



Review

Human Resource Management in Crisis Situations: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: The paper aims to present a systematic literature review in the field of human resource management in times of crisis since 2008. In that way gaps in the current body of knowledge can be established that justify future research guidelines. The study consists of an analysis of 56 articles published in journals indexed in the Web of Science database. The majority of the papers were published in recent years, indicating a growing interest in the field. To be included, the papers had to be (1) peer-reviewed papers, (2) empirical papers that report on HRM practices in firms, (3) written in English, and (4) published in the period 2008–2021. Four themes were identified: economic crisis and HRM, health crisis and HRM, natural disasters and HRM, and political instability and HRM. The findings provide valuable knowledge and understanding of the present situation of HRM in crises. A number of future research guidelines are presented, which may encourage more research in this crucial field of study.

Keywords: crisis; economic crisis; natural disasters; pandemic; COVID-19; political crisis; human resource management



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1. Introduction

Human resource management (HRM) is essential for the competitive advantage of firms [1,2]. To a large extent, the literature on HRM has focused on firms in stable business environments, and in many instances, the underlying assumptions are permanent growth and prosperity. However, in the last two decades, many societies around the world have been hit by sudden external shocks, such as the financial crisis starting in the US in 2007 and spreading to Europe and Asia in 2008, and as a consequence, many companies went bankrupt and unemployment rising rapidly, as well as individual and national debts. Earthquakes, hurricanes, and other natural disasters are, furthermore, usually characterised as sudden shocks and HRM is affected in many ways, such as skill shortages [3], the well-being of staff, and rising unemployment. Finally, a health crisis in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic hit the world unexpectedly and many firms were forced to close down in 2020, whereas in other cases production was slowed down or came to a halt for security reasons, and services and sales were moved online to keep operations going.

Given the possible severe consequences of crises, it is of theoretical and practical interest to analyse how crises affect HRM. An essential question, therefore, is whether the role of HRM is the same in times of crisis as in normal times. In addition, in what way? For theoretical reasons, it is also essential to know whether different types of crises, such as economic crises and natural disasters, have a similar impact on HRM. Are all crises treated the same in HRM? For practical reasons, managers and HRM staff needs to know what can be learned from crises so that upcoming crises can be addressed more properly.

At present, there is limited knowledge on how crises affect HRM in general. There seems to be one exception, which is the recently published literature review by Ererdi

et al. [4]. Their review covers the period 2000–2018; thus, it does not cover the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper aims to present a systematic literature review on HRM in crises in the period 2008–2021. The reason for starting in 2008 is the need to limit the search. Moreover, the financial crisis is viewed as a good example of a rather recent global crisis, and by ending in 2021, we can cover recent publications that covered the COVID-19 pandemic, too. The paper seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) What has been published on HRM in terms of crises? (2) What are the main findings of these research studies? (3) Which research methods have been used in the studies? (4) Are the effects of crises on HRM the same independent of the nature of the crisis? (5) What are possible directions for further studies?

The paper has the following structure. It starts with a theoretical framework. After that, the method of the literature review is presented. Then, the main findings of the analysis are presented. The paper ends with a discussion and conclusion.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper aims to analyse how crises affect HRM, that is, HR strategies, selecting and hiring of staff, training and developing staff, performance management, payroll, and termination [5,6]. Thus, to reach this aim, this section is a brief introduction before turning to the literature on the link between different types of crises and HRM.

Extant literature has proposed several definitions of crisis. Cater and Beal [7] for example, defined a crisis as “a low-probability situation with significant consequences for the organization, a high degree of uncertainty, and a sense of decision-making urgency” (p. 65). Doern et al. [8] summarized “that most definitions describe a crisis as an extreme, unexpected, or unpredictable event that requires an urgent response from organizations” (p. 401). According to Williams et al. [9], there are three common elements in every crisis, namely, surprise, threat, and short response time. Different types of crises have been discussed in the literature, too. The Institute for Crisis Management [10], for instance, makes a distinction between sudden and smouldering crises. The former covers unexpected events in which organisations have virtually no control and perceived limited fault or responsibility. Natural disasters or terrorist attacks can be assigned to this type of crisis. On the other hand, smouldering crises refer to events that start out as small, internal problems within an organisation, become public at some point, and, over time, grow as a result of negligence by the management. Scandals, bribery, or sexual harassment can be listed as examples. In a recent literature review made by Wenzel et al. [11] on articles published in Strategic Management Society journals, organisations tend to use four strategic responses to a crisis: retrenchment, persevering, innovating, and exit.

2.1. *Different Crises and HRM*

2.1.1. Economic Crisis and HRM

The term “economic crisis” is used to describe a severe recession in the economy, where production and services in the economy (GDP) shrink in real terms for two consecutive quarters in more than one industry [12]. The organisational decline is very similar and has been defined as a decline in the main organisational figures, such as return on assets, for two or three years [13]. General consequences of economic recession and organisational decline are reduced economic growth, rising unemployment, private-sector debt reduction, and public organisation deficits and debts [4,12]. In those moments, businesses respond in most cases through cost restraint, asset management by selling off units, and the creation of new revenue [14].

Former research has shown that a recession often leads to changes in labour markets, as well as in HRM practices. Financial crisis tends to reduce demands that have pressure on lowering cost, such as labour cost, resulting in wage reductions to redundancies, short-term work, and reduction in training [15–17]. Employment relations are altered, such as changing the dismissal law to allow firms to dismiss permanent workers [18].

Previous research has argued that in times of crisis firms can utilise two HRM approaches, namely, “soft” or “hard” models. The former indicates taking care of employees by motivation, support, social and psychological rewards, and providing training to promote successful socially responsible organisations. This leads to a climate of trust and commitment [5,19]. Hard HRM, on the other hand, looks at human resources as “other resources”, and is often related to strategies of cost reduction (Wenzel et al.’s “retrenchment” [11], such as pay cuts and pay freezes, minimal training, outsourcing, downsizing, and work intensification [4–6,16]). The outsourcing of HRM functions, for example, is a common practice to reduce costs [6,20,21].

A climate of distrust and less organisational commitment may follow the hard approach to HRM. Firms may also combine these models in times of crisis [4].

2.1.2. Other Kind of Crisis and HRM

Earthquakes, hurricanes, flooding, and other natural disasters are dramatic and destructive events that threaten the well-being of individuals [22]. Such disasters usually have a drastic effect on the psychological well-being of staff, and post-traumatic stress disorder is common among employees in such situations [4]. In addition, skill shortages and rapid staff turnover can be a challenge for HRM systems [23].

The most recent crisis was COVID-19, which spread quickly to many countries and continents, and is therefore classified as a pandemic. The consequences of the pandemic are that many people have lost their jobs, salaries have been reduced, and people have been sent home for distance working [5,24]. On the vast impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Collings et al. [25] p. 3 wrote:

“By late March, 81% of all workers lived in countries with recommended or required workplace closures and at the end of June 2020, 93%, of the world’s workers resided in countries with some type of workplace closure measure remaining in place”.

The pandemic has had many influences on HRM practices, such as stress, burnout, and exhaustion among healthcare workers; depression and even riots [26,27]; increased infection risk; isolation of patients; work–life imbalances; social isolation and seafarers stuck at sea [28]; and remote working [29]. Organisations have also been affected by reduced productivity, absent workers, disruption in production, lower morale, and anxiety [4,24]. All of this poses great challenges and ambiguity for leaders in general and HR managers [25], as they have to make decisions in very uncertain conditions, and change their communications with employees from face to face to information technology solutions, such as email and video conferencing [30].

Bombing, terrorist attacks, and political instability represent incidents that can be assigned to political crises, the last type of crisis covered in this paper. In the management literature, some research has been done on expatriates moving to hostile environments, where the threat of physical and psychological danger looms [31]. One consequence of political unrest, such as terrorist attacks, is post-traumatic stress [32].

Having set the framework, in the next section the methodology used in this paper is outlined.

3. Methods of the Literature Review

The primary purpose of this literature review is to serve as a guide for further research in the field of crisis and human resource management. It aims to further analyse studies, categorise them, search for themes and point out gaps in existing knowledge. With this aim in mind and the fact that the literature search criteria would be predetermined, the systematic review was based on Jesson et al. [33] as well as PRISMA 2020 [34].

Having determined the subject of this review, a research plan was made with formulated research questions and inclusion and exclusion criteria for the information to be gathered.

Inclusion criteria for the review were (a) peer-reviewed papers in scholarly peer-reviewed journals, (b) empirical papers that report on different crises and human resource management, (c) English language, (d) publication in the period 2008–2021. Exclusion criteria were (a) reviews and theoretical/conceptual papers; (b) reports and non-peer-reviewed papers; (c) languages other than English; (d) papers on training and development practices outside the firms, such as on networks and clusters as strategies for learning and further development as well as training and development courses taken outside the firms; and (e) papers published before 2008.

Our search criteria were based on the ones used by Ererdi et al. (2021), who identified economic crisis, natural disasters, and political uncertainty as the main uncertainties and crises affecting HRM. However, given the vast impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we decided to have that as a special theme, and not as a part of natural disasters. Once the search criteria were specified, the keywords were determined. Eight keyword searches were done using the Web of Science (SSCI) search engine in May and September 2021. The following results were reached: “crisis and human resource management” resulting in 292 papers, “pandemic and human resource management” resulted in 46 papers, “COVID-19 and human resource management” led to 67 papers, “disasters and human resource management” resulted in 87 papers, “economic crisis and human resource management” led to 12 papers, “natural disasters and human resource management” led to 12 papers, “catastrophe and human resource management” led to five papers, and “outsourcing, financial crisis, and human resource management” led to four papers. After screening all the papers by author, 56 papers were left for further analysis (please refer to Figure 1).

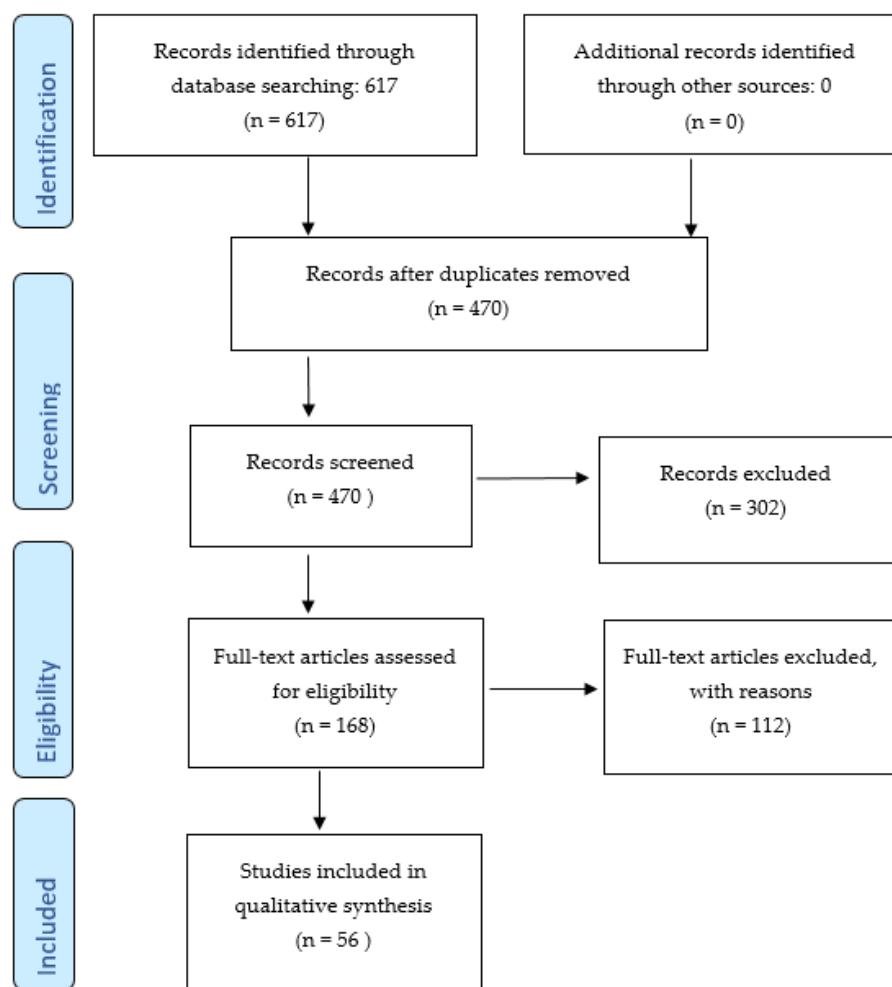


Figure 1. Article selection process based on PRISMA 2009.

After the analysis, all articles were systematically scanned for subthemes, and the authors produced keywords for each paper. These keywords (subthemes) were then used to further categorise the tables in the paper. Subsequently, the findings were discussed and each paper was arranged according to the particular theme. Last, the findings were synthesised in the format of a literature review paper. The overall approach to theme identification followed the ideas of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis can be described as a search for themes that appear to be essential to the understanding of the aspect in focus [35]. It helps researchers in data handling by segmenting, categorising, and summarising relevant content within the data set being investigated [36].

The authors then entered relevant data in the excel sheet (i.e., authors, year of publication, aim of the research, research methods, main findings, and journal) regarding our research purpose. This helped us to clarify what we know about knowledge learning and development in SMEs, and what we should know.

The final stage of our review process was devoted to writing up our findings.

4. Results

4.1. General Observations

Out of the 56 papers in the review, 10 articles were published in the period 2008–2014, whereas the remaining 46 articles were published in 2015 or later, not surprisingly, many of them in 2020–2021. The recent crises have provided the basis for more rigorous research.

The research presented in the papers reveals a significant geographical representation, as it involves many countries worldwide (see Table 1).

Table 1. The list of countries mentioned in the articles is related to studies of HRM in the context of crises (2008–2021).

Name of Country/Region	Frequency
Asia	1
Asian Pacific	1
Australia	1
Britain	6
China	3
Croatia	1
Europe	1
France	1
Germany	4
Greece	2
Iceland	1
India	3
Indonesia	1
Iran	1
Ireland	1
Israel	1
Italy	1
Japan	1
Korea	1
New Zealand	1
Norway	1

Table 1. *Cont.*

Name of Country/Region	Frequency
Pakistan	2
Peru	1
Serbia	1
Singapore	1
Slovenia	1
Spain	7
Sri Lanka	1
Switzerland	1
Thailand	1
USA	4
Vietnam	1

The papers covered in this review were also found to have been published in a broad range of international peer-reviewed journals, as can be seen in Table 2. Most papers (eight) were published in International Journal of Human Resource Management, followed by Asia Pacific Business Review.

Table 2. List of journals and number of articles related to studies of HRM in the context of crises (2008–2021).

Name of Journal	Number of Papers
Asia Pacific Business Review	4
Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources	1
Bmc Nursing	1
Bmj Open	1
British Journal of Industrial Relations	1
British Journal of Management	1
Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management	1
Current Issues in Tourism	1
Economic and Industrial Democracy	3
Economic Research-Ekonomska Istrazivanja	1
Employee Relations	2
Engineering Construction and Architectural Management	1
Frontiers in Psychology	1
Global Environmental Change-Human and Policy Dimensions	1
Human Resource Management	2
Human Resource Management Journal	3
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1

Table 2. *Cont.*

Name of Journal	Number of Papers
International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	1
International Journal of Health Planning and Management	1
International Journal of Hospitality Management	1
International Journal of Human Resource Management	8
International Journal of Manpower	3
International Nursing Review	1
Journal For East European Management Studies	1
Journal of Nursing Management	2
Leadership Quarterly	1
Nursing in Critical Care	1
Public Management Review	1
Public Personnel Management	1
Sustainability	3
Work Employment and Society	1

4.2. Research Methods Applied in the Papers

The studies reported in the literature review used a variety of research designs and methods, including longitudinal and cross-cultural studies, and collected data through interviews or surveys (see Table 3). The research presented in the papers used surveys in 33.9% of cases, whereas 17.8% used interviews or mixed methods.

Table 3. Research methods used by scholars focusing on HRM in crises.

Research Method	Number	Percent
Qualitative		
Interviews	10	17.8
Case study (5 multiple case studies)	8	14.2
Longitudinal interviews	1	1.7
Focus group	1	1.7
Written feedback	1	1.7
Quantitative		
Survey, questionnaire	19	33.9
Secondary data	1	1.7
Mixed Methods		
Total	56	100.0

4.3. Themes

The authors identified four themes in the analysis: economic crisis and HRM, health crisis and HRM, natural disasters and HRM, and political instability and HRM. The themes will be presented in detail below.

4.3.1. Economic Crisis and HRM

In the review, the largest number of papers, 26, dealt with the theme of economic crisis and HRM. The majority of the papers covered European countries, followed by a few countries in Asia and the US (see Table 4).

Table 4. The effect of economic crises on work situations and HRM.

Countries/Regions	Responses to Crises	HRM Practices	Authors
Asia China Indonesia Japan Korea	More emphasis on cost reduction and individual performance, Anglo-American approach, change of employment laws to enhance labour flexibility	Hiring temporary workers, bonuses, and individual performance system instead of group performance; less emphasis on seniority system; laying off workers; increased outsourcing and non-standard workers; increase in hiring university-educated workforce, but fewer women hired in times of recession	Aoki et al. (2014) Chang (2012) Cho et al. (2011) Patterson and Benuyenah, (2021) Sitalaksmi and Zhu (2010) Jaussaud and Liu (2011) Shen and D’Netto (2012)
Europe Croatia Germany Greece France Iceland Ireland Spain UK	Hard HRM, cutbacks, and pay freeze	Financial cutbacks meant that gender equality had less priority and support after the cutbacks and restructuring (Britain); work intensification, job enlargement, job losses, part-time jobs; pay freeze (Britain, France, Greece, Ireland, Spain), employee silence (Greece); outsourcing of HRM did increase partly and more emphasis on cost reduction, but few employees were laid off (Iceland); firms with employee ownership in 28 European countries were less likely to lay off staff and had higher firm performance; small firms tended to focus on pay-related cost-cutting, whereas alternative HR measures were more evident in large organisations; large firms were more likely to lay off workers than SMEs; firms with formal HR practices showed more resilience to the downturn (Britain); the global financial crisis (hard HRM) was found to be the most plausible explanation for the majority of HRM changes that happened in the observed three-year period. However, both the HRM philosophy (more market orientation) and the European Union (EU) membership (changes in labour laws and training) were recognised to have a certain impact as well (Croatia); organisations in East and West Germany used different measures to deal with the crisis, such as searching for new markets, restructuring, hiring stops, short-working, etc.	Page (2018) Cook et al. (2016) Edvardsson and Teitsdottir (2015) Garmendia et al. (2021) Gunnigle et al. (2013) Johnstone (2019) Kim and Patel (2020) Martinez-Garcia et al. (2018) Prouska and Psychogios (2018, 2019) Lai et al. (2016)Patterson and Benuyenah (2021) Prouska and Psychogios (2018, 2019) Roca-Puig et al. (2019)Okay-Somerville (2019) Jaiti and Thevenet (2012) Vokic et al. (2018) Zagelmeyer et al. (2012) Zagelmeyer and Heckmann (2013)
America USA	Public officers’ response to the recession	Reordering of spending priorities, leaving vacant positions unfilled, reducing services, salary freeze	Kim (2019)
India	HRM changes in the IT sector	Hiring freeze, hard HRM, no pay increase, some reduction in training, less turnover	Malik (2013)

The economic crisis in Asia in 1997 and the global financial crisis starting in 2008 that spread through the world had a major effect on labour markets, employment relations, and HRM practices. In a short period following the crisis, private and public organisations did implement “job cuts, short-term working, reduction in training and development expenditure, pay cuts and freezes, reduced benefits and changes in industrial relations” [15] p. 214. In short, they practiced hard HRM policies [15–18,37–55].

It is of theoretical interest that the Asian economic crisis did change the institutional system and HRM practices in China, Japan, and Korea. A transformation was made in Asian employment systems from group work, quality management, and kaizen to a stronger emphasis on cost reduction and outsourcing. Anglo-American practices were also introduced by hiring temporary workers, introducing bonuses and an individual performance system instead of group performance, placing less emphasis on a seniority system, and changing employment law in some countries [21,28,37,38,48,52,56].

Existing research suggests that gender equality measures seem to be delayed or halted in times of recession. For example, although new legislation was introduced in the UK around 2008, gender equality had less priority and support after the financial cutbacks and organisational restructuring [46]. In addition, university-educated women were hired to a lesser extent than university-educated men in Korea after the 2008 crisis [47].

Large firms seem to respond to the economic crisis in a different way than smaller firms. Small firms in Britain tend to cut pay-related costs and they are unlikely to lay off staff. At the same time, larger firms use other HR measures and use downsizing to a large extent [43]. The only paper dealing with outsourcing of HRM showed that outsourcing of HRM in Icelandic SMEs is infrequent, and they do not lay off staff in general following outsourcing. The 2008 recession meant that more emphasis was put on cost-cutting compared to earlier periods [40].

Finally, Prouska and Psychogios [48,49] pointed out that in long periods of recession, there is a tendency for employees and line managers to keep silent in the workplace about their demands and wishes.

4.3.2. Health Crisis and HRM

In our analysis, 21 papers dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on HRM practices (see Table 5). The papers included the following countries: China, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, Serbia, Singapore, Spain, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Table 5. The effect of the pandemic/health crises on work situations and HRM.

Professional Groups	Work Situations and Professional Response	HRM Practices	Authors
Nurses/health care professionals	Strict and unpleasant work situations and work–family conflict; workload and patient isolation increased and affected the way nursing was carried out negatively; shock, worry, isolation, a lack of confidence, and physical exhaustion; burnout, emotional exhaustion, and cynicism; reassignment to other positions; increased infections; absenteeism; no control overwork	Social, motivational psychological, and preventive rewards/measures by organisations to increase loyalty and retention; satisfaction with the hospital policy and strategies implemented during the outbreak, acknowledging the importance of support from nursing leaders; providing pandemic-related training and support; dissatisfaction with workplace preparedness; shared leadership, information sharing, and trust leading to reduced infections; servant leadership reducing burnout and increasing psychological safety	Cavanagh et al. (2021) Abdullah et al. (2021) Fernandez-Castillo et al. (2021) Gao and Tan (2021) Goldfarb et al. (2021) Lasalvia et al. (2021) Ma et al. (2021)Poortaghi et al. (2021) Dinic et al. (2021) Salas-Vallina et al. (2020)
Professionals in hospitals and the tourism industry	Employee fears of external threats; illness; stuck at sea, isolation, unhappiness	Tourism and hospitality businesses did use both defensive and offensive responses to survive the pandemic that included the protection of human resources, job redeployment, and performance management; sustainable HRM did decrease employee fears; better crisis preparedness needed; poor HRM leadership by cruise-line operators; employee-centred HRM strongly impacted employee well-being	Agarwal (2021) Sun et al. (2021) He et al. (2021) Srivastava (2021) Radic et al. (2020)
Other professions	A change in values towards social responsibility and training, going beyond the achievement of a socially acceptable income; remote working; between 2017 and 2020 five out of 10 of the most important analysed motivational factors overcame the significant change in the value of importance from the point of view of the time studied; emotional exhaustion due to unfinished tasks	A softer approach to managing employees can be used during a crisis; organisational values and job motivation can enhance organisation commitment during remote working	Adikaram et al. (2021) Castellanos- Redondo et al. (2021) Koch and Schermuly (2021) Redondo et al. (2020) Tanpipat et al. (2021)

Ten papers analysed the impact of the pandemic on healthcare workers, especially on nurses. It is evident from the studies that the pandemic negatively hit healthcare workers, both in their private lives as well as in work situations. The papers show that work–family conflict has increased, as well as workload and patient isolation. Health-care workers show signs of physical and emotional exhaustion, and burnout and absenteeism have grown. In such situations, soft HRM measures seem to be the right strategy. Social, psychological, and preventive rewards were mentioned as good measures, as well as the importance of support from nursing leaders. In other instances, pandemic-related training and support were helpful to prevent infections, and servant and shared leadership was claimed to reduce burnout and psychological safety [27,57–65].

Five papers did look at the COVID-19 influence on the hospitality and tourism industry. In the healthcare sector, employees in the hotel and tourism industry showed fear of external threats and illness, isolation, and general unhappiness with the situation. The situation of cruise-ship employees was extreme, as they were stuck at sea [28]. Tourism and hospitality businesses did use both defensive and offensive responses to survive the pandemic that included the protection of human resources, job redeployment, and performance management. Sustainable HRM did decrease employee fears, and shared leadership and information sharing helped to build trust and lessen the likelihood of getting infected [19,22,62,66,67]. Other studies looked at organisational resilience to survive the first wave of the COVID-19 crisis. The findings show “the need of multiskilling and professional development of the employees, increased sense of hygiene, sanitation and

related SOPs, optimism toward the revival of the industry, media roles, and need of better crisis preparedness” [67], p.1.

One paper was found that focused on the employees in the financial sector. Castellanos-Redondo et al. [68] found a shift in priorities towards the quality of life with a healthy environment, rather than sustainability. Those employees’ interests changed from a socially acceptable income to values in social responsibility and training. Finally, Tanpipat et al. [29] wanted to explore the effect of organisational norms on remote working, remote work productivity, and organisational commitment. They found that the norm of organisations has an impact on productivity and organisational commitment perceived by employees while preserving work demand. Finally, organisational commitment can be sustained while remote working due to employees’ job motivation.

4.3.3. Natural Disasters and HRM

Five papers focused on natural and human disasters and the management of human resources. Natural disasters, such as hurricanes, tsunamis, flooding, and earthquakes, have been the subject of research. In all cases, skill shortages followed the natural disasters, as people tend to migrate away from such areas. Rapid staff turnover was also mentioned (see Table 6). After the disasters, there was a lack of manpower to rebuild houses and infrastructure. To improve the situation, there is a need for information on infrastructure recovery experts and organisations need to have the capability to use volunteers in effective ways [3,22,23,58,69,70].

Table 6. The effect of natural disasters on HRM.

Incidents	Work Situations	HRM Practices	Authors
Earthquakes in New Zealand; Hurricane Catherina, USA; flooding in Peru	Skill shortages; rapid staff turnover; lack of information regarding infrastructure recovery experts; smaller cities and towns on the Gulf Coast continue to struggle with hiring and retaining qualified employees; migration of people, people moving to other sectors	A need to improve information about experts and skills	Cavanagh et al. (2021) Sun et al. (2021) Chang-Richards et al. (2017) French et al. (2008) Kluger et al. (2020)
Indian Ocean tsunami	A need for extra manpower and funding to tackle the consequence of the tsunami	Despite an influx of volunteers, the global disaster challenged multinational non-profit organisations’ ability to have enough skilled and experienced staff to respond to the tsunami and maintain existing workloads.	Merlot and De Cieri (2012)

4.3.4. Political Instability and HRM

Five papers contained an analysis of terrorism and threats against expatriate staff members of international organisations. The bombing in Oslo, Norway; 9/11 in the US; and two bombings in Bali were the subject of two papers [32,71]. Terrorist attacks tend to lead to post-traumatic stress among employees. Management support can lessen the stress, and the HR plan must include elements for proactive alertness, evacuation plans, and explicit employee training and cross-cultural management (see Table 7).

Three papers dealt with expatriate staff members of international organisations. According to the papers, unstable and hostile environments often pose a physical and psychological danger for expatriate staff members. In such situations, organisations must secure plans and support to protect their staff members [31,72,73].

Table 7. The effect of political instability on HRM.

Incidents	Work Situations, Employee Response	HRM Practices	Authors
Bombing in Oslo, Norway; 9/11 in the US; two bombings in Bali	Post-traumatic stress	Management support decreases post-traumatic stress, perception of leadership is not affected by the crisis situation; a functional HR plan must include elements for proactive alertness, the ability to dispatch inventory, evacuation plans, and record preservation coupled with dissemination to employees and explicit employee training and cross-cultural management	Birkeland et al. (2017) Liou and Lin (2008)
Protecting expatriates in international non-profit and for-profit organisations	A need for extra manpower and funding to tackle the consequence of possible attacks	The organisations seek to build in-house competence centred on culture building and supported by a suite of human resource practices relating to people services, information services, and communication services. These competencies coalesce around an overarching philosophy towards safety and security that we describe as personal responsibility and empowerment; there is a difference between industries; the importance of specialist expertise, knowledge and management of human resources in hostile environments is highlighted	Fee and McGrath-Champ (2017) Fee et al. (2019) Gannon and Paraskevas (2019)

4.3.5. Different Types of Crises and HRM

All four crises identified in the literature review share three common elements: surprise, threat, and short response time, as mentioned by Williams et al. [9] There is, however, one major difference. Economic crises take more time, usually weeks or months, to have an impact on labour markets and HRM compared to other kinds of crises. Terrorist attacks, hurricanes, earthquakes, and pandemics tend to happen very suddenly and are more often than not life-threatening for staff members. According to the findings of the papers in this literature review, the different characteristics of the crises have distinct HRM consequences. In times of crisis that pose a threat to the health and well-being of employees, the findings show that soft HRM and management support are the best practices. That is quite similar to situations in stable environments, where strategic HRM practices encourage the professional selection of staff and training, motivation by performance appraisals and payment systems, and management support to establish trust. In situations that are not a direct threat to the health of employees, such as economic crisis, the findings show that organisations use hard HRM (i.e., cost-cutting, downsizing, short-term employees, pay freeze, etc.) to adjust to decreasing demands and income. In such situations, there is some indication that gender equality can be affected negatively.

5. Discussion

This paper aimed to present a systematic literature review on HRM in crises in the period 2008–2021. In total, 56 papers were identified and analysed. Thematic analysis resulted in four themes: economic crisis and HRM (25 papers), health crisis and HRM (21 papers), natural disasters and HRM (5 papers), and political instability and HRM (5 papers). Britain and Spain are the countries that have been studied the most, followed by Germany and the US. No country in Africa has been studied. Most of the papers (eight papers) were published in *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, followed by *Asia Pacific Business Review*, a distribution that indicates that the publication of studies on HRM in crisis takes place in the respective parts of the world where the crisis took place.

The findings of the literature review show that there is sound knowledge on HRM practices in times of economic crisis. More precisely, the findings suggest that in times of an economic crisis, organisations utilize a hard approach to HRM to adjust to decreased demand and income loss; thus, an emphasis is put on retrenchment. These findings are similar to former research [15–17]. Although economic crises and their impact on HRM and labour markets have been extensively studied, more research is needed in the following fields:

- Some studies [46,47] have shown that economic recessions tend to harm gender equality, such as hiring educated women, rising wage inequality, etc. The limited number of papers on this topic indicates not only a need for further research but also awareness-raising activities to reduce the danger that positive developments regarding gender equality are not only come to a standstill but in a worst-case scenario are even reversed.
- Only one paper [43] was identified that did address the different paths that small and large firms take to deal with an economic crisis. Given the impact of heterogeneity on organisations and their capabilities with regard to HRM as well as the role of smaller firms in economies, there is an urgent need for more fine-grained research that takes into account size differences.
- Furthermore, only one paper [40] was found that focused on the outsourcing of HRM in the wake of economic recession. Given the emphasis on the hard approach to HRM in times of economic crisis, there is a need for more research on utilising outsourcing as an HRM practice in those times.
- There is also a need for more research on employee representation and voice in conjunction with HRM practices in times of recession; only two papers were found on the subject [48,49].
- The papers in the review solely focused on the demand side of economic shocks and their impact on HRM. There is, therefore, a need for an analysis of supply-side economic shocks, such as oil price turmoil in the last decade. There is also a need for research on governments' policy responses and their implication for public–private coordination.

The COVID-19 health crisis has had a vast effect on the well-being and health of people and thus organisations' HRM practices. The studies recently published demonstrate that in most cases soft HRM practices, increased health and safety measures, and shared leadership was utilised to cope with life- and health-threatening situations caused by the pandemic [4,24,25]). Although an increasing number of papers have been published on HRM and COVID-19, more research is needed on the following topics:

- Most of the papers on COVID-19 focused on the health care and hospitality and tourism industries. What has happened in other industries is unknown but needs research as well.
- As already noted, COVID-19, like other crises, has posed many challenges to the persons in charge of HRM in organisations, such as the need for rapid and decisive responses as well as the use of new communication channels and other forms of communication [30]. At the same time, it was noted that so far only very few papers have dealt with these challenges; they were found in the areas of health, i.e., challenges faced by nurse managers [61] and tourism [22,67]. More research is needed on the specific challenges of health crises and their implications for HR managers and their activities.
- Based on the review, the papers that investigated COVID-19 mostly addressed issues like fears, burnout, and other physical and psychological factors. Only one paper [29] was identified that investigated remote working, showing that organisational values and job motivation can enhance organisational commitment during remote working. No papers were found on the work–life balance or quality of life of the persons in remote working. That is surprising, given that millions of people have been working remotely in the last two years. How has social isolation affected people in remote working? Has burnout increased or decreased? How have organisations provided work equipment for employees to work at home? Have family conflicts increased during the pandemic due to remote working? How has the relationship between employees and HRM managers changed due to remote working?
- It was also found that no paper dealt with changes in labour markets or employment relations as a consequence of the pandemic. It seems it is time to start with more research in these areas. Given that the pandemic is still ongoing, the opportunity to

do longitudinal research is still there. How many companies laid off employees or put staff in part-time jobs? Has outsourcing increased during the pandemic? Have general labour agreements between employees and organisations been changed due to the pandemic? Tourism was very badly hit around the world due to the pandemic, with the closure or downsizing of many companies. Is there a difference in labour market changes between industries? Did public organisations maintain their employment relations with employees to a greater extent than private companies? Have smaller firms worked more intensively on maintaining the relationships with their staff than larger firms?

- Nations around the world imposed different restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID-19, with few restrictions in the beginning (US, Britain) or hard lockdowns (Australia, New Zealand), and with some countries choosing a middle road with quarantine and social distancing (Iceland). It would be of interest to analyse how these divergent policies have affected HRM practices in different countries, e.g., HR-related approaches to address the well-being of employees. It would be expected that in countries with hard lockdowns, firms and employees experienced more immediate effects regarding distance work, employment relations, and social isolation compared to firms and employees in countries with few restrictions.
- A recent Australian study demonstrated that COVID-19 has had a positive effect on employees, such as more family time, increased work flexibility, and a calmer life [74]. There has also been a vast advancement in online education, as well as in remote working tools and online meetings (Zoom, Teams, etc.). Further research should focus on the potential positive effects of the pandemic on HRM in organisations. In addition, are they found in all companies or sectors, or only in certain ones? Moreover, if so, why is that so?
- One study [68] showed that a health crisis changed the priorities in the life and motivation of employees in the financial sector in Spain. Is that the case in other sectors and other countries as well? In addition, what do these changed priorities mean for HRM in organisations?

Natural disasters and political instability pose very sudden and unexpected threats to organisations and their employees. Like in health crises, HRM managers appear to respond with soft HRM, and safety and management support. As only 10 papers were found that dealt with crises of this kind, and given the increase in both natural disasters and political instability around the world, more research is needed on these crucial topics.

If one compares the different crises covered in this paper, it is of theoretical interest that economic crises seem to have a different effect on HRM than the other ones. In addition to what has been said on the subject already, one explanation of these differences may be found in the role of governments and international organisations like the World Bank. In a financial crisis like the one in 2007–2008, the backup of governments was channelled to restore the banking system, whereas, after sudden natural disasters, governments and international organisations provided financial aid to restore infrastructure and support companies.

As regards the research methods, the reported studies in the literature review used divergent research methods and designs, such as longitudinal and cross-cultural studies, and collected data primarily through interviews or surveys. Surveys were the main research method, followed by interviews. Future research would benefit from more mixed-methods approaches.

Based on the findings of the literature review, many practical implications for HRM decision-makers can be derived. Economic fluctuations are a common feature of market economies. Managers of organisations should engage in crisis management to deal with such crises by having a specific crisis strategy (response) ready to meet declining demand and income. Very likely, such strategies will be a mixture of cost-cutting and using hard HRM, combined with seeking new markets. Yet there is also room for innovation, as an over-emphasis on retrenchment reduces the scope for action. Pandemics like COVID-19

are also likely to occur regularly in the future. The present findings indicate that up-to-date HRM practices and rapid solutions are very important. First, organisations need to enhance health and safety measures to protect staff from deadly infections; training and continued further education on dynamic crises is also needed to perform in uncertain contexts. At the same time, organisational support and trust are vital to reduce stress, fear, and burnout: Sustainable (soft) HRM seems to reduce stress and fear of external threats. Third, employees seem to regard social responsibility and training as more relevant than payment in times of crisis. Moreover, organisational commitment seems to have an impact on job satisfaction in remote working. Similar advice can be given regarding natural disasters and political instability crises.

A limitation of the present study is found in that the authors only searched the Web of Science database. That might have the possible consequence that some empirical articles in the field of crisis and HRM may have been missed. However, the authors found in total 617 papers, scanned 470 papers and analysed 56 papers. Thus, the authors believe that the findings reported in this paper provide important knowledge in this relevant research area.

In summary, it is believed that this literature review contributes to HRM theory by analysing different kinds of crises and HRM responses. One of the main contributions to the theory is that economic crises seem to have the effect of cost-cutting and hard HRM, whereas other types of crises seem to bring about management support and soft HRM.

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