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# What has Performance Management Scholarship Told Us?

The purpose of this study is to *analyze the progress of performance management (PM) research published in leading management and psychology journals between 1997-2017. Using a bibliometrics approach crafts a rigorous and focused review of the ensuing PM literature (1997-2017). The findings reveal that PM studies are yielding helpful information and that the extant PM literature has addressed some of the critical questions raised by earlier researchers. However, there remain many areas for improvement with several significant research gaps still existing. We observe a scarcity of empirical studies, in particular, qualitative studies. In addition to offering a comprehensive analysis of the literature on one of the important areas of human resource management, this paper highlights the discord between PM scholars and practitioners in resolving the continuing problems related to PM. While PM scholars are still immersed with the many technical problems associated with PM, they do not appear to be answering the call for a rejection and abandonment of the PM altogether. Clearly there is a much-needed call for more collaboration between these parties.*

## Track Performance Management

**What has Performance Management Scholarship Told Us?**

The purpose of this paper is to study the advance of the performance management (PM) literature based on an analysis of the content over two decades of PM research published in the leading management and psychology journals. The paper focuses on the wider and comprehensive topic of global PM as opposed to the narrow approach of the domestic performance appraisal (Claus and Briscoe, 2009). There is a distinct and important difference in these two processes, yet they are frequently confused by both practitioners and academics alike (Maley and Kramar, 2014). Performance appraisal refers specifically to the supervisor-employee interview where employees are typically evaluated once a year by a given set of dimensions and assigned a score to that assessment (DeNisi and Murphy, 2017).

Performance appraisal has a very checkered history associated with control, hierarchical management and more recently complex information technology processes which have resulted in mounting dissatisfaction from supervisors and employees (Adler *et al.*, 2016; Garr, Golder *et al.*, 2016); Performance management, on the other hand, was introduced in the early 1990s, to address the well-documented limitations of performance appraisal (Arvey and Murphy, 1998). The process of performance management encompasses a much broader range of management practices that include career management, training and development, regular feedback and reimbursement considerations (Aguinis, 2007). PM is intended as a continual process, opposed to the once a year event of appraising performance expectations. At the same time "the PM seen as an integrated process in which managers work with their employees to set expectations, measure and review results, and reward performance," (Den Hartog, *et al.,* 2004, p 4).

This paper specifically examines the all-inclusive process of PM and therefore includes the role of performance appraisal as a subset of PM. It organizes, reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on PM in an integrated way so that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic can be generated (Torraco, 2005). In short, the review will provide a comprehensive picture of PM research, as well as isolating important gaps in the extant literature in order to guide opportunities for future research. The chief methodology uses a bibliometric analysis that results in the interpretation of a unique map to clearly illustrate the orientation and substance of recent PM articles (Dabic, *et al,* 2014).

The study takes an innovative and rigorous bibliometric approach which to the best of our knowledge is the first bibliometric PM literature review. It responds to the call for research on the current state of PM practices in established and influential academic journals (Gorman, *et al., ,* 2017), such as the Personnel Review (*PR*), International Journal of Human Resource management (IJHRM), Human Resource Management (*HRM*), Journal of Applied Psychology *(JAP),* and Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology *(JOOP).* Finally, the review leads to the generation of an empirical-based model for future research that rejects an exclusive yet flawed performance appraisal approach and demands a return to a more inclusive, systematic approach to PM research that addresses the concerns of both employees and management.

To achieve these aims, the paper is structured as follows: First, we present a brief overview of the historical development of PM literature between 1970 and 1996. This overview subsequently highlights the major challenges raised by early research and helps shape the research question. Second, we present a detailed description of the methodological approach utilized to uncover PM research trends and gaps. Third, we offer a detailed description of the

analysis and the resulting trends of PM content and its evolution between 1997 and 2017. The analysis of the literature involves a classification of articles that allows an evaluation of disciplinary trends including a summary of the most published authors and most cited papers in the PM field. Fourth, we offer a discussion surrounding the contributions of our review. Finally, the article concludes with a model focused on avenues for broadening the breadth and scope of future research on PM.

**Historical Background of Extant PM Literature**

Over the past half-century researchers and practitioners have written an enormous amount on PM research. In order to understand the extant literature, it is useful to provide a brief overview of some of the historical treatments and models. Typically, most early researchers focused on the performance appraisal, however the appraisal is just one activity of the PM process (Claus and Briscoe, 2009). The early literature established a vast quantity of conceptual thinking and can be straightforwardly categorized into the early measurement thinking (i.e. Landy and Farr, 1980) and later cognitive characteristics of the appraisal interview (i.e. DeNisi, *et al.*, 1984; Feldman, 1981; Landy and Farr, 1980). Early social cognitive research helped clarify and refocus research from measurement to information processing and cognition (Landy and Farr, 1983). However, the models adopted at this time made few contributions to the practice of appraisals in organizations, because they paid insufficient attention to the context and failed to identify issues of concern to all stakeholders (Murphy and Cleveland, 1991).

Following the interest in cognitive studies researchers looked at the issues surrounding a deficiency of trust, fairness, and feedback and the negative impact of politics on the performance appraisal. In general, a fair appraisal system was found to increase the level of acceptability, which established trust and fairness as a crucial component of the appraisal

system. However, Longenecker and Gioia (1988) claim that interview research has been micro-analytic and unitary and that an integrative approach including politics and overall social context would give a more comprehensive understanding of the appraisal process Nevertheless, by the mid-1990s an effective appraisal system was considered as being a continuous process and a tool for managing future performance, not just scoring past performance. PM was hailed as the answer to the limitations of the narrow performance appraisal, by increasing both employee and management acceptance. Thus, the early literature and begs the following questions: 1) *To what extent has PM research developed beyond the narrow PA accuracy?* and 2) *Has the wider PM increased acceptability of the process?*

**Methodological Approach**

To examine the content of the PM literature and identify main streams of research, a content analysis was first performed of the published articles dealing with PM. A content analysis provides for an objective, systematic and quantitative consideration of published articles. It also allows for an interpretation of the direction in which journal editors, reviewers and authors are taking the field as it reflects the evolution of their priorities over time (Furrer and Sollberger, 2007; Furrer, *et al.,* 2008).

In terms of bibliometrics, scholars consider the Web of Science (WoS) one of the main academic databases for studying research contributions. WoS covers more than 16,000 journals and 70,000,000 articles. In general, expectations are that the material included in WoS holds the highest quality standards. However, many other databases exist, some of them internationally known (e.g., Scopus, Econ Lit, and Google Scholar). Following the systematic search methods found in the review articles (Terjesen, *et al.,* 2013), we searched for relevant literature in online databases WoS core collection. Bibliometric studies use a wide range of

methods. The most popular methods are those that take into account the number of publications and the number of citations. From a general perspective, the number of publications usually correlates with the productivity of an author while the number of citations correlates with his or her influence in the scientific community. We read the initial collection of 312 articles and exchanged notes among three co-authors to reach a consensus on the articles to be excluded from our final sample. In relation to the type of scientific contributions, we have focused on full length articles published in WoS core collection indexed academic journals, as they can be considered as knowledge certified by peers.

*Data Sources*

The first step in our analysis was to select the articles to be analyzed. Because of the specific focus on PM, we selected every article published between 1997 and 2017. This focus on recent literature allows us to not only analyze key trends, findings, and missing elements within the extant literature, but also to explore the degree to which recommendations by previous studies have been followed. We decided to study articles that had the most impact on the field and therefore focused on what Ramos-Rodríguez and Ruíz-Navarro (2004) call 'certified knowledge'. To do so, we decided to only retain articles from journals indexed in the WoS database, as they can be considered certified. Indeed, the WoS database comprises the most relevant journals for PM research, in addition to *PR, IJHRM, HRM, JAP* and *JOOP* this included: *Public Personnel Management; European Journal of International Management; Human Resource Management Review; International Journal of Manpower; Performance Management Systems a Global Perspective*; as well as other high-level outlets for PM scholars in management and psychology journals.

Articles in the database were retrieved using the search function and the lexemes 'performance' and 'performance appraisal'. The first search conducted January 20th, 2017

returned 103 articles, a later search February 10th, 2018 used the lexemes 'performance,' performance management', performance appraisal, 'performance planning,' 'monitoring,' 'evaluation,' 'employee performance management' this group raised over 900 articles. However, this string of lexemes raised a very large and unmanageable percent of spurious manuscripts; this was verified by two researchers checking the abstracts. The final search February 19th, 2018, used three lexemes: 'performance,' 'performance management' and 'performance appraisal' and raised 120 articles which were all relevant articles and was deemed by the research team to be the most accurate research stream. We performed a second content analysis and discovered another ten significant articles were missed. In addition we did a final manual check of late entry 2017 papers in May 2018. Thus, the total number of pertinent articles extended to 130.

*Themes Selection and Coding Procedure- Descriptors*

A key process within this stage is building a codebook containing main descriptors within the field. We have followed an inductive approach; therefore, these descriptors were not established beforehand but derived from the analysis of the content of the articles. This stepwise procedure comprises: (I) extracting key content from the articles' titles, abstracts and keywords; (II) classifying this content in order to build a reduced list of the core descriptors; and (III) iteratively revising the codebook by merging similar categories in order to obtain a meaningful short list of descriptors in terms of content and frequency. We used the Wordstat software for content analysis in order to obtain the list and frequency of nouns, verbs, and compound forms extracted from the articles' content. A total of 227 words and compound forms were extracted. These were then analysed by the research team in order to group them thematically. Next, some descriptors were joined and/or eliminated through the process of a manual revision guided by critical issues identified in past research.

In order to code and analyse the content of the articles, and following the procedure proposed by Dabic, *et al.,* (2014), a list of descriptors was derived from the keywords provided by the authors of the articles. This list included the number of times these themes were included in the articles' titles, abstracts, and list of keywords. Themes that were not present in more than six articles (< 5%) were discarded. Each article was related to multiple keywords and themes (when appropriate) rather than selecting a single dominating theme, as using only one theme would fail to acknowledge the cross-functional and interdisciplinary nature of globalisation research (Inkpen and Beamish, 1994). The outcome of this process was a list of 38 descriptors most commonly used in research on PM (see Table 2).

*\*\*\*\*\* Insert Table 1 and 2 About Here \*\*\*\*\**

The top five most cited descriptors were '*Across borders*' (*f* 208), '*PM*' (*f* 191), '*Research Schema*' (*f* 177), '*Effectiveness*' (*f* 163),' and '*Quantitative*' (*f* 157). The three most frequent descriptors include 35.8% of the occurrences; the top ten include 57.6% and the top 20 include 84.0%. The average number of descriptor per article was 9.75 and thus a multivariate approach to data analysis is likely to be more meaningful and valid than univariate analyses (Hair*, et al.,* 1998). Thus, following the recommendations of Furrer and Sollberger (2007) and Furrer et al. (2008), a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) was conducted. MCA is an exploratory data analysis technique for the graphical display of multivariate categorical data (Hoffman and Franke, 1986; Lebart, *et al*., 1984). It is an analysis of the interdependence among a set of categorical variables and is similar to principal component analysis (Hoffman, *et al*., 1994). Following the methodology described by Hoffman and De Leeuw (2011), a matrix with the 38 descriptors was constructed, computing a '1' when each of the latter topics was present in each of the 102 articles, and '0' otherwise.

MCA provides a rich representation of the relationships between descriptors by reducing the number of dimensions without losing significant information (Bendixen, 1995). The MCA provided coordinates in a two-dimensional space for each descriptor. Representing a figure with large number of words would not be interpretable and therefore each of the 38 descriptor is representing several keywords (see Table 2). The coordinates of each descriptor correspond to its relative position based on the number of its co-appearances with other descriptors in the sample (Bendixen, 1995; Hoffman *et al.*, 1994).

In order to relate the content and method of research on PM, additional insights can be derived, as proposed by González-Loureiro, *et al.,* (2015), by mapping descriptor' frequency and distance from quantitative and qualitative research markers. Quantitative marker was designed by using keywords such as: *quantitative, statistical distribution, performance appraisal meta-analysis, models, model, predicting turnover, promethee method, quasi experiment, item cluster subcomponents, questionnaires, questionnaire, surveillance, survey, 5 factor model, interpretivism, meta-analysis, patterns, alignment research agenda, ANP, AHP, promethee, system factors, systems, fit, MCDA, visual techniques analytic hierarchy process, measurement organisational behaviour, variables, predictors ratio reinforcement schedules, response rates, internal consistency, dimensions, distribution weighting systems, surveillance, validity, benchmark, inventory, comparison orientation, analytic hierarchy process, multilevel model, quantities* and qualitative marker was design by using keywords such as: *qualitative, interpretivism, concept maps, foucault, visual techniques, paradigm, schemata, comparative.* The larger the distance between the descriptor and the marker is, less articles are using the specific approach, either quantitative or qualitative. Mapping this distance with the occurrence of each descriptor provides an indication of the nature of the research on PM.

*Themes Selection and Coding Procedure- Clusters*

Finally, the descriptors were distributed straightforwardly into clusters. As a way of

validating the clustering technique, the classification of clusters was initially performed

independently by two researchers, and then the clusters were compared and found to be very

similar. Clusters represent themes of articles in a literature network, a cluster can be seen as a

group of well-connected articles in a research area with limited connection to papers in

another cluster or research area (Leydesdorff, 2011). Data clustering can be used as a

classification tool for concluding grouping of a set of given articles. Clustering permits the

topological analysis of networks, identifying topics, interrelations, and collaboration patterns.

The two researchers agreed that four major groups or clusters emerged from the data: 1)

Accuracy, 2) Firm level, 3) Across borders, and 4) Employee Acceptability.

*\*\*\*\*\* Insert Table 3 About Here \*\*\*\*\**

To provide a dynamic view of the evolution of research in the PM field and to be able to

speculate about its future developments, Figure 1 presents the number of articles published

each year between 1996 and 2016. In their recent 100-year review of PM in *Journal of*

*American Psychology (JAP)*, DeNisi and Murphy (2017) consider that the literature had its

heyday between 1970 and 2000. However, their review is confined to I/O Psychology

Journals, (in particular *JAP*) that have traditionally focused almost entirely on the

measurement aspect of performance appraisal. The DeNisi and Murphy (2017) analysis

differs from the present review in that it covers a very wide 100-year time span and as a

consequence only observes 27 articles published in the last 20 years – almost entirely in JAP.

We believe their article to be a comprehensive historical review rooted in performance

appraisal research and grounded from an I/O psychology perspective. Whilst the authors do

introduce the concept of PM, the ultimate focus of this study is the appraisal. While the De Nisi and Murphy (2017) study takes an exclusive subject review of performance appraisal over a 100-year period in JAP; the present study takes a broader subject approach of the PM literature over a narrow time period within the wider scope of management and I/O psychology journals. We argue that the 2 studies explore distinctive subjects over different time frames.

***** *Insert Figure 1 About Here* *****

**Analysis and Key Results**

*Connection among Descriptors*

The MCA was computed using the *Homals* procedure in IBM SPSS. Concisely, the definitive goal of this analysis is to find a low dimensional representation of the original high dimensional space (i.e. the matrix of articles and descriptors). The MCA provided a pair of co-ordinates in this two-dimensional space for each of the 38 descriptors. On the map of Figure 2, the sizes of the points are proportional to the number of articles associated with a descriptor and the proximity between descriptor corresponds to their shared content (Bendixen, 1995; Hoffman and Franke, 1986). Descriptors are close to each other when they share a large proportion of articles discussing them and are distant from each other when they appear together in a small number of articles (Furrer *et al.*, 2008). The center of the map represents the core of PM research in the field. For example, the descriptors '*Across Borders', 'Research Schema', 'Effectiveness', 'Quantitative'* are close to the center. Conversely, the descriptors '*capabilities,' '360', 'TQM' 'ethics/CSR'* and *'crisis'* are located away from the

center, indicating that issues related to these subjects have perhaps only started to be addressed (i.e. CSR and crisis) or are marginally addressed, alternatively they could be declining (i.e. TQM, 360).

The dimensions of the map (Figure 2), which resulted from the MCA, have also been interpreted using the four 'major codes'. The first, horizontal, dimension separates the major code '*Firm Level*' (on the left) to the horizontal dimension on the right '*Across Border.*' The vertical dimension separates the major code '*Accuracy*' (on the top) from those focusing on the major code '*Employee Acceptability*' (at the bottom).

***** *Insert Figure 2 About Here* *****

**Most Influential Papers**

In every scientific field, some publications assume seminal roles in the evolution of the field. These articles, owing to their impact, are accelerating factors to the development of the field (Berry and Parasuraman, 1993). Therefore, it is critical to identify which are the most influential articles on PM published between 1997 and 2017. This will help us to better understand the directions of the future development of research in the field. To measure the impact of an article, we used the generally accepted method of summed citation counts (Bergh, *et al.,* 2006; Furrer *et al.,* 2008). The top 10 most influential papers were initially identified based on the number of appearances in the Social Science Citation Index, accessed through the WoS on 6th April, 2017 and updated January 2nd, 2018 (see Table 4).

In an attempt to further examine and increase our understanding of the trend, we split the most influential papers into two periods. In the period 1997-2007, seven papers are represented in the most influential papers: 1.) Levy and Williams (2004); 2.) Fletcher (2001); 3.) Den Hartog *et al.,* (2004); 4.) Kuvaas (2006); 5.) Latham, *et al.,* (2005); 6.) Poon (2004) and, 7.) Milliman, *et al.,* (2002). Remarkably, the leading three papers in this period focus on research agendas. This could indicate the need at that time for researchers to reflect on the

early literature and may be symptomatic of the perplexity of the early literature, driving researchers to seek guidance for future PM research efforts. For example, Levy and Williams (2004) suggested a trend of increasing awareness of the importance of social context and Fletcher (2001) advocated the need for more practical guidance. While Den Hartog *et al.* (2004) determine that front-line managers play a crucial mediating role in implementing of PM and found that employee perceptions and attitudes affect employee performance, which in turn affects firm performance. Their model also addresses an interesting concept of reversed causality. In other words, the model proposes that besides PM influencing performance, there is also a reverse loop and a strong bottom-line may have a positive effect on the willingness to invest in PM practices. They conclude that unraveling what is '*causes*' and what is '*effect*' is not easy.

The four remaining papers in this period include a conceptual paper by Latham et al. (2005) that creates a model that spotlights the benefits of coaching and three empirical papers. The empirical papers utilised quantitative methods. For instance, Poon (2004) surveyed the influence of politics on job satisfaction and turnover intention; Kuvaas (2006) measured the commitment and turnover intention in the Norwegian banking sector; and Milliman *et al.,* (2002) surveyed purposes of PM in the Pacific Rim.

In the period 2007-2017, Chang, *et al.,* (2012) review of the self- evaluation literature is perhaps indicative of the pursuit of future guidance still prevailing. However, there are three empirical studies in this second period that are amongst the most influentially-ranked papers. For example, Brown, *et al.,* (2010) considered performance appraisal and turnover intention and, using the same data set from the Norwegian Banking sector, Kuvaas (2006) identified a relationship between autonomy and perceptions of development (Kuvaas, 2007) and Gruman

and Saks (2011) consider PM and reflect on employee engagement. Hence, splitting the analysis into two sections was useful in that it suggests that neither empirical studies nor a focus on PM have increased in the last 10 years. It also revealed that research steadily developed between 1997 and 2006, and started to accelerate from 2007 to 2011, peaking around 2012, which is somewhat later compared to estimates from other scholars (see DeNisi and Murphy, 2017).

*****  Table 4 About Here *****

**Discussion**

Our first research questions inquired: *To what extent has PM research developed beyond the narrow PA accuracy?* The analysis shows that PM research has extended beyond the narrow focus an accuracy in firm-level performance and across borders. For example, research has paid more attention to the importance of the purpose of the PM in terms of a strategic alignment and business outcome and the emerging theme from this literature is that the PM purpose must be transparently be aligned and support the strategic goals of the firm (Maley and Kramar, 2014). The need to not only persistently communicate the purpose of the PM to all relevant stakeholders, but also to increase employee participation has been investigated by several scholars (Biron, *et al*., 2011; Dewettinck *et al*., 2013; Maley and Kramar, 2014; Iqbal, *et al*., 2015). The final yet important theme to emerge in relation to firm-level performance is that research has started to address the elusive links between firm-level performance and employee performance.

Research has also advanced considerably 'across borders' and shows evidence of the growing importance of global PM. For instance, autonomy orientation was argued to be imperative for optimal performance of global managers (Kuvaas, 2007); and perceptions of global employees was strongly linked to fairness (Dewettinck and van Dijk, 2013). Individual

country contextual studies supported these claims, for example in India (Gupta and Kumar, 2012), Vietnam (Stanton and Pham, 2014), Botswana, (Migiro and Taderea, 2011) and China (Fee, *et al*., 2011). This suggests the ineffectiveness of solely utilising the PM system to identify employees for promotion and salary decisions.

Moving the field forward, Engle, *et al*., (2008) proposed a research domain that further differentiates PM systems by considering the complexity embedded in the extent of global standardization and local customization in global PM. Likewise, Claus (2008) argued for PM global integration and local responsiveness. Responding to this, Maley and Kramer (2014) offered suggestions for the multinational corporations to maximize the effectiveness of PM and profit simultaneously during times of global crisis by applying a Real Options approach. A four-level framework has also been conceptualised to explain how individual performance results are aggregated in MNCs (Engle*, et al*., 2015).

The importance of cultural sensitivity in relation to PM is apparent in many studies and the significance of cultural sensitivity when implementing PM practices across borders is a dominant theme (i.e. Cooke and Huang, 201; Buchelt, 2015; Kang and Shen, 2016). Thus, in response to the first research question, the analysis and our resultant discussion suggest that the literature is now beginning to address firm level performance and at the same time the across border theme is alive and well. However, there remains the need for more attention on the expatriate (Claus and Briscoe, 2009) and other forms of emerging global managers such as inpatriate managers, flexi -patriate managers and host country managers. We can also confirm that scholarly research has initiated inclusion of other management disciplines such as strategy, international business, and finance.

On the other hand, the 'measurement' research is far from dead and buried as predicted by Lawler (1994) and there remains an immense captivation with performance appraisal, accuracy and ratings, especially from the I/O psychology journals (Adler, *et al.,* 2017; Chiang and Birtch, 2010; Iqbal *et al.,* 2015). It is incongruous that performance appraisal and ratings are still demanding so much research attention. Landy and Farr (1980) claimed that there nothing more to found in the measurement theme appraisal research and we propose that they may have had a very valid point - nothing remarkable appears to have been found after another almost four decades of measurement research effort. For example, DeNisis and Murphy (2017), confirm that attempts to improve rating scales represented a significant portion of the total body of research on performance appraisal published in *JAP* during its first 100 years, and they make a case that these articles could be dismissed as unproductive. Indeed, our analysis detected signs of a division in subject matter; the management and HRM journals center on firm effectiveness and the employee, whilst the I/O psychology journals are more entrenched than ever in the accuracy of the appraisal interview.

The second research question probes: *Has the wider PM increased acceptability of the process?* By acceptability- we refer to acceptability in terms of all stakeholders- but namely the firm and the employee. The answer to this question is a very clear 'no' and this is by far one of our biggest surprises. There remains much conflict and tension in PM in the workplace (Rosen, et *al*, 2017) and a huge degree of intolerable politics in throughout all aspects of the process (Poon, 2004; Salimäki and Jämsén, 2010). Moreover, PM has been described as an aversive process which may have undesirable social consequences, such as the loss of friendship, conflict, or confrontation with the supervisor (Kozlowski, *at el.*, 1998). A lack of employee development may also be another area that has contributed to a lack of acceptability of the PM. The latest stream of literature points the neglect of employee

development being less than ideal and in some situations detrimental (i.e. Rabenu and Tziner, 2016). For example, when a firm does invest in employee development, employees perceive that the firm is supportive of their long-term career aspirations (Bednall *et al*., 2014; Chiang and Birtch, 2010; Kuvaas, 2006) and the resultant outcome is increased employee commitment (Iqbal, Akbar, and Budhwar). However, Bednall *et al.,* (2014) refer to 'acceptability' in terms of perceptions. They argue that positive perceptions of the PM process is associated with improved levels of informal learning

A shortfall in supervisor-employee feedback also emerged as pivotal to a more agreeable and acceptable PM process (i.e. Aguinis, *et al*., 2012; Dahling, and O'Malley, 201; Fletcher, 2001; Kuvaas, 2007; McCarthy and Garavan, 2007; Maley and Kramar, 2014; Tuytens and Devos, 2012). Nonetheless, despite the new wave of compelling scholarly evidence in favour of feedback and the rise of promising new techniques such as feedforward (Aguinis *et al.,* 2012; Budworth, *et al.,* 2015) equally, the opposite may be true. New evidence points to authentic feedback being potentially perceived as harsh, generating adverse employee reactions (Luffarelli, *et al.,* 2015) and being highly problematic for managers (Brown, *et al.,* 2016), a further factor which will surely negate the acceptability of the PM.

Certainly, it is evident that to date that little is known about stakeholder acceptability and why PM is not acceptable in the workplace. Scholarly research has been corroborated as firms such as Adobe, Colorcon, Dell, Deloitte, Gap, Google, Microsoft and PwC have recently discarded PM, claiming they are no longer acceptability to their employees (Capelli and Tavis, 2016) and there is a repated call to either scrap or reinvent the entire process (Buckingham and Goodall, 2015). Despite years of research – 'discontent with PM may be at a record high' (Adler, et al, p 219; Bersin, 2013; Pulakos, *et al.,* 2015; Pulakos and O'Leary,

2011). There is no doubt that there is a need to improve our knowledge of PM in respect to stakeholder acceptability. We align with the findings Golder et al., (2016); not to kill off the PM, but to create more value in the process (Pulakos, *et al.,* 2018: Levey *at al*., 2017).

In sum, evidence is firmly suggesting that the PM is not acceptable to many key stakeholders. Albeit, while management consultants and practitioner journals such as the Harvard Business Review have been tracking the declining dilemma of stakeholder acceptance; (*cf* Capelli and Tavis, 2015; Buckingham and Goodall, 2017), scholarly researcher appears to have been behind the eight ball. Notwithstanding, recent evidence (Levy *et al*., 2017; Pulakos *et al.,* 2018) is encouraging in this regard and signifies that academia may be beginning to wake up to the significant gap that exists between practice and research.

**Limitations**

This study is not without limitations. Whilst we consider through our content analysis and rigorous bibliometric method that we have captured the majority of PM papers over the past 20 years, our method is not infallible. The bibliometric databases do not cover all research areas and do not index all publications and one of the explicit challenges in examining the PM literature is that it is spread widely across management and I/O psychology journals. The second limitation is related to the selected database. Probably by selecting Scopus or Google Scholar, we could achieve a much bigger sample but we decided to use the most influential and more focused database in the WoS. Additionally, a large number of citations does not automatically mean that a study within an article is of high quality. A work may be heavily cited because other authors are refuting its research. There can also be issues with citation bias such as inappropriate citation of an individual's own work, that of their colleagues, or the journals in which they publish. A number of bibliometric tools allow the exclusion of

self-citations; however, it is not failsafe. Nonetheless, we feel confident that our approach has captured the spirit of the trends in PM literature.

**Conclusion**

In our central analysis of a 20-year period of PM publication, we have identified the main research directions in the field. PM studies are yielding some valuable information and we conclude that the extant PM literature has made contributions to the field over the past 20, this contribution is somewhat limited and there remain many areas for improvement with several important gaps still existing in the literature. The abundance of literature reviews on PM are surely an indication of past and present ambiguity?

Accordingly, several conclusions can be drawn from this literature review, as follows: First, the scholarly literature is apportioned into two key areas, namely the management (including HRM) literature and the I/O and psychology literature. It is evident that more cross-fertilization of these two disciplines is needed. Second, methodology wise, the literature is still largely conceptual, and though it has developed some noteworthy models, the analysis uncovers that that these tend to be largely untested propositions. It is true that the empirical studies over the past two decades have moved away from student populations but they have remained generally quantitative and according to our data there remains a scarcity of empirical studies, and in particular qualitative studies. Rectifying the shortfall in qualitative industry studies could be another way to encourage more interaction between scholars and industry. Third, it is not only a question of doing enough empirical research, it is also the importance of its perceived value and relevance and addressing the case of stakeholder acceptability is a case in point here. The evidence is clear that enhancing the influence of

research on PM practice will require much more collaboration between PM scholars and practitioners.

This is important for numerous reasons on several different levels, however, the main problem is that appraisal research centers on only a segment of the PM and as a result has taken up an amount of research time that is perhaps disproportionate to its relevance and weighting. We make a case that researchers must pay equal attention to the other dimensions of PM. Indeed, there is still much to be done and the field has far from plateaued. We believe this review is a valuable endeavor for researchers and makes a worthy contribution the PM literature as it will, we hope, influence more focused empirical research and across academic and practitioner boundaries that will help to take full advantage of the potential of PM in achieving long term organisational success and to continue to bridge the gap created by the early PM literature.

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