New Frontiers in HR Practices and HR Processes: Evidence from Asia

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Abstract

Research on the relationship between human resource management (HRM) and organizational outcomes has mainly been studied at the organizational level so far. However, HRM scholars acknowledge that employees are the foundation of organizations, and they play an important role in the effect of HRM on employee and organizational outcomes. While research on HR content focuses on the effects of HR practices, HR process research considers how employee perceptions and attributions of HR influence organizational outcomes. In the special issue of *New Frontiers in HR Practices and HR Processes: Evidence from Asia,* we focus on emerging research in the Asian region, especially China and Pakistan regarding the role of employees, also known as the micro-foundations of HR research, in terms of both HR content and HR process. In this Introduction of the special issue, we review the current state-of-the-art studies in both research streams and highlight further research questions. We outline how the papers in this special issue advance our knowledge for the Asian region and we also call for more Asian region HR practice and HR process studies in the future.

Keywords: International HRM, HR and Technology, Communication

1. Introduction

In human resource management (HRM) research, there is a long-standing tradition of investigating the relationship between bundles of HR practices (Becker & Huselid, 1998; Boon, Den Hartog, & Lepak, 2019) — such as recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal, pay and rewards—and organizational performance. These practices have been variously referred to as high-performance work systems or high-performance (HR) practices (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, Kalleberg, & Bailey, 2000; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007; Combs, Liu, Hall, & Ketchen, 2006), and high-commitment HRM (Collins & Smith, 2006; Walton, 1985). Despite their different names and somewhat different focus, these bundles of HR practices show considerable overlap, and their relationship with organizational performance has been firmly established. However, we still do not know the exact mechanism by which these bundles of HR practices contribute to organizational performance (Boon, et al., 2019; Bowen & Ostroff, 2004). This ambiguity has been referred to as the "black box" of HRM research (Ferris et al., 1999; Wright and Haggerty, 2004).

In response to this mainly organizational level research, scholars turned their attention to the role of employees in the relationship between (bundles of) HR practices and organizational performance (see also Sanders, 2022). This micro-foundational research has typically been informed by three perspectives. The resource-based view of the firm proposes that HR practices support organizational performance by attracting, developing and retaining top-performing employees (Wright & McMahan, 2011). The behavioural perspective proposes that HR practices enhance employees' ability, motivation and opportunity to work effectively (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). Finally, the social exchange perspective suggests that employees who benefit from HR practices are motivated to reciprocate the favours of their organization through increased satisfaction, effort and participation in discretionary activities (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Sun, Aryee, & Law, 2007).

To explain the "black box" of the relationship between HRM and organizational outcomes, research on HR process has emerged as a response to organizational-level HR research (see Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sanders, Shipton & Gomes, 2014; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Hewett, Shantz, Mundy & Alfes, 2018; Wang, Kim, Rafferty & Sanders, 2020; Sanders, Bednall, & Yang, 2021). Within this research program, two main research streams can be identified. In the first stream, Bowen and Ostroff (2004) emphasized the need to consider employees' perceptions and understanding of HRM as implemented by line managers, which is referred to as *perceived HR strength.* The second research stream in HR process research focuses on employee beliefs regarding policymakers' intentions for HRM, which is referred to as *HR attributions* (Nishii, Lepak & Schneider, 2008). Within this research stream, the focus is on employees' understanding of why management designed and implemented specific HR practices.

Despite these developments, important questions in this micro-foundational research remain unresolved. For instance, Boon et al. (2019) mention that the increasingly broad conceptualization and measurement of HR systems, as well as the lack of clarity on the HR system construct at different levels, have hampered research progress. They also conclude that much of the present research does not align with the fundamental assumption of synergies between HR practices in a system. In addition, according to these authors, the measures of HR systems have problems and increasingly confound HR systems with related concepts and outcomes, and insufficient attention is paid to the HR system construct at different levels. Also, despite the progress made in the HR process research (see Sanders, Yang & Patel, 2021), both within HR strength and HR attribution research streams conceptual and level issues remain unclear (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). While theoretical work started to consider HR strength as a unit- or organizational level construct, most empirical work has focused on perceptions of HR strength at the individual level (Bednall, Sanders &

Yang, 2021). Finally, despite the work on the promising concept of HR attributions, it also raises several outstanding research questions indicating that the concept is theoretically and empirically under-developed (see Sanders, Guest & Rodrigues, 2021).

Therefore, we argue that it is time to extend theory and research on the micro-foundations of the HR content and HR process research, exploring the remaining questions in the different research streams through a special issue. However, most human resource management (HRM), especially in the HR content research has been undertaken in Western, developed countries and generalized to contexts such as Asia-Pacific countries (Cooke, Schuler & Varma, 2020; see also De Cieri, Sanders, & Lin, 2021). The Asia-Pacific region is widely acknowledged as a challenging and dynamic context for management research (Rowley, 2017). By neglecting important contextual factors such as institutional factors and societal norms that may be unique and require understanding of the local contexts in Asia-Pacific countries (Bhagat, McDevitt, & McDevitt, 2010), incomplete information emerge with low external validity to Asian-Pacific countries (Zhao, Liu, Zhu, & Liu, 2020). In this special issue data for the different papers is collected in China and Pakistan.

This special issue aims to increase our knowledge about HR micro-foundations by addressing some of the outstanding conceptual, theoretical, and empirical questions and presenting an agenda for future research for the Asian region. In the special issue, we include papers that explore and examine various aspects of HR practices and HR process research. The five papers can be divided into two clusters: three papers are related to the HR content and two papers are related to the HR process research stream. In this Introduction, we elaborate on different aspects of the micro-foundations of the HR content research (Section 2), and the micro-foundations of the HR process research (Section 3) and connect these elaborations to an overview of the five papers in this special issue. In Section 4, we discuss future research for both research streams, and we search for ways how to combine this micro

foundation research within the HR content and HR process research. This Introduction of the special issue ends with a short Conclusion (Section 5).

2. Micro-foundations of HR content research

The primary objectives of HR *content* research are to identify which HR practices are effective in achieving desirable outcomes for organizations and the mechanisms underlying their benefits (Paauwe, 2009; Wright & Ulrich, 2017). Concentrating on organizational operational and financial performance, early research demonstrated the role of bundles of HR practices in achieving these outcomes, and it also identified underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions of these relationships (Jiang, Takeuchi, & Lepak, 2013). For instance, the effectiveness of HRM depends on the extent to which the system is aligned with organizational strategy and sustainable objectives (Lepak, Liao, Chung, & Harden, 2006). Research has also demonstrated HR systems bring about desirable outcomes to organizations through mechanisms, such as firm resources, employee ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO), employee attitudes and behaviours, and collective social exchange (see Jiang & Messersmith, 2018 for a review). Continuing but extending these studies, recent research on HRM has some new features. By reflecting these developments, papers in this special issue contribute substantially to the literature in this area, focus on the Asian region and offer new inspirations for future research and practice. In describing these new developments, we focus on the multi-level, multi-entity, and multi-criteria perspectives.

2.1. The multilevel perspective to understanding HRM effect

First, a multilevel perspective has been adopted to disentangle the effects of HR practices on individual, team and organizational outcomes (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019a). HRM is a multi-level phenomenon, where gaps exist between the designed, implemented, and

experienced HR practices (Nishii & Wright, 2008). Distinguishing between these levels helps to clarify how HR practices exert influence in the organizations. Also, tackling the multi-level dynamics such as mediating and contingent factors at different levels is quite important for understanding the influence of HRM (Takeuchi, Gong, Boon, & Jiang, 2021). It is also intriguing to look at the discrepancy between manager and employee ratings of HR practices, and how each has an impact on outcomes at each level (Wang et al., 2020).

Papers in our special issue reflect this trend and employ multilevel analyses. In the first paper of this special issue, entitled "*High-performance human resource practices and employee well-being: The role of networking and proactive personality*" Liu, Yu, and Yan investigated how organizations' implementation of HRM relates to employee networking and well-being. Drawing on the social capital theory, this study examined the relationship between high-performance human resource practices (HPHRP) and individual well-being, as well as its mechanism and boundary conditions in China. With a sample of 4,395 employees from 437 companies, the results of hierarchical linear modeling revealed that employee networking mediated the relationship between HPHRP and well-being. Moreover, the positive effect of networking on well-being was enhanced under high levels of proactive personality. By exploring the relationship between HPHRP and well-being through a networking perspective and incorporating individual factors into the research model, the present study provides a clearer picture of when and how HPHRP works in the Chinese context. Implications for the literature and managerial practices were discussed.

In the second paper, which is also related to the HR content research, Li, Lin, and Dong report in their paper, entitled "*Research on job insecurity and well-being in the workplace from triple perspectives of HRM, leader and coworker*" the results of a three-level study. This study aims to investigate how organizational high-commitment HRM, leader's trust, and coworker support influence well-being in the workplace. Based on signaling theory and

conservation of resources theory, these authors first posit that high-commitment HRM is positively related to work well-being through reducing job insecurity. They also assume that leader's trust in subordinates and coworker support serve as important moderators in this relationship. A multilevel, multisource field survey was conducted with 1,369 supervisors and 6,975 employees from 128 firms in China. Results support the hypotheses, indicating that job insecurity mediates the relationship between high-commitment HRM and work well-being. Leader's trust in subordinates and coworker support moderate the mediating effect of job insecurity; specifically, the effect of job insecurity is stronger when leaders' trust is high rather than low, and when coworker support is low rather than high. These findings provide a finer-grained understanding of how organizational HRM, leaders, and coworkers interact to affect job insecurity and, finally, work well-being.

Both Liu et al. and Li et al, examined similar issue but Li et al. included factors at the leader level, showing how leader's trust regulate the effect of organizational HRM on employees' perceived job insecurity and well-being.

2.2. The multi-entity perspective to understanding HRM effects

Closely linked to the abovementioned topic of multilevel analyses, HRM and leadership are related to each other, and it is thus quite important to investigate their joint effects (McClean & Collins, 2019: Fateh, Mustamil & Shahzad, 202; Zhong, Qian & Wang, 2020). For instance, HR systems and executive leadership styles work hand-in-hand to expose managerial values (Liu, Lepak, Takeuchi, & Sims, 2003; Song, Tsui, & Law, 2009). Department or team leaders determine how an organization's designed HRM is implemented within a department or team, and therefore how employees experience HRM. In this special issue, Li et al. showed how team leader trust similarly influences the effect of HRM on

perceptions of job insecurity and employee well-being. Also the paper of Jiang, Li and Zhu in the other stream of papers in this special issue discuss leadership.

In addition to leaders at different levels, other entities such as HR professionals, coworkers, and even external customers also matter in the HR process. Adopting a multi-entity perspective in examining HRM could be an avenue to integrate HR practices and HR processes since the leaders and HR practices will convey values to the employees and ensure that the sense-making is consistent with the framing of new strategic directions of firms (Sanders et al., 2021b).

2.3. The multi-criteria perspective to understanding HRM effect

Another feature of papers in this special issue is the shift in focus from performance to well-being, which reflects the trend of recent studies (Peccei & Van De Voorde, 2019b). Performance is no longer the sole important outcome for evaluating an HR system. Employee interests such as well-being, health, work-family balance, and long-term sustainability are becoming increasingly important criteria when assessing the effectiveness of HRM (Kramar, 2014; Wang, Xing, Song, & Moss, 2022). Following this trend, research has examined how HRM can reach "mutual gains" between organizational interests and those of employees.

In the third paper of our special issue, entitled "*Organizational career management in the new career era: scale development and validation*" Zhou, Zhao, Jiang and Lin discuss the scale development and validation for a new scale of organizational career management in the new career era for China. Despite the widely recognized change of career management in the new career era, little is known about whether current organizational career management practices differ from previous ones. Using an open-end survey and literature review, this study develops a scale of organizational career management in China that shows some features of the new career era. These authors conducted two independent studies of Chinese

respondents (N = 320; N = 216) to examine the reliability and validity of the scale. The final organizational career management scale includes four dimensions: boundaryless work, work-life balance policies, training and development, and diversification. Further, they tested both the possible bright side and dark side of organizational career management in contemporary organizations using 179 employees over a two-month interval. The study shows that both the bright side (i.e., higher organizational commitment and less turnover intention) and the dark side (i.e., overqualification issue and more likely to leave organizations) exist when discussing organizational career management in China. This paper discusses the contributions, practical complications, limitations, and future research directions.

In this special issue, also, both Liu et al. and Li et al. linked HR content to employee well-being. By addressing the role of HRM in expanding employees' social networks and reducing job insecurity—and considering individual differences (e.g., proactive personality) and work relationships (e.g., leader trust and co-worker support)—this research showed how bundles of HR practices can improve employee well-being.

3. Micro-foundation of HR process research

There is a longstanding research tradition in HRM of examining the relationship between HR practices and organizational performance at the organizational-level. As a response to this content-oriented HR research at the organizational level, scholars have turned their attention to the HR process (see Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Sanders, et al., 2014; Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Hewett, et al., 2018; Wang, et al., 2020, Patel, Yang & Sanders, 2021; Bednall, Sanders & Yang, 2021). Led by influential scholars as Bowen and Ostroff (2004), and Nishii, Lepak and Schneider (2008), the process approach focuses on how HRM is communicated and how employees make sense of HR policies and practices. Currently, two research streams

in studying HR processes can be identified. In the following, we elaborate on these two streams and make the connection between two of the papers in this special issue.

3.1. HR strength research

The first stream of research is informed by Bowen and Ostroff (2004)'s HR (system) strength framework. This research stream focuses on the process of how organisations communicate their HR policies and practices to employees. Bowen and Ostroff (2004) borrowed and integrated literature on organisational climate (Schneider, Salvaggio, & Subirats, 2002) and the covariation principle of Kelley's attribution theory (Kelley, 1967; 1973). They proposed that when employees perceive HRM in their organization as distinctive, consistent and consensual, the HR system is "strong" and employees can understand what is expected from them and respond accordingly. In the following section, we mainly focus on the covariation principle as the most applied part of Bowen and Ostroff's theory.

The covariation principle of Kelley's (1967, 1973) attribution theory proposes that when people interpret behaviours or events, they often have access to multiple instances of the stimulus across time and situations. At such times, individuals determine the cause of the stimulus based on three features: *distinctiveness*, *consistency,* and *consensus*. The first element, distinctiveness, refers to the extent to which a stimulus "stands out" in its environment, thereby capturing attention and arousing interest (Kelley, p. 102). The second element, consistency, refers to similarity across time and modalities. If the stimulus is the same in all situations, individuals perceive the situation as consistent. The final element of the covariation model is consensus, and it relates to the similarity of behaviour across different people. If many people perceive the situation in the same way, consensus is high. Depending on the information available, individuals attribute behaviour or events to the *entity or*

stimulus when they perceive the information as highly distinctive, consistent, and consensual, to *context or time* when they perceive high distinctiveness, low consistency and low consensus, or to the *person themselves* when they perceive low distinctiveness, high consistency and low consensus.

The seminal work of Bowen and Ostroff (2004) highlights the importance of communicating HR strategies, policies and practices to employees and has stimulated many empirical studies on HRM (system) strength (see Bednall et al, 2021). Although Bowen and Otsroff (2004; see also Ostroff and Bowen, 2016) have repeatedly clarified that *HRM (system) strength* should be considered an organisational construct, most empirical studies examine HR strength as employee perceptions (see also Sanders et al, 2021; Bednall, et al., 2021). Research shows that employees' perceptions of HR strength have an influence on employees' attitudes and behaviours, such as organisational commitment, organisational identification, employee well-being and informal learning activities, such as reflection, knowledge sharing and innovative behaviour (Hewett et al, 2018; Wang et al, 2020; Sanders et al, 2021).

In a meta-analysis on the role of employees' perceptions of HR strength in (bundles of) HR practices and outcomes relationship, Bednall et al. (2022) found greater support for HR strength as a mediator as opposed to a moderator. These results suggest that part of the effect of (bundles of) HR practices on employee outcomes is due to the signals produced by the HR system. Even after accounting for study characteristics, such as the operationalization and measurement of the construct of perceived HR strength, research study design (cross-sectional versus longitudinal or experimental designs), industry, sampling strategy, and publication status, these authors detected a consistent pattern in the mediation effect of perceived HR strength and an inconsistent pattern regarding the moderation effect of perceived HR strength.

The chapter of Sanders, Bednall and Yang (2021) in the Handbook on HR process research on HR strength shows that most HR strength research is conducted in Europe (41% of the reviewed papers) and in Asia (47% of the reviewed papers). This means that we cannot conclude that HR strength research is mainly considered from a Western perspective. However, studies that compare antecedents and outcomes between Western and Eastern countries are lacking.

Related to the HR strength research is the first paper in the second cluster by Babar, Obaid, Sanders and Tariq. These authors aim to create new knowledge regarding the boundary effects of HR strength in their paper entitled "*Does faith at work matter on HR strength, performance appraisal quality and employee performance*", based on the covariation principle of the attribution theory and job demand resource model. In this study, following the examination of the relationship between performance appraisal quality (clarity, regularity, and openness) and employees' proficient, adaptive, and proactive performance and the moderating effect of perceived HR strength, employees' religiosity is examined as a boundary condition of the effect of perceived HR strength. The findings of a two-wave, multi-actor study ($N = 391$ employees and 61 managers from the Telecom industry in Pakistan) highlight that the relationship between performance appraisal quality and employee performance is strongest when under the conditions of high perceived HR strength and low religiosity, or low perceived HR strength and high religiosity conditions. The situation of this study, namely Pakistan is interesting as Pakistan is an Islamic country in which 96.28% of the population is Muslim.

3.2. HR Attributions

The second influential HR process research stream focuses on employees' beliefs regarding their organizations' intentions for HR practices, referred to as *HR attributions*

(Nishii et al., 2008). The work on HR attribution relies on the causal attribution framework (Heider, 1958; Weiner, 1985). Causal attributions are the explanations that individuals form for their own and others' behaviour, which help people to understand, predict, and control their environment (Wong & Weiner, 1981). One of the key dimensions of Heider's (1944; 1958) attribution theory is the *locus of causality*, which concerns whether an individual considers the cause of behaviour to be internal (i.e., generated by the person) or external (i.e., generated by the situation). Depending on the experience of success or failure, people attribute the event or behaviour to internal or external causes. In general, people attribute personal success to internal factors, such as their abilities and competencies and talents, while attributing failures to external factors, such as bad luck or poor timing. However, in explaining the success and failures of other people, people attribute success to external factors, such as luck or opportune timing, and failure to internal factors, such as a lack of talents. These explanations (attributions) of one own and others' behaviour influence individuals' responses in terms of their attitudes and behaviours (Weiner, 1985).

In applying Heider's (1958) causal attributions to the HR domain, Nishii et al. (2008) first differentiated two general HR attributions. Internal attributions describe employees' beliefs that HR practices are designed in response to internal pressures, such as changes in CEOs, or financial issues, and external attributions refer to employees' beliefs that HR practices are designed in response to situational pressures, such as complying with unions, and other legal requirements. The previous and in some countries current threats of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related new guidelines from the government can also be seen as another example of external attributions (Sanders et al, 2020). As Nishii et al. (2008) argue that internal attributions are more complex in comparison to external attribution, they further divided internal attributions into four types by crossover a HR philosophy (commitment versus control approach) and HR focus (strategic versus employee focus) dimension. This

results in the following four internal attributions: service quality (commitment approach and strategic focus), employee well-being (commitment approach and employee focus), cost-reduction (control approach and strategic focus), and employee exploitation attributions (control approach and employee focus). The emergent conceptual matrix demonstrated that when employees believe that HR practices are intended to enhance employee well-being or increase service quality, they show higher organizational commitment, and are more satisfied, which is also associated with higher organization citizenship behaviours and customer satisfaction. In contrast, when employees believe that HR practices are designed to intensify work and/or reduce cost, they are less committed and less satisfied. Research shows that these HR attributions influence employees' attitudes and behaviours (Hewett et al, 2018; Wang et al, 2020; Hewett, 2021).

The review of research on HR attributions (Hewett, 2021) show that studies are conducted both in Western and Eastern countries. More in detail, of the 17 reviewed papers four are conducted in China and one was conducted in South Korea. The other papers in the review were conducted in West Europe and US. Similar to the HR strength research, studies comparing antecedents and outcomes of HR attributions are missing.

To investigate the synergy of HR practices and HR effectiveness, Jiang, Li, and Zhu, in the final paper of the special issue, entitled "*The trickle-down effect of managers' belief in the importance of human resource management practices on employee performance: evidence from China* presented a cross-level moderated mediation model. These authors argue that although many studies investigated the effects of HR practices on employee performance, it is unknown how top managers' belief in HR importance influences HRM effectiveness at the departmental level. Based on the upper echelon's theory, the present study presented a trickle-down effect of top managers' belief in HR importance on employee performance and empirically tested it. A cross-level analysis was conducted by using the data collected from

56 top managers, 91 department supervisors, and 316 employees in China. The results showed that: (1) top managers' belief in HR importance positively influenced HR competence, and the organization's HR competence played a fully mediating role between HR importance at the organizational level and HR effectiveness at the departmental level; (2) the HR effectiveness evaluated by department supervisors exerted a significant positive influence on employees' HR practices; and (3) the HR effectiveness evaluated by department supervisors indirectly affected employees' performance through their HR practices.

After exploring the micro-foundations of both HR content and HR process research, as well as the introduction of the five papers in this special issue, we elaborate further on the avenues for future research in the next section.

4. Avenues for future research

From a theoretical standpoint, there is a range of perspectives that address how HR has an impact, such as the resource-based view, social exchange theory and resource dependency theory. In a separate research stream, there are HR process theories, including attribution theory, social cognitive theory, and HR strength. Given these two divergent programs, there is a strong need for a better integrated theoretical model or new theories to underpin the integration of HR practices and HR processes, instead of a patchwork of theories that do not complement one another. We believe that the papers in this special issue start to develop these kinds of integrated theoretical models and new theories, especially for the Asian region.

More research is also needed to examine how an HR system can result in mutual benefits to organizational performance and employee interests. With an increased focus on employee outcomes and the evidence that attainment of performance might be at the cost of employee well-being, employee-focused HRM research emerges. Especially triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, employee well-being is the cornerstone of HRM and company survival

(Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Although research has linked HR practices or systems with employee interests, these practices and systems were originally designed for performance. Future research should take efforts into identifying HR practices or systems that exclusively lead to employee interests, including health, work-life balance and well-being (Cooper et al., 2019; Huettermann & Bruch, 2019; McCarthy, Darcy, & Grady, 2010). For instance, the trend of taking account of employee interests is associated with inclusive HR practices and the nature of diversified human resources (Shore, Cleveland, & Sanchez, 2018; Shi, Pathak, Song, & Hoskisson, 2018). In organizations, a healthy HR system will support a diverse workforce, treat each employee with respect and dignity regardless of their background, and help them to reach their full potential. In general, the interests of employees and their family members should be also the central theme (not the byproduct) of effective HR management and practice.

In this special issue, we incorporated submissions from two cultures, including China, and Pakistan, because cultural values are likely to shape HR practices and processes (Aycan et al., 2000). For example, HR strategy could be influenced by cultural values, implementation of HR systems could be facilitated or constrained by cultural context, and employees are likely to interpret the practices through a cultural lens. Therefore, coupled with attribution theory, sensemaking theory, social cognitive theory, and other anthropological perspectives (i.e., Hewett et al., 2018; Skålén, Quist, Edvardsson, & Enquist, 2005), future research is needed to identify the roles of culture and values in research on HR content and process. In particular, rather than merely applying theories of HRM that originated in the context of Western business, there is a need for members of non-Western societies to undertake research on HRM that is grounded in their own culture and values (see also De Cieri et al., 2022). For instance, attention should be paid to the effects of collectivism-oriented HRM and *guanxi* (social networks of power) in the Chinese context and beyond

(Zhao, Cooke, & Wang, 2021). Also, studies that compare the antecedents and effects of HR content and HR process between Western and Eastern studies should be encouraged, as well as studies that compare the antecedents and effects between Asian countries, such as China and Pakistan.

Related to China, we also encourage more HR research tailored to what is happening and what will happen soon to the organization (Zhao et al., 2021). Although HR scholars have provided a large body of knowledge into the usage of HRM, a series of questions under this changing business environment remain and await inquiry. For instance, how should HR systems be designed and implemented to adapt to the VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity) times? In addition, as more employees become multiple jobholders in the gig economy (Campion, Caza, & Moss, 2020; Sessions et al., 2021), HR research has to answer how to effectively manage this group of HR (e.g., leveraging their experience in the secondary job into the primary job, or protecting primary job energy impairment from the secondary job)? In addition, with the increase in digital transformation, the rise of automation and artificial intelligence, and the widespread adoption of hybrid and flexible working arrangements, are traditional HRM theories and findings suitable for these new phenomena?

It is also essential for scholars in different areas to work together. To tackle the issue of organizational sustainability and respond to the climate change crisis, we need to have multidisciplinary collaborations. For instance, there are already some studies on green HRM (Renwick, Redman, & Maguire, 2013). In the future, HR scholars, organizational behavior researchers, and earth and environment experts could work together to identify the best ways to develop, communicate, and promote measures for protecting the environment. Unsworth and her colleagues (2020) from various disciplines proposed the concept of employee green behavior, and they recognized that employees were crucial for helping the environment. As

argued by Tsui (2013), responsible researchers need to step out of their comfort zone to embrace the knowledge and collaboration opportunities from different areas. To answer these important questions (Tihanyi, 2020) and to respond to calls from the society and community, this should be our mission for future HRM research.

In addition to the HR (system) strength model (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004) and the HR attribution model (Nishii et al., 2008), HR process research considers the implementation of HR practices by line managers. These three elements have stimulated numerous empirical studies. Several review papers of this literature have recently appeared in influential journals (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016; Hewett, et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2020), and an edited book (Sanders et al., 2021). However, still, questions remain unanswered, even after the publication of this special issue. For instance, how should the HR process be studied? Signalling theory (Connelly et al., 2010) suggests that the quality of the signal, and characteristics of the senders and receivers are important aspects of communication. It is unclear which actors—employees, line managers, or the entire HR department—are most crucial to the effectiveness of HRM. In addition, HR practices are typically studied either in isolation or they are aggregated into a "bundle"; it is unclear how they interact with one another to produce different outcomes.

In this regard, existing research seems fragmented with little cross-fertilization. For example, most research on HR (system) strength to date has been situated at the individual level; it has not operationalized HR system strength as an organizational-level property (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). Similarly, equivocal findings regarding the impact of 'control-focused' attribution in different contexts (see for example, Van de Voorde & Beijer, 2015; Hewett et al, 2018) raise questions of external validity about the HR attribution typology. Also, on the topic of the implementation of HR by line managers some important questions remain unanswered: what is the role of ability, motivation and opportunities of managers to

implement HR in their team or department? Needless to say, the three strands of research around HR (system) strength and HR attribution run in parallel with work on HR implementation, within an overarching umbrella of attribution theory with different conceptual variations that link HR processes together.

We end this section on future research with some remaining questions regarding the micro-foundations of HRM, both for the HR content and HR process research, which we hope scholars will pick up for their research: How are the intended, the implemented and the experienced HR practices related, and how do personal, work, leadership, and organizational factors influence these relationships? How will organizational culture, leadership of senior and line managers influence employees' perceptions, understanding and attributions of HR practices? What are the roles of employees' characteristics such as proactivity, personality and learning goal orientation in HR process, including perceptions, understanding and attributions? What are the impacts of national cultural values in the HR process, including perceptions, understanding and attributions? How does a strategy-oriented HR system (e.g., service-oriented, safety-oriented, innovation-oriented, and green HRM) work for organizations, teams, and employees? Finally, how does an ethics-based HR system (e.g., sustainable HRM, socially responsible HRM) influence multiple stakeholders?

5. Conclusions

Research about the relationship between (bundles of) HR practices and outcome at the organizational level is until recently mainly studied at the organizational level. However, it can be observed that scholars to an increasing extent acknowledge that employees are the foundation of organizations and should play an important role in the research on answering the question of the effect of HRM on employee and organizational outcomes. In the special issue of *New Frontiers in HR Practices and HR Processes,* we pay attention to the emerging

research on the role of employees, also known as the micro-foundations of HR research in both HR content and HR process research in the Asian region. It is important to focus on the Asian region as most of the HR research are conducted in Western regions. By means of this special issue we provide insights of HR content and HR process research in two Asian countries, China and Pakistan. We call for more Asian region research in the areas of HR content and HR process.

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Declarations