emphasized in the formal system are also needed. "If you can't measure it you can't manage it" is a management adage that is still applicable. For our field to remain an operational and strategic partner with line management, questions regarding issues such as the validity of selections procedures, the effectiveness of training, and the gaps involved in reaching strategic targets need to be addressed. Responses to these types of questions usually rely on the formal PM system. Both formal and informal parts of the system are needed.

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Managing the Interpersonal Aspect of Performance Management

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It is safe to assume that an accurate performance appraisal (PA) is an important prerequisite to an effective performance management (PM) system, because with accurate PA information, management, teams, and employees can engage in the process of identifying and developing a wide range of job-relevant knowledge or skills to improve job performance. However,

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researchers and practitioners alike must continue to push for PA to be something other an administrative ritual; the ideal goal for PA is for it to contribute to a reliable process that can offer practical help to organizational operations, including PM. As Pulakos, Mueller Hanson, Arad, and Moye (2015) have pointed out, supervisors are concerned about demotivating or disengaging employees by providing PA ratings that are too much lower than the highest rating or ranking that is available, so having ratings that are clustered at the high end of the rating scale is quite common across organizations (Bretz, Milkovich, & Read, 1992). The ceiling effect issue is compounded by the fact that supervisors differ in their judgments about and use of the rating criteria (Jamieson, 1973), and the employees that the supervisors evaluate likely had different opportunities to be observed in real-world settings that are hardly standardized (Borman, 1974). All of these issues offer good reasons to suspect that PA ratings reflect a mixture of reliable judgment across raters (Viswesvaran, Ones, & Schmidt, 1996), reliable judgment unique to each rater (Murphy & DeShon, 2000), and unmodeled variance considered to be error.

A textbook principle might state that PA should be conducted in a neutral context in which supervisors are free to rate their employees accurately and objectively. Some organizational realities might come closer to this principle than to others, but our commentary seeks to emphasize that PA often takes place amid an unavoidably multifaceted organizational and interpersonal context that influences the ratings and feedback of raters in a complex manner (Levy & Williams, 2004; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), and emphasis on this reality will further strengthen the model that Pulakos and colleagues (2015) have proposed.

Interpersonal Dynamics

A relatively recent research stream has emphasized the important effect that social context has on how raters approach PA, which has distinct implications for the effectiveness of PA (Levy & Williams, 2004). For many peer raters, the social context of PA can make it generally difficult and discomforting to provide negative PA ratings or negative feedback—no matter how accurate—given that peers have to work together on a day-to-day basis. Likewise, supervisors and coworkers may have a difficult time transitioning from being inspirers, motivators, or even friends to being judicial evaluators of employees in the PA context. Thus, regardless of the nature of the organization, it is no surprise that raters will often tread carefully in ways that avoid negatively affecting their long-term relationships with ratees. Indeed, anecdotal evidence has shown that interpersonal political considerations are nearly always a part of the PA processes (e.g., Longenecker, Sims, & Gioia, 1987).

Social Context of Organizations Affects Performance Management

Less lenient PAs are possible, depending on the context of the appraisal (developmental vs. administrative; Jawahar & Williams, 1997). Pulakos and colleagues (2015) have pointed out that because PM procedures are not directly tied to practical administrative consequences, PM processes should theoretically be less prone to the negative effect that interpersonal factors have on the validity of PA ratings. Although we generally agree with their point, by nature, an organization is a social environment; therefore, we think that the critical factors of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal politics in an organizational environment may also have a profound-yet-underappreciated influence on the PM process. For example, the nature and amount of rater and ratee interaction affects the performance dimensions on which the rater has information; furthermore, these interactions (like any interpersonal interaction) likely have their own effect on how naturally the ratee performs in front of the rater (alone or on a team), and both of these in turn likely have an important influence on the PM and feedback process. Perhaps some of these social and interpersonal factors have a relatively uniform effect in the environment under which appraisals are actually used and therefore are not as important to consider (e.g., organizational climate); however, these factors should be accounted for when analyses and their implications extend beyond that local environment (e.g., in multilevel models that span organizations). These interpersonal factors described above could seemingly influence the PM processes in the model that Pulakos and colleagues (2015) have proposed. For example, Pulakos and colleagues (2015) have suggested that informal feedback sessions following a poor performance episode are usually the most meaningful and, if done right, can lead to positive outcomes. However, there may be several interpersonal dynamics between the feedback provider and the recipient that the feedback provider may need to take into consideration (e.g., likability of the recipient, relative position of the recipient in the organizational hierarchy), which could significantly influence the effectiveness of such informal feedback sessions.

That said, studies have demonstrated the promise of certain interventions that partially control for interpersonal considerations that are related to rating distortion in PA. For example, Mero and colleagues (Mero, Guidice, & Brownlee, 2007; Mero & Motowidlo, 1995) have shown that holding raters accountable for their ratings led to raters being more attentive to the ratees' performance information, with raters providing more accurate ratings under accountability conditions, to the extent that raters were reminded that accurate ratings are desired. Such interventions might have main effects across all raters or might interact with individual differences in rater characteristics. For example, absent any formal intervention, conscientious raters generally tend to provide less lenient and more accurate ratings (e.g., Bernardin,

Tyler, & Villanova, 2009), and in some cases, these raters seem to be less influenced by contextual demands that are consistent with conscientiousness (e.g., accountability to audience; Roch, Ayman, Newhouse, & Harris, 2005). Conversely, these interventions might be most effective in those raters who are especially susceptible to rating leniency. Villanova, Bernardin, Dahmus, and Sims (1993) developed a measure to gauge the extent to which raters were uncomfortable with conducting PA (Performance Appraisal Discomfort Scale [PADS]) and found that raters who scored high on this scale were more likely to provide lenient ratings because they wanted to avoid dealing with the discomfort and conflict that are often involved in delivering negative ratings or negative feedback information. This measure could be examined as a state measure (influenced by the ratee and rating environment), a trait measure (a relatively stable attribute of the rater), or both. With regard to traits, Bernardin et al. (2009) raters who were high on agreeableness and low on conscientiousness were also especially likely to be lenient in their PA. Other rater traits and rater states could be investigated in the context of an organizational environment that elicits or constrains trait-relevant behaviors (see the trait activation theory of Tett & Burnett, 2003).

Create an Environment for Open Communication
Models of employee learning and development have consistently identified the feedback environment as a critical antecedent to effective PM and employee development (e.g., London, 2003; Steelman, Levy, & Snell, 2004). Specifically, related to our previous discussion about the effect of interpersonal dynamics on PA, we think a productive PM process requires creating and maintaining a nonthreatening organizational social environment that facilitates ongoing communication and feedback among employees. Pulakos et al. (2015) have pointed out a consistent stream of empirical evidence showing that informal, continuous feedback that occurs on a day-to-day basis in such an environment (and preferably immediately following effective or ineffective performance episode; Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers, 2008) is much more likely to create real-time alterations in employees' job performance behaviors than are intermittent formal feedback sessions. Compared with formal feedback, informal feedback occurs naturally and is perhaps unexpected; ideally, it involves full engagement in feedback discussions that require genuine interpersonal interaction and accountability for both parties who are sending, receiving, or exchanging feedback. In a way, informal feedback behaviors may be described as a contextual performance in which coworkers or supervisors share technical, interpersonal, and organizational knowledge to help other employees improve their job performance and overall functioning in the organization. Just as shared values between the organization and its employees predict contextual performance (Goodman & Svyantek, 1999),

a combination of an organizational culture that actively promotes ongoing interpersonal feedback, a willingness on the part of the employees to actively provide supportive feedback to help each other improve (e.g., willingness to interact with each other, willingness to sacrifice one's own resources to help each other), and a willingness to seek, accept, and react positively to feedback information are essential precursors to effective PM processes, as Pulakos and colleagues (2015) have pointed out. However, instead of organizations just acknowledging trust and open communication as important precursors, we think that trust and open communication should be formally treated as an essential step that must be established before organizations can implement any formal PM procedures.

Although there is limited research on how a feedback environment can be modified or developed (Dahling & O'Malley, 2011), we can offer several hypotheses as to what interventions may be effective in creating an environment that is conducive to exchanging critical and honest feedback with less concern about interpersonal political considerations that might negatively influence the effectiveness of the PM process. First and foremost, an organizational environment that does not encourage hostile competition with others is more facilitative of a positive feedback environment. For example, Mohrman and Lawler (1983) suggested that, because the norms of an organization dictate how managers interpret the PA process, in an aggressively competitive organization, managers and employees may be less likely to view the appraisal process as developmental even when that is the actual purpose. Competition is not necessarily a bad thing, but developmental appraisal systems still need to align with the competitive norms of the organization. Indeed, this can be challenging (e.g., salespeople making commission on their sales are unlikely to be willing to share their unique knowledge on making sales), and organizations that make positive team-oriented change may increase employees' willingness to provide and seek feedback for effective PM.

Second, employees need to be equipped with appropriate interpersonal skills to establish constructive relationships that contribute to the feedback process. Formal interpersonal skill training can help facilitate an environment in which employees are open to feedback sessions. Previous studies have shown that high-quality leader–member exchange (Lam, Huang, & Snape, 2007), supportiveness of feedback source (Williams, Miller, Steelman, & Levy, 1999), and higher levels of leader consideration (VandeWalle, Ganesan, Challagalla, & Brown, 2000) were related to increased feedback-seeking behavior and lower feedback-avoidance behavior (Moss, Sanchez, Brumbaugh, & Borkowski, 2009). Thus, interpersonal skill training that helps facilitate positive interpersonal relationships or trust among organizational members should also lead to increased feedback-seeking (and lower

feedback-avoidance) behavior. Although few empirical studies have measured the effectiveness of training for interpersonal skills in creating behavioral change (e.g., Laker & Powell, 2011) and experts have expressed concerns regarding the lack of far transfer of trained interpersonal skills to on-the-job performance (Kupritz, 2002; Laker & Powell, 2011), some studies have found evidence for positive transfer of interpersonal skills to novel situations (e.g., Baldwin, 1992; Gist & Stevens, 1998). With respect to feedback behavior, training managers on the use of accounts, "or the use of language to interactionally construct preferred meanings for problematic events" (Buttny, 1993, p. 21), may be considered a useful interpersonal skill-training intervention that can be used to reduce employees' anger and increase perceived fairness toward negative feedback (Tata, 2002).

In addition to training employees to better deliver feedback information, Pulakos et al. (2015) have pointed out that how employees understand and react to the continuous, informal behavioral-feedback environment should also determine the success of a performance PM system. Related to this, recent theoretical models on learning, development, and PM in organizations (e.g., Gregory et al., 2008; London & Smither, 2002) have focused on a construct called *feedback orientation*, a multidimensional trait defined as one's general receptivity to feedback information (London & Smither, 2002). Although research on feedback orientation to date has largely consisted of theoretical propositions (e.g., London & Smither, 2002) or scale development and validation studies (Linderbaum & Levy, 2010), in recent empirical work, Dahling, Chau, and O'Malley (2012) tested a model of a broader context for feedback orientation, in which employees' perceptions of the supervisor feedback environment had a positive, moderate effect on feedback orientation, which in turn had a positive, moderate effect on active feedback inquiry behavior. Consistent with London and Smither's (2002) proposition that feedback orientation is a relatively malleable individual difference construct that can be shaped by strong, consistent situational influences, Dahling et al.'s (2012) results suggest that concerted effort by management to cultivate a more favorable feedback climate should contribute to the development of employees' feedback orientation (and vice versa). In addition, organizations might consider conducting employee training on how to receive and react to feedback information, which should also help facilitate cultivating a positive feedback environment.

Conclusion

Given that organizations are social by nature and that the PM process will always involve interpersonal interactions among organizational constituents, interpersonal dynamics or interpersonal politics, along with the organizational context, are researchable influences on PA ratings, delivery of feedback information, and reaction to and use of feedback information, all of

which should inevitably influence the success of the PM system. In the focal article, Pulakos and colleagues (2015) have described a five-step PM reform process that shifts the current formal PM systems to a more informal, ongoing interactive PM system that will clearly require even more interpersonal interaction and communication among organizational members (e.g., conveying performance expectations, setting goals, assessing performance, providing feedback). To help facilitate the success of such a PM system, we think that it is important to develop a deeper understanding of how the organizational social environment generally affects employees' PM behaviors, along with individual difference factors that influence the many ways that employees create, interact with, and react to the organizational social environment. Thus, perhaps the broader environment in which PM and PA take place might be usefully assessed and evaluated on a continuous basis as much as employee performance itself. We hope this perspective will inspire organizational research that can offer informed suggestions with regard to effectively managing the critical interpersonal aspects of PA and PM.

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Unlike the Cheese, Performance Management Does Not Stand Alone

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In their focal article, Pulakos, Mueller Hanson, Arad, and Moye (2015) have presented a helpful five-step plan for improving the use of performance management (PM) within organizations. As they have pointed out, it is important that an organization's PM system match the organization's values and culture. At the same time, one cannot forget that an organization's PM system should also align with the organization's other human resource (HR) practices. Thus, I suggest that taking time to make sure this alignment happens

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