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Jia Wang, Holly M. Hutchins and Thomas N. Garavan

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Exploring the Strategic Role of Human Resource Development in Organizational Crisis Management

JIA WANG 
Texas A&M University
HOLLY M. HUTCHINS 
University of Houston
THOMAS N. GARAVAN 
University of Limerick

Crisis management has been a largely overlooked territory in human resource development (HRD) despite the increasingly recognized impact of organizational crises on the individual and organizational performance. This article explores the strategic role of HRD in the context of organizational crisis management using Garavan’s strategic HRD model as a guiding framework to understand the various ways in which HRD can build crisis management capability in organizations. The authors apply various components of the model to the crisis management context and integrate ideas from both sets of literatures. The authors offer specific guidelines for HRD practitioners regarding how to align strategic human resource development focus, orientation, and strategies with the organization’s overall crisis management efforts and identify areas for further research.

**Keywords:** Strategic human resource development, crisis management, change management

Crisis events continue to pose a costly threat to organizations. Yet despite a decade that has witnessed terrorist attacks, natural disasters, and ethics violations, fewer than 60% of employees reported that their organization was not well prepared to effectively respond to a crisis (Fegley & Victor, 2005). Likewise, many senior executives have a similar view (Moynihan, 2008) and often do not think strategically about crisis management; as a result, their organizations are not sufficiently prepared to deal with crises when they arise (Sheaffer & Mano-Negrin,
Out of 137 large corporations Miller (2002) studied, 47% had no plan for any type of disaster. Similarly, 40% human resource (HR) specialists surveyed by the Society for Human Resource Management confirmed that their organizations did not have crisis and disaster plans (Cohen, 2002). Reasons for a lack of crisis preparedness planning are many, ranging from an insufficiency of resources to faulty assumptions that an organization would be immune from crisis events (Howell, 2004; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993). However, as organizations become more technologically complex, multinational, and operate in more turbulent environments, the need to align crisis management planning with business strategy becomes prominent to lessening potential vulnerability of critical resources (Boin & McConnell, 2007; Elliott, 2006; Preble, 1997).

In the last decade, attention has been given primarily to the administrative aspects of the human resource management (HRM) in crisis management, such as compensation allocation and employee assistance programs (Lockwood, 2005; Mankin & Perry, 2004; Pasek, 2002; Premeaux & Breaux, 2007). The role of human resource development (HRD) in organizational crisis management has just begun to emerge in the literature (Hutchins & Wang, 2008). From the rise in ethics training prompted by the Enron, Worldcom, and Arthur Anderson fraud cases to the organization development initiatives aimed at diversity at Denny’s and Texaco, organizations have adopted a variety of HRD-based interventions to enhance awareness and competencies for crisis management. However, much of these efforts are made often after a crisis has occurred. This assertion is supported by a qualitative cross-sectional analysis of 20 companies that experienced crisis events between 2000 and 2006. The analysis revealed that only 40% of these organizations were engaged in detecting crisis signals and making plans and that more than 65% of them focused on learning and recovering from crises. Although a growing body of research suggesting that HRD be used at each stage of the crisis management process (Castillo, 2004; Hutchins, Annullis, & Gaudet, 2007; Seeger, Ulmer, Novak, & Sellnow, 2005), its function has largely been confined to crisis training. The perception of HRD as training provider rather than strategic partner is likely to prohibit HRD from making valuable contributions to crisis management. Gilley and Maycunich (2003) called for the role of HRD to be transformed from being more activity based to becoming more results oriented with a focus on strategic interventions:

Gone are the days of delivering training as an activity and relying on employees’ reaction to training to validate the value and importance of HRD to the organization. Gone are the days of HRD practitioners with little operational experience. In their place is an HRD program with operationally proficient professionals focused on improving organizational performance and effectiveness through learning, performance management, and change. (p. 29)

In order for such a transformation to occur, a strategic approach to HRD is imperative. When HRD does not have a strategic role to play in the organization, HRD professionals’ knowledge of learning and performance may not be
capitalized on; individual and collective learning may be difficult to achieve (Kraiger, McLinden, & Casper, 2004). Strategic human resource development (SHRD) focuses on integrating HRD activities with organizational goals and values to develop core capabilities that enhance firm competitive advantage (Garavan, 1991, 2007). Specifically, SHRD can make two contributions to crisis management. First, it provides organizations with operational capabilities to manage crises. Second, it enables organizations to understand a basic objective of crisis management, that is, to accumulate wisdom by “learning together from an event to prevent, less the severity of, or improve on responses to future crises” (Hillyard, 2000, p. 9). SHRD represents an important set of interventions that facilitate both collective and individual learning. It helps induce practices and behaviors that are likely to improve crisis responses.

Crisis management requires the development of firm-specific capabilities and learning and performance interventions that enable stakeholders to identify, respond to, and recover from crisis events. Successful implementation of crisis management plans requires high-level strategic integration between HRD, organizational structure, culture, and strategy. Aligning learning, change, and performance interventions with organizational strategy is thus important for gaining stakeholder support and ensuring successful implementation across multiple organization units (Wognum & Lam, 2000). However, absent from extant literature is consideration about the strategic role that HRD may assume in helping organizations plan, handle, and recover from crises (Hutchins et al., 2008; Hutchins & Wang, 2008; Liou & Lin, 2008). Therefore, this article explores the ways in which SHRD can achieve both operational capability and crisis learning capability that will enhance organizations’ capacity, flexibility, and confidence to deal with unexpected events (B. Roberts & Lajtha, 2002).

The article begins by reviewing the crisis management literature to identify areas in which SHRD can contribute. In subsequent sections, we apply Garavan’s (2007) SHRD model to a range of crisis management activities and examine SHRD’s contribution at four levels of analysis: organizational, team, job, and individual. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our analysis for organizational practice and future research.

Organizational Crisis Management

Many researchers have examined crises in organizational settings (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Sayegh, Anthony, & Perrewe, 2004). The literature suggests some level of agreement on the nature of organizational crisis and the scope of organizational crisis management.

Organizational Crises

Agreeing on the definition of a crisis has proven challenging for crisis theorists and practitioners, perhaps symbolizing the changing nature of
crisis events during the last decade. Financial, social, industrial, health, and economic (just to name a few) crises are terms often used to identify undesirable and sometimes unlikely events that have large impacts. Despite the variations, a crisis is typically recognized as a low probability, high-impact situation that is unexpected, unfamiliar, and precipitated by people, organizational structures, economics, technology, or natural disasters (Pearson & Clair, 1998; Reilly, 1987; Rosenthal, Boin, & Comfort, 2001). Crisis events can be immediate (as captured in the definition) or slow to emerge “creeping” like the environmental crisis or the more recent energy surge that has resulted in gradual increase in fuel costs for most countries. Sayegh et al. (2004) synthesized the literature and identified six major characteristics of an organizational crisis, including the following: (a) high ambiguity with unknown causes and effects, (b) a low probability of it occurring, (c) an unusual and unfamiliar event, (d) the requirement for a rapid response, (e) significant threat to the survival of the organization and its stakeholders, and (f) the need for a quick decision that potentially will have positive or negative effects.

The comprehensiveness of a crisis definition is likely proportionate to the complexities of organizational systems in the 21st century. Modern organizations are highly interrelated, globally dispersed, and technologically complex, which invite more advanced and unusual forms of crisis events. Crisis theories and subsequent management processes grew out of an understanding of organizations as highly predictable and manageable. Consequently, crises were often understood as events that were relatively isolated, reasonably conceived and expected (e.g., fires, disease outbreaks, and theft), and had a limited duration and impact (Boin & Lagadec, 2000). Crises that arise from modern organizations do not fit into this definition. In fact, modern crisis events (e.g., terrorism, cyberattacks, and corporate scandals), which are characterized by the intent (Mitroff & Alpaslan, 2003), result in widespread and dispersed impacts, costly response and recovery efforts, and unexpected consequences that defy existing planning. To capture the nature of crises, Perrow (1984) coined the terms normal and abnormal crises. In his book Normal Accidents: Living with High Risk Technologies, Perrow described normal crises as accidents that are caused by system overloads or malfunctions such as the industrial accidents of Three Mile Island and the Exxon Valdez oil spill. In contrast, abnormal crises are deliberate acts to sabotage processes, inflict fear in individuals, or cause overall panic. Some examples of abnormal crises include terrorist attacks, workplace violence, and employee sabotage of computer systems or theft. Natural disasters are included as a third type of crisis event, identified as hurricanes, fires, flooding, or other natural events that can lead to a crisis situation. Drawing on two decades worth of crisis research and consulting with Fortune 500 organizations,
Mitroff and Alpaslan (2003) identified a growing trend in abnormal crisis events within the last 10 years citing the U.S.-based 9/11 terrorist attacks, London subway bombings, and Sarin gas attacks in Toyko as examples.

Organizational Crisis Management

With the increase in frequency and complexity of organizational crises, the need for planned efforts to mitigate crisis events has become a serious concern for organizations. It is important to learn quickly from crisis events that actually occur. Organizational crisis management is understood as a series of procedures used to sustain or resume normal business operations, minimize stakeholder loss, and use learning to improve crisis management processes (Pearson & Clair, 1998). Crisis management typically includes steps that help to identify potential crisis signals or indicators, planning strategies, response coordination, and recovery plans. Heath (1998) observed that Western organizations typically adopted a four-stage model: prevention, preparation, response, and recovery—PPRR. He viewed this model as interactive with opportunities for ongoing learning. Learning is considered as an axiomatic and critical recurrent feature of the majority of crisis management models. Among various models of crisis management, the one that was initially proposed by Pearson and Mitroff (1993) and later refined by Mitroff (2005) appears to be the most comprehensive and representative of earlier and more current model articulations. Therefore, a brief review of each component in their model is provided in Table 1. A full review of the crisis management model and related research can be found in Hutchins and Wang (2008).

In spite of an increased effort in crisis planning in the last decades, and especially in the United States since 9/11, organizations continue to fall short in developing comprehensive crisis management programs. Specifically, in a disaster-preparedness survey of U.S.-based organizations, Fegley and Victor (2005) found that organizations typically plan for events they consider highly probable to occur, such as a fire evacuation or administering employee first aid, or focus on a primary area such as protecting critical information technologies. This is also the case in countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Bali that experience major terrorism attacks in recent years. McConnell and Drennan (2006) explained that organizations fail to engage in crisis management because they lack an understanding of how to engage in systematic planning across often fragmented units. Consequently, organizations would rather place resources toward more immediate profit-generating needs, and are overwhelmed by the sheer number of potential crisis events that could occur.

Another impediment to crisis planning is the cultural belief system, often communicated by senior executives, concerning the extent of crisis management
efforts that will be supported (Mitroff, 1988; Pauchant & Mitroff, 1992; Pearson & Clair, 1998; Turner, 1976). A contributing factor to a crisis-prone culture is the false assumption that senior executives often carry, that is, the organization’s size, location, trust in employees, and connections with external stakeholders, will somehow protect them from a crisis. This faulty assumption has led to the ethics violations and financial corruption of some global organizations including Enron, Arthur Andersen, and Worldcom. In the case of Enron, senior executives incorrectly assumed that their close relationships with the Bush administration officials and Wall Street counterparts would somehow allow them to continue misleading financial analysts as to their corporate earnings. Such faulty belief led to actions that affected the interests of employees and other stakeholders and made them question Enron’s practices in financial management and reporting. As researchers pointed out, false assumptions can lead organizational leaders to ignore the need or support for crisis management activities (Boin & McConnell, 2007; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Wang, 2008).

TABLE 1: Crisis Management Model (Mitroff, 2005; Pearson & Mitroff, 1993)

1. Signal detection: Small but significant indicators exist to indicate that a crisis could occur. Examples include multiple engineer warnings about the booster rocket O-ring seal on NASA’s Challenger space shuttle.
2. Crisis planning: Systematic planning to prepare the organization to manage the crisis event. The most frequently reported planning activities include identifying and implementing crisis training, developing business continuity plans, creating a crisis communication strategy, and creating a crisis team.
3. Crisis containment: Attempts by the organization to manage the crisis event to mitigate further losses. Actions that typically occur include communicating with stakeholders on crisis management and securing fiscal, operational, and human resources that may be vulnerable to damage. Specific communication activities used during a crisis include information about operational and employee relations issues.
4. Crisis recovery: Steps taken to resume partial or full operation. Recovery efforts include enacting the business continuity plan and supporting human resource issues (such as employee assistance programs) to help stakeholders recover from the crisis event.
5. No-fault learning: Activities to support the learning process resulting from a crisis event, but without blaming a single person for the crisis event (except in the case of criminal behavior or liability). Activities associated with learning include critical reflection of the crisis experience and consideration of the direct and indirect impacts of the crisis event.
6. Redesign: Restructuring of the organization’s technical, structural, and cultural factors that may have influenced the crisis event. Other considerations include an evaluation of human factors and of top management’s psychology based on the new learning that occurred because of the crisis event. Consistent with systems theory, the redesign phase provides new data to consider in identifying early indicators during the signal detection phase.
An Overview of SHRD

SHRD has received increasing research attention in recent years (e.g., Garavan, 1991; 2007; Garavan, Costine, & Heraty, 1995; Gilley & Eggland, 1989; Gilley & Maycunich, 2000; Grieves, 2003; Horwitz, 1999; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; Walton, 1999; York, 2005). This concept has been examined at multiple levels including individual, organizational, and national (McLean & McLean, 2001). In this article, we focus on organizational SHRD because of the clear linkages between SHRD strategies, organizational priorities and results, and the emphasis on performance improvement to gain competitiveness and effectiveness (Garavan, 2007). In the crisis context where organizations tend to experience turmoil and multilevel changes, SHRD can provide a useful framework for leadership in designing HRD interventions that will ultimately contribute to the successful outcome of crisis planning and management.

Garavan et al. (1995) noted that SHRD is used in many contexts and for a variety of activities. It promotes practices that enhance the strategic performance of employees and organizations. It also emphasizes proactive change in management which enables organizations to survive in an increasingly complex, unstable, competitive, and global environment (Grieves, 2003). Garavan (1991, 2007) argued that to be effective, organizational SHRD needs to integrate learning interventions into business planning. This is a critical component; when combined with the active participation of top management as key stakeholders, SHRD will flourish. Organizational SHRD will also be strong where there is continuous knowledge of the external environment in terms of opportunities and threats facing the business.

It is argued that a strategic approach to HRD is an imperative in the globalization era. A strategic perspective involves designing and implementing HRD policies and practices to ensure that a firm’s human capital contributes to the achievement of business objectives (Davenport, Prusak, & Wilson, 2003; Garavan, 2007; Rainbird, 1994; Zula & Chermack, 2007). Organizational SHRD is grounded in the resource-based view of the firm (Wright, Dunford, & Snell, 2001; Wright, McMaInan, & McWilliams, 1994). The resource-based view provides a framework for understanding human resources as a pool of unique skills, knowledge, abilities, and experiences that can provide a resource to serve as a sustainable competitive advantage. Wright et al. (1994) suggested four criteria that human resources must meet to become an important source of sustained competitive advantage, that is, human resources must be (a) valuable, (b) rare, (c) inimitable, and (d) nonsubstitutable.

The scope and nature of the activities that come within the remit of organizational SHRD is contested (Garavan, 2007; Hu, 2007; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; Yorks, 2005). For example, Hu (2007) specified five key activities: (a) talent development, (b) training and development, (c) organization development, (d) performance development, and (e) leadership development. Garavan (2007) highlighted three sets of HRD strategies: (a) organization performance,
(b) organizational learning, and (c) organizational change. However, most agreed that SHRD involves systematic and formal processes that are aligned with the needs of the organization. In this article, we argue that by adopting performance and learning-based HRD interventions and collaborating with key stakeholders, HRD professionals can play a critical part in preparing the organization for crisis events. In the crisis management context, SHRD can help organizations develop operational capability. Operational capability consists of a collection of generic and specific competencies and skills that enable organizations to respond to crises and prevent future crises. Moynihan (2008) posited that SHRD can facilitate organizations to learn during and from the crisis. This makes SHRD particularly useful in crisis management given that crisis learning is difficult to achieve and often presents a paradox. As Boin, t’Hart, Stern, and Sundelius (2005) stated, “When the need to learn is at a peak, the institutional capacity of organisations may be disappointingly low” (p. 120).

Garavan’s Model of SHRD

Garavan (2007) developed a model of SHRD which includes three major constructs—(a) the context, (b) the HRD function, and (c) the stakeholder. According to Garavan, four levels of context shape the SHRD activities: (a) the global context (Level 1); (b) the organizational context, including strategy, structure, culture, and leadership (Level 2); (c) the job (Level 3), and (d) the individual (Level 4). The model also outlines three characteristics of SHRD—focus, orientation, and strategies. Furthermore, the model acknowledges the importance of multiple stakeholders that have emerged in the design, development, and implementation of SHRD, both internal and external to the organization (e.g., owners, investors, employers, employees, suppliers, and customers). The model emphasizes horizontal and vertical linkages throughout and suggests various stakeholder-focused outcomes. These stakeholders react to and evaluate outcomes, as well as provide input into the SHRD process. Garavan’s framework is used to guide our exploration of the role of SHRD in the specific context of organizational crisis management. Each component depicted in Garavan’s model will be elaborated in the following two sections. The model is a generalized one that prescribes the issues that are relevant at each level. It does not focus on the implementation process or how crisis management is enacted or managed in particular situations.

Contextualizing SHRD in Organizational Crisis Management

The literature on crisis management reveals that crises may be useful to organizations if they create greater learner readiness or have the potential for
Crisis learning focuses on identifying and embedding crisis management practices and behaviors in organizations to enhance crisis responses. Organizations encounter a number of barriers to learning during and after crises, which SHRD may help prevent or reduce. Specific barriers to learning highlighted in the crisis management literature include the following: the consequentiality of crises makes trial and error learning prohibitive (Moynihan, 2005); different types of learning are required including interorganizational, organizational, and individual (Koppenjan and Klijn, 2004); the amount of learning required in crisis situations is greater than that in more routine organizational situations (Boin et al., 2005); the ambiguity of previous experience may give rise to inappropriate lessons being drawn (Birkland, 1997); a focus on a specific crisis limits the potential for information processing (Jasanoff, 1990); organizational actors recycle old solutions to new problems (Senge, 1990); and crises provoke defensive postures and direct of problems (Moynihan, 2008).

Operational capability problems organizations may encounter include the lack of crisis management skills (Kaufman, Kesner, & Hazon, 1994), the lack of knowledge of crisis management processes (Sayeg et al., 2004), the lack of awareness of threats to operational continuity (Dahlhamer & D’Souza, 1997), the inability to follow the instructions of emergency respondents at the time of an incident (Perry & Mankin, 2005), skills in psychological coping (Gaudine & Thorne, 2001), and the lack of decision-making skills.
Level 1: The Global Context

Level 1 of the model focuses on a multiplicity of external factors that shape the role of SHRD in crisis management and trigger particular SHRD initiatives. Local or national conditions may focus on laws, codes, and protocols that impose varying levels of obligation. Laws, for example, may impose binding obligations on organizations to develop contingency plans and provide various forms of crisis management training. Health and safety laws may require organizations to devise emergency planning processes to address potential crises. There is a strong focus on national laws on preparedness. Some national governments do not adopt the “hard” laws approach; instead, they focus on “soft” interventions such as codes.
and protocols. These are typically written documents that do not have legal impact, but there is consensus that certain practices should be followed. They may be formulated by government agencies and political authorities or they may be advocated by employer bodies or associations or trade unions. They may emerge as a component of partnership arrangements between the government, employers, and trade unions.

Some countries have codes that focus on key players in a crisis management context, such as electricity distributors, water utility companies, and other organizations that provide essential services. The insurance industry is increasingly expecting public and private institutions to develop business continuity and contingency plans and to provide crisis management training to all employees. Crisis management may not be high on the national policy agenda or be perceived as a component of the national culture. For example, Pratchett (2004) articulated that given the conflicting priorities for public expenditure, contingency planning or crisis management is low on the political agenda. In some countries, demand for public funds by organizations in the name of crisis management is politically “taboo.” Similarly, McConnell and Drennan (2006) pointed out that the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the U.K. Emergency Planning Society, and Emergency Management Australia frequently struggle to get the ear of national governments, resulting in crisis management not being a high priority on the agenda of politicians.

Particular local conditions may prompt governments into action. The Philippines has, for example, one of the highest rates of international kidnapping. This came to a head with the brutal kidnapping and murder of Coco-Cola executive Betty Chua Sy. The president (Arroya) of the country vowed to focus on prosecution and the training of special teams to handle kidnapping situations. Similarly in Bali, the bombings were a wake-up call. The government there has developed a strategy to handle it. In Taiwan, the typhoons of 2001 were so severe that they disrupted manufacturing operations that Compaq depended on. As a result, the government implemented a national disaster recovery plan to prepare for future occurrences. These countries have taken actions that have multiple applications. They are valuable in responding to a wide range of disasters and emergencies.

A variety of multinational conditions and institutions also provide inputs that shape the role of SHRD in crisis management. The European Union, for instance, places a legal requirement on member states to develop contingency plans for dealing with threats such as terrorism and foot and mouth disease. Global terrorist events and international criminal acts have made national governments more aware of the urgency and necessity to provide security education and professional education of human resources involved in security management (Caudron, 2002). Multinational corporations may also pose certain policies on individual companies within the corporation. In addition, they have also taken actions in areas of security that they require sites in different
locations to implement. Various cross-cultural differences may also operate, including cultural assumptions toward planning and risk, and the extent of proactivity in the society and other cultural “blind spots” that either facilitate or inhibit crisis-planning initiatives by organizations. In Asian countries, for example, workplace disaster planning takes place in a slow and inefficient manner. Tierney, Lindell, and Perry (2001) highlight that these countries have been slow to react to disasters and do not understand the need for systems and processes to deal with disasters.

Overall, the demands of the external environment require that SHRD plays a major role in helping organizations learn from crises as well as strengthening the capability of organizations to respond. Disasters should be viewed as decision opportunities to build operational capability, capacity to learn, and the capacity to change. Birkland (1997) suggested that crises can have a catalytic effect. It focuses attention, helps break down resistance to change, and incorporates new ideas on crisis management.

**Level 2: Strategy, Structure, Culture, and Leadership**

The organization’s internal context shapes and explains the contribution of SHRD to crisis management efforts. Particular dimensions of the internal context that are relevant include the organization’s strategy, structure, culture, and leadership. The strategic orientation of the organization has significance in explaining the focus and types of SHRD practices that are introduced to manage crisis events. The organizational context is also important in explaining the resources that are committed to crisis management activities. British Airways (BA) experienced this first hand with the mishandling of the Terminal 5 opening at Heathrow Airport in London. Soon after the March 2008 opening, BA misplaced 23,000 passenger bags and cancelled 500 flights. BA’s Chief Executive Willie Walsh identified reasons for the terminal problems, including mistakes made with baggage checking technology, unfinished construction work, staff delays because of parking issues, and system failures. A major obstacle was that the testing mode for baggage security had not been transitioned to handle “live” cargo when the terminal opened, resulting in the system not recognizing baggages transferring to BA from other airlines. The cascading effect of multiple issues had not been considered in BA’s approach to planning and crisis management, thus resulting in BA’s inability to handle the factors at a financial loss predicted at £16 million (Thomson, 2008).

A resource-based theory of the firm suggests that organizations build both formal and tacit competence in the area of crisis management. Where strategy is planned, the emphasis will be on formal competency (Badarocco, 1991). This approach to strategy will likely be reflected in the development of formal SHRD interventions, such as training courses and learning interventions, which have clearly articulated knowledge. It provides the organization with
the capacity to be flexible, adaptive, and effective in reacting to crises when they occur. SHRD can, therefore, facilitate the development of the tacit competencies required by this approach (Ouedraogo, 2007).

It is worth acknowledging that some organizations do not develop strategies in a planned way. The strategies they adopt are frequently incidental rather than planned. A good example is the widespread financial impact of the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic in China. In a descriptive analysis, Tse, So, and Sin (2006) found that restaurant owners lost US$3 billion in revenue because patrons did not dine in because of fear of infection. Although some restaurants survived through government relief incentives, most responded by showing outward displays of a concern for the health and safety of their patrons. Appealing to traditional Chinese customs of herbal medicinal treatment, many restaurants offered special menu items that purported to decrease the risks of contracting the disease. In addition, restaurant servers wore hygienic masks and gloves, included multiple chopsticks (to avoid patrons using the same chopsticks to eat), and posted descriptions of what actions the restaurant was taking in the daily cleaning of the premises and food ware. Thus, to survive, Hong Kong restaurants had to engage in accelerated learning and action that was aligned with the cultural beliefs of the customers. For future crisis planning, restaurants that did survive the SARS crisis should engage in reflection and learning to identify what strategies worked and ensure that all employees are trained on appropriate behavior for similar crisis events.

Various aspects of the organization’s structure are relevant in shaping crisis management efforts and the contribution that SHRD can make. Hillyard (2000) highlighted that crisis management needs to draw on multiple sources of expertise across a range of networks. The structural dynamic may result in various conflicting tendencies such as centralization versus decentralization, control versus flexibility, and coordination versus fragmentation. A key challenge is to ensure that goals and strategies of crisis management are aligned with each other. Horizontal alignment focuses on the extent to which SHRD activities elicit appropriate structural behaviors. SHRD can contribute to effective horizontal alignment through leadership development activities, the development of commitment to crisis management, skills training, and empowerment strategies.

Structural considerations have major implications for the use of knowledge about crises and the manner in which they are integrated into policy and the wider concept of organizational learning (Garavan, 2007). Smith (1995) and Elliott and Smith (2006) suggested that structural or configurational features of organizations may inhibit the learning practices and create a situation where beliefs are reinforced rather than challenged. They further explained that from a crisis management perspective, it is not sufficient to look at decision outcomes only; it is also necessary to examine the manner in which decisions are made and how structure and culture framed that process. When a reputable international hotel chain located in the Mediterranean discovered a major food
poisoning outbreak that affected thousands of customers, their response was quick and decisive. The hotel management executive team immediately activated their crisis management plan (only in place since 9/11) that included engaging in frequent communication with media and hotel guests and coordinated medical care for infected guests (Paraskevas, 2006). Some of the properties had more infected guests than others, but coordination between properties had not been part of the crisis plan. With minimal training and little experience, the supervisors were left not knowing how to handle such a crisis on some properties. In reflection, the crisis plan should have been explained from both a vertical and horizontal perspective, which would have allowed resources and support to be shared between properties.

Organizational culture lies at the heart of crisis management. Pauchant and Mitroff (1992) argued that concepts such as proneness and resistance to crises were visible in the form of organizational practices, routines, and structures. These characteristics were largely determined by collective and individual beliefs. They suggested that crisis-prone organizations “have institutionalized ‘sickness’ in their culture, thus making it acceptable; furthermore, they put tremendous pressure on normal individuals to become ‘sick’ to fit in” (pp. 172-173). Such a cultural context requires SHRD interventions that can challenge the paradigm while making it safe to critically evaluate decisions and actions. Smith and Elliott (2007) illuminated that denial is a powerful feature of organizational culture; it prevents sense making when crises appear. They cited the example of the “it couldn’t happen here” syndrome that prevents managers from picking up cues. A classic case of a crisis-prone culture occurred at the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA) with the space shuttle Challenger explosion in 1986. Under pressure to avoid further flight delays, NASA managers ignored engineers’ concerns about the effect of cold weather on the booster rocket O-ring seal and approved the fatal launch. The result was a congressional inquiry that identified a culture characteristic of intimidation, inept communication and decision making between managers and engineers, and poor design quality standards (Shrivastava, Mitroff, Miller, & Miglani, 2006).

Finally, organizational leadership is central to the implementation of crisis management initiatives and is highlighted as a key influence on SHRD. Effective leadership is critical to articulating the crisis management agenda. Leaders confer legitimacy on both crisis management and SHRD. Boin and Lagadec (2000) proposed that effective crisis management be on the agenda of the decision making elites and that leaders be engaged in continuous efforts of preparation. They also suggested a number of ways in which leadership can engage with SHRD interventions in a crisis management context. These include involving organizational leaders in training and development, promoting learning within and across networks, aligning crisis management efforts with the core values of the organization, and continually learning from experience (Wooten & James, 2008).
Level 3: The Job Context

Different levels of values and uniqueness of jobs (Garavan, 2007) may shape the responses of SHRD to crisis management. Various job roles are important in the context of crisis management. Bulmahn and Krakel (2002) stressed that the most important tasks for key organizational leaders include focusing on information exchange to ensure coherence before a crisis occurs and preparing for unknown crises. K. H. Roberts and Bea (2001) called for teams to be formed to tackle difficult crisis management tasks and to ensure appropriate decision making. Poorly prepared and trained personnel will contribute to a disaster or crisis. Although the Mediterranean hotel executive team and the property managers had gone through simulations just months before the food contamination incident occurred, they realized that the crisis plan had not been fully experienced or understood by all employees nor had anyone expected that a food contamination could spread so quickly. In retrospect, one member of the executive team commented that the corporate headquarters and the properties did a poor job communicating with one another and implementing the crisis plan. In a similar vein, Mitroff and Alpaslan (2003) contended that an important component of crisis preparedness is to create an expert group that will explore future crisis possibilities and identify appropriate counter measures. These researchers particularly emphasized the importance of expert skills and the use of think tanks to identify potential crisis events. SHRD efforts should, therefore, be directed at jobs that are important to the organization’s crisis management efforts. In the case of the Mediterranean resort, those would be focused on the executive team, property managers, and staff levels.

Level 4: The Individual Context

The final level is on the individual context. Individual expectations, attitudes, employability, and cognitive characteristics can also influence the types of SHRD activities organizations may adopt in the context of crisis management. Sayegh et al. (2004) proposed that the key to crisis management be relevant experience that consists of education, training, and exposure to crisis events. Lazar (1999) stated that managers and employees need explicit knowledge that facilitates the processing of information in a logical way and the capacity to analyze information correctly in a stressful situation. What was also highlighted is the role of self-efficacy in crisis situations. According to Grandey (2000), the possession of strong self-efficacy has impact on employees’ ability to regulate emotions and their confidence to make decisions in crisis situations. The motivation employees have for participating in learning activities related to crisis management is also important. For example, managers and other experts may be slow to acknowledge that they have skill needs or lack motivation to engage in learning activities that are focused on crisis
management. This is manifested by reluctance to address issues that prevail in the workplace or by lack of individual willingness to develop a more crisis-prepared organization.

**Operationalizing SHRD in Organizational Crisis Management**

Now that we have discussed the levels in which SHRD can operate within an organization and specifically in crisis planning and response, we now explore how SHRD interventions can be applied to crisis management. Figure 2 highlights three characteristics of SHRD that are particularly relevant to organizational crisis management: focus, orientation, and strategies. To facilitate a better understanding, we discuss SHRD applications to crisis management around each one of the three characteristics.

**SHRD Focus**

SHRD focus addresses whether the activities of SHRD emphasize exploration or exploitation, the extent to which SHRD activities are horizontally integrated with organizational crisis management activities, and the level of sophistication of functions and processes (Garavan, 2007). Where SHRD emphasizes exploitation, its activities will focus on short-term concerns and the internal development of competencies. With such a focus, organizations will implement initiatives such as skills training, socialization processes, and performance management activities directed at organizational crisis management. An exploitation focus is short term and will not lead to the building of long-term operational capability. On the contrary, an exploration focus prompts organizations to stress tacit learning, adopt knowledge management initiatives, and incorporate processes such as learning from previous crises and experimentation with new approaches to crisis management. A SHRD approach can guide explorative learning by identifying and assessing future learning and performance needs, preparing and developing individuals, aligning systems and processes, and facilitating organizational and individual adaptation to changing conditions that affect shareholder values. Khatri and Ng (2000) highlighted the value of tacit learning in crisis management, that is, to fill in gaps in information and knowledge and to enable the accurate interpretation of the crisis event. Sayegh et al. (2004) found that flight controllers and other emergency services personnel at ground zero on 9/11 made sound decisions in spite of incomplete information available to them. This was because they were able to draw on tacit knowledge accumulated from years of experience. The tacit knowledge can be collectively facilitated through appropriate SHRD interventions (Mankin & Perry, 2004). The value of tacit and collective learning is also manifested in the case of the Heathrow Airport Terminal 5 debacle. The lessons learned, the review of training and development activities and their incorporation into
the collective tacit learning of the organization, is an example of an explorative approach to crisis preparedness. Similarly, involving SHRD in expanding the scope of potential crisis events and identifying crisis skill competencies for managers and staff will help the Mediterranean hotel company to be better prepared for future crisis events.

The integration of SHRD activities with organizational crisis management activities is another important dimension of focus. SHRD is concerned with both vertical and horizontal integration (Garavan, 2007). Vertical integration focuses on how effectively the activities of SHRD are aligned with the organization’s crisis management goals. Horizontal integration focuses on the alignment of SHRD with other crisis management activities, such as communication processes, emergency-planning processes, and risk assessment.

A key question concerns the extent to which the total spectrum of practices contributes to a defined set of crisis management behaviors and performance expectations. The response to the 9/11 attacks on the United States Pentagon is a good example of aligning SHRD activities with crisis management goals. The 9/11 Commission (2004) attributed the low number of human fatalities to the high level of crisis training and preparatory activities and the highly coordinated response provided by fire and police personnel. This response was in contrast to fragmented coordination between the port authority and the New York City first responders to the 9/11 World Trade Center bombings.

It is equally important that SHRD has strong functional and process integration. Functional integration highlights the importance of having high-quality specialists within the HRD function. The quality of HRD specialists will determine the extent to which they are able to contribute to the development of crisis management plans, lead postcrisis examination of a crisis response to identify areas needing improvement, act as a driving force behind the development of crisis management plans, and convince top managers to test the feasibility of these plans (Danowsky & Poll, 2005; Lockwood, 2005). The role of effective structural networks in crisis management is highlighted by Moynihan (2008). He cited the example of the outbreak and eventual containment of exotic Newcastle disease (END) in the state of California, which subsequently spread to other states in the United States. A network of 10 state and federal agencies was established consisting of more than 7,000 employees. This network worked in a coordinated way and facilitated intracrisis learning. The crisis was unusual and agencies had limited information about how END spreads. The crisis lasted for several months. The network participants had time to learn during the crisis. Process integration emphasizes the delivery processes used by SHRD. In the context of organizational crisis management, these processes may require involvement in the development of crisis management plans, the design of training for employees, needs identification and evaluation processes, and benchmarking of training and development practices with external best practices (Barrow & Darrow, 2005; Gurchick, 2006). Wooten and James (2008) cited Alaskan Airlines (AA) as a good example of
functional and vertical integration in their response to the Flight 261 crash from Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, to San Francisco, California. Drawing from his own experience with crises and recalling practices used in other air travel tragedies, John Kelley, AA’s new CEO, convinced top management that in addition to operational knowledge, employees also needed training in providing emotional support for passengers and families. Under Kelley’s leadership, AA implemented employee training and development for the compassionate assistance relief effort and the critical incident response program and provided grief and trauma support for families after the Flight 261 crash.

**SHRD Orientation**

The orientation of SHRD highlights the extent to which HRD professionals are strategic partners, acts as an organizational change agents, and facilitates linking. Strategic partner models envision that HRD professionals will be key players at the executive table and adopt a multiple stakeholder approach to the management of HRD (Armstrong, 2005; Casio, 2005). Strategic partners will play a strategic role in crisis management preparation and training to facilitate organizational continuity. Lockwood (2005) clarified that this role starts long before a crisis occurs and continues throughout the crisis response and recovery stages. The role also goes beyond the crisis itself and focuses on organizational learning to enable greater flexibility and capacity handling future crises. The notion of HRD professionals as strategic partners is central to the translation of crisis management strategic priorities into SHRD priorities and activities. Strategic partners devise mechanisms that incorporate line managers and employees in crisis management policy formulation. Liou and Lin (2008) reminded that SHRD will not make a significant contribution to crisis management unless it is accepted as a key strategic partner in emergency planning and crisis management initiatives. They acknowledged that there are significant barriers to strategic partnering in this context and suggested that the role of the HRD department needs to be rethought if it is to be a key player.

The change agent role envisages the implementation of organization-wide change and development interventions that focus on enabling organizations to be crisis ready. Budhwar (2000) and Caldwell (2008), among others, suggested that the goal of the organizational change agent be to foster HR scalability. In the context of crisis management, this means ensuring that there is a sense of common purpose, contextual clarity, and strong ownership of outcomes. The change agent role envisages a fluid and dynamic organization and most fundamental of all, changing the mental models of the organization in respect of crisis management (Pfeffer, 2005).

Last, linking represents an important challenge for HRD professionals. It involves the linking of HRD with the crisis management challenges of the business, shaping the strategic direction of organizations in response to crisis management, and developing innovative crisis management solutions. Linking
also involves creating conditions where line managers can ensure that things happen. Moynihan (2008) believed that HRD specialists can speed up the diffusion of information and provide more detailed and credible information. HRD specialists have a key role to play in pooling knowledge about crises and fostering partnership skills among crisis management personnel. Moynihan (2008) further proposed the use of learning forums where key decision makers are encouraged to closely examine crisis information and decide how it will affect future actions. These learning forums can be facilitated by organizational HRD specialists. Kraiger et al. (2004) likewise articulated the role of collaboration in facilitating learning.

**SHRD Strategies**

As Figure 2 depicted, three sets of SHRD strategies can be adopted to facilitate the organization’s crisis management efforts. These strategies focus on organizational learning, organizational change, and organizational performance, respectively.

*Organizational learning focused SHRD strategies* emphasize critical reflection, organizational socialization, tacit learning, learning from mistakes, and action-centered learning. Various contributors have highlighted organizational learning that can emerge from crises. For example, Smith and Elliott (2007) described three variations of organizational learning in the context of crisis management: learning as crises, learning for crises, and learning from crises. Learning as crises requires fundamentally challenging core beliefs and assumptions of key stakeholders. It may take the form of debates regarding how things should be done. Learning for crises does not seek to prevent all crises; rather, the goal of organizational learning is to develop capability around response. Learning from crises refers to organizations learning from their own experience with crises and the experience of others. Morgan Stanley, a U.S.-based financial services company, might not have learned from past crisis events had it not been for the insistent and frequent evacuation drills led by security chief, Rick Rescorla. Rescorla had observed that the 1993 World Trade Center evacuation was too slow and the employees were told to go to the roof to await rescue instead of descending the stairs. Rescorla imagined a scenario where roof-top evacuation would not be feasible if the building’s integrity was made vulnerable by a series of major bombs. Therefore, he had employees and visitors practice rigorously timed fire drills that required participants to know exactly where to evacuate and to descend several floors by walking down two steps at a time. This rote training saved more than 2,500 employees when Tower 2 collapsed on 9/11.

Seeger et al. (2005) noted that crises can motivate organizations to search for a wider portfolio of responses to future crises, like that considered by Rescorla. Organizational learning interventions ultimately may lead to
increased flexibility and adaptability (Shipton, 2006). It is important to note that eyewitness accounts described the Morgan Stanley evacuation as efficient and orderly because the employees already knew what to do. However, as Kovoor-Misra and Nathan (2000) acknowledged, not all organizations are capable of learning, and they often experience obstacles such as blame, the denial of responsibilities, and other dysfunctional behaviors. Hence, it becomes even more important to consider SHRD as it has the capacity to engage organizations in critical reflection and a discourse of renewal by identifying key lessons learned. An additional benefit is that SHRD can help organizational leaders become more open to examining the crisis response and understanding key organizational weaknesses. The goal then is to develop leaders who are more willing to question core assumptions and beliefs that prevent effective crisis management. The END case illustrates the value of this learning. Standing operating procedures (SOPs) were developed based on the insights of employees and those who managed the crisis. The development of these SOPs was a bottom-up process; however, they were reviewed by senior management. The final manual exceeded 400 pages and provided procedures for every aspect of crisis management.

As previously discussed, most organizations do not anticipate or are not prepared for the occurrence of crisis events. This often leads to undesirable crisis management outcomes and negative impacts on organizational performance (Scott, 2005; Walker, 1996). Organizational SHRD prompts organizations to unlearn and abandon beliefs and values through interventions such as questioning assumptions, proposing alternative scenarios, and challenging conventional thinking. These processes contribute to unlearning that in turn helps prevent organizational inertia. Unlearning also challenges key stakeholders to systematically rethink about their approach to crisis management. Embedded ideas can be revamped to safeguard against inertia (Hedberg, 1981; Stead & Smallman, 1999). Just as Kleiner and Roth (1997) warned, organizations that become blind to key lessons of the past will continue to make mistakes. A good example is the learning that occurred as the result of the Hagersville tire fire, one of the biggest environmental crises in North America that involved nearly 14 million tires. Simon and Pauchant (2000) found that the magnitude of the crisis experience had triggered learning at the behavioral, paradigmatic, and systemic levels. The first level of behavioral learning is enforced and maintained by external control, through rules, regulations, or technology systems. The second level of paradigmatic learning challenges the existing paradigms and allows different stakeholders to consider a wider range of issues. The third level of systematic learning allows individuals to recognize the impact of paradigms and develop new strategies for dealing with complex issues such as the tire fire crisis. Such a learning process positions HRD strategically within the organization; however, in the Hagersville tire fire case, it took a severe crisis event and huge loss to stimulate this outcome.
Organizational SHRD can play a role in ensuring that past learning does not hinder new learning and that insights learned from the past are used to prevent future crises (Sheaffer, Richardson, & Posenblat, 1998). Such introspection and critical assessment of lessons learned is constituted by Mitroff and Pearson (1993) as the “no fault” learning (p. 16). Soon after the Oklahoma City bombing, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management issued a book of guidelines for managers who have to respond to traumatic events in the workplace. Tyler (1996) called this an example of an outcome that contributed to organizational viability following a disaster. Wang (2008) further argued that organizations should promote learning throughout the process of crisis management rather than learning only after a crisis event occurs.

Organizational change focused SHRD strategies emphasize feedback processes, the creation of a crisis sensitive culture, and the development of change management processes including education activities. SHRD calls for HRD practitioners to play an active role in educating senior management and other organizational members on the meaning and importance of having strategically aligned policies and systems within organizations. This is paramount as most organizations often act reactively rather than proactively to crisis events. SHRD interventions can be mixed with HRM activities such as reward systems, benefits, employee assistance programs, flexible leave options, emergency compensation for displaced employees, the implementation of health and safety standards, layoffs, and reduced work hours (Barron, Phillips, & Steinmeyer, 2005; Lockwood, (2005); Kondrasuk, 2004; Pasek, 2002). This horizontal integration is fundamentally important to maximize the impact of SHRD.

As a result of the Tyco International corporate theft crisis, where executives were convicted of stealing US$170 million in unauthorized compensation, new leadership took aggressive steps to ensure that the ethical behavior would ensue in the organization. Specifically, Tyco executives conducted a root cause analysis of past crisis or “near miss” events to understand how the theft occurred and other antecedents. The human resources group found that unethical behavior had often occurred because of lack of mentoring and accountability. As a result, Tyco developed a series of corporate governance policies and made ethics training mandatory at all job levels (Wooten & James, 2008). This type of learning is beneficial for it enables the organization to develop greater resilience toward future crisis events.

SHRD can facilitate the development of an appropriate crisis-focused culture. Fostering such a learning-oriented culture has a major implication for ensuring crisis preparedness. Richardson (1993) stated that one of the triggers for crisis is the relationship between HR policies, technology, and corporate culture. Mirvis (1997) found that less crisis-prepared organizations are less likely to adopt state-of-the-art HRD practices. Firms with a low focus on sophisticated or high-performance HR practices are less likely to exhibit high morale, openness, willingness to change, and value the input of
employees. SHRD can help organizations balance the internal and external contexts to ensure that HRD processes support rather than undermining corporate culture.

The development of boundary-spanning skills represents another key component of effective organizational change. Given that more and more organizations operate in a global environment, change management becomes more complex and requires key organizational members to work across organizational boundaries. SHRD helps enhance organizations’ change capacity by identifying and developing boundary-spanning skills such as networking, alliances building, political skills, and trust building. It can also facilitate the creation of a culture of sharing technical, political, social, and functional information relevant to organizational crisis management strategies. A major critique of the U.S. government’s slow response to providing relief to Hurricane Katrina victims was that there lacked a unified coordination between the FEMA and Louisiana state and local officials. Even though emergency planners had been provided with a similar hurricane training scenario (i.e., Hurricane Pam), they did not consider it realistic and consequently did not implement many of the recommendations included in the exercise, such as the need to improve coordination between local, state, and federal response agencies (Moats, Chermack, & Dooley, 2008). Beechler, Sondergaard, Miller, and Bird (2004) confirmed that managers with well-developed boundary-spanning skills are more effective in building and maintaining relationships and enhancing the coordinating capabilities of organizations.

Organizational performance-focused SHRD strategies emphasize skills training, job and competency analysis, and management and leadership development. A key role for organizational SHRD is to identify performance needs and thereby developing core competencies to meet the demands of organizations. This can prove to be a difficult task in the context of crisis management. Sniezek, Wilkins, Waddington, and Baumann (2002) suggested that crisis management is particularly relevant in interactions among various teams. This poses a challenge for the identification of needs and means to best train employees. Where employees have individualized needs, it will not be practical to train employees together. Organizations in this case may use learning strategies such as e-learning, one-to-one interaction, coaching, and shadowing. Common crisis-training exercises differ in the range of interaction and realism (Peterson & Perry, 1999). Tabletop exercises are the least complex and include a narrative of a crisis event, requiring participants to role-play positions and describe how they would respond to a crisis event. In contrast, functional exercises involve actual tests of one or more parts of a crisis plan and evaluate how individuals coordinate and work together in their response effort. An example of a functional exercise is a crisis management team responding to a report of workplace violence on the company premises. The most interactive are full-scale exercises that test the major crisis-planning functions in the field and require substantial resources, props, and actors to simulate the event. An example of a full-scale activity is the
3-day simulated mass evacuation exercise conducted across coastal and southeastern Texas in early 2006. The exercise involved 75% of Texas emergency responders that reenacted evacuation procedures, response to casualties, and allocation of key resources in response to a hypothetical hurricane (Williams, 2006). Furthermore, the value of developing multidisciplinary teams is also noted. Ferris, Perrewe, Anthony, and Gilmore (2000) argued that such teams can become “nests” of complementary skills and competencies across organizations. DeRosa, Hantula, Kock, and D’Arcy (2004) suggested that HRD can facilitate through the use of coaching interventions and the dissemination of best practices throughout an organization. Multidisciplinary teams enable organizations to gain greater operational agility to deal with crises.

Effective crisis management requires a complex skill set, including communication skills, coordination skills, knowledge of crisis management, and resource allocation. As an organization-wide process, organizational crisis management links human resources, safety information, technology, and other relevant resources into a systemswide coordinated effort (Mitroff, 2005). This requirement highlights the need for a holistic and strategic approach to skills development. Organizational SRHD can help through the use of an organization-wide competencies development approach to crisis management. At a theoretical level, the specific contribution relates to its capacity to develop specialized resources and coordinating activities. Specialized resources focus on both the functional and organizational resources. Functional resources are the skills possessed by an organization’s crisis management team. These resources must, however, be unique and difficult to imitate (Premeaux & Breaux, 2007). In the context of organizational crisis management, functional resources include the skills of an organization’s top management team, the vision of the CEO with respect to crisis management, and other tangible and intangible resources that enable the organization to be crisis prepared.

As previously discussed, another key resource focuses on coordination ability that emphasizes the organization’s ability to coordinate its functional and organizational resources to create maximum value (Daft, 2007). In the context of organizational crisis management, this includes the “control systems” organizations use to coordinate and motivate people to be crisis prepared. It also includes the way organizations decide to centralize and decentralize authority for crisis management, and the way they develop and promote shared cultural values to increase effectiveness and allow for efforts in crisis management. In sharp contrast to the federal and state response to Hurricane Katrina, Wal-Mart has been lauded for its coordinated response to hurricane victims. Before Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Wal-Mart had already contacted distribution centers and organized a cross-functional emergency center that coordinated the allocation of supplies and resources (Wooten & James, 2008). These competencies and capacities needed for organizational crisis management can be built and enhanced through well-designed SRHD interventions such as structured training programs and e-learning activities.
It is argued that individual employees’ knowledge and skills are particularly important in managing crises (Liou & Lin, 2008). Such knowledge and skills may range from knowledge of emergency procedures, emergency preparedness, and communication skills to deal with emergencies to skills in handling the aftermath of crises. However, organizational performance-focused SHRD strategies are often implemented in a crisis management context with little consideration of employee capabilities. Consequently, it is likely only after implementation problems occur will HRD have a role to play. SHRD can make a contribution in estimating how long it will take before employees are ready to effectively implement organization crisis management strategies. This can be realized through the calculation of learning cycle times, the use of time and motion studies, and pre and post evaluations. The information generated from these processes allows the organization to determine the feasibility and cost/benefit of particular performance-focused strategies.

**Outcomes of SHRD**

The outcomes of SHRD are many and varied (Grieves, 2003; McCracken & Wallace, 2000; Torres & Preskill, 2001). In the context of organizational crisis management, they include the shaping of the organization’s mission and goals on crisis management, the creation of a crisis-focused corporate culture, greater individual readiness for crisis events, the development of a capacity to learn from crises, greater integration of crisis management efforts and the capability to draw on multiple expertise across a range of networks, and greater stakeholder satisfaction (Coles & Buckle, 2004; Hillyard, 2000; Tierney, Lindell, & Perry, 2001). However, SHRD needs to be conscious of the conflicting tensions running through the practice of crisis management. Different organizational stakeholders, such as owners, investors, employees, suppliers, and customers, are likely to evaluate the contribution of SHRD differently. HRD professionals need to ascertain the expectations of different stakeholder groups and merge these expectations into the overall HRD goals and strategies that are used to facilitate organization crisis management efforts.

**Directions for Future Research**

As stated at the beginning of our article, crises may result in both successes and failures for organizations. We content that organizations will have more success in dealing with and learning from crises when they consider capability and learning issues. These are key preoccupations of SHRD and they can contribute to the survival and viability of the organization and its people in times of crises.

As we noted earlier, the relationship between HRD and crisis management in general has not received much attention by HRD scholars nor championed by HRD practitioners (Hutchins & Wang, 2008). Therefore, HRD professionals
may have limited opportunities to adequately understand how learning, change, and performance-focused interventions can be effectively used to support organizations’ crisis management initiatives. Given the prevalence and recognized impact of crisis events on individuals, organizations, communities, and the society, it is important and necessary that HRD scholars make consistent and continuing research efforts in understanding the unique nature of organizational crises. Such understanding can assist HRD professionals in designing appropriate interventions that would be aligned with organizations’ strategic intent, and thus ultimately bring out the optimal outcomes of crisis management.

Second, this article unfolded the multifaceted contributions of SHRD to organization crisis management, including SHRD focus, orientation, and learning, change, and performance-based strategies. However, all the recommendations we proposed for HRD practitioners are derived primarily from our synthesis and analysis of crisis management and strategic HRD literature. Therefore, it is necessary that HRD researchers conduct empirical studies and collect both qualitative and quantitative data to test the applicability and effectiveness of our recommendations. That is, more empirical studies need to be done to identify successful cases where crisis-oriented organizational systems and structures are in place to enable organizations to have effectively prevented or dealt with crisis events. Particularly, HRD researchers need to find out what SHRD-based interventions have been adopted by these organizations to facilitate their efforts in managing crises, and how effective these strategies proved to be in practice? On the other hand, HRD researchers may also want to look into the cases where organizations have failed to cope with crisis events, to find out factors that may have resulted in such failure and consequences the organizations had to face. Inquiry along this line will provide useful and much-needed information to help HRD professionals continuously identify, design, and improve interventions that are more likely to address the specific demands of organizations in the crisis context.

Next, this article represents a broad sketch of the topic under study. Thus, we encourage HRD researchers who are interested in this line of research to take a narrower focus and examine specific SHRD interventions in relation to organization crisis management, as we proposed earlier. For example, HRD scholars may evaluate a specific crisis-training program, organizational learning, or change-oriented intervention to identify the level of effectiveness in the context of organization crisis management. Such focused studies can generate data that likely deepen and enrich our understanding of the role and value of SHRD and its wide applications in crisis management.

Finally, this article explored the HRD contribution to organizational crisis management from the strategic lens. It would be equally valuable for researchers to examine the same phenomenon from other perspectives. For example, McGuire, Garavan, O’Donnell, and Watson (2007) suggested four metaperspectives (language, community/societal, system, and psychological) that characterize emerging theoretical lenses in HRD. Researchers might consider
approaching the concept of crisis from these or other perspectives, perhaps considering how communities react and are influenced by organizational crisis events, or focus on how the role of HRD is affected by the discourse used to shape crisis events. Similarly, Wang (2008) proposed that crises be examined from the cultural perspective, that is, how the notion of crisis is perceived in different cultures and what culture-based strategies have been adopted to address the culture-sensitive crisis events. In this article, we included a number of crisis events that have occurred in different cultural settings. It is worth exploring how these cases were handled from the cultural perspective. As Torraco (2005) suggested, the scope of HRD is expanding past the more traditionally recognized areas of organizational development, training, and career management; hence, research must acknowledge and pursue these broadening interests. In sum, embracing multiple perspectives and theories is likely to broaden our knowledge base of the various contributions HRD may make to the process of crisis management within organizations.

Conclusion

In this article, we explored the role of SHRD in the crisis management activities of organizations. We argued that SHRD can contribute to the development of both operational capability and enhanced capacity to learn both during and after the crises. We proposed four key levels of SHRD contribution and identified key issues relevant at each level. We encourage HRD specialists and those responsible for crisis management in organizations to become more cognizant of the role that SHRD can play in the effective management of crises and crisis preparedness. Theories of crisis management should expand their current boundaries to incorporate the SHRD contribution. Our model proposes a particular way to view the capability and learning issues that are relevant to crisis management. It does not, however, address how these activities are implemented or enacted. Therefore, the next step in developing the contribution of SHRD is to more fully explore the politics and change implementation issues that emerge.

References


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**Jia Wang** is an Assistant Professor of Human Resource Development (HRD) in the Department of Educational Administration and Human Resource Development at Texas A&M University. With a wide range of international HRD experience, her research focuses on international HRD, management and leadership development, organization development, and qualitative research methods. Jia’s research has been published in journals such as *Human Resource Development Quarterly, Human Resources Development International, Human Resource Development Review*, and *International Journal of Vocational Education and Training*.

**Holly M. Hutchins** is an Assistant Professor of Human Resource Development at the University of Houston. Her research areas are training transfer, organizational crisis management and e-Learning. Holly’s articles have appeared in *Human Resource Development Quarterly, Performance Improvement Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Workplace Learning*.

**Thomas N. Garavan** is Professor and Associate Dean, Postgraduate Studies and Executive Education, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick. A graduate of the University of Limerick (BBS, 1982; MBS, 1985) and the University of Bristol (Doctor of Education, 1996), he has authored or co-authored 14 books and 100 refereed journal papers and book chapters.
Thomas is a Fellow of the Irish Institute of Training and Development (FIITD) and a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (MCIPD). He is also a member of the Society of Industrial and Organisational Psychologists (USA) and a board member of both the Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) and the University Forum for Human Resource Development. Thomas is currently Editor and Chief of the Journal of European and Industrial Training and Associate Editor of Human Resource Development International. He has examined doctoral theses at a number of leading universities and business schools, including the University of Swinbourn, Australia, University of Leicester, University of Plymouth, University of Leeds and Northumbria University.