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BEYOND APPRAISAL: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL PERFORMANCE IN THE NIGERIAN ARMY

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a conceptual framework explaining how performance management systems influence personnel performance within the Nigerian Army. Moving beyond episodic, appraisal-centric evaluation models commonly found in public and military bureaucracies, the study conceptualizes performance management as a continuous and leadership-mediated process embedded within a complex operational environment. Drawing on insights from strategic human resource management, military sociology, and performance governance literature, the paper proposes that developmental performance management practices, specifically goal alignment, continuous monitoring, and structured feedback, positively influence personnel performance outcomes. Personnel performance is conceptualized in terms of task performance, operational readiness, and professional competence. The framework further proposes that leadership behavior functions as a mediating mechanism through which performance management practices influence these outcomes, while operational and institutional conditions serve as moderating factors that shape the strength and direction of these relationships. In particular, contextual conditions such as operational tempo, institutional culture, hierarchical structures, and resource constraints may enhance or constrain the effectiveness of formal performance management systems. By situating performance management within the institutional realities of the Nigerian Army, the paper addresses an important gap in military human resource management scholarship in developing-country contexts. The proposed framework offers a theoretically grounded yet practically adaptable model for understanding how continuous performance management processes can enhance personnel effectiveness and institutional performance in military organizations.

Keywords: Performance management, Personnel performance, Nigerian Army, Military HRM, Defence effectiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

Performance management has become a cornerstone of modern organizational governance as institutions increasingly seek to enhance effectiveness, accountability, and strategic alignment. Across both private and public sectors, performance management systems (PMS) are viewed as mechanisms for clarifying expectations, monitoring progress, providing feedback, and developing human capital in pursuit of organizational objectives (Aguinis, 2019; Armstrong, 2021). Unlike traditional performance appraisal, which is often episodic and evaluative, contemporary performance management emphasizes continuous interaction, learning, and alignment with strategy (Maley et al., 2021).

In military organizations, performance management assumes heightened importance due to the direct relationship between personnel performance and national security outcomes. Military institutions operate in high-risk, resource-constrained, and politically

sensitive environments where deficiencies in individual or collective performance can have severe consequences for mission success and human lives (Garbers et al., 2020; Soares et al., 2022). Despite this significance, performance management in military contexts has received relatively limited scholarly attention, and existing studies often focus narrowly on performance appraisal systems, promotion criteria, or training evaluation rather than holistic performance management frameworks (Daka, 2020; Utomo & Fathurrahman, 2022).

The Nigerian Army presents a particularly compelling context for examining performance management. As the largest arm of Nigeria's Armed Forces, the Nigerian Army has been extensively engaged in counter-insurgency operations, internal security tasks, peacekeeping missions, and disaster response. These responsibilities impose substantial cognitive, physical, and emotional demands on personnel, intensifying the need for effective performance management systems that promote readiness, motivation, and professional development (Hawkins et al., 2018). At the same time, the Nigerian Army operates within a developing-country institutional environment characterized by budgetary constraints, evolving civil-military relations, and complex socio-political pressures, which shape the design and implementation of HR practices (Dyaji et al., 2020).

Although performance management has been widely studied in Nigerian public-sector organizations, including the civil service and public universities, empirical evidence suggests persistent challenges in linking appraisal outcomes to development, feedback, and performance improvement (Ojokuku, 2013; Maimela & Samuel, 2016). These challenges are likely magnified in military institutions, where hierarchical command structures, operational secrecy, and cultural norms influence performance processes. Yet, there is limited conceptual clarity on how performance management systems function within the Nigerian Army and how they influence personnel performance.

This paper therefore asks: How do performance management systems influence personnel performance in the Nigerian Army? To address this question, the study adopts a conceptual approach, synthesizing contemporary literature in strategic human resource management, military HRM, and defence performance studies to develop an integrative framework and theoretically grounded propositions. The paper contributes to the literature in three ways: first, by contextualizing performance management within the Nigerian Army, responding to calls for greater attention to non-Western and developing-country military contexts (Soares et al., 2022); second, by advancing a conceptual framework that explains the pathways through which performance management practices affect personnel performance in a military institution; and third, by proposing testable propositions to guide future empirical research and inform defence policy and leadership practice.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Performance Management: From Appraisal to Strategic Alignment

Performance management is widely conceptualized as a continuous and systematic process aimed at improving organizational outcomes by enhancing individual and team performance (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006; Armstrong, 2021). Early performance appraisal systems focused primarily on evaluating past performance for administrative purposes, such as promotion and pay decisions. However, critics argued that appraisal-centric systems were episodic, backward-looking, and often demotivating (Murphy et al., 2018).

In response, contemporary performance management frameworks emphasize goal setting, performance monitoring, feedback, coaching, and development as interconnected processes aligned with organizational strategy (Aguinis, 2019; Maley et al., 2021). From a strategic human resource management perspective, performance management systems are viewed as mechanisms that translate organizational strategy into individual behavior, thereby enhancing organizational effectiveness (Den Hartog et al., 2004).

Public-sector scholarship similarly highlights performance management as a tool for improving accountability, transparency, and service delivery (Stanton & Nankervis, 2011). Empirical evidence from developing countries suggests that when effectively implemented, performance management practices such as feedback, training, and participatory goal setting positively influence employee performance, even in

resource-constrained environments (Ab Rashid et al., 2020; Omigie & Kubeyinje, 2022).

2.1.2 Contemporary Developments in Performance Management Theory

Recent scholarship indicates a significant shift in performance management from traditional, episodic appraisal systems towards continuous, feedback-oriented and development-focused models. Contemporary studies emphasize that continuous performance management enhances real-time learning, employee engagement, and strategic alignment, particularly in complex and dynamic organizational environments (Bin Jarsh, 2025; Mishra, 2024). This shift reflects growing dissatisfaction with annual performance reviews, which are increasingly viewed as backward-looking and insufficient for supporting sustained performance improvement.

Emerging research further suggests that continuous feedback systems contribute to organizational agility by enabling employees to adjust behavior promptly in response to changing demands (Aguinis, 2019; Pulakos et al., 2015). Such adaptive performance management approaches are especially relevant in high-uncertainty contexts, where rigid evaluation cycles may undermine responsiveness and learning. Consequently, recent performance management literature increasingly conceptualizes performance management as a collaborative and developmental process, rather than a mechanism of administrative control (Bin Jarsh, 2025).

2.1.3 Performance Management in Military Organizations

Military organizations exhibit distinct structural and cultural characteristics that differentiate them from civilian institutions. Hierarchical command structures, standardized procedures, and strong organizational cultures shape how performance is defined, assessed, and managed (Bilgic & Sümer, 2009; Krishnakumar et al., 2019). Performance in military contexts is often collective, emphasizing teamwork, coordination, and mission success rather than solely individual output.

Existing studies on military performance management largely focus on appraisal systems, promotion ranking, and training effectiveness (Moon et al., 2010; Daka, 2020). While these studies provide valuable insights, they offer a fragmented view of performance management and often neglect broader developmental and strategic dimensions. Recent defence studies have called for integrated performance management frameworks that link strategic objectives, operational activities, and personnel performance (Soares et al., 2022).

2.1.4 Emerging Perspectives on Military Performance Management

Recent empirical studies in military and defence institutions underscore the importance of fairness, justice, and feedback quality in shaping personnel attitudes towards performance management systems. For example, Oschman and Matjie (2025), in their study of the South African Air Force, found that positive appraisal experiences were associated with higher acceptance of performance management systems and stronger organizational commitment. These findings suggest that personnel perceptions play a critical role in determining the effectiveness of performance management practices in military settings.

Additionally, recent defence performance research emphasizes that military effectiveness under conditions of sustained operational stress requires integrated performance management approaches that combine evaluation with continuous development and training (Abdurachman et al., 2023). Scholars argue that episodic appraisal systems are insufficient for capturing the dynamic and collective nature of military performance, advocating instead for adaptive performance management frameworks aligned with operational realities and leadership practices.

2.1.5 The Nigerian Army Context

The Nigerian Army operates in a challenging security environment marked by insurgency, terrorism, and internal security operations. These operational realities heighten the importance of personnel performance, resilience, and adaptability (Hawkins et al., 2018). At the same time, the Army's hierarchical command structure and institutional culture influence how performance management practices are perceived and enacted.

Empirical studies on Nigerian public-sector organizations indicate that performance management practices significantly influence employee performance but are often undermined by weak feedback mechanisms and limited developmental follow-through (Ojokuku,

2013; Maimela & Samuel, 2016). In the military context, these challenges may be exacerbated by operational secrecy and rigid command norms. However, research on motivation and service delivery in Nigerian Army formations suggests that leadership behavior and performance-related incentives strongly influence personnel outcomes (Dyaji et al., 2020). Despite these insights, there remains a lack of integrative conceptual models explaining how performance management systems influence personnel performance in the Nigerian Army, a gap this study addresses.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives: Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) Theory, Goal Setting Theory, and Leadership Theory.

Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) Theory posits that HR practices, when aligned with organizational strategy, create human capital advantages that enhance performance (Bratton & Gold, 2017). Performance management systems are central to this alignment, as they communicate strategic priorities, shape behavior, and facilitate learning and development. In non-market organizations such as the military, SHRM logic remains relevant, albeit adapted to institutional rather than competitive objectives. Military organizations seek effectiveness in terms of readiness, mission accomplishment, and operational efficiency rather than profit. Performance management thus serves as a strategic capability that aligns personnel effort with defence objectives (Garbers et al., 2020).

Goal Setting Theory, developed by Locke and Latham (1990), posits that specific and challenging goals, accompanied by regular feedback, enhance task performance. The theory emphasizes that goal clarity, feedback, and commitment are essential for performance improvement. In military contexts, goal alignment ensures that individual actions contribute directly to unit readiness and mission effectiveness. When personnel clearly understand how their individual roles contribute to collective objectives, motivation and performance outcomes tend to improve (Boselie, 2014; Kaplan & Norton, 2006).

Leadership Theory, particularly the Full-Range Leadership Model (Bass & Avolio, 1994), provides the foundation for understanding how leaders translate formal performance management systems into everyday supervisory practices. Leadership behaviors including coaching, developmental support, and effective communication play a crucial role in shaping how performance management practices are perceived and enacted by personnel (Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2022). In military settings, leadership engagement is critical for ensuring that performance management systems move beyond compliance and evaluation towards learning and capability development (Oschman & Matjie, 2025).

2.3 Empirical Review

Several empirical studies have examined aspects of the relationship between performance management practices and personnel performance in both civilian and military contexts, though gaps remain in developing-country military settings.

In a study conducted among 350 public sector employees in Malaysia, Ab Rashid, Hamzah, and Ramli (2020) investigated the impact of performance management practices on employee performance. Using a quantitative survey design and regression analysis, the study found that goal clarity ($\beta = 0.34$, $p < 0.01$), feedback quality ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$), and supervisory support ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) significantly predicted employee performance. The study recommended that organizations prioritize continuous feedback over annual appraisals. However, the study was conducted in a civilian public sector context, limiting its direct applicability to military organizations.

In a study specifically focused on military context, Daka (2020) examined performance appraisal and employee productivity in Zambian military organizations. Using a mixed-methods design with 200 respondents, the study found that appraisal systems were perceived as administrative tools rather than developmental mechanisms, with only 32% of respondents reporting that appraisals led to performance improvement. The study recommended that military organizations integrate developmental feedback into appraisal processes. However, the study focused exclusively on appraisal rather than holistic performance management.

More recently, Oschman and Matjie (2025) studied employees' experiences with performance appraisals in the South African Air Force. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach with 15 participants, the study found that positive appraisal experiences were

associated with higher acceptance of performance management systems and stronger organizational commitment. Participants emphasized that fairness, transparency, and leader engagement were critical determinants of appraisal effectiveness. The study recommended that military organizations train leaders in constructive feedback delivery.

In the Nigerian context, Ojokuku (2013) examined performance management practices and employee productivity in Nigerian public organizations. Using a sample of 400 respondents and regression analysis, the study found that performance management practices explained 28% of the variance in employee productivity ($R^2 = 0.28$), with goal setting ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.01$) and feedback ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$) as significant predictors. Similarly, Maimela and Samuel (2016) studied perceptions of performance management systems in the South African public sector, finding that weak feedback mechanisms and limited developmental follow-through undermined system effectiveness.

The empirical gaps evident from this review are as follows: (i) no study has developed a comprehensive conceptual framework explaining how performance management systems influence personnel performance in the Nigerian Army; (ii) existing military performance management studies focus narrowly on appraisal rather than holistic, development-oriented systems; (iii) the mediating role of leadership in the performance management–performance relationship has received limited attention in military contexts; (iv) the moderating effects of operational and institutional conditions (operational tempo, hierarchical culture, resource constraints) remain under-theorized; and (v) developing-country military contexts remain underrepresented in performance management scholarship. The present study addresses these gaps by developing an integrative conceptual framework grounded in contemporary literature and contextualized to the Nigerian Army.

2.4 Conceptual Model

Based on the theoretical framework and empirical review, the following conceptual model guides this study. The independent variable (Performance Management Practices) comprises three dimensions: goal alignment, performance monitoring, and developmental feedback. The dependent variable (Personnel Performance) is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising task performance, operational readiness, and professional competence. Leadership behavior serves as a mediating variable, while operational and institutional conditions (operational tempo, institutional culture, hierarchical structures, resource constraints) function as moderating variables.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a conceptual research approach grounded in an integrative and critical synthesis of extant literature on performance management, strategic human resource management, military HRM, and defence performance studies. Conceptual research is particularly appropriate where empirical evidence is fragmented, underdeveloped, or difficult to access, as is often the case in military contexts due to security sensitivities, operational secrecy, and institutional restrictions (Kothari, 1990; Soares et al., 2022). Rather than collecting primary data, the study systematically reviews peer-reviewed journal articles, defence policy reports, and authoritative academic books published between 2000 and 2025. Emphasis is placed on identifying dominant theoretical perspectives, key constructs, and relational patterns linking performance management systems to personnel performance.

Recent literature (2023–2025) was prioritized to capture contemporary debates on performance management, leadership, and military effectiveness (Armstrong, 2021; Maley et al., 2021; Soares et al., 2022). The integrative review approach allows for the combination of insights from multiple disciplines, including management, public administration, and defence studies, thereby enabling the development of a coherent conceptual framework (Den Hartog et al., 2004). This approach moves beyond descriptive summarization to theoretical abstraction and synthesis, which are essential for framework building and proposition development (DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006). The Nigerian Army is employed as the contextual anchor for the conceptual analysis. This anchoring is justified on two grounds. First, the Nigerian Army operates in a complex and demanding security environment, making it an analytically rich case for examining performance management under pressure (Hawkins et al., 2018). Second, developing-country military contexts remain underrepresented in performance management literature, limiting the generalizability of dominant Western-centric models (Utomo & Fathurrahman, 2022). While the framework is grounded in the Nigerian Army context, its underlying

assumptions and relational mechanisms are theoretically transferable to military organizations operating under similar institutional and operational conditions.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Conceptual Framework

Performance management systems are widely conceptualized as strategic organizational mechanisms that align individual behaviour with institutional objectives through goal setting, continuous monitoring, and structured feedback processes (Aguinis, 2019; DeNisi & Pritchard, 2006). Beyond their evaluative function, contemporary perspectives emphasize that effective performance management systems facilitate learning, capability development, and behavioural alignment, thereby enhancing both individual and organizational performance outcomes (Pulakos et al., 2015; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

This study proposes a multilevel conceptual framework that explains how performance management practices influence personnel performance within the operational and institutional environment of the Nigerian Army. The framework integrates insights from strategic human resource management and military organizational studies to conceptualize performance management not merely as an administrative appraisal exercise but as a continuous developmental process embedded within leadership interactions and operational realities (Aguinis, 2019; Armstrong, 2021; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017).

4.1.1 Independent Variable: Performance Management Practices

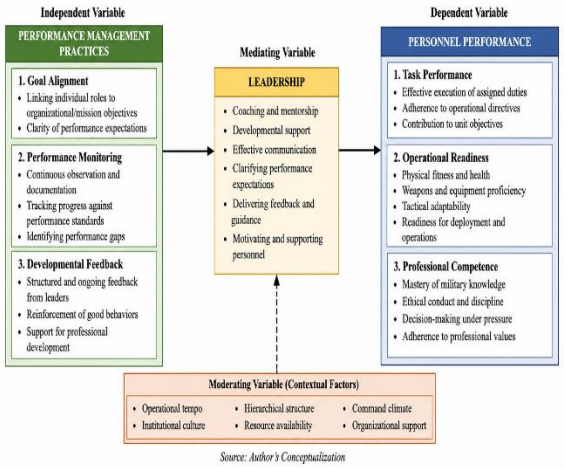
At the core of the framework are performance management practices, which constitute the independent variable. Within this framework, three core components of performance management practices are emphasized: goal alignment, performance monitoring, and developmental feedback.

Goal alignment refers to the extent to which individual responsibilities and performance expectations are explicitly linked to broader organizational and mission objectives. Strategic human resource management research suggests that when employees clearly understand how their individual roles contribute to collective objectives, motivation and performance outcomes tend to improve (Boselie, 2014; Kaplan & Norton, 2006). In military environments, goal alignment ensures that individual actions contribute directly to unit readiness and mission effectiveness.

Performance monitoring involves the systematic observation and documentation of personnel activities and outcomes relative to defined performance standards. Continuous monitoring enables commanders and supervisors to assess progress toward mission objectives, identify performance gaps, and provide timely guidance for improvement (Pulakos et al., 2015). In high-reliability organizations such as the military, ongoing monitoring is essential for maintaining operational standards and ensuring accountability (Snider & Matthews, 2012).

Developmental feedback refers to structured and ongoing communication between leaders and personnel aimed at reinforcing effective behaviors, correcting deficiencies, and facilitating professional development. Research in performance management consistently demonstrates that frequent and constructive feedback enhances employee learning, motivation, and performance outcomes (London & Smither, 2002; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). Within military contexts, feedback mechanisms are often embedded in training exercises, operational debriefings, and after-action reviews designed to improve collective learning and performance (Aguinis, 2019).

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Performance Management and Personnel Performance in the Nigerian Army



Source: Author's Conceptualization

4.1.2 Dependent Variable: Personnel Performance

The framework proposes that these practices influence personnel performance, which represents the dependent variable in the model. Personnel performance is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising task performance, operational readiness, and professional competence.

Task performance refers to the degree to which personnel effectively execute assigned duties in accordance with operational directives and standard operating procedures. In the Nigerian Army context, this includes the ability to carry out mission tasks accurately, maintain discipline in training and deployment environments, and contribute effectively to unit operational objectives (Snider & Matthews, 2012).

Operational readiness refers to the preparedness of personnel to participate in combat or support operations. This dimension encompasses physical fitness standards, weapons and equipment proficiency, tactical adaptability, and the capacity to deploy effectively when required. Operational readiness is widely recognized as a central indicator of military effectiveness because it reflects the ability of personnel and units to respond to emerging security challenges (Aguinis, 2019).

Professional competence reflects the observable mastery of military knowledge, ethical conduct, and decision-making capabilities required for effective service. In contemporary operational environments characterized by counter-insurgency and asymmetric warfare, professional competence includes the ability to apply tactical judgment, maintain discipline under pressure, and adhere to professional military values (Huntington, 1957; Snider & Matthews, 2012).

4.1.3 Mediating Variable: Leadership Behaviour

The framework further proposes that leadership functions as a mediating mechanism between performance management practices and personnel performance. Leadership behaviours including coaching, developmental support, and effective communication play a crucial role in translating formal performance management systems into everyday supervisory practices that influence personnel behaviour and motivation (Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2022). Through these leadership processes, performance expectations are clarified, developmental feedback is delivered, and personnel are supported in achieving both individual and unit performance objectives. Empirical evidence from both civilian and military contexts suggests that leadership commitment enhances the credibility and effectiveness of performance management systems by fostering trust, fairness, and motivation (Krishnakumar et al., 2019). In the Nigerian Army, leadership effectiveness is particularly salient given the hierarchical command structure and the reliance on obedience and discipline. When leaders actively engage in performance dialogue and development, personnel are more likely to perceive PMS as supportive rather than punitive.

4.1.4 Moderating Variables: Operational and Institutional Context

Finally, the model recognizes that the relationship between performance management practices and personnel performance operates within a broader operational and institutional context. Organizational context is widely recognized in HRM research as a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of performance management systems (Boselie, 2014). In military organizations, contextual conditions such as operational tempo, institutional culture, hierarchical structures, and resource availability may strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of performance management practices. These contextual conditions therefore function as moderating variables that influence how performance management practices translate into personnel performance outcomes.

Operational tempo refers to the intensity and frequency of operational deployments and training activities. High operational tempo environments are common in contemporary military operations, particularly in contexts involving counter-insurgency and asymmetric security challenges. Under such conditions, commanders often face severe time constraints that limit the opportunity for formal performance monitoring processes or structured evaluation procedures (Aguinis, 2019). As a result, the influence of formal performance monitoring systems may weaken during periods of intense operational activity. Conversely, informal and leadership-driven feedback processes may become more influential, as commanders rely on real-time coaching and immediate corrective guidance to sustain performance in dynamic operational environments (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

Institutional culture, particularly the degree of hierarchical rigidity within the organization, serves as another important moderating factor. Military

institutions are traditionally characterized by strong hierarchical structures, centralized authority, and clearly defined chains of command (Huntington, 1957). While such structures are essential for operational discipline and coordination, they may also constrain open dialogue and developmental feedback if communication channels become excessively formalized. However, this tension does not necessarily imply incompatibility. In practice, developmental feedback can coexist with hierarchical authority structures when it is embedded within formal command routines and institutionalized learning processes. Structured mechanisms such as after-action reviews, training debriefings, and performance briefings provide opportunities for constructive feedback while preserving established command relationships (Aguinis, 2019; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015).

4.1.5 Performance Management Practices in the Nigerian Army

In the Nigerian Army, performance management practices are embedded within formal military procedures, including training regimes, appraisal systems, promotion criteria, and operational evaluations. Goal alignment is achieved through the cascading of strategic and operational objectives from higher command levels to units and individual personnel. Clear articulation of mission objectives and performance expectations is critical, as ambiguity can undermine coordination and operational effectiveness (Stojković & Stojanović, 2012). Performance monitoring and appraisal provide mechanisms for assessing task accomplishment, behavioural compliance, and professional competence. However, extant literature suggests that appraisal systems in military and public-sector contexts often prioritize administrative control over developmental feedback, limiting their performance-enhancing potential (Murphy et al., 2018; Daka, 2020). In contrast, contemporary performance management theory emphasizes continuous monitoring and adaptive adjustment rather than episodic evaluation (Armstrong, 2021). Feedback, coaching, and development constitute the developmental core of performance management. Continuous feedback enables personnel to understand performance gaps and adjust behaviour in real time, while training and professional development enhance capability and readiness (Aguinis, 2019). In high-risk military environments such as those faced by the Nigerian Army, developmental support is particularly critical for sustaining performance under stress (Hawkins et al., 2018).

4.2 Propositions Development

Based on the conceptual framework presented above, the following propositions are advanced for future empirical investigation.

Proposition 1a: Developmental performance management practices, particularly coaching and structured feedback, will exhibit a stronger positive association with personnel performance than purely administrative appraisal practices within the Nigerian Army.

Proposition 1b: Goal alignment between individual performance objectives and unit mission goals will positively predict task performance and operational readiness among military personnel.

Proposition 2: Leadership mediates the relationship between performance management practices and personnel performance, such that effective leadership behaviours strengthen the impact of developmental performance management practices on performance outcomes.

Proposition 3a: The frequency and quality of structured feedback strengthen the positive relationship between goal alignment and personnel performance.

Proposition 3b: High operational tempo weakens the influence of formal performance monitoring systems but strengthens the influence of leadership-driven feedback on personnel performance.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The moderating role of operational and institutional context observed in the framework is supported by contingency-based human resource management literature, which emphasizes that the effectiveness of management practices varies across organizational environments (Paauwe, 2009; Den Hartog et al., 2004). In military settings characterized by high operational demands and hierarchical command structures, contextual factors such as operational tempo and institutional culture can either constrain or enhance the effectiveness of formal performance management systems (Pulakos et al., 2015; Oschman & Matjie, 2025). The proposed framework demonstrates that performance

management influences personnel performance not merely through formal appraisal but through a complex interaction of goal alignment, leadership behaviour, and contextual contingencies.

The mediating role of leadership underscores the importance of command-level engagement in performance management. This finding aligns with a growing body of research which indicates that performance management systems contribute to improved employee outcomes when they are implemented as continuous, development-oriented processes rather than episodic appraisal exercises (DeNisi & Murphy, 2017; Aguinis, 2019). Prior studies have demonstrated that the integration of feedback, coaching, and goal alignment mechanisms enhances employee engagement, learning, and performance across diverse organizational contexts (Pulakos et al., 2015; Ab Rashid et al., 2020). Additionally, the framework highlights the conditional nature of PMS effectiveness, suggesting that rigid, one-size-fits-all approaches are unlikely to succeed in dynamic military environments.

This study's conceptual framework aligns with contemporary shifts in performance management scholarship that emphasize continuous feedback and development as central to effective performance management. Recent studies on organizational performance management show that continuous, real-time feedback improves employee engagement and goal alignment more effectively than traditional annual appraisal systems (Bin Jarsh, 2025; Mishra, 2024). These findings reinforce the argument that in dynamic and high-stakes environments like the Nigerian Army, static appraisal mechanisms are insufficient for driving sustained performance improvement.

The central role of leadership observed in this study is consistent with established leadership and human resource management literature, which identifies leaders as key actors in shaping the effectiveness of performance management systems. Leadership behaviours such as coaching, communication, and developmental support have been shown to strengthen the relationship between performance management practices and employee performance outcomes (Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2022; Abdurachman et al., 2023). This supports the framework's emphasis on leadership commitment as a mediating force, especially relevant in military contexts where the chain of command influences how performance practices are interpreted and enacted.

Recent empirical evidence from air force settings also highlights the critical role of perceptions of fairness and justice in appraisal and performance systems (Oschman & Matjie, 2025). These attitudinal components are key for ensuring acceptance and engagement with performance management, which in turn affects organizational commitment and performance outcomes. Moreover, defence performance research focusing on operational resilience under stress underscores the need for performance systems that incorporate both training effectiveness and ongoing measurement rather than episodic evaluation (Smith et al., 2024). This aligns with the conceptualization of performance management in this paper as a continuous and adaptive process responsive to contextual demands, rather than a formalistic yearly event. By integrating these recent perspectives, the study reinforces the need for performance management systems that emphasize ongoing feedback, leadership engagement, and adaptability-principles that are particularly relevant for enhancing personnel performance in military institutions such as the Nigerian Army.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study developed a conceptual framework explaining how performance management systems influence personnel performance within the Nigerian Army. Moving beyond episodic, appraisal-centric evaluation models, the study conceptualized performance management as a continuous and leadership-mediated process embedded within a complex operational environment. The framework proposed that developmental performance management practices-specifically goal alignment, continuous monitoring, and structured feedback-positively influence personnel performance outcomes, which were conceptualized in terms of task performance, operational readiness, and professional competence. The framework further proposed that leadership behaviour functions as a mediating mechanism, while operational and institutional conditions (operational tempo, institutional culture, hierarchical structures, resource constraints) serve as moderating factors. Five testable propositions were advanced to guide future empirical investigation.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that performance management in the Nigerian Army should be conceptualized not as a discrete evaluative tool but as an integrated, leadership-driven, and context-sensitive system that supports continuous performance improvement and organizational effectiveness (Aguinis, 2019; DeNisi & Murphy, 2017). The study further concludes that leadership plays a central mediating role in translating performance management practices into improved personnel outcomes, while operational and institutional conditions shape the effectiveness of these processes. In contrast to traditional appraisal-centric systems that rely on periodic evaluation, the framework conceptualizes performance management as a continuous developmental process embedded within leadership interactions and operational realities.

The study also concludes that developmental performance management practices, particularly goal alignment, monitoring, and structured feedback, can influence measurable personnel outcomes such as task performance, operational readiness, and professional competence when effectively implemented. However, the effectiveness of these practices is contingent upon leadership commitment and the broader operational context. High operational tempo may weaken formal monitoring systems but strengthen the influence of leadership-driven feedback, suggesting that adaptive, context-sensitive approaches are necessary.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this conceptual study, the following recommendations are offered for the Nigerian Army, defence policymakers, and future researchers.

Recommendation 1: Prioritize Developmental Performance Management over Administrative Appraisal. The Nigerian Army should shift from episodic, appraisal-centric evaluation systems towards continuous, development-oriented performance management processes. This includes replacing or supplementing annual performance reviews with quarterly feedback sessions, after-action reviews, and real-time coaching. Commanders should be trained to frame performance discussions around development and learning rather than solely administrative outcomes.

Recommendation 2: Invest in Leadership Development for Performance Management. Given the mediating role of leadership, the Nigerian Army should integrate performance management competencies into leadership training programmes at all command levels. This includes training on constructive feedback delivery, coaching techniques, performance dialogue, and the use of after-action reviews for developmental purposes. Leadership performance should be evaluated partly on the basis of how effectively commanders develop their subordinates through performance management processes.

Recommendation 3: Institutionalize Continuous Feedback Mechanisms. The Nigerian Army should establish structured yet flexible feedback mechanisms that operate continuously rather than episodically. This can be achieved through routine performance briefings, training debriefings, operational after-action reviews, and digital performance tracking tools where security permits. Feedback should be timely, specific, and actionable, focusing on both behavioural reinforcement and corrective guidance.

Recommendation 4: Adapt Performance Management to Operational Context. Defence policymakers should recognize that rigid, one-size-fits-all performance management approaches are unlikely to succeed in dynamic operational environments. During periods of high operational tempo, formal monitoring systems should be simplified, and leadership-driven, informal feedback processes should be emphasized. Conversely, during stabilization and training periods, more structured performance management processes can be implemented. Context-adaptive protocols should be developed and disseminated.

Recommendation 5: Align Individual Goals with Unit and Mission Objectives. The Nigerian Army should strengthen goal alignment processes by ensuring that individual performance objectives are explicitly linked to unit mission goals and strategic defence objectives. This cascading process should be transparent, participatory, and documented. Personnel should receive regular updates on how their contributions affect unit and mission outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Address Institutional and Cultural Barriers. The Nigerian Army should examine institutional culture and hierarchical structures that may constrain open performance dialogue. While command authority is essential, mechanisms for upward feedback, confidential performance discussions, and psychological

safety should be enhanced. Structured mechanisms such as command climate surveys, confidential feedback channels, and protected performance dialogue sessions can facilitate open communication without undermining authority.

Recommendation 7: Develop Performance Management Metrics for Personnel Outcomes. The Nigerian Army should develop and validate performance metrics that capture the multidimensional nature of personnel performance, including task performance, operational readiness, and professional competence. These metrics should be integrated into training evaluation, promotion criteria, and unit readiness assessments.

5.4 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the study is conceptual in nature and therefore does not provide empirical evidence to validate the proposed framework or propositions. While conceptual analysis is appropriate for theory development and contextual exploration, the absence of primary data limits the ability to draw causal conclusions about the relationships between performance management practices and personnel performance. Second, the framework is anchored on the Nigerian Army, which, although analytically valuable, may limit the direct generalizability of findings to military organizations operating under different institutional or cultural conditions. Third, the study did not empirically test the proposed propositions, leaving validation to future research.

Future research may adopt both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationships proposed in this model. Quantitative studies may employ adapted versions of established performance management effectiveness scales, leadership behavior inventories, and operational readiness indicators to measure the key constructs identified in the framework. Structured personnel evaluation records and training performance metrics may also provide useful data sources for assessing task performance and operational readiness within military settings. Qualitative approaches may complement these methods by providing deeper insight into leadership practices and performance management processes within military units. Semi-structured interviews with commanding officers and senior non-commissioned officers could explore how performance feedback is delivered and how leadership behaviors influence personnel development. Focus group discussions with personnel in training institutions may also provide valuable perspectives on how performance management systems operate in practice.

One of the primary challenges in conducting empirical research within military organizations is limited access to operational data. Future researchers may address this challenge by partnering with defence colleges and military training institutions, where academic research is more feasible and security restrictions are less restrictive. Another approach is to utilize anonymized command-climate surveys or personnel development assessments that capture leadership and performance management practices without compromising operational security. Initial empirical validation of the framework may also be conducted within administrative units, training institutions, or professional military education environments before extending the analysis to operational formations. Methodologically, future studies could employ cross-sectional mediation models to examine leadership's mediating role, longitudinal designs to track feedback cycles over time, or multilevel modelling approaches that analyze leadership behavior at the unit level alongside individual performance outcomes. Through such empirical investigations, the conceptual relationships proposed in this study can be refined, validated, and adapted for broader application across military and public-sector organizations.

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