EMPLOYEE IMPRESSIONS OF LEADERSHIP STYLES AND HIGH PERFORMANCE WORK PRACTICE

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Abstract

Human resource management (HRM) research has documented the importance of high performance work practices (HPWPs) to organizations, and recent efforts have argued for increasing attention to the role of line manager implementation of HPWPs. To date, research in this area has focused largely on the organizational or employee implications of HPWP implementation, ignoring the process through which implementation affects outcomes. In this article, we use theory on impression formation to describe the perceptual process through which line manager implementation of HPWPs facilitates the formation of different employee impressions of manager leadership styles. We argue that this process is contingent upon employee attributions of implementation intent, which are influenced by the interaction of employee affective and attributional tendencies with line manager implementation style (i.e., political skill). Our conceptualization of this process contributes to HRM research by demonstrating the benefits of integrating it with leadership theory, as well as identifying the role of interpersonal perceptual processes in the effects of HPWPs.

Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) research has documented the positive impact high performance work practices (HPWPs) have on firm performance (Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006; Cooke, 2007; Kaufman & Miller, 2011; Sirmon & Hitt, 2009). Recently, scholars have noted that although HRM departments are responsible for developing and adopting HPWPs the actual implementation often falls to line managers within the organization (Sikora & Ferris, 2014). The degree to which HPWPs are implemented has been argued as key to the realization of their positive impact (Becker & Huselid, 2006; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sikora & Ferris, 2014;

Sikora, Ferris, & Van Iddekinge, 2015). This line of research has noted variance in the degree to which adopted HPWPs are implemented, and argued that this variance can be explained by both organizational and line manager factors (e.g., Sikora et al., 2015; Sikora & Ferris, 2014). Further, research has found that line manager characteristics and abilities also affect the perceived effectiveness of HPWP implementation and, consequently, individual and organizational outcomes (Bos-Nehles, Van Riemsdijk, & Kees Looise, 2013; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2015).

Interestingly, little research has explored line manager HPWP implementation through the lens of leadership. Some research has argued that HPWPs exist along a spectrum from transactional to traditional to transformational in nature (Carrig, 1997). In their contingency framework for HR practice delivery, Lepak, Bartol, and Erhardt (2005) elaborated on this conceptualization, arguing that although "certain HR practices may be considered transactional or transformational in nature, there is likely to be some fluidity to the specific HR practices that fall within each of these" (p. 144). They suggested this fluidity is dependent on organizational goals for the practice, and whether the practice is core to organizational objectives.

We agree with previous research, in that we view designations of the HPWPs and transactional-transformational intersection as fluid. However, we believe that it is the implementation of the practices, rather than their content, that determines the transactionaltransformational designation. Additionally, we suggest the transactional-transformational designation more appropriately describes the labeling of those who implement the practice, rather than the practice itself. Scholars have recognized that although HRM develops practices aligned with organizational strategy, perceptions of these practices and their intent can vary (e.g., Den Hartog, Boselie, & Paauwe, 2004), and these varied perceptions can affect HRM's intended outcomes (Kuvaas, 2008).

Thus, we argue that employee impressions of leadership result from the implementation of HPWPs, and are dependent upon employee perceptual processes and line manager implementation style. That is, we argue that unique characteristics and qualities of both managers and employees interact in a complex process, through which employees develop attributions of manager intent, and then develop impressions of line managers as transactional or transformational leaders. Using impression formation theory (Kunda & Thagard, 1996), we examine the perceptual processes that occur between HPWP implementation and follower impressions of line manager leadership. Fig. 1 presents a model that displays our conceptualization of this process, as well as its position within the broader HPWP literature. Specifically, the bulk of our theory focuses on the portion of the model contained within the dashed box, which suggests that follower characteristics (i.e., affective and attributional tendencies) and line manager implementation style (i.e., political skill) play important roles in the development of employee attributions of line manager intent, and, in turn, the impressions of line manager leadership that result from HPWP implementation.

However, we recognize that this process is embedded within a relationship between HPWP formulation and individual and organizational outcomes. Thus, we position our theoretical process within the HR devolution literature, which recognizes that line managers often are

responsible for implementing HPWPs formulated by the HRM department (e.g., Gilbert et al., 2015). Further, we also discuss the implications of this process within the broader HPWP literature, by explaining the effects of impressions of line manager leadership on subsequent individual and organizational performance.

Given the well-documented effects of leadership impressions on individual, group, and organizational outcomes (e.g., Dulebohn, Bommer, Liden, Brouer, & Ferris, 2012; Howell & Hall-Merenda, 1999), we believe there is value in the investigation of the effect of HPWP implementation on employee impressions of line manager leadership. Becker and Huselid (2006) called for "more theoretical work on the 'black box' between the HR architecture and firm performance" (p. 900), and scholars have acknowledged that doing so requires better integration of the micro and macro domains (Coff & Kryscynski, 2011; Huselid & Becker, 2011; Ployhart & Moliterno, 2011). Luthans and Sommer (2005) noted the theoretical gaps in our understanding of the mechanical links between HPWPs and outcomes, and we suggest that exploring the interpersonal processes involved in leadership impressions formed due to HPWP implementation helps to address part of the "black box" through the integration of more macro (i.e., HPWPs) and micro (i.e., leadership impressions) constructs.

Thus, we contribute to HRM theory by explicating the perceptual process through which HPWP implementation results in employee impressions of line manager leadership. Although much prior work has explored possible explanatory links between HPWPs and various outcomes (e.g., Patel, Messersmith, & Lepak, 2013; Ramsay, Scholarios, & Harley, 2000), investigating how leadership impressions are formed because of HPWP implementation adds value because it captures additional subjective and context-specific intricacies inherent in line manager-employee interactions. We build upon previous HRM literature that argues perceptions are dependent on line manager implementation style (e.g., Nishii & Wright, 2008), and detail the individual-level perceptual nature of these interactions to explain how employee characteristics and preexisting biases can affect impressions formed of line manager leadership. Additionally, we contribute to practice by demonstrating that how HPWPs are implemented and interpreted, based on employee and line manager characteristics, have important effects on employee leadership impressions, which ultimately impact important individual and organizational work outcomes.

We begin with a brief overview of the HPWP literature, and discuss the context within which our model fits. Then, we discuss how impressions are formed and review relevant leadership literature before presenting our arguments regarding how employee characteristics and line manager style of delivery affect employee formation of leadership impressions. Following this broad overview of our theoretical perspective, we elaborate our arguments with examples using a specific HPWP (i.e., formal appraisal), two employee characteristics (i.e., affective and attributional tendencies), and line manager political skill (to capture style of delivery). Finally, we discuss the implications of our arguments, as well as potential directions for future investigation based on our conceptualization.

High-performance work practices

Although there is not a universally agreed upon definition of high performance work practices (Gill, 2009), they can be conceptualized as the specific "methods and procedures the organization adopts ... that are likely to be helpful in achieving higher levels of organizational performance" (Posthuma, Campion, Masimova, & Campion, 2013, p. 1189). More specifically, HR practices are considered "high performance" because their adoption is thought to increase organizational performance based on their alignment with organizational strategies (Cooke, 2007; Kaufman & Miller, 2011; Sirmon & Hitt, 2009). Posthuma et al. (2013) noted that HPWPs represent the foundation of high performance work systems because their implementation in coordinated bundles facilitates positive outcomes such as motivated employees, flexible teams, and high employee commitment.

Evidence suggests HPWP-derived benefits are not realized if the practices adopted by HRM are not implemented, or not implemented effectively (Khilji & Wang, 2006; Sikora & Ferris, 2014), as scholars have suggested that the effectiveness of HPWPs depends on more than just their adoption (Marescaux, De Winne, & Sels, 2012). However, despite the well-documented positive effects of HPWPs on firm performance and employee outcomes (Posthuma et al., 2013), research has shown that firms do not consistently use these practices (Hornsby & Kuratko, 2003). In some cases, a lack of HPWP use might be the result of practices that were adopted for symbolic reasons, where firms are less concerned with the actual implementation of the practice than with the positive signal the stated adoption of the practices provides (Galang, Elsik, & Russ, 1999). However, another reason for inconsistent use might be due to variable levels of implementation by line managers (Van Iddekinge et al., 2009), who increasingly are tasked with implementing adopted HPWPs (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Gilbert, De Winne, & Sels, 2011; Guest, 1997). As a result, the relationship between adopted HPWPs and positive outcomes often is dependent upon line manager implementation (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007).

HRM department development and line manager implementation of HPWPs

Initial research seemingly operated with an assumption that HRM was responsible for HPWP implementation. However, Lepak et al. (2005, p. 156) remarked, "there is some evidence that line managers are assuming some of the responsibilities that have been allocated to the HR function in the past." In this vein, HR devolution scholars (e.g., Gilbert et al., 2011) have noted the increase in line manager HPWP implementation responsibilities, and subsequent research has investigated factors affecting line manager implementation of HPWPs. For example, Nehles, van Riemsdijk, Kok, and Looise (2006) found that capacity, competencies, support, and policy and procedures affect line manager HPWP implementation performance.

Relatedly, recent research has found that line manager political skill and HR competency were positively related to their perceptions of their HPWP implementation, which, in turn, was associated with several positive individual outcomes (Sikora et al., 2015). Similarly, other researchers have found that individual ability is a primary factor in line manager HPWP implementation. For example, using the ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) framework, Bos-Nehles et al. (2013) argued and found support for the notion that although line manager

motivation and opportunity are important, they do not directly affect HPWP implementation, but instead moderate the relationship between line manager ability and implementation.

Because HRM often provides little training or support when directing line managers to implement HPWPs, the managers likely are ill-prepared and lacking in ability, thus decreasing implementation effectiveness (Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). As a result, despite the stated intentions of executives and HRM departments who formally adopt HPWPs, adopted HPWPs might not be implemented because line managers are not willing to invest the time, may not believe the practices will be effective (Sikora et al., 2015), or may not be implemented effectively because they do not possess the necessary abilities (Bos-Nehles et al., 2013). Our perspective builds on this line of research, recognizing that line manager implementation of HPWPs is key to understanding impacts on employees, including their perceptions of line manager leadership.

Line manager implementation of HPWPs and employee impressions of leadership

The HPWP literature has adopted a largely macro focus, with firm performance as the primary outcome of interest. However, firm performance is influenced by many factors more proximal to HPWP implementation (Kehoe & Wright, 2013), and research should consider more micro-oriented outcomes on which HPWPs may demonstrate direct effects (e.g., individual performance) that subsequently affect firm performance. Further, research has suggested that employee reactions to HPWPs are dependent upon their perceptions of those practices (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), and that employee perceptions of those practices are the result of line manager implementation style (Nishii & Wright, 2008).

Thus, Sikora et al. (2015) argued that, through implementation, line managers must make HPWPs salient to employees in order for them to demonstrate their intended effects. These authors investigated employee-level effects of line managers' perceptions of HPWP implementation, including job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and participative decision-making. We follow that individuallevel focus, and argue that how employees perceive HPWP implementation influences employee impressions of line manager leadership. More specifically, we argue that employee characteristics, such as affective and attributional tendencies, interact with line manager implementation style to influence employee attributions of line manager HPWP implementation, which impacts whether employees view line managers as more transactional or transformational leaders.

Surprisingly, there has been relatively little research regarding HPWP implementation and line manager leadership. Lepak et al. (2005) argued that HPWPs exist on a continuum, and tend to represent transactional or transformational leadership styles. However, we argue that although certain HPWPs might be considered more transactional or transformational (Lepak et al., 2005), employee interpretation of line managers as leaders will not necessarily match these labels. That is, consistent with prior research (e.g., Harvey, Harris, Kacmar, Buckless, & Pescosolido, 2013), we argue that leadership impressions are subject to individual biases and external influence. Building our arguments on impression formation theory (Kunda & Thagard, 1996), we suggest that employee affective and attributional tendencies generate individual

biases, and that line manager political skill acts as an external influence that, together, affect attributions of implementation intent and impressions of line manager leadership, regardless of the transformational or transactional classification of HPWPs.

Impression formation

We use Kunda and Thagard's (1996) model of impression formation as the theoretical foundation for our arguments. Impression formation is a social-cognitive process in which perceivers observe a behavior of an actor and, using previously established cognitive structures, undertake both automatic and deliberate appraisals of those behaviors, which then form impressions (Kunda & Thagard, 1996; Neuberg & Newsom, 1993). Kunda and Thagard suggested these impressions are formed both from stereotypes (i.e., membership in certain categories) and individuating information (i.e., traits and behaviors unique to actors), which affect the interpreted meaning of behaviors.

Thus, actors' observed behaviors activate immediate associations that are reflective of perceivers' preexisting beliefs in concert with unique aspects of the actor. For example, employees form impressions of a manager based on the combination of existing stereotypes of managers, in general, as well as aspects unique to that manager and their behavior. Impression formation continues over extended periods of time, as information is continuously updated and additional inferences are made, which ultimately are integrated into a final impression of the actor. That is, multiple varied experiences with an actor begin to weave a pattern of behavior, which, when interpreted by the perceiver, become impressions.

Kunda and Thagard's (1996) model of impression formation is appropriate for our conceptualization, as leadership has been characterized as a perceptual phenomenon dependent upon follower interpretations of leader behavior (e.g., Harvey et al., 2013; Martinko, Sikora, & Harvey, 2012). For example, research has found that leaders' social influence effectiveness (i.e., a "factor" of the leader) is related to followers' impressions of their leaders as being ethical (Harvey et al., 2013). On the other side of the social interaction, research has found that followers' personality traits and other attributes predict impressions formed of their leaders (Avolio, Keng-Highberger, Schaubroeck, Treviño, & Kozlowski, 2016; Wang, Bishoff, & Zhang, 2016). Lord and Maher (2002) succinctly stated this concept when they observed that "the locus of leadership is not solely in a leader or solely in followers. Instead, it involves behaviors, traits, characteristics, and outcomes produced by leaders as these elements are interpreted by followers" (p. 9). We agree, and argue that the impression formation process involves both parties (i.e., leader and follower), and that there is a unique interaction between those two unique individuals.

In fact, Kunda and Thagard proposed that the impression formation process involves two sides (e.g., actors/line managers and perceivers/employees), each of which "brings" various factors to the exchange. We propose that certain follower characteristics and line manager implementation style affect the relationship between line manager HPWP implementation and employee impressions of line manager leadership via attributions of implementation intent. Following Kunda and Thagard's (1996) conceptualization, we suggest that employees'

affective and attributional tendencies represent established preexisting beliefs of managerial behavior likely to affect interpretations of HPWP implementation. However, individuating information related to line managers (i.e., their implementation style) has the potential to counteract employee tendencies and alter their attributions of implementation intent. Thus, employees' affective and attributional tendencies interact with line managers' implementation style to inform employee impressions of line manager leadership as either transactional or transformational .

Transformational and transactional leadership

Although there is no shortage of leadership styles from which to choose, we believe transactional and transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) are appropriate for the current discussion, given Lepak et al.' (2005) use of this terminology to describe a continuum along which they believe HPWPs can be classified. Additionally, these leadership perspectives have been the most researched for several decades (Barling, 2013), and thus are two of the more established leadership perspectives in the literature. Further, transactional and transformational leadership represent distinct, yet complimentary, styles. Like Lepak et al. (2005), early leadership research conceptualized the two as opposite ends of a leadership continuum, with transactional leadership focused on monitoring task performance, and transformational leadership focused on the motivation and development of followers (Bass, 1985). However, subsequent research has argued that transactional leadership forms an effective base, which is augmented by transformational leadership (Ewen et al., 2013).

Transactional leadership is evident when leaders focus on followers' performance of assigned tasks, and is comprised of three underlying dimensions (i.e., passive management by exception, active management by exception, and contingent reward behavior; Bass, 1985). Passive management by exception refers to leaders' practice of waiting to intervene only after an error (i.e., exception) has occurred. Conversely, active management by exception refers to leaders' practice of actively monitoring followers' progress to anticipate problems, and take corrective action before issues become serious concerns. Finally, contingent reward behavior focuses on leaders' exchange of resources/rewards for performance that meets or exceeds clear expectations set for followers.

Transformational leadership is characterized by leaders' focus on providing followers with purpose, and engaging them in ways that meet their needs as individuals. It is comprised of four underlying dimensions (i.e., idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration; Bass, 1985). Idealized influence is similar to charisma, and describes admirable behavior that causes followers to identify with the leader. Inspirational motivation captures leader behavior that inspires followers and challenges them to achieve high standards, while encouraging them that these goals are worthwhile and attainable. Intellectual stimulation refers to transformational leaders' encouragement of followers' creativity by calling for them to challenge assumptions and explore new ways of viewing problems. Finally, individualized consideration is displayed when leaders attend to the needs of followers as individuals, listening to their concerns, and acting as mentors or coaches.

The moderating role of employee characteristics

"All HRM practices communicate messages constantly and in unintended ways, and messages can be understood idiosyncratically, whereby two employees interpret the same practices differently" (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004, p. 206). Thus, because employees are responsible for their own interpretations and evaluations of the HPWPs implemented by line managers, attributions of intent and impression formation are subject to influence by individual differences. There are several traits and characteristics that can be expected to influence perceptions of leadership (Hall & Lord, 1995). However, because impression formation is a social cognitive appraisal process (Kunda & Thagard, 1996), we focus on two individual differences that have the potential to impact employees' cognition during the formation impressions. Specifically, aligning with recommendations of Kunda and Thagard (1996), we examine the employee characteristics of affective and attributional tendencies.

Kunda and Thagard (1996) suggested affect could guide impression formation, and called for future investigation to address its role. Also, they noted, "Some tasks require causal reasoning. These include the task of figuring out why a behavior took place, as in attribution studies that require participants to assess the extent to which different causal factors produced a behavior" (1996, p. 288). Perceivers often desire to understand what caused actor behaviors, and some individuals tend to attribute actions to either internal or external forces (Kent & Martinko, 1995). Thus, variability in perceiver characteristics such as affective and attributional tendencies likely are responsible for differences in impression formation and merit further investigation.

Attributional tendencies vary (Furnham, Sadka, & Brewin, 1992), and likely play an important role in impression formation, as the behaviors that trigger the impression formation process can be subjectively attributed to internal or external forces. Thus, employees could interpret manager behavior as a response to their own actions, based on an internal attribution bias, or simply as typical of the manager or managers in general, based on an external attribution bias (Martinko & Gardner, 1987). Additionally, the impact of follower affect on impressions of leadership has been the focus of much research (Bono & Ilies, 2006; Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002; Dasborough, 2006; Forgas & George, 2001; Hall & Lord, 1995; Johnson, 2008). Past research on affect and followers' perceptions of leaders often has been done in concert with follower cognition. Hall and Lord (1995, p. 266) noted, "most social perceptions, including leadership perceptions, appear to be based on both affective and cognitive processing strategies."

In the following sections, we argue that line managers implementing HPWPs will be perceived as either transactional or transformational leaders based on attributions of intent, which are developed through an interaction of follower characteristics (i.e., affective and attributional tendencies) and line manager implementation style (i.e., political skill). To help explain the theoretical process we develop, we use the example of line manager implementation of a formal appraisal process. Although our theory is flexible enough to consider its effects on the implementation of many HPWPs, we have limited our selection to one HPWP in efforts to facilitate understanding with a consistent example, as well as to conserve space. We chose

formal appraisal because it is a core practice (i.e., one of the most highly researched HPWPs) within the compensation and benefits literature, which is one of the most frequently and consistently researched HPWP categories (Posthuma et al., 2013). Thus, the well-developed theory and abundance of empirical support for the formal appraisal HPWP provide a strong base upon which to demonstrate the generalizability of our theoretical arguments.

Formal appraisals have been defined as the "continuing process of identifying, measuring, and developing the performance of individuals and teams and aligning performance with the strategic goals of the organization" (Aguinis, 2013, p. 2). They are implemented to properly assess behaviors within an organization so that certain HR and administrative decisions are well informed (Rynes, Gerhart, & Parks, 2005). The process of implementing a formal appraisal system is the type of social interaction that would serve as a catalyst for the individual-level information processing described by impression formation theory (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). Specifically, these processes often involve the behavior of an actor (e.g., the line manager implementing the formal appraisal) that is evaluated by a target (e.g., the employee whose performance is being appraised). This is an instance when employees can observe and integrate individuating information about the line manager.

Affective tendencies

In our model, leadership impressions are formed when employees evaluate a specific stimulus, such as line manager implementation of formal appraisal. Individuals rely on their affective states when they undertake thought processes, such as evaluations of stimuli (Forgas & George, 2001; Johnson, 2008; Schwarz, 1990), and they vary in their tendency to experience positive versus negative affectivity (Cropanzano, Weiss, Hale, & Reb, 2003; George, 1996; Judge, 1992). This is important, as individuals with positive affective tendencies tend to be more optimistic and positive in their appraisals of situations compared to those with negative affective tendencies (Ashkanasy & Dorris, 2017). More specifically, positive affectivity is related to enjoyable and agreeable feelings and quality social interactions, whereas negative affectivity is negatively related in all cases (e.g., Berry & Hansen, 1996).

Regarding leader-follower social information processing, Dasborough and Ashkanasy (2002) suggested the affective state of followers observing leaders' behaviors influenced the perceptions of those behaviors. Specifically, they argued that positive affect is more likely to lead to positive perceptions of leader behavior, whereas negative affect is more likely to lead to suspicious perceptions of leader behavior. Further, Forgas and George (2001) suggested that individuals often use a "how-do-I-feel-about-it" (p. 12) heuristic, which is based on affect, to form either positive or negative judgments on stimuli.

We argue that employee affective tendency influences the leadership impressions formed by line manager implementation of formal appraisal, because they involve situations that are "often ambiguous and subject to alternative interpretations" (Forgas & George, 2001, p. 19). When line managers implement formal appraisal, the messages (intended or otherwise) they send regarding their transformational/transactional leadership styles will be influenced by the affective state of their employees. For instance, compared to employees with negative affective

tendencies, employees with positive affective tendencies are more likely to evaluate formal appraisal in a positive manner (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002).

Again, employees higher in positive affectivity are more likely to have positive social interactions (Berry & Hansen, 1996). As a result, the appraisal meeting is more likely to be a pleasant experience for the manager and employee. Thus, the employee may be more likely to attribute the HPWP implementation to benevolent intentions of the manager, and then utilize this pleasant interaction as a source of individuating information regarding the manager, with which the employee can begin to form impressions (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). The benevolent implementation of performance appraisal processes is an example of the line manager engaging in transformational leadership behaviors — setting high standards (inspirational motivation), challenging them to think differently (intellectual stimulation), and ensuring that followers' needs are being met (individualized consideration).

Conversely, employees with negative affective tendencies are more likely to be skeptical in their interpretations of formal appraisal (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002). They may be more likely to make cynical evaluations of the formal appraisal process, and perceive the process as negative (Warr, Barter, & Brownbridge, 1983). For example, employees with negative affective tendencies may attribute the appraisal to organizational requirements, and something that is merely a necessary HR function. They would attribute the line managers' requirement of employees to participate as a task necessary to complete in exchange for compensation, which is related to the contingent reward aspect of transactional leadership. Further, employees with negative affective tendencies may attribute line manager implementation of appraisal to organizational surveillance of problematic employee behaviors, which is related to the management by exception aspect of transactional leadership.

Proposition 1. Employee affective tendencies moderate the relationship between line manager implementation of HPWPs and employee attributions of implementation intent, such that positive (negative) affective tendencies are associated with more transformational (transactional) attributions of intent, which subsequently influence employee impressions of line manager leadership.

Attributional tendencies

Attributional tendencies also can influence the cognitive processes that affect impression formation. "Individuals have an innate desire to determine the causes of events that are relevant to them" (Harvey, Martinko, & Gardner, 2006, p. 2), and they seek to understand the causality of observed behaviors to develop a modicum of control in what might otherwise be an ambiguous situation. Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor, and Judge (1995) argued that attributions of intent are a part of the cognitive process in which individuals evaluate, interpret, and label the intent of observed behaviors, and further form implicit assumptions of the behaviors. During the attribution process, individuals observe others' and may attribute the behavioral intent as either self-interested or sincere, which further influences their perceptions of others and behavioral reactions.

The motivation to attribute behavioral intent is triggered when behaviors affect individuals' welfare. For example, as the formal appraisal process is implemented, employees are motivated to make inferences about line manager implementation intent, and these attributions have the potential to influence follower cognition and affect impressions of the line manager. Specifically, impressions are formed through a process of understanding the observed behaviors, which involves cognitive evaluations, interpretation, and labeling the behavioral intent (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). Follower attributions of leader behavioral intent, as theories of attribution suggest (Kelley & Michela, 1980), involve an individual cognitive process, and thus can vary between employees as they form impressions of the manager.

As attributional tendencies vary among individuals (Furnham et al., 1992), some employees inherently are more likely to attribute line manager behavior as driven by internal or external factors. We argue that as managers implement formal appraisal processes, these attributional differences affect the development of impressions of managers as either transactional or transformational leaders. For example, employees with internal attributional tendencies are more likely to attribute the implementation of a formal appraisal process to internal characteristics and beliefs of the manager, whereas employees with external attributional tendencies are more likely to attribute the implementation of a formal appraisal process to organizational policies and pressures.

Formal appraisals are implemented with the intention of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of employees with the goal of improving alignment with organizational goals (Aguinis, 2013). It is reasonable to assume that most employees understand that higher levels of individual performance generally results in positives for the employee (e.g., increased wages, promotion, etc.). Employees with internal attributional tendencies would attribute the implementation of a formal appraisal process to the manager, and likely signify individualized attention given by the manager to employees. That is, these employees likely would perceive that the manager cared enough for them to implement a policy that is fundamentally aimed at helping to increase employee performance, and, in turn, provide positive outcomes for those employees. This individualized consideration is a primary dimension of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1993), and attributing such actions to the manager (rather than external forces), acts as individuating information (Kunda & Thagard, 1996) that would lead employees to perceive the manager as a transformational leader.

In contrast, employees with external attributional tendencies are more likely to believe that formal appraisal processes were implemented due to organizational pressures. In this case, the same implementation process would be perceived as something that the manager implemented because she or he was forced to do so. Therefore, rather than an act by the manager to help employees improve, the appraisal process would instead be perceived as an act that managers must carry out as part of their job. The manager would now be following an organizational directive to monitor potential mistakes and errors by employees, and correct when necessary. This process of monitoring and correcting aligns with the active management-by-exception dimension of transactional leadership.

Proposition 2. Employee attributional tendencies moderate the relationship between line manager implementation of HPWPs and employee attributions of implementation intent, such

that internal (external) attributional tendencies are associated with more transformational (transactional) attributions of intent, which subsequently influence employee impressions of line manager leadership.

The moderating role of line manager political skill

The preceding sections outline our arguments on employee characteristics that capture the bias portion of leadership impression formation. However, impression formation also is affected by aspects the actor brings to the interaction (Kunda & Thagard, 1996) and, more specifically, leadership impressions are affected by external influence attempts (Harvey et al., 2013). Consistent with this perspective, we argue that political skill, a personal characteristic fundamental to social influence (Ferris et al., 2007; McAllister, Ellen III, and Ferris, in press) as well as line manager HPWP implementation (Sikora et al., 2015; Sikora & Ferris, 2014), enables line managers to implement HPWPs in a manner that communicates concern for employees, and leads employees to form positive attributions of implementation intent.

Political skill has been defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 291). It is comprised of four dimensions: social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity. Social astuteness involves an individual's ability to recognize and interpret social cues and interactions, as well as the intentions of others. Interpersonal influence represents an individual's ability to adjust his or her behavior fittingly for different contexts, and to produce desired attitudes and behaviors from others. Networking ability involves one's aptitude in developing strong, instrumental relationships with others. Lastly, apparent sincerity enables individuals to present themselves in a manner that inspires trust and confidence in others by being perceived as genuine (Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012).

Just as there are idiosyncratic ways in which HR practices are interpreted (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004), the development of impressions are highly subjective, such that "the same behaviors could have multiple interpretations depending on who performed them" (Kunda & Thagard, 1996, p. 286). We argue that political skill enables line managers to implement HPWPs in such a way that employees will be more likely to attribute implementation to benevolent intentions, and, in turn, perceive them as transformational leaders. This is because politically skilled managers' ability to recognize and capitalize on influence opportunities (McAllister et al., in press) enables them to understand when and how to implement HPWPs. Thus, they are better able to communicate the benefits of HPWPs, and to explain how HPWPs positively impact employees, and not just the organization. As a result, these positive, employee development-focused interactions are more likely to lead to perceptions of line managers as transformational leaders.

Conversely, line managers low in political skill lack the ability to effectively implement HPWPs or communicate the reasoning behind implementation. Their lower levels of social astuteness and interpersonal influence likely will result in them implementing HPWPs in a manner viewed as the result of an organizational mandate intended to get more out of the workers.

Consequently, employees will be more likely to perceive the line managers as transactional leaders. The following sections provide further detail regarding how political skill will affect impressions of line manager leadership as a result of specific HPWP implementation.

As a "cognitive-affective-behavioral comprehensive configuration of social competencies" (Ferris et al., 2007, p. 299), political skill can be conceptualized as an ability to affect others' attributions and enhance aspects of certain individuating information, which, in turn, affect others' development of impressions (Kunda & Thagard, 1996). Thus, as politically skilled line managers implement HPWPs, their employees will form different impressions of them than of less politically skilled line managers implementing the same HPWPs. We argue that employee attributions of intent and the impressions of line manager leadership as a result of implementing formal appraisals are dependent upon the political skill of the line manager.

Line managers play a large role in the formal appraisal process, from conducting the actual rating of performance, to giving feedback and setting new goals (Jackson, Schuler, & Rivero, 1989). In its most basic, organizationally implemented form, a formal appraisal is an inherently transactional exchange between a leader and follower. Transactional leaders "focus on the proper exchange of resources" (Judge & Piccolo, 2004, p. 755). Judge and Piccolo argued that transactional behaviors include contingent reward (a leader who establishes expectations and rewards for meeting those expectations) and management by exception (corrective action taken by the leader to guide follower behavior). Organizations that implement formal appraisals are seeking to establish expectations, give rewards, and elicit certain behaviors. Thus, by simply following organizational directives and implementing formal appraisal processes, line managers are more likely to be perceived as transactional leaders.

In its initial theoretical development (Ferris et al., 2005, 2007), as well as in subsequent empirical investigations (e.g., Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015), it has been noted that, "political skill's most significant effects occur in the images politically skilled individuals convey to others" (Munyon et al., 2015, p. 152). For instance, political skill is an antecedent of leader reputation (Blass & Ferris, 2007; Munyon et al., 2015), and politically skilled leaders are able to cultivate their desired image to influential ends (Ferris et al., 2007). Thus, politically skilled line managers will know exactly how to execute the formal appraisal process in a way that elicits the desired employee attributions of intent.

Politically skilled managers are better at reading the social climate surrounding implementation, and sending appropriately timed and conveyed messages in a sincere manner (Ferris et al., 2007). They will be better able to diagnose which employees are more hesitant to accept the new policy, and then recognize and seize opportunities to effectively address those individuals (McAllister et al., in press). Due to this, they likely are more adept at influencing employees' perceptions by elaborating on the reasoning for newly implemented formal appraisal policies, and also delivering the appraisal in a way that conveys a positive image to others that inspires trust and confidence (Ferris et al., 2007; Munyon et al., 2015).

As a result of the individualized attention given to employees, as well as a more effectively delivered message, implementation will be seen as a way to increase trust and development for the employees, rather than as a simple exchange. Manager implementation will be

attributed to an effort to help and encourage development of employees, and, in turn, they will be perceived as transformational, as these types of exchanges are underscored by the development of trust, dependability, and consistency (Bass, 1998; Judge & Piccolo, 2004).

In sum, we argue that line managers with political skill are able to implement HPWPs (e.g., formal appraisal) in such a way that employees attribute intent as benevolent. Their social astuteness, interpersonal influence ability, and apparent sincerity enable them to implement HPWPs in a manner that builds trust and confidence, displays legitimate concern for employee well-being, and even challenges employees to grow and develop. As a result, employees are more likely to form impressions of line managers implementing HPWPs as transformational leaders.

Proposition 3. Line manager political skill moderates the relationship between line manager implementation of HPWPs and employee attributions of implementation intent, such that higher (lower) political skill is associated with more transformational (transactional) attributions of intent, which subsequently influence employee impressions of line manager leadership.

Employee characteristics and line manager political skill

We have argued, independently, that employee characteristics (i.e., affective and attributional tendencies) and line manager implementation style (i.e., political skill) will affect employee impressions of line manager leadership. However, we also believe that politically skilled line managers will be able to implement HPWPs in a manner that mitigates the effects of employee negative affective and external attributional tendencies. More specifically, political skill has been described as a construct that enables individuals to read situations and react effectively (McAllister et al., in press). This provides politically skilled individuals with the "ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris et al., 2005, p. 127). This ability to read others means that politically skilled line managers can recognize which employees might be prone to view HPWPs skeptically, as a result of their affective and attributional tendencies, and then adjust their behavior to implement the HPWPs in ways that facilitate more positive interpretations.

Kunda and Thagard (1996) noted that impressions are continually formed and updated by ongoing interactions with the actor. Thus, employees' initial impressions of HPWPs likely can be informed and updated by the way line managers implement them. We argue that politically skilled line managers' social astuteness enables them to recognize employees who view HPWPs in a skeptical light, and their interpersonal influence ability and apparent sincerity enables them to implement HPWPs in a manner that alters how employees interpret HPWPs (Ferris et al., 2007; McAllister et al., in press). As a result, politically skilled line managers can implement HPWPs in a manner that counteracts the transactional attributions of intent typically formed by employees with negative and external attribution tendencies. For example, politically skilled line managers can sense if employees are not reacting positively to a formal appraisal meeting, and adjust their behavior during the interaction in efforts to influence the

employee's attribution of intent. More specifically, a politically skilled line manager might notice the employee seemed resistant to the actual process, and adjust their implementation such that they focus more on the employee and the desire for the employee to be successful and fulfilled, rather than simply proceed through the prescribed steps of the formal appraisal process.

Further, due to their increased ability to understand others, build relationships, and communicate messages in an effective manner (Ferris et al., 2007), politically skilled line managers would be expected to heighten positive perceptions of their leadership. Thus, employee impressions of line managers as transformational leaders (as a result of their individual characteristics) are likely to be heightened, as implementation is carried out in an effective manner with increased clarity regarding HPWP implementation. More specifically, politically skilled line managers, because of their social astuteness, likely are able to detect when employees view them as transformational leaders. As a result, they are expected to be able to learn better from their implementation successes, and capitalize on future opportunities to influence employees (McAllister et al., in press) with future HPWP implementation.

Proposition 4. There is a three-way interaction between HPWP implementation, follower characteristics, and line manager political skill, such that line manager political skill mitigates (accentuates) the effects of employee negative (positive) affective and external (internal) attributional tendencies on employee attributions of implementation intent, which subsequently influence employee impressions of line manager leadership.

The effect of leadership impressions on individual and organizational performance

As presented earlier, the exchange-based approach to leader-follower relationships characteristic of transactional leadership has been shown to form the base of effective leadership. That is, establishing expectations for performance is an important aspect of leadership, and our arguments that some leaders may be perceived as transactional based on their delivery, as well as employees' characteristics, are not intended to suggest that transactional leadership is always necessarily a negative outcome. However, research has documented that transformational leadership demonstrates positive effects on outcomes beyond transactional leadership (e.g., Ewen et al., 2013). Thus, whether line manager implementation of HPWPs causes them to be perceived as more transactional or transformational has important implications for individual and organizational outcomes.

Discussion

HRM and leadership represent fundamental organizational concepts, each reflecting substantial theoretical and empirical research literatures within the organizational sciences. However, these two important sets of organizational phenomena have proceeded along largely independent and parallel paths, with little intersection or integration. The present article represents our attempt to bring HRM and leadership together in a new, interesting, and important way, which has the potential to meaningfully impact theory and research in both

areas. In the previous sections, we have suggested that line manager implementation of HPWPs will facilitate the formation of employee impressions of either transactional or transformational leadership. Further, we acknowledge the important interacting roles employee characteristics and line manager implementation style play in this perceptual process.

Contributions to theory and research

Our primary contribution is the use of impression formation theory to outline the perceptual process through which line manager HPWP implementation contributes to employee impressions of line manager leadership. Although prior work has suggested that HPWPs exist on a transactional-transformational continuum, our conceptualization argues that the distinction more accurately applies to the line managers who implement the HPWPs. Further, we detail the individual-level perceptual nature of these interactions to explain how employee characteristics and preexisting biases determine whether line managers are perceived as transactional or transformational leaders. Although prior research has explored other possible mediating processes between HPWPs and various outcomes (e.g., Patel et al., 2013; Ramsay et al., 2000), we argue that investigating how leadership impressions are formed because of HPWP implementation adds value because it captures previously unspecified subjective and context-specific intricacies inherent in line manager-employee interactions.

Additionally, we further research on HPWP implementation by suggesting an alternative explanation for the translation of HPWPs into organizational benefit. Although previous research has documented the importance of understanding the effects of line manager implementation of HPWPs on work outcomes, this stream of literature largely has focused on the degree to which adopted HPWPs were implemented (e.g., Sikora et al., 2015). Alternatively, our conceptualization build upon previous HRM literature that argues perceptions are dependent on line manager implementation style (e.g., Nishii & Wright, 2008), and demonstrates that how line managers implement adopted HPWPs impacts the translation of these practices into organizational benefit.

Further, we contribute to the leadership literature by examining the implications of manager-employee interactions for leadership impressions – specifically, how characteristics of each (i.e., managers and employees) affect employee impressions of managers as leaders. Much prior research has addressed leader-follower relationships (e.g., Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005); however, much of this work has focused on how managerial behaviors dictate leadership. Instead, we offer a conceptualization where leadership is defined not just by the actions of managers, but also (if not mainly) by employee perceptions. More specifically, our conceptualization details the effect employee affective and attributional tendencies, as well as line manager style of delivery, have on follower attributions of leader intent, and, in turn, perceptions of leadership. We believe this subtle distinction helps capture the truly idiosyncratic nature of leader-follower relationships.

Directions for future research

An initial future research direction is to test the conceptualization proposed regarding the role of line manager HPWP implementation, employee characteristics, and line manager political

skill in employees' perception of line manager leadership. Considerations for testing causality of our claims will be especially important. That is, our model has focused on the effects of HPWP implementation on impressions of line manager leadership, as moderated by employee characteristics and line manager political skill, and mediated by attributions of implementation intent. However, we acknowledge that HPWP implementation could occur after employee perceptions of line manager leadership have been formed. For example, if the line manager and employee are embedded in a relationship prior to the introduction of the HPWP, it might be an existing leadership perception that influences how employees interpret the implementation of the HPWP. Thus, it will be important to control for baseline perceptions of leadership impressions to see if implementation of the HPWP changes the leadership impressions.

Alternatively, researchers could focus on the implementation of HPWP in new line manager-employee relationships to mitigate the impact of HPWP implementation simply reinforcing existing impressions. Further, line manager implementation of HPWPs is an endogenous construct, as prior research (e.g., Sikora et al., 2015) has demonstrated that it is contingent upon a number of other factors. Thus, future research must include these factors when analyzing models designed to test our arguments to rule out biased results due to endogeneity (Antonakis, Bendahan, Jacquart, & Lalive, 2010).

Additionally, future research needs to consider a range of HPWPs. Although we believe our arguments will generalize to a range of HPWPs, we have discussed only one here as an example our conceptualization. More specifically, considering Lepak et al.' (2005) conceptualization of HPWPs existing on a transactional-transformational continuum, testing our arguments for HPWPs across the continuum is important. For example, it would be interesting to know if the effects are consistent across types (i.e., more transactional or more transformational) of HPWPs, or if the effects are stronger or weaker at different ends of the continuum.

Further, although we have proposed a moderating effect of two employee characteristics (i.e., affective and attributional tendencies) on the relationship between HPWP implementation and leadership impressions, we acknowledge that there are several other characteristics that likely play a role in impression formations. Thus, future research should consider additional individual differences that could affect impression formation. For example, individual differences such as self-efficacy levels, schemas, or relational demography and self-categorization may affect biases of attribution of intent and leadership impressions. Each employee possesses a unique set of characteristics that can affect impressions of the HPWP intent (Den Hartog et al., 2004).

Similarly, although we have focused on line manager political skill due to its inclusion in recent HPWP implementation research (e.g., Sikora et al., 2015; Sikora & Ferris, 2014), as well as its ability to capture implementation style, there are other possible constructs that could be relevant to leadership impression formation. For example, just as employee characteristics may indicate inherent biases that affect HPWP interpretation and subsequent formation of leadership impressions, certain line manager characteristics may affect the manner in which they implement HPWPs. More specifically, line manager negative affectivity, organizational

identification, or relationship quality (e.g., LMX) with employees may create biases that affect the competency of HPWP implementation.

We focused our analysis on follower perceptions of line manager transformational and transactional leadership. However, several other leadership literature streams exist (e.g., LMX, authentic leadership, servant leadership), and are worthy of investigation using the arguments presented here. As HPWPs are implemented, the actions taken by line managers, combined with varying follower characteristics, may lead to perceptions of these leadership styles and relationships. Future research should seek to determine how HPWP implementation affects follower perceptions of these styles, as well as which impressions are more important for subsequent work outcomes.

Finally, theory development is needed regarding the multilevel relationships involved in HPWP implementation. The devolution literature has addressed many aspects of the HRM-line manager relationships, and the resulting effects on HPWP implementation. However, improving our understanding of the role of certain contextual and higher-level constructs would be particularly useful. For example, Bowen and Ostroff (2004) described a strong HRM system as one characterized by distinctiveness, consistent implementation, and consensus among implementers. They argued that "These features create a strong HR system and need to be present in order for the HR practices to communicate their intended effects and ultimately influence firm performance" (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016, p. 197). How might a strong HRM climate affect HPWP implementation? Also, within what context are HPWPs being developed? Is HRM developing HPWPs in response to organizational change, such as an acquisition or firm diversification? Understanding how context affects employee perceptions is in need of further investigation.

Practical implications

We contribute to practice by demonstrating that how HPWPs are implemented and interpreted, based on employee and line manager characteristics, have important effects on employee leadership impressions, which ultimately impact important individual and organizational work outcomes. In addition to the important contributions to theory and future research outlined above, our current work has valuable implications for HRM practice, including line manager implementation of HPWPs. Research has documented the variability of HPWP implementation within organizations (Hornsby & Kuratko, 2003), and has identified line managers as a potential weak link in the implementation chain (Harris, 2001). Thus, HR directors and representatives can sell line managers on the benefits of implementing the adopted HPWPs using arguments that effective implementation can positively affect employee perceptions of line managers as transformational leaders, and that these impressions often are related to better manager–employee relationships, as well as higher employee and group performance.

Also, according to Fiske and Neuberg (1990), impressions are formed through multiple processes that reflect how a perceiver processes a target's attributes. Further, impression formation theory suggests that followers continually update their impressions of their leaders. It is likely that line managers will need to consistently implement HPWPs in effective ways to

maintain positive leadership impressions. This is consistent with research that argues firms must have consistent implementation of HPWPs in order to recognize their benefits (Hornsby & Kuratko, 2003; Van Iddekinge et al., 2009). Thus, it is important for line managers to truly buy-in to the importance of effective HPWP implementation, and not perceive their required efforts as a one-time necessity.

Finally, our conceptualization highlights the importance of the individual in the implementation of HPWPs. It is important for line managers to be aware of their own capabilities, and how their presentation and communication of the HPWP implementation intent can affect employee impressions. However, it also is important for managers to be aware of and interpret employee differences, as each employee's unique characteristics may affect attributions of HPWP implementation intent, and, in turn, impressions of leadership. Line managers should be aware of how their implementation efforts are interpreted by employees, and make efforts to influence these interpretations in ways beneficial to employees and the organization. Doing so likely will lead to more impressions of line managers as transformational leaders, which is likely to influence to positive individual and organizational outcomes.

Conclusion

HRM and leadership each have been heavily researched topics in the organizational sciences. However, these two topics largely have been explored independently. As our conceptualization demonstrates, there is much to be gained through the integration of the micro and macro domains when trying to address inconsistencies in HPWPs. Specifically, we have offered arguments that certain employee characteristics will affect attributions of implementation intent. Additionally, we have argued that line managers (who are critical to the deployment of HPWPs) also will affect these attributions via their implantation style. These attributions, in turn, activate impressions of either transactional or transformational leadership, depending on complex interdependent perceptual processes. As we have discussed, this perspective provides a number of important avenues for future research at the intersection of the leadership and HRM literatures, as well as some practical benefits to practitioners within organizations.

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