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Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) Maturity at the time of the Economic Crisis: A Case Study in Greek Banking Organisations through a Multi-Constituent Research Approach

Abstract

Purpose: This paper examines SHRD's maturity within the context of the economic crisis, and through the respective lens of different key HRD stakeholders. It aims to critically address existing SHRD models' limitations (e.g. assessed within "static" business environments, lack of employees' "line of sight", performative or humanitarian focus etc.) so as to explore and advance our understanding on how SHRD is perceived and applied within diverse institutions through a multi-constituent research perspective. Additionally, it assesses and evaluates the key characteristics which constitute the criteria of a SHRD mature organisation within two Greek banks at the time of the economic crisis.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study draws upon qualitative research data from two case study banking organisations in Greece (two largest private-owned banking corporations), by reporting on 76 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (HR staff, Bank Managers, Employees). A pre and post-crisis assessment was followed, supplemented by document analysis. Lastly, SHRD's maturity, within the targeted organisations, was evaluated through the employment of a modified SHRD model, with its respective strategic characteristics.

Findings: Research evidence highlights the complexity attached with stakeholders' perception of SHRD, and the level of its maturity (pre and post-crisis) respectively. Precisely, SHRD maturity is presented mixed for both time periods, with most strategic characteristics to be partially employed by both organisations either before or after the crisis. However, an interesting point was highlighted with both organisations' HRD practices to be presented agile enough in regard to the ongoing business uncertainty. Yet, having assessed all strategic characteristics, for both organisations and for both time periods, research data outlines SHRD's setback within both organisations.

Originality/Value: This paper provides both theoretical and practical considerations over the maturity of SHRD during recessionary times. Its value initially derives from its critical mindset, thus extending existing SHRD theory and models through its multi-constituent research perspective, and by seeing SHRD as a discursive action (moving away from a performative and/or humanitarian focus). Alike, it enhances existing knowledge on SHRD maturity both within a different industrial and cultural context, while it also adds to SHRD theory and practice by testing a modified SHRD model under the circumstances of an economic crisis.

Keywords: Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD), SHRD Maturity, Greek Banks, Stakeholders' Perception of SHRD (Multi-constituent perspective).

Introduction

The dynamic and competitive intensity of today's business and economic environments has challenged organisations to re-assess the vital role of their HRD interventions. Although, HRD was traditionally accustomed in order to resolve work problems relevant to performance and under performance (Acton & Golden, 2003; Goldstein & Ford, 2002), posteriori literature highlights its significance as a fundamental process of organisational transformation, change and growth (Anderson, 2009; Wang et al., 2009; Paprock, 2006; Beer et al., 2005).

Most recent research evidence further highlights that business world becomes turbulent faster than organisations attain a strategic orientation (O'Donovan & Rimland-Flower, 2013; Sung & Choi, 2013; Boin & Van Eeten, 2013). However, a relative lack of robust theoretical and methodological attention on SHRD maturity, and its practical implications at the time of an economic crisis, can be outlined. Hence, further research is required in exploring change and constraints in SHRD during turbulent and fast changing time periods.

SHRD maturity within the context of the economic crisis, and the rationale behind focusing on Greek Banks.

Existing SHRD models (Garavan, 2007; Robinson & Robinson, 2005; Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004; Gilley & Gilley, 2003; Becker et al., 2001; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000a, 2000b; Dwyer, 2000; McCracken & Wallace 2000a, 2000b; Ulrich, 1998; Pfeffer, 1998; Lee, 1996a, 1996b; Torraco & Swanson, 1995; Garavan, 1991 – figures 1 & 2) have been assessed within "static" business and economic environments, and thus they do not reflect the dynamic nature of today's business landscapes. Additionally, previous research has mostly been undertaken in US and UK, and in most cases by following a multi-sectoral research approach ("one-size fits all" problem). Furthermore, all of them follow either a performative or humanitarian focus (a proposition highly questioned from CHRD literature), while most of them totally neglect to incorporate employees' voicing within their respective strategic characteristics. Thus, a significant research gap can be outlined, both in terms of assessing SHRD maturity within today's business and economic uncertainty and complexity, and along with a different national and industrial context.

Alike, CHRD literature argues for the ambiguity of various concepts associated with SHRD (e.g. organisational change, learning organisations etc.), by arguing that they are theoretical in nature and too difficult to be achieved (Sambrook, 2009; Rigg et al., 2007;

O'Donnell et al., 2006; Sambrook & Stewart, 2005; Elliott & Turnbull, 2005; Holton & Naquin, 2005). It further questions previous research's performative or humanitarian focus, by proposing to examine SHRD as a "discursive action" and/or an "emergent process", so as to reveal multiple realities of it, and eventually to demonstrate its real roles and activities (Lawless et al., 2010; Sambrook, 2004; 2000).

Therefore, drawing upon and enhance the work of McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b), a modified SHRD model has been proposed and assessed (figure 3). Furthermore, in respect to the requirements of critically evaluating SHRD maturity, this study embraces a multi-constituent research perspective so as to secure different context-oriented viewpoints over the understanding and the maturity of SHRD, and thus to audit organisational behaviour at all levels (micro-meso-macro) within the two case study banking organisations.

The banking sector has been chosen as of being the dominant one in Greece, and one of the main pillars of most national economies. It is also considered, by nature, as people-oriented and knowledge-intensive for its growth and success (Antzoulatos, 2013; Dimitropoulos, 2012; BIS, 2012). Furthermore, there is a relative lack of relevant studies, both within the specific sector and national context. Coupled with the tremendous restructuring and transitional phase (both within the Greek economy and the financial sector), both can also present an interesting case for further exploration. The rationale behind studying SHRD in Greek banks during the recession also lies with the fact that Greece's adversity may also draw attention to akin economies and business sectors within the Eurozone.

Research Strategy, Methods and Synthesis of Interview Participants

Qualitative research evidence was secured through the use of a case study research strategy and the employment of semi-structured interviews (HR staff, bank managers, and employees) so as to allow for a multi-hierarchical analysis to be carried out. The qualitative research involved 76 interview participants (38 from each case respectively - figure 4), while document analysis and basic HR metrics have also been applied in a supplementary way to interviews. The purposive and snowball sampling techniques were applied in order to secure that participants are those who held the knowledge to provide the desired information (at a pre and post-crisis assessment), and eventually to increase the reliability and validity of the research design. Finally, interview key themes focused upon participants' perception of SHRD, and its level of maturity through the examination of the strategic characteristics of the suggested SHRD model.

A brief overview of the case study banking organisations

"Case A" is a private-owned banking institution with national and international presence, occupying almost 20.000 people within its approximately 1100 branches and other corporate divisions. "Case B" employs over 22.000 people within its domestic and international operational stores (1500) and business departments. Although mostly similarities can be identified amongst them (e.g. ownership, operational presence, unionised workforce), a few nuances can also be highlighted in regard to their training budgets, financial performance, training-man hours & benefits etc. (figure 5).

Both banks are private-owned with their services to be offered both at a national and international market level. However, "case B" appears slightly more effective in terms of its operating revenues, as they are almost twice than those of "case A". We can also report on "case B" higher number of branches and its larger workforce's size. Accordingly, the training budget and the training-man hours spend on average per employee in "case B" are both higher than the respective ones of "case A". Therefore, in a large extent, we can conclude that the former places greater emphasis on its HRD initiatives than the latter; thus, being more training intensive compared to its counterpart.

Exploring SHRD maturity through the respective perception of key HRD stakeholders

SHRD maturity has been examined at a pre and post-crisis assessment, and through a multi-constituent research perspective. That allowed the researcher to highlight the areas in which organisations are either contiguous or differentiate in regard to their SHRD practices (figure 6), along with demonstrating stakeholders' perception change over time (figure 7).

Shape organisational mission, goal and strategies

Consistent with the relative literature suggesting that HR's central role should be moved around the way in which its voice is expressed and heard during corporate strategy's formulation (Holbeche, 2009; Swanson, 2000), HR staff, from both organisations, highlighted their department's positioning with their respective BoD. All argued for HR's strong voice within the senior management team of executives for both time periods. In "case A", its HR staff verified the above assertions, yet without providing any relevant examples.

However, the story was quite different in "case B". HR department's consultation during corporate strategy's formulation was highlighted by pinpointing the close cooperation between its executives and senior management. Having further discussed with them, the underlying reason of such partnership was outlined. "Case B" CEO and top management's transformational leadership style highly welcomes the active involvement of the bank's HR executives during the setting of its business goals. Such a supportive business climate further helped "case B" to better achieve its objectives, and to gracefully change and adapt to new business realities; a proposition which is highly suggested within the literature as well (Wilson, 2012; Mendenhall et al., 2012; Gillon, 2011; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Zhu et al., 2005).

In line with their HR department, over three-fourth of the managers from "case B" outlined HR's capacity (for the past) in offering a wide variety of tools and solutions, probably because of the fact that their bank was the first to introduce innovative services and products, and the leader amongst bank corporations expanding to foreign markets. They have recognised HR's leadership capability which goes "hand-in-hand" with their senior management's priorities for both time periods. They further acknowledged that although the organisation is under a transition phase (owing to the crisis), the banking industry is highly people-oriented and knowledge intensive for its success, and thus HR consultation will be always in demand.

Contrariwise, the large majority of the managers from "case A" argued for their HR's strategic positioning at a pre-crisis time period, the time when most Greek banks employed a growth strategy. However, after crisis, they have noticed a setback and a more operational role for it. Accordingly, they have argued that since the organisation is struggling to ensure its survival, top-down business directions are mainly followed these days with limited HR intervention.

Besides such diverse viewpoints, a convergence amongst all employees' perception, from both banks, has also been noticed. Almost all (with very few from "case B") suggested that HR always lacked the capacity of shaping business goals and strategies as it was always senior management's role to do so. They have further argued that, either before or after the crisis, nothing has changed in regard to their organisation's HR approach. Such an operational standpoint may be explained through employees' greater vulnerability due to the new business circumstances. However, there were very few (case B) who defended their HR department by arguing that, owing to the on-going industrial restructuring, time will be required before judging their organisational, departmental and human capital's effectiveness.

Appropriately, stakeholders' diverse standpoints enhance the complex nature of people's understanding of SHRD and further bewilder the extent to which HR is capable of shaping business goals, mission and strategies. Such belief is supported from various research studies, all questioning HRD's alignment with corporate strategy and its ability of influencing it (Anderson, 2009; Wognum, 2001). Therefore, the extent to which this criterion was met is debatable.

Environmental scanning, in HRD terms, from all organisational members

There are many studies suggesting that a firm's ability to successfully identify and address any micro and macro-related environmental opportunities and threats can enhance its competitiveness (Li & Liu, 2014; Herrera, 2014; Sabir et al., 2012). The literature further argues that the most important condition for expanding an organisation's attention to T&D is to check its reaction to environmental challenges by suggesting that matching an organisation's HR capabilities with the environment's opportunities and challenges can be a source of its efficiency and competitiveness (Felstead et al., 2012a; 2012b; David, 2011; Fiorina, 2004). In further supporting such assertions, all organisational members should be included in relevant scanning activities so as to offer their useful insights and eventually to help organisations to reach a better decision.

Research evidence highlights "case A" functional role, in contrast to "case B" proactive nature. The latter reported greater scanning activities, along with the inclusion of its HR executives and some of its bank managers as well. However, most of the interviewed managers (case A) argued for their organisation's inability to take advantage of any favourable business opportunity owing to the total lack of implementing such activities. That was not a common practice before the crisis, as all highlighted a more proactive HR approach through the use of various scanning methods. Concurrently, branch managers' role (case A) was limited at simply reporting their branches' financial figures on a three-month basis owing to the bank's primal focus on ensuring its survival. Managers' assertion was further confirmed by their HR staff who outlined its pre-crisis proactive nature and its post-crisis operational role respectively.

Afresh, "case B" story is different, at least in regard to its HR executives and managers' involvement, with the latter to undertake some HR responsibilities within their job contexts. Although they have confirmed that such activities were greater in the past, they also argued that their organisation still searches for business opportunities to exploit or for environmental threats to confront. With the literature suggesting that effective leaders can create an interactive

platform in order to engage all organisational stakeholders in a brainstorming exchange session so as for their voices to be heard and eventually to lead to crisis management solutions (Heller, 2012; James & Wooten, 2005), transformational leadership can be identified as the root of "case B" HR executives and bank managers' active participation in regard to the organisation's efforts to promote its workforce's creativeness and adaptability to business change.

In line with their managers, HR people (case B) claimed that environmental scanning is conducted within their organisation on a regular basis by involving many of their branch managers, yet without including their front-line employees. They argued that branch managers are the most appropriate ones as they can represent their employees as intermediates. They further claimed that what has changed from the past is the context of scanning, with these days to be more oriented towards front-line operations as new business objectives dictate. Eventually, environmental scanning (in "case B") seems to be more mature as to the way it is suggested with this specific criterion.

However, for both organisations, employees' non-participation was highlighted, especially for the post-crisis era. Although there is an increasing amount of relevant research indicating the importance of employees' voicing within organisations, as a crucial element for the successful run of all business operations and as an important source of successfully addressing business turbulence and change (Purcell & Hall, 2012; Bennett, 2010; Cheese et al., 2009; Boswell, 2006; Hopp & Van Oyen, 2004), employees were not engaged at all. It is also remarkable that, opposite to what it was expected (based on top management's leadership style), "case B" employees were excluded from such activities as well. Such exclusion further enhances their operational way of seeing/explaining things and situations. However, a striking observation was noticed through most employees' perception (case A) of not feeling competent enough in participating in relevant scanning activities, basically because they do not hold all relative information in order to make insightful recommendations.

Although their assertion is not entirely wrong, that does not justify their exclusion from such scanning activities as useful recommendations can be made unexpectedly. Overall, research evidence highlights employees' exclusion (for both banks); however, with a greater involvement of its HR executives and branch managers to be identified (case B), thus constituting the organisation slightly more mature than its counterpart. Again, stakeholders' mixed viewpoints add to the complex nature of the examined phenomenon, and highlight the difficulties in assessing SHRD's maturity during turbulent economic times and through a multi-hierarchical approach.

"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies

A distinctive criterion of a strategically mature organisation lies in its ability to design and deliver quick, competitive and "environmentally-integrated" HRD practices so as to gracefully absorb the negative consequences of constantly changing business environment. Thus, in an extent for its HRD strategies to be agile enough towards business and economic turbulence.

Most of the managers, and all from the HR department, from both organisations, acknowledged HR's competitiveness and strategic integration by evaluating this respective criterion in regard to new business objectives. They recognised that, right after the crisis, both banks' had to totally revise their plans and strategies in such ways in order to ensure their organisational survival and renewal. That dictated the adoption of a more exploitation (short-term) business focus. Hence, they argued that due to a new business focus, HR needs to be engaged in facilitating its accomplishment through relevant training offerings (e.g. e-learning, webinars etc.), without necessarily to diminish the quality of their training offerings. Their assertion of the effectiveness of e-learning can be further supported by a growing body of the relevant literature that praises e-HRM practices as a developmental element within the HR field, which can result to its liberation in terms of managing time (customization & greater flexibility), quality and costs, and eventually to suggest a more strategic role for it (Moynihan, 2008; Johnson et al., 2008; Panayotopoulou et al., 2007; Gueutal & Stone, 2005; Salas et al., 2005; Lengnick-Hall & Moritz, 2003). To this extent, there were a few employees (case B) who stated that such practices can indicate an organisation's innovativeness and to highlight signs of development.

On the other hand, the large majority of the employees, from both sides, claimed that HR lost in position within the business agenda comparing to its pre-crisis status. They continued by arguing that today's HR practices are nothing more than the reflection of their organisation's retrenchment. Concurrently, they characterised e-learning as an inappropriate training method owing to the total lack of people's interaction within a class environment, and as a low cost intervention. Their assertion comes in full compliance with many research studies indicating that web-based training is mainly driven from cost reduction requirements rather than a strategic direction, while it tends to isolate participants, to reduce their communication and interaction skills, and to minimize their overall satisfaction due to non-timely feedback (Ruta, 2005; Ruel et al., 2004; Stanton & Coovert, 2004; MacPherson et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2003).

Overall, it would be better to implement a mix of e-learning and class-based training so as to increase communication and interaction amongst trainees, between them and the trainers, while also to make them feel motivated and eager to participate in the learning process (Klein et al., 2006; Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 2003). Appropriately, the application of e-HRM practices can also suggest partial evidence of strategically aligning HR and business objectives. Thus, in a large extent, to talk for HRD's agility in regard to this specific criterion. Without arguing for or against their short-term orientation, the researcher believes that the implemented HRD interventions managed to be quickly enacted and at a relative low cost, while also to maintain fit with the external environment's requirements; thus, they have been proved crucial in ensuring business survival and competitiveness throughout this difficult times. Such belief is also highly associated with Alagaraja's (2013a, 2013b) proposition that the importance of SHRD in supporting the strategic goals of the organisation can either occur through an operational or a strategic role; yet with the latter to be more appreciated. However, especially within the context of an economic crisis, it is debatable whether organisations should meet all strategic criteria or just for their HRD practices to be characterised as agile enough so as to ensure business survival, competitiveness and preparedness for a business upturn. Yet, such a controversial belief further enhances the contested territory within which SHRD's understanding and maturity associates with.

Strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders

A strategic alignment between HRD and stakeholders has to be maintained, as part of the continuous learn and change process in order to adjust to new business realities and to ensure business effectiveness (Beer et al., 2005; Clement, 2005: 256; Hyland et al., 2005). To this extent, both HR teams reported a strategic partnership with their senior management executives by the time HR is situated within the BoD; yet, to a different extent in each case. However, "case A" HR staff failed to support their assertions with relevant examples, and they were unable to clearly indicate whether the decision of offering additional training to their front-line employees and managers was the outcome of such strategic partnership or just a top-down direction.

On the other hand, research data highlight "case B" senior executives and HR staff collaboration in order to define new policies and strategies. The latter claimed that their department's positioning within the BoD is a strong indication of its strategic voicing and partnership with the bank's top management. Either before or after the crisis, HR's clearer role

at the top level can be outlined, as being amongst the first to be consulted for every business initiative. Such cooperation can be seen as a key element of improving performance, facilitating change initiatives (CIPD, 2006), and as a tool of creating a skilled and committed workforce who could contribute to organisational competitiveness while meeting the interests of various stakeholders (Phillips et al., 2007). Such propositions can be evidently illustrated through "case B" top management leadership approach. That was further evidenced through most organisational documents as well, all indicating senior executives' engagement in knowledge development and acquisition through their greater agility, creativity and support in respect to their engagement with HRD initiatives.

Alike, HRD literature emphasises on LMs involvement as learning facilitators throughout the identification of their personal and their employees' business needs so as to allow them to become more competent in their interpersonal interrelations with their teams, and eventually to collectively achieve their bottom-line goals (McCracken & McIvor, 2013; Alagaraja, 2013b; Wilson, 2012; Watson et al., 2007; Nehles et al., 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Thereupon, managers (case B) stated that there is a decentralization of most HR practices to their daily responsibilities so for HR professionals to concentrate more on strategic and long-term aspects.

In contrary, the large majority of the interviewed managers (case A) emphasized on the lack of their participation in HR's policy development, or within any other HR intervention, and highlighted their disappointment of being ignored although they are those holding all relevant information for making consistent suggestions.

Undeniably, "case B" is presented more open than "case A" in building strategic partnerships with its managers. Its top management's leadership approach might be the underlying reason of promoting such partnerships as its senior executives accept the active involvement of their managers so to holistically address business concerns. That comes in line with Garavan's (1995a, 1995b) suggestion that top management's standpoint proposes that T&D should be of LMs responsibility, while the role of HRD professionals is to provide advice and consultancy to them. Hence, the majority of the managers (case B) further concluded that their top management is savvy enough in detecting signs of forthcoming economic breakdown, political change, and deficiencies in business and human capital resources; thus, being capable of performing in such ways for organisational agility and resilience to be easier attained for ensuring organisational survival and renewal.

As aforementioned, employees' exclusion was highlighted in both cases. Although "employees voicing" inside organisations is highly encouraged for multiple benefits, such as increased organisational performance and a supportive business climate (Crane & Matten, 2007; Greenwood, 2007; Dundoon et al., 2004), employee satisfaction and industrial citizenship (Bishop & Levine, 1999), high performance work systems (Lynch-Fannon, 2004: 155; Boxall & Purcell, 2011), contribution to decision making process (Armstrong, 2006), and business success (Bennett, 2010; Danford et al., 2005), research evidence clearly illustrates HRD's lack of strategically partnering with them. Thereupon, employees' operational standpoint confirms Wognum and Lam's (2000) suggestion that a positive perception of HRD's effectiveness can only be achieved through all stakeholders' involvement within SHRD initiatives.

"Case A" employees argued that it is not only HR that ignores them; their managers, as well, do not communicate and promote T&D opportunities. Eventually, their participation and consultation seems pointless. They further claimed that such a failure of strategically partnering with HR highly restricts those organisational efforts which aim to develop and implement targeted T&D interventions so as to enhance their efficiency and eventually to maximize the quality of their customer service delivery.

Quite similarly, employees (case B) highlighted that their voice is not heard as it used to be in the past (through various employees' surveys); hence, a strategic partnership with them (on behalf of HR) is of limited importance. They further presented sceptical towards the effectiveness of their HR department by the time their "line of sight" is totally ignored.

From an organisational point of view, employees can play a significant role as they possess the physical, social and intellectual capabilities to influence the organisational attitudes, behaviours, motives and beliefs, while also to lead to an increase in shareholder value (Xirogiannis et al., 2008; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004; Becker et al., 1997) and eventually to increase their customer-oriented attitude (Yoo & Arnold, 2015). Therefore, partnering with them can enhance their sense of commitment and engagement with the organisation. However, research data reveals the opposite. Appropriately, HRD executives and managers need to realise that through strategically partnering with their employees, they would be able to better understand and address their needs, and eventually to clearly illustrate their common efforts in building mutual trust, along with jointly working towards a business upturn.

Conclusively, stakeholders' perception, even within similar business environments, could be diverse and complex. Although a strategic partnership with employees is not present

in both cases, those between senior executives, HR and managers is better attained in "case B" owing to the presence of a solid and devoted leadership.

Strategic partnership with HRM

Existing SHRD models suggest that an internal integration between HRM and HRD can be proved fruitful in enhancing HR's strategic orientation by keeping a balance between its developmental and administrative services (Jackson & Schuler, 2003a; 2003b; Garavan, 1991). Yet, there are other authors who criticised and questioned whether that can really exist, and proposed that instead of this "questionable" integration, it would be better to promote a strategic partnership between HRD and HRM (Peterson, 2008; Hamlin, 2006; Guest & Peccei, 2001). That would allow for HR initiatives to be seen as one and the same, and eventually to have greater impact on the achievement of the corporate strategies and objectives (McCracken & Wallace, 2000a, 2000b).

Although research findings indicate that such partnership exists, it mostly occurs for cost-efficient purposes. Concurrently, Greek business mentality welcomes the creation of a separate HRD unit as an indication of an organisation's strategic approach to T&D. Although this is the case in both organisations, HRD initiatives are mainly implemented within the bundles of the more general HRM practices.

Managers and employees could not distinguish between HRM and HRD by arguing that both are implemented under the HR umbrella. However, the latter, from both banks, also referred to the higher volume of training offerings in the past as an indication of a more strategic HRD approach back then. Yet, all acknowledged that new business realities, and their organisation's cost effective strategy, both dictate for HR interventions to be considered as one regardless their partition into several sub-categories.

On the other hand, for both time periods, HR staff (from both organisations) argued that a synergy between HRM and HRD is maintained; yet, under different perspectives. They further asserted that their department do not distinguish its services to less or more important, and that they are all working hard so as to facilitate the organisation's transformation due to the entire sector's restructuring.

Conclusively, the researcher believes that either such partnership can be proved of strategic importance specifically within the Greek territory, nor that its lack constitutes an indication of a more SHRD approach. Afresh, the complexity attached to SHRD's maturity is underscored again.

Extensive role for HRD executives

With the mainstream literature suggesting that HRD professionals need to be leaders and facilitators of individual and organisational change during constantly changing business environments (James & Wooten, 2013; Wooten & James, 2008; Haslinda, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c; Hyland et al., 2005; Lawler & Mohrman, 2003), employees, from both cases, acknowledged that HR in general, and T&D staff in particular, undertook a more enhanced and influential role in the past owing to both banks' growth strategy. Another considerable concern related to HR's application and operationalization is associated with HR staff's accountabilities amplification, owing to the confined manpower occupied within their departments. Thus, employees stressed that HR's ineffectiveness is obvious due to staff shortages and the lack of relative skills from those remained. They continued by arguing that today the role of their HR department is limited to the basics, while its cost minimization orientation can be evidenced through the "freeze" of their recruitment and selection processes, the limited training interventions, the poor evaluation processes, wage reductions etc. Additionally, they asserted that business directives are directed from senior executives and the HR department is obliged to follow them. However, there were a few who recognised that business restructuring restricted HR's role, yet it did not diminish its importance within the organisation, and eventually it is up to its people to bring it upfront again.

Similarly to their employees, the large majority of the interviewed managers (case A) stated that they don't expect anything from an under-developed and immature business department. However, their standpoint was embraced from only two (2) managers from "case B" who further argued that their HR department, and its HRD staff, lacks of a leadership capacity in helping its people to gracefully absorb business turbulence and accordingly to change. Oppositely, the large majority of the interviewed managers (case B), like those few employees, acknowledged the fact that HR undergoes through a transition phase, since the organisation is under a transformational period as well, and thus it will return stronger in the future. They further outlined that their HR department does not lack of the necessary skills, but from the appropriate funds to support its implementations. Apparently, such diverse perception may be the outcome of their slightly greater involvement in HR initiatives rather than that of their colleagues at "case A". However, all concluded with a more proactive role for their HR department, for its pre-crisis state, owing to the great expansion strategy of both banks.

On the other hand, HR staff, from both departments, initially recognised that business restructuring has affected their unit as well (e.g. staff redundancies), yet without diminishing

its strategic positioning and the role of its professionals. Hence, all reported that they are still working at their full potential so to deliver exceptional services to their stakeholders. They further claimed that business transformation will strengthen their status within the newly-formed bank corporation, if not in the short-term, definitely at the long run. Finally, they concluded that this transition will benefit HR, as it will offer space for revising its priorities and values for the common organisational good.

Anew, HRD executives' role is presented mixed throughout time. SHRD's maturity is becoming even more complicated, yet with "case B" to be presented slightly more mature than "case A".

Strategic ability to influence and shape business culture and climate

It is argued that within a collectivist culture, organisations are more likely to promote a learning environment and a knowledge-exchange business mentality in order to enhance their competitiveness (Hong & Baruch, 2011; Gillon, 2011; Valikangas, 2010; McShane & Von Glinow, 2009; Sun, 2008; Carbery & Garavan, 2005). In that event, employees (case B) argued that their organisation's cultural values are clearly circulated so for everyone to incorporate them within his/her work contexts. Although they all agreed that this is HR's success, they also argued that since directions are forwarded from senior management, its role is limited to their strict implementation; eventually, its job focuses on promoting, rather than shaping, an appropriate organisational culture and business climate. However, they further agreed that, before the crisis, HR held the capacity of pointing future directions and accordingly of shaping corporate culture and business climate in such ways so as to lead individual and organisational change. Finally, all concluded that they feel honoured for working in an organisation with clear and well-defined cultural values as that indicates a conscientious organisation.

Contrariwise, employees (case A) highlighted that their organisational culture is very weak. Concurrently, they argued that only within certain departments a clearer and stronger customer-focused culture can be identified. Accordingly, they evaluated business climate as ineffective in terms of promoting learning and developmental opportunities. Although most of them acknowledged HR's capacity in influencing business culture in the past, they mostly attested that this is quite difficult to be achieved today within organisations in which a culture does not exist at all or it is too weak. Finally, they proposed that such "cultural disinterest" can highly affect their perception of commitment and belongingness to their organisation with all the associated negative outcomes to follow. Their assertion confirms the literature's suggestion

that both business culture and climate can enhance organisational performance, employees' satisfaction, organisational change and success, while it can also decrease feelings of job stress and labour turnover (Zhang & Liu, 2010; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2008). Close to these employees (case A), the large majority of the interviewed managers (case A) agreed that a clearer business culture can be evidenced within specific divisions, yet without being properly communicated to all. That eventually restricts HR's capacity in clearly circulating the organisational cultural values, while it also impedes its ability in shaping them. However, they all concluded that, at a pre-crisis time period, HR held the capacity to do so owing to a totally different business philosophy.

Oppositely, managers (case B) argued that, either before or after the crisis, their organisational culture was strong by demonstrating a clear set of values which were regularly communicated. Meanwhile, they further claimed that business climate welcomes the development of various training initiatives, fully aligned with new business imperatives. Hence, they outlined that CSR is conducted through an environmental and stakeholder analysis that allows their organisation to effectively map and address strategic challenges, opportunities and threats both within its micro and macro business environments, and eventually to ensure their survival and competitiveness (Enright & Bourns, 2010; Griswold, 2008; Jones et al., 2005).

Appropriately, everybody from the HR department (case B) argued that the bank's cultural values are clear and well-structured, and that is not a coincidence that they have prevailed over the respective ones of the acquired organisations. Respectively, relevant training aims to facilitate this cultural transition (and the re-formation of the group's cultural values) so for everyone to embrace them within their work and life contexts. Their assertion is consistent with McCracken et al. (2012) study which indicated a positive relationship between a positive business climate and the effectiveness of the training interventions, by further arguing that the opposite state of the former can constitute a barrier to the effectiveness of the latter. Thus, they further acknowledged that, in the past, they were more capable of shaping both, yet with still playing a crucial role throughout their formation. Finally, they called everybody to remember that a cultural revision is undergoing so for more concrete cultural foundations to emerge. In a similar vein, the HR staff (case A) advocated of its ability to promote the foundation of a strong learning business culture, yet time will be required to do so, owing to a cultural revision from the on-going business amalgamations.

However, the story was quite different for both banks before the crisis. Everybody argued for HR's capacity to direct corporate culture due to the presence of a totally different

business philosophy. Back then, there was a predominating atmosphere which concentrated on both the organisation's and its workforce's well-being and self-renewal; a suggestion which is widely suggested within the mainstream literature as well (Das, 2012; Malik et al., 2011; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Overall, stakeholders' mixed perception of HR's capacity to meet this specific criterion further enhances the complex nature of the examined phenomenon. Alike, similarities and differences amongst the two case studies can be identified, with the most important one to be senior executives' (case B) role as enablers of a smoother cultural change throughout business merging, a process that enabled the organisation to gain the necessary insights for effectively filling any "cultural lags" and eventually to come with a new concrete business culture.

Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation

Research evidence highlights that T&D evaluation is mainly undertaken under a more functional and short-term direction, owing to the bank's (case A) cost-reduction orientation, and without focusing on delivering strategic outcomes, such as organisational and behavioural change.

All interviewees (including HR staff), from "case A", confirmed that training's evaluation is very typical, as it is just limited to the successful completion of the delivered programme on behalf of those been trained; thus, just assessing trainees' reaction towards training offerings. Apparently, nowadays, most of the evaluation criteria are relatively short-term oriented, by simply relying on identifying poor performance, or they are consisting of various qualitative criteria which are very subjective, and eventually make the entire process even more difficult. Opposite to literature's suggestions that individual behavioural and organisational change are the most required training evaluation outcomes (Kober, 2014; Phillips, 2009, 2008; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Phillips & Phillips, 2005), cost effective solutions are now dictating the implementation of such processes that instantly sign employees' improvement or not. Thus, if an employee got a "pass" grade, that would ultimately indicate training's effectiveness. However, things weren't like that before crisis. Training's evaluation was an "on-the-job" daily process which focused on measuring trainees' acquired knowledge and its transfer to their job contexts.

Similarly, employees (case B) initially complained of not been consulted for their actual needs, nor of being properly evaluated. They could not understand how a simple "pass" and a short questionnaire can constitute a strategic approach to training's evaluation. Moreover, they

all agreed that, even before crisis, training's evaluation was similar by just assessing trainees' reaction to training programmes.

However, HR staff and managers' perception opposed that of their employees by jointly arguing that their training implementations are always translated into measurable outcomes by examining employees' performance and behavioural change upon completion of the training programme. They further argued that their bank's training interventions are considered both as short-term and long-term HR investments and thus great emphasis is placed on their evaluation. Specifically, managers argued that work improvements can be identified through the increased rates of employees and customers' satisfaction. Furthermore, all related training's effectiveness with ROI, by outlining the financial outcomes reported from their branches, besides those related to their employees' behavioural change. Additionally, HR staff stated that various evaluation tools are implemented today as in the past. They all agreed that, throughout time, the aim of their training's evaluation was the same – to assess the extent to which employees' knowledge has been transferred to their job contexts and how their behaviour has changed so as to be more efficient and customer-oriented.

Once more, stakeholders' diverse and complex perception and SHRD's maturity mixed state can be holistically evidenced. Both conditions make it even more difficult to evaluate HRD's strategicness within the context of the economic crisis. Although a more mature state was expected for the pre-crisis time period, evidence highlights SHRD as not being fully mature within both case study organisations, for both time periods. Concurrently, stakeholders' diverse perspectives further complicate SHRD's understanding and maturity.

Closing comments

The study was based on the premise that different stakeholders' understanding of SHRD can be a prerequisite element of either promoting or suppressing its maturity. Thus, it initially captured their viewpoints on how SHRD is understood, applied and operationalised within organisations. Two different viewpoints were identified, namely the managerial and the operational, representing HR staff and managers, and employees' standpoints respectively. Their diverse or unified perception was also noticed throughout the assessment of the proposed strategic characteristics.

Research findings further highlighted the mixed and complex state of SHRD's maturity within both organisations and for both time periods. A partial employment of specific characteristics has been identified (pre-crisis), with the majority of them to be negatively

affected at the post-financial crisis time period. As to that, evidence suggests that HRD was not fully mature in both time periods, yet with "case B" to be slightly more mature than "case A". However, a striking and emerging observation came out through SHRD's current status which was proved to be agile enough, in both organisations, through the design and delivery of "environmentally-integrated" HRD practices, fully aligned with new business priorities; thus, to talk about agile HRD practices and for an opportunity for future research on the specific area.

Moreover, similarities and nuances amongst the two cases have also been oulined. A coercive and normative isomorphism has been noted between the two cases, along with their mimetic anti-isomorphism. Precisely, "case B" senior management's transformational leadership and HR's devolvement to the line were outlined. Additionally, a clearer communication process and a stronger cultural awareness of behalf of its employees was further noticed (case B). Finally, a more strategic-oriented training evaluation was experienced, along with a more active involvement of trade unions representatives throughout business merging (case B).

Appropriately, the researcher trusts SHRD in Greek banks to be more of a rhetoric business notion rather than constituting their organisational reality which can lead them to a business upturn.

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Figures

Figure 1: SHRD Models

Garavan (1991)	Torraco & Swanson (1995)	Lee (1996)	Pfeffer (1998)
Integration with organizational missions and goals	**Shape business strategy by**	**Scale of Training Maturity**	**Create Chief People Officers by**
Top management support	Being performance based	1) Training and learning are processes through which strategy is formulated	Building trust through sharing information and power
HRD plans and policies	Demonstrating strategic capability	2) Training and learning possibilities help to shape strategy	Encouraging change
Environmental scanning	Utilizing employee expertise	3) Training is the means for implementing corporate strategy and achieving change	Measuring key drivers of success
Line Managers commitment & involvement		4) Training integrated with operational management	
Complementary HRM activities		5) Isolated tactical training	
Recognition of culture		6) No systematic training	
Emphasis on evaluation			

Ulrich (1998)	McCracken & Wallace (2000)	Dwyer (2000)	Gilley & Maycunich (2000)
Partner with senior and line management	Shaping organizational missions and goals	Measure performance in quantifiable terms & communicate impact of long-term human capital investments	**Focus on:** Organizational Learning Organizational Performance Organizational change
Be experts in how work is organised and executed	Top management leadership	Know micro & macroeconomic political & social realities	**Domains** Analysis Design of initiatives & interventions Evaluation
Be a champion for employees	Environmental scanning by senior management, in HRD terms	Investigate business needs & drive action essential to business success	**Elements** HRD transformation HRD leadership Principles of strategic HRD
Be a champion for continual organizational transformation	HRD strategies, policies & plans		
	Strategic partnerships with line management		
	Strategic partnerships with HRM		
	Trainers as organizational change consultants		
	Ability to influence corp. culture		
	Emphasis on cost-effectiveness evaluation		

Becker, Huselid & Ulrich (2001)	Gilley & Gilley (2003)	Bourdeau & Ramstad (2004)	Robinson & Robinson (2005)
Develop rigorous measurement systems	**Domains** Organizational Learning Organizational performance Organizational change	**Human Capacity Bridge Framework**	**Build client partnership** Access Credibility Trust
	Steps Communicate urgency for change Provide leadership Create ownership Implement Integrate change into org. culture Measure progress	**Anchor Points** Impact Effectiveness Efficiency	**Identify & partner to support projects** Reframe requests Proactively identify strategic opportunities Implement projects
	Result Successful transformation of HRD	**Linking Elements** Sustainable strategic success, Resources & process, Talent pools Aligned actions Human capacity Policies & practices Investments	**Influence business strategies and direction** Contribute to formation of plans Integrate HR strategic plan into business plan Implement people initiatives

Figure 2: Garavan's SHRD Model

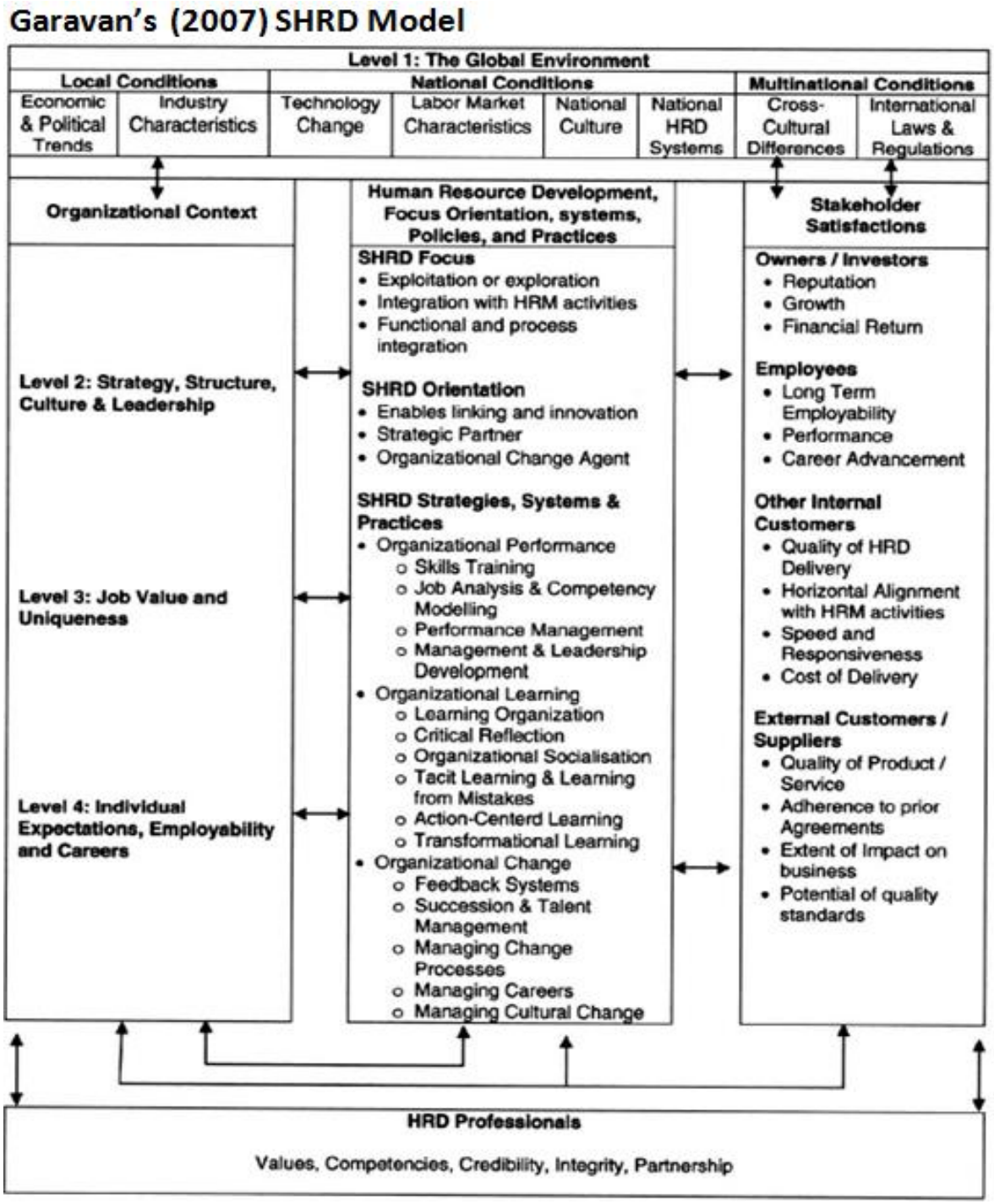

Figure 3: Towards a modified model of assessing SHRD Maturity

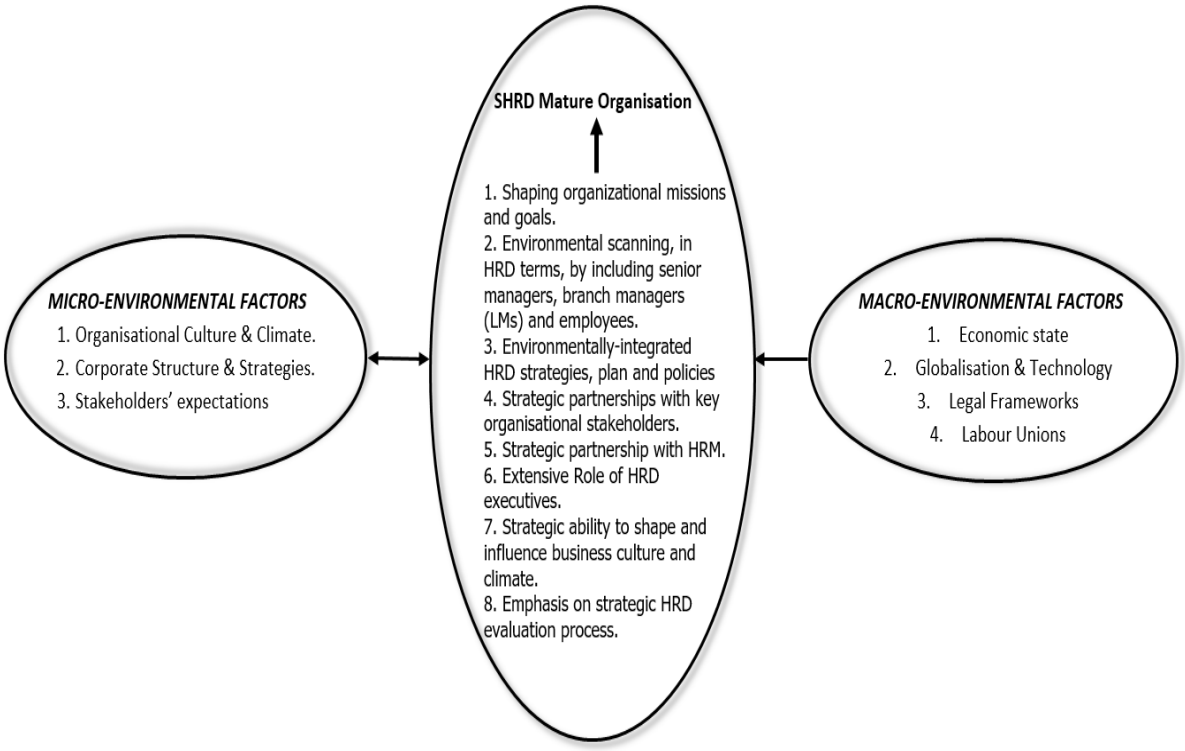

Figure 4: Interviewees' map

INTERVIEWEES' MAP	
HR STAFF (23)	
BANK GROUP A (13)	***BANK GROUP B (10)***
HR Director (1) Training and Development (T&D) Manager (1) HR Officers (5) HR Assistants (3) & HR Administrators (3)	HR Director (1) T&D Manager (1) HR Officers (4) HR Assistants (2) & HR Administrators (2)
MANAGERS (21)	
BANK GROUP A (10)	***BANK GROUP B (11)***
Branch Managers (8) IT Manager (1) Retail Loans Manager (1)	Branch Managers (8) IT Specialist (1) & IT Manager (1) Retail Banking Officer (1)
EMPLOYEES (32)	
BANK GROUP A (15)	***BANK GROUP B (17)***
Branch Network (10) Corporate Departments (5)	Branch Network (11) Corporate Departments (6)

Figure 5: Key figures of both case study organisations

Feature	Case A	Case B
Ownership	Private	Private
Operational Presence	National & International	National & International
Revenues	1.58 bn €	3.48 bn €
Operating expenses	880 m €	1.64 bn €
Personnel Expenses	410 m €	740 m €
Branches	1100	1500
Employees	19,000 approx.	22,500 approx.
Unionised manpower	Yes (limited bargaining power)	Yes (limited bargaining power)
Training Budget	1.5 m €	2.3 m €
Benefits from Training	17 m €	29 m €
Net Benefits from Training	15.5 m €	19.7 m €
Training-man hours on average per employee	26 hours	38 hours
Awards	Best Corporate / Institutional Internet Bank / Security - Payments Award / Best Consumer Internet Bank	World's Best Internet Banks / Best Consumer Internet Bank / Best in Mobile Banking & website design in Europe

Figure 6: SHRD's maturity through a multi-constituent research perspective, and through a pre and post-crisis assessment

Strategic Criteria	CASE A						CASE B					
	Pre-Crisis			Post-Crisis			Pre-Crisis			Post-Crisis		
	HR	MGR	EMP	HR	MGR	EMP	HR	MGR	EMP	HR	MGR	EMP
Shape Organisational mission, goals and strategies	M		IM	M	IM	IM	M		IM	M	MM	IM
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, from all organisational members.	MM	MM to IM	MM to IM	MM	MM to IM	MM to IM	M	MM	MM to IM	M	MM	MM to IM
Strategic Partnerships with key organisational stakeholders	MM	IM	IM	MM	IM	IM	MM to M	MM	IM	MM to M	MM	IM
Strategic Partnership with HRM	MM (Model's suggestion vs. Greek business mentality)			MM (Model's suggestion vs. Greek business mentality)			MM (Model's suggestion vs. Greek business mentality)			MM (Model's suggestion vs. Greek business mentality)		
Rapid, competitive & "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies	M	M	IM to MM	M	M	IM to MM	M	M	IM to MM	M	M	IM to MM
Extensive Role of HRD executives	MM			MM to M	IM		MM			MM to M	MM	IM
Strategic Ability to influence & shape business culture and climate	MM to M			MM	IM		M			MM	MM	
Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation	M		IM	MM	IM		M		IM	MM To M	MM To M	IM
OVERALL STATE	Mid-Mature			Immature			Mid-Mature to Mature			Mid-Mature		

M: Mature, **MM:** Mid-Mature, **IM:** Immature

Figure 7. Stakeholders' Perception on SHRD Maturity (change over time - pre to post crisis)

Strategic Criteria	***"CASE A" ORGANISATION***			***"CASE B" ORGANISATION***		
	HR	***MGR***	***EMP***	***HR***	***MGR***	***EMP***
Shape Organisational mission, goals and strategies	↔	↓	↔	↔	↓	↔
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, from all organisational members.	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
Strategic Partnerships with key organisational stakeholders	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
Strategic Partnership with HRM	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔	↔
Extensive Role of HRD executives	↑	↑	↓	↑	↔	↓
Strategic Ability to influence & shape business culture and climate	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation	↓	↓	↔	↓	↓	↔

- Viewpoint remained stable throughout time ↔
- Viewpoint changed to a better state ↑
- Viewpoint changed to a worst state ↓