

**Institutionalism and its Effect on HRM in the ASEAN Context:
Challenges and Opportunities for Future Research**

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Abstract

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has emerged as a dynamically developing market with remarkable economic achievements. However, HRM research in this bloc seems to lag behind Western countries. We conduct a systematic literature review to examine the development of HRM in ASEAN in accordance with its historical and institutional attributes and conditions. To do so, our analysis is mainly rooted in the relevant literatures on the core themes that are searched from a variety of databases such as ProQuest, ESBCO, books and webpages of relevant journals. This analysis helps to identify institutional constraints that may influence HRM practices in ASEAN, and thus develop an ASEAN-based HRM framework, and accordingly propose important directions for future research in this promising and under-researched context. This integrative framework would lay the useful foundation for researchers to theorize and examine the determinants of HRM and their effects on organizational performance.

Key words: ASEAN; HRM; institutional contexts; institutional constraints.

Highlights

- This paper provides an overview of institutional context of the ASEAN countries.
- This paper systematically reviews and evaluates the constraints of HRM practices in ASEAN.
- This paper devises an ASEAN-based HRM framework via the theoretical insights of institutional theory.
- This paper highlights the challenges and gaps in the study of HRM in ASEAN, and thus proposes future research directions.

1. Introduction

1.1. Why investigate HRM in the ASEAN context?

Over the past decade or so, the ASEAN region (which includes Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam) has emerged as a high economic growth area in comparison with other regions of the world and is considered to be the most successful regional organization in the developing world. Some of the key countries (also called as the emerging stars) that have made profound achievements in socio-economic developments in the region include Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam (Budhwar, Varma & Patel, 2016). This bloc has therefore become a key player in the global economy and is also attracting lots of foreign investments from economic powers such as the USA, European countries, China and India (e.g., EU's and India's 2016 FDI flows in ASEAN were \$30,465 and \$12,645.5 millions respectively) (the ASEAN Secretariat & UNCTAD, 2017).

The growing clout of ASEAN's member economies on the world economic scene is an outcome of numerous key factors. First, as a single market and production base with minimal economic barriers marking a major milestone in the regional economic integration, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) is expected to become a highly competitive economic region (Wailerssak, 2013). Second, the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Cooperation between ten Southeast Asian Nations and three East Asian Nations of China, Japan and South Korea makes this bloc an important and prestigious business partner in Asia. Third, ASEAN has a huge population of about 622 million, thereby becoming an increasingly attractive destination for FDI because of its large working-age population (60% of whom are working age), and low labor costs (Bartram, Stanton & Thomas, 2009). Fourth, ASEAN is endowed with abundant resources as well as is positioned in a gateway connecting East Asia with Eastern

Europe and Middle East, thereby being especially convenient for worldwide investors to trade and do business in this bloc. Finally, ASEAN is deemed as a resilient region against the last global economic crisis, thereby indicating that this bloc is likely to survive, develop and succeed in the long-term.

The aforementioned developments have drawn much attention from management scholars in undertaking research on issues such as management practices, organizational strategies, institutional environments directly relevant to the bloc (e.g., Andrews & Chompusri, 2005; Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002). As such, there is a steady rise in the number of publications dedicated to addressing issues such as management initiatives, conflict management, management strategies directly influencing ASEAN (e.g., Askandar, Bercowtch & Oishi, 2002; Do, Budhwar & Patel, 2018; Jetly, 2003). However, it is important to highlight that undertaking the management scholarship has been unbalanced across different subdomains of management. In particular, the field of HRM has lagged behind other areas of management in this respect, with the dominant philosophy in HRM still being one that is rooted in a simple theoretical model typically investigating the nature and influence of HRM systems - the overlook of the determinants of HRM; a lack of a standardized framework for understanding HRM research in ASEAN; a single-level perspective typically focusing on the individual or organizational level (e.g., Chew & Sharma, 2005; Do & Shipton, 2019); the dominance of cross-sectional research designs (e.g., Chow, Teo & Chew, 2013); a lack of strategic HRM; a dearth of robust literature that may cast light on and provide a comprehensive picture of the key aspects of HRM in the bloc; and a scarcity of cross-cultural comparative studies among countries in the region. This special issue provides a unique opportunity for us to stand back and conduct a robust literature review of HRM developments in ASEAN with a view to identifying critical gaps for future research in this context. In doing so, we intend to highlight key research gaps by exploring the development of HRM in line with ASEAN's historical and institutional forces over the past 30 years.

1.2. Aims of the paper

ASEAN is characterized as institutionally complex environments that are expected to provide an interesting context for the scholarship research. Under the pressure of globalization and harsh competition, ASEAN organizations need to be more strategic in relating their HRM policies and practices to firm performance. As such, there is growing evidence that HRM in the bloc is becoming more systematic and market oriented, with evidence of adaptation of Western HR techniques in a certain context (e.g., Vo & Stanton, 2011; Zhu, Collins, Webber

& Benson, 2008). Considering such developments, it is necessary to conduct a systematic review of literature with regard to the development of HRM that significantly contributes to further advancing and understanding this core area of HRM research. By doing so, we can identify important historical and institutional conditions that may influence the determinants and effects of HRM in this context, thereby developing an ASEAN-based HRM framework and accordingly proposing potential avenues for future research to take the field forward.

Our aims are therefore three-fold. First, we trace and provide an overview of historical, political, socio-cultural and economic conditions of the ASEAN countries. These institutional forces help lay the foundation for evaluating and relating them to HRM policies and practices in this context. Second, we build upon the idea of institutional constraint of HRM offered by Lewis et al. (2019) to systematically review and evaluate the constraints of HRM practices in ASEAN. Next, we extend institutional theory and synthesize from the different insights from early research in order to devise an ASEAN-based HRM framework that captures what, how and why HRM practices can be theorized and examined in the bloc. This framework should serve as a useful guide for future research undertakings. Finally, drawing upon the evaluation of current state of HRM studies in the area, we emphasize the key challenges and gaps faced by the application and analysis of HRM practices in the bloc, and thus propose avenues for future research with a view to helping researchers theorize and investigate the nature of how and why HRM drives performance.

1.3. Methodology and key results

In order to ascertain that we are able to achieve the above aims and our analyses are conducted in a robust and systematic manner, we build upon early work regarding analytical techniques of literature review papers (e.g., Budhwar, Pereira, Mellahi & Singh, 2018; Bell, Kothiyal & Willmott, 2017) in this paper. It is noteworthy that our analyses in the current paper are based on secondary information synthesized from the relevant literatures on the core themes. We therefore deploy ProQuest for searching articles that are relevant and concentrate on key HRM themes and terms relevant for our analysis. We also ensure that any article used for this analysis must be peer-reviewed and available in full-text format. To do so, we conducted a number of Boolean filter searches using relevant terms of our discipline topics of interest, countries of origin and thematic areas. Table 1 illustrates five key titles used to represent the HR discipline across ASEAN nations.

Our results suggest that the number of studies is greatest when we conducted our searches with general terms such as “human resource management,” and “people management”, “HRM” and “HR” whereas the number is significantly reduced when we searched with “HRM and performance”. Also, of interest is that when we used the same key words for ASEAN, the number of articles is relatively small. This reflects that the ASEAN context seems to be relatively little known about and underexplored in the HRM literature. In order to address the two parameters of “quality” and “recentness,” we extended our search for various online archives such as ProQuest, ESBCO, and books and from the webpages of relevant journals (Budhwar et al., 2016; Budhwar et al., 2018). We used the inputs from searched articles in order to shape and develop the key themes for the paper: (i) the historical institutional context of ASEAN, (ii) context-specific HRM, (iii) (vi) empirical evidence of HRM research in ASEAN; (iv) an integrative framework for undertaking HRM in ASEAN, and (v) themes for future research in ASEAN.

Insert Table 1 about [here](#)

2. The ASEAN context – An institutional lens

Institutional theory is the key to understanding the development of HRM in connection with changes in institutional environments in a certain context. This is because it holds that HRM practices are adopted in line with changes in the institutional environment of a particular context (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). Furthermore, institutional theory involves the experience of organizations in a particular context by considering institutional forces such as legislation system, national culture, economic development and market pressures (Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). We therefore draw on the ideas of institutional theory (e.g., Lewis et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Hughes, Powell, Chung & Mellahi, 2017; Powell & DiMaggio, 2012; Scott, 2008) and institution-associated issues (Kim & Bae, 2017) to highlight the importance of an institutional environment such as the government, regulatory agencies, the professions, social expectations, and leading organizations as our historical and institutional review.

ASEAN was founded in 1967 in Thailand by the Founding Fathers of ASEAN, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Later members joined this bloc including Brunei in 1984, Viet Nam in 1995, Laos and Myanmar in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999, making up what is today the ten Member States of ASEAN (Wailerdsak, 2013). The

key purpose of ASEAN is to promote “economic growth, social progress and cultural development” through regional cooperation (He, 2006). Since its foundation in 1967, ASEAN has gradually become a prominent regional organization, managing regional security through its unique combination of consultation, consensus building, and quiet diplomacy, also known as “the ASEAN way” (see He, 2006).

ASEAN is widely known as a mixture of civilizational fault-line (Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002). Each country reflects its own cultural uniqueness such as Muslim (Malaysia, Indonesia), Buddhist (Thailand), Sinic (Singapore), Christian (The Philippines) and Confucian (Vietnam) societies (see also Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002). Also, of note is that historical and political, socio-economic development of each ASEAN country varies from one nation to another (see Table 2 for details). These characteristics embedded in ASEAN make it a unique region with different institutional environments which may influence the process of economic development in general and management practices in particular. Some countries have experienced remarkable achievements in socio-economic development such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. In accordance with their achievements, management practices in these countries have also made much more progress than those of the remaining (Myanmar, Laos, Brunei, Cambodia). Our review demonstrates that there is imbalance in HRM research between the former countries and the latter counterparts. More importantly, despite its developments in HRM research in some countries, the study of HRM in this bloc still lags behind Western countries in terms of theoretical developments, quantity and quality of research as well as methodological advancements.

Insert Table 2 about [here](#)

3. Constraints of HRM in the ASEAN context

Given ASEAN is institutionally complex in nature, we build upon the idea of institutional constraint initiated by Lewis et al. (2019) in order to provide a comprehensive literature review with respect to the development of HRM in this bloc over the last 30 years. We first divide our table into columns corresponding to study/author(s), research questions/aims, study type, level of analysis, and constraints of institutionalization. We then conduct the review country after country. In each country, we attempt to search for all relevant studies and then select the ones that are peer-reviewed publications. We now present our review in turn.

3.1. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Singapore

Singapore is known as having a strategic position in ASEAN, and thus the government especially highlights the importance of increasing institutional capacities to devise and utilize fruitful national policies and strategies that can lay the foundation for continuous economic growth in the 21st century (Choy, 2007). In addition, Singapore is a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) which is highly recognized as one of the most dynamic and fastest growing economic sectors in the world (Choy, 2007). Coupled with the spirits of APEC, the Singaporean government concentrates on developing human capital and highlights the importance of people as most salient assets of the country (Choy, 2007). In particular, the government has endeavored to seek its support for proactive and comprehensive labor market policies in order to respond to the changing demographic structures, developments in the nature of jobs, and complex workplaces in the nation (Choy, 2007). The government is therefore determined to make use of its country-specific capabilities and its strategic position by inducing the best and highly innovative individuals, both locally and internationally, to work in the country (Choy, 2007).

Such above advantages and developments have enabled Singapore to make necessary changes in HRM practices with respect to the re-evaluation of the nature of jobs, skill requirements, prospective labor demands and division of labor, and new forms of employment (Choy, 2007). Also, of interest is that the external environment of organizations in Singapore is quite complex and influences their HRM practices to a large extent (Khatri, 2000, p. 340). It is for this reason that since the Singaporean economy has become increasingly developed and globalized with respect to trade and investment, Singaporean management practices are challenged by international firms (Kim & Bae, 2017). Faced with this challenge, Singaporean organizations have no other choice but to standardize their management practices in accordance with internationally accepted labor standards (see also Kim & Bae, 2017). As a result, this complexity can enable MNCs to adopt a more transnational HR strategy in Singapore than other member countries in ASEAN. We therefore argue that such institutional complexity brings about both challenges and opportunities within HRM strategies in Singapore (Lewis et al., 2019). By this logic, organizations seek to strategically align their HRM practices with environmental expectations with a view to achieving their legitimacy (see Do et al., in press; Lewis et al., 2019). As such, HRM structures are said to support this process, especially via HR practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and rewards, to the extent that institutionalized behaviors will likely be stimulated and rewarded (Lewis et al., 2019). Despite its progress, the study of HRM in Singapore

still needs more in-depth research with respect to the applicability of its multilevel perspective, strategic HRM and case study designs (see Table 3 below for details).

Insert Table 3 about [here](#)

3.2. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Vietnam

Vietnam, now known as a country of change, innovation and global integrity, is characterized as a saliently emerging market because of its desire to become a regional power in ASEAN and economic necessity stimulated policies of trade liberalization and export-led growth (Do et al., in press). Under pressure of highly dynamic environments, the Vietnamese government has given enterprises a great deal of discretion over their management practices to survive and strive in highly competitive environments (Do et al., in press; Qiao, Khilji & Wang, 2009). Also, of interest is that like Singapore, Vietnam is also a member of APEC which requires the development of human capital in order to retain competitive (Choy, 2007). In line with this trend, Vietnamese organizations are currently stimulated to shape and utilize innovative HR practices to induce and retain the talented to increase their competitive position in the industry (Do et al., in press; Qiao et al., 2009). Organizations therefore tend to value and adopt western-based HRM policies and practices, which underscore the importance of individual employees as key assets of the firm. In particular, enterprises seek to strategically align their HRM practices with environmental expectations with a view to achieving their legitimacy (see Lewis et al., 2019). In this regard, HRM structures are in a position to assist this process, especially via HR practices such as recruitment and selection, training and development, compensation and rewards, to the extent that institutionalized behaviors will likely be stimulated and rewarded (Lewis et al., 2019). However, it is also noteworthy that due to its historical and institutional complexity, Vietnam has undergone a mixture of economic models over time such as a centrally planned economic system (1975-1986); a market-oriented economy (since 1986); and a transitional economy or a market economy (Zhu et al., 2008). The Vietnamese version of economic adjustment was essentially patterned after the Chinese model, which was initiated some twenty years before, and has achieved similar results (Rowley, Quang & Warner, 2007). Although Vietnam has undergone its extensive reforms since 1986, the economic system remains socialist components (Collins et al., 2011). In this regard, the government plays a central role in directing and managing the whole economy (Collins et al., 2011).

Given its complex situation in the process of transition, innovation and global integrity, Vietnam is thought to confront its institutional complexity due to its political, legal and cultural issues (Do et al., in press). This institutional complexity therefore greatly influences the context of HRM (Lewis et al., 2019). For example, the government often plays a key role in framing the fundamental features of the HRM systems such as salary scales and grades, labor relations, regulations (see also Kim & Bae, 2017). However, the government also acts as an innovative organization that is willing to support and enable and stimulate enterprises to innovate, grow and integrate into the global market. To this end, organizational context is viewed as the highly important means by which HRM may impact external pressures in which organizations are operating. This is aligned with one aspect of institutional theory that institutional complexity may become both a challenge and an opportunity confronting HRM practices within organizations depending on how they respond to external pressures (Lewis et al., 2019). In this relation, the extent to which HRM practices are shaped and adopted within organizations will greatly depend on how environmental or market forces drive organizational change (Lewis et al., 2019). As such, institutional complexity may become both a challenge and an opportunity confronting HRM practices across Vietnamese firms depending on how they respond to external pressures. In short, the developments in the economic, legislative, and social life of Vietnam have resulted in significant changes in organizational life and people management practices (Nguyen et al., 2018, p. 248).

HRM, with its potential of developing competent and highly motivated employees, have been popularized in Vietnam over the years (see Do et al., in press; Do et al., 2015; 2016). Along with this trend, scholars have started to study the influence of HRM on firm performance in this context (shown in Table 4). We also observe that there has been an exponential growth in the number of papers published on management-related issues in Vietnam over recent years (e.g., Do & Shipton, 2019; Do et al., 2018; Nguyen et al., 2018). However, despite this research efforts made, the study of HRM is still in its fancy in Vietnam that requires further empirical demonstrations in order to address important research questions with respect to the impact of its institutional environments on HRM.

Insert Table 4 about [here](#)

3.3. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the most developed economies in the bloc where it has experienced lots of economic achievements over the past decades. Like any other emerging market in the ASEAN context, Malaysia has been trying its best to modernize, industrialize and internationalize in order to integrate into the world economy as well as to become a developed country in the future. The Malaysian government has envisioned as a developed nation by 2020, thereby especially highlighting the importance of HRM as the key means in order to achieve the said vision (Abdullah et al., 2009). It is noteworthy that Malaysian HRM practices are mainly impacted by the British colonization experience in the nineteenth century (Osman et al., 2011; Tan & Lim, 2012). HRM practices in Malaysia are therefore said to be an artefact of both indigenous and Westernized practices dating back to British colonization in the nineteenth century (Gould-Williams & Mohamed, 2010, p. 658). The external pressures are now forcing organizations to rethink and re-consider the importance of HRM to enable them to navigate through these challenging times (Osman et al., 2011). In this regard, Malaysian firms are becoming more and more increasingly aware of the importance of HRM, thereby tending to focus more on HRM and also treating HRM as a key of organizational success (Abdullah et al., 2009). Despite being fully aware of the importance of HRM as one of the influential variables that can help enhance organizational performance, many Malaysian private firms have yet to value and effectively implement HRM within their firms (Abdullah et al., 2009; Chew, 2005). This fact can be explained by the constraints of institutional context and multi-ethnic social structure in the Malaysian context (Smith & Abdullah, 2004; Tan & Lim, 2012). Table 5 below will provide an overview of the extent to which HRM has evolved so far in Malaysia and also point out how the constraints of institutional context and cultural factors may influence HRM practices in this context.

Insert Table 5 about [here](#)

3.4. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Thailand

Thailand is best known as a country of multi-cultures, languages and ethnic origins with an overwhelmingly Buddhist, making up 95 per cent of the population belonging to this religious group (Lawler & Atmiyanandana, 2003). Thailand is known to have multiple political parties which are mainly built around a particular leader rather than specific ideologies or philosophies. The king is highly respected throughout the nation and has a key role to play in fostering the nation's economic and political development (Lawler &

Atmiyanandana, 2003). The Thai economy commenced its sustained take-off in the 1980s with its focus on foreign direct investment (FDI), especially emanating from Japan after the yen appreciated substantially (Lawler & Atmiyanandana, 2003). It now becomes one of the most developed economies in ASEAN. Along with its economic growth, the government has concentrated on developing and modernizing its management practices as the key driver that can help their enterprises to strive and succeed in the business environment. This trend was especially encouraged and initiated after the Asian financial crisis (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1998). The period since 1997 has witnessed efforts at innovation and reform in the managerial arena, including changes in HRM policies and practices (Lawler & Atmiyanandana, 2003). This is empirically evidenced in a number of reported studies (Jeenanunta et al., 2017; Ishii, Rohitarachoon & Hossain, 2013; Vyas, 2016). Despite its efforts, the study of HRM in Thailand is still underdeveloped and scholars seem to have overlooked the effects of institutional environments on HRM practices that may influence organizational performance. Table 6 reinforces and supports our argument.

Insert Table 6 about [here](#)

3.5. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in the Philippines

The Philippines is best known as a country of political turmoil with lots of political instability (Skene, 2003). Until the mid-1990s, it appeared to show promise as political stability returned and economic growth appeared to be accelerating to levels similar to those achieved by their more dynamic neighbors (Skene, 2003, p. 1008). Since then, the country has endeavored to reform its political regime as well as industrialize and develop its economy. The Philippines is now recognized as a newly industrialized country, which its economy was transmitted from an agriculture-based economy to more service- and manufacturing-based one. Coupled with its economic development, the Philippines has paid more attention to improving its human capital and higher labor productivity. In response to the Asian crisis, Filipino firms have become more fully mindful that human capital or people are one of the most important assets of the organization. They are therefore the key factor that can contribute to the success or failure of the organization. In response, Philippine firms have embarked on the path to people management or HRM (Audea et al., 2005). In doing so, Philippine firms tend to value and adopt more Western-based HRM practices (SV Amante,

1997; Skene, 2003). Consequently, Philippine HRM practices are described as ‘a halo-halo (or mixed) approach; a pragmatic blend of Western practices with those that are specific to Philippine culture’ (Skene, 2003, p. 106). The nature of Philippine HRM therefore has started to draw attention from management scholars (Audea et al., 2005; Presbitero, Roxas & Chadee, 2016; Supangco, 2012). Despite its efforts, the study of HRM in this context is still in its early fancy in comparison with its potential and institutional factors (illustrated in Table 7).

Insert Table 7 about [here](#)

2.6. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Indonesia

With its efforts in reduced poverty and improvements in social indicators such as literacy levels and life expectancy, Indonesia is widely recognized as one of Asia’s newly industrializing countries (Bennington & Habir, 2003). However, even though most of Asia has begun to recover from the worse effects of the Asian financial crisis (1997), Indonesia is still struggling to recover from its unprecedented economic, political, and social problems (Bennington & Habir, 2003, p. 374). In order to respond to and recover from the crisis, both the government and organizations have started to value and pay more attention to HRM practices in Indonesia (see Bennington & Habir, 2003; Ciptono, 1998). Despite its efforts made, the study of HRM in Indonesia is limited mostly to labor economics and macrolevel HR development due to its both internal and external contextual factors (Bennington & Habir, 2003). Table 8 below provides robust evidence for our argument.

Insert Table 8 about [here](#)

3.7. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Laos

Like Vietnam, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) commenced its economic reform in 1986. This reform aimed to move from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented economy which permits private investors as key drivers of economic development (Phasathane, 2014). Ten years later, in 1996, the government clarified its privatization implementation plan by publishing a list of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to be maintained and to be privatized throughout 1997 (Quang & Thavisay, 1999). In line with its reform, the government has stimulated

organizations to modernize and innovate their management practices in order to optimize their outputs. One of the key areas under the innovative program is to develop human capital and to enhance labor force skills within organizations in order to achieve long term business goals (see Quang & Thavisay, 1999). Therefore, strategic HRM is considered as the key tool to enable organizations to accomplish their set goals if they effectively investment in HRM practices. Despite the government’s efforts and initiatives, HRM practices seems to have been less valued and disseminated within organizations in this context. This is empirically evidenced in the work by 1997 (Quang & Thavisay, 1999) that none of the studied firms operated a full range of HR functions and the studied firms placed the personnel function under the ‘personnel section’ within the administration department. More importantly, the role of strategic HRM was not valued by top management teams (Quang & Thavisay, 1999). This is well aligned with our review that the study of HRM in Laos is under-developed and lags behind other ASEAN member countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam. Table 9 below provides an illustration for this argument.

Insert Table 9 about [here](#)

3.8. Effects of institutional environments on HRM in Brunei

Brunei is one of the smallest member countries in ASEAN with a land area of 5765 km² and a population of 340,200 in 2002 (see Anaman, 2004). Dating back to its history. Brunei became a protectorate of United Kingdom in the early part of the 20th Century and regained its full political independence in February 1984 (Anaman, 2004). It is widely recognized as a ‘Malay-Muslim-Monarchy with Malay cultural and Islamic values underpinning the structure of government administration’ (Anaman, 2004, p. 778). With respect to its economic development, Brunei is largely reliant on the export of oil and gas products and its exports account for average about 80.0 and 55.2% of the country’s GDP during the periods, 1971 to 1990 and 1991 to 2001, respectively (see Anaman, 2004; Singh et al., 2017). Like any other Asian country, Brunei also suffered from the Asian crisis with a 14% negative growth rate over this period (Anaman, 2004). After that, the government attempted to reform in order to overcome the crisis and develop its economy. Brunei has now made some progress on its socio-economic development. Despite its achievements, HRM practices in Brunei are not as well developed and effectively implemented as in other ASEAN member countries due to its weaker institutional environments (Singh et al., 2017). The Table 10 that follows will illuminate and support our argument.

Insert Table 10 about [here](#)

3.9. Effects of institutional environments on Cambodia and Myanmar

Our literature review suggests that HRM practices in Cambodia and Myanmar are by far the least developed in comparison with the rest of ASEAN countries. The underdevelopment of HRM practices in these countries can be explained through their historic, social, political, legal and economic forces. Cambodia is known as the country that underwent the decades of civil war and Khmer Rouge regime resulting in massive destruction not only national infrastructures, but also human capital (Phearak & Dara, 2009). In particular, Cambodia faced extreme difficulties in renovating its war-torn nation (Phearak & Dara, 2009). Most public institutions therefore have employed low skilled human capital to fill its workplaces, thereby focusing mainly on basic skills training (Phearak & Dara, 2009). Although Cambodia's economy has been evolving into a market based one, which has been further enhanced through its entry into ASEAN and WTO since the early 1990s, Cambodian enterprises are still adopting a personnel management system which is rule based and centralized in terms of its personnel administration, training, and payroll preparation (Phearak & Dara, 2009). This fact can help explain why HRM practices in Cambodia are still under-developed and less diffused in enterprises.

Another ASEAN country that HRM is not developed and less known in the literature is Myanmar. Myanmar also began its economic reform late. In 1988, it started to expand the private sector. However, all the institutions including the government, markets, enterprises and foreign firms still developed very slowly. Since 2011, it has extensively reformed in order to develop its economy. Despite its efforts and reforms, Myanmar is still one of the least developed economies in the bloc. Coupled with its economic development, HRM in this country is largely unknown in the existing literature. In a nutshell, the study of HRM in both Cambodia and Myanmar seems to be under-explored, thereby no empirical studies having been reported in this review. Future research should pay more attention to considering the historical and institutional conditions that may influence the development of HRM in these countries.

3.10. Summary and Evaluation of HRM Practices among ASEAN Countries

Given its institutional differences, HRM practices within ASEAN countries vary from one country to another. This is well aligned with the view that firms are in a position to react to the isomorphic forces of their institutional contexts (Lewis et al., 2019). We therefore argue that there is a close link

between institutional environments and firm action (Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002). In this regard, HRM practices in ASEAN are greatly influenced by the institutional environments in which organizations operate. Our review reflects that those countries that have extensively reformed their socio-economic, political and legal factors and responded to external environments have made lots of achievements. These countries encompass Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. In line with these achievements, HRM is highly valued and adopted in enterprises and organizations. Table 10 below provides evidence to support our view. By contrast, those countries commencing their reforms late or not having implemented their comprehensive reforms and/or having unique political and cultural regimes have experienced low economic developments. Such countries include Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos. In this regard, HRM is not highly valued and effectively implemented by organizations within these countries. That is why the study of HRM in such countries is still under-explored and its theory is under-developed as summarized as follows.

- Despite its progress, the study of HRM in ASEAN still lags behind Western countries and other Asian countries such as China, India in terms of theory, empirical evidence and research robustness.

- There is imbalance regarding theory, empirical evidence and research design among ASEAN countries (e.g., more research conducted in some countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam than the rest such as Myanmar and Cambodia.

- The extent to which HRM practices are adopted and diffused among ASEAN countries is largely influenced by their political, social, cultural, legal and economic factors.

- The majority of empirical studies stop at the firm level of analysis.

- Few studies have adopted the multilevel perspective to understand the HRM-performance relationship.

- There is still a lack of cross-comparative studies among ASEAN countries.

- HRM practices seem to be less strategic in the ASEAN context.

4. A framework for understanding HRM research in ASEAN

Given ASEAN countries are embedded in institutionally and differently complex environments, organizational action may differ from one country to another (Carney & Gedajlovic, 2002; Lewis et al., 2019). Such complex environments are said to create both challenges and opportunities within HRM structures of the organization (Lewis et al., 2019). Some countries may make use of such environments in order to seize the opportunity and restrict the challenge in an attempt to optimize their HRM practices. It is for this reason that these countries manage to reach the ‘mutual and reciprocal influence between institutional environments and organizational action’ (Carney &

Gedajiovic, 2002, p. 2). HRM practices are often encouraged, valued widely diffused in organizations (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam). By contrast, other countries that are constrained by their uniquely historical, political, social, legal and economic factors tend to pay insufficient attention to HRM policies and practices (E.g. Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos). In a nutshell, HRM structures are influenced by institutional logics that organizations wish to adopt. Institutional logics therefore lay the foundation for providing ‘HRM relevant identities, goals and schemas’ (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 323).

On the basis of the above observations and discussion, we build upon early frameworks, models, institutional logics, HR trends as well as our own ideas to develop a multilevel framework for cross-national HRM research in ASEAN (e.g., Budhwar et al., 2016; Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Lewis et al., 2019). A multilevel framework for cross-national HRM research is needed in ASEAN for a number of reasons. First, each ASEAN country has its unique socio-cultural, political, legal and economic factors. This institutional complexity is expected to provide an interesting context for undertaking cross-national HRM analysis. Second, institutional context is argued to play a key role in understanding the determinants and effects of HRM systems (e.g., Budhwar et al., 2016; Cooke, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019; Murphy et al., 2017). Cross-national studies are therefore in a best position to provide insights into the current state of HRM practices in each ASEAN country. Finally, although the macro/field context in which organizations are embedded are the key to explaining how and why HRM practices react to external pressures (Lewis et al., 2019), the multilevel perspective is necessary to better understand such ‘the how and why’ (e.g., Bryson & White, 2018). The framework (shown in Figure 1 and Table 11) therefore involves three levels of determinants of HRM structures and practices: macro, meso and micro (Lewis et al., 2019; Budhwar et al., 2016).

Insert Figure 1 about [here](#)

Insert Table 11 about [here](#)

Figure 1 depicts our integrative framework that guides for undertaking cross-national comparative HRM analysis in the ASEAN context. It offers three levels of analysis, and accordingly three levels of determinants of HRM – macro, meso and micro. The macro-level determinants of HRM

encompass institutional factors such as legal, normative & political factors, unions (e.g., Lewis et al., 2019), national culture such as high or low power distance, individualism/collectivism (e.g., Hofstede, 2005), dominant political ideology (e.g., capitalism, socialism), socio-cultural features (e.g., seniority, social status), internal labor market (social connections), advancements in HRM such as change in nature of labor-management relations and HRM practices overtime, forces of globalization (e.g., free trade, intellectual property) (Budhwar et al., 2016), and environmental conditions such as regulations, nature of markets, environmental uncertainty, environmental dynamism.

At the *meso*-level determinants, we include industry level factors and variables: identity construction such as brand names (Lewis et al., 2019), innovation initiatives (e.g., business model, technology disruptions), social networks, professional associations, partnership, new technology and internationalization. The *micro* level determinants consist of HR principles, HR policies, HR practices, HR competencies (Posthuma et al., 2013). We also include HR orientation, HR departments, HR challenges, human capital. Finally, we involve organizational/individual level variables, which may impact on HRM structures and practices, such as structure, ownership, size, age of the organization (Budhwar et al., 2016).

We believe that the framework we propose is holistic and insightful as it involves the multiple levels of determinants of HRM – macro, meso and micro that are arguably regarded as indispensable ingredients in explaining the nature and effectiveness of HRM systems (Lewis et al., 2019). Given the field of HRM in ASEAN countries is under rapid development and evolvement, we believe our framework will allow future researchers to undertake in-depth cross-national comparative HRM studies as well as make use of the framework to theorize and frame their research models in their unique research context.

Our analysis of early HRM research in ASEAN has demonstrated that ASEAN organizations used to be less strategic in their approach to HRM than their Western counterparts. However, due to the high demand for talent throughout the world, ASEAN organizations have started to rethink about their strategy formulation and implementation. This trend accordingly leads to changes in designing and adopting HR policies and practices (see also Cooke, 2018). In other words, under the pressure of the war for talent and globalization, ASEAN organizations tend to be more strategic in relating their HR practices to firm performance. In particular, our observations suggest that HRM practices in the ASEAN bloc are becoming more systematic and market oriented, with evidence of adaptation of Western HR techniques (e.g., Budhwar et al., 2016; Chow et al., 2013; Do et al., in press). Despite this progress, the study of HRM in ASEAN still lags behind that of Western

researchers in terms of strategic HRM. This paper therefore aims to highlight this important gap, thereby adding strategic HRM to our working framework with a view to serving as a useful guide for researchers to focus on this area for further understanding the nature of how and when HRM influences performance in this context.

Also, of interest is that given HRM is still in its infancy in the majority of ASEAN countries, it is argued that in-depth explorations of HRM need to commence with an initial focus on investigating the determinants and effects of HRM. It is for this reason that determinants of HRM play a key role in shaping and implementing HRM within an organization (see also Chew & Sharma, 2005; Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). The extent to which an organization adopts and implements HR practices largely depends on its institutional conditions (e.g., government, legal regulations, labor unions, political culture, political structure of a country, and ownership types) as well as organizational leadership processes, strategy and culture where the organization operates. This largely supports the notion that while it is believed that the desire to adopt an HRM system may be often a critical factor in management's choice of HR practices, there exist other factors that influence the what and how the policies and practices can be selected and executed (Barnard & Rodgers, 2000). As such, the determinants of HRM included in the framework is of great value. To do so, we take into account the information relative to the socio-cultural, institutional and political factors in ASEAN countries; the key factors determining HRM structures and practices (e.g., globalization, environmental conditions, national culture, economy) (Budhwar et al., 2016). Exploring these factors can therefore help identify future directions and developments in HRM as well as predict future practice trends, and generate research ideas (Budhwar et al., 2016, p. 317). By doing so, we can contribute to a fuller understanding of the determinants that influence HRM practices in the ASEAN context.

5. Future Research Directions in ASEAN

Our literature review suggests that institutional contexts and economic development play a central role in the development and implementation of HRM in each ASEAN country. Depending on the socio-cultural, political, legal and economic factors, HRM structures and practices vary from one country to another. Countries with high levels of reforms, economic liberty and development have experienced the development and investment in HRM such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. It is for this reason that changes in globalization, technologies, the growth of knowledge economy, highly dynamic markets, and especially the Asian financial crisis (1997) have greatly influenced the economic development as well as labor-management relations of these countries. By contrast, we have also witnessed an opposite picture in other member countries such as Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos where HRM practices are less or under-developed in accordance with their

economic development and the influence of their intuitional forces. In this regard, intuitional conditions are viewed as important ingredients that influence HRM structures and practices in organizations (see Budhwar et al., 2016; Do et al., in press; Nguyen et al., 2018). We therefore argue that the field or macro context of HRM in which the organization is embedded is the key to understanding the nature and effects of HRM structures and practices (Lewis et al., 2019). On the basis of the arguments and key gaps identified in the review, we propose important suggestions and avenues for future research in ASEAN. We now discuss these aspects in turn.

5.1. Future research direction 1: The determinants of HRM

A first key area for improvement in the examination of HRM in the context of ASEAN involves the nature of the determinants of HRM that are often argued to play a key role in shaping and implementing HRM within an organization (see also Budhwar et al., 2016; Chew & Sharma, 2005). They involve institutional forces (e.g., socio-cultural factors and networks, legal regulations, labor unions, political culture, political structure of a country) as well as organizational strategy in which the organization is embedded (Tregaskis & Almond, 2019). This largely supports the notion that while it is believed that the desire to adopt an HRM systems may be often a critical factor in management's choice of HR practices, there exist other factors that influence which policies will be selected and how successfully the selected policies can be utilized (Barnard & Rodgers, 2000; Froese et al., 2019). Despite its importance, ASEAN researchers seem to have neglected this important aspect that may act as an important channel to understand the nature and influence of HRM structures and practices within the organization. It is clear that little work is available on the study of the determinants of HRM when exploring the influence of HRM practices in this context. This leaves us certain gaps in the field of HRM that especially needs more in-depth empirical research to address this concern. In order to lay the foundation for future research, we now discuss some of the important determinants of HRM that scholars may really need for their research.

National culture. Given the importance of the context of HRM, we especially underscore national culture as an important theme that future research may focus on. ASEAN countries' cultural values are a mixture of Muslim, Islamic, Chinese, Western, and socialist values. These cultural values make management practices in these countries unique from one country to another. For example, Vietnamese culture is characterized by a mixture of Chinese, Western, and socialist values (Nguyen et al., 2018). Vietnam's management practices are thus reflected by grassroots democracy, delegation (American), egalitarianism, and collective decisions and responsibility (socialism) (Nguyen et al., 2018). Due to the mixture of cultural values, Vietnamese culture is said to differ from other countries in the bloc. This is an excellent starting point for future researchers to conduct

cross-national comparative HRM studies among ASEAN countries. In particular, researchers can explore how MNCs' HR departments in these countries can effectively institutionalize or localize Western HR policies and practices under the impact of their traditional cultural values, norms, and beliefs held by their employees (see also Nguyen et al., 2018). It is for this reason that national culture influences values and that managers may maintain their value systems despite the power of outside forces (Andrews, 2005; Robertson et al., 2001).

Unionization. It is widely accepted that there is a close link between the nature of labor-management, national culture, and political ideology in a certain country (e.g., Collins et al., 2011). A country's unionization also changes in accordance with its changes in socio-cultural and political factors. Given each ASEAN country is embedded in its own unique institutional attributes, unionization may vary from one country to the next. In Vietnam, for example, as the government has a vital role to play in changes to the industrial relations systems, its labor unions are said to enhance their impact because their role in employee representation rises (Nguyen et al., 2018). However, despite their influential actor in organizational management, labor union representatives are criticized for their lack of competencies that may create constraints for them to get involved in HRM practices (see Nguyen et al., 2018). Following this logic, it is necessary to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of labor unions with a view to designing and building formal procedures and the competencies of union representatives in labor dispute resolutions (see Collins et al., 2011; Nguyen et al., 2018). Also, of interest is that there is a close relationship between unionization, the nature of HR departments and HRM practices (e.g., Beaumont, 1991; Galang & Ferris, 1997; Verma, 2005). Taken together, future studies should explore (1) key problems with industrial relations systems among ASEAN countries so as to support labor unions in fruitfully fulfilling their roles in organizations, and (2) whether unionization in organizations in ASEAN influence the relationships between HRM practices, HR departments and firm performance.

Environmental Conditions. To start with, we argue that a key characteristic of the organizational theory discipline is its emphasis on the market environment or the business landscape in which organizations operate (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). This is especially true in today's constantly changing environment in which organizations are facing fierce competition and lots of different challenges. In this regard, the level of environment uncertainty, perception of external environment, dynamism and competitiveness in a business landscape can function as central determinants of HRM as well as moderators for HRM (Raisch & Birkinshaw, 2008). Utilizing the contingency perspective, scholars suggest that the nature of the environment with which the organization is associated should be an optimal way for it to organize its activities because there is no best way to

organize the firm (see Oke et al., 2012). For example, organizations with a highly uncertain environment will expand their efforts in innovations to mobilize the opportunities provided by the changing market environments to accomplish superior performance (see also Oke et al., 2012). Also, in a highly dynamic environment, organizations need to increase the perception of change, for example, if the demands from customers have changed, they should make some necessary adjustments to match with (Li & Liu, 2014). Organizations therefore need to detect and execute innovative actions, such as generating new ideas, solutions and products (innovativeness) and being able to adapt to the external challenges of constantly changing business environments to keep pace with rapid technological evolution, globalization, and progressively sophisticated competitors (flexibility) (Schmelter et al., 2010). To achieve this important goal, organizations must invest in and adopt appropriate HRM practices that may allow employees to respond in unique ways to new challenges, adapt to dynamic environmental conditions, and are willing to welcome ambiguity (Schmelter et al., 2010). On this basis, future studies can focus on when environmental conditions amplify the relationship between HRM and performance.

Organizational Strategy. Early research suggests that there is a close relationship between strategy, HRM and performance (e.g., Cooke & Saini, 2010; Mudulia, Vermab & Datta; 2016). For example, scholars advocate that the implementation of firm strategy can serve as a response strategy by management to accomplish innovative performance targets, product development and/or new service introductions (Oke et al., 2012). As such, strategies are an essential instrument for firms to achieve their set targets as well as increase their performance. Another aspect of this is that HR practices that represent the firm's strategic goals and investment could be a potential enabler to constitute the pool of unique workforce in order to yield competitive advantage to the firm (Barney, 1991; Shin & Konrad, 2017). We build upon this logic by arguing that firm strategy can be an important antecedent of HR practices, and thus when firm strategy well interacts with HR practices, the complementation is likely to positively influence firm outcomes. Future research therefore should explore the influence of firm strategy on HR practices.

Research Proposition 1: Given each member country has its own characteristics in terms of culture, institutions, economy and business landscape, future researchers should undertake cross-level comparative HRM analysis among ASEAN countries using cultural values, labor unions, environmental conditions, strategy as the determinants of HRM in order to understand the nature and effects of HRM structures and practices on organizational performance.

Research Proposition 2: Explore how MNCs' HR departments in these countries can effectively institutionalize or localize Western HR policies and practices under the impact of their traditional cultural values, norms, and beliefs held by their employees

5.2. Future research direction 2: HR formality

HR formality is often understood as 'the extent to which HR practices are documented, systemized, and institutionalized' (Nguyen & Bryan, 2004, p. 601). HR formality is therefore one of the key dimensions of organizational management, thereby enabling organizations to strategically align HR strategy with organizational goals in order to stay innovative and competitive in the marketplace (see Nguyen & Bryan, 2004). Organizations that pursue formal HR systems often rely on HR departments along with the presence of an HR manager and his/her HR professionals in order to achieve their strategic goals (e.g., Storey et al., 2010; Nguyen & Bryan, 2004). As such, HR departments are key ingredients that help organizations formalize their HR practices, thereby increasing the effectiveness and quality of HRM implementation within organizations (e.g., Chadwick & Li, 2018; Gilbert et al., 2011). HR departments that are recognized as having more strategic value is to involve in 'developing characteristics of the firm's human resources that can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage' (Guthrie et al., 2011, p. 1675). In particular, HR departments allow organizations to form employee HR attributions in management's favor, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of HRM practices on labor productivity (Chadwick & Li, 2018). In this relation, HR departments are the key means that enables organizations to be more strategically effective about their approaches to human capital, and one of those avenues is to increase the effectiveness of their firms' HR systems by fine-tuning those systems in practice (Chadwick & Li, 2018). In the era of globalization, organizations face rapid changes, turbulence, and uncertainties in the internal labor markets in relation to social connections, political contacts, religion, and economic power (see Nguyen et al., 2018; Reichel & Lazarova, 2013). In response, HR departments are more in strategically aligning HR strategy and organizational goals with external pressures in order for the organization to strive and retain competitive in the market. By this logic, it is necessary for future researchers to investigate the formalization of HR practices in ASEAN by considering how HR departments can be involved in devising new strategies for the development of coherent HRM systems under such challenges (Nguyen et al., 2018).

Research Proposition 3: Given the importance of HR departments in helping organizations to formalize their HR practices, future research should examine whether HR departments are present in ASEAN organizations and if yes, investigate the nature and effects of HR departments on HRM practices as well as organizational performance.

5.3. Future research direction 3: Multi-levels of Analysis

Given that our proposed framework is multilevel, multilevel perspective is essential for researchers to truly capture variables at different levels of analyses. In particular, researchers should take into consideration variables at the macro level such as national culture, institutional environments, business strategy and forces of globalization. As scholars especially highlight HR outcomes such as employee attitudes and behaviors as potential mediators of the HRM-performance relationship (e.g., Jiang et al., 2013), future research can take these variables into account at the micro level. This is particularly well aligned with the view that the key way of understanding the underlying mechanisms or processes between HRM and performance is the idea that HRM practices at the firm level influence the attitudes and behavior of employees at the individual level which, in turn, lead to key aggregated level or HR outcomes such as labor productivity and turnover which, ultimately, may enhance firm outcomes (Paauwe, 2009). Following this view, we suggest that future research will make sense of the framework by adopting the multilevel perspective to truly understand the nature of how and why HRM practices are executed in ASEAN although we understand that channelizing micro and macro domains is arguably one of the biggest challenges in HRM research (Nohe et al., 2013).

Research Proposition 4: Given the proposed framework is multilevel, future research should adopt multi-levels of analysis in order to truly capture the variables at both macro- and micro levels of analysis.

5.4. Future research direction 4: Multilevel institutional theory

Institutional theory has popularized itself in different fields of studies such as management, economics, politics. In the field of HRM, institutional theory is a means that helps understand how this field emerges, and advances over time because the evolvement of HRM is often closely linked with institutional and economic changes in a certain context (Nguyen et al., 2018; Posthuma et al., 2013). This is well aligned with the view that management practices are shaped and executed in accordance with changes in the institutional environment of a particular context (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2008). In this sense, institutional theory is argued to be necessary to reflect the contextual underpinnings of research in a certain context (Nguyen et al., 2018; Chaudhry & Rubery, 2019). More importantly, institutional theorists highlight that “the how” and “the why” are not simply a matter of adhering to environmental prescriptions but also a function of the environment shaping the identities, values and schemas of HR professionals (Lewis et al., 2019, p. 316).

Institutional theory therefore serves as a salient means by which HRM can impact external pressures (Lewis et al., 2019).

Given our framework is multilevel in accordance with institutional complexity in ASEAN, we build up early work (Lewis et al., 2019) to extend and theorize institutional theory as a multilevel theoretical lens. It is for this reason that institutional theory has the potential to help HRM scholars to underpin the macro, meso and micro-level contexts of HRM, with these contexts not only acting as independent and moderating variables but also, with institutional theory's embrace of agency, as dependent variables as well (Lewis et al., 2019). To this end, institutional theory should be theorized as a multilevel perspective. It therefore provides 'a vocabulary which allows researchers to explore the top-down and bottom-up flows of influence between an organization's social environment and the individual within the organization, a direction of increasing importance of HRM scholars' (Lewis et al., 2019, p.317; see also Paauwe & Boselie, 2005; Wright & Ulrich, 2017). In order for this theory to be applied to the context of ASEAN, we provide guidance for how to make sense of this theory at the different levels of analysis. At the macro level, future research should consider the isomorphism of organizational practices in ways that organizations are believed to be isomorphic based on their employment of three mechanisms: coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms (Powell & DiMaggio, 2012; Scott, 2008). These mechanisms should then be complemented by other institutional forces such as socio-cultural, political and economic factors. At the meso level of analysis, researchers may extend the theory by relating industry level factors and variables such as identities construction, innovation, social networks, professional associations, partnership, new technology and internationalization as the determinants of HRM to understand the context of HRM. At the micro level of analysis, researchers can highlight the determinants of HRM such as HR principles, HR policies, HR practices, HR departments, HR orientation, HR challenges, quality of human capital in order to understand the nature and effectiveness of HRM systems (Lewis et al., 2019).

Research Proposition 5: Given institutional theory is most relevant for understanding the macro, meso and micro-level contexts of HRM, future research should frame and theorize this theory as a multilevel perspective in order to understand the top-down and bottom-up influence of HRM systems.

5.5. Future research direction 5: Strategic HRM

Under the pressure of globalization and highly dynamic environments, organizations tend to strategically align their HR strategy, strategic goals with external expectations (Do et al., in press).

Strategic HRM is therefore viewed as a management initiative for organizations to achieve their strategic goals and position themselves in the marketplace. Western organizations seem to have done this job well by effectively investing in, designing and implementing coherent HRM systems, which in turn lead to higher performance outcomes. Reported empirical studies send robust support to this argument (see Combs et al., 2006). However, ASEAN organizations lag behind their Western counterparts in this aspect. Our findings reflect that although researchers in ASEAN have started to examine strategic HRM practices (e.g., Do et al., in press), we know relatively little about this kind of research in this context. This leaves us much unknown about the nature and effectiveness of strategic HRM on organizational performance. Future research therefore needs to pay more attention to this timely research theme. Accordingly, we present our next research theme:

Research Proposition 6: Examine the evolving strategic role of HRM in firms operating in the ASEAN context, and especially place more emphasis on the effects of HRM systems, HPWS, policies, and practices as well as organizational outcomes.

5.6. Future research direction 6: Convergence and divergence, and their link to HRM

Convergence and divergence are thought to be the key attributes that may influence the developments of HRM (Budhwar et al., 2016). It is for this reason that convergence may be achieved by such factors as globalization and internationalization of firms, technology development, industrialization and standardization of products/services, and cross-national diffusion of work processes while divergence can be acquired by such attributes as distinct national business systems, diversity of cultural value orientation, diverse and unique legal set-up, and variety of capitalism (Budhwar et al., 2016; Brewster et al., 2015; Howard, Roehrich, Lewis & Squire, 2019). Taking into account the context of ASEAN, its member countries are characterized by a mixture of ideologies and institutions. Each country has its own institutional, socio-economic and legal attributes as well as undergoes and experiences different levels of economic and technological developments, industrialization and modernization. These unique attributes may differently contribute to the achievements of both convergence and divergence, in turn influencing the developments and/or determinants of HRM in ASEAN countries. Future research should therefore adopt multiple case studies in order to comparatively and cross-nationally examine the possible impact of convergence and divergence on the developments/determinants of HRM in this bloc. In particular, researchers can make best use of triangulation of data sources that derive from multiple case studies in order to identify, compare and contrast the factors that drive convergence and divergence, which in turn impact on policies and practices of HRM in ASEAN.

Research Proposition 7: Adopt multiple comparative case studies in order to cross-nationally examine the convergence/divergence of the developments/determinants of HRM in this bloc.

5.7. Future research direction 7: Governments as actors involving HRM

Scholars hold that governments act as one of the key players framing the fundamental features of the HRM systems in emerging economies (Kim & Bae, 2017). Governments in such economies play different roles such as employers, regulators and policy makers both for the system and for the mutual interrelations between itself, the employees and managers (Dunlop, 1958). It is noteworthy that ASEAN is described as a mixture of institutional attributes (e.g., Singapore as a country of capitalism, Vietnam as a country of socialism and so on). We therefore argue that the role of ASEAN governments in influencing the HRM policies and practices will vary from one country to other. For example, some governments may set protective regulations and/or social welfare for all employees via means of legislation (e.g., in Vietnam) while others may simply legislate the procedural ‘rules of the game’ for employers and unions (e.g., in Singapore). On the basis of the above argument, we propose future research should take into account the below.

Research Proposition 8: Transnationally examine the role of dominant state ideologies as well as the role ASEAN countries play and involve in determining their HRM systems.

6. Discussion and Contributions

6.1. Theoretical contributions

Our first important contribution in this paper is to provide the first comprehensive review with respect to institutional attributes of ASEAN countries and their effects on HRM structures and practices in this context. Our findings demonstrate that ASEAN countries are embedded in institutional complexity with their unique socio-cultural, political, legal and economic factors. These institutional factors are key indicators that lead to the varying degree of labor-management relations in general and HRM practices in particular. Countries that make use of their institutional attributes in order to reform, innovate and develop the economy have made significant achievements in socio-economic developments (e.g., Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam). Coupled with this, HRM practices have been valued, effectively invested and diffused in these countries. By contrast, those countries that do not have experienced low socio-economic developments, and accordingly HRM practices are less developed (e.g., Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar). However, although the study of HRM has made progress in this bloc, it has lagged behind the Western context in a number of ways. First, there is a dearth of robust empirical

HRM research in comparison with its potential and institutional attributes. Second, there is imbalance regarding theory, empirical evidence and research design among ASEAN countries (e.g., more research conducted in some countries such as Singapore, Malaysia and Vietnam than the rest such as Myanmar and Cambodia. Third, given HRM research in this bloc is in its early fancy, existing studies remain rooted in a single/firm level of analysis with regard to the nature and effectiveness of HRM systems. Fourth, there is still a lack of cross-comparative studies among ASEAN countries. Finally, HRM practices seem to be less strategic in the ASEAN context. By identifying these important gaps, we aim to especially highlight the key areas of HRM research that future researchers will be able to pay sufficient attention to further advancing this stream of research in ASEAN.

Another salient contribution of the paper is that on the basis of our review and evaluation, we can identify a number of important areas for improvement in understanding the nature of how and why of HRM systems in ASEAN. We therefore extend institutional theory (Lewis et al., 2019) and build on early HRM frameworks and models (e.g., Budhwar et al., 2016; Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002) to develop the ASEAN-based HRM framework that covers the multiple levels of determinants of HRM. Our expectation is that this integrative framework will act as a useful guide for ASEAN researchers to conduct research on the determinants of HRM with a special focus on the macro, meso and micro-level determinants of HRM. On the basis of our review inputs, identification of research gaps and institutionally complex environments in ASEAN, we suggest important directions for future research that can hopefully extend, refine and advance existing research in this context. The reasoning is that HRM research is still in its infancy in this bloc that needs further robust empirical studies to be undertaken in order to keep up with the constantly changing business environment.

A further contribution of the paper is that our proposed framework provides important implications that in order to understand the nature and effects of HRM systems, future research should be embedded in considering the context as well as the determinants of HRM (e.g., Budhwar et al., 2016; Cooke, 2018; Lewis et al., 2019). The framework highlights the multiple levels of the determinants of HRM which help answer the constant calls for the multilevel perspective to understand the HRM-performance relationship (e.g., Do et al., 2018; Wright & Ulrich, 2017). It is for this reason that the multilevel perspective can allow researchers to understand both top-down and bottom-up relationships, thereby interconnecting micro and macro domains (Nohe et al., 2013). In other words, doing so may help researchers explore concurrently the effect processes of HRM on performance via both

top-down and bottom-up flows of influence (e.g., Wright & Ulrich, 2017). Our key contribution is therefore to demonstrate how and why HRM influences performance.

A final important contribution of the paper is that we extend and theorize institutional theory as a multilevel lens that is relevant to understand the development of HRM in an emerging context like ASEAN in accordance with its institutional attributes or conditions such as socio-cultural, political, legal and economic factors. We take multilevel institutional theory because the development of HRM is best understood by the determinants of HRM in connection with such institutional factors. In doing so, we contribute to the existing knowledge in several ways. First, theory of HRM is underdeveloped in ASEAN, and thus the extension of institutional theory lays the foundation for researchers to further advance theory of HRM in this context. Second, institutional theory appropriates the development of HRM in emerging markets like ASEAN as the development is best understood by a particular context with respect to its institutional attributes. Finally, we respond to the criticism that HRM scholarship lacks a solid theoretical basis to understand the nature of how and why HRM influences performance (see Beugelsdijk, 2008; Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2014).

6.2. Conclusion

In a nutshell, our key aim of this paper is to examine the development and the current state of HRM in the ASEAN context by systematically reviewing the intuitional forces or conditions that may influence HRM practices with the bloc. We also propose a number of directions for future HRM studies with respect to changes in ASEAN's institutional environments and economic development. Furthermore, we underscore the importance of context of HRM in order to understand the nature and effects of HRM structures and practices. Based on the findings and early works, we develop an integrative framework for cross-national comparative analysis that serves as a useful guidance for future research to explore the determinants of HRM and their effects on organizational performance in the context of ASEAN. We specifically suggest a handful of research themes for future researchers to make use of the proposed framework for their own research agenda.

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APPENDICES

FIGURE 1

A Multilevel Framework for Cross-National Comparative HRM Research

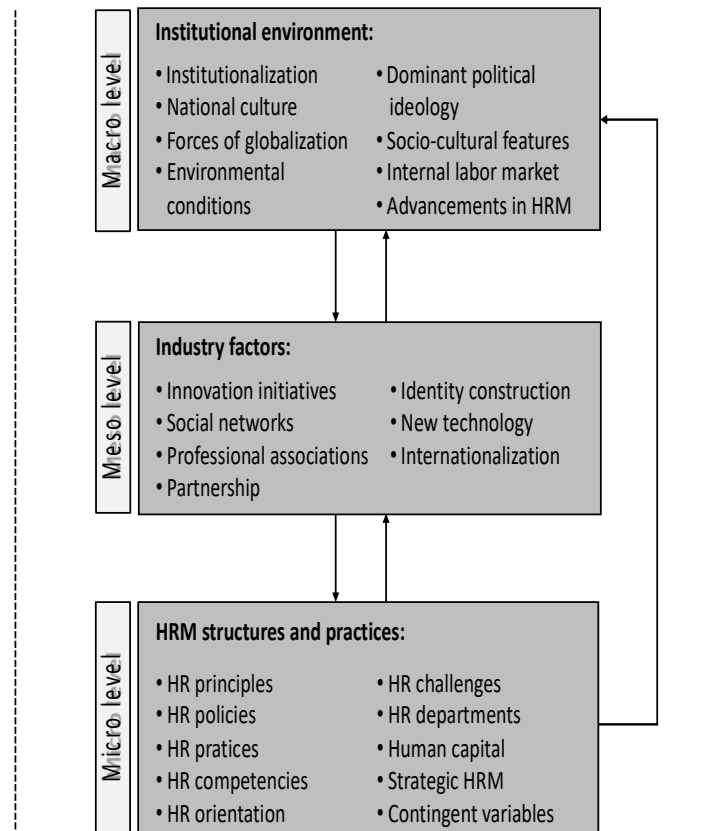


Table 1: Number of Cross-Country and ASEAN HRM Studies

Key Word	Brunei	Cambodia	Indonesia	Laos	Malaysia	Myanmar	Philippines	Singapore	Thailand	Vietnam	ASEAN
Human Resource	148	296	1398	309	2391	180	1422	4341	1736	1403	459

Management											
HRM	10	08	64	12	186	01	62	267	92	69	22
HR	52	60	440	49	877	57	660	1630	670	523	121
People Management	232	511	2564	503	2856	376	2392	6564	2874	2243	509
HRM and Performance	04	06	19	07	69	01	20	100	37	28	11

Table 2: Main issues, ideologies and roles of institutions in ASEAN countries

Country	Period	Main Issues	Dominant Ideologies	Role of Institutions	Cited Work
Singapore	1965	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Independence from Malaysia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dependence on mainly its domestic market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions (government, market and enterprises) underdeveloped; High levels of unemployment and poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tan (2003) Capannelli and Tan (2014)
	1966-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconstruction Economic development Overcoming Poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neo-liberalism Foreign direct investment Industrialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions (government, market and enterprises) developed Infrastructures improved 	
	2001-2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Globalization Modernization Digitalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions' efforts directed towards their higher levels of development and modernization 	
Vietnam	Pre - 1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> War Separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socialist in the north Capitalist in the south 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions (government, market and enterprises) underdeveloped 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nguyen et al. (2018) Collins et al. (2011) Zhu et al. (2008)
	1975 - 1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unification Reconstruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Socialism Socialist planning system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> State-owned enterprises Collective cooperatives 	
	1986 - 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic reforms Overcoming poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transitional economy Market orientation Pre-industrialization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multi-ownership Government: authoritarian Markets immature 	
	1995 - Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internationalization Industrialization Economic development Employment relations reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Member of ASEAN (1995) Member of WTO (2006) EVFTA (2018) CPTTP (2018) Integrity into the world FDI attraction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions' efforts directed towards economic growth Infrastructures fail to meet the demands of economic development Traffic congestion 	
Thailand	1980-1989	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industrialization Parliamentary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All institutions (government, market and enterprises, foreign companies) developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lawler and Atmiyanandana

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> democracy ▪ Heroic leadership 		(2003)
	1990-1997	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic development ▪ Military coup (1991) ▪ Influence of the Asian crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrialization ▪ Parliamentary democracy ▪ Heroic leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions (government, market and enterprises, foreign companies) developed until the Asian crisis (1997) 	
	Post -1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overcoming the Asian Crisis ▪ High economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neo-liberalism ▪ Globalization ▪ Internalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions developed well ▪ Infrastructures failed to meet the demands of economic development 	
Malaysia	1971-1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Eradicating poverty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrialization ▪ Constitutional democracy ▪ multi-ethnic social structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions developed well 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Smith and Abdullah (2004)
	1993-1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic booming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Globalization ▪ FDI increase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions developed well 	
	1997-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic decrease 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dependence on FDI ▪ Foreign management software 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions less developed ▪ High unemployment rate 	
	Post-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overcoming the Asian crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Globalization ▪ Effective management of labor market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards repositioning 	
The Philippines	1965-1986	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic growth ▪ Infrastructure development ▪ Tourism development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Marcos Regime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government failure ▪ Other institutions less developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skene (2003) ▪ Selmer and De Leon (2001)
	1986-1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aquino Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions developed well ▪ Certain achievements made 	
	1992-1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ramos Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government failure ▪ Financial burden 	
	1998-2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overcoming the Asian crisis ▪ Solving controversies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Estrada Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite its efforts, all institutions failed to achieve their targets 	

	2001-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regional development ▪ Tourism ▪ Foreign investments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Macapagal-Arroyo's Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions developed well Political stability 	
	2010-2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrialization ▪ Economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Benigno Aquino III's Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards economic growth and industrialization 	
Indonesia	1983-1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pre-Establishment of Islamic bank 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Islamic economics ▪ Islamic activism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions less developed ▪ Infrastructure underdeveloped 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Indrastomo (2016)
	1992-1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post-Establishment ▪ Faced with the Asian Crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Post-new order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions started to developed 	
	Post-1998	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rapid expansion of the industry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Democratization ▪ Free contested market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards economic growth and industrialization 	
Brunei	1984	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full political independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Malay-Muslim-Monarchy with Malay cultural and Islamic values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions developed well due to its oil and gas exports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anaman (2004)
	1991-2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Face with the Asian Crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishment of Ministerial Task Force on Economic Affairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Government failure ▪ Markets: immature 	
	2001-Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overcoming the Asian crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishment of Brunei Economic Development Board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards economic growth 	
Laos	Post-1975	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of state enterprises and cooperatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A planned socialist economy of the Soviet-style command economy system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions less developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Du Plessis, Douangphichit and Dodd (2015)
	1986-1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Beginning of its reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transformation of its economic model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions still less developed ▪ State-owned enterprises still dominated 	

	1995-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reforms ▪ Overcoming the Asian crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Market-oriented economy ▪ Privatization of state-owned enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions more developed ▪ Still immature market 	
	2005-Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Further reforms ▪ Economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrialization ▪ FDI attractions ▪ Globalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards economic growth 	
Cambodia	1989-1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ State of Cambodia ▪ Economic reforms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ An open market economy ▪ Internationalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions started to develop ▪ Still immature market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capannelli and Tan (2014) ▪ Pheara and Dara (2009)
	1993-Present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kingdom of Cambodia ▪ Overcoming the Asian crisis ▪ Economic development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industrialization ▪ Competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards economic growth 	
Myanmar	1988-2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expansion of the private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Totalitarian socialism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions (government, market and enterprises, foreign companies) less developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Capannelli and Tan (2014)
	2011-present	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reforms ▪ Economic growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Economic liberalization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All institutions' efforts directed towards reforms and economic growth 	

Table 3: Summary of Empirical Studies in Singapore

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Teo, Lim and Fedric (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the factors that impact the utilization of human resource information systems (HRIS) in firms as well as their effects they have on firm performance. 	Quantitative	Firm level	As HRM is constrained by its institutional environment such as lack of top management support, their utilization may not be diffused within the organization.	<p>As its institutionalization has taken a different role in each period, and thus its ideologies have evolved over time (e.g., domestic markets, neo-liberalism, globalization and digitalization). HRM policies and practices are therefore influenced by such factors, and thus HRM systems vary from period to period</p>
Barnard and Rodgers (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the relationship between internally oriented HRM practices and performance 	Quantitative	Firm level	The underlying logic is that the desire to adopt HRM depends on management's choice and how successfully the chosen HR policies and practices can be executed.	
Paik, Vance and Stage (1996)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the validity of country cluster analysis as a tool by which business practitioners can safely apply the implications of convergence theory 	Quantitative	Firm level	Given the shared cultural values and employee attitudes, the same similar types of work design and management practices would be adopted in the studied countries.	
Tsang (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to theoretically explore the knowledge transfer and learning aspects of IHRM to empirically evaluate the IHRM practices implemented by Singapore MNCs 	Qualitative	Firm level	Due to the institutional differences between home countries and host country subsidiaries, IHRM practices implemented by Singaporean firms failed to take account of the fact that expatriates are key agents of knowledge transfer and learning.	
Chew and Sharma (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the influence of corporate culture and HRM effectiveness on financial performance of firms involved in M&As in Singapore 	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Firm level	The study highlights the need to strategically manage HRM in order to adapt to and respond to external environments for the firm to gain its competitive advantage.	
Chow, Teo and Chew (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To examine the role of the underlying mechanisms between the HRM–strategy–performance. 	Quantitative	Firm level	The value of HRM and its impact on performance may be maximized when HRM practices of an organization support the firm's ability to shape the link between internal and external demands.	
Khatri (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate if the fit of HRM 	Quantitative	Firm level	The Singaporean government stimulates organizations to adopt	

	practices with firm strategy would enhance firm effectiveness and performance			HRM practices which seem to work well in other countries. Also, it may be that similarities between local and foreign organizations in Singapore result from organizations conforming to local government standards and to the mutual imitation processes operating between Singapore and foreign companies.	
Lee, Phan and Chan (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to apply descriptive theory to the evaluation of the conditions under which HRPPs may influence organizational outcomes. 	Quantitative	Firm level	Firms are becoming aware that there needs to be a strategic alignment between their HRM practices, strategic objectives and external environments in order to position themselves in the market.	
Khatri, Fern, and Budhwar (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate relationships between a holistic list of predictor variables and turnover intentions 	Quantitative	Individual level	HRM is influenced by its institutional environment in ways that firms experienced shortage of labor and job-hoping employees.	
Khatri and Budhwar (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore strategic HR issues (structure and culture) in organizations in Singapore 	Qualitative	Firm level	HRM practices are influenced by its instructional structure and culture.	
Cheng and Brown (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to summarize some recent studies which explored the effects of HRM policies and practices in the respective hotel industries on labor turnover. 	Qualitative	Firm level	Despite their social, economic and labor differences, HRM structures act as a mechanism for normative, mimetic, and coercive isomorphism in both Singapore and Australia	
Stanton and Nankervis (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the effects of SHRM on organizational effectiveness in Singaporean firms. 	Quantitative	Firm level	The need to strategically interlink between HRM practices, strategic goals and environmental expectations is the key management initiatives of the firm.	
Wan, Ong and Kok (2002)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine each strategic HRM variable against organizational performance 	Quantitative	Firm level	There is a need for the firm to strategically align HRM practices with its strategic goals in order that HRM practices influence external environments.	
Cunningham and Debrah (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to provide a perspective on the problems that HR managers experience in a complex environment where firms are experiencing high turnover and labor shortage. 	Qualitative	Firm level	HRM practices are constrained by its institutional environment in ways that firms experienced shortage of labor and turnover.	

Table 4: Summary of Empirical Studies in Vietnam

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Nguyen, Teo and Mylett (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to explore the roles of the HR department in Vietnam ▪ to identify the similarities or differences in how key stakeholders perceive the roles of HR departments. 	Qualitative	Firm level	HRM is constrained by its institutional context in which Vietnamese managers are less willing to accept change and more likely to avoid differences and tend to focus on harmonious bonds in the workplace.	As its mixture of socialist and capitalist institutions, Vietnam is especially unique in comparison with other countries. In Vietnam, the government plays a dominant role in framing the fundamental features of HRM systems. Yet, in order to integrate into the world, Vietnam is becoming more open and
Zhu et al. (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to examine the relationship between internally oriented HRM practices and performance 	Case study	Individual level	As a transitional economy, Vietnam is now accepting different forms of firm ownership. HRM practices are widely accepted, valued and diffused in Vietnam. As such, HRM practices are the means that can enable organizations to attain their certain degree of cognitive legitimacy.	
Nguyen, Teo and Ho (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to examine the validity of country cluster analysis as a tool by which business practitioners can safely apply the implications of convergence theory 	Literature review	Mixture	HRM has advanced in organizations because of institutional changes in the context of Vietnam.	
Zhu and Verstraeten (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ examine how far formal HRM practices are executed in Vietnamese firms with respect to the similarities and differences of HRM practices among various types of firms; the role of managers in people management; and the impact of political, economic, historical and cultural factors on HRM practices 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM is influenced by its institutional environment such as political, economic, historical and cultural factors, as well as external pressures.	

Thang and Quang (2005a)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore how and the extent to which the determinants of HRM are adopted and their effects on firm effectiveness. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM is influenced by the nation's socio-cultural idiosyncrasy in ways that HRM practices are characterized by the slow and cautious evolution of a complex system with a view to addressing the concerns and benefits of all stakeholders.	willing to welcome new things. HRM practices are becoming increasingly strategic in order to respond to the external pressures.
Thang and Quang (2005b)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the effects of types of economic ownership and management perception of HR value on the implementation of HRM practices 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM practices are influenced by organizational institutional contexts such as different types of economic ownership.	
Cox and Warner (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine how MNCs localize their HRM practices within their subsidiaries in a developing country. 	Qualitative	Mixture	HRM is influenced by the instability of the institutional environment, weak associations among employers' groups, and fragmented bargaining practices that stimulate employer and employee opportunism in Vietnam. MNCs therefore hesitate to invest in HRM practices.	
Vo and Stanton (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore how and the extent to which MNEs translate their home country HRM practices into their subsidiaries 	Qualitative	Mixture	HRM practices are influenced by the divergent approach to HRM of MNCs operating in Vietnam.	
MacIntosh (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the changing institutional framework within which export manufacturing occurs in Vietnam. 	Case study	Firm level	HRM practices are influenced by incremental changes in the approach of the government to economic development, the integration of the country into the international economy, and institutional reforms within the country.	
Nguyen and Bryant (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the level of formality as a dimension of HR management in private SMEs in Vietnam 	Quantitative	Firm level	The need to formalize HR practices due to the government regulation as well as the need to create a competitive advantage and induce and retain the talented.	
Rowley et al. (2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to discover the possibility of adopting certain HRM practices in the 	An assumption-matching analytical	Not applicable	HRM is influenced by the institutional environment such as social and cultural factors.	

	Vietnamese context.	approach			
Nguyen, Truong and Buyens (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to examine how the different country contexts, formulate firm approaches to HR training in typical economies in transition 	Literature review	Mixture	HRM practices are associated with stages of industrial and economic development, cultural features, country institutions, or globalization.	
Do and Shipton (2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ investigate the underlying mechanism between HPWS and firm innovation in Vietnamese SMEs 	Quantitative	Multilevel	Given that Vietnamese SMEs are constrained by the limitations of resources and capabilities, they must rely on innovation in order to survive, progress and succeed in today's highly dynamic markets.	
Do et al. (in press)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to explore the nature of how and why HPWS exist and are diffused in the context of Vietnam. 	Qualitative	Firm level	There is a need for the firm to strategically align HRM practices with its strategic goals in order that HRM practices influence external environments.	

Table 5: Summary of Empirical Studies in Malaysia

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Bhopal and Rowley (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the extent to which issues of ethnicity are functional and dysfunctional for firm management. 	Literature review	Mixture	Ethnicity is considered as an issue that can be labelled as constraints for HRM practices.	<p>In comparison with other ASEAN nations, Malaysia started with its industrialization very early. However, due to its multi-ethnic social structure and the influence of British colonization, HRM policies and practices are constrained and customized by these attributes.</p>
Fong et al. (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the relationship between HRM practices and knowledge sharing from the Malaysian industry context. 	Quantitative	Firm level	With the ever-increasing importance of the knowledge economy, Malaysian organizations tend to respond to this institutional change by adopting HRM practices that may influence such an institutional environment.	
Hashim (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the extent to which Muslim employees are mindful of Islamic HRM practices and the extent to which Islamic firms implement HRM practices. 	Quantitative	Individual level	As a Muslim country, the Malaysian government has been implementing an Islamization process in which it aims to infuse Islamic values throughout the society at all levels, from individual to institutional.	
Gould-Williams and Mohamed (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to report the empirical findings of a matched comparative study of employee responses in a public sector setting. 	Quantitative	Individual level	There is wide acceptance that ‘best practice’ HRM systems can influence firm performance. HRM structures are highly important as the means that elucidate such a relationship. HRM practices are therefore widely valued and diffused within firms.	
Vyas (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the extent of adopting HRM outsourcing from a larger number of bureaucrats and contractors in Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Thailand. 	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Not applicable	HRM practices are influenced by the political contexts.	
Rowley and Abdul-Rahman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the type of HRM practices in Malaysia and the evolution and role of the HRM function and MNC impact. 	Case study	Mixture	HRM practices are still characterized as still more like ‘personnel’, than ‘HR’, management, thereby making it difficult for home country MNCs to transfer their HRM	

(2007)				practices in their host country subsidiaries.	
Rees and Johari (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the extent to which the HRM function would contribute to the strategic organizational change agenda during a period of rapid change. 	Case study	Firm level	HRM is viewed as a partner in the implementation of organizational strategy in order for the firm to be able to drive its organizational change as well as respond to external environments.	
Ling and Nasurdin (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the linkage between HRM practices and firm innovation. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM practices are influenced by the need to align HR strategy and firms' strategic goals with external pressures in order to innovate and position themselves in the market.	
Othman, Abdul-Ghani and Arshad (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to detect the forms of HRM practices considered salient by Malaysian manufacturing firms. 	Quantitative	Firm level	The key message of the study is a desire to obtain consistency between HRM and strategy as well as internal conditions.	
Abdullah, Ahsan and Alam (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine and detect commonly HRM practices that influence the performance of Malaysian private firms. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM structures are viewed as a salient means that can enable organizations to improve their performance and effectiveness.	

Table 6: Summary of Empirical Studies in Thailand

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Onishi (2006)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the transferability of Japanese HRM practices to Thailand. 	Quantitative	Mixture	HRM practices are constrained by institutional differences between home country MNCs and host country subsidiaries.	<p>Heroic leadership is one of the most dominant ideologies in Thailand. HRM policies and practices are therefore influenced by this factor (amongst others). In particular, the good governance plays a key role in HRM process in Thailand.</p>
Kokkaew and Koopai (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the risk and opportunity faced by Thai firms if they continue to adopt the same HRM policies and practices. 	Literature review	Mixture	Due to its institutional complexity, organizations need to adopt HRM practices to achieve their competitive position in the market.	
Ishii, Rohitarachoon and Hossain (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the differences of central– local arrangements on the civil service management under decentralization in HRM practices in the research context. 	Case study	Not applicable	Due to the institutional arrangements or procedures of the two countries, there are differences in their experiences of decentralization reform.	
Jeenanunta et al. (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine HRM and coordination activities for innovation in production network. 	Case study	Firm level	HRM is the means by which organizations foster their strategies in order to innovate and adapt to external environments.	
Trakulmututa and Chaijareonwattana (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to test the path analysis of the factors that influence the achievement of Good Governance in HRM of the local governments. 	Quantitative	Firm level	The Thai government chose the good governance as the main strategy in developing and solving the problems of the country. As such, organizations were expected to be the good governance in their own HRM process.	
Tangthong et al. (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the influence of HRM practices on employee retention in Thai firms. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM is considered as the salient means that helps organizations to increase their performance as well as achieve a source of competitive advantage.	
Lawler et al. (1995)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to compare certain HRM practices between Thailand and India 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM structures are influenced by the differences in terms of social, cultural, political factors of each country.	
Ananvoranich and Tsang (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the effects of the financial crisis on equity perceptions and their relationships with employee satisfactions, involvements, and turnover. 	Case study (qualitative and quantitative)	Firm level	HRM practices are influenced by the external pressures.	

Table 7: Summary of Empirical Studies in the Philippines

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Galang (2004)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the prevalence and effect of HRM practices. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM practices are constrained by the differences in the country context and institutional environments. In particular, these differences make it difficult for Philippine organizations to transmit Western HRM practices to their context.	The Philippines has undergone different administrations, and thus the role of institutions have varied from one to another. HRM policies and practices are accordingly are influenced by the dominant ideologies of a given administration.
Supangco (2012)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore current strategic HR practices in Philippine firms that partook in the 2008 Cranet survey. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM practices are not consistently executed across Philippine organizations because though a formalized strategic planning process generally reaches, involvement of HR from the beginning of business strategy formulation has yet to characterize the majority of these organizations.	
Edralin (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the degree to which different HRM practices foster corporate entrepreneurship. 	Quantitative	Firm level	In order to gain a certain level of cognitive legitimacy, large organizations in the Philippines tend to adopt different HRM practices to facilitate corporate entrepreneurship.	
Presbitero et al. (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to advance traditional HRM practices in exploring how BPOs help improve employee retention 	Quantitative	Individual level	HRM practices are influenced by ‘no call/no show’ culture in the context of business process outsourcing.	
SV Amante (1997)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the current environment for HRM practices to present the most salient elements of these work practices 	Case study	Mixture	HRM practices are influenced by institutional structures and local work practices.	
Audea et al. (2005)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the effects of a strategic approach to HRM on organizational outcomes. 	Quantitative	Firm level	There is an alignment between HRM and business strategy in order for the firm to adapt to and react to highly dynamic environments.	
Edralin (2008)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the HRM practices that strongly drive employee job involvement and organizational commitment in the studied firms. 	Quantitative	Mixture	Under pressure of globalizations, firms must adopt and implement innovative HRM approaches and mechanisms and in order to deal with the external challenges.	

Selmer and De Leon (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to detect and draw the essence of HRM practices in the Philippines. 	Secondary data	Not applicable	HRM in the Philippines has gained a prominent position in the corporate structure, with the current focus on manpower development.	
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Table 8: Summary of Empirical Studies in Indonesia

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Muda and Rafiki (2014)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore and analyze the factors relative to HR development that may impact individual performance. 	Quantitative	Individual level	There is a full awareness that HRM is highly important as the means by which organizations are likely to achieve higher performance and productivity if HRM practices are appropriately implemented within organizations.	Islamic economics plays a key role in the development of Indonesia. HRM policies and practices are mainly oriented and shaped by this dominant ideology. This may make HRM practices unique and less developed in Indonesia.
Rupidara and Darby (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the isomorphism phenomenon in the Indonesian HR field. 	Qualitative	Mixture	HRM practices are influenced by different institutional mechanisms within and across organizational fields, and also from wider institutional contexts.	
Turner, Imbaruddin and Sutiyono (2009)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore the key components of HRM at sub-national level 	Qualitative	Mixture	HRM practices are constrained by organizational structures.	
Collins, Nankervis, Sitalaksmi and Warner (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the different paths taken by Vietnam and Indonesia towards a modern employee relations system, with its certain outcomes. 	Literature review	Mixture	HRM practices are constrained by historical, socio-cultural, ideological or political factors in the studied contexts.	
Sani and Maharani (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the effects of HRM practices on firm outcomes. 	Quantitative	Individual level	HRM becomes a source of competitive advantage when there is an alignment between HRM and business strategy.	
Kwong (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the relationship between HRM practices individual outcomes. 	Literature review	Not applicable	HRM practices are influenced by the need of the firm to strategically align HR strategy and its strategic goals with the external environments in order to position itself in the market.	

Table 9: Summary of Empirical Studies in Laos

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Du Plessis et al. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to analyze the practical and suitable HRM practices that may enhance employee motivation, satisfaction and job performance in the hotel industry in Laos 	Mixed methods (qualitative and quantitative)	Firm level	HRM is viewed as the key means that can help the organization to develop their human capital with competence and motivation to perform best in the workplace. It is also the means by which the organization can achieve its legitimacy in the industry.	Laos used to be influenced by a planned socialist economy of the Soviet-style command economic system. Therefore, the key function of HRM in Laos still focuses on the personnel features rather than HRM and people issues.
Southiseng and Walsh (2010)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to examine the HRD strategies and its actual practices in the telecom firms of Thailand and Laos. 	Qualitative	Mixture	The personnel department takes the lead instead of HRM/HRD departments and mostly function as administrative institutions in Laos while Thailand provides an opposite picture where HRM departments are in place	
Norasingh and Southammavong (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ to explore the organizational aspects of industrial development in Laos, with a focus on how HR interact with production and innovation activities. 	Qualitative	Firm level	HRM is an important driver of organizational innovativeness, thereby playing a key part in firm competition.	

Table 10: Summary of Empirical Studies in Brunei

Study	Research Aims/Questions	Study Type	Level of Analysis	Constraints of Institutionalization	Remarks
Singh, Darwish, Wood and Mohamed (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate differences in the effects of HRM practices between the oil and gas industry, as well as other areas of the economy. 	Quantitative	Firm level	In settings where institutional arrangements are weaker, mutually supportive HR bundles are not consistently disseminated.	Brunei has its unique culture with Malay cultural and Islamic values. Despite its globalization, HRM policies and practices are still constrained by its cultural values.
Singh, Mohamed and Darwish (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to explore how HRM practices are adopted and executed in domestic enterprises (DEs) versus MNEs, and how they are similar or different in nature 	Quantitative	Firm level	Due to differences in institutional environments between home country MNCs and host country subsidiaries, HRM practices vary between the two contexts.	
Darwish, Mohamed, Wood, Singh and Fleming (2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the link between specific HR policies and practices and firm outcomes. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM practices are influenced by the institutional strategy in ways that the alignment between HR strategy and organizational goals helps to improve the overall organizational performance.	
Mohamed, Singh, Irani and Darwish (2013)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to examine the behavioral differences in some HRM practices of domestic (DEs) versus MNEs in the context of Brunei. 	Quantitative	Firm level	HRM practices are constrained by the cultural differences between home country MNCs and their host country subsidiaries.	

Table 11: Useful Factors for Understanding HRM in ASEAN

Macro level		Meso level		Micro level	
Factors	Examples of elements	Factors	Examples of elements	Factors	Examples of elements
Institutionalization	Legal, normative & political factors; Unions	Innovation initiatives	Business model; technology disruptions	HR principles	Value of participation, autonomy, creativity, trust
National culture	High or low power distance; Individualism/ collectivism	Social networks	SMEs Association	HR policies	Pursuit of supportive work environment
Forces of globalization	Free trade; intellectual property; APEC; WTO	Professional associations	Unions	HR practices	Implementation of team-working, job quality, performance-based pay
Environmental conditions	Regulations; nature of markets; environmental uncertainty, environmental dynamism	Partnership	Strategic alliances	HR competencies	Flexible team-working, self-determination, psychological empowerment
Dominant political ideology	Capitalism; socialism	Identities construction	Brand names	HR orientation	Strategic/ administrative; decentralized/ centralized
Socio-cultural features	Seniority; social status	New technology	Advanced HRIS	HR departments	Yes/ no
Internal labor market	Social connections	Internationalization	Exports; Technology transfer	Human capital	High/low level
Advancements in HRM	Change in nature of labor-management relations and HRM practices overtime			Contingent variables	Structure, ownership, age and size of the organization
				Strategic HRM	HPWS; HRM systems

