

Crisis management in rural public organizations: What it takes to evolve?

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Abstract

The vortex of the financial crisis that struck European countries did not impact them as it has primarily affected the Mediterranean periphery. Instead, Greece was the prominent victim, both in terms of duration and size of crisis, with radical changes implemented. The present study explores the determinants of administrative and organizational amendments in the general rural administration during the economic crisis. Data were gathered through a qualitative survey with public officers and stakeholders and were gauged through a Delphi policy framework. The empirical study focuses on implementing crisis management and change management practices in the public sector. The results indicated that public administration was neither prepared to confront the crisis nor the changes that followed. On the other hand, stakeholders claim that despite all the changes that have occurred, the bureaucracy was unaffected and that there is a need for public services to be enhanced. The lessons derived suggest more profound shifts in the administrative practice, culture, implementation of organizational knowledge and tools to deal with crises and changes combined with organizational learning.

Keywords: *Economic crisis, Crisis management, Organizational change, Rural public administration, Delphi.*

1. Introduction

The globalized financial system has led to relations of dependence and interaction of markets, economies, and countries to such an extent that countries' economic crises are transferred in a short time to the international financial system, and vice versa (Claessens and Kose, 2013). This acknowledges the crisis that began in 2007 in the U.S. financial system and soon spread internationally as a capital market crisis that provoked a global economic recession (Kollintzas *et al.*, 2012). In 2008 the financial crisis hit Greece, which led to a recession of the Greek economy and severe consequences for society. The eco-

nomics crisis resulted in rising public debt, rising tax evasion, absence of investments negatively impacting business growth, production, market prices, and increasing unemployment (Giannakis and Bruggeman, 2015). Significant effects came on public finance such as high budget expenditures and large revenue deficits that entrapped the Greek government in a situation unable for growth rates and forced it in 2015 to proceed with capital restrictions, cash withdrawals and a full bank holiday that lasted six working days (Harari, 2015). Individuals or/and social groups had difficulties covering their daily needs and experienced misery or even absolute poverty.

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Wage cuts, 9.5% increased inflation, increases in indirect and direct taxation describe the suffocating and adverse climate for Greek society (European Bank, 2016; Kapiki, 2011).

The European member states were not affected in the same way. Those suffering from high public debt and deficit were forced to take serious austerity measures, leading to a deep recession and substantial fiscal cuts. The implementation of fiscal adjustment programs primarily affected Southern Europe's countries, especially Greece (Artelaris, 2017; Loizou *et al.*, 2019). Greece's economic downturn had consequences in many sectors, like education, health, environment, logistics, immigration, construction, tourism, shipping, entrepreneurship and agriculture (Zmas, 2015; Artelaris, 2017). Especially for agriculture, austerity measures led to lower commodity prices, a rise in production cost, and lower agricultural income (Karelakis *et al.*, 2013a; Micha *et al.*, 2015). The severe impact of crisis combined with factors like the aged population employed in the agricultural sector, low educational qualifications and lack of training, migration of young people, indifference by policymakers exacerbated poverty (Zografakis and Karanikolas, 2012; Anthopoulou *et al.*, 2017). The situation especially aggravated by corruption in public administration and the country's complicated legal framework (Micha *et al.*, 2015). Still, it is stressed out that given the proper policy intervention, the agricultural sector could boost other sectors related to agriculture, the regional economy, as well as playing a pivotal role for Greece to overcome recession (Karelakis *et al.*, 2013a; Lampiris *et al.*, 2018; Loizou *et al.*, 2019).

To regain its credibility, Greece had to take a series of measures under the tutelage of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Central Bank (ECB). Aberrations of fiscal policy affected almost any policy sector regarding its institutions, values, goals and processes. New regulatory forms and structures, new principles and approaches were introduced. According to Lane (2000), public administration implements political decisions based on laws that employees fol-

low. Therefore, the link between public administration and government policy is inevitable, making it clear that crisis management directly affects both interconnected parties, requiring the mobilization of public administration mechanisms and implementing models and strategies.

All this external pressure came to proliferate to the already existing issues that troubled Greece's public administration. Greece's public administration had to deal with problems even before the time of crisis: Lack of a clear hierarchy, corruption, absence of effectiveness, multifaceted structures, bureaucracy, difficulties in integrating human resource management, limited-service efficiency (OECD, 2011; 2012a; 2018; Papavassiliou, 2014; Tsekeris *et al.*, 2015; Makrydemetres *et al.*, 2016; European Union, 2017; Spanou, 2019). The severe consequences of the economic crisis inevitable affected public organizations.

Bearing those mentioned above, this study aims to map the context in which crisis was addressed and implement changes in rural public organizations, identifying critical factors that acted as catalysts or not in the public system. Also, it examines whether the operation of the Greek rural administration can be linked to the existing theory of crises and change management. The discussion attempts to determine when and under which circumstances crisis was perceived and challenged, whether changes were implemented, the driving forces behind these transformations, and the impact on stakeholders. The study's findings may contribute to comprehend better the relationship between crisis and change and the influence they had in a particular management system. Besides, it offers evidence for a possible correlation between management theory and practice, as the rural public administration denotes an attention-grabbing case study on the effects of the debt crisis on public administration.

Accordingly, the remainder of the paper presents the theoretical background on crisis management and public organizations in section two and the materials and methods employed in section three. Further on, the fourth section delivers and discusses the results, and the final section concludes.

2. Theoretical background

Various scholars defined the organizational crisis as an event that threatens an organization's normality (Coombs and Holladay, 1996). Mitroff *et al.* (1987) argued that organizational crises affect people, organizational structures, finance, technology and can cause extensive damage to human life, the physical and social environment. Pearson and Clair (1998) stated that the organizational crisis threatens the organization's vitality, but at the same time, the cause, the effects and the resolution of a crisis seem unclear. Hart (1993) provided a definition connected to the public sector and defined crisis as irregular breakdowns of well-known symbolic frameworks that substantiate the existing socio-politic order.

Literature also points out that crises often lead to change, having an unpredictable outcome for better or worse (Barnett and Pratt, 2000). According to Stern (1997), crisis causes changes in the way people think and forces them to question their previous beliefs and perceptions about the social and natural environment and the acceptability of the existing organizational structures and processes. Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer (2014) also referred to leaders' role in organizational learning and crisis management, emphasizing that learning combines a range of social, psychological, political, emotional, and cognitive parameters and leads to practical crisis management (Shrivastava, 1983). In other words, dealing with a crisis is manifested in daily activities and how an organization's members and leaders act.

There is also a relationship between crisis and organizational learning based on the assumption that better understanding of crises can prevent the recurrence of future ones (Kovoor-Misra *et al.*, 2000), can increase preparedness to deal with it (Mitroff *et al.*, 1988) or can assist in decision-making during crises (Pearson and Clair, 1998). Nevertheless, for organizational learning resulting from crises to be effective, it requires amendments in the beliefs and values of the members of the organization, which means organizational culture change that will lead to changes in the behaviour of members and es-

pecially leaders (Pergel and Psychogios, 2013). Scholars agree that if an organization's culture includes learning readiness and overall acceptance of new ideas, focuses on preparedness, it is probably more comfortable managing and dealing with a crisis (Elsabbagh *et al.*, 2004; Parnell *et al.*, 2010). However, Christensen *et al.* (2016) and Broekema *et al.* (2017) point out that organizational culture can contribute both to the favourable outcome and the negative outcome when it limits the prevention, preparedness, and recovery of organizations crisis. Furthermore, successful changes require vision, strategy, and a culture of sustainable and shared values (Gill, 2002). Culture is also expressed in less conscious and operational matters between members of an organization (Schein 1990). Therefore, if the cultural assumptions favour change, it becomes easier to implement it. Three crucial factors lead to functional changes: organizational culture, operating climate and administrative policies (McNabb and Sepic, 1995), and according to Dent and Goldberg (1999), the key to change is managing organizational behaviour.

In response to a crisis, organizations need to recognize that internal and external stakeholders may be involved in the crisis as it may have severe implications for the organization itself and its relationships with stakeholders (Bundy *et al.*, 2017). It is possible that stakeholders take distance from the organization in crisis because of fear of being involved or even turning against its interests (Pearson and Mitroff, 1993; Pearson and Clair, 1998). Thus, it becomes vital for them to maintain positive relations or even more engage stakeholders in preventing and mitigating the determinants of a crisis (Alpaslan *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, when the crisis expands, it is in its best interests to identify all stakeholders involved (Ulmer and Sellnow, 2000).

According to the consolidation programs imposed regarding Greece's public administration reform interventions between 2007 and 2019, a great effort was made to upgrade the administrative mechanism. In 2007, the Special Secretariat for Administrative Reform undertook the execution of the Operational Program entitled "Administrative Reform 2007-2013". The Pro-

gram followed the European Social Fund (ESF) guidelines and the Revised Lisbon Strategy to strengthen the efficiency of public administration. With a holistic approach to public administration and strategic interventions, the Program sought to offer friendlier and more comfortable services to the citizen. Furthermore, it aimed at training public sector executives with an emphasis on women’s participation in decision-making centres, institutional reforms in the organization and operation of public services, and the strengthening of central, regional administration, and local government (Ministry of Interior, n.d.).

The “National Strategy for Administrative Reform 2016-2018” followed more long-term planning by documenting public administration’s long-term weaknesses. Weaknesses include the lack of coordination of services, the irrational distribution of human resources, the labyrinthine regulatory framework, the lack of e-government issues, the lack of targeting, and the lack of introduction of acceptable practices administration. For implementing the strategy, key pillars of action were developed, which concerned the administrative structures, tools, functions, processes, human resources, transparency,

accountability and open governance (Ministry of Administrative Reconstruction, 2017).

Despite all efforts, the labyrinth of public administrative organization remained unalterable. The Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food (GMADF) has to deal with every issue concerning the primary sector. Greece covers an area of 13,196,887 Ha of which 97.1% are classified as agricultural areas (73.9% mainly rural and 23.2% intermediate rural), inhabited by about 2/3 of the total population of the country (64.4%) (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, 2009). The central administration of the Ministry (Figure 1) is located in the country’s capital. At the same time, several decentralized administration offices are located in the capital cities of the administrative districts, others in the capital cities of prefectures and some offices in other cities all over the country. In addition, there are also companies, institutes and legal entities supervised by the GMADF (Figure 2) that deal with issues about consumer protection by ensuring import, production and distribution of healthy food, the development of Greek agriculture, the rise of the professional and cultural level of farmers, geotechnical issues, research on

Figure 1 - Administrative structure of the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food.

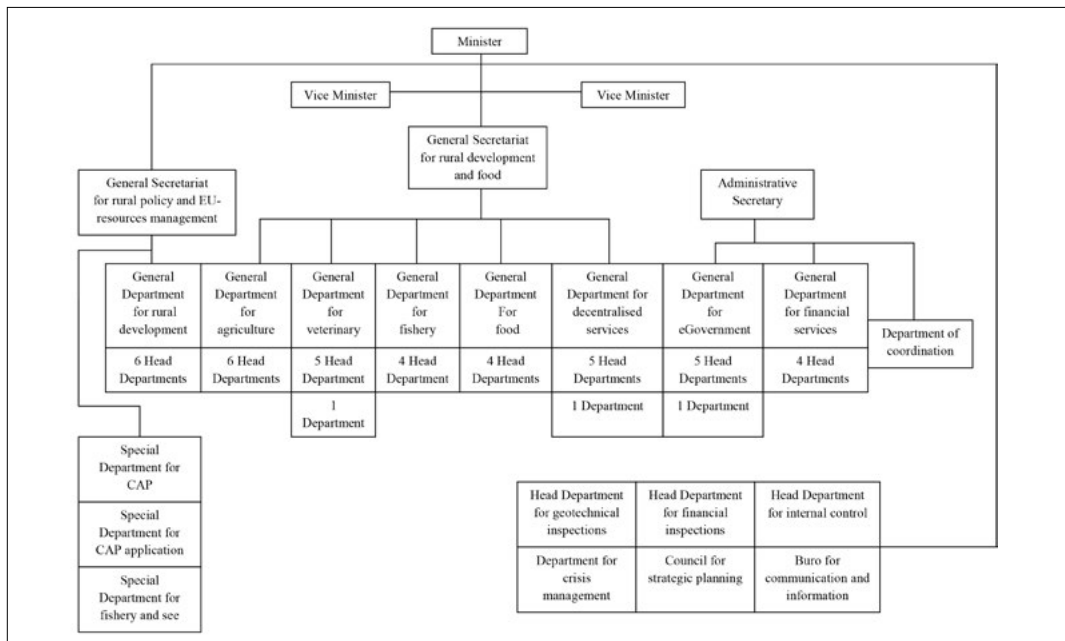
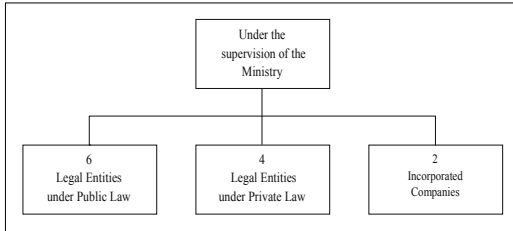


Figure 2 - Companies and legal entities supervised by the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food.



diseases and damage to crops, measures to prevent the occurrence and control of pests and other animals or plant pests, insurance of crop and animal production and livestock of agricultural holdings from damage caused by natural hazards, diseases and illnesses, training of executives capable of contributing to the development of the agricultural output, and many other issues.

Considering those mentioned previously, three research questions arise as follows:

- RQ1: Did Greece's financial crisis (2008-2018) force changes in the rural public administration?
- RQ2: Did parameters such as leadership, organizational culture, and learning play a role in dealing with crisis and introducing change?
- RQ3: What is the opinion of stakeholders as recipients of the services offered to them during the time of crisis by the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food?

3. Materials and methods

The Delphi Method is a qualitative method for gathering data from a panel of participants within a domain of expertise. The technique aims to reach consensus among the panellists upon the research subject and was developed in the 50s by Dalkey and Helmer (Dayé, 2012). The method's key feature is the use of multiple rounds of questionnaires to collect data and consensus-building from a panel (Young and Jamieson, 2001).

In the present research, study experts invited to participate from all over Greece were members of the Greek Parliament, managers and state employees of the GMADF, managers and state employees of public services supervised by the GMADF, professors in faculties of rural development, agri-

culture, crop production, rural environment, and agricultural technology. The expert panel consisted of 25 participants in the first round and 29 participants in the second round. In addition, to increase reliability, another parallel research panel of stakeholders was invited to participate in the research. The stakeholders' panel consisted of 25 participants in the first round and 19 participants in the second round. Stakeholders were identified as people who conducted any act that required the services offered by the GMADF. The Delphi process lasted for two months, starting from April 2020 to June 2020. Each panel of experts was given two weeks for each round, and all the questionnaires were distributed via email. Alongside the questionnaires, there was a letter of invitation to the experts to participate as members of the Delphi panel, a brief explanation of the procedure and instructions on how to complete the questionnaire.

Delphi studies' significant statistics are measures of central tendency, the level of dispersion and the frequency distributions to present information concerning the collective judgments of participants (Hallowell and Gambatese, 2010). The criteria for consensus used in this research were the mean, the median, the interquartile range and the measure of 75% of participants' opinions that coincide in the same two categories on the Likert scale.

In the first round, the panellists were given a structured questionnaire with closed-ended 5-point Likert scale questions to elicit their level of agreement with a series of statements regarding the economic crisis, organizational change and culture (Table A see Appendix). Participants were asked to rate a scale of 1 to 5 if they agree to the statement with 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree; and 5= strongly agree. After receiving participants' responses, questionnaires were analyzed by applying CHIC Analysis (Correspondence and Hierarchical Cluster Analysis) version 1.1 (Markos *et al.*, 2010). The data analyzed from round one was used to form the questionnaire for the second round of data collection. In the second round, panellists received a questionnaire and feedback on the results of the first round. In the second round, the panellists were asked whether they agree with the statements and clarify opinions expressed in the first round that needed further explanation (Table B see Appendix).

Table 1 - Determination of consensus.

	<i>high consensus</i>	<i>moderate consensus</i>	<i>no consensus</i>
IQR	≤ 1	≤ 1	≥ 1
	<i>and</i>	<i>or</i>	<i>and/or</i>
%	≥ 75	≥ 75	≤ 75

Regarding the participants of the stakeholders' panel, they were given a structured questionnaire (Table C see Appendix) with closed-ended, 5-point Likert scale questions in the first round regarding economic crisis, organizational change and culture and they were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 5 if they agree to the statement with 1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree. Responses were analyzed through the CHIC Analysis, and in the second round, another 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was distributed together with feedback of the statements analyzed in the first round. The questionnaire was about expressing an opinion on suggestions about improving public services (Table D see Appendix).

The degree of consensus was considered after each round. The consensus is determined as "high" when the quartile deviation range is less than or equal to 1, and a presence of $\geq 75\%$ of opinions coincide in two statements. A "moderate" consensus is reached when either the quartile deviation range is less than or equal to 1 or when a presence of $\geq 75\%$ of opinions coincide in two statements. There is no consensus if the quartile deviation range is more than one or when opinions do not coincide for equal or more than 75% on two statements (Table 1).

4. Results and discussion

In the first round, panellists were given a structured questionnaire with 45 statements, where eighteen reached a consensus. Out of the eighteen statements, eight reached a high consensus, ten moderate consensus and twenty-seven of the statements reached no consensus (Table 2). In the second round, panellists received a questionnaire of fourteen statements and were asked their level of agreement. A 100% consensus was reached in this round, and notably, eight statements reached a high agreement, while six of them a moderate (Table 3). Median and mean

scores were used to define on which statements consensus was expressed.

The analysis of the results showed that public officers agree that the financial crisis during the period 2008-2018 led to changes in public services provided by the GMADF. This statement answers the first research question, clearly identifying the relation between crisis and change. Likewise, it is determined that despite the type of the crisis, in the case of Greece, the financial crisis forced administrative, operational, and functional issues in public services. Although the crisis introduced modifications that led to a radical restructuring of the public services, it seems that changes were too many to be implemented. Managers seemed not to lead with efficiency and competitiveness or promote teamwork, cooperation, innovation, creativity and professionalism. During the crisis period, the public services climate was characterized by formal, bureaucratic procedures and rules. On the other hand, state employees were not negatively affected by changes, even though they had no training dealing with crisis or alterations.

Greece's economic crisis had no triggering effect, and that might be the reason why most people did not realize they were living in a financial crisis until two or more years than it started in 2008. It is evident to all participants that there was no proper training for supervisors, managers and employees, no plan, no political or administrative instructions on implementing changes during the ten years of crisis. There was no time given to employees to adjust to all changes occurring. They only had to follow standardized formal procedures and regulations, so introduced modifications were not fixed as new procedures.

The statements, as mentioned above, offer insights for the second research question to be answered. If parameters such as leadership, organizational culture and learning have had a role in dealing with crisis and introducing change. Leaders and employees followed standardized norms

Table 2 - Consensus measurements: first-round experts.

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>IQR</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>IQR</i>	<i>%</i>
1	4	3,958	2	≥75	24	3	3,042	2	
2	4	3,875	2		25	3	2,625	1	≥75
3	4	4,167	1	≥75	26	4	3,25	1,75	
4	4	3,5	1,75		27	4	3,792	1	
5	2	2,125	2		28	3	2,875	1	≥75
6	3	2,542	1		29	2	2,333	1,75	
7	3	2,875	2		30	3	2,708	1,75	
8	3	2,917	2		31	4	3,833	2	
9	4	3,375	2		32	2	2,167	2	
10	2	2,125	2		33	2	2,333	1,75	
11	2	2,083	2		34	2	2,25	2	
12	4	3,667	1,75		35	3	2,917	1,75	
13	4	4,042	1,75	≥75	36	3	2,583	1	≥75
14	4	3,5	1		37	2	2,208	1	≥75
15	2	2	2		38	3	2,708	1,75	
16	4	3,667	1		39	2	1,958	1,75	≥75
17	4	3,583	1	≥75	40	4	4,208	1	≥75
18	4	3,25	2		41	3	3,25	1,75	
19	3	2,583	3		42	3	2,583	1	
20	2	2,458	3		43	4	3,708	1,75	
21	1	1,75	1	≥75	44	4	3,542	1	
22	2	2,167	1		45	3	3,125	2	
23	3	3,125	2						

and procedures, the culture of the organization was to the maximum consolidated, and there was no training at all in dealing with crisis or change. Thus, the importance of these parameters is highlighted to efficient confront crisis and change.

Table 3 - Consensus measurements: second-round experts.

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>IQR</i>	<i>%</i>
1	1	1,345	1	
2	1	1,414	1	
3	4	3,31	1	≥75
4	2	1,552	1	
5	1	1,379	1	
6	2	1,931	0	≥75
7	2	2	0	≥75
8	1	1,138	0	≥75
9	1	1,138	0	≥75
10	2	1,724	1	
11	1	1,069	0	≥75
12	1	1,103	0	≥75
13	2	1,759	0,5	≥75
14	1	1,31	1	

As for the stakeholders' panel participants, they were invited in the first round to answer a structured questionnaire with fifteen statements (Table D see Appendix) in which a 100% consensus was reached. Specifically, eight statements reached a high consensus, and six achieved a moderate agreement (Table 4). Therefore, the need for a second round with eight statements (Table E see Appendix) was to assure that consensus was not random, in which a 100% consensus was reached, marking all eight statements with high consensus (Table 4).

Stakeholders ascertain that public services had not as a goal to serve better during the economic crisis. There were no optimizing or modernizing services, and even though many services were provided via the internet, still there were delays. It was for stakeholders to easily communicate with public services, and they had friendly service, but bureaucratic procedures did not lead to fast and sufficient services. It is in their healthy believes that things need to be changed.

Table 4 - Consensus measurements: first and second-round stakeholders.

Statements	Median	Mean	IQR	%	Statements	Median	Mean	IQR	%
1	2	2,4	1	≥75	1	2	1,737	1	≥75
2	2	2,44	1	≥75	2	1	1,421	1	≥75
3	2	2,28	1	≥75	3	2	1,842	1	≥75
4	3	2,88	2	≥75	4	2	1,789	1	≥75
5	2	2,44	1	≥75	5	1	1,316	0	≥75
6	3	3,08	1,5	≥75	6	1	1,368	1	≥75
7	4	3,8	2	≥75	7	2	1,632	1	≥75
8	4	4	1	≥75	8	1	1,684	1	≥75
9	3	2,96	2	≥75					
10	3	2,72	1	≥75					
11	2	2,52	1	≥75					
12	3	2,76	2	≥75					
13	3	2	1	≥75					
14	3	2,8	2,5	≥75					
15	4	3,32	2,5	≥75					

Therefore, they suggest that there is a need for modernization of the services provided by the GMADF. Minimization of time required to fulfil citizens requests, friendlier service, improvement of services efficiency, more expanded electronic services, training of the employees, but most of all overcoming bureaucracy are some of the stakeholders' suggestions for public service enhancement. Answering the third research question, stakeholders argue mostly about more changes that need to be done and that changes in times of crisis were not enough or not in the right direction that would help a public organization improve itself. According to Szpirglas *et al.* (2008), a new perspective on the stakeholder's role in crisis management should be considered moving the balance from mapping stakeholders to involvement and acting. Likewise, researchers highlight that a bottom-up approach that involves stakeholder's opinions as well as offering specialized and targeted services would lead to more concentrated policy and the use of private and decentralized public advisory and extension services, measures that could ensure the success of management efforts while supporting new strategies in the primary sector (Karelakis *et al.*, 2013b; Pascucci and De Magistris, 2012). Contrary to what researchers suggest, stakeholder's role in Greece is linked just to the acceptance of services, and it is not sure that there is even

mapping of stakeholders by the administration.

However, despite the planning, there have been difficulties in implementation due to the suffocating context created by the financial crisis, with the administration running to anticipate the fiscal adjustment changes. Besides, the public sector's contraction created significant shortages in human resources and resistance within the administration. One reason for the not so good performance of the efforts for consolidation of the public administration seems to be the power of politics, which manages to maintain its relationship with the administration (Spanou, 2019). Another reason is that the central government does not have good management, oversight, and coordination structures to support and carry out the required reforms and procedures. There is also minimal cooperation and coordination between the ministries, whose organizational structures - each of which has, on average, 439 internal structures - which does not at all help in any way to achieve the necessary changes. The administrative culture of modern public administration seems to have been an additional reason for its rigidity. Its unique feature is that it focuses mainly on fulfilling formal responsibilities, as defined by law (OECD, 2012b).

International literature identifies the critical role of organizational learning in dealing with crises when they occur (Elsabbagh *et al.*, 2004)

and crises likely to occur (Antonacopoulou and Sheaffer, 2013). The importance of proper training has also been noted by experts and stakeholders who participated in this research. It can be considered that the lack of appropriate crisis management training in public organizations has led to the loss of potential for optimizing operation and efficiency, for more modernization, for faster service and reduction of bureaucracy, for facilitating citizens in communicating with services and for expanding electronically provided services to citizens. Moreover, bureaucracy and pyramid schemes of leadership combined with non-existent in-service training may have led to uncoordinated stakeholder interventions, high staff turnover, poor communication between services and departments, ultimately expressed in late adoption. Still, appropriate training may have created opportunities for cooperation between ministries, departments and other public offices to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of services. Unfortunately, these opportunities have not been exploited. It is also concluded that through administrative and operational transformation or even a review of the structure of public services, it would be possible to provide better services, resulting in more tangible benefits for those involved. Respectively, opportunities for consolidation of solid values, strengthening of responsibility towards stakeholders, and developing the organizations' strengths were lost as examples of renewal. In the case of the services of the Ministry, the lack of training and knowledge on the subject failed to seize the advantage of the opportunities that may have arisen.

Results show an absolute lack in the use of crisis management and change management tools, confirming that structural reforms depend to no small extent on a well-functioning rural public administration. Real change to an efficient, accountable and inclusive administration is still required, as its adherence to the past is likely to jeopardize the broader reforms needed for the country's sustainable development (OECD, 2012b). A source of concern is the fragmented and complex rural public administration in handling the reform framework's coordination and monitoring. Insufficient cooperation between public bodies, irrationality in procedures, lack of use of new technologies,

resistance to change, and other administration weaknesses, as mentioned above, lead to ineffective administration actions (OECD, 2012b). Thus, maintaining old management frameworks, which tend to become routine, combined with the inconsistent implementation of new ones, jeopardizes any change's viability (Spanou, 2019).

Overall, Greece's administrative changes were sporadic without any coherent managerial tool and any theoretical or practical managerial context. Thus, despite the substantial external influence, the administrative pattern has not changed much.

5. Conclusions

Greece's financial crisis of the years 2008-2018 forced changes in public administration. This research study made apparent that Greece's public administration, mainly the public services of the GMADF, were neither prepared to confront the crisis nor the changes it led to efficiently. Administrative and organizational changes were introduced to public administration, but no change management models or culture change. Stakeholders claim that despite all the changes that have occurred, the bureaucracy level seems to be unaffected and that there is a need for public services to be enhanced. The research results demonstrate that a critical factor for successfully dealing with the crisis is to deal with organizational changes and culture successfully. Organizational learning related to the scope of changes and confronting crisis was of total absence.

Results highlighted the requisite framework for crisis, culture and change management, implementing crisis management models. In addition, it is required to embed into the public management system ongoing risk and issues assessment, sound and tested processes, adjusted training and practice. What would furthermore help public organizations to evolve is strong leadership and communicating and managing stakeholders' perceptions effectively to strengthen the primary sector in Greece, at least in terms of administrative adequacy and facilitation of processes that will support it as a vital sector for the country to return to economic stability and productivity.

Authors conclude that neither leaders nor state employees can hope to deal with crises through

legislation, written policies, or procedures. The only way is to adopt organizational crisis and change management in their lives. Greece seems to have overcome the financial crisis though it now must confront a health one, this of the pandemic of Covid-19. Thus, organizations must adopt processes that successfully avert and manage the crisis.

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Appendix

Table A - Statements first-round experts.

1	The financial crisis caused administrative problems in public services
2	...caused financial difficulties for public services
3	...caused operational problems in public services
4	...led to staff reduction in public services
5	...led to a reduction in bureaucracy
6	...led to corruption/lawlessness/disobedience within public services
7	...caused problems between employees in public services
8	...caused issues between employees and officers in public services
9	...caused problems between public services and citizens served
10	...led to better service by public services
11	...led to a decline in the efficiency of public service employees
12	...led to changes in the management of public services
13	...led to changes in the operation of public services
14	...dictated changes in the service of citizens

15	The effects of the financial crisis have been adequately addressed by management using crisis management models
16	During the period 2008-2018, there were changes in the structure of the public service
17	..., there were changes in the procedures followed by the public service
18	..., the requirements to the employees from their supervisors were increased
19	..., the structures of the public service and the services offered were modernized.
20	..., there was an improvement in the productivity and efficiency of the public service
21	..., there was an improvement in the training of public service employees
22	The administration followed a plan to introduce changes
23	Changes were introduced violently, abruptly
24	The employees of the public service reacted to the introduction of a change
25	Changes introduced led to a radical restructuring of public services
26	Employees responded positively to the changes
27	Changes in public services were introduced during the financial crisis without consequences being predicted
28	Changes negatively affected the performance of employees
29	Supervisors cooperated with the employees to introduce a change
30	Changes were too many to be implemented
31	Bureaucratic, standardized procedures prevailed in the public service
32	During the period of the financial crisis in the public service, innovative, alternative procedures prevailed
33	Supervisors acted as consultants and supporters for the employees
34	Supervisors operated innovatively and took initiatives
35	Supervisors operated to organize and coordinate the work
36	Supervisors operated with the aim of efficiency and competitiveness
37	The climate in public service promoted teamwork and cooperation
38	The climate was individualistic and dividing with a focus on goals and productivity
39	The climate was characterized by innovation, dynamism, readiness and initiative.
40	The climate in the public service was characterized by formal, bureaucratic procedures and rules
41	There was a mild and humane working climate.
42	There was a strict and competitive climate
43	Employees adopted and implemented changes introduced in the service
44	Despite the changes, the employees continued to operate as they did before them
45	The changes introduced during the period 2008-2018 did not affect the operation of the public service and its employees

Table B - Statements second-round experts.

1	Before 2008, did you consider the occurrence of an economic crisis possible?
2	Did you notice any „signs” that there would be a financial crisis shortly before its occurrence in 2008?
3	When did you realize that you were experiencing a financial crisis?
4	Have you noticed that management did systematic actions to deal with the financial crisis 2008-2018 and its consequences in the service?
5	Do you think that there was a plan into introducing changes during the financial crisis 2008-2018?
6	Do you think that proper training of employees would help introduce and implement changes during 2008-2018?
7	Do you think that managers’ proper training would help introduce and implement changes during 2008-2018?
8	Do you think that there were clear instructions for implementing the changes introduced in the period 2008-2018 by the leadership (political/administrative)?
9	Do you think that employees were given some time to adapt to the changes introduced?

10	Do you think that the changes introduced have been consolidated as procedures?
11	Do you think that during the period of the financial crisis 2008-2018, the public service had focused its functions on promoting the cooperation, teamwork of its employees?
12	Do you think that in the period 2008-2018, the service operated with innovation, creativity, professionalism?
13	Do you think that during the period of the financial crisis 2008-2018, the service focused on formal procedures, regulations and internal control?
14	Do you think that during the financial crisis, the public service operated with efficiency, productivity, goal achievement?

Table C - Statements first-round stakeholders.

1	During the period of economic crisis, public services operated with the aim of citizens better service
2	..., public services utilised to optimize services
3	..., the public services operated to modernize services
4	..., public services operated more with the use of technology
5	..., the public services utilised to reduce the time of service
6	..., the public services were friendly to the citizens
7	..., public services operated with a long delay in the provision of services
8	..., public services conducted through bureaucratic procedures
9	..., public services were not working proper
10	..., it was easy to contact with services
11	..., the public services operated according to the needs of the citizens
12	The financial crisis has helped make services more effective in accomplishing demands
13	During the financial crisis, the services operated quickly and adequately enough to citizens' demands
14	Public services operated better before the crisis
15	Public services operated the same as before the crisis
Table 8: Statements for the stakeholders' 2nd round	
1	How necessary do you consider the modernization of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food services?
2	How necessary is the reduction of the service time by the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food services?
3	How necessary is it for the services of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food to be friendlier?
4	How necessary do you think it is to facilitate citizens in their contact with the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food services?
5	Do you think it is necessary to reduce bureaucracy?
6	Do you think it is necessary to improve efficiency in handling citizens' requests?
7	Do you think it is necessary to train the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food services staff?
8	Do you consider it necessary to expand the services provided electronically by the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food?

Table D - Statements second-round stakeholders.

1	How necessary do you consider the modernization of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food services?
2	How necessary is the reduction of the service time by the services of the cultural Development and Food?
3	How necessary is it for the services of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food to be friendlier?
4	How necessary do you think it is to facilitate citizens in their contact with the services of Agricultural Development and Food?
5	Do you think it is necessary to reduce bureaucracy?
6	Do you think it is necessary to improve efficiency in handling citizens' requests?
7	Do you think that it is necessary to train the staff of the Agricultural Development and Food services?
8	Do you consider it necessary to expand the services provided electronically by the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Food?