (e.g., den Hartog et al., 2004; DeNisi & Smith, 2014) or specify how performance feedback leads to individual performance improvement (e.g., Gruman & Saks, 2011; Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979; London & Smither, 2002). More recently, a systems-based model of performance management was proposed based on a review of the performance management literature (Schleicher et al., 2018). In their model, Schleicher and colleagues organized the various components of the broad performance management process under a systems framework (Nadler & Tushman, 1980) to present an integrated and dynamic view of performance management. This systems-based model introduces a much-needed organizing framework to the performance management literature that can drive more concerted research efforts to understand this complex process. However, the systems-based model of performance management does not explicitly address the multilevel nature of the process or the mechanisms that connect the components of the process. Thus, a major gap in the literature is that current models address issues at largely different levels of analysis without an integrated idea of the mechanisms through which components of the performance management process are connected.

A proposed approach to fill this gap in the literature is to integrate a leadership process framework, which specifies the active role that leaders take in influencing change across targets at different levels of analysis, with current models of performance management. The primary argument of this paper is that an integrated multilevel leadership process framework can be applied to performance management research to elucidate the mechanisms that allow performance management systems to operate. Under this framework, managers assume the role of key drivers of the performance management process and link the components of performance management across levels. A visual depiction of our proposed conceptual framework is presented in Fig. 1. This multilevel leadership process framework of performance management contributes to the field of human resource management in at least three ways. First, our framework integrates theory and research across two distinct literatures to present an organized perspective on the complex process that is performance management. Specifically, our framework draws from recent developments in the leadership literature (i.e., relational leadership and leadership processes) and integrates them with current models of performance management. This framework puts the dyadic and collective relationships between managers and employees at the forefront, which answers calls for research on relational dynamics in both the leadership and performance management literatures. Second, this framework expands on the systems-based model of performance management (Schleicher et al., 2018) by explicating the multilevel nature of the process and positioning leadership processes as a central mechanism. By emphasizing the multilevel nature of this process, our framework reconciles concerns with current performance management models being either too broad (i.e., focusing strictly on organizational-level practices and outcomes) or too narrow (i.e., focusing strictly on intraindividual processes and outcomes). Furthermore, by centering the attention on leaders who actively exert influence on individuals, teams, and the organization, our framework introduces a mechanism that bridges the gap between current performance management models. Third, our framework serves to organize and provide direction for future research that focuses on managerial influence in performance management. Researchers and practitioners have long recognized the importance of managers in performance management and many of them have called for more research that frames managers as a core component of the process. Yet, currently, such research still appears to be lacking (Schleicher et al., 2018). Our proposed framework serves to stimulate and organize a research agenda.

2. A brief review of the relevant literatures

Before examining our proposed framework in detail, it is critical to first review the current developments in the areas of performance management and leadership. This review is important because the impetus for writing this paper and developing our framework can be attributed to the clear gap in knowledge that emerged upon reflecting on these literatures.

2.1. Current developments in performance management

In recent years, the traditional research area of performance appraisal has shifted toward a broader focus on performance management (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Levy et al., 2017). Research programs have moved from studying rating formats (Landy & Farr, 1980) and cognitive processes of raters (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, & McKellin, 1993) to studying the contextual aspects of performance appraisal and performance management (DeNisi & Sonesh, 2011; Levy & Williams, 2004). The area that has perhaps seen the most progress in the past decade of performance management research is the topic of contextual aspects of the process. Contextual aspects of performance management include issues such as rater motivation, employee reactions, and politics (Gorman, Meriac, Roch, Ray, & Gamble, 2017; Levy et al., 2017). Past research has also identified manager-employee relationships as a critical factor in the social context of performance management (e.g., Levy & Williams, 2004; Pichler, 2012). To this point, recent discussions among researchers and practitioners on the topic of improving performance management practices indicate that there is wide agreement that the relationship between managers and employees is a key to success (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Researchers and practitioners now vouch for a system that incorporates more regular check-ins with employees beyond or in place of a traditional annual review. Given that execution is key in practices like performance management (Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2011), the way in which organization-wide policies and procedures are implemented by direct supervisors and frontline managers will determine its effectiveness. These recent developments highlight the increasingly important role that managers hold in modern performance management systems.

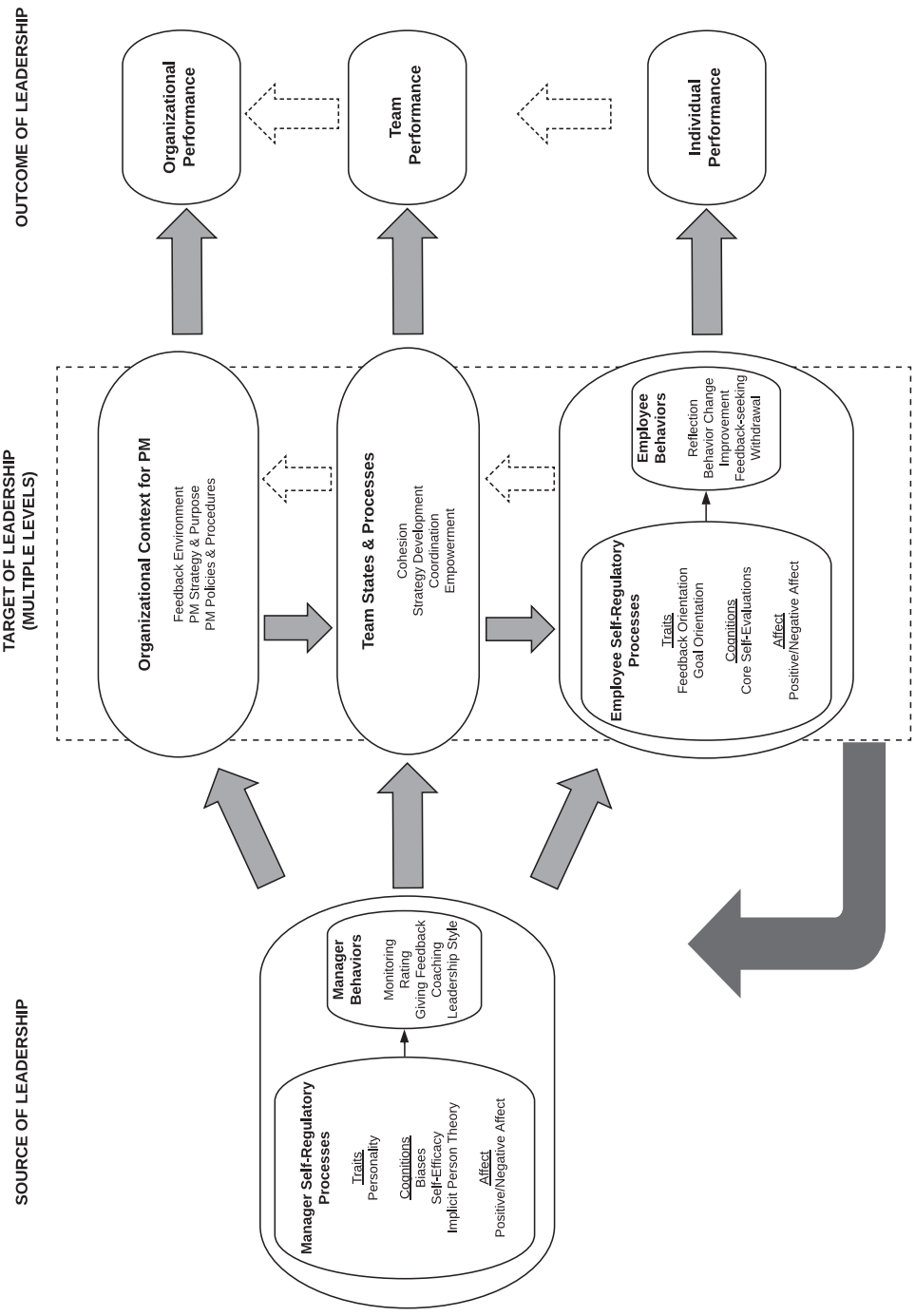

Fig. 1. Multilevel leadership process framework of performance management. PM = Performance management.

2.2. A call to focus on managers

The pivotal role of managers in the performance management process has long been recognized in the literature (e.g., in research on source effects), but researchers and practitioners are emphasizing their importance even more now in light of the recent developments described above. Practitioners have argued that ineffective performance management systems simplify the process into administrative steps and fail to focus on the role that managers play in establishing functional relationships with employees (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Researchers have also recognized the critical role that managers play. In a conceptual paper, den Hartog et al. (2004) note that "managers put performance management into practice". In a handbook review chapter, DeNisi and Sonesh (2011) emphasize that "the organization's goal to improve organizational performance may be achieved only to the extent that the managers foster the same goal of improving individual employee performance through the performance appraisal process". In their recent review of the literature, Schleicher et al. (2018) state that managers are "the central enactor of performance management, acting as an interpreter of formal practices and influencing informal processes" and call for more research that adopts an approach in which managers are framed as key participants in the process. Clearly, a strong sentiment shared by both researchers and practitioners is that mangers are heavily involved and have a large impact on the success of this process.

Managers are at the frontline of performance management systems as an identifiable representative of the organization that carries out the policies, procedures, and practices of the workplace. The process through which organization-wide performance management practices lead to the self-regulation that occurs in employees after they receive performance evaluations is not an enigmatic black box. In this process, there is a translation of the organization's policies and standards to the employees who are evaluated based on them. When employees receive feedback on their performance and guidance on setting goals for improvement, there is an alignment of these individual goals back to the strategic plan of the organization. Managers take the role of the translator and balance the alignment between the organization's strategic plan and individual employee goals. In this way, managers form the bridge between organization-wide practices and the actions of individual employees.

To the extent that managers are tasked with putting performance management into practice, managers are also expected to evolve alongside the developments in this area. As performance management systems are increasingly expected to move beyond being a mechanism for evaluation and become a system of motivation (Buchner, 2007; den Hartog et al., 2004; DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006), managers will also be expected to move beyond being a rater to being a partner that influences and motivates employees to improve performance in reaction to evaluative outcomes. At minimum, managers are expected to provide feedback to employees about their current performance and to help set goals for improvement. However, with the recent developments in performance management and the increased consideration of context and reactions, managers are now expected to also maintain high-quality relationships with employees, foster trust, manage emotions, maintain employee satisfaction with the process, and motivate employees to improve performance. In essence, managers are expected to do more than just their administrative and managerial duties; they are expected to also be leaders.

An area of research that can potentially inform us of the intricacies involved in this process of influence and motivation nested within performance management is leadership. At its roots, performance management processes can be broken down into interactions and relational dynamics between manager and employee, where managers assume the role of a leader and motivate employees to perform and achieve desirable outcomes for themselves and the organization at large. In this way, the process of leadership in manager-employee interactions becomes a critical focal point for performance management, and it is to this research that we now turn.

2.3. The process of leadership and leadership processes

Leadership is a social and goal-oriented influence process that involves the interaction between components at multiple levels of analysis and unfolds over time and space (Dinh et al., 2014; Fischer, Dietz, & Antonakis, 2017). Although highly related, leadership and management (or supervision) are distinct concepts (Antonakis & Day, 2017; Kinicki, Jacobson, Peterson, & Prussia, 2013). While leadership reflects a social process of influence, management reflects power and responsibility derived from a positional role within an organizational hierarchy. Indeed, it is not too difficult to think of a manager who shows a lack of leadership or a coworker who demonstrates leader qualities but does not hold a management position. In many cases, effective leadership and effective management go hand in hand and both are often needed to achieve desired outcomes. The major point of distinction is that whereas management is largely task-driven and transactional, leadership is purpose-driven and based on interpersonal exchanges that go beyond basic transactions (Antonakis & Day, 2017). In the context of performance management, managers can approach the process with the goal of satisfying the basic task and procedural requirements asked of them, or they can approach it with the goal of impacting the distal outcomes of those who are involved in the process. In this way, performance management can be framed as just managerial tasks that a manager carries out, or it can be framed as a fundamental process for leading. From the discussion thus far, it should be clear that leadership is inherent in the interpersonal aspects of performance management. Performance management is about improving performance. In the performance management process, managers exert influence on others to accomplish the goal of performance improvement.

Although the definition of leadership as a process of influence is helpful for conceptualizing managerial functions in performance management, it is less useful for developing a framework. A more useful approach comes from the discussion and theoretical work on leadership processes. Leadership process theories explain the causal mechanisms through which a leader's actions result in changes in the target's outcomes. These theories developed from the call of researchers to move toward developing process-oriented perspectives of leadership that acknowledge the relational aspects of leadership and highlight the complex interplay among leader, followers, and

context (Avolio, 2007; DeRue, 2011; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). In the past few years, several approaches to studying and thinking about leadership processes have been proposed and it is these processes that we believe need to be integrated into our conceptualization and understanding of performance management.

One conceptual model of leadership processes focuses on the cause-mediator-effect logic of processes (Fischer et al., 2017). This model explains leadership processes by proposing mediational mechanisms through which leader behaviors influence target outcomes. The model suggests that leader process models can be organized along two dimensions: level of analysis and type of leadership process (Fischer et al., 2017). The authors propose that leaders can influence targets at different levels of analysis, including individual employees, teams, the organization, or external factors. In terms of type of leadership process, leaders can influence targets via development or leverage. Whereas development involves expanding the resources of a target, leverage involves facilitating the resources of a target. For instance, leaders can develop individual employees by providing them with development experiences that expand their knowledge, skills, and abilities. On the other hand, leaders can leverage the existing capabilities of teams by empowering them or setting challenging goals. In the context of performance management, leaders can develop individual employees by giving them feedback on their performance (i.e., knowledge of results and evaluation of outcomes) as well as leveraging them by improving perceived usefulness of feedback (Fischer et al., 2017; Jawahar, 2010). Overall, existing leadership process models using a mediational approach have largely examined the impact of leader behavior on target performance through leveraging target affect, behavior, and cognition within a motivational framework (Fischer et al., 2017). Relatively less research has examined how leader behaviors impact target development of skills and abilities. In addition, less research has examined how leader behaviors impact the work context (e.g., job crafting) as a way of providing targets an opportunity to perform (Fischer et al., 2017). The gaps noted above in the leadership process literature present a useful avenue for performance management research to examine as well.

Another conceptual model of leadership processes focuses on the relational dynamics between the components involved in leadership. This framework developed from recent discussions of the limitations to leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. In an attempt to organize the state of the literature and present directions for future efforts, Uhl-Bien (2006) argued that relational theories of leadership were too static and did not acknowledge the dynamic nature of leader-follower relationships. In particular, the author proposed that research needed to move beyond a focus on a measure of relationship quality and actually address the relational dynamics of leadership. The article presented a framework, relational leadership theory, that defined relational leadership as “a social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (i.e., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviors, ideologies, etc.) are constructed and produced” (Uhl-Bien, 2006). In a similar vein, other researchers have proposed conceptual models to address the complex relational processes in leadership. In a qualitative review, the authors organized leadership theories along two dimensions: loci of leadership and mechanisms of leadership (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011). Loci of leadership is primarily concerned with the source of leadership, or where leadership comes from, and includes the leader, follower, dyads, collectives, or context (Hernandez et al., 2011). That is, the process of leadership can originate from the leader him or herself, the followers of the leader, the dyadic relationship between leader and follower, the group with which the leader is connected, or the organizational context. Mechanisms of leadership refers to the way influence is enacted, or how leadership is transmitted, and includes traits, affect, behaviors, and cognition (Hernandez et al., 2011). In other words, leadership can arise through an interaction between leader and follower characteristics, thoughts, feelings, or actions. Expanding on this conceptualization, Eberly, Johnson, Hernandez, and Avolio (2013) propose an integrative process model of leadership. The authors propose the idea of event cycles that link loci and mechanisms of leadership. Specifically, they argue that the phenomenon of leadership arises from simultaneous event cycles that occur between various loci of leadership (Eberly et al., 2013). Although behaviors are the primary basis of event cycles, this conceptual model suggests that traits, affect, and cognition influence both the intraindividual and interindividual processes involved in leadership. Importantly, the authors note that the implications of this integrative process model are that context influences leadership at any point in the process and that “leadership emerges from an interactive process between the intra- and interpersonal mechanisms of leadership” (Eberly et al., 2013).

Drawing from the different models introduced above, a basic framework of leadership processes emerges that includes a consideration of the source of leadership, the target of leadership at different levels of analysis, the mechanisms of leadership, and the reciprocal nature of leadership. The interactions between these components of leadership take place in a causal mediational and cyclical manner over time. The intricacies of how these interactions unfold over time reflect the relational dynamics of leadership. Although this approach to leadership research is relatively new, a theoretical framework of leadership processes based on the recent developments in this area can be applied performance management.

2.4. Beyond current models of performance management

As mentioned previously, current models of performance management do not explicitly model the relational dynamics in the process despite the concept being proposed widely, and they also fail to address the multilevel nature of the process. In general, existing models of the performance management process have taken both a broad, organization level approach as well as a narrow, intraindividual level approach.[1] At the organization level, den Hartog et al. (2004) outlined a conceptual model in which performance management practices lead to organizational performance through employee perceptions and attitudes, and employee

[1] In addition to the existing models reviewed here, there are several other models in numerous textbooks (e.g., Murphy & DeNisi, 2008; Aguinis, 2013). Those models are not reviewed here as they mainly focus on delineating the generic formal procedures of performance management, which is not a focus of this paper.

behavior and performance. Their model briefly highlights that the link between organization-wide practices and employee perceptions is driven by direct supervisors or frontline managers. Importantly, although this model proposes a direct link from employee behavior and performance to organizational performance, a review of the literature suggests that the link between individual performance improvement and firm performance has yet to be empirically established (DeNisi & Smith, 2014). Also at the organization level, DeNisi and Smith (2014) outline a conceptual model where external factors such as national culture, organizational culture, definition of firm performance, and organizational strategy influence an organization's performance management system, which leads to outcomes such as climate for performance; employee knowledge, skills, and abilities; and firm performance. Overall, these large conceptual models draw the link between organization-wide performance management practices and firm performance.

On the other hand, researchers have also proposed conceptual models at the intraindividual level that emphasize the link between performance management practices and individual outcomes. These include classic models in the performance feedback literature (e.g., Ilgen et al., 1979) and more recent models that highlight the effects of individual differences and organizational culture (London & Smither, 2002). In London and Smither's (2002) model of the longitudinal performance management process, feedback is linked to behavioral and attitudinal outcomes through intraindividual steps of receiving feedback, processing feedback, and using feedback. In another model, DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) apply an expectancy-based motivational framework to the process of individual performance improvement and propose that performance management practices impact employee perceptions of the link between their actions and need satisfaction. Specifically, the authors propose that performance management systems motivate performance improvement when they strengthen employee perceptions of the links between actions, results, evaluations, outcomes, and need satisfaction through recommended practices. Finally, Gruman and Saks (2011) integrated performance management and employee engagement research to develop a model of the engagement management process. The authors propose that high performance and performance improvement is preceded by employee engagement, which can be fostered by incorporating major elements (e.g., psychological contracts, coaching and support) into the performance management process.

From this brief review, it is clear that there has been much progress in developing theory and outlining models that explain the impact of performance management on outcomes at either the organization or individual level. However, it is also clear that there is a disconnect between levels. Overarching practices, climate, and culture may impact organizational performance via their influence on performance management systems (DeNisi & Smith, 2014), but it is unclear how this connects to employees at the individual level. Individual performance and improvement may be tied to need satisfaction (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006) and engagement (Gruman & Saks, 2011), but it is unclear how this connects to outcomes at the organization level. Some models include variables from different levels, such as linking culture and environment (den Hartog et al., 2004; London & Smither, 2002) to individuals, but these variables are treated as a broad overarching contextual factor in the background. Overall, it appears that each of the various models reviewed above take on a specific focus either at the organization level or individual level, but no model takes a multilevel approach to organize variables across distinct levels.

Notably, the recent systems-based model of performance management (Schleicher et al., 2018) does not incorporate multilevel theory either. Briefly, this systems-based model organizes performance management components under a systems theory taxonomy, delineating the inputs, outputs, tasks, individuals, formal processes, and informal processes of performance management. Performance management systems include *individuals* (i.e., rater/manager; ratee/employee) who perform the tasks of performance management (e.g., setting performance expectations, observing performance, delivering performance feedback, and performance coaching) either via *formal processes* (i.e., written documentation of evaluations) or via *informal processes* (i.e., informal feedback). The *outputs* of the system are the products of the tasks (e.g., performance ratings, feedback content, administrative decisions). In addition, factors external to the system are *inputs* that have a distal influence on performance management (e.g., resources, performance management strategy, organizational culture and climate).

Schleicher et al.'s (2018) model presents a useful comprehensive framework for organizing performance management research under a systems perspective, which emphasizes the interrelatedness of the components within performance management. Expanding on their goal of organizing and clarifying performance management as a whole, our multilevel leadership process framework introduces a distinct yet complementary perspective that makes unique contributions to the literature. First, our framework introduces a multilevel approach to clearly organize the outcomes and intermediate process components across different levels. This addresses the issue of variables being disconnected at different levels that is prevalent in current models of performance management, including the systems-based model. Second, our framework focuses on the key individuals and processes in the systems-based model and explicate these factors in more detail. We agree with and expand on their proposal that managers are the central enactor of the performance management process by organizing the process components under a leadership process framework where the manager is framed as the primary source of leadership. We begin to address their call for more research with the notion of managers as central enactors by presenting this multilevel leadership process framework as a starting point to conceptualize and organize future research. Next, we move on to discussing the proposed framework.

3. A multilevel leadership process framework of performance management

Drawing from the leadership process models reviewed previously (Eberly et al., 2013; Fischer et al., 2017), a basic framework of leadership processes in performance management highlights that managers serve as a primary source of leadership that influence change in targets at different levels of analysis to impact performance. Managers can exert influence directly or indirectly, and the recipients of influence also affect managers in a reciprocal manner. Changes in targets of influence result in subsequent effects on target performance at the same level of analysis, downstream effects on targets at a lower level of analysis, or emergent effects on targets at a higher level of analysis. In the following sections, we discuss our proposed framework (Fig. 1) and the implications of our

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framework.

3.1. Overview of the framework

A conceptual model that illustrates our proposed framework is displayed in Fig. 1, which we introduced earlier. The model is read from left to right, moving through three general process steps from the *source of leadership*, to the *target of leadership*, to the *outcome of leadership*, as indicated at the top of the figure in bold and capitalized font. Under each process step are boxes that represent a major model element in that step, denoted in bold type font. Within some boxes, there are examples of the model element, denoted in regular type font. Some model elements contain sub-elements, denoted in underlined font, under which examples are listed. For instance, self-regulatory processes within a focal manager or employee lead to the behaviors of that same manager or employee. Gray arrows pointing to the right indicate the direction of effect flowing from the source of leadership. Gray arrows pointing down indicate a top-down effect. White arrows composed of dashes indicate a bottom-up (i.e., emergent) effect. Finally, the darker curved arrow leading back to the source of leadership indicates the reciprocal nature between the source of leadership and targets of leadership. This arrow directed at the source of leadership reflects the notion that targets of leadership also affect leader self-regulation and behavior in a reciprocal manner.

3.2. Source of leadership

With the perspective of managers as the key driver of the performance management process, they are positioned as the primary source of leadership in the model. At the individual level of the source of leadership, *manager self-regulatory processes* lead to overt *manager behaviors*. Self-regulatory processes consist of an interplay between various individual differences within the focal individual, which include *traits*, *cognitions*, and *affect* based on the integrative leadership process model by Eberly et al. (2013). For instance, managers' implicit person theory, or the extent to which they believe people can change, can affect the extent to which they engage in certain behaviors such as coaching (Heslin, VandeWalle, & Latham, 2006). Other managerial behaviors relevant to the performance management context include performance monitoring and providing feedback. In addition, leadership styles reflected in manager behaviors have also been found to be relevant in the performance management context (e.g., Gregory & Levy, 2011). Under Eberly et al.'s (2013) framework, manager behaviors reflect a part of the mechanism of leadership, or the mode in which leadership is transmitted. Under Fischer et al.'s (2017) taxonomy, these behaviors can be categorized by the type of leadership process, which include developing (i.e., enlarging resources) or leveraging (i.e., facilitating use of resources). Conceptually, this combination of self-regulation and behaviors capture the intraindividual processes of a focal leader's deliberate attempt to exert influence. This influence can be targeted at individual employees, teams or groups of employees, or the organization at large.

3.3. Target of leadership

As indicated by the right-facing arrows, manager behaviors can influence targets of leadership at different levels of analysis. Within Fischer et al.'s (2017) framework and typical of multilevel theory and research (Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, & Mathieu, 2007; Mathieu & Chen, 2011), targets of influence can include the individuals, teams, the organization, or external factors. To keep within an organizational context, factors external to the organization are not included here.

Managers can direct their influence at individual employees, prompting *employee self-regulatory processes* that lead to *employee behaviors*. Self-regulation at the individual employee level can consist of an interplay of traits, cognitions, and affect (Eberly et al., 2013). For instance, manager influence can have varying effects on different employees depending on their feedback orientation (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010) or core self-evaluations (Bono & Colbert, 2005). This self-regulation within employees can result in behaviors relevant to the performance management context, such as reflection (Anseel, Lievens, & Schollaert, 2009) and feedback seeking (Ashford, De Stobbeleir, & Nujella, 2016). Relatedly, research in the motivation literature has begun to more closely examine interpersonal influences on self-regulation, moving beyond a paradigm that has mostly focused on intrapersonal processes (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2010). For instance, research has shown that behaviors of others can activate goal-directed behavior (Aarts, Gollwitzer, & Hassin, 2004). Research has also shown that self-presentation to others under challenging conditions negatively impacts persistence on goals (Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, 2005). In the performance management context, research suggests that employees pay attention to and adjust behaviors based on the actions that managers monitor (Mero, Guidice, & Werner, 2014). Research on interpersonal emotion regulation further provides an explanation for ways in which leaders manage affect (e.g., Butler, 2015; Niven, 2016; Zaki & Williams, 2013). This subarea of emotion regulation has made its way into leadership research (e.g., Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008; Little, Gooty, & Williams, 2016; Van Knippenberg & Van Kleef, 2016), and further research will provide a better understanding of affect management as a way for leaders to influence others. Together, these results indicate that interpersonal effects, such as deliberate actions from leaders, can impact an individual's self-regulation.

Managers can also influence *team states and processes*. Whereas emergent states refer to characteristic properties of teams that are dynamic, processes refer to interactions between members of a team that facilitate goal pursuit (Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). For instance, manager influences can impact cohesion (Shuffler, DiazGranados, & Salas, 2011) or strategy development (DeShon, Kozlowski, Schmidt, Milner, & Wiechmann, 2004). Research has also demonstrated that team leaders can drive team performance by facilitating coordination (Sui, Wang, Kirkman, & Li, 2016) or empowering them (Luciano, Mathieu, & Ruddy, 2014). In terms of an organizing framework, the functional leadership framework suggests that leaders affect team performance through four leadership processes: information search and structuring, information use in problem solving, managing personnel resources, and managing

material resources (Zaccaro, Rittman, & Marks, 2001). Specific behaviors under this framework include identifying needs and requirements, providing feedback, and motivating team members. These leader behaviors are proposed to impact team cognitive, motivational, affective, and coordination processes, which then influence team effectiveness. This functional approach to leadership is supported in a meta-analysis (Burke et al., 2006), suggesting that it may be a useful framework for leadership processes directed at teams.

Finally, managers can also influence the *organizational context* in several ways. Organizational culture and climate scholars have long theorized that leaders are a source of an organization's values and practices through their articulation of a vision and behaviors (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013; Schneider, Goldstein, & Smith, 1995). Research supports this notion and findings suggest that leaders have the capability of affecting the organizational context of the workplace through the development of things, such as conflict cultures (Gelfand, Leslie, Keller, & de Dreu, 2012) and safety climates (Probst, 2015). In the context of performance management, leaders can cultivate a favorable feedback environment to demonstrate to employees that feedback is regular and readily available at the workplace (London & Smither, 2002; Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). Depending on the level of the leader in the organizational hierarchy, leaders may also have a say in deciding the organization's strategy and can alter broader performance management policies and procedures to fit the needs of their organization. For instance, feedback schedules may be enforced as an organizational policy and require managers and employees to meet and discuss performance bimonthly or quarterly. Along with this policy may be formal procedures that outline the necessary steps and documentation required during these scheduled feedback sessions. To encourage more frequent feedback discussions as a way of establishing a favorable feedback environment, managers can push for performance management policies that require managers and employees to meet more regularly (e.g., biweekly, monthly) to discuss performance and expectations.

3.4. Outcome of leadership

The major outcome of leadership is target performance, but this can be examined at different levels of analysis (Fischer et al., 2017). CEOs bear major responsibility for the success or failure of a firm, team performance is often attributed to team leadership, and managers are held responsible for the performance of individual employees. However, leaders do not achieve these outcomes directly. Instead, leaders only have direct control over their own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and they must leverage them to impact the regulatory processes of the followers who receive their influence. It is through this dynamic interaction that leaders motivate individuals and teams in the organization to effectively self-regulate, demonstrate effective behaviors, and ultimately perform. Importantly, there are many different ways in which leaders can achieve the same desired behaviors or outcomes from a follower, especially in the performance management context where performance is the key criterion. Managers can employ a variety of tactics to impact the intermediate processes of employees, teams, and the organization, and mangers can also drive their performance through various means. In other words, multipath influences and the mediational nature of leadership (Fischer et al., 2017) are important aspects of leadership process models in performance management.

3.5. Multipath influences and the mediational nature of leadership

As discussed previously, managers can influence employees directly, perhaps by providing positive or negative feedback about their performance that conveys organizational expectations and an evaluation of employee performance based on those standards. With giving feedback as a behavior, managers can aim to influence employee attitudes and beliefs as a mechanism. When giving positive feedback, managers can reduce role ambiguity and boost employee perceptions of self-efficacy to motivate effort and improve performance (Schmidt & Deshon, 2010). When giving negative feedback, managers can draw attention to a discrepancy between current and desired performance, which could invoke negative affect that drives behavior to reduce the discrepancy (Carver & Scheier, 2012; Taylor, Fisher, & Ilgen, 1984). However, any intended behavior from a manager, including the act of providing feedback, does not necessarily operate through one mechanism to influence the target of that behavior. Importantly, Fischer et al. (2017) emphasize that a major endeavor in developing comprehensive leadership process theories is to examine “alternative channels of influence” that can impact the same outcomes. These multipath influences are not illustrated in our model for the sake of readability, but they are implicit in our discussion and important to keep in mind. Although only one arrow points from the source of leadership to each target of leadership, leaders can influence the same target in multiple ways, perhaps simultaneously, to affect performance. In the case of providing a feedback message, managerial influence can operate on at least two paths: affective and cognitive. A feedback message evokes certain emotions and thoughts in the feedback recipient, which cause further downstream self-regulatory processes (Ilgen et al., 1979). Notably, a manager's behaviors will likely impact multiple paths regardless of whether this is intentional or not (e.g., a feedback message intended to only influence cognitions will probably also influence affect).

In addition to exerting a direct influence on employees, managers can also influence them indirectly. In the case of influencing an individual employee to inspire change and motivate performance improvement, managers can do so indirectly by acting on a team associated with the employee or the organizational context. Managers can leverage team resources by building group morale and team cohesion (Shuffler et al., 2011), which would have a positive effect on team and individual performance (Beal, Cohen, Burke, & McLendon, 2003; Gammage, Carron, & Estabrooks, 2001). Managers can also develop team resources through team training (Salas, Tannenbaum, Kraiger, & Smith-Jentsch, 2012; Shuffler et al., 2011), which also impacts individual team members (Hughes et al., 2016). Even if there are no formal teams an employee is associated with, managers can influence work groups through their interactions, which may have downstream effects on individual employees.

Managers can also influence employees indirectly by acting on the contextual aspects of the workplace. For instance, managers

can work with employees to design the job and make it more intrinsically motivating (Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007; Parker, 2014). Leaders can also cultivate an organizational culture or climate to make the work context more motivating to work in. Past theory and research of organizational culture and climate have emphasized the critical role that leaders play in establishing an organizational context for employees (Chatman & Cha, 2003; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2011). Indeed, older articles on culture development (e.g., the ASA cycle) argued that leaders are at the forefront of establishing organizational norms (Schneider et al., 1995). In a handbook review, Schneider et al. (2011) proposed the climcult model which outlined a dual mediational link where leadership that values people and promotes strategy impacts organizational effectiveness through developing organizational culture and climate. These broad organizational context factors are proposed to have a top-down influence on employees, as has been demonstrated in culture and climate research (Gelfand et al., 2012; Probst, 2015).

Applying this theoretical framework to performance management, leaders also have the potential to impact the feedback environment in an organization (London & Smither, 2002). Research on the feedback environment (Steelman et al., 2004) has demonstrated the wide scope of positive influences of a favorable feedback culture on employee outcomes (e.g., task performance, contextual performance, role clarity, organizational commitment, stress, well-being; Peng & Chiu, 2010; Sparr & Sonnentag, 2008; Whitaker & Levy, 2012), and recent research has begun to examine the role of leaders in establishing this culture (Dahling, Gabriel, & MacGowan, 2017). Together, this research suggests that building a positive feedback environment has strong potential to improve performance management systems (Chawla, Gabriel, Dahling, & Patel, 2016; Dahling & O'Malley, 2011) and that leaders play an important role in this process. Specifically, in the current discussion of leadership processes in performance management, leaders take the central role in acting on the organizational context to indirectly influence employee perceptions of the feedback environment. For example, by implementing regular biweekly one-on-one check-ins with employees, managers establish an organizational context in which feedback is regular and expected. In this way, manager-employee interactions are not subject to an uncontrollable contextual influence of feedback environment, but rather managers actively establish this context to facilitate these interactions.

One noteworthy point in the model is that leaders can also indirectly impact the organizational context and organizational performance through their influences on individuals and teams, as indicated by the dashed arrows pointing upwards. It can be argued that broad work context variables such as culture and climate are emergent constructs (Kozlowski & Klein, 2000). Indeed, it is difficult to imagine a climate for performance to exist at the organizational level when only the leaders vouch for it and employees do not buy into it. This link suggests that leaders can cultivate a context by first cultivating individual employee attitudes and beliefs or team values. The literature on organizational development and change can potentially be informative here. Results of research in this area suggest that successful change is contingent on employee buy-in, and leaders play a role in inspiring commitment to change in employees (e.g., Seo et al., 2012). However, research in this area will be difficult as multilevel concerns with emergence need to be considered. Emergence refers to phenomena that arise from lower-level constructs (e.g., individual values) and manifest as higher-level constructs (e.g., culture), and studying emergence necessitates longitudinal research designs or some way to address the fact that the process takes time (Kozlowski, Chao, Grand, Braun, & Kuljanin, 2013). These bottom-up effects are difficult to capture, which is why there is understandably not much in the literature on culture emergence and more research is needed in this regard (Schneider et al., 2013).

3.6. Targets of influence reciprocate leadership

An important aspect of the proposed model is that the recipients of leadership influences from a focal leader react to them. In our model, this is indicated by the dark curved arrow leading back to the source of leadership from the targets of leadership. As mentioned previously, recent theory emphasizes that targets of influence are not passive but active players in the leadership process (Avolio, 2007). When leaders exert influence, recipients react by either accepting the influence or rejecting it, and in turn, these reactions reciprocally affect the source of influence (Eberly et al., 2013). While leaders can influence change in the behaviors of individuals and teams, the reactions of individuals and teams to influence may impact future leader behaviors. Similarly, while leaders can potentially influence the organizational context, changes to contextual factors such as company or department policies and procedures (e.g., enforced feedback schedules) more than likely also impact leader behaviors as well. Without this ongoing relational dynamic, the leadership process is not complete. The key point here is that this feedback loop highlights the need to examine the dynamic social process between leaders and followers.

A recent notable study that integrated relational leadership and performance appraisal research deserves mention here as it exemplifies the proposed focus on dynamic processes. In an empirical study of appraisal interviews, the researchers audiotaped and examined supervisor-subordinate communication patterns during appraisal interviews (Meinecke, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2017). Results revealed that relation-oriented statements (e.g., providing interpersonal encouragement) from supervisors triggered more active participation from employees, which was related to higher perceptions of interview success for both supervisors and employees. Qualitative analysis also revealed that employee disagreement with supervisor statements surfaced as an interesting dynamic. In particular, one finding indicated that when employees disagreed using a personal attack style instead of using constructive criticism, supervisors were more likely to enforce their own point of view. In addition, employees who disagreed with supervisors during the session were more likely to perceive lower levels of supervisor support than compared to employees who did not disagree. Overall, this study is a good example of how performance management research can use a framework of relational leadership to examine the complex social interaction that occurs between managers and employees as managers directly attempt to produce change. Future research should continue to study these social processes that occur throughout the performance management process to examine dynamic effects that go beyond perceived quality of relationships, as called for by current research (Uhl-Bien, 2006).

One implication of this reciprocal nature of leadership processes is that it highlights the need for leaders to adapt. That is, leadership is an adaptive process through which "recurring patterns of leading–following interactions produce emergent leader-follower identities, relationships and social structures that enable groups to develop and adapt in dynamic contexts" (DeRue, 2011). For instance, in a performance management context, employees can respond differently to feedback based in part on individual differences, such as feedback orientation (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010; London & Smither, 2002). Employee reactions would then reciprocally stimulate self-regulatory processes in the manager, where he or she may evaluate the level of success of the attempt to effect change in the target. For instance, when a manager gives an employee negative feedback and the employee disagrees and rejects the feedback, the manager would take this information and evaluate it to produce an effective response. The manager may take this response to mean his or her input is not respected by the employee, which may trigger a negative affective response. In addition, this response may negatively impact the leader's leadership self-efficacy (Paglis, 2010) because the leader may attribute this failure to his or her lack of competence for leading. This lowered self-efficacy would then change future interactions the leader has with employees and the leader may be discouraged from providing negative feedback in the future. This interaction may also cause the leader to re-evaluate his or her relationship with the employee, which may lead to a conclusion that the relationship needs to deepen first before feedback will be accepted. On the other hand, the leader may also conclude that the employee is just intractable and not interested in listening and thus refuse to go through the trouble of providing feedback to the employee in the future. These intrapersonal cognitive and affective processes that occur and the outcomes they lead to may depend on certain stable traits of the leader. For instance, a leader who generally believes that people can change (i.e., growth mindset; Dweck, 2006) would likely be more inclined to think that the employee can eventually be persuaded to accept and value feedback. Similarly, leaders who value feedback themselves may be more inclined to continue coaching employees despite initial conflict (Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018). Such interpersonal processes would also occur when teams are the target of influence and leaders adjust their inputs depending on the needs of the team (Morgeson, DeRue, & Karam, 2010). This dynamic social process of collaboration or negotiating back and forth about performance reflects an event cycle (Eberly et al., 2013) or element in the broad performance management process.

4. Future directions

A primary goal of this paper was to present a framework to drive future research that focuses on the processes and dynamics in performance management systems, with the manager as a focal leader. To this end, we provide some research questions that could be used to guide and develop a research agenda following from our framework. We make no claim that these questions define a research agenda on their own, but we do hope that they serve as a good starting point for those interested in conducting research within the framework we've presented.

4.1. In the context of performance management, what is the content of relational dynamics between managers and employees and how does it change over time?

The study by Meinecke et al. (2017) described earlier was an important step toward examining relational dynamics within performance management systems. The results of their study shed light on how manager-employee interactions during annual appraisal interviews engender employee perceptions of interview success and leader support. Within our framework, this study examined the bottom left portion of Fig. 1, focusing on the dynamic interplay between manager-employee communication behaviors and cognition outcomes of both parties. Future research can further extend this area of research and expand the scope of study beyond annual reviews to performance management at large and study continuous interactions over time. An important distinction between performance appraisals and performance management is that the latter subsumes the former and further reflects a broad continuous process rather than a discrete event (Aguinis, 2013). Along these lines, as performance management systems move beyond annual reviews and implement more regular check-ins (Adler et al., 2016; Levy et al., 2017), the content and evolution of manager-employee interactions over time becomes an important detail that needs to be examined. That is, what do managers and employees communicate throughout the continuous process of performance management and how does this communication change over time?

This broad research question is deceptively complicated and requires the consideration of several factors. Initially, a descriptive approach could be used to detail the day-to-day performance-related conversations between managers and employees (e.g., how often they touch base to gauge progress toward a goal). However, the continuous aspect of a process such as performance management necessitates a consideration of time (Fischer et al., 2017). Take, for example, an organization that requires managers and employees to meet monthly for a performance check-in. How would this procedural component of an organization's performance management system impact communication patterns over time? To speculate, perhaps the extent to which either the manager or employee initiates performance-related conversations depends on how early or late in the month it is. From a multilevel perspective and as illustrated in Fig. 1, this is an instance of an organization-level contextual factor exhibiting a top-down effect on managers and employees at the individual level. Naturally, these relational dynamics may also be affected by other factors, including individual differences and previous interactions between manager and employee. Future research will need to take into consideration these temporal and contextual factors at different levels of analysis to fully explore the relational dynamics in performance management.

4.2. How do manager-employee relational dynamics engender behavior change and performance?

As mentioned previously, the study by Meinecke et al. (2017) focused on cognitive outcomes (i.e., perceptions of interview

success and leader support). Future research can further examine how continuous manager-employee interactions impact not only affective and cognitive outcomes, but also tangible behavioral and performance outcomes. Within our framework, this means expanding the scope of research beyond dyadic interactions between manager (i.e., source of leadership) and employee (i.e., target of leadership) to also include distal outcomes such as performance (i.e., outcome of leadership). This is an important direction for research considering that others' performance is a primary goal of both performance management and leadership (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006; Fischer et al., 2017). In other words, the effectiveness of both performance management and leadership processes is evaluated on the distal performance outcomes of others. Affective and cognitive outcomes as a part of employee self-regulation are important intermediate components in the process, but the criteria of interest are performance-related outcomes. Thus, a critical question is: How do managers facilitate actual behavior change and performance improvement of employees through their interactions with them?

Some performance management research has explored the link between different performance management techniques and performance improvement. For example, one study found that feedforward interviews between managers and employees were more effective than traditional performance appraisal interviews at increasing peer performance ratings of employees (Budworth, Latham, & Manroop, 2015). These results draw a link between manager behaviors and distal performance outcomes, but they do not explain the process through which the effect occurs. That is, explanatory mechanisms in the form of mediating variables were not examined in this particular study. As depicted in Fig. 1, this gap in the literature can be filled by focusing on the process and examining the intermediate outcomes in the target of leadership that tie the two ends together. Future research can examine how distinct manager behaviors (e.g., feedforward versus traditional feedback techniques) differentially impact intermediate affective and cognitive outcomes of employees and how these self-regulatory processes subsequently affect performance. For instance, research suggests that reflection combined with feedback enhances performance (Anseel et al., 2009). Perhaps a particular aspect of feedforward interviews prompts employees to engage in reflection, thus explaining the effectiveness of the technique. An alternative explanation could be that feedforward interviews, which focus on the positive aspects of past performance (Kluger & Nir, 2010), increase positive affect, which subsequently impact performance. Notably, Fischer et al. (2017) recommend that multiple mediators be tested simultaneously in leadership process models to identify specious mediators and clarify the true form of explanatory mechanisms in processes.

4.3. In performance management systems, how do managers facilitate team performance?

In their review, Schleicher et al. (2018) noted a clear dearth of empirical work on performance management with teams. Organizations today are increasingly turning to teams to take on difficult assignments that surpass the capacity of lone individuals (Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, & Cohen, 2012), so understanding the impact of a critical human resource practice such as performance management on teams is essential. In particular, elucidating the process through which performance management practices lead to team performance holds important practical implications for organizations. Our framework emphasizes the role of managers in this process as a primary source of influence that impacts team states and processes. As repeatedly highlighted in this paper, we situate the manager as the central enactor of performance management and, in essence, position the manager as the proximal and direct driving force of the process. Past research on teams suggests that leadership impacts team functioning and performance (e.g., Burke et al., 2006; Morgeson et al., 2010; Zaccaro et al., 2001). Past research also suggests that components of performance management, such as feedback, impact team functioning and performance (e.g., DeShon et al., 2004; Gonzalez-Mulé, Courtright, DeGeest, Seong, & Hong, 2016). Thus, it is reasonable to expect managers to play a key role in influencing team states, processes, and performance through their implementation of performance management practices.

The performance management literature will benefit from research that focuses on teams and, in particular, process-oriented research that aims to articulate the causal mechanisms that lead to team performance. While research on performance management in teams is lacking, some research has examined the effect of feedback on teams. For example, one study found that feedback helps clarify organizational goals for highly autonomous teams, which is linked to higher team performance (Gonzalez-Mulé et al., 2016). One limitation of this study noted by the authors is that feedback was conceptualized as the degree to which performance feedback was received without indication of its source or valence. To further clarify the practical application of performance feedback for teams, future research can expand on this finding and examine the differential effects of positive and negative feedback from managers on team functioning and performance. In addition, alternative mediators to organizational goal clarity can be posited and examined in tandem. For instance, a longitudinal study found that team cohesion was positively and reciprocally related to team performance over time, but that the change in cohesion over time differed drastically between groups: cohesion steadily increased for some teams while it dropped after an initial rise for other teams (Mathieu, Kukenberger, D'Innocenzo, & Reilly, 2015). Perhaps managers can not only influence organizational goal clarity but also team cohesion with the feedback they provide to impact performance. Beyond this avenue of research, future research can also begin to examine how other components of performance management (e.g., setting performance expectations, performance coaching; Schleicher et al., 2018) impact team states, processes, and performance, and the role of managers in the process.

4.4. How do managers impact organizational performance through performance management?

Researchers have argued that firm-level, rather than individual-level performance, should be the focus of performance management systems and called for more attention on the impact of the practice on organizational performance (DeNisi & Smith, 2014). However, the focus of much performance management research in the past has been on individual performance outcomes. This is problematic considering that the literature does not demonstrate a clear link between individual-level performance and organization-

level performance (DeNisi & Smith, 2014). Furthermore, it is not enough to simply describe the links between practices and organizational performance; it is also important to explain how practices lead to organizational performance (DeNisi & Smith, 2014). Whereas multilevel theory (Klein, Tosi, & Cannella Jr, 1999; Kozlowski & Klein, 2000; Mathieu & Chen, 2011) can be used to address the missing link between individual and organizational performance, process models (Fischer et al., 2017) can be used to address the explanatory mechanisms between practices and organizational performance. Our framework incorporates both to highlight how managers can impact organizational performance through their direct and indirect influence on the organizational context.

One avenue of research can further examine how managers develop a feedback environment (Steelman et al., 2004) and how this context can impact organizational performance. Past research has shown that leaders can impact the broad organizational context through their communication and behaviors (Schneider et al., 2013). Managers might develop a favorable feedback environment directly by communicating openness and making arrangements to facilitate feedback-seeking (e.g., announcing open door policies to encourage employees initiating performance conversations). Managers might also develop a favorable feedback environment indirectly by coaching and encouraging feedback seeking from individual employees, which may emerge as a shared perception of the context at the collective level. Although most research has examined the relationship between the feedback environment and individual-level outcomes, past research has demonstrated that organization-level context variables such as culture can impact organizational performance (Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011), suggesting that the feedback environment may also be linked to organizational performance. Thus, to the extent that managers can influence the feedback environment, managers can facilitate organizational performance by establishing a favorable one.

5. Conclusion

Performance management systems are changing and recent developments in this area suggest a need to more closely examine the relational dynamics that put these systems into action. The leadership process framework of performance management introduced in this paper integrates the components of performance management across multiple levels of analysis with relational dynamics as the fulcrum. Following the call from researchers and practitioners to pay more heed to manager-employee relationships, the framework highlights that the ongoing interactions between manager and employee make up the individual building blocks of the performance management process. Applying this multilevel leadership process framework to performance management research can help us understand how these processes unfold from focal leaders to recipients of influence across multiple levels of analysis and vice versa. Future research can use this leadership process framework to formulate research questions that are testable and have implications for performance management processes in practice.

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