

## **MHR. Providing a New Perspective in HR in terms of Crisis Management.**

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### ***Abstract***

Crises have become an integral part of everyday life. They affect humans, their communities, and their organizations. The tragedies, natural catastrophes, and other crises that occur worldwide threaten the public's welfare, people's mental and physical wellbeing, the prosperity and operational sustainability of organizations, and impose inestimable costs. Human beings may be harmed or affected by crises in their roles as consumers, stakeholders, and employees.

Dealing with these events represents a challenging agenda, and particularly so for organizations' Human Resource Departments (HRDs). The authors of this paper explore the strategic role of HRDs in crisis management by adopting a theoretical perspective and synthesizing relevant literature in the crisis management field. This analysis offers valuable insights into the HRD's new Mentor-Healer-Renaissance Man (MHR) role for managing crisis situations. As a member of the Crisis Management Team (CMT), the HRD is responsible for providing leadership to an organization and its employees in the event of a crisis, by implementing predetermined actions intended to maintain the company's operations, and responding to its employees physical, psychological, and emotional needs.

This article's novelty and practical contribution is drafting a policies and procedures manual that specifies the actions that are to be performed by the HRD before, during, and following a crisis. These procedures, which can be implemented by appropriate departments in a wide range of organizations, can be modified as needed, to be consistent with an organization's more general crisis management strategy.

**Keywords:** crisis management, human resource management, new, role, strategic

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Crises inflict numerous negative events on people, their communities, and their organizations. Some occur at relatively lower intensities and to lesser extents than others. Those that last longer have a greater impact on businesses and may even affect global humanity on extremely rare occasions. Events that result in enormous financial losses due to poor management or even mismanagement—which may include failing to protect financial resources, providing inappropriate working conditions, labour accidents, cybercrime, computer viruses, and labour union strikes—and natural disasters such as fires and earthquakes may inflict substantial damages and/or losses (Lockwood, 2005).

Numerous extreme critical events have resulted in the loss of human lives. These include the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States (2001), Hurricane Rita in the Atlantic, and Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf Coast of the United States (2005), the tsunami in Japan (2011), the deliberate crash of the Germanwings flight in the French Alps (2015), the terrorist attacks in Paris (2015), in Copenhagen (2015), in Nice (2016), in Manchester (2017), and in Barcelona (2017). As time passes, the intensities of crises are magnified. Though in most cases crises cannot be averted, people nonetheless need to feel safe and confident that once a crisis has passed, they will return to their normal lives.

Given today's continuously changing environment, developing crisis management strategies has become a priority for organizations (Mitroff, 2005). When planning and developing crisis management procedures, many organizations emphasize methods and procedures that will prevent or avoid mishaps and interruptions and enhance resilience. Their ultimate goal is to help organizations return to normalcy, while minimizing losses. In more than a few cases, however, organizations' employees, as well as their needs, are not adequately considered (Vouzas and Nizamidou, 2018).

If an organization fails to protect its employees during a critical event, how can these employees be expected to return to their regular daily activities? How can employees deal with the possibility that their co-workers may be responsible for a crisis, and so be able to harm another human being? How can they find the courage and the strength needed to accept such behaviour, while simultaneously confronting the perpetrators and resuming their day-to-day working responsibilities? Though employees are an organization's "human resources", they are also living human beings with emotions and possible traumas that need to be resolved. This paper posits that the Human Resource Department (HRD) is well equipped to act on employees' behalf under these circumstances, by caring for their physical and mental health, ensuring their safety, and supporting their healing process.

Crisis management is a new responsibility for the HRD and requires that the HRD assume the role of strategic partner on every organization's Crisis Management Team (CMT). Numerous practitioners and theorists from the fields of crisis management and HR management highlight the HRD's contribution to planning, preparing, and managing an organizational crisis. To date, however, no in-depth analysis has been undertaken of the HRD's role in planning, managing, and helping an organization under threat recover after a crisis (Hutchins, Annulis, and Gaudet, 2008; Hutchins and Wang, 2008; Liou and Lin, 2008).

This article attempts to fill this gap in the literature, by proposing a new Mentor-Healer-Renaissance Man (MHR) framework. The role the HRD is called on to play in the present business environment is analyzed thoroughly, in all stages of a crisis. As a Mentor in the pre-crisis stage, the HRD may familiarize employees with potential crises and the actions that would then have to be taken. As a Healer during the crisis itself, the HRD can help employees cope with and adapt to difficult circumstances, so they are able to return to normalcy. Finally, in the role of Renaissance Man during the post-crisis stage, the HRD provides leadership, and helps employees experience a rebirth from their "ashes", reminding them repeatedly that they have survived the crisis, and that they are now a stronger, united entity that is prepared to confront any critical events that may occur in the future.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1. Crisis and Crisis Management**

Crises can occur anywhere in the world, in any organization, at any time, and may affect the whole of humanity (Payne, 1989; Wooten and James, 2004). Pearson and Clair (1998) define an organizational crisis as "a low-probability, high-impact event that threatens the viability of the organization and is characterized by ambiguity of cause, effect, and means of resolution, as well as by a belief that decisions must be made swiftly" (p. 60). A crisis is a complicated and a multi-faceted event that may harm any organization (Parrett, 2007). According to Barton (1993), a crisis is "a major unpredictable event that has potentiality negative results. The event and its aftermath may significantly damage an organization and its employees, products, service[s], financial condition and reputation" (p. 2). Further, "no individual crisis ever happens independently of any other crisis" (Mitroff, 2004, p. 65).

Mitroff also argues that “every crisis is capable of being the cause as well as the effect of any other crisis” (p. 65).

Organizations develop crisis management procedures to deal with crises effectively (Mitroff, 2004). Prior planning is essential. Employers must use their abilities to inspire others and assess all actions taken during a crisis, to avoid or limit a recurrence of the problems encountered during a crisis. Two key factors to be considered when developing a crisis management strategy include an organization’s size and its operational activities. Pearson and Clair (1998) define organizational crisis management as “a systematic attempt by organizational members with external stakeholders to avert crises or to effectively manage those that do occur” (p. 61). A creative organizational approach to dealing with crises may mitigate potential dangers. Another significant issue that has to be considered is the potential risk associated with uncontrollable natural disasters.

Every crisis is a unique event; it will only take place once in a particular organization and it will manifest itself in a novel way. However, crises do share some common features that allow us to classify them by type. Most researchers and specialists acknowledge that there is no definitive method for dealing with all the potential threats and dangers associated with crises. Naming and categorizing a crisis during its first crucial moments is of ultimate importance, since doing so reduces uncertainty regarding its causes, and clarifies management accountability for initiating a response (Seeger, Sellnow, and Ulmer, 2003). Classifying a crisis by type links that event to the specific pre-determined processes the organization and its stakeholders will have to follow in responding to the crisis.

Numerous researchers have developed and documented various crisis management models and identified the most effective crisis management procedures. These models include the three-stage model for crisis analysis, the four-stage model, known as the 4R’s (Heath, 1998), the five-stage model (Pauchant and Mitroff, 1992), and the six-stage model (Mitroff, 2005). Table 1 below summarizes these various theoretical models, which have some common features. The crisis management model used to design an organization’s Crisis Management Plan (CMP) must be known in advance, and the procedures developed must be consistent with this model.

**Table 1: Models of Crisis Management**

Three-Stage Model of Crisis Management	Four-Stage Model of Crisis Management (4R)	Five-Stage Model of Crisis Management	Six-Stage Model of Crisis Management
<b>Pre-crisis</b>	Reduction	Signal Detection	Signal Detection
	Readiness	Preparation	Probing/Preparation
<b>Crisis</b>	Response	Containment/Damage Limitation	Containment/Damage Limitation
<b>Post-crisis</b>	Recovery	Recovery	Business Recovery
		Learning	No Fault Learning
			Redesign

Source: (Nizamidou and Vouzas, 2017, p.139)

This article adopts the three-stage model, which consists of the pre-crisis stage, the crisis stage, and the post-crisis stage. This model was selected because it offers a simplified analysis, is more easily understood by non-experts, and is used as a general analytical framework by most researchers.

**2.2. Crisis Management Process and the Role of the HR Department**

Three elements constitute the crisis management process; the people who take part in the Crisis Management Team, the processes that deal with how to prepare an effective Crisis Management Plan and the environment where this team will work (Curtin, Hayman, and Husein, 2005). Every organization should have a CMT that is responsible for designing and implementing a CMP. Fink (1986) writes that “every crisis demands a crisis management team to run the plays, which may be called by the CEO or by some technical authority” (p. 56) that meets regularly to review and reassess its plans. This team is expected to make all the hard decisions at the best feasible time; when an organization operates during its daily normal rhythm, before the threat of any crisis.

Researchers note that crisis management is enhanced when organizations have access to reliable information that allows them to anticipate how a crisis will unfold and enables them to prepare and confront it most effectively (Paraskevas, 2006; Khodarahmi, 2009). An effective crisis management plan will document the methods to be adopted during a crisis and delineate the responsibilities of each member of the CMT. In this way, an effective crisis management plan may mitigate the severity of a

crisis. The plan must also anticipate “what resources are required to keep the team running and how best to ensure that the environment is the best place to actually work” (Curtin et al., 2005, p. 79).

It is essential that organizations and members of their CMTs focus on their employees when preparing and implementing their CMPs. The HRD is responsible for ensuring that all sectors of the organization have trustworthy and prepared leadership, and that employees feel secure, even as they are preparing for and adapting to crisis situations. A common deficiency evident in crisis management planning is failing to consider an organization’s employees, before finalizing the organization’s policies, procedures, systems, and infrastructure (Premeaux and Breaux, 2007). Even though the HRD has a key role to perform in crisis management, some organizations do not have an HRD manager on their CMT. An organization’s strategic framework for crisis management should specify how the activities conducted in response to a crisis will support the organization’s goals, and document how and when interactive collaboration will occur between managerial departments (Wooten and James, 2008; Garavan, 1991). Given their dedication to the organization’s goals, employees must be provided with a level of security and protection that allows them to sustain the organization’s operations, and so its business continuity.

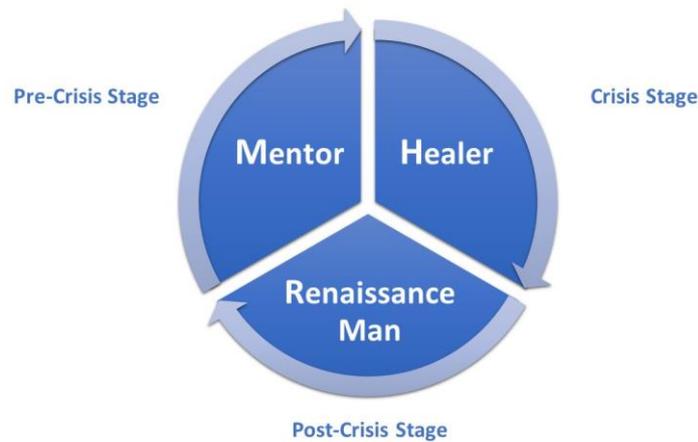
The HRD has the knowledge and expertise needed to identify which candidates are most capable of organizing, planning, and implementing a CMP, while protecting employees’ interests. These individuals are also responsible for encouraging the workforce’s return to a normal productive state (Wooten and James, 2008; Ruona, Lynham, and Chermack, 2003). HR operations often extend beyond training and hiring to facilitating knowledge, and consequently the HRD may be the first department to recognize the early signals of an emerging crisis. Facilitating effective communication between employees and encouraging them to express their views freely may reveal potential problems at an early stage. In some instances, crises might have been avoided, if effective levels of communication had been established between the employees, or the employees had informed the HRD in a timely way.

The HRD also has to use its knowledge and skills to prepare its employees to act appropriately in the event of a crisis. In doing so, it will limit its company’s financial losses, and save hundreds of human lives. Premeaux and Breaux (2007) underline the importance of planning, as well as the value of organizations’ human capital, and argue that organizations must pay more attention to the effects substantial incidents have on their employees. Lockwood (2005), who shares this perspective, observes that an organization cannot recover without its employees.

### **3. THE CHALLENGING MHR ROLE OF THE HR DEPARTMENT**

The HRD is fully responsible for managing, planning, and responding to crises, and the authors argue that it is time for the HR Department to surpass the boundaries of typical HR activities. By filling the existing gap in the literature noted earlier regarding the contribution of the HRD to crisis management, the authors propose that the HRD embrace a new MHR role when dealing with a crisis. In the pre-crisis stage, as a Mentor, the HR manager may be devoted to preparing employees for crises and explaining what will be expected of them in the event of a crisis. During the crisis stage, as a Healer, the HR manager must help employees cope with and recover from the effects of the crisis, thereby enabling them to return to their daily routine. Finally, in the post-crisis stage, as a Renaissance Man, the HR manager will provide leadership, by reminding employees that they survived the crisis and are now stronger, united, and better prepared for similar critical events in the future. Figure 1 below depicts these proposed roles.

**Figure 1: The MHR Role of HR in terms of Crisis Management**



### 3.1. The Mentor in the Pre-Crisis Stage

Prior to a crisis, the HRD must act proactively to ensure employees' safety. As a Mentor, the HRD manager has to show leadership, be aware of employees' sensitivities, and provide a sufficient level of reassurance with regard to the possibility of a catastrophic incident. In the pre-crisis stage, the HRD must educate, train, and inform employees about appropriate behaviour in the event of a crisis, and the methods they will use for communicating under those circumstances. As explained in further detail in the following paragraphs, the HRD is the most appropriate department for encouraging employees to both detect potential errors and failures, and to report them.

HR managers should train their organization's workforce on the actions and processes that will need to be implemented in the event of an emergency. HR managers can also urge top management to test the organization's CMP, to ensure that it will work as expected when needed (Premeaux and Breaux, 2007). They should also design crises scenarios that illustrate how employees may be affected. As Mentors, HR managers should train employees using presentations, seminars, training courses, role-playing, and on-the-job training. It is clearly understood, however, that the odds of protecting an organization and its employees from the dangers of natural disasters are extremely narrow (Gaillard, 2007). Nonetheless, with good organization, training, and preparation, employees have a greater chance of responding appropriately when a crisis occurs.

The HRD is also responsible for establishing and promoting high levels of communication. To feel secure, employees must have uninterrupted access to a means of communication and information updates. The primary tactics for achieving a sufficiently dispersed level of information and alerting others in emergency situations include call-free numbers, and easy and free access to Internet or private network platforms for exchanging or sending text messages (Fink, 1986). Many organizations use privately-owned Internet platforms, thereby establishing a constantly open channel of communication (Lockwood, 2005). Employees have an increased sense of safety, trust, and security when they know in advance whom they should contact during a crisis, and how they will make that connection. The HR manager, tasked with establishing proactive behaviours, should also ensure that there is a fallback in place, in the event anything disrupts or permanently damages the existing infrastructure (e.g. when phone-land lines are dead). Employees should be familiarized with all means of communication long before a crisis occurs.

HR managers should detect warning signals of minor defects and deficiencies that might lead to failures and catastrophic crises. According to Weick and Sutcliffe (2007) "these small discrepancies can cumulate, expand, and have disproportionately large consequences. This path of development is also similar across organizations, though what differs across organizations are variables, such as how much value people place on catching such developments earlier rather than later" (p. 20).

Though HR managers should encourage employees to detect and report these small signals, research findings have shown that people need to feel safe to report small signals and incidents; otherwise, they will probably ignore them (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2007). The HRD is obliged to apply managerial practices that will encourage people to ask questions and reward them for reporting suspicious and abnormal behaviours and incidents. One example that illustrates the importance of reporting errors and failures is the nuclear industry. Employees who work in this sector know that

nuclear technology is prone to failures, due to its complexity and constant development (Ramsay, 1999).

As authentic Mentors, HR managers should promote crisis management policies and procedures that ensure employees do not panic before a crisis occurs and prepare employees to cope with the psychological effects of anxiety and stress that follow a crisis, using real crisis scenarios and crisis simulations (Payne, 1989). Doing so gives those individuals who have worked together to plan, test, and review emergency plans the opportunity to identify each other's strengths and limitations. These people are better able to respond to crises than those who meet for the first time during a crisis (Ramsay, 1999). Practices and policies that include trial and error learning are excluded, since in many cases the first error that occurs is also the last for the organization.

### **3.2. The Healer during the Crisis Stage**

Though the crisis stage is usually shorter than the other two stages, it has the greatest impact. The HRD can provide guidance by quantifying impacts on employees, in terms of physical or psychological injuries, even in terms of the death or sudden withdrawal of key employees. Any decisions taken during this period are likely to have a tremendous impact on the organization and its workforce. If the crisis is mismanaged, employees will require more time and resources to return to normalcy than would otherwise be required. Thus, the HRD must maintain constant communication with the employees, as well as with other stakeholders, during a crisis. Finally, as discussed in the following paragraphs, in their role as authentic Healers, HRD managers may help their workforce overcome the negative emotions associated with a crisis.

The HRD's most challenging role is assisting in the placement of the key personnel needed for the recovery, filling alternative positions, and establishing communication options. Depending on the organization, certain key assessment functions may be required (Lockwood, 2005). According to Premeaux and Breaux (2007), "HR can help the company return to some sense of normalcy as it attempts to get back on its feet" (p. 41). Furthermore, together with the CMT, the HRD has to ensure that employees have ready access to contact information for their colleagues and managers prior to a crisis. As an active member of the CMT, the HR manager should be able to provide timely responses and possible solutions to the following questions:

- *Were any employees injured, or were there any fatalities?*
- *Are the employees in immediate need of food, shelter, medical attention, or psychological support?*
- *Which of them will be needed, and for how long?*

As a Healer, the HRD should secure all the primary physical needs of its workforce. When a crisis occurs, employees feel the need to return to their homes immediately to take care of their loved ones (Lockwood, 2005). Once a crisis is over, employees require certain services from their employer, such as aid and insurance in terms of safety, information, understanding, and continuous support, all of which facilitate their return to productivity. For all of the above, the HRD has to ensure that health aid centres have appropriate expert personnel on-site.

HRD managers must be able to make wise decisions under pressure. Brockner and James (2008) identified the factors that may affect leaders, given that threatening crises also present potential opportunities. Leaders initially perceive and experience a crisis as a threat to them and their organization, so they implement strategies that will mitigate the damages incurred. In conjunction with the emotional stress they inflict, crises increase the level of difficulty involved in making decisions. Factors such as limited access to information and other variables must also be considered, since leaders make wiser decisions when they are not pressed for time and have ready access to information. Otherwise, physiological, emotional, and cognitive constraints will converge to interfere with decision making (Smith and Ellsworth, 1985). HR managers must be capable of making the right decisions for all employees while under extreme tension and time constraints.

An effective communication plan is a fundamental constituent of crisis management. The HRD should develop both internal and external means of communication to be used during emergencies (Lockwood, 2005). Maintaining contact—possibly with a 24/7 communication channel for employees and other internal stakeholders—is of vital importance. Various means of communication have been used by organizations. Following the Seattle earthquake in 2001, Starbucks used a voicemail system to ask its employees to send their HRD a text message or to call the company, so their employer would be able to ensure that all its employees were accounted for (Premeaux and Breaux, 2007). Establishing an open line of communication with external stakeholders is of equal importance. Customers, suppliers, communities, and even the government need to be informed and regularly updated with regard to how the organization is coping with the crisis. The HRD also has to identify and assign the employees required to operate a telephone centre or fill other vital working positions when a crisis occurs, thereby

ensuring that employees perform their working tasks during the crisis as they were trained to do in the pre-crisis stage.

Depending on the number of people who have to be informed—and especially when the number is large—the media play the leading role of disseminating information and establishing communication networks. There is typically no government emergency communication service comparable to the triptych “television, radio and newspaper outlets, across the country” (Haddow, Bullock, and Coppola, 2008). Managers must verify which of their employees are aware of the company’s current situation from following the media news. HR managers, as well as managers from other departments, must be aware that there may be fundamental differences between their perceptions and those of their employees with regard to what is happening within the organization. Managers may improve their efficiency by putting themselves in the employees’ position (Galinsky, Ku, and Wang, 2005; Galinsky and Mussweiler, 2001).

Communication is used to shape stakeholders’ perceptions of a crisis and an organization positively (Coombs, 1995; Wooten and James, 2004). During a crisis, the HRD must bridge key organizational employees and other related personnel to provide security, in the form of guarantees, to any parties involved. Moreover, HR managers need to be confident, persuasive, or empathic, depending on the type of crisis. A leader’s ability to communicate effectively during a crisis is determined by the level of his/her emotional and psychological connection with the audience’s perception of the organization, which will have to be realigned after a crisis (Sturges, 1994), with the aim of maintaining the business’ sustainability.

As an authentic Healer, the HRD has to provide continuous support for employees and help them overcome their fears. Crises are accompanied by negative emotions such as anger, fear, depression, and uncertainty, which have long-term effects. Individuals often feel fear, which is revealed to a different extent in every individual, but characteristically has a lasting impact (Mankin and Perry, 2004), and there are cases where a crisis can be so devastating that it creates a sense of despair and helplessness (Seeger et al., 2003). In these instances, the HRD should undertake actions that will minimize negative consequences, while reviving the employees’ emotional state, and fostering an interactive relationship between them and the organization itself. The HRD, in cooperation with external specialists such as counsellors and institutions, is responsible for managing employees’ fear effectively.

The HRD, therefore, is obliged to relieve employees’ negative emotions, and encourage positive thoughts and emotions, with the aim of ensuring the organization’s operational sustainability. A key matter the modern organization has to resolve is therefore “not whether a crisis will occur, but when, and what type” (Crandall, Parnell, and Spillan, 2014, p. 3). Individuals can survive crises, and some may even prosper from doing so, if they are both mentally and physically prepared. Some individuals, however, may require psychological support from external counsellors, who can help them resolve intensely negative emotions. It should also be noted that the healing process might contribute to an organization’s renewal process (Seeger et al., 2003).

Finally, the HRD must acknowledge that the world is today supersaturated by a plethora of media, and nothing will remain hidden from view for long (Mitroff, 2005). Members of the media can gain access to almost any information pertinent to individuals, organizations, and political figures, which they can subsequently exhibit and broadcast. Denial, or deliberately creating false impressions, will eventually be criticized, on legal grounds and in the court of public opinion. There are numerous examples in which company employees starred in the news, taking advantage of the publicity for their own benefit, while refusing to follow their companies’ policies. On behalf of the company and its employees, the HRD should assess and eliminate all such potentially problematic issues. During a crisis, the HRD should ensure that all employees behave in a way that is consistent with their training and their organization’s CMP.

### **3.3. The Renaissance Man in the Post-Crisis Stage**

Though crises are unique events, they are not necessarily accompanied solely by negative and catastrophic consequences. They reveal that the existing infrastructure and systems no longer offer sufficient protection. Fink (1986) uses the term “a turning point” (p. 15) to describe a crisis. If managed successfully, it may offer a chance to make a change for the better. The HRD cannot be an exception to this rule. In the post-crisis stage, a Renaissance Man has to ensure that counselling continues to be provided to those who are still in need and ensure employees’ full recovery and complete return to their duties. As is discussed next, the HRD should also ensure that the workforce has assimilated the knowledge gained and the lessons learned. Lastly, while promoting the same values, HR managers need to continue to remind employees that they survived the crisis, and, as a result, are stronger than before.

Crisis management planning often mistakenly places humans at the bottom of the priority list, and instead emphasizes the recovery of systems, operations, infrastructure, and public relations (Lockwood, 2005). In their post-crisis procedures, many organizations' HR practices are terminated shortly after a crisis, or whenever it is perceived that the danger is over. The HRD, as an original Rejuvenator, should continue to offer counselling services and monitor the procedures being carried out by experts, in the event an employee requires further post-trauma support. Without these supports, humans have a tendency to withdraw, thereby minimizing workgroup communication (Barton, 1993). Productivity may also deteriorate, and employees may soon become vulnerable to other crises.

In the role of the Renaissance Man, the HRD is obliged to do anything within its power to ensure the full recovery of the employees. The HRD must also maintain a direct line of communication between the department and the employees, with the aim of strengthening employees' emotional and mental states. Since crises are experienced as "major acts of betrayal" (Mitroff, 2005, p. 39), the negative emotions, fears, uncertainties, and stresses that arise during the crisis stage continue long after the crisis is over. One HRD solution is providing employee assistance programs (EAPs), which may help employees overcome the negative emotions and sense of grief they might experience long after a crisis (Premeaux and Breaux, 2007). Lockwood (2005) writes that organizations have to be aware of the impacts that crises have on employees, their families, and the larger society, and notes that "business recovery and operational sustainability cannot occur without employees" (p. 3).

Numerous practitioners and scholars argue that a crisis may promote organizational learning and observe that organizational learning from the critical aftermath and previous crisis events is an underdeveloped process (Pauchant, Mitroff, and Lagadec, 1991). According to Wang, Hutchins, and Garavan (2009) "organizational learning focused SHRD strategies emphasize critical reflection, organizational socialization, tacit learning, learning from mistakes, and action-centered learning" (p. 40). Contrary to many beliefs, a crisis can promote organizational as well as individual learning. Numerous people, organizations, communities, and societies that have overcome crises have derived valuable knowledge and experience in doing so. The lessons gained resulted in stronger and healthier individuals relative to these individuals in the pre-crisis stage. Thus, crises may motivate organizations to search for a wider portfolio of responses to future crisis (Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, and Sellnow, 2005).

Crisis, and the events associated with them that have never been taken into consideration and have been omitted from existing CMPs, can motivate CMTs—and especially the HRD's managers—to reassess their plans. One such example is the case of the University of Texas, which acquired and used the lessons learned from the 2007 shootings that ended the lives of 32 people in the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in Virginia (Wang and Hutchins, 2010). The 2-hour delay before notifying the campus community and the police occurred simply because a scenario such as that was not included in the university's Emergency Response Plan (ERP), and it became an "example to be avoided". According to Wang and Hutchins (2010) "prior to the 2007 mass shootings, there had been no crisis events requiring the involvement of the Policy Group. Furthermore, there was no training or testing of how the campus Policy Group would respond to a crisis situation" (p. 560). This difficult lesson was subsequently used by the University of Texas to expand its portfolio of responses to future crises. A similar incident occurred on 28 September 2010, in a library on the University of Texas (Austin) campus, where a shooter opened fire. In a very short period of time the campus was locked down, and approximately 43,000 students, faculty, and personnel had been warned via mobile and text messages to stay away from the campus (Wang and Hutchins, 2010). Particularly after the 9/11 attacks, HR managers have been reassessing and redesigning their CMPs, with the aim of increasing their effectiveness.

The HR manager, as a Renaissance Man, is also obliged to promote and share values with the employees. The culture of an organization, the philosophy and vision of its founders, and its foundational values are essential for its survival and revival following a critical event. To recover from a severe crisis, Mitroff (2005) highlights that "one has to 're-humanize' the dehumanization that has taken place with regard to one's betrayer, whether individual, an organization, a society, or even a whole civilization, as in the case of 9/11" (p. 47). Characteristics such as independence, self-sufficiency, impartiality, the development of critical thinking, the acceptance of challenges, the application of innovative practices, and the advisory review should be the HRD's main attributes. The HRD may then use these values to inspire its employees. Integrity, in combination with objectivity and quality, are cornerstone values that contribute to the viability of every organization, as well as to its competitiveness (Parrett, 2007). Common values develop a powerful interactive bond between the HRD and its employees. This interface is of great importance, as it brings together employees with different cultures, morals, customs, languages, religions, and cultural backgrounds. Only by reinforcing the previously mentioned values is it possible to achieve the desired level of unity, which in turn will lead to success, via the appropriate and wise management of every potential crisis.

Finally, a Renaissance Man must alter employees' perspective of a crisis from that of a tragic incident to a lesson that can be used to inform future behaviour. The HRD should continuously remind its workforce that not only was the crisis a real incident, but more importantly, together they and the organization survived. Payne (1989) argued that the reframing process must be considered as a therapeutic situation: "when a population suffers a trauma, therapeutic discourse may help victims to recover an identity that has been denied by crisis event. Through discourse, victims must create a new identity capable of dealing with a new reality" (p. 29). This process can be enhanced by various anniversary celebrations on predetermined dates for the most challenging crises. Holding memorial ceremonies for the employees who lost their lives, or sacrificed their lives to rescue others, is equally important. Crisis survivors and casualties are perceived as heroes who acted for the organization's well-being. Heroes become the icons of an organizational spirit. For example, both religious and national rituals across the United States marked the one-year anniversary of the 9/11 attacks (Seeger et al., 2003).

The HRD is responsible for ensuring that everyone—including the employees—is fully aware of the tragedies associated with incidents, the adverse situations created, and their catastrophic direct and indirect impacts. It should also emphasize the willpower people have shown, and the ability they have demonstrated to stand on their feet again and return to normalcy. A fundamental role of the HRD during a post-crisis period is to remind employees of the unsurpassed capabilities they demonstrated when they were confronted with high-risk emergency situations.

#### **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Today's organizations operate in an unstable world and managing crisis events is an integral part of their environment. This research is aligned with the work of numerous academics and practitioners from the fields of Crisis Management and Human Resource Management (Hutchins and Wang, 2008; Lockwood, 2005; Premeaux and Breaux, 2007; Wang et al., 2009), who argue that the "human element" within the crisis management framework highlights the need to integrate HR management into crisis management practices and philosophies. The authors have postulated a new agenda for the HRD that may be implemented through a proposed MHR role. Ultimately, this work may constitute a cornerstone for future research, in terms of clarifying the need for a better understanding of the leading role that the HRD may play, when an organization is confronted by a crisis.

This paper highlights numerous aspects that require further research and thorough analysis. Most of the literature on crisis management deals with crisis leadership, the formation of a crisis management team, and the preparation of a CMP. Practitioners are often lost in a procedural maze when a crisis occurs, wondering whether they have the right documents to complete, and whether or not members of the CMT have signed and received the updated CMP. Fortunately, with the passage of time, more experts and theorists are acknowledging the strategic role the HRD may play, when aiming to overcome crisis situations.

Organizations' HRDs should embrace the new MHR role proposed above when a crisis occurs. Human resources are undeniably any organization's most valuable asset, and businesses can no longer afford to overlook them. Unless this MHR role is widely adopted by HR practitioners, the risks are great that poor decisions will be taken by HR specialists, which in turn may jeopardize both the employees and the organization's safety and security.

This article proposes a new MHR (Mentor-Healer-Renaissance Man) role for the HRD dealing with a crisis. This role, however, should be tested and implemented by HR managers. The authors are currently conducting research to ascertain the HRD's level of familiarity with crises and crisis management procedures. This research is being implemented in all sectors of Greek industry, to assess these organizations' level of preparedness for crisis management, and the degree to which the HRDs are involved in preparing employees for crises. These findings will be compared to international standards, with the aim of highlighting important insights as to whether or not the Greek reality is similar to the international reality. The authors urge other researchers to conduct similar studies to enrich our knowledge of the HRD's role in crisis planning and management, not only in Greece, but also at a larger scale in Europe, and even globally.

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