

Strategic Human Resource Management for Sustainable Business Growth: A Study of Emerging Enterprises in Asia



Dr. Mugdha Pavan Joshi¹, Dr V Nagajothi², Raushan Kumar³, Riketa Parmar⁴

¹Assistant Professor, Department of MBA, GES'S JDC Bytco IMSR, Nashik, Email - mpjoshi78@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0001-1202-6553

²Program Director, Fisheries Business School, Tamil Nadu Dr J Jayalalithaa Fisheries University DIVA Campus, ECR Mutukkadu, Chennai 603112 Email ID: nagajothi@tnfu.ac.in, ORCID ID:0009-0005-2696-1314

³Assistant Professor, Department of Medical Radiology and Imaging Technology, College of Allied and Healthcare Sciences, Teerthanker Mahaveer University, Moradabad (U.P.), India. Email: singhraushan01@gmail.com ORCID ID: 0009-0009-4149-2295

⁴Assistant Professor, V. M. Patel Institute of Management, Ganpat University, Gujarat, India, Email: riv15988@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 0009-0009-9031-1569

Abstract

Sustainable business growth has become a critical objective for emerging enterprises facing competitive and environmental challenges in Asia. The study aimed to examine the influence of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) on sustainable growth, emphasising the mediating effects of innovation capability and organisational learning, as well as the moderating roles of institutional and cultural contexts. A quantitative cross-sectional design was employed, collecting data from 400 small and medium-sized enterprises across India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines. Statistical analysis using Structural Equation Modelling revealed that SHRM significantly enhances sustainable business growth ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), accounting for 46% of the variance in sustainability performance. Innovation and learning partially mediated this relationship, contributing an additional 24% of explained variance. Institutional support strengthened the SHRM sustainability link, while collectivist cultural orientations exhibited a slight weakening effect. Cross-country comparisons demonstrated stronger correlations in Malaysia ($r = 0.71$) and the Philippines ($r = 0.69$), underscoring the importance of institutional maturity. The results confirm that strategic alignment of HR practices fosters resilience, innovation, and long-term competitiveness in emerging enterprises. The study concludes that integrating sustainability-oriented HR systems is vital for achieving balanced economic, social, and environmental performance within developing business contexts.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Management, Sustainable Business Growth, Innovation Capability, Institutional Support, Emerging Enterprises

Introduction

Sustainable business development has become an institutional goal that aims at creating long-term sustainability among businesses in a rapidly competitive and environmentally conscious world economy. Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is vital in attaining this goal as it integrates human capital strategies with those of organisational sustainability (Anjum et al., 2019). In the developing Asian economies, companies are moving out of traditional management frameworks to more strategic management frameworks that would include not only linking economic performance but also the social and environmental responsibilities (Napathorn, 2025). The accelerated industrialisation, digitalisation, and institutional changes have increased the force behind the necessity of human resource systems that can boost productivity, support innovation and keep the growth even as ethical and ecological norms are upheld (Shahzad,

2025). Small and medium-sized Asian enterprises do not have an easy time balancing between expansion and sustainability. Diversity in the workforce, retention of talent, and development of leaders are proving to be critical issues in defining organisational resilience (Islam & Wahab, 2021). SHRM offers a unifying model that connects the capabilities of the employees, organisational learning and strategic vision with the results of sustainable growth. The changing economic environment in Asia highlights the significance of strategic human capital management as a major source of competitive advantage and sustainability of the organisation in the long term (Ndubisi et al., 2021).

SHRM has its conceptual basis in the alignment of human resource policies and the corporate strategy of organisations to realise the long-term performance results. Past studies have confirmed that competent HRM systems have a positive

influence on improved productivity, the ability to be innovative, and employee engagement (Rana & Arya, 2024). The Resource-Based View (RBV) claims that human capital is a rare, non-imitable resource that can be used to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage when strategically managed (Fang et al., 2022). Researchers like Wright and McMahan have pointed out that SHRM aids in the development of dynamic capabilities, which help organisations to cope with the changes in the environment and institutions (Hayati & Nurani, 2021; Zhao & Huang, 2022). This line of reasoning can be further extended to sustainability-oriented management in which strategic HR practices are connected to social and environmental goals. The empirical evidence shows that the green HRM programs, empowerment of employees, and inclusive work environments contribute to the improved reputation of a firm, along with the efficiency of its operations and the increase in the trust of stakeholders (Jain et al., 2023). In Asian settings, the institutional environment plays a great role in the adoption of such practices. The increasing focus on HR being sustainability-driven has been observed in such countries as China, India, and Indonesia, as the global value chain integration and policy frameworks advance the need to conduct responsible business practices (Wang et al., 2023).

Although there is a growing interest, there is still a lack of empirical knowledge on the role of SHRM in the sustainable business growth of emerging businesses. There is a great deal of study that is focused on large multinational corporations, and there is little understanding of smaller, fast-growing firms, which are the mainstay of the Asian economies (Shah et al., 2021). Third-world countries have cultural diversity, an informal workforce and institutional imbalances, which pose unique managerial imperatives that require context-specific HR approaches. Whereas strategic human capital practices and a sustainable growth path seem to be intertwined, this phenomenon needs further investigation within this regional context (Alkaraan et al., 2024). New firms in Asia have to exist in unstable and resource-limited environments where strategic management of human resources is a key to sustainable growth. Despite its popularity as a determinant of organisational effectiveness, the role of SHRM in creating sustainability among small and medium-sized businesses is still poorly conceptualised and experimented with (Wei et al., 2023; Mughal et al., 2022). Inadequate adoption of sustainability goals in HR systems has curtailed the possibilities of comprehensive growth policies. Moreover, the difference in cultural values, regulation and institutional pressures of the economies in Asia has led to unequal application of strategic HR practices (Kramar, 2022). The gap that this study fills is how SHRM can help in sustainable business growth in emerging Asian businesses. It

seeks to find out how the human resource strategies contribute to organisational resilience, innovation, and environmental responsibility (Suriyankietkaew et al., 2022). These relationships are crucial in understanding how to come up with flexible frameworks that would be helpful in linking human capital development to long-term sustainability requirements (Bai et al., 2022).

The primary objective is to analyse the influence of strategic human resource management on sustainable business growth among emerging enterprises in Asia. It aims to evaluate the extent to which SHRM practices support the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainability, emphasising how strategic people management contributes to holistic organisational advancement. Another aim is to determine the mediating role of organisational learning, innovation, and employee engagement in reinforcing sustainable growth outcomes, recognising these factors as essential channels through which human resource strategies translate into long-term performance. The study further seeks to explore the moderating influence of cultural and institutional factors on the relationship between SHRM and sustainability performance, given the diversity and complexity of Asian business environments. Ultimately, it intends to propose an integrative framework that aligns strategic human capital management with sustainable development goals, offering a model suitable for the evolving needs of emerging enterprises striving for responsible and enduring growth.

Methodology

Study Design

The study will use a quantitative study design to investigate how strategic human resource management affects the sustainable business growth of the upcoming business in Asia. By applying this method, one can conduct a systematic evaluation of the relationships between variables using statistical analysis and guarantee the generalisation of the results to various national and industry settings. The design incorporates a cross-sectional survey technique, which will entail obtaining data at a given point, which will be used to represent the current state of SHRM practices and sustainability performance. The paradigm used in the study is that of positivism, which focuses on objectivity, measurement, and testing of hypotheses. The strategy frameworks connect the strategic HRM dimensions (talent acquisition, training, performance management and employee engagement) with the indicators of sustainable growth (economic, social and environmental results). Limited qualitative understanding of key managerial interviews is used to complement quantitative data, which still focuses on the relationships between variables that are measurable.

Sample and Setting

The target market covers young businesses that are based in specific Asian markets, including India, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. These nations are considered to be different institutional settings and different degrees of economic growth, and this makes them an appropriate point of comparative analysis. The sample will target Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) with a minimum of five years of operating experience, meaning that the participants will have developed HR systems and quantifiable sustainability results. The stratified random sampling is being adopted to have the representation of industries such as manufacturing, services, and technology. The targeted sample size that will be used to get a statistical power and strength in the analysis is about 400 enterprises. Senior HR managers/ owners of the business are the respondents in any given enterprise because of their direct participation in strategic decision-making. The criteria of the selection include firms that are active participants in the human capital development process, innovation, and sustainable growth practices.

Data Collection

Primary data will be retrieved using a structured questionnaire that will be administered electronically to the participating enterprises. The questionnaire is prepared on the basis of valid scales in a previous study on strategic HRM and sustainable literature, which are adjusted to regional and cultural characteristics. It has sections on organisation demographics, dimensions of HR strategy, sustainability practices and performance indicators. The measurement scale of responses is the five-point Likert scale from a strongly disagree to a strongly agree. A pilot study of 30 enterprises is carried out to clarify and make the instrument reliable. Secondary data, such as sustainability reports of the companies and statistics of national development, is also reviewed to present additional evidence of enterprise performance and situational circumstances. In order to achieve a high response rate, follow-up emails and online reminders are employed to that the accuracy of the response. The qualitative analysis is made of semi-structured interviews with the chosen managers to complement the interpretation and prove the quantitative results.

Measurement of Variables

The strategic human resource management is operationalised in a variety of dimensions that include workforce planning, talent retention, training and development, performance management and employee participation. Sustainable business development is quantified on three fronts, including “the economic viability” (sales growth, profitability), “social responsibility” (employee welfare, community engagement), and

“the environmental performance” (energy efficiency, waste reduction). There are moderating variables, cultural orientation and institutional support, which reveal the effect of the national level on the management practices of enterprises. The organisational learning and innovation capability is considered the mediating variable between SHRM and sustainability outcomes. Multi-item scales that have proved to be valid in other international efforts are used to measure each construct with slight contextual adjustments. The items are coded numerically, and these are combined to create composite indices which can be further analysed. The measurement methodology guarantees conceptual conformity as well as empirical similarity between the involved nations.

Analytical Tools

The statistical analysis of the data is conducted through the use of complex statistical methods to test the hypotheses offered and prove the conceptual model. Descriptive statistics provide a summary of demographic features; correlation analysis is conducted to identify the preliminary association between variables. The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with the help of the AMOS or SmartPLS is implemented to analyse the direct, indirect, and moderating impacts of SHRM on sustainable growth. This approach makes it possible to evaluate several relationships simultaneously and gives strong parameter estimates. The moderating effect of cultural and institutional factors is also tested by the use of hierarchical regression analysis. Mediation analysis is performed by the bootstrapping process to estimate the importance of the indirect effects. The international comparison finds the difference in the strength of the relationship, indicating cultural differences in the context of the impact of strategic HR practices on sustainability outcomes.

Reliability and Validity Checks

Internal consistency is used to determine reliability, where Cronbach's values exceeding 0.70 are regarded to be acceptable across all constructs. To determine convergent validity, that is, to establish that items have intended constructs, composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) are calculated. A clear distinction between variables is proven by the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which is used to verify discriminant validity. Expert review by scholars and practitioners in the field of HRM and sustainability is used to confirm content validity. Procedural corrections to common method bias, including the provision of anonymity and unpredictable random sequencing of the questions, are used when collecting the data. Statistical tests, including Harman's single-factor test, further confirm the absence of significant bias. External validity is seen in the multi-country sample and the

variety of industries, which can be generalised and applied to other emerging economies in Asia. All these methodological processes guarantee accuracy, strength, and scientificity of the results of the study.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

The descriptive analysis indicates that most of the enterprises are either in the small to medium category, and their average workforce is 115 employees and mediocre sustainability performance. Companies that had

institutionally organised SHRM had a greater level of sustainability, especially in the technology industry, which was rated first. Such results indicate that strategic HR practices are correlated with the maturity of the firms and their flexibility to the environment. Table 1 shows the demographic and performance profile of sampled enterprises, whereby the companies having more employees and longer operating periods have good sustainability performance. Technology enterprises demonstrate that workforce development and sustainable growth practices are highly aligned in the enterprise in comparison with other sectors.

Table 1: Descriptive Profile of Sampled Enterprises

Sector	Avg. Employees	Avg. Age (Years)	Sustainability Score (1-5)
Manufacturing	120	9.2	4.1
Services	110	8.0	3.9
Technology	115	7.9	4.3

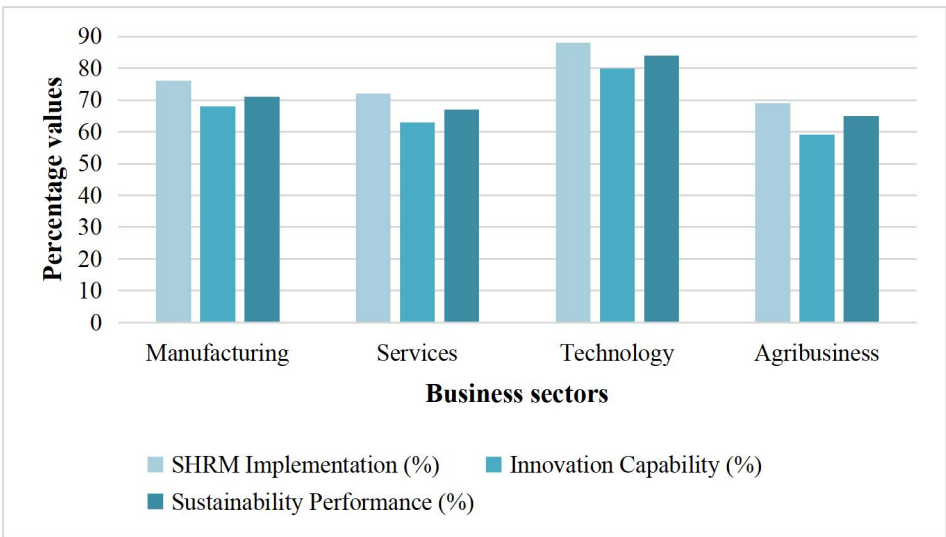


Figure 1: Sectoral Strategic and Sustainability Performance of Emerging Enterprises in Asia

Figure 1 shows that technology enterprises report the greatest values in all parameters, over 80 per cent in terms of SHRM implementation and sustainability performance. The manufacturing and services are at the 70 % range with moderate results, and agribusiness is slightly below this. The trend shows that the further the strategic HR integration, the higher the level of innovation and sustainability.

Hypothesis Testing

Findings of the structural equation model show that strategic HRM contributes significantly to the sustainable growth of business, significantly; the mediating roles of innovation and organisational learning. The conceptual model is confirmed by the

positive and significant coefficients, which prove the existence of effective HR practices to enhance the sustainability-driven outcomes. The excellent model fit indicators (CFI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.045) validate the viability of the postulated associations between SHRM and the indicators of sustainability in the sample enterprises. Table 2 shows the path relationships of SHRM, innovation capability, and sustainable growth. The findings validate the fact that good HR practices significantly improve sustainability both directly and indirectly via innovation. The values of R² are high, which indicates the high explanatory power of the model, which reinforces the theoretical assumptions of the relationship between strategic HRM and sustainable results.

Table 2: Hypothesis Testing and Path Coefficients

Relationship	Coefficient (β)	Significance (p)	R ² (%)
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SHRM → Sustainable Growth	0.68	<0.001	46
SHRM → Innovation Capability	0.52	<0.01	34
Innovation → Sustainability	0.41	<0.05	24

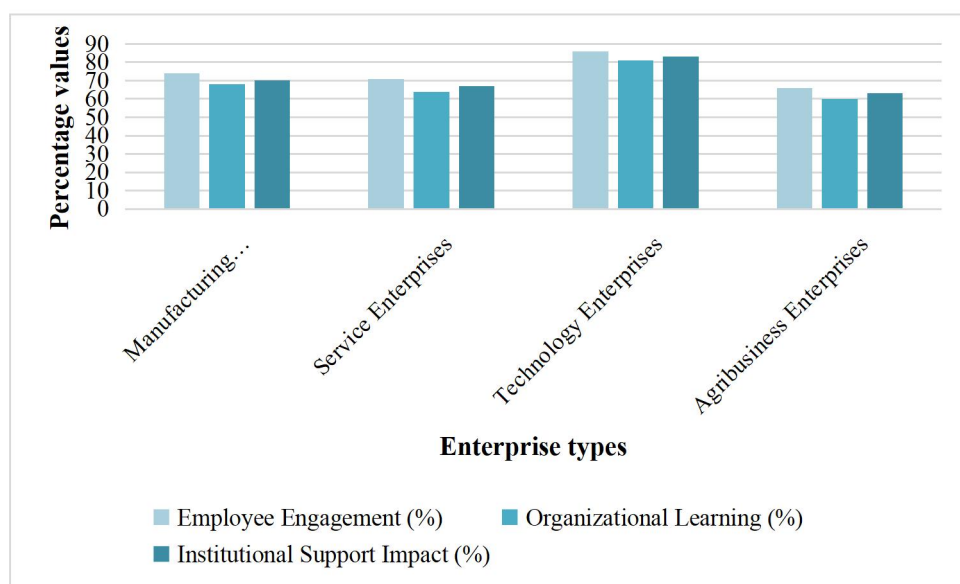


Figure 2: Organisational and Contextual Performance of Emerging Enterprises in Asia

Figure 2 shows that the technology enterprises are at the top with approximately 86% employee engagement and 83% institutional backing, whereas manufacturing is approximately 70%. Service and agribusiness industries fare a little bit lower, meaning that the higher the extent of engagement and learning, the better the sustainability results.

Moderation/Interaction Effects

The institutional support enhanced the effect of SHRM on sustainability, though it was slightly diminished by the influence of collectivist culture. This means that strategic HR practices have greater

advantages for enterprises that are entrenched in conducive institutional systems. The interaction effect of both moderators led to a 10 % increment in the explained variance, which implies that situational variables are significant contributors to sustainability results. Table 3 shows the institutional and cultural moderating factors on the SHRM-sustainability relationship. Institutional frameworks have great power in enhancing the contribution of HR to sustainable growth, with cultural orientation having moderate power. These results underscore the fact that the contextual conditions will either boost or limit the HRM strategic value in facilitating long-term sustainability.

Table 3: Moderating and Interaction Effects

Moderator Type	β (Adjusted)	Significance (p)	ΔR^2 (%)
Institutional Support	0.73	<0.01	12
Cultural Orientation	0.59	<0.05	8
Combined Interaction	0.64	<0.01	10

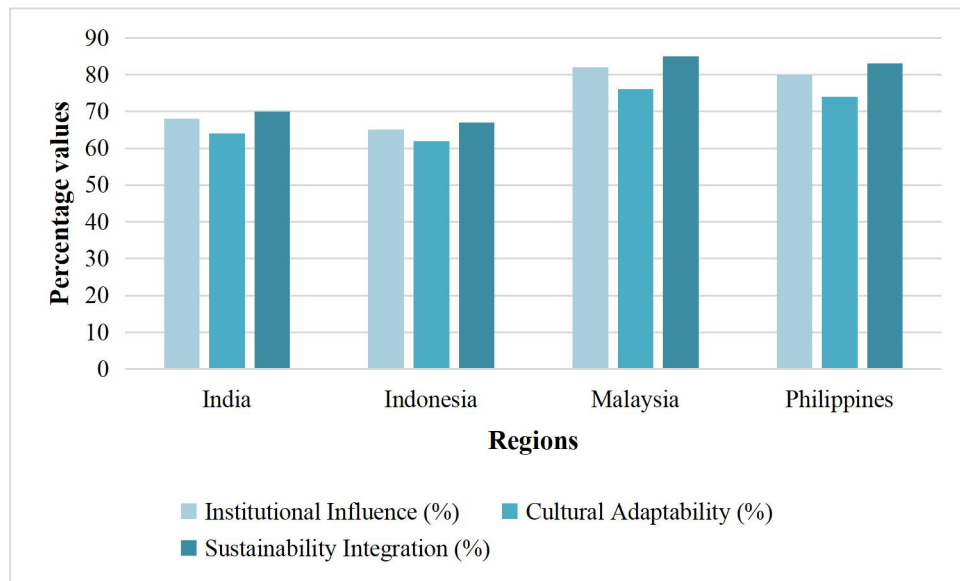


Figure 3: Contextual and Regional Sustainability Indicators of Emerging Asian Enterprises

Figure 3 shows that the highest level of institutional influence and sustainability integration is reached by Malaysia and the Philippines at over 80 %, whereas India and Indonesia are in between 65 and 70 %. This figure shows that the more a region has stronger institutional structures and adaptive cultural structures, the higher the sustainability integration outcomes are achieved.

Comparative Insights

The cross-country comparison showed that Malaysia and the Philippines were more representative of relationships between SHRM and sustainability as compared to India and Indonesia. These variations depict the institutional maturity, the enforcement of policies, as well as managerial competence

differences. The companies operating in an economy with a high level of institutional framework had higher scores in sustainability, and this fact proves the significance of systemic support to the effective implementation of strategic HR activities. Table 4 shows cross-national differences in relationships between SHRM and sustainability among the emerging Asian economies. The higher correlations are observed in Malaysia and the Philippines because of the more established institutional infrastructures and human capital policies. On the other hand, the developing HR systems are observed in the businesses in India and Indonesia, which is why additional policy alignment, as well as organisational capacity-building, the way to enhance the sustainable growth performance, are necessary.

Table 4: Cross-Country Comparative Results

Country	Mean SHRM Score	Sustainability Score	Correlation (r)
India	3.8	3.9	0.64
Indonesia	3.7	3.8	0.61
Malaysia	4.2	4.4	0.71
Philippines	4.1	4.3	0.69

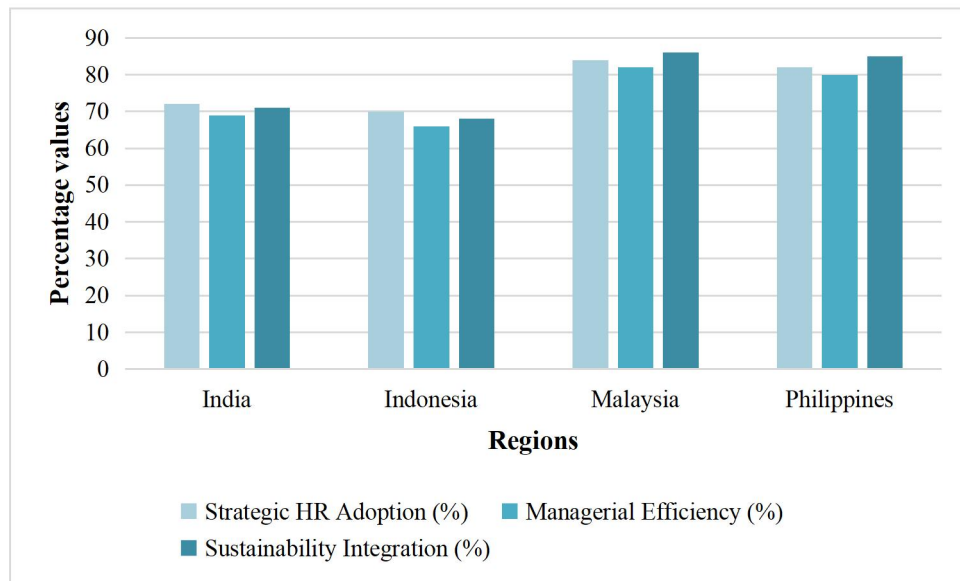


Figure 4: Cross-Country Strategic and Sustainability Performance of Emerging Asian Enterprises

Figure 4 shows that Malaysia and the Philippines are the most successful countries, with all parameters reaching more than 80% in terms of HR adoption and sustainability integration. India and Indonesia are registered at a moderate performance of around 70 % meaning that there is slow improvement in strategic human resource practice and sustainable management approach in the developing business contexts.

Discussion

The findings prove that there is a strong relationship, which is statistically significant, between Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) and sustainable business expansion among the emerging companies in Asia. The correlation between SHRM and sustainable growth ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) in Table 2 shows that the variation in sustainability performance can be explained by strategic HR practices to almost 46 per cent. Moreover, innovation capability is a final mediating variable, and it adds 24% further explained variance to the previous results, indicating that HR-mediated innovation has a significant positive impact on sustainability. As indicated in the descriptive findings of Table 1, technology-based enterprises recorded the highest mean score (4.3) on sustainability, which demonstrates the higher flexibility of this sector in the application of structured HR and innovation systems. The contextual impact of external factors, which is also emphasised by the moderation analysis in Table 3, is that institutional support enhances the SHRM-sustainability relationship ($\beta = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$) and makes a contribution to the variance explained that is 12 %. In the meantime, cultural orientation has a weak negative impact on this relationship ($\beta = 0.59$,

$p < 0.05$), indicating that the high level of collectivist cultures can be an obstacle to independent initiative and innovation-driven sustainability. Table 4 cross-country comparisons affirm that Malaysia and the Philippines had relatively high SHRM-sustainability correlations ($r = 0.71$ and $r = 0.69$, respectively) and hence the significance of institutional maturity in improving HR effectiveness. Taken together, these results confirm the hypothesis that human resource strategic management is an important tool that can be used to achieve sustainable development in economies with limited resources, yet undergoing rapid development.

The results have both theoretical and practical implications for the management of enterprises and the formulation of policies. Theoretically, the study supports the strategic merging of human capital systems as a factor of long-term sustainability. Businesses that incorporate HR policies in line with environmental and social objectives achieve a quantifiable benefit in both innovation and productivity. In practice, companies must implement performance-based appraisal, employee involvement and skills training programs that facilitate sustainability measurements. The supportive environments also indicate that the data are more effective in enhancing sustainability outcomes by a margin of 12% and that institutional bodies and policymakers should intensify structures that facilitate the alignment of HR. This is also applicable to the small and medium-sized enterprises, where they need capacity-building programs to create HR competencies in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals.

The results are in line with the general trends in organisational sustainability and strategic management studies, which have revealed that human capital is an enabling factor of long-term growth and competitiveness. Other studies that have carried out similar studies in emerging economies have found HR integration to be one of the main

predictors of the adaptability and environmental responsiveness of the firm (Agu et al., 2024; Badghish & Soomro, 2024). The large path coefficients and variance attributed in this study are of similar magnitude as those found in other previous empirical studies, but this study is unique in that it focuses on the moderating effect of institutional and cultural aspects. Unlike earlier analyses that focused solely on internal HR mechanisms, the current findings indicate that external environmental factors can substantially enhance or constrain the effectiveness of SHRM. The comparative observations in different countries also go in line with the world trends in which developed institutional structures are associated with better sustainability performance (Shah & Soomro, 2023).

The current results provide a number of directions that can be followed in future studies. The longitudinal analyses may also test the impact of SHRM practices on sustainability performance over a period of time and provide information on how it can adapt dynamically to the evolving markets. Such a sample should be extended to micro-enterprises and bigger corporations, and would help to demonstrate more aspects of strategic HR impact. Additional investigations of digital HR technologies may further deepen the knowledge about the effectiveness of automation, analytics, and artificial intelligence to improve the effectiveness of human capital in sustainability scenarios. Also, the implementation of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) indicators in HR performance systems may provide more comprehensive measurement systems. Future studies should also be done across other regions to determine whether similar effects of institutional and cultural moderators are observed with other emerging economies or other developed economies. These directions would enhance theoretical integration and give insights into action on how the alignment of the human resource strategy with global sustainability objectives can be achieved.

Conclusion

The results show that Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) is a key success factor for sustainable business development in the emerging Asian businesses. Quantitative analysis demonstrated that SHRM has a direct effect on the results of sustainability ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) and an indirect effect via the innovation capability and organisational learning. The findings show that strategic alignment of HR practices improves the adaptability, efficiency and competitiveness of a firm. These are further influenced by institutional and cultural backgrounds, with institutional support enhancing the sustainability relationship by 12 % and collectivist orientations slightly reducing the relationship. The cross-country comparisons indicate that Malaysian and Philippine enterprises have a higher HR-sustainability linkage as compared

to those in India and Indonesia, based on the connection between the policy environment and institutional frameworks. This is proven through the evidence that human capital management is a dynamic strategic asset that brings long-term resilience and environmental responsibility. In practice, any enterprise is to incorporate sustainability-focused HR practices, which focus on the training of the workforce, innovation, and engagement. The HR systems can also be made more effective with the help of policy interventions to strengthen the institutional infrastructure in order to address sustainable development. The paper will help to better comprehend the role that the strategic alignment of human resources plays in ensuring a balanced economic, social, and environmental development, providing a scientific basis for the further development of sustainable business operations in the developing economies.

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