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# Performance Appraisal in High-Tech Organisational Contexts: An Organisational Justice Perspective

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy (PhD)

Adam Smith Business School, College of Social Sciences

University of Glasgow

**"I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.**

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**Date: 2<sup>nd</sup> of June 2024 (revised thesis dated: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2025)**

## **Abstract**

**Research aim and objectives:** The aim of this research was to explore perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal in high-tech contexts using organisational justice theory and uncertainty management theory. The research objectives were to explore: (1) the extent of the three dimensions of organisational justice during performance appraisal, (2) the application of the human resource management triad (also known as the HRM triad) during performance appraisal from the perspective of HR, (3) the application of the HRM triad during performance appraisal from the perspective of line management and ratees, (4) the relationship between line management and HR, and (5) how the relationship between line management and HR affects ratees' perceptions of organisational justice

The research problem addressed here is lack of clarity and a sense of uncertainty that revolved around performance appraisal in high-tech contexts. The research also considered the role of various stakeholders in the performance appraisal process, notably employees, line managers, and HR professionals.

**Conceptual framework:** Several theories were considered to help explain employees' perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal. These included Adams equity theory and attribution theory. The former does not consider processes involved with determining perceptions of fairness, which meant that the theory was not considered appropriate. Likewise, attribution theory seems less concerned with perceptions of fairness, and more focused on how people try to understand the underlying mechanisms that have caused particular events to occur.

Organisational justice has a firm basis in the literature to help explain perceptions of fairness using three dimensions: procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice. Hence, it was chosen as a theoretical lens.

In addition, the literature explained that high-tech contexts are fast-changing and uncertain environments. Also, it was discovered from the literature that performance appraisal was also characterised by uncertainty. Uncertainty management theory was adopted as another theoretical lens to explain how employees in high-tech contexts deal with uncertainty during performance appraisal, and how uncertainty affects perceptions of fairness. Likewise, uncertainty management theory helped to shed light on the characteristics and quality of performance appraisal control systems.

**Methodology and methods:** The research deployed an interpretivist philosophy and an exploratory, qualitative research design. It relied on qualitative data from 26 interviewees.

**Findings:** The key findings from the research revealed that HR was often detached from the performance appraisal process. Line managers, or equivalents, were seen to be in control. Line managers, or equivalents, and employees were locked into dyads whereby the quality of their relationship would seem to shape the way performance appraisals were undertaken, as well as their outcomes.

Line managers focused principally, and in some cases exclusively, on evaluating technical aspects of employees' job roles during performance appraisal. This resulted in those stakeholders who were perceived as lacking technical expertise, such as HR professionals, not taking a pro-active role.

Smaller firms lacked an HR function altogether, with decisions being taken by owner-managers who appeared to not follow any formal performance appraisal processes. In general, there seemed to be a lack of effective control systems during performance appraisal.

The findings suggested a paradox at play: some high-tech professionals desired that HR oversee the performance appraisal process more rigorously to mitigate the emergence of toxic dyads, while at the same time they were wary of HR's lack of technical understanding of high-tech job roles.

**Implications and significance:** The findings suggested that a combination of organisational justice theory, uncertainty management theory and management control systems research offer an opportunity to better understand workers' perceptions of fairness in contexts that are fluid, fast moving, and utilise advanced, complex technology.

This combination illustrated that many decisions are contingent on the alignment, or misalignment, of contextual practices and processes. This has facilitated the identification of two justice rules that characterise the dynamics of performance appraisal in high-tech contexts: (1) Technical aptitude, and (2), the quality of dyadic relationships.

The findings suggested that senior leaders in high-tech contexts need to pay more attention to the actions of their line managers and do more to ensure that clearer processes in connection with the delivery of performance appraisal, are communicated and understood by everyone. There is future opportunity to use leader-member exchange theory to better understand the dyadic dynamics between line managers and their ratees.

From a policy perspective, a lack of HR representation in SMEs presents an issue for government to consider. Without adequate HR provision, SMEs may not be undertaking performance appraisal ethically. Likewise, the emergence of potentially toxic dyads in a burgeoning industry such as tech presents challenges to fulfilling the UN's sustainable development goals such as SDG 8, which seeks to deliver Decent Work and Economic Growth. This raises pertinent questions as to how policy needs to be shaped, if required, to tackle this issue.

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## CHAPTER 1- Introduction

The purpose of the research is to explore the dynamics of performance appraisal of high-tech organisational contexts with a particular focus on perceptions of fairness and the role of HR and other stakeholders.

The high-tech context has been chosen as a result of the researcher's curiosity about it. There is a lot of research which explains that high-tech work contexts are complex and their operations and dynamics are difficult to understand (Bers et al, 2014; Chen and Kannan-Narasimhan 2015; Conforto and Amaral 2016; Cooper and Sommer, 2016; Gronlund et al, 2010; Gillier et al, 2011; He and Wong 2004; Jarvenpaa and Wernick 2011; Limaj and Bernroider 2017; O'Reilly and Tushman 2013; Tesch et al 2017; Tate et al 2018; Tsai, 2016; Urbinati, 2018; Wang et al 2014). This complexity, and high-tech's growing prevalence, means that it warrants close attention from researchers.

The researcher used to work in high-tech contexts and has been intrigued with the manner in which high-tech professionals' performance is measured and evaluated, and by whom, and what impact this has on perceptions of fairness. The researcher has also been keen to learn more about HR's involvement in evaluating performance in high-tech contexts. There is a lack of existing research that explains the dynamics of fairness during performance appraisal, in general, with only a small number of articles that focus on tech contexts, such as Keegan et al (2019). The complexity of high-tech environments has created a management problem in the sense that there is a research gap in terms of understanding how performance appraisal is undertaken in these contexts, how perceptions of fairness are upheld, and what role HR plays. Most articles have tended to take a quantitative approach (Bogers et al, 2018; Bogers et al, 2016; Rindfleisch et al, 2017; Urbinati et al, 2018). This has created a methodological gap in the sense that there is an absence of qualitative research that explores the contextual dynamics that affect perceptions of fairness of performance appraisal in high-tech contexts.

Organisational justice theory is seen as key to understanding perceptions of fairness in the academic literature (Colquitt et al., 2001, 2005, 2012). Other theories, such as Adams Equity Theory (Adams, 1964), were considered. This theory is old and does not focus on procedures

associated with concepts such as performance appraisal (Al-Zawahreh and Al-Madi, 2012). A lack of focus on procedures during performance appraisal means that it is difficult to explain the dynamics that contribute to employees' perceptions of fairness.

Another theory that was considered to explore perceptions of fairness was attribution theory. This theory is more contemporary and is concerned with attempts that people make to draw causal inferences about actions that they have observed and experienced (Hewett, 2018; Vaidyanathan and Aggarwal, 2003). The theory focuses on three elements: Locus of causality, stability, and controllability (ibid). Locus of control refers to what extent someone attributes an event to their own effort and abilities, or whether the event can be attributed to external, situational factors (ibid). Stability refers to whether someone perceives that an event has been caused by something that is likely to last for a long time, or whether it is short-lived and likely to change quickly. Controllability relates to what extent someone believes they have a level of control over what has caused an event. After much consideration, the theory seems less concerned with perceptions of fairness, and more focused on how people try to understand the underlying mechanisms that have caused particular events to occur.

Organisational justice theory, on the other hand, focuses principally on perceptions of fairness, which is what this thesis is interested in. It uses three key dimensions to consider perceptions of fairness in more depth and detail: Procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice. Procedural justice relates to employees' perceptions of the openness, transparency, and relatedness of organisational rules, regulations, and procedures (Celani et al, 2008; Gilliland, 1993; Lievens et al, 2003; Thibault and Walker, 1975).

Distributive justice can be defined as the perceived equitable allocations of rewards and resources based on perceived legitimate performance-appraisal outcomes (Cheng, 2014; Colquitt et al, 2001; Gilliland and Chen, 2001; Korsgaard and Roberson 1995). It also relates to what extent there is equal opportunity for all participants to receive rewards and/or resources (Anderson et al, 2001; Gilliland and Hale, 2005). Finally, it also considers the level of correspondence between rewards and satisfaction (Celani et al, 2008).

Interactional justice relates to employees' perception of management's interpersonal conduct and behaviour (Bies & Moag, 1986; Celani et al, 2008). It also considers how people evaluate the quality of information based on how timely, relevant, and honest it is (Bauer et al, 2001; Gilliland, 1993, 2001; Truxillo et al, 2002).

Current research argues that members of organisations believe that upholding fairness is very important (Colquitt et al., 2001, 2005, 2012). The consequences of not upholding fairness leads to resentment, anger, and an intention to leave the organisation (ibid.) which can have a detrimental effect on organisational productivity. During the process of performance appraisal, which involves evaluating whether an employee of an organisation has met performance standards and expectations (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995; Boswell and Boudreau, 2002; Rubin and Edwards, 2020; CIPD, 2023), it is important that these standards feel attainable and that the process of reaching them appears fair. To this end, organisations need to consider implementing suitable control systems (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012; Graebner and Moers, 2013).

The thesis is also concerned with HR's role in control systems during performance appraisal as part of the human resource management triad (also known as the HRM triad), which considers the interactions between the HR function, line managers or equivalents, and the employees who are having their performance rated in high-tech contexts (Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004; Marchington, 2015). In this thesis, high-tech contexts are defined as fast-paced, highly technical, and complex workspaces, that utilise state-of-the-art technologies to fulfil job tasks. Corresponding job roles require high levels of knowledge and expertise in a particular area often coupled with a minimum of an undergraduate university degree in the relevant discipline (Urbaniti, 2018; Viale and Pozzali, 2010). In such contexts, there is arguably a knowledge asymmetry between high tech professionals' job content and the HR professionals onto whom their performance appraisal might depend on. In other words, HR may struggle to comprehend the technical complexities of what tech employees do.

To date, there is an absence of research that attempts to explain how perceptions of fairness are upheld during performance appraisal in high-tech contexts. There is also a lack of research that explains what control systems are in place that accommodates the potential uncertainty that fluid, fast changing, and complex high-tech contexts may present. In view of this, the processes and characteristics of performance appraisals and the nature of associated employee relationships in these complex contexts appear to be uncertain (Urbaniti, 2018; Viale and Pozzali, 2010). To address this gap, this thesis will look at the intersection of organisational justice theory and uncertainty management theory.

Uncertainty management theory was developed by Dale Brashers in 2007 and can be defined as an attempt to explain how people infer meaning and understanding in unpredictable and uncertain situations (Brashers, 2007). Lind and Van den Bos (2002) suggest that uncertainty management theory provides illuminating insights into the interplay of uncertainty and fairness reactions. The authors propose that uncertainty is a “powerful moderator...such that fairness effects are magnified in proportion to the level of uncertainty being experienced.” In other words, the higher the uncertainty perceived by employees, the possibility that they become more sensitised to issues of fairness. This is a useful theoretical foundation to consider the effect of uncertainty which seems to be an issue in tech contexts.

Uncertainty management theory helps to illustrate that perceptions of organisational justice during performance appraisal in high-tech contexts are contingent for the following four principles: first, uncertainty management theory relates to employees’ tolerance for ambiguity in the sense to what extent they will use any available information and evidence as a means to make a judgement and to reduce anxiety and uncertainty, even when that information is not directly relevant (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Colquitt et al, 2012; Desai et al, 2011). Second, uncertainty management theory considers that organisational justice perceptions are the outcomes of interactions between “organisational procedures, the personality of the person experiencing the procedures, and the context in which the procedures are used” (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002 and Thau et al 2009, cited in Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012, p.19). Third, uncertainty management theory considers task uncertainty which “reflects the complexity of the tasks performed by [the ratee]” (ibid, p. 18) and “the variability of [the ratees] job requirements” (ibid, p.20), which means that it may be difficult to capture efforts,

or outcomes, in a performance appraisal. This could affect how ratees' perceive levels of organisational justice. Fourth, uncertainty management theory suggests that different contexts introduce different demands, and therefore require, different types of management control systems (Grabner and Moers, 2013; Malmi and Brown, 2008). For this research, it will be interesting to gauge which stakeholders in the HR triad – line managers, employees, and HR – form part of the control system.

The key benefits academic researchers can derive from this study include a deeper understanding of the potential explanatory power of organisational justice theory and of uncertainty management theory in performance appraisal. Performance appraisal has a mixed reputation in its ability to offer accurate insights into employees' contributions. For example, Murphy (2020), and Rubin and Edwards (2020), argue that performance appraisal offers only a limited insight into an employee's overall performance at any given point in time. It also is prone to bias, and relies on data, the provenance of which can be obscure. Conversely, there are voices who argue that performance appraisal offers a positive opportunity for organisations to evaluate and discuss employees' performance and future learning and development, and career opportunities (Tyksbo, 2020). This research will throw more light on the effectiveness of using performance appraisals particularly in high-tech contexts that are becoming increasingly commonplace in the modern economy. It will also consider HR's role with a particular focus on whether the HRM triad – line managers, employees, and HR – is applicable.

Taking all of the aforementioned into consideration, the aim of this research is to explore perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal in high-tech contexts using organisational justice theory and uncertainty management theory.

Objectives:

- To explore the extent of the three dimensions of organisational justice during performance appraisal
- To explore the application of the HRM triad during performance appraisal from the perspective of HR

- To explore the application of the HRM triad during performance appraisal from the perspective of line management and ratees
- To explore the relationship between line management and HR
- To explore how the relationship between line management and HR affects ratees' perceptions of organisational justice

What has been discovered is that organisational justice plays a key role in contemporary organisations in terms of trying to understand employees' perceptions of fairness and equity in various contexts. The review from extant literature suggests that non-high-tech contexts and tech contexts share some similarities and differences in terms of which dimensions of organisational justice are important during performance appraisal (Bonet, et al, 2013; Byrne et al, 2020; Folgor and Konovsky, 1989; Keegan et al, 2019; Lau et al, 2008; Tyksbo, 2020). The literature also suggests that line managers often play a key role in performance appraisal particularly in tech contexts but not always – for example, Keegan et al's 2019 study of project based organisations and Karkoulian's 2016 study of the application of 360-degree feedback.

The literature indicates that the relationship between the employee and the line manager plays an important role in many of the studies (Byrne et al, 2012; Duarte et al, 2017; Lau et al, 2008; Sholohin and Pike, 2009; Varma et al, 2021). There is also research which suggests that these relationships – or dyads – can be potentially problematic, perhaps due to poor relationships, or a lack of trust, which can create a degree of uncertainty during performance appraisal (Duarte et al, 2017; Varma et al, 2021).

Wiemann et al's research from 2019, looks to explain the effect of the design of "output-oriented" management control systems during performance appraisal on levels of employees' trust. This is arguably the closest research to that being undertaken in this thesis. However, Wiemann et al do not deploy organisational justice theory to provide explanations. Plus, they focus strongly on trust as a concept which is not particularly relevant to this thesis. Furthermore, the context is the German public sector which arguably has different dynamics to those in tech. Overall, following a thorough search and consideration, the literature does not appear to provide clear insight into how different types of control systems affect the three

justice dimensions of procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice in high-tech contexts.

Likewise, it is not clear from the literature how control systems can be effectively created to ensure that performance appraisal can be undertaken effectively. It is also not obvious to what extent control systems are aligned or misaligned with the requirements of performance appraisal. The closest research that could be discovered that relates to this thesis is that of Adler (2011) who concludes that performance appraisal should align with the strategy of the organisation. However, it is not clear whether this alignment should form part of a control system. Likewise, he doesn't discuss the impact of this alignment on employees' perceptions of justice and fairness. Overall, there is no clear indication from the literature what impact control systems, or a lack thereof, have on employees' perceptions of the three justice dimensions during performance appraisal. Furthermore, it is not evident what role HR has in designing and implementing control systems put in place during performance appraisal.

The literature explains in some circumstances that employees have varying job tasks and responsibilities as part of their role that may be difficult to identify and evaluate during performance appraisal (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012). To some extent, Hartmann and Slapnicar have tried to explain through the concept of task uncertainty, how this can affect perceptions of organisational justice. The literature also explains that relationships between direct reports and the person evaluating their performance – often a line manager – are important in affecting direct reports' perceptions of fairness (Byrne et al, 2012; Duarte et al, 2017; Varma et al, 2021). However, there is a lack of explanation in the literature that accommodates and explains *how* these relationships, and the uncertainty that they can create, affect direct reports' perceptions of the application of organisational justice.

Also, there is a lack of explanation of how the quality of these relationships affect the evaluator's ability to accommodate task uncertainty during the performance appraisal. In other words, it is not evident how the quality of a relationship between an evaluator and the ratee, affects the evaluator's ability to identify and appraise key aspects of a tech employees' job role.

In general, contextual dynamics are not always explained in sufficient detail in the sense that one doesn't really gain a clear insight into the interactions between people, context, and processes. Also, there is very little literature that considers any of these issues in a tech context, which are becoming more pervasive in the global economy. This means that it is not known what high-tech employees/ratees' tolerance for ambiguity levels is, or what their levels of task uncertainty are that may affect perceptions of organisational justice. Likewise, this raises the importance of undertaking research to tackle this deficiency.

In effect, the literature does not provide insight into how organisational justice theory, uncertainty management theory, and management control systems combined, can shed light on the dynamics of performance appraisal, particularly in high-tech contexts, and what role the HRM triad plays. This thesis provides an opportunity to build on the work of Hartmann and Slapnicar, in particular, by considering the impact of contingencies, specifically task uncertainty during performance appraisal. The thesis will also build upon Rosen's work which focuses on the effect of relationships between ratees and their line managers on perceptions of uncertainty. The thesis will also draw upon Merchant's typology of actions, results, and personnel so that the dynamics of performance appraisal can be better understood. To achieve the proposed contribution, the thesis will address the following questions:

1. How does performance appraisal affect organisational justice in high tech organisational contexts?
2. What is the role of HR in the performance appraisal process in high tech organisational contexts?
3. What is the role of line management in the performance appraisal process in high tech organisational contexts?
4. How do HR and line management interact in performance appraisal in high-tech organisational contexts?
5. How does the interaction between HR and line management affect perceptions of organisational justice in performance appraisal in innovative high-tech contexts?



The answers to these questions will be sought from multiple interviews with professionals who work in high-tech contexts. These professionals will include employees who work directly in the operations of these contexts, including line managers and HR representatives. The answers will provide added value by delivering further insight into the dynamics, characteristics and contingencies of the processes, control systems, and relationships that revolve around performance appraisals, and how they impact perceptions of fairness.

The thesis will be structured by including an introduction chapter which has already set out the purpose of the thesis. Followed by a literature review chapter which will synthesise and evaluate relevant research. A methodology chapter will explain the philosophy and practical methods used to identify participants and collect and analyse qualitative data. The findings chapter will present the results of the data analysis. The discussion chapter will compare and contrast the findings with those from previous literature and position the findings in the current body of research. Finally, the conclusion chapter will reiterate the key findings, explain the implications of the research, acknowledge limitations, and recommend future avenues of research.

## CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review

Section 1: Performance appraisal and its outcomes

Section 2: Organisational justice in performance appraisal contexts

Section 3: Performance appraisal and organisational justice in uncertain contexts

### Section 1 – Performance Appraisal and its Outcomes

The literature review takes a narrative, critical approach. The reason for this is because it provides a more flexible and broad perspective in topic areas that lack directly relevant published research. This affords opportunity to flesh out various arguments, introduce themes of interest and consider contextual dynamics. The latter point in particular was important to this thesis as a key aim is to explore the characteristics and dynamics of high-tech contexts. This approach was chosen instead of a systematic literature review that research suggests tends to overlook contexts (Mallett et al, 2012).

#### 2.1.1 Performance Appraisal Definitions

Performance relates to how effectively an employee is able to meet key performance objectives and the strategic requirements of the business. It also considers what behaviours are employed in their day-to-day job role to meet those objectives (Bayo-Moriones et al, 2020; Rubin and Edwards, 2020). Performance appraisal involves applying a series of tools that allow organisations to evaluate how well their employees are contributing in terms of the quality of their work (ibid). Performance appraisal also involves holding employees to account and pinpointing where development and training are required (ibid). Furthermore, performance appraisal offers an opportunity to discuss how employees' performance can be better aligned with organisational objectives (ibid). In addition, performance appraisal allows for performance data to be collected and evaluated so that decisions can be taken about the allocation of rewards, and to decide on suitability for promotion (ibid). Performance appraisals are often conducted by line managers and supervisors (Murphy and Cleveland, 1995) but can occasionally be supported by more skilled members of staff if the line manager or supervisor lack the knowledge and expertise to evaluate employees (Boswell and Boudreau, 2002).

Performance appraisal often involves a combination of quantitative metrics and qualitative evaluation (CIPD, 2023). Quantitative metrics involve collecting measurable data to determine whether key performance indicators have been met (ibid). Qualitative evaluation often involves collecting 360-degree feedback from peers and clients (ibid). Qualitative evaluation can also include regular discussions between employees and their line manager, mentor and coach, to identify strengths and areas for improvement in their performance (ibid). It should be noted that the HRM literature indicates that the dynamics and characteristics of performance appraisal are context specific. This means that it is difficult to provide a standardised best-practice template for how performance appraisal should be undertaken. Nevertheless, the management control literature offers a three-stage management control approach which focuses on actions, results, and personnel, that may provide more of a standardised and structured approach to performance appraisal (Merchant 1982).

For actions, management should attempt to encourage employees to perform in a desirable manner and refrain from activities that are undesirable. For results, employees need to be held responsible for the outcomes of their work. For personnel, Merchant illustrated that organisations need to rely on their staff to do the right thing and perform in such a way that maximises performance. This latter control can be achieved by training, improving employees' competencies, introducing more transparent and targeted hiring practices, creating more attractive job roles and assignments, having better communication, and instituting tighter coordination (ibid.)

HR's role is often to design the procedures of the performance appraisal that line managers implement (Farndale and Kelliher, 2013) and collate and analyse performance analytics (Sharma and Sharma, 2017). Performance appraisals have a long history (DeNisi and Murphy, 2017) and there is some disagreement amongst researchers as to how to gauge their effectiveness (Levy and Williams, 2004). Performance appraisals can often have conflicting and overlapping objectives which can distort results and fuel accusations of bias and discrimination (Rubin and Edwards, 2020).

There is an argument in the literature that there needs to be a consideration of contextual circumstances during performance appraisal so that horizontal fit, which involves the alignment of all relevant processes and procedures associated with performance appraisal, can be achieved (Paauwe and Farndale, 2012; Kepes and Delery, 2007). In other words, HR processes need to complement each other, based on the specific requirements of an organisation, to create a cohesive performance appraisal function. Likewise, context plays a key role as illustrated in Tyksbo's case-study research of 2020, which involves a group of engineers operating in a medical supply company. He concludes that, for performance appraisal to work, local adaptations have to be made that diverge from organisational HR policy, which recognise the particular work processes and job roles and requirements in different work locations of the same organisation. He also points out that the dynamics of performance appraisal are influenced by the quality of relationships between line managers and their direct reports.

Some authors, such as Murphy (2020), argue that the performance appraisal offers little value and should not be used. This is because of four key reasons: the apparent failure in many contexts to design appropriate methods to judge direct reports' performance; overlapping and conflicting performance objectives; poor quality of feedback; and the lack of usefulness of appraisals to organisations in terms of providing actionable insights and improving organisational performance (ibid). Tyksbo points out that the effectiveness of performance appraisals can be affected by line managers' lack of time to undertake it properly, coupled with high stress levels and a fear of losing high performers. The difficulties associated with performance appraisals has resulted in some organisations substituting it for ongoing dialogues that involves having frequent conversations between line managers and their direct reports to evaluate progress and identify areas of concern.

The purpose of an ongoing dialogue is to nurture trust and rapport to create psychological safety so that each party has confidence to be honest and transparent with each other about performance issues. This corresponds more with a pro-active coaching or mentoring type of relationship rather than a formalised high-stakes ad-hoc once-a-year evaluation (Trost, 2017). We have witnessed some tech and knowledge-based firms terminate their performance

appraisals for this type of pro-active coaching approach such as Microsoft, Deloitte, GE, Accenture, and Adobe (Engagedly, 2022; Factorial HR, 2022).

Let's turn attention now to the development of performance appraisal in more depth and detail.

### 2.1.2 The Impact of Performance Appraisal

The result of a performance appraisal can have a substantive impact on a professional's career and status. This means that the reaction of a professional (also known as a ratee) to the performance appraisal can determine whether the appraisal has been perceived as fair. Using Greenberg's taxonomy of ratee reaction from 1987, Iqbal et al (2019) identify two aspects as having an impact on the perceived fairness of appraisals. The first is a person-referenced reaction that involves a ratee expressing feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction as a result of the extent the appraisal focuses on their personal development. The second is an organisation-referenced reaction whereby a ratee demonstrates citizenship behaviours if they perceive that the rules that revolve around the appraisal are clear, are applied accurately, and focus on career development and advancement.

Alternatively, a ratee may demonstrate resentful behaviours if they perceive appraisal rules as unclear and/or have been applied erroneously, and/or lack a connection with career development. From this, the authors' findings suggest that for performance appraisals to be perceived as fairer, organisations should focus closely on ratees' personal development to incite a more positive person-referenced reaction and to be goal oriented and strategic so to create a more positive organisation-referenced reaction. The authors don't establish a link or correlation between the type of ratee reaction and the performance of an organisation. In other words, they don't argue that positive person-referenced and organisation-referenced reactions are likely to lead to improved organisational performance and vice-versa. Furthermore, the research was undertaken in the telecommunications sector, which means that it is not evident that those sampled operate in high-tech contexts.

The work of Dal Corso et al (2019) echoes Iqbal et al in the sense that ratees' perceptions of performance appraisal can have a significant impact on whether it is deemed fair and, by extension, effective in improving job satisfaction, performance, and well-being. The authors identify personal development and well-being as key resources that ratees want to protect and maximise in the workplace to boost life satisfaction. Therefore, the argument the authors propose is that the performance appraisal process should aim to bolster personal development and well-being otherwise ratees are likely to experience dissatisfaction, which may affect job performance (Gruman and Sacks, 2011; Malik and Aslam, 2013). Whether these resources are important for high-tech professionals is unclear as this article's sample consists of teachers in Italy. One can assume, however, that high-tech professionals will be keen to uphold certain resources to maintain or bolster positive work experience. Also, it is not evident from the article who is best placed to undertake appraisals and what HR's role is or should be, which raises uncertainty about the contribution of each member of the HRM triad to the dynamics of performance appraisal.

Previous research has focused on the expectations that direct reports and line managers have of each other as an important aspect of performance appraisal (Harrington and Lee, 2015; Eyoun et al, 2020). If these expectations are not met, this can lead to a breakdown in trust and result in reduced levels of motivation, engagement, and performance (ibid). According to Stiles et al in a landmark qualitative study from 1997, professionals and their employer have expectations of how the appraisal process will be undertaken in terms of fairness and quality of outcomes. Using three case-study organisations, they discover four detrimental aspects of appraisals that can impact its effectiveness.

The first is the bureaucratic, time-consuming element of the process that took managers away from other important responsibilities which eroded their motivation and energy to carry out the appraisal to the high standards that their direct reports expected. The second is that in some circumstances, if the organisation is not in a healthy financial position and has to downsize, the outcomes from appraisals were not seen as positive by the ratees. This was due to the ratees' perceiving that the process did not focus on their personal development as the organisation was not prioritising this, which was not what professionals who had performed well expected. The third is that the subjective nature of the appraisal resulted in different line

managers evaluating performance differently which caused resentment from their direct reports. Finally, centrality bias caused some line managers to rate their direct reports similarly regardless of how well they had performed as they “didn’t want to single out any employees” and so rated all of them highly or negatively. None of the three organisations can be considered high-tech which means it is unclear whether these types of professionals would experience the same problems. Interestingly, the authors don’t indicate HR’s precise role in the appraisal process which raised questions about the applicability of the HRM triad in these case studies.

The issue of emphasising employee development during performance appraisal recurs in much of the literature particularly in Kooij et al’s work from 2013. The authors focus on identifying what kind of personal development older workers would prefer to discuss during their appraisal and what bundles of HR practice should be agreed upon to meet their development needs. The authors discover that older employees are motivated less by promotion opportunities and more by helping other employees through mentoring and coaching. The suggestion is that older employees’ performance could be appraised in association with actions that correspond with these values, in this case by helping others rather than on activities linked with promotion. The appraisal process could also be used to further develop older employees’ coaching, mentoring, and training skills. By acknowledging an employee’s values and developing associated skills, the performance appraisal may meet employees’ expectations which could boost its effectiveness, although the article did not mention this. The participants work in the public sector, which means it is not clear whether these findings suggest that tech workers also want appraisal outcomes to accord with their values.

The work of Krats and Brown from 2013 echoes the importance of employers focusing on personal development during the performance appraisal process. In other words, line managers should recognise and understand what kind of work stimulates their direct reports’ interests and motivation. Line managers can then use the performance appraisal process to create a set of performance objectives that leverage those interests to maintain or bolster job satisfaction. Using a sample of 440 workers from a Canadian mining organisation in a quantitative study, the authors discover that in order for the appraisal to be an effective

mechanism, it needs to be primarily perceived as fair. It also should allow employees an opportunity to co-create their career goals, and to be designed in such a way that it focuses on developing employees' skills and capabilities.

The authors also indicate that job satisfaction is bolstered if employees believe that the performance appraisal process focuses on their personal development. It is not clear whether this would be the case in a high-tech context. However, there is research which suggests that employees from a broad range of contexts are more likely to appreciate appraisals that focus on development rather than on just evaluating performance, which, by extension, may apply to high-tech contexts as well (Dipboye and de Pontbriand, 1981; Gosselin et al., 1997; Jirjahn and Poutsma, 2013).

Keegan et al (2019) in their research into the dynamics of performance appraisal in project based organisations illustrate how relationships operate in an environment in which there is a lack of a stable relationship based on the traditional HRM triad of employee, line manager, and HR specialist. The authors describe the context of project based organisations as one in which employees are distant from their line manager, but proximal to various project managers and clients that change regularly as employees move from one project to the next. This means that line managers may not be sufficiently informed about their direct report's performance to undertake a thorough appraisal. This supports Boswell and Boudreau's view from 2002 that on occasion line managers may lack sufficient knowledge and expertise to undertake the performance appraisal. Nevertheless, Keegan et al don't explain clearly what role project managers and other stakeholders, such as clients, take in the appraisal process.

The authors also indicate that employees in the project based organisations sampled have to organise their performance appraisals themselves. This involves seeking feedback from project managers, clients, and peers, which they then make available to their employer, otherwise an appraisal process will not take place. This suggests a more autonomous, polyadic model that challenges notions of the traditional HRM triad (Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004; Marchington, 2015). It also suggests that the traditional direct report-line manager dyad is less important in these contexts.



The sample of participants come from Dutch high-tech backgrounds which is potentially indicative for this research in the sense that it provides clues as to how performance appraisals are undertaken in other tech contexts. However, the article does not provide insight into organisational justice dynamics. Nor does the article consider the technical nature of the jobs themselves and how this might affect how performance is appraised. However, it does highlight arguably the uncertain nature of the performance appraisal process in project based organisations which seem to challenge the traditional HRM triad paradigm. Likewise, the article reveals the potential pressures this form of performance appraisal places on these types of professionals in terms of them having to do much of the heavy lifting of the performance appraisal process themselves.

Interestingly, the work of Bonet et al (2019) suggests that formalised performance appraisals, that deploy standardised processes and procedures set out by HR, which are then deployed by line managers who control the entire appraisal process, result in higher levels of organisational performance. The authors collected data from more than 1,500 organisations in Denmark to discover that employees who undergo formalised appraisals are more likely to be better educated and work for organisations that operate in the knowledge sector. This contrasts with Keegan et al's findings discussed earlier which indicate that IT workers, also knowledge based and educated, working in project based organisations did not appear to have these types of formalised appraisals. Keegan et al did not demonstrate how the less formal, autonomous approach impacts how performance is appraised. However, they did offer the caveat that employees might produce performance data that is biased in their favour and/or misinterpret data and feedback in such a way to provide a more positive overview of their performance.

Bonet et al's findings suggests that a better, more organised and professional approach to performance appraisal involves having a line manager controlling the process. This is on the basis that they are guided by a formal set of rules and procedures to mitigate bias. The authors argue that this affords line managers opportunity to discuss and evaluate direct reports' development and career growth according to a systematic framework that may boost perceptions of justice. However, Bonet et al's research has been undertaken across a broad

spectrum of industry, which means that their findings may not be relevant to high-tech contexts. Also, Bonet et al did not consider fairness and organisational justice as key aspects of their research nor the quality of relationship between the rater and the ratee. This is in contrast to the work of Harrington and Lee (2015), who demonstrate in a quantitative survey of US federal employees, that the perceived quality of relationships between rater and ratee will have a more significant impact on attitudes about fairness and effectiveness of performance appraisal rather than its level of formalisation.

Context appears to be important in the research discussed so far. This is an issue further explored by Bayo-Moriones et al in their 2020 study of the Spanish manufacturing sector. They identify elements such as the level of teamwork, job autonomy, and job rotation as aspects of a job that create complexity when trying to appraise an individual employee's performance. The authors also draw upon the work of Paauwe (2004) to consider how these elements impact employees' perception of the performance appraisal process. According to the authors, employees who have higher levels of job autonomy are more likely to view positively the use of subjective criteria based on the characteristics of their particular job role rather than objective, standardised criteria to appraise their performance.

Job autonomy is likely to create varying levels of job role characteristics. If objective measurement and evaluative criteria were applied, they may not correspond with the activities of particular employees. This may result in inaccurate and erroneous appraisal outcomes which could cause inconsistencies and resentment. Likewise, Bayo-Moriones et al and Paauwe (2004) have identified that teams of highly autonomous workers are likely to perceive the application of subjective criteria negatively. Employees with high autonomy expect to have their own individual contributions evaluated during performance appraisal. However, perceptions of unfairness may emerge if some employees in the team receive more positive appraisals than others. This is despite team members believing that each have made equally valuable, if different, contributions.

The authors also indicate that these dynamics question the HRM triad paradigm. This can occur when employees with a high level of autonomy rely on someone working closely with

them to evaluate their performance. This person is often their line manager. This results in a close dyad emerging between the employee and their line manager, who we assume is the only other member of the team who understands the level of autonomy granted to their direct report, and how this autonomy may impact performance. This may exclude HR from the performance appraisal process. This raises questions whether the application of the HRM triad is helpful to explain the dynamics of performance appraisal. This creates a sense of uncertainty as to how appraisals are undertaken and how they impact each party involved, particularly those who are having their performance appraised. These findings could be indicative for this research into high-tech contexts which may incorporate high levels of job autonomy.

To summarise, what emerges from reviewing these articles is evidence that appraisals have helped employees to improve their performance. However, there is also evidence to suggest that performance appraisals lack objectivity and can be compromised by bias and a lack of transparency (ibid). There is also a complexity in terms of how employees perceive the fairness of performance appraisals which is influenced by various factors such as the quality of employee relationships and employees' perceptions of the organization.

There is a lack of evidence of a clear link between improvements in performance at an individual level and an improvement in organisational performance. It is also observed that several factors can moderate or mediate the relationship between the outcome of a performance appraisal and the future performance of the employee and of the organisation. Furthermore, there is disagreement in the literature in the sense that some researchers argue that performance appraisal should be delegated to line managers (Tyksbo, 2020). Others argue that all members of the HRM triad are expected to undertake key processes that relate to performance appraisal (Bonet et al, 2019). Conversely, some researchers suggest a more autonomous form of performance appraisal whereby the employee conducts most of the performance appraisal processes themselves (Keegan et al, 2019).

What has been observed from the literature so far is mixed in the sense that on some occasions only line managers appear to be involved and not senior managers or HR (Tyksbo,

2020). In other circumstances, line managers are detached from the appraisal process (Keegan, et al). Consequently, in terms of this research project, it will be interesting to gauge what dynamic will be observed during performance appraisals in high-tech contexts and what level of uncertainty exists concerning the application/existence of the HRM triad.

Altogether, this suggests that performance appraisal, or equivalent, would best be conducted according to contextual and personal dynamics (Russell et al, 2018). What we arguably see here are degrees of uncertainty concerning how performance appraisal is undertaken and who undertakes it according to which set of rules or expectations. In other words, it is not particularly clear what contribution each member of the HRM triad – employee, line manager, and HR representatives - makes to the performance appraisal process. This creates a role for the application of uncertainty theory. Earlier we discussed the uncertainty created by the fast, fluid pace of tech development and tech job roles. However, we also see a lack of predictability about the characteristics of performance appraisal. This is due to the impact of contextual dynamics upon line managers' decisions about how to implement organisational HR policy, coupled with the unpredictability of relationships between line managers and their direct reports, both of which could distort outcomes.

Justice is a theme that is indirectly suggested in many of the articles, but not mentioned explicitly, which suggests that this is an area that warrants further attention. To achieve this, attention will be turned to the organisational justice literature that affords opportunity to deconstruct the characteristics of the performance appraisal process according to the three key dimensions: procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice. Procedural justice will examine the process of the performance appraisal in terms of who in the HRM triad designs and undertakes it and how it is undertaken. Furthermore, distributive justice will consider how decisions concerning performance are made and how these will impact decisions concerning the distribution and allocation of rewards. And interactional justice will consider the quality of relationships between the ratee and the raters and how these may impact the effectiveness of the performance appraisal.

To conclude, the research gaps so far are as follows: there is a lack of explanation of what perceptions of fairness are in the literature using organisational justice theory. Also, it is unclear whether the HRM triad concept is applied during performance appraisal.

Furthermore, it is not always evident who specifically undertakes performance appraisal. In addition, it is not clear how the particularities and complexities of ratees' jobs are identified and evaluated during performance appraisal.

### 2.1.3 Performance Appraisal and Management Control Systems

Management control systems can be defined as a set of practices that seek to monitor and steer decision making in an organisation (Graebner and Moers, 2013; Malmi and Brown, 2008). Specifically, Graebner and Moers characterise management control as a **system** if management control practices are interdependent and the design choices take these interdependencies into consideration. Alternatively, management control can be seen as a **package**, which represents the complete set of control practices in place, irrespective of whether they are interdependent. Graebner and Moers argue that viewing management control as a package is not appropriate to examine relationships between practices because a package perspective considers practices that may not be dependent on each other and may exist in isolation.

In contrast, Merchant and Van Stede (2008) define management control not as a set of practices to steer organisational processes, but as an attempt to deal with employees' behaviour, which echoes Merchant's typology of action, results, and personnel controls. In addition, Flamholtz et al (1985) define management control as a "set of techniques and processes to achieve goal congruence which may be designed for all levels of behavioural influence." Furthermore, Malmi and Brown (2008) consider contingencies such as environmental uncertainty which may impact a management control system's ability to achieve goal congruence. Graebner and Moers consider contingencies, or the contingency approach, as the performance effects of a combination of management control practices. They argue that in contexts of high uncertainty, one may see an increased use of management control to uphold performance.

Grabner and Moers discuss complementarity theory which relates to what extent management control practices fit with each other in order to gauge an organisation's level of internal consistency. However, the authors argue that the literature has made no attempt to define explicitly what internal consistency is. This suggests a disagreement with Merchant (1982) whose typology highlights three areas of control - action, results, and personnel - that could help to improve understanding of what internal consistency is when undertaking performance appraisal. Nevertheless, if one accepts Grabner and Moers' argument concerning ambiguity of what internal consistency means, then it suggests that context and contingencies are perhaps paramount when considering the dynamics of performance appraisal.

In a sense, Grabner and Moers' focus on complementarity and internal consistency echoes procedural justice, which considers to what extent an organisations' processes are aligned and understood by an organisation's employees. Likewise, Malmi and Brown's focus on control systems, which considers the effects of employees' behaviour, resonates with interactional justice, which considers the impact of the behaviour of the person in authority on perceptions of fairness.

For the purpose of this thesis, management control systems may help to explain the dynamics of performance appraisal in terms of understanding the impact of processes and procedures on participants' perceptions of fairness. In addition, management control systems may assist in explaining the characteristics and impact of line managers', or their equivalents', behaviour when undertaking performance appraisal on participants' perceptions of fairness. Furthermore, management control systems may aid comprehension of HR's involvement in controlling the performance appraisal process, whether that be through setting and/or deploying processes, and/or being actively involved in communicating with participants, and to what extent this affects participants' perceptions of fairness.

Much of this literature is associated with Management Accounting, but there is scope to leverage concepts from this area for this thesis, pushing forward HR literature in this way.

To summarise, the research gaps identified so far relate to a lack of clarity concerning the correspondence between the prevalence and extent of a management control system and perceived levels of uncertainty. For example, it is unclear from the literature so far whether a robust management control system pro-actively mitigates uncertainty, or whether a control system is introduced to reduce uncertainty. Plus, it is not clear what the effectiveness of management control systems are vis-à-vis the dynamics of the contexts which they operate in.

## Section 2 – Organisational Justice in Performance Appraisal Contexts

### 2.2.1 An Overview of Organisational Justice Theory and its Developments

Organisational justice is defined by to what extent those who work in organisations deem that they are being treated fairly (Colquitt et al, 2005). It is split into three dimensions: procedural justice, distributive justice and interactional justice. Detailed definitions of these dimensions appear later. The perceptions of how these dimensions are applied result in employees determining to what extent they are being treated fairly (Harrington and Lee, 2015).

The reason this thesis will focus on organisational justice is that it provides a firm theoretical basis to explore the effectiveness of performance appraisal by considering ratees' perceptions of fairness of how it is undertaken. If perceptions of fairness are low, the effectiveness of performance appraisal will be compromised. Of course, organisational justice has its limitations. For example, it focuses on subjective perceptions rather than actual levels of fairness. It can be difficult to measure perceptions of fairness as they can fluctuate regularly. It also doesn't consider contextual dynamics as closely as one would perhaps wish (Colquitt et al, 2001; Gilliland and Chen, 2001). However, substantial levels of research demonstrate that organisational justice is useful to provide explanations of employees' perceptions of fairness and to identify key mechanisms that impact these perceptions as will be discussed below.

Malhotra et al (2022), in more recent research, emphasises the concept of *perceived* organisational justice. He explains that perceived organisational justice can be affected by mediating and/or moderating variables to illustrate that context plays a role in how justice is discerned by employees. In this case, the researchers identified psychological need satisfaction as a mediator and person-organisation fit as a moderator. They also attempt to

illustrate that organisational justice, and its equivalent concept of fairness, can be experienced by employees according to their own individual organisational circumstances. It is interesting to note that Malhotra et al's paper does not encourage more qualitative research. This, arguably, would be useful in revealing participants' experiences, and potentially hitherto unknown underlying processes in more specific detail, given that the workplace has undergone significant change in recent years due to COVID and the advent of generative AI.

To gain a better understanding of organisational justice, researchers have deconstructed it into three elements or dimensions. This has afforded opportunity to identify which factors impact perceptions of fairness and equity in organisations. Those dimensions are distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. The early sections of this chapter will provide clear definitions and explanations of these dimensions plus an overview of which theories underpin their identification and development.

Theoretical understanding of justice stretches back to Classical Greece and Nichomachean ethics. However, the first substantive studies into organizational justice emerged from the work of Homans (1961) and Adams (1963). This laid the groundwork for the identification of the first dimension of organisational justice: distributive justice. This is defined as the perceived equitable allocations of rewards and resources based on perceived legitimate performance-appraisal outcomes (Cheng, 2014; Colquitt et al, 2001; Gilliland and Chen, 2001; Korsgaard and Roberson 1995). It also takes into consideration equal opportunity for all participants to receive rewards and/or resources (Anderson et al, 2001; Gilliland and Hale, 2005), and the level of correspondence between rewards and satisfaction (Celani et al, 2008).

One key theory that has improved understanding of organisational justice and fairness is Adams Equity Theory. Adams (1965) asserts that employees' will be motivated to act in response to a set of circumstances that they perceive as inequitable, or unfair. This motivation to act is spurred by comparing themselves with a referent peer to determine whether they are being treated more or less fairly. If there is a perception that one is being treated unfairly, this may generate feelings of anger and resentment that may result in reduced levels of effort, resignation from the organisation, or by shifting the target of comparison by substituting the



referent other(s) for someone else. However, according to Al-Zawahreh and Al-Madi (2012), there are several limitations with this theory such as: it does not forecast how long changes in performance will last. Plus, there is a lack of specificity concerning what can be considered as inputs and outputs in any given situation. In addition, some individuals may respond to inequity, whilst others may not - it is difficult to predict. Likewise, some individuals who experience inequity may not experience anger or guilt, but their colleagues in the same context may experience these emotions. Furthermore, the theory does not focus on the procedures that correspond with decisions concerning reward distribution. The authors indicate that these procedures are considered in the second dimension of organisational justice, which is procedural justice, that will be discussed next.

#### 2.2.2 The Identification of Procedural Justice and Interactional Justice

As discussed in the introduction chapter, procedural justice is defined as employees' perceptions of the openness, transparency, and relatedness of organizational rules, regulations, and procedures (Celani et al, 2008; Gilliland, 1993; Lievens et al, 2003; Thibault and Walker, 1975). There are five factors that determine procedural justice. The first involves consistency which involves management administering rules, regulations, and procedures in a standard, uniform, transparent manner across various work contexts (Cropanzano & Wright, 2003; Erturk, 2007; Garcia-Izquierdio et al, 2012; Gilliland, 1993; McNall and Roch, 2009; Roch and McNall, 2007). The second is impartiality that involves the creation and development of objective processes and procedures to minimise or eradicate bias and prejudice when making decisions (Colquitt et al, 2013; Outlaw et al, 2019). The third is voice that proposes that employees should have an input into how processes and procedures are created and implemented, and to allow employees to challenge management decisions (ibid). The fourth is accuracy whereby procedures and processes are implemented in such a way to produce evidence-based and more precise data and information that can be used to make better-informed decisions (ibid). Finally, the fifth is correctability which involves including procedures and processes that afford opportunity to revisit and appeal potentially questionable past decisions (ibid).

Procedural justice emerged from an understanding that Adams Equity Theory did not focus on processes that revolve around decisions concerning the distribution of reward and how the

design and implementation of those processes impact employees' perceptions of justice.

Various theories have influenced the development and evolution of procedural justice, some of which are summarised below:

1. Fairness theory: This relates to accountability when organisations are seen to have acted improperly or questionable decisions have been taken that have had a negative impact on the workforce (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998, 2001). This affords opportunity for fairness theory to generate two insights with regards to our understanding of procedural justice. Firstly, that it considers the consequences of employee responses, such as anger, to a lack of procedural justice that has resulted in unethical or poorly considered decision-making. Employee anger may result in resentment, sabotage, and increased turnover. Secondly, it forces us to consider what procedures and processes are in place, or should be put in place, to provide redress following poor decision-making, which may allow the organisation to repair relationships with their employees.
2. Fairness heuristic theory: An employee's perception of procedural justice within their organisation can act as a proxy for perceptions of their line manager's trustworthiness the latter of which can be difficult to gauge due to a lack of data. This has resulted in an increasing emphasis on the importance of how employees perceive procedural justice as a means to understand how, and to what extent, employees trust management (Lind and Tyler, 1988; Tyler and Lind, 1992).
3. Uncertainty management theory: This is a development of fairness heuristic theory in the sense that it considers that employees will use any available evidence as a means to reduce uncertainty and anxiety even when that evidence has only an indirect or tenuous connection with the issue that is causing anxiety. For example, employees may use their perceptions of procedural justice as a means to make a conclusion about the levels of the predictability of events in their organisation. In other words, if employees consider the quality of procedural justice to be high in the sense that processes and protocols that inform decisions are transparent and clearly understood by everyone, this may be sufficient to mitigate anxiety when the future of the organisation is uncertain (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Colquitt et al, 2012; Desai et al, 2011).

Uncertainty management theory may be the most useful to help explain the dynamics of performance appraisal in high-tech contexts when we consider its fast-moving and unpredictable nature. Performance appraisal may be difficult considering the unpredictable technological context. This may create a sense of environmental uncertainty with regards to how performance appraisal is to be undertaken. This could lead to task uncertainty which takes into consideration the complexity of ratees' job roles and requirements and how they can be captured in a performance appraisal (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012). Employees' may look to the clarity and transparency of procedures that inform how performance appraisal is undertaken as a means to reduce environmental uncertainty.

Task uncertainty may therefore be an effective concept which will help to provide explanation of the effectiveness of performance appraisal in high-tech contexts given the complexity of job roles in these arenas. Likewise, it will act as a conceptual basis to help understand and explain the difficulties performance evaluators may experience identifying and appraising key aspects of tech employees complex job roles. It may also aid understanding of how ratees' perceive the application of the three dimensions of organisational justice during an appraisal.

This raises issues with regards to who creates and implements processes and procedures that inform performance appraisal and what role HR has in this. One cannot locate any papers that discuss the issue of HR's involvement, other than Fortin et al's work from 2020 which concludes that HR are at the forefront of creating organisational justice mechanisms in various aspects of organisational life including performance appraisal. However, previous literature discussed does not seem to corroborate this. However, a criticism of task uncertainty is that it perhaps assumes that a complex job role has various components that may be difficult to identify, when this may not be the case. Nevertheless, the research discussed suggests that it is a useful basis to address this thesis' research objectives.

In addition to procedural justice, interactional justice has emerged as an important dimension of organisational justice. Interactional justice is defined as employees' perception of management's interpersonal conduct and behaviour (Bies & Moag, 1986; Celani et al, 2008),

and perceived quality of information in terms of whether it is deemed relevant, honest, and transparent (Bauer et al, 2001; Gilliland, 1993, 2001; Truxillo et al, 2002). Interactional justice has evolved from Blau's Social Exchange Theory of 1964 in which the quality of relationships that evolve between people is based on a cost-benefit consideration. This considers each party evaluating what positive outcomes they receive from maintaining a relationship with someone versus the costs, or level of work required, to keep the relationship going (Blau, 1964). Four elements are seen as being key to Social Exchange Theory. They are trust, power, reciprocity, and commitment (Benitez et al, 2022).

Trust involves each party expecting the other to perform their roles and duties in good faith for each other's benefit without a need for either party to monitor the other. Power relates to the level of dependence parties in the relationship have. The level of dependence that one party has in relation to the other may affect how they behave. For example, there may be a hierarchical aspect whereby one party has a more senior role in the organisation that may result in the other party having to seek permission from their more senior colleague to act in some contexts. Reciprocity assumes that all parties will openly exchange information when required and will respond in kind. Finally, commitment relies on all parties having faith in whatever objectives need to be fulfilled and being motivated to complete related tasks according to expectations (ibid).

These four elements have impacted our understanding of interactional justice. For example, employees' expectation that their manager responds in a timely and honest manner corresponds with reciprocity. However, what makes interactional justice different from Social Exchange Theory is an increased emphasis on how managers behave towards their employees which arguably raises the importance of the element of power.

Interactional justice interplays with procedural justice in the sense that the manner with which managers deploy procedures and processes will have an impact on employees' perceptions of justice. In other words, the behaviours with which managers use to implement processes and procedures will be keenly perceived by employees. For example, managers may deploy clear and transparent procedures in an aggressive manner or perhaps do not

consult with the employee as to when the procedures are to be deployed, which may impact the quality of interactional justice. One can see this in an article by Cheng et al from 2022. The authors argue that managers need to explain decisions in an open, earnest manner using accurate information, which corresponds with interactional justice. Managers then need to implement these decisions utilising clearly understood processes, which relates to procedural justice. Likewise, Zapeta-Phelan and colleagues, in a 2009 study, demonstrate that procedural justice and interactional justice play a key role together in affecting employees' intrinsic motivation.

Wan and colleagues' (2018) hierarchical multiple-regression analysis of a sample of over 1,000 nurses across seven Chinese hospitals, indicates that employees place significant value in interactional justice, characterised by clear and frequent communication with their line manager. The research emphasises that clear and consistent explanations of management decision making seems to improve levels of employee engagement amongst nursing staff albeit from a low level. This is in contrast to the effects of financial reward which was found to have less of an impact on employee engagement. It would seem that employees in this context perceived interactional justice to be more important than distributive justice.

Employees' perceptions of interactional justice, in the sense of the value placed on the quality of communication from their line manager, appear to have more significant impact, in contrast to notions of distributive justice and perhaps procedural justice. The research concludes that nursing staff value the quality of information communicated by management but continue to suffer relatively low levels of engagement. The authors suggest that deficient engagement may be influenced by the stressful nature of nurses' job roles, demands and responsibilities, and relatively low levels of salary.

Employees place a high value on their line managers' capability and capacity to communicate cogently and honestly. This may mean that low levels of engagement could be explained by a lack of a control system that includes suitable processes and procedures to translate management rhetoric into action. Therefore, procedural justice seems to be lacking. However, caution is required. The research did not focus on the dynamics of performance appraisal.

Also, the context is not high-tech, which means the findings may lack relevance. Furthermore, the authors do not mention what role HR plays in the organisation.

A study conducted by Li et al (2017), that applies statistical equation modelling following the collection of more than 1,000 questionnaires from respondents employed across a range of Chinese state-owned enterprises, reveal that knowledge workers' perceptions of fairness was affected by the quality of interactions with supervisors. These perceptions impacted employees' decisions to share knowledge with co-workers. Similar to Wan et al, the study highlights that employees who perceive high levels of interactional justice, in terms of having a positive relationship with their line manager, are more likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviours by more regularly exchanging knowledge with their peers. Their findings raise questions concerning whether knowledge workers in high-tech contexts are likely to exhibit similar organizational-citizenship behaviours, if they share a constructive relationship with their line manager.

Likewise, it is unclear whether knowledge workers would be motivated to cultivate a positive organizational climate, with departments, and support functions, such as HR, that they may not interact with on a frequent basis. It's not clear what role HR plays in terms of fostering engagement between line managers and their direct reports in Li et al's study, although this wasn't one of the research aims. This raises questions as to how line management, employees and HR – the HRM triad - interact to maintain organisational justice in similar contexts (Keegan and Den Hartog, 2019). It may be helpful to consider the level of involvement of each party of the HRM triad to understand the dynamics of organisational justice in high-tech work contexts.

Li et al (2017) also claim that organizational climate is characterised by employees' perceptions of interactional justice. In other words, if employees believe that they are not being treated with respect and honesty, levels of motivation and positivity are likely to decline. This supports the conclusions of Colquitt et al (2005) and Elovainio et al (2002). Again, it is not evident what HR's role is in this type of situation, which is not surprising as it

was not in the scope of the study. Nevertheless, it raises further interest into the impact of the HRM triad on perceptions of organisational justice.

In contrast, Bourne et al (2013), explain that it is the quality of interaction between performance appraisal and HRM practices that contribute to organisational performance. This article is unique in the sense that it attempts to focus on HR's role and contribution to the effectiveness of performance appraisal. The authors also seem to suggest that an effective application of both sets of practices can result in a positive organisational climate that enhances employees' efforts to achieving strategic priorities. The reverse also seems to be the case in that an ineffective application results in a negative climate.

However, the article does not include focus on organisational justice theory, or fairness per se. Furthermore, it is unclear whether these combined practices form part of a control system. In addition, there is not a clear indication of employees' attitudes towards HR as a function. In other words, the findings suggest that employees seem to appreciate when HRM practices are applied effectively alongside performance appraisal practices. This appreciation appears to be characterised by improved climate and more effort. However, it is not clear who is implementing these HRM practices, whether it is, for example, an HR representative engaging directly with a ratee during performance appraisal, or whether the HRM practices are delivered by the evaluator such as a line manager, or equivalent. Likewise, the research is conducted in service and manufacturing contexts, which do not appear to be high-tech.

Garcia-Izquierdio et al (2012) following a quantitative study of 213 employees across various private-sector organisations in Spain, reveal employees' preference for open and transparent promotion systems, which corresponds with procedural justice. These findings support earlier claims that procedural justice needs to be maintained when important decisions are being made to ensure that they are accepted by employees (Becton et al., 2008; Stumpf & London, 1981). Similarly, the work of Gillespie and Ryan (2012) highlight the importance of procedural justice, this time during recruitment and selection. They argue that recruitment and selection processes and criteria need to be cohesive and easily understood to be perceived as fair by participants. Likewise, interactional justice is important in the sense that processes

and criteria need to be openly and courteously communicated by management. Without these two dimensions of organisational justice, recruitment and selection processes may not be effective. Similar to previous studies discussed, the involvement of HR is not discussed, which is arguably surprising as the authors focus on recruitment and selection where one would expect HR to be involved. In addition, the contexts are not considered high-tech. This means it is unclear whether these findings are directly relevant.

In a different vein, Cheng et al's (2014) quantitative analysis of over 200 manufacturing workers in Taiwan, shows that perceived levels of distributive justice had little impact on employees' overall levels of perceived organizational justice and organizational commitment. These results contrast with a number of previous studies (Masterson, Lewis, Goldman and Taylor 2000; Aryee, Budhwar and Chen 2002; Kernan and Hanges 2002; Liao and Rupp, 2005; Olkkonen and Lipponen 2006; Lavelle, Rupp and Brockner 2007).

To conclude, we have discussed the development of organisational justice theory. We have also discussed how organisational justice has been applied by researchers to understand various dynamics of contemporary organisations. The research gaps identified so far relate to a lack of consensus concerning which dimensions of organisational justice are relevant in particular contexts. There is also a lack of explanation of the impact of control systems on perceptions of the effectiveness of performance appraisal. Likewise, there is a lack of clarity concerning how the complexity of ratees' job roles affect the dynamics of performance appraisal and perceptions of fairness.

Let's turn our attention now to performance appraisal.

## Section 3 – Performance Appraisal and Organisational Justice in Uncertain Contexts

### 2.3.1 Literature Overview

This chapter will discuss literature that considers the effect of organisational justice on performance appraisal in various contexts most of which are not high-tech contexts. The reason for this is that there is a lack of literature that focuses on organisational justice and performance appraisal in high-tech contexts. We will discuss various researchers' findings to



gauge insight into contextual dynamics and characteristics. We can then compare and contrast with the little literature that there is that focuses on high-tech contexts. We will also consider literature associated with uncertainty management theory.

Pichler (2012), using social-exchange theory and organisational justice theory, considers the social context of performance appraisals. Pichler applies the distributive justice dimension to reveal that employees react favourably towards their performance appraisal when they have expectations of positive reward outcomes. Furthermore, application of the procedural justice dimension also reveals that having a voice during performance appraisal creates a positive perception of the performance appraisal. Having a voice means that employees value the opportunity to discuss performance, reveal problems and issues, negotiate training and promotion opportunities, and co-develop performance objectives. Procedural justice also suggests that employees value having an element of control of how the appraisal is undertaken. The study suggests that employees value having control over the process of performance appraisal more than the outcome. Pichler pre-empts any surprise at this finding by suggesting employees expect that having control over the process will result in favourable decisions and outcomes concerning evaluation of their performance.

However, the most substantive finding relates to interactional justice whereby the quality of relationship between the ratee and their line manager who is rating their performance, has the most significant impact on employees' perception of equity during performance appraisal. This is indicative for this research project in the sense that it suggests that interactional justice may be the most important dimension of the organisational justice theory when considering the effectiveness of performance appraisal in terms of how equity is upheld in a high-tech context. This echoes previous literature such as Tyksbo (2020), and Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021), the latter articles emphasising the tangible impact of the quality of relationship between line managers and their subordinates on performance appraisal outcomes.

Sholihin and Pike (2009) deploy a mixed-methods research design that surveyed 165 managers and interviewed 24 of them from three organisations in a non-high-tech financial-

services and manufacturing context in Australia. They draw upon organisational justice theory to conclude that perceptions of fairness of performance appraisal are mediated by the level of commitment that employees have towards their organisation. They also conclude that employees perceive the fairness of rewards decided upon after performance appraisal as being an important indicator of the latter's effectiveness. Another substantive element is the extent to which ratees are willing to trust their line managers to undertake performance appraisal accurately and courteously. The authors conclude, however, that the level of organisational commitment is the most significant aspect that impacts perceptions of the fairness of performance appraisal. They suggest that this provides more support for non-outcome-based effects rather than outcome-based effects such as the level of reward given. It also calls into question the effectiveness of organisational justice theory into providing explanations of employees' attitudes towards performance appraisal.

The work of Duarte et al (2017) focuses on how the characteristics of relationships between line managers and their direct reports impact performance appraisal outcomes. The research indicated that dyads characterised by a high quality of relationship tend to have favourable performance appraisals. (A dyad is a relationship between two people, in this case between a line manager and the employee whose performance they are evaluating (ibid)). The findings suggest that line managers expect performance to be high and are reluctant to provide a negative appraisal outcome. They also spend less time on evaluating performance of those whom they have a close relationship with as they feel that they don't need to due to expectations of high performance. This means that they have more opportunity to evaluate people with whom they have a lower quality relationship with more closely and objectively.

There is little evidence to suggest that performance appraisal is biased against those with whom line managers have lower quality relationships with, or that performance evaluations are reduced. In other words, a lower quality relationship does not mean a toxic relationship, which could have resulted in biased performance appraisal that reduced ratees' performance outcomes unfairly. However, the research does raise concerns that high-quality relationships may gloss over possible flaws in the direct reports' performance evaluation. In other words, the quality of relationship may be a substitute for an objective consideration of performance. A point worth noting was that the research was undertaken in a telephone company which

does not appear to be a high-tech context. The findings may not be directly relevant to this thesis. Likewise, the authors don't discuss how the quality of relationships corresponds with organisational justice theory, which wasn't included in the scope of the study.

Duarte et al's findings echo those of Varma et al (2021). The latter's research indicates that a high-quality relationship between a line manager and their direct report helps provide the latter with a positive experience of the performance appraisal. (In this case, a relationship refers to the level of liking, rapport, mutual understanding, friendliness, and trust that exists between the line manager/evaluator and the ratee (ibid)). Likewise, the better the relationship, the greater the likelihood that the appraisal rating will increase. The authors suggest that organisations should strive to have more high-quality relationships with their subordinates.

However, the risk is that these relationships may mask performance flaws which may not be identified during performance appraisal or could be conveniently ignored. As a criticism of the article, suggesting that these types of close relationships should be nurtured could present ethical concerns. The reason for this is that more high-quality relationships may result in less objective consideration of actual performance. This could lead to more positive performance outcomes that rely less on evidence, which could artificially inflate the performance of the firm. In addition, the research was carried out with hospitality staff, which is a very different context to high-tech. Consequently, it is not evident whether these findings are relevant to this thesis.

Byrne et al (2012) following a quantitative analysis that surveyed 526 professionals from a technology firm in the US, draws upon social exchange theory, organisational support theory and organisational justice theory in their research. These professionals work in a high-tech context with many of them working on concept design. They argue that the interactional justice dimension of organisational justice has received less attention in the literature compared to distributive justice and procedural justice, when considering the effectiveness of performance appraisals. They find that perceived supervisory support mediates the relationship of interactional justice and the ratee's trust in their line manager. In other words,

the level of support that line managers offer their direct reports during the performance appraisal process will directly influence how they perceive the quality of the relationship that they have with their line manager. This will affect to what extent they are willing to trust their line manager to undertake performance appraisal fairly. This research echoes Sholihin and Pike in the sense that it offers support for non-outcome-based effects which in Byrne's case relates to interactional justice and perceived supervisory support.

The articles discussed so far offer an early opportunity to compare and contrast the dynamics of organisational justice during performance appraisal in a non-high-tech context and a high-tech context. It appears that the quality of relationship between direct reports and their line managers has an impact in both high-tech context and non-high-tech contexts. It's not always clear, however, what affect this has on perceptions of justice and fairness during performance appraisal.

Research conducted by Farndale and Keliher (2013) includes extensive quantitative analysis of 4,422 professionals located across 22 business units of five organisations. They draw upon organisational justice theory to reveal that interactional justice, characterised by the quality of a direct report's relationship with their line manager, plays a key role in how the direct report perceives the effectiveness of the performance appraisal. The authors also argue that the level of trust that employees place in senior management also affect how they perceive the effectiveness of performance appraisal. In other words, as the authors put it, "This would suggest that employees see their relationship with the organisation (and hence their commitment) personified by both line managers and senior management" (ibid, p. 890). It's not evident whether the contexts used in the research are high-tech or non-high tech. However, there is a repeated emphasis on interactional justice and non-outcome effects such as the quality of relationships between direct reports and their line managers, and between employees in general and senior management, as being central to the effective delivery of performance appraisal.

Alexander and Ruderman (1987) in their quantitative study of US government employees, find that both perceptions of procedural justice and distributive justice during performance

appraisal, impact direct reports' evaluation of their supervisor. The authors state that procedural justice has a larger effect than distributive justice. The authors argue that this is because procedural justice has a greater social effect due to the standardised nature of processes and protocol that impacts all employees. In other words, all employees expect the control system to be applied consistently to everyone. If an employee perceives any ostensible deviation from this standardised control system, they may arrive at the logical conclusion that the performance appraisal was undertaken unfairly. Distributive justice, in contrast, is more flexible in its application. This is because there is an expectation amongst employees that there will be differences in performance quality and hence the value of rewards that are contingent on performance. Outcomes are more individualised with employees expecting that they may be rewarded differently to referent others (Adams, 1963). Consequently, perceptions of fairness in this dimension are less keenly felt. This research was undertaken in a non-high-tech context and seems to support outcome effects as being significant. Non-outcome effects linked to interactional justice and quality of relationships between ratees and raters seem to be less important.

In another quantitative study, Folger and Konovsky (1989), following a survey of over 200 employees at a US manufacturing plant, similarly found that procedural justice, and distributive justice, both play a key role in impacting employees' reactions towards decisions taken about pay increases during performance appraisal. Again, procedural justice was perceived to be more salient. This was due to direct reports expressing importance that their line managers implement processes and procedures prescribed in the organisation's control system. Levels of organisational commitment to the organisation were also salient. Employees with higher levels of commitment were more likely to trust their line manager to undertake performance appraisal in accordance with the control system. The research was undertaken in a non-high-tech context and echoes Farndale and Kelliher with their emphasis on process and outcomes. However, this contrasts to Byrne et al's (2012) study undertaken in a high-tech context, and Pichler (2013), who conclude that interactional justice and non-outcome-based effects are more salient.

Lau et al (2008) undertook a quantitative study of 251 managers from the Australian health sector, which is not considered a high-tech context in this thesis. They find that employees'

faith in line management's competence to undertake performance appraisal professionally, impact perceptions of the fairness of performance appraisal. This impact can be conceptualised in terms of non-outcome-based effects that can be seen from aspects such as trust in line managers' capability to undertake the performance appraisal according to the prescribed control system. Likewise, outcome-based effects are considered important, such as a recognition that decisions taken about employees' performance meet expectations. The findings seem to place line managers as central to performance appraisal which supports much of the previous research discussed. This conclusion may be built on the assumption that line managers are more likely to comprehend the nature of their employees' work in contrast to other organisational actors, such as HR.

Consequently, line managers appear to be in a stronger position to undertake performance appraisal which echoes Bonet (2013) and Tyksbo (2020) although not Keegan's work on Project Based Organisations. It's not clear what HR's role is from much of the research looked at so far which means we don't know precisely how the HRM triad operates in both non-high-tech and high-tech contexts. Overall, there seems to be a degree of uncertainty concerning which other stakeholders, other than line managers and their direct reports, contribute towards the dynamics of performance appraisal.

Lau et al (2012) undertook a quantitative survey of 60 senior professionals in France who were taking part in a Masters course at a French University. They reveal that the participants' emotional responses to consideration of their line manager's trustworthiness was more significant and influential in formulating their perceptions of their organisation during performance appraisal than perceived fairness of its outcome. It is not evident what background these managers come from in terms of whether they work in high-tech or non-high-tech contexts. Nevertheless, the findings echo Byrne et al, Duarte et al, and Varma et al in the sense that interactional justice and quality of relationships are significant in terms of their impact on the effectiveness of performance appraisal.

Karkoulian et al (2016) following a quantitative sample of 400 employees in Lebanon who appear to work in high-tech contexts, echoes the work of Keegan et al. Employees have

autonomy to undertake certain elements of the performance appraisal themselves, in this case, by undertaking 360-degree peer feedback. Line managers appear less central.

To evaluate the previous studies, it is not clear whether knowledge workers in complex, high-tech, innovative contexts are more, or less, likely to value their line manager's input and their relationship, or other aspects of interactional justice, compared to non-high-tech work contexts. It is not evident to what extent the level of perceived interactional justice affects employees' feelings of uncertainty. It is also not clear how each member of the HRM triad engage and interact with each other i.e., employees, line managers, and HR representatives. The lack of clarity is particularly the case with respect to HR, which creates uncertainty concerning whether the HRM triad concept is helpful to understand the dynamics of organisational justice during performance appraisal. These aspects have not been considered in the literature so far.

To conclude and summarise, the research gaps so far include a lack of clarity concerning the impact of control systems on outcome and non-outcome effects considered through the lens of organisational justice theory. There is also a lack of consensus about which organisational justice dimensions are paramount in particular contexts.

### 2.3.2 Uncertainty Management Theory

As discussed in the introduction chapter, uncertainty management theory was developed by Dale Brashers in 2007 and can be defined as an attempt to explain how people infer meaning and understanding in unpredictable and uncertain situations (Brashers, 2007). Lind and Van den Bos (2002) suggest that uncertainty management theory provides illuminating insights into the interplay of uncertainty and fairness reactions. The authors propose that uncertainty is a "powerful moderator...such that fairness effects are magnified in proportion to the level of uncertainty being experienced." In other words, the higher the uncertainty perceived by employees, the possibility that they become more sensitised to issues of fairness. This is a useful theoretical foundation to consider the effect of uncertainty which seems to be an issue in tech contexts. There seems to be a sense of uncertainty of how outcome and non-outcome-based effects impact perceptions of fairness when complex job roles are being appraised.

There is also a sense of uncertainty of how organisations police the application of the three dimensions of organisational justice.

Lind and van den Bos argue that uncertainty can be defined as a situation whereby an employee is unsure of a particular outcome. This can be seen in examples of employees fearing job termination (Lind et al, 2000) where there is a lack of information about whether they may lose their job which leads to a lack of trust in the organisation. The authors highlight research by Hogg (2000) in which employees counter a lack of trust in the organisation by becoming members of social groups that consist of co-workers. This helps them to cope with their uncertainty. It also aids the development of social identity by being a valued colleague of their peers which helps to alleviate stress caused by uncertainty. The work of Kramer (2001) is also emphasised in which employees who have trusting and positive relationships with peers, and their line managers, are more likely to cope with uncertainty or perceive it as having less importance.

However, there is criticism of uncertainty management theory. Hogg and Belavadi (2017) argue that the theory assumes people seek to mitigate uncertainty, when in some contexts it may be tolerated or even desired. There is also an argument that more information may increase uncertainty rather than reduce it (Bradac, 2006). There is a concern that the theory focuses too closely on perceptions of uncertainty in dyadic relationships, neglecting wider group dynamics that may affect how employees assess uncertainty in their organisation (ibid). Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, the theory forms a firm basis for consideration of the effect of uncertainty on employees' attitudes and behaviour.

In terms of uncertainty management theory's relationship with dimensions of organisational justice, Lind and van den Bos's discussion is not always clear. Likewise, there are only two articles which attempt to apply uncertainty management theory to explore the potential impact of uncertainties linked to performance appraisal (Rosen et al, 2011; Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012). There is scope for further work to link uncertainty management theory with all three dimensions of organisational justice and the HR triad in the context of performance appraisal, to further develop theoretical understanding.



Let's discuss some of the articles that apply uncertainty management theory to some other areas to gain some understanding of how it has been used and what insights it has helped to generate before looking at uncertainty management theory research that applies to organisational justice and/or performance appraisal.

Yang et al (2019) use uncertainty management theory to reveal that employees who bear the brunt of negative behaviours from their superior, such as bullying and harassment, are more likely to perceive unfairness. The longer the abuse continues, the employees are more likely to feel uncertain with regards to their role and position in the organisation. It is probable that they will spend more time focusing on future goals and aspirations outside the organisation, rather than on current, organisational aims. The authors claim that as a result of their research, uncertainty management theory moderates the relationship between abusive supervision and its outcome.

In a similar study from 2006, Thau et al, deploy uncertainty management theory to reveal that abusive line management style is more likely to result in employees manifesting deviant behaviours in contexts of high situational uncertainty. These contexts are characterised by contingent decision-making due to a lack of transparent processes and procedures.

The work of Tangirala and Alge from 2006 also draws upon uncertainty management theory to reveal, in a quantitative study, that groups who operate virtually compared to those who operate face-to-face, are, according to the authors, more likely to perceive informational uncertainty. This is due to virtual members apparently being less likely to exchange social cues and comprehend each other's social context. This lack of familiarity may lead to uncertainty in terms of how interpersonal interactions should be undertaken. This uncertainty that emerges from virtual group members' ostensible lack of familiarity and rapport between themselves, and also with their line managers, mean that these employees place more value on fair treatment from their employer. They also respond more assertively to actions and events that they perceive as unfair, in contrast to groups who work together face-to-face. However, the article does not explain how and why the virtual group are more sensitive to

fairness. This article introduces some interesting insights in the sense that in the contemporary environment, many tech employees work remotely and flexibly particularly during and after the pandemic. This could mean that varying groups of tech employees may perceive uncertainty and fairness differently depending on what extent they work face-to-face or remotely.

Takeuchi et al, in a quantitative study from 2012, samples 450 employees across various industries, to explain the effect that employees' perceptions of all three dimensions of organisational justice have on their voice behaviour. Voice relates to employees' perceived opportunity to have their views listened to and their level of belief concerning whether they make a positive difference to the organisation.

The authors' find that employees' perception of each dimension of organisational justice was heightened when they experience higher levels of uncertainty due to, for example, having low levels of long-term job security. Specifically, the authors discover that higher levels of perceived interactional justice, due to more positive, constructive, and trusting relationships with line managers, have a positive effect on employees' willingness to express voice behaviours. This helps to reduce employees' feelings of uncertainty about their role in an organisation. The authors also reveal that employees' positive perception of procedural justice in the form of clearly understood and consistently applied principles, works alongside interactional justice to further minimise uncertainty and boost the likelihood of employees' voice behaviours occurring. They find that distributive justice plays a role by shaping how employees identify information that is relevant to them in securing rewards. The article did not focus on performance appraisals or any particular function of management but seems more interested in a general, less context-dependent consideration of the effect of organisational justice on employee voice behaviour.

In terms of the application of uncertainty management theory in research that involves organisational justice and/or performance appraisal, Hartmann and Slapničar (2012) undertook a quantitative survey of over 100 bankers in Slovenia. They found that voice, or the opportunity to express views and be a constructive participant in the performance

evaluation process, has a particularly significant positive impact on perceptions of procedural justice in situations where there are higher levels of task uncertainty. Task uncertainty refers to the level of variability in an employee's job requirements, and in this study relates to the level of variability of managers job tasks whose performance is being evaluated. This suggests that bankers, who have a parallel with high-tech workers in the sense that they both work in knowledge-based industries, desire to be directly involved with the process of performance evaluation in terms of having a say in how it is undertaken. This may enable their line manager to have a better understanding of the variability and complexity of job tasks which have been fulfilled. The authors did not explain clearly how the process of voice was implemented, or how it could be. However, it could be suggested that voice may allow for an opportunity to surface successes, failures or issues related to the performance of the role, and to discuss and agree how best the employee's performance can be evaluated, so that task uncertainty can be mitigated.

The second article that focuses on uncertainty management theory and performance is by Rosen et al from 2011. They draw upon uncertainty management theory to highlight that the quality of relationship between employees and line managers moderates the level of uncertainty employees are likely to encounter. In other words, a positive relationship between an employee and their line manager is likely to be based upon expectations of reciprocity between both parties which may reduce uncertainty in the outcome of performance appraisal. In contrast, less positive relationships may likely produce higher uncertainty with regards to the outcome of performance appraisal. This echoes the work of Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021).

## CHAPTER 3- Methodology and method

This chapter will explain the processes through which the research was undertaken by discussing philosophical underpinnings, research approach, data-collection and analysis techniques, and ethics.

### 3.1 The Research Process

To reiterate, the research objective was to explore the relationship between organisational justice and performance appraisal in innovative high-tech contexts. To achieve this, an appropriate research methodology was deployed to collect data from professionals who operate in these workplaces.

A research methodology is a systematic means to address research aims and objectives in an effort to build upon existing knowledge (Bell et al, 2018; Burns, 2000; Easterby Smith et al, 2012; Mertens, 2014; Saunders et al, 2007). The research methodology was underpinned by a suitable philosophical perspective and approach followed by appropriate data-collection and data-analysis techniques.

### 3.2 Philosophical Perspective

Philosophical perspectives address three key issues: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Ontology is a consideration of the nature of reality. Epistemology is a corresponding assumption of relevant means to acquire knowledge based on two things: the researcher's ontology and the dynamics of the research context. Axiology is an explanation of the researcher's values that affects the direction and purpose of the research project (Bryman, 2016; Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Schwandt et al, 2007).

Researchers use interchangeable terminology to categorise and explain ontology and epistemology. However, in Business Management scholarship, both sit somewhere on a continuum. On one side, there is a rational perspective, that applies the principles of measurement, objectivity and generalisability underpinned by numbers and facts. On the other, there is a more nuanced perspective, that applies the principles of subjectivity and in-

depth contextual insight underpinned by words and meanings (Collis and Hussey, 2014; Cresswell and Miller, 2000).

According to Easterby-Smith et al (2012), ontology can be categorised as objectivism or subjectivism. Objectivism assumes that the world consists of laws and dynamics that exist independently from the researcher. Consequently, objectivism is associated with a positivist epistemological perspective. This assumes that we can observe, measure, and infer correlation or cause-and-effect relationships in the research context being studied (Saunders et al, 2018). Alternatively, subjectivism assumes that the researcher is not independent of the research context and is a key part of the world that they inhabit. Consequently, subjectivism is linked with an interpretivist epistemological perspective. This assumes that knowledge is subjective which involves acknowledging and exploring individual experience, multiple realities, and local contextual characteristics (ibid).

It was decided to choose an interpretivist philosophical position. The reason for this was due to the desire to explore contextual dynamics in depth. These contextual dynamics included: employee attitudes towards fairness during performance appraisal, relationships between appraiser and appraisee, and attitudes towards HR.

Interpretivism holds that the world can be comprehended by immersing oneself in it, by acknowledging individual experiences and multiple realities (Flick, 2018; Guba and Lincoln, 1984). This was important to the researcher so that the voices of individual participants could be recognised to help build a detailed and nuanced understanding of how they perceived the application of organisational justice in high-tech contexts during performance appraisal. The researcher also wanted to build a detailed picture of participants' views of HR's role during performance appraisal in terms of upholding perceptions of organisational justice.

In the literature, high-tech contexts were described as having unique characteristics such as emergent patterns of behaviour, spontaneous collaboration, free-spiritedness, and creative thinking. An interpretivist paradigm afforded opportunity to surface specific details to explain

the impact of the characteristics of high-tech contexts on the dynamics of performance appraisal. This afforded opportunity to provide rich detail and insights into the nature of performance appraisal processes and perceptions of fairness. This involved investigating both HR professionals and high-tech professionals' viewpoints and experiences to gain a deeper insight into their job roles, their involvement, and attitudes towards performance appraisal. This afforded insight into stakeholders' attitudes and sentiments and deeper explanations of how performance appraisal was shaped.

Another reason for choosing an interpretivist philosophical position was to challenge the dominant research paradigm. Most existing literature into high-tech contexts adopted an objectivist/positivist philosophical perspective (Bogers et al, 2018; Bogers et al, 2016; Rindfleisch et al, 2017; Urbinati et al, 2018). These studies did not consider contextual dynamics in depth, nor offer nuanced insights into employees' experiences. This has resulted in a lack of detailed insight concerning the dynamics of the maintenance of organisational justice during performance appraisal in high-tech contexts, and HR's role during this process. In a nutshell, these studies' methodologies tended not to consider what occurs in the deeper folds and recesses of the organisations. Therefore, it was not very clear, from this body of work, how the fluid spontaneity of high-tech backgrounds impacted the performance appraisal process.

The objectives of the research were less interested in establishing cause and effect relationships, correlations, or to establish and measure construct validities. This meant that positivism was less appropriate for this research project. The research objectives focused on enquiring into contextual dynamics, particularly participants' views and opinions about HR, which the researcher was keen to explore in specific depth and detail. The researcher was also keen to find out the specifics of HR involvement in the performance appraisal process.

While subjectivism and interpretivism provided suitable philosophical grounding to address the aim of this research project, this philosophical perspective also accords with the researcher's own views of reality and values, or axiology. For a number of years, the researcher worked as a management consultant in several knowledge-based sectors and

witnessed first-hand the various, shifting experiences of professionals who operate in these contexts. The researcher was always struck at the fluidity and fast-changing nature of the workplaces that one was immersed in. Each workplace in the same industry were very different from each other which seemed to be because of the people who worked there, and the general ways in which business was conducted. It was through talking to people at length during previous experience, was the researcher able to discover more about what drove behaviours and attitudes and to learn more about the complexities of organisational life.

In particular, talking to workers in high-tech contexts during previous years in practice, one discovered a resentment towards senior management and other departments who sought to assert control or surveillance of their work. The reason for this resentment stemmed from a belief that some areas of management did not comprehend the unique, complex, technical nature of high-tech workers' job roles. One area of concern was performance appraisal, in which high-tech workers would indicate that they could not trust HR to deploy performance appraisal effectively because HR representatives, in their view, did not understand the nature of high-tech professionals' job roles. By recognising their individual experiences and subjective viewpoints was the researcher able to plant the seeds of this research project.

Focusing on individual stories and experiences from various contexts afforded opportunity to synthesise narratives and extrapolate shared, and unique, meanings. Recognising the need to maintain focus, one compared and contrasted these narratives with contemporary organisational justice research to incrementally generate theoretical insight (Wan et al, 2018).

### 3.3 Inductive approach

Choosing interpretivism corresponds with an inductive approach which seeks to generate new theoretical understandings. To achieve this, it was important to have a robust understanding of contextual dynamics, so that findings could be compared with existing research (Woo et al, 2017). The literature did not take into consideration the limitations of existing organisational justice theory in reflecting the complexities of high-tech environments. Hence why the researcher wanted to answer the calls of Ellswood, Grimshaw and Pandza (2017), McKenna

et al (2011), Cooke and Saini (2010), Storey, Quintas, Taylor, & Fowle, (2002), and Zanko et al. (2008) to undertake an inductive, qualitative inquiry that generated deeper contextual understanding that will contribute to a new set of theoretical ideas.

### 3.4 Sampling

To operationalise the inductive approach, qualitative data was collected from various HR and high-tech knowledge-based professionals. Interviewing HR professionals was important to maintain balance and learn more about the role of HR in the performance-appraisal process. This afforded opportunity to collect data that represented a broad canvas of perceptions of informed participants across various contexts. This allowed a deeper understanding of the interplay between performance appraisal and organisational justice. By focusing closely on high-tech professionals’ work patterns, activities, and their perspectives on the appraisal process through which their performance was evaluated, it was possible to gauge their views on what they believe a fair level of performance to be. It was also possible to explore whether they perceived that their performance was being assessed/monitored/observed appropriately.

It was also attempted to learn more about the complexities and dynamics of participants’ job roles and responsibilities and how their organisations shaped performance appraisals. The researcher wanted to reveal more about how HR responded to these complexities. For example, the researcher was curious to learn more about whether HR were able to comprehend esoteric tech work processes.

The sample size was 26 with details of the participants outlined in the table below.

<b>Interviewee identifier</b>	<b>Job title</b>	<b>Gender and age</b>	<b>Firm size (employees)</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date of interview</b>
1	Business Fulfilment consultant	Male: 40-45.	>250	UK	March 2021



2	HR Manager	Male: 35-40.	>250	UK	January 2021
3	Fintech Analyst and AI Specialist	Male: 25-30.	>250	UK	October 2020
4	Fintech Database Manager	Male: 35-40.	>250	UK	October 2020
5	Digital Transformation Consultant	Male: 35-40.	>250	UK	October 2020
6	Robotics Manager	Male: 35-40.	>250	USA	October 2020
7	IT Consultant	Male: 30-35.	>250	UK	October 2020
8	HR Manager – Fintech	Female: 25-30.	<250	USA	October 2020
9	VR and AR Consultant	Male: 25-30.	<250	UK	October 2020
10	Investment Banker	Male: 25-30.	>250	Germany	October 2020
11	IT Consultant	Male: 25-30.	>250	UK	October 2020
12	IT Director	Male: 50-55.	>250	Canada	November 2020
13	HR Manager – Sportswear Tech	Female: 30-35.	>250	Netherlands	November 2020
14	IT Manufacturing Design	Male: 30-35.	>250	UK	December 2020
15	IT Consultant and Technical Author	Male: 50-55.	<250	UK and USA	January 2021
16	IT Manufacturing Design	Male: 30-35.	>250	UK	January 2021
17	Fintech Director	Male: 30-35.	<250	Kenya	January 2021

18	HR Manager – Electric Carmaker	Male: 30- 35.	>250	Germany	January 2021
19	Fintech Consultant	Male: 25- 30.	>250	USA	January 2021
20	Virologist	Male: 35- 40.	>250	UK	February 2021
21	Engineer – Car making	Male: 25- 30.	>250	Germany	February 2021
22	IT Project Manager	Male: 30- 35.	>250	UK	February 2021
23	HR Director – Banking (tech division)	Male: 40- 45	>250	UK	October 2020
24	IT Project Manager	Male: 45- 50.	>250	UK	February 2021
25	CEO – IT and Facilities Management	Male: 50- 55.	>250	UK, Germany, China	February 2021
26	HR Director – Fintech	Male: 40- 45.	>250	UK	October 2020

Table 1: List of interview participants

All participants were known to the researcher hence a purposive sampling strategy was used, which is not unusual in inductive qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 2005; Karmel and Jain, 1987; Bryman, 2016). Identifying people who were known to the researcher helped to minimise access constraints and reduced time needed to develop trust and rapport. Of course, there was a risk that knowing the participants would create bias in terms of how the participants were selected and how the data was analysed. Indeed, the sample was skewed towards male respondents. However, this was not surprising as it is illustrative of the dominant role men play in tech roles (Crandall et al, 2021; Hupfer, 2020). It is unclear whether having more female participants would have produced results that were substantively different. Arguably, not, as being treated fairly during performance appraisals is desirable across all humans regardless of their sex or gender.

To guard against bias affecting data analysis, Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness criteria was applied. See page 208 onwards in the Conclusion chapter for more information on this.

All interviews were conducted online to save on travel costs. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 1 hour 20 minutes.

The research logic that drove the sample size involved asking whether it was big enough. It was discovered that as the final interviews were being conducted, an analysis of the transcripts revealed that the participants were beginning to repeat some of the key themes which previous interviewees had revealed. These key themes included distrust and disrespect for HR, line managers' dominance of the performance appraisal process, and a lack of effective control systems. It was felt that further interviews would not add any additional new or substantive insight which meant that a saturation point of 26 interviewees had been reached.

The sample is representative of the community I aimed to study. The reasons for this are that all of the interviewees worked in an environment where the application of cutting-edge technology was central to the execution of employees' job roles (the organisations may not be technology firms per se). For example, interviewee 20, a virologist does not work for a tech firm as such, but does use AI, statistical applications, and Python programming in his job role.

Consequently, a purposive sampling strategy was deemed important to identify participants whose job roles were sufficiently deemed "high tech"; in that they had a technical role. For example, being a programmer or database manager in a technology firm that operated in, for example, the areas of robotics or artificial intelligence that required a high level of technical knowledge, expertise, and experience. Likewise, some participants were targeted who worked in industries such as finance and engineering that prima facie may not be perceived as "high tech". Nevertheless, they deployed technology in their job roles such as python software, design software, machine learning and AI software, and other high-tech elements such as advanced machinery. Furthermore, the researcher also wanted to target HR managers who were known to be experienced in high-tech environments, so that they could offer their insights into how they operate in these contexts.

### 3.5 Data Collection

To capture contextual complexity, semi-structured interviews were deployed. Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to plan the general outline of the interview and identify key points that they wished to discuss with the participants which corresponded with the research aim and objectives and research questions (Easterby-Smith et al 2012; Flick, 2018; McEvoy and Richards, 2006). Using some structure in my interviews afforded opportunity to uphold dependability by asking questions that corresponded with the research project's key concepts (Guba and Lincoln, 1984). Semi-structured interviews also offered flexibility so that the researcher was able to pursue unexpected, and fruitful, lines of inquiry during the interview process to reveal bespoke insights that were unique and rich in depth (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews also offered opportunities for participants to reveal potentially very useful individual insights into their roles within high-tech contexts, beyond the questions they have been asked.

The interview protocol was developed according to Kvale's recommendations (Kvale, 2012).

The first recommendation involved ensuring that the interviews captured the life world of the participants in as much detail as possible. This resulted in creating a series of interview themes that were linked to the research questions, which are listed in the table below. The themes are both theory and experience driven:

<b>Interview Themes</b>
Nature of work in innovative work contexts.
Importance of organisational justice dimensions.
HRM departments' levels of understanding of work contexts particularly job characteristics, roles, and tasks.
HRM departments' efforts to improve understanding of work contexts.
Quality of HRM departments' engagement with employees.
Challenges HR experience in work contexts.
Employees' attitudes towards HR.
Nature of HR response to increasing workplace complexity driven by technology and innovation.

Mapping responsibility for designing and deploying performance-appraisal strategies in high-tech workplaces.
Dynamics of performance-appraisal interventions in work contexts.
Methods used to maintain employees' perceived organizational justice in performance-appraisal strategies.
Employees' perceived levels of organizational justice in response to performance-appraisal strategies.
Mediating/moderating factors that impact perceptions of organisational justice.

Table 2: Interview themes

The second of Kvale's recommendations involved capturing the meaning of what the participants said. This was achieved through the interviewer's own knowledge and experience of the subject coupled with a willingness to question and query participants' comments so that they could elaborate on an interesting point or clarifying an ambiguous comment.

The third recommendation involved ensuring that the participants described as accurately as possible their experiences and their feelings. This was achieved by asking follow-through questions with regards to their experiences during performance appraisal such as, "How did that make you feel?", and "How did you respond to that situation?".

The fourth recommendation involved ensuring that the participants were as specific as possible. This was achieved by asking participants to provide detailed examples of their involvement in performance appraisal and to elicit their understanding of organisational justice.

The fifth recommendation involved exhibiting qualified naivete, which proposes that an open mind be maintained during the interview, and that unexpected lines of inquiry be pursued. This was undertaken on several occasions so that the participant would be prompted to expand upon particularly interesting and evocative sentiments, for example, participants' feelings and attitudes toward their line manager and HR, and HR representatives' views about high-tech employees and their own angst.

The sixth recommendation involved being focused on particular themes and avoiding ambiguity. This was achieved by compiling a list of interview themes that are included in the

previous page, and asking participants to repeat, or clarify points that were not immediately understood.

The seventh recommendation involved recognising when participants change their perspective on a particular theme or acknowledge that they have learned something new from the interview. This occurred several times during the interviews as demonstrated by some participants admitting that they didn't know what was meant by organisational justice beforehand, but, following an explanation by the interviewer, they then recognised its meaning and importance during performance appraisal.

The eighth recommendation involved recognising the importance of sensitivity and maintaining a positive experience. As there was an ostensible power asymmetry between the interviewer and the participants, it was important to put their minds at ease by introducing myself in a relaxed, reasonably informal manner and to encourage participants to interrupt and/or ask me to clarify a question that they did not understand. This occurred several times during the interviews which suggests that the tactic worked.

The ninth recommendation involved assuaging concerns about power asymmetry. It is often considered that the interviewer may be perceived as being in a more powerful position during an interview. To address this, the researcher created a relaxed, psychologically safe environment in which the participants were encouraged to ask questions at any time, and to make it clear to the researcher if they did not want to discuss a particular topic.

Interviewees were contacted by email to arrange suitable dates and times. Interviews were conducted online due to lockdown mandates. Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and were recorded and transcribed.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

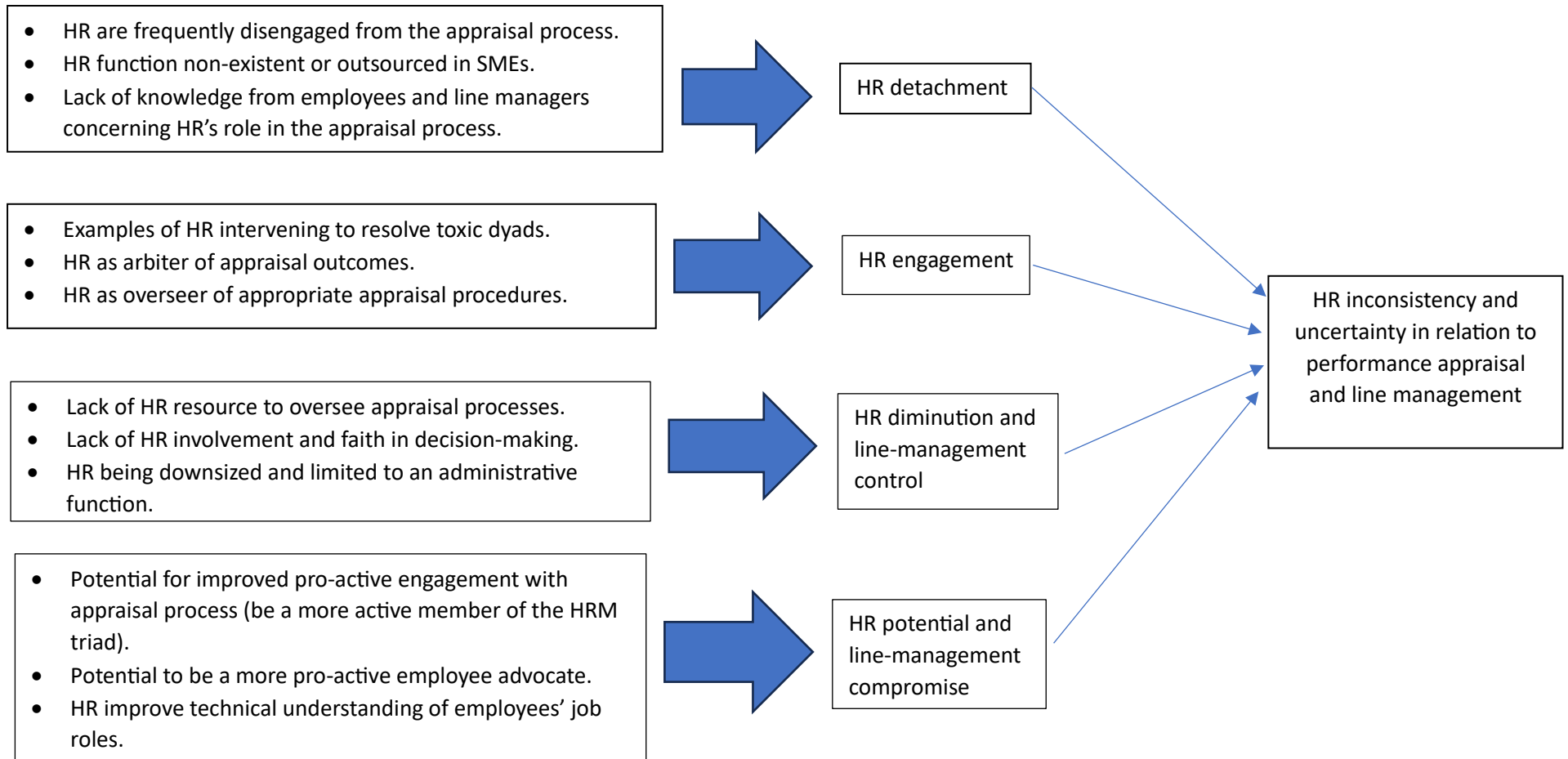
Data in this study were analysed thematically according to Gioia's template (Gioia et al, 2013). This allowed in-depth interrogation of the data by identifying first order concepts and then reflecting on what broader themes connected them together to identify second order

themes. Aggregate dimensions were then identified by interrogating the data again to identify what broader themes connected the second order themes together.

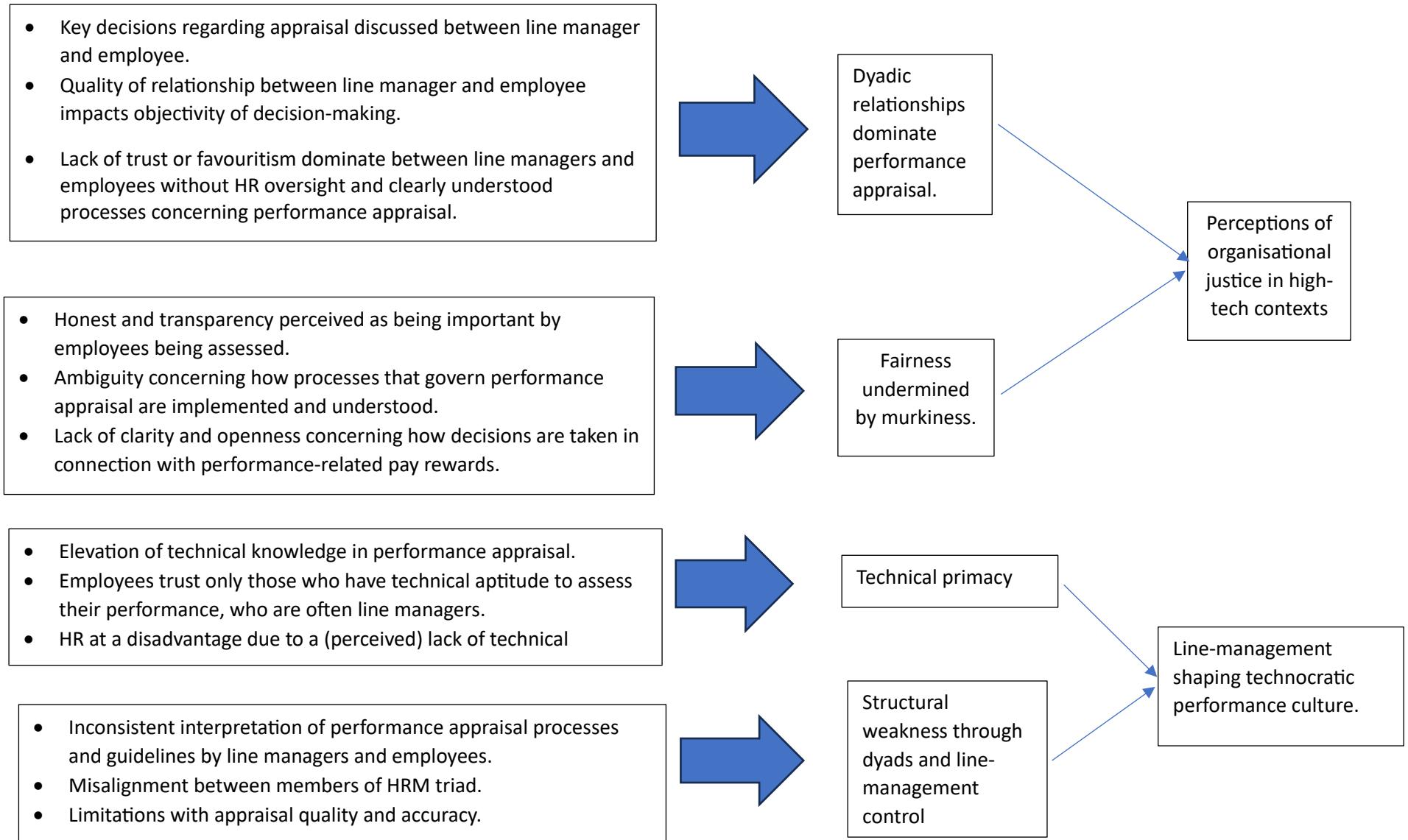
These aggregate dimensions capture the fundamental key points of the research. The findings chapter will explain the process of how they were arrived at:

1. HR inconsistency and uncertainty in relation to performance appraisal and line management.
2. Perceptions of organisational justice in high-tech contexts.
3. Line-management shaping technocratic performance culture.

See Figure 2 below for further details.







Thematic analysis does not rely on a priori themes, which afforded flexibility and open-mindedness to extract interesting and unique theoretical insights. Thematic analysis is (rarely) conducted in the area of performance appraisal and organisational justice, which offered an opportunity for a rich contextual analysis to identify key dynamics and characteristics to deepen theoretical understanding.

The sample size was small which meant that generalisation was not possible. Likewise, defending against researcher bias can be challenging as qualitative data, by its nature, is subjective as are interpretations of it. To defend against bias, a clear interview protocol was developed, which was discussed earlier. The scope of the research was narrow in the sense that it focused on a particular context. However, there is potential for the findings to be transferred to other contexts in which HR struggle to get involved in performance appraisals, and where line managers dominate the performance appraisal process.

Despite these limitations, the trustworthiness of the data was maintained using Guba and Lincoln's trustworthiness criteria. A full explanation can be found in the Conclusion chapter, page 208 onwards. Likewise, the previous section explained how Kvale's interview protocol was applied to maintain rigour during data collection.

### 3.7 Research Ethics

Research ethics processes concern the upholding of moral principles in research, and revolve around honesty and transparency, reducing harm to participants, securing participants' consent, respecting privacy, and protecting confidentiality (ESRC, 2020). Ethical approval was secured from the Adam Smith Business School and College of Social Sciences ethics' committee following rigorous screening and a series of corrections over a four-month period in accordance with the University's ethical principles (UofG, 2020).

Ethical principles were also upheld based upon Diener and Crandall's ethical principles: securing informed consent, avoiding deception, respecting privacy, and desisting from harming participants (Diener and Crandall, 1978, cited in Bryman and Bell, 2007).

Consent was secured by providing participants with an information sheet written in plain English that explained the purpose of the research project clearly and succinctly, alongside a

consent form, which the participants signed and returned indicating that they understood why they were participating. The clarity and honesty of the information sheet ensured that there was no ambiguity concerning the purpose of the research, which made sure that participants were not deceived or confused. It was also explained that participants had an opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time without giving an explanation. Likewise, reassurances to protect anonymity and confidentiality were outlined in the information sheet and also a privacy form. However, the information sheet also explained that if the participant's responses suggested serious impropriety, it would have been incumbent on me to notify the University and relevant authorities (UofG, 2020).

In terms of avoiding harm to participants, the research project was deemed low risk, as it did not encroach into sensitive areas of inquiry that were likely to induce physical injury nor psychological trauma. Only adults over the age of 21 were interviewed, many of whom were experienced HR or high-tech professionals. It was therefore unlikely that the research questions would have caused anxiety or psychiatric injury. In addition, the research process involved delivery of semi-structured interviews undertaken in face-to-face neutral environments or online, which did not involve activity likely to place participants at risk. Participants' identities have been anonymised to protect their interests. Data has been stored in encrypted databases in accordance with GDPR regulations (UofG, 2020). Findings have been stored in a digital repository for ten years' following thesis publication to allow researchers an opportunity to use the work to explore further research avenues. But all ancillary data that includes information concerning the participants themselves was destroyed using confidential waste disposal and file-removal software.

Furthermore, the research topic focused on fairness during performance appraisals, which had the potential to trigger possible negative, even traumatic, past experiences of an appraisal that, according to the participant, may have been undertaken unfairly and to their detriment. There was a risk that by discussing these negative experiences, some participants may have suffered an emotional response. However, following discussions with the researcher's supervisors, and with the ethics' committee, it was deemed that as the participants were experienced professionals in their industries, it was unlikely that any risk would be posed. Hence, the research project was deemed low risk, as it did not encroach into sensitive areas of

inquiry that were likely to induce physical injury nor psychological trauma. Only adults over the age of 21 were interviewed, many of whom were experienced HR or high-tech professionals. It was therefore unlikely that the research questions would have caused anxiety or psychiatric injury.

## CHAPTER 4 – Findings

In this chapter, the interviews will be analysed in depth to explain how the various first-order codes, second-order themes, and aggregate dimensions have been identified. The author will provide detailed evaluation and interpretation of the interviewees' comments so that the research objectives and questions can be answered in depth and detail. There are five sub-sections that correspond with each research question. This presentation of the results of the data analysis will be undertaken in advance of the Discussion chapter that will compare and contrast the author's findings with those of previous research and position the author's research in the body of existing literature.

### 4.1 Objective 1: To explore the extent of the three dimensions of organisational justice during performance appraisal

#### 4.1.1 Perceptions of the Process of Performance Appraisal

The interviews suggested that having clear processes and procedures (procedural justice), professional communications and relationships (relational justice), and evidence-based rewards based on performance (distributive justice) were important to the successful undertaking of performance evaluations in high-tech environments. The importance of these dimensions appeared to be accentuated in larger organisations, whereby there seemed to be more of an expectation that there would be sufficient resources and professionalism to ensure that appraisals were undertaken fairly. Also, there seemed to be control systems in place, but they seemed to be misunderstood or not properly implemented by line managers.

In smaller organisations, the justice dimensions were still important, but there seemed to be an acceptance from some interviewees that there would be less emphasis on formal processes and procedures due to a lack of time, resources, control systems, and HR expertise. The interviews highlighted that the quality of relationships and ambiguities and complexities related to the dissemination and comprehension of appraisal guidance affected perceptions of all three dimensions of organisational justice. HR were involved on an inconsistent basis in terms of overseeing delivery of appraisals, and were on some occasions, not perceived positively, although there was a call from some interviewees for greater involvement from HR.

#### 4.1.2 Perceptions of High-Tech Work Environments

It shall be proposed that OJ and PA are closely related. It was found that all interviewees were keen to ensure that performance appraisals were conducted fairly and objectively, although measures to implement this were not always successful. It was also found that employees were sceptical of HR's ability to maintain justice rules by drawing attention to their apparent lack of technical aptitude of job roles in these types of organisations. There was a suggestion that guidance aimed at upholding organisational justice communicated by HR was vague and some managers and participants were unsure of how HR might intervene to arbitrate or to ensure correct procedures were being followed. The interview data suggested that there was inconsistency with regards to how guidance was manifested, with larger organisations having clear, written guidelines, and smaller organisations having no official, written guidelines.

In some contexts, there was a lack of clarity and understanding about who was responsible for issuing guidance, and how to access guidance. In some instances, participants were concerned that HR were setting standards for performance appraisal implementation rather than line managers, although relationships between participants and line managers would serve to be highly problematic across many contexts. HR managers and directors themselves admitted that they struggled to operate in these contexts and to maintain fairness despite best intentions. In general, there was a lack of satisfaction with the performance appraisal process in high-tech contexts stemming largely, one could argue, from inconsistent attempts to ensure that fairness was upheld. In general, there was a pervasive sense of uncertainty with participants' relationship with their line manager being an important factor that impacted participants' perceptions of whether organisational justice was being maintained. In many cases, the traditional HRM triad of line manager, employee, and HR did not operate. Instead, appraisal was undertaken in a dyad between line managers, or equivalent, and participants. Often, HR took on a detached ad-hoc role or were not involved at all.

The discussion of the role and impact of processes and procedures during performance appraisal may involve the creation of standards and principles in an attempt to have a standardised approach across the organisation to maintain transparency and fairness.

For example, interviewee 1 is a Business Fulfilment Consultant for a major high-street bank who indicated the following:

“A colleague of mine, I hope you don’t mind me going into sort of the whole story but, a colleague of mine didn’t get her full bonus and what it was, was that she was only due to get several thousand, just say, if she met a certain level of competency, and she argued with her boss, and her boss’s boss, that she had met that competency, but what happened is that the bosses at the start of the year hadn’t told her she had to do this X job to meet this criteria, so she claimed it was an act of omission, she wasn’t given full information about what she needed to do the job correctly, and management came in at the last minute and said, “oh no but you had to do this as well,” and she claimed, “well that’s unfair because it wasn’t disclosed to me, if I’d known that I would have added this on my CV and my template and list of duties.” So HR had to get involved for this colleague, but the HR came down on the side of the management and said, “well, you haven’t actually done these competencies so you can’t get your full bonus,” which she was quite annoyed about because she thought, “well, HR don’t understand what I do, because I actually have done these things, but the management are saying... are coming out, are splitting hairs essentially”

It can be seen that HR have arbitrated in this case to resolve a dispute between an employee and their employer with regards to the calculation of her bonus. HR attempted to uphold procedural justice by examining the employee’s claim that her employer failed to disclose all competencies that one can assume would be evaluated in a performance appraisal to calculate her bonus. It can also be seen that HR appeared to have sided with management in this case. One does not know what drove them to side with management in this decision. But what the quote reveals is that there was ambiguity and complexity in this relationship. Likewise, she expressed her frustration at HR’s involvement as she believed that they did not act professionally. This seems to suggest a lack of an adequate control system to deal with this.

Despite these issues, there was a recognition that HR have a positive role to play in upholding fairness. For example, interviewee 22, an IT Project Manager for a large e-commerce firm, compared efforts by HR to uphold procedural justice in his previous employer, an engineering firm, to his current employer, a multi-national e-commerce firm:

“It seems to be a lot more formal [in my current employer] and it definitely uses technology in it, because it’s all online. All the feedback’s all online. You get chased up on it and things like that. HR are more involved [in my current employer].”

There was a sense that interviewee 22 was more comfortable with the arrangements in his current employer as HR took a more pro-active role to ensure that standards and procedures were implemented professionally and fairly. This was in contrast to the example from his previous employer whereby decisions were taken without HR oversight. The quote also emphasises the relationship between procedural justice and performance appraisal.

The interviewee goes on to say that there were active arbitration control mechanisms to address disputes between line managers and participants during performance appraisals which also emphasises the relationship between procedural justice and performance appraisal:

“HR do get involved in a lot of interviews and investigations and things like that, so there’s always an HR representative.”

Interestingly, the interviewee could not provide a specific example whereby HR took an active role. There was a tentativeness about HR’s role and a lack of clarity about how HR got involved. There was uncertainty about the nature of procedures, which means that it is not clear how procedural justice was upheld in terms of what associated processes and



procedures were adopted during performance appraisal. It also suggests a misaligned control system. There was also an implication that, due to the technical nature of the interviewee's role and those of his direct reports, it was perhaps difficult for HR to arbitrate and draw conclusions.

In contrast, interviewee 3, who is a Fintech Analysis and Vice President of Artificial Intelligence development and deployment in a multi-national asset-management firm, indicated the following:

“I mean, I think the most important thing is for them [HR] to set the playing fields... even the playing field by putting in a framework and making sure people adhere to a process, because then you can sort of be sure that everyone's getting judged in kind of the same way all across the firm.”

There was a sense that importance was being attached to ensuring that processes should be understood and followed to maintain fairness and equity in this firm, particularly when important decisions were being taken in connection with participants' performance. There was also an acknowledgement of HR's involvement in this.

But the interviewee included a caveat in the sense that the guidance issued by HR to support decisions concerning promotions that were linked to the performance appraisal process was generic and not always clear:

“There is always an element of sort of information asymmetry...the information you do get from HR might seem a bit vague, it'll say something like, “we're a firm that rewards high performance,” and you think, well, isn't that what every firm does? So, they make an effort to clarify it all and there's nothing misleading; but, for the lower rank employees it will seem that you don't quite see the inner decision-making discussions.”

This vagueness which the interviewee referred to could be linked to HR's lack of technical aptitude of participants' job roles which may have impacted their ability to issue more specific advice concerning promotion criteria. It also suggests a misaligned control system. A consequence of this may have been an erosion of respect for HR and possible diminution of HR's relevance in the organisation, although the interviewee did not suggest this.

Interviewee 10, who is an Investment Banker and Financial Analyst for a multi-national bank, who used sophisticated technology and coding in his role, echoed interviewee 3 by emphasising the relationship between procedural justice and performance appraisal in his organisation through implementation of a set of principles:

“All those [performance appraisal] principles are like a strict process. HR develops it and sets the goals and the line manager is just like... he should live by that standards and then just look how you fulfil these. My line manager hasn't the authority to set own goals, it's just directed by HR and by the bank and then he's like the operator.”

One can see that HR played a key role ensuring processes were understood and followed in this organisation by implementing standards in an effort to uphold consistency to try to ensure performance appraisals were undertaken fairly. Interestingly, however, the interviewee then went on to raise concerns about HR's role:

“But sometimes the problem with HR people, they've never really been in the business. They are making the whole process and setting the standards, but they never have to really do it their own. Sometimes I think it's hard for them to understand the issues of the business, sometimes.”

The text outlines that HR were detached from the rigours and technical complexities of what the organisation does, and by extension, what the interviewee does in his role. He appeared to be sceptical about HR's ability to create standards for performance appraisal when they seemed to lack technical aptitude of his job role, which raised concerns that processes were not being implemented appropriately. It also suggests that the control system was inadequate.

Interviewee 14, an IT Manufacturing Designer, indicated that in his organisation, HR also communicated standards in an effort to maintain perceptions of fairness, but the performance appraisals themselves were undertaken by line managers:

“I would say HR generally tends to delegate the performance reviews to the line managers. What the HR team at our company does is they act as more of a supportive, more support for line managers.”

It was interesting that he prefaced his statement with “I would say” which, similar to a previous interviewee, suggested a tentativeness that he was not fully confident of the mechanisms that drove the performance appraisal process. This raised concerns about the effectiveness of the organisation's ability to uphold procedural justice. Also, delegating performance appraisal to line managers may have eroded organisational justice and fairness as shall be discussed in more depth later.

The HR managers and directors who were interviewed also expressed the importance of the relationship between procedural justice and the effectiveness of performance appraisal so that participants perceived the process of performance appraisal as fair. But they cautioned that their involvement was constrained by a lack of technical understanding of participants' job roles.

Interviewee 18, HR Director of a US electric carmaker, outlined the processes whereby he was involved in upholding procedural justice:

“I have to prepare a list of who I rank where and then we meet as team leads in the department and make sure that we understand the ranking system similarly, so that the people across the entire department are ranked fairly, because everything is, of course, subjective, it is in quotes basically. There’s always an HR business partner attending and then the VP also sits in there and makes sure that the feedback is being set fairly.”

This quote highlights that the organisation was serious about maintaining fairness. He also suggested that HR did not necessarily require technical knowledge to make a positive and constructive contribution to the performance appraisal process:

“The feedback from everyone very much tells you whether they are good at their job or not, so you don’t necessarily need to have the knowledge about it if you have some qualitative and quantitative feedback, and we are supposed to give qualitative and quantitative feedback. However, tech employees prefer to have someone appraise them who have sufficient tech knowledge.”

But interestingly, he indicated that employees who undertook the highly technical tasks – car design, engineering, robotics, computer engineering – seemed to push back against HR involvement in performance appraisal. This suggested that only those with requisite technical knowledge led performance appraisals.

Another HR Director of an engineering firm, interviewee 2, emphasised the importance of maintaining procedural justice and perceptions of fairness by undertaking what can be seen as a quality-assurance exercise to ensure that line managers have been objective and professional during the performance appraisal process. It also suggests that quality assurance formed part of a control system:

“So, I think what HR need to do is sometimes look at evaluations objectively and challenge some findings if they didn’t seem to have been undertaken according to procedures.”

It can be seen that that there was a clear relationship between procedural justice and maintaining fairness during performance appraisal, but he qualified his ability to get involved in the following quote:

“I think it relies heavily on the [line] manager who’s the expert in that particular specialism.”

But what has been seen so far is that participants want fairness firmly embedded in performance appraisal processes, which means that there may have been pushback from some participants if HR get more directly involved in performance appraisal perceiving them as not having the necessary technical aptitude. Likewise, these participants may have been less likely to seek assistance from HR in the event of a disagreement with their line manager during the performance appraisal process. They may have believed that HR may side with the line manager, as what was seen from interviewee 1. This may hinder HR’s ability to arbitrate effectively. Also, it can be seen that there are sporadic efforts to have some form of control mechanism, but little evidence of any overarching, robust control system.

Interviewee 26, an HR Director at a multi-national bank who oversees their technology division, explained that robust mechanisms have been put in place to help HR get more pro-actively involved in the performance appraisal process and to uphold perceptions of organisational justice and fairness. Examples included Code Commit which is a mechanism that allows coders to upload examples of their most effective codes and to discuss the reasons for its success in the presence of their line manager and an HR representative. This was helpful to allow HR an opportunity to build up experiential knowledge of what coders do and to cultivate rapport with participants. It also suggests that HR are involved in the implementation of a control system.

However, the HR Director made clear that despite these efforts, there were several complaints concerning HR's involvement with some senior coders – earning in the region of \$3 to \$4 million dollars per annum – refusing to cooperate with HR in their performance appraisals. The HR Director indicated that these employees' responses would amount to little more than a “contemptuous grunt” when contacted by HR. The key reason being that the coders had no respect for HR due to their lack of technical aptitude.

A quotation from interviewee 7, an IT consultant, summarises succinctly the importance of organisational justice to the performance appraisal process and HR's ad-hoc role in trying to maintain procedural justice:

“Where HR do get involved more in the [performance appraisal] process is when that goes wrong, so that the organisation is seen to be doing the right thing, staying within the law.”

One can see here that there was a link between maintaining organisational justice and perceptions of fairness in terms of legal compliance. The organisation appeared to acknowledge the importance of OJ and fairness, but it can be deduced from this quotation that they perhaps do not take a pro-active stance, delegating the responsibility to HR to check due diligence and uphold procedural justice after the performance appraisal has taken place. There appeared to be a lack of scope for HR to become more directly involved in the mechanics of the performance appraisal process itself, again perhaps due to their lack of technical aptitude of the job roles themselves. It also suggests a misaligned control system.

To conclude, organisational justice and performance appraisal seem closely related due to the ostensible importance of maintaining procedural justice so that participants sensed that there was openness and transparency underpinning the performance appraisal process. A key theme that emerged was fairness characterised by participants' keenness to be treated equitably. However, this created potential problems for HR as these participants may have perceived

HR as having a lack of technical aptitude to become more directly and pro-actively involved in the performance appraisal process. HR detachment may have resulted in participants locked into a two-way relationship with their line manager (dyads) which resulted in appraisals being impacted by several factors such as contingency, bias, and problematic employee relationships.

#### 4.1.3 Perceptions of Performance Appraisal in High-Tech Work Environments

Relational justice in the context of conducting performance appraisal is defined by the quality of interaction between the person leading the performance appraisal and the person receiving it. From the perspective of the appraisee, the appraiser should communicate in a courteous, professional, and timely manner. The appraiser should also remain objective and be open and transparent in their findings.

However, the data would suggest that relational justice was more than just an assurance that the appraiser would conduct themselves professionally. There was an expectation that the appraiser show empathy, emotional intelligence, and recognise the growth and development prospects of their appraisee. This was encapsulated in the following quotation from interviewee 7, an IT Consultant:

“In that situation it’s much more about the things that... it’s much more... performance evaluation, it’s a genuine two-way discussion, where the company still has to try and get what it wants done, done, but it takes much more cognisance of what’s important to the key asset which, in this case is the person, the individual, and what’s important in their life and in their career and what they want.”

It can be seen from the quote that interviewee 7 wanted a “genuine two-way discussion”. It can be interpreted that the adjective “genuine” to mean that the interviewee wanted honesty, transparency, and meaningfulness from the appraiser. There’s also a suggestion that the participant wanted personal investment characterised by their line manager being fully prepared and being willing to focus on the ratees’ development and future career. The latter

text emphasised that the appraiser should understand what is “important” to the appraisee which required the development of rapport and a willingness on behalf of the appraiser to express an authentic interest in their appraisee’s future career development.

Interviewee 22, an IT Project Manager with a multi-national e-commerce firm, also highlighted the importance of relational justice in the performance appraisal process in more practical and colourful terms in the following exchange:

“I think it’s all... it’s just sitting as a like, on the fence. So, they’ll [HR] make sure the manager doesn’t say anything they shouldn’t be saying. They’re also there to document and make sure everything is by the book.”

Interviewee 22 outlined HR’s involvement in ensuring that the appraisee and appraiser conduct themselves professionally and courteously. This can be interpreted as meaning that both parties should not be expressing inappropriate views and ideas that could be perceived as improper, discourteous, biased, and inaccurate. This was backed up by the statement that HR should get involved to ensure that the parties conduct themselves professionally. It also suggests that HR should get more involved in the development of control systems. It can be seen that clarification was sought to link the interviewee’s comments with theoretical understanding of relational justice.

Further evidence from the interviews suggested a lack of relational justice can have a detrimental impact on the performance appraisal process. For example, interviewee 14, highlighted the difficulties associated with bias:

“Yes, definitely. I’ve seen... I’ve experienced and seen line managers who are biased in their appraisal. If the line manager is personable with the person, with their employee, or they seem to get along better, they’re more likely to overlook flaws and, really I think, double-down on praise for achievements. I’ve seen what I would consider to be very skilled employees getting critiqued heavily in reviews



and what I would personally perceive as underwhelming employees get praised and those.”

The impact of a lack of relational justice, due to the presence of bias, seemed to affect the relationship between the appraiser - the line manager - and the appraisee. Relationships underpinned by a lack of familiarity, or a personality clash, or resentment, may result in inaccurate, negative performance evaluations.

What this suggests was that participants who are having their performance appraised by their line manager may be locked into toxic dyads whereby line managers apply negative bias that impacts the objectivity and authenticity of the performance-appraisal process. Likewise, participants who have a close relationship with their line manager may find themselves locked into a gentle dyad whereby participant flaws are overlooked, and performance is appraised much more highly than it should be. This suggests that contingency is a factor due to an absence of a clearly defined control system. Dyads may result in the complexities of ratees' job roles due to high task uncertainty not being captured fully and accurately in performance appraisals conducted by line managers.

There was a potential role for HR to play in upholding relational justice to mitigate the emergence of toxic and gentle dyads, and to take a more pro-active role to improve employee relationships. But as can be found from previous interviewees, there was a reluctance on the part of some participants in high-tech environments to accept a direct role from HR in the performance-appraisal process. This perhaps reflected a technical chauvinism. Nevertheless, restraining HR from more pro-active involvement may result in the creation of more dyads and contingency that counterintuitively impacts tech participants' ability to be treated fairly and for organisations to maintain relational justice in performance appraisals. The outcome may result in higher turnover and lower productivity.

An example of what could be described as *laissez-faire* application of relational justice is underscored by the following quotation from interviewee 24 who is an IT Project Manager:

“Basically, it’s a handshake by discussion to define how that person’s going to measure themselves over the year. We’re just really a conjure and a bit of assurance to say, you know, “yes, you’re pretty much on track with that,” or, “no, I don’t agree with that, that target, that’s not going to push you, that’s just... that’s a paper exercise.”

The phrase, “handshake by discussion”, insinuated that the application of relational justice was based upon informality and what could have been interpreted as a mutual understanding between both parties concerning the organisation’s expectations of the appraisee’s future performance. Nevertheless, the phrase “conjure and a bit of assurance” indicates that the appraiser was improvising the performance appraisal (conjuring ideas out of a hat like a magician!). The process seemed to lack the “genuine” element that interviewee 7 implied, which required the appraiser to undertake appropriate research and preparation before the appraisal meetings. This would afford opportunity for the appraiser to communicate in a well-informed, professional manner to help uphold relational justice.

One can gain a sense, too, that different interviewees have a different understanding and perception of relational justice, which was affected by the relationship with their line manager and the culture of the organisation they work for. Again, perception of being favoured or being disfavoured by their line manager may also have impacted the interviewees’ perception of relational justice. Another example of contingency. If the appraisee was aware of being favoured, they may have enjoyed this attention and potential for access to greater opportunity. Although there may have been instances when the favoured members were acutely aware of their preferential treatment which may have caused tension and a sense of guilt. Another example of the potential consequence of not having a suitable control system.

On an organisational level, there was scope for HR to improve relational justice by responding to events in the macro-environment using an appropriate control system. Some employees may then perceive that they are less likely to be discriminated against during the

performance appraisal process. An example was from interviewee 6 who is a senior director of a robotics firm in the United States:

“HR are not directly involved in...performance evaluations. We leave to line managers. Nevertheless, we’ve actually had a lot of discussions with HR around diversity, in relation to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in the US in recent months.”

There was an acknowledgement that the firm needed to work with HR on how it interacted with its staff in response to high-profile macro events such as the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement. In contrast, performance appraisal was delegated to line managers. On the surface, one can see as positive that the firm was aiming work with HR to uphold relational justice in terms of communicating with staff about BLM protests. But perhaps less positive that HR were not involved in appraisal processes. Despite the rhetoric, black employees may have found themselves at the mercy of a toxic dyad during the performance appraisal process. It seemed to be the case that there was a lack of a suitable control system to deal with these issues.

To conclude, it was evident that relational justice and performance appraisal have a close relationship in high-tech environments. How line managers interacted and behaved during the performance-appraisal process appeared to have affected the perceptions of their direct reports. This may have consequences in terms of possible employee exit and reduced productivity, if toxic and biased relationships are not addressed. Nevertheless, negative attitudes towards HR may impede their ability to intervene, which may prolong and strengthen existing dyads. Likewise, it could be the case that a lack of an appropriate control system sharpens employees’ realisation that there is a lack of organisational justice.

#### 4.1.4 Perceptions of OJ in the Context of Performance Appraisal in High-Tech Environments

Distributive justice in the context of performance appraisal can be defined as the need to uphold fair calculation and dissemination of reward in an organisation following an evaluation of employee performance. This is a key aspect of the performance appraisal

process. It can be seen from the literature review that the distribution of reward can be viewed as contentious and may lead to accusations of unfairness and the growth of resentment. One can agree that it is in an organisation's best interest to undertake a performance appraisal process that is objective, fair and underpinned by various sources of evidence, so that cohesive decisions can be taken to reward employees according to their actual performance.

Despite the importance of distributive justice, there were various examples from the interviews that seemed to outline difficulties in maintaining fairness when determining rewards based on performance:

One example is from interviewee 6:

“There's not a lot of transparency within the company on compensation. We're not particularly transparent with things around salaries and some of the additional things like, say, options and appraisal like that.”

The interviewee believed that his organisation did not uphold distributive justice due to a lack of transparent mechanisms and processes that would link performance appraisal with decisions concerning employee rewards. In the context of the interview, he was unable to provide a clear explanation. This may be because of the vibrant labour market as indicated by the interviewee himself after the recorded interview was completed. He explained that this vibrant labour market has been created by a high demand for technology jobs, supported by a steady pipeline of high-quality graduates from top universities.

In addition, there are large volumes of applications received from well-qualified IT personnel from many parts of the world, which means that it is relatively “easy” to replace people when they decide to move on (which is common, apparently). Consequently, it perhaps does not make sense for the firm to invest in mechanisms that would have ensured that distributive justice was applied in a systematic way. They seemed more comfortable to deal with disputes and disagreements in an ad-hoc manner, which suggests an absence of robust control systems.

Also, they are a relatively young technology start-up which implied a lack of experience and knowledge about how to undertake these kinds of processes. The interviewee indicated that employees may approach him or his senior colleagues with concerns about their performance appraisal process. He was aware of the sensitive nature of the process as highlighted by the word “emotive” in the follow-up quote below, but it was not an issue that seemed to trouble him or the organisation:

“The thing that tends to be most emotive for people is direct individual compensation...when people bring it up it’s not necessarily that they feel that they’re being screwed but they’re not certain they’re not being screwed.”

He also explained in the unrecorded follow-up conversation that tech employees are paid significant sums of money which means they are less interested in distributive justice. This was not a theme echoed by participants interviewed in other organisations, which suggested that the context of this firm is unique, or the interviewee misunderstands the views of the firm’s employees. He indicated that HR played a weak role in the organisation. Therefore, he may have to contend with rising levels of resentment in future.

Interviewee 9, who is a director of a technology firm that specialises in virtual and augmented reality software and hardware in Scotland, echoed some of interviewee 6’s points about a lack of mechanisms to uphold distributive justice:

“[Performance] evaluation itself isn’t formally linked to rewards. [It’s] done on an ad hoc basis. There’s no formal mechanism for levelling up after a review and I think particularly my boss would be very against putting something like that in place.”

Similar to the firm that interviewee 6 works for, interviewee 9 works for a young tech start-up that was not keen to implement mechanisms to uphold distributive justice. There was no HR presence and performance appraisal was undertaken on an ad-hoc basis with his manager:

“I’m a director, so my employment is informally reviewed on a roughly annual basis...so long as I’m doing everything well and the business is growing and not rattling anybody’s trees and being professional, it’s assumed my performance is good and that will keep evolving with the business as it grows.”

The focus here was on organisational performance rather than on individual performance and development. There was an expectation that employees were expected to get on with it and hit the ground running. If the organisation was performing well, there was a lack of concern with individual sentiment which runs counter to the point interviewee 6 made about recognising the emotive aspect of appraising performance. Any individual reward was based on assumptions about an employee’s performance. This may be problematic as the firm begins to grow as employees may start to compare their rewards with each other. But, again, this firm’s approach appeared to be due to culture and a perceived lack of resources. As a tech start-up, it perhaps relied less on maintaining a brand image of order and certainty and thrived more on uncertainty, contingency, and improvisation, due to an ostensible absence of a control system. Interestingly, this interviewee is also a director, like interviewee 6, which suggests that there was a lack of concern for what lower-level employees think about how distributive justice was considered.

Nevertheless, he did recognise a potentially positive role for HR in business and suggested that as his firm gets bigger, they may employ an HR function:

“Outsourced HR, I’m not sure how effective that is because the best HRs I’ve worked with are people who’ve really got an understanding of the individuals in the business, you know, and the culture and the kind of on-the-ground understanding.”

But he also proposed that HR needs a firm understanding of the technical elements of job roles to become more directly involved in upholding distributive justice:

“I would think that would be important for any HR managers to have a root or a source for garnering a decent understanding of the assessed person’s day-to-day [technical] life working for that company.”

In a sense, he suggests that HR require a minimum technical aptitude to be accepted as a key player in upholding distributive justice, and to be a respected function within a performance appraisal control system.

In contrast, interviewee 3, who is vice-president of artificial intelligence in an asset-management firm, and manages a group of employees, indicates that distributive justice is taken seriously in his organisation and that HR play an important role:

“Yes [HR are involved]. They definitely will try to make sure that people are being paid close to what they call the market level, or the market rate. HR try and ensure that, and then your bonus will... I think it also will be somewhat related to total compensation in the market, you know.”

One can see from this exchange that HR played a role to ensure that employees’ salaries were benchmarked, and that compensation was calculated based on market rates. This was a positive indication of the organisation’s ostensible commitment to maintaining distributive justice to uphold fairness. HR also played a more pro-active role here which indicates that concerns about their lack of technical aptitude is less of a problem. However, it should be noted that the context was different compared to interviewee 6. Interviewee 3 works for a large, long-established, experienced, and well-resourced multi-national firm that seems to be more motivated and capable of upholding organisational justice. There was a recognition that the firm was more professional in its approach by creating a more structured environment that included a codified performance appraisal process. This suggests that a control system was in place.

The importance that some high-tech employees place on distributive justice was captured vividly by interviewee 4 who is a FinTech Database Manager:

“There’s some places in the organisation where you would get a very large bonus for doing well, and others where, if you do well, you actually just get an on track bonus, which is very... it’s standard percentage of your wage. I think it’s quite unfair in that respect because you’ll have somebody who is really... wants to perform really well, does perform really well, and only gets an on track, which would be the same reward as, say, somebody’s who’s just making the grade.”

The interviewee was unhappy about what he perceived to be a misaligned bonus system that did not take into consideration an employee’s actual performance. He implies that some job roles in the firm attracted higher bonuses than others which would point to a multi-tiered bonus system that may have disincentivised some employees who received the on-track bonus. Likewise, creating a binary on-track or off-track performance categorisation for some job roles means that on-track employees were rewarded in a similar manner. This seems to have created resentment for some on-track employees who perceived that they have performed better than other employees also awarded as being on-track. This ambiguity may have triggered irritation and a reduction in performance and organizational citizenship behaviours. Alternatively, such a system may have helped to simplify the performance appraisal process. But the key point here is that the interviewee believed that distributive justice was not being upheld which means that he perceived a lack of fairness, due to what could be described as a misaligned control system.

HR played a minimal role in the organisation which perhaps was unfortunate as they might have been able to offer constructive suggestions about how distributive justice could have been better maintained, as emphasised by the interviewee’s comments below:



“We have very minimal engagement with human resources. My manager deals with most aspects of performance appraisal – he is very technical. HR has quite a minimal role, has a minimal input.”

What this exchange indicates is that decisions concerning performance were delegated to line managers. The interviewee explained that his manager had a very good understanding of the technical nature of his subordinates’ work which one can assume would have allowed for a detailed examination of their performance. But it also forced both parties into a dyad that could have had a profound impact on the interviewee’s career development if the relationship was affected by bias, contingency, and a negative view of one another. Coupled with his reservations about the organisation’s performance-appraisal procedures (a lack of procedural justice), and hence, a lack of a robust control system, being locked into a dyad may have produced further perceptions of unfairness.

Interestingly, interviewee 8, an HR manager in a finance organisation, described her efforts to take a more pro-active stance in upholding distributive justice which counters some of the previous comments and viewpoints:

“I think for distributive justice, the one that I’m mostly making sure that everything is good is that I make sure that I’m giving time to new employees, also to senior employees and people that have been here for so long, because I feel that the part of training, organisational development, we are so focused on.”

It can be seen here that the interviewee recognised that it was important to engage with new starts and senior employees to gain a deeper understanding about their job roles and to develop rapport and empathy with them. This suggested an emotional intelligence that involved the HR manager recognising the firm’s employees and engaging with them to try and understand what was happening at a grassroots’ level. This knowledge and understanding enabled her to contribute more effectively to decisions taken with regards to rewards, which was markedly different from interviewees’ 6 and 9 who appeared more comfortable with a

laissez-faire, detached role. This was more likely to bolster respect in the sense that HR were recognised as a pro-active stakeholder who maintain distributive justice by engaging more closely with employees in an effort to find out more about the technical aspect of their jobs. The interviewee would also have had an opportunity to get to know the employees and recognise their concerns which may have helped her to work more confidently with line managers to try to maintain distributive justice and perceptions of fairness.

To echo this view of HR's potentially positive role in upholding distributive justice, interviewee 25, CEO of a multi-national facilities management and technology firm that retrofits technology into buildings to improve their sustainability, highlighted HR's role in processing/interpreting large volumes of employee data. This ensured a more standardised approach to maintaining distributive justice and a sense of fairness:

“HR gather information [about performance and rewards] across a wide range of disciplines, so it will give you that chance to understand, if there's a common theme, is something right or wrong in your workforce.”

There was a positive aspect to HR identifying patterns in the data and surfacing common themes. Distributive justice and rewards were not mentioned directly in the quote, but it suggests that HR can identify areas where there are potential problems with performance and reward. By reviewing existing appraisal documentation, HR can identify ways in which the procedures can be improved, and resources can be allocated for particular types of reward that employees required, which suggests the development of an appropriate control system.

However, interviewee 18, an HR manager in a multinational electric carmaker, in contrast to interviewee 8 and interviewee 25, took a less sanguine perspective:

“Yes, unfortunately they [performance and rewards] are linked together...it makes it a two-class system. For me, personally, I feel that we should give a little bit more power to managers about that, because this 360-degree feedback

takes a lot of it away, under the assumption that managers would give unfair feedback and unfair appraisals.”

The interviewee held a negative view of the link between performance appraisal and financial reward as being detrimental to maintaining distributive justice. He believed that this created a system of haves and have-nots that could have created resentment and a perceived lack of fairness – and possibly employee conflict. He took the view that line managers should have more authority to decide on rewards based on their appraisal of performance, rather than rely on alternative methods such as 360-degree feedback. This suggests that there is a misaligned control system.

He believed that the key difficulty with 360-degree feedback was that the raters may not have fully comprehended the purpose of questions asked during the performance appraisal as highlighted in the quotation below:

“We always had the choice to say to the feedback givers “please tell us whether this person is a top performer”. Every single time we did that a person said, “yes, this person is a top performer, that person, that person”. Yes, so you don’t seem to understand what a top performer is.”

The interviewee proposed that 360-degree feedback may have asked appropriate questions, but the raters may have provided unreliable responses, due to a lack of comprehension, or a lack of motivation to complete it, and possibly a lack of guidance from HR in terms of how to define a “top performer”. Again, this suggests a misaligned control system.

One can deduct from his comments that he did not perceive there being a problem with creating performance-appraisal dyads whereby line managers take the lead in evaluating performance, despite potential associated problems with bias and negative employee relationships. Furthermore, he may also have distrusted 360-degree feedback that was predicated on peer exchange due to the influence of bias and the impact of the quality of

personal relationships potentially distorting raters' peer reviews. For example, an employee who met their objectives successfully and went above and beyond in their performance levels, may have been provided with negative peer reviews by colleagues if the ratee was perhaps introverted and not sociable, and not part of the in-group. Also, the interviewee's unfavourable view of 360-degree feedback perhaps also masked a distrust of employees to undertake the process professionally. This may not have come as a surprise if the organisation did not provide guidelines to employees as to what a top performer may look like, which suggests a lack of an appropriate control mechanism. Allowing employees freedom to discern the characteristics of a top performer may have produced inconsistent and unreliable responses. Nevertheless, this may be an inescapable aspect of 360-degree feedback in which the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

To conclude, it appears that distributive justice has a key role to play in the relationship between organisational justice and performance appraisal. It was discovered that distributive justice can be upheld based on managerial assumptions and the implementation of a psychological contract, whereby the firm expects employees to perform well, and employees expect to be rewarded if the organisation performs well, without the need for formal performance appraisal. It also suggests that a lack of a suitable control system can distort decisions taken about rewards.

This corresponds with the position taken by smaller, younger tech start-ups that involved a laissez-faire approach to maintaining distributive justice and perceptions of fairness. These concepts, and their interplay, did not seem particularly important to them, nor did they think that they were particularly important to the employees due to their already (very) high salaries and excellent career opportunities in the technology sector. It also suggests that implementing a suitable performance and reward control system is not important to them either.

It was also discovered that a CEO and an HR Manager in a FinTech organisation took positive perspectives with regards to how HR can engage more closely with the performance appraisal process and with employees. This enabled them to gain a clearer understanding of

what employees do and what they want in terms of rewards, which can help to improve perceptions of fairness.

But one also witnessed a darker side to the relationship between distributive justice and the performance-appraisal process due to ostensibly misaligned objectives and performance evaluation practices that were deemed as unfair. In other words, a misaligned control system. One also observed the erosion of the HRM triad in the sense that HR in some cases took a detached role, or played no role at all. There also seemed to be a general sense of uncertainty surrounding the performance appraisal process with employees relying heavily on line managers during the performance appraisal process. In effect, line managers become a proxy for the employees' perception of whether their employer can be perceived as trustworthy.

#### 4.2 Objective 2: To explore the application of the HRM triad during performance appraisal from the perspective of HR

To address this objective, we started to gain an understanding of HR's involvement in the relationship between organisational justice and performance appraisal.

For this objective, we will examine HR's involvement in much more depth and detail.

There are several first-order concepts and second-order themes that emerged when considering how HR have shaped performance appraisal in high-tech organisational contexts, most of which suggested that HR's involvement is detached, lacking in visibility, superficial, and lacking in involvement in key aspects of maintaining organisational justice.

##### 4.2.1 HR Detachment

Interviewee 3, a Fintech Analyst and AI Specialist, indicated that HR play a minor, ad-hoc role in the performance appraisal process:

“It's mainly the line manager and their managers [who get involved in performance appraisal]. So, I would say HR doesn't come into it, unless maybe you have a particularly low rating for somebody.”

HR's role seems detached. The comments suggest that if there were no tangible issues or problems in the performance appraisal process, HR did not take part in it. Their role seemed to involve intervening on an ad-hoc basis if a problem emerged which suggested that they had a responsibility to uphold procedural justice, but only if line managers revealed the problem to HR. There may have been a risk that line managers who were perhaps locked into toxic dyads with their reports did not choose to advise HR that there was a problem, or they may not have perceived that there was a problem which meant that a potentially damaging situation was not reported.

Nevertheless, there was an acknowledgement that HR attempted to introduce standards to uphold procedural justice:

“[HR would try to create a] level playing field by putting in a framework and making sure people adhere to a process, because then you can sort of be sure that everyone's getting judged in kind of the same way all across the firm.”

However, the interviewee was not confident about what specific control mechanisms were put in place to maintain a “level playing field” in response to a later question:

“I don't know all the details and the mechanisms.”

Coupled with HR's detachment, and sporadic ad-hoc involvement, there was a sense of ambiguity about what HR actually did in terms of maintaining procedural justice.

This detachment was a theme echoed by interviewee 24, an IT Project Manager:

“I think HR could play more of a strategic role, but they are too far away from people on an individual level to add value [to the performance appraisal process].”

The comments seem to suggest a sense of detachment. The interviewee insinuated that HR might have played some sort of positive function. He wasn't able to elaborate on what this might have looked like. But he was clear in his view that HR did not comprehend important aspects of the job such as “quality delivery” when evaluating performance, which meant that their role was limited. This raised a question mark concerning HR's relevance in a context whereby technical aptitude was seen as a key performance factor. Furthermore, without HR's pro-active involvement in the performance appraisal process, there may be concerns about how relationships between line managers and employees affect decisions with regards to employees' performance. This suggests that HR's lack of involvement in the application of a control system, can have negative consequences.

Interviewee 22 suggested that HR played a background role in the performance appraisal process:

“HR are more in the background. I think that performance appraisal [is undertaken by] the individual manager. However, in the background... HR know all the numbers and everything that you're hitting, or not hitting, sort of thing. I don't know if they're actually in the room at the time [when the appraisal itself is undertaken].”

Interestingly, that sense of ambiguity which one witnessed in interviewee 3's comments surfaced here, too, in the language used – “I don't know if...” – which indicated that the interviewee was not fully aware of what HR do. This lack of understanding raises questions about HR's role in the performance appraisal. This may have resulted in employees querying the purpose of HR and what organisational role they played. It also suggested that the interviewee was unaware of what control mechanisms were in place, if any.

Interviewee 7, an IT Consultant, echoed previous interviewees in the sense that HR played an ad-hoc, detached role:

“The relationship in performance management is much more about the manager and the director report, the employee, than it is bringing in HR, in my experience. It might be different in other organisations but in my experience it’s... they [HR] have a fairly hands off approach until things start to become problematic.”

An ad-hoc, reactive approach was a theme that was beginning to emerge, but, again, there was uncertainty about who notified HR of a particular problem. Also, there was a lack of clarity of what the threshold was in terms of identifying when HR would be notified of a problem. This suggests a misaligned control system. There was potential for HR to be locked out, particularly if the performance appraisal process was dominated by characteristics associated with toxic dyads, such as bias, contingency, and a negative relationship between the line manager and employee. Likewise, if the relationship was dominated by a gentle dyad, or employees were rewarded too highly due to an overly familiar relationship with their line manager, this also could have caused difficulties.

Interviewee 15, an IT Consultant, Technical Author, and Programmer, also gave the impression that HR played a detached role in performance appraisal:

“They certainly don’t sit in on the appraisals. The company that does our HR would perhaps visit maybe once a month or something like that, just to speak to our operations manager and the office manager.”

The comments indicate that the HR function had been outsourced which involved a representative visiting on a monthly basis to ensure that regulations were being followed. There was little suggestion that HR played a meaningful role in shaping the performance appraisal process. It seemed that the organisation did not believe that the HR function was sufficiently important to warrant appointment of permanent staff members who could take a



potentially more pro-active role in working with line management to maintain organisational justice. Again, it would appear that upholding justice rules and perceptions of fairness were left to line managers and their direct reports. It also suggests that a control system is lacking to provide an independent oversight of performance appraisals.

Interviewee 20, a scientist, and line manager working for a large German pharmaceutical firm, echoed interviewee 15 by pointing out the lack of HR involvement in shaping the performance appraisal process:

“On my site alone there’s over 400 people so, one HR person, in fact for three sites, which is nearly 500 people; they can’t read 500 appraisals. Do you know what I mean? They can’t have input in that; so, they wouldn’t be able to anyway.”

Surprisingly for such an organisation with a global reach, there was one HR representative for three sites, which implied that HR as a function was not taken seriously in this firm. This arguably led to a lack of clarity and direction of the performance appraisal process which was underlined by the following comments from the same interviewee in response to a question concerning how performance was evaluated:

“If I’m being honest I don’t know. I really don’t know.”

As a line manager, it appeared that he was left to muddle along in terms of evaluating performance with no understanding of appropriate procedures. It appeared that HR played no substantive role in shaping the performance appraisal process and upholding organisational justice due to a lack of HR infrastructure. Overall, there seems to be a lack of understanding of what the control systems are.

Interviewee 12, an IT Director, also highlighted HR detachment in the following vivid comments:

“Again, they like to keep a distance between them and you. I don’t know if that’s normal but at... it certainly was, HR they were aloof. When it came to this whole PMP thing they kept their distance. Your manager was there to pad you between them and HR. You could not... you couldn’t communicate with HR directly when it came to compensation or performance. Unless you were really performing poorly and your manager and HR would go and tell you to pack your stuff up and leave.”

He described HR as aloof which was a negative connotation in the sense that they were perceived as being cold, removed, uncaring, and uninterested in both the welfare of others and in upholding organisational justice and maintaining fairness. The final sentence indicated that HR only got involved in adverse circumstances, for example assisting management to remove someone from their position of employment if it was believed that they were performing poorly. This is a troubling image of an organisation that appeared to have co-opted HR as part of a punitive control system, rather than recognising the potential positive contributions that HR could make.

When probed about why HR’s role was reduced to what could be described as an ad-hoc policing role, he indicated directly that it was because of their lack of technical aptitude of ITC job roles across the organisation, which was a common theme that emerged throughout the interview.

Employee 4, a Database Manager for a FinTech company, echoed interviewees 15 and 20 by pointing out that a lack of HR infrastructure constrained their ability to shape the performance appraisal process:

“HR play a minimal role...we’ve got a limited amount of people within HR. Performance appraisal is cascaded down to people within the organisation

here, leaders, team leaders. [my team leader] is very technical. We [he and I] have very minimal engagement with human resources.”

These exchanges highlight the lack of understanding of what HR do and their lack of visibility. They also seem to lack a pro-active approach to become involved in such an important process as upholding organisational justice during performance appraisal. Interviewees also seem to have a lack of respect for HR. In addition, the performance appraisal process needs direction. There’s also a deficit of investment in HR. Technical performance of employee job roles is the key focus during appraisal, which seems to distance HR from direct involvement.

Interviewee 19, a Fintech Consultant, reinforced some of these points by making it clear that they have never had to speak to HR, and do not know what they do, or what their importance is. Again, that ambiguity and lack of clarity about HR’s purpose raised serious concerns about their perceptions of relevance in high-tech environments.

This fed into ambiguity about HR’s role in the performance appraisal process: “I’m assuming they’re not directly involved. It would be up to your end of year review by your peers and your managers, is what most likely your promotion and stuff is based on.” He was making assumptions about HR’s involvement as it seems that the role of HR in performance appraisal was unclear. This ambiguity, again, suggests a lack of understanding about the characteristics of the control system, assuming one was in place.

He also echoed other interviewees when he made clear that the rater must comprehend the technical aspects of the ratee’s job so that the performance appraisal could be implemented appropriately:

“Yes, definitely. If a manager or someone that is reviewing you doesn’t understand what you’re doing, it would be very difficult for them to do. They have to know the function, they have done it on their own for some

time, and they need to understand what the needs and the... how to evaluate you.”

Interestingly, when prompted about what potential positive contribution HR could make towards the performance appraisal process, he talked about HR aggregating and analysing performance review data before reaching out to employees with suitable opportunities for advancement in the organisation. He also suggested that HR could facilitate discussions about how the performance appraisal process might be improved:

“[HR could reach out to employees] and recommend roles for [employees] to reach potential growth in the company, instead of [employees] trying to look for a role, promotion or...lateral movement. Maybe they can reach out and then give you feedback and reviews that way.”

This was an intelligent and constructive proposal and suggested a more pro-active role for HR to work alongside line managers in shaping the performance appraisal process and for improving relational justice. It also suggests an effective control system.

Interviewee 16 offered insights into SME contexts which involve outsourcing the HR function:

“I think for us having an HR department would be a start. They outsource the human resource management side of things to an external company, which I actually think adds even less value than not having an HR department at all. Basically she just comes in and does disciplinaries or things like that, but again offers no appraisal or coaching or feedback or anything, and couldn't because she doesn't have any understanding of what we do in each role and as a business really.”

There seems to be a situation whereby an outsourced HR representative visited the organisation to undertake ad-hoc responsibilities that included punitive acts. This echoes interviewee 15's negative experience of HR that evoked images of a police force or an inquisitor acting on behalf of management. This image was also conjured by interviewee 1 when recounting a story about HR siding with management against one of his colleagues. Interviewee 16 indicated that he was keen for the organisation to implement a systematic performance appraisal process, and by extension, a suitable control system:

“[An in-house systematic performance appraisal process] would give people opportunities to progress within the company as well, and that's the main reasons people have left in the past.”

Arguably, instituting performance appraisal could have provided direction, targets, and focus for the firm's employees. It was suggested that employees could be more motivated if they had clear aims that they wished to attain, supported by a feasible set of objectives that set out how they could achieve those aims. This would have helped, according to the interviewee, to reduce employee turnover and the threat of exit. In other words, an appropriate performance appraisal control system could have been beneficial to the organisation.

One can conclude that there was possible opportunity here for HR to have shaped the performance appraisal process by working with senior management to agree on how a suitable system could have been developed and implemented. There was scope, one could argue, for management to have appointed a suitably qualified HR Business Partner to drive a performance appraisal process that was embedded within a broader HR strategy.

A more professional approach to undertake performance appraisal would have seemed to be more attractive than current arrangements:

“[Performance appraisal is undertaken] informally through KPIs...so looking at production output and profit on projects, design turnaround, things like that. But

in terms of actual personal development, there's nothing really to measure that other than being told you're doing a good job. If you're doing a really bad job you get pushed out the company. All these decisions are taken by the board of directors.”

It can be seen from the text that evaluating technical aspects of the job seem to have held prime importance for the firm with other, softer aspects, such as personal development being viewed as less important. It also seems to have been the case that KPIs were not evaluated rigorously. This suggests an informal control system that is results oriented.

He recognised that it was important that technical inputs/outputs needed to be assessed and that those measuring them required suitable technical expertise:

“I think they need to understand what you do technically on a day-to-day basis, to actually give you some feedback of value. I think if they can't understand what it is you're doing, you can end up having a bit of a less effective appraisal.”

Overall, one gets a sense that technical aptitude was uppermost in the interviewee's mind that echoed several previous interviewees. Nevertheless, there did appear to have been a willingness on behalf of the interviewee to offer an opportunity for HR to work with senior management to shape a systematic and rigorous performance appraisal process. This could form the basis of a more rigorous, formalised control system, so that perceptions of organisational justice and fairness could be improved and the threat of employee exit reduced.

Interviewee 5, a digital transformational consultant, indicated that, similar to other interviewee's, HR played a detached role in terms of shaping the performance appraisal process. But there was evidence of what appeared to be some form of tentative constructive involvement:

“For example, the guy who is from HR who is responsible for my area. If I have any queries I will speak to him but I barely speak to him. I tend to ask him things around reward questions.”

The phrase “I barely speak to him” implied that contact was minimal, but there did appear to be a role for HR around the issue of rewards and possibly distributive justice. This was supported by the quotation below from the same interviewee:

“[HR] are responsible for [assessing] the outcomes of performance review, so in terms of remuneration, compensation, that kind of thing, they [HR] are the ones that have the information. They [HR] are the ones that can actually say yes or no, you can give that person this amount of money or that amount of money [based on the outcome of the performance appraisal]. That’s down to HR - anything else is from my understanding not, they don’t have heavy involvement.”

HR’s role in shaping the performance appraisal process appeared to be that of a financial gatekeeper. In other words, they did not undertake the performance evaluations but looked at the outcomes and decided whether employees could be rewarded a financial bonus based on his operating unit’s recommendation. Similar to a theme proposed by previous interviewees, HR’s role appeared to be on an ad-hoc, administrative basis. However, this involvement may have presented an opportunity for HR to identify any problematic decisions caused by bias by looking at the appraisal outcome data. This may have boosted HR’s credibility in terms of upholding distributive justice. However, there was some ambiguity with regards to what information operating units were sending to HR in connection with performance appraisal outcomes. Likewise, it was unclear what control mechanisms HR used to analyse the information and draw conclusions.

Interviewee 6 described HR’s role in the performance appraisal process as “tangential”:

“Their involvement is tangential and indirect, so they put a frame on it, but the performance evaluation is conducted by the individual supervisors. We previously had 360 reviews.”

Again, this indicated a theme of HR detachment. After the interview had been completed, he said that performance appraisal was not so important to the firm. This was because employees were paid very high salaries and there were substantive career opportunities in the firm, in the Massachusetts region of the USA, and in the robotics industry. This suggested that industrial and national contexts played a role in determining HR’s ability to shape the performance appraisal process. It also suggests that industry context affords opportunity not to invest in a suitable control system that focuses on evaluating employees’ performance.

Interviewee 21, a design engineer, echoed previous comments from interviewees who also worked for large multi-national firms, which gave the impression HR were largely absent from the performance appraisal process:

“I would think... I would say [HR’s involvement] is minimal. I don’t really have that much interface with an HR operative in these appraisals. It’s mostly done by me and my supervisor...there’s no HR involvement. I’ve never seen someone in HR be involved in those discussions. I mean, in the actual evaluation or the discussions, yes; I don’t think they do.”

The interviewee indicated that HR’s involvement was “minimal”. There was no indication in the interview of the existence of a control system.

HR’s ostensible lack of involvement and a lack of understanding of HR’s role was further echoed by interviewee 20. They also indicated a lack of understanding of what control system was in place:



“I’ve absolutely no idea [how disputes concerning performance appraisal outcomes are resolved] because I’ve never done it and I’ve never known anybody doing it. I would hazard a guess that you would escalate it for a second opinion to HR, or whoever else...I think HR should be doing more. This may help to motivate employees.”

The interviewee explains that a lack of HR infrastructure and presence contributed to a lack of understanding of how performance appraisal should be undertaken, and how problems and disputes could be resolved. Likewise, he suggests a possible role for HR to shape the performance appraisal control system, although he doesn’t explain what this role might look like in practice. Without investment in the HR function, there may have been little opportunity for a suitable control system to emerge. Again, this exchange served as an example of minimal involvement by HR in shaping the performance appraisal process in a large, multinational organisation, which was surprising given this firm’s emphasis on cultivating a positive employer brand.

Interviewee 1 offered a more positive appraisal of HR:

“I think HR is pretty good, but it didn’t always used to be, because HR just dealt with your payroll, pensions, bonuses and holidays and sick pay. But I don’t think they necessarily had knowledge of what they do in their job, and that’s fine, they’re not meant to know what you do.”

He highlighted that he thought they were “pretty good” although he didn’t know why specifically. This suggests that the interviewee has a lack of knowledge of what role HR play in the organisation’s control systems.

One has heard from employees working in high-tech contexts with regards to how HR have shaped performance appraisal. Let us turn attention now to the view from the HR function itself.

Interviewee 2, an HR Manager suggested that HR played an important role in shaping the performance appraisal process, particularly in upholding procedural justice and distributive justice:

“What we used to do from an HR perspective, so obviously I was part of that, we used to have what we called a People Panel, and we would get together, so HR, all the senior management team, and we would pull together all these managers’ MPP [performance appraisal] scores and we would look at what they had last year, is there people that have stayed the same or are they going down the way. Obviously if someone’s not getting their bonus we need to be able to clearly outline why, you know, why their performance wasn’t up to scratch, but also used it from a succession planning point of view. So, if someone was constantly going up a grade but they weren’t actually changing level... like, going up a grade of their marking but they were staying at the same level, there was that it was quite a formal process...and we would challenge, so we would say, “so, why are you giving,” say, “Ben three, but this guy four when, you know, I would actually say that he’s done more, from my observations”.

It can be seen that HR got involved to try and ensure that there was fairness being applied across the organisation. There was an element of collaboration with other stakeholders to create a “People Panel” to oversee the maintenance of procedural justice and distributive justice, as part of a corresponding control system.

Interestingly he also mentioned later that:

“There’s a standard form, there’s a standard process, but I think it all very much depends on how the manager and the employee decide to take that on board individually.”

He indicated that the paperwork used during the performance appraisal form was standardised to uphold procedural justice, but he implied that line managers' and employees' interpretation of the paperwork and the processes may have differed. Plus, there was the threat that toxic dyads, and contingency, may have had more impact than HR's efforts to uphold procedural justice and distributive justice using a standardised approach. The issue may have been that the performance appraisal itself was not being witnessed by anyone in HR, or perhaps anyone else. It wasn't clear that line managers were implementing due process free from bias, which qualified HR's ability to shape the performance appraisal process. This might have contributed to tech employees' views that HR lacked visibility and relevance. It may also have reinforced a lack of understanding of what HR do.

Interviewee 26, an HR Director, provided a more sanguine perspective of how HR shaped the performance appraisal process. He outlined that HR worked with line managers to create a control mechanism whereby an employee's coding skills could be evaluated. This involved creating a repository to which employees uploaded exemplars of their best coding. HR representatives and line managers would then speak to employees and ask them to explain why they considered these exemplars to be effective. HR also observed performance appraisals taking place. This indicated that each party of the HRM triad were actively involved in the performance appraisal process.

However, he qualified HR's ability to shape the process by pointing out that there were occasions in which employees and line managers indulged in conversations concerning technical aspects of performance that were incomprehensible to HR. He also outlined that some employees were hostile to HR's involvement due to HR's perceived lack of technical aptitude. Apparently, this inhibited constructive conversations with HR representatives and stymied pro-active involvement of the HR function. This suggests that elements of the control system were misaligned.

Interviewee 18, an HR Manager, put forward that HR also played a role in shaping performance appraisal, but his efforts to explain how this was achieved were unclear.

Nevertheless, he was keen to stress the importance of maintaining good relationships with stakeholders in the performance appraisal process:

“The line manager and HR [are involved in performance appraisal] but our involvement is not very clear. The line manager is very much in control of the appraisal process. The feedback from [line managers] very much tells you whether their [employees] are good at their job or not. We want to encourage this level of detailed feedback.”

This interviewee’s explanations suggests that HR are supposed to have a role, but what that role is was unclear. This raised concerns that efforts in this firm to expand HR’s role in shaping the performance appraisal may have been limited. The quote underpins line management dominance, and an indication that HR don’t need to get involved. Overall, there was a significant degree of uncertainty what precisely HR’s role is, and what the control system happened to be.

#### 4.2.2 HR Engagement: Dyad Intervention

It has been discussed in detail the limitations and constraints of HR’s efforts to shape the performance appraisal process in high-tech contexts but let us discuss more positive areas whereby HR have become more proactively involved and engaged.

One area is HR’s ability to intervene in situations whereby the performance appraisal may have been influenced by bias as a result of a dyad that emerged between a line manager and her or his employee.

For example, interviewee 10 indicated that HR got involved to intervene in a dispute with his line manager:

“HR’s involvement is to provide a fairly basic framework and guiding principles for the performance evaluation to take place. Then your manager fills in the template with all of the content, the substantive content. The last time I spoke with an HR guy was probably one and half years ago when I had issues with my

line manager, because of salary. Most of the time, line managers follow the process set out by HR.”

The interviewee had mentioned in another exchange that his relationship with his line manager was not good which had caused him to be dissatisfied with the manner in which his appraisal was conducted, which led to a disagreement with his salary band. One can see that he felt confident about reaching out to HR to try and resolve the situation. This is an example of HR having shaped the performance appraisal by arbitration and intervention, through a potentially effective control mechanism.

Interviewee 1 offered an interesting insight into how HR had developed an online control system that used performance statistics from a range of sources so that the employee could gauge whether their performance was on-track or off-track. Arguably, this afforded opportunity for employees in this organisation to rely less on their line manager being the gatekeeper of information concerning progress, particularly if their relationship was impacted by bias, by accessing data that had been collected by HR:

“Things are really now all digital and uploaded and if there’s any problems with your performance, just say you’re off-track or you’re underperforming, it can get written up in real time and it gives you like a... and so, HR can see, I think with your consent, like how you’re performing and how you’re doing. So, we’ve got an online management platform which can say that you’re on track or off-track or you’re keeping pace, or you understand you’re not... the competencies that’s expected of you or you’re maybe below par just now but in three months they know you’ll reach a certain trajectory. So, I think it’s actually quite good just now, especially with our intranet system, because we got a new system and things are recorded in real time.”

These comments indicate how HR were involved in shaping the performance appraisal process by using technology and data analytics. Nevertheless, there were deficiencies in this

control system in the sense that it was not clear how employees challenged the information on the online system if there was concern that there were inaccuracies. There was a risk that this may have forced employees to turn to their line managers if employees wished to question the validity of the data. But offering employees access to a portal that recorded performance data in real time arguably helped to improve openness and transparency and provided a role for HR to become more proactively involved in the control system. This may have helped to ensure that the balance of power in the performance appraisal process did not lie too much in favour of line managers.

Likewise, interviewee 1 highlighted HR's role in providing more regular communications to employees. This arguably helped employees to rely less on their line manager for updates and information, particularly if their relationship was framed in a toxic dyad:

“We're getting more regular updates from the Head of HR and some of the sub... the kind of the umbrella staff; we're getting much more updates, communication, across the whole organisation and interdepartmental. So, I think it's very good, yes.”

It can be seen from the comments that the head of HR seemed keen to raise the profile of their function and to improve visibility and relevance. This implied that there was a recognition that HR needed to do more to engage with employees. The pandemic seemed to have offered an opportunity for them to do that. Coupled with the introduction of the online system discussed earlier, this perhaps reassured employees that they could feel more confident about reaching out to HR to ask that they intervene to tackle poor employee relationships caused by toxic dyads, as part of a performance appraisal control system.

Interviewee 25 spoke at length about how the HR function in his organisation intervened to tackle problems that emerged from problematic relationships between line managers and their reports:

“[If a line manager is seen to have unfairly evaluated an employee], that could prompt a call between HR to the line manager, or from HR to the line manager’s manager. So, if somebody’s getting a bad appraisal because somebody just doesn’t like them, it gives them that route”

It can be seen from the comments that there appeared to be a robust system in place for HR to intervene to tackle problems that emerged between line managers and their direct reports during the performance appraisal process. It appeared that HR shaped the performance appraisal process by investigating complaints which helped to maintain procedural justice. However, there was a risk that if the employee escalated the matter to HR, which might have also involved their line manager’s manager, there could have been retaliation and a worsening of the relationship between the employee and their line manager. This suggests a misaligned control system. One could also have made the case that it may have been the line manager’s manager that intervened directly, not HR. The interviewee made no mention of HR taking steps to implement codes of conduct, best practice, or respect and dignity policies that could have raised awareness of the damaging impact of improper management practice on health and wellbeing and organisational productivity.

Interviewee 19 echoed aspects of interviewee 25’s comments in the sense that he indicated that his line manager’s manager was the person who intervened in the event of any difficulties that might have emerged, not HR:

“Our line manager’s manager has been doing well reaching out...asking what is going on, why is this happening, what is the whole logic behind [the way in which the line manager is undertaking performance appraisal]. He will get on calls with us, so he is trying to understand the process but it’s taking time.”

Interviewee 17, an owner of a FinTech organisation, indicated the potential that HR have, in general terms, to collaborate with line management:

“[Performance appraisal] is collaborative. It’s easier if HR handle certain aspects of the employee’s evaluation (soft skills, behaviours), whereas the person’s immediate supervisor handles another aspect, particularly the technical elements.”

The quote suggests that HR and line management could create an aligned control system that considers dual elements of an employee's performance.

Interviewee 15 indicated how HR could have got further involved to shape the performance appraisal process by addressing what the interviewee considered to be an unfair performance evaluation by their line manager:

“I suppose it probably would benefit from some input from HR; not necessarily maybe attending the appraisal as such but, making sure that the objectives that are set to people are fair and the feedback that’s given. I mean, I have, not in this job but in my previous job, I had an appraisal from my line manager which I thought was quite unfair, but it was that way, HR weren’t involved as such, it was just me and her, and I felt that she had been... she had input from her boss about how I had performed and she didn’t think I’d performed particularly well, so that really... and it was one visit to a customer that seemed to shadow the whole thing, even though I thought I’d had quite a good year. I think that’s always the problem with appraisals is that, you know, you can be flying for the first nine months of the year and then you come to the last three months and maybe, I don’t know, you’ve got some issue or something like that; it’s always the most recent events that really colour what’s given back to you in terms of an appraisal.”

It can be seen from the comments that the interviewee gave the impression that had HR been more involved in a previous performance appraisal, the procedures would have been undertaken more objectively and rigorously. This suggests that HR has an important role to develop and disseminate clear standards and expectations concerning how performance appraisal should be carried out to uphold procedural justice. There is also scope for HR to



intervene in toxic dyads. Overall, HR seem to have a key role to play in a corresponding control system.

This is supported by a later statement from the interviewee:

“But I do think that there is certainly a role within our company that HR could provide and I know, again, former colleagues who have had perhaps grievances and stuff like that, whether or not they were just or unjust, quite difficult for them to raise any concerns because there wasn’t an HR person onsite.”

This was a direct appeal for more HR engagement to shape not just performance appraisal, but to take a more proactive role in upholding procedural justice, which will be discussed in more detail in the next subsection.

HR’s role in upholding procedural justice during the performance appraisal process was a key theme that emerged from the interviews.

Interviewee 25 made this point clearly:

“I think HR do have a role in ensuring consistency across the line or consistency and understanding of the process and fair... I think, you know, creating that equity, absolutely.”

This point was emphasised when he drew attention to a particular flaw in the performance appraisal which he believed was set up to support younger employees’ career development and aspirations at the expense of what older employees may prioritise:

“The appraisal process is very, very much geared to younger people that have, you know, have a career path mapped out in front of them, but it doesn’t really... it can fail to address the aspirations of people that are maybe in the twilight of their career, that don’t want the big promotion, you know. I think the appetite would be there to support and develop [a more customised form of performance appraisal]”

The comments point out the potential negative impact of the performance appraisal process on older employees who might have felt detached from the objectives of the organisation. The comments also indicated that there was a role for HR to play to shape the performance appraisal process as part of a control system, or systems, that catered for different groups of people. This could afford opportunity for employees’ specific skills, knowledge, experience, and aspiration to be evaluated. There is the difficulty however, that creating more customised performance appraisals may require additional resources and a time commitment that may not be feasible. There was also a danger of creating a multi-tiered performance appraisal system whereby the organisation relied on generalisations (and caricatures) of what different generations aspire to and desire. In general, there was a potential for HR to explore this area further to try to shape a more sensitive and personalised performance appraisal control system(s).

Interviewee 25 likewise made it clear the positive role HR took in upholding procedural justice:

“Line managers evaluate performance. I think they have to, and if they’re going in the wrong direction, they could be guided by HR. HR could challenge them to say, “look, that’s maybe not quite right”. If it’s something that’s a kind of key decision about a person, HR should always be involved; that’s what they’re good at.”

The comments indicated the key role that HR took to shape the performance appraisal process. This involved guiding line managers and others involved in undertaking performance appraisal to ensure that it was conducted fairly. HR also had a responsibility to question line managers' decisions concerning employees' performance. The interviewee made clear that HR should play a key role in decisions that impact people. Performance appraisal was a process that was directly linked with people as it put them under the microscope to evaluate how effective they had been in terms of contributing to the objectives of the organisation. A benefit that HR can offer is to illustrate the dangers of bias and the impact of toxic dyads, both of which can lead to some employees reducing their performance or leaving the organisation. This would likely have a significant impact on organisational productivity and performance. Again, it suggests what roles HR can play within a control system.

The comments also highlight an opportunity for HR to intervene in toxic dyads by offering line management and appraisers training in unconscious bias and leadership training that focused on aspects such as developing emotional intelligence and improving empathy. This may help to neutralise dyads and mitigate bias, contingency, and favouritism.

“Yes because you need to make sure that somebody's not being pushed in a direction because they've a great relationship with their line manager, or it's a friend or, you need to make sure that it's for the correct reasons and I think that the HR give that kind of how... I don't know how to describe it, that kind of challenge, you know, or maybe kind of question it and have a bit of conscience applied to it, so that people are not going to say, “well, that's my friend, I'm going to get them promoted, they'll be the next team leader and then as I progress, I'll give them my job,” whereas that person has no leadership capabilities. They may be extremely good technically but they might never be this type of manager or capable of leading a team.”

Interviewee 7, outlined a direct role for HR that involved intervention to resolve difficult situations:

“Where HR do get involved more in the process is when that goes wrong, so where there’s an issue with an employee for whatever reason and there’s all sorts of problems [during the performance appraisal process], these managers then are heavily relying on some sort of HR support, so that they’re seen to be doing the right thing, staying within the law, etc.”

It can be seen from the comments that HR’s role was to uphold procedural justice by ensuring that the organisation stayed “within the law” so that due diligence was upheld. Staying within the law is important to avoid sanction and to indicate to employees that the organisation is morally transparent. It arguably also helps to burnish the organisation’s employer brand. The role of HR in this scenario was more than just upholding procedural justice in legal terms but ensuring that the organisation maintained its reputation, by undertaking compliance control.

The same interviewee in later comments suggested however that HR’s role in the performance appraisal process may still have been secondary to the line manager:

“The relationship is between the employee, and the manager, and that relationship is the one that really has to work really well. If you put HR in it’s more of an arbitration type thing rather than anything that’s really shaping the conversation on a day to day basis. HR have a fairly hands off approach until things start to become problematic.”

To echo many previous interviewees, there seemed to be a scenario whereby the performance appraisal process was dominated by the relationship between line managers and employees. HR took a background role unless disputes or legal anomalies began to emerge. There was perhaps scope for HR to have taken a more proactive role to negotiate and disseminate best practice. Perhaps attending performance appraisal meetings on a random basis to ensure that procedures were being undertaken appropriately, may have helped to improve procedural justice. There may have been push back to HR attending performance evaluations, but to echo interviewee 26, attending performance appraisal meetings helped to boost HR’s awareness of the technical landscape and to bolster their engagement with tech employees

and improve their own technical aptitude. This could have allowed HR to move from an ad-hoc role in shaping the performance appraisal process, to a more proactive role within a suitable control system.

Interviewee 3 echoed this latter point whereby he believed it would be helpful if HR took a role in setting standards in advance:

“I think the most important thing is for them to set the playing fields... even the playing field by putting in a framework and making sure people adhere to a process, because then you can sort of be sure that everyone’s getting judged in kind of the same way all across the firm.”

The quote highlights his key point that HR could have played a more pro-active role by setting guidelines and parameters so that the performance appraisal was undertaken according to standardised rules and procedures. This arguably could help to boost HR’s role in shaping the performance appraisal process by boosting procedural justice. The guidelines could also include information on how line managers can conduct the performance appraisal that may also help to improve relational justice. Likewise, guidelines on how performance appraisals can be interpreted and translated into evidence-based and objective decisions on rewards may also bolster distributive justice. Consequently, developing frameworks that create a “level playing field” could help HR shape performance appraisals by addressing all dimensions of organisational justice. It would also have arguably helped if HR had done this more visibly so that tech employees were aware that HR were taking a positive role to maintain justice and fairness. In effect, HR would be shaping the performance appraisal process through substantive means to protect employees from bias and questionable decision-making, but also by proactively advocating for equity which may have boosted their image – in essence, an act of impression management.

Interviewee 6 likewise alluded to HR’s involvement in setting standards but also highlighted their facilitative role in shaping the performance appraisal process:

“HR would be more facilitating. We have company-wide performance tracking tools. We use a tool called Lattice, where we would have, say, company goals which then get broken into division goals, which again break down into team and to individual. Within then the Lattice tool we have... we’ve got ways of documenting the ongoing supervision of performance management.

HR predominantly would facilitate that but not necessarily be directly involved. In the event of needing to pull HR in for something like disciplinary issues, performances improvement plans, anything like that, they would be involved to formalise some of that.”

These comments explain HR’s involvement and express a confidence on behalf of the interviewee what HR actually did in terms of shaping the performance appraisal process. HR appear to be a key part of a control system, in contrast to some of the previous interviewees who expressed an ambiguity and a lack of knowledge and understanding of the purpose of HR and what involvement they had during performance evaluation. This indicates a willingness, perhaps, on behalf of HR to assert themselves within the organisation to explain clearly what their involvement was and to raise awareness of their role. The interviewee himself had direct experience working with HR which also gave the impression that the firm were keen for HR to engage more proactively and constructively with line management and other key stakeholders:

“[The design of the performance appraisal template] is collaborative. We have a senior leadership team where we have division heads across the varying groups, which would be... so myself for sales and marketing. We have internal admin, which would be finance and HR, etc. We have a customer success team, so they focus on the manufacturing, and then within our engineering team we’ve got three product teams within that group. There would be a combination of direct input from HR in terms of best practices and then between the senior leadership team determining what specifics should fall into that.”

The interviewee sounded tentative which suggested that, despite expressing a confidence in about HR's involvement in the performance appraisal process, was not completely clear about the specifics of HR's contribution during the collaboration sessions. Perhaps there was scope for HR to clarify their position and explain more precisely what their role in shaping performance appraisal was as part of a formal control system.

Interviewee 10 also outlined HR's role in setting standards:

“Yes, [there is a standardised approach to assessing performance using a list of guiding principles]. And yes [my line manager is comfortable with those principles and fully understands them]

HR develops this approach and sets the goals, and the line manager is just like... he should live by that standards and then just look how you fulfil these. My line manager hasn't the authority to set their own goals, it's just directed by HR and by the bank and then he's like the operator.”

The comments indicate a clear sense of HR's involvement in introducing a standardised approach using a set of guiding principles. This suggests a more strident role for HR in terms of shaping the performance appraisal process. They have implemented what appear to have been a standardised performance appraisal that focused line managers on appropriate aspects of employees' activities. This suggests HR plays a key role in what appears to be a formal control system. What was less clear, was how these principles were agreed. The interviewee was silent on this issue, which meant one can only speculate that there must have been some level of input from line managers and employees themselves so that HR were aware of which aspects of tech employees' job roles were suitable for appraisal. Arguably, this could have emerged from processes associated with the creation of the original job description and possible discussions concerning job evaluations to ensure that equality and diversity criteria were being upheld, which would have provided HR with some insight into the nature of tech employees' job roles. But there may have been concerns that HR were setting principles that they did not understand. The job itself may have changed in response to rapidly shifting macro-economic dynamics and consumer sentiment, so it was not evident that existing

guidelines and principles remained relevant. Also, there was no explanation concerning HR's involvement in overseeing that their guidelines and principles were being interpreted and applied fairly by line managers. There seemed no tangible indication from the interviewee that HR were proactively involved in intervening to reduce the impact of toxic and gentle dyads, assuming that they existed. Interestingly, in a later exchange, the interviewee qualified HR's ability and pointed out that line managers appeared to still have the upper hand:

“HR understand some technical elements of what employees do, but sometimes the problem with HR people, they've never really been in the business. They are making the whole process and setting the standards but they never have to really do it their own. Sometimes I think it's hard for them to understand the issues of the business, sometimes.

Despite this, I would say the process is still quite fair, but, like I said, I think the most important person in the whole process is the line manager. If he evaluates you like... so I think HR is just... they're just giving my line manager infrastructure, but they're not really involved in more and more things.”

The key decision-maker in terms of assessing performance was the line manager. There was a role for HR to play here in terms of challenging employees' views that HR “don't understand the issues of the business”. A technical chauvinism appears to have emerged here which eroded HR's perceived importance and repositioned the locus of control back to the line manager. It also suggests that this chauvinism was causing the control system to be misaligned. Again, as mentioned previously, without HR donning a more assertive presence in terms of explaining to the organisation's tech employees more clearly and persuasively their positive role in upholding procedural justice and perceptions of performance, tech employees' views may result in behaviour that pushed them closer to their line manager. This may have been problematic if their relationship was both opaque to outsiders and impacted by bias.

Interviewee 22 likewise referred to HR's background role in making sure that processes and procedures were undertaken according to particular standards:



“I would think it would be more the line manager. I think it would be... I think it’s the HR... I don’t want to say the... what’s the phrase I want to look for here?

They’d be in the background, you’d know they would be there and you know that you could go to them and ask them any questions, but it wouldn’t be them that would initially brief it to you; it would be your line manager, or even colleagues - HR are reactive.

they’re controlling it in the background and they’re making sure everything’s happening in the background but what the employee sees, the face of it, is their line manager, whereas in the background all the strategy behind it and everything like that I would say is all HR, it’s just they’re like the faceless side of it.”

From the comments, one can see that there was an indication that HR operated in the background and lacked visibility to tech employees. The latter comments emphasised HR’s lack of involvement by describing them as “faceless”. Also, tech employees’ key contact throughout the performance appraisal was their line manager. It can be argued that employees were likely to perceive that their line manager controlled the performance appraisal process. This may have caused significant problems if an employee and their line manager were locked in a toxic dyad. There’s also the risk that employees could have undertaken dark-side behaviours to earn the liking of their line manager that might have included political manoeuvring tactics.

Considering this interviewee worked for one of the largest tech firms in the world, it was arguably surprising that there was not more objective oversight of the relationships between line managers and their reports, or more mechanisms to ensure that performance appraisals were undertaken with more transparency. There was definite scope for HR to take on a more strategic and proactive role to address some of the firm’s limitations with regards to upholding procedural justice, and to ensure that relational justice was underpinned by objectivity, respect, and fairness. It also suggests that there was a lack of a control mechanism that mitigated the potential emergence of dyads and their negative impacts.

Similarly, interviewee 14 indicated that HR also took a supporting role in terms of providing guidance on how performance appraisals could be undertaken consistently according to a standardised format:

“I would say HR generally tends to delegate the performance reviews to the line managers. What the HR team at our company does is they act as more of a supportive, more support for line managers saying, “oh, here’s some standardised things we want you guys to fill out, these are some forms, documents, this is where we want you to give them goals, where we want them to review themselves,” you know, they’ll go through... they basically create the structure but the content and actual review is all part of... it all falls under the line manager.

Line managers tend not to deviate from HR’s guidance. I have had managers in the past that would deviate but they follow what HR is telling them to do in terms of like format but, again yes, I would say they stick to the format that HR has dictated, and the only deviation will be in content, but still within the bounds of what HR’s asking them to do.”

The comments highlight that HR communicated standardisation control measures to line management (the relationship between HR and line managers will be discussed later) by explaining what information should be recorded during the performance appraisal process. Similar to previous interviewees, he pointed out that line managers controlled the undertaking of the performance appraisal. Interestingly, he proposed that line managers followed the format given to them by HR but there did appear to have been transgression in the past. This suggested that line managers perhaps were not satisfied with the format previously and consequently indicated their resistance by deviating from the procedures. Perhaps they considered that the procedures were unfair or inappropriate. Conversely, some line managers may have deviated from the prescribed process due to the existence of a gentle or toxic dyad which impacted procedural justice and relational justice and created misaligned control mechanisms.

Interestingly, the interviewee provided more insight into the dynamics with their line manager in a later exchange:

“I think there should be some sort of standardised set of criteria that HR would be more involved in, yes. It might be something that maybe bigger HR teams would do but, yes.

This would contribute to a fairer approach. I’ve experienced and seen line managers who are biased in their appraisal. So, yes, I think a more standardised, more involvement HR department would be very beneficial for that.”

He goes on to say that:

“If the line manager is personable with the person, with their employee, or they seem to get along better, they’re more likely to overlook flaws and, really I think, double-down on praise for achievements. So, you end up with a review where, I mean, you could potentially say that the employee’s really not benefitting as much because they’re not getting the same level of attention, constructive criticism or whatever but, yes, the... I’ve seen what I would consider to be very skilled employees getting critiqued heavily in reviews and what I would personally perceive as underwhelming employees get praised and those, they generally tend to flow with the, you know, how close you are to your manager.”

The interviewee indicated that more engagement by HR in creating a more standardised control system to undertake performance appraisal could be a positive move. He also revealed circumstances whereby he had witnessed line managers being biased and unprofessional when undertaking performance appraisals due to favouritism. He implied that these employees were losing out as they were not receiving constructive criticism so that they could learn, develop, and grow. This suggests a misaligned control system that failed to focus properly on actions and personnel. The interviewee did not explain why these particular line managers favoured some employees. However, the interviewee made an intelligent point in

that a gentle dyad may have been damaging to the employee as they were not being offered an opportunity to identify and address their performance weaknesses. Perhaps this was due to a lack of moral courage on behalf of the appraiser as she or he struggled with possible confrontation or conveying what they deemed to be negative feedback. There may also have been narcissism involved as the interviewee may have wanted to be liked and appreciated by those reporting to them.

Interviewee 1 implied that HR responded to recommendations made by line management when preparing appropriate guidelines for performance appraisal

“I think they go on what frontline managers and operation managers recommend to them, and then they incorporate that into their kind of evaluation guide, so to speak.”

There was an indication of contact between HR, line management, and those working in operations that seemed to highlight a level of collaboration amongst the HRM triad to create guidelines and control mechanisms that were acceptable across stakeholders involved in performance appraisal. HR appeared to have played a collaborative role in the sense that they worked with those who understood the complexities of various job roles so that the guidelines created to standardise performance appraisal were shaped in such a way that maintained perceptions of procedural justice.

The danger existed that HR were being led by line management and operations staff to create guidelines that the latter groups wanted, which may not have been in the best interests of tech employees and the organisation. There was a concern that if HR lacked technical aptitude, it was not evident whether they would have been able to recognise any drawbacks with the recommendations made by frontline managers. Or that attempts by HR to propose changes may have been met with resistance because of possible technical chauvinism, although there was no suggestion on behalf of the interviewee that this misalignment in control had occurred.

The interviewee lacked knowledge and understanding of the nature of collaborative discussions between HR and frontline managers and was not confident that this engagement took place. This echoed previous interviewees who expressed ambiguity concerning HR's involvement in shaping control mechanisms during the performance appraisal process. Despite this lack of clarity, the comments gave the impression that there was scope perhaps for HR to have played a more assertive role in shaping performance appraisal process/control mechanisms. There were potential manifold benefits of this: first, it may have helped to boost perception of HR's relevance and credibility by being seen to uphold procedural justice. Second, this boost to HR's standing may have instilled more confidence in the minds of tech employees that they could approach HR to intervene in toxic and gentle dyads. Third, another potential consequence of boosting HR's standing as an arbiter of procedural justice was that it may have increased trust in the sense that the organisation may have been seen as embedding clear procedural justice mechanisms throughout the organisation.

Later comments from this interviewee indicated that HR took an ad-hoc role in engaging with employees who were struggling with their performance:

“They do if it's something to do with performance. If you're a high flyer and you've got all the green lights for your work and you're signed off and you know your job, you don't really have much interaction with them. It tends to be more if your performance is sub-par or you've skewed off-track and they maybe get involved, not to vilify you, but just to say, “look, what can we do to make things better?” or, “how can we help you interact better with the management?” not really my own account, but just from colleagues that I've discussed with. So, they tend to get more involved if things are going slightly awry rather than when things are going well.”

So, if you're not reaching certain... a certain kind of standard by X time or Y time or Z time, HR could come in to say, look, what can we do to help? What can we do to support your confidence? What can we do to motivate you? What can we do

to get you working? Is it moving to another department? Is it you need a different boss? They tend to get involved if it's like you're being sub-par.”

There were positive elements here in that HR took a role in engaging directly with employees whose performance did not meet expectations. The language used by the interviewee implied that HR engaged in a sensitive and constructive manner. However, this approach may have been perceived as passive aggression by employees who were suspicious of HR's role in the performance appraisal process, or in the organisation itself. This was evidenced by earlier comments from this interviewee who illustrated an example of a disgruntled employee who expressed dissatisfaction with HR's support of management's decision concerning understanding of her job-role competencies. There may have been perceptions of HR acting as performance appraisal “police” who targeted employees who were seen as deviating from organisational norms in an effort to align them with strategic objectives and cultural values. In other words, HR may have been perceived as acting in a supporting role for line managers rather than a supporting role for employees, which suggests a misaligned control system. This could be seen as an example of the HRM triad operating in a punitive manner.

There was scope here for HR to have taken a more pro-active role by reaching out to all employees to learn more about their experiences and what was driving different levels of performance. Also, reaching out to employees who performed well may have helped HR to learn more about the characteristics of the performance appraisal process and to evaluate the authenticity and objectivity of line managers' evaluations. Collecting more data and information may have afforded opportunity for HR to identify pain points and difficulties with the performance appraisal process and control mechanisms – for example, questionable line management decision-making and inconsistent application of standards and procedures. It could also have shed light on dyadic relationships and provided insight into the existence of counterproductive work behaviours.

Interviewee 2, an HR manager, indicated that the HR function in his organisation made a conscious effort to intercede when questions arose concerning the credibility of some performance appraisals:

“But yes, it was quite a formal process of doing that and we would challenge, so we would say, “so, why are you giving,” say, “Ben three, but this guy four when, you know, I would actually say that he’s done more, from my observations”.

There seemed to be an effort by HR to apply an alternative perspective so that fairness and procedural justice were being upheld. However, this interviewee had suggested in previous sections that the HR function had no technical knowledge of employees’ job roles. This means that, arguably, it could have been difficult for HR to challenge decisions taken by line managers. This could have been the case if line managers defended their appraisals by drawing upon technical data and technical aspects of the employee’s performance which could not be understood by HR. This may have been viewed as a situation whereby technical chauvinism won out over HR’s efforts to draw attention to inconsistencies. There may have been an option for HR to create control mechanisms whereby decisions taken on technical aspects of performance have to be explained in plain English. However, this may have caused resentment amongst line managers as having to explain themselves in non-technical language may result in important information not being conveyed accurately.

Interviewee 18, also an HR manager, compared his experience with his current employer, a multinational electric carmaker, with his previous employer, an organisation in the fashion industry:

“The line manager and HR [are involved in performance appraisal]. I don’t know what HR do though during performance appraisal, I honestly must say. In the previous company it was so that there was the job family head involved. They were supposed to know on the technical stuff and the line manager was not involved at all. The line manger could only give feedback, but the committee then decided and the HR business partner was there as the mediator.

People involved in performance appraisal don’t necessarily need to have technical knowledge about the employee’s job role. The feedback from everyone very

much tells you whether they are good at their job or not, so you don't necessarily need to have the knowledge about it if you have some qualitative and quantitative feedback, and we are supposed to give qualitative and quantitative feedback.”

There has been some conflicting information which suggests ambiguity concerning HR's involvement in performance appraisal in high-tech contexts. For example, the interviewee referred to his experience with his previous employer, a fashion organisation, in which HR had more robust involvement in the performance appraisal process. In contrast, HR's involvement in performance appraisal with his current employer, a tech firm, was unclear. He then completed this section of the interview by indicating that tech employees in his current organisation would only accept involvement in the performance appraisal by those who have technical aptitude. This raised barriers to HR becoming more proactively engaged in shaping performance appraisal in this organisation.

The key point to make here is that the interviewee has drawn comparison between two organisations – one which was not high-tech: the other, a well-known high-tech carmaker – and the different approaches by HR in shaping the performance appraisal process. The interviewee's previous employer appeared to have HR taking the lead in shaping and delivering the performance appraisal process and control mechanisms vis-à-vis his current employer which seemed to push HR to the fringes. Of course, these are only two firms which were being discussed by one person, which meant that one cannot rely wholly on this point of view. Nevertheless, there was a striking echo with several other interviewees who indicated that HR played an ad-hoc, backseat role that reduced their visibility and perceived relevance in high-tech contexts. This was due to their lack of technical aptitude and the ostensible emergence of technical chauvinism. This led to the elevation of technical achievement at the expense of an emphasis on other aspects of performance that HR could have got involved with e.g., emotional intelligence and organisational citizenship behaviours.

Nevertheless, to quote interviewee 3 again, there was a recognition that HR could have engaged more proactively in the performance appraisal process:



“Yes. I mean, the way they do that is, as well as setting objectives, there’s also firm-wide principles that they expect people to live up. So, these are things set around being a good team member and being responsible, you know, being on the lookout for things that could... that are a risk and, you know, having a good attitude and having a, you know, a desire to innovate as well. So, there’s these kind of like behavioural principles that are part of the appraisal process, as well as the objectives that you set on a more specific basis for your work.”

Interviewee 26 highlighted how in his organisation he was able to create collaborative control mechanisms between the HR function, line managers and tech employees to shape the performance appraisal process. In other words, there was an attempt to deploy the HRM triad paradigm. But, in a similar vein to interviewee 18, he explained that engaging with tech employees was a challenge due to a strident technical chauvinism and poor behaviours – “Employees getting paid \$3m to \$4m a year just simply grunt at us when we try to engage with them.”

To conclude, some elements of existing organisational justice dimensions were maintained. In particular, HR’s efforts to uphold procedural justice by creating guidelines and frameworks to try to ensure consistency in the application of the performance appraisal process. This suggests efforts by HR to create suitable control mechanisms. There was evidence of HR’s occasional involvement to intervene in disputes between line managers and employees. However, there was an absence of involvement by HR in upholding justice rules that linked to relational justice and distributive justice.

Also, the existence of technical chauvinism and HR’s lack of pro-activity and lack of understanding of how best to navigate high-tech environments, seemed to limit involvement in the performance appraisal to those with technical knowledge of job roles. This often resulted in the delegation of performance appraisal to line managers which had the potential to escalate development of toxic dyads and gentle dyads based upon the characteristics of personal relationships influenced by bias, favouritism, and unhealthy employee relationships. Also, the lack of consistency and clarity concerning organisational policy and action - in

other words, the lack of a suitable control system - during performance appraisal appeared to have created a sense of uncertainty.

This seemed to result in employees relying heavily on their line manager, which is arguably unhealthy. All these elements appeared to have impacted employees' perceptions of organisational support and fairness which may have resulted in the emergence of negative behaviours and reduction of positive behaviours and an overall erosion of trust. Overall, there is mixed evidence of the application of control systems and their ability to manage behaviour, results, and actions.

#### 4.3 Objective 3: To explore the application of the HRM triad from the perspective of line managers and ratees

Our attempts to address objectives 1 and 2 indicated that line managers have played a key role in the performance appraisal process for reasons that will be discussed in more detail here. There will also be a focus on line management's role in our understanding of the application of organisational justice in the context of performance appraisal in high-tech contexts.

##### 4.3.1 Technical Primacy

An important theme that has emerged from the research is technical primacy in the sense that the focus and dynamics of the performance appraisal process explored the technical aspects of the job role at the expense of other dynamics. The key reason for this seems to have been a perception by tech employees that only those who have the aptitude to comprehend the technical complexities of their role should appraise their performance. In many cases, this has resulted in line managers (or equivalent) being directly involved in evaluating performance, with other stakeholders in the organisation, such as HR, being deemed not to have the necessary technical expertise of tech job roles.

This has resulted in them often lacking relevance and importance. Line managers have had a significant level of authority and control in shaping the performance appraisal process which has had a significant impact on perceptions of organisational justice. It also suggests that line

management plays a key role in control systems, in the sense that in dyads between them and their ratee, the control system is maybe informal and contingent on the quality of relationship between them.

Let's discuss the context as to why technical elements of the job have achieved primacy.

Interviewee 24 indicated that line managers were closer to what was happening on the front line, which provided them with a clearer perspective to gauge performance levels:

“I think there is potential for HR to be involved. I think it would have its uses but in terms of understanding what people... what, you know, what quality delivery looks like, what success looks like, you know, from a performance perspective, I think they're potentially too far away from people on an individual level to add value there. They might be overwhelmed with the technical ins and outs. Line management are closer to what's happening.”

There was recognition that HR might have played a role but not in “understanding what quality delivery looks like, what success looks like,” which suggested that only those close “to the technical ins and outs” of the job could have provided a valid appraisal of employees' job performance. This gave the impression that those who directly oversaw what an employee has done should play a key role in the performance appraisal process and be part of developing and applying a corresponding control system. This was backed up by later comments:

“The job role has to be assessed by somebody that has a [technical] understanding of how it is evolving, for sure. I think that is, yes, that is critical to a successful appraisal for me, yes.”

The use of the word “critical” was interesting. It suggested that as his job “evolves” it was very important that those who understood the technical evolution of his role appraised his performance so that perceptions of procedural justice could be upheld. This could also impact perceptions of distributive justice if his appraisal was linked to decisions concerning rewards. These comments could be perceived as the emergence of a technical chauvinism. This may raise barriers to others who do not understand the technical challenges of the job, being involved in performance appraisal. It could also lock out non-technical stakeholders from the development of a control system. This may be unfortunate as non-technical participants could contribute to a more multi-dimensional appraisal and control system by evaluating softer issues such as quality of teamworking and organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB).

Interviewee 3 made the incisive point that those without technical aptitude who got involved in the performance appraisal might be unable to identify nuances of employees’ performance:

“If you’re not an expert in something yourself then you might not appreciate how good some of the contributions have been.”

What the interviewee seemed to have put forward was that someone who was not an expert might not have applied the same level of rigour or deep-level objective analysis to identify positive aspects of the employee’s performance that might not have been tangibly obvious to those who were unfamiliar with the technical aspects of the role. If a non-technical appraiser were to be involved, this could have impacted perceptions of procedural justice. This may also have served to erode distributive justice if rewards were linked to the measurement of technical criteria. For example, positive contributions to technical processes that might not have been easily recognisable to those who were not technically proficient may have gone unnoticed or misinterpreted. It perhaps provides an argument that only those with technical aptitude should have influence within a control system.

Interviewee 7 indicated that line management responsibilities were distributed amongst two people – his project lead and his people lead. Both play a key role in evaluating his performance:

“I just finished a project, I got my feedback from my project lead, as it were, because it differs by project. The people lead who sits in my operating area will ask the project team how did I do, how were they, how did things go. Did they exceed expectations, were there any issues or challenges, any performance areas to work on? They’ll take that information, they won’t necessarily make a judgement or an appraisal themselves, but they’ll take that information and they’ll feed it back into the leadership team, who then have an open conversation about it. At that point they may have an opinion or an appraisal to make.”

It can be seen from the comments that there was an interplay between the project lead and people lead. Likewise, there was an impression that relational and procedural justice were being upheld. Their appraisals were then passed on to the leadership team who would consider them further. One can see that there was a straightforward appraisal of the interviewee’s involvement that began with the project lead who provided an appraisal of the quality of his contribution. This was followed up with further questions by the people lead. We can observe that the project lead was the person who provided information to the people lead. A conclusion can be drawn that technical elements of the interviewee’s performance were elevated in the sense that it was the project lead from whom the key initial information was sought. The softer “people” aspects were a follow up which suggested that this aspect is subordinated. This indicates that maintaining procedural justice involves primarily maintaining focus on evaluating technical aspects of the interviewee’s role. It also suggests that the corresponding control system was misaligned in that it elevated technical actions and results at the expense of evaluating and developing personnel’s behaviours and soft skills.

Interestingly, the people lead was not associated with HR, who took a detached role as outlined by a later exchange:

“I would say [HR’s role is] minimal. Actually, I was going for something like... not invisible but behind the scenes. I’m trying to think of the right word. They’re, at least from my perspective, not present, they’re detached, very arm’s length potentially, along those lines.”

The use of the adjective “detached” to describe HR’s role in the performance appraisal process supported points made in earlier discussions and, in the context of the findings presented so far, should not have posed a surprise. But what was surprising is that “people” issues were *not* dealt with by HR more proactively in this organisation and others, particularly when one closely associates HR with promoting softer aspects of organisational characteristics and behaviours. HR appeared to have had no substantive role at all in this organisation’s control system, which raised concerns about the perceived importance and relevance of HR as a function in what is one of the world’s largest organisations.

Much of the discussion concerning performance appraisal was undertaken by those who belonged to the interviewee’s “operating unit” (mentioned elsewhere in the interview) including the people lead. It was the project lead who was the source of information. One can draw the conclusion that with performance appraisal being controlled by the operating unit (with HR in the side-lines - or not involved at all), it would seem that technical aspects of the interviewee’s role was elevated at the expense of other elements. HR were perceived not to have had a role in upholding organisational justice or playing a substantive role in a corresponding control system. Although, to be fair, with such high costs involved it was not surprising that the firm should have valued excellent technical skills. It did seem to delegate a lot of responsibility and control to those in a position of authority who had technical aptitude such as line managers, or in this case, project leads, to maintain perceptions of organisational justice.

Interviewee 9, who works for an SME, had his performance appraised by the owner who acted as his line manager. The interviewee provided detailed insight into the dynamics of his organisation before confirming that, in his view, it was important that the person evaluating performance understood the technical nature of the role:

“The owner has a very good understanding of what it is I do and [they have done similar jobs] at various parts of their career. So, yes, they have a good understanding of my job [although, not all parts of it]. This understanding is important to maintain fairness. [The person evaluating your job needs to] understand what’s involved in it, which is I suppose the rationale behind having an immediate line manager, somebody who’s at least in contact with you every day or has a very solid understanding, is even giving you those tasks, you know, is up for determining and prioritising your time, it’s essential to understand, that they understand, ideally on as fine grained a basis as possible, what it is you do.”

The comments indicated that the owner-manager, who acted as the interviewee’s line manager, had significant control in shaping the performance appraisal due to the small size of the business. It was found to be a common feature in previous discussions that SMEs do not have an HR function as they do not have the resources or the desire to have permanent HR representation. The interviewee implied that the owner-manager understood most aspects of the technical nature of the job but there were some aspects that they may not understand. In post-interview discussions, there was an acknowledgement that the interviewee’s role evolves and elements of it may change in such a way that the owner-management may not fully recognise or understand. This gives the impression that the owner-manager may not have been fully cognisant of all key aspects of the interviewee’s role and the drivers that impacted performance. The interviewee went on to suggest that the owner-manager lacked the time and commitment to understand the “granularity” of the role. This meant that performance was evaluated by looking at the quality of outputs, which suggested a control system that focused on results rather than actions.

This implied that as a consequence of the owner-manager shaping performance appraisal, potentially valuable insights that considered the interviewee’s actions and behaviours that contributed to the achievement of the outcomes (or otherwise) may have gone unnoticed. This could have impacted the employee’s perceptions of organisational justice in the sense that efforts invested to achieve goals may not be recognised. Likewise, there was a danger

that this could have resulted in the emergence of a climate whereby the ends justified the means.

This could result in dark-side behaviours being deployed unobserved to achieve results. Also, if the interviewee did not meet his performance objectives, then it may have been difficult for the owner-manager to determine precisely why this happened. This could have resulted in the interviewee being blamed unfairly particularly if they had not been provided with sufficient resources, support, and training. It may have been easier for the owner-manager to simply blame the employee for his perceived lack of competence. This could have created a climate of resentment due to a lack of organisational justice triggered for the reasons discussed which could have resulted in increased employee turnover.

Interviewee 15 was very direct when he indicated that performance appraisal needed to be shaped by someone who understood the role:

“I would say that [line managers] are probably better than if it was someone like a human resources manager because they tend to be... their knowledge of the industry that we work in and that sort of thing, would be quite limited. My line manager used to do the job that I did, so he understands what’s required of the job. I have worked in other companies where the appraisal’s been done by a project manager that was... whose knowledge of what was going on and knowledge of the customer I didn’t think was particularly great.”

The comments suggest that their line manager understood the job because he used to do it, therefore he had technical aptitude which appeared to be an important element, or justice rule, in maintaining perceptions of organisational justice according to the interviewee. The other actors the interviewee referred to – the HR and project managers – were viewed negatively due to their lack of “knowledge” of what were perceived by the interviewee as the most important aspects of the job role. The point here was that the interviewee asserted that the line manager was the person to shape the performance appraisal.



However, to echo previous points, the risk was that by doing so, barriers would be erected to other stakeholders within the organisation from taking an active role in shaping performance appraisal. It also prioritised technical aspects of the role. This had the potential to produce one-dimensional performance appraisals that may have had a detrimental effect on the interviewee himself, as he may not have received valuable feedback on other aspects of his contribution to the organisation other than his technical capabilities. It also placed significant pressures on those in line management positions. All of this suggests a misaligned control system.

Also, it suggested a lack of effort on the organisation's part to challenge these ostensibly rather myopic views and negative sentiments concerning involvement by other stakeholders beyond line management. Perhaps it was not surprising that tech employees reacted negatively and discourteously towards HR during the performance appraisal process if the organisation was doing little to promote HR's relevance. Or HR was lacking in its ability to promote its own value. Again, it suggests a control system that does not focus as effectively as it could on actions, results, and personnel.

Interviewee 18, an HR manager, asserted however that HR do have a role to play:

“The feedback from everyone [not just line managers] very much tells you whether [employees] are good at their job or not, so you don't necessarily need to have the knowledge about it if you have some qualitative and quantitative feedback. Nevertheless, tech employees will prefer someone with technical knowledge of their job to assess them - yes, they would definitely say that.”

The interviewee's claim that others can become involved in the performance appraisal process based on quantitative and qualitative feedback suggested that the performance appraisal can be shaped by other stakeholders in the organisation. In other words, there is scope for a control system that is developed and applied by those who do not only have

technical aptitude. However, he did not indicate who these other stakeholders were or might be.

Likewise, there were inconsistencies in the interviewee's comments which have been discussed previously in which he was unclear about the extent of others' involvement in the performance appraisal including HR. This implied a lack of alignment and horizontal integration in the corresponding control system with regards to who was responsible for undertaking particular aspects of performance appraisal. Alternatively, the comments suggest a lack of knowledge on his part of the specifics of the mechanics of performance appraisal control mechanisms and processes. Nevertheless, what did seem clear from this exchange was that tech employees in his organisation were keen to have their performance evaluated by those who had acceptable levels of technical aptitude. This may have been so that perceptions of procedural justice and possibly distributive justice were upheld, if performance was linked to decisions with regards to reward distribution. This, again, suggested a technical chauvinism that may have resulted in line managers being delegated the responsibility to undertake performance appraisal – a potentially onerous prospect. The consequence potentially being that non-technical aspects of performance are overlooked.

#### 4.3.2 Line Management Control of PA

What has become clear from several parts of this discussion was that the elevation of technical expertise, the importance that the performance rater has the required technical aptitude of the ratee's job role, and the emergence of technical chauvinism expressed by several interviewees, were likely to have placed significant control of the performance appraisal in the hands of line managers and their equivalents. It was not evident from the data whether this was a scenario that line managers were keen on as it was likely to have placed significant pressures on them. One can assume that if the culture of the organisation and its resultant performance appraisal processes prioritised technical performance, it can be concluded that line management's central role in shaping performance appraisals would have been unavoidable. This may have been the case regardless of what their sentiments were with regards to the workload burden this placed on them. Line management taking control of many aspects of the performance appraisal process has had a significant impact on perceptions of organisational justice.

Let us look at some examples in the data.

Interviewee 21 was clear that his line manager controlled the bulk of his performance appraisal:

“My performance is definitely objective-based, I would say. We have, I would say, yearly target setting couple of weeks with supervisor... with my direct supervisor and management, where we set sort of programme-specific [goals].”

Later he adds:

“My supervisor takes control of most of the performance appraisal. we take a look at each of those and just do... there’s a small sort of description of what each level looks like. So, I would say, “I think I’m in level three,” my supervisor would say, “yes I agree, but you still have a couple of different things to work on, so I would evaluate you as a level three but for next year we need to make sure you’re a level three, almost four”. So, yes, so it’s a conversation between me and my manager, supervisor. No-one else is really involved. It’s just me and the line manager.”

It can be seen from the comments that performance objectives were set by the interviewee’s supervisor, who appeared to have had similar responsibilities to a line manager (the interviewee used the terms “supervisor” and “line manager” interchangeably.) There was some tentativeness expressed during the interview, which might have given the impression that he was not completely sure that it was only his line manager (supervisor) who was tasked with undertaking the performance appraisal. This was perhaps due to a recognition that there may have been others in the background who had some sort of input that he was unaware of. Nevertheless, there was a recognition that it was the line manager who appeared to be visibly much in control in terms of shaping the direction of the performance appraisal process.

Interviewee 24 explained the relationship with his line manager during the performance appraisal process in terms of informal familiarity:

“Basically, it’s a handshake by discussion to define how that person’s going to measure themselves over the year, you know, and that is... it’s how that person’s going to measure themselves over the year. We just really have a conversation and a bit of assurance to say, you know, “yes, you’re pretty much on track with that,” or, “no, I don’t agree with that, that target, that’s not going to push you, that’s just... that’s a paper exercise,” and we come to... so, we end up with half a dozen SMART targets, you know. Maybe three primary development ones, a functional target or two, and maybe a couple of softer ones as well, just around interaction with the team.”

The comments emphasized the rapport between both parties – “handshake by discussion” – which suggested that the transaction was conducted on amiable terms and that both were comfortable to discuss and agree performance expectations which served to uphold aspects of relational justice. What the quotation also outlined was the personal nature of the transaction, in which the line manager was the person who was shaping the direction of the performance appraisal, by discussing the interviewee’s level of progression and proposing ideas for improvement. It also suggests an informal control system that is contingent on the quality of relationship between the line manager and the person whose performance they are rating. This echoed previous comments by this interviewee, in which the technical and sensitive nature of his job role resulted in his line manager, who was said to have the necessary technical aptitude and detailed knowledge of the military importance and impact of the interviewee’s role, being the key person responsible for evaluating performance. This seemed to help to promote perceptions of procedural justice.

Nevertheless, the phrase “handshake by discussion” also raised concerns that the relationship may be too informal and lacked appropriate oversight from others within the organisation. This may have been seen to have eroded relational justice from the position of an objective

observer. However, not from the interviewee's perspective who, as was mentioned previously, appeared comfortable with the quality of interaction between himself and his line manager.

He also seemed unconcerned with the contingent nature of decisions taken about his performance. Nevertheless, irrespective of what negative impact informality may have had on relational justice, the argument was that no-one else was available to comprehend what the interviewee did in their job role. This meant that the line manager was the person who was perceived as having the competence to take the lead role in shaping the performance appraisal process. This encouraged the development of a dyadic relationship between interviewee and appraiser that may have caused problems which will be discussed in the next section, later in this chapter.

Interviewee 13, an HR manager, offered an alternative insight into the control that line managers had over the performance appraisal process:

“So, reward management specifically within the past organisation was taken... was... yes, were linked, but also not were linked. So, for example, if you wanted extra perks like flexible working and to work wherever you want, whenever you want, you had to be like, perceived highly by your manager, because if there was any kind of performance issues, your manager would have total control over these benefits. Your manager could say, “you're not having this”, so, you have to be first of all saying that you are doing well to then be given more freedom to like work from home or change your work hours. So, that was associated to negative reward.”

From the comments, there was a situation whereby line management had “total control”. This suggested an autocratic approach which appeared to be driven by a culture and control system that contributed to the development of a performance appraisal and reward distribution system that was in the full purview of line management. This may have been as a result of the technical nature of many employees' job roles, that revolved around the development and

application of machine learning algorithms. This meant that it was arguably difficult for those who lacked knowledge in this esoteric, complex area to have offered in-depth consideration of the technical performance of these employees. Having a technically knowledgeable person undertake performance appraisal may have been a key aspect in upholding perceptions of procedural justice. Nevertheless, the interviewee did indicate that HR could make a positive contribution:

“So, I think for anything that’s very technical, say of like a technical digital job, if the performance should be linked to OKRs, so you can very clearly say what is success and what isn’t success. So, I think that’s how their performance should be managed. I think if there is any performance such as bonuses, I think this shouldn’t be solely controlled by the manager because it produces bias; I think that any bonuses should have a bonus review board, because I think the way bonuses are given out company-wide should be reviewed and agreed on for transparency. But I think with the very technical job, very technical jobs are actually very easy to assess because they can have very specific measurable outcomes. So, I think that those can be very well done by HR and rather than a manager, because it should be open and you can just measure them across the company.”

The interviewee suggested a confidence that technical roles can be assessed by those who do not have technical aptitude. This may help to relieve the burden on line managers, and develop a control system that included non-technical stakeholders. However, this was not a view shared by most tech employees who expressed the need for someone with the necessary knowledge and understanding of what they do to appraise performance. This was deemed to be important to uphold perceptions of procedural justice. There have been several examples cited whereby HR have experienced difficulty and obstinacy from tech employees, for example, interviewee 26, who spoke about tech employees “grunting” in response to HR’s request to become more proactively involved in shaping the performance appraisal process.

It was interesting to note that in interviewee 13's own firm, there appeared to be a lack of a proactive role taken by HR which gave the impression that her comments and ideas were not those shared by other senior stakeholders in the organisation. Perhaps this was due to the importance these tech employees had in contributing to the success of the organisation and the risk of losing key talent in a market with high demand for these types of professional tech roles, that the firm chose to "side" with the tech employees' requirement that technical performance be assessed by those with technical aptitude. The interviewee's comments perhaps suggest a naivete about the reality of how her function was perceived vis-à-vis the tech function, and the importance that the market places on tech employees in terms of high rewards and status in contrast to HR. Despite her sentiments, line management appeared to remain in control of shaping the performance appraisal process in this firm.

Interviewee 6 added some interesting insights concerning the history of his organisation's performance appraisal dynamic. This had shifted from adopting 360-degree feedback to appraise performance to a process that involved line managers evaluating their direct reports:

"The performance evaluation is conducted by the individual supervisors. We previously had 360-degree reviews... but HR now create a procedural framework for line managers to use. I'm executing against it, that's it."

The comments highlight that line management conduct the performance appraisals. It appeared that 360-degree feedback was undertaken previously, which suggests that there was a preference to seek perspectives and insights from peers and possibly others as a means to create a control system that sought multi-dimensional perspectives. However, that had changed into a system whereby line managers were now in full control of performance appraisal using performance data harvested from an application called Lattice which operated as a data-analytics platform similar to WorkDay. This digitalised control system afforded opportunity to consider results and actions:

“They are... supposedly they’re to make everyone’s life easier and more streamlined and I do not see that, but they’re only as good as the information that goes into them. It’s not really clear where this comes from. There have been errors discovered in the data. A degree of consistency is required company wide. I don’t believe the platform is technically challenging, just not convinced of the value.”

Interestingly, the interviewee did not appear to be convinced that using applications was necessarily a positive step. He talked about the possibility of streamlining the performance appraisal process using the app, but he raised concern that the app was only effective if the quality of data being added to it was reliable. If it wasn’t, this might impact perceptions of procedural justice. It was also interesting that the interviewee was not clear about where precisely the performance data came from. One can assume that the data was collected by line managers who the interviewee indicated were the key actors in the performance appraisal process. It was unclear whether it was the app or line management that was driving and shaping the process. Or whether there was interplay between both.

This uncertainty may have been contributing to the errors. There also seemed to be a lack of oversight about how this data was being used. Alternatively, there may be a lack of knowledge by the interviewee and other senior managers and directors about the use of Lattice and the procedures being implemented to collect and handle data. The real danger is that Lattice may reinforce negative consequences for the employee if the data collected by the line manager is unreliable and/or is mishandled. There seems to be a lack of a control system that checks the integrity of the data.

This may result in a lack of transparency and distortions concerning the employee’s performance that may significantly impact perceptions of procedural justice and possibly distributive justice if performance is linked to decisions concerning rewards. Having line managers in control of the performance appraisal process in a context that utilises data-analytics apps could be problematic and may have serious consequences in terms of



upholding procedural justice. In other words, using technology to evaluate performance may be contributing to a misalignment of control mechanisms.

Perhaps this is why the interviewee draws the conclusion that: “we’re not particularly transparent with things around salaries and some of the additional things like, say, options and appraisal.”

This lack of transparency may be as a result of line managers not interfacing with the application appropriately.

In a similar vein, interviewee 11 indicated that his line manager was in control of his performance appraisal:

“Basically, we write down our self-appraisal and then my manager will kind of comment on my own self-appraisal. Then there will be a one-to-one meeting and discussion about the appraisal and also his comments. In the last quarter of the year the system will finalise and average the... numbers, if it’s quantitative appraisal. Then there will be an annual review at the end of the year.”

It can be seen from the comments that the interviewee reflected on his own performance before his line manager got involved. There was a “one-to-one meeting” between the interviewee and his line manager to discuss his performance. There was a quantitative element involved, too, that fed forward into the annual end-of-year review. Interestingly, the interviewee appeared to have had a level of control in shaping the performance appraisal process by having the agency to reflect on his own performance.

However there was a snag, as outlined in later comments made by the interviewee, that had an impact on relational justice:

“Yes, so talking about self-appraisal, I don’t think it’s really a very effective method, because sometimes you can only... for example, if you are doing the review for first quarter, I tend to forget what happened in the first months of the quarter. I would only focus on reviewing the projects I have at the moment. That’s probably the problem for self-appraisal. The way the system or the mechanism works is, I do self-appraisal first and then my manager comments on that, but because my manager doesn’t really work with me on a daily basis, because my manager is based in Singapore, and we have very few engagements. We barely talk to each other. That’s actually quite bad.”

The comments indicate that the interviewee did not think self-appraisal was effective as he could not recall events that occurred previously that may have impacted his level of performance. (Arguably, the interviewee could have done a better job of recording his thoughts by using a reflective journal.) The interviewee also expressed concern about his relationship with his line manager who he relied on to provide feedback in response to his self-appraisal, due to geographic distance. As the line manager played a key role in shaping the direction of the interviewee’s performance by evaluating his self-appraisal and presumably playing a role in collecting quantitative performance metrics in advance of the annual performance review, there was a detachment between both parties. This was in stark contrast to the experience of interviewee 24 and his line manager who ostensibly shared a close relationship, arguably helped by the both of them being located on the same site. Videoconferencing tools did not appear to have been a substitute for regular face-to-face contact.

Nevertheless, the key point here was that if the line manager had a key role in shaping the performance appraisal process by responding to their direct reports’ self-appraisals, consideration may need to have been given to the physical context of this relationship in terms of upholding relational justice. There was an opportunity for other stakeholders in the organisation to become more actively involved in the performance appraisal process by assisting the interviewee through offering training and more face-to-face support. Although, again, there was the threat that the interviewee might have viewed this as a threat to procedural justice if those who might have become more actively involved were perceived as

not having acceptable levels of technical knowledge and aptitude. Ultimately, some form of collaboration between others, the interviewee, and his line manager may have served to shape the performance appraisal process, and the corresponding control system, in such a way that it improved relational justice and procedural justice. There was scope for HR to have played a more active role in the performance appraisal process. Indeed, the HRM triad did not appear to have been in evidence.

The pressures of line managers assuming a key role in shaping the performance appraisal process was succinctly described by interviewee 7:

“To be honest, in the majority of cases, that’s probably what happens [line managers do everything during performance appraisal]. HR are more at the administration side and the burden of having the [performance appraisal] conversations with employees falls to the individual managers.”

The word “burden” emphasised the onerous challenge for line managers in having to play such a central role in performance appraisal and ensuring that procedural justice was upheld. These pressures may have resulted in line managers making short cuts that could have impacted the efficacy of the performance appraisal process. Again, this raised the question of who might have assisted line management in undertaking performance appraisal. It is questionable what pro-active role HR could have taken in shaping the process in high-tech environments. Again, the existence of the HRM triad appeared to be absent, as was a suitable control system.

Interviewee 9 offered a different perspective in terms of line management’s involvement and what impact this might have had on organisational justice:

“Yes. I think that in broad brush strokes that’s true [that line managers should evaluate performance] in that they understand roughly what the job is. But with any kind of role, particularly if you’re reporting into somebody senior, they just

don't have the time to understand or think about exactly what you do on a day-to-day basis; so, the fine grain nature of your work and your activity is only really seen by output. They don't understand the, for example, small time management issues, workload; that kind of stuff, they can't quite conceptualise but in terms of what they anticipate being the day-to-day business of the job, they're fairly accurate, they have a pretty good understanding, yes."

It can be seen from the comments that the interviewee proposed a caveat that line management's understanding of the role could also be constrained in the sense that they did not have the time and opportunity to comprehend all important aspects of the role. This suggests that it was not advisable to burden them with key responsibility in shaping the performance appraisal process as this could have ramifications in the sense that some important aspects of the interviewee's performance might be overlooked.

One can conclude from this that there was an opportunity for others to contribute to the performance appraisal process to evaluate aspects of employees' job performance which line management didn't fully understand or observe. This could have helped to address gaps to produce a more multi-dimensional appraisal, and corresponding control system, that captured more salient aspects of the interviewee's performance. This might have produced more evidence to base reward decisions upon which might have helped to boost distributive justice. The question is who in the organisation would assist line management particularly in SMEs if there was no active HR function. Likewise, it's not clear who would assist line managers in large firms if there is an emphasis on evaluating technical elements of employees' performance.

Interviewee 16 offered a perspective in terms of who might be best placed to assist line management:

"I think originally it was just statistics and profit. I think they've started to soften their approach, so we have started to have some feedback sessions, four weekly

catchups they call it [with the line manager]. Just running through your projects and making sure everything is where it should be. On the larger projects you have project teams, and my line manager gets copied in on some of these emails as well, so he can see how I'm performing on a day-to-day basis. Then obviously when results actually come in as well and client feedback comes in, they use that as well as a measure.”

The comments indicate that there was a situation whereby the interviewee had an opportunity to strike up a rapport with their line manager by having monthly meetings to discuss their progress. The interviewee was involved in various projects which meant that he was part of a matrix structure that resulted in him reporting to several project managers. This offered an opportunity for others in the firm to feedback on the interviewee's performance to his line manager. This shifted some of the responsibility of evaluating the interviewee's performance away from the line manager. This enabled others who worked with the interviewee in particular projects to contribute to the performance appraisal process, as part of a control system that took a broader perspective on results and actions. The line manager would then use this input to guide their monthly meetings.

This attempt to provide extra channels of feedback arguably helped to boost procedural justice by providing a more holistic perspective of the interviewee's performance, and also a more evidence-based approach. Plus, it might have helped to reduce the pressure on the line manager to procure all the data. Nevertheless, there was still a risk that it might have been left to the line manager to interpret the performance data sent to them by project leads. It was not clear whether the line manager was able to understand and properly interpret the project managers' data which may have resulted in improper decisions concerning performance evaluation. This could have had a negative impact on procedural justice. Also, the quality of relationship with the interviewee may have resulted in a biased interpretation of the data.

Interviewee 15 outlined some of the difficulties associated with delegating responsibility to line managers to undertake performance appraisals:

“We have a yearly appraisal which is done by the line managers. What we also tend to do is at the end of the year, we have a... it’s not so much an appraisal but what they try and do is if the company has been quite successful, they might look at salary increases, bonuses and stuff like that. The way the company operates is that we don’t have set pay scales for specific jobs; you’re paid in terms of your performance in the company. So, you could be doing the same job as someone sitting next to you and get paid a different rate.”

These comments illustrate the strong sense of responsibility line managers in this organisation have to ensure that organisational justice was upheld particularly given that there were no “set pay scales for specific jobs”. There was an imperative that line managers shape the performance appraisal process in such a way that transparency, objectivity, and an evidence-based approach was undertaken failing which there may have been many examples of inconsistency that could have resulted in employees being rewarded inappropriately.

The risk was that different supervisors undertook the performance appraisal according to their own views, perspectives, and biases which could have resulted in a series of inconsistent evaluations. This could result in a misaligned control system distorted by contingent decision-making. This could have a detrimental impact on procedural justice in the sense that processes and procedures were not being undertaken consistently. Likewise, distributive justice may not have been upheld as rewards linked to performance appraisals were skewed and did not accurately reflect employees’ performance. Furthermore, relational justice may have been impacted if employees perceived a lack of procedural and distributive justice. This could have created fractiousness and conflict, that may have resulted in a decrease in productivity and an increase in employee exit and turnover.

There was scope for third-party involvement to uphold organisational justice in this context, for example, HR, which was proposed by the same interviewee in later comments:

“I suppose [performance appraisal] probably would benefit from some input from HR; not necessarily maybe attending the appraisal as such but, making sure that the objectives that are set to people are fair and the feedback that’s given. I mean, I have, not in this job but in my previous job, I had an appraisal from my line manager which I thought was quite unfair, but it was that way, HR weren’t involved as such, it was just me and her, and I felt that she had been... she had input from her boss about how I had performed and she didn’t think I’d performed particularly well, so that really... and it was one visit to a customer that seemed to shadow the whole thing, even though I thought I’d had quite a good year.”

To echo points made in response to question 2, HR may have had a role in upholding procedural justice by ensuring that there was a sense of fairness and consistency injected into the performance appraisal process. This could have involved line management and HR working together as part of a suitable control system focused on results and actions, to co-create objectives and rules and procedures about how the performance appraisal process was undertaken. As has been discovered so far, examples of proactive collaboration between HR and line management have been minimal, that suggests misaligned control systems. This appears to impact employees’ perceptions of organisational justice. Again, the HRM triad does not appear to have been in evidence.

Although, interestingly, interviewee 14 indicated that HR would appear to actively delegate performance appraisal responsibility to line managers. This suggests that HR are less keen to become directly involved in this context:

“I would say HR generally tends to delegate the performance reviews to the line managers. What the HR team at our company does is they act as more of a supportive, more support for line managers saying, “oh, here’s some standardised things we want you guys to fill out, these are some forms, documents, this is where we want you to give them goals, where we want them to review themselves,” you know, they’ll go through... they basically create the structure

but the content and actual review is all part of... it all falls under the line manager.”

HR appeared to operate in a supporting role in terms of upholding procedural justice by distributing standardised guidelines. However, control of the performance appraisal process seemed to lie with line managers whose role it was to appraise their direct reports. Again, the risk of individual line managers applying their own views, interpretations, and biases to the “standardised things” HR proposed be included in the performance appraisal process was arguably high. Although, as was mentioned previously, there may have been pushback from tech employees if HR took a more proactive role.

Interviewee 18, an HR manager, outlined his irritation at the control line managers in his organisation had over the performance appraisal process:

“Currently, it’s very much individual on what the [line] manager wants it to be like, which is a little bit frustrating, to be honest. Beforehand [in my previous employer] it was very set and I think it gives a better outlook on how it generally worked in my life.”

The interviewee’s previous employer was an organisation that operated in the fashion industry (mentioned earlier in this chapter) in which HR took a pro-active role in shaping the performance appraisal process. In his current firm, responsibility appeared to be fully delegated to line managers to control the performance appraisal process as they saw fit. This might have created a lot of risk in terms of upholding perceptions of fairness and organisational justice, if line managers evaluated employees according to their own individual criteria and biases. HR seemed to lack any influence in this context in terms of making meaningful contributions to shaping performance appraisal.

Interviewee 2, also an HR manager, indicated that line management in his firm also controlled much of the performance appraisal process:



“I also think there’s a... I think there’s also an element of the individual line manager setting that expectation [of maintaining perceptions of organisational justice], you know, in terms of what do they expect, what behaviours, what attributes do they expect from their team and sort of lead by example, you know, from the top and actually cascading that down.”

This was an interesting perspective and echoed what interviewee 14 had to say about HR delegating control to line management to undertake performance appraisal. The interviewee here believed that line management are the main conduit to convey organisational expectations from the top down in view of the line manager’s proximity to their employees. This was an intelligent point but arguably also a flawed one as line managers are bringing to bear their own views, perceptions, attitudes, and biases. Likewise, different line managers may have their own interpretations of senior management communications.

If a line manager’s perceptions of the organisation were negative, this may have translated into difficulties in terms of maintaining relational justice with their employees as the line manager may lack motivation to encourage a positive working relationship. This may be because if the line manager had negative views, these may have translated into negative behaviours and a pessimism that impacted how they interacted with their direct reports whose performance they needed to appraise. Likewise, disengaged line managers may have resorted to counterproductive work behaviours that could affect the proper maintenance of procedural justice if they perceived performance appraisal guidelines negatively. Again, this suggests a misaligned control system.

In a later statement, the interviewee did admit that there needs to be some oversight of the performance appraisal process and corresponding control mechanisms. However, he continued to assert that line managers should shape the bulk of it, advocating that HR take a back-seat role:

“I don’t think it’s HR’s responsibility to do a performance appraisal so I would say it’s completely down to the line manager but my advice would be that we need to make sure we’re being consistent and fair across the board and we’re not, you know, we’re not things underhand, etc., as well. But I would say it still lies with the line manager.”

Interviewee 24, an IT Project Manager and a Line Manager, explained that he takes the performance appraisal seriously and outlines how he attempts to shape the process, despite time pressures. He also indicates that he would be prepared to work with HR to develop various aspects of the process:

“I think the appetite would be there [for HR] to support it and work and develop it; it’s capacity and time. That’s always the challenge when, you know, and appraisals rightly... wrongly are the fill-in jobs; they’re not the day job. So, it’s always kind of second... a second-tier thing, you know, or quite often can be a second tier thing. You know, I do make sure that I get one-to-one time with the guys, we run through them, the targets, you know, we do all the target stuff, the SMART perspective of that, so I do take it quite seriously and it is treated as a time for the individuals to speak to me one-to-one, so that we can understand if there’s any emerging issues or otherwise.”

One gets a sense that, despite viewing performance appraisal as “second tier” responsibility in the context of his various day-to-day important line-management responsibilities, there was a drive to maintain relational justice by ensuring that he had “one-to-one time” to discuss and agree SMART targets. He emphasised that “he takes it seriously” to identify “emerging issues or otherwise”. There was a professionalism evident here. What appeared to be important to the interviewee was developing a sense of trust and openness with his direct reports which again highlighted that sense of upholding relational justice. Likewise, he mentioned developing SMART objectives which suggested that procedural justice was being maintained by deploying a recognisable framework to shape those objectives. It also suggests that the interviewee recognises the importance of behavioural control mechanisms.

The perception was that the interviewee was keen to uphold aspects of organisational justice. It was not evident whether this was a sentiment shared by other line managers in the organisation. Consequently, the risk was that there were varying levels of commitment which might have resulted in differing levels of relational and procedural justice.

Interviewee 25, a CEO, reaffirmed many of the previous views with regards to the control line managers had over the performance appraisal process:

“I would think no – [employees wouldn’t be too concerned if HR took important decisions about their job] because, ultimately, it’s their line manager that’s making the ultimate choice, or the ultimate decision. If you think the HR doesn’t make the... they don’t do the whole decision or the appointment or the change or a promotion, or... they play a part in it. Ultimately, it’s your line manager who, if you’ve got a line manager, you would expect them to have those skills, if you’re working for them, to be able to say, “yes, okay, this is how we’re going to develop that person,” or, “this is a career path for them”. But you still need to ask them if they’re interested in it. You know, you still need to have that conversation with somebody.”

This was an interesting perspective from someone who was in overall charge of the Asian operations of their business. He asserted that it was line management who “you would expect to have [the] skills” required to evaluate performance of their reports, and to propose career development paths. This suggests that control mechanisms focusing on results and action should be the key responsibility of line management.

However, the key problem with delegating responsibility to line managers, was the quality of relationships that unfolded between them and their direct reports. It has been mentioned already that line managers – as human beings – bring to bear their own personalities, perceptions of their role, experiences, thoughts, sentiments, attitudes, and biases. All these

elements can impact how they perceive employees' performances, and of the employees' themselves. Line managers in an organisation are likely to have various levels of abilities and confidence to execute their role. A lack of a control system to mitigate these risks from emerging, could create contingent decision making that distorts perceptions of organisational justice.

If employees and line managers are forced to work closely together on performance appraisal (dyads), the above characteristics are likely to interplay to create dynamics that may produce unhealthy dyadic relationships, which will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

Also, by allowing line managers and employees to work closely together relatively unsupervised, there is the risk that line managers may create a series of dyads that could be impacted by bias and negative employee relationships.

#### 4.3.3 Dyads

This has proved to be the most prominent theme in the research. There are 68 references to the emergence and impact of dyads across all interviewees. In some circumstances, these relationships appeared to be healthy underpinned by a professionalism as indicated by interviewee 24, whose role included line management responsibilities:

“So, I do take it [performance appraisal] quite seriously and it is treated as a time for the individuals to speak to me one-to-one, so that we can understand if there's any emerging issues or otherwise.”

Likewise, interviewee 20, who was responsible for several direct reports' performance appraisals, implied that procedures were followed which suggests a professional approach:

“So, we have, at the start of year, we get given goals and objectives. So, there's a proper HR portal you go in and you agree with your manager your goals and

objectives for the year. You then have a midyear review where you go over that, see how you're progressing, and then at the end of year there's your end review, basically, and then you'll get your appraisal after that."

Furthermore, interviewee 3 who was responsible for undertaking performance appraisals in his role as line manager explained the structured processes put in place:

"There will be objectives set at the individual level, at the sort of small team level, at the broader department level and then at the firm level there's also objectives but, of course, the firm level's easy to gauge based on share price and revenue and so on. So, the feedback is more numerical, I suppose you could say, but at the departmental level it's more about delivering on promised projects that you've committed to and then at the small team level, how much the team has completed its part of the job, even if the overall project, you know, regardless of how that went; and then, at the individual level, what was your contribution and importantly, how well did you collaborate with other people, you know, were you collaborative or were you hard to work with, that's part of it, not just like what you actually did in terms of, you know, programming or designing or whatever."

These quotations highlight that there is an ostensible effort to create procedures and control mechanisms so that the performance appraisal is undertaken in a professional manner. The quotations also indicate that the line managers recognised that these procedures are a key part of the performance appraisal process. This suggests that they are aware of maintaining professionalism by upholding procedural justice. These procedures have been created by the organisation, in some instances with input from HR, which implied that on some occasions, each member of the HRM triad was involved in shaping the performance appraisal process and, by extension, developing a suitable control system.

However, as seen in previous sections in this chapter, relationships between line managers and their direct reports could be problematic. Both parties appeared to be prone to

counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs) and dark-side behaviours which created incidents of bias, favouritism, exclusion, politicking, and intimidation that impacted how the performance appraisal process was shaped. One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was that interpersonal relationships and behavioural factors impacted strongly on performance appraisal processes. Again, there seemed to have been a lack of suitable mitigating control systems.

Likewise, it has been seen that HR often played a background, ad-hoc role, or were resisted, during the performance appraisal process. This meant that, in general, HR did not seem to undertake a pro-active oversight of organisational processes and procedures. In other words, HR did not play a role in whatever control systems were in place in many contexts.

This resulted in line managers retaining a significant level of control in terms of shaping and undertaking the performance appraisal process. In this section, we will explore in more depth and detail the challenges that this created in terms of upholding perceptions of organisational justice.

As there were 68 references to dyads in the interviews, I do not mean to discuss them all as this would be beyond the scope of this thesis. But I will discuss some of the more illustrative instances and link as succinctly as I can to other cases that share similar characteristics. Likewise, I will split this section into three sub-sections: gentle dyads, toxic dyads, and structural weakness.

From the data, what I would label as a gentle dyad in some circumstances emerged whereby a relationship between an employee and their line manager was characterised by familiarity and friendliness. This may have been seen as healthy in the sense that both parties' relationship was underpinned by trust and respect which afforded opportunity for an open and transparent exchange of views. This trust may have been characterised by various dimensions of trust such as affective trust whereby both parties suggested care and concern for each other that created positive emotions and feelings. Trust may also have been underpinned by

vulnerability. This may have involved both parties accepting that they were relying on each other doing what they said they would do, recognising that plans may not have been fulfilled, or desired outcomes may not have occurred, being open to feedback and advice, and asking for help if needed. There is an argument that these dynamics may have helped to uphold elements of organisational justice during performance appraisal by maintaining relational justice in which both parties communicated in a professional, courteous, and constructive manner, moderated by respect and openness.

But there was scope for gentle dyads to evolve into unhealthy relationships whereby objectivity eroded, and favouritism may have emerged. The line manager may have been keen to keep an employee in their team with whom they had a positive, friendly relationship to provide each other with emotional support, and/or as instrumental support to advocate the line manager's agenda. This may have created a taxonomy of dyadic relationships in which the line manager had various levels of relationship with their direct reports. There was a potential for some dyads to be characterised by nepotism in which direct reports were provided with access to resources and opportunities at the expense of other employees in other dyads.

There was the possibility that other factors, such as structural weakness, may have affected the evolution of dyads. Structural weakness can be characterised as a lack of a suitable control system, but this will be discussed later.

The characteristics of a dyad were likely to correspond with the quality of relationship between the line manager and their direct report. This quality of relationship could be visualised on a continuum from being toxic on one side to being constructive on the other, the position on the continuum representing the level of the opposing attributes. The mid-point could represent a situation whereby levels of toxicity and constructiveness are finely balanced in which changes in the behavioural dynamics between both parties could tip the relationship either way. There is scope for third-party involvement to help mitigate the shift into toxicity, as part of an appropriate control system. A continuum also indicates that relationships are fluid and not necessarily fixed. External forces and structural weaknesses and/or changes may also impact the quality of dyadic relationships.

There is an argument that the suggestion of dyads underpinned by toxicity and constructiveness is simplistic. However, this understanding has emerged from the interpretation of the data whereby many participants have expressed their concern about the quality of their relationship with their line managers which has impacted their perceptions concerning the upholding of organisational justice. This emergence of dyads has been influenced by an ostensible unwillingness by HR in some instances to take a pro-active role in the performance appraisal process.

In addition, other criticisms include apparently ineffective attempts by HR to position themselves in the performance appraisal process and a perception that HR lack visibility and relevance in organisational activity and decision-making. The existence of what can be described as technical chauvinism whereby tech employees insist that their performance be evaluated by those who have an acceptable level of technical knowledge, understanding, and experience of what they do (often line managers, or equivalents), seem to exclude HR from being directly involved. Likewise, resistance by tech employees against those from outside their career discipline intervening in their technical area was detrimental to HR. All of these elements are symptoms of a lack of a suitable control system.

However, one has to be careful about drawing firm conclusions regarding the existence and effectiveness of control systems, as some employees worked in matrix structures that involved reporting to more than one line manager and a project manager. The point to make here is that in some cases, other stakeholders may have had a say with regards to an employee's performance appraisal, not just the line manager. Therefore, in some cases one may have to consider that employees being appraised have different types of relationship with various performance raters. This also means that control systems should be in place to monitor the outcomes of these various evaluations and ensure that they are undertaken properly so that perceptions of organisational justice are upheld.

#### 4.3.4 Gentle Dyads

A key point to make here with regards to the maintenance of organisational justice is that trust and vulnerability may have been key elements of the relationships between line managers and their direct reports. This may have resulted in both parties being willing and comfortable with undertaking honest, open, and transparent discussions during the performance appraisal process. The appraisal process may have been guided by a set of



objectives that were co-developed with employees, and possibly HR – the HRM triad - which indicated that some line managers were not in complete control of the process. Nevertheless, if the HRM triad was not evident during the performance appraisal, one can make the logical conclusion that the existence of a healthy gentle dyad may have been equally effective in upholding perceptions of justice. This was potentially possible due to both parties displaying integrity, openness and professionalism during appraisal which would more likely have resulted in procedural justice, distributive justice, and relational justice being upheld. In other words, the line manager's role in shaping the performance appraisal process would perhaps have been more positive and constructive and less susceptible to bias and nepotism.

A caveat is in order, however, as there may have been circumstances whereby line managers may not always have been comfortable delivering negative feedback to direct reports with whom they had a constructive relationship with. This may have been linked to the personality of the line manager who perhaps lacked confidence to deliver bad news.

Also, as was discussed in the previous section, there was a risk that a friendly relationship between a line manager and their direct report could evolve into one that was underpinned by favouritism rather than openness, honesty, and transparency. This could be due to an overabundance of affective trust whereby the personal feelings of the line manager overcome her or his objectivity. As was mentioned before, affective trust and personal feelings may interplay with a line manager's proclivity to portray counterproductive work behaviours (CWBs). Consequently, some line managers may have been reluctant to offer a performance appraisal that upheld organisational justice. An example of this might have involved a direct report's actual unsatisfactory performance being overlooked or misinterpreted in such a way as to downplay negative aspects.

Likewise, an inflated appraisal of the employee's performance may have resulted in the erosion of distributive justice. This was because the employee's performance appraisal may have been linked to decisions concerning the level of reward the employee receives, which means that they may have access to financial rewards, resources, and opportunities that they are not entitled to. This could have a negative impact on organisational productivity and morale as a result of elevating employees based on biased performance appraisals undertaken by line managers who have, with their direct report, created a gentle dyad which has evolved into an unhealthy relationship.

These are examples whereby line managers can shape the performance appraisal in a negative manner. The existence of the HRM triad that includes a more active role for HR, could result in more surveillance of the appraisal process so that organisational justice dimensions are more likely to be upheld.

Let us look at the data to gain an understanding of the dynamics of dyads at the sharp end of performance appraisals in high-tech contexts.

For example, interviewee 4, suggests that the relationship with his line manager may have influenced the dynamic of his performance rating:

“If you’re able to get that overview of everyone, that level playing field, then you’re not going to see teams where they look like they’ve got people that are progressing really well and others that aren’t, but really they’re actually performing the same, which I think can happen if everything’s siloed going through the people leader, or if everything’s quite subjective.

I think also maybe something to do with... I’m quite friendly with my people leader, so that helps. I never get an outstanding rating but I never get a bad one either. If somebody was to come in externally, say, they obviously can’t monitor you for the whole quarter or anything like that, but if somebody externally was able, or from another part of the organisation who didn’t know you, was able to gauge your performance in some way, then I’d think that might be a bit more fair.”

The interviewee was not completely sure that the quality of relationship he had with his people leader, which was equivalent in this context to that of a line manager, impacted decisions taken about his performance appraisal. But he was cognisant of the possibility, which meant he was aware of how the characteristics of relationships could affect how line managers shaped performance appraisals.

He also acknowledged that there may have been benefits to a third party “who didn’t know you...gauging performance in some way”. He implies that this could help to boost procedural

justice as the third party may be more transactional in the sense that they may prioritise objectivity at the expense of potential bias. A drawback of an appraiser not knowing the employee was that tacit knowledge of the employee's performance could be overlooked.

Also, there could be an overemphasis on evaluating outputs in terms of whether objectives have been met, rather than a consideration of *how* the employee has achieved their objectives – an overemphasis on ends rather than means. This suggests that a collaboration between the interviewee's people leader (line manager) and a third party such as an HR representative may have been helpful. Nevertheless, the risk would be perhaps that the line manager dominates discussions concerning the interviewee's performance as they have more knowledge of their direct report's activities, compared to the third party, due to being able to *observe* their performance day-to-day. Despite this, the key point to make here is that there are alternatives to line managers' alone shaping performance appraisal by attempting to bring in others so that the outcomes of performance appraisal are not dominated by the influence of gentle dyads.

Interviewee 13, an HR manager, offered some vivid personal insight into the damaging impact of a gentle dyad:

“I mean, that's just from like hearsay, and I think that as well, within senior level jobs in other organisations as well, it's very much like that person's coming in and a position is kind of like made and asked, and I see that again and again and again.

It makes you think, screaming like, “you guys are bias,” when someone says, “oh, they remind me of me when I was younger,” like, I'm just like, that is the worst thing ever, which is why I consistently hired by women who look like me and act like me; that, again, even though I maybe benefit for it, for me that seems that this is not necessarily what this position needs, another person to agree with them, another person that thinks the same; that is not necessarily good for an organisation or good for hire diversity anyway.”

The interviewee delivered her views in a quite fragmentary manner which explained why the quotation in the first paragraph was slightly unclear. However, one gets a sense that “strong relationships” can have a beneficial impact. It should be said that she was referring to a different context in the sense that she was talking about a circumstance that related to a recruitment decision rather than decisions taken during the performance appraisal process. But the logic was the same in that she highlighted the impact of what appeared to be a halo effect based on perceived similarity of personality by the recruiter. If this logic is applied to the relationship between a line manager and their direct report, it could be seen that there is potential for an unhealthy gentle dyad to emerge which could translate into favouritism based on an overabundance of affective trust. Again, it highlights the potential negative impact of a lack of an appropriate control system to mitigate the emergence of unhealthy gentle dyads.

A gentle dyad may be difficult for a third party to oversee or observe. There is an argument that two people who share personality traits are more able to form a healthy relationship characterised by empathy and mutual understanding, which is a positive dynamic. Again, one has to consider the level of “gentleness” involved. A key issue is whether it translates into a relationship based on affective trust that fosters openness, transparency and psychological safety that creates a frank and candid relationship. Or transmutes into a relationship underpinned by favouritism. How this evolves may be difficult for HR or any third party to affect.

I suspect the only solution to mitigate the emergence of unhealthy gentle dyads is to rethink organisational structure. This could involve redesigning management responsibility so that the concept of a line manager is redefined in such a way so that the emergence of dyadic relationships can be avoided. This might involve line management teams or panels overseeing day-to-day work rather than individual managers, or rotating line managers and employees regularly to avoid unhealthy close relationships emerging.

This idea arguably conflicts with the majority of the literature that stresses the importance of making close connections, fostering relationships, and encouraging rapport. If line managers are regularly rotated amongst teams to avoid unhealthy dyads emerging, this might impact consistency and coherence of team membership and leadership. It could result in a drop in team productivity and team performance if line managers cannot establish a long-term

relationship with the individuals in the team. Therefore, in terms of shaping performance appraisal, I suspect line managers will continue to play a key role, as alternatives may produce other drawbacks.

Interviewee 22 highlighted two points that build upon the previous interviewee's perspective. He indicated that he seemed to have a good relationship with his line manager who was involved in his performance appraisal. However, there were others whose views were sought as part of a broader effort to create a more multi-dimensional perspective:

“I would say [my line manager is] really good. When I started he was like my mentor sort of thing. You usually get someone in the same role or similar but I'm a standalone role and he was the last person that did it six years ago so, there'd been no one since then doing it. So, yes, I'd say he's good. He evaluates my performance. But you also get six managers or, I think six or more, will then give feedback to him. So, he'll put out comments to other managers and say, “look, who's dealt with him?” or, he'll know who's dealt with me and ask for feedback from them.

Then I also put out feedback, to get feedback from colleagues and he'll see what they're saying about me and then, I then say what I think about me and where I've been good, where I've not been good and then we'll have a talk about it and he evaluates it all but, yes. So, it's quite structured that way.”

From the comments it can be seen that the interviewee's line manager was his former mentor, and from his positive comments – “I would say he's really good” - it can be said that there was a gentle dyad in existence between them. One does not know whether this dyad is impacted by favouritism. However, it could be seen that information about the interviewee's performance was sought from other managers, and from his peers in what seemed to be a form of 360-degree feedback, as part of an ostensibly suitable control system. This could achieve a more in-depth and fairer appraisal of the interviewee's performance. Interestingly, however, what was not entirely clear is how this evidence is then processed. By the interviewee's own admission, discussed in earlier sections, he was not fully aware of how decisions were taken with regards to performance appraisal due to a lack of KPIs – “**and there's no key performance indicators yet**” (page 5) – which suggests the potential for the

control system to be misaligned, but he seemed to suggest that elements of organisational justice were upheld:

“So, it’s interesting how structured they are yet how people-centric they are and they look at employees as customers, as well. So, you’re an associate, because they call everyone an associate but... and no matter what level you’re at you’re an organisation X associate, but you’re also a customer. So, and they say they’re the most customer-centric company out there but they’re very much for development just now. It’s really interesting how much they focus on development compared to my last place. I would go into a meeting with my boss and it would all be about projects and they’d be like, “give me an update on this, give me an update on that, I don’t really care about what’s happened personally-wise, we’ll maybe have a wee chat but that’s your own stuff,” whereas here it’s very much like, “how can I develop you as a person and how can I get you to the next level in the company?” So, yes, it might just be the people, but it might be the business, as well. So, it’s very much quite an eye-opener.”

The interviewee compared his current employer with his previous employer by highlighting that his current employer focused more on personal development and helping him to achieve the “next level”, which indicates that there is an emphasis on encouraging personal advancement. He did not mention the involvement of his line manager specifically in terms of what processes they undertook to identify personal development requirements or what they did personally in helping him achieve the next level. The interviewee appears to have a positive perspective of the organisation which by extension would imply that he has a positive perception of the contribution that his line manager makes to the performance appraisal process. One can also suggest that the use of the word “structured” was telling in that there was a systematic process and control system in place which suggested that there were particular procedures and processes to be followed. It can possibly be concluded that procedural justice was being upheld, although one cannot say for certain precisely how the line manager was shaping this.

Interviewee 7 by contrast explained that in the SME he worked for, there was a less structured approach:

“But the reality is we’re a smallish company, we will speak to people on a regular basis. We tend to be in touch and try to improve, it’s much more a coaching type environment we’ve got on a day to day basis.”

From the comments, employees’ performance seems to be evaluated using a more informal approach that involves daily interactions in an environment focused on nurturing employees’ development. It corresponds with a mentoring-type arrangement where employees can learn from advice given and perhaps role-model their manager’s behaviours. The employee can also receive real-time feedback on their performance. There seems to be an element of what might be described as a gentle dyad in view of the nurturing and constructive focus of the relationship.

However, without adequate oversight and a clear structure that outlines procedures and processes that forms part of a suitable control system which explains how performance appraisal can be undertaken professionally, there is a risk that procedural justice may be eroded. This is due to the manager making his or her own contingent decisions that lack due diligence concerning how their direct report has performed. There is a danger that the coaching relationship may develop in such a way that the manager is wary of providing negative feedback as this might reflect on her or his ability to develop their staff. There is no suggestion from the interview that an unhealthy gentle dyad has emerged.

However, without third-party observation, the interviewee himself may not recognise that a halo effect might have existed; or that decisions contingent on how line management perceive their ratee in terms of whether they like them or not, impact perceptions of organisational justice. In essence, it’s not entirely clear whether their relationship is a healthy gentle dyad predicated on an open and frank exchange of views and knowledge and experience, or an unhealthy gentle dyad which is underpinned by favouritism and a failure to impart potentially

honest, negative feedback. Conversely, the interviewee did not explicitly mention that a problematic relationship exists with his manager which gave the impression that it was not a toxic dyad per se. Although a lack of toxicity does not necessarily mean that the opposite was true i.e., that a gentle dyad existed. But the evidence would suggest that a positive relationship is in place that could evolve into something more healthy or unhealthy. This is an example of a line manager or equivalent being in a strong position to shape the performance appraisal process. Again, perhaps there is an opportunity for a third party to be involved, such as an HR representative, to oversee that organisational justice is being upheld as part of a more robust control system.

Interestingly, later in the interview he referred to problems with a lack of consistency in terms of the application of procedure:

“Where the process, I’ve seen process fall down, typically, is performance evaluation. Have you had the one-to-one discussions? You have to have them by a certain time, have you done it? A lot of time managers just see it as a... depending who the manager is. They don’t see it as... they’ve got a day job so don’t need to worry about that. You’ve got some procedural slack that happens in there and equally training programmes as well, sometimes training processes aren’t being followed as tightly as they should be.”

From the comments – “depending who the manager is” – suggests a structural weakness in the sense that there is a lack of procedural oversight and a control mechanism to minimise the threat of a lack of consistency concerning how the performance appraisal is shaped and undertaken. This may have an adverse impact on the maintenance of organisational justice (the effect of structural weakness will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter).

But what the quotation also indicates is that the slackness and the lack of importance that some managers attach to the performance appraisal process may be due to the quality of relationship they have with their direct reports. For example, if a healthy gentle dyad exists,



managers may be keen to ensure that the process is undertaken assiduously. Conversely, if an unhealthy gentle dyad exists, the manager may be unwilling to convey negative feedback assuming that his direct report has not performed according to expectations. This may reduce levels of procedural justice. Alternatively, the line manager's closeness and belief in her or his report's positive contribution based on their own subjective interpretation may result in them believing that there is no requirement for an in-depth performance appraisal.

Some of the points that the interviewee made were ambiguous, but I suspect this is because he himself does not fully comprehend what occurs during performance appraisal which is in itself telling. There seems to be a lack of understanding of what control mechanisms are in place. Despite this lack of clarity, it can be agreed that line management has a considerable role in shaping the performance appraisal process through informal controls, although the characteristics of this role may not always have been clear to his or her direct reports, particularly in tech SMEs.

Interviewee 9, who also works for a tech SME, has his performance evaluated by the CEO who he has a positive relationship with:

“Yes. Absolutely, yes [the CEO communicates with me courteously and professionally during the performance appraisal process]. I think it's difficult to differentiate because certainly the CEO, I've known him so long that there's like a blended relationship there of some respect, but certainly courteous to an extent but I think it depends on the characters you're dealing with, and in my case they can be a little spiky but in general, yes, absolutely.”

The comments signify that the interviewee and his manager have had a long-term relationship which is characterised as being “courteous” but occasionally “spiky”. This implies that there is occasionally an open and direct exchange of views in which the CEO conveys sentiments that might potentially offend. This suggests that there is a potentially healthy relationship that is predicated on openness and honesty.

However, the interviewee draws attention to a lack of structure and procedure, and therefore a lack of an appropriate control system:

“The informal element of that [performance appraisal] means it can be unpredictable, but so long as I’m doing everything well and the business is growing and not rattling anybody’s trees and being professional, it’s assumed my performance is good and that will keep evolving with the business as it grows.”

There are some interesting comments here. The interviewee draws attention to the informal element of the performance appraisal which suggests an element of uncertainty. The comments which are particularly striking are– “not rattling anybody’s trees and being professional”. This suggests that if he is not causing anxiety to others or being confrontational or annoying others in some sense, in addition to demonstrating a positive level of organisational performance (according to his rater’s perception), then it is believed that his overall contribution meets expectations. This informal control system seems to focus on achieving results, but also in discouraging actions that are seen as being counterproductive.

He mentioned earlier that the CEO who appraises his performance could be “spiky”, and that there seemed to be a suggestion that the interviewee should not express negative views that might irritate those in authority. This hints at a gentle dyad in which the CEO, whom he has known for a long time, trusts the interviewee to fulfil his work tasks successfully. In view of this, a structured and systematic performance appraisal is perhaps not required. However, there is a risk that the dyad could become unhealthy in the sense that openness and transparency may be discouraged.

The interviewee perhaps acknowledges this by revealing that he is aware of the importance of not intruding on others. He also seems to be suggesting, perhaps indirectly, that their relationship could evolve into a toxic dyad in the sense that the CEO may attempt to shut

down the interviewee's ability to voice their views during performance appraisal. One can argue that, in this context, the CEO's shaping of the performance appraisal, by undertaking line management responsibilities, might be impacting relational justice as it appears that there is an erosion of the interviewee's ability to voice his views.

There is also a broader risk of upholding organisational justice if the business expanded. One could argue that without an agreed upon set of rules and procedures with regards to how performance appraisal is undertaken, resentment might develop due to a perceived lack of organisational justice. This resentment may occur because of a lack of procedures and controls which could lead to inconsistent decision-making concerning rewards and promotions that might impact distributive justice.

Interviewee 16, who also works for a tech SME, offered some interesting insights into his experiences:

“I think [performance appraisal is fair] but I think it's also a wee bit of if your face fits. I think I've been quite lucky that I've made a good impact on directors and line managers and things, and I've proved myself to be good at my job. I think other people have maybe not had the same kind of opportunity or maybe the same kind of credibility I've had. I've come in with a bit more experience in other roles.”

From the comments, one gets the sense that some aspects of the performance appraisal process are shaped by management's personal views of their direct report, and not necessarily the substance of their performance. This suggests that the interviewee has forged a gentle dyad with his manager in such a way that his performance is being assessed positively due not only to ostensibly good quality inputs and outputs, but to a halo effect. There are concerns that the interviewee's performance is being evaluated in such a way that might erode objectivity in the sense that he is being favoured in contrast to others who “have maybe not had the same kind of opportunity.”

Later, the interviewee added:

“I think [performance appraisal could benefit from another set of eyes], just to make sure it’s impartial, because I think if you have just line managers doing things, this goes back, then, to bias or maybe somebody doesn’t get on with somebody. You can’t get on with everyone in your job but I think as a kind of maybe two or three people sitting on an appraisal. Somebody in an HR function, a director who’s got oversight of the whole company and then maybe a line manager as well, between them and to have that technical experience as well to actually understand what your job role is.”

These comments qualify the interviewee’s earlier views concerning the impact of relationships on the performance appraisal process in the sense that he recognises that bias and the effect of “somebody [not] get[ting] on with somebody”, would benefit from third-party intervention, possibly from HR. The comments also hint at the emergence of a toxic dyad whereby the relationship is underwritten by distrust and negative perceptions of the employee – a horns effect. This could have negative consequences for employees and for the organisation in terms of increased turnover and reduced productivity.

Let us take this opportunity to discuss toxic dyads in more detail.

#### 4.3.5 Toxic Dyads

Interviewee 15 introduces us to a performance appraisal process that appears to be co-developed:

“I have to say, ordinarily the deadlines are kind of arbitrary and stuff like that but usually what happens is you get given that document from the previous year, you go through and look at how you’ve performed, you assess for yourself how you think you’ve performed, there’s certain areas, there’s sort of general stuff like

timekeeping, team building and all that sort of stuff, you give yourself a mark out of five and then you sit down with your manager and go through the form and he or she gives you what they think you've scored and you put what you've scored and if there's a big discrepancy then you have a chat about what you think is the issue or that sort of thing.”

From the comments, there is an indication that the performance appraisal process perhaps lacks clear procedures and controls – “deadlines are kind of arbitrary and stuff like that” – which might impact perceptions of organisational justice.

The dynamics of the performance appraisal process appears to be shaped by one-to-one conversations between the interviewee and his line manager. This implies a dyadic relationship rather than the existence of the HRM triad. There appears to be no oversight from a third party, which raises concerns that the line manager's personal views and biases may potentially impact the performance appraisal process. Again, evidence perhaps of a lack of a suitable control system.

Later, the interviewee refers to a previous performance appraisal in which he was not rated positively:

“I had an appraisal from my line manager which I thought was quite unfair, but it was that way, HR weren't involved as such, it was just me and her, and I felt that she had been... she had input from her boss about how I had performed and she didn't think I'd performed particularly well, so that really... and it was one visit to a customer that seemed to shadow the whole thing, even though I thought I'd had quite a good year.”

Later, he reflected on his relationship with his current line manager:

“I think it's the same with a lot of things within the office workspaces. Obviously, the clash of personalities [if you rely on a line manager to undertake performance appraisal].

I have a good relationship with my line manager, been with the company for over seven years now and he's been there 10 years so we've kind of got to know one another, in the office I actually sit next to him and stuff so, we kind of socialise as well, but I've also seen him with other members of staff who perhaps he doesn't get on with as well and I would say that, in an appraisal situation, it might be... I'm not saying that this happens but, there's the possibility that a clash of personalities means that that person gets an appraisal that's perhaps not as fair as if they see... someone sees eye-to-eye with you. I think that's always the same, especially if you've got a one-person appraisal team.”

It appears that the interviewee's current line manager may have treated some employees unfairly if they did not “see eye to eye”. These relationships seem to resonate with the understanding of what the experiences of being disfavoured may look like in contrast to those who have cultivated what appear to be strong social relationships.

The disfavoured employees appear to have been positioned in what could be seen as toxic dyads due to a lack of a suitable control system. There seems to be a distortion of relational justice whereby relationships are characterised by friendly and amiable relationships in contrast to relationships characterised by negative feelings for a direct report, which produce skewed performance appraisal results. This could potentially affect distributive justice particularly if rewards are linked to performance. This also suggests that the performance appraisal process may be used to reinforce boundaries between the disfavoured and the favoured which raises concerns that procedural justice is not being upheld. Again, there is a lack of reference to the involvement of the HRM triad.

To return to interviewee 16, it may be the case that “old-fashioned” managers are more likely to deploy biased behaviours that drive the evolution of unhealthy and toxic dyadic relationships. These managers may be less receptive to a more evidence-based, open, and transparent relationship due to a fondness for allowing the quality of personal relationships, that have been cultivated over considerable time periods, to affect decisions:

“I think as a business we are getting better, I think it's just been a case of old-school management. All the managers are older, so I think they've been more used to an older way of working, whereas obviously, we're beginning to start

focusing on more emotional intelligence and things like that, and trying to be a bit more modern employer.”

Perhaps this was a generalisation, but it was instructive in the sense that it raised awareness of the possible impact of managers from different generations applying different justice rules to shape the performance appraisal process. It also suggests that control systems need to be in place to prevent this from happening.

It also raised awareness of the potential effect of line managers who have been in their role for a long period of time. Perhaps this echoes a previous point whereby rotating line managers, as part of a control system, may reduce the threat of unhealthy and toxic dyads emerging in high-tech environments. However, if one assumes that many tech employees are independent and are comfortable working on their own initiative, they may care little who their line manager is. Interestingly, if it is argued that line managers are less important to some tech employees, then this may weaken the argument that line managers have significant control and influence over shaping the performance appraisal process and hence fostering potentially unhealthy and toxic dyads.

However, the evidence indicates otherwise in the sense that line managers seem to have engineered themselves into close relationships with their employees as a result of a technical chauvinism against HR, and other actors perceived to lack technical knowledge. This seems to have driven decisions about how performance appraisal is shaped and delivered (line managers or an equivalent being the person whom the tech employee believes has the necessary aptitude to conduct the appraisal). Whatever control systems are in place, or not, appear to have allowed this to happen.

It should also be pointed out that there may be practical constraints to undertaking a form of rotation in SMEs, as there may be insufficient numbers of management personnel to do this.

Nevertheless, there is an argument that job rotation amongst line managers may be beneficial and could boost their own levels of motivation by exposing them to more layers of the organisation, widening their experience, and increasing their knowledge of how the organisation operates. The risk however is that if they are prone to exhibiting dark-side behaviours, they may negatively impact productivity in other areas of the organisation.

Interviewee 18, an HR manager, echoes some of the risks associated with allowing line managers substantive control of the performance appraisal process, an issue which seems to have been recognised by his organisation:

“What I personally think is... but I must say... I think there’s no right or wrong answer on some of the most basic questions when it’s about performance appraisal. For me, personally, I feel that we should give a little bit more power to managers about that, because this 360 feedback takes a lot of it away, under the assumption that managers would give unfair feedback and unfair appraisals.”

From the comments, it can be seen that the firm has instituted peer-to-peer feedback due to a belief that managers would provide “unfair feedback and unfair appraisals”. This seems to have been due to a perception by the firm that line managers were biased (which may have contributed to the formation of toxic dyads) a view which, interestingly, the interviewee did not concur with. He uses the phrase – “under the assumption” – in such a way as to perhaps suggest that the organisation did not have persuasive evidence that line managers are actually biased.

In other words, the assumption that managers gave unfair feedback and appraisals is not perhaps because of bias on the part of the managers, but possibly because employees perceive a gap between expectation and reality in terms of their performance evaluation. This could be due to a lack of procedural justice, and a corresponding lack of an appropriate control system that manages expectations. One can also extend this view to propose that the firm may not have evidence to substantiate that the three organisational justice dimensions are not being upheld by line managers. Regardless, there seems to be a degree of uncertainty about line management’s ability to conduct performance appraisal effectively.

The participant, at the time of interview, had been employed by the firm for a short period. One should interpret his views with caution in the sense that a reasonable person might conclude that due to his inexperience, he may not be fully aware of the circumstances that led the organisation to make this decision to deploy 360-degree feedback. The argument that the firm is making assumptions about its line managers is arguably not persuasive. Nevertheless, the comment indicates that the organisation is aware of the potential risks of giving



substantive control to line managers to shape the performance appraisal because of the potential risk of bias and its contribution to the creation of toxic dyads. As a result, the organisation may be keen to bolster procedural justice by using 360-degree feedback.

A further comment from the interviewee added an interesting footnote to this part of the discussion:

“What I’m seeing very often is that the loudest gets the most and the people who work silently in the back and are invisible do not get enough. As a manager I see that, and I would like to support them.”

The comments suggest that those who are “loudest” are those who are more assertive, or who are more willing to cultivate rapport and positive relationships with key stakeholders to advance opportunities to access resources. One could argue here (albeit speculatively) that those who are more assertive perhaps perceive greater levels of psychological safety, possibly because of their position in a gentle dyad. Those who are “invisible” are those who are possibly part of a toxic dyad and are perhaps wary of voicing their views for fear of retribution. Again, it raises questions about what control systems are in place to mitigate this from happening.

This is an interesting dynamic that emerged in an organisation which ostensibly has taken power away from line managers. Peers have an opportunity to evaluate their colleagues’ performance. One hopes that this might help to fashion a more egalitarian environment in which more employees perceive themselves to be more “visible” and more confident about asserting their rights in the organisation. The HR manager recognises that there are problems and “would like to support them”, i.e., those who lack visibility. This implies a reactive approach rather than a proactive approach. This indicates that the HRM triad is only partially in evidence during the performance appraisal process as HR only seem to get involved at particular moments.

The interviewee went on to offer more critique of 360-degree feedback, a technique that takes control away from line managers:

“The entire process takes longer than two to three weeks. The employees are not as engaged in their work as they normally are, because they are constantly thinking “what is my performance”, and they’re constantly on edge and constantly talking about it. The first company I worked for took one and half to two months to do this, and it was just a dreadful experience for everyone because you couldn’t move on.”

Plus:

“There was...a...question, I think a lot of people misinterpreted it. We always had the choice to say to the feedback givers “please tell us whether this person is a top performer”. Every single time we did that a person said, “yes, this person is a top performer, that person, that person”. Yes, so they don’t seem to understand what a top performer is.”

The point of focusing in such depth on this interviewee’s comments is to illustrate the potential risks of an alternative to having line managers having the bulk of control over the performance appraisal process. Likewise, there seems to have been a degree of uncertainty created by this peer-review process.

Let us compare this HR Manager’s views with another. Interviewee 2 did not share interviewee 18’s perspective that taking control away from line managers is a negative issue.

He first explains the line manager’s role in shaping the performance appraisal process:

“So, [employees] would have a monthly conversation with their line manager; it would be employee-led and then you can talk about, you know, development there, you can talk about any concerns that you’ve got and that sort of counter... it kind of took over the performance appraisal process because, essentially, if there was any concerns, we would be addressing them at that more informal place and then putting the mechanisms in place to support them, so that when they get to their overall end of the year review or whatever then it’s not necessarily something that’s going to come as a shock to them.”

From the comments, one can see that line managers play a key role in shaping the performance appraisal process by undertaking regular “informal” “conversations” with their direct reports in an effort to surface any issues. This suggests a proactive approach. HR act as a support function by providing “[control] mechanisms [of] support” in an ostensible effort to uphold procedural justice. This process contributes to an end-of-year review whereby all parties should have a degree of understanding of the result of the end-of-year performance appraisal. In effect, the organisation has instituted a form of forward guidance in an attempt to create transparency and maintain relational justice and procedural justice. Line managers appear to have played a positive and constructive role in shaping the performance appraisal process.

However, the informality indicates a significant risk of dyadic dynamics emerging that are influenced by line manager’s personal biases and the quality of relationship with their direct report.

The interviewee went on to imply that line managers have significant control:

“I think there’s a standard form, there’s a standard process, but I think it all very much depends on how the manager and the employee decide to take that on board individually.”

The interviewee, despite being an HR manager appears uncertain what the procedures are in connection with the performance appraisal process. Nevertheless, the interviewee indicates that the dynamics of the performance appraisal process take place between the line manager and their direct report, which arguably raises the risks of dyads emerging.

This risk is further emphasised in the following quotation:

“Because sometimes I think the line manager can be set in their ways and they can just say it as they think but HR tend to be more, you know, certainly if you’re in an organisational development capacity which I have been, you’re aware of the strategic direction of the organisation. So, I think what HR need to do is sometimes look at it objectively and say, “actually, is this relevant, why are you

doing this?” and just maybe, you know, challenge... not challenge but maybe, you know, challenge I suppose question, as well. So, that’s been my sort of role.”

They go on to say that:

“Essentially though, from an HR perspective, I don’t think it’s HR’s responsibility to do a performance appraisal so I would say it’s completely down to the line manager, but my advice would be that we need to make sure we’re being consistent and fair across the board and we’re not, you know, we’re not things underhand, etc., as well. But I would say it still lies with the line manager.”

Some of these comments are contradictory, which makes them interesting.

He indicates that “line managers can be set in their ways” which can lead to subjectivity, bias, and the emergence of dyads. However, he then gives the impression that HR plays what appears to be a quality assurance role, as part of a corresponding control mechanism. This involves HR analysing line managers’ decisions to ensure that procedural fairness is being upheld. He seems to take a positive view on this.

Nevertheless, he then makes the point that the performance appraisal is “completely down to the line manager”. One could say that perhaps the interviewee is not confident about the dynamics of the performance appraisal process. Essentially, one can interpret his comments in such a way that, despite an acknowledgement of HR’s ostensibly constructive involvement in the role of post-hoc adjudicator, he seems to be asserting that line managers remain in control of the performance appraisal process. This is striking when one considers his view that line managers can be biased and “set in their ways”. This echoes a previous interviewee who highlights that the management in his organisation is “old fashioned”, which suggests that, despite his acknowledgement of the importance of upholding organisational justice, he did not recognise the dangers and the dynamics of dyadic relationships.

This implies a gap in understanding of the link between maintaining organisational justice in a high-tech environment and the effects this might have on the quality of relationships between line managers and their direct reports. The interviewee did not seem to recognise that giving line managers more control of the performance appraisal process left it at the

mercy of human behavioural weakness characterised by various biases and counterproductive work behaviours. It also suggests a lack of understanding about the importance of having effective control systems to mitigate the impact of negative and counterproductive behaviours. This may point to a lack of general recognition in research and practice of performance appraisal dynamics in high-tech contexts.

This lack of consideration of the finer points of the impact of line managers' shaping of the performance appraisal process on organisational justice is illustrated vividly in this exchange with interviewee 20:

“Yes [there have been instances where performance appraisals have been challenged]. I felt that my previous manager would just write, on the day, whatever mood she was in is what you would get, you know, which I didn't fully find was very fair because, don't tell anyone this, one of her comments in my year-end review was, “after a mediocre start to the year,” then she went, “**oh**, I'm sorry, I was in a bad mood when I wrote that,” so that's sometimes, depending who your manager is, that's what you're up against, to be honest, even though you think you've done... you've had the best year ever. Do you know what I mean? You're like, “what?” You're up against the whim of your manager.

Or she's getting hammered by a bad review, you know, takes it out on you. But, no, that's not... that's a thing of the past. That was my previous manager, so that's not here.”

From the comments, one seems to have a situation whereby the interviewee's performance appraisal is being shaped by whatever “mood” their line manager happened to be in at the time. This suggests that performance appraisal is being conducted based on the whim of the line manager. This suggests that all three key dimensions of organisational justice are being eroded due to contingent decision making and a lack of a control mechanism to stop this from happening.

This interviewee mentioned previously that there was a lack of clear processes and procedures concerning how performance appraisal should be conducted as outlined in the following exchange:

“If I’m being honest I don’t know [what elements of my performance are assessed]. I really don’t know. It’s like, delivering on deadlines, projects, how I’ve handled situations, obviously more managerial things if I’ve managed people and that sort of thing, to be a lot of people, project related, just basically through... probably through feedback from other people, how clients have given feedback, other parts of the company have fed back about how we’ve done on projects and that sort of thing, and just your general, I guess, reputation in the place.”

The comments are striking. There seems to be a lack of understanding about how performance appraisal is undertaken. It is not surprising that the dynamics of the process is open to human biases. The risk of problematic dyads emerging appears high in this organisation.

Interviewee 24 indicates that two people are involved in his performance appraisal as outlined in this exchange:

“My performance appraisal is undertaken by two people; my primary delivery manager, who’s kind of my boss, my line manager, the guy that I deliver to and I’m responsible to every day, and we have somebody called a kind of FDO, which is functions sort of. So, a kind of matrix view of your primary delivery manager and a functional representative. So, in my case, it’s from the project management function. HR do not get involved unless there’s issues [problems], I would say, such as employees falling under the bar of acceptable levels, you know, if there was a kind of formalising of a PIP, a Performance Improvement Plan, or something like that then, I think there would be HR involvement there, you know, to see you through that process and hopefully see you out the other side of it, but I can’t speak from experience; that’s an assumption.”

From the comments, one can see that there is input on the interviewee’s performance from two people. Likewise, one can see that HR plays an ad-hoc role by getting involved if there are “issues” such as “falling under the bar of acceptable levels [of performance]”.

What is striking here is the possibility of the development of a toxic triad. Similar to previous interviewees' accounts, there seems to be a lack of proactive oversight from HR or other third parties to ensure that the primary delivery manager, who acts as the interviewee's line managers, and the FDO uphold procedural and relational justice. Consequently, there is a risk of personal biases and other behavioural weaknesses influencing how the performance appraisal process is shaped. Also, HR's role is detached which means that the HRM triad is only partially in evidence.

#### 4.3.6 Structural Weakness

The previous sub-sections have illustrated interviewees' lack of understanding of the performance appraisal process and corresponding control systems (assuming that they exist). The consistent use of qualifiers such as "I think", "I am unsure...", "I believe that...", "I would say...", "I don't know...", indicate that many of them are not aware of the procedures and processes involved in shaping the performance appraisal process. Even from interviewees who are more confident about how performance appraisal is undertaken, such as interviewees 3, 24, 25, and 26, there is, in general, a sense that HR's involvement is not fully understood. One is also made aware that in smaller and medium-sized businesses, there is no HR function, or it is outsourced which results in minimal engagement from HR personnel.

One can argue that these limitations can be conceptualised as a structural weakness which create situations whereby line managers and their direct reports are not confident about how the performance appraisal process should be undertaken. As has been said already, HR often take a background, ad-hoc role – or did not seem to get involved at all. This creates the conditions for line managers to exert significant control to shape the performance appraisal. It has been discovered that in some circumstances, line managers' biases and other factors such as their mood or their perception of their direct reports contribute to the risk of dyads affected by bias emerging in high-tech contexts. There is also the possibility that the technical chauvinism that has been drawn attention to, is a factor that contributes to the obstruction of the development of effective procedures and processes. It could also impact the effectiveness of how they are deployed (there are suggestions in some instances that procedures and processes exist, but several interviewees did not seem to know what they are, or how they should be used). Overall, a lack of a suitable control system, or misaligned controls, seemed to contribute to this structural weakness.

#### 4.4 Objective 4: To explore the relationship between line management and HR

##### 4.4.1 HR Diminution and Line Management Control

The responses to the previous objectives explain line management's involvement during the performance appraisal process, in the sense that employees and line managers, or equivalents, conduct the process often between themselves in dyads. The HRM triad is often absent as, ostensibly, were suitable control systems. The problems that have emerged in these dyads have also been extensively documented. To avoid repetition, this chapter is shorter than the previous chapters.

Several codes have been created that illustrate HR's positive role in engaging with the organisation. For example, HR's occasional efforts to adjudicate to ensure that line managers make diligent judgements concerning their direct reports' performance as illustrated by interviewee 2.

Likewise, several interviewees – for example, interviewee 3 – explain the role HR play to uphold procedural justice by creating a set of standards that line managers should follow when undertaking the performance appraisal process.

Likewise, there are isolated examples of the direct existence of the HRM triad whereby HR representatives engage directly with line managers and employees. For example, interviewee 26, in which the interviewee describes performance appraisal meetings being attended by all three representatives of the triad – employee, line manager, and HR personnel. Interviewee 25 also describes how line management and HR maintain seemingly healthy lines of communication during the performance appraisal process.

Several interviewees allude to HR's ad-hoc role by intervening only if an employee's performance falls below expectations. For example, interviewee 1 and interviewee 24.



However, to answer the question directly, there is a general lack of direct interaction between HR and line managers. This suggests that the existing control system(s) do not require it, or that they are misaligned, or absent. In some circumstances, it can be seen that there is no tangible HR function in tech SMEs, which means there is often no interaction at all between HR personnel and line managers and employees. Other interviewees – both line managers and employees – state that HR often sit in the background, and that they lack visibility and relevance. They seem to get involved only if there is a problem or an “issue”, in which performance falls below expectations. Consequently, interaction between line management and HR is frequently indirect and asynchronous. Direct contact appears to be limited to resolving complaints or performance issues as described by several interviewees in depth already. There is a significant lack of proactive communication between line managers and HR.

It has been discovered that in several instances there is no interaction at all between HR and line management due to a lack of investment in an in-house HR function particularly in SMEs:

For example, interviewee 10, in the following exchange echoed this point:

“We don’t really have... we outsource our HR function, so we don’t have an HR department as such.

They don’t sit in on the performance appraisals. I’m sure they’re consulted in terms of are we adhering to whatever employment laws and regulations and etc., but in terms of, I mean, typically the company that does our HR would perhaps visit maybe once a month or something like that, just to speak to our operations manager and the office manager, just to make sure that, you know, it could be that there’s some regulations. I’m sure that when we all do go back to the office there’ll be some COVID regulations that we’ll need to make sure that we are adhering to.”

This is a common issue in all the SMEs I spoke to during the research – no HR function at all, or a token presence that is often outsourced.

SMEs recruit over 90% of the workforce in the UK. What this indicates is that in high-tech SMEs, HR has a diminished presence. We also learned from some interviewees in directorship positions that performance appraisals did not occur or were not overseen by whatever HR resource they had available. In these circumstances, HR's role and presence is also diminished.

Furthermore, interviewee 24 drew attention to the lack of faith in HR:

“I think they're perceived as... I think they're perceived... I think you think of HR in the context of problems and not support. I think it's naturally a negative perception of what HR do. They're there to deal with grievance, that they're there to deal with non-compliance, underachievement. I don't think it's a natural thing for individuals to like them.”

The comments echo a point already made in that HR exist to deal with ad-hoc issues and problems rather than to act in a constructive, pro-active manner. Only in these circumstances, might line management and HR interact directly. These comments also diminish HR's relevance.

This apparent lack of faith is also echoed by interviewee 10:

“But sometimes the problem with HR people, they've never really been in the business. They are making the whole process and setting the standards but they never have to really do it their own. Sometimes I think it's hard for them to understand the issues of the business... Maybe... some of my co-workers, I think

they haven't spoken with HR people for two years or something, so HR isn't that visible in our organisation. To be honest I think HR isn't one of the areas of the bank where they're really investing in people, so they're rather reducing people."

He also added:

"My HR guy is responsible for two big areas...I don't know exactly how many but I would guess it's two to three hundred people, or even more, so therefore I think it's quite difficult for an HR guy to really do his job properly with every person."

It can be said that this interviewee's firm is looking to diminish their HR function which may restrict line management's ability to interact with HR. Likewise, the interviewee draws attention to the large numbers of employees that one of their HR representatives is responsible for. This hints at a diminution of HR's role which further weakens the opportunities for interaction with line management. Again, it suggests that whatever control system(s) are in place, they do not value HR's role or input.

To conclude, there are several examples of HR's diminution which have been discussed at various points throughout this chapter, whether that be their perceived lack of aptitude and their perceived lack of relevance and visibility. This general negative climate for HR does not bode well for future constructive interactions between HR and line management.

#### 4.4.2 HR Potential and Line Management Compromise

On a more positive note, many interviewees draw attention to the potential that HR have to get more involved to improve aspects of the performance appraisal process. There is a view that HR can contribute to more proactive and collaborative interaction between themselves and line management. Likewise, there is a sense that line management, and employees themselves, can concede that HR can make a positive contribution by having a more direct and constructive role during performance appraisal. There is certainly a desire for more direct

interaction between line managers and HR from some employees who believe that this can improve fairness and the application of organisational justice.

One example being from interviewee 26 who describes that HR representatives participate in performance appraisal meetings with line managers and their direct reports, despite the resistance HR receive from some tech employees who object to their presence.

For example, interviewee 7 suggests that HR could get more involved in helping to determine whether performance objectives are appropriate using the SMART framework:

“They should be able to identify good objectives from bad objectives, on the basis of are they smart, are they smart objectives. The usual specific measurable, achievable etc.”

This implies a stronger role in upholding procedural justice by interacting more proactively with line managers to work together to ensure that performance objectives are fair and reflect the nature of the job role and the responsibilities of the employee.

Interviewee 10 describes a difficult relationship with his line manager:

“If the line manager is good with you and likes you, you’ll probably get a better evaluation, than if the line manager is not in your favour. My line manager is quite... has quite a difficult personality, so he’s not the easiest person. A lot of my co-workers, and sometimes myself, have some issues with him, so it’s not that easy because he just evaluates you but, yes, I don’t know how... yes.

[One way to improve how performance appraisal is undertaken] is to focus more on the feedback from others [rather than just the line manager]. They need to say you have an evaluation process but, sometimes it’s difficult, but I think in our organisation you always have interactions with a lot of different departments

within the bank. I think it should be implemented that not just your line manager has the main authority to evaluate you. You're just trying to get as many opinions from other people, that you really can say not just small picture, let's get a big picture."

There is scope for HR to take a more proactive approach by interacting more directly with line managers to address any behavioural problems that could impact the efficacy of performance appraisals. HR could also interact more constructively with line managers to create broader networks and channels of feedback so that more evidence can be sought, as proposed by the interviewee. Likewise, HR could act to obtain feedback from other sources and colleagues concerning employee performance. This might help to reduce the burden of performance appraisal being placed on line managers. Overall, there is certainly scope for HR to play a more substantive role in a control system that oversees performance appraisal in such a way that organisational justice is perceived to be upheld.

#### 4.5 Objective 5: To explore how the relationship between line management and HR affects rates perceptions of organisational justice

From all the insights we have discussed so far, this objective has essentially been addressed. Nevertheless, one can include some additional points which add some peripheral insight and affords opportunity to form a conclusion to this Findings chapter.

It was found that organisational justice played a key role in performance in high-tech contexts as was discovered in the answers to the previous questions. Procedural justice was a key element in exploring the extent to which processes and procedures were upheld during performance appraisal that impacted perceptions of fairness which were sharply perceived by high-tech employees. It has been discovered that the level of procedural justice was impacted positively by the existence of a control system that set out clearly understood procedures and processes and impacted negatively by the lack of a control system. Relational justice also played a key role in the sense that the quality of relationship and interaction between line

management and their employees could be impacted by line managers' attitudinal and behavioural factors such as bias, mood, and counterproductive work behaviours. An absence of a control system to mitigate these negative behaviours from occurring seemed to result in decisions on performance that were contingent on the quality of relationship between line management and employees. Distributive justice could be affected whereby rewards and access to opportunities were impacted by decisions taken with regards to performance.

To expand on this, a series of bullet points below address the five research objectives:

- Objective 1: There is a potential breakdown in all three dimensions of organisational justice. There is also the emergence of a new justice rule: "aptitude". Aptitude can be defined as the evaluator having acceptable levels of technical knowledge, expertise, and experience of someone's job role. In many cases, this involves line managers becoming heavily involved in the performance appraisal process, as they are the actors perceived as having the necessary technical aptitude.
- Objective 2: There is uncertainty at various points of the performance appraisal process. Several interviewees are unsure of procedures and how performance appraisal outcomes are arrived at. Some respondents suggest that this is because HR are not part of a fully understood control system. There seems to be a lack of understanding of what control systems are in place. Employees appear to rely on their line manager as being the sole representative of the organisation during performance appraisal. Uncertainty is also reinforced due to misaligned control systems, or a lack thereof, that seem to favour line management's role in undertaking appraisals while disfavours non-technical stakeholders, such as HR. This results in decisions being taken about performance that seem to be contingent on the quality of relationship between line management and the person whose performance they are rating.
- Objective 3: Line managers dominate due to technical primacy. This is predicated on the belief that line managers have the necessary technical expertise, knowledge, and experience to understand the nature of their employees' jobs. This creates an imbalance of power which results in a toxic dyad characterised by a line manager

having a negative view of their report. This can erode objectivity and increase the chances of a negative performance appraisal outcome. Conversely, there may have been a friendship between the line manager and his or her report which could inject a positive bias into the line manager's performance appraisal. This could be considered a gentle dyad. One could argue that task uncertainty is being caused by the quality of relationship between the evaluator, often a line manager or equivalent, and their ratee. The findings suggest that a negative relationship between both parties – a toxic dyad - is causing important aspects of a ratees' job to be undervalued or to not be properly identified and assessed. Likewise, a gentle dyad may be causing negative aspects of performance to be overlooked.

- Objective 4: Line management and HR appear not have a particularly pro-active and healthy relationship. In many contexts, line managers did not fully understand the role of HR, or did not understand the guidance provided by HR, or complained that HR did not get actively involved.
- Objective 5: Involving line managers as key shapers and drivers of performance appraisal is often seen to erode all dimensions of organisational justice due to the emergence of toxic and gentle dyads. Relational justice often seems to decline due to poor employee relationships or nepotism. Procedural justice appears to decline due to biased application of rules and procedures and biased interpretations of employee performances. Distributive justice also gives the impression of biased decisions about performance distorting decisions taken with regards to rewards. This is why the quality of “personal fit” between employee and line manager also has become a justice rule in high-tech environments. A healthy “personal fit” can be defined as a relationship underpinned by fairness, objectivity, psychological safety, fair exchange of views, and transparency. This personal fit was not always in existence. All of these issues seem to occur due to control systems that encourage line management to take a key role in performance appraisal, and/or misaligned control systems, or a lack of a control system. Line managers may also shape the performance appraisal process as a result of structural weakness caused by their control of the performance appraisal process and a lack of constructive interaction between them and HR. This structural weakness may occur due to the nature of the control system, or lack of one. This

seems to result in inconsistent interpretations of employee performance, misalignment between different guidelines, and ambiguity of the performance appraisal process. This also appears to precipitate a diminution of organisational justice dimensions such as procedural justice.

- To conclude, research gaps have been addressed by advancing theoretical understanding of organisational justice. This has been achieved by identifying justice rules such as technical aptitude and personal fit that seem to operate in high-tech environments. These environments are characterised by a significant sense of uncertainty that have been ostensibly caused by the emergence of dyadic relationships that are dominated by line managers. These relationships appear to have evolved due to a lack of suitable control systems and a technical primacy due to mistrust of HR, and/or HR not taking a more pro-active role. This erosion of the HRM triad appears to have resulted in contingencies whereby the dynamics of performance appraisal are influenced significantly by the quality of relationship between the ratee and the line manager or equivalent. A model can be created which further tests the relationship between perceptions of organisational justice and performance appraisal outcomes using mediating/moderating variables that relate to uncertainty, technical primacy, and dyadic relationships.

The table of first-order concepts, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions visualises the above key findings.



## CHAPTER 5- Discussion

### 5.1 Summary of Results

A key theoretical implication from the research is that organisational justice theory and uncertainty management theory overlap to provide a richer explanation of the characteristics of performance appraisal in high-tech contexts. This theoretical insight might be transferrable to non-high-tech settings.

The findings generated a mixed response concerning whether performance appraisals conformed with the academic explanations of them. Many respondents indicated that appraisals were not systematic and did not relate to whether key performance indicators were met (in some cases, respondents stated that there were no explicit KPIs). There was only limited evidence of a range of tools being used to deliver performance appraisal. Furthermore, there was a mixed response with regards to whether appraisals pinpointed training and development requirements. In addition, some respondents indicated that data was not collected as part of performance appraisal. This challenges the findings of Bayo-Moriones et al (2020) and Rubin and Edwards (2020).

The findings indicated that line managers or equivalents (for example, owner-managers in SMEs), conducted the bulk of performance appraisal activities, which supports the conclusions made by Murphy and Cleveland (1995). However, there was a lack of evidence whether appraisals were supported by other, skilled members of staff, which challenges the findings of Boswell and Boudreau (2002), who suggested that line managers may defer to those more skilled than them. The contexts the respondents described seem to be dominated by dyads that consisted of the employee whose performance was being evaluated and the evaluator, who was often the line manager or equivalent. Line managers seemed reluctant to delegate this responsibility, or were unaware of what additional assistance might have been on offer.

The findings describe contexts in which HR were absent. For example, in SMEs that could not afford to recruit an HR specialist or deemed HR as a function insufficiently important to invest in. These firms outsourced HR responsibility or were undertaken by the owner-

manager with uncertain results. Likewise, in some larger firms, HR were often sidelined during performance appraisal due to mistrust in their ability to understand the complexity of job roles being assessed. This seems to challenge the conclusions drawn by Farndale and Kelleher (2013) in which HR often design performance appraisal. Likewise, the findings indicate that HR only occasionally get involved in collecting and analysing performance data, which disputes the conclusions made by Sharma and Sharma (2017).

The findings also suggest that there was occasional ambiguity and confusion about the purpose of performance appraisal and that discrimination and bias occurred from time to time. This supports the view of Rubin and Edwards (2020). Overall, the effectiveness of performance appraisal was unclear with some participants contesting the outcomes and questioning their validity. This echoes the work of Levy and Williams (2004) who argued that there are question marks about the effectiveness of performance appraisal.

There was a lack of evidence in the findings to suggest that horizontal fit was achieved during performance appraisal. Horizontal fit describes a situation whereby all processes and procedures associated with performance appraisal are aligned. Many respondents described performance appraisals as being chaotic, but in some cases were still able to be reasonably effective in terms of evaluating employees' performance. Nevertheless, in many cases, the appraisals did appear to be contingent and ad-hoc. This partially upholds but also, in a sense, partially challenges the perspective of Paauwe and Farndale (2012), and Kepes and Delery (2007), who argued that horizontal fit needs to be in place for any performance appraisal to be effective. It partially upholds because some examples of appraisal without horizontal fit were not perceived to be effective by some respondents. Alternatively, some respondents believed their appraisal was successful despite an ostensible lack of horizontal fit.

Context appeared to play a key role in the findings. Many participants described unique circumstances that took place during their appraisal. Some appraisals seemed to have clear rules and procedures, while others did not especially in SMEs. Some appraisals had a team of people involved, while others had a dyad between the person being evaluated and their evaluator, in most cases the line manager. Relationships appeared to be key in determining

outcomes which echo Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021). Likewise, some participants complained about bias and a lack of clarity, while others were more sanguine about the manner in which appraisal was undertaken. The importance of context supports the conclusions drawn by Tyksbo (2020) who argued that performance appraisal needs to adapt to the contextual dynamics of different business units in an organisation. Tyksbo also points out that the effectiveness of performance appraisal is influenced by the professionalism of line management, which certainly echoes many comments made by participants. Indeed, some participants called into question the purpose of performance appraisal which supports the view of Murphy (2020).

Some participants, especially those working in SMEs, suggested that their performance was evaluated during ongoing discussions rather than in an annual or biannual high-stakes formal appraisal. This echoes the views of Trost (2017) who suggested that organisations substitute formal appraisal for ongoing conversations and regular performance check-ins. However, there were concerns from the findings that the accuracy and fairness of performance evaluations in SMEs could be influenced by the quality of relationships between evaluator and ratee (Duarte et al, 2017; Varma et al, 2021).

The findings suggest that many respondents expressed a person-referenced reaction to performance appraisal. This means that respondents would be seen to express a feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in response to the appraisal. Certainly, the findings include accounts of dissatisfaction due to lack of fairness as a result of perceived bias. Alternatively, there were descriptions of satisfaction. This partially supports the work of Iqbal et al (2019) who put forward the idea of a person-referenced reaction. However, there was no evidence from the findings to suggest that respondents demonstrated an organisation-referenced reaction, which is the second element of Iqbal's research.

An organisation-referenced reaction is characterised by employees carrying out organisational citizenship behaviours when they perceive their performance appraisal to have been undertaken fairly. There's no firm evidence from the findings of these types of

citizenship behaviours described by respondents who considered their performance appraisal to have been fair or effective.

The respondents on the whole seemed keen to improve their job satisfaction, performance, and well-being, but there seemed to be mixed evidence whether performance appraisal was seen to be a function towards achieving these goals. This partially challenges the research of Dal Corso et al (2019).

There were several instances of dissatisfaction expressed by respondents due in part to a lack of focus on future development which supports the findings of Gruman and Sacks (2011) and Malik and Aslam (2013) who also outlined this problem. It also highlights a contrast with Kooji et al (2013), Krats and Brown (2013), Dipboye and de Pontbriand (1981), Gosselin et al. (1997) and Jirjahn and Poutsma, 2013 who argue that employee development should be emphasised during performance appraisal.

The findings suggest that all respondents expected performance appraisal to be fair. There was an expectation from ratees that their evaluator should understand the complexities of their job role. Likewise, some respondents expected that their evaluator should understand the processes involved with performance appraisal so that it could be undertaken effectively. Also, some respondents who were evaluating others expected guidance from their organisation in the form of explicit instructions about what processes should be implemented to undertake appraisal properly, which were frequently not met. There was a suggestion that if these expectations were not met, there could be a breakdown in trust and reduced levels of engagement and motivation. This echoes the warnings of Harrington and Lee (2015), Eyoum et al (2020), and Stiles et al (1997) who underscored the importance of meeting expectations during the performance appraisal process.

The findings outline that in many cases, line managers or equivalent, are in close control of the performance appraisal, with lack of evidence of any instances whereby employees have their performance rated by others. This was due primarily to tech employees being mistrustful

of others appraising their performance, particularly HR, due to their perceived lack of knowledge and understanding of the complexities of tech roles. This challenges the perspective of Boswell and Boudreau (2002) who argue that line managers may outsource performance appraisal to other colleagues. There is also a lack of evidence to suggest that employees have autonomy to collect their own performance data. This contrasts with the work of Karkoulian et al (2016) and Keegan et al (2019), the latter of whom explained that in some project based organisations, employees have more of a sense of freedom to collate and interpret their own performance data. Several organisations in which some respondents worked, could be said to resemble project based organisations. However, there was little evidence to suggest that there was an approach to data collection and analysis similar to that described in the literature.

The findings also suggested that there was a lack of evidence of the existence of the HRM triad during performance appraisal. (The HRM triad includes a representative from HR, a line manager, and an employee, who closely engage with each other to complete a process or a procedure.) HR were often absent, especially in SMEs, or were sidelined, or were lacking visibility and a clear purpose during the performance appraisal process. This contrasts with the work of Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe (2004) and Marchington (2015), who emphasise the importance of the existence of the HRM triad during the execution of important people-related processes.

There was mixed evidence from the findings concerning whether performance appraisals could be described as formalised. Some respondents, particularly in larger, blue-chip organisations, would undergo a process-driven appraisal. However, even in some of these large firms, there was an occasional lack of understanding of the rules and processes and a lack of consistency in their application. In SMEs, there seemed to be an absence of a formalised approach. This connects with the work of Bonet et al (2019) who argue that formalised and systematic performance appraisals result in increased levels of organisational performance. This presents a warning for organisations in the research who lack this approach.

Bonet et al also argue that line managers should play a central role in performance appraisal which echoes several respondents' experiences of having a line manager, or equivalent, in control. However, having a line manager in control without a formalised, systematic approach may be problematic.

The findings have generated some surprising results. It emerged that high-tech contexts were not quite the open and creative contexts that one expected them to be, which contrasts with the research of Urbaniti (2018) and Viale and Pozzali (2010). Rather, high-tech contexts appeared sometimes bureaucratic, which resulted in rigorous and in-depth performance appraisals that focused very closely on the employees' outputs, or uncertain environments in which employees were unsure as to how appraisal would be undertaken.

Some employees expressed concern that their appraisal would be affected by the quality of relationship with their line managers. In some contexts, particularly in SMEs, there was no formal performance appraisal system. Many of the interviewees seemed to muddle through, based on their understanding of their own job roles in the sense of what they needed to achieve in their day-to-day work. The HR representatives interviewed appeared to have little understanding of technology and innovation, or of associated practices in their organisations. This suggests that in several contexts, HR were not part of an interdependent set of appraisal practices.

It then follows that HR do not always appear to be part of a **system** of management control practices (Grabner and Moers, 2013), but instead may be part of a **package** of management control practices in which their own practices do not correspond directly with those of other participants in the performance appraisal process (ibid.) This would suggest inefficiencies if HR are not aligned with other key players. This may hinder their ability to form part of an interdependent system that focuses on the three elements of Merchant's typology: actions, results, and personnel. It is not clear from the findings whether HR's lack of understanding would impact the effectiveness of the appraisal process, but it does suggest that HR do not play a direct or pro-active role in the HR triad.

The findings indicate that, in some contexts, the dynamics of appraisal are at the mercy of the whims and biases of line managers as a result of a lack of direct HR involvement, which suggests an absence of a behavioural control mechanism (Merchant and Van Stede, 2007). This bias in some circumstances, seemed to reduce the employees' confidence that their views would be listened to and respected by their line manager. This perhaps reduces the ability of the appraisal to capture their full experience and complexity of their job role. This seems to suggest that there is task uncertainty which corresponds with the findings of Hartmann and Slapnicar (2012).

This task uncertainty appears to be as a result of the quality of relationship between the evaluator, which is often the line manager, and the ratee. This echoes the work of Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021). However, there were instances in the findings, particularly from respondents who worked in SMEs, that relationships did not play such a key role in determining appraisal outcomes. Likewise, some respondents did not suggest that line managers, or equivalents, struggled to identify and evaluate key job inputs. There were, however, occasions in which respondents would struggle to explain what performance appraisal procedures were in place, which suggests a lack of a control system

As such, there may be a lack of a control mechanism to reduce task uncertainty (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012). This bias and lack of voice may also distort all three dimensions of organisational justice.

The findings present a mixed response in terms of whether organisational justice is upheld.

Some respondents indicated that there was a process-driven approach to performance appraisal. This was in contrast to some respondents who were less confident that processes were being applied properly. Some respondents were unaware of what processes should have been applied. In SMEs, performance appraisals seemed to be undertaken on an ad-hoc basis. It seems that in practice, processes were often not seen to be applied clearly and consistently, which created resentment on occasion. This resulted in a perceived lack of procedural justice

and fairness which reflects the work of Cropanzano & Wright (2003), Lau et al (2008), Erturk (2007), Garcia-Izquierdo et al, (2012), Gilliland (1993), McNall and Roch (2009), Roch and McNall (2007), Colquitt et al, (2013), and Outlaw et al (2019).

Likewise, the findings indicate that interactional justice was a key issue in impacting perceptions of fairness, which supports the work of Bauer et al (2001), Gilliland (1993, 2001) and Truxillo et al (2002). Due to a lack of a formalised system, or a lack of understanding of the rules involved with undertaking performance appraisal, the relationship between the line manager, or equivalent, and the ratee, had an important effect on the ratees' perceptions of fairness. This echoes the findings of Li et al (2017), Duarte et al (2017), Byrne et al (2012), Farndale and Kelliher (2013) and Varma et al (2021). Respondents were keen on their evaluator explaining the outcomes of their appraisals in a clear, open manner, which supports the work of Cheng et al, (2022).

The findings were less clear on whether respondents reacted favourably to performance appraisal if they expected a positive reward outcome, which challenges the findings of Pichler (2012).

This study's findings suggest that line managers dominated the performance appraisal process, which seemed to create problems in terms of upholding organisational justice. The reason for this, as shown in the findings, is that, in some contexts, HR did not get directly involved, or the organisation was too small to have an HR function. This resulted in the appraisal being at the mercy of the quality of relationship between the line manager and the employee being rated, that could create biased and opaque processes of evaluation that impacted procedural justice. Rewards based on the outcome of performance appraisal may then be inflated or eroded, which could distort distributive justice. And a lack of a professional relationship between a line manager and their employee being rated, would impact the perception of interactional justice.



The latter seemed to have affected some participants' confidence to have a voice that would be heard during the appraisal. Poor relationships between the person being rated and their rater, often their line manager or equivalent, would often increase a sense of uncertainty that the outcome would be fair and objective, which echoes the work of Rosen et al (2011).

There were a number of fresh insights from findings not covered in the literature.

Overall, by applying Merchant's typology, a lack of a behavioural control mechanism (Merchant and van Stede, 2007) to oversee the application of all three dimensions of organisational justice during performance appraisal may erode actions, in the sense that management may lack an ability to encourage employees to perform well. Likewise, results may also be affected in the sense that employees being rated may not perceive that they are being properly held responsible for their work outcomes. For personnel, it could be the case that some employees being rated do not have confidence that their appraisal results will be sufficiently accurate to form a firm basis for identifying future training and development requirements, and improving communication (Merchant, 1982). It was proposed that a dyad level – the relationship between tech professionals and their line managers – was the key locus of activity in performance appraisals in high-tech contexts and potentially an important differentiating characteristic of these organisational contexts from others.

It was also discovered that HR played an ad-hoc, reactive, and background role, in some contexts, or played no role at all particularly in small businesses, in the performance appraisal process. There was little evidence from the data that HR played a role in performance appraisal that would correspond with one's understanding of their role in high commitment or high-performance work systems that are occasionally associated with high-tech contexts, which challenges the findings of Tsai (2006). HR's inability to play a key role in the HR triad in some contexts means that a high commitment or a high-performance work system (HPWS), that revolves around HR playing a key strategic role, may be difficult, or impossible.

In larger organisations that have an HR function, their absence from an interdependent management control system, due to perceptions of their lack of competence, and their lack of willingness to become more pro-actively involved, means that a high commitment system or

an HPWS led by HR may be very difficult to implement. Likewise, in small organisations, a lack of an HR function, or its outsourcing, means that there may be a lack of HR knowledge and expertise to implement a high commitment system or HPWS.

It was also found that many organisations that operated in the high-tech industry are SMEs that did not have an HR function, or have what could be described as a token presence, a fact that does not appear to be acknowledged by current literature in the fields of HR. This is perhaps not surprising given the dominant role that owner CEOs have in some of the organisations described by the participants. Nevertheless, there is evidence from the data that small businesses do outsource their HR function and bring in an HR Business Partner (HRBP) to oversee HR practice. This echoes research from the CIPD going back to 2015 which indicated that 81% of medium-sized organisations have at least one person in an HR role, 47% of small organisations that have at least one person in an HR role, and 29% of micro-organisations that have at least one person in an HR role (CIPD, 2015).

Current research from Capterra (2024) suggests that there is an increasing interest from SMEs in having an HR representative. The data suggests that there was a mixed response concerning whether some of the participants, many of whom worked in roles which have high task uncertainty due to their multidimensionality and complexity that may be difficult to capture during appraisal, had a voice during the appraisal process. This could have had a negative effect on perceptions of justice, particularly interactional justice, as the ratees may have perceived themselves as having a lack of influence or control with regards to decisions taken about their performance (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012).

Likewise, perceptions as to whether fairness was being upheld in terms of the three dimensions of organisational justice was also mixed. Furthermore, it was not always clear from the data whether performance appraisal practices in SMEs could be deemed a system or a package (Grabner and Moers, 2013). There is an argument there may be neither, which suggests that effective management control systems are lacking or absent, which may present problems with the future performance of the organisations in terms of achieving actions, results, and positive personnel engagement according to Merchant's typology.

It was discovered that technical aptitude and personal fit between line managers and employees were key justice rules that emerged from one's understanding of the data. A justice rule is one that has a significant impact on perceptions of fairness. Study participants indicated that the person undertaking the performance appraisal should have the necessary technical expertise to do it, otherwise there would be a lack of perceived organisational justice. This echoes elements of uncertainty management theory in the sense that perceptions of organisational justice are the outcomes of interactions between "organisational procedures, the personality of the person experiencing the procedures, and the context in which the procedures are used" (Lind and Van den Bos, 2002 and Thau et al 2009, cited in Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012, p.19).

It also suggests that there is a systemic failing in many of the interviewees' organisations as there is a misalignment between the requirements of performance appraisal and existing control systems, or lack of control systems, or a control system that encourages line management to take full control of the appraisal process at the expense of other stakeholders. There is an argument for a better balance between action, result, and personnel controls, as per Merchant (1982) that places emphasis on having a control system that requires actions to focus not just on technical elements, but also on softer aspects such as collaboration, and organisational citizenship behaviour that could be considered during performance appraisal.

Likewise, when results are being evaluated, it is not just outcomes that are being assessed based on the ratee's ability to meet them, but an emphasis on how they were met. This requires a consideration of personnel attributes that considers not only technical aptitude, but softer behavioural attributes. Also, it requires that decision-makers actually understand what the control systems are, as it was evident from the data that many participants did not know what the performance appraisal and control mechanisms and processes were.

In most cases, the person with the required technical knowledge was the line manager, or owner CEOs in SMEs. HR were either absent or perceived to lack sufficient technical expertise to be involved constructively in the performance appraisal process. However, this

elevation of technical aptitude as a justice rule, due to ostensible dysfunctional control systems, or a lack of a control system resulted in performance appraisals being undertaken in dyads between the employee being rated and the line manager or owner CEO. This resulted in decision-making about performance being contingent on the quality of relationship between line management and the person whose performance they were rating. Therefore, a lack of personal fit, which the data suggested could be in the form of personality clashes or personal dislikes between the ratee and rater, resulted in biased decisions in some contexts, which had a detrimental impact to all three dimensions of organisational justice.

For example, employees being rated would perceive that processes were not being properly followed if there was a negative relationship with the person rating them. This could lead to perceptions that rewards were not being calculated or decided upon accurately, which could distort distributive justice. By way of consequence, interactional justice could be undermined if the employee being rated perceived that they were lacking a voice (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012) and were being treated with a lack of respect and objectivity by their line manager or owner CEO. There did not seem to be any mention or discussion of these justice rules in the literature.

Finally, it was revealed that many interviewees expressed a desire for more proactive involvement by HR. The reason for this was so that HR could provide clearer explanations and processes so that performance appraisal could be undertaken more effectively, and to intervene in toxic dyads to improve perceptions of organisational justice. But some interviewees would contradict these wishes by evoking the justice rule of technical aptitude. This would involve expressing a view that only those with technical expertise and understanding of their job roles should be involved in performance appraisal. Again, the previous literature was largely silent on this paradox.

The next section will compare and contrast the findings with extant literature in more specific detail. The first part will compare and contrast the findings directly with each section of the literature review. The second part will compare, and contrast findings based on key themes documented in the literature review.

## 5.2 Discussion of Key Themes

The key findings from this research carve the thesis's contribution which is to explain how organisational justice theory and uncertainty management theory, particularly task uncertainty, can help to explain the dynamics and characteristics of perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal in high-tech contexts. Drawing on these theories, I illustrate the dynamics of the HRM triad in the sense that it outlines how each member of the triad is involved in controlling the systems that revolve around performance appraisal. This section will discuss the key themes that illustrate these contributions.

### 5.2.1 HR Detachment

This theme relates to research question number 2 in the sense that HR's role in shaping performance in high-tech organisational contexts was often ad-hoc and indirect. Likewise, with respect to question 3, the theme also indicates that it is line managers and owner CEOs in SMEs, who frequently shape the direction of performance appraisals. For research question 4, the findings outline that line managers and HR on occasion do interact and communicate, but in other contexts they do not due to a disrespect of HR, or HR not communicating processes and procedures with regards to how performance appraisal should be undertaken, or line managers not making an effort to determine what those processes communicated by HR happen to be. In SMEs, there is often no HR function, or it is outsourced to an outside agency who appear to undertake only minimal administrative tasks.

The findings indicated that HR often played a background role in shaping performance appraisal and upholding perceptions of organisational justice. This ran counter to the findings of Fortin et al (2020) who argued that HR played a more pro-active and decisive role in upholding procedural justice in the form of developing rules and regulations for performance appraisal to be undertaken more transparently. It was also discovered that line managers played a central role in the performance appraisal process which supported the findings of Lau et al (2008), that placed line managers and employees (raters and ratees) at the centre of performance appraisal in terms of developing and deploying processes, rules, and practices. Arguably, line managers and their employees whose performance they were rating, were creating their own package of practices that may result in the emergence of bespoke control

systems that are contingent on the quality of relationship between the two parties involved. A lack of direct HR involvement to ensure that perceptions of fairness were being upheld between line managers and their ratees suggests a lack of a behavioural control system. This supports the work of Merchant and van Stede (2007).

This could result in a patchwork of control systems in an organisation that lack interdependence, internal validity, or complementarity (Malmi and Brown, 2008). This could also result in variable perceptions of fairness, as the procedures, practices, and decisions in each line manager's team may have variable quality of perceived procedural justice, distributive justice, and interactional justice. One can conclude that the absence of HR to oversee a more standardised development and deployment seems to create more environmental uncertainty and less confidence in an ability to accommodate task uncertainty during performance appraisal (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012).

The findings also suggested that HR played a limited role in proactively engaging with employees, which was in contrast to the findings of Wan et al (2018) and Bonet (2019). This also suggests that HR do not play a key role in the HR triad during performance appraisal that creates some of the difficulties already discussed in terms of toxic dyads, increased uncertainty, and opaque control systems.

The importance of the relationship between employees being rated and their line manager who is rating them echoes the work of Li et al from 2017. They indicated that employees' perceptions of organisational justice were characterized by the quality of interactions with their line manager, which suggests that interactional justice in line manager-employee dyads was key. This echoes the work of Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021).

The findings outlined that HR had, in rare instances, attempted to engage directly with their employees to observe what they did and shadow them to try to gain an understanding of the complexities of their role. These participants suggested that by doing this they could gain rapport with the employees and boost levels of trust and respect. This might have afforded

opportunity for HR to become more involved with shaping the performance appraisal process. However, it was also discovered that HR often did not get involved, with some interviewees, including those from the HR function, indicating bluntly that performance appraisal should be the responsibility of line managers. This echoes the research of Lau et al (2008), Tyksbo (2020), and Bonet (2013). When one considers the complexity of technology and innovative contexts, this was perhaps not a surprise. For example, Bers et al, (2014), Conforto and Amaral (2016), Cooper and Sommer (2016), Gronlund et al (2010), and Tesch et al (2017), Tate et al (2018) and Gillier et al (2011) discussed the difficulties in understanding what goes on in high-tech contexts.

### 5.2.2 HR Diminution

This theme relates to question 1 as HR's reduction in involvement may impact the relationship between organisational justice and performance appraisal in a positive sense as participants being rated do not want direct HR involvement, as they are deemed to lack the technical aptitude to be a partner in the performance appraisal process. However, there are concerns that the reduction, or absence of an HR role, means that there are no checks and balances on how line managers and their equivalents maintain perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal.

The result of this is that the relationship between line managers and their ratees' dominates appraisal outcomes. This reflects the work of Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021). Likewise, HR's absence means that there is a potential lack of a control system which results in an over-reliance on the aforementioned dyadic relationships, which can result in bias and favouritism. These are warnings flagged by Grabner and Moers (2013), and Malmi and Brown (2008). This theme also relates to question 2 in the sense that it reinforces the view that HR do not take an active role in shaping performance appraisals. Likewise, the theme connects with question 5 as it illustrates that organisational justice does play an important role in innovative high-tech contexts as several participants take the view that HR's involvement would have a negative impact on justice due to their lack of technical aptitude.

This theme identified from the data highlighted HR's limited role in some contexts, with some interviewees indicating that their organisations were looking to reduce the HR function. The findings also indicated that HR's role in shaping important elements of performance appraisal was minimised, or not deemed sufficiently important enough to recognise. In SMEs, roles that HR may be seen to undertake, such as creating and communicating rules and procedures that may standardise the performance appraisal and uphold procedural justice, were often undertaken by owner CEOs, in an ad-hoc fashion. All of this denudes HR's involvement in the HR triad during the performance appraisal process. This is a new insight from the findings with no direct connection to existing literature.

The findings also highlighted technical primacy whereby several interviewees indicated that performance appraisal would be better conducted by people who comprehended the technical nature of the work, namely line managers or equivalents in many circumstances. This echoes the research of Lau et al (2008), Tyksbo (2020), and Bonet (2013). Some participants indicated that, if people without the perceived technical aptitude were to become directly involved in the performance appraisal process, it could generate negative responses from those having their performance rated. This may have a detrimental impact on perceptions of fairness as procedural justice may be seen to be deficient as the processes that revolve around performance appraisal would be (co-)directed by someone who perhaps does not understand them, or their impact, due to their lack of technical understanding of the person's job role, the performance of which is being evaluated.

Likewise, this could distort perceptions of fairness concerning the calculation of reward based on performance, and thus negatively impact distributive justice. Furthermore, if those participants having their performance rated believe that one of the parties who is involved in evaluating them lacks technical aptitude, this could negatively affect perceptions of interactional justice as the ratee may disrespect the other party deemed to be unqualified which may jeopardise the quality of relationship. This echoes the work of Colquitt et al, (2012) and Zapata-Phelan et al, (2009). Over time, this could result in resentment, reduced notions of loyalty and organizational citizenship behaviour, and increased likelihood of turnover intention, which were risks highlighted by Byrne et al, (2012), Chory and Hubbell (2008), Colquitt et al (2012), Folger et al (1992), Korsgaard and Roberson (1995), McNall



and Roch (2009), Sholihin and Pike (2009), Steensma and Visser (2007), and Thurston and McNall (2010).

The findings challenged the recent work of Malhotra et al (2022), which outlined that HR have a key role to play in meeting employees' needs as a means to uphold organizational justice. Conversely, the findings echoed those of Schippers et al (2015) who indicated that HR often played a background role and seemed reluctant to get more proactively involved in high-tech contexts. Likewise, there was a lack of evidence from this study data that HR had the capacity, capability, or willingness to take the lead in implementing high-commitment or high-performance work systems that were often seen in high-tech contexts. This challenged the views taken by Zhou et al (2013), Bos-Nehles et al (2017), Seeck & Diehl (2017), and Wright and Boswell (2002).

Again, line managers or equivalent were often the dominant players. Taken together, this study's findings, as well as those from the literature, present a mixed picture, whereby context seems to influence to what extent HR are involved, and to what degree this may affect perceptions of fairness. This echoes findings from the management control systems and uncertainty management theory literature in the sense that different contexts produce different demands, and therefore, require different control systems (Grabner and Moers, 2013; Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012; Lind and Van den Bos, 2002).

In general, the findings suggested that HR had a subordinate role in high-tech contexts, that echoed Bos-Nehles et al (2017), Seeck and Diehl (2017) and Zhou (2013) who highlighted that it was rare for research to focus on HR's involvement in developing activity and procedures in innovative/high-tech contexts.

### 5.2.3 HR Potential and Line Management Compromise

This theme relates to question 1 as it explains how context can affect the relationship between organisational justice and performance appraisal. For questions 2 and 3 and 4, the theme explains how HR and line management can shape performance appraisal, and how both parties can work together more effectively. Finally, the theme relates to question 5 as it

demonstrates how context can impact the role organisational justice plays in high-tech contexts.

The findings suggested that HR had the potential to get more involved in shaping the performance appraisal process which would be more likely to result in HR taking a more active role in maintaining organizational justice. The interview data indicated that HR representatives were keen to uphold fairness even when they understood their own limitations in terms of their direct involvement in the processes of performance appraisal. There were also non-HR voices who were keen on HR having more direct involvement to intervene in toxic dyads. This supports the work of Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) who argue that a key role of HR is to act as an employee advocate in which they address the needs of the current workforce, that includes ensuring they are treated fairly during performance appraisal, and human capital developer in which they work with others to prepare and train employees so that their performance is capable of meeting future challenges.

It makes intuitive sense for HR to collaborate more to maintain positive and constructive employee relationships to build a sanguine organizational climate. It also presents opportunities for HR to increase involvement to improve trust and mutual understanding that could lead to “co-development, co-delivery and legitimation of performance-appraisal strategies.” This echoed sentiments expressed by some of the interviewees and also supported the views of Colquitt et al (2005) and Elovainio et al (2002).

Nevertheless, the literature made clear the challenges and complexities involved with navigating high-tech contexts. For example, Urbinati (2018) described the difficulties of comprehending high-tech socio-technical systems. Likewise, O’Reilly and Tushman (2013), Limaj and Bernroider (2017), Wang et al (2014), Tsai (2016), Chen and Kannan-Narasimhan (2015), and He and Wong (2004) explain the complexities of innovative ambidextrous environments. Likewise, Jarvenpaa and Wernick (2011) description of technical contexts “reveal arenas of innovative activity distinguished by tensions, opaque incremental processes, non-linear progress, interactions underwritten by multi-faceted patterns of self-organisation, and levels of input that do not correlate with levels of output” that may be difficult for HR to

comprehend. Furthermore, Viale and Pozzali (2010) explained the technicalities of complex adaptive systems that are often associated with high-tech contexts.

The implications for performance appraisal are that task uncertainty will likely remain high, rather than it ever being low, due to fast-changing advancement and evolution of technology. This will require suitable control systems that are able to capture all the important performance characteristics of someone's job role (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012), that include behavioural controls that affords opportunity for ratees to have a voice during the appraisal (Malmi and Brown, 2008) to maintain perceptions of organisational justice.

Likewise, complexity may lead to high-tech contexts that are different from each other which leads to management control systems that are contingent on the particular requirements of those contexts (Grabner and Moers, 2013; Lind and Van den Bos, 2002; Malmi and Brown, 2008). As mentioned already, these complexities may contribute to HR's diminution in the HR triad, which may have positive effects on organisational justice during performance appraisal by eliminating a function that is perceived as lacking technical aptitude of technology, or reinforcing negative perceptions of organisational justice by not having a layer of management, or a behavioural control mechanism (Merchant and Van Stede, 2007), that observes whether fairness is being upheld in line manager and employee dyads.

There are question marks concerning HR's capacity to shape performance appraisal effectively in these environments. But there is potential for HR to get involved in terms of helping employees deal with the levels of possible stress that may be evident in high-tech contexts. There is a possibility for HR to work with line management to implement elements of the Innovation-Fairness-Stress model of Janssen (2000, 2004) into the performance appraisal process to recognise those pressures.

However, a caveat. Bledow (2009) indicated the cognitive and practical challenges that organizations experience recognising and comprehending innovative work processes that one may expect to see in high-tech contexts. It has been seen that with regards to SMEs, there seemed little systematic understanding of organisational processes. Likewise, in larger firms, it's been seen that HR often struggled to comprehend the terrain. There was little evidence of

HR, or anyone else, implementing Bledow's concept of "integrating variability" (a shared vision; diverse, cohesive teams; free exchange of ideas between business units) that might have an impact on how HR shape the performance appraisal process alongside line managers. Many of the underpinning aspects of integrating variability are stymied by a tendency for parties to muddle through, a lack of understanding of organizational processes, the existence of dyads, and technical primacy.

Alexiev et al (2010) and Borjesson et al (2014)'s suggestions that organizations create an internal infrastructure of knowledge interchange was not supported in the findings other than from interviewee 26 who explained HR's efforts to set up information exchange networks between key stakeholders during the performance appraisal process. The participant outlined the challenges involved with making this network a success, but there is certainly a potential for HR to work more closely with line management.

There is arguably potential for HR to get further involved in terms of providing support to line managers, so that they better understand how to undertake performance appraisal. This may help to improve procedural justice and foster trust by intervening more proactively to deter the development of toxic dyads, which might help to boost interactional justice. As per several comments from interviewees, there seemed to be a desire for more overview of these relationships and more evaluation of appraisal output produced by line managers, which presents an opportunity for HR to get more involved.

#### 5.2.4 Dyads

This theme relates to research question 1 as dyads were a key issue that affected the relationship between organisational justice and performance appraisal. Likewise, for question 2, dyads often formed as a result of HR not having a direct role in performance appraisal which indicates that HR did not take an active part in shaping the performance appraisal process. For question 3, the theme of dyads reinforces the view that line managers and their equivalents take a dominant role in shaping performance appraisal. For question 4, dyads indicates that line managers and HR often do not interact constructively or regularly. And for question 5, dyads highlight that eliminating HR can have a positive effect on organisational

justice, but can also create negative effects by removing a behavioural control mechanism (Merchant and Van Stede, 2007).

It was discovered that the relationship between line managers and employees was key to the performance appraisal process in high-tech contexts. This supported Sholihin and Pike (2009) for whom the relationship between line managers and direct reports was uppermost and seemed to elevate importance of interactional justice above distributive and procedural justice. Likewise, the findings also echoes the research of Lau et al (2008, Duarte et al (2017) and Varma et al (2021).

Likewise, the findings supported Byrne et al (2012) in the sense that the quality of the relationship between line managers and their direct reports was mediated by perceived supervisor support (PSS). Many of the interviewees highlighted the importance of the manner in which their line managers or supervisors supported them during the performance appraisal process as a central factor in shaping how they perceived its fairness. This suggests that trust may play a role in moderating or mediating interactional justice, but trust is often underpinned by vulnerability of one party vis-à-vis the other (Searle and Billsberry, 2011; Searle and Renaud, 2023). However, this sense of vulnerability did not really emerge from the data. Resentment, irritability, and anger were more commonplace, with participants being more prepared to act in response to a perceived lack of fairness, by intending to leave, or complaining. This indicates that the participants believed that they had agency to act, which does not suggest vulnerability.

But despite these similarities, and the abundance of literature that focuses on trust, it was discovered that there was an absence of literature that recognised the impact of dyadic relationships between line managers and employees as a key unit of analysis to consider the dynamics of performance appraisal and its effects on organizational justice.

The work of Lau et al (2012), that highlighted how employees' emotional responses to their line managers impacted their level of confidence in their abilities, echoed the findings in the

sense that some interviewees expressed various emotions concerning their line managers competence and fairness. This seemed to have an impact on whether they considered their line manager objective during the performance appraisal process. Likewise, this supported various findings that have explored the significant impact of perceptions of competence in various organizational contexts (Brower et al, 2009; Chory and Hubbell, 2008; Colquitt et al, 2012; DeConinck, 2010; Hubble and Chory-Assad, 2005; Sholihin, 2013).

The findings also supported the work of Li et al (2017), whereby employees who perceived high levels of interactional justice characterised by constructive communication with their line manager, were more likely to exhibit organizational citizenship behaviours.

The findings also highlighted that the threat of toxic dyads impacted the quality of interactional justice, which might then distort procedural and distributive justice. Gentle dyads also presented a problem in that favouritism may have limited the line manager's willingness to offer negative feedback that might be an accurate reflection of the direct report's performance. The forming and reinforcement of these dyads over time reflected Foucault's work from 1982 in which he warned that the "the solidification of peer-to-peer relationship patterns may emerge to exclude others." We can see from the data that HR were sometimes excluded from participating in discussions concerning performance appraisal, which meant that their influence on upholding organisational justice was constrained.

The data also suggested that performance appraisals were dominated by strong ties between line managers and their direct reports rather than weak ties described by Granovetter (1977). Weak ties might have acted to create more permeable boundaries between line managers and employees, to encourage more involvement by HR, and other functions, to address the damaging impact of toxic and gentle dyads.

These strong ties between line managers and employees perhaps elevated the importance of these dyads in terms of their impact on shaping the performance appraisal process above team dynamics which challenges the findings of Amabile et al (2004), Hirst, van Dick & Zhou

(2009), Taggar (2002), Ellemers et al (2003), Hogg & Terry (2000), Sarroes et al (2008), Cauwelier (2019), O'Neill and Salas (2018). When one talks about team dynamics, it is about organisations putting together teams of people to undertake performance appraisals rather than one person: the line manager. There was one instance in which an interviewee indicated that both the project leader and their line manager contributed appraisal input, which suggested a team approach. However, even here, the line manager appeared to have the final say on the employee's performance appraisal. In general, performance appraisal was very much seen as the domain of the line manager due to reasons that have been discussed previously – for example, HR's unwillingness to get involved more proactively, perceptions that those with technical aptitude should be directly involved, and a tendency to muddle through at the expense of acting upon clear procedures and instructions concerning how the appraisal process should be undertaken.

### 5.3 Wider Contributions to Literature

#### 5.3.1 Organisational Justice

Malhotra (2022) and Ryan (2016) outlined the importance of context. This corresponded with the study's findings in the sense that high-tech contexts seemed to have particular characteristics. These could be seen to demonstrate a technical primacy, in which those who did not understand the complex nature of employees' work were mistrusted to get involved in important aspects of performance appraisal. Context also played a key issue particularly with regards to relationships between line managers and employees, and mistrust of HR. The importance of context also resonated with Bayo-Moriones et al (2020) and Paauwe (2004), who suggested that knowledge-based employees who enjoyed autonomy in their job role, preferred the use of subjective criteria to evaluate their job role. Again, contingency may play a role here that echoes findings in the management control systems and uncertainty management theory literature in that issues related to organisational justice are a result of a potential misalignment between context and selected control mechanisms (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012; Grabner and Moers, 2013; Lind and Van Den Bos, 2002; Malmi and Brown, 2008).

The reason for this enjoyment of autonomy was because these types of employees believed that their job roles and outputs were unique and inimitable in some sense, which meant that

their performance required bespoke criteria to be mapped onto their job tasks and responsibilities. This partially corresponded with the findings in the sense that there were dyads in which line managers used subjective criteria to assess performance, but this was sometimes due to a lack of clear process and guidance from HR. Plus the use of line managers' subjective criteria in these types of circumstances was not always perceived as being positive due to a lack of transparency. There were those who wanted more objectivity and, in some cases, more HR involvement in applying clearer and standardised processes.

Similar to Cheng, 2014, Colquitt et al, 2001. Gilliland and Chen, 2001, and Korsgaard and Roberson 1995, several interviewees indicated the importance of organisational justice in terms of looking for fair rewards based on an objective evaluation of performance. They also expressed a wish for equal opportunity for all participants to receive rewards and/or resources (Anderson et al, 2001; Gilliland and Hale, 2005). Furthermore, they highlighted the correspondence between the level of reward and the level of satisfaction (Celani et al, 2008).

There was correlation between the findings and Perry's (1993) conclusion that more transparency into how salaries are calculated, and deployment of robust performance appraisal (if pay is linked to performance), were more likely to produce outcomes that, according to Adams Equity Theory, were perceived as being equitable. Likewise, the findings echoed Schaufeli (1996) that perceived inequity may lead to reduced organisational commitment.

The findings demonstrated that procedures were an important element of the performance appraisal performance. This suggests that Adams Equity Theory would not be a particularly useful theory to help make sense of the dynamics of high-tech contexts. This echoed the work of Al-Zawahreh and Al-Madi (2012) who discussed the limitations of Adams Equity Theory by implying that the theory focuses more exclusively on reward distribution, but not the protocol that underpins it. Also, the key constructs of Adams Equity Theory such as motivation, guilt/shame reduction, and anger mitigation, were not really seen in the findings neither. Instead, we saw paradoxes, murkiness, and a sense of irritation with line managers and occasional indications of anger.



### 5.3.2 Procedural Justice and Interactional Justice

Several participants implied that the consistency of procedures was important, although some interviewees who worked for SMEs indicated that they were not particularly concerned that there was a lack of codified procedures. But other interviewees employed in SMEs were unhappy about this, which presented a mixed picture that only partially supported Cropanzano & Wright, 2003, Erturk, 2007, Garcia-Izquierdio et al, 2012, Gilliland, 1993, McNall and Roch, 2009, and Roch and McNall. 2007.

Impartiality was also often seen to be important in the sense that several participants agreed that objectivity and a lack of bias were desired, although sometimes not in evidence as implied by the toxic dyads between employees and line managers. This supported the findings of Colquitt et al, 2013, and Outlaw et al, 2019. Interestingly, some interviewees from SMEs were less interested in impartiality, presumably on the basis that they were being sufficiently rewarded and/or that they trusted whoever made decisions about rewards, or that they were in a gentle dyad.

The presence of voice was mixed with some interviewees indicating that they had had an opportunity to openly discuss their performance with their line manager or equivalent, while others were less positive about this due to the existence of toxic dyads. This partially supported Colquitt et al, 2013, Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012, and Outlaw et al, 2019.

Transparency was not always mentioned as a key factor in the findings. Some interviewees indicated that they wanted successes and their positive performance recognised, with some of them stating clearly that they wanted more transparency about the decision-making process. But others were less focused on transparency which suggested that they were satisfied with their evaluation and didn't care much about how it was arrived at. All of which suggested partial support for Colquitt et al, 2013 and Outlaw et al, 2019.

There was occasional acknowledgement of correctability in the sense that HR got involved in an ad-hoc basis to deal with deviation from procedure or disagreement that required mediation. However, several interviewees spoke of a lack of appropriate process to deal with disagreement, particularly those in toxic dyads.

The findings indicated that interviewees wanted interactional justice to be upheld in the sense that they wanted line management or equivalent to conduct themselves professionally and behave courteously, which corresponds with the findings of Bies & Moag, 1986 and Celani et al, 2008. Although, these types of behaviours were not always in evidence as indicated by the existence of toxic dyads.

Likewise, interviewees expected the quality of information in connection with performance appraisal to be underpinned by perceptions of timeliness, relevance, and honesty. This echoed the work of Bauer et al, 2001, Gilliland, 1993, 2001, and Truxillo et al, 2002. However, the findings also implied that decisions taken with regards to performance were often biased and lacking in honesty and accuracy due to toxic and gentle dyads, and a lack of pro-active oversight of the performance process by HR.

There were also echoes of Social Exchange Theory, that underpins interactional justice, in the findings, but not always convincingly so. This means the findings only partially upheld Blau (1964) and Benitez (2022) when considering the existence of the four elements of SET. For example, in terms of trust, particularly in SMEs, there was the expectation that employees would perform their roles without the need for the monitoring of their performance, or a thorough performance evaluation. This was due to the lack of resource to fund an HR function, and a lack of time on behalf of the owner-manager to undertake a systematic performance evaluation.

There was also a sense from the findings that biased communication and behaviour, or a lack of timely communication, particularly in toxic dyads impacted levels of engagement which supported the conclusions of Wan et al (2018). However, it wasn't evident that engagement in

SMEs was particularly impacted by a lack of communication perhaps because there was a realisation that the owner-manager and other stakeholders were busy with day-to-day operations.

The findings strongly supported the work of Li et al (2017) in the sense that employees' sense of fairness was impacted by the quality of interaction with their supervisor, particularly in larger organisations. As seen from the findings, performance appraisal was often undertaken in dyads that were often perceived as toxic due to negative bias. These relationships and negative interactions affected employee's sense of interactional justice. HR often were not involved on a pro-active basis to intervene. Furthermore, interviewees expressed a desire for clear communication to uphold notions of interactional justice which echoed Garcia-Izquierdo et al (2012).

Cheng et al (2022) argued that procedural justice and interactional justice often have to co-exist so that decisions concerning performance can be made effectively. The findings indicated, however, that this frequently did not occur as line managers and the organisations themselves did not always explain decisions concerning performance appraisal clearly, nor be honest with their employees when communicating decisions. This seemed to create frustration for employees, and on occasion, impacted their motivation levels, which partially supported the conclusion made by Zapeta-Phelan et al (2009).

### 5.3.3 Performance Appraisal

The findings indicated that performance appraisals were often conducted by line managers which supported the conclusions drawn by Murphy and Cleveland (1995). However, some interviewees implied that others were involved in performance appraisal such as project managers and owner-managers of SMEs which echoed Boswell and Boudreau (2002).

HR's role in terms of providing guidance in the form of procedures and protocols to line managers or equivalent so that performance appraisal was undertaken properly corresponded with the work of Farndale and Kelliher (2013). Although, some interviewees indicated that

HR did not always provide the levels of guidance and advice that they themselves, and some employees and line managers, would have liked.

Likewise, there was some evidence from the findings that HR's role was to collate performance analytics that echoed Sharma and Sharma (2017). Although some organisations, particularly SMEs, did not have the resources or knowledge or an HR function to undertake this type of activity. Furthermore, the findings suggested that, despite HR's lack of presence and lack of systematic guidance, performance appraisal was able to function in most organisations, albeit imperfectly. This partially challenged the conclusions drawn by Paauwe and Farndale (2012) and Kepes and Delery (2007) in the sense that they argued that HR processes needed to complement each other to create a cohesive performance appraisal function.

To repeat an earlier point, context also seemed to play a part in high-tech organisations and high-tech roles in terms of the focus on technical elements of the role during performance appraisal. Also, technical elements seemed to influence employees' attitudes towards those deemed suitable by them to assess their performance in the sense that only those perceived to have the technical aptitude should be involved.

There was a sense that performance appraisal wasn't always seen as helpful with some interviewees implying that there was bias and a lack of clarity about how it should be undertaken. These findings were similar to those of Murphy (2020), and Rubin and Edwards (2020). Nevertheless, there was no overt suggestion that performance appraisals should no longer be undertaken, which challenges Trost's view from 2017 which suggested that performance appraisal could be replaced with coaching or mentoring-type approaches.

The findings also indicated that the impact of line managers' actions and decisions on their employees through their perceptions of organisational justice would impact satisfaction levels supported Iqbal et al's (2019) concept of person-referenced reaction. This involves employees

placing significant importance on how they are treated by their line manager which impacts how satisfied they are with their job and their employer.

Many of the interviewees highlighted the bureaucratic nature of performance appraisal which corresponded with Stiles et al (1997), Murphy (2020), and Rubin and Edwards (2020). Likewise, the inconsistent nature of performance appraisal that some interviewees complained of also equated with Stiles et al's findings. Kooij's et al discussion from 2013 which suggested that performance appraisal should consider employees' values wasn't so much mentioned in the findings.

Keegan et al's work from 2019 suggested that line managers played less of a role, but this wasn't replicated in the findings. Line managers played a strong role with employees in forming dyads due to mistrust of HR and other non-technical staff. Likewise, there was no evidence to suggest that employees had to seek feedback themselves. The findings, on the other hand, supported Tyksbo (2020), Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe (2004), and Marchington (2015), in the sense that performance appraisal was frequently delegated to line managers.

The formalised approach towards the implementation of performance appraisal that was seen in the findings, particularly highlighted by interviewees in larger organisations, equated with Bonet et al (2019) who concluded that performance appraisal needed to be systematic, and process based. But a formalised approach seemed less important to interviewees than the relationship between line managers and employees, which supported Harrington and Lee's findings from 2015 that the quality of relationship between line managers and supervisors had a key impact on perceptions of fairness. This seems to suggest that interactional justice is a key dimension of organisational justice.

This section will compare the findings with literature that looked at the impact of organisational justice on performance appraisal in various contexts.

Pichler's meta-analysis of (2012) indicated that interactional justice was the most salient dimension in terms of maintaining perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal. This resonated with the findings as many interviewees commented on the significant impact that the quality of relationship with line managers had on their views of procedural justice. This was a key point that has recurred elsewhere.

Sholohin and Pike (2009) indicated that organisational commitment was the most significant mediating variable – but this wasn't seen in the findings as none of the participants really expressed any great commitment to the organisation. Nevertheless, there was some support for Sholohin and Pike's findings that non-outcome-based elements were important, in the sense that employees valued their relationships with line managers as evidenced by the dyadic relationships that emerged.

Farndale and Keliher (2013) indicated that employees saw their relationship with their organization proxied by their relationship with their line manager which corresponded with some of the comments expressed by participants who were locked into dyads with their line manager. In other words, there was a suggestion that employees' relationship with their line manager would shape employees' views of their employer. These issues echoed Byrne et al's research of 2012 which, like this research, took place in a high-tech context.

Nevertheless, Alexander and Ruderman (1987) suggested that outcome-based results were more important as were procedural justice and distributive justice dimensions. From the findings, there was some indication from interviewees that they viewed procedures as being important, particularly the HR representatives. Some employees also wanted clearer procedures. But the findings seemed to have stronger support for Farndale and Kelliher, and Sholohin and Pike.

The findings also supported Lau et al (2008) which outlined that employees' faith in their line manager's ability and competence to undertake performance appraisal professionally was

important to maintain perceptions of fairness. Nevertheless, some participants raised concerns about their line manager's competence and objectivity.

Lau placed line managers, or their equivalents, at the centre of the performance appraisal process, which resonated considerably with the findings. The findings also supported Lau et al (2012) in that employees' emotional responses to their line management, and appraisal of their line manager's trustworthiness, were most significant in shaping employees' perception of the organisation during performance appraisal. This also echoed Farndale and Kelliher (2012) and this thesis's findings in that line managers or their equivalents were often central to the performance appraisal process as emphasised by the many dyads.

#### 5.4 Uncertainty Management Theory and Management Control Systems Theory

In terms of uncertainty management theory, the findings illustrated that there was an absence of clear processes and protocol around performance appraisal, particularly in SMEs that lacked an HR function. Or, if there were processes and procedures, they were sometimes misunderstood by line managers, or not deployed correctly due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of them, or of bias due to the existence of a toxic or gentle dyad. Contingency theory may provide an explanation, as mentioned in earlier sections, according to which management controls reflected the context of the organisation, and in the negative effects of a misalignment between context and selected controls (Grabner and Moers, 2013; Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012; Malmi and Brown, 2008). Likewise, the high complexity of high-tech contexts and the inherent high task uncertainty therein may have made it difficult to capture all relevant aspects of participants' job roles within the context of the performance appraisal process (Hartmann and Slapnicar, 2012).

Several participants suggested that this caused anxiety and a desire for HR to become more involved in policing the application of the rules to ensure that they were understood by everyone. This was similar to the findings of Lind and Van den Bos (2002), Colquitt et al (2012) and Desai et al (2011) in the sense that if processes and protocols were more clearly understood, this would be sufficient to reduce anxiety and improve the perception that procedural justice was being upheld. The lack of clarity and uncertainty concerning HR's

involvement in the literature was echoed in some parts of the findings, although some interviewees were clearer about HR's involvement in developing rules and procedures. Some participants also expressed the importance of having a voice during the appraisal which echoes the findings of Hartmann and Slapnicar (2012).

Takeuchi's article from 2012 in which employees' perceptions of organisational justice were heightened during periods of uncertainty, corresponded with some interviewees who noted that negative relationships with line managers in dyads increased uncertainty about transparency and objectivity, particularly when HR seemed to play less of an active role. Likewise, positive relationships seemed to decrease uncertainty and improve trustworthiness. Also, HR's involvement in developing procedures and processes seemed to help reduce uncertainty. This suggested that a more pro-active application of the HR triad may decrease uncertainty, so that employees were less likely to use the relationship with their line manager as a proxy for their view of the organisation, and as a signal for how predictable the outcome of their performance appraisal was likely to be.

There was a mixed response concerning levels of employee voice and the effect this had on perceptions of uncertainty and predictability in contexts of task uncertainty, which can be seen to exist in fast-changing high-tech contexts, that partially supports points made by Hartmann and Slapnicar (2012). Some participants indicated that they had positive relationships with their line manager, whereby the employee believed that they could openly discuss their performance which seemed to lower uncertainty, regardless of whether HR were involved or not. But on the other hand, there were toxic dyads characterised by poor relationships and bias and a general lack of trustworthiness and employee voice, which heightened perceptions of a lack of justice and fairness. This also seemed to exacerbate a lack of predictability about what the performance appraisal outcomes would be, hence affecting distributive justice.

There was support for Rosen's findings from 2011, in that low levels of leader-member exchange (LMX), characterised by poor employee relationships between line managers and



employees, created a toxic dyad that heightened feelings of uncertainty concerning the outcome of the evaluation due to bias and/or a lack of line-management competence.

## CHAPTER 6- Conclusion

The key findings of the thesis are reiterated as follows with an explanation of what gaps have been addressed:

- Objective 1: There is a potential breakdown in all three dimensions of organisational justice. There is also the emergence of a new justice rule: “aptitude”. Aptitude can be defined as the evaluator having acceptable levels of technical knowledge, expertise, and experience of someone’s job role. In many cases, this involves line managers becoming heavily involved in the performance appraisal process, as they are the actors perceived as having the necessary technical aptitude.
- Objective 2: There is uncertainty at various points of the performance appraisal process. Several interviewees are unsure of procedures and how performance appraisal outcomes are arrived at. Some respondents suggest that this is because HR are not part of a fully understood control system. There seems to be a lack of understanding of what control systems are in place. Employees appear to rely on their line manager as being the sole representative of the organisation during performance appraisal. Uncertainty is also reinforced due to misaligned control systems, or a lack thereof, that seem to favour line management’s role in undertaking appraisals while disfavours non-technical stakeholders, such as HR. This results in decisions being taken about performance that seem to be contingent on the quality of relationship between line management and the person whose performance they are rating.
- Objective 3: Line managers dominate due to technical primacy. This is predicated on the belief that line managers have the necessary technical expertise, knowledge, and experience to understand the nature of their employees’ jobs. This creates an imbalance of power which results in a toxic dyad characterised by a line manager having a negative view of their report. This can erode objectivity and increase the chances of a negative performance appraisal outcome. Conversely, there may have been a friendship between the line manager and his or her report which could inject a positive bias into the line manager’s performance appraisal. This could be considered a gentle dyad. One could argue that task uncertainty is being caused by the quality of

relationship between the evaluator, often a line manager or equivalent, and their ratee. The findings suggest that a negative relationship between both parties – a toxic dyad - is causing important aspects of a ratees' job to be undervalued or to not be properly identified and assessed. Likewise, a gentle dyad may be causing negative aspects of performance to be overlooked.

- Objective 4: Line management and HR appear not have a particularly pro-active and healthy relationship. In many contexts, line managers did not fully understand the role of HR, or did not understand the guidance provided by HR, or complained that HR did not get actively involved.
- Objective 5: Involving line managers as key shapers and drivers of performance appraisal is often seen to erode all dimensions of organisational justice due to the emergence of toxic and gentle dyads. Relational justice often seems to decline due to poor employee relationships or nepotism. Procedural justice appears to decline due to biased application of rules and procedures and biased interpretations of employee performances. Distributive justice also gives the impression of biased decisions about performance distorting decisions taken with regards to rewards. This is why the quality of “personal fit” between employee and line manager also has become a justice rule in high-tech environments. A healthy “personal fit” can be defined as a relationship underpinned by fairness, objectivity, psychological safety, fair exchange of views, and transparency. This personal fit was not always in existence. All of these issues seem to occur due to control systems that encourage line management to take a key role in performance appraisal, and/or misaligned control systems, or a lack of a control system. Line managers may also shape the performance appraisal process as a result of structural weakness caused by their control of the performance appraisal process and a lack of constructive interaction between them and HR. This structural weakness may occur due to the nature of the control system, or lack of one. This seems to result in inconsistent interpretations of employee performance, misalignment between different guidelines, and ambiguity of the performance appraisal process. This also appears to precipitate a diminution of organisational justice dimensions such as procedural justice.

To conclude, research gaps have been addressed by advancing theoretical understanding of the concept of organisational justice. This has been achieved by identifying justice rules such as technical aptitude and the quality of dyadic relationships that seem to operate in high-tech environments. These environments are characterised by a significant sense of uncertainty that have been ostensibly caused by the emergence of dyadic relationships that are dominated by line managers. These relationships appear to have evolved due to a lack of suitable control systems and a technical primacy due to mistrust of HR, and/or HR not taking a more proactive role.

This erosion of the HRM triad appears to have resulted in contingencies whereby the dynamics of performance appraisal are influenced significantly by the quality of relationship between the ratee and the line manager or equivalent. A model can be created which further tests the relationship between perceptions of organisational justice and performance appraisal outcomes using mediating/moderating variables that relate to uncertainty, technical primacy, and dyadic relationships.

The answers to the research questions will also help to flesh out further understanding of the implications of the research:

1. How does performance appraisal affect organisational justice in high tech org contexts?

Perceptions of organisational justice were often negative. There seemed to be a cynicism from several ratees that their organisation did not invest time and resources into ensuring that there were adequate control systems in place. This resulted in perceptions of organisational justice being mediated by the quality of relationship with their line manager or equivalent. This created a sense of uncertainty for some ratees who did not have positive relationships with their line manager.

2. What is the role of HR in the performance appraisal process in high tech org contexts?

HR were often not involved. In SMEs, HR were seen as a luxury that the firm could not afford. Consequently, appraisals were undertaken by owner-managers on an ad-

hoc basis. Outcomes were often mediated by the quality of relationship between them and their ratee. In larger organisations, there were rare occasions of HR taking a constructive, pro-active role. In most cases, however, they tended to take a background role by attempting to provide guidance and instruction on how appraisal could be standardized. Often, however, line managers were not aware of these guidelines, or did not understand them.

3. What is the role of line management in the performance appraisal process in high tech org contexts?

Line management were central to the appraisal process. The quality of relationship with their ratee seemed to affect the dynamics of the appraisal process. This seems to have had a negative effect on perceptions of fairness from some respondents. This was due to their view that fair and transparent processes were not being applied, and that the behaviour of their line manager was unprofessional.

4. How do HR and line management interact in performance appraisal in high-tech org contexts?

There was a lack of evidence to suggest that there was healthy and frequent communication between HR and line management. Both parties appeared to be siloed. There was a suggestion that line managers shared their ratees' perspective that HR should not play a role in the appraisal process due to their lack of technical knowledge of what tech employees do.

5. How does the interaction between HR and line management affect perceptions of organisational justice in performance appraisal in innovative high-tech contexts?

As explained above, the relationship between HR and line management was not a particularly healthy one. HR seemed to be sidelined which resulted in line managers, or equivalent, dominating the appraisal process. There were occasions in larger organisations whereby HR would play a pro-active, constructive role, and/or would review line managers' performance appraisal outcomes on a post-hoc basis to check for anomalies. Overall, however, this lack of a constructive relationship appears to have resulted in dyads emerging during performance appraisal. These dyads maybe

considered toxic if the relationship between the line manager, or equivalent, and the ratee is characterised by a low-quality relationship. A lack of a positive, pro-active relationship between line management and HR is synonymous with the lack of a suitable control system

To further explain the implications of the research, a discussion of how the aggregate dimensions emerged will now be undertaken:

1. **HR inconsistency and uncertainty in relation to performance appraisal and line management.**

The first aggregate dimension indicates that HR operate differently in different contexts. However, a common theme was that HR were often disregarded in larger firms, or were absent in SMEs, with sometimes only a token presence. HR seemed to struggle to operate pro-actively despite some occasional glimmers of positive action. Their ability to maintain perceptions of fairness and organisational justice seemed to be limited to, in some contexts, attempts to disseminate instructions to line managers as to how performance appraisals should be undertaken. However, line managers often did not understand what the procedures were or seemed to pay little heed. Their relationship with line management was often distant and lacking in constructive dialogue and understanding of each other's responsibility. There were occasional efforts by HR to mediate disputes, but some participants indicated that HR seemed to support management at the expense of employees. This contrasts with Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) who argued that a key role of HR is to be an employee advocate.

2. **Perceptions of organisational justice in high-tech contexts.**

Participants were sensitive to being treated fairly and were keen, for the most part, to have transparent rules and processes in place to ensure that performance appraisal was conducted professionally. However, there was a dichotomy in the sense that participants did not want direct involvement by HR, who may be best placed to create and oversee rules and procedures, as they were deemed to lack technical expertise to understand job roles. Some participants expressed concern that if HR were to have a more significant involvement, this may negatively impact perceptions of organisational justice. Conversely, there was a desire

proposed by some participants for HR to have a more substantive role to intervene in toxic dyads that emerged between the employee being rated and their line manager, or equivalent, who were rating their performance.

### 3. **Line management shaping technocratic performance culture.**

As explained already, line management appeared to dominate performance appraisal on the basis that they were perceived by their employees as being capable of undertaking it due to their knowledge and understanding of the technical aspects of the ratees' job roles. This seemed to create a technocracy whereby technical expertise was seen as being key to determining who would undertake performance appraisal. However, the upshot of this was the creation of dyads whereby the relationship between both parties could determine whether the performance appraisal would be perceived as upholding organisational justice due to biased decision-making. Likewise, this bias seems to have caused a misalignment between the contextual requirements of fairness that organisations claim to desire, and the control systems that were put in place, that were often inadequate, ignored, or misunderstood.

## **JUSTICE RULES**

From one's understanding of the aggregate dimensions, two justice rules can be identified based on the application of organisational justice theory, uncertainty management theory, and management control systems:

### 1. **Technical Aptitude.**

A key factor was that employees and line managers appeared to have created a new justice rule which could be labelled as "technical aptitude", whereby participants in the performance appraisal process needed to have sufficient levels of knowledge and expertise about the nature of employees' job roles and the operational characteristics of high-tech contexts. This could also be perceived as a shift away from result control towards action controls (Merchant, 1982). This locked out HR from becoming more actively involved in the performance appraisal process, even when some employees wanted HR to take more of a lead. This paradox stemmed from what could be described as a technical primacy, whereby employees

and line managers would prioritise the technical aspects of job performance above everything else during performance appraisal. This led to a distrust of HR and other stakeholders who were perceived as not having the necessary knowledge and expertise to get involved in the performance appraisal process. This appeared to have led to the diminution of HR involvement in several contexts. However, some interviewees expressed a desire for more oversight and more pro-active involvement from HR, which has resulted in this paradox and what could be described as a structural weakness.

## 2. **Quality of dyadic relationships**

The second justice rule relates to the impact of the quality of relationship between the person having their performance appraised, and the person who is undertaking the appraisal, which in larger organisations tended to be a line manager, and by owner CEOs in smaller and medium-sized organisations. Bias and personal liking and disliking seemed to play a key role in upholding ratees' perceptions of organisational justice that could be distorted due to claims of bias. Likewise, a lack of involvement of those deemed not technically astute, including HR, meant that there was a lack of a behaviour control mechanism (Merchant and Van Stede, 2009) to oversee the proper application of organisational justice.

### **What the findings mean for theory**

The findings suggest that a combination of organisational justice theory, uncertainty management theory and management control systems offer an opportunity to better understand workers perceptions of fairness in contexts that are fluid, fast moving, and utilise advanced, complex technology. This combination illustrates that many decisions are contingent on the alignment, or misalignment, of practices and processes with the context that they operate in. As the findings have indicated, this could result in multiple misalignments in an organisation due to the various dynamics of personal relationships between ratees' and raters, with some dyads being underpinned by objectivity, and others being dominated by bias to various degrees. In addition, this combination has offered a valuable opportunity to understand the personal dynamics within the dyads themselves, which affords opportunity for expansion into leader-member exchange (LMX) theory.



Likewise, our understanding of the concept of organisational justice has been bolstered through the identification of two key justice rules that have emerged in a high-tech context: Technical aptitude, and the quality of fit between evaluator and ratee.

The application of the theories has also helped to understand the importance of employee voice on perceptions of task uncertainty, and how this impacts perceptions of organisational justice. Also, the theories, in conjunction with Merchant's typology (Merchant, 1982), suggests that the future productivity of tech organisations could be compromised due to the prevalence of dyadic relationships that lack a behavioural control mechanism.

### **What the findings mean for policy and practice**

The findings suggest that senior leaders in high-tech contexts need to pay more attention to the actions of their line managers and do more to ensure that clearer processes in connection with the delivery of performance appraisal, are communicated and understood by everyone. Other performance factors, beyond technical performance, need to be introduced to create a more holistic performance appraisal that may encourage the involvement of other parties, possibly HR, that may help to mitigate the impact of bias.

In SMEs, owner CEOs need to consider delegating performance appraisal to a party who is more objective or seek professional advice from an HR consultancy or an HRBP, to find out more about how performance appraisal can be delivered more effectively. Likewise, stakeholders need to consider a suitable control system that can accommodate complexities and contingencies during performance appraisal that respond to the demands of specific high-tech contexts.

From a policy perspective, a lack of HR representation in SMEs presents an issue for government to consider. Without adequate HR provision, SMEs may not be undertaking performance appraisal ethically. Likewise, the emergence of potentially toxic dyads in a burgeoning industry such as tech presents challenges to fulfilling the UN's sustainable development goals such as SDG 8, which seeks to deliver Decent Work and Economic

Growth. This raises pertinent questions as to how policy needs to be shaped, if required, to tackle this issue.

### **Future research**

There are possibilities to conduct further research into the dynamics within line manager and employee dyads in tech contexts that could be achieved through detailed mixed-methods research designs. In particular, it would be useful to further research the relationship between control systems and the prevalence of leader-member exchange dynamics. For example, in the research findings, it was discovered that dysfunctional control systems, or a lack of control systems, resulted in greater emphasis being placed on the quality of relationship between line management and the person whose performance they are rating being a contingent factor that affected perceptions of organisational justice during performance appraisal.

There are also questions concerning line management's capability to control results, action, and personnel elements of control systems. In addition, further research into the impact of informal control systems that exist in dyads may illuminate in more detail the effect this has on contingent decision-making and the impact the latter has on organisational performance. Furthermore, a taxonomy of levels of dyadic relationships and their corresponding impact on the quality on the effectiveness of performance appraisal may also provide fruitful insights.

Other avenues of research could consider the interplay between leadership approach taken by line management and the level of voice and co-development of performance appraisal control systems that ratees have in contexts of high task uncertainty. Likewise, further research that considers line management's capability to undertake performance appraisal in high-tech contexts would be interesting, as would consideration of alternatives to performance appraisal.

Furthermore, a closer examination of the level of alignment/misalignment of control systems and its impact on contingent decision-making may also prove fruitful. Also, it is worth

considering the particular dynamics of control systems in tech organisations, both of which could be achieved through qualitative case studies. Likewise, it may be interesting to determine whether the two justice rules identified are applicable in non-high-tech contexts. In general, the author is keen to take more of a systems approach in future research.

Quantitative research could be undertaken in future that tests the existence and prevalence of mediating and moderating variables that impact ratees' perceptions of fairness. Likewise, there is scope to undertake more work into the root causes of perceptions of fairness using attribution theory, for example.

Using Guba and Lincoln's evaluative criteria, the study's limitations will be acknowledged and discussed as appropriate. Before we do that, there needs to be acknowledgement that qualitative research output means that these findings cannot be generalised to a wider context. The research has provided some valuable insights into the concept of organisational justice in particular. However, these findings need to undergo future testing to verify whether these insights into organisational justice are significant and have external validity.

### **Credibility**

This involves having confidence that there is "truth" in the findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). A qualitative research design was deployed which afforded opportunity to identify deep, contextual insights. Likewise, the interviewees were all experienced professionals who were able to provide authentic insights in the dynamics of performance appraisal. Also, the researcher has spent significant time in tech contexts in his career and understands their characteristics. Nevertheless, there was perhaps an insufficient level of prolonged engagement and persistent observation due to a relatively small sample size which meant that there was only a limited cross-section of representatives who, despite offering detailed insights that allowed the researcher to draw trustworthy conclusions, cannot be said to be representative of all high-tech employees and HR functions. This limited cross-section also erodes levels of triangulation, which could be addressed in future studies by using mixed-methods research designs or using larger samples.

## **Transferability**

There were attempts to obtain thick descriptions from interviewees, as evidenced by the interview protocol discussed in the Methodology chapter. Nevertheless, qualitative data obtained from a relatively small sample of people working in high-tech contexts means that the findings may not be transferable to non-high-tech contexts. But the theoretical contribution does offer potential transferability of this thesis's findings to various other high-tech contexts that could enable richer explanations of the characteristics of performance appraisal.

## **Dependability**

A limitation concerns the consistency of the findings and whether there is a likelihood that they can be repeated. Tech contexts are fast moving and fluid which means that the findings presented here may be different to findings obtained in future in response to a research agenda that has a similar topic and themes.

Another limitation was the limited level of female representation in the sample. This was an issue discussed in the methodology chapter. This is unsurprising, given the general lack of female representation in high-tech industry, and indeed it would have been surprising to be able to achieve a different gender representation in my sample than the industry allows.

## **Confirmability**

There was the threat of the researcher's own biases impacting the trustworthiness of this thesis. The introduction chapter explained that the management problem being addressed emerged from conversations that the researcher had had with personal contacts who worked in high-tech contexts. These contacts had explained that HR did not take a key role in performance appraisal due to their lack of knowledge and expertise. They also had a negative reputation in the organisations of the people that the researcher had spoken to before the research started. It was important to guard against the bias that could have come across in the line of questioning, in the sense that the researcher could have assumed that HR did not get actively involved in performance appraisal. The researcher practiced critical reflexivity so that biases were filtered out. Likewise, the researcher was guided by the work of Kvale

(1994) in which he advised that the interviewer should identify and reflect on their biases in advance of questioning, which has been done. Furthermore, the interviewer tried to avoid leading questions so as to allow the interviewee to respond naturally. A pilot interview was set up with a close family member in advance to identify any potential areas of bias to avoid which demonstrates an attempt at external audit, albeit a very limited one. Of course, it is arguably impossible to eradicate all bias, but this research has done its utmost to mitigate it.

## METHODOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION

The exploratory approach to the research, which is unusual in the organisational justice literature in particular, has resulted in creating a rich and detailed account of contextual characteristics of high-tech job roles and workplaces. This has afforded opportunity to explore the dynamics and characteristics that impact tech employees' perceptions of fairness during performance appraisal. This exploratory approach has identified contextual elements that have improved our understanding of what factors contribute to uncertainty and the emergence of contingencies. Unique justice rules have been identified that can form the basis of future research that further explores our newfound understanding of organisational justice.

Hence the researcher has attempted to answer the calls of Ellswood, Grimshaw and Pandza (2017), McKenna et al (2011), Cooke and Saini (2010), Storey, Quintas, Taylor, & Fowle, (2002), and Zanko et al. (2008) to undertake an inductive, qualitative inquiry that generated deeper contextual understanding that will contribute to a new set of theoretical ideas.

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