UNIVERSITY OF INSURANCE AND FINANCE

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ADMINISTRATION AND MARKETING

TOPIC:

EMPLOYEE TRAINING AS A MEANS OF MANAGING OPERATIONAL RISK AND OVERCOMING ECONOMIC CRISES IN ORGANIZATIONS

ABSTRACT

of a dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of PhD under the programme “Finance, Insurance and Social Security”, professional field 3.8 Economics

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The dissertation was discussed and scheduled for public defence by the Department of Finance and Insurance at the University of Insurance and Finance (UIF). The dissertation comprises an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a list of references.

The dissertation has a total length of 297 pages, including the main text, conclusion and bibliography. It contains 10 figures/graphic elements and 50 tables. The bibliography includes Bulgarian- and English-language sources, among them scholarly literature, international reports, regulatory documents and analytical studies in the fields of organisational learning, operational risk, crisis management and human capital management.

The author's abstract presents the general characteristics of the dissertation, its structure, the principal content of each chapter, the applicability of the results, the scientific and practical contributions, directions for future research, the author's publications, and the declaration of originality and authenticity.

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CONTENTS

I. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE DISSERTATION

1. Relevance and significance of the dissertation topic

We live in a world characterised by a high degree of uncertainty and an increasing frequency of crises of an economic, social, health-related, psychological, technological and geopolitical nature. The intensity of these processes has a substantial impact on organisational functioning, placing companies in unstable conditions in which any external or internal shock may cause serious structural, functional and managerial disruption. In this environment, traditional approaches based primarily on predefined procedures, formal control mechanisms and static response plans are increasingly proving insufficient to ensure sustainable organisational functioning.

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world has experienced a succession of large-scale shocks, among which the 2008-2009 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing geopolitical and economic tensions have been particularly significant. These tensions have been associated with disruptions to global supply chains, energy insecurity, inflationary pressure, accelerated digitalisation and the transformation of labour markets. These events not only reshape the external environment but also expose substantial internal deficiencies within organisations, including weaknesses in management, communication, workforce preparedness, digital readiness and adaptive capacity. Crises may therefore increasingly be regarded as an indicator of the resilience of organisational structures and the maturity of internal risk-management mechanisms.

Crises are not manifested solely through macroeconomic imbalances, declining demand, restricted access to financial resources or market instability. They directly affect intra-organisational processes by increasing pressure on human resources, disrupting workflows, compromising information systems, impeding coordination, reducing managerial effectiveness and increasing the likelihood of human error. Under such conditions, operational risk assumes particular importance because it is directly related to an organisation's actual capacity to preserve its functionality, efficiency and economic viability.

Operational risk, defined in international regulatory and management practice as the risk of direct or indirect loss resulting from inadequate or failed internal processes, human actions, system failures or external events, should be viewed not merely as a technical or financial category but as a complex managerial problem. It affects every organisational level - strategic, managerial and operational - and is directly related to the quality of human capital, organisational culture, levels of competence, the effectiveness of communication and the ability to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty.

The relevance of the present study stems from the fact that contemporary organisations are increasingly required to manage risk in an environment of continuous, difficult-to-predict and multidimensional change. Modern crises are not isolated events; rather, they are processes that exert a long-term influence on the organisational environment. They accelerate digitalisation, alter business models, prompt a reassessment of employment relations, intensify psychological pressure on employees and require rapid managerial responses. This necessitates a transition from a reactive to a proactive approach to risk management, whereby organisations not only respond to events after they occur but also build advance capacity for adaptation, prevention and sustainable recovery.

Operational risk management and the development of operational resilience are assuming an increasingly central role and have become key elements of strategic management. It is becoming ever clearer that organisational resilience does not depend solely on financial resources, technological capabilities or formal control procedures. To a considerable extent, it is determined by employees' knowledge, skills, behaviour and adaptability. Human capital is becoming a critical resource for reducing vulnerabilities, preventing errors, maintaining process stability and enabling an effective organisational response to crises.

These considerations highlight the importance of employee training as a strategic instrument for managing operational risk. Training should not be viewed solely as an administrative function, a means of obtaining professional qualifications or an organisational expense. In times of crisis, it can serve as a preventive and corrective mechanism that improves employees' preparedness to work in uncertain environments, reduces the likelihood of human error, enhances internal coordination, standardises organisational behaviour and strengthens the capacity to make appropriate decisions in critical situations.

A lack of adequate knowledge, skills and behavioural patterns increases the probability of operational losses. Such losses may take the form of process errors, ineffective managerial decisions, disrupted communication, delayed responses to problematic situations, insufficient digital competence, weak coordination between departments and an inability to adapt rapidly to changed circumstances. Training may therefore be regarded as a key element of the risk-management system because it creates the conditions for greater organisational preparedness, stronger process resilience and more effective recovery from crisis situations.

This dissertation examines employee training as a means of managing operational risk and as an instrument for overcoming economic crises in organisations. The topic is therefore highly relevant because it integrates three key fields of management - human capital development, operational resilience and crisis management - within a single research framework.

The significance of the study also derives from the need for Bulgarian small, medium-sized and large enterprises to develop more systematic training models focused not only on qualifications, but also on error prevention, the reduction of process disruptions, improved coordination, digital readiness and managerial responsiveness under conditions of uncertainty.

2. Research object, subject and objective

The object of the study comprises organisations operating in a dynamic and crisis-prone economic environment, with particular emphasis on small, medium-sized and large enterprises in Bulgaria.

The subject of the study is the role of employee training and development as a means of managing operational risk, increasing adaptability and building organisational resilience during economic crises.

The principal objective of the dissertation is to examine the role of systematic, purposeful and strategically integrated employee training as a mechanism for managing operational risk and enhancing organisational resilience during economic crises, and to develop an applicable training model for organisational teams in small, medium-sized and large enterprises.

Within this overarching objective, the following more specific objectives are formulated:

- To clarify the role of employee training as a strategic instrument for preventing and mitigating operational risk.
- To analyse the relationship between the human factor, internal processes, organisational culture and the likelihood of operational losses.
- To establish how economic crises expose deficiencies in organisational competencies, communication, managerial responses and digital readiness.

- To assess the extent to which training practices in Bulgarian organisations support adaptability, resilience and the capacity for post-crisis recovery.
- To develop an applied model and a practical toolkit for diagnosing, planning, delivering and evaluating training in the context of operational risk.
- To formulate practical recommendations for small, medium-sized and large enterprises that reflect the specific characteristics of the Bulgarian business environment.

3. Research thesis and hypotheses

The main thesis of this study is that systematic, purposeful and strategically integrated employee training constitutes a key mechanism for reducing operational risk by enhancing competencies, standardising organisational behaviour, limiting human error and improving process resilience, thereby increasing organisations' adaptability and resilience during economic crises.

On the basis of the stated thesis and the objectives of the dissertation, the following research hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis 1: There is an empirically testable relationship between the level and systematic nature of employee training and an organisation's capacity to mitigate operational risk.

Hypothesis 1.1 - Competencies: Higher levels of employees' professional and digital competencies acquired through training lead to a lower frequency of operational errors.

Hypothesis 1.2 - Processes: Training aimed at process standardisation and optimisation reduces the likelihood of process failures and operational losses.

Hypothesis 1.3 - Adaptability: Organisations that invest systematically in training demonstrate greater adaptability during crises.

Hypothesis 1.4 - Type of training: Practice-oriented and situational forms of training - including simulations, case studies and crisis scenarios - have a stronger effect on reducing operational risk than traditional training formats.

Hypothesis 1.5 - Organisational culture: Integrating training into organisational culture as part of a learning organisation leads to greater resilience and lower operational risk.

Hypothesis 1.6 - Organisational size: The effect of training on operational risk varies according to organisational size - small, medium-sized and large enterprises.

4. Research tasks

In accordance with the formulated research objective and hypotheses, the dissertation addresses the following principal research tasks:

- To analyse theoretical concepts and models of employee training and development in the context of organisational resilience, operational risk and economic crises.
- To clarify the nature of operational risk and its manifestation in organisations under conditions of economic instability, with particular emphasis on the human factor, internal processes and systemic vulnerabilities.
- To examine the impact of the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic on operational resilience, human capital management and organisational training practices.
- To identify the principal factors, difficulties and organisational deficiencies associated with implementing training programmes in small, medium-sized and large enterprises in Bulgaria.
- To analyse international and local employee training and development practices that contribute to greater adaptability, the mitigation of operational risk and the management of crisis situations.
- To conduct an empirical study among representatives of Bulgarian enterprises and experts in order to establish the role of training as a preventive mechanism for risk management and enhanced organisational resilience.
- To assess the effectiveness of training programmes in developing key competencies, reducing human error, improving internal coordination and strengthening crisis-response capacity.
- To develop a training model for organisational teams in small, medium-sized and large enterprises, aimed at managing operational risk, increasing adaptability and building resilience during economic crises.

5. Research methodology

The methodological approach adopted in the study is interdisciplinary, integrating elements of economic theory, human resource management, organisational psychology, risk management, crisis management and knowledge management. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used to achieve an integrated and analytically substantiated assessment of the role of training as an instrument for operational risk management.

5.1. Research approaches and logic

The study is based on a systems approach through which the interaction between employee training, internal processes, the human factor, organisational culture and operational resilience is examined. A comparative approach is applied to the analysis of two major crisis events: the 2008-2009 financial crisis and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The research logic follows a sequence comprising theoretical clarification of the problem, analysis of the crisis context, empirical testing through a survey and expert interviews, and the development of an applied training model for organisational teams.

5.2. Research methodology

The methodology of the dissertation combines theoretical, comparative, empirical and applied research approaches. This integrated approach is intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between employee training, operational risk management and organisational resilience.
The theoretical section employs methods of analysis and synthesis of scholarly literature, concepts and models relating to organisational learning, the learning organisation, human capital management, operational risk and crisis management.

The analytical section applies a comparative approach to examine the impact of the 2008-2009 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic on organisational resilience, internal processes and training practices.

The research methodology is based on a mixed-methods approach incorporating both quantitative and qualitative methods.

The quantitative component was implemented through a survey of 137 respondents working in organisations of different sizes and sectoral profiles in Bulgaria. The sample is non-representative and was formed through convenience and purposive sampling. Owing to the uneven sectoral and organisational distribution, the results are interpreted as indicative of the population studied and are not statistically extrapolated to all enterprises in the country.

The survey instrument contains 25 questions structured into several thematic blocks concerning:

- the level and forms of training;
- perceived operational risk;
- the organisation's adaptability and resilience.

The survey primarily uses categorical nominal scales.

The qualitative component was implemented through expert interviews with 15 specialists who have professional experience in human resource management, corporate training, organisational development and risk management.

The study includes representatives of organisations from various sectors of the Bulgarian economy, including manufacturing, trade, insurance, banking, telecommunications, information technology and business services. The companies represented in the expert interviews include Ficosota, Lidl, Bulstrad, Armeec, Yettel, Fibank, ITC Consult, Eurohold, Euroins, Lev Ins, Paysafe, Allianz Bank Bulgaria, Allianz Bulgaria, Zundert and Partners Group.

The selection of experts was intended to provide a broader and multidimensional perspective on the role of training in organisations by including both companies with clearly structured learning and development systems and organisations in which training practices are more closely linked to regulatory requirements, operational needs or digital transformation processes. This makes it possible to identify common trends, sector-specific characteristics and practical guidelines regarding the importance of training as an instrument for operational risk management and enhanced organisational resilience.

The data are processed through descriptive and comparative analysis, together with statistical methods for identifying relationships between the variables under study.

This mixed-methods approach enables a more in-depth examination of the relationship between employee training and operational risk management.

The applied section of the study develops a training model for organisational teams in small, medium-sized and large enterprises, aimed at developing key competencies, increasing adaptability, limiting operational losses and building organisational resilience during economic crises.

6. Limitations and assumptions

With regard to organisational scope, the study does not seek to reproduce the full structure of the Bulgarian economy and does not claim statistical representativeness for all small, medium-sized and large enterprises. Organisations of different sizes are included so that they may be compared according to a common set of analytical criteria: the existence and systematic nature of training; the manner in which competency gaps are identified; the relationship between such gaps and operational errors; crisis preparedness; feedback mechanisms; and the measurement of results. Organisational size is treated as a contextual characteristic that affects resources, formalisation and the manner of implementation.

The study distinguishes between Bulgarian enterprises and companies with international participation. Although they operate within the same national regulatory and labour environment, international subsidiaries frequently apply policies, standards, learning platforms and procedures developed at group or corporate level. Their practices are therefore not automatically regarded as typical of the Bulgarian business environment; rather, they are used to identify transferable principles whose application requires an assessment of resource, sectoral, cultural and regulatory compatibility.

The study is conducted in a rapidly changing economic, technological and social environment, which imposes certain methodological limitations. The principal analytical focus is placed on two major crisis events: the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Contemporary geopolitical, energy-related and technological disruptions are considered as contextual factors but do not constitute separate objects of study.

Further limitations arise from the geographical focus of the research. The dissertation examines primarily organisational practices in Bulgaria and compares them with selected European and international approaches. The developed model is designed for application in Bulgarian small, medium-sized and large enterprises and takes account of differences in resources, managerial maturity, digital readiness and organisational learning culture.

It is assumed that the effect of training on operational risk cannot be entirely isolated from other organisational factors, including leadership, technological capabilities, internal communication, the regulatory environment and organisational culture. Training is therefore treated as a key, but not the sole, factor in building operational resilience.

II. STRUCTURE AND CONTENT OF THE DISSERTATION

The structure of the dissertation is aligned with the stated research objective, the formulated tasks and the logic of the study. The work is organised into four chapters, which successively present the theoretical foundations of the research problem, the impact of economic crises on organisations, the methodology of the empirical study and the developed applied model for training organisational teams.

The dissertation comprises an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. The introduction presents the relevance of the topic, the research object, subject, objective and tasks, the thesis, hypotheses, scope, limitations, methodology, and the scientific and practical significance of the study.

Chapter One, Theoretical and Methodological Foundations of Organisational Learning and Risk Management, examines the principal theoretical propositions concerning operational risk, organisational learning, human capital development and the learning organisation. Particular attention is paid to the human factor both as a source of risk and as a resource for prevention, adaptation and organisational recovery.

Chapter Two, The Impact of Global Economic Crises on the Operational Resilience of Organisations, analyses the effects of economic crises on intra-organisational processes, management, human resources, team dynamics, conflict, stress and training as an instrument for overcoming crisis situations.

Chapter Three, General Framework and Methodology of the Empirical Study, presents the research design, the comparative analysis of global corporate practices and reports, the results of the survey among representatives of enterprises in Bulgaria, and the expert interviews with specialists from different sectors.

Chapter Four, A Training Model for Organisational Teams in Small, Medium-Sized and Large Enterprises, contains the author's model and a practical toolkit for its implementation. The model includes a key-role map, a competency profile, a self-assessment questionnaire, a managerial assessment form, a competency-gap matrix, a risk-assessment matrix, a training-priority index, an individual learning pathway, a group training plan, a transfer-of-learning monitoring form, an effectiveness-measurement form and a register of training interventions.

The structure of the dissertation follows the logic of the research process - from the theoretical clarification of the problem, through the analysis of the crisis context and the empirical results, to the development of a practically applicable model. In this way, the relationship between training, operational risk management and the sustainable development of organisations in Bulgaria is clearly delineated.

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

1. CHAPTER ONE

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AND RISK MANAGEMENT

1.1. Operational risk: nature, classification and specific characteristics in times of crisis

Chapter One establishes the theoretical foundation of the dissertation by examining the relationship between operational risk, employee training, human capital development and the concept of the learning organisation. Operational risk is presented as a complex managerial phenomenon arising not only from technological, process-related or external factors, but also, to a considerable extent, from human behaviour, levels of competence, the quality of management culture and an organisation's ability to respond appropriately to crises.

The discussion emphasises that the contemporary understanding of operational risk extends beyond its traditional regulatory dimensions and places it at the centre of strategic management. Its principal sources relate to people, processes, systems and external influences, including crisis events, digitalisation, cyber threats, geopolitical instability and supply-chain disruption. In this context, the human factor emerges as one of the most significant sources of risk, since inadequate preparation, weak communication, qualification gaps and a lack of adaptability may result in operational errors and losses.

The theoretical and historical analysis of the development of organisational training shows that it has undergone a substantial transformation - from an instrument aimed primarily at acquiring specific skills to a strategic mechanism for managing organisational development. In today's dynamic and risk-intensive economic environment, training has become a key factor in developing adaptability, resilience and the capacity to operate effectively under conditions of uncertainty.

The chapter analyses the evolution of theories of learning and human capital development. The cognitive, behavioural and social constructivist approaches are examined, each providing a different but complementary explanation of how employees acquire knowledge, develop skills and change their behaviour. The cognitive approach emphasises thinking, analysis and decision-making; the behavioural approach focuses on developing standardised patterns of action through feedback and reinforcement; and the social constructivist approach highlights the importance of collaboration, shared experience and learning in a social environment. The evolution of these theoretical approaches reveals an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the role of human capital, with contemporary concepts emphasising continuous learning, systems thinking, collective knowledge and the capacity to transform experience into sustainable organisational practices.

The historical review confirms that every major economic transformation leads to a reassessment of the role of training. From the Industrial Revolution to the digital economy, training has developed in response to the need for greater efficiency, flexibility and adaptation. Training should therefore be understood as a dynamic process closely connected both to changes in the external environment and to internal organisational needs.

Considerable attention is devoted to the concept of the learning organisation, which is presented as a crisis-management mechanism. A learning organisation is characterised by its ability systematically to create, share and apply knowledge, analyse errors, develop collective learning and adapt its processes to a changing environment. The approaches of Peter Senge, David Garvin and Chris Argyris are examined to substantiate the importance of systems thinking, team learning, shared vision, experimentation, experiential learning and double-loop learning in reducing risk and building greater organisational resilience.

Training, and lifelong learning in particular, is considered not merely as an educational process but as an essential component of the operational risk-management system. The continuous updating of knowledge and skills reduces the likelihood of human error, incorrect execution of procedures and ill-judged responses in critical situations. Conversely, competency gaps increase the vulnerability of organisational processes and, during a crisis, may result in substantial economic losses.

The relationship between training and operational risk management is highlighted and shown to operate through the enhancement of employee competencies, the reduction of human error and improvements in the effectiveness of internal organisational processes. Inadequate preparation, outdated knowledge and weak coordination increase the likelihood of errors and process failures. In this sense, training performs a preventive function by creating the conditions for higher quality of performance, better coordination and more effective management of activities.

At the same time, training also performs an adaptive function by supporting organisations when introducing new technologies, restructuring processes and responding to external shocks. Organisations that develop a systematic approach to employee training demonstrate greater resilience, faster adaptation and lower levels of operational loss.

Chapter One demonstrates that employee training should not be viewed merely as a means of enhancing qualifications, but as a strategic instrument for managing operational risk. It supports the development of key competencies, reduces the likelihood of human error, improves coordination and creates the conditions for a more effective response under uncertainty. In knowledge-driven economies, training constitutes a form of capital investment with a multiplier effect, as it simultaneously increases productivity, shortens crisis-related downturns and accelerates recovery. Resilient organisations are learning organisations, and resilient economies are those in which the micro-dynamics of organisational learning become a driver of innovation, competitiveness and long-term growth.

2. CHAPTER TWO

THE IMPACT OF GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISES ON THE OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE OF ORGANISATIONS

2.1. Analysis of operational deficiencies during the financial crisis

Chapter Two develops a comprehensive theoretical and analytical framework for examining economic and organisational crises as a regular, yet manageable, element in the development of contemporary organisations. Crises are treated not as isolated or random events, but as the result of interaction between external shocks - such as economic cycles, pandemics, military conflicts, regulatory transformations and global disruptions - and internal organisational deficiencies related to managerial capacity, insufficient innovation, fragmented processes, inadequate communication and a weakened organisational culture.

From a systems perspective, an organisation functions as an open input-process-output system whose resilience is determined by its ability to adapt internal mechanisms to environmental dynamics and maintain control over critical value-creation cycles. The analysis of organisational life-cycle models shows that transitions between stages of growth naturally generate tensions which, in the absence of timely managerial intervention, may develop into a profound organisational crisis. In this context, mature leadership and targeted managerial adjustments are key to transforming a crisis from a destructive event into a developmental process.

The chapter analyses the impact of major crisis periods, including the 2008-2012 Global Financial Crisis and the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020-2022. Although these crises had different origins and mechanisms, they produced similar organisational consequences: increased uncertainty, restricted access to resources, coordination difficulties, disrupted internal processes, intensified psychological pressure on employees and a greater likelihood of human error. Crises therefore function as a form of stress test for organisational structures and the maturity of risk-management systems.

The empirical evidence of recent years, and particularly the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrates that economic processes, the social environment and the psychology of work are affected simultaneously. Fiscal and monetary instruments, together with employment-support schemes, may contribute to temporary stabilisation, but they do not eliminate the need for deeper organisational transformation. Such realignment is manifested in accelerated digitalisation, the introduction of remote and hybrid working arrangements, the transformation of business models, the restructuring of value chains and the purposeful development of new competencies. At labour-market level, these processes substantially alter the profile of skills in demand and intensify segmentation among different employment groups.

Operational risk is examined in the context of contemporary economic and organisational challenges. The analysis shows that, under conditions of globalisation, digitalisation, geopolitical instability, inflationary pressure, supply-chain disruption, energy insecurity and cyber threats, operational risk is becoming increasingly complex and systemic. It can no longer be regarded solely as the product of internal process weaknesses, but must be understood as the result of interaction between internal and external factors. Organisations must therefore develop an integrated approach to risk management based on anticipation, adaptation, flexibility and competency development.

The chapter also examines the dynamics of organisational development under systemic and external crises. A crisis is presented as a condition in which the normal functioning of an organisation is disrupted by internal or external factors. Three phases of the crisis process are distinguished: the preventive phase, the crisis itself and the recovery phase. It is emphasised that crises cannot always be prevented, but they can be anticipated, analysed and managed through early-warning systems, effective internal communication, training and timely managerial intervention.

Substantial attention is devoted to crisis management and the role of the manager. Crisis management is viewed as a systematic and holistic process encompassing the identification of potential risks, emergency preparedness, response to crisis events and subsequent organisational recovery. The manager's role is critical throughout the crisis cycle - from preparation and early warning to operational management, recovery and organisational learning. Clear leadership, honest and timely communication, rapid decision-making, continuous monitoring and the ability to mobilise employees around a common course of action are of paramount importance.

Team dynamics under crisis conditions are also analysed, with particular attention to conflict, stress and challenges to internal coordination. A crisis environment exposes the most vulnerable element within organisations: human relationships. Responses to change vary according to attitudes, levels of preparedness and the availability of support mechanisms, thereby requiring differentiated managerial interventions. The management of stress, conflict and psychological safety, together with systematic internal communication, is established as a key condition for organisational stability rather than as a secondary management practice.

A distinction is made between functional conflicts, which may stimulate creativity, critical thinking and the search for alternative solutions, and dysfunctional conflicts, which result in demotivation, damaged relationships, reduced productivity and difficulties in task performance. High levels of stress are shown to impair concentration, hinder decision-making and intensify resistance to change. Team dynamics in times of crisis therefore become a significant factor in an organisation's operational resilience.

The role and strategic positioning of the Human Resources department during crises are also examined. Human resource management emerges as a central stabilising force in crisis management. The HR function is transformed from an administrative executor into a strategic partner, an architect of change and an owner of human capital development systems. The Human Resources department plays a key role in diagnosing crises, identifying competency gaps, supporting employees, managing change, sustaining motivation and developing training solutions aimed at organisational stabilisation.

Internal public relations and internal communication are presented as essential instruments for managing crisis processes. Under conditions of uncertainty, employees require clear, timely and consistent information that reduces anxiety, limits rumours and strengthens trust in management.

Effective internal public relations support a shared understanding of the situation, employee engagement and acceptance of the necessary changes. Communication thus becomes not only an informational mechanism but also a managerial one, helping to reduce resistance, sustain organisational culture and preserve internal stability.

A particularly important aspect of Chapter Two is the analysis of training as an instrument for overcoming organisational and economic crises. During periods of instability, training is often viewed as an expense that can be deferred; however, such an approach entails serious risks. In crisis conditions, employees' knowledge, skills and behavioural patterns acquire strategic importance because they determine the quality of internal processes, response capacity, error reduction and the mitigation of operational losses. Human capital should be understood as the aggregate of knowledge, skills and attitudes and recognised as a key productive factor whose return becomes especially evident under conditions of high uncertainty.

When training is systematically aligned with organisational strategy and based on reliable performance-assessment mechanisms, a crisis can be transformed into an operational capacity to introduce new standards, technologies and management practices. The economic benefits of targeted training in a crisis environment are measurable and manifest themselves in several interconnected areas: reducing the hidden costs of crisis, preserving firm-specific knowledge, limiting losses caused by employee turnover, strengthening process discipline, increasing productivity and improving resource utilisation. Training therefore functions both as a stabiliser of current operations and as an instrument for long-term efficiency gains.

The role of training in fostering sustainable motivation is equally important. Reliance solely on monetary incentives has a limited and short-term effect, whereas lasting engagement arises from combining fair assessment and remuneration systems with genuine development opportunities, clear career pathways and a visible connection between individual learning and collective productivity. In this sense, training operates as a mechanism for converting individual progress into organisational capacity while simultaneously reducing errors, stabilising processes and preserving accumulated knowledge.

Effective crisis management requires methodological consistency and coalition-based leadership grounded in a shared vision, a clear allocation of roles and responsibilities, and timely internal communication. Resistance to change is a natural response to perceived threats to interests, status and competence, but it can be reduced through targeted information and training, employee participation in diagnosis and solution design, and direct support addressing genuine barriers. The combination of a strong HR function, effective internal public relations and a disciplined change-management process makes it possible to transform a crisis from a source of disorganisation into a catalyst for learning and improved performance.

Chapter Two demonstrates that an organisation functions as an integrated system in which departments, processes, management levels and communication channels are inseparably connected. Owing to this interdependence, every destabilising situation - whether originating in the external environment or in internal organisational deficiencies - affects the organisation as a whole. A crisis may therefore be viewed as a form of stress test that reveals the quality of leadership, the effectiveness of internal communication, the resilience of team interactions and the degree of process maturity.

Organisations that regard training as an essential element of their crisis-management strategy achieve a dual effect. On the one hand, they enhance operational resilience through better coordination, a lower probability of errors, increased productivity and more efficient use of resources. On the other hand, training supports strategic organisational development through the accumulation of new competencies, the strengthening of organisational culture and increased competitiveness.

The analyses in Chapter Two demonstrate that economic and organisational crises are not merely external events that temporarily disrupt business activity, but complex processes that expose internal organisational weaknesses. They reveal the extent to which an organisation possesses resilient processes, well-prepared employees, effective leadership, adequate internal communication and the capacity for rapid adaptation. In this context, operational risk management becomes an integral part of organisational strategy. It is not limited to process control, but also encompasses the systematic development of human capital, effective internal communication, stronger team resilience and the creation of adaptive capacity.

Training may therefore be regarded as a key mechanism for mitigating and preventing operational risk, as well as a factor that transforms crisis-related challenges into a source of sustainable competitive advantage. Organisations that integrate training, internal public relations, human resource management and crisis management within a unified crisis-management policy demonstrate greater adaptability, stronger process stability and a higher capacity to recover from economic and organisational shocks.

3. CHAPTER THREE

GENERAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1. Methodology and design of the empirical study

This chapter presents the methodology of the empirical study, which seeks to establish the extent to which employee training contributes to organisational resilience and adaptability during economic crises. The research approach is based on a mixed methodology combining quantitative and qualitative methods. This multidisciplinary strategy enables an in-depth understanding of the relationship between training and organisational resilience in a crisis context and is structured around three principal components: an analysis of international good practices, a survey of Bulgarian companies and expert interviews.

The first stage of the study - the analysis of international good practices - provides a detailed review of the training strategies of leading international companies (EY, KPMG, PwC and IBM) and Deloitte's Human Capital Trends reports for the preceding three years. These sources constitute a particularly valuable empirical basis for identifying applicable approaches to building organisational resilience in the context of economic crises. International practices provide a clear indication of the importance of organisational training and of how it is transformed in response to changes in the economic and business environment.

Deloitte's reports for the three-year period from 2023 to 2025 are used to conduct a detailed analysis of global trends in human capital management, workforce transformation, the role of learning and development as strategic instruments for building organisational resilience, and companies' adaptation to a rapidly changing economic, technological and social environment.

The analysis identifies key challenges and good practices relating to skills development, organisational culture, leadership, digital transformation and the development of learning organisations that may be adapted and applied within Bulgarian enterprises.

The second component of the study is a survey of representatives of small, medium-sized and large enterprises in Bulgaria, focusing on the frequency, scope and effectiveness of training during crises. An online questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on the frequency, scope and effectiveness of crisis-related training, as well as organisational attitudes towards training as a strategic instrument. The study seeks to outline the current state of training practices in Bulgaria and identify the principal obstacles and opportunities for their development amid economic turbulence.

Particular attention is paid to perceptions of the relationship between training and an organisation's ability to adapt to changing external conditions.

The third stage consists of expert interviews.

FIRST STAGE OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.2. Comparative analysis of global corporate practices and reports on risk management through training

The principal objective is to examine and summarise international good practices in the training strategies of leading companies (EY, KPMG, PwC and IBM) and to analyse global trends in human capital management through Deloitte's Human Capital Trends reports for 2023-2025. The purpose is to identify applicable approaches to building organisational resilience and enabling enterprises to adapt to economic crises and dynamic change. The analysis is specifically intended to:

- Provide a detailed review of the training strategies and initiatives of leading international companies aimed at human capital development.
- Analyse the trends presented in the Human Capital Trends reports for 2023-2025 concerning workforce transformation, digitalisation, leadership and organisational culture.
- Identify the key challenges and successful practices employed by international companies in building organisational resilience.
- Establish the role of training and skills development as strategic factors in organisational adaptation.
- Formulate conclusions and recommendations concerning the potential adaptation and application of these practices in the Bulgarian organisational context.

The subject of this part of the study comprises the training strategies and human capital development approaches used by international companies as instruments for enhancing organisational resilience and competitiveness under economic and social challenges.

The object of the study comprises leading international companies (EY, KPMG, PwC and IBM) and the global trends reflected in Deloitte's Human Capital Trends reports for 2023-2025, which illustrate the worldwide transformation of human resource management.

The scope of the study covers the period from 2023 to 2025 and includes an in-depth analysis of the three most recent editions of Deloitte's Human Capital Trends report. The international practices of EY, KPMG, PwC and IBM are also examined as an empirical basis for identifying successful training strategies. The study focuses on key areas such as skills development, organisational culture, leadership, digital transformation and the development of learning organisations. Particular attention is given to the possibilities of adapting these practices to Bulgarian enterprises during economic crises and accelerated socio-technological change. The identified principles are not transferred mechanically to Bulgarian enterprises; instead, they are assessed according to their resource, sectoral, regulatory and cultural compatibility with the local context.

The analysis shows that large international companies are increasingly moving from traditional training models towards integrated capability-development systems. Artificial intelligence, digital technologies, cybersecurity, ESG competencies, leadership, adaptability, critical thinking and emotional intelligence lie at the centre of these strategies. Training is delivered through diverse formats, including internal academies, digital platforms, microlearning, simulations, boot camps, crisis centres, personalised learning pathways and learning in the flow of work. This demonstrates that human capital development is now regarded as a continuous process integrated into everyday work and aligned with the organisation's strategic objectives.

Artificial intelligence (AI) occupies a central place in contemporary training practices. It is becoming not only a subject of training but also an instrument for personalising, accelerating and optimising the learning process. Companies are introducing AI literacy programmes, internal chatbots and assistants, training in the ethical use of AI, data management, and the development of employees capable of working with new technological solutions. In this context, particular importance is attached to establishing ethical frameworks and ensuring transparency, privacy, reliability and explainability in the organisational use of artificial intelligence.

International practices show that training is no longer perceived as a secondary HR function, but as a strategic priority for organisational resilience, competitiveness and risk management. Data from Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends for 2023-2026 confirm the growing importance of reskilling and upskilling, processes driven by rapid technological development, dynamic market conditions and changing workforce expectations. Alongside technical skills, human competencies such as creativity, empathy, critical thinking, adaptability and the ability to make ethical decisions are becoming increasingly important.

The benefits of systematic and targeted training are multidimensional. At the strategic level, training increases organisations' readiness to respond to crises, manage complex risks and adapt to rapid change. At the operational level, it improves productivity, quality of work, coordination and employee engagement. From a human capital perspective, investment in training increases employee satisfaction, loyalty and motivation, reduces turnover and strengthens the employer brand. Training thus becomes a mechanism for converting technological and market challenges into competitive advantage.

Similar, although more acute, trends are observed in the Bulgarian context. Low levels of basic digital skills among the population, limited participation in lifelong learning and shortages of specialists in emerging technologies point to the need for large-scale programmes in digital literacy, reskilling and skills development. This applies not only to the IT sector, but also to finance, insurance, marketing, operations, public administration and human resource management. Corporate training in Bulgaria is therefore gradually shifting towards internal academies, microlearning and platforms for learning in the flow of work.

The analysis of the Bulgarian environment shows that artificial intelligence is becoming a strategic factor in economic transformation and competitiveness. Despite its substantial potential in healthcare, manufacturing, energy, agriculture, finance and research, the country continues to face challenges related to insufficient investment, limited research activity, shortages of specialists and the need to modernise the education system. The development of critical thinking, analytical skills, digital competencies and an ethical culture in the use of AI should therefore be treated as a priority for both the business and public sectors.

Additional emphasis is placed on the readiness of public administration to use artificial intelligence. The AI Readiness Index indicates that Bulgaria is in a capacity-building phase, which also has implications for the corporate sector, particularly in regulated industries such as finance, energy and insurance. Companies operate in an environment strongly influenced by regulatory change, digital transformation and public policy; consequently, training in digital competencies, cybersecurity, data management and the ethical use of AI has become a strategic necessity.

Sector-specific characteristics further define future training priorities. In manufacturing companies and small and medium-sized enterprises, programmes relating to Industry 4.0, digital work instructions, automation and predictive maintenance are of key importance. In business services and outsourcing, training focuses on language, customer-service and digital skills, supplemented by work with AI-assisted systems. Training thus becomes a principal instrument for maintaining the competitiveness of Bulgaria's services market and adapting to the economy's new requirements.

The first stage of the empirical study demonstrates that training in contemporary organisations is no longer a reactive measure intended to compensate for deficiencies, but a strategic mechanism for building resilience, innovation capacity and competitive advantage. The international practices of EY, Deloitte, KPMG, PwC and IBM show that successful organisations invest in systematic skills development, personalised learning pathways, digital academies, simulations and training integrated into the workflow. In the Bulgarian context, these trends are even more significant because of deficiencies in digital skills, low participation in lifelong learning and the need for accelerated adaptation to artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and new technological models. Training is therefore established as a key instrument for change management, operational risk mitigation and enhanced organisational resilience amid economic and technological transformation.

SECOND STAGE OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.3. Analysis of a survey among representatives of small, medium-sized and large enterprises in Bulgaria

The sample comprises 137 respondents selected through random sampling and covers organisations from a range of economic sectors, including banking, insurance, financial services, education, public administration, trade, logistics, manufacturing, healthcare and information technology. The survey instrument contains 25 questions structured into several thematic blocks concerning the level and forms of training, perceived operational risk, and organisational adaptability and resilience.

The principal objective is to examine the attitudes, practices and expectations of employees from different sectors regarding organisational training as an instrument for crisis prevention and management, with particular emphasis on training effectiveness, applicability and frequency. The survey also seeks to outline the current state of training practices in Bulgaria and identify the main obstacles and opportunities for their development in the context of economic turbulence. More specifically, the study aims to:

- Examine the profile of the respondents by sector, organisational size, position, education, length of service and age.
- Establish the extent to which organisations have been affected by crises and the measures they have undertaken.

- Analyse the existence and role of the Human Resources department in managing crisis situations.
- Assess the place of training as a preventive measure within organisations.
- Examine the frequency, format and subject matter of preferred training.
- Assess employees' willingness to participate and their expectations concerning the financing of training.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and applicability of acquired knowledge in the actual workplace.

3.3.1. Summary and conclusions from the second stage of the empirical study: survey research

The following overall conclusion may be drawn from the survey. The corporate sector predominates among the participants, a large proportion of whom are employed in structured organisations with more than 250 employees and dedicated Human Resources departments. This suggests the existence of resources and capacity to implement sustainable crisis-management policies.

At the same time, substantial differences are observed in the extent to which employees participate in management processes. More than one third of respondents report that management does not consult them when making decisions concerning crisis prevention and response. This indicates a deficiency in the internal organisational culture of participation, which is critically important during periods of uncertainty.

Participants demonstrate a high level of awareness and commitment to their own professional development. A total of 95.3% believe that training is essential for coping with crises. There is particularly strong interest in training aimed at developing specific skills applicable in an unstable business environment. A substantial proportion of respondents are even willing to invest personal funds in such training, although many report financial constraints or a lack of employer commitment.

With regard to organisations' actual response to crisis circumstances over the previous four years, the majority of respondents assess their organisations' actions as adequate and effective. Nevertheless, one quarter express no opinion, while approximately 14% report serious adverse effects on both the organisation and its employees.

A structural basis for organisational learning and adaptation exists, particularly in larger organisations with internal HR functions.

Communication channels and employee involvement in crisis-management processes are inconsistent and often limited.

Professional training and employee development are perceived as important factors in resilience, yet actual investment in them remains a challenge.

THIRD STAGE OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.4. Expert interviews

As part of the empirical study, in-depth expert interviews were conducted to complement and deepen the results of the survey and the international comparative analysis. This method was selected because of the need to examine not only the formal existence of organisational training, but also its actual strategic role, practical application, relationship with operational risk management and contribution to organisational resilience.

Expert interviews are particularly appropriate for the present study because they enable the collection of rich, detailed and practically oriented information that is difficult to capture through standardised quantitative instruments. The method provides access to the professional experience of specialists with direct insight into training processes, human capital development, organisational adaptation, digital transformation, internal control and risk management. The interviews therefore provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which training affects employee behaviour, the quality of internal processes and an organisation's capacity to respond to crises.

The respondents were selected on the basis of predefined expertise criteria. The study includes HR managers, Human Resources directors, learning and development specialists, and experts engaged in risk management, operational risk and internal control. This broadening of the sample is methodologically important because it allows the topic to be examined from an interdisciplinary perspective - both in terms of human capital management and in terms of organisational risk processes.

Experts from 15 organisations operating in the Bulgarian market participated in the study. Some of these organisations have international participation, while others are wholly Bulgarian companies. They include Ficosota, Lidl, Bulstrad, Armeec, Yettel, Fibank, ITC Consult, Eurohold, Euroins, Lev Ins, Paysafe, Allianz Bank Bulgaria, Allianz Bulgaria, Zundert and Partners Group.

The principal criteria for including experts comprised a minimum of five years of professional experience; participation in the design or management of corporate training programmes; strategic involvement in employee development; experience in organisational change, digital transformation or crisis management; and knowledge of mechanisms for evaluating training effectiveness. The study therefore relies not merely on respondents' formal positions, but on their actual practical contribution to training management and organisational resilience.

The expert interviews were structured around six principal themes: the strategic role of training; the relationship between training and economic crises; the changing dynamics of training formats; competencies and future skills; the alignment of training with business results; and future prospects for corporate learning and development. This structure makes it possible to determine whether organisations perceive training as an operational HR function or as a strategic resource, and whether a relationship exists between training programmes, business results and the mitigation of operational risk.

The expert-interview results show that, in more mature organisations, training is already regarded as a strategic instrument directly connected with business objectives, change management and resilience. These companies have structured induction programmes, internal academies, digital platforms, personalised learning pathways and training in leadership, digital skills, artificial intelligence, adaptability and crisis management. Such practices demonstrate that training is used not only to improve qualifications but also as a mechanism for building organisational capacity.

The interviews also reveal different levels of organisational maturity. Some companies, particularly in the technology, telecommunications and parts of the financial sector, demonstrate a systematic and integrated approach to training. Their training policies are linked to long-term strategy, digital transformation, risk management and the development of key competencies. In other organisations, training remains fragmented, reactive and dependent on immediate operational needs, without a clear connection to long-term business objectives.

One of the principal findings from the expert interviews is the confirmation that training functions as an indirect but effective mechanism for mitigating operational risk. By improving employee competence and communication, standardising processes and developing adaptive skills, organisations can reduce the likelihood of human error, ineffective decisions, process failures and delayed crisis responses. Training is therefore established as a preventive risk-management instrument.

Another important finding is the need to achieve a balance between digital, technical and human skills. The experts emphasise that, although digitalisation, artificial intelligence and automation require new technical competencies, organisations cannot be resilient without developing critical thinking, communication, leadership, emotional intelligence, adaptability and the capacity to work under uncertainty. Future training should therefore address not only technological knowledge but also the development of a comprehensive employee competency profile.

The expert interviews also identify problems related to measuring training effectiveness. Many organisations lack clearly defined indicators linking training programmes to specific business outcomes such as increased productivity, reduced turnover, shorter adaptation periods, a lower frequency of errors or improved crisis-response readiness. This finding demonstrates the need for a more systematic approach to needs diagnosis, training planning, results monitoring and evaluation of the return on investment in human capital.

The significance of the expert interviews also lies in their ability to validate the survey results from the perspective of professionals involved in managing real organisational processes. Whereas the survey outlines respondents' general attitudes and perceptions, the interviews reveal the causes, mechanisms and practical dimensions underlying those attitudes. The qualitative method thus contributes to a more complete understanding of the relationship between training, organisational resilience and operational risk.

Expert interviews were used because they provide depth, context and practical validity to the empirical study. They make it possible to establish how organisations actually plan, implement and evaluate their training policies, how they connect training with business strategy, and how they use it as a means of adapting to crises. The interview results confirm that training is being transformed from a supporting HR activity into a strategic management mechanism for competency development, operational risk mitigation and the building of long-term organisational resilience.

4. CHAPTER FOUR

A TRAINING MODEL FOR ORGANISATIONAL TEAMS IN SMALL, MEDIUM-SIZED AND LARGE ENTERPRISES

Chapter Four has a distinctly applied focus and presents an original model for training organisational teams in companies of different sizes. The model was developed on the basis of the empirical study and expert interviews, which demonstrate the need for Bulgarian organisations to move from sporadic, reactive and often formal training towards a systematic, strategic and measurable approach to human capital development.

The proposed methodology is based on the understanding that skills and competencies are not static resources but dynamic categories requiring continuous monitoring, adaptation and development. Training is therefore regarded not as a one-off activity or an operational HR function, but as a continuous management process aligned with organisational strategy, operational risk and long-term resilience.

The principal objective of the toolkit is to establish a sustainable mechanism through which organisations can regularly identify existing competencies, determine critical gaps and plan targeted training interventions. This overcomes the practice of organising training intuitively or formally, without a clear connection to actual needs, risks and expected outcomes.

The methodological model comprises several interrelated stages. The first stage involves mapping key competencies in accordance both with the organisation's strategic objectives and with the requirements of the external environment - digitalisation, the implementation of artificial intelligence, technological change, economic uncertainty and the need for greater adaptability. At this stage, the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behavioural patterns required for the effective performance of specific organisational roles are defined.

The next stage involves identifying key roles and developing competency profiles for them. The purpose is to identify those positions and functional roles in which a competency gap could have serious consequences for operational effectiveness, customer service, financial performance, regulatory compliance or reputational resilience. This enables training resources to be directed as a priority towards positions that are highly significant for the organisation's sustainable functioning.

The third stage concerns the diagnosis of current competency levels. For this purpose, the model provides for a combination of instruments, including employee self-assessment, assessment by the direct manager, 360-degree feedback and analysis of actual performance. Self-assessment provides information about the employee's perceived level of proficiency in particular competencies, while managerial assessment makes it possible to observe actual workplace behaviour. Combining these instruments increases the reliability of the diagnosis and creates a more objective basis for planning training measures.

An essential element is the introduction of clearly defined assessment indicators and standardised scales that enable development to be monitored over time. This allows individual competency profiles to be created and comparative analysis to be conducted at employee, team and organisational levels. Training planning is thereby based on data, measurable results and a clear relationship between competency gaps and organisational risks.

Once gaps have been identified, they are prioritised according to the degree of risk involved. Particular attention is paid to gaps in knowledge, skills or behaviour that may cause human error, process failures, delayed adaptation, ineffective communication, insufficient digital readiness or reduced managerial effectiveness. Training is thus directed not towards broad and formal topics, but towards genuine areas of risk that are significant for operational resilience.

At the next stage, personalised learning pathways are developed in accordance with the specific needs of employees, teams and managers. These may include microlearning, practical sessions, mentoring, coaching, checklists, simulations, digital platforms and learning-in-the-flow-of-work models. Training is thereby integrated into the actual organisational environment and connected to specific work tasks rather than remaining isolated from daily practice.

An important component of the model is the integration of assessment, training and the subsequent measurement of results. The data obtained should be used not only for diagnostic purposes, but also as a basis for training planning, the development of internal academies and the updating of training programmes. This creates a closed cycle connecting assessment, training, workplace application and subsequent measurement of impact.

The synthesised logic of the proposed methodology may be presented as a sequence of interrelated management actions: specification of competencies, diagnosis of gaps, risk-based prioritisation, development of learning pathways, workplace application, impact measurement, updating and continuous improvement. This sequence transforms training into a strategic and measurable process through which organisations can manage human capital development in direct connection with operational resilience.

The proposed toolkit includes practical management instruments that support implementation of the methodology: a competency-gap identification matrix, a matrix for assessing the risk arising from competency gaps, a transfer-of-learning monitoring form, a training-effectiveness measurement form, and an annual competency- and risk-based training plan. Through these instruments, training becomes a manageable process linked to specific roles, actual gaps, operational risks and measurable results.

The methodology is applicable to both small and medium-sized enterprises and large companies because it can be adapted to organisational size, sector, degree of digitalisation, available resources and the maturity of management processes. Its practical significance lies in helping organisations move from the general understanding that employees require training to a more precise determination of which competencies should be developed, among which employee groups, within what period and with what expected result.

Its practical applicability is illustrated through an example involving a Bulgarian company in financial services, insurance, telecommunications or business services. The introduction of a new internal digital system may cause errors in entering customer data, delays in processing requests, an increase in customer complaints, tension within the team and resistance to the new process. This example demonstrates that technological change is not merely a technical process but requires targeted competency development. In the absence of training, the new system may increase operational risk instead of improving efficiency.

On the basis of the diagnosis, a combined learning pathway is developed, incorporating practice-oriented training formats, support from the direct manager and subsequent feedback. The effect of the training intervention is measured through process and behavioural indicators, while the manager's role is crucial in monitoring the application of acquired knowledge in the actual workplace. Training therefore does not end with the training session, but continues through observation, support, feedback and assessment of the results achieved.

The model establishes a direct connection between training, operational risk and organisational resilience and constitutes a principal original contribution of the dissertation.

IV. APPLICABILITY OF THE RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the dissertation have practical applicability as methodological guidelines for organisations operating under conditions of economic instability, digital transformation, shortages of qualified personnel and increased demands for adaptability. Such applicability does not imply statistical representativeness or an identical effect in all small, medium-sized and large enterprises, but rather the possibility of adapting the general principles to specific managerial tasks and organisational conditions.

The developed framework may be used by managers, HR specialists, learning and development professionals, risk managers, internal trainers and consultants. Its implementation should reflect organisational size, sector, available resources, managerial maturity and existing corporate policies.

Its practical value lies in establishing a connection between training and risk management. Training activities may therefore be justified not merely as an expenditure on employee development, but as an investment in operational stability and the organisation's capacity to function during crises.

The proposed toolkit may be adapted to different sectors, but the applicability of individual elements should first be assessed against regulatory requirements, process risk, organisational structure, the degree of digitalisation and management culture.

The results may also be used in academic and professional training practice when developing programmes in human resource management, risk management, organisational development, crisis management and corporate learning. The study offers a conceptual and applied framework for treating training as a strategic factor in resilience rather than solely as a standard HR function.

The framework is relevant to Bulgarian enterprises and international companies operating in Bulgaria because of the deficiencies identified within the studied population in systematic training planning, digital skills and the relationship between employee development and business results. These observations are indicative and are not statistically generalised to the Bulgarian economy as a whole. The proposed model enables a more structured and measurable approach to training in times of crisis.

V. SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The scientific and practical contributions of the dissertation may be summarised in the following areas:

- The theoretical relationship between employee training, operational risk management and organisational resilience has been systematised. Training is considered not only as a human resource management function, but as a strategic mechanism for prevention, adaptation and the mitigation of operational vulnerabilities during economic crises.

- A conceptual framework has been developed for examining training as an instrument for operational risk management. The framework connects key elements including competencies, human error, process resilience, organisational behaviour, internal communication and crisis-response capacity.
- An empirically substantiated relationship has been identified between the systematic nature of training and organisations' capacity to mitigate operational risk. The survey and expert interviews identify principal trends, deficiencies and practical needs relating to human capital development in small, medium-sized and large enterprises.
- Practical guidelines have been formulated for using training as a preventive and corrective mechanism during economic and organisational crises. They are aimed at increasing adaptability, improving internal coordination, reducing human error and strengthening process stability.
- An applied model has been developed for training organisational teams in small, medium-sized and large enterprises. The model comprises sequential stages for diagnosing competency gaps, assessing risk, planning training interventions, monitoring results and measuring effectiveness.
- A practical toolkit has been proposed for implementing the model in an organisational environment. It includes a key-role map, a competency profile, a self-assessment questionnaire, a managerial assessment form, a competency-gap matrix, a risk-assessment matrix, an individual learning pathway, a group training plan and a training-effectiveness measurement form.
- The approach has been adapted to the specific characteristics of the Bulgarian business environment. The proposed model takes account of the characteristics of small, medium-sized and large enterprises in Bulgaria, including resource constraints, differences in managerial maturity, the need for digital skills and the necessity of a more systematic employee-development policy.

VI. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

On the basis of the results achieved, several principal directions for future research may be identified.

The first concerns more detailed quantitative measurement of the effect of training on specific operational risk indicators, including error frequency, response time, number of process failures, costs arising from operational losses and the level of recovery after crisis events.

The second concerns examination of the influence of artificial intelligence, digital platforms, microlearning and workplace learning on competency development and crisis-response readiness. This direction is particularly relevant in view of accelerated digitalisation and changes in the manner in which employees acquire knowledge and skills.

The third direction concerns applying the model in specific organisations and monitoring the results in actual working environments. Such research would make it possible to compare the model's effects across different sectors and in organisations with different sizes, levels of managerial maturity and learning cultures.

The fourth direction concerns developing sector-specific versions of the training model for banking, insurance, manufacturing, trade, information technology, public administration and education. This would enable key competencies and risk factors to be defined more precisely according to sector-specific characteristics.

The fifth direction concerns examining the relationship between leadership, organisational culture and the effectiveness of training as a risk-management instrument. Future research may analyse how management style, levels of trust, employee engagement and internal communication affect the actual application of learning.

The sixth direction concerns developing standardised indicators for measuring training priority and the return on training in the context of operational risk. This would support organisations in justifying investment in training and building more sustainable human capital development systems.

VII. PUBLICATIONS BY THE AUTHOR RELATED TO THE DISSERTATION

The author's abstract includes the author's publications related to the dissertation topic. The dissertation text provided does not contain a separate list of publications; consequently, this section should be supplemented with the final bibliographic details before the author's abstract is submitted.

1. Article prepared for the scholarly journal Rhetoric and Communications, entitled Artificial Intelligence as a Factor in Organisational Training and Internal Communication, Issue 66, 2026.

2. Article prepared for the scholarly journal Management in Business and the Public Sector, entitled Economic Challenges Facing Organisations in the Twenty-First Century, Issue 1, 2025.

3. Article prepared for the scholarly journal Preschool and School Education, entitled The Learning Organisation and Lifelong Learning: The Key to Innovation and Crisis Resilience, Issue 4, 2025.

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY AND AUTHENTICITY

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled Employee Training as a Means of Managing Operational Risk and Overcoming Economic Crises in Organisations is an independently developed original work. All sources used have been properly cited and included in the dissertation bibliography.

I declare that the results, conclusions, proposed model and practical guidelines were developed on the basis of the theoretical, analytical and empirical research conducted, and that no work by other authors has been used without appropriate acknowledgement.

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