



8-30-2023

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Sanjay Singh
University of Dundee

Arup Varma
Loyola University Chicago, avarma@luc.edu

Pawan S. Budhwar
Aston University

Prakriti Soral
Indian Institute of Management, Indore

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Recommended Citation

Singh, Sanjay; Varma, Arup; Budhwar, Pawan S.; and Soral, Prakriti. Impact of Supervisor's Interactional Justice and Interpersonal Affect on Subordinates' Performance Rating: A Signalling Perspective. *British Journal of Management*, 35, 3: 1296-1312, 2023. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, School of Business: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-8551.12758>


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Impact of Supervisor's Interactional Justice and Interpersonal Affect on Subordinates' Performance Rating: A Signalling Perspective

Sanjay Kumar Singh ¹, Arup Varma,² Pawan S. Budhwar³ and Prakriti Soral⁴

¹University of Dundee School of Business, Nethergate, Dundee, DD1 4HN, UK, ²Quinlan School of Business, Loyola University, 820 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611, USA, ³Work and Organization Department, Aston Business School, Aston University, Aston Triangle, Birmingham, B4 7ET, UK, and ⁴Indian Institute of Management, Indore Prabandh Shikhar, Rau – Pithampur Road, Indore, Madhya Pradesh, 453556, India
Corresponding author email: profsanjaysingh16@gmail.com

The complexity of performance evaluation and the insufficiency of objective measures to make informed performance decisions is an ongoing challenge. We suggest that extracting supportive information from social cues during supervisor–subordinate interactions can aid in navigating these complexities. The current study assesses how signals transmitted during supervisor–subordinate interactions play a crucial role in providing additional information for evaluations. We propose the ‘signalling chain’ concept based on signalling theory, which elaborates on the reciprocal exchange of signals between the sender and receiver, ultimately mitigating information asymmetry for both parties. We collected data from 253 matched supervisor–subordinate dyads to study the proposed relationships and analysed the data using structural equation modelling techniques. The findings show that the supervisor’s signals of liking and relational fairness from interpersonal affect and interactional justice positively influence the subordinate’s organizational commitment. The findings also suggest that subordinates reciprocate their obligation to the supervisor by being committed to the organization that counter-signals involvement and identification to supervisors and aid in performance evaluation. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of our study and offer future research directions.

Introduction

Performance rating is a fundamental element of performance appraisal and management (Li, Bagger and Cropanzano, 2017), built on the organizational members’ rational and calculative behaviour (Vakkuri and Meklin, 2006). However, the ambiguity perspective of performance management argues that owing to the organization’s social setting, the decision-making in performance evaluation brings uncertainties, ambivalences and conflicting interests, making performance evaluation challenging (Davis, 1986). These complexities are emphasized within the social context of supervisor–subordinate interactions (Varma *et al.*, 2021). While the intricate nature of social-based complexities in performance evaluation poses a significant challenge to decision-makers, it provides an opportunity to interpret information cues for better performance evaluation. This information exists as behavioural cues in the or-

ganizational environment, which can be captured to provide a better understanding of the performance. Rather than drawing conclusions based only on measurable information, it is necessary to understand and interpret both the explicit and tacit dimensions of performance (Power, 1999; Vakkuri and Meklin, 2006). To effectively capture these information cues and to make an informed evaluation, it is imperative to increase the amount of information available to decision-makers (Vakkuri and Meklin, 2006). In the social context, studies have overlooked how the interactions between supervisors and subordinates create such information for each other that ultimately impacts the performance evaluation (Iqbal *et al.*, 2019; Meinecke, Lehmann-Willenbrock and Kauffeld, 2017). Examination of these cues would give us a better insight into how interactions between the two parties generate information that impacts the performance ratings, which is critical for both individual and organizational effectiveness.

Objective performance measures do not capture the full range of behaviours necessary for assessing overall employee performance (Holmstrom and Milgrom, 1991; Landy, Farr and Farr, 1983; Milgrom and Roberts, 1988). Also, defining these performance standards is challenging owing to fluctuating work activities and objectives (Lin and Kellough, 2019). So, to gain a comprehensive understanding of employee performance, social interactions between supervisors and subordinates serve as a primary source of valuable information, as these frequent interactions significantly influence both parties' attitudes and behaviours and generate reciprocal information (Dossett and Greenberg, 1981; Tremblay *et al.*, 2010; Varma, Denisi and Peters, 1996). However, how performance-related subjective information arising from these interactions is transferred, interpreted and reciprocated remains unclear (Gillenkirch and Kreienbaum, 2017). Understanding this process is crucial, because attitudes and perceptions are reciprocal responses to subordinates' evaluation of the treatment they receive from the organization and their supervisor. Evaluating how these attitudes are formed and how they impact subordinates' behaviours is critical for subjective evaluation and an essential source of information for evaluating performance. To understand the transmission of information via the interactions between supervisors and subordinates, we adopt signalling theory (Spence, 2002) and try to understand how these interactions convey information in the form of signals that shape the desired attitude and perception among subordinates, ultimately providing additional supportive information on their performance, leading to a better performance appraisal.

We suggest that it is necessary to simultaneously investigate subordinates' and supervisors' signals to understand the interpersonal dynamics of performance rating. As affect and morality are established as critical in developing social bonds that allow people to work together (Bekoff, 2004), the study explores the role of interactional justice and interpersonal affect as the primary aspects of supervisor–subordinate interactions. We argue that these aspects of interactions will signal *liking* and *relational fairness* to the subordinates. For these signals to be transmitted clearly, we specifically focus on evaluating supervisors' self-awareness of their interactional justice and affective behaviour towards subordinates, as because of self-awareness, the self-components of supervisor become more prominent in their behaviour (Wicklund, 1979).

To further understand how supervisors' interactional justice and interpersonal affect impact the performance rating, we look at this relationship through the lens of reciprocity. Receiving respect and dignity from supervisors makes subordinates obligated (Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996). To pay this obligation, we propose that subordinates reciprocate by committing themselves to their organization and its goals. Orga-

nizational commitment is one of the most common exchange mechanisms for employees to reciprocate by involving in high performance and being loyal to the organization (Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996; Shore and Wayne, 1993). In the present study, we evaluate its intermediary role in understanding how the signals from the supervisors' positive interactions transfer into higher performance ratings. While previous studies have argued that it is the biases caused by interpersonal affect that increase performance rating (Robbins and DeNisi, 1994), we take a fresh perspective and expand upon the existing understanding by arguing that it is the increased commitment due to healthy interpersonal interactions that causes higher and dedicated performance. Accordingly, our study addresses the following research question: *What is the role of supervisors' interactional justice and interpersonal affect in improving subordinates' performance rating through the reciprocal effect of organizational commitment?*

To answer the above research question, we collected primary data from 253 supervisor–subordinate dyads working in various United Arab Emirates (UAE) organizations and tested our hypotheses using structural equation modelling (SEM). Our study contributes in the following ways. First, we integrate signalling theory with the performance management literature to bring a new perspective on how information emerges from supervisor–subordinate interactions, a crucial ingredient for performance evaluation. The study argues that signal transmissions within the supervisor–subordinate interactions aid in removing the ambiguity in performance evaluation by providing subjective information on the performance. These signals help make informed decisions by the supervisor for both the trait and task-related performance evaluations. Second, the study also advances signalling theory by proposing the signalling chain concept, which explains how signals are transmitted from one person to another and are reciprocated as counter-signals. Each of these signals carries new information that reduces ambiguity for the receiver. While previous studies have focussed primarily on signal transmission from supervisor to subordinate (Mikkelsen and Sloan, 2020; Xu *et al.*, 2019), in our study, using the signalling chain concept, we also evaluate how subordinates will further reciprocate the signals to supervisors. The signalling chain is an important concept that can help us understand how the chain of signal transmissions between parties leads to the development of a particular attitude or behaviour. Finally, the study emphasizes the role of supervisors' interpersonal affect and interactional justice in improving performance ratings by enhancing organizational commitment. This finding brings the new knowledge that for performance to improve, supervisors must be fairer in their treatment and display their affect for their subordinates.

Theory and hypotheses

Signalling theory

Signalling theory elaborates upon how signals from senior management are received and interpreted by organizational members to develop shared perceptions (Spence, 1973). The signals help the receiver to understand the sender's intention and act accordingly (Spence, 2002). Signals are utilized by the sender to communicate information and prompt specific desired reactions from the receiver (Bangertner, Roulin and König, 2012; Spence, 2002). Indeed, it has been argued that signals are more effective in understanding employee outcomes than the practices themselves (Haggerty and Wright, 2009). As such, managers cannot assume that just having systems in place will yield results; it is also essential for them to understand what these systems convey to the organizational members (Varma and Budhwar, 2020). Studies indicate that signals help employees build their attitudes and behaviour based on their perception of the organization and its members (Farndale and Kelliher, 2013). For instance, job applicants try to understand the organization and its systems using signals, as they have limited data (Pernkopf, Latzke and Mayrhofer, 2021).

Specifically, signalling theory has proved to be a useful lens for understanding the relationship between supervisors and subordinates. The signalling theory helps decrease the information asymmetry between two entities by making the signal-receiver more explicit about the signal-giver's intentions and preferences (Spence, 1973) in a dyadic relationships in the organization. Supervisors transmit signals either implicitly or explicitly, requiring subordinates to learn and make sense of the social context by observing the behaviours and attitudes of their supervisors (Bandura, 1986). Subordinates also engage in explicit signalling by conveying their preferences to help supervisors make sense of many critical events.

Several studies have investigated the specific signals that help supervisors to make judgments about subordinates. For instance, signals of reputation (Podolny, 2001) provide important cues to decision-makers about the reputation of the focal entity. Also, a study by Venkataramani *et al.* (2022) looked into network centrality as a signal that shows a person's likability and trustworthiness. Supervisors rely on these signals to decide subordinates' promotability (Paustian-Underdahl *et al.*, 2016), job-related rewards (Leslie *et al.*, 2012), managerial potential (Wayne *et al.*, 2017) and delegation capability (Venkataramani *et al.*, 2022). From these studies, it is clear that supervisors, as well as subordinates, look for specific signals to make important judgments. While previous studies have discussed the critical role of signals in supervisors' decision-making

for the subordinate, studies have not investigated how the signals between the supervisor and subordinate impact the overall performance rating.

Signalling perspective and performance rating

Performance evaluation is widely acknowledged as a complex information-processing task conducted within a social context (Landy and Farr, 1980). Although objective assessments are a crucial component of performance evaluation, an accurate and comprehensive understanding of an individual's performance requires consideration of the information cues present in social interactions (Landy and Farr, 1980; Voußem, Kramer and Schäffer, 2016). To provide a well-informed performance evaluation, supervisors search for cues that could aid accurate attribution during the performance evaluation process (Dossett and Greenberg, 1981). Signals carry information on employees' task performance and traits and are acknowledged as an integral part of decision-making (Venkataramani *et al.*, 2022). As these signals play a crucial role in reducing uncertainty for the underinformed (Belogolovsky and Bamberger, 2014), it is necessary to understand how to help provide the necessary information that further aids the supervisor during performance evaluation.

Accordingly, we draw on signalling theory to explain the social dynamics between supervisors and subordinates and how these impact subordinates' performance ratings. To understand this relationship, we introduce the signalling chain (Figure 1), a concept that explains a chain of signals that passes from supervisor to subordinate and further from subordinate to supervisor. Past studies have noted a similar occurrence, called counter-signals (Gupta, Govindarajan and Malhotra, 1999), that improves signal interpretation by responding to the signal in a dyadic relationship. In line with the concept of counter-signals, we argue that the signal-receiver will learn from the signal and reciprocate his/her learning as counter-signals, leading to a chain of signals. To further elaborate, the supervisor's attitude or perceptions are transmitted, through their conscious and unconscious behaviour, as a signal, which the subordinate receives and perceives. The subordinate gains knowledge from these signals and accordingly engages in certain behaviour that again signals the supervisor, thus creating a chain of signals. In the current study, we further theorize this concept using the reciprocity norms of social exchange theory, which explains that 'when one party benefits another, an obligation is generated. The recipient is now indebted to the donor, and he remains so until he/she repays' (Gouldner, 1960, p. 174). For instance, when subordinates receive organizational support, they fulfil their exchange obligation by engaging in extra-role behaviours (Shore and Wayne, 1993). Similarly, in the context of supervisor-subordinate

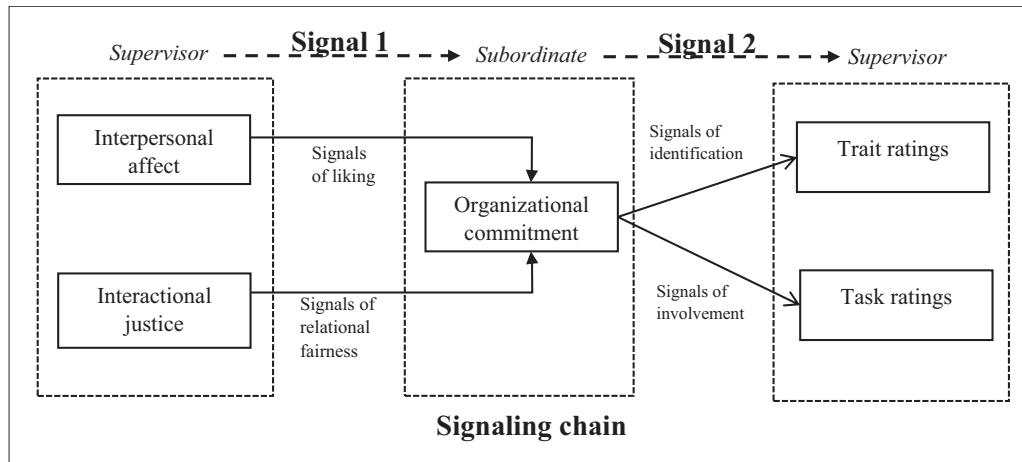


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

relationships, the exchange in relationships based on reciprocity norms helps maintain positive interrelationships (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 2015). Accordingly, in the present study, using the signalling chain concept and reciprocity norm, we try to understand how the specific signals transmitted from supervisors are, when received by subordinates, reciprocated by subordinates' further transmission of counter-signals to supervisors, which ultimately helps in improving the performance ratings. We develop and propose the study's hypotheses based on these arguments in the following section.

Organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is defined as the 'relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization' (Porter *et al.*, 1974, 604). It involves an acceptance of one's organization's goals and values, a willingness to contribute one's effort towards the organization, and a desire to maintain a relationship with the employer (Mowday, Steers and Porter, 1979). Organizational commitment is also an important commodity with which to pay the obligations incurred by supervisors or organizations (Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996). It is a key mediating factor and an antecedent to a variety of desirable work outcomes (Hunt and Morgan, 1994), such as job satisfaction, performance and productivity, and has a negative correlation with absenteeism and turnover (Fedor, Caldwell and Herold, 2006; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990). Other than personal characteristics, such as education, age, gender, income and organizational tenure, (Chughtai and Zafar, 2006) as important antecedents to commitment, research has discussed the role of top management, colleagues, customers and supervisors in building and maintaining organizational commitment (Meyer, Allen and Smith, 1993; Van Knippenberg and Van Schie, 2000). Among these antecedents, a

supervisor's role is considered the most significant for building the subordinate's commitment owing to their daily interactions to provide guidance, evaluation and emotional support (Mottaz, 1988; Rhoades, Eisenberger and Armeli, 2001). Several supervisory variables, such as supervisors' behaviour (Mathieu *et al.*, 2016), transformational leadership (Avolio *et al.*, 2004) and perceived organizational support (Meyer *et al.*, 2002), among others, have been studied as significant antecedents to organizational commitment. Taking the literature forward, in the current study we look at the critical role of organizational commitment as an intermediary variable between the supervisor-subordinate interactional relationship and performance ratings. We specifically explore this relationship based on the theoretical understanding of organizational commitment as a vital mechanism of exchange through which employees reciprocate to the organization.

Interpersonal affect and organizational commitment

Interpersonal affect constitutes the core of interpersonal relationships; it is expressed as 'like-dislike' and acts as a central vehicle through which people handle social intercourse (Zajonc, 1980). The types of affect that develop at the workplace are a key determinant of employees' on-the-job behaviours (Sonnetag *et al.*, 2018). Positive interpersonal affect, where the liking towards each other is high, predicts proactive, innovative, creative job behaviours (Amabile *et al.*, 2005) and organizational citizenship behaviour (Spence *et al.*, 2014). As indicated by past studies, interpersonal affect acts as a heuristic influencing the information processing strategy of a person (Clore and Storbeck, 2006), which is reflected and this strategy is reflected in their behaviour as an information cues. People use such information received in the form of signals to make

judgments about whether they are liked by the other person or not (Schwarz, 2002).

In the context of the supervisor–subordinate relationship, the affective interplay between supervisor and subordinate was found to play a crucial role in directly influencing their subordinate evaluations based on which the attitudes and behaviours are formed (Hartung, 2020; Rowold and Borgmann, 2014). The verbal and non-verbal expression of affective signals conveys a lot about the relationship between the sender and the receiver. These signals carry the interacting individuals' feelings, intentions and relational orientations, which help in the interpretation of ambiguous stimuli and clarify the social dynamics (Keltner and Kring, 1998; Walden and Ogan, 1988). Accordingly, we argue that the supervisor's interpersonal affect signals liking towards the subordinate. The signal of liking elicited from a supervisor towards their subordinate is indicative of a positive emotional state and presupposes a genuine sense of care and concern for the subordinate's welfare (Casciaro and Lobo, 2008). Supervisors' awareness of their positive affect towards subordinates manifests in supervisors' behaviour; they transmit signals of liking, which, when picked up by subordinates, will elicit complementary emotions (Keltner and Kring, 1998). Subordinates will perceive signals of liking as indicating that they are valued by the supervisor (Varma and Stroh, 2001). Receiving such signals will help the subordinates better evaluate their relationship with their organization and make them feel part of the organizational community (Newman *et al.*, 2017). Subordinates will reciprocate the feeling of being valued and accepted by showing commitment to the organization. Subordinates view commitment as a commodity for exchange that is reciprocated in return for the positive experiences and benefits one has as a result of organizational membership (Farndale and Kelliher, 2013; Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996). Accordingly, the interpersonal affect of the supervisor will transmit signals of liking that will obligate the subordinate to reciprocate by committing themselves to the organization. Based on the above, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1: Interpersonal affect is positively associated with organizational commitment.

Interactional justice and organizational commitment

Interactional justice, a subset of organizational justice, is concerned with the fairness employees perceive from the interpersonal treatment they receive in their organization settings (Cropanzano *et al.*, 2001; Van Dierendonck and Jacobs, 2012). Employees with high justice perceptions feel that they are treated with respect and esteem (interpersonal justice) (Bies and Moag, 1986) and are provided with explanations or clarifica-

tions (informational justice) (Shapiro, Buttner and Barry, 1994). Interactional justice is most frequently connected with one's supervisor, which is perceived positively by the subordinate, leading to high trust in their relationship (Kougiannou, Dundon and Wilkinson, 2021; Masterson *et al.*, 2000). Other facets of justice, namely distributive and procedural, are formal (Greenberg, 1990) and apply more to the exchange between the individual and their respective organizations, as compared with interactional justice, which generally involves an exchange between the individual and the supervisor (Cropanzano, Prehar and Chen, 2002). The ambiguity and informal aspects of interactional justice (Umphress *et al.*, 2003) give supervisors full control over how they want to treat their subordinates. Because of this, interactional justice becomes more critical for studying supervisor–subordinate relationships than distributive and procedural justice.

Justice is defined as 'the perceived adherence to rules that reflect appropriateness in decision contexts' (Colquitt and Zipay, 2015, p. 76). As per the deontic model, it is a sense of moral obligation (Cropanzano, Goldman and Folger, 2003). The denotoc model suggests that behaviour is fair as long as it conforms to norms of moral obligation, not only for oneself but also for others (Folger, 2001). Therefore, supervisors are morally obligated to show relational fairness to their subordinates by treating them with respect and dignity (Sasaki and Hayashi, 2014). Signalling theory suggests that how the receiver receives and interprets information cues will determine their perceptions and responses. Accordingly, the interactional justice behaviour of the supervisor, eliciting relational fairness towards subordinates, will convey the respect that supervisors have for their subordinates. We propose that, upon receiving these signals, subordinates will develop the perception that the supervisor has fulfilled his/her moral obligation in treating them with fairness and respect, and now the subordinate is under the obligation to reciprocate. The knowledge gained from these signals not only clarifies the sender's perceptions, attitudes and motives, but also helps develop a clear understanding of several integrated aspects of organizational justice (Walker *et al.*, 2013). Accordingly, signals of relational fairness will lead to the development of a perception of fairness extending beyond the supervisor to the overall organization. Based on the reciprocity norm, we propose that subordinates will reciprocate the relational fairness depicted through the supervisor's interactional justice by committing themselves to their organization. Therefore, we hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 2: Interpersonal justice is positively associated with organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment and signals of identification and involvement

To evaluate subordinates' performance, supervisors engage in information recall, which consists of two types, namely behavioural and dispositional (Feldman, 1981). For instance, to assess the subordinate's task performance, the supervisor will recall information specific to work assignments (Feldman, 1981; Sockbeson and DeNisi, 2019). Similarly, the supervisor will recall information about the subordinate's disposition to decide upon trait rating. However, most of this information is not objective or directly measurable, so supervisors have to rely on social cues to gather further information on subordinates' overall performance (Vakkuri and Meklin, 2006). Based on signalling theory, we propose that supervisors generally receive this information in the form of signals from subordinates. Subordinates produce/release/discharge/express various kinds of signals that help supervisors determine their critical traits, such as trustworthiness or managerial capabilities (Venkataramani *et al.*, 2022; Wayne *et al.*, 2017). These signals are generally determined by the attitude and perception that the subordinate possess towards the organization and towards their own work.

One such prominent attitude is the organizational commitment of a subordinate, which is a psychological configuration that directs their behaviour (Herrbach, 2006). Committed subordinates display the traits of being loyal and dedicated to the organization and create stable and enduring behaviours to achieve these goals (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Huang *et al.*, 2021). Porter *et al.* (1974) and Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) defined commitment as the composition of identification and involvement that depicts acceptance of the organization's values or goals, a willingness to exert effort to achieve these goals for the organization, and the desire to maintain organizational membership (Porter *et al.*, 1974; Reichers, 1985). Borrowing from this understanding of commitment, we argue that subordinates committed to their organizations elicit signals of identification and involvement. While the signal of identification conveys the emotional attachment the subordinate has to the organization, the signal of involvement displays the degree to which the subordinate is focused on accomplishing organizational goals. Both these signals convey crucial information that is important for performance appraisal but they are not readily available to the supervisor.

Performance appraisal, specifically trait appraisal, is an ambiguous evaluation. Because traits are not objective in nature (Varma and Stroh, 2001; Varma, Denisi and Peters, 1996), the supervisor tries to find various cues or signals in the environment that may reveal the subordinate's traits. For instance, supervisors use signals from the social network of subordinates to

identify the trait of trustworthiness of the subordinate (Venkataramani *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, we propose that subordinates committed to the organization also emit signals that help supervisors evaluate traits. As discussed earlier, one important aspect of committed subordinates is that they identify with the organizational values and goals owing to their emotional bond with the organization (Buchanan, 1974; Meyer and Allen, 1991; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1986). Because of this, committed individuals display behaviours consistent with the organization's goals and values. As supervisors are uncertain about subordinates' traits because they are not directly measurable, they look for such signals that provide information, based on which they may make their judgments (Spence, 2002). So, when subordinates develop commitment towards the organization, they transmit signals of identification that show their traits of being loyal, trustworthy and compliant with the organization (Greenberg and Baron, 2008; Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996). Therefore, we propose that subordinates committed to their organizations send signals of identification to their supervisors. This will help bring clarity about their traits and improve their trait ratings:

Hypothesis 3: Organizational commitment is positively associated with trait rating.

As organizational commitment is a social exchange in response to the support and rewards given by the organization to the employees, employees reciprocate by involving themselves in work at a level beyond what is required of them in the formal employment contract (Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996). This positive attitude towards the organization also makes subordinates engage in in-role and extra-role performance (Jaramillo, Mulki and Marshall, 2005) to cater to the organization's needs and ensures strenuous efforts for the institution's good (Tremblay *et al.*, 2010).

Accordingly, subordinates' organizational commitment signals their involvement, involvement displays the degree to which actions are directed towards accomplishing their work and organizational goals. Several previous studies have found significant relationships between commitment and employee performance (Cooper-Hakim and Viswesvaran, 2005; Meyer *et al.*, 2002; Riketta, 2002), such relationship shows that employee behaviour is genuine and involves extended involvement with the work. As task rating involves both measurable and non-measurable aspects of performance (Varma, Denisi and Peters, 1996), signals of involvement from the subordinate's organizational commitment will bring more clarity to an assessment of task performance of the subordinate. In light of the above arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 4: Organizational commitment is positively associated with task rating.

The mediating role of organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is contingent on subordinates' perceptions about the quality of the relationship with the supervisor or the organization. It is understood as an emotional attachment to an organization that is developed through high-quality exchange relationships. Subordinates reciprocate to the organization for their positive treatment by being highly committed to its goals (Ng, 2015). As proposed earlier, signals of liking from a supervisor's interpersonal affect towards a subordinate will transmit the supervisor's relational orientation towards the subordinate. By receiving such positive signals, subordinates understand supervisors' liking of them, so they commit to their organization in reciprocation. Owing to this commitment, the subordinate will put more effort into challenging tasks (Huang *et al.*, 2021) and will be obliged to reciprocate by exhibiting higher performance standards. This reciprocity will signal their involvement with the organizational goals which, when recognized by supervisors, will provide additional information on subordinates' task performance. Thus, borrowing from the previously proposed concept of the signalling chain, the subordinate will reciprocate signals of liking from the supervisor by emitting signals of involvement, which will lead to a higher task rating for the subordinate. Hence, we propose that:

Hypothesis 5: Interpersonal affect has a positive indirect impact on task rating through organizational commitment.

As discussed above, the supervisor's interactional justice behaviour will result in a relational fairness signal that will positively impact subordinates' perception of their interactional relationship with the supervisor. The feeling of being treated with relational fairness, that is, with dignity and respect, results in positive attitudes towards the supervisor and the organization (Masterson *et al.*, 2000). Subordinates in such a high-quality dyad with supervisors engage in extra-role behaviours and take on tasks that involve more responsibility (Liden, Sparrowe and Wayne, 1997; Masterson *et al.*, 2000). Such subordinates' involvement in achieving organizational goals is rewarded and they tend to receive a higher performance rating (Gerstner and Day, 1997). All of this happens with the help of the signals being displayed by both parties. As per the signalling chain, interactional justice will transmit signals of relational fairness to subordinates that will increase their commitment to the organization, and in reciprocation, they will further transmit signals of involvement, leading to a higher task rating. Based on this, we propose that:

Hypothesis 6: Interactional justice has a positive indirect impact on task rating through organizational commitment.

Further, we propose that supervisors' interpersonal affect also aids in improving the trait rating of subordinates. A supervisor seeks to solve the ambiguity over his/her understanding of subordinates' traits by seeking new information, directly or indirectly, through observations (Feldman, 1981). We propose that the signalling chain resolves such ambiguity. A subordinate will receive and perceive the signal from the supervisor's interpersonal affect (liking) as positive organizational membership. Such perceptions will motivate subordinates to reciprocate by committing themselves to the organization and its goals. These committed subordinates will identify with the organizational goals and will display traits of being loyal, trustworthy and compliant, which will be transmitted as signals to the supervisors. Reception of these signals that display the traits of a committed individual will help the supervisor be clearer about the traits of the subordinate and result in higher trait ratings. In light of the above arguments, we propose that:

Hypothesis 7: Interpersonal affect has a positive indirect impact on trait rating through organizational commitment.

The literature reports that authentic leaders help their followers leverage their talents and build their authentic selves (May *et al.*, 2003). An environment in which subordinates perceive that they are treated fairly and respectfully makes them emotionally engaged with the organization. Based on signalling theory, we propose that the signals of relational fairness resulting from the interactional justice of the supervisor will show that the organization values and respect subordinates, which will develop their trust and commitment to the organization. As discussed earlier, subordinates committed to their organization signal traits of being identified with the organizational goals, which will remove ambiguity and help supervisors make better decisions. Thus, based on the signalling chain, the transmission of signals of relational fairness from supervisors will be reciprocated by subordinates being committed to the organization, which will elicit a signal of identification, leading to higher trait ratings. Accordingly, we suggest:

Hypothesis 8: Interactional justice has a positive indirect impact on trait rating through organizational commitment.

Methodology

Sample and data

For our study, we collected data from superior-subordinate dyads in seven organizations in the oil and gas industry in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). After receiving approval from the Human Resources (HR)

Table 1. Sample descriptions

Supervisor	Counts	Percent	Subordinate	Counts	Percent
Gender			Gender		
Male	197	77.87	Male	177	69.96
Female	56	22.13	Female	76	30.04
Age (in years)			Age (in years)		
<30	0	0.00	<30	66	26.09
30–40	135	53.36	30–40	98	38.73
41–50	81	32.02	41–50	65	25.69
51–60	35	13.83	51–60	17	6.72
61 and above	2	0.79	61 and above	7	2.77
Educational qualification			Educational qualification		
Bachelor's degree	74	29.25	Bachelor's degree	159	62.85
Master's degree	179	70.75	Master's degree	94	37.15
Nationality			Nationality		
African	61	24.11	African	73	28.86
Asian	129	50.99	Asian	147	58.10
European	39	15.41	European	21	8.30
North American	24	9.49	North American	12	4.74
-	-	-	Length of working experience under current supervisor		
			Up to 2 years	47	18.58
			>2–4 years	170	67.19
			>4 years	36	14.23

Department of the respective organizations, one of the co-authors approached the supervisor–subordinate dyads in person and requested their voluntary participation in this study. We received voluntary agreement to respond to the survey questionnaire from 632 superior–subordinate dyads. After assuring them of complete anonymity and confidentiality, we distributed hard copies of the questionnaire(s). A total of 278 completed supervisor–subordinate matched surveys were returned to us. However, only 253 sets were useable, as 25 of them had some of the items left unanswered. The subordinates responded to a questionnaire designed to assess their organizational commitment, whereas their immediate supervisor responded to questions on their interpersonal affect, interactional justice and performance rating. All items were presented on a 7-point Likert scale, where 7 = high and 1 = low.

Table 1 provides sociodemographic details about the supervisor–subordinate dyadic sample in this study. In the supervisor sample, 77.87% were male, 87% of them were in the age group ranging from 30 to 50 years, 70.75% had a master-level education in science, technology and business, and the majority were Asian, followed by African, European and North American origin. In contrast, in the subordinate sample, 69.96% were male, approximately 64% were in the age bracket 30 to 50 years, 62.85% had bachelor-level degrees, and most were Asian, followed by African, European and North American origin. Finally, approximately 67% of the subordinates in the superior–subordinate dyads had been working under their current supervisor for the last 2–4 years at the time of data collection.

Measures

Interpersonal affect (IAFF). Interpersonal affect scale had five items adapted from Varma, Denisi and Peters (1996) and Tsui and Barry (1986). The scale was adapted to measure the supervisors' self-awareness of affect towards their subordinates. A sample item is, 'I would like to get to know the subordinate better'. Cronbach's alpha for the interpersonal affect scale was 0.906.

Interactional justice (IJUST). We adapted Moorman's six-item interactional justice scale (1991), wherein supervisors rated their self-awareness of interactional justice towards their subordinates. A sample item is, 'I am able to suppress my personal biases'. Cronbach's alpha for the interactional justice scale was 0.962.

Performance rating. We adapted the performance rating scale of Varma, Denisi and Peters (1996), wherein there are six items for the work-related task/outcome scale and nine items for the trait scale. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the task/outcome and the trait scale were 0.938 and 0.961, respectively.

Organizational commitment. We adapted 15 items from the organizational commitment scale of Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979). A sample item is, 'I am proud to tell others about working in the current organization'. Cronbach's alpha for the organizational commitment scale was obtained as 0.957.

To explain the variance in the dependent variables, based on previous studies, we controlled for supervisors' and subordinates' age, gender and experience (Settoon, Bennett and Liden, 1996; Sturman, 2003; Varma *et al.*, 2021). In addition, we controlled for how

long the subordinate had been working with the current supervisor. We controlled for both the age and gender of the rater and the ratee as they are found to have an influence on the performance rating (Liden, Stilwell and Ferris, 1996; Ng and Feldman, 2008). For instance, Liden, Stilwell and Ferris (1996) found that older supervisors had higher performance ratings than younger supervisors, while Maas and González (2011) suggest that the gender of the rater and the ratee impacts the performance evaluation.

Results

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for the constructs along with the control variables in the study. As seen in the table, most of the correlations are below the suggested level of correlation (0.8), suggesting that multicollinearity is low (Gujarati, Porter and Gunasekar, 2012). To further ensure the absence of multicollinearity, we also calculated the variance inflation factor (VIF), as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2006). The VIF values ranged from 1.09 to 3.66, within the permitted level of <10 (Belsley, Kuh and Welsch, 2005; Gujarati, Porter and Gunasekar, 2012).

Before proceeding with testing the study's hypotheses, we examined the dataset for two kinds of biases, namely the non-response bias and the common-method bias. An independent t-test was performed on the datasets of the early- and the late-respondent samples, and the obtained results do not differ significantly in terms of their responses (see Table 3). That suggests that the respondents in this study display the characteristic features of the population to which they belong. Therefore, this study's dataset is free from non-response bias, and we can generalize the obtained results to a larger population (Becker and Ismail, 2016).

In addition, we tested for common-method biases in the dataset. The supervisor in the supervisor-subordinate dyadic sample responded to questionnaires on interpersonal affect, interactional justice and performance appraisal at one point in time. Hence, we undertook several steps to take care of the common-method biases in the dataset. First, as noted earlier, we assured the respondents of the confidentiality and anonymity of the information collected in this study. Second, as per the suggestions of Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), we randomized the order of items in the questionnaire to purposefully make it difficult for the respondents in this study to recognize the antecedent and outcome variables. Finally, Harman's single-factor test was carried out on the dataset received from the supervisor. We found a single factor to elucidate 31.91% of the variance, which confirms the absence of common-method biases in the dataset (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

Table 2. Descriptive analysis

	Mean	SD	INT_ JUSTICE	INT_ AFFECT	ORG COMM	RATING_ TASK	RATING_ TRAIT	SUP_ AGE	SUP_ GENDER	SUP_ EXP	SUB_ AGE	SUB_ GENDER	SUB_ EXP
INT_ JUSTICE	31.123	5.476											
INT_ AFFECT	26.000	4.363	0.701**										
ORGCMM	78.490	10.820	0.403**	0.403**									
RATING_ TASK	31.249	5.291	0.337**	0.439**	0.182**								
RATING_ TRAIT	46.328	7.795	0.278**	0.393**	0.174**	0.862**							
SUP_ AGE	2.621	0.750	0.059	0.091	0.147*	0.026	0.075						
SUP_ GENDER	0.771	0.421	0.019	0.035	-0.016	0.019	0.063	0.276**					
SUP_ EXP	17.689	8.720	0.119	0.130*	0.099	0.096	-0.138*	0.834**	0.289**				
SUB_ AGE	2.190	1.014	0.067	0.095	0.105	0.034	0.066	0.393**	0.186**	0.381**			
SUB_ GENDER	0.621	0.486	0.061	0.073	0.024	-0.023	0.003	0.224**	0.407**	0.151*	0.437**		
SUB_ EXP	4.551	4.024	0.103	0.098	0.143*	0.109	0.093	0.437**	0.215**	0.410**	0.229**	0.251**	
SUB_ SUP	3.383	1.087	0.069	0.039	0.029	0.032	0.021	0.135*	-0.015	0.202**	0.186**	0.059	0.186**

Note: N = 253.

INT_ JUSTICE, interactional justice; INT_ AFFECT, interpersonal affect; ORGCMM, organizational commitment; RATING_ TASK, task rating; RATING_ TRAIT, trait rating;

Control variables: SUP_ AGE, supervisor's age; SUP_ GENDER, supervisor's gender; SUP_ EXP, supervisor's experience; SUB_ AGE, subordinate's age; SUB_ GENDER, subordinate's gender; SUB_ EXP, subordinate's experience; SUB_ SUP, length of working with current supervisor in years.

*p < 0.05.

**p < 0.01.

***p < 0.001 (2-tailed).

Table 3. Test for the non-response biases

	Levene statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Interactional justice	0.530	1	251	0.467
Interpersonal affect	1.497	1	251	0.222
Task rating	0.042	1	251	0.838
Trait rating	1.352	1	251	0.246
Organizational commitment	1.694	1	251	0.259

To test our hypotheses, we used structural equation modelling (SEM) based on the covariance-based method (CB-SEM). The path model was analysed in two steps: (a) evaluating the measurement model, and (b) evaluating the structural model. A summary of the results is presented in Figure 2.

Measurement model

Table 4 provides the measurement model results. Cronbach’s alpha measured the reliability coefficient of all four measuring instruments and ranged from 0.906 to 0.962 (Hair *et al.*, 1998). Average variance extracted (AVE) of the constructs also ranged from 0.623 to 0.84, values that are much higher than the threshold of 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), depicting the presence of convergent validity. Also, to test the discriminant validity, we followed Fornell and Larcker’s (1981) method. The square root of AVE on each construct was larger than correlations obtained with other constructs, thus proving the discriminant validity (Table 4). The chi-square difference test was conducted to further assess the discriminant validity (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). To test for discriminant validity between constructs, we can compare the fit of a model that assumes that all constructs are distinct (i.e. no correlations between con-

structs) with that of a model that allows for correlations between constructs. If the model with correlations fits significantly better than the model without correlations, this suggests that some constructs are not distinct and may be measuring the same underlying construct. The chi-square difference test can be used to compare the fit of the two models. This study treats two constructs as independent variables (IVs), one as a mediating variable, and two as dependent variables (DVs). Hence, it is a five-factor model. To check for the discriminant validity, we correlated the IVs, making the model a four-factor model. Then we conducted a chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 169$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$), which showed that the less restricted model (i.e. five-factor model) was significantly better than the four-factor model. We performed the same test by correlating both DVs. The chi-square difference test ($\Delta\chi^2 = 325.69$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$) again indicated that the less restricted model (i.e. the five-factor model) was significantly better than the four-factor model. The difference test results were significant, indicating that the discriminant validity between constructs is present in this study. For the model fit, we calculated goodness-of-fit measures, such as comparative fit index (CFI = 0.88), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI = 0.87), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA = 0.06) and coefficient of determination (CD = 0.997), suggesting a good fit.

Structural model

After validating the model, we next estimated the structural model to test the relationships between the constructs. To assess the significance of the paths, we employed a bootstrapping technique with 5000 resamples (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

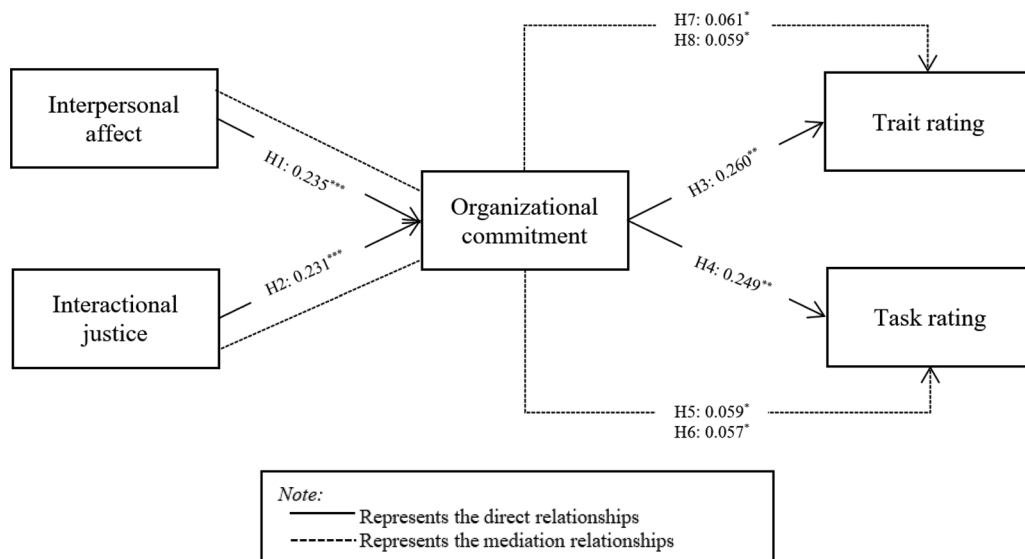


Figure 2. Results of hypotheses testing

Table 4. Construct reliability and validity, discriminant validity

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted (AVE)	INT_ JUSTICE	INT_ AFFECT	ORG COMM	RATING_ TASK	RATING_ TRAIT
INT_JUSTICE	0.962	0.969	0.84	0.916				
INT_AFFECT	0.906	0.93	0.726	0.701	0.852			
ORGCMM	0.945	0.961	0.623	0.419	0.419	0.805		
RATING_TASK	0.938	0.951	0.762	0.346	0.439	0.202	0.873	
RATING_TRAIT	0.961	0.967	0.764	0.278	0.393	0.187	0.859	0.874

Note: Diagonal elements present the square root of the AVE (in bold).

INT_JUSTICE, interactional Justice; INT_AFFECT, interpersonal affect; ORGCMM, organizational commitment; RATING_TASK, task rating; RATING_TRAIT, trait rating.

Table 5. Testing for direct effect

	Path coefficients (β)	Hypothesis testing
INT_AFFECT → ORGCMM	0.235**	H1 is supported
INT_JUSTICE → ORGCMM	0.231***	H2 is supported
ORGCMM → RATING_TRAIT	0.260***	H3 is supported
ORGCMM → RATING_TASK	0.249***	H4 is supported

INT_JUSTICE, interactional justice; INT_AFFECT, interpersonal affect; ORGCMM, organizational commitment; RATING_TASK, task rating; RATING_TRAIT, trait rating.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$ (2-tailed).

Testing for the direct effect. Table 5 shows that interpersonal affect and interactional justice both had a positive and significant relationship with organizational commitment (H1: $\beta = 0.235$, $p < 0.01$ and H2: $\beta = 0.231$, $p < 0.01$, respectively). Also, organizational commitment had a positive and significant relationship with trait rating and task rating (H3: $\beta = 0.260$, $p < 0.001$) and (H4: $\beta = 0.249$, $p < 0.001$), respectively.

Testing for the indirect effect. We followed Zhao, Lynch and Chen's (2010) recommendation and used bootstrapping statistics to test the mediation hypotheses while performing the SEM. Table 6 suggests that organizational commitment mediates the relationships between interpersonal affect and task ratings (H5: $\beta = 0.059$, $p < 0.05$) and interactional justice and task ratings (H6: $\beta = 0.057$, $p < 0.05$). Also, we found support for H7 and H8 representing organizational commitment mediating the relationships between interpersonal affect and trait ratings (H7: $\beta = 0.061$, $p < 0.05$) and interactional justice and trait ratings (H8: $\beta = 0.059$, $p < 0.05$).

Regarding the control variables, the supervisor's work experience ($\beta = 0.023$, $p < 0.05$) and age ($\beta = -0.244$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant relationship with task ratings, whereas only work experience ($\beta = 0.025$, $p < 0.05$) had a significant relationship with trait ratings.

As a robustness check, we tested the model also using PLS-SEM. This method helps evaluate complex models involving several constructs, indicator variables and paths without imposing distributional assumptions on the data (Hair et al., 2019). As shown in Appendix B, the results are similar to the results from CB-SEM, lending further support to the model.

Discussion and conclusion

Relatively little is known about social dynamics vis-à-vis performance appraisal (Meinecke, Lehmann-Willenbrock and Kauffeld, 2017), especially about the effect of interactional justice (van Dijke et al., 2019) and interpersonal affect (Varma, Budhwar and Pichler, 2011) on the employee's performance rating. This study explores the critical intermediary role of organizational commitment between the linkages of interactional justice, interpersonal affect and employee performance appraisal. While previous studies have emphasized the role of biases in the relationship between affect and performance ratings (Robbins and DeNisi, 1994), our study takes a fresh perspective in arguing and establishing that it is the increased organizational commitment rather than biases that play a role in enhancing the performance rating as a result of supervisors' interpersonal affect. Our research draws upon signalling theory (Spence, 1973) to provide an understanding of and explain the social dynamics between supervisors and subordinates and how they influence subordinates' performance ratings in the organization. The key findings of this study indicate that signals of liking (i.e. interpersonal affect) and signals of relational fairness (interpersonal justice) from supervisor to subordinate result in the subordinate emitting signals of identification and involvement (i.e. organizational commitment), which in turn influence supervisor's ratings of subordinate's performance in the organization.

Implications for theory

The findings of our study have three critical theoretical implications. First, our research contributes to sig-

Table 6. Testing for the indirect effect

	Path coefficients (β)	Confidence interval	Hypothesis testing
INT_AFFECT \rightarrow ORGCOMM \rightarrow RATING_TASK	0.059*	(0.007 to 0.110)	H5 is supported
INT_JUSTICE \rightarrow ORGCOMM \rightarrow RATING_TASK	0.057*	(0.012 to 0.103)	H6 is supported
INT_AFFECT \rightarrow ORGCOMM \rightarrow RATING_TRAIT	0.061*	(0.006 to 0.116)	H7 is supported
INT_JUSTICE \rightarrow ORGCOMM \rightarrow RATING_TRAIT	0.059*	(0.011 to 0.108)	H8 is supported

Note: Bias-corrected 95 % confidence intervals are reported in parentheses and computed with bootstrapping using 5000 resamples.

INT_JUSTICE, interactional justice; INT_AFFECT, interpersonal affect; ORGCOMM, organizational commitment; RATING_TASK, task rating; RATING_TRAIT, trait rating.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

*** $p < 0.001$ (2-tailed).

nalling theory (Spence, 1973) by proposing the concept of a signalling chain. According to signalling theory, when a receiver effectively receives a signal, there is usually an accompanying modification of attitude, behaviour or perception. Few studies have explored the subsequent responses upon receiving the signals. These responses, or 'feedback', have been conceptualized as information relayed back to the signaller regarding the effectiveness of the signals for the receiver (Gupta, Govindarajan and Malhotra, 1999). However, understanding these responses has been largely limited to providing feedback for improving future signals. Our study extends this explanation by proposing that the feedback also functions as a reciprocation mechanism. According to our hypothesis, upon receiving the signals, the receiver will further send the signal to the signaller, which will help the signaller gain knowledge about the receiver. In addition to clarifying the conventional understanding of 'feedback', which focusses primarily on enhancing the quality and effectiveness of future signals (Gulati and Higgins, 2003), our study contributes by suggesting that feedback also encompasses reciprocation, whereby the receiver transmits a signal back to the sender, helping to reduce information asymmetry about the receiver for the sender. We refer to this conceptualization as the 'signalling chain'.

Through empirical investigation of the signalling chain, our study illustrates that when a supervisor displays signals, a subordinate learns from those signals and reciprocates by displaying counter signals (Gupta, Govindarajan and Malhotra, 1999) to the supervisor. This forms a chain that shows how signals further trigger other signals. Using the context of the supervisor-subordinate relationship, this study depicts how signals move from one party to another and how the other party reciprocates those signals. At each of these transmissions of signals, ambiguity is reduced, and new knowledge is added to the signals, knowledge ultimately aid the individuals in making important decisions or judgments. The signalling chain provides a

new perspective on understanding exchanges between dyadic relationships.

Second, our study introduces the signalling perspective into the performance-rating literature. While previous studies have explored various factors that enable supervisors to make performance evaluation decisions (Tremblay *et al.*, 2010; Varma, Denisi and Peters, 1996), studies have briefly explored the role of social and situational factors in performance decisions (Ferris *et al.*, 2008; Judge and Ferris, 1993; Levy and Williams, 2004). Performance evaluation, being a cognitive process, is subjective and deeply influenced by extraneous factors (Judge and Ferris, 1993). The influence of these factors becomes prominent when the social elements are salient to the rater (Duarte, Goodson and Klich, 1994; Judge and Ferris, 1993). Our study suggests that these social cues are critical in removing ambiguity from performance ratings by providing information supporting the objective evaluation. Our findings suggest that owing to a signalling chain, subordinates reciprocate the signals of liking and relational fairness by demonstrating commitment towards the organization. This commitment further facilitates the supervisor in providing a deeper understanding of the subordinate's attitudes and perceptions that are important to understand in order to rate the subordinate's overall performance. Accordingly, our study contributes to the performance-evaluation literature by introducing signals as a source of supportive information that assists the supervisor in making informed performance evaluation decisions.

Our study illustrates that specific signals provide specific information that helps in both task and trait ratings. For instance, signals of involvement from subordinates' organizational commitment display the dedication that subordinates show towards achieving their work goals, which aid the supervisor in better evaluating the task performance. Similarly, signals of identification display the traits of a committed person, which helps in deciding the trait ratings. Overall, the signalling perspective in performance literature opens new avenues to understand how specific signals

transmitted from subordinates' behaviours or attitudes contribute to removing information asymmetry for particular performance ratings.

Finally, our study delivers a significant theoretical contribution to the performance-management literature by suggesting the critical role that supervisor–subordinate interactions play in shaping performance evaluations. Our study illustrates that every behaviour of the supervisor, whether conscious or unconscious, signals information that subordinates use to decide on their own behaviour. This requires that supervisors monitor and regulate their behaviours consistently. Specifically, our findings show that when supervisors display behaviours associated with interpersonal justice and affect, this fosters a sense of organizational commitment among employees, which, in turn, sends further signals to the supervisor and aids in performance evaluation. This underlines the need to consider the implications of these interactions for performance evaluation and not only the traditional markers of performance (Ferris *et al.*, 2008). Overall, the findings open new pathways for understanding the nuanced interplay between supervisors' behaviours during interactions and their impacts on subordinate performance. Thus, our study attests that a supervisor can contribute to improving subordinates' job performance by consciously investing in fair treatment and interactions with subordinates (Moorman, 1991).

Implications for practice

From a practitioner's perspective, the findings of this research offer vital applied implications.

First, organizations should pay attention to interactional justice and interpersonal affect mechanisms, as these drive employees to psychological attachment and commitment to the organization and its goals. Thus, our study's findings suggest that leaders and managers should create and foster an organizational climate in which employees experience a sense of justice and membership. Fairness, being the social and moral responsibility of the supervisor (Brebels *et al.*, 2011), requires policies that reward fair treatment and respectful interactions for setting the tone for a healthier work environment. Furthermore, our findings suggest that managers should treat their subordinates with respect, politeness and honesty and display emotional connections with them, as signals of affect are critical components of complex discourse processes in the organization (Ferris *et al.*, 2008).

Second, our findings highlight the importance of supervisors' self-awareness of how they interact with their subordinates. As a result of self-awareness, supervisors are able to assess better and display their liking and interactional justice to subordinates, which helps subordinates to improve their commitment to the or-

ganization. Accordingly, we suggest that organizations arrange leadership development interventions such as reflective exercises or 360-degree feedback to help supervisors develop a better sense of self and enhance their managerial skills (Tekleab *et al.*, 2007).

Third, this study highlights the importance of signals for building a positive supervisor–subordinate relationship. Using the signalling chain concept, the study emphasized that signals are transmitted, interpreted and reciprocated by both parties, which plays a crucial role in building attitudes, perceptions and behaviour. For instance, workers having frequent communications with supervisors have been reported to have favourable job performance ratings (Kacmar *et al.*, 2003). We suggest that organizations build strong, direct and easy communication channels between supervisors and subordinates so that signals can be clearly transmitted and interpreted. Also, supervisors should improve their approachability so that subordinates feel free to contact them.

Limitations and future research directions

Although this study offers sound theoretical and practical implications, we must acknowledge the limitations so that future research can address them. First, this study is a survey-based (cross-sectional) inquiry to examine what makes employees committed in the workplace. However, studies based on cross-sectional designs have an inherent limitation in establishing causality between the variables. Therefore, future research could follow experimental designs to answer questions on directionality. Second, future studies could further explore the signalling chain in other contexts, such as organizational deviances, to understand how signals between two entities are transmitted and interpreted to finally trigger deviant behaviours and what role negative norms of reciprocity play between the signal transmissions (Uhl-Bien and Maslyn, 2003). Third, the study could be developed further using some important contextual variables. As discussed, organizational commitment is contingent on the exchange relationship. In our study, we explored how subordinates reciprocated the supervisor's justice and affect. Future studies could also investigate the role of perceived organizational support or a supportive organizational culture as moderator constructs. This would allow for an exploration of how the impact of the supervisor's interactional justice and interpersonal affect could be enhanced when subordinates also perceive that the organization cares for their well-being and has a supportive culture. Also, to ensure that signals are accurately received by the supervisor, the frequency of interaction is important. Supervisors may often lack sufficient data to accurately evaluate performance owing to the low frequency of interactions (Lin and Kelloway, 2019). In line with this,

a wider span of control is becoming more prevalent in current IT-based companies (Kirkpatrick, 2017), owing to which even highly capable leaders tend to form ‘only a few higher-quality exchange relationships’ (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995, p. 227). These situations burden the supervisor with information cues and may create errors in judgment during performance evaluation. Contextual variables such as frequency of interaction or span of control could be studied further to enhance understanding of how signal transmission will be affected, and subsequently, the performance appraisal. Finally, we examined our conceptual framework in one country in the Middle East, which might affect the generalizability of the study’s findings across the Middle Eastern region and beyond. Consequently, we submit that future researchers empirically examine our theoretical research model across other countries for better generalization of the obtained results. Future research could also include contextual moderators such as organizational/national culture or industry type to evaluate their impact on how signal transmissions across national culture differ between supervisor–subordinate interactions and how this difference impacts the performance evaluation.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Sanjay Kumar Singh PhD is Chair Professor of Human Resource Management, University of Dundee School of Business, Dundee, UK. His research interests include human resource management, health & wellbeing, leadership, knowledge & innovation management, and ethics. He has published in *Journal of World Business*, *Human Resource Management Review*, *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Journal of International Management*, *European Business Review*, *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* and *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*.

Arup Varma is Professor and the Frank W Considine Chair in Applied Ethics at the Quinlan School of Business, Loyola University Chicago, USA. He holds a PhD from Rutgers University, New Jersey, USA, a PGDPM from XLRI, Jamshedpur, and a BSc (Hons) from St. Xavier's College, Calcutta. Dr Varma's research interests include performance appraisal, expatriate adjustment and human resource management issues in India.

Pawan Budhwar is the 50th Anniversary Professor of International Human Resource Management at Aston Business School and the Associate Deputy Vice Chancellor International, Aston University, UK. He is the Co-Editor-in-Chief of *HRM Journal* and is globally known for his research in the fields of strategic and international human resource management and emerging markets with a specific focus on India. He is the Co-Vice Chair – Research & Publications of the British Academy of Management (BAM) and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and BAM.

Prakriti Soral PhD is faculty in the area of Organizational Behaviour and Human Resource Management at the Indian Institute of Management, Indore. Her key research interests include occupational stigma, identity work, coping resources, affirmations and supervisor–subordinate relationships. She has published in international journals of repute, such as *Human Resource Management Review*, *Journal of Business Research* and *Australasian Journal of Information Systems*.

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