STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT MATURITY: AN INVESTIGATION INTO GREEK BANKS AT THE TIME OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

By

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ABSTRACT

Although there is a consensus that Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) can play an important role within organisations, the ways in which it is operationalised during periods of business and economic uncertainty and complexity remains under-researched. This research explores the adoption and maturity of SHRD in Greek banks within the challenging context of the economic crisis. It examines how SHRD is perceived and operationalised within both financial institutions through the respective lenses of different HRD stakeholders. It further identifies the factors that can constrain or facilitate the adoption and maturity of SHRD in organisations. A modified SHRD framework (with its set of strategic characteristics) is proposed so to assess and evaluate SHRD maturity in both organisations.

The study draws upon qualitative research data from two case studies, reporting on 76 semi-structured interviews with HR staff, branch managers and front-line employees, complemented by documentary analysis. Research data was interpreted through a pre and post-crisis assessment so to allow for an in-depth investigation into people's perspectives on the understanding and maturity of SHRD over time. Research evidence highlights the complexity being attached to stakeholders' understanding of SHRD, with their perceptual contradiction to be noticed. There is also mixed evidence on the employment of the strategic criteria, and of their respective indicators, in both cases. However, a striking observation suggests HRD practices being proved "environmentally-integrated" (fully aligned with new business objectives, besides their short-term orientation) in terms of their responsiveness to the constantly changing business environments. Finally, economic crisis has been identified as the major impeding factor of SHRD, with other factors to follow.

The thesis' original contribution derives from applying a modified SHRD framework within the challenging context of an economic crisis (thus addressing previous models' limitation of being assessed within "static" business and economic environments). The study also advances qualitative research through its adopted methodological approach (case study research strategy, before-and-after research design, multi-constituent research perspective). Finally, it contributes to SHRD literature by extending a large amount of knowledge within a different/specific industrial and national context.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page(s)

CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 7 – ASSESSMENT OF "CASE B" BANKING ORGANISATION

CHAPTER 8 – DISCUSSION AND INTEPRETATION OF MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

CHAPTER 9 – CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, CONTRIBUTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Appendices

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is submitted in accordance to the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management of the University of Strathclyde – Glasgow.

The thesis is the result of the author's original research. It has been composed by the author and has not been previously submitted for examination which has led to the award of a degree.

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Date……………………………………………………………………………

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Terminology
CD	Career Development
HC	Human Capital
HR	Human Resources
HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM	Human Resource Management
ID	Individual Development
LMs	Line Managers
OD	Organisational Development
PA	Performance Appraisal
PM	Performance Management
SD	Societal Development
SHRD	Strategic Human Resource Development
SHRM	Strategic Human Resource Management
T&D	Training and Development
ROI	Return on Investment
BLC	Business Life Cycle
HPWS	High Performance Work Systems
HPWP	High Performance Work Practices
NHRD	National Human Resource Development
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
TIF	Training Impact Factor
RF	Revenue Factor
HCROI	Human Capital Return on Investment
TROI	Training Return on Investment
SWOT (Analysis)	Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats
PESTLE(Analysis)	Political-Economic-Social-Technological-Legal-Environmental
GEC	Global Economic Crisis
GNP	Gross National Product
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction to the Research Project

1.1 Background of the study

Constantly changing business and economic environments have challenged organisations to understand the vital role of their HRD interventions (Sung & Choi, 2013; Anderson, 2007; Garavan, 2007; Chen et al., 2007; Paprock, 2006). The strategic significance of HRD can be outlined through the fundamental process of leveraging their workforce's knowledge, capabilities, adaptability, and efficiency (Fiksel, 2015; O'Donovan & Rimland-Flower, 2013). Relevant research evidence further identifies a wide range of factors which can either constrain or facilitate HRD's strategic outlook (David, 2011; Sthapit, 2010; Stavrou et al., 2010; Katou, 2009). Taking that into consideration, McCracken and Wallace (2000a: 288) defined strategic human resource development (SHRD) as: "*the creation of a learning culture, within which a range of training, development and learning strategies both respond to corporate strategy and also help to shape and influence it*". Furthermore, emphasis has also been placed on the development of various SHRD models, all suggesting a set of strategic characteristics that can be taken as components of SHRD maturity within organisations.

This research aims to offer an empirical investigation into SHRD maturity (*the presence of strong or weak evidence of the suggested strategic characteristics, and of their respective indicators, of the suggested SHRD framework*) by proposing a modified SHRD framework so to address previous SHRD models' limitations. To fulfil its research objectives, this study examines the way in which SHRD is understood, applied and operationalised within the case study organisations through the respective perspectives of different HRD stakeholders. It also assesses the extent to which the suggested strategic characteristics are employed from both organisations so to evaluate the maturity of their HRD approach. The study further discusses the major factors inhibiting or expediting SHRD's adoption, and attributed to its maturity. A pre and post-crisis assessment approach on the analysis of the research data enabled the researcher to identify and highlight any similarities or differences between the two

cases and their stakeholders' perceptions. Interviews were held with bank staff (HR, managers, front-line employees) being employed for more than six (6) years within their organisations, thus enabling them to address interview questions retrospectively.

1.2 The Rationale behind examining SHRD maturity in Greek Banks at the time of the economic crisis.

The global economic crisis (GEC) in 2008 brought forward many HRM/HRD and labour relations associated challenges for organisations. However, it is of greatest concern the extent to which business and economic uncertainty and complexity will pose future challenges for businesses across the globe. Such unfavourable conditions further highlighted most financial sectors' weaknesses, both at national and international levels, in effectively handling business and economic turbulence. Precisely for the Greek banking sector, for many years, organisations have encouraged their employees to take full advantage of the Hellenic Bank Association's numerous sponsored educational and training opportunities, besides those being offered within. Therefore, the sector has been described as "people-oriented" and "knowledge intensive" with regards to its competitiveness, survival, business change and growth.

However, the crisis and its aftermath led to significant change within the sector owing to fierce competition and on-going business amalgamations, with most of its HRM/HRD practices being among the first casualties (Oyeavaar et al., 2016; Felstead et al., 2012a; Lynn, 2011). Therefore, the transitional phase within which the Greek economy is undergoing, along with the tremendous restructuring of its financial sector, represents an interesting case for examination. Furthermore, since the banking sector is considered one of the main pillars of many national economies, coupled with a relative lack of empirical research examining SHRD maturity under turbulent economic times, the logic behind choosing the specific sector is because it remains critical to managing a successful exit to the recession; thus, with this scenario to provide an interesting case and challenge of the importance of SHRD within organisations.

The specific two banking organisations were chosen as being the two largest private-owned banking corporations (out of five) within the sector, and the most interesting ones in terms of their establishment, operational presence and structure, strategic expansion, and the way in which they have changed over time. Furthermore, they were the most actively involved within the restructuring phase of the banking sector through the latest business amalgamations. At the same time, they are also interesting because of their differences in their HR structures, their approach to training and development, and their overall expansion and growth strategies. On a more personal note, having previously worked for a banking institution (on a different department though / not on HR), the researcher found it challenging to examine how SHRD is understood and operationalised within such a dynamic sector and against a backdrop of an economic downturn.

Overall, owing to the dynamic nature of contemporary business and its complexity, the rationale of studying SHRD in Greek banks during the recession lies with the fact that the troubles being experienced by Greek banks may also draw attention to comparable economies and business sectors within the Eurozone and/or globally.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

With respect to the requirements of critically evaluating SHRD maturity, this research examines the way in which SHRD is understood, applied and operationalised within organisations through the respective lenses of different HRD stakeholders. It also assesses SHRD maturity by evaluating the extent to which key strategic criteria are employed within the case study banking organisations. Finally, it considers the major factors inhibiting or expediting SHRD's adoption and maturity.

Therefore, the research is concerned with answering the following research questions which better serve its focus:

- *How is SHRD understood, applied, and operationalised within organisations from the perspectives of different HRD stakeholders?*

- *How strategically integrated (mature) has HRD been within the case organisations from stakeholders' perspectives, and over the period of the recent economic crisis and its aftermath?*

- *Which factors have proved crucial in constraining or facilitating the adoption of SHRD, and have contributed to its maturity in these organisations from different stakeholders' perspectives?*

1.4 The Justification of this research and its contribution

Given the dynamic and evolving nature of the HRD concept, emerging research should reflect the changes occurring in real world, along with portraying organisations' efforts to create and sustain competitive advantage through their SHRD practices. Additionally, a recent study conducted by Ghosh et al. (2013), on the evolution of HRD literature, highlighted that research on themes like SHRD, strategic training and learning have significantly decreased the last ten years. Therefore, the importance of this research emerges from the increasing interest in SHRD within the global business and academic agenda in general, and for the Greek banking sector in particular. It has been argued that it is through SHRD maturity that organisations can achieve a competitive advantage through increasing their employees' capabilities so to ensure organisational survival, change and business growth (Fiksel, 2015). The continuous restructuring of the Greek economy and that of its financial sector, both also draw attention in terms of affecting managerial practices in general, and SHRD in particular. All of which could be of great interest to those economies and business sectors operating under similar circumstances.

The research contributes to academic knowledge by applying and testing a modified SHRD framework, and its respective strategic components, within the challenging context of the economic crisis. It further extends a large amount of knowledge within a specific industrial and national context under the economic crisis context. Finally, it offers a methodological contribution through its adopted research strategy, design and multi-stakeholder research perspective. It is also expected to provide direction to

future research within the SHRD field, along with offering practical recommendations to HRD professionals.

1.5 The Structure of the study

This thesis unfolds into nine (9) chapters, as described below:

Chapter One: Introduction to the Research Project. This chapter provides a brief overview of the thesis, along with presenting its research objectives and questions which had better serve its focus. The rationale behind conducting this study is also highlighted, and its theoretical framework is presented.

Chapter Two: HRM and HRD: Definitions and Foundation. A brief historical overview of the foundation of both concepts is provided, and definitions are also given. Both concepts' interrelation is further highlighted. The foundation of SHRM is discussed, while a brief reference is also made of its associated models which can be viewed as antecedents of the development of the respective SHRD ones. The chapter concludes by pointing out the need for moving towards a more strategic role for HRD within organisations.

Chapter Three: Towards a modified framework for operationalising SHRD Maturity. A critical review of the relevant literature is undertaken. The chapter introduces existing SHRD models by discussing their strategic propositions and by outlining their limitations. Then, the discussion focuses more on a modified SHRD framework and on its respective strategic components. The chapter concludes by presenting the major factors shaping, constraining, or facilitating SHRD adoption and maturity within organisations.

Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology. This chapter explains the adopted research design and strategy of the study. The philosophical position of the research is also discussed, and reference is also made to the research approach and data collection methods. The chapter continues by presenting the empirical part of this

thesis (fieldwork) and its ethical considerations. Lastly, the validity, reliability, credibility, transferability and authenticity of the research study are considered.

Chapter Five: Economic Crisis and the Greek Banking Sector. This chapter presents a timeline of the economic crisis, along with its definition. It continues by discussing key facts of the economic crisis' impact, both at global and national levels. Then, it offers a historical overview of the Greek banking sector by further referring to its structure and operational procedures. Finally, it discusses the way in which banks have handled economic uncertainty and complexity.

Chapter Six: Assessment of "Case A" banking organisation. This chapter presents the first of the two banking organisations in-depth through a detailed description of their management and HR approaches. Later, the main research findings on SHRD maturity, and on those factors constraining or facilitating its adoption, are discussed. Stakeholders' perceptions are also depicted through a pre and post-crisis assessment.

Chapter Seven: Assessment of "Case B" banking organisation. This chapter follows the same format as the previous one by presenting the second of the two banking institutions in full detail. The main research findings being identified on SHRD maturity, and on the factors inhibiting or expediting its adoption, are also discussed through a before-and-after investigation. Stakeholders' perceptions are also captured so to evaluate and analyse how different organisational stakeholders can differently understand, apply and operationalise SHRD maturity under specific organisational and environmental circumstances.

Chapter Eight: Discussion and Interpretation of the research findings for both case study organisations. This chapter offers a discussion of the key research findings, by associating them with the relevant literature. Through a thematic analysis approach, an in-depth evaluation of SHRD maturity is provided for both case study banking organisations over time (pre & post-crisis).

Chapter Nine: Conclusions, Implications, Contribution, and Recommendations for future research. This final chapter provides the final conclusions of the research, and it demonstrates the academic and managerial contribution of this research attempt. The limitations of the study are also discussed, along with offering recommendations for future research.

Overall, the structure of the thesis can be presented with the following figure:

Figure 1.1 Theoretical Framework
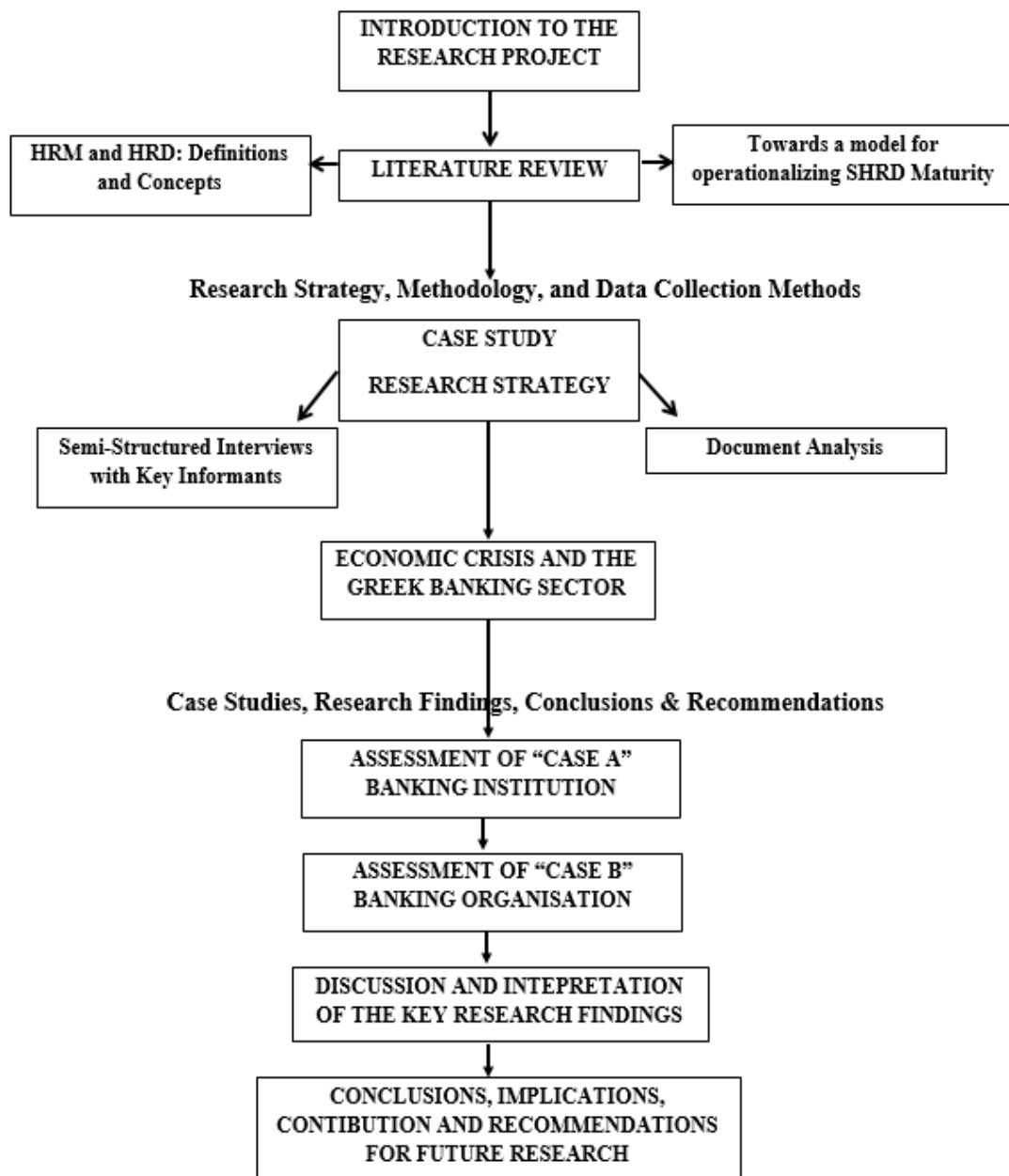
CHAPTER 2 – Human Resource Management (HRM) and Human Resource Development (HRD): Definitions and Foundation

2.1 Introduction

There are numerous definitions given both for HRM and HRD concepts. Boxall and Purcell (2011: 2) define HRM as: "*anything and everything being associated with the management of employment relationships in a firm*". Slotte et al. (2004: 542) defined HRD as: "*the function related primarily to training, career development, organisational development and research and development in addition to other organisational HR functions where these are intended to foster learning capacity at all levels of the organisation, to integrate learning culture into its overall business strategy and to promote the organisation's efforts to achieve high quality performance*". Although their different focus can be noticed through their respective definitions, generally, it is argued that both work in parallel and in cooperation due to their correlation and intonation on the fundamentals of business strategy (Carbery & Cross, 2015; McGuire, 2014). Thus, both aim on being strategically positioned within the organisational contexts so to attest their value contribution through their strategic outcomes (Werner, 2014).

Both concepts' evolving nature calls for a more strategic orientation to be attained so to reach their full potential, and eventually to be regarded as strategic business partners within organisations (Chui, 2015; Olson, 2014; Jacobson et al., 2013; Ananthram & Nankervis, 2013). Typical examples accentuating the importance of such strategic direction can be found in one of the earliest SHRM papers from Tichy et al. (1982) indicating its role in driving organisational performance. Evans (1986), Becker and Huselid (2006) and Inyang (2010) have also underlined SHRM's role in providing strategic solutions for organisations. Most recent research also outlines HRD's significance in supporting organisational goals by contributing to business success, growth, and change either through an operational or proactive role (Alagaraja, 2013a; 2013b; Boin & Van Eaten, 2013; Wang et al., 2009; Anderson, 2009).

2.2 The origins of HRM and HRD

World War II (WW2) has been identified as a crossroad for the function of personnel. A relative shortage of skilled workers resulted in changing labour relations, while governments' regulations on wages called for organisational policies on compensation schemes (Arthur, 2004). Additionally, collective bargaining had predominated by key concerns related to benefit plans, health, and safety etc.; thus, a continuous monitoring of social legislation was required (ibid). HRM has firstly been referred to as "personnel management" (PM), with the HRM term to emerge after WW2 as an attempt to detach and intensify itself from the organisational contexts and thus to increase its integrity (Haslinda, 2009c).

Traditionally, PM was about hiring and firing employees in organisations, along with providing incentives and training. Therefore, PM has been described as "*the traditional term used to refer to the organisational function or department concerned with managing the employment relationship*" (Wilton, 2013: 10). However, its role and purpose received extensive criticism in addressing trade unions' demands instead of managing and implementing HRM activities to effectively respond to contrasting employment circumstances (Haslinda, 2009c). The end of WW2 initiated a series of industrial and technological advancements which resulted to an increase in demand of a "college-educated" and "exempt wage" workforce (Tyson, 1995). Thus, in the absence of a qualified workforce, training opportunities were offered. Furthermore, owing to the advancement of hiring, training, rewards and benefits, performance monitoring and appraisal systems were also introduced (ibid). Finally, both unionised and non-unionised employees started to acquire a stronger collective voice and eventually formalised employment regimes were developed (AMA, 2010).

Following major employment-related changes in legislation brought forward in the 1960s and 1970s across the globe (owing to tremendous business amalgamations), businesses were forced to consider and promote "equal employment opportunities" (EEO) and "affirmative action", with both having an impact on most aspects of employment relationship (Torrington et al., 2008; Arthur, 2004). Therefore, the HRM term has emerged in relevant discussions. Although it has started to become well-

known within the business world, its dominant definition was closely attached to the work undertaken in PM (Haslinda, 2009c). However, HRM re-emerged in the early 1980s, and it was viewed as distinct from PM, by emphasising on those strategic HRM initiatives linked with the respective business strategic plans (Dyer, 2006). Having replaced the traditional focus of PM on employees' utilisation, HRM suggested a proactive role of its initiatives through a "managing by anticipation" approach (Ruona & Gibson, 2004).

The roots of HRD are claimed to have originated in US at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution; yet, there are others arguing that it first appeared in 1913 when Ford Motor Company provided training to its workers in order to increase mass production within its assembly line (Steward & Sambrook, 2012). Yet, a significant historical turn-point occurred during the outbreak of WW2 in the 1940s. The need for producing weapons, warships and other military equipment led to an increased demand of offering extensive training to workers (Werner & DeSimone, 2012). However, others suggest that HRD emerged in the 1950s and 1960s, when employee developmental theories were published and brought into use by organisational psychologists (Ruona, 2001). Amid the 1960s and 1970s, it was believed that HR executives also needed to mentor and offer advice to employees (Haslinda, 2009c). Then, it was Nadler and Nadler (1990), who perceived PM's extended role, and placed it under the broader structure of HR, as well as the function of employee selection and development under the HRD term.

Specifically, for the UK, academics started to talk about HRD in the late 1980s, by suggesting that the concept was highly influenced by its US equivalent (Steward & Sambrook, 2012). In the late 80s, because of the impact of the recession in the UK and its manufacturing industry (and a switch to a services economy), a new strategy was required so to bounce back to normality, especially for those companies operating globally (Steward et al., 2009; McGuire & Cseh, 2006). Thus, training initiatives were predominately developed for meeting short and long-term organisational needs (Garavan et al, 2007; Ruona & Gibson, 2004; Grieves & Redman, 1999). That was when organisations started to realise the importance of their human capital as an

important organisational asset in terms of increasing productivity and efficiency (Harrison, 2000). Yet, a recent study by Steward and Sambrook (2012) indicated that UK agencies and the government have not fully adopted the HRD term, probably because of their "*narrow human capital view of HRD which is apparent in their focus on skills and in their concern with an exclusively performative economic and financial rationale for investment in HRD activities*" (pp.26-27).

2.3 The Development of HRM and HRD in Greece

HR has a rather short history in Greece both from an academic and practitioner perspective. With regards to the former, it is indicative that there is only one HR programme being offered from a public university, with a few more to be offered from various private colleges which are not officially recognised from the Greek government (ministry of education) though. In addition, limited research has been conducted so far by mostly indicating its under-developed and degraded role within organisations in contrast to other management functions (Prouska & Kapsali, 2011). From a practitioner point of view, although there is an official professional body (Greek People Management Association) the last 30 years (rather short history), its role is limited to the basics (even through its title, its focus on personnel management is apparent).

However, when Greece entered the European Union (EU) back in 1980s, major changes were introduced as organisations started to adopt and implement HR practices that had been previously implemented only by multinationals (ibid). The presence of the latter in Greece, along with the constantly changing business and economic environments, added additional pressure on most Greek-owned companies to adopt more modern management and HR practices so to ensure their survival and to remain competitive (Prouska, 2006). Since then, many HR interventions (e.g. e-HRM administration, e-training etc.) were either unavailable or unknown to Greek organisations. Yet, later, most of them started to design and implement HR practices, or to update their existing ones, in relation to recruitment and selection (R&S) (e.g. diversified workforce, targeted recruitment etc.), T&D (e.g. e-learning), performance

evaluation (e.g. 360 degree evaluation), employee rewards, communication (e.g. intranet) and general administration (e.g. e-HRM software) etc. (Erkens et al., 2012).

Thereafter, for most Greek organisations, T&D started to be viewed as an effective way to achieve competitive advantage through enhancing their employees' skills, competences, and capabilities so to increase organisational efficiency as well (Patiniotis & Stavroulakis, 1997). However, for the post-crisis era, research evidence highlights quite low levels (20%) of workforce's development in Greece (Eurostat, 2015a; 2015b; Dedoussopoulos et al., 2013). Other studies further identified the lack of an internal T&D function, with the large majority of Greek organisations mainly outsourcing their training activities (Erkens et al., 2012; Prouska, 2006). Most recent research highlights that such an outsourcing activity was an instant organisational response owing to their limited financial resources (Leiser et al., 2015; Prouska & Kapsali, 2011; Galanaki & Papalexandris, 2007). Furthermore, there are studies indicating that specific types of economies (e.g. "liberal market" - United Kingdom & USA / "social democratic" - Sweden, Finland / "continental European capitalisms" - Germany, Belgium, and France) / "southern European" economies - Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Turkey) tend to prevail from structural fragilities in both T&D and learning activities, which eventually impact upon the quality of employees' skills (Amable, 2003; Ignjatovic & Svetlik, 2002). Research evidence further classifies Greek organisations as low performance-oriented with poor training needs assessment and analysis processes and training implementations (Nikandrou et al., 2008). HR's limited role within the business and trade unions' agenda was also highlighted (Apospori et al, 2005).

In recent decades, several factors (e.g. competitive intensity, participation in EU, multinationals, higher educational levels etc.) have put additional pressure on Greek firms in adopting the latest HR techniques so to become more competitive. Thus, over the last 20 years, Greek organisations implemented major changes to improve the quality and flexibility of their training programmes with regards to their specialisations (Psychogios & Wood, 2010; Galanaki et al., 2008; Stavrou-Costea, 2005; Galanaki & Papalexandris, 2004; Sotiropoulos, 2004; Vretakou & Rousseas, 2003; Papalexandris

& Chalikias, 2002). There was an increasing demand to modernise HR departments, not only in terms of running the business, but also with regards to the design and formulation of its corporate strategy (Prouska & Kapsali, 2011; Papalexandris et al., 2001). Yet, to date, in many organisations, HR policies and strategies are not implemented through a strategic and proactive approach by maintaining an administrative and reactive role instead (Yannakourou & Tsimpoukis, 2014). In addition, since the economic crisis, the Greek government's austerity measures reformed employment relations and decreased the role of trade unions (Yannakourou & Tsimpoukis, 2014; Dedoussopoulos et al., 2013; BBC News, 2010; EIRO, 2009). Besides Greek organisations' efforts to intensify the importance of their HR interventions, the crisis has proved to have had a profound impact on business environments and employees' working lives by pushing the latter to perform at higher standards, and the former to increase performance through minimising costs (Rauner, 2008).

Hereafter, Greek HR, and its professionals, were called to continuously demonstrate their organisational value. However, Prouska and Kapsali (2011) believe that they have a long way to go until they can be compared with those HR strategies and policies present within more advanced economies and organisations.

2.4 Defining HRM and HRD

Following the definitions provided earlier, relevant theoretical discussions were initiated around HRM's related disciplines [e.g. Baron et al., (1986) for PM, Jacoby (1985) and Wren (1987) for American management theory, Kaufman (1993) and Adams (1993) for industrial relations]. Price (2007: 32) defines HRM as "*the philosophy of people management which is based on the belief that human resources are uniquely important in sustained business success. HRM is eventually aimed at recruiting capable, flexible and committed people, managing, and rewarding their performance and developing their competencies*". Although HRM has mostly been recognised as the term to describe and clarify HR administration and improvement (e.g. recruitment, compensation and benefits, career management, retirement etc.), it

also exemplifies the relationship between an organisation and its employees, along with an additional centrum to behavioural change through its learning activities (Haslinda, 2009b). Thus, within a broader context, HRM can be defined as: "*the framework of philosophies, policies, procedures, and practices for the management of the relationship between an employer and an employee*" (Wilton, 2013: 4).

With regards to HRD, McLean and McLean (2001) define it as: "*a process or activity that, either initially or over the long term, has the potential to develop employees' work-based knowledge, expertise, productivity and satisfaction, whether for personal or team gain, or for the benefit of an organisational community*". McCracken and Wallace (2000a: 281-282) further described HRD as: "*the creation of a learning culture within which a range of training, development and learning strategies, all respond to corporate strategy and help to shape and influence it*". Overall, it is argued that HRD can be viewed as a series of learning, T&D opportunities offered to employees, with the overall aim of producing behavioural change so to increase individual and organisational capacity and performance (Werner & DeSimone, 2012; Storberg-Walker, 2004). Therefore, its scope is to design and implement training and learning interventions as an effective and efficient process fully aligned with HRM's purpose of identifying the relationship amongst people and organisations. Thus, the interrelation of the two concepts to be highlighted. In the words of Brockbank (1999), a strategic partnership between HRM and HRD can enable HR's overall evolution from an "operationally reactive" and "operationally proactive" approach to a more "strategically reactive" and even better "strategically proactive" nature. Although both hold the capacity to clearly distinguish their specialisations within their respective fields, together they are more likely to distinguish their strategic, change, cultural and business-associated traits (Hughes & Gosney, 2016; Dessler, 2015; Rees & Smith, 2014; Gold et al., 2013). Therefore, a "cross-fertilisation" of their ideas and capabilities should be encouraged, by concurrently feeding their own singularity (Ruona & Gibson, 2004). To this extent, the modified SHRD framework argues that a strategic partnership between them can constitute of an indication of SHRD maturity. Such a partnership could also enhance HR's value-added proposition and risk reduction

capacity, so as for the HR department to be regarded as an equally strategic business partner within the organisation (Dai & Qiu, 2016).

2.5 The relationship between HRM and HRD

The literature suggests HRD of being a pivotal element of HRM, by considering both concepts as integrated notions, yet with each one presenting its own distinctive characteristics (Mankin, 2009). HRD traces its roots back to training and development (T&D), which has traditionally been one of the main elements of HRM. Overall, it is argued that HRM puts greater emphasis on the existing workforce's utilisation within its current job context in a broader way; HRD focuses, through training and learning activities, either on preparing employees for new jobs and enhanced roles or on further developing them so to unleash their full potential and eventually to help their organisations in meeting their objectives (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005; Brown, 2003). In a similar vein, Yorks (2005) emphasised HRM's guiding principle on identifying the right candidates and placing them in the right position so to maximise their effort. The author further identified that HRD's guiding principle is to continuously prepare and develop employees to realise their full potential so to help organisations in achieving their objectives (ibid).

Both concepts are interrelated through a unified focus which leads to sustainable competitive advantage through their value-driven capability (Buyens & De Vos, 2001). Since employees can either limit or enhance organisational strengths and weaknesses, HRM and HRD can help organisations to drive forward their goals through a motivated and multi-skilled workforce, employment stability, a shared mind-set, and a strong link between personal and corporate goals (Amit & Belcourt, 1999; Becker et al., 1997; Hiltrop & Despres, 1995). Research evidence further highlights that effective people management can be linked to an increase in shareholder value (Jung, 2015; Collings, 2014; Xirogiannis et al., 2008; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004), while a secure working environment can result in a highly-valued workforce (Afiouni et al., 2013: Meijerink et al., 2013; Cohen, 2012; Parmenter, 2002). Further studies suggest that top management and line managers (LMs) can also

contribute to HR's strategic audit so for it to acquire access to organisational planning (Alfes et al., 2013; Buller & McEvoy, 2012; Holton & Yamkovenko, 2008). Thus, they argued for HR's voice to be expressed and heard during the formulation of corporate strategy through an attained strategic alignment between its policies and actions with the respective corporate ones, and the devolvement of HR responsibilities to the line (ibid). Consistent with these suggestions, the modified SHRD framework argues that a strategic partnership with key organisational stakeholders should be attained so for better insights to be secured.

HRM and HRD are unquestionably interdependent notions. Matching the right person to the right position would stress and influence the type of T&D being required to further develop employees' skills. However, it is of much greater importance for HRM and HRD strategies, policies and practices to be strategically integrated either through a horizontal or vertical alignment, as that proposed by Garavan (1991). Smith (2006) and Huselid (1995) further suggested that high performance work practices (HPWP) can also result in enhanced business performance when T&D initiatives complement HRM practices. Yet, most recent research questions HRD's performative and/or humanitarian focus, by suggesting a more critical stance towards HRD research (Sambrook, 2009). However, within today's constantly changing business and economic landscapes, a strategic partnership between HRM and HRD is more essential by considering both as the axis of an organisation's life (McCracken & Wallace, 2000a; 2000b). Following this proposition, the modified SHRD framework argues for "environmental-intergraded" HRD strategies, plans and policies through a horizontal (HR effectiveness through contribution to organisational objectives), vertical (HR efficiency through an attained alignment of all HR practices), external (sustainability/resilience of HR) and internal (HR acceptance – equal strategic business partner) integration. Having all these elements secured, organisational transition and change can be achieved smoother through an attained behavioural change at all levels and limited resistance to change.

2.6 The Foundation of SHRM

HRM has been recognized earlier as the term to describe and clarify HR administration and improvement. However, strategic HRM (SHRM) places greater emphasis on the relationships amongst human capital, organisational structure, strategy and the external environment (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). It examines individuals' behaviours within organisations, and explores the way in which they can develop and change (Jackson et al., 2014). It also investigates the factors influencing individual and organisational behaviour and their respective performance (Truss et al., 2012). Therefore, Rees and Smith (2014: 74-75) define SHRM as: *"the development and implementation of a set of both explicit and covert strategic HRM philosophies, programs, plans, and policies, all aiming at expediting the achievement of the strategic business objectives"*.

In brief, the SHRM concept has been developed from organisational behaviour (OB) and management studies within the industrial relations and personnel management theories, by indicating the ways through which its practices can be aligned with business objectives either through a "hard" or "soft" HRM approach. However, research evidence highlights that different meanings and assumptions of human nature dominate within each notion. Some argue that HRM follows a hard approach, while rhetorically organisations embody the characteristics of a soft management approach, where most of the time the focus is on improving bottom-line performance (Storey, 2015; Ihuah, 2014; Arrowsmith & Parker, 2013; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2013; Truss et al., 1997). Other studies further demonstrate a mistrust between HRM and work experience, by highlighting employees' lack of autonomy through continuous monitoring (Mom et al., 2015; Harvey et al., 2013; Delbridge & Turnbull, 1994). Thus, a gap between the reality and rhetoric of HRM can be evidenced.

Kaufman (2015), Kramar (2014) and Buller and McEvoy (2012) further suggest that there is a strong integration between SHRM, corporate strategy and business performance. In the words of Armstrong and Taylor (2014) and Muller et al. (2013), the on-going economic, political and business change further necessitated the adoption

of a more strategic HR approach within organisations so to effectively compete at international levels, beyond ensuring their survival. Other authors further propose that strategic implementations, such as the introduction of HPWP, can also lead to various organisational outcomes, namely higher profitability, efficiency, shareholder value, return on investment, increased market share, innovation, lower employees' turnover etc. (Ivars & Martinez, 2015; Asmawi et al., 2015; Agarwal, 2014; Kehoe & Wright, 2013). Research evidence further calls for LMs involvement in HR activities within those organisations welcoming HR's devolvement to the line (Evans, 2015; Bainbridge, 2015; Sikora et al., 2015). However, others oppose such assertion by arguing that such integration is impractical owing to LMs responsibility of managing their departments and people (Gooderham et al., 2015; Brewster et al., 2015; Bos-Nehles et al., 2013).

Considering all of that, various SHRM models (e.g. Michigan Model, Matching Model, Harvard, Guest's Model, Warwick, Sparrow & Marchington Model) focused on explaining the way in which a strategic alignment between HR and corporate objectives and strategies can be achieved (Cross & Carbery, 2016; French et al., 2015; Wilson, M.F. 2014). Given the interrelation of the HRM and HRD concepts, SHRM models' propositions can be viewed as antecedents for the development of the respective SHRD ones, since most of their suggestions are present within the latter's strategic components (e.g. consideration of stakeholders' interests, employees' voice, consideration of contextual factors, behavioural change, HR-corporate strategy integration etc.). Yet, due to the constantly changing business and economic environments, it is important to move towards a more strategic role for HRD within organisations, by developing a modified SHRD framework indicating the criteria of a SHRD mature organisation.

2.7 Towards a more Strategic Role for HRD and SHRD Maturity

Although there are many diverse definitions for SHRD, all mainly highlight its proactive role and strategic alignment with corporate strategy and stakeholders' expectations, along with highlighting the strategic management of all training and learning interventions aiming at improving individual and organisational performance (Hughes & Gosney, 2016; Alagaraja et al., 2015; Kuchinke, 2015; MacKenzie et al., 2014; Yorks & Barto, 2013; Garavan, 2007; Millmore et al., 2007; Sadler-Smith, 2006). Therefore, greater emphasis is placed on a range of learning and developmental activities, rather than solely relying on training programmes, for the improvement of individual and organisational performance (Loewenberger, 2013). The importance of HRD's strategic alignment and integration with corporate strategy further outlines its value proposition which is in line with both a resource-based view of organisations and human capital (HC) theory (Alagaraja, 2013a; 2013b). Overall, SHRD can be described in many different contexts based on each author's different stance. Therefore, it can play different roles within organisations, and eventually to be understood, applied and operationalised differently amongst them.

Generally, it is believed that owing to constantly changing business and economic environments, SHRD's contribution can be two-fold. Firstly, it can equip organisations with operational competencies to oversee emergencies, and eventually to make them comprehend the fundamentals of crisis management (James & Wooten, 2013; Wooten & James, 2008). Secondly, to gain the appropriate knowledge and wisdom through coping with an emergency, and thus to improve their organisational responses to future events (Haslinda, 2009a; Hyland et al., 2005; Gilley et al., 2002). Following HRM and HRD's interrelationship, both at operational and strategic levels, Ulrich and Brockbank (2005a; 2005b) argued that HR excellence (e.g. skills development, behavioural change, strategic partnership, increased performance, competitive advantage etc.) can also be attained. However, there are others suggesting that since HRD roles are narrower than the respective HRM ones, targeted and purposeful HRD initiatives must be designed and delivered for the above objectives to be achieved (Wilson, 2012; Gillon, 2011). Yet, SHRD's role varies across organisations. Its

principal objective focuses on designing and analysing job contexts based on organisational targets. It also aims to address the training needs of both the individual and the organisation so to provide the necessary developmental opportunities (McGuire, 2014). Therefore, SHRD could facilitate both individual and organisational change through its interventions, and through the creation of an organisational learning culture that stimulates innovation and creativity (Garavan et al., 2016; Burrow & Berardinelli, 2003; Luoma, 2000a; 2000b). However, the notion of a "learning organisation" cab be proved problematic as it overlooks key concerns related to HRD/T&D (e.g. who is going to be trained, who decides on training etc.) in favour of organisational knowledge (Valentin, 2006). In any case, SHRD needs to focus on developing and elevating organisational self-renewing capability and competitiveness rather than solely aiming at performance outcomes (Boin & Van Eaten, 2013; Wang et al., 2009; Anderson, 2009; Opperman & Meyer, 2008). Therefore, HRD executives need to constantly demonstrate their value proposition through their practices in components of their HRD and organisational strategies (Alagaraja, 2013b, Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005a; 2005b). To do so, organisations, and their HR executives, need to effectively respond to environmental pressures; a proposition being highlighted through the implementation of "environmentally-integrated" HRD interventions (as suggested with the modified SHRD framework). Along with the rest of the strategic characteristics, all should aim to strengthen SHRD maturity.

Taking all that into consideration, Garavan (1991: 17) define SHRD as: "*the strategic management of training, development and of management education interventions, so to achieve the objectives of the organisation while at the same time ensuring the full utilisation of the knowledge in detail and skills of individual employees. Thus, SHRD is concerned with the management of employee learning for the long term keeping in mind the explicit corporate and business strategies*". McCracken and Wallace (2000a: 288; 2000b: 435) also describe SHRD as: "*the creation of a learning culture, within which a range of training, development and learning strategies both respond to corporate strategy and help to shape and influence it*". Drawing upon both definitions, for this study, SHRD is defined as: "*the strategic management and integration of all HRD interventions, along with the creation of a supportive organisational*

environment within which a range of proactive HRD initiatives can shape and influence corporate strategy so to help organisations in achieving their strategic objectives, and to maintain competitiveness when threats arise and uncertainty deepens". The definition suggests that SHRD practices can be associated with enhanced organisational outcomes. It also distinguishes its significance through building a supportive and collaborative business environment that promotes strategic interventions that can sharpen and influence corporate strategy. It further implies SHRD's contribution through its capacity to proactively respond to external and internal forces as part of the organisation's strategic efforts to cope with business uncertainty and complexity (Alagaraja, 2013a). A main idea is also that SHRD initiatives must be integrated and linked with an organisation's strategic planning process; thus, the definition emphasises on SHRD's ability to help organisations to achieve their corporate strategies and objectives, by building strategic capabilities to meet new challenges (Alagaraja & Egan, 2013).

In relation to SHRD maturity, McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) argued that evidence on the suggested strategic characteristics of their SHRD model can be classified within Lee's (1996) scale of training maturity. The scale suggests that based on the implemented training interventions of an organisation, this can be either characterised either as being immature or mature by moving from the lower to the upper levels. Each stage presupposes the inclusion of its previous ones, expect in the bottom stage in which there is no systematic training at all.

However, such a suggestion can be proved problematic owing to its sole focus on the sophistication of training ("*the degree of their strategic integration with the corporate strategy*" - Lee, 1996a). The volume/intensity of training cannot guarantee enough evidence for classifying an organisation as being either SHRD mature or immature. Taking that into account, for this study, SHRD maturity can be defined as: "*the presence of strong or weak evidence of the suggested strategic characteristics, and of their indicators, of the modified SHRD framework*". Therefore, research data/evidence can offer an indication of either a mature or immature organisation, in HRD terms,

based on the suggested indicators of SHRD maturity (figure 3.2) on each of the strategic components of the modified SHRD framework.

Overall, limited research has been undertaken so far on SHRD maturity in times of an economic crisis. Existing SHRD models have mainly been assessed within "static" business and economic environments, thus lack in addressing the complex nature of today's business and economic landscapes. To this extent, the modified SHRD framework suggests a set of eight strategic characteristics which can constitute the components of an SHRD mature organisation, along with considering a range of macro and micro-environmental factors which can simultaneously facilitate or constrain its strategic adoption and maturity.

2.8 Chapter Summary

The chapter offered the theoretical background around HRM (SHRM) and HRD (SHRD) so to highlight their interdependence. All concepts were clearly defined as well.

It is also important to view HR as an equally strategic business partner and contributor within organisations. For HRD to evidence such a role, it will need to undertake a more proactive/mature orientation. However, the extent to which the suggested strategic characteristics are employed from the organisations is going to be debated within the context of the recent economic crisis. Furthermore, existing SHRD models have mainly examined SHRD maturity through an input-output systems approach. It would be wiser though to consider an open-system framework which allows the consideration of numerous factors that are simultaneously at play in organisations.

The voice of the employees also needs to be considered (besides that of the HR executives and the managers so to highlight how different stakeholders can differently understand, apply and operationalise SHRD within organisations. Thus, the modified SHRD framework incorporates employees' perspective within some of its strategic characteristics, along with considering all potential factors which can affect SHRD's

adoption and maturity. Therefore, the research contributes to the literature by identifying the potential problems and limitations of putting SHRD's aspirations into practice, and by highlighting any difficulties of embedding strategic criteria into HRD strategies, plans and policies under periods of business and economic uncertainty and complexity. To this extent, the following chapter will introduce readers to the criteria of a SHRD mature organisation by discussing the modified SHRD framework examining SHRD maturity at the time of an economic crisis.

CHAPTER 3 – Towards a modified framework for operationalizing SHRD Maturity

3.1 Introduction

The GEC challenged organisations with regards to their viability and competitiveness (Wang et al., 2009). It was further argued that HRD's strategic positioning could be viewed as a means of attaining business survival, success, growth, and change (MacKenzie et al., 2014; McGuire & Garavan, 2013). Such an approach can facilitate the promotion of a supportive and learning culture within organisations, along with the establishment of strategic partnerships with key HRD stakeholders. If HRD practices are strategically integrated with corporate objectives and strategies, this can constitute the axis of a stronger organisational structure (MacKenzie et al., 2012).

However, the extent to which specific strategic criteria are employed within organisational HRD strategies, plans and policies can indicate the maturity of SHRD. Therefore, various SHRD models have been developed, all indicating the strategic components of a SHRD mature organisation. All offered a different set of strategic components, but their common element is that they have been tested mostly within stable business and economic environments. Therefore, following today's dynamic and constantly changing business and economic environments, a modified SHRD framework (fig.3.1) was suggested in assessing SHRD maturity. The framework builds upon and enhances the work of McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) since their SHRD model is the most cited and most comprehensive one within the literature. Consistent with the authors' suggestion, the suggested strategic characteristics are equally weighted while evaluating SHRD maturity in organisations. Thus, there is a strong interrelation amongst them so to enhance individually and collectively the maturity of SHRD. The modified SHRD framework further proposes a set of factors (micro & macro) that can shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity. Therefore, the application and testing of this modified SHRD framework will be the main focus of this research. Different HRD stakeholders are expected to offer their respective perspectives on how SHRD can be understood, applied and operationalised within organisations. In addition, a before-and-after research investigation (pre and

post-crisis assessment) will allow the researcher to examine and evaluate SHRD maturity over time.

3.2 A review and critique of existing SHRD Maturity Models

There are several models assessing SHRD maturity, all suggesting the way in which HRD can be perceived as being strategic and mature based upon the evidence provided on their respective strategic criteria (Garavan, 2007; Robinson & Robinson, 2005; Boudreau & Ramstad, 2004; Gilley & Gilley, 2003; Becker et al., 2001; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000a, 2000b; McCracken & Wallace 2000a, 2000b; Ulrich, 1998; Pfeffer, 1998; Lee, 1996a, 1996b; Garavan, 1991).

Garavan (1991) was amongst the first who have developed an SHRD model, by proposing nine key strategic characteristics indicating an HRD mature organisation. The author further identified eight contextual factors that can affect SHRD's focus (e.g. external environment, organisational culture, organisational stakeholders, technology, business structure-size and power, and on-going change) (ibid). He also proposed that HRD implementations should be either vertically or horizontally integrated with corporate objectives. Identification of the model's eight contextual factors is central to the modified SHRD framework by adopting an open-system approach which allows the consideration of numerous internal and external forces that can simultaneously affect SHRD adoption and maturity. However, rather than solely focusing on either a vertical or horizontal integration, the modified SHRD framework suggests for both to exist, along with promoting an external and internal integration so for HRD to be seen as an axis of an organisation's life.

A major contribution was also made by Lee (1996a; 1996b) in suggesting six layers of SHRD maturity with regards to the T&D approach that organisations adopt. The author categorised them based on the degree of their strategic integration with the corporate strategy (ibid). Therefore, moving from the lower to the upper levels, organisations become more proactive and mature, and thus it is more likely for their HRD practices to shape and influence organisational strategy and objectives. However, the model has

been critisised for neglecting other important HRD practices (e.g. career planning, change management, appraisals, evaluation etc.), which can also affect HRD's strategic outlook (Pfeffer, 1998; Ulrich, 1998). Furthermore, the model's sole focus on the sophistication of training ('*the degree of their strategic integration with the corporate strategy*' - Lee, 1996) can be proved problematic since the volume/intensity of training cannot guarantee enough evidence for classifying an organisation as either SHRD mature or immature. To this extent, specific indicators of SHRD maturity were proposed instead (fig.3.2). Lee's (1996) SHRD model further lacks in identifying other potential agents which can simultaneously affect HRD's strategic direction and integration.

Later, it was Pfeffer (1998) and Walton (1999) who further suggested that it is through greater HRD interventions that its role can be strengthen; thus, to maximise its effectiveness and contribution towards business success, and eventually to be regarded as a strategic business partner. However, a critique that accompanies these models is their end-point assumption. Quite problematic is also the fact that some of their suggestions (e.g. "driving change") are unclear since not all change is necessarily strategic. Along with Garavan's (1991) SHRD model, all implied a more short-term, financial-driven, and responsive HRD evaluation process. Finally, although all models suggest a clear set of strategic characteristics, and their common idea is that HRD activities need to be integrated and linked with the organisational strategic planning process, they do not exemplify the extent to which their strategic characteristics are equally weighted or not while evaluating SHRD maturity; a proposition made clear earlier in relation to the modified SHRD framework.

McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) tried to bring previous models' suggestions into a new framework so to advance the "SHRD Maturity" notion. The authors argued that all criteria should be strategically integrated and interrelated so to promote the creation of a strong learning culture within organisations (ibid). They further outlined SHRD's ability in recognising the on-going organisational and environmental changes as crucial factors related to organisational growth and success (ibid). Consistent with those two suggestions, the modified SHRD framework places HRD as an axis of an

organisation's life (through a vertical and horizontal integration), while it further calls for the existence of "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies (through an internal and external integration) which can offer a constant evaluation of both micro and macro contextual factors. The authors' model also adapts an end-point focus rather than seeing SHRD as a an "emerging process" (Steward & Sambrook, 2012; Sambrook, 2009; Sambrook & Steward, 2005). Finally, the model's emphasis on cost-effective HRD evaluation indicates a short-term orientation through the achievement of financial business results and cost control, rather than focusing on long-term strategic outcomes such as individual and organisational change and transfer of training/learning to job contexts. Yet, the model offers some interesting points within its suggestions (e.g. HRD to shape organisational missions and goals, strategic partnership with HRM, active involvement of LMs etc.), most of which are present within the modified SHRD framework as well.

Following the SHRD discourse, Gilley and Maycunich (2000a) have also proposed that organisational learning, performance and change can constitute the key criteria of an HRD mature organisation, by suggesting a three-step process (analysis, design of interventions and evaluation) for measuring their effectiveness. However, such practices can be viewed as just common HRD practices without truly enhancing SHRD maturity. Although the authors introduced another three elements (e.g. HRD transformation, leadership, and principles of SHRD) that impact upon these practices, they did not explain how to test the extent to which these elements, domains and practices can help HRD in becoming more strategic (ibid). Therefore, Gilley and Gilley (2003) repositioned SHRD by suggesting a seven-step process through which organisations can increase their HRD's strategic positioning. Although the model aptly recognises specific HRD behaviours (e.g. leadership, ownership, shared vision, change management etc.) that can be translated into specific objectives, their proposition remains vague as to how all these elements are interconnected, and with regards to what makes these behaviours strategic rather than simply being operational and reactive in nature. Overall, the model focuses more on how to drive change (again not all change is necessarily strategic) rather than presenting the ways in which HRD could attend a proactive and more influential role in organisations.

Later, Boudreau and Ramstad (2004) suggested a model, named it "Human Capacity Bridge Framework", by suggesting a connection between the anchor points of the model and its linking elements. By narrowly focusing on identifying those areas in which talented workforce has the greatest impact, and by creating a pool of highly-talented employees who can drive business results, the authors advocated for their framework's appropriateness in helping HR to become a pivotal player in organisations (ibid). Yet, the model does not consider other potentially influential factors (macro & micro-environmental agents) that can also affect HR's strategic positioning within organisations. As to that, Robinson and Robinson's (2005) model highlighted the imperative need for HRD to become a strategic business partner within organisations. To do so, the authors proposed three main HRD accountabilities (e.g. building client partnerships, identifying and partnering to support projects, influencing business strategies and direction) through which HRD can become more strategic (ibid). The central idea of these propositions is incorporated into some of the strategic characteristics of the modified SHRD framework (e.g. strategic partnerships with senior executives, branch managers (LMs) and employees, shaping organisational missions, goals and strategies, strategic partnership with HRM etc.). The authors' suggestion of HRD to be regarded as an equally strategic business partner is also reflected within the modified SHRD framework.

Lastly, Garavan's (2007) SHRD model suggests that HRD strategies and practices should focus on achieving performative outcomes through the creation of a learning culture, and the facilitation of the organisational change process. The model can be characterised as the most complete one by recognising that several conditions (e.g. local, national, multi-national etc.) can impact upon the organisational contexts and stakeholders' expectations. However, its complex nature makes SHRD's understanding extremely difficult. Its extensive internal and external dimensions (24 processes) and their expected outcomes (14 outcomes) also constitute a model that may be challenging to operationalise.

Overall, there are many suggestions on HRD's strategic outlook. Various SHRD definitions are also provided within the literature. The actual problem with defining

SHRD is that it could be assessed from many different angles and contexts, and eventually be understood, applied and operationalised differently amongst diverse organisations. As a result, it is difficult to be "put into a box". Existing SHRD models offer interesting points with regards to SHRD maturity, yet they are also characterised by several inaccuracies such as to whom the call for SHRD is directed, since different executives and organisational stakeholders, in facing a similar situation, would react differently and they would take diverse strategic decisions. There is also a relative lack of empirical studies testing SHRD models' applicability and compatibility, both within the context of an economic crisis and within a single industry (addressing the "one-size fits all" problem). Consistent with all that, this research further adopts a multi-stakeholder analysis approach so to capture differing and changing perceptions of the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD within the case study organisations and over time (pre and post-crisis).

This research study draws upon and enhances the work of McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b). The authors' model is considered as the most comprehensive and the most cited one within the SHRD literature. To this extent, the modified SHRD framework incorporates most of its strategic characteristics and enhances some of them in such a way so to advance the notion of SHRD maturity. Thus, the suggested SHRD framework comes with a slightly modified cluster of strategic criteria, along with considering all influential factors that may simultaneously hinder or facilitate SHRD's adoption and maturity in organisations. Specific indicators of SHRD maturity (fig.3.2) are also proposed so to facilitate the assessment of the framework's strategic components.

3.3 Towards a modified SHRD framework of exploring SHRD maturity

Building upon the most comprehensive, operationalised and cited SHRD model (McCracken & Wallace, 2000a; 2000b), a modified SHRD framework (figure 3.1) is proposed. Consistent with the relevant literature, the framework identifies eight key strategic characteristics related with SHRD maturity. The framework further adopts an open-system approach so to allow consideration of several micro and macro-environmental forces which can simultaneously constrain or facilitate SHRD's adoption and maturity. Both the micro and macro-environmental factors can influence, and be influenced by, the key strategic characteristics (thus, having a reciprocal relationship – two way arrows). All (either individually or combined) can put additional pressure over the employment of the strategic criteria and thus either to inhibit or expedite their adoption. However, beyond those contextual factors' effect, the employment of the proposed strategic characteristics may vary amongst organisations (regardless operating within the same sector) based upon their stakeholders' diverse perspectives. Therefore, the examination of both the internal and external environments, along with evaluating the employment of the proposed strategic characteristics, will enable the researcher to better examine how different organisations understand, apply and operationalise SHRD. Following a pre and post-crisis assessment will further assist the researcher to examine SHRD maturity over time. The modified SHRD framework further moves away from solely focusing on performative and/or humanitarian outcomes by suggesting that SHRD maturity (through the employment of the proposed strategic criteria) will enhance HRD's role within organisations so to be regarded as an equal strategic business partner. Having that element secured, strategic outcomes are expected to emerge (both of performative and humanitarian nature as well).

Figure 3.1: A modified framework measuring SHRD Maturity
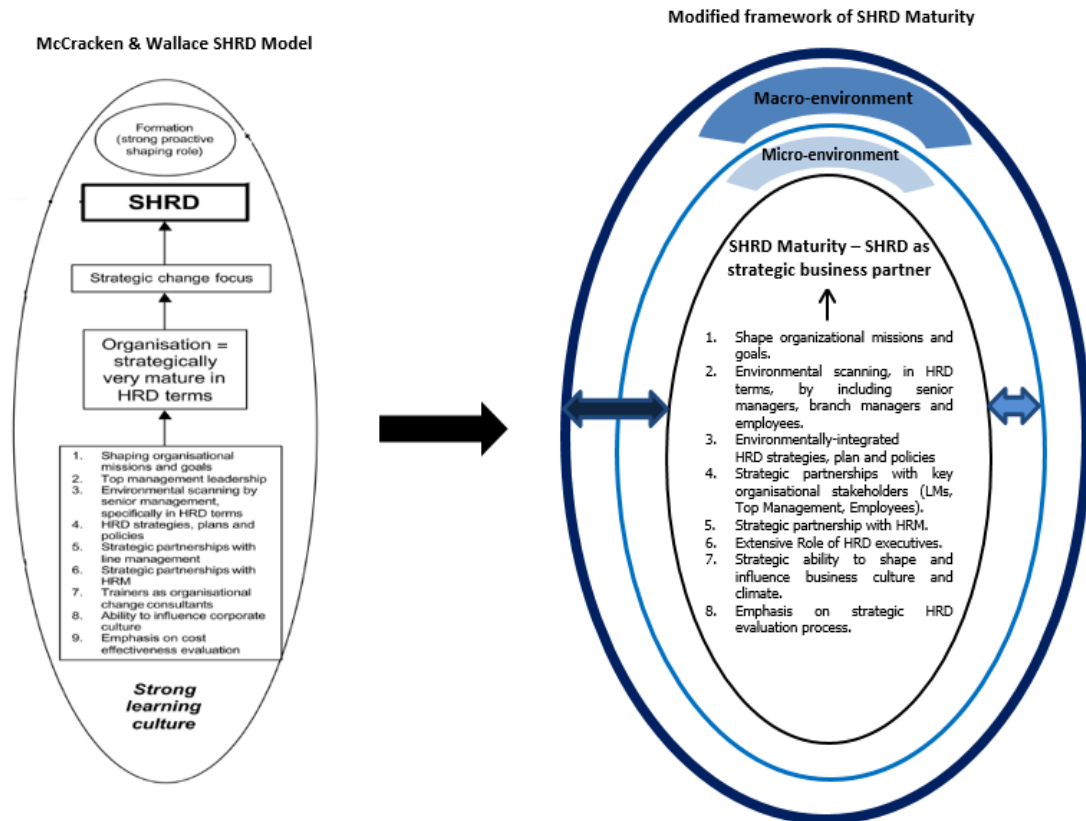
3.3.1 Shape Organisational Missions and Goals

Garavan (1991) and Garavan et al. (1995) proposed that HRD strategies should be integrated with organisational strategies and goals. Although such integration is vital, it mostly implies a responsive and reactive role for HRD in terms of its ability to help organisations execute their corporate strategies through a vertical integration. Furthermore, research evidence from the work of Heraty and Morley (2000) highlights that such a strategic integration is mostly missing within organisations by further indicating a mismatch between the resources allocated to T&D and the organisational aims. The work of Swanson (2000) further outlined HRD's responsive nature in many organisations, with its main concern being on integrating itself with, or simply by supporting, business strategy.

However, in organisations where innovation and change are required, HRD is expected to undertake a more strategic-oriented and influential role, rather than simply being transactional and supportive in nature, so to better contribute to business strategy's formulation (Sung & Choi, 2013; Lee, 1996a; Torraco & Swanson, 1995; Legnick-Hall & Legnick-Hall, 1988). In line with this proposition, McCracken and Wallace (2000a, 2000b) argued that, in an ideal situation, HRD strategies and policies could drive and shape business goals so to achieve the desired outcomes. Several authors have also supported this suggestion by arguing that SHRD must be the axis of organisational life so to help them grow and change (Sthapit, 2010; Holbeche, 2009). Therefore, the modified SHRD framework embraces this suggestion by proposing that HRD should constitute an axis of an organisation's life through an attained vertical, horizontal, internal, and external integration. With regards to this specific strategic criterion, a vertical integration (HRD effectiveness) can be evidenced through its ability to shape and influence business missions and goals. Therefore, it is of HRD executives' responsibility to see crisis as an opportunity to demonstrate their value-added capacity through the business strategy's formulation. Then, a horizontal integration (HRD efficiency) would focus on the formation of a strategic partnership with HRM so for them to be seen as one and the same, and eventually to have greater impact over the achievement of the corporate strategies and objectives. An external integration (through "environmentally-integrated HRD strategies, plans and policies) could enhance HRD's sustainability/resilience, while through an attained internal integration (HRD acceptance) HRD is expected to be regarded as an equal strategic business partner. All these proposed types of integration represent a respective strategic criterion of the modified SHRD framework.

Garavan (2007) also proposed that SHRD requires from its professionals to translate organisational strategies and objectives into specific SHRD priorities and activities and vice versa. For instance, different types of business strategies (e.g. concentration, internal growth, external growth, and divestment) call for specific SHRD implementations (e.g. focus on training, organisational culture, team building initiatives, leadership and structural change). Thus, within an integrated system, SHRD would be able to shape and influence, and to subsequently be affected by,

corporate strategy (ibid). This reciprocal relationship will enable HRD's strategic positioning, and will assist organisations in remaining competitive (Hiltrop & Despres, 1995). However, there are studies questioning HRD's alignment with corporate strategy, by suggesting that it is quite complex and sometimes difficult to be achieved in real life (Anderson, 2009; Wognum, 2001; Harrison, 2000). As previously noted, the modified SHRD framework argues for HRD's ability to shape organisational missions and goals (initially through a vertical integration and overall through a horizontal, internal, and external integration as well), as an indication of its strategic focus. Thus, following the literature's discourse to what extent these strategic integrations could exist, this research examines and evaluates whether such strategic alignment can be attained exists, and whether HRD practices and policies can shape business mission and goals within the challenging context of an economic crisis.

3.3.2 Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees

Owing to the evolving nature of today's business world, environmental scanning (internal & external contexts) is of high importance for all organisations. Such activities would allow them to identify their organisational strengths and weaknesses by scanning the former, while also to address opportunities and threats from the latter (Coombs, 2014). Therefore, the inclusion of various organisational stakeholders (beyond senior management) could be of great value in maximising the successful execution and outcomes of a relevant process.

In the words of Hendry (1995), the most important condition for expanding an organisation's attention to T&D is to check its reaction to environmental challenges. The author proposed that this can help organisations to stay updated with on-going change by simply re-organising their training objectives and interventions so to address its requirements (ibid). Garavan (1991) had also proposed that an indication of SHRD maturity could be the regular scanning of the external environment (thus allowing organisations to identify any threats and opportunities within it). Others

further argued that organisations need to match any environmental challenges with their human capital's capabilities as the basis of their competitive advantage (Buller & McEvoy, 2012; David, 2011; Thompson & Strickland, 2002).

However, it is not only the external environment that can impact upon organisations. Their micro-environment can also influence their practices, and thus requires some attention. McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) argued that an environmental scan of both macro and micro-environments should be undertaken by involving senior managers. They further argued that a strategic alignment between the HRD strategies and the corporate one would enable an easier analysis of both environmental contexts (ibid). Harrison (2000) also stressed the importance of linking HRD strategies with corporate ones as a prerequisite of increased organisational success. Felstead and Green (1994) also distinguished that the powers keeping up HRD practices, in the larger part of firms during previous recessions, were a blend of outer regulations and focused business sector strengths. To that extent, some organisations or industries were more successful in handling organisational or environmental shocks than others (ibid).

The modified SHRD framework suggests that organisational awareness of both micro and macro-environmental contexts can increase their attention to SHRD. However, beyond senior managers' sole involvement, the modified SHRD framework argues for the inclusion of branch managers (as LMs) and employees throughout the execution of environmental scanning. It is expected to lead to better solutions through their respective insightful contribution to the process. Especially with regards to the latter, research evidence outlines the importance of "employees' voice" within organisations in all aspects of their management practices, either through a substantive or consultative role (Grant, 2015; Morrison, 2014; Tangirala et al., 2013; Purcell & Hall, 2012; Kim et al., 2010; Bennett, 2010).

The consideration of various factors (e.g. socio-cultural, technological, environmental, economic, political, legal etc.) is crucial as they can, either directly or indirectly, affect organisational processes and SHRD practices as well. As Grant (2015) suggests, the organisational capacity to effectively address the impact of those factors can be a

predictor of business success. However, besides solely scanning the external environment, an internal environmental scanning process will allow organisations to identify their strengths (while diminishing their respective weaknesses) and thus to build sustainable competitive advantage. However, as reported earlier, rather than solely include HRD executives and other senior managers (as proposed by McCracken & Wallace, 2000a; 2000b) in relevant scanning activities, the inclusion of branch managers (as LMs) and front-line employees can offer a broader reflection of both environmental contexts. To this extent, the modified SHRD framework argues that it is not only senior managers who could offer useful recommendations. Managers at all levels (branch managers, in this case, owing to the business focus shift) and front-line employees can offer additional information through their respective propositions. Especially with regards to the latter's participation, research evidence highlight the importance of a committed and engaged workforce (through their greater involvement), as central to enhancing organisational capabilities for successfully addressing environmental turbulence and change (Fiksel, 2015; Cheese et al., 2009; Hopp & Van Oyen, 2004). Thus, the modified SHRD framework builds upon McCracken and Wallace's (2000a; 286) proposition ("*environmental scanning by senior management in HRD terms*") by further enhancing it through the inclusion of branch managers and front-line employees, as both could offer useful insights and recommendations throughout the implementation of relevant scanning activities.

3.3.3 "Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans, and policies.

Today, various micro and macro-environmental forces are causing the business world to become turbulent faster than organisations are becoming strategically oriented (O'Donovan & Rimland-Flower, 2013). SHRD-oriented organisations are expected to perform at higher levels even when environmental pressures escalate, threats ascend and uncertainty intensifies (Boin & Van Eaten, 2013). However, such an organisational capacity is debatable as to what extent is the outcome of a strategically-designed business process or just the result of improvisation/pure luck. To this extent, Garavan et al (2016) argued that the biggest challenge for SHRD is to offer those

interventions which aim towards the creation of new dynamic capabilities or the enhancement of the existing ones in assisting organisations to better respond to environmental change.

Earlier, Garavan's (1991) SHRD model called for clear HRD plans and policies through a vertical and/or horizontal integration with corporate strategies and objectives. The author's suggestion is partially correct as it needs to consider the internal and/or external integration as well (as being proposed within the modified SHRD framework). In addition, Garavan's (1991) model mostly implies an operational emphasis through which HRD can influence business plans. However, McCracken and Wallace (2000a, 2000b) suggested that while HRD policies and plans are crucial, it is vital for HRD strategies to exist as well, through which these policies and plans can be supplemented. This is essential since an HRD strategy concerns not only the present but also the future direction of an organisation, while it also includes both policies and plans so to achieve its objectives (ibid). Others further argued that especially within rapidly changing business and economic environments, organisations need to adopt long-term strategies so to proactively address future changes through a strategic integration of all their functional strategies with their corporate one (Felstead et al., 2012a; 2012b; Sthapit, 2010, 2009, 2007).

There are many studies focusing on proactive management actions and decision making processes, by suggesting that organisations can reduce risk through increasing their sensitivity against on-going change and economic uncertainty, and through enhancing their operational excellence and competitive advantage (Chen et al., 2015; Torugsa et al., 2013; Vidal-Salazar et al., 2012). Empirical research evidence further outlines the crucial role of proactively obtaining all relevant information to effectively design strategic plans for coping with business uncertainty (Paille et al., 2014; Vogel & Guttel, 2013; Hitt et al., 2010; Miller et al., 2004; Hickson et al., 2003). The work of Luthans et al (2010) also identified that both proactive and reactive HRD investments can enhance individuals' capabilities and performance, and it can foster a supportive business environment that welcomes HR investments for sustained competitive advantage. Other authors further highlighted that SHRD practices can lead

to enhanced organisational competitiveness through "positive psychology" (enhance employees' self-efficacy, aspirations, hope etc.) for their human capital (Bardoel et al., 2014; Jiang et al., 2012; Avey et al., 2011; Avey et al., 2010; Youndt & Snell, 2004). Yet, there are other HR practices (e.g. workforce redundancies, organisational downsizing, retrenchment policies etc.) that can negatively affect employees' psychological state (Gunnigle et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2011). Overall, some firms usually fail to respond and adjust to changing business and economic environments, and thus they are more likely to lose their competitiveness and eventually their stakeholders' support (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015; Marchington, 2015).

Following on from the focus of this research, this study builds upon McCracken and Wallace's (2000a) suggestion for the existence of clear HRD strategies, plans and policies. Therefore, the modified SHRD framework suggests the adoption of "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies under both an exploitation (short-term) and exploration (long-term) orientation. That could be achieved under an attained external integration (along with vertical, horizontal, and internal) through which HRD sustainability/resilience could be enhanced. It would allow organisations to maintain a regular fit with the latest developments and changes occurring both within their internal and external environments. Although, someone may argue that such an ability is part of an organisation's reactive response, the modified SHRD framework suggests that there is a stronger interrelation amongst the strategic characteristics without amplifying one at the exclusion of the other, even if the emphasis given to each one may vary over time. Therefore, "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies are expected to enhance SHRD's ability to change on relatively short notice and at low cost, while also developing and applying dynamic strategic moves so to respond to emerging opportunities and incipient trends (Jamrog et al., 2006). Coupled with evidence on the rest of the suggested strategic criteria, SHRD will move closer to a mature state and eventually will be regarded as an equal strategic business partner (internal integration). At the same time though, other business processes and structures should also be considered, along with a range of internal and external factors which can simultaneously be at play (Sabatino, 2015; Schuler & Jackson, 2014).

3.3.4 Strategic Partnerships with key organisational stakeholders (Senior Management, Branch Managers, Employees)

SHRD can interact both vertically (fit between the decisions made relevant to the organisational strategic direction and its external environment) and horizontally (internal alignment between different organisational functional parts) with its stakeholders (Alagaraja, 2013a; Hitt et al., 2010; Gibb, 2008; Lin & Jacobs, 2008; Francis & Keegan, 2006; Vos & Achterkamp, 2006; Colakoglu et al., 2006; Nilson & Fagerstrom, 2006). Such an interaction could enable a knowledge and information exchange process to take place under the objective of better adjusting to new business realities, to enhance organisational competitiveness and to achieve a higher return on investment (ROI) (Beer et al., 2015; Anderson, 2009: 264; Clardy, 2008; Zula & Chermack, 2007; Elias & Scarbrough, 2004; Kim & Cervero, 2007; Gubbins et al., 2006).

Garavan (1991) proposed that through ensuring top management's support, HRD's implementation can be facilitated. He further suggested that HRD can be viewed as a tool for enhancing senior managers' strategic thinking (ibid). To get them involved, HRD executives need to demonstrate the benefits of their plans through clear and well-designed strategies and budgets that can identify all potential barriers and can highlight the financial or non-financial positive outcomes for the organisation (Harrison, 2000; Garavan et al., 1998; Garavan, 1995). A study by Nikandrou et al (2009), on employees' perception of training transfer (44 trainees from different organisations), further outlined that standpoints and behaviours of managers can represent important signals to them and thus to affect both their pre-training and post-training behaviour. Building upon the work of Garavan et al (1998), McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) suggested that top management must be involved in planning and implementing HRD interventions, and thus moving their focus from support to leadership (as their perspectives are considered crucial either in enhancing or limiting HRD's role in organisations). The authors further proposed that HRD executives need to continuously demonstrate their strategic capabilities in order to gain their senior managers' support and trust (ibid). Finally, along with other authors, they suggested

that forming a strategic partnership with senior managers would help HRD executives in persuading them that relevant organisational problems are associated with the lack of support to SHRD (Shanaham et al., 2009; Phillips et al., 2007; Kearns, 2005). In a similar vein, a most recent research identified both organisational and leadership capability as contextual factors affecting the impact of a financial crisis by indicating SHRD as the driving force of organisational change and growth (MacKenzie et al., 2014).

Therefore, following McCracken and Wallace's (2000a, 2000b) proposition, the modified SHRD framework suggests that besides a strategic partnership with senior management, strategic alliances should also be formed with branch managers and employees. Relevant research evidence outlines a positive perception of SHRD's effectiveness due to various stakeholders' involvement (McCracken & McIvor, 2013; Clement, 2005; Hyland et al., 2005; Harrison, 2000). Therefore, LMs' commitment and involvement, as key organisational stakeholders, is prerequisite for SHRD so to identify their business needs and accordingly to help them achieve their bottom-line goals (Townsend & Loudoun, 2015; Brewster et al., 2015; Bos-Nehles et al., 2013; Brewster et al., 2013; Peterson, 2008). LMs can also be viewed as facilitators of learning and knowledge sharing (Alagaraja, 2013b; Wilson, 2012; Khurana et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2007; Nehles et al., 2006; Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005a; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003). Thus, the emergence of an "HR shared services model" (HR as a strategic business partner and centre of excellence) automatically transfers day to day responsibilities for people management to LMs (Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003). Garavan's (1995a; 1995b) studies also highlighted top management's standpoint that T&D should be of LMs' responsibility, and the role of HRD executives to provide advice and consultancy to them. The literature further suggests HR's decentralisation and their transformation to LMs' responsibilities so to allow HR executives to concentrate more on strategic and long-term aspects (Evans, 2015; Gooderham et al., 2015; Wilson, 2012; Ramachandra et al., 2011; CIPD, 2008a; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). Yet, Anderson (2009) argued that such decentralisation can make it difficult for HRD executives to influence a strategic alignment with LMs. Yet, it can equally be argued that by providing the latter

39

with HRD responsibilities there is some kind of alignment. Therefore, HRD executives could offer their ordinal support to LMs while analysing performance problems, identifying training needs and delivering training activities, and while developing coaching and mentoring skills, so to collectively create value for the organisation as part of their mutual relationship (Inyang, 2010; Anderson, 2009; CIPD, 2000a, 2000b; Zula & Chermack, 2007; Boselie et al., 2005).

However, the ability of LMs to deliver HR implementations is disputed within the literature, owing to their work overload, work-related pressures, and a relative lack of expertise in undertaking HR responsibilities (Ryu & Kim, 2015; Watson et al, 2007). Hutchinson and Purcell's (2008) study of front-line managers (FLMs) in the British National Health System (NHS) confirmed such an assertion by indicating that many of them lacked the necessary skills in order to perform their HR responsibilities either due to inadequate experience or not enough T&D to do so. Furthermore, many LMs lack the appropriate knowledge to implement change management processes, a crucial area of SHRD, while HRD executives sometimes lack enough business knowledge to link their outcomes to business performance (Op de Beeck et al., 2015; Bainbridge, 2015; Gatenby et al., 2014). Therefore, the main responsibility of HR executives is to ensure that LMs possess the desired competencies to manage people and teams, and their consensus to perform HR responsibilities especially during times of continuous operational change (Alfes et al., 2013; Boxall & Purcell, 2011; Renwick, 2003; Renwick & MacNeil, 2002).

According to Gibb (2008), employee development could also contribute to broader organisational change and transformation of human relations at work. Thus, it will be of greater value if LMs were more involved in HRD practices (ibid). LMs can be viewed as learning facilitators, as they can use their own initiatives to identify training needs at individual or team level, and thus to become more competent in their interpersonal interrelations with their teams and how they manage their subordinates (Alagaraja, 2013b; Khurana et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2007; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2007; Nehles et al., 2006).) Eraut and Hirsh (2007) also proposed that LMs could (i) promote teamwork and peer-to-peer consultation, (ii) possess conflict resolution skills

so to maintain a positive climate within their groups, (iii) provide constructive feedback within the context of good working relationships, (iv) facilitate the creation of an organisational and individual learning and mutual-support culture, and (v) continuously work together with HR and other managers to receive the support they need. Thus, LMs could play a vital role in various HR activities (e.g. hiring, T&D etc.), as it has always been part of their job contexts (Khurana et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2007; Nehles et al., 2006; Papalexandris & Panayotopoulou, 2005). Despite any difficulties that may be associated with LMs involvement, a strategic partnership with them can assure their active participation throughout any HRD decision-making process by ensuring that all HRD activities are fully aligned at all levels (tactical, operational, strategic) (Ford et al., 2008; Wognum, 2001). In any given case, the modified SHRD framework welcomes the formation of a strategic partnership between HRD executives and LMs (beyond that between HRD executives and senior managers) so for win-win outcomes to emerge. The latter could offer useful insights with regards to HRD practices as being closest to employees, and they can also be benefited from their participation to relevant activities, while the former could focus more on strategic and long-term aspects of their work by devolving HR responsibilities to the line.

Besides HRD's focus on senior management and LMs, HRD executives also need to remain sensitive to their employees' needs, as they can be identified as key organisational stakeholders from almost all stakeholder perspectives (Cording et al, 2014). Employee motivation, commitment, and development are considered essential parts of HR executives' roles to associate employee behaviour with stakeholder results (Greenwood, 2007). From an organisational point of view, employees possess the physical, social, and intellectual capabilities to influence organisational attitudes, behaviours, motives and beliefs (Crane & Matten, 2007). Thus, it is through extensive SHRD activities, clear communication, effective reward systems, and employees' participation that organisations can assume high levels of employee commitment (ibid). Therefore, through a strategic partnership with them, HRD executives and LMs could better understand their needs, and they can better illustrate their common efforts in building mutual trust between the management team and the workforce (ibid). There are many studies indicating that employees' effective management and involvement,

both can be linked to a significant increase in shareholder value (Xirogiannis et al., 2008; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004; Amit & Belcourt, 1999; Becker et al., 1997).

From an employee viewpoint, clear SHRD practices permit better understanding of the career paths and the competencies required for future work tasks (Alagaraja, 2013a). However, a problem of seeing employees as stakeholders derives from the fact that they are called to act for their employers' interests (Stewart, 2008). That eventually marginalises their interests in favour of those of their employer, as they are facing the possibility of being replaced by other employees if they fail to act in such ways (Greenwood & Anderson, 2009). However, working under the same objectives will definitely favour everybody. Thus, relevant literature and research, both encourage "employees' voice" within organisations for multiple benefits like increased organisational performance, climate and commitment (Robson & Mavin, 2014; Dundon et al., 2004), employee satisfaction and industrial citizenship (Bishop & Levine, 1999), high performance work systems (Ivars & Martinez, 2015; Kehoe & Wright, 2013; Boxall & Purcell, 2011), contribution to decision making processes (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014), and overall business success (Bennett, 2010; Danford et al., 2005). Furthermore, there are other studies highlighting that all stakeholders' participation in SHRD's operationalisation can have a positive impact on its overall effectiveness (Robson & Mavin, 2014; May et al., 2003). Therefore, HRD executives need to identify those groups of special interest in the organisation, mapping them against the degree of influence they have, and involve those stakeholders with the greater influence and power in T&D's formulation (Wilson, 2012). They need to continuously identify, analyse and manage the diverse demands of their key stakeholders through developing collaborative client relationships with them as part of their efforts to enhance their image and credibility (Gilley et al., 2002). They also need to be abreast of their stakeholders' interests, and to create and align their strategies with their requirements, as it is through an effective stakeholder management process that strategic outcomes and shareholder value creation can be reached (Hillman & Keim, 2001). They need to maintain effective communication channels as well so to better address future problems (Chan et al., 2006), and to be aware of each stakeholder's interests so to better negotiate with them (Bourne & Walker, 2005). All

that would further allow HRD executives to ensure that both their department, and each of their stakeholders, act to benefit of all so to collectively contribute to the organisation's success (Holtbrugge et al., 2007; Lim et al., 2005).

None of the existing models (neither that of McCracken & Wallace) emphasise on a strategic partnership with employees, and most overlooked their interests. Although Garavan's (2007) SHRD model refers to employees' satisfaction through long term employability, performance, and career advancement, it does not indicate how all that associate with SHRD maturity in organisations. Therefore, the modified SHRD framework, rather than solely relying on top management support and/or leadership, highlights the necessity of formulating strategic partnerships with senior managers, branch managers (as LMs) and the buy-in of employees so to get the utmost from their involvement.

3.3.5 Strategic Partnership with HRM

Aside from these strategic criteria, literature on SHRD maturity further suggests that HRD create synergies with HRM. Garavan (1991), among other authors, proposed that a horizontal integration between HRM and HRD is required so to promote the development of a more strategic approach (Jackson & Schuler, 2003a; 2003b). Hendry (1995) also suggested that HRD alone is not enough to cope with environmental complexity, and thus an integration with HRM should be attained. He further argued for the adoption of a combined set of "hard" and "soft" HR practices, along with the design and development of strategic HRD initiatives (ibid).

However, others criticised and questioned whether this integration can really exist (Harrison, 2000). McCracken and Wallace (2000a) and Guest and Peccei (2001), both argued that instead of this "questionable" integration, it would be much better to promote a strategic partnership between HRD and HRM. The authors proposed that HRD can work in parallel and in synergy with HRM so for HR initiatives to be seen as one and the same, and eventually to have greater impact over the achievement of the corporate strategies and objectives (ibid). Furthermore, a strategic partnership

between HRD and HRM can be proved helpful in enhancing the former's strategic orientation by keeping a balance between its developmental and administrative services (Peterson, 2008). Therefore, HRD interventions can be implemented both within and outside the wider HRM practices. Yet, an existing discourse within the literature also argues for HRD to be regarded and examined as a distinctive concept and not under the HRM umbrella (Steward et al., 2011; Wasti et al., 2008; Ruona & Gibson, 2004). However, with regards to this specific strategic criterion, a synergy between HRM and HRD is suggested as offering an indicator of SHRD maturity because of all the associated benefits coming out from it. Hamlin's (2006) work (on HRD executives' partnerships in two UK public and private sector organisations) has also verified the above assertion by indicating that through a strategic alliance between HRM and HRD better business outcomes can be attained.

Taking all that into consideration, the modified SHRD framework adapts McCracken and Wallace's (2000a; 2000b) proposition by further suggesting that such a strategic partnership can be attained both through a functional and process-based integration. Both types concentrate on the quality and the delivery process of HRD initiatives, and eventually can enhance SHRD maturity.

3.3.6 Extensive Role of HRD Executives

SHRD maturity also calls for HRD executives ("*those being responsible for employees' and organisational development, performance improvement, career progression and succession planning etc.*" – McGuire, 2014: 12) to undertake an extensive role so to drive individual and organisational change and growth. Garavan (1991) proposed that HRD executives (as trainers) need to carry out an innovative and consultative role so to design and deliver the most targeted training programmes for individuals. Yet, such a role mostly focuses on meeting individual needs rather than promoting the organisation's strategic ones. HRD executives need also to be viewed as facilitators of learning ("*offer the appropriate instructional methods and techniques so to facilitate the learning experience of their trainees*" – Werner & DeSimone, 2012: 19) and change agents ("*advise management in the design and implementation of*

change strategies used in transforming organisations, along with helping individuals to change and adopt to new business realities" - ibid) if they want to make a real strategic contribution to their organisations (Monks et al., 2013; Budhwar, 2012). Relevant research evidence highlights the perceived effectiveness of HRD executives' role as change agents, by suggesting that they need to possess a specific set of competencies (e.g. leadership, management acumen, personal attributes etc.) so to successfully fulfil their roles (Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Buchanan & Boddy, 1992). For example, a study among 300 HRD directors in the US outlined HRD leadership as an important indicator of driving change, collaborating with LMs, and achieving corporate goals and objectives (Johansen et al., 1996). To this extent, McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) proposed that HRD executives, along with all other managers involved in HRD implementations, need to be leaders and facilitators of change so to successfully drive and promote individual and organisational change.

In account of all of that, the modified SHRD framework emphasises on HRD executives' extensive role. Thus, it argues for their ability to identify training and learning needs, to develop the most appropriate HRD interventions to address them, and to establish a learning environment that is conductive in sharing and exchanging important information and knowledge. For instance, by undertaking the role of the change agent, they can be viewed as strategic advisors through their constant consultation on HRD issues related to the formulation of business strategy and to performance outcomes as well (Gilley et al., 2002). Then, as consultants, they accept a wide range of responsibilities each of which aims to maximise the effectiveness of their interventions, to improve communication, to enhance client relationships and to support stakeholders' expectations, to improve individual and business performance, and to enhance organisational culture (ibid). HRD executives are also expected to demonstrate up-to-date skills and competencies so to better perform their undertaken roles/duties. In addition, they are required to always be proactive in nature and thus to set rather than follow trends. The outcome of espousing such an extensive role, and beyond that proposed by McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b), will allow HRD executives to strategically position themselves and their respective departments within

organisations, especially within today's complex and constantly changing business and economic environments.

3.3.7 Strategic ability to shape and influence business culture and climate

French et al (2015: 226) defines organisational culture as "*the system of shared values and beliefs that develops within an organisation and guides the behaviour of its members*". Organisational culture could play an important role with regards to the way in which training interventions would be delivered and evaluated, as it reflects employees' attitudes and experiences, the working environment, as well as the individual and organisational capabilities, all of which could be viewed as determinants of a firm's competitive advantage (Gillon, 2011). At the same time, the extent to which the organisational members are aware of their organisation's cultural values could offer an indication of how strong and clear these are across people and organisational departments.

Garavan (1991) argued that HRD should recognise corporate culture, by further proposing that a match between it and business strategy should be attained. The author further suggested that organisational culture can be viewed as an important variable of how HRD could be implemented (ibid). In addition, many authors have linked organisational culture with organisational success and employee satisfaction by highlighting that, within a collectivist culture ("*organisational objectives above the individual ones*" - McShane & Von Glinow, 2009: pp.466-467), organisations are more likely to promote a learning environment and to develop a knowledge-exchange business mentality (Hong & Baruch, 2011; Valikangas, 2010; Sun, 2008; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2008; Carbery & Garavan, 2005). However, McCracken (1998) argued that business culture is considered a complex concept that sometimes it can create barriers to individual and organisational learning due to concerns in relation to key decisions on who is going to be trained etc. Beyond that, McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) later proposed that HRD practices need to correspond to corporate strategy by matching the organisational culture with business strategy so to make a real

contribution. To this extent, the authors suggested that HRD should be able to influence corporate culture in such a way so to successfully promote its developmental activities (ibid).

In todays' competitive business landscapes, organisational effectiveness goes hand in hand with the construction of an adaptive culture ("*evolution of organisational culture due to consistent environmental change*" – French et al., 2015: 390), within which employees and organisations can be both flexible and receptive to change. The work of Jones et al (2005) highlighted the importance of an adaptive and flexible organisational culture, especially when it comes to business amalgamations. Their findings outlined that a clear and well-communicated business culture can facilitate the change process, while it could also eliminate resistance to change within both the acquired and the leading organisations (ibid). It was also stressed that through an adaptive and flexible business culture, organisations can continuously monitor on-going changes within their internal and external environments, and accordingly to adjust to new situations not only for serving their stakeholders' interests, but also for assuring their survival and success (Griswold, 2008).

However, in many cases, organisations and their members are unaware of their culture's significance, and thus makes it difficult to manage and change it. Therefore, Tseng & McLean (2008) argued that it is the responsibility of HRD executives, and of all other managers with HR responsibilities, to clearly circulate the organisational cultural values so to enhance their organisational members' cultural awareness and to facilitate a process of cultural change when required. Yet, such efforts presuppose an in depth understanding of the existing corporate and management cultural values so to gain the necessary insights for effectively filling any "cultural lags" (Stevens, 2013; Bates, 2003). Thus, by enhancing McCracken and Wallace's (2000a) proposition of HRD's ability to influence corporate culture by matching organisational culture with corporate strategy, the modified SHRD framework suggests that it should hold the strategic ability to shape and influence both (business strategy and organisational culture) beyond simply recognising and corresponding to them.

Along with business culture, Zhang and Liu (2010: 190) argued that the organisational climate ("*employees' shared perceptions or experiences of the policies, practices, and procedures of their workplace*") also needs to be considered. Walker (2011) further argued that it alludes to the predominating atmosphere which exists inside a business and affects its operations, workforce etc. Furthermore, within every organisational climate, the HRD climate also exists ("*employees' perceptions of the availability and effectiveness of the T&D opportunities within the organisation*" – Srimannarayana, 2007: 2) and it can contribute to the organisations' and their workforce's well-being and self-renewal through a wide range of learning and developmental opportunities. Research evidence highlights that both the organisational culture and climate can impact on HRD by arguing that the more positive the perception of them is, the higher the employees' job satisfaction, and the lower the job stress and turnover would be (Zhang & Liu, 2010). Furthermore, during business and economic uncertainty and complexity, both can help individuals and organisations to effectively respond to the demanding nature of their business and economic environments (Hofstede & Minkov, 2010). It is also argued that organisations following a long-term orientation, and being under a clearly defined culture and a positive perceived business climate, tend to recover more easily from external shocks (Das, 2012).

Taking that into account, the modified SHRD framework argues for HRD's ability to shape and influence both the organisational culture and climate. To do so, its executives need to undertake an extensive role through which they could be identified as change-agents and consultants and thus to work towards the development of a supportive culture and business climate that promotes organisational competitiveness and success through continuous learning and developmental opportunities. Once more, the interrelation of the proposed strategic characteristics can be evidenced so to collectively contribute to SHRD maturity.

3.3.8 Emphasis on Strategic HRD Evaluation

Garavan (1991) called for HRD's attention to evaluation; yet, his suggestion mainly focused on a reactive evaluation (assessing employees' reaction to the training

programme) rather than looking for strategic outcomes. The literature suggests that HRD's evaluation can be viewed as the key process in enhancing its credibility, and as the mechanism for indicating the path of transforming training into HRD and accordingly to SHRD within organisations (Rao, 2014; Walton & Valentin, 2014; Gold et al., 2013; Griggs et al., 2012; Harrison, 2010; Mankin, 2009; Phillips, 2009; 2008). In addition, following one of the most cited evaluation frameworks, namely that of Kirkpatrick, HRD evaluation needs to aim to its highest levels, namely level three (behavioural change) and level four (organisational performance) (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Yet, there are others suggesting that beyond these four evaluation levels (reaction, learning, behaviour, results-organisational performance), two more levels could be added, namely the return on investment (ROI) and HRD's social contribution. The former aims to check whether HRD investments have paid-off, and thus to determine their actual benefits for the organisation, while the latter focuses on HRD's societal contribution (Giangreco, 2010; Wang & Wilcox, 2006; Phillips & Phillips, 2005).

Following Garavan's (1991) work, McCracken and Wallace (2000a; 2000b) further suggested a process for evaluating cost-effectiveness within their SHRD model. The authors argued that through a cost-effectiveness HRD evaluation, organisations can assess its long-term and intangible benefits (e.g. cultural and organisational change) rather than solely focusing on short-term financial results (ibid). To this extent, both financial and non-financial benefits must be considered; yet, with the latter to be viewed as more important through which the former can also be achieved (Schermuly et al., 2012). However, despite heavy investments in HRD, organisations frequently fail to adequately evaluate the success of their training interventions (Hale, 2003; Tennant et al., 2002), or they are merely focusing on trainees' reaction to the programmes being offered (Nickols, 2005). In addition, existing SHRD models either lack the appropriate feedback and evaluation mechanism to measure HRD's effectiveness or they just focus on trainees' reaction to a learning experience. Their evaluation suggestions mainly concentrate either on short-term financial results or on cost-effectiveness rather than assessing long-term strategic outcomes such as

behavioural change and knowledge transfer to the job context, ROI and business performance.

The modified SHRD framework places emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation should take place instead by focusing more on long-term results (e.g. behavioural and organisational change, Training's ROI, societal outcomes) as an additional indicator of SHRD maturity. Thus, it should move beyond cost-effective evaluation (short-term perspective) and to look for more long-term oriented results. Furthermore, the evaluation process should aim to assess individual and organisational change and growth, while also to ensure that the acquired knowledge has been transferred to job contexts. Overall, for a strategic-oriented HRD evaluation to take place.

3.4 Indicators of SHRD Maturity

The afore-stated strategic criteria provide a way into exploring perspectives on the maturity of SHRD in organisations. They are equally weighted and interrelated to each other. As McCracken and Wallace (2000a: 432) argued: "*all characteristics are important in their own right, but they are also interrelated. If one or more is absent or weak, then this could significantly undermine the development of SHRD, because the links with other characteristics would also be weakened*". Building upon Lee's (1996) idea of creating a scale of SHRD maturity, the indicators of SHRD maturity are expected to offer a better explanation/evaluation of the concept by suggesting key elements for each one of the proposed strategic criteria of the modified SHRD framework, and for each respective state. Therefore, we can identify two potential states of SHRD maturity, namely the mature and immature state. Overall, HRD's credibility is expected to be enhanced by presenting evidence of all strategic criteria, along with being able to help both the organisation and its stakeholders to address their business and performance needs, and their respective goals and objectives (Jo et al., 2009; Gilley et al., 2002).

Figure 3.2: Indicators of SHRD Maturity

Strategic Criteria	Indicators of SHRD Maturity		
	Immature		**Mature**
Shape Organisational Missions & Goals	• Supportive HRD function • Passive role of HR Executives within the BoD • Top-down directed organisational goals (rather than mutually formulated)		• Proactive & long-term oriented • HRD's vital role in business planning (set up business goals) • Active role of HR Executives within the BoD • Constant consultation of HR executives in regard to future business directions • HRD as a contributor to business objectives
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	• Reactive approach to environmental change • Lack of implementing scanning techniques • Exclusion of various organisational members in relevant activities (e.g. employees) • Suspension of TNA and training activities		• Environmental scanning tools (e.g. PESTLE, SWOT, HR Metrics, Employees surveys etc.) • Involvement of all organisational members • TNA and investments on T&D as a tool of meeting future needs, for increasing creativity, and for facilitating individual and organisational change
"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies	• Responsive plans to environmental pressures (following trends rather than setting them) • Supporting business objectives with a short-term perspective • Lack of support from senior management (subsequent low commitment from lower levels as well)		• Proactive HRD plans and strategies (complemented by strategic business plans) • Ongoing analysis of both the internal and external environments • HRD's strategic alignment with business objectives under a long-term orientation
Strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders	• Lack of strategically partnering with key organisational stakeholders beyond senior management • Lack of LMs involvement in HR activities • Exclusion of employees (lack of employees' voice)		• Formation of strategic partnerships with LMs and employees (besides that with Senior management) • HR responsibilities' devolvement to LMs • Employees consultation on HR matters

Strategic Criteria	Indicators of SHRD Maturity		
	Immature		**Mature**
Strategic partnership with HRM	• Divergence on their strategic objectives		• Work in parallel (distinctive services) and complementary with the HRM practices • Convergence of their strategic objectives (individual & organisational change and growth)
Extensive role of HRD executives	• Supportive/passive role of HRD executives • Lack of the necessary skills to effectively perform their duties		• Proactive role of HRD executives (e.g. change agents & consultants, learning facilitators etc.) • Up-to-dated skills
Strategic ability to shape and influence the corporate culture and climate	• Following changes within the corporate culture rather than directing them • Lack of a supportive learning environment within the organisation • Lack of strategic management plans • Unable to clearly circulate the cultural values of the organisation • Jeopardize a cultural transition owing to ineffective communication		• Foster the creation of a learning culture and of a supportive business climate • Formulation of a change-oriented culture as a defense mechanism to the constantly changing business & economic environments • Circulate the organisation's cultural values across all departments and organisational members • Allow for a smooth cultural transition to take place through effective communication
Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation	• Assess trainees reaction to a training offering • Lack of transferring knowledge to the job context • Incapable of promoting individual and organisational change		• Move beyond cost effective evaluation (short-term perspective) and look for long-term oriented results • Assess individual and organisational change and growth • Ensure knowledge transfer to job contexts

The respective indicators were initially developed before conducting the interviews, and they were updated throughout and after completion of the fieldwork. Based on interviewees' responses, a decision was taken over the strength of the evidence provided for each respective strategic criterion. Therefore, strong evidence of the right-sided indicators indicate a mature, in SHRD terms, organisation, while the opposite occurs when the left-sided indicators are mostly witnessed. For instance, with regards to the "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies, a mature state could mostly be evidenced through proactive HRD plans. Such practices can help organisations to reduce operational risk, and to increase their sensitivity against on-going change and economic uncertainty. By employing several scanning techniques (e.g. PESTLE & SWOT analysis, HR metrics, employee surveys etc.), organisations can constantly analyse their internal and external environmental contexts so to maintain a regular fit with the latest developments and changes occurring within both. Furthermore, a mature organisation would also be able to change its strategies and practices on a relatively short notice and at low cost, while also to develop and apply dynamic strategic moves so to respond to emerging opportunities and incipient trends. It is also expected that a strategic alignment between HRD and corporate objectives exists under a long-term perspective (beyond their short-term orientation). Thus, for all that to happen, senior management's support is considered crucial. Having all these elements secured, a classification closer to the "mature" state could be attained. However, having witnessed the left-sided points, research findings tend to move towards an immature state. In such a case, limited-to-none scanning activities are undertaken, and HRD-business plans are mainly short-term oriented. The support of senior managers is also lacked.

It is of equal importance the creation of strategic partnerships between the HRD executives and the LMs (branch managers) and the employees. In a mature case, HR responsibilities are devolved to the line, while employees are consulted in relevant HR concerns. On the other hand, limited or total lack of strategically partnering with the suggested key stakeholders could offer an indication of an immature organisation in relation to the respective strategic criterion. Finally, emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation is required as a prerequisite of SHRD maturity. Mature organisations are

expected to focus more on long-term strategic outcomes such as behavioural change and knowledge transfer to the job context, ROI, business performance and societal outcomes. Thus, individual and organisational change are at the forefront, rather than solely assessing employees' reaction towards training (immature). In a similar vein, mature organisations are expected to go beyond cost-effective evaluation (short-term orientation) by paying greater attention to those business results which can assure their long-term viability. On the other hand, immature organisations mostly concern for their survival without planning for their business upturn and long-term prosperity. Overall, based on the respective perceptions of the interviewed stakeholders on all strategic characteristics of the modified SHRD framework (through a pre and post-crisis assessment), the researcher managed to assess and evaluate SHRD maturity within his case study organisations and thus to highlight change and constraints of SHRD at the time of an economic crisis.

However, besides the extent to which these strategic characteristics are present or not within organisations, there are various factors that can simultaneously be at play. Therefore, the modified SHRD framework adopts an open-system approach so to allow consideration of all micro and macro-environmental forces that can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity in organisations.

3.5 Factors shaping, constraining of facilitating SHRD Maturity

A clear understanding of all these pressures will allow organisations to effectively address them through the design and delivery of the most appropriate HRD strategies, plans and policies either through a short-term or a long-term business perspective. Internal factors can affect organisational efficiency with redundancies to be promoted in order to address them. External pressures can be associated with high unemployment rates and drop in demand, and eventually can impact upon organisational and market competitiveness (Farnham, 2010; Ozutku & Ozturkler, 2009; Alas et al., 2008; Eraut & Hirsh, 2007).

Most of the existing SHRD models consider these contextual forces. For example, Garavan (1991) and McCracken and Wallace (2000a, 2000b) recognised the importance of diagnosing those factors which can simultaneously constrain or facilitate SHRD's adoption and maturity in organisations. The former's SHRD model identified eight contextual factors that can affect SHRD (e.g. external environment, organisational culture, organisational stakeholders, technology, business structure-size and power, and on-going change). In a similar vein, the latter's SHRD model further outlined SHRD's ability in recognising the on-going organisational and environmental changes as crucial factors related to organisational growth and success. However, these factors may vary considerably across countries and business sectors. That makes it even more difficult for those organisations operating globally to effectively manage and develop their human capital. Thus, the modified SHRD framework suggests the consideration of several micro and macro-environmental factors which can impact upon the strategic characteristics featuring SHRD maturity. In addition, stakeholders' perceptions of the understanding and operationalisation of SHRD may differentiate based on the impact of these factors, and thus they should be carefully considered.

3.5.1 Organisational Culture and Business Climate

A clearly defined organisational culture can be the key of having an organisation's vision and mission communicated clearly by providing employees with directions towards achieving individual and business goals (Susaeta et al., 2013; MacKenzie et al., 2012; Tharp, 2009; McShane & Von Glinow, 2009; Sun, 2008). It can also offer a sense of identity and consistency amongst the organisational members and business functions, while it can strengthen their communication and problem solving capacities, their commitment and satisfaction to eventually foster organisational effectiveness, competitiveness and efficiency (Sadler-Smith, 2015).

Evidence within the literature further highlights training's association with organisational culture by suggesting that a strong correlation between them can offer greater support to employees' daily duties (Shahzad et al., 2012; Reena & Jayan, 2012). Past research also outlined that a "people-organisation" fit can enhance

employees' job satisfaction and commitment (Norton, 2005; Silverthorne, 2004). Therefore, business effectiveness correlates with the construction of an adaptive and supportive organisational culture under which employees are more likely to understand and embrace the corporate values and beliefs, and thus to help organisations to become more flexible and receptive to on-going change (Griswold, 2008). French et al (2015) further argued that organisations with an adaptive culture continuously monitor changes within their business environments so to adjust to new conditions, not only for serving their stakeholders' interests, but also for assuring their survival and success. For those organisations operating globally, one of their main concern is to enhance their workforce's intercultural skills so to better comprehend the diverse cultural contexts and thus to achieve a stronger cultural fit (Stevens, 2013; Pless & Maak, 2004). Especially during business amalgamations, a clear understanding of the cultural differences amongst the merging organisations could result to a cultural synergy through which a stronger set of cultural values and beliefs could emerge, by taking the positive elements from each while diminishing their respective negative ones (Du Plessis & Beaver, 2008).

Besides organisational culture, business climate can also play an important role throughout the design and implementation process of any HR initiative. Organisational climate alludes to the predominating atmosphere which exists inside an organisation and impacts upon its employees (Burton et al., 2004). Research evidence suggests that business climate generally reflects employees' creativity, motivation and innovative behaviour (Janssen, 2000; Ekvall, 1996); job satisfaction (Seibert et al., 2004); job performance (Wright & Boswell, 2002), and productivity (Patterson et al., 2004). Thus, it can enhance collective identity and group commitment which can enhance organisational effectiveness (Potosky, 2010). Typical examples examining the way in which organisational climate associates with employees and business performance can be found in studies conducted by Bowen and Schneider (2014) and Hong et al. (2013), both outlining a strong relation between customer satisfaction and service climate ("*Service climate captures employees' perceptions of an organisation's emphasis on service quality*" − Bowen & Schneider, 2014: 238). Smith et al. (2005) further demonstrated the relationship between a "risk-taking" climate and knowledge

creation, while Pirola-Merlo and Mann (2004) argued that there is a strong correlation between business creativity and an "innovation" climate.

Organisational climate and organisational HR tactics (e.g. training, selection, reward systems, appraisals) can promote a "service-oriented" strategy which in turn can significantly affect customer satisfaction (Dietz et al, 2004). The more positive the perception of the organisational climate is, the higher employee job satisfaction and service quality would be, and the lower turnover and work stress as well (Zhang & Liu, 2010; Alavi & Jahandari, 2005). Other studies further highlighted that enhanced business performance requires a strong fit between the organisational climate and corporate strategy (Bowen & Ostroff, 2004; Gelade & Ivery, 2003). However, different organisations, with diverse management and HR practices, will present different climate constructs based upon their employees' inter-perceptions of their own organisation (Neal et al., 2005). For instance, an engaged workforce may be more customer-oriented and efficient, impacting on levels of absenteeism and turnover (Katou, 2013; Chalofsky, 2010; Xanthopoulou et al., 2009; Macey & Schneider, 2008; Saks, 2006). Taking all that into consideration, these findings can strongly associate with the business focus shift being noticed within the case study banking organisations (enhancement of their front-line operations). Therefore, the importance of the organisational culture and climate can be noticed. That is why the modified SHRD framework argues that the strategic ability of HRD to shape and influence business culture and climate could offer an indication of SHRD maturity.

HR/HRD executives, and all managers with HR responsibilities, need to support the development of a collaborative and supportive culture within which greater HRD interventions will be encouraged (Tseng & McLean, 2008). Furthermore, it is part of their job responsibilities to help their organisations in establishing and maintaining a positive business climate, through developing strategies that encourage teamwork, and enhance their workforce's commitment and engagement (Malik, 2013). In response to on-going change, organisations also need to develop new strategies with the aim to re-shape and strengthen their organisational culture so to eventually grasp all the benefits associated with it (Farnham, 2010; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2008).

3.5.2 Economic environment

A government's macro-economic policies (e.g. fiscal, monetary etc.), can impact on global and local economies and businesses (Archibugi et al., 2013; Campbell & Craig, 2012). Austerity can further affect a market's demand and supply chain, and eventually to influence workforce demand within the "job market" (Farnham, 2010). In contrast, under a "healthy" and stable economy, firms tend to recruit more, as the demand for their offerings also increases; thereupon, unemployment rates usually drop, the "war of talent" intensifies, and training initiatives are in demand (ibid).

Hausknecht et al (2009) highlighted the importance of retaining and training employees, especially during dynamic periods of change, as such strategies can increase employee satisfaction, engagement, and commitment. However, a common practice during a downturn is to trim rewards and all related benefits so to avoid lay-offs or to implement workforce redundancies either through early retirement schemes or by simply firing employees (ibid). However, an organisation's ability to successfully attract, retain, train and develop its workforce, when labour demand and supply fluctuates, associates with increased competitiveness (Lockwood, 2006). It can also enhance other factors (e.g. company's reputation, career opportunities, rewards, job security etc.), which can simultaneously affect employees' positive perceptions with regards to their employment status (ibid).

Economic uncertainty and complexity and globalisation made the labour market even more unstructured and unpredictable than it was before (De Haan & Rogaly, 2015; Timmermans & Boschma, 2014). Labour's global mobility also forced organisations to revisit their HR strategies and policies so to meet the new market requirements (ibid). To this extent, the modified SHRD framework suggests that environmental scanning should be an on-going process through the inclusion of various organisational members, beyond HRD executives and senior management. That would allow for more voices to be heard, and thus to help organisations to better track changes within their supply and demand of human capital, and accordingly to more effectively address them. Labour market conditions and economic trends also need to be constantly

observed so to maintain focus on the end goal of determining present and rising patterns (e.g. workforce's changing nature), and eventually for revisions to take place. Alike, the modified SHRD framework calls for "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies to exist so to enhance SHRD's sustainability (through an external integration) and thus making it able to change on relatively short notice and at low cost, while also applying proactive initiatives so to respond to emerging opportunities and incipient trends.

3.5.3 Labour Unions

Labour unions can also affect HR-related concerns within organisations. Their influential role can be viewed as a stabilising force for most national economies, as their bargaining power can result in multiple benefits for the workforce (Burrell et al., 2014; Williams, 2012; Colakoglou et al., 2006). As an employee recognised association, a labour union aims to enhance their collective voice within organisations with regards to their employment terms and conditions, and to further ensure their well-being (Hancke, 2013; Rosman et al., 2013; NLRB, 2012). However, owing to GEC, unions had to enormously restructure their bargaining agendas, as labour markets and employment legislative frameworks have been both highly altered (Durrenberger & Reichart, 2010; Thompson & McHugh, 2009). Precisely for the Greek case, past research highlights trade unions' limited focus on HRM/HRD concerns, both for the period before and after the crisis (Nikandrou et al., 2008; Apospori et al., 2005).

In most cases, unions found it difficult to get employees on board, while labour market's current state allowed employers to be opportunistic by taking immediate actions (e.g. pay cuts, workforce redundancies etc.) without advising them (Roche et al., 2011). Unionists claimed that HR's new concern is moving towards meeting firm's needs instead of developing partnerships with them to successfully create and promote a shared vision for employee well-being (ibid). The authors' work, during the Irish recession, indicated that only 24% of the investigated firms considered the participation and contribution of unions in a fairly positive way, and eventually were

effectively engaged with them in developing their HR strategies. Therefore, Teague and Roche (2013) proposed that there should be a constructive collaboration between organisations and trade unions so to handle future retrenchments collectively and effectively and in advance of any type of crises.

In the Greek case, unions used to hold a powerful influence that could impact upon employees and organisations (Matsaganis, 2012). Relevant research highlighted that even when the Greek economy flourished, unions tended to be very short-term oriented rather than electing qualified representatives and increasing their bargaining power (Katsoridas & Lampousaki, 2013; Williams, 2012; Wunnava, 2004). Eventually, right after the crisis, their bargaining power decreased, along with their membership status (ibid). Their main concern was to ensure national agreements rather than focusing on unilateral adjustments (Rudig & Karyotis, 2014). Therefore, Hodson and Sullivan (2008) proposed that unions should recruit new members so to keep up with the rapidly changing industrial and occupational environments. A proposition which cannot be evidenced within most Greek sectors as people started to lose faith on trade unions' importance and power to meet their agendas due to their high politicalised nature (Yannakourou & Tsimpoukis, 2014; Katsoridas & Lampousaki, 2013).

However, trade unions' bargaining power may vary amongst countries, depending on the political intervention within them (Williams, 2012). Thus, the author stated that: "*continuing union contributions to political campaigns, and union members' diligent voter-turnout efforts kept unions' political power from ebbing as much as their membership*" (p.10). Such proposition can clearly illustrate the Greek case through fewer union memberships, high political intervention from the state, and clear political preference to specific political parties on behalf of many trade unions representatives (Matsaganis, 2012). All that can also be explained through the characteristics associated with the "Mediterranean Model of Economy" (MME) (Papadopoulos, 2016 - figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3 Types of Capitalism

Labour market regulations and varieties of capitalism

	LMEs	CMEs	MEs
Labour market characteristics	Weak employment protection Secondary and external markets	Intermediate level of employment protection, mobility facilitated by high levels of generic qualifications/skills Occupational markets	Strong employment protection Internal markets, labour market segmentation
Preferred instruments of employment adjustment	External flexibility: redundancies, wage flexibility	Internal flexibility: working time, functional flexibility	Dual flexibility: protection for the core labour force and precarity
Main response to employment crisis	Accentuation of misadjustments	Adaptation to the crisis	Reinforcement of inequalities

MMEs are characterised by extensive state intervention, a relative weakness of its educational and training systems, and with various difficulties in implementing strategic approaches for high valued outcomes (Lallement, 2011). Therefore, Greece's main response to the economic crisis was the reinforcement of social inequalities amongst its citizens through an increased youth unemployment rate (48.6%), decreased wage levels, the closure of many businesses, and the continuous implementation of cost reduction policies from most employers (Papadopoulos, 2016, 2014; Economou et al., 2013). Trade unions' weakening also limited their ability to offer strong employment protection to the workforce. Such disparity can also be a significantly hazardous factor to sustained economic growth, as unequal societies are more likely to face serious debt crises (Berg & Ostry, 2011).

Taking all that into consideration, HR departments need to undertake greater responsibility in developing rational HR procedures that focus on promoting successful management-workforce relations, and thus to create the necessary conditions for maintaining a harmonious working environment. To do so, HR must recognise trade unions as an organisational stakeholder who fights for a firm's viability along with ensuring its members' well-being. Therefore, a strategic partnership with them would be proved beneficial so for win-win outcomes to emerge. To this extent,

it would be good to have trade union representatives on board (interviews with them) so to capture their perspectives and eventually to offer a more holistic view of the phenomenon under examination. A limitation which future research could consider.

3.5.4 Technology

Technological advancements can also play an important role in how HR/HRD initiatives are designed and implemented. Many organisations were forced to develop new and innovative products/services, or to improve their existing ones, to maintain their market segments and competitiveness. New forms of technology-based systems highly affected the way in which people are managed at work (Farnham, 2010). Sophisticated HR information systems were developed in an attempt to diminish time losses occurring throughout most HR operational activities (e.g. data keeping, shift scheduling etc.). Such technologically-friendly systems enabled HR executives to focus more on strategic issues and thus to redefine many aspects of their organisational employment practices (ibid). That also resulted in the implementation of new hiring and training processes, while reward and jobs contexts were redesigned, and organisational structures were re-shaped so to meet these new business requirements (DeFillippi, 2002).

Relevant studies also outlined that technological HR-related innovations (e.g. e-HRM) can assist firms in becoming more productive and quality-focused by reducing the associated costs within their HR agendas (Marler & Fisher, 2013; Marler & Patty, 2013; Schalk et al., 2013). Others further suggest that e-learning can be advantageous as it can offer greater flexibility, customisation and trainee control (Johnson et al., 2008; Salas et al., 2005). In addition, technologically-related medical and health advancements are now expanding life expectancies and thus the extent to which individuals will remain active in the workforce (Mishra & Akman, 2010). All that can pose a new challenge for HR departments with regards to their approach of dealing with an ageing workforce (different training needs etc.). However, although technological advancements have mainly been positive, they can also lead to various organisational problems (e.g. anxiety, tension, resentment, alienation etc.) (Ensher et

al., 2002). Others further suggest that web-based training tends to isolate employees, to reduce their communication and interaction skills, and to minimise their overall satisfaction due to non-timely feedback (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Piccoli et al., 2001). There are others further suggesting that e-HRM is mainly driven by cost reduction requirements rather than a strategic direction (Ruta, 2005; Ruel et al., 2004; Stanton & Coovert, 2004; MacPherson et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2003; Coppola & Myre, 2002).

Especially under constantly changing business and economic environments, an innovative organisational culture can be proved beneficial for the organisation's upturn (Boothby et al., 2010). It has been argued that organisations that adopt technological innovations, and concurrently invest in their employees' development, are more likely to achieve gains in productivity and thus to boost their organisational efficiency and growth (ibid). Milic (2013) identified two types of innovation, namely the incremental and the radical. The former is the one espoused during an economic crisis as it is easier for it to be executed right after retrenchment strategies; yet, without guaranteeing organisational success and growth (ibid). On the other hand, radical innovations call for radical changes. Even though there is a high degree of uncertainty within their adoption and implementation, they can direct to new ways of conducting business using these technological advances (ibid). Without neglecting organisations' existing state, radical innovations can help them grow and develop so to become more competitive within their markets. In any case, a clear and continuous communication and information sharing process is required, while HRD initiatives need to focus on enhancing employees' change management skills and overall efficiency rather than simply offering a training intervention (Ensher et al., 2002). The way in which technology will influence HRD also depends on the way in which organisations view such advancements and how they are trying to incorporate them within their business practices. Taking all that into consideration, the modified SHRD framework proposes specific strategic components (e.g. environmental scanning, "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies, HRD's strategic ability to influence business culture and climate etc.) which can be used to address the impact of

technology (and of other factors), and eventually to offer a clearer indication of SHRD maturity within organisations.

3.5.5 Globalisation

Globalisation has also affected business and HR-related practices within organisations, and it is expected to remain a real HR challenge in the years to come (Williams et al., 2013; Vare, 2012). Organisations which were previously facing only local or national competition are now facing global antagonism (Williams, 2014). Therefore, many organisations have adopted a growth strategy so to grasp the benefits of globalisation (e.g. larger employment pool, low-cost workforce, local and globalised service delivery etc.) through expanding to foreign markets (like the case study banking organisations).

From an HRD perspective, globalisation allowed organisations to further develop their intellectual capital, capabilities and behaviours, and urged the speed at which employees had to acquire new skills so to keep pace with new challenging tasks (Burrell et al., 2014). Yet, there are others who believe that globalisation and economic crisis are interrelated notions by proposing that the latter came out as an outcome of the former (OECD, 2013; Lane, 2013). In any case, HR departments had to adjust their strategies in such a way so to meet the associated challenges of both concepts. Therefore, HR executives had to utilise the most appropriate HR toolkits in order to weather the current downturn and to eventually drive organisational change, growth and success (Vance, 2010). Especially with today's business and economic uncertainty and complexity, organisations should proceed with sound investment decisions in HR, and/or HRD initiatives if they aim to significant improvements both with regards to their organisational and business market value (ibid).

However, further HRD investments are not just about increasing the skills of the workforce. A well-trained and better qualified employee would be able to provide a better service which can directly result in happier customers (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Bowles, 2011). Especially for banking organisations (as a service-oriented

sector), that would be of great value. Further development of employees is also essential due to the increased competition which calls for a high-calibre workforce to cope with uncertainty through the promotion of work innovation, higher customer satisfaction and market share (Felstead et al., 2012a; IoD, 2008). Thus, HR executives need to take up crucial leadership roles and responsibilities in order to demonstrate that workplace T&D can support the accomplishment of their business objectives, and that it can yield a high ROI for their organisations in the long term (MacKenzie et al., 2014). In the words of Bowles (2011), organisations that do not invest in their employees' development are not investing in the future of their business, and in their firm's ability to meet their stakeholders' needs.

Consistent with the notion of SHRD maturity, organisations need to implement "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies and practices so to effectively respond to business uncertainty and complexity. That would allow them to address any threats and opportunities and eventually to increase their preparedness towards the side-effects of an unexpected event.

3.5.6 Political and Legal Context

Within the political and legal contexts, there are different laws established by governments which have had, and will keep on having, an impact on labour relations (Bamber et al., 2016; Rees & Smith, 2014). Employment-related legislation looks at various parts of employability (e.g. human rights, job value, pay value and so forth), and thus requires businesses to meet certain commitments (e.g. providing their employees with well-being and safety options, high occupation and working principles, honest employment terms etc.) (Thompson & McHugh, 2009).

However, owing to constantly changing business and economic conditions, employment relations have been highly altered (ibid). Of greater importance within the political sphere is also the inexorably dynamic government involvement within the labour markets (Farnham, 2010). A typical example indicating governments' political ideologies and their impact on organisations' HR can be found in a study by Hauss

and Haussman (2013) within which the state's political power over the development of organisational HR is highlighted through the enactment and implementation of various rules and regulations. Overall, changes (minor or major) within the political and legal contexts can affect a business' viability and should not be overlooked. The political instability within the Greek territory (due to the economic crisis) can lead to detrimental outcomes both for the economy and the businesses and the employment relations (Sklias & Maris, 2013; Koukiadaki & Kretsos, 2012).

As to all that, HR executives need to be fully aware of the relative legislation framework so to develop and deliver HR practices which can meet institutional legitimacy. That can be achieved through undertaking an extensive role, through continuous environmental scanning etc. as suggested within the modified SHRD framework.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined and discussed the SHRD concept, and highlighted its significance, by critically evaluating existing SHRD models and relevant literature on SHRD maturity. That enabled the researcher to address the research gaps within the models' strategic propositions, and eventually to propose a modified framework of exploring SHRD maturity. Furthermore, in regard to constantly changing business and economic environments, a range of influential factors have also been considered and discussed. With that taken into account, there is an imperative need of new empirical studies to be undertaken by focusing on SHRD maturity at a time of an economic crisis. Therefore, the modified SHRD framework aims at addressing these concerns through its proposed set of strategic characteristics, and by testing them within the broader context of the economic crisis.

The following chapter will discuss the design, methodology and philosophy under which this research was undertaken. Reference will also be made on the fieldwork study before moving on to discuss the research findings in later chapters.

CHAPTER 4 – Research Design, Methodology and Philosophy

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research methodologies employed for collecting and validating research data drawn from two case studies. The chapter will open with the rationale of the chosen research strategy and design for carrying out this empirical study. Then, it will discuss its philosophical stance, by highlighting the dominant paradigms along with offering the researcher's philosophical stance. Furthermore, the strengths of the selected data collection methods will be discussed, and reference will also be made to those techniques applied so to eliminate any drawbacks. Having these explained, the researcher would bring all research components together so to enhance his thesis' reliability, validity, credibility, transferability and authenticity.

4.2 Research Strategy and Design

A research methodology is concerned with the ways in which a researcher gathers his/her data so to address his/her research questions and to meet his/her research objectives. With regards to the research questions and objectives of this study, a case study research strategy (two case studies) allowed the researcher to explore SHRD maturity in depth and over time within the target organisations. With regards to the latter, in the words of Kumar (2014), a retrospective study design can be employed when a researcher aims to "*examine a phenomenon, problem and/or situation that has happened in the past*" (p.139). Elliot (2005: 62) also argued that a retrospective collection can be viewed as: "*an established method for obtaining basic information about key events*". The author further suggested that retrospective methods focus upon recording information of past events by asking research participants to recall previous-dated events/situations (ibid).

For this specific research, stakeholders' perceptions of SHRD have been captured for both time periods (pre & post-crisis). Therefore, interview participants had to recall what happened in the past with regards to each strategic criterion (SHRD Maturity),

and in relation to the factors that have either hindered or facilitated SHRD within their organisations. Interviewees were also asked to offer their viewpoints on the current state of all key areas examined (post-crisis). Thus, by following a before-and-after research investigation design, the researcher managed to capture and evaluate changing perceptions of SHRD's understanding, operationalisation and maturity by comparing research data through a pre and post-crisis assessment. In addition, this further allowed him to observe a correlation and/or causality between SHRD maturity, stakeholders' perceptions, and of the factors affecting (or not) both (Ang, 2014). Yet, there are some limitations associated with the employment of a retrospective design (e.g. interviewees' responses tend to be biased towards change and sensitive issues, difficulties in recalling past events which may lead to poor-quality data, interviewees hold (or not) knowledge of past events etc.). Although a longitudinal study may appear as an alternative route, it was difficult to carry out due to time constraints, and the refusal of the case study banking organisations to commit their staff for more than a few days. To overcome such "research constraints", the interview sample was consisted of key individuals being employed for more than six years within their organisation (HR staff, branch managers, front-line employees). Everyone held the appropriate knowledge to address interview questions at a pre and post-crisis assessment approach (retrospectively / before-and-after research investigation design).

With regards to the adopted research strategy, the literature uncovers the application of a case study approach in most disciplines and research areas. Mauffette-Leenders et al (1997: 2) defined a case study as: "*a description of an actual situation, commonly involving a decision, a challenge, an opportunity, a problem or an issue faced by a person or an organisation, and the case often allows one to step figuratively into the situation in order to make sense of the situation*". Yin (2014: 16) further explained its purpose by arguing that it is: "*an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident*". Case studies focus on collecting information about contemporary events (e.g. SHRD maturity at the time of an economic crisis), often about a particular firm or industry, so as to offer a complete picture of the entire situation (ibid). They can be designed and undertaken either by

following a single or a multiple-case approach. Precisely, an "embedded multiple case study" design (Yin, 2014: 50 – figure 4.1) was adopted through the use of two case studies with multiple levels/areas of analysis (e.g. multi-hierarchical analysis, pre & post-crisis, SHRD criteria, shaping/constraining factors). Research data can lead to research findings for each individual case, and it can offer either similar results ("literal replication") or opposite results for anticipated reasons ("theoretical replication") (ibid).

Figure 4.1 Case Studies Designs

	single-case designs	multiple-case designs
holistic (single-unit of analysis)	CONTEXT — Case	CONTEXT — Case / CONTEXT — Case / CONTEXT — Case / CONTEXT — Case
embedded (multiple units of analysis)	CONTEXT — Case — Embedded Unit of Analysis 1 — Embedded Unit of Analysis 2	CONTEXT — Case — Embedded Unit of Analysis 1 — Embedded Unit of Analysis 2 (×4)
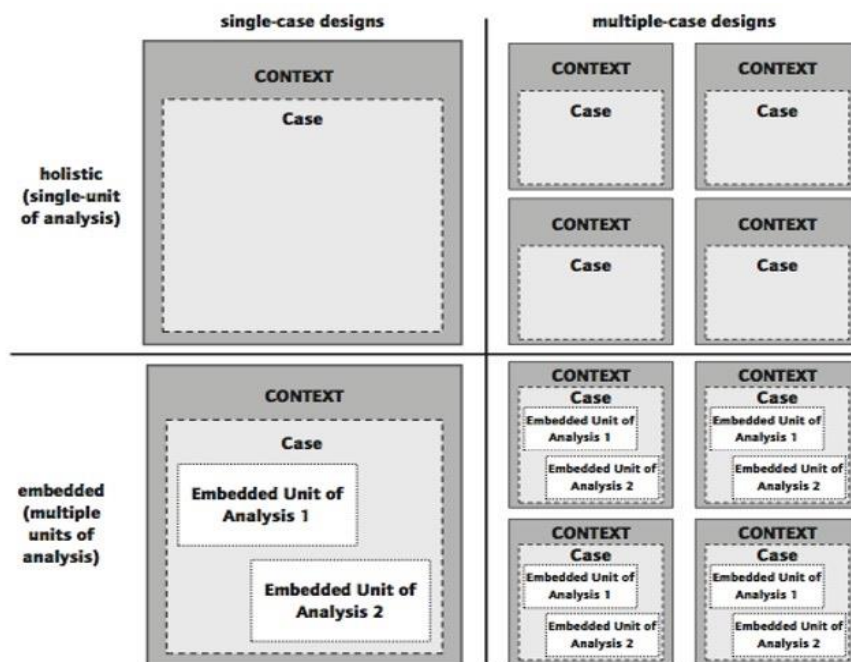
A case study can also present complicated and "hard-to-handle" issues in a feasible, intense, personal and "down-to-earth" way (Hair et al., 2011). Many authors stressed their appropriateness in examining contemporary topics, as they are usually considered more accurate, convincing, diverse and rich, and they can allow for an in-depth investigation to take place by focusing on a bounded phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Case studies are also considered useful as they allow researchers to examine data at all levels (micro, meso, macro), and thus can be viewed as a practical solution when a big sample population is difficult to be obtained (Rowley, 2002). With multiple-case studies, research evidence is also considered more interesting and convincing, with the research study being more robust (Yin, 2014).

One of the core advantages of a case study research strategy lies within its flexibility in employing both qualitative or quantitative approaches (Yin, 2014). Thus, they are increasingly used, especially when research questions following a "how" and "why" approach (ibid). They can also result in unbiased data, by helping researchers to examine their topic without overly influencing it (Wilson, J. 2014). This strategy can allow researchers to reveal multiple truths, and eventually to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. A case study research strategy further enables researchers to place themselves within the context being under investigation and thus to understand the perception and behaviours that characterise the social actors of their research (Flyvbjerg, 2006). As to all that, the applied research strategy allowed the researcher to grasp stakeholders' perceptions of SHRD maturity, and to highlight their differing and changing viewpoints over time. However, a disadvantage of this strategy comes out the fact that stakeholders' perceptions of SHRD cannot be generalised to the entire financial services industry or to other industries.

As with most research methods, case studies also received criticism. They are often accused of lacking rigour, and that they provide little basis of scientific generalisation (Yin, 2014). Furthermore, case studies are often too long and hard to be conducted, as they can produce a huge amount of documentation (Yin, 2014). Their reliability and validity are subject to scepticism when sampling is not adequate (Thomas, 2004). Yet, the objective of most case studies is not the generalisation of their findings (Stake, 2004: as cited in Thomas, 2004: 131). In the words of Adams et al (2014), case studies are used to examine a situation/phenomenon within specific settings. To this extent, the authors argued that: "*case studies are to do with uniqueness, understanding and particularisation rather than generalisation. The key advantage is the scope for gathering a rich source of data that allows particularisation, that is, getting to know the uniqueness of the cases and their contexts*" (p.98).

Overall, by following a case study research strategy, the researcher managed to explore and identify the experiences of SHRD maturity within the two banking organisations through the respective perceptions of different key stakeholders. The specific strategy

further provided him with greater flexibility and with a deeper/richer insight into the phenomenon being investigated, due to the strategy's ability to adapt to areas of "original" and "emergent" theory (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Gray, 2014; Wilson, J. 2014).

Generally, there is a tendency to associate them with qualitative research, as proponents of a case study design often favour qualitative methods such as interviews and participant observation (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Therefore, semi-structured interviews with HR staff, bank managers and employees (purposive/snowball sampling) offered a deeper investigation over the targeted organisations and the examined topic. Interview themes focused on HRD strategy and practices, SHRD maturity (testing of the suggested strategic characteristics), HR's response to the crisis and to those factors shaping, facilitating or constraining SHRD maturity. As Easterby-Smith et al. (2008) proposed, interviewing is often claimed to be the best method of gathering qualitative information for complex and sensitive issues, as it helps to gain more insights into people and situations, while it is easier to increase the participation rates by previously explaining to the interviewees the project and its value. Interviewing can also follow interviewees' tangents of thought, and eventually it can result in unexpected and insightful information which can enhance research outcomes (Cooper & Schindler, 2011).

Furthermore, the purposive sampling technique lays the premise that participants are those holding the knowledge to provide the desired information; hence, the selection of respondents enhances the reliability and validity of the research design (Yin, 2014). Although interviews are considered time consuming, they could generate a large amount of detail, they are reliable and easy to be analysed (Bryman & Bell, 2015). However, various data quality concerns can be identified with the use of semi-structured interviews, which are highly associated with reliability (lack of standardisation – Robson, 2002), forms of bias (interviewer bias, interviewee or response bias), and generalisability (difficult to generalise about the entire population) (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008). Moreover, the issue of reflexivity emerges as interviewees may express what the interviewer wants to hear (ibid). To overcome such

concerns, the analysis and interpretation of various organisational documents (e.g. mission statements, strategies, HR/HRD policies, CSR & Annual Reports) will provide a methodological triangulation of the research data for both banks' SHRD practices.

For all that to happen, a careful research design is required. Research design is the process of identifying the necessary steps that need to be followed so to construct the research's structure before and during data collection and analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The research design of each individual study is mainly concerned with all aspects of how to conduct the research, for example its type (e.g. explanatory, exploratory, evaluative etc.), the sample population, the data collection tools, and the adopted methods of data analysis (Sekaran, 2003). However, although there are multiple choices throughout developing a research design, that will depend highly upon the researcher's philosophical stance. Therefore, the justification of the chosen research philosophy will be discussed.

4.3 Research Philosophy

Each academic research study is underpinned by philosophical assumptions which reflect the researcher's own understanding of social reality, and the dominant perceptions accepted within any given academic field (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Easterby-Smith et al (2002) argued that research philosophy enables researchers to increase their knowledge and experience on the available research material and theories so to better adjust them to their individual projects. Therefore, depending on the philosophical stance a researcher adapts, diverse methodological choices will be applied.

In business research, there are certain research philosophies and dominant paradigms which appoint the research tools for the later stages of the research process (Saunders et al., 2012). However, an ongoing debate amongst scholars exists with regards to ontological thoughts (*"how we see our world"*), epistemology (*"how we think about our world"*), and axiology (*"the values that determine how a researcher should and*

actually act during a research project") (McGoldrick et al., 2004: 14; Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the dominant paradigms will be discussed, and a reflection upon the researcher's own discipline will present his philosophical stance.

4.3.1 Research Paradigms

Hurt (2010) argued that HRD contends with comprehending the diverse perspectives on its multiple subjects within its literature. Therefore, if paradigms represent the dominant views of the world within the HRD literature, then it can be argued that HRD could have many paradigms (ibid). Paradigms are closely related to epistemology. Within the HRD literature, four epistemologies can be found (Lincoln & Lynham, 2011). *Positivism* (objective worldview and regulated) (Swanson, 2005), *post-positivism* (objective worldview and estimated) (Swanson & Holton, 2001; Schwandt, 2001), *interpretivism* (subjective or constructed worldview) (Guba & Lincoln, 2005), and *critical realism* (world turns around the ideas of power and injustice) (Callahan, 2010; Valentin, 2006). Each paradigm embraces a different perspective through which it can influence the way in which the world is described and instituted by HRD researchers. Yet, it could be wise to clarify the confusion that certain methodological approaches emanate from a specific paradigm and its philosophical assumptions. Research methods and tools are not excluded from consideration because of their tension to favour either the use of qualitative or quantitative data collection methods. This means that research can include both approaches; yet, each paradigm will heavily influence the interpretation and analysis of the collected data.

4.3.2 Positivism and Post-positivism

Most of the HRD research is based on a functionalist paradigm by focusing on the regulation and the objectivity of the systems (Creswell, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Based on a positivist ontology, the researcher considers things to be real if they can be objectively measurable either through hypotheses testing or cause-effect relationships (e.g. outcomes derive from HRD interventions). Therefore, research data

from hypothesising is interpreted through statistical tools, while the justification of the expected outcomes supports determinism (ibid).

Burrell and Morgan (1979) further suggested that HRD research is about affecting organisational practices and policies throughout the process of social engineering, and the technocratic approaches upon the problems we are dealing with. Thus, Wang et al (2009) and Gilley and Maycunich (2003) called for a more "*results-oriented*" HRD rather than being "*activity-based*". The former is widely accepted from theorists and practitioners, and it is probably the most widely practiced within organisational settings (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Thus, it was widely argued that "*evidence-based*" and "*capability-driven*" HRD can have a significant contribution on organisational effectiveness, and the formation of a business strategy (Hamlin, 2002; Short & Kuchinke, 2002; Luoma, 2000a; 2000b).

However, positivism contributes to the representation of human beings as things or mere objects of study, thus "*lowering their ontological status and obscuring their need for emancipation*" (Harvey, 1990: 40). Others further argued that since HRD is considered a managerial discipline, it cannot adopt a neutral stance by viewing organisations as variables that do not have an impact on it (Cho & McLean, 2004; Ruona & Lynham, 2004). Thus, Thompson (2013: 4) argued that "*since the observed objects of social science are not durable, they can't be studied effectively under closed systems conditions*".

With the ascent of industrialisation (mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century), post-positivism had followed positivism. Post-positivism adopts a more realistic approach by accepting that: "*answers about the nature of the one genuine reality is likely never to be identified*" (Hurt, 2010: 32). Thus, through a post-positivist approach, these answers are mostly evaluations with a given level of certainty on how that one true reality is prone to be (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Post-positivists further criticised positivism's epistemology (empiricist & objectivist) by arguing that scientific knowledge is more constructed, premised and contextual (Lee, 2007; Kuchinke, 2001;

Morcol, 2001). Therefore, they suggested that reality is liable to construction, and thus the positivist "subject-object" differentiation can be problematic (ibid).

4.3.3 Interpretivism

On the other hand, European HRD research is dominated by the interpretivism paradigm. Interpretivism is an anti-positivist research position which is subjective in nature. It suggests that people's understanding of the world can be more useful if they are involved within the phenomenon under investigation (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Opposite to positivism, which considers human actions as being influenced by their external environment, interpretivism views human beings as autonomous units which can act on their free will (ibid). Thus, interpretivism considers the need of a deeper understanding of HRD and its processes so to exemplify their impact on employee performance (Nyhan, 2002). To this extent, HRD is viewed as "*humanistic-developmental*" and "*instrumental-utilitarian*" (Wang, 2008). However, Habernas (1971) had argued that there are limitations when researchers try to understand interpretivism, in terms of its practical judgment, action and communication. Foley (2000) also highlighted that interpretivism lacks facts such as organisational culture and structure. Therefore, despite increased preference of qualitative approaches of social inquiry in HRD research, the underlying ontological and epistemological perspectives can be described as relatively positivist (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2011).

4.3.4 Critical Realism

Some of the key issues which have drawn the attention of HRD research are the constantly changing employment patterns, the evolving nature of work, and technological advancements (Cascio, 2014; Callahan, 2010). Therefore, they suggested to move away from HRD's dominant paradigms towards adapting a more critical stance (ibid). Thus, critical realism (CR) has emerged by mainly focusing on issues that are difficult to understand, such as radical changes within the economic and business environments (Sambrook, 2009; 2004; 2000; Rigg et al. 2007). As to that, CR is described as a "less travelled road" (Clark, 2008).

Thompson (2013: 5) defines CR as: "*a post-positivist realist paradigm based on the belief in a social ontology, causal explanation and the view that methods are tools for tasks*". CR positions itself between positivism and interpretivism by acknowledging the socially-embedded and imperfect nature of scientific inquiry, and the existence of knowledge independent of humans (Clark, 2008). CR is based on a depth-ontology by arguing that reality exists in three domains (*actual / real / empirical* - Reed, 2008). By focusing on understanding causality and explaining events in the actual domain (e.g. recession), CR uses abduction so to move from events to their causes, while, in the real domain, it views behaviour as being influenced by both agency and structural factors (dualism) (Archer et al., 1998). Although humans have a degree of agency, this is always constrained by wider structural factors that are viewed as surrounding the individual. Likewise, social phenomena are made possible by the presence of humans but are deemed to be external to individuals and have existence and the power to constrain whether this being recognized by individuals or not (ibid). Therefore, CR can offer greater opportunities to better distinguish between actual, real and empirical world views, since it follows a middle path (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Specifically, the authors suggested that: "*CR makes a conscious compromise between the extreme positions: it recognises social conditions as having real consequences whether or not they are observed and labelled by social scientists, but it also recognises that concepts are human constructions*" (p.33).

It is further argued that CR research views HRD as a cultural process with political motives (Fenwick, 2003). Thus, O'Donnell et al (2006) and Valentin (2006), both called HRD researchers to adapt a more critical stance towards those concerns related to employees' problems, complexity of processes and power conflict. To this extent, a critical researcher should interview and pose questions to certain groups (e.g. HRD stakeholders) which might be hesitant to provide answers, although they are considered crucial from a disadvantaged groups' perspective (e.g. employees). Sambrook and Steward (2005) and Sambrook (2004) also suggested that thinking critically allows different voices to be heard over the same history so to reveal multiple realities of it. This means a "problem-posing" rather than a "problem-solving" stance (Elliott & Turnbull, 2005; Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). Epistemologically, CR poses

questions of "why" and "how" so to examine a specific situation/phenomenon (Jeppesen, 2005).

Most recent research highlights that less is known about organisations' HRD responses to a crisis, and thus in accordance to the "dynamic capability" literature, they have proposed that proactive organisations could see crisis as an opportunity to enhance their organisational capabilities (including SHRD maturity) so to successfully adjust to new business environments (MacKenzie et al., 2014). Amongst others, they also proposed that HRD should represent an influential and shaping factor of an organisation's future so to promote and drive organisational change (McCarthy & Sheeham, 2014; Lawless et al., 2010). To this extent, Thompson (2013: 3) suggested that: "*complex situations can't be reduced to variables, as social ontology is too dynamic, multi-layered and context-dependent to talk in terms of universal applicability and covering laws*". Ackroyd (2008; 2004: 3) further outlined positivism's inappropriateness by arguing that: "*Positivism is ill-equipped to recognise some basic human attributes (such as self-reflection and evaluation) and is hard to develop techniques sensitive enough to recognise the more developed human tendencies and thoughts*". In addition, HRD research should move beyond an "*economics-based*" theory perspective which mainly views SHRD from a traditional performative and/or humanitarian focus (Edwards et al., 2014).

4.4 A pragmatic realist approach

Moving beyond induction and/or deduction, a pragmatic approach relies on abductive reasoning by suggesting that there is not a single/real reality, with everyone having his/her own perspective and unique interpretation of the world (Morgan, 2007). Thus, world is described as interacting, multi-directional and complex (McKelvey, 2004).

Pragmatists further tend to see research methods as "tools for tasks", and thus to selectively choose them with regards to the distinct subject under investigation. Therefore, Morgan (2007) argued that: "*the great strength of a pragmatic approach is its emphasis on the connection between epistemological concerns about the nature of*

the knowledge that we produce and technical concerns about the methods that we use to generate that knowledge. This moves beyond technical questions about mixing or combining methods and puts us able to argue for a properly integrated methodology" (p.73). Therefore, pragmatists tend to favour the integration of both qualitative and quantitative paradigms in studying a phenomenon. That is because each research approach's weaknesses could be diminished by the respective strengths of the other. In that case, semi-structured interviews will be supplemented by documentary analysis and the use of basic HR metrics so for a methodological triangulation to take place.

Based on Walliman's (2001) proposition that research philosophy depends on the characteristics of the research problem and its research questions, the researcher will follow a pragmatic realist approach. In agreement with the first and the second research question of this study, it is necessary to deeply understand stakeholders' emotions, feelings, and personal perspectives on the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD, rather than identifying their contrast of reality. All participants signed up to provide their critical insights into the phenomenon under investigation. Then, in line with its third research objective and question, this research examined a range of factors which can generate positive behaviours, or can influence abnormal, counterproductive behaviours and eventually can affect organisational propensity and SHRD maturity.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

With regards to the specific requirements of this research, the proposed data collection methods are expected to better serve its focus. Therefore, semi-structured interviews with HR staff, branch managers and front-line (branch network) employees have been conducted. Complementary to interviews, documentary analysis was also carried out and some basic HR metrics were also used. Such a methodological triangulation allowed the researcher to better balance each method's strengths and weaknesses and eventually to increase research validity and reliability.

4.5.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Hussey and Hussey (1997) describes interviews as a data collection method which allows a detailed description of people's perception and interaction, and a detailed representation of situations, events and individual and organisational behaviours. Saunders et al (2012) define interviews as a purposeful data collection tool through which a discussion between the interviewer and the interviewee can result in valuable and reliable data outcomes, as they allow researchers to get into a participant's perspective. Interviews can also offer an in-depth exploration of the various subjective factors and variables which need to be addressed (Patton, 2001). Thus, interviews were held with those employees and executives being employed for more than six years by their organisation so to examine SHRD maturity through a pre and post-crisis assessment.

Semi-structured interviews are viewed as the most appropriate data collection technique, as they allow the development of pre-determined questions conjointly with a great openness that allows researchers to pose "probing" questions based on interviewees answers (Saunders et al., 2012). Such flexibility can also enable a researcher to adjust his/her questions from one interview to another, depending on the diverse interview and organisational conditions. Therefore, a researcher could skip or add questions depending on the interview's flow, and to change the order of his/her questions based on an interviewee's responses. In that case, the researcher conducted his interviews by using a pre-determined set of questions, yet with also having a list of back-up questions to use depending on his interviewees' responses. That allowed him not only to better follow their thoughts by posing them additional questions, but also to be able to get a holistic view of the phenomenon under investigation through a wide list of relevant questions.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2002) and Saunders et al (2012) summarised the advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews into the following points (fig. 4.2).

Figure 4.2 Advantages and disadvantages of semi-structured interviews

Advantages

- Many researchers like to use semi-structured interviews because questions can be prepared ahead of time. This allows the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview
- Semi-structured interviews also allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms
- Semi-structure interviews can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data
- Semi-structured interview encourages two-way communication. Those being interviewed can ask questions of the interviewer. In this way it can also function as an extension tool
- Confirms what is already known but also provides the opportunity for learning. Often the information obtained from semi-structured interviews will provide not just answers, but the reasons for the answers
- When individuals are interviewed they may more easily discuss sensitive issues
- Help field staff become acquainted with community members. Outsiders may be better at interviewing because they are perceived as more objective
- Using both individual and group interviews can optimise the strengths of both

Disadvantages

- Interviewing skills are required
- Need to meet sufficient people in order to make general comparisons
- Preparation must be carefully planned so as not to make the questions prescriptive or leading
- Skills to analyse the data can be a problem - risk of construing too much
- Time consuming and resource intensive
- You have to be able to ensure confidentiality

Source: Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Saunders et al., 2003

Overall, we can highlight their flexibility which can lead to more complete information. Greater flexibility also allows for modifications within the interview process, which can eventually result in better questions and responses (Robson, 2002). Another major advantage of this method lies in its increased certainty and attention to detail. At first, owing to the direct interrelation among the researcher and the interview participants, the former can better explain the purpose of his/her research so to avoid any misunderstanding of the questions or the interview concepts and processes (Oppenheim, 2000). If everything is clear, the researcher can obtain more detailed information and thus to extract more insightful conclusions. When interviews are conducted through a face-to-face interaction, they can also allow for conclusions to be drawn through non-verbal communication by examining and un-coding interviewees' feelings, attitudes, facial expressions etc. (Saunders et al., 2012). This can further result in higher confidence levels regarding the responses given than the respective ones gathered from other data collection methods (Hussey & Hussey, 1997). Finally, interviews tend to demonstrate higher response rates, if they are previously carefully

79

designed, communicated, and launched (ibid). To grasp these benefits, the researcher maintained a continuous communication with the case study banking organisations (from the very early stages of his research till the fieldwork), along with offering them the option to request a report of his research findings after completion of his PhD studies.

However, along with their advantages, semi-structured interviews tend to be time consuming (e.g. data gathering & transcription of recordings), expensive (e.g. depending on the number of participants), whilst sometimes they can be considered of low validity and reliability due to interviewer's bias (Saunders et al., 2012). Finally, access-related concerns may also be encountered by a researcher during his fieldwork. To overcome these concerns, the researcher chose to transcript every interview right after its completion so to save time to devote it on their interpretation.

Overall, the rationale of adapting this type of data collection lies within Greek managers' and employees' preference of talking and clearly expressing their thoughts directly rather than filling in a questionnaire. Thus, by interviewing key HRD stakeholders, and by interpreting their respective perceptions, the researcher managed to better explore the organisational context within which each organisation operates through examining various contextual variables (e.g. SHRD characteristics, organisational culture and climate, organisational structure and strategy, work organisation and management style, organisational approach to its people development, impact factors of their HRD approach etc.). That allowed him to conduct an in-depth and insightful investigation through their data's triangulation with respective data from several organisational documents so to better support and enhance his research findings.

4.5.2 Interview sample – The population of the targeted participants

Bryman and Bell (2015) define an interview's sample population as all people and/or every possible case that could be of a researcher's interest. Therefore, Saunders et al.

(2012: 172) argued that it is not the sample's size that matters most but "*the logical relationship between the selected sample selection technique and the purpose and focus of the research*". The population of this research is defined as the Greek banking sector and its organisational stakeholders. However, due to time constraints, it was not possible to examine all banking institutions within the sector, nor to interview all potential stakeholders. Therefore, the researcher chose to focus on two banking organisations and to conduct interviews with those people who had been employed for more than six years within their organisation, thus having the knowledge to address the interview questions retrospectively. However, the researcher acknowledges that having decided not to approach all banks may constitute a limitation to his research in terms of presenting a more holistic view of the entire population/sector. With regards to interview participants, it was difficult to approach senior managers due to their workload and the denial of the HR executives to introduce the researcher to top management executives. Trade union representatives were also excluded due to time constraints, yet a few unionised employees were interviewed instead.

In line with the thesis' research objectives, the researcher chose to conduct interviews by adapting a multi-constituent research perspective. According to Ang (2014) and Anderson (2004), a "*purposeful and criteria-based*" sample can be used when a researcher tries to identify those people whose perception and experience would be proved to be of high importance for his research inquiry, as they possess the information that others may not. Thus, the interviewed organisational stakeholders represent the key informants who can meet Merriam's (1988: 48) statement that: "*if someone wants to discover, understand, and gain insight into an examined topic, then he needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most*".

4.5.3 Interview Participants

The study draws upon qualitative research data from two case study banking organisations in Greece, reporting on seventy-six (76) semi-structured interviews with key HRD stakeholders (HR staff, bank managers, employees). Twenty-three (23) employees from both HR departments (e.g. Director, Head of T&D, assistants,

administrators, etc.), twenty-one (21) managers (branch & other divisions), and thirty-two (32) employees (branch network & corporate departments) participated from both banking organisations. Such a multi-stakeholder research perspective allowed the researcher to conduct an in-depth investigation into both banking organisations with regards to their SHRD practices. All research participants were employed for more than six years from their organisations; thus, having the knowledge to address interview questions retrospectively. From each case, thirty-eight (38) participants were interviewed in total, as presented below.

Table 4.1 Interview Participants (Case A & B)

Synthesis of interview participants	
HR STAFF (23 in total)	
CASE A (13)	*CASE 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 in total)	
CASE A (10)	*CASE 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 in total)	
CASE A (15)	*CASE B (17)*
Branch Network (10) Corporate Departments (5)	Branch Network (11) Corporate Departments (6)

The initial contact was made before the start of the researcher's PhD studies by approaching the HR directors of both organisations after being introduced by a common friend (this is a common practice within the Greek territory). The researcher explained them the purpose of his research and asked for their consent in supporting his research at its later stages (throughout the fieldwork). Having considered his suggestions, both banks (though their HR directors) provided the researcher with a written consent form. However, due to crisis, the researcher had to maintain a regular contact with both banks as many people came and gone, and thus he had to re-negotiate access with them.

The first interviews were conducted with HR staff from both organisations. One of the very first findings they pointed out was a business focus shift towards the enhancement of both banks' front-line operations. In that case, it was decided to conduct interviews with branch managers and front-line employees. Both HR departments introduced the researcher to a few branch managers and front-line employees. However, their offering sample was not sufficient (two branch managers and three employees per case), and thus the researcher decided to introduce the snowball sample technique so to increase participation. The researcher also had to consider that those participants being introduced to him by both HR departments may were those they wanted to offer (thus, for biased responses to emerge).

Therefore, besides purposeful sampling, the snowball sample technique was also introduced. Like purposive sampling, the snowball technique also assures that all participants possess the desired knowledge, and can eventually increase the pool of interviewees and to enhance research's outcomes. Such a technique allows recommendations of additional interview participants from existing interviewees. Those branch managers and employees were the ones who further introduced the researcher to other colleagues who were willing to participate, and being employed for more than six years (like them) within both organisations. In addition, the researcher used his personal network to come with additional participants. At the end, more than half of the branch managers and almost one-third of the employees (from both organisations) were identified from the researcher's personal network, and took part to his research. That is why some of the interviews were conducted in a "neutral" space outside their work as they wanted to assure anonymity with regards to their participation.

For every single interview participant, a short description of his/her duties can be seen below (table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Interview Participants – Work Description and Duties (Case A & B)

Job Position	Work description and duties
HR Department	
HR Director	The HR director has an overall control of the HR function, thus an ultimate responsibility for all human capital based activity within the organisation. Eventually, he/she is involved in many HR related areas (e.g. recruitment and selection, training, compensation and benefits, general employee-related issues etc. His/her focus is often considered as following both an operational and strategic perspective. He/she is at the board of directors and closely works with the other directors and chief executives during the process of the organisation's strategy formulation, by promoting the value proposition of HR through the various HR programs that could be offered.
T&D Manager	The role of the T&D Manager is to plan and develop training and developmental strategies in relation to the individual and/or organisational T&D needs. His/her role is to lead and manage the HRD (T&D / OD) function according to the training policies of the organisation. His/her role also embodies the effective utilisation of all financial resources relating to T&D opportunities. His/her close collaboration with other HR staff members and line managers is also essential.
HR Assistants	The HR assistant carries out responsibilities in some or all of the following functional areas: departmental development, employee relations, T&D, benefits, compensation, organisational development (OD), administration, employment etc. He/she further helps with the implementation of services, policies, and programs through HR staff, and assists department managers with HR-related issues. He/she usually responsible for conducting the initial interviews with job applicants, and eventually contributes towards the successful selection of the best candidates. In regard to T&D, his/her role is to assist in developing effective T&D programmes, by coordinating their preparation and delivery. It is within his/her responsibilities to identify T&D needs through conducting job analysis, monitoring appraisal schemes, and through maintaining a regular communication and consultation with line managers and the other HR staff. Along with the T&D Manager, monitor the effectiveness of the delivered programmes, and accordingly devise the T&D strategies so to better fit the individual and organisational needs. Finally, he/she is responsible for monitoring and reviewing the progress of trainees through interpreting relevant questionnaires and through having discussions with them regarding the effectiveness of their training sessions.
HR Administrators	The HR Administrator provides administrative support to other HR staff across the full range of HR work (e.g. documentation relating to personnel activities such as staffing, recruitment, training, grievances, performance evaluations, and classifications). He/she is considered to be the first point of contact for all the HR-related queries within and outside the organisation. He/she will also be responsible to liaise with the recruitment agencies and to set up potential interviews, while to issue all relevant correspondence. In regard to T&D, a HR administrator has a supportive role on the function by mainly maintaining computerized records for all employees training undertaken and their evaluation feedback sheets in order to provide relevant statistical information and to ensure the appropriateness of the delivered training program. Within his/her responsibilities is also to develop the appropriate administrative procedures for booking either in house and/or external training premises, to schedule the training sessions and to send notifications to participants, while to make sure that all statutory training requirements are met.
HR Officer	A HR officer is responsible for developing policies and procedures relating to the staff employed by the organisation, along with assisting the HR director and the T&D Manager with generalist HR matters. Within his/her responsibilities lay the identification of future personnel needs, and the provision of counselling services to employees either for personal or work-related problems. His/her role is also to oversee employee services (e.g. health & safety, pay and benefits, grievances, employees' performance, absence etc.).

Job Position	Work description and duties
BANK MANAGERS	
Branch Manager	The duties of a bank branch manager consist of the effective administration and the efficient daily operation of a full bank branch office (e.g. operations, lending, product/services sales, security and safety, etc.). He/she is also responsible for ensuring that customer service is provided at the highest level, and he/she is accountable at meeting with customers and resolving any problems or complaints. Moreover, he/she promotes his/her branch's product/service sales, and he/she is further responsible for attaining established bank and branch goals through active participation in sales management. Within his/her HR-related duties is employees' coaching, guidance and motivation, and to provide leadership, training and supervision. Finally, he/she is responsible for preparing and reporting to headquarters.
Information Technology (IT) Manager	An IT Manager is responsible for the computer systems within an organisation, along with ensuring that all software licencing laws are met. His/her role is also to advise organisations on IT solutions that will best help them grow and perform more efficiently, while also to manage the financial aspects of his/her department (e.g. purchasing, budgeting, and budget review, etc.). He/she is accountable at negotiating and administering supplier contracts and service agreements. Finally, his/her role accounts for managing crisis situations, which may involve complex technical hardware or software problems, and to monitor the work of his/her specialists so to ensure a smooth business operation.
IT specialist	An IT specialist is responsible for ensuring an effective network management, software development and database administration. He/she further provides technical support to a business or its employees (phone-based or desk-based support to all internal users) on It related issues, and trains non-technical workers on the business's information systems. He/she is also responsible for developing and implementing all IT policies and procedures (e.g. architecture, security, back up, break down recoveries, etc.), while providing secure access to the business network for all remote users.
Retail Loans Manager	He/she is responsible for analysing various financial statements and tax returns in order to determine final disposition of the loan, while concurrently identifying all potential risks for the organisation. He/she further coordinates the work processes of a loan review function, by ensuring that all reporting disputes are researched and corrected so to ensure accurate credit bureau reporting. He/she also makes recommendations to management regarding any part of the lending process, and he/she overall helps in enforcing the bank's loan policies and regulatory guidelines. Within his/her job duties is also the annual evaluation of all updated credit information on borrowers, and accordingly to make recommendations in loan workout arrangements
Retail Banking Officer	A retail banking officer helps with the financial requirements of individuals and businesses by providing advice and financial services (e.g. authorising loans and overdraft facilities, setting up saving accounts, dealing with customer complaints that can't be solved by the front line staff, etc.). He/she is also responsible for implementing any new products, services and processes devised by his/her manager, and to constantly report the achievement of his/her targets.

EMPLOYEES	
Branch network	Bank clerks are mostly undertaking various roles within a branch (or been promoted to them), including the work of an assistant branch manager (e.g. to assist and support the branch manager in the administration and efficient daily operation of the branch office), bank teller (e.g. to process deposits and pays in accordance with bank procedures, and to record all transactions accurately and to balance each day's operations), customer service representative (e.g. to provide a positive contact between the public and bank sales and service personnel, while also to perform clerk/typist duties for the branch), loan
	officer (e.g. to provide professional and administrative work, primarily involving approving or denying credit to customers), private banking officer (e.g. he/she is responsible for attracting, growing, and retaining a designated portfolio of high net worth customers for the Bank) etc.
Other Corporate Departments	Within this category fall bank employees of various organisational departments. Their role is quite administrative and they could be categorised under numerous corporate divisions (e.g. call centres, back office, audit control, marketing, IT, collections, real estate, etc.)

4.5.4 Documentary Analysis and HR Metrics

Besides interviews, organisational documents also offered useful data. Documentary analysis includes the interpretation of various organisational reports, mission and strategy statements, HR policies and relevant handbooks, organisational climate surveys, HR metrics etc. Browell (1995) suggested that for those researchers following a case study approach, documentary data analysis can provide additional evidence that can enhance the validity of their research outcomes. Therefore, the use of documentary analysis was expected to offer supplementary information on both cases' SHRD maturity through an attained methodological triangulation (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Danermark et al., 2002; Harris, 2001).

Most of the examined reports were collected in the headquarters of both banks or through their corporate websites. The researcher granted with free access to all organisational documents, yet without being able to make any copies to work with outside both banks' headquarters. That forced him to spend more time within both banks' premises, and restricted his time and flexibility. In any case, a careful inspection was conducted and only the most pertinent parts were translated and utilised during data interpretation. Such an approach reflects Yin's (2014) suggestion that documentary evidence within organisational contexts can accommodate specific details for particular situations that are difficult to capture through interviews (since people's perception may be totally different without reflecting the actual facts) or other data collection methods. Finally, documentary evidence can also offer useful information in a more detailed and formally written manner (ibid).

Basic HR metrics also provided additional information, and further allowed the researcher to measure and analyse (through descriptive statistics) HRD's strategic orientation and integration. For instance, HR metrics such as "*Human Capital Value-Added*", "*Return on Training Investment*", "*HR Department spending per full time employee*", "*Retention rate*" etc., all offered additional insightful data, and further validated research findings from interviews and organisational documents. All HR

metrics used were found through both banks' HR policies and relevant handbooks which were provided for free to the researcher.

4.6 The Fieldwork

Data collection was conducted in Greece from July to September 2014. From the early stages of this research, the researcher maintained regular contact with the HR departments of both banks so to assure their support during his fieldwork. Every time he was back in Greece, he visited both headquarters in order to further introduce himself and his research project to new staff, and eventually to build and maintain trust with them. Prior to his visit for conducting his fieldwork, a cover letter was sent (appendix 1), within which the aim of his thesis was briefly explained, complemented by a statement of his supervisor (appendix 1) kindly requesting them to participate in this study. Finally, a draft of the interview questions (appendix 6) was sent to most participants so to allow them to be better prepared.

A major concern during the interviews was whether to take notes or to record the discussion, or do both. The researcher decided that digitally recording the interviews was essential so to ensure that the entire discussion would be available during their transcription. Notes were also taken. All interviews with HR staff were conducted either in their offices or in meeting rooms within both banks' premises, while interviews with managers and employees were conducted either in branches or headquarters respectively. However, there were a few interviews with employees which were performed in a "neutral" quiet environment outside the organisations as they required to remain anonymous. Most interviews lasted from sixty to ninety minutes maximum. All digital recordings were safely backed up onto two different external data storages (USB sticks) and under specific file names for security purposes and for their future transcription as well. The large majority of the interviews were conducted in Greek as per participants' requirement. All concepts were clearly explained to them so to assure that interviews will run without any particular problems. Then, interviews were transcribed and translated into English by the researcher so to reflect the actual meaning of his participants' responses.

4.6.1 Difficulties associated with fieldwork

As within every research attempt, fieldwork can be proved as the most difficult part of a PhD thesis. Difficulties may rise owing to social, cultural and other internal or external factors. The most typical problem is usually participants' availability. Therefore, the researcher had to re-arrange many of his interview meetings as many of the participants were extremely busy during that period (July-September 2014), while others were on their annual leave. A few interviewees also refused to be recorded (mostly front-line employees), as they believed that their supervisor might have access to these recordings, although they had been informed in advance that all information would be kept strictly confidential.

A second difficulty was associated with various interruptions which occurred during the interview process, such as a phone call or a colleague's enquiry, each resulting in the interviewer and the interviewees' distraction.

4.6.2 Data Analysis

According to Saunders et al. (2012) and Denzin and Lincoln (2003), qualitative data analysis cannot be done under a standardised approach. However, a common analytical strategy can consist of the examination, categorisation and the summary of the collected data (Yin, 2014). Therefore, research data from interviews was carefully transcribed, and grouped under specific sections following a thematic analysis approach of pre-determined key themes (e.g. strategic characteristics, shaping factors, stakeholder group etc.). A thoughtful examination of all transcriptions highlighted stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions of SHRD maturity within their respective organisations. Data analysis was carried out throughout the fieldwork by constantly analysing, coding and explaining all case notes. For instance, short code names were given for each interview participant (e.g. HR Director Case A – "HRDrA", Branch Manager Case B – "BM B" etc.) so to help the researcher throughout the analysis of his data. Short names were also provided for the factors shaping, inhibiting or expediting SHRD adoption and maturity (e.g. Globalisation – "Glbn",

Technological Advancements – "Tech" etc.). Research data and findings were further analysed and discussed under a thematic analysis approach by mainly focusing on the key strategic characteristics of the proposed SHRD framework. A similar approach was also followed for the analysis on the factors constraining or facilitating SHRD's adoption and maturity.

Documentary analysis was also utilised. An extensive review of interview transcripts, along with documentary data, both allowed the researcher to categorise his data under specific themes, and thus to conduct a more cohesive examination of the underlying meanings, and a more thorough interpretation of his research findings. Documentary analysis also allowed him to move back and forth within his data collection and analysis process (present and past organisational documents) so to supplement and/or support research findings from his interviews.

Finally, with regards to the use of various HR metrics, their analysis was conducted through descriptive statistics so to allow for a basic description and comparison amongst the data set. The underlying assumptions of these metrics also offered the researcher insightful information that allowed him to further enhance his research outcomes.

4.7 Ethical considerations

The thesis adhered both with the banks' and the interviewees' code of conduct and business ethics. An "*Ethics application form*", along with a "*Context form*" for each participant (appendices 2, 3, 4 & 5) was introduced. Both documents highlighted that all personal data on participants would be dealt with as per the procurements of "Data Protection Act 1998". Thus, all information would be kept strictly confidential and it would be destroyed upon completion and submission of this PhD thesis. Both the research participants and the case study banking organisations' confidentiality and anonymity was secured. Participants were offered the option to withdraw from the interview process at any time and without any obligation. For the latter, code names were provided, while limited reference was made to sensitive information that could

reveal their true identity. In addition, the researcher offered the opportunity to organisations to require a brief report on the final findings as the minimum reward for their participation and help.

A second ethical consideration had to do with the researcher's relationship (either professional or personal) with some of the interview participants. For instance, the researcher used his personal and professional network back in Greece in order to increase his research participants through the snowball technique. When this happened, he discussed any possible conflict implications with his supervisor. It was then decided to proceed with the interviews as he ensured his supervisor that all interviews will be help under a professional manner.

4.8 Research Validity, Reliability, Credibility, Transferability, and Authenticity

All concepts are important and interrelated with a research process as they constitute essential criteria for the successful evaluation of the accuracy and rigour of the research (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, every research should be valid, in terms of producing accurate findings/measurements which clearly represent what they are about to produce (ibid). Research data should also be reliable/precise, in that similar results could be attained either through a follow-up analysis or from different researchers (ibid). Overall, every research design must address issues and concerns related to validity (internal, external), as well as reliability, credibility, transferability, and authenticity so to enhance its findings.

According to Hussey and Hussey (1997), validity is concerned with the degree to which the obtained data is accurately representing the investigated phenomenon. Nonetheless, several research errors (e.g. poor samples, incomplete analysis, biased results, inappropriate research procedures etc.) may weaken a research study's validity (Saunders et al., 2012). Therefore, researchers must ensure an accurate method of analysis that would clearly reflect an insightful understanding of the questions within their selected research methods. A case study allows a researcher to enhance his/her

internal validity/credibility through a careful examination of his/her case study organisations (e.g. by focusing on those areas related to SHRD maturity before and after the crisis). Along with documentary data and HR metrics, all methods could further enable a researcher to authenticate his/her research findings.

External validity accounts for the degree of generalisation of the research findings, meaning that data outcomes are applicable to other organisations as well (Saunders et al., 2012). Although case studies have been accused of their lack of rigour and little basis for scientific generalisation, when multiple cases are chosen, they can offer either a "literal replication" or a "theoretical replication", and thus somehow to overcome such concerns (Yin, 2014). The researcher acknowledges that his research's generalisability is limited, yet his initial focus was on particularisation and that was the reason he decided to adopt a case study research strategy. However, it can be equally argued that since most Greek organisations are facing similar problems owing to the ongoing recession, that can eventually increase the external validity of this research.

On the other hand, reliability is concerned with the preciseness of data, with regards to the concurrence of the results, either within a future research or within different occasions (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991). Research reliability can further demonstrate the extent to which the research findings are un-biased in order to ensure a consistent evaluation and analysis of the collected data (Sekaran, 2003). For the purpose of this thesis, the researcher reflects on Marshall and Rossman's (1999) suggestion that reliability concerns over semi-structured interview findings are, importantly, not intended to be repeatable as they represent the time when they were obtained, and eventually may be subject to change. Thus, in order to avoid issues associated with interview bias, the researcher followed an identical verbal and non-verbal communication pattern in order to minimise interviewees' influence over their responses. Finally, biased answers were also diminished by building a mutual trust with his interviewees by proactively presenting the scope of his research and by continuously highlighting that confidentiality would be the utmost of his research attempt.

The researcher secured research credibility by passing many drafts of his research chapters to his supervisor for review and feedback. That allowed the researcher to constantly make all necessary amendments to his thesis so to offer a more meaningful research story. In addition, his supervisor's constructive feedback allowed him to come with objective decisions so not to influence his research outcomes.

Research transferability is identical to external validity in a sense as it relates to the generalisability of the research attempt. The researcher offered a detailed description of all key literature concepts, and provided a substantial description of both case study banking organisations and of their respective research findings. Therefore, the researcher anticipates that the format and the auditing process being utilised within his research would be adopted and/or customised by other researchers and organisations under similar research focus.

Finally, the researcher ensured research authenticity by holding a comprehensive daybook and by constantly updating it throughout his PhD studies. His research's authenticity was secured through regular meetings and checks with his supervisor so to ensure that both the conduct and the assessment of his research are truthful and trustworthy by fairly and truly describing his interview participants' perspectives. That also assured that his research would consider its impact on the members and/or organisations being under investigation.

4.9 Chapter Summary

The research strategy, design, philosophy and the methods which have been applied in this research attempt were presented in this chapter. All of which allowed the researcher to achieve his research objectives and to address his research questions. The chapter initially referred to the adopted research strategy and design, by highlighting the adoption and the appropriateness of a case study research approach. Later, reference was made to the adopted research philosophy, by highlighting a pragmatic realistic approach as the most suitable philosophical stance. The justification behind the choice of the applied research methods was also offered, by outlining semi-

structured interviews and documentary analysis, along with the use of basic HR metrics, as the most appropriate data collection methods. Key information regarding the population of the targeted participants was also presented, along with a brief description of their work duties. The fieldwork process, and its associated difficulties, were further discussed. The chapter closed by referring to the validity, reliability, transferability, authenticity and credibility of the research.

Having presented and explained all key concerns that accompany a research project, the following chapter will provide an overview of the economic crisis and the Greek banking sector. The chapter will refer to key facts related with the economic crisis in Greece, and it will briefly discuss how Greek HR has handled it.

CHAPTER 5 – Economic Crisis and the Greek Banking Sector

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a definition and timeline of the economic crisis, along with a historical background and overview of the Greek banking sector. It will further refer to the crisis's impact and aftermath in relation to the HR landscape, both at an international and national level. Finally, the way in which crisis was handled by the HR departments of Greek banking organisations will be presented, and conclusions will be drawn.

5.2 Definition and Timeline of the Economic Crisis

According to Mishkin (1992: 117-118), an economic crisis can be described as: *"a disruption to financial markets in which adverse selection and moral hazard problems become much worse, so that financial markets are unable to efficiently channel funds to those who have the most productive investment opportunities"*. The definition highlights its broader impact to all industrial sectors owing to the inability of the banking system to finance them. Knight (2011: 155) also defined economic crisis from a sociological perspective as: *"a signifying period of social change or instability that evokes feelings of fear, panic, danger and insecurity"*. The definition can reflect employees' feelings of job insecurity, while it may also enhance their operational viewpoint towards SHRD maturity. James and Wooten (2013) further defined crisis as any situation that draws a negative reaction of an organisation's stakeholders that may result in potential threats for the firm. However, the most succinct definition of a crisis is a reduction of 4% or more of the Gross National Product (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Skoufias, 2003). A continuous decline in GDP indicates a recessionary economy. GNP and GDP's escalation can also indicate the extent to which the crisis has impacted a nation, and eventually its industrial sectors and the employment relations within (Natsios, 2013; Lallement, 2011).

The financial crisis, the deepest the world has experienced since the stock market crash in 1930s, originated in the US mortgage market and led to a liquidity shortfall of its banking system, the full effect of which started to be felt in August 2007 (Mitsakis & Aravopoulou, 2016; Soriano, 2011). However, Appelbaum (2011) argued that crisis did not originate in financial markets, but its direct cause is rooted back to the bursting of the housing bubble. Construction companies left with a large inventory of new unsold houses, resulted in a demand shock that triggered the recession (Hein et al., 2012). The second phase of the global economic crisis started in September 2008 with the fall of Lehman Brothers. It was more intense and resulted in a general loss of confidence and solvency problems for many financial institutions across the globe (Otero-Iglesias, 2015). Although the crisis has mostly been concentrated in the financial systems of US and Europe, it also heavily affected the economies of most developed and emerging countries, including Greece (Oyeavaar et al., 2016; Mitsakis & Aravopoulou, 2016). However, this economic hardship did not affect all EU countries with the same intensity (EC, 2012; 2009). The particularity of the current crisis is that it combines a financial crisis originated in the largest world economy (US), along with a global downturn (Soriano, 2011). Therefore, such business and economic uncertainty and complexity led to a global collapse in trade. A short timeline of GEC, both across the globe and within the Eurozone, is illustrated below (figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1 Financial Crisis' Timeline
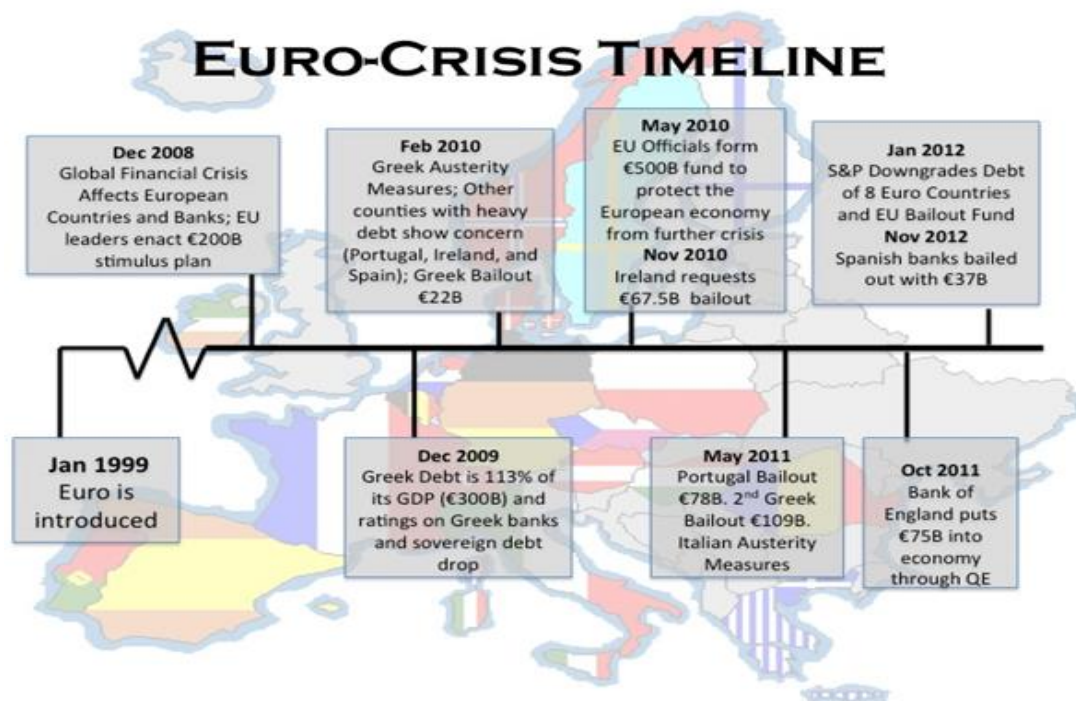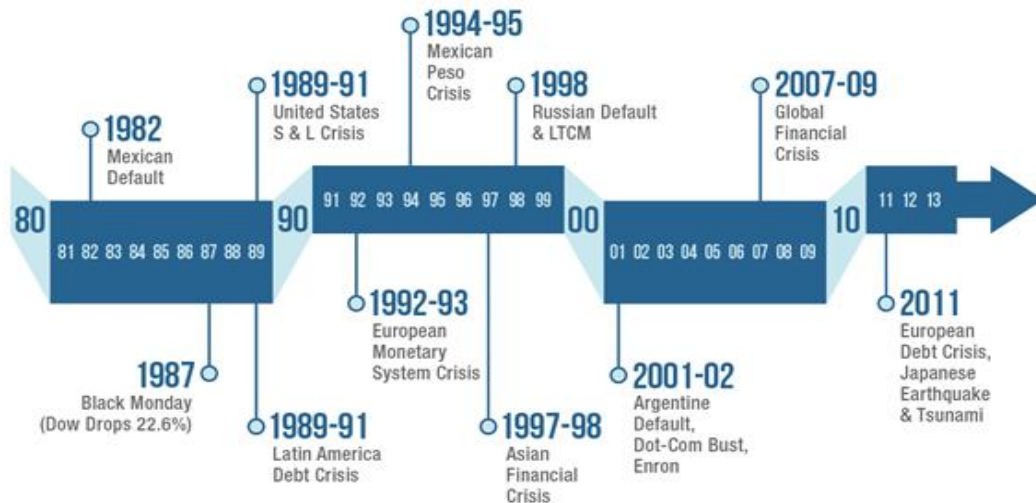
Going through these series of events, the crisis's severity can be outlined, regardless of each country's competitiveness (Otero-Iglesias, 2015). Economic uncertainty dictated both nations and organisations to create agile structures in order to effectively address such unforeseen conditions within their internal and external environments (Kotios et al., 2012; De Grauwe, 2010). It could be equally argued for HRD that needs to implement "environmentally-integrated" strategies, plans and policies as part of its

effort to address crisis-related concerns, as being suggested within the modified SHRD framework.

5.3 Aftermath of the Economic Crisis and HR's state

The first aftermath of the economic crisis can be identified through high unemployment rates within most EU members, and through the creation of new labour regimes (Simosi et al., 2015; Cazes et al., 2009; Venn, 2009). Unemployment rates began to rise in 2008, first in Spain, then in Ireland, UK, Greece and the rest of Europe respectively, and reached their highest rate since the end of the WWII (Teague & Roche, 2013; EC, 2012; HRMF, 2012; OECD, 2011).

Owing to the GEC, and the rapid changes that occurred to corporate environments, organisations were forced either to restructure and/or to downsize their workforce or to place their employees under short-term employment contracts, as part of their retrenchment strategies (Lallement, 2011). Even within stronger economies, as that of the UK, many organisations proceeded with further redundancies, while 35% of them are planning further retrenchments or job cuts (People Management, 2013). However, such actions made employees feel more insecure (Schumacher et al., 2015; Lam et al., 2015), and led to downsizing-related illness (enormous stress – *"Survivor syndrome"*) (Teague & Roche, 2013; Gandolfi, 2006). Eventually, the *"psychological contract"* (unwritten mutual expectations between the employer and their employees) was dramatically breached (Adam & Papatheodorou, 2015; Bal et al., 2008). Such a breach also impacted upon organisational trust and commitment, employees' job satisfaction, productivity and work attitude, turnover etc. (Karamessini, 2015b; Economou et al., 2013; Suazo et al., 2005). HR was widely accused of this psychological break-down (Milic, 2013; Van Gyes, 2009). HR's perpetual credibility has been highly questioned, with many people characterizing it as being incapable, and the most ineffectual business function (Littlecott & Dunham, 2008). Yet, organisations had to balance the benefits of their retrenchment strategies with the overall loss of what was being cut.

In general, there are three views within the literature regarding the state of HR in relation to the economic crisis. The first proposes that recession will have a disastrous impact on it (e.g. people occupied in HR departments would be disproportionately reduced compared to those working in other business functions, "operational" HR practices would be outsourced etc.), and on the viability of long predominant business employment models (Karamessini, 2015a; Roche & Teague, 2012; Phillips, 2008; Pitcher, 2008). A second strand proposes that recession will boost HR's influence (Patro, 2013; Roche et al., 2011; Lawler et al, 2010; Brocket, 2010; Cooper, 2009; Howard, 2009; Laff, 2008). Roche et al. (2011: 36) believe that "*recession might provide a shot in the arm for HR*" and it may prove the "*making of HR*" both for the function and its executives. Finally, the third strand argues that changes in industrial and labour relations can be described as "*pragmatic, eclectic and incremental*" by suggesting that organisational responses relate to pre-crisis trends, and thus may result to perplexing and even opposing sets of measures (Gunnigle et al., 2013; Roche & Teague, 2012: 3).

Overall, the more prepared an organisation is, the stronger financially and the more competitive would be (Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2003; Boin & Hart, 2003; Barton, 2001). Thus, Rusaw and Rusaw (2008) suggested that all organisational efforts should aim at the formation of a crisis response strategy/plan so to handle business and economic uncertainty effectively. The authors called for a more strategic/proactive HR role to be undertaken (ibid). In line with this proposition, the modified SHRD framework suggests the development and implementation of "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies as an indication of an organisation's responsiveness and preparedness towards the constantly changing business and economic environments.

5.4 Economic Crisis in Greece: Key Facts

The economic crisis has heavily influenced most Greek organisations through its macroeconomic causes and effects, which account for a significant impact on their HR practices and the employment relations as well (Mitsakis, 2014). During the first phase of the GEC, the Greek economy managed to avoid serious shocks (ibid). Its delay in

affecting Greece is related with the fact that the Greek economy was a relatively closed one, along with some other favourable factors such as the diminution of its inflation and budget deficits for the period before 2001, as part of its efforts to become an EU member (Moschos & Chortareas, 2013).

From 2000 to 2007, Greece had one of the fastest growing economies in the Eurozone (GDP annual rate of 4.2%), as significant foreign investment and capital entered the country (Nelson et al., 2011). Besides the stability brought about by the adoption of the common currency and participation in the Eurozone, the Greek economy was further strengthened through high inflows of EU "Structural Funds" in view of the Olympic Games 2004 in Athens, the making of several structural reforms, and the banking system's contribution after its liberalisation (Mitsakis, 2014; Moschos & Chortareas, 2013). However, as reported through several global financial institutions, Greece is considered as a very uncompetitive country, with its economy to be characterised as being ineffective in terms of efficacy and competitiveness (Lynn, 2011). Despite remarkable progress recorded within its financial sector, this was not initiated by national resources but from external assistance and incentives, which were not used to autonomously expand further growth (Karamessini, 2015a). This also led to high dependence relationship with the EU (ibid). Thus, it was inevitable for Greece to be heavily affected by the crisis owing to its relatively small manufacturing sector and due to a large share of its "shadow economy" which is estimated to consist of 25%-30% of GDP (Kouretas & Vlamis, 2010). However, conditions began to further deteriorate after Lehman Brothers' collapse, along with the significant pressure which was put on valuations of Greek government bonds (Mitsakis, 2014; Mylonas, 2013).

At first, the Greek economy's troubles emerged as an outcome of the crisis within the European financial systems, but also turned into a social and political crisis (Karamessini, 2015a, 2015b). Later, it evolved into a liquidity crisis in the regional countries, and transformed into a debt and solvency crisis respectively (ibid). To date, it is expressed as an ongoing crisis of the existence and cohesion of the Eurozone within international dimensions (Economou et al., 2013; Kotios et al., 2011). Glover and Tomek (2012) outlined that Greece is spiralling into the kind of decline that both

the US and Germany endured during the Great Depression, as its economy shrank by 18.4% in the past four years, compared to a 27% decline of the US economy and a 34% decline of the German economy during 1929-1933. Another study also illustrated the severe impact of GEC within the Greek economy by highlighting a considerably dramatic (44.9%) impact on organisations (Epitropaki, 2012). It was widely argued that the Greek economic crisis could become the worst recession in modern world history as its GDP has declined by more than 7.1% and is expected to decline further in the coming years (Karamessini, 2015a; Yannakourou & Tsimpoukis, 2014; Mitsakis, 2014; Dedoussopoulos et al., 2013; HRMF, 2012).

Such a catastrophe also presents a social and political payoff for Greece and the rest of the EU. Such an impact can be evidenced on people and companies within Greece itself through a record unemployment rate, decreased wage levels, the closure of many businesses, and an increasing number of people facing social exclusion through wage inequality (Leiser et al., 2015; Mitsakis, 2014; Knight, 2013; Economou et al., 2013; Knight, 2011). Such disparity can also be a significantly hazardous factor to sustained economic growth, as unequal societies are more likely to face serious debt crises (Berg & Ostry, 2011).

Furthermore, high levels of unemployment present two distinct problems for Greece and its business sectors. First, an increasing number of people are driven to financial ruin since the Greek social security system pays unemployment benefit only for the first 12 months (Karamessini, 2015a; 2015b). Of the 1.147 million unemployed these days, approximately half receive state benefit, which accounts for less than 400 Euros per month (ibid). A second concern is related to Greece's lack of a formal system in helping either young people to enter the job market or middle-aged individuals who have lost their jobs to be retrained for other positions (Natsios, 2012). Therefore, Greece faces the real possibility that some people will join the ranks of the long-term unemployed, while others will choose to leave the country. With regards to the latter, the prolonged recession resulted in an exodus of many talented, ambitious, and well-educated young Greeks (49,3%) to other growing European economies as part of their efforts to find a job (Eurostat, 2015a, 2015b; Mitsakis, 2014). Youth unemployment

(15-24) ratio reached 24.6%, with seven out of ten high school graduates to consider working abroad (Papadopoulos, 2016; Eurostat, 2016; Malkoutzis, 2011). Work in Greece further became less secure as more and more employees are now managed under a more flexible status (e.g. part-time, temporary, fixed-contract etc.) (Mitsakis, 2014).

Greece also immersed itself into the eye of this financial storm, as both its national economy and the banking sector had become over-exposed to bad debt due to massive lending to other business sectors (Roche et al., 2011; Whelan, 2010). Like the Irish case, the Greek recession extended owing to a large fall in GNP, as well as extensive business closures, layoffs and high unemployment rates (Felstead et al., 2012a; 2012b; Roche et al., 2011). The inability of the credit rating agencies to predict the 2007 US mortgage loan crisis led them to target Greece and other European countries (since all held large budget deficits) by downgrading them within the international markets (Kouretas & Vlamis, 2010). Moreover, the delayed reaction of the European Central Bank, and the rest of the EU governments, in signaling their intention to provide help, both conditions further demonstrated the lack of a political union within the European borders (ibid). Finally, the austerity measures being implemented by the Greek government further impacted on Greek society. The clearest evidence can be seen through Greece's highest unemployment rate since the country has joined the Eurozone, and the highest amongst EU members (Eurostat, 2016; Mitsakis, 2014; Glatzer & Petmesidou, 2014). Thus, Miller (2005) argued that it is important to consider the crisis's actual impact on posing HR and labour-related challenges to forthcoming generations.

Following all these key facts and events in relation to the crisis, it would also be good to present an overview of the Greek banking sector before moving on to discuss how Greek banks have handled the economic crisis with regards to their HR practices.

5.5 Historical Overview of the Greek Banking Sector

Greek banks went through a series of evolutionary stages. The history of the modern Greek banking system dates back in 1828, the year when Ioannis Kapodistrias (Greek prime minister) founded the Bank of Greece, followed by the establishment of the National Bank of Greece in 1841 (Kostis & Tsokopoulos, 1988). Till 1927, the number of Greek banks increased significantly through the enactment of the following banking institutions: the Naval Bank (1870), the General Credit Bank (1872), the Industrial Credit Bank (1873), the Privileged Bank of Thessaly (1882), the Bank of Athens (1893), Bank of Crete (1899), the Bank of Anatolia (1904), Laiki Bank (1905), Commercial Bank of Greece (1907), and Piraeus Bank (1916) (Melas, 2012). However, this period (1828-1927) was mainly characterised by the total lack of governmental economic policies (regulations) within the financial sector, accompanied by the international monetary system's collapse, high inflation and the unstable global exchange rates since World War I (WWI) (Salvanou, 2004). However, by the end of WWI, a new expansion phase started for Greek banks under the context of those economic conditions created owing to the increased influence of major political and military events (Melas, 2002).

During the second phase (1928-1945), specific regulations were introduced. There was a rapid growth in the number of banking institutions, all of which were adequately equipped with capital funds to face Great Depression (1929-1932) (Melas, 2002). Yet, owing to the collapse of the international monetary gold exchange standard system, many Greek banks led to bankruptcy due to continuous deposit withdrawals from their customers. Major restructurings took place, with the size of the sector to be diminished (25 commercial banks, 3 agricultural banks, 1 mortgage bank, 2 ad hoc credit agencies).

The third term (1946-1991) was dominated by intense, systematic and multi-state interference with regards to the creation of an international economic development policy (Melas, 2011). During the German-Italian occupation, Greek banks were under-performing, while right after the liberation, the entire sector was found with decreased

assets and liabilities (ibid). However, once the economy started to recover, a gradual entry of foreign banks into the domestic banking system also began (Melas, 2012).

The fourth phase starts in 1992 and extends till 2001. It is characterised as the period of banking sector's modernisation, and typically begins after the commencement of the Maastricht Treaty (Mylonidis & Kelnikola, 2005). Many structural changes were introduced due to the enhanced role of the Bank of Greece in conducting semi-independent monetary policy (ibid). The on-going internationalisation of most financial transactions, along with rapid technological advancements and globalisation, all further transformed the international banking system, by enhancing its role within the modern financial environment (Melas, 2011). Such intensity led to many acquisitions and mergers, leading to a significantly restructure of the Greek banking landscape with the formation of larger banking corporations (Melas, 2012).

Finally, the fifth period (2002 – present) is described as the "financialisation" of the Greek economy (Hardouvelis & Gortsos, 2011). Although there were 12 banks operating before crisis, the prolonged recession led to extensive business amalgamations in an attempt to create larger financial institutions, ready to compete on a global basis through the provision of innovative products and services (ibid). The sector became increasingly complex both with regards to its functionality (including HR practices), and in terms of its product and services' delivery (ibid). The synthesis of the sector's workforce was also reformed, which compared to other industrial sectors is consisted of relatively younger and high-educated individuals with developed skills and competencies (Hardouvelis & Gortsos, 2011).

5.6 Greek Banking Sector: Structure and Operating Procedures

It is believed that strong financial institutions can play a crucial role throughout the formulation and execution of most national and international financial policies (HBA, 2012). The formation and the structure of such organisations is highly associated with the institutional framework within which they operate, the degree of the markets' liberalisation and the level of economic development (ibid). The principal

representatives of such organisations are the so called financial/credit institutions which usually undertake the form of a multipurpose banking organisation (e.g. a financial/credit institution which can offer a wide range of products and services that have been previously approved by relevant authorities).

The Greek banking system is comprised of the Bank of Greece (Central, Editorial Bank), and all other financial intermediaries. The latter can be divided into: (a) Specialised credit institutions, (b) Cooperative banks, and (c) Commercial Banks (figure 5.2), and their role is to represent the intermediaries between those trading within an economic system (HBA, 2011).

Figure 5.2 Structure of the Greek banking Sector
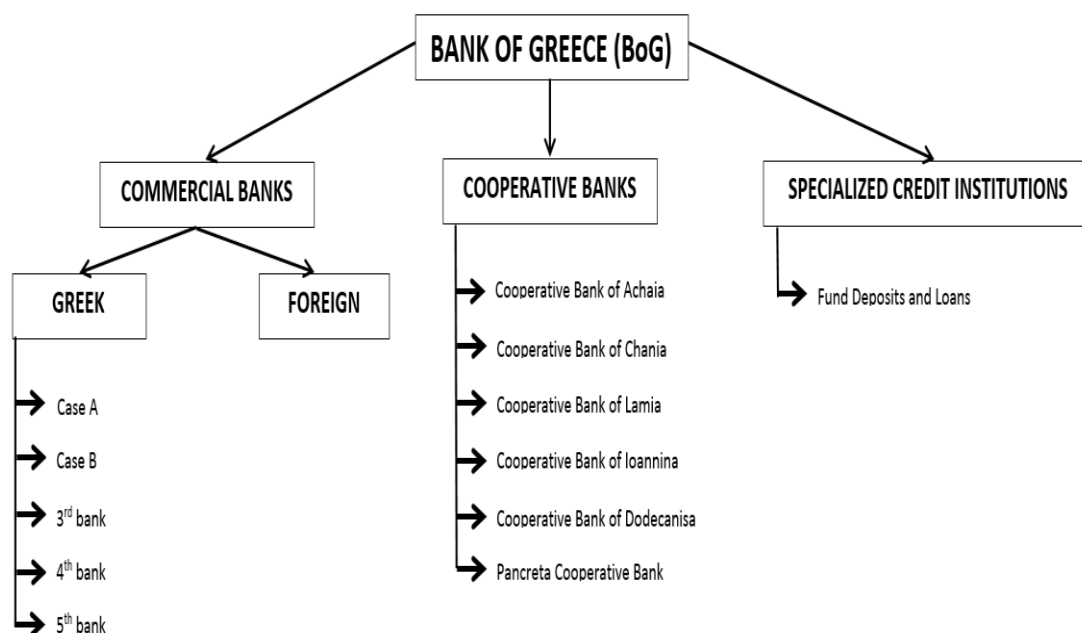
5.6.1 Bank of Greece (BoG)

The BoG is the country's central bank. The bank follows several guidelines directed by the European Central Bank (ECB), and eventually it is designated with the following activities: (a) the implementation of ECB's directives; (b) to exercise a clear monetary policy; (c) to maintain price stability; (d) the issuance of banknotes; (e) the supervision of credit organisations and other financial institutions; (f) the treasury

management of all public revenues and expenditures; and (g) the extradition and repayment of all public securities (Bonds - treasury bills) (HBA, 2011).

The BoG supports the national economy through its monetary, credit and exchange rate policies, while it also holds the privilege of issuing banknotes when required (HBA, 2011). Among its most important operational activities is the supervision of all financial institutions. That is exercised over all financial organisations operating in Greece, by including their branches both within EU borders and globally (ibid). The BoG's supervisory role further aims to ensure the stability of the financial system and to protect the interests of all parties involved. Thus, it issues directives and regulations regarding the legal and proper operation of all financial institutions, their capital adequacy, the risks associated with their conduct and outlines all concerns related to their investment activities as well (ibid).

The BoG can also audit the financial statements, records and books of all financial institutions in order to check for possible violations within the context of its preventive and repressive control (HBA, 2011). In case of a non-compliance event, the BoG is entitled to impose all necessary actions to assure that the organisation will be legally legitimate. The bank can also impose fines, to revoke the operating license of the institution and to set it in special liquidation under its supervision (ibid). Finally, for those banking organisations facing insufficient liquidity, the BoG can extend compulsory payments of their problematic payables and receivables for a period of two to three months, and to also appoint an administrator under its supervision (ibid).

5.6.2 Commercial Banks

The role of these financial intermediaries is important as they can finance the national economy and eventually boost economic growth within a country. Commercial banks have been transformed into modern credit/financial service institutions that can offer a wide range of banking products and services, along with mediating between surplus and deficit units in order to absorb deposits and loans (HBA, 2011).

Traditionally, the focus of these banks could be divided into three main categories:

- **Passive Operations**: all forms of deposits (current, savings, term deposits, money-market etc.), along with any other activity on attracting capital from various sources (HBA, 2011).
- **Mediating Actions**: all services provided by commercial banks for a fee or commission (excluding interest rates) such as working capital, stock receipts, hire safes, currency exchange etc. (ibid).
- **Active Operations**: the provision of performance bonds and/or credit letters, along with capital investments in securities or foreign currencies (ibid).

Our two case study banking organisations fell into this category as both can be described as financial institutions offering a wide variety of products and services (e.g. deposits, personal and business loans, investment products etc.) to the public and businesses. Following their request of remain anonymous, both are presented under code names (e.g. Case A & Case B). To further support their anonymity, codes names were also given to the rest of the banks being present with the specific category (e.g. third, fourth and fifth bank).

5.6.3 Specialised Credit Institutions

These organisations conduct limited banking operations. Currently, there is only one specialised credit organisation operating in Greece (The Fund Deposits and Loans Organisation). An on-going effort to transform it into a modern financial institution is in progress so to allow it to offer a wider range of financial products and services (HBA, 2011). The organisation was established in 1839 as an independent financial institution (public entity) under the supervision of the Ministry of Finance. It aims to serve public and social interests, and its purpose is to provide exclusive custody and management of all kinds of consignment (ibid).

5.6.4 Cooperative Banks

The establishment and operationalisation of this kind of banks are based on the principles of cooperative enterprise, and their activities include the provision for loans, guarantees, insurance etc. (HBA, 2011). Cooperative banks contribute highly to the economic development of those regions within which they are located by exploiting the capital of the inhabitants (ibid). Currently, there are six (6) cooperative banks operating in Greece, with another twenty (20) established organisations which aim to develop into cooperative banks soon.

5.7 Banking Organisations amid the Recession

Economic turmoil continues to create extremely challenging business conditions within which financial institutions need to constantly address changing employment relations and labour regimes. The GEC has severely affected European banks, with many of them reporting at least three restructurings throughout the recession (Mitsakis, 2014). As a response to the crisis, many European governments initially provided financial support to their banking systems in order to help them face not only liquidity problems, but solvency problems as well (Antzoulatos, 2013; Lallement, 2011; Soriano, 2011; Clinton & Woollard, 2010). However, such measures proved to be inefficient in terms of the challenges they had to confront. Watt (2009) had argued that the European debt crisis, along with the sovereign bond market volatility, both can pose additional challenges to EU banks, with afflictive implications for their HR practices. Therefore, the author proposed that many financial institutions may have to be bailed out, while public programmes of an unprecedented nature should be put in place so to avoid the financial market's collapse (ibid).

Owing to business and economic uncertainty, HR departments have also been confronted with major challenges that forced them to increase individual and business efficiency and efficacy while minimising their associated costs. Therefore, many organisations had to restructure, to cut benefits or to impose wage cuts, to dismiss employees and to change employment contracts to more flexible terms (Antzoulatos,

2013; Bouas & Katsimardos, 2012). Greek banks have mostly been dominated by short-term oriented HR planning rather than seeing the crisis as an opportunity to push forward their HR strategic dynamic (ibid).

In such difficult times, training budgets are usually amongst the first casualties. Ferreira and Leite (2013) highlighted the reasons that turned firms reluctant to invest in HRD during a crisis. Their research findings outlined the organisations' preference on hiring new employees rather than training their existing ones (ibid). Furthermore, the high costs associated with the implementation of most HRD initiatives, and the lack of conducting a successful training needs' identification, were also pointed out (ibid). Finally, research participants highlighted employees' inefficient time in attending training and developmental opportunities (ibid). Eventually, as HRD budgets diminish, a great part of the obligation of enhancing efficiency and efficacy moves to human capital (Freed et al, 2012).

For Greek organisations, such correlation is questioned through an evidenced HRD-organisational performance mismatch (Tharenou et al., 2007; Apospori et al, 2005). Relevant research evidence indicates that "*HR planning is less tightly linked with corporate planning in Greek firms than in MNC subsidiaries within the Greek territory*" (Myloni et al, 2004: 19). Other reasons that may hinder training investments can be traced to top management's lack of support, the absence of clear and comprehensive HRD policies, the lack of HRD's strategic integration with corporate strategy, the absence of skilled trainers, and the ineffective HRD evaluation (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2015; Lumley, 2009). With regards to the banking sector, for many years, Greek banks encouraged their employees to take full advantage of the various Hellenic Bank Association's (HBA) sponsored education and training programmes, besides including those being offered within (Mitsakis, 2014). The banking sector eventually became widely known as a leader in workforce development (ibid). However, the sector underwent significant change owing to fierce competition, business amalgamations, and several other developments which occurred due to crisis and the prolonged recession (ibid).

Furthermore, in terms of the employment relations, banking employees have experienced a change in their working conditions because of most banks' retrenchment strategies (Gennard, 2009). Approximately, 250.000 jobs were lost within the banking sector from 2008 to 2010 within the EU (BIS, 2012). This translates to an employment decrease of 6%, which is above the average employment reduction across the EU economy (-2.4%), and it can be explained by two opposite trends (Mitsakis, 2014). First, the privatisation and liberalisation of the sector resulted in higher profitability, value proposition and high employment, particularly in those countries in which the sector was less developed. On the other hand, the sector's concentration led to an increased number of redundancies and job losses, markedly in those countries with a mature and well-structured financial sector (ibid). For Greek banks, although relevant jobs have been traditionally considered as well protected (low incidence of temporary contracts and higher than average levels of remuneration), most banks' retrenchment strategies, to tackle to negative effects of the crisis, have challenged such a favourable outlook (ibid). In nearly every country (including Greece), banks have implemented cost-saving programmes (e.g. wage reductions, training cuts etc.) so to reduce labour costs and to create a more flexible, productive and efficient workforce (Dimitropoulos, 2012; Soriano, 2011).

Greek banks are also experiencing unprecedented challenges from the escalating economic crisis which test the sector's elasticity (Mylonas, 2013). Rapanos (2012), president of HBA, amongst others (Beck et al., 2012; Rioja & Valev, 2004), emphasized the critical role of national banking institutions as a key driver for national growth, by stating that: "*the banking sector is currently in the middle of the storm, a storm that it is dealing with, with sobriety and without complaint, in order to help the suffering economy and to support the national effort for the tackling of the economic crisis. We deeply believe that Greece has the possibilities to exit from the crisis the country has been experiencing over the past five years, and in this effort the banking system can play a catalytical role*". To this extent, Kontogiannis (2012) argues that the Greek economy remains gloomy, by foreseeing an economic contraction of 2.5-3.5% as fiscal consolidation, private sector wage cuts and high unemployment taking hold.

However, it is not that easy to assess the real impact of the GEC on banks, as the sector was already experiencing a deep restructuring phase (prior to the crisis) owing to the market's integration and internationalisation, the liberalisation of most global capital markets, the introduction of new technologies and an overall commercial expansion (Mylonas, 2013). Yet, the GEC, alongside the spread of financial innovations, contributed to the weakness of most financial institutions in effectively managing risk (Moschos & Chortareas, 2013).

Beyond its financially related problems, the economic crisis (and the prolonged recession) will continue to create work-related concerns for organisations. Therefore, the latter need to restructure their HR strategies and programmes, by turning them into more "environmentally-integrated" so to effectively cope with business uncertainty and complexity. That would allow them to better meet the demands of the new workforce and business era, along with increasing the maturity of their HRD practices (as that being suggested within the modified SHRD framework).

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided several definitions and a timeline of the economic crisis, and further highlighted its associated challenges with the HR implementations of organisations. Both the economic crisis, and the prolonged recession, have resulted in tremendous lay-offs, the rise of unemployment, and reductions in HRD investments. The immediate and profound impact of the crisis on HR was also outlined through a more market-oriented and short-term approach opposite to a proactive, long-term HR/HRD orientation. The need for Greek banks to pay greater attention to their SHRD practices was also highlighted both as part of their efforts to ensure their survival and for leading organisational change and business growth. Through an overview of the past and current state of HR in Greek banks, the following chapter will present the first of the two case study banking organisations in full detail, along with discussing the research findings that emerged through interviewing its HR staff, bank managers and employees.

CHAPTER 6 – Assessment of the "Case A" Banking Organisation

6.1 "Case A" Banking Organisation

This chapter will present the first case study banking organisation. A general background (vision & mission, operational activities, workforce synthesis, organisational & HR structure etc.) will introduce readers of this thesis with "Case A" banking institution. The interpretation of its research findings will then follow so to offer an insight into the organisation and thus to better explain its stakeholders' diverse perceptions of SHRD maturity. Later, the factors inhibiting or facilitating SHRD's adoption and maturity will be discussed, and a visual summary of the key findings (strategic criteria with regards to stakeholders' perceptions, stakeholders' perceptions change over time, pre and post-crisis shaping factors) will be provided within the closing comments.

6.1.1 Background

"Case A" was established in 1990 and it is mainly based in Athens-Greece. It is considered to be one of the leading Greek banking institutions with total assets of more than €75.5 billion (Annual Report 2014). Its operational presence extends beyond the national borders in many foreign financial markets (e.g. Ukraine, Western Europe, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Cyprus) (ibid). Therefore, the banking group is recognised as one of the main pillars of the national economy.

"Case A" went through several mergers and acquisitions before being formed into its current structure, and before becoming recognised as a key player both at national and international levels.

Following its prosperous past, "Case A" managed to strategically position itself in many countries by offering a wide range of retail and corporate banking products and services. The organisation further offers its asset management consultation not only in Greece but also in Luxembourg and Cyprus, while it is also present in the UK (London)

through the provision of investment and corporate banking products and services to its international client base. However, from 2006 to 2012, the organisation underwent a stagnant period and became reluctant to expand, along with selling 70% of its shares within a Turkish bank so to increase its operating capital and to handle its liquidity problems. Having temporarily resolved them, the bank acquired two new-reformed banking organisations in 2013. However, recent reports highlight the group's demand for crisis liquidity support from the "Greek Central Bank".

Besides the group's financially-related concerns, its corporate strategy acknowledges that its social face and innovation practices can both constitute the key factors of its success and renewal. Thus, it forms partnerships with several third-party organisations so to promote its targeted sponsorships. Especially after its latest acquisitions, the bank managed to achieve noteworthy synergies for its customers, workforce, and shareholders and thus to provide a wider range of products and services to its stakeholders through its expanded branch network (Annual Report 2014).

6.1.2 Vision and Mission

The bank's vision is to become customers' first choice within the South-Eastern and Central Europe by demonstrating its responsibility towards its stakeholders (e.g. employees, customers, shareholders, society) (Annual Report 2014). "Case A" organisational values correspond to teamwork and to an Equal Opportunity strategy which aims to consider and value the needs of its stakeholders.

The bank's creativity and innovation can be evidenced through several initiatives (because of various collaborations with third-party organisations) which aim to foster young entrepreneurship. For instance, one of its offerings is described as a programme which equips "*young individuals or groups of people with a complete scope of business incubation, acceleration and cooperating infrastructures and services*" (CSR Report 2014). Another initiative is offered jointly with the Greek Federation of Businesses and focuses on rewarding innovative business ideas, products and services by further developing them (ibid). The bank also provides extensive donations to various

educational and relief institutions. Overall, its core business values focus on the organisation's social contribution so to help local communities to thrive, especially after the economic downturn.

Although the bank has passed through major restructurings lately, its vision and mission are implemented consistently throughout business merging. Based on its principal values and priorities, the newly-formed "Case A" banking corporation has been transformed into a strong and internationalised Greek bank, able to support healthy, outgoing and innovative entrepreneurship, while also to decisively contribute to the reconstruction of the Greek economy.

6.1.3 Pillars of Operational Activities

"Case A" is a privately-owned banking institution which offers a wide range of personal and private banking products and services to its client base. Its main activities can be categorised under five main divisions, namely retail banking, corporate banking, wealth management, a global market and treasury department, and investment banking and equity brokerage operations. The group further administers services such as securities, payroll, real estate, and other e-services as part of its broader offerings (Annual Report 2014). Within all its departments/divisions, the most qualified employees (e.g. those holding, at minimum, a relevant master's degree or a relevant business certification) are employed so to enhance the bank's competitive positioning within the market.

With regards to its retail banking services, the group offers tailor-made deposit plans and saving arrangements, along with providing its customers with a wide range of benefits and loyalty reward schemes (Annual Report 2014). Furthermore, it supports specially designed and integrated loans, fully customised to their clients' financial needs (ibid). The bank also offers customised savings solutions by allowing its customers to design their own accounts through a set of options being available to them through an e-platform. Yet, the prolonged recession forced the bank to adopt a conservative credit policy so to reduce its risk and to maintain its capital, both coming

out from its liquidity problems. At the end of 2013, after the successful completion of a business amalgamation with two other banking institutions, the group's total retail banking portfolio has increased to approximately 34 million euros (ibid).

Its customer-oriented focus has also helped the bank to enhance its corporate banking division by offering customised products and services to its corporate clients, and thus to better meet their increasing financial needs due to the economic uncertainty (Annual Report 2014). The bank further reconsidered the management of its high-risk corporate clients by offering them lower terms for their loan repayments. Overall, the group aims to enhance its presence within those sectors, market segments and business activities (e.g. technology, energy, telecommunications, shipping, entrepreneurship etc.) which are considered of high impact to the national economy (ibid). Within its international operations, it has also been involved in high-value deals so to reduce their associated risk (ibid). For both cases, the group formed strong synergies with key sectorial players, either nationally or internationally, so for win-win outcomes to emerge.

Its wealth management division focuses on the effective management of mutual funds and institutional portfolios (Annual Report 2014). Furthermore, within its global markets and treasury division, the group aims to offer an incorporated approach both in Greece and through its international presence by integrating all exchanges and assessing risky investments through a centralised cash administration model operated and controlled within its headquarters in Greece (Annual Report 2014). As far as the group's investment banking and equity brokerage services are concerned, the organisation provides financial advice to both individual and corporate customers. Thus, its sales department has formed several strategic partnerships with an extensive network of private dealers, as well as financial intermediation and investment firms in order to ensure that its products and services are delivered across Greece and abroad (ibid). Finally, the bank offers a wide range of services concerning securities, payroll administration and real estate management either through its branch network or through its e-banking and mobile-banking applications (ibid).

Overall, the organisation aims to remain competitive through the provision of a wide range of specialised services and products. By acknowledging the lean economic times within which people and businesses operate these days, it has transformed its offerings in such a way so to assure a balance between its deliverables and risk. Yet, in early 2015, the group had to apply for a liquidity assistance scheme offered by the Central Bank of Greece so to ensure its business survival.

6.1.4 Workforce Synthesis

The active growth of the bank in the years before the crisis, along with its recent business amalgamations, resulted in the formation of an even larger banking corporation. Both its corporate divisions and branch network have expanded in such a way that required the transformation of its organisational and HR practices so to offer competitive advantage within those market segments in which the group operated (nationally and abroad). Following its transformation, the bank's workforce comprised of approximately 19,000 employees with 57.8% of them based in Greece and the remaining 42.2% across its subsidiaries in Europe (CSR Report 2014 - figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 "Case A" Workforce's Synthesis

Employees per country
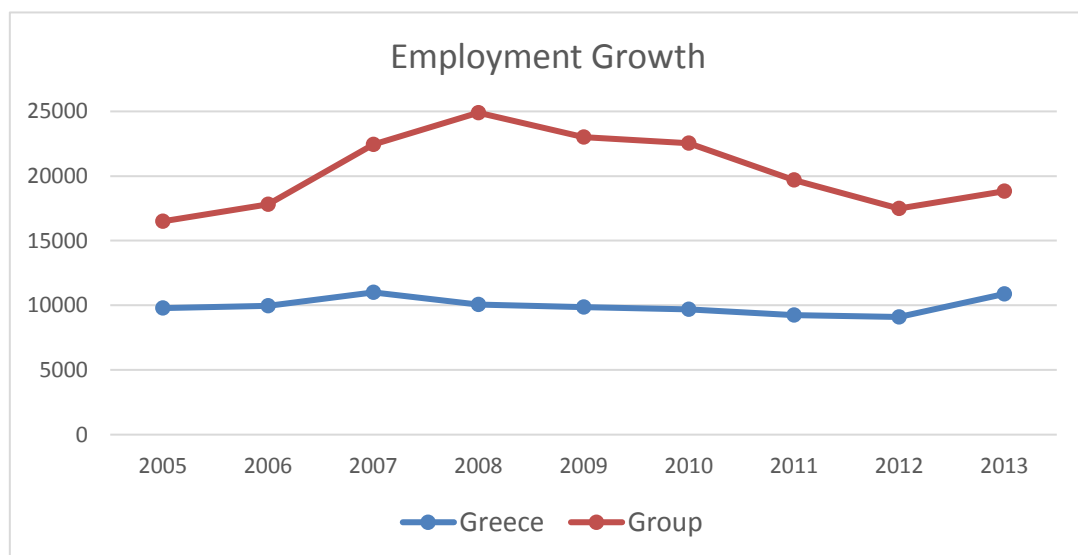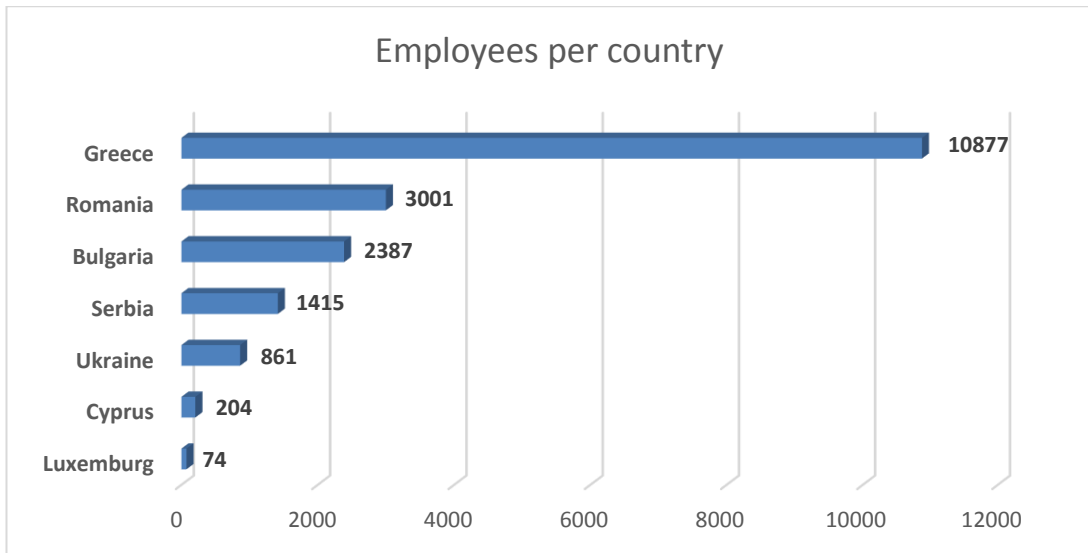
The geographical distribution of its workforce reveals an expansive convergence of employees within the Attica region (Athens & suburbs), with most of the employees being employed within its branch network (ibid - figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2 "Case A" Employee Distribution

Employment per financial activity

Employee distribution per function
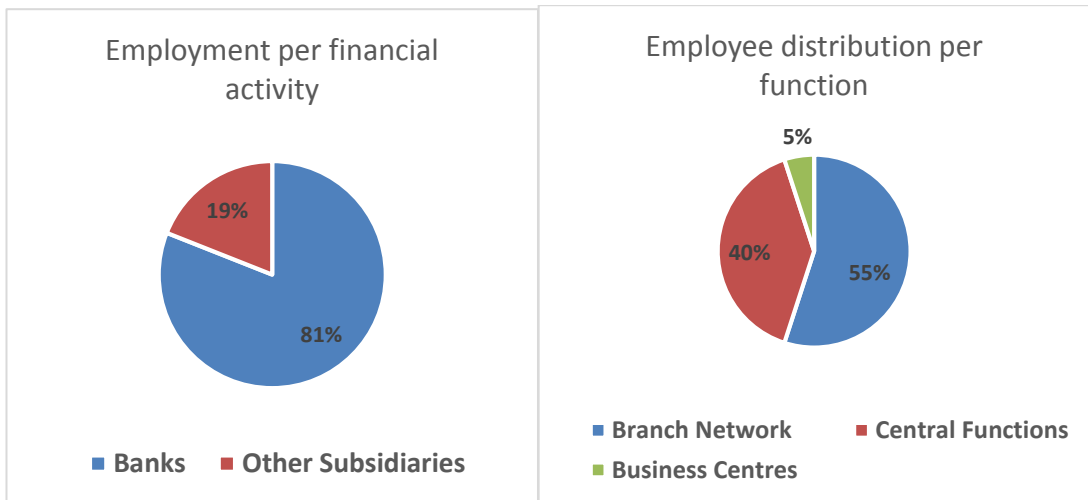
Women account for 56% of the group's operational and corporate divisions in Greece, with the average age of its workforce being thirty-nine (39) years old (ibid). Within its international subsidiaries, the presence of women representation is even higher (63%) than that of men (37%), while the average age of its employees is thirty-eight (38) years old (Annual Report 2014 – figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3 "Case A" Workforce's Synthesis

Employees distribution per function (**Greece**)

- Employees in other subsidiaries
- Bank Employees

Employees distribution per function (**Group**)

- Employees in other Group subsidiaries

Employee distribution by age and gender (**Greece**)

Men | Women

Employee distribution by age and gender (**Group**)

Men | Women
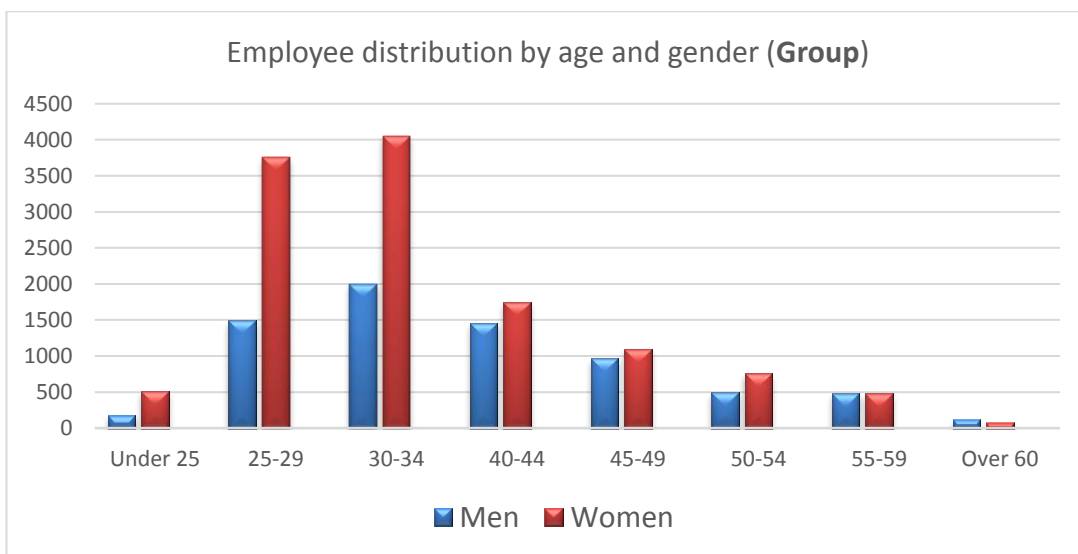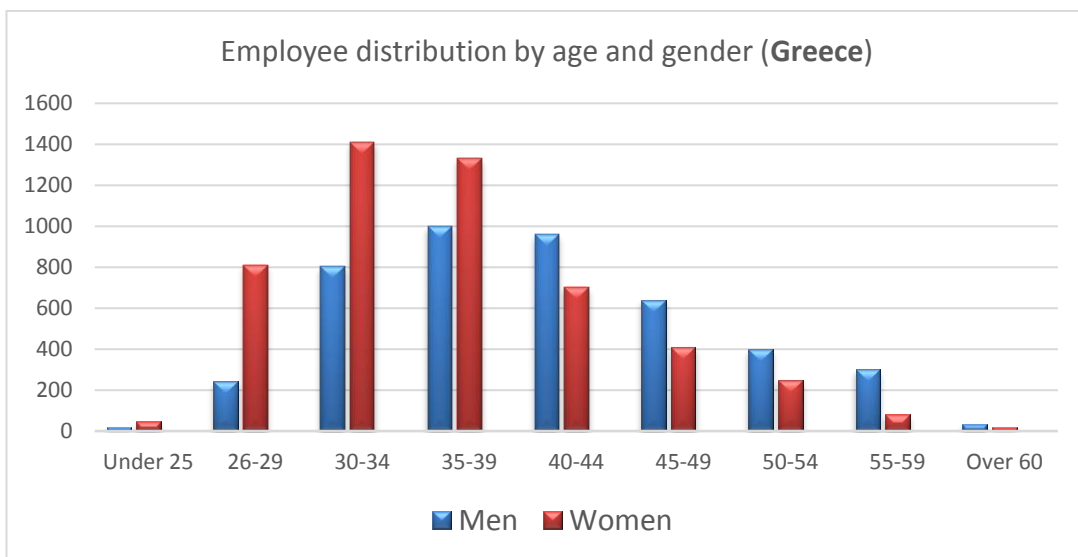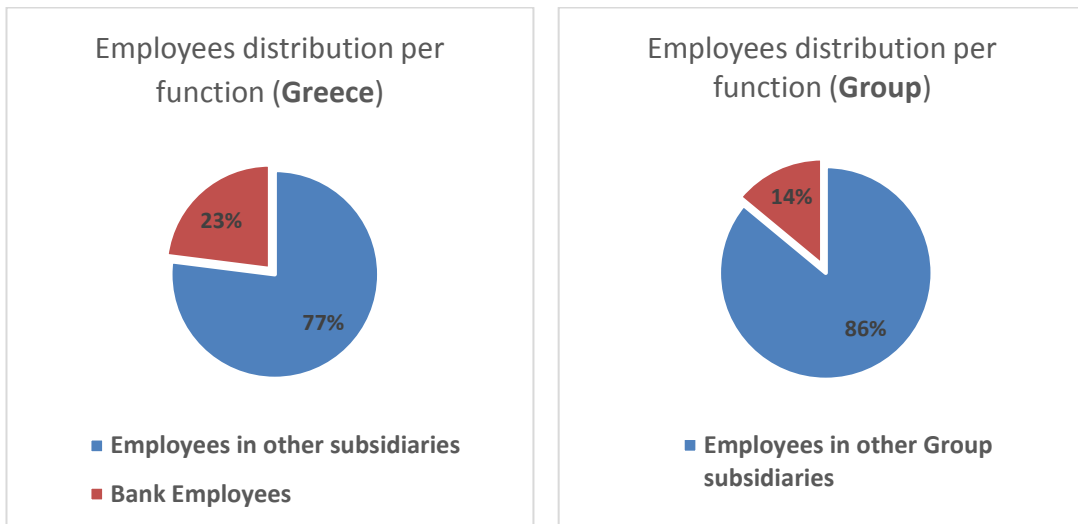
The academic background of its front-line and corporate division employees consists of individuals holding at least a bachelor's degree (53% at group level – 56% at national level), with the rest 47% and 44% holding a postgraduate or PhD degree (figure 6.4). That is common within the Greek financial sector because of its highly competitive nature. As to that, the organisation recognises that employee recruitment and professional development, could both be the start of a long-term and mutually beneficial relationship. Thus, 80% of its new job postings are secured by external candidates, and 20% are covered internally so to support and offer career development (CD) opportunities to its existing employees. Furthermore, the large majority of its employees have been employed by the bank for more than 5 years (53% at group level – 51% at national level); thus, constituting them as being capable of addressing interview questions at a pre and post-crisis assessment (figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4 "Case A" Workforce's Educational Background and Work Experience
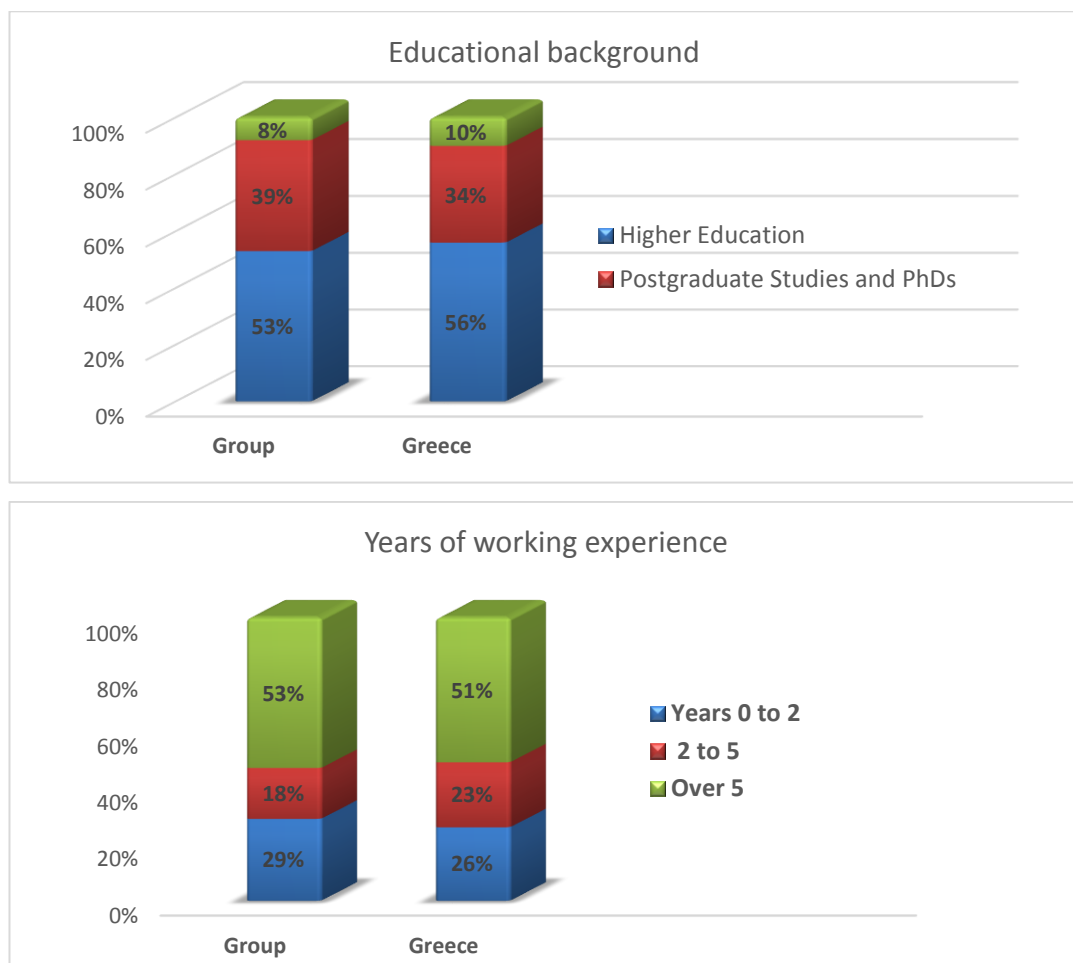
Overall, the bank's workforce is ranked amongst the most competent, both in terms of its productivity and educational level within the Greek banking sector.

6.1.5 Corporate Governance

"Case A" draws upon its corporate values, along with adopting national and international legal regulations, by integrating all within its wider business culture and philosophy (Annual Report 2014). However, the organisation acknowledges that strong corporate governance is not constrained to the ordinary recognition of the legislative framework (ibid). Therefore, its board of directors (BoD) is responsible for deciding the way in which the bank will operate. Its highest responsibility is to set the group's strategic objectives, and to guarantee all the necessary resources to achieve its aims.

The BoD also sets the group's values, and ensures that its stakeholders' interests are met. Thus, it is placed at the top of the organisational chart, and it consists of executives from several departments such as the marketing and communication, the internal audit and strategy department, the compliance and regulatory requests, and the human resource department etc. (figure 6.5). With regards to the latter, its executives highlighted the importance of their strategic positioning within the BoD as a means of ensuring a smooth operation and transformation of the business due to the on-going business amalgamations and owing to the escalating pressures from economic instability and environmental hostility. Below the BoD, the organisational chart is composed of various business departments/divisions that complement the business structure of the bank.

Figure 6.5 "Case A" Organisational Structure
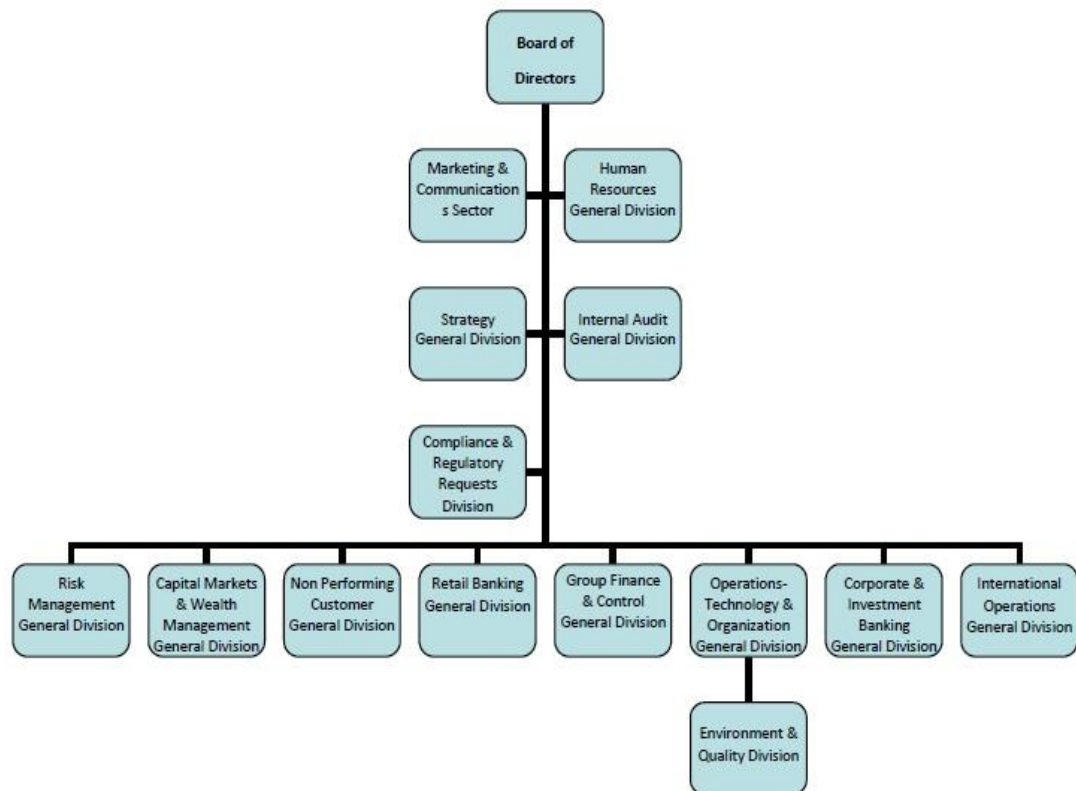
Besides its basic members, the BoD is supported by several board committees (e.g. audit, risk, strategic planning, remuneration, nomination) from which it receives regular support (CSR Report 2014). Each one accounts for different responsibilities, yet with all aiming to assist the BoD throughout the effective management of the organisation (ibid). Therefore, the audit committee focuses on assisting the BoD with issues regarding the internal and external audit function, along with assuring the group's regulatory legitimacy. The risk committee provides risk assessment reports so to help the group throughout its strategic risk management decision making processes (ibid). The remuneration committee offers specialised advice with regards to the group's remuneration strategy so to attract and retain the most talented individuals. Moving forward to the responsibility of the nomination committee, it focuses on issues related to the BoD's sufficiency, productivity and viability, along with arranging the designation of key management executives (ibid). Finally, the strategic planning committee is responsible for ensuring the design of a well-defined business strategy so to comply with the BoD's directions. Thus, it proposes strategic business plans and

initiatives to enhance the group's competitiveness. The committee also sets key annual objectives, along with preparing the annual budget by monitoring and controlling of the group's capital structure (ibid).

Overall, all committees aim to ensure that everyone works under the organisational corporate governance codes and practices so to maximise value proposition and to reduce risk. Therefore, the group's HR department is expected to offer its advice and to assist these committees by undertaking a more strategic role within the BoD.

6.1.6 The HR Function at "Case A"

Resourcing methods of "Case A" are accredited (ISO 9001), and they are practiced by fully-trained and certified (from several external training organisations – e.g. Hellenic Bank Association, Hay Group etc.) HR specialists (CSR Report 2014). Its external hiring targets the recruitment of individuals with high academic and strong professional backgrounds. Half of its employees (53%) hold a bachelor degree, with 39% of its workforce to possess a Master or a PhD within its national operations; thus, for a total of 92% of its workforce to make up of well-educated individuals. Within its international operations, the respective percentage of its qualified workforce (BSc, MSc or PhD) is 90%. The organisation also places great emphasis on promoting internship programmes so to attract the most talented young individuals so to nurture the future generation of its bank executives (Annual Report 2014).

The group further outlines the strategic importance of filling vacancies internally so to advance its employees within. Following the 2008 crisis, greater emphasis has been placed on the group's workforce internal utilisation. In Greece, the percentage of people moving within went up to 91% in 2013, while cross-functional movements accounted for 75% (CSR Report 2014). The group's job vacancies were covered internally at the percentage of 57% (Case A website). Overall, the organisation acknowledges that its staffing processes can enhance its competitiveness within today's environmental hostility, and that can the organisation to bounce back to a "healthier" organisational and economic condition.

"Case A" T&D programmes aim to promote the creation of a learning business environment by reflecting the latest developments within the industry. Therefore, they focus on a variety of training subjects so to keep employees up-to-date on issues related to their work contexts, and the financial sector in general (CSR Report 2014). The bank's HR department claims that by enhancing their employees' knowledge, insight and work-related skills and abilities, they would be able to accept greater responsibilities and eventually to progress within the organisation. Most of its training initiatives are offered either in-house or externally (figure 6.6), and they can be categorised into five main sections, namely the "induction" training programme for its new-joiners, the "sales consulting-customer service" programme for its front-line staff, various certification programmes in co-operation with the Hellenic Bank Association, the "in-house MBA in Financial Services" programme in collaboration with a reputable Greek educational institution, and finally its "leadership development" programme (ibid).

Figure 6.6 "Case A" Participations per Training Subject & Type of the Training Program

Participation per training subject (%)

- Management 27.50%
- Banking 46%
- IT 13%
- In house MBA 0.40%
- Other Post-graduate 0.50%
- Accounting & Tax 0.90%
- Sales 9.50%
- Congress 2.20%
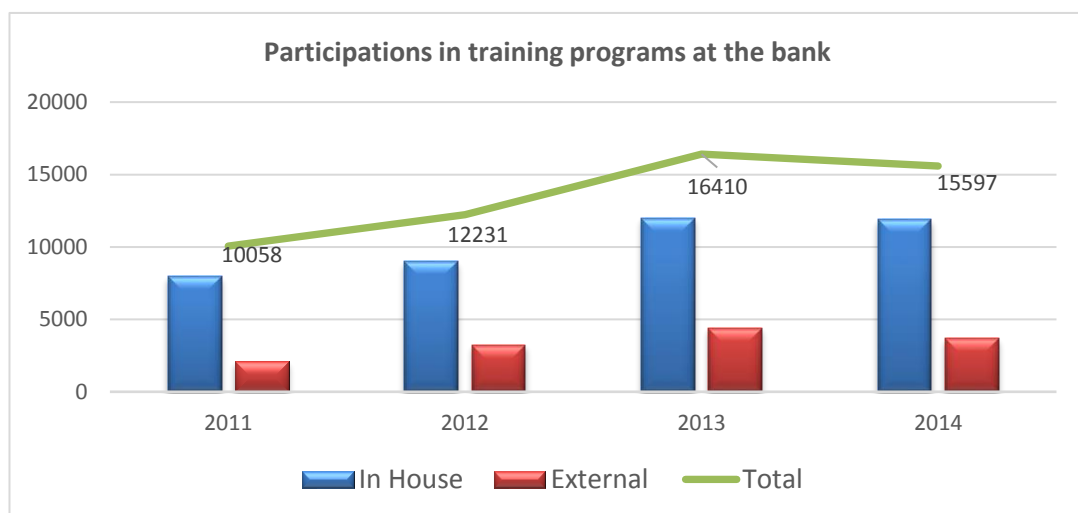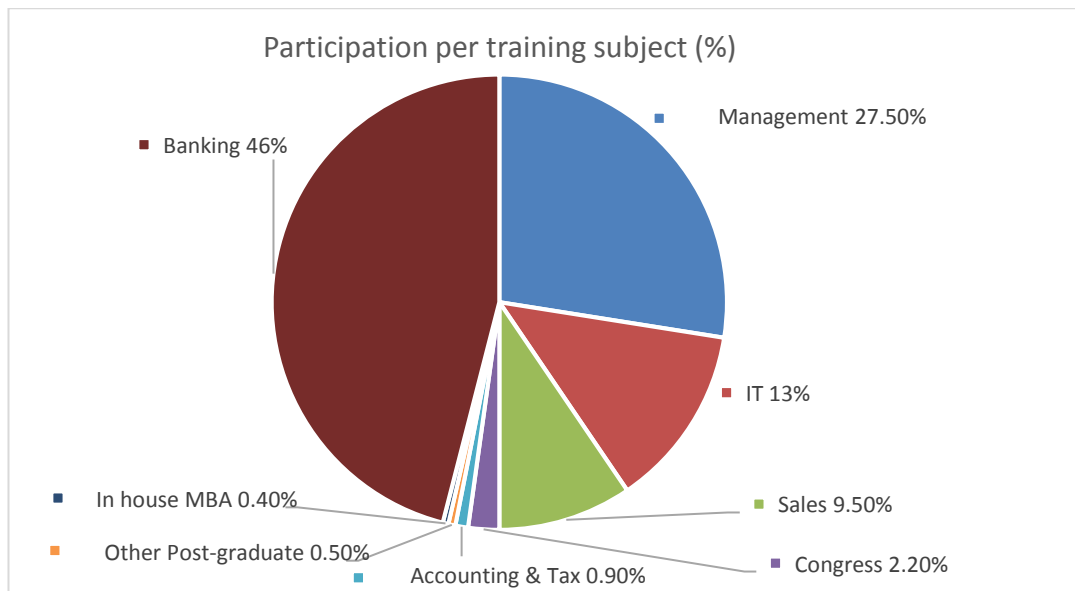
For all newly-hired employees, induction training is offered. The programme lasts three to eight weeks and its aim is to provide all the necessary information so to familiarise newcomers with the organisation, its philosophy, its services and products and the financial sector as well (CSR Report 2014). The organisation claims that it treats all employees equally by offering them a wide range of career advancement opportunities so to keep them motivated, committed and efficient (ibid). Having altered its business focus towards the enhancement of its front-line operations though, the bank offers a "sales consulting and customer service" training programme to its branch employees only (ibid). By acknowledging the diverse and complex demands of today's client base, the programme focuses on creating a client-oriented mentality so to enable employees to successfully identify the unique demands of each of their clients, and thus to offer tailor-made services and products aiming to increase customer loyalty and to foster mutual trustworthiness (ibid). Therefore, qualified trainers and experienced HR executives design and deliver relevant training initiatives with the aim to increase employees' capabilities and eventually the banks' overall competitiveness.

In cooperation with the Hellenic Bank Association, the group offers a series of certified training programmes focusing on private banking, branch network management, training for business centre account officers etc. (ibid). The bank also administers an in-house MBA programme which is delivered in collaboration with a reputable Greek

educational institution. The programme lasts two years and it aims to cultivate participants' skills and abilities through the delivery of relevant courses and case-study examination. The programme is also viewed as a good career development opportunity for those wishing to progress within the organisation (ibid).

The bank's leadership training programme aims to equip its workforce with key strategic capabilities and management aptitudes so to enable them to adapt and adjust gracefully to constantly changing business environments. Its objective is to advance these capabilities that could prompt the consistent advancement of both the employees and the organisation. In addition, the organisation designs and offers diversity training both within its national and international operational departments.

The bank also embraces a compensation and rewards policy for its people fully-aligned with the group's corporate strategy. Its main aim is to guarantee that compensation schemes are competent enough so to attract and secure the employment of those individuals possessing the desirable aptitudes and experience (Annual Report 2014). It also aims to assure inner parity amongst the bank's business divisions, to avoid unnecessary risk-taking, and to associate employees' compensation with their long-term performance (ibid). Most recently, its reward system has been revised in such a way so to remain competitive compared to sectorial competition. Therefore, the bank has developed a mixed reward scheme that is based on variable and fixed compensation. The scheme is also performance-driven, especially with regards to its branch network and business centers, so to reward individual and team/branch success (figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7 "Case A" Compensation & Rewards System – Employee Benefits
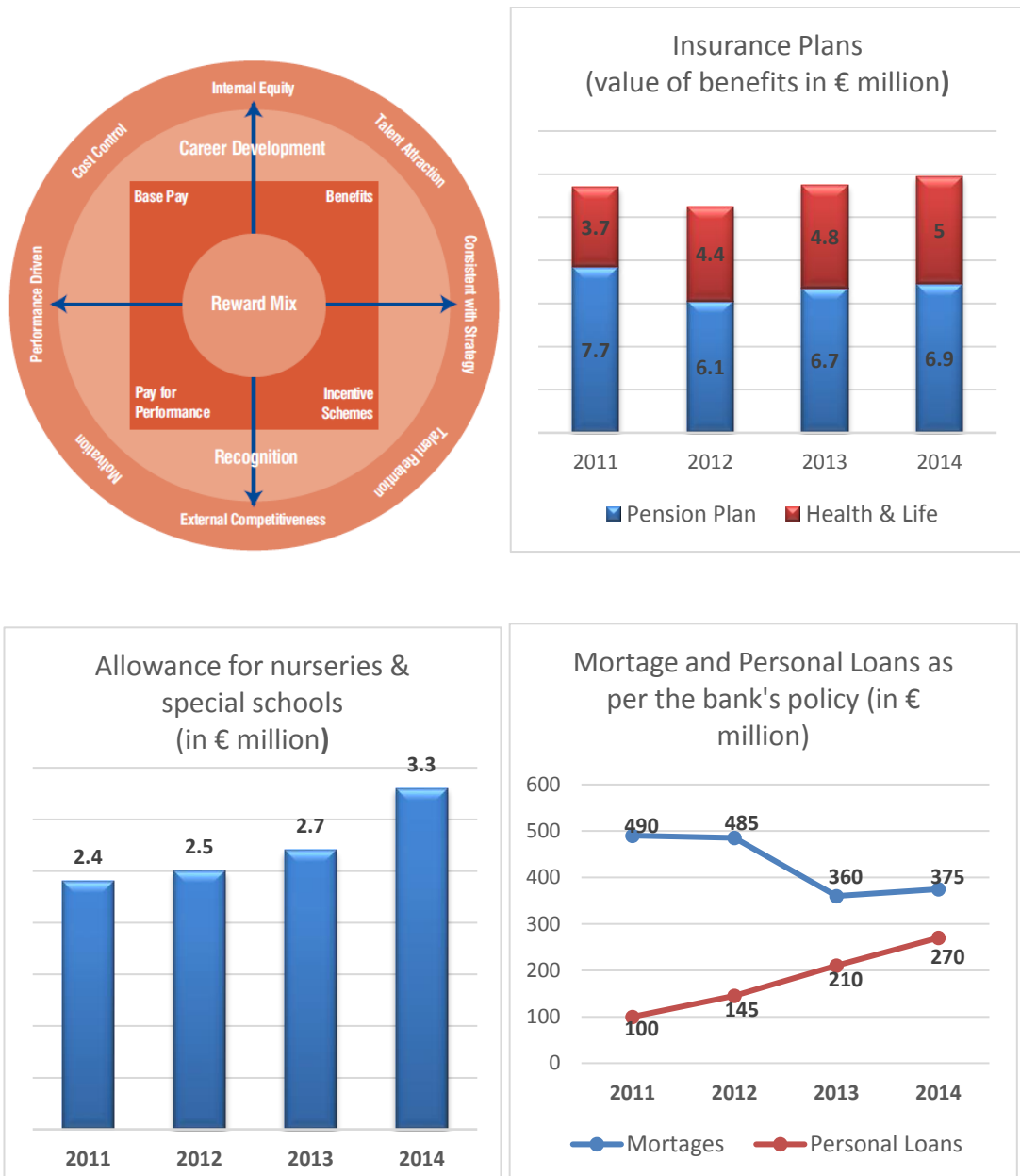
The bank further offers a wide range of well-being related benefits such as insurance plans, financial advice on personal loans and financial support to its employees and their families (CSR Report 2014). The group's social insurance arrangement covers most of the issues related to its workforce's health and well-being. Its health plan ensures that both its employees and their families are eligible for hospital and medical care in any health-related occasion, along with providing emergent transportation, when required, to all injured or heavily-sick employees and family members either in

Greece or abroad (ibid). In addition, the organisation offers a savings plan so to assist employees to finance their children's studies, and to help them start their professional career (ibid). Additional benefits are also offered (e.g. "marriage bonus" for newly-married employees, nursery expenses of their new-born children, financial aid for disabled family members and cover of their educational expenses etc.). Finally, the organisation actualises an employee-pricing policy with low interest rates for its employee mortgages, while it also pays the total amount of four salaries, upfront, as a personal loan for each employee (figure 6.7). Although such offerings are commonly used within the banking sector, employees welcome their provision and recognise them as exceptional rewards, during such difficult times.

Overall, the bank's HR department aims to develop those HR strategies, plans and policies that fully comply with the highest business requirements and standards. Therefore, it was argued that its significance can be evidenced through its positioning as a strategic business partner within the BoD (figure 6.5, p.120).

6.1.7 Organisation of HR

The group's HR structure follows a traditional format, with an HR Director placed as the head of the department (figure 6.8), and the one appointed to the BoD. Below the HR director, the HR structure consists of four HR managers (e.g. an HR Manager for the corporate divisions, one for the branch network, a communication manager, and the head of training and development). Each one has a different focus, yet with all working interdependently to achieve their common objectives. One of the latest change within the group's HR structure was the introduction of the HR manager focusing on all branch network-associated HR aspects because of the latest business amalgamations and the bank's business focus shift towards the enhancement of its front-line operations.

Figure 6.8 "Case A" HR Structure
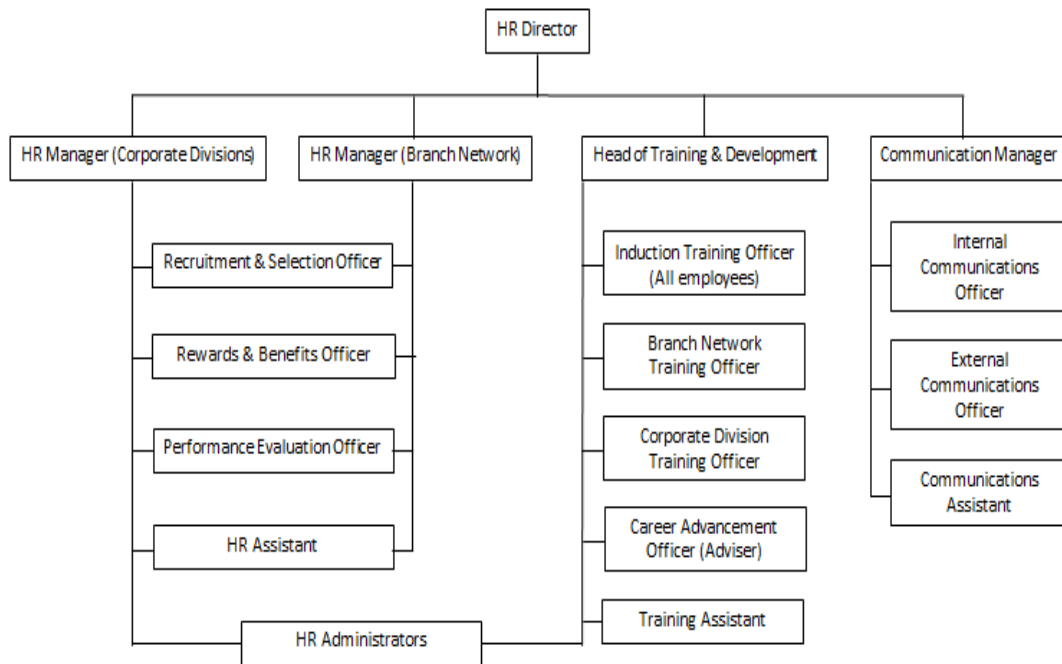
Following the bank's HR structure, there are two HR managers reporting to the HR Director; one for its corporate divisions, and a second one for its branch network. Both care for almost similar responsibilities. The latter's role is to co-operate with branch managers (LMs) so to ensure the smooth running of their branches in terms of managing their human capital. Therefore, branch managers' active involvement is welcomed as they are the ones closest to their front-line employees. However, research findings contradict this suggestion by highlighting that HR accountabilities are not devolved to the line. The HR department's centralised decision making process accounts for restricting branch managers' role on just reporting their branch results monthly.

The HR department further consists of a Training & Development Manager who works with his/her officers and assistants so to deliver T&D opportunities to all bank employees. The design and implementation of all HRD initiatives aim to ensure that business and HR objectives are both met. Finally, a communication manager is situated within the HR department, with his/her unit being accountable of all internal and external communication processes (e.g. stakeholders' reports regarding the latest changes within the organisation in terms of its human capital transformation etc.).

6.1.8 Training and Development

"Case A" designs and delivers HRD initiatives through its "Professional Development and Training Framework" which emphasises on the development of a supportive learning culture and the continuous development of its workforce (Annual Report 2014). Several mentoring and coaching programmes aim to advance and boost employees' leadership and competence skills so for superior performance and increased organisational competitiveness to emerge. In addition, a constructive evaluation and feedback mechanism is implemented so to distinguish each employee's qualities and weaknesses, and accordingly to highlight the areas of improvement (ibid).

The bank offers a management development and leadership programme for its executives in collaboration with an educational institution in Greece. Its purpose is to equip participants with the required skills to acquire managerial positions within the organisation's national and international operations. The programme identifies each participant's areas of further improvement, and through teamwork and coaching aims to set their personal management and leadership requirements. The programme also focuses on discovering innovative ways through which present and future leaders can become more effective with regards to managing themselves and their teams (ibid). The programme is delivered on a part-time basis and it lasts two years. Participants are called to undertake various modules aiming to enhance their strategic thinking, while also helping them to viably manage individuals and groups, to effectively adapt and manage within a rapidly changing business world, and to successfully deal with teamwork and conflict management.

Furthermore, the organisation promotes and finances its employees' certification in various financial-related subject areas, such as investment and insurance services, "counter-fraud", e-banking etc. (Annual Report 2014). In addition, the bank delivers a targeted training programme, named "Combating Fraud", to all senior, middle, and front-line employees (ibid). Following on from a recent number of financial frauds, this certification aims to promote an "anti-fraud" culture within the organisation, and

to further equip its employees with the necessary knowledge and tools so to prevent such phenomena (Case A website – Employee Development & Training). The bank also introduces, for its experienced banking officers both in Greece and abroad, an internal "Corporate Banking" and "International Corporate Banking" certified training programme to enable its executives' cross-collaboration (ibid). Furthermore, owing to its business focus shift (towards enhancing its front-line operations), the bank has designed a training course focusing on "sales consulting and customer service excellence". The programme is delivered in co-operation with the Hellenic Bank Association, and it is available to all branch network employees. It aims to enhance employees' cognitive skills and to boost their creativity and innovation, by further aiming to increase organisational competitiveness and efficiency (ibid). The group further promotes work-life balance training initiatives so to enhance their employees' skills in managing anger & work-related stress, to enhance their emotional intelligence, communication, and employability skills etc. Such programmes are free for everyone, and they are conducted in-house either within or beyond the working schedule. External certified training professionals deliver these sessions, which usually tend to be intensive as they last from one to two days, depending on the number of the attendees. Last year, the bank reported a total number of 1527 employees who undertook such courses.

Overall, the organisation acknowledges that its employees' professional development is a continuous process that cannot be attained by just undertaking some training courses or seminars (Annual Report 2014). Thus, the organisation offers developmental opportunities, such as the active involvement of all employees in various projects, mentoring and coaching, job enrichment and work-exchange role taking. In relation to the latter, the bank has launched its "Employment Family Scheme" which involves all employees regardless of the level of their knowledge, skills, expertise etc. (ibid). Through this training programme, employees volunteer in assisting other departments to complete their work tasks. Such a strategy aims to create a collaborative and supportive business environment within which people can engage with other work activities, and thus to gain insights into different business sections and operations.

Taking all that into consideration, the organisation highlights the success of its T&D framework through an increased number of participations (74.3%), a high level of training man-hours (tmh), and a percentage of 24.8% for its e-training offerings (e.g. "Harvard Business Publishing" and "Money Laundering") versus the total tmh (figure 6.9 - CSR Report 2014). With regards to e-learning, the bank supports the provision of all of its e-based initiatives as first-class training techniques (Annual Report 2014).

Figure 6.9 "Case A" Training Rates

The rationale behind such deliverables lies under the proposition that their employees' PC literacy allow the organisation to enrich its training offerings with a wider package of training techniques/methods that can be individually managed (every day, all week, at any time, at any place) (ibid). Therefore, e-learning programmes consist of training

sessions focusing on various organisational aspects such as general banking principles, private and personal banking, products and services delivery, health and safety etc. In most cases, they are delivered through relevant informative videos and written material that the employees need to watch and read respectively. At the end, an evaluation questionnaire should be completed, and a passing mark is awarded. The HR department views these training initiatives as a cost-efficient way of training their employees as it is not necessary for the latter to leave their jobs, neither to employ an internal or external trainer, and neither to use the bank's training centre. However, research findings indicate that much of the employees do not agree with such implementations by indicating their preference to the traditional class-based training due to the interaction between the trainer and the trainees.

Following the interdependency of all HR managers and of their respective function, the T&D unit collaborates closely with all HR managers, and their staff, so to constantly identify the bank employees' training needs, and accordingly to design and deliver the most appropriate programmes to meet their needs. Yet, research data outlines that access to the bank's training programmes and the quality of the training being offered is a matter of debate amongst the interviewed stakeholders.

6.1.9 Communication

Following the HR structure of "Case A", the enhancement of both its external and internal communication processes is a top priority for the organisation so to build a trusting relationship with its stakeholders (CSR Report 2014). Internal communication aims to inform employees and other stakeholders on issues related to business strategy and to its corporate culture by constantly providing them with the latest news concerning the group. It is also viewed as a tool of strengthening business philosophy and as a means of reinforcing the bonds between the employees and the business (ibid). Especially throughout the merging process, the communication manager claimed that their clear communication process was proved critical in maintaining employee morale at high levels, while concurrently initiating a creative discourse between them and the

management team. Therefore, it was argued that "Case A" supports its HR-related communication processes through its intranet, and a system called "HR4U" (ibid).

The bank's intranet aims to provide real, direct and up-to-date information on various events occurring within the organisation, along with presenting the organisational principles and values, the business philosophy, the operational regulations, any internal job vacancies etc. The system is user-friendly as it allows all employees to get involved (CSR Report 2014). Furthermore, the system focuses on guaranteeing the consolidated, rational and equal treatment of all employees' appeals (ibid). The HR help desk, which runs this platform, claims that it has handled approximately 23,500 requests, with 79% of them being resolved instantly, and 94% of these appeals being settled within two to three days (Case A website). However, it was difficult to check the nature of these requests (severe or less severe), and thus it was not possible to draw useful conclusions from these figures. Yet, an assumption may be made here with regards to employees' limited expectations to HR-related concerns.

Overall, internal communication of "Case A" incorporates three cornerstones, namely corporate communication, business events for rewarding academic excellence and superior performance, and other cultural, sports, and social events for its workforce and their families (CSR & Annual Reports 2014). As part of its internal communication processes, "Case A" also implements a communication programme called "breakfast with management" through which employees are welcomed to have an open discussion with the bank's senior management on any workplace-related concern. Although such an initiative represents an interesting approach to "employees' voicing" within the organisation, research findings highlight the latter's limited interaction and participation in relevant processes.

Overall, having acknowledged the economic turbulence and the environmental hostility within which the bank operates, the group aims to maintain constant communication with its stakeholders, either internally or externally, so to keep them informed with regards to the latest changes occurring within the organisation and the banking sector as well. Following its business philosophy, the organisation claimed

that it has managed to better transform into the current new bank corporation after completing on-going business amalgamations.

6.2 The Strategic Audit of "Case A" HRD practices

In respect to the requirements of assessing SHRD maturity within the case study organisations, a modified SHRD framework, with its respective strategic criteria, has been proposed. Each strategic component was examined through the perceptions of different HRD stakeholders, and through a pre and post-crisis assessment approach. That enabled the researcher to examine and evaluate SHRD maturity over time, and to highlight the complexity attached with stakeholders' differing and changing perspectives. In addition, a range of factors affecting its adoption and maturity were outlined.

Therefore, interviews were held with key HRD stakeholders. Precisely, thirteen (13) people from the HR department were interviewed, consisting of one (1) HR director, the head of T&D (1), five (5) HR officers, three (3) HR assistants, and three (3) HR administrators (**tables 4.1 & 4.2, pp.82-85**). Following the interviews with HR staff, bank managers (branch & other corporate departments – 10 in total) were approached because of the business focus shift identified towards the enhancement of the bank's front-line operations. Precisely, interviews were held with eight (8) branch managers, one (1) IT manager, and one (1) retail loans manager. Finally, fifteen (15) bank employees also offered their insights, consisting of ten (10) front-line employees (branch network) and another five (5) from other corporate divisions.

In brief, although a consensus between the respective perceptions of the HR staff and the bank managers were identified in relation to most of the examined themes (SHRD understanding, maturity-strategic characteristics, factors etc.), a perceptual contradiction was also found amongst them and the interviewed employees. Such identifiable contrasts were noticed with regards to the extent to which each of the proposed strategic characteristics was employed or not within their organisation. Everyone identified economic crisis though as the most influential factor hindering

SHRD's adoption and maturity. Yet, there were a few who claimed that crisis was just an excuse of their organisation's retrenchment strategies.

Following the structure of its main literature review chapter (ch.3: "*Towards a modified framework for operationalising SHRD maturity*"), and the strategic components of the proposed/modified SHRD framework (**p.31**), the analysis of the research findings will focus on the following set of strategic characteristics of SHRD maturity: (1) shaping organisational mission and goals, (2) environmental scanning through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees, (3) "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies (4) strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders, (5) strategic partnership with HRM, (6) extensive role for HRD executives, (7) strategic ability to shape and influence business culture and climate, and (8) strategic HRD evaluation process. Having examined stakeholders' perceptions of the suggested strategic components, the researcher managed to evaluate SHRD maturity over time, and thus to present its aspirational and real nature. In addition, strong evidence on the suggested strategic indicators for each strategic characteristic (**p.51**) proposed either a mature, in HRD terms, organisation or the opposite. The factors which can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity had to be addressed as well; therefore, these were categorised into micro (e.g. organisational culture and business climate etc.) and macro ones (e.g. economic state, labour unions, globalisation, technology etc.). Finally, stakeholders' perceptions were examined retrospectively (pre and post-crisis) so to explore change and constraints of SHRD maturity over time.

6.2.1 Shape organisational mission, goals and strategies

HRD's ability to shape corporate mission, goals and strategies can offer an indication of SHRD maturity with regards to this specific strategic criterion. Taking that into consideration, over three-quarters of the interviewed participants stressed the importance of HR (including its HRD activities) to undertake a more proactive role in achieving such aims, especially within today's business and economic environments. Everyone from the HR department, and more than half of the interviewed managers,

pointed to HR as being a key player within their organisation and its board of directors (BoD). For instance, the HR director argued that their voice is strong and clear throughout the formation of the business strategy, by stating that:

"Our department undertakes a significant role during business strategy's formulation as its voice is represented within our BoD, and eventually our concerns and suggestions are heard and considered" (HRDr)

His assertion could be demonstrated within most organisational documents, yet without explicitly explaining the role of the HR department, and that of its accountabilities within the bank's BoD (CSR Reports & Annual Reports 2014). Therefore, further probing him to provide an example of his department's strategic role, the respondent could not point to specifics:

"Ermmmmm, you see, within the BoD, our role is very complicated. Yet, we think that all other managers' roles are complicated as well. Do not think that they have more influence or power than us" (HRDr)

An HR officer and an HR assistant, both also proposed that HR's positioning had been reinforced because of the crisis, as it now undertakes an important role throughout the design and execution of most business operations. Both further outlined HRD's strategic alignment with new business objectives (enhancement of the bank's front-line operations) through the provision of e-learning as a powerful tool with regards to their employees' development. Thus, they argued that:

"Our goal is to grow our people. Our training interventions aim to enhance our workforce's skills and knowledge so to boost productivity and eventually to ensure business survival and competitiveness within such a hostile business and economic environment" (HROff)

"Targeted and first-class training (e.g. e-courses) is provided to our employees so to meet the demanding needs of an evolving sector and business environment.

Rather than following trends, our target is to set them, by helping our people to become more competent" (HRAss)

Again, their assertions could be evidenced within all organisational reports, however without referring to specific examples on how to achieve their objectives (Staff Training and Development Policy, 2014). Asking them to provide further examples to support their arguments; surprisingly, both were unable to come with one that could indicate their department's strategic voice within the BoD. Their points were mainly focused on the training offered, but without explicitly indicating whether that was the outcome of their strategic positioning within the BoD or just a reaction to new business realities. Therefore, it can be argued that their suggestions mostly indicated the aspirational role of HRD rather than the reality of it (a more functional rather than a strategic HR approach as well).

Others further suggested that:

"Everybody plainly distinguishes that our mission is to enhance the nature of doing business through the consistent training of our manpower. Therefore, we work towards accomplishing our key strategic priorities which aim to create, prepare and leverage an adequate labour force, capable of delivering exceptional services to our customers" (HRAdm)

"We constantly aim to be ahead of our competitors. To do so though, we need a competent workforce; here comes our role. To further enhance our department's role and importance, the HR department is represented at the BoD so to offer its strategic advice" (HRAss)

Like their HR Director's assertion, their suggestions represented just a rehashing of their HR mission statement (HR Policies and Procedures, 2014), and highlighted their inability to defend their department's strategic capacity in influencing business strategies and goals by referring to specific examples.

Following HR staff's propositions, although most bank managers have acknowledged HR's value proposition, along with the necessity of its professionals to participate more actively throughout business strategy's formation, their statements mainly indicated an operational role for HR. Precisely, a branch manager argued that:

"Since the HR manager represents the unit within the BoD, that is enough. There is no imperative need to include HR executives within the BoD and strategy's formulation. A simple representation of their unit is enough as nothing moves around recruiting, training, career advancement etc. anymore" (BM)

A Retail banking officer (RBOff) further suggested that:

"I believe that HR executives' role within the BoD is more supportive than that of a shaper or a contributor. Yet, things were quite different a few years ago" (RBOff).

From their statements, a more functional role for HR can be evidenced, as both outline that nothing has been initiated from an HR proposition, and therefore HR department's presence within the BoD is a simple representation rather than the indication of a strategic positioning.

However, things were presented differently for the period before the crisis. A branch manager argued that:

"Our HR department used to be a pivotal player amongst top management executives through its constructive propositions and implementations" (BM)

Furthermore, all interviewed managers agreed that pre-crisis HR was progressing due to the bank's expansion into foreign countries, while they further argued that a higher budget was at their hands (HR department) so to design and deliver T&D opportunities for their employees. Back then, HR's consultation was considered crucial, not only for operational but for strategic purposes as well.

An HR officer further claimed that their pre-crisis HR department was amongst the first to be consulted with regards to new business developments owing to the bank's great growth, by stating that:

"*A few years ago, during the banks' great expansion period, we were a major contributor to the successful execution of all business strategies, through the design and delivery of our tailored and exceptional services and consultation*" (HROff)

Although someone may argue that financial incentives mainly lie behind such business developments, HR's pre-crisis role was stronger compared to its post-crisis one, and thus it was presented as being easier for it to shape and direct business goals and missions. That could also be evidenced through the greater reference made within most organisational documents on HR's role to shape and influence business missions, goals and strategies prior to the crisis, compared with the respective ones published after (Annual Report 2007; Annual Report 2014, HR Policy 2007, HR Policy 2014).

On the other hand, employees offered a different perspective. Although greater training opportunities were offered before, employees further argued that HR always lacked the capacity to influence and shape organisational objectives, as everything was directed from senior management. Eventually, its role was restricted to following top-down guidelines, and accordingly in supporting their successful implementation. Employees also appeared skeptical as to whether HR's positioning within the BoD was of great importance, by suggesting that the department was, is and will be the most marginalised one in terms of budget allocations. They further claimed that although a more proactive role is required for HR these days, its setback is clear. With all that being considered, they could not identify a match between SHRD and their bank's HRD approach. Having been asked to highlight the major problems associated with the strategic development of their organisation's HRD approach, all outlined its lack of a strategic business outlook, by arguing that:

"There is not something like that. What you are talking about is more of an old fairy tale with a bad end. There is no long-term strategy, while a limited budget is now available for almost all business functions" (Branch employee)

"Our HR department does not hold the capacity to design and deliver substantial developmental opportunities, as its priority is to keep costs down through major staff redundancies and other related actions. Don't think that makes it strategic at all" (Branch employee)

"Nowadays, there is no HR planning at all, especially under a long-term perspective. All business executives, along with those situated in HR, are now occupied with how to increase business prosperity (in the short-term), and how to successfully help with on-going business amalgamations" (Employee-corporate division)

"What to say about these guys (HR department)? All they care about is to do more with spending less. How that could happen? What they also forget is that people who could make the difference; employees are those keeping banks operating; therefore, they should focus on them and offer opportunities to further develop them" (Employee-corporate division)

Their viewpoints illustrate HR's inability to shape organisational strategies due to its functional, cost and short-term orientation. Although everyone believed that HR has always been reactive in nature rather than demonstrating its strategic value proposition, a strategic alignment between the HR and the new business objectives does exist.
The story was presented differently for HR before the crisis. All employees highlighted that greater training, development and career advancements opportunities were offered back then, either because of the bank's expansion or owing to favourable economic and industrial conditions. Thus, they argued that:

"Five to six years ago, you could choose amongst a wide range of training opportunities which you could undertake either within the bank's training centre or through its training associates. Today, limited training sessions are largely offered as

subsidised programmes from M.E.O (Manpower Employment Organisation) and during our shifts, with limited momentum or support from our managers" (Branch employees)

"To date, training is mainly focused on front-line employees, with the rest of us to depend on our own initiatives with regards to our development. The focus now is on lowering the associated costs by providing the minimum training required to specific business sections. There is no point of talking about career development opportunities, promotions etc." (Employees-corporate divisions)

Following the suggested business focus shift, it can be evidenced that greater training opportunities are now offered to those employees mostly needing them (branch network). Although that can offer partial evidence of a strategic alignment between HR and business objectives, it cannot constitute strong evidence as to the extent to which the former can shape and influence the latter.

In summary, stakeholders' differing perceptions can be evidenced. Employees offered a more operational perspective, which may be explained through their limited access to relative information, and their lack of engagement and representation within the organisation. In contrast, bank managers and HR staff expressed their views from a more managerial perspective. Overall, research evidence suggests a more SHRD approach (thus a more mature state) for the period before the crisis. HRD's supportive role (rather than a shaping one) can also be highlighted for its post-crisis state with regards to this specific criterion. In addition, limited evidence was provided from those interviewees who claimed that HR is capable of shaping business goals and strategies. Thus, for research data and findings to move towards a more immature state. Relevant data from most organisational documents also offered mixed evidence on HR's ability to shape and influence business missions, goals and strategies. Taking all that into consideration, SHRD maturity is presented as mixed across time, being further supported by stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions with regards to this specific strategic criterion.

6.2.2 Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees

Environmental scanning, in HRD terms, by actively involving employees and branch managers beyond senior executives could also offer an indication of a mature SHRD organisation. In brief, research evidence highlights that relevant scanning activities are limited, with mainly being conducted by the latter and their teams.

A branch manager clearly highlighted his organisation's inability to take advantage of any favourable business circumstance due to the lack of implementing such processes, by arguing that:

"We used to implement SWOT and PESTLE analysis as the ultimate business tools a few years ago. Nowadays, both planning processes sound like alien practices. Our bank was amongst the first to introduce innovative products and services, and one of the few that expanded their operations abroad. Yet, I assume this is a story of a prosperous past. Now, its concern is initially to ensure its survival and then to do more with less, back to basic economics, right?" (BM)

Another branch manager further argued that:

"My organisation used to be an aggressive player within the sector. Accordingly, we used to employ various scanning and planning techniques that are now limited since our corporate focus has now turned to survival and cost-efficiency" (BM)

Both arguments can highlight HR's pre-crisis proactive/strategic nature, and its post-crisis operational role respectively. The large majority of the people working at the HR department were also verified those managers' assertions, by arguing that:

"In the past, we utilised a variety of HR analytics, such as HR metrics, allowing us to predict future needs, especially when it came to business growth. Today, all we need to do is to ensure that workforce-related costs remain low. That ultimately results in cutbacks to our training budget as well. Overall, our role is highly restricted" (HR Staff)

Within most organisational documents, such a setback with regards to environmental scanning were also noticed through limited reference on relevant activities, with those limited ones being conducted from senior management and without the inclusion of branch managers and bank employees (Annual Report 2007, Annual Report 2014). Yet, a different HR approach towards environmental scanning was highlighted for the period before and after the crisis. Again, they stated that:

"Before the crisis, our bank expanded its operations into Balkans and Turkey as new business opportunities were presented within these emerging markets. Our enhanced role focused upon ensuring that the recruited employees were the most appropriate ones so to boost our new branches' productivity and overall efficiency. Quite the opposite occurs these days with a limited budget to support our activities" (HRAss)

"Previously, a higher budget was available to us not only for hiring the most talented individuals, but also for designing and delivering outstanding training programmes so to address the specific needs of a globalised workforce. Accordingly, synergies were developed with other departments so to facilitate all relevant procedures as well. Yet, this is a good fairy tale to tell to our kids these days (laughing)" (T&D Manager)

From both statements, some evidence can be drawn with regards to HR's proactive role prior to the crisis, with its present functional role also to be outlined. Again, relevant reference is limited within most recent organisational documents, with greater reference to be made on the respective ones published before the crisis (HR policies and procedures 2007, 2014; Annual Report 2007, 2014).

Employees further confirmed such views by stressing their lack of involvement and consultation throughout any environmental scanning activity for both time periods. Thus, they argued:

"I cannot recall ever being asked about my views or my suggestions concerning any possible opportunities and/or threats within the workplace" (Employee)

"My role was limited to serving our customers and on providing short reports to my supervisor on a regular basis" (Employee)

"We, either individually or collectively, have never participated in such actions; I assume it was the work of our managers to do that, but I am not sure whether they ever did it either" (Employee)

Although most of them stressed their non-participation within any environmental scanning activity, there were also a few (being employed for over 10 years) who recalled various "employee surveys" undertaken in the past with their overall aim being to extract their views/thoughts on several organisational concerns. However, a striking observation emerged from some employees' perceptions of not feeling competent enough to do so, and thus to help their organisation with their respective remarks. They based their suggestion on the fact that in most cases they do not hold the necessary information so to help with their respective propositions. Whether that was the outcome of their lack of representation (trade unions) and/or a result of their "ignorance" is up for debate. However, a greater involvement of employees can be evidenced through the implemented surveys for the pre-crisis period. That can also be noticed through past organisational documents which further supported bank managers' exclusion from relevant processes.

Overall, environmental scanning is mostly presented as an activity of a "prosperous past" within the organisation, yet without being undertaken as proposed within the modified SHRD framework (through the inclusion of HR staff, branch managers, employees). A contested territory also exists with regards to employees' participation

in such relevant activities for a number of reasons (e.g. lack of information, lack of engagement, lack of representation). To this extent, such lack of "*employees' line of sight*" may affect the degree to which they can contribute towards the achievement of the organisational objectives. Furthermore, relative failures in employees' voicing may undermine the effective implementation of SHRD, and eventually to negatively affect its maturity. In conclusion, interview responses provided strong evidence that environmental scanning was more an activity of the past (thus, more mature before crisis), yet without fully addressing the requirements being proposed within the modified SHRD framework (e.g. employees and branch managers' exclusion was highlighted for both time periods). In addition, it was not made clear to what extent the findings of such scanning activities turned into HRD outcomes. Strong evidence was offered over SHRD maturity (with regards to this strategic component) for its post-crisis state, as limited (to none) environmental scanning was conducted, and again without including employees and branch managers within (besides having altered their business focus towards the enhancement of their front-line operations). Overall, the complex nature of both stakeholders' perceptions and that of the state of SHRD maturity can be underlined.

6.2.3 "Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans, and policies

To talk about an SHRD mature organisation, clear HRD strategies must be present. However, the extent to which they are "environmentally-integrated" enough (establish a fit with new environmental circumstances) is of greater importance as they can indicate and enhance HRD's responsiveness and preparedness towards business and economic uncertainty and complexity. Therefore, rather than solely focusing on performance outcomes, SHRD needs to develop and elevate its organisational self-renewing capability by providing interventions aiming to enhance its maturity so to strengthen the organisation's robustness as well.

Research evidence demonstrates HRD practices as featuring these characteristics, besides their actual short-term orientation. Although that could offer an indication of

a strategically mature organisation, most employees and very few managers stressed that HR always lacked the ability to exploit environmental challenges, as its main concern was on supporting the business rather than indicating future direction. Furthermore, compared to its pre-crisis role, over three-quarters of them argued that it has lost in position within the business agenda, by stating that:

"Today, HR is like a «water-boy» within a sports team. The latter needs to be constantly hydrated, with the former's role to provide team members with refreshments; however, team players can live without him, as his job is not that much difficult as to require special skills. This is how HR looks like nowadays" (Employee)

"I believe that HR these days is following trends rather than setting them. Although we can talk of a match between the HR and the corporate objectives, that could not constitute enough evidence of HR's preparedness towards on-going change. Thus, how can we talk of an "environmentally-integrated" HRD practices the way you have described it (referring to the researcher's explanation of this specific strategic criterion)" (Employee)

A few branch managers further claimed that:

"Many HR initiatives are no longer available, owing to cost cutting, while the department's role is now focusing on supporting rather than shaping business objectives. Accordingly, all HRD initiatives were negatively affected as well" (BM)

"HR's credibility is under high risk these days, not only because of its operational nature, but also because of its continuous need to demonstrate its capacity. Proactive and integrated? I do not think so at all, or maybe it was in the past. I would rather describe it as rigid, clumsy and stubborn" (BM)

On the other hand, the large majority of the managers, along with people from the HR department, all acknowledged HR's strategic integration by evaluating this respective criterion in relation to new business objectives. Thus, they acknowledged that, right

after the crisis, both the bank and its HR department had to totally revise their plans and strategies in such ways so to ensure business survival and renewal. That eventually dictated the adoption of a more short-term business focus. Therefore, through the organisation's retrenchment strategy, HR proceeded with the development of those actions and plans focusing on securing the group's viability. Coupled with the sector's competitive intensity and the on-going restructuring phase, competitive and cost-effective moves were required so to re-establish fit with the new business and economic conditions. Despite been accused of following a short-term focus, HR staff believed that a combination of an exploitation (short-term) and an exploration (long-term) orientation was required. Thus, they proposed that competitiveness and integration could be met in such a way that it can constitute the basis of a business upturn in the future. In relation to their HRD interventions, e-learning and webinars were introduced as a cost-efficient, yet effective way to train the employees. Taking all that into consideration, more than three-quarters of the interviewed branch managers argued that:

"Business environments are constantly changing and banks need to change respectively. However, if you do not ensure your financial survival, that can prove fatal for the entire business. Eventually, focusing on maintaining our client base can successfully result in rebounding major business profits. Accordingly, training being offered by our organisation had to be revised in such a way so to better fit with the new business circumstances" (BMs)

"You cannot talk of SHRD if you have not first ensured your business survival. Therefore, a combination of both short-term and long-term oriented practices should be implemented so to ensure your survival and then to prepare for your business upturn" (BM)

Everyone from the HR department further stressed the importance of their offerings, by highlighting that:

"Considering the new business and economic conditions, our practices need to be delivered at a minimum cost so to assure business competitiveness" (HRDr)

"We need to maintain a fit with the constantly changing business world. Thus, e-learning and webinars are of high quality, time and cost-efficient and they are better suited for our globalised e-world" (T&D Manager)

"Owing to our limited HR budgets, along with today's customer-oriented business focus, we believe that our practices can be characterised as being proactive and environmentally-integrated enough so to ensure that the business remains on track" (HRAss)

Others further commented:

"We have been accused of proceeding with major lay-offs and T&D cutbacks, however without accessing the returns of such practices in the long run" (HRMgr – Branch Network)

"Volunteer redundancies helped us keep the most talented employees who are now subject to prospective development within our business" (HRMgr – Corporate Divisions)

"By ensuring our organisational survival, we can also plan for a business rebirth. Most of our accusers do not realise that economies spin around and eventually better days will come, accompanied by greater job opportunities within the sector. Our jobs is to constantly monitor these changes and to effectively communicate them across the organisation" (HRCommMgr)

Overall, research evidence suggests that a strategic alignment between HR and business objectives is maintained; thus, for an SHRD mature state to be justified with regards to this strategic component. Without arguing either for or against their short-term orientation, HRD interventions have proved to be the most appropriate ones in

terms of ensuring business survival and competitiveness in such lean times. Although a proactive HRD approach cannot be totally confirmed, a strong link between the HR and the corporate objectives can be evidenced through the delivery of those HRD initiatives (e-learning, webinars etc.) which have managed to be quickly enacted and at a relative low cost so to maintain an organisational fit with its external environment's requirements. Accordingly, evidence provided within most organisational documents highlighted a strategic alignment between the corporate and the HR objectives both for ensuring the bank's viability and for preparing the newly-formed banking corporation to remain competitive within the market (CSR Report 2014). As to all that, we can draw upon some evidence so to argue for HRD's strategic responsiveness, based upon the requirements of this specific criterion. Yet, once more, stakeholders' perceptual contradiction can be highlighted, by further adding to the complexity attached to SHRD's understanding and operationalisation within organisations at the time of an economic crisis.

6.2.4 Strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders

HRD's strategic outlook also calls to attain strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders, namely senior executives, branch managers, and employees. However, research evidence highlights stakeholders' diverse perceptions of SHRD's ability in creating such partnerships.

Employees underlined HR's lack of strategic vision and voicing, as guidelines are mostly dictated through a top-down approach, and they are expected to be strictly followed. To this extent, their participation and consultation, within any HR initiative, seems pointless. Furthermore, they suggested that limited training is now offered from their organisation, and without being based on their actual needs as there is not a proper training needs identification (TNI) mechanism, something that used to exist in the past. Therefore, employees argued that:

"A few years back, the HR department used to conduct a quarterly employee survey through which training needs were identified and appropriate training interventions were designed and delivered. Today, such surveys are rarely conducted, or not at all, while limited training opportunities do not reflect our actual needs and/or are focusing on totally irrelevant things" (Employee)

Another employee further stated that:

"I cannot understand how a «health & safety» course can enhance my knowledge and productivity or keep me motivated. Supposing that business focus is now on its front-line operations, we (as front line employees) have no voice at all. I guess both the crisis and the on-going industry restructuring phase restricted HR's capacity and our role respectively" (Employee)

An evident failure of strategically collaborating with their employees can be noticed. Such lack of a strategic partnership could relate with those organisational efforts aimed at developing and implementing targeted HRD interventions so to enhance the workforce's capabilities and to maximise the quality of their customer service delivery. Many employees further highlighted that it is not only HR that ignores them; their managers, as well, do not communicate and promote T&D opportunities to them, by arguing that:

"Our manager's role is inhibited in simply reporting their branch's monthly results to superiors at the bank's headquarters, while ensuring that guidelines are closely followed. They have nothing to say about training and development" (Employee)

In a similar vein, much of the managers emphasised their non-participation in HR's policy development, or within any other HR/HRD intervention, although they are the ones holding all relevant information for making consistent suggestions. Therefore, a branch manager argued that:

"Although the focus is now on the front-line, our role is limited at reporting our branch's financial results. I have never been asked for my personal or my employees' training needs in order to provide us with additional training, and eventually to enhance our efficiency, productivity and quality of service delivery" (BM)

Regarding training, another manager also stated that:

"Although I do undertake a few e-learning courses, these used to be more in the past. Nonetheless to highlight that training's evaluation is poor – all you need is a pass mark on the final assessment" (Retail Loans Manager)

Another branch manager further stated:

"Today, our objective is to ensure that a satisfied customer base is maintained, which in return will assist business survival. The problem is that today's training is very structured in terms of not allowing us to address the unique and diverse needs of our customer region" (BM)

Some other branch managers eventually concluded that:

"The bank's approach in managing its human capital is ineffective. We, as branch managers, usually undergo public humiliation in front of ten top executives regarding the attained targets and the setting of new ones. That does not represent an effective way of partnering your workforce, especially when your business focus is at enhancing front-line operations. They (HR team & senior managers) should realise that the majority of the employees are working within the bank's front-line operations. Instead of seeking our consultation, we are inhibited to just reporting figures" (BMs)

By all accounts, evidence suggests that their role is mainly restricted to the basics without being involved in any HR initiatives; thus, of not maintaining a strategic partnership with HR. Within most of the examined organisational documents, relevant

reference was not made to such partnerships; thus, further supporting branch managers and employees' assertions of not forming strategic partnerships with their HR departments (HR Policy and Procedures, 2014; CSR report, 2014).

On the other hand, HR staff reported that a strategic partnership with the bank's senior management is maintained since HR is situated within the BoD. They further argued that by acknowledging new business objectives, targeted training is now offered to those employees mostly in need of it (front-line) by aiming to enhance their capabilities on delivering exceptional customer service. However, they could not provide relevant examples to further support the suggested strategic partnership with top management, while they were also unable to clearly indicate whether the training initiatives offered were the outcome of a strategic partnership with senior management or just a top-down direction. Overall, their suggestions mainly represented written organisational statements, by missing to refer to the significance of strategically partnering with their branch managers and their employees, whose consultation can prove crucial in many organisational aspects.

It is noticeable that stakeholders' perceptions, even within similar business/organisational contexts, could be diverse and complex. With regards to the proposed strategic partnerships, although these are sometimes difficult and complex, they should be attained with all suggested parts so for win-win outcomes to emerge. Since such a strategic partnership is limited between HR and senior executives, this strategic component of the modified SHRD framework appears weak in terms of SHRD maturity. If a strategic alignment with its managers and employees was also attained, the organisation would have been able to grasp better and greater insights, and thus to move towards a more mature state.

6.2.5 Strategic partnership with HRM

Along with partnering with key organisational stakeholders, a strategic partnership between HRM and HRD is essential. Research findings indicate that such partnerships do exist, however mostly for cost efficient purposes. Furthermore, although a separate

HRD function exists within the HR department, its initiatives are implemented within the bundles of the more general HRM practices. That may constitute an indication of an attained strategic partnership between HRD and HRM, and thus for this criterion to be met.

However, as reported from most interviewees, a separate HRD function could offer an indication of an organisation's greater emphasis on its T&D implementations. Therefore, although the bank recognises the importance of implementing its HRD initiatives as distinctive services (beyond its general HRM ones), new business realities dictate for both interventions to be considered as one.

Taking all that into account, all the interviewed HR staff argued that a synergy between HRM and HRD is attained; yet, under different perspectives. Therefore, they argued:

"As a HR department, we don't distinguish our services as being good or bad. However, we do recognise that more attention is required in some areas and accordingly we work on them so they can be accurately delivered and be further improved. That may require our services to be put under specific sub-functions so to be better implemented" (HRDr)

"The HR department is one and unified. Although there are distinctive sub-units within it, that is mainly for facilitating the implementation of our services. We are all collaborating with each other so to offer the best we can, whether it has to do with recruitment and selection, training, rewards etc." (HRAss)

On the other hand, all managers and employees could not distinguish between HRM and HRD, by collectively arguing that both are delivered under the umbrella of the general HR business approach. Hence, they asserted that:

"HRM, HRD, what's the difference? To me it's only one letter. What I do know is that HR's retrenchment is obvious in many cases" (Employee)

"I don't think that there is so much difference between HRM and HRD. One refers to the more general HR stuff, while the other concentrates more on people's T&D. The point is that both are implemented under the same limited budget" (BM)

Things were slightly different before the crisis, with a more enhanced role for the HRD function to be evidenced through a higher budget allocation for its interventions. Yet, its initiatives were still implemented under the HRM umbrella; thus, it cannot be argued that the HR's state has changed significantly since then.

Research data, along with relevant evidence extracted from various organisational documents, mainly suggest that either such a partnership can be proved of strategic importance specifically within the Greek territory, nor that its absence can constitute an indication of a SHRD mature approach. As for that, SHRD maturity can balance between an immature and mature state within our suggested indicators of SHRD maturity table. Although the modified SHRD framework suggests that a strategic partnership between HRM and HRD should be attained, it is difficult to evaluate the extent to which such partnership is the outcome of a cost-minimisation strategy or the result of a more strategic-oriented HR approach. Stakeholders' differing perceptions further complicate the assessment and evaluation of this specific strategic component of SHRD maturity.

6.2.6 Extensive role for HRD executives

An extensive role for HRD executives is also required as a prerequisite for an SHRD mature organisation. Research evidence outlines interview participants' unified viewpoint on the importance of HRD executives undertaking a more expanded role so to enhance their function's competitiveness. The majority of them recognised that HRD's pre-crisis role allowed both its executives, and the organisation as a whole, to achieve this objective.

However, although having HRD executives' role recognised as an important element, all employees stressed their HR department's ineffectiveness owing to staff shortages and the lack of relevant skills, by arguing that:

"Both the HR department in general and the T&D unit in particular are experiencing staff shortages or a relative lack of those skills required so to efficiently perform their duties and thus to deliver exceptional services either inside or outside the organisation" (Employee)

"There is nothing to expect from an underdeveloped department. Staff redundancies affected even them. Ironic, isn't it?" (Employee)

In line with these employees, most managers outlined:

"We do not expect anything from an immature business function. It is supposed that the HR guys are those who should empower others within the organisation; yet, they are the ones who need to be endowed with extra capacity to effectively perform their roles" (BM)

"Organisational and individual change should be on their agenda; however, they only perform administrative work for other organisational units. Sometimes, I cannot clearly understand what their role is all about" (IT Mgr)

On the other hand, all HR staff have initially recognised that staff shortages have affected their department. Yet, they further argued that on-going business restructuring will strengthen their strategic positioning within the newly-formed bank corporation, if not in the short-term, definitely in the long run. They believed that this transition will prove beneficial for the HR department, as it will offer space for revising its priorities and values for the common good. Although they acknowledged that, a few years back, their role was stronger and more influential, they also believed that they still mainly contribute to business success by suggesting that:

"Various factors have changed the nature of how we do business today. Inevitably, our role has changed as well. New skills are now required for all of us so to meet the increasing needs of the new business environment" (HRMgr)

"We still work towards the development of our people both in order to offer distinctive customer services and to accommodate business change gracefully. Accordingly, we aim to enhance our skills so to better achieve our aim" (T&D Manager)

HR staff recognised the importance of establishing a learning environment that is conducive to sharing and exchanging important information and knowledge, but at the same time the organisation's short-term approach was highlighted. Relevant examples were not provided for assessing the real role(s) of the HR executives before and after the crisis despite the HR Director's and T&D Manager's statements:

"We used to be at the forefront of all business initiatives in the past, by proposing changes and/or by implementing tailored training programmes focusing on better suiting our workforce's actual needs and eventually moving the business forward" (T&D Manager)

"Today, our budget is limited, targets are more short-term oriented and our value proposition is highly questioned. However, our focus remains the same; to enhance our people and our business" (HRDr)

In general, although we can draw upon some evidence of strategically aligning HR with business objectives, the role of HR is limited to the basics for effectively running the unit and its related implementations. Practices of the past (e.g. TNI, employee surveys, key performance indicators, continuous and strategic-focused evaluation, intrinsic rewards etc.) are now rarely conducted/provided (or totally neglected), while change initiatives are no longer appreciated, as they used to be in the past. In addition, evidence within most organisational documents was too vague with regards to HRD executives' roles, with limited reference to be made on their accountabilities. To this

extent, within the suggested SHRD maturity indicators, evidence moves closer to an immature state with regards to this specific strategic criterion. Like in previous sections, stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions further complicate the evaluation of SHRD maturity within organisations. Overall, following the suggestions being made within the modified SHRD framework, for HRD to attain a more strategic role (and thus to move towards a more mature state), its executives need to undertake an expanded role through evidencing roles such as that of a learning and change agent and consultants within the organisation.

6.2.7 Strategic ability to influence and shape business culture and climate

HRD's ability to influence and shape business culture and climate can also be viewed as a prerequisite element of SHRD maturity. Yet, a striking observation came from employees and branch managers' comments, both highlighting that their organisation's culture is weak as it is not embedded into the way in which the business is run, while its core values are not clearly circulated across all organisational members and departments. They further argued that only within certain business functions (e.g. wholesale, retail banking), a clearer and stronger customer-focused culture can be identified. Therefore, they also evaluated business climate as of limited importance in terms of promoting learning and developmental opportunities, by arguing that:

"*Business climate is not supportive at all. For example, my HR line manager, being responsible for my business unit, has never met with me in person, even though I've worked six years for this organisation*" (BM)

"*Our corporate culture, if it still exists, was formulated many years ago and hasn't been revised since then. It is strong only for those working within specific departments*" (IT Mgr)

"*In the past, both (culture & climate) used to work in favour of the clients rather than the bank; that has totally changed these days. I would rather say that the*

organisation promotes the creation of a business culture of employees' intimidation and uncertainty" (Employee)

Even though most of them acknowledged HR's capacity in influencing business culture in general, they mostly attested that this is difficult to achieve in organisations within which a culture does not exist at all or it is too weak. Most of the reviewed organisational documents could not offer explicit evidence over the extent to which the organisational culture was weak or not. They were just presenting the organisational cultural values, yet without making it clear how these are circulated across the organisation and if they are incorporated within the work contexts of the employees etc.

On the other hand, HR staff defended its ability to promote the foundation of a strong learning business culture. Yet, they argued that time will be required to do so, as a cultural revision is under process due to the latest business amalgamations. Thus, they stated that:

"*Our culture aims to preserve the high quality of its services towards society, while also constantly improving its work in its field of activity, and to contribute to the creation of a life-long learning culture within the organisation. Although it is under revision, its core values remain the same*" (T&D Manager - CSR Report 2014)

"*Our cultural values focus upon building loyalty and commitment across the organisation. They are clearly communicated so to create a bond amongst all organisational members towards achieving our shared goals. That was, and still is, our aim*" (HRDr)

"*Our corporate culture aims to shape and co-ordinate our members' behaviour by communicating our organisational priorities and thus to collectively achieve our aims. Either before or after the crisis, our people's behaviour should reflect our core values*" (HRCommMgr)

Everyone further argued that HR's ability to do so was stronger before the crisis though owing to a different business philosophy. Back then, there was a predominating business atmosphere focusing both on workforce's well-being and the organisation's self-renewal, two objectives which would have been difficult to achieve without HR's active involvement.

In summary, research evidence is not convincing enough so to suggest whether HR can shape and influence business culture and climate. Research evidence from stakeholders' comments, and that being offered from various organisational documents, could not explicitly illustrate how weak or strong "Case A" organisational culture was either before or after the crisis. Communication problems can be identified though, while limited evidence was provided of HRD's role in facilitating a cultural transition because of the latest business amalgamations. Stakeholders' perceptual contradiction further supported such a belief.

6.2.8 Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation

The evaluation of all training interventions is viewed as a fundamental process of assessing its effectiveness, while it also constitutes a tool at the hands of HR so to demonstrate its value-adding capacity. Yet, all research participants (including HR staff) confirmed that their evaluation process was very typical, as it was just limited to the successful completion of the training programmes on behalf of those being trained. Thus, it just assessed trainees' reaction to the training offerings. Within a large proportion of employees and branch managers, the last training opportunity was dated back to 10-16 months or as far back as 4-5 years in some cases.

"Training is a long-term business investment, and eventually its results will emerge at later stages of our business life. However, our trainees' immediate reactions and their ability to succeed within a final test at the end of the training course is a clear indication that they have gained something through the course. Greater returns will emerge in the future" (HRAss)

"All we need to do is to get a pass score (50%) at the end of the training programme. That is not difficult as most of the training subjects are general and easy. Whether we have transferred what we have learned does not seem to be a matter of concern though. Isn't that ridiculous? What's the point of being trained then?" (Employee)

Within most organisational documents, limited reference was made on the evaluation of the bank's training offerings. That could offer an indication of lacking to strategically evaluate training interventions so to get the utmost out of them both for the individuals and the organisation (CSR Report 2014; HR Policies and Procedures 2014).

However, things were presented differently before the crisis. Training's evaluation was a daily on-the-job process focusing on constantly assessing the trainees' acquired knowledge and its transfer to their job contexts so to better contribute to the bottom line. Past dated organisational documents were extensively referred to evaluation by making great reference to employees behavioural change, knowledge transfer to their job contexts etc. (CSR Report 2007; HR Policies and Procedures 2007). Yet, to date, most of the evaluation criteria are relatively short-term oriented (by simply relying on identifying poor performance) or they consist of various qualitative criteria which are very subjective, and eventually making the entire process even more difficult.

An employee and a branch manager, both stressed the importance of a knowledge transfer to work context by arguing that:

"In the past, we used to closely work with our branch managers right after completing a training course so to ensure that what was learned it was transferred to our daily work routine" (Employee)

"I remember I had to constantly check on all employees in order to ensure that they were applying their acquired knowledge within their job contexts. Although that

could also be evidenced through their sales and customer-related figures, I had to make sure that everybody was working to the standards being taught" (BM)

Research evidence can clearly highlight that the bank's evaluation processes totally neglect to assess strategic training outcomes such as employees' behavioural change, increased morale, long-term commitment, and overall satisfaction. All these could be considered as essential elements of promoting organisational change, performance and competitiveness, as that suggested within the modified SHRD framework.

Having further examined the organisation's evaluation procedures prior to the crisis, the roots of this change could be identified. Cost effective solutions are now dictating the implementation of such steps that can instantly signal employees' improvement or not; thus, whether an employee is certified with a "pass" grade, that ultimately indicates the training's success. However, this cannot constitute an indicator of knowledge transfer to job contexts, neither be viewed as a sign of changing employees' behaviour towards the specific end goals of the delivered training programme (e.g. enhancing a more customer focused attitude). The organisation mainly assessed its employees' reaction to the training being offered without focusing on assessing long-term strategic outcomes as explained earlier. Thus, evidence suggests a slightly more mature role for HRD for its pre-crisis state, in contrast to its immature status for the period after the crisis.

All in all, having assessed all strategic characteristics of the modified SHRD framework (evidence through stakeholders' perceptions & data from various organisational documents), a partial employment of most strategic criteria can be evidenced either for the period before or after the crisis. SHRD maturity is presented as mixed over time, while stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions could further add to the complexity attached to SHRD's understanding, operationalisation and maturity in organisations. Therefore, with regards to HRD's ability to shape and influence business missions and goals, there was no convincing evidence to suggest that this could happen today, as most interviewees highlighted that senior management mostly provide business directions, and thus being the ones who can shape them.

However, we could draw upon some limited evidence on HRD's ability to influence corporate goals, mainly for the period before the crisis (owing to business growth/expansion). In terms of conducting environmental scanning through the inclusion of the suggested organisational members, evidence suggests that this is mainly conducted by senior managers and their teams. Branch managers and employees are not involved, compared to pre-crisis when they used to express their concerns through several surveys.

A clearer indication of SHRD maturity can be evidenced through an attained strategic alignment between HRD and the business objectives through the provision of those HRD practices which can ensure a fit with the requirements of today's business and economic landscapes. Furthermore, with regards to the suggested strategic partnerships between HR and key organisational stakeholders, research evidence outlines a strategic partnership between HR and senior executives. However, strategic partnerships are not attained amongst HR and branch managers and/or employees, opposite to the suggestions of the modified SHRD framework. The attained strategic partnership between HRM and HRD is also debatable as evidence could not clearly indicate whether this was the outcome of a strategic approach or just the result of the organisation's cost-minimisation focus. Regarding the role of the HRD executives, this was clearer and stronger in the past, with highly being restricted to the basics these days. Furthermore, whether HRD holds the ability to shape and influence business culture and climate is a matter of controversy owing to stakeholders' contrasting perceptions. Finally, HRD evaluation is presented as being more mature for the period before the crisis, with today's evaluation to mainly focus on employees' reaction to the training programme, and thus to be viewed as immature.

Finally, documentary evidence and stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions of the strategic characteristics and their indicators, both suggest a contested territory surrounding SHRD's understanding, operationalisation and maturity in organisations. However, beyond these elements, it would also be good to consider a range of factors that can simultaneously affect SHRD adoption, maturity and transformation over time.

6.3 Factors shaping, constraining or facilitating SHRD adoption and maturity

Both micro and macro-related environmental forces appear to have either greater or lesser impact on SHRD adoption and maturity, while they can also influence stakeholders' perceptions. Having thoughtfully examined SHRD maturity through the suggested strategic characteristics, the researcher also asked interview participants to highlight those factors which they consider to be of high influence with regards to SHRD adoption and maturity. Amongst them, the economic crisis and the presence of an unclear/weak organisational culture and climate were identified as barriers of SHRD's adoption and maturity. Furthermore, the sector's restructuring, owing to the latest business amalgamations, was highlighted. In addition, globalisation and technological advancements were outlined as facilitators of HRD's strategic outlook; yet, mainly for its pre-crisis state.

6.3.1 Business Culture and Climate

Interview participants outlined business culture and climate as an important factor of either impeding or facilitating SHRD adoption and maturity. It was found that one of the main factors confronting organisational prosperity to SHRD is the organisation's cultural reformation owing to recent business amalgamations.

Employees, within the corporate divisions, argued that owing to a cultural and business shift towards the enhancement of the group's front-line operations, they now feel marginalised and under-developed with regards to training and development, by arguing that these are limited and mainly offered to specific employees. Furthermore, they pointed out that the cultural values of their organisation are not well communicated. Thus, they argued that:

"If you ask me about the cultural values, or my organisation's cultural statement, I will just reply that I do not really know them. Either it is my fault or they have not been clearly and properly communicated" (Employee)

162

"A few years back, we were fully aware of our bank's cultural values, by highlighting their commitment to employees' continuous development, along with business's and society's well-being" (Employee)

"I guess that since greater T&D opportunities were offered in the past, the so called «leaning culture» existed. However, to date, our culture mainly focuses on ensuring business survival within an unfavourable business environment. As to that, training is now offered to branch employees as they are believed to be the ones generating the bank's cash flow; but what about the rest of us? We equally add value to the organisation through our work" (Employee)

In line with their colleagues, most of the interviewed front-line employees further highlighted the lack of a clear communication process so to promote the cultural values across the organisation. However, they recognised that training is mostly targeting them these days as they are at the front of the bank's business operations. Therefore, they argued:

"After such tremendous mergers and acquisitions, a cultural reform is undertaken. We are not sure whether we should keep on working under the old cultural values or if there are some new ones. I guess that is the managers' fault for not communicating in an effective manner" (Employee – branch network)

"Although we have not been informed of any cultural changes owing to the latest business amalgamations, I believe these are moving towards the provision of an excellent customer service. That would probably be the reason why training is mainly being offered to all of us within the bank's branch network" (Employee – branch network)

Based on all these statements, a communication problem can be evidenced within the organisation. Employees are not aware of their organisation's cultural values and that could be of HR's responsibility. However, the story was different in the past, with all arguing as being fully informed on their organisation's cultural values, as those were

regularly communicated, and thus all were working under them so to collectively contribute to the success of the business. This could offer an indication of people's resistance to change and thus of their "negative" approach to such relevant actions. Furthermore, owing to the latest business amalgamations that took place, most organisational members focused on their negative impact (e.g. dismissal of personnel, HR setback, training budget cuts etc.) without acknowledging the cultural revision being under process.

On the other hand, a large majority of the interviewed managers suggested that their HR department works towards ensuring that everyone understands the new business direction; therefore, it devotes its full potential in achieving it through a continuous communication process. They claimed that this can be evidently seen in HR's work towards the design and implementation of targeted training programmes to those employees who mostly need it (those being within the bank's front-line services). Therefore, to them, both the business culture and climate support the delivery of targeted T&D initiatives, regardless of their volume/intensity. Taking all that into consideration, a branch manager argued that:

"There is no doubt that less training is offered these days, but that does not necessarily mean that it is not the proper one. Since today's business focus is on enlarging our customer services, those employees working at our branches, and in any other relevant department, must be trained. Accordingly, our cultural values are constantly changing as well. After the latest mergers and acquisitions, I believe we will return stronger. There are some who understand this, and others who don't. Yet, this is the new business reality. Take it or leave it" (BM)

Another branch manager also stated that:

"Our corporate culture focuses on enhancing our customer service excellence and that is why training is now offered to those people who mostly need it. Like it or not, these people are us; the branch network staff which are in direct contact with our customer base. I can understand that some colleagues may be upset with that, but these

are the new circumstances. Business merging is ongoing, thus cultural reform is as well. Our corporate culture and identify will return stronger. Even much better than it used to be in the past. Back then, our cultural values were continuously circulated so to ensure that everyone was working by incorporating them into their daily work context. That will happen again after this cultural revision" (BM)

An IT manager further suggested that:

"I cannot remember having a budget for training my employees. Today, training is focused on a specific category of employees (not us apparently), as dictated by new business objectives. That was not happening in the past. Thank God for us, our role remains crucial in ensuring a smooth operation of our branch network through service delivery. However, if I had the option, I would definitely offer additional training to my staff, beyond their initiative to learn new technologies and to acquire new knowledge" (IT Mgr)

From all these arguments, it is evident that a stronger and clearer business culture existed in the past. However, due to a number of reasons (e.g. the sector's restructuring, the latest business amalgamations, and the business' shift towards the enhancement of their front-line operations), banks had to undergo a cultural revision so to ensure a cultural fit amongst the merging institutions. Thus, to date, the corporate values mainly focus on those people within the bank's branch network, while a cultural revision is in process. Therefore, most of them also argued that their organisation is expected to return stronger after the successful completion of the business merging process, and thus for a new corporate culture to emerge by including the positive elements of the merged organisational cultures.

The HR department has respectively argued that their organisation's cultural values are strong, clear and regularly communicated. Much of them further outlined that, within specific departments, a more service-oriented culture has been emerged, coming in full alignment with new business directives. Their arguments can be clearly evidenced through their assertions:

"Our business culture is clear and strong. Its values are circulated on a regular basis among all organisational members and business units. They also appear within every organisational document, besides the fact that all are embedded within our daily work context. Yet, we do recognise that due to business restructuring, they have to be revised and communicated clearly again" (HRCommMgr)

"Bearing in mind that our new business focus is on ensuring the effectiveness of our front-line business operations, then within all involved departments (e.g. retail banking, wholesale banking, branch network etc.) a more well-defined customer-focused culture can be evidenced" (HRAss)

In a similar vein, the bank's HR Director and a T&D Manager, both claimed that:

"While we have a clear set of core values that drive our business, there are many which are constantly altering in order to keep up with the latest business changes" (HRDr)

"Business merging and our business's focus shift, both call for a cultural revision and/or the support of a sub-culture within specific departments. Nonetheless, all changes are constantly and clearly communicated within our business units so to ensure that everyone is aware of them" (T&D Manager)

Their unified viewpoint distinctly outlines the change of the bank's business focus towards the enhancement of its front-line operations as a means of ensuring its survival throughout these difficult economic times. Besides its short-term orientation, it may also constitute partial evidence of a strategic alignment between HR and new business priorities through the provision of targeted training to those who require it most. However, stakeholders' perceptual contradiction cannot clearly indicate whether business culture and climate, and their respective reformation, is the outcome of a strategic HR approach or just a response to business uncertainty mainly for ensuring business survival. Thus, to a large extent, it further complicates SHRD's understanding, adoption and maturity within organisations.

In addition, from an institutional point of view, research evidence on Greek companies (including banks) points out an alarming high score in terms of "decisiveness" (*the degree to which individuals in organisations and societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships*"), "family collectivism" ("*the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty and cohesiveness within their organisations or families*"), and "power distance" (Stavroulakis, 2009). Other studies further describe Greek organisations as low performance-oriented with poor training needs assessment and training programme delivery, and with a limited role for HR within the business agenda (Nikandrou et al., 2008; Apospori et al, 2005). Coupled with the undergoing cultural revision because of the latest business amalgamations, "Case A" needs to carefully address these concerns by eliminating their negative aspects so to come up with a clearer - and better communicated - set of cultural values which are expected to facilitate SHRD's adoption and maturity as well. Overall, evidence suggests that the on-going cultural revision was mainly viewed as an obstacle towards achieving SHRD maturity due to the problems associated with it.

6.3.2 Economic Crisis

Research findings provided convincing evidence of the crisis' impact on organisations, not only in financial, but also in organisational and labour relations terms. Therefore, after being identified as the major impact factor, interview participants have been asked to rate its severity with regards to its impact on their business. Over three-quarters (77%) of them agreed that its impact was severe, with the remaining almost one-fourth (23%) rating it as moderate. In both cases, relevant examples were provided such as pay cuts, employee redundancies, limited HR budget allocations, the suspension of training, the reconstruction of their employment relationships etc. Overall, the majority of them agreed that HR's business role has been weakened. They also recognised that new business realities resulted to significant changes, not only for their HR departments but for the entire organisation as well.

Therefore, most of the employees envisaged such an impact by stating that:

"Low budgets are now available for training activities. Training is no longer a priority as business focus has shifted to other areas. Participation in T&D opportunities outside the organisation is non-existant, while internal offerings were reduced to zero as well and they are mainly offered to our front-line workforce" (Employee-corp. division)

"The Economic crisis has heavily impacted upon our organisation in relation to its training and developmental opportunities. The associated budget has been diminished and limited training is now offered to specific departments. Yet, sometimes it's totally irrelevant to our job contexts" (Employee-branch network)

However, besides training's contraction, it was also noticed a simultaneous increase of most employees' job accountabilities along with major departmental restructurings, both of which further amplified feelings of job insecurity, and resulted in higher levels of disengagement and demotivation.

In addition, more than half of the interviewed managers highlighted that the crisis has weaken HR's role in total by restricting its influence to the implementation of specific measures being dictated by senior management. Various HR practices (including T&D) were suspended or dispensed of, with greater emphasis placed on lowering their associated costs. Managers further argued that their organisation had failed to counterbalance the negative effects of the crisis, as it had mostly been dominated by short-term oriented planning, followed by staff shortages, wage reductions etc. Thus, they stated that:

"Instead of identifying the business opportunities within such a turbulent business and economic environment, our organisation has faced only the negative ones, and without relative success" (BM)

"Most of the banks, including ours, have proceeded with major staff redundancies and wage cuts, yet without them being necessary. Accordingly, training and developmental opportunities have also been reduced to the basics. What was the

outcome? I have been left with an under-staffed department, greater responsibilities and no money to train my people on new IT developments so to better support our work" (IT Mgr)

"*Many departments are under-staffed, and I am not sure whether those who've managed to survive have kept the most talented individuals or just those who decided not to retire earlier. The crisis has proved catastrophic for people working in Greek banks, even though the latter managed to survive. That is a different story*" (BM)

They also highlighted that, like the Irish case, Greek banks were also in the eye of this financial storm as they had become over-exposed to bad debt due to massive lending to other sectors the years before.

The discussion with employees and managers continued by asking them to identify the extent to which the crisis meant a way to discover new ideas and best practices so to provide their organisations with new business opportunities. The majority of them argued that new ideas and best practices are not promoted today as the negative aspects of the crisis have mostly prevailed. Therefore, they argued that their organisation has mostly been damaged owing to the changes caused by the crisis. However, they also suggested that business amalgamations (as an outcome of the crisis) may lead to the formation of a stronger banking corporation, which it is expected to better cope with crisis and thus to move forward. Yet, there were only two employees (out of 15) who acknowledged the fact that the crisis also led to many voluntary employee exit schemes; thus, it has provided the opportunity for others to be employed or to be promoted within the organisation.

The story was quite different from HR's viewpoint, with most of its people arguing that besides the implementation of some cost-minimisation related actions, more targeted and exceptional training is now offered. Most of them argued that, like in the past, training focuses on increasing the bank's competitiveness and market positioning through equipping its employees with those skills required for efficiently performing

their jobs at key positions within the organisation (front-line). Thus, the HR director and an HR officer stated:

"*Our training programmes may now be limited, yet they are tailor-made for those needing them. Our organisation constantly aims to ensure its survival at such difficult times, and accordingly to be prepared for the future*" (HRDr)

"*How can we talk of a strategic-oriented organisation if it is not in business? Organisational life-cycles are dictating a business upturn. All we need to do is to get this message across and be well-prepared. I believe we are working towards this position. Everybody needs to be patient. Better days will come*" (HROff)

Their assertions outline that the economic crisis and its aftermath put in danger the financial viability of most banks. Therefore, it was important for the bank to initially ensure its business survival, and then to move towards its business transformation and renewal. However, they totally missed to indicate the ways in which their HR department and executives could offer their valuable consultation. It was also notable that all HR staff acknowledged that the crisis was mostly seen as an obstacle in terms of their value proposition, rather than as an opportunity to demonstrate their strategic capacity. Such a belief was further outlined by most managers and employees.

At an institutional level, both the financial crisis and the austerity measures implemented by the Greek government led to market deregulation and the radical reconstruction of the related labour regimes. Accompanied by negative implications such as the elimination of most collective agreements, the reduction of wage levels, the introduction of individual employment contracts etc., most organisations were forced to reduce their costs while maintaining high standards of performance. That added additional pressure on employees to become more efficient, yet under an uncertain employment status. Furthermore, the economy's liberalisation made it even more difficult for the Greek government to continue protecting domestic companies from international competition; therefore, the sector's restructuring was viewed as an essential process. Therefore, local businesses had to upgrade their operations or to face

bankruptcy if they were unable to successfully compete in the market. However, with regards to whose interests the HR department serves (those of employees or the business), the aforementioned outcomes can be proved either beneficial or detrimental for organisations and the business sector.

Overall, because of the economic crisis, greater "hard" HR approaches were adopted, with the respective "soft" ones neglected or reduced for cost efficient purposes. It was believed that the crisis heavily impeded the strategic adoption of HRD and its maturity respectively. However, it can be equally argued that an economic crisis cannot constitute the catalytic agent towards and HR setback, as business life-cycles tend to be cyclical and eventually most banking organisations had been put under the same pressure in the past, yet without reporting such changes though with regards to their employment and HR-related practices. Therefore, other factors may also be at play and need to be carefully considered.

6.3.3 The Absence of Trade Unions

Interview participants (employees & managers) highlighted the lack of participation by trade unions. All employees, and around two-third of the managers, outlined the significance of trade unions' representation as a strong influential agent in relation to an organisation's HRD strategies and initiatives. However, they further stressed that, in their case, trade unions consultation was never considered. Based on their suggestions, that was actually the outcome of a change which occurred in trade unions' density and led to their decreased bargaining power. Furthermore, both participants emphasised on trade unions' lack of incorporating T&D concerns within their agendas. They (mostly employees and a few managers) also accused unions, and their representatives, of being too politicalised, and thus for not being overly concerned about resolving work-related issues. Finally, it was also proposed that economic turbulence had radically changed the nature of the relationship between organisations and trade unions, by allowing the former to be more opportunistic (e.g. through retrenchment strategies) and without seeking the active involvement of the latter.

In line with these points, very few unionised employees argued that HR's new concern is inclined more towards meeting business needs through proceeding to pay-cuts and staff redundancies rather than creating partnerships with their union representatives so to collectively promote a shared vision of the workforce's well-being. They also stated that the government's constant mediation, within labour and industrial relations, has doubtlessly resulted at the weakening of the Greek General Confederation of Labour's (Greek GSEE) power. Therefore, employees claimed that:

"*Divergence and non-communication are those two words characterising the newly established employee union. Our unions have no power as they used to in the past*" (Employee - unionised)

"*Any involvement in HR's implementations is limited to those unionised employees, however even their role and influence passes through a very bleak period. There is not a union as we knew it*" (Employee – non-unionised)

"*Political parties' intervention within most unions is evident, with union members and leaders welcoming such intercession*" (Employee – non-unionised)

"*Most of our union representatives are concerned with how to promote their public image so to eventually move to the political arena. Eventually, how can we talk about workforce's representation and well-being enhancement when everything is all about politics?*" (Employee - unionised).

A few managers further referred to trade unions by stating that:

"*Employment/Labour relations are changing on a regular basis. Rather than getting trade unions' assistance on employment related concerns, we are fighting on our own in order to keep our jobs within such an unfavourable business environment*" (BM)

"We don't know where we will be tomorrow morning. Every day we wake up and go to work like it's our last day. At least, a few years back, unionism was stronger and we could ask for advice. Although being so politicalised, they could prove to be a powerful tool in our hands" (BM)

All statements can clearly indicate trade unions' limited representation and decreased bargaining power; thus, for employees to be left alone struggling to improve employment relations on their own initiatives.

On behalf of the HR department, only the HR director referred to trade unions by simply stating that the group always aims to do the best for its workforce so to avoid conflict with trade unions. Indeed, a quite diplomatic response so to move on with our discussion. The rest of the HR staff interviewed politely declined to talk about such a sensitive issue (as they have called it), and eventually the researcher had to alter the focus of the discussion to other related topics.

Overall, relevant research evidence on employment and industrial relations outlines that Greece always lacked of a social consensus culture (when it comes to business), and a clear lack of collective bargaining as well (Karamessini, 2015b; Yannakourou & Tsimpoukis, 2014). Research data also highlight trade unions' lack of involvement throughout the design and execution of most organisational practices (especially for the post-crisis period), with that being slightly stronger a few years ago. Such non-involvement on the part of the trade unions and of their representatives may also explain employees' operational viewpoint (lack of relevant information, lack of representation and engagement) in relation to SHRD's understanding and operationalisation.

6.3.4 Globalisation and Technological Advancements

Interview participants outlined both globalisation and technological advancements as enablers of SHRD, especially for the period when Greek banks were expanded into foreign countries and markets. Precisely for "Case A", the organisation proceeded to

major adjustments within its training programmes in the past either to meet the emerging technological challenges (e.g. introduction of new banking systems, ATMs, e-banking etc.) or to address concerns relating to globalisation (e.g. workforce diversity and variation, job flexibility, temporary work, market and business expansion etc.) (CSR Reports / Annual Reports 2007). Both factors, along with other favourable institutional agents (e.g. liberation of markets etc.), either highly or partially favoured the employment of most strategic HRD characteristics back then.

However, today, the organisation remains static and skeptical towards business and economic uncertainty and proceeded to major restrictions and retreats with regards to its growth/expansion strategies and/or technological investments beyond those being required (CSR Report 2014). In relation to the latter, an IT manager argued that limited financial resources are now blocking his department's capacity to innovate, by arguing that:

"Numerous technological opportunities exist within today's business environment. Yet, we do not have the budget to support the development of new banking systems which will allow organisations to lower their operational costs. Sometimes, we even need to finance our department from our own expenses by acquiring relevant equipment which will allow us to efficiently perform our work. While there is much room for innovation, it mainly appears as a «gloomy space»" (IT Mgr)

Regardless of the intensity of the impact of any micro or macro-environmental challenges, HR (including the HRD function) needs to undertake a more proactive role so to continuously demonstrate its value proposition through "forward-looking" implementations. That would further allow it to be viewed as an equally strategic business partner and eventually to increase SHRD maturity. Yet, the extent to which that could happen in an era of business and economic uncertainty and complexity represents a contested territory which HR and its professionals need to elucidate.

6.3.5 Business Amalgamations

The latest business mergers and acquisitions amongst banking institutions in Greece were identified as one of the most HR-related challenges for the post-crisis era. The sector's restructuring changed the nature of business conduct, and eventually affected HR's course. It was widely acknowledged, from all participants, that business amalgamations also impacted upon the employment and industrial relations, either at a micro or macro level.

Throughout interviewing HR staff, all highlighted the importance of their department in accommodating this changing process by arguing that:

"We have the core responsibility to take charge of this business change and lead it to success. It is up to us to make this transition to look at nothing in particular, and to promote the idea that we can achieve it through our people" (HRDr)

"If we manage to make clear to everyone that organisational change is for the better, it would allow us to move forward" (HRAss)

Although both participants outlined their department's crucial role within the constantly changing business and economic environments, they also stressed that their department is under a transitional phase which may constitute a rebirth point and thus to strengthen its strategic positioning (if it is properly managed) within the organisation.

On the other hand, over three-quarters of the employees and over half of the managers argued that feelings of job insecurity and stress are prevailing these days, due to HR's inability to take a proactive role throughout business merging. That was clearly evident through employees' standpoint, outlining that:

"Mergers and acquisitions resulted in staff redundancies that made most employees feel much more depressed and frustrated regarding their future within the newly-formed organisation" (Employee)

"On-going business restructuring led to extensive lay-offs, voluntary exits etc., all of which further increased job insecurity amongst the workforce. Furthermore, the HR team of our organisation has totally failed to move towards a direct and clear communication concerning the merger process. The organisation was undergoing change and we did not exactly know what was happening" (Employee)

"We are now feeling so stressed that we cannot even properly perform our job. Every day you don't know whether it would be your last one or not. After this business merger, many branches were shut down and many employees were either made redundant or they had been told to move to different departments. Our future seems gloomy" (Employee)

Most managers confirmed their employees' assertions, by further arguing that:

"Banking institutions used to be a secure workplace in which everybody was looking to be employed. Today, we don't even know what will happen within the next few minutes" (BM)

"No matter the hierarchical level you are, you are subject to dismissal due to on-going change and business restructuring. I don't believe that someone can work under such pressure. I cannot recall feeling like that before" (Retail Loans Manager)

It is evident that business amalgamations restricted HR's ability to creatively combine business change with workforce's needs and concerns. Furthermore, it was pointed out that such processes will directly affect employees' working and personal lives, along with the banking sector in general, mostly in a negative way.

Research findings also indicated that the sector's restructuring led to the decentralisation of the collective employment relations. It was noted that business mergers resulted in the creation of a "multi-speed" HR department, which now focuses on maintaining and developing differentiated labour regimes, through selective and decentralised policies, with diverse arrangements and responsibilities amongst the banking organisations and their functional units. This also caused many problems to employees' collective representation, by notably restricting their labour unions' power. Research data further indicated that this decentralisation, along with the scope of identifying profit and cost centres, led to diversified motivational and personal development policies, by emphasising more on increasing employees' productivity in the short-term. Yet, it is also remarkable to note that all that occurred through a direct employment-related cost-minimisation process, the introduction of flexible working schedules, the problematic nature of union representation, and the existence of strong unilateral practices on behalf of the organisations. However, opposite to all that, business amalgamations occurred in the past as well, yet without reporting such unfavourable consequences. That may lead someone to the assumption that the crisis' gloomy aftermath took over the mind-set of people and firms and eventually resulted in putting pressure on all other business-related activities.

The inability of the HR executives to act as change agents throughout business merging appeal for the development of a change management programme in assisting organisational members to cope with relevant circumstances. Such an increasing need was widely illustrated through their claim that:

"We have suddenly found ourselves in the middle of an economic and structural change storm. We had to deal both with the challenges associated with the crisis and business change, while we also had to change as well" (HRAdm)

"From one day to another everything has changed. We were shocked by such tremendous change (both from the economic instability as well as the mergers and acquisitions), but we should be flexible and competitive enough if we want to survive.

That should be our direction and aim – to change our business, our people, ourselves"
(HRCommMgr)

In summary, there is some evidence suggesting that business amalgamations can deliver both negative and positive outcomes. Within the former, HR's capacity in maintaining workplace's equity and stability can be questioned, while within the latter, the creation of stronger institutions, ready to compete in a global market landscape, can be outlined. However, research data mainly indicates HR's inability to properly handle relevant concerns. Rather than solely concentrating on implementing short-term oriented practices to ensure business survival, it would be equally important to focus on developing capacity for a business upturn. Finally, it is worth noting that all participants appeared skeptical whether these business amalgamations would have occurred if it was not for the crisis.

6.4 Closing Comments

This chapter provided a general overview of "Case A" banking organisation by referring to its workforce's synthesis and its organisational and HR structures. Then, a discussion on its main research findings was also offered. Interviews mainly focused on SHRD maturity, and the proposed strategic criteria (accompanied by the suggested indicators of SHRD maturity) were assessed and evaluated through a pre and post-crisis assessment and multi-stakeholder approach.

Research data highlights stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions by further outlining the complexity attached on the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD within organisations. A partial employment of most strategic characteristics was also noticed (mainly for the period before the crisis), with most of them being weakened after the crisis, as presented within the following figure:

Figure 6.10 Pre and post-crisis evidence of the suggested strategic characteristics & stakeholders' perceptions over time

Strategic Criteria	CASE A					
	Pre-Crisis			Post-Crisis		
	HR	MGR	EMP	HR	MGR	EMP
Shape Organisational mission, goals and strategies	++		--	++	--	--
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	+/-		+/-	+/-		--
"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	++		--	+/-		--

Strategic Criteria	"CASE A" ORGANISATION		
	HR	MGR	EMP
Shape Organisational mission, goals and strategies	↔	↓	↔
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	↔	↔	↓
"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	↓	↓	↔

(++): Strong evidence, (+/-): Moderate evidence, (--): Limited evidence

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

At the same time, the major factors that can simultaneously hinder or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity were discussed. The economic crisis was identified as a key impeding factor and the root of many others. Amongst them, recent business amalgamations and the lack of a strong organisational culture were highlighted. For both time periods (pre & post-crisis), a visual summary of the factors that either highly or partially favoured and/or restricted the employment of the strategic components of the modified SHRD framework is presented within the following figure:

Figure 6.11 Pre and post-crisis shaping factors

Pre-crisis time period

Shaping factors

External
- Globalisation
- Technological Advancements
- Favorable Institutional Factors (e.g. liberation of markets, privatization of bank institutions)
- Business Merging

Internal
- Innovation / Expansion Business Strategies
- Strong Organisational Culture
- Supportive Business Climate

Strategic Characteristics

Highly Favoured:
- Adoption of proactive HR/HRD practices
- Synergy with HRM
- Extensive role of HRD professionals
- HRD's ability to influence business culture and climate

Partially favoured:
- Strategic Partnerships with senior management
- Environmental Scanning from senior managers/HR executives
- Shaping Organisational Goals, Mission and Strategies

179

Post-crisis time period

Shaping factors

Strategic Characteristics

External
- Economic Instability (Crisis)
- Lack of Trade Unions' Participation
- Major Restructurings within the industry due to on-going business amalgmations

Highly Restricted HRD's capacity to:
- Shape the organisational goals, mission and strategies
- Strategically partner with key organisational stakeholders
- Strategically partner with HRM practices
- Favour an extensive role for its professionals
- Strategically influence business culture and climate
- Promote a strategic evaluation of its offerings

Internal
- Cost Reduction Business Strategies
- Weak / Under Revision Organisational Culture (Survival Culture)
- Unsupportive Business Climate
- Shift of Business Objectives

Partially promoted a strategic alignment between HR and the new business objectives, thus favoured the adoption and implementation of environmentally-integrated HRD practices so to ensure the achievement of the new business focus.

Overall, research evidence mainly presents SHRD adoption and maturity as a contested territory which need to be further elucidated. The stakeholders' differing and changing (in some cases) perspectives further complicate the researcher's efforts to assess and evaluate SHRD adoption and maturity, by presenting SHRD more as an aspiration rather than an organisational reality which can lead to a business upturn.

Having presented in full detail the first of the two case studies, and having discussed its research finding, the upcoming chapter will present the second case study banking organisation (case B), and it will also expose its key research findings throughout interviewing its respective stakeholders.

CHAPTER 7 – Assessment of the "Case B" Banking Organisation

7.1 "Case B" Banking Organisation

Like in the previous chapter, an overview of "Case B" banking organisation will be provided here. Relevant information will be given on the organisation's background, its mission, and the main areas of its operational activities. The chapter will also present "Case B" workforce's composition, and its organisational and HR structures. Later, it will continue with auditing the strategic characteristics of SHRD, as perceived by the interviewed stakeholders over time.

7.1.1 Background

"Case B" was founded in 1916 and it is headquartered in Athens-Greece. From its early establishment, the organisation undertook a leading role within the Greek banking sector (30% and 29% market share for loans and deposits respectively). The bank employs approximately 22,500 employees, with total assets of close to €89.3 billion. "Case B" operational presence is expanded to more than 10 countries, mainly in South East Europe (Annual Report, 2014).

The organisation was initially established as a private credit organisation before being transformed into a state-owned one for almost fifteen (15) years (1975-1991), and becoming privatized again in late 1991. Today, the bank maintains its private-owned status by offering its financial products and services to a customer base of approximately 5.8 billion clients across its national and international operations.

Being in business for almost a century (and 74 years prior to "Case A" establishment), the bank's growth strategy could be evidenced throughout tremendous business amalgamations since its early foundation till the late of 2008. Furthermore, "Case B" proceeded to the creation of several finance-related companies in an attempt to expand its offerings both at national and international levels (Annual Report 2014). In 2005, the organisation purchased "Case A" shares of a Bulgarian banking corporation, and

eventually it expanded its operations through an established network under its brand name. However, the period 2008-2012 was proved difficult for the bank, as it did for most of its competitors, because of the challenges associated with the global economic crisis. Therefore, the organisation postponed most of its growth plans so to ensure its business survival and to maintain increased capital levels. Besides the prolonged recession followed, "Case B" managed to retain its leading role within the sector owing to its latest business amalgamations. The bank further proceeded with several capital increases, apart from those being offered in the form of financial aid by the state, so to confront its liquidity problems (ibid).

Having survived such environmental hostility, the main objectives of the newly-formed banking group are to shield its monetary position by increasing its competitiveness and strategic positioning within the market, while also to contribute the utmost to the rebirth of the Greek economy. To this extent, "Case B" value system is based on three core principles which focus on protecting its shareholders' value, the development and welfare of both its human capital and the society, and the advancement of its customer relationships (Annual Report 2014; CSR Report 2014). As to that, its vision is to become a pioneer within the sector, and to remain creative so to hold its leading market position (ibid).

7.1.2 Vision and Mission

"Case B" vision and mission statement can clearly illustrate the values being described earlier by highlighting that:

"Our vision is to be a leading financial institution by providing high value to our stakeholders through the utilisation of our human capital and unprecedented expertise. Accordingly, we promote stringent environmental and social norms in order to support a sustainable future for all people and societies. Our mission is to constitute the bank as a trusted partner of our stakeholders by applying high standards of ethics and integrity. Overall, our aim is to make "Case B" people's own bank with services

and products which can be available anywhere and at any time" (Annual & CSR Reports 2014).

The bank's corporate identity incorporates the values of trust, responsibility and transparency through attained client relationships, and by remaining committed towards securing the human rights and equal treatment of its workforce (CSR Report 2014). The group claims to invest in its people's career development and welfare, while it further supports the development of an innovative culture which welcomes the promotion of new ideas (ibid). Therefore, in line with promoting its stakeholder value proposition, the bank aims to ensure that it is risk-secure by, in the first instance, complying with the sector's regulations, and through identifying and exploiting all business opportunities that can positively influence its prosperity (ibid). Thus, it aims to enhance its financial state and to support the development of the Greek economy into a new model of economic advancement (ibid).

Meanwhile, the organisation further claims that it supports workplace creativity and innovation, teamwork and the exchange of ideas as top of its business priorities (CSR Report 2014). The bank's relative success can be evidenced through the provision of various innovative e-banking solutions that had been emerged through a brainstorming session amongst its people. For instance, the bank allows its customers to create personalised deposit accounts so to meet their individual needs. One of its latest innovative products aims to reinforce the Greek agricultural sector as part of the bank's efforts to contribute to the recovery of the national economy (ibid). Thus, it offers it's a wide range of relevant business products and services, along with its "know-how", to new farmers and newly-established agricultural companies so to ensure their viability and competitiveness (ibid). Furthermore, "Case B" supports young entrepreneurship by offering its executives' expertise to senior high school and university students across the country through several seminar and training courses focusing on issues related to business endeavours, and the architecture and application of various projects and business initiatives (ibid).

Overall, "Case B" aim is to strengthen its relationships with its social partners by reinforcing its business development and corporate social responsibility so to enhance the group's strategic positioning within the market. Therefore, the bank claims that the latest business amalgamations resulted in a breakthrough year for "Case B" with regards to its organisational aspects and operational activities.

7.1.3 Pillars of Operational Activities

"Case B" holds assets that account for almost €89 billion worth, with net loans and customers' deposits of €55 billion respectively (Annual Report 2014). The bank offers its products and services to approximately 6 million customers, with most of its activities to be offered within the Greek territory. The bank claims to be actively involved in the restructuring and rebirth of the Greek financial market. Therefore, its activities mainly focus on commercial, retail, investment and capital management banking. Further to that, the group offers a wide range of products and services (e.g. investment and deposit management, real estate, leasing and insurance, retail and large business banking) to its international client base through an established network in many countries (Bulgaria, Serbia, Albania, Cyprus, Romania, Ukraine, Egypt, Russia, UK, Germany) (ibid).

Having created an extensive branch network, the bank offers its retail banking products and services, in addition to their provision via the bank's e-banking platform (Case B website). Retail banking clients are provided with a wide range of personalised offerings such as savings and current accounts, fixed-term deposits, investment products, loans and mortgages, credit cards, insurance services etc. (Annual Report 2014). However, due to the unfavourable economic conditions, the bank proceeded with various adjustments to its loan and mortgage policies so to help those families facing financial difficulties. One of its recent decisions was to cancel all personal debts of up to €20,000 so to assist individuals and their families to cope with recession (ibid). That has actually resulted in boosting its market share to even higher levels with regards to its loans and deposits offerings, and placed the bank amongst the leading financial institutions in Greece.

"Case B" also places great emphasis on its risk assessment tools so to ensure its long-term viability and to secure its capital resources. Therefore, its business credit units, and their specialised employees (individuals who hold at least a finance-related degree and relevant working experience), constantly aim to identify the most promising business sectors and businesses so to promote the group's customised product and services (Annual Report 2014). Regardless of a company's size (large, small, SME etc.), the bank focuses on building long-term relationships with its clients so to provide them with its business expertise in strategic management and growth-related concerns (ibid). At present, "Case B" holds the largest business loan portfolio in Greece accounting for almost €50 billion (e.g. €21 billion to SMEs, €16bl to large enterprises, €3bl to small businesses, and approximately €10bl to the maritime industry). Furthermore, the bank offers its investment and asset management "know-how" both to individuals and businesses. The group's financial advisory services cover a wide range of business activities such as forms of privatisation, capital increases, mergers and acquisitions etc. (ibid). In addition, it administers tailor-made wealth management services to its high capital client base, both in Greece and/or abroad. Finally, its real estate management and development services are offered within its subsidiaries (ibid).

To further expand its operations and to strengthen its position, the bank went through six strategic integrations in 2013, either through acquiring other banking institutions or by absorbing the "healthy" segments of many other financial organisations. Having successfully completed these business amalgamations, the organisation turned into the largest banking institution in Greece, with the highest total assets, the biggest customer base, and the largest workforce within the sector (Annual Report 2014).

7.1.4 Workforce Synthesis

Following its latest business amalgamations, "Case B" employs approximately 22,500 employees within its national and international divisions (Annual Report 2014 – figure 7.2).

Figure 7.2 "Case B" Human Resources
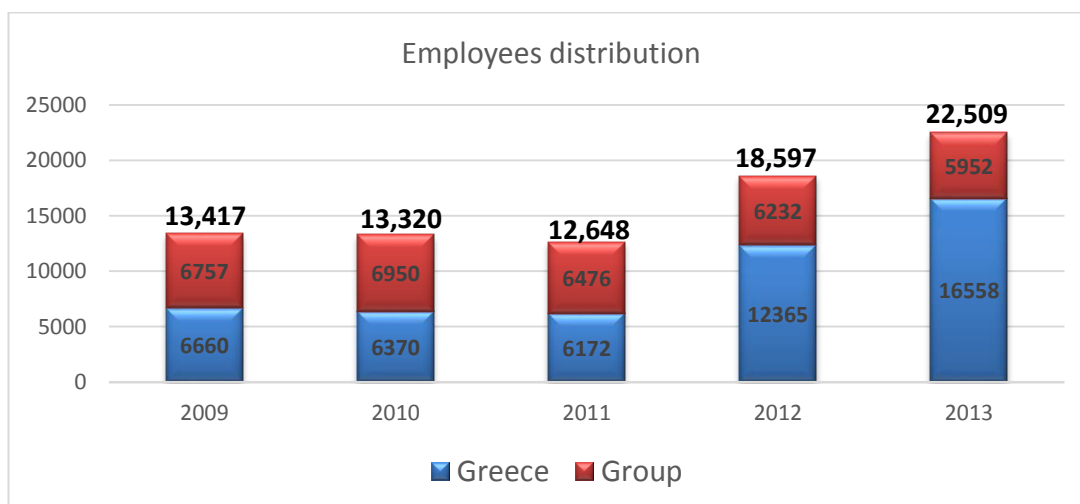
Compared to its workforce synthesis back in 2008 (before the crisis), a total increase of approximately 5,500 employees can be evidenced (Annual Report 2008 - figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 "Case B" Workforce Synthesis (Before & After the Crisis)
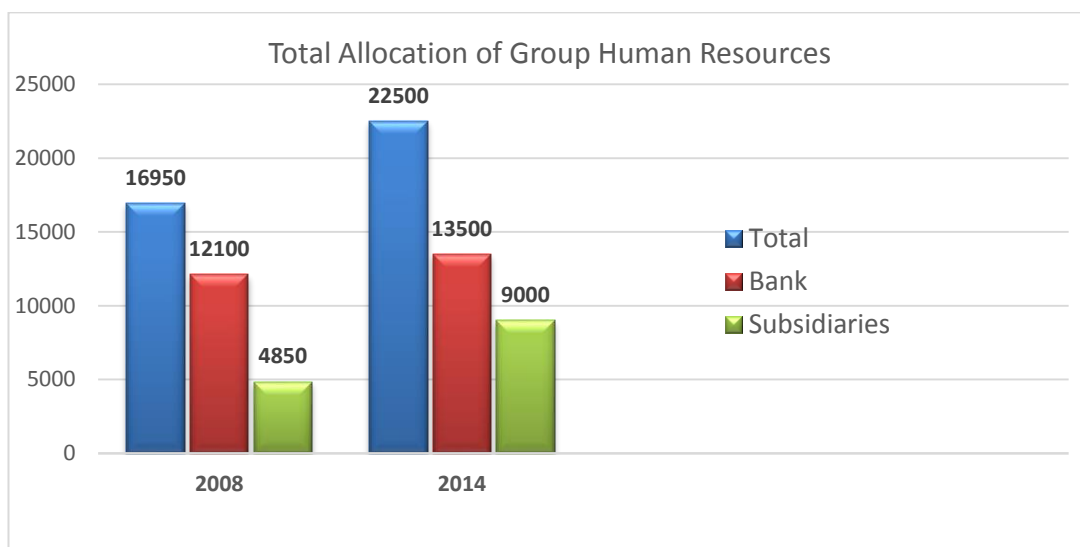
From both figures, the group's human resource retrenchment can be evidenced through massive lay-offs and voluntary exits. Thus, from 16,950 employees back in 2008, the bank's workforce reduced to 13,417 employees in 2009 (Annual Report 2014). The bank remained reluctant to any hiring until the late months of 2011. The year after (2012), its workforce increased to 18,597 employees mainly because of the sector's

restructuring. Following the successful completion of its merging processes, the newly-formed banking corporation increase its manpower to 22,509 employees by the end of 2013 (Annual Report 2014). Today, "Case B" employs 22,146 employees (Official website).

With regards to its workforce distribution per age and gender, 55% are female and 45% male, with the average age of its employees being 36 years old, both within its domestic and international divisions (Annual Report 2014 – figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 "Case B" Workforce distribution per gender and age
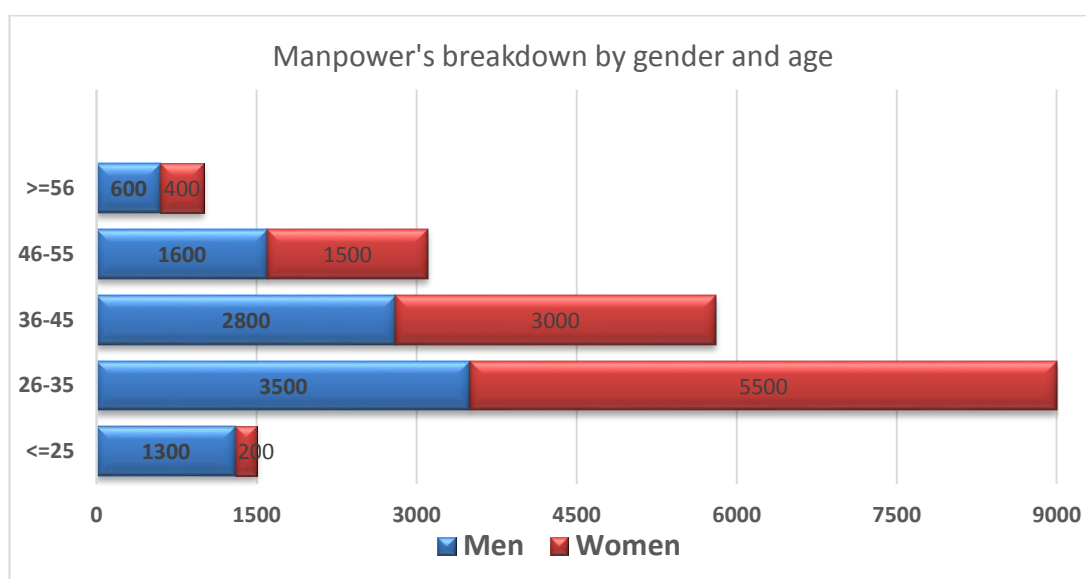
A large majority of the group's (international subsidiaries) employees (99.6%) are employed on a full-time basis under a permanent employment contract, with the remaining 0.4% being covered with a fixed-term agreement in the context of an induction/trial period right after their employment (CSR Report 2014). As with its operations in Greece, its entire workforce (100%) is employed under a full-time/permanent employment status (ibid). The majority of the bank's workforce is concentrated in the Attica region (43%), followed by a 11% on the co-capital town of Thessaloniki, and 14% across Greece (figure 7.5). The remaining 32% of its human capital allocation represents the group's international divisions (ibid).

In relation to the educational background of its staff, 55% of its employees come from tertiary educational institutions. Precisely, 30% hold a university degree, 13% a Master's degree, and 12% are graduates of a Technological Educational Institution (TEI). The remaining 45% consists of those employees holding a secondary degree, and mainly represents the oldest ones within the organisation (CSR Report 2014). In an effort to elevate its workforce's educational level, a stricter recruitment policy is now followed within which only the most talented (in terms of their educational background and professional experience) candidates are considered for all job vacancies both within its branch and corporate divisions, either in Greece or abroad.

Figure 7.5 "Case B" Allocation of Human Resources per Geographical Area
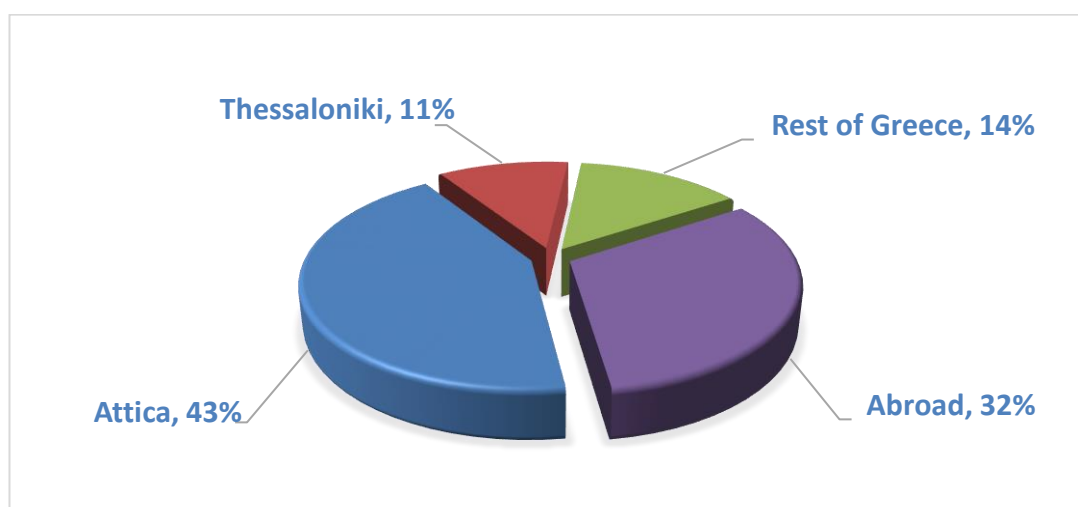
The bank claims that its human-value philosophy is reflected in all of its HR practices, starting from the earliest phase of selecting its employees. The organisation utilises a set of standard recruitment and selection tools (e.g. competency tests, structured interviews, assessment centers, role plays, personality tests etc.) (HR Proceedings 2014; 2015). These can fluctuate based on the applicants' educational and professional background so to ensure a fair and transparent hiring process (ibid). Besides external recruitment, the bank places great emphasis on filling job vacancies internally so to offer career advancement opportunities to its existing employees. Therefore, 21% of its job vacancies are filled externally, with the remaining 79% filled by internal candidates (CSR Report 2014). At group level, the respective figures are 27% and 67%, while their employees' internal transfers (both within the bank and its

subsidiaries) account for a 15% rate. In line with its "Human Rights and Equal Opportunities" policies, the group aims to continuously develop its employees so to allow them to progress within the organisation. Therefore, 53% of men and 47% of women were promoted last year to managerial positions, with its middle and senior management positions to consist of 55% men and 45% women respectively. It is also worth mentioning that last year a 2.7% increase of women's progression in such managerial posts was noted Case B website). All of which resulted in a 97% retention rate with regards to its talent management success, and to an 85% retention rate in general (Annual Report 2015).

Altogether, "Case B" philosophy claims to focus on enhancing its workforce's capabilities and potential so to contribute to organisational excellence (Official website). Thus, it always aims to offer training and development, as well as career advancement opportunities to its people so to ensure their engagement and commitment, and thus to collectively cope with business and economic uncertainty and complexity.

7.1.5 Corporate Governance

"Case B" has an established corporate governance division being responsible for supervising the bank's actions and programmes so to ensure its institutional legitimacy (CSR Report 2015). Its corporate governance statement highlighting the bank's priorities as presented below:

"Our institutional legitimacy is of top priority for "Case B". Concurrently, the constant upgrading of our systems of governance and internal control, regulatory compliance, transparency and information dissemination towards the investment community, all constitute key concerns for our group" (ibid, p.22)

Drawing upon the bank's main corporate values (e.g. *"harmonious relationship with its social partners"*, *"alignment of business targets with social progress and solidarity"*, *"corporate governance optimisation"*, *"adoption of best workplace*

practices", "*environmental consciousness*", "*cultural awareness and promotion*" – CSR Report 2014, pp.13-14), "Case B" BoD members, and its assisting committees, constantly aim to represent the group to its internal and external stakeholders. In addition, all aim to strengthen the group's long-term economic value, and to protect its corporate interests (ibid). Precisely, its integrated committees aim to ensure that all organisational practices adhere to the institutional legal framework requirements. Therefore, the BoD team of executives is placed at the top of the organisational structure, being comprised of six executive member units, as presented below (figure 7.6).

Figure 7.6 "Case B" Organisational Structure
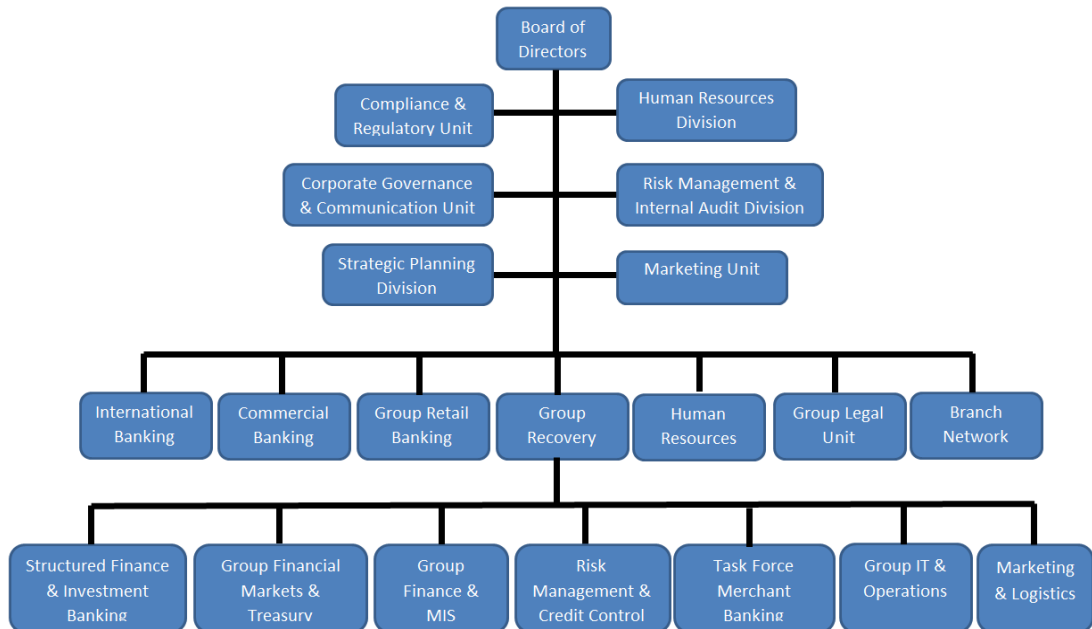
Following "Case B" organisational structure, its BoD is assisted by several committees with all aiming to assure the bank's effective management. There are 12 committees in total as shown below (figure 7.7).

__Figure 7.7 "Case B" BoD and Administrative Committees__

BOARD OF DIRECTORS (BoD) COMMITTEES	AUDIT COMMITTEE RISK MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REMUNERATION COMMITTEE SUCCESSION AND NOMINATION COMMITTEE OF BoD MEMBERS STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE GROUP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
MAIN EXECUTIVE AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEES	IT PLANNING AND OPERATING QUALITY COMMITTEE (BOG 2577) CREDIT COMMITTEE WORK OUT COMMITTEE ASSET-LIABILITY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE (ALCO) EXPENDITURE AND BUDGET COMMITTEE CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY COMMITTEE

As per their name, all committees aim to assist the BoD by providing their immediate support so to address its requirements on a daily basis. Their definitive objective is to guarantee that everyone within the organisation is working by incorporating the corporate values and codes of practice within his/her work contexts so to collectively contribute the utmost for the organisation. Therefore, the HR department claims to offer its expertise in assisting the organisation to become more competent and strategic oriented.

Overall, "Case B" broader organisational structure (compared to a narrower one of "Case A") may constitute some evidence of its organisational efforts to specialise the roles and accountabilities of its departments so to enhance its front-line operations and to lead a business upturn.

7.1.6 The HR Function at "Case B"

To date, after having successfully completed a series of business amalgamations, the group employs approximately 22,500 employees versus 16,950 back in 2008. Women outnumber men by 57.3% to 42.7% (12,900 versus 9,600 respectively), while employees' average age is thirty-nine (39) years old (ibid). "Case B" further employs 209 employees through third-party organisations (56% men to 44% women), and another 56 people (50-50% per gender) through a services-rendered invoice scheme (CSR Report 2015).

With regards to its workforce's educational background, approximately three-quarters (75%) of its employees, within its national operations, hold either a bachelor degree, a Master or a PhD, with the remaining 25% to hold a secondary education diploma (CSR Report 2015). For its subsidiaries abroad, the respective figure of its high-educated employees accounts for 84%. It is also remarkable that the percentage of its employees holding a post-graduate degree has increased by 7.1% since 2007. Such an increase reflects the significance that the group places on its workforce as a value-agent, regardless the difficult economic times within which the bank operates these days. In relation to its recruitment and selection processes (either internally or externally), the organisation advertises all new job vacancies so to welcome the most talented individuals to apply. External hiring accounts for 46% of the entire workforce, with the remaining 54% filled internally (Annual Report 2015). A rate of 64% of its internal staffing and people's advancement refers to the bank's branch network, while 36% relates to job vacancies within its headquarters (ibid). Employee career development (in relation to their gender) accounts for 56% and 44% for men and women respectively within its national operations; accordingly, for its subsidiaries abroad, the respective percentages are 29% for men and 71% for women (ibid).

The group provides its employees with full-time employment contracts so to enhance feelings of job security amongst them. It also strengthens their career advancement opportunities through the provision of several training programmes (CSR Report 2015). Training is offered across all hierarchical levels, with its average duration to vary depending on the training subject (figure 7.8). Overall, 67% of all staff participated at least in one training course, resulting in an average of 38 training man-hours per employee, resulting to an 86% satisfaction rate for the bank's training offerings.

Figure 7.8 Allocation of Training Man-Hours

ALLOCATION OF TRAINING MAN-HOURS (TMH)						
	Higher & Top Management		Middle Management		Other Employees	
	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN	MEN	WOMEN
PEOPLE	178	67	253	160	5,664	7,788
TRAINING MH	3,329	1,506	11,680	8,055	240,637	377,291
AVERAGE MH	19	22	46	50	42	48

However, following the crisis' aftermath, the bank proceeded to a training focus alteration, with 5.3% of the bank's total training courses to focus on "business and systems re-organisation" besides the other offered within (figure 7.9).

Figure 7.9 "Case B" Training Focus
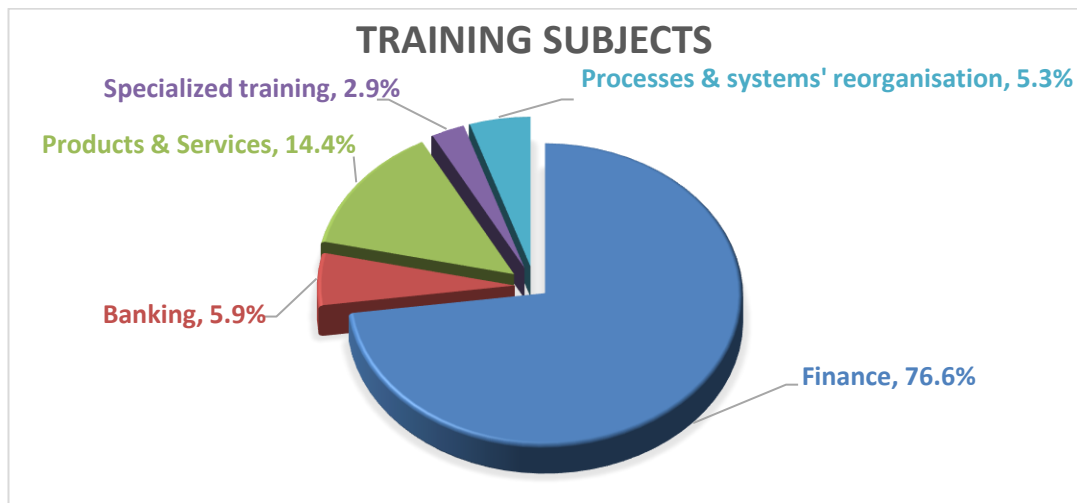
The organisation further claims that its e-learning initiatives reflect the foundation of its training work and environmental consciousness (figure 7.10), with all aiming to deliver significant benefits to all employees (e.g. flexibility, personalised training, instant satisfaction of participants' training needs etc.).
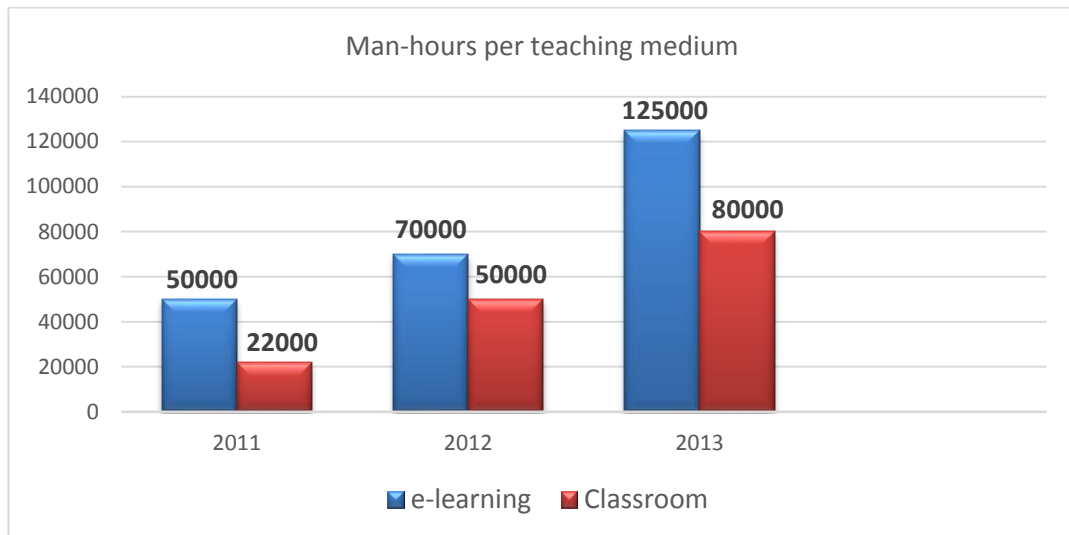
"Case B" also rewards its employees based on their contribution and competencies, while it encourages their continuous development (CSR Report 2015). The group implements rewards benchmarking in order to design its compensation and benefits policies, yet it usually offers a higher wage to its employees, compared to that described within the collective employment agreements. In addition, its managerial positions are covered through competitive individual employment contracts (ibid). Depending both on employees' competencies and the organisation's financial state, additional benefits may also be offered. Therefore, employees' exceptional efforts, high performance and quality of service delivery are further recognised and rewarded through an attractive bonus scheme (ibid). The organisation claims that such an approach focuses on enhancing teamwork and the sense of belonging within the organisation rather than urging people to assume risks or aiming at short-term outcomes and benefits (ibid).

Apart from its basic reward schemes, other benefits are also provided. For instance, private insurance coverage is available to all employees by covering a wide range of health-related concerns (e.g. medical care expenses, free check-ups, life insurance with full accident, death and disability coverage etc. - CSR Report 2015). Financial aid is also provided to all employees' children studying in universities (either abroad or at

home) along with nursery allowance and extra day-offs for special occasions (e.g. hospitalisation, children's sickness, maternity etc.) (ibid - figure 7.11).

Figure 7.11 "Case B" Compensation & Benefits Expenses

STAFF COMENSATIONS	€574 mn
SOCIAL INSURANCE CONTRIBUTIONS	€146 mn
OTHER EXPENSES*	€28 mn
VOLUNTARY EXIT SCHEME	€126 mn
RETIREMENT BENEFITS	€10 mn
TOTAL	€884 mn

*Other expenses include the cost of: medical care, employee insurance with death and/or disability coverage (Group insurance scheme), preventive check-up for managers and executives, nursery schools and employer contributions other than security funds.

All employees are also entitled to preferential rate loans and mortgages when buying their first-owned residence. At the end of 2014, the organisation had offered over €45 million through its staff mortgage scheme (Annual Report 2015). Furthermore, the group offers advisory services to its workforce through its "Employee Assistance" programme. Employees are encouraged to look for help through the group's support and counselling department within which experienced psychologists offer their services for free (ibid).

Further to that, "Case B" welcomes and organises meetings between its senior management and its employees and their union representatives on a quarterly basis (CSR Report 2015). The purpose of these meetings is to inform employees and union representatives on all functional changes occurring within the organisation, and to ensure them that employment contracts remain intact (ibid). However, the paradox with these meetings is that they usually turn into a "one side" affair as they mostly focus on informing employees and their union representatives rather than getting their opinions and suggestions on any business-related and employment-related concerns (as reported from interviewed employees). In addition, although there are six unions, only one is recognised as the official body for representing the entire workforce (ibid). Yet, the organisation claims that it fully complies with the legislative framework that

governs the banking sector, and thus it offers collective employment agreements so to maintain its legislative legitimacy.

Overall, "Case B" HR department claims that it always works towards its human capital's development, with its main objective being to increase its workforce's value proposition so to enhance organisational competitiveness, and thus for the HR department to be regarded as an equally strategic business partner within the organisation and its BoD.

7.1.7 Organisation of HR

"Case B" HR's structure follows a similar format to that of "Case A", yet with some slight differences. Instead of one HR Director (Case A), "Case B" HR structure consists of a Group HR Director under whom another two HR Directors (corporate division and branch network) are situated (CSR Report 2015). In a lateral movement, a Learning and Development Director and only an Internal Communications Manager (internal and external for "Case A") complete the higher managerial positions, as presented below (figure 7.12).

Figure 7.12 "Case B" HR Structure
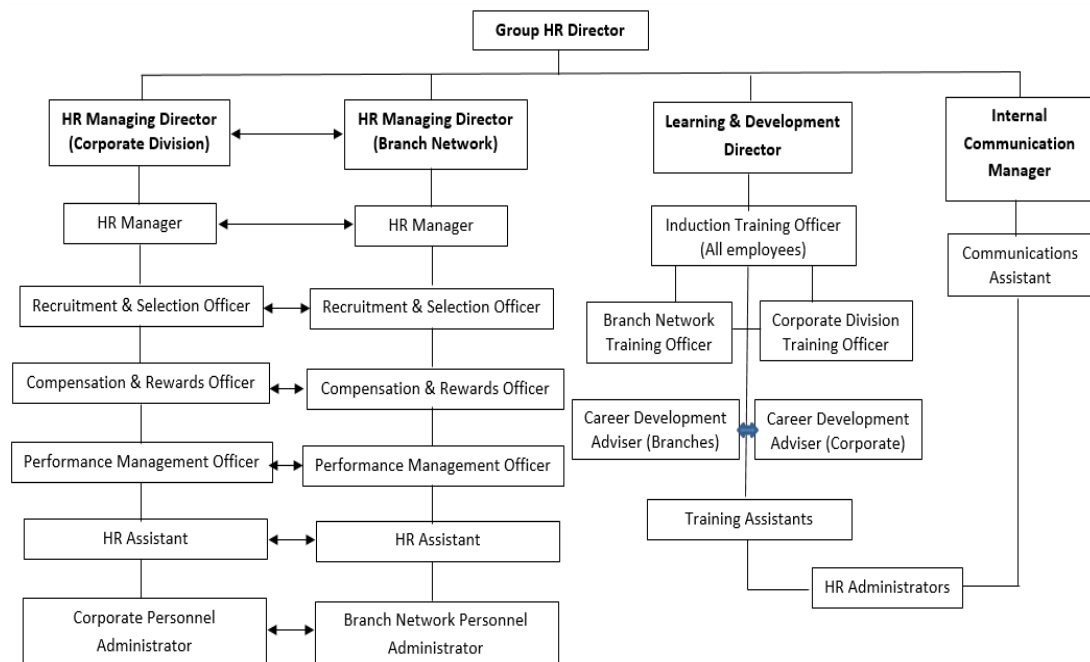
Both directors and managers (either within the corporate division or the branch network function) focus on general HR aspects (e.g. recruitment and selection, compensation and rewards, performance management and evaluation etc.). An HR assistant and a Personnel Administrator supplement both functions respectively, and a close co-operation amongst all HR staff takes place. That allows the organisation to address all HR concerns either separately for each unit and/or holistically as well. As in "Case A", the T&D unit is comprised of a head director, another four officers and an HR assistant (HR Proceedings 2015). The training officers are divided into three categories, namely the Induction Training Officer, who is responsible for delivering training to all newly-hired employees before getting full responsibility of their job contexts. Later, depending on the nature of the employees' work, they are trained either by a branch network training officer or a corporate division officer. Such a distinction allows the organisation to better focus on its training interventions and eventually to distinguish its offerings as targeted training that can meet the particular needs of each respective function (ibid). Furthermore, there are two Career Development Advisers (CDA), for each division, who offer their expertise with regards to the employees' career advancement. Since the organisation welcomes internal applicants for all job vacancies, their role is considered crucial in assuring people's development and their lateral or vertical movement within the organisation. The unit also occupies two T&D Assistants, whose responsibilities focus on assisting all HR officers and advisers when required. "Case B" HR structure is complemented by an Internal Communications Manager and his/her assistant. Both are responsible for keeping all employees informed on all the latest changes and news related to the organisation. Their objective is also to maintain their employees' morale and satisfaction at high levels through a continuous and transparent communication process. Finally, two HR Administrators assist both units (T&D and Communications) on administrative issues related to their daily operations.

Overall, the organisation claims that its HR's application and operationalisation (including its HRD practices) is conducted in such a way so to enhance organisational competitiveness and human capital competence (HR Proceedings 2015). Therefore,

owing to its business focus shift, the bank welcomes its branch managers' active involvement within most of its HR implementations. Research findings confirm that HR accountabilities are devolved to branch managers, where possible, as they are the ones closest to their employees.

7.1.8 Training and Development

In alignment with its corporate strategy, the organisation invests in its employees' learning and development through the design, update and deliver of its training offerings aiming to achieve individual and organisational excellence (CSR Report 2015).

Both in-house and external training is provided, with both aiming to enhance employees' managerial knowledge, and their leadership skills and abilities as well (ibid). In addition, various evaluation methods are used (e.g. psychometric tests, 360 degree evaluation, quarterly and annual reviews etc.) so to assess the effectiveness of their training programmes. Clear career development pathways are also offered to all employees so to progress within the organisation, and thus to increase their engagement and commitment (Annual Report 2014). Furthermore, as part of its efforts to prepare the next generation of its executives, the group offers a three-year development programme aiming to equip individuals with all the necessary skills for leading teams and inspiring, coaching and mentoring their members (ibid). "Case B Leaders of Tomorrow" academy is a fine example, with already having certified 45 senior and middle management executives in undertaking leading roles in key positions within the organisation (ibid). Another two newly-formed academies have also been launched, namely the "Branch Network Management Academy" and the "Case B Group Management e-Academy". The former aims to enhance middle and senior executives' competencies, while the latter helps them to enrich their skills so to move to higher hierarchical positions. The group's "The First Steps in Management" e-learning academy also targets those employees interested in enhancing their management skills by being certified from a leading educational institution such as the Harvard Business School Publishing organisation (ibid). To date, four academies

operate across its subsidiaries, with an organisational plan of creating another two soon (ibid).

Following today's business and economic uncertainty, the group's training programmes also aim to raise employee awareness on issues related to business-associated risks (e.g. credit, operational, market etc.). Thus, relevant training focuses on increasing their knowledge with regards to the financial products and services being offered from the bank, while also to inform them about the regulatory and legal requirements within which they need to conform in relation to their job accountabilities (figure 7.13).

Figure 7.13 "Case B" Training Programmes & Training Man-Hours

Training Programmes	%Total training man-hours
Development of financial and banking knowledge	43%
Product and Services Knowledge and development of selling skills	30%
Development of personal/managerial/specialised technical know-how skills	17%
Corporate Responsibility Issues	10%

Over 52% of its employees were certified through relevant training in issues related to financial corruption and fraud (CSR Report 2015). Various workshops were also organised, all aiming to advance employees' knowledge of CSR, waste management, "green banking" etc. More than 3,000 employees undertook environmental training either through short e-learning courses (e.g. basic environmental concerns, terminology, organisational environmental policy) or through more extensive training programmes (e.g. "green" products and services, environmental management etc.) (CSR Report 2015). The group further introduced a series of work-life balance seminars so to inform its employees on issues related to business and economic uncertainty, work/life stress, effective communication, employability etc. (ibid).

In total, 855,342 training man-hours (tmh) were recorded at the end of 2014, and approximately 3,653 training courses were delivered (CSR & Annual Reports 2015).

The average tmh, at the end of 2014 (group level), was 38 compared to 27 hours back in 2009. Accordingly, 67% of its employees attended at least one training course versus a respective 58% in 2009 (ibid). Precisely, 85,432 tmh (international level) were delivered on courses related to anti-corruption, anti-fraud, and regulatory compliance. Training participants accounted for 59% of women and 41% of men. Respectively, at a national level, 56% of women and 44% of men were trained on similar topics, while the total tmh climbed up to 59 from 45 in 2009 with almost 85% of its workforce having undertaken at least one training session (75% before crisis) (ibid).

All in all, the organisation claims that the success of its training offerings is based on its increased levels of participation and their high satisfaction rates (CSR report 2015). The majority of its instructor-led programmes were evaluated as "excellent" from its employees, while a satisfaction rate of 86% can also be evidenced (ibid). Research findings outline the significance that the organisation places on training and development, while it also highlights the active involvement of its branch managers throughout the implementation of most of its training initiatives. Besides that though, a clear and continuous communication process is also required so for everyone to be aware of all ongoing changes within the organisation and the banking sector as well.

7.1.9 Communication

"Case B" claims to welcome the active participation of all its organisational members through an open and direct communication process within which everyone can express his/her concerns (CSR Report 2015). Its motto "*We compose our common future together*" can demonstrate the group's intention to promote accurate and two-sided communication for the common good (ibid).

The aim of its communication policy is to enhance its employees' relationships, and to reinforce the bonds between its stakeholders and the organisation (Case B website). Internal communication focuses on keeping employees up-to-date with all the latest changes occurring within the banking group, its business strategy and its corporate culture. Such processes aim to enable an information exchange between senior

management and employees (CSR Report 2015). The bank's external communication processes are also considered crucial in distributing timely and accurate information to its stakeholders (e.g. shareholders, customers, suppliers, investors, society etc.) (ibid).

The group uses its intranet and e-newsletters for posting all corporate and sectoral news on a regular basis (CSR Report 2015). Employees' comments are also welcomed so for a constructive dialogue to initiate. In addition, regular formal and informal meetings are also held, and several events are organised (e.g. cultural, sports, team building, employee recognition rewards etc.). All of which aim to increase employees' morale, to reinforce the mutual-trust relationship between them and the organisation, and to reward their outstanding performance, contribution and commitment to the organisation (ibid).

"Case B" further claims to maintain regular contact with its external stakeholders so to continuously demonstrate its financial stability, prosperity and social image (CSR Report 2015). Various financial statements are produced throughout the year, along with its annual and CSR reports, and press announcements are regularly released as well (ibid). Furthermore, in respect to its societal responsibility, the organisation promotes donations to many governmental and non-governmental agencies so to assist them to publish their studies on a variety of research fields and educational subjects. The bank further helps all national museums to enrich their collections through its fund-raising events and generous donations (ibid).

As to all that, communication appears to be an important organisational process for "Case B", as it is with most organisations. By further acknowledging today's economic conditions, the group aims to implement transparent communication policies and processes so to coordinate interdivisional co-operation and knowledge-exchange, and to increase its employees' morale and commitment, and eventually to achieve its business goals (CSR Report 2015). Therefore, its communication philosophy focuses on building an open, timely, direct, accurate and reciprocal communication process amongst the organisation, its stakeholders and the society (ibid).

7.2 The Strategic Audit of "Case B" HRD practices

Like in "Case A", qualitative research data was also secured for "Case B" through the employment of semi-structured interviews with key HRD stakeholders, accompanied by the analysis of various organisational documents. Thirty-eight (38) interviewees (**table 4.1, p.81**) offered their insights over the examined topics. Such a multi-constituent research perspective allowed the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the interviewed stakeholders' perceptions of the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD, and on those factors that can shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity in organisations.

Precisely, ten (10) people from the HR department were interviewed, namely the HR Director (1), the Learning and Development Manager (1), four (4) HR officers, two (2) HR assistants, and two (2) HR administrators. One of their very first suggestions was their organisation's business focus shift towards the enhancement of their front-line operations. Therefore, interviews were held with eight (8) Branch Managers, one (1) IT Manager, one (1) IT Specialist, and one (1) Retail Banking Officer. In addition, eleven (11) front-line employees (branch network), along with another six (6) employees from other corporate divisions, offered their insights. For all participants, a short role description is provided (**table 4.2, pp.84-85**). Finally, all interviews were conducted by following a pre and post-crisis assessment approach so to allow for an "over time" examination of SHRD maturity to take place.

Stakeholders' differing and changing perspectives were noted, both with regards to the understanding and maturity of SHRD. Furthermore, although both organisations operate within similar external (environmental pressures, trade unions, industry regulations, employment relations etc.) and internal (workforce synthesis, employees' educational background etc.) contexts, their diverse HR approach in coping with business and economic uncertainty and complexity was also pointed out.

Overall, the employment of the modified SHRD framework allowed the researcher to capture the diverse, changing and complex perceptions of his interviewed stakeholders

on the maturity of SHRD over time. For each strategic criterion being proposed within the SHRD framework, interview participants were exposed to a combination of pre-determined and probing questions so for an in-depth investigation to take place, and for useful conclusions and recommendations to emerge. Complemented by evidence provided on the suggested strategic indicators of SHRD maturity (**fig.3.2, p.51**), SHRD was characterised either as mature or immature. Interviews also aimed to identify the factors that can simultaneously hinder or expedite SHRD adoption and maturity. Like in previous chapters, a thematic analysis (focus on specific patterns/themes of analysis such as the strategic characteristics, the factors that can shape, facilitate or constrain SHRD maturity etc.) will allow the researcher to categorise his data and thus to better analyse his research findings. Both research themes were examined/analysed/discussed through the respective perceptions of the interviewed stakeholders, and under a before-and-after investigation research design (retrospectively).

7.2.1 Shape organisational mission, goals and strategies

The modified SHRD framework suggests that an SHRD mature organisation would be able to shape organisational strategies and goals. In line with this proposition, all interview participants stressed the importance of a more proactive HR/HRD approach regardless business and environmental conditions. Everyone from the HR department further outlined the importance of matching the HR philosophy with the organisational one. Thus, with regards to their HRD interventions, an HR Manager argued:

"*Our mission is to constantly provide our people with T&D opportunities not only for enhancing their capabilities, but also for ensuring that the organisation employs the most talented individuals who can offer outstanding service delivery, while concurrently expanding our client base at these difficult times. All of which will eventually increase organisational efficiency and will ensure business survival in such lean periods*" (HRMgr)

He further admitted that, prior to the crisis, a higher training budget was available to them; thus, constituting the HR department more capable of designing and delivering greater T&D opportunities. He continued though by arguing that it is reasonable for organisations to "*offer more in better conditions*", especially during the sector's great expansion phase. In line with his manager, the HR Director outlined his department's strategic ability in influencing business goals, by arguing that:

"*People recognise and value our work, as we represent the link between the business and its employees. We are always trying to deliver exceptional services and practices which aim to motivate our workforce, while concurrently satisfying our business needs. To achieve that, HR is situated within the BoD so for its voice to be heard*" (HRDr)

He further argued that, since the HR department is situated within the BoD, its consultation is considered vital throughout the design and formulation of all business strategies. Then, he also stated that his organisation acknowledges the value of its human capital, and thus it constantly aims to ensure that its organisational representatives' (HR department) voice is heard and considered within the upper levels of the bank's hierarchy. Such assertions were further supported by relevant reference within almost all organisational documents within which HR's consultation was outlined (CSR & Annual Reports, HR Proceedings 2015). Yet, there were also a few who argued for HR's strategic capacity only for the pre-crisis period.

Therefore, an HR administrator and an HR assistant, both argued for their department's ability to be at the forefront of any business activity in the past, by stating that:

"*A few years back, HR held knowledge of all of the organisation's burning issues, and accordingly provided its consultation in order to resolve them*" (HRAss)

"*A more strategic role was undertaken in the past, with our role being enhanced within the business agenda as we had to also ensure the smooth running of operations within every single country where we operated*" (HRAdm)

However, within most organisational documents dated prior to the crisis (CSR Report 2007; HR Proceedings 2008), the HR department's active involvement within the senior management team of executives could be noted through relevant reference on its importance and role within the BoD.

Both further outlined though that, even to date, a strategic alignment between the HR and the corporate objectives is maintained to a large extent, and eventually the role of the HR department is of high influence so to ensure their workforce's engagement and commitment through their extended training offerings. Having these elements secured, both claimed that organisational efficiency and performance were also expected to increase.

Following their colleagues statements, the L&D Manager and the Training Assistant (TrAss), both argued:

"Our L&D team focuses on offering outstanding T&D to our staff. We all aim to create and extend our human capital's capabilities through continuous T&D opportunities so to eventually achieve its vital objectives and the respective ones of the organisation" (L&D Mgr)

"Our T&D opportunities are very important as they can influence our employees' performance, can reduce work-related faults and costs, while also to boost their morale, commitment and productivity" (TrAss)

Others further stressed the importance of their training interventions, in terms of their flexibility, customisation and trainee control, through the provision of e-learning courses and other e-related initiatives (e.g. webinars), by arguing:

"Our L&D plans and policies are clear and formally written and communicated. They are flexible enough so to adapt to ongoing business change. They are also sufficient so to successfully meet our employees' needs and our organisational objectives as well in order to collectively offer improvement at all levels" (CDAdv)

"Today, e-learning courses and webinars both represent an effective way of promoting learning and knowledge sharing. It is time and cost efficient and it can be delivered to high quality standards" (TrOff)

In line with these assertions, an IT Manager stated that:

"E-HRM is the most up-to-date approach in training these days. Our work is to constantly provide help through ensuring that the bank's IT systems run smoothly. People can now easily acquire and/or share knowledge without having to physically attend a class. Accordingly, the employment of such practices makes our work more interesting as we need to constantly work towards delivering and supporting such interventions" (IT Mgr)

Whether before or after the crisis, it was suggested that there was a good fit between HR and the broader organisation. Through an attained alignment, HR seemed to hold the capacity of shaping and/or directing business strategies and goals, and eventually for HR excellence to be promoted. That also allowed the organisation to change and adapt to new business realities gracefully.

Following the HR staff's suggestions, a branch manager outlined that HR's role is not functional at all (either before or after the crisis) since its executives are consulted throughout all business initiatives. He grounded his suggestion on the fact that the banking sector is a knowledge intensive and people-centric business industry with regards to its survival, success and growth, by claiming that:

"Our sector is made up of products and services. How can we not be people-oriented? While I am responsible for running my branch, I believe that my people are actually doing so. Without them, nothing is possible. Each one is specialised in a different part of the job. Accordingly, he/she gets the appropriate training, and he/she becomes the master of his/her work. As every service-oriented business, people mostly matter. As for that, our HR team always aims to incorporate this belief within our organisational objectives and strategies. I guess our business culture is also influenced by this people-oriented mentality" (BM)

Another branch manager further identified HR's ability in shaping business strategies by stretching its leadership capability which goes "hand in hand" with senior management's priorities. Thus, she argued that:

"HR leadership comes from the HR department. I strongly believe that it has always been senior management's priority to engage HR people as it considers them to be the link between the organisation and its manpower. Although, a setback may be apparent these days for HR, all it needs is to change its mind-set to its previous state if it wants to regain its leading behaviour" (BM)

Yet, there were also a few managers who believed that HR lost its position compared to its pre-crisis state, mainly because of its staff shortages. Therefore, they argued:

"HR people…… Ermmmmm...... Although they are represented within the bank's BoD, I believe that their powerlessness on achieving key strategic objectives and on affecting our corporate goals is evidenced through a relative lack of commitment. Accordingly, their initiatives are not properly evaluated. You see, staff shortages affected them as well. Their role is not as it used to be. From business growth, we moved to business retrenchment. From motivation and engagement, we now experience ignorance and uncertainty. Everyone feels like that – even them" (BM)

"Nothing is the same as it used to be. The HR department is supposed to care about our people, not only for the bank (as an entity). That is evident through the tremendous wage cuts, lay-offs and overall retrenchment practices, never mind the limited training offerings. How are you supposed to grow your business without caring about your employees? Yet, there is a way: cost minimisation. It might work for now, but it will not work for long. They should consider that" (BM)

On the other hand, employees' perceptions contradicted HR staff and most managers' contentions. More than three-quarters of them argued that staff shortages within the HR department resulted in overloading existing HR staff with greater work responsibilities, and thus turning them incapable of performing at their highest

standards. HRD implementations were also affected, which seem to be improperly designed and delivered these days; thus, making them ineffective. As to that, employees argued that HR can no longer shape business objectives and strategies, as both are directed by senior executives. Their assertions can be evidenced within their statements below.

"We can no longer talk of a strategic HR approach when the entire business fights for its daily survival. Nowadays, the bank aims to maintain its customer base, quite a short-term financial approach indeed, however by totally not recognising its people's capacity to do so – that's why more training is essential for us in the front-line" (Employee)

"I guess we do have a clear formal T&D strategy. At least, it is evident within all our organisational documents/statements. However, this does not mean that our HR strategy can formulate the bank's mission, goals and strategies. This is impossible. Do not ever believe that HR will reach this extent especially within the days we live" (Employee)

"Limited training opportunities are now offered, compared to the past, indicating the organisation's principal focus on reducing costs. Job insecurity is also quite high amongst the workforce, with the HR department doing nothing to keep us motivated and make us feel valued. Therefore, which strategic goals are you talking about? The so called strategic HR approach (cut down HR expenditures) only reflects business's cost-down orientation. In that case, HR's sole input in the strategy formulation process is to help implement after being developed" (Employee)

"If HR ever held the capacity to shape business strategies, then it would dictate a more training oriented business focus. Today, limited training is provided and in many cases on totally irrelevant subjects. That was not happening in the past" (Employee)

From those employees' perspectives, a reactive role for HR can be noticed. They further believed that HR always lacked the ability to shape business objectives and

strategies, and that can be highlighted through its limited training offerings. They argued that business expansion (before crisis) could associate with higher training budgets, as their organisation had to provide more induction and follow-up training to newcomers and existing employees back then. Thus, to a large extent, they associated HR's effectiveness in shaping business goals with the volume of the bank's training offerings, by reporting both on their and HR's role:

"We now feel like the pawns of a chess match (the first casualties). Nonetheless to mention that our opinion does not count. But you know what? Their opinion (HR) does not count either. Business decisions are now taken from a small group of senior executives, and directed to business unit managers. These are the people shaping our business strategy and objectives and, accordingly, the focus of T&D" (Employee)

"Hopefully someday, everybody will understand how important is to keep your employees satisfied, motivated and valued during such difficult times. That also refers to our HR people, who should constantly work for their workforce's development and well-being. If they realise that, then they will be able to drive our organisational goals and strategies towards a relative direction" (Employee)

However, there were very few employees who acknowledged that the organisation is in a transitional phase, and thus time will be required before making final judgements on people and departments in terms of their effectiveness. Opposite to a managerial perspective offered by HR staff and managers, employees' operational viewpoints may be explained by the on-going retrenchment practices and their aftermath upon them. Their operational perspective may also correlate with their limited access to relevant information, and the lack of their representation. With regards to their statement on the volume of training, although greater training opportunities were offered in the past, it will not be right to associate the intensity of training with HRD's ability to shape business goals and strategies since there are also other factors that can enhance its ability to do so.

Overall, stakeholders' diverse perceptions complicate the nature of the examined phenomenon. Evidence suggests a mixed state of SHRD maturity, yet with stronger evidence to be provided on behalf of the HR staff and the managers (complemented by documentary evidence) so to argued that SHRD is moving closer to a mature state based on the suggested strategic indicators of SHRD maturity, and with regards to this specific strategic criterion.

7.2.2 Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees

Environmental scanning, in HRD terms, is also an essential element of SHRD maturity. Multiple voices (from various organisational members, and regardless their hierarchical level) are expected to offer greater insights into situations. Therefore, the modified SHRD framework suggests that environmental scanning should occur by including senior managers, branch managers and employees. Taking that into consideration, an HR Manager, an HR Assistant, and an HR Administrator, all argued that their senior management executives conduct relevant scanning activities by bearing in mind the HR-HRD implications associated with them by stating that:

"Our management team examines all business growth opportunities, and their labour-related implications, by carrying out environmental scanning along with our HR team. Feedback is also welcomed from branch managers who are willing to participate in such processes. Yet, there is still too far to go to return to previous states" (HRMgr)

"Our team of senior executives acknowledges the importance of the bank's manpower as a tool of its success. Thus, they call on our HR department to offer its expertise on relevant scanning processes so to make its human capital related propositions" (HRAdm)

"Although I have not been involved in such activities, I know my manager is. I assume it is the role of our managers and directors to participate in environmental scanning as they are the ones closest to our senior levels of hierarchy" (HRAss)

Probing them to further explain what their "return to previous states" means, all referred to employees' engagement (before crisis) in relevant scanning processes through the employment of various employee surveys within which they could share their opinions and offer their recommendations. Yet, such surveys are limited today. Having examined various organisational documents, dated before and after the crisis, the researcher noticed that greater reference to employees consultation (through relevant surveys) was made to those published prior to the crisis (CSR Report 2007; HR Proceedings 2008), and less to none to those published after the crisis (HR Proceedings 2014; CSR Report 2014).

The bank's HR Director further referred to the involvement of branch managers, as much of the HR responsibilities are devolved to them. He argued that several HR-related practices (e.g. first scanning of job candidates, initial interviews, training needs analysis, PM etc.) are assigned to them as they are the ones closest to the bank's front-line employees. Therefore, he claimed:

"While our senior executives recognise our department's strategic role, we also acknowledge our branch managers' strategic positioning within our front-line operations. Thus, if we want to get the utmost from our people, and to grasp any business opportunities within such hostile environments, their involvement is important and thus their consultation is highly demanded" (HRDr)

In line with their director, an HR Manager and an HR Officer suggested:

"Greater involvement of our managers results into two things: the first is that it reduces our workload, which is like outsourcing part of our services within the organisation, and secondly we can get the best information regarding our branch network from those most relevant and closest to it" (HRMgr)

"Within the difficult times we all live in these days, it is good to have everybody on board. More suggestions usually lead to better solutions. That can also result in reducing organisational risk and increasing business competitiveness" (HROff)

All statements clearly indicate an active involvement both on behalf of the HR staff and the branch managers, along with that of the bank's senior executives. Yet, following the modified SHRD framework's proposition, employees were excluded from environmental scanning activities, and thus they were not able to offer their insights into a range of organisational matters. None of the interviewed HR staff had argued for employees' participation, with just referring to some relevant surveys offered in the past.

In line with their HR department, the majority of the interviewed managers (branch network) verified their active involvement in relevant processes, along with undertaking a few HR responsibilities within their job contexts. However, they also pointed out that greater environmental-related scanning was undertaken in the past because of their bank's expansion into foreign markets and due to the introduction of new products and services. Thus, they argued:

"Our work is not limited to our branch management. Besides successfully running our branch, our job is also to keep our staff motivated and engaged. That will only occur if we continuously aim to address their needs and try to meet them accordingly. Therefore, being at the forefront of our organisation's operations, HR looks for our advice in terms of staffing and training needs, while we are solely responsible for delivering performance appraisals and bonus schemes according to our people's performance" (BM)

"Banks are their people, always keep that in mind. Since the bank is now focusing on enhancing its front-line operations, its front-line employees are the most important ones as well. Our role is to effectively manage these people so to collectively contribute to their well-being and the business's prosperity. In that case, part of our work includes some HR responsibilities and close co-operation with the HR department" (BM)

While branch managers' involvement can be evidenced within these statements, there were a few managers, from other corporate divisions, who outlined that they had never been asked to address their people's needs or to share their opinion on organisational issues and other relevant concerns. To this extent, an IT Manager and a retail banking officer, both argued:

"Although our department keeps the bank alive by offering our 24h IT services, I have never been asked whether my people need additional training or not. It is up to us to arrange and self-fund our development. Nevertheless, it would be worth noting that we have suggested many innovative solutions which can help people's work, but never been called back by HR. Opportunities are out there, yet we cannot grasp them, nor point them out as our voice is not heard" (IT Mgr)

"All we can do at the moment is to stay calm and wait for a business upturn; our role is very functional, although many ideas are around the corner. Can you recall an old song: No Woman, No Cry - These days can be like: No voice, no try (laughing). We cannot express our opinion, and they do not try to get it either" (Retail Banking Officer)

It can be suggested that even amongst managers within the same organisation, differing perceptions can be offered. However, the large majority of the interviewed managers highlighted their active involvement and consultation in environmental scanning, beyond those HR responsibilities that they undertake. That could also be evidenced through most organisational documents (both before and after the crisis) highlighting branch managers' active involvement through their constant consultation on various organisational matters and their undertaken HR responsibilities within their job contexts (CSR Report 2007; HR Proceedings 2007; CSR Report 2014; HR Proceedings 2014).

As it was pointed out earlier, "Case B" employees are not involved in relevant scanning activities, besides those employee surveys implemented in the past. However, the large majority of them could not argue to what extent their recommendations and involvement could be proved crucial. Thus, most of them agreed

that they do not necessarily need to be advised on such issues, as it is of their managers' responsibility to do so, by stating that:

"It is not our job to do something like that; otherwise, we would have been called managers or top executives" (Employee)

"I can recall various employee surveys undertaken in the past, but basically at a surface level. Most of the points made within them did not refer to strategic issues and concerns; there were rather administrative in nature. Having such a philosophy in place, how do you expect for us to be involved? That requires a strategic-oriented business philosophy" (Employee)

In summary, research evidence highlights that environmental scanning is conducted within the organisation by involving senior executives and HR staff. Yet, opposite to the SHRD framework's suggestion, weak evidence was provided on employees' participation in such relevant activities, and mainly for the period before the crisis through the employment of various employee surveys. Therefore, employees were not invited to participate in such activities as it was believed that their limited access to information, and sometimes their low level of engagement, both can restrict their strategic insight. Although, there were some relevant surveys in the past, these were mainly focused on administrative concerns and less on HR-related and business strategic concerns. In addition, strong evidence is provided on the inclusion of branch managers within the undertaken environmental scanning activities, supplemented by HR's devolvement to the line (their job contexts). Evidence further highlights stakeholders' differing perceptions with regards to this specific strategic criterion. That makes it even more difficult to exemplify the complex nature of the phenomenon under investigation. HR staff and managers' suggestions confirm the conduct of environmental scanning with the inclusion of most organisational members (senior management, HR staff, and branch managers). On the other hand, employees highlight their lack of involvement, opposing to the suggestion of the modified SHRD framework. However, we can draw upon some evidence so to talk of a slightly more mature organisation ("Case B") compared to its counterpart ("Case A") with regards

to this strategic component. Since both organisations exclude their employees from such activities, a fully mature SHRD state cannot be attained based upon the proposition of the modified SHRD framework and that of its strategic indicators.

7.2.3 "Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans, and policies.

"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies and practices can also offer an indication of HRD's preparedness and responsiveness to internal and external environmental challenges and ongoing change. Having such strategies in place could allow organisations to identify business opportunities within its environmental contexts and to better cope with their negative consequences. Being able to do so, an organisation is also expected to offer the optimal solutions with regards to its people's development.

Taking that into consideration, most of the employees suggested that today's HRM/HRD practices are nothing more than a reflection of their organisation's cost reduction focus. They further argued that, either before or after the crisis, HR's aim was the same: *"get more by doing less"*. They believed that their organisation's HRD practices were always implemented in such a way to ensure cost minimisation and outcome optimisation. They further asserted that less training is now offered, with its subject being irrelevant as well (with a few exceptions). As to all that, they stated:

"*We cannot talk of a strategic HR when all it does is to reactively follow top-down directions, instead of proactively being involved in their formation. From your definition of a HRD mature organisation, I will only keep the cost-efficiency perspective*" (Employee)

"*Keep costs down, do only what is only necessary, and get the most of your implementations. That is our bank's and HR's philosophy these days. If that makes a high sophisticated HR organisation, then I would rather say that we are mature*

enough, since the only thing the entire business (along with HR) does is to keep costs down by any means" (Employee)

Employees also argued for the inappropriateness of e-learning and the irrelevance of the training subjects, by stating:

"*Yes, apparently, we all live in the so-called information age, yet not all of us have a high level of PC literacy. Because of that, class-based training seems better – if nothing but to highlight the interaction between the trainer and the trainee. I am also very disappointed with the lack of awareness on the importance our T&D. Our bank distinguishes important to non-important training programmes depending on how much these cost. Therefore, although some T&D programmes are relevant to us, they are expensive as well and in most cases they are not implemented*" (Employee)

"*There is no point in training me either in totally irrelevant subjects (e.g. first aid) or by attending extensive short e-based seminars which do not address our actual needs and they are adequately educating you in the training topic. E-courses and webinars are promoted as high-quality training techniques these days. However, there is always an underlining reason behind such implementations - and that is called cost-efficiency – nothing more*" (Employee)

However, there were a few employees (2-3 in total) who identified e-learning and webinars as the most effective training approaches during such lean times, while they further referred to specific training programmes which mainly focus on enhancing their skills as front-line employees.

From a different perspective, much of the interviewed managers and the HR staff, all argued for the appropriateness of their e-training practices by evaluating them in relation to the new organisational objectives and the constantly changing business environments. Thus, a branch manager claimed:

"*Today, delivering outstanding customer service is our new business focus. That will ensure our firm's viability and prosperity, initially in the short-term and in*

the long term as well. Regardless of the considerable cutbacks of most T&D initiatives, I believe that the current ones being offered are more tailored to our specific business needs. Their cost effectiveness and flexibility can also be outlined" (BM)

In a similar vein, an IT manager and another branch manager further suggested:

"There is no need of occupying space, time and people by offering training any more. Everybody is now a PC expert in a sense and thus can utilise technology for their own benefit and flexibility. And it costs less than class-based training" (BM)

"E-learning actually assured our job!! (Laughing). Seriously, I cannot see why in the 21st century we do not to use e-learning. It is a convenient, flexible, cost efficient and innovative way of training these days – even my kids prefer interactive learning through their PCs instead of attending a class (laughing)" (IT Mgr)

HR staff described their training interventions as the most appropriate ones with regards to the business and economic environments within which the organisation operates these days. Therefore, an HR manager argued:

"We acknowledge the fact that our role was more enhanced before the crisis, but we also need to consider that all business departments fell back because of this economic shock, it was not only us. That is not an excuse; it is a fact. Thinking about our revised business goals, we believe that our e-HRM deliverables highly contribute to their successful completion" (HRMgr).

An HR officer further highlighted that his organisation is now offering technological friendly training interventions (e-learning/webinars) to most of its front-line employees. A training assistant and an HR administrator, both outlined that such methods can be viewed as a cost-effective and time-efficient way to train their workforce, by arguing:

"Although people believe that it is all about costs - apparently, it is about that as well – it is a flexible way to train your employees across all our subsidiaries. People

are not required to attend a class anymore and they are free to complete the training session within two weeks after being informed of a new programme" (TrAss)

"*Of course, that saves us time and costs, yet it works the same for the employees as well. Using a computer to learn does not mean that training is not properly delivered. We have been accused of scaling back amongst other things as well – some of changes we had to make were inevitable for us – yet, business upturn is on its way, and we will return stronger and more competitive – that would be our response to those setback accusers. All these practices would then be appreciated*" (HRAdm)

They concluded that today's limited budget (compared to a larger one before the crisis) does not automatically diminish the quality of their training offerings. They further suggested that people should acknowledge the transitional phase under which the organisation is passing through due to the sector's restructuring. As to that, it was inevitable for the HR practices to be affected. Having to deal with a larger number of employees after the latest business amalgamations, e-implementations were presented as the most suitable option in delivering punctual and up-to-date training across an extended branch and corporate network within the newly-formed banking organisation.

Overall, research evidence suggests that the organisation has managed to transform its training practices in such a way so to be offered in time and to adapt and correspond effectively to ongoing change. Yet, it was further noticed that many training programmes were irrelevant to the job contexts of their target audience, and thus it was proposed to be offered as part of the bank's induction training instead. However, considering the difficult times within which organisations operate these days, such practices offered a better solution in response to the demanding requirements of both internal and external environments. Although a short-term orientation can be identified within their provision, research data offers strong evidence of an "environmentally-integrated" HRD approach. Data within most organisational documents further highlighted the alignment between the HR/HRD objectives with the corporate ones by outlining HR's significance in leading change and business renewal and growth. Being able to do so, HR was suggested as being environmentally aware of all changes

occurring within the organisation and the business sector so for it to deliver optimum solutions (HR Proceedings 2008; 2015; CSR Report 2008; 2015). Most of the suggested strategic indicators were also met. Therefore, SHRD maturity moves towards a more mature state in respect to this strategic criterion. Yet, once more, stakeholders offered contrasting perspectives which resulted in further complicating the contested territory of the phenomenon under examination.

7.2.4 Strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders

The modified SHRD framework suggests that strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders (e.g. senior management, LMs-Branch Managers, employees) can also be viewed as elements of SHRD maturity.

Like most previous characteristics, employees highlighted that their voice is not heard, while they are the most vulnerable "organisational assets" these days. Thus, their consultation and representation/voice is of limited importance, by arguing:

"*With so many staff redundancies, how can we expect to be heard? Everybody ignores us. Senior managers, the HR department, our supervisors? None of them care. Just have a look on the training deliveries and you will realise that they don't care about us. Rather than trying to address our real training needs, they call us to participate in training activities irrelevant to our job contexts. That's their approach to keep us motivated and developed*" (Employee)

"*You know what? If we are about to fall, we will all fall. That means that if we want to succeed in what we are doing, everyone should contribute regardless of their position within the organisation. Yet, they take the decisions and then they blame everyone else if something goes wrong. We are either all together or not*" (Employee)

"Of course, all organisational members should offer their insights. If that constitutes a strategic partnership between HR and employees, then I can assure you that this is not happening here" (Employee)

Overall, they seemed skeptical towards their HR department's implementations. They also reported that communication problems further enhance their negative perceptions of the effectiveness of their HR department, by claiming that in most cases they do not even get any feedback or evaluation after completing a training course. Later, they argued that the lack of their "voice" impedes their HR department's efforts to design and deliver those practices being required for maximising their potential and front-line operational effectiveness respectively.

On the other hand, branch managers and HR staff contradicted their employees' assertions by suggesting that through an attained co-operation between them, most HR-related concerns can be successfully addressed. Most managers outlined that they regularly undertake an active role in addressing future training requirements for their organisation to meet. In this regard, they stated:

"While our role seems to be restricted to basics these days that is not absolutely true. We need to acknowledge that, in many cases, we have been advised regarding upcoming training offerings besides incorporating HR responsibilities within our daily work agendas" (BM)

"I believe that our organisation understands the vital role of its front-line operations and eventually tries to meet our needs so to provide high quality services to our clients. And here's our role: we have constantly been asked to indicate our staff's training needs or to participate in management meetings as part of a brainstorming process so to cope with all issues that we probably have. Hope it will stay this way until a business upturn to further enhance our role" (BM)

Although the large majority of managers highlighted their involvement in the recruitment process, training (induction or follow up) and performance management of their employees, there were also a few (2 managers from corporate divisions) who

claimed that their role is limited to the basics, by suggesting that there is still room for improvement with regards to their relationship with the HR department and its initiatives. However, they also acknowledged that the bank is under a transitional and transformational phase, so they hoped for their greater involvement in the future within the newly-formed banking corporation.

Research data further highlighted that the role of senior management executives in "Case B" had played a more crucial role in collaborating with HR executives while defining new policies and strategies. Taking that into consideration, everyone from the HR department claimed that their department's positioning within the BoD is an indication of its strategic voice and strategic partnership with the bank's top management. HR's strategic positioning could also be highlighted over time within most organisational documents, with evidence outlining the close cooperation between the HR department and the senior executives, supplemented by that between the HR executives and the branch managers (CSR Report 2007, 2015; HR Proceedings 2008, 2015). HR's importance was outlined through relevant reference on its role and strategic suggestions by highlighting that the HR department was, remains, and it will be amongst the first to be consulted throughout the design and implementation of any business initiative, as everything moves around people (ibid). Therefore, HR represents a vital partner within the bank's BoD. In addition, documentary evidence indicated senior management's engagement in knowledge development and acquisition through their involvement and creativity with respect to their support towards HRD initiatives (ibid).

In summary, we can draw upon some evidence indicating the formation of strategic partnerships between the HR executives and the senior management, and between the former and the branch managers respectively. Based on this evidence, SHRD maturity, in respect to this criterion, can move closer to a mature state. However, for a fully mature state to be attained, strategic partnerships with employees should also be formed. In accordance with the environmental scanning proposition (being conducted with the active involvement of its branch managers and its HR department), "Case B" is presented as being more open in building strategic partnerships with its senior and

middle managers compared to "Case A". Such strategic partnerships are also expected to enable a smoother and a more successful business merging process to take place. Once again though, the interviewed stakeholders offered their mixed (differing and changing) perceptions, and thus added to the complexity being attached with the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD in organisations.

7.2.5 Strategic partnership with HRM

A strategic partnership between HRD and HRM could also be an indication of SHRD maturity. All interviewed HR staff highlighted that their department does not distinguish its services as being less or more important. They further argued that, from the most administrative to the most sophisticated HRM/HRD interventions, everyone works towards the achievement of their HR and organisational objectives. Their suggestions can be clearly evidenced through their statements:

"The HR department is unified regardless its sub-units. Our practices are implemented under the general HR approach and strategy of our organisation. HR, HRM, HRD, all have the same focus: our people" (HRDr)

"From our initial recruitment, selection and induction training processes to employees' continuous development, reward and performance management, the aim is always the same: make your people feel valued and keep them motivated so to reach their full potential. Yes, we do have a separate HRD unit, yet that does not mean that its people are working alone. All of us, we are working in synergy" (L&D Mgr)

"Every little step is important. From the simplest administrative work to the most complicated performance appraisal and management, employee career development etc. Thus, our actions are interrelated but have their own significance as well. That is why we have not outsourced any of our HR activities; just because we want to keep everything in-house and improve it day by day. Improvements can always be made though, and unbelievably we are working on them every single day, especially these difficult days" (HRMgr).

In a similar vein, much of the interviewed managers could not distinguish between HRM and HRD by arguing that "letter differentiations" do not make any difference; what really matters is the value of their offerings. They further suggested that it would be a luxury to talk about distinctive functions within the period in which banks operate. Although there is a separate HRD unit within the HR structure, it is mostly for structural reasons as all HR implementations are regarded as one under the same scope. For them, the most important thing is to maintain high levels of staff morale. They proposed that there are many ways to do so either through clear and honest communication or by offering more training, as both aim to "*increase your organisational power through your people*". In line with these suggestions, a branch manager argued that:

"*If they are people-centred and always work in that direction, I believe we are on the right track. Especially today when job insecurity is high, your HR people, regardless of their job title, are those who can reverse the situation and can help the organisation to achieve its objectives*" (BM)

"*The HR department is one entity and it offers its services to all employees. Although there are people with different job accountabilities, their main focus does not differentiate. It is like in our case. I am the branch manager of my store, and there are another 10 people with different job titles and positions. Yet, we all aim at increasing our branch's efficiency and to maintain a harmonious working environment*" (BM)

On the other hand, employees simply referred to the volume and the nature of the training offered being before and after the crisis by arguing that:

"*HRM or HRD, who really cares? What I know is that a few years back more training opportunities were offered to all of us. Nowadays, limited training is provided, and in most cases it is totally irrelevant to our job contexts and it is targeted at specific employees. Although I am one of them, I can't see the point of how a first aid training or an environmental consciousness programme can increase my productivity and efficiency*" (Employee)

"Limited T&D opportunities are now offered, while those being implemented do not clearly reflect our actual needs. I think that my organisation is panicking and just offers the minimal training required for keeping us satisfied (somehow); yet, I don't think it manages to do that, especially within such a stormy business environment and through its general practices" (Employee)

"Depending on which department you are employed, you will either get some training or not. I can't recall the last time I have been offered a training opportunity. It was probably back in 2009, just before the crisis commenced. I assumed people in front-line operations now get the most training as now banks are trying to ensure their survival through their branch network/retail operations" (Employee-corp. division)

Again, employees' viewpoints mainly focused on the intensity and the subject of the training being provided by their HR department, by judging HRD's effectiveness based upon those two dimensions.

Overall, stakeholders' diverse perceptions cannot clearly indicate whether HRD is implemented under the umbrella of the general HRM practices (as being suggested within the modified SHRD framework) or as an outcome of a cost-effective approach. Documentary data could not offer clear evidence whether HRD and HRM are viewed as distinctive and/or identical services. In most cases, general suggestions were made which could not offer enough evidence to support the modified SHRD framework's proposition. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the extent to which HRM and HRD work interpedently or not, and thus to talk of an attained strategic partnership, and an SHRD mature organisation respectively. Having all suggestions considered, the researcher believes that SHRD maturity balances between an immature and mature state.

7.2.6 Extensive role for HRD executives

Another important component of SHRD maturity relates to the role of HRD executives. The modified SHRD framework suggests that an expanded role is required from them so to facilitate and to drive both individual and organisational change within

a period that is highly demanded. To this extent, all interview participants highlighted the critical role of their HR department by arguing that it is the most relevant business function to lead such change. Yet, with regards to the role of its HRD executives, they offered mixed perceptions.

A large majority of employees acknowledged that HR in general, and L&D staff in particular, both had a more enhanced and influential role in the past owing to the adopted business growth strategies of their organisation. However, to date, they argued that senior management dictates business directives, with the HR department to follow them. They continued by arguing that the role of their HR department is limited to the basics these days, while their cost minimisation orientation can be evidenced through the "freeze" of their recruitment and selection processes, the diminished training budgets, the training's poor evaluation, the wage reductions etc. Therefore, they argued:

"Nothing is as it used to be. To date, all decisions are taken from the top and directed through a top-down communication. Then, you are expected to follow them. It is that simple" (Employee)

"The HR department's role used to be greater back in the sector's prosperous years. Now, their role is a more supportive one rather than a leading one. Their focus has changed as well: from people to cost" (Employee)

However, there were also a few (3 in total) who recognised that business restructuring restricted HR's role, but it did not diminish its importance within the organisation, and eventually it is up to its people to bring it up to the forefront again.

Following those few employees' suggestion, most of the interviewed managers also acknowledged that HR is under a transitional phase at the moment, yet they believed that it will return stronger in the near future, by stating that:

"The organisation is in a transformation period, not only due to the crisis, but also owing to on-going business amalgamations and sector restructuring. It is

225

inevitably for all departments to be affected. Our HR department is going through a re-development process, but it always plays an important role" (BM)

"*Whereas it is under-staffed, as most other departments, I would rather say that it is effective as it offers all of its services in such a way so to ensure a smooth-running business operation. Accordingly, I assume that its professional capacity is high. As things turn better, they will rise again*" (BM)

Yet, there were two managers who stated that their HR department, and its HRD staff, both are underdeveloped, and thus both lack leadership capacity to help its people to change and adapt to new business realities. Despite such contrasting viewpoints, time will reveal the extent to which HR could lead such change or not through the provision of all the necessary incentives with regards to its people development so for them to follow its lead.

On behalf of the HR department, its staff also recognised that business restructuring has affected their unit as well, yet without diminishing its strategic importance and role. Although less people are now employed within the department, the remaining ones perform at their highest standards so to offer their outstanding services to all organisational stakeholders. To this extent, the HR director argued that:

"*Since new business objectives focus on enhancing our front-line operations and to ensure our business survival, we are working towards the design, development and implementation of those practices and programmes that can enhance our workforce's skills to deliver high quality customer services. That also requires skill development for us as well. Those few left within our HR department are competent enough to efficiently perform their tasks and thus to ensure that our business' operations are performed in relation to its human capital*" (HRDr).

In line with his HR director, an HR Assistant claimed:

"*Either before or after the crisis, I believe that we were offering our services in such ways so to help our people and our business to prosper and grow. Thus, we*

now offer e-learning training opportunities as a more flexible approach to our people's development. Yet, we have been heavily accused of that although it can prove valuable during these lean times. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that we also get trained so to stay updated with the latest trends and HR developments so to offer better services to our stakeholders" (HRAss)

Finally, the L&D manager argued that:

"*Our staff is competent enough in performing its work effectively, especially if you bear in mind that they have to deal with an increased number of employees due to the latest business mergers and acquisitions. Accordingly, the low percentage of employees' grievances reflects the department's efficiency, along with the increased ROIs from our training interventions*" (L&D Mgr)

Everyone concluded with that, either before or after the crisis, staff shortages did not affect the quality of their offerings, with their role to remain the same; something that can also be evidenced through their positioning within the organisation's BoD. Thus, they suggested:

"*Owing to the latest business amalgamations we need to deal with a larger workforce and thus our role is greater. However, our role remains the same: to ensure our people's well-being and growth, along with helping our organisation to prosper, change and grow. That's a reciprocal relationship*" (HRMgr)

"*Our services reflect the business and environmental conditions within which our bank operates. Thus, we are constantly revising them so to had better suit our people and organisational needs. Their quality and our support and devotion remains the same*" (HRAdm)

A clear divergence amongst the interviewed stakeholders' perceptions can be noticed with respect to this specific strategic criterion, with SHRD maturity being mixed over time. Supporting evidence from documentary data though highlighted HRD executives' extensive role mainly for the period before the crisis. In most cases, they

were presented as change agents, learning consultants, employee advocates, and strategic partners within the BoD, with their consultation to be highlighted within all business initiatives (HR Proceedings 2008). Thus, a more mature state can be evidenced prior to the crisis, with a middle state (balancing between a mature and an immature state) being attained after the crisis according to those comments offered from all interviewees.

7.2.7 Strategic ability to influence and shape business culture and climate

An HRD mature organisation should also hold the strategic ability to shape corporate culture and business climate in such a way so to point towards a future direction. Owing to a business focus shift towards the enhancement of the bank's front-line operations, the key aim was to identify the extent to which that was the outcome of HR's influence or a senior management's directive. Research evidence suggests that such a shift was a business imperative related with the crisis' impact and due to business amalgamations as well.

However, all employees argued that business objectives are directed form the top, and thus HR's role is restricted to their promotion and implementation, rather than shaping them. Yet, they also agreed that, before the crisis, HR held the capacity of pointing the way forward, and accordingly to shape business culture and climate in such a way so to lead individual and organisational change. Therefore, they have stated that:

"*The years before the crisis, HR philosophy was reflected in our business culture. It was clear that the focus was on enhancing the skills and the capabilities of its people so to drive the organisation forward*" (Employee)

"*Back in the golden years for our sector, we could talk of a more learning-oriented culture, and accordingly, of a supportive business climate, both of which aimed to promote learning and developmental opportunities to all employees. The message was simple: organisations are their people. To date, training is not offered*

that much and not to all employees, while our culture is more cost-efficient oriented"
(Employee)

Finally, it was acknowledged that their organisation's cultural values were better circulated in the past, and that everyone was aware of them so to incorporate them within his/her work contexts. However, to date, they argued that their organisational cultural values target specific business departments, and thus they are clearer to them. On the other hand, branch managers, and people from the HR department, all agreed that their cultural values are clear and well-communicated across all organisational departments and members. In the meantime, they further outlined that the business climate welcomes the development of various training initiatives, all fully aligned with new business imperatives. Compared to "Case A", that could also be evidenced through a higher training budget, greater training man hours (tmh) per employee etc. Bank managers also highlighted that due to the sector's restructuring and owing to the latest business amalgamations, a cultural revision is undertaken. Therefore, time will be required for a total revision to take place.

HR staff further argued that their organisational cultural values are clear and strong, and thus it was not a coincidence that they prevailed over those of the acquired organisations. Furthermore, they suggested that all employees are aware of them and further embraced them within their work and life contexts. To this extent, they stated:

"*Our values work towards developing a better future for our people, our organisation, the environment and our society as well. Thus, we promote our people's empowerment through continuous learning, we guide with integrity, clear direction and responsibility, we foster collaboration and we promote innovative and sustainable entrepreneurship in all of our business and social aspects. You can witness that everywhere within the organisation*" (HRDr)

"*Everyone is aware of our cultural values, which are also presented within all of our organisational statements and documents, and are regularly communicated*

across our business units. Thus, our people work under these cultural values so to offer superior customer service performance" (HRAss)

Although they agreed that it might have been easier for them to shape and/or influence business culture and climate in the past, they believed that they can still play a crucial role throughout their formation. They further suggested that since new people with different cultural values have joined the organisation (due to business mergers), a cultural transformation was experienced. Thus, their job was to assess and evaluate those people's cultural values and awareness so to proceed to the necessary amendments, and to ensure that all organisational members are working under the revised organisational culture. At this point, senior management's role also played an important role by welcoming HR and branch managers' active involvement in such processes so to facilitate the cultural shift of the newly-formed banking corporation.

Again, research evidence is mixed and complex, like stakeholders' perceptions. With regards to HR's ability to shape and influence the corporate culture and business climate, a more mature state can be witnessed for the past, and an immature one after the crisis. Yet, the transitional phase through which the bank undergoes should also be considered, along with the cultural transformation that is required. Finally, although stakeholders' diverse perceptions can mostly be evidenced, a convergence between HR staff and managers' perceptions was also noticed in relation to the way their organisation's cultural values were/are clear, well-structured and well communicated across the organisation.

7.2.8 Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation

Strategic HRD evaluation is also important so to assess the effectiveness of a training programme, and to examine the extent to which the trainees have transferred the acquired knowledge to their job contexts, and whether a behavioural change has occurred. Therefore, the L&D Director argued that their training plans are always translated into measurable outcomes by examining employees' performance and behavioural change after the course, by stating:

"We use mystery customers who are sent to branches around Greece so to observe and evaluate employees' performance and abilities in serving them after completing a relevant training course. Put quite simply, we don't just care about employees' reactions to the training programme, but we are looking at identifying if they have transferred what they have learned into their job contexts; if they have altered their behaviour based on what they have been taught. Base on the feedback that we get, results indicate that this is happening" (L&D Dr)

In line with his L&D director, an HR assistant and a Branch Network Training Officer, both stated that their bank's training interventions can be viewed as both short-term and long-term HRD investments. However, regardless their orientation, great emphasis is placed on their evaluation. Thus, they suggested:

"Our people's learning and development is a long-term investment. Our aim is to change their behaviour so to offer quality services and products to our customer base. We do recognise that this is something quite difficult under constantly changing business and economic environments, yet we intensively work on that in order to ensure them that we run a healthy business. Thus, we continuously evaluate our offerings in order to ensure their effectiveness. I can assure that the outcomes we get are promising" (Branch Network Training Officer)

"Our practices have both a short-term and long-term perspective. We initially aim to ensure our business viability, and then to support its prosperity. That could only happen by ensuring our people's well-being and growth respectively. To this extent, we need to make sure that our implementations can meet our objectives. What we've seen so far tells us that we are on the right track" (HRAss)

Furthermore, an HR administrator stated:

"We have certain ways to evaluate our training programmes; from a simple questionnaire to mystery customers, performance appraisals etc. With all our targets being the same: to identify how our people behave, if they are practicing those things

we have taught them and if they can satisfy our client base so to stay in business in a sense" (HRAdm)

Finally, all agreed that even before the crisis, the aim of their training evaluation was the same – to assess the extent to which employees' knowledge has been transferred to their job contexts and whether they have changed their behaviour so to better serve their customers and be more efficient.

In a similar vein, all interviewed managers argued that work improvements can be evidenced through the increased rates of employee and customer satisfaction. All that were the outcome of their implemented training interventions, by suggesting that:

"*Our training interventions achieve their objectives and that can be evidenced through our higher records of customer satisfaction. This indicates that our people get something from training and use it in their work*" (BM)

"*In such difficult times, it is good to hear that your employees' morale, commitment and satisfaction are high. That is an indication of training's effectiveness. I believe you don't need anything more other than seeing your employees' confidence to be high and your profits to increase*" (BM)

"*Our training programmes aim to improve our people's skills, career prospects and willingness to change and grow as well. Such a behavioural change can also result in better customer service and increased loyalty*" (BM)

Branch managers clearly related the effectiveness of training with ROI, by highlighting their increased financial outcomes within their branches, besides those being associated to their employees' behavioural change and better customer service delivery.

On the other hand, employees complained of not been consulted on their actual training needs, nor of being appropriately evaluated. They did not understand how a simple "pass" on a short questionnaire could indicate a strategic approach to training

evaluation. They further argued that although evaluation is conducted for most basic e-learning courses, this is not happening for the entire training programme, as HR staff suggested it. Additionally, all agreed that even before the crisis, training evaluation was poor by only assessing trainees' reaction to the training programmes; thus, just grasping their general opinion on its structure and delivery method by arguing that:

"There is no systematic way for evaluating training, and the delivery method is not always the best one. That turns the whole process into a waste of time for us and a waste of the bank's money" (Employee)

"I cannot understand how a simple pass grade can indicate what we have been taught. Wouldn't it have been better to check somehow if we have transferred what we have learned to our jobs? Isn't that more strategic in a sense? Yet, they are the HR department and I guess they know better, don't they?" (Employee)

However, what employees did not know was that their behaviour, commitment, and satisfaction was constantly assessed through various processes (as described earlier), and accordingly new training needs were identified so for new training programmes to be designed and delivered.

In summary, we can draw upon some evidence suggesting that HRD evaluation follows a strategic approach like that being suggested within the modified SHRD framework. Documentary data also supports HR staff and managers' suggestions by indicating a wide range of evaluation tools (e.g. 360-degree evaluation, mystery customers, training's ROI, HR metrics, formative & summative evaluation etc.). In addition to all that, most of the respective strategic indicators of SHRD maturity were met. Therefore, in terms of this specific strategic component of SHRD maturity, the organisation's evaluation processes move towards a mature state. However, like previous observations for most of the proposed strategic characteristics, stakeholders' differing perceptions move within a contested territory which future research should elucidate. At the same time, such a complex state can further be enhanced through a variety of factors that can simultaneously be at play and eventually to shape, impede

or expedite SHRD maturity and stakeholders' perceptions respectively. Therefore, these factors should be carefully addressed.

7.3 Factors shaping, constraining or facilitating SHRD adoption and Maturity

The key factors being associated with SHRD maturity were highlighted throughout the interview process. The economic crisis was pointed out as a constraining factor of SHRD adoption and maturity, followed by the sector's restructuring due to the latest business amalgamations. A cultural transformation was also identified, while the absence of trade unions seemed to impede the adoption of a more strategic HRD approach. On the other hand, factors such as business growth (due to globalisation) and market innovations (owing to technological advancements) were identified as facilitators of SHRD, yet mainly for the period before the crisis.

7.3.1 Business Culture and Climate

Most organisation's cultural transformation, owing to the latest business amalgamations, was identified as an impeding factor of SHRD's adoption and maturity. However, precisely for "Case B", a continuous and clear communication of the bank's new cultural values enabled a shared understanding, and the cultural awareness amongst all organisational members so for a smoother cultural transition to take place.

With that in mind, most of the interviewed employees argued that they were aware of their organisation's cultural values, as these were clearly circulated across the organisation. This may be explained through "Case B" HR executives' greater involvement in shaping business goals and strategies, along with consulting branch managers on many organisational matters. Such involvement can provide both with greater access to relevant information so to enable a better communication of the new business objectives, revised cultural values etc. to their subordinates. The effective communication of the bank's vision and mission further enabled their employees to

achieve individual and business goals more effectively compared to "Case A"; an indication which was also evidenced from both banks' financial results (Annual Reports 2015 – Case A & B).

Following their employees' suggestions, bank managers and HR staff agreed that their organisation's prosperity relates to its own particular cultural dimensions, and to those practices that focus around them, by successfully translating their values and norms into specific behaviours. Therefore, a branch manager stated:

"Our organisational culture is clear, well-defined and well-communicated. From early on, employees are taught how to behave under those values and how to promote themselves and our business as well" (BM)

In a similar vein, HR staff argued that one of the core cultural values of their organisation is to "*to preserve the high quality of its services towards society and to constantly improve its activities by empowering our people through continuous learning*". As to that, the HR Director and the bank's HR Internal Communication Manager, both stated:

"It is important to ensure that the vision, the mission and the cultural values of the organisation are all clearly and constantly communicated. Thus, our work is to constantly demonstrate our value-added capacity through our practices and our people. Despite the unfavourable conditions under which the entire organisation should operate and eventually we also need to perform, I strongly believe that we have managed to achieve that during our business merging process which was not as easy as it may have seemed" (HRDr)

"I am sure that the banking industry will flourish again, along with its manpower. Our job is to ensure that our people are competent enough to lead this change. However, that also presumes that everyone is working under the same cultural values and ethics. And here comes the most difficult part of our work: to clearly and effectively communicate these values and to ensure that they are embraced from our people" (HR Internal Communication Manager)

Along with other colleagues, all suggested that, either before or after the crisis, the organisation has managed to maintain its core cultural foundations, with minor revisions to occur because of the latest business amalgamations; in addition, it did not happen by chance that these had prevailed amongst the respective ones of the acquired organisations.

Although there are studies suggesting that Greek organisations are low performance-oriented and weak in terms of their cultural awareness and cultural foundations (Nikandrou et al., 2008; Apospori et al, 2005), research evidence suggested that "Case B" managed to communicate its core cultural values clearly and regularly, and thus to ensure that these were embraced from all organisational members. Taking that into consideration, the large majority of the interviewed stakeholders believed that this further enabled a sense of belonging within the organisation, and resulted to the creation of a unified business climate within which both individuals and the organisation could better cope with business uncertainty. Having reviewed both banks' organisational documents, the researcher further noticed that greater reference was made on "Case B" cultural dimensions (compared to "Case A") by constantly highlighting them, and explaining how these could associate with positive individual and organisational outcomes.

7.3.2 Economic Crisis

Research evidence over the impact of the economic crisis was convincing enough both in terms of affecting business practices in general, and human resource management/development and employment relations in particular. More than three-quarters of the interviewed participants rated its impact as heavily severe. It was argued that crisis led to major changes with regards to the nature of the employment relationship within the sector. Therefore, the large majority of the stakeholders interviewed emphasised the extensive lay-offs and pay-cuts, the changes that occurred with regards to their employment relations, and the decreased training offerings as detrimental agents of employees' morale, commitment, satisfaction etc. Thus, over

three-quarters of them agreed that the crisis totally changed their organisation's approach towards its people development, by arguing that:

"*Nowadays, limited T&D opportunities are offered to those employees staying with the organisation. New business realities have led to staff redundancies, extensive work loads, and other negative related measures for all of us. These changes have resulted in losing many of our previous rights and benefits, while also making us feel more insecure*" (Employee)

"*Workforce motivation and commitment through T&D is a past activity – a deceptive dream*" (Employee)

"*I would describe crisis as a thunderstorm. It suddenly appears and destroys everything in its way. Everything has changed, especially with regards to labour and employment relations. Lay-offs, pay cuts, hiring 'freezes', suspension of training, less collective agreements etc. Although there might be some opportunities within the crisis as well, I don't think our organisation has managed to identify them. At least not thus far. Let's wait to see what will happen in the future. If we are still around*" (Employee)

Employees also argued that the sector's restructuring further undermined their feelings of job security as many branches were closed, while some corporate divisions were merged, and eventually were left either overstaffed or understaffed. However, there were also a few who suggested that the crisis could also offer many opportunities besides its negative aspects. For instance, they referred to the implemented voluntary exit schemes as a great career advancement opportunity for those remaining within the business. Thus, they proposed that organisations should take advantage of these conditions so to prepare their business upturn by suggesting:

"*Obviously, the crisis was a major hit for the banking industry and its manpower. Yet, it was also proved beneficial in a sense that it was the root of a «workforce's tidying»*" (Employee)

"Besides the negative aspects associated with such circumstances, positive implications are also attached. As banks are now left with the most talented individuals, it is clearer to them how their careers can advance" (Employee)

They concluded with suggesting that it is up to the organisations and their people to identify these opportunities, and eventually to take advantage of them for their own mutual benefit. Then, having recalled their organisation's past HR practices, they proposed that higher training budgets were available (based on the volume of the training offerings) back then, along with extensive recruitment processes and better career advancement opportunities for all.

In a similar vein, all interviewed branch managers outlined that the crisis offered organisations an opportunity to re-organise their human capital. Voluntary exit schemes offered to their older employees enabled the most talented youngest ones to remain for the business recovery. The new organisational objectives (customer-oriented focus) further resulted in maintaining and promoting those employees adopting the same philosophy. Thus, they suggested:

"Being in business for so many years, first as a front-line employee and then as a manager, the crisis has taught me to be more careful in the choice of those clients and projects been financed, while also enabling me to think more like a customer rather than as a bank employee" (BM)

"In the long run, this business focus alteration will benefit our organisation, in HR terms, by preserving a workforce which will be fully dedicated to new business objectives by focusing on maintaining good customer relationships and satisfaction. If it wasn't the crisis, I don't think we would have realised how important these objectives were" (BM)

However, there were a few managers (one branch manager and two from other corporate divisions) who complained about their branch/department's staff shortages and the suspension of most training interventions. The latter further acknowledged that

targeted training is now offered on those departments and employees mostly in need of it. Thus, the bank's front-line operations "*are the lucky ones*", as they said.

Finally, all HR staff initially recognised that the crisis heavily impacted upon their organisation, and to their department and its practices, yet they further argued that this had happened in such a way so to allow for a stronger HR department and organisation to emerge. Thus, they stated:

"*The economic crisis forced all banking organisations to proceed with major restructurings and amalgamations. However, along with the 'healthy' part of an acquired organisation, you also get its weak one. That inevitably will result in staff redundancies and other related actions, yet with skilful employees being transferred to other divisions or being promoted so that they can lead their departments throughout this organisational change, and thus for the entire organisation to benefit as well*" (HROff)

"*Every business merging process comes with positive and negative aspects. With regards to the latter, staff shortages and wage cuts can represent common practices, yet with all aiming to ensure business survival, renewal, and growth. Positive outcomes associate with greater career advancement opportunities for those employees staying behind so to collectively contribute to a business upturn. Having that secured, only win-win outcomes could emerge*" (HRAdm)

Others further referred to the bank's new business objectives by arguing that today's training targets those employees mostly in need of it, yet without restricting training opportunities for others when that being required. They further praised their e-based training programmes as being the optimum solution/option with regards to the unfavourable circumstances within which the sector operates. Not only can they ensure their people's development, but they are also the most cost-effective and time-efficient ones being available. They concluded by suggesting that they always aim to maintain their staff's morale and commitment at high levels, and thus they called for everyone

to be patient as business cycles dictate a business upturn after a fall, and eventually better days will come.

From an institutional point of view, the market's deregulation, the economy's liberalisation, and a transformation in labour relations were all noted as negative side-effects of the crisis which can lead to the termination of most collective agreements, the introduction of flexible employment contracts and wage schemes, massive lay-offs etc. The Greek government's austerity measures further restricted organisational growth and individual development. To this extent, it was widely argued that HR needs to secure that it can serve both the interests of its people and that of the organisation. Maintaining a balance between those two will result to win-win outcomes.

However, overall, it was noticed that mostly "hard" HR approaches (e.g. staff redundancies, wage cuts, top-down communication, short-term orientation etc.) were adopted by most banks in terms of managing their workforce. Thus, the crisis made it even more difficult for them to fulfil their side of the psychological contact with their employees. All that may explain employees' operational perspectives, as they were the most affected ones because of the ongoing business and economic uncertainty. However, it was not only the crisis that led to such outcomes. Other factors were also at play and either hindered or facilitated SHRD adoption and maturity.

7.3.3 The Absence of Trade Unions

Most employees highlighted that trade unions' lack of participation can also be viewed as a barrier in promoting the workforce's well-being and development. Although all participants outlined the significance of employee representation (through their union representatives), employees argued that they are too vulnerable due to their limited bargaining power. Precisely, two of them suggested that:

"Our trade union is nothing more than a bunch of people who seek to be future politicians. Who cares about us? No one" (Employee)

"Everything is changing in favour of the employers, and our union reps are doing absolutely nothing to secure our rights and/or to promote our well-being as they were supposed to" (Employee)

Further to those employees' assertions, the large majority of the interviewed managers suggested that they were left alone in terms of managing their working lives although being represented by six unions in total within the sector. Therefore, they argued:

"Although there are six unions representing bank employees within the sector, only one of them is recognised as the competent body for representing the entire workforce and eventually the one for meeting and bargaining with senior management executives. What about those employees from other unions? If there was communication between them, then everything would be fine; however, each union has its own priorities – some of them match with others – yet, they are not working on the same track which would allow them to have a stronger voice" (BM)

"The problem is, which collective bargaining are we talking about? There are not any collective agreements as there used to be as everything has changed within the sector in terms of employment relations and workforce development as well. Accordingly, unions have lost their focus within this changing process" (BM)

Others further referred to trade unions' politicisation as a barrier for their bargaining power since their main concern is to serve the interests of a particular government/political party rather than the actual needs of its members. Thus, they concluded with:

"If you (as an employee) get a good deal with your employer, all you need is to stay with that. We should be grateful that we have a job in these hard times. I am not expecting anything from unions and their representatives. The only thing they care about is their well-being" (BM)

"I know that I am on my own with regards to my employment status, and thus I am trying to stay up to date with the latest changes within the sector so to be proactive

in a sense. Accordingly, I am trying to continuously develop myself with training from external sources so to enhance my skills and position within my organisation or to build a stronger candidate profile if I need to look somewhere else" (BM)

There were also a few managers though who denied to talk about trade unions either because they were not members or because they did not feel comfortable enough in addressing a sensitive issue like that in an era of employment uncertainty and instability.

The story was presented differently from HR staff's perspective by highlighting that their aim is to create a pleasant and safe working environment for their employees and to empower their relationships with them. That could clearly be evidenced through relevant reference within most organisational documents highlighting HR department's initiatives to organise meetings between its senior management and union representatives on a quarterly basis (CSR Report 2015). With regards to the aforementioned meetings, employees and union representatives are informed about all functional changes occurring within the organisation by further ensuring that all employment contracts are applied intact (ibid). In addition to documentary data, all participants argued that their practices comply with the legislative framework that governs the banking sector and its signed employment agreements so for their organisation to be legislative legitimate. However, HR staff further acknowledged that part of their collective employment contracts have been altered to individual ones, yet without resulting in any harmful changes for both parties involved. Finally, all agreed that voluntary exit schemes were developed in accordance with those interested in leaving the organisation, while lay-offs were implemented in close cooperation with union reps by further accompanied by a transition period so to allow employees to look for a different job. Overall, the HR department claimed that it had worked (especially throughout business merging) in such a way so to safeguard its workforce's rights. Thus, it was argued that its overall aim was, and remains the same, to increase its value proposition through its employees' well-being and development.

Although trade unions' lack of participation could be evidenced, the organisation claimed to have acted in such a way that it had ensured that redundancies, and the alteration of the employment contracts, both resulted to win-win outcomes. However, stakeholders' mixed perceptions of trade unions' participation could not clearly highlight whether such win-win outcomes were achieved or not. In addition, the extent to which trade unions offered their consultation or not throughout the implementation of most HR-related actions (retrenchment strategies) is a matter of debate. As to all that, such a contested territory made it even more difficult for the researcher to explain stakeholders' perceptions of the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD within organisations.

7.3.4 Globalisation & Technological Advancements

Research findings also indicated those factors that acted as enablers of SHRD within organisations, namely globalisation and technological advancements. Yet, both were identified as influential agents of the "pre-crisis SHRD" as the bank's objective these days is to ensure its business survival mainly through its retrenchment strategies.

All interview participants reported that, a few years back, the sector underwent a massive business growth phase owing to most banks' expansion into foreign markets, and due to the introduction of new banking products and services. Therefore, organisations had to reform their HR strategies and their HRD practices in such a way so to meet the increasing demands of a globalised workforce and client base. Thus, to a large extent, organisations had to adopt a more strategic-oriented HRD approach. Taking all that into consideration, HR staff argued:

"Business growth, the introduction of new products and services (e.g. e-banking, ATMs, integrated banking systems etc.) and workforce diversity, all allowed us to introduce greater strategic HR initiatives in order to address all relevant concerns. Nowadays, we still try to be proactive and strategic in nature, yet we have fewer initiatives as our organisation remains skeptical towards business and economic uncertainty" (HRDr)

"Every year you go back in time, the better it was for us. There were many favourable factors that enabled our services to be strategic as we had to address strategic concerns as well. As to that, our budget was higher. Today, although we are trying to maintain our strategic focus, our budget restricts our efforts in doing so. We do our best though to ensure the interests of all of our stakeholders" (HRMgr)

In a similar vein, some managers suggested that:

"There is an overall stagnancy on most organisational and HRD practices that used to be delivered in the past as the organisation looks for signs of a business upturn" (BM)

"Nothing is as it used to be. Nothing moves around business growth anymore. Retrenchment and survival are today's keywords opposite to expansion and innovation" (BM)

Factors such as globalisation and technology can mainly facilitate the strategic adoption of HRD, and eventually to increase an organisation's SHRD maturity, as both require strategic moves to be undertaken so to address their associated concerns. For instance, a globalised workforce calls for targeted and proactive HRD interventions so to address the unique training needs of a diversified workforce. Accordingly, the introduction of new products and services and/or the emergence of new technologies, both require form organisations to provide continuous training and developmental opportunities to their employees so to cope and/or to better perform their tasks (including better customer service). Although both factors were identified as enablers of SHRD for the pre-crisis period, HRD is expected to always undertake a proactive/strategic role so to constantly demonstrate its value proposition through the continuous development of the organisation's human capital. Even if business survival is of top priority, the ability to do so will derive from employees' capacity to perform at their full potential, along with remaining committed under such unfavourable business and economic conditions.

7.3.5 Business Amalgamations

One of the main challenges associated with mergers and acquisitions is the way in which organisations address individual and organisational change. Taking that into consideration, HR staff agreed that individual and organisational change are both critical elements in ensuring organisational survival and business upturn, by arguing that:

"Rather than concentrating on lessening resistance to change and eventually loosing valuable time and resources, it would be easier and better for the entire organisation and its members to realise the imperative need to change and progress" (HROff)

"Owing to the latest business amalgamations, we had to totally change our strategies, plans and policies so to better serve a larger workforce. Therefore, radical changes are sometimes required. Yet, we have tried to implement such changes under a win-win perspective. Everyone had to change somehow. Where it was not possible, alternative solutions were imposed" (HRDr)

Both statements indicate the imperative need of everyone to understand that change is for the common good, and that the easier it happens, the more graceful for everyone it would be. However, two managers argued that:

"None of us knows what will come every single morning. I really don't know how that will work for all of us. Not for the better I believe. I guess HR has not prepared us for this shock. I am not sure whether they are unable to do so or they were surprised as well" (BM)

"Throughout the completion of business mergers, tremendous changes have been implemented. I would mainly associate them with our employees. From one day to another, I have personally witnessed the voluntary exit or the dismissal of many colleagues that I have not seen much of in the years that I have been with the organisation. Business change was imperative and the rest were side-effects. For

good, for bad who knows? For me, such increased level of job insecurity will definitely not be good" (BM)

Although both branch managers' statements could indicate their concerns, the majority of their colleagues claimed that business amalgamations will result in the creation of a stronger and more competitive banking corporation. They further suggested that the most skilful employees will stay within the organisation so to collectively contribute (along with their managers and other executives) to the bank's and the national economy's recovery. Finally, they acknowledged that their organisation's communication processes allowed for the business amalgamations to be smoother and thus to provide the base for the creation of a new "coliseum" bank corporation.

On the other hand, employees' perceptions were different, with half of them arguing that business amalgamations mainly resulted in staff redundancies, and thus have limited their organisation's competitiveness, and the career and developmental opportunities of its people. However, the other half highlighted that business amalgamations will result in better developmental opportunities owing to "workforce purification" through voluntary exit schemes, by suggesting that:

"*Business amalgamations will turn our organisation into a stronger and more competitive banking institution, while its manpower will take advantage of new diverse opportunities that would arise*" (Employee)

"*Our business culture will strengthen after the merger as it will integrate both firms' cultural values, while alienating their respective negative aspects. This cultural and overall business change will further boost issues related to career development, promotions, and compensation*" (Employee)

It would appear that business mergers can result both in positive and negative outcomes, yet it depends highly on the willingness of individuals and organisations to change and adapt to new business realities. The transition phase under which organisations operate throughout a business amalgamation usually puts aside long-term implementations in favour of more short-term approaches so to ensure business

survival, and a smoother transformation into the newly-formed organisational structure. It is worth noting that most people identified both the negative and the positive aspects being associated with such processes. However, business amalgamations occurred in the past as well, yet without reporting such a massive impact. Coupled with stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions of the impact of business amalgamations, both further complicate the way in which SHRD can be understood and operationalised, along with making it difficult to evaluate the actual impact of those factors over SHRD's adoption and maturity within organisations.

7.4 Closing Comments

An overview of the second case study banking organisation was provided, followed by a discussion of its key research findings. Like in the previous chapter, the analysis focused on the strategic criteria of SHRD maturity by evaluating them through stakeholders' perceptions and over time (pre & post-crisis). Research data outlines stakeholders' diverse perspectives on the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD. With regards to the latter, that is presented as being mixed over time, with some of the suggested strategic criteria being partially employed and some others being partially or completely neglected. In addition, stakeholders' differing and changing (in some cases) perspectives further intensify the complexity attached to SHRD's comprehension, adoption, and maturity under the context of the economic crisis. The following figure (figure 7.14) provides an illustrative summary of stakeholders' supporting evidence for each of the suggested strategic components of the modified SHRD framework (left side). On its right side, stakeholders' changing perceptions over time (either to a better or worse state or stable) are presented.

Figure 7.14 Pre and post-crisis evidence of the suggested strategic characteristics & stakeholders' perceptions over time

Strategic Criteria	CASE B						Strategic Criteria	"CASE B" ORGANISATION		
	Pre-Crisis			Post-Crisis				HR	MGR	EMP
	HR	MGR	EMP	HR	MGR	EMP				
Shape Organisational mission, goals and strategies	++		--	++	+/-	--	Shape Organisational mission, goals and strategies	↔	↓	↔
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	++		+/-	++		--	Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	↔	↔	↓
"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies	++	++	--	++	++	--	"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies	↔	↔	↔
Strategic Partnerships with key organisational stakeholders	+/-	+/-	--	+/-	+/-	--	Strategic Partnerships with key organisational stakeholders	↔	↔	↔
Strategic Partnership with HRM	+/-			+/-			Strategic Partnership with HRM	↔	↔	↔
Extensive Role of HRD executives	++	+/-	--	++	+/-	--	Extensive Role of HRD executives	↔	↔	↔
Strategic Ability to influence & shape business culture and climate	++			+/-			Strategic Ability to influence & shape business culture and climate	↓	↓	↓
Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation	++		--	++	++	--	Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation	↔	↔	↔

(++): Strong evidence, (+/-): Moderate evidence, (--): Limited evidence

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

In addition, the major factors that can shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity were also discussed. Amongst them, the economic crisis was identified as an impeding factor, complemented by the recent business amalgamations, the lack of trade union participation etc. On the other hand, globalisation and technological advancements were identified as enablers of SHRD, yet for its pre-crisis state. Opposite to "Case A", a stronger/clearer organisational culture and a supportive business climate favoured the promotion of a strategic alignment between the HR and the business objectives so to holistically contribute to the enhancement of the bank's front-line operations. Furthermore, rather than highly restricting most of the strategic characteristics (as in "Case A"), most of the external factors slightly restricted HRD's ability with regards to some of the strategic components (yet, without fully diminishing its strategic importance – as that reported by the interviewed stakeholders). All that can be summarised into the following figure:

Figure 7.15 Pre and post-crisis shaping factors

Pre-crisis time period

Shaping factors

External

- Globalisation
- Technological Advancements
- Favorable Institutional Factors (e.g. liberation of markets, privatization of bank institutions)
- Business Merging

Internal

- Innovation / Expansion Business Strategies
- Strong Organisational Culture (Learning Culture)
- Supportive Business Climate

Strategic Characteristics

Highly Favoured:

- Adoption of proactive HR/HRD practices
- Synergy with HRM
- Extensive role of HRD professionals
- Strategic Evaluation of HRD programs
- HRD's ability to influence business culture and climate

Partially favoured:

- Strategic Partnerships with key organisational stakeholders (Top management, HR & branch managers)
- Environmental Scanning from senior managers, HR executives and branch managers
- Shaping Organisational Goals, Mission and Strategies

Post-crisis time period

Shaping factors

External

- Economic Instability (Crisis)
- Lack of Trade Unions' Participation
- Major Restructurings within the industry due to on-going business amalgmations

Internal

- Cost Reduction Business Strategies
- Strong / Clear Organisational Culture
- Supportive Business Climate
- Shift of Business Objectives

Strategic Characteristics

Slightly Restricted HRD's capacity to:

- Favour an extensive role for its professionals
- Strategically influence business culture and climate
- Shape organisational missions and goals

Highly promoted a strategic alignment between HR and the new business objectives, thus favoured the adoption and implementation of rapid, competitive, and environmentally-integrated HRD practices so to ensure the achievement of the new business focus.

Overall, various similarities and differences between the two case studies can be identified, both in terms of their operational nature and with regards to the way in which they dealt with business and economic uncertainty in terms of their human capital management and development. Taking all that into consideration, the following chapter will offer a summary of the key research findings for both banks by highlighting their respective stakeholders' perceptual contradiction. In addition, the extent to which the suggested strategic characteristics (and their strategic indicators) were employed or not will be discussed, along with referring to those factors that can either constrain or facilitate SHRD adoption and maturity. That would allow us to come up with final conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 8 – Discussion of the major research findings from both case study banking organisations

8.1 Introduction

This chapter will expose the key research findings emerged from both case studies so to highlight any similarities and/or nuances between them with regards to SHRD maturity. Like in previous chapters, a thematic analysis approach will focus on key themes/patterns around SHRD maturity. Therefore, reference will be made on the suggested strategic characteristics (as being proposed within the modified SHRD framework), and on those factors which can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD maturity within organisations. In addition, through a multi-constituent research perspective, the researcher will present the respective perceptions of the those HRD stakeholders interviewed so to highlight how different stakeholders can understand, apply and operationalise SHRD maturity diversely in organisations.

8.2 Review of the research questions

Given the complex nature of today's business and economic environments, the expected value of this thesis can emerge from being the first research study to apply and test a modified SHRD Maturity framework under the challenging context of an economic crisis. Its value proposition can also be enhanced through its methodological approach (case study research strategy/multi-constituent research perspective/before-and-after research investigation design). That enabled the researcher to assess and evaluate SHRD's real roles over time as those perceived by different HRD stakeholders.

With respect to the requirements of critically evaluating SHRD maturity, the first research question aimed to assess how different stakeholders understand, apply and operationalise SHRD within their organisations. Thus, it was framed as: "*How is SHRD understood, applied and operationalised within organisations from the perspectives of different HRD stakeholders?*". Research evidence highlights

stakeholders' differing and changing perspectives by further outlining the complexity being attached to SHRD's understanding, adoption and maturity respectively. To a large extent, the study captures the multiple realities and roles of SHRD within organisations as perceived by different organisational stakeholders.

Having suggested and applied a modified SHRD framework, the second research question aimed to assess SHRD maturity within the case study organisations through the evaluation of specific strategic criteria. Therefore, it asked: "*How strategically integrated (mature) has HRD been within the case organisations from stakeholders' perspectives, and over the period of the recent economic crisis and its aftermath?*". Again, stakeholders' perceptions were mixed. SHRD maturity was also presented as mixed over time (pre & post-crisis). Both resulted to the creation of a contested territory within which the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD could be placed. Several similarities and nuances were also identified between the two cases with regards to their stakeholders' perspectives on the suggested strategic components of SHRD maturity.

Finally, the third research objective aimed to identify the factors that can impede or expedite SHRD maturity. Thus, the respective research question was addressed as: "*Which factors have proved crucial in constraining or facilitating the adoption of SHRD, and have contributed to its maturity in these organisations from different stakeholders' perspectives?*". Research evidence indicated several factors with the economic crisis being amongst the most influential ones, followed by the tremendous business amalgamations. In addition, there were other factors which were identified as enablers of SHRD adoption and maturity (e.g. globalisation, technological advancements), however mainly for the period before the crisis. All factors were analysed and evaluated in accordance to their impact upon both organisations' SHRD adoption and maturity over time (pre & post-crisis).

8.3 SHRD through a multi-constituent research perspective

Consistent with mainstream HRD literature suggesting that a strategic/proactive HRD organisation should meet its stakeholders' expectations (Garavan, 2007; Millmore et al., 2007; Sadler-Smith, 2006), this study adopted a multi-constituent research perspective so to secure different context-oriented perceptions of the understanding and maturity of SHRD within the case study organisations. Research evidence highlights stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions by further highlighting the complexity being attached to SHRD understanding, operationalisation and maturity within organisations operating under the challenging context of an economic crisis.

All research participants highlighted a business focus shift towards the enhancement of their bank's front-line operations as an attempt to ensure organisational viability due to the ongoing unfavourable conditions associated with the economic crisis. They also outlined the imperative need to address new business objectives; thus, to maintain their organisation's client-base through exceptional service delivery. To this extent, both banks' training initiatives mainly targeted those employees within their branch network. An alignment between the HRD objectives and the respective corporate ones was also evidenced; a key proposition being suggested within the HR literature (Sung & Choi, 2013; Garavan, 2007; McCracken & Wallace, 2000a, 2000b; Garavan, 1991). Others further argued that through an attained strategic alignment between HRD and business objectives, the former would be able to shape and influence corporate strategy in such a way to be regarded as an equal strategic business partner (Peterson, 2008; O'Donnell et al., 2006; Fenwick, 2005). It was also be easier for it to demonstrate its value proposition through higher ROI and financial bottom-line outcomes (ibid). However, there are others suggesting that such a strategic alignment can be equivocal as it is more aspirational rather than something real (MacKenzie et al., 2012; Wognum, 2001; Heraty & Morley, 2000)

An ongoing discourse within HRD literature further highlights the complexity attached to SHRD's understanding and operationalisation. For instance, Anderson (2009) suggests that HRD's understanding and strategic alignment is complex and sometimes

difficult to be achieved. With regards to this study, stakeholders' differing and changing perspectives outline the complex nature and a mixed state for SHRD respectively. In most cases, a perceptual contradiction was noted. Precisely, HR staff and managers perceptions were similar, opposing the respective ones of their employees. That may suggest a miscommunication problem for both organisations in terms of failing to clearly circulate their HRD's values beyond the managerial level. It can be equally argued that the lack of "*employees' voice*" may also affect the degree of their contribution towards the achievement of the organisational objectives, and to undermine the effective implementation of any SHRD activity and its maturity respectively (Boswell, 2006). However, employees' "operational" perspectives may also be explained as the outcome of their limited access to relevant information, and through the lack of their representation within the organisation.

8.4 A review of the case study banking organisations

Two case study banking organisations were examined during the fieldwork conducted in Greece (July-September 2014). Both cases (through their stakeholders' perceptions) offered a substantial amount of relevant information on the phenomenon under investigation. Following both organisations' request to remain anonymous, code names were given to all banks within the sector so not to reveal their identity. Before discussing the key research findings emerged, key figures from both banks will be provided. Therefore, table 8.1 offers key information in terms of their ownership status, operational presence, training budgets and workforce synthesis. Likewise, table 8.2 refers to basic HR metrics for both case study organisations. Both tables could indicate some similarities and a few nuances between the two cases with regards to their HRD approach and other key areas as well (Annual Reports 2014 – Case A & B).

Table 8.1 Key organisational figures for case study banking 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

Although similarities can mostly be identified between them (e.g. ownership, operational presence, unionised workforce etc.), a few nuances can also be outlined with regards to their training budgets, financial performance, HR metrics etc. Both banks are privately-owned and they offer their products/services at a national and international market levels. However, "Case B" is presented as being more effective in terms of its operating revenues (almost twice that of "Case A"). Someone can also evidence "Case B" higher number of branches and its larger workforce. The training budget, and the training-man hours spent on average per employee in "Case B" are also higher than those of "Case A". Overall, these figures can offer some evidence on the former's greater emphasis towards its HRD initiatives than the latter's, and thus to be described as more training-intensive than its counterpart.

Various HR metrics also outlined some differences between the two case studies with regards to their training costs per employee, training expenses in relation to their total operational costs, and their training offering's effectiveness. The following ratios (e.g. "Training expense factor", "Training Investment Factor", "Revenue Factor") were considered so to further explain both banks' approach towards their workforce's learning and development (table 8.2).

Table 8.2 HR Metrics

Ratio	Case A	Case B
Training Expense Factor (TEF) *(Training Budget / Operating expenses)*	0.0017	0.0014
Training Investment Factor (TIF) *(Training Budget / Total Number of FTE)*	78.94	102.22
Revenue factor (RF) *(Revenues / Total Number of FTE)*	83,157	154,666
Human Capital Return on Investment (HCROI) *[Revenue – (Operating Cost – Labour Cost) / Labour Cost]*	2.70 € return for every euro invested in employee pay and benefits	3.40 € return for every euro invested in employee pay and benefits
Training Return on Investment (TROI) *(Net Benefits from Training / Training Budget)*	10.3 € return for every euro invest in training	11.6 € return for every euro invest in training

The "Training expense factor" ratio indicates the percentage of the total operating expenses that the training budget makes up. "Case A" spends slightly more for its T&D activities than "Case B" although its revenues are almost half that of the latter. That comes in contradiction with previous observations solely focusing on both organisations' training expenditures though. However, since "Case B" employs a higher number of employees than "Case A", its training investment factor (training cost per employee) is higher. That means that the former spends on average more than the latter per employee. Although the amount appears low, it is worth noting that not all employees receive training (for different reasons – e.g. front-line vs corporate division employees); therefore, a more accurate indication would have been achieved if the exact number of those employees trained within both banks were known. "Case B" effectiveness can also be evidenced through a higher revenue factor. This ratio explains the amount of revenue being generated per employee; thus, it highlights "Case B" employees as being more efficient and productive. Training's ROI in "Case B" is also higher compared to "Case A". That may offer an indication that employees' greater knowledge acquisition and transfer to their job contexts in "Case B" is attained more successfully than in "Case A".

Two other useful ratios are the human capital return on investment (HCROI) ratio, and the Training Return on Investment (TROI). The former indicates the effectiveness of the HR practices, while any number higher than one (1) indicates the return on each single euro spent on employees' pay and benefits. Based on relevant information provided within both banks' annual reports, both ratios were calculated. Therefore, "Case B" HCROI can generate a higher amount (€3,40) for each euro invested compared to the respective figure of "Case A" (€2,70). Combined with the respective revenue factors of both banks, it is evident that "Case B" employees are more efficient than those of "Case A". The Training ROI ratio further highlights the net amount of benefits returned for every euro invested in training activities. Comparing both bank's figures, "Case B" gets more in return from its training investments than "Case A". That could also be evidenced by comparing both banks' "benefits from training" and "net benefits from training" amounts, and their respective revenue factors (table 8.1).

Although this brief overview of both cases mainly highlights a better state for "Case B", it is worth mentioning that organisational effectiveness could not only depend on these indicators; thus, other metrics should also be considered beyond those being related to T&D. In addition, the suggested strategic criteria within the modified SHRD framework (as perceived from their respective interviewed stakeholders) should also be considered so to better assess and evaluate SHRD maturity within both organisations.

8.5 SHRD Maturity: Evidence on key strategic characteristics through the respective lenses of different HRD stakeholders

SHRD maturity were evaluated based upon the evidence provided on the employment of the suggested strategic characteristics of the modified SHRD framework. In addition, indicators of SHRD maturity were proposed **(fig.3.2, p.51)** by highlighting the exemplars (for each respective strategic criterion) of a mature and/or immature organisation. Following a before-and-after research investigation design (pre & post-crisis assessment), all strategic criteria were assessed through the respective perceptions of different stakeholders. Their differing and changing perspectives were

outlined, resulting to a contested territory surrounding the phenomenon under examination. Their mixed perceptions can clearly be illustrated by the following "maturity evidence" table (table 8.3).

Table 8.3 A mixed perception of SHRD maturity

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	++	++	--	++	--	--	++	++	--	++	+/-	--
Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	+/-	--	++	++	+/-	++	++	--
"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	++	++	--	+/-	--	--	++	++	--	++	++	--

(++): Strong evidence, **(+/-)**: Moderate evidence, **(--)**: Limited evidence

Following the strength of the evidence provided, this was categorised as strong (++), moderate (+/-), and weak (--). Furthermore, the highlighted red and green points indicate the areas in which the two case studies differentiate with regards to their stakeholders' perceptions of each respective strategic criterion. Such a graphical classification enabled the researcher to map and evaluate SHRD maturity within both organisations, while also to highlight the differing and changing perceptions of those stakeholders interviewed. In addition to table 8.3, the following table (8.4) illustrates the change of stakeholders' perspectives over time (pre & post-crisis) with regards to each strategic component of the modified SHRD framework. Therefore, their perceptions were either remained stable (unchanged) or changed to a better state or to a worst one.

Table 8.4 Stakeholders' Perception of SHRD Maturity (change - 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, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees	↔	↔	↓	↔	↔	↓
"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 ↓

Both tables, along with the suggested indicators of SHRD maturity **(fig.3.2, p.51)** and through a thematic analysis approach, enabled the researcher to better present and discuss his research findings so to come with useful and insightful conclusions and recommendations. Therefore, the discussion will initially focus on the suggested strategic characteristics, followed by the consideration of those factors which can shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD maturity. Research findings will further be discussed by exposing stakeholders' perceptions on all related/interviewed themes.

8.5.1 Shape organisational mission, goals and strategies

Consistent with the literature suggesting that HR's central strategic role should aim on its voice to be expressed and heard during corporate strategy's formulation (Holbeche, 2009; Swanson, 2000; Hiltrop & Despres, 1995), HR staff, from both organisations, highlighted their department's strategic positioning with their respective BoD. Everyone argued for HR's strong voice within the senior management team of executives either for the period before or after the crisis. In "Case A", its HR staff

verified the above assertions, yet without being able to provide specific examples to support their arguments. Relevant reference within the examined organisational documents did not offer a clear explanation of the role of the HR department, and that of its accountabilities within the bank's BoD (CSR Reports & Annual Reports 2014). Overall, most of their suggestions represented just a rehashing of their HR mission statement. That could be an indication that interview participants responded from an aspirational point of view with regards to their SHRD practices, rather than offering the reality of it.

The story was presented differently in "Case B", with its HR staff highlighting their department's consultation during the formulation of their corporate strategy through a continuous co-operation between its executives and senior management. Research evidence outlined that "Case B" senior management executives welcomed the active involvement of their HR executives during the setting of its business goals. Evidence further suggested that the HRD function was a key player during business strategy's formulation due to the business focus shift towards the enhancement of their front-line operations. All organisational documents further offered additional evidence on HR department's consultation by highlighting the active role of the HR executives throughout the formation of the bank's strategy (CSR & Annual Reports, HR Proceedings 2015). As to all that, "Case B" managed to better achieve its objectives, and thus to change and adapt more effectively to new business realities; a proposition which is 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-fourths of the interviewed managers from "Case B" outlined HR's capacity (in the past) in offering a wide variety of tools and solutions. They based their suggestions on the fact that their bank was the first to introduce innovative services and products, and the leader within the sector with regards to their growth strategies and expansion to foreign markets. They also recognised that their HR department's leadership capability goes together with their senior management's priorities. Later, they further considered the transition phase under which their organisation operates these days by arguing that although HR's

strategic positioning may seem to be in jeopardy, it will return stronger in the future. They supported their statement on the assumption that the banking industry is people-oriented and knowledge intensive for its success. On the other hand, the large majority of "Case A" managers argued for their HR department's strategic positioning for the period when most Greek banks had employed a growth strategy (pre-crisis). However, after the crisis, they noticed a major setback and a more functional role for it. Finally, they concluded that since the organisation is struggling to ensure its survival, top-down business directions are now followed with limited HR intervention. Thus, all believed that their organisation's HRD strategies and practices did not contribute significantly to the achievement of their business goals, nor in shaping them. That could also be evidenced through the greater reference made within most organisational documents on HR's role to shape and influence business missions, goals and strategies prior to the crisis, compared with the respective ones published after (Annual Report 2007; Annual Report 2014, HR Policy 2007, HR Policy 2014).

Employees, from both banks, suggested that HR always lacked the capacity of shaping business goals and strategies as it was always the senior management's role to do so. They further argued that, either before or after the crisis, nothing had changed with regards to their organisation's HR approach. Overall, a clear convergence amongst most employees' perceptions can be noticed through their operational perspectives. Yet, opposite to a managerial perspective offered by HR staff and managers, employees' operational viewpoints may be explained by the on-going retrenchment practices and their aftermath upon them. Their operational perspective may also correlate with their limited access to relevant information, and the lack of their representation. However, there were a few (Case B - 3 employees) who defended their HR department by arguing that, owing to the sector's restructuring, time would be required before judging its organisational, departmental and human capital's effectiveness.

In summary, research evidence (from stakeholders' perspectives) was stronger on HRD's ability to shape business strategies and goals for the period before the crisis. With regards to its post-crisis status, that balanced between a mature and immature

state basically because of top-down directives and the sector's retrenchment. Therefore, "Case A" interview participants noticed a setback for their HR department, with respect to those of "Case B" who argued for minor changes in relation to their HR department's importance compared to its pre-crisis state. The latter further claimed that through a maintained strategic alignment between the HR and the corporate objectives, HR could still demonstrate its leadership and value-added capacity. Overall, stakeholders' differing perceptions highlight how context could shape people's understanding and operationalisation of SHRD. In addition, the mixed state of SHRD maturity (tendency to balance between mature and immature states) could further complicate the extent to which HRD could shape and influence business goals, mission, and strategies.

8.5.2 Environmental Scanning, in HRD terms, through the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers (LMs) and Employees.

A firm's ability to identify and address any micro and macro-related environmental opportunities and/or threats can enhance its competitiveness (Li & Liu., 2014; Herrera, 2014; Sabir et al., 2012). In addition, to assess an organisation's attention to HRD is to check its reaction to environmental challenges by suggesting that matching its HR capabilities with such challenges could be a source of organisational efficiency and competitiveness (Felstead et al., 2012a; 2012b; David, 2011).

Taking all that into consideration, research evidence presents "Case A" less strategic/mature than "Case B" with respect to this strategic criterion. The latter reported greater scanning activities, along with the inclusion of its senior managers, HR executives and some of its branch managers as well.

On the other hand, most of the managers interviewed (Case A) argued for their organisation's inability to take advantage of any favourable business opportunity due to the total lack of implementing environmental scanning. Yet, that was not a common practice before the crisis, as everyone highlighted a more proactive HR approach

through the implementation of various scanning activities (e.g. SWOT & PESTLE Analysis, employees' surveys etc.). The bank managers' assertion was further confirmed by "Case A" HR staff who pointed out their department's pre-crisis proactive nature compared to its post-crisis operational role. All interviewees' statements could also be evidenced within most organisational documents highlighting HR's setback with regards to environmental scanning (limited reference on relevant activities was made), with those few ones being conducted only from senior management and without the inclusion of HR staff, branch managers and bank employees (Annual Report 2007, Annual Report 2014).

A different story was presented in "Case B", with its managers confirming their active involvement in relevant scanning processes, along with undertaking a few HR responsibilities within their job contexts. Although they argued that such activities were greater in the past, they also stressed that their organisation still looks for business opportunities to exploit and/or for any environmental threats to confront. In line with their managers, HR staff claimed that environmental scanning is conducted on a regular basis within the organisation and in co-operation with the bank's senior managers, along with involving many of their branch managers as well. However, their front-line employees were excluded (the opposite of what is suggested within the modified SHRD framework). They argued that their 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, which these days is more focused on their front-line operations, coming in full compliance with new business objectives. All these statements could also be evidenced within all organisational documents examined (published before and after the crisis), with all highlighting branch managers' active involvement in relevant activities, along with undertaking HR responsibilities within their job contexts, in addition to HR and senior managers' participation and collaboration (CSR Report 2007; HR Proceedings 2007; CSR Report 2014; HR Proceedings 2014).

At the same time, "Case A" branch managers' role was limited to simply reporting their branches' financial figures on a three-monthly basis because of the bank's

primary focus in ensuring its survival. By contrast, "Case B" senior management welcomes their active involvement so to collectively contribute to their workforce's creativeness and adaptability to business change. That comes in line with several authors' suggestions that an effective senior management team allows organisational stakeholders' voice to be heard so for better management solutions to emerge (Heller, 2012; James & Wooten, 2005). However, for both organisations, employees' non-participation was highlighted, especially for the post-crisis era. Contrary to literature's suggestions, and the modified SHRD framework's proposition, that "employees' voice" should be heard within organisations (Purcell & Hall, 2012; Bennett, 2010; Cheese et al., 2009; Boswell, 2006; Hopp & Van Oyen, 2004), employees were excluded from such activities. Yet, an interesting point was made from a few employees (Case B) who stated that they do not feel competent enough in participating in relevant scanning activities as they do not hold all the relative information so to make insightful recommendations.

Overall, research evidence outlines the diverse approach of the case study organisations with regards to this specific strategic component of SHRD maturity. In both cases, employees' participation is lacking, in contrast to the suggestion of the modified SHRD framework. However, in "Case B", stronger evidence was offered on the involvement of its senior managers, HR executives and branch managers, compared to "Case A". Therefore, "Case B" could be described as slightly more mature than its counterpart. Stronger evidence was also provided from both organisations with regards to environmental scanning in the past, mainly because of both banks' growth strategies and expansion to foreign markets. Yet, once again, stakeholders' mixed perspectives lead to a contested territory by further highlighting the difficulties being associated with assessing SHRD maturity under a challenging crisis context.

8.5.3 "Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans, and policies.

An equally strong component of SHRD maturity is the presence/implementation of "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies. Such practices can allow organisations to change more effectively within the constantly evolving business and economic environments. Consistent with that, a recent study from Garavan et al (2016) suggests that SHRD practices' alignment and strength with an organisation's environmental contexts could result to the creation of Dynamic SHRD (SHRD practices that can enhance existing and/or create new capabilities), which can help organisations to adapt to environmental change more gracefully. Thus, the authors argued that: "*SHRD needs to be alert to changes, be focused on particular changes and possess the capacity to make sense of them. Effective sensing processes help SHRD to make sense of events and changing environmental conditions, initiate plans, capitalise on opportunities, and configure existing operational capabilities to them*" (ibid, p.9).

Taking that into account, a large majority of the managers interviewed, and everyone from both HR departments, acknowledged HR's competitiveness and strategic integration by evaluating this respective criterion in relation to new business objectives. All recognised that, right after the crisis, both banks' HR departments had to totally revise their plans and strategies in such a way so to ensure organisational survival and renewal. Therefore, the adoption of a more exploitive (short-term) business orientation was required. They further argued that their HR department had to be engaged in facilitating the accomplishment of the new business objectives through relevant training offerings (e.g. e-learning, webinars etc.) to those who mostly needed it (front-line employees). Consistent with their assertion, a growing body of the relevant literature, praises e-HRM practices as a developmental element within the HR field, by arguing that it can result in its liberation in terms of managing time, flexibility and customisation, and eventually to suggest a more strategic role for it (Marler & Fisher, 2013; Bondarouk & Ruel, 2013; Schalk et al., 2013; Moynihan, 2008; Johnson et al., 2008; Panayotopoulou et al., 2007; Gueutal & Stone, 2005; Salas

et al., 2005; Lengnick-Hall & Moritz, 2003; Shrivastava & Shaw, 2003). Further to that, branch managers and HR staff, both agreed that today's lower training budget do not automatically diminish the quality of its offerings as the latter reflects both organisations' efforts to provide their employees with up-to-date HRD interventions. Although a more recent study highlights a strong negative correlation between LMs perceptions and the implementation of e-hrm practices (John & Bjorkman, 2015), research data highlights the positive perception of both banks' branch managers towards e-hrm implementations.

On the other hand, employees, from both sides, claimed that HR lost its position within the business agenda when compared to its pre-crisis status. They further suggested that today's HR practices are nothing more than a reflection of their organisation's retrenchment strategies. They continued by saying that, either before or after the crisis, HR's aim was to do more with less. Furthermore, they characterised e-learning as an inappropriate training method due to the total lack of people's interaction within a class environment. Their assertion can be supported by various studies suggesting that web-based training tends to isolate employees; to reduce their communication and interaction skills, and to minimise their overall satisfaction due to non-timely feedback (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Piccoli et al., 2001). Others also suggest that e-hrm is mainly driven by cost reduction rather than a strategic direction (Ruta, 2005; Ruel et al., 2004; Stanton & Coovert, 2004; MacPherson et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2003; Coppola & Myre, 2002). In line with these propositions, all employees agreed that e-hrm practices are nothing more than training interventions with a low cost orientation.

However, there are many studies suggesting that e-hrm practices are welcomed within those industries in which there is a huge extent of administrative work, such as the banking sector (Klein et al., 2006; Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 2003). To this extent, SHRD implementations can be viewed as HR innovations. However, other further suggest that it would be better for HRD executives to implement a mix of e-learning and class-based training so to increase communication and interaction between trainees and their trainers so to make the former feel motivated and eager to participate in the learning process (Ruel et al., 2004). In line with all that, there were a few

employees (Case B) who argued that such practices can indicate an organisation's innovativeness and thus can highlight signs of development.

Further to that, evidence provided within both banks' organisational documents highlighted a strategic alignment between their corporate and HR objectives by also outlining HR's significance in leading change and business renewal and growth. Being able to do so, HR was suggested as being environmentally aware of all changes occurring within the organisation and the business sector so for it to deliver optimum solutions (Case A & Case B: CSR Reports 2008; 2015).

Once again, stakeholders' diverse perceptions were noted. However, by strategically aligning HR with corporate objectives, the implementation of targeted training was viewed as the best option to adapt to new business realities. Without arguing for or against their short-term orientation, the delivered HRD interventions, from both organisations, managed to be quickly enacted and at a relatively low cost, while also to ensure an organisational fit with its external environmental requirements. Thus, to a large extent, this could indicate both organisations' responsiveness and preparedness towards business and economic uncertainty. Such a suggestion is also supported by Alagaraja's (2013a; 2013b) proposition that SHRD could support organisational goals either through undertaking an operational or a strategic role. Therefore, some evidence was offered so to talk of a SHRD mature approach from both case study organisations in respect to this strategic criterion.

8.5.4 Strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders.

The modified SHRD framework suggests that a strategic partnership amongst key organisational stakeholders (e.g. senior management, managers, and employees) can offer an indication of SHRD maturity. In line with this proposition, relevant literature argues for a strategic alignment between HRD and key stakeholders as part of an organisation's learn and change process so to adjust to new business realities and to

ensure its effectiveness (Garavan et al., 2016; Beer et al., 2015; Clement, 2005; Hyland et al., 2005; Harrison, 2000).

Taking that into consideration, both HR teams reported a strategic partnership with their senior management executives (yet, to a different extent) by the time HR is situated within the BoD. For instance, "Case A" HR staff failed to support their assertions with relevant examples (with regards to their strategic positioning within the BoD), 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 an attained strategic partnership or a top-down direction. On the other hand, research evidence highlighted "Case B" senior executives' co-operation with their HR staff so to define new organisational policies and strategies. The latter further claimed that their department's positioning within the BoD represents 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 was outlined, as being amongst the first to be consulted on all business initiatives. Such indications also correspond to a written allegation on the importance of top management's active participation and support, as means of HRD's effectiveness (Phillips et al., 2007; Harrison, 2000; Garavan et al., 1998; Garavan, 1995b). Further to that, "Case B" senior management's support to HRD implementations could also be evidenced through most organisational documents highlighting their engagement in knowledge development and acquisition through their greater support and creativity in respect to their engagement with HRD initiatives.

The HRD literature further emphasises on LMs (branch managers) involvement as learning facilitators throughout the identification of their personal and employee training needs (as being closest to them). Such an engagement allows the former to become more competent with regards to their interrelations with their teams so to collectively achieve their bottom-line goals (Alagaraja, 2013b; Wilson, 2012; Khurana et al., 2009; Watson et al., 2007; Nehles et al., 2006; Hutchinson & Purcell, 2003). In that case, most branch managers (Case B) identified a decentralisation of most HR practices to their daily responsibilities so to allow HR executives to concentrate more

on strategic and long-term aspects; a common literature suggestion (Wilson, 2012; Ramachandra et al., 2011; CIPD, 2008a; Kulik & Bainbridge, 2006; Whittaker & Marchington, 2003). That could also be noticed through documentary evidence outlining the close cooperation between the HR department and the senior executives, supplemented by that between the HR executives and the branch managers. On the other hand, a large majority of the managers interviewed (Case A) emphasised their lack of participation in HR's policy development (or within any other HR intervention), although they are the ones holding all relevant information for making consistent suggestions. Opposite to "Case B", documentary evidence for "Case A" offered limited evidence on branch managers and employees' consultation and strategic partnering with their HR departments. That can associate to the disappointment related with their "by passed" status, as proposed by McCracken and McIvor (2013). Therefore, "Case B" is presented as being more open than "Case A" in building strategic partnerships with its managers. Its senior executives support the promotion of such partnerships through the active involvement of their HR and branch managers so to collectively address business concerns. Furthermore, most managers interviewed (Case B) concluded that their senior management is competent enough in detecting signs of forthcoming economic breakdowns, political change, and deficiencies within their business and human capital resources, and thus to perform in such a way to ensure organisational viability, and to prepare for a business upturn.

In a similar vein, a growing body of the relevant literature argues for "employee's voice" within organisations to gain additional benefits such as organisational performance (Crane & Matten, 2007; Greenwood, 2007; Dundon et al., 2004; Lynch-Fannon, 2004), employee satisfaction and industrial citizenship (Bishop & Levine, 1999), contribution to decision making process (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014), and business success (Bennett, 2010; Danford et al., 2005). However, research evidence (from both banks) highlights HRD's lack of strategically partnering with them, as well as opposing suggestions from the modified SHRD framework. Evidence from employees further confirms Thompson's (2011) and Wognum and Lam's (2000) suggestions that a positive perception of HRD's effectiveness can be achieved through all stakeholders' involvement within SHRD initiatives. Since a strategic partnership

with employees is not attained, their perceptions of the effectiveness of their HR department was expected to be negative.

Furthermore, a large majority of employees (Case A) argued that it is not only the HR department that ignores them; their managers, as well, do not communicate and promote T&D opportunities to them. Therefore, their participation and consultation seems pointless. They further argued that such a failure of strategically partnering with HR highly restricts those organisational efforts aimed at developing and implementing targeted HRD interventions so to enhance their productivity and to maximise the quality of their customer service delivery. In line with "Case A" employees, those of "Case B" also highlighted that their voice is not heard as it used to be in the past (employees' surveys); hence, a strategic partnership with them (on behalf of HR) is of limited importance. They were also presented skeptical towards the effectiveness of their HR department since their "line of sight" is totally ignored. Although there are studies demonstrating that employees' effective participation is linked to a significant increase in shareholder value (Xirogiannis et al., 2008; Ulrich & Smallwood, 2004; Amit & Belcourt, 1999; Becker et al., 1997), and can positively influence their customer-oriented attitude (Yoo & Arnold, 2015), research evidence pointed out employees' limited participation. In addition, from an organisational point of view, employees can play a significant role as they possess the physical, social, and intellectual capabilities to influence organisational attitudes, behaviours, motivation etc. (Crane & Matten, 2007). Therefore, an attained strategic partnership with them can enhance their sense of commitment and engagement within the organisation. Yet, once again, evidence suggested the opposite. Documentary evidence from both organisations further confirmed this lack of strategic partnership between the HR executives and the bank employees through limited reference on employees' involvement and consultation in any business initiative. Taking all that into consideration, 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 so to collectively work for a business upturn.

In summary, research evidence suggests that stakeholders' perception, even within similar business environments, could be diverse and complex. Yet, a stronger indication on the role of "Case B" senior management in forming partnerships with HR and their branch managers was offered throughout defining new policies and strategies. Thus, there is stronger evidence of SHRD maturity as well. Although a strategic partnership with employees is lacked in both cases (opposite to the framework's suggestion), that being attained amongst senior executives, HR and branch managers is evidently stronger in "Case B".

8.5.5 Strategic partnership with HRM.

Many studies suggest that an internal integration between HRM and HRD could enhance HR's strategic orientation by maintaining a balance between its developmental and administrative services (Jackson & Schuler, 2003a; 2003b; Hendry, 1995; Garavan, 1991). Yet, others criticised and questioned whether that could happen by proposing 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; Harrison, 2000). That would allow for HR initiatives to be viewed as "one and the same", and eventually to have a greater impact on the achievement of corporate strategies and objectives (McCracken & Wallace, 2000a, 2000b; O'Donnell & Garavan, 1997). Consistent with these propositions, the modified SHRD framework explores evidence of a strategic partnership between HRD and HRM as an indication of SHRD maturity.

Research evidence indicates that such a partnership exists, however mostly for cost-efficiency purposes. The large majority of the interviewed participants proposed that the creation of a separate HRD unit can be viewed as an indication of an organisation's strategic approach to T&D. Ulrich and Brockbank (2005a; 2005b) also suggested that HRD initiatives and roles are narrower than that of HRM, and thus need to be executed separately. The authors further proposed that HRD executives should design and deliver purposeful T&D initiatives that aim to serve the diverse interests of their key organisational stakeholders (ibid). Although this is the case in both organisations,

HRD initiatives are mainly implemented within the bundles of the general HRM practices.

To this extent, much of the managers and employees interviewed could not distinguish between HRM and HRD by arguing that both are implemented under the umbrella of the general HR business approach. Yet, the extent to which that was the outcome of an attained strategic partnership or the result of a cost-effective HR approach could not be identified. Employees, from both banks, also referred to the higher volume of training interventions offered in the past as an indication of a more strategic HRD approach back then. However, they also acknowledged that new business realities, and their organisation's retrenchment strategy, both dictate that HR interventions should be considered as one regardless of being partitioned into several sub-categories.

On the other hand, HR staff (from both organisations and for both time periods) argued that HRM and HRD work in synergy. They further explained that their department does not distinguish its services to less or more important, and thus everyone works hard so to facilitate organisational transformation due to the sector's restructuring and business and economic uncertainty.

Therefore, it would appear either that such a partnership can be proved as having strategic importance specifically within the Greek territory, or that its presence constitutes an indication of a more SHRD-centred approach. In addition, stakeholders' mixed perceptions cannot clarify the extent to which this specific criterion has been met in relation to the modified SHRD framework's proposition. Therefore, the contested territory surrounding SHRD maturity can be highlighted once more.

8.5.6 Extensive role for HRD executives.

HRD executives are also expected to hold fundamental knowledge in coping with business uncertainty so to deal with future crises events and ongoing change (James & Wooten, 2013; Wooten & James, 2008). For those organisations seeking not only to ensure their survival, but also to maximise their operational effectiveness in a turbulent

business environment, greater emphasis should be placed on their HRD initiatives and the role of its professionals (Haslinda, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; Hyland et al., 2005; Gilley et al., 2002). Consistent with these suggestions, the modified SHRD framework proposes that an extensive role for HRD executives can offer an indication of SHRD maturity.

With mainstream literature suggesting that HRD executives could be leaders and facilitators of individual and organisational change (Lawler, 2003; Johansen et al., 1996; Buchanan & Boddy, 1992), employees, in both cases, acknowledged that HR in general, and HRD staff in particular, both used to have an enhanced and more influential role in the past owing to both banks' growth strategies; yet, without being fully strategic. Employees further stressed that HR's ineffectiveness can be evidenced through their department's staff shortages and the lack of relative skills from those who remain. They also argued that the role of their HR department is limited to the basics today, while its cost-minimisation orientation can be evidenced through the "freeze" in their recruitment and selection processes, the limited training interventions, the poor evaluation processes, wage reductions etc. Finally, they asserted that business directives are directed from senior executives and the HR department is expected to follow them; thus, for it being unable to shape business goals, with its job to be restricted on their communication across all organisational members. However, there were a few employees (3 in total-Case B) who recognised that business restructuring restricted HR's role, yet without diminishing its importance, and eventually it is up to its people to bring it to the forefront again.

In line with most employees, a large majority of the managers interviewed (Case A) argued that they don't expect anything from an under-developed and immature business function. However, their standpoint was embraced from only two (2) managers from "Case B" who further stated that their HR department, and its HRD staff, lacked leadership capacity in helping its people to absorb business turbulence and change. On the other hand, most of the managers interviewed (Case B) acknowledged that HR is undergoing a transitional phase (since the organisation is in a transformational process as well), and thus they expect for it to return stronger in the

272

future, and to undertake a more strategic role within the organisation. They further outlined that their HR department does not lack the necessary skills, but from the appropriate funds to support its implementations. This contradiction between managers' viewpoints may be explained through "Case B" managers' greater involvement in HR initiatives compared to that of their colleagues in "Case A". Finally, everyone concluded with a more proactive role for their HR department in the past owing to the expansion strategies of both banks.

Following managers and employees' assertions, the HR staff, from both organisations, initially recognised that business restructuring affected their department (e.g. staff redundancies), yet without diminishing the role of its professionals. Therefore, all suggested that everyone works to his/her full potential so to deliver exceptional services to their stakeholders. They further claimed that business transformation will strengthen their strategic positioning within the newly-formed banking corporation, if not in the short-term, definitely in the long run. They concluded that this transition will further benefit the state of HR, as it will offer space for revising its priorities and values for the common good of the organisation.

Documentary evidence was also clearer for "Case B" by making greater reference on the role of its HRD executives, compared to that of "Case A" which was too vague. A complicated state of the roles of HRD executives was also highlighted through stakeholders' diverse perceptions over time. In addition, SHRD maturity is presented as mixed, yet with "Case B" to provide slightly more evidence, on behalf of its managers, in terms of their HRD executives' role for the post-crisis period. Overall, stakeholders' perceptions did not change over time, with only that of "Case A" managers who argued that the role of their HRD executives has slightly diminished after the crisis, compared to its pre-crisis state. Eventually, SHRD maturity is balancing between an immature and a mature state within the suggested SHRD maturity indicators' table.

8.5.7 Strategic ability to influence and shape business culture and climate.

It is argued that within a collectivist culture ("*organisational objectives above individual ones – interconnectedness of organisational members*" - McShane & Von Glinow, 2009: pp.466-467), organisations are more likely to promote a learning environment and a knowledge-exchange process so to enhance their competitiveness (Hong & Baruch, 2011; Gillon, 2011; Valikangas, 2010; Sun, 2008; Carbery & Garavan, 2005). In line with this proposition, the modified SHRD framework suggests that HR should be able to influence and shape business culture and climate in such a way so to promote the creation of a collectivist and innovative culture within the organisation and thus to stay ahead of its competitors (Garavan et al., 2016). Furthermore, the HR department has to clearly communicate the cultural values of the organisation across its business functions and their members so to ensure that everyone performs under the same cultural principles and business ethics.

To this extent, employees (Case B) argued that their organisation's cultural values are clearly circulated, by suggesting that all organisational members are aware of them so to incorporate them within their work contexts. Although everyone agreed that this is HR's success, they also argued that since business directions are given by senior management, HR's role is limited to their strict implementation rather than being able to shape them. However, everyone also agreed that, before the crisis, HR held the capacity of providing future directions, and accordingly of shaping corporate culture and business climate in such a way so to lead individual and organisational change. Finally, everyone concluded by arguing that since their organisation has a clear and well-defined set of cultural values, this could also indicate its strong conscientiousness.

On the other hand, employees (Case A) highlighted that their organisational culture is weak ("*cultural values are not clear, not well-communicated, not embedded within their working lives*"). They argued that only within certain departments a clearer and customer-focused culture can be identified. They also evaluated the business climate as being ineffective in terms of promoting learning and developmental opportunities.

Although most of them recognised HR's capacity in influencing business culture in a past (not to a large extent though), they attested that this is difficult to achieve these days due to the cultural transition which has weakened their organisation's culture. Finally, they proposed that most organisational members' "cultural disinterest" can affect their perception of commitment and sense of belonging to their organisation with all the associated negative outcomes to follow. Their assertion confirms several authors' suggestion that both business culture and climate can enhance organisational performance, employee satisfaction, organisational change and success, while it can also decrease feelings of job stress and labour turnover (Zhang & Liu, 2010; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2008; Chatman & Cha, 2003).

Close to these employees (Case A), a large majority of the managers interviewed (Case A) argued that although a clearer business culture ("*well-defined, clear & solid, and better communicated cultural values*") can be evidenced within their divisions, it is not properly communicated across the entire organisation. Therefore, to many people, the organisational cultural values are not clear enough so to embrace them within their job contexts. That may constitute an indication of HR's incapacity to clearly circulate them across all business functions (beyond front-line operations), while it can also impede its ability in shaping them as these are mostly directed from senior management. However, all agreed that, before the crisis, HR held the capacity to do so owing to a different business philosophy, mainly because of the organisation's expansion into foreign markets.

The story was presented differently in "Case B", with its managers arguing that, either before or after the crisis, their organisational culture was demonstrated by a clear set of values which were regularly communicated. Meanwhile, they further claimed that the business climate welcomes the development of various training initiatives, fully aligned with new business imperatives. However, it was also argued that HR's ability in influencing or shaping them has been decreased owing to the cultural transformation after the latest business amalgamations and the crisis' impact on people and organisations. Further to that, they argued that time will be needed though before judging HR's capacity of doing so. Managers' suggestions come in agreement with

various authors' belief that both organisational culture and business climate can be key drivers of business success during successful organisational mergers and acquisitions (Enright & Bourns, 2010; Tharp, 2009; Griswold, 2008; Jones et al., 2005).

All HR staff (Case B) further argued that their bank's cultural values are clear, well-defined, and well-communicated across all business units and organisational members, and thus it is not a coincidence that they have prevailed over the respective values of the acquired organisations. Relevant training is also offered so to facilitate this cultural transition, and thus for everyone to embrace the newly-formed cultural values within their work and life contexts. Their assertion is consistent with McCracken et al (2012: 302) findings which indicated a positive relationship between the effectiveness of training interventions with a positive organisational climate ("*an environment supportive of training participation and transfer*"). The authors further argued that the opposite state of the latter can constitute a barrier to the effectiveness of the former (ibid). To this extent, HR staff further acknowledged that, in the past, they were more capable of shaping both, yet still play a crucial role throughout their formation. In a similar vein, HR staff (Case A) advocated their ability to promote the foundation of a strong learning business culture, yet with time to be required these days, due to the ongoing cultural revision and owing to the latest business amalgamations and the crisis's impact. Again, the story was different for both banks in the past, with everyone arguing for HR's capacity to direct corporate culture due to the presence of a different business mentality. Back then, there was a predominating atmosphere which concentrated on both the organisation's and its workforce's well-being and self-renewal; a key suggestion found within the mainstream literature (Das, 2012; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Evidently, different stakeholders can offer different views on HR's ability to shape and influence business culture and climate. In addition, similarities and differences between the two case studies can be identified, with that indicating "Case B" senior executives' role as enablers of a smoother cultural change/transition throughout business mergers. It was suggested that the organisation managed to gain the necessary insights for effectively filling any "cultural lags" and eventually to come up with a

new concrete business culture; following similar suggestions made by various authors (Stevens, 2013; Bates, 2003). Furthermore, "Case B" managers' perceptions differentiated from the respective ones of "Case A" with the former arguing that their organisational culture is strong (through clear, well-defined, and well-communicated cultural values), and for their organisation's business climate to welcome the implementation of various training activities. That could offer more evidence of a more mature approach from "Case B" than that of "Case A" with regards to this specific strategic criterion. However, overall, stakeholders' contrasting perspectives still point to a contested territory surrounding SHRD maturity in organisations, and thus complicate the researcher's efforts to evaluate SHRD maturity within the targeted organisations.

8.5.8 Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation.

A strategic HRD evaluation process is also a key strategic component of SHRD maturity. For "Case A", research evidence highlights that T&D evaluation is mainly undertaken in a more functional and short-term direction, owing to the bank's cost-reduction orientation; thus, without focusing on delivering strategic outcomes, such as organisational and behavioural change.

All research participants (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 being trained; thus, just assessing trainees' reaction towards training. It was argued that most of the evaluation criteria are relatively short-term oriented, by simply relying on identifying poor performance, or they consist of various qualitative criteria which are very subjective, and eventually make the entire process even more difficult. Opposing the literature's suggestions that individual behavioural and organisational change are the most required training evaluation outcomes (Kober, 2014; Phillips, 2009; 2008; Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006), interviewed participants (Case A) argued that cost-effective solutions are now dictating the implementation of such processes that can instantly signal employees' improvement or not. Therefore, getting a "pass" grade, that could ultimately indicate

training's effectiveness. However, things weren't like that before the crisis. Training evaluation was an "on-the-job" daily process which used to focus on measuring trainees' acquired knowledge and its transfer to their job contexts, per most managers and HR staff suggestions. Past dated documentary evidence extensively referred to evaluation by making greater reference to employees' behavioural change, knowledge transfer to their job contexts etc. However, post-crisis organisational documents offered limited evidence with regards to the evaluation of the bank's training offerings.

In a similar vein, employees (Case B) initially complained of not been consulted about their actual needs, nor of being properly evaluated. They could not understand how a simple "pass" and a short questionnaire can offer a strategic indication of the training's evaluation. Furthermore, all agreed that, even in the past, training evaluation was similar in that it just assessed the trainees' reaction to the training programmes. However, HR staff and managers' perceptions 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. What employees did not know was that the bank uses "mystery customers" as part of its efforts to assess whether employees have transferred what they have learned into their job contexts.

Managers (Case B) also argued that work improvements can be identified through the increased figures of their employees and customers' satisfaction. Furthermore, everyone related the training's effectiveness with ROI, by outlining the financial outcomes being reported from their branches, besides those related to their employees' behavioural change. Additionally, HR staff stated that various evaluation tools are implemented today compared with in the past. Finally, all agreed that, throughout time, the aim of their training's evaluation was the same – to assess the extent to which employees' knowledge was transferred to their job contexts and how their behaviour changed so to become more efficient and customer-oriented. Documentary data also supported HR staff and managers' suggestions by outlining a wide range of evaluation

tools being used (e.g. 360-degree evaluation, mystery customers, training's ROI, HR metrics, formative & summative evaluation etc.).

Evidently, training evaluation is conducted under a more strategic focus in "Case B" compared to "Case A". Although, once more, stakeholders' perceptions were mixed and complex, evidence provided on behalf of "Case B" HR staff and branch managers (referring to "mystery customers" assessing employees' behaviour and business conduct) is stronger compared to that offered from "Case A". Thus, the former is presented slightly more mature than the latter in respect to this specific strategic criterion. Having further assessed all proposed strategic characteristics of SHRD maturity, a mixed state can be evidenced over time. Coupled with stakeholders' differing and changing perceptions, both conditions enhance the complex nature surrounding the understanding, operationalisation, and maturity of SHRD in organisations. Overall, research evidence highlights SHRD as not being fully mature within both case study organisations (either before or after the crisis) by presenting it more as an aspiration rather than an organisational reality. Yet, besides stakeholders' contrasting viewpoints, it is also of high importance to consider those factors which can simultaneously constrain or facilitate SHRD's adoption and maturity.

8.6 Factors shaping, constraining or facilitating SHRD adoption and Maturity

Both micro and macro-related environmental forces appear to have an impact upon the SHRD practices in organisations. The economic crisis (followed by a prolonged recession), and the presence of a weak organisational culture ("*not well-defined, unclear, not properly communicated cultural values*") and business climate ("*an environment less supportive to the development of training initiatives*"), both were identified as impeding factors of SHRD maturity (as that perceived by the stakeholders interviewed). Furthermore, the restructure of the banking sector, owing to the latest business amalgamations due to the crisis, was also perceived as a barrier towards a more strategic HRD approach. In addition, trade unions' lack of participation was also outlined. However, there were other factors (e.g. globalisation, technological

advancements) which were identified as facilitators of SHRD maturity, particularly for the period before the crisis. Taking that into consideration, the extent to which organisations can address the impact of those factors could offer an indication of their organisational efforts to implement strategic business and HRD decisions. Therefore, these factors should be addressed and discussed as perceived from the stakeholders' interviewed.

8.6.1 Business Culture and Climate

With the literature suggesting that organisational culture consists of several shared values, beliefs, attitudes, artefacts, behaviours, and assumptions (Tharp, 2009; McShane & Von Glinow, 2009; Sun, 2008), a more customer-oriented business culture was identified in both organisations. However, "Case B" cultural values were circulated in a more effective way compared to "Case A" as these there were clear to all organisational members (based on stakeholders' perceptions) and better presented within most organisational documents. Yet, it was widely argued that both organisations' cultural transition, owing to the latest business amalgamations, was viewed as an impeding factor of HRD's strategic adoption and maturity respectively.

Employees (Case A) argued that their organisation's culture is weak and accused their HR department of not clearly and regularly communicating its cultural values. However, they also stated that, prior to the crisis, everybody was working under a clearer set of cultural values contributing towards business success. On the other hand, "Case B" employees' cultural awareness was evidenced, corresponding to the literature's suggestion that a strong organisational culture can help in achieving strategic HRD outcomes; to enhance the workforce's job satisfaction and commitment; and to enable a knowledge-exchange process within the organisation (Stevens, 2013; McCracken et al., 2012; Shahzad et al., 2012; Reena & Jayan, 2012; Norton, 2005; Smith & Elliott, 2007; Pless & Maak, 2004; Silverthorne, 2004). All these outcomes were pointed out from most stakeholders interviewed (Case B).

All bank managers and HR staff (Case B) further argued that their organisation views its prosperity as starting from its own cultural dimensions by translating them into specific behaviours. Therefore, they claimed that, either before or after the crisis, the bank managed to maintain its basic cultural foundations with minor revisions to take place owing to the latest business amalgamations. Accordingly, its cultural values are clear, well-defined and properly communicated across all organisational departments. Such allegations confirm Griswold's (2008) suggestion that organisations with an adaptive culture continuously monitor changes within their business environments and accordingly adjust to new situations, not only for serving their stakeholders' interests, but also for assuring their survival and success; thus, they aim to create a strategic alignment between their HR and corporate objectives. Research data from all organisational documents examined further offered additional evidence on "Case B" corporate culture by clearly circulating its core values across all organisational members and business functions. In a similar vein, most managers (Case A) suggested that their HR department works towards ensuring that everyone understands new business priorities and cultural values, and devotes their full potential to achieve them. However, their mutual perception was that these are not properly communicated across all business units, and thus they are only apparent to front-line operational departments. That could also be evidenced through most organisational documents within which limited reference was made on "Case A" cultural values and norms, with only being more clear on documents related to its front-line operational network.

On the other hand, the HR staff (Case A) offered a different perspective by suggesting that their organisation's cultural values are strong, clear and regularly communicated across the organisation. However, they also outlined that, within specific departments, a more service-oriented culture has emerged, coming into full alignment with new business objectives. Therefore, to them, both business culture and climate support the delivery of specific HRD interventions, regardless of their volume. Finally, the large majority of participants (Case A) recognised that their organisation demonstrated a stronger and clearer corporate culture prior to the crisis, while the respective ones (Case B) suggested that a stronger cultural organisation will emerge after the successful completion of the ongoing mergers and acquisitions.

Overall, although there are studies indicating Greek organisations as being weak in terms of their cultural foundations, greater evidence was provided on "Case B" cultural awareness. It was argued that this resulted in increasing the sense of a unified business climate which helped both individuals and the organisation to better cope with business uncertainty. Additionally, evidence from both banks' CSR reports, outline the long-term planning approach of "Case B" in contrast to a short-term orientated one from "Case A"; thus, enabling the former to better deal with ongoing change and uncertainty – a proposition suggested within the studies of Das (2012) and Hofstede & Minkov (2010), both indicating that organisations with enhanced long-term orientations are better at recovering from crises events than others.

Evidently, both corporate culture and business climate can impact, either negatively or positively, upon SHRD maturity. Their impact depends on how well-developed and properly circulated amongst all business units and organisational members. However, stakeholders' perceptions of the impact of business culture and climate upon SHRD are presented as being mixed by further highlighting the different ways in which SHRD can be understood within organisations from different stakeholders' perspectives.

8.6.2 Economic Crisis

Research data and findings provided convincing evidence on the crisis' impact on both organisations, not only in financial, but also in organisational and employment relations terms. In "Case A", almost three-fourths of the participants described the crisis' impact as severe, with the rest rating it as moderate. In "Case B", over three-quarters rated the crisis' impact as heavily severe as it has changed the nature of employment relations within the industry. The rest rated it as moderate, yet by also recognising the benefits associated with it with regards to a business upturn. In addition, the large majority agreed that HR's business role was weakened. Finally, all recognised that new business realities led to significant changes, not only for their HR departments but for the entire organisation as well.

As to that, employees (Case A) argued that the contraction (or even elimination) of several business units, due to departmental restructurings, and the simultaneous increase of their job accountabilities, both amplified the feeling of job insecurity and increased employee disengagement and demotivation. They further argued that new ideas and best practices are no longer promoted as the negative aspects of the crisis mostly prevailed. Therefore, they strongly believed that their organisation was damaged owing to the changes brought about by crisis. However, they also acknowledged that business amalgamations may result in the formation of a stronger banking group and more strategic in nature. Likewise, employees (Case B) referred to the extensive lay-offs and pay-cuts, the tremendous changes occurred in their employment relations and the reduced training offerings as detrimental agents of workforce's morale, commitment, satisfaction etc. Over three-quarters of them argued that the crisis totally changed the way in which their organisation operates in terms of its people's development. Their suggestions comes in line with literature's allegation that the financial/banking crisis was the outcome of an extensive knowledge gap and top management's incapacity to proactively identify and address it (Holland, 2010; Turner et al., 2010; Turner, 2009). Employees, from both banks, further suggested that the restructuring of the banking sector also enhanced their feelings of job insecurity since many branches were either closed or merged. However, there were a few (Case B) who referred to voluntary exit schemes as a great career opportunity for those remain within the business; thus, highlighting the beneficial part of the crisis in a sense.

Branch managers (Case B) outlined that the crisis was proved propitious in terms of providing organisations with an opportunity to re-organise their workforce's status. However, more than half of the respective managers (Case A) highlighted that the crisis has weakened HR's business role by restricting its influence to the implementation of specific measures dictated by senior management. Therefore, they argued that their organisation failed to equilibrate the effects of the crisis by mostly dominated by short-term oriented planning, followed by staff shortages, wage reductions etc.

The story was presented differently from HR staff's perspectives in both organisations. They initially recognised that the crisis heavily affected their organisation, their department and its activities as well, yet in such a way that allowed for a stronger organisation to emerge. People from both HR departments outlined that targeted training programmes are now offered, all aiming to increase banks' competitiveness and market positioning, through increasing their employees' expertise for efficiently performing their jobs at key positions within the business (front-line). However, it was also remarkable that everybody acknowledged that the crisis was mostly viewed as an obstacle to their value proposition, rather than being seen as an opportunity to demonstrate their capacity; thus, for its negative consequences to dominate.

At an institutional level, both the financial crisis and the austerity measures being implemented by the Greek Government led to market deregulation and the radical reconstruction of the related labour relations. Accompanied by negative implications such as the elimination of most collective agreements, reduction of wage levels, the introduction of individual employment contracts etc., all banks were forced to limit their costs in favour of increasing their organisational performance. Thus, employees were pushed to perform at higher standards under an uncertain business environment and employment status. The integrity of both banks' HR department was also questioned (to a different extent though between "case A" and "Case B"). It was widely argued that depending on whose interests the HR department serves (those of employees or the business), the outcomes accompany its decisions can prove to be either beneficial or detrimental.

Overall, the crisis has definitely changed business conduct, yet opportunities can also be identified. Although it can mostly be viewed as an impeding factor of SHRD's adoption and maturity, at the same time, it cannot constitute the catalytic agent of moving towards a more operational HR approach. Therefore, other factors are expected to hinder SHRD maturity, and accordingly need to be addressed.

8.6.3 The Absence of Trade Unions

It is suggested that trade unions can define T&D's profusion within a business environment (Heyes, 2000; 1993; Stuart, 1996; Streeck, 1992). Yet, employees, from both organisations, outlined their limited bargaining power, and emphasised on trade unions' lack of incorporating T&D concerns within their agendas. They further accused unions, and their representatives, of being too politicalised, and thus neglecting to resolve job quality related concerns. In addition, very few unionised employees argued that HR's new concern is more inclined towards meeting business needs, through pay-cuts and staff redundancies, rather than creating partnerships with trade unions so as to create and promote a shared vision of the workforce's well-being. Furthermore, they explained that the government's constant mediation within both labour and industrial relations resulted in weakening the power of the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) – the association which formally represents the entire Greek workforce. These also brought about the failure of unions to achieve better employment relations. In that case, consistent with recent studies of union representation in the financial sector (Hoque et al., 2014; Katsoridas & Lampousaki, 2013), employees proposed that better job quality can be achieved from union involvement, and more precisely from an on-site representation so for their collective voice to be heard. Yet, unions' limited involvement may offer an indication that labour relations are in trouble.

A large majority of the managers interviewed (Case A & B) also argued that they were left alone in terms of managing their working lives despite being represented by six unions in total within the sector. Like employees, they highlighted trade unions' politicisation as a huge barrier to their bargaining power since their agendas focus on serving the interests of each respective government/political party rather than the actual needs of its members. Then, they pointed out that economic turbulence has radically changed the nature of the relationship between organisations and trade unions, by allowing the former to be more opportunistic through retrenchment actions, and without seeking the active involvement and advice of the latter (Keeble & Armitage, 2015; Bakir, 2013; Roche et al., 2011). Finally, there were a few managers

who did not refer to unions either because they were not members or because they did not feel confident to talk about such a sensitive issue in an era of employment uncertainty.

On the other hand, HR staff (Case B) presented a different story by arguing that their aim is to create a better working environment for their employees and to empower relationships with them. Therefore, their department welcomes and organises meetings between its senior management and unions' representatives on a quarterly basis. Accordingly, the bank complies with the legislative framework that governs the banking sector and its signed employment agreements. With regards to the aforementioned meetings, employees and union representatives are informed about all functional changes occurring within the business, and they are ensured that employment contracts remain intact. However, they acknowledged that part of their collective employment contracts altered to individual ones, yet without any harmful changes for both parties. Finally, they stressed that all voluntary exit schemes were developed in accordance with those people interested in leaving the organisation, while lay-offs were implemented in close cooperation with unions' reps and they were accompanied by a transition period so to allow employees to look for a different job. On the other hand, only the HR director (Case A) referred to trade unions by simply stating that the group complies with the legislative requirements, and that it always aims to do the best for its workforce; indeed, that could be a diplomatic response to avoid further discussion. Furthermore, it was argued that the banking industry's decentralisation also weakened trade unions' power by limiting their role to that of an observer. Additionally, with regards to employee and industrial relations, Greece always lacked of a social consensus culture, while a respective lack of collective bargaining can also be noticed (Dedoussopoulos et al., 2013). Overall, the trade unions' limited interference within most organisational practices was noticed for both time periods; yet, with their post-crisis participation being weaker than that of the past.

In general, trade unions can be viewed as a key player impacting upon the facilitation of a more proactive HR approach. Their role can be strengthened through a more active union membership, and eventually their intervention to be enhanced within

organisations. Besides being too politicalised, their density reflected their bargaining power throughout the arrangement of all Greek labour-related enactments and laws. However, their limited power was also evidenced after the crisis. The lack of their involvement may also constitute the root of most employees' operational viewpoint and thus to explain, somehow, the differing standpoints amongst the interviewed stakeholders on SHRD's understanding and maturity.

8.6.4 Globalisation and Technological Advancements

Research evidence outlined both banks' growth strategies prior to the crisis through the expansion of their operations to new countries and market segments, a direction that dictated HR's strategic involvement. Therefore, all participants argued that their HR strategies had to be reformed in such a way so to meet the increasing training needs of a globalised workforce. In addition, their organisations proceeded to major adjustments within their training agendas so to meet the technological challenges (e.g. introduction of new banking systems, ATMs, e-banking etc.), along with addressing those concerns related to globalisation (e.g. workforce diversity and variation, job flexibility, temporary work, market and business expansion etc.).

In addition, it was noticed that, further to that, other favourable institutional factors (e.g. liberation of markets etc.) of the past also directed HR's conduct towards a more proactive and strategic direction. Back then, there was an imperative need to address the increasing needs of a universal workforce, and accordingly to increase both banks' "institutional homogeneity" within the sector.

Finally, the impact of other socio-cultural factors (e.g. demographic trends, socio-economic inequality etc.), along with factors lying within the political and legal contexts, did not appear to affect HR/HRD implementations either before or after the crisis. Especially for the latter, both banks reported their legislative legitimacy by fully corresponding to the governmental requirements (Jaffe, 2001; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991).

8.6.5 Business Amalgamations

One of the main challenges associated with mergers and acquisitions is the way in which organisations will manage upcoming cultural and organisational turnarounds. Therefore, people from both HR departments argued that individual and organisational change was critical for their bank's viability. Furthermore, all acknowledged that their department is under a transformational phase, which will constitute the rebirth point in terms of strengthening their strategic positioning within the organisation.

The majority of the managers (Case B) claimed that business amalgamations will create a stronger and more competitive banking corporation, consisting of the most skillful employees who will collectively contribute to the bank's and the national economy's recovery. They further outlined that through a continuous communication process during business merging, everybody stayed informed with regards to new business conditions; that enabled the organisation to transform into the new "coliseum" bank corporation with minimum negative side-effects to emerge throughout the merging process. On the other hand, over half of the managers (Case A) argued that feelings of job insecurity and job stress are prevailing these days, due to HR's inability to acquire a proactive role throughout the transformation of the business. They suggested that business amalgamations restricted HR's capacity of creatively combining business change with workforce's needs and concerns. Furthermore, they argued that such processes will directly impact upon their jobs and employment relations, mostly in a negative way.

From employees' viewpoint, the large majority of them (Case A) and half from "Case B" argued that business amalgamations mainly resulted in staff redundancies, and thus limited the competitiveness of their organisation and the career and developmental opportunities being offered to its people. However, the other half (Case B) highlighted that business amalgamations resulted in better developmental opportunities for those remained within the organisation through a "workforce purification" (through voluntary exit schemes etc.).

Research findings further indicated that sector's restructuring led to the decentralisation of the collective labour relations by enabling both banks to implement personalisation policies. Additionally, it was noted that business mergers resulted in the creation of a "multi-speed" HR department, which focused more on maintaining and developing highly differentiated labour regimes, through selective and decentralised policies, with diverse arrangements and responsibilities between bank corporations or with the functional units of each one. However, that burdened employees' collective representation, by notably restricting labour unions' power. Data also indicated that such decentralisation, along with the scope of identifying profit and cost centers, both led to diversified motivational and personal development policies, by emphasising more on increasing employees' efficiency in the short-term. All that were also evidenced through cost-reduction practices, the introduction of flexible working relations, the problematic nature of union representation, and the existence of strong unilateral practices on behalf of the organisations. However, business amalgamations also occurred in the past, yet without reporting such unfavourable consequences. That may suggest that the crisis' gloomy aftermath dominated the thinking of firms and their employees, eventually putting significant pressure on all other business and work-related activities as well.

Once again, participants' perspectives on the impact of this factor appear mixed. Such diverse perceptions may be the outcome of the sector's ongoing restructuring phase which further resulted in the elimination of employees' collective agreement and the introduction of new employment regimes. However, the extent to which business amalgamations either facilitated or hindered SHRD's adoption and maturity is a matter of debate owing to the differing perspectives offered from those stakeholders interviewed.

8.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a discussion of the key research findings from both case study banking organisations. By triangulating research data from interviews and various organisational documents, the researcher managed to achieve an in-depth

understanding over the examined topic, and to associate his empirical research with the relevant theory.

With regards to the thesis' first research question which aimed to assess stakeholders' perceptions of SHRD's understanding and operationalisation, their differing and changing perspectives were outlined. A large majority of the managers interviewed, and much of the HR staff, all mainly talked of a proactive SHRD approach by associating its strategic adoption with the alignment maintained between HR and corporate objectives. On the other hand, most of the employees perceived SHRD in such a way that they associated its meaning with the volume of its offerings. Therefore, they talked of a more functional HR approach, fully complied with today's cost-efficient requirements. However, everyone agreed on their HR's department role in the past, by arguing that it was more enhanced compared to its post-crisis state due to a different business philosophy adopted back then.

The second research question focused on assessing and evaluating the extent to which both organisations could offer evidence over the employment of specific strategic characteristics proposed within the modified SHRD framework. Overall, SHRD maturity is presented as being mixed over time, with a partial employment of some of the suggested strategic criteria being noticed. Yet, "Case B" offered slightly more evidence on most strategic characteristics, so to talk of a slightly more mature organisation compared to "Case A".

Finally, with regards to the third research question which focused upon identifying the factors that can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD's adoption and maturity, a large majority of the participants prioritised the economic crisis as the most influential agent in restraining the implementation of most HRD initiatives, followed by business amalgamations and the lack of a supportive business culture and climate. Furthermore, those employees being in transition also highlighted trade unions' absence as an additional constraining factor. At the same time, technological advancements and globalisation were presented as facilitating factors of the past, while

the impact of the political and legal contexts seemed to have played limited role either before or after the crisis as both organisations reported their legislative legitimacy.

Stakeholders' perceptual contradiction outlined the contested territory surrounding the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD within organisations. That further complicated the researcher's efforts to evaluate SHRD maturity under the challenging context of the economic crisis. Although both organisations operate under the same institutional framework, and besides their similarities (e.g. with regards to their ownership status, their operational presence, their workforce's synthesis etc.), their different approach to business and economic uncertainty and complexity was also highlighted. This was clearly evidenced (in some cases) through their stakeholders' differing perspectives in relation to the key themes examined. Overall, SHRD maturity in Greek banks is presented as a mixed and complex concept, and through a more inspirational perspective rather than constituting an organisational reality which can lead to a business upturn.

CHAPTER 9 – Conclusions, Implications, Contribution and Recommendations for future research

9.1 Introduction

The aim of this research study was to assess and evaluate SHRD maturity in Greek banks within the challenging context of the economic crisis. Therefore, a modified SHRD framework was employed, with eight key strategic components of SHRD maturity. In addition, specific indicators for each of the strategic criteria were suggested so to better evaluate SHRD maturity within the case study organisations. The suggested SHRD framework also considered various micro and macro-environmental factors which can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD maturity.

To achieve its research objectives and to address its research questions, a case study research strategy was adopted, and semi-structured interviews and documentary analysis were employed as its research methods. The researcher also espoused a multi-constituent research perspective so to evaluate SHRD maturity through the respective perceptions of different HRD stakeholders. A before-and-after research design investigation was further adopted from the researcher so to explore change and constrains of SHRD maturity over time. Later, research data was analysed through a thematic analysis approach, which allowed the researcher to present and discuss his research findings in-depth so to highlight the complexity being attached to SHRD's understanding, operationalisation and maturity at a time of an economic crisis. In addition, various similarities and differences between the two case studies, as well as their respective stakeholders' perceptions, had also been identified. All of which allowed the researcher to draw insightful conclusions on SHRD maturity within the case organisations. Research findings were also paralleled with relevant literature to allow for realistic conclusions and useful theoretical and practical recommendations to be made.

The chapter will provide a summary of the key findings emerged. Then, it will offer its final conclusions and recommendations. Later, it will highlight the research's

contribution to academic knowledge and its practical implications. Finally, its limitations and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

9.2 A summary of the key research findings

The key research findings emerged can be summarised into the following:

- The study outlined the contested territory surrounding the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD through the differing and changing perceptions of the stakeholders interviewed. A perceptual contradiction was noticed, mainly between the employees and the branch managers and the HR staff. A perceptual convergence was identified on most key points examined between the latter (managers & HR staff), and a respective perceptual divergence between them and the employees. Therefore, with regards to the way in which SHRD was applied and operationalised, HR staff and managers argued for the attained strategic alignment between the HR and the corporate objectives, while employees attributed it to the volume of its offerings. Then, in relation to the maturity of SHRD, research evidence was mixed again, yet with a more unified perspective to be evidenced for its pre-crisis state, compared to stakeholders' contrasting perceptions of its post-crisis status.

- The indicators of SHRD maturity were also presented as being mixed over time. Contradictions between the stakeholders were identified, with stronger, moderate and limited evidence was provided for each respective strategic criterion through their differing and changing perceptions.

- In relation to those factors which can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD maturity, technological advancements, globalisation and business growth strategies were identified as influential agents of SHRD maturity for the period before the crisis. On the other hand, the economic crisis, the latest business amalgamations, and a weak organisational culture were presented as impeding factors of SHRD maturity for its post-crisis state.

- The lack of trade unions' participation was also noticed, owing to their extensive politicisation and the weakening of their bargaining power, as most stakeholders addressed. That allowed organisations to become opportunistic and to proceed with major lay-offs and other staff-reduction related actions without considering the possible counteractions from unions and their unionised employees. Employment and labour relations were also altered, mostly to the benefit of the employer.

- A business focus shift towards the enhancement of their front-line operations, as a means of ensuring their survival, was also pointed out from the very first interviews. Such an alternation resulted in the design and delivery of targeted training within specific departments (front-line operations/branch network). Therefore, many employees, from other corporate departments, complained of being marginalised with regards to their development. Thus, for most of them, their disengagement and demotivation was noticed; an outcome that directly undermines both organisations' objective of offering high quality service delivery to their customers.

- Both organisations' retrenchment strategy was also evidenced by their respective HR budgets allocations being highly restricted. That further impeded HRD's ability to offer strategic/proactive initiatives, and eventually affected its maturity. A striking observation came from a large majority of the research participants who highlighted that their last training took place as far back as 10-16 months ago or even further.

- Such retrenchment strategies also affected HR's conduct in general. More than three-quarters of employees, from both banks, argued that staff shortages within their HR departments resulted in overloading existing staff with greater work responsibilities, thus making them incapable of performing to their highest standards. Therefore, HRD implementations were improperly designed and delivered. However, managers' and HR staff's viewpoints opposed their employees' assertions, by arguing that although the HR department was highly affected, everyone was still working at their full potential so to deliver exceptional services to their stakeholders. Overall,

stakeholders' contrasting perspectives resulted to a contested territory that complicated the researcher's efforts to assess SHRD's understanding and maturity within the case study banking organisations.

- HRD executives' lack of participation during the formation of the corporate strategy was also stressed in one of the two case studies. Although both banks' HR staff reported their positioning within the BoD, limited evidence was provided on behalf of "Case A" HR executives so to support their arguments. The belief that HR's presence within the BoD was just a simple representation, without crucial importance, was further implied by many managers and all employees. However, "Case B" senior executives appeared more open to creating strategic partnerships with its HR executives and branch managers throughout the execution of most environmental scanning and strategy formation processes.

- It was found that many HR responsibilities were devolved to LMs (branch managers) in "Case B", by further reporting the latter's greater involvement within various HR implementations. A clearer communication process was also evidenced in "Case B", with most of its organisational members to report their cultural awareness towards the newly-formed business culture and organisational structure because of the recent business amalgamations. "Case B" organisation was also presented more open in attaining strategic partnerships with its key organisational stakeholders, specifically between its senior executives and its HR executives and its branch managers.

- Finally, a different evaluation approach of their T&D offerings was further identified between the two case studies. "Case A" evaluation was mainly focused on assessing its employees' reaction to training by overlooking the way in which more strategic outcomes can be attained. On the other hand, "Case B" moved forward on assessing behavioural and organisational change, and how the acquired knowledge was transferred to the job context (through mystery customers), as a strategic result of its evaluation process. Inappropriate T&D opportunities were also offered within both organisations, as that perceived from most employees.

9.3 Research's contribution: Academic

The relative lack of research focusing on SHRD maturity at a time of an economic crisis increases the expected academic and managerial contribution of this thesis, along with addressing a methodological gap through its multi-constituent and before-and-after research perspectives.

The review of the relevant literature on SHRD maturity, and on its respective SHRD models, revealed several gaps (e.g. models assessed in stable business & economic environments – thus do not reflect the dynamic nature of today's business world; lack of employees' voice, performative or humanitarian focus, "one size fits all" problem due to their multi-sectoral approach etc.) which had to be addressed. Therefore, this research's added value associates with the development of a modified SHRD framework based upon and extending the work of McCracken and Wallace (2000a, 2000b – SHRD maturity model). The modified SHRD framework comes with eight strategic characteristics, as components of SHRD maturity, along with suggesting specific indicators for each one of them so to better evaluate SHRD maturity. It also proposes the consideration of various micro and macro-environmental factors which can simultaneously shape, constrain or facilitate SHRD maturity within organisations. Yet, having the framework applied under the challenging context of the economic crisis, the study further adds to academic knowledge as being the first research study applying and testing a SHRD framework within a period of business and economic uncertainty and complexity. Thus, the study outlines the aspirational and the real role of SHRD within organisations operating under the crisis context. Further to that, it offers a better understanding of how SHRD maturity could be achieved and on how its associated benefits could emerge. Therefore, its calls for future research to re-consider the concept of SHRD maturity under the challenging context of today's business and economic uncertainty and complexity.

The study further contributes to academic knowledge by advancing qualitative research through its case study research strategy, its multi-constituent research perspective, and its before-and-after research design investigation. All enabled the

researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the examined topic by assessing and evaluating SHRD maturity over time and through the respective perceptions of different HRD stakeholders. As to that, the study offered a better understanding and more valuable insights on SHRD maturity in organisations, which were not previously offered from existing research (e.g. the perceptual contradiction on the understanding and operationalisation of SHRD, change and constraints of SHRD over time, aspirational and real role of SHRD before and after the crisis etc.). In addition, the study aimed to address the "one-size-fits all" problem of previous research (due to their multi-sectoral approach) by adopting a case study research strategy which focused on particularisation rather than generalisation (in depth understanding of the examined topic within the targeted organisations and through the respective lenses of their HRD stakeholders interviewed).

The study further contributes to academic knowledge, and precisely to Greek HRD literature, as being the first empirical study conducted both on SHRD maturity and in Greek banks. Thus, it extends a large amount of knowledge within a different national and industrial context. The study offers a better understanding of SHRD maturity and fills a relevant gap within the Greek HRD literature since previous research was mainly conducted either in UK or US.

9.4 Research's contribution: Managerial

The findings of this research have important implications for HRD executives by highlighting the aspirational versus the real role of SHRD within organisations operating under the challenging context of the economic crisis. The study further highlighted the contested territory surrounding the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD.

The study identified the potential problems and limitations of putting SHRD aspirations into practice, and highlighted the difficulties of embedding strategic criteria into HRD strategies, plans and policies under periods of business and economic uncertainty and complexity. As an HR setback was noticed in general, the research

indicated to HRD executives the areas of improvement so to better manage and enhance the outcomes of their HRD interventions.

Having critically evaluated SHRD maturity, along with considering the factors that can simultaneously shape or constrain its adoption within organisations, practical recommendations can be made. The study offered guidelines to HRD executives on how to advance their HRD practices and how to enhance SHRD maturity so to be regarded as equal strategic business partners within their organisations. Therefore, employees' voice should be encouraged and welcomed, along with branch managers' participation in HR implementations (especially after their business focus shift). A more strategic evaluation should also be undertaken, moving beyond assessing employees' reaction to the training programme. In addition, HRD executives are encouraged to undertake a more extensive role so to facilitate the merging process (due to the latest business amalgamations), and eventually to offer the utmost to their stakeholders. The study further outlines the importance of all organisational members to be involved in environmental scanning so to collectively contribute with their insights to a business upturn.

Having all these elements secured, HR's value proposition and strategic positioning is expected to enhance. Overall, the study calls for HR/HRD executives to pay greater attention to their respective practices so to grasp all related benefits of an attained strategic HR/HRD approach.

9.5 Limitations of the study

It is argued that "*every research is limited by the constraints placed upon the researcher*" (Yin, 2014). Therefore, the following limitations can be identified for this research study.

Following this research's sole focus in Greek banks, its sample was restricted only to Greek banking organisations, and eventually for its findings to be limited to the specific sector, or to other similar industries within the Greek territory. Therefore, the

research's findings cannot be generalised to an international context due to different organisational and social contexts (e.g. political, economic, etc.). However, someone may equally argue that they can be applicable to those sectors and nations facing similar problems to Greece. In that case, future research will be benefited from a comparison amongst bank institutions betwixt two or more countries operating under similar business and economic circumstances. A replication of this research study in other countries and/or organisations would offer additional insights into SHRD maturity at the time of an economic crisis and/or under the circumstances of a prolonged recession.

A second limitation derives from both organisations' denial to allow the researcher to conduct interviews with their top management executives, along with the lack of approaching Hellenic Bank Association (HBA) and Trade Union's representatives. All stakeholders are considered crucial in providing relevant information on banks' HRD strategies and for both time periods so for a better comparison to be made. That would also allow the researcher to get a deeper understanding on the examined topic. However, it was difficult to approach senior managers due to their workload, while trade union and HBA representatives were excluded due to time constraints; yet, a few unionised employees were interviewed instead. Therefore, future research would be benefited from the inclusion of all potential stakeholders so as to grasp their perspectives, and eventually to get a more holistic understating of the examined topic.

Thirdly, a methodological limitation relates to the research sample of the study, and associates with the researcher's decision not to approach all banks (5 in total) within the sector. Having that considered, the researcher would have been able to offer a more holistic view of the entire population/sector. However, due to time constraints, a longitudinal study was not possible to take place. In that case, future research, either within the Greek territory or elsewhere, would be benefited from the examination of the entire sector so for more insights to be drawn.

Finally, there are some limitations associated with the employment of a retrospective design (e.g. interviewees' responses tend to be biased towards change and sensitive

issues, difficulties in recalling past events which may lead to poor-quality data, interviewees hold (or not) knowledge of past events etc.). Although a longitudinal study may appear as an alternative route, it was difficult to be undertaken due to time constraints, and the refusal of the case study banking organisations to commit their staff for more than a few days. To overcome these "research constraints", the researcher selected his interview sample to consist of key individuals being employed for more than six years within their organisation (HR staff, branch managers, front-line employees). All research participants held the appropriate knowledge to address interview questions at a pre and post-crisis assessment approach (retrospectively / before-and-after research investigation design). In addition, the researcher posed them many probing questions so to facilitate discussion and to help them recall past events.

9.6 Recommendations for future research

Based upon this research study's objectives, its research findings, and its respective limitations, directions for future research can be pointed out. Therefore, these recommendations include the following:

- A comparison amongst bank institutions amongst more organisations and betwixt two or more countries under similar and/or different business and economic circumstances would be beneficial so for a better comparison to be made. A replication of this research study in other countries and/or organisations would offer additional insights into SHRD maturity at the time of an economic crisis and/or under the circumstances of a prolonged recession.

- Future research would also benefit from the inclusion of all potential stakeholders (e.g. senior management, trade union representatives etc.) so to offer a deeper insight into people's perceptions and situations, and for a richer understanding over the examined topic to be achieved.

- A longitudinal study may also appear as an alternative route for future research to follow. That would allow researchers to offer a more holistic view of the

phenomenon under investigation. In addition, future research would be benefited from the examination of the entire sector and/or from the comparison between two or more different business sectors so for deeper insights to be achieved and for better conclusions to be drawn.

- Following this research's focus on stakeholders' perceptions of SHRD maturity, future research could examine the respective perspectives of those stakeholders within other business sectors, and precisely within the public sector so for a comparison between the private and the public sector to be made.

- Future research could also be designed in such a way to examine how HRD professionals could strengthen the maturity and resilience of SHRD within their organisations. Existing research has examined how individual and organisational resilience can be enhanced; yet, it would be good to examine how "HRD resilience" (e.g. the extent to which the HRD practices have been survived, developed or degraded due to internal and external shocks by demonstrating flexible, adaptive and agile initiatives to any kind of environmental forces). Taking that into consideration, future research could aim on answering the following research questions:

  ➢ *How could organisations strengthen the resilience of their HRD practices?*
  ➢ *What are the barriers in promoting HRD resilience, and what are their effects (a) to the organisation as a whole, and (b) to HRD practice?*

- Finally, future research would benefit from the employment of a mixed-method approach so for a methodological triangulation to be achieved, and thus for more robust findings and recommendations to be offered.

9.7 Conclusion

This study was a research journey of exploring the understanding, operationalisation and maturity of SHRD in two Greek banking organisations under the challenging context of the economic crisis. Key organisational stakeholders offered their insightful, yet differing, perceptions of SHRD maturity through a pre and post-crisis

assessment approach. Major factors impeding or facilitating SHRD maturity were also examined. Research evidence highlighted the differing and changing perspectives of the stakeholders interviewed by further outlining the contested territory surrounding the understanding and operationalisation of SHRD within organisations. SHRD maturity was also presented as being mixed over time through a partial employment of the suggested strategic characteristics in most cases. Overall, the importance and value of SHRD were pointed out, especially within constantly changing business and economic environments. Finally, the research's academic and managerial contribution was highlighted, and directions for future research were provided.

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APPENDICES

<u>Appendix 1: Cover Letter for interviews</u>

"Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis"

<u>Interview Participation</u>

Dear participant:

I am currently studying for a PhD degree in Human Resource Management at the University of Strathclyde, United Kingdom. I am undertaking a research project entitled "*Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*", supervised by Dr. Colin Lindsay.

Through this research, I am trying to investigate and evaluate SHRD maturity within specific organisational contexts (Greek banks). In addition, I am trying to examine how different stakeholders (HR staff, Top Management Executives, Line Managers, Employees) within organisations understand the process of SHRD, in respect to their corporate strategies, objectives and structures during dynamic periods of change. The research further aims to identify the major factors shaping, facilitating or constraining the adoption of SHRD and contributing to its maturity in organisations during dynamic periods of change.

Your participation is truly important to the success of this study. I would like to assure you that your responses will be processed as "Strictly Confidential", as confidentiality will be of the utmost importance to this thesis, and it will follow all codes of value principles in its context. Your responses will be used for academic purposes only. I shall be pleased to share the findings of this research once the study is completed. In closing, I would like to thank you very much in anticipation for your kind cooperation.

I look forward to conducting interviews with you.
Sincerely yours,

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Dr. Colin Lindsay
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To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of Mr. Fotios Mitsakis, a full-time PhD research student in the department of Human Resource Management at the University of Strathclyde (UK). His main research interest is to explore the ***Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis.***

The enclosed questionnaire would be the guide for conducting his interviews by seeking the views and opinions of HR executives and staff, top management executives, line managers, and employees on the maturity of SHRD at the time of the recent economic crisis. The primary purpose of the research is to draw implications for banking institutions, considering the "strategicness" of HRD.

Therefore, you are kindly invited to participate in this research by allowing him to conduct interviews with the aforementioned HRD stakeholders. Your co-operation and support are crucial for the successful completion of this research. Please also be reminded that your contribution is significant in investigating the researched topic, aiming at contributing both to academic knowledge, while making practical recommendations to HRD practitioners as well.

Please be assured that your participation and responses will be treated as extremely confidential and only be used anonymously for academic purposes.

Many thanks for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Colin Lindsay
Senior Lecturer in Employment, Skills, and Social Policy
Human Resource Management
Principal Supervisor

Participant Information Sheet for [HR Staff – at any level]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

Introduction

You are kindly invited to participate in this research about the maturity of SHRD practices in Greek banks at the time of the recent economic crisis, by allowing the researcher to conduct interviews. Your co-operation and support are crucial for the successful completion of this research. Please also be reminded that your contribution is significant in investigating the researched topic, aiming at contributing both to academic knowledge, while making practical recommendations to HRD practitioners as well.

The research is being conducted as part of my (Fotios Mitsakis) Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management Thesis at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The purpose of this research is to investigate and evaluate the "strategicness" (maturity) of HRD within specific organisational contexts. It further aims to explore and advance our understanding on how different organisations, understand, apply and operationalize SHRD interventions in respect to their corporate strategies, objectives, structures etc. during dynamic periods of change. It is the main inquiry of this research to investigate and identify the major factors shaping, facilitating or constraining the adoption of SHRD in some organisations, through a modified and proposed framework of strategic criteria constituting a HRD mature organisation. All in all, the purpose of this study is to explore the position and role of SHRD in Greek banks in the context of the recent economic crisis.

By exploring the contemporary and challenging concept of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) under the current economic crisis, its impact on banking institutions, their manpower along with the key drivers for future implementations as well, the outcomes of this doctoral thesis would be of high importance for both HR policy makers within financial organisations and potential or existing scholars and researchers in order to better understand the influence factors, impacts and outcomes of the SHRD practices. What makes this research novel is the fact that within the existing literature the implications of economic crisis in strategic organisational HRD approaches has not received detailed research and study, while being limited to suggestions for crisis management issues. There is relative absence of innovative HRD approaches to the economic downturn, and little evidence of firms introducing greater SHRD policies as an alternative to lay-offs, redundancies and short-term working. To that end, regardless the general sorts of confluence of this research, the major contribution of this thesis will result in generating new knowledge around the researched topic; it will also develop new insights that may result in new practical implementation tools for HRD executives dealing with recession, while it will address several inquiries for further investigation not only within a domestic focus, but also at an international level.

Do you have to take part?

This information sheet has been written to help you decide if you would like to take part in this study. It is up to you and you alone whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be free to withdrawal anytime. You do not have to provide a reason and information collected will be securely destroyed. Should you decide to participate, you may choose to not answer any question without providing a reason.

What will you do in the project?

You will be asked to participate in an interview that we anticipate to take approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes (1.5 hours) to complete. You will be asked questions regarding crisis' impact on your SHRD policies, accompanied by questions focusing on the maturity (strategicness) of your

organisation's SHRD practices during the economic crisis along with general questions referring to the factors hindering or facilitating the implementation of SHRD.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been selected to take part in this study as a member of the HR department of the organisation, hence having direct involvement in the researched topic.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

The nature of this research is not one that poses any significant risk of harm. There is no potential risk of physical harm in taking part in this research.

What happens to the information in the project?

Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the data, which will be kept **strictly confidential**. All responses will be processed as "Strictly Confidential", as confidentiality will be of the utmost importance to this research, by following all codes of value principles in its context. Participants' responses will be used for **academic purposes only**, and all data will be **anonymised** by using codes in such way that will allow only the researcher to identify each participant. The collected data will be securely stored on password-protected computer along with a password-protected external hard drive (USB stick). All data will be anonymised from the point of collection onwards and will be kept for a period of 4-5 years until not being necessary.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you do not have any further questions related to this project and would like to participate, please complete the Consent Form.

Researcher contact details:
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Chief Investigator details:
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E: colin.lindsay@strath.ac.uk

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee / Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde / Graham Hills Building
50 George Street, Glasgow, G1 1QE / Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for [HR Staff – at any level]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to take part in this study and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this form does not commit you to anything and you are free to withdraw.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.	YES	NO
I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time	YES	NO
I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available	YES	NO
I consent to being a participant in the project	YES	NO
I consent to being audio and video recorded as part of the project	YES	NO

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Participant Information Sheet for [Bank Managers – various organisational departments]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

Introduction

You are kindly invited to participate in this research about the maturity of SHRD practices in Greek banks at the time of the recent economic crisis, by allowing the researcher to conduct interviews. Your co-operation and support are crucial for the successful completion of this research. Please also be reminded that your contribution is significant in investigating the researched topic, aiming at contributing both to academic knowledge, while making practical recommendations to HRD practitioners as well.

The research is being conducted as part of my (Fotios Mitsakis) Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management Thesis at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The purpose of this research is to investigate and evaluate the "strategicness" (maturity) of HRD within specific organisational contexts. It further aims to explore and advance our understanding on how different organisations, understand, apply and operationalize SHRD interventions in respect to their corporate strategies, objectives, structures etc. during dynamic periods of change. It is the main inquiry of this research to investigate and identify the major factors shaping, facilitating or constraining the adoption of SHRD in some organisations, through a modified and proposed framework of strategic criteria constituting a HRD mature organisation. All in all, the purpose of this study is to explore the position and role of SHRD in Greek banks in the context of the recent economic crisis.

By exploring the contemporary and challenging concept of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) under the current economic crisis, its impact on banking institutions, their manpower along with the key drivers for future implementations as well, the outcomes of this doctoral thesis would be of high importance for both HR policy makers within financial organisations and potential or existing scholars and researchers in order to better understand the influence factors, impacts and outcomes of the SHRD practices. What makes this research novel is the fact that within the existing literature the implications of economic crisis in strategic organisational HRD approaches has not received detailed research and study, while being limited to suggestions for crisis management issues. There is relative absence of innovative HRD approaches to the economic downturn, and little evidence of firms introducing greater SHRD policies as an alternative to lay-offs, redundancies and short-term working. To that end, regardless the general sorts of confluence of this research, the major contribution of this thesis will result in generating new knowledge around the researched topic; it will also develop new insights that may result in new practical implementation tools for HRD executives dealing with recession, while it will address several inquiries for further investigation not only within a domestic focus, but also at an international level.

Do you have to take part?

This information sheet has been written to help you decide if you would like to take part in this study. It is up to you and you alone whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be free to withdrawal anytime. You do not have to provide a reason and information collected will be securely destroyed. Should you decide to participate, you may choose to not answer any question without providing a reason.

What will you do in the project?

You will be asked to participate in an interview that we anticipate to take approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes (1.5 hours) to complete. You will be asked questions regarding crisis' impact on your SHRD policies, accompanied by questions focusing on the maturity (strategicness) of your

organisation's SHRD practices during the economic crisis along with general questions referring to the factors hindering or facilitating the implementation of SHRD. Overall, you will be asked to reflect your perception on the aforementioned issues based on your experience so far.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been selected to take part in this study as a line manager of the organisation, hence having direct involvement in the researched topic as a linking part between corporate departments (HR) and the employees of your department.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

The nature of this research is not one that poses any significant risk of harm. There is no potential risk of physical harm in taking part in this research. Just in case of feeling discomfort in reflecting your thoughts towards your organisation's HR approach during the crisis, every effort will be made on part of the researcher to ensure that your level of psychological discomfort is minimized (e.g. anonymity).

What happens to the information in the project?

Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the data, which will be kept **strictly confidential**. All responses will be processed as "Strictly Confidential", as confidentiality will be of the utmost importance to this research, by following all codes of value principles in its context. Participants' responses will be used for **academic purposes only**, and all data will be **anonymised** by using codes in such way that will allow only the researcher to identify each participant. The collected data will be securely stored on password-protected computer along with a password-protected external hard drive (USB stick). All data will be anonymised from the point of collection onwards and will be kept for a period of 4-5 years until not being necessary.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you do not have any further questions related to this project and would like to participate, please complete the Consent Form.

Researcher contact details:
Fotios Mitsakis
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Chief Investigator details:
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50 Richmond Street, G1 1XU
Glasgow, Scotland
T: +44 (0) 141 548 3976
E: colin.lindsay@strath.ac.uk

This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde,
Graham Hills Building
50 George Street, Glasgow, G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for [Bank Managers – various organisational departments]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to take part in this study and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this form does not commit you to anything and you are free to withdraw.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.	YES	NO
I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time	YES	NO
I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available	YES	NO
I consent to being a participant in the project	YES	NO
I consent to being audio and video recorded as part of the project	YES	NO

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Participant Information Sheet for [Employees]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

Introduction
You are kindly invited to participate in this research about the maturity of SHRD practices in Greek banks at the time of the recent economic crisis, by allowing the researcher to conduct interviews. Your co-operation and support are crucial for the successful completion of this research. Please also be reminded that your contribution is significant in investigating the researched topic, aiming at contributing both to academic knowledge, while making practical recommendations to HRD practitioners as well.

The research is being conducted as part of my (Fotios Mitsakis) Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management Thesis at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK.

What is the purpose of this investigation?
The purpose of this research is to investigate and evaluate the "strategicness" (maturity) of HRD within specific organisational contexts. It further aims to explore and advance our understanding on how different organisations, understand, apply and operationalize SHRD interventions in respect to their corporate strategies, objectives, structures etc. during dynamic periods of change. It is the main inquiry of this research to investigate and identify the major factors shaping, facilitating or constraining the adoption of SHRD in some organisations, through a modified and proposed framework of strategic criteria constituting a HRD mature organisation. All in all, the purpose of this study is to explore the position and role of SHRD in Greek banks in the context of the recent economic crisis.

By exploring the contemporary and challenging concept of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) under the current economic crisis, its impact on banking institutions, their manpower along with the key drivers for future implementations as well, the outcomes of this doctoral thesis would be of high importance for both HR policy makers within financial organisations and potential or existing scholars and researchers in order to better understand the influence factors, impacts and outcomes of the SHRD practices. What makes this research novel is the fact that within the existing literature the implications of economic crisis in strategic organisational HRD approaches has not received detailed research and study, while being limited to suggestions for crisis management issues. There is relative absence of innovative HRD approaches to the economic downturn, and little evidence of firms introducing greater SHRD policies as an alternative to lay-offs, redundancies and short-term working. To that end, regardless the general sorts of confluence of this research, the major contribution of this thesis will result in generating new knowledge around the researched topic; it will also develop new insights that may result in new practical implementation tools for HRD executives dealing with recession, while it will address several inquiries for further investigation not only within a domestic focus, but also at an international level.

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What will you do in the project?
You will be asked to participate in an interview that we anticipate to take approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes (1.5 hours) to complete. You will be asked questions regarding crisis' impact on your SHRD policies, accompanied by questions focusing on the maturity (strategicness) of your organisation's SHRD practices during the economic crisis along with general questions referring to the factors hindering or facilitating the implementation of SHRD.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been selected to take part in this study as being bank's employees, hence having direct involvement in the researched topic.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

The nature of this research is not one that poses any significant risk of harm. There is no potential risk of physical harm in taking part in this research. Just in case of feeling discomfort in reflecting your thoughts towards your organisation's HR approach during the crisis, every effort will be made on part of the researcher to ensure that your level of psychological discomfort is minimized (e.g. anonymity).

What happens to the information in the project?

Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the data, which will be kept **strictly confidential**. All responses will be processed as "Strictly Confidential", as confidentiality will be of the utmost importance to this research, by following all codes of value principles in its context. Participants' responses will be used for **academic purposes only**, and all data will be **anonymised** by using codes in such way that will allow only the researcher to identify each participant. The collected data will be securely stored on password-protected computer along with a password-protected external hard drive (USB stick). All data will be anonymised from the point of collection onwards and will be kept for a period of 4-5 years until not being necessary.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you do not have any further questions related to this project and would like to participate, please complete the Consent Form.

Researcher contact details:	**Chief Investigator details:**
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This investigation was granted ethical approval by the University of Strathclyde Ethics Committee.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Secretary to the University Ethics Committee
Research & Knowledge Exchange Services
University of Strathclyde
Graham Hills Building
50 George Street, Glasgow, G1 1QE
Telephone: 0141 548 3707
Email: ethics@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form for [Employees]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to take part in this study and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this form does not commit you to anything and you are free to withdraw.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.	YES	NO
I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time	YES	NO
I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available	YES	NO
I consent to being a participant in the project	YES	NO
I consent to being audio and video recorded as part of the project	YES	NO

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Participant Information Sheet for [Senior Executives]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

Introduction

You are kindly invited to participate in this research about the maturity of SHRD practices in Greek banks at the time of the recent economic crisis, by allowing the researcher to conduct interviews. Your co-operation and support are crucial for the successful completion of this research. Please also be reminded that your contribution is significant in investigating the researched topic, aiming at contributing both to academic knowledge, while making practical recommendations to HRD practitioners as well.

The research is being conducted as part of my (Fotios Mitsakis) Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Management Thesis at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK.

What is the purpose of this investigation?

The purpose of this research is to investigate and evaluate the "strategicness" (maturity) of HRD within specific organisational contexts. It further aims to explore and advance our understanding on how different organisations, understand, apply and operationalize SHRD interventions in respect to their corporate strategies, objectives, structures etc. during dynamic periods of change. It is the main inquiry of this research to investigate and identify the major factors shaping, facilitating or constraining the adoption of SHRD in some organisations, through a modified and proposed framework of strategic criteria constituting a HRD mature organisation. All in all, the purpose of this study is to explore the position and role of SHRD in Greek banks in the context of the recent economic crisis.

By exploring the contemporary and challenging concept of Strategic Human Resource Development (SHRD) under the current economic crisis, its impact on banking institutions, their manpower along with the key drivers for future implementations as well, the outcomes of this doctoral thesis would be of high importance for both HR policy makers within financial organisations and potential or existing scholars and researchers in order to better understand the influence factors, impacts and outcomes of the SHRD practices. What makes this research novel is the fact that within the existing literature the implications of economic crisis in strategic organisational HRD approaches has not received detailed research and study, while being limited to suggestions for crisis management issues. There is relative absence of innovative HRD approaches to the economic downturn, and little evidence of firms introducing greater SHRD policies as an alternative to lay-offs, redundancies and short-term working. To that end, regardless the general sorts of confluence of this research, the major contribution of this thesis will result in generating new knowledge around the researched topic; it will also develop new insights that may result in new practical implementation tools for HRD executives dealing with recession, while it will address several inquiries for further investigation not only within a domestic focus, but also at an international level.

Do you have to take part?

This information sheet has been written to help you decide if you would like to take part in this study. It is up to you and you alone whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be free to withdrawal anytime. You do not have to provide a reason and information collected will be securely destroyed. Should you decide to participate, you may choose to not answer any question without providing a reason.

What will you do in the project?

You will be asked to participate in an interview that we anticipate to take approximately 45 minutes to 90 minutes (1.5 hours) to complete. You will be asked questions regarding crisis' impact on your SHRD policies, accompanied by questions focusing on the maturity (strategicness) of your

organisation's SHRD practices during the economic crisis along with general questions referring to the factors hindering or facilitating the implementation of SHRD.

Why have you been invited to take part?

You have been selected to take part in this study as a top management's member within the organisation, hence having direct involvement in the researched topic.

What are the potential risks to you in taking part?

The nature of this research is not one that poses any significant risk of harm. There is no potential risk of physical harm in taking part in this research. Just in case of feeling discomfort in reflecting your thoughts towards your organisation's HR approach during the crisis, every effort will be made on part of the researcher to ensure that your level of psychological discomfort is minimized (e.g. anonymity).

What happens to the information in the project?

Only the researcher and his supervisor will have access to the data, which will be kept **strictly confidential**. All responses will be processed as "Strictly Confidential", as confidentiality will be of the utmost importance to this research, by following all codes of value principles in its context. Participants' responses will be used for **academic purposes only**, and all data will be **anonymised** by using codes in such way that will allow only the researcher to identify each participant. The collected data will be securely stored on password-protected computer along with a password-protected external hard drive (USB stick). All data will be anonymised from the point of collection onwards and will be kept for a period of 4-5 years until not being necessary.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Thank you for reading this information – please ask any questions if you are unsure about what is written here. If you do not have any further questions related to this project and would like to participate, please complete the Consent Form.

Researcher contact details:
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Chief Investigator details:
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Consent Form for [Senior Executives]

Name of department: Human Resource Management
Title of the study: *Strategic Human Resource Development Maturity: An Investigation into Greek Banks at the time of the Economic Crisis*

The purpose of this form is to ensure that you are willing to take part in this study and to let you understand what it entails. Signing this form does not commit you to anything and you are free to withdraw.

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction.	YES	NO
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences.	YES	NO
I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time	YES	NO
I understand that any information recorded in the investigation will remain confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available	YES	NO
I consent to being a participant in the project	YES	NO
I consent to being audio and video recorded as part of the project	YES	NO

(PRINT NAME)	
Signature of Participant:	Date:

Appendix 6: Copy of the interview questionnaire

1) How would you define Strategic HRD? Based on your answer could you please provide an example(s) of strategic HRD intervention(s) within your organisations?

2) How is the HR function perceived within your organisation? Do you believe that HRD is seen as a strategic business partner? (Either YES or NO, please state the reasons making you to believe that).

3) How would you describe the relationship between the HRD function and the business strategy of your organisation?

4) To what extent HRD maintains an ongoing strategic alignment with your organisation's strategic business missions and goals? (Examples required).

5) To what extent do you think it is important for line managers to be involved in HR activities? What would be the benefits and the barriers to achieve that?

6) To what extent are other organisational members (e.g. top management / employees etc.) involved in HR responsibilities (including designing and delivering HRD initiatives / environmental scanning)? What are their main responsibilities? How do you encourage them to participate?

7) To what extent do you believe that you have achieved a strategic business partnership with key organisational stakeholders (line managers, top management, employees etc.) so to promote your function's efficiency? How has their commitment been achieved? (Please provide examples of this partnership.)

8) Would you describe your HRD practices as being flexible (change quickly at low cost), agile (develop and apply quick competitive moves) and adaptive (establish fit with the new business circumstances)? Can you provide any examples indicating the above characteristics?

9) How would you describe your organisational culture and climate? What are the dominant cultural values of your organisation? Do you think the organisation has a strong culture and a supportive climate? (What makes you to believe that?)

10) To what extent do you consider that HRD plays a significant role in shaping both of them?

11) Which is the role of your HRD executives within your organisation? Have there any changes occurred within these roles owing to the crisis?

12) How important is HRD evaluation process in your bank? How do you measure HRD programs' effectiveness? Which HR metrics (if you do so) does your bank utilize in order to measure the effectiveness of its HRD interventions? (e.g. Human Capital ROI

/ Human Capital Added Value / Return on Training Investment / HR Department Spending per FTE / Retention Rate etc.).

13) In what way economic uncertainty has impacted on company's HR in general and HRD policies and practices in particular? Has the economic crisis meant a way to discover new ideas and best practices? To which extent the crisis offered new opportunities for your work?

14) What was the most immediate concern at the time of the crisis for HRD in your organisation?

15) What do you consider to be the major challenges for HRD in your organisation, prior-today-and after the recession? What do you foresee you would need to meet todays and future challenges? Are there any decisions you would take in a different way today?

16) Which other factors (except of the crisis) resulted in inhibiting or facilitating the implementation of HRD interventions within your organisation (e.g. political and legal context, labour unions, globalisation etc.)

17) How has operating within the banking sector shaped your approach to SHRD? Did your organisation experience industrial disputes or other forms of conflict as a by-product of the crisis?

Appendix 7: List of interview back up questions

HR Staff (at any level) – Top Management Executives

Crisis Impact on HR Practices (HRD)

1) How would you rate the severity of the economic crisis in terms of its impact on your organisation? Can you provide an example?

2) In what way economic uncertainty has impacted on company's HR in general and HRD (training and development, learning) policies and practices in particular? (Please provide examples).

3) If HRD has been affected by the crisis, in what ways compared to prior to the crisis?

4) Has the organisation benefited or damaged due to the changes catalysed by the crisis? In what ways?

5) Which was the role of the HR department in an attempt to address the challenges posed by the crisis/recession?

6) What was the most immediate concern at the time of the crisis for HRD in your organisation?

7) What HRD countermeasures did you adopt to handle the crisis? Please describe briefly the three most effective HRD practices implemented by your organisation during the recession.
(Reduced staff of the HR department / re-structured HR department / Cut HRD budgets / HR overall reductions / Increased use of internal staff for T&D / Outsourcing HR activities / other).

8) Is there a crisis management planning within your organisation?

9) How did you manage employee relations during the recession?

10) Has the economic crisis meant a way to discover new ideas and best practices? To which extent the crisis offered new opportunities for your work?

11) What do you consider to be the major challenges for HRD in your organisation, prior-today-and after the recession? What do you foresee you would need to meet todays and future challenges?

12) Are there any decisions you would take in a different way today?

18) How would you define Strategic HRD? Based on your answer could you please provide an example(s) of strategic HRD intervention(s) within your organisations?

19) Please highlight the top priorities in your organisation regarding Human Capital Development?

20) How SHRD impact upon employees? How significant is the impact of HRD in respect to the following areas? (1: HIGH, 2: LOW, 3: DON'T KNOW, 4: NO IMPACT)

Profitability	Employees' development
Financial Turnover	Accommodate Organisational Change
Productivity	Strategy Formulation
Market share	Raising employees' satisfaction and morale
Cost Reduction	

21) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:
(1: STRONGLY DISAGREE, 2: DISAGREE, 3: NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, 4: AGREE, 5: STRONGLY AGREE)
- HRD costs are very high
- HRD can influence and shape corporate strategy
- HRD outcomes focus on short-term financial results
- HRD outcomes adapt a more long-term orientation
- HRD outcomes are evaluated on an ongoing basis based on employees' knowledge transfer from learning/training activities to their work

22) How is the HR function perceived within your organisation? Do you believe that HRD is seen as a strategic business partner? (Either YES or NO, please state the reasons making you to believe that).

23) Which is the role of your HRD executives within your organisation? Have there any changes to these roles owing to the crisis?

24) How would you describe the relationship between the HRD function and the business strategy of your organisation? (e.g. HRD plays no role in business strategy / HRD is involved in implementing the business strategy / HRD provides input to the business strategy and helps implement it once it has been developed / HRD is a full partner in developing and implementing business strategy). Please provide relevant examples based on your answers.

25) How do you think HRD is maintaining ongoing strategic alignment with your organisation's strategic business needs? (Examples needed).

26) How far ahead does your company plan? Do you have a specific HRM/HRD policy?

27) Who makes the decisions regarding HRD interventions?

28) To what extent the involvement of line management executives facilitates or hinders the design, communication and implementation of the HRD offerings?

29) What do you consider to be the most critical HRD practices for driving excellence and value? How does your HRD function provide strategic value to your organisation?

30) Can you highlight the main problems associated with SHRD interventions within your organisation?

31) To what extent do you think that greater or less investments in HRD are needed?

Factors affecting HRD & Strategic Criteria (HRD mature organisation)

1) Which were the factors inhibiting or facilitating the implementation of SHRD interventions within your organisation (except of the crisis)?

2) What are your corporate strategy and vision? Does your bank covered by a formal strategic plan sets out objectives and how they will be achieved?

3) Are the same philosophies applied to both corporate strategy and strategic HR areas?

4) How would you describe the culture of your organisation? What is your organisational culture statement? What are the dominant cultural values of your organisation? Do you think the organisation has a strong culture? Why?

5) To what extent do you consider that HRD plays a significant role in shaping organisational culture?

6) How effective is your organisational climate in promoting HRD initiatives for the well-being of both the employees and the organisation? (Examples).

7) How does the way your organisation is structured support the goals/vision of the corporate strategy, and the way people are managed?

8) Was your organisation significantly re-structured as a consequence of the recent economic crisis? (YES / NO). What changes, if any, occurred within your HRD function and its programs owned to this restructuring?

9) How have your HR practices been affected from any changes within the political and legal context owing to the crisis?

10) How has operating within the banking sector shaped your approach to SHRD? Did your organisation experience industrial disputes or other forms of conflict as a by-product of the crisis?

11) Would you describe your HRD practices as being flexible (change quickly at low cost), agile (develop and apply quick competitive moves) and adaptive (establish fit with the new business circumstances)? Can you provide any examples indicating the above characteristics of your practices?

12) To what extent do you believe that you have achieved a strategic business partnership with key organisational stakeholders (line managers, employees etc.) so to promote HR function's efficiency? How is commitment gained from each respective group? (Please provide examples of this partnership.)

13) To what extent do you think it is important for line managers to be involved in HR (HRD) activities? What would be the benefits and the barriers to achieve that?

14) To what extent are other organisational members (employees etc.) involved in HR responsibilities (including designing and delivering HRD initiatives / environmental scanning)? What are their main responsibilities? How do you encourage them to participate?

15) Do you believe that your organisation's stakeholders perceive you as a strategic business partner? Based on your answer, why do you believe that?

16) How important is HRD evaluation process in your bank? Who is involved within it and how do you measure HRD programs' effectiveness?

17) Which HR metrics (if any) does your bank utilize in order to measure the effectiveness of its HRD interventions? (e.g. Human Capital ROI / Human Capital Added Value / Return on Training Investment / HR Department Spending per FTE / Retention Rate etc.).

18) Coming back to the factors you have mentioned earlier which inhibit or facilitate the implementation of SHRD interventions within your organisation (except of the crisis), which of those do you consider to maintain the maturity of your strategic HRD interventions?

Bank Managers (across organisational departments)

Crisis Impact on HRD

1) How would you rate the severity of the economic crisis in terms of its impact on your organisation? Can you provide an example?

2) In your opinion, in what way economic uncertainty has impacted on company's HR in general and HRD (training and development, learning) policies and practices in particular? (Please provide examples).

3) Has the organisation benefited or damaged due to the changes catalysed by the crisis? In what ways?

4) Which was your role within your organisation in an attempt to address the challenges posed by the crisis/recession?

5) What was the most immediate countermeasures your organisation adopted to handle the crisis? (In HR measures).

6) What do you consider to be the major challenges for HR in your organisation, prior-today-and after the recession? What do you foresee you would need to meet todays and future challenges?

7) Has the economic crisis meant a way to discover new ideas and best practices? To which extent the crisis offered new opportunities for your work within the banking industry?

8) Have you been involved in any HR activities as part of your job? If YES, what kind of HR responsibilities?

9) Is anything hindering you from implementing HR? Do you receive any support from delivering HR? Examples?

10) Do you participate in HR policy development? How? Do you think you should?

Strategic HRD

1) How would you define Strategic HR? Based on your answer could you please provide an example(s) of strategic HR intervention(s) within your organisations?

2) Please highlight the top priorities of your organisation regarding its workforce's development.

3) How SHRD impact upon employees? How significant is the impact of HRD in respect to the following areas? (1: HIGH,   2: LOW,   3: DON'T KNOW,   4: NO IMPACT)

Profitability	Employees' development
Financial Turnover	Accommodate Organisational Change
Productivity	Strategy Formulation
Market share	Raising employees' satisfaction and morale
Cost Reduction	

4) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:
- HRD costs are very high
- HRD can influence and shape corporate strategy
- HRD outcomes focus on short-term financial results
- HRD outcomes adapt a more long-term orientation
- HRD outcomes are evaluated on an ongoing basis based on employees' knowledge transfer from learning/training activities to their work

5) How is the HR function perceived within your organisation? Do you believe that HRD is seen as a strategic business partner? (Either YES or NO, please state the reasons making you to believe that).

6) How would you describe the relationship between the HR function and the business strategy of your organisation? (e.g. HRD plays no role in business strategy / HRD is involved in implementing the business strategy / HRD provides input to the business strategy and helps implement it once it has been developed / HRD is a full partner in developing and implementing business strategy). Please provide relevant examples based on your answers.

7) How far ahead does your company plan? Do you have a specific HRM/HRD policy? Who makes the decisions regarding HRD interventions?

8) What do you consider to be the most critical HR practices for driving excellence and value? How does your HRD function provide strategic value to your organisation?

9) Can you identify the main problems associated with SHRD interventions within your organisation?

10) To what extent do you think that greater or less investments in HRD are needed? (Especially during recessionary times).

1) Based on your opinion, which were the factors inhibiting or facilitating the implementation of HR within your organisation (except of the crisis)?

2) What are your corporate strategy and vision? Does your bank covered by a formal strategic plan sets out objectives and how they will be achieved?

3) How would you describe the culture of your organisation? What is your organisational culture statement? What are the dominant cultural values of your organisation? Do you think the organisation has a strong culture? Why?

4) To what extent do you consider that HR plays a significant role in shaping organisational culture?

5) How effective is your organisational climate in promoting HRD initiatives for the well-being of both the employees and the organisation? (Examples).

6) How does the way your organisation is structured support the goals/vision of the corporate strategy, and the way people are managed?

7) Was your organisation significantly re-structured as a consequence of the recent economic crisis? (YES / NO). What changes, if any, occurred within your HR function and its programs owned to this restructuring?

8) How have your HR practices been affected from any changes within the political and legal context owing to the crisis?

9) How has operating within the banking sector shape your HR policies? Did your organisation experience industrial disputes or other forms of conflict as a by-product of the crisis?

10) Would you describe your HR practices as being flexible (change quickly at low cost), agile (develop and apply quick competitive moves) and adaptive (establish fit with the new business circumstances)? Can you provide any examples indicating the above characteristics of your practices?

11) To what extent do you think it is important for you to be involved in HR activities? What would be the benefits and the barriers to achieve that?

12) To what extent are other organisational members (employees etc.) involved in HR responsibilities (including designing and delivering HRD initiatives / environmental scanning)? What are their main responsibilities? How do you encourage them to participate?

13) How important is to continuously evaluate your HR interventions? Are you involved in such activities and how do you measure HR programs' effectiveness?

14) Which HR metrics (if any) does your bank utilize in order to measure the effectiveness of its HRD interventions? (e.g. Human Capital ROI / Human Capital Added Value / Return on Training Investment / HR Department Spending per FTE / Retention Rate etc.).

15) Coming back to the factors you have mentioned earlier that either inhibit or facilitate the implementation of SHRD interventions within your organisation (except of the crisis), which of those do you consider to maintain the maturity of your organisation's strategic HRD interventions?

Employees

Crisis Impact on HRD

1) How would you rate the severity of the economic crisis in terms of its impact on your organisation? Can you provide an example?

2) In your opinion, in what way economic uncertainty has impacted on company's HR in general and HRD (training and development, learning) policies and practices in particular? (Please provide examples).

3) Has the organisation benefited or damaged due to the changes catalysed by the crisis? In what ways?

4) Which was the role of the HR department in an attempt to address the challenges posed by the crisis/recession?

5) What was the most immediate concern at the time of the crisis for HRD in your organisation?

6) What was the most immediate countermeasures your organisation adopted to handle the crisis? (In HR terms).

7) What do you consider to be the major challenges for HR in your organisation, prior-today-and after the recession?

8) Has the economic crisis meant a way to discover new ideas and best practices? To which extent the crisis offered new opportunities for your work within the banking industry? Have you benefited or not from the crisis? How?

9) Does your line manager / HR manager consults you (asks your opinion) regarding any developmental opportunities offered?
10) When was the last time you have received further training and development within your organisation?

11) How satisfied or not are you with the developmental opportunities provided from your organisation? Do you believe greater investments in employees' development are needed, especially during recessionary times? Justify your answer.

12) Is anything hindering you from undertaking further developmental opportunities? OR, do you receive any support for doing that? Examples?

Strategic HRD

1) How would you define Strategic HR? Based on your answer could you please provide an example(s) of strategic HR intervention(s) within your organisations?

2) Which do you think to be the top priorities of your organisation regarding its workforce's development?

3) How significant is the impact of HRD in respect to the following areas? (1: HIGH, 2: LOW, 3: DON'T KNOW, 4: NO IMPACT)

Profitability	Employees' development
Financial Turnover	Accommodate Organisational Change
Productivity	Strategy Formulation
Market share	Raising employees' satisfaction and morale
Cost Reduction	

4) To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following:
1: STRONGLY DISAGREE, 2: DISAGREE, 3: NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE, 4: AGREE, 5: STR. AGREE
- HRD costs are very high
- HRD can influence and shape corporate strategy
- HRD outcomes focus on short-term financial results
- HRD outcomes adapt a more long-term orientation
- HRD outcomes are evaluated on an ongoing basis based on employees' knowledge transfer from learning/training activities to their work

5) How is the HR function perceived within your organisation? Do you believe that HRD is seen as a strategic business partner? (Either YES or NO, please state the reasons make you to believe that).

6) How would you describe the relationship between the HR function and the business strategy of your organisation? (e.g. HRD plays no role in business strategy / HRD is involved in implementing the business strategy / HRD provides input to the business strategy and helps implement it once it has been developed / HRD is a full partner in developing and implementing business strategy). Please provide relevant examples based on your answers.

7) How would you describe the relationship between your line manager and your organisation's HR team? Do they collaborate so to offer you the up-to-date training?

8) What do you consider to be the most critical HR practices for driving excellence and value? How does your HRD function provide strategic value to your organisation?

9) Can you identify the main problems associated with SHRD interventions within your organisation?

10) To what extent do you think that greater or less investments in HRD are needed? (Especially during recessionary times).

Factors affecting HRD & Strategic Criteria (HRD mature organisation)

1) Based on your opinion, which were the factors inhibiting or facilitating the implementation of strategic HR interventions within your organisation (except of the crisis)?

2) What are your corporate strategy and vision? Does your bank covered by a formal strategic plan sets out objectives and how they will be achieved?

3) How would you describe your organisation's culture? What is your organisational culture statement? What are the dominant cultural values of your organisation?

4) To what extent do you consider that HR plays a significant role in shaping organisational culture?

5) How effective is your organisational climate in promoting HRD initiatives for the well-being of both the employees and the organisation? (Examples).

6) Was your organisation significantly re-structured as a consequence of the recent economic crisis? (YES / NO). What changes, if any, occurred within your HR function and its programs owned to this restructuring?

7) Do you consider your organisation's structure effective in terms of supporting the goals/vision of the business strategy and the way employees are managed?

8) Would you describe your organisation's HR practices as being flexible (change quickly at low cost), agile (develop and apply quick competitive moves) and adaptive (establish fit with the new business circumstances)? Can you provide any examples indicating the above characteristics of your practices?

9) To what extent do you think it is important for you to be consulted when designing and delivering HR activities? What would be the benefits and the barriers to achieve that?

10) How is the knowledge gained from your training measured? Are there any performance indicators, performance appraisal systems etc.? To what extent this evaluation process focuses more on long-term rather than short-term business results?

11) Which of the afore stated factors (hindering or facilitating the implementation of Strategic HR interventions) do you consider to be the most important for maintaining the maturity of your organisation's strategic approach (including HR practices)?