

**WHAT WORKS FOR YOU MIGHT NOT WORK FOR ME:  
CONSEQUENCES OF IPT, FEEDBACK ORIENTATION, AND  
FEEDBACK ENVIRONMENT ON PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT  
EFFECTIVENESS**

by

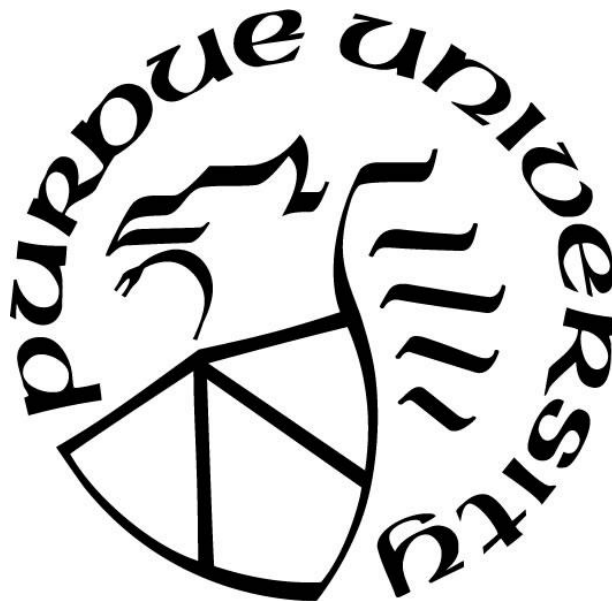
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*“To the stars who listen – and the dreams that are answered.”*

- *Sarah J. Maas*

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Now, on to the next great adventure!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	7
LIST OF FIGURES .....	8
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....	9
ABSTRACT.....	10
INTRODUCTION .....	11
Overview .....	11
Performance Management and Performance Management Behaviors .....	13
Supervisor Feedback Environment: Informal Performance Management.....	15
Feedback Orientation .....	17
<i>Feedback Orientation as a Moderator</i> .....	19
Implicit Person Theory .....	20
<i>Implicit Person Theory as a Moderator</i> .....	21
Employee Reactions to Performance Management .....	22
<i>Satisfaction with Performance Management</i> .....	23
<i>Commitment to Performance Management</i> .....	24
<i>Motivation to Improve Performance</i> .....	24
Current Study and Hypotheses.....	25
METHOD .....	28
Participants.....	28
Procedure .....	29
Measures .....	30
RESULTS .....	34
Hypothesis Testing.....	34
DISCUSSION.....	38
Theoretical Contributions .....	39
Practical Implications.....	40
Limitations and Future Directions .....	40
CONCLUSION.....	43
APPENDIX A. SURVEYS.....	44

APPENDIX B. MATERIALS .....	51
APPENDIX C. INTERACTIONS .....	52
REFERENCES .....	55

## LIST OF TABLES

<b><i>Table 1.</i></b> Descriptive Variables and Bivariate Correlations .....	33
<b><i>Table 2.</i></b> Hierarchical Regression Analyses for SFE and FO Interactions.....	36
<b><i>Table 3.</i></b> Hierarchical Regression Analyses for SFE and IPT Interactions.....	37

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.</i> Hypothesized Model .....	25
<i>Figure 2.</i> Moderation of Feedback Orientation on Satisfaction with PM .....	52
<i>Figure 3.</i> Moderation of Feedback Orientation on Commitment to PM .....	52
<i>Figure 4.</i> Moderation of Feedback Orientation on Motivation to Improve Performance .....	53
<i>Figure 5.</i> Moderation of IPT on Satisfaction with PM .....	53
<i>Figure 6.</i> Moderation of IPT on Commitment to PM .....	54
<i>Figure 7.</i> Moderation of IPT on Motivation to Improve Performance .....	54



## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

PM – Performance management

SFE – Supervisor feedback environment

FO – Feedback orientation

IPT – Implicit person theory

## ABSTRACT

Despite its status as a commonly used and seemingly vital talent management system, performance management has received an abundance of criticism surrounding its effectiveness and utility in organizations. Existing deficiencies in performance management are largely attributed to gaps in its strategy and implementation, with researchers arguing that organizations need to spend more effort supporting personnel engagement in *informal*, “everyday” performance management behaviors to drive performance. The present study sought to expand on existing performance management research by investigating: 1) how supervisor engagement in *informal* performance management behaviors influences employee perceptions of *overall* performance management and 2) how *employee* feedback orientation and implicit person theory potentially alter those perceptions. The hypothesized model was tested using an online survey sent through Prolific academic to a random sample of 351 full-time United States employees. A series of hierarchical regressions revealed that employee perceptions of performance management were positively predicted by supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors. However, employee feedback orientation and implicit person theory were not found to significantly moderate these effects. The present study contributes to performance management literature by examining the degree to which informal supervisor performance management behaviors shape employee reactions to performance management. Implications, limitations, and directions for future research are discussed.

# INTRODUCTION

## Overview

Performance management continues to be a widely disputed topic among organizational researchers and practitioners, especially regarding the ability for this complex process to effectively improve employee performance and drive organizational productivity outcomes. Extensive research and debate on the effectiveness of performance management has led many to question whether organizations should continue allotting resources to its improvement, or abandon the process altogether (Pulakos et al., 2019). Performance management is expensive, time-consuming, and generally unfavorable to organizations – oftentimes yielding inconsistent and untrustworthy metrics of employee performance due to factors such as rater error and rater motivation (Mueller-Hanson & Pulakos, 2018; Schaerer et al., 2018). Moreover, employees and supervisors – key players in the practice of performance management – experience the process as cumbersome, biased, and largely disconnected from their day-to-day work. Such negative experiences produce decreased perceptions of value and meaningful engagement in performance management, which can translate into negative consequences for organizations (e.g., turnover intentions; Levy et al., 2017).

Existing deficiencies in performance management are attributed to gaps in strategy and implementation. Organizations tend to be more concerned with improving and re-branding their formal, administrative performance management processes and tools (e.g., rating scales, competency models) than with supporting personnel engagement in the informal, ongoing performance management behaviors that drive performance (e.g., expectation setting, feedback; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). In reducing their performance management practices to series of prescribed steps that seek to document performance rather than strategically improve it, organizations limit their ability to increase performance management outcomes tied to employee performance (Pulakos et al., 2015). Researchers, thus, argue that performance management can and should be “fixed” by streamlining formal performance management processes (i.e., reducing complexity and time-commitment) and by concentrating more efforts on improving personnel engagement in “everyday” developmental behaviors (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos et al., 2019; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). Importantly, these types of informal behaviors promote mutual trust,

relationship-building, and consistent communication – the foundational pillars of effective performance management (Chawla et al., 2016; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011).

More recently, researchers have started to re-consider how supervisor-employee interactions in feedback processes impact performance management effectiveness (Chawla et al., 2016; Levy et al., 2017; Levy & Williams, 2004). Specifically, how a supervisor’s engagement in *day-to-day, informal* feedback processes influence key performance management outcomes, such as employee attitudes, behaviors, and performance (Schleicher et al., 2019). Some studies have also examined how a supervisor’s receptivity to performance feedback (i.e., feedback orientation) and beliefs about the malleability of employee abilities (i.e., implicit person theory) predict their engagement in informal performance management (Heslin et al., 2006; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018; Wolfred, 2020). This research suggests that 1) supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors (e.g., coaching, feedback) improves employee performance management outcomes, and 2) supervisors are more likely to engage in these informal behaviors when they value performance feedback or believe that employee abilities can be developed. Research to date, however, has rarely empirically examined how an *employee’s* own feedback orientation or implicit person theory might alter their engagement in and reactions to the performance management process. Moreover, research has not yet considered employee perceptions of the *overall* process of performance management in determining performance management effectiveness (Keeping & Levy, 2000). Although supervisors are largely responsible for executing performance management practices (Schleicher et al., 2018), employee reactions also determine the effectiveness of performance management systems (Pulakos et al., 2019; Schleicher et al., 2019).

Thus, the present study seeks to expand upon previous research by examining how supervisor engagement in informal performance management influences employee perceptions of performance management broadly. Namely, how supervisor engagement in informal performance feedback processes predict employee satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve their performance. Further, the present research examines the potential moderating effects of employee feedback orientation and implicit person theory on employee perceptions of performance management.

## **Performance Management and Performance Management Behaviors**

Performance management is an essential process that contributes to the success of an organization through the strategic alignment of employee performance with larger organizational objectives (Aguinis, 2013). In practice, performance management can serve administrative and developmental functions – meeting a variety of needs, including those to measure, evaluate, and improve employee performance (Hartog et al., 2004; Mueller-Hanson & Pulakos, 2018). With effective performance management systems in place, organizations can create and implement successful organizational development strategies, make vital personnel decisions, comprehensively develop their employees, and achieve greater organizational effectiveness (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). Traditionally viewed as a system for talent measurement via performance appraisals and annual reviews (Farr & Levy, 2007), current models of performance management view it as an integrated and dynamic process that extends beyond measurement and evaluation to also include supervisor-employee interactions and supervisory behaviors that improve employee performance (e.g., performance conversations, coaching, goal-setting, feedback; Hartog et al., 2004; Levy et al., 2017; Schleicher et al., 2018; Tseng & Levy, 2019). This shift has transformed performance management from a lackluster, monotonous process into a strategic, motivational process for employees and supervisors (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011).

Recently, performance management has received an abundance of criticism questioning its effectiveness and utility in organizations. Researchers claim that the process has been reduced to burdensome, administrative checklists for supervisors instead of serving as the purposeful, engaging talent development system it is intended to be (Pulakos et al., 2015; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). Deficiencies in the process are attributed to “futile” organizational efforts to improve performance management by implementing non-empirically supported practices with no prior evaluation of the organization’s capacity to sustain those practices or their fit with the organization’s dynamic needs (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). Moreover, organizations neglect the importance of personnel engagement in performance management behaviors – leading to continuous cycles of unsuccessful performance management implementations (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos et al., 2015). Many organizations also experience difficulties with performance management due to unrealistic expectations for one process to meet multiple, competing objectives such as those to improve performance (i.e., developmental goal) *and* make reward

decisions (i.e., administrative goal; Mueller-Hanson & Pulakos, 2018). Much to the concern of organizations, continued implementation of unsustainable practices results in diminished credibility, as well as increasing doubts in the value of performance management (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). Thus, it is important to understand what factors make performance management effective.

Extant performance management literature has dichotomized the overall process of performance management into two broad categories of processes: formal and informal (Schleicher et al., 2018). Historically, performance management has been characterized by the formal processes in which supervisors utilize internal structures, tools, and procedures (e.g., appraisals, annual reviews, rating scales) to formally document and quantify employee performance compared to performance standards (Levy et al., 2017; Schleicher et al., 2018). These generally guide the *formal behaviors* that supervisors are expected to engage in as part of the performance management process (e.g., cascading goals, appraisal sessions; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011) and tend to be deficit-focused and retrospective, rarely considering opportunities for employee development or career progression (Daoanis, 2012). Employees and supervisors experience these as “checklist” behaviors and thus find them bureaucratic, time-consuming, and unvaluable (Levy et al., 2017). Informal performance management processes, on the other hand, are characterized by the *informal behaviors* that are not inherently required by the performance management process. They relate to the opportunities for employees to receive guidance, communication, and feedback beyond formal performance management activities and can include the delivery of real-time feedback, coaching, and relationship-building (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). It is believed that informal behaviors distinguish effective performance management from ineffective performance management due to the continuous provision of performance information that is immediate, relevant, and easily applicable to current performance (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos et al., 2015; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011).

Indeed, research suggests the importance of these informal behaviors in producing positive individual and organizational-level outcomes. The provision of frequent, consistent performance feedback, for example, has been found to be more effective in developing employees and their performance than the delayed, infrequent feedback that typically occurs in formal performance management (Gregory & Levy, 2015; Ilgen et al., 1979). Several studies, too, have demonstrated that ongoing feedback is more likely to result in employee behavioral

changes (Pulakos et al., 2015). Regular coaching exchanges empower employees to leverage performance feedback and goal setting in the improvement and regulation of their own performance (London et al., 2004), and strong coaching relationships have been found to enhance leadership performance and system perceptions (Boyce et al., 2010), self-efficacy (Baron & Morin, 2012), and general system effectiveness (de Haan et al., 2019). These informal behaviors equip employees with the necessary information and tools they need to improve their performance in real-time, throughout their entire career (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011), making performance management more dynamic and engaging for them (Levy et al., 2017). Taken together, these findings support researchers' claims that performance management is most effective and sustainable when informal processes are used to develop performance (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011).

In response to calls for more research on informal performance management processes and behaviors (feedback especially), the current research examines the feedback environment in its investigation of performance management effectiveness. Informal supervisory behaviors in these environments, specifically, have been identified as instrumental in understanding successful performance management (Levy et al., 2017; Levy & Williams, 2004; London & Smither, 2002; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011; Steelman et al., 2004).

### **Supervisor Feedback Environment: Informal Performance Management**

The generation and delivery of performance feedback is a performance management behavior that has been examined extensively in the performance management literature (Schleicher et al., 2018). This is not surprising due to the prominence of opportunities for performance feedback in most, if not all, activities that fall under the umbrella of performance management (Chawla et al., 2016; Schleicher et al., 2018). When implemented effectively, performance feedback encourages employees to better understand gaps and inconsistencies between their current performance and their desired or expected performance (Taylor et al., 1984), and it helps them develop effective strategies for reducing those gaps (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). Specific characteristics of performance feedback such as quality (i.e., specificity, relevance), delivery (i.e., intent, frequency), and sign (i.e., positive, negative) have been linked to employee behaviors, including feedback-seeking, performance improvement, and feedback acceptance (Anseel et al., 2015; Ilgen et al., 1979). Though performance feedback can exist in

both formal and informal performance management (Schleicher et al., 2018), it is generally more meaningful and effective when delivered more frequently (i.e., informally; Gregory & Levy, 2015).

Supervisor feedback environment refers to the support and encouragement that employees experience through supervisor behaviors when requesting, receiving, interpreting, and using performance feedback in their day-to-day work (London & Smither, 2002). Perceived supportiveness from supervisor behaviors in these ongoing feedback interactions influences how, when, and if employees opt to seek, accept, and respond to performance feedback (Andiola, 2014; Steelman et al., 2004), which can then impact performance outcomes (Ilgen et al., 1979; Kluger & DeNisi, 1996). The most widely accepted and utilized operationalization of supervisor feedback environment comes from Steelman et al. (2004) who draw on previous feedback literature to inform how supervisors informally engage in feedback processes with their employees. Supervisors create supportive feedback environments by 1) establishing themselves as a credible source of performance feedback through understanding their employees' job responsibilities and job performance, 2) providing performance feedback that is consistent, useful, genuine, and considerate, 3) providing both positive and negative feedback as warranted, 4) engaging in regular communication with their employees and being available to provide performance feedback, and 5) being supportive of employee feedback-seeking behaviors. Together, these "everyday" informal performance management behaviors communicate the extent to which collaboration, development, and continual learning are valued and encouraged by supervisors (Andiola, 2014).

Research has shown that supportive supervisor feedback environments predict important performance management outcomes, including employee attitudinal and behavioral reactions. In the development and validation of the feedback environment construct, Steelman et al. (2004) found that employee perceptions of supervisor feedback environment predict employee satisfaction with performance feedback, feedback-seeking behaviors, and motivation to improve performance. Notably, employees were more likely to be satisfied with their performance feedback, want to seek additional performance feedback, and feel motivated to improve their work performance when they perceived their supervisor feedback environment as more supportive. Conversely, they were less likely to experience these reactions when they perceived their feedback environment as less supportive.



More interested in behavioral measures of performance management effectiveness, Norris-Watts and Levy (2004) examined the relationship between supervisor feedback environment, affective commitment, and organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs). They found affective commitment to partially mediate the relationship between supervisor feedback environment and OCBs. Specifically, employees engaged in more extra-role behaviors when they felt more emotionally connected to their organization, and this connection was stronger when they perceived their supervisor feedback environment as more supportive. The opposite occurred when they perceived the environment as less supportive. Several studies have extended these findings, demonstrating that employee perceptions of supervisor feedback environment also positively predict task performance and OCBs via increased employee perceptions of role clarity (Whitaker et al., 2007) and decreased employee perceptions of organizational politics (Rosen et al., 2006). Still, further research has shown that employee perceptions of supervisor feedback environment also positively predict intrinsic motivation (i.e., psychological empowerment) and negatively predict employee turnover intentions and emotional exhaustion (Dahling et al., 2017; Gabriel et al., 2014).

As evidenced in the literature, supervisor engagement in informal performance feedback behaviors (i.e., cultivating supportive feedback environments) is a valuable determinant of performance management effectiveness (Katz et al., 2021). Employees consistently react favorably when their supervisors encourage opportunities for improvement (i.e., provide informal performance feedback) on an ongoing, day-to-day basis. However, little is still known about how employee individual differences might alter these outcomes, especially when evaluating performance management overall (Schleicher et al., 2019). Thus, employee feedback orientation and implicit person theory are introduced as potential moderating variables in this study.

## **Feedback Orientation**

Like contextual factors (e.g., feedback environment, supervisor behaviors), employee individual differences also have the capacity to influence feedback processes and relevant outcomes (Andiola, 2014). Feedback orientation refers to an individual's propensity to consider, accept, and respond to the performance feedback they encounter in their performance management experiences (London & Smither, 2002). A relatively stable trait, feedback

orientation impacts how likely someone is to seek and thoroughly process performance feedback, consider performance feedback a valuable self-improvement tool, and be motivated to use the performance feedback they receive. In developing and validating a feedback orientation measure, Linderbaum and Levy (2010) utilized motivational and attitudinal theories to expand on the feedback orientation construct and help explain how it might drive employee performance improvement behaviors. Operationally, they define feedback orientation as one's 1) perceptions of the utility or value of performance feedback in meeting objectives, 2) felt responsibility to respond to or use performance feedback, 3) inclination to use feedback for self-consciousness, and 4) understanding of how to appropriately interpret and apply performance feedback. Research and theory on feedback orientation suggest that individuals with a high feedback orientation are better equipped and more motivated to seek out and mindfully process performance feedback, as well as to interpret and want to use that performance feedback to improve their performance (Braddy et al., 2013; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010; London & Smither, 2002). Conversely, employees with a low feedback orientation are less equipped and less motivated to engage in those same behaviors.

Research has only recently started to test propositions related to feedback orientation (Andiola, 2014). Thus far, organizational research has discovered positive correlations between feedback orientation and other achievement-related motivational constructs including learning goal orientation (i.e., employee motivation to develop), self-efficacy (i.e., employee beliefs about their ability to perform), and positive affect (i.e., employee propensity to experience positive emotions; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). In two studies examining feedback orientation in undergraduate students and full-time manufacturers, Linderbaum and Levy (2010) also found that feedback orientation positively influences role clarity, perceptions of feedback environment, satisfaction with performance appraisals, and feedback-seeking behaviors. Empirical investigations of feedback orientation across undergraduate students, manufacturing professionals, and nurses have expanded these findings demonstrating the direct effects of feedback orientation on employee task performance (Rasheed et al., 2015), employee perceptions of coaching relationships (Gregory & Levy, 2012), and employee feedback-seeking (Dahling et al., 2012). Employees are more likely to have higher performance ratings, report having high quality coaching relationships, and seek further performance feedback when they have a high feedback orientation than when they have a low feedback orientation. Together, this research

suggests that employee reactions to performance management activities can be shaped by their feedback orientation.

### ***Feedback Orientation as a Moderator***

The effects of feedback orientation have not been tested extensively (especially as a moderator); however, there is some evidence that would suggest this construct might influence how supervisors and employees engage in and experience informal performance management processes. Steelman and Wolfeld (2018), for example, conducted a study on supervisor-employee dyads across industries to test the effects of supervisor engagement in coaching behaviors and coaching effectiveness. They found that supervisors with a high feedback orientation were more likely to engage in informal coaching behaviors and offer developmental support to their employees than were supervisors with a low feedback orientation. Supervisors with a high feedback orientation were also perceived as better coaches than those with a low feedback orientation. These findings are consistent with theory on feedback orientation, which proposes that supervisors who value feedback would be more likely to cultivate strong feedback environments and coaching relationships with their employees than supervisors who place little value on performance feedback (London & Smither, 2002).

Gabriel et al. (2014) directly tested feedback orientation as a moderator in their investigation of the effects of supervisor feedback environment on employee psychological empowerment. They found a stronger positive relationship between employee perceptions of feedback environment and job meaning (i.e., task meaning) for employees with a high feedback orientation than for employees with a low feedback orientation. Further, researchers in this study found that feedback orientation moderated the relationship between employee perceptions of feedback environment and experienced competence and self-determination, such that employees with a high feedback orientation experienced strong positive relationships while employees with a low feedback orientation experienced negative relationships. Gabriel et al. (2014) demonstrated that feedback orientation can differentially impact the effects of employee performance-related motivation in relation to the informal performance management behaviors that supervisors engage in. This work suggests that informal behaviors and processes that benefit some employees may harm important outcomes (e.g., self-efficacy, autonomy) for other employees. A possible explanation for these relationships is that individuals who want and value feedback (i.e.,

have a high feedback orientation) may be more receptive to and accepting of it, whereas others who do not necessarily want or value feedback (i.e., have a low feedback orientation) may view it as demanding and burdensome (Gabriel et al., 2014). Related to the current study, such differences in perceptions of performance feedback may ultimately lead to differences in employee reactions to performance management broadly as a function of supervisor behaviors.

### **Implicit Person Theory**

Like feedback orientation, implicit person theory (IPT) is another individual difference factor that could moderate the relationship between informal supervisor feedback behaviors and performance management effectiveness outcomes. IPT proposes that people hold certain underlying views or beliefs about the malleability of their own and others' personal attributes, such as intelligence or ability (Dweck et al., 1995). Specifically, IPT posits that people fall into one of two categories: *entity theorists* (i.e., low IPT) or *incremental theorists* (i.e., high IPT), and the underlying beliefs that correspond with these categories determine someone's *implicit person theory* (IPT; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). Entity theorists tend to believe that personal attributes are fixed, and that people cannot do much to change who they "inherently" are. In contrast, incremental theorists tend to believe that personal attributes are malleable, and that people can do a lot to develop and significantly change who they are with effort (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

IPT initially stems from Dweck's (1986) model of children's achievement-motivation and learning. In this model, Dweck (1986) proposed that children develop adaptive and maladaptive patterns of motivation as a function of their goal-orientation (i.e., performance or learning). Performance goal-orientation relates to motivations that someone has around acquiring positive judgments and avoiding negative judgements about themselves from others. This goal-orientation might lead people to develop maladaptive patterns of "helplessness," in which they opt to avoid any opportunities where someone else could question their competencies or abilities. Learning goal-orientation, conversely, relates to motivations that someone has around enhancing their personal competencies and abilities. This goal-orientation might lead people to develop adaptive patterns of "mastery orientation," in which they actively seek out and pursue opportunities to develop their competencies and abilities. Whereas someone with a performance goal-orientation fears failure and does what they can to avoid it, someone with a learning goal-orientation views failure as an opportunity to grow (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). In theory and

practice, IPT overlaps with these orientations, such that incremental theorists have a learning goal-orientation and entity theorists have a performance goal-orientation (Dweck, 1999).

### ***Implicit Person Theory as a Moderator***

Empirical evidence supports the notion that IPT predicts differences in employee attitudes and behaviors in response to a variety of informal performance management behaviors. IPT was initially introduced in the performance management literature to explain differences in supervisor performance management behaviors, specifically in performance evaluations and coaching (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2011; Heslin et al., 2006). Supervisors with a high IPT, for instance, provide more accurate feedback to their employees (Heslin & VandeWalle, 2011), are more motivated to coach employees (Heslin et al., 2006), and are more likely to acknowledge performance improvement among their employees (Heslin et al., 2005) than are supervisors with a low IPT. An explanation for these findings may be that individuals who have a high IPT are more likely to believe that people can change and develop their abilities – and therefore, see the value in providing opportunities for that growth and development. In contrast, individuals who have a low IPT – and are less inclined to believe that people can change and develop their abilities – fail to see the value in development opportunities, and so do not offer them (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Though employee IPT has not been examined as extensively as supervisor IPT in the context of performance management, there is empirical evidence that suggests employee IPT might influence employee attitudes and behaviors in response to informal supervisory behaviors. Sue-Chan et al. (2012) explored coaching effectiveness as a function of employee IPT. They specifically investigated whether IPT moderates the relationship between supervisor coaching style (promotion-oriented vs. prevention-oriented) and employee performance effectiveness. Results suggest that promotion-oriented coaching (i.e., coaching employees to reach positive outcomes) led to greater performance effectiveness for employees with both a high and a low IPT, but the effects were stronger for employees with a high IPT. Prevention-oriented coaching (i.e., coaching employees to avoid negative outcomes) however, was only beneficial for employees with a low IPT. Sue-Chan et al. (2012) explain that low IPT individuals are more likely to avoid challenges (that may reveal flaws in their abilities) than to seek out and pursue opportunities that will help them develop (something they do not believe is possible) making

them more suited for avoidant environments than those with high IPT who do want opportunities to develop. Lin et al. (2017) replicated these findings demonstrating that the relationship between promotion-oriented coaching and employee performance was positive for both high and low IPT employees, but the relationship was stronger for those with a high IPT. Additionally, high IPT employees did not perform as well when coaches used prevention-oriented coaching.

Exploring interactions between feedback environment and IPT in academic settings, Katz and O'Malley (2016) examined IPT as a moderator of the relationship between student perceptions of feedback environment and students' intentions to continue collaborating with their faculty advisors. These researchers found that student perceptions of the feedback environment cultivated by their faculty advisor positively predicted intentions to continue collaborating with that advisor. Stated differently, supportive feedback environments predicted greater collaboration intentions, whereas unsupportive feedback environments predicted lower collaboration intentions among students. Importantly, Katz and O'Malley (2016) reported that student perceptions of feedback environment positively predicted collaboration intentions for students with a low IPT and students with a high IPT, but this relationship was stronger for those with a high IPT.

Seitz and Owens (2021) directly tested the moderating effect of employee IPT on performance when a leader engages in transformational leadership – a change-oriented leadership style focused on employee development. Researchers in this study found that employee IPT moderated the relationship between transformational leadership and employee performance, such that employees with a high IPT experienced improved performance when their supervisor displayed transformational leadership. However, employees with a low IPT did not experience the same results. Taken together, this previous research on employee IPT suggests that informal, developmentally-focused performance management behaviors are more likely to produce stronger, positive effects for employees who believe in and desire the performance improvements encouraged (Dweck & Leggett, 1988) – at least partially explaining differences in employee reactions to and the effectiveness of performance management.

## **Employee Reactions to Performance Management**

Researchers have only recently started to create theoretical frameworks for measuring and determining the effectiveness of performance management (Schleicher et al., 2018; 2019). Schleicher et al. (2019) introduced a model of evaluative criteria for individual (e.g., reaction,

learning, transfer) and firm-level outcomes (e.g., operations, financial) inspired by Kirkpatrick's (1987) model for evaluating training and learning programs. The present study focuses on employee *reactions* to performance management, as this is the first level of criteria for evaluating performance management effectiveness. Employee reactions to performance management can be measured as perceptions of the *overall* process of performance management, or perceptions of various processes within performance management (e.g., ratings, appraisals, feedback; Schleicher et al., 2019). Research to date has primarily focused on employee reactions to performance appraisals – a specific performance management activity (Levy et al., 2017). Research on perceptions of the *overall* process of performance management is necessary, though, to gain insight on employee perceptions of and reactions to this process and its practice in organizations (Schleicher et al., 2019). Understanding what factors predict these perceptions might help organizations to mitigate some of the concerns with performance management presented earlier (Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011).

Previous research on employee reactions to performance appraisals is used to inform the current research. In their examination of performance appraisal reactions, Keeping and Levy (2000) identified several employee reactions which could be used to determine performance management effectiveness: satisfaction, perceived fairness, perceived utility, and affect. Many of these reactions have been linked to employee outcomes such as performance (Selvarajan & Cloninger, 2012), organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Brown et al., 2010), trust (Hartog et al., 2004), and turnover (Brown et al., 2010) – indicating the importance of positive performance management perceptions. Because previous research has focused on employee reactions to performance appraisals – a single component of performance management – it is critical to investigate these reactions more broadly. Thus, the present research investigates the interactive effects of supervisor feedback environment, feedback orientation, and IPT on employee satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve performance.

### ***Satisfaction with Performance Management***

Satisfaction with performance appraisal systems is the most commonly measured employee reaction to performance management and is considered significant due to its close relationship with important employee outcomes (Giles & Mossholder, 1990; Keeping & Levy,

2000). Satisfaction with performance appraisals positively predicts employee job satisfaction and commitment, and negatively predicts employee turnover intentions (Brown et al., 2010).

Research suggests that supervisory behaviors predict satisfaction with performance appraisals, such that levels of satisfaction increase as supervisor behaviors increase in supportiveness (Jordan, 1990). Both formal and informal performance management processes can be shaped by supervisory decisions and behaviors (Schleicher et al., 2018); therefore, it may be reasonable to assume that this employee reaction might extend to general perceptions of performance management. Further research is necessary to test this assumption, however.

### ***Commitment to Performance Management***

Commitment is argued to be one of the most significant predictors for creating change within organizations (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002), and is defined as “a force (mind set) that binds an individual to a course of action of relevance to one or more targets” (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001, p. 301). *Commitment to change* shares this definition but with the specific target being change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). In organizational settings, change initiatives succeed by implementing strategies for change, acceptance, and adaptability (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). For the present research, performance management is considered a specific change initiative. In performance management, employees are given strategies for performance development, feedback acceptance, and applicability (Levy et al., 2017; Mueller-Hanson & Pulakos, 2018; Schleicher et al., 2018). Wolfred (2020) found that individuals (i.e., supervisors) with a high IPT were more likely to be affectively committed to performance management – and thus, more likely to partake in discretionary performance management behaviors. Since commitment to performance management appears to be meaningful for supervisor engagement in the process (Wolfred, 2020), it may be important to also understand *employees’* general commitment to the process, as these reactions might influence employee performance behaviors.

### ***Motivation to Improve Performance***

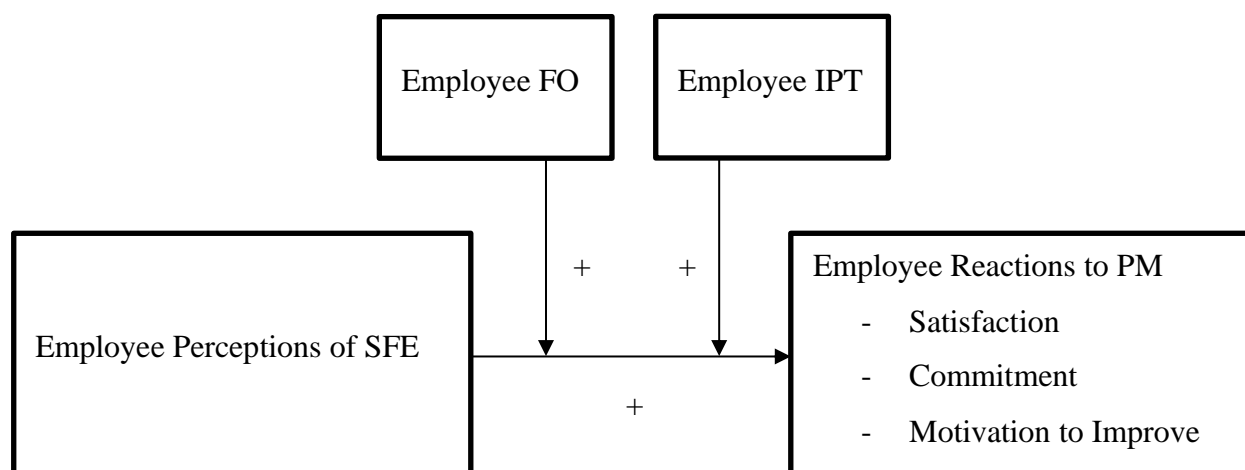
Employee motivation is a force that dictates the direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior toward an objective in the workplace. Research suggests that supportive and developmental performance management approaches (i.e., informal processes) – as opposed to



administrative approaches (i.e., formal processes) – increase employee motivation (Oyomikun, 2017). Oyomikun (2017) found that performance management practices, such as goal setting and identifying employee strengths and weaknesses, predict greater levels of motivation in employees. Consequently, increased motivation results in increased employee performance outcomes (e.g., productivity; Hung et al., 2011). Thus, it may be helpful for researchers and practitioners to understand how informal supervisory behaviors shape this reaction to performance management broadly.

### Current Study and Hypotheses

The current study investigates the influence of supervisor engagement in informal performance feedback processes on performance management effectiveness. Specifically, it explores how informal supervisor behaviors within the feedback environment shape employee perceptions of performance management. It further explores whether employee individual differences in feedback orientation and IPT moderate the relationships between employee perceptions of informal performance management behaviors and employee satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve performance. It is expected that employee perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors (i.e., employee perceptions of supervisor feedback environment) will predict employee reactions to performance management, and that employee feedback orientation and IPT will moderate these relationships (See Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Hypothesized Model

First, it is expected that employee perceptions of their supervisor's informal performance management behaviors will positively predict their reactions to performance management. Previous research has demonstrated that supportive development-focused behaviors positively predict employee reactions such as process satisfaction (Jordan, 1990; Steelman et al., 2004), affective commitment (Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004; Steelman et al., 2004), and motivation to improve (Oyomikun, 2017; Steelman et al., 2004). Furthermore, research has consistently demonstrated positive employee attitudinal and behavioral reactions to supervisor feedback environment and the informal behaviors within those contexts (Steelman et al., 2004). Thus:

**H1:** *Employee perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal, day-to-day performance management behaviors (i.e., cultivating supportive feedback environments) will positively predict employee reactions to performance management such that increased supervisor engagement in these behaviors will result in greater levels of a) employee satisfaction with performance management, b) employee commitment to performance management, and c) employee motivation to improve performance.*

Next, it is expected that employee feedback orientation and implicit person theory will moderate these relationships. Research suggests individuals engage in informal performance management differently and experience informal performance management differently depending on their feedback orientation and implicit person theory (Gabriel et al., 2014; Sietz & Owens, 2021; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018; Sue-Chan et al., 2012). Furthermore, theory suggests that employees with a high feedback orientation are more likely to value and desire the performance feedback they receive in performance management contexts than employees with a low feedback orientation (Braddy et al., 2013; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). Similarly, theory on IPT suggests that employees with a high IPT experience greater intrinsic motivation to pursue and take advantage of developmental opportunities than employees with a low IPT (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). It seems highly likely, then, that employees with a high feedback orientation and employees with a high IPT would be more inclined to seek out and value feedback interactions that allot those opportunities – more so than employees with a low feedback orientation or a low IPT. Thus:

**H2:** *Employee feedback orientation will moderate the relationship between perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal, day-to-day performance management behaviors (i.e., cultivating supportive feedback environments) and employee reactions to performance management, such that the relationship will be more positive and stronger for employees with a high feedback orientation than those with a low feedback orientation for a) employee satisfaction with performance management, b) employee commitment to performance management, and c) employee motivation to improve performance.*

**H3:** *Employee IPT will moderate the relationship between perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal, day-to-day performance management behaviors (i.e., cultivating supportive feedback environments) and employee reactions to performance management, such that the relationship will be more positive and stronger for employees with a high IPT than those with a low IPT for a) employee satisfaction with performance management, b) employee commitment to performance management, and c) employee motivation to improve performance.*

## METHOD

### Participants

The population of interest in the present research was full-time employees across various industries who report to a direct supervisor in the day-to-day completion of their work responsibilities. To participate in the study, participants had to be 18 years or older, reside in the United States, work 31 or more hours each week, and report to a direct supervisor. Participants were recruited using Prolific academic, an online data collection platform that enhances researcher ability to collect high-quality, reliable, and representative data. An *a priori* G\*Power analysis with 80% power and a .025 effect size ( $f^2$ ; between a small and medium effect) suggested that 316 participants would have been sufficient in testing the proposed linear moderated regressions. The final sample consisted of 351 participants after attrition between Time 1 and Time 2 of data collection.

Individuals in the final sample were majority Male ( $N = 231$ , 65.8%) and White ( $N = 267$ , 76.1%), with 119 Female participants (33.9%) and 1 Non-Binary participant (.3%). The remainder of participants identified as Black/African American ( $N = 15$ , 4.3%), American Indian/Alaska Native ( $N = 2$ , .6%), Asian/Asian American ( $N = 35$ , 10.0%), and Hispanic/Latinx ( $N = 26$ , 7.4%). Participants ranged in age from 20 to 69 years, with an average age of 37.7 years ( $SD = 10.05$ ). Most participants reported working between 31 to 40 hours per week ( $N = 219$ , 62.4%) and having earned at least a 4-year degree ( $N = 186$ , 53.0%). Most of the sample included individuals who work in-person ( $N = 150$ , 42.7%) compared to remote ( $N = 93$ , 26.5%) or hybrid ( $N = 108$ , 30.8%) options. The final sample also consisted largely of individuals who have worked at their current organization for 1 to 3 years ( $N = 86$ , 24.5%) or 4 to 6 years ( $N = 103$ , 29.3%), under their current supervisor for 1 to 3 years ( $N = 140$ , 39.9%), and in their current role for 1 to 3 years ( $N = 113$ , 32.2%) or 4 to 6 years ( $N = 101$ , 28.8%). There was also a broad range of industries represented in the final sample, including manufacturing ( $N = 36$ , 10.3%), healthcare ( $N = 35$ , 10.0%), entertainment ( $N = 3$ , .9%), hospitality/service ( $N = 27$ , 7.7%), agriculture ( $N = 2$ , .6%), government ( $N = 25$ , 7.1%), education ( $N = 39$ , 11.1%), business ( $N = 46$ , 13.1%), and technology ( $N = 67$ , 19.1%). Regarding the average frequency in which participants meet with or interact with their direct supervisor at work each week, 4 participants

reported never (1.1%), 33 said once (9.4%), 94 said two to three times (26.8%), 75 said four to five times (21.4%), and 145 said more than five times (41.3%).

## **Procedure**

Participants were asked to complete a series of two surveys with one week between the first and second survey. Data collection was separated to control for common method bias that may occur when independent and dependent variables are collected at the same point in time with the same response method (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In the first survey, participants were asked to complete a measure of their perceptions of the feedback environment created by their current direct supervisor (i.e., the informal performance management behaviors that their supervisor engages in on a day-to-day basis). Participants were instructed to consider their day-to-day interactions with this direct supervisor while responding to the measure. They were also asked to complete measures of their own feedback orientation and implicit person theory in this survey.

After completing the first survey, participants were informed that they could complete a second survey one week later for additional compensation. In the second survey, participants were shown a visual representation of performance management created by the researcher (See Appendix B). This visual representation included definitions of performance management and its key processes. Participants were then asked to complete measures about their satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and their motivation to improve their performance. Finally, participants were asked to provide basic demographic information about themselves, including their gender, age, race/ethnicity, education level, and industry. The number of years that participants have worked at their current organization, under their current supervisor, and in their current role were also collected to be used as control variables due to their potentially confounding influence on employee perceptions of feedback environment and behaviors enacted by their supervisor (Gabriel et al., 2014). At the conclusion of the second survey, participants were thanked for their time and compensated for their participation (\$2.40 for Survey 1 and \$1.60 for Survey 2). Compensation was determined using ethical compensation recommendations on Prolific academic.

## Measures

**Supervisor Feedback Environment.** Employee perceptions of the informal, “everyday” developmental behaviors of their supervisors were measured using a 32-item feedback environment scale developed and validated by Steelman et al. (2004). This scale includes several items that capture the informal performance management behaviors supervisors may engage in with their employees on an ongoing basis: “*My supervisor is fair when evaluating my job performance*” (source credibility), “*The feedback I receive from my supervisor helps me do my job*” (feedback quality), “*My supervisor is tactful when giving me performance feedback*” (feedback delivery), “*I seldom receive praise from my supervisor*” (favorable feedback), “*My supervisor tells me when my work does not meet organizational standards*” (unfavorable feedback), “*I have little contact with my supervisor*” (source availability), and “*My supervisor encourages me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance*” (promotion of feedback-seeking). Responses were recorded from participants using a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) and were aggregated into a single measure after negatively worded items were reverse-scored. Higher scores on the aggregated measure indicated that a feedback environment was more supportive (i.e., supervisors engaged in more informal behaviors), while lower scores indicated that a feedback environment was less supportive (i.e., supervisors engaged in less informal behaviors). In the present study, the scale demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .97$ ) – consistent with previous research ( $\alpha = .96$ ; Steelman et al., 2004).

**Feedback Orientation.** Employee feedback orientation was measured using a 20-item feedback orientation scale developed and validated by Linderbaum and Levy (2010). This scale includes 5 items for *perceived utility* (e.g., “*Feedback contributes to my success at work*”), 5 items for *accountability* (e.g., “*It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance*”), 5 items for *social awareness* (e.g., “*I try to be aware of what people think of me*”), and 5 items for *self-efficacy* (e.g., “*I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback*”) – all intended to capture an individual’s receptivity and natural inclination to value or want performance feedback. Participant responses were measured using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) and were aggregated into a single measure of feedback orientation. Higher scores on the aggregated measure indicated a high feedback orientation (i.e., greater receptivity to performance feedback), while lower scores indicated a low feedback

orientation (i.e., lower receptivity to performance feedback). This measure demonstrated a high reliability in the present study ( $\alpha = .91$ ), matching that of previous research ( $\alpha = .91$ ; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010).

***Implicit Person Theory.*** Employee IPT was measured with an 8-item *kind-of-person* scale developed by Levy and Dweck (1997). This scale includes 4 items for *entity beliefs* (i.e., low IPT; “*People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can’t really be changed much*”) and 4 items for *incremental beliefs* (i.e., high IPT; “*People can always substantially change the kind of person they are*”). Responses were recorded using a 6-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*). Entity belief items were reverse scored, and responses were aggregated to create an overall IPT score. Higher scores indicated a high IPT, and lower scores indicated a low IPT. In the present study, this IPT measure demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .98$ ).

***Satisfaction with PM.*** Employee satisfaction with performance management was measured using an 8-item performance management satisfaction scale containing 3 items from a Decramer et al. (2013) system satisfaction scale and five additional items that were created using Pulakos and O’Leary’s (2011) definition of performance management. An example item from Decramer et al.’s (2013) scale includes, “*I am satisfied with the way my goals are determined.*” From the five additional items, an example item is “*I am satisfied with the way my goals are communicated to me.*” Responses were recorded on a 6-item scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*). Higher scores indicated greater satisfaction with performance management, while lower scores indicated lower satisfaction with performance management. This combined scale demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

***Commitment to PM.*** Employee commitment to performance management was measured using an adapted 5-item affective commitment to change subscale (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). A sample item from this scale is “*I think performance management is a useful process.*” Participant responses were recorded using a 7-item scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). Higher scores on the aggregate measure indicated a greater commitment to performance management, while lower scores indicated a lower commitment to performance management. In the present study, this adapted measure demonstrated high reliability ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

***Motivation to Improve Performance.*** Employee motivation to improve performance was measured using an adapted 3-item motivation to improve scale from Fedor et al. (1989). An item

from the original scale, “*The feedback makes me want to do better*” was adapted to “*The performance management system makes me want to do better.*” Responses were recorded using a 5-item scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*). This scale demonstrated high reliability in the present study ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

A confirmatory factor analysis was conducted due to the relatedness of outcomes variables included in the present research (satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, motivation to improve performance). Results of this analysis indicated an acceptable three factor model fit,  $X^2(101) = 599.63$ ,  $p < .001$ , TLI = .91, CFI = .92, RMSEA = .12, SRMR = .05. These fit indices indicate that the three outcome variables presented in the current study are separate, distinct constructs of employee reactions to performance management.



**Table 1.** Descriptive Variables and Bivariate Correlations

	<b>Variable</b>	<b>M (SD)</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1</b>	Supervisor Tenure	2.64 (1.32)								
<b>2</b>	Interaction Frequency	3.92 (1.08)	.053							
<b>3</b>	Supervisor Feedback Environment	5.46 (1.05)	-.005	.251**	(.97)					
<b>4</b>	Employee Feedback Orientation	3.93 (.54)	-.041	.169**	.512**	(.91)				
<b>5</b>	Employee IPT	4.33 (1.19)	.040	.047	.153**	.298**	(.98)			
<b>6</b>	Satisfaction with PM	4.31 (1.16)	.127*	.030	.615**	.393**	.144**	(.96)		
<b>7</b>	Commitment to PM	5.45 (1.23)	.110*	.018	.372**	.473**	.124*	.601**	(.94)	
<b>8</b>	Motivation to Improve Performance	3.69 (.95)	.070	.036	.479**	.437**	.061	.720**	.691**	(.94)

*Note:* *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation; Cronbach's alphas presented on diagonal in parentheses; Supervisor Tenure (1 = Less than 1 year, 2 = 1-3 years, 3 = 4-6 years, 4 = 7-10 years, 5 = 11-13 years, 6 = 14-16 years, 7 = 17-20 years, 8 = Over 20 years); Interaction Frequency (1 = Never, 2 = Once, 3 = 2-3 times, 4 = 4-5 times, 5 = More than 5 times). \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

## RESULTS

### Hypothesis Testing

The present study intended to examine the relationship between supervisor “everyday” developmental behaviors (i.e., employee perceptions of supervisor feedback environment) and employee reactions to broader performance management (i.e., employee satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve performance). Further, it intended to examine the potential moderating effects of employee feedback orientation and employee IPT on these employee reactions. All hypotheses were tested using hierarchical regression analyses (See Table 2 and Table 3). These analyses were conducted in SPSS by creating two interaction terms (SFE\*FO and SFE\*IPT) and entering specific variable sets into multiple steps of each analysis. Employee perceptions of supervisor feedback environment were always entered into the first step, one of the two moderating variables (employee feedback orientation or employee IPT) were entered into the next step depending on the interaction being tested, and one of the two created interaction terms were entered into the final step depending on the interaction being tested. In total, these analyses were run six times to test the interactions for each moderator on each outcome variable (2 X 3).

It was hypothesized that employee perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors would predict their reactions to broader performance management. Specifically, that their satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve performance would increase as perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors increased. Hypothesis 1 was supported for satisfaction with performance management,  $b = .68, p < .001$ ; commitment to performance management,  $b = .43, p < .001$ ; and motivation to improve performance,  $b = .43, p < .001$ . Employee perceptions of supervisor engagement in informal performance management accounted for 37.8%, 13.8%, and 22.9% of the variance in each of these employee reaction outcomes, respectively. These results did not change when supervisor tenure and supervisor-employee interaction frequency were entered into the regressions as control variables.

It was further hypothesized that employee feedback orientation and employee IPT would moderate these relationships, such that higher levels of these constructs would result in greater levels of subsequent employee reactions to performance management. Results did not reveal significant moderating effects for feedback orientation on employee satisfaction with performance management,  $b = .06$ ,  $p = .377$ ; commitment to performance management,  $b = .04$ ,  $p = .656$ ; or motivation to improve performance,  $b = .08$ ,  $p = .182$ . Results also did not reveal significant moderating effects for employee IPT on satisfaction with performance management,  $b = -.03$ ,  $p = .410$ ; commitment to performance management,  $b = -.03$ ,  $p = .440$ ; or motivation to improve performance,  $b = -.006$ ,  $p = .849$ . Thus, hypotheses 2 and 3 were not supported in the present study. Although the present research did not yield significant moderating results, the patterns of each hypothesized interaction can be found in Appendix C.

a

**Table 2.** Hierarchical Regression Analyses for SFE and FO Interactions

<b>Model</b>	<b><i>b</i> (se)</b>	<b><i>b</i> (se)</b>	<b><i>b</i> (se)</b>
<b>Satisfaction with PM</b>			
SFE	.68 (.05)***	.62 (.05)***	.38 (.27)
FO		.23 (.11)*	-.08 (.37)
SFE*FO			.06 (.07)
$R^2$	.378	.383	.382
$\Delta R^2$	.378***	.008*	.001
<b>Commitment to PM</b>			
SFE	.43 (.06)***	.21 (.06)**	.07 (.32)
FO		.87 (.12)***	.69 (.43)
SFE*FO			.04 (.08)
$R^2$	.138	.246	.247
$\Delta R^2$	.138***	.108***	.000
<b>Motivation to Improve</b>			
SFE	.43 (.04)***	.31 (.05)***	-.006 (.24)
FO		.46 (.09)***	.04 (.32)
SFE*FO			.08 (.06)
$R^2$	.229	.279	.283
$\Delta R^2$	.229***	.050***	.004

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 3.** Hierarchical Regression Analyses for SFE and IPT Interactions

<b>Model</b>	<b><i>b</i> (se)</b>	<b><i>b</i> (se)</b>	<b><i>b</i> (se)</b>
<b>Satisfaction with PM</b>			
SFE	.68 (.05)***	.67 (.05)***	.80 (.16)***
IPT		.05 (.04)	.21 (.20)
SFE*IPT			-.03 (.04)
$R^2$	.378	.381	.382
$\Delta R^2$	.378***	.003	.001
<b>Commitment to PM</b>			
SFE	.43 (.06)***	.42 (.06)***	.57 (.20)**
IPT		.07 (.05)	.26 (.25)
SFE*IPT			-.03 (.04)
$R^2$	.138	.143	.144
$\Delta R^2$	.138***	.005	.001
<b>Motivation to Improve</b>			
SFE	.43 (.04)***	.43 (.04)***	.46 (.15)**
IPT		-.01 (.04)	.02 (.18)
SFE*IPT			-.006 (.03)
$R^2$	.229	.230	.230
$\Delta R^2$	.229***	.000	.000

Note: \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## DISCUSSION

Despite consistent efforts to improve performance management, the effectiveness and utility of this vital talent management system continues to be widely debated (Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). Recent attempts to better understand existing deficiencies within performance management have highlighted several pain points with traditional, formal processes – namely, that they tend to be bureaucratic, inaccurate, antiquated, and demotivating (Levy et al., 2017). Researchers have proposed that organizations can resolve these concerns – and enhance performance management effectiveness – by concentrating their efforts on supporting personnel engagement in *informal* performance management behaviors instead of continuously re-packaging their formal tools and processes (Levy et al., 2017; Mueller-Hanson & Pulakos, 2018; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011). This proposition is supported by research showing that performance management is more successful when supervisors engage in informal, ongoing feedback and coaching exchanges with their employees beyond formal performance management processes (Gregory & Levy, 2015; Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011; Steelman et al., 2004; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018). There is also emerging evidence that an individual’s feedback orientation and implicit person theory can influence how they react to and engage in these performance management behaviors (Gabriel et al., 2014; Heslin et al., 2006; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018; Sue-Chan et al., 2012). The present research sought to expand on these previous findings by examining: 1) how supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors influences employee reactions to the *overall* process of performance management (as opposed to sub-processes which have been the focus of research to date; Keeping & Levy, 2000) and 2) how *employee* feedback orientation and implicit person influence these reactions.

Consistent with previous research, results demonstrated that employee reactions were more favorable when supervisors engaged in more informal performance management behaviors. Specifically, employees in the current study reported greater satisfaction with the process of performance management, commitment to the process of performance management, and motivation to improve their performance when their supervisor engaged in more informal feedback behaviors – cultivating a supportive feedback environment for them in their day-to-day work. Employees reported lower levels of these outcomes when their supervisors did not engage in these same behaviors. The hypothesized moderating effects for employee feedback orientation

and IPT were not found in the present study. One possible explanation for this is the relationship between the employee individual difference variables and the outcome variables. Feedback orientation and IPT are underlying beliefs that are associated with and often predict how an individual will *evaluate and interact with others* or how they will *behave* in a given setting based on their beliefs about the value of feedback or whether people can develop their abilities (e.g., achievement setting; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Linderbaum & Levy, 2010). It could be possible that a *process* may not yield as strong of reactions from individuals with these mindsets as would measures of specific perceived self- or other- *abilities* and *behaviors*. In the present study, employee feedback orientation was found to have stronger correlations with the three outcome variables than employee IPT did. This could be due to IPT's broad scope in experiences beyond performance management, while feedback orientation is more connected to performance management and performance feedback processes specifically (Braddy et al., 2013). Another possible explanation is that the study simply did not have enough power to detect the hypothesized effects, and thus more participants may be necessary in future replications.

## **Theoretical Contributions**

Research continues to suggest that performance management effectiveness requires more than formal administrative processes (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). The present study contributes to performance management literature by examining the degree to which informal supervisor performance management behaviors shape employee reactions to performance management. Specifically, results demonstrate that supervisor engagement in ongoing feedback exchanges is a powerful predictor of employee perceptions of the value and utility of performance management to themselves and their organization. These informal performance management behaviors accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in performance management effectiveness when measuring employee satisfaction with the process (40%), commitment to the process (14%), and motivation to improve (23%). Consistent with previous research, these findings provide further support for the positive relationship between informal performance management behaviors (especially supervisor engagement in informal feedback processes) and performance management effectiveness (Kim, 2014; Schleicher et al., 2018). Notably, the present study also expanded performance management literature by examining employee reactions to the *overall* process and practice of performance management,

as opposed to a sub-process (e.g., performance appraisal) of performance management – providing evidence for performance management effectiveness with broad, novel employee reactions (Keeping & Levy, 2000). This approach enables researchers to gain a more holistic understanding of performance management effectiveness and its determinants.

## **Practical Implications**

The results of the current study hold some practical implications. Regardless of employee feedback orientation and employee IPT, supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors resulted in increased perceptions of performance management. This finding suggests that performance management processes that promote employee development and continuous learning are more valuable to organizations and employees than those that do not – and may be more likely to increase employee satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve performance. Indeed, previous research has demonstrated that employees do experience increased performance and development-related outcomes when they encounter more informal performance management behaviors, such as increased performance feedback (Gregory & Levy, 2015) and performance coaching (Gregory & Levy, 2011). These development goals, which performance management systems are encouraged to work towards (Mueller-Hanson & Pulakos, 2018; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011), can produce firm-level outcomes (e.g., productivity, financial success) which organizations should be concerned with (Pulakos et al., 2015; Schleicher et al., 2019). Thus, organizations should consider developing and implementing more informal performance management processes that promote ongoing communication dynamics between supervisors and employees, as well as supporting initiatives that improve personnel engagement in informal performance management. The current research – in line with previous research – informs organizations of potential processes and behaviors that drive employee performance (Levy et al., 2017; Pulakos & O’Leary, 2011).

## **Limitations and Future Directions**

There are a few potential limitations in the current study that should be considered in future investigations of performance management effectiveness. All data in the current study was



collected from a single source (employee) using a single method (self-report), which leaves potential for common method bias to occur (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Attempts to mitigate this concern were taken by separating data collection into two time points with one week separating them. Perhaps this limitation could be addressed in future research by also collecting reports from others (e.g., co-workers, supervisors, neutral rater), especially for the feedback environment construct to compare rater perceptions of these environments and the informal behaviors that occur within them. This approach would offer insights into measurement reliability.

Another potential limitation of the current study is its measurement of supervisor engagement in “everyday” informal performance management behaviors. The measure used in the study attempted to capture informal, day-to-day feedback interactions between supervisors and their employees. However, it could be possible that employees may not have responded solely on their “informal” performance management interactions with supervisors but rather all their performance management interactions with supervisors. Attempts to mitigate this limitation included instructing participants to consider their informal interactions with supervisors in day-to-day completion of work responsibilities. Future research may consider adding more explicit instructions with this measure, or even informing participants of what *not* to think about while responding (e.g., formal performance management interactions).

The correlational nature of the study is also a potential limitation. Causation cannot be inferred from correlation. Future research might consider manipulating supervisor engagement in informal behaviors to test its effects on employee reactions to performance management. This could be done by randomly assigning participants to hypothetical vignettes about supervisors and their performance management behaviors. Further, the present study did not compare formal and informal performance management processes, so it cannot say that one process is better than the other. The present research does suggest, however, that supervisor engagement in informal performance management behaviors is more likely to result in greater performance management effectiveness.

Finally, a potential limitation of the current study could be limited variability in self-reported feedback orientation and IPT. The sample may have been positively skewed toward high feedback orientation and high IPT, which could have produced more generally positive reactions to performance management and difficulty in detecting an effect. Future research could

consider screening for feedback orientation and IPT to ensure comparable numbers of employees with these individual differences.

In general, performance management research could benefit from further research investigating the effects of informal supervisor behaviors and individual differences on broader employee performance management perceptions. For example, there is only limited correlational research on the relationship between feedback orientation and IPT in employee coaching (Gregory & Levy, 2012; Heslin et al., 2006; Steelman & Wolfeld, 2018). Investigating other informal performance management processes and behaviors – as well as individual differences – may give researchers and practitioners a more complete understanding of what factors make performance management effective.

## **CONCLUSION**

Given the constant nature of debate over the merits of performance management as an effective tool for talent development, the present study answered a call for more research on the effectiveness of informal performance management processes and behaviors, particularly performance feedback. The study examined the relationship between supervisor engagement in informal performance management and broad employee perceptions of performance management (satisfaction, commitment, motivation to improve), as well as the potential moderating effects of employee feedback orientation and implicit person theory on these relationships. Results suggest that supervisor engagement in informal performance management, namely informal feedback behaviors, produces greater perceptions of performance management. Specifically, employee satisfaction with performance management, commitment to performance management, and motivation to improve increased when supervisors engaged in more informal behaviors. Employee feedback orientation and implicit person theory were not found to be significant moderators. Despite conflicting views on the effectiveness of performance management, the present study sheds light on the benefits of leveraging informal performance management systems in organizations.

## APPENDIX A. SURVEYS

### **Feedback Environment** – Steelman et al. (2004)

1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) scale

#### **Source Credibility**

1. My supervisor is generally familiar with my performance on the job.
2. In general, I respect my supervisor's opinions about my job performance.
3. With respect to job performance feedback, I usually do not trust my supervisor. (R)
4. My supervisor is fair when evaluating my job performance.
5. I have confidence in the feedback my supervisor gives me.

#### **Feedback Quality**

1. My supervisor gives me useful feedback about my job performance.
2. The performance feedback I receive from my supervisor is helpful.
3. I value the feedback I receive from my supervisor.
4. The feedback I receive from my supervisor helps me do my job.
5. The performance information I receive from my supervisor is generally not very meaningful. (R)

#### **Feedback Delivery**

1. My supervisor is supportive when giving me feedback about my job performance.
2. When my supervisor gives me performance feedback, he or she is considerate of my feelings.
3. My supervisor generally provides feedback in a thoughtless manner. (R)
4. My supervisor does not treat people very well when providing performance feedback. (R)
5. My supervisor is tactful when giving me performance feedback.

#### **Favorable Feedback**

1. When I do a good job at work, my supervisor praises my performance.
2. I seldom receive praise from my supervisor. (R)
3. My supervisor generally lets me know when I do a good job at work.
4. I frequently receive positive feedback from my supervisor.

**Unfavorable Feedback**

1. When I don't meet deadlines, my supervisor lets me know.
2. My supervisor tells me when my work performance does not meet organizational standards.
3. On those occasions when my job performance falls below what is expected, my supervisor lets me know.
4. On those occasions when I make a mistake at work, my supervisor tells me.

**Source Availability**

1. My supervisor is usually available when I want performance information.
2. My supervisor is too busy to give me feedback. (R)
3. I have little contact with my supervisor. (R)
4. I interact with my supervisor on a daily basis.
5. The only time I receive performance feedback from my supervisor is during my performance review. (R)

**Promotes Feedback Seeking**

1. My supervisor is often annoyed when I directly ask for performance feedback. (R)
2. When I ask for performance feedback, my supervisor generally does not give me the information right away. (R)
3. I feel comfortable asking my supervisor for feedback about my work performance.
4. My supervisor encourages me to ask for feedback whenever I am uncertain about my job performance.

**Feedback Orientation** – Linderbaum & Levy (2010)

1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale

**Utility**

1. Feedback contributes to my success at work.
2. To develop my skills at work, I rely on feedback.
3. Feedback is critical for improving performance.
4. Feedback from supervisors can help me advance in a company.
5. I find that feedback is critical for reaching my goals.

**Accountability**

1. It is my responsibility to apply feedback to improve my performance.
2. I hold myself accountable to respond to feedback appropriately.
3. I don't feel a sense of closure until I respond to feedback.
4. If my supervisor gives me feedback, it is my responsibility to respond to it.
5. I feel obligated to make changes based on feedback.

**Social Awareness**

1. I try to be aware of what other people think of me.
2. Using feedback, I am more aware of what people think of me.
3. Feedback helps me manage the impression I make on others.
4. Feedback lets me know how I am perceived by others.
5. I rely on feedback to help me make a good impression.

**Feedback Self-Efficacy**

1. I feel self-assured when dealing with feedback.
2. Compared to others, I am more competent at handling feedback.
3. I believe that I have the ability to deal with feedback effectively.
4. I feel confident when responding to both positive and negative feedback.
5. I know that I can handle the feedback that I receive.

**Implicit Person Theory – Levy & Dweck (1997)**

1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*) scale

1. The kind of person someone is, is something very basic about them and it can't be changed very much. (R)
2. People can do things differently, but the important parts of who they are can't really be changed. (R)
3. Everyone, no matter who they are, can significantly change their basic characteristics.
4. As much as I hate to admit it, you can't teach an old dog new tricks. People can't really change their deepest attributes. (R)
5. People can always substantially change the kind of person they are.

6. Everyone is a certain kind of person, and there is not much that can be done to really change that. (R)
7. No matter what kind of person someone is, they can always change very much.
8. All people can change even their most basic qualities.

**Satisfaction with PM** – Adapted Decramer et al. (2013)

1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 6 (*Strongly agree*) scale

1. I am satisfied with the way my goals are determined.
2. I am content with how often my performance is monitored.
3. I am content with the way my performance is monitored.
4. I am satisfied with the way my performance is evaluated.
5. I am satisfied with the way organizational goals are communicated to me.
6. I am satisfied with the way my supervisor motivates me to achieve my goals.
7. I am satisfied with the feedback my supervisor provides me.
8. Overall, I am satisfied with the performance management process.

**Commitment to PM** – Adapted Herscovitch & Meyer (2002)

1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*) scale

1. I believe in the value of performance management.
2. Performance management is beneficial to this organization.
3. I think performance management is a useful process.
4. Performance management serves an important purpose in my organization.
5. Performance management is necessary.

**Motivation to Improve Performance** – Adapted Fedor et al. (1989)

1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly agree*) scale

1. The performance management system makes me want to do better.
2. The performance management system encourages me to improve my performance.

3. The performance management system encourages my commitment to do well.

### **General Demographics**

1. How long have you worked under your direct supervisor?
  - a. Less than a year
  - b. 1-3 years
  - c. 4-6 years
  - d. 7-10 years
  - e. 11-13 years
  - f. 14-16 years
  - g. 17-20 years
  - h. Over 20 years
2. How long have you worked in your current role?
  - a. Less than a year
  - b. 1-3 years
  - c. 4-6 years
  - d. 7-10 years
  - e. 11-13 years
  - f. 14-16 years
  - g. 17-20 years
  - h. Over 20 years
3. How long have you worked with your current company?
  - a. Less than a year
  - b. 1-3 years
  - c. 4-6 years
  - d. 7-10 years
  - e. 11-13 years
  - f. 14-16 years
  - g. 17-20 years



- h. Over 20 years
- 4. Which of the following categories best describes the industry in which your job falls?
  - a. Manufacturing
  - b. Healthcare
  - c. Entertainment
  - d. Hospitality/Service
  - e. Agriculture
  - f. Government
  - g. Education
  - h. Business
  - i. Technology
  - j. Other
- 5. Which of the following best describes your current work situation?
  - a. In-Person/Office
  - b. Remote
  - c. Hybrid
- 6. What is your highest level of education?
  - a. Less than high school
  - b. High school degree/GED
  - c. 2-year college degree
  - d. 4-year college degree
  - e. Master's degree
  - f. Doctorate degree
  - g. Professional degree
- 7. What gender do you most identify with?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Non-binary/Third gender
  - d. Other
- 8. What race/ethnicity do you most identify with?
  - a. White/European American

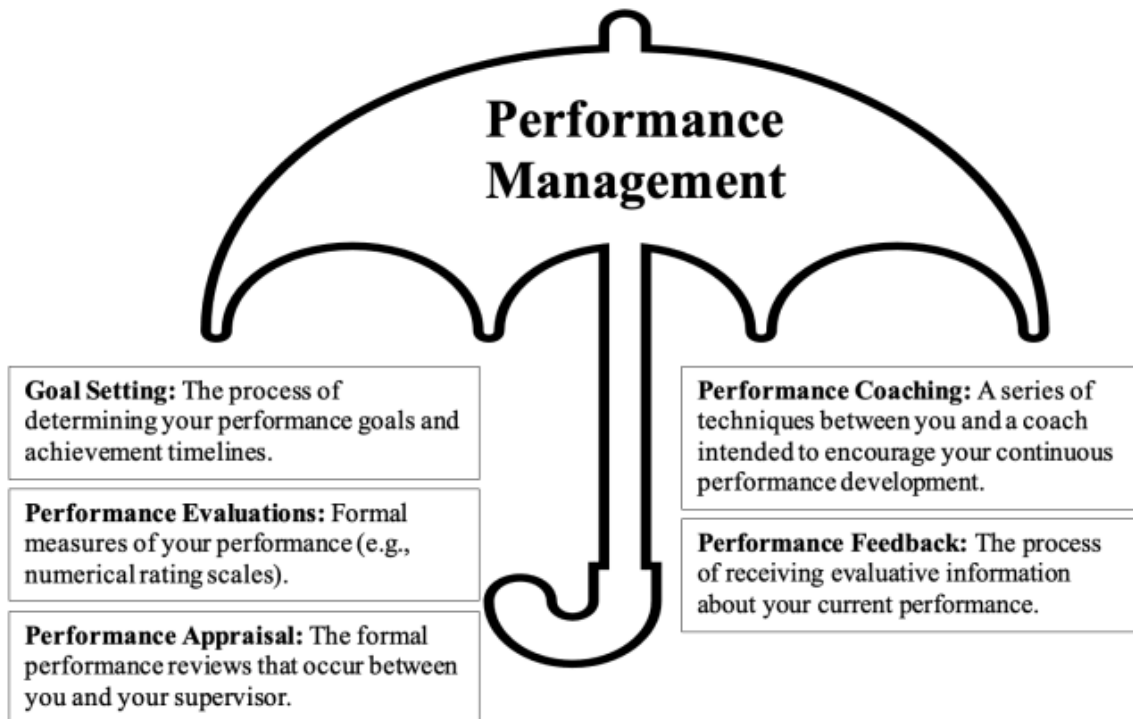
- b. Black/African American
  - c. American Indian/Alaska Native
  - d. Asian/Asian American
  - e. Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
  - f. Hispanic or Latino/Latina
  - g. Other
9. What is your age (in years)? (fill-in)

## APPENDIX B. MATERIALS

### **Definition of Performance Management** – *Created by author*

Given to participants prior to answering outcome variables.

“Performance management can be defined as **a system that contains multiple processes focused on managing and developing employee performance at work.** Please review and consider the following visual representation of performance management prior to completing the survey.”



APPENDIX C. INTERACTIONS

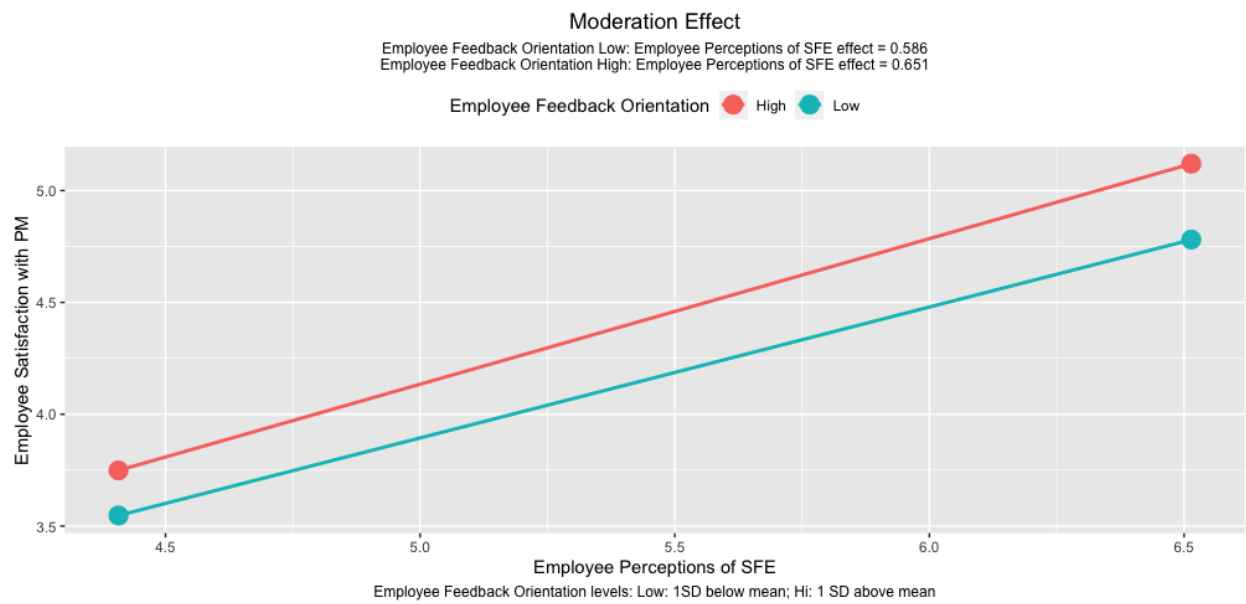


Figure 2. Moderation of Feedback Orientation on Satisfaction with PM

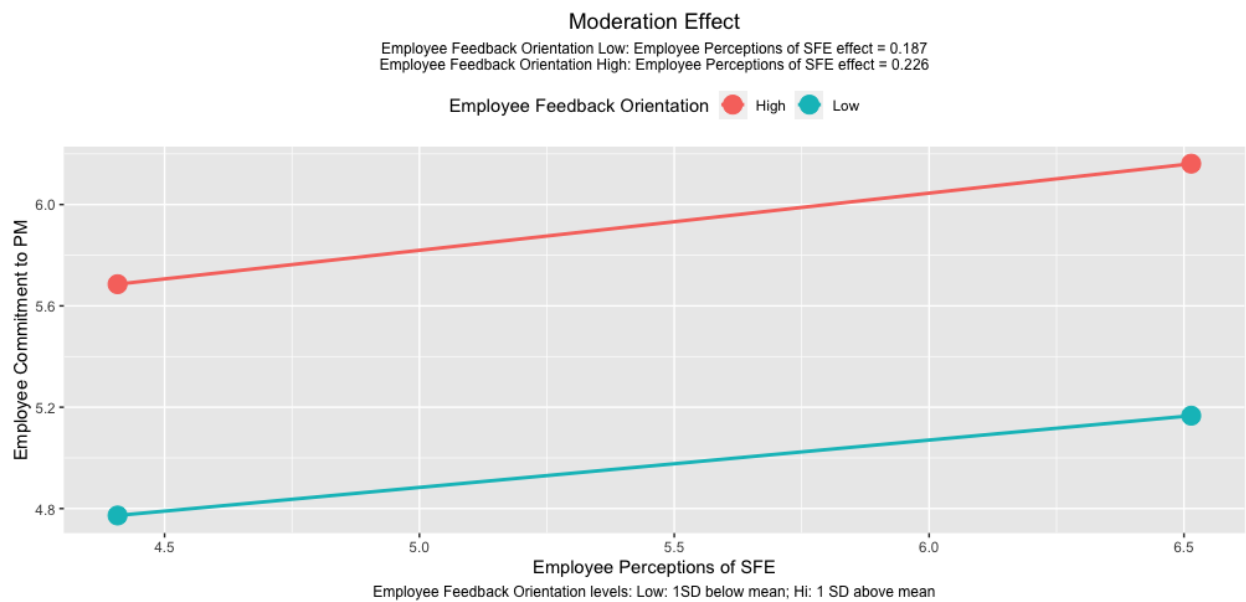
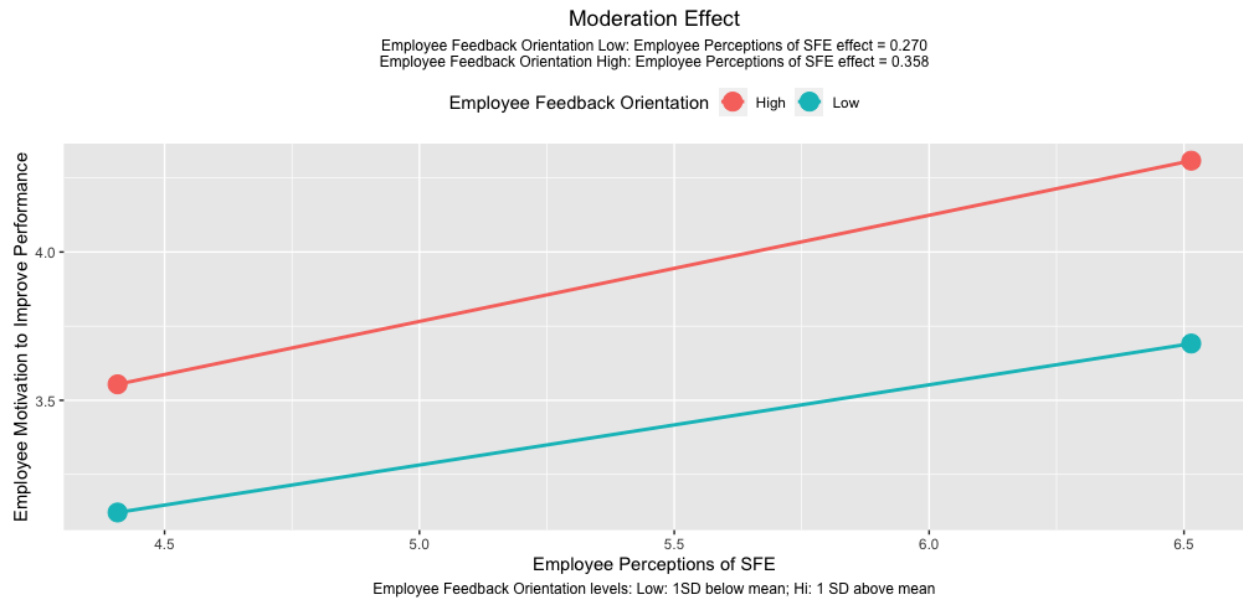
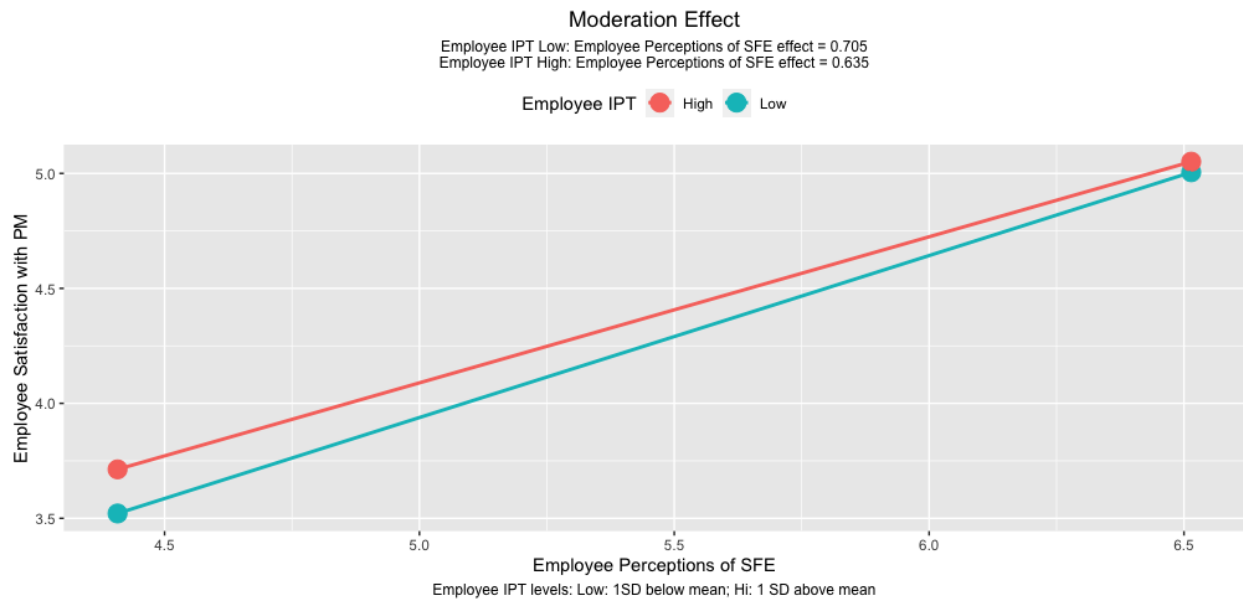


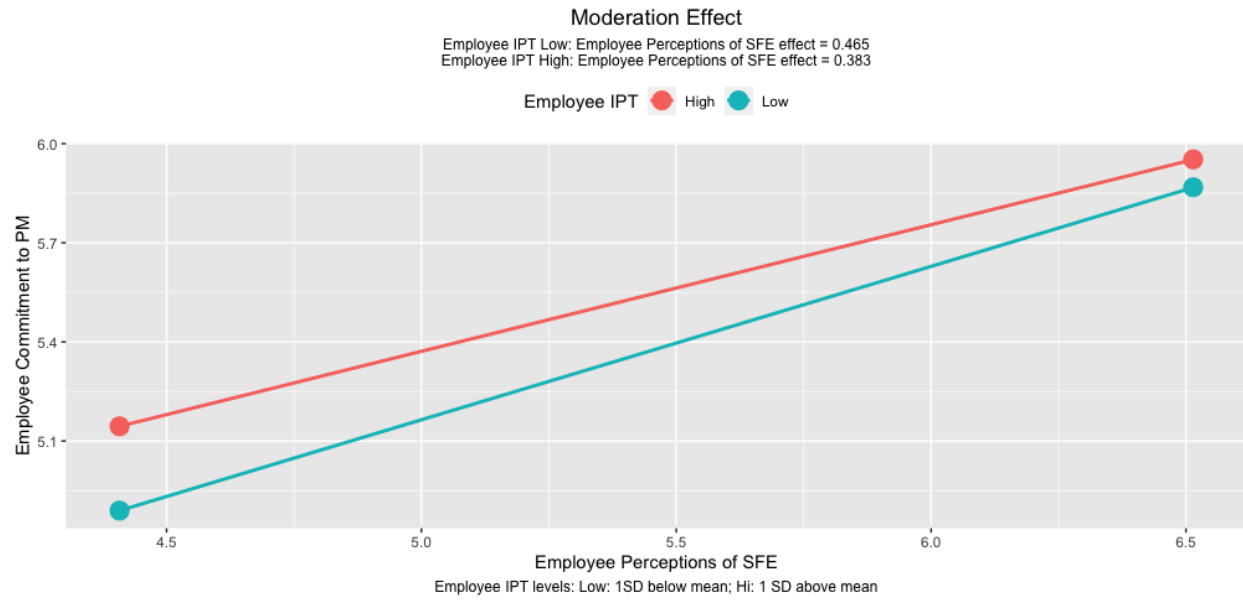
Figure 3. Moderation of Feedback Orientation on Commitment to PM



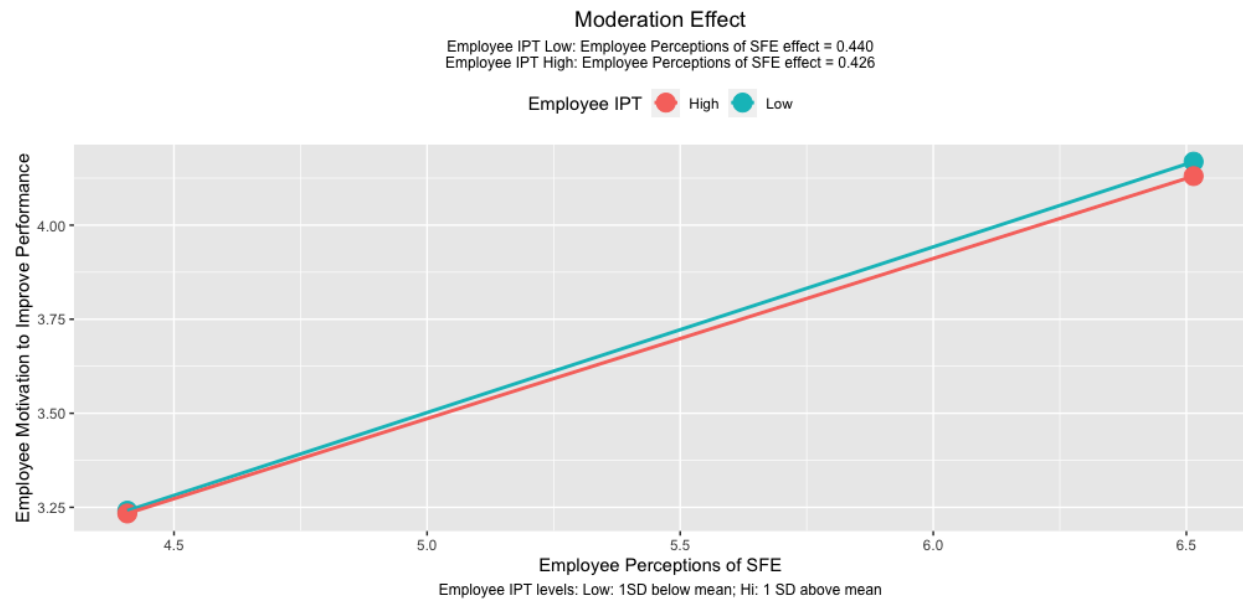
**Figure 4.** Moderation of Feedback Orientation on Motivation to Improve Performance



**Figure 5.** Moderation of IPT on Satisfaction with PM



**Figure 6.** Moderation of IPT on Commitment to PM



**Figure 7.** Moderation of IPT on Motivation to Improve Performance

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