Strategic Human Resource Development in times of business and economic uncertainty: The Case of Greek Banks

Abstract

Purpose - The paper operationalizes a modified SHRD framework to examine managerial perceptions of the strategic embeddedness of HRD in organisations in times of business and economic uncertainty.

Design/Methodology/Approach – The paper draws on qualitative research data, following a case-study research design, and semi-structured interviews with forty-four participants to enable an in-depth investigation of managerial perspectives.

Findings – Research findings outline complexities in both understanding and operationalising SHRD in times of crisis which flow from managerial differing viewpoints.

Research limitations – Research findings and conclusions are subject to 'respondent bias' as events occurred several years ago, thus participants may not fully recall how SHRD has changed overtime. Focusing on a unique industrial sector, as well as to a specific national context, limits the generalisation of the findings in comparative contexts.

Practical implications – Owing to the ongoing business and economic uncertainty, this study could serve as a powerful tool at the hands of HRD professionals to effectively assess the nature of their HRD interventions in their organisations.

Originality/Value – Having a modified SHRD framework assessed in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) contexts, the reality of SHRD in organisations is examined. In addition, focusing on a single sector overcomes the "one-size fits all" proposition of prominent SHRD models. Lastly, the paper expands SHRD literature by examining managerial perspectives on SHRD into understudied national and industrial contexts.

Keywords: Managerial Perceptions, Strategic Human Resource Development, Uncertainty, Economic Crisis, Greek Banks.

Paper Type – Research Paper

Managerial Perceptions of SHRD in times of business and economic uncertainty

Introduction

The onset of the 2008 global economic crisis, the prolonged recession followed, as well as Brexit and the current covid-19 pandemic, all have challenged organisations to restructure their HRD strategies, mainly owing to the significant change (e.g. fierce competition, business amalgamations, sector restructurings, change of employment regimes, extensive HRD budget cuts etc.) brought forward for most sectors across the globe (Abel and Gietel-Basten, 2020; Hodder, 2020; Fana et al. 2020; Chu, 2017; Rachman, 2016). Such adverse conditions accentuated most organisations' weaknesses to cope with business and economic uncertainty to secure their survival and compete at national and international levels. A sector that was heavily affected was that of the financial services, and particularly banking organisations across the globe. Eventually, one of their first organisational casualties relate to the reconsideration of their SHRD plans and policies.

Having prominent SHRD research mostly conducted in "static" business and economic environments, empirical research lacks in examining the application and operationalisation of SHRD under VUCA contexts. The paper reports on managerial perceptions of SHRD in Greek banks by examining the components of a modified SHRD framework (Mitsakis, 2019) under the challenging conditions of VUCA contexts, namely that of the economic crisis. Examining the troubles, and the tremendous restructuring under which the sector underwent, could draw attention to comparable sectors and economies both within and outside the Eurozone.

The article divides into four main parts. Part one offers a review of prominent SHRD models to outline their key propositions and limitations, and eventually to conclude with the operationalisation of that suggested by Mitsakis (2019). In this part, the two research questions that drive the focus of this study are also presented. Part two outlines the chosen methodology and the rationale for researching Greek banks. Part three presents the empirical research findings and discusses these in relation to the mainstream literature and research. Lastly, part four details the research contribution, limitations, and the recommendations for future research, before making final concluding remarks.

Prominent Strategic Human Resource Development Models

Prominent SHRD models suggest specific characteristics to describe the strategic embeddedness of HRD in organisations. However, a problem with SHRD is its frequent assessment from many different perspectives and contexts.

Research embracing the universalistic perspective suggests that specific SHRD practices are linked to organisational performance and effectiveness, further arguing that the greater the SHRD practices are in organisations, the more efficient organisations become (Garavan, 1991; Pfeffer, 1998; McCracken and Wallace, 2000a&b; Dwyer, 2000; Becker et al. 2001; Garavan 2007). Amongst the first adopting this perspective, Garavan (1991) suggested an SHRD model with nine strategic components to assess SHRD. The author further argued for specific contextual agents that contribute to SHRD's focus (e.g. organisational culture, external environment, organisational stakeholders, on-going change, technology, organisational structure) (ibid). Finally, the author argued for SHRD practices to align, either vertically or horizontally, with corporate objectives; a proposition also welcomed by Torraco and Swanson (1995) (see table 1).

Insert table 1 here

Indeed, a crucial contextual agent (e.g. economic crisis) is considered as a key impact factor of HRD's strategicness, fully embraced by Mitsakis' (2019) modified SHRD framework. The author argued that rather than solely promoting a vertical or horizontal alignment, a multi-layered integration is needed instead (e.g., *vertical* – SHRD with business strategy, *horizontal* – SHRD with SHRM, *internal* – SHRD with other organisational practices/processes, and *external* – SHRD with macro-environmental challenges) to enable organisations to evaluate micro- and macro-environmental contexts better; a proposition lacking on previous SHRD models (ibid). Mitsakis (2020) further argued that if all strategic integrations are established, SHRD can then enhance its resilience which in turn could contribute to organisational resilience and adaptability especially during times of business and economic uncertainty and complexity.

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Universalistic-focused SHRD research further implies that research findings applied within specific national and industrial contexts are applicable to other similar contexts. However, there are empirical difficulties in grounding abstracted theories across sectors in one survey-based study. For example, critics of abstracted quantitative and/or qualitative approaches to SHRD generalise ethnocentric American and/or British approaches as the one best way to conduct and report research findings (Cooke, 2018). Thus, what is nationally, or even organisational specific, appears applicable in other national and industrial contexts without difficulty, but as we suggest this is frequently not the case (see table 2).

Insert table 2 here

Later, it was Lee (1996a&b) who proposed a scale to assess SHRD by measuring the "sophistication of training" in organisations; therein, the degree of strategic integration within corporate strategy connects SHRD to the volume of training offered in organisations. This approach, however, provides partial evidence of the strategic embeddedness of HRD as it excludes other vital practices, for example, evaluation, change management and stakeholder involvement in SHRD initiatives, all of which can enhance SHRD embeddedness in organisations.

Ulrich (1998), Pfeffer (1998) and Becker et al. (2001) further added to the SHRD discourse by arguing that greater SHRD interventions could strengthen its strategic positioning in organisations through its contribution to performance improvements, with that eventually enhancing its strategic business partnering role as well. However, such end-point assumptions (e.g. performance improvements) associate with the contingency SHRD research perspective which diminishes other important roles for SHRD to purely performance-related outcomes. It is also problematic the fact that these models emphasised on "driving change"; an unclear notion since not all change is necessarily strategic in nature.

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Other models are also subject to criticism when they attribute suggestions of becoming 'learning organisations' to SHRD (Gilley and Gilley, 2003; Gilley and Maycunich, 2000a&b). This proposition may overlook key concerns relating to training and development such as who receives training, and who decides on training needs. Therefore, Mitsakis' (2019) modified SHRD framework moves away from end-point considerations to suggest specific strategic components, which are equally weighted in enhancing the strategic embeddedness of HRD in organisations. This comes in full compliance with other researchers (e.g. Garavan, 2007; Robinson and Robinson, 2005; Dwyer, 2000) who argued that attaining a SHRD partnering role in organisations could allow HRD professionals to enhance their value proposition and eventually for performative outcomes to emerge too (e.g., individual efficiency and productivity, organisational performance, quality customer service etc.).

A major contribution was made by McCracken and Wallace (2000a&b) who brought previous SHRD suggestions into a newly formed SHRD model. The authors suggested that all strategic criteria should be interrelated towards the creation of a strong learning culture in organisations, and emphasised on the ability of SHRD to proactively address VUCA landscapes and thus to contribute to business growth and success (ibid). Building upon McCracken and Wallace's (2000a&b) suggestions, Mitsakis (2019) also argued for a multi-layered integration through its "environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plans and policies strategic criterion to allow a constant evaluation of both micro and macro contexts; a key recommendation also offered by Dusoye and Oogarah (2016). McCracken and Wallace's (2000a&b) SHRD model offers many other interesting points as well (e.g. HRD to shape organisational missions and goals, active involvement of LMs etc.), all of which highly informed Mitsakis (2019) modified SHRD framework. So far, prominent SHRD models also overlooked employees' voicing in organisations; a key consideration addressed by Mitsakis (2019). As such, the author's modified SHRD framework offers specific strategic components (e.g. 'environmentally-integrated HRD strategies, plans and policies', 'environmental scanning and the inclusion of senior managers, line managers, and employees', 'strategic partnerships with key organisational

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stakeholders') which support a multi-layered integration; a key requirement in times of business and economic uncertainty and complexity (table 1).

Boudreau and Ramstad (2004) proposed their 'Human Capacity Bridge' framework (see table 1), which narrowly focused on identifying the areas where the greatest impact is made by talented employees, further arguing that it is through SHRD that business success can be achieved, and thus placing it as a pivotal player in organisations (ibid). However, the framework lacks in considering other factors that could be simultaneously at play in enhancing or diminishing SHRD embeddedness in organisations. Thus, Robinson and Robinson (2005) argued for HRD to become a strategic business partner in organisations through specific HRD accountabilities (see table 1). Key propositions offered by the authors are embedded into the strategic components proposed by Mitsakis (2019) SHRD framework (e.g. HRD shaping organisational missions, goals and strategies, and the business culture, HRD environmental scanning through the inclusion of senior managers, line managers and employees, building strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders).

Garavan (2007) proposed a SHRD model (fig.1) which focused on performative outcomes through facilitating organisational change.

Insert figure 1 here

The model can be viewed as the most informed one due to its extensive internal and external dimensions and outcomes, as well as because of the recognition of multi-national, national, and local contexts; yet, all these also constitute the model difficult to operationalise.

Dusoye and Oogarah's (2016) study further examined the application of SHRD in Mauritius through the application and operationalisation of a tailor-made SHRD framework (table 1). The authors' SHRD framework argued for the interrelation of various levels (i.e. Micro – the individual, Meso – the organisation, Macro – national and international) in assessing the design, implementation,

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and evaluation of the HRD strategy in organisations. Indeed, the consideration of all levels is crucial while assessing SHRD in VUCA contexts; the key focus of this research paper.

Lastly, Mitsakis' (2019) modified SHRD framework (table 1) considers participatory management as a key strategic component which should be reflected on the SHRD characteristics (e.g. environmental scanning through the inclusion of senior managers, branch managers and employees, strategic partnerships with key stakeholders). This is a key recommendation that comes in line with this paper's focus on managerial perceptions of SHRD. Building upon McCracken and Wallace's (2000a&b) model, Mitsakis (2019) modified SHRD framework argues that rather than implementing environmental scanning (that is the evaluation of internal and external environments) by senior management in isolation, line managers' and employees' should also be involved. Furthermore, instead of confining strategic partnerships to those between HRD executives and line managers, the presence of strategic partnerships between senior management and employees are also measured to gauge a broader stakeholder perspective (ibid). An extensive role for HRD professionals is further suggested to enable them to better cope with business uncertainty. Most importantly, SHRD strategies, plans, and policies should be 'environmentally-integrated' through attaining multiple alignments (e.g., vertical, horizontal, external and internal) to allow a better evaluation of both internal and external environmental contexts and eventually to better inform SHRD and business decisions (ibid). Mitsakis (2017) assessed employees' perceptions of SHRD in Greek banks, yet managerial perceptions were not offered for a comparative discussion.

To summarise, established SHRD models are frequently assessed from many abstracted perspectives and contexts, which effectively makes them typologies. Secondly, differential application of the models across diverse organisations leads to looser empirical specification in individual sectors. Although prominent SHRD models offer insightful suggestions, they also come with limitations which need to be considered. One of their main disadvantages is that all have been operationalised (expect that of Mitsakis, 2019) within stable business and economic environments, and therefore empirically the literature lacks application to the dynamic uncertainty of contemporary business and economic

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landscapes. Furthermore, prominent SHRD models examined SHRD embeddedness following a multi-sectoral approach in US, UK and/or Ireland (see table 2). This research paper examined SHRD in specific national and industrial contexts to overcome the 'one-size fits all' problem.

Taking all into account, this research study operationalised Mitsakis' (2019) modified SHRD framework in one sector (i.e. banking) and a different country (i.e. Greece) to examine SHRD into understudied geographical/national and industrial contexts through assessing managerial perceptions of SHRD (thus, expanding Mitsakis, 2017 research of employees' perspectives of SHRD in the same national and industrial context). As such, this study addresses two research questions; the first aims to depict managerial perceptions (e.g. branch managers and HR staff) on the enactment of SHRD components by their organisations, and the second to investigate the extent to which SHRD is strategically embedded in their organisations during a period of volatility, uncertainty and complexity.

Research Question 1: *How do branch managers and HR staff perceive SHRD?*

Research Question 2: *How strategically embedded has SHRD been in organisations from the perspective of HR staff and branch managers, and over the period of the economic crisis?*

Methodology and Rationale for researching Greek banks

The study draws on qualitative research data, reporting on forty-four semi-structured interviews (June-September 2019) with HR staff and branch managers (table 3), complemented by document analysis (e.g. business and HR reports). Examining managerial perceptions could shed light into the ways through which managers could influence SHRD processes, beyond simply implementing them. In terms of our participants' gender and year of service, there was an equal representation from both banks to enhance reliability of our interviews (table 3). Purposive and snowball sampling techniques used to secure participants who held the necessary knowledge to respond to key interview questions examining the application of SHRD in times of the economic crisis. Particularly, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to identify participants with more than eleven years of service in each bank, a length of tenure that enables a retrospective perception. Respectively, the snowball technique enabled the

researcher to increase his pool of participants by securing that people recommended to be interviewed, all meet the necessary criteria to address key questions retrospectively. Both techniques contributed in enhancing the validity and reliability of the research design (Yin, 2017).

Insert table 3 here

Additionally, semi-structured interviews featured as the best option to retrospectively gather our participants' insights and delve into their perception of SHRD pre- and post-crisis. Semi-structured interviews further offer flexibility (through a set of pre-defined questions and probing ones) to result to richer information due to their increased focus on details and certainty (Robson, 2000). Despite several data quality issues relating with the use of semi-structured interviews (e.g. generalisability, flexibility, forms of bias, lack of standardisation), these could generate detailed and insightful data for consideration which is easy to be analysed through the use of various software packages (e.g. NVivo). Regarding the ethical considerations relating to this research study, the researcher adhered to the participants' and organisations' business ethics and code of conduct. Therefore, a participant information sheet, context form and an ethics application form were administered to all participants prior to all interviews to inform that all information will be kept confidential. Therefore, code names were provided for all interviewees to ensure anonymity (e.g., HR Director – "HR Dir", Branch Manager – "BM", HR Assistant – "HR Asst" etc.). To back up key suggestions returned, organisational documents used to enable data triangulation. Lastly, regarding the number of participants (44), the researcher decided to conduct interviews up to the number where saturation is evidenced.

Furthermore, in line with Morgan's (2007) suggestions, the researcher adopted a pragmatic realist philosophical stance, through abductive reasoning, that enabled him to reveal multiple realities of SHRD pre- and post-crisis, and thus to outline the complexity, interacting and multi-dimensional nature of the SHRD understanding and operationalisation in organisations. In addition, pragmatists see

research methods as "tools for tasks" and thus could use those which better suit the needs of the research study (ibid).

Concerning the rationale for examining Greek banks, pre-crisis, these were widely recognised as 'people-oriented' in relation to their competitive strategies to change, grow therein and survival. Yet, the crisis dramatically altered this orientation (Bouas and Katsimardos, 2012). The sector witnessed significant change, fierce competition, and on-going business consolidation, where many SHRD interventions appeared as the first casualties of forced change (ibid). Particularly, for our case study banks A and B, much interest centers on their size (the largest out of five in total – approximately 20.000-22.000 employees each), as well as on their market presence (more than 130 years each). Both underwent tremendous business restructuring through significant business consolidation due to the crisis.

The Greek banking sector represents an understudied geographical/national and industrial context, with research being nascent both on and the Greek banking sector within VUCA contexts (only one paper by Mitsakis, 2017). Therefore, by grounding such a particularised approach (SHRD in Greek Banks) pre- and post-crisis, and through examining managerial perceptions of SHRD, this study presents an informative case that may provide a comparative potential to other business sectors and crisis-ridden Eurozone nations and/or globally.

Empirical application of the modified SHRD Framework to assess managerial perceptions.

The empirical material on managerial perspectives, under each proposition heading following the strategic components of Mitsakis (2019) modified SHRD framework, allows to build a composite comparative picture of SHRD in both banks pre- and post-crisis.

The ability of HRD to shape organisational mission, goals and strategies

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A strategic outlook must find voice to report on the effects of corporate strategy for all stakeholders (Holbeche, 2009). In this study, HR staff from both banks were keen to highlight the strategic position of their department with their respective board of directors (BoD). This is also consistent with key theoretical suggestions outlining the central role of SHRD during the formulation of corporate strategy (Mendenhall et al. 2012). As such, all HR staff, in each bank, referred to HR's strong voice within the senior executive team both before and after the crisis; the following responses are typical of these claims:

'*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. That was the case before the crisis, as well as these days*' (HR Dir – bank A).

'*Everyone recognises our value. Thus, we constantly aim at meeting our stakeholders' expectations through the provision of exceptional services that meet their unique needs. To do so, HR is situated within the BoD. Nothing has changed due to crisis*' (HR Dir – bank B)

The assertion of the HR Director in bank A was validated in a search of organisational documents, but without indicating how the HR department is actively involved within the BoD; for example, bank A's CSR Report 2018 and Annual Report 2018 fail to do so. Furthermore, the HR director was unable to provide further examples to support his arguments, stating:

'*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*' (HR Dir – bank A).

Similarly, other HR staff (2 HR Administrators, 2 HR Assistants & 1 HR Officer) could not offer specific examples of how their department played a strategic role within bank A's BoD. That suggests

that their perception of a strategic role is an aspirational one, rather than one offering clear-cut evidence.

In contrast to this, the narrative presented differently in bank B, where all HR staff highlighted consultation with them during the formulation of corporate strategy via close co-operation between its executives and senior management. A proposition highly welcomed as key requirement of HRD excellence (Gillon, 2011: Oreg and Berson, 2011). To support this assertion, an HR assistant argued:

'People recognise and value our work, as we represent the link between the business and its workforce. We always aim to deliver exceptional services to meet our stakeholders' needs and eventually to collectively improve at all levels. To achieve that, HR has a voice within our BoD. Either before or after the crisis, our role did not change much' (HR Asst – bank B).

Document analysis supports such assertions for bank B; the CSR reports 2018 & 2018 reveal that senior executives welcomed the active involvement of HR executives during the formulation of its business priorities. This was primarily so because of business amalgamations following on from the crisis. The annual report 2018 further indicated that the HRD function played a key role in the formulation of bank B's business strategy, particularly for the citation of a business shift towards the enhancement of their front-line operations. Both inclusions have helped bank B to achieve its objectives better, and thus to change and effectively adapt to contemporary post-crisis business conditions.

In line with their HR colleagues, most branch managers interviewed at bank B outlined the capacity of HR (pre- and post-crisis) to offer a wide variety of tools and solutions. For example, our respondents appeared to base their evidence on the fact that their bank was the first to introduce innovative services and products and was the sector leader regarding business expansion in foreign markets. They also reported on the leadership capacity of HR which goes 'hand-in-glove' with senior management priorities. Thus, a branch manager stated:

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'HR leadership comes from the HR department. I strongly believe that it has always been senior management's priority to engage HR people, as they are the link between the organisation and its workforce. Although a minor HR setback may be evidenced these days, all it needs to do is to change its mindset to its previous state if it wants to regain its leading behaviour' (BM – bank B)

Another respondent later considered the transitional phase under which bank B now operates by arguing that although HR's strategic positioning may appear in jeopardy, it would return stronger soon.

'The banking industry is all about services and products. Therefore, it can be described as a 'knowledge-intensive' sector. Eventually, our HR department aims to embrace and circulate such a belief across all organisational departments. I suppose this people-oriented mentality also influences our business culture. Some might argue that HR services and systems were affected heavily, yet that is not true. You could draw upon evidence offered within our annual reports etc. to outline the significance of our HR approach' (BM – bank B)

There were though two respondents who suggested that HR lost its position compared to its pre-crisis profile owing to staff shortages resulting from the extensive business amalgamations. Indicatively, a branch manager 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. 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 – Case B).

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Like their colleagues in bank B, all managers in bank A argued that the HR department enjoyed a strategic profile during pre-crisis growth, but they noticed a significant setback and a more functional role for it after the onset of the crisis.

'HR executives' role is more on supporting the BoD rather than contributing to its agenda. Yet, that was not happening in the past when they held a more influential role' (BM – bank A).

'*When banks expanded to foreign markets, HR was consulted on a regular basis. Business strategies formulated according to its suggestions, as everything had to do with managing people across different cultures. That is missing these days*' (BM – bank A)

Overall, the consensus of respondents in bank A suggests that since the organisation is struggling to ensure its survival, top-down business directions are now followed with limited HR intervention. Accordingly, HRD activities (either as these being described as strategic in nature or not) are viewed as not contributing significantly to the achievement of the organisational goals, nor in shaping them, at least for one of the two case study organisations. In summary, research evidence is stronger on the ability of the HRD function to actively shape business strategies and goals pre-crisis. In comparison, post-crisis SHRD has deteriorated following the adoption of a top-down approach which reflects retrenchment across the sector. Thus, bank A managers noticed a significant setback in the profile of their HR department, whereas bank B respondents suggested the presence of minor changes in their HR department's importance compared to its pre-crisis profile. The latter further claimed that by maintaining strategic alignment between the HR and the corporate objectives, the department could still demonstrate its leadership and value-added capacity.

HRD environmental scanning and the inclusion of Senior Managers, Branch Managers, and Employees

Research findings for bank B are more clear-cut than that for bank A. The former reported greater scanning activities, along with the inclusion of its senior managers, HR executives and some of its branch managers. Thus, an HR manager argued:

'*Our team of senior executives acknowledges the importance of the bank's workforce as a tool of its success. Eventually, our HR team is called to examine all business growth opportunities, and their workforce implications, by carrying out relevant environmental scanning activities. Feedback is also welcomed from branch managers who are willing to participate in such processes. Yet, there is still room for improvement*' (HR Mgr – bank B)

Branch managers at bank B confirmed their active involvement in such processes, along with undertaking some HR responsibilities within their job contexts (e.g., initial scanning of CVs, selection interviews, performance appraisals etc.). Although they argued that environmental scanning was slightly greater in the past, they also stressed that the bank constantly seeks for business opportunities to exploit and regularly confronts any environmental threats. A branch manager stated:

'*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. Therefore, being at the forefront of our organisation's operations, HR looks for our advice with regards to staffing and training needs, while we are solely responsible for delivering performance appraisals and bonus schemes according to our people's performance*' (BM – bank B)

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HR respondents (HR Director & 2 HR Officers) from bank B further argued that their branch managers are the most appropriate colleagues to represent their front-line employees as intermediaries. They also claimed that what has changed from pre-crisis is the context of scanning, which now focuses on their front-line operations to align with contemporary business objectives (e.g., enhancement of front-line operational network). Finally, the annual report for 2018 illustrates that senior management in bank B welcomes the active involvement of HR and branch managers in the formulation of the corporate strategy and objectives, so to collectively contribute to workforce creativity and adaptability to business change.

Conversely, most of the managers in bank A emphasised their bank's HRD approach as being unable to take advantage of favorable business opportunities due to an absence of environmental scanning. This absence was not the case pre-crisis, as all respondents (10 in total) highlighted a more proactive HRD role through the implementation of various scanning techniques (e.g. SWOT & PESTLE analyses, employee attitude surveys etc.). Accordingly, a branch manager argued:

'*We used to implement SWOT and PESTLE analysis as the ultimate business tools. Nowadays, both planning processes sound like alien practices. Thus, I assume scanning is a story of a prosperous past. Now, HR's concern is to do more with less, back to basic economics right?*' (BM – bank A)

An HR assistant confirmed the above assertion by highlighting the department's pre-crisis proactive nature compared to its post-crisis operational role:

'*Before, we utilized a variety of HR analytical tools, such as HR metrics, allowing us to predict future needs, especially when it came to business expansion. Today, all we need to do is to ensure that workforce-related costs remain low. Overall, our role was highly restricted with a limited budget in our hands*' (HR Asst – bank A)

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Once again, greater evidence is offered for bank B with regards to this specific strategic criterion. Key propositions returned by respondents are supported by respective theoretical suggestions arguing as the most important condition of an organisation's attention to SHRD its environmental processes in line with its human capital and organisational capabilities as a source of organisaitonal efficiency and competitiveness (Felstead et al. 2012; David, 2011). The inclusion of senior and line managers is also highly commented within the literature as. A crucial success element in such processes (Ramachandra et al. 2011). Interestetly though is the fact that both organisations missed to include their employees (e.g. front-line) in environmental scanning; thus, coming partially in contrast to the proposition made by the reformed SHRD framework arguing for employees to have voice in relevant processes, as well as opposing key theoretical propositions outlining the importance of employees' voicing as a crucial element of organisational success in times of business turbulence and change through insightful contributions on decision making around key challenges faced by organisations (Purcell and Hall, 2012; Bennett, 2011).

'Environmentally-integrated' HRD strategies, plans, and policies

Organisational preparedness to environmental challenges via the provision of 'environmentally-integrated' HRD strategies, plans and policies (through a multidimensional alignment) can offer an indication of greater SHRD capabilities at firm level (Garavan et al. 2016). A large majority of the managers interviewed (16 from both banks), and all from both HR departments, acknowledged HRD's competitiveness and strategic integration by highlighting its alignment with contemporary corporate objectives. All respondents (both banks) recognised that the onset of crisis witnessed their employer totally revising business and HRD strategies in such a way to ensure organisational survival. Therefore, the adoption of an instrumental, short-term business approach was evident. Respondents beyond HR further argued that the HR department was engaged in accomplishing business objectives through relevant training offerings, such as e-learning and webinars to front-line employees (e.g., financial services knowledge and development of selling skills, financial anti-corruption and fraud behaviours,

green management etc.); these were the ones most needed training to manage firm-level responses to crisis.

Furthermore, our respondents (both HR staff and branch managers) agreed that lower training budgets do not automatically diminish the quality of their offerings, which still aim to equip employees through up to date SHRD interventions. Branch managers and HR staff from both banks suggested:

'*Business environments are constantly changing, and banks change respectively. However, if you do not ensure your financial survival, that can be proved fatal for the business. Accordingly, training being offered by our organisation had to be revised to better meet new business requirements*' (BM – bank A)

'*We need to maintain a fit with the constantly changing business world. Thus, e-learning and webinars are of high quality, timely and cost efficient, and better suited for our globalised e-world*' (HRD Mgr – bank A)

'*Today, delivering outstanding customer service is our new business focus. That will ensure our firm's viability and prosperity. Regardless of the significant cutbacks of most HRD initiatives, I believe that those being offered now are more tailored to our specific business needs. Their cost-effectiveness and flexibility can also be outlined*' (BM – bank B)

'*Our role was greater yet felt back due to the economic shock. That is not an excuse; it is a fact. However, thinking about our revised business goals, we believe that our e-HRD deliverables highly contribute to their successful completion*' (HR Mgr – bank B).

It seems there is a consensus concerning this specific strategic criterion with all indicating a more significant role of SHRD pre-crisis, without this being automatically diminished post-crisis. Our

respondents' suggestions come in line with the mainstream literature arguing for a strategic alignment between SHRD and key stakeholders, as well as internal and external contexts, to offer a better evaluation of emerging challenges (Wang et al. 2009; Moynihan, 2008; Beer et al. 2005; Ruta, 2005).

HRD and strategic partnerships with key organisational stakeholders.

Top management's strategic HR orientation could inform strategic decision-making concerning workforce development (Sung and Choi, 2018). The HR teams at both banks reported a strategic partnership with senior management flowing from the representation of HR on the BoD. However, HR staff at bank A (Training and Development Manager, HR Officer, HR Assistant) were unable to support such assertions with relevant examples or illustrate how the decision to offer additional training to their front-line employees and managers resulted from a strategic partnership between HR and line managers, rather than being a top-down direction.

In contrast, HR staff from bank B outlined the cooperation between senior executives and HR staff to define new organisational policies and strategies. The latter further claimed that their place on the BoD is a strong indication of its strategic voice and partnership with top management. Furthermore, pre- and post-crisis, the 'top level' role of HR was highlighted; it was amongst the first functions to be consulted for every business initiative.

'*Either in the past or today, HR holds knowledge of all organisational burning issues and accordingly provides its consultation in order to resolve them. As to that, it is also situated within our organisation's BoD*' (HR Asst – bank B)

Branch managers at bank B also argued that there was a de-centralization of most HR practices to allow HR executives to concentrate more on strategic and long-term aspects, as suggested earlier. A branch manager argued:

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'*I believe that our organisation understands the vital role of its front-line operations. Therefore, in many cases, we have been advised regarding upcoming training offerings besides incorporating HR responsibilities within our daily work agenda. Hope it will stay this way until a business upturn to further enhance our role*' (BM – bank B)

Contradictory, a vast majority of managerial respondents from bank A emphasised their lack of participation in HR policy development, or within any other HR intervention, although they are the ones closest to the bank's front-line employees. Indicatively, a branch manager stated:

'*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 to provide us with additional training, and eventually to enhance our efficiency, productivity, and quality of service delivery*' (BM – bank A)

An absence in both banks of strategically partnering with their employees, and other stakeholders (e.g., shareholders, customers etc.) is evident. Research findings with regards to this strategic criterion oppose key theoretical propositions arguing for multi-stakeholder voicing in organisations for benefits such as enhanced individual and organisational performance, and commitment (Crane and Matten, 2007; Greenwood, 2007), stakeholder satisfaction and industrial citizenship (Bishop and Levine, 1999), better decision making (Armstrong, 2006), and business success (Bennett, 2010; Danford et al. 2005). Overall, bank B appears more open than bank A to building strategic partnerships with its managers. Its senior executives support the promotion of these partnerships through the active involvement of their managers to address business concerns collectively. Most of the managers interviewed at bank B concluded that senior management is perceptive enough to detect signs of emerging economic uncertainty, political change, and deficiencies in business and human capital resources. Not the same case for bank A though.

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The role of HRD executives.

Within dynamic periods of change, HRD executives are expected to undertake a strategic role to facilitate individual and organisational change. However, a large majority of the managers from bank A argued that they do not expect anything from an under-developed and immature business function compared to a more mature one pre-crisis; the following are typical of these views.

'*It is supposed that the HR people are those who should empower others within the organisation; yet, they are the ones who need to be endowed with an extra capacity to perform their roles effectively. That was not the case pre-crisis when they could do so*' (BM – bank A)

'*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. I need to admit though that their role pre-crisis (owing to business expansion) was more strategic-oriented, highly contributing to the successful formulation and implementation of our business growth strategies*' (BM – bank A)

These positions are in line with those of two managers from bank B who further argued that HR staff always lacked leadership skills in developing staff to cope with periods of turbulence and change. On the other hand, most managers in bank B acknowledged that their HR department undergoes a transitional phase due to organisational and sectoral restructuring; thus, they expect a setback but a return as well through undertaking a more strategic role within the organisation by suggesting:

'*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 inevitable for all departments to be affected. Our HR department is going through a redevelopment process, but it always plays an important role, like the one had in the past*' (BM – bank B)

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'*Whereas it is under-staffed, like 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 to previous states*'' (BM – bank B)

Those seven branch managers further outlined that their HRD function possesses the necessary skills (e.g., HR professional experience, leadership etc.) to be at the forefront. This contrast between managerial views may be explained by the greater involvement of managers in bank B in HR/HRD initiatives compared to that of their colleagues in bank A. However, all branch managers, from both banks, agreed that a more proactive role for their HRD function (and the HR department as a whole) prevailed pre-crisis owing to the growth strategies in place at that time.

The HR staff, from both organisations, initially recognised that business restructuring had affected their department (e.g., staff redundancies), yet without diminishing its strategic role by highlighting:

'*We are currently working towards the design, development, and implementation of those practices 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 concerning its human capital*'' (HR Dir – bank A).

'*Owing to the latest business amalgamations changes occurred within most departments and our workforce as well. 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 is a reciprocal relationship*''
(HR Mgr – bank B)

All HR staff from both banks further reported that they still work to their full potential to deliver exceptional service to their stakeholders. They also claimed that business transformation would strengthen their strategic position within the newly formed banking corporation (due to business amalgamations), if not in the short-term, definitely in the long run. Two HR Assistants (one from each bank) concluded that this transition would benefit HRD's state, as it will offer space for revising its priorities and values by arguing:

'*Although we have a restricted budget within our hands and many question our value proposition, our focus remains the same; to enhance our people and our business. Revisions on our plans are required though so to reflect today's environmental requirements and to offer strategic suggestions*' (HR Asst – bank A)

'*Either before or after the crisis, our services aim to develop our staff and to help our business to grow. It is worth noting that we are also trained in order to stay updated with the latest trends and HR developments so to offer better services to our stakeholders*' (HR Asst – bank B).

Overall, a more strategic role for HRD executives is evidenced pre-crisis, with them leading individual and organisational change through an enhanced and influential role; thus, confirming key literature propositions on HRD executives being leaders and facilitators of change (Lawler and Mohrman, 2003; Ehrlich, 1999). Post-crisis though, the role of HRD executives was diminished in both banks, with them having a slightly enhanced role in bank B compared to bank A.

The role of HRD in shaping business culture

Apart from one branch manager, his colleagues in bank A argued that although a more transparent business culture is evident within their divisions, it is not effectively communicated across the

organisation. Therefore, to many managers, organisational values are not clear enough to embrace within their job contexts. A branch manager argued:

'*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 though (e.g., retail divisions, front-line operations etc.). I believe crisis has changed business priorities from communicating business objectives across all organisational members to just ensuring that specific departments are aware of these. Yet, all departments could contribute to organisational survival and growth through their aligned practices and strategies*' (BM – bank A)

This view may indicate the inability of the HR department to communicate across the organisation, while the function demonstrates its ability to shape commitment in internal communication flows top-down. However, all respondents (HR staff and Branch managers) concluded that before the crisis, HR held the capacity to do so owing to a different business philosophy, which flowed from the banks' expansion into foreign markets. A branch manager stated:

'*Our business culture 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. That wasn't the case in the prosperous past*' (BM – bank A)

The narrative presented differently in bank B where managers argued that both before and after the crisis, their organisational culture was strong and clearly communicated. Meanwhile, they further claimed that it welcomes the development of training initiatives that are fully aligned with new business imperatives. However, the role of SHRD in influencing and shaping these has been restricted due to the cultural transition after the latest business amalgamations and the impact of the crisis. Thus, branch managers argued that time is needed before judging SHRD's overall capacity to do so.

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The views of HR respondents on cultural values at bank B are clear, well defined and well communicated across all business units. HR staff further argued that relevant training is also offered to facilitate a cultural transition to enable all employees to embrace the newly formed priorities/values within their work and life contexts. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that they were more capable of shaping both in the past, as well as still playing a crucial role throughout their formation by arguing:

'*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*' (HR Dir – bank B)

Similarly, HR staff at bank A advocated their ability to promote the foundation of a strong learning business culture as the HR director asserts:

'*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*' (HR Dir – bank A)

The contemporary narrative is different in each bank, but before the crisis, it was clear that SHRD held some capacity to direct corporate culture due to the presence of a different business philosophy. Pre-crisis, a predominant atmosphere and culture focused on both the organisational and workforce well-being, self-renewal, and development (both individual and organisational), whereas the contemporary focus is on organisational survival.

Evidently, different stakeholders offer competing views on the ability of SHRD to shape and influence business culture and climate. The perceptions of managers in bank B are different to those in bank A; with the former arguing that a strong organisational culture is present through clear, well-

defined and well-communicated cultural values that welcome the implementation of various training activities. Thus, suggesting a strong interrelation between SHRD and corporate culture, with both working under the same direction and influencing and be influenced by each other. Such suggestions come in line with key theoretical propositions arguing that SHRD should be able to shape organisational culture in such a way to accommodate the creation of a learning culture within which could bring employee and business performance improvements (Hong et al. 2013). Again, not the case for bank A, with suggestions offered to indicate a less mature state compared to bank B.

Discussion, theoretical contribution, and practical implications

Given the ambiguity and complexity of today's economic and business contexts, this research study contributes to academic knowledge by identifying the absence of research on SHRD in periods of business and economic uncertainty. It also expands SHRD academic knowledge as a pioneering empirical study examining managerial perceptions of SHRD into understudied geographical and industrial contexts; thus, contributing on overcoming the "one-size fits all" proposition of prominent SHRD models.

Managerial perceptions of SHRD allowed the researcher to compare its understanding and operationalisation pre- and post-crisis, as well as to identify the various roles and realities of SHRD in organisations operating under VUCA contexts. Understanding managerial perceptions of SHRD could enable HRD scholars and practitioners to assess the impact of similar crises, such as Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic, and thus to indicate potential solutions to overcome their related shocks. Comparing managerial perceptions with employees' perspectives on SHRD (Mitsakis, 2017), this research study confirms Anderson's (2009) proposition that the strategic alignment and understanding of HRD is difficult to be achieved due its complex nature, making this even more difficult in VUCA contexts.

All research participants outlined the negative impact of the economic crisis on SHRD, mainly by highlighting its major setback post-crisis. For instance, in terms of shaping organisational mission,

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goals, and strategies, diverse managerial perceptions highlighted the complexity of evaluating SHRD in just two organisations, in one sector, and retrospectively. Their suggestion that HRD always lacked this strategic ability contradict key theoretical underpinnings emphasizing on the role of SHRD to business strategy formulation in times of business uncertainty and complexity (Sung & Choi, 2018; Anderson, 2009). Such assertions were also noted through employees' perspectives on SHRD, where a major setback was outlined (Mitsakis, 2017). Yet, the story was presented differently pre-crisis, with all highlighting a more strategic HRD role, mainly owing to favourable business and economic conditions, having SHRD featured as a central key player in their organisations; a key proposition of the mainstream SHRD literature, arguing for SHRD's voice to be heard during business strategy's formation (Gillon, 2011; Oreg & Berson, 2011; Holbeche, 2009; Garavan, 2007). With all these in mind, this research contributes to SHRD literature by highlighting the potential problems and limitations of aspirational approaches to SHRD within VUCA contexts. The differing, and changing over time, perceptions identified in this research study could also serve as a "wake-up call" for all HRD professionals in relation to their role in organisations. Therefore, we argue for an extensive role to be undertaken by HRD executives to enhance their value proposition in organisations. Such proposition comes in line with key theoretical recommendations relating to the role of HRD executives as leaders and change agents amongst others to enable them deal with crises events and constant change (James & Wooten, 2013; Wooten & James, 2008; Gilley and Gilley, 2003).

The mainstream literature further suggests that effective senior management involvement could enable other stakeholder's voice to be considered and thus for better management solutions to be taken (Li & Liu., 2014; Herrera, 2014; Heller, 2012). Yet, having both banks excluded their employees, and in some cases their line managers, during relevant processes, key theoretical suggestions are not met (Mitsakis, 2019, 2017; Robson & Mavin, 2014; Purcell & Hall, 2012; Bennett, 2010). SHRD literature further argues for the need of vertical alignment between SHRD and business objectives (Alagaraja, 2013a, 2013b; Alagaraja & Egan, 2013; Marler & Fisher, 2013; Bondarouk & Ruel, 2013). This was noted through our research participants viewpoints, further confirming theory/research relating to

dynamic SHRD capabilities (Garavan et al. 2016). This mixed state of mind though could help HRD professionals/practitioners to better understand the multiple realities of SHRD in organisations, and thus to enable them work towards enhancing the strategic role of their HRD function.

In respect of building strategic partnerships with key stakeholders, research evidence suggests that stakeholder perception, even within similar business contexts, can be diverse and internally complex. Our findings come in line with key literature propositions arguing for a strategic alignment between SHRD and key organisational stakeholders to better adjust to new business realities through collective effort (Garavan et al., 2016; Beer et al., 2015). Yet, both banks lack in forming strategic partnerships with other key organisational stakeholders, such as their employees, shareholders etc., thus, opposing key allegations of the modified SHRD framework (Mitsakis, 2019). This also contradicts mainstream literature which argues for employees' involvement as central to SHRD's effectiveness (Mitsakis, 2017; Townsend & Loudoun, 2015; Brewster et al., 2015; McCracken & McIvor, 2013). A growing body of the literature calls for SHRD to be able to shape organizational culture. Research findings confirm such assertion, further highlighting a positive interrelation between SHRD and the organisational culture that could lead to organisational change and success, organisational performance etc. (Das, 2012; McCracken et al. 2012; Hofstede & Minkov, 2010).

Overall, this research study describes SHRD more as an aspiration rather than an organisational reality both pre- and post-crisis. HRD professionals are urged to apply the modified SHRD framework to compare the application of SHRD in their organisations, and make the necessary arrangements where needed. In addition, stronger collaborations between local educational institutions and HRD professionals are called to elevate the knowledge and skills of existing and future HRD staff that eventually to enhance the strategic role of HRD in organisations. HRD scholars could also replicate this research's findings into other national, industrial, and environmental contexts to expand SHRD literature. All in all, this study could be described as an incubator within Toumlin's Greenhouse (SHRD literature) which could help SHRD knowledge to "continue to flourish at the expense of new conceptual saplings" (Renwick et al. 2019: 167).

Research limitations and suggestions for future research

Besides its theoretical contribution and practical implications, it is essential to acknowledge that the empirical responses of this research study are subject to respondent bias as some events occurred several years ago. Therefore, research findings and conclusions drawn are subject to criticism in terms of their reliability, as respondents might not have been able to recall information/events occurred in the past, and thus not being able to offer the "full truth" of how SHRD has changed overtime (pre- and post-crisis).

Focusing on a unique industrial sector, as well as to a specific national context, could associate with a limitation of our study to be generalised in comparative contexts. Generalisability of research findings also associates with research transferability. The researcher argues that after having carefully reviewed the mainstream SHRD literature, supplemented by a detailed presentation of the key research findings in line with the strategic components of the modified SHRD framework adopted, and through a thoughtful discussion/comparison/association of key research findings with existing literature/research, the paper's approach/format could be adopted by other researchers as well which focus on similar contexts. Therefore, the researcher further suggests that this work represents an informative case for all businesses facing similar problems to those of the two case studies. For instance, having BREXIT described as the new financial crisis of today's business and economic landscapes (Elliot and Stewart, 2017; Gold, 2017), further research would benefit by replicating the methods employed in this study within the UK banking sector or other banking sectors across the globe to offer comparable results. Having identified the potential limitations relating to the application of SHRD in organisations within VUCA contexts, HRD professionals could use our study and its research findings as a useful tool in benchmarking approaches to SHRD.

A final limitation that accompanies this study is the exclusion of employees, senior executives, and trade union members from the interview process. Future research would benefit from applying the modified framework to examine perceptions of SHRD through a multi-constituent research perspective

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to allow considerations of all stakeholders and thus to offer a deeper understanding of SHRD during dynamic periods of change and business uncertainty.

Lastly, future research could employ a mixed method approach in examining SHRD so to achieve a stronger data triangulation, and thus to come with more robust research findings and better-informed recommendations to make.

Conclusion

Given the uncertainty of contemporary business and economic landscapes, our two research questions outline the difficulties of embedding SHRD criteria into organisational processes and highlight the aspirational versus real role of SHRD in the case study organisations through examining managerial perspectives on SHRD in the context of business and economic uncertainty.

In terms of the first research question on the perceptions of SHRD by HR staff and branch managers, research evidence highlights a contested territory surrounding the understanding and operationalisation of SHRD through the contradicting viewpoints offered from our research respondents. Such diverse perceptions further outline the need of applying a SHRD framework to more national and industrial contexts. Concerning the second research question, while more evidence on SHRD embeddedness is offered pre-crisis, diverging views emerge post-crisis.

Since similar cases feature in most businesses these days (i.e. Brexit, Covid-19 pandemic), part or all suggestions offered in this study could serve as potential solutions to current HRD problems. Therefore, we urge researchers to expand SHRD research to other understudied sectors, national, and environments (crises) contexts to inform SHRD literature, as well as to offer practical recommendations to HRD professionals.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Tables

Table 1: Prominent SHRD models

Garavan (1991)	Torraco & Swanson (1995)	Lee (1996)	Pfeffer (1998)
Integration with organizational mission and goals. Top management support. HRD plans and policies. Environmental scanning. Line Managers' commitment and involvement. Complementary HRM activities. Recognition of culture. Emphasis on evaluation.	**Shape business strategy by:** Being performance based. Demonstrating strategic capability. Utilizing employee expertise.	**Scale of Training Maturity** **Level 6:** Training and Development are processes through which strategy is formulated. **Level 5:** Training and learning possibilities help to shape strategy. **Level 4:** Training is the means for implementing corporate strategy and achieving change. **Level 3:** Training is integrated with operational management. **Level 2:** Isolated tactical training. **Level 1:** No systematic training.	**Create Chief People Officers by:** Building trust through sharing information and power. Encouraging change. Measuring key drivers of success.
Ulrich (1998)	**McCracken & Wallace (2000a, 2000b)**	**Dwyer (2000)**	**Gilley & Maycunich (2000)**
Partner with senior and line management. Be experts in how work is organised and executed. Be a champion for employees. Be a champion for continual organizational development.	Shaping organizational missions and goals. Top management leadership. Environmental scanning by senior management, in HRD terms. Strategic partnerships with line management. Strategic partnerships with HRM. Trainers as organizational change consultants. Ability to influence corporate culture. Emphasis on cost-effective evaluation.	Measure performance in quantifiable terms and communicate impact of long-term human capital investments. Know micros and macroeconomic pollical and social realities. Investigate business needs and drive action essential to business success.	**Focus on:** Organizational learning. Organizational performance. Organizational change. **Domains:** Analysis. Design of initiatives and interventions. Evaluation. **Elements:** HRD transformation. HRD leadership. Principles of SHRD.

Table 1: Prominent SHRD models (continues)

Becker, Huselid & Ulrich (2001)	Gilley & Gilley (2003)	Boudreau & Ramstad (2004)	Robinson & Robinson (2005)
Develop rigorous measurement systems.	**Domains:** Organizational learning. Organizational performance. Organizational change. **Steps:** Communicate urgency for change. Provide leadership. Create ownership. Integrate change into the organizational culture. Measure progress. **Result:** Successful transformation of HRD.	**Human Capital Bridge Framework** **Anchor points:** Impact. Effectiveness. Efficiency. **Linking elements:** Sustainable strategic success, resources and processes. Talent pools. Human capacity. Policies and practices. Investments.	**Build client partnership:** Access. Credibility. Trust. **Identify and partner to support projects:** Reframe requests. Proactively identify strategic opportunities. Implement projects. **Influence business strategies and direction:** Contribute to formation of plans. Integrate HR strategic plan into business plan. Implement people initiatives.
Dusoye and Oogarah (2016)	**Mitsakis (2019)**		
HRD strategy design, alignment, implementation, and continuous evaluation through assessing the interaction of: Micro level (the Individual) Meso level (the organisation) Macro level (national) Macro level (international)	"Environmentally-integrated" HRD strategies, plan and policies. Environmental scanning, in HRD terms, by including senior managers, line managers and employees. Shape organisational missions and goals. Strategic partnerships with key stakeholders (LMs, Top Management, Employees) Strategic partnership with HRM. Extensive role of HRD executives. Strategic ability to shape and influence business culture and climate. Emphasis on strategic HRD evaluation process.		

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Table 2: Summary of prominent SHRD literature (e.g. SHRD models' propositions, additional research on SHRD)

Publication (author & date)	Country	Key propositions	Type of Publication
Mitsakis (2019)	Greece	Proposed a modified SHRD framework to address the limitations of existing SHRD models and frameworks. Strategic pointers explaining SHRD maturity (in relation to each strategic component of the framework) are also offered.	Integrative literature review paper
Mitsakis (2017)	Greece	Examined Greek banking employees' perspectives on SHRD at the time of the economic crisis by applying and testing a modified SHRD framework. Identified a major setback for HRD due to the crisis, mostly presenting it as a rhetoric notion rather than an organisational reality.	Research paper
Dusoye and Oogarah (2016)	Mauritius (Africa)	Explored SHRD's applicability in Mauritius. Suggested a tailor-made SHRD framework for the Mauritius case, and mainly identified that SHRD is practiced at the administrative level of the business strategy rather than undertaking a strategic partnering role.	Research Paper
Lyons (2016)	US	Applied the Baldridge framework to suggest that organisaitonal performance is an outcome of SHRD interventions across the organisation.	PhD thesis (research)
Herd and Alagaraja (2016)	US	Examined employees' perspectives on SHRD through outlining the integration between organisaitonal strategy, SHRD, organisaitonal learning culture and investments on employee development.	Book chapter
Garavan et al. (2016)	UK & Ireland	Introduced the concept of dynamic SHRD capabilities and proposed a framework with key strategic components enabling SHRD dynamic capabilities.	Conceptual paper
Hughes and Byrd (2015)	US	Suggested how SHRD models could guide and provide decision-making, leadership competencies, strategic talent management, career planning and change (all crucial elements of SHRD maturity).	Book
Shanahan et al. (2009)	Ireland	Examined the Strategic Business Partner Model in an Irish call centre, featuring SHRD maturity characteristics, but not entirely mature.	Conference paper (research)
Garavan (2007)	UK	Proposed a contextual and dynamic SHRD framework, focusing on the interaction between context, HRD processes, stakeholder satisfaction, and the criteria of the HRD profession.	Conceptual paper
Robinson & Robinson (2005)	US	Like Becker et al. (2001), the authors suggested how HRD professionals could become Strategic Business Partners in organisations to secure alignment of SHRD objectives with corporate goals.	Book
Boudreau & Ramstad (2004)	US	Developed the HC Bridge Model suggesting the logical connections between talentship and sustainability. Its anchor points indicate the characteristics of SHRD, while their linking elements highlight the areas in which talent management could contribute to SHRD and organisational performance.	Conceptual paper

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Table 2: Summary of prominent SHRD literature (e.g. SHRD models' propositions, additional research on SHRD) continues

Gilley & Gilley (2003)	US	Proposed a six-step approach to create results-driven HRD through strategic integrated HRD practices.	Book chapter (based on previous publications - Gilley & Maycunich, 2000a, 2000b)
Becker et al. (2001)	US	Suggested how HRD could be seen as a strategic business partner in organisations, aiming to enhance organisaitonal performance.	Book
Gilley & Maycunich (2000a)	US	Suggested the SHRD elements, and how these should be performed and to focus at in order to enhance SHRD credibility and organisational influence.	Book
Gilley & Maycunich (2000b)	US	Elaborated on previous research to examine how latest advances in SHRD can be integrated into organisational processes to drive business growth.	Book
McCracken & Wallace (2000a)	UK	Enhanced Garavan's (1991) strategic criteria by proposing a new cluster of strategic characteristics.	Conceptual paper
McCracken & Wallace (2000b)	UK	Conceptually examined SHRD and operationalised their modified SHRD model in UK.	Conceptual paper
Ulrich (1998)	US	Proposed four ways to HRD professionals in enhancing their strategic outlook through organisational excellence.	Conceptual article on Harvard Business Review
Pfeffer (1998)	US	Suggested three guiding principles to assist HRD professionals to enhance their strategic positing in organisation (how to become Chief People Officers to enhance business performance through people).	Conceptual paper
Lee (1997)	UK	Examined how value for money in relation to training can be assessed.	Perspective paper
Lee (1996)	UK	Suggested how HRD professionals could demonstrate the value proposition of their practices to enhance the strategic outlook of HRD through a scale of SHRD maturity focusing on the volume of training.	Research paper
Garavan (1991)	Ireland	Key strategic criteria suggesting SHRD maturity introduced. Proposed conditions to promote SHRD in Irish organisations.	Research paper

Table 3: Details of Interview Participants

Interview Participants	
Branch Managers (19)	

'Case A' organisation (10)			**'Case B' organisation (9)**	
Gender	*Year of Service (YoS)*		*Gender*	*Year of Service (YoS)*
5 Males (M)	Min: 11 years		4 Males (M)	Min: 11 years
5 Females (F)	Max: 16 years		5 Females (F)	Max: 17 years

HR Staff (25)	

'Case A' organisation (13)		**'Case B' organisation (12)**
Gender: 6 M / 7 F – **YoS**: Min 11 / Max 16		**Gender**: 6 M / 6 F – **YoS**: Min 11 / Max 17
HR Director – **M (16 yos)**		HR Director – **F (16 yos)**
T&D Manager – **F (12 yos)**		T&D Manager – **F (12 yos)**
HR Officer – **F (13 yos)**		HR Officer – **M (13 yos)**
HR Officer – **M (14 yos)**		HR Officer – **M (14 yos)**
HR Officer – **F (11 yos)**		HR Officer – **F (11 yos)**
HR Assistant – **M (12 yos)**		HR Assistant – **M (12 yos)**
HR Assistant – **F (16 yos)**		HR Assistant – **F (16 yos)**
HR Assistant – **M (13 yos)**		HR Assistant – **M (16 yos)**
HR Assistant – **F (16 yos)**		HR Administrator – (n.2) **M (11 yos)**
HR Administrator – (n.2) **M (11 yos)**		HR Administrator – **F (12 yos)**
HR Administrator – **F (12 yos)**		HR Administrator – **F (14 yos)**
HR Administrator – **F (14 yos)**		

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Figure(s)

Figure 1: Garavan's (2007) SHRD Model