



"Unraveling the Complexities of the Role of District Managers: An Ethnographic Study"

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ABSTRACT

Title: “Unraveling the Complexities of the Role of District Managers: An Ethnographic Study”.

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Keywords: District Managers, Ethnographic Research, Retail Industry, Organizational Dynamics, Management Challenges, Decision-Making Paradigms, Hierarchical Structures, Female Management Professionals, Portuguese Retail Landscape, Reflective Qualitative Analysis.

Within the contemporary business sphere, the many-sided challenges facing District Managers remain significantly underexplored. Despite the diversity of management portfolios embracing management variables and fundamental functions, a comprehensive understanding of the various obstacles encountered by District Managers in their complex roles remains a considerably understudied domain. Although ethnographic methodologies have demonstrated potential in diverse research contexts, their application to uncover the complexities embedded in the role of in the District Manager in the specific organizational context of a fashion retail business has confront with significant limitations.

This study required direct observation involving immersive practical engagement and interactions with a diverse of participants within the company's hierarchical structure. Engagements included interactions with the country manager, two area managers, multiple district managers, saleswomen, and store managers, all situated across varied locations in the central and northern regions of Portugal.

Adopting an ethnographic model as an observational sample provides several advantages. This approach enables a profound immersion in scientific documents, facilitating a complete and contextualized comprehension of organizational processes and interactions. Furthermore, participatory observation, promoting greater empathy and understanding of interpersonal dynamics in the work environment.

Utilizing a reflective qualitative model, data through observational methods and a diary, this study aims to improve the knowledge of aspiring professionals in the field. Its main objective

is to investigate the fundamental dynamics, operational complexities, and organizational challenges encountered by District Managers and other management professionals.

RESUMO

Título: "Desvendar as Complexidades do Papel dos Gestores Distritais: Um estudo etnográfico".

Autora: Inês Nogueira

Palavras-chave: Gestores Distritais, Investigação Etnográfica, Sector do Retalho, Dinâmica Organizacional, Desafios de Gestão, Paradigmas de Decisão, Estruturas Hierárquicas, Profissionais de Gestão Femininas, Paisagem do Retalho Português, Análise Qualitativa Reflexiva.

No contexto contemporâneo empresarial, os desafios enfrentados pelos gestores distritais nas suas funções multifacetadas permanecem pouco explorados. Apesar da diversidade de portfólios de gestão, os quais englobam as variáveis de um manager e as inerentes funções, a compreensão dos inúmeros obstáculos enfrentados nas suas complexas funções permanece como um domínio insuficientemente explorado. Apesar do reconhecido potencial das metodologias etnográficas em vários contextos de investigação, a sua aplicação para desvendar as complexidades inerentes no papel dos Gestores Distritais no contexto específico do negócio de retalho de produtos de moda encontrou limitações significativas.

Este estudo envolveu uma observação direta, ou seja, um envolvimento prático imersivo e interações com diversos participantes inseridos na estrutura hierárquica. Para tal, foram realizadas interações com o *country manager*, os dois *área manager*, vários gestores distritais, as vendedoras de loja, as *store managers*, todos em diversas localizações das regiões centro e norte de Portugal.

Ao adotar um paradigma etnográfico, enquanto modelo observacional, proporciona algumas vantagens. Esta abordagem permite uma profunda análise nos documentos científicos, possibilitando uma compreensão contextualizada dos processos e interações organizacionais. Além disso, a observação participativa promove uma maior empatia e compreensão das dinâmicas e relações interpessoais na organização.

Utilizando um modelo qualitativo reflexivo que colete dados através da observação e da criação de um diário, este estudo tem como objetivo melhorar o conhecimento de futuros profissionais.

O principal objetivo é investigar as dinâmicas fundamentais, as complexidades operacionais e os desafios encontrados pelos Gestores Distritais e outros gestores.

QUOTE

“Good management consists in showing average people how to do the work of superior people”
John D. Rockefeller

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1. INTRODUCTION

This ethnographic research seeks to thoroughly analyze the challenges faced by District Managers in the retail sector, in order to develop the scope. The objective is to consider the basic characteristics of sales force management functions so that there is a greater understanding of this position. Thus, the focus is on understanding the details that underlie this demanding position. The present study begins with an exploration that embraces conventional management functions down to middle and junior management levels. This study aims to expound the critical importance of selective the complexities intrinsic at each level to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the role of a District Manager. The transition from bigger management concepts to a more specific domain of District Managers emphasizes the need to analyze the different adversities encountered by individuals who occupy this specialized role. It should be noted that the complexities comprehend a series of challenges, these being operational domains, such as inventory management, the definition of strategic pricing policies, the entire management of diverse teams and multiple stores. Such challenges are intrinsically interconnected with various interpersonal and leadership dynamics, requiring shrewd decision-making and a lot of emotional intelligence. Furthermore, this research addresses the maze of complexities that are present in experiential learning, in order to "reveal" the obstacles involved in practical knowledge within training structures and a multinational company.

The motivation behind this research recognizing the difficulty of the profession, the fact that many people "fail" and mainly in helping future holders of this role to think about situations that could potentially impact performance from the beginning. By meticulously exploring these complexities, this study aims to bridge the gap between theoretical paradigms and the objective complexities faced by District Managers. As an integral approach, the research aims to address the fundamental question: ***"How does experiential learning contribute to validating theory and practice for effective decision-making among young District Managers in the retail sector?"***. As a personal motivation, this is linked in a genuine ambition to improve training and post-training experiences and to strengthen the necessary skills that young managers will need in the demanding retail and fashion sector.

Besides, the ethnographic nature of this investigation aims to clarify the outlines interconnected with the adversities that often lead to failure and exhaustion of many people in roles as District Managers. Discussions with individuals holding this position revealed a considerable rate of

failure and subsequent breaks of contracts, thus highlighting the critical imperative to assume a comprehensive investigation that clarifies the complexities and challenges faced. Consequently, this study seeks to contribute to elucidating the main difficulties, thereby sharing experiential knowledge that can guide future professionals and organizations in navigating the various components necessary for the training of a young District Manager.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the main objective of this study is to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the role of the District Manager, a previous review of the literature that served as the basis for this study is necessary, and which was carried out in an organized and sequential manner. For this to be possible, it begins by examining the role of a manager and then explores the complex landscape of being an effective leader in the retail sector. Subsequently, it also highlights the importance of middle managers, addresses the dynamics associated with recently graduated young managers and investigates the unique challenges of the role of District Manager.

Existing research on district managers is brief, but recent studies have broadly described a manager's extensive responsibilities as negligible, including leadership, strategic planning, team management and all operational supervision. The literature review relied on various academic resources, such as Google Scholar, EBSCO, JSTOR, academic journals, newspapers and blogs.

Exploring the roles of manager, middle manager and young manager is extremely necessary when trying to understand the difficulties involved in the role of District Manager. Despite the little documentation in this specific area, the fact of exploring into the variables inherent to this profession are clear, due to the complex nature of the District Manager's responsibilities, which differ from a general manager. More clearly, when understanding the comprehensive scenario of management functions, these are the motto that begins the understanding and deconstruction of the role of a District Manager. The role of the general manager is in itself also very diverse and demanding, he must have the foundations, these foundations must be linked to the skills needed to make decisions, to effectively lead teams and throughout organizational management. A general manager has the power to solve several problems while being in one place, whereas, when compared to a district manager, as the latter has to be on the "field", there must also be enormous time management.

In the same element, the presence of an intermediate manager in understanding this role of district manager is necessary because there is an understanding of the involvement of present responsibilities, that is, in order to supervise the teams, make the connection between the more senior management and the salespeople in this case, who are on the front line with the customer (which in a way contributes to understanding daily strategies and customer knowledge). This approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of the necessary skills path to becoming a District Manager, offering insights into the diverse skills, challenges and experiences required to excel in this complex position.

Finally, the role of District Manager requires in-depth knowledge of both the theoretical foundations and practical skills present in people management, which is why the study is an ethnographic model that combines both theory and practice. On the other hand, the dynamic nature of retail and fashion, especially, requires an approach that modifies and harmonizes established management theories with real-world experiences. Involvement in store operations, the fact of always being with different teams, the necessary leadership roles to adopt for each person and the optimization of daily performance highlighted the importance of effective people management and the complex responsibility that is managing each store. . The importance of this involvement becomes evident when considering the fundamental role that employees play, particularly in the retail sectors, they all have to be brand ambassadors, they have to provide personalized service to each customer, understand them and with all strategies always maximize sales daily compared to last year's data.

Thus, the research phase identified several challenges faced by District Managers in carrying out their responsibilities. These challenges cover operational complexities such as managing inventory and ensuring uniform standards across all stores, along with human resource concerns such as staff motivation, turnover and interpersonal conflicts. Furthermore, District Managers face market competition, changing consumer behaviors and the need to align local strategies with the commercial objectives of each store, which are always different.

Table 1 below examines the management aspects that are present in the central role of a District Manager, thus presenting a comparative analysis between the various hierarchical dimensions of management compared to those discussed above. This analysis offers an insight into the different commitments, obligations and operational dynamics that characterize the role of a District Manager in these different organizational frameworks. Recognizing the great

importance of management functions in general and the specific magnitude of the District Manager's responsibilities, it is important to note that the literature available was limited, the access I had was due to only a restricted number of documents relating to this specific management position . However, by comparing management hierarchies with the role of a District Manager, this analysis seeks to provide clear and objective perspectives on the different ideas, competencies and responsibilities present in the roles between a normal manager and a District Manager.

Table 1 -Aligning Management Aspects related to the DM Function
Comparative Insights on Different Managerial Hierarchies to District Manager

Topic	Authors/ Theories	Main Learnings	Contrast
The role of a Manager	Wheststone (2003), Bartol and Martin (1998), Anderson and Oliver (1987), Good (1962)	Emphasizes the importance of managers in creating strategies, meeting organizational goals and evaluating behavior and control systems.	The ideal manager balances rational decision-making with intuition, specially in dynamic and uncertain business environments.
Middle Managers	Floyd & Wooldridge (2000)	Middle managers play an essential role in executing strategies, facing uncertain circumstances and providing valuable strategic information.	They fill the gap between top management and the front line, improving strategic vision and contribution to strategic initiatives.
District Manager's role	Author's experience, Anderson and Oliver (1987)	District managers oversee multiple locations, ensure compliance with regulations and promote a high-performance culture.	Their responsibilities demand a blend of leadership, strategic acumen, operational expertise, and people management skills.
Effectiveness of a Manager	Yulk (1989), Good (1962), Anderson and Oliver (1987)	Transformational leaders inspire a shared vision, motivate teams, and promote adaptability and innovation.	A manager's success depends on inspiring others, stimulating motivation, and adapting strategies in competitive sectors.
Construction of young Managers	DeRue & Ashford (2010), Avolio et al. (1990), Kearney (2008), Pelled et al. (1999)	Challenges for young leaders involve gaining recognition and acceptance due to preconceived societal notions about age and leadership.	Cultural norms link age with leadership qualities, impacting perceptions of effective leadership among young professionals.

Source: Author, based on District Manager experience.

After analyzing the synthesis present in table 1, academic theories are present, below, I will summarize the main ideas addressed in the literature review in order to facilitate a deeper understanding of the authors' ideas.

Throughout this professional challenge, I came across a diverse scenario of theoretical perspectives that shaped my thinking, each one addressing topics of great interest about particularities present in the grandeur of variables present in effective management and the

complexities that are present in an organizational reality. Firstly, Whetstone (2003) addresses the pillars that govern management, which have been a guide for many in resolving present conflicts relating to team management. This approach has been fundamental in ensuring that the conditions are met to promote an environment of integrity and efficient conflict resolution.

Likewise, the knowledge shared by Bartol and Martin (1998) clarifies and addresses the supports present in management that balance organizational, leadership and operational objectives that contribute to consolidating my ability to implement operational planning, while keeping them in sync with objectives more defined by what the organizations want. The strategic alignment promoted by these principles significantly improved the operational effectiveness in practice.

Furthermore, Good's theory (1962), which emphasizes a well-adjusted approach to decision-making, combined with rational analysis and intuition, has profoundly influenced my methodology to teams. The fusion of an objective and logical approach culminated with intuitive insights facilitated quick and effective decision-making, especially in these dynamic and challenging contexts. The structure "built" by Anderson and Oliver (1987) regarding processes related to the sales force highlighted the critical need for a well-structured control structure in retail management to optimize profitability. The implementation of such supervision strategies highlighted the need for meticulous control mechanisms that maximized the profitability of all stores, such as daily analysis of each store's KPI's.

In another way of thinking, insights derived from Yukl's (1989) research on transformational leadership and motivation frame leadership strategies. In a more explanatory way, there are several priorities. Prioritizing vision, motivation and adaptability has been fundamental to promoting a work environment characterized by dedication and enthusiasm, driving teams towards shared goals.

Furthermore, Wooldridge and Floyd (1990) give meaning to the strategic role of middle managers, highlighting the indispensable role of middle managers in aligning strategic objectives, decision processes, the objective is to bridge the gap between strategies decided by a superior entity , the way in which the middle manager has decision-making power here and the participation that this manager has on the ground.

DeRue and Ashford (2010) focus on building a leadership identity that aligns with the guidelines necessary to shape team visions, this is possible, according to the author, through authentic leadership, which strengthens credibility and promotes trust between team members. Furthermore, the insights of Avolio, Waldman and McDaniel (1990) on the perceptions of leadership associated with the manager's age, highlight the urgency in facing the challenges arising from prejudices related to the age of a manager, in this case young, in the multiplicity of demands of the various components present in leadership.

The fusion of these diverse perceptions, when interconnected, not only expanded the depth of my understanding of demanding management practices, but also sheds light on less explored variables. These insights not only served as guides, but intrinsically paved the way for new variables to be explored in a scenario that is complex and constantly evolving in organizational and sector management.

I emphasize that the importance of addressing the management function, whilst recognizing the requirement for effectiveness of middle managers and young managers, aims to build a comprehensive representation of the personality traits and difficulties inherent to the role of district manager. This present study sought to enrich my approach, illuminating several dimensions that contribute to the journey towards more effective leadership, which were previously not so clear to me.

a. MANAGING PEOPLE IN RETAIL

According to the Oxford dictionary, a manager is defined as “*a person responsible for the administration of a business, a shop/shop or similar organization or part of one*”. In a more academic approach, Whetstone defines a manager as “*a person responsible for creating their own personal and group strategies and actions in order to achieve the desired objectives in an organization* (Whetstone, 2003)”. Still, introductory management textbooks (e.g., Bartol and Martin, 1998) are typically structured around business, organizational, leadership, and operational objectives. The main basis of research related to social sciences misrepresentations in the thorough analysis of managers' conduct, together with the analysis of the impact applied by all external elements, which cover organizational structure, social roles, communication patterns and social taboos.

Retail is related to the adaptable skills of salespeople in serving multiple customers and in all operational components fundamental to the sustainable functionality and dynamics of each store. Generally, efficient people management is related to two aspects: **rationality** and **emotion** in decision-making. Regarding rational decision-making in retail, this is subject to the need for precision in stock control, pricing strategies, coordination and training of teams, optimization of layout, obligations and management of daily operational plans to maximize store profitability. In this context, the District Manager's strategic planning requires adaptability, ethical awareness and time management.

Rationality is a fundamental aspect in critical thinking and in the execution of all tasks, IJ Good (1962) highlights the value of intuition in making the most difficult decisions. Likewise, intuition is another interesting variable, often associated with experience, in pattern recognition, a skill that allows quick decision-making in uncertain and unknown situations. However, it must be taken into account that being excessively rational can lead to more time-consuming and thoughtful decision-making, whereas with intuition, this leads to decisions being more subjective and biased. Routine, well-structured decisions can benefit from rational analysis, while strategic or recent situations may require a certain degree of intuition. IJ Good (1962) argues that managers must recognize that there is inherent uncertainty in many business decisions. For example, in situations with limited information, intuition can provide valuable information and guide action. For all this to happen naturally, organizations must consider the possibility of providing all the necessary training and all the variables for a decision that equips managers with rational and intuitive decision-making skills. This can allow managers to adapt their approach as needed.

I would like to highlight the importance of an equalized approach, where managers use both rational analysis and intuition to make effective decisions in a dynamic and uncertain business environment. In fact, on a global scale, effective people management incorporates two fundamental principles: rationality and emotion in decision-making processes. The focus on rational decision-making in retail and fashion management highlights the need for maximum rigor in stock control, pricing strategies, staff schedules, layout optimization and daily operational schemes, aiming to maximize the profitability of each store. In this analytical context, the District Manager's strategic planning requires adaptability and ethical considerations, fundamental for meticulous decision-making processes.

In accordance with what was mentioned about the importance of rationality in decision-making, it implies that there must be daily control in organizations, as this is what will direct, strategically correct and influence the team's attitudes and behaviors to achieve multiple objectives (Anderson and Oliver, 1987). Anderson and Oliver define a sales force supervision system as “an organization of procedures to monitor, direct, evaluate compensation, the daily value realized per hour and what strategies are used to maximize profit (1987, p. 76)” .

This control strategy is essential in the work of a District Manager. The position of District Manager requires permanent management attentive to the different behaviors of its stakeholders (consumers and employees), consequently, to the way in which all details are important and need to be constantly fine-tuned to maximize profits. As Oliver and Andersen refer, this role is characterized by “high levels of supervision that monitor the direction and intervention in activities, and more complex and subjective methods of evaluating performance, typically focusing on the professional contributions of the salesperson” (Oliver and Andreson 1994, p. 53).

Table 2 below summarizes the main types of behavior associated with the main hierarchical functions of operational managers and the main authors who published literature on these same behaviors.

Table 2 – The Strategic Roles of Managers

Roles	Behaviors	Documenting Studies
Top management		
Ratifying	Articulate strategic intent Monitor Endorse and support	Hamel & Prahalad (1989) Burgelman (1983a) Hart (1992)
Recognizing	Recognize strategic potential Set strategic direction Empower and enable	Burgelman (1991) Mintzberg (1983) Hart (1992)
Directing	Plan Deploy resources Command	Ansoff (1987) Schendel & Hofer (1979) Bourgeois & Brodwin (1984)
Middle management		
Championing	Nurture and advocate Champion Present alternatives to top management	Bower (1970) Burgelman, (1983a,b; 1991) Wooldridge & Floyd (1990)
Synthesizing	Categorize issues Sell issues to top management Blend strategic and hands-on information Synthesize	Dutton & Jackson (1983) Dutton & Ashford (1993) Nonaka (1988) Floyd & Wooldridge (1992)
Facilitating	Nourish adaptability and shelter activity Share information Guide adaptation Facilitate learning	Bower (1970) Mintzberg (1978) Chakravarthy (1982) Chakravarthy (1982)
Implementing	Implement Revise and adjust Motivate and inspire; coach	Schendel & Hofer (1979) Nutt (1987) Hart (1992); Quinn (1980)
Operating management		
Experimenting	Learn and improve Link technical ability and need Initiate autonomous initiatives Experiment and take risks	Argyris & Schön (1978) Burgelman (1983a,b) Burgelman (1991) Hart (1992)
Adjusting	Respond to the challenge	Hart (1992)
Conforming	Be a good soldier Follow the system	Bourgeois & Brodwin (1984) Hart (1992)

Source: Floyd, S. W., & Lane, P. J. (2000). *Strategizing throughout the organization: Managing role conflict in strategic renewal. Academy of management review, 25(1), 154-177.*

b. THEORY ACCORDING EFFECTIVENESS OF A MANAGER

Effective management of stores and people depend on a leader's ability to inspire and create a shared vision. According to Yulk (1989), transformational leaders have the unique ability to cultivate a uniform vision centered on achieving excellence in customer service and improving sales performance across multiple stores. This collective and unique vision serves as a driving force, compelling managers and sales teams to provide unparalleled service and increase customer satisfaction levels.

In the fiercely competitive landscape of the retail sector, the critical role of employee motivation cannot be overstated. Managers are entrusted with the vital task of possessing the knowledge

and skills necessary to adequately motivate teams. In my practical experience, countless discussions and conversations with participants highlighted the importance of learning and evolving through the collection of knowledge from the various stakeholders, who are experienced and employ different motivational methodologies. In this domain, transformational leaders stand out for prioritizing individual roles in creating a collective vision and a sense of belonging. In doing so, they automatically spark enthusiasm and encourage ongoing commitment among store teams.

Furthermore, this sector is in a constant dynamic evolution and metamorphosis, it is necessary to remain aware of contemporary trends and trend strategies that are created and adopted by brands. For this to happen in-store as well, salespeople need access to a variety of training opportunities so they continually rise above industry warnings and have the ability to adapt in this ever-changing market. This highlights the paramount importance of transformational leaders, who serve as catalysts in promoting adaptability and innovation within their teams. These leaders actively cultivate a culture of responsiveness to market fluctuations and evolving customer preferences, thereby enabling employees to thrive in constantly evolving industrial environments (Yulk, 1989).

c. MIDDLE MANAGERS

Previous research has shown that middle managers' involvement in strategy influences important and broader organizational outcomes (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). In today's business environment, characterized by increased competition, rapid change, continuous innovation, shorter product life cycles and unclear industry boundaries, young middle managers face the need to build on existing skills and constantly stay up to date.

The central role of middle managers in contemporary organizational structures cannot be undervalued, particularly in the domain of strategic decision-making, implementation and capacity building. My time as a young District Manager gave me in-depth knowledge about the strategic importance of middle managers in defining the trajectory and strengthening the resilience of organizations.

Middle managers occupy a unique point of view in organizational hierarchies, serving as channels of communication between top managers and those present in the first line. This

positioning provides them with a differentiated understanding of operational complexities, organizational culture and interactions with customers. The core element of your strategic role lies in your ability to transform comprehensive organizational strategies into actionable plans, effectively translating visionary objectives into operational realities.

Empirical evidence, as suggested by Wooldridge & Floyd (1990) and Floyd & Lane (2000), highlights the fundamental role of middle managers in the guidance and productivity of companies in periods of greater difficulty. These managers have the ability to proactively communicate alternative strategies to top management and create solutions in adverse situations, thus highlighting the importance they have in facilitating strategic renewal processes. This proactive connection increases organizations' agility to deal with uncertainties, positioning them favorably in dynamic market scenarios. Not only because it can often be people outside the organization who bring other views. Furthermore, the strategic contribution made by middle managers functions as a fundamental element in the quality of strategic decision-making. Their broad understanding of the operational environment allows them to offer valuable insights and pragmatic perspectives that enrich problem solving and strategy execution. This fusion of knowledge from operational realities and the most diverse areas contributes to the creation of a more solid strategic vision, fundamental to increasing the effectiveness and viability of strategic initiatives.

My journey as a young District Manager and the insights covered highlight the indispensable role of middle managers as architects of strategic resilience and effective implementation. Their strategic insight, communication skills and capacity for strategic repair support their importance as supports for organizational success in an increasingly strong business scenario. Therefore, investing in the development and training of middle managers appears as a strategic decision for organizations that aspire to grow in a context of constantly evolving challenges, anticipating and capitalizing on emerging opportunities.

d. THE ROLE OF A DISTRICT MANAGER

District Managers are tasked with the daily supervision of multiple branches within a designated zone, overseeing operations and billing. Their primary responsibilities encompass several essential tasks, including personnel management to align employees with each store's daily objectives, establishment of regional goals, and ensuring compliance with company and industry regulations. Their range of duties involves setting regional and individual sales targets,

preparing sales projections and forecasts, overseeing the management of each store and its personnel, ensuring the consistency of marketing materials across all points of sale, adapting layouts accordingly to specific store needs, and manage regional budgets.

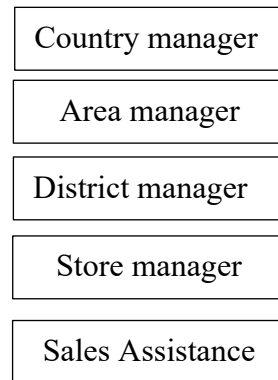
Evidently, the role of a District Manager in retail or corporate operations is multifaceted, serving as a central axis for an organization's success. Then, leadership, as expounded upon in existing literature, stands at the core of a District Manager's responsibilities. They design and execute plans to drive sales, increase daily profits according to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) compared to previous year's data, and promote customer loyalty. Achieving these objectives requires strategic vision, involving thorough analysis of market trends, identification of growth prospects, and formulation of strategies to optimize store performance. This involves a meticulous evaluation of store performance metrics such as sales goals, profit margins, and customer service ratings, with quick corrective actions implemented as necessary.

An integral part of their role is the cultivation and nurturing of high-performance teams in their district. District Managers perform tasks such as recruiting, training, and mentoring store managers and employees, promoting a culture of responsibility, motivation, and teamwork. Transparent communication, effective training, and mentoring form the foundation for preparing each store team to achieve their objectives and provide exemplary customer experiences. Serving as a liaison between corporate headquarters and individual stores, they facilitate ongoing communication channels, ensuring the effective transmission and implementation of corporate guidelines, initiatives, and best practices. Additionally, they collect feedback, insights, and challenges from store managers and frontline staff, providing senior management with vital information for informed decision-making. Their ability to solve problems, make quick decisions, and develop adaptive strategies is essential.

Essentially, the role of a District Manager is dynamic, requiring a distinctive combination of leadership, strategic expertise, operational proficiency, and people management skills. They exert a critical influence in ensuring operational excellence, nurturing a high-performance culture, and promoting sustainable growth across multiple locations within an organization.

In alignment with the insights gleaned from the literature review, the roles of District Managers and middle managers exhibit similarities as intermediary figures within organizational structures. Figure 1 below summarizes the organizational hierarchy at the target Company.

Figure 1 - Sales force hierarchy at the Target Company



Source: Author, based on District Manager experience.

Despite their unique spheres of influence, both district managers and middle managers play key roles in guiding organizational objectives. District managers, operating on a larger scale, oversee multiple regions and offices, requiring a deep understanding of strategic delineation, team management, and achievement of objectives. Likewise, middle managers in specific business segments translate broader organizational strategies into actionable plans, ensuring smooth execution and promoting unity among teams. Both roles require the ability to address complex managerial challenges, including managing team dynamics, ensuring operational efficiency, and serving as liaisons between senior management and frontline staff. The responsibilities shared between District Managers and middle managers highlight their essential contribution to the execution of strategic directives, enhancing operational effectiveness, and incorporating indispensable leadership qualities to organizational success.

e. THE CONSTRUCTION OF A YOUNG MANAGER

Leadership effectiveness depends on the support, commitment and trust of followers. According to the identity construction theory of leadership as a social process (DeRue & Ashford, 2010), the perception of a person as a leader does not only depend on individual characteristics, but is also shaped by the collective perceptions of team members. The authenticity of leadership depends not only on self-affirmation, but also on recognition and acceptance by teammates. The fact that young people become leaders early often appears to be a barrier to establishing credible leadership. In other words, it was interesting that young leaders did not depend solely on experience or age-related status (Avolio, Waldman, & McDaniel, 1990; Kearney, 2008; Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Pelled, Eyesenhardt, Xin, 1999). They face

enormous difficulties in obtaining recognition and respect from their teams due to social perceptions already created. Therefore, a leader's age has a significant impact on the effectiveness of leadership behaviors and ultimately shapes the team's perception of the leader. In the same way of thinking, this factor is related to cultural norms, as these have a strong impact on perceptions, aging is linked to a broader work experience, a depth of knowledge, advanced skills and an increase in a statute (Avolio et al., 1990; Kearney, 2008; Nishii & Mayer, 2009; Pelled et al., 1999).). This social structure tends to idealize older people as people with effective leadership qualities. The academic perspective suggested by several authors (Bryman, 1987; Eden and Leviathan, 1975; Lord, 1985; Lord and Maher, 1991) is that young leaders often manage to convey that there are many things that do not fit into the established prototype. In other words, young professionals entering middle management roles face a variety of complex challenges. These challenges range from the effective management of multiple responsibilities to intergenerational management and the creation of effective communication channels between different teams. Thus, the complexity of these challenges highlights the rigor and unique dynamics faced by young middle managers and requires a comprehensive and personalized approach to strengthen an ability to drive organizational success.

f. KEY POINTS OF THE LITERATURE REVIEW

The synthesis of the literature review includes an investigation relating to a concise management approach, the various factors inherent to the area and the challenges, to make the role of District Manager clearer, I include the role of mid-career managers and juniors, also focus on the challenge of age and focus on the connection that this factor has with leadership. Thus, the authors present in the literature reveal the various aspects intrinsic to the role of district managers and reveal important theoretical knowledge related to effective management practices. These academic discussions not only shed light on theoretical pragmatics, but also demonstrate practical applications that are consistent with my experience as a district manager. Table 3 below summarizes the key points essential to understanding the complexities and challenges of district management and provides a consistent link between the theoretical foundations and the real-world complexities encountered in district management work. is showing. Appendix B provides a comprehensive and detailed comparative analysis of academic theory and practical leadership experience, which is clearly illustrated in Tables 1 and 3.

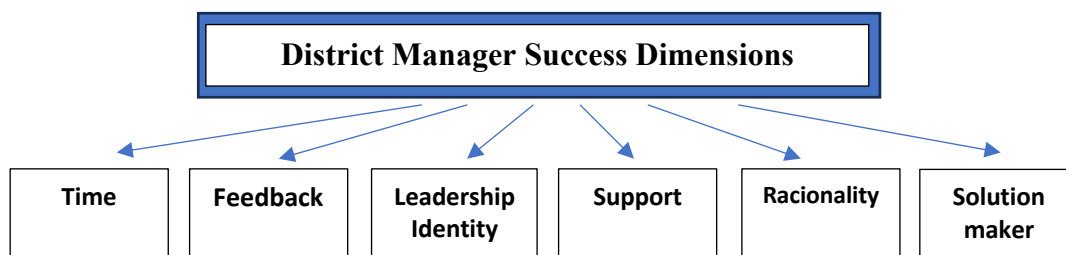
Table 3 - Aligning Management Aspects related to the District Manager Function
Comparative Analysis of Literature Review Perspectives and Practical Implications

Theory/ Author	Focus/ Aspect of District Manager Role	Key points from theory	Connection with experience
Whetstone (2003)	Skills to acquired na excellence management	Focus on the main values present on management	Application of key values in team conflict resolution
Bartol and Martin (1998)	Management structure	Organizational leadership and operational goals	Implementation of operational strategies
Good (1962)	Rationality vs. Intuition in Decision-making	Supporter for balanced decision-making	Balancing rational analysis with intuition
Anderson and Oliver (1987)	Sales Force Control System	Strategies for maximizing profit	Implementation of sales control procedures
Yukl (1989)	Transformational Leadership and Motivation	Importance of vision, motivation and adaptability	Inspiring teams towatds shared goals
Wooldridge & Floyd (1990)	Middle Managers in Strategy Influence	Influence of middle managers in strategy	Middle manager role in strategy alignment
DeRue & Ashfor (2010)	Leadership Identity Construction	Construction of a leader's identity in teams	Shaping team perception through leadership
Avolio, Waldman & McDaniel (1990)	Age and Leadership	Impact age on leadership perceptions	Addressing challenges related to age

Source: Author, based on district manager experience.

Based on these theoretical insights and practical experiences, the following Figure 2 illustrates the dimensions for the success of District Managers. These cover both variables discussed in the literature review and those that were not, and will be describe later.

Figure 2 – District Manager´s Success Dimensions



Source: Author, based on District Manager experience.

g. CHALLENGES

In the current contemporary scenario, assuming the role of young District Manager at the age of 21 implies significant growth along with the inherent challenges. This designation marks a

notable achievement while presenting distinct obstacles rooted in social norms, biases, and conventional workplace expectations.

One of the biggest obstacles for young female District Managers is the ageism that persists in many industries, especially those that have historically been dominated by experienced individuals (Ridgeway et al., 1985). These biases often manifest as unconscious assumptions about a person's skills, experience, or leadership qualities compared to more experienced colleagues. Overcoming these biases requires ongoing efforts to consistently demonstrate competence and aptitude. Building authority and gaining respect within a team or among more experienced colleagues is a big challenge. When young managers, especially women, occupy leadership positions, there is often uncertainty about their management skills and decision-making capabilities. It's important to balance positivity and friendliness, walking the fine line between earning respect and promoting understanding among team members. It's a continuous test where I'm always pushing the limits and I'm aware that others are also testing me. It is a continuous journey of overcoming obstacles (Bass & Bass, 2008; Sauer, 2011).

Furthermore, interestingly, integration into organizational culture is linked to considerations regarding traditional leadership styles and represents a challenge for young District Managers (Sagie & Koslowsky, 2000). The daily struggle to create a clear identity and assertive “voice” within established organizational structures requires adaptability and unwavering resilience. In an environment that advocates traditional methods and demands persuasive strategies and strategic maneuvers, the introduction of innovative ideas may face resistance. To add to the complexity, the challenge of balancing high-level leadership roles, personal commitments, and academic demands remains a challenge (Allen, Shore, & Griffeth, 2003). The pressure to prove one's worth and exceed social and personal expectations creates great pressure, while maintaining relationships with co-workers, sales teams, store managers and senior management can meet this challenge.

Beyond that, oversight of multiple stores presents unique complexities for district managers (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). Unlike department heads, who are often on-site to resolve complex problems, district managers cannot be physically present in multiple locations at the same time. This requires effective time management and the ability to lead and inspire from a distance, it is an important skill for having success on the management role (Good, 1962). It involves the ability to redefine actions and make them productive and is important to inspire

and leave the path clearly defined so that store teams can function without physical presence. This challenge highlights the need for young leaders to manage their time astutely, to be useful and effective during store visits. In short, young district leaders' journey through these challenges requires resilience, determination and a willingness to change. It requires the continuous development of confidence, perseverance and courage to challenge already defined rules, with the aim of promoting a more inclusive and diverse leadership environment. In this profession, it is important to take advantage of each person's strengths, while removing barriers and building an inclusive environment that supports and empowers the next generation of women leaders.

3. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was conducted using an ethnographic approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges that District Managers face in their professional environments. Ethnography, a qualitative research method, was used to provide an investigation that goes beyond superficial observations. This approach aimed to capture the complexity of a district leader, including their experiences, perspectives and the influence they have within organizational structures and hierarchies.

The choice of the ethnographic approach resulted from the investigation of the dynamics of team management and operational management. Given the complexity and diversity faced by this role, it was essential to use a methodology that resulted in a comparative investigation between practice and theory. Ethnography, known for its careful and thoughtful observation, combined with various dialogues with participants and daily learning compared to theory, provided a powerful framework to describe the various challenges faced by district leaders.

Although the research process lasted only four months, it was characterized by participant observation, intense learning involvement and the diversity of past situations in the organizational environment. This includes activities in different areas of work, including at headquarters, international events, the management of several stores, a vast knowledge of statistical analysis, knowledge of the competition and the market. The participants in this study were diverse and included a national manager, two national area managers, the 15 district managers in Portugal, two members of the IT team and three members of the training department. Furthermore, the interaction took place with a larger group, including 82

salespeople, 12 store managers, 2 store salespeople, and 3 training team members from all stores visited. This diverse and inclusive sample of participants contributed greatly to achieving robust data collection. Table 4 summarizes the total number of participants and Appendix A contains an extensive compilation of notes from individual participants who observed, supplemented with extensive comments from industry experts. This section also provides details of the stores I passed in this process, categorized by literacy level and average age, providing a detailed picture of the environment observed.

Table 4 - Overview of Participating Individuals
Professional Profile of Employees - By Age, Gender and Literary Skills
of Retail Stores and Organizational Functions
(Details of Participants per store can be found in the Appendix)

ALL STORES	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY	BACHELOR		
SALES ASSISTANTS	82	NA	27	NA	50	61%	32	39%
STORE MANAGER	12	NA	32	NA	8	67%	4	33%
STORE ASSISTANT	2	NA	29	NA	2	100%	0	0%
SUB-TOTAL STORES	96	0	28	NA	60	63%	36	37%

OTHER ROLES	GENDER			AGE (average)			LITERARY SKILLS	
	F	M	TOTAL	F	M	TOTAL	SECONDARY	BACHELOR
TRAINING DEPARTMENT	2	1	3	32	29	31	33%	67%
IT DEPARTMENT	0	2	2	0	50	50	0%	100%
DISTRICT MANAGER	14	1	15	29	28	29	53%	47%
AREA MANAGER	1	1	2	35	38	37	0%	100%
COUNTRY MANAGER	0	1	1	0	43	43	0%	100%
SUB-TOTAL OTHER	17	6	23	30	40	32	39%	61%

Source: Author, based on District Manager experience.

The importance of bringing together such a diverse group of participants lies in the sincere search for a comprehensive and diverse understanding of the complex organizational dynamics present in this study. By conferring and having contact with different hierarchical levels and functions, I gained a more comprehensive understanding of the workings of the company's structure, ethos and procedures. This diverse perspective led to a comprehensive analysis of organizational practices, highlighting subtleties and recurring patterns that might have gone unnoticed by a more limited group of participants. Similarly, the demographic diversity of the participants, from senior management to operational team members, provided a variety of perspectives, experiential knowledge and insights into the challenges faced, enriching the scope of our analysis. This considerably increases the reliability and credibility of the data collected

and provides a detailed insight into corporate culture, employee interactions and the web of issues that permeate various aspects of the business environment.

It is important to recognize the inherent limitations of ethnographic methods. Conclusions and interpretations depend on the context and may not be completely generalizable beyond the organizational context or the participants in the study. In addition, the subjectivity and position of the researcher in the field can, to some extent, influence observations and interpretations. The focus on understanding and involving the participants in the context provides valuable information that contributes to a deeper learning of the management situation, the complexities and nuances present in the role of District Managers.

4. RESULTS

As described in the literature review, the involvement of new district directors presents substantial links with several themes specific to the role, effectiveness and progression of young directors. The complete transition from the role of student to taking on the responsibilities of a District Manager holds a comprehensive ethnographic exploration of the complexities of organizational dynamics, leadership challenges and personal growth in a professional environment. This transition phase presents many practical challenges and challenges such as supervising several stores, aligning strategies with company objectives, motivating teams in volatile markets, managing stressful situations, among others. There was a steep and closely related learning curve. In order to better understand the branch manager's guiding principles, I regularly asked him for advice on motivating and managing diverse teams and recorded one of these conversations in my diary. The details can be found in Appendix C.

In addition, the prevalence of closed and isolated group dynamics made it difficult to integrate into established organizational networks. As highlighted, this challenge reflects the academic debate on the role of middle managers, who act as a bridge between top management and frontline workers, and addresses the complexity of hierarchical structures and organizational culture.

Moreover, assimilating into an established organizational network posed challenges due to the prevailing closed and insular group dynamics. As previously highlighted, this challenge mirrors scholarly discourse on the roles of middle management, serving as a bridge between senior

management and frontline staff, thus emphasizing hierarchical structures' complexities and understanding organizational cultures.

The various responsibilities of District Managers are in line with the general aspects highlighted in the literature. The various interactions include managing a diverse workforce across multiple sites, fostering a high-performance culture and effectively handling a variety of responsibilities, such as being smart about making rapid changes, managing human resources and solving problems strategically. These responsibilities are clearly aligned with the complex roles described in the academic sources and with the dimensions of District Managers' success illustrated in Figure 2.

Furthermore, the role of District Managers highlights the critical need for effective leadership and strategic vision, as reflected in the literature review presented in Table 3. The challenges of aligning strategy, motivating teams and navigating closed organizational cultures further highlight the importance of transformational leadership, team motivation, adaptability and innovation. These elements are widely discussed in academic sources to achieve effective management roles. Furthermore, this experience reflects the challenges faced by young professionals in important leadership roles that have a significant impact on the development of their organizations.

Age and preconceived social ideas about leadership made it difficult to integrate into established and cohesive organizational groups. Difficulties arose in integrating into an established and cohesive organizational group due to preconceived social notions about age and leadership, echoing academic discussions elucidating young managers' struggles in garnering recognition and acceptance within hierarchical structures, attributed to perceived leadership limitations linked to age.

Thus, the journey of young District Managers relates to the key themes presented in the literature review, including the challenges, responsibilities and dynamics of leadership roles, as well as the effectiveness and growth of these young leaders in their area.

The consideration of different aspects of management, especially derived from my experience as a District Manager, revealed some important aspects that may not have been directly highlighted in the existing literature. Table 5 shows the correlations or differences between the

variables observed in the literature review and actual experience, highlighting aspects that require more attention in the scientific literature.

Table 5 - Critical Components Shaping District Management Success
Insights from Practical Experience and Literature Review

Variables	Literature Review	Connection To Experience
Time	Not specifically addressed.	Identified as a significant factor affecting performance, trust from others and decision making.
Feedback	Limited discussion found.	Recognized as a first step for improving performance and refining decisions.
Leadership Style	Emphasized importance.	Acknowledged in experience; effective leadership is a driving factor for success.
Support	Not extensively discussed.	Lacked support affects performance; also a key element for personal development.
Rationality	Discussed as a management dimension.	Acknowledge in decision-making; rationality aids in complex situations.
Information Available and Experience	Considered and proved.	Emphasized; personal experience enhances understanding and application.
Team Spirit	Important point addressed for cohesion.	Highlighted; team dynamic driver; lack impacts collaboration and success.

Source: Author, based on District Manager experience.

In relation to these main components, the following comments may be appropriate:

1. **Time:** Despite not being an explicit variable in the literature review on time constraints, empirical experience illustrates the fundamental role of time in the decision-making process, in the assimilation of knowledge and in the overall efficiency of work, in more consistent learning and in gaining the trust of other employees.
2. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Academic literature limits its knowledge to feedback tools, but experiential knowledge amplifies the meaning of feedback in promoting personal and professional development, profoundly influencing the trajectory of success.
3. **Leadership style:** The academic discourse emphasizes the centrality of leadership style, a premise confirmed by personal observations of participants' leadership models.

Effective leadership stands as a fundamental element in competently managing teams and navigating the various challenges of management roles.

4. **Organizational Support:** Despite the limited academic discussion on organizational support, practical experience exposes the repercussions associated with the absence of this dimension, precipitating a tangible impact on productivity levels and the trust that is essential for carrying out tasks.
5. **Rational Decision-Making:** Academic circles approval rational decision-making as a fundamental management attribute, particularly relevant when faced complex and uncertain scenarios associated to the role of the District Manager.
6. **Informational Resources and Experiential Learning:** Although the academic literature highlights a variety of knowledge, first-hand experience emphasizes the value of the contribution of contacts between the group and the participants in increasing understanding and application of established management paradigms.
7. **Team Spirit Synergy:** Previous academic studies focus on the central role of consistent teamwork that is in line with experiential perceptions. The absence of cohesion or team spirit has a negative impact on people's cooperation, affecting objectives and achievements.

It is notable to emphasize certain variables not addressed in the literature review. For instance, the absence of a solid support network in the organization increased stress levels and intensified the pressures associated with meeting performance standards. The absence of a collaborative environment placed significant obstacles in the way of harnessing knowledge, thus adding to the pressure.

The progression of a recent graduate to a management position involved a multitude of challenges. Overcoming these obstacles and the subsequent learning process provided a comprehensive view of the ins and outs of management that went beyond theoretical models. Taking on a role of considerable responsibility with limited previous work experience represented a distinct opportunity that required rapid on-the-job learning and adaptability. Supervising several stores, each manifesting a unique dynamic in the midst of operational idiosyncrasies, yielded insights often overlooked in theoretical frameworks.

These complexities are interlaced with aligning corporate strategies with diverse store objectives, fostering team motivation amidst market fluctuations, and navigating complex operational dynamics while overseeing all stores on a daily basis. To assist this management, another vital factor necessitated daily consideration: the meticulous analysis of each store's statistics before entry, ensuring each visit was enriching and aimed at enhancing store performance (detailed analyses are available in Appendix B).

The significance of this ethnographic study resides in its capacity to furnish individuals assuming such roles with a more informed and realistic comprehension of the challenges they might confront.

Table 6 - Synthesis of District Managerial Experience
Bridging Literature Review Insights and Practical Realities

Experienced as a District Manager Reported on the Results	Connection with Literature Review by Authors
<p><u>Transition from student to District Manager:</u> Managing multiple stores, different teams, and operational complexities</p>	<p>Managerial theory: Discusses managerial roles, responsibilities, and strategic planning. Middle Managers: Emphasizes their strategic importance in organizational structures. District Manager's role: Explores responsibilities, leadership, and strategic oversight</p>
<p><u>Challenges Faced:</u> Closed organizational culture, high stress, and lack of support. Difficulty in integrating into an established network.</p>	<p>Effectiveness of a Manager: The importance of support, strategic roles, and leadership efficacy. Middle Managers: Outlines their strategic significance and role conflict. District Manager's Role: focusses on leadership, strategic decision-making, and operational oversight.</p>
<p><u>Impact of Challenges:</u> Hindered interpersonal connections, isolation, and increased stress due to the lack of support.</p>	<p>Effectiveness of a Manager: Emphasized the importance of support for success in management roles. Middle Managers: highlights their role in strategy implementation and organizational resilience. District Manager's Role: Operational excellence and strategic acumen.</p>
<p><u>Important learnings to growth:</u> Importance of effective communication, transformative leadership, decision-making, adaptability, and continuous learning.</p>	<p>Managerial theory: Focused on communication, transformational leadership, and decision-making. Middle Managers: Strategic roles and strategy automatic execution. District Manager's Role: Leadership, teamwork, statistical analysis, strategic planning.</p>

Source: Author, based on District Manager experience.

5. CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

a. CONCLUSION

This ethnographic study was positioned at the intersection between the participants and the impartial observer, who meticulously followed an intense period of learning the role of a District Manager, which allowed us to investigate the polygonal complexities in the structure of a reference organization in the retail business of fashion. To this end, theoretical frameworks (transformational leadership, role conceptualization, management functions, the importance of middle management, the essence of district management and associated challenges) were addressed, which contributed to the study being able to disentangle the complex structure of multiple and interconnected challenges, as well as the responsibilities and strategic demands in the field of District Managers.

Answering the research question "How does experiential learning contribute to validating theory and practice for effective decision-making among young District Managers in the retail sector?", firstly, the comprehensive integration of experiential learning, witnessed through the career path of a young District Manager, profoundly improves both theoretical understanding and its practical application. This academic research is intended to improve the decision-making skills of young District Managers who may go on to take on similar management roles.

Additionally, the association of experiential learning significantly contributes to validating theoretical concepts and practical applications in the field of effective decision-making among young District Managers in the retail sector, while also highlighting areas for future study that have not yet been explored. In the same vein, theory validation through experiential learning acts as a fundamental mechanism for testing and refining theoretical frameworks in real-world contexts. Although the theories are robust in their conceptualization, their practical validation is often imperative to determine their relevance and effectiveness in addressing the involved challenges faced by young District Managers in the retail sector. Experiential learning serves as a platform for these managers to investigate deeper into practical scenarios, thus enabling the validation and refinement of theoretical knowledge, examining its relevance and viability in the dynamic and evolving scenarios of retail environments.

In other words, practical experiences serve as a critical confirmation test for theories, initiating a continuous cycle of improvement and adaptation. Through experiential learning, managers

gain valuable insights into potential limitations or gaps within existing theoretical models, fostering a continuous cycle of validation, refinement, and evolution that leads to more robust and pertinent theoretical frameworks. Simultaneously, experiential learning acts as a bridge between theoretical knowledge and its practical implementation, providing a dynamic platform for young District Managers to apply theoretical frameworks in real-world scenarios. This pragmatic approach fosters a deeper comprehension of theoretical principles and their practical application within the dynamics of decision-making processes in retail management.

Basically, experiential learning stands as a keystone in validating theoretical knowledge and its practical relevance for effective decision-making among young District Managers in the retail sector. It not only limits the divide between theory and practice but also facilitates the development of decision-making skills through real-life experiences, thereby improving their proficiency in navigating the complexities inherent in retail management.

The research findings explicitly affirm that the fusion of practical experiences alongside theoretical concepts and real-world challenges substantially improves critical analysis and the managers' adeptness in handling involved decision-making scenarios. Consequently, this study affirms the key role of experiential learning in bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and practical decision-making, empowering these managers to adeptly apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations within the retail environment.

Synthesizing the insights collected from the literature review, I highlight the strategic importance of middle managers, revealing their central role in fortifying organizational resilience, fostering robust communication channels, and supporting strategic adaptability. Their unique responsibilities and strategic positioning within the organizational hierarchy emerge as vital components in aligning global strategies with localized operational dynamics.

b. CONTRIBUTION

Academic Contribution to the Theoretical Framework:

My aim with this academic study is to expand on existing studies, with the challenge of uncovering the particularities inherent in defining the central role of a District Manager. This academic work represents a significant contribution, not only to enrich the understanding of the challenges attached to this position, but also to offer unique and invaluable perspectives,

beneficial to recent graduates or individuals newly appointed to District Manager roles, as well as to those occupying similar management positions. By meticulously exploring these underlying variables, my work seeks to broaden the theoretical understanding of the composite responsibilities, complexities and distinct dynamics that characterize the role of a District Manager.

Likewise, my academic contribution aims to illuminate fundamental supports that have the potential to significantly influence management practices, thereby establishing a solid foundation for subsequent academic explorations. This academic challenge aims to present a comprehensive and detailed framework capable of informing and directing future research trajectories in the domain of managerial functions and responsibilities. I tried to address some fundamental themes in this profession, such as the issue of time, necessary support and feedback. I believe that these little explored variables are essential in this study, therefore, combined with my practice, these were the ones that felt the greatest gap and were little addressed in recent studies on the topic.

Practical Contribution:

In the field of practical implications, my contribution focuses mainly on the sphere of professional development. Recognizing the fundamental importance of a comprehensive understanding of the management landscape, especially for newly appointed District Managers, my work emphasizes that equipped knowledge substantially increases the likelihood of success in this critical role. This emphasis gains particular importance due to the predominant turnover and redundancies frequently observed in this managerial position.

The fusion of theoretical knowledge with practical experiences serves a dual purpose: firstly, it aims to elucidate the sophisticated complexities fundamental to the role of the District Manager. Secondly, it attempts to prepare potential District Managers, providing them with a vigorous fundamental structure, essential for sustained success in their roles. This comprehensive understanding equips them with the tools necessary to cultivate conducive work environments, implement effective leadership strategies, and perpetuate continuous growth in all facets of their management responsibilities.

In essence, this combined academic and practical contribution seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its real-world applicability, providing a comprehensive understanding capable of guiding and empowering aspiring and existing District Managers throughout their professional journeys.

c. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This research comprehensively acknowledges several limitations that are made clear in its scope and methodology. Firstly, the study's limitations restrict from the researcher's unique point of view as a participant observer. This unique perspective potentially imposes limitations on data analysis, the scope of the results and comparability with other contexts. The confidence on the subjective perceptions of observers introduces bias, thus restricting the study's ability to summarize the diverse and multifaceted role of the District Manager in a range of organizational contexts. To mitigate this constraint, a proposed solution involves employing a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative methodologies, promising a more comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand.

Time constraints are particularly evident, since observations are limited to a specific period without comparative elements. The dynamic nature of management functions and organizational environments can experience imperceptible changes, thus compromising the applicability and relevance of the results in future contexts. In addition, geographical constraints limit the generalizability of the study due to its focus on a specific area. Suggestively, future investigations should expand across diverse geographic locations to offer a more expansive understanding of how contextual nuances influence the role of District Managers.

Resource limitations, including constraints on access and confidentiality, have potentially reduced the depth and breadth of the analysis. Resource restrictions, be they time, access to databases or confidentiality for organizational privacy, have prevented a deeper exploration of the complexities of the managerial role. Resolving these limitations requires a strategic deployment of additional resources to facilitate an in-depth analysis of the complexities of management.

In addition, the specificity of the context presents another notable limitation, as the research is confined to a specific sector, restricting the generalizability of findings across industries. Engaging in comparative studies across several industries or sectors could shed light on industry-specific management challenges and practices, providing a broader context for analysis.

Ethnographic research provides valuable information, with the adjunct that personal interpretation can introduce a spectrum of reflexivity and compromise objectivity. The complex panorama that is management requires a comprehensive analysis, having to filter out various points relating to management that are multiple (due to the size of this analysis). The filter was carried out in such a way that it included the complexities of middle management and the nuances of junior management, and both complement each other theoretically. In addition, the lack of literature focusing on the role of district managers makes a comprehensive analysis difficult and requires further research.

Taken together, these limitations highlight the need for comprehensive research that includes all levels of management. This approach is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic and complex situation intrinsic in management dynamics.

In terms of recommendations for future studies on the same topic, I suggest the following strategies to improve data collection:

- ❖ **Another observer:** Increase internal reliability by involving another observer capable of extending perspectives and observing additional situations.
- ❖ **Increase the number of participants and involvement:** reinforcing internal validity by conducting interviews and surveys across various functions, groups, and teams in the company, an aspect that I was unable to fully explore due to my relative limited period of time. Carrying out formal interviews and structured surveys will contribute to greater rigor, as they will allow different opinions to be incorporated into the analysis to be contrasted and allow us to obtain better-founded conclusions.
- ❖ **Longitudinal Study:** Engaging in a longitudinal investigation covering an extended duration would enable the comprehensive tracking of the District Manager's role evolution.

This approach would include an analysis of shifts in managerial methodologies and adjustments in organizational dynamics over a prolonged timeframe.

- ❖ **Succession Planning and Development:** Systematically examining methodologies aimed at nurturing and cultivating prospective District Managers, including thorough examination of succession planning mechanisms and leadership development initiatives. This examination aims to fortify organizational continuity and optimize operational efficacy.

- ❖ **Stakeholder Perspectives:** Integrating diverse viewpoints from an array of stakeholders, including employees, clients, and shareholders, to cultivate a general comprehension of the District Manager's role. This inclusive approach ensures a multifaceted evaluation of the managerial role from varied vantage points.

By acknowledging these additional limitations and proposing perspectives for further research efforts, the study seeks to enrich the understanding of the facets that outline the role of District Managers in heterogeneous organizational frameworks.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Characterization of Participants

Store Profiles, Staff (Managers and Sales Associates), Literacy Levels, and Average Age

BARCELOS	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	4	NA	30	NA	4	100%	0	0%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	36	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	5	0	31	NA	100%		0%	

MONTIJO	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	10	NA	28	NA	7	70%	3	30%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	34	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	11	0	29	NA	73%		27%	

NORTE SHOPPING	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	12	NA	27	NA	7	58%	5	42%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	29	NA	0	0%	1	100%
STORE ASSISTANT	1	NA	30	NA	1	100%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	14	0	27	NA	57%		43%	

ARRÁBIDA SHOPPING	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	8	NA	25	NA	4	50%	4	50%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	31	NA	0	0%	1	100%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	9	0	26	NA	44%		56%	

ALAMEDA PORTO	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	5	NA	25	NA	3	60%	2	40%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	32	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	6	0	26	NA	67%		33%	

VILA REAL	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	5	NA	33	NA	3	60%	2	40%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	34	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	6	0	33	NA	67%		33%	

PÓVOA DE VARZIM	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	3	NA	28	NA	2	67%	1	33%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	34	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	4	0	30	NA	75%		25%	

CIDADE PORTO	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	6	NA	25	NA	3	50%	3	50%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	36	NA	0	0%	1	100%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	7	0	27	NA	43%		57%	

PAÇOS FERREIRA	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	4	NA	30	NA	3	75%	1	25%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	29	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	5	0	30	NA	80%		20%	

BRAGA PARQUE	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	7	NA	27	NA	5	71%	2	29%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	29	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	8	0	27	NA	75%		25%	

COLOMBO	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	14	NA	26	NA	6	43%	8	57%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	34	NA	0	0%	1	100%
STORE ASSISTANT	1	NA	27	NA	1	100%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	16	0	27	NA	44%		56%	

TELHEIRAS	GENDER		AGE (average)		LITERARY SKILLS (average)			
	F	M	F	M	SECONDARY		BACHELOR	
SALES ASSISTANTS	4	NA	25	NA	3	75%	1	25%
STORE MANAGER	1	NA	28	NA	1	100%	0	0%
STORE ASSISTANT	0	NA	0	NA	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL STAFF	5	0	26	NA	80%		20%	

Comments about the participants:

This statistical representation aims to scrutinize the demographics of individuals engaged within the stores under examination, evaluating their literacy proficiencies in conjunction with their average age. Notably, among the female workforce within these establishments, a comprehensive review included 96 participants - 82 sales assistants, 12 store managers, and 2 store assistants. The collective average age of this group stands at approximately 28 years, with 63% having attained a secondary school degree and 37% having pursued higher education at the university level.

It is pertinent to highlight that within the spectrum of the 12 stores assessed, a mere 5 stores surpass the established general average age, while three outlets exhibit a more pronounced prevalence of employees with advanced literacy skills.

Regarding the occupation of individuals in more senior roles, the most notable variances are visible among district managers, whose average age stands at 29. This force demonstrates a higher proportion of secondary school qualifications compared to those possessing university degrees. This trend is primarily attributed to the fact that nearly all district managers have traversed the ranks internally within the company, predominantly advancing from store management positions, thus accruing significant tenure and experience within the organization.

It is evident that rapid ascension within the company for external entrants depends significantly on the possession of effective communication and analytical skills. The indispensability of these skills lies in the demanding nature of the role, where the continuous analysis of multifarious variables is imperative. Successfully navigating this role requires the ability to offer appropriate solutions, exhibit a good understanding of the products, and inspire individuals to effectively engage customers while promoting appreciation for the merchandise offered.

APPENDIX B

a) Comparative Analysis of Tuesday's Product Sales: Current Year vs. Previous Year by a District Manager

<u>Progressivo</u>			
Conversão		38.89	vs 38.55 ↑
Faturação		-13%	
Talão Médio		+7% ↑↑	
Proposta		+6% (4% vs 3.7)	
Entradas		-19% ↑↑	
valor → 15835€	MES	FCT -31%	ent.modo: -27%
	ANO	+3%	-17%
Categories		JRX %	VAR %
A I		-9%	-41%
BASIC		81% ↑	-18%
senhora		88% ↑	-14%
Homem		4%	-16%
criança		8%	+8%
leggings total senhora		18% ↑	-8%
collant lycra senhora		40% <small>representa</small>	-17%
collant opacos senhora		7%	-19%
collant moda senhora		7%	-5%
Collant TOTAL senhora		55% <small>+ de 11% de</small>	-18%
Meias total senhora		12%	-3%
Meias total homem		4%	-15%
leggings total criança		1%	-37%
collant total criança		5%	-9%
Meias total criança		2%	+158%

The incorporation of the "Tuesday's Comparative Analysis: Product Categories, Gender, and KPIs vs. Previous Year's Data" into the appendix aims to illustrate the systematic and meticulous analytical procedure consistently carried out by myself as a former District Manager. This comprehensive analysis constituted a fundamental component of our regular routines before entering a store, emphasizing our commitment to meticulously assess various elements, encompassing product categories, gender-related metrics, and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) relative to the previous year's data. This rigorous assessment was essential for a profound understanding of the retail environment, facilitating well-informed decisions and the formulation of crucial strategies for efficient store management.

b) Evaluation of 5 stores per product category, contrasting with the previous year's data and encompassing the overall chain and the district manager's zone and area.

	1) Braga Parave	2) cidade do porto	3) Póvoas Fereira	4) Póvoa	vila Real	2002	cadeia
cont.	77% (-16%)	77% (2%)	73% (-7%)	70% (-21%)	67% (-18%)	74% (-12%)	72% (-4%)
icras	42% (-15%)	28% (2%)	38% (-12%)	30% (-29%)	29% (-12%)	35% (-13%)	30% (-5%)
eggings	16% (-26%)	28% (+23%)	21% (+16%)	23% (-33%)	15% (-38%)	18% (-16%)	20% (-5%)
DCS	4% (+37%)	11% (+55%)	5% (-16%)	5% (-27%)	40% (+34%)	7% (+24%)	7% (+15%)
MS	2% (+87%)	3% (-36%)	2% (+69%)	2% (+365%)	2% (+110%)	2% (+21%)	2% (+24%)
num	3% (+37%)	7% (+27%)	3% (-34%)	4% (+55%)	4% (+16%)	4% (+6%)	5% (+7%)
icangas	10% (-2%)	8% (16%)	9% (-21%)	2% (+15%)	5% (-18%)	10% (+2%)	9% (+5%)
cas (capim)	7% (-20%)	11% (-20%)	6% (0%)	9% (+12%)	7% (-23%)	9% (-16%)	8% (-7%)
r	23% (-2%)	23% (+24%)	27% (-1%)	29%	33% (-2%)	26% (+11%)	28% (+8%)
scs	10% (-9%)	6% (-6%)	7% (-17%)	8% (-3%)	33% (-2%)	9% (-7%)	10% (-1%)
ucla	108 vs 106 (900%)	150 vs 24 (+525%)	40 vs 150 (-73%)	40 vs 55 (-27%)	105 vs 50 (210%)	97E vs 58E (68%)	154E vs 123E (+2)
leias	20 vs 2 (900%)	30 vs 5 (500%)	07 = 9 vs 30 (-73%)	9 vs 11 (-21%)	31 vs 10 (210%)	10 vs 12 (68%)	31 vs 25 (+2)

Perda into grande + tratar caso do problema

visita 9-11 - Vila Real

perdes face cadeia → Contrativo

Semena

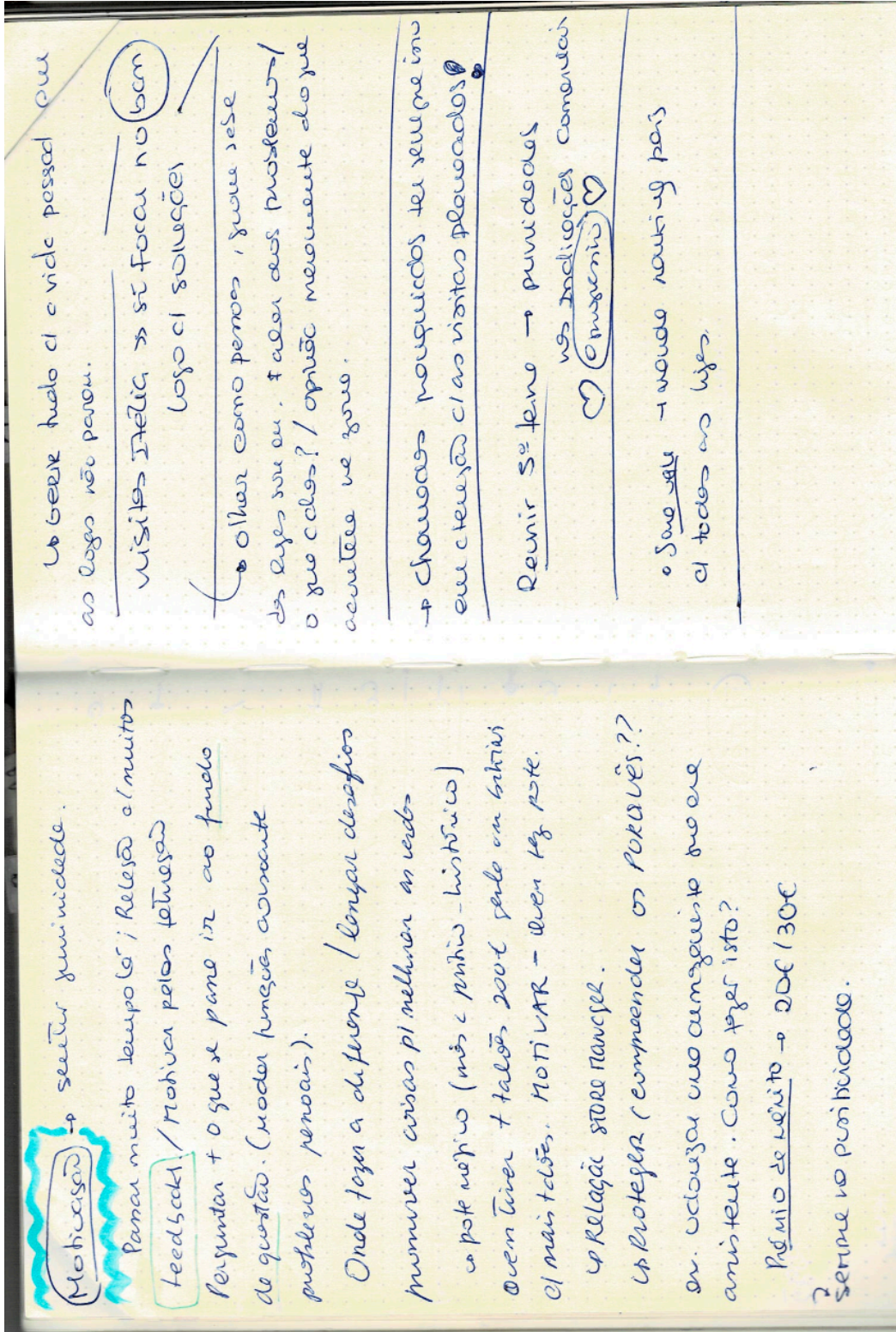
- Ciças
- eggings
- Hover
- ciçanga
- Mics
- M

• Ver de entrada → 1 J.M.

• Falar com aquil

APPENDIX C

Records derived from discussions held with store managers and district managers regarding methods to inspire and motivate their respective teams



STO DO MANGOSER V

- ↳ In linha do moute, ver condições, viabilidade, dar feedback
- ↳ Diagnóstico, adequação, ajustes
- ↳ tudo que se consegue ter de existência eutursão
- ↳ Dousar que muda mundos (vicente, intensão, comuaer tudo pntre a dntre
- ↳ logística
- ↳ Li vo alterações horário de acordo com AT (ordens e horários, com de modo regular no lmo de ceteroqum horário
- ↳ vende de acordo ao shipping -
- ↳ part time => VENDER.
 - ↳ ficheiro xano - o todos as vendas
 - ↳ Adaption personalidades.

- ↳ Motivação -> Mauaio de armos de objetos (cupp) qual foi a melhor vendadure?
- ↳ pelo lado (Efo) -> Conotiohal
- ↳ Bnheiro, hies armo (t pago)
- ↳ Dohigos a dnter o rucados
- ↳ M. LO INTRMO (karios do ruf. ^{u do e})
- ↳ Bca -> constante -> uo de
- ↳ consegue fcaosca muito, nito difícil de bens usutentes, nito constantes. Belomgo do ano, nunca supera ntu.
- ↳ perguntas Dntreniste.
- ↳ rnter muito.
- ↳ tales mol antigo toselho.
- ↳ rofoxo DM.

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