

# THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND APPRAISAL REACTIONS: A META-ANALYSIS

### SHAUN PICHLER

This study reviews and meta-analyzes the literature on the social context of performance appraisal. Results indicate that aspects of rater-ratee relationship quality (i.e., supervisor satisfaction, supervisor support, supervisor trust) are strongly related to ratee reactions to performance appraisals. Raterratee relationship quality is more strongly related to appraisal reactions than appraisal participation or performance ratings. Integrating social exchange theory with procedural justice theory, this article tested whether or not the relationship quality-appraisal reactions relationship was due to relationships between relationship quality and instrumental resources for the ratee (i.e., appraisal participation and rating favorability). When controlling for relationships between these resources and appraisal reactions, a direct path between relationship quality and reactions was significant, supporting a relational model of the exchange between appraisal partners. The relationship quality-appraisal reaction relationship was not moderated by performance rating favorability or appraisal participation. In total, these results highlight the importance of relationship quality to employee reactions to performance appraisal—and the importance of ratee reactions as an important resource in the social exchange between appraisal partners. Implications for theory, practice, and future research are discussed. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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n response to calls for research on contextual and qualitative aspects of performance appraisal (e.g., Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), recent research has focused on the social context of appraisals (Levy & Williams, 2004), performance appraisal participation, and employee reactions to the appraisal process (Cawley, Keeping, & Levy, 1998). While researchers generally agree on the importance of the social context of performance appraisal and appraisal participation as related to appraisal

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reactions, the literature is not clear as to the way in which these constructs are related to appraisal reactions. Social exchange and procedural justice theories offer different propositions about the way in which these predictors of appraisal reactions should be interrelated, and competing models of the relationships between these variables are found in the literature.

The performance appraisal literature is therefore lacking a clear and cohesive understanding of how and under what circumstances constructs studied as aspects of the "social context" of performance appraisal are related to appraisal reactions. This limits scientific knowledge as to what the most

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accurate representation of the performance appraisal session is and perpetuates the performance appraisal science-practice gap (Balzer & Sulsky, 1990). It is important to understand how performance appraisal session characteristics are related to appraisal reactions, in part because appraisal reactions are related to job attitudes (Pettijohn, Pettijohn, & d'Amico, and changes in job performance (e.g., Jawahar, 2006; Nathan, Mohrman, & Milliman, 1991). authors contend Some appraisal reactions are perhaps the most important appraisal criteria, in part because managers are more interested in these as criteria than other criteria (e.g., psychometric properties—see Balzer &

Sulsky, 1990).

The purpose of the current research report, therefore, is to (1) review the existing empirical literature on the social context of performance appraisal, in order to (2) test competing models of the performance appraisal process and (3) develop hypotheses about the boundary conditions of the social context–appraisal reaction relationship. Performance appraisal is an opportunity for information exchange, and rater-ratee relationship quality (including, for instance, trust) is essential to the effectiveness of

this process (e.g., Mayer & Davis, 1999). This is the first quantitative review of the literature on the social context of performance appraisal, despite the proliferation of research in this area.

Meta-analysis and meta-analytic structural equation modeling will be used, which will organize existing research, as well as provide important directions for future research. The overarching assumption that guides this article is that performance appraisal is a complicated social process (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995) that needs to be better understood so as to guide future research as well as performance management in organizations.

### The Social Context of Performance Appraisal and Employee Reactions

# Employee Reactions as Appraisal Criteria

Before explaining competing models of the appraisal session, a brief understanding of employee reactions as appraisal criteria is necessary. In response to critical reviews (e.g., Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, & McKellin, 1993), research on performance appraisal has broadened in scope. The traditional, psychometric approach to appraisals, which focused on rating errors and accuracy as appraisal criteria, has been complemented by increased interest in and research focus on qualitative aspects of appraisals, such as employee reactions, as important criteria. Researchers have not proposed an operational definition of employee reactions, but employee reactions can be defined as individual-level attitudinal evaluations of and responses to the performance appraisal process. For a review of the literature on appraisal reactions as criteria, see Keeping and Levy (2000).

Reactions measured in the literature include perceptions of appraisal accuracy, fairness, utility, satisfaction with the appraisal, and motivation to improve performance. While these are distinct constructs (Keeping & Levy, 2000), they are related in similar ways to the predictor constructs included in this study

(i.e., relationship quality, performance rating favorability, and appraisal participation), in the sense that these variables are positively related to different types of appraisal reactions. These variables have therefore been combined to represent an overall, composite "appraisal reactions" variable in individual studies and for purposes of cumulating research findings (e.g., Cawley et al., 1998). While it is ideal for researchers to choose appraisal reaction criteria that are most relevant and meaningful based on the propositions being tested in individual studies, it is beyond the scope of the current article to test differential relationships between antecedent constructs and different types of appraisal reactions. Given the purpose of testing competing models of appraisal reactions in the current study, a composite appraisal reactions variable will be used.

Appraisal reactions are related to job attitudes (Pettijohn et al., 2001) and changes in job performance (e.g., Jawahar, 2006; Nathan et al., 1991). This is, of course, consistent with perhaps the primary purpose of performance appraisal, which is to diagnose and remedy performance-related problems and to thereby increase individual job performance and organizational productivity (e.g., DeNisi & Gonzalez, 2000). Given that previous attempts to improve the performance appraisal process based on more traditional models (e.g., the psychometric approach) have been less successful than desired, appraisal reactions represent an alternative target for improving the process and outcomes of the process.

# The Social Context of Appraisal and Appraisal Reactions

Relatively recent models of the performance appraisal process have proposed that the social context of performance appraisal is an important area of research inquiry (i.e., Erdogan, 2002; Ferris, Munyon, Basik, & Buckley, 2008; Levy & Williams, 2004; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995), if not the most important context of the appraisal as related to appraisal reactions (e.g., Russell & Goode, 1988). The conceptual model developed by

Erdogan (2002), for instance, included social or relationship-oriented constructs, such as leader-member exchange, as a "contextual factor" in performance appraisal, and the model developed by Levy and Williams (2004) includes leader-member relationship quality, supervisor trust, and impression management as "proximal process variables." The current review of the employee reaction literature identified four constructs regularly measured as correlates of employee reactions: (1) rater-ratee relationship quality, (2) super-

visor trust, (3) social support, and (4) supervisor satisfaction. While effect sizes are not necessarily consistent across studies, research has indicated that these variables tend to be positively correlated with appraisal reactions.

# Rater-Ratee Relationship Quality

These constructs can efficiently and perhaps meaningfully be understood as aspects of rater-ratee relationship or exchange quality. Leader-member exchange theory, performance appraisal research, and the broader social-psychological literature on relationships illuminate how each of the constructs are related to appraisal reactions.

Unlike more traditional leadership theories, leader-member exchange theory contends that characteristics of the dyadic relationship, as compared to characteristics of the leader, are predictive of outcomes at multiple levels of analysis (i.e., the employee, dyadic, group, and organizational levels of analysis; Gerstner & Day, 1997). According to leader-member exchange theory, leaders (supervisors) do not

treat all members (subordinates) equally but form different exchange relationships (i.e., of relatively high and low quality) with members (Dansereau, Graen, & Haga, 1975). High-quality leader-member relationships

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are characterized by increased levels of mutual support and trust, for instance, whereas low-quality relationships are characterized by lower levels of these characteristics (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden & Maslyn, 1998; Liden, Sparrowe, & Wayne, 1997; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). This is true of relationships in work organizations in general that are characterized by social as opposed to economic exchanges (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). These constructs have been identified as dimensions of relationship quality in the performance appraisal (e.g., Nathan et al., 1991) and broader social-psychology literature (e.g.,

Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002).

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One would accordingly expect that these constructs would be related in similar ways to outcome variables, including appraisal reaction criteria. Research has consistently shown higher-quality rater-ratee exchanges are related to more positive ratee reactions to the performance appraisal process (e.g., Elicker, Levy, & Hall 2006; Nathan et al., 1991), including each of the relationship quality aspects mentioned earlier. Previous metaanalytic reviews in the broader psychology literature have therefore used a composite measure of relationship quality for purposes of cumulating findings, which includes, for instance, relationship satisfaction as well as social support (e.g., Hawkins, Blanchard, Baldwin, & Fawcett,

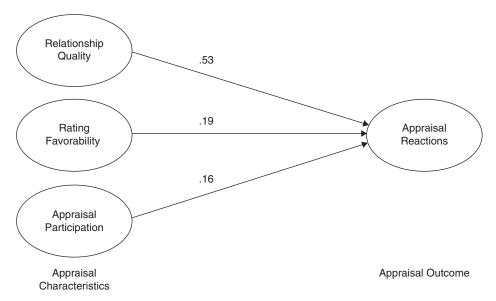
2008). A composite measure of rater-ratee relationship quality will be used in the present study to test alternative models of the role of relationship quality in the appraisal process.

# Competing Models of Appraisal Reactions

Although the social context of performance appraisal is an increasingly visible area of research, performance appraisal research has also recently focused on the importance of other contextual predictors of appraisal reactions, including performance rating favorability and appraisal participation (e.g., Erdogan, 2002; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). This literature has documented that favorable performance ratings (e.g., Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999) and employee participation in the appraisal process (Cawley et al., 1998) are positively related to appraisal reactions. While performance appraisal research indicates that rater-ratee relationship quality, appraisal participation, and performance rating favorability each predict appraisal reactions, the literature is not clear as to the way in which these constructs are related to appraisal reactions. It is important to understand the interrelationships between these variables because different process models have different implications for the performance appraisal literature as well as different practical implications.

Three different models of the appraisal session have been proposed in the literature, each of which will be considered in the sections that follow. The theoretical underpinnings of each model will be developed in order to understand the different implications of each model. In so doing, social exchange and procedural justice theories are integrated to develop competing models of the appraisal process.

The least complicated model of the three is one where relationship quality, participation, and rating favorability are modeled as independent antecedents of appraisal reactions. This model is presented first for clarity, since the other two models build on the basic propositions embedded in the first model. Next, an instrumental model of the appraisal process is considered where raterratee relationship quality is presumed to predict reactions because of its relationships with favorable treatment in the appraisal (i.e., participation and rating favorability). Finally, a relational model is considered, which includes a direct path from relationship quality to appraisal reactions, suggesting that, while these instrumental resources are important, the appraisal process is largely a social one—that appraisal reactions are influenced by relationship quality,



**FIGURE 1.** An Independent Antecedents Model of Employee Reactions to Performance Appraisal *Note:* All paths are significant at p < .05.

even considering the instrumentality of the process. Since each of the three models is based on important theoretical propositions and competing conceptual models of the appraisal process found in the literature, the following is offered as a research question:

Research Question 1: Which of the three models best represents the performance appraisal process?

# Model 1: An Independent Antecedents Model of Appraisal Reactions

The most obvious—and the simplest—model of the appraisal session is one where relationship quality, performance ratings, and participation are all treated as independent predictors of appraisal reactions (see Figure 1). This model does not assume that any antecedent is a more proximal (or distal) predictor of reactions.

This model is consistent with primary if not basic propositions from organizational justice theory. A basic premise of distributive justice theory is that perceptions of outcome favorability are related to employee reactions to organizational decisions (Greenberg, 1990). Rating favorability is positively related to appraisal reactions (e.g., Dulebohn & Ferris, 1999). A basic

premise of procedural justice theory is that participation in a decision-making process results in more favorable reactions to that process (Greenberg, 1990), which is known as the "voice" effect (Thibaut & Walker, 1975) in procedural justice theory. Research consistently indicates a positive relationship between performance appraisal participation and appraisal reactions (Cawley et al., 1998). Procedural justice theory also proposes that relationship quality with authority figures is an important predictor of the extent to which reactions to organizational processes are favorable (Lind, Kanfer, & Earley, 1990), and research tends to indicate a positive relationship between rater-ratee relationship quality and appraisal reactions (e.g., Elicker et al., 2006).

Although this model is perhaps a relatively simplified view of appraisal reactions, it is consistent with existing models of performance appraisal reactions in the literature. For instance, in their model of perceptions of performance appraisal fairness, Dulebohn and Ferris (1999) treated raterratee relationship quality, opportunity for voice in the performance appraisal, and performance rating favorability as independent predictors of perceptions of appraisal fairness. Models of the performance appraisal process based on more comprehensive

literature reviews also tend to treat the antecedent constructs in Model 1 as independent predictors of appraisal reactions. The model of the performance appraisal process developed by Erdogan (2002), for instance, treats appraisal participation, rater-ratee relationship quality, and performance rating favorability as independent antecedents of different types of justice perceptions related to the appraisal. Similarly, in the model of the social context of performance appraisal developed by Levy and Williams (2004), rater-ratee relationship quality and appraisal participation are considered independent predictors of appraisal reactions. As will also be discussed later, this model is inconsistent with a

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more advanced analysis of social exchange and organizational justice theories, in that these theories suggest a more complicated set of relationships between the constructs in Model 1.

Leader-member exchange theory is a social exchange theory focused on how the quality of a manager-employee relationship is related to mutual obligation, support, and exchange of valuable resources (Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2002). As compared to an economic exchange, where the inputs and outputs are often relatively transparent and immediate, a social exchange is based on an exchange of resources in the present for some unspecified return in the future. There is a norm of reciprocity between exchange

partners that is the basis of social exchanges, which compels individuals to respond positively to or repay favorable treatment (e.g., in terms of attitudes and behaviors that benefit the exchange partner; Gouldner, 1960). In terms of leader-member exchanges, leaders and members share the benefits of a high-quality relationship in terms of important work outcomes (Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009) because of the reciprocal exchange of resources.

In the context of performance appraisal, social exchange theory would suggest that

raters in high- (low-) quality exchanges should be more (less) likely to treat ratees favorably, in terms of opportunities to participate in the process as well as more (less) favorable ratings. Indeed, leader-member exchange theory suggests that higher-quality rater-ratee relationships should be related to better treatment in the appraisal context (Scandura, Graen, & Novak, 1986). Under these circumstances, raters have relatively high trust for ratees and provide them with relatively more information (Cleveland & Murphy, 1992) and allow them more upward influence (Wexley & Klimoski, 1984) and participation in the appraisal. Since raterratee relationship quality is determined, in part, by the ratee's objective performance (Liden & Graen, 1980), higher-quality relationships should also be related to more positive performance ratings (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997; Kacmar, Witt, Zivnuska, & Gully, 2003; Wayne et al., 2002).

In return for favorable treatment in the appraisal, ratees can respond concordantly to the appraisal process in the form of positive appraisal reactions, which is an important predictor of another form of repayment—future performance. Employee reactions to performance appraisals can therefore be viewed as an important element of rater-ratee social exchanges, a proposition that is not salient in the performance appraisal literature. The performance appraisal literature does suggest that a highquality rater-ratee exchange is predicated on the rater's exchange of important organizational resources, such as favorable performance ratings, for sustained performance on the part of the ratee. Thus, models of the performance appraisal process, as well as models of social exchange in organizations, position relationship quality constructs as antecedents to appraisal session constructs namely, appraisal participation and performance ratings (e.g., Klein, Snell, & Wexley, 1987; Levy & Williams, 2004; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995; Wayne et al., 2002).

The social exchange literature is not clear as to whether or not exchange quality itself is a basis for positive attitudes, such as appraisal reactions, or if these attitudes are explained by favorable treatment and outcomes of the exchange. In fact, models of social exchange in organizations posit that favorable treatment and rewards predict exchange quality, which then predicts reciprocity of favorable treatment (e.g., Masterson et al., 2000; Wayne et al., 2002). These models do not translate well to the appraisal process itself, where relationship quality is a key predictor of treatment in the process. In other words, models of social exchange in organizations organize favorable treatment and rewards as antecedent to exchange quality, yet in the appraisal process, these have been shown to be a result of exchange quality.

The social exchange literature therefore needs to be adapted to the performance appraisal context where exchange quality predicts favorable or unfavorable treatment in the appraisal in terms of participation and ratings, which then predicts reactions (e.g., Klein et al., 1987). It seems important to understand if, in this context, positive reactions are a result of resources exchanged, the quality of the exchange relationship itself, or both. Stated differently, it is important to determine if the relationship between raterratee relationship quality is explained completely by its relationships with participation and rating favorability, or whether relationship quality directly predicts appraisal reactions. Models of the performance appraisal process that are based on social exchange theory (e.g., Erdogan, 2002) have not addressed this question-not because it is unimportant, but perhaps because the level of focus of existing models is typically broader than in the current study. To address this gap in theory, at least as related to the performance appraisal process, social exchange theory can be considered in relation to, or integrated with, procedural justice theory.

Tripp, Sondak, and Bies (1995) suggest that individuals attend to fairness when social harmony or the preservation of relationships predominates concerns about allocation of scarce resources. Performance appraisal is an interesting scenario specifically because it is an administrative process intended to determine the allocation of scarce resources, yet it is also a human and social one where relationship preservation between parties is important. Like social exchange theory, procedural justice theory has not answered, or fully addressed, whether relationship quality should directly predict reactions in the context of an important administrative decision where future relationship quality is important. Different theories of procedural justice theories can help elucidate this question, however.

Regardless of the explanation as to why individuals attend to the fairness of organizational processes, research has overwhelmingly indicated that the opportunity to

have some sort of a say in a process that affects us is important to individuals. This is known as process control, or voice (Folger, 1977), whereas influence over the actual decision of a process is known as decision control (Folger, 1977). Individuals judge procedures to be fair when they have had some process control, which is known as the "voice" effect (Folger, 1977; Lind & Tyler, 1988). There are two primary theories of procedural justice, or the role of voice in reactions organizational decision-making processes: instrumental and noninstrumental or value-expressive theories. These theories will be considered in turn as related to a model of the performance appraisal process.

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### Model 2: An Instrumental, Exchange-Oriented Model of Appraisal Reactions

Instrumental theories of procedural justice posit that voice is related to perceptions of fairness because of the potential to influence the actual decision or outcome of the process (Tyler, 1994). Instrumental models of procedural justice posit that individuals prefer procedures that result in outcomes that are either favorable to them (Leventhal, 1980) or

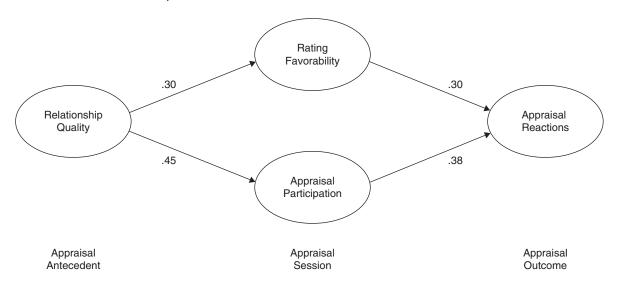


FIGURE 2. An Instrumental Model of Employee Reactions to Performance Appraisal

*Note:* All paths are significant at p < .05.

equitable (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), and that process control is perceived as important because it is a way for individuals to achieve these results (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Individuals are willing to relinquish decision control so long as they are guaranteed process control (Thibaut & Walker, 1975): process control is valued even when persons have no control over the actual decision (e.g., Folger, 1977). Still, instrumental models of procedural justice posit that the voice effect is explained by an expectation that process control will result in a more desirable outcome. Instrumental models of procedural justice "claim that individuals posit no value for fair procedures independent of their association with fair outcomes" (Konovsky, 2000, p. 493).

The proposition that the reason raterratee relationship quality is an important predictor of appraisal reactions is because of its relationships with appraisal participation and outcome favorability (see Figure 2) is consistent with the instrumental model of procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; Tyler & Lind, 1992). Applying this model of procedural justice, participation in the appraisal session is an indirect form of decision control (i.e., influence over the performance rating), which is valued by ratees. In other words, employees value a high-quality

exchange because it allows them increased control over the process and, ultimately, a more favorable outcome. Favorable treatment is responded to by relatively more favorable reactions to the appraisal and, potentially, through improved job performance. This model would also be consistent with results from Elicker et al. (2006), which indicated that perceptions of voice in the performance appraisal and justice judgments mediated the relationship between rater-ratee relationship quality and appraisal reactions.

### Model 3: A Relationship Quality– Driven Model of the Appraisal Process

An alternative perspective to the performance appraisal process is that it is largely a social process, which is bound and influenced by the rater-ratee relationship (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995). A direct relationship between rater-ratee relationship quality (see Figure 3) and appraisal reactions would support the proposition that relationship quality is a key predictor of appraisal reactions, even considering relationships with other proximal predictors. This proposition is more consistent with noninstrumental, relational models of procedural justice. The noninstrumental or value-expressive model of procedural justice posits that voice is valuable in and of itself,

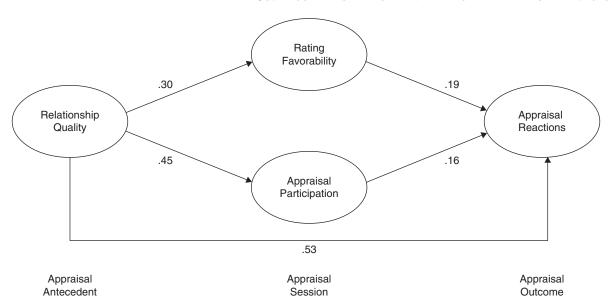


FIGURE 3. A Relationship-Driven Model of the Performance Appraisal Process

*Note:* All paths are significant at p < .05.

regardless of any potential influence on a decision or outcome.

For instance, the relational or group-value model of procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988) proposes that having one's voice heard carries signals about group-member status that one's voice is valued by one's workgroup. Lind and Tyler (1988) posit that being a valued group member is important to individuals, regardless of outcome favorability. This is an alternative explanation for the voice effect, and it is especially likely when one is granted voice by a group's authority figure (Tyler & Lind, 1992). An authority's provision of voice has symbolic meaning, and can enhance the recipient's reactions to a process, controlling for or in addition to the instrumental effect or outcome (Lind et al., 1990; Tyler & Lind, 1992). In fact, research has shown that perceptions of relationship quality between decision makers and individuals affected by their decisions are more strongly related to an individual's fairness perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors than are perceptions of instrumental control or outcome favorability (Tyler, 1989). The group-value model of procedural justice is consistent with results from a study by Nathan et al. (1991), who found that rater-ratee relationship quality predicted appraisal reactions, controlling for the relationship between relationship quality and appraisal participation.

# The Importance of Comparative Model Tests

It is important to test which of the proposed models is more plausible with robust quantitative (i.e., meta-analytic) data, since each of these models is consistent with theory and is based on existing models of the performance appraisal process. Rater-ratee relationship quality, appraisal participation, and performance ratings are interrelated and related to appraisal reactions; it is important to include these variables simultaneously in a model of the appraisal process. In this way, the effects of each individual variable on the process can be more clearly understood, as the effects of other variables are accounted for. Individual studies reviewed earlier (e.g., Nathan et al., 1991) generally did not include each of the antecedents involved in the competing models presented in this article, nor did they test the fit of competing models. Moreover, path analysis in meta-analytic structural equation modeling allows for more accurate and stable estimates of bivariate relationships from possible models, and is well suited for clarifying research findings and theory (e.g., Fassina, Jones, & Uggerslev, 2008; Shadish, 1996).

Testing the relative fit of the three alternative models is particularly important because of the interrelationships between the constructs in the models. The effects of voice on evaluations of organizational processes are attenuated when results of the process are favorable (Lind & Tyler, 1988), and when relationship quality is low between the ratee and the group's authority figure (Tyler & Lind, 1992). Moreover, individuals are especially likely to rely on judgments about process fairness (i.e., appraisal participation) when they are uncertain about the trustworthiness of decision makers (van den

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Bos, Lind, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1997; van den Bos, Wilke, & Lind, 1998). Research has consistently indicated that rating favorability is systematically related to appraisal reactions, so to get a clear picture as to how relationship quality, appraisal participation, and reactions are interrelated, it is important to include rating favorability in a model of the appraisal process (e.g., Levy & Williams, 1998).

### Boundary Conditions of the Social Context-Appraisal Reactions Relationship

Despite the consistently positive relationships between different rater-ratee relationship quality variables (i.e., relationship quality, trust, support, and satisfac-

tion) as related to appraisal reactions overall, the size of correlations across studies is not uniform. This suggests that there are moderators of these relationships. As an example, Russell and Goode (1988) report a correlation of .18 between supervisor satisfaction and appraisal satisfaction, whereas Elicker (2000) reports a correlation of .62. It is important to understand these potential moderators so as to better understand the boundary conditions of these relationships.

### Performance Appraisal Participation

Procedural justice theory posits that involvement in decision-making processes should enhance the employee's relationship quality with the authority figure, as well as the employee's overall reactions to the particular decision process. Procedural justice theory has also proposed that when relationship quality is low, the fairness-enhancing effect of voice is attenuated (Tyler & Lind, 1992). These propositions suggest that rater-ratee relationship quality and appraisal participation interact to predict performance appraisal reactions, such that they have complementary effects on appraisal reactions.

That said, research that has found judgments about process fairness are particularly important when information about the trustworthiness of an authority figure is unclear (van den Bos et al., 1997, 1998). So, if relationship quality (including trust and support) is high, then perhaps judgments about process fairness become less important. This would suggest that appraisal participation has a substitution effect for relationship quality as related to appraisal reactions. Given these competing perspectives, it is expected that appraisal participation will moderate the relationship between raterratee relationship quality and appraisal reactions, but the form of moderation is offered as a research question:

Research Question 2: Will appraisal participation enhance or substitute for the effect of relationship quality on appraisal reactions?

### Rating Favorability

Research has consistently shown that rating favorability is an important predictor of appraisal reactions—and that relationship quality and rating favorability are closely intertwined (e.g., Kacmar et al., 2003). It is likely that rating favorability and relationship quality variables have combined effects on appraisal reactions. When there is a high- (low-) quality exchange, ratees may expect that their rating will relatively be more (less) favorable,

as is often the case in reality, as demonstrated in the appraisal literature. It is likely that positive ratings could enhance the relationship between exchange quality and reactions. This logic would suggest that the effects of these variables are likely complementary. This has implications for the broader literature on, for instance, applicant reactions to selection decisions (e.g., Bauer et al., 2001), which has documented that appraisals of organizational processes are more critical when the outcome is negative.

Hypothesis 1: Rater-ratee relationship quality is more (less) strongly related to appraisal reactions when rating favorability is high (low).

### Method

### Meta-Analytic Method

The effect-size metric chosen was the correlation coefficient (since almost all of the studies in this database reported effect sizes in this metric). Correlations were first transformed into the Fisher's z for analysis, and were then back-transformed in the correlation metric for presentation of results. Each effect size was weighted by the inverse of its sampling error variance. No other effect-size corrections were employed, since this can lead to inaccurate conclusions about the population mean and variability (e.g., DeShon, 2002). This approach is consistent with previous meta-analyses related to organizational justice (e.g., Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001). Random effects models were employed throughout; effect sizes were consistently significantly heterogeneous (Hedges & Vevea, 1998).

Tests of significance for effect-size centrality were conducted using Z-tests (Lipsey & Wilson, 2001). Significance tests for moderation (with continuous moderators) were conducted using procedures developed for meta-analytic regression in SPSS by Lipsey and Wilson (2001). Procedures for testing effect size centrality and homogeneity were consistent with convention (i.e., Hedges & Olkin, 1985). Models of meta-analytic correlation matrices were used to

test the process models proposed earlier. All latent factors were treated as single-item indicators, and models were tested using maximum likelihood estimation, with the harmonic mean of the sample sizes, as is consistent with published research in management and applied psychology. A variety of fit indices are reported in order to evaluate model fit.

## Literature Search and Inclusion Criteria

### Literature Review

Relevant databases (i.e., PsycInfo, Business Source Elite, Istor, Proquest, Sage Journals Online, and Social Science Abstracts) were searched using sets of keywords such as "employee reactions and performance appraisal." Reference lists of major reviews related to contextual or qualitative aspects of performance appraisal (i.e., Cawley et al., 1998; Erdogan, 2002; Levy & Williams, 2004) were searched for unidentified articles. Theses and dissertations were identified using the Dissertation Abstracts International database, and were included in this study. The online database for the Society of Industrial-Organizational Psychology conference was also searched, and relevant papers were requested from authors. The online database for the Academy of Management publications (e.g., Academy of Management Journal), conference proceedings, and presentations was also searched to identify relevant published and unpublished manuscripts. Unpublished manuscripts were also solicited from the Organizational Behavior and Human Resource Management listservs of the Academy of Management. This search process was intended to be as inclusive as possible of relevant empirical papers and to prevent any file drawer concerns.

### Inclusion Criteria

Studies that measured a relationship between one or more employee reaction criteria and one or more contextual variables were included. Each study had to reflect an actual performance review session, as opposed to simply giving feedback related to a specific task, for instance. Finally, the study must have reported an effect size (i.e., *r* or d) or information that was sufficient to calculate an effect size to be included. Whenever a study reported multiple correlations between a contextual antecedent(s) and an employee reaction(s), non-independent effect sizes were transformed into a correlation of composite variables. In total, effect sizes were analyzed from 69 unique samples, from 62 studies. These studies are marked with an asterisk in the References section.

### Study Coding

To establish coder reliability, studies were

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coded independently by two trained raters. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion by consulting the original articles.

Relationship quality variables were coded as to whether they measured overall relationship quality, supervisor trust, supervisor support, or supervisor satisfaction. Relationship quality was measured using a leader-

member exchange variable (e.g., Graen, Novak, & Sommerkamp, 1982) in six studies; in another study, it was measured using a semantic differential scale; and in one additional study, it was measured using a scale developed by the authors. Supervisor trust was measured using a validated measure of supervisor trust (e.g., Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974) in all but two studies; in those studies, items were developed by the authors. While there is an extensive literature on supervisor support, which includes validated scales (e.g., Caplan, Cob, French, Harrison, & Pinneau, 1975), the studies that measured supervisor support did so using self-developed items. Some studies that measured supervisor satisfaction did so using validated scales (e.g., Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969), whereas others developed items for the purposes of their study (e.g., Russell & Goode, 1988), which were then used in subsequent performance appraisal studies. Agreement between raters ranged from 83 percent to 100 percent for relationship quality variables.<sup>1</sup> The employee participation variables were coded consistent with Cawley and colleagues (1998). Agreement for these variables was 88 percent and 100 percent, respectively.<sup>2</sup> Given the interest in rating favorability in this study, studies that measured the relationship between reactions and the favorability of the employee's performance rating (in terms of perceived favorability, self-reported performance rating, or supervisor-reported performance rating) were coded for rating favorability. Agreement for this variable was 93 percent.

### Results

### Meta-Analytic Correlations

Meta-analytic correlations are reported in Table I.<sup>3</sup> Findings indicate that the social context within which the appraisal occurs is indeed important. Each of the correlations between employee reactions and relationship quality variables (relationship quality, supervisor satisfaction, supervisor support, and supervisor trust) are at or around Mr = .60, p < .05. This is consistent with a primary thesis of the review earlier: that social contextual variables should be similarly related to employee reactions. The meta-analytic correlation between composite relationship quality and appraisal reactions is strong (Mr = .66, p < .05).

Results also indicate that composite relationship quality is moderately related to performance ratings (Mr = .30, p < .05) and appraisal participation (Mr = .45, p < .05). Likewise, appraisal participation was moderately related to performance ratings (Mr = .25, p < .05) and appraisal reactions (Mr = .48, p < .05). Finally, performance ratings were moderately related to appraisal reactions (Mr = .39, p < .05).

### Test of Competing Structural Models

Results of meta-analytic structural equation models are reported in Table II. Model 1 proposed that rater-ratee relationship quality, appraisal participation, and rating favorability

TABLE I Results of Meta-Analysis							
	2	K	SD	Mr	Lower 95% Cl	Upper 95% CI	đ
Relations	ationship Quality Subdimensions and Appraisal Reactions	ubdimensior	s and Appra	isal React	ions		
Relationship Quality, Appraisal Reactions	1,356	œ	14.	*09	.55	.62	27.65*
Supervisor Satisfaction, Appraisal Reactions	2,235	1	.28	*09'	.47	.70	169.40*
Supervisor Support, Appraisal Reactions	633	က	Ė	*86:	.47	89.	7.41*
Relationship Trust, Appraisal Reactions	1,103	∞	.24	*09'	.48	.71	63.21*
Relationship Quality Composite, Appraisal Session Variables, and Appraisal	Composite, Ap	opraisal Ses	sion Variable	s, and App	oraisal Reactions		
Relationship Quality, Appraisal Reactions	4,042	23	.16	*99	.59	.73	105.09*
Relationship Quality, Performance Ratings	2,092	15	.17	*08.	.21	.38	61.54*
Relationship Quality, Appraisal Participation	2,492	12	.20	.45*	.35	.54	99.43*
Appraisal Participation, Performance Ratings	3,413	17	.15	.25*	.17	.34	72.79*
Appraisal Participation, Appraisal Reactions	10,467	42	.17	*84	.43	.5	288.59*
Rating Favorability, Appraisal Reactions	10,880	36	.17	*66.	.33	.44	300.07*

Note: N = cumulative sample size; k = cumulative number of effect sizes;  $SD_c =$  weighted standard deviation of observed effect sizes; Mr = population mean correlation;  $\Omega =$  heterogeneous, random effects models were employed for Mr and its confidence interval (Hedges & Vevea, 1998). All of the correlations needed for path analyses (Table II, Figures 1 and 2) are represented in Table I.

TABLE II Model Fit Indices from Path Analyses (Research Question 1)										
Model	df	χ²	GFI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA				
Model 1—Independence Model	3	37.63 (p = .00)	.85	.72	.24	.33				
Model 2—Instrumental Model		34.33 (p = .00)	.86	.69	.14	.39				
Model 3—Relationship-Driven Model	1	1.93 (p = .16)	.99	.99	.04	.09				

Note: df = degrees of freedom,  $\chi^2$  = normal theory weighted least squares chi-square, GFI = goodness-of-fit index, CFI = comparative fit index, SRMR = standardized root mean square residual, RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation.

T A B L E         Results of Continuous Variable Moderator Analysis in Regression for Appraisal											
Independent Variable	Moderator Variable	k	В	SE	Lower 95% CI	Upper 95% CI	Mr	Q	R²		
Research Question 2											
Relationship Quality	Appraisal Participation	12	.32	.13	.11	.64	.54	1.59	.12		
Hypothesis 1											
Relationship Quality	Rating Favorability	12	.33	.18	03	.68	.53	3.22	.21		

Note: k = number of effect sizes; B = regression coefficient; SE = standard error; Mr = population mean correlation; Q = heterogeneity of Mr.

are all independent antecedents of appraisal reactions. This model (see Figure 1) was a poor fit to the data:  $\chi^2(3, N = 107) = 37.63, p = .00$ , GFI = .85, CFI = .72, RMSEA = .33, SRMR = .24,  $R^2 = .40$ .

Model 2 proposed that the best-fitting model of the appraisal session is one where there is no direct path between rater-ratee relationship quality and appraisal reactions. This model (see Figure 2) was a poor fit to the data:  $\chi^2(2, N=107)=34.33, p=.00$ , GFI = .86, CFI = .69, RMSEA = .39, SRMR = .14,  $R^2=.27$ . This indicates that the rater-ratee relationship quality is important as related to appraisal reactions, even when considering relationships between relationship quality and other appraisal session constructs.

Model 3 positions rater-ratee relationship quality as an antecedent of performance appraisal session characteristics (i.e., employee participation and performance ratings) and appraisal reactions. This model (see Figure 3) fit the data reasonably well:  $\chi^2(1, N = 107) = 1.93, p = .16$ , GFI = .99, CFI = .99, RMSEA = .09, SRMR = .04,  $R^2 = .49$ .

Results related to Research Question 1 indicate that Model 3 is the best-fitting model of the three models.

### Tests of Moderation

Research Question 2 asked which form of an interaction would relationship quality and appraisal participation have as related to appraisal reactions, since theory and existing research offer competing perspectives. Results are reported in Table III. The relationship between relationship quality and appraisal reactions was significantly heterogeneous (Q = 105.09, p < .05), but appraisal participation did not moderate this relationship  $(B = .32, R^2 = .12, k = 12, n.s.)$ . Rating favorability  $(B = .33, R^2 = .21, k = 12, n.s.)$  also did not moderate the relationship between relationship quality and appraisal reactions.

### Discussion

The purpose of this article was to review and meta-analyze the existing empirical literature on the social context of performance appraisal so as to better understand the way in which variables studied as aspects of the social context of performance appraisal are related to appraisal reactions. This is the first meta-analysis on the social context of performance appraisal literature. Results indicate that constructs studied as aspects of the social context (relationship quality, supervisor trust, supervisor support, and relationship satisfaction) are strongly related to appraisal reactions. Rater-ratee relationship quality is moderately related to instrumental appraisal session characteristics (appraisal participation and rating favorability) and appraisal reactions. Appraisal participation and rating favorability are moderately related to appraisal reactions. Appraisal participation and rating favorability did not moderate the relationship quality-reactions relationship. Implications of these results, as well as results of testing different models of the appraisal process, for theory, practice, and future research, are discussed in the sections that follow.

# Implications for Theory and a Model of Performance Appraisal Reactions

The performance appraisal process is interesting because it involves both instrumental and relational dynamics or, in other words, two potential types of exchanges: It is first and perhaps foremost an administrative process used to allocate resources, and in this way it has some elements of an economic exchange. Yet it is a process embedded in a social context—the most important of which perhaps is the relationship between the rater and ratee. In this way, it also involves elements of a social exchange. Employee reactions to performance appraisals, therefore, are related to both resource allocation in the process as well as relational aspects of the process.

For these reasons, social exchange and organizational justice theories are useful to understand the performance appraisal process. An overarching question addressed in this article is whether rater-ratee relationship quality is directly related to appraisal reactions, or if this relationship is due to relations between relationship quality and

more instrumental outcomes in the process itself (i.e., employee participation and rating favorability). Social exchange and organizational justice theories are useful here—but they did not offer a direct explanation or prediction. As such, social exchange theory was integrated with instrumental and relational theories of procedural justice so as to better understand the appraisal process. In this way, this study contributes to both sets of theories.

Research has shown that both the instrumental and noninstrumental explanations of the voice effect predict fairness perceptions (e.g., McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). Lind and colleagues (Lind et al., 1990; Lind & Tyler, 1988) called for research that integrated instrumental and noninstrumental theories of procedural justice to explain reactions to processes and procedures. It is important

to make two notes here. First, the models tested in this article are not direct tests of either theory, in that they do not test whether process control has a direct relationship with reactions to appraisals that is not explained by decision control (McFarlin & Sweeney, 1992). Second, Model 3, the model that received empirical support, is in its essence an integration of both instrumental and relational theories of procedural justice, in that it supports primary propositions from both theories. It supports the instrumental proposition that a fair process (one that involves participation)

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will result in a more favorable decision (in terms of reactions to the decision), as well as the relational proposition that relationship quality with an authority has important meaning above and beyond any influence on the outcome of a process.

# The Importance of Relationship Quality to Appraisal Reactions

Results of the meta-analysis indicate that rater-ratee relationship quality, performance appraisal participation, and rating favorability are positively related to appraisal reactions. The meta-analytic correlation between relationship quality and reactions is noticeably larger than the meta-analytic correlations between participation and reactions and rating favorability and reactions. This is consistent with results of the path models 1 and 3, in that the path between relationship quality and reactions is the largest, controlling for relationships between other variables in the models.

This study suggests that theory and research should also focus on how important evaluative decisions, and the way in which members are involved in these decisions. impact members' perceptions of the way in which they have been treated, which could perhaps influence subsequent relationship quality dynamics.

These results suggest that, even when controlling for rating favorability and appraisal participation, rater-ratee relationship ity is an important predictor of appraisal reactions. This is an important contribution of the meta-analysis, one that is generally novel to the performance appraisal literature. This is consistent with and contributes to research on the group-value model of procedural justice, which has shown that aspects of relationship quality between an authority figure and an evaluatee are perhaps more important than judgments about decision control or outcome favorability (Tyler, 1989, 1994). Further supporting this perspective, the direct path between relationship quality and reactions is important, even when controlling for relationships between relationship quality and other appraisal session characteristics (see Model 3). This calls into question the very limited research that has found that instrumental session characteristics mediate the relationship quality-appraisal reaction relationship (i.e., Elicker et al., 2006). What is also interesting in this connection is that the relationship quality-appraisal reaction relationship was not

moderated by rating favorability or appraisal participation. While this relationship seems robust, it is important for future research to

determine the variables that explain heterogeneity in the relationship quality-appraisal reaction relationship.

It is important to note that results lend some support to the instrumental model of procedural justice, as mentioned earlier. Results certainly indicate that participation in the process is important, as is the favorability of the outcome. Instrumentality in the session, in the form of influence in the process and outcome favorability, may be less important to employees than relational aspects, but future research should give due attention to both the group-value and selfinterest models of procedural justice—at least as related to performance appraisal. This is an important point because previous meta-analytic evidence has suggested that the group-value model is a better explanatory model of the appraisal process than the instrumental model (Cawley et al., 1998). Moreover, some procedural justice research has suggested that concerns about being a valued group member "dominate definitions of justice" and that "procedural justice judgments are shaped by relational concerns" (Tyler, 1994, p. 850). Results of this study are perhaps consistent with this perspective, but instrumentality in the process is nonetheless important to employees, and this should not go unrecognized.

### Rater-Ratee Relationship Quality

Leader-member exchange researchers have focused on the role of relationship quality as a predictor of various outcomes for leaders. members (or followers), and organizations (Gerstner & Day, 1997; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This study suggests that theory and research should also focus on how important evaluative decisions, and the way in which members are involved in these decisions, impact members' perceptions of the way in which they have been treated, which could perhaps influence subsequent relationship quality dynamics. This is especially important since members are more interested in social currency than task-based or economic currency in leader-member exchanges (Day & Crain, 1992).

A high-quality exchange is dependent upon each party's willingness to contribute to and maintain the relationship. Leadermember exchange agreement is often low (e.g., Gerstner & Day, 1997). Accordingly, relationship quality post-review may be particularly subject to change (negative or positive) when leaders and members have "unbalanced" views of the exchange. For instance, in the case of "follower overestimation" (Cogliser et al., 2009, p. 455), members may feel particularly hurt by the leader not involving the member in the appraisal. There is an opportunity here to more fully integrate leader-member exchange theory with the performance appraisal literature, which could contribute to both perspectives. For instance, future research could investigate how the feedback environment (Norris-Watts & Levy, 2004) interacts with rater-ratee relationship quality to determine appraisal reactions.

### Practical Implications

This research addresses issues that are relevant to practitioners (i.e., the determinants of appraisal reactions and their position in the overall performance appraisal process), helping to bridge the science-practice gap that has been a source of concern for some time (Banks & Murphy, 1985). The importance of supervisor-subordinate relationships and the various aspects of relationship quality to performance appraisals have been highlighted in the recent scholarly literature (Erdogan, 2002; Murphy & Cleveland, 1995) but are not necessarily salient in popular human resource management texts (e.g., Noe, Hollenbeck, Gerhart, & Wright, 2000), government handbooks on performance appraisal (http://www.doi.gov/hrm/guidance/ 370dm430hndbk.pdf), or discussions in the practitioner literature (e.g., Fox, 2009). In total, results of this study suggest that the social context of the performance appraisal is important to study in relation to appraisal reactions. While this is not inconsistent with previous research, it does further buttress the importance of the social context of performance appraisal, especially given the magnitude of relationships between social context constructs and appraisal reactions.

If a major goal of performance management and appraisal is to provide employees with feedback to remedy performance problems and identify areas for improvement so that performance can be maximized (e.g., DeNisi & Gonzalez, 2000), results of the current study indicate that this should be done in an environment wherein employees feel supported, and where their voice in the process matters. This is consistent with procedural justice research that has documented that the fairness-enhancing effect of voice is possible when individuals feel that their perspective was taken into consideration and that the authority figure is fair and unbiased (Tyler, 1987).

Rater training could focus on how to deliver feedback in a supportive, participatory way as opposed to or in addition to other more traditional types of training (e.g., rater error training). Appraisal reactions are important not only as related to motivation to improve future performance, but also in terms of implications for fairness (i.e., discrimination) perceptions and, hence, grievances and even discrimination claims (e.g., Werner & Bolino, 1997). As such, the results of this study imply that allowing employees to participate in the appraisal is a key way to maximize positive outcomes from the appraisal process.

So much of the performance appraisal research has focused on interpersonal variables (e.g., interpersonal affect; Lefkowitz, 2000) as a source of bias in the performance appraisal process. The results of this study, in total, suggest that relationship quality is important when it comes to appraisal reactions—even taking into consideration the relationships between relationship quality and instrumental session characteristics (appraisal participation and performance ratings). This suggests that organizational interventions should focus on how to improve supervisor-subordinate relationships and how to increase the extent to which supervisors are socially supportive, which is consistent with a long, but growing, literature on supervisor support (e.g., Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). The bottom line here is that ratees react more positively to their appraisals, regardless of how favorable they were in an instrumental sense, when they have a good working relationship with their supervisor—which is a relatively novel contribution to the performance appraisal literature.

# Study Limitations and Additional Directions for Future Performance Appraisal Research

As is the nature of much of the empirical research in the organizational sciences, and with meta-analyses of related literatures (e.g.,

The bottom line here is that ratees react more positively to their appraisals, regardless of how favorable they were in an instrumental sense, when they have a good working relationship with their supervisor—which is a relatively novel contribution to the performance appraisal literature.

Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt, Wesson, Porter, Conlon, & Ng, 2001), the effect sizes included in the database for this meta-analysis were almost exclusively based on cross-sectional, percept-percept data. This is a concern because of the potential for effect sizes to be inflated, and because this limits the extent to which research sheds light on the process by which employee reactions occur. That said, meta-analysis allows for more stable estimates of bivariate relationships. Moreover, meta-analytic path analysis is well suited for clarifying empirical models and informing theory (e.g., Fassina et al., 2008). Some researchers (e.g., Pettijohn et al., 2001) have begun to test aspects of the performance appraisal process over time, and future researchers should employ more longitudinal research designs. This is perhaps especially relevant to research related to relationship quality, which is developed over time through different

stages of relationship development (Liden et al., 1997).

This study was also limited by the types of variables included in existing research studies. Future performance appraisal research should attempt to more carefully model important aspects of the rater-ratee relationship, as well as characteristics of the parties involved. For instance, research has found that organizational tenure may mitigate the voice effect (Avery, McKay, Wilson, Volpone, & Killham, 2001). Tenure was not investigated often enough in the studies in the database to be investigated as a meaningful boundary condition of the relationships of interest. The purpose of this study was to test competing models of employee reactions to performance appraisals, so a composite reactions variable was used similar to prior research (Cawley et al., 1998). Research has shown, however, that different processes lead to different types of reactions, such as fairness perceptions and system satisfaction (van den Bos et al., 1998). Performance appraisal research should continue to investigate differential predictors of different types of appraisal reactions. It is also important to note that this study was limited to supervisor-driven, administrative performance reviews, and the results of this meta-analysis do not necessarily generalize to employee reactions to 360-degree reviews (e.g., Atwater & Brett, 2005).

### Conclusion

This study suggests that organizations should be concerned primarily with employee relationships with their managers when it comes to reactions to administrative performance reviews. Performance appraisal interventions and training opportunities should not only focus on improving managers' rating accuracy and communication of feedback, but on productive communications pre- and postreview between managers and employees. Performance appraisal scholars should continue to consider the importance of perceptions of appraisal participation and influence in the appraisal session. Results of this study indicate that social interaction is at least as important as performance ratings to favorable reactions (if not more important). Nevertheless, performance appraisal participation and rating favorability are important predictors of appraisal reactions.

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### **Notes**

- While agreement was also acceptable for employee reaction variables (i.e., 75 percent to 100 percent),
- meta-analytic relationships across different types of reaction criteria are not reported since (1) this would be beyond the scope of the current study and (2) differential relationships were not predicted.
- For participation, some effect sizes were already coded by Cawley and colleagues (1998). Only effect sizes that were not already coded by these authors were coded in this study.
- All of the correlations needed for path analyses are represented in Table I.

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