

Title:

People Management After State Socialism: A Literature Review And Research Agenda

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Abstract

This paper reviews the existing evidence base on the practice of people management in the context of post-state socialist countries of Asia. The focus is on Asian successor states of the Soviet Union and those under direct Soviet domination. In an undeniably diverse region, in all the countries under review there appears to be a disarticulation between liberal market reforms, economic progress, the ability to attract FDI and the development and persistence of a formal employment base. Extended informal networks of support often play an important role, inter alia, in informing recruitment, although clan based networks appear as quite impermeable to outsiders. Regulatory coverage is uneven but in many instances job protection is high. Drawing on the available research base, this paper consolidates and extends the existing state of knowledge on people management within the institutional contexts examined and draws out the implications for theorising and practice. The study highlights how reforms in one area may lead to counter-movements in others, shoring up existing modes of people management. Again, whilst clans and middle classes both have channels for political advocacy, there are fewer opportunities for workers and their representatives; this means that there is little impetus for legislation to promote better practice, workplace inclusivity and equity.

Keywords:

Post-State Socialism; Transitional Periphery Economies; Context; People Management; Business Systems; Varieties of Capitalism; MNCs; Informal Networks; Regulation of Employment.

Highlights

- There are common features in people management across the countries under review.
- Regulatory coverage is uneven although in many countries high levels of job protection persist.
- Family owned firms, characterised by autocratic paternalism, play a prominent role.
- As with many other emerging markets, extended informal networks of support are prominent; however, as they are often clan based, these are particularly impermeable to outsiders.
- There is a disarticulation between the scale and scope of liberalisation, economic development and the retention or extension of a formal employment base, providing space to practice people management; in turn, this reduces pressures for further reforms.
- Many institutional features are deeply embedded and have persisted into the post-Soviet era.

1. Introduction: The need for comparative analysis in the context of post-state socialist countries of Asia

In the recent past, the mainstream literature on people management in Asia has focused heavily on the economies of South and Southeast Asia-Pacific (Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2016). As the burgeoning economic performance of these nations has become of keen interest (e.g., Asian Development Bank, 2018), this has encouraged increasing research on people management in the post-state socialist countries of Southeast Asia (Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2016). Yet, other post-state socialist Asian countries, the Transitional Periphery Economies (TPEs) (Wood & Demirbag, 2015), and other Asian countries formerly under close control of the Soviet Union, are rather less investigated. The dissolution of the USSR in 1991 generated post-Soviet national realities that followed unique development paths. This included the emergence of post-Soviet autocracies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (Junisbai, 2012), areas where the corpus of research relevant to studying people management is much smaller; there is even much less work on the other two Asian countries that were previously dominated by the Soviet Union, specifically Mongolia and Afghanistan. Wood and Demirbag (2015) argue that this set of countries, representing post-Soviet national entities, are on an initial path towards modernisation and integration into the global marketplace but they vary in the degree of their openness.

We seek to encompass in our review all the post-Communist countries of the former Asian Soviet Union, as well as Mongolia and Afghanistan but excluding China. We have decided to exclude the latter owing to its size and scale, and given that there are already many consolidations and extensions of the HRM literature on the country itself (e.g., Mayes et al., 2017; Zhang, 2012). More specifically, the context of this literature review (see Table 1) pertains, first, to Asian TPEs that encompass former Communist countries in Asia representing the successor Asian states of the Soviet Union (cf. Wood & Demirbag, 2015) located in the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Next, the focus shifts to the post-state socialist states of Asia (Mongolia and Afghanistan), each of which underwent a period of rule under close control

of the former Soviet Union. We chose to focus on the countries within, or directly dominated by, the former Soviet Union, given the scale and scope of reforms they have undergone and the challenges these have experienced in bedding down unambiguous and genuinely complementary political and economic orders and associated sets of complementary firm level practices (Lane, 2017; Lane, 2007).

Therefore, in this article we examine the application of policies and practices for managing people through a cross-country analysis comparing “(...) the management of people in different national contexts, without the employees in question necessarily being linked to the same organisation or even in the same global value chain.” (Cooke et al., 2017, p. 198).

Table 1
Groupings of Asian countries examined

1	Successor Asian states of the Soviet Union (Transitional Peripheral Economies; TPEs) (8)	Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
2	Other post-state socialist states of Asia (2)	Mongolia and Afghanistan (excluded from the main study due to lack of a critical mass of literature).

The aggregate population of the aforementioned ten Asian countries totals approximately 125 million (Central Intelligence Agency, 2018) and reflects significant foreign direct investment (FDI) potential as companies seek to expand into so-called blue ocean environments. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in its place in December 1991 (Strayer, 2016), the resulting post-state socialist states began their journey towards becoming part of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The first countries accepted by the organisation were Mongolia (Central & East Asia) in 1997 and Kyrgyzstan (Central Asia) in 1998. Nowadays, out of the sampled countries, only three are still seeking to join of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in the near term: Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan (World Trade Organisation, 2018).

Budhwar and Mellahi (2018) highlight the interconnectedness of limitations in formal institutional structures, political dynamics and the dominance of autocratic rule, dominant public sectors and underdeveloped financial markets, closed economies, the resource curse, weak entrepreneurial classes, and conflicts in explaining the sub-optimal performance in the Middle East. Within this context, it has proven challenging to develop and sustain local skills to meet indigenisation directives and, simultaneously, retain

skilled expatriates. Again, there are shared cultural effects to consider as well as associated legal traditions. This study encompasses all these dimensions in exploring the post Soviet successor states in Asia; the study reveals much diversity in the region but also counter-intuitive trends from specific policy prescriptions. In our conclusions, we return to the key institutional features and contradictions associated with their interplay with workplace practice; we draw out the relevance of emerging themes from the research reviewed for understanding institutional diversity and comparing people management between capitalisms.

This literature review and analysis undertakes a cross-country comparative study on particular practices towards managing people, *inter alia*, in order to reveal any convergence and divergence across the contexts of post-state socialist states of Asia (cf. Al Ariss & Sidani, 2016). The balance of the paper is structured as follows. Firstly, there is an outline of the methodology used. Next, we illustrate the reviewing academic literature published in three and four star journals according to the Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS, 2019) list published in 2018. Lastly, the paper concludes with an overview of future research avenues for exploration. This study confirms the uneven nature of institutional coupling, and the disarticulation between national policies and practice; this means that systematic complementarities incentivising the adoption of modern HR systems are limited or absent. In any event, the nature of political representation means that employees lack an effective political voice; in turn, this means that there is little impetus for new legislation providing more comprehensive employment regulation, mandating greater co-determination and/or encouraging better people management.

2. Methodology

The target scope and purpose of the review are, respectively, the post-state socialist countries of Asia and the status of the literature on people management in these contexts. As such, our paper draws exclusively from secondary information in order to identify a research agenda related to contexts that, to a large extent, still constitute *terra incognita* (Witt & Redding, 2014). We sought out publications in peer-

reviewed journals featured in the JStor, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. The keyword search was repeated for each of the three databases considered leading to a systematic identification of relevant papers. The keywords used in our search included the following including variations of the like: Human Resource Management, Labour Relations, Industrial Relations, and Employee Relations.

The JStor digital library search included all fields for articles covering only items published in English within the areas of labour relations/employment and management/organisational behaviour. The Scopus search involved title, abstract, and keywords concerning articles and including only items published in English within the field of social sciences as well as business, management, and accounting. Finally, the Web of Science search included a topic examination of articles encompassing only those published in English within the field of social sciences.

By entering the words in the search engine of the respective databases, identified articles were then itemised according to the title, keywords, abstract, main body, and references. The initial database searches encompassed both theoretical and empirical sources in refereed (peer-reviewed) academic journals, while excluding irrelevant or non-appropriate work related to areas such as psychology or the natural sciences (e.g., Meier, 2011). We further supplemented our research through a search of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Central Asia online library of research reports. While our priority was journal quality given the scarcity of credible scholarly HRM research in the area, many of the search results captured more general studies which encompassed issues such as the operation of labour markets and/or offering insights on implications for managing people within their specific local institutional contexts (see Table 2).

Table 2
Initial aggregate keyword search results per country

	Successor Asian states of the Soviet Union							Other post-state socialist states of Asia			
	Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan	Uzbekistan	Mongolia	Afghanistan	
JStor	127	15	21	7	28	11	10	10	15	5	4
Scopus	64	6	4	4	29	7	4	2	5	2	4
Web of Science	45	14	5	4	10	3	3	0	2	0	2
Total	236	35	30	15	67	21	17	12	22	7	10

We then proceeded to cull out all publications not pertaining to top ranking journals by utilising the CABS 2018 list as reference (CABS, 2019). This reduced the list to 51 articles published in three and four star

journals; in particular, our findings show 18 and 12 journal titles for three and four star rankings, respectively. As a measure of cross-checking, an additional web search via Google Scholar confirmed the limited amount of sources obtained via the three databases utilised. Hence, we are confident that the picture illustrated in Table 3 reflects the breadth of research in the context of post-state socialist countries of Asia.

An analysis of the research methods applied across the 51 articles led to a categorisation according to two groupings: reviews and empirical studies. While the former totalled 13 papers, the latter were further examined to identify the research method utilised. As Table 4 shows, the majority of studies undertaken were quantitative deploying surveys to investigate the under-researched contexts of post-state socialist countries of Asia.

Table 3

List of three and four star CABS 2018 ranked journal titles and respective articles found related to studies in people management in successor Asian states of the Soviet Union and other post-state socialist states of Asia (1991-2018) ($N = 51$).

No.	Journal titles in descending order of number of articles	CABS Star Ranking	No. of articles found
1	Journal of Business Ethics	3	8
2	International Business Review	3	5
3	Management International Review	3	3
4	Academy of Management Journal	4	3
5	Journal of International Business Studies	4	3
6	International Journal of Human Resource Management	3	3
7	Academy of Management Review	4	2
8	Journal of International Management	3	2
9	Review of International Political Economy	3	2
10	Human Relations	4	1
11	Industrial Relations	4	1
12	Journal of Organizational Behaviour	4	1
13	Journal of Vocational Behaviour	4	1
14	Journal of World Business	4	1
15	Public Administration Review	4	1
16	Strategic Management Journal	4	1
17	Tourism Management	4	1
18	Work, Employment and Society	4	1
19	Academy of Management Perspectives	3	1
20	Administrative Sciences	3	1
21	Asia Pacific Journal of Management	3	1
22	California Management Review	3	1
23	Economics and Management	3	1
24	European Management Review	3	1
25	Financial Management	3	1
26	IMF Economic Review (previously IMF Staff Papers)	3	1
27	Journal of International Marketing	3	1
28	Journal of Managerial Psychology	3	1
29	Small Business Economics	3	1

Table 4
Research methods applied in empirical studies ($N = 38$)

Research methods		No. of articles	N(%)
Qualitative	Interviews	5	
	Case study	2	
	Case study and interviews	2	
	Sub-total	9	24
Quantitative	Surveys	12	
	Secondary data	10	
	Sub-total	22	58
Mixed	Interviews and surveys	7	
	Sub-total	7	18
Total		38	

This paper focuses on work published from the period 1991 onwards to encompass academic research that occurred since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Hence, 1991 would symbolise the start of institutional shifts towards opening to the global marketplace and, thus, would indicate a possible, albeit gradual, embracing of modern HR practices. This foundation is predicated on an implicit assumption that during this period academic interest would have increased in relation to the contexts in question and, hence, this paper would represent the most recent knowledge and thinking in the area. An analysis of the countries examined individually in the studies indicated that, of the totality of papers sampled, 14% concerned Kazakhstan, followed by Kyrgyzstan (6%), Armenia (4%), Uzbekistan (4%), Azerbaijan (2%), and Georgia (2%). The remaining 68% featured comparative studies involving two or more post-state socialist countries of Asia. Based on the total sample ($N = 51$), Table 5 illustrates the overall frequency per country studied in the 1991-2018 period.

Table 5 clearly reveals the dearth of research in relation to the extremely poor and conflict-plagued nations of Mongolia and Afghanistan in contrast with the noteworthy and increasing amount of studies pertaining to TPE nations featuring vast economic resources and largely untapped markets (cf. Lane, 2017). This latter category encompasses transitional economies such as Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan which, despite low per capita income, weak institutions, corruption, and arbitrary law enforcement, have nonetheless recorded relatively strong growth and have attracted significant FDI (cf. Krumm, 2007). The selected sample of understudied countries reveals that the more growing and open towards FDI the economy, the higher the share of academic source interest (cf. Blonigen, 2005). Focussing on three and four star CABS 2018 ranked journal titles (CABS, 2019) led us to only one relevant paper for Afghanistan

and Mongolia, respectively. Since this represents a major constraint for any conclusion to be drawn from this sample, we decided to exclude these countries from the study.

Table 5

Overall frequency of relevant articles published in three and four star CABS 2018 ranked journal on countries studied in descending order (1991-2018 period)

Countries	Frequency	%
Kazakhstan	29	23
Azerbaijan	20	16
Georgia	18	14
Kyrgyzstan	16	13
Armenia	15	12
Uzbekistan	14	11
Tajikistan	7	5
Turkmenistan	7	5
Afghanistan	1	1
Mongolia	1	1

2.1 Theoretical framework

Our analysis on people management in the post-state socialist countries of Asia is grounded on the assumption that, nationally, embedded sets of institutions affect managerial practice and the reactions of employees thereto. As North (1990, 1991) argues, institutions represent the humanly conceived constraints that define political, economic, and social interplays. Hence, such norms (see Rodrik, Subramanian, & Trebbi, 2004) affect the economic behaviour of stakeholders. A number of different strands of comparative capitalism literature emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s; although they drew on very different intellectual traditions, an increasing overlap became apparent between business systems theory (Whitley, 1999) and the Varieties of Capitalism approach (Hall & Soskice, 2001). This included a recognition that many emerging or transitional markets remained locked on distinct trajectories despite strong pressures towards liberalisation (Hancke', Rhodes, & Thatcher, 2007; Whitley, 2010). A feature of business systems theory was that it accorded particular attention to intra-organisational practice; this encompassed the development of a theoretical framework related to the defining features of work and employment practice (Whitley, 1999, p. 38-39) including employer-employee interdependence and delegation to employees (Table 6). This has been widely deployed to compare HRM, and work and employment policies and

practices between countries (cf. Brewster, Wood, & Brookes, 2008; Budhwar & Sparrow, 2002; Dibben et al., 2016). What makes this model particularly salient to this study is that it has served as a framework for locating many different types of work and employment practice, whether the latter could be construed to be recognisably modern HRM or not (Dibben et al., 2016). In this instance, it has enabled the ordering of different sets of empirical findings within these two over-arching features (table 6). Our conclusions confirm the relevance of this approach, inter alia, in highlighting the linkages between limited representivity and accountability in the political sphere, and managerial reliance on established modes of practice and improvisation and firm level.

Table 6
Themes emerging from the literature based on the defining features of practice (Whitley, 1999)

Feature	Sub-dimensions	Themes emerging from the literature (academic sources in three and four star CABS 2018 ranked journals)	Author(s)
Employer-employee interdependence	1. Training and development	Educational system-firms link	• Minbaeva and Muratbekova Touron (2011) • Woldu and Budhwar (2011)
		Expatriate cultural training and preparation	• Chen et al. (2010)
		Competence /capacity development	• Linz and Semykina (2012) • Gashi, Hashi, and Pugh (2014) • Kjellstrand and Vince (2017)
		Career development	• Luthans and Ibrayeva (2006) • Griffith, Zeybek, and O'Brien (2003) • Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013)
		Vocational/skills training	• Airey and Shackley (1997) • Ivlevs and Veliziotis (2018)
		Training relevance	• Clark and Geppert (2006) • Gasimov and Gurbanov (2013)
		Education system improvement	• Mikesell and Mullins (2001)
	2. Security of tenure	Labour law enforcement	• Gould and Sickner (2008) • Upchurch, Croucher, Danilovich, and Morrison (2015)
		Employment flexibility	• Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013)
		Staffing and career development of locals	• Muratbekova-Touron (2002) • Serafini and Szamosi (2015) • Bakacsi, Sándor, András, and Viktor (2002) • Hénisz and Zelner (2005) • López and Santos (2014) • Syed (2008)
Delegation to employees	1. Representative participation	Role of unions	• Croucher (2015) • Serafini and Szamosi (2015) • Upchurch, Croucher, Danilovich, and Morrison (2015)
		Labour rights Working conditions	• Frynas (2010) • Crane (2013)
	2. Financial participation	Compensation	• Semykina and Linz (2010)
		Pay and job satisfaction	• Linz and Semykina (2012) • Van De Vliert, Van Yperen, and Thierry (2008)
		3. Functional participation and upward communication	Employee commitment
	Employee creativity and innovation		• Kakabadse et al. (2018)
	Workplace quality		• Kjellstrand and Vince (2017) • Muratbekova-Touron (2002)
	4. Effectiveness of formal downward communication	Performance management	• Ford and Ismail (2006) • Gasimov and Gurbanov (2013) • Gregory et al. (2013) • Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013)
		Top-down communication	• Chen et al. (2010)

Interdependence here is taken to denote mutuality and shared commitment to the organisation, expressed via security in tenure and investment in people; employees are incentivised to develop their organisation specific skills (Brewster, Wood, & Brookes, 2008; Dabos & Rousseau, 2004; Whitley, 1999). There is a strong relationship between national context and variations in the degree of employer-employee interdependence and delegation to employees. This results in location isomorphism accompanied by noteworthy variations between locations (Whitley, 1992). The academic sources garnered are located at the intersection of the chosen research terms indicated above and Whitley's (1999) theoretical framework around intra-organisational practice. Later work in the Varieties of Capitalism framework adopted this broad template as a way of comparing practices between capitalisms (cf. Cooke, 2017; Goergen, Brewster, Wood, & Wilkinson, 2012). Table 6 summarises later work which looks at specific sub-dimensions of these two elements.

3. Post-state socialist states of Asia: the institutional context

Before delving into the sampled literature, it is necessary to make some important considerations related to the context of post-state socialist economies of Asia. In fact, recent literature stresses the importance of context in HRM studies (Budhwar, Varma, & Patel, 2016; Farndale & Sanders, 2017). Such movement holds that context is a crucial determinant in the application of HRM policies and practices (Arnholtz & Andersen, 2017; Duman, 2014; Feldmann, 2017; Psychogios et al., forthcoming). Hence, since we are interested on context and people management, our work aligns with comparative HRM literature.

All of the sampled nations have engaged in reforms, albeit at a different shape, speed or rate (Fingar, 2016; International Monetary Fund, 2014). In the process of reforming and modernising institutions towards accessing the global economy, FDI has been particularly associated with financial liberalisation (Campos & Kinoshita, 2010). FDI related to services (e.g., finance, insurance, and information) seems to have benefited the most from the shift of institutions towards democracy as opposed to manufacturing and, especially, mining and oil and gas extraction where foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) appear to be much less particular (Kucera & Principi, 2014). While, on the one hand, foreign aid appears to have

been ineffectual in skewing transitional economies towards democratisation (Freytag & Heckelman, 2012), on the other hand there is a weak causality between FDI inflows and economic growth (Angelopoulou & Liargovas, 2014). A particularly compelling argument as to why this has occurred centres on the relative quality of FDI (Guimón & Filippov, 2012) since most of the economies captured by the review are low wage ones. Coupled with tax concessions or outright avoidance, foreign investors can generate strong returns simply through accessing very cheap labour even if the spin-off benefits to the host country may be slim.

It has been argued that the enforcement of organic, integrated, and solid institutional reforms (Urinboyev, 2015) appears to be crucial in the diffusion of foreign know-how (Burstein & Monge-Naranjo, 2009) and in encouraging firms to reinvest in emerging economies - and raise labour standards - rather than simply paying the bare minimum and repatriating earnings (Chakravarty & Xiang, 2011). To the contrary, institutional instability and political crises increase the effect of perceived uncertainty, disincentivising the upgrading of processes and skills (Chong & Gradstein, 2009).

Part and parcel of economic expansion in transitional economies are the pervasive informal activities of the shadow economy (Bitzenis & Szamosi, 2009; Williams & Schneider, 2016) deriving from local culture and customs favouring rent-seeking structures (Demirbag, McGuinness, Wood, & Bayyurt, 2015; Ledeneva, 2018; López & Santos, 2014; Makhmadshoev, Ibeh, & Crone, 2015; McMann, 2015) which often occur under non-liberal, authoritarian, regimes (Gould & Sickner, 2008). Hence, MNCs entering the fragile states of the transitional periphery are compelled to operate in such risky settings through partnerships and international joint ventures (IJVs) built on assimilated levels of trust (Abramov, 2009; Demirbag, McGuinness, & Altay, 2010). Although the reviewed countries are diverse, common features include uneven and poorly coupled institutions, weak law enforcement, segmentation between the state and large firms, and their smaller counterparts, and a prominent role for family owned business, the latter associated with authoritarian paternalism (Abramov, 2009; Akbar & Kisilowski, 2015; Bakacsi, Sándor, András, & Viktor, 2002; Gould & Sickner, 2008; Hoskisson, Eden, Lau, & Wright, 2000; Martin, Cullen, Johnson, & Parboteeah, 2007; Spencer & Gomez, 2011).

Building on the literature on comparative capitalism, the concept of the Transitional Periphery Economy (commonly referred to as TPE) was developed to explain structure, the very distinct trajectories, and dominant sets of firm level practices encountered in the countries formerly dominated by the Soviet Union, other than the relatively mature emerging markets of central and eastern Europe that have now joined the European Union. The post-Communist TPEs of the Caucasus and Central Asia (Aliyev, 2015; Brewster & Wood, 2015; Dadabaev & Komatsu, 2016; Gilauri, 2016; Hiro, 2011; Lane & Myant, 2007) include cases such as Kazakhstan, where these ex-Soviet societies attained impressive economic growth rates largely on the back of natural resources (The World Bank, 2018; Yilamu, 2017) despite acute human costs (Izyumov, 2010; Uteubayev, 2016). In others, such as Uzbekistan, the availability of forced labour around the production of cotton led to significant foreign exchange (forex) inflows (Johnston, 2017). In both instances, growth was predicated around labour repression; however, the uneven economic performance of the region cannot simply be ascribed to primary resources and very cheap labour.

Several studies have highlighted the disarticulation between macro-economic policy choices and macro economic outcomes in the region (Dowling & Wignarajan, 2006; Demirbag & Wood, 2018). This underscores not only the weaknesses of successor states, but also the extent to which neo-liberal reforms often prove equally damaging as the shoring up of the status quo (ibid.). In terms of employment relations, contrary to the predictions of neo-liberal evangelists, the paring back of employment protection did not significantly encourage more hiring (ibid.). In other instances, the retention of strict employment protection did not preclude massive job losses as a result of industrial failure (Demirbag & Wood, 2018) nor have the effects of policy ineffectiveness been confined to employment. In addition to shortfalls in technical skills, most national education systems face challenges in developing sufficient generic and specialist skills in marketing, public relations, HRM, information technology, and foreign languages, formal policy commitments notwithstanding (Kantarci, Uysal, & Magnini, 2014). In several instances such as Georgia and Armenia, budgetary cutbacks led to a rapid decline in vocational and technical training, despite formal policy commitments to promote skills (e.g., Gevorkyan, 2015). Again, social protection is very uneven and there are structural barriers to an adoption of a West-European style social model (Meyer,

2016). Moreover, inconsistent and unpredictable enforcement of labour legislation encouraged firms to devise strategies to evade the spirit, if not the letter of the law (Demirbag & Wood, 2018). This has meant there are few incentives or support for firms to upgrade people management practices. Rather, many firms default to a coping mode and improvising HR practices in line with contextual pressures (ibid).

It would be incorrect, however, to see government action wholly in negative terms. As with the case with China, whilst undeniably repressive, the governments of countries such as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan have recognised the basic point that broad based growth resolves many political problems (Demirbag & Wood, 2018). This has been referred to as authoritarian modernisation; indeed, the governments of these countries have, through a combination of caution and resource windfalls, managed to bring about relatively solid economic performance (Krumm, 2007). This has led to some successful industrial policy initiatives, for example in the development and sustenance of the Uzbek motor industry (ibid.; Shukurov, Maitah, & Smutka, 2016). In turn, the preservation of large scale industrial employment at least creates a place where comprehensive HRM could take place even if actual practice, as we shall see, often falls short of the ideal.

Although there is debate as to the relative severity of the resource curse, resource rich countries are often associated with poor economic performance and misrule (see Pendergast, Clarke, & Van Kooten, 2011) and this is clearly visible in the region (Markowitz, 2017; Sachs & Warner, 2001). Easy forex windfalls lead to rent-seeking behaviour in turn favouring corruption to the detriment of the overall population's well-being (Cabrales & Hauk, 2011; Venables, 2016). This also harms already weak institutions (Markowitz, 2017; Salti, 2011). As Wood and Demirbag argue (2015) "such windfalls may dilute incentives for institution building or reform" (p. 917) as in education (see Engvall, 2016, p. 112) relegating the transitional periphery to the category of poor, low skills based countries (Veugelers, 2011).

More broadly speaking, whether complete or incomplete, transition to capitalism in the TPE countries saw the explosion of social inequalities which led to high levels of national poverty and dispossession (Hamidov, Helming, & Balla, 2016; Popov, 2010) at a much larger scale than in the post-Communist countries of Eastern Europe (Izyumov & Claxon, 2009). The resulting increase in labour migration has

seen a rise of remittances from the diaspora, which are motivated by psychological and sentimental reasons (Nielsen & Riddle, 2009). The most dramatic example would be the case of Armenia although most of the countries in the region have significant diasporas. Despite the significant reliance of many TPEs on remittances, these have been found to not significantly boost institutional development (Tynaliyev & McLean, 2011). The same applies to the rich natural resources available in most of these countries, such as mining, oil, gas, and hydroelectric power (van der Ploeg, 2010, 2011). Indeed, migrant remittances seem to generate resource curse effects similar to natural resource windfalls. In practical terms this means that, once again, formal government policy becomes disarticulated from economic performance (Demirbag & Wood, 2018). Indeed, great policy failures are likely to increase emigration; in turn, migrant remittances may intensify leading to economic recovery and creating a moral hazard of sorts for politicians. In terms of employment creation, migrant remittances encourage the sustenance of small enterprises that, without inflows of cash from abroad, would be unable to generate sufficient means of subsistence (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007). This may help create and secure more jobs than would otherwise be the case. These are likely to be characterised, however, by the familiar mix of low wages, recruitment on family lines, and authoritarian paternalism; to be added to the mix would be greater insecurity and a reliance on the goodwill of members of extended families (Demirbag & Wood, 2018; Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007).

Clanism adds a further level of complexity as it permeates the societies of most of the successor Asian states of the Soviet Union (Collins, 2003, 2006; Edgar, 2004); such social dynamics may make it difficult to sustain ethical business practices (Banai, Stefanidis, Shetach, & Özbek, 2014). In terms of people management, clanism is likely to make for nepotism, complex and blurred lines of authority, and, with relative influence, do not always coincide with formal job status as clan networks are closed to outsiders (Demirbag & Wood, 2018). Clan loyalties may also temper excessive managerial power and ensure that, even if limited, employee clan members have not only responsibilities, but also some rights (ibid.).

4. A caveat: challenging the concept of HRM in the context of post-state socialist countries of Asia

Before examining the practice of people management in the Post-state socialist states of Asia, it is necessary to reflect on the perceptions of the concept of HRM in the countries in question given the challenge of applying a paradigm of the developed world (United States and Western Europe) to emerging contexts. The HRM construct was initially introduced in the developed world in the US in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g., Brewster, 1995) as a progressive approach to people management encompassing teamwork, employee empowerment, participation, and voice. This stands in stark contrast with the authoritarian, mistrusting, controlling, and bureaucratic labour management approach characterising transitional periphery countries at the time (Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2011).

In an effort to modernise inefficient labour management practices, HRM emerged as an appropriate answer to foster customer centric and accountable professional employee behaviours. By virtue of economic liberalisation policies and the inflow of FDI, the transitional periphery context has seen the application of HRM practices primarily in MNC subsidiaries and IJVs as well as in privatised public organisations, state owned enterprises (SOEs), and private firms aiming to be in line with Western, Anglo-American precepts. It is interesting to note that the implementation of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes, granting loans to enterprises in countries of the former USSR, historically coincided with the imposition of neo-liberal policy prescriptions through ‘shock therapy’ according to the Washington Consensus. In turn, this opened the way for firms to adopt more contingent approaches to managing people, rather than comprehensively upgrading them, as might have been anticipated by some of the proponents of Westernisation (Danilovich & Croucher, 2011, p. 246; Martin, 2002). The perception of HRM is intimately affected by the local context and how this affects the way people are valued within organisations. As Teclmichael, Tessema and Soeters (2006) argue, although HR practices implemented in developing countries could potentially maximise employee performance and contribution, a key mitigating factor is conduciveness of the local institutional environment, particularly in socio-legal and political terms.

While the collapse of the USSR was initially welcomed as a triumph of democracy, the resulting successor states of the Caucasus and Central Asia did not converge with the liberal market paradigm due to weak institutions, and/or the failures of neo-liberalism in practice (Bingol, 2004; Meissner, 2018). The post-Communist transition failed to challenge the authoritarian status quo but rather reinforced the predominance of an oligarchic, established *nomenklatura* ruling on the base of clan relationships and surviving Soviet-era managerial approaches (Akbar & Kisilowski, 2018; Junisbai & Junisbai, 2005; Pickles, 2010; Prokopenko, 1995). Any emerging HRM model applied in the Caucasus and Central Asia region, therefore, is expected to refer to, in the best of cases as in Kazakhstan, a “hybrid of Soviet, Western European and US approaches” (Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2013, p. 115). Yet, as Upchurch (2012) contends, the transitional periphery is plagued by economic behaviour which is either non-regulated or poorly regulated. In particular, “The existence of large informal, black or grey economies (...) appears inextricably linked to crony capitalism and crime and the wider problems of what may be termed ‘wild’ capitalism whereby non-documented working is encouraged as (is) illegal working.” (ibid., p. 464). Furthermore, large-scale corruption, sheer income inequality from high unemployment rates and decreasing salaries, weak legal protection, patronage, clientelism, and an endemic rent-seeking attitude by the elite and the oligarchs (Charman, 2007; Christophe, 2007; Lane, 2013; Pomfret, 2012; Rainnie, Smith, & Swain, 2005; Stucker, 2013; Upchurch, 2012) under the backdrop of personal and authoritarian states (Gleason, 2003; Özcan, 2016) are all factors affecting the management of labour. This assumes autocratic connotations especially in privatised public organisations, SOEs as well as local firms (Gurkov, 2016) and less in foreign-owned subsidiaries, foreign acquisitions, and IJVs (Minbaeva, Hutchings, & Thomson, 2007; Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2011). Furthermore, in transitional periphery contexts, the role of unions is fundamentally ‘Soviet-style’ in that they are closely monitored and reduced to a tool for management to disseminate information and control employees instead of representing a legitimate, independent entity pursuing the interests of the workforce and collective bargaining (Croucher, 2015; Gleason, 2003).

Consequently, it is evident that the balance within the employment relationship is heavily skewed towards employers and managers leading academics to point to a generalised “retrogression” path followed by USSR successor states (Danilovich & Croucher, 2011, p. 258). It could be argued that the notion of HRM appears elusive in the context of the successor Asian states of the Soviet Union under consideration. This leaves us to ponder whether anything resembling HRM, as defined by the classical US and European theorists, exists in the Caucasus and Central Asia outside of a few islands of best practice (Latukha & Malko, 2019; Upchurch, 2012).

5. Examination of the practice of people management in Post-state socialist states of Asia according to Whitley’s framework: evidence from reviewed academic sources in three and four star CABS 2018 ranked journals

5.1 Employer–employee interdependence: overview

While countries such as Kazakhstan have recently attained impressive growth rates (The World Bank, 2018), this has been tempered by a dearth of workforce skills in both the public and private sectors. Given shortfalls in access to pre-employment training (Umbetaliyeva & Panchenko, 2016), in Kazakhstan there has been a drive to upgrade on the job skills at least in the public sector (Kadyrbekova, 2017; Kuljambekova, 2013; Sadykova, Abilmazhinov, & Zharkeshova, 2016; Zharkeshova et al., 2017).

Inefficiencies related to poor levels of competence and obsolete practices, however, remain and are particularly resilient in the health sector (Parfitt, 2009). Concerning the private sector, an extensive body of research indicates that the modernisation of educational strategies needs to be more tailored towards the demands of business competitiveness (Amanova et al., 2017; Kurmanov, Yeleussov, Aliyev, & Tolysbayev, 2015). Particularly, a critical upgrade of higher education has been suggested in order to develop business, managerial, and leadership competences for future local executives (Myrzaliyev et al., 2018; Seitova, 2016) as well as ongoing training throughout their careers (Davis & Callahan, 2012). This development of managerial education in successor states of the Soviet Union TPEs through MBA programs ‘imported’ from the West has encountered challenges due to cultural mismatches related to student behaviours and learning styles (Jones, 2013) which need to be overcome. Barriers to business

education also emerge in terms of international language competencies which relate, as Kuznetsov and Kuznetsova (2014) suggest, to the “existing lexical deficiencies, impairing the sector’s role of a conduit of modern management know-how” (p. 585). Thus, efforts towards economic innovation are hampered by the frequent inadequacy of local managers in establishing international collaborations, in part a function of training limitations (Kuznetsov & Kuznetsova, 2014; Yessengeldin, Sitenko, & Ramashova, 2015).

Nonetheless, the role of education has been recognised as vital to the development of human resources not only to build generic competencies, as in the case of Uzbekistan (Rutkauskas & Ergashev, 2012), but also in modernising industrial sectors (e.g., agri-business in Kazakhstan) (Kenzhin et al., 2016; Malikov, Qineti, Pulatov, & Shukurov, 2016; Nedelkin et al., 2017). Of course, a limitation of such arguments is the assumption that an increase in skills and knowledge leads to an uptake in demand. Many of the more conservative organisations in the region would be, at best, sceptical to the worth of a new generation of managers with modern, generic skills sets.

In almost all countries in the region, labour laws still predominantly feature strong formal employee protection elements inherited from the Communist past (Alzhanova & Sabituly, 2014; Rutkowski, 1999). Consequently, in formal terms, the private sector suffers from limited employment flexibility supposedly affecting global market competitiveness, even if firms often devise informal solutions of their own (Serafini & Szamosi, 2018). A lack of modern integration between the different policy spheres has resulted in insufficient job creation and very low wages, both of which push workers towards the shadow economy, seeking hidden forms of employment (Khamzin et al., 2016). Furthermore, there are two other issues salient to regulation and, ultimately, the implementation of HRM by the private sector. First, there is the political will to enforce labour laws. Not only are there limitations in the capacity of the state to monitor and enforce the law, but it is also often possible for managers to ‘buy’ their way out of it. The TPEs of the former Soviet Union are affected by such endemic corruption levels that, in 2017, they represented the worst performing region in the world alongside Sub-Saharan Africa according to Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index (2018). Second, the aforementioned clanism significantly detracts from the application of HRM practices due to the massive group pressure exerted on its members;

this constitutes a powerful mechanism of informal regulation which can have a significant impact on recruitment, retention, reward, and planning. As Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013) suggest, however, this is particularly visible, but not confined, to the public sector. Again, subsidiaries of Western MNCs seem to be more effective in ameliorating the influence of clanism due to organisational scale and maturity as well as, most importantly, to the close support provided by head office (cf. Brewster, Mayrhofer, & Smale, 2016), although it remains present in all spheres of economic life (Serafini & Szamosi, 2018).

5.1.1 Training and development

As TPEs are experiencing a transition from central planning to market system, a key element in this process is human capital which requires upgrading (Gashi, Hashi, & Pugh, 2014). Nonetheless, government expenditures related to education have been declining substantially since the demise of the USSR in all the countries under consideration (Mikesell & Mullins, 2001). As the workforce is overwhelmingly occupied in the primary sector versus a weakly developed service sector, poor formation surfaces in managerial and operational roles related to customer care, marketing, and finance as expected in a market economy (Airey & Shackley, 1997). Hence, the workforce would attain the required and updated professional education when hired by public or private businesses, either local or foreign. Here, research clearly identifies differences in the application of training and development between local organisations, both public and private, and foreign ones. Relative to the former, research by Kjellstrand and Vince (2017) in Kazakhstan indicated an attitude against training due to a culturally grounded and widespread fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, an autocratic, paternalistic approach to management hampers the sound application of training fundamentals such as training needs analysis. In fact, as Gasimov and Gurbanov (2013) reveal, the way in which such key procedures are applied does not sufficiently integrate an employee viewpoint, thus affecting their engagement. Additionally, drawing from pointed remarks in relation to the Kyrgyz business reality, Kuznetsov and Kuznetsova (2014) ascertain that such managerial shortcomings could result also from an erroneous understanding of the procedure rooted in “the deficiency of the local discursive and language provision” (ibid., p. 593).

On the other hand, as foreign businesses realise the challenges deriving from dynamic, yet adverse, TPE environments, they identify as a top priority the development of self-starting behaviours in the locally hired workforce as occurs in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Luthans & Ibrayeva, 2006). As Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013) and Griffith, Zeybek, and O'Brien (2003) contend, the establishment of operations by foreign MNCs through, for example, IJVs, initiates a transfer of knowledge and practices impacting attitudes and improving employee commitment. A recent study by Ivlevs and Veliziotis (2018) indicates that in TPE countries such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Tajikistan vulnerable members of forcibly displaced populations due to conflicts show remarkable willingness to acquire extra education and training. This is especially valid for younger population in the 18-34 age group (ibid., p. 142). As Linz and Semykina (2012) and Clark and Geppert (2006) warn, however, foreign investors cannot assume that local workforces would enthusiastically embrace training and development especially if not supported through the process. Hence, job satisfaction can be secured on condition that foreign firms are prepared to encourage and extensively mentor local workforces as demonstrated in the case of a Canadian firm taking over a state oil company in Kazakhstan (Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2011).

5.1.2 Security of tenure

The local institutional reality across successor Asian states of the Soviet Union TPEs critically affects the security of tenure representing the second sub-dimension of employer-employee interdependence.

Upchurch, Croucher, Danilovich, and Morrison (2015) depict the situation in rather bleak terms by noting a persistent divergence from liberal economic values and practices. In particular, a “crony capitalism associated with clientelism” (ibid., p. 1) is the key reason for a weak, arbitrary enforcement of the labour law as also confirmed by Gould and Sickner (2008). Such labour law, as researched in the contexts of Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan, is still affected by Soviet-era rigorousness thus appearing irrelevant to the modern imperatives of workforce flexibility compared to advanced economies (Serafini & Szamosi, 2015).

Aptly referred to by Henisz and Zelner (2005, p. 33), the resulting “idiosyncratic institutional context” is further compounded by the importance of social capital in the form of networks of dependency and

reciprocity cemented by widespread informal (clan based) networks of support (López & Santos, 2014) with such ties remarkably affecting staffing, career development, and promotions in public and private local enterprises (Muratbekova-Touron, 2002) while foreign enterprises are impacted to a lesser extent (Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2013). Thus, group cohesion and the criticality of connections foster nepotism and clientelism which challenge the transition of TPEs to advanced, market-based economies (Bakacsi, Sándor, András, & Viktor, 2002).

5.2. Delegation to employees: overview

In terms of representative participation, since the early 2000's the majority of successor Asian states of the Soviet Union TPEs have been developing labour codes encompassing procedures related to collective bargaining, settling disputes, and grievances (Hayter, 2010), thus indicating an emerging convergence of labour regulations with elements of those encountered in mature market economies, such as the OECD and EU-15 (Muravyev, 2014). Yet, as Pavlova and Rohozynsky (2005) argue, the transformation of labour markets has not yet been achieved thus seeing the persistence of the similar underlying challenges of the early 1990s. Particularly, problems emerge in terms of

“extensive unemployment and underemployment, much of which is hidden; ineffective systems of labour relations and social protection; large mismatches between the labour market skills supplied and the skills demanded by new market economies; inadequate official labour market data” (p. 5).

In other words, the disjuncture between formal regulation and actual practice is quite broad. Nowadays, there is coexistence dotted by rivalry between old Soviet-era trade unions (cf. Borisov & Clarke, 2006) and new independent representative entities (Pavlova & Rohozynsky, 2005). Collective bargaining occurs predominantly in the larger public and private enterprises; management relies on the former to counter the emergence of the latter, belligerent, independent unions (e.g., key export industries such as oil and gas). As Myant (2016) contends, “[t]rade union organisations rarely challenge managements and could not ensure formalisation of employment relations by recourse to a legal system that is likely to favour powerful business interests” (p. 143). Civil society remains relatively weak in the region; ‘colour coded’ revolutions, such as the ‘Tulip Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan and the ‘Rose Revolution’ in Armenia, represented cynical

jockeying by elite factions, with some support by the fledgling middle class, leaving worker interests out of the picture (Fairbanks, 2007; Tudoroiu, 2007).

Furthermore, the inadequacy of stakeholders (Hayter, 2010), in concurrence with the sheer decline of membership to trade unions (Van der Linden, 2016), hampers the establishment of broad collective bargaining at the societal level. As aforementioned, the application of Soviet-era centralised collective bargaining practices contributes to a measure of labour rigidity in these TPEs (Abdih & Medina, 2016), without necessarily amounting to better worker protection. Compensation research indicates that local private business payment practices tend to reflect and maintain the mono-dimensional, output based, approach of the Soviet-era. This may change to a more Western style, mixed-bonus, system through the involvement of foreign investors (Petrick, 2017).

5.2.1 Representative participation

As argued by Frynas (2010) in his research of the Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan contexts, the trend is towards weakening labour rights due to the political pressure that businesses often exert.

Among the countries examined, it appears that labour rights are particularly weak in Uzbekistan given the reliance on low wages or even free labour for cotton production, and repressive political institutions (Crane, 2013). In this context, the role of unions also becomes inconsequential because, as Croucher (2015) underlines, they are still anchored in their Soviet-style past. Like other organisations, they are overwhelmed by deeply embedded clanism. Furthermore, as Upchurch, Croucher, Danilovich, and Morrison (2015) maintain, the unions' role is mitigated because of the ambitious industrialisation policies and plans enacted by TPE governments. As for MNC subsidiaries in TPE countries, a combination of relatively high pay and high involvement type managerial practices appear to have limited union influence (Serafini & Szamosi, 2015).

5.2.2 Financial participation

In those TPE countries that experimented with neo-liberal shock therapy (e.g. Kyrgyzstan), large masses of the population experienced poverty and dispossession (Tadjbakhsh, 2009; Upchurch, Croucher, Danilovich, & Morrison, 2015) while in many others wages stagnated. Research by Linz and Semykina (2012) confirms that there is a strong positive correlation between job satisfaction and reward, “even if the expected reward is not highly desired” (p. 811). Further, the work by Gregory et al. (2013) reveals that in such autocratic management contexts positive satisfaction with pay reduces the negative correlation between abusive supervision and organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB).

There is a body of geographical-cultural literature on wages in relation to climate temperature and national wealth (Van De Vliert, Van Yperen, & Thierry, 2008) underlining that the population of poorer countries with colder climates of the successor Asian states of the Soviet Union (e.g., Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia) perceive wages as more important in comparison to richer countries with colder climates as well as poorer and richer countries with temperate climates (ibid., p. 90). Consequently, it is argued that mixed-bonus and performance-related pay approaches could be particularly suited to poorer countries with colder climates, something that may be effectively encouraged by foreign investors with the appropriate HRM know-how (ibid.). The evidence base of such studies, however, is somewhat inconclusive and it could be argued that the long historical legacies of the Soviet era represent a more convincing explanation for the status quo, and, indeed, worker response thereto.

5.2.3 Functional participation and upward communication

According to Özbek, Yoldash, and Tang (2016) the worryingly high emigration rate of the TPE workforce impacts the rarity of employee commitment. The resulting brain drain hampers local firms trying to find employees displaying the necessary characteristics that enable participation and upward communication. Further, such is the power of clanism that, according to Banai, Stefanidis, Shetach, and Özbek (2014), it appears to render employees prone to endorse “ethically questionable negotiation tactics” (p. 669).

Peng (2001) notes that local entrepreneurial businesses are traditionally characterised by family-style, paternalistic, and autocratic management that excludes any diverging viewpoint from the boss and, much less, any criticism. In such a reality where fear of making mistakes rules (Kjellstrand & Vince, 2017), employee participation is prevented thus stifling creativity and demotivating the workforce. On the other hand, a recent study by Kakabadse et al. (2018) pointed to the increasing role of female leadership in Kazakhstani enterprises as a development which is conducive to value creation to the benefit of all stakeholders.

While elderly employees who experienced the Soviet era tend to be more fearful of change and see innovative practices such as upward communication with suspicion (Bakacsi, Sándor, András, & Viktor, 2002), Muratbekova-Touron (2002) argues that this is changing with the younger generation. They seem to be more confident to voice their opinion and offer ideas especially in foreign companies applying coherent HRM. This behaviour is also emerging in local, export oriented, private firms (Lee, Oh, & Eden, 2010).

In relation with upward communication, it is worth noting that there are instances of whistle-blowing in TPEs. Most notably, there are nascent signs of a whistle blowing culture in Armenia (Miceli, Near, & Dworkin, 2009). Nonetheless, these are quite rare occurrences as they are hampered by the absence of a “reporting culture” (Schultz & Harutyunyan, 2015, p. 92) due to pervasive clanism and clientelism (Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2013).

5.2.4 Effectiveness of formal downward communication

Performance management is a practice applied in TPE subsidiaries of MNCs which is being gradually adopted by both local businesses and state-owned enterprises. According to Minbaeva and Muratbekova-Touron (2013), the effect of clanism on performance management is rather limited compared to recruitment and selection (p. 134). This could also be determined by the managerial decision to purposefully disjoin performance management from compensation matters. To avoid subjectivity risks and biases, a successful solution applied by MNC subsidiaries involves cross-culturally motivated expatriates (Chen et al., 2010) running the practice as a developmental initiative exclusively covering training matters

(Serafini & Szamosi, 2015). On the other hand, local businesses tend to apply performance management as a top-down monitoring instrument with limited to no impact on reward (Gasimov & Gurbanov, 2013). This is compatible with the autarchic, paternalistic, management approach characterising TPE contexts where employees are unaccustomed to question the behaviour of superiors and fear retaliation (Gregory et al., 2013). Notwithstanding, a study by Ford and Ismail (2006) involving highly educated, Central Eurasian managers reveals that their perception of effective leadership gravitates around humane-oriented, charismatic/transformational leadership valuing team effort. It seems, therefore, that the way local managers perceive their role is a function of their education, experience, and exposure to western-style management approaches (ibid., p. 176).

6. Conclusions

Many of the features common in people management across emerging markets are evident in most of the countries under review including a prominent role for family owned businesses characterised by autocratic paternalism, low pay, and poor working conditions somewhat ameliorated by informal mutual obligations. A further feature is segmentation, with a sharp divide between state and large enterprises and many smaller businesses, many of the latter being scarcely able to generate a means of subsistence.

This review has confirmed the pervading influence of clans (Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2013). Not only would this impact on recruitment patterns, but also on the density of ties between specific categories of workers and management. Again, influential clan elders may have the authority to impact managerial choices. Training systems are imperfectly aligned to present needs, although turnover is relatively low given the dearth of formal employment alternatives and owing to the persistence of formal employment rights under the law. Unions constitute imperfect mechanisms for representing employee needs, and, with few exceptions, there is a general shortage of effective mechanisms for employee voice and communication. It would be incorrect to conclude, however, that a dearth of modern features represents a dearth of people management; in reality, many firms have improvised solutions that represent the most feasible options under the circumstances. This includes the forging of informal arrangements with

local power holders and selective adherence to regulations carefully calibrated to allow maximum discretion within the system's constraints.

Although government interventions are often poorly conceived, it would be incorrect to suggest that it is holding back the modernisation of HRM that might flow from market deregulation. There seems to be little connection between overall government policy setting and economic prosperity – a lack of reform does not necessarily seem to leave countries in the region, and workers, materially 'worse off'. This might not only reflect a recognition by some otherwise quite authoritarian governments that political stability is easier to secure if the position of the bulk of the citizenry does not radically worsen, but also the preservation of large components of undeniably inefficient industry. With this the latter has maintained complex forms of people management, albeit of the bureaucratic personnel management variety.

Finally, it seems that modernising HR practices in one area may bring with it counter-movements in others. For example, shock therapy neo-liberal reforms were, *inter alia*, intended to entice overseas investors (Dowling & Wignarajan, 2006); at least some of the latter brought with them, and actively attempted to implement, at least some aspects of modern HR systems (Serafini & Szamosi, 2015). At the same time, such reforms also had the effect of increasing job losses and leading to wage declines. Such developments may place strong pressures on workers to support the subsistence of their extended families, leading to particularly instrumental approaches to work. Again, general declines in incomes and high unemployment may incentivise firms to opportunistically cut their own wages and conditions of service, reducing the scope for high value-added HR interventions (Upchurch, Croucher, Danilovich, & Morrison, 2015). In other words, even if specific aspects of macro-economic policy reforms may work in terms of specific desired outcomes (attracting FDI from the developed world), other consequences (wage declines and unemployment) may disincentivise incoming firms from disseminating Western style HRM (as labour comes so cheap and easily substitutable, the attractions of low value added approaches to managing people may become irresistible) (*ibid.*; Croucher, 2015).

This review highlights a number of issues of theoretical relevance well beyond the region. The first is that there appears little connection between the relative appetite for liberalisation and overall economic

progress; indeed, some of the countries that have liberalised the least (e.g., Uzbekistan) have been most successful in preserving large areas of industry and, indeed, being able to export to other markets (Demirbag & Wood, 2018; Shukurov, Maitah, & Smutka, 2016). This might reflect the extent to which institutions are so poorly aligned as to make policy interventions meaningless, or, more likely, a central paradox of adjustment; shock therapy liberalisation may actually create more opportunities to introduce modern HRM in the firm but, at the same time, the associated job losses can lead to a significant diminishment of the space in which it can function. Secondly, the more stable governments are those which have managed to sustain broad based growth leading to income and employment security. Albeit often going hand in hand with repression, a common policy tool is state-driven infrastructural development (Demirbag & Wood, 2018; Laruelle, 2008). Whether or not this is sustainable is debatable, but in the short and medium terms, this has proven more effective than an absence of industrial policy in preserving and creating jobs, and indeed, making growth possible. In turn, this means that pressures to converge with one or another mature type of capitalism will be greatly diluted. Thirdly, whilst the comparative HRM literature highlights the importance of informal and extended networks of support in many national contexts, in many of the countries under review this has taken the form of clanism (Collins, 2003, 2006; Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2013). What sets clanism apart is that membership cannot easily be changed, meaning that such networks are likely to be somewhat rigid and spatially confined; whilst this may help mould HR policies and practices, there is likely to be some divergence in how clan based patronage will act out according to specific historical traditions and regional priorities. Fourthly, uneven regulatory enforcement has often gone hand in hand with strict job protection: this means that firms cannot easily adjust workforces or eject unwanted workers; however, this would make for relatively high levels of de facto interdependence (Alzhanova & Sabituly, 2014; Rutkowski, 1999) but the evidence base as to how firms respond to this challenge and strategic opportunity remains uneven. Finally, skills bases do not only reflect formal training structures and informal on the job training, but also very specific societal features including the range of acceptable work open to women and how elites value particular skills (cf. Ivlevs & Veliziotis, 2018; Airey & Shackley, 1997).

In turn, this leads us to the nature of the representation of classes and interest groupings. Although clans in central Asia encompass members from all walks of life, they serve to enrich local ‘big men’, chieftains and their immediate circles, with the rank and file gaining much more modest returns (Banai et al., 2014; Minbaeva & Muratbekova-Touron, 2013). Unions often represent legacies of the Soviet period, and serve company and managerial interests over that of workers (Szamosi & Serafini, 2015). Meanwhile, where they have managed to gain some political space, emerging civil society groupings often direct their energies to fledgling local middle classes, most spectacularly in mobilising them in the ‘Tulip’ and other colour coded ‘revolutions’ (Fairbanks, 2007; Tudoroiu, 2009) in the region. However, invariably the outcomes of the latter did not seek to mobilise the working class, and did not translate into meaningful change in politics or cleaner government, nor better conditions for workers (ibid.). There is a wide body of research that suggests that labour friendly legislation is much more likely when governments represent the outcome of broad based and encompassing coalitions (von Beyme, 1983); this is something that both neo-Soviet and ‘colour coded’ successor governments are not (Fairbanks, 2007; Tudoroiu, 2009). This does not mean that governments might not seek to build consent, inter alia, through preserving jobs and industries. However, there has proven to be much less interest in enacting comprehensive policies and legislation aimed at promoting greater delegation to workers, encouraging greater investment in people, indeed, incentivising firms to move towards modern HR systems (Alzhanova & Sabituly, 2014; Demirbag & Wood, 2018; Serafini & Szamosi, 2015). In turn, this means that people management has tended to either follow on embedded paths or, in a small minority of cases, represents the active strategic choices of firms to try something new, regardless of systematic disincentives. Taking fuller account of the role of political elites, and the core interests behind ruling parties might also help explain the embedded nature of, and trajectories of reform to, HR systems in many other national and regional contexts.

All these findings appear to confirm that institutions are not only variably coupled, but there is much more to national competitiveness than a single institutional recipe. It is easy to dismiss specific systems as dysfunctional, which in many respects most of the economies reviewed are. Nevertheless, many work quite

well in serving particular patterns of interests, and, indeed, in sustaining large scale employment, and providing a space to practice HR, even if truly modern HRM remains elusive.

In terms of future research, a number of key areas emerge. The first would be, given the apparent regional commonalities, a much closer identification of defining institutional features and how they trace through to the practice of people management. Secondly, given the seeming disarticulation between sets of government policies and firm level and macro-economic outcomes in Central Asia, it would be appropriate and valuable to more closely analyse informal regulatory features and how they feed into firm level practice. Thirdly, there is the relationship between industrial policy interventions and HR practice, and what types of industrial policy feed into the genuine betterment of people management. Fourthly, there is the role of new independent worker groupings; here, key questions would include the necessity to gain a better understanding of the specific circumstances that lead to their rise and to sustaining them. This would include more fine grained understanding of their uneven and shifting relationship with the official unions. As the latter are often state aligned, they may have better information on future trends in government policy and leverage when it comes to official job creation efforts; at the same time, they are likely to be more politically compliant than their independent counterparts, narrowing the scope as to the kind of representation they could afford. Next, although much has been written as to HRM policies in MNCs, there is room for more detailed work on the adaption of country of origin HR systems to suit specific countries of domicile, and the relative infusion of indigenous HR practices, in the areas under review. Furthermore, the caveat outlined in Section 4 underlines the need to address a fundamental question permeating this review. This is whether 'HRM' as defined by classical US and European theorists is actually valid in the context of the post-socialist countries examined. As our study highlights, in many Central Asian countries 'HRM' appears to represent an empty term since people management appears to dutifully follow a Soviet, paternalistic, and autocratic tradition. Therefore, the key question is how far labour management has evolved into how we define 'HRM' (i.e., beyond anything more than the formal titles of Soviet times being removed and replaced by western-sounding 'HRM' terms). Lastly, given the dearth of literature in relation to Mongolia and Afghanistan, future reviews might seek to capture work which, while not published in

three and four star CABS (2019) ranked journal titles, might still have merit. Good work may be found in a wide range of outlets, and, the selection of a lesser outlet (or even, a very obscure one) might not so much represent a function of article quality, but also the very focused nature of the study, an imperfect understanding of the journal ecosystem by the author and/or an active strategic choice to reach a particular readership.

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