

# The Strategic Role of Human Resources Development in the Management of Organizational Crisis

Cristina MANOLE<sup>1</sup>  
Cristina ALPOPI<sup>2</sup>  
Sofia Elena COLESCA<sup>3</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

*Together with the global economic crisis, the impact of organizational crises on human capital and its performances has become increasingly obvious. From this perspective, the strategic role of human resources' development is crucial, being analyzed in this article. It provides the conceptual basis for human resource management practitioners, to understand how to strengthening and developing human potential enables the construction of crisis management skills, manifested at the institutional level.*

**KEYWORDS:** *strategic development, human resources, institutional crisis, organizational stress, professional training*

**JEL Classification:** O15, J24

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## 1. General Considerations Regarding the Strategic Human Resources Development

In the context of economic crisis, when organizations go through turmoil and changes at different levels, the strategic human resource development (DSRU) may provide a useful conceptual framework for the organizations' management (leadership teams) in order to better manage the crisis manifested at the institutional level (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009; Radulescu and Ioan, 2009). According to experts, the strategic development of human resources has to promote practices which improve individual performance, of each employee, as well as the global one, reached at the organizational level (Garavan et al., 1995). However, the strategic development of human resources emphasizes the proactive management change, which enables organizations to survive in an increasingly complex environment, unstable, competitive and global (Grieves, 2003). In fact, it is argued that the strategic approach of human resource development is an imperative request in the globalization era. Thus, strategic perspective implies creating and implementing policies and human resource development practices which can ensure their contribution to acquiring the organizational goals (Davenport, Prusak & Wilson, 2003; Garavan, 2007; Zula & Chermack, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> *Cristina MANOLE*, The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, România,  
E-mail: man\_cor\_1969@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup> *Cristina ALPOPI*, The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, România,  
E-mail: calpopi07@yahoo.com

<sup>3</sup> *Sofia Elena COLESCA*, The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies, România,  
E-mail: sofiac@man.ase.ro

To establish the purpose and nature of the activities that enter within the strategic development of human resources, Hu (2007) specifies the following components:

- developing talent;
- training;
- developing the organization;
- performance development;
- leadership development.

At the same time, Garavan (2007) emphasizes on several sets of human resource development strategies, namely: a) those that focus on performance of the organization, b) those who regard organizational learning and c) those aimed at the organizational change (see Figure 1).

Most researchers agree that the strategic development of human resources implies systematical processes, formal ones, to be adapted to the needs at the organizational level. However, this development can help the organizational management to improve their operational abilities, meaning all the specific skills and competencies that allow a better management of the existing crises and also preventing future ones (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009).

The organizations may face more difficulties on the operational capabilities, for example:

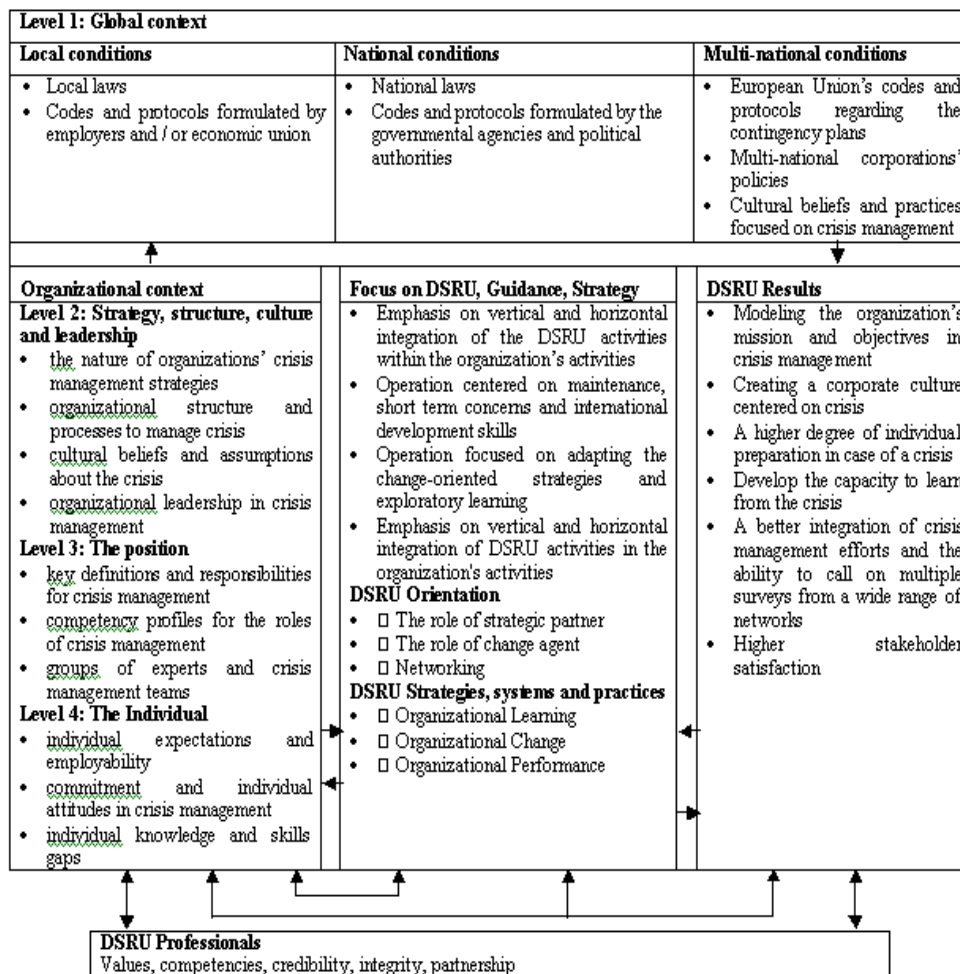
- the lack of adequate knowledge in crises' management (Sayegh et al., 2004);
- the lack of awareness regarding threats to business continuity (Dahlhamer & D'Souza, 1997);
- the inability to follow the respondents' instructions to the crisis when the incident occurs (Perry & Mankin, 2005);
- the lack of psychological skills to cope and lack of decision-making skills (Gaudin & Thorne, 2001).

Given the difficulties mentioned and the fact that, as stated above, the strategic approach of human resource development is a requirement in the globalization era, we can say that the employees' continuous training is essential. If, decades ago, young graduates gained a profession following the aptitudes and knowledge learned in schools, nowadays the stock of knowledge, skills, professional aptitudes, accumulated over time, are fast stalling. The existence of employees who are no longer able to keep up, professionally, with the mutations occurring in the activities' conduct at the organizational level, is a major problem for the managers.

The main objective in this area is to provide skill and experience, so that optimal performance is obtained using the most appropriate and safe methods. In doing so, a very important role is held by the strategies and personnel policies, since modernizing work processes does not ensure economic efficiency, if there is not taken into consideration the training of personnel too. In order to improve professional training it is also felt the need for action in (Manole, 2006):

- knowledge, as accurate, of the demand for training and its evolution;
- the establishment of a clear record regarding the training of employees in each organization;
- information for those interested upon the possibilities of training;
- motivating employees and helping those who wish to improve their training;
- creating a training plan of action;

- coordinating the continuous professional development actions without breaking the initiatives.



**Figure 1 - The conceptual framework of the Strategic Human Resource Development in organizational crisis management (adapted from Garavan, 2007)**

Each of these distinct types of learning activities involves varying degrees of knowledge acquisition, training of the understanding capabilities, training aptitudes and attitudes.

The primary goal of training activities is to increase performance (Livy, 1988). There are also other reasons for which training is one of the elements of "outpost" of human resource management: it is focused on human potential development, it helps individuals to "grow" both professionally and also in terms of socio-cultural factor. These issues are nothing else but a consequence of the socio-economical and cultural changes throughout the world, with repercussions on the training activity (Manole, 2006). In experts' opinion (Bennett, 1990), there are certain advantages resulting from the use of training, which have a significant

effect in organizational activities' increase and the economy overall efficiency and individual, for example:

- improving performance at individual level, team and organizational in terms of results (outputs), quality, speed and overall productivity;
- increasing membership and employees' involvement in the organization's activities by encouraging them to participate in establishing the mission and organization's objectives;
- improve operational flexibility by broadening the scope of employees' professional skills;
- developing a positive organizational culture oriented for example, on results and continuous performance.

The organizations that have an appropriate vocational training philosophy means to operate in an area where competitive advantage is achieved only using high quality staff training and welfare. For this, it is necessary to invest in the organization's human resources in developing their skills and knowledge.

Therefore, training must meet certain requirements to be a viable investment, namely (Louart, 1994):

- to be focused on solving problems and to remove the cause that lead to producing the disfunctionalities;
- to be addressed in connection with the performance;
- to be geared towards obtaining clear and effective results;
- to be aimed at continuous personnel improvement;
- to assume a strategic approach.

In conclusion, we can say that professional formation (training) is a major component of strategic human resources development, regarding all others: talent development, performance, management and organization (Hu, 2007).

## **2. Organizational Dimensions of Human Resource Strategic Development**

Strategy, structure, culture and leadership are the four internal dimensions of the organization, explaining the strategic development of human resources contribution to crisis management.

According to experts, many organizations do not develop strategies in a planned manner, but often are adopted due to the time period (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009). In organizations where strategy is planned, the emphasis is on formal competence (Badarocco, 1991). Thus, this approach of strategy can be reflected in formal (regarding human resource), such as training courses and learning interventions, giving the organization the ability to be flexible, adaptable and efficient in responding to crises when they occur (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009).

Research carried out in the last decade, within the public sector, have shown a considerable interest in Total Quality Management (TQM) as a solution for increasing performance. The premise is that production and quality service are the outputs of central importance for the public management strategies (Moldoveanu, 2005). Integrating TQM in public institutions and private organizations needs emphasis in the following strategic factors (Moldoveanu, 2005):

- involvement, training the management from one end of the organization to the other in a planned manner;
- organizational change (meaning restructuring);
- designing real human resources policy in hiring employees towards quality improvement.

The same author notes that in the public sector there are three major obstacles for the implementation of TQM, namely: a) the adversity towards managers' work; b) conflict between the budgetary and human resources management policies; c) barriers to improving the quality on one hand and innovation processes / reengineering, on the other hand.

Transforming public organizations in the context of modernizing the administration is done through five strategies that reflect the role of the five main mechanisms of the administration: (1) goals (2) incentives, (3) responsibility (4) power and (5) organizational culture (Moldoveanu, 2005). Thus, each strategy proposes some methods that may or may not be required (see Table 1).

**Table 1 - The five strategies proposed for the modernization of Public Administration**

<b>MECHANISMS</b>	<b>STRATEGY</b>	<b>PROCEDURES</b>
Goals	Strategy at the central level	Clarity in objectives Clarity in establishing roles Clarity in followed directions
Incentives	Consequences' strategy	Managed competition Private company management Management by results
Responsibility	Client's strategy	Freedom of choice for the customer Choosing the conditions of competition Quality assurance for the customer
Power	Strategy of control	Organisms' capacity Employee's capacity Community's capacity
Culture	Strategy of culture	Changing habits Changing the affective ties Changing attitudes

The organization's structure has many aspects that are relevant in shaping the crisis management efforts, evidenced at the institutional level and the contribution that strategic human resource development can have. Thus, structural dynamics can be incorporated into several conflictual tendencies: centralization versus decentralization, control versus flexibility, coordination versus fragmentation (Hillyard, 2000). However, organizational structures have a direct influence on the behavior of individuals and groups. In terms of individuals, structures may generate satisfaction or dissatisfaction, psychological disturbances, in a word organizational stress.

### **3. Research Method**

For more precise knowledge of stress factors within the organization and their effects on human resources can be applied, as a mean of research, the questionnaire survey. This may reveal a series of individual problems related to the impact of the organizational structure and group structure on each employee. The questionnaire, as a research method, can use several types of questions - direct and indirect, open and closed, selection and control, etc. - which will allow continuous assessment of the obtained answers. Questions can be grouped into a series of "packages", according to coverage, to facilitate and simplify quantification and their final interpretation as follows (Caramete, 2002):

#### *Packages of questions for survey questionnaires*

- I. Identification questions:
  - a) age;
  - b) sex;
  - c) marital status;
  - d) position;
- II. Questions about stress factors inside the organization and outside the organization:
  - a) To what extent the pace of family life events affect your professional work? (open question)
  - b) Do you think that marital status has an influence on work performance? (open question)
  - c) The income earned from work is sufficient to ensure the existence of your family? (open question, dichotomy)
  - d) Do you consider that there are inequities in determining your salary level? (open question, dichotomy)
  - e) Do you agree with the penalties? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - f) Are you satisfied with the advancement opportunities you have in the team? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - g) Which are the factors that determine the advancement in your team? (open question)
  - h) Are you satisfied with the microclimate conditions in which you work (lighting, noise, pollution, etc...)? (open question)
  - i) Are you consulted or participate in decision-making process within the team? (closed question, dichotomy)
- III. Questions about stress factors related to the professional group:
  - a) Do you work in a united team? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - b) What do you think are the causes of internal conflicts, within the team you work in? (open question)
  - c) Is there a fair distribution of workload in the team? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - d) What influences the incorrect allocation of professional duties? (open question, selection)
  - e) Do you think your direct superior, performs correctly his tasks? (closed question, trichotomy)
  - f) Do you think that the resources of the team you are part of are used at the maximum level? (closed question, dichotomy, control)

- g) What suggestions do you have for an efficient use of the resources in the team? (open question, control)
- IV. Questions about stress factors related to the individual:
- a) Do you think the professional tasks correspond to your training level? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - b) Do you think that other colleagues receive tasks according to their training? (closed question, dichotomy, control)
  - c) Do you have proposals regarding collective tasks sharing? (open question, control)
  - d) Have you attended some form of professional development within your team? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - e) Do you think professional training is needed? (closed question, dichotomy, control)
  - f) In which situation would you leave the team you work in? (open question)
  - g) If the collective you work in work would be in a difficult situation, would you choose a different institution? (closed question, dichotomy)
  - h) In case of personal problems (illness, complex family problems, etc ...) are supported by the team you work in? (closed question, dichotomy)

The question packages are grouped by the structure of the survey, therefore it will allow subjects to give more complete responses avoiding the psychological blockage generated by potential fears in the face of supposed consequences. For this reason, questions can be rotated in the questionnaire without taking into account the packages in which they were structured.

*The survey*

1. Are you satisfied with the microclimate conditions (lighting, noise, pollution, etc.) you work in?
2. The income earned from work is sufficient to ensure the existence of your family?
3. Do you agree with the fines system (penalties)?
4. Do you think that there are inequities in determining your salary level?
5. Do you work in a united team?
6. There is a fair distribution of workload in the team?
7. Do you think that team resources you are part of are used up to the maximum?
8. What suggestions do you have for effective use of resources in the team?
9. Do you think your direct superior respond correctly fulfills his duties?
10. Do you think your professional tasks correspond to your training level?
11. Do you think that marital status has any influence on business performance?
12. To what extent the pace of family life events affect your professional work?
13. Have you attended some form of professional training in your team?
14. Do you think professional training is needed?
15. Are you satisfied with advancement opportunities you have in the team?
16. Which are the factors that determine the advancement in your team?
17. Do you think that other colleagues receive tasks according to their training?
18. Do you have proposals on burden-sharing group?
19. Are you consulted or participate in decision-making process within the team?

20. What do you think are the causes of internal conflicts within the staff where you work?
21. In which situation would you leave the team you work in?
22. If your working team would be in a difficult situation would you choose another institution?
23. In case of personal problems (illness, complex family problems, etc...) are you supported by the team you work in?
24. Age;
25. Sex;
26. Marital status;
27. Position.

In preparing such a survey questionnaire, it is better to take into account the ways in which stress affects individuals' personality, behavior, health status and their ability to work as they were established by specialists (Derevenco et al., 1992).

**Table 2 - Influences and general manifestations of stress**

<p><b>1. Influences on Personality</b>                      agitation                      aggressiveness                      apathy                      depression                      fatigue                      disillusionment                      feeling of guilt                      psychic tension                      negative self-evaluation                      nervousness                      relief</p>	<p><b>2. Influences on behavior</b>                      vulnerability to accidents                      alcohol and narcotics addiction                      emotional crisis                      bulimia or anorexia                      excessive smoking                      impulsive behavior                      tremors, etc..</p>
<p><b>3. Cognitive effects</b>                      inability to make decisions                      lack of concentration                      hypersensitivity to criticism                      blackouts                      mental block</p>	<p><b>4. Physiological effects</b>                      hyperglycemia                      tachycardia                      dry mouth                      hipersweat                      mydriasis                      chills or hot flushes                      tingling in the extremities, etc..</p>
<p><b>5. Influences on Health</b>                      chest and back pain                      vertigo                      faint                      frequencies                      headache                      migraine                      insomnia                      diarrhea                      actual psychosomatic diseases etc.</p>	<p><b>6. Influences on work capacity</b>                      lack of concentration                      conflicts at work                      low efficiency                      frequent occupational accidents                      dissatisfaction                      instability                      fluctuation, etc..</p>

From the groups perspective, structures can generate high or low cohesion, intensive or limited communication (Moldoveanu, 2005). In terms of group cohesion (team), one can say that when it occurs between individuals with different cultural affiliation, it will become highly efficient, because the heterogeneity of components, due to these affiliations, can become stimulant within a general framework and a common motivation to the task, allowing an efficient division of roles and hence a more dynamic team (Manole, 2006). From the perspective of communication, it requires the existence and effective functioning



of a communication network adapted to the nature of the task and use it to its maximum potential by the team members, also interpersonal communication must be done without obstacles or work-related inhibition on all the ways of this network (Manole, 2006).

Smith (1995) and Elliott (2006) noted that, in terms of crisis resolution is not sufficient to consider only the decisional effect, but also the manner in which the organizational structure and culture influence the decision-making process. In conclusion, we can say that an effective organizational structure is created based on objectives set at the global level, from the tools and processes required to achieve them, through accurate knowledge of the structure components (position, leadership rules, compartment, organizational relations, hierarchical level) (Manole, 2006).

The organizational culture, an important internal dimension, existing at institutional level can be the basis for crisis management (Wang, Hutchins & Garavan, 2009). Also, the integration of culture in an organization structure is extremely important in terms of the issues that arise. "The metaphor of the iceberg", launched in 1990 by French and Bell correctly captures the two contrasting aspects of organization structure, the first being composed of elements with formal character, and the second from largely informal nature elements which require careful research from experts as the informal forms the largest part of the organization (Moldoveanu, 2005). As an iceberg, the informal aspects can not be brought to the attention of specialists but only when they cause malfunctions at the organizational level.

<p><b>Formal Organization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objectives</li> <li>Strategy</li> <li>Structure</li> <li>Procedural Systems</li> <li>Artificial products</li> <li>Financial Resources</li> <li>Management</li> <li>Human Resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>Informal Organization</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Values, attitudes, beliefs</li> <li>Leadership style</li> <li>Rules of conduct</li> <li>Power</li> <li>Organization's policy</li> <li>Conflicts</li> <li>Informal groups</li> </ul>

**Figure 2 - Organizational iceberg**

For example, Smith and Elliott (2007) showed that denial is a strong component of the organizational culture, making a crisis seem meaningless when it appears. In this respect, the two authors cited the example of the syndrome "could not happen here", which prevents the decisional factors (managers) to take necessary measures. A classic case of culture, prone to crisis, took place in the National Aeronautic Space Administration (NASA-USA) when the ship Challenger exploded in 1986. Thus, under pressure to avoid delaying the next flight, NASA managers ignored the warnings and concerns of engineers about the effect of cold weather on the so-called "Ring-O", the rocket, approving its release, a decision that proved to be fatal. The result of the investigation conducted by the U.S. Congress has identified several characteristics of the culture that led to disaster: the

adoption of inefficient decisions based on inadequate communication between managers and engineers, intimidation, the existence of poor design and quality standards (Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller & Miglani, 2006).

Alongside the strategy, structure and organizational culture, leadership has a major influence on the strategic development of human resources, with an important role in managing crises, expressed at the institutional level and in the private sector. One might say that leadership is a vector of development, so its role should not be reduced, nor overrated. The strategic side of leadership is an objective one, consisting of working activities and / or administrative, which compose the economy and organization's structure. Approaching this side of leadership means a detailed analysis, precision, rigor, etc. The subjective aspect (human) of leadership is constituted based on the organizational culture and individual spirit. In fact, in reality, no one can speak of an organizational culture unless a number of individuals think and act as a leader, if in an organization there are enough people with a genuine leader mentality (Moldoveanu, 2005). (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3 Implications of strategic leadership and staff**

The leader of a working group should have a number of qualities, without which the work becomes inefficient (Manole, 2006). He must be pleasant, to assess the fulfillment of professional duties, resulting in a hierarchy based on employee performance, to oversee the work completed. The official leader's action becomes extremely important to its members because, according to his conclusions (embodied in the hierarchy of the group members), they get their material satisfactions and moral rewards, those that ensure the prestige of the team. A leader unable to realize the performance level of employees, depending on the proposed objectives, risks being isolated by the group, under the influence of informal, opinion leaders. The leader's attitude is important also in the use of full working capacity of

the staff that he manages. Therefore, engaging the "isolated" may lead to an improvement in efficiency, while the leader knows how to manipulate existing psychological personalities in the group, making even those who seem to feel marginalized to feel important in the team's functioning.

We saw above that the structure of the organization - the internal dimension of it - can generate a high or low cohesion in the working groups, which also is influenced by how the group climate functions, by the manner in which the leader enforces rules, group values, penalizing the nonconformists.

#### **4. Research Method**

In order to investigate the labor climate and quantifying human affective relations, in a formed professional group, the sociometric method is applicable representing a set of processes and mathematic and graphic techniques – the test and sociometric, the target sociogram (Caramete, 2002).

The test is designed from the perspective of emotional climate, even to achieve the sociogram, obtaining individual scores signifying the group structure and type of status of its members. As a test that seeks to capture the role of work climate, its orientation is made in the beginning, towards the activities involved in the specific area, which includes the groups analyzed. Thus, each group member is asked to express their preference (and denials) on the choice (and rejection) of other members of the group to accompany him in a professional activity, such as completion of work on specific problems or analyzing data needed to develop projects to improve the organization.

The test requires the appointment of the first three members (+3; +2; +1) that the employee would like to have as collaborators, and the first three members (-3, -2, -1) and he would not like to work on professional tasks.

The test requires also a member of each group to present its views on those who believe that elected him and those who rejected it for the same type of activity. The answers to such questions are represented in the sociogram, which provides an insight into the existing affective structure by revealing who the "star" of the group (the member converging toward positive choices), who are the "isolated" (the group members who obtain a score equal to "0"), the "rejected" (those who receive negative scores), which are the "mutual" elections.

#### **5. Sociometric Test Model**

1. If, for next week, you have to do a job on specific issues for the team that you belong, which of your colleagues would you like to do it with? Name the top three of them (+3; +2; +1).
2. In the same work, which are the colleagues you would not work with? Name three of them (-3, -2, -1).
3. Regarding the completion of the work, which are the colleagues you think chose you to be a collaborator? Name three of them
4. Which are the colleagues that you think did not choose you to collaborate with them in completing the work? Name three of them.

Within the sociometric table that reflects the results of the test, the situation of the reviewed group can be balanced or, conversely, unbalanced, because of the leader's formal personality (official), which can be also the informal leader (unofficial). However, the

analyst notes with "+" preference relations among group members and "-" reject relations between them. Sociometric statements made in the table after applying the test, are plotted with the help of the sociogram (Caramete, 2002).

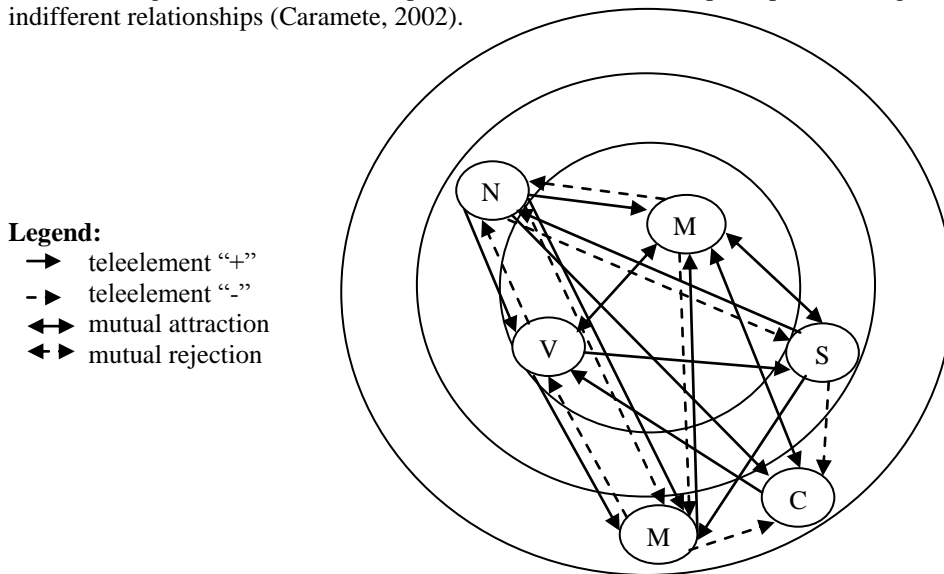
**Table 3 - Extract from the sociometric table**

Nr. crt.	MEMBERS	Colective members						
		VP	MG	ST	NA	.....	CP	MA
1.	VP		3	1	-1	.....		2
2.	MG	3		2	-2	.....	1	-1
3.	ST		3		1	.....	-1	2
4.	NA	1	3	-1			2	-2
	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	.....	⋮	⋮
	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	.....	⋮	⋮
	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	.....	⋮	⋮
10.	CP	3	2		1	.....		
11.	MA	-1	3		2	.....	-2	
	SCORE “+”/”-”	20/-15	24/-3	3/-1	7/-3	.....	3/-3	4/-3
	TOTAL SCORE	5	21	2	4	.....	0	1

Note: "MG" is the formal leader (official) of the team analyzed and also the informal leader (unofficial) since it gained the highest positive score (21). The Group isolation achieved a score of zero.

The sociogram corresponding to the sociometric table looks as in Figure 4.

The teleelement is the preferred psychological link between individuals and is the simplest unit of feeling transmitted from one person to another. It can express positive, negative or indifferent relationships (Caramete, 2002).



**Figure 4 - The sociogram**

The extract from the sociometric table reads as follows:

- “VP” preferred “MG”, “MA” and “ST” and rejected “NA”;
- “MG” preferred “VP”, “ST” and “CP” and rejected “NA” and “MA”.

### **Conclusions**

In this study, we join to professionals on human resource management and organizational analysis, arguing the importance of the four major internal components of the organization - strategy, structure, culture and leadership - in the strategic development of human capital, the latter having an essential role in dealing with crises that arise at the organizational level. The four dimensions are intertwined, being extremely important in terms of issues that arise at the organizational level, demonstrating the absolute influence over decision-making process by managers. It is correct to say that leaders are those who give legitimacy to the strategic development of human resources, and also on crisis management, manifested at the organizational level. Situations, conflicts, pressure generated by major events, involve a group of professional solidarity with a view to overcoming them, in a maximum effort (Caramete, 2002).

The leader must stimulate the group climate and by changing his attitude, towards the group members under the pressure of events, the action context changes. In such situations the leader's style becomes extremely important for the others. A situational pressure may include, for example, the transition from a democratic to an authoritarian style, adopting an anarchic style threatening to weaken the capacity of effort solidarity within. Although prominent individuals, members of professional groups have psycho-physiological effort capacities and different resistance to situational pressure. They can not also when involved in perceiving the "hot" event to have the vision of the overall importance in the economy and not even always notice the attitudinal orientation of the organization. An effective genuine leader, assumes to reduce the stress caused by these views, eliminating the sources of internal conflict favored in the group members' competition. (Caramete, 2002)

All these aspects result from the research that I conducted while on work climate, human relations, affective relations that exist across work groups (teams) and the work-related stress using the research methods described above, inside this study (questionnaire survey, sociometric test and target sociograma).

However, according to experts (Wooten & James, 2008) there are several ways in which leadership can interfere with the strategic development of human resources in managing a particular crisis, such as:

- leaders involved in training and development activities;
- promoting lifelong learning and experience;
- efforts alignment to resolve the crisis at the organization's core values.

Consequently, the strategic development of human resources at the organizational level, has a major role in crisis management, with the following effects (Garavan, 2007):

1. Creating a corporate culture centered on the crisis;
2. Modeling mission and objectives of the organization in crisis management;
3. A higher degree of individual preparation in case of crisis;
4. Developing the ability to learn from crisis;
5. High stakeholder satisfaction;
6. A better integration of crisis management efforts and the possibility of multiple expertise of a wide range of networks.

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