

# The Challenges of Human Resource Management in Pakistan: A Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

*The application of the new concept of institutionalism has gained increased prominence in the examination of comparative human resource management (HRM). This approach tends to downplay the importance of power dynamics and the interaction of contradictory logic, leading to an insufficient comprehension of the elements that influence the variance of 'HRM' and its associated practices across different nations. The primary objective of this research is to examine Human Resource Management (HRM) practices within Pakistan's banking industry. This study aims to assess the congruence between managers' articulated perspectives on human resource management (HRM) practices and the prevailing ones outlined in prominent HRM models. Furthermore, the objective is to ascertain any discrepancies that may exist between the viewpoints of managers and the opinions held by early-career professionals about these human resource management methods. The influence of the cultural phenomenon referred to as 'Seth,' characterized by a hierarchical structure reminiscent of feudalism, has implications for managers implementing human resource management (HRM) policies. This effect conflicts with the formally articulated rationale of Human Resource Management (HRM). The argument posits that managers use a "Seth" rationale when managing their workforce since it perpetuates existing power imbalances within businesses. By engaging in this activity, individuals effectively alter the nature of HRM to the extent that it becomes unrecognizable from existing models. The term 'Human Resource Management' (HRM) in contemporary scholarly works influenced by the new institutionalism often supports a particular viewpoint on organizations and management. However, this perspective may need to be revised and might lead to misleading analysis when applied to emerging countries.*

**Keywords:** HRM Practice, Seth Culture, Institutionalism, Banking Sector

## Introduction

Research endeavors that aim to elucidate the variations in human resource management (HRM) practices across different countries frequently employ theoretical frameworks derived from the new institutionalism perspective in the analysis of organizations (Gooderham et al., 1999; Lewis et al., 2019; Paauwe & Boselie, 2003, 2007). These studies often integrate broader social and cultural contexts into their analytical frameworks, as advocated by Paauwe (2004). Nevertheless, similar to a significant portion of the broader modern institutionalist research (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, p. 13; Greenwood et al., 2008: 7; Whitley, 1999), it tends to minimize the significance of power dynamics and how various social actors engage in competition to exert influence over economic logics. Therefore, there needs to be a more comprehensive understanding of the definition and implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) and its corresponding organizational practices across various countries.

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The present analysis expands upon the observation made by Brewster (2004: 371) that national culture is an inherent component of HRM and should not be seen as a precursor to it. This approach presents a contrasting viewpoint to the perspective of new institutionalism, which considers culture as a distinct factor (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991, pp. 8–9). According to this perspective, culture is seen as separate from actors and is believed to have little material repercussions. This study aims to analyze the dynamic relationship between culture and actors to understand how power is manifested and how actors' concerns contribute to perpetuating established hierarchies within organizational contexts.

This study examines the implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) in banks in Pakistan. Specifically, it investigates the extent to which managers' stated beliefs about important HRM practices align with the prevailing models and explores the differences in perceptions of these activities between early-career experts and the conventional understanding of HRM. This study aims to investigate the impact of the cultural script known as 'Seth' on how managers apply their professed human resource management (HRM) strategies. Consequently, we evaluate the predominant effect on managerial practices inside our focus organizations, specifically between two contrasting logics: an 'HRM' logic that aligns with established professional standards and a 'Seth' logic.

The term "Seth" originates from the Hindi-Urdu language and has the literal connotation of a person of wealth or high social standing. In a broader sense, embodying the characteristics of a seth encompasses more than just affluence or social status. This concept refers to a managerial approach that prioritizes authority, hierarchical differentiation, and the preservation of the existing state of affairs. It permits the discretionary interpretation and application of norms that may seem unchangeable (Nizami et al., 2017; Pearson, 1976; Rahman, 1998). According to Pearson (1976), workplace interactions under Seth have more than just commercial or economic aspects. They also incorporate a non-monetary element, which signifies reciprocity and reciprocal duties. Consequently, individuals in positions of high authority and their preferred subordinates often display characteristics of authoritarian paternalism, characterized by a pronounced sense of entitlement. In this dynamic, subordinates are granted minimal autonomy and are expected to comply with the directives of their superiors unquestioningly (Nizami et al., 2017; Saini & Budhwar, 2013; see also, more generally, Perveen & Dasti, 2014). In this paper, we undertake a comprehensive examination of the existing body of literature about new institutionalism in the field of organizational studies, with a specific focus on its relevance and applicability to the analysis of human resource management (HRM). Aligned with the theoretical framework of new institutionalism, which highlights the significance of ingrained scripts and schemas that aid individuals in comprehending various circumstances (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 1995), Seth serves as a paradigm for managers, exerting an influence on their approach to subordinate management. Furthermore, previous research that utilizes the framework of new institutionalism has a generally favorable perspective toward HRM. This perspective assumes that HRM is linked to practices that prioritize the well-being of employees, merit-based awards, and the promotion of employee voice (Lewis et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that new institutionalism often overlooks the connections between culture and material and status disparities and their perpetuation (Beckert, 1999). This perspective sees culture as a normative, intangible, and non-political framework. Research on Human Resource Management (HRM), informed by the theoretical framework of new institutionalism, does not examine the ways in which managers might potentially use cultural norms to reinforce their authority inside organizations, hence perpetuating established hierarchies for personal benefits. Our analysis suggests that the Seth logic is poised to significantly influence the HRM logic, resulting in a fundamental transformation of the HRM field. This transformation will lead to a notable divergence between HRM approaches put into action and those just advocated.

To evaluate this anticipation, we analyze the perspectives of managers and other personnel inside Pakistani banks on their company's human resource management procedures. The study reveals that managers adhere to a Human Resource Management (HRM) perspective that aligns with prevailing models. These models emphasize the significance of workers as valuable resources, the provision of training opportunities, the implementation of performance-based compensation systems, and the use of mechanisms to enhance employee satisfaction, such as voice mechanisms (Guest, 1987; Marchington et al., 2016; Paauwe, 2004). Nevertheless, there is significant variation in workers' perspectives on Human Resource Management (HRM), indicating that favoritism, subjective rule interpretation, and limited employee participation, all of which align with the concept of Seth culture, reshape HRM processes in a way that perpetuates existing power dynamics and disparities in resources.

### **Objective & Significance of the Study**

Consequently, our study extends the current literature that posits the impact of diverse socio-cultural environments on human resource management (HRM) practices, as discussed by Boon et al. (2009), Boxall and Macky (2014), Edwards et al. (2016), Lewis et al. (2019), and Paauwe and Boselie (2003). These studies indicate that Human Resource Management (HRM) is a non-political and intangible aspect of management in many settings, although with some variations. In this analysis, we explore how these environments transform the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) to the point where it deviates significantly from prevailing paradigms.

This study aims to expand upon existing research that investigates the political and material factors driving work, as explored by Thompson (2003, 2011). Additionally, we want to analyze the coexistence of conflicting institutional logic and the possible power conflicts that may arise about practice, as discussed by Roulet (2019). Our contribution aligns with the growing body of literature that aims to (1) advance a more nuanced and less managerial-centric perspective in the field of Human Resource Management (HRM) research, as proposed by Delbridge et al. (2011); (2) examine the organizational practices related to employee management within the broader context of the sociology of work, as explored by Halford and Strangleman (2009); and (3) reestablish the link between HR research and institutional theory, which underscores the significance of both conceptual and material dimensions of culture, as highlighted by Sewell (1992).

### **Literature Review**

The concept of new institutionalization in the field of organization theory emphasizes the stability of organizations and the endeavors of players to preserve legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, 1991). This concept is based on the notion that in organizational settings, there exist shared perceptions regarding suitable and meaningful behavior. These common beliefs hold significant influence, compelling individuals to conform to them without question and granting them legitimacy. This perspective aligns with the works of Meyer and Rowan (1977) and Jepperson (1991), as well as Zucker's (1983) assertion. Actors strive to fulfill the legitimacy requirements embodied in mental scripts and schema, as discussed by Beckett (1999) and Garud et al. (2007). Significantly, this approach emphasizes the absence of a universally applicable rationality inside organizations (Farndale and Paauwe, 2007; Paauwe and Boselie, 2007).

The field of organization theory has seen the emergence of a theoretical framework known as novel institutionalism, which emphasizes the stability of organizations and the actions taken by individuals inside these organizations to maintain their legitimacy (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983, 1991). This concept is based on the notion that in organizational settings, there exist shared perceptions regarding appropriate and meaningful behavior. These shared perceptions hold significant influence, compelling individuals to conform to them without question, as they

are considered legitimate. This idea is supported by the works of Zucker (1983), Meyer and Rowan (1977), and Jepperson (1991). Actors strive to fulfill the legitimacy standards represented by mental scripts and schema (Beckert, 1999; Garud et al., 2007). Significantly, this approach emphasizes the absence of a universally applicable rationality inside organizations (Farndale & Paauwe, 2007; Paauwe & Boselie, 2007).

Nevertheless, a significant critique of new institutionalization is around its depiction of actors as "cultural dopes" (Colomy, 1998; Hirsch & Lounsbury, 1997: 409; Perrow, 1985; Powell & Colyvas, 2008). By virtue of their roles, actors inadvertently assume the role of bearers and physical manifestations of institutions. The very first creation of new institutionalism, as discussed by DiMaggio and Powell (1991), Farndale and Paauwe (2007), Greenwood and Hinings (1996), and Zucker (1983) did not adequately address the potential for actors to deviate from established assumptions about their expected behavior or the institutionalized scripts and rules. As a result, a significant portion of scholarly inquiry in the field of new institutionalism fails to adequately consider the material and ideal interests of the actors involved (Beckert, 1999; Colomy, 1998; Lewis et al., 2019; Perrow, 1985; cf. DiMaggio, 1988). This is primarily due to the prevailing notion that routines, scripts, and schema are devoid of political implications and, in the immediate context, resist change (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

Two recent advancements in institutional theory have addressed the little attention given to actors and their agency in the context of modern institutionalism (Lewis et al., 2019). The two viewpoints under consideration in this study are referred to as "institutional work" (Lawrence et al., 2009; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006) and "institutional logics" (Thornton et al., 2012; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999, 2008). While there are notable distinctions between them, it is worth noting that they also exhibit certain resemblances (Zilber, 2013). This suggests that their analyses may not comprehensively account for material interests, leading to hesitancy in acknowledging the potential dominance of material goods within cultural frameworks or the impetus they provide for institutional endeavors.

The term institutional logics refers to the socially constructed and historically rooted patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules that individuals employ to produce and sustain their material subsistence, structure time and space, and assign significance to their social environment (Thornton & Ocasio, 1999: 804). These logics serve as the foundation for understanding and interpreting the organizational reality (Roulet, 2019; Thornton, 2004). The term "institutional work" encompasses the deliberate efforts of people and groups to establish, sustain, and challenge institutional structures (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215). This particular viewpoint examines the endeavors of both individuals and groups to manage, adapt to, reinforce, dismantle, modify, or establish new institutional frameworks that shape their daily lives, professional activities, and recreational pursuits and that provide them with their respective positions, connections, assets, and established patterns of behavior (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 53).

Social constructionism refers to the principles, symbols, phrases, and arguments individuals use to assign significance to everyday actions. It is a fundamental component of the institutional logic approach (Thornton et al., 2012: 2) and the institutional labor paradigm (Lawrence et al., 2011, p. 53; Morgan & Hauptmeier, 2014). Therefore, both Alford and Friedland (1991), DiMaggio and Powell (1991), Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), Lawrence et al. (2011), Meyer and Rowan (1977), Scott (2001), and Thornton and Ocasio (2008) argue that the material interests of actors are socially constructed through frames of reference, aligning with the perspective presented by fresh institutionalism.

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Alford and Friedland (1991: 251), DiMaggio and Powell (1991: 28), Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), Lawrence et al. (2011), Meyer and Rowan (1977), Scott (2001: 65), and Thornton and Ocasio (2008) that the material interests of actors are socially constructed through frames of reference, aligning with the perspective of new institutionalism.

Consequently, both approaches reject explanations grounded in tangible, materialistic desires. The primary objective of the institutional work viewpoint is not to provide a comprehensive model that explains or theorizes the many patterns of intent. Instead, it aims to gain a deeper understanding of these patterns and the ability of actors to engage in institutional work (Lawrence et al., 2009, p. 6). The institutional logic perspective posits that, before conducting any analysis, there is an assumption of equality among the various logics. The dominant institutional logic or combination of logic is contingent upon particular circumstances and necessitates empirical investigation (Alford & Friedland, 1991; Greenwood et al., 2010; Roulet, 2019). According to the institutional logic approach, organizations' actions and choices cannot be only attributed to limited material interests (Lounsbury & Ventresca, 2008: 458; Ocasio, 1999; Thornton et al., 2012: 2).

In contrast, our argument posits that material interests and the potential for material gain influence actors' interests, priorities, and behavior (Boon et al., 2009; Vidal & Peck, 2012). Consequently, this leads to consistent behavior patterns among actors within particular organizational contexts. In cultures characterized by significant inequality and restricted avenues for social mobility, the significance of material wealth is likely to be heightened (Hyden, 2016).

The field of empirical HRM research has seen a significant impact from many viewpoints within new institutionalism (Björkman et al., 2007; Farndale & Paauwe, 2007; Lewis et al., 2019; Paauwe, 2004; Tatoglu et al., 2016). In this discourse, we contend that contemporary institutional assessments of human resource management (HRM) in emerging-economy enterprises exhibit certain tendencies:

1. They tend to diminish the significance of interests in shaping managerial approaches toward employee management.
2. They deploy the term 'HRM' to include employee management.
3. They implicitly presume that managers adhere to the practices associated with prevailing HRM models.

For example, scholarly investigations have examined the comparison of Human Resource Management (HRM) practices between domestic businesses and subsidiaries of international multinational organizations (Edwards et al., 2016; Kostova, 1999; Tatoglu et al., 2016). However, these studies have often overlooked the perspectives of local workers (Delbridge et al., 2011) and the actual implementation of HRM by managers. In a similar vein, Björkman et al. (2007) use the theoretical framework of new institutionalism to analyze the human resource management (HRM) methods implemented by subsidiaries of overseas multinational corporations (MNCs). The authors believe that the subsidiaries are subject to isomorphic pressures, and they contend that the human resource management methods that are considered suitable in the local context are likely to be deeply ingrained in the values and behavioral norms that are commonly held by individuals in that particular setting (Björkman et al., 2007, p. 433). This quote presents two distinct matters for consideration. Initially, the book emphasizes the significance of the suitability or validity of human resource management (HRM) techniques while supposing that individuals within the specific geographical setting possess comparable values and conventions, diminishing the potential for divergent perspectives. The specification of the organizations that determine the legitimacy of HRM procedures is not provided, leaving room for possible variation in their judgments. As a result, it fails to acknowledge the impact of varying interests, power dynamics, and the possibility for some groups to adopt policies that favor their interests while disadvantaging others. Furthermore, it is assumed that norms and

values would not influence the management of workers in host nations; however, it is acknowledged that these factors impact the HRM practices as defined by Björkman et al. (2007).

Several studies utilize the theoretical framework of new institutionalism to investigate the human resource management (HRM) practices in foreign subsidiaries of multinational corporations (MNCs). These studies primarily rely on quantitative data collected from a single management respondent, which poses challenges in accurately evaluating the actual experiences of employees regarding HRM practices (Edwards et al., 2016: 1003; Tatoglu et al., 2016: 283). This study often assumes that when a manager identifies the presence of a human resource management (HRM) practice, it aligns with prevailing HRM models, which aim to incentivize people and enhance organizational performance. Additional research examines the diverse and sometimes conflicting institutional forces that impact the actions of individuals (Tempel & Walgenbach, 2012), with a specific emphasis on multinational enterprises (MNEs). Although this study incorporates material resources as part of its analysis, it fails to consider the influence of subsidiary managers' material interests on their actions (Tempel & Walgenbach, 2012). This oversight neglects the potential power conflicts that can arise from the coexistence of different institutional logics in shaping enacted practices (Roulet, 2019).

In contrast to prevailing research assumptions that suggest the presence of a discernible form of Human Resource Management (HRM) in numerous emerging-market firms, our study posits that managers within our selected firms are more inclined to adopt the institutional logic of Seth. In other words, they will likely engage in institutional practices that uphold or enhance their material privileges and social standing. Managers will strategically deploy training programs, performance-based incentive systems, and platforms for employee input to advance their interests or those of a select group of workers whom they favor monetarily and in terms of their social standing. By implementing policies in this manner, managers fundamentally modify them, deviating from the policies they advocate and, therefore, from prevailing paradigms of Human Resource Management (HRM). Hence, we inquire about the impact of the cultural and material Seth script on the preexisting organizational structures and human resource management (HRM).

### **Perspective and Design of the Study**

In order to comprehensively examine the intricacies of perceptions and context, we have used a comparative case study methodology, as suggested by Kessler and Bach (2014). By the concept of "light theorization" proposed by Kessler and Bach (2014: 169), our selection of focus firms was based on their distinct qualities, which provide a preliminary but plausible, explanation of how Seth may potentially influence the accepted HRM practices (Ackroyd & Karlsson, 2014). The organizations under consideration are all financial institutions operating as banks, yet their distinct historical backgrounds may influence the presence or absence of certain characteristics associated with Seth. By narrowing our scope to a certain industry inside a particular country, we have effectively reduced the potential impact of varying national regulations across multiple industries. In order to evaluate the potential impact of Seth on Human Resource Management (HRM) across various contexts, our analysis focused only on domestic banks. While international banks can provide a valuable point of comparison to domestic banks, the presence of distinct cultural backgrounds and expatriate management may limit the impact of cultural norms inside the banking industry.

Furthermore, a significant number of international banks have withdrawn from the Pakistani market, therefore diminishing the availability of access to financial services. It is expected that the perspectives of early-career professionals about HRM practices will diverge from those of managers due to variations in organizational culture across various banks. Specifically, it is

anticipated that newly established and privately owned banks would exhibit a lower degree of organizational culture impact.

Semi-structured interviews were done with HR/senior managers and early-career professionals in order to integrate diverse viewpoints into our research (Beer et al., 2015). The participants in our study were chosen from the millennial generation, specifically early-career professionals (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). It is expected that the values of this generation differ from those of previous generations, which may result in their inclination to question and challenge the conventional working systems that are currently in place (Kultalahti & Viitala, 2015). Early-career professionals do not universally embody a homogenous force of modernization; within this cohort, individuals may have a preference for reverting to an assumed pre-feudal Islamic era (Javaid, 2011). Nevertheless, the participants in our study were exclusively individuals who had obtained degrees from business schools since it is customary for Pakistani banks to hire early-career professionals from such educational institutions primarily.

Moreover, it is common for these individuals to examine Western management models within the curricula of Anglo-American business schools (Khilji, 2003). These educational programs prioritize meritocratic principles and extensively explore prevailing human resource management (HRM) models. Consequently, many of these professionals may need clarification of seth culture (Nizami et al., 2017) and its impact on managerial practices. The sample methodology used in this study consisted of convenience sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Senior or HR managers at two banks granted access to young professionals. In other instances, communication was initiated using social media platforms. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and were explicitly told that the data collection was only to conduct research.

In the preliminary stage, 16 exploratory interviews were carried out to elucidate the fundamental contextual factors about the management of early-career professionals in Pakistani banks. The interviews revealed that Seth was a prominent topic prevalent across the sector. As a result, our attention was directed to Seth during the last phase of data collecting. This included conducting 65 interviews with employees from five domestic banks. The financial institutions under consideration consist of a significant privately owned bank (LPV), a notable publicly owned bank (LPB), a medium-sized private bank (MPV), a bank of intermediate size (SLPV), and an Islamic bank (MIB). Among the cohort of young professionals, a majority of 69% were identified as male. Table 1 displays the number of interviews conducted, categorized by level and financial institution.

		<b>List of Interviews</b>					
		<b>Medium-sized Islamic bank (MIB)</b>	<b>Medium-sized private bank (MPV)</b>	<b>Semi-large private bank (SLPV)</b>	<b>Large private bank (LPV)</b>	<b>Large public bank (LPB)</b>	<b>Total</b>
HR Managers	Senior	4	3	2	3	2	14
Young Professionals		11	11	10	12	13	57
<b>Total</b>							<b>71</b>

The interview instructions used Huselid's (1995) HRM paradigm and corresponding high-performance work practices (HPWPs). We requested the HR/senior management to describe the current processes of recruiting and selection, training and development, remuneration and career advancement, as well as communication and voice methods. We inquired about the perspectives of the junior professionals about the same procedures.

The interviews, with an average duration of 40-45 minutes, were digitally recorded and then transcribed, save for four interviews. The transcripts were edited and accompanied by analytical annotations (Saldaña, 2015). Thematic analysis was used in this study, whereby topics were allowed to arise organically rather than just depending on the available literature (King, 2012). In order to ensure the reliability of the findings, two writers of the paper separately generated their codes and themes, which were then compared to evaluate their consistency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to facilitate data management, we used the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis program (CAQDAS), NVivo, developed by QSR International. It is important to note that our usage of NVivo did not include identifying keywords or themes.

## **Analysis and Findings**

In this report, we provide our research results in two distinct parts. The first statement posits that HR/senior managers uphold HRM models that align with prevailing norms. Additionally, we provide data supporting a seth culture, as shown by workers' opinions of HRM practices that contradict the models above. In the subsequent phase, an analysis is conducted to examine the effect of Seth on the implementation of Human Resource Management (HRM) policies across various banking institutions.

### **Human Resource Policies and Seth Culture**

The HR and senior managers at each bank we examined presented their organization's HR procedures in a manner that aligned with Huselid's (1995) High-Performance Work procedures (HPWPs). In addition to conducting a complete staff survey, HR/senior managers have indicated the presence of High-Performance Work Practices (HPWP) in several areas, including recruiting and selection, orientation, training and development, performance management (utilizing a forced distribution system), career development, performance-related remuneration, and voice mechanisms.

A disparity was identified between the proclaimed 'HRM' policies and the actual implementation of these practices. It was observed that HR/senior managers presented a far more favorable depiction of employee-management practices compared to younger professionals, as shown below. An HR manager from MPV emphasized the comprehensive nature of the orientation and training programs aimed at cultivating versatile banking professionals:

The individuals are inducted and undergo a comprehensive training program lasting about three months. Subsequently, they are assigned to operational roles, enabling them to get practical experience and develop an understanding of the responsibilities associated with being an operative and functioning within a branch setting. Currently, there exists a training academy in close proximity.

In a similar vein, the Human Resources (HR) director of SLPV acknowledged the strategic significance of the career development strategy used by his financial institution:

The process of talent management is often overseen by the Human Resources department and ultimately falls under the responsibility of the Chief Executive Officer. Once the identification of high-potential individuals has begun, they are assigned an individual development profile. This profile provides a comprehensive analysis, including the specific tasks and responsibilities the person will do, as well as their possible future positions and the recommended strategies for their growth, training, and mentoring.

Similarly, the human resources manager of LPV has highlighted a correlation between career development training and salary management:

A talent categorization system is in place for the whole workforce of 14,000 individuals. Within our organization, there exists a diverse range of individuals who possess varying levels of



potential and performance. Based on this information, judgments are made about individuals' career paths, training opportunities, and salary packages.

The Human Resources (HR) director of MIB provided commentary on the bank's performance management system, highlighting its demanding character:

Any endeavor aimed at enhancing responsibility is likely to encounter early opposition, although the subsequent realization of associated advantages may lead personnel to reassess their viewpoint. The use of our scorecard serves to mitigate the inherent subjectivity within the performance management system.

The HR representative of LPB, a publicly-owned financial institution that has undergone organizational reorganization and seen workforce reductions, expressed similar thoughts:

From 1995 to the present, there has been a complete transformation in the human resources processes inside my firm. My observation is that my whole company has transitioned from conventional techniques to contemporary ones across several domains, such as services, information technology, business, and operations.

Therefore, human resource directors advocate for adopting human resource management practices that align with significant human resource management concepts. Nonetheless, the viewpoint presented by managers needs to provide a comprehensive understanding of the functioning of these activities for workers since their opinions of HRM practices diverge significantly from the representation provided by managers. According to testimonies provided by workers, it is apparent that the phenomenon known as "Seth culture" mainly accounts for this disparity.

In the following discourse, we explain how various social aspects fundamentally alter these human resource management (HRM) methods. Table 2 provides an overview of the coding methodology used in this study. The first-order codes about various facets of Seth were extracted from the quotes and then consolidated into second-order themes. In conclusion, the present study demonstrates the impact of several parts of Seth's culture on various human resources (HR) policies (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

**Table 2: Coding Sheet**

Quotation	First Order Theme	Second Order Theme (Seth Culture Elements)	Third Order Theme (HRM Dominant Variations)
Individuals are immersed into the pool from varying levels, which is considered to be the most unfavorable aspect. It is not appropriate to provide a 'C' grade to a senior vice president and a 'A' mark to an assistant vice president. It is not permissible to engage in such behavior.	The prioritization of chronological seniority above performance is seen to be of greater significance. The incidence of temporal-based growth and professional advancement.	Seniority	The implementation of a performance management system that prioritizes seniority above merit. The absence of distributive and procedural fairness in the realm of compensation.
[HR should] make things more approachable or at least let people know such things [certain benefits] are there. But I believe that in my organization there is a lack of culture of information sharing.	The preservation of one's position and associated privileges within the existing hierarchical structure The absence of information dissemination	The preservation of the existing state of affairs	The pay rates exhibit a significant degree of skewness. The grievance procedure in question is insufficient. The absence of job advancement opportunities

Given that our organization operates inside the realm of government, it is evident that favoritism continues to have a significant influence. A culture characterized by the expression of excessive admiration and praise is prevalent not just inside our department, but across the whole corporation. I am aware that presenting desserts to my supervisor has the potential to expedite my career advancement; yet, I choose not to engage in such behavior. Within the confines of my workplace, individuals engage in such behavior.

The concept of favoritism refers to the practice of showing preferential treatment or bias towards  
The topic of discussion pertains to the concept of arbitrary decision making and the practice of nepotism.

Favouritism

The phenomenon of nepotism in the context of performance management and career advancement. The issue of inequitable remuneration  
The allocation of training opportunities exhibits inherent inequities.

If I arrive at 9:06, one minute after the designated start time, I am recorded as being tardy. However, despite consistently being at the workplace until 9 pm each day, there is no provision for pay or acknowledgment of this extended commitment.

The focus is placed on the formal aspects of policies rather than their substantive content.  
Procedures with a focus on short-term outcomes.

Inefficient bureaucracy

Insufficient levels of employee participation and inadequacies in the grievance mechanisms. The issue of unfairness in performance management systems

Despite the absence of the trainers, it was necessary for us to visit the learning center in order to record our attendance. The nature of this thinking is unclear to me. Engaging in this activity is very inefficient. This behavior might be considered trivial or insignificant. It is imperative to discontinue the practice of idolizing senior management while simultaneously infantilizing the rest of the workforce.

The presence of condescending attitudes shown by bosses.  
The absence of empowerment among young professionals  
The significance of hierarchy

Patriarchal attitude

Ineffectual training and suboptimal staff engagement.

Our research revealed that individuals in their professional careers had significantly unfavorable views of several aspects of organizational practices, including training and development programs, performance rating systems, pay structures, career advancement opportunities, and employee engagement initiatives. The poor view of Human Resource Management (HRM) may be attributed to many variables within the organizational culture.

**Seniority**

High-performance work practices (HPWPs) often aim to enhance employee empowerment and provide work environments that incentivize and recognize exemplary performance. Nevertheless, a seth culture implies the presence of a well-defined organizational hierarchy, which is reflected in the assessment system implemented by our target banks. It is important to

note that these appraisal systems are not autonomous entities but rather closely intertwined with the hierarchy above. Early-career professionals have mostly unfavorable opinions of performance-management systems. Salman, a young professional employed in the finance department of LPB, observed that individuals from various hierarchical positions are included in the evaluation pool, which he identified as the most unfavorable aspect. It is inappropriate to provide a "C" grade to a senior vice president and an "A" grade to an assistant vice president. It is not permissible to engage in such actions.

Salman's conduct aligns with the hierarchical, authoritarian, and paternalistic aspects of Seth's culture, altering a system intended to discern workers' performance into one that perpetuates established hierarchies and degrees of seniority.

### **The Preservation of the Existing State of Affairs**

One notable attribute of Seth's culture is the priority that individuals in positions of authority assign to maintaining their power, which may lead to limited dissemination of information and little engagement of employees in the decision-making process. Hence, the early-career professionals within the banking industry expressed doubts about the effectiveness of employee engagement tools as well as communication and voice methods:

The Human Resources president sometimes convenes a meeting with branch managers, during which they inquire about any concerns or problems that may have arisen. However, we have a sense of apprehension over our participation in that particular forum. If we were to raise an issue, the president would likely recognize it temporarily. Nevertheless, we are concerned about potential reprimands that may be imposed upon us later. In this study, Ali (2021) investigates the impact of multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs) on several aspects of transportation. The compensation method was subject to criticism by several individuals, with Adnan, a marketing specialist from SLPV, highlighting its perceived unfairness:

The transparency of bonus distribution needs to be more questionable. The bonus pool is allocated to your group. Subsequently, the group leader allocates the bonus pool among the employees. Regrettably, within the context of my group, it has come to my attention that the allocation of resources is conducted in a manner without objective criteria and devoid of a comprehensive evaluation process.

### **Favoritism**

One notable characteristic of Seth culture is its tendency to exhibit a disproportionate preference for the "in group," which mainly consists of close family members and friends (Saher & Mayrhofer, 2014). According to Nadeem from MPV, there is a notion that the professional development system often exhibits unfairness since promotions are allegedly granted based on favoritism and personal connections. The policy exists; moreover, its implementation needs to be improved. Approximately half of the policies are successfully implemented, while the other half still need to be implemented.

Hence, the existence of a significant aspect known as Seth, which entails granting preferential treatment to favored (Islam, 2004), leads to workers harboring unfavorable attitudes about the fundamental functions of the HRM systems.

### **The Presence of an Inefficient Bureaucracy**

Another characteristic of Seth culture is that, despite rules and regulations, managers see them as burdensome and as obstacles to their independence. As a result, they make arbitrary decisions on which option to implement. Saba, a female respondent hailing from LPV, said that she had experienced workplace bullying from her former supervisor. She acknowledged the existence of rules and processes to address such issues. One must adhere to several regulatory requirements about punctuality, professional attire, and appropriate conduct towards

superiors. However, when a subordinate has difficulties or challenges with a superior who holds a position four or five levels above in the organizational hierarchy, the human resources department does not often intervene.

### **Paternalism and Patriarchy**

The origins of Seth culture may be traced back to a management style characterized by paternalism when the male leader of the household or company assumes the role of a patriarch responsible for the well-being of his subordinates. This aspect is also evident in human resources practices prioritizing the management patriarch's authority. The newly employed management trainee, Alina, conveyed her perspective regarding senior management: I believe I believe there is a need to discontinue the practice of idolizing senior managers and instead recognize their potential to cultivate intelligent individuals. By treating trainees with respect befitting their intellect, they may absorb and retain knowledge more effectively, thereby reducing any animosity that may arise. One needs to acquire knowledge when subjected to such treatment.

Paternalism engenders considerable disparities in status between managers and subordinates beyond mere hierarchical delineations. According to the responses provided by early-career professionals during the interviews, it was observed that they perceived top-level managers to be detached from lower-level workers, exhibiting inadequate communication and a lack of understanding towards their jobs. Khurram, an employee affiliated with the planning department of MPV, observed:

Despite the grandeur of the celebratory event held at an upscale hotel by the upper echelons of management after the relaunch of our brand, the workforce at the operational level still needs to be made aware of the substantive implications of this transformation.

Consequently, the distinct components of the sesh culture fundamentally modify the essence of human resource management (HRM) regulations, sometimes leading to workers harboring unfavorable opinions towards them.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Evidence indicates the presence of sesh culture features throughout all five focus banks, despite their distinct histories and ownership characteristics. Nevertheless, it is essential to note that this culture does not have a neutral influence on the legitimacy or acceptability of specific policies, as previous studies have indicated (Aycan et al., 2007; Paauwe & Boselie, 2007). In the context of firms in Pakistan, managers adopt the sesh cultural script to align with and promote their material interests, thereby perpetuating existing hierarchies.

Managers, for example, advocated a perspective on Human Resource Management (HRM) that aligns with prevailing models emphasizing the meritocratic characteristics of assessment systems, comprehensive training for some entry-level professionals, and remuneration based on market principles. Nevertheless, there is a significant disparity between the behaviors that managers advocate and the practices that are implemented. The available information indicates that assessment systems are based on something other than merit. Similarly, it is observed that pay methods, such as the allocation of bonuses, are influenced by seniority rather than merit, resulting in senior managers being awarded the most significant incentives. Seth's leadership style may result in managers using subjective judgment when determining the policies they implement. This particular excerpt inherently signifies the authority and prestige of managers, reaffirming their place within the hierarchical structure of the corporation. These behaviors oppose prevailing HRM models that aim to recognize and reward workers based on their performance, motivate people via incentives, and establish a connection between employee behavior and company goals (Guest, 1987; Huselid, 1995; Marchington et al., 2016).

Therefore, researchers should use caution when using terminologies, such as 'HRM,' in the analysis of organizational practices in Pakistan. There is a potential risk for researchers to unthinkingly use the word HRM, which may lead them to reinforce the rationality of the institutions they are studying inadvertently. Alford and Friedland (1991: 260) have cautioned against this phenomenon, emphasizing that researchers may inadvertently become participants in the reproduction of these institutions. The use of the term Human Resource Management (HRM) in Pakistan's context may validate and justify a particular perspective on managerial practices concerning personnel management. However, this perspective is deemed unsuitable and needs more analytical accuracy. In prevalent narratives encompass studies on HRM in developing nations, the term HRM is generally associated with favorable implications (Aycan, 2005; Lewis et al., 2019; Paauwe & Boselie, 2007). This perspective assumes a focus on the welfare of employees, their productivity, and their significance in contributing to the achievements of organizations (Marchington et al., 2016). The use of the term Human Resource Management (HRM) in the managerial methods employed in employee management in Pakistan legitimates these practices and unintentionally perpetuates the existing power imbalances among various employee groups.

Based on our research findings, it is imperative to comprehend the principal analytical category of Human Resource Management (HRM) within its specific historical and institutional context (Alford & Friedland, 1991 p. 260). This entails analyzing how individuals and groups interpret and employ the term, both longitudinally and across various geographical settings. In the organizations under scrutiny, managers often use Human Resource Management (HRM) practices to sustain and, perhaps, augment their tangible and intangible benefits relative to a large number of other employees. The HRM research that draws upon the theoretical framework of new institutionalism tends to discount the potential for a 'material self-interest' logic to supersede the logic of HRM. This perspective has been highlighted by scholars such as Aycan (2005) and Lewis et al. (2019). However, it is important to note that this study neglects the influence of how a 'material self-interest' logic can transcend the HRM logic. The implementation of material self-interest logic results in the transformation of HRM policies, which are commonly associated with employee well-being, performance-based rewards, and firm competitiveness, into practices that perpetuate and amplify the prevailing material and status disparities between managers and their preferred employees, on one side, and all other lower-level employees, on the other side. The institutional work approach fails to acknowledge how managers engage in "institutional work" to sustain and perpetuate prevailing material and status disparities. Managers need to engage in institutional tasks to preserve organizational culture in a politically neutral manner with little material implications. Managers' perpetuation of organizational culture enables them to maintain their social authority and prestige, undermining and nullifying the objectives of Human Resource Management (HRM) as outlined in prevailing HRM frameworks.

The perspective of organization-centered new institutionalism tends to minimize the significance of material factors in influencing the actions of individuals and groups. In developing economies, many workers have constrained prospects for social mobility. When combined with elevated levels of social inequality, the potential threats to workers in terms of losing their current socio-economic standing are amplified, influencing the behavior of managers and employees. While the issue may have predominantly affected certain developing countries (Hyden, 2016), the increasing inequality and limited social mobility, together with the emergence of zero-sum politics in the United States, indicate a narrowing gap between some developed and emerging economies. This phenomenon challenges existing theories of embeddedness and offers potential insights into how particular insider groups strategically use institutional resources to further their objectives.

Hence, our work presents a theoretical addition by highlighting the significance of material interests in examining institutional techniques that investigate managerial practices in developing countries. The current advancements in new institutional theory place a significant emphasis on agency, as highlighted by Lewis et al. (2019). Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that players within this framework sometimes exhibit a peculiar apolitical stance, overlooking the absence of agreement among various groups and the contentious character of specific policies and practices. Within the framework of new institutionalism, actors' actions are influenced by competing logic or their endeavors to engage in institutional work. However, it is essential to note that new institutionalism analyses, rooted in an interpretivist perspective (Morgan & Hauptmeier, 2014; Vidal & Peck, 2012), do not evaluate the actors' motivations to achieve material gains through their actions.

There are two alternative approaches to address this limitation. Theoretical perspectives on human resource management (HRM) in emerging economies, informed by the framework of new institutionalism, may encompass the concept of constructed self-interest. These perspectives explore how such self-interest shapes managers' endeavors to uphold their positions and privileges and their management practices concerning employees. It is important to note that these theoretical frameworks and associated research do not assume that managers universally adhere to an HRM logic or engage in HRM activities unaffected by cultural factors. An alternative perspective on the management of employees in emerging markets could incorporate other institutional approaches that highlight the reciprocal relationship between institutions and actors, which significantly influence their interests without ultimately determining them (Morgan & Hauptmeier, 2014). This implies that culture encompasses conceptual and tangible dimensions (Sewell, 1992).

According to our study findings, directing attention toward the examination of "how managers effectively oversee their employees" instead of only focusing on "Human Resource Management (HRM)" will enhance the comprehensive analysis of firms and their workforce in the context of Pakistan. This expanded and impartial analytical approach would eliminate any preconceived notions about the characteristics and conduct of individual and collective entities and organizations. It depicts the involvement of these entities, as well as their underlying motivations and rationales for their behaviors. Furthermore, this would enhance the analytical breadth, allowing researchers to investigate the impact of more prominent cultural elements on adopting practices and how these practices may perpetuate established hierarchies within organizations and society.

Our research primarily focused on banks operating within the Pakistani context. The banking business is prevalent in developed nations, which may influence Pakistani banks to adopt a professional human resource management (HRM) approach that aligns with prevailing paradigms. Nevertheless, managers operating in different sectors within the informal economy may only sometimes be motivated to pursue such a rationale for their benefit. Likewise, it is common for workers working in banks in Pakistan to acquire knowledge of prevailing HRM models via their pursuit of MBAs, which may enhance their understanding of the disparities between the professed HRM policies and the actual practices implemented by management. Employees in various industries may need a greater understanding of the disparities between their organization's stated employment policy and the prevailing norms and practices in the industry.

### **Future Research**

Our study only examined companies within a specific industry in a particular nation over a specific period. Our findings should be limited to suggesting that a similar cultural phenomenon exists across other sectors in Pakistan or developing countries. Furthermore, there needs to be more analysis of the evolution of tensions between the 'Seth' and 'HRM' logics over

time. However, examining Seth and its associated cultural attitudes and behaviors provides a valuable perspective for analyzing the managerial practices used by those overseeing workers in other former British colonies that may have similar cultural characteristics. The outcomes of our study strongly suggest the need to critically examine the operational dynamics of human resource management (HRM) in developing economies.

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