

**A Systems Perspective of Performance Management in the  
Singapore Public Sector**

Author

Lee, Qian Yi

Published

2019-07

Thesis Type

Thesis (PhD Doctorate)

School

Dept Empl Rel & Human Resource

DOI

[10.25904/1912/2367](https://doi.org/10.25904/1912/2367)

Rights statement

The author owns the copyright in this thesis, unless stated otherwise.

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/386758>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>



**GRIFFITH BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**By**

**Qian Yi Lee**

**April 2019**

# **A Systems Perspective of Performance Management in the Singapore Public Sector**

Qian Yi Lee

Bachelor of International Business with Honours, Master of Business Administration

Department of Employment Relations and Human Resources

Griffith Business School

Griffith University

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

April 2019

## **Abstract**

Performance management systems have traditionally been developed by organisations to help ensure that organisational goals and targets are met. However, performance management systems appear to promise more than they deliver. The complex nature of the performance system is in part due to the various components within the intended and actual performance management sub-systems (functioning as individual systems) that run within the overarching performance management system. Many organisations experience deviations from the intended system, where performance management has been perceived to be ironically underperforming and not meeting senior management's expectations. Notably, the implementation of performance management is the responsibility of managers; more importantly, a key part of a frontline manager's role is ensuring that frontline employees, who make up the majority of the organisation, are performing to meeting organisational goals. It is therefore important to understand how the overarching performance management system in an organisation (with its various sub-systems that have multiple components, and processes) is managed by frontline managers and how the behaviours of all managers influence the implementation of performance management.

However, existing research has shown a lack of focus on the role of frontline managers in the implementation of performance management systems, despite plenty of research on the separate topics of frontline managers and performance management. This is surprising, given that frontline managers are responsible for overseeing most of the organisation's day-to-day operations. Moreover, little is known about how frontline managers connect the intended performance management system, through components and processes developed by the human resources department and higher levels of management, with their employees' performance. Frontline managers find ways outside the formal system to bridge the gap between intended and actual performance management systems in organisations. Despite being commonly termed 'performance management systems', performance management has not been studied using a systems theory lens – instead of the interaction between sub-systems that have various components and processes within a performance management system, performance management tends to be studied through its individual components and processes. As

such, there is a lack of understanding regarding the interaction between formal and informal performance management systems.

This thesis addresses these issues by using systems theory to illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of performance management in practice. The focus is on the perspective of frontline managers as the key actor in performance management in the context of the expectations and actions of other actors in the system. In doing so, this thesis examines the implementation process of the intended performance management system. The actual performance management system, as experienced by frontline employees, is the result of their respective frontline manager's discretionary behaviour when implementing the intended system. An inductive case study approach is utilised in this thesis using qualitative data collected from two public sector organisations in Singapore. Although from two different sectors, PublicWorks and AdminInc (both are pseudonyms) share similarities in their performance management systems. Within each organisation, data were collected from at least two different departments and across the different levels of employees. At PublicWorks, the data were collected from three different departments and the HR department; at AdminInc, the data were collected from two different departments. This research design enabled the cross-case analysis of data, both within and between the organisations. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. In total, 57 interviews were conducted across different levels of management (senior, middle, and frontline management), the HR department, and frontline employees.

A key finding of this research is that frontline managers often sought to maintain agency in the process using their discretion to balance meeting the demands and expectations of those both above and below them. Within the actual performance management systems, frontline managers were concurrently using the formal performance management system and informal performance management system to show their conformity with the intended performance management system and also to effectively manage the performance of their employees. They implemented the intended performance management system using minimalist compliance through the formal performance management system. The frontline managers' apparent compliance with the intended system were through the implementation of the compulsory components through the formal performance management system aimed to keep higher levels of

management and the HR department satisfied that they were executing their responsibilities. However, the design of the intended PM system did not allow for the frontline managers to appropriately manage the expectations of their employees. As such, their actions were not ad hoc, but were in effect set up using the developed, parallel informal performance management system with its own rules and internal consistency to manage the expectations of their frontline employees. A key feature of their actions was to maintain flexibility to manage their work units through their use of the formal and informal performance management systems.

This study provides a more nuanced picture of frontline managers in action, implementing performance management to comply with organisational requirements and also ensuring they maintain flexibility in how they operate to meet operational goals and keep their staff on board and favouring informal styles of management wherever possible.

## **Statement of Originality**

This thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

-----  
Qian Yi Lee

April 2019

## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>Statement of Originality .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>ix</b>
<b>List of Abbreviations .....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>xi</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Thesis Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Research Context .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 Research Focus.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1.4 Thesis Outline.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2.1 Systems Theory .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2.2 Performance Management Systems .....</b>	<b>11</b>
2.2.1 Definition of Performance Management .....	14
2.2.2 Performance Management Research Findings.....	17
2.2.3 Why the Gap? .....	23
2.2.4 New Public Management.....	25
<b>2.3 Managers in Performance Management.....</b>	<b>28</b>
2.3.1 Frontline Managers in Performance Management Systems .....	31
2.3.2 The Frontline Manager in Practice .....	34
2.3.3 The Gap Between the Intended and Actual Performance Management System ...	36
<b>2.4 Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) Theory and Leader-member Exchange (LMX) Theory.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>2.5 Research Questions.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>2.6 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology .....</b>	<b>49</b>

<b>3.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>3.1 The Research</b> .....	<b>49</b>
3.1.1 Philosophical Stance.....	49
3.1.2 Case Study Approach .....	50
<b>3.2 Research Design</b> .....	<b>52</b>
3.2.1 Unit of Analysis.....	53
3.2.2 The Sample .....	53
<b>3.3 Data Collection and Analysis</b> .....	<b>55</b>
3.3.1 Access.....	55
3.3.2 Data Collection .....	56
3.3.3 Data Analysis.....	58
3.3.4 Rigour of the study .....	59
<b>3.4 Limitations of Research Methodology</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>3.5 Ethical Consideration</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>3.6 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>Chapter Four: The Cases</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>4.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>4.1 Singapore’s Public Sector</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>4.2 Case One – PublicWorks</b> .....	<b>64</b>
4.2.1 PublicWorks’s Hierarchy.....	64
4.2.2 The Intended Performance Management System .....	67
<b>4.3 Case Two</b> .....	<b>76</b>
4.3.1 AdminInc’s Hierarchy .....	76
4.3.2 The Intended Performance Management System .....	79
<b>4.4 Components That Were the Responsibility of Higher Levels of Management</b> .....	<b>86</b>
<b>4.5 Conclusion</b> .....	<b>90</b>
<b>Chapter Five: Implementation Process of the Intended Performance Management System</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>5.0 Introduction</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>5.1 Performance Culture</b> .....	<b>91</b>
5.1.1 Senior Management and the HR Department’s Responsibility Within the Intended System .....	92
5.1.2 Span of Control.....	99
5.1.3 Support from the HR Department.....	101
5.1.4 Workplace Tensions .....	107
5.1.5 Seniority.....	111

<b>5.2 Nature of Work .....</b>	<b>115</b>
5.2.1 Goal Clarity .....	117
5.2.2 Location of Work.....	119
5.2.3 Training and Development .....	127
<b>5.3 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Chapter Six: The Formal and Informal Performance Management Systems ...</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>6.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>6.1 The Frontline Manager’s Attitude towards Performance Management .....</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>6.2 The Frontline Manager’s and Frontline Employee’s Relationship .....</b>	<b>145</b>
6.2.1 Performance Discussions.....	150
<b>6.3 Support from Higher Levels of Management and Peers .....</b>	<b>159</b>
6.3.1 Support from Higher Levels of Management .....	160
6.3.2 Support from Peers .....	163
<b>6.4 Work Allocation .....</b>	<b>167</b>
<b>6.5 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>7.0 Introduction.....</b>	<b>176</b>
<b>7.1 Discussion.....</b>	<b>177</b>
7.1.1 The Implementation of the Intended Performance Management System.....	178
7.1.2 Frontline Managers and the Performance Management System .....	192
7.1.3 The Role of the Frontline Manager in Performance Management Systems .....	200
<b>7.2 Contributions.....</b>	<b>207</b>
<b>7.3 Limitations .....</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>7.4 Recommendations for Further Research.....</b>	<b>212</b>
<b>7.5 Conclusion.....</b>	<b>214</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendix A: Request for Access Email .....</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>Appendix B: Consent Form .....</b>	<b>242</b>
<b>Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Questions .....</b>	<b>246</b>
<b>Appendix D: Interview Participants’ Demographic Information .....</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>Appendix E: PublicWorks’s Formal Disciplinary Measures.....</b>	<b>250</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1 <i>Performance Management Definitions by Academics and Practitioners</i> .....	15
Table 2 <i>Interview Participants from PublicWorks and AdminInc</i> .....	54
Table 3 <i>Information Available to Various Levels in Both Organisations</i> .....	86
Table 4 <i>The Intended Performance Management System</i> .....	88
Table 5 <i>The Frontline Manager's Span of Control</i> .....	100
Table 6 <i>Summary of the Type of Work Done by the Frontline</i> .....	116
Table 7 <i>Perception of Performance Management from Employees and Managers</i> ..	180
Table 8 <i>Perception of the HR Department's Role in Performance Management According to Organisational Actors</i> .....	185
Table 9 <i>Perceptions of Senior, Middle, and Frontline Management by Organisational Actors</i> .....	187
Table 10 <i>Components within the Intended Performance Management System</i> .....	201
Table 11 <i>Components within the Actual Performance Management System</i> .....	202
Table 12 <i>The Performance Management System</i> .....	205

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Purcell and Hutchinson's (2007) people management-performance causal chain.....	17
<i>Figure 2.</i> The performance management system causal chain. Adapted from Purcell and Hutchinson (2007).....	18
<i>Figure 3.</i> Organisational actors' responsibilities in performance management.....	20
<i>Figure 4.</i> The performance management system in organisations. Adapted from Purcell and Hutchinson (2007).....	46
<i>Figure 5.</i> The cross-case analyses. ....	54
<i>Figure 6.</i> Hierarchy of PublicWorks' interviewees. ....	65
<i>Figure 7.</i> PublicWorks's annual performance review process.....	69
<i>Figure 8.</i> PublicWorks's annual performance review cycle.....	71
<i>Figure 9.</i> Hierarchy of AdminInc's interviewees.....	78
<i>Figure 10.</i> AdminInc's annual performance review process.....	80
<i>Figure 11.</i> The ranking process at PublicWorks and AdminInc. ....	87
<i>Figure 12.</i> The intended performance management system in both organisations. ....	89
<i>Figure 13.</i> The frontline manager support system in organisations. ....	102/162
<i>Figure 14.</i> The organisational actors within the performance management system. Adapted from the people management-performance causal chain by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007). ....	208

## List of Abbreviations

AMO	Ability, Motivation, Opportunity
CEP	Current Estimated Potential
CCAs/ECAs	Co-Curricular Activities/Extra-Curricular Activities
FLM	Frontline Manager
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KRA	Key Result Area
LMX	Leader-Member Exchange
PM	Performance Management

## **Acknowledgements**

The last three years and nine months of my PhD journey have been extremely challenging, intellectually and emotionally, but also extremely rewarding. Throughout the entire process of getting to this final product, I have learnt a lot more about myself as a person, and of course, performance management systems. However, this thesis would not have been possible without the help and encouragement I have been blessed to receive along the way.

The supervision by Professor Keith Townsend and Professor Adrian Wilkinson has been instrumental in providing me with the expert guidance and support required to get from an idea almost four years ago to a now completed thesis. Keith, thank you for believing in me even when I did not, and more importantly, for all the time, encouragement, and advice you have given me over the past few years. You sell the idea of being an academic and really do make academia seem like a dream job. Adrian, your immense knowledge about what seems to be every topic has been vital in getting the thesis into shape. Thank you for the hours of your patience to go through comments and ideas with me. Your constant reminders for me to think deeper and about my contribution to literature has really made a difference, without which I would never have been able to finish.

To my colleagues, and now friends, at Griffith University that my PhD has introduced me to, thank you for sharing this journey with me, there are no better people to do this with. In particular, thank you to Michelle Hayes, Shirley Chan, Vishal Rana, Fiona Archontoulis, and Georgi Cohen for being part of these few years of my life and making my PhD journey a lot more bearable. I would also like to thank Dr. Ashlea Kellner, Dr. Paula Mowbray, and Dr. Susan Ressia for all of their advice over the past few years, which made the entire process a lot smoother and easier.

Thank you to the gatekeepers and participants for all of your time and insight into performance management. Without all of you, this research would not have been possible, and I hope that you find satisfaction in your contributions to this study about performance management implementation.

I would also like to thank professional editor, Kylie Morris, who provided copyediting and proofreading services, according to university-endorsed guidelines and the Australian Standards for editing research theses.

Heartfelt thanks also go out to my old friends – all of you have been with me from day one, and given me a lot of encouragement and kind words, made a difference to my life, and helped me through some trying times. Thank you for believing in my ability, and this is proof that all of your encouragement did not go to waste. Sandra, my best friend since forever (we are older than I care to admit), thank you for always being there for me, having my back, and giving me the push I needed to keep going. El and Pearl, both of you have never-ending positivity that is truly infectious and I am grateful to have you two in my life. To my beloved T25 (Alex, Amos, Din, PK, Preena, and Yang + HQ, and Teepo), our wayward years in JC seemed like a lifetime ago but I am still thankful to have your friendship and support after all this time. Amanda, Corde, and Shi, thank you for always being concerned about my wellbeing and keeping me grounded. Heeyoung, I appreciate you and all that you do for me – thank you for always looking after me unnie!

Lastly (and most importantly), my family has been my source of unconditional love and support, and they have been firm believers in what I can accomplish. I have been extremely lucky to have such an accommodating family, and I am grateful for each and every day (even though I might not express it). They have spent countless hours listening to me lamenting about how difficult a PhD is (it really is) and nit-picking everything, but never once have they stopped encouraging me to keep going. Thank you, Mommy and Daddy, for not letting me worry about how to financially support myself in this pursuit and for always encouraging us to chase our dreams. I would also like to thank my sister (all round best friend and my better half), Abby, for being my emotional pillar of support, life-sized thesaurus, and (almost professional) proofreader – without you, my PhD journey would have been very different and much lonelier.

This journey would not have been possible if not for everyone who has touched my life and I am forever grateful. Thank you everyone! I am finally done!

## **Publications Arising from this Thesis**

Two parts of this thesis were published or presented in a book entry and conference during the course of thesis preparation. My principal supervisors had joint authorship in the conference paper, as stated in the list of publications below; however, I made the lead intellectual contribution.

### **Conference Paper:**

Lee, Q. Y., Townsend, K., & Wilkinson, A. (2018). *The formality and informality of performance management*. Presented at EURAM 2018, Reykjavik, Iceland, 2018.

### **Book Entry:**

Lee, Q. Y. (2017). Being flexible in interviews: Make sure that you account for power imbalance in K Townsend & M Saunders (Eds.) *How to keep your research project on track: insights from when things go wrong* (pp. 109-110). Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Thesis Introduction**

Human resource management (HRM) is a system that operates within an organisation's larger, overall system (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Systems are made up of complex independent parts that work together to achieve a common goal (Boulding, 1956; von Bertalanffy, 1950). Within organisations, systems can be perceived as open systems that interact with the environment, leading to fluidity and adaptability depending on the inputs and outputs that are unique to the organisation (Clegg, 1990; Norton, 2008). Wright and Snell (1991) argued that human resources (HR) are essential "as the carriers of effort and motivation necessary to maintain the social system" and "the social structures of human behaviour are largely responsible for the throughput transformation process" (p. 208). Individuals contribute to the open system when they are recruited into the organisation, and as they perform their job, their abilities and motivation in their work tasks will influence work performance, which impacts the organisation's overall performance (Schuler, Jackson, & Tarique, 2010). In particular, frontline managers (FLMs) play an essential role in influencing the work performance of frontline employees through the implementation and management of HR policies through various organisational systems. Existing research tends to focus on the extent of HRM implementation but tends to neglect how managers actually implement HRM (Fu, Flood, Rousseau, & Morris, 2018).

Performance management (PM) is a sub-system of the overall HR system in an organisation. It should be noted that although the performance appraisal system is an important part of the overarching PM system, they are not the same; there are many PM studies that tend to take an exclusively appraisal focus rather than examining the PM system in its entirety. In addition, PM lacks a single cohesive definition that is used by both academics and practitioners – academics define PM as a process, while practitioners define PM as activities that help improve employee performance (Behn, 2002; Cho & Lee, 2012). Nevertheless, PM is seen as an essential system to ensure that goals are being met through the performance of individuals in the workplace. Many organisations have been moving away from formal PM systems because they have found that their PM systems are not able to deliver their intended benefits (Chillakuri, 2018; Cunningham, 2015). As such, there has been a shift in the focus of PM from the quantitative to the qualitative elements of PM (Kinley, 2016). In this thesis, the PM systems of two Singaporean organisations are examined and operationalised as the constant and ongoing process and activities within an organisation that aim to help employees maintain and/or improve their performance to reach organisational goals (Dessler, 2005; Ivancevich, 2001).

Existing research suggests that PM is supposed to help employees improve performance to achieve their goals; however, the implementation of it is not without difficulties (Goh, Elliott, & Richards, 2015; Morgan, 2006; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). Thus, the presence of a PM system and policies in organisations does not mean that it will be utilised or implemented, let alone implemented effectively. In their literature review, Schleicher et al. (2018) recommended that future PM research could benefit from focusing on the manager. Notably, FLMS play a key role in implementing PM systems in organisations because they are responsible for the daily management of the largest group of employees – frontline employees. This is because there is the perception that FLMS help to connect higher management and frontline employees through the implementation of policies and practices (Saville & Higgins, 1994). The definition of FLMS in this study is that of the first level of management to whom frontline employees with no managerial or supervisory responsibility report (Armstrong, 2006; Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, Kok, & Looise, 2006; Hales, 2005).

Frontline managers are responsible for implementing HR practices to frontline employees; due to the FLM's role, he or she is responsible for the performance of individual employees, as well as the team under him or her. It is important for frontline employees that FLMs are able to implement PM practices consistently, as the messages they send will affect their experience and performance (den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004; Pak & Kim, 2016). How successfully HR policies, including PM, are implemented and perceived by frontline employees largely lies in the hands of FLMs (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). However, research has shown the FLMs do not prioritise their PM responsibilities, and this can impact the success of the implementation (Goh et al., 2015; Harris, 2001). Additionally, FLMs have been seen to struggle with consistency and the management of poor performance (Klaas & Wheeler, 1990; Tyler & Bies, 2015).

The ability, motivation, and opportunity (AMO) and leader-member exchange (LMX) theories can be used to explain FLM's discretionary behaviour within the PM system and how the system is implemented (both AMO and LMX will be explained further in the literature review chapter). Firstly, the performance of FLMs in their PM responsibilities is related to: 1) their ability to implement PM, 2) their motivation to implement PM, and 3) the opportunity provided by their superiors to implement PM (Truss, Mankin, & Kelliher, 2012). The context that the FLMs operate within affects the AMO that they have during the implementation of PM systems. For example, individual FLMs have different priorities depending on their goals at work, which means that different FLMs can evaluate the same performance differently (Li & Frenkel, 2016; Murphy, Cleveland, Skattebo, & Kinney, 2004). The goals of a FLM affect his or her AMO to manage the performance of employees through the PM system.

Secondly, the interpersonal relationships that FLMs have with other organisational actors also influence the implementation of PM systems. The working relationship or LMX between FLMs and other organisational actors influences how the PM system in an organisation is implemented. The LMX can range from high quality to low quality (Bauer & Green, 1996; Hsiung & Tsai, 2009), where a high quality LMX between the FLM and higher levels of management and the FLM and frontline employee can lead to more opportunities being offered to the FLM and frontline employee, respectively.

The position of the FLM requires them to manage the expectations of superiors and subordinates (see Figure 3 in 2.2.2 Performance Management Research Findings), and it can be inferred that the expectations vary depending on the relationship between them through the PM system. Due to varying contexts that FLMs work within, the tendency to tailor different approaches based on the situation leads to room for deviation from intended policy, leading to gaps between policy and practice (Lawler, 2015; Rosen, Kacmar, Harris, Gavin, and Hochwarter, 2016; Tummers & Knies, 2013). Moreover, despite the intrinsic role FLMs play in the performance of their employees, they tend to not be held accountable for the effectiveness of the PM system (Cascio, 2012). In addition, FLMs tend to be evaluated based on their operational tasks rather than their people management skills (Hailey, Farndale, & Truss, 2005).

Despite the importance of FLMs in PM systems, they tend to be neglected in research. Although scholarly research on other organisational actors, especially line managers (e.g. Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, and Kees Looise, 2013; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2015), can be generalised to fit FLMs, FLMs still have a unique position in the organisation; FLMs manage frontline employees directly (Boxall & Macky, 2007; den Hartog et al., 2004), giving FLMs specific duties and responsibilities that are not the same as other levels of line managers. The next section considers the research context of this thesis.

## **1.2 Research Context**

According to Stanton and Nankervis (2011), questions often arise from HRM and PM research in Asia about “the transference of Western management models and the associated assumptions about human behaviour in Asian business environments” (p. 70). Other research into HRM and PM has explained that culture and context is essential to understanding behaviours in organisations (e.g., Chatterjee & Nankervis, 2007; Chew & Sharma, 2005). There is also a lack of research in the Singapore public sector that would provide an interesting context to understand how the PM systems function and the role of the FLMs within PM systems. Hofstede’s (1984) cultural dimensions help to explain “elements of common structure in the cultural systems of countries” (p. 83), and a person’s national culture heavily impacts their personal values and the way they approach their work (Hofstede & Bond, 1988, p. 7). The four dimensions are

power distance (acceptance of unequal power distribution), uncertainty avoidance (level of comfort with uncertainty and ambiguity), individualism-collectivism (acting or contributing as an individual versus acting or contributing as a group), and masculinity-femininity (preference for achievement and success or relationships and quality of life) (Hofstede, 1984). Singapore has been noted to have high power distance, low uncertainty avoidance, a collective nature, and is between masculinity and femininity, leaning towards femininity (the softer aspects of culture) (Hofstede, 2017). The cultural dimensions of Singapore affect how FLMs implement PM systems within organisations and will be further examined throughout this thesis.

Singapore has transformed from an underdeveloped economy into one of the most successful Asian economies in less than 30 years (Hampden-Turner, 2003). Even though it may be the Asian country closest to Western values, it shares many Asian cultural characteristics with a focus on “strong leadership, meticulous planning and discipline” (Choo, 2007, p. 247). Political pragmatism has driven this development, resulting in “all aspects of social life to be instrumentally harnessed to the relentless pursuit of development” (Chua, 1995, p. 59). In the past, the Singapore public service was “largely characterised by rigid, top-down, bureaucratic hierarchy in line with the British model of elitist state bureaucracy” until more recent reforms in the public sector that “led to considerable changes in its organisational structure and management” (Haque, 2014, p. 83). Singapore attained self-government from Britain in 1959 after the People’s Action Party won the general election (Quah, 2001). The People’s Action Party government transformed Singapore from a third world country with multiple social and economic problems to a first world one based on four policies that were initiated and adopted: reforming the Singapore Civil Service, enforcing anti-corruption practices, decentralising the Public Service Commission, and paying competitive salaries to attract and retain talent (Quah, 2013).

Following these initiatives, Singapore’s public sector evolved, with the government selectively introducing various new public management reforms in economic, administrative, and social governance (Lee & Haque, 2006). In 1995, new public management was introduced into the Singapore public sector through ‘Public Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century’ to sharpen the organisational focus and provide commercial practices to change the existing culture to better meet the needs of the public and

encourage organisations to embrace change (Chia & Koh, 2007; Robinson, 2015; Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017c). This approach included the introduction of more formal PM systems, although individual agencies were provided with some autonomy to adapt the PM system to their organisations (Haque, 2002; Quah, 2010). Roh (2018) suggested that unlike other countries that have adopted new public management reforms due to inefficient bureaucratic public sectors and heavy public debt, Singapore already had a relatively efficient and well-managed public sector, with no direct pressure to adopt these market reforms. Different countries can have distinctive features in their public sector's PM systems (Roh, 2018). 'Public Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' was established with the objectives of meeting public needs and to encourage an environment of continuous change (Chia & Koh, 2007; Ho, 2006). The disaggregation of ministries, departments, and agencies was announced in 1996, leading to the introduction of *autonomous agencies*, allowing each agency the freedom to develop and implement programs focusing on outcomes rather than inputs and processes (Haque, 2002; Quah, 2010). This means that the public sector in Singapore has the autonomy to adapt PM systems to their organisation, as shown in the two case organisations in this thesis.

### **1.3 Research Focus**

This thesis aims to provide understanding about the implementation of the PM system in organisations through FLMs through adopting a systems theory lens. Therefore, the research is situated in the perspective of various levels of organisational actors to gain insight and perceptions into the PM system and the responsibilities of FLMs within PM. According to existing literature, PM is the use of policies and practices on individual employees in order to work towards organisational performance (Dessler, 2005; Ivancevich, 2001; Stone, 2013). Performance management is seen as a necessary and critical component in organisations; however, the implementation process is often seen as problematic (e.g., Goh et al., 2015; Morgan, 2006; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). As the first line of managerial contact for employees, FLMs play a key role within the implementation of PM systems for frontline employees because they are responsible for the daily management of their employees' performance (Boxall & Macky, 2007; Thomson & Arney, 2015). Frontline managers are relevant to the implementation of PM systems because their responsibility for both individual and team performances of

frontline employees can affect the overall organisational performance through the achievement of organisational goals (den Hartog et al., 2004; Pak & Kim, 2016). The pressure they face from both ends of the organisational hierarchy can also impact on how they are able to implement PM systems (Child & Partridge, 1982; Hales, 2005). Little is known about the underlying processes that FLMs utilise when connecting organisational policies and frontline employees to ensure performance (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2016), or whether PM systems help to facilitate the responsibilities of FLMs in the performance of their subordinates.

Hence, there are gaps in our knowledge surrounding the implementation of the PM system in organisations and the FLMs' role in PM. In response to the focus of this thesis, the main research question posed is:

***RQ1) What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?***

This research question is further broken down into two sub-questions:

*RQ1a) How is the intended PM system implemented?*

*RQ1b) How do FLMs navigate the process of PM?*

#### **1.4 Thesis Outline**

Chapter One introduced the study and research focus of this thesis, providing the rationale for studying the implementation of PM in Singapore's public sector. The chapter discussed the need to use systems theory to understand how PM is implemented to gain a better understanding of how FLMs approach their PM responsibilities and the gaps between the intended and actual PM that is implemented. In addition, the research context was also shared to provide information on the Singapore public sector to help better understand the background that frames the study.

Chapter Two examines the scholarly research on PM from the HRM discipline. The literature review is divided into four main sections – systems theory, the PM system, FLMs in PM, and the AMO and LMX theories. The first section examines the conceptualisation of systems theory, which serves as the foundation through which PM is analysed. The review demonstrates that a myriad of systems operate within an

organisation and the PM system is one such system. Lastly, the discussion of AMO theory and LMX theory provides context through which FLMs' implementation of PM is analysed.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology designed to answer the research questions emerging from the literature review. The underlying research paradigm, constructivism, is first discussed. The research design is then presented. A justification is provided for the use of a qualitative case study approach using data from two organisations. The data analysis, rigour of the study, and limitations are also discussed.

Chapter Four provides further information about the two organisations to provide the organisational context of the thesis. The organisational hierarchy and formal PM expectations that establish the intended PM systems are also detailed based on the formal documentation provided. Interview responses are also taken into consideration and included where necessary to provide clearer descriptions of the organisational systems in place.

Chapters Five and Six provide the analysis of the findings from the two case organisations. The data explains the complexity of the PM systems through the implementation process of the intended PM system that resulted in the actual PM system. Chapter Five analyses the implementation process of the two case organisations' intended PM systems. Chapter Six analyses the use of formal and informal PM systems within the actual PM system in the two case organisations.

Chapter Seven presents the discussion and conclusion chapter. The chapter discusses the answers to the two research sub-questions and the main research question. The chapter also discusses the main theoretical and practical contributions of the thesis, including how deviation from the intended PM is due to constraints that FLMs faced in their work responsibilities from other organisational actors and policy in place. The chapter concludes by acknowledging the limitations of the study, and then identifies several areas for future research based on these limitations.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the literature review for this study. The chapter begins by examining systems theory, serving as a foundation through which the HR practice of PM is analysed. An organisation is made up of multiple systems and sub-systems that affect its operation. The HR system is a sub-system of the organisation and PM is a sub-system of the HR system. However, sub-systems also operate as systems. As such, the sub-system of PM is specifically explored to demonstrate the operationalisation of PM. An understanding of PM as an operating system is necessary to understand how FLMs implement the PM system within the context of their responsibilities. This chapter shows that much of the literature has found that the focus of PM research tends to be centred around performance appraisals rather than the overarching system. Additionally, the implementation of PM is understood to be mostly problematic, negating the intended benefits. As such, the gaps between intended and actual PM are discussed before literature pertaining to FLMs in PM is presented. Thereafter, literature on the theories of AMO and LMX is discussed to provide context through which the FLM's implementation of PM can be analysed. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the gaps within the literature, thus identifying the research questions developed based on the literature review.

## **2.1 Systems Theory**

Systems are regarded in general systems theory as being made up of complex independent parts (von Bertalanffy, 1950). These complex independent parts are designed to function together in order to achieve a common goal or purpose (Boulding, 1956). The term *organisation* denotes a form of social system, differentiated from other forms of social systems (e.g., family and community) (Kühl, 2008). General systems theory was first used in organisational studies in the 1950s, with the understanding that an organisation was like an *open system*, where organisations would try to create order through strategies and processes that were unique to them based on the environment in which they operated (Clegg, 1990). A system has interrelated elements and within open systems, interactions with and feedback from the various elements affect the other elements within the system (Katz & Kahn, 1978). From the perspective of an open system, organisations are seen as one part of a series of social and economic networks (Edwards, Gilman, Ram, & Arrowsmith, 2002). Context is an important part of these networks, whereby the interdependence between an organisation's internal and external environment affects how it operates due to the varying flows of people, resources, and information (Harney & Dundon, 2006; Scott, 1987). The simplicity or complexity of a system is dependent on the number of and the interactions between the elements (Jackson, 2000). The organisation and environment have a delicate relationship, and through open systems, we can account for the uncertain and indeterminate relationship (Bedeian, 1990; Thompson & McHugh, 1995). Organisations are continuously striving to reach a relatively stable equilibrium in open systems because the context they operate in influences what their *steady state* is, which contrasts with the assumed definite equilibrium in closed systems (Koehler, 1981).

An organisation's performance leads to feedback arising from both internal and external environments (von Bertalanffy, 1968). As such, the feedback loop is an integral part of systems theory. According to Senge (2006), feedback is not just positive or negative – in a system, feedback serves as a “reciprocal flow of influence” (pp. 74-75) and because “nothing is ever influenced in just one direction” (p. 76), the feedback is both the cause and effect of change. S. E. Jackson and Schuler (1995) used general systems theory to help explain that an organisation depends on the environment for inputs (e.g., labour, raw materials, etc.), which will then, through the business processes and systems that they have in place, produce outputs (e.g., goods, services, etc.) that

are traded or circulated back into the environment. It can be inferred that changes in the environment can lead to corresponding changes in the organisation, and vice versa. Organisational changes are dependent on the strategies and systems in place that process the environmental changes, consequently incorporating them into the organisation (Levasseur, 2004). However, rather than assuming that organisations only make optimum choices, systems theorists take the perspective that organisations “adapt well enough to *satisfice*” (Simon, 1965, p. 129).

Despite the lack of explicit reference to the concept of systems theory, it has long influenced organisational research, which includes HR research (e.g., Boxall & Macky, 2009; Guest, 1997; Townsend, Lawrence, & Wilkinson, 2013). Organisations operate under both external and internal constraints, and there are multiple social systems within the organisation’s internal environment. Burns and Stalker (1961) segregated these systems into formal and informal systems, which they respectively termed ‘mechanistic’ and ‘organic’ management systems. They posited that mechanistic management systems are stable and based on the formality in the organisation where there are formal rules and procedures; while organic management systems are fluid and based on the informal practices and decision making in the organisation. They also explained the polarity of both systems, where management systems operate and teeter between the two (Burns & Stalker, 1961). According to Selznick (1981), having a formal system does not mean that individuals will adhere to it due to their individual needs, which may not be aligned with or focussed on organisational goals. Large organisations can establish informal systems through the institutionalisation of deviations from the formal system (Selznick, 1981). In particular, public sector organisations face a dilemma between balancing short-term and long-term goals (Verbeeten, 2008), which can affect the development of their informal systems. The interaction between systems is complex and can lead to multiple games being played in an organisation; these organisational games can be public and well-known or subtle and hidden (Palazzoli, 1986).

## **2.2 Performance Management Systems**

The HR system is a sub-system of the overarching organisational system, which has strong influence on the performance of all employees, depending on how well the

organisation implements HRM. Wright and Snell (1991) explained that systems theory is useful for examining the role of HRM in organisations because of the integral role that HR plays as “the carriers of effort and motivation necessary to maintain the social system” and “the social structures of human behaviour are largely responsible for the throughput transformation process” (p. 208). Human resources systems rather than individual practices are more appropriate in explaining the contributions to organisational performance (Delaney & Huselid, 1996) and can help organisations gain competitive advantage through the development and maintenance of organisational competencies (Lado & Wilson, 1994). A myriad of HRM research has explored the link between HR systems or specific sub-systems within the HR system and organisational performance (e.g., Boland & Fowler, 2000; Boxall & Macky, 2007; Roh, 2018; Shin & Konrad, 2014). Sub-systems are also an important consideration because they can “work together and use system processes to transform organisational inputs into performance outcomes” (Townsend, Lawrence, et al., 2013, p. 3064).

Just as the HR system is a sub-system of the organisation, the HR system is also composed of multiple subsystems (Severance, 2001). A systems approach has been seen to be influential in the development of HR functions such as PM (Iwu, Kapondoro, Twum-Darko, & Lose, 2016). Structure provided by systems theory can help in understanding organisations and their PM systems. Notably, even though PM is a sub-system of the HR system, it still functions as its own system and can contain other sub-systems. The PM system comprises the sub-systems of intended, actual, and perceived PM (Farndale, Hope-Hailey, & Kelliher, 2011; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007), which also function as their own systems; within the intended, actual, and perceived PM systems lie other sub-systems, as discussed later in the chapter. The presence of multiple, interdependent sub-systems within an organisational system that work concurrently can influence the organisation’s performance and goal achievement (Townsend, Lawrence, et al., 2013). Movements and changes in any part or sub-system of the organisation can lead to movement and changes in other parts (Wright & Snell, 1991). However, despite being commonly referred to as PM systems, Schleicher et al. (2018) found that research has neglected to study PM through the lens of systems theory. As such, this thesis uses systems theory as the foundation to understand the implementation of PM systems in organisations.

Organisational performance has always been a key goal that companies strive to maximise, with PM systems supposedly being able to help to achieve these goals. According to Franco-Santos and Otley (2018), the term *PM system* is a recent development that extends from previous research on *management control systems* (see Ferreira & Otley, 2009; Otley, 1999); previous HR literature often used PM systems to study performance appraisals. The process of PM has been gaining popularity since the 1980s and has also been defined by literature in several different ways (Dransfield, 2000). Before the interest in the process of PM, the focus used to be solely on performance appraisal research. DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) defined performance appraisals as performance evaluation periods (once or twice a year), where employees' work performance is evaluated according to fixed criteria and conveyed to them. DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) also defined the process of PM as "a broad set of activities aimed at improving employee performance" (p. 255). Traditionally, individual employee performance was formally and informally rated through performance appraisal processes (Grote, 1996). The shift in interest from performance appraisals to PM resulted from the rise in attention to how individual performance could be improved (DeNisi & Smith, 2014). Performance appraisal literature in turn focussed on the performance raters, contributing to the understanding of the appraisal process, but providing limited assistance to practitioners trying to improve their methods for conducting performance appraisals (Ilgen, Barnes-Farrell, & McKellin, 1993). Eventually, the integration of performance appraisal research into larger PM research developed with the perception that organisations should emphasise "managers being highly focussed on quality and long-term improvement" rather than the short-term gains that traditional performance appraisals prioritise, which negatively affect the quality of work and employee morale (Elmuti, Kathawala, & Wayland, 1992, p. 48). The concept of PM is not concentrated on one factor or on a short-term goal; it is a natural and continuous process where regular monitoring is performed to ensure that the appropriate action or amendment can be taken when necessary (Armstrong, 2015; Armstrong & Baron, 2005).

Despite the presence of overlaps in the literature, performance appraisals and PM are two interrelated but different concepts – performance appraisal is an important component or subset of PM. Performance appraisals provide the performance data that simplify the improvement and management of performance in organisations (Edwards

& Thomas, 2005). However, the mere presence of performance appraisal data does not guarantee improved performance. Much of the PM literature has focussed on the performance appraisal process rather than the broader issue of the PM process (Claus & Briscoe, 2009; Brown, O'Kane, Mazumdar, & McCracken, 2019). According to DeNisi and Pritchard (2006), performance appraisals should generate information that provides input for organisations to improve employee performance; however, existing research on performance appraisals does not contribute to the larger PM goal of performance improvement because it is overly focussed on ways to better measure performance. Performance appraisals also lack the overarching strategic and business considerations that PM incorporates (Aguinis & Pierce, 2008). Halachmi (2005) explained that “in order to advance performance there is a need to manage performance rather than simply measure any given aspect of it across the board” (p. 506), and the sole use of performance appraisals does not allow for the shifting from one dimension of a program to another due to changing circumstances, such as PM.

This thesis utilises a systems theory approach to understand the role of FLMs within PM systems. Schleicher et al. (2018) explained their belief that examining PM through a systems approach is important to understand the effectiveness of PM, which involves studying the interrelations and interactions between the multiple components (or sub-systems) within it. As such, beyond the process of PM and its individual components, this thesis examines the sub-system of PM as a system on its own that has been designed to facilitate the achievement of organisational goals and targets. However, the process of PM should not be neglected, because it also contributes to the development of the PM system within an organisation. The varying concepts, descriptions, and definitions of PM illustrate the complexity of PM systems and help in understanding how the PM system is implemented.

### ***2.2.1 Definition of Performance Management***

Kloot and Martin (2000) and Stiles et al. (2015) explained that the PM literature tends to focus either more widely on organisational control or on only the identification of key aspects of PM (e.g., appraisal, rewards, training and development, etc.), instead of looking at PM as an entire system. As a result, the definitions of PM can be classified into two distinct categories used by academics and practitioners, respectively.

Academics tend to define PM as a process, while practitioners tend to define PM as a broad set of activities aimed at improving employee performance (Behn, 2002; Cho & Lee, 2012). Table 1 shows the differences between academic and practitioner definitions of PM.

Table 1

*Performance Management Definitions by Academics and Practitioners*

	<b>Academic</b>	<b>Practitioner</b>
<b>Definition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using performance information to improve the systems and processes in the organisation by aligning individual, managerial, and organisational goals, and allocating appropriate resources to ensure that the performance goals can be achieved (Amaratunga &amp; Baldry, 2002).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance appraisals are the centre of joining organisational goals to individual work goals (Dessler, 2005)</li> </ul>
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Various levels of managers work together to ensure that employee performances are in line with organisational goals (Ivancevich, 2001).</li> <li>A system that ensures employee performances are aligned with the goals of the organisation (Dessler, 2005).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reward management or management of poor performance using performance appraisals (Redman, 2009).</li> <li>Selecting performance indicators and targets and then achieving those targets (Boyne, 2010).</li> </ul>

The academic definition of PM as a process can be generalised as “the use of performance measurement information to affect positive change in organisational culture, systems, and processes by helping to set agreed-upon performance goals, allocating and prioritising resources, informing managers to either confirm or change current policy or programme directions to meet these goals, and sharing results of performance in pursuing those goals” (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2002, p. 218). This can be a process where different levels of management work together in order to integrate employee performances into the organisation’s goals (Ivancevich, 2001) or a process where the organisation’s aims, performance, and development are integrated into a system with the goal of ensuring that employee performances support the strategic goals of the organisation (Dessler, 2005). In contrast, practitioners define PM as connecting the objectives and goals of the organisation to the individual employee’s work targets, where performance appraisals are seen as the heart of the approach (Dessler, 2005).

Performance management is then used as a form of reward management or a way to manage poor performers through performance appraisals (Redman, 2009).

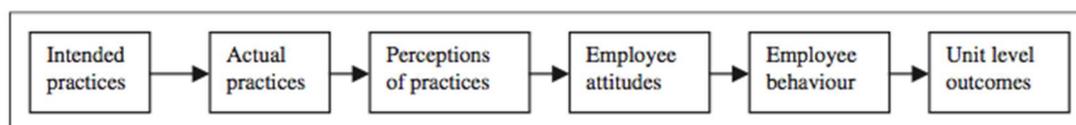
Regardless of the definition, PM is seen as a necessary system used to measure and improve the effectiveness of people in the workplace (Cardy & Leonard, 2015; Luecke & Hall, 2006). The PM system provides organisations with the opportunity to integrate their HR strategies by aligning the various components of the HR system, adding value to the organisation (Gruman & Saks, 2011). Lawler (2003) asserted that almost every organisation has a PM system in place with objectives that include “motivating performance, helping individuals develop their skills, building a performance culture, determining who should be promoted, eliminating individuals who are poor performers, and helping implement business strategies” (p. 396). Performance management systems in organisations have been found to affect employee attitudes and how performance is managed (Kagaari, Munene, & Mpeera Ntayi, 2010). However, it is important to understand that a PM system has conflicting components that organisations can find difficult to implement because of the evaluation of employees’ performance but also the need to improve and develop employees (Tweedie, Wild, Rhodes, & Martinov-Bennie, 2019).

This study focusses not only on performance appraisals (the systematic assessment of an individual employee’s performance) but also includes performance data that can be used to improve, develop, or reward employees (Edwards & Thomas, 2005; Ilgen et al., 1993; Levy & Williams, 2004). Although appraisal is a key component of the PM process due to its visibility and emphasis, PM is more than just the evaluation of performance. As defined in Chapter One (see 1.1 Thesis Introduction), the PM system is therefore examined and defined as the constant, ongoing process and activities within an organisation that aim to help employees maintain and/or improve their performance to reach organisational goals (Dessler, 2005; Ivancevich, 2001). In addition, PM systems are expected to have “a set of management control mechanisms used by executives and employees with the overall purpose of facilitating the delivery of organisational goals by influencing people’s behaviour and performance” (Franco-Santos & Otley, 2018, p. 698). The control mechanisms of PM systems are expected to include at least a planning (e.g., goal/expectation setting), measurement (e.g., how is performance operationalised), review (e.g., feedback), and reward (e.g., promotion)

component (Ferreira & Otley, 2009; Flamholtz, Das, & Tsui, 1985). Additionally, PM systems can also include cultural (e.g., social norms) and administrative (e.g., specifying the performance of tasks) components (Malmi & Brown, 2008). Previous research (e.g., Ferreira & Otley, 2009; Malmi & Brown, 2008) has also considered these control mechanism components as individual sub-systems within a PM system, which can either be highly co-dependent (where changes in one control lead to changes in the others) or slightly co-dependent (where the various controls interact but changes in one control does not affect the others) on each other (Franco-Santos, Rivera, & Bourne, 2014; Malmi & Brown, 2008). These sub-systems within the PM system are discussed further under the various roles of organisational actors in the PM system.

### ***2.2.2 Performance Management Research Findings***

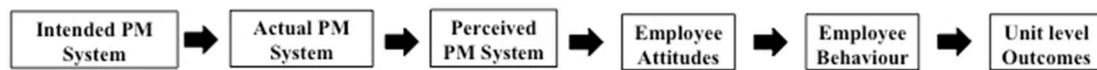
Despite the benefits that PM systems are supposed to provide to organisations, the implementation process is rarely straightforward. The HR literature contains conceptual models that examine the process of HR practices and HR outcomes that are also applicable for PM systems. The HR practices within the HR system can be segregated into intended practices, actual practices, and perceived practices (e.g., Farndale et al., 2011; Nishii & Wright, 2007; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).



*Figure 1.* Purcell and Hutchinson's (2007) people management-performance causal chain.

The figure above displays Purcell and Hutchinson's (2007) model, which regards discretionary behaviour as the key to managing performance. Discretion used by organisational actors in their work will affect the organisation's performance; at the heart of their discretionary behaviour is the perception of HRM policies that will contribute to and influence their corresponding attitudinal outcomes. As such, the actual implementation of HR practices is a key part of this relationship. This is where the FLM enters the equation, playing a vital role in the implementation of HR practices. Even though the model examines HR practices and policies in general, it can be further

refined to specifically examine PM systems for the study. Figure 2 below adapts the people management-performance causal chain by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) specific to the PM system.



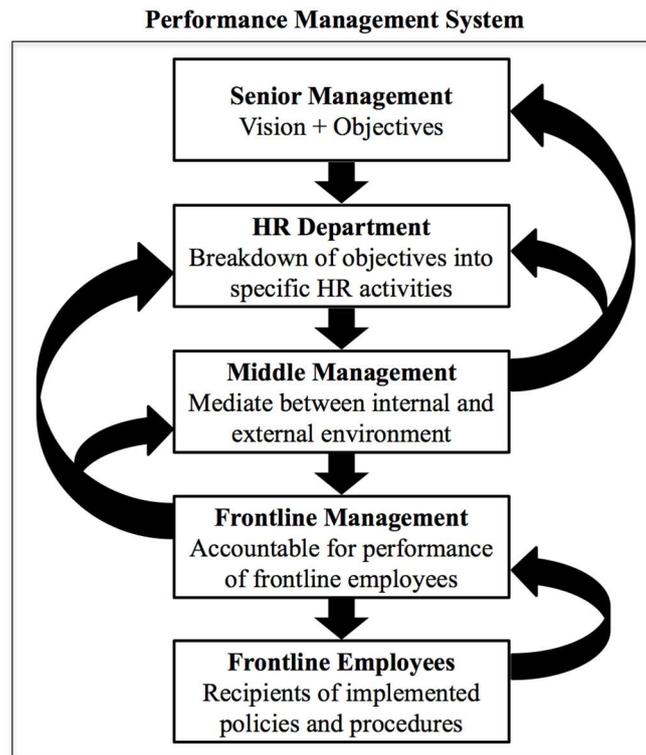
*Figure 2.* The performance management system causal chain. Adapted from Purcell and Hutchinson (2007).

Farndale et al.'s (2011) description of the intended, actual, and perceived practices can be applied to the intended, actual, and perceived PM sub-systems (that function as individual systems) within the PM system. The intended PM system refers to the PM system designed and developed at the top through policies and practices that are implemented across the organisation. However, line managers can deviate from the intended system during the implementation process. The implementation process of the intended PM system then leads to the actual PM system, which can be in line with or deviate from the intended PM. The actual PM system that is implemented by line managers leads to the perceived PM system, which refers to the perceptions that individuals on the receiving end of the actual PM system have regarding PM (Farndale et al., 2011). The various sub-systems show that the PM system is complex. In this thesis, only the intended and actual PM systems are analysed to better understand the implementation process by FLMS.

Many organisations find that their PM systems are underperforming and not meeting expectations (Morgan, 2006). In 2015, many large organisations (e.g., Deloitte, Microsoft, etc.) chose to modify their existing PM systems to better suit their needs (Chillakuri, 2018). Accenture, in particular, chose to get rid of their annual performance review (Cunningham, 2015). The move away from traditional PM and performance appraisals has led to the discussion in academia and mainstream media about the death of PM and performance appraisals. However, in reality, PM is still prevalent in organisations. As such, rather than thinking about the decline of PM systems, it is better to think of PM systems as evolving – there is a shift away from forced rankings and

annual performance reviews to more fluid and on-going feedback from managers (Kinley, 2016).

Goh et al. (2015) showed that organisations face significant challenges aligning PM systems across all units because there is “a tendency for different branches or departments to start functioning in silos” (p. 163), indicating the need for PM due to lack of ownership across all units. Managers play an important role in the PM system because they are responsible for ensuring that organisational goals and PM processes are in line with individual employee work goals (Dale, van der Wiele, & van Iwaarden, 2007). However, managers experience discomfort when managing the performance of their subordinates and those who are more uncomfortable tend to be more lenient in the process (Brown & Lim, 2019). Should those in charge be merely going through the motions, this would defeat the purpose of organisations having PM systems (Marsden, 2007). The roles of organisational actors need to be considered, because they can reduce the effectiveness of the PM system (Lewandowski, 2018); that is, key organisational actors need to buy into the PM system to allow it to be successfully implemented (Marsden, 2007). As such, various levels of management, the HR department, and frontline employees all have roles to play within the PM system. The organisational actor’s role will affect perceptions towards the PM system (Brown, Hyatt, & Benson, 2010) and their use of the various sub-systems and components within the sub-systems (Ferreira & Otley, 2009). Figure 3 on the next page shows the key actors in the PM system and their main responsibilities that was developed based on information from the existing literature.



*Figure 3.* Organisational actors' responsibilities in performance management.

The PM system usually begins with senior management and cascades through the organisation (Weiss & Hartle, 1997). Through interviews with senior management in the public sector, Pollitt (2005) found that they believed that they had utilised the performance data generated by the PM system the most in the organisation. After considering both the internal and external environment, senior managers develop the organisation's vision and strategy that they want to assimilate (Liang, Saraf, Hu, & Xue, 2007). Trust in senior management is an important component in helping frontline employees to perform, allowing them to focus on their allocated work tasks (Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Pate, Beaumont, and Stewart (2007) found that employees had minimal trust in the integrity of senior management because they were perceived to lack sincerity and honesty. However, senior management can also serve as role models for line managers in the PM system where good and bad habits can be imitated (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2007).

The HR department breaks down the organisation's programs and objectives developed by senior management into specific HR activities (e.g., performance appraisals, training and development, etc.) that employees are subsequently able to access (Truss, 2001).

Middle managers can be implied to act as facilitators between senior managers and FLMs. Their input can influence how senior managers shape, and how FLMs execute, these strategies (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997). In addition, middle managers still play a significant role in organisations through directly impacting the performance and behaviour of frontline employees or influencing FLM's leadership behaviour (Yang, Zhang, & Tsui, 2010). Townsend, Wilkinson, Allan, and Bamber (2012) found that mixed signals from higher levels of management from inconsistent messages received by line managers can pose a challenge. As such, middle managers are in a position where they can help in sending consistent messages to FLMs and frontline employees. As Currie and Procter (2001) found, FLMs hardly interact with senior management, resulting in feelings of detachment, which middle management can help to reduce. It is evident that higher levels of management and the HR department set up the intended PM system that FLMs have to implement. These organisational actors will also have expectations about the role of the FLMs within the PM system and how the FLMs should be implementing the PM system.

Frontline managers are in direct contact with frontline employees, and as such, are responsible for implementing PM to them; support from peers and superiors can help FLMs to navigate any role ambiguity or overload in their operational and PM responsibilities (Hunter & Renwick, 2009). From Figure 3, it is noticeable that the FLMs are positioned between higher levels of management and the frontline employees where they have to manage the varying demands and expectations of those above and below them. The role of FLMs has become extended, because they have taken on additional tasks and responsibilities previously associated with other organisational actors (Hales, 2005, 2006). In particular, there has been a decentralisation of people management down to line managers (and thus FLMs) over the past few decades (Harris, Doughty, & Kirk, 2002; Perry & Kulik, 2008). Frontline managers can facilitate the organisation's goals through implementing, controlling, and disseminating essential information to frontline employees (Ortiz & Ford, 2009); they are in a unique position where they can facilitate meaningfulness in the organisational context for frontline employees because they have wider knowledge of organisational processes and also participate in the mediation between management and practice (Lawler, 2015; Tummers & Knies, 2013). As defined in Chapter One (see 1.1 Thesis Introduction), this thesis characterises FLMs as the first level of management that is involved in day-

to-day operations rather than strategic matters, whom frontline employees with no managerial or supervisory responsibility report to (Armstrong, 2006; Bos-Nehles et al., 2006; Hales, 2005).

The decentralisation of HRM down to line managers and FLMs is not to say that other members of the organisation are not important in the PM system. They all play important roles and provide valuable support to FLMs, because the perception of support will affect how effective FLMs are in their abilities to manage their employees within the PM system (Hutchinson, 2013). Support from the HR department in particular is extremely important in the PM system. Armstrong (2011) described the HR department as a strategic partner that has to work with the various levels of management to be able to develop strategies and ensure that they are effectively distributed across the organisation. Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler (1997) also discussed the importance of the HR function in substantiating its HRM capabilities, as the skills and abilities of the HR department are required to support the implementation of HR practices such as PM. The visibility of the PM system boils down to how active the HR department is in promoting the system and how well performance is supported and rewarded (John & Björkman, 2015). However, Link and Müller (2015) found that the HR department plays “a solely administrative function... which fails to play an integrative role in aligning delegated HR work” (p. 297). Frontline managers face a lot of role ambiguity and overload in their jobs and support from the HR department can help them to manage and reduce such ambiguity and overload (Evans, 2016).

However, the goals of FLMs and the HR department tend to be different, affecting the delivery and acceptance of HR practices such as PM (Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper, & Brooks, 2016). Lack of time and a heavy workload can lead to FLMs focusing on the operational aspects of their job, resulting in a lack of attention paid to HR strategies (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Link & Müller, 2015; McConville, 2006). Hailey et al. (2005) argued that the HR department’s focus on the implementation of best practice HRM results in the erosion of commitment and loyalty of employees; these problems arise because the line managers lack the ability and motivation to be responsible for the people management aspect of their jobs. It is evident that a focus on just strategy, and assuming that all line managers, especially FLMs, are able to fulfil the human management aspect of HR, does not help the organisation’s performance and

productivity. As such, FLMs and the HR department need to be able to work harmoniously in order to achieve business success (Park, Gardner, & Wright, 2004). The literature shows that HR departments are important in ensuring PM systems are successfully carried out through their strategic planning and support given to line management in the implementation process.

### ***2.2.3 Why the Gap?***

Pulakos and O'Leary (2011) commented that the reduction of PM to “prescribed, often discrete steps within formal administrative systems” adds little value to the organisation, leading to disappointing results (p. 147). The presence of a PM system does not automatically guarantee its success. The open system that organisations operate in is influenced by the internal and external environment (Deb, 2009). An organisation’s culture influences the beliefs and behaviour of employees by providing them with shared assumptions, and these shared values impact how organisations achieve their performance goals and successes (Edgar & Geare, 2009; Ulrich, 1984). The organisational culture affects how the PM system is adopted because the internal environment influences how managers and employees respond to it (Aycan, Kanungo, & Sinha, 1999). Organisational culture and PM were found to be complementary rather than independent variables (ul Mujeeb & Ahmad, 2011) and differences in organisational culture across different organisations may mean that the same PM system can lead to different results (Kandula, 2006).

A part of any organisation’s culture is the tensions that each employee has an individual response to, which can affect employees’ work attitudes, behaviours, and performance (Rosen & Levy, 2013). According to Ferris, Russ, and Fandt (1989), these workplace tensions (or organisational politics) refer to activities that are not endorsed by the organisation that are carried out for personal gain without consideration for the organisation and other organisational actors. Tensions between people at work are unavoidable and can arise due to power struggles within decision making (Witt, 1995) or personality clashes. In addition to tensions between organisational actors, Redman (2009) argued that tensions are evident within the PM system and the performance appraisal process. Tensions within the performance appraisal process can impact employees’ impressions about fairness or bias (Poon, 2004). In particular, tensions

within the PM system can affect the performance of employees when actual performance is ignored and performance ratings are inflated or deflated to achieve the appraiser's self-serving goal (Dhiman & Maheshwari, 2013). Studies have been conducted on tensions in the appraisal process from the perspective of employees (e.g., Dhiman & Maheshwari, 2013; Poon, 2004). Although the experience of employees can help to shed light on how management handles workplace tension, little is known about how these workplace tensions affect managers in the PM process.

As discussed in systems theory, the levels of formality and informality in an organisation affect the implementation of PM. Schleicher et al.'s (2018) PM review used Nadler and Tushman's (1980) argument for formal and informal processes existing in an organisation concurrently in the development of their systems theory framework – formal processes are structured procedures developed explicitly for employees to perform for the achievement of organisational goals and are usually recorded in writing; while informal processes are implicit, tending to develop and emerge over time. Schleicher et al. (2018) also drew attention to the increased research attention on the impact of informal processes either beyond or in conjunction with formal processes but the “formal/informal distinction has not always been articulated clearly in the literature” (p. 15), and their review suggested that “the various formal and informal process elements of PM differ in how consistently they affect PM effectiveness” (p. 16). Additionally, Farndale et al.'s (2011) framework of intended, actual, and perceived practices interpreting HR practices was used by Schleicher et al. (2018) to further explain formal and informal processes where intended practices fall under formal processes and actual and perceived practices fall under informal processes. As discussed earlier (see 2.2.2 Performance Management Research Findings), this thesis sees intended, actual, and perceived practices as individual sub-systems within the PM system. Additionally, the thesis uses formal and informal systems instead of formal and informal processes to better illustrate the differences between the intended and actual PM systems and how the interactions between the various sub-systems (which function as individual systems) through the implementation of FLMs affect the complexity of the PM system.

Notably, the concept of custom and practice can be used to understand the interaction between formal and informal PM systems. Custom and practice refers to the unwritten

rules or informal systems that develop over time that regulate the workplace, even though they have not been formally established by management (Flanders, 1967). Employees in the work group establish these new norms, which are not contested by management (Fox, 1971), and even when management is not aware, can be considered binding (Clegg, 1970). W. Brown (1972) argued that custom and practice expectations in organisations can supersede the formal rules that are established. Managerial custom and practice also exists and can “supplant or fill gaps of interpretation within the relevant negotiated agreements of formal rules initiated by management” (Armstrong & Goodman, 1979, p. 14). Managers can use custom and practice to comply with what they think senior management expects (Brewster & Richbell, 1983). Consequently, the implementation of PM can be affected by the custom and practice within the organisation and work group. Deviation from the intended PM system can be affected by what organisational actors decide is the norm and acceptable within their work group, leading to the development of the formal and informal PM systems.

Other non-PM research has also discussed the importance of formal and informal systems in the workplace (e.g., Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend, Wilkinson, & Burgess, 2013) and this information can be used to understand how the interaction of formal and informal PM systems can affect the effectiveness of PM. Formal and informal systems have been shown to either complement or compete with each other. Formal and informal systems can complement each other, working together to support individuals (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013) where organisational actors can approach a workplace issue (e.g., performance feedback) through a formal and/or informal system. However, formal and informal systems can also compete with each other, working separately in the workplace, whereby some studies (e.g., Boxall, Haynes, & Freeman, 2007; Mohr & Zoghi, 2008; Schleicher et al., 2018) have argued for differentiation between formal and informal systems. In particular, the interactions between formal and informal PM systems are important and should not be neglected (Marchington & Suter, 2013).

#### ***2.2.4 New Public Management***

Systems theory can be used to understand PM systems within the public sector and the role of the FLM because it “potentially provides clarity of process, structure and method

which can help to focus perceptions with respect to issues” and it also promotes “understanding with respect to the overall complexity of the organisational situation generally” (Boland & Fowler, 2000, pp. 418-419). Different combinations or applications of the sub-systems within the PM system can lead to the same end goal. Equifinality in open systems was explained by Katz and Kahn (1978) as “the same final state from differing initial conditions and by a variety of paths” (p. 170), and can be reached as “there does not have to be a single method of achieving an objective” (p. 171). Specifically for PM, this would mean that there are many different routes that involve different configurations of formal and/or informal PM systems that can be taken to reach the intended PM goal (Schleicher et al., 2018). However, in order to better understand the role of FLMs in PM systems within the public sector, the new public management literature has to be reviewed.

There is an assumption, from which the new public management movement was founded, regarding the impression that private sector organisations tend to be more flexible and efficient than the public sector (Haque, 2002; Parrado-Díez, 1997). This assumption underpinned the move from *traditional public administration* towards *public management*, which was later termed new public management, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s in the United States and the United Kingdom before the governments of New Zealand and Australia also joined the movement (Gruening, 2001). This momentum then led to new public management administrative reforms being on the agendas of most OECD countries and other nations (Dunsire, 1995; Gruening, 2001). New public management reforms are based on adapting management techniques and practices from the private sector in order to become more efficient and cut costs (Larbi, 1999). Movement towards new public management is also perceived as being about rewarding individual performance at work when seniority has traditionally been the basis of promotion and reward within the public sector (Brown, 2004; Fischer, 2008; White, 2011). The move away from seniority-based systems in organisations allows for individual ability and performance to be rewarded (Arrowsmith, Nicholaisen, Bechter, and Nonell, 2010; Perkins & White, 2010; Perkins, White, & Jones, 2016).

According to Pollitt (2007), new public management can be defined as a bundle of specific components and processes that includes placing greater emphasis on

performance and outputs. As such, performance is a key part of new public management (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011) and PM is one of the defining characteristics of new public management (Christensen & Yoshimi, 2001; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). In his study, Gerrish (2006) found that PM systems that use “best practice techniques” (practices that are recommended by the PM literature) have a positive impact on performance in public sector organisations (p. 53). Additionally, it has also been argued that public sector organisations can use PM to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness in their activities, improve performance, and help management make decisions because PM serves as a planning, gathering, and management tool to assist the organisation in determining best practices and new ideas (Ewoh, 2011). However, new public management cannot be assumed to be a universal, one size fits all approach to improving the public sector (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Multiple influencing variables affect the success of new public management practices, and in some cases, “when inappropriately applied or incompetently implemented it can generate significant disbenefits” (Pollitt, 2003, p. 50).

O'Toole and Meier (2015) proposed that context is an important factor that influences public sector PM because it interacts with management, changing the relationship between management and performance. Context can be defined as “situation opportunities and constraints that affect the occurrence and meaning of organisational behaviour as well as functional relationships between variables” (Johns, 2006, p. 386). The public sector is inherently complex, because at any given time, the national and political climate influences the managerial culture, implicating managerial decisions based on the expectations placed on them (Lapsley & Skaerbaek, 2012). For example, Wang, Zhu, Mayson, and Chen (2017) found that China’s public sector organisational actors interpret and manipulate performance rules based on cultural factors. This can cause conflicts between objectivity and what they consider the norm, which may be subjective. Context heavily influences organisational HR practices, leading to varying consistencies of implementation or even success (Kim & Wright, 2011). As such, contextual factors should not be neglected, because managerial decisions and practices in the public sector can be affected (Andrews, 2016).

Rainey and Steinbauer (1999) explained that organisations with clear goals are likely to perform better. Literature has shown that goal ambiguity in the public sector can

undermine performance because goals in the public sector have been known to be more ambiguous than those in the private sector (Moynihan & Pandey, 2005). Public sector employees are intrinsically motivated through contributing to the organisations' goals (Campbell, 2018; van Loon, Kjeldsen, Andersen, Vandenabeele, & Leisink, 2018). As such, clear goals are necessary to help employees better understand what needs to be achieved and lead to higher performance. However, employees also need to be able to align the goal with their ability and opportunities, which could otherwise lead to reduced motivation (Wright & Davis, 2003). Supportive organisational cultures coupled with clear goals and missions are important to motivate employees to perform (Rainey & Steinbauer, 1999), and this is where management plays an intrinsic role in defining the organisation's culture (Campbell, 2018). Adherence to hierarchical structures and reporting is commonplace in the public sector to ensure control and accountability, with policy set by the higher ups permeating down the rest of the organisation (Kalgin, Podolskiy, Parfenteva, & Campbell, 2018; Stazyk, Pandey, & Wright, 2011). In particular, the power distance index indicates the dependence employees would have on their superiors; a high power distance culture relies on the superior's authority and decision, whereas a low power distance culture prefers including the decisions of and participation from subordinates (Hofstede, 1983, p. 51). Singapore was found to have high power distance (Hofstede, 2017), which affects how FLMs approach PM because the choices made by FLMs to counter performance problems or challenges will impact themselves and frontline employees (Campbell, 2015). The impact of high power distance in Singapore on the implementation of PM systems will be further examined throughout this thesis. This leads to the next element of this research, the role of FLMs in PM.

### **2.3 Managers in Performance Management**

Many organisations lack the time to evaluate the effectiveness of their PM systems. As such, these organisations then have “to make do with a standard solution that does not address their individual problems” (Fryer, Antony, & Ogden, 2009, p. 491). Additionally, organisational actors have different responsibilities and approaches, which can affect the implementation process of PM. In particular, line managers are the “key protagonists in performance management systems”, who may experience clashes between their responsibilities: motivating and developing their subordinates versus

judging and evaluating their subordinates' performance (Taylor, 2013, p. 24). A successful PM system lies in the hands of managers (Lado & Wilson, 1994), where Schleicher et al. (2018) suggested that they are likely to serve as “a key linking mechanism” between the formal and informal processes in organisations (p. 17). It is not uncommon for managers to rate their own division above others, or even above the rest of the organisation, due to the belief that they know their staff better than others (Manzoni, 2004). A standard text by Aguinis (2014) used many examples to explain the important role of managers in organisational PM. However, a comprehensive examination of the various levels of management in PM is lacking and Aguinis' (2014) textbook tended to take a consolidated view of managers, without taking into consideration the possible differences that different levels of managers have in the PM system. Existing research acknowledges the HR responsibilities that all line managers have, but largely ignores the existence of possible distinctions between these managerial levels (Hall & Torrington, 1998; Stanton, Young, Bartram, & Leggat, 2010).

Accordingly, the PM literature also tends to neglect the importance of the people implementing PM – line managers. Although many publications do include discussions about the various actors (e.g., managers, line managers, HR managers) in PM, there tends to be a lack of in-depth analysis (e.g., Aguinis, Joo, & Gottfredson, 2012; DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006; Haines & St-Onge, 2012). There is usually a customary nod towards their suggested responsibilities and duties; however, further analysis is lacking. The lack of research on managers within the PM system means we lack a full understanding of the implementation process. This is a problem, because the intended PM system is designed at the top of the organisation but does not necessarily get implemented. Understanding how managers choose to implement the actual PM system can show further insight into why there are deviations from what senior management and HR have designed for the organisation. For example, the DeNisi and Pritchard (2006) publication used the term *managers* only thrice and only briefly explained what they should do with performance appraisals, despite their intrinsic role in motivating employees to perform. In one aspect of their study, Haines and St-Onge (2012) focussed “on the extent of performance management training received by managers” (p. 1169); however, their discussion was merely around how organisations improved PM systems through training and employee recognition, rather than the impact of the managers,

despite their acknowledgement of the importance of human capital:

those organisations that provide more performance management training or that emphasize employee recognition also have performance management systems that deliver more valued outcomes.

Training managers to deal with the many challenges of performance management thus appears to be an approach with much promise. (Haines and St-Onge, 2012, p.1169)

Two major reviews on the relationship between HRM and performance by Boselie, Dietz, and Boon (2005) and Combs, Liu, Hall, and Ketchen (2006) found an association between HRM and performance; however, the lack of proof to justify causation led to the conclusion that the studies lacked evidence in explaining the association between HRM and performance. Nevertheless, the effective implementation of HRM could lead to an increase in individual and organisational performance (Wright & Nishii, 2013). Bowen and Ostroff (2004) discussed the importance of supervisors as “interpretive filters of HRM practices” (pp. 215-216). As such, it is implied that line managers are important in HRM effectiveness because they implement the HR policies and will therefore affect the HRM processes in organisations. Employee perceptions, influenced by how the organisations communicate their intentions for HR practices, both directly, through formal organisational communications, and indirectly, through their line managers, are also important for organisations to achieve their goals (Nishii, Lepak, & Schneider, 2008). Line managers are important in organisational HR policies (including PM) because there is the risk that they may fail to implement policies, or possibly worse, implement the policies badly (Guest, 2011). As discussed previously, there is a lack of distinction between the various managerial levels and a lack of literature specifically about FLMs in PM.

Frontline managers are a level of line management that many feel is critical and key to an organisation; however, they tend to be neglected in the literature (Hutchinson, 2008; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2010). Although FLM research and the material written about line managers, supervisors, or managers in PM could be related to what FLMs experience in PM because they are part of that larger group in organisations (e.g., Alfes, Truss, Soane, Rees, & Gatenby, 2013; Biron, Farndale, & Paauwe, 2011; Brown & Lim, 2019; Farndale et al., 2011; Fletcher, 2001; Goh et al., 2015), FLMs still play a

unique role within the PM system. Frontline managers are the link between higher levels of management and employees, where higher levels of management implement PM through them (Saville & Higgins, 1994). Despite plenty of research on FLMs and PM, there is the lack of a strong stream of research about FLMs in PM systems, which is surprising, because FLMs are responsible for the day-to-day management of frontline employees' performances.

### ***2.3.1 Frontline Managers in Performance Management Systems***

Line managers are involved in an extensive range of formal and informal PM activities because they are responsible for evaluating performance and providing feedback (Brown & Lim, 2019). Senior managers and the HR department are responsible for defining the objectives and the technical aspects of PM, respectively; however, FLMs are better able to “identify more accurately the needs and potential” of their employees (Biron et al., 2011, p. 1302). Frontline managers are also part of PM activities “which start as soon as an employee joins the organisation by way of induction and socialisation” and although they generally have key responsibilities in the performance appraisals and coaching of their direct reports, their other responsibilities in PM (e.g., staff development, disciplinary procedures, etc.), tend to be shared with the HR department (Hutchinson, 2013, p. 75). The actual implementation of the PM system also involves FLMs, which heavily influences frontline employees' perceived PM that contributes to, and influences the latter's corresponding attitudinal outcomes (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

The authority of FLMs has long been an area of interest for academics. Dunkerley (1975) emphasised that authority is not an independent component but it depends “upon the role and power” (p. 87). Authority can be defined simply as the right to make decisions and take actions that affect the organisation, including giving orders and instructions to others and the use of organisational resources; power can be defined as the ability or capacity to influence others so that they will respond favourably to the orders and instructions they receive (Greer & Plunkett, 2007; Prentice & Rabey, 1994). A FLM's authority originates from his or her position in the workplace (Leonard & Trusty, 2016). The number of subordinates reporting to a FLM is the span of a FLM's

control – the larger the span of control, the less possibility of close control; the optimal span of control also depends on the nature of work (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010).

As part of their supervisory responsibilities, FLMs are involved in the implementation of HR practices, including PM-related responsibilities. Frontline managers play an important role in the PM system because they are accountable for the performance of frontline employees, which affects the entire organisation (Thomson & Arney, 2015). With reference to den Hartog et al. (2004), FLMs “play a crucial mediating role” in implementing PM systems because they influence employee behaviour and performance (p. 562). Motivation levels of FLMs will affect the amount of discretionary effort used to implement PM as part of their work responsibilities (Domínguez-Falcón, Martín-Santana, & Saá-Pérez, 2016). The perception that FLMs have regarding HR practices (including PM) will affect their discretionary behaviour in how they choose to implement them (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). The role of FLMs in the PM system stems from their responsibility for both the individual and team performances of their subordinates. Throughout the years, there has been an increase in the interest and number of pieces published on FLMs; despite this, researchers in this field still tend to refer to three key studies: the book *Lost Managers* by Child and Partridge (1982), and the journal articles *Rooted in Supervision, Branching into Management: Continuity and Change in the Role of First-Line Manager* by Hales (2005), and *Front-Line Managers as Agents in the HRM-Performance Causal Chain: Theory, Analysis and Evidence* by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007). These pieces show the development, or lack of development, of the FLM’s role and job in the workplace over time.

Though dated, the study by Child and Partridge (1982) shows the complexity and vulnerability of the role of FLMs. The study showed that despite the increase in their level of responsibility, FLMs are restricted in the amount of authority they have, leaving them as “men in the middle” (Child & Partridge, 1982, pp. 46-47). The FLM’s job also involves handling uncertainty and pressure, making up a large portion of their role. The lack of corresponding authority for their responsibilities and the gap between their espoused job description and actual job completed leads many FLMs to feel unappreciated by higher management. As such, FLMs tend to struggle with their role due to role ambiguity and the discrepancies experienced (Child & Partridge, 1982).

The journal article by Hales (2005) is one of the most comprehensive modern studies on FLMs, focussing on describing the actual role of FLMs (who carry out the role and what the role entails). Even with FLMs as the first level of authority in organisations, they have been restricted in decision making. Hales' (2005) study noticed that "in most organisations, the FLM role has been enlarged" but rather than taking over the role and responsibilities of the middle manager, the new elements to the role have been integrated into the supervisory role (p. 494). An important insight that can be gained from this study is that the industry or structure of the organisation also affects the roles, responsibilities, and authority of the FLM. As such, when considering whether the role of the FLM has changed, the industry and organisational structures also impact the role of the FLM, because varying internal and external factors drive the changes that affect FLMs.

Lastly, the heavily cited article by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007) studies the link between people management and organisational performance through an examination of leadership behaviours and the enactment of HR policies. This study examined the influence that FLMs' leadership behaviour had on employee attitudes towards their job and their organisation, and the effect that employee perceptions about HR practices had on these attitudes. The study showed that "the gap between intended and actual [HR practices] is commonly experienced" and this is where FLMs exert significant impact on organisations (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007, p. 16). The successful implementation of HR policies and their employees' attitudes and perceptions rest heavily on their shoulders. Frontline managers can engage in discretionary behaviour by influencing the perceptions employees have regarding the gap between the intended and actual policies implemented. However, appropriate recruitment, training, and development are still required to ensure that the FLMs can provide the best experience to their employees, which in turn, affects the performance of the organisation (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

These three key studies demonstrate the conflicting pressures that FLMs face in their job from the expansion of their roles; because even though they lack the corresponding authority within the organisation, FLMs need to bridge the gap between the intended and actual PM systems to ensure that frontline employees are reaching organisational

targets. The FLM is often accountable for the communication of PM components (e.g. planning, reviewing, and reporting performance), and implementing efficiency improvements (Hales, 2006). As such, FLMs directly impact organisational performance as “key figures in building and sustaining an organisational culture that promotes high performance” (Brewer, 2005, p. 519). According to den Hartog et al. (2004) “most PM practices are facilitated and implemented by direct supervisors or FLMs” (p. 565); thus, the way that they implement these or behave will affect the perceptions that employees have regarding the effectiveness of the PM system. During the implementation process, FLMs need to deliver clear HR messages because this affects individual and team performances (Pak & Kim, 2016). Frontline employees also tend to have stronger ties with their FLM because they work together on a daily basis (Boxall & Macky, 2007) and the attitude of FLMs towards the organisation’s PM system can shape their employees’ culture towards it. Frontline managers also provide feedback to and evaluate their subordinates. Feedback can be planned and delivered formally and/or unplanned and delivered informally; however, feedback is not a one-off event – it is supposed to take place over the period of the PM process (London & Smither, 2002). A feedback interview can be used by the FLM and employee to “arrange exchanges and commitments by developing emotional engagements” (Davila & Elvira, 2007, p. 398). This thus allows for consistency within the PM system to ensure that the organisation’s goals are attainable. Evaluation can be done using performance appraisals where FLMs need to provide constructive feedback to their subordinates to ensure that their subordinates’ performance is managed beyond just monetary terms.

### ***2.3.2 The Frontline Manager in Practice***

The complex nature of PM systems was shown by Dewettinck and Vroonen (2016), who found that FLMs enact PM depending on their attitudes towards PM, which is affected by these antecedents: the organisation’s performance culture, the quality and amount of PM support by the HR department, and the FLM’s individual characteristics. Their study showed that the implementation of PM is more than the FLM – FLMs need the ability, motivation, and opportunity to implement the PM system that the organisation and other organisational actors can influence. In addition, FLMs have to balance their PM and other responsibilities within their role. Harris (2001) explained

that line managers do not view PM tasks positively, because they can not justify the time taken due to the increase in bureaucracy within the PM system; they also feel restricted by the formal monitoring processes, where the perception is that the organisation is interfering with how they manage their staff. Evidently, if FLMs do not value PM, this can impact the success levels of implementation (Goh et al., 2015).

Not all managers enjoy their PM responsibilities and many are either reluctant to provide negative feedback to their subordinates or unable to provide feedback constructively (O'Donnell, 1998). Frontline managers can face conflict between managing the performance of their employees and the relationships between them. Reporting poor performance can lead to repercussions (e.g., reduced trust) (Lewandowski, 2018); however, avoiding the management of poor performance can negatively impact employee performance because they are not able to understand where they excel and where they do not. The lack of reward for accurate ratings and the “often negative and immediate” consequences of low ratings can influence managers to inflate their appraisals (Murphy & Cleveland, 1995, p. 266). Frontline managers can choose to inflate their employees’ appraisals to protect the relationship that they have with their employees or to protect their performance collectively. Grint (1993) also illustrated the “lack of interpersonal skills” or abilities leading to managers “avoiding the task [of performance appraisal] wherever possible” (p. 63). As such, FLMs require interpersonal skills to communicate and interact with their employees to ensure that they are working towards their performance targets. However, if FLMs lack the ability to handle performance feedback (an important component of the PM system), this can lead to employees not performing up to expectations. The quality of the feedback given by FLMs can be improved through the provision of training (London & Smither, 2002).

The FLM’s ability affects how the PM system is implemented. Individual FLMs vary in their abilities and have different criteria regarding what constitutes good or poor performance, affecting how their employees’ performance is managed. Goodhew, Cammock, and Hamilton (2008) found that their sample of FLMs had the prerogative and authority to manage the poor performance of their employees, utilising previous experiences to modify how they managed new incidents. A conducive environment is required for the constant management of performance, where both parties are able to discuss work performance issues instead of waiting for formal performance appraisals

(O'Donnell & O'Brien, 2000). The sole use of monetary incentives to induce performance has the possibility of backfiring (Kessler & Purcell, 1992; Milkovich & Wigdor, 1991). Existing literature demonstrates that the implementation of PM systems is complicated and dynamic. The complexity of the implementation process can help to explain the gap experienced between the intended and actual PM system.

### ***2.3.3 The Gap Between the Intended and Actual Performance Management System***

Even though PM is intended to be used as a tool to achieve strategic outcomes, the actual implementation of the intended PM system can help to explain the difference between what is expected and what actually happens in the organisation (West & Blackman, 2015). The intended PM system and the actual PM system that is implemented by FLMs do not necessarily run in conjunction with each other. Existing literature can be grouped into five main factors that help to explain the gap between the intended and actual PM systems: 1) the promotion of FLMs into the role, 2) the intended PM system is instilled at the top, 3) the different focusses that FLMs have, 4) the culture of the organisation, and 5) formal versus informal PM systems. These are discussed in order.

Firstly, there is the tendency for FLMs to be promoted into their role due to seniority rather than suitability, leading to them being ill-prepared for their new responsibilities (Townsend et al., 2012). Individual FLMs differ in their ability, motivation, and opportunity during the implementation process, where they prioritise PM and other parts of their job differently (Li & Frenkel, 2016). Multiple FLMs who are observing the same performance can rate employees differently depending on their goals (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 162). Second, the intended PM system has policies and practices instilled at the top, which can lead to different experiences within the actual PM system. In particular, Rosen et al. (2016) explained that managers tend to deal with PM in a self-serving manner that is dependent on their work context – managers who faced fewer tensions with other organisational actors generally handled their responsibilities in accordance with the organisation's formal policies; accordingly, managers who experienced more significant levels of workplace tension were likely “to base personnel decisions on more informal criteria” (p. 13). As a result, the deviation from the intended PM system can be due to the FLM's own ability, motivation, and/or opportunity

impacts the implementation of the PM system because the inputs from the environment differ depending on the FLM.

Third, the FLM's focus can help to explain the gaps between intended and actual PM implementation. Consistency affects the PM system, because unlike HR personnel who are focussed on consistent application of policy, FLMs are motivated to focus on their work groups' immediate needs, which may limit consistency (Klaas & Wheeler, 1990). This shows the gap between the mechanistic management system (formal system) that is expected based on the formal policies in place and the organic management system (informal system) that is dependent on the decisions that FLMs make in their jobs. Cole (2008) also suggested that inconsistency was due to supervisors taking the employee's situation into consideration, as they are "concerned with fair treatment by providing opportunities for *voice* to their employees" (p. 113). The management of poor performance also provides FLMs with opportunities to learn from experience. Individual FLMs can learn from their own experiences or from others (Butterfield, Trevino, & Ball, 1996). For example, Cole (2008) commented that supervisors have a tendency to be lenient when disciplining employees, which she theorised as being related to previous experiences with union grievances. However, as FLMs consequently learn from experience, shaping their response to subsequent employee misconduct, it can further amplify inconsistencies in the management of poor performance.

Although training is necessary to allow FLMs to understand what their focus should be on and to be able to manage the performance of their employees, it does not solve all of the problems that they face. Training only improves the ability of FLMs who are willing to learn (Caldwell, 2000). Despite the increase in PM training given to line managers, few organisations hold them accountable for the effectiveness of the organisation's PM system, which affects their motivation because they have no incentive to execute that part of their job well (Cascio, 2012; Shore & Strauss, 2008). Line managers are generally measured by meeting their operational targets (e.g., sales) rather than their HR responsibilities, reducing their motivation and incentive to perform equally in both areas (Hailey et al., 2005). FLMs are also in a unique position where they are caught between facing pressures from higher levels of management and frontline employees, limiting their opportunity to reward and punish employees

(Brewer & Walker, 2013). The lack of accountability that FLMs have within the PM system influences how FLMs implement the intended PM system (Cascio, 2012; Shore & Strauss, 2008).

Fourth, the organisation's culture impacts the actual PM system that is utilised. The culture of the organisation also affects the amount of authority and power that FLMs have in their daily tasks, and as a result, how they handle their PM responsibilities. This is because organisational culture provides all employees with "a pattern of shared basic assumptions" (Schein, 2010, p. 18), which can be embedded strongly or weakly in HR practices, influencing the extent that FLMs are motivated to implement them consistently (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sørensen, 2002). In particular, bureaucracy is a key part of the public sector's culture. Weber (1964) defined bureaucracy as a "rational legal authority" where organisations follow the principle of hierarchy (p. 330). A bureaucratic organisation's hierarchal system appoints organisational actors into their position, setting the lines of authority and responsibility to follow the known policies in decision making (Garston, 1993). As such, it is clear that higher levels of management control and supervise lower ranking employees in bureaucratic organisations because they have the necessary authority to carry out their job. The high power distance in Singapore (Hofstede, 2017) limits the authority of the FLM within the workplace, because the authority of higher levels of management is acknowledged and tends to go unchallenged. In a highly bureaucratic organisation, the decisions are centralised because "the decisions at the top have priority" (Hyman, 2005, p. 144), and FLMs working in bureaucratic environments may experience "little freedom of action and few opportunities for development" because "the majority of decisions and initiatives are predetermined" (Vogel & Masal, 2012, p. 8).

The literature shows that the authority given to FLMs forms part of the organisation's culture. In many organisations, FLMs have multiple responsibilities without the corresponding level of formal authority. A FLM's formal authority within the PM system depends on what has been officially assigned through policy; however, he or she still has discretion through informal authority to get the job done. The formal rules within a highly bureaucratic organisation can officially restrict FLMs within formal systems, leading them to use informality because they lack the support, empowerment, and authority to carry out their daily tasks and activities effectively via formal channels

(Ortiz & Ford, 2009; Pagan & Franklin, 2003). Although organisations have rules and regulations, FLMs have the flexibility (within boundaries) of deviating from the intended system to get their job done (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). However, it is evident that informality in organisations and the authority of FLMs have a circular relationship – the level of informality used affects the authority of FLMs; the amount of authority of a FLM also affects the amount of informality they can use at work. Some organisations encourage the use of informality, where FLMs and employees generally prefer using informal systems to address situations (Townsend, Wilkinson, et al., 2013).

Informality allows FLMs to have more authority and power to influence the implementation of certain policies. Pagan and Franklin (2003) showed that an organisation with a flat and decentralised operating structure provided a “familial and informal” working environment where “a large degree of autonomy and discretion granted to the first-line supervisor” allowed for the FLMs to utilise a mixture of formal and informal systems to maintain productivity in the workplace (p. 66). When FLMs have authority in the workplace, they can use discretion to determine the use of formal and informal systems. However, the use of informality does not always benefit FLMs. Saundry, Jones, and Wibberley (2015) showed the complexities of informality, stating that it may be difficult for less-experienced FLMs, because it requires a certain amount of ability that needs to be developed with experience and time. Even though informality allows FLMs to be able to develop nuanced resolutions for individual situations, the more conflict management that is delegated to the line, the more FLMs are constricted and are “more rigid to their adherence to procedure” due to pressures from higher management for consistency in conflict handling (Saundry et al., 2015, p. 438). As such, even though FLMs can use informal systems, they still have limited authority that is restricted by higher levels of management. However, the limited authority of FLMs does not mean they are unable to use discretionary behaviour within the PM system. Notably, the FLM’s discretionary use of the formal and informal PM systems within an organisation is important in understanding the implementation of the intended PM system.

Lastly, despite the possible co-existence of formal and informal systems in organisations, Hunter and Renwick (2009) showed that line managers preferred the use of informality due to the cumbersome nature of formality, which some found to be

“confusing, ambiguous, or vague” (p. 405). The formal and informal PM systems can be used to understand the gap between the intended and actual PM systems (see 2.3.3 Why the Gap?). Even though the use of informal systems can lead to consistency issues, line managers can tap into their support system by using advice from peers and/or seniors in making HR decisions. Organisational support given to FLMs indicates prioritisation of the implementation of HR responsibilities – a supportive organisation can lead to FLMs reciprocating through performing their HR responsibilities effectively (McGovern, Gratton, Hope-Hailey, Stiles, & Truss, 1997; Op de Beeck, Wynen, & Hondeghem, 2018; Watson & Maxwell, 2007). However, many FLMs are stuck between balancing the formal and informal systems of their job, causing a paradox when the lines between them blur (Harris et al., 2002; Saundry et al., 2015). The difficulty that FLMs face in the implementation of formal and informal PM system can cause them to conflict with each other, causing the gaps between the intended and actual PM systems that are experienced by employees.

The gaps between intended and actual PM can cause consequences, one of which is the management of poor performance. Since the 1980s, the management of poor performance has been a ubiquitous reality in organisations due to the change in mindset that punishment should be avoided (Arvey & Ivancevich, 1980; Ball, Trevino, & Sims, 1994). The presence of PM systems in organisations can help to identify poor performance, allowing for changes to be made to rectify it (de Bruijn, 2002). Nevertheless, poor performance is also a facet of the PM system that FLMs widely struggle with. In particular, FLMs face challenges in employee discipline due to fairness and consistency issues (Tyler & Bies, 2015). Brown, Kulik, and Lim (2016) found that managers preferred using a best-fit strategy when distributing negative feedback to their subordinates. The FLMs are not *robotic conformists* (Marchington & Grugulis, 2000) and the modification of the intended PM system allows for individual employee needs to be met (Lewandowski, 2018); however, tailoring different approaches based on the recipients leaves more room for deviation from the intended system. Frontline managers can face a dilemma between needing to treat all of their employees fairly (e.g., all employees are provided performance feedback) while still allowing for individual responsiveness (e.g., employees have access to different developmental programs depending on their ability and contribution) (Fu et al., 2018). As such, FLMs need to balance being fair to employees, while also accommodating the

differing circumstances that each employee can face. However, fairness tends to be subjective, with employees tending to have different views about what constitutes fair and consistent treatment (Sheppard & Lewicki, 1987). Neu Morén (2013) found that FLMs emphasised the importance of fairness when they used performance appraisals as a basis for pay-setting, yet found it difficult to identify employees in the middle because they do not stand out compared to good and bad performers. That is to say, it is clear who the high performers and poor performers are; however, the majority of employees who perform adequately are difficult to differentiate.

In their comprehensive review of PM, Schleicher et al. (2018) suggested the need to place a focus on the manager as an essential actor in future PM research. The tendency for literature to conflate line and frontline management negates the important and unique roles that FLMs play in organisations – despite being responsible for frontline employees who make up the majority of the organisation, they lack the corresponding authority in their PM responsibilities, unlike higher levels of management (den Hartog et al., 2004; Hales, 2005; Leonard & Trusty, 2016; Thomson & Arney, 2015). Even though the reduction in middle management within organisations has resulted in the extension of the FLM's role, whereby additional tasks and responsibilities previously associated with middle managers have been taken on by FLMs, FLMs have not taken over the middle manager's position (Hales, 2005). Frontline managers still retain their supervisory roles and lack the decision making authority that middle managers have, limiting them in the decisions they can formally make regarding issues lying outside of routine matters to ensure operational continuity (Hales, 2005, 2006). The roles and responsibilities for middle and frontline management still remain in the workplace. Rather, it can be seen as an evolution of their roles as the workplace transforms and progresses in order to function optimally (Child and Partridge, 1982; Hales, 2005; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). As a result, even with overlaps in certain responsibilities across various levels of line managers, differences still remain due to a mismatch of duties and actual decision making capabilities. As such, the importance of FLMs in PM is not to be neglected and should be further investigated.

## **2.4 Ability, Motivation, and Opportunity (AMO) Theory and Leader-member Exchange (LMX) Theory**

The importance of FLMs in the PM system has been illustrated in the literature review and AMO theory can help to explain FLMs' implementation of PM systems. This theory posits that performance is an outcome of ability, motivation, and opportunity to perform (Purcell, 2003; Sterling & Boxall, 2013). Ability, motivation, and opportunity theory demonstrates how HR practices affect the attitudes and behaviours of all levels of employees in order to assist in the explanation of the relationship between HRM and organisational performance (Woodrow & Guest, 2014). It also suggests that people perform well when they have the necessary skills or ability to do so, the motivation to perform, and are given the opportunity to perform by their superiors (Truss et al., 2012). As such, AMO theory can help to explain the role of FLMs within a PM system through how they implement the organisation's PM system.

The three different components (ability, motivation, and opportunity) are influenced by the HR practices that are put in place by organisations. Ability is related to the skill or competence of the FLM (Gilbert et al., 2015); the ability of the FLM can be improved with organisational policies (e.g., recruitment, training and development) that attempt to influence and advance the knowledge and skills of individuals, enhancing the overall competencies of the labour pool (Lai & Saridakis, 2013). Next, motivation is related to the FLM's willingness to complete the work and how incentivised they are (Harney & Jordan, 2008); the FLM's motivation can be affected by policies (e.g., appraisals and rewards) that influence individuals to reciprocate what they have received from the organisation through positive work attitudes and behaviours, enhancing their efforts to perform well (Kooij & van de Voorde, 2015; Lai & Saridakis, 2013). Lastly, opportunity is related to FLMs having the time and necessary structures in place for them to be able to perform in their job (Gilbert et al., 2015; Harney & Jordan, 2008); the opportunity that FLMs have to do their jobs is influenced by empowerment-enhancing policies that are important to individuals, such as participation in decision making and the ability to exert their authority (Brothers, 2007). Despite the common individual components of AMO, existing literature has different views regarding AMO.

From a classic work performance theory point of view, the individual factors have a multiplicative relationship because they are complementary and influence performance

when they are all present to some degree and the absence of any one would affect performance; the extreme view goes on to express that the lack of any one component makes performance impossible (Blumberg & Pringle, 1982; Siemsen, Roth, & Balasubramanian, 2008). Other researchers believe that the individual factors have an additive relationship, because regardless of the other components, each component of AMO has a direct and independent contribution, where an increase in any one factor should result in increased levels of performance (e.g. Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006). Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) positioned themselves between the two extremes, combining the multiplicative and additive relationship between the individual factors. They found that opportunity strengthened the effect of ability, because line managers are better able to implement HR policies effectively with appropriate support from the organisation. Additionally, they argued against the effect of motivation, because it was found to have a detrimental impact on HR implementation, as highly motivated line managers tend to be constrained by the formal guidelines, restricting flexibility and freedom in the implementation process (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Kellner, Townsend, Wilkinson, Lawrence, and Greenfield (2016) further expanded the argument, as they found that the intrinsic role of motivation influenced the performance of FLMs because it is the interaction between ability and motivation and the input of opportunity affecting how FLMs perform in HRM systems.

The varying studies and research on AMO theory show that there is no single definition or understanding of it. Nevertheless, the use of AMO theory can explain how HRM practices and policies help to develop the attitudes, commitment, and motivation in organisational actors (Purcell, Kinnie, Hutchinson, Rayton, & Swart, 2003; Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). An organisation's HR practices affect the AMO that FLMs have when they implement PM systems. Consequently, the implementation of the PM system by individual FLMs will influence the AMO of frontline employees to perform (Katou & Budhwar, 2014). Existing literature using AMO theory tends to focus on frontline employees who are influenced by implemented HR practices in organisations (Guest, 1997). However, there has been a growth in research into AMO theory regarding line managers, with a small number specific to FLMs. For example, Harney and Jordan (2008) found that even though FLMs had the ability to do their jobs, their motivation and opportunities were affected due to the individualistic nature of their jobs, the lack of training, and the procedures that they had to adhere to. This study

therefore uses AMO theory to analyse how the AMO of FLMs affects their implementation of PM systems.

The AMO of FLMs may not be the only factor influencing how they implement the PM system. Gilbert et al. (2015) found positive links between the AMO of line managers and strong HRM processes, but they also noted the lack of negative relations between the two, creating a more nuanced explanation where the AMO of the line manager alone is not sufficient. Interpersonal relationships also affect the implementation of PM systems and Uhl-Bien, Graen, and Scandura (2000) suggested that research tends to show how well-developed relationships between leaders and subordinates (or high quality LMX) allow for better performance. Leader-member exchange can be defined as the working relationship between a leader and an employee (Thibodeaux & Hays-Thomas, 2005). It is a form of social exchange where leaders face constraints in their job and treat their individual subordinates differently (Deluga, 1994). Behaviours in the workplace involve a series of interactions that are usually interdependent and contingent upon the actions of another person, which then generates obligations (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005).

Social exchange can determine the reciprocation level that individuals develop depending on their perception of their relationship with others (Nishii et al., 2008). Employees are valued differently depending on their performance and competency, where those who are more competent have more exchanges with their superiors, establishing a closer relationship (Bass & Bass, 2008). When organisational actors perceive strong organisational support, they feel obligated to return the favour by delivering in performance (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Shanock and Eisenberger (2006) further explained the impact social exchange theory has on workplace performance, where the support FLMs receive from the organisation affects the support they give to their employees; these employees, when provided with strong support by their FLMs, will then in turn reciprocate by increasing their efforts in their jobs. Moreover, employees' perception of their supervisors' status within the organisation affects how they interpret perceived organisational support and perceived supervisor support (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). As such, LMX theory can also be used to understand how FLMs implement PM systems

based on their relationships with other organisational actors, which affects the level of reciprocity between them.

Hsiung and Tsai (2009) described the development of leader-member relationships through a role-making process, which helps to differentiate the types and qualities of relationship. Due to time and resource limitations, the relationships between leader and member range from high quality LMX relationships (accompanied with higher levels of mutual trust, respect, and communication) to low quality LMX relationships (based primarily on the formal employment contract) (Bauer & Green, 1996; Hsiung & Tsai, 2009). The relationship between leaders and members can impact the work experience and behavioural and attitudinal outcomes (Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012). A high quality LMX is believed to lead to high performance appraisals (Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009; Davis & Gardner, 2004). As such, if a FLM and employee have a high quality LMX, it can be assumed that the employee would have a better performance appraisal and have access to more programs in the organisation to help improve his or her performance further. On the other hand, if a FLM and employee have a low quality LMX, it can be assumed that the employee would not perform as well and have less access to any additional programs and tools to improve his or her performance further.

Both AMO and LMX theories can be used to understand the role of FLMs in the PM system because the theories are not necessarily independent of each other – the ability, motivation, and opportunity of a FLM can influence the LMX between a FLM and employee. It is possible that a FLM's capacity to develop a high quality LMX is related to his or her ability, motivation, and/or opportunity to interact with employees to develop their relationship.

## **2.5 Research Questions**

Based von Bertalanffy's (1950) definition of systems comprising of multiple components, the PM system is a part of an organisation's sub-system of the HR system. The PM system functions as its own system within the organisation and is intended to assist organisations to manage the performance of employees to better contribute to organisational performance (Farndale et al., 2011; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

However, despite the espoused benefits that the PM system is supposed to provide to organisations, research has shown that PM has not always been delivered and is often not delivered adequately (e.g. Morgan, 2006; Pulakos & O'Leary, 2011). In particular, the intended PM system that has been designed is not implemented as expected, leading to gaps between the intended PM system and the actual PM system (what is actually implemented in the workplace) (Goh et al., 2015). Additionally, there is also a lack of understanding regarding the interaction between formal and informal PM systems within the actual PM system, which affects the effectiveness of the intended PM system (Marchington & Suter, 2013; Schleicher et al., 2018). As such, Figure 4 depicts the framework used in this thesis, derived from the model by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007), which was modified for this thesis to fit PM systems and includes the various organisational actors as the foundation of the study, illustrating the complexity of the PM system. This framework serves as the basis for Chapters Five and Six, which relate to the analysis of the data.

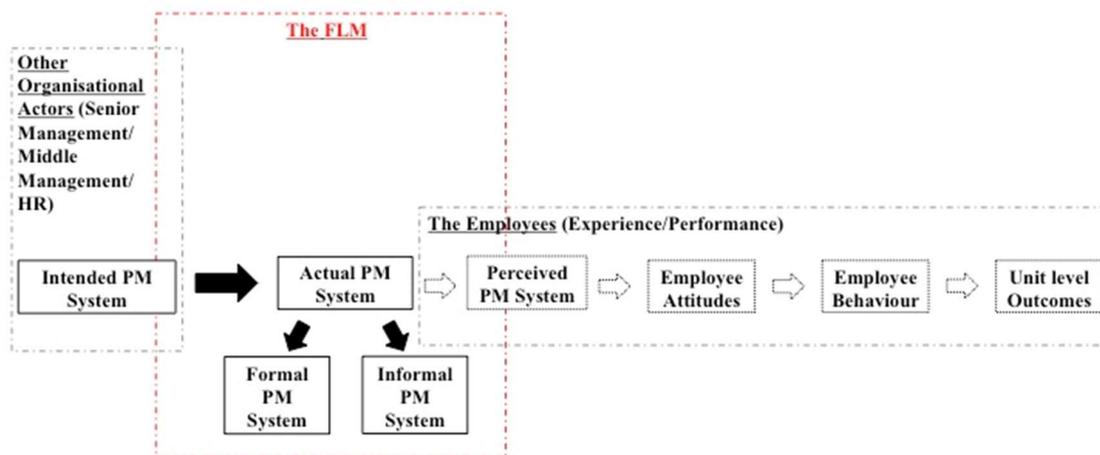


Figure 4. The performance management system in organisations. Adapted from Purcell and Hutchinson (2007).

This thesis focusses on the role of FLMs within the PM system because FLMs are such key characters within the implementation process. Thus, understanding their role within the PM system is important. Existing HR literature broadly illustrates the importance of the role of FLMs in general HRM; however, only a few studies have specifically examined the role of FLMs in relation to PM (e.g., Ahmed, Shields, White, & Wilbert, 2010; Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2016). Equally, researchers discussing the importance of FLMs in the implementation of policies do not view this as the central focus of the study (e.g. Boxall & Macky, 2007). Frontline managers are responsible for the day-to-

day management of frontline employees (Boxall & Macky, 2007; Thomson & Arney, 2015). As such, how FLMs choose to implement the PM system is an important area that needs to be studied, because they are in a position to impact the success or failure of a PM system. Not focusing on the FLM can lead to a lack of understanding about how FLMs carry out their PM responsibilities and the crucial role that FLMs play has led to previous calls for a more detailed understanding about how line managers implement HR policies. Little is known about the underlying processes that FLMs use to connect organisational policies and frontline employees to ensure performance (Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2016) or whether the PM system helps to facilitate the responsibilities of FLMs in their subordinates' performances, which can neglect the intricacy of, and dynamics within, the PM system. As such, this thesis examines how the PM system is implemented utilising systems theory with a focus on the role of the FLM using perspectives from organisational actors of all levels.

As the first line of managerial contact for employees, the FLM is a key actor within the PM system (Thomson & Arney, 2015). Frontline managers are relevant to the implementation of PM systems because their responsibility for both individual and team performances of frontline employees may impact the overall organisational performance (Brewer, 2005; den Hartog et al., 2004). In particular, FLMs bridge the gap between intended policies and actual implementation, and this impacts the frontline employees' experiences, and eventually, how they perform, based on how their performance has been managed (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007; Saville & Higgins, 1994). Additionally, the behaviours of other organisational actors likely influence how the FLM handles his or her responsibilities within the PM system. This is where the pressure they face from both ends of the organisational hierarchy can impact how they handle their PM responsibilities through the formal and informal PM systems.

Hence, gaps exist in our knowledge surrounding the implementation of the PM system in organisations. As such, this thesis examines the FLM's role within the PM system. This research aims to address the following research question:

***RQ1) What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?***

This question acts as a means to better understand the implementation of PM in

organisations and is therefore more specifically broken down into two sub-questions:

***RQ1a) How is the intended PM system implemented?***

***RQ2b) How do FLMS navigate the process of PM?***

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter began with an analysis of systems theory to determine how it could be used to understand the PM system. In addition, the literature review also examined existing literature in the fields of PM and frontline management. The analysis of the literature pointed to gaps in studies on PM: not using systems theory to understand PM, the interaction between the formal and informal PM systems, and a lack of focus on the manager. Performance management literature tends to focus on individual elements of the system (e.g., performance appraisal) rather than looking at the system as a whole. Additionally, there is also limited understanding of FLMS in PM systems in the Singapore public sector. Frontline managers play important roles in the implementation of PM systems for the majority of the organisation. Even though studies pertaining to line managers can be generalised to FLMS, there may still be differences between the organisational actors and how they choose to manage the performance of their employees. Multiple factors within the organisation can also affect how FLMS choose to implement PM systems. As such, the main research question was developed to better understand the role of FLMS within the PM system to illuminate the implementation of PM systems in organisations.

The following chapter discusses the research methodology used to frame the study.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided the literature review for this thesis. Existing PM and FLM literature exposed the gaps within our knowledge of how PM systems are implemented. Notably, there is a lack of research on the role of FLMs within the PM system, which is important, because they are responsible for the day-to-day management of frontline employee performance that heavily influences the organisation's performance. This chapter provides an explanation of the procedures used to explore the research questions outlined in the previous chapters. Specifically, the chapter details the chosen research methodology, reflecting the researcher's consideration of the paradigmatic framework, research design, and the data collection and analysis procedures. This chapter also describes the methodological limitations and addresses validity, reliability, and ethical issues.

### **3.1 The Research**

#### ***3.1.1 Philosophical Stance***

The research paradigm of any study is shaped by the ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (nature of knowledge), and the methodology that the researcher of that study chooses to take (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2013). In turn, the paradigm shapes how a qualitative researcher sees the world and acts in it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The philosophical stance is then supported by the research paradigm through the use of worldviews, breaking down the

complexity of the real world, directing how research should be done in a specific discipline and interpreting the results (Bryman, 1988). Creswell (2014) highlighted four main worldviews or paradigms: postpositivism, constructivism, transformative, and pragmatism.

As this study is focussed on the perceptions and beliefs that people have about the role of the FLM in PM, constructivism was deemed the most suitable, because it is “oriented to the production of reconstructed understandings of the social world”, valuing “transactional knowledge” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 92). Constructivists regard realities as relative and multifaceted, where the opinion or experience of a person shapes them (Guba, 1990). Here, the use of a constructive lens allowed the researcher to gain greater comprehension of the phenomenon under study through people’s perceptions (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). As a result, the collaborative process between the researcher and participants helped create knowledge through the co-created findings and reconstructions (Lincoln et al., 2011). Symbolic interactionism, which has an interpretive centre, was also applied in this study to compliment constructivism. It was used to investigate different people and everyday situations by examining the creation and dissemination of meaning through peoples’ actions and behaviours in various social situations, affecting and influencing the following interactions (Babbie, 2013; Shalin, 1993). The perspectives of participants and how they dealt with “things” were examined (O’Donoghue, 2007, p. 190) by seeing evidence as a process to collect meaningful information through symbolic filters or collective meanings that control accepted actions (Altheide & Johnson, 2011).

Due to the true value of the research coming from the respondents’ interpretation of various situations, a primarily inductive approach was also applied in this study. This allowed for a greater understanding of the actions and behaviours from the participant's point of view, which was dependent on the context (Tracy, 2013). The data collected from respondents were used as a starting point, where patterns and themes were analysed and categorised (Creswell, 2014) in order to explore the implementation of PM.

### ***3.1.2 Case Study Approach***

A case study of social science field research was used to examine the phenomenon of the perspectives on the role of FLMs in PM systems through interview data. Even though it was possible to use various other methods to process the data in order to answer the research

question, the use of case studies allowed the phenomenon to be studied and understood in its natural context, from the respondents' individual perspectives (Stake 1995 in Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Merriam, 2010). Case studies allowed for greater depth when delving into the phenomenon being studied. According to Yin (2009), case studies can be used in many situations, but they are more relevant in explaining “*how* or *why* some social phenomenon works” through contributing “to our knowledge of individual, group, organisational, social, political, and related phenomena” (p. 4). As the two research sub-questions sought to answer the main research question by asking the *how* questions, the use of case studies helped to answer the explanatory nature of the study that the researcher had no control over (Yin, 2009).

The study was based on data collected from the two case organisations. Although some researchers (e.g., Dyer & Wilkins, 1991) have highlighted the benefits of a single case design, others (e.g., Stavros & Westberg, 2009) have echoed Yin (2009) in indicating that a case study with multiple sources of evidence would ensure that the “converging lines of inquiry” allows the study to be more robust (p. 115). Additionally, the two different cases served as forms of different data sources and allowed for *data source triangulation* (Evers & van Staa, 2010; McMurray, Pace, & Scott, 2004). Eisenhardt (1989) also asserted that “triangulation provides a stronger substantiation of constructs and hypotheses” (p. 538). Here, case studies using several data sources provided various perceptions regarding a single reality, which helped to increase the rigour of the study, because the researcher searched for convergences in the different data (Healy & Perry, 2000). Multiple data sources also allowed the researcher to create a story that honoured the participants' meaning-making development via processes of interpretation, which possibly allowed the researcher to evolve and broaden understanding about the topic (Krauss, 2005).

This study took a qualitative approach. The choice of qualitative methods for the study was justified due to the focus on the knowledge building process placed on the thoughts and experiences that different levels of management had about the meanings and perceptions of the role of FLMS in PM systems within their organisations. This would be difficult to express and explain merely through numbers or statistics (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A qualitative method allowed for the understanding of what the participants' values-in-use were, and how those values, rather than just their adopted values, were applied to their everyday lives (Tracy, 2013). Moreover, due to the constantly shifting and situation-based reality of the study, qualitative analysis was deemed more difficult, as such analysis is centred around a stagnated

and numerically determinable reality (Minichiello, Rosalie, & Hays, 2008). Hence, in addition to organisational policy documents, interviews were used to allow for inquiry into, and the understanding of, the participants' experiences (Seidman, 2013).

### **3.2 Research Design**

This thesis adopted case studies to examine the role of FLMs through the use of qualitative interview data. This use of interviews enabled a greater understanding of other people's experiences, including the meanings that they made of it; it was through interviews that the researcher was able to inquire about these experiences (Seidman, 2013). Interviews also fit well with the constructivist paradigm, because the realities were co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee; it was a collaborative process throughout the interviews where stories were created and constructed (Montgomery, 2012; Nunkoosing, 2005). Supplementary documents provided by the organisations regarding their PM systems were also used.

Based on the interest in the perceptions that people have about FLMs in PM systems, this research used in-depth semi-structured interviews with the various levels of management and the HR department. Interviews allowed for the co-production of content by the interviewer and interviewee working together (Wengraf, 2001). In-depth interviews allowed for the researcher to take a phenomenological approach to understanding and interpreting the "lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (Seidman, 2013, p. 9). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed for more control over the direction of the interview compared to unstructured interviews; in contrast to structured interviews, it did not restrict the answers that respondents had to adhere to (Ayres, 2008). As the study benefited from the thick description and nuances that respondents provided in their responses to study the phenomenon of PM, semi-structured interviews were selected for this study because they allowed the researcher to maintain structure and consistency in the questions asked, but still allowed for the conversation to be able to flow more naturally based on the interviewee and context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The researcher was able to tailor the interview depending on the context, rephrasing questions or posing additional inquiries, allowing for the interviewees' point of view, or even the development of new ideas on certain topics to be expressed (Merriam, 2009). While the use of leading questions was avoided, probing questions were used to "elicit information more fully than the original questions which introduced a topic" (Klenke, 2016, p. 132), allowing for respondents to be more specific in their responses and avoid generalities.

### **3.2.1 Unit of Analysis**

The main unit of analysis in this study was FLMS. However, the unit of analysis was also dependant on the specific research question. Sub-question one examined the implementation process of the PM system. The second sub-question was concerned with the influence of FLMS within the PM system through the perception and experiences of other organisational actors. All interview participants assisted in answering the three research questions with varying focusses. Outside of these units of analysis, the relationship between the different levels of management and the HR department was also an important factor for consideration. The various levels of management in the organisations were “typical of the phenomenon under examination” (Tracy, 2013, p. 137), because they had to respond to and were responsible for the PM of the organisation.

### **3.2.2 The Sample**

To better understand the phenomenon of FLMS in PM systems, the sample consisted of two large case organisations. The study was conducted using hierarchical samples from two large public sector organisations from different sectors in Singapore. PublicWorks (pseudonym) was the larger organisation, with a headcount of more than 5,000 employees in the infrastructure and environment sector. Participants were recruited from the construction division, which had four departments led by the director (#1.24). In contrast, AdminInc (pseudonym) had over 500 employees and was in the central administration sector. The participants were from two departments that were also led by the director (#2.29). The following chapter provides more information about the sampled participants and the intended PM system through PM expectations.

The organisations were sampled through *typical instance sampling*, where they were “typical of the phenomenon under examination” (Tracy, 2013, p. 137), with the intent that they suitably represented the majority of perceptions about the role of FLMS in PM systems (Cleary, Horsfall, & Hayter, 2014). Large organisations tend to have established intended PM systems in place that are managed by their line managers. The selection of two organisations from the public sector in different fields allowed for comparisons to be made within and between the

cases, as shown in Figure 5. This allowed for a comparison across departments, locations, and management styles.

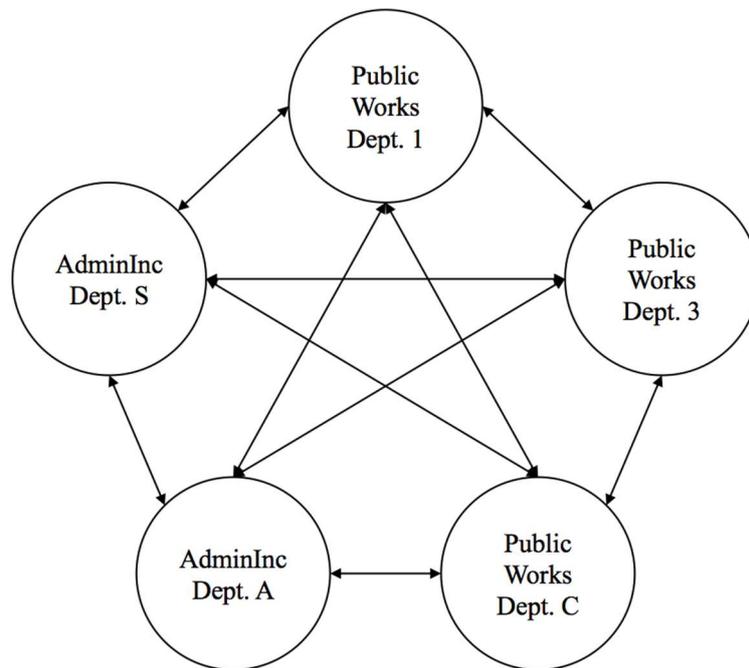


Figure 5. The cross-case analyses.

The two organisations had five departments in total to be sampled, allowing for multiple levels of analyses. The figure above shows that the three departments from PublicWorks and two departments from AdminInc allowed for comparisons of difference, if any, within the individual organisations themselves. Additionally, the departments sampled from PublicWorks and AdminInc also allowed for comparisons between the organisations to be done. This cross-case strategy increased the accuracy and reliability of the research findings by providing multiple lenses that were used to analyse the data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Table 2

*Interview Participants from PublicWorks and AdminInc*

Organisation	FLEs	FLMs	MM	SM	HR	Interviewees	Total
PublicWorks	3	15	6	1	2	27	57
AdminInc	20	5	3	2	0	30	

Table 2 provides a representation of the participants from both organisations. There were 57 interview participants from both organisations in total – a number at the upper end of the recommendations for qualitative case comparisons provided by Saunders and Townsend

(2016). The selection of senior managers, middle managers, FLMs, and members of the HR department where possible, allowed for a horizontal and vertical slice of the department's employee representation. Participants from both organisations consisted of senior management, middle management, frontline management, and frontline employees provide a view from above and below. Despite the sampled participants being under the same senior management, the directors, different employees were managed by different middle or frontline managers. This hierarchical sampling frame enabled any similarities or differences, if any, to be demonstrated.

The interviews ranged from around 30 minutes to one and a half hours, but were generally around 45 minutes long. There was no opportunity for repeat interviews; however, emails were sent to four participants to gather additional information and clarification. Commonly, saturation would be reached between 20 and 30 interviews of this style with a heterogeneous sample (Creswell, 2013). However, given the phenomenon under investigation and erring on the side of caution, all 57 respondents were interviewed and analysed (Seidman, 2013).

### **3.3 Data Collection and Analysis**

#### ***3.3.1 Access***

As the research was focussed on PM systems in public sector organisations, the Singapore Government Directory (Ministry of Communications and Information, 2016) was used to identify ministries, statutory boards, organs of state, and public services. The organisations were identified, with their various gatekeepers shortlisted, before they were contacted via email to express the researcher's interest in interviewing members of their organisation. The email contained an overview of the study, including the aims, methods, anticipated outcomes, the potential benefits to their organisation resulting from the study, the demographic of the participants required, and the time commitments required from them (Jennings, 2005; King & Horrocks, 2010). The email sent to the organisations is available in Appendix A.

Only PublicWorks' gatekeeper responded positively to the access email and access was eventually achieved through multiple emails with various members of the organisation to negotiate access and approval. This was also limited to only one division with a headcount of around 160 staff; employees there either worked in the headquarters of the organisation or on various work sites, allowing for a cross sample of participants. Notably, the director was in

charge of identifying the participants for interviews and he mentioned that in his selection of the employees, he chose them based on their political alignment. This was because of certain differences between him and his superior, in which the latter would not appreciate staff working on activities that he felt were not directly related to their work. As such, the director chose employees based on who he felt would not speak to his superior about their participation in the interviews.

AdminInc was recruited through the recommendation of the gatekeeper from PublicWorks. The gatekeeper introduced the director of AdminInc to be part of the study. Access was negotiated by email with the director, who agreed to be interviewed in addition to those of her staff who were available. Heading two divisions allowed for participants from both, who were selected based on their availability during the data collection period. However, although two members of the HR department were interviewed at PublicWorks, none were interviewed at AdminInc. This was despite numerous approaches for participants to be made available. AdminInc's HR documents were obtained from one of the interview participants instead.

### ***3.3.2 Data Collection***

#### *Interviews*

Following confirmation from the organisations, the study's qualitative respondent interviews were carried out over a 12-week and 10-week period at PublicWorks and AdminInc, respectively. The interviews were arranged by a contact assigned by the directors, accommodating the work schedules of the participants. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in consideration of the theme, allowing for topics of interest to be adequately covered but still allowing room for exploration (Cook, 2008; Flin, O'Connor, & Crichton, 2008). Participants were selected by the director at PublicWorks and there was a call for volunteers from each division identified to take part in the interviews at AdminInc. However, the final selection of participants at AdminInc was finalised by the contact person and the director to ensure that there was an appropriate representation (different levels of management, different teams, etc.) from each division. Senior managers, middle managers, FLMS, and at PublicWorks, members of the HR department, were interviewed, allowing for a horizontal and vertical slice of the division's employee representation.

The semi-structured interviews were completed and recorded by the researcher. This was done in private meeting rooms to ensure anonymity and confidentiality as most of the participants, except the directors, worked in common working spaces. At PublicWorks, the director's interview was also carried out in a meeting room in a separate building due to underlying conflict with his superior. He felt it would be better not to let his superior know that he was doing an interview for the research during office hours. Most of the interviews were done individually; however, just before the interview, the director from AdminInc announced that her deputy would be joining the interview as well. This took place in the director's office. Most of the interviews lasted for around 45 minutes, following the required research ethics discussion and explanation of the study's purpose that also allowed for any questions by the participants to be answered. A consent form and information sheet outlining the study was also distributed to interview participants before the interviews started (see Appendix B). In the case of multiple interviews in a day, they were generally scheduled to start every one and a half hours, which left some buffer time in case the respondents went over the time allocated; it also allowed for the researcher to have time after each interview to note down themes that emerged as the interviews progressed.

The interviews began with demographic questions about the respondent. Respondents were also encouraged to talk about their job, their organisation's PM system, and their perception of their responsibilities within the PM system. Those in the HR department, middle, and senior managerial positions were also asked to talk about their perceptions and experiences of the FLM's role in the PM system. Leading questions were avoided because they could affect and influence the responses from the respondents (Merriam, 2009). The questions posed served more as a guideline, where the interviewer would help to facilitate the information from the participants to be generated. The use of leading questions may have influenced or pressured respondents to conform to what seemed to be expected by the interviewer and this may have then affected the credibility of the data, as it might not be recognisable by others who shared the same experience (King & Horrocks, 2010; Krefting, 1991). Probing questions were also used when further information regarding a particular issue or experience brought up by the participant was required (Whiting, 2008). Three different interview protocols were developed – one set was for all interviewees, one set was for FLMs only, and one set was for higher levels of management and the HR department only. Each protocol consisted of a list of questions that served as prompts during the interview that would answer at least one of the research questions. The three interview protocols are available in Appendix C.

The researcher transcribed the first ten recorded interviews of each organisation to gain an understanding of the themes that were developing and to allow for modification of the research questions for the remaining interviews; the remainder of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber and checked by the researcher to ensure accuracy and consistency. Although the interviews were conducted in English, several of the interviewees used local slang that was not part of the official English language and/or used Mandarin or Malay phrases to convey their perceptions on the questions being posed to them. All of these have been translated into English and reworded in the analysis chapters. Moreover, a small number of interviewees spoke in broken English, which was later paraphrased; however, the original meaning has been conveyed. As a Singaporean native, the researcher is proficient in such local dialects and conversational norms.

### *Documents*

Several participants from both organisations provided organisational documents related to the PM system in place. This included internal information regarding the intended PM system (e.g., PowerPoint presentations, guides, etc.) and organisational structure charts. Such information was shared either in hard copy format or through email following the interviews. Some confidential documents were shared that can not be discussed directly in the thesis. The provision of such information assisted in informing the study and provided a better understanding of the cases being studied but is not included in the reference list.

### **3.3.3 Data Analysis**

The generic attributes of the interview respondents were first documented. This was drawn from attribute coding, where essential participant information and contexts were organised, allowing for more direct location of information to be analysed and interpreted (Saldaña, 2013). The respondents' basic and demographic information were first arranged according to their respective departments (see Appendix D) before two hierarchy charts were created for both organisations, respectively. The hierarchy chart is discussed in Chapter Four, and represents the various roles that the respondents had, as well as the relationships between them. The process of identifying the various levels of line managers was therefore simplified.

During the analysis stage of the data, the following techniques were used: combining data units, generating meaning of data, and inductive thematic analysis. The combination of data units was done by grouping responses from interviews together under the same topic, regardless of whether they came from the same interviewee or not (Klenke, 2016). This was done in the coding stage by assigning codes to the relevant interview responses, which then allowed for those addressing the same issue to fall under the same categorisation, allowing for meaning to be generated. The meaning generation of the data was completed by “selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving them order, and thereby making sense of them that makes telling stories a meaning-making experience” (Seidman, 2013, p. 7). Meaning from the data was compiled by isolating impactful statements from the interviews and coding them appropriately to be used in the analysis chapters, as well as in the generation of themes later on. Lastly, inductive thematic analysis was performed through the constant re-reading of the interviews in order to revise the codes, and by comparing the information against the codes. “Themes emerge from and are grounded in the data” and it was through this that overarching patterns were seen (Lapadat, 2010, p. 926). This process allowed the researcher to develop themes for the data, which were then compared to the existing literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

### ***3.3.4 Rigour of the study***

As objectivity cannot be achieved in constructive paradigms, this qualitative research has value in its subjectivity observed in the transactional activities between the various members in society (Kirk & Miller, 1986; Lincoln et al., 2011). Thus, this study made use of the criteria that Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided, of which the rigour of an interpretive research would be determined; that is, the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Firstly, credibility was achieved in this study through checking for representativeness of the data as a whole (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Unadulterated first thoughts from the respondents were valued, ruling out the use of member checking. Therefore, checking for similarities within and across the respondents through reviewing the individual transcripts was undertaken (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Additionally, not discarding and citing any deviant cases also helped with credibility, as it illustrated that the researcher was not only considering the cases and responses that supported the researcher’s theory and biases (Saumure & Given, 2008). Next, transferability, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985) is “how one determines the extent

to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects/participants” (p. 290). As generalisability is not the goal of qualitative research, there is a need for respondents’ perspectives coupled with sufficient information to be recorded in detail for the reader to be able to evaluate the findings and see how they may apply to other situations (Sharts-Hopko, 2002). Thus, in this study, rich, thick descriptions of the original context are provided so that readers can make the judgement of transferability (Creswell, 2013; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011).

Following transferability, dependability was achieved by a “clear audit trail” in this study (Murphy & Yelder, 2010, p. 66). This was achieved through outlining the decisions made throughout the research process to provide the rationale for the methodological and interpretative judgement of the researcher’s choices. The audit trail allows readers to examine the process of how the study was carried out to ensure consistency and present faithful descriptions recognisable to the readers (Houghton et al., 2013). Dependability was also improved during the coding process by comparing and discussing the codes produced by the researcher with a secondary coder (Klenke, 2016; Saumure & Given, 2008). The documentation of the various methods and procedures of the research also helped in reducing possible errors and biases (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011; Yin, 2009). The last component of rigour is confirmability, which refers to the adequacy of the information reported in the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote about the inclusion of the raw data in all forms; for example, the data reduction and analysis process, and even connecting the existing literature to the emergent concepts. Full and detailed descriptions of the process of data collection have been incorporated, which makes it possible for the reader to locate any information needed, or even to some extent, replicate the study.

### **3.4 Limitations of Research Methodology**

As with all studies and research, this study is not free from limitations. The generalisability of the findings can be limited due to the small sample size of two organisations (Yin, 2009) and the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews that resulted in specific information being obtained from the interviewees (Klenke, 2016). However, increasing the number of case organisations can dilute the in-depth study that the case study method can bring (Yin, 2013). As such, having two case studies was optimal for this thesis. Another area of concern is that the selection of the organisations and participants was not random, restricting the ability to

claim these findings as representative (Yin, 2009). The director from PublicWorks and the director and contact person from AdminInc selected the participants and organised and scheduled the interviews. As such, the researcher acknowledges the possibility that the selected interviewees may not be representative of the population. In addition, the selection of the interview participants could have been done to reflect positively on the organisations. The mismatch between the number of FLMs and frontline employees (see Table 2 in 3.2.2 The Sample) sampled from both case organisations could have affected the representation of beliefs and perceptions of the interviewees. Lastly, although the study used willing participants and the data were de-identified, participants may have felt compelled to answer in a certain way or even inflated their support or endorsement of their FLMs and the PM system. As such, it was important to ensure that the participants were aware that their responses were confidential and that they should not be pressured to answer in any particular way.

### **3.5 Ethical Consideration**

Ethical clearance was sought from Griffith University prior to contacting the participants (GU Ref No: 2016/342). This study was conducted in line with the university's ethical guidelines. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed respecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, all data was de-identified to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and organisations.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provided the justification for the use of qualitative research methods as the research design for this project in conjunction with the interpretive constructivist paradigm and the research aims. A detailed overview of the research process underpinning the study was also provided. A case study approach utilising in-depth semi-structured interviews and formal documentation was used for this thesis. The sample was drawn from two large public sector organisations, with five different departments, allowing for comparisons within and between the two case organisations. Interviewees included a selection of senior, middle, and frontline management, frontline employees, and members of the HR department. The data collection and data analysis methods were described, as well as the processes utilised to identify themes and results. Lastly, limitations associated with the research methodology were also addressed.

The following chapters (Chapters Four, Five, and Six) draw on the data collected throughout the processes described in this chapter to address the research aims. Firstly, Chapter Four provides information on the hierarchy within the two case organisations and the intended PM system, as dictated by formal policy and documents.

## **Chapter Four: The Cases**

### **4.0 Introduction**

Chapter Three discussed the research methodology used for this qualitative two case comparative study. Chapter Four provides further detail about the two organisations that served as the case studies. The chapter provides more insight into the hierarchy of the interviewees to allow for better understanding of the organisational contexts. The policies from both organisations, based on what was publicly available to all working in the organisation, are also discussed; setting up the intended PM system that functioned as a set of formalised PM expectations that all employees of the organisations (including managers) operated within. In addition, information provided by senior management regarding the intended PM system in the organisations is also discussed to provide insight into components not openly shared with all levels of the organisation and their own attitudes towards the intended PM system.

### **4.1 Singapore's Public Sector**

This section details information about the public sector in Singapore, specifically through information obtained from the Public Service Division, a department in the Prime Minister's Office that provides "policy directions for shaping the Public Service through public sector leadership development and implementing progressive and effective Human Resource and Development policies" (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017a). The Singapore Public Service employs about 145,000 officers in 16 Ministries and more than 50 Statutory Boards; within the Public Service is the Civil Service, comprising about 84,000 officers in the Ministries (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017d). According to the Public Service

Division, the work done by the public service bodies can be categorised into five sectors: central administration, security, social, infrastructure and environment, and economy (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017b). The department has a stated policy that every employee in service should develop their talent and ability to their potential (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017b). This has resulted in each public service employee being given up to 100 hours of training each year, opportunities for job rotations within and across the public sector, and chances for further education (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017b). As discussed in Chapter One, the introduction of 'Public Service for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' in 1995 was to help drive change in the public sector, equipping and empowering civil servants at all levels to deal with their work responsibilities (Singapore: Prime Minister's Office, 2017c).

## **4.2 Case One – PublicWorks**

Under the public service, PublicWorks operated in the infrastructure and environment sector. The entire organisation had more than 5,000 employees responsible for various stages of infrastructure development in Singapore. As previously explained in Chapter Three, interviewees were from one division in the organisation that had around 160 employees and were selected based on the director's impression of their relationship with him and his superior.

### ***4.2.1 PublicWorks's Hierarchy***

Figure 6 shows the breakdown and hierarchy of the 27 participants from PublicWorks. This included two HR and 25 operational individuals from four different departments within a division. Notably, interviewee #1.25 was the only one from Department 2 and could not be considered representative of a department; only three departments were sampled from this organisation. Interviewing two members of the HR department allowed for HR's perception about PM in the organisation and understanding the roles and responsibilities of the FLMs in the PM system from the HR department's perspective.

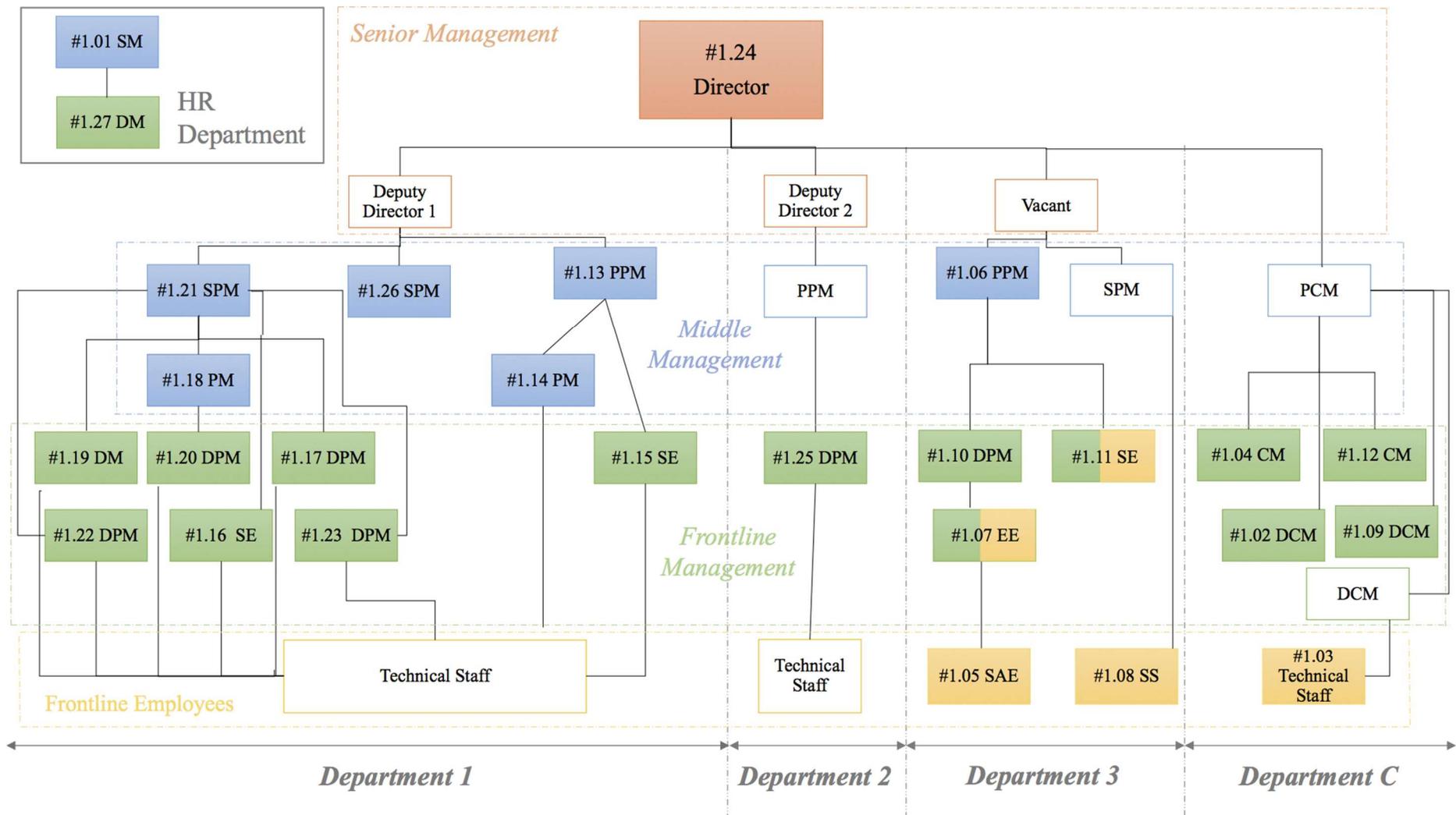


Figure 6. Hierarchy of PublicWorks' interviewees.

The FLMs were generally responsible for around two to three frontline employees and were recognised as reporting officers within the intended PM system. Department C FLMs (interviewees #1.02, #1.04, #1.09, and #1.12) provided support to the various teams from Department 1, 2, and 3, and they generally oversaw two to three frontline employees under them. Interviewee #1.19 performed an administrative role for the division based in headquarters and was responsible for 16 employees due to the nature of her work, in which the division's drivers reported to her. The remainder of the FLMs managed a team on a project basis. Interviewee #1.17 was only responsible for one employee because at that point in time she was not on an active project; interviewees #1.18, #1.20, and #1.25 were responsible for five to six employees because they were working on larger project sites that required more manpower.

Figure 6 also shows that the roles of FLMs were not that clear cut. Even though frontline employees reported to interviewees #1.07, #1.11, and #1.15, they were not formally considered FLMs (or reporting officers) within the intended PM system because they were only responsible for the day-to-day performance of their staff; the next level of superiors was responsible for the annual performance review of the frontline employees under these FLMs. Although these FLMs had an obligation to ensure that frontline employees under them were performing, they had no formal PM responsibilities. The director (#1.24) explained that FLMs in such a predicament had either not proven their capabilities and were provided with fewer responsibilities or that they were taking on more than their peers to prepare them for more responsibility in future; this was not made aware to the FLMs. These FLMs had little to no input through formal paperwork and it could be inferred that the skills and abilities of an FLM could affect his or her opportunities for more complex roles – one of which was managing more employees. Higher levels of management had to feel confident that the FLM would be able to handle the workload and number of employees before being offered the opportunity for a greater span of control. It should also be noted that some working groups in the organisation had multiple layers of frontline or middle management due to the overlapping responsibilities in the different roles. This is in line with what two key literature pieces from Child and Partridge (1982) and Hales (2005) discussed about the complexity of the FLM's role in practice.

Interviewees from this work group mostly either operated out of the organisation's headquarters or at various site locations across Singapore. In general, the FLMs and frontline employees were based on site locations as part of their job to monitor and manage the progress of the construction works. A FLM oversaw a team of frontline employees at a designated worksite and was responsible for the smooth running of the project there. Middle and senior managers, on the other hand, tended to be based at the headquarters because they were in charge of overseeing more than one work group. However, there were FLMs who also had their work based at headquarters due to the additional ad hoc tasks and responsibilities they had outside of their day-to-day work tasks, which required them to be easily accessible by higher levels of management. Examples of these ad hoc tasks included being the secretary of committees that were chaired by senior management.

#### ***4.2.2 The Intended Performance Management System***

This organisation had a formalised intended PM system in place, of which a large focus was on the performance appraisal system. The PM expectations were conveyed to all employees accessible through material available on the intranet – this made up the organisation's intended PM system. The assessment period for performance was based on the calendar year from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December of the same year. The most comprehensive guideline accessible to all employees came from the employee handbook. Specific to PM, the handbook gave very clear instructions on: i) the probation and confirmation of new hires, ii) appraisal and promotion of confirmed employees, iii) appointment to positions in the organisation, and iv) management of poor performance.

Supplementary guides and information were also provided on the intranet that employees could access for a more detailed explanation of specific components within the intended PM system. The documents showed that the focus of the organisation's PM system was on the performance appraisal system. In particular, more than half of the documents and guides were provided on the annual performance review where all employees' performance was formally documented. There were appraisal guides for employees' confirmation, the planning phase, the mid-year phase, the year-end phase, and the release/communication of performance scores. These documents provided a step-by-step and pictorial walk-through of the appraisal process that detailed how the appraisal process began, how employees should complete their appraisals, what superiors had to complete, and how the cycle was completed. The HR department had

also compiled a document for frequently asked questions regarding the appraisal process (appraisal ranking FAQs). Due to the large amount of information available that extended beyond the context of PM, only relevant information related to the research and interviewees is discussed here.

The director (#1.24) explained his support for the current PM system, even though it had drawbacks, because he experienced PM prior to the introduction of the PM system where he felt there was a lot of ambiguity:

We have gone through it without quota before. I have gone through those days, we didn't even discuss about performance. That means everything was black-boxed. If your boss gave you a zero, it means zero. You didn't even have a chance to question your boss... to me, this performance management system, you at least have an opportunity to discuss about your performance with your boss, and also the quota is also fairly transparent... if there is no quota, it's the whim and fancy of [the] bosses.

Despite his perceptions regarding the intended PM system, he himself did not adhere to it fully because of his superior. The role of the direct supervisor is essential within the intended PM system:

I won't write so much [in the annual performance review] because if I know that he's not looking at it, what is the point? At the end of the day, I still know how I am going to perform... It depends on your reporting officer. If your reporting officer says "We need to do it. I'm looking for it". Yeah, then you do it! If my reporting officer didn't tell me anything and doesn't look at it; I know every time it's just sitting in his inbox, I'll say "What's the point?". – Director (#1.24)

As such, even though he believed there were benefits to the intended PM system, he himself did not adhere to it and was running a modified version of it in order to balance expectations that other organisational actors had on him.

Employees and their superiors had to complete a formal appraisal report three times a year. This report consisted of three main tabs/components: key performance indicators (KPIs), ad hoc projects/assignments, and development. There was a tab for the appraisal guide that employees should refer to as instructions before completing the report. The key result areas (KRAs) tab was completed during the planning stage with employees filling in their work targets or tasks that were significant enough to be evaluated based on what they had discussed and agreed on with their reporting officer, normally the immediate supervisor, previously. The

same went for any ad hoc projects or assignments that had been planned or assigned for the year. The HR department encouraged reporting officers to have face-to-face discussions with their employees about their targets, aspirations, and development needs at this stage. These targets would carry over in the mid-year and year-end phase, which could be reviewed and updated by employees. Employee development was set separately in a development plan at the start of the year that ran parallel to the planning phase. This tab allowed employees to indicate any additional comments or requirements on their personal development that would assist in meeting their targets. In addition, during these two phases, employees were also able to indicate whether they would like a change in job, which they could discuss with their immediate supervisor. During the mid-year and year-end appraisal cycle, there was also a tab for any comments that employees and supervisors had following their prior face-to-face discussion. Figure 7 below illustrates the annual performance review process in the organisation.

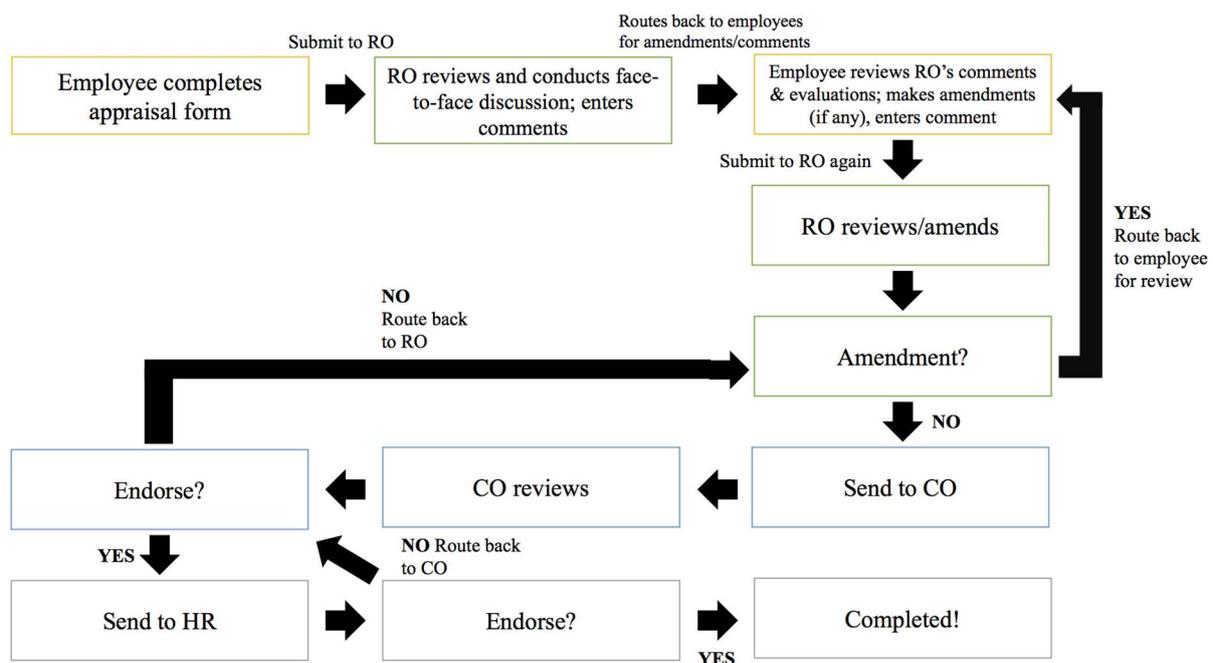


Figure 7. PublicWorks's annual performance review process.

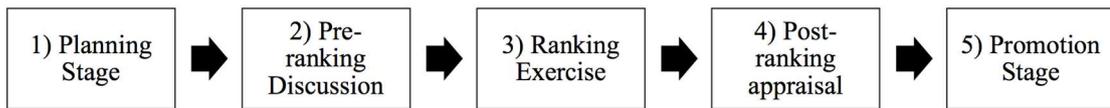
The performance appraisals were completed online, where frontline employees had to self-appraise before routing the forms to their official reporting officer, who was supposed to evaluate and review the input of the employee, have a face-to-face discussion with the employee, key in comments, then route the form back to employee for any amendments or comments. The employee was then to make the necessary changes, if any, enter their comments, and re-submit the form to the reporting officer. Next, the reporting officer would

review or make changes, and if changes were made, he or she would have to route the form back to the employee for review and the cycle would repeat. This was the endpoint for the review processes that led to no specific outcome (the planning phase and mid-year performance review) but for other processes that led to a specific outcome (confirmation appraisal or year-end performance review) the process continued. The form would thereafter be routed to the countersigning officer, normally higher in grade to the reporting officer, who would endorse the form and send it to the HR department. The cycle was completed after approval from the HR department.

The following section discusses three of four components related to PM in the employee handbook. ‘Probation and confirmation’ is not discussed. Although part of the organisation’s PM system, it only focussed on the performance of new, unconfirmed employees who were under a probation period of six months. None of the 27 interviewees were under a probation period, and hence, did not refer to it at all. Any additional information obtained from other documents (e.g., appraisal guides, etc.) and the interviews that were raised pertaining to these components were attributed and used to supplement the content of the employee handbook.

i) Appraisal and promotion

According to the employee handbook, this section was applicable to all employees of the organisation and addressed the appraisal system and guidelines on employee promotion. The organisation adopted an open appraisal system, where the employee and FLM were both involved, facilitating in-depth discussions of employees’ performance and development opportunities. All employees were expected to be assessed systematically and periodically. In addition, a permanent record of each employee’s assessment was also expected. Appraisal reports were therefore prepared annually to allow understanding of what needed to be achieved for the year, to provide feedback to the employee about his or her performance for the year, and to identify training and development needs for the next year. The appraisal FAQ document, employee handbook, and interviewees pointed out that employees would be notified by the HR department on the commencement of each appraisal phase through email. The employee handbook also specifically stated that the appraisal and promotion process would be initiated by the HR department at the appropriate dates and senior management of the division and a promotion panel would assess the suitability of the employee for promotion through a process of ranking for performance and potential.



*Figure 8.* PublicWorks’s annual performance review cycle.

Figure 8 demonstrates the five main stages in the annual performance review and promotion cycle in the organisation. The cycle began with the planning stage. This was where the reporting officer and the employees discussed and agreed upon the KRAs (or work targets) to be achieved and whether there were any ad-hoc, special projects, or assignments for the new performance review period before the said period commenced. Employees and their respective reporting officers then engaged in pre-ranking appraisal discussions as part of the second stage to review the former’s performance for the year, allowing them to understand how they were assessed before ranking commenced. An appraisal report was prepared for each employee only for the work done in the year under review, with no reference to any previous appraisal reports. If there were shortcomings listed in the report, the employee also had to be notified so that improvements could be made. The third stage was the ranking and promotion panel meetings, where a ranking exercise was conducted to moderate scores assigned by respective reporting officers from the various divisions to ensure relativity, fairness, and rigour in the assessment. Feedback and discussions were taken into consideration before finalised ranking results and promotion recommendations were tabulated for approval. The fourth stage involved the post-ranking appraisal, where the moderated scores, which could be different from those assigned by the reporting officers, were communicated to the employees. Following this, the last portion of the appraisal report was completed and submitted to the HR department by the end of March. The last stage was the promotion stage. This was where employees could be recommended for promotion if they had been evaluated as having the ability to perform the portfolio of a job at the next grade and if there were vacancies at the higher grade within or outside of the division.

Additionally, the employee handbook explained that employees could request transfers to another department/role if he or she had been in their current position for 24 months. Applications were considered based on availability of vacancy, overall qualifications,

and skill-set for the job. Employees first had to approach their deputy director to discuss possible work rotations within the division. However, approaching higher levels of management was not commonly done within the two cases. As such, it could be difficult for employees to approach their deputy director to talk about work rotations. This approachability of higher levels of management is discussed further in Chapter Six. Otherwise, for transfers across work groups, the employee had to identify the position opening for which he or she wished to be considered. Information about position openings was available on the HR portal. Upgrades in schemes of service were based on the employee's education qualifications; when the employee attained higher education qualifications, he or she might apply for a position of a higher scheme of service that matched the qualifications. However, upon successful upgrade, employees would then be placed under probation, as this involved a change in grade. Transfer or upgrade in scheme applications were done by the employee through the HR portal, which would be evaluated alongside external applications for the position. If shortlisted, the employee might be interviewed by that division's deputy director to assess suitability and the current deputy director would be notified of the application. If accepted by the hiring division, the transfer would take effect within three months following agreement from both deputy directors.

ii) Appointment

It was made clear in the employee handbook that no appointment could be made unless it has been provided for in the establishment approved by the organisation and the HR department was responsible for ensuring that no appointment was made other than the approved establishment. However, the director (#1.24) stated that it was difficult to fill the number that they had because of the nature of work and the specific skillset required. In addition, unless otherwise stated, seniority of employees would be determined by the date of an employee's appointment to the current grade. When two or more officers were appointed to the same grade at the same time, their seniority was determined by the total years of service the officers had in the organisation.

iii) Management of poor performance

There was a section in the employee handbook dedicated to poor performance, which was acknowledged as important. Poor performers needed to be identified and managed

to maintain the morale, discipline, and performance of the organisation. The PM system was more than just about recognising and rewarding good performers. The identification and management of poor performers were expected to be done by direct supervisors. These supervisors (including FLMs) were responsible for managing their subordinates' performance through regular feedback, counselling, and the annual performance review discussions. Feedback was to be given to the employee regarding any shortcomings to be improved upon and properly documented for future use. However, the employee handbook also explained that it was important to understand that poor work performance could be due to various reasons and the employee's disciplinary and performance records should be considered before determining the type of actions to be taken.

Employees demonstrating poor work performance due to lack of ability to keep up with the requirements of the job could be placed on a performance review at any time during the year, giving them opportunity and time to improve. Employees were also considered to be performing poorly if a score of '2' or below was received during the annual performance review and would be placed on a performance review. In general (with appropriate justifications), employees could be placed on a performance review at any time for a period of six months, which was broken down into two three month phases. A performance review began with the deputy director of the division submitting relevant documents or justifications relating to the poor work performance to the HR department. The HR department would then evaluate the justifications before seeking approval from the relevant approving authorities to place the employee on a performance review. The employee's performance would be closely monitored with all additional monetary reward or entitlement beyond the basic salary being withheld. If there was significant improvement during the first three months, the employee would be taken off the performance review. If there was only slight or no improvement, the employee might have the review period extended for three months, and the employee would not be eligible for any benefits that were withheld at the start.

Employees under a performance review would also not qualify for awards should they undergo performance review within the five years preceding the award; even after being taken off the review process, performance maintenance was expected and the HR department would continue to monitor performance closely. If the employee was

assessed to have unsatisfactory performance or given a performance score of '2' in the annual performance review again within two years after being on review, action would be taken to terminate service without going through another review process. Aside from termination of service, other forms of action might be taken with prior approval (e.g., downgrading to a lower grade, or scheme, reduction in salary, etc.). Notably, none of the interviewees talked about the use of the formal disciplinary procedure. The managers tended to deal with poor performing or problem employees through discussions to work on the issues that affected work performance. However, there were FLMs who explained that some employees did not want to change and yet they still did not use the formal disciplinary channels. There were instances where these FLMs sought advice from or worked with their peers and superiors regarding how to handle problem employees. This is further elaborated in Chapter Five and Chapter Six.

The employee handbook further explained that if poor performance was combined with misconduct, negligence, or breach of the organisation's rules and regulations, actions might be taken in accordance with the disciplinary proceedings to manage the employee. Disciplinary action was meant to encourage employees to conform their behaviour to the standards expected by the organisation; as such, it should be progressive, immediate, and consistent and impersonal. Nevertheless, depending on the severity of the misconduct, the organisation might decide to terminate the employee's service by giving one month's notice or pay one month's salary in lieu of notice. For more severe cases, it might warrant a dismissal (24 hour notice to leave service). The organisation had a guideline on minor (e.g., being rude; neglect of duty, etc.) and major (e.g., misuse of official position; theft of resources and property, etc.) misconduct that was not exhaustive. Management would have the prerogative to decide whether an offence or misconduct should be classified as minor or major misconduct; however, in general, minor misconduct related to employees' inappropriate work behaviour and attitudes affecting operational efficiency, while major misconduct related to employees' failure to meet the values of being a civil servant (e.g., lack of integrity and dishonesty) that affected the public image of the organisation.

If an employee was alleged to have committed an offence, the deputy director or nominated officer investigated the matter and submitted a report of the findings and recommendations on the action to be taken against the employee to the HR department.

The HR department would then evaluate and determine whether the offence was minor or major. If the employee was found to be guilty of misconduct after due investigation, a range of punishments could be imposed depending on the employee's disciplinary and performance records. Further information about the organisation's formal disciplinary measures can be found in Appendix E.

The organisation expected that most employee grievances could be quickly resolved through informal discussions with immediate supervisors. For a frontline employee with problems, this would mean speaking to the FLM. However, if unsuccessful, the grievance would then be handled by the union of the employee and deputy director of the HR department. Should the problem still not be solved, higher levels of management would step in. Following which, the Commissioner for Labour would be asked to mediate before the case would progress to the Industrial Arbitration Court. As such, the formal grievance handling procedures were to assist in cases where informal procedures proved inadequate. All efforts were to be taken to resolve any grievance amicably, efficiently, and fairly to promote and maintain a harmonious employer-employee relationship.

Despite the guidelines around management of poor performance, the director (#1.24) explained that it was difficult to remove employees from the public sector, because there was a lot of paperwork involved. It can be inferred that even though the intended PM system addressed the management of poor performance and developed processes through which poor performance should be managed, the organisational actors could choose not to use them. The issue of additional paperwork within the PM system is analysed in Chapter Six (see 6.2.1 Performance Discussions).

The employee handbook and supplementary guides were very explicit about what should be done within the intended PM system. In particular, the information available to all employees specified multiple times that supervisors were expected to provide feedback and coaching throughout the year and record relevant information in the annual performance review when it commenced. The documents and guidelines provided by PublicWorks were in line with what Pulakos and O'Leary (2011) wrote about PM systems being relegated to prescribed steps within the organisation that organisational actors are expected to follow. The reality of PM is not straightforward due to the complex relationships and interactions between the various sub-

systems (e.g., intended and actual PM systems) within the PM system. There was also additional information that interviewees discussed that was not available in the documents (e.g., quotas, CEP, etc.) that made up the intended PM system and these are discussed later in this chapter.

### **4.3 Case Two**

AdminInc operated under the central administration sector in the public service. The organisation had more than 500 employees dealing with developmental and regulatory activities in Singapore. As previously explained in Chapter Three, interviewees were from two departments in the organisation, both within a division under the same director.

#### ***4.3.1 AdminInc's Hierarchy***

Figure 9 shows the breakdown of the 30 participants from AdminInc. The 30 operational employees included senior management (job title of the director and deputy director), middle management (job title of senior managers), frontline management (job title of head), and frontline employees from nine different teams. The FLMs were generally responsible for the same number of employees as reporting officers within the intended PM system. However, some interviewees expressed that they 'double-hatted' in terms of the work that they did – they did additional work for another department or team to help in labour shortages. There was a tendency for the middle management here to double-hat, playing more than one role due to vacancies in the departments, and this resulted in them acting as middle managers as well as FLMs. Interviewees #2.18 and #2.22 had a larger span of control because of their dual roles as a FLM and middle manager. They had more responsibilities because they were perceived to have the ability to perform two roles, and subsequently, more employees that they were in charge of. It should be noted that this would influence the management of employees, which impacted how their performance was managed, due to overlapping and contrasting responsibilities (e.g., an employee who reported directly to the middle manager as a FLM versus an employee who reported to a FLM, who reported to that middle manager).

Interviewees #2.17 and #2.27 were both responsible for six frontline employees each and interviewee #2.20 was responsible for five employees due to unfilled FLM positions for some teams that required them to oversee the work of those frontline employees. The director (#2.29)

explained the difference between managers being based on ability – the span of control for managers increased if they had proven that their ability to perform in their role. These three FLMs (#2.17, #2.27 and #2.20) had a minimum of 20 years in service in the organisation and it could be inferred that they were given more reporting employees because they had demonstrated their abilities in managing employees and work tasks. Additionally, a middle manager, interviewee #2.27, played the role of a FLM, when she should have been a middle manager. This showed a lack of significance of the title or position of the manager compared to the responsibilities given to them. For example, interviewee #2.18 sat in with the director and participated in the ranking exercise, but interviewee #2.27 did not and was not privy to such information. As such, the relationship or LMX between higher levels of management and FLMs impacted the opportunities given to the latter (Nishii et al., 2008; Uhl-Bien et al., 2000).

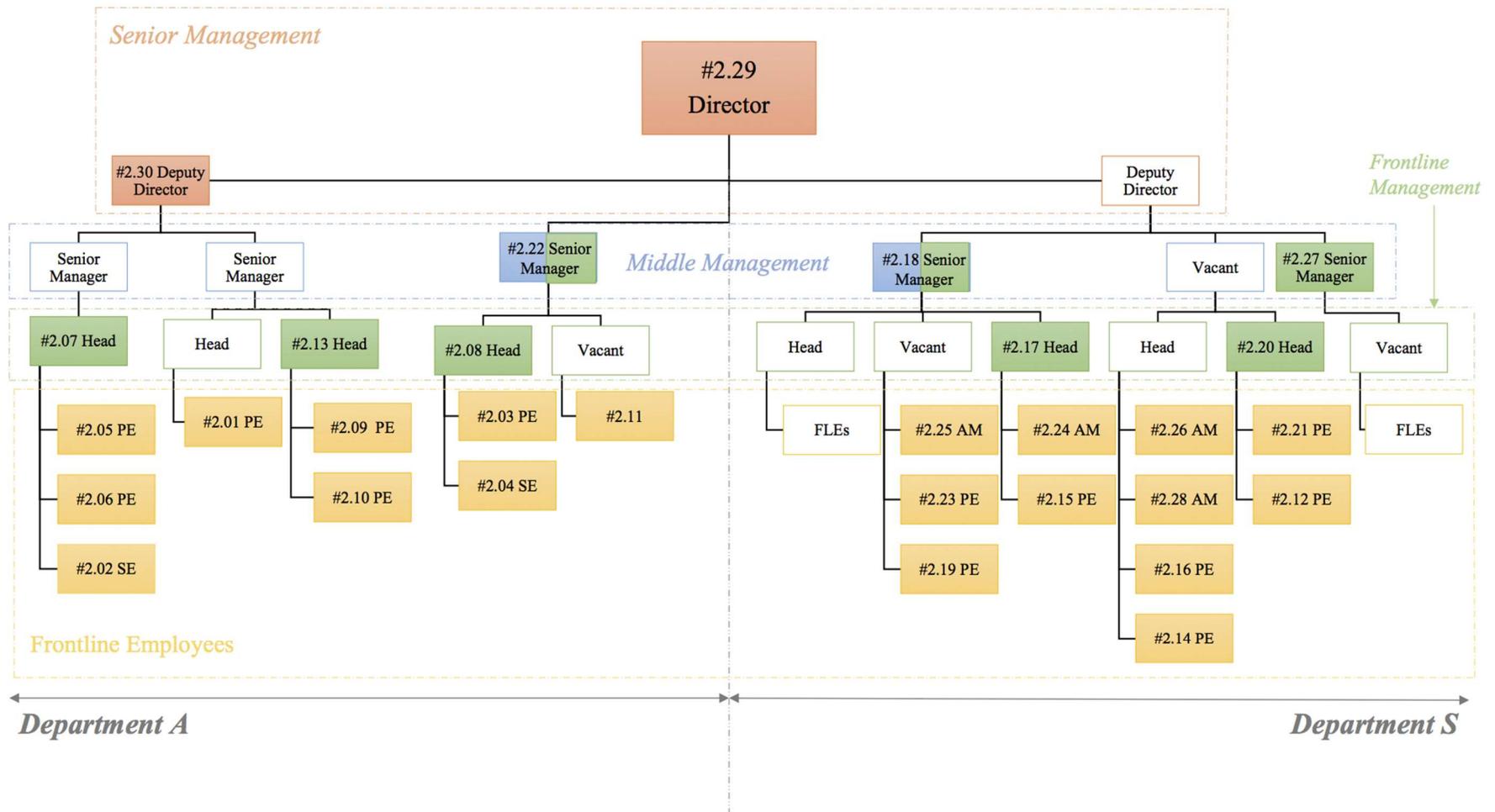


Figure 9. Hierarchy of AdminInc's interviewees.

### ***4.3.2 The Intended Performance Management System***

Like PublicWorks, AdminInc also had a very formalised intended PM system focusing on the performance appraisal system. The organisation set up PM expectations through an employee handbook and a performance management system guide to which employees could refer. The PM segment of the employee handbook stated that the intended PM system was to ensure that both employees and their respective reporting officers had a clear understanding of the performance criteria. Employees also needed to understand the performance expectations that their reporting officers had; reporting officers used the PM system to evaluate their employees' work performance and be aware of the performance strengths and weaknesses of their employees.

The director (#2.29) explained the importance of adhering to guidelines that were set up in accordance to public sector policy:

That's not my policy, that is the PSD [Public Service Division] guideline, so we're just following the PSD guideline here...They [referring to all employees] have to follow. This is civil service, we don't deviate that much...We are quite specific because we follow PSD guidelines quite clearly. So, whatever PSD guidelines are given to us, we will follow.

It was evident from her response that the intended PM system within AdminInc was developed following public service guidelines and she believed that there was very little room for deviation by individual organisational actors. As such, senior management also had expectations placed on them in which they had to operate a version of the intended PM system that was based off the Government's imposed system.

According to the performance management system guide, the intended PM system was guided by three principles. It should: a) be open and objective with clear performance criteria and have an interactive process between employees and their reporting officers, b) have a clear line of sight where individual efforts were aligned to the organisation's vision and objective, and c) be holistic and balanced by focusing on both the tangibles (the 'what', which were the goals and results) and the intangibles (the 'how', which were competencies such as behaviours and skills) of performance. As a guideline, the weighting between goals and competencies should be split equally to emphasise the equal importance of the achievement of goals as well as the demonstration of desired competency levels. It was essential that the individual goals linked

with what the team, department, division, and the organisation were trying to achieve to enable employees to link their work and contribution to the overall success of the organisation. Competencies were defined by the organisation to be the knowledge, skills, and behaviours that all employees should have in order to achieve the organisation’s strategy. Target competency proficiency levels were dependant on employees’ roles and grade levels in the organisation and were accessible by all employees. Although the guide provided very clear instructions regarding the definitions and processes that should be taken in the organisation, interviewees showed that this was not the case in practice. This is further explored in Chapters Five and Six, where the responses of interviewees are analysed.

The annual performance review process based on official documents is illustrated in Figure 10. The annual performance review process in the organisation was divided into three main stages: performance planning, mid-year performance review, and the year-end performance review. All stages were completed by individual employees online through the organisation’s intranet.

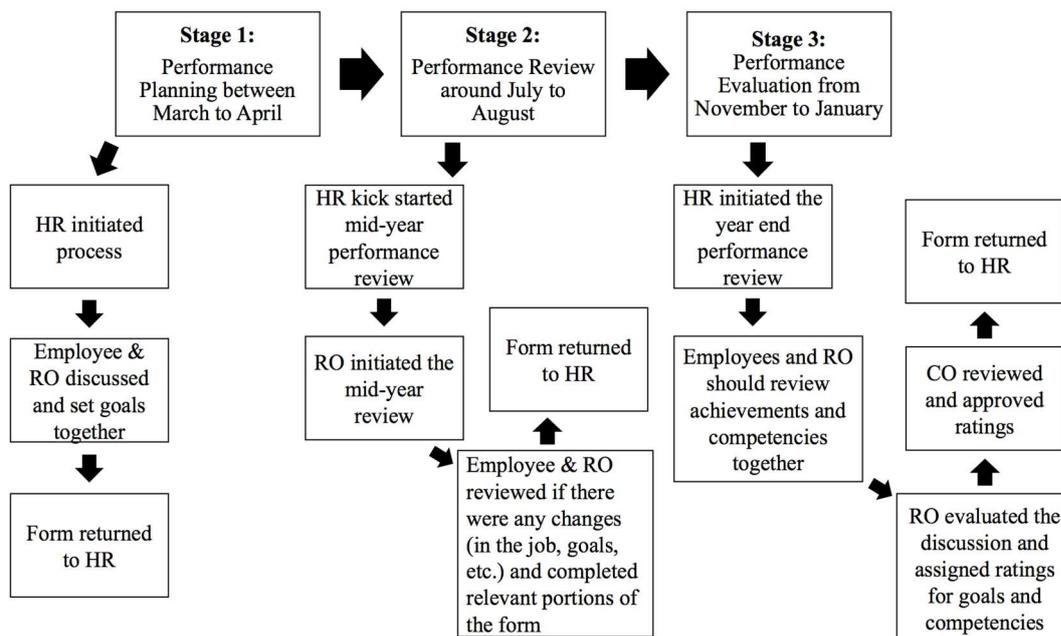


Figure 10. AdminInc’s annual performance review process.

Stage 1 allowed employees and their reporting officers an opportunity to discuss and agree upon what was expected during the forthcoming performance cycle. This allowed for performance expectations to be made clear and for employees to know what criteria their performance would be measured against. The process began with the HR department initiating

the planning process through emails to employees by cascading the corporate goals to the divisions and departments. Employees and their reporting officers then got together and discussed the former's job responsibilities, set goals, and reviewed the competency proficiency level before signing off on the relevant portion of the form. This was where agreed upon three to four performance goals for the employees were agreed upon, including any ad hoc projects that employees would be involved in. The 'SMART' criteria was expected to be used in goal setting where the targets set were specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time based. Special or ad hoc projects that were not related to, or did not contribute to the employee's primary job were to be identified during the planning stage, if possible. Expectations were also to be clearly set out in this instance. For example, what a rating of '1', '2', '3', '4' (exceeds target, meets target, below target, unacceptable) meant in terms of goal achievement. Reporting officers were also to discuss the development plan that should be put in place to help employees to meet the goals and competency levels. The form was then sent back to HR.

Stage 2 was where a formal mid-year performance review was conducted to allow employees and reporting officers to discuss the progress of achieving their goals and expectations. No ratings were assigned during this review. However, the mid-year performance review served as a useful mid-point check to review employees' progress against their set goals and targets, and demonstrated behaviours against targeted competency proficiency levels. In addition to the review, reporting officers were also encouraged to provide performance feedback and coaching to staff regularly by gathering information throughout the year; employees themselves should proactively solicit feedback in tandem to improve their self-awareness and areas of strengths and weaknesses. This stage began with the HR department circulating emails regarding the mid-year review. Respective reporting officers then began the process by discussing with their employees whether there were any changes to be made in job responsibilities, goals, and ad hoc responsibilities and review progress on the goals. They would then complete applicable components of the form and send it back to the HR department.

Stage 3 was where a formal evaluation of performance would ensue via the comparison of comparing actual performance against the plan to reach the final performance rating. The HR department started the process through the online system and emailed all employees. Employees and their respective reporting officers would review the accomplished goals and demonstrated ability of the employee before completing the relevant portions of the form. Before signing the form, the reporting officer would appraise the employee's performance and

hold a discussion to allocate ratings for the goals and competencies. The form would then be circulated to the countersigning officer, normally higher in grade to the reporting officer, who checked and authorised the ratings. Completed forms were then sent back to the HR department. Reporting officers would then also provide feedback to employees regarding their performance and demonstrated competencies. Competency gaps would act as the foundation for development needs in both formal and informal on the job training and projects that would help employees develop their competency in the following year. Following discussion with employees, the respective reporting officers would assign ratings for the former's goals and competencies. At the end of the PM cycle, individual employee's goals and competencies would lead to the overall performance rating they received, which would form the basis of their performance rewards.

Employees would be rated on their actual performance against the performance expectations established at the beginning of the year, where employees would be given a rating: '1' for 'unacceptable', '2' for 'below target', '3' for 'meets target', and '4' for 'exceeds targets'. For special or ad hoc projects, questions were given to reporting officers to consider when evaluating the performance of employees. Questions that the reporting officer used when evaluating how well their subordinates did in ad hoc tasks included:

What did the employee do on the project?

Did the employee meet the deadline for the project?

How was the quality of the output delivered?

Was there anything that could have been done better?

Did the employee continue to manage his/her normal workload?

Managers were also given guidelines for assessing the competency of employees through the provision of competency framework tables and explanations of how to assess the desired behaviours and skills that should be demonstrated daily at work. The guide also discussed the use of 'tracking' to gather behavioural data to be used as a basis to determine whether competency demonstrated by employees was on target and to provide feedback about their performance throughout the year. This could be done through assessing critical incidents, which were specific events that occurred, that provided opportunities to observe the demonstration of competencies through the employee's actions and how the situation was handled. Objective and reliable feedback about the demonstration of competencies could be

provided through this channel when managers collected complete critical incidents and identified the competencies demonstrated. Critical incidents could be gathered through direct observation, written materials, and third-party feedback. Direct observation could be done through how the employee behaved every day on the job, especially in difficult situations or assigned tasks. As for written materials, the competency of the employee could be evaluated based on emails, memos, and reports written by him or her. Lastly, third party feedback could provide vital information about the competencies of employees, especially for managers who did not work directly with the employee. The compliments or complaints could come from colleagues, clients, and others with whom they worked.

Employees were then given a numeric rating based on how well they had demonstrated the required competency behaviours on a scale of 1 to 4 – ‘1’ (rarely or never demonstrated required competency behaviours on the job), ‘2’ (sometimes demonstrated required competency behaviours on the job), ‘3’ (often demonstrated required competency behaviours on the job), and ‘4’ (served as a role model for others, often exceeding expectations) – in the areas of continuous improvement, teamwork, results orientation, communication, leadership with vision, and customer excellence. The weighted rating would be tabulated by taking the average rating of the six components and dividing it by two. This would be combined with the weighted rating of the employee’s goals and special projects component by also taking the average rating of the various goals (depending on how many an employee had) and dividing it by two to get the overall performance rating. The reporting officers oversaw the assignment of overall ratings. However, the data show that the rating of frontline employees was beyond the limited authority of FLMS within the intended PM system as senior management was the one making the final decisions regarding the assignment of ratings. This is explained in Chapters Five and Six.

The intended PM system also included the performance ranking, rewards, management of poor performance, and assessment of potential.

i) Performance ranking

Following the performance evaluation stage at the end of the year, the performance ranking exercise would be conducted. Ranking of employees was done to moderate the differences in evaluations from different reporting officers (notably, no information was given about what the moderation process entailed), ensure fairness and rigour in performance

evaluations, and identify the better performers for the distribution of rewards. Please refer to Figure 11 for the ranking process.

## ii) Rewards

The performance of employees affected their recognition and rewards. Rewards included promotion, monetary rewards, and performance awards. The promotion of employees referred to the advancement of an employee from a lower to a higher grade within the organisation. Promotion was more than a reward for good performance, and included the consideration of competence and contribution at the next level. The following criteria had to be met before employees were considered for promotion. Firstly, employees had to have consistently good performance. Next, employees had to be assessed to have the potential (as discussed in the 'assessment of potential' section) to take on a higher level job. Employees also had to be evaluated as having accumulated sufficient knowledge and experience in their current job. Lastly, there had to be a job vacancy for promotion to the next level. The monetary rewards (performance bonus, merit increment, and special variable payment) that employees had access to were dependent on the individual employee's performance and achievement of goals and targets. Awards were also provided to employees based on their performance and contribution in areas of service, creativity and support. Notably, within the reward system, specific details about the evaluation process (e.g., what was defined as good performance, how the performance of an employee affects the monetary rewards, etc.) were not provided.

## iii) Management of poor performance

Like PublicWorks, employees who were assessed to be underperforming within the mid-year or year-end performance review were placed on a performance review for three months. The process began with the organisation informing and counselling an employee whose performance was evaluated as unsatisfactory before formally notifying the employee that he or she would be placed under performance review at least three months before the performance review was initiated. After the employee was formally notified through a warning letter, he or she would be assessed at the end of the three-month period to determine whether performance had improved. If an unsatisfactory grade was given at the end of the performance review, the organisation would take action to terminate the employment of the employee. If a satisfactory grade was received, the performance review would end. However, the employee would also be given a notice that should another

unsatisfactory grade be received within the next two year-end reviews, employment would be terminated without another performance review. Employees under a performance review would have their monetary rewards withheld until a satisfactory grade was received at the end of the performance review. If an employee was assessed as having an unsatisfactory performance at the end of the performance review, the employee would forfeit all withheld payments.

iv) Assessment of potential

The assessment of potential, which was also known as current estimated potential (CEP), was done yearly. The CEP indicated the highest level of appointment that an employee could attain and handle competently before retirement. Assessing the CEP of an employee allowed the organisation to: i) identify and plan training and development programs for the employee, and ii) plan for the employee's career advancement opportunities and succession of key positions. The CEP of an employee was evaluated by considering *helicopter* and *whole person quality*. Helicopter quality referred to the employee's ability to look at problems at a higher level and produce solutions that considered the impact within and outside the organisation. Whole person quality referred to the intellectual qualities, results orientation, and leadership qualities of an employee. However, specific information about the assessment of an employee's CEP was not provided (e.g., who was responsible for the assessment of CEP).

Like PublicWorks, AdminInc's managers were also prompted in the guide to provide feedback to and have discussions with their employees throughout the year. The intended PM system is designed by top levels of management to be implemented throughout the organisation via certain policies and processes (Farndale et al., 2011). However, it was not clear whether the FLMs in the organisation implemented the system as intended. The PM system within organisations was also complicated as a result of the various organisational actors and their interactions with each other and components of the system. This is analysed in detail in Chapters Five and Six. The complexity of the PM systems within PublicWorks and AdminInc could, in part, be assigned to the hidden components of the intended PM system.

#### **4.4 Components That Were the Responsibility of Higher Levels of Management**

Different levels in the organisation were privy to varying amounts and types of information that affected their perception of the PM system, which impacted how they chose to utilise formal and informal PM system. The table below shows the level of information that was available to all managers and employees in both organisations based on what interviewees shared.

Table 3

*Information Available to Various Levels in Both Organisations*

<b>Type of Information</b>	<b>SM</b>	<b>MM</b>	<b>FLM</b>	<b>FLE</b>	<b>HR</b>
<b>PM Guides</b>	√	√	√	√	√
<b>Quota</b>	√	√	×	×	√
<b>Ranking</b>	√	√	×	×	√
<b>CEP</b>	√	√	×	×	√
<b>Promotion Criteria</b>	√	×	×	×	√

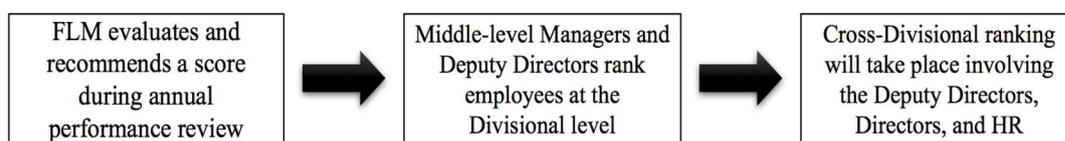
*Note.* 'SM' = Senior manager; 'MM' = Middle manager; 'FLM' = Frontline manager; 'FLE' = Frontline employee; 'HR' = Human resource department

Certain frontline managers and employees have information about the quota, ranking and CEP that is in place because of their relationships but it is not from an official source.

Even though all of the information in the table above was part of the intended PM system in both organisations, the information was not readily available to all levels in the same way. The FLMs tended to be given specific work tasks and goals that they and their teams had to achieve, which might not be the whole picture that higher levels of management would have. The FLMs were generally more focussed on communicating with their employees regarding performance, and this was where paperwork that was part of the intended PM system tended to be completed inaccurately or neglected because FLMs were in a position where they had to manage the expectations of their superiors and subordinates. In addition, they required the ability to manage both their operational and HR responsibilities, leading to deviation from their PM responsibilities because they lacked comprehensive information behind the purpose of the PM system and believed the achievement of work goals was more important. This is explained further in Chapters Five and Six.

Although it was not possible or feasible for the two case organisations to share all information with employees, when there is a lack of transparency in an organisation, it can, as it did in these

two cases, lead to a lot of guessing and hearsay that dominates the minds of employees. For example, the ranking process in both organisations (who was in charge or ranking, how they were ranked, the quota system) at the end of the year was not conveyed clearly to most FLMs and frontline employees in both cases. Due to the lack of information or communication about ranking, the only ‘facts’ that FLMs and frontline employees knew about was what they heard from others or what someone else had shared, which might not be accurate. Specific examples about the components of the intended PM system that were the responsibility of senior management and the HR department are analysed in Chapter Five (see 5.1.1 Senior Management and the HR Department’s Responsibility Within the Intended System).



*Figure 11.* The ranking process at PublicWorks and AdminInc.

The figure above illustrates the simplified ranking process in both organisations from information that was provided by senior and middle management. Official ranking information was provided by the HR department to senior management through briefings, while other levels of management and employees did not have access to formalised information. The director (#2.29) of AdminInc emphasised that not all of the organisational actors would be aware of the ranking process and she was not even sure whether the HR department provided information. The deputy director (#2.30) of AdminInc further explained that HR only provided briefings up to the middle management level, which might not have been conveyed to FLMs and frontline employees:

#2.29: I admit that not everybody will know. I’m not too sure, does HR do this kind of talks?

#2.30: It’s only up to the manager level.

#2.29: Ah! They may not have conveyed it downwards.

The selective delivery of ranking information explains why not all organisational actors were aware of it. Moreover, the PublicWorks’ director (#1.24) further elaborated the complexity of the ranking process where the quota imposed within ranking caused relative ranking within the organisation:

It's not only about delivering good results, because it's very important, every staff [member] will have that mentality. "As long as I don't make mistakes, I can deliver and finish the job in time, I will naturally get a five"... Let's say a staff [member] has a job that is very difficult, with so many problems, and yet the staff [member] manages to overcome the problems, even though there is a delay, but the problems are contained, then this staff [member] has delivered a better result than the others. Furthermore, if you look at it, being able to resolve the problem means that he is a better staff [member] who is able to stand on his own two feet and has analytical thinking skill to resolve the issue, but many of the junior staff do not understand this. That's why we have to have an open appraisal and make sure the PMs explain to them, because otherwise they'll say "Hey you gave me KRA to finish this job. Yeah, I have finished it! If I finished, naturally, I deserve a five!". But now, we say that it's a relative ranking. If all the fives are good, I cannot have all fives, because I have a quota. So, once I place you in order, naturally, the last one cannot be a five.

The responses by the senior management from both case organisations regarding the ranking process imply that there were components within the intended PM systems that were not shared with all levels and could cause conflict in the management of performance because the employees were not aware of all of the components that affected their evaluated performance.

Despite both case organisations being part of the public sector, they provided varying levels of information to employees regarding the intended PM system. Table 4 below details the differences between the intended PM systems in both case organisations. For example, AdminInc discussed the evaluation of CEP but PublicWorks did not. This is not to say that PublicWorks did not have CEP within their PM system, but rather it was not seen to be shared with all employees of the organisation.

Table 4

*The Intended Performance Management System*

<b>PublicWorks</b>	<b>AdminInc</b>
· Performance Planning	· Performance Planning
· Mid-year Review	· Mid-year Review
· Year-end Review	· Year-end Review
· Regular Performance Discussions	· Regular Performance Discussions
· Training and Development	· Training and Development
· Ranking	· Ranking
· Promotion	· Promotion
· Poor Performance Management	· CEP
· CEP (hidden)	· Quota (hidden)
· Quota (hidden)	· Ranking and Promotion Criteria (Hidden)
· Ranking and Promotion Criteria (Hidden)	

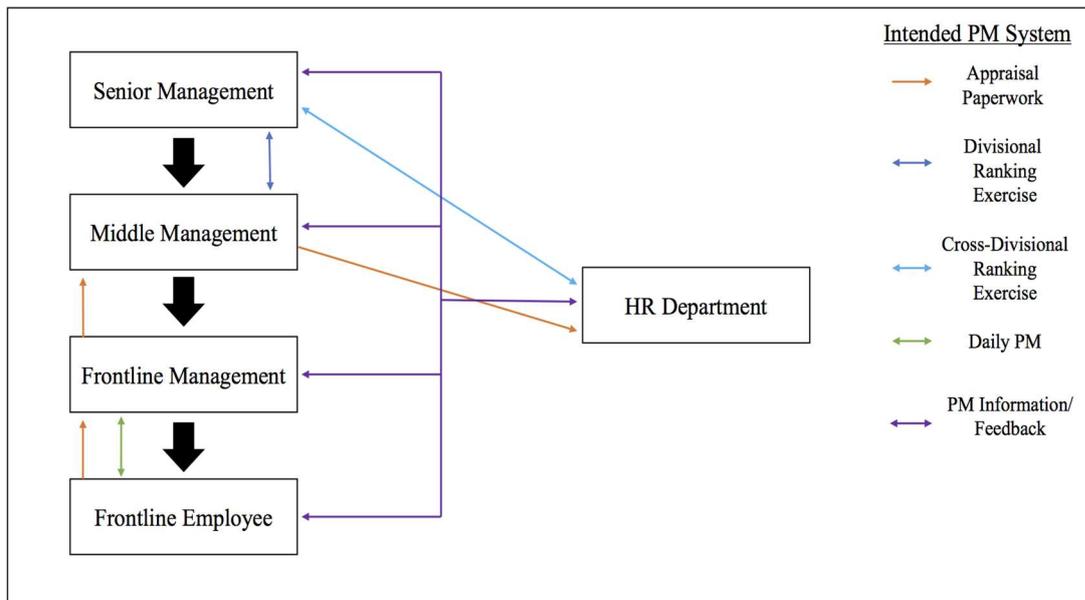


Figure 12. The intended performance management system in both organisations.

Figure 12 illustrates a simplified version of the intended PM system for frontline employees based on HR documents provided by both organisations and interviewee responses that referred specifically to the intended system. Senior management within both organisations were seen to implement the intended PM system due to pressures from their own superiors and the expectation that they were following the public service policy. Each level in the organisation had their own role to play and work was generally distributed downwards from senior management all the way to frontline employees. The HR departments played a facilitative role, where they provided information to, and at the same time, took feedback from the various levels of management to help to improve the system. The annual performance review paperwork would get routed to HR after it went through the frontline and middle management levels to ensure that there were counterchecks in place in the system to ensure transparency and consistency. The HR department also played a part in the cross-divisional ranking exercise. The ranking process had two parts: the first involved senior and middle management ranking the employees within the division at the same grade; the second involved senior management and HR, where employees at the same grade were ranked across different divisions. The day-to-day performance of frontline employees was the responsibility of the respective FLMs. The FLM should be consistently evaluating and managing the performance of their employees, not just waiting for the annual performance review.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided the working hierarchies for the interviewees in both case organisations. Through the hierarchies of the organisations, it is evident that the role of the FLMs was not clearly defined, because they could have overlapping responsibilities. The chapter also examined the intended PM systems that were in place in both case organisations through the formal documents as prepared by the HR department that all employees were supposed to use as a guide to the implementation of PM. It was found that the intended PM systems, as dictated by formal policy, were complicated due to the multiple components contained within them, within which components that not all employees were privy to also existed. The following two chapters provide the analysis generated from the themes that emerged from the interview data.

## **Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis Part One**

### **Implementation Process of the Intended Performance Management System**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The hierarchical charts of both case organisations were shared in Chapter Four to explain the role and reporting relationships between the various organisational actors. Additionally, the intended PM systems, as established by HR through guides and documents and information from management in both organisations were also discussed. This chapter is the first of the two analysis chapters that use the data to answer the main research question: “*What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?*” through the first research sub-question: “How is the intended PM system implemented?”. The chapter demonstrates the implementation process of the intended PM system through the analysis of the two case organisations. It was found that that the implementation process was not uniform due to FLMs’ discretionary behaviour, which led to deviations from the intended PM system experienced by frontline employees. In particular, the performance culture of the organisation and the nature of work that the organisational actors engaged in affected the AMO of and LMX with the FLMs that impacted the implementation process of the intended PM system.

#### **5.1 Performance Culture**

The culture of an organisation influences the design and implementation of the PM system; however, the PM system in place can also change the culture of the organisation. An organisation’s culture is reflected in the intended PM system, which impacts how FLMs

approach their PM responsibilities (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sørensen, 2002) through the use of formal and informal PM systems. However, the data show that the perceptions held by organisational actors of the PM system can affect the culture and practices of an organisation. Performance culture is a broad term; however, it is a key part of PM because it heavily influences the way FLMs are able to manage the performance of their employees (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Schein, 2010; Sørensen, 2002). Different organisations can have unique strategies or processes that shape the systems and sub-systems in the organisation (Clegg, 1990). Public sector organisations tend to be more bureaucratic and rule bound than private sector organisations, which limits FLMs' authority in the PM system due to strong control by top management (Chew & Sharma, 2005; Haque, 2002). Organisational hierarchy affects the delegation of authority and responsibilities to FLMs, influencing their behaviour in the PM process (Garston, 1993; Hyman, 2005; Vogel & Masal, 2012). Even though hierarchy is important within the public sector, the senior management and HR department's responsibility within components of the intended PM system, the FLM's span of control, support given by the HR department, workplace tensions, and the seniority of employees were found to be a key part of an organisation's performance culture. The influence of these factors on the implementation process of the intended PM system within the two case organisations is analysed here, in order.

### ***5.1.1 Senior Management and the HR Department's Responsibility Within the Intended System***

PublicWork's HR department believed that an intended PM system was necessary because there was the tendency for humans to be subjective; while having a structured system in place helped reduce bias (by including criteria, cross-ranking, and developmental opportunities, etc.) for all to follow. Senior management from both organisations also agreed that the intended PM system introduced structure in the management of employees' performance, which was necessary to facilitate the prevention of blatant bias or favouritism when determining the measurement of performance. The intended system allowed employees to access the same development or rewards as others, and according to interviewee #2.18 (middle manager/FLM), the intended PM system in place was "the most transparent and justifiable basis of rewards". Nevertheless, total objectivity was difficult to achieve, and although the intended system introduced more objectivity, it was still not perfect, especially in the annual performance reviews:

So, what we can do to reduce subjectivity is basically to have a structured system to have criteria... I think this is how best we have put in the system, and plus cross ranking, where you rank together to gauge each person's performance instead of just a manager decides and that's the final scoring, you need to have another level to do a balance and check. But, I won't say that it's 100% fair, there's always subjectivity involved because people are human and tend to favour someone over someone else. – HR Manager (#1.01)

As discussed in Chapter Four, the intended PM systems in both cases were developed with the intention of uniform implementation organisation-wide. However, the implementation process was complicated because it was extremely challenging for every component of the intended system to be transparent and open to all organisational actors. Despite the guidelines and manuals available to all, there were still components of the intended system that were not codified in those guides. Middle and senior managers from both organisations explained that it was very difficult to detail the inner workings of every stage of the PM system to all FLMs and frontline employees. This was a problem, because FLMs and frontline employees could be unaware of all of the components within the intended PM system that affected how their performance was evaluated. An example would be the lack of awareness about the quota system in place at PublicWorks – only a certain percentage of employees could be given a particular score during the annual performance review that had corresponding rewards. Senior management and the HR department explained that this was where cross-ranking took place among frontline employees of the same working level within a working group. Cross-ranking helped to arrange employees in numerical order, which determined the eventual score and reward. Senior management was adamant that all were aware of the quota system; however, the findings demonstrated that this was not the case. The information regarding the quota system was not available in the formal documents available on the intranet and this impacted the motivation of FLMs when implementing the intended PM system.

Senior management was responsible for the evaluation of employees' performance; if FLMs were not aware of the quota system in place that resulted in the cross-ranking of employees, they might not realise that the reported performance they submitted might not match up with the final evaluation. The change in score given by senior management due to the quota system established the importance of visibility and impression management – senior management had to know the employees and FLMs in order to appropriately evaluate their performance; otherwise, it would be difficult for senior management to determine the exact ranking of all of

their employees. As such, employees and FLMs who had a higher quality LMX with senior management could be perceived to be better performers compared to their peers. Additionally, (as analysed later in the chapter in the analysis of workplace tensions) FLMs with a high quality LMX with higher levels of management and experienced FLMs could have knowledge of the quota in place within the intended PM system, which motivated them to inflate the reported performance of their employees through the annual performance review component of the intended PM system. The inflation of performance was used by some FLMs as a means to balance the expectations of their superiors and subordinates, allowing them to still achieve their operational goals. This is further explored in Chapter Six (see 6.2.1 Performance Discussions) but specific to the quota system in place within the intended PM system, the inflation of performance could help frontline employees have a higher ranking out of their peers should senior management not be aware of their actual performance, building on the visibility of the employee and FLM. However, the lack of knowledge regarding the quota in place within the case organisations could lead to FLMs deviating from the intended PM system by not accurately completing all components of the intended PM system, especially the performance reviews of their employees, because they believed that higher levels of management did not look at the formal processes within the intended PM system that they had completed. The FLMs could therefore lack motivation to implement the intended system if they believed that their input did not contribute to the evaluation of their employees' performance.

There were also certain aspects that were confidential and intentionally kept within management due to the sensitivity of the PM system. An example of this was the CEP in both organisations. The CEP affected an employee's perceived performance in the formal system and constrained the progression or rewards of that employee:

All staff have a current estimated potential, we call it the CEP. For example, when a staff [member] joins us, after one of two years with us, we need to assess whether he can be, for example, CEO-level, can be a group director level, or whether the max when he retires is only a principal project manager. Then we will attach to them this current estimated potential in the human resource record... Current estimated potential, nobody knows. If a person knows that, means it's a leak [laugh]. – PublicWorks Director (#1.24)

Usually the CEP is determined after [the] first year. For a junior officer, the CEP is not exactly firm for the first three years; beyond that, then the CEP should be rather fixed and should not change, because your CEP is not a measure of your performance. You can be a very lousy performer but if we assess that you have the potential to take on higher level duties, that's looking at potential. So, your potential can be things like: whether you have helicopter view, whether are you able to see long-term implications,

are you able to see connectivity of issues? These are what we assess to be potential. –  
AdminInc Director (#2.29)

In Chapter Four, even though AdminInc employees were notified about how CEP was evaluated (helicopter and whole person quality) through the employee handbook, it did not provide more detailed information about the weighting of the qualities or who was responsible for the evaluation. The interviews from both case organisations demonstrated that CEP was something emphasised by senior management. It was formally evaluated by HR and senior management at the time of employment and re-evaluated regularly. A senior manager explained that the potential of employees did not change often unless the employee in question was young or new to the organisation. A possible explanation for the lack of change in the CEP of employees could be due to the correct identification of employees who are able to perform and have the potential to go further in their careers. The CEP of an employee was basically postulating how far he or she could go in his or her career in the organisation – the highest position that an employee was estimated to be able to perform. Middle managers, who were closer to senior management or had worked in that role for a longer period, had a better understanding of potential and how it affected employees in their performance. For example, a middle manager (#2.18) from AdminInc, who was the second in charge in his department after his deputy director, explained what CEP was:

Potential – okay, so what I understand in [AdminInc] is that there’s a potential, they call it CEP, assigned to every staff [member]. So, maybe your potential is to a manager-level, to a DD-level [deputy director level], or a director-level. This is will [be] assessed by the directors. If you are a fresh grad and your potential is only a manager, maybe you will reach it in about three to four promotions. Of course, your potential defines how good a staff [member] you are and you can be. So, usually for people with slower potential, their promotion will be slightly slower.

According to the director (#2.29) from AdminInc, the performance of employees did not affect the CEP because “CEP is not a measure of your performance”. However, the CEP of an employee affected the perceptions managers held of his or her performance. The performance of frontline employees was affected by their CEP – if their potential was only that of a FLM, their progression and development would be limited, regardless of their actual performance, because they were seen as being unable to take on more at a higher level:

So, if let's say a person joins us from day one of graduation, he will have a CEP of CEO, then he has many steps to jump. If you average [the steps] out, the promotion will be

shorter and faster. But if he has only a senior engineer potential then he only is able to jump, let's say, three grades. – PublicWorks Director (#1.24)

We [referring to senior management] see whether you have leadership qualities... we also look at whether you have the high level thinking to be able to see implications on Singapore... it's not just a matter of how hard you work, because sometimes this kind of insight and this kind of acumen, in the business, of course is business acumen, but in the government sector it's the political sensitivity and the ground sensing ability [that] is very, very important. – AdminInc Director (#2.29)

Most employees were generally not aware of the existence of CEP; however, there were exceptions. Frontline employees and FLMs who had been with the organisation for a long period of time, knew about CEP. Alternatively, FLMs at PublicWorks who had a high quality LMX relationship with higher levels of management had a better understanding of how potential worked in the organisation:

I think there's one thing in the government sector that's called CEP – current estimated potential. Apparently, this is something that from day one when you join, your management has already decided the score for you that you can reach at the age of 50 or something. It's like the peak that you can go and it's not so simple to change this CEP. Of course, it's very confidential. If people know, they may not be happy. – FLM (#1.22)

I don't know what's the acronym for it, but basically, when you just join the company, they sort of postulate about how far you can go in your career in [PublicWorks]. So, let's say a graduate comes in and a scholar comes in – the CEP for a scholar will be much further and the CEP for a graduate is just normal. But as you work your way up, the graduate, if he proves himself, they can amend the CEP and then it goes further. That is if you really perform very well... we don't know; I think only the deputy directors and above, they know the staff's CEP. I don't really know my own CEP! – FLM/Frontline Employee (#1.15)

The components of the intended PM system that were the responsibility of senior management and the HR department demonstrated the lack of transparency and clarity in both organisations. The two case organisations did not detail every component of the intended system and the lack of knowledge that FLMs had regarding the components affected the implementation process of the intended PM system. The FLM's lack of awareness affected his or her ability and motivation to implement the intended system – the CEP of employees influenced how senior management evaluated their performance, which resulted in corresponding rewards and FLMs who lacked this knowledge were not able to understand how the intended PM system operated (e.g., why employees who were reported as performing by their FLMs were not rewarded) and (as discussed earlier about the quota system) this could result in them having the perception

that the formal processes within the intended PM system were not important, resulting in them not completing those components as intended. Even though FLMs had no authority over the CEP of employees, they still needed to be aware of the importance of potential in the formal PM system and manage the expectations of their superiors and subordinates. In particular, the FLMs had to be able to report the performance of their employees that took their CEP into account because of relative ranking within the organisations. This is analysed later in the chapter (see Workplace Tensions), but should the FLM report employees as performing when higher levels of management did not agree, the perception of performance that higher levels of management had about their other employees could be affected.

Most of the interviewees from both cases, including FLMs, equated PM primarily with the annual performance review process. Although FLMs could list the components of the intended PM system that they had responsibility for (e.g., performance planning at the beginning of the year, regular performance discussions, performance review, etc.), many seemed unsure when probed about each component. Notably, despite the knowledge of the various stages within the intended PM system, FLMs generally only focussed on the annual performance review at the end of the year that they believed must be completed due to constant reminders from HR through email. Higher level managerial interviewees tended to feel that the annual performance review allowed for structure, transparency, and consistency in the organisation. In Chapter Four (see 4.2.2 The Intended Performance Management System), PublicWork's director (#1.24) clarified his support for the intended PM system. Additionally, a middle manager/FLM (#2.18) explained his perception of the importance of the intended PM system:

It's largely based on their output in a way, and we do try to keep it that way, because that's the most transparent and justifiable basis of rewards.

However, frontline employees and FLMs from both cases generally did not share the same perception. As discussed earlier, even the FLMs were not aware of all of the components of the intended PM system and they also believed that it was not shared with their level:

We do know that there is a ranking exercise, but at the same time, we don't even know how it's conducted or what's our ranking [sic]. So, they [referring to management] say that they try to be transparent, like, they give you a one-liner to tell you, like, roughly what kind of grade you get, but it's not that explicit, I would say. – FLM (#2.13)

At my level, I only know because my boss updates me up until the director's level. So, maybe when it reaches the group director level, it may change, but I do not know. How

I see and how I evaluate is through the score that is released to me to release to my staff. So, it may change... I think the higher it goes, there will be some changes, which I don't manage. My boss told me that for him, he actually suggested a different score, and this is like the side-line kind of info that he shared. So, I guess it will change at the top. We don't know. I don't know. – FLM (#1.19)

Conflicts in perceptions that organisational actors had about PM could result due to deviations from the intended PM system. At PublicWorks, multiple comments were made about the intended PM system, suggesting that it did not help to improve the performance of employees or reward employees appropriately – it was about the relationship with higher levels of management and not actual performance. A middle manager (#1.26) explained this phenomenon as the relationship that an employee had with superiors that determined the performance for the year in the PM system:

I don't know how does my boss evaluate my performance! We have never talked about performance or done any form together. It is something that I feel is quite bad and I feel that my appraisal is based on my relationship with my boss. Honestly speaking, it's a relationship – [based on] how good my relationship with my boss [is].

The literature shows that a better working relationship between subordinate and superior leads to higher quality LMX, which can improve impact performance ratings (Cogliser, Schriesheim, Scandura, & Gardner, 2009; Davis & Gardner, 2004). However, this can affect the perception that others have about PM and reduce the motivation of organisational actors to utilise it in the intended manner, decreasing its effectiveness. The interviews with HR personnel from PublicWorks acknowledged that although they constantly reminded employees through emails about the various stages in the intended PM system, they were not able to monitor everyone to ensure adherence to the intended system. There were specific guidelines in place that had to be adhered to (e.g., a ranking quota at the end of the year that limited the percentage of top performers in a work group) that were difficult for organisational actors to avoid. However, even though the HR department enforced the formal processes for poor performers to ensure that sufficient opportunity was provided for them to improve and for documentation, this was not necessarily adhered to. This is further elaborated in Chapter Six, but the FLM had the opportunity and could be motivated to not document the performance of the employee to protect the working relationship that they had – recording an employee's poor performance results with senior management, developing the impression that the employee lacked the ability to perform. In turn, the documentation of poor performance could damage the working relationship between the FLM and frontline employee, demotivating the employee to improve

their performance. Should the FLM not make it known that an employee was performing poorly, either informally or through the intended PM system, the HR department and higher levels of management might not be aware that poor performance was ongoing. The relationship between FLMs and their respective frontline employees is an important component in facilitating better performance (Uhl-Bien, Graen, & Scandura, 2000); the quality of a FLM's relationship with frontline employees can be affected by his or her span of control, which is discussed next.

### ***5.1.2 Span of Control***

A FLM's span of control affects their relationship with frontline employees, and as such, the implementation process of the intended PM system. Interviewees from both organisations explained that FLMs' span of control affected their workloads and responsibilities, and this in turn, affected the opportunities that FLMs had to manage the performance of their employees. The span of control affected the FLMs' opportunities within the intended PM system because the number of employees they were responsible impacted the LMX between them and the amount of time the FLMs had to divide amongst their employees – this is discussed further in Chapter Six (see 6.2 The Frontline Manager's and Frontline Employee's Relationship). The nature of the work also influenced the optimal span of control of FLMs (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010), where the type of work the FLMs and frontline employees engaged in affected the number of employees a FLM was responsible for. The table on the next page illustrates the different number of frontline employees that FLMs were responsible for in both cases.

Table 5

*The Frontline Manager's Span of Control*

Organisation	Interviewee	Position	Subordinates
PublicWorks	#1.02	FLM	2
	#1.04	FLM	3
	#1.07	FLE/FLM	2
	#1.09	FLM	2
	#1.10	FLM	2
	#1.11	FLE/FLM	3
	#1.12	FLM	2
	#1.15	FLM	2
	#1.16	FLM	2
	#1.17	FLM	1
	#1.18	FLM	6
	#1.19	FLM	16
	#1.20	FLM	5
	#1.22	FLM	4
	#1.23	FLM	4
#1.25	FLM	5	
AdminInc	#2.07	FLM	3
	#2.08	FLM	3
	#2.13	FLM	3
	#2.17	FLM	6
	#2.18	MM/FLM	15
	#2.20	FLM	5
	#2.22	MM/FLM	13
#2.27	FLM	6	

The number of employees that FLMs were responsible for in the two cases was important in influencing how they navigated the intended PM system. At AdminInc, there were middle managers who double-hatted as FLMs (#2.18 and #2.22) due to labour shortages in the department; frontline employees reported directly to these middle managers, who also played the role of FLMs. There were also other frontline employees reporting to FLMs, who then reported to the middle managers instead:

I have a very big team because another senior manager has left, so I have taken over the teams. So, all in all I have about eight teams in all. Eight teams – each has about three to four members and some of the teams, they do have a head or a manager overseeing the team members... only two are managers or heads, the rest are not. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.18)

So, for PEs and SEs [both refer to job titles] who have a head, the head will do the first round of evaluation and after that they will route to the CO, which will be me... Then after I evaluate, it will be routed to my director. For those without a head, I will be doing the evaluations. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.22)

The FLM's ability to report on their employees' performance within the intended PM system was affected by his or her span of control. For example, a bigger span of control resulted in FLMs having to divide their focus across a larger number of employees, which meant less direct knowledge about their employees' performance. Chapter Six (see 6.2 The Frontline Manager's and Frontline Employee's Relationship) provides further discussion regarding the span of control and how it affected the use of the formal and informal PM systems by FLMs. Within the intended PM system, AdminInc FLMs who reported to a middle manager were required to submit their annual performance reviews to the middle manager. Frontline employees who reported to those FLMs had an additional layer of management that moderated their reported performance, limiting the opportunity and autonomy that those FLMs had in the annual performance review. Those frontline employees who reported directly to a middle manager (serving as a FLM and middle manager concurrently), reporting directly to senior management had fewer levels to go through. As such, a FLM in this context had more autonomy and opportunity in the annual performance review compared to other FLMs who reported to a middle manager. The hierarchy chain in place affected how FLMs went about their PM responsibilities (Vogel & Masal, 2012) and was seen to impact how FLMs implemented the intended PM system through the formal processes. Organisational hierarchy also impacted the support given to FLMs during the implementation process and is discussed in the following section.

### ***5.1.3 Support from the HR Department***

Organisational support is important to ensure that FLMs can implement intended policies (Evans, 2015). The perception of support by other organisational actors during the implementation of the intended PM system is important to FLMs, because it affects how they approach their PM responsibilities. Perceived supervisor support and organisational support have a long history and are well-researched in OB literature; however, few studies, if any, have focussed solely on FLMs and the support they receive (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

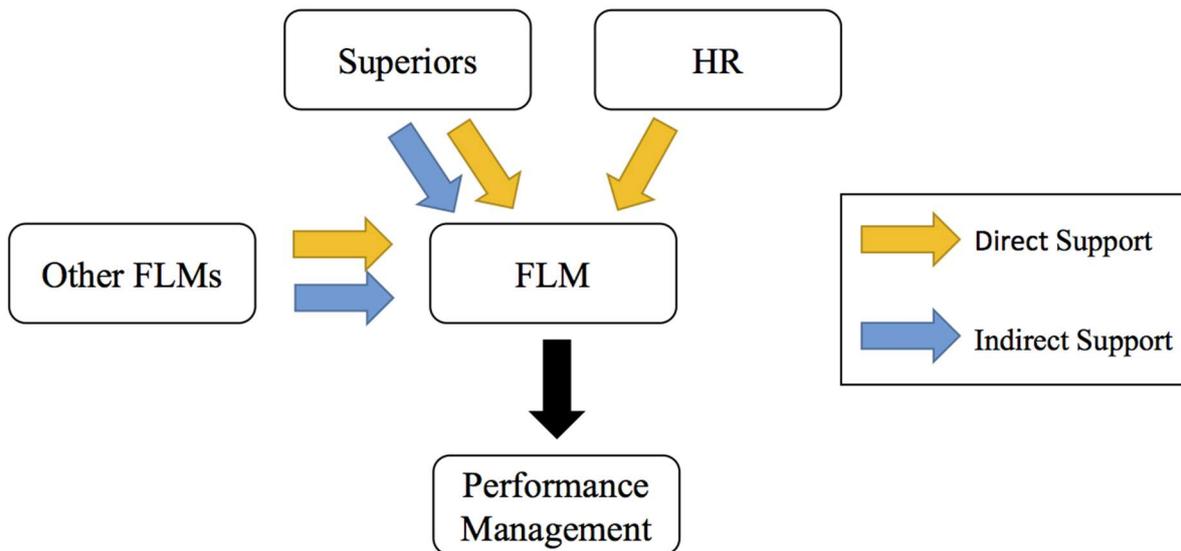


Figure 13. The frontline manager support system in organisations.

Figure 13 above shows that the support the FLMs received in the PM system came from other managerial organisational actors and the HR department. This section in the chapter focusses on the direct support given to FLMs by the HR department, because it affects the implementation of the intended PM system. The direct support that FLMs get from the HR department influences the ability and motivation that they have to manage the performance of employees through the implementation of the intended PM system.

The HR department is central to the successful implementation of the intended PM because they follow PM through formulation, adoption, and implementation (Huselid, Jackson, & Schuler, 1997; John & Björkman, 2015). Even though HR serves as an important source of support for FLMs when managing the performance of frontline employees, the different operational goals of FLMs and the HR department impact the implementation of the intended PM system (Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper, & Brooks, 2016). Interviewees who were not from the HR department did not acknowledge the strategic usefulness of the HR department because they tended to regard HR as a separate entity from their operational departments that did not provide support or assistance in the PM process. That is to say that employees and managers held the position that HR only sent out email reminders during fixed periods in the year to inform other organisational actors of the specific components and processes that should be completed:

Frankly speaking, we only receive emails from them – “this is the brand new phase” and “this is the mid-year review phase”, etc. So, we don’t really touch base that much closely with them. – FLM (#1.12)

I think what they try to do is they send out email circulars to state that “this performance exercise is coming up, you may want to review...”. Like, they give a very simple email with some, like, steps and pointers to take note of, which I will just read it once and then I will probably just put it aside after that. – Frontline Employee (#2.04)

So, at the start, mid-year, and the end of the year, they [referring to HR] will be the ones sending emails out to remind you and the whole company to do performance management. Like, at the start of the year they will tell everyone “you need to go and complete this thing, you should discuss [this] with your boss, you should sit down with your boss” – FLM (#2.08)

The directors from both organisations also explained that the HR department was responsible for employee promotions, which was contrary to what most of the other levels of organisational actors believed to be senior management. Even as part of senior management, they were not privy to what was part of the “black box”, the term used by PublicWork’s director (#1.24), promotional criteria. They might have known some necessary components (e.g., continuous performance uptrend over two to three years), but it was the HR department who notified them regarding whether employees met the criteria for a promotion:

There are criteria for promotion... A promotion criteria is for a consecutive three years, you have to be having an uptrend in performance results... This is only one criteria. The other criteria, we call it the CEP, because all staff have a current estimated potential... Then there's also the experience. Some of them don't join us day one, they are at mid-career... The criteria are a bit of a black-box inside, so we don't know. Many times after the ranking exercise in January, before the corporate one, then they will tell us "Okay you recommended this promotion of this guy, right?" “Yes, he has three years of uptrend” because that one we know. Even the estimated potential we know, but we also do not know because it's not linear, it may be a curve like this or a curve like this. Then the HR will tell us “doesn't qualify”. – PublicWorks Director (#1.24)

Years in service, whether do they have how many Bs or Cs that they have in past two or three years – those kind of promotion criteria, it’s fairly fixed...It’s HR. So, HR will tell us whether have they met [the] criteria... So, if they meet [the] criteria, we have no reason to say no. – AdminInc Director (#2.29)

As discussed earlier in the chapter, it was discernible from senior management that the PM system lacked adequate transparency regarding certain components and processes. Although senior management may have had information about all of the components of the intended PM system, there were still components to which they were not privy. These components further

emphasised the importance of the HR department in facilitating the implementation of the intended PM system because the other organisational actors did not know each component of the system and how it needed to be utilised. However, comments by other organisational actors showed that the HR department was not perceived as supportive, which could be problematic when the organisational actors lacked sufficient ability to implement the intended PM system due to a lack of knowledge and requisite skills.

In contrast to the statements by other organisational actors, the HR interviewees from PublicWorks strongly believed that they did aid FLMs in the PM system. The HR department had steps in place through the provision of training programs and working closely with line managers to facilitate managers in PM; support was also given outside the intended PM system, especially when FLMs faced problems with their employees:

Every year HR provides a performance management course that they can attend; on top of that, we will also brief the directors on how to conduct the appraisal. Every year, the core team, we will go to the staff meetings to conduct the briefings once the cycle is up. They will go to the management team and brief them that the annual appraisal cycle is this – what are [the] things to look out for, what are the promotion criteria, and things like that. It's a refresher that we do every year. Then for the business partners [referring to dedicated HR staff that work with the operational departments], they'll be briefed in a two-hour long briefing. After that, they will go down to the line and share with the business line management staff one more time... When we go down to the line, it's more related to their business, including their staff. So we will sit down with them, go through with them the ranking again, the process, then after that, during their own ranking session, we will sit down with them to facilitate [that] as well... as a business partner, what we do sometimes is we go through the additional steps by briefing the frontline managers on the ranking process. – HR Senior Manager (#1.01)

I think one way would be training them, providing them with the tools and the guidelines. This is not so much on performance management specifically, but we do meet up with them together when there are certain situations or cases that they struggle with. Let's say there are cases whereby they are not going to renew their contract due to performance issues and things like that, they will get HR to be involved in such situations. If it's really a case of a wrong job, fit, then we try to help them to source for alternative arrangements, like seeing whether they could be deployed to do other things within the organisation. – HR FLM (#1.27)

It is recognisable from the data that different levels of management in operational departments and the HR department had different perceptions about the function of the HR department in the PM system. As is further discussed in Chapter Seven (see Table 8), the HR department perceived their role in the intended PM system to be supportive and facilitative of FLMs and

other managers, while managerial employees of the organisation believed that HR only formulated and introduced the intended PM system that they had to implement. Operational departments at PublicWorks did not believe that the support was there within the intended PM system and felt that the problem with the HR department was that they formulated a system that had to be followed and then provided instruction rather than collaboration, which affected their motivation to implement the system (or processes) as they were intended by senior management and the HR department:

HR, of course, is the main one who pushes all those programs and we are the ones who have to keep implementing. So, they push [it] out [but] we have to implement it. – FLM (#1.09)

Occasionally, you will see HR starting to come out with something new, and then if you look at it closely, it's just the packaging [that] has changed, but the interior is all the same. – FLM (#1.17)

The problem is that it's one-way. He's coming up to tell you "this is how it is"; when so-called feedback is being sought, right, the approach is to defend the policy. It's not to see what are the issues that you will face to implement the policy... The problem with our HR, they do not want to even step into that thing. They just tell you that it has to be done and full-stop! I think the HR partner is something that is good but maybe it's not really functioning in our type of organisation, because when they discuss a policy, it's not about two-way communication. It's decided and the business partner is the one that deals with it by the book and implements the policy. So far, I've not seen anything that can really change. The most they can tell you is "yeah, we know it", and that's about it. Because if they want to change, we're big enough, we have 6,000-over staff; they would say "How do you change with 6,000 people?". So maybe this is one way to look at it. – Middle Manager (#1.21)

John and Björkman (2015) explained that support and promotion from the HR department is also a key influencing factor for the visibility of the PM system. Notably, support from HR is essential to the successful implementation of the intended PM system (Huselid et al., 1997). A small number of FLMs explained that the HR department still served as support when they managed their employees' performance by being available as a source of information that could help FLMs who lacked ability due to their experience within the implementation process. A minority of the interviewed FLMs conveyed that HR provided a channel for them to ask for help and training that helped them in the PM process:

Sometimes we also can call HR and ask them what we should do. – FLM (#1.09)

I'll usually clarify with HR... Because I'm centralised admin, so whenever staff need anything, usually they will come through me. Because HR is very big, so they do not

know who to contact. So, they'll come through me and then I will check for them certain queries that they have, then I will pass the information to them. – FLM (#1.19)

There are some [referring to training] done by HR. So, those are definitely helpful, because it's really something that is quite new, so whatever they can provide I will go for in that sense. – FLM (#2.13)

HR provides briefings and lessons to us, including how the appraisals should be done, how should we manage our teams, etc. They are useful because they set the framework for us to follow in our jobs. – FLM (#2.17)

Because organisations operate in and as an open system, they seek to find balance within the environment through different strategies and processes (Clegg, 1990). The varying combinations of people, resources, and information affect how organisations function (Harney & Dundon, 2006; Scott, 1987). Applying systems theory to the organisational actors, it is evident that operational and HR departments operate within different environments and constraints – the various organisational actors have different focusses and work goals that they need to deliver, resulting in varying perceptions about the level of support they are giving or being given (Lewandowski, 2018; Marsden, 2007). The data show that individual FLMs had different experiences and management styles, helping to explain the disparity in how supportive FLMs find the HR department. Additionally, HR and FLMs have different work goals that can affect the implementation of intended PM systems (Sheehan et al., 2016). AdminInc's director (#2.29) communicated that the departments focussed more on operational work, with managerial responsibilities as a lower order priority. With reference to PM, she believed that the HR department had more information and clarity regarding the PM system because they were in charge. As such, the HR department needs to be a source of support to FLMs in the PM system; however, the differences in work goals will affect the different attention and focus that each work group places on different work (Link & Müller, 2015; Sheehan et al., 2016), which can also help to explain the difference in how supportive the HR department is perceived to be. Support given by other organisational actors also affects the implementation of the intended PM system; however, as is discussed in Chapter Six (see 6.3 Support from Higher Levels of Management and Peers), it also illustrates the complexity of the actual PM system. The various organisational actors can support FLMs in the implementation process of the intended PM system; however, they can also create conflict and tensions within the workplace that affect how FLMs are able to manage the performance of their employees.

#### ***5.1.4 Workplace Tensions***

All organisations have tensions (or internal politics) in the workplace that are unavoidable and affect the behaviours and performance of organisational actors (Rosen & Levy, 2013; Witt, 1995). Even though workplace tensions influence the PM system, the different perceptions that varying levels of management and employees have of the tensions impact the implementation process of the intended PM system. Despite the role of workplace tensions in the performance appraisal process (Dhiman & Maheshwari, 2013; Levy & Williams, 2004), there has been little research on how workplace tensions affect the PM system. Tensions that are present at work, whether individual or departmental, can be a big part of an organisation's culture, affecting the way performance is managed and how FLMs can manage their employees' performance (Rosen & Levy, 2013). Workplace tensions affect how the FLM approaches his or her PM responsibilities and the implementation of the formal PM system, as Rosen et al. (2016) found that managers tended to adhere to formal policy when faced with fewer workplace tensions. As such, less tensions present in the workplace would lead to FLMs implementing the intended PM system more closely, with less deviation.

Tensions in an organisation can arise from power struggles during policy decisions (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Even though more than half of the frontline employees and FLMs from both case organisations believed they did not experience any form of tension in their work, it could be inferred from the data that internal politics was prevalent within the organisations and this affected the implementation of PM. These workplace tensions tended to be subtle and it was only with experience that individuals were exposed to and became familiar with work group tensions. As discussed in Chapter Three, interpersonal tensions at PublicWorks ran within the work group. The director (#1.24) explained that the tension was present due to differing focus and views from his superior; as a result, there were employees that were in line with him and others that were in line with his superior:

Why we are having this session here is because my boss may not like things that are not related to the job to be done. He may say "are you all so free?". That's why I said that I will choose those who are 'in line' to be interviewed. 'In line' does not mean in line with performance management. After going through so much of the interviews, you will see that some of them are very rigid, some of them are very flexible. It has nothing to do with performance management; they have all got their different styles. 'In line' here means that this group of them are not part of the grapevine, where they will go back to their bosses and say "the director asked me to do this".

In contrast, AdminInc had interdepartmental tensions, yet frontline employees did not see any major issues within their working group:

Everyone has their own agendas at times. If it's between my boss and another boss, I will try [to] let them know, "Actually I spoke to this boss and then this is what he said". It's more of just letting everyone be in the loop but whatever they decide to do, it's not my problem already. It's inevitable. – Frontline Employee (#2.03)

We are separated by departments and divisions, and generally between divisions and departments, we will try to work closely and hand in hand, but of course sometimes inevitably because of the segregation of responsibilities there might be one or two times where you feel that it might be other divisions trying to push work to you... That is between divisions but within our own department of course we are very tight-knit, so I suppose it helps to be together every day. So, in terms of when we're working, we will often help each other. We will often in fact go out of our way to help each other, so the sharing of information is very strong, the intention to help each other is very strong also, so that is what I appreciate a lot from the department. – Frontline Employee (#2.11)

Organisational actors experienced different amounts and types of tensions within both case organisations; however, it is evident that tensions tended to increase going up the management level due to the struggle for power. However, that did not mean that FLMs and frontline employees did not have to navigate it. The quotes below show the experience of a sample of interviewees from both cases with workplace tensions:

PublicWorks:

Everywhere is the same, workplace politics... there are people who are always around the bosses... There's also the other kind of guys who are the same level, but they do more work at the ground, solve our problems, but there's this other group, they only do PowerPoint slides, presentations and all. – Frontline Employee (#1.08)

For us, we don't feel any politics. For our level, middle management [interviewee believed that FLMs were considered middle management] and our staff. But I would feel that is high management level. – FLM (#1.02)

At my level, we do have politics earlier on, at the higher levels, [the] politics are actually more obvious. So, it depends on oneself how you manage politics. – Middle Manager (#1.14)

AdminInc:

I think within the department it's not so bad, but across departments, that's where it could get a bit tricky, because we all have our own interests to safeguard. So, sometimes you don't want to promise this, don't want to promise that. So, it can get a bit frustrating

when it comes to between departments. But within [the] department itself, it's okay. It's quite harmonious, at least to me. – Frontline Employee (#2.04)

No. In my five years in the same department, no – workplace politics. I mean, I'm quite lucky to say that. – FLM (#2.07)

For us, we don't experience that huge politics. I guess we are still quite sheltered in the department. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.22)

Tensions are an important part of a PM system; although workplace tensions tend to be more centralised at the top (leadership tension at PublicWorks and interdepartmental tensions at AdminInc), whether it flows down on to the frontline employees is largely dependent on the FLM. Newer FLMs and employees tended not to be as aware of the tensions in the organisation as the more experienced cohort. However, at PublicWorks, the FLMs with high quality LMX relationships with senior management were made aware of tensions in the workplace through their interaction with their superiors. Knowledge of any workplace tensions added an additional layer of work for the FLMs who were privy to and aware of it within the intended PM system because they had to allocate work that could involve tensions. These FLMs were motivated and had the opportunity to use their discretion to strip out any form of tension from managing their employees and work, as they felt that it was their duty and part of their responsibility – they believed that their approach of only passing the task onto their employees contributed to their employees and them accomplishing their work tasks. There were instances where work was passed to FLMs due to competing pressures from individuals at the top of the organisation. The FLMs were motivated not let their employees know about the issue, only about the work that needed to be done, ensuring the operational goals were being met. This allowed the FLMs to manage the performance of their employees to ensure that the employees performed and delivered quality work, without having to consider or worry about the conflict involved.

As such, FLMs play an important buffering role in controlling the message that is passed onto frontline employees – they are in a position where they can choose how much or how little they want their employees to know in order to get the job done. Equally, within PM systems, FLMs play an important role in the implementation of the intended PM system because they are in a position where they are able to protect their employees from the knowledge of tensions at higher levels of management and do so through their use of the formal and informal PM system. This is discussed further in Chapter Six.

In heavily bureaucratic organisations, workplace tensions influence the implementation of intended PM systems because decisions tend to be made at senior management levels (Hyman, 2005; Vogel & Masal, 2012). Within the two case organisations, even though the FLMs had first-hand experience in the day-to-day dealings with frontline employees, and as a result, gave their superiors the appraisal or feedback about their respective frontline employees, at the end senior management made the final decision. The lack of formal authority within the intended system affected how it was implemented because FLMs had discretion and needed to take the tensions that existed in the organisation into consideration, especially during PM because performance was more than just the employee's individual performance:

we do an individual appraisal... all these appraisals will be combined and go into a ranking session within the whole division or the group. It would be moderated later... a person may perform very well based on his own scope of work, but when it comes to an overall team, his performance may be buried. – FLM (#1.04)

The competitive and comparative aspect of the intended PM system meant that just because employees were performing well within their intermediate work group, it did not necessarily mean that they were also performing well when compared to others. The competitive nature of PM can increase tensions between employees should they feel that there is inconsistency or bias in the evaluation process (Poon, 2004). Middle managers at PublicWorks explained that it was essential for other managers, especially senior management, to have the same perception of performance:

the entire system is based on competitive ranking... just because I say you are good does not mean that the other person will agree – Middle Manager (#1.06)

You always want your staff and your team to be the best performer and to do the best that they can... everybody will have their own perceptions, and we'll say, "This staff [member] is so good." They'll say, "Are you sure they are so good? My staff [member] is better". So that's sometimes where the politics come in... to me it's not actually what we say. We can say all we want but subsequently, you have to convince the most senior one... because there is no point for us to say so much about the staff when he doesn't view it that way. – Middle Manager (#1.13)

As such, the intended PM system in the organisation facilitated interdivisional and intergroup tensions due to the need for visibility and the need to impress higher levels of management. It is difficult to accurately identify the performance of all employees within an organisation, but good or poor performers tend to be noticed easily (Neu Morén, 2013), which emphasises the importance of visibility influencing perceived performance and how the intended PM system

is implemented. Additionally, FLMs can deviate from the intended PM system using discretion to balance their subordinates' and superiors' expectations through the use of the formal and informal PM systems within the actual PM system. This is further analysed in Chapter Six. PublicWork's director (#1.24) explained the numerical importance of ranking employees because the eventual order would affect the score and reward of individual employees. However, the ranking of the employees also had to take into consideration other contextual factors and not just the actual performance of the year because they would be compared with another division that was part of the same group under his superior, the group director. If the top ranked employee for the division was not seen by the group director to be a good performer, the rest of the employees below would be affected and might lose out to the other division. This was beyond the FLM's formal authority and role within the intended PM system; however, knowledge of the importance of ranking would help him or her use discretionary behaviour in order to find a middle ground between higher levels of management and frontline employees. Workplace tensions show the complexity of an intended PM system, which relates back to what Boulding (1956) and von Bertalanffy (1950) described about systems in general being made up of complex independent parts that work together to achieve a common goal; a part of the complex intended PM system that lies beyond the control of the FLM is tensions in the workplace. Knowledge of specific tensions in PM will allow FLMs to better manage the expectations of their employees. Some FLMs also used their knowledge of workplace tensions to help their employees be perceived as performing to higher levels of management and this is also discussed further in Chapter Six (see 6.2.1 Performance Discussions).

### ***5.1.5 Seniority***

Employees from both organisations also experienced the issue of seniority or years in service affecting the evaluation of performance, which is in line with what literature has shown about promotions and rewards in the public sector tending to be for senior staff (e.g., Brown, 2004; Fischer, 2008). FLMs need to be aware of the role that seniority plays within the intended PM system so that they can better manage the expectations of their employees through the implementation process. At PublicWorks, frontline employees spoke about their impression of more senior employees getting better scores because they had been working longer and tended to be more visible:

I heard there is a quota here... they will have to set a quota for those who have poorer performance. So, normally they will put the newbies there. – Frontline Employee (#1.03)

It's the same problem we are facing here in our division. I can't say that it's on a seniority basis or it's because you're a young employee, that's why they are giving you a lot of responsibilities on site; or it's because you're senior, you're not doing anything, but then your score is still [laugh] higher than the one doing well. – Frontline Employee (#1.05)

5 is considered good performance and I used to get 5s in my previous department, but I believe here I may drop, because I'm still new. I'm new here, so my director doesn't know me personally – “Who is this, I don't know who [frontline employee #1.08] is”. – Frontline Employee (#1.08)

At AdminInc, frontline employees further emphasised the impression of seniority being rewarded, with the expectation that newcomers tended to be given a default score in the annual performance review in their first year, which equated to the minimum reward they received:

They don't really rank you because they recognise that it's your first year over here, so there's a default. – Frontline Employee (#2.03)

Normally when you first join [the organisation], you get a one month [reward] by default.– Frontline Employee (#2.25)

The employee's score affected the rewards and developmental opportunities that they were entitled to. As such, when senior employees were given higher scores than newer employees, they had access to rewards and development that otherwise would not be available. New employees who were given a default score were also given minimum rewards. Although the interviewees believed that seniority increased the visibility of employees leading to better scores, employees who had more years in service could have been given better scores because they were more experienced and therefore performing better in their jobs. Alternatively, more senior employees may have been given better scores because they had higher quality LMX with their superiors, where managers knew them and were confident in their ability to perform in the long run. New employees may not have had the opportunity to perform in a wide range of tasks that more senior employees had and management could be reserving their judgement until they received more information.

Seniority within a role also affects how performance is evaluated within the PM system. Data from AdminInc show that there was a trend after a promotion to give employees the default score again:

I think if you got promoted the last year, the next year your grade is kind of a default. But if you have done well, then I shouldn't just give you a default grade, because it will not be fair to you, so we do request for such write-ups from them in a way to help themselves... I heard from the management side that "this is your first year into your new position, so if you compare against people who have been in that position for many years, the tendency is they are likely to be able to do better than you"; especially if you just got promoted into a managerial role – you are new to management. So, of course there will be some skills that you are lacking behind your fellow managers who have been in the same role for years, and hence the default grade logic. That's another side of the story that I've heard before... I can't tell you exactly whether it is [an] openly known thing or they – because a lot of people have the same impression, so it could already be an open secret. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.18)

I think it varies also. So, typically in the years that you get promoted, you might get more bonus [sic], which, I guess that's why you got promoted in the first place. But other times, for example, when you just got promoted, the next year your bonus won't be as high, because it could be, like, a standard thing. – Frontline Employee (#2.26)

This PM system was best described by a frontline employee (#2.28), where new employees and employees who were just promoted got a default grade and the remainder of the employees' performance were determined by management who ranked and rewarded the employees:

What we understand is, let's say if you're promoted this year, the next year will be a default. So, you will not be ranked. And then those new joiners, within the first year, will not be ranked. Then the rest will – the bosses will sit down together and then decide who will have a better performance bonus by ranking the staff.

AdminInc's PM system was perceived to be based on years in service rather than actual on the job performance. This is common in traditional civil service and the shift away from seniority-based progression and reward may not necessarily be in place in all organisations, as shown in previous literature (e.g., Arrowsmith, Nicholaisen, Bechter, & Nonell, 2010; Perkins & White, 2010). However, AdminInc's director (#2.29) explained that although senior employees tended to be more visible because they had been given more complex work that increased their visibility because they delivered results, these employees would move up the corporate ladder giving other employees the opportunity to perform:

Of course, these people also eventually will move up. If they're good performers, they will move up, or they can also get rotated to other divisions. There's always a chance for the younger ones to rise up to the occasion as well. So, they wouldn't be buried under the shadow of all these better staff.

Within the performance appraisal literature, workplace tensions or internal politics can affect the perception of performance, especially when the actual performance of the employee is ignored for other purposes (Dhiman & Maheshwari, 2013). As such, although all employees have an opportunity to perform and gain visibility, they are also limited by other organisational actors and how their superiors choose to present their performance to senior management. The findings show that seniority affected the visibility of the frontline employee to senior management, affecting the evaluation of performance within the intended PM system. Additionally, the components of the intended PM system that were not within the responsibility of the FLM (e.g., CEP, quota and ranking) also affected the perceived performance of frontline employees, because senior management had to take those components into consideration during the evaluation of employees' performance. A lack of ability due to inadequate knowledge regarding what influences frontline employees' evaluated performance can result in FLMs also lacking in the motivation to implement the intended PM system as they could have the impression that their input does not matter. Frontline managers had the opportunity to deviate from the intended system through their discretionary behaviours in how they chose to implement the components within the intended PM system. The FLM's implementation of the intended PM system within both organisations is further discussed in the remainder of this chapter (e.g., 5.2.2 Location of Work) and Chapter Six.

The findings from both organisations demonstrate that the performance culture of an organisation impacts the implementation of the intended PM system because FLMs are constrained by their position in the workplace. A FLM's knowledge of the components within the intended system, workplace tensions, and seniority within the workplace and support given by the HR department and span of control affects how he or she implements the intended PM system. Within the actual PM system, what that FLM implements from the intended PM system falls into the formal system that shapes the experience of frontline employees of the formal policy dictated by senior management and HR. However, in addition to performance culture, the nature of work that FLMs and frontline employees engage in also shapes the implementation process of the intended PM system.

## **5.2 Nature of Work**

This section will show how the nature of work that organisational actors engage in affects the implementation of the intended PM system because the type of work determines the goals that need to be achieved. The performance culture of a work group is also affected by the type of work done, and vice versa. In particular, FLMs have to consider how the varying work tasks and roles of the employees will impact the performance of themselves and their employees because the intended PM system in the organisation is developed by HR with the intention of organisation-wide implementation, which may be difficult to implement in all scenarios. There is no fixed equilibrium within an open system that organisations operate from (Koehler, 1981), and the FLMs in organisations will need to take the nature of work into consideration when trying to find their steady state within the PM system. Table 6 illustrates the daily and ad hoc work that FLMs and frontline employees were expected to perform in both organisations based on interview responses.

Table 6

*Summary of the Type of Work Done by the Frontline*

Organisation	Department	Role	Daily Work	Ad Hoc Work
PublicWorks	1/2/3	FLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervise physical site works</li> <li>• Liaise with contractors</li> <li>• Assist and report to the FLM on site</li> <li>• Manage the site project (safety, quality, budget, time)</li> </ul>	<p>Extra work/assignments that fall outside of the regular job scope but still must be accomplished:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 'ECAs' – being part of a committee, competitions, work assigned directly by higher management</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> </ul>
		FLM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrative responsibilities</li> <li>• Assigning work to and monitoring the performance of FLEs</li> </ul>	
	C	FLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support post-contract administration</li> </ul>	
		FLM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing post-contract administration to project teams</li> <li>• Assigning work to and monitoring the performance of FLEs</li> </ul>	
AdminInc	A/S	FLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Routine administrative case work</li> <li>• Reporting to and supporting the FLM</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional projects not related to work</li> <li>• Ad hoc public enquires</li> <li>• 'ECAs' – committee member, organising organisational events</li> <li>• Covering duty</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> </ul>
		FLM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluation of proposals</li> <li>• Guiding FLEs in work processes</li> <li>• Unresolved or complicated case work</li> </ul>	

*Note.* 'FLE' = Frontline employee; 'FLM' = Frontline manager; 'ECAs' = Extracurricular activities

### **5.2.1 Goal Clarity**

The nature of work that both organisations engaged in affected the clarity of performance goals, which was an important part of the PM system. In particular, goal clarity can help to facilitate the implementation of the formal PM system. The literature states that clear goals are expected to result in better performing organisations (Rainey and Steinbauer, 1999). Goals are necessary for the various components of the PM system to work towards (Boulding, 1956) and FLMs need to know what they are working towards in order to use the PM system to achieve it. The sample of employees from PublicWorks did construction-related projects and clear department goals were shared with all employees – FLMs and frontline employees knew that all work should be delivered on time, within budget, safely, and with quality. The FLMs utilised the intended PM system with these common goals in mind to ensure that the frontline employees were able to achieve these goals; even if the intended PM system was not adhered to, frontline employees would still be able to understand what was expected of their performance. However, FLMs explained that it was difficult for individual employee goals (goals were also known as KRAs and/or KPIs within both case organisations) to be specifically determined due to the focus on meeting project targets, which is a group effort over a period of a few years:

Because we are project-basis, and a project maybe five or six years long... I know within a HR context, you have to plan for the work year, but for us, in terms of managing projects, it's the same... You have different stages of a project... it all depends a lot on the contractor's progress... So, our KRA is actually to make sure that the project runs smoothly. We must continue, the work must never stop. – FLM (#1.22)

For each individual project, it's somewhat different from each other... sometimes the project runs over a few years... we will have to look at each stage of the project every year. – FLM (#1.16)

Performance management is expected to facilitate the development of employee goals to ensure that managers are working with the employees to achieve organisational goals and targets (Amaratunga & Baldry, 2002; Dessler, 2005). However, PublicWorks' FLMs were restricted in terms of how employees' goals were determined:

Then KRA and KRI becomes repetitive, it's the same every year... I just set it myself and then submit [the KRA/KPI] to him and then he approves [it], and

then it goes on... it becomes more of like a paperwork kind of thing... –  
Frontline Employee/FLM (#1.15)

They give you a new project and then basically you are going to fill up the new project details only and then also you'll be filling up the old details. In terms of KRA, like, ok, continue with this contract number and then following up with this new project, that's it. That kind of thing, that is the basic thing the KRA. –  
Frontline Employee/FLM (#1.11)

Due to the nature of the construction, project-based work at PublicWorks, the four goals (on time, within budget, safely, and with quality) were not individual goals that the individual employees had to achieve within their work capacity. Instead team performance and meeting the operational targets was the focus instead of allocating individual specific goals to help improve individual performance and this affected how FLMs approached their PM responsibilities. In contrast, the frontline employees from AdminInc explained that they lacked specific goals (both group and individual) to work towards or be evaluated on. A frontline employee (#2.09) explained that although there were fixed timelines that they had to adhere to, the timelines could be extended, allowing them to meet their timeline goal:

We do have deadlines, but more often than not these deadlines can be stretched... for example, if you cannot meet this, then you stretch it. I think the nature of the work for [Department A] is not so easy to have a KPI... that's the way the work in [Department A] is... most of the time the timelines get pushed automatically without you doing it yourself. So, somehow you just got an extension of time, so by this way we generally meet the KPIs.

Additionally, as the cases that had to be completed were not fixed at the start of the year, with each case having different demands and timelines, it made it difficult for the FLM and employees to plan out specific goals they needed to achieve aside from the cases that needed to be completed. The absence of clarity in what they needed do then led to a lot of assumptions and gossip being a key source of information for employees. The lack of goal clarity led to FLMs being motivated to deviate from the intended PM system (e.g., not doing performance planning with their employees) because they were not able to understand the purpose behind certain components – this is further discussed in Chapter Six. Notably, goal clarity was important within the PM system because it affected the performance of employees, and also how FLMs were able to monitor, evaluate, and report the performance of their employees through a consistent means.

The clearer the goals, the less conflict and tension FLMs and employees face in their work responsibilities that affects their performance.

### ***5.2.2 Location of Work***

The location of FLMs and frontline employees affects their visibility to higher levels of management and as a result impacts how the intended PM system is implemented. This was seen in PublicWorks, where interviewees who were working on construction projects were based in site offices out of headquarters. As such, the FLMs were responsible for supervising the various construction works across multiple site locations around Singapore. Each FLM was a project officer in charge of an individual worksite and a team including the frontline employees he or she was in charge of, the number varying depending on the size of the site. The team was then responsible for overseeing the work done by contractors or other third parties at that location. However, a few FLMs were based at the headquarters due to the ad hoc work they were assigned. A specific example of such ad hoc work that required them to be in the headquarters was being a secretary of a committee for senior management – the FLM needed to be at the headquarters to participate in the meetings. These FLMs made visits to their work sites, but did not have that daily face-to-face interaction that the other FLMs who were based on site experienced. There were also FLMs who oversaw more than one worksite due to manpower issues and a frontline employee (#1.08) expressed concern because he believed that as the secondary site, he lost out due to the lack of contact with his FLM:

He doesn't know me, he doesn't see me often. He has his own team of guys to look after and they are all based at [the] site, so I believe the priority will be given there, although we are under the same boss.

The location of work affects the actual and perceived distance between FLMs and frontline employees, which impacts the implementation of the intended PM system. As discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two pertaining to the Singapore context, Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions can help to explain how distance affects the relationship between superior and subordinate and the implementation of PM. In particular, Singapore was found to have high power distance, where the superior's authority was accepted and respected in the workplace (Hofstede, 1983, 2017). As such,

Singaporean FLMs are expected to respect decisions and not to subvert the authority of higher levels of management. Within the two case organisations, findings show that FLMs were motivated to respect the authority of their superiors (e.g., they generally did not go against the evaluations of their senior managers within the intended system). However, the FLMs' consideration of the authority of higher levels of management led to them using discretionary behaviour within the PM system to circumvent the authority of their superiors. The FLM's use of discretion was not meant to undermine the authority of their superiors, but rather allowed the FLM to better manage the expectations of his or her subordinates and superiors concurrently. The opportunities for the FLMs' within the implementation process of the intended PM system were affected by their acceptance of the power distance within the organisation. However, they were still able to use discretion within the intended system to help manage the responsibilities within their role.

The interviewees demonstrated that the location of work created opportunities for impression management within the intended PM system, and FLMs who worked closely with their employees daily tended to manage performance through the work that employees did. Moreover, the location of work also affected the relationship between FLMs, frontline employees, and higher levels of management. Having the same work location helped FLMs communicate regularly with employees to ensure that the work ran smoothly and helped their employees improve:

I would be looking out for the things which they are doing and if they are not doing something correctly, I would highlight it to them straight away. Because if there're any issues that crop up, then I think it's not good for our performance as a team. So normally what I try to do is to scrutinise their work very closely, make sure that they don't commit any wrongdoings and to guide them along. If I find that they are not very familiar with a certain aspect of the work, I would normally sit down with them and tell them what to do. – FLM (#1.10)

I meet my staff every day and the first thing we do in the day is our daily meetings. So, after the daily meetings, then we will start to do all kinds of the work for the rest of the day – so what are the things to look out for and all that. Then, the subsequent day, we would start to review what has happened the day before. So, this will just go on for the rest of the week. – FLM (#1.16)

However, some FLMs explained that ad hoc work that required them to be at headquarters made it challenging for them to be able to manage performance in real time because they lacked the opportunities that other FLMs who worked on site had:

Because being on site, I'm able to keep an eye on my contractors, I'm able to resolve things so easily. But because I'm based here, it's difficult for me to even talk to them. Like, previously when I was on site, I [would] just go downstairs and talk to the project manager and then I will discuss things. Now, I have to, like, call them, "Hey can I have a meeting?", arrange a meeting another day, and then, like, there'll be time loss because of this distance. – FLM (#1.15)

It [ad hoc work] means taking time off from your daily work. You can't talk to your technical officers so often and you have to keep relying on emails to track contractors and talk to your staff. Everything is through email. You can't go to the site and pre-empt things, because for us we always try to look ahead. So, if you don't have time to go to the site to look ahead, then it's pretty tough. As such, for us, ECAs is just taking time off from your normal schedule to make time to clear things for the bosses. – FLM (#1.20)

These FLMs who worked at headquarters lacked regular access to their frontline employees to closely monitor the progress or work, but they had access to senior management, which facilitated their opportunity for impression management. The location of work influenced the implementation of the intended PM system because the multiple worksites introduced the issue of visibility between higher levels of management and FLMs and frontline employees – the visibility of employees who worked at site locations versus employees who worked at headquarters. As senior management were ultimately in charge of the final evaluation of employee performance, the visibility of frontline employees and the FLM was a very influential component of the intended PM system through the evaluation of performance. In particular, the high power distance in Singapore meant that the FLMs tended to not challenge the decisions made by senior management. The large number of organisational actors made it difficult for senior management to be able to monitor individual work performance:

It is very important to report to them, because if you just do [something] and nobody knows about it, then nobody will know and it will not go into your appraisal. The reporting process is the key, but I think a lot of people, they just do their own work and if it goes well then everything is fine, but if something goes wrong, then it seems like they are incompetent. Unless we proactively report to the bosses, I don't think there is an avenue for them to know what we

have been doing on site, because we are site-based and what they get is just monthly reports of the progress of the project and not how we have solved issues or what kind of difficulties we encountered... I think I see that happening to some of my colleagues. They are very good at running their projects but they don't really like to come back [to headquarters] or they are not assigned CCAs, so [the] bosses don't really see them. To the point that I think my group director doesn't even know who that person is. So, how do you expect him to rank you well when he doesn't even know your name? – FLM (#1.15)

They [referring to higher levels of management] cannot see you every day. The only person that sees your work is your reporting officer; he can appreciate everything that you do, but you don't know if your reporting officer shares this with higher management. – Frontline employee/FLM (#1.05)

He has... a hundred over staff under him. He wouldn't exactly know each and everyone, but those that he has a good impression of, probably he would rank them better or higher... One thing is exposure. – FLM (#1.25)

Although visibility was not conveyed by the HR department as a component of the intended PM system, it played an important role in how the performance of employees was evaluated. Senior management had difficulty evaluating all of the work that was done by individual employees because of the sheer number of frontline employees in their department. There were goals that had to be met within the department or work group, but unless there were big problems or someone had gotten the attention of higher levels of management, it was difficult for senior management to know how all of their employees were performing. The components of an organisational system are typically intended to fit together for the achievement of goals (Boulding, 1956). As discussed earlier, project-based construction work at PublicWorks made it difficult for individual goals to be established and monitored, resulting in department goals being used. Within a work group, it was difficult for senior management to be aware of individual performance unless they worked closely with the team of FLMs and frontline employees on the project. As such, the intended system was such that the impression that senior management had about individual employees was important because the performance of the frontline employees was evaluated based on management's perception of them.

However, evaluating employees through impression had its difficulties, especially for average performing employees. Appropriately classifying and rewarding employees in the middle, who are not as noticeable as employees at the top or bottom of the group,

is challenging (Neu Morén, 2013). Some FLMs found it difficult to report their employees' positive performance if higher levels of management were not aware of the individual employee's contribution or performance. This relates back to the final decision of the intended PM system ultimately lying in the hands of senior management. Hence, if senior management was not aware of the employee's performance, the FLM's opportunity within the intended PM system was limited. The visibility of the FLM and frontline employees affected how senior management evaluated performance due to the quota and comparative ranking within the intended PM system:

I will think that maybe because my boss is very friendly with this subordinate [and] that [is why] he prefers to give him higher marks. So, even though another person actually deserves high marks, but because of the quota, then he must drop [to] the lower band... They have a certain percentage for 5 marks and then another percentage for 4 marks. Once they meet the quota, there are no points left; no choice, the other person has to drop down. You get what I mean? So, I find that, in this organisation, they don't really see the actual performance of the staff, I would say. – FLM (#1.02)

The day-to-day running of project is important, but the thing is, the project is about four or five years long, at least. At the end of the day if the project is smooth, yes – everything goes on smoothly and everything – but what is the additional thing to get you better or higher than your peers in terms of your performance... For example, I can be in charge of two projects, but if the day-to-day, the two projects, everything is like this, then what makes me special when compared to other people? – FLM (#1.22)

Employees who were not based at headquarters also had the chance to be exposed to or visible to higher levels of management should they prove to have potential to go further in their career. However, visibility was also double-edged sword. From the perspective of senior management, director (#1.24) explained that with visibility also came the risk of gaining notoriety, especially if you were not able to perform:

Some of the KRAs, for example, appoint people to write minutes for me, for my committee, or to write minutes for the group-level committee. These are the people whom we want to groom for succession planning to see how well they are able to grasp the issues at hand. Only if you understand the issues, then you are able to write good minutes and also the exposure to different issues and problems in [the] committees. Other than that, it's the corporate-level committee members; it's for other groups to know this staff [member]. Some of them, if they're in the D&D committee, for example, other groups will know him or her. If it's a secretary at the corporate management meeting then all [of] the group

directors will know him or her. But it's a high-risk, high-gain thing; if done badly, then good luck!

The findings in these cases demonstrate that visibility was an important component in how performance was managed and evaluated because the difficulty of setting individual goals affected the evaluation of individual performance. As such, impression management is important for all organisational actors. For FLMs within the intended PM system, they have the responsibility of the visibility of themselves and their employees, as this helps in the determination of performance out of group performance.

The out-of-headquarters working arrangements influenced the discretion that FLMs had within the intended PM system – they had increased autonomy in how they chose to manage their subordinates' daily performance because they were the only level of management that worked closely with the staff on location. The director (#1.24) believed that FLMs had a lot of flexibility in the PM system if they kept within the limitations placed on them:

Our criteria [for PM] are not that rigid... as long as you keep within your quota, then it's up to you... So, the flexibility is for them to assign people, to give challenging stuff to their next line – the staff reporting to them – so that they can do bigger things... in terms of flexibility... I think it is flexible enough for them, but the choice is theirs, whether they want to exercise that flexibility.

Even though FLMs had to keep within the boundaries of the intended PM system that they were expected to deliver (e.g., year-end performance review), they were given the flexibility by senior management in how they chose to implement components of the intended PM system (e.g., how the performance discussions were carried out). Despite the perception of senior management, how much actual flexibility FLMs had in the management of their employees also depended on the middle manager and how much leeway was given to the FLM in that aspect; this was where the formal PM system implemented by FLMs could vary depending on the middle manager they reported to. A system is dependent on the components within it and the interactions between the components (Jackson, 2000). As such, higher levels of management can constrain FLMs' discretionary behaviour within the intended PM system that limits the opportunity they have to deviate from it. There were middle managers who were more concerned about adhering to components within the intended PM system (e.g.,

completing the performance reviews). This was where the location of work did not influence the discretion that FLMs had, because they were expected to keep within the boundaries imposed on them when they were managing performances:

No, I don't think they are given full freedom. I would say they're given some freedom with the common understanding of the expectation of the management... They must understand. To me it's quite important, because as middle management, our job is to link between the top [and FLMs and frontline employees]. So myself, my team, my project manager, deputy, the frontline manager, they have to first understand the thinking of management and the consistency in the message delivered down to the staff. – Middle Manager (#1.13)

With a certain constraint or limitation, because what I understand is that certain areas are beyond their responsibility. So, they need to understand what is their limit and this limit must be made known to them. I think this is very important... Not restricted, but... they need to know the procedures and follow [the procedures]... a good and successful frontline manager will need to have flexibility in terms of both knowing the procedures, where is his limitation [sic], and to handle items or issues on site with his own freedom, but of course reporting to his superior. So, I think that by gaining this frontline management skill, he will be a successful person in the organisation. – Middle Manager (#1.14)

However, there were other middle managers who chose to give the FLMs a lot of flexibility in the day-to-day management of performance because they were more concerned with the output rather than the process of getting there:

I choose to give them the flexibility; I don't dictate what is the style you are must follow. I am a person who's looking at [the] end results – I don't care how you do it. If I set the deadline, say Friday, I want to get this done; how you do it in-between, I don't care... because I don't see a point by enforcing my way or my style of running the project into these people... What you want is the end-result, right? That's all! – Middle Manager (#1.26)

I don't see them every day. I don't even see my engineers every day. So, they are taking care of certain things at a different location... It's a bit different from the office set up here. Here, all the staff are all housed in this building. So, whoever is sitting there can get to meet anybody, if you walk down. If you choose to walk down, you can meet anybody. Whereas for us it's different, we're spread out. Structure-wise [it] is a bit different. So, all the frontline managers will have in fact full control of what is happening... Use their discretion, yes, because I think everyone is a bit different, but the outcome has to be the same. – Middle Manager (#1.21)

As such, the intended PM system allowed FLMs flexibility in the components that were carried out informally (e.g., how they chose to give feedback to and have discussions with their staff) as long as they adhered to certain deliverables (which were considered compulsory) in the intended system (e.g., the year-end performance review). Nevertheless, the nature of work can impact the use of the intended PM system. A FLM (#1.23) explained that their work made it difficult for them to use the intended PM system's use of fixed measurables (as discussed in Chapter Four where KPIs were set based on significant work tasks or targets) to evaluate and report on the performance of their staff because different sites had different work scopes, and as such, different requirements:

We are project-based, so different projects have different needs. It's not like in the office where we have a few divisions; they are mainly based in the office so they have a fixed scope of work to follow. We as project-based site staff, we have different scopes of work for different projects. That's why it would be better, aside from KPI, to have these schemes [PM components that are tailored to individual work sites] to assess the performance of the staff.

Other FLMs expressed that they tended to set their employees' KPIs based on the goals of the division because each individual project had different focusses and timelines. A middle manager (#1.21) explained that even though he understood the need for the intended PM system, the problem with the intended system was that it was difficult to measure everything; certain jobs might not have measurable components:

HR... they're doing their part to have a system, which I think is a theoretical system. The problem is that our organisation is so huge and the work that we are doing varies greatly. Not everything has, for example, a KPI, and it's not measurable. So, the performance assessment cannot be based just solely on facts and figures... Let's say the policy department that creates [name of product] and then you say that your KPI is to see whether people are happy with it. How many people, [when] you go out there and ask them "Are you happy to be taxed every morning?" The answer is "No!"... you have to find a benchmark, but I do believe not everything can be put to numbers and figures.

This was where informality played a large part in helping employees perform in their job, which the FLMs generally preferred to engage in on a regular basis. The limited authority of FLMs in the intended PM system can help to explain why they preferred the use of informality (Pagan & Franklin, 2003). Beyond the location of work, the findings also show that the nature of work influenced the training frontline employees

received as part of the intended PM system through the formal PM system implemented by FLMs.

### ***5.2.3 Training and Development***

The training and development available to frontline employees is also affected by the nature of work they engage in. Training and development can help to improve the ability of organisational actors (Caldwell, 2000), improving the competencies of the labour pool (Lai & Saridakis, 2013) to achieve work goals. As such, training and development programs provided to the frontline employees was another important component of the intended PM system within the two case organisations. However, a frontline employee (#1.05) explained that the location of work impacted their training due to work commitments that clashed with training opportunities:

In [PublicWorks] there're a lot of career development training, but then most of the time as site employees, you don't have much time for developing your careers because you are too busy on site works. As such, most of the time, we just read the email from HR to attend these courses, to attend this performance training, but then we don't have the time to attend because there's a conflict with the schedule on site. So, most of the time it's only for the office-based staff... because we are too attached to site works. If performance management training would be done in the main office, like here, you cannot just attend as and when you like, because there's a job to do on site.

According to HR and senior management, PublicWorks offered standard training and development programs that were available to all employees (different levels of employees had access to different types of programs) subject to supervisor approval, but employee performance also affected access to training and developmental programs. According to a HR FLM (#1.27), the intended PM system was such that employees who were perceived as performing and who had a high CEP would have more training and development opportunities:

Of course, if a person is performing well and they are keen to sponsor the person, for example, to go for some sort of in-house scholarship, and things like that. The performance grade as well as their potential will play a part. So, a lot of development also would look at the performance.

The location of work is not the only factor that limits the training that employees are able to access. Frontline employees need the approval and support of their respective

FLMs to attend standardised training and development programs. As such, management's attitude towards training and development affects what employees can attend. Frontline employees from Department S at AdminInc explained that they found it difficult to attend training and development when their applications were constantly rejected or they were asked to pick another time to go:

If you are interested, you go and apply, but I have stopped applying. It's not that I don't want to go. Some of them I want to go for, but... I've got to seek approval before I can go for the course... From my RO [reporting officer] and sometimes I have to go all the way to my director... And sometimes when I apply, I provide the reasons why I want to go, because if it's related to the job then you can go, but then some of them will tell you "This will be a busy month, so can you reschedule to another session?" and all that... the thing is, when you are doing cases, you've already got [to] do submissions and all that; then now, to go for the course, you've also got to do a submission to go and when you do the submission, you get these kinds of reasons or get rejected. So, now I'd rather not go. Then some of the courses are not really related to your job, but it's good to have the exposure... So, if I want to go for that, I don't know whether they will reject me because it's not related to my job scope. Then, what is the point of all these training? When they offer it to you, you've still got to apply and when you apply, there may be the possibility that you will be rejected because of all these kinds of reasons. It's too much of a hassle to me; I rather don't go; I don't care – If I have it, I have it; if I don't have it, I don't have it. So, if you want to assign me, I'll go, but if you ask me to apply for it, I won't apply. – Frontline Employee (#2.15)

I always apply, but then I always get rejected. I heard recently we have to put a submission to our DD [deputy director] to ask for permission to go for courses... I think we have those courses that we need to fulfil, but even though I didn't fulfil anything, HR also didn't check with me... It's either I come back from holiday then he says "better clear your work first" or if not "there's not enough people in the department" because he wants people to be around... I just don't apply because I cannot even finish my own work, so I just don't apply. – Frontline Employee (#2.19)

As such, even though an intended PM system has been set up to allow for training and development, this does not mean that employees will be able to access it. AdminInc demonstrated that the intended PM system could be set up to fail because although frontline employees identified their training needs and made requests, the constant rejection by their FLMs or having to get approval from higher levels of management led to them to avoid applying for and attending these programs. The pressures on the completion of work tasks can help to explain the constant rejection of training by FLMs

and higher levels of management. Verbeeten (2008) explained that the public sector finds balancing their short-term and long-term goals to be a challenge, and this was seen at AdminInc. Training and development programs are supposed to help with both short term (how to do your job) and long term (how to manage your future career) performance, but AdminInc neglected the training and development of employees to focus on the completion of the current workload – the concentration on current or specific work tasks restricted employees’ short and long term performance where they were unable to improve performance and go further in their careers. The FLMs were in a position where they needed the ability to balance the needs of the organisation and their employees – they needed to ensure that work was being completed in order for organisational goals and targets to be achieved but they also needed to ensure that their employees were being equipped to perform in the future. However, the intended PM system’s requirement for frontline employees to seek approval from senior management to attend certain training and development programs limited the FLMs’ opportunities within the intended system, as they were not the decision makers within the process. In line with the high power distance in Singapore (Hofstede, 1983, 2017), the requirement for senior management’s approval also did not encourage training because employees generally did not feel comfortable approaching higher levels of management directly. This is further elaborated on in Chapter Six.

Frontline managers need the motivation to support training and development within the intended PM system, otherwise frontline employees will not be able to experience the benefits. Managers from PublicWorks commented that training was dependent on the person receiving it and might not be effective for everyone:

The best way to improve is to go through training. Although I myself don’t like to go [for training], I do feel that for younger and junior managers they should go for training. – FLM (#1.04)

But sometimes you are limited by your own ability... If you look across even for higher management, it’s also the same. They can go and attend so many overseas management courses; even after coming back he’s still very much the same person. Character over application – I always find that gap is very big. – Middle Manager (#1.06)

If a FLM has the opinion that training and development programs are not useful, they lack the motivation to encourage or even approve the programs that their employees

want to attend. The PM training undertaken by FLMs can also be influenced by their attitude towards training. Eight of the 15 FLMs interviewed at PublicWorks explicitly expressed that, if given the choice, they would rather go for technical training over project or people management training:

We have this learning roadmap and some of the courses in our learning roadmap are project management based and some are technical based. Say, for example, deep excavation, which are very technical. So, if you ask me, I will normally choose courses which are more technical in nature because it helps in our work.  
– FLM (#1.10)

We actually have this training roadmap that is catered for every staff... you yourself choose and then being approved by the AO. But... I think usually I don't go for those HR stuff... I mainly go for the technical. – FLM (#1.17)

In contrast, five of the six FLMs from AdminInc expressed their interest in PM training that they believed helped them understand the system better:

I mean, it's always good to understand what is the proper way and then you could follow or you could tweak that to your own liking. Become sometimes without any proper training and [if] you do what you like, you might not have the best results or it might not be very fair for your staff. – FLM (#2.07)

There should be at least some form of formal instructions or basics that [are] provide[d to] you, and then after that, the rest I guess will come through on the job. – FLM (#2.13)

It is evident from the two case organisations that the nature of work that FLMs engage in and the amount of experience they have in the role can also impact their choice of training. At PublicWorks, the FLMs who preferred attending technical training did construction-related work – there was a lot of technical knowledge that could be learnt and applied to their job and ensuring that they were performing. Four of the seven FLMs who did not express preference for technical over people management training had five years or less of experience in the organisation. Additionally, four of the seven did not work on construction sites and were responsible for the administrative components of the division.

At AdminInc, three of the five FLMs who would attend PM training were new to the role with less than six months' experience. The job performed at AdminInc also differed from PublicWorks (administrative paperwork versus construction-related work) where

there was the belief that formal training did little to help them perform in their operational responsibilities at PublicWorks. As such, FLMs who did not have technical job components were also more likely to attend PM training; FLMs who had less experience in their managerial role welcomed a combination of technical and PM training in their job. The PM training that FLMs receive affects their ability through the development of their skills and knowledge within the PM process and influences the implementation of the intended PM system. Equally, training can also affect their motivation because they are likely to be given more opportunities to engage in different roles within the organisations. Hence, AMO interactions appear to be a key element of FLMs operating within the PM system.

The preference for particular training types of a FLM can also influence the type of training their employees prefer – there would be the tendency to encourage employees to attend training that they themselves find useful and believe to be beneficial in the workplace. Likewise, if the FLM does not find training and development programs beneficial, they can also discourage employees from attending them (e.g., making the application process difficult by asking employees to apply another time or rejecting it). Alternatively, it is possible that FLMs do not support training and development for employees because they understand that higher levels of management do not encourage it over meeting their work targets. The findings show that training and development programs were developed to cater to a wide audience across the entire organisation and did not benefit the organisational actors equally due to individual differences (e.g., nature of work, perceptions toward training, etc.). As such, a supportive PM system is required to facilitate training and development, otherwise frontline employees can be restricted or discouraged from attending training by their FLMs and higher levels of management.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an analysis of how the intended PM systems were implemented in both case organisations. The performance culture affected the implementation process of the intended PM systems because different managerial levels had varying knowledge about the components within the system, which affected how they handled the implementation process. Moreover, the span of control of the FLM affected his or

her responsibilities within the intended PM system because the number of employees influenced the opportunity given to the FLM and the relationship between the FLM and employee. A lack of support by the HR department impacted how the intended system was implemented because other organisational actors did not know about the purpose behind the system. Tensions and seniority that FLMs must manage in their work also impacted the implementation of the intended system. The PM system was also such that the nature of work affected how FLMs handled performance because the clarity of goals, location of work, and training heavily influenced the evaluation of performance by senior management. The difficulty of setting individual goals affected the intended PM system because the impression that senior management had about individual employees was more important than individual performance. Working in teams away from the line of sight of higher levels of management gave the FLMs more autonomy in their day-to-day tasks but may have also reduced their visibility. In addition, work allocation was another important factor, because being given more complex ad hoc tasks impacted how senior management was exposed to the ability of the employee and FLM.

Chapter Six provides an analysis of the actual PM system implemented by FLMs through the formal and informal PM systems that they utilised to balance their varying expectations and responsibilities.

## **Chapter Six: Findings and Analysis Part Two**

### **The Formal and Informal Performance Management Systems**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided an analysis of the implementation process of the intended PM systems in the two case organisations. This is the second of the two analysis chapters that use the data to answer the main research question: “*What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?*” through the second research sub-question: “How do FLMs navigate the process of PM?”. Through the analysis of the data, this chapter illustrates that the actual PM systems within the organisations were the result of FLMs balancing their PM responsibilities through the formal and informal PM systems that were in place. Specifically, it presents the findings about how the expectations from other organisational actors affected the AMO of FLMs, leading to them use their discretion to blend the formal and informal systems to reach what they saw as an equilibrium in relation to their competing demands. The findings from the two case organisations further demonstrate the complexity of PM systems where FLMs use an informal PM system to manage their employees’ expectations when the formal PM systems prove insufficient.

#### **6.1 The Frontline Manager’s Attitude towards Performance Management**

Frontline managers directly impact organisational performance because they have daily or regular interaction with frontline employees and are generally responsible for PM implementation to frontline employees (Boxall & Macky, 2007; Brewer, 2005; den

Hartog, et al., 2004). As such, a FLM's attitude toward the organisation's PM system affects his or her motivation in managing employees' performance. Despite the key role of FLMs in PM and other HR responsibilities, existing research has found that FLMs tend to be evaluated on their operational targets, which leads to a primacy of attention to such areas (Cavanagh, 1976; Ferrell & Gresham, 1985; Hailey et al., 2005). If the FLM holds the attitude that PM is not important, motivation will be lacking to implement PM and it will tend to be neglected for other more pressing work commitments. However, most FLMs from both case organisations expressed that they did not feel that their focus tended to be on their operational goals. Seventeen of the 23 interviewees with FLM responsibilities conveyed that they did not struggle with their operational and people management responsibilities. They believed that the integration of their operational and people management responsibilities helped them balance their work tasks to ensure they performed on both aspects and to be able to fairly assess their employees:

I would say that they [operational and PM responsibilities] are integrated, yes... at the end of the year when we assess the performance of the staff, from our experience with dealing with the site staff we know what he should be ranked.  
– FLM (#1.23)

It's the same – how they behave and how they operate daily is equal to their performance. If they are able to manage the projects or their core duties, then obviously for my case it will [be] equal to my performance management; that my way of guiding them is good. So, in in a way, both are on par with each other. How they behave will [be] equal to the performance management. – FLM (#1.17)

I think they're more integrated, because work in part plays a role in performance – whether you can complete a task in time. Depending on how they evaluate cases and things like that, they will come to me, and then I would form an opinion or my own views about the case... it's cumulative and I would say it's integrated; it's not a separate process. – FLM (#2.07)

Integrated... if there's a need to then, yes, we will go and talk to them. – FLM (#2.20)

Only four of the 23 interviewees with FLM responsibilities believed that PM was not as important as meeting their work or operational targets:

I mean work, of course it's more of a priority over the performance management... it [PM] comes as a subset to it [work]. The thing is that you set targets and at the end of the day, you can't deviate from them. – FLM (#1.12)

The main time you have to manage performance is during the year-end appraisal. I mean, you do think about it on a day-to-day basis, like, whether each person has enough on their plate and what are the things that they are doing that can contribute to their appraisal at the end of the year, but it kind of takes a backseat towards the actual work that I am doing. – FLM (#2.13)

These FLMs understood the importance of PM, and when necessary, they prioritised their operational responsibilities (e.g., meeting their output targets or deadlines) over managing the performance of their employees. Their segregation of PM from their work responsibilities could be a result of their attitude toward PM, which they did not believe was an integral part of their work responsibilities. For example, a FLM (#1.17) from PublicWorks believed that PM was not within her jurisdiction. She did not place emphasis on it if she felt that she was fair to her employees because she could not control how higher management chose to carry it out:

To me, performance management, that's not my core job. My core job is actually more on [the] technical stuff. So, my focus is on the technical stuff rather than this type of performance stuff. As long as my staff under me are not ill-treated and I take care of them well, I did my part. So, how the management wants to mould the whole thing is up to them, it's not my level here anyway.

However, contrary to the FLMs stating that they integrated their operational and PM goals, Chapter Five showed that, in practice, the focus of the FLMs was on meeting the operational targets at the expense of the intended PM system. For example, it was detailed (see 5.2.3 Training and Development) that frontline employees from AdminInc found it difficult to attend training and development programs due to the focus on them meeting their operational targets. Additionally, around half of the FLMs from both organisations explained their preference for training helped them perform in their operational responsibilities. This was where they tended to avoid training that they felt did not contribute to them performing operationally. Although these 17 FLMs did not acknowledge conflict between their operational and PM responsibilities, this did not mean their actions reflected that. They deviated from the intended system through the use of formal and informal PM systems (that were part of the actual PM system) to

manage the expectations of higher levels of management and their subordinates. This is explored further later in the chapter.

The lack of transparency within the intended PM system further explained the segregation between operation and PM responsibilities, because how FLMs were being evaluated based on their implementation of the intended PM system was not clear. At AdminInc, when asked about how their PM of their employees was assessed, two of the five FLMs indicated uncertainty over the processes and consequently guessed or assumed that it was through the annual performance review or the way the work goals were accomplished:

I have no idea [laugh], but I presume it's really on a day-to-day [basis], when my staff needs to do assigned work by my RO [reporting officer], how am I guiding them, how am I ensuring that whatever they do is correct, and it is according to whatever that I myself have done before – rather than because they are new to it and then whatever they put up it's all in a mess, it's not according to what we have done previously. – FLM (#2.08)

I don't know [laugh]. Probably through the appraisal as well? – FLM (#2.13)

At PublicWorks, half of the FLMs also conveyed their belief that how well they managed the performance of their employees was largely dependent on the achievement of work tasks – there were no fixed steps in how they should be managing their employees:

It's based on the progress of the project, that's one. Then the day-to-day works – how we are able to help our bosses solve their problems. – Frontline Employee/FLM (#1.07)

I think they will look at the end result... they will look at the tasks, whether we have met the target or not; if we couldn't meet the task, the target, or the deadline in a way, it may tell them that there's something wrong with my management in my team. I think it's in that way, but because I have never seen bosses come into detail when it comes appraisal. They don't exactly ask me "How do you assign tasks to your staff? How do you guide them? What do you tell them to do if they don't do that". So, I think they will just look at task-based [activities] in determining the performance. – FLM (#1.04)

Here, the opportunity was given to FLMs to utilise the PM system for the achievement of work goals. As such, there were FLMs who appeared to comply with the intended PM system through the formal PM system to keep higher levels of management and

HR satisfied that they were carrying out their PM responsibilities; they also used the informal PM system to manage the relationship with and performance of the frontline employees. Many of the interviewees expressed that components of the intended PM system were merely formality. Notably, the majority felt that the annual performance review was mainly paperwork that everyone must complete, but they strongly believed that it did not help them improve performance:

To tell you honestly, I think in [PublicWorks] or rather in our own group, the performance appraisal that we do every year, it's more on administration and paperwork for recording purposes only. The actual performance management is the informal performance. That means the informal part where they look at your work itself. Whatever that you write on your appraisal, it could be very good or very lousy, but you could be receiving something different from the bosses. Something different, as in the boss may feel very good or not good about you, but your appraisal may be something different from that. So, to me, every year the appraisal exercise is just going through the motions, that's all. – FLM (#1.04)

Formal is just very standard. We have the system, so we just basically key in our roles and responsibilities, whether you hit what is expected of you. There's nothing much I can say about the system, because to be honest, at least for our department, I don't think they really assess based on the system. – Frontline Employee (#2.09)

Due to the impression that the annual performance review was mostly only paperwork, FLMs would complete it with little regard for the reason behind the need for it in the organisation. For example, interviewee (#1.11), who was a FLM and frontline employee from PublicWorks, believed that the intended PM system was not important in the organisation to help or reward employees due to biases:

That's why I said this form does not really take importance – they already have the scoring. When they do the ranking, there is a board with [the] employees' names there; they just look at [a] person's name, for example, and then everybody, the managers, gives their opinion. From there, then the director will sit down, this is the feedback and he will set the scoring. This is the process that is going on. So, the paperwork is actually nothing you see... there are people who did not submit the form for many years.

With this approach towards the intended PM system, FLMs generally did not take the implementation process annual performance review seriously. Several FLMs at

PublicWorks, especially those who had been in the organisation for a long time, did not even complete parts or all of their own annual performance review:

I don't do that [referring to the annual performance review] also frankly speaking... The mid-year, the annual, I don't do any of the appraisal... our forms are empty. [laugh] I know we are not following the SOP [standard operating procedure] again. – FLM (#1.17)

There's a mid-year review where you have to submit, I think sometimes we don't even submit... We always get prompted, but I think I haven't done mine yet. [laugh] – FLM (#1.25)

However, despite their own dismissive attitude towards their own performance reviews, these FLMs were motivated to insist that their employees completed the annual performance review because they believed that it was important for their employees to have an official record of their performance, as they might change supervisors and not have appropriate exposure to senior management. As such, even though FLMs may not have agreed with components within the intended PM system, this did not mean that they discouraged their employees from using them. In Chapter Five, it was shown that the presence of the intended PM system did not mean that it would be enforced or utilised in the organisation. The results show that FLMs implemented components of the intended PM system through a formal PM system that helped their employees maintain visibility and the impression of performance.

The contrast between the FLMs' attitude towards PM and how they implemented it could be explained by their acknowledgement that their employees' performance would impact their own performance:

If management thinks that your site staff is not performing, it will also affect your performance – it's true. – FLM (#1.23)

If your team performs, then I guess they will equate it to you also performing in that sense. So, if there are certain cases that slip up, that may in a way affect your ranking. – FLM (#2.20)

The employees' achievement of operational goals affected the FLM's achievement of his or her own operational goals, which helps to explain the tendency for FLMs to focus on their operational targets. Moreover, it was evident that visibility was a very important component in the PM system within both cases because of the role of senior

management. The high power distance within Singapore organisations (Hofstede, 2017) means that the authority of senior management is respected and this influences how FLMs choose to manage the performance of their employees to ensure that both the FLM and the frontline employee are giving senior management the right impression. The FLMs from both organisations understood that within their role, they had the responsibility of managing their employees to achieve work goals. As such, they were motivated to ensure that employees presented their accomplishments for the year. The data show that FLMs from both case organisations were motivated to consistently monitor performance and have performance discussions within the formal PM system. They kept track of employee performance throughout the year and took the time to intervene informally when they saw any problems or issues being faced in the progress of work:

I think I would spend more time on the informal; of course we will do a formal one, which is just the yearly affair thing, but the informal one, we'll spend more time on it. Because to me it's something that you can do impromptu – if you feel that something is not right, you can just point it out straight away. – FLM (#1.16)

What I've been doing – because they report to me and then be it cases or whatnot – I do tell them here and there what they did wrong or what they should do or how they should improve and things like that, because I think performance management has to be consistent throughout the year. – FLM (#2.07)

The FLMs in both organisations generally had regular and consistent performance discussions with their employees and Chapter Four showed that the intended PM system in both organisations encouraged regular communication between supervisor and subordinate. Communication between FLMs and their employees was an essential part of ensuring that there was greater transparency and understanding between them and the FLMs were aware of these benefits. It was through regular communication and contact that the FLMs were better able to be updated about what was going on and be aware of any issues that their employees might face in their day-to-day job:

I think it's communication and how you talk to them. I find that communication is really very important. So, for my management style, I will focus more on communication. We also need to talk to them more frequently, then we will get to know their problems. – FLM (#1.03)

So, from time to time if we have any issues, we're encouraged to voice out and to discuss with our RO. If there are any issues in regard to our job – whether it

is about the job burden being too much for us to handle or whether we still have enough capacity to take up more work. So, that is the more human part where they're always open to listening to us as their staff. – Frontline Employee (#2.11)

However, the use of regular communication in the formal PM system does not mean that other components of the intended PM system are implemented. Despite the FLMs having the ability to and being motivated to have consistent communication with their frontline employees, the FLMs had the opportunity to not have performance review discussions, as they lacked the motivation to do so where they tended to dismiss the required discussions that took place around the annual performance review. Most noted that they either bypassed the annual performance review's discussion or it was only very brief; frontline employees believed that it was through the day-to-day discussions that they had with their FLM that they knew how they were performing and where they needed to improve and change. The consistent monitoring and communication rendered the annual performance review discussions unnecessary, because the FLMs and frontline employees were already aware of the performance throughout the year, explaining the deviation from the intended system. The literature shows that the evolution of PM systems in many organisations has moved away from traditional PM processes to allow for the frequent informal feedback from managers to take centre stage (Chillakuri, 2018; Cunningham, 2015; Kinley, 2016). Likewise, the FLMs from both cases were managing the performance of their employees using this approach rather than the traditional PM systems within their organisations.

However, despite the focus of FLMs on discussion and feedback, it should be noted that performance (e.g., expectations, progress, development opportunities that was part of the intended PM system) was generally not something that was explicitly discussed in both organisations. Rather, it was observable that FLMs tended to focus on ongoing work performance. The FLMs from both organisations elaborated that discussions tended to be centred on specific work tasks or issues where employees were able to receive guidance from them:

This part [referring to performance discussions] arises if you meet on something during the course of the work, we have some issues popping up, then how you actually feed back to your staff and how do we actually work together and resolve it. So, that part is more on an as and when basis. – FLM (#1.12)

It's really through the normal work, where you give a bit of feedback here and there on their work; I'll guide them here and there, as well in the course of work. When they report to me for cases, there's the opportunity to tell them how certain things should be done, how certain things should not be done, and then what to look out for, that acts as a form of guidance. – FLM (#2.08)

The informal components and processes of the intended PM system that were implemented through the formal PM system allowed frontline employees to know how they were performing in their job consistently, because guidance was also provided by the FLM to help employees accomplish their work tasks more effectively. However, as a result of FLMs only focusing on ongoing work tasks, some AdminInc frontline employees explained the dilemma they faced with discussions they had with their FLMs:

I think she's still growing into it, so she hasn't had time to really give proper guidance in that sense. It's mostly been about direct help, which is nice, but it doesn't really always help you improve as a person... It's more of her helping me accomplish a task rather than telling me how I should go about doing it. – Frontline Employee (#2.12)

All these [referring to how work should be presented] keep changing along the way. Things that are applicable back in 2015, 2014, may no longer be applicable now. Probably due to the change of boss or when the director felt that some things have to be changed, then they would go and amend it and then that becomes the new norm. So, I don't know, and sometimes I feel that, it depends on the scenario. So, this may be applicable to this particular case and you use it for another case right, it may not be suitable and all that, but we won't know what the bosses want to present. – Frontline Employee (#2.15)

The feedback tended to be focussed on particular work tasks that helped them improve their performance for that specific piece of work, but not necessarily their overall performance. There could be a lack of transferability of advice from one work task to another. Focusing on specific work tasks is again in line with what was previously discussed about FLMs prioritising the operational targets instead of integrating their operational and PM responsibilities. The improvement of overall performance as expected through the intended PM system was neglected because FLMs tended to focus on completing the task at hand rather than setting employees up for future performance. The focus on current performance over future performance could lead to the PM system being used in a manner that reflected the importance of only performing in the job now,

without consideration for job progression. An explanation comes from the importance of visibility – ensuring the employees are performing in current work tasks shows higher levels of management that the FLM and the employee have the ability to perform. Another possible explanation comes from the ability of the FLM. Frontline managers who are new to their role and lack experience are more likely to focus on the progress of the cases at hand because they see this as more urgent. The increase in competency of a FLM can result in shifting focusses. This was explained by FLM (#2.20) from AdminInc who believed that the priority for her as a new FLM was to be able to move the work along rather than focusing on how her individual employees' performance could be improved:

Since I just took over, the priority then was to start clearing the cases and all that. I haven't really gone down to the individual level and started talking to them on a one-to-one basis and see what is it that they think should be done differently or what is it that they think should be improved on.

Although the focus on current work tasks can neglect the employee's development, the interaction that employees have with their FLMs still has its benefits. Frontline employees from PublicWorks and Department A at AdminInc explained that their FLMs would regularly communicate with them through their day-to-day interactions; it was through these discussions that they also had the opportunity to learn about their performance:

Normally, we don't really sit down and have a very in-depth conversation. It's quite broad and general. My boss will tell me what I need to improve when I go to her seat to have a normal casual chat; she will tell me "maybe you should do this in future" and then I will take note. – Frontline Employee (#1.03)

During the day-to-day operations and work we do discuss a lot. Of course, he gives me ideas or suggestions – "you could have done it this way, that way". We just improve along the way as we work together. – Frontline Employee (#1.08)

Because a lot of times, let's say we want to approve [a specific work task], then I have to submit my proposal, whether we should accept or reject, and then he will look at my submission, then he will tell me what is good, what is not good, what can be improved... throughout the year we will just be engaging each other to feedback. – Frontline Employee (#2.02)

Actually, I feel that the thing [referring to the PM system] is just a system, but whenever I face problems, whether or not there's a system, I always go to him or her to discuss first... whenever there're problems or projects or they give you

feedback, it's typically at that point of time... whenever you do a project and maybe you did something wrongly or well, they'll just give you feedback there and then... it's a bit more relatable to the case rather than just going through that platform that is very generic. – Frontline Employee (#2.06)

Frontline employees from Department S at AdminInc, tended to lack regular communication, but they still got feedback from their FLMs when mistakes were made or about areas of improvement:

Actually, we don't really get praise. Most of the time, if our work is not up to the standard... sometimes we don't really meet their expectations, then they'll just highlight to us by saying "you need to put in more effort" or "you need to think out of the box", that kind of thing. – Frontline Employee (#2.19)

For example, when I have a specific case and the way that I do it is not what he wants, then he will guide me along. I think it helps to improve the performance in this way; it guides you along. Because the bosses are too busy, so it's an as and when there are cases whereby he can quote, for example, "you can do it this way or that way", then we will learn from that. I guess [it] improves the performance from there... If it's not good, then usually they will highlight, like, how you should do better next time. – Frontline Employee (#2.23)

AdminInc's departments illustrated the FLMs' attitude towards PM affecting the experience of frontline employees in the PM system. Although the FLMs sometimes lacked the ability to implement PM as intended due to a lack of experience, they were able to use the formal PM system to ensure that they delivered what higher levels of management wanted. As such, despite being under the same director, the frontline employees could have different experiences and perceptions of the PM system. Frontline managers do not need to take the same path to achieve organisational objectives – they have the opportunity to make contingent decisions based on their individual ability and motivation (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Manning, 2013; Schleicher et al., 2018). However, the findings show that although the FLMs had the opportunity to deviate from the intended PM system, they were still constrained based on the custom and practice in place. In particular, the custom and practice expectations within the work group determined the boundaries within which the FLMs operated out of (e.g., what components of the intended PM system could be ignored without repercussions; what was considered acceptable within the informal system). This is discussed further later in the chapter.

In addition to custom and practice limiting what they can do within the PM system, FLMs tend to lack the authority and autonomy that higher levels of management have despite being responsible for the performance of frontline employees (Hales, 2005). This was previously discussed in Chapter Five, where the formal responsibility that FLMs had in the PM system extended little beyond reporting their employees' performance by keying their input and feedback into the annual performance reviews; the formal authority and decision making was in the hands of senior management. The limited authority that FLMs have in the intended PM system affects their attitude towards the formal and informal PM systems. This was reflected in the responses from a few FLMs at PublicWorks, where they explained that manoeuvring through the PM system was about knowing what your superiors wanted, and being able to convey that to their employees as well:

To me, I would think that performance management is about managing [my] bosses' expectations. That means, if they give me a piece of task, I would first find out what they expect from me and then I will manage that expectation; that means if they expect me to give them this much, I would will give them slightly lower, so that the next time their expectations won't go too high, or if I give them slightly better, then they will feel that each time I give them something, there is improvement. – FLM (#1.04)

Performance management is more, like, how do you manage your staff to perform in a way, because management has different styles and different areas as well. You can always manage your staff to do all the mundane things, but if you don't tell them how they can improve, they will be stagnant. – FLM (#1.20)

Performance management to these FLMs then transitioned into something more than just meeting goals and targets – FLMs and their employees must know what their superiors want and be able to perform in that aspect. More than just looking at the PM system as a tool to help employees improve or maintain their performance, FLMs also must be able to help employees understand what higher levels of management want. The knowledge that PM is more than performance itself influences the attitude of FLMs towards the PM system. If they understand that PM is more than the actual performance of the employee, their motivation and opportunity to manage the performance of their employees also changes, because simply adhering to the intended PM system developed by the organisation does not help them to manage the responsibilities they have in their role. Although the different FLMs in the two case organisations had individual abilities, motivations, and opportunities that helped to explain the variations in how they

managed the performance of employees, it was their use of the formal and informal PM systems in the organisations that allowed for customised PM within boundaries to manage the expectations of both superiors and subordinates. The management of expectations through the PM system affects the relationship between the FLM and other organisational actors. Notably, the relationship between frontline employee and FLM can influence the employee's performance in work tasks and how performance is managed.

## **6.2 The Frontline Manager's and Frontline Employee's Relationship**

In Chapter Five, how the FLM's span of control affected the implementation process of the intended system was analysed. The data demonstrated that the chain of command and the number of employees that FLMs were responsible for affected the opportunities they had within the intended PM system. In addition, the FLMs' span of control influenced the relationship with their employees, affecting the motivation and opportunity they had to deviate from the intended system through the informal PM system. Many of PublicWorks' FLMs oversaw site works, and as such, were part of a close-knit team with their employees. This was where they worked with each other daily and needed to have a good working relationship in order to be able to deliver on their responsibilities:

We work together, eat together, and laugh together... Because for us, our team is quite small – it's only [FLM (#1.10)], me, and [frontline employee (#1.05)].  
– Frontline Employee/FLM (#1.07)

We work as a team, so we should know each other well in order to delegate the scope of works for them – how they handle and what they handle. – FLM (#1.23)

The number of employees a FLM is responsible for can affect the relationship with frontline employees. For example, a FLM who has a larger number of employees has to look after a larger group and would have less direct knowledge of employees, affecting the quality of LMX between them compared to a FLM looking after a smaller group of employees. As previously discussed in Chapter Five (see 5.2.2 Location of Work), a frontline employee (#1.08) from PublicWorks disclosed his concern about his FLM being responsible for two different teams due to manpower issues, where he believed that he did not have as much contact time and visibility with his FLM

compared to the other team. When FLMs are responsible for a larger number of employees and/or teams, it reduces their close control of employees (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010). Hence, FLMs who are responsible for a smaller number of employees and/or only one team can find it easier to build high quality LMX with their employees. The number of employees a FLM is responsible for changes how PM is implemented because the relationship between the FLM and individual employees will be different – the fewer employees a FLM is responsible for, the more time the FLM is able to spend with his or her employees to build their relationship.

Frontline employees and FLMs from both organisations worked together closely on a day-to-day basis and even though frontline employees were generally comfortable approaching their FLMs for regular discussions as they did not feel impeded by physical or psychological barriers, there were exceptions. Twelve of the 20 frontline employees at AdminInc explained that feedback from their superiors tended to be focussed on areas of improvements without any acknowledgement on the positives, leading to the perception of “no news is good news” (frontline employee #2.05); they did not expect or want to hear from their superiors about their performance on a regular basis – they believed that they were doing well enough not to warrant any discussion on their performance; when they did hear something from their boss, it was not a good thing. The prioritisation that FLMs had on meeting operational targets helps to explain their motivation to provide feedback that focussed on improving performance to ensure that employees were performing in their work to achieve current operational goals more than how they could improve in their future performance.

The relationship between FLMs and frontline employees affects the manner of informality within the PM system. Although employees in Department A felt comfortable approaching their FLMs for discussions, those in Department S generally did not have regular discussions with their FLMs. Department S employees found it uncomfortable to approach their FLM to discuss work or performance issues because they did not find their FLMs approachable. This was best described by a frontline employee (#2.14) in that department who believed that it was through experience that you would know how to manage your own performance based on what had happened previously:

Just don't cock up; make sure I do the right things; make sure I don't frustrate my boss. When you work long enough, you will slowly know your boss' style. So, you know how your boss will react under certain circumstances – what your boss will do; what your boss expects you to do under certain circumstances. I mean, you get scolded a few times, then you know you cannot be doing this. You will know the expectation is at this level and so on. So, more or less through experience.

Even though the span of control of a FLM is not officially part of the intended PM system, it still can influence how employees experience PM. The FLMs from Department A (#2.07, #2.08, and #2.13 – each with three employees) had a smaller span of control compared to the FLMs from Department S (#2.17 – six employees, #2.20 – five employees, and #2.27 – six employees) and employees experienced a difference in the level of approachability of their FLM. This contributes to explaining how the span of control of a FLM affects the PM of employees, because FLMs are a key part of the actual PM system in individual work groups. Employees in Department A, who had a very good relationship as a whole, were able to comfortably have lunch together up to the middle management level where personal issues could be discussed:

We do go for lunch, then occasionally we do go out as a group, as a whole department for after-work activities. – FLM (#2.07)

We go for lunch together as a whole department, which is quite rare... and there's not really a hierarchy present, which I think is very rare in an organisation this size, because when we go for lunch the whole department goes together. – Frontline Employee (#2.10)

Because we do have lunch in a group – for our department we just go to lunch in a group – so we have a lot of interactions during lunchtime. So, it's not that he's just my boss and then other than that we only talk about work and we don't talk about anything else. He will show concern, whether beyond work and us as a person. – Frontline Employee (#2.11)

I think we are quite close. I mean we will lunch together – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.22)

In contrast, frontline employees in Department S did not have this close level of interaction and even outside of working hours, personal discussions were kept to a bare minimum:

Just pure colleagues. You won't want to share your own personal life... Probably other departments, they also have such practice and culture, but I'm

not sure whether to, I mean, is it so severe until our department's extent. I feel that my department's extent is quite severe... you have to see the mood, see the weather, then you can go and approach and all that. Else, a small issue can just backfire. – Frontline Employee (#2.15)

Still a certain distance because they are your ROs [reporting officers] after all... I think they are, like, always busy, always occupied with some things, so you must not catch them at the wrong time. If not, you will make them annoyed with you. – Frontline Employee (#2.26)

As such, it is notable that the relationship between FLMs and frontline employees can influence the actual PM system. In particular, a high quality LMX between both parties allows the FLMs to be able to address any performance issues that they or their employees might have informally that may otherwise be uncomfortable formally (as seen in AdminInc's Department A).

AdminInc had a very strong hierarchy in place, where multiple interviewees expressed the clear divide between the frontline employees and managers and higher levels of management. This was evident from the responses that frontline employees gave when asked about who they would approach first when they had difficulties or problems at work; almost all stating that they would generally always approach their peers first to see if any of them have had a similar experience of a preceding case. They would only approach their superiors should they already have solutions on hand or if they were not able to find precedent cases as examples. The FLMs would also generally approach their peers for help in the first instance as well. This was explained by a FLM (#2.13) who first tried to solve any issues within her own team or sought advice from her peers; it was only after she had solutions on hand or she knew that it was something that was out of her hands that she went to her superiors:

If I know that at my level I can't make a decision or I would need somebody higher up to make the decision, then I will definitely go to my boss. If I know I can figure out something from the experiences of my colleagues, then I will go to my colleagues.

The FLMs and frontline employees in both case organisations were motivated to adhere to the hierarchical expectations that they believed existed in their organisation's systems. The tendency for FLMs to approach peers for advice and precedent examples could affect how FLMs manage the PM system, because they learn about the

organisational custom and practice through their peers. The use of the informal PM systems by more experienced peers that could come into conflict with the formal PM system and deviate from the intended PM system would be passed onto FLMs in their implementation of PM. The experience of frontline employees was also affected because they also tended to approach their peers over their FLMs with any problems they had. As such, it was evident that custom and practice within the PM system had the expectation of frontline employees and managers first approaching peers for help. Although custom and practice can replace the codified rules within an organisation (Brown, 1972), different custom and practice expectations can emerge at various levels. For example, middle management did not express discomfort about approaching their superiors for help because they believed that higher levels of management were more experienced and were better able to guide them:

Usually we go to our boss first to ask them for guidance. A lot of times we will ask them because they have been here longer than us. First thing we need to know is have there been past precedence; for such precedent cases, how we handle it – because it's a very young team, so those old cases that happened six, seven, eight years ago they might not know what maybe applicable or relevant. So, the only person that could have all these insights and solutions should be my DD [deputy director] and director. So, I do have to run to them and seek their views. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.18)

Because for us, we have another DD [deputy director] ... she is also very experienced. So, for some advice and all that, I may just go to her. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.22)

Aside from custom and practice, another possible explanation for why middle managers were able to approach their superiors for help without any hesitation could be through the relationship they had built within their time in the organisation. The middle and senior managers tended to have more experience in the organisation than FLMs and frontline employees, where they were promoted into their role from lower levels. As such, they had been working with the same individuals for an extended period of time (some of the senior managers used to be at the same working level as the middle managers), which affected their LMX. Nevertheless, the different perceptions about hierarchical expectations at AdminInc could affect the custom and practice expectations in the work group, which affected the relationship between superiors and subordinates and how PM was actually implemented – FLMs tended to approach or look to their peers for examples, whereas middle managers looked to their superiors for guidance.

Specifically, FLMs could affect the PM experience of employees in the organisation informally, resulting in different experiences that frontline employees had in the PM system.

As explained earlier, the span of control that FLMs and middle managers had differed and this affected the opportunities that they had – having more subordinates reduced the opportunity for closer control (Griffin & Moorhead, 2010). As a result, FLMs responsible for a smaller number of frontline employees have more opportunity and increased ability to monitor and manage performance of their staff through informal processes compared to other FLMs who are responsible for a larger number of staff – a smaller number of employees allows the FLM to better keep track of their employees’ performance without the need for the formal system like those used by higher levels of management who are not able to interact with all the frontline employees and thus require the formal processes to be aware of how employees are performing. The quality of the relationship can also differ between larger and smaller work groups; the relationship or LMX between that FLM and their subordinates influences how they choose to manage their employees. In addition, the relationship will also impact the perception that employees have about how their performance is being managed by their respective FLMs. The PM system in place in an organisation does not restrict FLMs from contingently managing the performance of their employees because they all experience a different hierarchy and span of control that will affect the environment that they operate in (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Chandler, 1962; Govindarajan, 1988; Woodward, 1965). As such, the relationship between FLMs and frontline employees can influence his or her choice to deviate from the intended PM system through the informal PM system to maintain the working relationship between them.

### ***6.2.1 Performance Discussions***

The performance discussions between FLMs and frontline employees are a key component of the PM system. More importantly, the relationship between FLMs and frontline employees affects the content and consistency of the discussion. In addition to the discussions that FLMs have with frontline employees regarding their work performance, frontline employees can also discuss or share how they have performed with their peers. However, in line with the finding by Boland and Fowler (2000), open

sharing about performance can differ between organisations because of the unique PM systems in place – differences in the information shared between peers was seen in PublicWorks and AdminInc. At AdminInc, even though interviewees generally had a good relationship within their work groups, the problem of frontline employees discussing their grades and rewards was not rampant, because frontline employees tended to keep it to themselves:

I think the first thing is that I cannot really determine whether or not it's fair because personally I feel that it may not be that transparent. So, whatever it is like or whatever people are getting, I'm not aware of it, but then again, there's always cons to knowing that whatever people are getting. I mean there's no point knowing whatever they're getting, because ultimately my grade will be my grade. But whatever that I'm getting now, I wouldn't know whether or not it's fairly given, that it's just given to you and you just have to accept it. That's it, full stop. – Frontline Employee (#2.06)

We don't really ask each other honestly, or not many are willing to share as well, but it is privacy. – Frontline Employee (#2.21)

The lack of sharing contrasted with PublicWorks, where employees explained that they felt demoralised or demotivated when they saw their peers, who they deemed as underperforming, being rewarded instead of them. The findings emphasise the importance of managing underperformance or poor performance. Notably, the main focus of performance discussions or feedback in both case organisations tended to be centred around poor performance, which was in line with the FLMs' focus on operational goals and targets, because poor performing employees affected the achievement of their work goals.

An important component of performance discussions involves the management of poor performers. The management of poor performance was where gaps were seen between the formal and informal PM system in both case organisations, affecting workplace tensions. The management of poor performance is an aspect of PM that managers struggle with due to the tendency to be lenient with their staff (Cole, 2008). However, there was the perception at PublicWorks that mistakes or poor performance tended to be critical, which took away from goal achievement; as such, FLMs used performance discussions to manage poor performing employees:

I would be looking out for the things which they are doing and if they are not doing something correctly, I would highlight [that] to them straight away. Because if there're any issues which would crop up, then I think it's not good for our performance as a team. So, normally what I try to do is to scrutinise their work very closely, make sure that they don't commit any wrongdoings and to guide them along. If I find that they are not very familiar with a certain aspect of the work, I would normally sit down with them and tell them what to do. – FLM (#1.10)

To be frank, those who are performing are not really a big concern, because your daily interaction can more or less resolve all [of] the issues. Whereas the non-performers are probably a bit stickier in the sense that everybody will think that they are good to begin with, but whether you are good very much depends on where you work, and also the expectation of the workplace. So, most of the time, from my experience, this structure of three-times [a year] kind of thing [referring to the annual performance appraisal] is maybe suitable for those who are underachieving. – Middle Manager (#1.21)

The use of informality tended to be the preferred method used to deal with poor performance rather than through formal channels. At PublicWorks, some FLMs inflated the performance of their staff in the formal system because they did not want to show higher levels of management something negative:

I will tell them personally, or I will just tell my boss. For example, this person needs to improve on this area, things like that. But as a group, I don't think it's so nice to say something bad out about that person... Of course, I cannot say something bad about my subordinates, as it reflects on the whole team and our work. So, normally I won't say anything bad about them during the appraisal. – FLM (#1.02)

I will do that, but we still need to let them know what are their weaker points. I mean, they can't just give a nice appraisal to the management without improving. So, for myself, I will still help them to paint a nice picture for the appraisal, but they themselves also have to improve. – FLM (#1.09)

The design of the PM systems allowed for these FLMs to provide feedback to their employees about their weak areas but also allowed for FLMs to not document performance. A FLM (#1.20) explained that there needed to be justification for a poor evaluation, which could be time consuming:

I do believe that [referring to being lenient towards poor performers within the formal system] to an extent, simply because of what I do here... there'll be staff who may not be ranked well, but when the scores are finalised, nobody dares to stick out their necks to really give him a very poor score, because we heard that

you need to give a lot of explanations if you really, really want to score a particular staff so poorly.

The director (#1.24) further justified the design of the PM system in the public sector that made it challenging for them to be able to remove poorly performing employees:

Once you've join[ed] a government sector, how often do you sack people? You can, but it's not easy. You need to write a lot of reports. You would rather not bring them in. If there is a risk, don't bring them in! Once you bring them in, you can never get rid of them until they leave on their own accord.

According to Dhiman and Maheshwari (2013), the actual performance of employees can be ignored for other self-serving purposes. In addition to being concerned about how the performance of their employees (and themselves) was perceived by higher levels of management, the Public Works FLMs were also concerned about the additional paperwork they would have to complete in order to appropriately evaluate and report poor performance. The avoidance of paperwork also went against the belief of FLMs that they integrated their operational and PM responsibilities.

The opportunity was provided to FLMs to manage any issues at the workplace informally and instantaneously, helping the employees' performance because they would be notified of areas that they needed to work on and could do so immediately and for the future. The data show that FLMs were motivated to not want to paint a negative picture of their staff to higher levels of management; they would rather handle the situation by themselves and gave their employees a more positive image in front of others. Additionally, the process to manage poor performance was also seen to be cumbersome and it was difficult to remove employees from service. As such, by protecting the image of employees' performance, FLMs are able to maintain the relationship with their employees. Recording poor performance within the formal PM system can damage the relationship between both parties and affect the future motivation and performance of the employee.

By inflating the performance of their employees, FLMs are also protecting themselves. Senior management are left with the impression that the FLM is performing by being able to manage their employees well. Nevertheless, it was explained that if the management of poor performance turned out to be difficult or there were no changes

seen, a small number FLMs would then adopt other approaches or even turn to the formal PM process to manage such employees. This was explained by a FLM (#1.23) from PublicWorks:

I think to handle those problem employees you must have skills. Some people with skills, they are quite good in handling this kind of people. So, how do I handle [poor performance]? I would do it through discussions and from the discussions I can find the problem; if I can handle [it], I will handle it. If not, I will pass it down to my management to deal with it.

However, there are still situations in which problems and tensions arise when improvement or changes are not seen and yet FLMs do not take action that is in line with the intended PM system. Instead of using the annual performance review to highlight and record any problems with their employees (which then led to disciplinary procedures for the employee), FLMs typically left these problems undocumented. This was seen at PublicWorks, where six FLMs implied that management of older employees was challenging due to their age and experience:

I find it very difficult to work with this man because of his experience and his character. He's a very proud kind of man where [he thinks he] knows his work and he gets very defensive or unhappy when you try to tell him that, you know, it should not be done this way. – FLM (#1.04)

They've been working from ground up and... it's moulded them to what they are today. Then for me... I'm just a fresh graduate, I come in and I am of a higher rank than them; I have to manage them. This is one of the challenges that they will think that you're not good enough... why are you sitting on top of him just because of the educational background? – FLM (#1.16)

The use of performance discussions in the informal PM system to manage the performance of these employees was common and even though middle management spoke about support they provided to FLMs in poor performing situations, the FLMs chose not to escalate the problem of poorly performing senior employees for help:

They [would] rather prefer to do the routine kind of things every day. So, if you give them a different task, [it] makes them not so ready to adapt to that... because they are really senior, so it's a bit tough for me to directly pinpoint at them at times. So, I have to think about ways on how to tell them, how to bring out the point to them, because older people are very sensitive. – Frontline Employee/FLM (#1.11)

I guess the older generation, they are a bit more touchy on this issue [performance] and then they will get agitated... you have to slowly break the news to them, feed them any information slowly, and then sweet talk them a bit; try to explain to them what they are lacking in, maybe communication skills, for example, then probably because of what they are lacking in, they are not ranked so high. But I still continue and encourage them to try harder the next year, to work harder, but some are at the age of close to retirement, so they don't even bother. – FLM (#1.25)

A FLM may decide that the intended PM system is not appropriate to manage poor performance for a variety of reasons (O'Donnell, 1998) and he or she adapts the system to best fit their situation (Simon, 1965). Evidence shows that the FLM worked closely with frontline employees on a daily basis, which made it difficult and challenging to bring up points of negativity with them because the LMX or relationship between them could be affected. As such, they require the ability to be able to convey negative information in a nice and positive manner (e.g., telling their employees how they can improve but not recording down mistakes within the annual performance review – as is discussed later in the chapter). If the FLM was to consistently manage poor performance directly (e.g., pointing out their areas of mistakes consistently; using the annual performance review as an avenue to record down mistakes or poor performance), this could affect the working relationship between the FLM and the frontline employee.

Even though FLMs were in a position where they needed to informally advise employees of poor performance, Chapter Four detailed the management of poor performance component within PublicWorks and AdminInc, where it could be seen that discipline procedures were cumbersome and although FLMs were in a position to begin the process, the final decision was not within their control. As such, if the FLM chose to go through the intended PM system to manage poor performance, they could damage the relationship they had with their employee. In an open system, there are many ways that FLMs can choose to manage poor performance – in this instance, FLMs will adapt and take the best approach that they perceive to be the least disruptive to their work group. The PM systems in both organisations allowed FLMs the opportunity to use conflicting formal and informal PM systems to manage the expectations of their employees (being told where they were not performing and giving them a chance to improve without formal repercussions) and the demands of higher levels of

management (the FLM was doing his or her job of managing employees such that work goals were being met).

The intended PM systems were created by PublicWorks and AdminInc as a structure to minimise blatant bias and favouritism. However, the actual PM systems, as implemented by FLMs, allowed them to tailor PM for individual frontline employees through a combination of formal and informal PM systems. The formal and informal systems were not meant to be in conflict and undermine each other. However, there were situations in which the formal and informal systems did not work in harmony and manage the performance of employees consistently. Custom and practice within the organisation or work group were seen to affect how FLMs chose to utilise the formal and informal PM system to manage poor performance. The management of poor performance demonstrated how some FLMs from PublicWorks dealt with their employees differently through formal and informal systems – they generally gave accurate feedback to the employees about their actual performance but did not reflect this in the annual performance review submitted to higher management. This helped maintain or improve the impression that higher management had of employees; however, it also undermined the purpose of the intended PM system. Employees could get the perception that the PM system was ineffective because there was room for FLM to be lenient no matter the actual performance, allowing poor performers certain rewards or benefits that might otherwise not be available to them should it have accurately depicted their performance:

This is what I feel through my perceptions on different officer levels – when it comes to filling up the form, they will put everything very nicely. I believe to show HR or the CE [chief executive] all very nice things. Internally I don't know what's happening but when it comes to the form, all is very nice [sic]. – FLM/Frontline Employee (#1.11)

However, FLMs found that writing positively in the annual performance review also backfired when others were aware of the performance of the employee in question (as discussed earlier in this section), which led to a lot more gossip, unhappiness, and demoralisation. This was explained by FLMs from PublicWorks:

I've realised that some people, even though their staff are not performing well, they're still giving their staff very, very high marks. This is not so healthy, because between staff, they tend to communicate; they will find out from each

other. So, when somebody hears about this particular person, who has gotten these high marks and he's not doing things. For example, he comes late every day, goes back on time, and can't settle all the work matters, but he still gets 5 marks. I finalise all my project matters, my BO and my payments are all on time, I should do very well, but I only got a 4. We will get to see. How come this person can get such high marks but he's not doing many projects but the other staff carry a lot of projects and only get so little? Even though they don't see other people's scores, they tend to talk; sooner or later they will find out. – FLM (#1.02)

Everybody will say that their own staff are good, so in the whole relative ranking environment, it's the bosses' impression that counts. If the bosses happen to know you and you are doing the things for the bosses, somehow that will add value. That's the thing I see. So, that's why there will be some unhappiness. So, that's why they always say that it's a relative comparison. If you are ranked lower, it doesn't mean that you are not good. I keep telling my staff this, because of course the appraisal is confidential and you shouldn't talk about it, but employees just talk; whether they speak the real numbers, we're not sure, but I always tell my staff that "If this year your number is not so good, it doesn't mean that you are not good for this year. It's just that there are some people who are slightly better than you for this year". So, I always have to tell them this logic, because this is what I have observed over here, and if they are upset and they can't get over it, it's just going to happen every year. I always have to tell them, but so far, they always tell me that they understand, but if they are not given the scores that they wanted, they will definitely be upset, so it's more, like, to explain to them how this appraisal thing works. – FLM (#1.20)

The FLMs worked closely with their own employees on a regular basis and they perceived that their own employees were performing better than others. Moreover, the intended PM system in the organisation was one where relativity must be considered; this was where employees were compared and ranked in relation to their peers in other teams. However, the PM system within the organisation introduced an unexpected problem of ranking employees. When employees were rated and ranked high without the appropriate accompanying performance that other frontline organisational actors agreed with, there was unhappiness within the work group. For low performers, management avoided rating and ranking them low because they wanted to avoid the additional paperwork that accompanied this. It appears that the PM system placed pressure on employees to end up in the middle or be ranked as average. Relating this back to the inflation of employees' performance, the FLMs could also be doing so in order to allow poorly performing employees to fall within the middle group. By inflating the employee's performance, senior management could be left unaware of the

employee and FLM's performance. Unless senior management explicitly knew about the performance of specific employees who could be performing extremely well or poorly and be on their radar, they would not step in to re-adjust the performance evaluations and rankings because there were just too many frontline employees that they had to consider.

The intended PM system in both organisations was such that senior management had the final say in how performance was perceived and this carried over to the formal PM system. As discussed earlier, interviewee (#1.11) (see 6.1 The Frontline Manager's Attitude towards Performance Management) explained that senior management already had an idea of how the employees would be ranked without the need for the annual performance review. However, PublicWork's director (#1.24) said that although it was normal for a manager to "want to push their favourite to be at the top", the formal PM system still ensured that "they still have to follow some rules". Nevertheless, he also added that although they could argue for a better ranking for their employees, at the end of the day, it was the highest level of management that had the final say and the relationship that employees had with senior management made a difference:

So many of them who tend to lean towards that side, because he [referring to the group director] has a greater circle of influence. It's natural, but it's also for the director to say our piece... let's say I have a staff [member] who, during that year, his particular project caused a small flooding [sic]. When you look at it, that flooding was caused by a soccer ball stuck in the drain, it had nothing to do with him. I will fight for that staff [member] even though my boss said "no, drop him in the ranking!" but at the end he's still the boss. I'll fight [for the staff member] but at the end, who calls the shots? This is life.... some of them, even though they are not really solving a problem – I'm not saying that they are poor staff but comparatively they may not be the best of the whole lot – but if the staff [member] and the boss has a better relationship, the relative ranking is being adjusted, you also can't help it. Unless those beyond my boss see through it. – Director (#.124)

This is where senior management can support or campaign for their 'favourite' employees – they have an idea of which employees are performing and this could be influenced by the relationship that middle management and/or frontline management has with them. As a result, this leads to the weakening of the formal PM system because it is not being utilised in the manner intended. Frontline employees who are performing adequately may not be recognised due to a lack of their own or their FLM's visibility

to senior management. Individuals who are “hardly visible... become a grey mass” and are difficult to classify compared to those who are actively taking on more (Neu Morén, 2013, p. 682). This can lead to the inconsistency experienced by employees and FLMs, affecting the FLM’s motivation to accurately record their employees’ performance formally.

Several FLMs elaborated that how well their employees performed was also a reflection of their own performance. Collectivism is valued over individualism in Singapore (Hofstede, 2017) and this helps to explain why some of them tended to inflate their reports of their employees’ performance – the visibility of their employees was as important as their own visibility and performance. However, when there are obvious gaps in the actual performance of employees and what is in the annual performance review that can be seen by other employees, it contradicts the purpose of the intended PM system. Even though the poorer performing employees can improve through their FLMs’ feedback, they are still able to obtain rewards because of their inflated appraisals, which demotivates other employees because they do not see the fairness in the system. The components of the PM system that fall beyond the responsibility of the FLM also influence the perception of fairness and consistency that employees experience. As such, even though FLMs have limited opportunities within the formal PM system to evaluate their employees’ performance (they are only able to report on their evaluation of their employees’ performance), they are able to use discretionary behaviour to ensure that they are aware of and able to manage their employees’ performance and selectively pass that information on to higher management. Doing this helps the FLMs to manage their superiors and employees’ expectations and perceptions. The FLMs’ use of formal and informal PM systems is influenced by other organisational actors because they learn about what is acceptable or custom and practice within the work group. In particular, the support (both direct and indirect) that they receive from their superiors and peers shapes how they approach their PM responsibilities.

### **6.3 Support from Higher Levels of Management and Peers**

Organisational support is important to ensure that FLMs can implement intended policies (Evans, 2015). The perception of support given by other organisational actors

during the implementation of the PM system is important to FLMs because it affects how they approach their PM responsibilities. In particular, support from other organisational actors impacts the FLMs' use of informal processes. Perceived supervisor support and organisational support have a long history and are well-researched in OB literature; however, few, if any, of the OB literature has focussed solely on FLMs and the support they receive (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Shanock & Eisenberger, 2006).

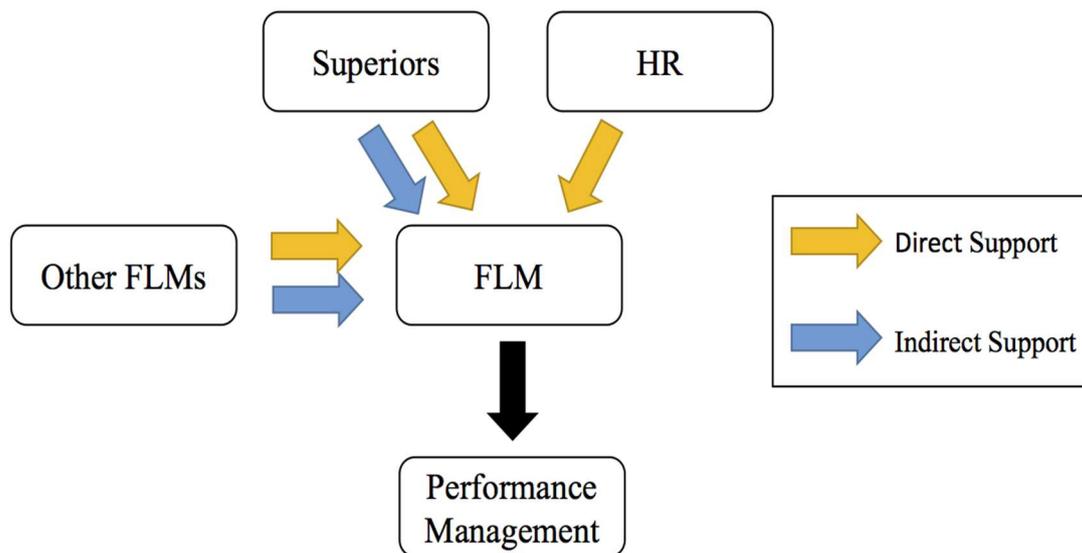


Figure 13. The frontline manager support system in organisations.

The figure above shows that the support FLMs receive in the PM system comes from other managerial organisational actors. Superiors, the HR department, and peers provide direct support to the FLM in their PM responsibilities. In addition, indirect support from superiors and peers also helps FLMs in how they go about implementing PM. This section in the chapter focusses on the support given to FLMs from their superiors and peers. The direct and indirect support that FLMs receive in their role influences the ability, motivation, and opportunity they have to manage the performance of employees.

### 6.3.1 Support from Higher Levels of Management

As discussed in Chapter Five, only a minority of the FLMs explicitly expressed that work goals always took precedence over their PM responsibilities due to their

segregation of their operational and people management duties. Although support from HR helps FLMs in how they navigate the PM system, interviewees explained in Chapter Five (see 5.1.3 Support from the HR Department) that they lacked support from the HR department within the PM system because HR only sent out reminders regarding specific components within the intended PM system that had to be completed. However, the findings also showed that FLMs did not want the HR department's support and involvement in how they implemented PM because it would restrict what they were able to do within the system. Due to the lack of HR support, the support provided by middle and senior management is important from an operational point of view. Support from higher levels of management can influence how FLMs use the formal and informal PM system. Middle managers are an important support source because they are the FLMs' direct supervisor, and the relationship between the two will affect their LMX. An AdminInc middle manager (#2.22) explained that even though he did not really provide direct support to FLMs within the PM system, he saw himself as a "role model" for them and he was always open for them to approach him if they had any doubts or queries. Middle managers generally saw themselves as providing continuous support to FLMs through guidance or mentoring. This was best expressed by a middle manager from PublicWorks (#1.26):

I [will] give him the example of what I've been through, the process that I've been through; let him realize how this process is being materialised and then I go with him to see how he manages with the staff. At times when we chit-chat, I will just bring up a topic and let him see how he handles the situation with the staff. I will guide him, let him do the actual talking – let him be the talker rather than me. So, I'm sort of in that way the backup, like a mentor to them and guide them.

By looking to more experienced organisational actors, the FLM can learn about what is deemed acceptable or the custom and practice in the implementation of the PM system. AdminInc's FLMs used their superiors as examples or precedents when they themselves were tackling PM responsibilities:

For myself, it's more of that – to really see how he is doing it to me, how is he guiding me, how is he giving me opportunities, how is he managing my duties and things like that – then that's what I learned. – FLM (#2.08)

I think that training will provide some background because when you move on from [being] staff to management; you definitely need some background or some basic training to bring you up to speed and all that. After that, it's really

on the job. Then, I guess how your previous supervisor was will make a difference... So, it depends on whether you want to adopt that [previous superior's management style] or do you not want to. It really depends; it matters. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.22)

Custom and practice within a work group tends to develop over time despite the lack of formal or codified establishment (Flanders, 1967). By using superiors as examples, the FLMs were able to increase their PM ability by understanding what was accepted in the organisation and having the opportunity to use their discretion to decide how to proceed.

Frontline managers also suggested that the behaviours and approach of their superiors could also affect them subconsciously through their attempt to align with management and the working style of their superior:

If you follow someone for [a] long [time], you may adopt their practice, their style and all that. So, some people said, “Oh, actually some of them, during their processing officer days they were not like that, but they changed. They changed when they moved up to the mid-management role” and all that, which could be explained by the reason that they have been following the big boss for a long time. What the big boss is doing, they will have to align [with] – you have to do it this way to suit her style, in terms of presentation, and all that. Along the way, they may also get influenced by her culture, her attitude, and then it just gets absorbed, learned, and passed down. It manifests downwards. – Frontline Employee (#2.15)

My RO [reporting officer], she does the same for all the staff under her as well. So, we don't only meet staff at the pre-determined slot; we do give feedback throughout the whole of the year and so on... I think in a way, largely that will be the trend, where you follow or imitate your boss. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.18)

By looking to higher levels of management, FLMs can learn about what is deemed acceptable and what is expected from them in the PM system. PublicWorks interviewees demonstrated that the support in the PM system was stronger in negative situations when things did not go as planned or smoothly, where many middle managers worked very closely with the FLM to handle such cases or employees. Middle managers wanted to ensure that they were backing up the FLMs in such situations, where the employee could create problems for the FLM should the situation not be handled appropriately. A middle manager (#1.13) said that in the situation of dealing with

poorly performing or problem employees, he would sit in with the FLM and the employee in question to manage the situation; not just leaving it to the FLM to handle alone. Three of the five middle managers from PublicWorks communicated that the effort was taken even in positive situations, where they took the initiative to support the FLM in the PM process. However, for employees who were performing adequately or better, even though middle management indicated their support, none of the FLMs discussed the role of their superiors in such cases. As such, FLMs learnt that poor performance was the emphasis of higher levels of management and they tended to focus on poor performance or how performance could be improved over giving positive feedback to employees.

The findings show that FLMs also tended to neglect the processes that resulted from the paperwork within the PM system to document the performance of employees because they lacked the motivation to do so as they did not believe it affected the performance of themselves and their employees. Although the FLMs could have developed this impression of the PM system over time through their own experience, another possible explanation for this phenomenon is that they formed this impression from how they were managed by their superiors in the past. For example, many FLMs expressed their belief that the custom and practice within both cases was that the annual performance reviews were not read through. This relates to impression management, because there were FLMs who used the informal PM system in conflict with the formal PM system in their management of poor performance. With higher levels of management prioritising the management of poor performance, when FLMs use the formal PM system for poor performers, their immediate supervisors become part of the process. This allows a formal record of poor performance that middle management will be aware of, impacting their perception of the employee's and FLM's performance.

### ***6.3.2 Support from Peers***

At PublicWorks, FLMs explained that their colleagues and superiors helped them in adapting to their role and the way the organisation operated:

When I first came in, my colleague also told me that. So, you have to put it in a nicer way to tell them their negative thing. You have to rephrase the whole thing. – FLM (#1.02)

When you are new to a company, how do you know what are the things you can or cannot do? I closely follow what my manager will do and I'll quickly bring down the information and then follow. It may not be the best, but it is a guide, then after that, when I've been in the organisation for a longer period of time, then I [will] start to think about what I can improve on; maybe I don't need this anymore. – FLM (#1.20)

Organisational actors establish the custom and practice expectations within a work group that supersedes and therefore can often become more important the formalised rules in the organisation (Brown, 1972; Fox, 1971). As such, a new FLM learns about the custom and practice expectations within the organisation's PM system from his or her peers and superiors. It is evident that peers play an intrinsic role in FLMs' PM abilities. When asked about who they turned to first when facing problems in their work, only four of the 57 interviewees from both organisations expressed that their first point of contact would be their direct superiors:

I go to my boss first... Sometimes I will try to solve [it] myself, but when I need help, I will definitely go to him, because for us, our team is quite small. – FLM (#1.07)

Definitely boss first, because colleagues in that sense, unless I need to check certain things I didn't really know and maybe [the] peer relationship helps in the sense that they have a similar experience. Otherwise, it will be the boss, who have definitely more experience than me to advise me, and of course, the boss knows it better in the sense that he's overall in charge of the whole project. – Middle Manager (#1.18)

If I know that my RO [reporting officer] would know, I would go straight to my RO [reporting officer]. But sometimes, there are some cases that he might not have done before... So, I will also know that he'll probably ask me "can you check what do they or what does the other department do?", then at least he has something to cross reference with. So, I will go and find that first before going to him. I mean, ultimately, I will still have to approach him or approach my bigger boss. So, it really depends on the circumstances, but most of the time, I will just go to him. – Frontline Employee (#2.03)

Because I'm in a new team, right, I'm the only one dealing with the portfolio, so now I have any questions, right, I can only ask my boss [laugh] because she has more experience than me. And she has also dealt with the [name of work task] if I'm not wrong, maybe ten years ago she was in the team, so she is quite familiar with the work in this team. So, I can approach her anytime. – Frontline Employee (#2.21)

Approaching superiors for help in the first instance was uncommon at the frontline and was generally for new employees who did not have many (or any) friendly colleagues they could approach with the experience or employees who have a long-standing, good working relationship with their superior. As a result, although FLMs were able to learn about what was acceptable in the organisation within the PM system from their superiors and how they had been managed in the past, their peers were the most common source of information. For a large majority of frontline staff, both employees and managers, the main source of support was their peers. As stated earlier in this chapter, most FLMs explained that they tended to go to their peers with issues they faced in their job rather than their superior in the first instance; it was only when they faced major or urgent problems or their peers were not able to help that they went to their superior:

I will discuss [the situation] with my colleagues first to find a way out before I talk to him. If some issues can be resolved within the working level, I'll just do it. After which I will just let him know about it. So, if some issues need him to be involved, then I'll just let him know, but most of the time I will just stick with my colleagues first. – FLM (#1.16)

Normally, we will check around first – if anybody else has faced that problem or has come across that issue. So, if they have, then we can use that to bring up to the bosses, and say “this was done like this in the past” or “this is what we've found”. But ultimately, we will check with them what they feel is the best way to move forward [with] that problem or how to solve that issue. Because if there's a need to accelerate it, then we'll probably bring it up to a higher level, let's say if the next level cannot solve it. – FLM (#2.20)

Experienced FLMs in particular held the perception that when they went to superiors, they should already have potential solutions in mind or they were keeping their superiors in the loop regarding the situation:

Normally, we will solve it by ourselves first. We cannot just go to him [referring to superior] for everything. I will check with my other colleagues [about] whether they have faced the same issue before and what they would do; after that I would go to my boss and update him on the issue. Then he will advise me whether to go by the usual way or if there is a new way that we can approach it. – FLM (#1.09)

I go to my boss first if it's major issues – if I know that those are really huge issues that maybe my colleagues won't be able to handle as well, then I will go to my boss directly... Otherwise, I mean if it's normal things or problems on

lower level issues in that sense, then if I know that at the staff level, if me and [my] colleagues, we can handle the problem, we will just get it done. I mean, we can probably tell him after that, but it's telling him that it's done, we've already resolved it, rather than asking him for a solution. – FLM (#2.08)

A PublicWorks FLM (#1.10) helped to explain the reason why FLMs tended to try to solve any issues by themselves or with the help of their peers, without involving their superiors in the first instance because custom and practice was that they “don’t go to the bosses with problems” but “they go to them with problems but also with the solutions”. The impression of performance is very important – FLMs do not want their superiors to have the impression that they are incapable of generating solutions to problems. This is also in accordance with the high power distance that is experienced in the Singapore culture (Hofstede, 2017). The approachability of superiors is dependent on organisational culture and the working culture can vary within the same organisation. This was seen in AdminInc, where managers in Department A and Department S had different levels of approachability, impacting the experience of frontline employees’ PM. The FLM influences frontline employees through custom and practice and this was seen by frontline employees when also choosing to approach their peers before their respective FLMs. A frontline employee (#2.28) expressed that “if I think my colleagues can help, I will go to them first. If not, then I will go to the boss”.

Supportive peers are important in organisations where they provide the first level of support. Additionally, peer support can explain the deviation from the intended PM system due to the development of the informal system. Approaching peers for support leads to custom and practice being consistently implemented, which can differ from the intended system (Armstrong & Goodman, 1979; Brown, 1972). The operational focus that FLMs place on their work responsibilities takes priority over the HR strategies of the organisation (Link & Müller, 2015) and this was also seen in the actions of the interviewees, where they tended to emphasise operational goals. As a result, most FLMs were either not aware of PM guides that were available or had not read them at all – the belief that if it had been done before meant that it must be acceptable governed the PM process. A lack of knowledge regarding the intended PM system and an over-reliance on peers can lead to the use of the informal system that opposes the formal system.

Peers and superiors are important sources of support in a FLM's job and influence how FLMs approach their PM responsibilities differently. However, superiors are more impactful, in that they serve as 'role models' for FLMs in their implementation of PM, whether they are aware of it or not. The perceived lack of HR support can help to explain the use of higher levels of management to understand what is expected and accepted in the organisation. Peers may lack experience in certain areas that higher levels of management have insight in, and therefore influence how FLMs choose to implement PM. The lack of focus on certain components of the intended PM system can be passed down to the frontline from higher levels of management through custom and practice. This is where the FLM can learn to focus more on the informality that they experience from their own superiors – FLMs can consciously or subconsciously adopt the way they have been managed in the past.

#### **6.4 Work Allocation**

Work allocation refers to the regular tasks that organisational actors have that form part of their role's responsibilities and/or the ad hoc tasks that they are assigned by higher levels of management. This allocated work will affect the performance of employees, especially if there is an unfair distribution of work. The amount and type of work allocated can affect the visibility of an employee, which in turn leads to performance rewards, training, and development. However, the work allocation of frontline employees is part of the PM system, because their performance affects the work distributed to them. Moreover, the perception was that disproportionate and unfair distribution of work affected the perceptions of FLMs and frontline employees regarding the PM system. This affected how FLMs managed performance because the type and amount of work a frontline employee did influenced how higher levels of management judged their performance.

The PM system in both organisations had two ways of allocating work – one for regular work tasks and another for ad hoc tasks. For day-to-day work tasks, both organisations generally had a fixed method of distribution, where employees had areas where they were in charge. In contrast, the distribution of ad hoc work was dependent on the discretion of management. At PublicWorks, ad hoc tasks, also known as extra-curricular activities or co-curricular activities (ECAs or CCAs), were generally

assigned by senior management directly to employees at the FLM-level. Frontline employees could have ad hoc tasks that might bypass the FLM altogether. The FLMs then had to keep track of their employees' day-to-day and ad hoc work to ensure that the employee's performance was accurately presented to higher levels of management:

For the past one year, you definitely more-or-less will remember. For example, if they get assigned to help out at a [specific activity for the organisation] you will remember because it's just this one year... because maybe I only have five staff. Then, when they send to me their ECAs for that one year, I will also compare again. Since my RO [reporting officer] asked that from me, I thought that I also need to ask them for that in case there are things that I have missed out. So, I want them to tell me the things that they are doing apart from the day-in-day-out and sometimes they have under-reported. I know that they tend to help out at other projects, especially when we have [activity name], we need more manpower, they didn't report that, but I put that in to say that "Hey, they spent two weekends overnight to help this team. It's not their project but they helped out"... so that when I talk to my reporting officers and we are sharing what our respective employees are doing, I'm able to talk about it. You can say, "Oh, my staff [member] is good" but how good they are? You must give an example. So, that's where we will give them "Oh, I understand he helped this particular team to do the [activity name]" and that particular team's project officer is in the room as well, then he may even chip in to say "He has been helping me for that". Then it helps them already. – FLM (#1.20)

In terms of my reporting officer, he's also not based at our site office, he's based at this HQ [headquarters] here. So, he also won't interact much with all these staff [referring to employees not working at headquarters]. He will go through me, then we will go through the staff. So, he also takes [his] cue from me by how I assess the staff. So, that's where he will find out [about] their performance – not direct[ly], but through secondary information and so on. – FLM (#1.25)

As such, the FLMs had the difficulty of being responsible for their employees when the PM system gave them more work to do – the FLMs had to ensure that employees were performing in their operational tasks, but they also needed to be aware of any additional ad hoc work that their employees did that they were not actually responsible for.

The FLMs also had the opportunity to increase their frontline employees' visibility through how they chose to allocate work – if an important and complex task that was noticed by senior management was completed well, the employee's ability could be acknowledged by higher levels of management. The FLMs' focus on meeting operational goals to avoid senior management's unwanted attention meant that

increasing the visibility of their employees was not their priority. This impacted the employee's future opportunities in the organisation, because the perceived performance of the employee was influenced by the impression that management had:

I think because we are human, so sometimes we tend to be a bit biased and/or sometimes we are a bit more sympathetic... maybe certain staff are poorer in performance, but there's some reason behind it, which we are more sympathetic towards. Hence, we might be a bit more lenient towards them and some of the more competent ones, because they are so good, or rather we feel that they are very good, and when they didn't perform up to task or to expectation, we might be harsher towards them. But, I think that's not the problem with performance management, it's the human nature in play. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.18)

I think it actually boils down to human beings... they will try to make everybody happy, but they do 'kill' the lousy performers... To [a] certain extent, if you are really overdoing it, obviously, anybody who gets angry will surely want to 'kill' you... if they give you enough opportunity and you don't actually treasure it, then you are looking for trouble aren't you?- FLM (#1.17)

Even though the PM system within both organisations allowed frontline employees to demonstrate their capability, there needed to be a certain level of performance present before that opportunity was given to them. It is evident that an effective PM system allows the best performing employees to receive more opportunities. Management from both organisations commented that performing employees were more likely to receive higher workloads with more challenging and complex work tasks as they were better equipped to deliver satisfactory results:

Normally, the better performers I think are loaded with more tasks, because they can deliver the work... most of the time, it's time critical. You don't have time – I need this today, by end of today. [laugh] Who else can you ask? You ask the person with the best knowledge. – Middle manager (#1.13)

The performance of employees affects their workload – how much work they're given, the quality of the work. – Director (#2.29)

However, if a FLM or frontline employee was perceived to lack the ability to perform, the opportunity for receiving challenging or ad hoc tasks that provided more exposure and development opportunities would be limited. Hence, visibility and performance would be rewarded with more opportunities; employees who were hidden and/or perceived to not be performing would lack the opportunities they needed to perform. It was a continuous cycle within the two case organisations in which those who had

proven their capabilities would tend to keep being selected because management had the motivation to give more complex work to them, knowing that they could be trusted to deliver. Then there would be a noticeable gap between the employees in terms of the amount and complexity of tasks they were given:

Something lands on your lap, it's so important... You've got two performers, two non-performers. The two performers are obviously dealing with something; the two under-performers are dealing with something, which is not so important and you have one very important thing that lands on your lap. So, what are you going to do? You will likely talk to the performer again, because it's important. So, for every important thing that comes here, you're going to talk to performer, that's when you create a system that the under-performer will tell you that "I'm not given opportunity"... The opportunity is there, but it's simply not given to you because you're not assessed to be able to do the job. With this kind of scenario that you have, at the end of the day, those who can perform will do more... Of course the thing you can do is to reward the person who does more. So, after a while the gap will be there. – Middle Manager (#1.21)

So, all the routine works are divided by the location – there could be ad hoc enquires, which are distributed quite randomly because it is very ad hoc in nature... It also depends on the nature of the query – if there is certain officer who has done more of such cases, who has more experience in this area of work, then we might assign it based on experience. Of course, on [and] off we will definitely have special projects, cross agency projects and so on. These are, I think, assigned based on experience and competencies. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.18)

Allocation of work based on merit is in line with the new public management's movement away from seniority-based rewards service (Perkins & White, 2010; Perkins, White, & Jones, 2016). This was seen at PublicWorks, where a FLM chose to allocate more work to the performing employee because of two non-performing senior employees:

I've got no other choice but to give [frontline employee (#1.08)] more assignments rather than depending on the other two. I have three employees under me, but most of the tasks, I give it to [frontline employee (#1.08)], which is good for him, because that means my superior and I have already taken notice of him, to groom him so that he can take up higher responsibility, which can also pull him up to the next level in that sense. It also benefits me as well, because I can share some of my workload. – Frontline Employee/FLM (#1.11)

Despite the poor performance of the other two employees, the FLM did not choose to utilise the formal PM system but chose to allocate a higher workload to the performer. As such, the findings show that FLMs had the opportunity and autonomy to manage performance through the informal PM system without escalating the poor performance of the other employees. However, the FLM's allocation of work and use of the informal PM system can be affected by his or her own performance. The opportunities that FLMs have in the PM system are also determined by higher levels of management's impression about their performance and potential. Not all FLMs are equal, and this was seen in the type of work allocated to them by higher levels of management and the amount of autonomy they had in the formal PM system. As discussed earlier in Chapter Five, some FLMs from PublicWorks were based at headquarters rather than individual worksites due to the ad hoc work (or CCAs/ECAs) they had been assigned. The director (#1.24) explained that higher levels of management had to believe that the FLM had the ability to take on the added responsibilities that came with the ad hoc work assigned:

We only select staff whom we think they can do [it]. We definitely won't select one where... I have to risk my own job because I have asked him to do it. I might even need to do the job myself later on!

The ability of FLMs increases their visibility and results in them being given more opportunities to perform and increase the perception that higher levels of management have regarding their ability and performance. However, the assignment of ad hoc work was portrayed by FLMs as a double-edged situation – only a select few FLMs tended to be selected, giving them the opportunity to build the relationship with senior management, but this could also take away from their main work tasks:

Our team is not so big, and the bosses tend to, like, to call the same few people for different kinds of ECAs... The bosses will send an email to you "Can you help me?", and can you reply no? [laugh]... once they [referring to senior management] are comfortable with these few people, when there are things he needs help with and he finds that you might have the information he needs, then he will get you in. It tends to be a bit repetitive, like, you always see the same people doing the things for him, so that's how the ECA comes in. – FLM (#1.20)

It's through additional work [that differentiates me from others]. I don't like to use the word, but it's called ECA [laugh] – the special duties and ad hoc tasks. Running through that then, often you find that the work is actually assigned by your higher management directly to you. So, you will have a lot of interaction with higher management because the work is being allocated to you alone. In a

day-to-day project, we have seniors, we have supervisors to report to. So, you go through a chain of command, but when it comes to higher level work, some of them may not be involved. Your supervisor may not be involved, and he may not know directly what you are doing because your director or your group director asks you to [do] it. – FLM (#1.22)

In addition, because the same few FLMs tended to be selected, other FLMs who lacked the opportunity may be unhappy with how their performance is perceived and the fairness of the system:

Sometimes the main scope of work... it's not going very well, but they have a ton of CCAs, which they are excelling in. So, when they [referring to senior management] do ranking, all these are taken into account... these [referring to ad hoc work] take up a lot of time, and that's why they're being taken into account during the ranking, but not everybody gets to be, for example, the secretary of this committee. Although they rotate it, but there are only a select few that are chosen. – FLM (#1.15)

The findings show that the actual PM systems within the organisations were such that visibility and the impression of performance were rewarded. From the FLMs' own experiences within the PM system, they learnt what the custom and practice expectations were – visibility being a key influencer. In addition, the ability of an FLM affected the amount of autonomy he or she had within PM. As explained in Chapter Four, at PublicWorks some FLMs had frontline employee(s) reporting to them even though they had no official responsibility in the formal PM system; there were also FLMs who were part of higher management's inner circle and were given a lot more freedom and opportunities in how they went about completing their work tasks and managed their employees. The relationship between FLMs and higher levels of management can range from low quality LMX (limiting opportunities in the workplace) and high quality LMX (offering more opportunities because of the closer relationship) (Bauer & Green, 1996; Hsiung & Tsai, 2009). The latter group have a higher quality LMX relationship with higher levels of management, increasing their own and their frontline employees' visibility. As such, it is evident that the ability of the FLM affects senior management's perception of their performance. The more competent a FLM is perceived to be, the more exchanges they have with their superiors, allowing them opportunities for a better relationship (Bass & Bass, 2008) and higher quality LMX. According to Dulebohn et al. (2012), the relationship between leaders and members can

affect the latter's experience at work and this was reflected in the data – FLMs with higher quality LMX were seen to have access to more opportunities than those who did not.

However, there were also instances at AdminInc where the perception that workload was distributed evenly existed, despite senior management's belief that performance affected the type and amount of work that employees got:

It's quite evenly spread out among the teams based on the type of work that they have and the projects and all that. Everybody will be given [an] opportunity, so it's not so much on, like, because you are very good, so you get more work. It's not that kind of place. – Middle Manager/FLM (#2.22)

I think it's [referring to the type and nature of work] [a] random distribution – Frontline Employee (#2.09)

Specifically, FLMs explained that they did have flexibility in how they chose to distribute the work to their employees:

Currently, we actually go by locations. So, we distribute based on that, but of course there are certain cases, if one officer is heavily loaded, then it will be passed on to another one to handle. There is no hard and fast rule... Let's say if you've got general enquiries or you[ve] got other things and that's like "who does what?", then there is a breakdown. For ad-hoc cases or let's say [name of an organisation], they come in bulk purchase; for bulk purchases, they come in multiple sites at one go and we cannot distribute the cases such that everybody has a hand in it. Normally only one officer is in charge of it. So, it's like a round robin thing – if this officer did this bulk purchase, the next bulk purchase will be another officer... There is a firm distribution, but as and when there is a need to, we will also deviate from it. – FLM (#2.20)

In terms of work distribution, I do have a lot of flexibility. In fact, when I was rotated, because there's this huge internal shuffle in the department and certain people in my team left for the other team and things like that, I had to reshuffle work here and there and I think at the time our senior manager, she let me handle the work distribution. So, in that sense it's quite flexible. – FLM (#2.07)

The discretion held by FLMs allowed them the opportunity to go against authority, illustrating that they were not powerless within the PM system. The FLMs in the two case organisations were trying to manage in their own way against the intended PM system but not against the goals that they had, which were their operational goals. AdminInc demonstrated that FLMs had the discretion to deviate from higher levels of

management and allocate work in the manner they believed best fit their work group, giving frontline employees the opportunity to perform in more challenging or difficult tasks that they might not have the experience in. This contrasted with higher management, who believed that better performers would be awarded more work or work that was more complex. The PM system in place intended to distribute work to those who were better able to perform and complete; however, FLMs at AdminInc were able to take into consideration the capacity that employees were able to undertake in their distribution. However, AdminInc's director (#2.29) explained her belief that all employees would have a chance to "rise up to the occasion" because the good performers continuously moved up within the organisation, freeing up the opportunity for other employees at that level to perform. As such, FLMs need motivation to provide their employees with opportunities to perform, regardless of their own personal bias and preference, by giving all of them an equal chance in terms of how they distributed the work.

The conflict between the formal and informal PM systems is influenced by the complexities of work allocation. The quality of relationship that a FLM has with higher levels of management influences the amount of flexibility and autonomy he or she has in the PM system; the relationship between the FLM and higher levels of management is affected by the impression that higher levels of management has about the FLM's performance. As such, the importance of visibility will affect how FLMs choose to show higher levels of management their own and their employees' performance. The complexity and workload allocated to frontline employees can impact their perceived performance and visibility because senior management are ultimately responsible for final decisions in the formal PM system – the impression that frontline employees leave on senior management through their work therefore affects the perception that senior management has. The formal PM system is such that FLMs are restricted in what they can do for the employees because the final decision is out of their jurisdiction. However, FLMs can use a combination of formal and informal PM systems to manage the visibility of themselves and their employees.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter provided an analysis of the actual PM system, with a focus on FLMs' use of formal and informal PM systems through discretionary behaviour within both case organisations. The FLM's attitude towards PM affected his or her motivation to implement the intended PM system. Most of the FLMs stated that PM was important, and as such, understood the importance of monitoring and managing frontline employee performance throughout the year. However, they did not apply the same beliefs to the annual performance review, which affected their motivation to accurately complete it. In addition to attitude, the relationship that FLMs had with their employees could also influence how they chose to manoeuvre the PM system. Frontline managers who had a smaller span of control tended to have a closer relationship with their employees, increasing their ability (because they had better knowledge of how individual employees were performing) and opportunity (through informal processes within the PM system instead of only the formal processes) to manage their employees. The support given to FLMs by peers and superiors significantly impacted how they chose to implement PM, because FLMs were either consciously or subconsciously influenced by other organisational actors in their enactment of PM – the custom and practice expectations of the work group and how they handled PM would then be learned by FLMs. Lastly, work allocation as part of the PM system could cause a mismatch between what senior managers expected and what FLMs did. Allocating complex, ad hoc work helped to improve the visibility of the FLM and employee, which could take precedence over actual work tasks.

Chapter Seven provides the discussion and conclusion of the thesis.

## **Chapter Seven: Discussion and Conclusion**

### **7.0 Introduction**

The previous two chapters provided the findings from PublicWorks and AdminInc, and were presented in order to answer the main research question and the two research sub-questions. In the analysis, it was found that the complexity of the intended PM system resulted in FLMs deviating from the intended system during the implementation process, resulting in formal and informal PM systems within the actual PM system. This chapter presents the discussion and conclusion of the thesis. The findings presented in the previous two chapters are related to each of the following research questions:

***RQ1) What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?***

*RQ1a) How is the intended PM system implemented?*

*RQ1b) How do FLM navigate the process of PM?*

After which, the contributions of the thesis are explained. The key theoretical contribution of this thesis is through FLMs' use of formal and informal PM systems within the actual PM system in order to balance the various responsibilities of their role and the expectations of other organisational actors that can come into conflict with each other when the intended PM system proves insufficient. Lastly, the limitations of the thesis and recommendations for future research are shared.

## **7.1 Discussion**

A variety of organisational systems operate at any given time and HR is a system of practices and processes within larger systems of organisation (Severance, 2001; Townsend, Lawrence, et al., 2013; Wright & Snell, 1991). Existing literature demonstrates the importance of using HR systems (or sub-systems within the HR system) to better understand organisational performance (e.g., Delaney & Huselid, 1996; Shin & Konrad, 2014; Wright & Snell, 1991). Chapter Two's literature review explained that although PM is a sub-system within the HR system, it functions as its own system, with other operating sub-systems (the intended and actual PM systems, formal and informal PM systems) within it. The thesis focussed on the intended and actual PM systems to better understand the role of FLMs within the implementation process of the PM system. The PM system is an essential driver of performance for all individuals in an organisation (Cardy & Leonard, 2015; Gruman & Saks, 2011; Luecke & Hall, 2006). Specific to the public sector, new public management was designed to change the culture and systems in the public sector by emphasising performance and outputs (Pollitt, 2007), resulting in PM systems being a key part of new public management (Christensen & Yoshimi, 2001; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Despite the benefits, PM is not without issues. In particular, many organisations have found their PM systems not performing as intended (Morgan, 2006). The literature review delineated the gaps in our knowledge surrounding the implementation of PM system in organisations – the excessive focus on individual PM control mechanisms (e.g., performance appraisal), insufficient understanding of formal and informal systems interaction, and the lack of emphasis on the role of managers in the PM process.

The findings from the two case organisations demonstrate that the formal and informal PM systems utilised by FLMs within the actual PM system affect the implementation of the overarching PM system. As such, a variety of factors explain why PM does not operate as intended by HRM, and answered the two research sub-questions before answering the main research question.

In order to understand the gaps within intended and actual PM, the first research sub-question asked "*How is the intended PM system implemented?*". This question predominantly focussed on the intended PM system, in which different levels of

management and the HR department have differing perceptions about its purpose, which affects the implementation of the intended PM system by FLMs.

The second research sub-question focussed on the role of the FLM by asking “*How do FLMs navigate the process of PM?*”. This question examined how FLMs went about implementing PM and how this impacted the overall PM system of the organisation. It also helped to illustrate the gaps between intended and actual PM systems.

The main question: “What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?” explored how PM systems were implemented in organisations using a systems theory approach. The focus that FLMs have on their operational goals impacts their choice of formality and informality with their employees. This is where the lack of consistency and the complexity of the intended PM system help to explain the interaction between the formal and informal PM system.

### ***7.1.1 The Implementation of the Intended Performance Management System***

This section discusses the findings from PublicWorks and AdminInc related to the first research sub-question: *How is the intended PM system implemented?* The varying input of organisational actors can influence the operations of an organisation as it operates in and as an open system (Clegg, 1990; Harney & Dundon, 2006; Scott, 1987). The existing literature illustrates the key roles that different levels in the organisation play in the implementation of the PM system (see 2.2.2 Performance Management Research Findings). The discretionary behaviour of organisational actors based on their perception towards the systems within the organisation affect how they operate (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). As such, within an open system, the choices and decisions that organisational actors make during the implementation process of the intended PM system affects the experience of frontline employees. Senior management and the HR department are responsible for developing the intended PM system that is meant to be implemented throughout the organisation (Truss, 2001; Weiss & Hartle, 1997). Middle management serves as a buffer between senior and frontline management (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997; Yang et al., 2010). The FLMs act as the implementers of the intended PM system for frontline employees (Lawler, 2015; Ortiz & Ford, 2009). The various organisational actors need to believe in and support the intended PM system for

it to be successfully implemented (Marsden, 2007). In particular, the HR department plays a vital role in supporting the PM system and helping FLMs to balance their operational and people management responsibilities (Armstrong, 2011; Huselid et al., 1997). However, research has found that the goals of FLMs and the HR department tend to be different (Sheehan et al., 2016), which affects their varying focusses within their role and within the PM system (Francis & Keegan, 2006; Hailey et al., 2005; Link & Müller, 2015; McConville, 2006). The steady state within an open system is dependent upon the context the system operates within (Koehler, 1981). As such, the actions of the organisational actors affects the equilibrium or the steady state of the PM system.

Existing literature has tended to explore the implementation of HR and PM systems at individual levels (e.g., Currie & Procter, 2001; Yang et al., 2010), neglecting the interaction between the different levels of organisational actors, or conflating the roles of the varying organisational actors into generic groups, such as line managers and employees (e.g., Fu et al., 2018; Ozcelik & Uyargil, 2015). According to Boulding (1865), the multiple components within a system have to work together to achieve a goal. It is evident that the actions of the organisational actors affect the implementation process of the intended PM system, because a deviation by one actor impacts the entire system.

This thesis differentiates itself from the existing literature by examining the individual levels of organisational actors through their perceptions of their own roles and the roles of other organisational actors within the PM system to answer the first research sub-question. The findings show that the intended PM system was implemented differently by the various levels of management based on the goals and outcomes they wanted and needed to achieve within their role – the focus on the operational targets resulted in the intended PM system being seen as a bureaucratic nuisance that managers had to be seen to be implementing. However, managers were able to use their discretion to achieve their high priority goals by deviating from the intended system through the combined use of formal and informal PM systems and managing the expectations of other actors.

*Implementation focussed on outcomes and goals*

The findings from the two case studies demonstrate that the varying levels of organisational actors had different views about the role of the intended PM system. This was influenced by their experiences with PM in the past and what they thought their role and responsibilities were within the PM system. Moreover, the components that were part of the intended PM system (as discussed in Chapters Four and Five) were not made known to all levels of organisational actors, yet there was the expectation by the HR department and senior management that they had to be adhered to. Table 7 illustrates the perception that each level of organisational actor had of PM.

Table 7

*Perception of Performance Management from Employees and Managers*

<b>Senior Management</b>	<b>HR Department</b>	<b>Middle Management</b>	<b>Frontline Management</b>	<b>Frontline Employee</b>
A necessity to create structure in the organisation to allow for consistency	A form of structure and assessment tool	Could help teams to work towards goals through continuous feedback; however, the intended system could be very subjective depending on the person implementing it.	Should be about engaging employees to perform in their job and achieve work goals through consistency	Focusses on rewards and progression but the structured nature neglected intangible components of performance and engagement

The organisational actors were outcome focussed, where the intended PM system could be seen as a process that the organisation had in place that organisational actors could use to achieve the required outcomes. The organisational actors had different roles and responsibilities in the organisation and they used the PM system to achieve their own goals or targets. This is in line with Selznick (1981), who discussed the importance of individual needs achievement that can cause deviation from the intended system due to goal misalignment. Managers can deviate from the intended PM system in order to allow themselves to better manage the expectations of their employees (Lewandowski, 2018; Rosen et al., 2016). Notably, a FLM's goal affects his or her use of the intended PM system and this was explained by Sheehan et al. (2016), where the differing goals between FLMs and the HR department impact the delivery and acceptance of the

intended PM system. A change in one component within a system results in changes to other components of that system (Katz & Kahn, 1978). As such, the deviation by FLMs from the intended PM system results in a shift in the PM system as a whole due to the interaction between the other elements within the PM system.

All levels of line management are inclined to focus on the operational achievements of their job (Link & Müller, 2015). Within the two case organisations, this was where the attention tended to be on their subordinates and themselves delivering on their operational targets rather than implementing the intended PM system, which could detract from their goals. In contrast, the HR department is mainly interested in implementing best practice HR practices (Hailey et al., 2005), which is the department's operational target – the successful implementation of the intended PM system. However, even amongst the operational managers, the individual levels of management have different focusses and goals. A lack of understanding about the purpose of the intended PM system led to organisation actors further deviating from the intended PM system to achieve their individual goals. The different interests and performance goals of organisational actors can result in FLMs using the informal PM system as a channel that allows them to align their individual interests with organisational goals. The FLMs in both cases showed that they utilised the informal PM system in a way that conflicted with the intended PM system to achieve their performance goals.

Additionally, the general perception of the intended PM system by those outside of senior management and the HR department was that PM was a bureaucratic system that did not affect the performance of employees – the belief was that the senior management's perceived performance of employees would affect rewards, which was more important than what was recorded within the PM system records. This perception negated the intended system to paperwork that organisational actors had to complete, which they did not believe helped improve their employees' performance or the achievement of performance goals. Middle management explained that the intended PM system could be very subjective because it depended on the goals of the person implementing it. As such, inadequate understanding of the intended PM system impacts the lack of ownership behind PM implementation (Goh et al., 2015). Most interviewees tended to relate the entire PM system to the annual performance review because they

believed that this was the component that the organisations strongly pushed, with HR sending out constant reminders to complete their appraisals at fixed times throughout the year. The annual performance review could affect rewards that individuals received (i.e., promotions, development, and monetary bonuses), which explained the immediate relation of PM to the appraisal. It is common for organisations to find their PM systems underperforming (Morgan, 2006); just because an organisation has established a PM system does not automatically guarantee its success. The relationship between an organisation and the environment it operates within is sensitive where open systems help to explain the uncertain and indeterminant relationship (Bedeian, 1990; Thompson & McHugh, 1995). The deviation from the intended PM system due to the actions taken by the organisational actors from both organisations demonstrated the changing environment within the organisation where employees experienced different variations of PM based on the decisions of their managers.

The establishment of an intended PM system does not mean individuals will implement it according to policy. Burns and Stalker (1961) explained that the fluidity of management systems leads to various combinations of formal and informal systems in the implementation process. Moreover, the findings from both organisations demonstrated that the intended PM systems had components that were not communicated to all organisational actors. The lack of transparency in the PM system can lead to ambiguity as organisational actors are aware of how to implement the intended PM system due to ambiguity, and they then turn to peers and superiors for support (Hunter & Renwick, 2009). Ambiguity within the intended PM system allowed FLMs from both case organisations room to use discretionary behaviour. Deviations from the intended PM system resulted from the lack of transparency and clarity within the PM system and differing interests of the organisational actors. The various levels in the organisations had different perceptions regarding the intended PM system, which affected the implementation process and the perceived effectiveness of the PM system. As can be inferred from Jackson's (2000) description of the simplicity and complexity of a system, the complexity of a PM system depends on the components and processes within it. A lack of understanding behind the purpose of the intended PM system affects the complexity of the PM system because the organisational actors implement PM differently based on their performance goals, which can cause conflicts between what is intended by the organisation and what is actually experienced by employees.

Despite the formalised structure of the intended PM system within PublicWorks and AdminInc, there was still room that allowed for deviation. Organisational actors tended to reduce components of the intended PM system into two main groups: components that were ‘compulsory’ and components that were ‘optional’. The custom and practice in organisations can override the intended system (Brown, 1972) and this was seen in both organisations. The informal system within PublicWorks was developed through custom and practice and was used by those at managerial level to modify the intended PM system to help them achieve their goals. Other organisational actors learnt to use the informal system to overcome constraints within the intended PM system because they believed that this was acceptable within the organisation. For example, as analysed in Chapter Six, some FLMs from PublicWorks acknowledged their use of the informal PM system to have discussions with their poorly performing employees about how their performance could be improved. They had the motivation and opportunity to inflate the performance of these employees to prevent higher levels of management from being aware of the actual performance. It was implied that FLMs learn about what is deemed as acceptable within the organisation from their superiors based on how they had been managed in the past, or from peers by approaching them to ask for help. Senge (2006) explained the importance of feedback loops within systems, which are the cause and effect of change. The results show that superiors and peers within the organisation served as feedback loops for the FLMs, influencing how the intended PM system was implemented through the formal and informal PM systems based on the feedback they received. The FLMs’ use of formal and informal PM system is explained in further detail in the next section when discussing how FLMs navigate the process of PM.

As such, the formal and informal PM systems in the organisations could run in contradiction to each other within the organisation – FLMs could be telling their employees directly where they are not performing and how they could improve, which could help to improve performance, but FLMs were documenting that their employees were performing as per expectation. The FLMs’ use of the formal and informal PM systems is in line with the preference of managing informally. Despite the FLMs’ inflation of performance within the formal system, it was a veiled threat towards the frontline employee, as the FLM was in a position where he or she could escalate the performance to the next level if needed. However, the inflation of performance within

formal documentation also allowed employees access to rewards and development opportunities that might otherwise be denied, and this caused other employees who were aware of the situation to be demotivated and unhappy with the inconsistency within the PM system. The lack of alignment between the formal and informal PM systems could affect more than just the employee being managed in this way, and reduced the performance of other employees.

#### *Implementation based on perceptions of roles*

Organisational actors have different roles and responsibilities in the overall PM system; and they also have different perceptions about other actors and the PM system (Brown et al. , 2010). In particular, the literature emphasises the importance of the HR department in the PM system to ensure consistent implementation across the various organisational levels (e.g., Armstrong, 2011; Huselid et al., 1997). Even though the HR department and operational departments need to work together to achieve work goals and targets (Hunter & Renwick, 2009), the different focusses that they have impact the implementation of the PM system. Just as the environment an organisation operates within affects how it utilises its resources (Harney & Dundon, 2006; Scott, 1987), the environments that organisational actors operate within vary and affect how they choose to manage their job responsibilities. The intended PM system in both case organisations demonstrated the facilitative role of the HR department, where they monitored the formal processes to ensure consistency and completion by other organisational actors. Moreover, the HR staff believed that they facilitated the implementation process by supporting other organisational actors in the PM system by being approachable and collaborating with the operational departments. This perception was not shared by the other interviewees.

The common consensus was that the HR department did not work with the operational departments in the implementation of PM, but rather only provided instructions regarding how the intended PM system should be implemented through email. When HR did not facilitate the intended PM system, there was more room for deviation from it because the use of emails to notify organisational actors of various PM components did not explain what needed to be done. Even when the HR department gave instructions about the intended PM system, they did not regulate and monitor the

implementation process closely. The HR department’s lack of interaction with the operational departments allowed for deviation from the intended PM system, because monitoring and standardisation were not present. The custom and practice expectations of the work group could therefore motivate the organisational actors to not implement the intended PM system because their peers and seniors were also not doing so. Moreover, operational departments had differing goals to the HR department (Sheehan et al., 2016), where the managers focussed on the operational aspects of their job, neglecting their HR responsibilities (Link & Müller, 2015). Table 8 below outlines the difference in the perceptions between the organisational actors and the HR department.

Table 8

*Perception of the HR Department’s Role in Performance Management According to Organisational Actors*

<b>Senior Management</b>	<b>HR Department</b>	<b>Middle Management</b>	<b>Frontline Management</b>	<b>Frontline Employees</b>
Responsible for ensuring that policies were being followed and the promotion of employees – only they were aware of the full promotion criteria and whether employees have met it.	A strong support in the PM system through the provision of training for all employees; they also helped to facilitate the ranking process at the end of the year that affected promotions and bonuses that employees could receive.	They reminded organisational actors about PM components throughout the year and were responsible for the PM system in place through the policies and structure that had been introduced.	Responsible for the PM system in place and they generally did not work closely together with other actors, mainly interacting through emails when PM reminders were sent out.	Instructions on PM and training were communicated through emails.

In particular, middle and frontline management generally did not provide feedback to or receive the required support from HR – only a small number of interviewees indicated the supportive role of the HR department, which was mainly through a channel to ask for help at PublicWorks and the provision of training at AdminInc. The perception that the HR department was not interested in collaborating with the operational departments was also stated (see 5.1.3 Support from the HR Department) – HR only wanted the intended PM system that they developed, where senior

management had the ultimate authority within the decision making process, to be implemented. However, it is not fair to say that the HR department did not provide support to other organisational actors within the PM system. The FLMs generally did not ask for support from HR and did not want HR to be constantly checking up on their implementation of PM, otherwise their room for discretion within the system would be reduced. The differences in focus (HR implementation versus operational targets) helps to explain why the operational managers and the HR department had different perceptions about the role of HR. In particular, the FLMs in both case organisations were seen to focus on their operational goals and their use of discretionary behaviour within the PM system was to ensure that those goals were being met.

In addition to the HR department, other organisational actors also influenced the implementation of the intended PM system. The gaps between the intended and actual PM system were also a result of the differences in perceptions about individual roles, responsibilities, and the PM system. The focus that each level had differed dependent on their work goals, which affected what they believed was important. Table 9 on the next two pages provides a summary of the perceptions that different organisational actors had about themselves and others.

Table 9

*Perceptions of Senior, Middle, and Frontline Management by Organisational Actors*

<b>Actors in PM</b>	<b>Perception of SM</b>	<b>Perception of MM</b>	<b>Perception of FLM</b>
<b>SM</b>	They understood that they held the final say in the formal PM system and they acknowledged that although they were not able to work closely with the frontline employees, it was their responsibility to be aware of how their employees were performing - this could be through departmental meetings or informal interactions.	<p><b>PublicWorks:</b> Countersigning officers for frontline employees; even though frontline employees might not report directly to them, they still needed to be aware of what was going on.</p> <p><b>AdminInc:</b> Managed a bigger team than FLMs because they had proven to be able to be responsible for a larger number of employees.</p>	<p>There was a general expectation that the FLM was responsible for their subordinates and led them to perform in the job responsibilities.</p> <p><b>PublicWorks:</b> Assigned and monitored the work given to frontline employees. FLMs who had formal PM responsibilities were perceived to be capable and had higher potential than those that did not.</p> <p><b>AdminInc:</b> Managed a smaller team than middle managers to determine whether they would be able to take on more.</p>
<b>HR</b>	Senior management had a broader perspective of their department and employees. However, they would not have knowledge about all of their employees' performance, especially lower level employees; and as such, they had to work with middle and frontline management to appropriately evaluate the performance of their employees.	They had a better overview across the different FLMs and employees and had a better understanding about how different FLMs assessed their employees.	Responsible for the team under them where the FLM played a guiding role to ensure that employees were performing. FLMs were also the closest point of assessment for the staff themselves to know how they were performing.

<b>MM</b>	<p><b>PublicWorks:</b> Set the culture of the workplace by communicating what was expected of employees and what the focus should be on to middle managers.</p> <p><b>AdminInc:</b> Determined the potential of employees and had the final say in the evaluation of employees.</p>	<p>They had to ensure that work was done by the FLMS and frontline employees; they also guided FLMs and served as examples for FLMs to follow.</p>	<p><b>PublicWorks:</b> Bridged the gap between the expectations from higher levels of management and what was delivered by themselves and frontline employees. They needed to be able to communicate and manage their employees to deliver job performance.</p> <p><b>AdminInc:</b> Managed a team where they had to mentor and guide the frontline employees under them. They evaluated the performance of these employees before passing this onto middle management.</p>
<b>FLM</b>	<p>Distributed work down the line and were responsible for the final grading of all employees that affected rewards employees receive.</p>	<p>A lot of FLMs modelled their behaviour after their previous superiors; there was the general perception that they should go to their superiors with solutions along with the problem on hand rather than actively approaching middle management for assistance with problems at work.</p>	<p>They believed that they needed to guide frontline employees and also be able to complete their own work responsibilities.</p>
<b>FLE</b>	<p>Highest level of management that they generally did not deal with directly. Seen to be responsible for the approval of work and the decision makers in the formal PM system.</p>	<p>Level above FLM that affected their flow of work.</p>	<p>Team leader that had to be responsible for the employees under them; this was where the FLM needed to be able to guide employees to produce work to the expectations of higher levels of management. They should also be able to guide employees through feedback to improve and avoid problems, allowing them to progress in their careers.</p>

Liang et al. (2007) explained that senior management are expected to develop the vision and objectives that the organisation wants to achieve and all organisational employees should strive to achieve. Senior management also serve as role models, demonstrating to line managers behaviours that are acceptable and expected (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2007). Although the intended PM system that was communicated to organisational actors through policy did not include senior management as part of the frontline employees' PM process, most interviewees explained that senior management made the final decisions in the formal PM system, which affected the development and reward received by employees. Most FLMs conveyed feelings of being undermined in the PM process due to their limited authority within and contribution to the formal PM system. Vogel and Masal (2012) explained that the bureaucratic nature of the workplace can restrict FLMs due to the lack of control they have in decision making. The components that were the responsibility of senior management and HR further complicated the intended PM system, because most of the FLMs were not given information about these components, affecting their ability to manage the performance of their employees. The FLMs lacked knowledge regarding the components and processes within the intended PM system, which complicated the final evaluation of their employees' performance. This resulted in their ability within their PM responsibilities being influenced by the deviations from the intended PM system to keep their higher levels of management and employees happy.

The evidence shows that the dilemma FLMs faced between managing the daily performance of their subordinates and the expectations of senior management could leave FLMs feeling overwhelmed and underappreciated in the organisation and they might then neglect some of their PM responsibilities (e.g., performance planning, performance reviews, training). However, most of the deviations from the intended PM system within the two case organisations resulted from FLMs' own interests (e.g., unwanted attention from higher levels of management). Moreover, the lack of approachability of senior management can affect their relationship with FLMs. As such, middle managers play an important role within the implementation process of the intended PM system by FLMs.

Floyd and Wooldridge (1997) argued that middle managers play a facilitative role in passing messages and meaning between higher levels of management and FLMs and

frontline employees; unlike FLMs and frontline employees, they are comfortable approaching senior management. The lack of interaction between FLMs and frontline employees and senior management (Currie & Procter, 2001) results in the funnelling of expected behaviour and practices to FLMs and frontline employees becoming the responsibility of middle managers. Inconsistent messages within organisations can lead to problems (Townsend et al., 2012); however, the position of middle managers allows them to send consistent signals to both FLMs and frontline employees. In this study, the focus of senior management and the HR department for middle managers was on monitoring and managing larger groups. Although middle management interviewees expressed that they needed to ensure subordinates were performing in work and were able to manage the work flow, they did not perceive themselves as mediators. Rather, they saw themselves as role models for FLMs and supported them through guidance and approachability. The FLMs supported this perception because they believed that middle managers were very experienced and helped to guide them. Middle managers also channelled messages down from senior management to FLMs and thus frontline employees; the FLMs' experience from their direct superiors was what senior management expected middle management to deliver. However, the characteristics and attitudes of middle management could differ between individuals and this affected the opportunities given to FLMs within the PM system. The opportunities that FLMs had affected the amount of discretion they were able to use during the implementation process.

The literature explains that with the decentralisation of certain HR people management functions down to FLMs, they have additional tasks and responsibilities that have expanded their roles (e.g., Hales, 2005, 2006; Harris et al., 2002; Perry & Kulik, 2008). As "interpretive filters of HRM practices" (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004, pp. 215-216), how FLMs implement PM impacts on the experiences that frontline employees have in the PM system and their performance (den Hartog et al., 2004; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Senior management, middle management, and HR interviewees tended to perceive the role of FLMs as one where they were responsible for the frontline employees within their team: the FLM had the responsibility of cascading information down to frontline employees and ensuring that the employees could perform in their work tasks. However, the FLM's role did not come with the corresponding authority. The FLMs had limited authority within the intended PM system. Even though they were

responsible for ensuring that their team was able to achieve work goals, they were not responsible for determining employees' performance within the intended PM system, despite being in the best position to evaluate their employees' achievement of goals.

Hailey et al. (2005) argued that as line managers are generally assessed on whether they meet their operational targets rather than their capabilities to develop their staffs' potential, there is an apparent inclination for FLMs to focus on operational outputs over their people management responsibilities (Link & Müller, 2015). Here, other organisational actors failed to consider that FLMs could face conflicts between their operational and people management responsibilities that impacted the implementation of PM. Even though the FLMs at PublicWorks were in a position within the intended PM system to make poorly performing employees known to higher levels of management to help improve performance through steps that could be taken, most had the opportunity and chose not to do so. Instead, they chose to distribute the workload to other performing team members. When allocating a heavier workload to performing employees, there must be a high quality LMX between the FLM and frontline employee such that the FLM is motivated to allocate more work to him or her. The bureaucracy within the Singapore public sector is such that managing poor performance is a bureaucratic process that was seen to be tedious, and hence, the FLMs themselves would rather not start the process. Additionally, the FLMs were motivated not to inform higher levels of management about poor performing employees because their own performance could be implicated, as he or she could be perceived by higher levels of management as lacking the ability to manage their employees to meet operational targets.

It is clear that organisational actors had different roles and responsibilities within the two organisations. Each level had their own focus based on what they needed to achieve, and this impacted how they utilised the intended PM system and interacted with other organisational actors. The HR department was focussed on the process within the PM system; senior management was focussed on the structure of the PM system; middle management was focussed on supporting the FLM; frontline management was focussed on the implementation of the PM system to frontline employees. The PM literature tends to neglect the interaction of the different organisational actors and how that affects their roles within the PM system. The varying

levels of organisational actors have different focusses, where their individual needs may not be aligned with organisational goals (Selznick, 1981; Verbeeten, 2008). In particular, Chapter Five showed that at PublicWorks, the nature of the work made it difficult for individual goals to be set, resulting in FLMs using department goals to benchmark performance. Conflicts between individual and organisational goals can explain the deviations from the intended PM system. In particular, organisational actors deviate from the intended PM system using the informal PM system to help them bridge the gaps between individual and organisational goals.

### ***7.1.2 Frontline Managers and the Performance Management System***

The second research question asked: *How do FLMs navigate the process of PM?* This question was designed to examine how individual FLMs balanced their responsibilities within the PM systems in organisations. The literature shows that the implementation of PM systems is complex, with significant obstructions impacting the expected benefits it is supposed to bring (e.g., Goh et al., 2015; Morgan, 2006). Systems theory also explains that rather than only making optimum choices, the best choice for specific situations can be made (Simon, 1965). Frontline managers are not *robotic conformists* (Marchington & Grugulis, 2000) and just as the intended PM and actual PM system in organisations vary due to the different perceptions of and processes taken by organisational actors, this could also be applied to how FLMs choose to implement PM – they do not just implement the intended PM system, but rather have to consider the constraints they face in their role. The results show that FLMs navigated the process of PM by trying to balance the conflicting goals they faced within the PM system and their job – in broad terms, they tended to prioritise their operational responsibilities and the achievement of work targets rather than following the components within the intended PM system and all that they entailed. In doing so, they ignored or modified the components of the intended PM system through the formal PM system and turned to an informal PM system to provide feedback to employees about their performance, which reduced conflict with their team and did not expose FLMs or their employees to the scrutiny of senior managers. They drew upon the experience of their superiors and peers to navigate the process of PM – given their lack of formal training in PM, they adopted custom and practice to help them navigate the PM system.

### *Conflicting goals within the PM system*

A PM system can have conflicting goals because it needs to judge and evaluate the performance of employees but also motivate and develop employees (Tweedie, Wild, Rhodes, & Martinov-Bennie, 2019). The findings show that the components of the intended PM system that FLMs were required to implement could be demotivating to frontline employees because performance evaluation was done by senior management who could reward employees they perceived to be performing. Should the PM system demotivate employees to perform, this could negatively affect performance, subsequently conflicting with the FLM's responsibility within the PM system to facilitate employees in the achievement of organisational goals. Data from the two case organisations illustrate that FLMs tended to focus on employees who were performing below expectations that would take away from the achievement of work targets. Although it is important to improve poor performance within the PM system, a sole focus on poor performance can have a negative impact on performance – neglecting the average or performing employees or de-motivating the poor performers. Most frontline employees from the two case organisations conveyed that FLMs tended to focus on poor performance, leading to them not expecting feedback if everything was going well. However, a small number of frontline employees who did receive feedback from their FLMs regarding where they were performing well explained that it was useful and motivated them to perform. As such, although a PM system can have conflicting goals, FLMs focusing only on poor performance can also reduce the employee's motivation to improve and perform.

The evidence shows that components from the intended PM system that have been implemented through the formal PM system can motivate employees through performance rewards and developmental opportunities. However, the formal system can also negatively affect performance if employees do not feel that they are given what they deserve due to poor implementation. FLMs from PublicWorks were motivated to inflate the reported performance of their employees for two reasons. Firstly, when FLMs inflated the reported performance of their employees in the annual performance review, they were choosing to use the formal system to help motivate their employees to improve or maintain their performance. Secondly, the FLMs' inflation of the reported performance also kept higher levels of management unaware of poor performance and helped to maintain the impression of performance by the FLM and employee. Even

though the FLM's report of the employee's performance may not have been the final decision, the FLM could still influence the final scoring if senior management was not aware of the employee's actual performance. As seen in Chapter Six, (see 6.1 The Frontline Manager's Attitude towards Performance Management), some frontline employees and FLMs (mainly from PublicWorks) explicitly conveyed their impression of the inaccuracy in senior management's evaluation within the formal system of their own or others' actual performance. Such a lack of accuracy of evaluation can lead to demotivated employees due to the formal PM system. Moreover, senior management from both case organisations explained that it was natural for performing employees to be given more opportunities to perform in challenging and complex work because they were confident in their ability to perform.

Likewise, the focus that the FLMs had on the operational goals explained the tendency to assign more work to performers to enable the work to be completed. Performing employees consistently being allocated more work can neglect the other average or underperforming employees, reducing their motivation to perform. However, within AdminInc, FLMs had the opportunity and motivation to deviate from the intended PM system to allocate work evenly amongst their frontline employees. This was shown in Chapter Six (see 6.4 Work Allocation), where the FLMs had the opportunity and motivation to equally distribute work through the informal PM system to the frontline employees, allowing the employees opportunities to gain experience through the work and improve performance. The equal workload also allowed for employees to be better able to achieve work goals, because performing employees would not be overloaded. Frontline employees being given an equal opportunity to perform through the informal PM system can help to motivate them beyond only using the formal PM system's rewards.

#### *The FLM's prioritisation of operational responsibilities*

Hailey et al. (2005) discussed FLMs' lack of motivation to perform in both their operational and HR responsibilities because the focus by higher levels of management tends to be on operational targets. As such, FLMs need the ability and motivation to divide their time between operational and HR responsibilities. Here, the span of control for the sample of FLMs varied from one employee to 15 employees. The number of

employees a FLM is responsible for can affect the quality of LMX between the FLM and employees because FLMs with a larger span of control have more employees they need to manage. Notably, a larger span of control means that individual FLMs must divide their operational and PM responsibilities over a larger number of employees, affecting the way they implement the intended PM system. Frontline managers who are responsible for a larger number of employees tend to have more opportunities (e.g., autonomy) within the intended PM system because higher levels of management have perceived them to have the ability and motivation to manage more employees and carry out their PM responsibilities effectively. The two case organisations showed a lack of transparency regarding how FLMs were evaluated on their implementation of the intended PM system. As a result, integration between the FLMs' operational and people management responsibilities was not seen, despite policy dictating that FLMs consistently monitor and manage employee performance, not only waiting for the annual performance review.

Even though most FLMs explained that they did not struggle to manage their operational and people management responsibilities, they were seen to prioritise the achievement of work targets. The FLM's motivation influences the effort used to implement PM in their job (Domínguez-Falcón et al., 2016). This was seen in Chapter Six (see 6.1 The Frontline Manager's Attitude towards Performance Management) where the lack of clarity about how FLMs were evaluated on the implementation of PM resulted in them assuming that their performance would be evaluated through the achievement of work goals. As such, the data show that most FLMs were unsure about how their implementation of PM systems would affect their perceived performance by higher levels of management, but by meeting operational goals, they were performing in their job. The belief that the achievement of work goals reflected how well FLMs have managed the performance of their employees therefore influenced FLMs to focus on their operational over their PM responsibilities.

As shown in previous research (e.g., Hales, 2005), FLMs lack decision making authority, which affects how they navigate their PM responsibilities. The results show that senior management made the final decision in the formal PM system, limiting the FLM's contribution. Consequently, PM was more than just employees' actual performance – employees needed to be visible and a 'performing' employee delivered

what senior management wanted. This was shown in Chapter Six, where FLMs explained that PM was being able to understand what senior management wanted and delivering that. As such, most FLMs did not believe that the components within the intended PM system contributed to an employee's perceived performance and corresponding rewards, because senior management already had an idea of who was performing without it. The lack of belief in the intended PM can help to explain the deviation from it. The findings demonstrate that senior management were aware of employees who they believed to be performing. However, the FLMs still had to go through the motions and implement the components that were deemed compulsory (e.g., the annual performance review) as part of the formal PM system to ensure that the expectations of the HR department and higher levels of management were met.

Research has shown that FLMs who are uncomfortable with PM tend to be more lenient (e.g., Brown & Lim, 2019) and this leniency by FLMs presents other problems in the workplace. For example, FLMs from PublicWorks chose either to: a) inflate the performance of poor performing employees, or b) not to escalate the poor performers to higher levels of management and instead allocated heavier workloads to the performing employees in order to ensure that operational targets were being met. These FLMs did so even though they did not believe that the annual performance review was an integral part of their work responsibilities because they understood that there was the expectation for them to complete it. However, completing it accurately would allow higher levels of management access to information that showed their employees performing below expectations.

In 6.2.1 Performance Discussions, the director (#1.24) explained that it was difficult for them to remove poor performing employees within the public sector. As such, escalating the poor performance of these employees damages the LMX with the FLM should they consistently work together (see the section where FLMs explained the difficulty of working with older employees and managing their performance). In addition, by allocating work to performing employees, the FLMs would also ensure the work goals were being met, maintaining the impression of performance within the work group. The FLMs did not want higher levels of management to perceive that they and their employees were not performing. As such, these FLMs were motivated to complete the year-end performance review because they were expected to by higher levels of

management; however, the low respect FLMs had for HR work and the opportunities available to them led to them inaccurately report the performance of their employees. The completion of the year-end performance review satisfied higher levels of management that FLMs were completing their PM responsibilities and managing their employees well; this also kept frontline employees happy, because they could receive rewards and development opportunities. Additionally, FLMs at PublicWorks also chose not to escalate poor performers, instead choosing to allocate a heavier workload to the performing employees.

#### *Experience of superiors and peers*

More than half of the FLMs from the two organisations were promoted into their roles. A smaller number of FLMs were hired into the role with previous work experience outside the organisation. Townsend et al. (2012) previously found that promoted FLMs can be ill-suited for the role because they are promoted due to seniority rather than the requisite skills. Therefore, they can be very skilled technically but lack the ability to effectively manage the employees under them. Moreover, the bureaucratic nature of the public sector still limits the authority of the FLM despite the expansion of responsibilities (Evans, 2015; Townsend & Loudoun, 2015). The results show the limited formal authority that FLMs had; however, they did have informal authority within the PM system. The lack of experience and authority of the FLM would make training an important part of equipping FLMs with the necessary skills in their role. The FLM interviewees explained that HR provided training to allow them to understand how to implement PM. This is in line with what literature states about the increase in PM training given to line managers (e.g., Cascio, 2012; Shore & Strauss, 2008). However, Harney and Jordan (2008) found that FLMs still lacked sufficient training to manage their responsibilities.

The findings from FLMs and frontline employees (see 5.2.3 Training and Development) show the preference for technical training over PM training. For FLMs, because they tended to see their operational and people management responsibilities as separate, this affected their choice of training. More than half of the FLMs at PublicWorks chose not to go for PM training because they felt that formal training was not as helpful as on-the-job training through their work. At AdminInc, the frontline

employees explained that they did not generally attend training programs because they were always discouraged by their FLMs or higher levels of management in favour of completing their work tasks. As such, it could be inferred that the FLMs at AdminInc themselves did not attend training due to the tendency to focus on operational targets. They could lack the opportunity to attend training and development programs due to the lack of support from higher levels of management, reducing the motivation the FLMs had to apply for it. It was found that the training programs were developed by HR for a wide audience and the provision of PM training did not mean it would be utilised. Training could provide FLMs with information about the PM system and provided guidelines for what was expected from them. As also stated in Chapter Five, the type of work FLMs engaged in and the experience of the FLM impacted their choice of training. FLMs who engaged in jobs that required a lot of technical knowledge preferred attending relevant technical training; however, FLMs with little experience did not prioritise technical training over PM training. Moreover, Chapter Six explained how support from peers and superiors contributed to the on-the-job training of FLMs, where they learnt from their superiors and peers, causing deviation from the intended PM system. Existing research shows that support can help increase the ability of FLMs and help them in making HR decisions (e.g., Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Hunter & Renwick, 2009; Hutchinson, 2013).

The context that FLMs operate in can impact the opportunity they have in the implementation of PM systems (Kim & Wright, 2011) and even though they are limited within the formal system (they are in a position where they start the process but are not able to make the final decision), FLMs can use discretion to manage the performance of their employees. Most of the FLM interviewees explained that their peers were almost always the first point of contact if they needed help with their work. The findings show that other FLMs could give advice based on their previous experience with similar situations, providing direct support about how they managed the performance of their employees. This influenced other FLMs in the PM of their own employees, as previous experience indicated that it was acceptable in the organisation. Findings also show that higher levels of management indirectly supported FLMs through the demonstration of the expectations of the PM system. The FLM's experience of PM that they received from their superiors impacted how they themselves chose to manage their employees. In Chapter Six (see 6.3.1 Support from Higher Levels of Management), FLMs

described their choice of either wanting to or not wanting to emulate their superiors. As such, it can be inferred that that an organisation's PM custom and practice expectations are learnt through FLMs' peers and superiors, which they may not be aware of and be able to learn through training programs.

However, the 'training' provided by peers and superiors can cause inconsistencies in the implementation of PM systems due to the various individuals who serve as 'role models' for the FLM – peers can advise FLMs about organisational norms; higher levels of management can serve as guides where FLMs consciously or subconsciously adopt the way they have been managed previously. This lack of consistency has been highlighted in previous research (e.g. Cole, 2008; Sheppard & Lewicki, 1987; Tyler & Bies, 2015) and was also seen in the two case organisations, with inconsistencies experienced within the PM system. Fu et al. (2018) explained that FLMs have to be consistent in their treatment of employees but also still allow for individual responsiveness. It can be inferred from the findings that it is difficult for all FLMs within a work group to implement PM systems consistently due to the presence of informal PM systems. Specifically, there is a lack of cohesiveness between formal and informal PM systems, which is expected because the informal system is developed with the purpose of providing an alternative and supplement to the formal system, allowing the FLMs to better manage the demands of other organisational actors. Additionally, FLMs all have different abilities, motivation, and opportunities within the PM system that affect how they are able to implement it. In particular, performance discussions that FLMs and frontline employees had within both case organisations were a part of the inconsistency experienced because they caused grey areas between the formal and informal PM systems during the implementation process. As such, it was evident that the 'training' provided by peers and superiors allowed FLMs to learn about the custom and practice expectations within the organisation where they understood the boundaries in which they had discretion to operate, allowing them to customise the management of performance of their frontline employees. The lack of formal training programs offered to or attended by FLMs led to the development of the on-the-job training that they received from their peers and superiors regarding how they chose to implement the PM system. In particular, it was evident that their peers and superiors contributed to the FLMs' use of the informal PM system within the organisations to help them achieve work goals that the formal PM system would have otherwise not been able to.

### ***7.1.3 The Role of the Frontline Manager in Performance Management Systems***

The focus of this thesis is the role of the FLMs within PM systems based on the implementation process of the intended PM system and how FLMs balance their responsibilities and the expectations of other organisational actors to navigate the overarching PM system. As such, this section answers the main research question: *What is the role of FLMs in PM systems?* The existing literature explains the importance of FLMs within PM systems, because they need to implement the policies and practices within the organisation in such a way that their employees are performing to achieve organisational goals (e.g., Dale et al., 2007; Ortiz & Ford, 2009; Tummers & Knies, 2013). Frontline managers have also been seen to link higher levels of management and frontline employees (Saville & Higgins, 1994). Using a systems theory approach to examine the implementation of PM systems, this thesis found that within the PM system, FLMs were in a position where they still faced the problem of being the “men in the middle” (Child & Partridge, 1982, pp. 46-47), trying to find an ideal equilibrium between their superiors and subordinates through formal and informal PM systems.

It is evident from the findings and discussion thus far that the FLMs within both case organisations had multiple responsibilities within the organisation and the PM systems; however, their position restricted their opportunities in decision making within the intended PM system to allow them to perform. However, FLMs had the discretion that allow them to “adapt well enough to *satisfice*” (Simon, 1965, p. 129); a key role of the FLM within the PM system was to facilitate PM implementation within their position that held them answerable to the frontline employees and higher levels of management. The FLMs had to ensure that they were utilising the PM systems to maintain or improve their frontline employees’ performance for the achievement of the organisational goals. In addition, the FLMs’ use of the PM systems also had to fall within their jurisdiction and authority within the work group to convey compliance to higher levels of management. To improve or maintain their employee’ performance, FLMs needed the ability and motivation to critically assess how their employees were performing and motivate their employees to want to achieve work goals. However, the implementation of the intended PM system could result in demotivated employees due to the conflicting goals of the system (as discussed in the previous section). As such, FLMs had to balance

the different interests of the other organisational actors through discretionary behaviour where they selectively implemented the intended PM system.

Table 10

*Components within the Intended Performance Management System*

<b>Compulsory</b>	<b>Optional</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Year-end Performance Review</li> <li>· Regular Performance Discussions</li> <li>· Work Allocation</li> <li>· CEP (hidden)</li> <li>· Quota (hidden)</li> <li>· Ranking (hidden)</li> <li>· Promotion Criteria (hidden)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Performance Planning</li> <li>· Mid-year Performance Review</li> <li>· Performance Review Discussions</li> <li>· Training and Development</li> </ul>
<p><i>Note.</i> 'hidden' = responsibility of senior management and the HR department</p>	

The above table segregates the components of the intended PM system into two groups: compulsory components and optional components – based on formal documentation detailed in Chapter Four and information provided by the organisational actors. The custom and practice expectations of the organisation determine what is considered compulsory and optional within the intended PM system and needs to be learnt by FLMs. To manage the expectations of higher levels of management, FLMs from the two case organisations were motivated to implement the three compulsory components of the intended PM system that were within their control (the year-end performance review, regular performance discussions, and work allocation) through the formal PM system. For the optional components, the FLMs had the opportunity and lacked the motivation to implement them. As such, the optional components (except training and development) were either ignored or only partially completed by the frontline employees, with no input from their FLM. Training and development of frontline employees were managed through the informal PM system and are discussed below. However, the implementation of the compulsory components did not mean that the FLMs would adhere to their intended purpose. The FLMs were motivated to appear to comply with the expectations of their superiors so that higher levels of management did not develop a negative impression of their ability and performance within the PM system. This apparent compliance with the intended PM system through the implementation of the compulsory components could also help the FLM to develop their relationship with higher levels of management. The literature shows that a high

quality LMX can lead to better perceptions of performance (Cogliser et al., 2009; Davis & Gardner, 2004).

Table 11

*Components within the Actual Performance Management System*

<b>Formal PM System</b>	<b>Informal PM System</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Annual Performance Review</li> <li>· Regular Performance Discussions</li> <li>· Work Allocation</li> <li>· CEP (hidden)</li> <li>· Quota (hidden)</li> <li>· Ranking (hidden)</li> <li>· Promotion Criteria (hidden)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Work Allocation</li> <li>· Training and Development</li> <li>· Performance Discussions (different from what is recorded in the year-end performance review)</li> </ul>
<p><i>Note.</i> 'hidden' = responsibility of senior management and the HR department</p>	

The above table lists the formal and informal PM systems seen within both case organisations. Interactions between the different sub-systems can affect the complexity of the overarching system (Jackson, 2000); the interaction between the various systems (or sub-systems) within an organisation can affect how goals are achieved (Townsend, Lawrence, et al., 2013). The implementation of the formal PM system within the authority of the FLM was discussed above during the implementation of the compulsory components of the intended PM system. Here, the implementation of the informal PM system is discussed, because FLMs require the ability to facilitate the visibility of frontline to higher levels of management. Within the PM system in both case organisations, the FLMs had the opportunity to use the informal PM system to manage the visibility of their employees and themselves. In particular, they were able to use work allocation, training and development, and performance discussions that differed from what was recorded in the year-end performance review. Organisations have systems that are unique to them because they operate in different environments (Clegg, 1990) and this was seen at PublicWorks and AdminInc, which had different informal PM systems in place.

Firstly, the FLMs from both organisations were able to manage the work allocation of their employees through the informal PM system to manage their operational responsibilities. However, there were differences between how work was allocated within both organisations due to the different goals of the FLMs. Within PublicWorks,

FLMs allocated performing employees more work to be able to cover up the inadequacies of underperforming employees, allowing for the operational targets to be met. At AdminInc, the focus of the FLMs tended to be on equal work distribution, which allowed for all employees to have a balanced workload, facilitating the achievement of operational goals (because employees who are overloaded may not be able to complete all their work in time). Secondly, the management of training and development of employees were also different in both organisations. Although frontline employees from PublicWorks generally did not express concern regarding attending training and development programs; at AdminInc, it was shown that frontline employees were constantly prevented from attending training and development programs by their FLMs despite this being part of the intended PM system. AdminInc's FLMs were focussed on the completion of current work goals and believed that attending training programs hindered employees' ability to complete their work. Lastly, within PublicWorks, FLMs chose to have different performance management discussions with their employees than what was recorded within the annual performance reviews. This occurred because the FLMs were trying to protect the impression of performance for their employees and themselves by inflating the performance of their employees through the annual performance reviews and they did not want to have to spend time on additional paperwork. The interviewees from AdminInc did not report the inflation of performance and a possible explanation would be the shorter chain of command within the organisation and the same work location. Higher levels of management could have the opportunity to interact with the FLMs and frontline employees within the organisation; whereas at PublicWorks, the FLMs and frontline employees tended to work at various site locations, which removed them from the regular line of sight of higher levels of management.

The work allocation, training and development, and different performance discussions as to what was recorded in the performance reviews were endemic components of the informal PM system seen in the case organisations. Although both informal systems were different, they were implemented by FLMs to manage the visibility of themselves and their employees in order to balance the expectations of their superiors and subordinates. An FLM's management of the visibility of his or her employee can affect the relationship between them, which impacts the motivation of the employee to perform. Likewise, the FLM's own visibility to higher levels of management can affect

the relationship between them, affecting how higher levels of management evaluate the FLM's ability and performance, which can impact the opportunities brought offered in future to the FLM. As such, the informal PM system is an important tool that FLMs can use to facilitate the impression of performance through the visibility of their employees and themselves.

The new public management literature explains the move away from seniority within the public sector (e.g. Fischer, 2008; Perkins et al., 2016; White, 2011). However, this did not seem to be the case within the two case organisations, as analysed in Chapter Five (see 5.1.5 Seniority). Although senior employees can be more experienced and perform better in their jobs, seniority within the two cases was an important influencer regarding the visibility of the employees where they tended to be rewarded. However, FLMs could use the allocation of work to manage the visibility of their employees, regardless of seniority. As shown in Chapter Six (see 6.4 Work Allocation), AdminInc's FLMs had the opportunity to distribute workload evenly across their employees. The focus of the FLMs was on being able to reach their work goals and distributing the work evenly allowed for a better balance of the employees' workloads. The consideration of the capacity of the frontline employee and giving the frontline employee the opportunity to perform can help in developing the LMX between the FLM and frontline employee. In addition, the work allocation can also give the frontline employees, and thus the FLM, the opportunity to gain visibility with higher levels of management.

In addition to managing seniority within the workplace, FLMs also needed to manage workplace tensions if they were aware of them. Dhiman and Maheshwari (2013) explained that tensions or politics within a workplace can affect the evaluation of performance, but equally, the tensions and politics between and within groups can also affect actual performance. Workplace tensions can be obvious or discrete (Palazzoli, 1986). The findings in Chapter Five showed (see 5.1.4 Workplace Tensions) that workplace tensions within both case organisations tended to be in regards to senior management. However, FLMs were only aware of the tensions in the workplace if they had been working in the organisation for a long time or had a good relationship (high quality LMX) with higher levels of management. According to the director (#1.24) of PublicWorks, how the performance of employees was evaluated was a very important

component within the formal PM system, because if the group director did not agree with the evaluation, it could affect the performance of other employees. The role senior management meant that the FLMs were limited within the formal PM system, and they therefore tended to use the informal PM system to manage their employees.

Organisational actors can deviate from the formal system due to obligations that require them to use informal systems (Selznick, 1981). For example, AdminInc FLMs used work allocation (as discussed above) to distribute work equally to all employees, regardless of the perception of senior management. However, the discretion of the FLMs that affects their use of the formal and informal systems could also cause workplace tensions. This was seen at PublicWorks, where FLMs used performance discussions that they had with their employees to explain the situation through the informal system; however, they did not record the actual performance in the formal system. The difference between the performance discussions they were having and the performance reflected in the formal system allowed for the poor performing employees having access to rewards that they would otherwise not have; which caused tensions within the workplace with other organisational actors who were aware of what was happening.

Table 12

*The Performance Management System*

Intended PM System		Actual PM System	
Compulsory	Optional	Formal PM System	Informal PM System
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Year-end Performance Review</li> <li>· Regular Performance Discussions</li> <li>· Work Allocation</li> <li>· CEP (hidden)</li> <li>· Quota (hidden)</li> <li>· Ranking (hidden)</li> <li>· Promotion Criteria (hidden)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Performance Planning</li> <li>· Mid-year Performance Review</li> <li>· Performance Review Discussions</li> <li>· Training and Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Performance Review</li> <li>· Regular Performance Discussions</li> <li>· Work Allocation</li> <li>· CEP (hidden)</li> <li>· Quota (hidden)</li> <li>· Ranking (hidden)</li> <li>· Promotion Criteria (hidden)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· Work Allocation</li> <li>· Training and Development</li> <li>· Performance Discussions (different from what is recorded in the annual performance review)</li> </ul>

*Note.* 'hidden' = responsibility of senior management and the HR department

Table 12 demonstrates that the complexity of the PM system through the components the FLMs from both case organisations needed to consider during the implementation of PM, even though they might not be aware of all components. The various components of a system can be independent, yet are meant to fit together to help towards the achievement of goals (Boulding, 1956). However, the actions of the FLMs and other organisational actors can affect how the components within the PM system work together. A PM system can develop over time in organisations where the deviations from the intended system by organisational actors become custom and practice expectations. The systems within organisations can cause organisational changes (Levasseur, 2004) and the way FLMs utilise the PM system can become custom and practice for others. The multiple components of the intended PM system are extremely tedious to complete, and if the various levels of management segregate their operational and PM responsibilities, they would tend to neglect the latter. Dividing components within the PM system into compulsory and optional can help FLMs to simplify their role within the PM system. The feedback loop within the system that results from the environment that organisations operate within can cause changes to organisational performance and vice versa (Senge, 2006; von Bertalanffy, 1968). The division of the components can arise from the feedback loop within the organisation's PM system, where the FLMs use their own experience and the experience of their peers and superiors within the PM system to determine which components are compulsory or optional.

In addition, as senior management tended to lack interaction with the FLMs and frontline employees (Currie & Procter, 2001) within the two case organisations, they used their impression of individual FLMs and frontline employees based on interactions with them and what they had heard from others to determine the performance for the year. As such, instead of the components within the PM system, the FLM and frontline employee's visibility and relationship with higher levels of management heavily influenced their perceived performance within PublicWorks and AdminInc. The importance of visibility within the two case organisations indicates that it is not sufficient for FLMs to simply complete their responsibilities within the formal PM system, as this does not necessarily help in the performance of their employees and themselves. FLMs also need to use the informal PM system to manage expectations of their employees. Equilibrium can not be reached within the PM system, making it

complex – the interaction between the various components that operate within the open system will influence the steady state (Koehler, 1981) of the PM system.

FLMs are in a position where they need to balance the different demands and expectations that other organisational actors have of them. Within their role they face conflicting pressures and have to bridge the gap between the intended and actual systems (Child & Partridge, 1982; Hales, 2005; Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Notably, FLMs have to manage their operational and HR responsibilities. Frontline managers need to manage, and indeed find a way to balance, their potentially competing operational and HR responsibilities. At the same time, FLMs also need to manage the different stakeholders and the varying demands they have. As such, FLMs have a role where they use formal and informal system to achieve their idea of balance in the workplace, helping them to achieve work targets, which can mean multiple equilibrium within the PM system in an organisation.

## **7.2 Contributions**

The findings in this research present interest from both theoretical and practical perspectives. In particular, drawing from various bodies of literature (PM, FLM, systems theory, and public management literature) and organisational aspects that have not been previously studied together allows for the contribution to theory and practice. The key theoretical contribution of this thesis is to PM literature, where the deviation from intended PM system was shown to result from FLMs trying to balance the various responsibilities of their role that came into conflict with each other. The contribution to PM was through the collective use of systems, AMO and LMX theories to better explain how the demands and expectations that other organisational actors have on the FLMs cannot be managed by the FLM adequately within the intended PM system. Although systems theory was essential in explaining the interaction between the formal and informal PM systems, the combined use of AMO and LMX theories allowed for a better understanding of the FLMs' implementation of the PM systems. It is evident in the thesis that FLMs do not function in silos - other organisational actors influenced the FLM's AMO within their role. Moreover, the relationship that FLMs had with other organisational actors affected their LMX. Both the AMO and LMX of a FLM affected the implementation of his or her PM responsibilities and as such the formal and

informal PM systems. Figure 14 illustrates the implementation process of FLMs, where they use a combination of formal and informal PM systems within the actual PM system to reach an equilibrium they believe best satisfies what is required from them within their role.

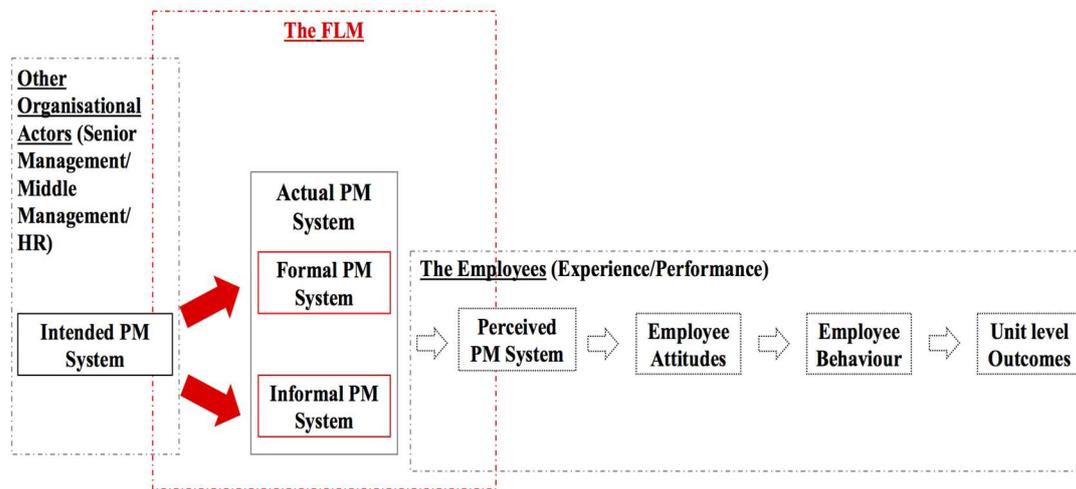


Figure 14. The organisational actors within the performance management system. Adapted from the people management-performance causal chain by Purcell and Hutchinson (2007).

In Chapter Two, it was explained that Schleicher et al.'s (2018) PM review emphasised the importance of studying PM systems through systems theory because the interactions of the multiple components within the PM system can help to further our understanding of the effectiveness of PM systems. At this point, systems theory has not been widely used in examining PM systems and this thesis has shown that systems theory has substantial explanatory power in analysing how the sub-systems within a PM system interact. In particular, Schleicher et al. (2018) elaborated on the importance of formal and informal processes within organisations. This thesis found that a combination of formal and informal PM processes creates the procedures that allow organisational actors to achieve their performance goals and targets within the PM system. The formal and informal sub-systems are whole functioning systems used by FLMs to manage their PM responsibilities; the FLMs' usage of both systems is heavily dependent on their individual AMO to implement or deviate from the intended system and their LMX with other organisational actors. According to Nadler and Tushman (1980), the formal PM processes are structured procedures developed by the organisation and the informal PM processes are implicit procedures that develop over time. However, this thesis

demonstrated that the processes within the PM system are not individual processes that have been designed by and/or developed within the organisation that FLMs simply utilise in their role. Rather, the role of the FLMs requires them to utilise the formal PM system and informal PM system that have various formal and informal processes through their discretionary behaviour, allowing them to manage the demands and expectations that they face.

Non-PM literature has explained that formal and informal systems complement (e.g., Marchington & Suter, 2013; Townsend et al., 2013) or compete (e.g., Boxall et al., 2007; Mohr & Zoghi, 2008) with each other. This thesis found that formal and informal PM systems can conflict, but also complement each other. The formal and informal systems are contradictory, because FLMs have the discretion that is affected by their ability, motivation and opportunity that is also partially dependent on their LMX with their superiors and subordinates to use formal and informal systems to manage the expectations of other organisational actors. However, formal and informal systems are still complementary when they work together to ensure that FLMs are able to achieve their operational goals and targets. As shown in this thesis, during the implementation process of the intended PM system, FLMs discretionarily use the formal and informal PM systems. Within the formal PM system, they are implementing the compulsory components of the intended PM system, which higher levels of management will be aware of if not completed. For components within the FLM's control, FLMs show minimalist compliance to the intended PM system through the formal PM system to show their superiors that they are doing what is expected of them within their PM responsibilities. By appearing to comply with the intended system, FLMs can appease higher levels of management; however, they also need to manage the expectations of their employees. In order to do so, they use the parallel informal PM system that has already been developed and utilised by their predecessors with its own rules and internal consistency. The FLMs' actions are not ad hoc, but are carefully calculated to ensure that they are able to maintain flexibility to manage their work group and keep other organisational actors happy within the system. Just as organisations work toward reaching a steady state within the open systems they operate within (Koehler, 1981), the FLMs work within the PM system to reach their idea of equilibrium based on the demands from their role and other organisational actors.

The role of FLMs within PM systems shows the complicated and intricate nature of the PM systems within organisations. There is also contribution to the FLM literature by examining the role of the FLMs specific to PM – by placing the FLM in the centre of the PM system, it is evident that FLMs play an important role in the implementation of HR systems in the organisation. The findings also show that systems theory is very suitable to frame the study of the implementation of HR systems, which tends to be lacking in HR and PM literature. Sub-systems (intended, actual, formal and informal PM systems) within an overarching system (PM system; HR system) were found to be very complex and dynamic – it is the sum of various individual yet interrelated components that causes a lack of a single equilibrium point. The thesis also contributes to public management literature by examining PM in the Singaporean public sector context.

The main practical contribution of the thesis comes from the role of FLMs in the PM system and the importance of support from other organisational actors. The multiple sub-systems within the PM system are complex and complicated, influencing how PM is implemented. Moreover, there is a need for organisations to be aware of the dilemma faced by FLMs when they try to balance the expectations and demands of their superiors and subordinates within the PM system. As such, instead of all components of a system working together for the achievement of a common goal (Boulding, 1965), this thesis shows that FLMs used components of the PM system to achieve their performance goals by juggling the expectations of other organisational actors. Each level of management does not function in a silo and needs to support the others in order to reach a cohesive and consistent use of the PM system. In particular, the role of the HR department should be facilitative rather than dictatorial to assist in the implementation of PM systems.

This thesis also shows that there is a need for organisations to consider PM as a system rather than individual and separate components. As such, rather than discounting the effectiveness of PM, organisations should rethink the individual components within the PM system and how they can be re-designed or re-worked to complement rather than come into conflict with each other. Additionally, the various organisational actors should not be forgotten and their roles within the PM system needs to be reconsidered

to ensure that they are able to work with each other and the components of the system to achieve organisational goals.

Lastly, the thesis demonstrates the lack of suitable PM-related training within the public sector. As such, there is a need for organisations to design and develop suitable PM training programs for different levels. Generic training that is provided to all organisational actors repeatedly over the years does little to help them to understand and implement PM.

### **7.3 Limitations**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the qualitative case study method was chosen as the best research method to explore the implementation of PM systems in organisations through the role of FLMs. This approach was successful in providing a number of insights into the FLMs' implementation of PM systems and the various influences that affect it. However, this approach has its limitations.

The sample was drawn from only two statutory boards in Singapore's public sector from two specific sectors. Additionally, interviewees were part of departments within a division under the same director. This may limit the generalisability of the findings to other departments and organisations. While the two organisations came from different sectors and there were similarities in the findings between them, the extent to which the findings can be generalised beyond the infrastructure and environment sector and central administration sector is difficult to determine. Findings from the study may be generalisable to other similar organisations; however, future studies may attempt to examine whether the empirical results about the roles of FLMs in the PM system can be generalised to fit organisations in other sectors.

Another limitation is the focus on the role of FLMs in PM, as this study only examined this phenomenon from the perspective of others on FLMs, despite the responsibilities of PM involving other parties and policies. Additionally, there is an unequal representation of the various levels from both organisations due to the different workplace structures in place – there were larger working groups at PublicWorks, leading to more FLMs and middle managers to be sampled, compared to AdminInc,

which had more frontline employees represented. In addition, there was a lack of HR representation from AdminInc, and the findings may therefore be distorted. It is possible that equal representation of the different levels of both organisations and the inclusion of HR from AdminInc in the sample may have generated different findings.

The ability to determine causal relationships between the role of FLM and PM systems was restricted by the sole use of qualitative methods. The exploratory nature of the study allowed for the use of qualitative methods to answer the research questions; however, the inclusion of a quantitative component would further extend the exploration of implementation of the PM system and the relationship between PM and the role of FLMs. Including equal representations from both organisations and the use of quantitative research methods would strengthen the findings from this research.

#### **7.4 Recommendations for Further Research**

Opportunities are present for the field of HR to advance the findings of this thesis. There were several limitations in this research related to the sample that provide opportunities for future research. For example, the research design of this thesis did not enable the use of quantitative research methods that could help determine definitive causal relationships between formal and informal organisational systems and the FLMs' role in PM. Thus, there is an opportunity for future research to undertake studies to determine these relationships through the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods.

An area that particularly warrants future research is to examine other elements of HRM and the interactions between the formal and informal systems within them. One of the most important findings of this thesis is that FLMs used the formal and informal PM systems to balance the varying demands that came with their role. The FLMs used the formal system to manage the demands of higher levels of management, showing that they had the ability to carry out their PM and operational responsibilities. The informal system was used by FLMs to manage the demands of their subordinates, maintaining or improving the relationship between them and ensuring that operational goals were being met. Future research could study the FLM's use of the formal and informal

systems within other elements of HRM to see if there are different performance outcomes dependent on different FLM approaches.

One of the limitations of this study was the exclusive focus on the role of FLMs in the PM process. Future research could examine the roles of other organisational roles in PM and the extent to which they affect the balance between the formal and informal PM systems. The influence of organisational culture on PM also warrants further investigation, given that this thesis was based on two public sector organisations. Previous studies (Brewer & Walker, 2013; Cole, 2008) have discussed the importance of organisational culture that influences how FLMs chose to manage their HR responsibilities. This thesis focussed on how organisational culture, which is influenced by the national culture, constrained the FLM in the management of frontline employees' performance. It would be worthwhile for future research to explore how different types of organisational cultures in different fields can influence the management of performance and the formal and informal systems within the organisation, and whether the factors identified in this thesis, such as authority formally and informally assigned to FLMs, affects the PM of employees.

One of the most important findings of this thesis is that there is an interaction between formal and informal systems within the organisation that goes beyond just PM – the visibility of FLMs and frontline employees affects the perception of performance. There is a lack of training provided to FLMs to appropriately manage their formal and informal responsibilities within the boundaries of the formal systems in the organisation. This leads to FLMs approaching their work responsibilities differently depending on the ability, motivation, and opportunity that they have access to, which results in the varying implementations of formal and informal systems in the organisation. This thesis also demonstrates the importance of making sense of frontline employees' experiences to better understand how FLMs can manage their employees and work responsibilities. Future research could utilise cross-disciplinary collaboration in studies, enabling scholars to utilise not only their own strengths, but also to draw upon the strengths of others. In doing so, it may be possible to uncover additional theoretical findings relating to the body of FLM and PM literature, both in isolation and collaboration.

## **7.5 Conclusion**

Ironically, the distinction between formal and informal systems tends to be neglected in the PM literature, despite the interaction between the two systems serving as a key part of understanding PM. Schleicher et al.'s (2018) PM review used Nadler and Tushman's (1980) model, which included formal and informal processes. Schleicher et al. (2018) also explained that the components within the formal and informal processes affected PM effectiveness differently. This thesis integrated the concept of formal and informal processes into the formal and informal PM systems and found that the effectiveness of the PM system was dependent on the organisational actor implementing it. For FLMs, their use of the processes within both the organisation's formal and informal PM systems (and processes within them) was based on their discretion to ensure that they were able to meet their work goals by balancing the demands that other organisational actors had. The effectiveness of the PM system to the FLM was dependent on them being able to modify the intended PM system that proved inefficient through the formal and informal PM system.

By focusing on the varying systems within the PM system rather than only looking at the processes, the thesis allows for a better understanding of the interaction between the varying systems (including formal and informal processes) that FLMs have the discretion to utilise in order to manage the expectations that are placed on them and responsibilities they have within the PM system. The implementation of intended PM systems was noted to be problematic and led to issues of effectiveness. Additionally, even though FLMs play an important role in the implementation of PM system, few studies have specifically examined the role of FLMs in relation to PM (e.g., Ahmed et al., 2010; Brewer, 2005; Dewettinck & Vroonen, 2016) and the conflation of line and frontline management negates the important and unique roles that FLMs play (e.g., Saundry et al., 2015). Equally, while touching upon the importance of FLMs in the implementation of policies, researchers have not viewed this as the central focus of the study (e.g., Boxall & Macky, 2007). As such, little is known about the underlying processes that FLMs take when connecting organisational policies and the frontline employees to ensure performance or that PM systems help facilitate the responsibilities of FLMs in the performance of their subordinates.

The focus of this thesis was on the perspective of the FLMs as a key actor, although in

the context of the expectations and actions of other actors in the system. Additionally, this thesis used systems theory to illustrate the complex and dynamic nature of PM in practice to answer the main research question: “What is the role of FLMs in PM system?” through the two sub-questions of: “How is the intended PM system implemented?” and “How do FLMs navigate the process of PM?”. The findings indicate that deviation from the intended PM system is a result of the custom and practice within a work group. Despite the age of custom and practice literature, it can still serve as understanding for contemporary literature. This is because custom and practice influences how FLMs use formal and informal PM systems as they attempt to balance the demands of higher levels of management and their frontline employees. Notably, the perceived performance of a FLM and frontline employee by senior management was found to be more important than accurate implementation of the intended PM system by the FLM. As such, the implementation of the informal PM system by FLMs was their way of combating the gaps that they saw within the formal system to keep their employees happy. Frontline managers were also often found to seek to maintain agency in the process to balance meeting the demands and expectations of those both above and below them while apparently complying with the formal system. Their actions were not ad hoc, but in effect set up within a developed, parallel informal system with its own rules and internal consistency.

However, the ability of individual FLMs affected the opportunities they were given to manage their employees informally. The performance of FLMs within PM systems was dependent on higher levels of management’s perception about their ability in their role, which affected the opportunities and as a result the motivation of the FLM. When FLMs were perceived to have the ability to perform at a higher level (e.g., manage more employees; take on more responsibilities) by higher levels of management, the visibility of the FLMs allowed them more opportunities (e.g., ad hoc work that allows them to work more closely with senior management that further increases their LMX and visibility), and this increased their autonomy and discretion within the PM system. However, the opportunity they had to closely monitor the performance of their employees and build a higher quality LMX was affected when FLMs had a larger number of employees they were responsible for. In turn, the motivation of the FLMs to perform in their PM responsibilities was affected by the relationship they had and how they maintained this with their employees and superiors. Frontline managers attempt to

reach their idea of congruence within the PM system through their use of the formal and informal PM systems to help them achieve work goals.

In summary, this thesis provides important new findings regarding how PM systems are implemented in organisations, including how FLMs utilise the formal and informal PM sub-systems within the actual PM system. The findings indicate that the different perceptions that organisational actors have and the performance culture of the organisation explains the gaps between intended and actual PM implementation. More importantly, FLMs are constrained by their role within the formal PM system but are able to use discretionary behaviour within the informal PM system to allow them to manage demands of their role. Senior management was identified as the key driver behind the formal PM system, where the visibility of frontline employees heavily influenced senior management's evaluation of performance. However, frontline managers were identified as playing the key role within the informal PM system, shaping the experiences of frontline employees.

Public sector organisations should be aware that the use of an informal system is not just a deviation from the intended formal system, but rather a means of balancing conflicting demands. The focus should not be on the implementation of the intended PM system, but rather on understanding why FLMs deviate from it. This thesis also provides an important contribution to PM literature by demonstrating how using older literature (e.g., systems theory, custom and practice) to study PM may provide new insights.

## References

- Aguinis, H. (2014). *Performance management* (3rd ed.). Essex, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited.
- Aguinis, H., Joo, H., & Gottfredson, R. K. (2012). Performance management universals: Think globally and act locally. *Business Horizons*, 55(4), 385-392. doi:10.1016/j.bushor.2012.03.004
- Aguinis, H., & Pierce, C. A. (2008). Enhancing the relevance of organizational behavior by embracing performance management research. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(1), 139-145. doi:10.1002/job.493
- Ahmed, Z., Shields, F., White, R., & Wilbert, J. (2010). Managerial communication: The link between frontline leadership and organizational performance. *Journal of Organizational Culture, Communication and Conflict*, 14(1), 107-120.
- Alfes, K., Truss, C., Soane, E. C., Rees, C., & Gatenby, M. (2013). The relationship between line manager behavior, perceived HRM practices and individual performance. Examining the mediating role of engagement. *Human Resource Management*, 52(6), 839-859. doi:10.1002/hrm.21512
- Altheide, D. L., & Johnson, J. M. (2011). Reflections on interpretive adequacy in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 581-594). California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Amaratunga, D., & Baldry, D. (2002). Moving from performance measurement to performance management. *Facilities*, 20(5/6), 217-223. doi:10.1108/02632770210426701
- Andrews, C. (2016). Integrating public service motivation and self-determination theory: A framework. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 29(3), 238-254. doi:10.1108/IJPSM-10-2015-0176
- Armstrong, M. (2006). *A handbook of human resource management practice* (10th ed.). London, United Kingdom: Kogan Page.
- Armstrong, M. (2011). *Armstrong's handbook of strategic human resource management* (5th ed.). London, United Kingdom: KoganPage.
- Armstrong, M. (2015). *Armstrong's handbook of performance management: An evidence-based guide to delivering high performance* (5th ed.). London, United Kingdom: Kogan Page Limited.
- Armstrong, M., & Baron, A. (2005). *Managing performance: Performance management in action*. London, United Kingdom: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- Armstrong, P. J., & Goodman, J. F. B. (1979). Managerial and supervisory custom and practice. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 10(3), 12-24.
- Arrowsmith, J., Nicholaisen, H., Bechter, B., & Nonell, R. (2010). The management of variable pay in European banking. *The International Journal of Human*

- Arvey, R. D., & Ivancevich, J. M. (1980). Punishment in organizations: A review, propositions, and research suggestions. *The Academy of Management Review*, 5(1), 123-132.
- Aycan, Z., Kanungo, R. N., & Sinha, J. B. (1999). Organizational culture and human resource management practices: The model of culture fit. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 30(4), 501-526. doi:10.1177/0022022199030004006
- Ayres, L. (2008). Semi-structured interview. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research* (pp. 810-811). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Babbie, E. (2013). *Social research counts*. California, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Ball, G. A., Trevino, L. K., & Sims, H. P. J. (1994). Just and unjust punishment: influences on subordinate performance and citizenship. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 37(2), 299-322.
- Bass, B. M., & Bass, R. (2008). *The Bass handbook of leadership: Theory, research, and managerial applications* (4th ed.). New York, NY: The Free Press.
- Bauer, T. N., & Green, S. G. (1996). Development of leader-member exchange: A longitudinal test. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 39(6), 1538-1567.
- Bedeian, A. G. (1990). Research notes and communications choice and determinism: A comment. *Strategic Management Journal (1986-1998)*, 11(7), 571.
- Behn, R. D. (2002). The psychological barriers to performance management: Or why isn't everyone jumping on the performance-management bandwagon? *Public Performance & Management Review*, 26(1), 5-25. doi:10.2307/3381295
- Biron, M., Farndale, E., & Paauwe, J. (2011). Performance management effectiveness: lessons from world-leading firms. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(6), 1294-1311. doi:10.1080/09585192.2011.559100
- Blumberg, M., & Pringle, C. D. (1982). The missing opportunity in organizational research: Some implications for a theory of work performance. *Academy of Management*, 7(4), 560-569.
- Boland, T., & Fowler, A. (2000). A systems perspective of performance management in public sector organisations. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 13(5), 417-446. doi:10.1108/09513550010350832
- Bos-Nehles, A. C., Van Riemsdijk, M., Kok, I., & Looise, J. K. (2006). Implementing human resource management successfully: A first-line management challenge. *Management Revue*, 17(3), 256-273.
- Bos-Nehles, A. C., Van Riemsdijk, M. J., & Kees Looise, J. (2013). Employee perceptions of line management performance: Applying the AMO theory to explain the effectiveness of line managers' HRM implementation. *Human Resource Management*, 52(6), 861-877. doi:10.1002/hrm.21578
- Boselie, P., Dietz, G., & Boon, C. (2005). Commonalities and contradictions in HRM and performance research. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 15(3), 67-94. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2005.tb00154.x

- Boulding, K. E. (1956). General systems theory – The skeleton of science. *Management Science*, 2(3), 197-208.
- Bowen, D. E., & Ostroff, C. (2004). Understanding HRM–firm performance linkages: The role of the “strength” of the HRM system. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(2), 203-221.
- Boxall, P., Haynes, P., & Freeman, R. B. (2007). Conclusion: What workers say in an Anglo-American world. In R. B. Freeman, P. Boxall, & P. Haynes (Eds.), *What workers say: Employee voice in the Anglo-American workplace* (pp. 206-220). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Boxall, P., & Macky, K. (2007). High-performance work systems and organisational performance: Bridging theory and practice. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 45(3). doi:10.1177/1038411107082273
- Boxall, P., & Macky, K. (2009). Research and theory on high-performance work systems: progressing the high-involvement stream. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(1), 3-23.
- Boxall, P., & Purcell, J. (2011). *Strategy and human resource management* (3rd ed.). Hampshire, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brewer, G. A. (2005). In the eye of the storm: Frontline supervisors and federal agency performance. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(4), 505-527. doi:10.1093/jopart/mui031
- Brewer, G. A., & Walker, R. M. (2013). Personnel constraints in public organizations: The impact of reward and punishment on organizational performance. *Public Administration Review*, 73(1), 121-131. doi:10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02681.x
- Brewster, C., & Richbell, S. (1983). Industrial relations policy and managerial custom and practice. *Industrial Relations Journal*, 14(1), 22-31. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2338.1983.tb00434.x
- Brothers, L. S. (2007). *Organization-level human resource policies, culture, and managerial practices: What can consistency between Barney's inimitable characteristics tell us about employee attitudes and behaviors?* (Dissertation/Thesis), The University of Wisconsin, Wisconsin, WI.
- Brown, K. (2004). Human resource management in the public sector. *Public Management Review*, 6(3), 303-309. doi:10.1080/1471903042000256501
- Brown, M., Hyatt, D., & Benson, J. (2010). Consequences of the performance appraisal experience. *Personnel Review*, 39(3), 375-396. doi:10.1108/00483481011030557
- Brown, M., Kulik, C. T., & Lim, V. (2016). Managerial tactics for communicating negative performance feedback. *Personnel Review*, 45(5), 969-987. doi:10.1108/PR-10-2014-0242
- Brown, M., & Lim, V. S. (2019). Understanding performance management and appraisal: Supervisory and employee perspectives. In A. Wilkinson, N. Bacon, T. Redman, & S. Snell (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of human resource management* (pp. 191-209). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Brown, T. C., O'Kane, P., Mazumdar, B., & McCracken, M. (2019). Performance management: A scoping review of the literature and an agenda for future

- research. *Human Resource Development Review*, 18(1), 47-82. doi:10.1177/1534484318798533
- Brown, W. (1972). A consideration of 'custom and practice'. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 10(1), 42-61.
- Bryman, A. (1988). *Quantity and quality in social research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Burns, T. E., & Stalker, G. M. (1961). *The management of innovation* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: Tavistock Institute.
- Butterfield, K. D., Trevino, L. K., & Ball, G. A. (1996). Punishment from the manager's perspective: A grounded investigation and inductive model. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 39(6), 1479-1512.
- Caldwell, C. M. (2000). *Performance management*. Massachusetts, MA: American Management Association.
- Campbell, J. W. (2015). Identification and performance management: An assessment of change-oriented behavior in public organizations. *Public Personnel Management*, 44(1), 46-69. doi:10.1177/0091026014549473
- Campbell, J. W. (2018). Felt responsibility for change in public organizations: General and sector-specific paths. *Public Management Review*, 20(2), 232-253. doi:10.1080/14719037.2017.1302245
- Cardy, R. L., & Leonard, B. (2015). *Performance management: Concepts, skills and exercises* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Cascio, W. F. (2012). Global performance management systems. In G. K. Stahl, I. Bjorkman, & S. Morris (Eds.), *Handbook of research in international human resource management* (pp. 183-204). Gloucester, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
- Cavanagh, G. F. (1976). *American business values in transition*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Chandler, A. D. J. (1962). *Strategy and structure: Chapters in the history of the industrial enterprise*. Massachusetts, MA: MIT Press.
- Chatterjee, S. R., & Nankervis, A. R. (2007). *Asian management in transition: Emerging themes*. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Chew, I. K. H., & Sharma, B. (2005). The effects of culture and HRM practices on firm performance: Empirical evidence from Singapore. *International Journal of Manpower*, 26(6), 560-581. doi:10.1108/01437720510625467
- Chia, Y. M., & Koh, H. C. (2007). Organizational culture and the adoption of management accounting practices in the public sector: A Singapore study. *Financial Accountability & Management*, 23(2), 190-213.
- Child, J., & Partridge, B. (1982). *Lost managers: Supervisors in industry and society*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Chillakuri, B. (2018). Scrapping the bell curve: A practitioner's review of reinvented performance management system. *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management*, 5(2), 244-253. doi:10.1177/2322093718795549

- Cho, Y. J., & Lee, J. W. (2012). Performance management and trust in supervisors. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 32(3), 236-259. doi:10.1177/0734371x11421496
- Choo, S. (2007). Managing the entrepreneurial culture of Singapore. In S. R. Chatterjee & A. R. Nankervis (Eds.), *Asian management in transition: Emerging themes* (pp. 239-272). Hampshire, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Christensen, M., & Yoshimi, H. (2001). A two country comparison of public sector performance reporting: The tortoise and hare? *Financial Accountability & Management*, 17(3), 271-289.
- Chua, B.-H. (1995). *Communitarian ideology and democracy in Singapore*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Claus, L., & Briscoe, D. (2009). Employee performance management across borders: A review of relevant academic literature. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 11(2), 175-196. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2008.00237.x
- Cleary, M., Horsfall, J., & Hayter, M. (2014). Data collection and sampling in qualitative research: Does size matter? *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 70(3), 473-475. doi:10.1111/jan.12163
- Clegg, H. A. (1970). *The system of industrial relations in Great Britain*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Basil Blackwell.
- Clegg, S. R. (1990). *Modern organisations: Organisation studies in the postmodern world*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Cogliser, C. C., Schriesheim, C. A., Scandura, T. A., & Gardner, W. L. (2009). Balance in leader and follower perceptions of leader-member exchange: Relationships with performance and work attitudes. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(3), 452-465. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.03.010
- Cole, N. (2008). Consistency in employee discipline: An empirical exploration. *Personnel Review*, 37(1), 109-117. doi:10.1108/00483480810839996
- Combs, J., Liu, Y., Hall, A., & Ketchen, D. (2006). How much do high-performance work practices matter? A meta-analysis of their effects on organizational performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 59(3), 501-528. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6570.2006.00045.x
- Cook, K. E. (2008). In-depth interviewing. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 422-423). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Cropanzano, R., & Mitchell, M. S. (2005). Social exchange theory: An interdisciplinary review. *Journal of Management*, 31(6), 874-900. doi:10.1177/0149206305279602
- Cunningham, L. (2015). Accenture: One of the world's biggest companies to scrap annual performance reviews [Press release]. Retrieved from

- <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/news/accenture-one-of-worlds-biggest-companies-to-scrap-annual-performance-reviews-10421296.html>
- Currie, G., & Procter, S. (2001). Exploring the relationship between HR and middle managers. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 11(3), 53-69.
- Dale, B. G., van der Wiele, T., & van Iwaarden, J. (2007). *Managing quality* (5th ed.). London, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Davila, A., & Elvira, M. M. (2007). Psychological contracts and performance management in Mexico. *International Journal of Manpower*, 28(5), 384-402. doi:10.1108/01437720710778385
- Davis, W. D., & Gardner, W. L. (2004). Perceptions of politics and organizational cynicism: An attributional and leader-member exchange perspective. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(4), 439-465. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2004.05.002
- de Bruijn, H. (2002). *Managing performance in the public sector*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Deb, T. (2009). *Managing human resources and industrial relations*. New Delhi, India: Excel Books.
- Delaney, J. T., & Huselid, M. A. (1996). The impact of human resource management practices on perceptions of organizational performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 39(4), 949-969.
- Deluga, R. J. (1994). Supervisor trust building, leader-member exchange and organizational citizenship behaviour. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 67(4), 315-326.
- den Hartog, D. N., Boselie, P., & Paauwe, J. (2004). Performance management: A model and research agenda. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 53(4), 556-569. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2004.00188.x
- DeNisi, A. S., & Pritchard, R. D. (2006). Performance appraisal, performance management and improving individual performance: A motivational framework. *Management and Organisation Review*, 2(2), 253-277. doi:10.1111/j.1740-8784.2006.00042.x
- DeNisi, A. S., & Smith, C. E. (2014). Performance appraisal, performance management, and firm-level performance: A review, a proposed model, and new directions for future research. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 8(1), 127-179. doi:10.1080/19416520.2014.873178
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Dessler, G. (2005). *Human resource management*. New Jersey, NJ: Pearson.
- Dewettinck, K., & Vroonen, W. (2016). Antecedents and consequences of performance management enactment by front-line managers. Evidence from Belgium. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 1-30. doi:10.1080/09585192.2015.1137608
- Dhiman, A., & Maheshwari, S. K. (2013). Performance appraisal politics from appraisee perspective: A study of antecedents in the Indian context. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(6), 1202-1235. doi:10.1080/09585192.2012.706816

- Domínguez-Falcón, C., Martín-Santana, J. D., & Saá-Pérez, P. D. (2016). Human resources management and performance in the hotel industry: The role of the commitment and satisfaction of managers versus supervisors. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 28(3), 114-134. doi:10.1108/IJCHM-08-2014-0386
- Dransfield, R. (2000). *Human resource management*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Heinemann Educational Publishers.
- Dulebohn, J. H., Bommer, W. H., Liden, R. C., Brouer, R. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2012). A meta-analysis of antecedents and consequences of leader-member exchange: Integrating the past with an eye toward the future. *Journal of Management*, 38(6), 1715-1759. doi:10.1177/0149206311415280
- Dunkerley, D. (1975). *The foreman: Aspects of task and structure*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Dunsire, A. (1995). Administrative theory in the 1980s: A viewpoint. *Public Administration*, 73(1), 17-40. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9299.1995.tb00815.x
- Dyer, W. G. J., & Wilkins, A. L. (1991). Better stories, not better constructs, to generate better theory: A rejoinder to Eisenhardt. *The Academy of Management Review*, 16(3), 613-619. doi:10.2307/258920
- Edgar, F., & Geare, A. (2009). Inside the “black box” and “HRM”. *International Journal of Manpower*, 30(3), 220-236. doi:10.1108/01437720910956736
- Edwards, D., & Thomas, J. C. (2005). Developing a municipal performance-measurement system: Reflections on the Atlanta dashboard. *Public Administration Review*, 65(3).
- Edwards, P., Gilman, M., Ram, M., & Arrowsmith, J. (2002). Public policy, the performance of firms, and the 'missing middle': The case of the employment regulations, and a role for local business networks. *Policy Studies*, 23(1), 5-20. doi:10.1080/0144287022000000055
- Eisenberger, R., Stinglhamber, F., Vandenberghe, C., Sucharski, I. L., & Rhoades, L. (2002). Perceived supervisor support: Contributions to perceived organizational support and employee retention. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(3), 565-573. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.87.3.565
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4), 532-550. doi:10.5465/AMR.1989.4308385
- Elmuti, D., Kathawala, Y., & Wayland, R. (1992). Traditional performance appraisal systems: The Deming challenge. *Management Decision*, 30(8), 42-48. doi:10.1108/00251749210022203
- Evans, S. (2015). Juggling on the line: Front line managers and their management of human resources in the retail industry. *Employee Relations*, 37(4), 459-474. doi:10.1108/er-06-2014-0066
- Evans, S. (2016). HRM and front line managers: The influence of role stress. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(22), 3128-3148. doi:10.1080/09585192.2016.1146786
- Evers, J. C., & van Staa, A. L. (2010). Qualitative analysis in case study (Vol. 2, pp. 749-757). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

- Ewoh, A. I. E. (2011). Performance measurement in an era of new public management. *Journal of Emerging Knowledge on Emerging Markets*, 3(1), 105-117. doi:10.7885/1946-651x.1041
- Farndale, E., Hope-Hailey, V., & Kelliher, C. (2011). High commitment performance management: The roles of justice and trust. *Personnel Review*, 40(1), 5-23. doi:10.1108/00483481111095492
- Ferreira, A., & Otley, D. (2009). The design and use of performance management systems: An extended framework for analysis. *Management Accounting Research*, 20(4), 263-282. doi:10.1016/j.mar.2009.07.003
- Ferrell, O. C., & Gresham, L. G. (1985). A contingency framework for understanding ethical decision making in marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(3), 87-96. doi:10.2307/1251618
- Ferris, G. R., Russ, G. S., & Fandt, P. M. (1989). Politics in organisations. In R. A. Giacalone & P. Rosenfeld (Eds.), *Impression management in the organisation*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Fischer, R. (2008). Rewarding seniority: Exploring cultural and organizational predictors of seniority allocations. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 148(2), 167-186.
- Flamholtz, E. G., Das, T. K., & Tsui, A. S. (1985). Toward an integrative framework of organizational control. *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 10(1), 34-50.
- Flanders, A. (1967). *Collective bargaining: Prescription for change*. London, United Kingdom: Faber and Faber.
- Fletcher, C. (2001). Performance appraisal and management: The developing research agenda. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 74(4), 473-487.
- Flin, R., O'Connor, P., & Crichton, M. (2008). *Safety at the sharp end: A guide to non-technical skills*. Hampshire, United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Floyd, S. W., & Wooldridge, B. (1997). Middle management's strategic influence and organizational performance. *Journal of Management Studies*, 34(3), 465-485. doi:10.1111/1467-6486.00059
- Fox, A. (1971). *A sociology of work in industry*. London, United Kingdom: Collier-Macmillan.
- Francis, H., & Keegan, A. (2006). The changing face of HRM: In search of balance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(3), 231-249.
- Franco-Santos, M., & Otley, D. (2018). Reviewing and theorizing the unintended consequences of performance management systems. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 20, 696-730. doi:10.1111/ijmr.12183
- Franco-Santos, M., Rivera, P., & Bourne, M. (2014). *Performance management in UK higher education institutions*. London, United Kingdom: Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.
- Fryer, K., Antony, J., & Ogden, S. (2009). Performance management in the public sector. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 22(6), 478-498. doi:10.1108/09513550910982850

- Fu, N., Flood, P. C., Rousseau, D. M., & Morris, T. (2018). Line managers as paradox navigators in HRM implementation: Balancing consistency and individual responsiveness. *Journal of Management*. doi:10.1177/0149206318785241
- Garston, N. (1993). The study of bureaucracy. In N. Garston (Ed.), *Bureaucracy: Three paradigms* (pp. 1-24). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Gerrish, E. (2016). The impact of performance management on performance in public organizations: A meta-analysis. *Public Administration Review*, 76(1), 48-66. doi:10.1111/puar.12433
- Gilbert, C., De Winne, S., & Sels, L. (2015). Strong HRM processes and line managers' effective HRM implementation: A balanced view. *Human Resource Management Journal*. doi:10.1111/1748-8583.12088
- Goh, S. C., Elliott, C., & Richards, G. (2015). Performance management in Canadian public organizations: Findings of a multi-case study. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 64(2), 157-174. doi:10.1108/ijppm-10-2013-0170
- Goodhew, G. W., Cammock, P. A., & Hamilton, R. T. (2008). The management of poor performance by front-line managers. *Journal of Management Development*, 27(9), 951-962. doi:10.1108/02621710810901291
- Govindarajan, V. (1988). A contingency approach to strategy implementation at the business-unit level – Integrating administrative mechanisms with strategy. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 31(4), 828-853.
- Greer, C. R., & Plunkett, W. R. (2007). *Supervisory management* (11th ed.). New Jersey, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Griffin, R. W., & Moorhead, G. (2010). *Organizational behavior: Managing people and organizations* (10th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Grint, K. (1993). What's wrong with performance pppraisals? A critique and a suggestion. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 3(3), 61-77. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.1993.tb00316.x
- Grote, D. (1996). *The complete guide to performance appraisal*. New York, NY: American Management Association.
- Gruening, G. (2001). Origin and theoretical basis of new public management. *International Public Management Journal*, 4(1), 1-25. doi:10.1016/S1096-7494(01)00041-1
- Gruman, J. A., & Saks, A. M. (2011). Performance management and employee engagement. *Human Resource Management Review*, 21(2), 123-136. doi:10.1016/j.hrmr.2010.09.004
- Guba, E. G. (1990). *The pradigm dialog*. California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Guest, D. E. (1997). Human resource management and performance: A review and research agenda. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 8(3), 263-276. doi:10.1080/095851997341630
- Guest, D. E. (2011). Human resource management and performance: Still searching for some answers. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 21(1), 3-13. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2010.00164.x

- Hailey, V. H., Farndale, E., & Truss, C. (2005). The HR department's role in organisational performance. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 15(3), 49-66. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2005.tb00153.x
- Haines, V. Y., & St-Onge, S. (2012). Performance management effectiveness: Practices or context? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 23(6), 1158-1175. doi:10.1080/09585192.2011.561230
- Halachmi, A. (2005). Performance measurement is only one way of managing performance. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 54(7), 502-516. doi:10.1108/17410400510622197
- Hales, C. (2005). Rooted in supervision, branching into management: continuity and change in the role of first-line manager. *Journal of Management Studies*, 42(3), 471-506. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2005.00506.x
- Hales, C. (2006). Moving down the line? The shifting boundary between middle and first-line management. *Journal of General Management*, 32(2), 31.
- Hall, L., & Torrington, D. (1998). Letting go or holding on – The devolution of operational personnel activities. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 8(1), 41-55.
- Hampden-Turner, C. M. (2003). Culture and management in Singapore. In M. Warner (Ed.), *Culture and management in Asia* (pp. 171-186). London, United Kingdom: Routledge Curzon.
- Haque, M. S. (2002). Structures of new public management in Malaysia and Singapore: Alternative views. *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development*, 1(1), 71-86. doi:10.1080/15339114.2002.9678350
- Haque, M. S. (2014). Reinventing public governance in Singapore: Major reform premises, initiatives, and consequences. In G. M. Mudacumura & G. Morçöl (Eds.), *Challenges to Democratic Governance in Developing Countries* (pp. 73-94). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Harney, B., & Dundon, T. (2006). Capturing complexity: Developing an integrated approach to analysing HRM in SMEs. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 16(1), 48-73.
- Harney, B., & Jordan, C. (2008). Unlocking the black box: Line managers and HRM-performance in a call centre context. *International Journal of Productivity and Performance Management*, 57(4), 275-296. doi:10.1108/17410400810867508
- Harris, L. (2001). Rewarding employee performance: Line managers' values, beliefs and perspectives. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12(7), 1182-1192. doi:10.1080/09585190110068386
- Harris, L., Doughty, D., & Kirk, S. (2002). The devolution of HR responsibilities – perspectives from the UK's public sector. *Journal of European Industrial Training*, 26(5), 218-229. doi:10.1108/03090590210424894
- Healy, M., & Perry, C. (2000). Comprehensive criteria to judge validity and reliability of qualitative research within the realism paradigm. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 3(3), 118-126. doi:10.1108/13522750010333861

- Hesse-Biber, S. N., & Leavy, P. (2011). *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Ho, K. L. (2006). Singapore: A transitional state in an era of globalization. In K. L. Ho (Ed.), *Re-thinking administrative reforms in Southeast Asia* (pp. 130-152). Singapore, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish International (Singapore).
- Hofstede, G. (1983). National cultures in four dimensions: A research-based theory of cultural differences among nations. *International Studies of Management & Organization*, 13(1/2), 46-74.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). Cultural dimensions in management and planning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 1(2), 81-99.
- Hofstede, G. (2017). *What about Singapore?* Retrieved from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/singapore/>
- Hofstede, G., & Bond, M. H. (1988). The Confucius connection: From cultural roots to economic growth. *Organizational Dynamics*, 16(4), 5-21. doi:10.1016/0090-2616(88)90009-5
- Houghton, C., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2013). Rigour in qualitative case-study research. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(4), 12-17.
- Hsiung, H.-H., & Tsai, W.-C. (2009). Job definition discrepancy between supervisors and subordinates: The antecedent role of LMX and outcomes. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 82(1), 89-112. doi:10.1348/096317908x292374
- Hunter, W., & Renwick, D. (2009). Involving British line managers in HRM in a small non-profit work organisation. *Employee Relations*, 31(4), 398-411. doi:10.1108/01425450910965441
- Huselid, M. A., Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1997). Technical and strategic human resource management effectiveness as determinants of firm performance. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 40(1), 171-188. doi:10.2307/257025
- Hutchinson, S. (2008). *The role of front line managers in bringing policies to life*. Retrieved from Bristol, United Kingdom:
- Hutchinson, S. (2013). The role of line managers in managing performance. In S. Hutchinson (Ed.), *Performance management: Theory and practice* (pp. 73-94). London, United Kingdom: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- Hutchinson, S., & Purcell, J. (2007). *The role of line managers in reward, and training, learning and development*. London, United Kingdom: CIPD.
- Hutchinson, S., & Purcell, J. (2010). Managing ward managers for roles in HRM in the NHS: Overworked and under-resourced. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 20(4), 357-374. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2010.00141.x
- Hyman, R. (2005). Shifting dynamics in international trade unionism: Agitation, organisation, bureaucracy, diplomacy. *Labor History*, 46(2), 137-154. doi:10.1080/00236560500080758
- Ilgen, D. R., Barnes-Farrell, J., & McKellin, D. B. (1993). Performance appraisal process research in the 1980s: What has it contributed to appraisals in use? *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 54(3), 321-368. doi:10.1006/obhd.1993.1015

- Ivancevich, J. M. (2001). *Human resource management*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.
- Iwu, C. G., Kapondoro, L., Twum-Darko, M., & Lose, T. (2016). Strategic human resource metrics: A perspective of the general systems theory. *Acta Universitatis Danubius: Oeconomica*, 12(2), 5-24.
- Jackson, M. C. (2000). *Systems approaches to management*. New York, NY: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.
- Jackson, S. E., & Schuler, R. S. (1995). Understanding human resource management in the context of organizations and their environments. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 46(1), 237-264.
- Jennings, G. R. (2005). Interviewing: A focus on qualitative techniques. In B. W. Ritchie, P. Burns, & C. Palmer (Eds.), *Tourism research methods: Integrating theory with practice* (pp. 99-118). Oxfordshire, United Kingdom: CABI Publishing.
- John, S., & Björkman, I. (2015). In the eyes of the beholder: The HRM capabilities of the HR function as perceived by managers and professionals. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 25(4), 424-442. doi:10.1111/1748-8583.12078
- Johns, G. (2006). The essential impact of context on organizational behaviour. *The Academy of Management Review*, 31(2), 386-408.
- Kagaari, J., Munene, J. C., & Mpeera Ntayi, J. (2010). Performance management practices, employee attitudes and managed performance. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 24(6), 507-530. doi:10.1108/09513541011067683
- Kalgin, A., Podolskiy, D., Parfenteva, D., & Campbell, J. W. (2018). Performance management and job-goal alignment. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 31(1), 65-80. doi:10.1108/ijpsm-04-2016-0069
- Kandula, S. R. (2006). *Performance management: Strategies, interventions, drivers*. New Delhi, India: Prentice Hall of India Private Limited.
- Katou, A. A., & Budhwar, P. (2014). HRM and firm performance. In J. Crawshaw, P. Budhwar, & A. Davis (Eds.), *Human resource management: Strategic and international perspectives* (pp. 26-47). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Katz, D., & Kahn, R. L. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Kellner, A., Townsend, K., Wilkinson, A., Lawrence, S. A., & Greenfield, D. (2016). Learning to manage: Development experiences of hospital frontline managers. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 26(4), 505-522. doi:10.1111/1748-8583.12119
- Kessler, I., & Purcell, J. (1992). Performance related pay: Objectives and application. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 2(3), 16-33. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.1992.tb00258.x
- Kim, S., & Wright, P. M. (2011). Putting strategic human resource management in context: A contextualized model of high commitment work systems and its implications in China. *Management and Organization Review*, 7(1), 153-174. doi:10.1111/j.1740-8784.2010.00185.x

- King, N., & Horrocks, C. (2010). *Interviews in qualitative research*. London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Kinley, N. (2016). The end of performance management: Sorting the facts from the hype. *Strategic HR Review*, 15(2), 90-94. doi:10.1108/shr-09-2015-0081
- Kirk, J., & Miller, M. L. (1986). *Reliability and validity in qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Klaas, B. S., & Wheeler, H. N. (1990). Managerial decision making about employee discipline: A policy-capturing approach. *Personnel Psychology*, 43(1), 117-134.
- Klenke, K. (2016). *Qualitative research in the study of leadership* (2nd ed.). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Kloot, L., & Martin, J. (2000). Strategic performance management: A balanced approach to performance management issues in local government. *Management Accounting Research*, 11(2), 231-251. doi:10.1006/mare.2000.0130
- Koehler, W. (1981). Closed and open systems. In F. E. Emery (Ed.), *Systems thinking* (2nd ed., pp. 71-82). Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.
- Kooij, D. T., & van de Voorde, K. (2015). Strategic HRM for older workers. In P. M. Bal, D. T. Kooij, & D. M. Rousseau (Eds.), *Aging workers and the employee-employer relationship* (pp. 57-72). London, United Kingdom: Springer International Publishing.
- Krauss, S. E. (2005). Research paradigms and meaning making: A Primer. *The Qualitative Report*, 10(4), 758-770.
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessment of trustworthiness. *American journal of occupational therapy*, 45(3), 214-222.
- Kühl, S. (2008). *Organizations: A systems approach*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Lado, A. A., & Wilson, M. C. (1994). Human resource systems and sustained competitive advantage: A competency-based perspective. *The Academy of Management Review*, 19(4), 699-727.
- Lai, Y., & Saridakis, G. (2013). Employee attitudes, HR practices and organizational performance: What's the evidence? In G. Saridakis & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *How Can HR Drive Growth?* (pp. 170-214). Gloucester, United Kingdom: Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2010). Thematic analysis. In A. J. Mills, G. Eurepos, & E. Wiebe (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of case study research* (pp. 925-927). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc.
- Lapsley, I., & Skaerbaek, P. (2012). Why the public sector matters. *Financial Accountability & Management*, 28(4), 355-358. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0408.2012.00550.x
- Larbi, G. A. (1999). The new public management approach and crisis states (Discussion Paper No. 112), Geneva, Switzerland: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development.

- Lawler, E. E. (2003). Reward practices and performance management system effectiveness. *Organizational Dynamics*, 32(4), 396-404. doi:10.1016/j.orgdyn.2003.08.007
- Lawler, J. (2015). Motivation and meaning: The role of supervision. *Practice*, 27(4), 265-275. doi:10.1080/09503153.2015.1048056
- Lee, E. W. Y., & Haque, M. S. (2006). The new public management reform and governance in Asian NICs: A comparison of Hong Kong and Singapore. *Governance*, 19(4), 605-626. doi:10.1111/j.1468-0491.2006.00330.x
- Leonard, E., & Trusty, K. (2016). *Supervision: Concepts and practices of management* (13th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning.
- Lepak, D. P., Liao, H., Chung, Y., & Harden, E. E. (2006). A conceptual review of human resource management systems in strategic human resource management research. *Research in Personnel and Human Resources Management*, 25, 217-271. doi:10.1016/s0742-7301(06)25006-0
- Levasseur, R. E. (2004). Open system theory and organizations. *Futurics*, 28(3/4), 82-88.
- Levy, P. E., & Williams, J. R. (2004). The social context of performance appraisal: A review and framework for the future. *Journal of Management*, 30(6), 881-905. doi: 10.1016/j.jm.2004.06.005
- Lewandowski, M. (2018). Refocusing performance management through public service design? In A. B. Savignon, L. Gnan, A. Hinna, & F. Monteduro (Eds.), *Cross-sectoral relations in the delivery of public services* (Vol. 6, pp. 1-21): Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Li, X., & Frenkel, S. (2016). Where hukou status matters: Analyzing the linkage between supervisor perceptions of HR practices and employee work engagement. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(17), 1-28. doi:10.1080/09585192.2015.1137613
- Liang, H., Saraf, N., Hu, Q., & Xue, Y. (2007). Assimilation of enterprise systems: The effect of institutional pressures and the mediating role of top management. *MIS Quarterly*, 31(1), 59-87.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). Pragmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 97-128). California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Link, K., & Müller, B. (2015). Delegating HR work to the line: Emerging tensions and insights from a paradox perspective. *Zeitschrift Für Personalforschung*, 29(3), 280-302.
- London, M., & Smither, J. W. (2002). Feedback orientation, feedback culture, and the longitudinal performance management process. *Human Resource Management Review*, 12(1), 81-100. doi:10.1016/S1053-4822(01)00043-2

- Luecke, R., & Hall, B. J. (2006). *Performance management: Measure and improve the effectiveness of your employees*. Massachusetts, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Malmi, T., & Brown, D. A. (2008). Management control systems as a package - Opportunities, challenges and research directions. *Management Accounting Research*, 19(4), 287-300. doi:10.1016/j.mar.2008.09.003
- Manning, T. (2013). A “contingent” view of leadership: 360 degree assessments of leadership behaviours in different contexts. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 45(6), 343-351. doi:10.1108/ict-02-2013-0014
- Manzoni, J.-F. (2004). From high performance organizations to an organizational excellence framework. In M. J. Epstein & J.-F. Manzoni (Eds.), *Performance measurement and management control: Superior Organizational Performance Studies* (Vol. 14, pp. 19-44). California, CA: Elsevier Ltd.
- Marchington, M., & Grugulis, I. (2000). 'Best practice' human resource management: Perfect opportunity or dangerous illusion? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 11(6), 1104-1124. doi:10.1080/09585190050177184
- Marchington, M., & Suter, J. (2013). Where informality really matters: Patterns of employee involvement and participation (EIP) in a non-union firm. *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society*, 52(1), 284-313.
- Mayer, R. C., & Gavin, M. B. (2005). Trust in management and performance: Who minds the shop while the employees watch the boss? *The Academy of Management Journal*, 48(5), 874-888.
- McConville, T. (2006). Devolved HRM responsibilities, middle-managers and role dissonance. *Personnel Review*, 35(6), 637-653. doi:10.1108/00483480610702700
- McGovern, P., Gratton, L., Hope-Hailey, V., Stiles, P., & Truss, C. (1997). Human resource management on the line? *Human Resource Management Journal*, 7(4), 12-29.
- McMurray, A. J., Pace, R. W., & Scott, D. (2004). *Research: A commonsense approach*. Melbourne, Australia: Thomson Social Science Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, SF: John Wiley & Sons.
- Merriam, S. B. (2010). Qualitative case studies. In P. L. Peterson, E. L. Baker, & B. McGaw (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of education* (3rd ed., pp. 456-462). Oxford, United Kingdom: Elsevier Science.
- Milkovich, G. T., & Wigdor, A. K. (1991). *Pay for performance: Evaluating performance appraisal and merit pay*. Washington DC, DC: National Academy Press.
- Minichiello, V., Rosalie, A., & Hays, T. N. (2008). *In-depth interviewing: Principles, techniques, analysis* (3rd ed.). Sydney, Australia: Pearson Education Australia.
- Ministry of Communications and Information (2016). Singapore government directory. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.sg/sgdi/ministries>.

- Mohr, R. D., & Zoghi, C. (2008). High-involvement work design and job satisfaction. *Industrial and Labour Relations Review*, 61(3), 275-296. doi:10.1177/001979390806100301
- Montgomery, A. (2012). Difficult moments in the ethnographic interview: Vulnerability, silence and rapport. In J. Skinner (Ed.), *The interview: An ethnographic approach* (pp. 143-162). New York, NY: BERG.
- Morgan, R. (2006). Making the most of performance management systems. *Compensation and Benefits Review*, 38(5), 22-27. doi:10.1177/0886368706290001
- Moynihan, D. P., & Pandey, S. K. (2005). Testing how management matters in an era of government by performance management. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 15(3), 3421-3439.
- Murphy, F., & Yelder, J. (2010). Establishing rigour in qualitative radiography research. *Radiography*, 16(1), 62-67.
- Murphy, K. R., & Cleveland, J. N. (1995). *Understanding performance appraisal: Social, organizational, and goal-based perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Murphy, K. R., Cleveland, J. N., Skattebo, A. L., & Kinney, T. B. (2004). Raters who pursue different goals give different ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(1), 158-164. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.89.1.158
- Nadler, D. A., & Tushman, M. L. (1980). A model for diagnosing organizational behavior. *Organizational Dynamics*, 9(2), 35-51. doi:10.1016/0090-2616(80)90039-X
- Neu Morén, E. (2013). The negotiated character of performance appraisal: How interrelations between managers matters. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 24(4), 853-870. doi:10.1080/09585192.2012.703215
- Nishii, L. H., Lepak, D. P., & Schneider, B. (2008). Employee attributions of the "why" of HR practices: Their effects on employee attitudes and behaviours, and customer satisfaction. *Personnel Psychology*, 61(3), 503-545. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6570.2008.00121.x
- Nishii, L. H., & Wright, P. M. (2007). Variability at multiple levels of analysis: Implications for strategic human resource management. In D. B. Smith (Ed.), *The people make the place: Dynamic linkages between individuals and organizations* (pp. 225-248). Mahwah, NY: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Norton, M. S. (2008). *Human resources administration for educational leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Nunokoosing, K. (2005). The problems with interviews. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(5), 698-706. doi:10.1177/1049732304273903
- O'Donnell, M. (1998). Creating a performance culture? Performance-based pay in the Australian public sector. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 53(7), 28-40. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8500.1998.tb01279.x
- O'Donnell, M., & O'Brien, J. (2000). Performance-based pay in the Australian public service: Employee perspectives. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 20(2), 20-34. doi:10.1177/0734371X0002000203

- O'Donoghue, T. A. (2007). *Planning your qualitative research project: An introduction to interpretivist research in education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- O'Toole, L. J. J., & Meier, K. J. (2015). Public management, context, and performance: In quest of a more general theory. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 25(1), 237-256. doi:10.1093/jopart/muu011
- Op de Beeck, S., Wynen, J., & Hondeghem, A. (2018). Explaining effective HRM implementation: A middle versus first-line management perspective. *Public Personnel Management*, 47(2), 144-174. doi:10.1177/0091026018760931
- Ortiz, L. A., & Ford, J. D. (2009). The role of front-line management in anti-unionization employee communication: America West Airlines vs the Teamsters Union. *Journal of Communication Management*, 12(2), 136-156. doi:10.1108/13632540910951759
- Otley, D. (1999). Performance management: A framework for management control systems research. *Management Accounting Research*, 10(4), 363-382. doi:10.1006/mare.1999.0115
- Ozcelik, G., & Uyargil, C. (2015). A conceptual framework for line managers' HRM implementation effectiveness: Integrating social context and AMO theories. *Journal of Business, Economics & Finance*, 4(2), 289-289. doi:10.17261/Pressacademia.2015211620
- Pagan, J. F., & Franklin, A. L. (2003). Understanding variation in the practice of employee discipline. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 23(1), 61-77. doi:10.1177/0734371X02250113
- Pak, J., & Kim, S. (2016). Team managers implementation, high performance work systems intensity, and performance: A multilevel investigation. *Journal of Management*, 1-26. doi:10.1177/0149206316646829
- Palazzoli, M. S. (1986). The organization plays a game of its own. In M. S. Palazzoli, L. Anolli, P. Di Blasio, L. Giossi, I. Pisano, C. Ricci, M. Sacchi, & V. Ugazio (Eds.), *The hidden games of organizations*. NY, New York: Pantheon Books.
- Park, H. J., Gardner, T. M., & Wright, P. M. (2004). HR practices or HR capabilities: Which matters? Insights from the Asia Pacific region. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 42(3), 260-273. doi:10.1177/1038411104045394
- Parrado-Díez, S. (1997). Staffing and human resources flexibilities in the Spanish public services. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 17(3), 46-56. doi:10.1177/0734371X9701700305
- Pate, J., Beaumont, P., & Stewart, S. (2007). Trust in senior management in the public sector. *Employee Relations*, 29(5), 458-468. doi:10.1108/01425450710776281
- Perkins, S. J., & White, G. (2010). Modernising pay in the UK public services: Trends and implications. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 20(3), 244-257. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2009.00125.x
- Perkins, S. J., White, G., & Jones, S. (2016). *Reward management: Alternatives, consequences and contexts* (3rd ed.). London, United Kingdom: CIPD.
- Perry, E. L., & Kulik, C. T. (2008). The devolution of HR to the line: Implications for perceptions of people management effectiveness. *The International Journal of*

- Human Resource Management*, 19(2), 262-273.  
doi:10.1080/09585190701799838
- Pollitt, C. (2003). *The essential public manager*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.
- Pollitt, C. (2005). Performance management in practice: A comparative study of executive agencies. *Social History*, 16(1), 25-44. doi:10.1093/jopart/mui045
- Pollitt, C. (2007). The new public management: An overview of its current status. *Administratie Si Management Public*, 8, 110-115.
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis – New Public Management, Governance, and the Neo-Weberian State* (3rd ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Poon, J. M. L. (2004). Effects of performance appraisal politics on job satisfaction and turnover intention. *Personnel Review*, 33(3), 322-334. doi:10.1108/00483480410528850
- Prentice, E., & Rabey, G. (1994). *Empowering supervisors: Leading winning teams - A guide for managers and supervisors*. Melbourne, Australia: Pitman Publishing.
- Pulakos, E. D., & O'Leary, R. S. (2011). Why is performance management broken? *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 4(2), 146-164. doi:10.1111/j.1754-9434.2011.01315.x
- Purcell, J. (2003). *Understanding the people and performance link: Unlocking the black box*. London, United Kingdom: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.
- Purcell, J., & Hutchinson, S. (2007). Front-line managers as agents in the HRM-performance causal chain: Theory, analysis and evidence. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 17(1), 3-20. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2007.00022.x
- Purcell, J., Kinnie, N., Hutchinson, S., Rayton, B., & Swart, J. (2003). *Understanding the pay and performance link: Unlocking the black box*. London, United Kingdom: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. [here
- Quah, J. S. T. (2001). Singapore: Meritocratic city-state. In N. J. Funston (Ed.), *Government and politics in Southeast Asia* (pp. 291-327). Singapore, Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.
- Quah, J. S. T. (2010). *Public administration Singapore-style* (Vol. 19). Bingley, United Kingdom: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Quah, J. S. T. (2013). Ensuring good governance in Singapore: Is this experience transferable to other Asian countries? *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 26(5), 401-420. doi:10.1108/ijpsm-05-2013-0069
- Rainey, H. G., & Steinbauer, P. (1999). Galloping elephants: Developing elements of a theory of effective government organizations. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 9(1), 1-32.
- Redman, T. (2009). Performance appraisal. In T. Redman & A. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Contemporary human resource management: Text and cases* (3rd ed., pp. 175-206). Essex, United Kingdom: Pearson Education Limited.

- Renwick, D., Redman, T., & Maguire, S. (2013). Green human resource management: A review and research agenda. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 15(1), 1-14. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2370.2011.00328.x
- Rhoades, L., & Eisenberger, R. (2002). Perceived organizational support: A review of the literature. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(4), 698-714. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.87.4.698
- Robinson, M. (2015). *From old public administration to the new public service: Implications for public sector reform in developing countries*. Singapore, Singapore: United Nations Development Programme, Global Centre for Public Service Excellence.
- Roh, J. (2018). Improving the government performance management system in South Korea. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 7(3), 266-278. doi:10.1108/aeds-11-2017-0112
- Rosen, C. C., Kacmar, K. M., Harris, K. J., Gavin, M. B., & Hochwarter, W. A. (2016). Workplace politics and performance appraisal: A two-study, multilevel field investigation. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 24(1), 20-38. doi:10.1177/1548051816661480
- Rosen, C. C., & Levy, P. E. (2013). Stresses, swaps, and skill: An investigation of the psychological dynamics that relate work politics to employee performance. *Human Performance*, 26(1), 44-65. doi:10.1080/08959285.2012.736901
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual of qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). London, United Kingdom: SAGE Publication Ltd.
- Saumure, K., & Given, L. M. (2008). Rigor in qualitative research. In L. M. Given (Ed.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (pp. 795-796). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Saunders, M. N. K., & Townsend, K. (2016). Reporting and justifying the number of interview participants in organization and workplace research. *British Journal of Management*, 27(4), 836-852. doi:10.1111/1467-8551.12182
- Saundry, R., Jones, C., & Wibberley, G. (2015). The challenge of managing informally. *Employee Relations*, 37(4), 428-441. doi:10.1108/er-06-2014-0061
- Saville, J., & Higgins, M. (1994). *Australian management: A first-line perspective*. South Melbourne, Australia: Macmillan Education Australia.
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership* (4th ed.). San Francisco, SF: Jossey-Bass.
- Schleicher, D. J., Baumann, H. M., Sullivan, D. W., Levy, P. E., Hargrove, D. C., & Barros-Rivera, B. A. (2018). Putting the system into performance management systems: A review and agenda for performance management research. *Journal of Management*, 1-37.
- Schuler, R. S., Jackson, S. E., & Tarique, I. (2010). Human resource management in context. In R. Blanpain & J. Baker (Eds.), *Comparative labour law and industrial relations in industrialized market economies* (pp. 97-137). New York, NY: Wolters Kluwer.
- Scott, W. R. (1987). *Organizations: Rational, natural, and open systems* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

- Seidman, I. (2013). *Interviewing as qualitative Research: guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Selznick, P. (1981). Foundations of the theory of organizations. In F. E. Emery (Ed.), *Systems Thinking* (2nd ed., pp. 301-321). Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin Books.
- Senge, P. M. (2006). *The fifth discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization* (Rev. ed.). New York, NY: Doubleday.
- Severance, F. L. (2001). *Systems modelling and simulation: An introduction*. Chichester, United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons.
- Shalin, D. N. (1993). Modernity, postmodernism, and pragmatist inquiry: An introduction. *Symbolic Interaction*, *16*(4), 302-332. doi:10.1525/si.1993.16.4.303
- Shanock, L. R., & Eisenberger, R. (2006). When supervisors feel supported: Relationships with subordinates' perceived supervisor support, perceived organizational support, and performance. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *91*(3), 689-695. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.91.3.689
- Sharts-Hopko, N. C. (2002). Assessing Rigor in qualitative research. *Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care*, *13*(4), 84-86. doi:10.1016/S1055-3290(06)60374-9
- Sheehan, C., De Cieri, H., Cooper, B. K., & Brooks, R. (2016). The impact of HR political skill in the HRM and organisational performance relationship. *Australian Journal of Management*, *41*(1), 161-181. doi:10.1177/0312896214546055
- Sheppard, B. H., & Lewicki, R. J. (1987). Towards general principles of managerial gairness. *Social Justice Research*, *1*(2), 161-176.
- Shin, D., & Konrad, A. M. (2014). Causality between high-performance work systems and organizational performance. *Journal of Management*, *43*(4), 973-997. doi:10.1177/0149206314544746
- Shore, T., & Strauss, J. (2008). The political context of employee appraisal: Effects of organizational goals on performance ratings. *International Journal of Management*, *25*(3), 599-612.
- Siemsen, E., Roth, A. V., & Balasubramanian, S. (2008). How motivation, opportunity, and ability drive knowledge sharing: The constraining-factor model. *Journal of Operations Management*, *26*(3), 426-445. doi:10.1016/j.jom.2007.09.001
- Simon, H. A. (1965). Rational choice and the structure of the environment. *Psychological Review*, *63*(2), 129-138.
- Singapore: Prime Minister's Office. (2017a). *About us*. Retrieved from <http://www.pmo.gov.sg/about-us>.
- Singapore: Prime Minister's Office. (2017b). *Developing careers*. Retrieved from <https://www.psd.gov.sg/what-we-do/developing-careers>.
- Singapore: Prime Minister's Office. (2017c). *PS21: Then and now*. Retrieved from <https://www.psd.gov.sg/what-we-do/ps21-building-a-future-ready-public-service/ps21-then-and-now>.

- Singapore: Prime Minister's Office. (2017d). *The public service*. Retrieved from <https://www.careers.gov.sg/build-your-career/career-toolkit/public-agencies>.
- Sørensen, J. B. (2002). The strength of corporate culture and the reliability of firm performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(1), 70-91. doi:10.2307/3094891
- Stanton, P., & Nankervis, A. (2011). Linking strategic HRM, performance management and organizational effectiveness: perceptions of managers in Singapore. *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 17(1), 67-84. doi:10.1080/13602381003790382
- Stanton, P., Young, S., Bartram, T., & Leggat, S. G. (2010). Singing the same song: Translating HRM messages across management hierarchies in Australian hospitals. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(4), 567-581. doi:10.1080/09585191003612075
- Stavros, C., & Westberg, K. (2009). Using triangulation and multiple case studies to advance relationship marketing theory. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 12(3), 307-320. doi:10.1108/13522750910963827
- Stazyk, E. C., Pandey, S. K., & Wright, B. E. (2011). Understanding Affective Organizational Commitment. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 41(6), 603-624. doi:10.1177/0275074011398119
- Sterling, A., & Boxall, P. (2013). Lean production, employee learning and workplace outcomes: A case analysis through the ability-motivation-opportunity framework. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 23(3), 227-240. doi:10.1111/1748-8583.12010
- Stiles, P., Trevor, J., Farndale, E., Morris, S. S., Paauwe, J., Stahl, G. K., & Wright, P. (2015). Changing routine: Reframing performance management within a multinational. *Journal of Management Studies*, 52(1), 63-88. doi:10.1111/joms.12111
- Stone, R. J. (2013). *Managing human resources* (4th ed.). Queensland, Australia: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd.
- Taylor, P. (2013). *Performance management and the new workplace tyranny: A report for the Scottish trades union congress*. Retrieved from Glasgow, Scotland:
- Thibodeaux, H. F., & Hays-Thomas, R. (2005). The concepts of leader-member exchange and mentoring. In G. B. Graen & J. A. Graen (Eds.), *Global organizing designs* (pp. 99-126). North Carolina, NC: Information Age Publishing Inc.
- Thomas, E., & Magilvy, J. K. (2011). Qualitative rigor or research validity in qualitative research. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing*, 16(2), 151-155. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6155.2011.00283.x
- Thompson, P., & McHugh, D. (1995). *Work organisations: A critical introduction* (2nd. ed.). Basingstoke, [England]: Macmillan.
- Thomson, R., & Arney, E. (2015). *Managing people: A practical guide for front-line managers* (4th ed.). Oxford, United Kingdom: Routledge.
- Townsend, K., Lawrence, S. A., & Wilkinson, A. (2013). The role of hospitals' HRM in shaping clinical performance: A holistic approach. *The International Journal*

- of *Human Resource Management*, 24(16), 3062-3085. doi:10.1080/09585192.2013.775028
- Townsend, K., & Loudoun, R. (2015). The front-line manager's role in informal voice pathways. *Employee Relations*, 37(4), 475-486. doi:10.1108/er-06-2014-0060
- Townsend, K., Wilkinson, A., Allan, C., & Bamber, G. (2012). Mixed signals in HRM: The HRM role of hospital line managers. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 22(3), 267-282. doi:10.1111/j.1748-8583.2011.00166.x
- Townsend, K., Wilkinson, A., & Burgess, J. (2013). Filling the gaps: Patterns of formal and informal participation. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 34(2), 337-354. doi:10.1177/0143831x12448442
- Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons.
- Truss, C. (2001). Complexities and controversies in linking human resource management and organisational outcomes. *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(8), 1121-1149. doi:10.1111/1467-6486.00275
- Truss, C., Mankin, D., & Kelliher, C. (2012). *Strategic human resource management*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Tummers, L. G., & Knies, E. (2013). Leadership and meaningful work in the public sector. *Public Administration Review*, 73(6), 859-868. doi:10.1111/puar.12138
- Tweedie, D., Wild, D., Rhodes, C., & Martinov-Bennie, N. (2019). How does performance management affect workers? Beyond human resource management and its critique. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 21(1), 76-96. doi:10.1111/ijmr.12177
- Tyler, T. R., & Bies, R. J. (2015). Beyond formal procedures: The interpersonal context of procedural justice. In J. S. Carroll (Ed.), *Applied social psychology and organizational settings* (Vol. 6, pp. 77-98). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Graen, G. B., & Scandura, T. A. (2000). Implications of leader-member exchange (LMX) for strategic human resource management systems: Relationships as social capital for competitive advantage. *Research in Personnel and Human Resource Management*, 18, 137-185.
- ul Mujeeb, E., & Ahmad, M. S. (2011). Impact of organizational culture on performance management practices in Pakistan. *International Management Review*, 7(2), 52-57.
- Ulrich, W. L. (1984). HRM and culture: History, ritual, and myth. *Human Resource Management*, 23(2), 117-128. doi:10.1002/hrm.3930230203
- van Loon, N., Kjeldsen, A. M., Andersen, L. B., Vandenabeele, W., & Leisink, P. (2018). Only when the societal impact potential is high? A panel study of the relationship between public service motivation and perceived performance. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 38(2), 139-166. doi:10.1177/0734371X16639111
- Verbeeten, F. H. M. (2008). Performance management practices in public sector organizations: Impact on performance. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 21(3), 427-454. doi:10.1108/09513570810863996

- Vogel, R., & Masal, D. (2012). Publicness, motivation and leadership: The dark side of private management concepts in the public sector. *Administration and Public Management Review*, 19(2), 6-16.
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1950). The theory of open systems in physics and biology. *Science*, 111(2872), 23-29.
- von Bertalanffy, L. (1968). *General system theory: Foundations, development, applications*. New York, NY: George Braziller, Inc.
- Wang, M., Zhu, C. J., Mayson, S., & Chen, W. (2017). Contextualizing performance appraisal practices in Chinese public sector organizations: The importance of context and areas for future study. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 1-18. doi:10.1080/09585192.2017.1292537
- Watson, S., & Maxwell, G. A. (2007). HRD from a functionalist perspective: The views of line managers. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 9(1), 31-41. doi:10.1177/1523422306294493
- Weber, M. (1964). *The theory of social and economic organization* (A. M. Henderson & T. Parsons, Trans. Vol. 1). New York, NY: Free Press.
- Weiss, T. B., & Hartle, F. (1997). *Reengineering performance management: Breakthroughs in achieving strategy through people*. Florida, FL: St. Lucie Press.
- Wengraf, T. (2001). *Qualitative research interviewing: Biographic narrative and semi-structured methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- West, D., & Blackman, D. (2015). Performance management in the public sector. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 74(1), 73-81. doi:10.1111/1467-8500.12130
- White, G. (2011). Rewarding public servants: Continuity and change. In S. Corby & G. Symon (Eds.), *Working for the state: Employment relations in the public services* (pp. 87-107). Hampshire, United Kingdom: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
- Whiting, L. S. (2008). Semi-structured interviews: Guidance for novice researchers. *Nursing Standard*, 22(23), 35-40.
- Witt, L. A. (1995). Influences of supervisor behaviors on the levels and effects of workplace politics. In R. S. Cropanzano & K. M. Kacmar (Eds.), *Organizational politics, justice, and support* (pp. 37-53). Westport, CT: Quorum Books.
- Woodrow, C., & Guest, D. E. (2014). When good HR gets bad results: Exploring the challenge of HR implementation in the case of workplace bullying. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 23(1), 38-56. doi:10.1111/1748-8583.12021
- Woodward, J. (1965). *Industrial organization: Theory and practice*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Wright, B. E., & Davis, B. S. (2003). Job satisfaction in the public sector. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 33(1), 70-90. doi:10.1177/0275074002250254
- Wright, P. M., & Nishii, L. H. (2013). Strategic HRM and organizational behavior: Integrating multiple levels of analysis. In D. E. Guest, J. Paauwe, & P. Wright

- (Eds.), *HRM and performance: Achievements and challenges* (pp. 79-96). Chichester, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons Ltd.
- Wright, P. M., & Snell, S. A. (1991). Toward an integrative view of strategic human resource management. *Human Resource Management Review*, 1(3), 203-225.
- Yang, J., Zhang, Z.-X., & Tsui, A. S. (2010). Middle manager leadership and frontline employee performance: Bypass, cascading, and moderating effects. *Journal of Management Studies*, 47(4), 654-678. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6486.2009.00902.x
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). California, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Yin, R. K. (2013). Validity and generalization in future case study evaluations. *Evaluation*, 19(3), 321-332. doi:10.1177/1356389013497081

## Appendix A: Request for Access Email



Griffith Business School  
Department of Employment  
Relations  
and Human Resources

26 May 2016

Nathan campus, Griffith University  
170 Kessels Road  
Nathan, Queensland 4111  
Australia

Dear Sir/Mdm,

I am a PhD candidate at Griffith University Australia supervised by Professor Adrian Wilkinson and Associate Professor Keith Townsend and I am writing to you in connection with a research for a doctoral dissertation entitled: *Frontline Managers Approach to Their Responsibilities in Performance Management*. This study and all information is for academic/scholarly purposes only.

My interest is in exploring the operation of performance management and the extent to which it is meeting expectations of key stakeholders given the challenges in implementing and controlling performance management across the entire organisation. In particular, I am interested in how frontline management operationalise performance management in their daily work.

As such, I am seeking to talk to a number of managers in your organisation to understand their perception of the organisation's performance management system and the implementation process. Involvement in the study may assist organisations to gain a better understanding of how performance management works and is perceived. An individual report may be provided to the participating organisations with broad findings and recommendations from the study. This report may assist participating organisations with their design, implementation, and management of these mechanisms. Please note that the organisation and employees' identity will remain confidential at all times.

Please let me know if your organisation is keen in participating in the research. I look forward to meeting and discussing this issue with you further and sharing the research findings with you at the end.

Yours sincerely,

Qian Yi Lee

Email: [qianyi.lee@griffithuni.edu.au](mailto:qianyi.lee@griffithuni.edu.au)

GU ref no: 2016/342

## Appendix B: Consent Form



### Frontline Managers' Approach to Performance Management CONSENT FORM

**Research Team** Qian Yi Lee  
Griffith Business School  
qianyi.lee@griffithuni.edu.au

Professor Adrian Wilkinson  
Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing  
adrian.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au

Associate Professor Keith Townsend  
Griffith Business School  
k.townsend@griffith.edu.au

By signing below, I confirm that I have read and understood the information package and in particular have noted that:

- I understand that my involvement in this research will include participation in an interview of approximately 60 minutes;
- I have had any questions answered to my satisfaction;
- I understand the risks involved;
- I understand that there will be no direct benefit to me from my participation in this research;
- I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary;
- I understand that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time, without explanation or penalty;
- I understand that I can contact the Manager, Research Ethics, at Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee on +61 7 3735 4375 (or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au) if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the project (GU ref no: 2016/342); and
- I agree to participate in the project.

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	

## **Frontline Managers' Approach to Performance Management INFORMATION SHEET**

### **Who is conducting the research?**

**Qian Yi Lee**

Griffith Business School

Contact Phone 98186263

Contact Email [qianyi.lee@griffithuni.edu.au](mailto:qianyi.lee@griffithuni.edu.au)

**Professor Adrian Wilkinson**

Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing

Contact Email [adrian.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au](mailto:adrian.wilkinson@griffith.edu.au)

**Associate Professor Keith Townsend**

Griffith Business School

Contact Email [k.townsend@griffith.edu.au](mailto:k.townsend@griffith.edu.au)

### **Why is the research being conducted?**

Organisations all strive for performance and do so through the performance management practices put in place to assist their employees to do so. However, many find that the performance management systems are not meeting expectations and that the implementation process is challenging. As such, many organisations are moving away from traditional performance management processes without considering the people who are implementing the system. In particular, frontline managers need to have the ability to manage and support a large majority of employees – the frontline staff.

The PhD candidate, as part of her degree, is interested in the responsibilities of frontline managers in performance management, in collecting data from a representative sample of employees regarding their perceptions of the frontline manager's role in performance management. This study focusses on an area that is lightly or occasionally studied and can serve as an important source of information for practitioners and academics on how to pursue constructive performance management processes.

### **What you will be asked to do**

Participation in the research project will involve a one-on-one interview with the PhD candidate. The interview will last for approximately 60 minutes. Question about demography, the participant's job, the organisation's performance management system, and the participant's opinion on his or her responsibilities in performance management will be asked. All interviews will be audio recorded with the participants' consent then transcribed before being sent to the respective participants for review and corrections, if any.

### **The basis by which participants will be selected or screened**

Potential participants will be drawn from the pool of management and HR staff in the selected organisations. This is in order to better understand the role and responsibilities of frontline managers in performance management. Volunteers from each of the departments identified will then be called via email to take part in the interviews alongside the researchers working with the

executive management to ensure that there is an appropriate representation (different levels of management, different teams, etc.) from each department.

### **The expected benefits of the research**

The research expects to assist in advising organisations on the current performance management practices that frontline managers are undertaking and how the process can be improved. It provides better understanding on the responsibilities of frontline manager's in the performance management of their subordinates.

### **Risks to you**

There is negligible risk involved in taking part in this research. The anonymity and confidentiality of all participants will be respected.

### **Your confidentiality**

The organisation will not be provided with any information divulged in the interview. Identifiable data will be collected in order to allow for matching between data sources, however, all data will be de-identified before the analysis stage in order to safeguard the privacy and confidentiality of the participants and organisations. No participant or organisation will be identifiable in any publication or reporting.

All audio recordings will be erased after the transcription process. All data collected will be stored for five years using the University secured research storage, which only the research team will have access to. All audio recordings will be erased after the transcription process.

### **Your participation is voluntary**

No person is under any obligation, moral or legal, to assist with the research. Potential respondents are free to decline the interview, and are advised by the interviewer, at the outset of the interview, to inform the interviewer if there is any question that they prefer not to answer. Participants are also free to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

### **Questions / further information**

Participants are welcome to contact the PhD candidate Qian Yi Lee for additional information.

Griffith University conducts research in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*. The GU ethics reference number for the project is 2016/342. If potential participants have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project (GU ref no: 2016/342) they should contact the Manager, Research Ethics on +61 7 3735 4375 or [research-ethics@griffith.edu.au](mailto:research-ethics@griffith.edu.au).

### **Feedback to you**

A report with the overall findings and results of the research will be provided to the participating organisations upon completion.

## **Privacy Statement**

“The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of your identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. For further information consult the University’s Privacy Plan at <http://www.griffith.edu.au/about-griffith/plans-publications/griffith-university-privacy-plan> or telephone (07) 3735 4375.”

## Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Questions

No.	Interview Questions – For ALL respondents	RQ
1.1	Tell me about PM in this organisation.	1 + 1a + 1b
1.2	Can you tell me something about your experiences with PM here?	1 + 1a + 1b
1.3	What are the key components of PM here?	1a
1.4	On the whole, how well do you think your direct manager(s) in general carries out these responsibilities?	1a + 1b
1.5	What opportunities do you have to talk to your superiors about problems or suggestions you see within the workplace? How would you describe your relationship with your manager?	1b 1a + 1b
1.6	Do you think this affects his/her approach to your PM?	
1.7	What sort of training do you receive to develop your understanding of PM and its effectiveness?	1 + 1a + 1b
1.8	To what extent does PM facilitate opportunities for employee development?	1 + 1a + 1b
1.9	In your opinion, to what extent does PM help people perform at a higher level?	1a
1.10	How can PM be improved?	NA

No.	Interview Questions – For FLM respondents only	RQ
2.1	What does PM mean to you/How do you define PM?	1b
2.2	Can you tell me about what your role is in relation to PM?	1 + 1b
2.3	Can you tell me about how you carry out your PM duties?	1a
2.4	I know that the performance appraisal process tends to be very formal, how do you manage that? Can you tell me about the training you have had to help you undertake your PM duties?	1 + 1a + 1b
2.5	What about support during the performance of these duties?	1b
2.6	Can you describe the level of flexibility you have or what gets in the way of how you choose to implement PM policies?	1a + 1b
2.7	In what way do you think the quality of your relationship with an employee influences the way you approach his/her PM?	1b
2.8	In what way do you think the attitudes of the employee's co-workers influences the way you approach PM? Based on your responses, the organisation's culture seems to be [description]. What do you think about that?	1b
2.9	Does the organisation's culture affect how you are able to carry out your operational and HR responsibilities?	1 + 1a + 1b
2.10	How do your PM responsibilities fit together with/impact your other day-to-day/operational tasks?	1b
2.11	Can you tell me about the workplace politics that you experience?	1a + 1b

	What are the barriers in relation to your being able to carry out performance management?	
2.12	In what way do you think the legislation/your legal rights influence how you are able to implement performance management?	1b
2.13	How does your management of performance management get assessed or evaluated?	1a + 1b
2.14	Do you feel that there are differences between performance management that is implemented and the performance management that should be implemented according to policy? Why or why not?	1a + 1b
2.15	How can performance management be improved?	NA

<b>No.</b>	<b>Interview Questions – For respondents in the HR department, middle and senior managerial positions</b>	<b>RQ</b>
3.1	What does performance management mean to you/How do you define PM?	1a
3.2	What are the responsibilities of the different levels of management in the PM system?	1 + 1a
3.3	How do you disseminate information and instructions regarding performance management to other organisational employees?	1a
3.4	What are the responsibilities of FLMs in PM?	1
3.5	Do you feel that they are accountable for their responsibilities in PM?	1 + 1b
3.6	In your opinion, are the FLMs able to manage their responsibilities in the PM of frontline employees?	1a + 1b
3.7	In your opinion, how do you facilitate/support FLMs in the PMS?	1b
3.8	Do/would you allow FLMs the flexibility and freedom to carry out the PM policies? Why or why not?	1b
3.9	Do you follow up to ensure that policies are being followed? Why or why not? How do you do so?	1a + 1b
3.10	How important do you think is the role of the FLM in implementing HR policies? Why?	1 + 1b
3.11	To what extent does the culture of the organisation influence the way FLMs are able to implement PM effectively?	1a + 1b
3.12	Has the organisation made any major changes/amendments in structure or policies in recent years? If so why?	NA
3.13	Do you feel that there are differences between PM that is implemented and the PM that should be implemented according to policy? Why or why not?	1a
3.14	How can PM be improved?	NA

## Appendix D: Interview Participants' Demographic Information

### *PublicWorks Participant Demographic Information*

Interview #	Code	Age	Gender	Title	Position	# supervised	Years in service	Department	Relationships
1	1.01	44	Female	Senior Manager	MM	Did not provide	19	HR	Did not interview
2	1.02	48	Female	Deputy Contracts Manager	FLM	2	4	Department C	Did not interview
3	1.03	29	Female	Senior Engineering Officer	FLE	0	5	Department C	Did not interview
4	1.04	42	Female	Contracts Manager	FLM	3	17	Department C	Did not interview
5	1.05	31	Male	Senior Assistant Engineer	FLE	0	3	Department 3	RO: 1.07
6	1.06	57	Male	Principal Project Manager	MM	16	27	Department 3	RO: 1.24
7	1.07	26	Male	Executive Engineer	FLE/FLM	1	1	Department 3	RO: 1.10
8	1.08	41	Male	Site Supervisor	FLE	0	16	Department 3	Did not interview
9	1.09	29	Female	Deputy Contract Manager	FLM	2	4	Department C	Did not interview
10	1.10	40	Male	Deputy Project Manager	FLM	2	6	Department 3	RO: 1.06
11	1.11	42	Male	Senior Engineer	FLE/FLM	3	16	Department 3	RO: 1.06
12	1.12	38	Male	Contracts Manager	FLM	2	15	Department C	Did not interview
13	1.13	46	Male	Principal Project Manager	MM	30	9	Department 1	Did not provide
14	1.14	48	Male	Project Manager	MM	18	4	Department 1	RO: 1.13
15	1.15	28	Female	Senior Engineer	FLM	2	3	Department 1	RO: 1.13
16	1.16	32	Male	Senior Engineer	FLM	2	7	Department 1	RO: 1.21
17	1.17	38	Female	Deputy Project Manager	FLM	1	17	Department 1	RO:1.21
18	1.18	59	Male	Project Manager	FLM	6	20	Department 1	RO: 1.21
19	1.19	31	Female	Deputy Manager	FLM	16	5	Department 1	RO: 1.21
20	1.20	33	Female	Deputy Project Manager	FLM	5	4	Department 1	RO: 1.18
21	1.21	39	Male	Senior Project Manager	MM	36	7	Department 1	Did not interview
22	1.22	31	Male	Deputy Project Manager	FLM	4	4	Department 1	RO: 1.21
23	1.23	40	Male	Deputy Project Manager	FLM	4	3	Department 1	RO: 1.21
24	1.24	49	Male	Director	SM	160	26	Overall Head	Did not interview
25	1.25	32	Male	Deputy Project Manager	FLM	5	7	Department 2	Did not interview
26	1.26	54	Male	Senior Project Manager	MM	9	8	Department 1	Did not interview
27	1.27	38	Female	Deputy Manager	FLM	2	0.5	HR	RO: 1.01

*Note.* 'FLE' = Frontline employee; 'FLM' = Frontline manager; 'MM' = Middle manager; 'SM' = Senior manager; 'RO' = Reporting officer  
Participant #1.07 and #1.11 have the position of FLE/FLM as they only have some official managerial responsibilities for their subordinates.

*AdminInc Participant Demographic Information*

Interview #	Code	Age	Gender	Title	Position	# supervised	Years in service	Department	Relationships
28	2.01	32	Male	Principal Executive	FLE	0	3	A	Did not interview
29	2.02	24	Female	Senior Executive	FLE	0	1	A	RO: 2.07
30	2.03	25	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	2	A	RO: 2.08
31	2.04	24	Female	Senior Executive	FLE	0	1	A	RO: 2.08
32	2.05	31	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	3	A	RO: 2.07
33	2.06	25	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	2	A	RO: 2.07
34	2.07	30	Male	Head	FLM	3	5	A	Did not interview
35	2.08	30	Male	Head	FLM	3	5	A	RO: 2.22
36	2.09	25	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	2	A	RO: 2.13
37	2.1	27	Male	Principal Executive	FLE	0	2	A	RO: 2.13
38	2.11	29	Male	Assistant Manager	FLE	0	4	A	RO: 2.22
39	2.12	28	Male	Principal Executive	FLE	0	2	S	RO: 2.20
40	2.13	32	Female	Head	FLM	3	5	A	Did not interview
41	2.14	31	Male	Principal Executive	FLE	0	4	S	Did not interview
42	2.15	30	Male	Principal Executive	FLE	0	4	S	RO: 2.17
43	2.16	29	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	5	S	RO: 2.18
44	2.17	46	Female	Head	FLM	6	20	S	RO: 2.18
45	2.18	35	Male	Senior Manager	MM/FLM	15	9	S	RO is SM
46	2.19	27	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	2	S	RO: 2.18
47	2.2	46	Female	Assistant Manager	FLM	5	23	S	Did not interview
48	2.21	26	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	3	S	RO: 2.20
49	2.22	35	Male	Senior Manager	MM/FLM	13	9	A	RO: 2.29
50	2.23	30	Female	Principal Executive	FLE	0	4	S	RO: 2.18
51	2.24	38	Male	Assistant Manager	FLE	0	9	S	RO: 2.17
52	2.25	29	Female	Assistant Manager	FLE	0	5	S	RO: 2.18
53	2.26	29	Female	Assistant Manager	FLE	0	5	S	Did not interview
54	2.27	51	Female	Senior Manager	FLM	6	>20	S	Did not interview
55	2.28	34	Female	Assistant Manager	FLE	0	5	S	Did not interview
56	2.29	46	Female	Director	SM	75	X provided	Overall Head	X provided
57	2.3	X provided	Female	Deputy Director	SM	X provided	X provided	A	RO: 2.29

Note. 'FLE' = Frontline employee; 'FLM' = Frontline manager; 'MM' = Middle manager; 'SM' = Senior manager; 'RO' = Reporting officer  
Participant #2.18 and #2.22 have the position of MM/FLM as they are middle managers but also have to take on frontline managerial responsibilities.

## Appendix E: PublicWorks’s Formal Disciplinary Measures

The table below dictates the possible actions that can be taken for both minor and major misconduct:

### *Possible Actions to be Taken Against Misconducts*

	<b>Minor Misconduct</b>	<b>Major Misconduct</b>
Verbal warning	√	√
Written reprimand	√	√
Termination with notice	√	√
Termination with pay in lieu of notice	√	√
Dismissal	×	√
Reduction in pay and/or grade	×	√
Retirement in public interest	×	√

Minor misconduct can be dealt with by HR and the deputy director unless it warrants a fine or termination, then approval from higher management must be sought. Major misconduct on the other hand, upon approval from higher management, will have HR informing the employee in writing of the allegations against him and the employee will be given up to 21 working days to explain. Failure to provide a written explanation within the allocated period will lead to the implementation of any of the punishments listed – any salary increment/adjustment, annual variable component, or bonus payment due to the employee will be stopped and employee will also not be eligible for the flexible benefits for the current year. However, if the offence is serious enough to warrant dismissal or a reduction in grade and/or salary, and the officer does not admit to the charges, a ‘Committee of Inquiry’ comprising of three officers who are more senior in rank to the employee under investigation will be appointed. The employee will then be given not less than seven working days’ notice of the date on which the inquiry will commence and he or she must attend. Within 14 working days of the conclusion of the inquiry, the ‘Committee of Inquiry’ will submit its report to higher management, who will take into consideration the report and findings to decide on a suitable punishment for the employee. Employees who are punished in such a manner have the right to appeal the outcome and will be considered by the chairman, whose decision is final.