

Contextual Influences on Evaluative Style and its Effectiveness: Three Avenues for Future Research

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ABSTRACT AND KEYWORDS	
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Contextual influences on evaluative style and its effectiveness: three avenues for future research

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Abstract

Many accounting studies have investigated the effects of differences in evaluative style on subordinate managers' attitudes and performance. These studies have usually based the distinction of different evaluative styles on the extent to which a superior uses and relies on accounting performance measures when evaluating subordinate managers' performance. The literature on this concept of evaluative style has become known as RAPM (reliance on accounting performance measures). Recently, this literature has been subject to severe criticism. This paper argues that to gain relevance for the accounting and management community, future research on evaluative style needs to (1) incorporate the development in management accounting and control towards a broad array of information, (2) recognize the importance of organizational context and control system design for understanding evaluative style effectiveness, and (3) consider characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship. The relevance of these three issues is empirically illustrated with interview data from a pilot study. Overall, these three avenues for future research provide a valuable approach to increase our understanding of evaluative style effectiveness in contemporary organisations.

Keywords: evaluative style, accounting, control, performance measurement, dyad

1 Introduction

For many years, in the management accounting and control literature budgetary control has been the dominant control mechanism. As a control mechanism, budgetary control is part of 'the process by which managers influence other members of the organization to implement the organization's strategies', which is Anthony's (1988, p. 10) definition of management control. Based on Anthony's (1965; 1988) framework of management control, the involvement and judgment of humans, especially in the administration of budgets, is an essential part of budgeting. For example, managers have to decide whether and which performance measures could be used to motivate others to implement the organization's strategies. Managers also face decisions on what constitutes an appropriate standard for

the chosen performance measures. When exploring variances, managers are faced with multiple possible causes, some within and some outside the responsibility and control of their subordinates. Furthermore, managers have to decide whether meeting or not meeting budgetary standards affects the realisation of overall goals and strategies of the organisation, and if so how and to what extent. Although mainly operating within the performance-oriented, cybernetic view of management control, a considerable number of accounting studies have focused on these issues as aspects of (financial) budgeting, by studying the consequences of different evaluative styles on subordinate managers' behaviour.

Some early studies (Argyris, 1952; Hopwood, 1972a; 1973) found that using accounting information for evaluating the performance of subordinate managers could enhance feelings of tension and evoke dysfunctional behaviours such as manipulating accounting information and inferior relationships with peers and superiors. These studies also suggest that participants' behaviour is not affected by the adequacy of the **design** of the system only, but as much by **how managers use** these systems. In the past few decades, many studies have tried to relate performance evaluation style to behavioural and attitudinal outcomes at the subordinate level. Performance evaluation style, or, in short, evaluative style, refers to the manner in which managers evaluate the performance of their subordinate managers or lower-level employees. In the accounting literature, research addressing evaluative style has based the distinction between different evaluative styles on the extent to which a superior uses and relies on accounting performance measures when evaluating subordinate managers' performance. The literature on this concept of evaluative style has become known as RAPM (reliance on accounting performance measures). Although this literature provides consistent support for the existence of a relationship between evaluative style and job-related tension, performance and dysfunctional behaviours (e.g., Hopwood, 1973; Otley, 1978; Brownell & Hirst, 1986; Ross, 1995), there is also much support for the hypothesis that this relationship is conditional on organizational (e.g., Otley, 1978; Hirst, 1981; 1983; 1987), environmental (Brownell, 1985; 1987), and personal factors (e.g., Hopwood, 1973; Brownell, 1981). However, a clear understanding of the nature of this relationship under different conditions is still lacking.

There are numerous problems with the RAPM-literature that may have limited a good understanding of the concept of evaluative style and, subsequently, of its relationship with

subordinate managers' behaviour. A number of reviews of the work conducted in this area have spelled out these problems (see Briers & Hirst, 1990; Hartmann & Moers, 1999; Hartmann, 2000; Otley & Fakiolas, 2000; Otley & Pollanen, 2000; Vagneur & Peiperl, 2000; Dunk, 2003; 2003), and several recommendations have been made to restore the flaws in existing RAPM-studies. However, in our opinion, even the latest criticisms have not sufficiently dealt with some more fundamental issues that future research should see to. These issues require a reconsideration of the construct and nature of evaluative style that goes beyond the methodological issues addressed in most recent reviews of RAPM research. Three such issues are the need to move beyond the narrow focus of the RAPM-literature on the role of quantitative budgetary information in performance evaluation, the need to recognize the importance of organizational context and control system design to define evaluative style effectiveness, and the need to consider characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the relevance of these three issues for future research on evaluative style. We believe that considering these issues in future research will contribute to a better understanding of performance evaluation as an important management control tool. The management and leadership literature may benefit from accounting studies that study the role of supervisors in performance evaluation as a complement to the design of the performance evaluation system, taking into account the appropriateness of the performance measures used within the evaluation. In the accounting literature, in turn, a stronger focus on the role of supervisors, taking a more managerial approach, is likely to contribute to a more thorough understanding of the effects of performance measures on the motivation and behaviour of lower level managers and employees.

The remainder of this paper is organised as follows. First, we will briefly elaborate on the theoretical relevance of the three issues (section 2). Next, we will empirically illustrate the relevance using some preliminary evidence from a pilot study (section 3). Finally, we will briefly present the main conclusions.

2 Theoretical background

Going beyond quantitative budgetary data

In a recent review of the conceptualisation and measurement of evaluative style in RAPM-studies, Noeverman et al. (2005) conclude that in later RAPM-research the concept of evaluative style has become narrowly focused on 'the extent to which a superior uses budgetary data (or other quantitative data) to evaluate the performance of subordinate managers', thus excluding the complex behavioural and attitudinal patterns in which superiors may in fact use a much broader set of information. By emphasising the role of budgetary data for performance evaluation, the RAPM-literature has failed to appreciate relevant developments within the management accounting and control literature (Chenhall, 2003; Noeverman et al., 2005). While the conventional view with its strong emphasis on budgetary control systems is prevailing in most of the RAPM-literature, in the management accounting and control literature the definition of management control has evolved 'to one that embraces a much broader scope of information' (Chenhall, 2003, p. 129), including external information, non-financial information, predictive information and informal personal and social controls. As a consequence, the RAPM research has hardly investigated the nature of evaluative styles in which budgetary data is (relatively) unimportant (i.e., the so-called non-accounting category), while contemporary management control theory implies that these styles are highly relevant.

The conceptual nestedness of evaluative style effectiveness

By excluding the behavioural dimension, RAPM research has also failed to appreciate the relationship between **the use** of management control tools (such as budgeting) and the behavioural impact of the **design** of these tools. Yet, this relationship was at the heart of the early studies by Hopwood (1972a; 1973) and Otley (1978) that induced later RAPM-research. Their argument was that the use of accounting information for evaluative purposes (design) in itself did not pose a threat. Rather, the manner in which superiors used accounting information, depending on their judgment of the quality and relevance of accounting performance measures, influenced the subsequent functional or dysfunctional behavioural responses of subordinates. In this perspective the effectiveness of an

evaluative style is determined by the quality of a superior's response to¹ (compensation for) the degree of "fit" between control system design and the task it has to fulfil in its immediate organisational context.

As this implies that the definition of an effective evaluative style is context-dependent, Noeverman et al. (2005) argue that to deal with these issues effectively we need field studies studying the effectiveness of different evaluative styles in the context of a specific organisational control system, more than quantitative surveys across organisations. These contextual studies help to conceptualise and measure (effects of) differences in evaluative style in ways that are relevant, meaningful and valid. They enable the development of measures of evaluative style that are tailored to a particular context, and make it possible to show how meaning and effectiveness of evaluative style will depend on this particular context.

Studies of single organisations are also needed because they allow researchers to assess the behavioural impact of differences in how superiors handle the evaluation process, i.e. evaluative style as a characteristic of superiors, while controlling for the behavioural impact of the **design**, i.e. the technical aspect or architecture of control systems (Flamholtz, 1983). Such research does not aim to identify the contexts in which the use of particular management control tools such as budgets in itself would enhance functional or dysfunctional decisions or behaviours. Rather, such research aims to identify how differences in the manner in which superiors use particular management control tools for evaluation purposes strengthen or limit the motivational and behavioural impact of these tools within a particular (organisational) context.

Characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship

Besides neglecting the importance of organisation level control system design as a defining context for evaluative style effectiveness, RAPM-research has disregarded another important aspect of organisational context that defines evaluative style effectiveness: the characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship. Two factors make the superior-

¹ By using the word "response", we do not intend to suggest that evaluative style is necessarily a conscious choice of the superior, i.e. intended behaviour. This in fact is one of the issues that has remained largely unexplored despite decades of research on evaluative style, but that future research on evaluative style needs to address, as we will argue later in this paper.

subordinate characteristics relevant for determining evaluative style effectiveness. First, the ultimate behavioural response of a subordinate is determined by his or her perception of the superior's evaluative style. Second, a superior can be expected to adapt his or her style to the specific characteristics of his or her subordinates. From this perspective, two essentially different issues need consideration. The first is a measurement issue, concerned with the reliability and validity of measurement of the concept of evaluative style. The second issue is the expectation that the nature of the superior-subordinate relationship provides yet another dimension influencing evaluative style and its effectiveness.

Kahn (1972), Hopwood (1972b) and Otley (1978) already raised the first issue. Evaluating Hopwood's pioneering study Kahn (1972, p. 185) argued that Hopwood's measurement of perceived evaluative style (based on the responses of subordinates) casted doubts on the objective accuracy of the report of subordinates about their superior's style of evaluation. In his response to Kahn (1972), Hopwood (1972b, p. 192) agreed that the use of expert observation and the scoring of evaluative transactions were "promising" means to improve the measurement and validation of perceived evaluative style adding that 'perhaps even more objective means can be derived from an analysis of formal evaluation reports and the reported budgetary data'.

In a replication of Hopwood's (1972a) study, Otley (1978) identified five distinct evaluative styles within a single organization, which were based on the perception of subordinates of how their bosses evaluated their performance. Otley's (1978) sample consisted of 41 operating unit managers selected from three geographically different groups within one single company. Each group was headed by one group manager. His results (p. 140) indicated that

'despite considerable differences in perceived evaluative style perceived by managers in each group, there were significant differences between groups... These perceived differences correspond very closely to the nuances of style that senior group managers intend to transmit to their subordinates.'

The second issue, relating to the relevance of the superior-subordinate relationship for evaluative style and its effectiveness, has also been part of the early RAPM debate. Evaluating Kahn's (1972) suggestions Hopwood (1972b, p. 193) says

'... There is no reason to always expect self-reported behavior to correspond to descriptions by others. As recent studies have suggested, the two sets of reports are different, one at times reflecting no more than intended behavior. There are similar problems with presupposing agreement among the managers evaluated by the same supervisor. Disagreement may, of course, reflect biased reports, although several previous studies have found that supervisors do vary their styles in relation to different subordinates. In practice, the data needs analyzing in this manner, although it is also necessary to move beyond looking for simple correspondence to consider the reasons for agreement or otherwise.'

Surprisingly, these issues have been completely ignored or overlooked in the subsequent literature on evaluative style. Still, the limited evidence available from Hopwood (Hopwood, 1972a; 1973) and Otley (1978), combined with the evidence from, for example, the leadership literature on Leader-Member Exchange Theory (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Schiemann, 1978; Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Schriesheim et al., 1999) indicates that the dyad, rather than the work group or the individual subordinate manager, can also be a relevant level of analysis for studying evaluative style effectiveness rather than relying solely on perceptual data from individual subordinates.

3 Empirical illustration

3.1 Research setting and methodology

The relevance of these three issues will be illustrated based on a number of interviews that were conducted within a business unit of a large Dutch service organisation that at the time was in transition from an emphasis on controlling costs to a more quality-oriented strategy. The organisation was chosen because it was a large branch-type organisation, which made it relatively easy to interview subordinate managers at the same level in the organisation and with similar job responsibilities, i.e. branch managers, who report to and are evaluated by the same supervisor, i.e. an area manager. We were able to get access to the organisation through the Head of Management Development.

Data were collected through different sources. We conducted two interviews with the Head of Management Development and collected a number of documents that described the formal design of the performance evaluation system. The Head of Management Development gave us the names of two area managers that we could talk to. Both immediately agreed to participate in the study. In one area (area X) we interviewed the area manager and three branch managers (X1, X2 and X3). In the other area (area Y) we interviewed the area manager (Y), two branch managers (Y1 and Y2) and the manager of Customer Service (Y3). Although the area manager evaluates the latter's performance too, it is important to realize that manager Y3 was in a staff function, not in a line management function. His position was not directly comparable to the position of the branch managers. The Customer Service manager replaced the Area Manager in case of absence. Furthermore, the Customer Service department provided monthly and quarterly management information on the performance of the area as a whole, and all branches within the area. The Service Manager was interviewed to get an independent view on how the area manager evaluated the branch managers.

The branch managers were the lowest management level (of four levels) in the organisation, supervising employees in non-managerial positions. In area Y, the area manager, the two branch managers and the service manager had been working together for over three year. In area X, however, although all three branch managers had considerable tenure, the area manager had only been employed in area X for a couple of months when we conducted the interviews. He did have considerable experience as an area manager, but in other areas. Thus, area manager X had not formally evaluated the branch managers yet, but he had made a management contract with each of the branch managers that would be the basis for their performance evaluation. Given this situation, to capture differences in evaluative style, we explicitly asked the branch managers in area X about possible differences in how their new area manager evaluated their performance in comparison to their previous supervisor. This allowed us to not only compare (perceptions of) evaluative styles of area manager X and Y, but also of area manager X and the former area manager.

An interview protocol was developed to guide the interviews and to collect data in a semi-structured format. The interviews were not tape-recorded. Notes made during the interviews were written out in as much detail as possible directly after the interview. The interview-transcriptions were sent back to interviewees to check the validity of

statements. The data were analysed by creating a data matrix and coding the data as suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994).

3.2 Results and discussion

The findings from the interviews substantiate and further clarify the theoretical arguments made in section 2 regarding the need to broaden the perspective of evaluative style research.

Going beyond quantitative budgetary data

The performance evaluation of the branch managers in both areas are primarily based on the extent to which branch managers meet the targets that are set as part of their yearly management contract. Costs and quality are the two most important performance areas on which targets are included in the contract. Quality refers mainly to delivering mail in time and correctly, and is measured by on-time delivery of mail. The emphasis on quality in evaluating the performance of branch managers is in line with the quality-oriented strategy that the company pursued, while at the same time there was a high emphasis on controlling costs, especially labour costs, because of the labour intensive processes. The interviews also revealed that measures of customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction received increasing attention in the performance evaluation of the branch managers. The inclusion of customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction measures in the performance evaluation of branch managers reflected a recent organizational-wide change of emphasis. Both aspects had been measured for only two years at the time of the interviews as part of the stronger emphasis on quality in addition to cost efficiency.

These findings suggest that in this organisation evaluative styles cannot be distinguished solely on the manner in which budgets are being used, as other non-financial measures receive increasing attention in the performance evaluation of the branch managers. It should be noted however that, in contrast to later measures of evaluative style in the RAPM-literature, Hopwood's (1972a; 1973) original categorization of styles in a Budget Constrained, Profit Conscious, and Non-Accounting category, seems to be able to capture these broader types of information.

Conceptual nestedness of evaluative style effectiveness

However, the interviews also revealed differences in evaluative styles of the two area managers X and Y that casts some doubt on the ability of Hopwood's categorization to fully grasp the subtle nuances in style.

First, in area X, the area manager and the three branch managers all indicated that, besides costs and quality, customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction were part of the management contract of branch managers. Furthermore, both the area manager himself and the three branch managers stressed that the area manager attached importance to these targets, although the primary emphasis remained on cost efficiency, which was given a weight of 50%, and on-time delivery (a weight of approximately 35%). In contrast, in area Y, all four respondents only referred to cost and quality targets as part of the management contract. The interviews revealed that the area manager did consider customer satisfaction and employee motivation in the performance evaluation of branch managers, but merely as an indication of whether the branch managers were 'people managers' and no targets were included in the management contract. According to the service manager, employee satisfaction was part of the performance evaluation, although this was a more subjective part in his opinion than cost efficiency (productivity) and quality targets. These findings suggest that there were important differences in how the recent emphasis of the organization on a broad concept of quality, including internal processes, was dispersed and emphasised by different area managers across the organization.

A second difference in performance evaluation that appeared from the interview data is the emphasis on results (pre-set targets) versus on the processes by which these results were obtained (managerial behaviour). Area manager Y seemed to adhere more strictly to pre-set targets than area manager X. Although branch managers Y1 and Y2 might have been able to explain why they did not achieve their targets, this did not change the fact that area manager Y still thought that they should have attained their targets: managers have either met agreements or they have not; explanations cannot change that. Yet, when managers could provide a reasonable explanation this did influence the consequences of not meeting the targets for their overall evaluation. While area manager X also stressed that the agreements in the contract have to be met, the interviews showed that area manager X put a lot more emphasis on the processes by which branch managers achieved the results than area manager Y, also in the daily practice between formal evaluation moments. The importance of how a branch manager operates was an ever-recurring theme during the interview with area manager X. First, when describing his own function, the

area manager said: 'I regard it as my most important responsibility to determine what has to be realised, but above all how it has to be realised.' Second, concerning his own evaluation, the area manager said he slightly disagreed with how his boss evaluated him, because the evaluation was limited to the items in the contract, while he felt dedication was far more important. Third, the area manager even introduced a special term (a verb) in his area to describe how he expected the (branch) managers to behave: 'a manager has to show ATP', which is Autonomous, Taking initiative, and Problem solving (ATP). ATP was explicitly included in the contract as a formal aspect of performance evaluation in area X.

Together, these findings show the relevance of considering the organisational context in general, and the control system design in particular, on interpretation and meaning of differences in evaluative style and the effectiveness of such differences. First, the emphasis on costs and quality in performance evaluation is not a personal preference of superiors per se. Instead, these items are emphasised throughout the organisation, in line with the organisational strategy. However, the data analysis does reveal that there are differences in how superiors use these measures, not just when actually evaluating the performance of subordinates, but during the whole period in particular. This supports the importance of distinguishing between the evaluative system and evaluative style. Secondly, it is important to realise that although branches within Service Group differed in size, the processes in all branches were very similar, making comparisons and standardised target-setting much easier than in organisations with business units which differ from each other with respect to inputs, processes and outputs. Therefore, internal and external benchmarking was an important part of performance evaluation within Service Group. This could explain the emphasis on meeting cost and quality targets in both areas, and also why the branch managers generally accepted the use of such targets. Furthermore, if subordinates disagreed with targets, discussions about the (level of) targets were based on facts and on the (level of) targets in similar branches. Yet, not all targets are fully controllable by the branch managers, and when they are unable to meet the targets while they know that is the only thing that counts, they will not be motivated anymore to do the best they can. Thus, even though a strong emphasis on meeting the targets seems appropriate, there is also some evidence that an emphasis on the processes through which branch managers attain their targets, especially when evaluating their progress during the period, keeps managers motivated to do the best they can, and will help them to attain their targets. Especially area manager X applies such a style, which can be described as a

more coaching type of style than area manager Y. Furthermore, it may prevent a too narrow focus on short-term performance at the expense of long-term performance. Thus, the interview data also provide some evidence that the behavioural impact of particular evaluative styles should be considered against the background of the 'fit' between the design of the performance evaluation system and the wider organisational context.

Characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship.

The interviews revealed an interesting dyadic dynamic between superiors and subordinate characteristics. In area Y, the descriptions that branch managers Y1 and Y2 gave of area manager Y's evaluative style seemed to be consistent with one another. Furthermore, these descriptions also appeared to be reasonably similar to the descriptions given by the service centre manager and the area manager himself, although, as explained above, there were some small differences regarding the importance of customer satisfaction and employee satisfaction. In area X, however, one of the branch managers had a very different perception of his area manager's style of evaluation than two of his colleagues. The descriptions that branch managers X1 and X2 gave of area manager X's evaluative behaviours were consistent with each other, as well as with the description given by area manager X himself. Both branch managers referred to ATP, which is clearly referring to effort and behaviour, several times during the interviews, similar to the emphasis on ATP in the interview with the area manager. Branch manager X3, however, did not mention ATP once. According to branch manager X3, behaviour and effort were not part of performance evaluation. This branch manager stated that performance evaluation focused on numbers only; performance evaluation is too straightforward in his opinion. Yet, this clearly contradicted the impression the other three interviews provided: effort seemed to be important, and explanations for not attaining targets seemed possible, lest they are realistic. A number of reasons may explain this apparent contradiction. First, branch manager X3's perception of his current area manager's evaluative behaviours may have been coloured by past experiences. As we explained above, area manager X had just recently been appointed and had not formally evaluated the branch managers yet. All three branch managers in area X emphasised that the former area manager evaluated performance very rigidly against pre-set targets. Although this explanation did not emerge from the interview with branch manager X3 himself, a comment from one of his colleagues, branch manager X1, concerning the visit he got from area manager X supports this explanation:

‘As part of the control cycle, we have progress interviews, and two weeks ago the area manager was here. He told me earlier: ‘I will visit you to have a progress interview’. With my former boss I was used to prepare really well, and I had to present very detailed numbers. So, that is what I did. He immediately said: ‘Hey, it goes really well. I do not need to hear that at all. I would really like to know: how do you manage employee motivation?’ So I sat there stammering. I actually knew that he would do it like this, but you are still used to the control cycle, in this case progress interviews.’

But although such past experiences could be part of the explanation, it cannot fully explain why the description of branch manager X3 was so different from the other two branch managers and the area manager.

Second, current performance may influence the perception of evaluative behaviours. The interview with branch manager X3 revealed that he had trouble meeting his targets in the current year. In particular, the branch manager explained that he was using more labour than he was supposed to. He knew there was only a slight chance that he would meet his target on this item. He was sure that he would get a negative evaluation at the end of the year, and seemed to feel threatened by this. In contrast, branch managers X1 and X2 were quite sure they were performing well. Possibly, managers who experience trouble in achieving their targets may perceive their supervisor’s evaluative behaviours in a different way than managers who know they are performing well. In this particular case, this effect may even be stronger because of past experiences (see the first reason above).

Third, while the two former reasons assume the difference in description occurred primarily because of a difference in the perception of performance evaluation, it is also possible that this difference in perception reflected an actual difference in how the area manager evaluated performance. In this particular case, it is possible that area manager X did stress the importance of meeting the targets precisely because branch manager X3 had trouble meeting them. If the area manager at this stage would accept that branch manager X3 will not meet his targets, branch manager X3 may not do the best he can to meet them. Since both branch managers X1 and X2 were likely to meet their targets anyway, there was no need to stress the importance of these targets. With these two managers the emphasis could be on what they did to attain these targets; these managers had to show that they attained their targets because of the way they managed, and not just because they got lucky. However, it should be noted that in the interviews with the area managers, area

managers were asked to indicate how they in general evaluated the performance of branch managers. Thus, we were unable to validate this last explanation with the interview data with the area manager. A different approach could have been to take a more dyadic approach, asking the area manager how he evaluates one or more specific branch managers. Such an approach would not only allow to make a distinction between intended differentiation in evaluative behaviours and perceived differentiation in evaluative behaviours, but also matching intended and perceived evaluative style for each superior-subordinate relationship.

Finally, although the three explanations seem plausible, in the current study the difference could also be due to methodological artifacts, as the respondents from area Y had worked together with their area manager for some years as compared to just a couple of months in area X. This difference in tenure with the supervisor may also reflect differences in the level of trust in the supervisor and/or in the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Leader-member-exchange theory (LMX) (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen & Schiemann, 1978), for example, suggests that leaders will differentiate leadership behaviours towards subordinates within the work-group, based on the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Scandura & Lankau, 1996; Schriesheim et al., 1999). Thus, in area Y the quality of the supervisor-subordinate relationship may be high, while in area X this relationship may be low as there has hardly been time to develop this relationship.

These findings and explanations, however, need further investigation in future studies. Do subordinates' perceptions of their superior's evaluative style differ? And if they do, do these differences reflect differences in the actual style used by the superior, or are they caused by differences in the reading of evaluative style by the subordinates? And when superiors evaluate subordinates in different ways, why? Can differences in personality between subordinates or differences in performance level (partly) explain differences in perceived or intended evaluative style, as our findings may suggest? These are important questions, as they relate to the validity and reliability of research findings that have used subordinate managers' responses for data analysis, as in most of the RAPM-studies, but most of all because they provide new avenues for building the field of evaluative style research beyond RAPM increasing its relevance for management practice.

4 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to demonstrate the relevance of further research on evaluative style that deals with three fundamental issues that RAPM-research has largely ignored by illustrating the relevance using interview data in a Dutch service organisation. Although a very limited number of interviews were used, this paper illuminates three ways to broaden the perspective on evaluative style. First, future studies on evaluative style need to develop tailored measures of evaluative style within the context of a single organisation. This enables the development of concepts of evaluative style that are relevant and valid in the context studied, and 'accommodate changes in contemporary control systems' (Chenhall, 2003, p. 131). In addition, there is a need for future studies on evaluative style that study the behavioural impact of evaluative style as a complement to the impact of the 'fit' between design of components of performance evaluation and the wider organisational context. Finally, future studies need to investigate characteristics of the superior-subordinate relationship in addition to subordinate and superior characteristics. This is necessary to understand the effect of individual characteristics on the perception of evaluative style, and to determine the need for superiors to differentiate evaluative styles between subordinates. Together, these three avenues for future research provide a valuable approach to increase our understanding of evaluative style effectiveness in contemporary organisations.

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